

Atlantic Coast

شاطئ الأطلسي



It was once literally the end of the earth: those living around the ancient Mediterranean believed there was no land beyond Morocco's Atlantic Coast. Now it's one of Morocco's most prosperous regions, home to the nation's capital, to its major city and some of its finest sights.

Miles of glorious sands peppered with small fishing villages, historic ports and fortified towns weave along Morocco's blustery coast. Throughout history, control of this coast was imperative for both invading forces and local tribes hoping to expand their empires. The Phoenicians, Romans, Portuguese, Spanish and French all fought to control the region and left a legacy in the beautiful walled towns, wide boulevards and relaxed attitude of this part of Morocco.

The coast has its beauty and its eyesores. A large chunk of Morocco's population lives in this area and the modern cities are far more cosmopolitan than those of the interior – their art-deco and neo-Moorish architecture, stylish cafés and liberal attitudes a far cry from traditional Morocco, but increasingly valued by locals and visitors.

Beyond these two cities lie Assilah and other fortified towns, and around these are several reserves that showcase the coast's rich birdlife. But the developers are arriving with their plans for mega-resorts, golf courses and huge marinas, hoping in the process to transform a region that, for many, already has more than enough attractions.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Dress to the nines and join the in-crowd at the hip Blvd de la Corniche in **Casablanca** (p114)
- Revel in the whitewashed colonial 1920s architecture in the spotless streets of **Rabat** (p120)
- Wander the ramparts, gorge on fresh fish or just sit back and soak up the atmosphere in laid-back **Essaouira** (p153)
- Drive along the coastal road from **El-Jadida** (p144) to **Essaouira** (p153), where the fields go down to the wild shores of the Atlantic
- Gorge on oysters or a fresh seafood platter and catch a wave at the idyllic, crescent-shaped bay of **Oualidia** (p149)
- Enjoy the quiet pace and authenticity of the old medina in **Azemmour** (p148), between the sea and the Oum ar-Rabia river
- See a cloud of pink flamingos fluttering like huge butterflies in the sunset while boating on the waters of the **Merdja Zerga National Park** (p133)





HISTORY

The French called it *Le Maroc Utile* (useful Morocco), and throughout the country's history, this stretch of the Atlantic Coast has remained crucial to its prosperity. From the 10th to 6th century BC, seafaring Phoenicians found it useful to run trading posts – including Lixs (Lixus), Essaouira

and Chellah – along the coast. Some of these settlements went on to become the western-most outposts of the Roman Empire.

The Portuguese established several trading posts from Assilah to Agadir in the late 15th and early 16th centuries. A period of great prosperity followed, as the spoils from the trans-African caravan routes were

shipped from Moroccan ports. With increasingly precious bounty on board, piracy soon became a lucrative trade and, by the 18th century, Barbary Corsairs controlled much of the coast. These pirates terrorised the region and raided as far afield as Cornwall in England, looking for Europeans they could sell into slavery or hold for ransom. Over a million people disappeared this way.

The end of the golden era for Morocco's Atlantic Coast came in the late 18th century, when the great European navies tried to bring the region under control while their merchants opened safer trade routes beyond the Mediterranean and Atlantic ports.

Today the Atlantic Coast is once again *Le Maroc Utile*. The political capital Rabat, and the economic hub Casablanca, are both located along the coast, and a large part of the country's production is concentrated here. Shipping is of major importance again, and thanks to the huge industrial ports at Agadir and Safi and the thriving resorts up and down the coast, the region is the most prosperous in the country. Picturesque smaller towns along the coast, which already attract foreign tourists, are set for a boom as new marinas and resorts open.

CLIMATE

The climate, moderated by the ocean, is pleasant year-round. Winters are mild and moist, with average temperatures of 10°C to 12°C. Spring is slightly warmer and, although it rains frequently, wet weather is generally blown out to sea within a day. Summer sees highs of 25°C to 27°C with ocean breezes, making the coast a welcome respite from the stifling heat of the interior.

Throughout the year the Atlantic waters are chilly. Beaches are crowded with Moroccan tourists in July and August only.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Casablanca and Rabat are transport hubs for the region. Both are on the national train line with direct links to Tangier, Oujda, Fez, Meknès and Marrakesh. Both also have international airports, though Casablanca has a far greater number of international flights.

CASABLANCA (DAR AL-BAÏDA) الدار البيضاء

pop 3.8 million

Many travellers stay in Casablanca just long enough to change planes or catch a train, but the sprawling metropolis deserves more time. It may not be as exotic as other Moroccan cities, but it is the country's economical and cultural capital, and it represents Morocco on the move: Casablanca is where the money is being made, where the industry is, where art galleries show the best contemporary art and where fashion designers have a window on the world. The old pirate lair is looking towards the future, showing off its wealth and achievements.

The city saw a rapid expansion during the early days of the French Protectorate, and still attracts droves of the rural poor dreaming of a better lifestyle. Many have made it good and proudly flaunt their newfound wealth, but many others languish in the grimy shanty towns on the city's edge.

Casablançais are cosmopolitan, and more open to Western ways than other places in Morocco. This is reflected in their dress, and in the way men and women hang out together in restaurants, bars, beaches and hip clubs. But Europe is not the only inspiration. More and more young Casablançais are realising that they come from a country with a fascinating history.

Casablanca is full of contradictions. It is home to suffocating traffic jams, simmering social problems and huge shanty towns as well as wide boulevards, well-kept public parks, fountains and striking colonial architecture.

The bleak facades of the suburbs stand in sharp contrast to the Hispano-Moorish, art-deco and modernist gems of the city centre, and to Casablanca's modernist landmark, the enormous and incredibly ornate Hassan II Mosque.

HISTORY

The Phoenicians established a small trading post in the now upmarket suburb of Anfa from the 6th century BC onwards. In the 7th century AD, Anfa became a regional capital under the Barghawata, a confederation of Berber tribes. The Almohads

destroyed it in 1188, and 70 years later, the Merenids took over.

In the early 15th century, the port became a safe haven for pirates and racketeers. Anfa pirates became such a serious threat later in the century that the Portuguese sent 50 ships and 10,000 men to subdue them. They left Anfa in a state of ruins. The local tribes however continued to terrorise the trade routes, provoking a second attack by the Portuguese in 1515. Sixty years later the Portuguese arrived to stay, erecting fortifications and renaming the port Casa Branca (White House).

The Portuguese abandoned the colony in 1755 after a devastating earthquake destroyed Lisbon and severely damaged the walls of Casa Branca. Sultan Sidi Mohammed ben Abdallah subsequently resettled and fortified the town, but it never regained its former importance. By 1830 it had few more than 600 inhabitants.

By the mid-1800s Europe was booming and turned to Morocco for increased supplies of grain and wool. The fertile plains around Casablanca were soon supplying European markets, and agents and traders flocked back to the city. Spanish merchants renamed the city Casablanca and by the beginning of the 20th century the French had secured permission to build an artificial harbour.

Increased trade brought prosperity to the region, but the activities and influence of the Europeans also caused resentment. Violence erupted in 1907 when Europeans desecrated a Muslim cemetery. The pro-colonialist French jumped at the chance to send troops to quell the dispute; a French warship and a company of marines soon arrived and bombarded the town. By 1912 it was part of the new French Protectorate.

Under the first French resident-general, Louis Hubert Gonzalve Lyautey, architect Henri Prost redesigned Casablanca as the economic centre of the new protectorate. His wide boulevards and modern urban planning still survive, and mark the city as more European than Moroccan. However, Lyautey underestimated the success of his own plans and the city grew far beyond his elaborate schemes. By the end of the WWII, Casablanca had a population of 700,000 and was surrounded by heaving shanty towns.

Casablanca still has huge disparities of wealth, and the shanty towns (see p105) are easily visible on the train journey in from the airport. New migrants arrive daily and for every one that finds success, others continue to struggle.

ORIENTATION

Casablanca is a sprawling modern city. The medina – the oldest part of town – is tiny and sits in the north of the city close to the port. To the south of the medina is Place des Nations Unies, a large traffic junction that marks the heart of the city.

The city's main streets branch out from here: Ave des Forces Armées Royales (Ave des FAR), Ave Moulay Hassan I, Blvd Mohammed V and Blvd Houphouët Boigny.

Ave Hassan II leads to Place Mohammed V, easily recognised by its grand art-deco administrative buildings. Quartier Gauthier and Maarif, west and southwest of the Parc de la Ligue Arabe, are where most of the action is, with shops, bars and restaurants.

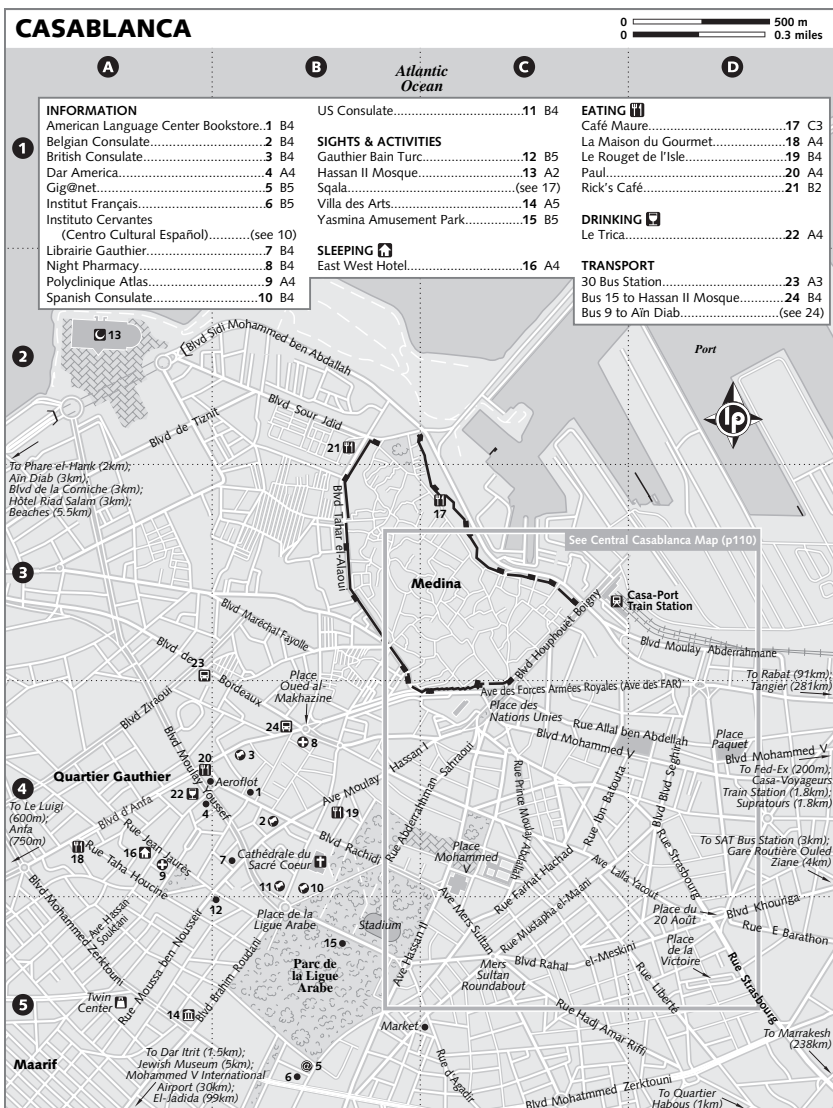
To the southeast is the Quartier Habous (also known as the nouvelle medina) and to the west is Ain Diab, the beachfront suburb home to upmarket hotels and nightclubs.

The CTM bus station and Casa Port train station are in the centre of the city. Casa Voyageurs station is 2km east of the centre

CASABLANCA IN...

24 hours

Start your day with breakfast at **Paul** (p113) in the stunning Zevaco building filled with local yummy mummies. Take a taxi to the **Hassan II Mosque** (p105), then head to **Café Maure** (p112), in the ramparts, for lunch. Follow the **walking tour** (p106), taking in the best of Casa's art-deco heritage, before making your way to the **Quartier Habous** (p104) for shopping and cakes the French-Moroccan way. Treat yourself to stunning views over the ocean by dining at one of the **cliff-top restaurants** (p113) by Phare el-Hank before joining the city's pretty young things in the bars and clubs along **Blvd de la Corniche** (p114).



and the airport is 30km southeast of town. See p128 for more transport information.

Street Names

Casablanca's French street names are slowly being replaced with Moroccan names. Be very specific when asking for directions, as many people (and some local street di-

rectories) have yet to make the transition. You'll often see several different names for one street.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

American Language Center Bookstore (Map p102; ☎ 022 277765; 1 Place de la Fraternité) A good selection

of English-language classics as well as books on Morocco, North Africa and Islam. Just off Blvd Moulay Youssef.

Librairie Gauthier (Map p102; ☎ 022 264426; 12 Rue Moussa ben Nousseir) Books by French and Moroccan writers, as well as road maps.

Cultural Centres

Dar America (Map p102; ☎ 022 221460; <http://casablanca.aca.org.ma>; 10 Place Bel Air; ☎ 8am–5pm Mon–Fri) The cultural centre of the American Language Center and library; bring ID to get in.

Goethe Institut (Map p110; ☎ 022 200445; www.goethe.de/casablanca, in German; 11 Place du 16 Novembre; ☎ 10am–noon & 3–6pm Tue–Sat) Conducts German classes and presents the occasional film screening, cultural event and exhibition.

Institut Français (Map p102; ☎ 022 779870; www.ambafrance-ma.org, in French; 121–123 Blvd Mohammed Zerkouni; ☎ 9am–2.30pm Tue–Sat) Offers a good library, films, lectures, exhibitions and other events.

Instituto Cervantes (Centro Cultural Español; Map p102; ☎ 022 267337; <http://casablanca.cervantes.es>, in Spanish; 31 Rue d'Alger; ☎ 10am–noon & 3–6pm Tue–Sat) Hosts film screenings and cultural events and has a library.

Emergency

Emergency services (☎ 15; ☎ 24hr)

Service d'Aide Médicale Urgente (SAMU; ☎ 022 252525; ☎ 24hr) Private ambulance service.

SOS Médecins (☎ 022 444444, 022 202020; house call Dh350; ☎ 24hr) Private doctors who make house calls.

Internet Access

EuroNet (Map p110; ☎ 022 265921; 51 Rue Tata; per hr Dh10; ☎ 8.30am–11pm)

G@.net (Map p110; ☎ 022 229523; 29 Rue Abdelkader al-Moftaker; per hr Dh8; ☎ 9am–midnight) Very clean and modern, with fast connection.

Gig@net (Map p102; ☎ 022 484810; 140 Blvd Mohammed Zerkouni; per hr Dh10; ☎ 24hr)

LGnet (Map p110; ☎ 022 274613; 81 Blvd Mohammed V; per hr Dh6; ☎ 9am–midnight)

Medical Services

Night Pharmacy (Map p102; cnr Place Oued al-Makhazine & Blvd d'Anfa; ☎ 24hr)

Polyclinique Atlas (Map p102; ☎ 022 274039; 27 Rue Mohammed ben Ali, Quartier Gauthier; ☎ 24hr) Off Rue Jean Jaures.

Money

There are banks – most with ATMS and foreign-exchange offices – on almost every street corner in the centre of Casablanca.

BMCE (Map p110; Hôtel Hyatt Regency, Place des Nations Unis; ☎ 9am–9pm) Good for after-hours and weekend services.

Crédit du Maroc (Map p110; ☎ 022 477255; 48 Blvd Mohammed V) Separate bureau de change that is very central; American Express (Amex) travellers cheques cashed for free.

Voyages Schwartz (Map p110; ☎ 022 376330; schwartz@mbox.azure.net; 112 Rue Prince Moulay Abdallah) Amex representative; does not cash or sell travellers cheques.

Wafa Cash (Map p110; ☎ 022 208080; 15 Rue Indriss Lahrizi; ☎ 8am–8pm Mon–Sat) Open longer hours; has an ATM and cashes travellers cheques.

Post

Central Market post office (Map p110; cnr Blvd Mohammed V & Rue Chaouia; ☎ 8am–4.15pm Mon–Fri)

FedEx (☎ 022 541212; 313 Blvd Mohammed V)

Main post office (Map p110; cnr Blvd de Paris & Ave Hassan II; ☎ 8am–6pm Mon–Fri, 8am–noon Sat)

Medina post office (Map p110; Place Ahmed el-Bidaoui; ☎ 8am–6pm Mon–Fri, 8am–noon Sat) Near the youth hostel.

Tourist Information

Although the staff are polite, tourist offices in Casablanca are of very little practical use. Try www.visitcasablanca.ma for information before you travel or ask the receptionist at your hotel for help.

Office National Marocain du Tourisme (ONMT; Map p110; ☎ 022 279533; 55 Rue Omar Slaoui; ☎ 8.30am–noon & 2.30–6.30pm Mon–Fri)

Syndicat d'Initiative (Map p110; ☎ 022 221524; 98 Blvd Mohammed V; ☎ 8.30am–4.30pm Mon–Fri, 9am–12.30pm Sat)

Travel Agencies

Carlson Wagonlit (Map p110; ☎ 022 203051; www.carlsonwagonlit.com/en/countries/ma; 60–62 Rue Araïbi Jilali) A respected international chain of travel agencies.

Supratours (off Map p102; ☎ 022 248172; www.supratourstravel.com; Casa Voyageurs train station) Organises rail and bus connections.

Voyages Wastels (Map p110; ☎ 022 541010; www.wastels.fr, in French; 26 Rue Léon L'Africain) A good place for cheap intercontinental rail tickets.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Although Casablanca can feel pretty rough around the edges, it's relatively safe for tourists. However, there are huge disparities of wealth – as in any large city, you need to keep your wits about you. Travellers

should take care when walking around the city centre at night and be extra vigilant in and around the old medina. Coming home late from a bar or club, it's best to take a taxi.

SIGHTS

Casablanca is Morocco's commercial hub and locals are far more interested in big international business than in tourism. Tourists are few in town and it's very much a workaday place with remarkably few traditional tourist attractions. Apart from the grand Hassan II Mosque, the city's main appeal is in strolling around its neighbourhoods: the wonderful art-deco architecture of the city centre, the peaceful Parc de la Ligue Arabe, the gentrified market district of the Quartier Habous and the beachfront views of the Corniche. Join the Casablancais in enjoying the cosmopolitan pleasures of their city, go out for dinner, visit an art gallery, shop till you drop in Maarif, try out the funky nightlife or go roller skating outside the Hassan II Mosque.

Downtown Casa

It is often said that Casablanca has no sights apart from the Hassan II Mosque, but the French-built city centre is packed with grand colonial buildings, some of which are being restored. The best way to take it all in is by strolling in the area around the **Marché Central**, or by doing the walking tour (see p106). The run-down Marché Central quarter is slowly being revived, particularly around the pedestrian street of Rue Prince Moulay Abdallah. The **Place Mohammed V** is where the architect Henri Prost really went to town. The grand square is surrounded by public buildings whose designs were later copied in buildings throughout Morocco, including the law courts, the splendid *wilaya*, the Bank al-Maghrib, the post office and the Ministry of Defense building. Many grand boulevards lined with wonderful architecture go off this square. To the south is the **Parc de la Ligue Arabe**, designed in 1918 with a majestic palm tree-lined promenade.

Located in a converted art-deco building near the Parc de la Ligue Arabe, the gorgeous 1930s **Villa des Arts** (Map p102; ☎ 022 295087; 30 Blvd Brahim Roudani; admission Dh10; 🕒 9am-7pm Tue-Sat) holds exhibitions of contemporary Moroccan and international art.

Ancienne Médina

Casablanca's small and dilapidated **medina** (Map p110) gives an idea of just how small the city was before the French embarked on their massive expansion program. Most of the buildings date from the 19th century, so it lacks the medieval character of other medinas.

Enter the medina from the northeast corner of the Place des Nations Unies near the restored **clock tower** (Map p110). The narrow lanes to the east are piled high with cheap shoes, high-sheen underwear, household goods and, reputedly, stolen goods. The rest of the medina remains largely residential. The old city's main Friday mosque is the **Jemaa ash-Chleuh** (Map p110) along Rue Jemaa ash-Chleuh Aرسالane.

On the north side of the medina, facing the port, you'll see the last remains of Casablanca's 18th-century fortifications. Known as the **sqala** (Map p102), the bastion offers panoramic views over the sea.

Maarif

Southwest of the Parc de la Ligue Arabe is the city's business centre and the place to head for international designer brands. At the time of writing, the **Twin Center** (Map p102; cnr Blvd Mohammed Zerktouni & Al-Massira al-Khadra) – marking the high-end of the chic shopping area – was about to open a shopping mall, luxury hotel and office spaces. Smaller boutiques on the side streets and around the covered Maarif market are more atmospheric and good for bargains.

Quartier Habous (Nouvelle Medina)

The Quartier Habous, or nouvelle medina, is Morocco-lite – an idealised, almost Disney version of a traditional medina, with neat rows of streets and shop stalls. Built by the French in the 1930s it was a unique experiment: a medina built to Western standards to accommodate the first rural exodus in the 1920s. As such, it blends Moroccan architecture with French ideals, epitomised by a mosque and a strip of grassy lawn, reminiscent of European village churches.

However sanitised it may feel, if you have some last-minute souvenir shopping to do, Habous is more peaceful than most souqs and has a decent selection of bazaars, craft shops, bakeries and cafés.

The **Royal Palace** (closed to the public) is to the north of the district, while to the south is the old **Mahakma du Pasha** (courts & reception hall; admission free; ☎ 8am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Sat), which has more than 60 rooms decorated with sculpted wooden ceilings, stuccowork, wrought-iron railings and earthenware floors.

The Quartier Habous is located about 1km southeast of town. Take bus 81 from Blvd de Paris, across from the main post office.

Hassan II Mosque

The late King Hassan II wanted to make his mark, and give Casablanca the landmark it so sorely missed. This most ambitious building project started in 1980 to commemorate the king's 60th birthday and was completed in 1993, although work continues on reshaping the boulevards and area around the mosque, also part of the grand plan.

Designed by French architect Michel Pinseau the **mosque** (Map p102) rises above the ocean on a rocky outcrop reclaimed from the sea, echoing the verse from the Quran that states that God's throne was built upon the water. The 210m-high minaret, the tallest building in the country, is topped by a spectacular laser beam that shines towards Mecca. It is the world's third-largest mosque,

accommodating 25,000 worshippers inside, and a further 80,000 in the courtyards and squares around it. Believers can enjoy praying on a centrally heated floor, seeing the Atlantic washing the rocks underneath the glass floor and feel the sunlight through the retractable roof.

Above all, the vast size and elaborate decoration of the prayer hall is most striking. Large enough to house Paris' Notre Dame or Rome's St Peter's, it is blanketed in astonishing woodcarving, *zellij* (tilework) and stucco moulding. A team of over 6000 mastercraftsmen was assembled to work on the mosque, delicately carving intricate patterns and designs in cedar from the Middle Atlas, marble from Agadir and granite from Tafraoute.

The project cost more than half a billion dollars and was paid for largely by public subscription. Most Casablancais are proud of their monument, but some feel this vast sum might have been better spent. There is also a dispute over who is going to pay for the upkeep of the mosque, as the exterior is already showing serious distress under the extreme weather conditions so close to the ocean.

The mosque of Tin Mal in the High Atlas (see p336) and Hassan II Mosque are the only two mosques open to non-Muslims in Morocco. To see the interior you must

THE SHANTY TOWNS

In May 2003, 13 suicide bombers blew themselves up at public places in Casablanca, killing themselves and 32 other people. They belonged to Salafia Jihadia, a radical Islamic group whose founding members trained in Afghanistan. The bombers were all young Moroccan men living in Casablanca's worst slums, less than half an hour from the city centre.

In 2007, 24 Islamists were arrested for plotting another wave of bombings after their leader blew himself up at an internet café. Many came from the same slums.

Most Casablancais openly condemn the killings, and claim their city is the most tolerant in the country. But a quarter – perhaps even a third – of the city's population lives in shanty towns, where living conditions are harsh: makeshift houses are made of cardboard and plastic, there is no running water, sewage system or electricity, no schools, no work and no hope. Many youngsters feel they have nothing to lose.

After the bombings, many charities were set up to improve the conditions, and the government has become more aware of the problems. The Housing Ministry has a plan to abolish all slums in Casablanca by 2012 and several slums have already been destroyed, with residents moved to new housing. Tens of thousands of houses are under construction, but slum residents complain that the new housing is too expensive and too small for extended families. There has been a serious improvement, but many feel it's not enough, and unless the government addresses the underlying problems there will be no improvement in conditions. It is hoped this will happen before anger and frustration boil over into support for violent alternatives.

take a **guided tour** (☎ 022 222563; adult/child/student Dh120/30/60; ☎ 9am, 10am, 11am & 2pm Sat–Thu). Visitors must be ‘decently and respectfully dressed’ and, once inside, will be asked to remove their shoes. Hour-long tours are conducted in French, English, German and Spanish, and take in the prayer hall, ablutions rooms and hammam.

It is possible to walk to the mosque in about 20 minutes from Casa Port train station, but Blvd Moulay Youssef is busy with traffic, there are hardly any pedestrians, and there have been some reports of muggings here. It’s certainly not advisable for lone women. Take a petit taxi from the town centre (around Dh10 on the meter). Bus 15 leaves from Place Oued al-Makhazine (Dh4).

Jewish Museum

Set in a beautiful villa surrounded by lush gardens, this is Casablanca’s only **museum** (off Map p102; ☎ 022 994940; 81 Rue Chasseur Jules Gros, Quartier Oasis; admission Dh20, with guide Dh30; ☎ 10am–6pm Mon–Fri) and the only Jewish museum in the Islamic world. It relates the history of the once-thriving Jewish community and its influence on modern Moroccan society, with more than 1500 historical artefacts including documents, traditional clothing, ceremonial items and a vast collection of photographs. The museum is in the suburb of Oasis, a 15-minute taxi ride (Dh20) from the city centre.

Aïn Diab

This affluent suburb on the Atlantic beachfront, west of the centre, is home to the happening **Bvd de la Corniche**. Lined with beach clubs, upmarket hotels, restaurants, bars and clubs, it is the city’s entertainment hub and *the* place for young, chic professionals to see and be seen.

However, the promenade packed with walkers and joggers is really a potholed pavement. In between the busy beach clubs, the view is spoiled by abandoned pleasure grounds and concrete swimming pools filled with construction rubbish. Nevertheless, the beach remains extremely popular. The easiest way to find space in the sand is to visit one of the beach clubs. Two of the better ones, **Miami Plage** (per day Dh80–150) and **Tahiti** (per day Dh80–150) have beach umbrellas, a pool, restaurant and bar.

Bus 9 goes to Aïn Diab from Place Oued al-Makhazine. A taxi from the centre costs around Dh25 (Dh60 at night).

ACTIVITIES

Hammams

Sparkling clean and decidedly modern, **Hammam Ziani** (Map p110; ☎ 022 319695; 59 Rue Abou Rakrak; Mon–Fri Dh40, Sat & Sun Dh50; ☎ 7am–10pm) is an upmarket hammam offering the traditional steam room and *gommage* (scrub) and massage, as well as a Jacuzzi and gym. Its off Rue Verdin.

You’ll find similar facilities at the ultra-modern **Gauthier Bain Turc** (Map p102; ☎ 061 145926; 25 Rue Jean Jaures; Mon–Fri Dh50, Sat & Sun Dh60; ☎ 7am–10pm), where a scrub costs about Dh20 and a 30-minute massage Dh100.

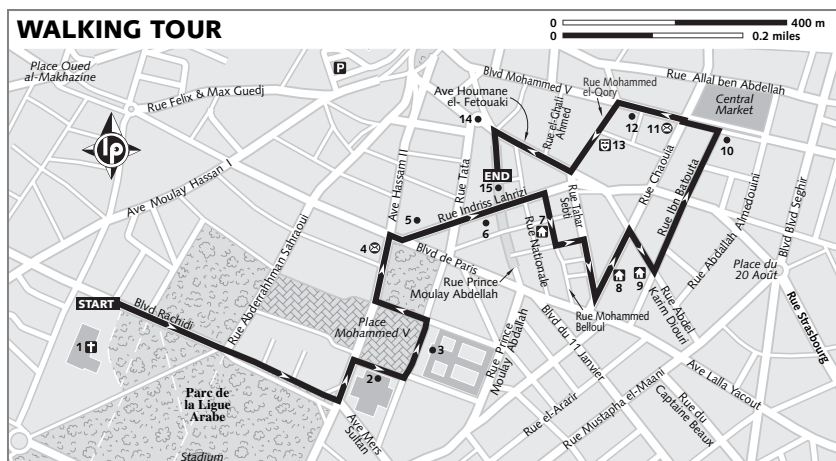
For a traditional hammam, a Japanese bath, a Balinese massage or an ayurvedic treatment head for the trendy **Spa 5 Mondes** (off Map p102; ☎ 022 996608; 18 Rue Ibrahim En-Nakhai, Maarif; ☎ 10am–8pm).

WALKING TOUR

Central Casablanca has a rich architectural heritage, particularly with its Mauresque architecture – a blend of French-colonial design and traditional Moroccan style, popular in the 1930s. Heavily influenced by the art-deco movement, it embraced decorative details such as carved friezes, ornate tilework and wrought-iron balconies. Some gems have been beautifully restored, others remain shamefully neglected. This walking tour takes in the best Mauresque buildings, and some other Casa treasures.

Start on the northwest edge of the Parc de la Ligue Arabe, where you can’t miss the imposing **Cathédrale du Sacré Coeur (1)**, a graceful cathedral designed by Paul Tournon in 1930. It has been used as a school, theatre and cultural centre, and is due to be restored. The rundown interior is only open for special events.

From here, walk two blocks east to Place Mohammed V, which is the grand centrepiece of the French regeneration scheme. The vast square is surrounded by an impressive array of august administrative buildings, most designed by Robert Marrast and Henri Prost. The **wilaya (2)**; old police headquarters), dating from 1930, dominates the south side of the square and is topped by a modernist clock tower.



WALK FACTS

Start Parc de la Ligue Arabe, Blvd Rachidi
End Rue Prince Moulay Abdellah
Distance 3km
Duration 45 minutes

The nearby **palais de justice** (3; law courts) was built in 1925. The huge main door and entrance were inspired by the Persian *iwān*, a vaulted hall that usually opens into the central court of the *medersa* (theological college) of a mosque.

Stroll across the grand square and admire the 1918 **main post office** (4), a wonderful building fronted by arches and stone columns and decorated with bold mosaics. More in the style of traditional Moroccan architecture is the **Banque al-Maghrib** (5), on Blvd de Paris. Fronted with decorative stonework, it was the last building constructed on the square.

From here, walk east on Rue Indriss Lahrizi, where impressive facades line both sides of the street, the best being **La Princièrè Salon de Thé** (6), easily recognised by the huge stone crown on the roofline. Turn right into Rue Mohammed Belloul to see **Hotel Guynemer** (7; p109) with its art-deco panelling, then walk one block east and turn right down Rue Tahar Sebti, which is lined with colonial buildings.

