

The Souss, Anti Atlas & Western Sahara

سو الأطلس الصغير و الصحراء الغربية



The fertile plains, sudden granite mountains and long stretches of pristine beach of Morocco's southwest corner announce that you are arriving somewhere different. And you are. The Souss and the Anti Atlas are the most geographically varied regions of Morocco and also the most culturally distinct. And as if the vast, challenging nature of the landscape has had a softening effect on the character of the people, the sort of hassle visitors can suffer elsewhere in Morocco, is rare here, while the hospitality is legendary.

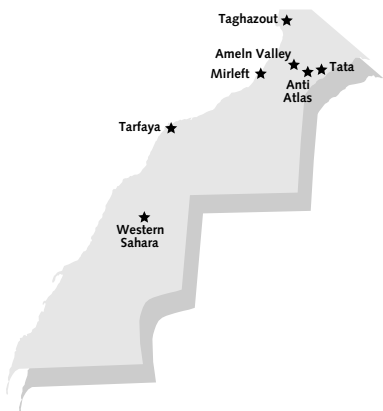
The Souss plain, with red-walled Taroudannt at its centre, is one of Morocco's most important agricultural zones. To the south lies the Anti Atlas, not as challenging as the High Atlas, but less visited and with plenty worth visiting, including the contorted slopes of Jebel Bani, prehistoric rock carvings in the Akka Oasis and the idyllically peaceful Ameln Valley.

On the coast, Agadir is both the principal port of the south and Morocco's premier beach resort. The glorious coast runs hundreds of kilometres south, past nature reserves, the art-deco splendours of Sidi Ifni and the tiny town of Tarfaya.

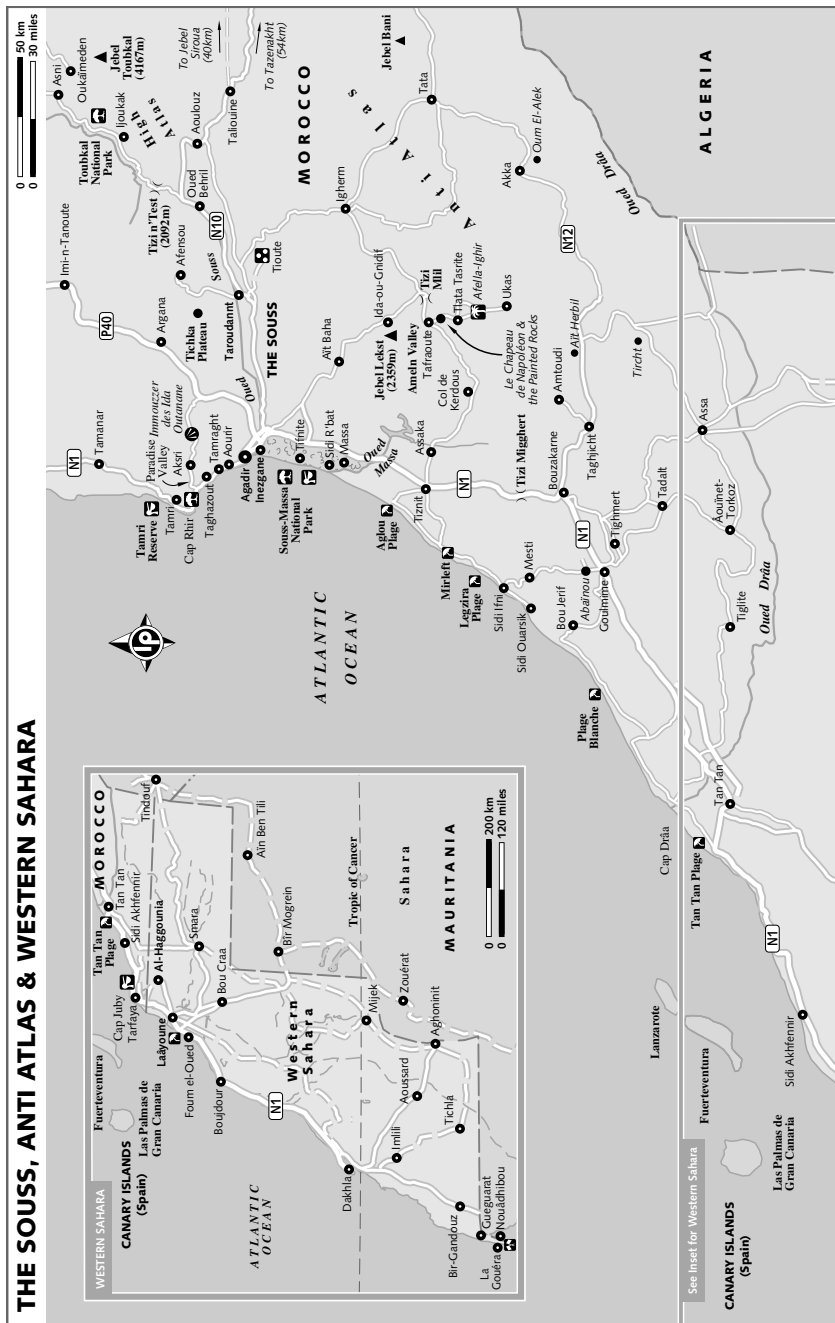
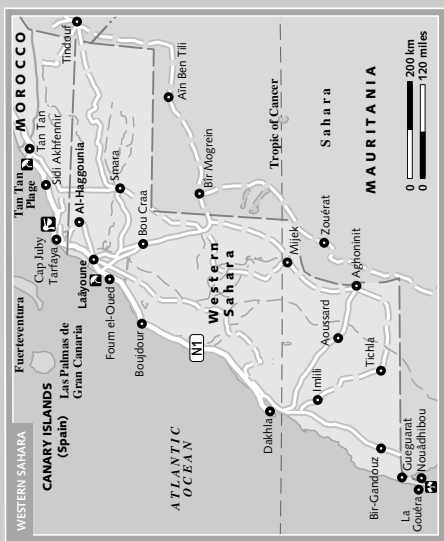
Further south, the Western Sahara is a vast, desolate and lightly populated tract of *hammada* (stony desert). Inhabited by free-spirited Saharawis, fishing communities and industrious Moroccans, it is a hotly disputed territory and is watched over by the ever-present security forces. .

HIGHLIGHTS

- Ride killer waves or watch others in the ocean at Morocco's top surfing spot of **Taghazout** (p385)
- Commune with Antoine de Saint-Exupery's *Little Prince* at **Tarfaya** (p410)
- Escape the crowds and find prehistoric rock carvings around **Tata** (p407)
- Hang loose in **Mirleft** (p395), the coolest spot in the south with six fabulous beaches
- Lose yourself among the pink-hued rock faces and lush green *palmeriaies* of the peaceful **Ameln Valley** (p406)
- Trek or drive through the foothills of the **Anti Atlas** (p402), concertinaed like mille-feuille
- Travel to the end of the road in the **Western Sahara** (p408) beyond the town of Dakhla



THE SOUSS, ANTI ATLAS & WESTERN SAHARA



HISTORY

The region's history is as varied as its landscape. Taroudannt in the Souss Valley has a story that parallels Marrakesh, with its walls dating to the 11th century, and its glory years in the 16th century as part of an empire that stretched to Timbuktu. Agadir shares a story with the more northerly Atlantic ports, both formerly occupied by the Portuguese and Spanish. Meanwhile, the region's Chleuh tribes people have a long history of dissidence and independence, many of their communities remaining beyond central authority well into the 1930s.

Deeper south lay the wild frontier. The nomadic desert tribes known collectively as Saharawi (constituting the indigenous population of the Western Sahara) were even more difficult to control. Their unique independent spirit ultimately manifested itself in the 20th century in the Polisario movement. The bid for autonomy for the Western Saharan province remains a thorn in the current government's side. For a deeper understanding of the situation today, read *Endgame in the Western Sahara: What Future for Africa's Last Colony?* by Toby Shelley. An expert on resource politics, he believes there is still hope for a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

CLIMATE

The south divides into three distinct geographical areas, each with its own micro-climate. The semitropical, verdant Souss Valley is hot and humid, with temperatures ranging between 22°C and a steamy 38°C, when water vapour rises like a mist from the huge citrus groves that fill the valley. The valley is also prone to heavy winds in spring. The climate of the barren Anti Atlas veers between freezing winters and hot, dry summers. The deep southern coast enjoys a more constant year-round sunny climate.

LANGUAGE

Arabic remains the lingua franca of all major cities in the south. The Chleuh tribes who dominate the Souss speak Tachelait, a Berber dialect, most noticeable in the villages of the Ameln Valley and the Anti Atlas. French is widely spoken and Spanish is still heard in some of Spain's former territories.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Agadir is the hub airport of the south, but is now poorly served compared to Marrakesh. Most international services are European charter flights and a quirk of airline licences makes it impossible to buy a one-way ticket out of Agadir. **Royal Air Maroc** (RAM; ✈️ 022 311122; www.royalairmaroc.com) operates flights to and from Laâyoune (Friday, Sunday, Tuesday) and Dakhla (Wednesday) and others via Casablanca. Direct flights from Agadir to the Western Sahara are often more expensive than via Casablanca, though none are cheap. **Regional Air Lines** (RGL; ✈️ 022 536940; www.regionalmaroc.com) also operates direct flights to Dakhla and Laâyoune.

There is no train out of Agadir, but Supratours (buses run by the rail network) runs regular, fast buses to Marrakesh (four daily), Tiznit, Laâyoune and Dakhla. CTM bus services also operate to a range of destinations including Casablanca and Es-saouira.

GETTING AROUND

CTM, Satas and other local bus companies operate a range of bus routes across the region, including to Taroudannt, Tiznit, Laâyoune and Dakhla. Grands taxis are the fastest means of public transport and run to most destinations in the region.

The distances involved in touring the region, particularly in the south, make it worthwhile considering car rental. Agadir is one of the better places to hire a car in Morocco and all the major agencies are represented.

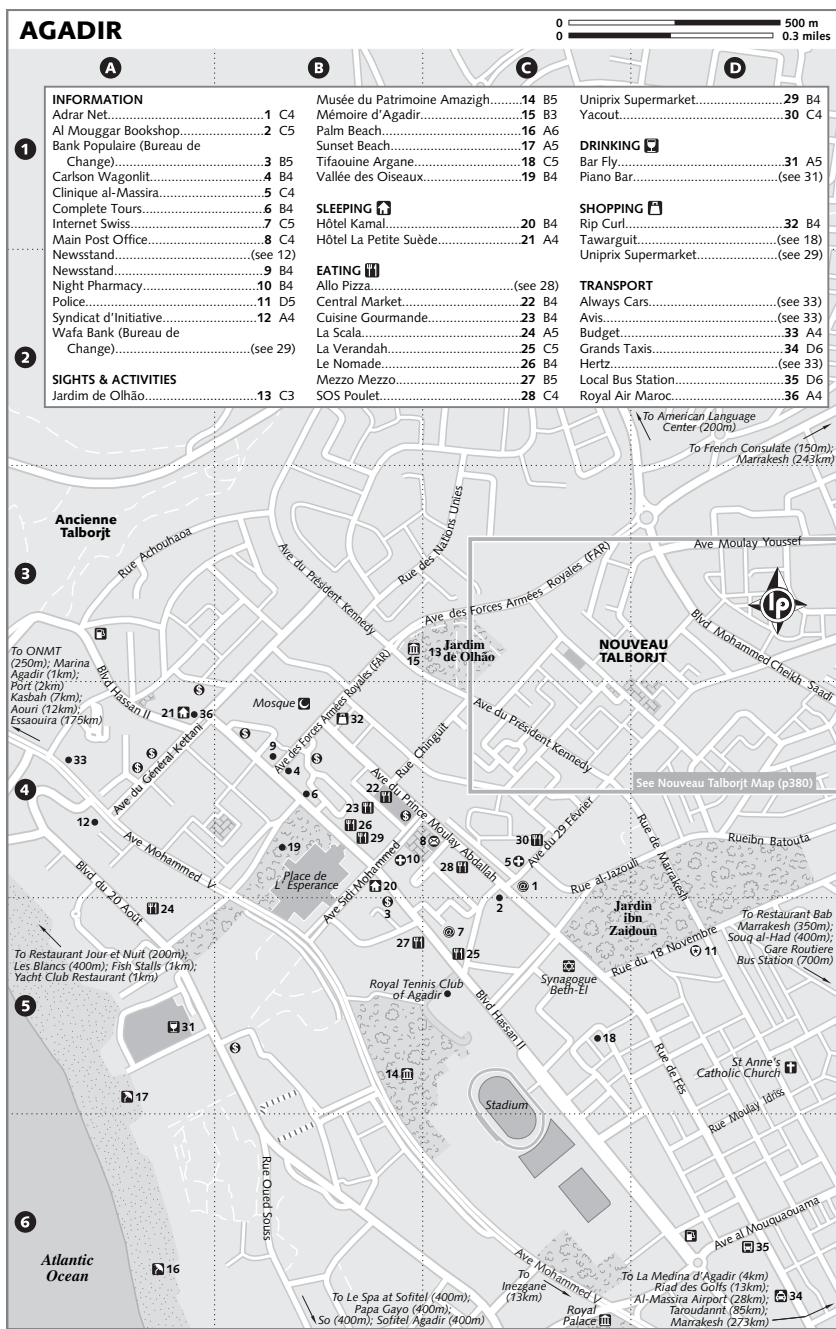
THE SOUSS VALLEY

AGADIR

pop 679,000

Agadir feels unlike anywhere else in Morocco. A busy port and seaside town built around a fortified kasbah, it was completely destroyed by an earthquake in 1960. It has since been rebuilt as Morocco's premier beach resort with some 30,000 beds. Laid out as a large grid of downtown streets, surrounded by spacious residential suburbs, Agadir doesn't have the bustling street life found in so many Moroccan cities, although the new marina development may soon provide this. Its lure, for now, lies in

أكادير



its huge swathe of sandy beach: more sheltered than many other stretches of the Atlantic, it offers clean water, safe swimming and some 300 sunny days a year.

Although Agadir's tourism industry is mainly geared to package-tour holiday-makers, it has an increasing number of attractions for independent travellers. It's a good place to stop, not only for some good old-fashioned R&R and for its improved restaurants, but for its gentle sights – the ruined kasbah, the undeveloped nearby beaches (popular for surfing and wind-surfing) and the Souss-Massa National Park.

History

Named after the *agadir* (fortified granary) of the Irir tribe, Agadir has a long history of boom and bust. It was founded in the 15th century by Portuguese merchants wanting to develop trade links with the Saharan caravans. From the mid-16th century, as the Saadian empire expanded, the port became very prosperous from the export of local sugar, cotton and saltpetre, and the products of the Saharan trade, which the Moroccans then controlled. But this prosperity came to an abrupt end in the 1760s when the Alawite Sultan Sidi Mohammed ben Abdallah diverted the trade north to Essaouira.

French colonists did go some way towards redeveloping Agadir in the 20th century, but the devastating earthquake on 29 February 1960, which killed as many as 18,000 people, around half of the population, completely destroyed the city. The authorities were unable to manage with the apocalyptic aftermath of death and disease, sprayed the area with lime and DDT, and consequently left the dead where they had been buried, in the collapsed city. The mound this created is now known as Old Talborjt, north of the modern city.

Since its reconstruction, Agadir has developed into an important port, with a large fishing fleet helping to make Morocco the world's largest exporter of tinned sardines. At the same time, Agadir has continued to grow as Morocco's top beach resort. The opening of the new luxury marina complex is a sign of plans to move the resort upmarket, as is the start of work on the huge new luxury resort at Taghazout.

Orientation

Agadir is spread over a large area, both along the coast and inland from the huge swathe of beach. From the northern end and the marina, three main boulevards – 20 Aout, nearest the ocean, Mohammed V and Hassan II – run through the main tourist area. The southern district of Founti has some of the best resort hotels. Inland in the northeast side of town, Nouveau Talborjt (New Talborjt) is the business centre and has most of the budget hotels.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

News-stands along Blvd Hassan II, particularly near the junction with Ave des Forces Armées Royales (FAR) have a good selection of international papers (usually a day or two late) and magazines.

Al Mouggar Bookshop (Map p376; ☎ 028 842712; Ave du Prince Moulay Abdallah) Just off Ave du 29 Février, there's a wide selection of French books from novels and history to travel guides, and some in English about Morocco.

EMERGENCY

Most of the larger hotels in Agadir are able to recommend reliable, English-speaking doctors.

Ambulance (☎ 15)

Police (☎ 19; Rue du 18 Novembre)

INTERNET ACCESS

There are dozens of internet places, charging Dh5 to Dh10 per hour.

Adrar Net (Map p376; Ave du 29 Février, Talborjt; per hr Dh5).

Internet Swiss (Map p376; Blvd Hassan II; per hr Dh10; ☎ 9am-11pm) The busiest, most conveniently located cybercafé.

MEDICAL SERVICES

The Syndicat d'Initiative (p378) posts a list of doctors and pharmacies on its door.

Clinique al-Massira (Map p376; ☎ 028 843238; Ave du 29 Février)

Night Pharmacy (Map p376; ☎ 028 820349; Ave Sidi Mohammed) Located in the basement of the town hall, next to the post office. A list of other night services is usually posted in the windows of all pharmacies.

MONEY

Most banks have ATMs, and there are exchange booths and ATMs at the airport. Large

hotels change cash and travellers cheques. These banks have exchange offices.

Banque Populaire (Map p376; Blvd Hassan II)

Wafa Bank (Map p376; Blvd Hassan II)

POST

Main post office (Map p376; Ave Sidi Mohammed;

☎ 8.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-noon Sat)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Information booth (☎ 028 839077; Al-Massira

airport; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 2.30-6.30pm)

ONMT (Délégation Régionale du Tourisme; Map p376;

☎ 028 846377; fax 028 846379; Immeuble Ignouan, Ave

Mohammed V; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 2.30-6.30pm Mon-Thu,

8.30-11.30am & 3-6.30pm Fri) The best place for local and

regional information.

Syndicat d'Initiative (Map p376; ☎ 028 825304; Ave

Mohammed V; ☎ 9am-noon & 3-6.30pm) Useful for the

list of doctors and pharmacies.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

Atlantic Sport Travel (Map p376; ☎ 061 387177;

atlantic.sport.travel@gmail.com) Runs day treks and

mountain-bike trips out of Agadir.

Carlson Wagonlit (Map p376; ☎ 028 841528; 26 Ave

des Forces Armées Royales) Represents all major airlines.

Complete Tours (Map p376; ☎ 028 823401; Immeuble

Oumlil 26, Ave Hassan II; www.complete-tours.com) Runs

trips to Taroudannt, Imouzzer and elsewhere in the

region.

