



Mesmerising Morocco

Mazes of medinas, saffron-scented souks, sweeping deserts and epic mountain ranges: Morocco is a country of dizzying diversity. The landscapes here spell adventure and the cities are easily some of the most exciting in Africa.

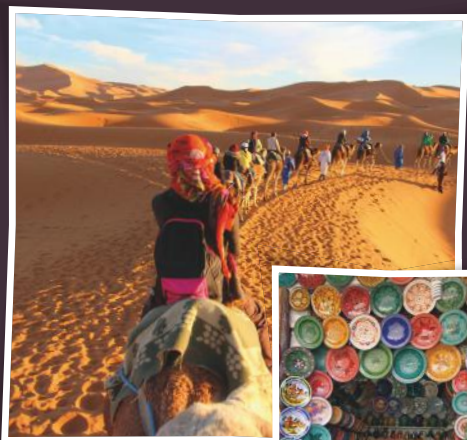
It's not called the 'Gateway to Africa' for nothing. Just a mere three-hour flight away from London, a trip to Morocco is the perfect introduction to this mammoth continent, with a tantalising blend of adventure, culture and plenty of sunshine. There's heaps to explore, so we've gathered together the most unmissable experiences to tick off while you're there.

Lose yourself in Marrakech's medinas

Marrakech is a city that sweeps everyone off their feet. Love it or hate it, it's an assault on your senses, filled with enough sounds, sights and smells to keep you mesmerised for

days. Trace intricate tilework, admire Islamic architecture, get lost amidst the city's maze of power-pink medinas and stop for some retail therapy in Djemaa El Fna square – where shopping, street food and culture collide.

Then there's the souks: if you're a sucker for exotic treasures and a bargain, you'll be happy to hear that Marrakech is one of the best shopping destinations in the world! Soft leather bags, beautiful carpets, colourful spices and a whole host of North African flavours to try: a trip to Marrakech's markets warrants plenty of extra room in your suitcase – and your stomach!



Spend some time in the Sahara

Imagine falling asleep beneath a glittering tapestry of stars in the world's largest desert. Sounds like paradise, right? That's because few places on Earth compare to the Sahara, a sprawling expanse of vast plains and sun-baked dunes that occupy nearly all of North Africa.

You can experience the magic of the desert yourself in the south and east of Morocco, with heaps of tours departing from all of Morocco's major cities. From camel trekking and quad-biking trips to sandboarding and immersive desert camping experiences, there's something here for every type of traveller.

Visit the blue city of Chefchaouen

Nestled in the heart of the Rif mountain range, Chefchaouen's blue-washed buildings easily make it the prettiest and most photographed city in Morocco. The reasons behind the blue aren't entirely clear: some say the walls were painted blue by the Jews who settled there after World War II, while others swear they were painted this way to keep mosquitoes at bay.

Put your camera to good use in the narrow, winding streets of the old medina, and browse the souks for traditional Moroccan trinkets and treasures. The city has become a big hit with backpackers in recent years thanks to its artsy bohemian scene, but it's still managed to maintain a healthy balance between ease and authenticity. To top it off, Chefchaouen's close proximity to the Rif mountains also gives you access to beautiful hiking trails, whenever you need them.



Relax by the beach

Boasting 2,500km of coastline, Morocco offers its fair share of blissful beaches too, but the most popular are found in the resort of Agadir in the south. This bustling city is framed by a beautiful stretch of sand, and is also a popular spot for golfers.

Known as the 'Wind City of Africa', Essaouira is another popular choice, particularly amongst windsurfers and kitesurfers looking to make the most of the port city's gusty coastal winds. While the sands here are pleasant, Essaouira is more than just a beach resort. Despite a rise in tourism, the city's culture and character have remained intact. Navigate the medina, admire the art galleries and watch the locals working on the electric-blue fishing boats that line the waterfront.

Trek the Atlas Mountains

Hiking a portion of North Africa's highest mountain range is an experience not to be missed. The High Atlas runs diagonally across Morocco for almost 1,000km, spanning arid desert landscapes, snow-capped peaks and lush green valleys. The range is also home to Morocco's nomadic Berber population, who have an indigenous history dating back to at least 10,000 BC.

With an elevation of 4,167m, Toubkal in southwestern Morocco is the range's highest peak and is well worth the three-day climb for the views alone. If you fancy something a little easier, don't fear – there are scenic trails to suit every fitness level. The best time to visit is from spring through to autumn, although some may find it too hot to comfortably tackle the long-distance routes.

