



## **destination UPDATE** **MARRAKESH AND BEYOND**

Only very occasionally will you find a destination that is short haul yet offers a perfect balance of excitement, culture, architecture and natural beauty. Marrakesh is such a destination. The old city is a typical Medina, surrounded by a high wall that encompasses life within, as it has been lived for many generations past. The backdrop to the city is the snow-capped peaks of the High Atlas Mountains only some 30 miles from the city centre. Outside the walls are excellent hotels, offering good cuisine that has been enhanced by the influence of the French. Marrakesh also offers superb, local entertainment, blending folklore, local customs and cuisine into nightly extravaganzas, making the added expense of themed parties unnecessary. Finally, the scale of the city fits perfectly with everything, including its airport, which is never more than twenty minutes away from any of the major hotels.

### **RECOMMENDED HOTELS**

Marrakesh has a wide choice of properties suitable for any type of group, be they incentive or conference. It is worth pointing out, however, that the majority of hotels quote on a half-board basis. This is not such a problem as it may at first seem, as most of the local cuisine served at the restaurants outside the hotels and at the theme type evenings that are available, tend to offer the same type of food, namely a meze, tagine (a type of casserole) of lamb or beef or spit-roast lamb. The hotels offer the opportunity to vary the menus with some excellent European cuisine which is enhanced by the French colonial influence of the country's past.



### **LA MAMOUNIA \*\*\*\*\*DELUXE**

La Mamounia was first built in 1923 on the plans of architects Prost and Marquisio, first with 50 rooms only, then with 100 from 1946.

Many important persons fell happily under its charm over the years, from politicians to film directors, from actors to rock stars or famed fashion designers. Winston Churchill still has its own suite and bar there, Général de Gaulle had a special extra long bed made for him, Hitchcock shot *The Man who Knew too much* there with Jimmie Stewart, Nash & Young created the

«Marrakech Express» in its garden and Pierre Balmain fell in love in Marrakech after a stay at La Mamounia!!!

It was rejuvenated several times over the years, the one before last with a mix of Art Déco and Moroccan Style. Today Jacques Garcia the French architect and decorator has

chosen to give it back its original splendor and its full authenticity, through the beautiful artwork of all Moroccan craftsmen, the re discovery of a beautiful ceiling Fresco by Majorelle himself and through a secular Moroccan refined «art-de-vivre». La Mamounia consists of 136 bedrooms, 71 suites, 3 Riads, 700 staff members, 8 hectares of Garden and also 8 pillows on each bed, and an organic orchard ....



#### **THE SOFITEL MARRAKESH**

An excellent hotel, where detail is King; from the rose petals on your bed to the rose in your bathrobe pocket. Its city centre location makes it very attractive for middle size and high budget Incentive or small conferences. The hotel is definitely aiming at more FIT's than groups and lacks sometimes of flexibility. This can be overcome but it is a hotel for which you really do need the services of a DMC.



On the hotel front I can confirm that the **HOTEL MANSOUR EDDHABI \*\*\*\*\*** (formerly the Pullman) is still (in my opinion) the best all-round hotel, ideal for both small and large groups alike. I still don't know where they hide 362 double rooms and 38 suites and it is totally unlike the typical Congress Centre Hotel properties you find elsewhere, with its 5 restaurants and 3 bars plus a superb poolside area and gardens. Similarly the **Palais De Congres** is one of the finest I have seen anywhere, offering a wide choice of

conference facilities ranging from an extendible ballroom-style auditorium with a stage which is ideal for concerts and gala events etc., through to a choice of auditoriums that offer capacity ranging from 15 to 1700 participants. The centre is perfect, especially for car launches, with a wide range of terrain nearby for testing purposes.