Turn left into Rue Chaouia and look out for **Hotel Transatlantique** (8; p109), which dates

from 1922 and has been beautifully restored. Just around the corner, another restored gem, the **Hotel Volubilis** (9), has a great facade.

Turn left up Rue Ibn Batouta and continue to the corner of Blvd Mohammed V. On your right is the derelict shell of the **Hôtel Lincoln** (10), an art-deco masterpiece built in 1916 and patiently awaiting a long-talked-about restoration.

Turn left into Blvd Mohammed V and look out for an array of wonderful facades along the south side of the street. The Central Market **post office** (11), with its delicate, carved motifs, and the **Le Matin/Maroc Soir** (12) building, with its classic style, are two of the most impressive.

At the end of this block turn left into Rue Mohammed el-Qory to find the **Cinema Rialto** (13; p115), a classic art-deco building with some wonderful touches. Continue south to the junction with Ave Houmane el-Fetouaki and turn right to reach **Place 16 Novembre** (14), which is home to an array of art-deco buildings. Finally, continue to the south along pedestrianised **Rue Prince Moulay Abdellah** (15), where you'll find a selection of interesting facades with decorative doorways and ironwork.

COURSES

Casablanca has a multitude of language schools, almost all of which have French classes. Many, including the Institut Français (p103), only run semester-long courses. Some options for short-term lessons:

Centre International d'Étude de Langues (CIEL; Map p110; ☎ 022 441959; ciel@menara.ma; 4th fl, 8 Blvd Khouribga, Place de la Victoire) Runs courses in a host of languages including classical Arabic.

École Assimil-Formation (Map p110; ☎ 022 312567; 71 Rue Allah ben Abdellah) Offers private tuition in Arabic.

CASABLANCA FOR CHILDREN

Casablanca is a big, grimy city and your best bet when travelling with children is to retreat from the noise and traffic of the city centre. The beaches and beach clubs in Ain Diab (p106) are the places to go. Along with swimming pools, slides and playgrounds, they have various sports courts and countless facilities. Staying at a hotel along the Blvd de la Corniche means you'll probably have your own swimming pool and won't have too far to walk for entertainment.

Back in town, Casa's biggest open space is the **Parc de la Ligue Arabe**. It's a good place for games and walks, and has a choice of small cafés and the **Yasmina amusement park** (Map p102; admission Dh150; ☎ 10am-7pm), with plenty of small-scale rides and fun-fair atmosphere.

TOURS

Both tourist offices (p103) offer a three-hour walking tour of the city (Dh450 for up to three people) that can be customised to suit the client's interests. **Olive Branch Tours** (Map p110; ☎ 022 220354; www.olivebranchtours.com; 35 Rue el-Oraïbi Jilali) offers a 'Grand Tour of Casablanca', which takes in the main squares in the city centre, the medina and Quartier Habous, as well as a stroll along the Corniche.

FESTIVALS

The **L'Boulevard Festival of Casablanca** (www.boulevard.ma) takes places every year in June. It's a three-day urban-music festival with hip-hop, electro, rock, metal and fusion music, with bands from Morocco, France, the USA and the UK.

SLEEPING

Most of Casablanca's hotels are in the centre of town with the exception of the youth hostel, which is in the medina, and the upmarket hotels along the Blvd de la Corniche. Hotels fill up fast during the summer months, particularly in August, so it's a good idea to make reservations in advance.

GRAND DESIGNS

For information on Casablanca's architectural heritage look out for *Casablanca: Colonial Myths and Architectural Ventures* by Jean-Louis Cohen and Monique Eleb, or for francophones, *Casablanca – Portrait d'une ville* by JM Zurfluh.

Budget

Casablanca's budget hotels are pretty basic. The medina hotels are invariably grotty and overpriced and don't offer good value compared with their ville-nouvelle counterparts.

Youth Hostel (Map p110; ☎ 022 220551; frmaj1@menara.com; 6 Place Ahmed el-Bidaoui; dm/d/tr incl breakfast Dh45/120/180; ☎ 8-10am & noon-11pm; ♿) Clustered around a bright central lounge area, the rooms are basic but well kept and quiet, with high ceilings and a lingering smell of damp in winter. There are good hot showers in the morning and a small kitchen for guests use. No IYHF or YHA cards are required. Sheet hire is Dh5.

Hôtel du Palais (Map p110; ☎ 022 276191; 68 Rue Farhat Hachad; s/d Dh80/120, with bathroom Dh140/240) At the lower end of the price range, this basic hotel is a good choice, offering clean, spacious rooms with large windows. Although recently upgraded, it's still fairly spartan and can be noisy. A hot shower costs Dh10.

Hôtel de Foucauld (Map p110; ☎ 022 222666; 52 Rue el-Oraïbi Jilali; s/d Dh80/130, s/d/tr with bathroom Dh130/160/190) Rooms in this simple hotel in the centre of town don't live up to the plasterwork decoration in reception, but they're much bigger than average and have a certain faded charm. Some rooms have en-suite bathrooms. Streetside rooms can be noisy.

Hôtel Mon Rêve (Map p110; ☎ 022 411439; 7 Rue Chaouia; s/d Dh100/130, with bathroom Dh150/180) This charming old-style hotel has been a favourite with budget travellers for years. It is centrally located (off Rue Colbert) but can be quite noisy, and the rooms painted in blue are spartan but clean. Choose a higher room to avoid the noise.

Hôtel Oued-Dahab (Map p110; ☎ 022 223866; oueddahab@yahoo.com; 17 Rue Mohamed Beloul; s/d bathroom Dh120/180, s/d/tr with bathroom Dh150/250/295) Run by the same family as

the Guynemer, this hotel with spacious rooms is cheap and clean and offers rooms with shower or bathroom. Rooms facing inwards are quieter but a bit darker. Very good value.

Hôtel Galia (Map p110; ☎ 022 481694; galia_19@hotmail.fr; 19 Rue Ibn Batouta; s/d/tr Dh150/220/300, with shower Dh170/250/330; 🗺️) Tiled floors, gold tasselled curtains and matching bedspreads adorn the homy, spacious and well-kept rooms at the Galia, a top-notch budget option offering excellent value. Management is friendly and helpful, and it's in a convenient location, although the bar underneath can be quite rowdy at times. There's free internet in the lobby.

Hôtel Astrid (Map p110; ☎ 022 277803; hotelastrid@hotmail.com; 12 Rue 6 Novembre; s/d/tr Dh256/309/405) Tucked away on a quiet street south of the centre, the Astrid offers the most elusive element of Casa's budget hotels – a good night's sleep. There's little traffic noise here and the spacious, well-kept rooms are all en suite, with TV, telephone and frilly decor. There's a friendly café downstairs.

ourpick Hôtel Guynemer (Map p110; ☎ 022 275764; www.guynemerhotel.com; 2 Rue Mohammed Beloul; s/d/tr incl breakfast Dh398/538/676; 🗺️ 📶 wi-fi) The friendly and super-efficient family-run Guynemer, in a gorgeous art-deco building, just goes from strength to strength. The 29 well-appointed and regularly updated rooms are tastefully decked out in cheerful colours. Fresh flowers, plasma TVs, wi-fi access and firm, comfortable beds make them a steal at these rates and the service is way above average: staff will happily run out to get anything you need. There's an airport pick-up service (Dh200) and city tours. The small restaurant serves a range of top-notch Moroccan specialities and has live oud (lute) music every night. There is also an interactive info post in the lobby, a dedicated PC for guest use and a phone to call the USA and Canada free.

The hotel also rents out two contemporary, fully equipped flats on the same street, which are ideal for longer stays and for families.

Hôtel de Paris (Map p110; ☎ 022 274275; fax 022 298069; cnr Rue Ech-Cherif Amziane & Rue Prince Moulay Abdallah; s/d/tr Dh400/450/450) Flowered carpet and flashy textiles in the corridors reveal dubious taste, but the renovated, spacious rooms at this small hotel are clean and relatively quiet. Rooms are decorated with dark

wood and equipped with good mattresses, satellite TV and direct phone line. There's a swish café downstairs on the pedestrian street, and the hotel is in a good central location.

Hôtel Maamoura (Map p110; ☎ 022 452967; www.hotelmaamoura.com; 59 Rue Ibn Batouta; s/d Dh420/550, ste Dh650-750; 🗺️ 📶 🗺️) This newly opened modern hotel offers excellent value for money. The spotless and spacious rooms may lack period detail, but they are very quiet for this central location, tastefully decorated in muted colours and have neat bathrooms. There is a Moroccan and international restaurant, and friendly, helpful staff.

Midrange

Casablanca has a good selection of mid-range accommodation scattered around the city centre. You'll also find some nice alternatives with ocean views and easy access to the beach along Blvd de la Corniche.

Hôtel Transatlantique (Map p110; ☎ 022 294551; www.transatcasa.com; 79 Rue Chaouia; s/d/tr Dh600/750/950; 🗺️ 🗺️) Set in one of Casa's art-deco gems, this 1922 hotel, shaped like a boat, has buckets of neo-Moorish character. The grand scale, decorative plaster, spidery wrought iron and eclectic mix of knick-knacks, pictures and lamps give the Transatlantique a whiff of colonial-era decadence crossed with '70s retro. It has a lovely outdoor seating area and comfortable, but fairly plain, bedrooms. Avoid the 1st floor, as it gets the brunt of noise from the popular and very rowdy piano bar and nightclub. There are several newly decorated suites. Edith Piaf lived in rooms 303, 304 and 315.

Dar Itrit (off Map p102; ☎ 022 360258; www.daritrit.ma; 9 Rue de Restinga; d Dh850) There are only three double rooms in this charming B&B, each decorated in a different Moroccan style – Marrakesh, Berber and Mogador. A delicious breakfast is served in a bright living room or on the terrace, in this slightly out of the centre location.

East-West Hotel (Map p102; ☎ 022 200210; www.eastwest-hotel.com; 10 Ave Hassan Souktani, Quartier Gauthier; s/d Dh400/626; 🗺️) Several readers have recommended this bright and cheerful three-star hotel. All rooms have clean bathrooms with modern fittings, free internet and a safe, and the hotel boasts a good restaurant and a lounge bar. The hotel,



in the residential but upcoming Quartier Gauthier, is very quiet.

Hôtel Bellerive (off Map p102; ☎ 022 797504; www.belleriv.com; 38 Blvd de La Corniche, Ain Diab; s/d/tr/q Dh570/720/950/1200; ♿ ♿) The lovely terrace, pool and garden make up for the dated, standard rooms at this small, family-run hotel. Many rooms have ocean views

though, and it's cheaper than most along this waterfront strip. There's plenty of space and a playground, which makes it a good bet if you're travelling with children.

Hôtel le Littoral (off Map p102; ☎ 022 797373; fax 022 797374; Blvd de l'Océan Atlantique, Ain Diab; s/d Dh699/850; ♿ ♿) This cavernous, well-kept hotel is rather dark, with rooms that

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were once the height of fashion but now look dangerously '80s. However, there are large balconies and wonderful views over the waterfront. The hotel has several restaurants, a discotheque and a private beach with umbrellas.

Hôtel les Saisons (Map p110; ☎ 022 490901; www.hotellessaisonsmaroc.ma; 19 Rue el Oraïbi Jilali; s/d Dh900/1100; ☎ ☎) This small hotel offers extremely comfortable, well-appointed and quiet rooms with all the usual facilities: a safe, minibar, satellite TV and direct dial phone. It's a more personal place than the larger international hotels and offers good value for money. The staff speak English.

Top End

Casablanca has a glut of top-end hotels, with all the major international chains represented in town. Most are along Ave des FAR, with a few others along the Blvd de la Corniche. For something less generic try one of the following:

Hôtel Riad Salam (☎ 022 391313; fax 022 391345; Blvd de la Corniche; r Dh2325; ☎ ☎) Although not as swish as it once was, and with rather erratic service, the Riad Salam is still the top spot along the waterfront. The Moroccan-style, nonsmoking rooms with low couches,

woven rugs and decorative tiling are centred on the hotel's three swimming pools and landscaped terrace. It has a thalassotherapy centre, a health club and tennis courts, and substantial discounts in the off-season. It's located 3km south of Casablanca.

Hôtel Hyatt Regency (Map p110; ☎ 022 431234; www.casablanca.hyatt.com; Place des Nations Unis; r Dh3500; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) The best and the most central of all the five-star hotels, the Hyatt is a favourite meeting place for Casablancais for a meal in one of the many restaurants, or a drink at the bar. The spacious rooms are equipped with modern amenities and decorated in an elegant contemporary style, and have magnificent views of Casablanca, the old medina, the ocean and the Hassan II Mosque. The hotel also has a discotheque and spa.

EATING Restaurants

Casablanca has a great selection of restaurants, and you can eat anything from excellent tajine to French pâté and Thai dumplings. However as elsewhere along the ocean, fresh fish and seafood are the local speciality and it's worth checking out the restaurants at the port or on the way to Ain Diab for a culinary treat.

CENTRAL CASABLANCA

Le Luigi (off Map p102; ☎ 022 390271; cnr Rue de Normandie & Blvd Abou Yalaa al-Ifrani; mains Dh55-90) One of the most popular Italian restaurants, Le Luigi makes for a welcome break from tajine if you've been in Morocco for some time. The decor is nothing special but the pizzas are worth the journey. Book ahead.

Taverne du Dauphin (Map p110; ☎ 022 221200; 115 Blvd Houphouët Boigny; 3-course set menu Dh110, mains Dh70-90; ☎ Mon-Sat) A Casablanca institution, this traditional Provençal restaurant and bar has been serving up *fruits de mer* (seafood) since it opened in 1958. This is an old-fashioned family-run place, and one taste of the succulent grilled fish, fried calamari and *crevettes royales* (king prawns) will leave you smitten.

Sqala Restaurant (Map p102; ☎ 022 260960; Blvd des Almohades; mains Dh70-160; ☎ 8am-10.30pm Tue-Sun, daily in summer) Nestled in the ochre walls of the *sqala*, an 18th-century fortified bastion, this lovely restaurant is a tranquil escape from the city. The café has a rustic interior and a delightful garden surrounded by flower-draped trellises. No alcohol is served, but there's a good selection of teas and fresh juices. It's a lovely spot for a Moroccan breakfast (Dh70) or a selection of salads for lunch (Dh68). Tajines are a speciality (the goat tajine with argan oil being particularly good), but the menu features plenty of fish, as well as a selection of meat brochettes.

our pick Restaurant du Port de Pêche (Map p110; ☎ 022 318561; Le Port de Pêche; mains Dh80-140) This authentic and rustic seafood restaurant in the middle of the fishing harbour is packed to the gills at lunch and dinner as happy diners tuck into fish freshly whipped from the sea and cooked to perfection. The fish and tangy paella are some of the best in town. The decor is very 1970s with red-and-white gingham tablecloths. Service is professional and swift. Book ahead as this place is very popular with Casablançais from all walks of life.

Le Rouget de l'Isle (Map p102; ☎ 022 294740; 16 Rue Rouget de l'Isle; mains Dh110-130; ☎ lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Mon-Sat) Sleek, stylish and charming, renowned for its simple but delicious and light French food, Le Rouget is one of Casa's top eateries. Set in a renovated 1930s villa, it is an elegant place filled with period furniture and contemporary artwork. The impeccable

food is reasonably priced though, and there's a beautiful garden. Book in advance.

Ostréa (Map p110; ☎ 022 441390; Le Port de Pêche; dozen oysters Dh74, mains Dh120-250; ☎ 11am-11pm) Across the road from Restaurant du Port de Pêche is this more upmarket seafood restaurant specialising in Oualidia oysters and fresh lobster.

Rick's Cafe (Map p110; ☎ 022 274207; 248 Blvd Sour Jdid; mains Dh130-160; ☎ noon-3.30pm, 6pm-midnight) 'Here's looking at you kid!' Cashing in on the Hollywood hit Casablanca, this beautiful bar, lounge and restaurant is run by a former American diplomat, with furniture and fittings inspired by the film, and serving a taste of home for the nostalgic masses. Lamb chops, chilli, hamburgers and American breakfasts as well as a few excellent French and Moroccan specialities are all on the menu. There's also an in-house pianist, a Sunday jazz session, wi-fi access and, inevitably, souvenir T-shirts. It's a stunning setting and a good place for late-night drinks. You can watch the film again and again on the 1st floor.

Restaurant al-Mounia (Map p110; ☎ 022 222669; 95 Rue Prince Moulay Abdallah; mains Dh130-170) Eat the best Moroccan food in the centre of Casablanca at this delightful traditional restaurant where you can choose to sit in the Moroccan salon elegantly decorated with *zellij* (tilework) and sculpted wood, or under the pepper tree in the cool, leafy garden. There's a selection of salads worthy of any vegetarian restaurant and an array of exotic delicacies such as pigeon *pastilla* (rich, savoury pie) and sweet tomato tajine.

La Brasserie la Bavaroise (Map p110; ☎ 022 311760; 129 Rue Allah ben Abdallah; mains Dh140-200) Locals and expats like to hang out in this upmarket brasserie behind the Marché Central, partly for the French cuisine, partly to see and be seen. It offers a good selection of fish as well as French classics such as veal, steak and pheasant cooked to perfection. Meat is grilled on a wood fire. It has a pleasant atmosphere and a friendly welcome. Every month the menu features specialities from a different region of France. The same owners also run La Bodega (p114) next door, a great tapas bar.

Thai Gardens (☎ 022 797579; Ave de la Côte d'Émeraude, Anfa; meals Dh250) Slightly out of the centre in the affluent suburb of Anfa, but

worth seeking out for its excellent Thai cuisine, this place is another top-notch option. The vast menu of Thai classics is refreshingly inventive and makes a good choice for vegetarians.

La Maison du Gourmet (Map p102; ☎ 022 484846; Rue Taha Houcine, Maarif; meals Dh400-500; 🍴 lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Mon-Sat) This upmarket gourmet restaurant serves an inventive menu of the finest of French and Moroccan cuisine, run by a couple, he French, she Moroccan, both trained by Paul Bocuse. Specialities include a heavenly *pastilla* with confit of duck and foie gras. The elegant surroundings, excellent service and exceptional food make this the perfect address for a special occasion. Book ahead.

AÏN DIAB

The best of this neighbourhood's restaurants are clustered together on a cliff top overlooking the crashing Atlantic waves near the el-Hank Lighthouse.

La Fibule (☎ 022 360641; Blvd de la Corniche, Phare el-Hank; meals around Dh300) Subtle lighting, warm colours and an elegant decor give La Fibule an inviting atmosphere. The food is a mixture of well-prepared Moroccan and Lebanese, served at low tables overlooking the ocean through large windows.

La Mer (☎ 022 363315; Blvd de la Corniche, Phare el-Hank; meals around Dh300) Right next door to La Fibule, and under the same management, this seafood restaurant is a more refined place with white linen and bone china replacing the ethnic vibe. The menu and service is very French, bordering on stuffy, but the food is divine.

Le Mystic Garden (☎ 022 798877; 33 Blvd de la Corniche, Aïn Diab; meals around Dh350; 🍴 noon-3pm & 7pm-2am) Giant glass walls swathe this sleek, two-storey restaurant-cum-bar in light. Downstairs leads onto a garden; upstairs overlooks the ocean. It's an ultra-cool hang-out for Casa's well-heeled youth but the Mediterranean menu is well worth sampling. Dinner is accompanied by low-key sounds that morph into a full-on disco beat later in the evening, and for once on this strip the beer isn't astronomically priced.

A Ma Bretagne (☎ 022 362112; Sidi Abderrahman, Blvd de la Corniche; meals around Dh500; 🍴 dinner daily) Locally promoted as the best restaurant in Africa, this self-consciously cool establishment is all modern lines and superb food.

Although seafood tops the bill here, you can opt for some other French delicacies, cooked by the *maitre cuisinier* (master chef) André Halbert. It's 5km out of town.

Cafés, Patisseries & Ice-cream Parlours CENTRAL CASABLANCA

Paul (Map p102; ☎ 022 366000; www.paul.ma; cnr Blvd d'Anfa & Blvd Moulay Rachid; 🍴 7am-9pm) The French chain of bakery and patisserie has arrived in Casa, in the gorgeous art-deco Villa Zevaco. There is a constant flow of people here, coming as much for the food and decor as for the pleasure of being seen in this trendy hang-out. Excellent breakfast is served, and there is also a menu of salads, snacks and other Mediterranean delights.

Patisserie Bennis Habous (☎ 022 303025; 2 Rue Fkih el-Gabbas; 🍴 8am-8pm) One of the city's most famous and traditional patisseries, this place in the Quartier Habous is Casa's best spot for traditional Moroccan treats, including some of the best *cornes de gazelle* (gazelle horns, almond paste) pastries in town, as well as made-to-order *pastillas*.

AÏN DIAB

Palais des Glaces (☎ 022 798013; Blvd de la Corniche, Aïn Diab; 🍴 7am-9pm) Famous across the city for its excellent ice cream, this is one of the city's oldest sweet-tooth stops, serving up delicious ice creams and sorbets for 125 years. Set across from the beach in Aïn Diab, it makes a glorious retreat on a fine day.

Hediard (☎ 022 797232; Résidence Jardin d'Anfa, Blvd Lido Route Côtier, Aïn Diab; cakes Dh12-28, meals Dh45-60) Slick, new and popular with the young and beautiful, this café in Aïn Diab serves a range of sumptuous cakes as well as light meals and deli-style sandwiches (Dh30 to Dh50).

Quick Eats

Rue Chaouia, located opposite the Marché Central is the best place for a quick eat, with a line of rotisseries, stalls and restaurants serving roast chicken, brochettes and sandwiches (Dh20 to Dh30). It's open until about 2am.

La Petite Perle (Map p110; ☎ 022 272849; 17-19 Ave Houmane el-Fetouaki; mains Dh25-45; 🍴 11.30am-3pm & 6-11pm) Popular with young professionals and women travelling alone, this spotless, modern café serves up a range of

sandwiches, crêpes, pastas and pizzas as well as a great choice of breakfasts.

Epsom (Map p110; ☎ 022 220746; cnr Rue Tata & Mouftakar; mains Dh22-60) Almost always crowded and spilling customers onto the streetside seating, this friendly café serves a choice of grills and brochettes at bargain prices. It's a relaxed place with a mixed clientele and offers hassle-free eating for women.

Snack Amine (Map p110; ☎ 022 541331; Rue Chaouia; mains Dh25-45; ☎ noon-10pm) Tucked between the chicken rotisseries by the Marché Central, Snack Amine serves up big plates of simple but tasty fried fish, and platters of the freshest seafood.

Self-Catering

If you're planning a picnic on the beach, head for the **Marché Central** (Central Market; Map p110), located between Blvd Mohammed V and Rue Allah ben Abdellah. It's a fascinating place to just stroll and has a great selection of fresh produce and a couple of good delis.

DRINKING

Although there are plenty of classic French-style drinking dens in the centre of town, they are pretty much a male preserve and are usually intimidating for women.

Cafés

Café Alba (Map p110; ☎ 022 227154; 59-61 Rue Indriss Lahrizi; ☎ 8am-1am) High ceilings, swish, modern furniture, subtle lighting and a hint of elegant colonial times mark this café out from the more traditional smoky joints around town. It's hassle-free downtime for women and a great place for watching Casa's up-and-coming.

Sqala Café Maure (Map p102; ☎ 022 260960; Blvd des Almohades; mains Dh60-80; ☎ 11am-1am) Another exception to the men-only rule, this lovely café is set behind the *sqala* in the medina wall. The flower-filled garden is quiet all afternoon and makes a great place for coffee or delicious juices.

Bars

Casablanca's bars can be pretty rough around the edges and generally attract a male-only clientele (plus prostitutes). In general, the bars in the larger hotels are more refined places to drink, especially for women.

La Bodéga (Map p110; ☎ 022 541842; 129 Rue Allah ben Abdellah; ☎ 12.30-3pm & 7pm-midnight) Hip, happening and loved by a mixed-aged group of Casablanca's finest, La Bodega is essentially a tapas bar where the music (everything from Salsa to Arabic pop) is loud and the Rioja (Spanish wine) flows freely. It's a fun place with a lively atmosphere and a packed dance floor after 10pm.

Petit Poucet (Map p110; Blvd Mohammed V; ☎ 9am-10pm) A die-hard relic of 1920s France, this strictly male-only bar was where Saint-Exupéry, the French author and aviator, used to spend time between mail flights across the Sahara. Today, the bar is low-key but is an authentic slice of old-time Casa life.

Le Trica (Map p102; ☎ 022 220706; 5 Rue el-Moutanabi, Quartier Gauthier; ☎ noon-1am, closed Sat lunch & Sun) This bar-lounge, set over two levels with brick walls and 1960s furniture, is the place to feel the beat of the new Morocco. The atmosphere is hot and trendy at night, stirred by the techno beat and a flow of beer and *mojitos* (rum cocktails), but things are a lot calmer at lunch.

ENTERTAINMENT Nightclubs

The beachfront suburb of Aïn Diab is the place for late-night drinking and dancing in Casa. However, hanging out with Casablanca's beautiful people for a night on the town doesn't come cheap. Expect to pay at least Dh100 to get in and as much again for drinks. Heavy-set bouncers guard the doors and practise tough crowd control – if you don't look the part, you won't get in.

The strip of disco joints along the beachfront ranges from Fellini-esque, cabaret-style bar-cum-restaurants such as **Balcon 33** (33 Blvd de la Corniche) to the pastel-coloured pop sensation **Candy Bar** (55 Blvd de la Corniche) and the catch-all **VIP club** (Rue des Dunes). **Le Village** (11 Blvd de la Corniche) has a slightly gay-friendly atmosphere, and the incredibly packed **Armstrong Legend** (41 Blvd de la Corniche) is one of the few places with funky live music.

Other than Aïn Diab, the only real options are clubs at the large international hotels, including **Caesar** (Map p110; Hôtel Sheraton, 100 Ave des FAR) and **Black House** (Map p110; Hôtel Hyatt Regency, Place des Nations Unies). Prostitutes work all of the clubs, men are always expected to pay for drinks and women shouldn't expect hassle-free drinking anywhere. The seedy night-

club at **Hotel Transatlantique** (p109) is good for late night *couleur locale* as the belly dancers and singers provoke the mostly male locals into throwing money at them.

Theatres

Complex Culturel Sidi Belyout (Map p110; 28 Rue Léon L'Africain; ☎ performances 9pm) This 200-seat theatre hosts plays (usually in Arabic) and the occasional music recital or dance performance.

Cinema

Most English-language films are dubbed in French, unless it specifically mentions '*version originale*'.

Megarama (☎ 022 798888; www.megarama.info, in French; Blvd de la Corniche; afternoon/evening shows Dh35/45) The plushest cinema in town, this huge complex in Ain Diab has four comfortable theatres that are usually packed.

Cinéma Lynx (Map p110; ☎ 022 220229; 150 Ave Mers Sultan; screen/balcony/club Dh25/30/50) A good option if you don't want to trek out to Ain Diab, this spacious and comfortable cinema has an excellent sound system.

Cinéma Rialto (Map p110; ☎ 022 262632; Rue Mohammed el-Kouri; screen/balcony/club Dh25/30/50) A classic, cavernous, single-screen art-deco cinema.

SHOPPING

Although not an artisan centre, Casablanca has a good choice of traditional crafts from around Morocco. The most pleasant place to shop is Quartier Habous (p104), south of the centre. Merchants here are pretty laid-back, but the quality of crafts can vary and hard bargaining is the order of the day.

If you'd rather avoid haggling altogether, head for the **Exposition Nationale d'Artisanat** (Map p110; ☎ 022 267064; 3 Ave Hassan II; ☎ 8.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-8pm), where you'll find three floors of fixed-price crafts.

For a good selection of traditional Arab and Berber music try **Disques GAM** (Map p110; ☎ 022 268954; 99 Rue Abderrahman Sehraoui) or **Le Comptoir Marocain de Distribution de Disques** (Map p110; ☎ 022 369153; 26 Ave Lalla Yacout).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Casablanca's **Mohammed V International Airport** (☎ 022 539040; www.onda.ma) is 30km southeast of the city on the Marrakesh road. Regu-

lar flights leave here for most countries in Western Europe, as well as to West Africa, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, the Middle East and North America. For a list of airlines with flights in and out of Casablanca see p480.

Internally, the vast majority of Royal Air Maroc's (RAM) flights go via Casablanca, so you can get to any destination in Morocco directly from the city. Regional Air Lines flies to over a dozen Moroccan destinations, mostly south along the coast.

Bus

The modern **CTM bus station** (Map p110; ☎ 022 541010; www.ctm.ma; 23 Rue Léon L'Africain) is close to the Ave des FAR. It's a pretty efficient place with a café and **left-luggage counter** (per 24hr Dh5; ☎ 6am-11.30pm). There are daily CTM departures to the following places:

Destination	Cost (Dh)	Duration (hrs)	No of daily services
Agadir	190	9	10
El-Jadida	40	1½	every 15 min (6.30am-7pm)
Essaouira	130	7	2 with CTM; hourly with private companies
Fez	100	5	10
Laâyoune	340	24	3
Marrakesh	80	3½	10
Meknès	80	4	10
Rabat	30	1¼	every 30 min
Tangier	135	6	5 with CTM; regularly with private companies
Taza	130	7½	5
Tetouan	130	7	3

There are also overnight buses to Ouarzazate (Dh140, 7½ hours) and Er-Rachidia (Dh155, 14 hours) via Tinerhir, as well as one or two buses daily to Oujda (Dh180, 11 hours), Al-Hoceima (Dh160, 11 hours), Nador (Dh170, 13 hours), Taroudannt (Dh165, 10 hours) and Dakhla (Dh520, 28 hours). CTM also operates international buses to Belgium, France, Germany, Italy and Spain from Casablanca (see p483).

The modern **Gare Routière Ouled Ziane** (☎ 022 444470), 4km southeast of the centre, is the bus station for almost all non-CTM services. The main reason to trek out here is for destinations not covered by CTM,

mainly Ouezzane (Dh60, nine daily) and Chefchaouen (Dh70, two daily). A taxi to the bus station will cost about Dh15, alternatively take bus No 10 or 36 from Blvd Mohammed V near the market.

Also on Route Ouled Ziane, but more than 1km closer to town, is the **SAT bus station** (☎ 022 444470). SAT runs national and international buses of a similar standard to CTM, but fares are slightly cheaper.

Car

Casablanca is well endowed with car-rental agencies, many with offices around Ave des FAR, Blvd Mohammed V and at the airport.

AVIS Casablanca (Map 110; ☎ 022 312424; 19 Ave des FAR); Mohammed V International Airport (☎ 022 539072)

Budget Casablanca (Map 110; ☎ 022 313124; Tours des Habous, Ave des FAR); Mohammed V International Airport (☎ 022 339157)

Hertz Casablanca (Map 110; ☎ 022 484710; 25 Rue el-Oraïbi Jilali); Mohammed V International Airport (☎ 022 539181)

National Casablanca (Map 110; ☎ 022 277141; 12 Rue el-Oraïbi Jilali); Mohammed V International Airport (☎ 022 539716)

President Car (Map 110; ☎ 022 260790, 061 210394; presidentcar@menara.ma; 27 Rue el-Ghali Ahmed) A reliable local agency that has a well-maintained fleet of cars, very competitive rates, and comes much recommended by the local expat community. The Bouayad brothers will do their utmost to help, and can deliver a car to the airport or Marrakesh if requested. It's off Blvd Mohammed V.