Sights

The old **kasbah** (Map p376), on a hill 7km northwest of the centre and visible from much of Agadir, is a rare survival of the earthquake. Built in 1541 by Saadian Sultan Mohammed ech-Cheikh, it was restored in the 1740s. The inscription over the entry arch in Dutch and Arabic ('Believe in God and respect the King') is a reminder of the beginning of trade with the Low Countries. Events took a turn for the worse in the 1750s when Agadir joined in a local revolt against the Alawite Sultan Moulay Abdallah. His revenge was to garrison the kasbah, move the Jewish community to Essaouira and forbid merchants to trade here. Abandoned to the inhabitants of Agadir, the garrison once provided housing for nearly 300 people. All that remains is the outer wall, though traces of these dwellings can still be made out. But the real reason for visiting is to take in the view of Agadir, the port, marina and sprawling suburbs.

The grassy area below the kasbah, **Ancienne Talborjt** (Map p376), covers the remains of old Agadir town and constitutes a mass grave for all those who died in the 1960 earthquake. The walk up to the kasbah is long, hot and uncomfortable: get a taxi up (Dh20 to Dh25) and walk back down. After a visit to the kasbah it is worth dropping in at the **port** (Map p376), to eat or just soak up some atmosphere.

The small **Musée du Patrimoine Amazigh** (Map p376; ☎ 028 821632; Passage Ait Souss, Blvd Hassan II; admission Dh20; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) has an excellent display of Berber artefacts, especially strong on jewellery. Inspired by Bert Flint, the Dutch owner of the Maison Tiskiw in Marrakesh (p302), this is a great place to learn about the traditional life and culture of the Berber people of the region. A free guided tour can be arranged on request (a tip is welcome). Nearby is the **Vallée des Oiseaux** (Valley of the Birds; Map p376; adult/child Dh5/3; ☎ 9.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-7pm), a shaded children's playground, with an aviary and small zoo, created in the dry riverbed that runs down from Blvd Hassan II south to Blvd du 20 Août.

Equally refreshing is **Jardin de Olhão** (Map p376; Ave du Président Kennedy; ☎ 8am-6pm), a cool, relaxing spot created in 1992 to mark the twinning of Agadir with the Portuguese town of Olhão. In the southwest corner there's **Mémoire d'Agadir** (Map p376; admission free; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 3-7pm Tue-Sat) a small museum dedicated to the 1960 earthquake. Displays include interesting photos of Agadir since the 1920s, while others show the effects of the quake.

The newest sight in town is **Marina Agadir** (Map p376; ☎ 028 828298; www.port-marina-agadir.com), a billion-dirham pleasure port between the beach and commercial port. As well as mooring for your floating pleasure palace, the marina has a range of apartments and a hotel (still not open at the time of writing). With shops (mostly international brands), cafés and restaurants, this will increasingly become a hub of activity in the city.

Four kilometres south, on the Inezgane road, Coco Polizzi, a Rabat-born Italian architect, has created the **La Médina d'Agadir** (☎ 028 280253; www.medinapolizzi.com, in French; Agroud Ben Sergaou; adult/child Dh40/20; ☎ 8.30am-6.30pm), an idealised Berber village, built using tra-

MARIE-LUCE MILANO KRIMI

Formerly from Alsace, in the northeast of France, Marie-Luce Milano Krimi is assistant to the general manager of the Agadir Beach Club Hotel

How long have you lived in Agadir? I have been living here in Agadir for 22 years! I arrived in 1986

Why did you choose to live here? I arrived to work at Club Med for the summer season, met my future husband (Moroccan guy also working there) and we decided to try living together. Twenty-two years later we have two daughters, two dogs, two cats, several birds, a few red fishes and many friends.

Has it changed much since then? It has changed a hell of a lot! Before it was like a big village – everybody knowing each other. Now it's quite a big town, many new people, more Europeans as well, the town has become nice and clean, but it has lost its 'typical' side... Progress has its good and bad sides we all know, and having Marjane, the big supermarket is not one of the good sides. I liked the little shop next door, open all day and nearly all night, with a little man speaking hardly any other language than Arabic but knowing exactly what you were looking for in whatever language you spoke and saying 'oh don't worry, come and pay tomorrow' when you didn't have any change.

So what do you like best about the place? People's attitude. Space. The beach. I love the blue sky when I get up in the morning, birds singing, everybody saying hello when you go out. I also love the fact that IMPOSSIBLE is not a word Moroccans understand. Everything is possible if you are patient.

And your favourite restaurant? I love the Mezzo Mezzo for Jean Mi, the owner of the place, the pizza is the best in town.

What's your favourite phrase in Arabic, Berber or French? Inshallah. I used to hate it. Then I understood that in fact the whole world should use it. And now I use it a million times a day! Inshallah is a real philosophy.

How do you spend your weekends? We both work a lot, so the weekend is usually only Sunday. My daughters spend their Saturdays bodyboarding. I sometimes go to the souq for my shopping. Then we go to the beach or to Taroudannt and see friends in the evening. We certainly don't stay home in front of the TV, this is for sure.

ditional techniques and materials, with workshops for 30 independent artisans. A café-restaurant provides refreshments. Shuttle buses (adult/child costs Dh60/30) drive out to La Médina d'Agadir from the kiosk on Blvd du 20 Août, picking up at several hotels on the way.

Activities

BEACH

The glory of Agadir is its crescent **beach**, which usually remains unruffled when the Atlantic winds are blustering elsewhere. It's clean and well maintained, and during peak periods (June to September) is patrolled by lifeguards (there is a strong undertow) and police.

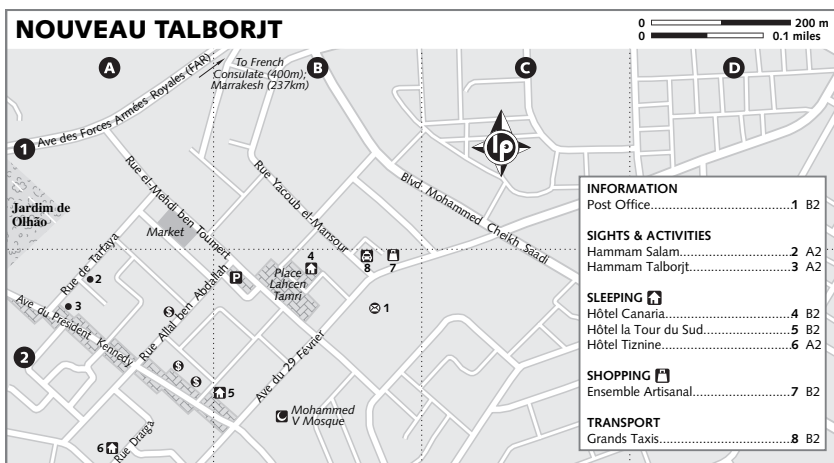
The beach is mostly hassle-free, but single females or families will have a more relaxed time at one of the private beaches (Dh20 for a deckchair and umbrella) such as **Sunset Beach** or **Palm Beach** (Map p376)

which also have showers, toilets and a kids' play area. Many larger beach hotels and surf clubs rent out windsurfing equipment (Dh120 per hour), jet skis (Dh300 for 20 minutes), bodyboards (Dh60 per hour) and surfboards (Dh120 per hour). If you prefer to stroll, the **promenade** runs for several kilometres from the marina to the royal palace.

You can get out onto the water by sailing with **Voiles du Sud** (☎ 061 215746; www.voilesdusud.com; per person in morning Dh300, per person day trip incl lunch Dh450), who operates a 16-person ketch and 30-person catamaran out of the marina.

HAMMAMS

There are a few hammams in Nouveau Talborjt, including **Hammam Salam** (Map p380; 12 Rue de Tarfaya; from Dh10) and the very spruce, women-only **Hammam Talborjt** (Map p380; Rue de Tarfaya; from Dh10) just south of Ave du



Président Kennedy. Many big hotels have more luxurious hammams where you can pamper yourself from Dh80.

If you want something more sophisticated, several hotels have spas offering hammam, massage and a range of treatments, one of the best being **Le Spa at Sofitel** (off Map p376; ☎ 028 820088; www.sofitel.com; Baie des Palmiers, Ben Sergao; massage per hr from Dh650). In the centre of town, **Tifaouine Argane** (Map p376; ☎ 028 690043; www.tifaouine-argane.com; Blvd Mahdi Ben Barka, No.8 Riad Salam; 2hr massage from Dh350) is an argan centre where you can buy oil and argan-based cosmetics and enjoy a range of massages.

Sleeping

Agadir has set its sights on the midrange and top-end visitor, but if you move away from the beach, you will find a very good selection of budget places. High season in Agadir includes Easter, summer and the Christmas period, when European holiday-makers fly out on package tours. During these months, it's best to book ahead to be sure of a room. Midrange and top-end hotels offer a discount on rooms during low season, though it's always worth checking online for rates. Prices for budget hotels remain pretty much constant throughout the year.

BUDGET

Sea views come at a price, so most budget hotels are away from the ocean in Nou-

veau Talborjt. The all-night bus activity and prostitution ensure that most hotel receptions here are open 24 hours, so if you've already booked a room, don't worry about arriving late.

Hôtel Canaria (Map p380; ☎ 028 846727; Place Lahcen Tamri; s/d without bathroom Dh70/90, s/d with bathroom Dh80/100) This hotel overlooks a pleasant square, although the rooms, with pine furniture and potted plants, all face into the internal upper courtyard.

Hôtel Tiznine (Map p380; ☎ 028 843925; 3 Rue Drarga; s/d Dh80/120, with shower Dh120/160) One of Agadir's best budget places, with a dozen good-sized rooms around a green-and-white-tiled flowering courtyard. Some rooms have private bathroom, but the communal ones are spotless. The manager speaks good English, and Yacout (opposite) is nearby for breakfast.

Hôtel La Petite Suède (Map p376; ☎ 028 840779; fax 028 840057; cnr Blvd Hassan II & Ave du Général Kettani; s/d/tr Dh160/244/333) Simple but perfectly located hotel, five minutes' walk from the beach, with very good, friendly service. The streetside rooms have large balconies, but the inside rooms are quieter.

Hôtel La Tour du Sud (Map p380; ☎ 028 822694; Ave du Président Kennedy; s/d Dh191/223) En-suite rooms in this solid two-star hotel, formerly the Hotel de Paris, are brightly decorated in traditional style, gathered around two courtyards dominated by trees. The good ground-floor café serves breakfast (Dh24) on the terrace.

MIDRANGE

our pick Hôtel Kamal (Map p380; ☎ 028 842817; fax 028 843940; Blvd Hassan II; s/d Dh403/462; 🍷) An extremely popular and well-run downtown hotel in a modernist white block located near the town hall. The Kamal manages to appeal to a wide range of clients, including package-tour groups and travelling Moroccans. Rooms are bright and clean, the staff are helpful and there's a pool large enough to swim laps. Streetside rooms can be noisy, and breakfast (Dh36) is dull and overpriced.

TOP END

Most luxury hotels along the seafront cater to package tours, but most of them offer deals on their published rates, so be sure to ask.

Sofitel Agadir (Map p376; ☎ 028 820088; www.sofitel.com; Baie des Palmiers, Ben Sergao; s/d from Dh750/900; 🍷 🍷 🍷) The Sofitel stands out from the large range of resort hotels. Built like a low-rise kasbah, it manages to seem smaller than its 240 rooms, all of which have had a recent upgrade. Luxury facilities include an excellent thalassotherapy spa, hammam, several swimming pools, a well-tended beach and a range of restaurants. It also boasts Agadir's most happening nightclub (see p382).

Riad des Golfs (☎ 028 337033; www.riaddegolfs.com; Chemins des Français; ste from Dh1760; 🍷 🍷 🍷) Tucked away to the south of Agadir, this villa, designed and run by a French architect and his wife, bucks the trend of mega-hotels. Eight large and simply elegant suites, a heated pool surrounded by olive trees and a restaurant serving some of the city's best food (only for residents) mean that this appeals to more than just golfers heading to the nearby courses.

Eating

Agadir used to be a culinary desert where you were lucky to find anything reliable outside the usual tajine or pizza. But a number of recent openings have stirred things up. Many stop serving food by 10pm, but some stay open later for drinks. Agadir restaurants serve alcohol unless stated.

RESTAURANTS

Le Nomade (Map p376; ☎ 028 841186; Blvd Hassan II; mains DH60) In a row of restaurants near the municipal market, Hadj Larbi's restaurant

serves straightforward Moroccan classics: couscous, tajine and brochettes cooked on a wood-fired grill. No alcohol.

La Scala (Map p376; ☎ 028 846773; Rue du Oued Souss; meal with wine Dh350) Excellent Moroccan restaurant, popular with wealthy Moroccans, Arab tourists and Westerners, which makes for a pleasantly cosmopolitan atmosphere. The food is elegant and fresh, and beautifully presented.

our pick Les Blancs (off Map p376; ☎ 028 828388; Marina; mains from Dh90) The best-located restaurant in Agadir by a long way. At the very northern end of the beach and at the entrance to the new marina development, Les Blancs is a chilled, elegant, white-tiled bar, lounge and restaurant. A Spaniard runs the kitchen serving a mix of Andalucian and Moroccan dishes. Service can be slow.

Yacht Club Restaurant (off Map p376; ☎ 028 843708; commercial port; meal Dh200) Also known as Restaurant du Port, the fish couldn't be fresher at this modernist waterfront restaurant situated inside the commercial fishing port. The lighting and decor are plain, but the food, particularly the freshly fried and grilled catch of the day and calamari, is reliable and the service hassle-free. There's a terrace for warm days.

Mezzo Mezzo (Map p376; ☎ 028 848819; Blvd Hassan II; meal Dh200) Ask any Agadir resident for their list of favourite restaurants and this pizzeria will be on it. Why? 'Because it's always so much fun.' 'I've never had a bad meal there.' 'Worth going just to see Jean Michel, the maitre d', at work.' Classic pizzas and pastas.

Restaurant Bab Marrakesh (Map p376; ☎ 028 826144; Rue de Massa; tajine for 2 people Dh100, couscous Dh70, sandwich Dh25-35) Near Souq al-Had, this is the real thing, far removed from the tourist traps near the beach. Highly regarded by locals, it serves authentic Moroccan food at authentic prices.

CAFÉS

There's a good choice of cafés where you can start the day with coffee and pastries or recover from the rigours of Agadir beach life. Most tend to be open by 8am and run until at least 8pm.

Yacout (Map p376; Ave du 29 Février) With its shaded garden, screeching parrot and delicious Moroccan-Western pastries, Yacout wins hands down as *the* breakfast spot.

Later in the day it serves sandwiches, Moroccan sweets and ice-cream cakes. Avoid the main menu.

La Verandah (Map p376; Blvd Hassan II) Opposite the Royal Tennis Club, this Parisian-style café has a seductive array of sweet and savoury treats and is good for people-watching.

Cuisine Gourmande (Map p376; ☎ 028 821542; Central Market, Blvd Hassan II) In a corner of the Central Market's parking, this French-run café and *traiteur* serves salads and ready-made dishes, perfect for a quick meal or picnic on the beach. They also make some of Agadir's best French cakes and pastries.

QUICK EATS

The cheap snack bars in Nouveau Talborjt and around the bus stations are open after hours. **SOS Poulet** (Map p376; Ave du Prince Moulay Abdallah) and its twin, **Allo Pizza** (Map p376; Ave du Prince Moulay Abdallah), serve tasty rotisserie chickens (half chicken Dh54) and a range of pizzas (Dh45 to Dh50). For ultra-fresh, non-nonsense fish, try one of the many **fish stalls** (off Map p376; meals around Dh50) at the entrance to the commercial port.

SELF-CATERING

The large **Uniprix supermarket** (Map p376; Blvd Hassan II) sells everything from cheese and biscuits to beer, wine and spirits. The **Central Market** (Map p376) sells fresh food alongside tourist tat. At the **Souq al-Had** (off Map p376; ☎ Tue-Sun), you can buy fresh fruit and veg from the Souss Valley. It's liveliest on Saturday and Sunday.

Drinking

There are plenty of places along the beach to chill out at midday or toast the sunset. Some of the places along Palm Beach stay open till 1am in summer. The majority of bars have happy hours between about 5pm and 8pm each night, or some offer the dubious pleasure of karaoke or crooning entertainers.

Restaurant Jour et Nuit (Map p376; ☎ 028 840610; Rue de la Plage; ☎ 24hr) is a popular spot for a sundowner, though it gets seedy as the night wears on.

Piano Bar (Map p376; Tafoukt Complex, Blvd du 20 Août) Has a real pianist under the palm trees and some of Agadir's cheapest beers. Situated in the same complex is also the Irish bar, The Pub.

Bar Fly (Map p376; ☎ 028 840123; www.tafoukt.hotel.com; Blvd du 20 Août) One of the happening bars of the moment, girls-only on Tuesday night and salsa on Thursday, but drinks are from Dh60.

Entertainment

Agadir's annual music festival, the **Festival Timatar** (☎ 028 820338; www.festival-timatar.com), attracts a range of top-ranking Moroccan and African musicians each July. Year-round, there is a decent range of clubs, mostly scattered along Blvd du 20 Août, or attached to the big hotels.

When bars start to close around 1am, Moroccans and tourists move to the hotel clubs. Entry ranges from Dh50 to Dh250 during weekends, including a drink. During the low season, tourists are often allowed in free of charge and clubs close around 2am.

Papa Gayo (off Map p376; ☎ 028 845400; Riu Tikida Beach, Chemins des Dunes; ☎ 10pm-4am) Still one of Agadir's most popular nightclubs, and well regarded even in fairly respectable Moroccan circles. Dance the night away and chill on the beach.

So (off Map p376; Sofitel Agadir, Baie des Palmiers; ☎ 10pm-5am) The hippest club in Agadir and one of the most expensive. So is laid out on several levels and includes a champagne bar, vodka bar, live-music stage, restaurant, dance floor and chill-out area. Guest DJs appear on Thursdays. Agadir swingers save this one for the climax of the evening's entertainment.

Shopping

Most souvenirs in Agadir are trucked in from other parts of the country and tend to be of low quality. **Uniprix supermarket** (Map p376; Blvd Hassan II) sells handicrafts at fixed prices. For some Moroccan atmosphere head to **Souq al-Had** (off Map p376; ☎ Tue-Sun) in the southeastern suburbs, with souvenirs, household goods and a second-hand items area outside the western gate. Better-quality crafts are available at the **Ensemble Artisanal** (Map p380; ☎ 028 823872; Ave du 29 Février; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Mon-Sat).