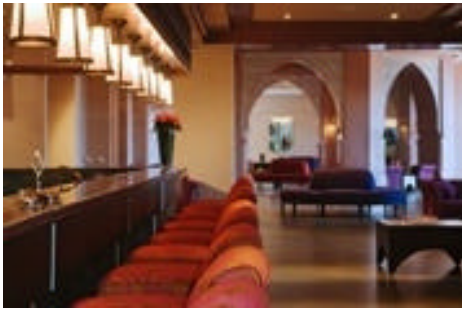


#### **THE PALMERAIE GOLF PALACE AND CONFERENCE CENTRE**

is situated just 20 minutes outside the city in the Palm Grove area and from where most of the evening entertainment venues, such as Chez Ali are in easy reach. This 5\* deluxe property is more of a resort hotel, surrounded as it is by a golf course, superb gardens and pool area, a selection of restaurants including French, **Japanese** and Italian, plus tennis and squash courts, several swimming pools, A beautiful 1500 sqm brand new Spafitness centre, bowling alley, Sports bar (with a huge screen !) and disco. The hotel offers over 314 rooms and 34 suites and I am sure it will be a firm favourite for

groups, especially those that like golf or traditionally prefer coastal resorts to cities, as although not by the sea, it combines the benefit of both types of destinations.

The conference centre (or Le Centre International de Conference de la Palmeraie) can accommodate from 50 to 1500 delegates and offers 4000 square metres of exhibition and meeting space, a high quality range of services, including security and technological equipment and a team of professionals. It is also a natural connection between Le Palmeraie Golf Palace, Le Pavillon du Golf, Les Jardins d'Inès and Le Palmeraie Village.



### **The KENZI MENARA PALACE**

Excellent location, overlooking the old historical city walls and the lush Agdal Royal Gardens; 236 spacious rooms and suites set up in various «riads» that can be booked exclusively for groups, giving a cosy atmosphere while the public areas are very spacious. The restaurants are looked over by the Pourcel Brothers, a twin pair of famous french Chefs, the Spa is run by Terraké and the atmosphère is truly Moroccan.



### **The ES SAADI PALACE**

The Es Saadi Gardens and resort is set in the heart of the city of Marrakech in a 8 hectares park with shaded pathways that lead you to the Hotel, the Palace, the Villas but also to the Restaurants, Swimming pools, Spas, Casino and Discotheque ....

The Palace offers 90 suites, nice if not too numerous meeting facilities and is well known for the high quality of its cuisine and service. For 3 generation the family Bauchet -Bouhlal has been association luxury and refinement with traditional Moroccan hospitality and the result is superb for high end small incentive and meetings!!

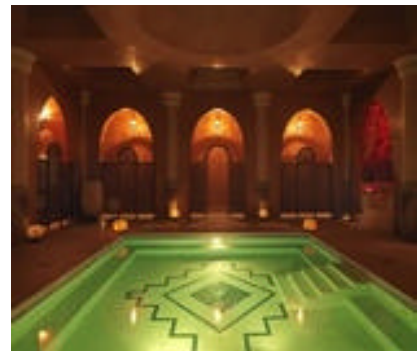
## **BUDGET PROPERTIES**



**ATLAS MEDINA and Spa** (Conference combination with large meeting room at Atlas Marrakech): This property is situated within 5 hectares of palm tree gardens and offers 224 spacious and air-conditioned rooms with verandas leading out onto the swimming pool and gardens. The hotel also boasts 13 suites, each individually decorated and equipped with large TV, hi-fi and DVD player. The conference facilities are plentiful and the rooms can accommodate up to 100 delegates and each benefit from natural daylight and are available with modern equipment. There is also internet access available as well as a business centre.

The hotel has 2 restaurants and 3 bars to suit each of the discerning guests' needs - the Jnane Bar, Douiria piano bar and Living Room Lounge.

The shopping facilities will bring you into the world of traditional Moroccan handicrafts with the aptly named Bazar and as well as 2 swimming pools – one for relaxing and one for sports and activities, the property's Spa is the real highlight of the property, as suggested in its title. This is the first ever spa for Marrakesh and the hotel has taken up partnership with Daniel Jouvance in a real effort to bring ultimate indulgence to the city, offering treatments such as balneotherapy and massages etc. as well as facilities such as hammams and the more widely known Jacuzzis and saunas etc.





