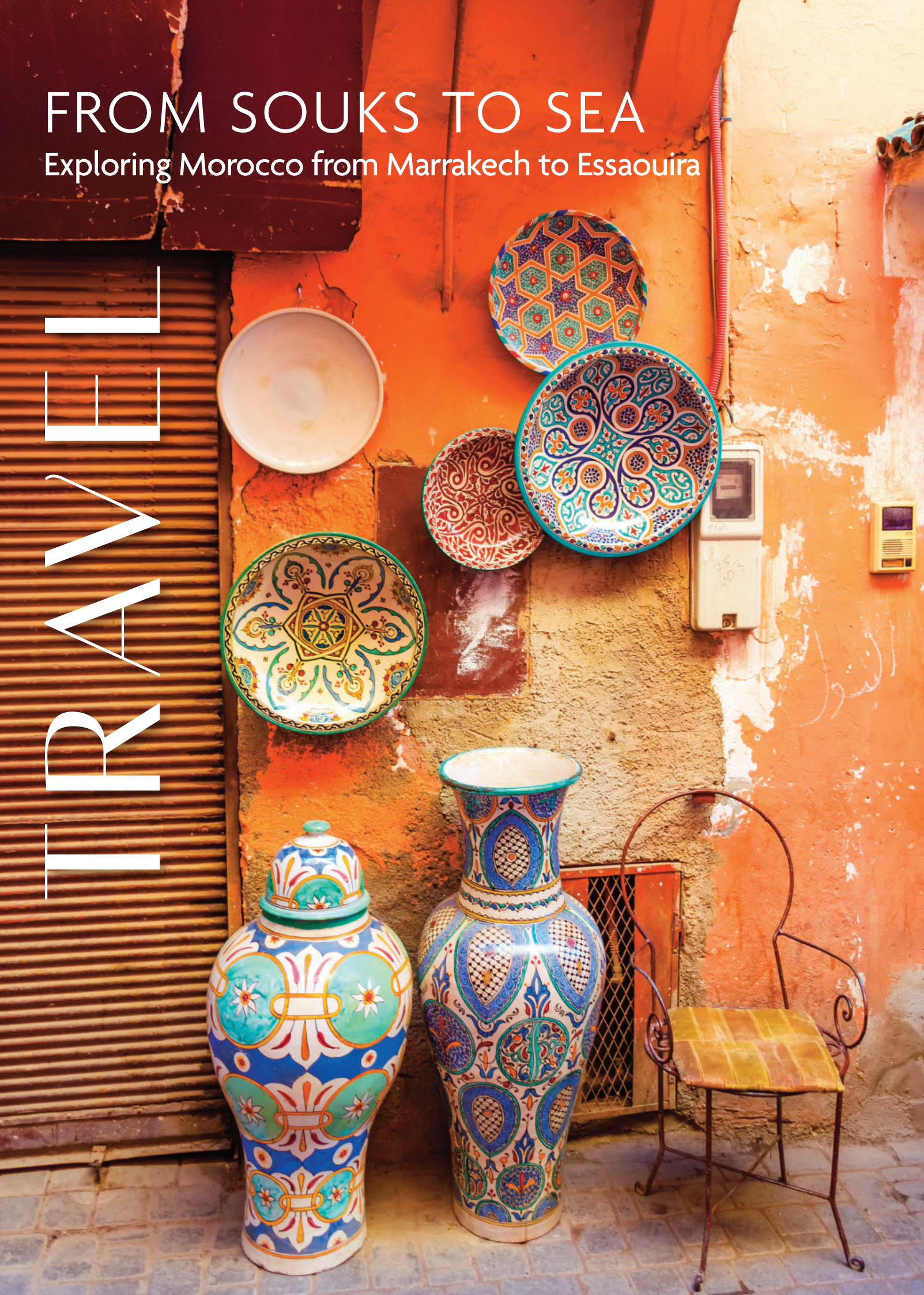


FROM SOUKS TO SEA

Exploring Morocco from Marrakech to Essaouira

TRAVEL



MARRAKESH

Marrakech is a city of contrasts, where vibrant souks and centuries old architecture meet serene gardens and hidden riads. Whether you're exploring for a day or a week, there are certain places that simply can't be missed. Here are three must-visit spots to experience the true magic of the Red City.