Casablanca has parking meters (Dh5, two hours maximum), operating from 8am to noon, and 2pm to 7pm daily, except on Sunday and public holidays. If you don't pay, you may be fined. There is a guarded car park next to the British cemetery (per day/night Dh20) and another just off of Rue Tata (costs Dh5 per hour). Anywhere else a guard will ask for a tip for watching your car; it is common practice to pay Dh5.

Taxi

Grands taxis to Rabat (Dh35) and to Fez (Dh55 to Dh65) leave from Blvd Hassan Seghir, near the CTM bus station. However, the train is more convenient and comfortable.

Train

If your destination is on a train line, it's generally the best way to travel. Casablanca has five train stations, but only two are of interest to travellers.

All long-distance trains as well as trains to Mohammed V International Airport depart from **Casa-Voyageurs train station** (☎ 022 243818), 4km east of the city centre. Catch bus 30 (Dh3.50), which runs along Blvd Mohammed V, or hop in a taxi and pay about Dh10 to get there.

Destinations include Marrakesh (Dh84, three hours, nine daily), Fez (Dh103, 4½ hours, nine daily) via Meknès (Dh86, 3½ hours), Oujda (Dh202, 10 hours, two daily) via Taza (Dh134, seven hours), Tangier (Dh118, 5¼ hours, two daily) and El-Jadida (Dh30, 1½ hours, five daily). For Safi (Dh75.50, five hours, two daily) change at Benguérir.

The **Casa-Port train station** (Map p110; ☎ 022 271837) is a few hundred metres northeast of Place des Nations Unies. Although more convenient, trains from here only run to Rabat (Dh32, one hour, every 30 minutes) and Kenitra (Dh44, 1½ hours, every 30 minutes).

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

The easiest way to get from Mohammed V International Airport to Casablanca is by train (2nd class Dh35, 35 minutes). The trains are comfortable and reliable, and leave every hour from 6.45am to 10.45pm. You can also continue to Rabat (Dh60) or Kenitra (Dh75), though you'll probably have a change of train at Casa-Voyageurs or Ain Sebaa. The trains leave from below the ground floor of the airport-terminal building.

From Casa-Voyageurs train station to the airport, trains go every hour from 5am to 10pm. A few additional trains go from Casa-Port.

A grand taxi between the airport and the city centre costs Dh300, though you may be asked for Dh350 at unsocial hours. Some taxi drivers receive commissions if they bring clients to particular hotels.

Bus

The local bus system is underfunded and very crowded; unless you're travelling alone and on a very limited budget a petit taxi is generally much easier. Buses cost Dh4 and stop at designated bus stops. At the time of research, the city bus system was about to be overhauled by French transport company RATP. The following routes are useful,

but numbers and routes may change in the restructure:

Bus 2 Blvd Mohammed V to Casa-Voyageurs train station.

Bus 4 Along Blvd de Paris and down Ave Lalla Yacout to Nouvelle Medina.

Bus 9 From Blvd d'Anfa to Ain Diab and the beaches.

Bus 10 From Place de la Concorde, along Blvd Mohammed V to Gare Routière Ouled Ziane.

Bus 15 Northbound from Place Oued al-Makhazine to the Hassan II Mosque.

Taxi

Casa's red petits taxis are excellent value and can generally get you to your destination far faster than any bus. You can hail one anywhere, or there's a petit-taxi stand on Ave des FAR. The minimum fare is Dh7, but expect to pay Dh10 in or near the city centre. Most drivers use the meter without question, but if they refuse to, just get out of the cab. Prices rise by 50% after 8pm.

NORTH OF CASABLANCA

RABAT

الرباط

pop 1.7 million

While Rabat, Morocco's political and administrative capital since independence in 1956, has not established itself as a tourist destination, the few visitors who do find a gem of a city. The colonial architecture is stunning, the palm-lined boulevards are well kept and relatively free of traffic, and the atmosphere is as cosmopolitan as its economic big brother down the coast. All in all, life here is pleasant and civilised. Casablançais say that, with all the bureaucrats, Rabat is dull, and they have a point. Yet the city is more laid-back, pleasant and more provincial than Casablanca, and far less grimy and frantic.

The quiet medina has an authentic feel to it, some good shops and fascinating architecture. You'll be blissfully ignored on the streets and souqs, so it's easy to discover the city's monuments and hidden corners at your own pace. The picturesque kasbah, with its narrow alleys, art galleries and magnificent ocean views, is also worth exploring.

Rabat has a long and rich history, and plenty of monuments to show for it from the Phoenician, Roman, Almohad and Merenid times. The power shifted at times between Rabat and Salé, the whitewashed

town across the Bou Regreg river, where time appears to have stood still.

Rabat is also a good place to eat; there are plenty of wonderful restaurants around town. The nightlife is not what it is in Casablanca, but an early afternoon stroll along the main avenues of the happening suburb of Agdal, where local hipsters flaunt their skinny jeans, is entertaining enough. And if city life gets you down, there are beaches further north to escape to.

The mega project of Amwaj – started in 2006 and due for completion by 2010 – aims to link the cities of Rabat and Salé by developing the waterfront on both sides of the river. Thousands of new apartments, offices, shops, theatres, parks and landscaped areas are being built, as well as a new tramway and several bridges.

History

The fertile plains inland from Rabat drew settlers to the area as far back as the 8th century BC. Both the Phoenicians and the Romans set up trading posts in the estuary of the Oued Bou Regreg river in Sala, today's Chellah. The Roman settlement, Sala Colonia, lasted long after the empire's fall and eventually became the seat of an independent Berber kingdom. The Zenata Berbers built a *ribat*, a fortress-monastery after which the city takes its name, on the present site of Rabat's kasbah. As the new town of Salé (created in the 10th century) began to prosper on the north bank of the river, the city of Chellah fell into decline.

The arrival of the Almohads in the 12th century saw the *ribat* rebuilt as a kasbah, a strategic jumping-off point for campaigns in Spain, where the dynasty successfully brought Andalusia back under Muslim rule. Under Yacoub al-Mansour (the Victorious), Rabat enjoyed a brief heyday as an imperial capital, Ribat al-Fatah (Victory Fortress). Al-Mansour had extensive walls built, added the enormous Bab Oudaïa to the kasbah and began work on the Hassan Mosque, intended to be the greatest mosque in all of the Islamic West, if not in all of the Islamic world.

Al-Mansour's death in 1199 brought an end to these grandiose schemes, leaving the great Hassan Mosque incomplete. The city soon lost all significance and it wasn't until the 17th century that Rabat's fortunes began to change.

INFORMATION		Chellah.....	16 D5	EATING 🍴	
Algerian Embassy.....	1 D4	Galérie d'Art Nouïga.....	17 A1	Borj Eddar.....	28 B2
American Bookshop.....	2 C4	Institute for Language & Communication Studies.....	18 B6	Galapagos Café.....	29 A6
Belgian Embassy.....	3 D4	Kasbah des Oudaïas.....	19 A2	L'Entrecôte.....	30 A6
British Embassy.....	4 D3	Le Tour Hassan.....	(see 20)	Les Casseroles en Folie.....	31 B6
Canadian Embassy.....	5 B6	Mausoleum of Mohammed V.....	20 D3	Paul.....	32 B6
DHL.....	6 A6	Mosque el-Atiqa.....	21 A1	Restaurant de la Plage.....	(see 28)
Dutch Embassy.....	7 D4	Musée des Oudaïa.....	22 A2	Restaurant Dinarjat.....	33 B2
French Consulate.....	8 B4	Oudayas Surf Club.....	23 B2		
French Embassy.....	9 B5	Sala Colonia.....	(see 16)	DRINKING ☕	
Italian Embassy.....	10 D3	Surf Club Monde de la Glisse.....	24 B2	Café Maure.....	34 A2
Spanish Consulate.....	11 C4			ENTERTAINMENT 🎪	
Tunisian Embassy.....	12 D4			5th Avenue.....	35 A5
US Embassy.....	13 D4				
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		SLEEPING 🛏		SHOPPING	
Carpet Souq.....	14 C2	Dar Al Batoul.....	25 B2	Ensemble Artisanal.....	36 C2
Center for Cross-Cultural Learning.....	15 B2	Riad Dar Baraka.....	26 A1		
		Riad Kasbah.....	27 A1		

As Muslim refugees arrived from Christian Spain, so did a band of Christian renegades, Moorish pirates, freebooters and multi-national adventurers. Rabat and Salé became safe havens for corsairs – merciless pirates whom English chroniclers called the Sallee Rovers. At one point they even created their own pirate state, the Republic of Bou Regreg. These corsairs roved as far as the coast of the USA seeking Spanish gold, and to Cornwall in southern England to capture Christian slave labour. The first Alawite sultans attempted to curtail their looting sprees, but no sultan ever really exercised control over them. Corsairs continued attacking European shipping until well into the 19th century.

Meanwhile, Sultan Mohammed ben Abdallah briefly made Rabat his capital at the end of the 18th century, but the city soon fell back into obscurity. In 1912 France strategically abandoned the hornet's nest of political intrigue and unrest in the traditional capitals of Fez and Marrakesh and instead shifted power to coastal Rabat, where supply and defence were more easily achieved. Since then, the city has remained the seat of government and official home of the king.

Orientation

Ave Hassan II divides the medina from the ville nouvelle and follows the line of the medina walls to the Oued Bou Regreg. The river separates the cities of Rabat and Salé.

The city's main thoroughfare – the wide, palm-lined Ave Mohammed V – is where you'll find many hotels and the main administrative buildings. Most embassies cluster around Place Abraham Lincoln and Ave de

Fès east of the centre; see p462 for addresses. Rabat Ville train station lies towards the southern end of Ave Mohammed V. Many restaurants and boutiques are in the suburb of Agdal, 3km southwest of the city centre.

MAPS

Rabat is one of the few places in Morocco where you can get a range of topographical Moroccan maps and town plans. The **Division de Cartographie** (off Map p118; ☎ 037 708935; www.acfcc.gov.ma, in French; cnr Ave Moulay Youssef & Ave Moulay Hassan I; 🕒 9am-3.30pm Mon-Fri) sells topography maps, but staff can be sensitive about selling some maps; see p417. Take your passport. Most maps need to be ordered and can be picked up 48 hours later.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

American Bookshop (Map p118; cnr Rues Moulay Abdelhafid & Boujaad) A good range of new titles, and a good selection of books on Morocco.

Aux Belles Images (Map p122; ☎ 037 724495; 281 Ave Mohammed V; 🕒 9am-noon & 3-8pm Mon-Sat) Good picture books of Morocco.

English Bookshop (Map p122; ☎ 037 706593; 7 Rue al-Yamama) New titles and second-hand English-language novels.

Librairie Kalila Wa Dimma (Map p122; ☎ 037 723106; 344 Ave Mohammed V) Carries a decent collection of trekking and travel guides (in French) to Morocco.

CULTURAL CENTRES

British Council (Map p122; ☎ 037 760836; www.britishcouncil.org.ma; 36 Rue de Tanger; 🕒 8.30am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, to 5.30pm Sat) Offers a large library (with English papers) as well as a program of lectures and exhibitions.

Goethe Institut (Map p122; ☎ 037 736544; www.goethe.de/rabat, in German; 7 Rue Sana'a; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Fri) Features a library, art and photography exhibitions and the cool Café Weimar (p127).

Institut Français (Map p122; ☎ 037 701122; www.ambafrance-ma.org; 1 Abdou Inane; ☎ 10am-6.30pm Tue-Sat, noon-6.30pm Thu) Films, exhibitions and cultural events as well as a fun restaurant, La Veranda (p126).

EMERGENCY

SAMU (☎ 037 737373) Private ambulance service.

SOS Médecins (☎ 037 202020; house call Dh250; ☎ 24hr) Doctors on call.

INTERNET ACCESS

Internet (Map p122; ☎ 037 346903; Rue Tantan; per hr Dh7; ☎ 9am-7.30pm) Next to La Mamma.

Librairie Livre Service (Map p122; ☎ 037 724495; 46 Ave Allal ben Abdallah; per hr Dh7; ☎ 9am-noon & 3-8pm Mon-Sat)

MEDICAL SERVICES

Town pharmacies open nights and weekends on a rotational basis; check the rota posted in French and Arabic in all pharmacy windows.

Hôpital Ibn Sina/Avicenna (off Map p118; ☎ 037 672871, emergencies 037 674450; Place Ibn Sina, Agdal)

Night Pharmacy (Map p122; Rue Moulay Rachid; ☎ 9.30pm-7.30am)

MONEY

Numerous banks (with ATMs) are concentrated along Ave Mohammed V and the parallel Ave Allal ben Abdallah, including Banque Populaire.

BMCE (Map p122; Ave Mohammed V; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri)

POST

DHL (Map p118; ☎ 037 779934; Ave de France, Agdal)

Main post office (Map p122; cnr Rue Soékarno & Ave Mohammed V; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Office National Marocain du Tourisme (ONMT; off Map p118; ☎ 037 674013; visitmorocco@onmt.org.ma; cnr Rue Oued el-Makhazine & Rue Zalaka, Agdal; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 3-6.30pm Mon-Fri) Smiles and vacant faces await at this bureaucratic office. To get here, take bus 3 from the train station or take a taxi.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

CAP Tours (Map p122; ☎ 037 733571; www.captours.ma; 7 Rue Damas) A good place for cheap flights to African destinations; also makes ferry reservations.

Carlson Wagonlit (Map p122; ☎ 037 709625; www.carlsonwagonlit.com; 1 Ave Moulay Abdallah)

Sights

MEDINA

Rabat's walled medina (Map p122), all there was of the city when the French arrived in the early 20th century, is a rich mixture of spices, carpets, crafts, cheap shoes and bootlegged DVDs. Built on an orderly grid in the 17th century, it may lack the more intriguing atmosphere of the older medinas of the interior, but it's a great place to roam, with no aggressive selling.

The main market street is Rue Souika, lined with food and spice shops at the western end, then textiles and silverware as you head east. The **Souq as-Sebbat** (Jewellery Souq; Map p122) specialises in gaudy gold and begins roughly at Rue Bab Chellah. The **Grande Mosquée**, a 14th-century Merenid original that has been rebuilt in the intervening years, is just down this road to the right.

If you continue past the Rue des Consuls (so called because diplomats lived here until 1912), you'll come to the *mellah* (Jewish quarter) with an interesting **flea market** (Map p122) going down to Bab el-Bahr and the river. Turning north along Rue des Consuls is one of the more interesting areas of the medina, with craft shops and some of the grand diplomatic residencies. After the **carpet souq** (Map p118) the street ends in an open area lined with craft shops, which was once the setting for the slave auctions in the days of the Sallee Rovers. From here you can make your way up the hill to the kasbah.

KASBAH DES OUDAIAS

The **kasbah** (Map p118) occupies the oldest part of the city, the site of the original *ribat*, and commands magnificent views over the river and ocean from its cliff-top perch. Predominately residential, with tranquil alleys and whitewashed houses mostly built by Muslim refugees from Spain, this is a picturesque place to wander. Many foreigners are buying up the houses here, and it's easy to see the appeal. Some 'guides' offer their services but there is no need. Ignore anyone who says that the kasbah is 'forbidden' or closed.

The 12th-century Almohad **Bab Oudaia**, the most dramatic kasbah gate, is elabo-

rately decorated with a series of carved arches. Inside the gateway, the main street, Rue Jamaa, runs straight through the kasbah. About 200m ahead on the left is the **Mosque el-Atiqa**, the oldest mosque in Rabat, built in the 12th century and restored in the 18th century. You'll also find a number of low-key tourist shops and a couple of art galleries, such as the **Galerie d'Art Nouiga** (Map p118), along this street.

At the end of the street is the **Plateforme du Sémaphore** (Signal Platform) with sweeping views over the estuary and across to Salé. The elevated position provided an excellent defence against seagoing attackers negotiating the sandbanks below.

Returning from the Plateforme, turn left down Rue Bazzo, a narrow winding street that leads down to the popular **Café Maure** (p127) and a side entrance to the formal **Andalusian Gardens** (☀ sunrise-sunset). The gardens, laid out by the French during the colonial period, occupy the palace grounds and make a wonderful shady retreat.

The palace itself is a grand 17th-century affair built by Moulay Ismail. The building now houses the **Musée des Oudaïa** (Map118; ☎ 037 731537; admission Dh10; ☀ 9am-5pm Wed-Mon), the national jewellery museum with a beautifully displayed and fascinating collection of prehistoric, Roman and Islamic jewellery found in the different regions of Morocco.

LE TOUR HASSAN & MAUSOLEUM OF MOHAMMED V

Towering above Oued Bou Regreg, and surrounded by well-tended gardens, is Rabat's most famous landmark, **Le Tour Hassan** (Hassan Tower, Map p118). The Almoahads most ambitious project would have been the second-largest mosque of its time, after Samarra in Iraq, but sultan Yacoub al-Mansour died before it was finished. He intended a 60m-tall minaret, but the tower was abandoned at 44m. The mosque was destroyed by an earthquake in 1755, and today only a forest of shattered pillars testifies to the grandiosity of Al-Mansour's plans. The tower is built to the same design as the Giralda in Seville, and the Koutoubia in Marrakesh (p299).

Near the tower stands the marble **Mausoleum of Mohammed V** (Map p118; admission free; ☀ sunrise-sunset), built in traditional Moroccan style. The present king's father (the late

Hassan II) and grandfather have been laid to rest here. The decoration, despite the patterned *zellij* and carved plaster, gives off an air of tranquillity. Visitors to the mausoleum must be respectfully dressed, and can look down into the tomb from a gallery.

CHELLAH

Abandoned, crumbling and overgrown, the ancient Roman city of **Sala Colonia** (Map p118) and the Merenid necropolis of **Chellah** (Map p118; cnr Ave Yacoub al-Mansour & Blvd Moussa ibn Nassair; admission Dh10; ☀ 9am-5.30pm) is one of Rabat's most evocative sights.

The Phoenicians were the first to settle on the grassy slopes above the river, but the town grew when the Romans took control in about AD 40. The city was abandoned in 1154 in favour of Salé, but in the 14th century the Merenid sultan Abou al-Hassan Ali built a necropolis on top of the Roman site and surrounded it with the towers and defensive wall that stand today.

This rarely visited site, overgrown by fruit trees and wild flowers, is an atmospheric place to roam around. From the main gate, a path heads down through fragrant fig, olive and orange trees to a **viewing platform** that overlooks the ruins of the Roman city. Making out the structures takes a bit of imagination, but the mystery is part of the magic of this place. A path leads through the ruins of the triple-arched entrance known as the Arc de Triomphe, past the Jupiter Temple (to the left) and to the forum (at the end of the main road), while another goes to the octagonal Pool of the Nymph, part of the Roman system of water distribution.

Far easier to discern are the remains of the **Islamic complex**, with its elegant minaret now topped by a stork's nest. An incredible colony of storks has taken over the ruins, lordling over the site from their treetop nests. If you visit in spring, the clacking bills of mating pairs is a wonderful soundtrack to a visit.

Near the ruined minaret is the tomb of Abou al-Hassan Ali and his wife, complete with ornate *zellij* ornamentation. A small *medersa* is nearby, where the remains of pillars, students' cells and scalloped pools – as well as the blocked-off mihrab (prayer niche) – are still discernable.



INFORMATION			
Aux Belles Images.....	1 C4	Hôtel Dorhmi.....	21 B2
Banque Populaire.....(see 21)		Hôtel Majestic.....	22 B3
BMCE (ATM).....	2 B3	Hôtel Royal.....	23 C3
British Council.....	3 D6	Hôtel Splendid.....	24 B3
CAP Tours.....	4 C4	Le Pietri Urban Hotel.....	25 D4
Carlson Wagonlit.....	5 C4	Riad Oudaya.....	26 B2
English Bookshop.....	6 B5	EATING ☞	
French Consulate-General.....	7 C4	Café Weimar.....(see 9)	
German Embassy.....	8 C4	Fruit & Vegetable Market.....	27 B2
Goethe Institut.....	9 B5	L'R du Gout.....	28 D5
Institu Français.....	10 D4	La Dolce Vita.....	29 C4
Internet.....(see 31)		La Koutoubia.....	30 D5
Librairie Kalila Wa Dimma.....	11 B3	La Mamma.....	31 C4
Main Post Office.....	12 B3	La Petit Beur - Dar Tajine.....	32 C4
Night Pharmacy.....	13 C3	La Véranda.....	33 D4
Spanish Embassy.....(see 8)		Le Grand Comptoir.....	34 C3
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES			
Archaeology Museum.....	14 D5	Le Ziryab.....	35 D1
Flea Market.....	15 D1	Pâtisserie Majestic.....	36 C3
Souq as-Sebbat.....	16 C1	Restaurant de la Libération.....	37 B2
SLEEPING ☞			
Hôtel al-Maghrib al-Jadid.....	17 B2	Restaurant el-Bahia.....	38 B2
Hôtel Balima.....	18 C4	Riad Oudaya.....(see 26)	
Hôtel Bélère.....	19 C5	Tagine wa Tanja.....	39 B5
Hotel Central.....	20 C4	Ty Potes.....	40 D4
DRINKING ☞			
		Bar de L'Alsace.....	41 B3
		Cafétéria du 7ème Art.....(see 44)	
		Henry's Bar.....	42 C4
		Hôtel Balima.....(see 18)	
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On leaving the mosque, the path passes the **tombs** of several saints on the far right. To the left, the murky waters of a walled pool (marked '*bassin aux anguilles*') still attract women who believe that feeding boiled eggs to the eels here brings fertility and easy childbirth.

ARCHAEOLOGY MUSEUM

Dusty and forlorn but interesting (even if the labels are only in French), the **Archaeology Museum** (Map p122; ☎ 037 701919; 23 Rue al-Brihi Parent; admission Dh10; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Wed-Mon) gives a good account of Morocco's history. Prehistoric finds include a beautiful neolithic rock carving of a man surrounded by concentric circles. The highlight of the collection is the **Salle des Bronzes**, which displays ceramics, statuary and artefacts from the Roman settlements at Volubilis, Lixus and Chellah. Look out for the beautiful head of Juba II and the unforgiving realism of the bust of Cato the Younger – both found at Volubilis.

Activities

SURFING

King Mohammed VI was a founding member of the **Oudayas Surf Club** (Map p118; ☎ 037 260683; 3 Plage des Oudayas; 90min surfboard/bodyboard lesson Dh150), below the kasbah. Next door is the **Surf Club Monde de la Glisse** (Map p118; ☎ 061

654362; Plage des Oudayas), offering similar services and equipment rental.

Courses

Rabat has many language schools offering year-long courses, but the following offer short-term classes:

Center for Cross-Cultural Learning (CCCL; Map p118;

☎ 037 202365; www.ccd-ma.com; Ave Laalou, 11 Zankat Hassani) Intensive short courses in French and Moroccan Arabic.

Institute for Language & Communication Studies

(Map p118; ☎ 037 675968; www.ilcs.ac.ma; 29 Rue Oukaimeden, Agdal) Offers intensive courses and private tuition in French and Moroccan Arabic.

Festivals & Events

Rabat hosts a number of festivals and events each year, including the popular **Oudayas Jazz Festival** held in the last weekend of May. The **Festival Mawazine** (www.mawazine.ma), also held in May, draws big names from the world-music scene. The biggest drawcard is the **Festival International de Rabat** (www.rabatfilmfestival.org, in French), which attracts hoards of music lovers and film buffs to the capital for two weeks in late June and early July.

Rabat for Children

Hassle-free shopping in the souqs and the impressive kasbah make Rabat a pleasant

place to visit with children. However there are few specific attractions in the city for younger visitors. The best bet is to head out of town to the beach, or the Jardins Exotiques (p132).

Sleeping

Most of Rabat's better accommodation is in the nouvelle medina between Ave Mohammed V and Ave Abderrahman, while the old medina has a host of low-budget dives and a couple of upmarket riads (town houses set around an internal garden). Rabat caters mainly for business travellers and has a disproportionate number of top-end hotels.

BUDGET

Although the medina is full of budget hotels, they're pretty basic and many lack any kind of creature comforts, including showers. The best medina options are listed here, otherwise pay the extra and head for the ville nouvelle.

Hôtel al-Maghrib al-Jadid (Map p122; ☎ 037 732207; 2 Rue Sebbah; s/d Dh70/110, hot shower Dh7.50) Although the rooms at this hotel are fairly small and spartan, they are pristinely clean, and have shuttered windows that let in lots of light. You'll either love or hate the shocking pink walls but it's all part of the rather quirky character of this place.

Hôtel Dorhmi (Map p122; ☎ 037 723898; 313 Ave Mohammed V; s/d Dh90/130, hot shower Dh10) Immaculately kept, very friendly and keenly priced, this family-run hotel is the best of the medina options. The simple rooms are bright and tidy and surround a central courtyard on the 1st floor above the Banque Populaire. Despite being in the hub of things, the Dormhi offers quiet rooms.

Hotel Central (Map p122; ☎ 037 707356; 2 Rue Al-Basra; s/d 90/130, with bathroom Dh120/170, hot shower Dh10) Opposite the imposing Balima and right in the heart of town, the Hotel Central has a good-value range of simple rooms. It's a little past its best, but remains a friendly place handy to everything in town.

Hôtel Splendid (Map p122; ☎ 037 723283; 8 Rue Ghazza; s/d Dh104/130, with bathroom Dh130/190) Slap-bang in the heart of the medina, the spacious, bright rooms with high ceilings, big windows, cheerful colours and simple wooden furniture are set around a pleasant courtyard. Bathrooms are new and rooms

without bathrooms have a hot-water wash-basin.

Hôtel Majestic (Map p122; ☎ 037 722997; www.hotelmajestic.ma; 121 Ave Hassan II; s/d Dh239/279) Another excellent option, though not as palatial as it sounds. This modern place has smallish rooms with sleek, new furniture and fittings – if not a lot of character. Despite the double glazing the rooms can be noisy, so it's best to forego the medina view for a room at the back.

MIDRANGE




Rabat has a limited choice of midrange accommodation, most of it located on or just off Ave Mohammed V.

ourpick Le Piétri Urban Hotel (Map p122; ☎ 037 707820; www.lepietri.com; 4 Rue Tobrouk; s/d/ste Dh600/650/1050; ☎ ☑) The former Hôtel Oudayas was totally renovated and is now a good-value boutique hotel in a quiet street in a central, but more residential, part of town. The 36 spacious bright rooms with wooden floors are comfortable, well equipped and decorated in warm colours in a contemporary style. The hotel has an excellent restaurant with a small garden for elegant alfresco dining. On the menu are contemporary Moroccan and Mediterranean specialities and there is a good wine list.

Hôtel Balima (Map p122; ☎ 037 707755; www.hotel-balima.com; Ave Mohammed V; s/d Dh450/580; ☎ ☑) The grand dame of Rabat hotels is not as grand as she used to be but still offers newly decorated and comfortable en-suite rooms, all immaculately kept and with great views over the city. The hotel has a decent restaurant and nightclub and a glorious shady terrace facing Ave Mohammed V – still the place to meet in Rabat.

Hôtel Royal (Map p122; 1 Rue Jeddah Ammane; s/d Dh400/600) Slightly expensive for what's on offer but in a very central location. The Royal's tastefully renovated rooms are very comfortable, with polished wooden furniture and sparkling clean bathrooms. The rooms on the 4th floor have the best views over the park and city, are quieter and come with a large terrace. The rooms on the lower floors are quite noisy and the staff make a racket cleaning the rooms in the morning. An adequate breakfast is served in the downstairs restaurant by rather surly waiters.

Hôtel Bélère (Map p122; ☎ 037 709689; fax 037 709801; 33 Ave Moulay Youssef; s/d Dh665/864;

  ) This four-star hotel is a step up from the other options in this price range and offers small but extremely comfortable nonsmoking rooms with tasteful (albeit very 1970s) modern decor, now back in fashion. It has a good bar and restaurant and it's handy to the train station.

TOP END

Rabat offers all the usual top international chain hotels, but for something with a little more local flavour the medina options offer ultra-chic style and service.

Riad Kasbah (Map p118; ☎ 037 705247; www.riadoudaya.com; 49 Rue Zirara; s/d incl breakfast Dh880/980) Set in the heart of the kasbah away from the hubbub of the city, this sublimely peaceful guest house is a sister property to the Riad Oudaya. Although it's not quite as luxurious, this beautiful house has three rooms with elegant traditional decor.

ourpick Riad Dar Baraka (Map p118; ☎ 037 730362, 061 783361; www.darbaraka-rabat.com; 26 Rue de la Mosquée; s/d incl breakfast Dh990/1430) Recognisable from the blue door at the end of the main street of the kasbah, this most delightful guest house has superb views over the estuary and Salé. There are just two rooms – one small and one large, both decorated in white and electric blue, and bright and airy – so definitely book ahead. Breakfast is served on a terrace in summer or by the fireplace in winter. This really is, in all its simplicity, the dream home-away-from-home.

Dar Al Batoul (Map p118; ☎ 037 727250, 061 401181; www.riadbatoul.com; 7 Derb Jirari; d/ste incl breakfast Dh1100/1600) This grand 18th-century merchant's house has been transformed into a sumptuous hotel with just eight rooms in traditional Moroccan style. Centred on a graceful columned courtyard, each room is different, with stunning combinations of fabrics, stained glass and intricate tilework.

Riad Oudaya (Map p122; ☎ 037 702392; www.riadoudaya.com; 46 Rue Sidi Fateh; r/ste Dh1350/1650) Tucked away down an alleyway in the medina, this gorgeous guest house is a real hidden gem. The rooms around a spectacular courtyard are tastefully decorated with a blend of Moroccan style and Western comfort. Subtle lighting, open fireplaces, balconies and the gentle gurgling of the fountain in the tiled courtyard below complete the romantic appeal. Meals here are

sublime but need to be ordered in advance (see below).

Eating

Rabat has a wonderful choice of restaurants from cheap and cheerful hole-in-the-walls to upmarket gourmet pads feeding the city's legions of politicians and diplomats.

RESTAURANTS

Medina

Restaurant de la Libération (Map p122; 256 Ave Mohammed V; mains Dh30) Cheap, cheerful and marginally more classy than the string of other eateries along this road (it's got plastic menus and tablecloths), this basic restaurant does a steady line in traditional favourites. Friday is couscous day when giant platters of the stuff are delivered to the eager masses.

Restaurant el-Bahia (Map p122; ☎ 037 734504; Ave Hassan II; mains Dh50; ☎ 6am-midnight, to 10.30pm in winter) Built into the outside of the medina walls and a good spot for people-watching, this laid-back restaurant has the locals lapping up hearty Moroccan fare. Sit on the pavement terrace, in the shaded courtyard or upstairs in the traditional salon.

Le Ziryab (Map p122; ☎ 037 733636; 10 Zankat En-najar; mains Dh90-140) This chic Moroccan restaurant is in a magnificent building just off Rue des Consuls. The blend of old-world character and stylish contemporary design is reflected in the excellent menu of interesting variations on tajine, couscous, *pastilla*, and grilled meat and fish.

