

**This sample edition features pages from our Northern Africa Yearbook Edition. The latest version is in production and a digital version will be available for download following the Africa Travel Association (ATA) 35th Annual Congress, May 17-20 in Banjul, The Gambia.**

**For your convenience, we have limited the size of this sample to under 60 pages  
Also for your convenience to avoid constant page turning, we have designed this PDF version in double page spreads, except for the covers. Previews of over 24 other editions can be viewed from our website - <http://www.africa-ata.org/mag.htm>**

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# AFRICA

## Travel Magazine

Algeria  
Egypt  
Libya  
Morocco  
Sudan  
Tunisia  
Western Sahara

# NORTHERN *Region*

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# I AM MOROCCO ...

I am Morocco, home of Africa's oldest monarchy, consitutional in form, with an elected parliament. I rank high on the list Africa's prime tourism destinations, generating over 2 billion per year in foreign currency. I am located in Northern Africa, with coastlines along the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea. I am a stable and democratic country linking Sub-Saharan Africa and Western Europe, separated by the Straits of Gibraltar, a short ferry ride. In area I am slightly larger than the state of California and the same size as Iraq. I am bordered by Algeria to the east, Spain to the north, three small Spanish enclaves and Mauritania to the south via my Western Saharan territories. Most of my south east area is in the Sahara Desert and as such is generally sparsely populated

### **My status**

I am a member of the Arab League, Arab Maghreb Union, Francophonie, Organization of the Islamic Conference, Mediterranean Dialogue group, and Group of 77. I received my independence from France in 1956. My current population is more than 30 million. My official language is Arabic, Berber dialect - with French popular as the language of business, government and diplomacy and English widely spoken. My Ethnic groups are as follows: Arab-Berber 99.1%, other 0.7%, Jewish 0.2% My religions: Muslim 98.7%, Christian 1.1%, Jewish 0.2%.

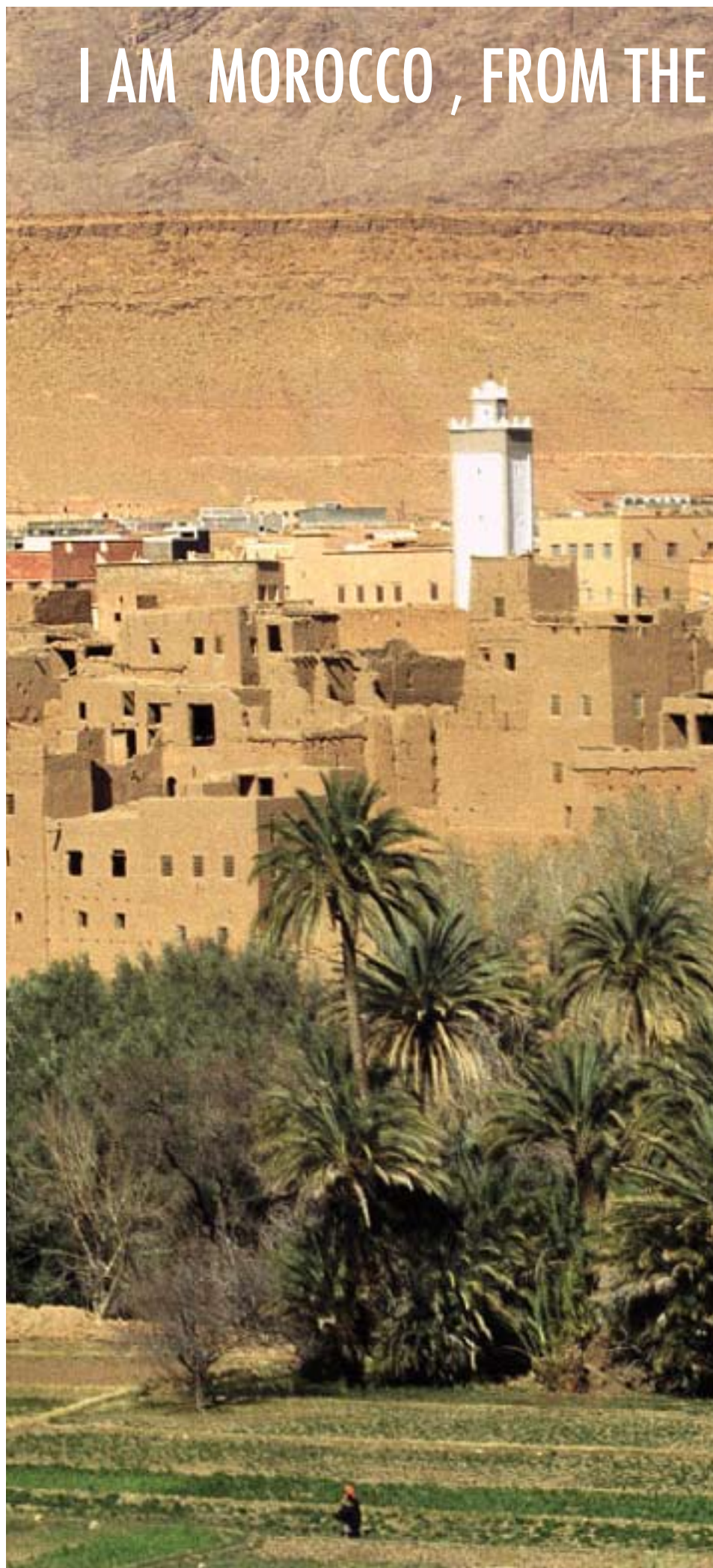
I am the third most populous Arab country, after Egypt and Sudan. Most of my people practice Sunni Islam and are of Berber, Arab or mixed Arab-Berber stock.

### **Great Cities of Morocco**

I am famous for my Imperial Cities. Casablanca is my business and economic capital, and has the Northern Africa's largest seaport. A modern autoroute connects Casablanca with other major centers, and the railways system is well advanced, with seamless service to the Mohammed V International Airport, with over 6.2 million passengers annually.

Continued on page 40

# I AM MOROCCO, FROM THE ATLANTIC OCEAN AND MEDITERRANEAN SEA TO MOUNTAINS AND DESERT



From page 2

It is home base to RoyalAir Maroc, Jet4you, Air Arabia Maroc and Regional Air Lines. Rabat is my administrative capital - traditional yet modern and elegant, with wide boulevards with trees, flowers, gardens and luxurious boutiques. Small wonder they call in the Garden City.

An exciting development currently underway is a rapid light rail system linking Rabat to its sister city of Sale.

Fés, the Imperial City, is my spiritual and cultural center and original capital, dating back to the 800s. Meknes is famous for its picturesque and exotic souks (markets) with colorful displays of foods, handicrafts and textiles. Close by is the Roman City of Volubilis, now a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Marrakech has many historical sites as well as exquisite shopping bazaars. Opportunities to experience luxurious palaces, exotic kasbahs, museums, casinos, golf courses, mountains, lush oases, and fabulous market-places.

Other cities include Agadir, Essaouira, Fes, Marrakech, Meknes, Mohammadia, Oujda, Ouarzazat, Safi, Salè, Tangier and Tétouan. My climate is Mediterranean, becoming more extreme towards my mountainous interior regions. My coastal plains are rich and accordingly, they comprise the backbone for agriculture. Forests cover about

12% of the land while arable land accounts for 18%. 5% is irrigated. I am known for my wildlife biodiversity, with birds representing the most important fauna

I m an ethnically diverse country with a rich culture and civilization, having hosted many people coming from East (Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Jews and Arabs), South (Sub-Saharan Africans) and North (Romans, Vandals, Andalusians (including Moors and Jews)). All those civilizations have had an impact on my social structure.

I am any ally of the United States via the Moroccan-American Treaty of Friendship, the oldest non-broken friendship treaty. It was negotiated by Thomas Barclay and signed by John Adams and Thomas Jefferson. It has been in continuous effect since 1787.

Portuguese efforts to invade and control the Atlantic coast in the fifteenth century did not profoundly affect the Mediterranean heart of Morocco. Many former Portuguese forts are integrated into my coastal cities.

With my capital at Rabat, there are 37 provinces and 2 wilayas; Agadir, Al Hoceima, Azilal, Beni

Mellal, Ben Slimane, Boulemane, Casablanca\*, Chaouen, El Jadida, El Kelaa des Srarhna, Er Rachidia, Essaouira, Fes, Figuig, Guelmim, Ifrane, Kenitra, Khemisset, Khenifra, Khouribga, Laayoune, Larache, Marrakech, Meknes, Nador, Ouarzazate, Oujda, Rabat-Sale\*, Safi, Settat, Sidi Kacem, Tanger, Tan-Tan, Taounate, Taroudannt, Tata, Taza, Tetouan, Tiznit . note: three additional provinces of Ad Dakhla (Oued Eddahab), Boujdour, and Es Smara as well as parts of Tan-Tan and Laayoune fall within Moroccan-claimed

Executive branch: Chief of state: King MOHAMED VI (since 23 July 1999),

Head of government: Prime Minister \_\_\_\_.

Education is free and compulsory through primary school (age 15).

List of universities in Morocco  
Main article: List of universities in Morocco

Abdelmalek Essaâdi University , Tétouan - Tanger  
Al Akhawayn University, Ifrane

Cadi Ayyad University, Marrakech  
Chouaib Doukkali University , El Jadida  
Hassan II Ain Chok University , Casablanca

Hassan II Mohammedia University , Mohammedia  
Hassan Premier University , Settat

Ibn Tofail University , Kenitra

Ibnou Zohr University , Agadir  
Institute of Management and Business Technology (IMBT) Rabat

Mohamed Premier University , Oujda

Mohammed V University, Rabat  
Mohammed V University

Agdal, Rabat  
Mohammed V University  
Souissi, Rabat

Moulay Ismail University , Meknès

Sidi Mohamed Benabdellah University , Fes

University of Al Karaouine, Fes

Université Moulay Slimane (formerly called Cadi Ayyad Univer





# La Mamounia, Marrakech. A Grand Hotel's Joyous Return to Elegance



by Jerry W. Bird

Muguette Goufrani, our magazine's Associate Editor, whose father owned a thriving tour operation in Morocco, has fond memories of La Mamounia. "This grand hotel was a favorite meeting place in Marrakech for our family, friends and clients," she said. Muguette mentioned that the hotel got its name from the beautiful, spacious, and perfumed gardens - a wedding gift to Prince Moulay Mamoun from his father over 200 years ago. Prost and Marchisio architects designed the hotel, featur-

ing the Art Deco style so popular in the 1920s, combined with traditional Moroccan designs that were carried through to the furnishings and decor.

## A Magnet for Prestige Events

Marrakech is well known for its conference facilities - as a magnet for prestige events - meetings, international events, trade missions and summits. When the Africa Travel

Association held its first Cultural and Ecotourism Symposium here in 1996, our magazine was represented by editors Muguette Goufrani and Karen Hoffman, both of whom have participated in ATA events for 15 years.



Marrakech captured the hearts of all delegates, including African Tourism Ministers and travel-tourism professionals from the USA, Canada and Africa.

## Photo Ops galore!

Where else are many walls and buildings tinted in a rich pastel peach, with broad boulevards and promenades lined with rows and rows of orange trees, with ripe fruit dangling from their branches like holiday ornaments?

In 2002, following the ATA Conference in Fez, our media team of Muguette Goufrani, Broadcaster Ogo Sow and myself inspected a wide cross-section of hotel facilities in Marrakech to give our readers and listeners a word picture of the choices available.

We were not disappointed!

During this summer's visit for a Bastille Day gala evening hosted by the French Consulate, we were simply amazed at the major development and the sophistication of the city since 2002. More recently we did a complete city tour. Learning that La Mamounia was closed for major renovations at the time, we waited eagerly for its grand reopening. The result is a fitting tribute to well known Speaking of movies, several well known films used La Mamounia as a setting, including "Morocco" with Marlene Dietrich, Hitch-

cock's "The Man Who Knew Too Much." Charlton Heston, Omar Sharif, Nicole Kidman, Sylvester Stallone and Tom Cruise are a few of the celebrities who've stayed here. Modern as today's most elegant world class hotels in terms of facilities, yet furnished and decorated in the art deco tradition, with an authentic Moorish touch. starters.

*For more information on La Mamounia, e-mail [airhwy@smartt.com](mailto:airhwy@smartt.com)*




# La Mamounia: A World Class Dining Experience

## A Grand Dining Experience

According to Muguette and her family, La Mamounia has always ranked among the leading hotels in North Africa and the world for the quality and variety of cuisine. Now, with new facilities and world class service, the experience is better than ever, with five bars and four outstanding restaurants - Le Marocain, Le Marocain, Le Framamouniançais, L'Italien, and Le Pavillon de la piscine. Author Habeeb Salloum, one of the top contributors to Africa Travel Magazine, speaks highly of traditional Moroccan cuisine of which you will find the finest on the menu at Le Marocain in addition to dishes from around the world.



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by Habeeb Salloum

In this rushed 20th century there are not many of us who know that in Morocco there still exists a medieval world of craftsmen who are creating, with their hands, masterpieces of art. Incorporating a synthesis of the Libyco-Berber, Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, African and Andalusian artistic traditions, these artisans have a long and honored history.

Whole families, century after-century, handing down the trades from father to sons, have kept Motional fee based on number of nights. Prices and dates for each of the tours are subject to change based on total number of participants. Photo (above right) Rabat, Mor.occo's artistic traditions alive. The families know-how, always open to contributions from the outside world, are constantly improved without deviating from tradition. New ideas are assimilated, brewed, melted, then re-created to become genuine Moroccan art.

These craftsmen who, in our time, compete with modern mechanical technology, are able to survive and, in fact, prosper. Unbelievably, these Moroccan skilled workmen, unlike their brethren in other parts of the world, have fought against the machines of the modern age and have not lost the battle. With skills inherited from their fa-

# The Splendid Handicrafts of Morocco

thers, they produce, today, some of the finest handmade products in the world.

If one wishes to be transported to a world of ancient oriental splendor, Fez el-Bali or the old section of Fez is the place to visit. Within its walls no automobile is allowed to enter and, as it was in the medieval ages, all work is carried on by man or donkey. The craftsmen, like their forefathers in the days when Moorish Spain and Morocco were one, still turn out superb handmade articles which dazzle the onlooker.

In the same way as they have been for hundreds of years, these artisans are grouped in numerous streets specializing in different crafts. Fascinating to any visitor, the souks not only in Fez but also in the other cities of Morocco, appear to come straight out of The Arabian Nights.

## Artistry in Fine Leather

I will never forget the first time I walked down into the heart of the medieval part of Fez and saw artisans working amid shops displaying their colorfully embossed articles of leather.

Green, red, violet, white and yellow, marvelously treated by that city's celebrated tanners and dyers, leather was being gilded and transformed into dozens of products. Book covers, wallets and purses in all shapes and forms, desk sets, belts, hassocks, photo

frames and countless other articles were being decorated with sumptuous motifs comprising geometric designs, arabesques and stylized flowers or stars. The artistry of these Moroccan craftsmen was dazzling and breathtaking. However, this should not have come as a surprise since the ancestors of these leather artisans have been world-renowned hundreds of years. In the Middle Ages Moroccan leather was so famous that the best leather of that time and Moroccan were synonymous terms.

## Brass and Copper

Next to leather products, the craftsmen of Fez and Marrakesh are world famous for their brass and copper utensils. In the shops and homes, gleaming brass and copperware entice the tourist and Moroccan alike. Trays in all sizes, ashtrays, braziers, incense burners, door knockers, kettles, sugar boxes, teapots and other articles decorated with interlacing

arabesque designs and intricate floral motifs are produced with hands inheriting the skills of centuries.

Candelabra and lanterns with green, red and yellow glass inserts are in demand by the many visitors Morocco hosts annually. Numerous restaurants and night-clubs make use of them to create for their clients a relaxed aura. The colored lights project to the customers an haunting and romantic atmosphere.

## Artistry in Lighting

In Morocco, a room lit with colored lanterns is always complemented with attractive handmade carpets. The oldest of that country's handicrafts, they come in basically two types: rural and urban. However, these are divided into a wide range of many styles.