Tawarguit (Map p376; ☎ 028 848225; Lotissement Faiz, Rue 206) has a range of gorgeous, if pricey, homewares, crafts and paintings, including specially commissioned ranges. If you need some beachwear, **Ripcurl** (Map p376; ☎ 028 827154; Ave des Forces Armées Royales) has opened downtown.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Al-Massira Airport (off Map p376; ☎ 028 839122), 28km southeast of Agadir, is mainly served by European charter flights. There are banks with exchange booths and ATMs, car-hire offices, a tourist information office and a couple of restaurants.

Royal Air Maroc (RAM; Map p376; ☎ 028 829120; www.royalairmaroc.com; Ave du Général Kettani) has daily flights to Casablanca and Paris, as well as weekly services to Dakhla, Marrakesh and several European capitals.

Regional Air Lines (☎ 028 820330; www.regionalmaroc.com) operates services to Casablanca, Marrakesh, Ouarzazate, Laâyoune and Dakhla as well as Las Palmas in the Canary Islands.

BUS

Although a good number of buses serve Agadir, it is quite possible you'll end up in Inezgane, 13km south, the regional transport hub. Check before you buy your ticket. Plenty of grands taxis (Dh10) and local buses (Dh5) shuttle between there and Agadir.

The new *gare routière* (main bus station; Map p376) on Rue Chair al-Hamra Mohammed ben Brahim, past the Souq al-Had, looks like a work-in-progress, but this massive circular building is finally fully functioning and all major companies are running services from here. If you need to travel on a specific bus, it is worth booking ahead.

CTM (☎ 028 825341; www.ctm.co.ma) has buses to Casablanca (Dh180, eight hours, six daily). The 10.30pm continues to Rabat (Dh195, 10 hours). There are also departures for Marrakesh (Dh80, four hours, seven daily), Essaouira (Dh60, two hours, one daily), Dakhla (Dh340, 20 hours, three daily), Laâyoune (Dh190, 10 hours, five daily), Tangier (Dh300, 13 hours, one daily) and Fez (Dh235, 12 hours, one daily).

Supratours (☎ 028 224010) has fast services to Marrakesh train station (Dh90, four hours, several daily), Tiznit (Dh40, four hours, two daily), Laâyoune (Dh210, 11 hours, one daily), Dakhla (Dh340, 21 hours, one daily) and Essaouira (Dh60, three hours, several daily). **Satas** (☎ 028 842470), **Tassaout** (☎ 070 595856), **SICR** (☎ 028 214133), **Bab Salama** (☎ 028 826220) and others also run intercity services out of here.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Car hire is never cheap in Morocco, but you can find some of the country's best deals in Agadir. It is worth checking out the local agencies along Blvd Hassan II, where prices start at around Dh300 per day for the smallest car, though there's usually room for haggling. Always Cars is one of the most reputable of the locals, used by several foreign tour operators. Scooters and motorbikes are also available, although you should check carefully the state of the machines as we have heard of problems with the standard of maintenance.

Always Cars (Map p376; ☎ 028 846061/840760; Ave Mohammed V)

Avis (Map p376; ☎ airport 028 839244, office 028 841755; www.avis.com; Ave Mohammed V)

Budget (Map p376; ☎ airport 028 839101, office 028 848222; www.budget.com; Immeuble Marhaba, Ave Mohammed V)

Hertz (Map p376; ☎ airport 028 839071, office 028 840939; www.hertz.com; Immeuble Marhaba, Ave Mohammed V)

TAXI

The main grand-taxi rank is located at the south end of Rue de Fès. There is a smaller grand-taxi rank on Rue Yacoub el-Mansour in Nouveau Talborjt. As a rough guide, a seat on a long-distance ride (more than 50km) costs Dh4 per km. Destinations include Inezgane (Dh8), Taghazout (Dh8), Taroudannt (Dh35), Essaouira (Dh70), Marrakesh (Dh120), Laâyoune (Dh200) and Dakhla (Dh350).

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

There is no direct bus between the airport and Agadir. Bus 22 runs from outside the airport (about 500m straight out on the road) to Inezgane (Dh5) every 40 minutes or so until about 8.30pm. From Inezgane, several buses run to Agadir (Dh3), or take a grand taxi (Dh8).

A grand taxi between the airport and Agadir costs Dh150 by day, and Dh200 at night for up to six people. Expect to pay more for luggage.

BUS

The main local bus station is next to the grand-taxi rank at the southern end of

town. Buses 5 and 6 run every 10 minutes or so to Inezgane (Dh3). Ratag buses 12 and 14 go to Taghazout (Dh5).

TAXI

Orange petits taxis run around town. Prices are worked out by meter, so ask for it to be switched on.

AROUND AGADIR

Inezgane

إنزكان

One of the region's transport hubs, Inezgane, 13km south of Agadir, is not a tourist destination, but some travellers enjoy stopping here for that very reason. There's a vast fresh-produce market across from the combined bus station and grand-taxi lot – Tuesday is the main souq.

Should you need to stay overnight, there's a clutch of cheap hotels around the bus station.

Hôtel Louz (☎ 028 331990; fax 028 331842; Ave Mokhtar Soussi; s/d with shower Dh100/160) is a cheerful hotel with modern, boxy rooms and private bathrooms. It also has a TV lounge and a restaurant, though there is better food at the stalls around the main square.

Hôtel-Restaurant La Pergola (☎ 028 271803; lapergola@menara.ma; Km 8 Rte d'Agadir; s/d Dh194/226) is a relic of another, low-key Agadir, its comfortable bungalows set in a garden full of flowers. The hotel is used by birdwatchers as it is a few minutes from the Souss estuary. The restaurant (breakfast Dh24; set menu Dh115) is old-fashioned French cuisine with some Moroccan specialities, all very comforting after a long bus journey.

You'll also find dozens of cheap cafés and restaurants around the main square and outside the market.

There are plenty of buses going in all possible directions. The bus station is just off the Agadir–Tiznit road. The CTM and Supratours offices are on either side of Ave Mokhtar Soussi.

Loads of grands taxis to Essaouira (Dh50, three hours), Tiznit (Dh20, two hours) and Taroudannt (Dh20, 2½ hours) also gather here, as well as less regular taxis for Goulmime (Dh50, 4½ hours) and Tan Tan (Dh90, six hours).

Adding to the organised chaos are regular local buses (Dh3) and grands taxis (Dh5) heading to Agadir and Al-Massira airport (bus 22).

SOUSS-MASSA NATIONAL PARK

منتزه سو ماسه الوطني

Places like the Souss-Massa National Park are going to become ever more important in Morocco's future. The most significant of all the country's national parks stretches 70km south of Agadir, a block of over 33,000 hectares of protected land between the main north–south highway and the beach. It is a spectacular and wild place of cliffs, sand dunes, farmland, coastal steppes and forests.

The park was created in 1991 in recognition of its importance as a feeding ground for birds. Along with the Souss estuary near Inezgane, it has become very popular with birdwatchers, although it is also a great place for walking. The best times to visit are March to April, and October to November.

During the winter, ospreys and large flocks of pochard and other ducks are commonly seen, as well as greater flamingos. But the biggest attraction is the population of bald ibises. These birds, revered in ancient Egypt and once widespread in Central Europe, North Africa and the Middle East, are now an endangered species. A few small colonies or breeding pairs have been found around the Eastern Mediterranean, but over half of the world's total population is found in the Souss-Massa. The greatest threat, now, comes from tourism development. A few years ago Club Med was granted permission to build a massive new resort on the coast side of the park, but after pressure from BirdLife International, the global authority on bird numbers, and other concerned organisations, the plans were shelved and Club Med has retreated. For the moment, the breeding grounds remain off-limits, though you can spot the ibises around Oued Massa or at the mouth of the Tamri River.

Jackal, red fox, wild cat, genet and Eurasian wild boar are also found in the park, while a large fenced area in the north of the park contains species that have now disappeared from the south including Dorcas gazelles, addaxes, red-necked ostriches and scimitar horned oryxes. The **Souss-Massa National Park headquarters** (☎ 028 333880), which looks after the day-to-day running of the park, is located at Oued Souss. To get there, take the main Agadir–Inezgane highway

past Golf des Dunes. Take the right fork and you will find the park entrance before you reach the royal palace. At the time of our visit, the centre was shut because, they said, the government had not renewed their contract. We hope this situation will have been rectified by the time of publication.

Oued Massa

لويده مصا

Some 58km south of Agadir there's a second entrance to the park near the village of Massa, signposted from the main highway. Trained guides (Dh100 to Dh150) can be arranged through the forestry warden's office near the car park, as can donkey rides for kids. A track leads along the river to the estuary mouth (3km) and the village of Sidi R'bat.

The tiny village of **Sidi R'bat** has two claims to fame. Supposedly this is where the biblical Jonah was vomited up by a whale, and also where Uqba bin Nafi, the 7th-century Arab conqueror of Morocco, rode his horse triumphantly into the sea and called on God to witness the fact that he could find no land left to conquer. Spectacularly located on the gorgeous beach and in the middle of the park is **Ksar Massa** (☎ 061 280319; www.ksarmassa.com; Sidi R'bat, Oued Massa; B&B per person Dh900, full board per person Dh1350; 🚶 🚗 🏠). This wonderful guest house on the beach is a wonderful place to unwind. Luxuriously spacious rooms and suites are painted in bright colours and the pool overlooks the ocean. Management can arrange guided trips into the park and throughout the region. To get there follow the signposts from Massa.

Getting There & Away

From Agadir, 4WD tours head into the park, but both Oued Massa and Oued Souss are usually accessible by 2WD (or grand taxi). The Gab bus 17 runs from Inezgane to Massa (Dh10) every 30 minutes or so, from where it is about an hour's walk to Oued Massa river mouth. For Oued Souss and the park headquarters, take bus 40 from any stop along Ave Mohammed V in Agadir.

NORTH OF AGADIR

Most beaches near Agadir have been colonised by foreigners, who have built winter villas here. King Fahd of Saudi Arabia, who

has a palace north of Agadir on the road to Taghazout, has funded the building of the road along this stretch.

If you're looking for surf and less crowded beaches, then head further north, where there are beautiful sandy coves every few kilometres.

Local bus 12 from Agadir bus station (with a stop on Blvd Mohammed V, outside the Royal Mirage Hotel) runs up the coast to Taghazout (Dh5) and beyond. The daily buses between Essaouira and Agadir also stop here.

Aourir & Tamraght

طمرات و اورير

Known collectively as Banana Village because of the large banana groves that surround them, Aourir and Tamraght lie some 12km and 15km north of Agadir, respectively, separated by Oued Tamraght. They share Banana Beach, which can be good for beginner surfers. Aourir also has a lively souq each Wednesday on the ocean side of the road.

Despite its unprepossessing location, close to the town of Aourir, **Villa Mandala** (☎ 028 314773; www.villa-mandala.com; Aourir; s/d incl breakfast Dh550/880) is a rare find. Established in 1999 to help women travel safely in Morocco, it has since morphed into a guest house that supports artisans. The villa on the beach has five airy rooms, communal showers and a large salon. Meals (Dh130) are taken communally and guests are free to wander the house, including the kitchen, where they can help prepare local dishes. There is an in-house hammam (Dh100), as well as body-therapy sessions that can be arranged, and a female staff member can also take you to Aourir hammam (Dh250). Les Amis des Artisans, the craftworkers association founded here, now has its office in Agadir, but a selection of their pottery, ironwork and other crafts is used here and is for sale.

In Tamraght, in the midst of numerous surf breaks, **Surf Marokko** (☎ 068 395124; www.surfmarokko.de) and **Dynamic Loisir** (☎ 028 314655, 061 259838; Tamraght) are both popular with the surfing crowd, and offer board rental and courses. Dynamic Loisir also runs the beach café.

Taghazout

تاغزوت

Six kilometres from Tamraght, the laid-back fishing village of Taghazout, which

was once famous for calamari and hippies, is now considered one of Morocco's premier surfing beaches. However soon it will be known as one of its largest resorts: at the time of our visit, bulldozers were levelling the ground between Tamraght and Taghazout villages. The first hotel and golf course are due to open at the end of 2009, though it will be some years before all 20,000 beds are ready. In the meantime, the surf is still up. Surf breaks such as Killer Point, La Source and Anka Point continue to attract experienced surfers, while beginners try out the appropriately named Hash Point. The surf is most reliable from September to May.

If you are a surfer, then the beachfront villa of **our pick Surf Maroc** (☎ 028 200368, in UK 00 44 1794 322 709; www.surfmaroc.co.uk; r per person incl half-board from Dh500) is the place to go. Run by a group of passionate British surfers, it offers a full-service surf camp for all levels, as well as yoga classes. What's more, the straightforward rooms provide an increasingly rare opportunity along this stretch of the coast to fall asleep listening to the waves break. Breakfast is served on a terrace with a good view over the surf. They have a range of packages from Dh500 per person per night half-board including surf guiding (taking you to the best waves) and from Dh200 per day for wetsuit and surfboard. They also rent nearby luxury and self-catering apartments.

There are rooms to rent in the village, and out of high season you can usually turn up and find somewhere. Otherwise, try **Résidence Amouage** (☎ 028 200006; www.residence-amouage.com; s/d Dh170/220; 📶), which has simple self-catering studios and an internet room open to the public.

There are some good places to eat on the main road, but the point of being here is to see the ocean and there are several simple café-restaurants up from the beach, of which **Panorama** (breakfast Dh18, tajine Dh40) at the south end of the beach, has the best view. Service is slow, but the fish is fresh. It's also a great place to catch the sunset.

IMMOUZER DES IDA OUTANANE

ایموزار ادو اوتنان

This thoroughly recommended side trip takes you about 60km northeast of Agadir, into the High Atlas foothills. On the way you pass through the aptly named **Paradise**

Valley, an oleander- and palm-lined gorge, and a popular picnic and swimming spot.

The famous cascades of Immouzer, one of North Africa's most beautiful waterfalls, flow most strongly between February and August – at other times they're reduced to little more than a trickle. The site is about to change as plans have been agreed to remove many buildings close to the falls and to improve access and visitor facilities.

Water falls off the edge of the plateau in several chutes, collecting in pools at the base of the cliff. There is a cool plunge pool and second waterfall nearby – villagers will be glad to take you there, telling you how Jimi Hendrix is responsible for the peace/love symbol carved in the rock. Immouzer, even without water pressure, is a delightful place to hang around for a few days, and walk. Steps lead down to the bottom of the falls. Also worth considering is the walk to the source of the river above the falls. Ask at Restaurant Chez Rachid for directions.

The area turns white in spring when the almond trees blossom. There is a honey harvest and festival in July/August, and around late November you may be lucky enough to witness the olive harvest, when villagers climb up into the trees to shake the olives from the branches. Thursday is souq day.

Sleeping & Eating

Hôtel Tifrit (☎ 028 826044; Paradise Valley; s/d with half board Dh250/390; 📶) Set right by the river, this family-run auberge is about halfway along the road to Immouzer from the coastal turn-off. Functional rooms come with clean shared bathrooms. The hotel has a pleasant terrace looking on to the river, and serves good Moroccan meals.

Auberge à la Bonne Franquette (☎ 028 823191; www.bonnefranquette-agadir.com, in French; s/d half-board Dh600/725; 📶 📶) In the village of Aksri, 15km from Immouzer and surrounded by argan trees, is a surprising place to find tasty and reasonably priced French cooking, served out in a flowering courtyard, weather permitting (meals around Dh120). There are also five cosy rooms with private bathrooms and a heated pool open year-round. From here you can work off that lunch with a walk through the palm groves.

Hôtel des Cascades (☎ 028 826016; www.cascades-hotel.com, in French; s/d half-board Dh600/900; 📶) Just east of Immouzer, in a wonderful location

perched high above the valley, the hotel is set amid a riotous garden of almond and apple trees and there are tennis courts and a good restaurant (set menu Dh150) with a terrace. The hotel is built on three floors, the large rooms (the best ones are on the 3rd floor) come with a west-facing terrace or balcony. A path leads down through olive groves to the cascades and there's other excellent walking around – ask in the hotel for suggestions.

Getting There & Away

A very unreliable local bus runs from Agadir bus station to Immouzzar (Dh30, three hours), but unfortunately it doesn't run if there are not enough people. Also, you'll have to wait until the following morning for the unreliable bus back. A better option would be to share a grand taxi (Dh35), easiest on Thursday, which is market day. Many hotels and travel agencies in Agadir offer coach tours to Immouzzar.

TAROUANNT

pop 70,000

Taroudannt (also spelled Taroudant) is often called 'Little Marrakesh', but that doesn't do it justice: it is a place in its own right. Hidden by magnificent red-mud walls and with the snowcapped peaks of the High Atlas beckoning beyond, Taroudannt has a touch of mystery about it. Yet it is also a practical place, a market town where Berbers trade the produce of the rich and fertile Souss Valley.

There aren't any must-see sights here. Instead, it is a place to stroll and linger. The town's souqs are well worth a browse, more laid-back than Marrakesh, but with an atmosphere of activity that is missing in Agadir – many people come on a day trip (it is only 80km). Taroudannt also makes an excellent base for travellers interested in trekking up into the little-explored western High Atlas (see p445).

Some 53km east of Taroudannt is the turning for the Tizi n'Test road (see p336), one of the most spectacular and perilous passes in the country, leading you across the High Atlas and on to Marrakesh.

History

Taroudannt was one of the early bases of the Almoravides, who established them-

selves here in 1056 AD, at the beginning of their conquest of Morocco. In the 16th century the emerging Saadians made it their capital for about 20 years. By the time they moved on to Marrakesh, they had turned the Souss Valley, in which the city stands, into the country's most important producer of sugar cane, cotton, rice and indigo – all valuable trade items on the trans-Saharan trade routes the dynasty was so keen to control. The Saadians constructed the old part of town and the kasbah, though most of it was destroyed and the inhabitants massacred in 1687 by Moulay Ismail, as punishment for opposing him. Only the ramparts survived. Most of what stands inside them dates from the 18th century.

Taroudannt continued to be a centre of intrigue and sedition against the central government well into the 20th century, and indeed played host to the Idrissid El-Hiba, a southern chief who opposed the Treaty of Fès, the 1912 agreement that created the French Protectorate.

Orientation

Unlike many southern Moroccan towns, and perhaps because of its reputation for sedition, the French didn't use Taroudannt as an administrative or military centre, so it has no 'European' quarter or ville nouvelle.

The cheaper hotels are all on or near the two central squares: Place al-Alaouyine (still known by its former Berber name, Place Assarag) and Place an-Nasr (formerly Place Talmoqlate). Banks, restaurants and a small post office are clustered in this area.

Most buses and grands taxis terminate just outside the medina's southern gate, Bab Zorgane.

Information

Three banks have ATMs on Place al-Alaouyine (Banque Populaire, BMCE and BMCI), and all have exchange facilities and accept travellers cheques. BMCE also does cash advances.