Riad Oudaya (Map p122; ☎ 037 702392; 46 Rue Sidi Fateh; lunch/dinner Dh220/330) This lovely restaurant squiggled away behind a wooden door in the depths of the medina is reason enough to come to Rabat. Set in a gorgeous riad, it dishes up gourmet five-course dinners featuring anything from juicy tajines or *pastilla* to stuffed calamari.

ourpick Restaurant Dinarjat (Map p118; ☎ 037 724239; 6 Rue Belgaoui; menu Dh450, bottle wine Dh80) Stylish and the most elegant of medina restaurants, Dinarjat is a favourite with well-heeled locals and visitors alike. It's set in a superb 17th-century Andalusian-style house at the heart of the medina, and has been carefully restored and decorated in a contemporary style but in keeping with tradition. The restaurant is an ode to the Arab-Andalusian art of living with its sumptuous

architecture, refined traditional food and peaceful oud (lute) music. The tajines, couscous and salads are prepared with the freshest ingredients, using little fat, and are surprisingly light. Book in advance.

Ville Nouvelle

ourpick Le Petit Beur – Dar Tajine (Map p122; ☎ 037 731322; 8 Rue Damas; meals Dh66-84; ☹ closed Sun) This modest little place is renowned for its excellent Moroccan food, from succulent tajines and heavenly couscous to one of the best *pastillas* in town. It's a little sombre at lunchtime but livens up at night when the waiters double as musicians and play oud music to accompany your meal. Book ahead or get there early as it fills up quickly.

Tajine wa Tanja (Map p122; ☎ 037 729797; 9 Rue de Baghdad; mains Dh70-90; ☹ closed Sun) Down-to-earth Moroccan dishes are the speciality at this small, friendly restaurant near the train station. Choose from a range of wood-fired grills or tajines prepared to traditional recipes, or make a special outing for the magnificent Friday couscous. It's a fairly quiet spot, and not so intimidating for women travelling alone.

Ty Potes (Map p122; ☎ 037 707965; 11 Rue Ghafsa; set menu Dh70-105; ☹ closed Mon & Tue-Wed dinner) A pleasant and welcoming lunch spot and tea house, serving sweet and savoury crepes, healthy salads and sandwiches. It's popular with well-heeled locals. The atmosphere is more European, with a little garden at the back, and the Sunday brunch is particularly well attended.

La Mamma (Map p122; ☎ 037 707329; 6 Rue Tanta; mains from Dh80) It looks pretty dark from the outside, but this old favourite serves some of the best pizza and pasta in town. The beamed ceilings and candlelit tables add a touch of 1970s romantic atmosphere, and the wood-fired pizzas and grilled meats will leave you planning a return visit.

La Koutoubia (Map p122; ☎ 037 701075; 10 Pierre Parent; mains Dh90-140) Old-fashioned Moroccan restaurant with plenty of traditional *zallij* and colourful painted panels. All the classic Moroccan dishes are on the menu here, including tajines and couscous, but labour-intensive specialities like *pastilla ay pigeon* or *mechoui* (roast lamb) need to be ordered in advance. Good wine list.

La Veranda (Map p122; ☎ 074 841244; Institut Français, 1 Rue Abou Inane; mains Dh90-150; ☹ closed

Sun) Run by the same owner as Le Grand Comptoir, this loft-style restaurant, in a modernist villa with a pleasant garden under majestic palm trees, is already proving the place to be at lunchtime. It serves good contemporary French-Mediterranean bistro food from a changing menu written on a blackboard. The staff is young and trendy. It's just behind the church.

Le Grand Comptoir (Map p122; ☎ 037 201514; www.legrandcomptoir.ma; 279 Ave Mohammed V; mains Dh95-175) Sleek, stylish and oozing the charms of an old-world Parisienne brasserie, this suave restaurant and lounge bar woos customers with its chic surroundings and classic French menu. Candelabras, giant palms and contemporary art adorn the grand salon while a pianist tinkles in the background. Go for the succulent steaks or be brave and try the *andouillette* (tripe sausage) or veal kidneys. A good place to have breakfast or coffee too, and there is wi-fi.

L'ru du Gout (Map p122; ☎ 037 262727; Rue Moulay Abd el-Aziz; mains Dh100-150) This large, new restaurant with a colourful interior – a blend of French bistro and Moroccan flair – is run by young French men. The menu serves traditional French brasserie food such as foie gras, veal kidneys, and steak with a pepper sauce.

Outside the Centre

Borj Eddar (Map p118; ☎ 037 701500; mains from Dh120; ☹ closed Oct-Apr) This restaurant overlooking the sea has a menu of excellent fresh fish and seafood dishes. The next door Restaurant de la Plage has a similar menu and the same views, if the Borj Eddar is full. There's little to choose between them: both have glass-fronted terraces overlooking the ocean.

Les Casseroles en Folie (Map p118; ☎ 037 674247; 4 Ave de l'Atlas, Agdal; mains around Dh130) This elegant French restaurant is popular at lunchtime with bureaucrats from the nearby ministries, but more relaxed in the evening. The food is very French with specialities like *Salade des Casseroles* (a salad with wild mushrooms and duck breast), and steaks with various sauces. Keep some space for the delicious dessert trolley.

L'Entrecôte (Map p118; ☎ 037 671108; 74 Blvd Amir Fal Ould Omar, Agdal; mains around Dh140) The menu and attitude at this upmarket old-

style restaurant in Agdal are very French but the dark woods and rough plaster are more reminiscent of Bavaria than Bordeaux. Steak, fish and game specialities dominate the classic French menu, and to further confuse the ambience there's jazz or traditional Spanish music at night.

CAFES, PATISSERIES & ICE-CREAM PARLOURS

Café Weimar (Map p122; ☎ 063 428101; 7 Rue Sana'a; pizza Dh55) This hip café in the Goethe Institut is where the young and beautiful hang out for cake and coffee or lunch. It also does a simple Mediterranean menu and is a good spot for Sunday brunch. Book ahead, but there are no reservations on Friday and Saturday

Pâtisserie Majestic (Map p122; cnr Rue Jeddah Ammane & Ave Allal ben Abdallah) An excellent and extremely popular patisserie, perfect for breakfast or an afternoon cake and coffee, and right in the centre of town.

Paul (Map p118; ☎ 037 037 672000; 2 Ave al-Oumam al-Muttahida, Agdal; mains from Dh60; ☎ 7.30am-11pm) This French bakery and patisserie is the place to hang out in Rabat, serving the best croissants in town for breakfast, good sandwiches, salads and a light menu throughout the day. Sit in the elegant interior or on the pleasant, if noisy, streetside terrace.

La Dolce Vita (Map p122; ☎ 037 707329; 8 Tanta; cones/tubs Dh7/12; ☎ 7.30am-1am) Delicious homemade Italian gelato next to the Italian La Mamma restaurant, with over 40 flavours.

Galapagos Café (Map p118; ☎ 037 686879; 14 Blvd al-Amir Fal Ould Omar, Agdal; snacks Dh25-45) Slick café-terrace with dark-wood panelling, contemporary furniture and floor-to-ceiling windows. It's popular with young professionals for its ice cream, crêpes, panini and people-watching.

QUICK EATS

The best place for quick, cheap food in Rabat is on Ave Mohammed V just inside the medina gate. Here you'll find a slew of hole-in-the-wall joints dishing out tajines, brochettes, salads and chips for cheap and cheaper. You'll know the best ones by the queue of locals waiting patiently to be served.

Another good spot is around Rue Tanta in the ville nouvelle, where you'll find a selection of fast-food joints serving every-

thing from burgers and brochettes to pizza and panini.

SELF-CATERING

The medina is the best place to go for self-catering supplies. The indoor **fruit and vegetable market** (Map p122; Ave Hassan II) has a fantastic choice of fresh produce, dried fruits and nuts. You should be able to find everything else you need (including booze) at the surrounding stalls or along Rue Souika and near Bab el-Bouiba.

You'll find Western food at the vast **Hypermarché Marjane** (off Map p118; ☎ 7am-7pm) on the road to Salé.

Drinking CAFÉS

Café Maure (Map p128; Kasbah des Oudaïas; ☎ 9am-5.30pm) Sit back, relax and just gaze out over the estuary to Salé from this chilled open-air café spread over several terraces in the Andalusian Gardens. Mint tea is the thing here, accompanied by little almond biscuits delivered on silver trays. It's an easy place to pass time writing postcards, and a relaxed venue for women.

Cafetéria du 7ème Art (Map p122; ☎ 037 733887; Ave Allal ben Abdallah) Set in the shady grounds of a cinema (p128), this popular outdoor café attracts a mixed clientele of students and professionals. It's a relaxed place but the noise of passing traffic makes it less tranquil than Café Maure.

BARS

Most Rabat bars are pretty intimidating for women. The more modern, popular joints are a safer bet.

El Rancho (off Map p118; ☎ 067 330030; 30 Rue Mischliffen, Agdal; ☎ 7pm-1am) Tex-Mex restaurant and bar where Rabat's well-heeled go for a bite and a drink before clubbing. The atmosphere on weekends is electric, when the world-music beat gets turned up a few notches.

Le Puzzle (off Map p118; ☎ 037 670030; 79 Ave ibn Sina, Agdal; beer Dh45; ☎ 7.30pm-1am, closed Sun lunch) A happening bar-restaurant in Agdal, favoured by suburban sophisticates. It has a strange mix of traditional style and modern design but pulls in the punters with half-price beer and daily live gigs (except for Wednesday and Sunday karaoke nights).

Hôtel Balima (Map p122; ☎ 037 707755; Ave Mohammed V; ☎ 8am-11pm) Less self-conscious than the chic town bars and an excellent place to watch Rabat go by, the leafy terrace in front of the Balima is a great place to just see and be seen. It's a relaxed place for women and pleasantly cool on summer nights.

If you're in search of old-time local haunts rather than squeaky-clean trendsetters, try **Henry's Bar** (Map p122; Place des Alaouites) or **Bar de L'Alsace** (Map p122; Ave Mohammed V), both staunch male-only preserves where the smoke is thick and the alcohol neat. These two are open all day but close by about 10pm.

Entertainment

Rabat has a large international community and plenty of young, well-heeled and well-educated locals looking for entertainment so there's usually a good choice of events on offer. Check the French-language newspapers for listings.

NIGHTCLUBS

Rabat's nightlife is a lot more limited – and subdued – than Casablanca's but there's still a fairly good range of clubs to choose from. All the large hotels have their own discos, usually fairly standard fare, and there's a few try-hard theme clubs where you need plenty of booze to numb the decor. Expect to pay about Dh100 to Dh150 to get in and the same for drinks, and dress up or you won't even make it past the door.

Amnesia (Map p122; ☎ 037 701860; 18 Rue de Monastir; admission Mon-Thu Dh100, Fri & Sat Dh150, women free) The hippest club in downtown Rabat, this USA-themed place (complete with a diner-style backroom) buzzes most nights of the week. The music is pretty standard chart pop but the young socialites who come here just lap it up.

5th Avenue (Map p118; ☎ 037 775254; 5 Rue Bin al-Widane, Agdal; cover Dh80; ☎ until 5am Sat & Sun) Another USA-themed bar, this one styled on a Moroccan impression of New York, it plays a better range of music than the others and features everything from hip hop to techno to Middle Eastern.

CINEMA

Most films are dubbed in French, unless marked as '*version originale*'.

Cinéma Renaissance (Map p122; ☎ 037 722168; 360 Ave Mohammed V; orchestra/balcony Dh30/35) This

large cinema complex on the main drag shows mainstream Hollywood flicks.

Cinéma du 7ème Art (Map p122; ☎ 037 733887; Ave Allal ben Abdallah; admission Dh20) A good bet for more local offerings and art-house films, this cinema shows mainly Moroccan, Middle Eastern and European films.

Shopping

Rabat's great shopping secret is its laid-back merchants. There's little pressure to buy, so you can stroll the stalls in relative peace, but there is also less space to bargain. The souqs still have a fair bit of good handicrafts, particularly in and around the Rue des Consuls in the medina and Blvd Tariq al-Marsa towards the kasbah. You'll find everything in this area from jewellery, silks and pottery to *zellij* and carved wooden furniture.

Weaving was one of the most important traditional crafts in Rabat, and the more formal, Islamic style (see p67) is still favoured. On Tuesday and Thursday mornings women descend from the villages to auction their carpets to local salesmen at the carpet souq off Rue des Consuls, a great sight even though tourists are not allowed in on the action.

For fixed prices head for the **Ensemble Artisanal** (Map p118; ☎ 037 730507; Blvd Tariq al-Marsa; ☎ 9am-noon & 2.30-6.30pm), which sells a good selection of crafts. For ceramics, your best bet is to head across to Salé to the Complexe des Potiers (p132).

Getting There & Away

AIR

Tiny Rabat-Salé Airport (☎ 037 808090/89), 10km northeast of town, only has direct flights to Paris with **Royal Air Maroc** (RAM; Map p122; ☎ 037 709766; www.royalairmaroc.com; Ave Mohammed V) and **Air France** (Map p122; ☎ 037 707066; www.airfrance.co.ma; 281 Ave Mohammed V). A grand taxi to the airport will cost about Dh100.

BUS

Rabat has two bus stations – the main **gare routière** (off Map p118; ☎ 037 795816; Place Zerktouni) where most buses depart and arrive, and the less chaotic **CTM station** (☎ 037 281488). Both are inconveniently situated about 3km southwest of the city centre on the road to Casablanca. The main station has a **left-luggage service** (per item per day Dh5; ☎ 6am-11pm). To get to the town centre from either

station, take bus 30 (Dh4) or a petit taxi (Dh20).

Arriving by bus from the north, you may pass through central Rabat, so it's worth asking if you can be dropped off in town. Otherwise, you could save some time by alighting at Salé and taking a local bus (Dh4) or grand taxi (Dh4) into central Rabat.

CTM has buses to the following:

Destination	Cost (Dh)	Duration (hr)	No of daily services
Agadir	190	10	3
Casablanca	35	1½	every hr
El-Jadida	65	3½	3
Er-Rachidia	145	10	1
Essaouira	115	8	3
Fez	68	3½	every hr
Marrakesh	120	5	every 30min
Nador	150	9½	1
Oujda	145	9½	1
Safi	105	5½	3
Tangier	90	4½	5
Taroudannt	192	10	1
Tetouan	88	5	1
Tiznit	198	10½	2

There are also international services to Barcelona (Dh1190), Madrid (Dh735) and Paris (Dh1480).

CAR

Rabat has no shortage of local car-rental agencies – most of which offer cheaper rates than these international agencies:

Avis (Map p122; ☎ 037 769759; 7 Rue Abou Faris al-Marini)

Budget (Map p122; ☎ 037 705789; Rabat Ville train station, Ave Mohammed V)

Europcar (Map p122; ☎ 037 722328; 25 Rue Patrice Lumumba)

Hertz (Map p122; ☎ 037 707366; 467 Ave Mohammed V).

City centre parking restrictions apply from 8am to noon and 2pm to 7pm Monday to Saturday; meters cost Dh3 per hour. There's a convenient car park near the junction of Ave Hassan II and Ave Mohammed V.

TAXI

Grands taxis leave for Casablanca (Dh35) from just outside the intercity bus station. Other grands taxis leave for Fez (Dh59), Meknès (Dh46) and Salé (Dh4) from a lot off Ave Hassan II behind the Hôtel Bou Regreg.

TRAIN

Train is the most convenient way to arrive in Rabat, as **Rabat Ville train station** (Map p122; ☎ 037 736060) is right in the centre of town (not to be confused with Rabat Agdal train station to the west of the city). The station is in use but was under refurbishment at the time of writing, and only the ticket counter, Budget and **Supratours** (Map p122; ☎ 037 208062; 🕒 9am-12.30pm & 3-7pm Mon-Sat) offices are open.

Trains run every 30 minutes from 6am to 10.30pm between Rabat Ville and Casa-Port train stations (Dh36 to Dh46) and Kenitra (Dh15, 30 minutes). Taking the train to Mohammed V Airport (Dh67, one hour and 40 minutes) in Casablanca requires a change at Casa Voyageurs or at Ain Sebaa.

On all long-distance routes there's always one late-night ordinaire train among the rapide services (see p497 for information on train classes). Fares for the 2nd-class rapide service include Fez (Dh76, 3½ hours, eight daily) via Meknès (Dh60, 2½ hours), Oujda (Dh182, 10 hours, three daily) via Taza (Dh113, six hours), Tangier (Dh91, 4½ hours, seven daily) and Marrakesh (Dh112, 4½ hours, eight daily).

Getting Around

BUS

Some useful bus routes (Dh4) are listed below:

Buses 2 & 4 Ave Moulay Hassan to Bab Zaer, for the Chellah.

Bus 3 Rabat Ville train station to Agdal.

Buses 12 & 13 Place Melilla to Salé.

Buses 17 & 30 From near Bab al-Had to Rabat's gare routière via the map office; 17 goes on past the zoo to Temara Beach.

Bus 33 From Bab al-Had to Temara Beach.

TAXI

Rabat's blue petits taxis are plentiful, cheap and quick. A ride around the centre of town will cost about Dh15 to Dh20. There's a petit-taxi rank near the entrance of the medina on Ave Hassan II.

SALÉ

pop 400,000

Still a long way from its lively counterpart and old rival on the other bank of the Oued Bou Regreg, Salé is a quiet and traditional kind of place, where time seems to have stood still. But not for too long, as a massive

سلا

project is underway to bring the city into the 21st century with a new tramway, new bridges and a new development with apartments and shopping malls.

The centre of Salé feels more like a typical Moroccan village with its narrow alleys, old medina houses and beautiful mosques, but beyond it lies a sprawling town with characterless apartment buildings, mostly home to Rabat commuters. People are noticeably more conservative here, and the dress code is a lot tighter.

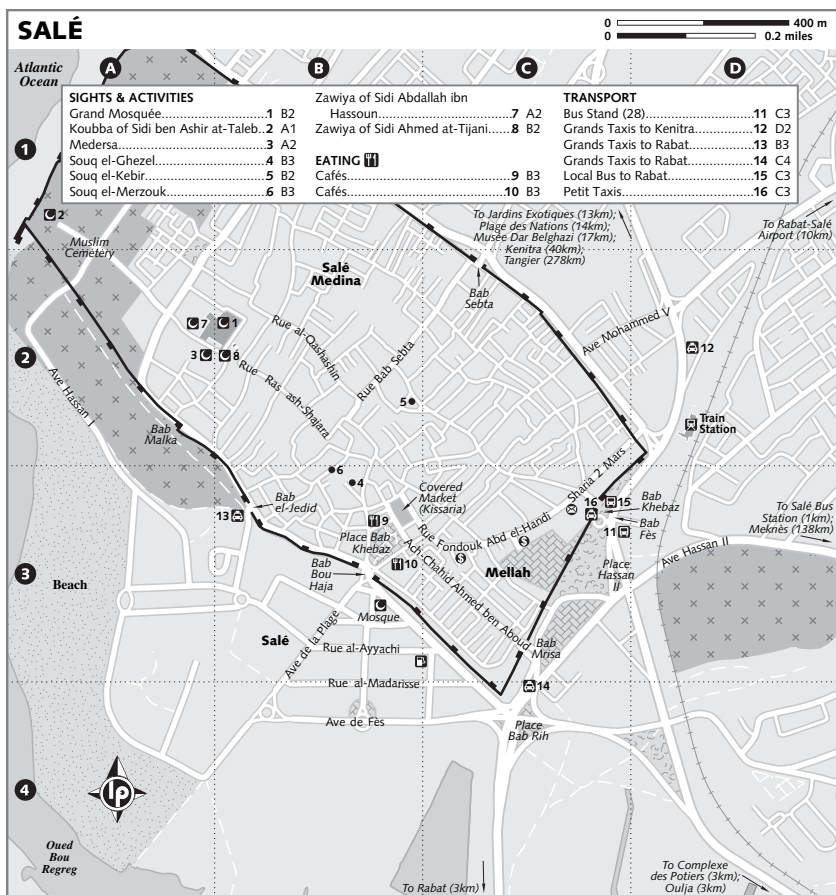
History

People began to settle in Salé in the 10th century and the town grew in importance as inhabitants of the older settlement at Sala

Colonia began to move across the river to the new town. Warring among local tribes was still rampant at this stage and it was the Almohads who took control of the area in the 12th century, establishing neighbouring Rabat as a base for expeditions to Spain.

Spanish freebooters attacked in 1260; in response the Merenids fortified the town, building defensive walls and a canal to Bab Mrisa to allow safe access for shipping. The town began to flourish and established valuable trade links with Venice, Genoa, London and the Netherlands.

As trade thrived so too did piracy, and by the 16th century the twin towns prospered from the activities of the infamous Sallee Rovers pirates (see p117).



By the 19th century the pirates had been brought under control, Rabat had been made capital and Salé sunk into obscurity.

Orientation & Information

Salé is best seen on an afternoon trip from Rabat. The main entrance to the medina is Bab Bou Haja, on the southwestern wall, which opens onto Place Bab Khebaz. From here walk north to the souqs, and find the Grande Mosquée 500m further northwest along Rue Ras ash-Shajara (also known as Rue de la Grande Mosquée). Alternatively walk along the road that runs inside the city walls past Bab Bou Haja and Bab Malka for a more straightforward approach.

There are a few banks along Rue Fondouk Abd el-Handi. To the south Bab Mrisa was once connected to the ocean by canal, allowing ships to float right into the city. It was here that Robinson Crusoe was brought into the town in Daniel Defoe's novel. The Complexe des Potiers (pottery cooperative, p132) is southeast of the medina on the road to Oulja.

Sights

GRANDE MOSQUÉE & MEDERSA

Central to life in pious Salé and one of the oldest religious establishments in the country, the Grand Mosquée and *medersa* are superb examples of Merenid artistry. They were built in 1333 by Almohad Sultan Abu al-Hassan Ali. The mosque is closed to non-Muslims, but the splendid *medersa* (admission Dh10; ☎ 9am-noon & 2.30-6pm) is open as a museum. Similar to those in Fez or Meknès, it takes the form of a small courtyard surrounded by a gallery. The walls are blanketed in intricate decoration from the *zellij* base to the carved stucco and elegant cedar woodwork.

Small student cells surround the gallery on the upper floor, from where you can climb to the flat roof, which has excellent views of Salé and across to Rabat. The guardian who shows you around will expect a small tip.

SHRINES

To the rear of the Grande Mosquée is the **Zawiya of Sidi Abdallah ibn Hassoun**, the patron saint of Salé. This respected Sufi died in 1604 and is revered by Moroccan travellers in much the same way as St Christopher

is revered among Christians. An annual pilgrimage and procession in his honour makes its way through the streets of Salé on the eve of Mouloud (the Prophet's birthday, usually in late spring). On this day, local fishermen dress in elaborate corsair costumes, while others carry decorated wax sculptures and parade through the streets, ending up at the shrine of the *marabout* (saint).

There are two more shrines in Salé: the **Zawiya of Sidi Ahmed at-Tijani**, on the lane between the mosque and *medersa*, and the white **Koubba of Sidi ben Ashir at-Taleb** in the cemetery northwest of the mosque.

SOUQS

From the Grande Mosquée, head back to the souqs via the Rue Ras ash-Shajara, a street lined with the houses built by wealthy merchants. Shaded by trees and unchanged for centuries, the atmospheric **Souq el-Ghezal** (Wool Market), makes an interesting stop. Here, men and women haggle over the price and quality of rough white wool as it hangs from ancient scales suspended from a large tripod.

In the nearby **Souq el-Merzouk**, textiles, basketwork and jewellery are crafted and sold. The least interesting souq for travellers is the **Souq el-Kebir**, featuring second-hand clothing and household items.

Sleeping & Eating

There is little point in staying in Salé as there's a much better choice of accommodation in Rabat. There are plenty of hole-in-the-wall cafés in the souqs and surrounding streets, as well as in the area just south of Place Bab Khebaz.

Getting There & Away

BUS

Salé's main bus station is 1km east of the medina, but buses from Rabat also stop outside Bab Mrissa. From Rabat take bus 12, 13, 14, 16 or 34 (Dh4) from Place al-Mellah just off Ave Hassan II, and get off at Bab Khebaz. This is also the place to take the bus back.

TAXI

The easiest way to get to Salé medina from Rabat is to pick up a taxi close to the Hôtel Bou Regreg, on Ave Hassan II; ask for the

Bab Bou Haja or Bab Mrissa. From Salé there are departures from Bab el-Jedid and Bab Mrisa (Dh4 one way). Note that petits taxis are not permitted to cross into or out of Rabat. Petits taxis are frequent, and there's a taxi stand at Bab Fès. Grands taxis for Kenitra leave from just north of the train station (Dh14).

TRAIN

Trains run to/from Rabat, but buses or grands taxis are probably the simplest options. Trains north to Kenitra run every 30 minutes (Dh15).

AROUND RABAT & SALÉ

Complexe des Potiers

The village of Oulja, 3km southeast of Salé, is home to the **Complexe des Potiers** (Pottery Cooperative; ☒ sunrise-sunset) which produces a huge range of ceramics. The potters work at the back of the complex, bringing in clay from a rich seam in the surrounding hills (you'll see it on the left as you drive in), throwing and turning it on kick wheels, then glazing and firing the finished pieces in enormous kilns. A firing takes 15 hours and reaches 900°C. Fine domestic pottery is fired in gas kilns designed to reduce environmental degradation and air pollution, but more rustic pieces are still fired in kilns fuelled by twigs and leaves from nearby eucalyptus forests.

The centre has a café and some workshops used by basket weavers and blacksmiths. To get here take a petit taxi from Salé (about Dh15) or catch bus 35 or 53 (Dh4) from Bab Khebaz.

Jardins Exotiques

The **Jardins Exotiques** (www.jardinsexotiques.com, in French; adult/child Dh10/5; ☒ 9am-5pm winter, to 7pm summer), created by French horticulturist Marcel François in 1951, was declared a Natural Heritage site in 2003 and reopened in 2005 after several years of restoration. The gardens are divided into the Jardin Nature, plantations that evoke the exotic vegetation the horticulturalist encountered on his many travels; the Jardin Culture, referring more to the philosophy of the garden in different cultures; and the Jardin Didactique, with birdcages, an aquarium and a vivarium. Colour-coded paths lead through overgrown Brazilian rainfor-

est, Polynesian jungle, Japanese pleasure grounds and an Andalusian garden. Jardins Exotiques is managed by the Mohammed VI Foundation for the Protection of the Environment.

The gardens are tranquil on weekend, and are a great place to bring children. It's also a popular spot for courting couples.

The gardens are 13km north of Rabat on the road to Kenitra. Take bus 28 from Ave Moulay Hassan in Rabat, or Bab Fès, the main gate at Salé medina.

Musée Dar Belghazi

The first museum in Morocco, the **Musée Dar Belghazi** (☎ 037 822178; www.museebelghazi.maroc.oriental.com, in French; admission to main collection Dh40, incl private rooms Dh100; ☒ 8.30am-6pm), has a vast collection of traditional Andalusian, Jewish Moroccan and Islamic arts and crafts amassed by the Belghazi family.

Displays include measuring instruments, (one of the first Belghazis was an astrologist at the Qarawiyin court in Fez), 17th-century carpets, exquisitely carved wooden *minbars* (pulpits from a mosque), doors and ceilings dating from the 10th century, intricate gold and silver jewellery, exceptional pottery and embroidery from Fez, and miniature copies of the Quran. The museum has a boutique with souvenirs and a restaurant

The museum is 17km from Salé on the road to Kenitra. Take bus 28 from Ave Moulay Hassan in Rabat or from the main gate of the Salé medina.

Beaches

There are beautiful beaches close to Rabat, such as the wild and sandy **Temara Plage**, 13km southwest of the city, popular with surfers and sunbathers alike. It can be reached on bus 17 from Bab al-Had in Rabat.

The clean, sandy strip of beach at **Plage des Nations**, 17km north of Rabat, is a popular spot with Rabat locals. It gets some serious wave action, good for surfers, but the currents can be dangerous for swimming. Above the beach, the **Hôtel Firdaous** (☎ 037 822131; fax 037 822143; s/d Dh550/670; ☒) is a haven of retro glory with decor largely unchanged since the '70s. Rooms at this resort hotel are comfortable and have ocean views and new bathrooms. Book in advance to have any chance of a room in summer. To get to the

beach, drive north as far as the Musée Dar Belghazi and turn left down a road known as Sidi Bouknadel. Bus 28 from Rabat or Salé will drop you at the turn off, from where it's a 2km walk to the beach.

Further north along the coast, 50km from Rabat, is another strip of beach, **Mehdiya Plage**, lined with holiday homes and beach bars, but here again the currents are dangerous for swimmers. It gets busy with day-trippers in summer but is deserted for the rest of the year. There are regular trains from Rabat to Kenitra, from where you take bus 9 or 15 to Mehdiya. Both of these buses (Dh4) and grands taxis (Dh5) leave from the corner of Rue du Souk el-Baladia and Ave Mohammed Diouri in Kenitra.

Lac de Sidi Bourhaba

Inland from Mehdiya is the beautiful freshwater Lac de Sidi Bourhaba, part of a larger protected wetland reserve. As a refuelling stop for thousands of birds migrating between Europe and sub-Saharan Africa, the lake provides some of the best birdwatching in the country, especially between October and March. It's also a great place for gentle hiking, with well-appointed walking trails in the forested hills around the lake.

More than 200 species of birds have been spotted here and many choose to winter or nest here – among them a number of rare or endangered species. This is one of the last places on earth where you can still see large numbers of marbled ducks, distinguished by the dark patch around their eyes. Other birds to look out for include the beautiful marsh owl (seen most often at dusk), the crested coot, black-shouldered kite and greater flamingo.

The **information centre** (☎ 037 747209, 060 383331; 🕒 noon-4pm Sat & Sun) on the northern side of the lake is useful but has limited opening hours.

To get to the lake follow the signposts from the beach road to Mehdiya Plage, 300m past the Café Restaurant Belle Vue. If you're on foot, the lake is a 3.3km walk from the turn-off.

MOULAY BOUSSELHAM

مولاي بوسلهام

The idyllic fishing village of Moulay Bouselham is a tranquil place, protected by the shrines of two local saints. The village is

slowly expanding, as retired Europeans are starting to buy homes here. There is a sweeping beach, (empty for most of the year), friendly people, good fish restaurants and an impressive, internationally important wildfowl reserve. Except for the summer months, this is a great place to spend a few days, with little more to do than birdwatching, fishing or strolling along the beach. Surfers come here for the crashing waves, but the strong currents are dangerous for swimmers. In summer the pace changes dramatically as the village becomes a low-key resort for Moroccans, and the inhabitants swell from around 1000 to 65,000.

Moulay Bouselham is named after a 10th-century Egyptian saint who is commemorated in one of the *koubbas* (shrines) that line the slope down to the sea, and guards the mouth of the river. Moroccans seeking a cure for psychological problems are locked into the tomb for 24 hours. Across the river is another shrine of Sidi Abd el-Galil, believed to cure sterile women. You'll find everything you need along the one main street, including a bank, post office, pharmacy and a couple of internet cafés (Dh8 per hour), but there is no alcohol in town.