## World Famous Carpets

Rural carpets, known as Berber carpets, are the oldest type and the most common. Some have very thick woolen piles while others have short goat or camel hair piles. In almost all cases, they reflect the colors of the landscapes where they are made. Hence, they come mostly in beige, brown and tan with a few in black, red and white. Some have designs recalling prehistoric inscriptions while others have geometric compositions made up of lozenges, arrows and



*Photos: Left- Craftsman at ITB Berlin, 2009. Right- ornate lamp at Atlas Hotel,, Essaouira, a Royal Air Marox\ property.*

saw-tooth lines. Urban carpets are a newer type of rug. They were only introduced from the East into Morocco in the 18th century. Rabat and Sale became the production centers of these rich carpets. Traditionally, the urban carpets have a harmony of seven colors and a multitude of designs. Three bands of unequal width frame a rectangular field with a star-shaped motif in the center. Bands of different colors in geometric or floral designs encompass

these and, at each end, there is a kind of mihrab arch. Fine carpet experts indicate that these colorful rugs bring to mind garden paths around a pool surrounded by flowers and pet birds. In the homes of the wealthy in Morocco the handmade rugs are usually associated with inlaid furniture and other wooden knick-knacks usually made from they wood (a type of oak). Essaouira, famous for its marquetry, is where many of these charming pieces of furniture, desks, all kinds of tables, chests and jewelry boxes are made.

#### **Artistry in Woodwork**

The city's skilled artisans polish the hard they to a satin finish, then inlay it with cedar, lemon wood, ebony, mother-of-pearl and silver in floral



and geometric patterns. By using thin veneers of the same wood in a checkered design, or with chevrons, stars and other forms alternating with mother-of-pearl, ebony and silver they bring out the subtleties of the they wood. The saying that the wood craftsmen of the city combine and harmonize their inlaying to sing a song of beauty has much merit.



In Fez, the craftsmen are well known for their skill in decorating all types of structures with cedar wood, which is abundant in the nearby forests. Ceilings, doors and windows are made attractive with zouak, a type of decor dominated by geometric figures. The city's artisans, as well as those in neighboring Meknes, also specialize in masharabiehs

(screens made of small pieces of cedar wood turned on a lathe and then assembled in clever designs). Delicate and appealing these screens make the windows of the traditional homes attractive.

#### **Ceramics**

Alongside the inlaid articles are the ceramics which beautify, besides the homes, fountains, palaces, mosques and public buildings. The tile-makers whose ancestors made Andalusia an earthly paradise still practice their trade in Fez and Meknes. Throughout Morocco, tiled green roofs harmonizing with the surrounding greenery and breathtaking tiled blue, turquoise, white and yellow patios, rooms and hallways are all the handi-

work of these master craftsmen. For the preparation of their food the Moroccans, in the main, employ glazed red or brown pottery. However, enameled ornamental pottery made in Fez, Meknes, Sale and Safi are produced with the finesse of Italian or Spanish wares. Amphoras, dishes, jars, pots and vases are decorated mainly with cobalt blue on an enamel background. Cross-stitch designs, interlaced curves, polygonal stars and geometric or floral designs are then applied in black to these colorful utensils. In addition, in Safi, ceramic artisans produce in darker colors the metallic sheen found in Malaga pottery which itself was initiated by the Arabs. In all aspects of the handiwork industries, nothing is created hastily. The taste for the superb, along with the passage of time has created perfection. For export, the production of handicrafts is strictly regulated by the Moroccan government which allows only the topnotch products to be exported outside the country. In the country itself, the cooperative shops Coopartim sell handmade goods of guaranteed quality at reasonable prices. Hence, a visitor need not worry about bargaining if he/she is not inclined.

Nevertheless, whether sold in these regulated stores, in the traditional shops, or laid out on the sidewalks or on the bare ground

*Photos: From top left- (1) Metal sculptures of Gnaoua musicians, Atlas Hotel, Essaouira. Moroccan crafts at ITB Berlin (3) Leather handbags, souk, Essaouira.*





# MOROCCO: FROM MAJESTIC MOUNTAINS TO ROMANTIC KASBAHS AND DESERTS

Story and photos by  
Habeb Salloum

*Thanks to the Africa Travel Association's 6th Cultural and Ecotourism Symposium in Fez, Morocco during the International Year of Ecotourism, our ATA web site is receiving a flood of e-mail requests for information on the historic host city. The following article by Habeb Salloum captures the magic of Fez and its surrounding area thanks to the writer's professional style.*

For two days we had explored Fez, Morocco's historic city, glorifying in its ancient section which remains enclosed within its ancient ramparts. Inside no auto is allowed. Only donkeys contest with humans the few feet wide medieval streets. Seemingly, we had traveled back a thousand years in time.

It was a fabulous beginning for the trip we intended to take across the Atlas Mountains to the land of kasbahs (mud castles) and deserts. Fez, with its air of the Arabian Nights, was still on my mind as our tour group of five, along with Abdelatif, our guide, traveled through the foothills of the Atlas Mountains towards the desert frontier town of Erfoud, some 480 km ( 298 mi) away. I was still dreaming of the

city's enchanting medieval palaces and skilled craftsmen when suddenly, the voice of Abdelatif, magnified by our small auto bus's microphone, boomed, "During this journey, we will see some of the most magnificent scenery in the world. It will be a journey of make-believe". A lady next to me snickered, "He's like all the other guides, always exaggerating." "We will see!", I thought to myself as we drove through a green fertile valley, covered with olive trees, many newly planted, set in the midst of sprouting wheat fields.

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After about a 40 km (24 mi) drive, we turned and began to travel upward on a road edged by stately maple trees, into the Middle Atlas Mountains. Further away, small apple orchards and patches of pine trees, increasing as we moved along, dotted the slope of the hills. Past the 1,220 m (4,000 ft) high red-roofed resort town of Imeuzzer der Kandari, we passed through an oak forest, then barren land until we entered the attractive 1,650 m (5,412 ft) high skiing town of Ifrane with its red-sloped roofs. A modern and prosperous resort town, it is labeled by travelers as the 'Switzerland of Morocco'. Located 60 km (37 mi) from Fez, this European-looking town is snow-bound in winter and ideal for skiing. It is the playground of the rich - the place where affluent Moroccans build their second home. Ifrane is also noted for the

privately built Al-Akhawayn University, specializing in foreign language training. Downward, we drove through oak forests until, on the outskirts of Azrou, we turned upward. A short drive and the oak forests were soon inter-mixed with the majestic cedar. However, this all-encompassing greenery was followed by a barren countryside - the home of shepherds and their flocks. We drove through this arid Middle Atlas landscape, in the shadows of the snow-capped peaks of the High Atlas Mountains, until we stopped at Midelt - a town of 70,000, located at the entrance to the Berber region in Morocco - 200 km (124 mi) southeast of Fez. Situated between the Middle and High Atlas Mountains, 1,525 m (5,000 ft) above sea level, this windswept town, an important center for local carpets, defuses

a calm and friendly atmosphere. Besides being a rest stopover, travelers come to this town to visit the nearby convent of Kasbah Myriem - a nunnery staffed by a handful of European nuns who make their living selling carpets. We stopped to refresh ourselves at the Kasbah Hotel Restaurant Asmaa - a traditional kasbah-style building whose interior is beautified by fountains and tiles in traditional Moroccan fashion. Soon thereafter, we were driving in the barren High Atlas until we passed a spot 1,907 m (6,255 ft) above sea level - the highest point we were to reach during our journey. From this high pass, the road wound its way downward through an arid landscape until we reached the Ziz River - a thin line of greenery in an otherwise barren countryside. Habeb Salloum (continued)



**Habeeb Salloum.** From page 7

At places, the road wound its way high above the river, then suddenly it would descend to the water's edge where vegetables thrive under olive, palm and many other type of trees. The scene brought to mind the words of the poet-astronomer Omar Khayam, "Between the desert and the sown."

After passing a dam on the Ziz River, which supplies the nearby city of Errachida with drinking water, we entered that town - some 400 km (248 mi) from Fez.

Once known as Kasr es Souk, its name was changed in 1979 to honor Moulay Rachid, father of Morocco's ruling Alaouite dynasty. Built at the crossroads of the main caravan routes to the Dadés Valley and the Tafilalet area, Errachida us by the beauty of its kasbak-like structures, seemingly all newly built. A city of some 200,000, with agriculture the main source of revenue, it appeared attractive and had an air of prosperity.

From Errachida, the highway continued to hug the Ziz River, forming the largest valley oasis in

Morocco. The whole valley is covered with aspin trees and date palm. This shimmering field of green stayed with us until we reached the desert town of Erfoud, saturated with modern buildings, built in replicas of the ancient kasbahs - huge fortress structures, once castle-homes of emirs, tribal chiefs and government officials. Some 350 million years ago the region around Erfoud was a huge

ocean and sea creatures from that era are found in abundance, fossilized in the local rock formations. A thriving tourist industry has been established by the fashioning into works of art these fossilized creatures of the sea and the manufacture of black marble found in the area

The last town in Morocco to be occupied by the French who thereafter made it into a military outpost, Erfoud is a typical tourist destination. A bustling place of some 40,000, its dusty streets, all year round, are usually filled with travelers from the four corners of the world, coming to examine its fossils and exploring it's sand dunes. This is especially true when the annual Date Festival is held in October.

October had long gone when we landed in Erfoud, but there was still much to do in and around that desert town. After resting that night in our kasbah-like hotel, the next day we set out for nearby Rissani where the Ziz River disappears into the desert. Just before entering that town, we stopped at the spot where the now almost disappeared historic city of Sijilmassa once stood. Erected in 757 A.D., it was the first true Muslim city in North Africa. Subsequently, it became a major staging post on the trans-Saharan caravan route, especially in the trading of salt. It once had a population of 100,000 and was the capital of the Tafilalt region. Today, only the desert wind and blowing sand swirl around the little of what remains of Sijilmassa.

In a few minutes we passed the

town's gate and entered Rissani, a town of 30,000. Strangely, the setting of the town and its environs along the Ziz River with heavily populated villages, seemingly living in the past, its canals, building styles and the nature of its inhabitants, have often reminded travelers of the villages edging the Nile in Egypt.

Just inside the city gates, we stopped at a tiny museum where we examined artifacts found in Sijilmassa. We then moved on to visit the Mausoleum of Moulay Ali Chérif, ancestor of Moulay el Rachid, the founder of the present ruling Alaouite dynasty. A colorful authentic Berber market was our next stop after which we drove to the Kasbah of Moulay Ismail - a tiny town inside the city walls. Here, we spent some time examining beautiful rugs for sale in converted old homes. Back in Erfoud, while my traveling companions left to view the spectacular sunset over some of the highest sand dunes in the world, I explored the town. Tired, I sat down on a bench by a well-dressed young man and introduced myself. Soon my new found companion, Muhammad, and myself were talking together in a friendly fashion.

When he found out that I would be writing an article about the Erfoud region, Muhammad asked, "Did you know that Hilary Clinton is from here?" Taken aback, I looked at him in astonishment, "Hilary Clinton from here! You must be kidding!" He smiled, "Haven't you heard about her Moroccan origin?"

Muhammad went on to explain

that Hilary's grandfather, a Moroccan Jew living in Rissani, married an American woman, then immigrated to the U.S.A. He went on, "You know that Hilary visited her grandfather's home in Rissani and along with our king's sister Lalla Myriem visited the Mausoleum of Moulay Ali Chérif - forbidden to non-Muslims." He continued, "At the same time, she also visited her sister's daughter who is married to a Berber tourist guide and lives in the Atlas Mountains." I looked at Muhammad in disbelief. Was he telling the truth? I had no idea! But it was an interesting story which capped our thrilling mountain journey to the land of kasbahs and desert.

#### Facts About Morocco:

- 1) Nationals of most countries do not need visas to enter Morocco- only valid passports.
- 2) If you know French, its is easy to get around in Morocco. Everyone speaks French, but many also know English.
- 3) Unit of currency in Morocco is the dirham which fluctuates at around 10 to 12 to a dollar. Exchange money at banks or hotels - rates are all the same with no commission.
- 4) When traveling in Morocco, trains are the most comfortable. Buses are inexpensive - CTM the best. Small autos, with unlimited mileage and fully insured, rent for about \$50. a day, fully insured.
- 5) The mass of hustlers which once infested the tourist spots in Morocco have been greatly diminished by the strong arm of

the law.

6) Tips are expected for every service - always carry small change.

7) Bargain for all tourist items - never shop with a guide - his commission is usually about 30%.

8) At night, avoid dark alleyways. Morocco is safer than many other countries, but muggers still stalk the lonely streets.

9) When in Erfoud, for a breathtaking taste of the desert, one should make a trip to Merzouga, an oasis near the Algerian border surrounded by sand dunes - some more than 50 m (164 ft) high. The oasis's lake is a favorite spot for migrating birds, especially in February and March, when the Dayet Srji flamingos appear. On the other hand, if traveling the desert is on one's mind, trips to the desert can be arranged by tour companies in Erfoud.

10) Two good places to stay in Erfoud: Hotel Salem - a 4 star abode - from \$56. To \$80. A room; Hotel Ziz, an excellent 3 star abode located in the heart of town - \$34. a room. Note: All prices quoted are in U.S. dollars. For Further information, Contact: Moroccan National Tourist Office: Suite 1460, 2001 rue Université, Montreal, Quebec, Canada H3A 2A6. Tel: +1 514 842 8111/2. Fax: +1 514 842 5316. Moroccan Tourist Office: 20 East 46th St., Suite 1201, New York, NY 10017, U.S.A. Tel.: 212-557-2520. Fax: 212-949-8148. Web Site: <http://www.tourism-in-morocco.com/>

Habeeb Salloum





# HAPPY RETURNS TO MOGADOR FOR FESTIVAL D'ESSAOUIRA GNAOUA, A MUSICAL BANQUET



By Jerry W. Bird

It's been seven long years since we first toured Morocco with the Ministry of Tourism as part of the ATA media team. This time, our purpose is to set up Africa Travel Magazine's first office in Africa, here at Essaouira, a beautiful Atlantic Coast city, once known as Mogador. A world-class golf course development, with multi-star hotels is underway and many other attractions are on the horizon. Since arriving from Paris on Royal Air Maroc, we have visited Rabat, with brief stops at Safi and Al Jaddida, spent two days in Casablanca and another in Marrakech, meeting old friends and new. Some of our positive impressions were a new Autoroute, with divided highway and the start of a Tramway system in Rabat. Muguette's brother, **Maurice Goufrani** of the Pompidou Centre in Paris, asked us to make sure we covered **Festival Gnaoua** (Gnawa) Essaouira, a unique musical experience, June 24-29, 2009. This event is high on our agenda and is in the **Venues World Edition**, now available for download at [www.africa-ata.org/venues.pdf/](http://www.africa-ata.org/venues.pdf/)

Known as the "windy city," Essaouira is Morocco's wind-surfing capital, where the sky is ablaze with multi colored kites from dawn to dusk every day.

## Flashback 2002

Here we are, basking in the noonday sun on North Africa's Atlantic Coast at Essaouira, Morocco, following a journey of discovery which began in the Imperial City of Fès and continued via Rabat, Casablanca and Marrakech. In a few days, we will drive south to the resort city of Agadir, with its luxury beach front hotels and lavish casinos, catering to the jet set of Europe, Africa and Middle East. Most North Americans have yet to really discover Morocco's coastal resort cities - and that's a prime opportunity for our magazine, read by travel professionals



and their clients.