Club Roudana (Ave Bir Zaran; per hr Dh8) Internet access.

Hospital (Ave Moulay Rachid) By the kasbah.

Main post office (Rue du 20 Aout) Off Ave Hassan II, to the east of the kasbah.

Night pharmacy (☎ 028 854599) Next to Grande Mosquée.

Wafanet (Ave Mohammed V; per hr Dh8) Internet access.

Sights

The 7.5km of **ramparts** surrounding Taroudannt are among the best-preserved pisé walls in Morocco. Their colour changes from golden brown to deepest red depending on the time of day. They can easily be explored on foot (two hours) preferably in the late afternoon, or take a bike or a *calèche* (see p391) and see the walls by moonlight.

Built in the 16th and 17th century, a string of mighty defensive towers create the gates of the city. One of the most commonly used of these gates is the triple-arched **Bab el-Kasbah**, approached via an avenue of orange trees. Through here, on the right past an olive press, is another gate, **Bab Sedra**, (cyclists and pedestrians only) leading to the old kasbah quarter, a fortress built by Moulay Ismail and now the poorest part of town. The governor's palace, also in the kasbah, now forms part of the **Hôtel Palais Salam** (right).

Activities

Ballade Roudana des Remparts (☎ 068 395696; per hr Dh30 plus tip) will take you for a fascinating guided bike tour around the walls and city (mainly in French).

Taroudannt is a great base for trekking in the western High Atlas region, and the secluded **Tichka Plateau** (for details of treks here see p435) is a delightful meadow of springtime flowers and hidden gorges. Several agencies in town offer treks, but we recommend you insist on travelling only with a qualified guide.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Most budget hotels around Place al-Alaouyine offer basic accommodation and roof terraces, good for sunbathing and people-watching.

Hôtel el-Warda (☎ 028 852763; Place an-Nasr; s/d Dh50/70) This is the best of the ultra-cheapies, with a funky *zellij* (tilework) terrace overlooking Place an-Nasr. The rooms are basic – you get a bed and washbasin – and toilets and showers are communal. It is run by women, but single women might find the alley entrance and all-male clientele in the café difficult.

Chambres d'Hotes Les Amis (☎ 067 601686; Sidi Belkass; s/d Dh80/150) Simple but quite large whitewashed rooms with patterned tiled floors and bedspreads, a large communal

bathroom, a couple of salons, a terrace and above all the owner's enthusiasm make this guest house recommended. It's a short walk out of the medina, but quieter and less hassled for that.

Hôtel Taroudannt (☎ 028 852416; Ave Mohammed V & Place al-Alaouyine; s/d/tr Dh140/160/200) The Taroudannt is faded, the en-suite rooms, though clean, have seen better days and its bar can get rowdy. And yet its jungle-style courtyard and faintly colonial public areas have a unique atmosphere – and the bar closes early. There is a good restaurant (menu Dh70) and they can organise great treks in the surrounding mountains with the excellent guide El Aouad Ali (☎ 066 637972). All told, this remains the best budget hotel in town.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

our pick **Naturally Morocco Guest House: Centre Culturel & Environmental** (☎ bookings 0044 1239 710814, 028 551628/067 297438; www.naturallymorocco.co.uk; 422 Derb Afferdou; per person half-board Dh410, 'Real Morocco' package per person 1 week Dh3500). If only there were more places like this, a medina house run by locals offering a rare glimpse into Moroccan life. Run in conjunction with UK-based Naturally Morocco, dedicated to sustainable tourism and cultural contact, they offer excursions led by skilled guides, exciting cultural experiences and delicious Moroccan meals. Sunday night dinner is followed by Berber music and dancing. Staff can arrange ecotours on birdwatching, flora and fauna, if they don't have another group.

Hôtel Palais Salam (☎ 028 852501; www.palaisalam.com; kasbah; s/d incl breakfast from Dh692/934; 🍽️) This former pasha's residence should be the best hotel in town, but is sadly dilapidated, the staff demoralised and the exotic garden overly built on. Rooms in the old wing are large, but in need of refitting or at least a thorough clean. Newly refurbished rooms, a little bland but better equipped, were due to open soon after our visit.

Kasabat Annour (☎ 028 854576; www.kasabatannour.com; kasbah; s/d incl breakfast Dh880/1320; 🍽️ 🍷 📺). A wonderful new addition to Taroudannt, built around a former colonel's house in the medina, right up against the kasbah walls. It features six elegant and spacious rooms around a good-sized swimming pool, and meals, hammam and treatments are available on request. There

are also a couple of cheaper rooms built into the city walls which cannot, by law, have water plumbed in, so have separate facilities.

Dar Zitoune (☎ 028 551141; www.darzitoune.com; s/d/ste incl breakfast Dh900/1200/1540; 🍴 🚶 🚿) In a series of bungalows in a gorgeous fruit-filled garden, the rooms are large and simply furnished in local style, but with all the facilities one expects at this level. Suites are enormous and well priced, with working fireplaces. The pool is heated in winter and there is a hammam. The restaurant is one of the best in town (menu Dh150).

Eating

The hotel terraces on Place al-Alaouyine are good places to have breakfast, and also offer good-value set menus of couscous and salad (Dh75).

RESTAURANTS

Chez Nada (☎ 028 851726; Ave Moulay Rachid; set menu Dh70; 🍴 lunch & dinner; 🚶) West of Bab al-Kasbah, this is a quiet modern family-run place, famous for its excellent and good-value tajines, including one with pigeon. There's a male-dominated café downstairs, and main dining room on the 1st-floor terrace with great views over the gardens. Food is home cooking and excellent. *Pastilla* (pie) and couscous (Dh60 to Dh95) should be ordered a couple of hours ahead.

Jnane Soussia (☎ 028 854980; set menu Dh75; 🍴 dinner; 🚶 🚿) A delightful restaurant, a short walk from Bab Zorgane, with tented seating areas set around a large pool in a garden adjacent to the ramparts. The house specialities are a mouth-watering *mechoui* (whole roast lamb) and pigeon *pastilla*, which have to be ordered in advance, but everything here is good.

Restaurant Vala (☎ 028 850249; Km2, National 10; 3 courses from Dh110; 🍴 lunch & dinner) You couldn't get more contemporary Moroccan than this. In a villa located 2km from the centre, this restaurant serves good, solid food to local businessmen and bureaucrats, and is packed with families on weekends. Call ahead to order couscous (Dh80 to Dh150) or *pastilla* (Dh120 to Dh150).

QUICK EATS

The best place to look for cheap eateries is around Place an-Nasr and north along

Ave Bir Zaran, where you find the usual tajine, *harira* (lentil soup) and salads. Several places around Place al-Alaouyine serve sandwiches and simple grills.

Mehdi Snack (off Ave Moulay Rachid; set menu Dh25-45; 🍴 lunch & early evening) Located just behind Chez Nada, and run by the same family, this is a good snack bar with cheap burgers, salads and fried sardines.

SELF-CATERING

Putting together a picnic is not a problem in Taroudannt. In addition to stalls in the souqs, there's a dedicated **fruit and vegetable market** at the northern end of Ave Bir Zaran.

Drinking

Jus al Boustane (Ave Bir Zaran; juice Dh5) Run by a cheerful chap surrounded by piles of fruit, this is a good place to stock up on vitamins with fresh juice near the Lycée Mohammed V.

Shopping

Taroudannt is the central Chleuh city of the Souss, so it is a good place to look for the good-quality silver jewellery for which this tribe is renowned. The jewellery is influenced both by Saharan tribes and by Jewish silversmiths, who formed a significant part of the community until the late 1960s.

Bab Taghout is the easiest way into the pleasant medina. South of Place an-Nasr, the **Souq Berbère** has fresh vegetables, spices, pottery and baskets. The main **Souq Arabe**, east of Place al-Alaouyine, has antique and souvenir shops hidden in the quiet streets. Look out for the **Antiquaire Haut-Atlas** (☎ 028 852145; 61 Souq el Kabir), the most reputable dealer in top-quality objects, with a huge collection of well-chosen carpets, fabulous jewellery and antique pottery. At **Galerie du Sud** (☎ 077 608260; 16 Souk el Karaza) artist Amahou Mohamed sells his striking paintings mounted in frames made out of recycled bike tyres.

A large souq on Sunday morning, just outside Bab al-Khemis, brings in people from the whole region.

Getting There & Away

BUS

All buses leave from the main bus station outside Bab Zorgane. **CTM** (Hotel Les Arcades, Place al-Alaouyine) has the most reliable buses,

with one departure per day for Casablanca (Dh150, 10 hours) via Marrakesh (Dh90, six hours).

Other companies run services throughout the day to both these cities as well as to Agadir (Dh30, 2½ hours), Inezgane (Dh15, 2½ hours) and Ouarzazate (Dh80, five hours). There's one bus to Tata (Dh50, five hours).

CAR

Local agencies **Tinghir Cars** (☎ 028 850810; Ave Moulay Rachid Ferk Lahbab) and **Tioute Cars** (Ave Prince Héritier Sidi Mohammed) hire out small cars from Dh300 per day.

TAXI

Taroudannt's grands taxis also gather at the bus station outside Bab Zorgane. The main destinations are Inezgane (Dh23), and sometimes Agadir (Dh28) and Marrakesh (Dh130).

Getting Around

You can tour the ramparts in a *calèche*. The *calèches* gather just inside Bab al-Kasbah, on Place al-Alaouyine and other prominent spots. A one-way trip around town costs Dh15 to Dh20, while one-hour tours are Dh50 or more depending on your bargaining skills. Taroudannt is also a good place to cycle: reliable bikes can be rented at **Bab Tamaklat** (☎ 012 987351), near Place Talmoqlate.

TALIOUINE

تاليوين

The straggling village of Taliouine, halfway between Taroudannt and Ouarzazate, is dominated by hills and the impressive Glaoui kasbah. It is disintegrating fast, but the best part is still inhabited by descendants of the Glaoui's servants. A caretaker can show you around.

Taliouine is the centre for saffron, the most expensive spice in the world, which grows in a very narrow band of land. The *crocus sativus*, from which it comes flowers between late October and November, when a festival is held to celebrate the harvest. **Coopérative Souktana du Safran** (☎ 068 395215; www.safran-souktana.mezgarne.com; ☎ 7.30am-1.30pm & 2-8pm) has a small museum, saffron tasting and shop, where you need to insist that bags are weighed in front of you. Auberge le Safran (see right)

also sells top-quality spice. Saffron here costs around Dh30 per gram.

The village comes to life during the Monday **souq**, behind the kasbah.

Taliouine is becoming a popular trekking centre for the nearby **Jebel Siroua** (see p445), which offers some of the finest walking in the Anti Atlas.

The N10 road east from Taroudannt to Taliouine is less dramatic than the Tizi n'Test, but provides a good alternative if you are heading to Ouarzazate. The road north of Taliouine crosses a beautiful and immense landscape, to join the main Marrakesh–Ouarzazate road near the turn-off to Aït Benhaddou.

Sleeping

Auberge le Safran (☎/fax 028 534046, 068 394223; www.auberge-safran.com, in French; d/tr/q Dh170/200/280) Closer to the centre and currently the best in the village, the five simple but pretty ensuite rooms are decorated in bright colours. The family suites are particularly spacious and the roof terrace has great views. They harvest their own saffron, which they sell and use in the delicious cooking (meals from Dh80). They also organise a range of treks into the mountains.

Auberge Souktana (☎ 028 534075; souktana@menara.ma s/d room with shower Dh180/220, bungalow Dh100/160, tent Dh50/80) A small family-run auberge, the former Youth Hostel, 1km east of the village on the main road, with recently modernised rooms, four small bungalows with basin and space for tents. The multilingual hosts have a wealth of information on the region, and have great experience at running Jebel Siroua treks. Reservations are essential in trekking season.

Hotel Ibn Toumerte (☎ 028 534125; fax 028 534126; s/d Dh445/538; ☎ ☎) Right next to the kasbah, a bunkerlike 1970s hotel has little character but does have some stunning retro decor, small though comfortable rooms, great views, a neglected pool and the town's only bar. Meals cost Dh169.

Getting There & Away

Buses pass through Taliouine from both Ouarzazate and Taroudannt (Dh30), but there are not always seats available. Your best chance is to wait at the main bus stop in town. Grands taxis head west to Oued Berhil, where you can change for Taroudannt,

and east to Tazenakht (Dh20), where you can change for Ouarzazate (Dh27).

TIZNIT

تزنيت

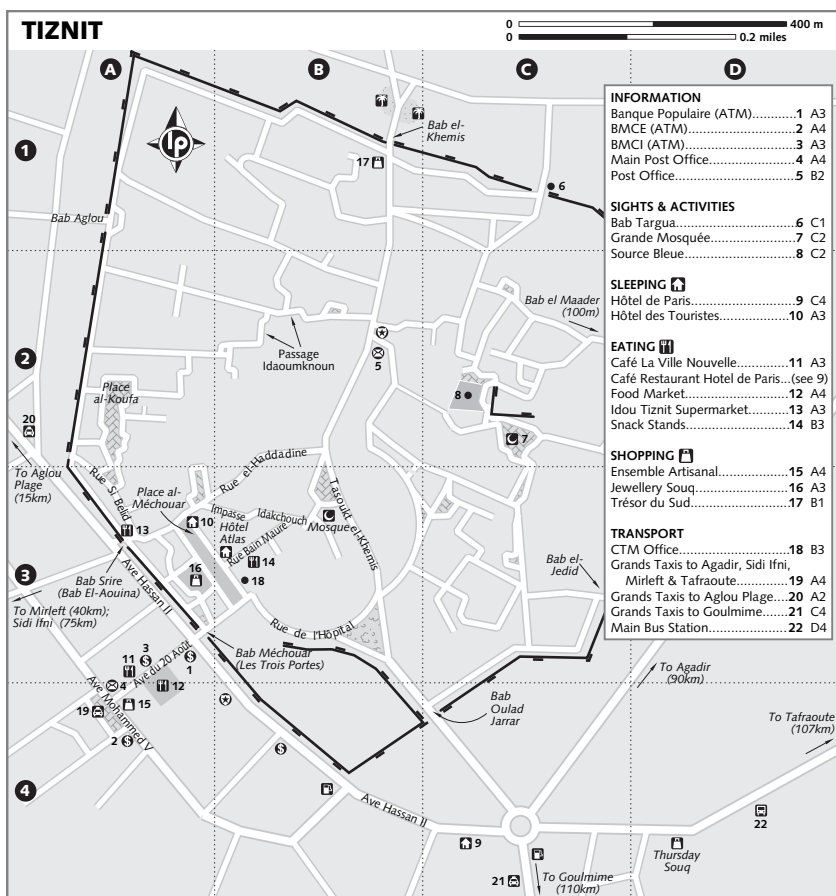
pop 53,600

South of the Souss Valley and beyond the western end of the Anti Atlas, Tiznit is an old walled medina town surrounded by modern development. It was originally the site of a cluster of kasbahs, which were encircled in the 19th century by some 5km of pisé wall. It quickly became a trade centre and remains the provincial capital, a central point between the coastal towns and the Anti Atlas. Good for a visit, but Tiznit is most often seen on your way through or on a day-trip from Mirleft or one of the other coastal towns.

History

In 1881 Sultan Moulay Al-Hassan (1873–94) chose Tiznit as a base from which to assert his authority over the rebellious Berber tribes of the south. To do this, he built the town's perimeter walls. Jewish silversmiths were moved into the town and gave it a reputation as a centre for silver.

However, Tiznit remained embroiled in local sedition. In 1912, it was a base for resistance to the 1912 treaty that turned Morocco into a French and Spanish protectorate. This resistance movement was led by El-Hiba, the so-called 'Blue Sultan' from the Western Sahara, who earned his nickname for always wearing his Saharawi veil.



Following Sultan Moulay Hafid's capitulation to the French at the Treaty of Fés, El-Hiba proclaimed himself sultan at Tiznit's mosque in 1912. The southern tribes rose to support him and El-Hiba marched north at the head of an army of men from the Tuareg and Anti Atlas tribes. They were welcomed as liberators in Marrakesh but much of the army was slaughtered by the French as it moved towards Fez. El-Hiba retreated to Taroudannt, then Tiznit, then up into the Anti Atlas, where he pursued a campaign of resistance against the French until his death in 1919.

Orientation

Within the medina, Place al-Méchouar is where you'll find the jewellery souq and cheap hotels. Outside the main gate, Bab Méchouar, is the main grand-taxi rank, the main post office, banks, restaurants and a food market.

Midrange to top-end hotels can be found to the south of the medina.

Information

Banks in Tiznit include **BMCE** (Ave Mohammed V), **BMCI** (Ave du 20 Août) and **Banque Populaire** (Ave du 20 Août), all of which have ATMs.

The **main post office** (Ave du 20 Août) and a smaller branch in the medina are open the usual hours.

Sights & Activities

Tiznit is a sleepy place with a medina that is a fun place to wander around and with an equally sleepy jewellery souq. The Berber traders here are tough salesmen, but it is still worth trying to strike a bargain. Things liven up considerably on Thursday, which is market day.

The minaret of the **Grande Mosquée** (Great Mosque; closed to non-Muslims) is studded with jutting wooden sticks. Local legend suggests this is where the souls of the dead congregate. More likely, these are left in place by the masons who built the minaret to help them climb up and replaster. A similar arrangement is used on minarets in south of the Sahara, notably in Timbuktu.

Nearby is the **Source Bleue**, the original town spring, now a stagnant shallow pool, green rather than blue. Legend has it that a woman of ill repute, Lalla Zninia, stopped to rest here at what was then plain desert.

She spent the next three days repenting her wicked ways and God was so impressed with her fervour that he showed forgiveness by having a spring gush beneath her feet. Her name was thus given to the village that preceded Sultan Moulay al-Hassan's 19th-century fortress town.

It's possible to climb onto sections of the 5km-long city walls, which have 29 towers and nine gates. From **Bab Targua**, for instance, you get a great view over the lush *palmeraie*, where there is another natural spring, used as a laundry by local women.

Sleeping

Many budget hotels are right on Place al-Méchouar, but lone women may find the area a bit off-putting late at night.

Hôtel des Touristes (☎ 028 862018; Place al-Méchouar; s/d Dh50/90) Budget doesn't have to mean slummy, as this spotless, welcoming place at the end of the Place shows. Rooms are simple, decorated in Moroccan style, and showers are free and hot. The pious staff are serious and ensure it is safe for women travellers.

Hôtel de Paris (☎ 028 862865; www.hoteldeparis.ma; Ave Hassan II; s/d Dh138/164; 📶) On a busy roundabout a short walk from the old walls, the hotel has some questionable colour schemes (pink and orange?), but en-suite rooms are bright, spacious and well run.