Sights & Activities

MERDJA ZERGA NATIONAL PARK

One of the great pleasures in Moulay Bouselham, even for the most unconvinced of twitchers, is to take a boat out on Merdja Zerga (the Blue Lagoon), preferably with a bird guide who will bring the place to life. The 7300-hectare **Merdja Zerga National Park** (4000hectares of water and the rest marshland) attracts thousands of migrant birds, including wildfowl, waders and flamingos in huge numbers, making it one of Morocco's prime birdwatching habitats. The lagoon is between 50cm and 4m deep depending on the tide. Ninety percent of the water comes from the sea, 10% is sweet water from the Oued Dredr, south of the lagoon.

Although the largest flocks are present in December and January, you'll find herons, flamingos, ibises, spoonbills, plovers and egrets here as late as March or April, and there are about 100 species all year round. The calm lagoon is also a good place to see slender-billed and Audouin's gulls, and the

African marsh owl. Shelducks, teals, and numerous terns are frequently seen, as are marsh harriers and peregrine falcons.

There are six villages around the lake, four of which depend on agriculture, two on fishing – the men fish the lagoon and the ocean while the women gather shellfish.

Most of the fishermen take tourists around the lake as a sideline. Boat trips with the local boatmen, who have had some guide training, are easily arranged if you wander down to the small beach where the boats are moored. Expect to pay about Dh100 per hour for the boat. The only officially recognised (and by far the best) guide is **Hassan Dalil** (☎ 068 434110; guide

half-day Dh200, plus motorboat per hr Dh100), who can also be contacted at the Café Milano (on the main road into town). Call him rather than ask for him as several people have been known to pretend to be him in order to take his business. Otherwise ask the waiters at the Café Milano to call him. Trips can also be arranged through Villanora (see opposite). The boatmen can also arrange fishing trips (Dh100 per hour, including equipment).

Hardcore birdwatchers may also want to explore **Merdja Khaloufa**, an attractive lake about 8km east of Moulay Bouselham, which offers good viewing of a variety of wintering wildfowl.

HASSAN DALIL

How long have you lived in Moulay Bouselham? I was born on the lagoon, and I started taking tourists in my little rowing boat when I was 12, so I could make money to go to school. People then mostly wanted to see flamingos. In 1987 I finished studying physics and chemistry at the University of Kenitra and decided to become a bird guide. In the summer I take people walking around the lagoon, in winter I take them by boat.

How did you get into birds? People came here to watch birds so I learned a lot from them at first. In 1990 there was a very rare bird, the slender-billed curlew, and I became an expert in finding it. This bird became extinct here in 1995, so then I decided to look for the rare marsh owl, now we have 20 pairs. They nest in April so we leave them alone, but May and June are a great time to see them. I used to go to a village on the other side of the lagoon to spot the slender-billed curlew, but after it became extinct I met my wife there. It's a beautiful story, no?

Has it changed a lot recently? There are a lot more people now than when I started, and less birds. We had thousands of birds and now it is more like hundreds – before 1000 flamingos and now maybe 400. The farmers take over the habitats of the bird, and the new highway hasn't helped as you can actually hear the passing trucks. But look up in the sky – a large flock of flamingos. They must be scared of a falcon or maybe they are just following the tide. Aren't they magnificent? They are like butterflies. I never tire of seeing them.

How do you pass your day? I take people out every day in the season. Birdwatchers from all over the world come and see me, and a lot of people who make documentaries. I have met so many nice people, and I learn a lot from them too. My work is very word of mouth. People say it would be good to have a website but I'm on the internet already! On quiet days I fish and sell the catch to campers or local people.

What is your favourite bird? The slender-billed gull. Its chest is pink like a flamingo.

Favourite monument? I love the sight of the two *marabouts*, shrines of holy men. We are very well protected here.

What do you like about this place? I like the peace and quiet, there is place to think here. I love eating fish. Of course I love the birds. I love seeing people returning happy from a trip on the lake, even if they've just had a picnic and saw flamingos.

What is your favourite restaurant? I always go to Café Milano. I keep my bird log there, which is updated by birders from all over the world.

Where do you go to relax? I take a boat out on the lagoon, or go for a walk on the beach. In summer we don't relax though.

What is your favourite word in the local *darija* (Moroccan dialect)? All the names of birds. I know them in Arabic, French and English.

Hassan Dalil is an official bird guide and fisherman

Sleeping & Eating

Villanora (☎ 037 432071, 064 872008; <http://villanora.morocco.iffrance.com>; s/d incl breakfast Dh250/400, with seawiew Dh350/500). This B&B, the holiday home of an English family who fell in love with this quiet corner of Morocco, could be somewhere in Brittany, on top of a high dune with glorious ocean views. It's run by the Anglophile Mohammed, a family friend. There are just a few homy rooms (with shared bathroom) where you can fall asleep to the sound of crashing waves, and breakfast is served on the terrace. It is possible to order dinner in advance – ask for the fish. Villanora is at the far northern end of town, about 2km from the main street and it's essential to book in advance. Mohammed can also organise boat trips on the lake. The same family has just opened Farm Nora (same contact), the only accommodation on the nearby lake Merdja Bargha.

Hôtel Le Lagon (☎ 037 432650; fax 037 432649; d Dh250; 📍) The saving grace of this faded '70s hotel is its stunning location overlooking the lagoon below. The rooms are big, bright and clean, but in dire need of updating. The large terrace makes up for that. The restaurant is mediocre, and the swimming pool and nightclub are only open in July and August.

La Maison des Oiseaux (☎ 037 432543, 061 301067; <http://moulay.bousselham.free.fr>; half board per person Dh350) Another friendly guest house set in a lovely garden with eight simple but beautifully styled traditional rooms. There's a seminar room upstairs for visiting school groups and birding excursions can be arranged for Dh200 to Dh300 for 2½ hours. The guest house is hidden down a maze of sandy lanes to the left as you drive into town. Ask around or call for directions.

The friendly owner of Restaurant l'Océan (see right) can help to arrange a **house rental** (Sep-May Dh300, Jun-Aug Dh600-700), which sleeps up to six people. During the summer months they fill up quickly, so it's best to call and reserve in advance.

There are two popular camp sites here.

Camping Caravanning International (☎ 037 777226; tent/car/caravan Dh10/20/30 plus per adult/child Dh12/6) Slightly run-down but beautifully situated.

Camping Flamants-Loisirs (☎ 037 432539; <http://flamants-loisirs.iffrance.com>, in French; camp site per person Dh15, plus per caravan/car/tent Dh50, bungalows Dh240-330; 📍) A large place that's aging badly.

The road down to the seafront is lined with cafés and restaurants serving platters of grilled fish and tajines (Dh45 to Dh60). One of the best is the small **Restaurant l'Océan** (☎ 078 31 0954, 069 434245), with a terrace and an indoor seating area, serving excellent fish, couscous, tajines and paella.

Getting There & Away

Moulay Bousselham is about 40km due south of Larache. To get here by public transport you'll need to make your way to the little town of Souk el-Arba du Rharb, from where there are frequent grands taxis (Dh17, 45 minutes) and a few buses (Dh12, 45 minutes) to Moulay Bousselham. You can get to Souk el-Arba du Rharb by grand taxi from Kenitra or Larache (Dh30, one hour) and Rabat (Dh40, 1½ hours). Souk el-Arba du Rharb also has a train station with daily trains in either direction. Villanora can arrange a private taxi from Larache to Moulay Bousselham (Dh150, one hour).

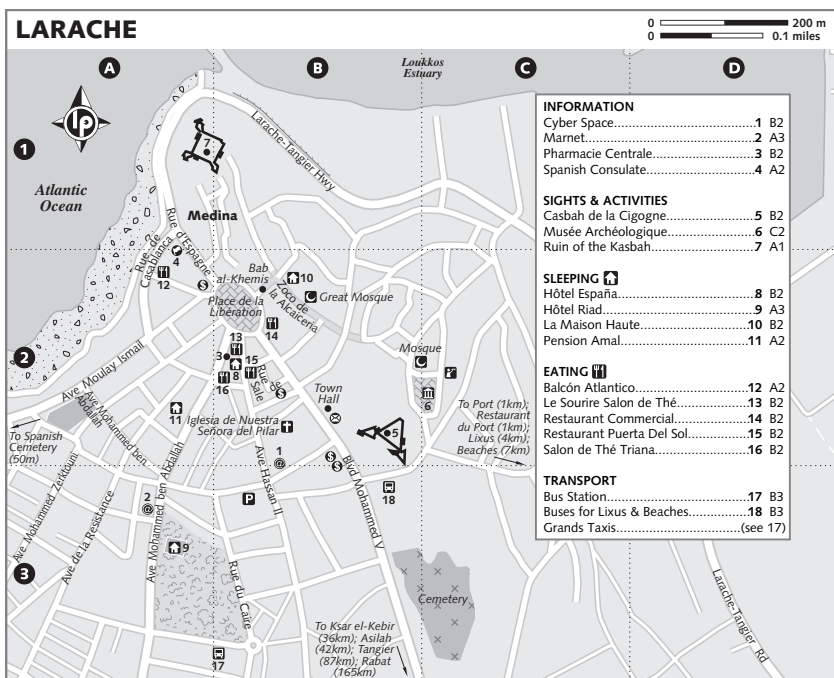
LARACHE

العرائش

Larache, like the other towns on this stretch of coast, is sleepy and laid-back for most of the year, bursting into life in summer when Moroccan tourists come to the beach. The charming town otherwise sees few visitors. The new town has some grand Spanish-era architecture, particularly around the central Place de la Libération (the former Plaza de España), while the tiny crumbling medina was being renovated at the time of writing. North of the river Loukos, on the edge of town, is the main site, the overgrown ruins of ancient Lixus, the legendary site of the Gardens of Hesperides.

Larache was occupied by the Spanish for most of the 17th century. The port activities were limited because of some dangerous sandbars offshore, but the locals made ships for the corsairs further south. It became the main port of the Spanish protectorate in 1911. Today the whitewashed houses with blue doors, the church, the market, the hotels and bars still reveal the strength of the Spanish influence. The town may be as picturesque as Assilah, but it gets far fewer visitors and has none of the hustle.

All Larachians seem to come out for the *paseo* (evening stroll) in the centre of town. The cafés and few restaurants fill up



as the locals drink coffee, play cards and chew over the day's events, and by 10pm the streets are again deserted.

The French writer Jean Genet loved the bay of Larache and although he died in France, he was buried here (see right).

Information

The banks cluster at the northern end of Blvd Mohammed V; most accept cash and travellers cheques, and have ATMs. For internet access try **Cyber Space** (☎ 039 914141; Rue 2 Mars; per hr Dh8; ☎ 24hr) or **Marnet** (☎ 039 916884; Ave Mohammed ben Abdallah; per hr Dh8; ☎ 10am-midnight Sat-Thu, 3pm-midnight Fri).

Sights

MUSÉE ARCHÉOLOGIQUE

Housed in a former Merenid palace, and often closed, the tiny **archaeological museum** (admission Dh10; ☎ 10am-noon & 3.30-5.30pm Tue-Sat) has a limited but interesting collection of artefacts, mostly from the nearby Roman ruins of Lixus (p138). The displays include ceramics and utensils from Phoenician and Roman times with explanations in Ara-

bic and French. Look out for the arms of Charles V above the main door.

OLD TOWN

Perched on a cliff top overlooking the ocean are the ruins of the **kasbah** (Qebibat), a 16th-century fortress built by the Portuguese and now in a state of serious disrepair. Head south from here to the old cobbled **medina**, through **Bab al-Khemis**, a large, unmistakable Hispano-Moorish arch on Place de la Libération. You come immediately into a colonnaded market square, the bustling **Zoco de la Alcaiceria**, which was built by the Spaniards during their first occupation of Larache in the 17th century. South of the square, through the medina, is the **Casbah de la Cigogne** (Fortress of the Storks), a 17th-century fortification built by the Spaniards under Philip III. Unfortunately, the building is not open to visitors.

To the west of town, the old Spanish cemetery is the final resting place of French writer Jean Genet (1910-1986). If the gate is not open, ring the bell on the right and

the caretaker will let you in. A small tip is expected for showing you to the grave.

BEACHES

Larache has a small strip of sand below the town but the best beach is 7km north across the Loukos Estuary. This strip is now being developed into a huge holiday resort, Port Lixus, with golf course, several resort hotels, villas and a luxury marina. To get there take the hourly bus 4 (Dh5, June to August). Out of season, bus 5 will drop you at the turn-off just before Lixus (Dh5), from where it's a 3km walk to the beach. Both buses leave from opposite the Casbah de la Cigogne.

Sleeping

Larache has a small but decent selection of accommodation, most of which is clustered along the streets just south of the Place de la Libération.

Pension Amal (☎ 039 912788; 10 Rue Abdallah ben Yassine; s/d/tr Dh40/80/120) Dirt cheap, immaculately kept and extremely friendly, this little pension has tiled rooms with shared facilities. The mattresses are renewed every year and the beds are very comfortable. A hot shower is Dh6. The owner, who likes to exchange ideas more than make money, is always happy to meet new people. If you like music, he will jump at the chance to get out his guitar for an impromptu performance.

Hôtel España (☎ 039 913195; hotelespana2@yahoo.fr; 6 Ave Hassan II; s/d/tr/ste Dh220/260/280/350; 🚗 📺) A relic of colonial times, this once-grand hotel is now again a great place to stay in town, as the rooms have been redecorated. The decor is still old-style with dark wood furnishings, but the beds are comfortable, the rooms spotless, and the bathrooms have new fittings. Ask for rooms higher up as the noise from the square can be a problem. The service is friendly. There's no breakfast, but the reception will order you breakfast from Café Sourire next door and one of the waiters will bring it up.

Hôtel Riad (☎ 039 912626; Ave Mohammed ben Abdallah; s/d incl breakfast Dh239/314; 📺) This grand old 19th-century mansion, which belonged to the Duchesse de Guise when she was exiled from France, is set in landscaped gardens just south of the centre and offers comfortable rooms and plenty

of child-friendly activities. The hotel has lots of character and at the time of writing there were talks of turning it into a luxury boutique hotel. The hotel has tennis courts, bicycle hire, a pool and its own pizzeria.

La Maison Haute (☎ 065 344888; www.lamaisonhaute.com; 6 Derb ben Thami; r Mar-Jun & Sep-Nov Dh350-450, Jul-Sep & public holidays Dh390-550) The most atmospheric accommodation in Larache, this wonderfully restored Hispano-Moorish house has a choice of six charming rooms with modern bathrooms. Traditional Moroccan decor, bright colours, stained-glass windows and mosaic floors give this place a feeling of simplicity, warmth and tradition, while the roof terrace boasts incredible views of the ocean and market square, and offers a nice corner to read a book or sunbathe.

Eating

Eating out in Larache is cheap and cheerful with plenty of little places around Place de la Libération and the Zoco de la Alcaiceria serving simple but substantial meals. The Spanish influence lingers on in the *churros* (a kind of doughnut) stall on the main square.

Restaurant Commercial (☎ 061 682420; Place de la Libération; mains Dh20; 🕒 noon-9.30pm) The locals' favourite, this basic place on the main square does a roaring trade in simple soup, brochettes and fried fish. It's ultra cheap, packed with happy diners every night and is a great place for people-watching.

Restaurant du Port (☎ 039 417463; Larache Port; mains Dh60; 🕒 10am-5pm & 7-11pm) Out of town by the port, but worth the trip, this slightly upmarket place specialises in fresh seafood cooked simply but to perfection.

Restaurant Puerta Del Sol (☎ 039 913641; Rue de Salé; mains Dh20-30; 🕒 noon-9pm) For more seafood and a choice of Moroccan dishes, this no-nonsense place is a good bet. It's popular but a little quieter than the Restaurant Commercial.

Balcón Atlántico (☎ 039 910110; Rue de Casablanca; pizza Dh40-60, crepes Dh10-15; 🕒 6am-10pm) Overlooking the beach, and the nicest spot in town for a relaxed breakfast or simple lunch, this bright, bustling café has plenty of outdoor seating and passable pizzas.

For a quick breakfast or ice cream your best options are the **Salon de Thé Triana**

(☎ 039 500913; Ave Mohammed ben Abdallah), which also serves decent pizza (Dh26 to Dh40) in summer, or, just off the square, **Le Sourire Salon de Thé** (Ave Hassan II; ☎ 6am-10pm).

Getting There & Away

The bus station is south of the town centre on Rue du Caire.

CTM buses include services to Casablanca (Dh90, four hours, three daily) via Kenitra (Dh40, two hours) and Rabat (Dh70, three hours); Fez (Dh80, four hours, three daily) via Meknès (Dh60, three hours); Tangier (Dh30, 2½ hours, four daily); Tiznit (Dh310) via Marrakesh (Dh160, eight hours); and Agadir (Dh225, 12 hours).

Cheaper non-CTM buses also cover these destinations as well as Ouezzane (Dh20), Tetouan (Dh20) and Kenitra (Dh30), and are generally more frequent.

Grands taxis run from outside the bus station to Ksar el-Kebir (Dh12) and occasionally to Assilah (Dh30), Souk el-Arba (Dh25) and Tangier (Dh40).

LIXUS

الوكوس

Set on a hill overlooking the Loukkos Estuary are the Roman ruins of **Lixus** (admission free), a rather mysterious and neglected site that is one of the oldest inhabited places in the country. Only about a quarter of the ancient city has been excavated but the visible ruins, though badly damaged and overgrown, are impressive. Although not as extensive or as well excavated as Volubilis (see p266), the location, size and serenity of Lixus give it a lingering sense of gravitas and with a little imagination you can picture just how grand and important this city once was.

The site is not enclosed, so you're at liberty to wander around. Few visitors make it here outside the summer months, and in winter your only companions will be the wind and the odd goat quietly grazing, but beware that some readers have reported being hassled by local youths. Although some unemployed locals may offer their services as a guide, it's not really necessary and their knowledge of the site is usually sketchy.

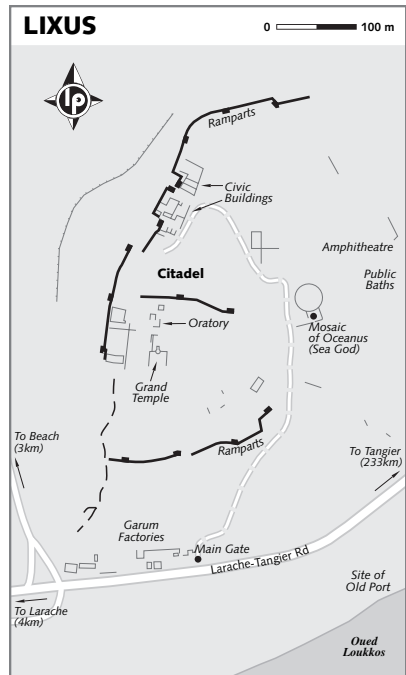
History

Megalithic stones found in the vicinity of Lixus suggest that the site was originally inhabited by a sun-worshipping people with

knowledge of astronomy and mathematics. However, little more is known about the areas prehistory until the Phoenicians set up the colony Lixus here in about 1000 BC. According to Pliny the Elder, it was here that Hercules picked the golden apples of the Garden of Hesperides, thus completing the penultimate of his 12 labours. The golden apples may well have been the famous Moroccan tangerines.

In the 6th century BC the Phoenician Atlantic colonies fell to the Carthaginians. Lixus remained a trading post, principally in gold, ivory and slaves and, by AD 42, had entered the Roman Empire. Its primary exports soon changed to salt, olives, wine and *garum* (an aromatic fish paste) and its merchants also grew rich from the export of wild animals for use in the empire's amphitheatres.

The colony at Lixus rapidly declined as the Romans withdrew from North Africa, and was abandoned completely with the collapse of the Roman Empire sometime in the 5th century. Later, the site became known to Muslims as Tuchummus.



Sights

The main gate to Lixus is in the green railings that border the Larache–Tangier road. Inside the railings to the left are the remains of the *garum* factories, where fish was salted and the prized paste produced. A gravel path leads up the hill from the gate past a number of minor ruins to the **public baths** and **amphitheatre**. The amphitheatre provides impressive views of the surrounding countryside and makes a wonderful place just to sit and relax.

Most mosaics from the site were removed and are now on display at the archaeology museum in Tetouan (see p197). The Grand Temple mosaics depicting Helios, Mars and Rhea, the three Graces, and Venus with Adonis are all there. The only remaining mosaic at Lixus is that of **Oceanus** (the Greek Sea God). Unfortunately, it's been exposed both to the elements and to local vandalism, so is in rough shape.

Continue up the path to the main assembly of buildings, which straddle the crest of the hill. From here there are incredible views down over the Loukos Estuary and salt fields below. The civic buildings, additional public baths and original city ramparts are here, while to the south is the striking citadel, a flurry of closely packed ruins standing stark against the sky. Although most of the antiquities are in an advanced state of decay, you should be able to make out the main temple and associated sanctuaries, an oratory, more public baths and the remains of the city walls.

Getting There & Away

Lixus is approximately 4.5km north of Larache on the road to Tangier. To get there take bus 4 or 5 from outside the Casbah de la Cigogne (Dh4). A petit taxi costs about Dh20 one way.

ASSILAH

أصيلا

The gorgeous whitewashed resort town of Assilah feels like somewhere on a Greek Island, but the tapas and paella on the Spanish menus in the restaurants and the wrought-iron windows on the white houses are but a few reminders that the town was Spanish territory for a long time. Arriving here by ferry from Spain, Assilah is an easier and much more hassle-free introduction to Morocco than its northern neighbour Tangier.

With a good selection of budget hotels and restaurants, and a small art scene, the town has become a favourite stop on the traveller's trail of the North Atlantic coast.

The town's mayor lives in the picturesque medina and has vowed to make it as clean as Switzerland. The old medina has been seriously gentrified in the last few years as more and more houses have been bought by affluent Moroccans and Europeans, mainly Spanish. Its narrow streets are indeed squeaky clean and a bit empty. Flats and houses are as expensive now as in Marrakesh. The town is sleepy for most of the year, but in the summer months the population grows from 12,000 to 110,000, when Moroccan families descend here, as elsewhere along the coast. The small town is then completely over-run, the beaches are packed and the touts come out in force. Outside the summer months, touts are less imposing, but they are around, waiting for tourists at the train or bus station, offering drugs and cheap accommodation in the holiday homes of absent foreigners in the medina (see p140).

The best time to visit is in spring or autumn when the weather is still pleasant but the crowds are gone.

History

Assilah has had a turbulent history as a small, but strategic port since it began life as the Carthaginian settlement of Zilis. During the Punic Wars the people backed Carthage, and when the region fell to the Romans, the locals were shipped to Spain and replaced with Iberians. From then on, Assilah was inexorably linked with the Spanish and their numerous battles for territory.

As Christianity conquered the forces of Islam on the Iberian peninsula in the 14th and 15th centuries, Assilah felt the knock-on effects. In 1471 the Portuguese sent 477 ships with 30,000 men, captured the port and then built the walls that still surround the medina, a trading post on their famous gold route across Africa. In 1578, King Dom Sebastian of Portugal embarked on an ill-fated crusade from Assilah. He was killed, and Portugal (and its Moroccan possessions) passed into the hands of the Spanish, who remained for a very long time.

Assilah was recaptured by Moulay Ismail in 1691. In the 19th century, continuing

piracy prompted Austria and then Spain to send their navies to bombard the town. Its most famous renegade was Er-Raissouli (see p142), one of the most colourful bandits ever raised in the wild Rif Mountains. Early in the 20th century, Er-Raissouli used Assilah as his base, becoming the bane of the European powers. Spain made Assilah part of its protectorate from 1911 until 1956.

Information

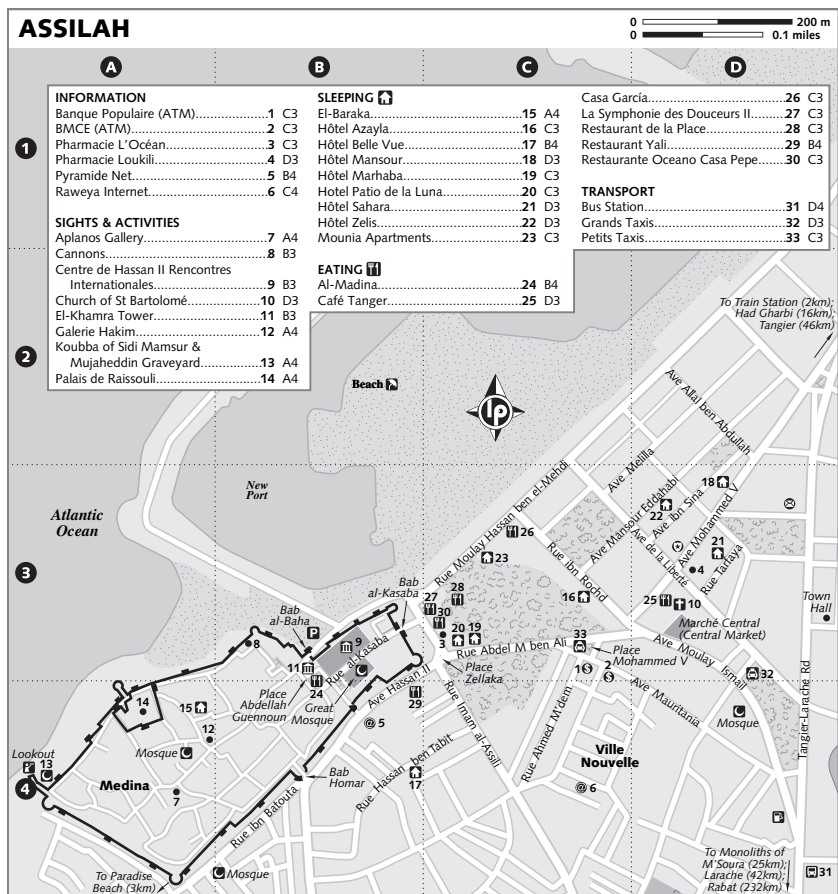
Place Mohammed V is crowded with banks, including BMCE and Banque Populaire, both of which will change cash and traveller's cheques and have ATMs.

Internet access is available at **Pyramide Net** (Ave Hassan II; per hr Dh8; ☎ 9am-midnight) and

Raweya Internet (Rue Assoussane; per hr Dh6; ☎ 10am-midnight). There are a couple of pharmacies in town including **Pharmacie l'Océan** (Place Zellaka) and **Pharmacie Loukili** (Ave Mohammed V).

Dangers & Annoyances

Assilah has a large young population, and unemployment is high. Kif (dope) plays a big role in Assilah: increasingly, tourists are being offered it, often as part of an elaborate scam to fleece them (see drugs, p459). As tourism and kif use have increased in recent years, so too has the number of touts operating in Assilah. Apart from offering drugs, many will tell you that the only place to stay in town is in the medina. There are hardly any official places to stay in the medina, but



the touts offer rooms in the holiday homes of absent foreigners, or worse, a sleeping mat in a friend's house in the medina at sumptuous prices.

Sights & Activities

RAMPARTS & MEDINA

Assilah's largely residential medina is surrounded by the sturdy stone fortifications built by the Portuguese in the 15th century and it is these walls, flanked by palms, that have become the town's landmark.

The medina and ramparts have been largely restored in recent years and the tranquil narrow streets lined by white-washed houses are well worth a wander. Although the restoration work has left the medina much sanitised, the ornate wrought-iron window guards and colourful murals (painted each year during the International Cultural Festival, see right) give it a very photogenic quality. Craftsmen and artists have opened workshops along the main streets and invite passers-by in to see them work.

Access to the ramparts is limited. The southwestern bastion is the best spot for views over the ocean and is a popular spot at sunset. It also offers a peek into the nearby **Koubba of Sidi Mamsur** (which is otherwise closed to non-Muslims) and the **Mujaheddin Graveyard**.

The southern entrance to the medina, **Bab Homar** on Avenue Hassan II, is topped by the much-eroded Portuguese royal coat of arms. There are a few **old cannons** just inside the medina's seaward wall, but they are cut off from the walkway below and can only be seen from a distance. The **Bab al-Kasaba** leads to the **Great Mosque** (closed to non-Muslims) and the Centre Hassan II des Rencontres Internationales. The medina is busiest on Thursdays, Assilah's main market day.

ART GALLERIES

With more than 50 resident artists, five galleries and several artist studios and exhibition spaces, Assilah is renowned as a city of arts. It all started in 1978 when several Moroccan artists were invited to hold workshops for local children and to paint some walls in the medina as part of the town's *moussem* (International Cultural Festival) celebrations. Several Zailachi artists and some of these children have

now made a name in the contemporary-art world, among them the late Abdelilah Bououd, Brahim Jbari, Elina Atencio, Mohamed Lhaloui and several members of the Mesnani family.

Belgian painter Anne-Judith Van Look created the **Aplanos gallery** (☎ 061 998030; Rue Tijara) with her Moroccan husband Ahmed Benraadiya, where foreign and local artists can exhibit. Zailachi artist Hakim Ghailan started the **Galerie Hakim** (☎ 039 418896, 061 799535; hakimghailan@yahoo.fr; 14 Place Sidi ben Issa) and exhibits mainly young Moroccan artists.

The main exhibition space in town is the **Centre de Hassan II Rencontres Internationales** (☎ 039 417065; foundationdassilah@yahoo.fr; admission free; ☎ 8.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-5pm, to 8pm summer), just inside the medina walls. This centre in a beautiful medina house displays a revolving exhibition of international painting and sculpture in its gallery (and at times, in the nearby **El-Khamra Tower**, a renovated Portuguese fortification on Place Abdellah Guennoun).

The **Palais de Raissouli**, also known as the Palais de Culture (Palace of Culture) on the seaside of the medina, was built in 1909 by Er-Raissouli (see boxed text, p142) and still stands as a testament to the sumptuous life he led at the height of his power. It has been beautifully restored, but is only open during the *moussem* or for temporary exhibitions, although if you can find the caretaker you may be able to persuade him to let you in. The striking building includes a main reception room with a glass-fronted terrace overlooking the sea, from where Er-Raissouli forced convicted murderers to jump to their deaths onto the rocks 30m below.

NEW TOWN

The centre of the small new town is Place Mohammed V. Northwest of the square is the **Church of San Bartolome**, built by Spanish Franciscans, in a typical colonial Moorish style. It is one of the few churches in Morocco allowed to ring the bells for Sunday Mass. Nearby is the **marché central** (central market).

MOUSSEM

The Centre Hassan II des Rencontres Internationales is the main focus for the annual **moussem** (International Cultural

RASCALLY ER-RAISSOULI

Feared bandit, kidnapper and general troublemaker, Moulay Ahmed ben Mohammed er-Raissouli (or Raisuni) was one of Assilah's most legendary inhabitants. He started life as a petty crook in the Rif Mountains but saw no problem in bumping off unwilling victims and was soon renowned as a merciless murderer, and feared right across the region.