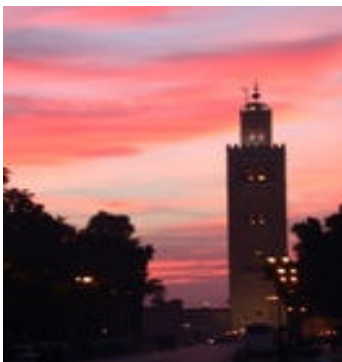
**PALM PLAZA HOTEL & SPA** situated in the new «Hotel area» of the city, facing the ramparts offers 234 rooms: 131 twins, 52 doubles and 6 junior and 20 senior suites, 2 rooms for disabled guests and 20 non smoking rooms, all furnished for utmost comfort and each offering a large Terrace. Several restaurants and bars, a disco, a large spa with all sorts of traditional and modern treatments, combined with 6 fully equipped meetings rooms (2 main and 4 break out) accommodating from 10 to 500 participants make of this venue an excellent budget choice for Incentive or conferences.

**TIKIDA GARDEN HOTEL \*\*\*\*** Situated in Marrakesh's Palm Grove, just outside the Medina it has 204 rooms and 4 suites, 3 restaurants and a bar. It offers a more activity based atmosphere for younger, budget conscious groups featuring 8 tennis courts, archery, Boules, golf practice, volley ball and a disco and several meeting spaces are also available. In addition the property now boasts also a fitness centre and spa.

### **WHAT TO DO, WHAT TO SEE**

I have always felt that sightseeing in Marrakesh is best undertaken by mini-bus or by horse drawn carriage rather than a regular tourist bus. With good guides being relatively inexpensive smaller parties will enjoy the delights of the city much more, especially as much of the city is best seen as part of walking tour. Outside the city, especially on an excursion to the Ourika Valley or Asni and Ouirgane, this is also best by mini-bus, as so much of the experience of Morocco is stopping to enjoy the scenery and meet the people who seem to pop out from behind stones and bushes, even in the remotest of areas. Longer journeys are best undertaken with a full size coach.

**THE CITY TOUR** is a must, including a visit to the Koutoubia Mosque, which has become the symbol of Marrakesh, the Bahia Palace (one of the most beautifully decorated buildings I have ever seen) and of course the Saadian Tombs. The visit can be complemented with a short visit to the Souks, but this is best undertaken in smaller



groups. Tours normally end at the Jemaa El Fna Square for a truly remarkable glimpse of a lifestyle that has remained unchanged for over a thousand years. There is no finer end to a day than to sit atop one of the rooftop cafés and enjoy the spectacle of the storytellers, witch doctors and tradesmen below, as the sun sets behind the Koutoubia Mosque. But the Souks and Jemaa El Fna Square are really worth a half-day visit on their own.

Variations on the city tours are offered including walking tours and most notably a 'Riddle and Ride' discovery tour by Caleche (horse drawn carriages) with clues guiding you around the city.





**THE OURIKA VALLEY** A relatively short drive out of the city, driving towards the Atlas Mountains is the beautiful fertile valley of Ourika. Ourika is a combination of European alpine, blended with the lifestyle of the Himalayas, a unique combination that offers many stopping-off points to photograph the stunning scenery. On Mondays, Tuesdays and Fridays there is a local country market that is well worth a visit and several excellent restaurants also make this an ideal morning excursion with a lunch stop by Coach or Mini-bus. As with many other areas of the mountain

this is the place to buy locally found minerals at very low prices; these include Amethyst and many other semi-precious stones.



**ASNI & OUIRGANE** Another mountain pass visit with a market at Asni every Tuesday and Saturday complete with donkey parking areas rather than car parks. The village of Ouirgane is a pleasant stop point where you can tour the village by donkey and have lunch at the beautiful hotel/restaurant - La Roseaie.

## **EXCURSIONS WITH A DIFFERENCE**



Something different that I undertook on this occasion was an off-road drive into the foothills of the mountains by a chauffeur driven 4-wheel drive on a **'Berber Adventure' to Lalla Takerkoust reservoir lake**, approximately 45 kms from Marrakesh. A pleasant experience, especially with a typical 'Berber' lunch. If you wish, abseiling & climbing can also be arranged for your group.