Bab el Maader (☎ 028 864252; www.bab-el-maader.com; Rue El Haj Ali; r Dh220-275; 📶) Hotel Idou Tiznit, across from Hôtel de Paris, is the most expensive in town, with a pool and vast marble lobby, but this is Tiznit's best address, a five-room guest house with a courtyard, plenty of great decorative touches and good use of Moroccan fabrics and materials. The laid-back owners will arrange trips in the region. Home-cooked lunch or dinner is available on request (Dh110).

Eating

Most of the budget hotels on the main square have cafés offering food, the Hôtel Atlas being one of the most popular on the Place al-Méchouar. A number of snack stands along Rue Bain Maure offer acceptable sandwiches for around Dh10.

Café La Ville Nouvelle (Ave du 20 Août; mains Dh35-55; 📶 lunch & early dinner) An attractive restaurant serving the classic salads, brochettes

BEYOND THE GLITTER

Berber jewellery serves a much wider purpose than simple adornment. The jewellery a woman wears identifies her as a member of a clan or tribe, it is a sign of her wealth, it reflects cultural traditions and it has power beyond the visual, to protect her from the evil eye.

A woman will receive jewellery from her mother until she marries. For her marriage, her future husband will commission his mother or sister to provide jewellery for her and these will be kept by her as dowry and added to throughout her life. This jewellery will always be made of silver, as gold is considered evil. Necklaces are important, the traditional assemblage in the southern oasis valleys sometimes featuring talismans of silver, pink coral, amazonite, amber, Czech glass and West African ebony beads. A woman will also have bracelets, *fibulas* (elaborate brooches, often triangular, used for fastening garments), anklets, earrings and headdresses. Some pieces will be worn every day, others – the finest – will be saved for occasions such as festivals, pilgrimages and funerals.

The protective, medicinal and magical properties of jewellery are extremely important. The necklaces contain charms bought from magicians or holy men, which offer protection against the evil eye, disease, accidents and difficulties in childbirth. Silver is believed to cure rheumatism; coral symbolises fertility and is thought to have curative powers; amber is worn as a symbol of wealth and to protect against sorcery (it's also considered an aphrodisiac and a cure for colds); amazonite and carnelian stones are used in divining fortunes; and shells traded from East Africa symbolise fertility.

Talismans feature stylised motifs of animals, sun, moon and stars, all of which are believed to have supernatural powers. A common symbol to ward off the evil eye is the hand of Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet Mohammed. Any depiction of the hand (which represents human creative power and dominance) or of the number five is believed to have the same effect as metaphorically poking fingers into the evil eye with the words *khamsa fi ainek* (five in your eye).

and couscous, while the popular downstairs café is good for coffee and pastries.

Café-Restaurant Hôtel de Paris (☎ 028 862865; www.hoteldeparis.ma; Ave Hassan II; mains Dh40-50; 🍴 lunch & dinner) There is something wonderfully old-fashioned and correct about the bright, tiled dining room, where, true to their name, they serve a predominantly French menu, with a range of large salads (Dh12 to Dh30), simple fish and meat dishes, and fresh juices, including almond during the season. The loud TV can dampen the pleasure.

If you want food for a picnic, head for the **market** (Ave du 20 Août), or the **Idou Tiznit Supermarket** (☎ 028 602397; Carrefour de Tiznit), which sells a range of local and imported food.

Shopping

With its long history of silversmiths, the **jewellery souq** has some of the best work in the south. Some of this jewellery is made in Tiznit, some bought from Saharan tribes in the south. You will need time to look around and bargain to get the best prices.

Away from the souq, **Trésor du Sud** (☎ 028 862885; www.tresordusud.com; 27 Bab al-Khemis) is not the cheapest, but the work is good; they

only deal in hallmarked solid silver and you can see a craftsman at work.

The **Ensemble Artisanal** (Ave du 20 Août; ☎ 8.30am-1pm & 2.30-8.30pm), opposite the main post office, covers the full range of local crafts.

Getting There & Away

BUS

All buses leave from the main bus station just off the Tafraoute road, past the Thursday souq. CTM tickets are also available from the CTM office on Place al-Mechour in town. CTM has buses for Agadir (Dh40, two hours, one daily), Casablanca (Dh220, 10 hours, one daily), Marrakesh (Dh120, five hours, one daily) and a twice-daily service south to Goulimime (Dh35), Tan Tan (Dh75), Laâyoune (Dh190) and Dakhla (Dh340).

Other companies run daily buses to the above destinations plus Sidi Ifni (Dh25, 1½ hours), Tafraoute (Dh35, four hours) and Tata (Dh80, 6½ hours).

TAXI

Grands taxis to Sidi Ifni (Dh23), Mirleft (Dh16), Agadir (Dh25) and occasionally Tafraoute (Dh40) leave from the main

grand-taxi rank, opposite the post office in the western part of town.

Goulmime-bound grands taxis (Dh35) wait at a stand just south of the Hôtel Idou Tiznit roundabout. For Aglou Plage (Dh5) they leave from Ave Hassan II.

AROUND TIZNIT

Aglou Plage

اكلو بلاج

Aglou Plage, 15km from Tiznit, is a long beach with good surf, but the strong undertow makes it dangerous for swimming most of the time. When Atlantic winds start blustering, it's a wild and woolly sort of place. It is still pretty undeveloped, with a raised walkway and behind it some seafront cafés, the best being **Idou Aglou** (☎ 028 613189; mains Dh50) an offshoot of the Tiznit hotel, which serves snacks (sandwiches Dh15) and a full restaurant menu. If you want to stay, **Le Chant du Chameau** (☎ 068 167255; www.chantduchameau.com; half-board per person Dh385) is a delightful French-Moroccan-run guest house at the south end of Aglou beach. A rust-red house, some fantasy tents, and a dramatic view of the beach and sea, they also offer excursions in the area and a weeklong course in *tadelakt*, the local plaster-work.

Grands taxis come out here from Tiznit (Dh5).

MIRLEFT

pop 6500

ميرلفت

One of the most beautiful roads in the region runs south of Aglou Plage, with wonderful views of the ocean, rugged hills and the occasional empty cove. Then comes Mirleft, 38km southwest of Tiznit, 140km from Agadir, and one of the region's least promoted attractions. That, perhaps, explains why it remains popular with artists, musicians and people returning from some serious desert bashing, as well as Marrakshis wanting to hide away from the world. The climate is gentle, the air clear and the views magnificent. Mirleft is no longer untouched – it has a bank (with ATM) and post office – but unlike most tourism development in Morocco, all this is the doing of individuals, with not a large corporation or chain hotel in sight.

If at first the place seems uninspiring, the gentle bustle soon becomes contagious. A social morning coffee is followed by a trip to the beach – choose from Fish Beach, Camp-

ing Beach, Coquillage Beach, Aftas Beach, Plage Sauvage and Marabout's Beach, the last being the most dramatic with its *marabout's* (saint's) tomb and savage-looking rocks. And then back to town for a walk along a short main street where you can find a billiards hall, arts and crafts, an argan product store, phone booths, cafés, restaurants and a small vegetable market.

Out of the village there are plenty of activities to keep you busy. The beach is good for surf casting (fishing) and hotels will help organise trips from fishing to desert excursions. If you have a head for heights, **Le Nid d'Aigle** (☎ 071 668505; www.nidaigle.com) is the place for hang-gliding. **Mirleft Ride** (☎ 061 441933; mirleftride.net) runs surf schools and organises both fishing trips and treks into the hills. **Anzid Quad Evasion** (☎ 077 756548; www.anzidquadevasion.com) runs a range of quad tours into the surrounding country.

Sleeping

Our pick **Hôtel Resto Abertih** (☎ 028 710304, 072 225872; www.abertih.com; r per person with shared/private bathroom Dh100/150; ☑ wi-fi) This gorgeous blue-and-yellow cubist guest house has 11 rooms decorated in simple fabrics and strong colours, and is scattered around upper terraces. Below there is an atmospheric bar-restaurant, a favourite hang-out of the local expat community and where the amiable French proprietor holds court. The menu (Dh80) is simple and delicious: grilled fish, some Moroccan standards, apple tart and lobster on request.

Hôtel Atlas (☎ 028 719309; www.atlas-mirleft.com, in French; r per person without/with shower Dh120/150; ☑) In the same vein – and the same family as Hotel Resto Abertih – is Hotel Atlas, with a great 1st-floor streetside balcony – fantastic in the early evenings. Vibrant aquamarines, yellows, terracottas and blues splash colour throughout the 17 rooms. There is also a huge roof terrace with sofas and cushions for summertime barbecues and music. Meals are usually only available on request.

Sally's Bed & Breakfast (☎ 028 719402, 061 469888; www.sallymirleft.com; d from Dh660) Created by a horse-loving Englishwoman, a gorgeous villa on the edge of the cliff above Tourga Beach, Sally's offers a home-stay feel, five rooms with private bathroom, and a sun terrace with Jacuzzi. Sally can arrange horse treks.

Les 3 Chameaux (☎ 028 719187; www.3chameaux.com; d/ste half-board Dh750/1000; 🍴 📺) High on the hill, in a renovated 1930s military fort, is Mirleft's best address, a lovely guest house with fabulous views over the village to the sea beyond. Whitewashed wood and terracotta urns make for subdued and relaxed surroundings, the pool is heated, the restaurant relaxed and the whole place designed to help you unwind. No wonder Marrakshis come here for down time. Unusually, the suites are better value than the small rooms.

Eating

Apart from excellent restaurants at the above hotels, a number of cafés on the main street serve up some of the tonnes of caught fresh fish that end up here. On the souq street, **Restaurant Ayour** (☎ 028 719371; meals Dh85; 🍴 lunch & dinner) serves reliable tajines and grilled fish. The newcomer in town, **Restaurant Tikiout** (☎ 028 719463; main street) is run by a former chef from Agadir and serves classic French dishes such as *salade de chevre* (goat-cheese salad), quiche and chicken livers.

Getting There & Away

Local buses and grands taxis between Tiznit and Sidi Ifni stop in Mirleft. There's also a daily bus to Agadir (Dh30).

SIDI IFNI

pop 20,600

The eerily empty outpost of Sidi Ifni, with its fabulous decaying Spanish art-deco architecture, often shrouded in Atlantic mists in July and August, is a haunting reminder of Spanish imperial ambitions. At the heart of what was the Spanish Sahara, Sidi Ifni was once a base for slave-trading operations and later a large exporter of fish to the Spanish mainland.

Returned to Moroccan control only in 1969, the splendid esplanade and *calles* (streets) are still quintessentially Spanish in character. The town's unhurried pace of life attracts a surprising number of visitors, and it is an increasingly popular base for surfing and paragliding.

History

Spain acquired the enclave of Sidi Ifni after they defeated the Moroccan forces in the war of 1859. They christened their new pos-

session Santa Cruz del Mar Pequeña, but seem to have been uncertain what to do with it as they did not take full possession until 1934. Most of Sidi Ifni dates from the 1930s and features an eclectic mix of faded art-deco and traditional Moroccan styles.

On Moroccan independence in 1957, Spain refused to withdraw, citing the fact that some 60% of the town's population was Spanish. The protracted dispute over territorial rights eventually ended with a UN-brokered agreement for Spain to cede the enclave back to Morocco in 1969. Santa Cruz was renamed Sidi Ifni, after a holy man buried in the town in the early 1900s. Ifni still celebrates 'Independence Day' (30 June) with a festival on the abandoned airfield.

Information

Banque Populaire (Ave Mohammed V) and **BMCE** (Ave Mohammed V) have currency exchange and ATMs. The nearby **post office** (Ave Mohammed V) still has a letterbox outside marked 'Correos - Avion/Ordinario' (Post - Air Mail/Ordinary) as well as an ATM. Internet is available at several places, including **Fabionet** (Ave Mohammed V; per hr Dh4), around the corner from the bus stands. For information on the town, check out www.geocities.com/ifnirocks.

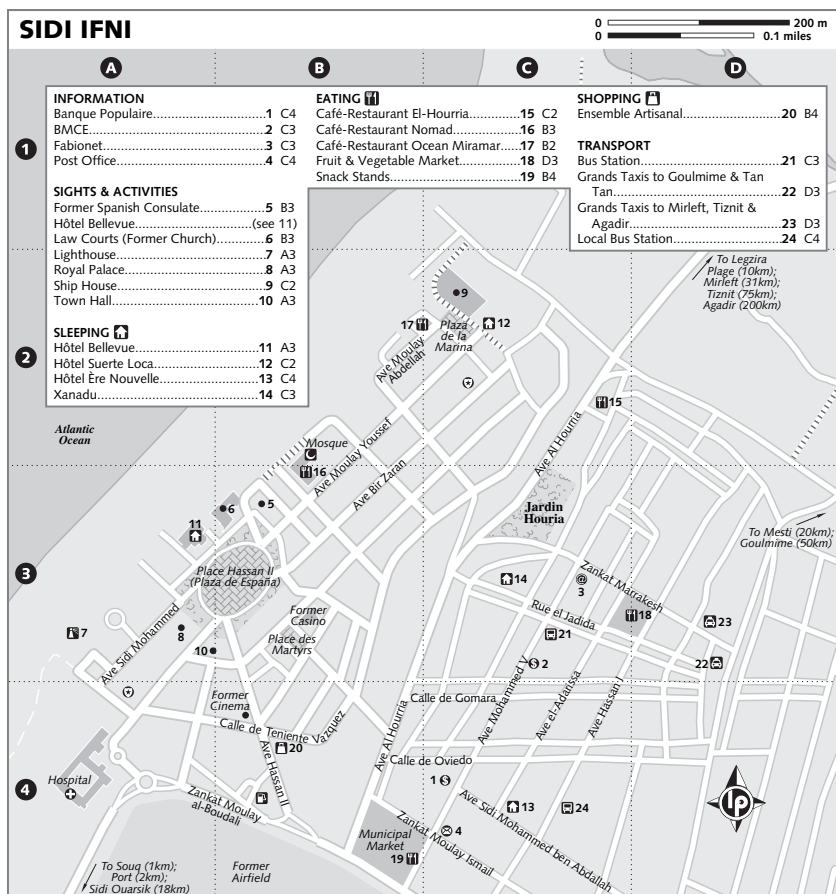
Sights & Activities

The real draw of Sidi Ifni is its atmosphere, which has lured many a passing foreigner to settle. The small old Spanish part of town is one of the main attractions. At its heart is **Place Hassan II** (often still called Plaza de España), the colonial centrepiece consisting of a large square with a small park in the centre and surrounded by the main administration buildings: law courts (former church), royal palace, Spanish consulate and town hall, mostly in grand art-deco style.

Other interesting remnants of the colonial era include the **Hôtel Bellevue**, also on Place Hassan II, a nearby **lighthouse** and the **house in the form of a ship** on the edge of the cliff, which served as the Spanish Naval Secretariat (next to Hôtel Suerte Loca). There's also some funky art-deco architecture in the streets east of Place Hassan II.

The **beach** is big and rarely busy, though not always clean. At the south end is the port: Ifni's economy is based on small-scale fishing, most of the catch being sold in Aga-

سيدي إفني



dir. The odd construction just offshore is the remains of an old land-sea conveyor that was used to take cargo from ships to the old Spanish port. There's some excellent surfing here – ask at Hôtel Suerte Loca (right) or Café Restaurant Nomad (p398) for their recommendations.

Sleeping

Like the rest of Ifni, most of the hotels have seen better days. The colonial-era **Hôtel Bellevue** (☎ 028 875072; Place Hassan II) was closed for renovation at the time of our visit.

Hôtel Ère Nouvelle (☎ 028 875298; 5 Ave Sidi Mohammed ben Abdallah; s/d Dh30/50) A centrally located cheapie, the rooms are simple but clean (go for the brighter top floor) with

shared facilities. There's a terrace and a decent restaurant (mains Dh25 to Dh40).

Hôtel Suerte Loca (☎ 028 875350; fax 028 780003; Ave Moulay Youssef; s/d without shower Dh70/105, with shower Dh120/170) Stay here for the beach views, the variety of simple rooms with balconies, and the restaurant (set menu Dh56), popular for its French, Spanish and Moroccan cuisine, including paella.

our pick Xanadu (☎ 028 876718; www.maisonxanadu.com; 5 Rue el Jadida; r incl breakfast Dh330; 🚗) The most charming address in town, a restored house in the centre, not far from Ave Mohammed V. Soothing colours, elegance and a subtlety about the many little touches in the five rooms put this French-Moroccan collaboration far ahead of anywhere else in

Ifni. Children are welcome and dinner is available on demand (Dh110).

Eating

There are a few small café-restaurants on Ave Hassan II, and snack stands set up at the southern end of Ave Mohammed V at dusk. Hôtel Suerte Loca has some of the better food in town – let them know you're coming in advance if possible. None of the restaurants below serve alcohol.

Café-Restaurant el Hourria (☎ 028 876343; Ave Al Hourria; mains Dh30-40; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) The Hourria, also known as Chez Omar, serves all day, from breakfast (Dh20) to dinner. French and Moroccan food, plenty of fresh fish, a calm room inside and a terrace on the edge of a public garden.

Café-Restaurant Ocean Miramar (☎ 028 876637; Ave Moulay Abdellah; mains Dh40-60; ☺ lunch & dinner) Newly opened near the Hôtel Suerte Loca and overlooking the ocean, the Miramar serves a range of dishes, including pizzas (Dh30) and ice cream, but specialises in fish.

Café-Restaurant Nomad (☎ 062 173308; 5 Ave Moulay Youssef; meals Dh85; ☺ lunch & dinner) This remains Ifni's all-round top dining spot, both for the food and for the atmosphere. Run by two multitalented friends – artists, musicians and general good-time guys – they can also cook up a storm, including a great fish tajine (Dh60). Place your order, sip on a milkshake or fruit cocktail while you wait, or ask them about the region.

For self-caterers there's a busy **fish market** (☺ 5-8pm) in the municipal market and also a covered **fruit and vegetable market** (off Zankat Marrakesh). On Sunday, a large souq takes place 1km out of town on the road to the port.

Shopping

Crafts enthusiasts should drop in to the **Ensemble Artisanal** (Ave Hassan II). Look in the markets for *melhaf*, the very fine and colourful fabrics Saharan women use to cover themselves.

Getting There & Away

Buses depart from Ave Mohammed V, near Fabionet. Services for Agadir (Dh40, 3½ hours, one daily) and Marrakesh (Dh130, 8½ hours, one daily) both travel via Mirleft (Dh10, 30 minutes) and Tiznit (Dh25, 1½

hours). The local bus to Legzira Plage costs Dh3 and leaves from the local bus station on Ave Hassan I. Grands taxis leaving from the northeast of the town head to Tiznit (Dh23), Goulmime (Dh20), Tan Tan and to Mirleft (Dh10). There are irregular grands taxis to Agadir (Dh50).