Internationally, Er-Raissouli was best known for kidnapping Westerners. He and his band held various luminaries to ransom, including Greek-American billionaire Ion Perdicaris, who was ransomed in 1904 for US\$70,000.

In an attempt to control the unruly outlaw, consecutive sultans appointed him to various political positions, including governor of Assilah and later Tangier. However, Er-Raissouli continued with his wicked ways, amassing great wealth in whatever way he could. He held considerable sway over the Rif tribes and the Spanish funded his arms in the hope of keeping order in the mountains, but Er-Raissouli often used them against his benefactors.

The Spaniards eventually forced Er-Raissouli to flee Assilah after WWI, but he continued to wreak havoc in the Rif hinterland until 1925, when the Rif rebel Abd al-Krim arrested him and accused him of being too closely linked with the Spanish.

Festival) held in August, when artists, musicians, performers and thousands of spectators descend upon the town. Numerous workshops and public art demonstrations, concerts, exhibitions and events are held throughout the month with a strong Spanish and Islamic slant. A three-day horse festival, including a Moroccan *fantasia* (musket-firing cavalry charge) takes place towards the end of the festival.

BEACHES

Assilah's main beach, flanked by camp sites and hotels, stretches north from town. It's a wide sweep of golden sand and although pleasant in low season, the crowds and noise from the nearby road make it much less appealing in summer. For more peace and quiet head 3km south to **Paradise Beach**, a gorgeous, pristine spot that really does live up to its name. It's a pleasant walk along the coast or, alternatively, hop on one of the horse-drawn carriages that ply this route in summer. Assilah Marina, an entire new resort, is planned to open in 2010 south of town with a marina, golf course and several luxury hotels.

Sleeping

Assilah has a choice of decent but uninspiring accommodation options, all in the new part of town. Touts meeting the buses or trains offer basic accommodation in the medina for about Dh75. It's usually a large room sleeping up to seven people on thin mattresses on the floor. Some also offer rooms

in unofficial B&Bs at much higher prices. Be careful however when renting through touts: there are many scams. During high season (Easter week and July to September), the town is flooded with visitors so it's advisable to book well in advance.

BUDGET

Assilah has a limited choice of budget hotels.

Hôtel Sahara (☎ 039 417185; 9 Rue de Tarfaya; s/d/tr Dh98/136/204, hot showers Dh5) By far the best budget option, this small, immaculately kept hotel offers simple rooms set around an open courtyard, with a very Moroccan atmosphere. Patterned tiles and potted plants adorn the entrance, and the compact rooms, though fairly spartan, are comfortable and well maintained. Some have tiny windows, so it may be worth checking more than one. The sparkling shared toilets and showers are all new and scrubbed till they gleam.

Hôtel Marhaba (☎ 039 417144; Rue Zellaka; s/d Dh80/120, Jul & Aug Dh100/180) This place has a good central location, next to the Place Zellaka, and a friendly welcome. The rooms have seen better days, though all are spotless. Go for the rooms in the front which are larger and brighter, if a bit noisier. The shared facilities are ancient but there's a nice roof terrace overlooking the medina.

Hôtel Belle Vue (☎ 039 417747; Rue Hassan ben Tabit; d low/high season Dh100/200) A friendly, small hotel in a quiet side street, run by young Moroccans who are very welcoming and up to date on what's happening in town. The

rooms have all recently been redecorated; some are entirely painted by local artists. The mattresses are good and everything is immaculately kept, including the shared facilities. A few rooms have their own bathroom (Dh50 extra) and balconies, and there are four pleasant apartments (Dh100 per person), with two double rooms and a sitting area. The rooftop terrace is a great place for an evening drink or to relax. It's particularly popular with Spanish travellers.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Hôtel Mansour (☎ 039 417390; www.hotelmansour.fr.fr; 56 Ave Mohammed V; s/d Dh180/220) You'll get a hint of traditional character in the tiled public areas at this small hotel, northeast of the centre, but the bedrooms are fairly bland with faded decor and tiny bathrooms. It's still a good deal for the price, but it's worth asking for a room with balcony and sea view.

ourpick Hôtel Patio de la Luna (☎ 039 416074; 12 Place Zellaka; s/d Dh300/450) The only accommodation option in Assilah with any local character is this intimate, Spanish-run place secluded behind an unassuming door on the main drag. The simple, rustic rooms have wooden furniture, woven blankets and tiled bathrooms and are set around a lovely leafy patio. It's very popular, so book ahead.

Hôtel Zelis (☎ 039 417069; fax 039 417098; 10 Ave Mansour Eddahabi; s/d/tr Dh300/400/550, Jul-Sep Dh400/500/650; 📶 📺 📺) Packed out in summer and deserted the rest of the year, this big holiday hotel has 65 comfortable, modern rooms with funky blue and white textiles, TV and fridge. You can eat in the traditional Moroccan restaurant with low seating and tables, or the characterless cafeteria-style alternative. The pool is fine and there's a games room for children, a gym, cyber café (Dh10 per hour) and a bar.

Hôtel Azayla (☎ 039 416717; e-elhaddad@menara.ma; 20 Rue Ibn Rochd; s/d Dh300/380, Jul-Sep Dh390/480) Big, bright, comfy and well equipped, the rooms here are a good deal. The bathrooms are new, the decor is tasteful with great photographs of Morocco and Moroccans by the owner, and the giant windows bathe the rooms in light. The larger rooms include a spacious seating area where up to three people could easily sleep. The place may lack local character, but the staff is friendly, helpful and reliable.

HOUSES & APARTMENTS

A host of properties in Assilah's medina have been bought by foreigners and wealthy Moroccans and reconstructed as holiday homes. At any time of the year it is possible to rent a flat or house in the medina or near the beach through the agency **el-Baraka** (☎ Miguel 075 722323, Larbi 068 092187; www.elbaraka.net). There are some wonderful three- and four-bedroom houses available with stunning decor and all the comforts you are likely to want. Prices range from about Dh4000 per week in low season to about Dh15,000 per week in high season.

Mounia Apartments (☎ 039 417815; 14 Rue Moulay Hassan ben el-Mehdi; 2-/4-person apt Dh250/350, Jul & Aug Dh450/600) Generally spacious and clean flats, but there are only basic kitchen facilities and well-worn furnishings.

Zaki Apartments (☎ 039 417497; 14 Rue Imam al-Assili; 2-/4-/7-person apt Dh300/450/550) Offers similar accommodation to Mounia Apartments.

Eating & Drinking

Assilah has a string of restaurants clustered around Bab Kasaba and along the medina walls on Ave Hassan II. There are a few other cheap options on Rue Ahmed M'dem near the banks on Place Mohammed V.

La Symphonie des Douceurs II (☎ 039 416633; 26 Place Zellaka) During summer, this French-style patisserie is the best place for breakfast or an afternoon sugar fix. Devour pastries and ice cream in very civilised surroundings; for the rest of the year only drinks are available.

Café Tanger (52 Ave Mohammed V) If the Symphonie is too flashy for you, head for this café north of the square, where the predominantly male clientele sip coffee, suck their teeth and watch over the world.

Restaurant Vali (☎ 071 043277; Ave Hassan II; mains Dh25-50) Although there's little to choose between them, this is one of the most popular of the string of restaurants along the medina walls. It serves up a good selection of fish, seafood and traditional Moroccan staples.

Al-Madina (Place Abdellah Guennoun; mains Dh30-45) The main attraction of this simple little café in the medina is its sunny seating area in the square in front of El-Kamra Tower. It's a great place to sip a coffee, have a snack from the simple, Moroccan menu or drink a delicious freshly squeezed orange juice.

Restaurant de la Place (☎ 039 417326; 7 Ave Moulay Hassan ben el-Mehdi; mains Dh40-80) Friendly, less formal and more varied than its neighbours, this restaurant offers a choice of traditional Moroccan dishes as well as the ubiquitous fish and seafood. The delicious fish tajine provides the best of both worlds.

Casa García (☎ 039 417465; 51 Rue Moulay Hassan ben el-Mehdi; mains Dh55-80) Spanish-style fish dishes and fishy tapas are the speciality at this small restaurant opposite the beach. Go for succulent grilled fish or a more adventurous menu of octopus, eels, shrimp and barnacles, served with a glass of crisp Moroccan rosé wine on the large and breezy terrace. The paella is delicious too.

Restaurante Oceano Casa Pepe (☎ 039 417395; 8 Place Zellaka; mains Dh60-80) Black-tied waiters lure in the punters from the street at this slightly more formal dining option, where fresh seafood tops the bill. Spanish and Moroccan wine, pata-negra ham imported from Spain, low lighting and soft music make it a more refined atmosphere, but the food doesn't entirely live up to it.

Getting There & Away

BUS

Assilah is 46km south of Tangier and has good bus connections to most towns. The tiny bus station is on the corner of Ave Moulay Ismail and the Tanger-Rabat Rd. Since the highway was built, CTM doesn't really stop in Assilah anymore. Several private bus companies offer various services including Rabat (Dh60, 3½ hours), Marrakesh (Dh 130, nine hours), Tangier (Dh10, one hour) and Fez (Dh60, 4½ hours). It's a good idea to book long distance buses in advance as they tend to fill up in Tangier.

Buses to Tangier and Casablanca leave roughly every half-hour, from 6.30am to 8pm. Just wait until a bus pulls in and hope there's a seat available.

CAR

There is guarded parking (Dh10 overnight, Dh15 per 24 hour) outside Bab al-Baha (Sea Gate), near the port.

TAXI

Grands taxis to Tangier (Dh20) and Larache (Dh15) depart when full from Ave Moulay Ismail, across from the mosque. Tangier's airport is only 26km north of here, so tak-

ing a taxi from Assilah (Dh250) may save you spending a lot of time and energy in Tangier. The petit-taxi stand is at Place Mohammed V.

TRAIN

The train station is 2km north of Assilah, but a bus (Dh5) generally meets trains and drops passengers at Place Mohammed V and Bab Homar. Three trains run daily to Rabat (Dh77, 3½ hours) and Casablanca (Dh101, 4½ hours), one to Meknès (Dh66, three hours) and Fez (Dh81, four hours) and six daily to Tangier (Dh14, 45 minutes). One overnight train goes direct to Marrakesh (Dh174, nine hours), but this train originates (and fills up) in Tangier, so you may want to buy your ticket in advance.

AROUND ASSILAH

The mysterious **Monoliths of M'Soura** make an interesting half-day trip from Assilah if you've got time to spare. The prehistoric site consists of a large stone circle (actually an ellipse) consisting of about 175 stones, thought to have originally surrounded a burial mound. Although many of the stones have fallen or been broken, the circle is still impressive, its strange presence heightened by the desolation of its location. The tallest stone reaches about 5.5m in height and is known as *El-Uted* (The Pointer).

The stone circle is about 25km (by road) southeast of Assilah. To get there you'll need a sturdy vehicle. Head for the village of Souq Tnine de Sidi el-Yamani, off highway R417, which branches east off the main Tangier to Rabat road. Veer left in the village and follow a poorly maintained, unsealed track 6km north to the site. It can be difficult to find so you may want to ask for directions or hire a guide in the village.

Another interesting trip from Assilah is a visit to the lively Sunday market in the village of **Had Gharbia**, 16km north of town off the road to Tangier.

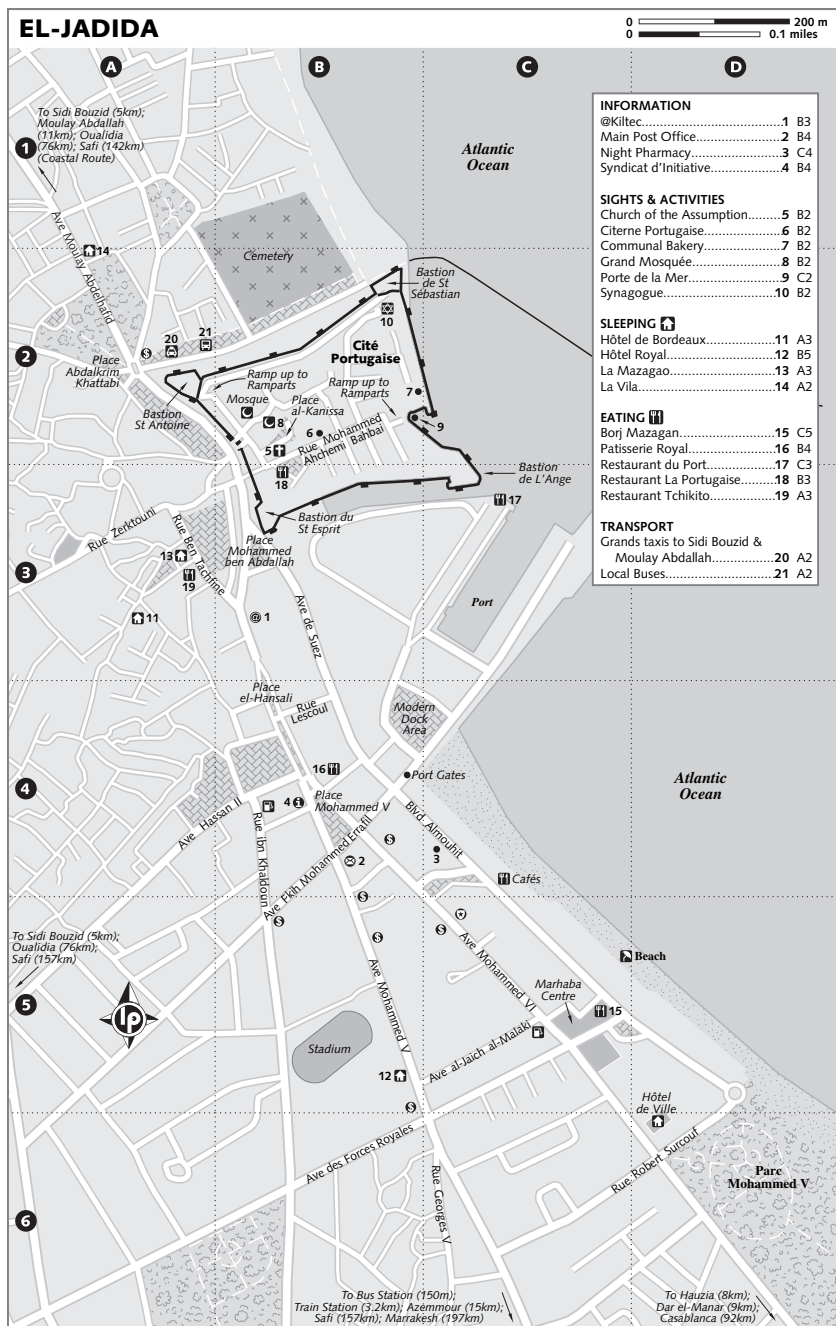
SOUTH OF CASABLANCA

EL-JADIDA

pop 144,000

El-Jadida owes its existence to the exchange between Europeans and Moroccans so it is perhaps not surprising that it

الجديدة



is currently being transformed both by and for foreigners.

The Portuguese built a port here, called Mazagan, to protect their ships following the African coast. Their town, now known as the Cité Portugaise, is a sleepy but gorgeous medina, which was granted World Heritage status by Unesco in 2004. A lack of investment has helped maintain the integrity of the picturesque Portuguese town's rambling alleys and ramparts. For much of the year El-Jadida is a quiet backwater, disturbed only by the crowds of Moroccans flocking to its beautiful beaches and strolling its boulevards.

This all looks to change. In the last year or two, foreigners have started buying up property in the old walled town, including the old colonial church. This is bringing about a regeneration of the town, as the crumbling houses are being given a facelift. Just north of the town, on a gorgeous stretch of beach, a new mega tourism project is on the way, called Mazagan, which will include several golf courses, a casino, spas and several resort hotels. The old town of El-Jadida in the next few years will be given a new, if very different, lease of life.

History

In 1506 the Portuguese built a fortress on this coast and baptised it Mazagan, which soon developed into the country's most important trading post. Sultan Sidi Mohammed ben Abdallah got hold of Mazagan following a siege in 1769, but the Portuguese blew up most of the fort before leaving. Most of the new settlers preferred to live in the new town and the citadel remained a ruin until the early 19th century when Sultan Abd er-Rahman resettled some of the Jews of Azemmour in old Mazagan, and renamed the town Al-Jadida, 'the New One' in Arabic.

The large and influential Jewish community soon grew rich on trade with the interior, and unlike most other Moroccan cities, there was no *mellah* (Jewish quarter); the Jews mixed with the general populace and an attitude of easy tolerance was established in the city. During the French Protectorate, the town became an administrative centre and a beach resort, but its port gradually lost out to Safi and Casablanca.

Orientation

El-Jadida sits on the eastern coast of a large promontory jutting north into the Atlantic. (Although the map appears to be orientated incorrectly, this is only due to the city's location on the promontory.)

The town's focal point is Place Mohammed V, home to the post office, banks, tourist office and several hotels. The Cité Portugaise and the main market area lie a short walk to the north.

The bus station is about 1km south down Ave Mohammed V, and El-Jadida's train station is another 3km further south on the Marrakesh road.

Information

There are numerous banks located in the centre of town which have ATMs. The **main post office** (☎ 8.30am-4pm Mon-Fri) is on Place Mohammed V.

INTERNET ACCESS

There are several internet cafés on Ave Mohammed VI.

@**Kiltec** (☎ 023 350487; 1st fl, 62 Place Hansali; per hr Dh6; ☎ 9am-11pm, closed Fri lunch for prayer).

MEDICAL SERVICES

Clinique Les Palmiers (☎ 023 393939; Rte de Casablanca) Twenty-four-hour emergency service.

Night Pharmacy (off Ave Mohammed VI; ☎ 9pm-8am) Behind the theatre.

TOURIST OFFICE

Syndicat d'Initiative (33 Place Mohammed V; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 3-6.30pm, closed Wed) This tourist office is a rarity in Morocco – it's actually knowledgeable and helpful.

Sights & Activities

El-Jadida's main sight, the **Cité Portugaise** (Portuguese city), is a compact maze of twisting streets, surrounded by ochre ramparts. The main entrance is just off Place Mohammed ben Abdallah and leads into Rue Mohammed Ahchemi Bahbai. Immediately on the left is the Portuguese-built **Church of the Assumption**, closed to the public, and almost next door, the **Grande Mosquée**, with a unique pentagonal-shape minaret, which originally acted as a lighthouse.

On the main street past the souvenir shops is the **Citerne Portugaise** (Portuguese Cistern; Rue Mohammed Ahchemi Bahbai; admission Dh10; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-6.30pm), a vast, vaulted cis-

tern lit by a single shaft of light. The spectacularly tranquil spot, with a thin film of water on the floor reflecting a mirror image of the vaulted ceiling and elegant columns, was originally used to collect water. It is famous as the eerie location for the dramatic riot scene in Orson Welles' 1954 *Othello*.

Further down the street are the ramparts with the **Porte de la Mer**, the original sea gate where ships unloaded their cargo and from where the Portuguese finally departed. To the left of the gate, through the archway, is one of the town's **communal bakeries**, where local women bring their bread to be cooked.

To the right of the sea gate, a ramp leads up to the windy ramparts (open 9am to 6pm) and **Bastion de L'Ange** (southeast corner), an excellent vantage point with views out to sea and over the new town and port. Walk along the ramparts to the left to reach **Bastion de St Sebastian** (northeast corner), from where you can see the old Jewish cemetery. Next to the bastion is the abandoned **synagogue** (originally the old prison) with its Star of David.

The **beaches** to the north and south of town are fairly clean and safe, enjoyable out of season, but packed in July and August. The beach at **Hauzia**, northeast of town, used to be pleasant, but the Mazagan mega-resort was being built here at the time of research. **Sidi Bouzid**, 5km southwest of El-Jadida, is a popular spot with sunbathers and surfers. **Le Requin Blue** (☎ 023 348067; set menus from Dh140) overlooking the beach in Sidi Bouzid serves excellent fish.

Local bus 2 runs from El-Jadida to Sidi Bouzid (Dh3) every hour.

Sleeping

A few new hotels near the Cité Portugaise make El-Jadida a nice option to spend a couple of days. The hotels in the new town are modern and comfortable but have less character. At the time of writing, a group of new hotels was under construction near Hauzia beach.

BUDGET

Hôtel de Bordeaux (☎ 023 373921; 47 Rue Moulay Ahmed Tahiri; s/d Dh95/130, hot shower Dh5) The best of the cheapies, this friendly, good-value hotel in a traditional house in the medina has comfortable but compact rooms around a

covered courtyard. Only the rooms on the 1st floor have en-suite bathrooms. You'll have use the communal shower downstairs for hot showers. The hotel is well signposted from Rue ben Tachfine.

Hôtel Royal (☎ 023 341100; 108 Ave Mohammed V; s/d Dh100/140, with bathroom Dh140/250) This large hotel has big, bright rooms with cheap furnishings and retro-fitted showers separated from your bed by a sheet of glass panelling. Quality and comfort varies, so check first. The public areas have colourful tiling and a lovely courtyard that becomes a lively bar at night.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Le Mazagao (☎ 023 350137; 6 Derb el-Hajjar; www.lmazagaocom; s/d Dh484/615; ☎) The rooms are set around the courtyard and on the roof terrace of this welcoming atmospheric 19th-century guest house located in the medina. The large rooms are decorated in a warm Moroccan style with lots of tiling and local textiles, and feel very homy. Half board is obligatory if you stay more than a week. The communal bathrooms are spotless.

La Villa (☎ 023 344423; www.villa-david.com; 4 Ave Moulay Abdelhafid; r Dh700-900, ste Dh1100; ☎) A charming contemporary-style hotel in an old villa, built using local materials and vegetation, is just outside the old city and run by two Frenchmen. The rooms are set around a white courtyard. Stylish neon lights lead you upstairs, and rooms have plasma screens, wi-fi and *tadelakt* (lime plaster) bathrooms and floors. The effect is very Zen rather than high tech. There is a little bar on the roof with spectacular views over the old city, and the best restaurant in town serving inventive French-Moroccan cuisine.

our pick Dar el-Manar (☎ 023 23351645, 061 495411; www.dar-al-manar.com; off the road to Casablanca; r Dh700/900; ☎) Fatima fell in love with this wheat field overlooking the ocean and town while out cycling, and decided to build a lovely house with a vast garden, where it would be good to live and receive guests. Everything is done to make guests feel at ease, in the five simple but stylish and spacious rooms, decorated in a contemporary Moroccan style. Guests can use the garden, where a few cows and a donkey graze, and the bright dining room. Dinner can be ordered in advance, and is cooked with

vegetables from the organic garden. You'll get a warm welcome from Fatima and her French husband. Call for directions; it is near the Phare Sidi Mesbah, a lighthouse, and is signposted on the road from El-Jadida north to Azemmour.

Eating

El-Jadida has a handful of reasonable restaurants and a thriving café culture.

Restaurant Tchikito (4 Rue Mohammed Smiha; mixed fish platter Dh25-30) This hole-in-the-wall, just off Place Hansali, is popular for its delicious and cheap fried fish served with a fiery chilli sauce.

Restaurante La Portugaise (☎ 063 037480; Rue Mohammed Ahchemi Bahbai; mains Dh35-60) Just inside the walls of the old city, this characterful little place serves up a decent menu of good-value fish, chicken and tajine dishes.

Restaurant du Port (☎ 023 342579; Port du Jadida; mains Dh60-80; ☹ closed Sun evening) Head upstairs for excellent views over the port and ramparts from one of El-Jadida's best restaurants, naturally focused on fish and seafood, cooked simply but well. The atmosphere is pretty mellow making it a comfortable spot for women and – joy of joys – it's licensed.

Borj Mazagan (☎ 023 343435; 4th fl, Marhaba Centre, 54 Ave Mohammed V; mains Dh60-100; ☹ 7am-midnight) Sort of slick and stylish, this friendly restaurant is popular with young professionals. Sleek modern furniture, floor-to-ceiling windows and an international menu featuring homemade pasta, wood-fired pizzas and succulent steaks mean it's an ideal place to just feel anonymous once more. It's fantastic for breakfast (Dh18 to Dh28) or luscious afternoon cake on what is easily El-Jadida's finest terrace. It's not licensed.

Pâtisserie Royale (☎ 061 878354; Place Mohammed V; ☹ 6am-8pm) A good spot for breakfast or a quiet coffee, the Royale is an old-style kind of joint where you can blend into the woodwork or chat to the locals without feeling under any pressure.

Getting There & Away

BUS

The **bus station** (☎ 023 373841) is a 10-minute walk from the centre on Ave Mohammed V.

CTM (☎ 023 342662) runs services to and from Casablanca (Dh27, 1½ hours, four daily). There are also services to Oualidia (Dh30, 1½ hours, three daily), Safi (Dh60, 2½ hours, six daily) and Essaouira (Dh80, 4½ hours, one daily).

Cheaper local buses go to all the same destinations as well as Azemmour (Dh5), Rabat (Dh40, four hours, 12 daily) and Marrakesh (Dh40, four hours, hourly). In summer, buses to Casablanca (Dh23) and Marrakesh should be booked at least one day ahead.

Bus 2 for Sidi Bouzid (Dh3) and bus 6 for Moulay Abdallah (Dh4.5), leave from just north of the Cité Portugaise.

TAXI

Grands taxis for Azemmour (Dh6) and Casablanca (Dh35) leave from the side street next to the long-distance bus station. Taxis to Oualidia (Dh25) and Safi (Dh55) depart from a junction on the road to Sidi Bouzid. You'll need to take a petit taxi (Dh5) to get there. The grand-taxi rank for Sidi Bouzid (Dh5) and Moulay Abdallah (Dh6) is beside the local bus station north of the Cité Portugaise.

TRAIN

El-Jadida **train station** (☎ 023 352824) is located 4km south of town. There are five services a day to and from Casablanca (Dh30, one hour). A petit taxi to the centre costs around Dh10. For timetable details ask at the tourist office (p146).

AROUND EL-JADIDA

Azemmour

El-Amine, one of Azemmour's most successful painters, hit it right describing his favourite view of town from his roof terrace, which he has painted numerous times: the old walled medina squeezed in between the Oum er-Rbia (Mother of Spring) river and the ocean, with the fields spread beyond.

The picturesque town has inspired many artists, who have come to live here. Although it is close to the art market of Casablanca, life is still simple, with the farmers and fishermen going door-to-door with their produce. It's a sleepy backwater with a languid charm, a sturdy Portuguese medina and some wonderful accommodation

options – a great place to while away a few days overlooking the river.

The Portuguese built the town in 1513 as one of a string of trading posts along the coast. The town's most famous inhabitant was Estevanico the Black. Captured and made a slave, he later became one of the first four explorers to cross the entire mainland of North America from Florida to the Pacific.

Azemmour has several banks, a pharmacy and internet access at **Capsys** (off Place du Souk; per hr Dh7).

The main sight is the medina, an ochre-walled town of narrow winding streets and whitewashed houses. Unlike Assilah, to the north, it is completely unadorned and still gives an authentic glimpse of life in modern Morocco. You can get up onto the **ramparts** near Place du Souk or via steps at the north-eastern corner of the medina. Walk along the walls to see **Dar el Baroud** (the Powder House) a Portuguese gunpowder store of which only the tower remains. To the north of the medina is the *mellah* and further on you'll get wonderful views over the river. All over the medina are walls painted by local artists, artists studios including **Ahmed el-Amine** (☎ 023 358902; 6 Derb el-Hantati) and a few places selling the typical Azemmour embroidery.

Azemmour has two wonderful accommodation options. **Riad Azama** (☎ 023 347516; www.riadazama.com; 17 Impasse Ben Tahar; d Dh500-750) is a grand 19th-century house complete with original carved woodwork and charming rooms surrounding a lovely courtyard. The carved, painted ceilings here are some of the finest and the rooftop terrace has great views of the medina. There's an excellent dinner (Dh200).

Totally different but equally special, **L'Oum Errebia** (☎ 023 347071; www.azemmour-hotel.com; 25 Impasse Chtouka; s/d/tr Dh750/900/1250) blends traditional Moroccan style with chic contemporary design. The simple rooms are delightful and the large lounge, complete with open fireplace and grand piano, acts as a modern art gallery. The large terrace overlooks the river and communal meals (Dh200) are served at the big dining-room table.

There are lots of small restaurants outside the city walls in the new town.

A grand taxi to/from El-Jadida costs Dh7, a bus trip costs Dh5.

OUALIDIA

pop 4000

The drive from El-Jadida to Oualidia along the coastal road, where the fields come down to the wild shore of ocean, is spectacular enough, but the view upon arrival is more than pleasing. The delightful small-scale resort of Oualidia spreads around a gorgeous crescent-shaped lagoon fringed with golden sands and protected from the wild surf of the ocean by a rocky breakwater. A quiet backwater for many years, with a good selection of accommodation and great fish restaurants, Oualidia is becoming increasingly chic as a weekend resort for Marrakchis and Casablancais.

Out of season it is still quiet, with little more to do than relax, surf, swim and eat well, but avoid the crowds in summer. A lot of building work is threatening to destroy the tranquil charm of this stunning location.

Orientation & Information

The village sits on an escarpment above the lagoon. Most hotels and restaurants are along the road to the beach (1km) – follow signs down beside the post office. You'll find a bank, CTM office and **internet café** (per hr Dh8; ☎ 8am-midnight) here, and a Saturday souq when people from surrounding villages come to town to sell their wares.

Sights & Activities

The town is named after the Saadian Sultan el-Oualid, who built the atmospherically crumbling **kasbah** on the bluff overlooking the lagoon in 1634. The lagoon also attracted Morocco's royalty and the grand villa on the water's edge was **Mohammed V's summer palace**.

The safe, calm waters of the lagoon are perfect for **swimming**, **sailing** and **fishing**, while the wide, sandy beach on either side of the breakwater is good for **windsurfing** and **surfing**. Signposted left off the road to the beach is **Surfland** (☎ 023 366110; ☎ Apr-mid-Nov) a well-organised surfing and kitesurfing school offering tuition (Dh250). **Dream Surf Oualidia** (☎ 061 817817, 041 291838; ☎ year-round), on the beach in town, also offers surfing and kitesurfing lessons, as well as equipment rental, fishing trips and treks in the hinterland. **Plancoët Canoë-Kayak** (☎ 062 2511934; 4 Ave Hassan II; http://canoekayakplancoet.free.fr; per hr Dh80-100;

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☞ Mar-Oct offers canoe and kayak trips on the lagoon, ideal for birdwatching.

Oualidia is famous for its **oyster beds**, which produce about 200 tonnes of oysters annually. You can visit oyster farm No 7 at **Maison de l'Ostréa II** (☎ 023 366324; www.ilove-casablanca.com/ostrea; entrance of Oualidia on the Casablanca road) to see how it all works. You can taste oysters and other seafood at the excellent restaurant attached (meals including wine cost, Dh200 to Dh250).

To explore Oualidia the splendid countryside around Oualidia you can hire mountain bikes (Dh100 per half-day) and scooters (Dh200 per half-day) from **Oualidia Maroc Adventure** (☎ 061 157743) on the main drag.

South of Oualidia the coast road becomes ever more dramatic, passing through green grazing lands that end at precipitous sea cliffs.