We are enjoying a nautical view of Essaouira's historic seaport, once known as Mogador, from our dockside table at "Chez Sam." Highly recommended by locals in the know, this charming waterfront restaurant is surrounded by fishing boats and marine activity. Men repairing fish-nets, shucking shrimp and sorting sardines, looming skeletons of boats under construction add to the scene. The interior of Chez Sam reminds me of Trader Vic's, once a popular hang-out in our home port of Vancouver, and Ivar's in Seattle. The fresh seafood, decor and atmosphere are magnificent and the impressive gallery of celebrity photos; Louis 'Satchmo' Armstrong, Stevie Wonder and others, attests to the fact that the owner comes from the world of jazz. Sam and his huge, jet black dog Nikita joined our table a few days later, and thanks to that rendezvous, I was able to learn the history of this outstanding restaurateur and the origin of the Essaouira (Mogador) seaport's most popular eatery. Freshness is the order of the day, every day at Chez Sam and also at the many outdoor stalls, perched side-by-side along the dock area. Each offers visitors fresh caught products from the sea to the table and each competes vigorously with its neighbour for our attention. Barkers, menu boards and tempting displays of fresh catch from the Atlantic is their marketing approach. I enjoyed a generous portion of sole fillet and

fresh salad for less than five dollars U.S. My two colleagues split a large crab for a similar tab. Overhead a flotilla of sea gulls was dipping and diving against a background of crashing whitecaps, rocky outcrops and rugged remnants of the centuries old Portuguese fort that marks the city's place in history. Some call this the "city of winds ... and when we visited Essaouira earlier this same week, a minor storm was brewing. Gusts swept the area clear of surfers, bathers, wanderers and beachcombers. A few lonesome camel drivers still tended their stalls near the far end of the crescent shaped beach, and the waves grew even more fierce as they pounded the shore. But today, near the end of December,



the weather is as balmy as any spring afternoon, and the buyers and browsers are out in force, filling the Medina with its dozens of shops and stalls. We found an excellent Cyber Cafe right by the entrance and are getting our dozens of e-mail letters ready to send around the world. It's a great way to stay in touch, which is why we always carry our 'portable office - a reliable Macintosh laptop computer.

## Arabian Nights On New Years Eve in Morocco

One of my favorite meeting places in Essaouira is the 5-star Sofitel Mogador, located on the main promenade facing the beach. Here's where we spent one of the most enjoyable New Year's Eve celebrations in years. It started with an invitation to a Fashion Show, which continued into the wee hours. For starters, the hotel's dining room staff were all decked like Aladdin (of the lamp), and the entire ballroom looked like a scene from Arabian Nights, complete with belly dancers, mariachis with their Spanish guitars, Magicians and special visual and musical effects. The entire evening was unforgettable.

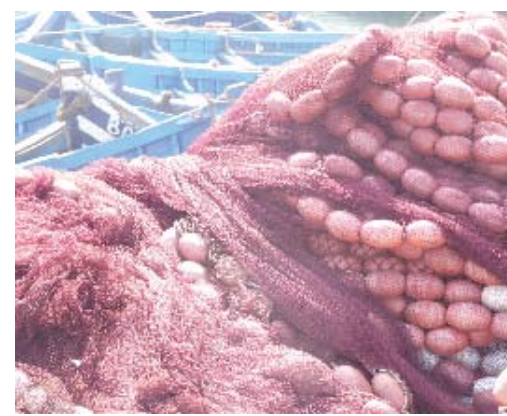
We then moved to the hotel's beach side restaurant, where the music was going full tilt. One of local girls modeled Muguette's bottle- green gown with shoulder wrap- one of several gifts we received from our friend and former Tourism Minister, Hon. Sylla Diakite of Conakry, Guinea. The Moroccan Khaftan fashion segment of the evening proved highly popular.

## Doors of Hospitality

Another friendly, convenient place to meet is the Hotel des Isles. Next to the Medina and offers a full range of services. Since we spent almost two weeks in the immediate area, we are pleased to recommend a stay in Essaouira to any traveler looking for something different. Photos courtesy: Thierry Mareschal and the Essaouira Cultural Center.

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## SCENES OF MOROCCO'S ATLANTIC COAST LIFESTYLE: THE HARBOR AT ESSAOUIRA RETAINS THE MAGICAL SPIRIT OF OLD MOGADOR



From our magazine's African office at Essouira our editors explore this ageless city, so rich in culture, from art galleries and strolling musicians to the dawn to dusk activity at the medina and adjoining harbor - one of the best anchorages on Africa's Atlantic Coast.

It's a photographer's delight with and interesting kaleidoscope of activities - seagulls fighting for scraps, fishermen mending their nets, workmen applying coats of paint to the hulls of fishing craft. On this warm, sunny day in mid October, the weather was the best we've

experienced since summer. However with the powerful trade winds and current from the Canary Islands, the visitor can expect a refreshing breeze most of the year. Small

wonder Essouira is the wind-surfing capital of Morocco. We often meet groups of people from Marrakech which is only a few hours away by car. Many consider this area the

beach for Marrakech, but in return, families from Essouira often drive to Marrakech for upscale shopping in its many stores and boutiques. *Continued on page 52.*

Behold what treasures await in the heart of a typical Moroccan Medina.

## African Lifestyles

# THE RIADS OF MOROCCO. VIVE LA DIFFERENCE!



by Mugette Goufrani

### Homes of Character

These traditional homes of Morocco, which many referred to as riads, villas, dars, kasbahs or guest homes, range from the simplest structures to the most sumptuous,

luxurious palaces. Legendary

comparisons are made to the Garden of Eden, with its fruit-laden trees, or a treasure-filled hideaway from A Thousand and One Nights. Cascading waterfalls, inner fountains with roses petals and bird baths, interior and rooftop tented patios, refreshing sauna-like hammams - you will find all of this and much more.

Many riads are showpieces of Moroccan architecture and culture, a constant challenge to innovative decorators attracted by the opportunity to renovate and improve, with amazing transformations from ugly ducklings to graceful swans. While the concept is the same, each riad is unique in its own way, as in the hands and eyes of the owner or designer. Africa Travel Magazine's editorial team never tires of visiting a riad, whether it be in the heart of a médina, a desert oasis or a retreat high in the Atlas Mountains. In our first Morocco edition, Habeeb Salloum describes the experience this way, "We stopped to refresh ourselves at the Kasbah Hotel Restaurant Asmaa - a traditional kasbah-style building whose interior is beautified by fountains and tiles in traditional Moroccan fashion. Soon thereafter, we were driving in the barren High Atlas until we passed a spot 1,907 m (6,255 ft) above sea level - the highest point we were to reach during our journey. From this high pass, the road wound its way downward through an arid landscape until we reached the Ziz River - a thin line of greenery in an otherwise barren countryside.

At places, the road wound its way high above the river, then suddenly it would descend to the water's edge where vegetables thrive under olive, palm and many other type of trees. The scene brought to mind the words of the poet-astronomer Omar Khayyam, "Between the desert and the sown."

### How it started

The idea for our World Edition supplement on Moroccan homes and lifestyle was born in 1996 during the first Africa Travel Association (ATA) Conference held in this fascinating country. The venue was Marrakech and the focus was on Cultural and Ecotourism. The stage was set in 2002, when myself, Editor Jerry Bird and broadcaster Ogo Sow toured the major cities from Fez to Rabat, Casablanca, Essaouira and Marrakech. One of the highlights was our visit to several of the boutique hotels, riads and luxury resorts, such as the Amanjena with its 32 Pavilions, six, two-storey maisons and the Al-Hamra Maison, with its pools and oasis of palms and olive trees in the foreground and the High Atlas Mountains as a backdrop. Our editor has these comments



about Marrakech, "Where else are all the walls and buildings tinted in a rich pastel peach, the broad avenues and promenades lined with rows and rows of orange trees, with ripe fruit dangling from their branches like holiday ornaments?"

### Riads of Mogador

We stayed an extra few weeks through New Years at Essaouira, formerly Mogador. Here we were treated to a visit of the superb facilities and park-like grounds at the elegant Dar Mimosas, situated a few miles south of the city. At the Médina, inside the walls of a centuries old Portuguese fortress, a variety of attractive riads offer fine food and accommodation. I was introduced to Les Terrasses d'Essaouira, a luxurious riad which offers a scenic view of the bay.

One of our favorite stops while doing business or shopping is the Riad Al

Médina. My brother Maurice Goufrani of the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris often stays when he visits the Essaouira Cultural Complex, or attends the popular Ganaoua Festival, a three day banquet of music.

Our current stay in Essaouira has given the Homes and Lifestyles project a giant leap forward. In recent months, we have traveled the Atlantic Coast from Agadir in the South, via Safi, Al Jaddida and Casablanca to beyond Rabat. Other areas are in our sights as we develop the Africa Travel Library through our series of World Editions and supplements.

### Living the Moroccan Lifestyle

We are actually living in a riad. When my mother retired over a decade ago, she had an architect friend design her a villa in the traditional Moroccan style and during the interim the place has taken shape. Now that we have arrived to stay it will become the African base for our magazine and growing library of magazines, books and media resources. At the moment we are developing the garden area, which will be a pleasant retreat, with additional shade trees, flowers, birds and fish pools. The roof terrace has an outstanding view of the new world class golf course, with construction well underway - confounding the skeptics who said it could not be done.

### Facts About Morocco:

Courtesy of Habeeb Salloum.

- 1) Nationals of most countries do not need visas to enter Morocco- only valid passports.
- 2) If you know French, its is easy to get around in Morocco. Everyone speaks French, but many also know English.
- 3) Unit of currency in Morocco is the dirham which fluctuates at around 10 to 12 to a dollar. Exchange money at banks or hotels - rates are all the same with no commission.
- 4) When traveling in Morocco, trains are the most comfortable. Buses are inexpensive - CTM the best. Small autos, with unlimited mileage and fully insured, rent for about \$50. a day, fully insured.
- 5) The mass of hustlers which once

infested the tourist spots in Morocco have been greatly diminished by the strong arm of the law.

6) Tips are expected for every service - always carry small change.

7) Bargain for all tourist items - never shop with a guide - his commission is usually about 30%.

8) At night, avoid dark alleyways. Morocco is safer than many other countries, but muggers still stalk the lonely streets.

9) When in Erfoud, for a breath-taking taste of the desert, one should make a trip to Merzouga, an oasis near the Algerian border surrounded by sand dunes - some more than 50 m (164 ft) high. The oasis's lake is a favorite spot for migrating birds, especially in February and March, when the Dayet Srji flamingos appear. On the other hand, if traveling the desert is on one's mind, trips to the desert can be arranged by tour companies in Erfoud.

10) Two good places to stay in Erfoud: Hotel Salem - a 4 star abode - from \$56. To \$80. A room; Hotel Ziz, an excellent 3 star abode located in the heart of town - \$34. a room.

Note: All prices quoted are in U.S. dollars.

**This feature continues on the following page.**





# THE RIADS OF MARRAKECH ARE EVERYTHING A FINE HOTEL SHOULD BE - AND MUCH MORE



by Mugnette Goufrani

While I was born in Morocco and began my career there with our family's tour company and Royal Air Maroc, before working my way

around the world, my return as part of the Africa Travel Association, has been a true rediscovery. Marrakech was ATA's host city for a Cultural and Ecotourism Conference in 1996 and Fez had the same honors in 2002. As Morocco's third largest city and a bustling center of commerce, Marrakech is high on our list as an ideal convention site and place to visit. The metropolitan area comprises the Médina, a walled city built centuries ago as a fortification, surrounded by one of the most

modern communities anywhere, with upscale shops, famous name hotels, leafy parks and treed boulevards.

### Hidden Treasures

Within the Médina itself you will find several huge doors, which like the entrance to Ali Baba's cave, open up to reveal what North Africans call a 'riad.' During a stop in Marrakech enroute to Casablanca, we had the pleasure of staying at the **Hotel Riad Shama**, and

visiting several others including the **Hotel Riad Oasis**. Both are operated by the same company and each has its unique attractions - magical Arabian architecture and



*Africa Travel Magazine*

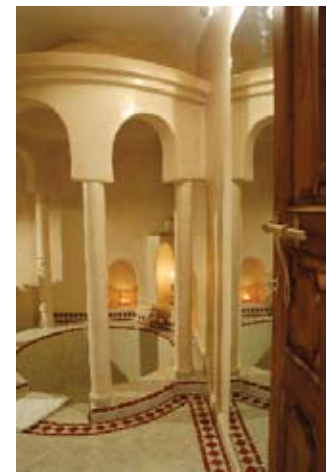
decor, pools and oriental lounges, spacious bed rooms, cosy fireplaces and luxury bathrooms. Want to enjoy the fresh air of Southern Morocco and a bird's eye view of the exotic surroundings within the Médina? Each riad provides guests with access to a roof terrace or sundeck. How did we know about these two attractive riads? We spent some time learning about them from the general manager herself - during our weeks at ITB Berlin

and the Salon International de Tourism in Paris. After checking in at the **Hotel Riad Shama**, we took a walk through the souk, a huge marketplace with products and services of every description - and plenty of bargains awaiting your pleasure. Close by is

Djemaa el Fna, one of the busiest market squares in Africa, with snake charmers, acrobats, storytellers, dancers, and musicians. By night, the square turns into an open-air restaurant where traditional Moroccan dishes, such as cous cous and tangine are on the menu.

### What is a Riad?

A traditional Riad is a Moroccan home or palace, which often includes an interior garden. The ancient Roman city of Volubilis, which we visited in 2002, during our conference in Fez, provides a reference for the beginnings of riad architecture. The



design of these courtyard dwellings in the coastal regions of Morocco were an adaptation and modification of the Roman villa. When the Almoravids conquered Spain in the 11th century they sent Muslim, Christian and Jewish artisans from Spain to Morocco to work on monuments. These artisans brought with them the idea of arranging

the rooms of the house around the central open-air courtyard that has become today's riads. The riads were inward focused which allowed for family privacy and protection from the weather in Morocco. This inward focus was expressed in the central location of most of the interior gardens and courtyards and the lack of large windows

on the exterior clay or mud brick walls. Entrance to these houses is a major transitional experience and encourages reflection because all of the rooms open into the central atrium space. In the central garden of traditional riads there are often four orange or lemon trees and possibly a fountain. The walls of the riads are adorned with tadelakt plaster and zellige tiles. The style of these riads has changed over the years, but the basic form is still used in designs today. Many riads are now used as hotels or restaurants.

*Photos from the Riad Shama are on the above page (left) and those from the Riad Oasis are on above page (right). To find out more or to book rooms for yourself or group at either hotel, contact Mugnette Goufrani by e-mail: [airhwy@smarrt.com](mailto:airhwy@smarrt.com)*  
**CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE**



## DESERT ECOTOURS WITH THE BLUE MEN OF MOROCCO INCLUDE LA CHANCE DESERT HOTEL AND EXCITING CAMEL EXCURSIONS

We first met Elena Hall during the Africa Travel Association's Cultural and Ecotourism Symposium in the Imperial City of Fez, 1992. Originally from the state of Maryland, USA, Elena has spent over 15 years bringing visitors to Merzouga, a small village in the Sahara Desert of southern Morocco. Recently, Elena and her partner Hmad Ourdaras, a local Berber from Merzouga, established the Haven La Chance Desert Hotel to facilitate their many Ecotours. Amenities include a restaurant, camping, bivouac, camel excursions and a unique Sahara experience amidst the sand dunes and palm trees.

Merzouga is a poor village that has little or no outside support - so tourism is the main source



of income for residents. With the Blue Men of Morocco, visitors spend several days or longer if they wish, and can enjoy camel excursions in the desert from a

few hours to 6 days into the sand dunes. Many of their guests are inclined to slow down their pace and mingle with the families, play with the children or watch local women make bread, tangine and cous-cous.

### Sharing with Berbers

Some guests will offer advice to the Berber men on agriculture, modes of construction, well digging and other skills. They are in a completely different world in Southern Morocco.

Elena and Hmad travel back and forth regularly from their base in Malaga, Spain and some of the Ourdaras brothers manage the business when the partners are

not in the Moroccan desert. Other brothers travel throughout Morocco on an expanded series of tours that may include the Imperial cities of Fez, Marrakech, Rabat, Meknes and Casablanca, Essaouira, Safi, El Jaddida and other fortified towns along the coast. The travel includes the desert treks, mountain villages and kasbah routes.

### Berbers are unique

Elena has been accepted by the local people who were originally nomads but have decided to settle down in the smaller villages. Other nomads live in the desert with their camels or goats and can be seen during camel excursions. Like many guides who keep in regular contact with tourists who travel to Morocco, Hmad speaks several languages.

Berbers are not Arabic, although most belong to the Muslim faith. The Berber women are seldom involved with tourists, but Hmad's family and friends invite visitors



into their homes to share meals and refreshing mint tea. Guests are also welcome at special feasts and weddings where they can watch the rituals, and enjoy the meals like part of the family. Elena Hall has great respect for these desert people, poor as they may be. She and her partner try to help the locals by bringing tourists to the area. They like to acquaint guests with these special Berber people, their humble food, and generosity. Profits from tour operations are invested in Haven La Chance

Desert Hotel, which generates employment for locals. The combination of skills, education and background of Elena and Hmad provides a reliable, professional tour with no surprises. Close contact with local Berbers and their way of life is a special extra to the rest of the tours. It is important to make friends and provide an unforgettable experience which entices one to return to Morocco.