AROUND SIDI IFNI

All hotels will advise on the many walks to be done in the countryside around Sidi Ifni. The 18km coastal path south leads to **Sidi Ouarsik**, a fishing village with a great beach.

Ten kilometres north of Ifni, on the road to Mirleft, El Gzira, usually called **Legzira Plage**, is a superb secluded bay with excellent sand and two dramatic natural **stone arches** reaching over the sea. There are a few houses in a huddle near the access road, but most of this is pristine and undeveloped. **Au-berge Legzira** (☎ /fax 028 780457; s/d Dh150/300) is the oldest and best sleeping option, with 20 simple rooms. The neighbouring **Beach Club** (☎ 070 522800; s/d Dh150/200) is similar. Prices vary according to demand. Both will offer a good meal of fresh fish (from Dh60) or tajine (Dh80 for two people) and a bed for the night. If it is open, **Snack Les Amies** (☎ 028 875510; menu Dh35) serves a cheaper lunch. The bus that runs between Tiznit, Sidi Ifni and Goulmime stops at Legzira Plage.

The Berber village of Mesti makes a good stop, 25km south of Ifni on the Goulmime road. The **Tafyoucht Cooperative** (☎ 028 867252; ☺ 7am-noon & 2-6pm Tue-Sat) is a women's co-operative that produces oil and cosmetic products from the versatile argan tree. At the Mesti turnoff, the shop of **Miel Afoulki** (☎ 067 166418), a honey cooperative, sells some extraordinary local flavours, including orange and euphorbia.

GOULIMIME

pop 96,000

Once the 'Gateway of the Sahara', dusty derelict Goulmime (or Guelmim) sprang up as a border town where farmers from the fertile Souss traded with nomads from the south.

In its heyday, Tuareg, the so-called 'blue men' came in from the desert to buy and sell camels at the weekly souq. In the evenings, women performed the mesmerising *guedra* dance to the sound of a drumbeat. Nowadays you might only get a taste of this during the weeklong *mousssem* (festival) and

كثلميم

camel fair held here in July or August (the dates change).

But if you have come from the north, you will still recognise Goulimime as a border town. For the first time, you will see Saharawis in the majority. But there is little reason to stop, the only tourist sight being the unremarkable ruins of the early-20th-century Palace of Caid Dahman (admission free), in the street behind Hotel de la Jeunesse on Blvd Mohammed V. What's more, there is an undercurrent of aggression not found in places such as Tan Tan or Sidi Ifni.

The town is disturbed once a week by day-trippers from Agadir, who descend for the Saturday-morning souq, a few kilometres outside town on the road to Tan Tan. There is plenty of fruit there, and some overpriced souvenirs, but most day-trippers leave sorely disappointed.

Information

Place Bir Anazarane is the centre of town, and near here you'll find the post office, banks and the internet. The main bus and

grand-taxi stations are about 1km north of here along Ave Abaynou.

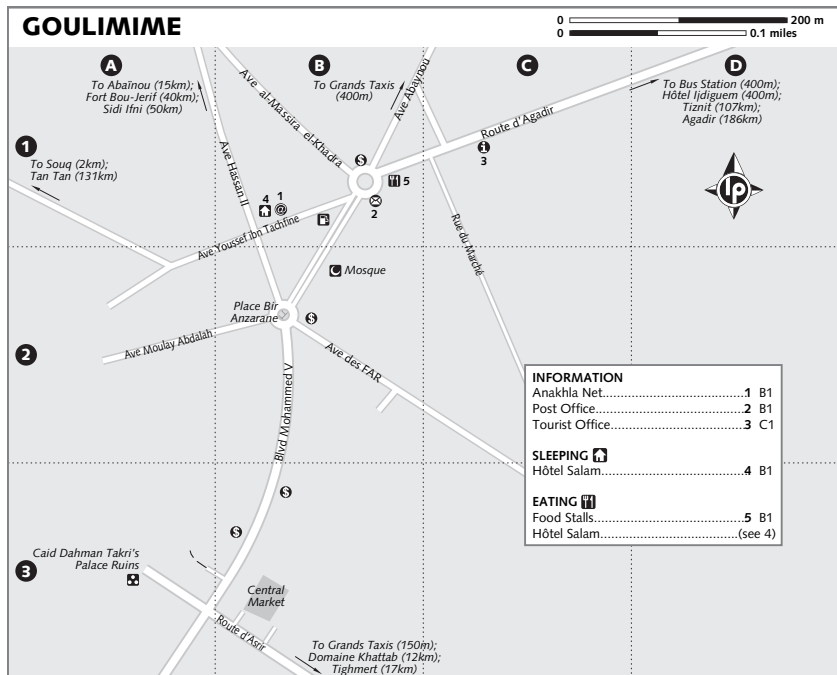
The **tourist office** (☎ 028 872911; 3 Résidence Sahara, Route d'Agadir; 🕒 9am-noon & 2.30-6pm Mon-Fri) offers basic information on the town and trips further south.

Several places offer internet access, including **Anakha Net** (Ave Youssef ibn Tachfine; per hr Dh8), next to Hôtel Salam.

Sleeping

You will only want to stay in Goulimime if necessary, as hotels are basic and some will be tricky for women (full as they are of trans-Saharan tradesmen). If you have transport, there is better accommodation outside town.

Fort Bou-Jerif (☎ 072 130017; www.fortboujerif.com; camp site Dh20 plus per person Dh30, r from Dh320, half board per person motel/hotel Dh340/440; 🕒) Run by a French couple, this wonderful oasis of civilisation in the desert is about 40km northwest of town (the last 9km is rough *piste*). Built near a ruined French Foreign Legion fort, this compound has a range of sleeping options, from rooms in a motel



and a hotel, to nomad tents and camping spaces. There is also an excellent restaurant (menu Dh175), where you can try a camel tajine. They also offer 4WD trips to Plage Blanche, a little-visited and unspoiled stretch of beach 40km west of Bou-Jerif.

Domaine Khattab (☎ 061 176411; fax 028 873150; Km 12 Route d'Assa; camp site Dh50 plus per tent Dh25, bungalows/d Dh150/200) A 20-hectare working farm with a tiny zoo is a little paradise for families. There are bungalow rooms and a camp site, as well as a restaurant serving simple set meals (Dh55). Bathroom facilities are spotless, and you can have a hot shower by candlelight (Dh10). The friendly owner organises treks in the region

Hôtel Ijdiguen (☎ 028 771453; Blvd Ibnou Battouta; s/d Dh75/150) Conveniently situated opposite the entrance to the bus station, this simple hotel has clean, tiled rooms (quieter at the back) and communal showers (Dh7).

Eating

The best food in town is served at **Hôtel Salam** (☎ 028 872057; fax 048 770912; Ave Youssef ibn Tachfine), where a traditional three-course Moroccan meal costs Dh85. Alcohol is available.

There are good rotisseries and food stalls on Place Bir Anzarane.

Getting There & Away

BUS

The bus station is off Ave Abaynou Route d'Agadir, a 10-minute walk from the centre. **CTM** (☎ 028 873855) has a bus for Marrakesh (Dh125, seven hours, one daily) via Tiznit (Dh35, two hours) and Agadir (Dh65, four hours). There is a daily departure to Tan Tan (Dh39, 1½ hours), Laâyoune (Dh142, seven hours) and Dakhla (Dh280, 15 hours).

Other companies, including Satas and Supratours, who have four daily departures south (Tan Tan Dh45; Tarfaya Dh120; Laâyoune Dh140; Dakhla Dh300) and five north to Agadir (Dh75) via Tiznit (Dh40). They also have four daily departures to Marrakesh (Dh130).

TAXI

You can catch grands taxis to Abainou (Dh8), Sidi Ifni (Dh20), Tiznit (Dh50), Tan Tan (Dh40), Inezgane (Dh50) and Laâyoune (Dh130) from beside the bus station. For a grand taxi to Tighmert (Dh7), head southeast of town on the Route d'Asrir.

TAN TAN & TAN TAN PLAGE طانطان

pop 50,000

South of Goulmime, across the dry Oued Drâa, you enter the cauldron of the Sahara proper. The 125km of desert highway to Tan Tan is impressive for its bleak emptiness and harsh *hammada* (flat, stony desert).

If you weren't stopped by security on the way in, you could probably drive along Tan Tan's main street without realising you had missed most of the town, which spreads south of the highway (known as Ave Hassan II within the town boundaries). The majority of the inhabitants are nomads who settled here, and blue robes are a big feature. The army and police presence is also noticeable, due to the disputed status of the Western Sahara (for more information, see p408).

The town was founded in the 1940s during the Spanish Protectorate, but had its moment in 1975, when it was the departure point for the Green March (see *Marching to the King's Tune*, p45). There's nothing much to do in Tan Tan, though a *mousssem* does sometimes take place in September, or June. The Sunday souq is held 1.5km south of town.

Tan Tan Plage, also known as Al-Ouatia, 28km west of Tan Tan, is a large, beautiful, often windswept stretch of beach that first attracted a 19th-century Scottish trader, Mackenzie, who held a trading post here. There is now a choice of hotels and guest houses and a friendly laid-back atmosphere, which makes this a good place to stop for some days. There is a big sardine fleet in the port and good surf fishing from the beach.

Information

TAN TAN

Banque Populaire (Ave Mohammed V).

BMCE (Ave Hassan II) ATM and exchange, next to the Shell petrol station.

El-Hagounia Internet (Ave Hassan II; per hr Dh8)

Main post office (Ave Hassan II) To the east of town.

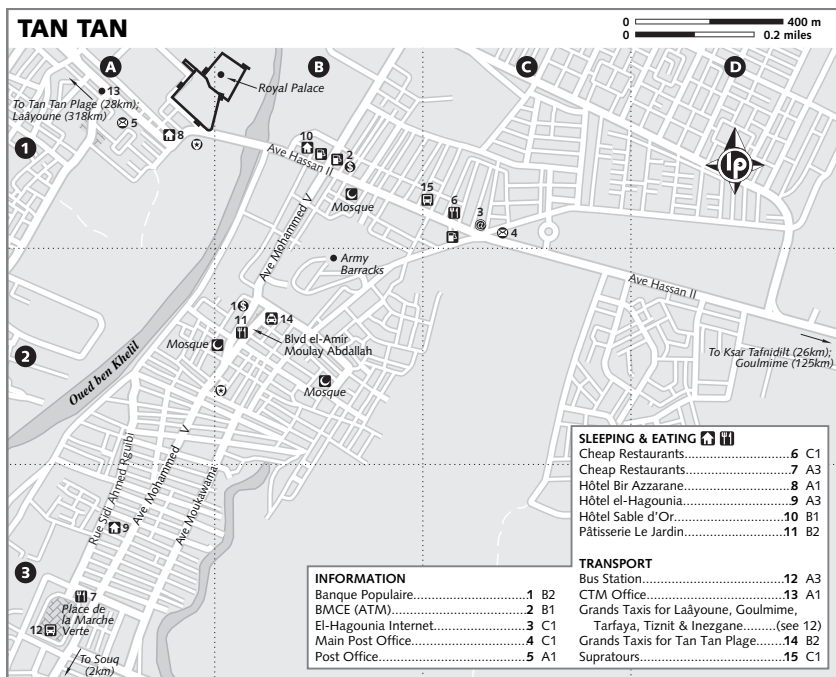
TAN TAN PLAGE

There is a post office, a BMCE and Banque Populaire, with ATM and exchange, in the centre of the village.

Sleeping & Eating

TAN TAN

Hôtel Bir Azzarane (☎ 028 877834; Ave Hassan II; s/d Dh50/80) A slightly worn, but remarkably



friendly place, next to the royal palace (and therefore extremely secure) on the west side of the river. Rooms are boxy and many have windows only onto the corridor but at this price...

Hôtel el-Hagounia (☎ 028 878561; Rue Sidi Ahmed Rguibi; s/d Dh50/80) The most convenient for the bus station, the rooms here are basic but clean, the showers are communal (Dh5) and the place is safe. Look out for the sign from the station.

Hôtel Sable d'Or (☎/fax 028 878069; Ave Hassan II; s/d Dh150/200) Tan Tan's best hotel by far. The big, airy rooms come with comfy beds, TV and hot showers. There's also a popular café terrace and a rather bleak restaurant (meals Dh60 to Dh100) with too many plastic flowers.

Ksar Tafnidilt (☎ 063 233115; www.tafnidilt.com; tent per person Dh60, bivouac per person half-board Dh245, s/d half-board Dh470/740, breakfast Dh35, lunch & dinner Dh150; 🚗) If you have transport and can brave the *piste*, this large complex 6km from the road and some 20km north of Tan Tan, just before the police post, repays the effort. Tafnidilt has rooms, tents and

camp space, and has an air of being very far from anywhere and plenty of ideas of ways to spend time.

There are dozens of cheap restaurants on Ave Hassan II, Ave Mohammed V and around the Place de la Marche Verte. To sip a mint tea, or for breakfast, head for the Hôtel Sable d'Or (left) or back up the hill to **Pâtisserie Le Jardin** (Ave Mohammed V).

TAN TAN PLAGES

Résidence Raja (☎ 028 879503; beside Place des Taxis; s/d Dh70/100) The best budget option in the village, the small rooms are more or less clean, the communal showers more or less hot and the welcome is friendly. Convenient location for transport.

our pick Villa Océan (☎ 028 879660/879641; villa.ocean@menara.ma; Blvd de la Plage; s/d Dh150/200) This is a wonderful oceanfront guest house with a handful of spacious and airy rooms, some with ocean views, and clean bathrooms. It is good value, and has friendly French owners who know a huge amount about the region and can arrange trips to grottoes and other sights inland (half-day from Dh300) and

fishing trips. The restaurant and terrace have blue-and-white checked tablecloths, and the grilled fish is served straight from the sea (meals Dh80) and there is alcohol. The tajine of fruits (Dh30) is a house speciality.

Hotel de France (☎ 028 879641; www.hotel-tantan.com; s/d Dh200/250) With the same owners as the Villa Ocean, the Hotel de France is a larger building, one street back from the ocean, though the rooms still have ocean views and balconies. The restaurant was not open at the time of our visit.

Getting There & Away

BUS

CTM (Ave Hassan II) in Tan Tan has nightly departures for Laâyoune (Dh120, 4½ hours) and Dakhla (Dh250, 14 hours) and there's another departure for Goulmime (Dh39, 1½ hours), Tiznit (Dh75, 3½ hours) and Agadir (Dh90, 4½ hours).

Further east, **Supratours** (Ave Hassan II) operates similar services at similar prices.

Other, cheaper companies, all serving the same destinations, use the main bus station 500m south of the centre at Place de la Marche Verte.

TAXI

You can catch grands taxis headed for Laâyoune (Dh100), Goulmime (Dh40) and occasionally Tarfaya (Dh60), Tiznit (Dh80) or Inezgane (Dh100), at the bus station at Place de la Marche Verte.

Grands taxis to Tan Tan Plage (Dh12) leave from the top of Blvd el-Amir Moulay Abdallah.

THE ANTI ATLAS

الأطلس الصغير

The Anti Atlas remains one of the least visited parts of Morocco's mountainscape, which is surprising, as it is beautiful and close to Agadir. The mountains are the stronghold of the Chleuh tribes, who live in a loose confederation of villages strung across the barren mountains, some of them still far beyond the reach of any central authority. The region was only finally pacified by the French relatively recently, in the 1930s.

Moulded by the demanding landscape of granite boulders and red-lava flows, the Chleuh have always been devoted to their farms in the lush oasis valleys, now some of the country's most beautiful *palmeraites*.

TAFRAOUTE

تافراوت

pop 5000

Nestled in the gorgeous Ameln Valley, the village of Tafraoute is surrounded on all sides by red-granite mountains. Despite its unassuming appearance the area is actually quite prosperous due to the hard-earned cash sent home by relatives working in the big cities or abroad.

It is a pleasant and relaxed base for exploring the region.

In late February/early March the villages around Tafraoute celebrate the almond harvest with all-night singing and dancing; the festivities move from village to village and therefore last several days. A lively souq takes place near Hôtel Salama from Monday evening through to Wednesday.

Information

BMCE (behind the post office) Has an ATM, though the system is often down.

Banque Populaire (Place Mohammed V; ☎ Wed) Only opens for the souq.

Internet café (per hr Dh12) On the Tazekka road. Internet is also available at Hôtel Les Amandiers.

Post office (Place Mohammed V) Has pay phones outside.

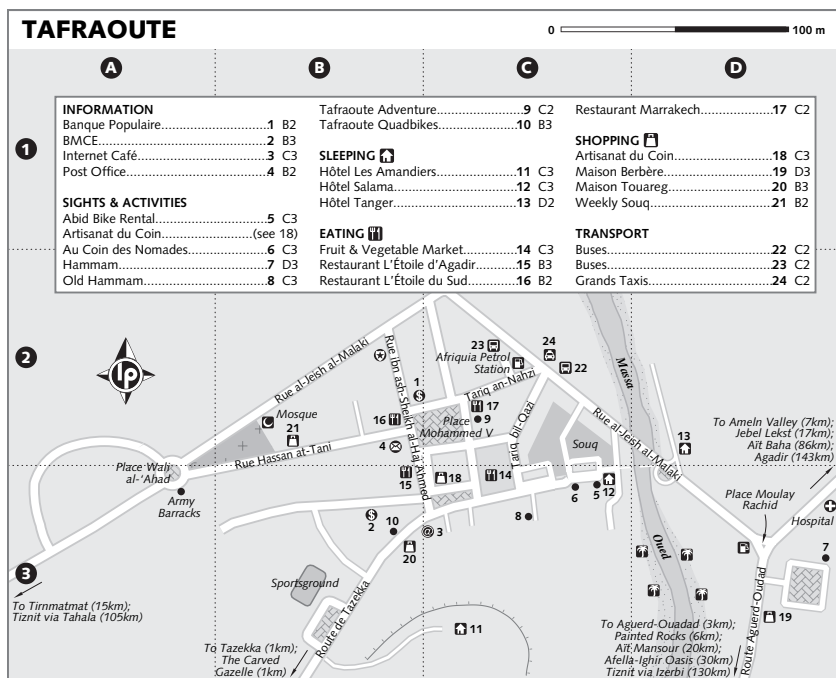
Activities

CYCLING

The best way to get around the beautiful villages of the Ameln Valley is by walking or cycling. Bikes can be rented from Abid, next to Hôtel Salama, or from the shop **Artisanat du Coin** (per day Dh60). You can also rent mountain bikes or book a mountain-biking trip from **Tafraoute Adventure** (☎ 061 387173) and **Au Coin des Nomades** (☎ 061 627921). **Tafraoute Quadbikes** (☎ 070 409384) also have mountain bikes and helmets.