**A FULL DAY'S TOUR TO ESSAOUIRA** the setting for Orson Well's Othello, a charming town set on the coast with an old fishing harbour is also available with or without a 'Treasure Hunt'. We would recommend this excursion for the longer stay groups who need additional sightseeing during their stay, as although the town is very attractive, the journey of some 170 km's is rather long and not particularly interesting. The Essaouira trip can also be undertaken by self-drive car or chauffeured land rovers with a fun "road book."

**OUARZAZATE & ZAGORA** Although it is technically feasible to visit Ouarzazate in a day, being on the opposite side of the High Atlas Mountains to Marrakesh makes it a better overnight proposition, or combined with Zagora, for those groups who prefer to explore a country and its people in a little more depth (see description later on in this report).

## **FUN & SPORTS ACTIVITIES**

**Trek through an unspoilt Berber World** (minimum 10 pax, maximum 36 pax)

**Teambuilding and Icebreaking activities near Lalla Takerkoust Dam (minimum 20 pax, maximum 100 pax):** Bringing together people in your company meetings can sometimes prove to be a strain on the organiser, especially if you feel that people aren't mixing well. What you need are some relaxing and ice-breaking activities, out of the conference centre, set in beautiful surroundings, which will really get people laughing together. Laughter seems to cross over all cultural and language barriers.

**Treasure Hunt in Marrakesh:** Pleasure, discovery and motivation. These are the three main elements of the Treasure Hunt game. We do believe that a stay in Morocco should contain a great part of conviviality and fun. This is why our DMC has developed a brand new service for you, the fascinating Treasure Hunt in Marrakesh. Each Treasure Hunt is adapted to your client's requirement. They are able to adapt it to specific purposes, such as motivation, leadership, group management... whilst preserving, at the same time, the charm of discovering the wonders of Marrakesh.



## **OTHER ACTIVITIES**

MOUNTAIN BIKING  
CAMEL RIDES  
HORSE RIDING  
HOT AIR BALLOONING  
GOLF  
QUAD BIKING  
HELICOPTER FLIGHTS  
FUN OLYMPIC GAMES  
MOROCCAN CUISINE WORKSHOP  
DRUMS WORKSHOP

## **SHOPPING**

The normal handicrafts made from wood and brass are in abundance and leather and carpets are also a reasonable bargain. Morocco is one of the centres for creating handbags for many of the world's fashion houses and what I presume to be seconds are available at very advantageous prices. The shopkeepers of the Souks tend to get rather frantic in their salesmanship and are best used by those who are good at haggling and have plenty of time, as it can get a little wearing after a while. I have always found the new part of the city an ideal place to wander round when time is limited for buying mementoes of your trip. It hosts a mixture of food stalls and other various types of shops and stalls, in a more relaxed atmosphere and shopping in the new part of the city in the fixed price shops is also very reasonable and the guarantee of quality is more assured.

## **EATING OUT AT RECOMMENDED LOCAL RESTAURANTS**



As I mentioned earlier, most hotels insist on a half-board basis. This is not such a negative as it may first appear, as one can cater the meal programme more towards a European/International style cuisine to offset an over-indulgence in Moroccan cuisine. Many of the restaurants, especially outside the city tend to serve very similar dishes, basically consisting of either Lemon Chicken, a Tagine (earthenware casserole dish) of normally lamb or sometimes beef, Couscous either lamb or chicken or whole adobe oven roasted lamb.

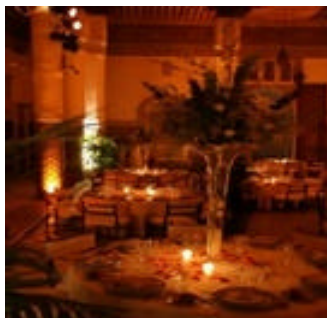
Our manual contains details and descriptions of some of the recommended restaurants including Lyakout, **Tangia**, **Styilia**, Al Fassia and the **Palais Arabe**.