Contact information:

### BLUE MEN OF MOROCCO CO.

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http://www.blumenumofmorocco.com

# The Medieval Schools

## Morocco's Intellectual Heritage by Habeeb Salloum

Called the "Holy City of Morocco," Fez is, above all, noted for its Qarawiyn mosque - the symbol of the country's intellectual life and its most prestigious historic site. For more than eleven hundred years it has been the haven for Islamic scholars and religious officials. Enhancing this aura of learning are medersas (Islamic schools) which dot the city and hug the Qarawiyn in a loving embrace. Inspired by the schools in Baghdad, they were, in the main, built by the Marinid sultans, during the 14th century. As Islamic colleges with lodgings for students who came to study, besides religion, the Arabic language, astronomy, mathematics and medicine, they were unequalled, in their time, as places of learning. The majority of these schools were built in the same fashion. Each medersa had two levels and a central courtyard, incorporating a fountain, used in ritual ablutions. A colonnade or gallery surrounded the courtyard

which is edged by a large room, serving both as a lecture hall and a place for prayer. The student rooms or cells were mostly located on the second level but, in a few of the schools, there were a number on the first level. The medersas were all exquisite works of art, decorated with carved wood, geometric designs and floral motifs and lace-like



plaster-work. Each one is a creation of perfect handiwork by master craftsmen. Yet, in spite of the ostentatious splendor of the buildings, the students, living two in each cell-like room, led a frugal life. In these usually damp and dark rooms, they prepared their

meals, slept and studied. Their lodgings, bread and drinking water were supplied free, but they had to buy their own books and most of their food. Hence, many were compelled to work part-time as lecturers in mosques or as servants in the homes of the affluent. The mother of all of Fez's medersas is **Bou Inania**, built in the mid 14th century by Sultan Abu

Inan, the first ruler of the Marinid Dynasty. Incorporating direct importation of 14th century Andalusian building techniques, the school is different than the other medersas in that it had an imposing minaret and served both as a mosque and a school. Its doorways, columns, courtyard and hall are all extravagantly decorated with dark cedar, exquisitely carved; floral and geometrical patterns; delicate lace-like stucco, toughened with egg white; marble floors; and

ceramic-tiled lower walls covered in Arabic script with academic messages - one reading, "This is a place of learning." The whole inside is a stunning combination of decorative artwork. However, like the other medersas, its student cells are barren and forlorn. It is said that Sultan Abu Inan

built the school to rival the city's grand Qarawiyn mosque and its cost almost broke the treasury. Because of the great expense, a story is told that the Sultan threw away the account books into the river saying, "A thing of beauty is beyond reckoning."

Opposite Medersa Bou Inania, but connected to this school, is a medieval water clock, consisting of 13 windows and platforms - seven of which still retain their brass bowls. High over them on a carved lintel of cedar is a decaying row of 13 windows. Forgotten for centuries, the clock is being renovated and hopefully, in the future, experts will be able to have it working again.

The grandest, most elaborate and beautiful of all the Marinid monuments, Bou Inania comes close to perfection in every aspect of its construction. It is the one historic site not to be missed by travelers, in fact, it is the only structure still in religious use which non-Muslims can enter. Almost every first-time tourist in Fez takes a photo of Bou Inania's green-tiled minaret through the Boujeloud Gate - the most utilized point of entry into the old walled medieval town into which no auto is allowed to enter.

**The Medersa El Attarine**, next door to the Qarawiyn mosque was built in the 14th century by the Marinid Sultan Abu Said. He built it on the edge of the spice souk - hence, its name, Attarine (from the Arabic air (spices).

In fame, it comes second to Bou Inania. Some claim it is more beautiful and delicate, and more perfect than that medersa.

It is an incredible structure, with a profusion of fine pattering in blue and white tile, wood and stucco. Verses from the Koran are incised in continuous friezes and are breath-taking in their intricacy. Even though some renovation has been made, basically the school is in an excellent state of preservation. Without question, its graceful proportions, elegant geometrical carved-cedar ornamentation and distinctive brass doors make it a living medieval work of art.

**Medersa Shrij** is the third finest of the Fez medersas. Erected in the 14th century, it was named after its beautiful ablution pool (from the Arabic saharaj - pool). Noted for its rich carvings and its aura of calmness and tranquility, it is worth a visit. However, if one has visited Bou Inania and El Attarine, this school does not have anything really new to offer. **Medersa es Seffarine**, constructed in the 13th century is the oldest medersa built in Fez. Unlike the other schools, it is built like a traditional Fasi (Fez) home and gets its name from the Seffa-



rine square (from the Arabic afar - brass) where craftsmen hammer metal into huge urns and pots. The medersa still houses some students and is only worth a visit if one has time to spare. Edging the medersa on the square, stands a marble fountain, decorated with a carved fleurs-de-lis and one side of the Qarawiyn mosque's library - one of the most important libraries in the Arab world.

The newest of these medieval schools is **Medersa El Cheratin**, built in the 17th century by the Alaouite Sultan, Moulay el-Rachid, founder of the present Moroccan dynasty. Noted for its double bronze-faced doors and fine door knockers, it is much less ornate than the medersas built by the Marinids. However, as a school it is much more functional. Designed to hold more than 200 students, it contrasts vividly with the intricate craftsmanship of the medersas erected during the earlier Marinid era. Rarely visited by travelers are the few remaining less important schools like Medersa Misbahiya, now under renovation. Built in the 14th century by Sultan Abu Hassan, it is noted for the lavish use of marble in its construction.

For visitors seeking historical architectural gems, these schools have few equals as relics from the medieval era. Yesterday, they drew students from the whole Islamic lands; today they draw tourists from the four corners of the world.

# Berber Wedding Fair at Imilchil

by Muguette Goufrani

My father, who owned and operated a tour company in Casablanca, Morocco for many years, took me along with a German tour group to visit a traditional “Wedding Fair” at Hadiddou Imilchil, a Berber village in southern Morocco. While I knew that many Berber Fairs combine a local Saint’s Day with a regional market event, only at September’s ‘moussem’ (pilgrimage) of Imilchil, have I seen such a colorful pageant, with instant engagement, and a mass exchange of marriage vows. Berbers have inhabited North Africa for centuries, some being of Caucasian ancestry, with fair complexions and blue eyes. Visitors may think of Berbers as exotic outsiders, yet they preceded the Arabs in settling Morocco, and they remain the country’s main culture. This is expressed by the phrase, “Morocco is Berber - the roots and the leaves of freedom.”

While the Wedding Fair is key part of Berber marital custom, families usually arrange marriages in their home village. Women are free to divorce and remarry. At the moussem, divorced and widowed women form the majority, and are identified by their pointed headdress. The courtship is a family affair as I learned after accepting an invitation to drink mint tea in the goat hair tent of a Berber elder. His oldest daughter Malika, prettied up her divorced 18 year old sister Yasmina with traditional beauty aids - rubbing

saffron colored powder into her sister’s eyebrows, applying kohl to outline her eyes and carmine rouged to her cheeks. A wool cape, striped in tribal colors, covered her white dress; then a cone shaped headdress was assembled, held on by loops of spangled wool.

I gave Yasmina a silver chain as a wedding gift, since silver brings good luck. Many Westerners think that

Moroccans purchase their wives at the fair, but in truth, marriage depends on mutual consent and family approval.

A nod and a wink: The language of gesture is as clearly understood by these people as the spoken word. By having a friend help him choose a bride (with often no more than a silhouette and two dark eyes as a clue) the groom gets overcomes his shyness. All day long, in pairs, these men weave in and out amongst a cluster of anxious brides. Then, welcomed by a shy glance or a quick nod, the suitor will stop to speak to the lady, encouraged by a signal from his friend’s reassuring hand.

Once this happens, the newly acquainted boy and girl unite, holding hands as a sign of intent. Male relatives who accompany

the bride-to-be lend advice, often making snap judgment calls at first sight. If rejection is signaled by a broken handclasp, it’s time to look elsewhere.

When a bride does give consent, she may speak the magic phrase, “You have captured my liver.”

Since a healthy liver aids digestion and promotes well-being, in Berber culture it’s the liver, not the heart that’s considered the location of true love. Might one say, “Darling, my liver pines for you?” Often snowbound behind village walls for up to six months a year, the new couples must learn to live in harmony. Despite those

old Foreign Legion movies from the 50s, which showed Berbers as being fierce, hot tempered and warlike, they believe in “paix chez eux” (peace at home).

Moroccan food

Who wouldn’t enjoy steamed semolina, topped with a meat and vegetable sauce called couscous? Or tajines. a vegetable stew that may contain rabbit, lamb, goat and chicken meat, combined with prunes, apricots or raisins. Pastilla (baked pigeon pie) is made of layered filo pastry, with nuts and spices, and coated with sugar. With your morning coffee, try a light deep fried Spanish doughnut, we call sfinj, or cornes de gazelle pastries.

History and culture

Most of the 27 million Moroccans are Berbers, Arabs or Moors (people of mixed Berber and

Arab descent), whose ancestors built the mighty Moorish empire that once ruled Spain, Portugal and most of Northern Africa. Most Berbers dwell in the mountains, while the Arabs and Moors live on the plain and desert. Most cities have a European section a Jewish enclave, and a Medina (Arab-Moorish section). Over the past 3,000 years, its geographic location has given Morocco a strategic importance far beyond its small size. The country has taken the best from the Phoenicians, Romans, Arabs, Berbers, Portuguese, Spanish and French.

## Letter from a reader

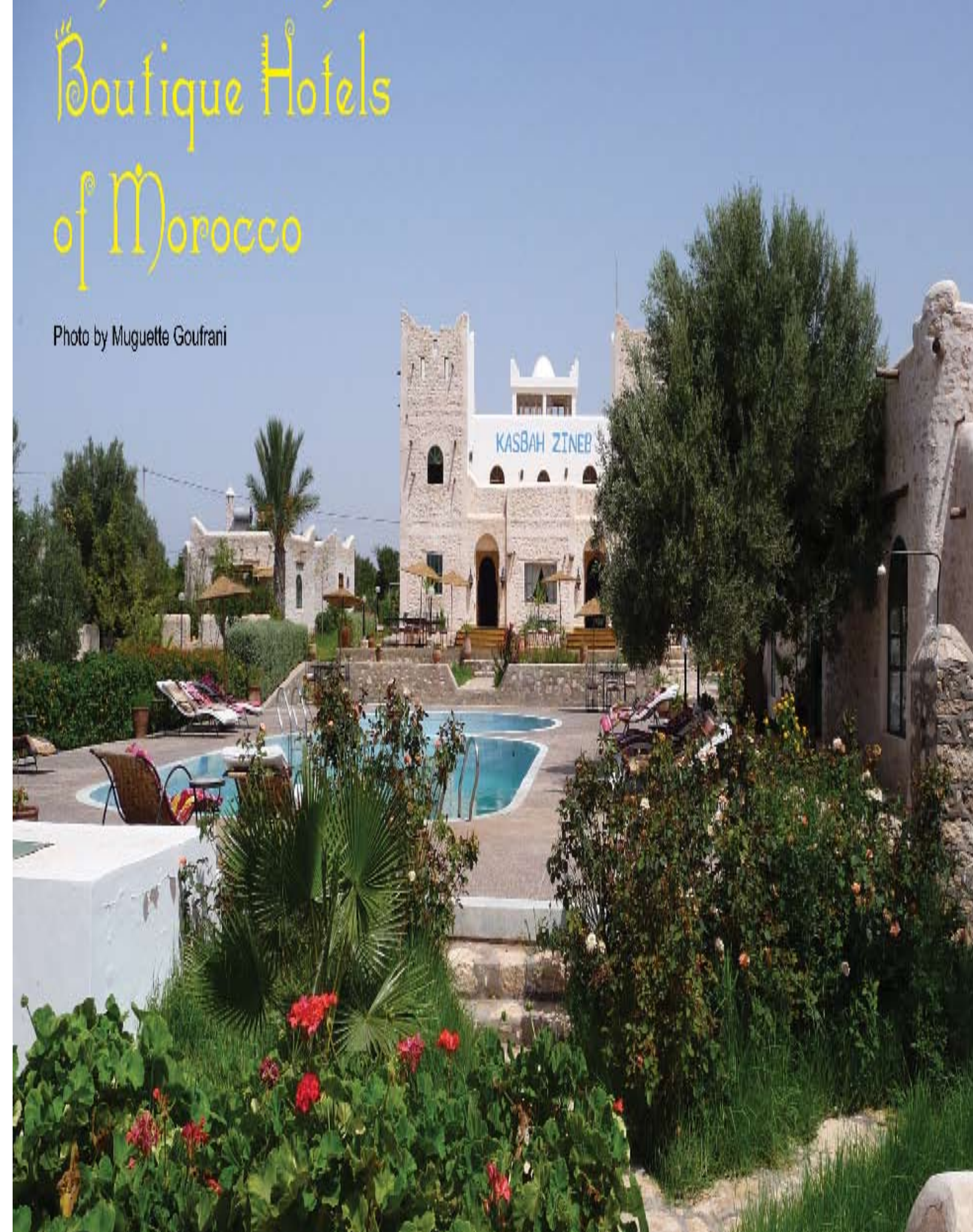
Dear Muguette,  
Since I read your article about Morocco, we took a group of African American Female educators there last year and had a wonderful time. Hope to take a group again next year. Briefly, the experience was wonderful. We spent most of our time in Agadir with a one night excursion to Marrakech. We stayed at Club Valtur and the resort was great, albeit very Italian. I didn’t learn much about the people or culture of Morocco, hence the need for a second trip. However, I did make a few friends (smile). Morocco is a fascinating if you love sensory experiences or sensory overload!! The experience started as soon as we boarded the Royal Air Maroc flight, and continued for the entire trip. I’ll never forget the





# Boutique Hotels of Morocco

Photo by Muguette Goufrani



## Night in the Berber Gites

by Karen Hoffman

Our one-day adventure began in Marrakech; an enchanting walled city at the foot of the Atlas Mountains. We drove about 48 km into the mountain foothills to Imlil, a charming hamlet which was the starting point of our trek. We were welcomed by the villagers with mint tea and a delicious array of Moroccan pastries. The mountain guides gave a briefing on the area, and on the culture and tradition of its inhabitants, the Berbers (“Chleuhs”). Morocco is a land of mountains which cover an area of 100,000 square kilometres. The High Atlas alone cover more than 700 square kilometres, with a dozen summits exceeding 4000m and more than 400 reaching 3000m.

Trekking on foot and on skis are popular mountain sports in Morocco. The summits are easily accessible, with a good network of mule tracks. The peaks are permanently snow-capped, but there is a mild climate with sunshine most of the year. But it is the opportunity to explore less frequented areas and interact with an extremely hospitable local population that make the Atlas particularly attractive to hikers. Our trek was an easy 60-90 minute hike up a winding path which we shared with cargo-bearing mules. Each turn revealed a breathtaking vista. One could only envy the views enjoyed by these villagers from the terraces

of their flat-roofed homes. Built into the mountain slopes, these house fit into each other. Although the summit of this mountain was Toubkal, at 4167m, our destination was the tiny village of Aremd. As the group arrived, we were greeted with a loud fanfare of Berber horns. On the terrace, we were able to relax and appreciate the dramatic mountain panorama before us. Rested, we were invited to feast on a seemingly endless array of traditional dishes made of couscous, lamb and chicken. Our

“digestive” was the return trek to Imlil, once again taking in the peaceful scenery and fresh mountain air.

For those unable to make the trek on foot, Aremd is also accessible by four-wheel drive vehicles. And for visitors who prefer a more challenging mountain experience, you can arrange overnight treks, staying in one of three types of accommodation: mountain inns, mountain refuges (cabins built by the French) and Gites, overnight stays in the homes of local people. Many GITES are classified according to the amenities and facilities available (toilets, running water, shower, bedrooms, kitchen terrace) Another option is

to spend a night under the stars in one of the many mountain sheepfolds (AZIB), but in winter it is advisable to pitch a tent.