WHERE TO VISIT

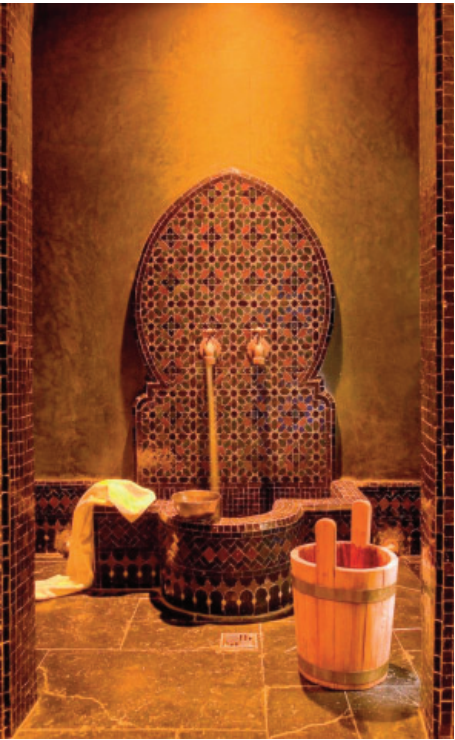


The Hammams

No visit to Marrakech is complete without experiencing a traditional hammam, the Moroccan version of a steam bath. From lavish spa resorts to authentic neighbourhood hammams, this ritual is a must-try. Indulge in a cleansing steam session followed by a scrub with black soap, leaving you refreshed and rejuvenated. Luxury options, like those at La Mamounia or Royal Mansour, combine traditional techniques with modern indulgence for a truly pampering experience.

Le Jardin Majorelle

1920s and later lovingly restored by Yves Saint Laurent, Le Jardin Majorelle is one of Marrakech's most iconic sights. This lush botanical garden is filled with exotic plants, vibrant cobalt-blue buildings, and is a beautiful relaxing space to explore.



Medina & Souks

No trip to Marrakech is complete without getting lost in the labyrinth of souks that make up the city's bustling medina. From spice stalls and handwoven rugs to intricately carved lanterns, this is the place to shop, haggle, and soak up the atmosphere. Pause for a mint tea on a rooftop café overlooking Jemaa el-Fnaa Square, where street performers, and market traders bring the city to life, especially at sunset.

Jnane Tamsna A HAVEN OF TRANQUILLITY AND STYLE

Within the lush, palm-studded landscape of the Palmeraie, just a short drive from the bustle of Marrakech's medina, Jnane Tamsna is a world apart. Created by renowned designer Meryanne Loum-Martin, this boutique retreat captures the very essence of Moroccan elegance and hospitality. It is a place where culture, design, and comfort meet, offering guests an experience that is as restorative as it is inspiring.

Each of Jnane Tamsna's rooms and private villas are uniquely designed, filled with hand-picked antiques, vibrant textiles, and artwork that reflect Meryanne's global aesthetic. No two rooms are the same, yet all share a sense of warmth and intimacy.

From soft, sumptuous beds that promise a blissful night's sleep to quiet terraces where you can sip mint tea as the sun rises, every detail has been considered. The atmosphere is deeply peaceful and is the perfect retreat after a day exploring the vibrant souks and winding alleyways of Marrakech.

Scattered across the sprawling gardens are five swimming pools, each offering a

secluded spot to cool down under the Moroccan sun. Whether you prefer to bask in the heat or relax in the shade of an ancient olive tree, there's always a tranquil corner waiting to be discovered.

The pools are never crowded, and their serene surroundings make them ideal for lazy afternoons with a good book or a refreshing cocktail from the bar.

Breakfast is a deliciously unhurried affair, with freshly baked breads, local honey, seasonal fruits, and perhaps the best omelette in Marrakech, all enjoyed alfresco while birdsong fills the air. Lunch is served daily and freshly prepared using ingredients grown in the hotel's organic gardens or sourced locally. Expect colourful salads, fragrant tagines, and light, flavourful dishes that celebrate Morocco's incredible produce. As the sun sets, the cocktail menu beckons. Sip a cooling drink poolside or beneath the palms, soaking up the last of the golden light before heading into the city for dinner or staying put for a private feast arranged just for you.