Others include La Bohème, an informal French-style brasserie near the square and Le Jacaranda, a French fish speciality restaurant. One restaurant I would thoroughly recommend from personal experience is the **DAR MARJANA**, an exquisite little restaurant set in the Medina with a superb ambience for a small group during the winter period of up to a maximum of 45-50. During better weather the courtyard canopy can be completely withdrawn, leaving a pleasant courtyard setting for an evening of above average Moroccan cuisine.



**PALAIS GHARNATTA:** This beautiful venue is an ancient house set within 2000 Square metres and is hidden away like a jewel within the walls of the Medina. This is the perfect place to try traditional Moroccan cuisine and sets the perfect ambience for any group, whether large or small. There are 4 rooms available for hire – Room of the Fountain, Royal Room, VIP Room and the Mezzanine and each cater for groups from 80 to 120 persons.



### **PALAIS SOLEIMAN**

This elegant and refined place, part of the palace of Caid Layadi, once the ruler of Marrakech, is available on exclusive use from 100 to 200 guests. It has been restored over the years to its past original splendour. The Moroccan cuisine served here is refined and inventive, the décor truly splendid and your evening there will have something of an «imperial» taste...



For a farewell with a difference try a typical Berber breakfast at **AL KASBAH**, set overlooking the river and palm groves very close to the **Palmeraie** Golf Hotel. It offers a peaceful and picturesque setting for a Berber breakfast, which consists of an assortment of different home made breads, preserves and hot meat dishes combining to offer a memorable last glimpse of Morocco before transferring to the airport. **AL KASBAH** is also a perfect setting to arrange an exclusive Moroccan evening complete with a folklore show and Fantasia (the local

horseback tribesmen who fire their old hand-primed rifles on the gallop.) A minimum of at least 50 persons would be needed for reasons of both budget and atmosphere.



Further out from the "Hustle & Bustle" of the main town, on the road to the Ourika valley is Bb & Zin, set around nice gardens. Mojitos, delicious Thai and French fusion food, leather banquettes, moody lightings and excellent music, the natural result of an aesthetic born in Marrakech farmed out to stylists in London and LA, and ... flown back !

### **FUN NIGHT OUT DINNER VENUES**

Marrakesh is fortunate to have a number of all inclusive 'themed' evenings, offering good all-round entertainment in atmospheric venues. Both the food and the entertainment are generally of a high standard, especially if you take the VIP packages that have been specifically designed for Incentive groups. The principal venues are Chez Ali and Al Kasbah both offering similar folklore entertainment including dancing and the 'Fantasia' (the famous charge by horse-riding riflemen).

Very special for larger groups (from 100 to 1000) is the «Berber Fiesta» a specially set up Bedouin village for dinner and enjoy the evening dancing with DJ shisha.





## **BEYOND MARRAKESH FOR THE SLIGHTLY MORE ADVENTUROUS**

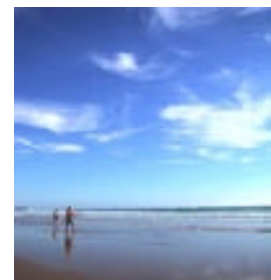
I mentioned a little earlier the cities of Ouarzazate and Zagora. A programme based on these two cities maybe using a car rally format introduces everyone to the real face of Morocco. Majestic scenery, both mountains, scrub desert and the start of the true rolling sand dunes of the Sahara with their numerous oasis, as well as the fertile palm fringed riverbank that stretches for mile after mile are best experienced when you venture off-road through the many small towns and villages along the way.

**OUARZAZATE** has two main hotels both 4-star; the Hotel Belere, a good holiday-style property using the pool as a central feature surrounded by the rooms, restaurant and bars and offering an informal atmosphere and a disco where you can relax and unwind after a hectic day out in the desert. The Berber Palace Hotel is slightly more formal featuring separate and small apartment blocks.