“The Great Trek Through the Moroccan Atlas”, a brochure distributed by the Moroccan

National Tourist Office, is a detailed guide full of practical information, including local customs and the environment. This is an excellent example of how government tourist boards can encourage responsible tourism by reminding visitors to respect the environment and ancestral traditions of the local population. Luxurious antidote to adventure: A secretive



hideaway

In Palmeraie, a lovely suburb of Marrakech, hidden in a park full of bougainvillea, rose bushes and jasmine, is an exquisite, new “Palais”. Completed a few years ago as a private residence, the owners recently decided to open it to guests as an exclusive villa and “hideaway”

The architecture, a magnificent blend of Greco-Roman and oriental styles, maximizes the use of natural light. A double row of majestic columns, together with the five guest rooms and two suites, gracefully form a semi-circle around the Hollywood-style swimming pool.

Already discovered by jet-set

# MOROCCO'S VEGETABLE FOODS

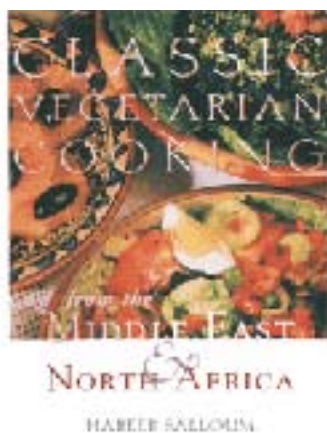
by Habeeb Salloum

No one who has enjoyed cous-cous, the national dish of Morocco, in all its meat varieties, will dream that in many peasant homes this delicacy is prepared solely from vegetables and semolina. These toilers of the soil who never taste meat for weeks at a time prepare, not only their couscous, but almost all their dishes from grain and vegetables. With the right amount of herbs and spices they create incredibly tasty meals, forming an important part of the Moroccan kitchen - a cuisine with an illustrious history. A great number of the Moroccans firmly believe that no other country's culinary art has reached the exalted heights of their cooking. A number of travellers support this assessment, stating that if the food of this North African country is not the greatest in the world, it stands near the top as one of the world's eminent cuisines.

## Ethnic Variety

In that spellbinding land with its long sandy coasts, rich plains, towering mountains, and endless deserts, many civilizations have

come and gone. Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, Arab's, Spanish Muslims, and the Berbers, the original inhabitants of the country, all had their day. They ruled the country for awhile then faded into history. Their cuisines, with a touch of Portuguese, Turkish and Jewish influences, helped in the creation of the modern Moroccan. Well-known culinary experts have written that great food and glorious civilizations complement each other. They go on to say that what creates a noteworthy cuisine are: abundance of ingredients;



NORTH AFRICA  
HABEEB SALLOUM

outside influences; a noble civilization; and refined palace life. Hence, in the elegant palaces of the rich in Fez and Marrakesh where the great Arab-Islamic civiliza-

tion of Spain had its greatest impact, the culinary art of Morocco reached its epitome of perfection. Paula Wolfert in her book, *Couscous and the Other Good Foods From Morocco*, writes that Moroccan cooking is the last of the great undiscovered cuisines. Included in this relatively unknown kitchen with a distinguished past are the tasty dishes of the workers and peasants. In their daily Menues, little meat is utilized. The grains and vegetables are combined with numerous herbs and spices to produce savory and satisfying meals. The herbs: chervil, garlic, fresh coriander leaves, mint and pars-

ley are blended with the spices: aniseed, cayenne, cinnamon, cumin, ginger, paprika, pepper, saffron, turmeric and ras el-hanout (a blend of spices) to produce mouth-watering dishes. To give these non-meat creations even more zest, onions, olives, pickled lemons, almonds and sesame seeds are utilized extensively.

Soups, the mainstay of the poorer peasants and at times their only meal of the day, are based mostly on chickpeas and lentils. Infused with herbs and spices, they become delightful creations. The most widely prepared of these soups is harira - the ultimate of Moroccan soups. In the cities, the wealthy, in addition to the vegetables, utilize all types of meat to create their mouth-watering hariras. Yet, the peasants' meatless hariras are a match for any of these soups.

Moroccan salads differ to some extent from the usual well-known salads. They are, in most cases, prepared from cooked vegetables and are somewhat zesty but not spicy hot. In the homes of the affluent, they are served at the beginning of the meal as appetizers. However, for the poor, like the soups, they are usually the main course.

As to stews, the Moroccan kitchen would be much poorer without the delectable vegetable tajines. Fragrant, zesty, spicy or sweet, they are always delicious and inviting. Simmered to produce tasty sauces, their enticing aromas, as they cook, makes even the one who has just eaten yearn to sample the simmering dish.

Perhaps, more than any other food, couscous, Morocco's national dish, is cooked by the peasants solely from vegetables. A Berber dish embellished by the Arabs and Spanish Muslims, it is prepared in endless varieties. Pleasing to the eye, it is served on a platter and the couscous is heaped pyramid style with a hollow on top which is filled with the stew. Known as the king of the Moroccan kitchen, it is served

at the end of diffas (great feasts) to satiate the hunger of guests. Hence, complying with Arab hospitality that 'no guest can go home hungry'.

For sweets, the Moroccans are known for their creations based on honey, almonds, sugar and flaky dough. The honey and almonds have always been utilized in Moroccan pastry. The sugar and flaky dough were introduced by the Arabs to North Africa and

Spain.

With an illustrious background and centuries of evolvement, Moroccan cuisine has made for itself a notch in the cooking of the world. In all strata of society, the housewife prepares her dishes so perfectly that it is considered vulgar to place salt on the table. Usually, she keeps secret her own recipes and improves them with the passing years until they reach perfection.

For one visiting Morocco there is not much chance to try these home-cooked meals. Nevertheless, travellers should not leave the country without having a meal in restaurants set in a converted Moorish-Andalusian palace which are to be found in every large city. Here, with haunting Arab music as a background, one can enjoy a sumptuous Moroccan repast which always includes a number of tempting vegetarian dishes. Such a meal will leave with most visitors, when they return to their native lands, a deep nostalgia for that country's food.

On the other hand, if a person cannot journey to the enchanting and fascinating land of the Moors, these few vegetarian foods will give an insight into their great cuisine.

## VEGETABLE HARIRA

Serves about 12  
5 tablespoons olive oil  
2 medium sized onions, chopped  
3 cloves garlic, crushed  
1/2 cup finely chopped fresh coriander leaves  
1 small hot pepper, finely

chopped  
 1 cup lentils, soaked overnight  
 2 cups cooked chickpeas  
 2 cups stewed tomatoes  
 8 cups water  
 3 teaspoons salt  
 2 teaspoons ginger  
 1 teaspoon paprika  
 1 teaspoon pepper  
 1 teaspoon cumin  
 1 teaspoon turmeric  
 1/4 cup rice  
 4 tablespoons lemon juice

In a large saucepan, heat oil, then sauté onions over medium heat for 10 minutes. Add garlic, coriander leaves and hot pepper, then stir-fry for a further 5 minutes. Stir in remaining ingredients, except the lemon juice, then bring to a boil. Cover and cook over medium heat for 35 minutes or until the rice and lentils are well done, adding more water if necessary or if a more liquid soup is desired. Stir in lemon juice, then serve.

**BROAD BEAN PURÉE - BIESAR** Serves about 8  
 2 cups large dried broad beans, soaked for 24 hours, then skinned  
 5 cloves garlic, chopped  
 1 teaspoon ground cumin  
 4 tablespoons olive oil  
 3 tablespoons lemon juice  
 1 1/2 teaspoons salt  
 1 teaspoon oregano  
 1/2 teaspoon thyme  
 1/8 teaspoon cayenne  
 1/2 teaspoon paprika

In a pot, place broad beans, garlic and cumin, then cover with water and bring to boil. Cover saucepan, then cook over medium heat for 50 minutes or until beans are cooked. Drain, but reserve the

adding more water if necessary. In the meantime, in a frying pan, heat oil, then sauté onions over medium heat for 15 minutes. Add garlic, coriander leaves and hot pepper, then stir-fry for further 5 minutes. Add frying pan contents and remaining ingredients to beans, then bring to boil, adding more water if necessary. Re-cover, then cook for 30 minutes, adding a little more water if necessary. Stir in lemon juice, then serve hot or cold.

**VEGETABLE TAJINE**  
 Serves 6 to 8  
 4 tablespoons butter  
 2 medium onions, chopped  
 4 cloves garlic crushed  
 4 tablespoons finely chopped fresh coriander leaves  
 1 small hot pepper, finely chopped  
 4 medium potatoes, peeled, the sliced into 1/4 inch thick slices  
 2 medium sized carrots, scraped, then cut into thin rounds  
 1 can chickpeas (19 oz 540 ml), with its water  
 2 cups stewed tomatoes  
 1 teaspoon salt  
 1 teaspoon ginger  
 1/2 teaspoon pepper  
 1/4 teaspoon cumin  
 pinch of saffron  
 1 lemon, quartered, then sliced into thin slices  
 1/2 cup pitted green olives

In a casserole, melt butter, then sauté onions, garlic, coriander leaves and hot pepper over medium heat for 10 minutes. Stir in remaining ingredients, except the lemon slices and olives, then place in a 350 F preheated oven, then cover and bake for 1 hour, or until vegetables are cooked. Place

*Africa Travel Magazine*

lemon slices and olives evenly overtop, then re-cover and bake for a further 10 minutes. Serve hot from the casserole.

**VEGETABLE COUSCOUS**  
 Serves about 12  
 A couscouciere is needed for this recipe. However if one is not available a double boiler with a perforated top may be substituted.  
 2 cups couscous  
 5 tablespoons butter, melted  
 4 tablespoons cooking oil  
 1 large onion, chopped  
 4 cloves garlic, crushed  
 1/2 cup finely chopped fresh coriander leaves  
 1 hot pepper, finely chopped  
 1 can chickpeas (19 oz 540 ml), with its water  
 2 cups stewed tomatoes  
 1/2 cup lentils  
 2 medium carrots, scraped and quartered, then cut lengthwise into 2 inch long pieces  
 2 medium parsnips, peeled and quartered, then cut lengthwise into 2 inch long pieces  
 2 medium sized potatoes, peeled and diced into 1 inch cubes  
 1 small turnip, about 3 inch in diameter, peeled and diced into 1 inch cubes  
 1/4 cup raisins  
 3 teaspoons salt  
 1 teaspoon pepper  
 1 teaspoon ginger  
 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon  
 1/2 teaspoon allspice  
 pinch of saffron  
 6 cups water  
 1 teaspoon paprika  
 1/4 cup toasted sesame seeds  
 Place couscous and butter in a bowl, then thoroughly mix until all kernels are coated. Place in top part of the couscouciere, then



set aside. In the bottom part of the couscouciere, heat oil, then sauté onion, garlic, coriander leaves and hot pepper over medium heat for 10 minutes. Add remaining ingredients, except paprika, and sesame seeds, and bring to a boil, then fit the top part of the couscouciere with the couscous on the bottom part and seal the two parts together with a piece of cloth impregnated with flour. Cook over medium heat for 20 minutes, stirring couscous once in a while to make sure no lumps are formed, then slowly sprinkle, while constantly stirring, a cup of water over couscous. Cook for further 30 minutes, continuing to stir couscous every few minutes. Remove top part of the couscouciere and ensure the vegetables are cooked. If not, cook for further few minutes. Place couscous on a large serving platter, pyramid shape, then make well on top. Place cooked vegetables with a little of the sauce in the well, then decorate couscous with paprika and sesame seeds. Serve immediately with remain-

ing sauce in a gravy bowl and remaining vegetables in a separate bowl.  
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New higher resolution photos and maps to be added. Text to receive final editing before publication.

# MOROCCAN TRAVEL MARKET, MARRAKECH 2010

**January 14-17, 2010 will be here soon. Make plans now!**

## About Marrakech

by Muguette Goufrani  
We have known what a great host city Marrakech is since we were part of the Africa Travel Association's 3rd Cultural and Ecotourism Symposium in 1996 at Le Palais du Congrès, one year after Africa Travel Magazine was founded. Born in Morocco, educated here and having traveled much of the country with my father, one of Morocco's major tour operators, I knew about Marrakech, its reputation and amazing potential for tourism. Today, 14 years later, that statement is borne out by outstanding growth in the city's tourism sector and the

country as a whole. Where else are all the walls and buildings tinted in a rich pastel pink, the broad avenues and promenades lined with rows and rows of orange trees with ripe fruit dangling from their branches like holiday ornaments? In recent years and from our magazine's new base in Morocco, we managed to visit a and photograph a wide cross section the city's of riads and hotels, in order to give our readers an idea of the choice available for all price ranges. The following are comments from Morocco Tourism: Serving as the capital of southern Morocco, the city of Marrakech is one of the country's most visited and this colorful oasis retains a rather exotic flavour, with some 16 km / 10 miles of mid-brick ramparts still stand-

ing adding an undeniable feeling of the past. Marrakech is now something of a Moroccan tourism Mecca and is home to the south's premier souq (market). Founded almost 1,000 years ago, the character of Marrakech remains quite unchanged, being hot, full of energy and somewhat African. However, the city of today has been greatly influenced by arriving Europeans and features outdoor swimming pools, mountain parties, and street cafes, as well as Moroccan palaces, mosques and kasbahs, spread around the Medina and its centre Djemaa El Fna square. For the latest in Marrakech tourist information, head to the New City (Ville Nouvelle) and pay a visit to the Office National Marocain du Tourism (ONMT). Morocco and Africa are developing their own tourism event, the Moroccan Travel Market (MTM), the International Tourism Fair dedicated to industry professionals, which will take place from 14 to 17 January 2010 in Marrakech. An International Event, MTM's first edition in 2008 brought together tourism professionals from over 20 countries; with 230 exhibitors, 8689 visitors and 120

# INTERNATIONAL FAIR FOR TOURISM PROFESSIONALS

foreign journalists who took part in the inaugural event, which has been unanimously described as a master piece.

An excellent business platform, the fair is the ideal opportunity for all Moroccan and foreign tourism professionals to expose their products and services and meet fellow professionals, decision makers and buyers from around the world. Enjoying its strategic geographical situation, between Europe and Africa, Morocco, through the Moroccan Travel Market, is becoming the vector of development of the North-South exchanges. For fill

information and accommodation visit [http://www.mtm.ma/Home\\_a71.html](http://www.mtm.ma/Home_a71.html)

## Why Exhibit at MTM?

A single quote summarizes the satisfaction of the participants to the Moroccan Travel Market, that of a Tour Operator who addressed the organizers: "What has been noted here far exceeds what we generally expect at some shows that are more internationally famous. Morocco gave evident that it can organize its own event and succeed."