Sleeping & Eating

All hotels listed have their own restaurants. There are some slightly cheaper places lining the road down to the beach. For bargain meals there is a selection of cheap eateries on the main road in the village.

Hotel Thalassa (☎ 023 366050; r Dh100-150, Jun-Sep Dh150-200) The only hotel on the main drag, this slightly dated place is better than you might expect, with bright, airy whitewashed rooms with old-fashioned bathrooms. It's good value but far from the beach.

Hôtel-Restaurant L'Initiale (☎ 023 366246; linitiale@menara.ma; r Dh400, Jun-Sep Dh500, set menu from Dh100) This little, white villa with a warm orange interior and pleasant and comfortable rooms, is well equipped with new fittings, spotless bathrooms and tiny balconies. The popular licensed restaurant is one of the best in town and serves a wide selection of fish dishes and pizzas.

Motel A l'Araignée Gourmande (☎ 023 366447; fax 023 366144; s/d Dh200/300, Jun-Sep Dh246/280) A friendly hotel with spacious, comfortable rooms that could do with some modernising. The ones at the back however have views of the lagoon from a balcony. The restaurant downstairs serves up a feast of well-prepared seafood with set menus ranging from Dh110 to Dh250.

L'Hippocampe (☎ 023 366108; s/d Dh200/300, Jun-Sep Dh246/280) A friendly hotel with immaculate rooms off a garden filled with flowers, looking over the lagoon. There's an excel-

lent fish restaurant (set menus cost Dh110 to Dh250), and steps down to the beach. It's family friendly.

La Sultana (☎ 024 388008; www.lasultanaoualidia.com; Parc à Huîtres No 3; d Dh2100-4200, ste Dh3800-4750; ☞ ☞ ☞) Spectacularly luxurious, this gorgeous hotel has just 11 rooms with fireplace, private Jacuzzi and terrace overlooking the lagoon. There's a choice of three restaurants (set menu costs Dh200 to Dh350), an indoor pool, and an infinity pool and spa – all set in beautiful landscaped gardens.

Villa La Diouana (☎ 066 551646, in UK 00 44 7810 541646; www.ladiouana.com; off Ave Moulay Abdel Salaam; up to 6 people from £1000; ☞ ☞) All you can hear at night from this stunning 1930s villa is the crash of the ocean and the wind. High on a cliff with panoramic ocean views, the chic villa is simply but luxuriously decorated in a mixture of traditional and contemporary Moroccan design. There is a three bedroomed villa, a lovely one-bedroom garden cottage and a studio flat with roof terrace, all surrounded by a 25,000-sq-ft garden with palm trees. The accommodation is rented out for the week and prices include a maid and breakfast.

Other apartments and villas can be rented through **www.oualidia.net** (in French; studios per night from Dh300).

Getting There & Away

Local buses and grands taxis run at irregular times to El-Jadida (bus/taxi Dh25/22) and Safi (bus/taxi Dh25/22). They leave from near the post office on the main road. CTM has an office here and has a daily bus (Dh30) in either direction.

SAFI

pop 415,000

An industrial centre and a thriving port for the export of phosphates, Safi is a lot less picturesque than the neighbouring coastal towns, but it offers an insight into the day-to-day life of a Moroccan city. Most tourists stop here en route to or from Essaouira to visit the giant pottery works that take over a whole city quarter and produce the typical brightly coloured Safi pottery.

The new town is pleasant enough with tree-lined boulevards and whitewashed villas, but the alleys of the walled and fortified medina are more atmospheric to stroll through, and you often have the sites to

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yourself. The beaches are famous for their impressive surf. The immaculate sands north of town were the location for the 2006 Billabong Challenge and are said to have some of the finest waves in the world. Just south of town the landscape is largely industrial and of no interest to visitors.

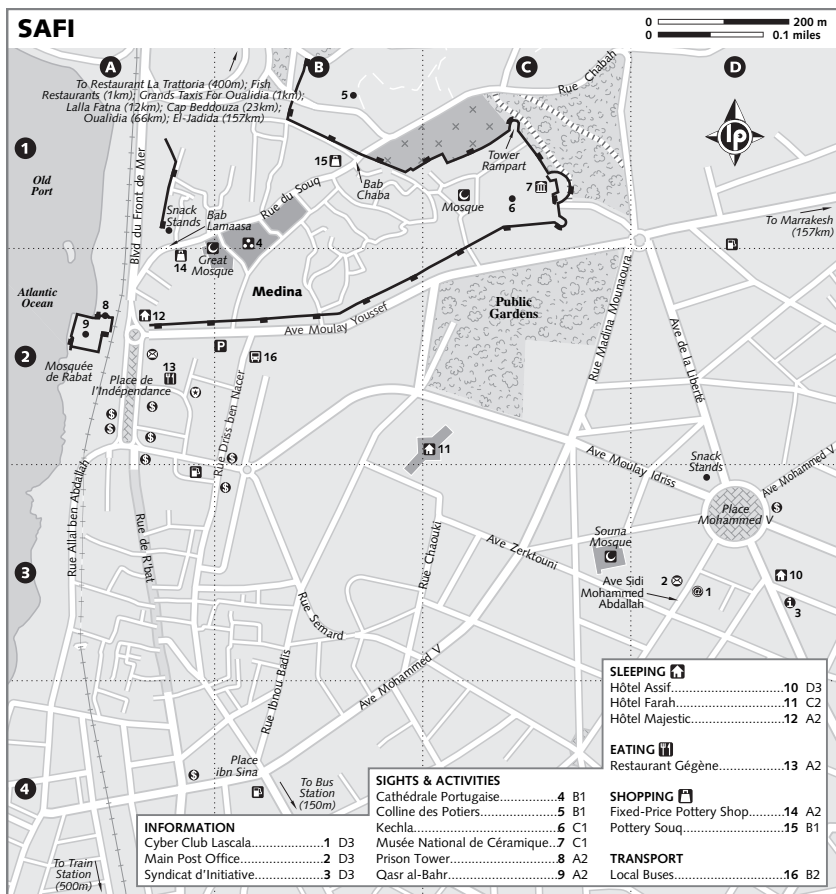
History

Safi's natural harbour was known to the Phoenicians and the Romans, but in the 11th century it was known as a port for the trans-Saharan trade between Marrakesh and Guinea, where gold, slaves and ivory were sold. In the 14th century the town became an important religious and cultural centre, when the Merenids built a *ribat* (fortified

monastery) here. The Portuguese took the city for a brief spell from 1508 until 1541, when the Saadians took it back. They built the monumental Qasr al-Bahr fortress, a cathedral and generally expanded the town, but destroyed most monuments upon their departure.

In the 16th century, Safi grew wealthy from the trade in copper and sugar, and European merchants and agents flocked to the city, but when the port at Essaouira was rebuilt in the 18th century and all external trade was diverted, Safi was largely forgotten.

Safi's real revival came in the 20th century when its fishing fleet expanded and huge industrial complexes were built to process



the 30,000 tonnes of sardines caught annually. A major phosphate-processing complex was established south of the town and the city began to expand rapidly. Today, Safi is one of Morocco's largest ports.

Orientation

The fortress, medina and the bulk of cheaper hotels and restaurants are in the lower town, on or around Place de l'Indépendance. The 'new' town – up on the hill to the east – is home to the city's administrative buildings, the more expensive hotels and the smarter residential areas. At the centre is Place Mohammed V.

Safi's bus and train stations are about 1km south of the town centre.

Information

There are plenty of banks and ATMs clustered around Place de l'Indépendance and Place Driss Ben Nacer. Visit www.safi-ville.com for tourist information.

Cyber Club Lascala (Ave Sidi Mohammed Abdallah; per hr Dh7; ☎ 8am-midnight) Fantastic games den, with pool tables (Dh5 per game) and heaving with students.

Main post office (Ave Sidi Mohammed Abdallah)

Syndicat d'Initiative (Rue de la Liberté; ☎ 9am-noon & 3-7pm) Tourist information centre, but not very helpful.

Sights

The impressive **Qasr al-Bahr** (Castle on the Sea; admission Dh10; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 2.30-6pm) dominates the crashing waves of the Atlantic on the rocky waterfront. The fortress was built to enforce Portuguese authority, house the town governor and protect the port. The ramp in the courtyard leads to the southwest bastion with great views. Prisoners were kept in the basement of the **prison tower**, right of the entrance, before being killed or shipped as slaves. You can climb to the top for views across the medina.

Across the street from the Qasr al-Bahr stands the walled **medina**. The main street, Rue du Souq, runs northeast from Bab Lamaasa, and you'll find most of the souqs, stalls, jewellery, clothing and food in this area. To the right of this street, down a twisting alley, are the remains of the so-called **Cathédrale Portugaise** (admission Dh10; ☎ 8am-noon & 2.30-6pm), which was never finished by the Portuguese who started it.

The **Kechla**, a massive defensive structure with ramps, gunnery platforms and living

quarters, has been restored and opened as the **Musée National de Céramique** (admission Dh10; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Wed-Mon). Exhibits include pottery from Safi, Fez and Meknès, and some contemporary pieces by local artists.

Outside Bab Chaba, on the hill opposite the gate, you can't miss the earthen kilns and chimneys of the **Colline des Potiers** (Potters' Hill). The skills used here are predominantly traditional and you can wander around the cooperatives and see the potters at work. If a potter invites you in to watch him at work, you'll be expected to give a small tip or buy an item or two from the shop.

Sleeping & Eating

There is not much reason to spend the night in Safi, but if you do decide to stay, go for a better place than an average budget hotel (which can be pretty grim). The cheapest places are around the port end of Rue du Souq and along Rue de R'bat, though neither of these are great choices for women.

Hôtel Majestic (☎ 024 464011; fax 024 462490; Place de l'Indépendance; s/d/tr Dh60/100/130) This is the best of the medina options, with large, good-value rooms, although it can be noisy. The rooms are basic and have shared bathrooms (hot shower costs Dh5), but everything is clean and well kept, and half the rooms have ocean views.

Hôtel Assif (☎ 024 622940; www.hotel-assif.ma; Rue de la Liberté; s/d with shower Dh198/280, with bath Dh262/330; ☎) Comfortable, slightly faded rooms with clean en-suite bathrooms and small balconies are available at this reliable, three-star hotel.

Hôtel Farah (☎ 024 464299; www.goldentulipfarah.safi.com; Ave Zerktouni; s/d/ste Dh514/728/1500; ☎ ☎) The best hotel and the best value in Safi, the renovated Farah is a bargain with large and stylish rooms in pale neutrals, sparkling bathrooms, anti-allergy duvets and a minibar. There are good views from the pool terrace, a fitness room, hammam, two restaurants (set menu costs Dh190), a pizzeria and nightclub.

Restaurant Gégène (☎ 024 463369; 11 Rue de la Marne; mains Dh70-90; ☎ closed Sun) Old-fashioned service, tasteful decor and a surprisingly fine menu, with a wide choice of Moroccan and Mediterranean dishes from lamb tajine and pizza to Oualidia oysters, all served with a glass of wine.

Restaurant La Trattoria (☎ 024 620959; 2 Rue l'Aouinate; meals Dh200, fish Dh150; ☺ closed Sun) Run by the same management as Gégène, but more upmarket, La Trattoria is a lovely place with a relaxed ambience and surprisingly good Italian food. The menu has a full range of pizzas and pasta, and a good choice of fish and seafood.

Fish and seafood, particularly sardines, are a speciality in Safi, and the best place to sample them are at the **open-air fish restaurants** on the hill at the *ronde-point de Sidi Bouzid* (the Sidi Bouzid roundabout). Establish the price before ordering, as fish is charged by weight, or order the fish special – a plate of fish served with bread and a spicy tomato sauce for Dh35. A petit taxi to get there costs about Dh10.

Shopping

Safi is an excellent place to buy pottery of all types. To get a feel for prices visit the **fixed-price pottery shop** (☎ 9am–8pm) on the right-hand side of Rue du Souq as you enter the medina from Bab Lamaasa. To the left, towards the eastern end of the same street, you'll find the colourful **pottery souq**.

Getting There & Away

BUS

Most of the **CTM** (☎ 024 622140) buses stopping in Safi originate elsewhere, so consider booking at least a day in advance. CTM has one daily service to Agadir (Dh97, five hours) and others to Casablanca (Dh81, four hours, 15 daily), El-Jadida (Dh45, two hours, four daily) and Essaouira (Dh30, two hours, nine daily).

Other operators run daily departures to the same destinations as well as to Oualidia (Dh25, one hour, one daily) and Tiznit (Dh90, six hours, one daily).

TAXI

There are grands taxis to Marrakesh (Dh57) and Essaouira (Dh48), among other destinations, which leave from the parking lot beside the bus station. The rank for Oualidia (Dh25) and El-Jadida (Dh45) is a good kilometre north of town on the El-Jadida road.

TRAIN

There are two services from Safi **train station** (☎ 024 462176; Rue de R'bat) for Benguerir, where you change for services to Rabat (Dh109,

5½ hours), Casablanca (Dh84, 4½ hours), Fez (Dh179, 8½ hours) and Marrakesh (Dh63, three hours). They depart at 5.50am and 3.50pm. There are return trains to Safi at noon and 8pm.

Getting Around

Both the **bus station** (Ave Président Kennedy) and the **train station** (Rue de R'bat) are quite a distance south from the centre of town. A metered petit taxi from either will cost around Dh10. Local buses operate from just north of Place Driss ben Nacer.

AROUND SAFI

The wonderfully wild coastline north of Safi, with its dramatic cliffs sheltering gorgeous sandy coves, makes a great drive. The first stop is the headland of Sidi Bouzid, where you'll get a great view back over town. It's a good spot for lunch at the popular fish restaurant **Le Refuge** (☎ 024 464354; Route Sidi Bouzid; set menu Dh150; ☺ closed Mon).

Driving further on, you'll hit some undeveloped beaches that are up-and-coming surf spots and home to one of the longest tubular right-handers in the world. Professionals such as Gary Elkerton, Tom Carroll and Jeff Hackman come here to train and in 2006 the Billabong Challenge was held here. At 12km from Safi, sheltered **Lalla Fatna** is one of the nicest spots on this stretch. Take a left by the Lalla Fatna café down a series of hairpin bends to the sands beneath the cliffs. Further on you'll reach the headland and lighthouse at **Cap Beddouza** (23km), where there's a wide, sandy beach.

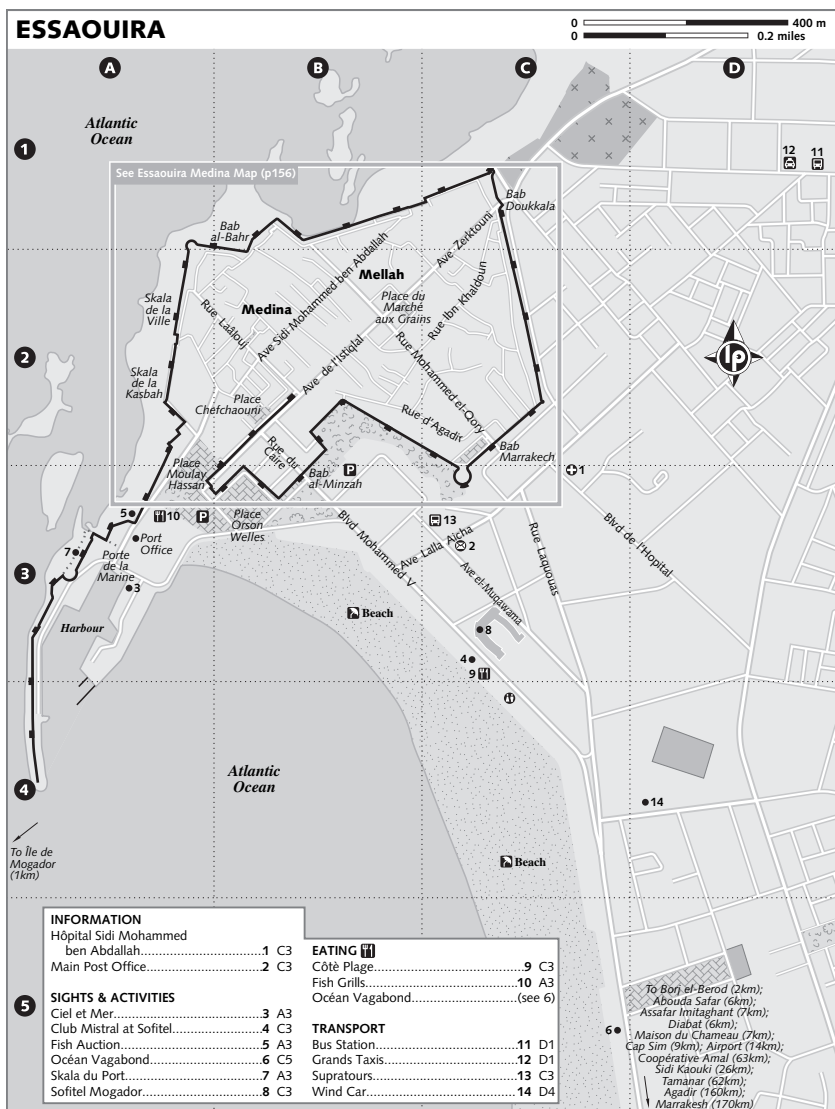
In summer (May to September) bus 15 runs along this route from Rue Driss ben Nacer in Safi.

ESSAOUIRA

pop 69,000

Essaouira (pronounced 'essa-weera', or 'es-Sweera' in Arabic) is at once familiar and exotic with its fortified walls, fishing harbour and seagulls soaring and screaming over the town. At first it seems as though this could be a town in Brittany, France – not such a strange thought given that Essaouira was designed by the same Frenchman who designed Brittany's most famous port town, Saint-Malo. And yet once you enter the walls, it is also infinitely Moroccan and mysterious: narrow alleys full of

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intrigue, the wind that reputedly drives people crazy, the smells of fish guts and damp sea air mixed with the aroma of spices and thuya wood, the women in their white *haïks* (veils), the midday shadow reflection of the palm trees on the red city walls, and the sound of drums and Gnawa singing that reverberates from shops and houses.

With its long history as a coastal trading post, Essaouira has always been a place where Arabs, Africans and Europeans meet. The town has a more laid-back attitude towards newcomers than elsewhere in Morocco, and it's the kind of place where people come and hang out rather than go sightseeing. This is what attracted hippies,

including Jimi Hendrix, here in the 1960s and 1970s, and later artists, writers and craftsmen. These days however, as in many places in Morocco, you are more likely to encounter visitors looking to buy a house in the picturesque old medina, dreaming of an easy life in the sun or of opening yet another guest house.

Firmly established on the travellers' trail, Essaouira has become more crowded in recent years and increasingly it is a chic place to be. The 18th-century old town is slowly but surely being tarted up and gentrified. In the late morning, busloads of day-trippers get dropped off at the main square, stroll en masse through the town, and are picked up on the other side of town in the late afternoon. At night however the place becomes itself again, laid-back and calm, when you can hear once again the gentle shuffle of kaftans, the blowing of the wind and the hush of the Souiris (term for locals from Essaouira) crowding the cafés on Place Moulay Hassan.

It is the wind – the beautifully named *alizée* or *taros* in Berber – that, despite the crowds, ensures Essaouira retains its character. It blows too hard to attract sun, sand and sea tourists: for much of the year, you can't sit on the beach at all as the sand blows horizontally in your face. No surprise then that Essaouira has been dubbed 'Wind City of Africa' and attracts so many wind-surfers. Sun-seekers head further south to the temperate clime of Agadir. The charm of the town is that it hasn't been entirely taken over by tourism. The fishing harbour is just as busy as it always was, the woodworkers are still amazing at their craft and the medina is just as important for locals as it is popular with tourists.

Essaouira lies on the crossroads between two tribes: the Arab Chiadma to the north and the Haha Berbers in the south. Add to that the Gnawa, who came originally from further south in Africa, and the Europeans and you get a rich cultural mix. The light and beauty have forever attracted artists to Essaouira, and the town has a flourishing art scene. The sculptor Boujemaa Lakhdar started the local museum in the 1950s and, in the process, inspired a generation of artists. Since then, the autodidactic Gnawa painters, who paint their dreams in a colourful palette, have earned international

renown, mainly thanks to the efforts of the Galerie Frederic Damgaard (p164).

Winter is the time to get closer to the real Essaouira, when the wind howls at its strongest and the waves smash against the city's defences. In summer the town is invaded by throngs of Moroccan tourists, the beach is crowded and it is hard to find accommodation.

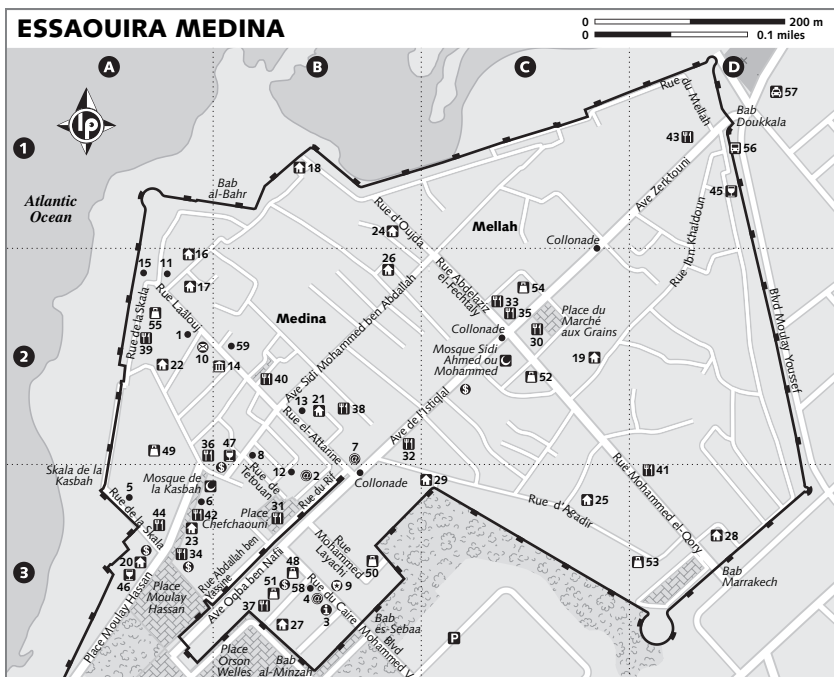
History

Most of the old city and fortifications in Essaouira today date from the 18th century, but the town has a much older history that started with the Phoenicians. For centuries, foreigners had a firm grip over the town, and although Moroccans eventually reclaimed it, the foreign influence lingers on in the way the town looks and feels today.

The Phoenicians founded the settlement of Migdol (meaning watchtower) here around the 7th century BC, and the rocky offshore islands soon supported a large population who extracted a much-prized purple dye from a local mollusc, the murex. For centuries Essaouira served as a safe harbour and freshwater source on the route between the Cap Verde Islands and the equator.

In the late 15th century, Portuguese sailors saw the advantages of the bay, renamed it Mogador, and established a trade and military post. The Jews took an important position in the town, as intermediaries between the sultan and the foreign powers. They were the only ones allowed to sell wheat to the Christians. By 1541, the Portuguese had lost control to the Saadians, the port fell from favour and trade diverted to Agadir. Although trade returned to Mogador when political power shifted to the Alawites, the town never fully recovered.

In 1764 Sultan Sidi Mohammed ben Abdallah installed himself in Essaouira, from where his corsairs could go and attack the people of Agadir who rebelled against him. He hired a French architect, Théodore Cornut, to create a city in the middle of sand and wind, where nothing existed. The combination of Moroccan and European styles pleased the Sultan, who renamed the town Essaouira, meaning 'well designed'. The port soon became a vital link for trade between Timbuktu and Europe. It was a place where the trade in gold, salt, ivory, and ostrich feathers was carefully



monitored, taxed and controlled by a garrison of 2000 imperial soldiers.

By 1912 the French had established their protectorate, changed the town's name back to Mogador and diverted trade to Casablanca, Tangier and Agadir. It was only with independence in 1956 that the sleepy backwater again became Essaouira. After Orson Welles filmed *Othello* here, and since Jimi Hendrix and the hippies chose Essaouira as a hang out, the town has seen a steady flow of visitors, from artists, surfers and writers to European tourists escaping the crowds of Marrakesh.

Dangers & Annoyances

Essaouira is still mostly a safe, relaxed tourist town but you should be on your guard in the backstreets of the *mellah* after dark. Although the town, and particularly the *mellah*, have been much cleaned up in recent years, there are still problems with drugs and drinking. Drug dealers and junkies hang out in the backstreets in an area east of l'Unétoile and north of Ave Zerktouni, making this the least salubrious part of town.

Orientation

Almost everything you'll need in Essaouira is in the old walled town, around the port or along the seafront, a pretty compact area that is easy to navigate.

The main thoroughfare in the walled town is Ave de l'Istiqlal, which becomes Ave Zerktouni as you head towards Bab Doukkala to the northeast. At the southwestern end is the main square Place Moulay Hassan, with café-terraces. Beyond the square is the port, fish market and the bastion of Skala du Port.

Intersecting the main thoroughfare is Rue Mohammed el-Qory, which runs from Bab Marrakesh in the southeast to near Bab al-Bahr in the northwest, changing into Rue Abdellaziz el-Fechtaly and then into Rue d'Oujda along the way. Parallel to this is another busy street, Rue Lattarine, merging into Rue Laalouj.

The new town is fast expanding but most of the hotels and restaurants are along the seafront; the rest of the town is residential. The bus station and grands taxis are 1km northeast in a fairly raggedy part of the new town.

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MAPS

The tourist office sells a useful map of town (Dh15) and an interesting guidebook *Essaouira – La Séductrice* (Essaouira – the Enchantress, in French, Dh40), which has information on everything from local history and arts to traditional music, festivals and architecture. Another good buy (though not always available locally) is *Essaouira de Bab en Bab: Promenades* (in French) by Hammad Berrada, a wonderful book of walking tours. It provides details of eight different walks, accompanied by descriptive text, photographs and comprehensive maps of the medina.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Galerie Aida (Map p156; ☎ 024 476290; 2 Rue de la Skala) Run by a former New Yorker, this place stocks a small but good selection of English-language books and some funky junk.

Jack's Kiosk (Map p156; ☎ 024 475538; 1 Place Moulay Hassan) Sells foreign-language newspapers and magazines along with some English, French and German books. You can also rent apartments here (see p163).

CULTURAL CENTRES

Alliance Franco-Marocaine (Map p156; ☎ 024 476197; www.ambafrance-ma.org/institut/afm-essaouira/index.cfm; Derb Lâalouji, 9 Rue Mohammed Diouri; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 2.30-6.30pm Mon-Fri) Offers semester-

long French classes and eight-week Arabic classes as well as regular films, exhibitions and cultural events.

EMERGENCIES

Medical Emergencies (☎ 024 475716)

Police (Map p156; ☎ 19, 024 784880; Rue du Caire)

Opposite the tourist office.

INTERNET ACCESS

There are internet cafés all over town. Most open from 9am to 11pm and charge Dh8 to Dh10 per hour.

Cyber Les Remparts (Map p156; 12 Rue du Rif)

Espace Internet (Map p156; 8 bis, Rue du Caire)

Mogador Informatique (5 Ave de l'Istiqlal)

MEDICAL SERVICES

Hôpital Sidi Mohammed ben Abdallah (Map p154;

☎ 024 475716; Blvd de l'Hôpital) For emergencies.

Pharmacie la Kasbah (Map p156; ☎ 024 475151;

12-14 Rue Allal ben Abdellah)

MONEY

There are several banks with ATMs around Place Moulay Hassan and along the main road leading northeast to Bab Doukkala. Most are good for foreign exchange and credit-card cash advances.

POST

Main post office (Map p154; Ave el-Mouqawama;

☎ 8.30am-4.15pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat)

Post office (Map p156; Rue Laâlouj; ☎ 8.30am–4pm Mon–Fri)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Délégation du Tourisme (Map p156; ☎ 024 783532; www.essaouira.com; 10 Rue du Caire; ☎ 9am–noon & 3–6.30pm Mon–Fri) This helpful tourist office has lots of information and advice for travellers, as well as noticeboards with information on events and activities around town.

Sights

Although there aren't so many formal sights in Essaouira, it's a wonderful place for rambling. The medina, souqs, ramparts, port and beach are perfect for leisurely discovery interspersed with relaxed lunches and unhurried coffee or fresh orange juice.

MEDINA & PORT

Essaouira's walled **medina** (Map p156) was added to Unesco's World Heritage list in 2001. Its well-preserved, late-18th-century fortified layout is a prime example of European military architecture in North Africa. For the visitor, the mellow atmosphere, narrow winding streets lined with colourful shops, whitewashed houses and heavy old wooden doors make it a wonderful place to stroll.

The dramatic, wave-lashed ramparts that surround the medina are a great place to get an overview of the labyrinth of streets. The ramparts were famously used in the opening scene of Orson Welles' *Othello* for a panoramic shot where Iago is suspended in a cage above the rocks and sea. The easiest place to access the ramparts is at **Skala**

EMMA WILSON

How long have you lived in Essaouira? I have been coming to Essaouira for 10 years, and I have lived here for about five years. I love it but I go home to London for sanity's sake every three months, usually for three weeks.

Why did you choose Essaouira? I guess Essaouira chose me and I suited it. I bought a house here at first, because I fell in love with this white, organic architecture and the town just reeled me in. This has partly to do both with the fact that the business is just more successful with me around, but mainly because I thought life here would be less stressful than in London and boy, have I been proven very wrong!

Has the town changed a lot since you have been living here? It has changed hugely in the last five years. There has been a huge influx of tourists, so now there are a lot of hotels all built along the seafront. A lot of authenticity has been removed and with lots of foreigners buying up houses in the old city, mostly to turn them into holiday homes, the town is now too cleaned up. These days it's hard to find the true Essaouira I used to know, where the fishermen were sitting in the port mending their nets or pitching sheets of plastic anywhere they could to sell their catch. The money spent by the local authorities is all superficial I'm afraid. The infrastructure really is a mess and Morocco is a little corrupt!

How do you feel about the changes, is it good or bad? I personally have mixed views about the changes. Of course for us in some ways the changes are good because more people come to Essaouira, so we now have a successful business. But for many locals it has had a negative effect, because there is no work for them here so they have been pushed to alcohol and drugs. They are a lot more aggressive and you cannot leave a bag in a café and go back an hour later for it and expect it still to be there like you used to.

Unfortunately when a new hotel opens employees are brought in from more educated towns or cities like Marrakesh, Agadir or Casa, so there is less and less work for the people in the town. We were made to feel very welcome here at first, but there is now a lot of resentment against the foreigners like me who have bought places here and are running a business, do you get my story? It happens in so many places but is so sad to see and it is us who are to blame really. I still love the place to bits though...

What is your favourite building or monument? My favourite building in town is probably Villa Maroc from the interior, but I love walking along the ramparts at any time of the day. It is truly stunning there and I don't go often enough.

de la Ville (Map p156), the impressive sea bastion built along the cliffs. A collection of European brass cannons from the 18th and 19th centuries lines the walkway here and you'll also get great views out to sea and gorgeous sunsets.