**ZAGORA** has the **4-star Hotel Reda**, a reasonable modern-style property, more than adequate for an overnight. Zagora is perfect for a meal out in the desert, in fact after a visit at sunset to the first of the large sand-dunes that typifies the desert to us all, you can not only join in on an evening of local food and entertainment in a Bedouin camp, you can in fact also sleep out in typical Bedouin tents. Personally this is only for the real outdoor enthusiast, as a sleepless night of barking dogs, braying donkeys and camels breaking wind makes a 05.30 dawn rising less than the beautiful experience it is meant to be. I am certain that the majority of groups would prefer the experience of an evening in the desert and then make the short journey back to the hotel.

**ERFOUD** with its 4-star hotel - Kasbah X'aluca Maadid: a small oasis located at the entrance of the city. Erfoud offers same amenities as those at Zagora.

**AGADIR:** Much to my surprise I found all the elements that appear to be a prerequisite of so many client 'Sun, sand and sea' in total abundance, with the extra benefit of an exceptionally high quality of all the basic elements, such as rooms, pools, good sandy beaches and food, plus the additional benefits of both price and a willingness to be of service where the words 'I can't do that' do not seem to be part of the language. Agadir is not the greatest centre for sightseeing, but for those who favour a beach-type incentive, it has everything they could need in abundance.



The best hotel by far is **Atlantic Palace - a 5-star deluxe hotel**. It hosts 280 rooms, 8 Royal suites, 3 Duplex and 30 junior suites and all rooms are equipped with air-conditioning, hair dryer, Minibar, Safe Box, Direct Dial and TV Satellite. It has 6 restaurants, Piano Bar & Night Club and the hotel offers several activities: Casino, Swimming pool, Fitness Centre, Tennis, Golf, Ping-Pong, Thalassotherapy and a private beach.

Another excellent hotel is the **4\* Agadir Beach Club**, with some 450 rooms, 1 main and 4 speciality restaurants, plus beach and poolside bars. The Beach Club also has excellent meeting facilities and a purpose built theatre. The superb gardens include a large pool, 3 tennis courts and a gym centre. In all, one of the best all-round hotels I have stayed in anywhere. The only negative is that it is so good it is difficult to secure large room allocations, even in low season.

#### **Other hotels worth considering:**

The **(4\*A)Tivoli Hotel** has some 280 exceptionally spacious rooms, set in four blocks, offering at least 80% of the rooms with a sea or pool view. It also has two conference rooms (one above another) that seat on average 250 delegates theatre style.

The **5\* Melia Al Madina Salam** - a Moroccan style property with 206 rooms is also worth considering, especially for smaller, more mature types of groups. It is situated opposite the beach and close to all the shops, restaurants and bars and has all the facilities one would expect from a Melia property.

**A couple of things to do:** One of which is the Weekend Souk, just on the edge of town and the other is an evening at Jardin D'Eau, which offers good live music at pub prices. Agadir also offers an excellent range of bars, clubs and discos to suit most tastes. All in all Agadir offers an excellent destination for those who wish to enjoy an excellent beach based programme with the benefit of good nightlife.

### **OTHER PLACES OF INTEREST**

Apart from the desert it is the experience of meeting the people and seeing the sights off-road along the banks of the River Draa with its fortified villages that is the major appeal of the area, as well as such spectacular settings as the Ait Ben Haddous Kasbahs (fortified village) just outside Ouarzazate. There is also a wide choice of good quality local restaurants although the menus are somewhat limited and sometimes alcoholic refreshments are not available, but with the hotels satisfying all these needs it is a small price to pay for an experience of a lifetime.



### **CASABLANCA IN A NUTSHELL**

Casablanca is a large, modern city, but it still has its own particular charm, being on the Atlantic coast. With many of the major hotel groups having properties and good access from most places by air it is an excellent, cost-effective choice, especially for conferences. It is also a perfect base from which to explore the major areas of interest, including Meknes and Fez and even Marrakesh, which is only 2hrs 30 minutes away with the new motorway and 25 minutes by air.

### **OVERVIEW**

Morocco never ceases to surprise me with its all-round quality in accommodation, service, food and value for money. It also has exceptional venues for large conferences in Marrakech, where charters are the order of day, with quality and quantity of rooms all within 10 to 15 minutes of the airport and now 3 conference centres to compete with any in the world in their diversity of space and technology.