In one edition, The MTM became the first Travel Fair dedicated to tourism professionals in the

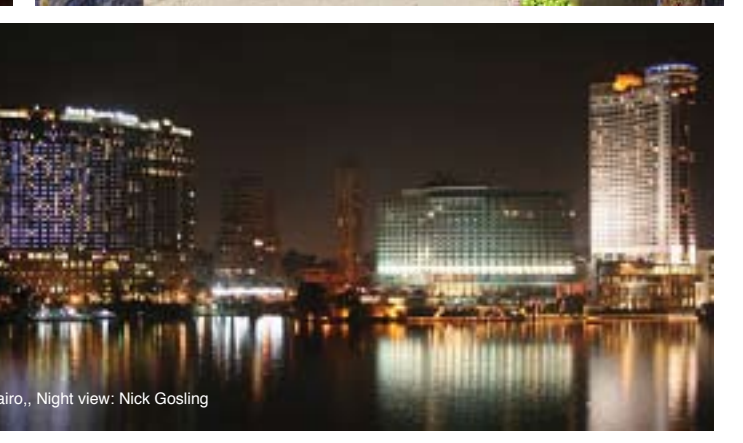
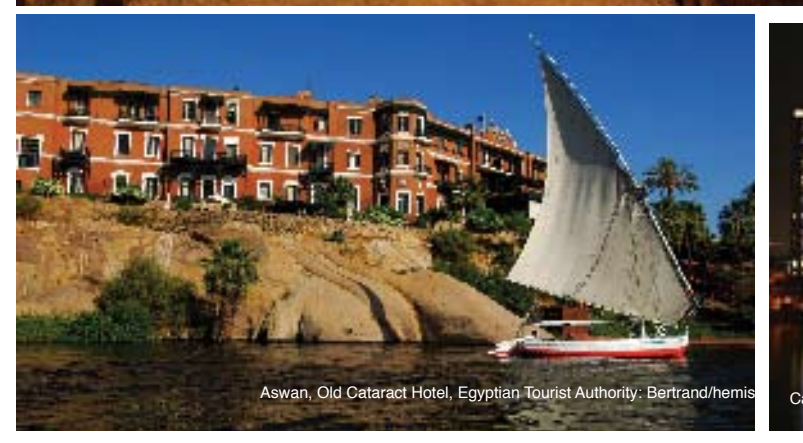
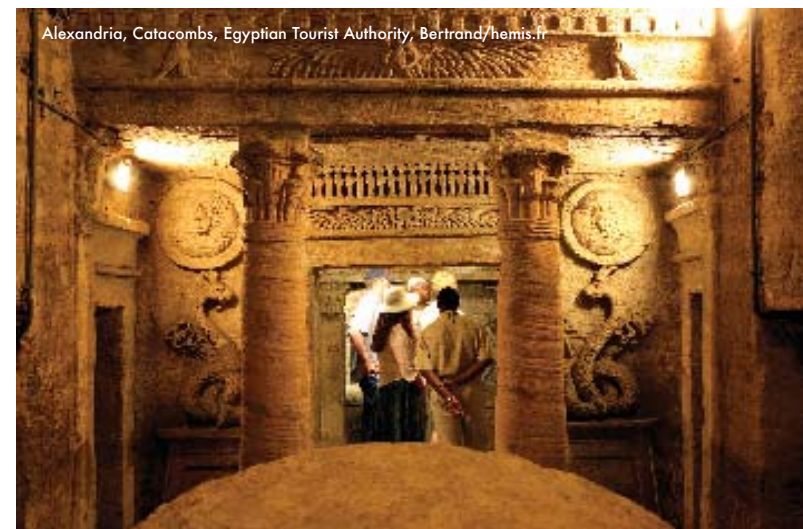
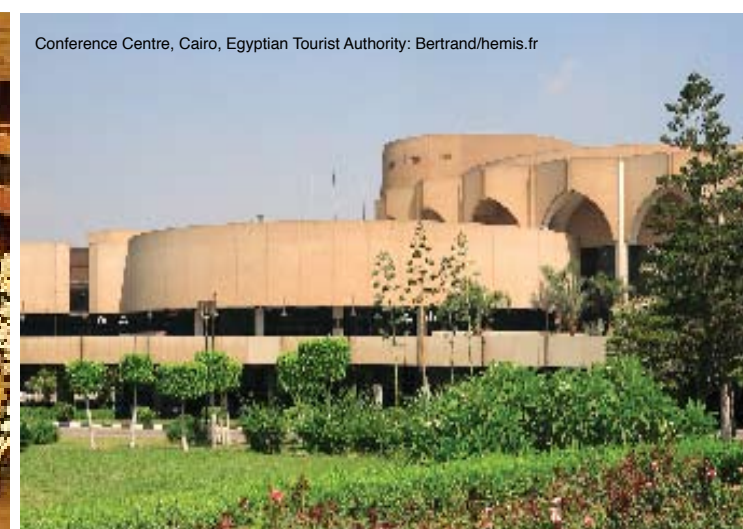
region, this is confirmed by the international echo which it had that by the trust and the loyalty of the participants. Indeed, 97 % of the exhibitors renew their participations to the second edition and the majority of exhibitors double their spaces of exhibition. This trust is a strong signal expressed by satisfied professionals.

Exhibiting at the Moroccan Travel Market it is benefiting from the contribution of an integral event:

- Business and development opportunities for your company
  - Fruitful and beneficial meetings
  - Professional visitors and decision-maker
  - A rich and diverse program in a friendly atmosphere
  - A meeting space for professionals to promote destinations
- MTM offers you the possibility to:
- Materialise commercial opportunities and finalise partnership agreements
  - Follow new market trends and stay up-to-date
  - Promote your offering to the leaders of the industry
  - Boost your image and stress your positioning



# "THE ROMANCE OF EGYPT BECKONS ATA'S WORLDWIDE MEMBERSHIP TO EXPERIENCE ATTRACTIONS OF THE AGES, MAY 17-22, 2009"



Home to ancient sites and world famous monuments, including the Giza Pyramids, the Great Sphinx, the Nile and Red Sea coral reefs, Sharm El Sheik Resort, as well as the grand Khan El Khalily market, Egypt stands as one of the African continent's top travel draws.

## Egypt to Host ATA 34th Annual Congress, May 2009

The Egyptian Tourism Ministry, in cooperation with the Egyptian Tourist Authority, will host the Africa Travel Association's 34th Annual Congress in Cairo, May 17-22, 2009.

This joint announcement was made by Hon. Zoheir Garranah, Egyptian Tourism Minister, and Edward Bergman, ATA Executive Director. "It is with great pride that we are now working with ATA to welcome the world to Egypt for ATA's Annual Congress," said Minister Garranah. "We look forward to welcoming the world to our country."

## Connecting Destination Africa

Under the above banner, ATA's hallmark event will be attended by African tourism ministers, national tourism board direc-

tors, private sector leaders, travel agents, tour operators, heads of nongovernmental organizations, scholars, and members of the media, who will discuss together challenges related to global tourism promotion to Africa.

"ATA is looking forward to engaging with the world's leading travel specialists to bring the world to Africa," Bergman said. "By combining Egypt's unique capacity to achieve record numbers in tourist arrivals with ATA's ability to bring diverse industry leaders together to shape Africa's tourism agenda, this meeting holds tremendous promise for change in the industry and the global marketplace."

## Active in ATA since 1983

ATA held its eighth congress in Cairo; its 16th was held in 1991. Today, tourism is the largest source of foreign currency revenue in Egypt and authorities plan to welcome 16 million tourism arrivals by 2014. "We anticipate that the 2009 Congress will not only help Egypt reach its target, but it will also help the country generate

even more tourism growth from the U.S. and Africa, as well as from Asia and the Caribbean" said Bergman.

The Congress, to be held at the Cairo International Conference Center (CICC), will run for five days, engaging participants in working discussions on a range of topics, such as intra-African industry cooperation, infrastructure development and investment opportunities. Roundtables for ministers, suppliers, travel agents and tour operators, alongside special networking events, a marketplace expo, and ATA Young Professionals events, will also be held. For the first time, ATA will also organize networking opportunities for Africans living in the Diaspora as part of its new Africa Diaspora Initiative.

"Egypt also stands as an example for other African destinations to turn to, especially given that foreign and Egyptian investments helped drive the tourism boom by helping the government target coast regions and build supportive tourism infrastructure, including accommodation stock and better



airport services. In fact, ATA delegates will arrive in Egypt's newly opened international airport," said Bergman.

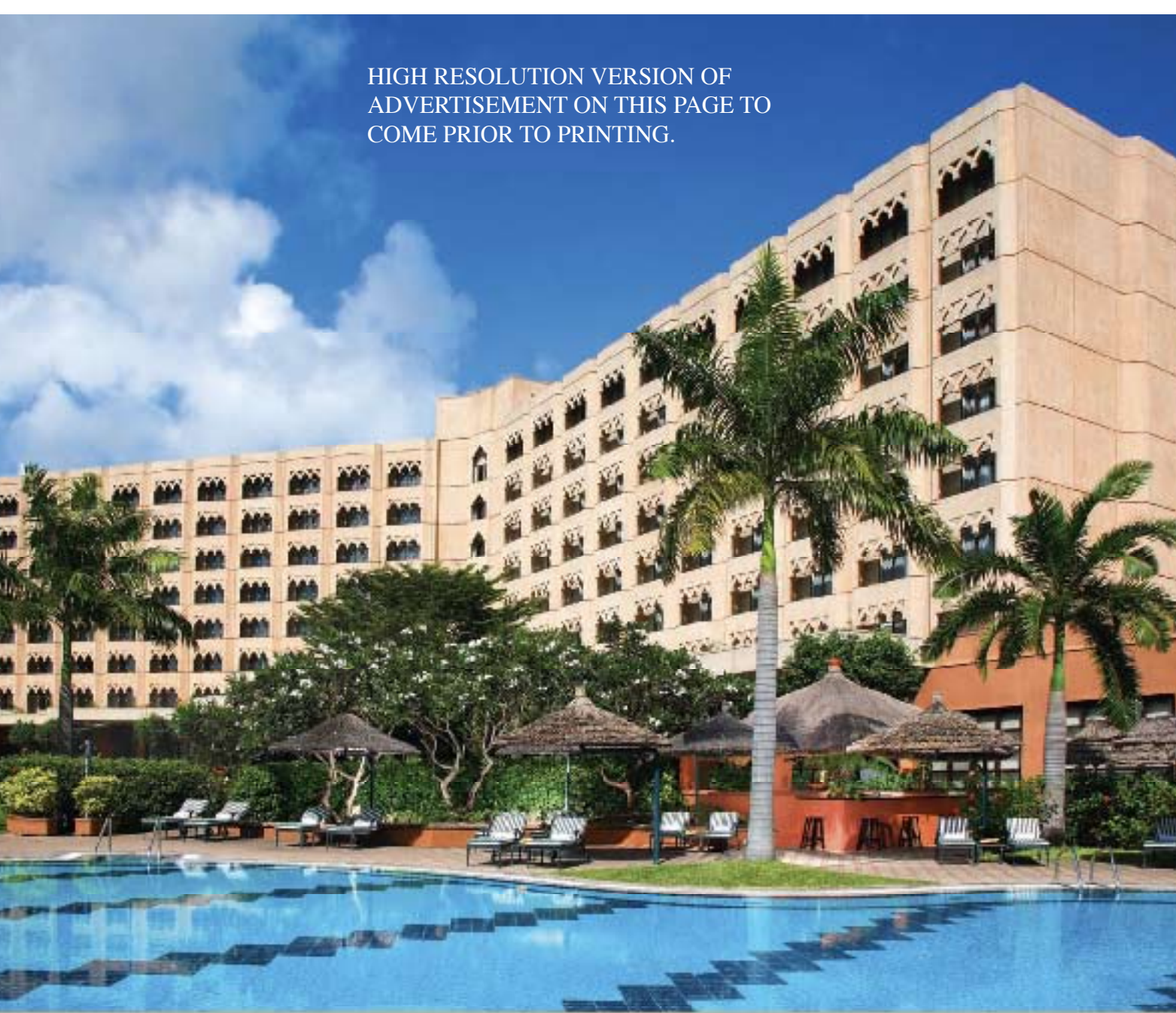
## Host Country Pre Post Tours

Egypt will organize a Host Country Day for delegates, who will have the opportunity to explore some of these tourism spots, as well as many more. Pre and post-country tours will also be offered.

To prepare for the event, ATA sent a delegation to Egypt in August, 2008 for a site inspection. The team met Hon. Zoheir Garranah, Minister of Tourism, Mr. Amr El Ezabi, Chairman of the Egyptian Tourist Authority (ETA), as well as Mr. Riad Kabil, Secretary General of the Egyptian Travel Agents Association, a 1,600-member association.

The ATA delegation also met Captain Tawfik Assy, Chair of Egyptair Holding Company, and Mr. Ashraf Osman, EGYPTAIR's General Manager of Sales to introduce the association and the congress. For more information on Egypt, visit the Egyptian Tourist Authority (ETA) website at [www.egypt.travel](http://www.egypt.travel).

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## THE LANDMARK CAIRO TOWER REOPENS IN TIME TO DAZZLE AFRICA TRAVEL ASSOCIATION (ATA) DELEGATES COMING FOR THE 34TH ANNUAL CONGRESS MAY 17-21, 2009

### The 60 Story High Icon Boasts New State-Of-The-Art Nighttime Lighting Effects And Panoramic View Restaurants

CAIRO, EGYPT, May 13, 2009  
– Cairo's famous icon, the 60 story high Cairo Tower, has just reopened with stunning new LED nighttime light effects and panoramic view restaurants. This Cairo landmark will most certainly be an added attraction for the delegates participating in the 34th Annual Congress of The Africa Travel Association (ATA) scheduled to open Sunday, May 17 at the Conrad Nile Hotel in Cairo.

The ATA Congress, hosted by the Hon. Zoheir Garranah, Egyptian Minister of Tourism and Amr El Ezaby, Chairman, Egyptian Tourist Authority (ETA), will bring together travel industry professionals from the US, Canada and Africa including tourism ministers, tourist boards, airlines, hoteliers, ground operators, as well as representatives from business, non-profit and development sectors, to address some of the challenges facing the travel, tourism, transport and hospitality industries across Africa.

High profile Egyptian speakers will include, among others, the Minister of Tourism, the ETA Chairman, Hisham Zaazou, First Assistant to the Minister of Tourism, Ahmed El Nahas, Chairman Egyptian Tourism Federation and Elhamy El Zayat, Chairman, Emeco Travel.

Other featured speakers will include Hon. Shamsa S. Mwangunga, Tanzania's Minister of Natural Resources and Tourism and ATA President, Eddie Bergman, ATA Executive Director, Dr. Elham M.A. Ibrahim,



African Union Commissioner of Infrastructure and Energy, Ray Whelan, Official Representative for Accommodation, Ticketing, Hospitality and Technology for FIFA World Cups 2010 and Lisa Simon, President, US-based National Tour Association (NTA).

The Egyptian Ministry of Tourism will host all ATA Congress delegates on a full-day tour to the National Museum in Cairo and to the Pyramids that will conclude with a dinner cruise on the Nile.

“The Cairo Tower has always been a point of reference in the City for visitors as well as Egyptians,” said Mr. Sayed Khalifa, Director, Egyptian Tourist Office for US and

Latin America. “Now with four diverse restaurants, and the unmatched panoramic views of Cairo and its famous sites, the Cairo Tower is once again a tourist attraction. Although not part of the official tour, we encourage the ATA delegates to find time to visit the Cairo Tower on their own and enjoy the spectacular view and some of the wonderful restaurants.”

The highest spot in Cairo, enhanced with strategically placed telescopes, The Panoramic View on the top floor offers spectacular views of the Egypt's bustling Metropolis. The 360 Revolving Restaurant on the 59th floor, offers an array of International cuisine. The Garden Coffee shop on the 60th floor of the Cairo Tower has a more informal dining atmosphere. The new

VIP Restaurant and Lounge features luxurious furnishings and an elegant upscale menu. The Tower now also has space for meetings and conferences. The visiting hours are from 9AM to Midnight.

For more information on Egypt visit [www.egypt.travel](http://www.egypt.travel); for more information on the ATA Congress, registration and program visit [www.africa-travelassociation.org](http://www.africa-travelassociation.org).