HAMMAMS

Tafraoute is an excellent hammam place for a completely authentic hammam experience as most houses here still lack water. There are three hammams in the town, but locals prefer the old one, just behind the market. Second choice is the one off the main roundabout. All cost Dh10.



TREKKING

Tafraoute has plenty of possibilities for trekkers, though most of the walks are strenuous. Several companies and guides offer mountain-biking and trekking trips either up Jebel Lekst (2359m) or along the palm-filled gorges of Aït Mansour, leading towards the bald expanses of the southern Anti Atlas (see p444). **Tafraoute Adventure** (☎ 061 387173) has a good selection of maps, as does **Au Coin des Nomades** (☎ 061 627921) near **Hôtel Salama**, whose owner, Houssine Laroussi, is a respected climber. For short walks, you could get by with *Tafraout in Colours* (Dh7) a one-page brochure that shows villages and roads through the valley.

Sleeping

Hôtel Tanger (☎ 028 800190; r per person Dh30) A small, friendly nine-room hotel with very basic rooms and a communal bathrooms, situated in the centre of town near the souq. You can eat on the roof (Dh20 to Dh35) as long as the wind is blowing the right way from the *oued* (river).

Hôtel Salama (☎ 028 800026; s/d Dh199/298;) Completely renovated to higher standards, the long-established Salama mixes local materials with modern standards. The result is the best midrange hotel in town with great mountain views from the terrace, a restaurant serving full meals (Dh65) and a tea house overlooking the market square.

Hôtel Les Amandiers (☎ 028 800088; hotellesaman diers@menara.ma; s/d from Dh350/450;) Sitting like a castle on the crest of the hill overlooking the town, Les Amandiers wants to be Tafraoute's top hotel, in every sense. The kasbah-style hotel has spacious, if unglamorous rooms and a pool with spectacular views, as well as a bar and restaurant (set menu Dh120). Service, like much of the furnishings, is tired, but efficient.

Eating

Apart from the hotel restaurants, Tafraoute has a few good local places to eat.

Restaurant Marrakech (☎ 063 229250; Rue Anahda; set menu Dh55) A cheap, family-run restaurant on the road up from the bus station

with a small terrace and good, dependable food. It attracts a local crowd and knocks up a mean tajine (Dh35).

Restaurant L'Étoile d'Agadir (☎ 028 800268; Place Mohammed V; meals around Dh75; ☎ 8am-6pm) Locals swear by this place for its succulent tajines, all beautifully presented. This is also the place to ease into the day over a coffee.

Restaurant L'Étoile du Sud (☎ 028 800038; set menu Dh90; ☎ lunch & dinner) They serve an excellent set menu in a rather kitsch Bedouin-style tent, but you often have to share the place with tour groups, particularly at lunch-time. Still, you can take your own wine and the lamb tajine is commendable.

Plenty of small food stores sell cheese and basic picnic supplies to supplement the fruit and veg available in the market.

Shopping

Tafraoute has several slipper shops around the market area selling the traditional leather slippers (yellow for men, red for women, starting at Dh75, though expect to pay more for quality). Look out, too, for people selling local argan and olive oil.

Buying a carpet here is less pressurised than in Marrakesh. The two main outlets are **Maison Touareg** (Rte Tazekka) and **Maison Berbère** (Rte Aguerd-Oudad). Alternatively you can also pick Berber carpets up from small dealers at the weekly **souq** on Rue Hassan at-Tani.

Artisanat du Coin (Sharia ibn ash-Sheikh al-Haj Ahmed), near the post office, specialises in Berber jewellery and other portable knick-knacks.

Getting There & Away

BUS

Buses depart from outside the various company offices on Rue al-Jeish al-Malaki.

Trans Balady runs buses to Agadir (Dh40, six hours, daily): the 2pm and 6.30pm departures go via Tiznit (Dh25, four hours), while the 6pm bus takes you through Ait Baha (Dh20, 2½ hours). Other companies serve these same destinations as well as Casablanca (Dh100, 14 hours, five daily) and Marrakesh (Dh90, seven hours, four daily).

CAR

You can hire a 4WD with a driver from Maison Touareg or Tafraoute Adventure

for around Dh1200 per day plus fuel (about Dh3000 for a whole day's driving).

TAXI

The occasional grand taxi goes to Tiznit in the morning (Dh35) from Rue al-Jeish al-Malaki. Otherwise, station wagons and Land Rovers do the rounds of various villages in the area, mostly on market days. They hang around the post-office square and near the Afriquia Petrol Station. The going rate to the Ameln Valley is Dh7 per person.

AROUND TAFRAOUTE

Renting a mountain bike is a great way of getting to see most of the sights around Tafraoute. Before setting off to explore the region, arm yourself with *Tafraout in Colours* (Dh7), a basic map available at hotels, shops and restaurants in Tafraoute.

Rock Carvings

The area around Tafraoute has some easily accessible examples of prehistoric rock engravings. The closest is the **Carved Gazelle**, at the edge of the village of Tazekka. The easiest way to walk here is to take the road past the BMCE and the sports ground, then follow a footpath southwest through the palm groves. After about 15 minutes you reach the edge of the village. From here on you'll need a local to help you locate the gazelle, a simple engraving on the top face of a fallen block.

To find the other engravings at **Tirnmattmat**, you need to go further west towards Ait Omar (on Rte 7148). Just before the village, an unmarked *piste*, opposite a well, leads to Tirnmattmat, where you will find the *gravures* (engravings) along the riverbed (the local kids will lead you there, or engage a guide from Tafraoute). The village sits in a lovely spot and there is good walking in all directions.

Le Châpeau de Napoléon & the Painted Rocks

The village of Aguerd-Oudad, 3km south of Tafraoute, makes for a nice stroll or bike ride. On the way you pass the unmistakable rock formation known as Le Châpeau de Napoléon (Napoleon's Hat).

Take the signposted track through the village to the square, where there's a

el-Had Issi you can loop round 25km through the Timguilcht gorges and back up to Tlata Tasrite. Another option is to head 12km south to Ukas to see some impressive rock carvings, although you probably need a guide to find them.

On market days, grands taxis sometimes go out to villages around this area, but otherwise you'll probably have to hire the whole taxi.

AMELN VALLEY & JEBEL LEKST

جبل لكست و أميلن وادي

Tafraoute lies in a basin, largely surrounded by craggy gold-pink rocks and cliffs. To the northwest lies one such ridge, on the other side of which runs the Ameln Valley. North of the valley is **Jebel Lekst** (2359m). From Tafraoute you can make out a rock formation in this range that resembles a lion's face. Villagers will jokingly tell you

MOHAMED SAHNOUN OUHAMOU

Mohamed Sahnoun Ouhamou is a painter, teacher, guest-house owner and tour guide.

How long have you lived in Tiwado? I was born here, but after finishing secondary school I went to work in Beni Mellal as a photographer's assistant. I came back when I heard they needed teachers.

Did others leave? Many people from this valley went to Casablanca in the 1950s, where they took over shops and businesses from Jews leaving for Israel. Many of these families have now become industrialists in Casa and almost all the corner shops in Casa, Rabat and even many in Paris are owned by Berbers from this area.

The men usually leave their families behind and come home in their holidays to build big houses. The region is full of huge houses. But there is a problem: after a while many men take a new wife and start another family, and then they don't come back. Agriculture has come to a standstill, because there are no longer enough men to work the land. People move out of the old mudbrick villages, so the houses are disintegrating. We are losing our traditions, it's a big problem.

Why do you stay? I love this place; I wouldn't want to live elsewhere. There is still human exchange, and also something I value immensely: solidarity. If someone needs something, everyone helps. They have helped me build a house here and a small museum with objects from daily life as we used to know it, but which is now disappearing.

How can tourism help? Tourism and education are the only solutions. That's why I built my guest house. And that's why I work with local women who got left behind: in some villages, 90% or more are women, the rest are children and old men. The day the husband stops sending money the hardship begins. So we started a women's cooperative and now have 86 women learning about weaving and embroidery, and how to read and write. Before the women were not really valued, now they have some income as they sell their work to tourists. I'm the only man allowed to go in because I teach them. We also teach their children, so all now do at least three years primary school. But local people value 'commerce', trade, so from 14 years onwards, boys go into business. They don't care about education.

What is your favourite time? I like the *moussem* of Timguilcht in March. The tomb of the saint is in the village but people go on a pilgrimage to the nearby sacred mountain Afarkad because they believe he lives there. When you go up seven times, it is like going to Mecca. We all get together and it is a happy time.

What is your favourite area? I am fascinated by the rock carvings. I am a self-taught painter and I love what my ancestors did. I heard that the rock carvings here are the same as some found in Gabon. There are seven sites and I organise treks of three, five or seven days in the winter months to go and see them. I love introducing foreigners to this area. Going off to the mountains and total tranquillity.

What is your favourite restaurant? There are no restaurants here, but my wife cooks the best tajine. If people are walking in the area they can call us ahead, and she will cook for them as she does for me. It's simply the best.

Where do you go to relax? I love beauty, so I made this beautiful garden in the *palmeraie*: it is my little paradise.

that he is there to guard the women while their husbands are away working.

The Agadir road takes you to the valley, dotted with picturesque Berber villages. Four kilometres out of Tafraoute, the road forks with the right branch turning east up the valley towards Agadir. Shortly after, the village of **Tandilt** stands on the left of the road, across a *oued*. **Yamina** (☎ 070 523883; www.yamina-tafraout.com; half board per person Dh350; ♿) is run by a Berber woman and her French husband, who have created a unique fusion of styles, a Berber house as one rarely finds them, made of palm trees and plaster, of great beauty and comfort inside. Yamina prepares delicious and unusually light local dishes.

Another few kilometres on at **Oumesnate**, follow a signpost off to the left along a short *piste* and a footpath for the **Maison Traditionnelle** (☎ 066 917768, 066 918145; maison.dhote@gmail.com; admission Dh10; ☎ 8.30-sunset). This three-storey house (some 400 years old) has been open to the public since 1982. An elderly man, who was brought up in the house and was later blinded, will take you on a fascinating tour, telling tales of traditional life. Nearby, the current family home serves as a restaurant and guest house. Call ahead for a delicious lunch of couscous or tajine, served on a terrace overlooking the valley (Dh60), or to reserve a room (half board per person costs Dh200).

For trekking in Jebel Lekst and the Ameln Valley, see p444.

TATA

pop 40,000

Situated on the Saharan plain at the foot of Jebel Bani, Tata was an oasis settlement along the trade route from Zagora to Tan Tan. Close to the Algerian border, the small modern town has a garrison feel, dominated as it is by the military installations on the hill above.

The *palmeraie* is well worth exploring as is the old **kasbah**, converted into the Dar Infiane hotel (right) and a small museum.

More than anything in town, Tata is best as a base for off-the-beaten-track excursions, such as Akka oasis, desert camping and the rock engravings at Oum el-Alek, Tirtch and Ait Herbil, among the finest in Morocco. Information is available from the tourist office at the **Maison du Patrimoine**

Tataoui (☎ 072 130395; Ave Mohammed V) on the main road. If you are lucky enough to be staying at Dar Infiane, the staff can arrange fantastic excursions.

You'll find a post office and Banque Populaire (with an ATM) just off the main road, as well as the **Délégation de Tourisme** (Tourist office; ☎ 028 802076, 076 002699) with helpful staff.

Sleeping & Eating

Along Ave Mohammed V are several basic hotels, at around Dh40 per person.

Hôtel Renaissance (☎ 028 802225; fax 028 802042; Ave Mohammed V; d/ste Dh140/285; ♿ ♿) This big hotel is on both sides of the road, with the older part on one side and an annex with comfortable minisuites on the other. The restaurant serves standard Moroccan dishes, but also has an alcohol license.

Le Relais des Sables (☎ 028 802302; fax 028 802300; s/d without bathroom Dh235/316, s/d with bathroom Dh375/466, ste Dh414; ♿ ♿) This is among the most comfortable accommodation options in town, and hence is popular with tour groups. It has a bar and a licensed restaurant, and rooms are arranged around flowery courtyards. It is worth the extra dirham even though the cheaper rooms are a bit poky.

our pick Dar Infiane (☎ 028 24437292, 061 610170; www.darinfiane.com; s/d incl breakfast Dh620/1000; ♿ ♿) Tata's old kasbah, deep in the *palmeraie*, has been turned into an extraordinary guest house by architect Latifa Maali and owner Patrick Simon. Off a carpet-strewn central courtyard lie six rooms and a fabulous terrace pool, overlooking thousands of palm trees. Excursions from Dar Infiane are carefully crafted and range from using a light aircraft to fly over the green veins of the southern oases to going with Latifa to local markets or visiting rock engravings with knowledgeable guides. Dinners (Dh200) are delicious, and evenings on the rooftop terrace are magical in the still of the Sahara night.

Café Restaurant el-Amal (Ave Mohammed V; mains Dh50) In an attractive spot next to the camp site, you can get a good square meal here of tajine or brochette.

Getting There & Away

Buses and taxis collect on Place Massira, one block east of Ave Mohammed V. A

طاطا

Satas bus leaves every other day for Agadir (Dh80, eight hours, three daily) via Tiznit (Dh60, 6½ hours). Other companies operate departures to Marrakesh (Dh120, one daily), Agadir via Tiznit or Taroudannt (Dh70, five hours, one daily) and Goulmime (Dh60, six hours, one daily).

Goods taxis ply the routes to Tiznit (Dh100), Taroudannt (Dh70), Agadir (Dh90) and Goulmime (Dh80).

WESTERN SAHARA

الصحراء الغربية

Ask any Moroccan about the status of the Western Sahara and they will insist it belongs to them, yet the UN is clear that this is still under dispute. Moroccan maps may show this region as part of their country, but few outside Morocco will agree.

This area largely comprises the former Spanish colonies of Spanish Sahara and part of Tarfaya. Travelling through here, one does marvel at the dispute. The towns are merely administrative centres, and the road

cuts through a vast area of *hammada* – featureless, arid, inhospitable and uninviting.

Despite the 1991 ceasefire in the Polisario-backed war, the desert is still occupied by the Moroccan military. But, apart from the endless police roadblocks, going south to Dakhla is now a routine affair.

One of the benefits of the area's tax-free status is that petrol costs a couple of dirham less per litre than in the rest of the country. The first of the Atlas Sahara petrol stations is just south of Tarfaya.

History

Despite its windswept desolation, the Western Sahara has a long and violent history. Islamic missionaries started to spread Islam among the Zenata and Sanhaja Berber tribes in the 7th century, but it was only in the 13th century when a second wave of Arab settlers, the Maqil from Yemen, migrated to the desert that the whole region was Arabised.

By the 19th century the desert had new overlords again: the Spanish, who grabbed the Western Sahara and renamed it Rio de Oro, even though it had neither water nor gold. In reality, until 1934 it was Sheikh Ma

A DESERT OF DREAMS AND NIGHTMARES

The name is enough to make most of us dream. The Sahara, from the Arabic word *sahra*, meaning 'desert', is the world's largest arid zone. It is also a place of nightmares as only the well-attuned or well-prepared can survive in its 3 million sq miles of sand dunes, arid mountains and rock-strewn plains.

The 18th-century British geographer James Rennell summed up the challenge of the Sahara in his *Geographical Elucidations* (published 1790) when he wrote, 'Africa stands alone in a geographical view... its regions separated from each other by the least practicable of all boundaries, arid Desarts [sic] of such formidable extent, as to threaten those who traverse them, with the most horrible of all deaths, that arising from thirst!' The Romans never managed to cross the desert, preferring instead to patrol its northern borders. They had good reason for staying away: lucky travellers who survived the crossing described the trail of human and animal skeletons that lined the Saharan caravan routes.

European explorers of the late-18th and early-19th centuries, who struggled across the Sahara's vast expanses in search of answers to the geographical riddles of the Niger River, the legendary town of Timbuktu and the gold fields of West Africa, as often found themselves overwhelmed by the landscape as by raiders. And even in the 20th century, the desert thwarted European colonisers and idle travellers, as was so elegantly captured in Paul Bowles' novel *The Sheltering Sky*, in which a group of wealthy Americans run into increasing trouble, the further they move into the Sahara.

The dangers involved in Saharan travel give people who inhabit the wilderness a special place in society. Travel through southern towns such as Essaouira and Goulmime, both of which have depended on the desert and its trade, and you will meet some of them.

Essaouira's Gnawa people are descendants of slaves brought across the desert long ago from West Africa. While many slaves were sold in the souq and shipped across the Atlantic or north to Europe, others settled in the Atlantic port. Among them were men initiated into the mystic rites

El-Ainin and his son El-Hiba who controlled the desert and the nomadic tribes. After that, an uneasy colonial peace prevailed until Moroccan independence in 1957, when new nationalist fervour contributed to the establishment of the Polisario Front and the guerrilla war against the Spanish.

When it was abandoned by Spain in 1975, Morocco and Mauritania both raised claims to the desert region, but Mauritania soon bailed out. In November 1975 King Hassan II orchestrated the Green March – 350,000 Moroccans marched south to stake Morocco's historical claims to the Western Sahara (see boxed text, p45).

In the following years 100,000 Moroccan troops were poured in to stamp out resistance. When the Polisario lost the support of Algeria and Libya, it soon became clear that Rabat had the upper hand. The UN brokered a cease-fire in 1991, but the promised referendum, in which the Saharawis could choose between independence and integration with Morocco, has yet to materialise.

Ever since, Morocco has strengthened its hold on the territory, pouring money into infrastructure projects, particularly

offshore oil exploration, and attracting Moroccans from the north to live here tax-free. The debate is still open but, to all intents and purposes, Morocco seems to have succeeded in its claim to the territory.

For the most up-to-date information on the Western Sahara, or the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (as they officially call themselves), log on to one of the following:

- www.un.org
- www.wsahara.net
- www.arso.org

Climate

Beyond the foothills of the Anti Atlas lies an arid hinterland starved of moisture. Here temperatures can exceed 45°C during the day and plunge to 0°C at night, while an annual rainfall of less than 125mm a year gives a suffocating aridity hovering between 5% and 30% – dry enough to mummify corpses. March to April sandstorms also plague the desert, making driving inadvisable. (The desert wind is known locally as the *chergui*, *irifi* or *sirocco*.)

Remember, it is important to carry a good supply of water. In winter it is also

of the south, often expressed through trance-inducing music. Some of these musicians – usually drummers – were pressed into service during the trans-Sahara crossing, creating rhythms to which the slave coffles moved.