Down by the harbour, the **Skala du Port** (Map p154; adult/child Dh10/3; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 2.30-6pm) offers more cannons and picturesque views over the fishing port and the Île de Mogador. Looking back at the walled medina from here, through a curtain of swirling seagulls, you'll get the same evocative picture that is used on nearly all official literature.

The large working port is a bustling place with plenty of activity throughout the day. Along with the flurry of boats, nets being repaired and the day's catch being landed

you can see traditional wooden boats being made. It's also worth visiting the **fish auction** (Map p154; ☎ 3-5pm Mon-Sat), which takes place in the market hall just outside the port gates.

ÎLE DE MOGADOR & ELEANORA'S FALCONS

Used in Phoenician and Roman times for the production of Tyrian purple dye, and once known as the Îles Purpuraires (Purple Isles), the **Île de Mogador** (off Map p154) is actually two islands and several tiny islets. A massive fortification, a mosque and a disused prison are all that is left of what was once a thriving settlement, and today the uninhabited islands are a sanctuary for Eleanora's falcons.

These elegant birds of prey come here to breed from April to October before making their incredible return journey south to

What do you like about this place? I like the naivety of the people and the way they showed me what is really important in life – spending time with your family, watching the kids grow, while we in Europe run around like headless chickens. I am sure they have it more right than us really!

What is your favourite restaurant? My favourite restaurant was Elizir but he has closed just now, but he is going to reopen I hope. I love the fresh fish at the stalls just outside the harbour, particularly number 33 Ali. I have known the boys there for 10 years so they always really look after me, but I hate sharing a table so I normally go there around 3pm.

Your favourite bar or café? Taros is the only real bar really. It's a great place to go at sunset, with the seagulls soaring over you on the rooftop terrace. The Café France on the square is very authentic but I hate to say that the Italian Gelateria on the corner is my favourite, because they have excellent coffee and ice cream!

Where do you go to relax? Océan Vagabond on the beach is good to relax, otherwise I go further south to the beach in Sidi Kaouki.

What is your favourite word in the local darija (Moroccan dialect)? *Chuir* which means 'so so'. When someone asks 'Are you ok?' you can answer '*chuir*'.

There seem to be many characters in the streets here, do you have a favourite? You are right, there are so many, and I love or hate them all for different reasons. The tramp at the car park by the fish stalls is cool though. He sort of works there but doesn't get paid, as in he hangs out there looking filthy dirty so we all give him money. I have to say he is very helpful and speaks excellent English.

What do you do on weekends? The week and weekends are all the same to me. If I have clients staying in one of our houses, or I'm doing up someone's house, I will usually be running around with them. If not, I'll be seeing friends in the country, or off to Marrakesh or Sidi Kaouki for a couple of days.

What does Essaouira represent for you? Essaouira for me is the old Essaouira: lovely, giving, smiling people, the simplicity of their lives and they seem so content. The fact that they have time to sit and have tea with friends and chat all day (although now that drives me mad). I love the architecture and the town definitely has some magic that I will never forget.

Emma Wilson is an interior designer, who rents out houses, and girl-about-town.

Madagascar. The falcons can easily be seen through binoculars from Essaouira beach, with the best viewing in the early evening. Another viewing place (though not recommended in the evening if you're alone) is south of town, about 1km or so beyond the lighthouse, on the shore by the mouth of the river.

The islands are strictly off limits in breeding season but you can arrange a private boat trip at other times. You need to obtain a permit (free) from the port office before seeking out one of the small fishing boats at the port and negotiating the price of the trip. It shouldn't cost more than Dh300.

There is also an organised boat trip, **Ciel et Mer** (Map p154; ☎ 024 474618, 064 326493; www.mogador-iles.com; Port de Peche; adult/child Dh80/40) around the islands, but bad sailing conditions can delay departures or leave you stranded at sea unable to escape relentless folk music. In summer there are four departures between 11.30am and 6.30pm. For the rest of the year, departures are at noon and 3.30pm. It also organises fishing trips.

SIDI MOHAMMED BEN ABDALLAH MUSEUM

Essaouira's beautifully refurbished **museum** (Map p156; ☎ 024 475300; Rue Laâlouj; adult/child Dh10/3; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Wed-Mon) in an old riad, has a small but interesting collection of jewellery, costumes, weapons, amazing musical instruments and carpets of the region. There's a section explaining the signs and symbols used by local craftspeople and some interesting photographs of Essaouira at the turn of the century. Note also the Roman and Phoenician objects found in the bay.

Activities

BEACH & WATERSPORTS

Essaouira's wide, sandy beach is a great place for walking, but the strong winds and currents mean it's not so good for sunbathing or swimming. Footballers, windsurfers and kitesurfers take over the town end of the beach, while fiercely competitive horse and camel owners ply the sands further on. They can be quite insistent, so be firm and make it clear if you've no interest in taking a ride – and bargain hard if you do.

If you're walking, head south across the Ksob River (impassable at high tide) to see

the ruins of the **Borj el-Berod** (off Map p154), an old fortress and pavilion partially covered in sand. Local legend has it that this was the original inspiration for the Jimi Hendrix classic 'Castles Made of Sand'; however, the song was released a year before he visited. From here you can walk inland to the village of Diabat (p166) or continue along the sands to the sand dunes of Cap Sim.

A number of outlets rent water-sports equipment and offer instruction along the beach. **Club Mistral at Sofitel** (Map p154; ☎ 024 783934; www.club-mistral.com; Blvd Mohammed V; ☎ 9am-6pm) rents windsurfing equipment (Dh170 per hour) and surfboards (Dh80 per hour). It also offers kitesurfing and surfing tuition for all levels (from Dh250 per hour). Six-hour surfing courses cost Dh1100 and 10-hour kitesurfing courses cost Dh2300.

Further along the beach, **Océan Vagabond** (off Map p154; ☎ 024 783934; www.oceanvagabond.com, in French; ☎ 8am-8pm) rents surfboards (three days for Dh500) and gives two-hour surfing lessons (Dh350). It also offers kitesurfing lessons (six hours cost Dh1950) and rental (three days for Dh1200), and windsurfing lessons (one hour/six hours costs Dh500/1200) and rental (Dh60 per hour). It has a cool café-restaurant with a laid-back terrace on the beach.

HAMMAMS

There are plenty of small hammams hidden about town;

Hammam de la Kasbah (Map p156; 7 Rue de Marrakesh; admission Dh8) For a more traditional, local experience. Women only.

Hammam Lalla Mira (Map p156; ☎ 024 475907; www.lallamira.ma; 14 Rue d'Algerie; hammam Dh15, gommage Dh60; ☎ 9.30am-7pm women) One of the oldest, this newly restored hammam is heated by solar energy and, although aimed at tourists, has a wonderful traditional interior. Good value massages with argan oil.

Hammam Riad el-Madina (Map p156; ☎ 024 475046; 9 Rue el-Attarine; admission Dh70, massage from Dh100; ☎ 9-10am & 3-4pm women, 10am-12.30pm & 4-7pm mixed) Another good place to break a first sweat.

Sofitel Mogador (Map p154; ☎ 024 479000; Blvd Mohammed V; ☎ 7am-12.30pm & 4-10.30pm women, 2.30-4pm mixed) A traditional hammam, also offering hydrotherapy, aquagym and massages. Excellent service.

RIDING

To try something more serious than the horse and camel rides on the beach, several

companies offer cross-country trekking and multi-day rides in the countryside around Essaouira. Tailor-made horse trips can be arranged through Ranch de Diabat (p166), which also offers riding lessons for adults and children. **Abouda Safar** (☎ 028 271258, 062 743497; www.abouda-safar.com) offers an eight-day trek around the region or half-day/full-day local treks (Dh350/450).

For camel riding, the best place to go is the **Maison du Chameau** (off Map p154; ☎ 024 785962; maisonduchameau@yahoo.fr; Douar Al Arab; per hr Dh 110, per day incl lunch Dh380, r Dh190-330), a remote guest house that is home to eight *me-haris* (white Sudanese racing camels). The guest house offers weeklong camel-riding courses, shorter excursions and a selection of peaceful rooms decked out in vibrant fuchsia-pink and electric-blue.

Festivals & Events

Essaouira has three major festivals that draw hoards of performers and spectators to town.

Printemps Musical des Alizés (May; www.alizesfestival.com) A small music festival featuring classical music and opera.

Gnaoua and World Music Festival (3rd weekend Jun; www.festival-gnaoua.net) A four-day musical extravaganza featuring international, national and local performers as well as a series of art exhibitions.

Festival des Andalouses Atlantiques (late Sep) An eclectic mix of Andalusian music, art and dance by local and international performers.

Sleeping

Accommodation in Essaouira isn't cheap but there's now a seemingly endless selection of properties to choose from at all price levels. Most hotels and riads are within the walls of the medina, so everything you need is within walking distance. In summer book ahead or at least arrive early in the day to find a room. As the medina gets increasingly crowded, hotels are being built along the coast further south and on the seafloor.

BUDGET

The choice of budget accommodation in Essaouira is well above the usual Moroccan standard. Not only will you find a place where the bathrooms won't scare you, you'll probably get a character-laden room and terrace as well.

Hôtel Smara (Map p156; ☎ 024 475655; 26 Rue de la Skala; s/d/q Dh75/105/185, d/q with sea view Dh200/275) All whitewashed, the Smara has just four rooms overlooking the sea, the best ones on the roof terrace where breakfast is served. The other rooms open onto an internal room, but can be damp in winter. The communal bathrooms are tiled and clean. Popular because it's good value, especially the quadruple rooms, so book ahead or arrive early.

Dar Afram (Map p156; ☎ 024 785657; www.dar-afraam.com; 10 Rue Sidi Magdoul; s Dh150, d Dh300-400, Jun-Sep s Dh250, d Dh400-450) This extremely friendly guest house has simple, spotless rooms with shared bathrooms and a funky vibe. The Aussie-Moroccan owners are musicians and an impromptu session often follows the evening meals shared around a communal table. It also has a lovely tiled hammam.

our pick Riad Nakhla (Map p156; ☎ /fax 024 474940; www.essaouirinet.com/riad-nakhla; 2 Rue Agadir; s Dh225, d Dh325, ste Dh400-500) Riad Nakhla comes as a bit of shock. It looks like any other budget place from the outside, but inside the weary traveller is met with a friendly reception in a beautiful courtyard, with elegant stone columns and a fountain trickling, more what you'd expect from a hotel in a higher price bracket. The well-appointed bedrooms are simple but comfortable and immaculately kept, full of local flavour with shuttered windows, colourful bedspreads and great *tadelakt*-clad bathrooms. All have a TV. Breakfast on the roof terrace with views over the ocean and town is another treat. It's an incredible bargain at this price.

Hôtel Beau Rivage (Map p156; ☎ 024 475925; www.essaouirinet.com/beaurivage; 14 Place Moulay Hassan; s/d/tr Dh250/350/450, d without bathroom Dh200) As central as it gets, overlooking the main square, the Beau Rivage has bright and cheerful rooms with modern fittings and spotless bathrooms. The rooms are a bit noisy but offer the greatest spectacle in town, while breakfast is served on the charming and quiet roof terrace with views over the port and town.

Hôtel Les Matins Bleus (Map p156; ☎ 024 785363, 066 308899; www.les-matins-bleus.com; 22 Rue de Drâa; s/d/ste Dh275/420/840, Jun-Sep Dh300/460/920) Hidden down a dead-end street, this charming hotel has bright, traditionally styled rooms

surrounding a central courtyard painted in cheerful colours. The rooms all have plain white walls, lovely local fabrics and spotless bathrooms. Breakfast is served on the sheltered terrace from where you'll get good views over the medina.

MIDRANGE

In this price range you'll be spoilt for choice in Essaouira. Each place is more charming than the next.

Lalla Mira (Map p156; ☎ 024 475046; 14 Rue d'Algerie; www.lallamira.net; s/d/ste Dh436/692/920; 📍) This gorgeous little place, the town's first eco-hotel, has simple rooms with ochre *tadelakt* walls, wrought-iron furniture, natural fabrics and solar-powered underfloor heating. The hotel also has anti-allergy beds, a great hammam (see p160) and a good restaurant serving a selection of vegetarian food.

Le Grand Large (Map p156; ☎ 024 472866; www.riadlegrandlarge.com; 2 Rue Oum-Rabia; r Dh495-715, half board per person extra Dh140) After the simple whitewash and muted colours of many riads in town, Le Grand Large is much more colourful with pink, green and blue walls, bright throws on cast-iron beds and buckets of character. It's a friendly, cheerful place with an excellent restaurant.

Dar Al-Bahar (Map p156; ☎ 024 476831; www.daralbahar.com; 1 Rue Touahen; d Dh550-850, ste Dh1045) The rooms at the Al-Bahar are elegantly simple, with plain white walls, wrought-iron furniture and a contrasting touch of blue, pink, green or yellow in the traditional bedspreads and curtains. Local artworks adorn the walls and the views from the terrace overlooking the ocean are magnificent.

Dar Adel (Map p156; ☎ 024 473910; www.dar-adel.com; 63 Rue Touahen; d Dh600-770, ste Dh880) This lovingly restored house has just a few comfy rooms with subtle lighting, beautiful furniture, restrained muted colours and little touches that make it feel like a home rather than a hotel. The staff is incredibly friendly – you'll feel more like family than a paying guest by the time you leave.

La Casa del Mar (Map p156; ☎ 024 475091; www.lacasa-delmar.com; 35 Rue D'Oujda; d incl breakfast Dh825/990) Delightful guest house that seamlessly blends contemporary design with traditional style and creates a stunning yet simple atmosphere where you can sit back and relax. Retire to your room, join the

other guests for a communal Moroccan meal or Spanish paella, arrange a home visit from a masseur or henna artist, or just watch the sunset from the seafront terrace.

TOP END

Madada (Map p156; ☎ 024 475512; www.madada.com; 5 Rue Youssef el-Fassi; d Dh1240-1670, ste Dh1835; 📍) Sleek, stylish and very, very slick, Madada offers luxurious, contemporary rooms in a traditional house. Ivory and sand *tadelakt*, pared-back minimalism, designer furniture, neutral colours and a profound sense of calm run throughout. The spacious, bright rooms have subtle decor, brass handbasins, private terraces and rosewood furniture. The upstairs rooms have a large terrace with sweeping views of the bay.

Palais Heure Bleue (Map p156; ☎ 024 474222; www.heure-bleue.com; 2 Rue Ibn Batouta; d/ste Dh2200/3900; 📍 📍 📍) A decided hush falls as you walk through the doors of the Heure Bleue, Essaouira's top hotel. This swish place has everything you could ever want, from a rooftop swimming pool to its own private cinema and billiard room. Chic European style and colonial charm meet in the lounge, where a grand piano sits beneath trophy heads from a long-forgotten hunting trip, and in the bedrooms where zebra prints, dark woods and marble counter tops vie for attention.

APARTMENTS & RIADS

Essaouira has a great selection of apartments and riads to rent, most done up in impeccable style. If you're travelling as a family or in a group, they can be an affordable and flexible option. Prices range from about Dh500 per night for a one-bed apartment up to Dh3000 per night for the grand three-bedroomed former British consulate.

our pick Dar Beida (Map p156; ☎ 067 965386, UK 00 44 07768 352190; www.castlesinthesand.com; per week incl maid, firewood & babouches per person from Dh3300) A stunning 18th-century traditional Moroccan house, the 'White House' right in the centre of Essaouira, was lovingly restored by London interior decorator Emma Wilson (see p158) and her husband with iconic 1950 and '60s furniture found in local junk markets. The house has several bedrooms, the best one on the upper roof terrace, and two living rooms with lots of books and

CDs, and a large terrace. This is definitely the place to be in Essaouira. Dar Emma is Emma's other house for rent, more traditional but equally comfortable and funky.

Jack's Apartments (Map p156; ☎ 024 475538; www.essaouira.com/apartments; 1 Place Moulay Hassan) and **Karimo** (Map p156; ☎ 024 474500; www.karimo.net; Place Moulay Hassan) both have a good selection of rental properties. Book well in advance during the high season.

Eating

RESTAURANTS

Essaouira is packed with cafés and restaurants so there's no difficulty finding somewhere to eat. However, the standards vary substantially.

Medina

Riad Al-Baraka (Map p156; ☎ 024 473561; 113 Rue Mohammed el-Qory; mains Dh45-95, set menu Dh90-130; ☎ noon-3pm & 6.30pm-late Mon-Sat) Set in a former Jewish school, this hip place has several dining rooms and a bar set around a large courtyard shaded by a huge fig tree. The food is mainly Moroccan with some Middle Eastern and Jewish influences, the decor cool, and there's live music by local bands at weekends.

Restaurant El-Minzah (Map p156; ☎ 024 475308; 3 Ave Oqba ben Nafii; mains Dh50-120, set menus from Dh95) Sit on the outside terrace or in the elegant dining room inside at this popular place facing the ramparts. The menu features a good selection of international dishes with specialities such as blue shark and Berber tajine with argan oil, and there's lively Gnawa music here on Saturday nights.

Restaurant Ferdous (Map p156; ☎ 024 473655; 27 Rue Abdesslam Lebadi; mains Dh60-80, set menu Dh105; ☎ closed Mon) A delightful Moroccan restaurant, and one of the few places in town that serves real, home-cooked, traditional Moroccan food. The seasonal menu offers an innovative take on traditional recipes, the service is very friendly and the low tables and padded seating make it feel like the real McCoy.

ourpick Elizir (Map p156; ☎ 024 472103; 1 Rue Agadir; mains Dh80-90) The best restaurant in town by far, this place was temporarily closed at the time of research, but will hopefully reopen soon. The Elizir serves a perfectly cooked mix of Moroccan and Mediterranean dishes with an innovative twist. The

owner of this old house just off the main street is super-friendly, and loves to talk about where he found all the iconic 1950s and '60s furniture he has collected from local junk markets. The decor is sublime, and if it were in London or New York, it would be voted the hippest place in town.

Restaurante Les Alizés (Map p156; ☎ 024 476819; 26 Rue de la Skala; mains Dh75-90) This popular place, run by a charming Moroccan couple in a 19th-century house, has delicious Moroccan dishes, particularly the couscous with fish and the tajine of *boulettes de sardines* (sardine balls). You'll get a very friendly welcome. Book well ahead as it fills up every night, both with Moroccans and visitors. It's above Pension Smar.

Le 5 (Map p156; ☎ 024 784726; 5 Rue Youssef el-Fassi; Dh180; ☎ 7-11pm Wed-Mon, noon-3pm Sat & Sun) Deep-purple seating, warm stone arches and giant lampshades dominate this trendy restaurant which serves well-cooked and original Mediterranean and Moroccan dishes. One of the favourite places to head for dinner.

Beachfront

Ocean Vagabond (off Map p154; ☎ 024 783934; Blvd Mohammed V; mains Dh60-90) Although a good walk from town, this simple little café is the best of the beachfront offerings. It serves a decent but limited range of sandwiches, pizza, pasta and salads and has plenty of comfy seats in the sand from where the kids can run free.

Côté Plage (Map p154; ☎ 024 479000; Blvd Mohammed V; mains Dh150) Part of the looming Sofitel across the road, this beachfront café has a nice and elegant decked area where you can sit beneath the shade of giant white umbrellas. You can nibble on tapas (Dh35) as you look out over the ocean for the afternoon or arrive on Sunday for the all-day barbecue.

CAFÉS, PÂTISSERIES & ICE-CREAM PARLOURS

Taros Café (Map p156; ☎ 024 476407; 2 Rue de la Skala; ☎ 8am-11pm Mon-Sat) The roof terrace at the Taros is a wonderful place for afternoon tea. The salons in this beautifully restored house are lined with artworks.

Café d'Horloge (Map p156; Place Chefchaouini) Set on the attractive square beneath the clocktower, this popular café is an excellent choice for a breakfast of *amlou* (a spread

made of local argan oil, almond and honey) and crepes or bread (Dh25). It's away from the hoards of people on the main café drag and a good choice for a quiet coffee or snack.

Gelateria Dolce Freddo (Map p156; Place Moulay Hassan) With more than 30 varieties of authentic Italian ice cream on offer, you'll find it hard to resist temptation at this little place on the main square. It's just Dh5 a scoop and the best you'll find in town.

Au Bonheur des Dames (Map p156; ☎ 024 475968; Place du Marché au Grains) A new, elegant terrace on this picturesque square that serves an upmarket selection of teas, coffee, fresh juices and a good breakfast (Dh80).

For morning croissants or an afternoon pastry the best places to go are **Pâtisserie Driss** (Map p156), which has a hidden seating area, and **Café Faid** (Map p156), both near Place Moulay Hassan.

QUICK EATS

One of Essaouira's best food experiences is the **outdoor fish grills** (Map p154) that line the port end of Place Moulay Hassan. Just choose what you want to eat from the colourful displays of fresh fish and seafood at each grill, agree on a price (expect to pay about Dh40 for lunch) and wait for it to be cooked on the spot.

Alternatively, you can visit the **fish souq** (Map p156; just off Ave de l'Istiqlal), buy some of the day's catch and take it to one of the grill stands in the southern corner. It'll come back cooked and served with bread and salad for Dh30.

There are plenty of snack stands (Map p154) and hole-in-the-wall type places along Ave Sidi Mohammed ben Abdallah, Ave Zerktouni and just inside Bab Doukkala.

Drinking

Despite its popularity as a tourist destination, Essaouira isn't the hottest place for nightlife. To warm up for an evening out, you could visit the alcohol shop (Map p156) near Bab Doukkala and take your drinks to your hotel terrace to watch the sun go down. Alternatively, try the terrace at the **Café Restaurant Bab Laachour** (Map p156; Place Moulay Hassan).

One of the most atmospheric terraces in town, and the only real bar, is at the **Taros Café** (Map p156; ☎ 024 476407; 2 Rue du Skala;

☎ 8am-11pm Mon-Sat), where you can sip your drinks under giant lamps and huddle round your table to fend off the wind whipping up from the sea. The restaurant (mains Dh70 to Dh120) is a bit hit-and-miss for food, but it has live music and belly dancing most nights.

For something more sultry, the hip bar and restaurant **Le Patio** (Map p156; ☎ 024 474166; 28 Rue Moulay Rachid; ☎ 5.30-11pm Tue-Sun) is a candlelit den with blood-red furnishings and a black mirror ball. You'll need to buy some tapas (Dh35) to just sit and drink or you might even be tempted by the whiff of grilled fish coming from the canopied restaurant (mains Dh85 to Dh150).

Shopping

Essaouira is well known for its woodwork and you can visit the string of **woodcarving workshops** (Map p156) near the Skala de la Ville. The exquisite marquetry work on sale is made from local fragrant thuya wood, which is now an endangered species. Although the products are beautiful and sold at excellent prices, buying anything made from thuya threatens the last remaining stands of trees by increasing demand and therefore encouraging illegal logging. For a guilt-free conscience look for crafts made from other woods instead. For fixed-price shopping try the **Coopérative Artisanale des Marqueteurs** (Map p156; 6 Rue Khalid ibn Oualid).

Essaouira's other great product is its raffia work, made from the fibres of the doum palm. For the most stylish designs, try **Rafia Craft** (Map p156; ☎ 024 783632; 82 Rue d'Agadir), which sells much of its line to European outlets.

For herbal Viagra, Berber lipstick, cures for baldness and exotic spices, the **spice souq** (Map p156) is the place to go. You can also buy argan-oil products here as well as the traditional *amlou* (about Dh40 per bottle). Nearby is the **jewellery souq** (Map p156), a small area of jewellery shops with everything from heavy Berber beads to gaudy gold.

Essaouira also has a reputation as an artists hub, and several galleries around town sell works by local painters. It's a mixed bag of talent and you may need to look in all of them before finding something you like. **Galleries Frederic Damgaard** (Map p156; ☎ 024 784446; www.galeriedamgaard.com; Rue Oqba ben Nafi) is

the best and oldest in town and features the work of local artists. Nearby, the **Association Tital des Arts Plastiques** (Map p156; ☎ 024 475424; 4 Rue de Caire) and **Espace Othello** (Map p156; ☎ 024 475095; 9 Rue Mohammed Layachi; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-8pm) feature up-and-coming artists.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Direct flights to Casablanca and Paris leave from **Aéroport de Mogador** (☎ 024 476709; Route d'Agadir), 15km south of town, though the schedule is unreliable.

BUS

The **bus station** (off Map p154; ☎ 024 785241) is about 400m northeast of the medina, an easy walk during the day but better in a petit taxi (Dh10) if you're arriving/leaving late at night. The **left-luggage office** (Dh7 per item) is open 24 hours.

CTM (☎ 024784764) has several buses daily for Safi (Dh45, 2½ hours), El-Jadida (Dh85, four hours) and Casablanca (Dh125, six hours), and one to Marrakesh (Dh75, 2½ hours). The bus to Agadir (Dh70, three hours) continues to Inezgane (Dh70). It's best to book a day in advance for long-distance services.

Other companies run cheaper and more frequent buses to the same destinations as

well as to Taroudannt (Dh70, six hours), Tan Tan (Dh130, six hours) and Rabat (Dh90, six hours).

Supratours (Map p154; ☎ 024475317), the ONCF subsidiary, runs buses to Marrakesh train station (Dh80, 2½ hours, four daily) to connect with trains to Casablanca from the station near Bab Marrakesh. You should book several days in advance for this service, particularly in summer.

Local bus 5 to Diabat (Dh4) and Sidi Kaouki (Dh6) leaves from Blvd Moulay Youssef outside Bab Doukkala. There are about eight services a day.

TAXI

The grand-taxi rank (off Map p154) lies immediately west of the bus station. The fare to Agadir (or Inezgane) is Dh75.

Getting Around

To get to the airport take bus 5 (Dh10, 15 minutes) or a petit taxi (Dh150 to Dh200). The blue petits taxis are also a good idea for getting to and from the bus station (Dh10) but they can't enter the medina. If you're happy to walk but don't want to carry your bags, there are plenty of enterprising men with luggage carts who will wheel your bags directly to your hotel (about Dh20).

THE NEW OLIVE OIL

Organic argan oil is 'the new olive oil', increasingly used in hip restaurants around the world to season salads with its nutty flavour. The wrinkled argan tree is unique to this part of the world and, as a result, the argan forests of the Souss Valley and the Haha Coast south of Essaouira have recently been designated by Unesco as a Biosphere reserve.

The tree, *Argania spinosa*, is resistant to heat and survives temperatures up to 50°C, so is an essential tool in the fight against desertification in southern Morocco. It has become vital to the local economy, providing firewood, fodder for the goats – you can see them actually climb into the branches – and oil for humans. Berber women harvest the fruits in spring and then feed them to goats, whose digestive juices dissolve the tough elastic coating on the shell. The nuts are then recovered from the goats' dung, and the kernels are split, lightly toasted, pulped and pressed. To produce just one litre of oil takes 30kg of nuts and 15 hours of manual labour, solely done by women. In a recent change to this tradition, some cooperatives have decided to cut the goats out of the process and are hand-picking fruits from the trees to produce a more subtle-tasting oil. You can see this whole process in a guided tour at the **Coopérative Amal** (☎ 024 788141; www.targanine.com, in French; Tamarar; admission free; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri), 80km north of Agadir, whose organic oil won the 2001 Slow Food Award.

The Berbers have long used argan oil to heal, but modern research suggests that the oil may help reduce cholesterol and prevent arteriosclerosis. The oil also has a high vitamin E content, which makes it a great anti-wrinkle cream. In the kitchen its rich and sweet nutty flavour works wonders as a salad dressing, or added to grilled vegetables or tajine. Berbers mix it with ground almonds and honey to make *amlou*, a delicacy believed to have aphrodisiac properties.

You can hire bikes from **Résidence Shah-zared** (Map p156; ☎ 024 472977; 1 Rue Youssef el-Fassi; per day Dh80) and **Résidence Hôtel Al-Arboussas** (Map p156; ☎ 024 472610; 24 Impasse Rue Laâlouj; per day Dh80).

Cars can be hired from **Wind Car** (Map p154; ☎/fax 024 472804; Rue Princesse Lalla Amina) for around Dh400 per day. **Avis** (☎ 024 474926) also has an office at the airport.

AROUND ESSAOUIRA

If you have your own transport, it's worth taking a trip to one of the small women's cooperatives around Essaouira that sell argan products, natural cosmetics and foodstuffs. Try **Assafar Imitaghant** (off Map p154; ☎ 061 553586) 8km from town on the road to Marrakesh or the **Coopérative Tiguemine** (off Map p156; ☎ 024 790110) 7km further on. The tourist office has a full list of places to visit. Best of all, travel south to the village of Tamarar to see the whole argan process at the **Coopérative Amal** (see p165).

Diabat

الديابات

The sleepy Berber village of Diabat, just south of Essaouira, was once a dope-smoking colony made popular with hippies after a visit by Jimi Hendrix in the early '70s. Today it is the site of a major project for a new marina, golf course and tourist complex.

The main reason to visit is to hire a horse or join a trekking tour at **Ranch de Diabat** (☎ 062 297203; www.ranchdediabat.com, in French; 3-/6-day trip Dh3500/6000). You can take a lesson, ride along the beach or sign up for a multi-day trip through the surrounding countryside.

If you want to stay in Diabat, your best bet is the rustic **Auberge Tangaro** (☎ 024 784784; www.auberge-tangaro.com; d half board per person Dh700-900), a remote old house in a serene location. The rooms here are chic but spartan, each has its own open fireplace and is lit by candlelight (there's no electricity on the prop-

erty). The hearty communal evening meals are romantically lit by candelabra.

To get to Diabat drive south on the coast road to Agadir and turn right just after the bridge about 7km out of town. Alternatively, local bus 5 leaves from outside Bab Marrakech (Dh5, every two hours).

Sidi Kaouki

سيدي كاوكي

The constant blustery winds, wild beach and decent accommodation at Sidi Kaouki are fast turning it into one of Morocco's top windsurfing and surfing spots. It's not for the faint-hearted and the waters here can be dangerous for inexperienced surfers.

A clutch of guest houses and small stalls serving tajine, seafood and snacks stretch along the beachfront. You can rent a horse (half-hour/hour costs Dh70/120) and ride along the long stretch of beach, or try your hand at mono-gliding at **VHM** (Village Hôtel Meziane; ☎ 024 475035; per hr Dh90; ☎ 10am-6pm) at the far end of the beach. The VHM centre also has a restaurant (mains Dh30 to Dh55).

For overnight stays try **El Kaouki** (☎ 024 476600; www.kaouki.com; s/d/tr incl breakfast 210/300/410, half board extra Dh120), a lovely house with simple but comfortable rooms in white and blue, decorated with local textiles, and with good views of the ocean or country behind. There is no electricity, which makes for romantic candlelit dinners. You'll get a warm welcome. It's a good place to stay for a few days.

Alternatively, try the swish new apartments at **Windy Kaouki** (☎ 024 472279; www.wind-y-kaouki.com; apt Dh750-1150). Although it's fairly plain from the outside, the wonderful rooms display a modern take on traditional Moroccan decor, with warm colours, open fireplaces and balconies with sea views.

Sidi Kaouki is about 27km south of Essaouira. Bus 5 (Dh7) leaves from outside Bab Marrakech every two hours.

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