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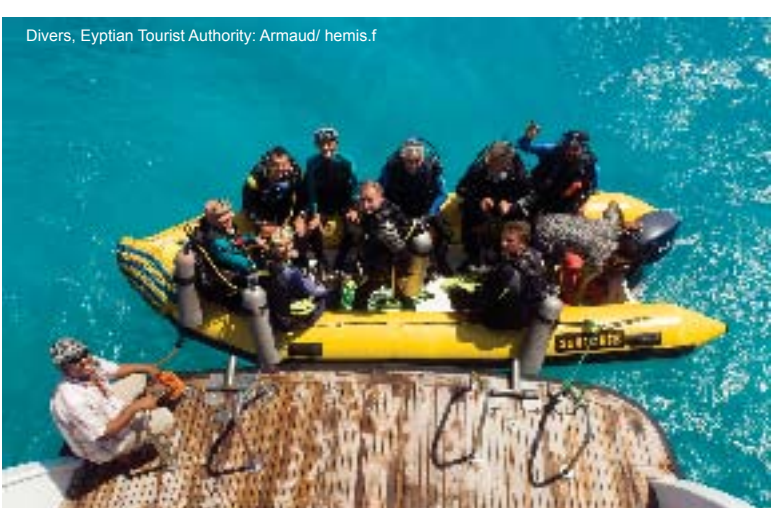
Emperor Angel fish in coral, Red Sea, Egyptian Tourist Authority: Arnaud/hemis.fr



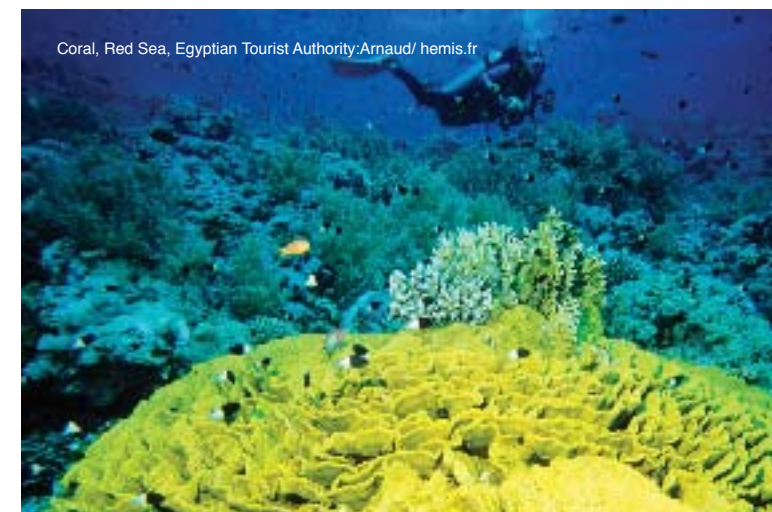
Red Sea Pink Anemone and Clown Fish, Egyptian Tourist Authority: Arnaud/hemis.fr



Red Sea swimmers, Egyptian Tourist Authority Arnaud/ hemis



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Hawksbill Sea Turtle, Red Sea, Egyptian Tourist Authority, Arnaud/hemis.fr



Marsa Alam Glass bottom boat, Egyptian Tourist Authority

### Treasures of the Deep

Egypt is a prime location for diving year round, where visitors will discover famous shipwrecks, stunning coral formations, caves and a colorful variety of sea creatures. Some of the popular sites are Sharm el-Sheikh, Dahab, Murghada, Tiran, Marsa Alam and Ras Banas. You will find more about this exciting travel option on our award winning website [www.africa-ata.org/egypt.htm](http://www.africa-ata.org/egypt.htm) - or [www.egypt.travel](http://www.egypt.travel)

# The Pharaohs Await You in Egypt the Eternal

by Habeeb Salloum

From atop the Cairo Tower, the mighty Nile appears to be overwhelmed by the edging luxury hotels and towering apartment buildings. Beyond, the city with its crowded streets, literally infested with humanity, spreads out to the horizon. In between the avenues with their mass of darting autos, one sees a thousand minarets of new and historic mosques, peppered with a number of Coptic-Christian basilicas. It appears to be an inviting city to explore - a mixture of eastern exoticism and Western sophistication.

Yet, this is not what the millions of people traveling to Egypt want to see. If one turns atop the Tower to the other side, in the distance, a visitor glimpses the outline of the Great Pyramids. Located on a desert plateau on the western edge of the city, they are the magnets that draw these tourists. It is as if the pharaohs of Ancient Egypt are still caring for their descendants. Of the millions of tourists who travel to Egypt, the vast majority come to view the monumental vestiges left by one of the greatest civilizations the world has ever known.

Europeans and North Americans, traveling in groups, usually stop in Cairo, the cultural capital of the Arab world, but never in reality see Africa's largest city, milling with some 15 million inhabitants. They spend one or two days visiting the Egyptian Museum of Antiquities and the Great Pyramids, then are whisked southward to see the other eye-bulging works of the ancient Egyptians around Luxor and Aswan.

### Pyramids and Sphinx, World's Enduring Monuments

Perhaps the tour operators have a point when they steer their herds toward these world renowned monuments. By any standard, the pyramids - the only one of the 'Seven Wonders of the World' which still exist - are an unbelievable accomplishment by ancient man. It is said that no traveler who has viewed them for the first time, has not gasped in awe, overwhelmed by their majesty. With their guardian, the

Sphinx, They stand on a desert plateau some 15 km (9.3 mi) from the heart of Cairo. Since the days of ancient Greece and continuing to modern times, they have been visited, written about, explored and, in this century, have become a part of world mythology.

Called the Giza Pyramids to distinguish them from the other 108 pyramids in the country, they are approached by a wide-straight road built in the 19th century by the Empress Eugénie, the wife of Napoleon III. She came during the inauguration of the Suez Canal and in order to see the pyramids, the empress constructed this avenue called Al-Ahram - in Arabic meaning 'the pyramids'.

### Giza Pyramids of Cheops, Chephren and Mykerinos

In the early 1960s, when I first visited the pyramids, this road was mostly edged by desert. Today, it is one of Cairo's major and longest streets and, on both sides, a forest of buildings cover every inch of space to the very edge of these venerable monuments. Standing immutably majestic, the Giza Pyramids of Cheops, Chephren and Mykerinos, the most famous of all the attractions in Egypt, have watched humans come and go for untold centuries. The largest and oldest of these is the Great Pyramid of Cheops, erected about 2590 B.C. Its base covers 6 ha (13 ac) and it is estimated to

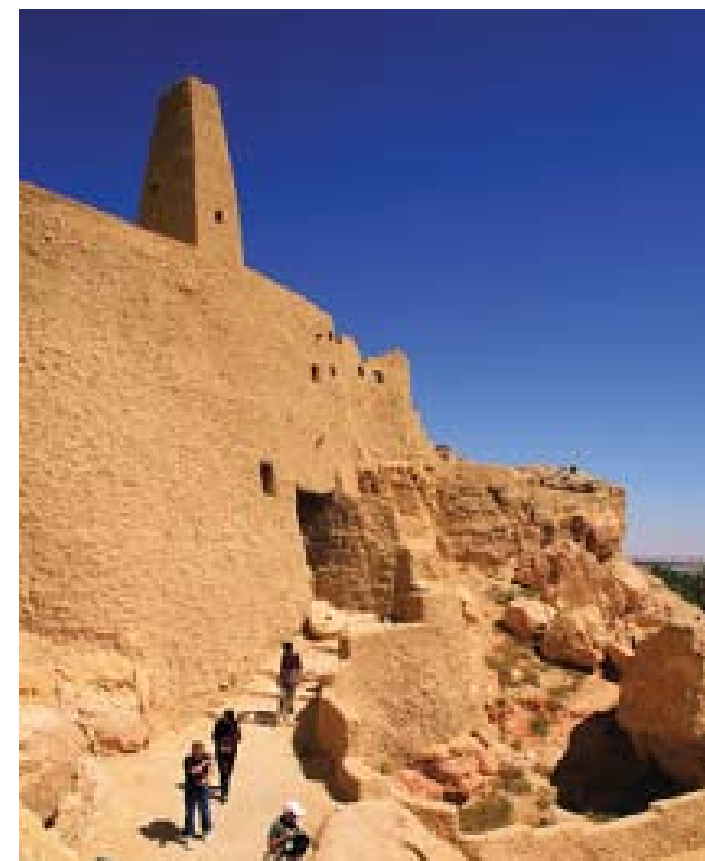
contain 3 million separate blocks of stones, averaging 2 1/2 tons each. vital role in the lives of Egypt's kings and peasants. Today, for many, they are the trademark of lasting power, drawing, from across the globe, tourists and those who dabble in magic and the extraterrestrial. Watching haughtily over the pyramids is the nearby famous Sphinx, carved out of solid natural rock by Chephren the son of Cheops, the builder of the second pyramid. He had this huge statue sculptured from soft limestone with a lion's body, and a god's face - believed to be his own. For over 45 centuries, it has defied time, witnessing all the morning suns civilized man has seen. Carved in the midst of temples, which are in the process of being excavated, this half man half beast statue has acquired, through the centuries, an air of mystery and romance.

The magnificence of the pyramids and the Sphinx are superbly portrayed in the 'Sound and Light' shows, presented nightly. After sunset throughout the year, on different nights, in Arabic, English, French and German, these shows, the finest of their kind presented anywhere, draw droves of tourists. They add much to the appreciation of the Giza pharaonic monuments and their history.

### Museum of Antiquities

On the other hand, more thrilling to many tourists is the Egyptian Museum of Antiquities, housing some 100 thousand exhibits.

It contains a very rich store of remains from the Ancient Egyptian civilizations, including the 4000 piece treasure found in Tutankhamen's tomb. Few museums in the world can even come close to its impressive exhibits. This huge classical-style museum was built in 1853 by Auguste Mariette, the great pioneer archaeologist, but its collection has only occupied the building since 1902. Days are needed to truly appreciate the exhibits, not the half or one day tours allotted most visitors. For more information visit [www.africa-ata.org/egypt.htm](http://www.africa-ata.org/egypt.htm)



Photos copyright Egyptian Tourist Authority



# FROM MOEVENPICK'S HOTEL IN CAIRO MEDIA CITY TO OUR LUXURY CRUISE UP THE NILE ABOARD THE "ROYAL LILY."

**Swiss Style Hospitality on the outskirts of Cairo**  
 A great hotel with a staff of professionals that made us feel at home from the minute we checked in - and the warm feeling of hospitality continued every step of the way during the week to follow. Media City is a prime example of the New Cairo, and Moevenpick's beautiful hotel is right in the heart of a modern development that is ideal for business and pleasure. What's more, Media City is noise and pollution free. We found the

hotel very laid back and relaxing after a busy day at the Africa Travel Association Congress. The room had everything we could ask for. It overlooked the gardens and a swimming pool which extended for the full length of the property. This resort style hotel combines the needs of the business and leisure traveler, and its huge convention center will accommodate up to 2250 guests. The location is offers easy access to both the diagonal highway and the ring road; so all of Cairo is accessible. Guests also

have complimentary access to a number of health club facilities, including sauna, Jacuzzi, steam bath and gym. The hotel's superior rooms are spacious, with high ceilings and nice, big balconies that look onto the swimming pool. Rooms are decorated in a modern style, with fresh colors, wooden furniture and fixtures, and marble floors. We will describe the Moevenpick experience more fully in our World Edition Hotel and Resort Supplement. Our thanks and compliments to manager Amr Kallini and staff.

**The Royal Lily and Ports of Call on the Nile.**  
 Having read The River God, The Seventh Scroll and other books in the series by South African author Wilbur Smith, we were looking ahead to this cruise with eager anticipation. It was all we expected - and more! From Cairo we flew via EgyptAir to Aswan, home of the High Dam, constructed in the 1960s near the site of a previous dam built by the British in 1898. Here we boarded

the Moevenpick Royal Lily, one of the classiest cruise ships on the Nile today. We received a royal greeting from the management and staff, which set the stage for a wonderful, unforgettable cruise. **Aswan area:** The unfinished obelisk provides an example of how obelisks were carved in ancient times and why the supply of granite in Aswan was so valuable to the pharaohs for their vast building projects. We would view the results of many such

projects during the cruise ahead. Also of interest were Botanical Island, Elephantine Island and Philae Island. The Philae Temple is a sacred complex of monuments built for the cult of Isis and Osiris, initiated under the Ptolemies and finished in Roman times. **Kom Ombo:** As our cruise on the Moevenpick Royal Lily was getting underway we studied a map showing the historic ports of







Photos on this page will be replaced by a new set of high resolution images



• call that lie ahead on the Northern run. The first stop was Kom Ombo. Since earliest times, this port served visitors from the many desert caravans which arrived from near and far. The town was an administrative center and became an important military garrison during the Roman period. Its temple was dedicated to the divinities of Haroeris and the Crocodile God Sobek.

**Edfu**

Just 100 km south of Luxor, the town of Edfu has one of ancient Egypt's most impressive, well preserved temples, which was dedicated to Horus and completed during the Ptolemaic age.

**Luxor**

At the conclusion of our cruise, we were so impressed with Luxor, we decided to spend an extra day. Luxor is on the site of ancient Thebes, once described as the "City of the Thousand Gates."

**The West Bank**

Here we disembarked from the Royal Lily to visit the famous "Valley of the Kings" which contains the Thebian tombs and mortuary temple of Hatshepsut with its impressive architecture. She was the first and only woman pharaoh to reign in ancient Egypt. In the "Valley of The Queens" is the Colossi of Memnon, which once guarded the entrance to the mortuary temple of Amenhotep III, which was destroyed by a devastating earthquake.

**The East Bank**

This is the site of Luxor Temple, built by pharaohs, Amenhotep III and Ramses II. An avenue of ram-headed Sphinxes links Luxor and Karnak Temples. Karnak was a center of worship in ancient Egypt, referred to as the "Temple of all Temples."



# A BERBER WEDDING FAIR PLUS OTHER MOROCCAN CULTURAL TREASURES

By Muguette Goufrani

My father, who owned and operated a tour company in Casablanca, Morocco and France for many years, took me along with a group of German tourists to visit a traditional "Wedding Fair" at Hadiddou Imilchil, a Berber village in southern Morocco. While I knew that many Berber Fairs combine a local Saint's Day with a regional market event, only at September's 'moussem' (pilgrimage) of Imilchil, have I seen such a colorful pageant, with instant engagement, and a mass exchange of marriage vows. Berbers have inhabited North Africa for centuries, some being of Caucasian ancestry, with fair complexions and blue eyes. Visitors may think of Berbers as exotic outsiders, yet they preceded the Arabs in settling Morocco, and they remain the



country's main culture. This is expressed by the phrase, "Morocco is Berber - the roots and the leaves of freedom." **A unique experience** While the Wedding Fair is key part of Berber marital custom, families usually arrange marriages in their home village. Women are free to divorce and remarry. At the moussem, divorced and widowed women form the majority, and are identified by their pointed head-dress. The courtship is a family affair as I learned after accepting an invitation to drink mint tea in the goat hair tent of a Berber elder. His oldest daughter Malika, prettied up her divorced 18 year old sister Yasmina with traditional beauty aids - rubbing saffron colored powder into her sister's eyebrows, applying kohl to outline her eyes and carmine rouged to her cheeks. A wool

cape, striped in tribal colors, covered her white dress; then a cone shaped headdress was assembled, held on by loops of spangled wool. I gave Yasmina a silver chain as a wedding gift, since silver brings good luck. Many Westerners think that Moroccans purchase their wives at the fair, but in truth, marriage depends on mutual consent and family approval. **Friends get involved** The language of gesture is as clearly understood by these people as the spoken word. By having a friend help him choose a bride (with often no more than a silhouette and two dark eyes as a clue) the groom gets overcomes his shyness. All day long, in pairs, these men weave in and out amongst a cluster of anxious brides. Then, welcomed by a shy glance or a quick nod, the suitor will stop to speak to the lady, encouraged by a signal from his friend's reassuring hand. Once this happens, the newly acquainted boy and girl unite, holding hands as a sign of intent. Male relatives who

accompany the bride-to-be lend advice, often making snap judgment calls at first sight. If rejection is signaled by a broken handclasp, it's time to look elsewhere. When a bride does give consent, she may speak the magic phrase, "You have captured my liver." Since a healthy liver aids digestion and promotes well-being, in Berber culture it's the liver, not the heart that's considered the location of true love. Might one say, "Darling, my liver pines for you?" Often snowbound behind village walls for up to six months a year, the new couples must learn to live in harmony. Despite those old Foreign Legion movies from the 50s, which showed Berbers as being fierce, hot tempered and warlike, they believe in "paix chez eux" (peace at home). **Moroccan food** Who wouldn't enjoy steamed semolina, topped with a meat and vegetable sauce called couscous? Or tajines, a vegetable stew that contains rabbit, lamb, goat or

chicken meat, combined with prunes, apricots or raisins. Pastilla (baked pigeon pie) is made of layered filo pastry, with nuts and spices, and coated with sugar. With your morning coffee, try a

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light deep fried Spanish doughnut, we call sfinj, or cornes de gazelle pastries. **Berber history and culture** Most of the 27 million Moroccans are Berbers, Arabs or Moors (people of mixed Berber and Arab descent), whose ancestors built the mighty Moorish empire that once ruled Spain, Portugal and most of Northern Africa. Most Berbers dwell in the mountains, while the Arabs and Moors live on the plain and desert. Most cities have a European section a Jewish enclave, and a Medina (Arab-Moorish section). Over the past 3,000 years, its geographic location has given Morocco a strategic importance far beyond its small size. The country has taken the best from the Phoenicians, Romans, Arabs, Berbers, Portuguese, Spanish and French.