No group is more closely associated with the desert than the Touareg, to whom the so-called blue men, found in places such as Goulimime, belong. Wrapped in their veils so only their eyes are exposed to the desert's withering condition, bound by strict tribal codes, Touareg have long had a reputation for toughness and independence. The 14th-century Arab traveller Ibn Battuta wrote of them, 'They wear face-veils and there is little good to say about them. They are a rascally lot.' That opinion was confirmed over the next few centuries by many who plied the Saharan caravan routes, whose goods or lives were often taken by Touareg.

If the idea of survival in such an inhospitable place is part of what makes the Saharan dream so potent, so too is the mysticism associated with its vast wastelands. It wasn't by chance that Moses found guidance in a desert. Jesus went to the desert (though not the Sahara) for 40 days to prepare himself, early Christian hermits headed there to draw themselves closer to divinity, the Prophet Mohammad brought his message of a new religion out of the desert. And in Morocco, many reformist movements came out of the desert fringes, most notably the reformist zeal of the Almoravids and Almohads.

Yet for many visitors, the main attraction is nothing more complicated than the pure beauty of the landscapes. Morocco has few true sand dunes (Algeria and Libya have some of the best of the Saharan dunes), but it does have thousands of kilometres of arid land. You need only head south of Goulimime, to Tan Tan and Tarfaya, or over to the sandier regions of the southeast, to have a sense of the Sahara, of the cool beauty of its sunrise, the terrifying brilliance of the midday sun and the extraordinary calm of dusk over a land that seems empty but is not and that stretches not just as far as the eye can see but further than most visitors can even imagine.

essential to carry a warm sleeping bag and some warm clothing as desert nights can be bitterly cold.

Dangers & Annoyances

In both Laâyoune and Dakhla you will be more aware of the military and police, both of whom remain sensitive to photography around military installations.

Similarly, they will not take too kindly to the photographing of the depressing refugee camps in both cities, where many Saharawis still live. The busy red-light district in Dakhla, opposite the military headquarters and barracks, is also off-limits to Westerners.

If you are crossing the border into Mauritania, you will need to engage a local guide (on the insistence of the Mauritanian authorities) to negotiate the off-*piste* road to Nouâdhibou due to the very real danger of landmines.

Language

In the Western Sahara, Arabic and French are spoken almost universally. As a previous Spanish Protectorate, the more common second language was, until recently, Spanish, a habit that lingers on with the older generation. English is also spoken, due to the UN presence.

Getting There & Away

There is no officially designated border between Morocco and the Western Sahara, and Morocco treats the region as an integrated part of the country.

Laâyoune is served by regular flights from Casablanca. More infrequent flights from Agadir and Dakhla are also available. There is a small airport at Dakhla, which operates one flight a week to Agadir and a few more to Casablanca.

There is talk of running buses to the border from Dakhla, but for now you need to arrange good 4WD transport. Take plenty of water and food (enough for two days), and allow at least six hours to cover the 380km. Hôtel Erraha (p415) in Dakhla is the best local source of information regarding the border. Jeep drivers can be found hanging out near the Dakhla checkpoint, and in the Hôtel Sahara, and charge around Dh500 to Dh600 per person for border crossings. During the winter season (November to

March) overland trucks may consider giving you a lift.

Once you arrive at the border you will need to go through two customs points, one on the Moroccan side and the other in Mauritania.

It is possible to have a Mauritanian visa issued in Rabat, but you are strongly advised to get one before arriving in Africa.

See p484 for more on crossing into Mauritania.

Getting Around

Supratours and CTM both operate buses to Laâyoune and Dakhla, although Supratours provides the faster and more efficient service.

TAN TAN TO TARFAYA

The 225km drive from Tan Tan to Tarfaya takes you across a monotonous stretch of desert highway. The road is good and the traffic relatively light.

Along the route you'll see anglers' huts perched on the cliff tops (many of these anglers sell their catch by the roadside) and, further south, herds of camels wandering slowly through the *hammada*. Sidi Akhfennir, 110km further on, is a good place to stop, either at one of the garages or at a café serving grilled fish straight from the sea.

If you want to hang around longer, the **Auberge Pêche et Loisirs** (☎ 061 211983; <http://peche.sudmaroc.free.fr>, in French; per person half-board Dh330) has clean and comfortable rooms and is run by a man passionate about fishing, who organises trips on the nearby Naïla Lagoon or ocean.

The area just north of Tarfaya is extremely scenic, with wild, untouched Atlantic beaches and a series of surreal shipwrecks, clearly visible from the road, rising from the waters.

TARFAYA

pop 4500

The tiny fishing port of Tarfaya was the second-largest town in the Spanish-controlled zone of the same name. The original settlement seems to have been created in the late 19th century by a Scottish trader, Donald Mackenzie, who built a small trading post on a rock just off-shore, which he called Port Victoria. When the Spanish took over, they appropriated the building, now

طرفاية

known as Casa Mar (house in the sea; see below). Today Tarfaya is on the cusp of big developments, with Spanish and Jordanian developers planning projects, and rumours of a relaunch of the ferry connection to the Canary Islands.

But Tarfaya will forever be associated with the French pilot and writer Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. In 1926 he began flying the mail service down from France to St Louis in Senegal. Tarfaya, then known as Cap Juby, was one of the stops. In 1927 he was appointed station manager for Tarfaya and he spent a couple of years here, writing for *Courrier Sud* (Southern Mail) and dreaming up his most famous story, *Le Petit Prince* (*The Little Prince*), which features a pilot lost in the desert. In 1944 Saint-Exupéry disappeared over Corsica while on a photographic reconnaissance.

The **Casa Mar** is abandoned but still standing and can be easily reached at low tide. But like much of the deep south, Tarfaya is short on specific sights, but what there is, is predominantly dedicated to Saint-Exupéry. A **monument** was erected in his memory at the north end of the beach: a Bréguet 14 biplane, the sort of plane he used to fly. Nearby is the **Musée Saint-Exupéry** (Ave Mohammed V; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm), which tells the story of his life and of the airmail service he helped run. The descriptions are in French.

Each year, the service is remembered in the Rallye Saint-Exupéry, when planes fly from Toulouse to Saint Louis and back. In October 2007, they landed at Tarfaya to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the writer taking up his post and the 25th year of the rally.

Tarfaya does have a couple of simple hotels, the better being the **Bahja** (☎ 028 895506; Blvd Bir Anzarane; s/d Dh100/130). The man responsible for the museum, Sadat Melainime also rents **three rooms** (☎ 061 079488; Ave Mohamed V; s/d Dh150/250). Both of these places can serve up a good fish tajine. Other food options revolve around the main street, where a couple of cafés serve up fried fish.

A new ferry service which opened in December 2007 between Tarfaya and Fuerteventura brought hope of a property boom as investors started buying in the hope of turning the sleepy place into a resort, but the ferry ran aground just offshore on 30 April 2008 and there is no word from the operators,

Armas (www.navieraromas.com), about relaunching the service. Until they do, transport to Tarfaya is limited to the buses and occasional grands taxis that run north up to Tan Tan and south to Laâyoune. There are daily services, but timetables are erratic at best.

LAÂYOUNE (AL-'UYUN)

العيون

pop 200,000

The Spanish created Laâyoune as an outpost from which to administer the nearby Bou Craa phosphate mines. The Moroccans have had bigger ambitions and have spent more than US\$1 billion turning it into the principal city of the Western Sahara. Now neither Saharawi nor Spanish, its population is mostly Moroccans, lured from the north by the promise of healthy wages and tax-free goods.

As a government centre and a military garrison, Laâyoune – let's not forget, like the rest of the region it is officially under foreign occupation – doesn't make much of a destination. But whether you're heading north or south, distances here are so great that you may have to stop.

Orientation

The town's showpiece is the vast Place du Méchouar (where bored youths hang about at night), but there is no obvious centre. The post office, banks and most hotels are along either Ave Hassan II or Blvd de Mekka.

Buses mostly gather at offices towards the southern end of Blvd de Mekka. Grand taxi stations are scattered about town.

Information

There are several banks with ATMs and exchange facilities near the intersection of Blvd Hassan II and Blvd Mohammed V.

Banque Populaire (Place Dchira). Has another branch on Blvd Mohammed.

BMCE (Place Hassan II) Has another branch at Place Dchira.

Délégation Régionale du Tourisme (ONMT; ☎ 028 891694; Ave de l'Islam; ☎ 9am-noon & 2.30-6.30pm Mon-Fri) Few handouts, but the staff are anxious to please.

Post office (Place Hassan II; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 2.30-6.30pm Sat-Thu, 8.30-11.30am & 3-6.30pm Fri) Also has public phones with international connection. There is a smaller (post only) branch on Place Dchira.

Sahar@Network (Blvd de Mekka; per hr Dh10) Internet access.

W@dernet (Blvd de Mekka; per hr Dh8) Internet access.

Wafa Bank (cnr of Ave Hassan II & Blvd Mohammed)

Sights & Activities

The Moroccan government wants the grand Place du Méchourat to attract our attention, but the **Palais de Congrès** (Blvd de Mekka) and new **Grande Mosquée** (Moulay Abdel Aziz Mosque; Blvd Moulay Youssef) are unlikely to have you reaching for your camera. The original Spanish town runs along the riverbed Saquia el-Hamra over which presides the startling **Spanish cathedral**, (now closed) on Ave Hassan II, with its huge, rounded white dome mimicking the local architecture. To the southwest of the cathedral, bustling **Souq Djemal** is the liveliest area of town and has some of the best food stalls.

More alluring are the kilometres of dunes north and west of town, clearly visible from several vantage points in and around the city. To get in among them, take a 4WD off the road to Tarfaya (local travel agents can organise trips). Lagoons to the north of town are great for birdwatching.

Sleeping

The UN maintain a significant presence in Laâyoune and tend to fill the better hotels, so you would be wise to book ahead. Unsurprisingly, good accommodation in this desert outpost is relatively expensive by Moroccan standards.

BUDGET

Hôtel Sidi Ifni (☎ 028 893488; 12 Rue Sanhaja, Souq Djaj; s/d Dh35/55) By far the best of the real cheapies, this place is very local in flavour. Showers here use cold, salty bore water – luckily there are public showers opposite.

Hôtel Jodesa (☎ 028 992064; fax 048 893784; 223 Blvd de Mekka; s/d without shower Dh100/144, with shower Dh144/155) Centrally located north of Place Dchira, this modern hotel is a good cheaper option. Rooms are basic, but reasonably spacious and some have private bathroom.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Hôtel Parador (☎ 028 892814; fax 028 890962; Ave de l'Islam; s/d Dh1100/1400; 🚻 🚿) A survivor from Spanish days, built in hacienda style around gardens, it has a faintly colonial bar and a good, if expensive, restaurant (set menu Dh200). The rooms are equipped with all the creature comforts you'd expect and each has a small terrace.

Sahara Line Hotel (☎ 028 995454; fax 028 990155; Blvd el-Kairaouane; s/d/tr Dh399/506/614; 🚻 🚿) A re-

liable three-star option, the swish, carpeted air-conditioned rooms have fridge, bathrooms and TV. There's a restaurant on the top floor (breakfast Dh50), but no bar.

Eating

There are many cafés and simple restaurants around Place Dchira, where Dh20 should get you a filling meal. More lively food stalls can be found at the Souq Djemal.

The hotel restaurants at the Sahara Line Hotel and the Parador offer more upmarket meals.

Au Palais des Glaces (☎ 028 980476; Blvd de Mekka; breakfast Dh10-17) A modern and very European-style tearoom, patisserie and ice-cream parlour, with the best ice creams in town. A good place to start the day, too.

Restaurant el-Bahja (Blvd Mohammed V; set menu Dh20; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Simple grilled meat – lamb, certainly, camel perhaps – is served without ceremony here, but with plenty of grease and chips. A good place for when you've had enough of fresh fish.

Pizzeria la Madone (☎ 028 993252; 141 Ave Chahid Bouchraya; pizzas Dh40-60) A cosy place to eat in, though they also do a brisk takeaway trade. Thin-crust pizzas, *harira* (lentil soup), salads, omelettes are all excellent, as is the pasta marinara.

Le Poissonier (☎ 028 993262, 061 235795; 183 Blvd de Mekka; meals Dh60-90; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Apart from the restaurants at the top-end hotels, this is the best restaurant in town and if you have to be in Laâyoune, there are worse ways of spending your time than over a fish soup or lobster in this friendly place.

Getting There & Away

AIR

The **Hassan I Airport** (☎ 028 893346) is located 2km south of Laâyoune. **Royal Air Maroc** (RAM; ☎ 028 894071; Place Dchira) operates three direct weekly flights to Casablanca (1½ hours) and one to Dakhla (one hour). **Regional Air Lines** (☎ in Casablanca 022 538080; www.regionalmaroc.com) has flights to Agadir (1¼ hours).

BUS

CTM (Blvd de Mekka) has a morning bus to Dakhla (Dh141, seven hours, one daily) and services to Agadir (Dh190, 10½ hours, three daily) via Tan Tan (Dh100, four hours) and Goulmim (Dh142, seven hours, three daily).

Supratours (Place Oum Essad) has buses to Marrakesh (Dh270, 16 hours, two daily), and to Dakhla (Dh150, nine hours, one daily).

Satas (Blvd de Mekka) will get you to Tiznit (Dh130, nine hours, two daily), Agadir (Dh190, two daily), Dakhla (Dh140, one daily) and Tan Tan (Dh100, two daily).

TAXI

Catch grands taxis north to Tan Tan (Dh100), Goulmimé (Dh130) and Inezgane (for Agadir; Dh180) about 1.5km east of Place Hassan II along Ave Hassan II. A local red-and-white petit taxi will take you there for Dh5 or so; ask the driver for Place Tan Tan.

Grands taxis heading south to Boujdour (Dh70) and Dakhla (Dh170) leave from 'Place Boujdour' in the southern suburbs. A petit taxi there also costs about Dh4.

The taxi lot for Foum el-Oued (Dh8), the nearest beach, is more conveniently located just south of the Great Mosque.

DAKHLA (AD-DAKHLA)

الداخلة

pop 40,000

'Marrakesh is for tourists', said one Moroccan blog, 'but Dakhla is for travellers'. But not for long: French newspaper *Le Figaro* didn't put Dakhla on its list of cool destinations on a whim. Things are starting to happen down here.

Established by the Spanish in 1844 and formerly called Villa Cisneros, Dakhla lies just north of the Tropic of Cancer on a sandy peninsula stretching out 40km from the main coastline. It's a very lonely 520km drive from Laâyoune (more than 1000km from Agadir) through endless *hammada*. It is the sort of journey you would think would only be worthwhile if you were en route to Mauritania or trying to get lost: after so many hours of driving, it is tempting to imagine that you are arriving at the end of the earth. And yet Dakhla is the focus of some significant and upmarket hotel projects and feels less remote than many towns in the south.

Dakhla's whitewashed, arcaded streets are rather soulless but it is a pleasant enough place and the government continues to pour money into the town. New apartment blocks are constantly stretching the town boundaries, roads are being paved, the huge new port is home to Morocco's largest fishing fleet, day-trippers from the nearby Canary Islands scuttle through town looking

for Moroccan exotica and it won't be long before some of the Marrakesh set bring their private jets down for a weekend.

The old **Spanish lighthouse** at Point Durnford is good for some fantastic views. Otherwise it's out into the desert for some four-wheel driving, or down to the beach to windsurf, kitesurf, paraglide or go fishing (all hotels can help arrange these activities).

Orientation & Information

Dakhla is reasonably easy to get around, with the bus offices, central post office and most hotels and cafés situated around the old central market.

The **tourist office** (☎ 028 898228; 1 Rue Tiris; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 2.30-6.30pm Mon-Fri) is up a side street to the east of the CTM office.

Dakhla has a number of banks with ATMs, including **BMCE** (Ave el-Walaa) and **Crédit du Maroc** (Ave Mohammed V) on the road running along the seafont. You'll also find internet cafés dotted around town charging Dh10 per hour.

There are plenty of mechanics, mostly in the newer part of town to the southwest, who can service vehicles before a trek south.

Sleeping & Eating

Café Restaurant Samarkand (☎ 028 898316; Ave Mohammed V; mains Dh40-80) The favourite place to hang out for an hour or two under the pergolas, with fairy lights, mock gaslights and stone lions. They usually serve coffee and croissants in the morning and good salads, fish and omelettes later.

Casa Luis (☎ 028 898193; 14 Ave Mohammed V; meal around Dh100) A good Spanish restaurant where you can enjoy an excellent octopus salad, a decent paella and beer or wine to wash it down.

Hôtel Aigue (☎ 028 897395; Ave Sidi Ahmed Laroussi; s/d Dh60/80) Peach paintwork, hot water and standards of cleanliness above the norm make this hotel, just south of the CTM office, one of Dakhla's better budget deals. Rooms are bright; facilities are communal.

Sahara Regency (☎ 028 931555; www.sahara-regency.com; Ave al-Walaa; s/d/ste incl breakfast Dh660/880/1100; ☎ ☎ ☎) Some time soon there will be a Marrakesh-style five-star hotel, but for now this modern four-star resort hotel, 100m from the gorgeous bay, is Dakhla's best. The colourful spacious rooms have all the modern amenities, and all kinds of water sports, including fishing

and kitesurfing, are available. The hotel has no less than three bars and a good rooftop restaurant. Like elsewhere in Dakhla, bathrooms don't always have water.

Hôtel Erraha (☎ /fax 028 898811; Ave Beuchekroune; s/d Dh180/220) This spick-and-span hotel boasts 24-hour hot water and spacious rooms, some with kitchenettes. Its location about 1km southwest of the centre, near the new Edderhem Mosque, is a pain if you want to hang out in town, but convenient for grand taxi and the SAT and Supratour stations.

Hôtel Doumss (☎ 028 898046; fax 028 898045; Ave el-Walaa; s/d Dh250/300) Large rooms have bathrooms and balconies, but are somewhat dull and functional. Unexpectedly, there is also a bar, which closes at 7pm. To find it, head north to the water tower and keep going for another 200m.

Getting There & Away

Aéroport Dakhla (☎ 028 897049) is just west of town; a petit taxi to a hotel costs Dh4, although most are within walking distance.

RAM (☎ 028 897049; Ave des PTT) operates three flights a week to Casablanca, one of them stopping in Agadir and two in Laâyoune.

Regional Airlines (☎ 082 000080) has four flights a week to Casablanca, three to Laâyoune, two to Las Palmas in the Canaries, and one to Agadir.

CTM (Blvd 4 Mars), **Supratours** (Ave Mohammed V), and **Satas** (Blvd de Walaa) have daily services to Laâyoune (Dh141, eight hours), Tan Tan (Dh250, 14 hours) and Agadir (Dh340, 21 hours); tickets should be booked ahead.

Grands taxis for Laâyoune (Dh170) leave from an area called Al-Messira at the south-west end of town.

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