For more information visit: [www.africa-ata.org/morocco.htm](http://www.africa-ata.org/morocco.htm)

## Tunisia

### AURA OF CARTHAGE AND HANNIBAL STILL LIVE ON

by Habeeb Salloum

Standing atop Mount Byrsa, the acropolis of both Punic and Roman Carthage, I surveyed the panorama of the modern spread-out urban centre covering the historic ruins which, without doubt, form an important part of the heritage of humankind. After having a short time before explored the few Punic, also known as Phoenician or Carthaginian, and Roman remains, so far uncovered, it was easy to fantasize about the Punic/Roman wars and their most renowned hero, Hannibal - one of the greatest army commanders in the ancient world and Carthage's most illustrious son. Among its once splendid villas and richly adorned temples, he must have strolled, planning his battles with mighty Rome. Leading his 59,000 men and 40 elephants over the Alps in an epic march, he kept Rome for years under the threat of his troops. Even though he won many battles, he was never able to occupy that city. Eventually, he had to return to defend Carthage. At the Battle of Zama near Carthage, his army was defeated in 202 B.C. and he fled to Asia Minor where, rather than be captured by the Romans, he committed suicide.

Today, Hannibal and his city, of which only traces remain, are remembered by modern day Tunisians with pride. Ancient Carthage, once the richest city in the world, is marketed by Tunisian Tourism as a 'storehouse of history'. Throughout the country, hotels and businesses carry the name of its courageous Carthaginian leader and his city. Modern Tunisia owes a great deal to Hannibal in the building of its national character. His city might be no more, but its memory remains. Carthage, derived from the Phoenician Kart Hadascht (new village), was established in 814 B.C. by the Phoenician princess, Elissa-Dido, who had fled Tyre, in present day Lebanon, to escape the wrath of her brother Pygmalion. In the ensuing centuries her descendants created a navy which ruled the seas, guarding Carthage and its empire until, in 146 B.C., the city was destroyed by the Romans and their Berber allies. They razed it to the ground and scattered salt on the ruins to ensure that it would rise again. Roman historians gleefully describe how thoroughly they demolished the city. During the razing, its libraries were burned, hence, all we know of Carthage was written by her



conquerors.

Yet, only a century later, the Romans built atop the Phoenician ruins, New Carthage and made it the capital of their African province. It quickly grew until it became a cultured and cosmopolitan urban centre with a large university and the second largest city in the empire. Subsequently, Christians - Saint Augustine was born here - Vandals, Byzantines, Arabs and Turks took over the city as it gradually declined. According to Edward Gibbon, at the beginning of the 16th century Carthage had only a mosque, a college without students, some thirty shops and five hundred ignorant peasants.

#### French Influence

By the 19th century, little of the city still stood. It almost became a ghost town after its stones had been pillaged as building materials for other towns. When the French occupied Tunisia in 1881, they built a massive cathedral on the summit of Mount Byrsa - known to its new conquerors as the hill of Saint Louis. It was named after the Crusader King Louis IX who was killed trying to conquer Tunisia and was believed to have been buried here.

After the French occupation, his supposed bones were taken back to France. Atop his burial spot, the Catholic Carmelite Order decided to carry on his Crusade to Christianize North Africa. They built the cathedral as a base for this modern Crusade. Yet, it all came to naught.

The French left in the 1950s and today the cathedral is an empty historic structure, edged by remnants of a Punic neighbourhood. Beside it stands a museum where archaeological finds from Carthage's past are exhibited, relating to three major periods in Carthage's history - Phoenicio-Punic, Romano-African and Arab-Islamic. The wide

range of objects from ceramics, mosaics, inscriptions and pottery to sarcophagi, sculptures, and stelae reflect the particular nature of each age.

The museum only houses a minuscule part of the remnants of ancient Carthage. A modern sparkling-white town dotted with pine trees and mimosa cover most of the ruins

of the Punic and Roman city. Only here and there have parts of the historic metropolis been uncovered.

Of these, the most famous are the remains of the Antonine [Antoine] Thermal Baths, covering 3 1/2 ha ( 8.6 ac). The third largest and the most imposing in the Roman Empire, they were completed in 162 A.D. after 12 years of work by thousands of slave laborers. A large drawing on a plaque of the baths in their days of glory and a re-erected granite column 15 m (49 ft) high, topped by a white capital give visitors an idea of the luxury and the immense size of the baths. Even the little that remains is quite impressive.

The 2nd century Roman theatre was one of the largest in the empire, but through the centuries it was almost totally razed to the ground. At the beginning of the 20th century, it was partially reconstructed. Today, it retains little from its past, yet, as it did in Roman times, it still draws visitors, providing an attractive setting in July and August for the International Festival of Music, Singing and Dancing.

On the Odeon plateau, facing Byrsa's twin hill, there is an entire quarter of Roman villas, a number partially excavated - the most notable being called 'Villa de la Volière'. It is positioned around a courtyard colonnade and from its terrace there is a marvelous view of the sea.

As to Punic Carthage, the Magon Quarter near Antonie Thermal Baths was originally Phoenician but rebuilt by the Romans. The Punic Quarter, edging the cathedral is largely preserved because the Romans used the site as a dumping ground during their building of New Carthage. Dating from the 3rd and 2nd centuries B.C., excavation has

revealed a collection of carefully built and laid-out houses on a regular grid system. These were endowed in their time with all the conveniences and comforts of that age which included plastered walls, sewers, tiled floors and water tanks. In the ensuing centuries, the Romans inherited these Punic building features and they came down to us as a legacy of Rome.

Opposite the Roman theatre stands the tophet - a Punic cemetery, appearing like a shrub-filled elegant garden. In it, a Punic crematorium and many small stone coffins with carvings of children on their face have been unearthed. Guides point to these as indication of child sacrifice. Yet, it has never been proven that the Carthaginians prac-

ticed this form of offering to the gods. Only the Romans, Carthage's mortal enemies, have accused them of this cruel practice. As I wandered through Carthage's scattered ruins, I thought of how our world would be today if Hannibal had occupied Rome. No doubt, instead of the Roman gods, the Phoenician god Baal-Hammon and the goddess Tanit would have been the supreme beings of the pre-Christian Mediterranean lands. Who knows what would have come thereafter. Yet, was Carthage truly destroyed? Even though the Romans erased the Punic city from the face of the earth, its renown is imprinted on the soul of modern day Tunisia.

#### How To Get There:

Carthage is only a suburb of Tunis - tramway costs less than \$1. and taxis about \$5. Facts About Tunisia:

- 1) To enter Tunisia, no visas are necessary for travellers from western Europe, Japan, the U.S.A. and Canada.
- 2) It is best to travel to southern Tunisia in spring or autumn. In summer it is very hot.
- 3) The currency used in Tunisia is the dinar - one US dollar is worth 1.25 dinars. Tunisia is one of the few countries in the world where hotels give a better exchange rate than the banks.
- 4) In all of Tunisia, taxis are metered and very reasonable; buses and shared taxis (louages) connect all towns and villages;

tour companies offer excursions; autos can be rented - small ones for about \$60. per day, fully insured.

5) Hotels in Tunisia are very reasonably priced. However, it is to best book through a tour company. They can offer even better prices.

6) Try Tunisian food. It's very tasty. Four of the best dishes are: couscous - prepared in seemingly hundreds of different ways - from sweet to very hot; briq - a thin pastry which comes with a variety of fillings, but always includes an egg; chakchouka - a ratatouille which is offered in many types; and spaghetti cooked Tunisian style - for me the epitome of Spaghetti dishes.

7) There is less crime in Tunisia than in western Europe or North America, but beware of pick-pockets, especially in crowded trains, buses and souks.

8) When taking tours, make sure the guide speaks English. If you do not ask, French will be the language spoken.

9) Tunisia is the most sophisticated, relaxed and tolerant state in North Africa. Women travellers are very safe when travelling alone.

10) With the exception of its capital, Tunis, Tunisia is geared up for tourism. The most up-to-date touristic facilities are found in all its resorts.

Note: All prices quoted are in US dollars.

For Further Information, Contact: Tunisia Tourist Office, 1253 1515 Massachusetts Avenue N.W., Washington, DC 20005 Tel : (202) 466-2546. Fax : (202) 466-2553. or Web: [www.tunisiaonline.com](http://www.tunisiaonline.com) and [www.tourismtunisia.com](http://www.tourismtunisia.com) Habeeb Salloum

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## DJERBA - TUNISIA'S ISLE OF FORGETFULNESS

Photos and story by Habeeb Salloum

No different from Ulysses, who some authors have described as Djerba's first tourist, a traveler will find the people of this Tunisian isle friendly and hospitable. From the first day of a visit, the delightful charms of Djerba (also spelled Jerba) will hold most travelers spellbound.

Why this island, which travelers have labeled, 'Isle of Forgetfulness', holds visitors under its spell, is virtually unexplainable. A great many attribute it to its magic halo - a combination of a clear-blue sky, shining white houses, clean and well-kept towns, tree-covered countryside and warm, yet not too hot climate. Whatever the case, a good number of travelers go into raptures when describing this island - made famous by Ulysses. Photo: Villas amongst the palms, Djerba

### Land of Lotus Eaters

According to Greek mythology, Djerba was the home of the seductive lotus eaters. In Homer's Odyssey, Ulysses almost lost his men when the beautiful maidens of the island fed them the lotus flower. The men were so pleasantly intoxicated by the lotus that Ulysses found it almost impossible to make them return to their ships.

Yet, even if this story is only a fable, Djerba has, for many centuries, enraptured travelers who have been lucky enough to land on its shores. A veritable floating garden, rising from the sea like a mirage, the island's spell of forgetfulness which supposedly entrapped visitors in ancient times, has not faded with the passing centuries. It is said that Djerba is a land of dreams, created by nature to enchant the imagination of the human soul. In Djerba's Phoenician and Roman periods, the island and its principal town were known by the Phoenician name of Meninx whose ruins are to be found near the 6 km (4 mi) Phoenician based Roman causeway, which joins the island to the mainland. After the Muslim conquest, Djerba became the haven for an Islamic sect, known as Kharidjite, which today, in its present form, only exists on this island.

During the Middle Ages, the inhabitants withstood the most powerful and ruthless rulers of Mediterranean Europe. From the 12th to the 16th centuries, the people of this Isle of

forgetfulness fought almost continuously, usually against the Spaniards, but at times against the united kings of Christendom. Djerba is a 614 sq km (238 sq mi) flat island situated off the southern coast of Tunisia, not far from the Libyan border. It is joined to the mainland with a 6 km (3.6 mi) causeway built on a Roman foundation. More than 145,000 inhabitants, mostly of Berber origin, live on this isle of mythology. Its 133 km (83 mi) shoreline abounds with sandy-white beaches, gently lapped by the warm-azure waters of the Mediterranean

Covered with trees and flowers, the island is in reality one huge oasis covered with more than 1,000,000 date palms and 700,000 olive trees, some over 3000 years old. In between, small fields of apricots, carobs, figs, grapes, grenadines, lemons, mandarins, oranges and pomegranates cover almost every empty space. Only travelers dreaming of Djerba's mythology are usually disappointed, nowhere is the fabled lotus fruit to be found.

Here and there amid these fields, watered from some 2700 wells, are the breathtaking white, small villages and isolated homes. The striking white houses, known as menzels, and their architecture, unique to the island, appear like white jewels, sprinkled between the greenery. Their rounded domes and bright snowy color, embellished by

sky-blue wrought iron trimmings, sparkle in the sunlight and give the buildings an appealing charm. Inside, there are clean courtyards filled with trees and flowers. Set amid these fairy tale buildings are to be found the some eye-catching 200 small mosques - many of the older ones built as fortresses to ward off invaders. Houmt-Souk, which means market center, with a population of 45,000, is the capital of the island and one of the most picturesque urban centers in Tunisia. It is a well-kept bright town centered around the souk area, overflowing with handicraft products. Traditional clothing, blankets woven since the time of Hannibal, beautifully wrought gold and silver jewelry, leather goods, straw mats and beautiful pottery saturate the markets.

In town, two of the most important usual stopovers for visitors are the Museum of Folklore and Popular Art, displaying traditional costumes and jewelry; and the historic fortress of Borj el-Kebir, a 15th century Arab citadel. Interesting to many tourists is the plaque nearby marking the spot where once 5000 skulls of a Spanish defeat were once piled pyramid style.

Even though overpowered by Houmt-Souk, each of the other tiny towns on the island, is noted for some specialty in its artisan's handiwork or is a place of historic importance. Ajim, from where a ferry can be taken to the mainland, is a sponge fishing

town; El-May has a colorful market; Fatou produces fine hand-woven baskets and rush mats; Guellala has been the center for the hand manufacture of exquisite ceramics and pottery since the time King Midas; La Ghriba is noted for its synagogue and adjoining monastery whose foundations were laid in 584 B.C.; Mah-boubine is famous for its backyard gardens; Midoun is celebrated for its Gougou dancers; and Sedouikech is well-known for its handmade camel muzzles, fishing baskets and straw hats.

Enhancing these and other villages, are Djerba's annual 300 days of sunshine and warm blue waters with their cooling breezes, edged glittering

sands, embellished by the many attractive and comfortable modern hotels with the most up-to-date tourist facilities. Without disturbing the calm and peace, 125 of these eye-catching tourist palaces - the largest Dar Djerba with 2,500 beds - built in traditional menzel style, fit neatly into the palm-saturated landscape. Nature and the edifices built by man have merged together to strengthen the island's magic spell. These attractive and comfortable hotels, hospitable and friendly people with a slow-moving lifestyle, breathtaking countryside, mild winters, cool summers and tantalizing sea, make Djerba one of Tunisia's most popular tourist spots. Located on Europe's doorsteps, the island which some call the 'Little Mediterranean Polynesia' has since the time of Ulysses been drawing travelers. Annually, it hosts some 600,000 visitors - 50% of these Germans. With the softness of its sweet-serene air, perfumed with the flowers of the many fruit trees, overshadowed by clear blue sky and ringed by golden sands, this paradise isle entraps even the most skeptical visitor. Our guide had a point when he remarked as we climbed the ferry at Ajim for the mainland, "I always think of Djerba as Tunisia's isle of forgetfulness."

### How To Get There:

There are good bus connections between Djerba and all the large urban centers in Tunisia. Djerba also, has an airport through which most of the tourists are processed and has good connections to the city of Tunis and some centers in Europe. When driving, to reach the island, cross from the mainland on the causeway or take a ferry

- Facts About Djerba and Tunisia:
- 1) To enter Tunisia, no visas are necessary for travelers from Western Europe, Japan, U.S.A. and Canada.
  - 2) It is best to travel to Djerba in spring or autumn. In summer, the island teems with tourists.
  - 3) The currency used in Tunisia is the dinar - one US dollar is worth 1.25 dinar. Tunisia is one of the few countries in the world where hotels give a better exchange rate than the banks.
  - 4) To tour the island, taxis are metered and very reasonable; buses and shared taxis (louages) connect all towns and villages; tour companies offer excursions; autos can be rented - small ones for about 75 dinars per day, fully insured; tour companies offer excursions; but the best way to relish Djerba's atmosphere is to hire a bicycle - the island is flat and very easy to navigate.

5) Hotels on the island are very reasonably priced. However, it is best to book through a tour company. They can offer even better prices. A good hotel to stay in on Djerba is Hotel Melia Djerba Menzel - cost for double room from \$30. - \$68., depending on season.

6) Try Tunisian food. It's very tasty. Three of the best dishes are cous-cous. Prepared in seemingly hundreds of different ways - from sweet to very hot; briq - a thin pastry which comes with a variety of fillings, but always includes an egg; chakchouka - a ratatouille which is offered in many types; and spaghetti cooked Tunisian style - for me the epitome of Spaghetti dishes. Also, Djerba is noted for its fresh seafood dishes. One will not be disappointed when dining on these fruits of the sea.

7) There is less crime in Tunisia than in Western Europe or North America, but beware of pick-pockets, especially in crowded trains, buses and souks.

8) When taking tours, make sure the guide speaks English. If you do not ask, French will be the language spoken.

9) Tunisia is the most sophisticated, relaxed and tolerant state in North Africa. Women travelers are very safe when traveling alone.

10) With the exception of its capital, Tunis, Tunisia is geared up for tourism. The most up-to-date touristic facilities are found in all its resorts. Note: All prices quoted are in US dollars.

For Further Information, Contact: Tunisian National Tourist Office 1515 Massachusetts Avenue N.W., Washington, DC 20005 Tel : (202) 466-2546. Fax : (202) 466-2553. E-mail : tourism@tunisiaaccess.com

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