Jnane Tamsna is designed to encourage slow living. There are countless spots to relax, whether it's a sun-drenched courtyard, a shaded garden nook, or a cosy salon filled with plush cushions and eclectic décor. Wander through the expansive grounds, dotted with olive groves and bougainvillea,



or find a peaceful terrace to practise yoga or simply be still. The gentle pace here is a soothing contrast to the lively energy of Marrakech.

More than just a hotel, Jnane Tamsna is a cultural hub. Meryanne and her team regularly host art exhibitions, live music evenings, and cooking classes, connecting guests to the soul of Morocco in a way that feels authentic and enriching.

www.jnanetamsna.com/

WHERE TO EAT

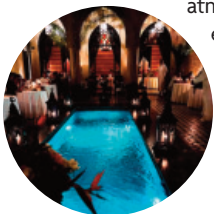


Pergola Rooftop Drinks & Live Jazz

Perched high above the medina, Pergola is one of Marrakech's most stylish rooftop bars. As the sun sets, the atmosphere comes alive with live jazz music, making it the perfect spot for pre-dinner drinks or a relaxed evening under the stars. Sip on expertly crafted cocktails or sample local Moroccan wines while grazing on small plates. The vibe here is chic yet laid back, with twinkling lights and plush seating creating an intimate, magical setting. It's a must-visit for anyone looking to experience Marrakech's sophisticated nightlife scene.

Dar Yacout A Legendary Moroccan Feast

For a dining experience steeped in tradition and opulence, Dar Yacout is an iconic choice. Hidden behind unassuming doors in the medina, this restaurant reveals itself as a grand riad with candlelit courtyards, sweeping staircases, and intricate tilework. Dinner here is a multi-course feast, beginning with an array of vibrant mezze, followed by fragrant tagines, succulent lamb, and sweet pastries. As you dine, the evening is enhanced by traditional Moroccan music, creating a magical backdrop that makes the whole experience feel even more special. The service is warm and welcoming, and the atmosphere feels like stepping back in time. Arrive early to enjoy cocktails on the rooftop terrace before descending for dinner by candlelight. This is a traditional Moroccan dining experience in a truly breathtaking setting, and was my favourite dining experience in Marrakech.



ESSAOUIRA, MORROCO

FINDING COASTAL CALM

After the whirl of Marrakech, its winding souks, kaleidoscope of colour, and endless hum of activity, Essaouira feels like an exhale. Just a three-hour drive west, the Atlantic coast greets you with fresh sea air, salt-tanged breezes, and a slower rhythm.

We journeyed from Marrakech's Medina to Essaouira through changing landscapes. Terracotta earth giving way to olive groves and desert and finally the sweep of the ocean before delivering us to the gates of Villa Maroc, Essaouira's most elegant riad-turned boutique hotel.



WHERE TO STAY IN ESSAOUIRA

VILLA MAROC

There are few places in Morocco where history, culture, and tranquillity weave together as seamlessly as at Villa Maroc. Tucked within the walls of Essaouira's Medina, this former 18th-century riad has been carefully reimagined into a boutique hotel that feels less like a property and more like a sanctuary. From the moment you step inside, Villa Maroc feels like a retreat woven from history. Whitewashed walls, carved wooden doors, tiled courtyards and intimate corners set the tone. We were greeted with the ritual of welcome mint tea, sipped slowly while the sea breeze drifted over the rooftop bar.

THE HISTORY

Villa Maroc holds a special place in Essaouira's story as Morocco's very first riad hotel. Tucked within the UNESCO-listed Medina and just moments from the beach, it began life as two adjoining riads purchased in 1994 by the Swiss-Moroccan couple who fell in love with their architecture and atmosphere. The buildings had briefly been used as a surfer's hostel in the late 1980s, but were soon transformed into a boutique hotel that blended homely warmth with quiet luxury. Over the years, two more riads were added (in 1997 and 2000), carefully restored and furnished with antique pieces, art, fabrics, and pottery sourced across Morocco by Mounia Ezzaher's Swiss mother.

Today, Villa Maroc is still owned by the same family and has welcomed a glittering guest list including Jade Jagger who described the hotel as 'beautiful', Bob Geldof, who was so taken with it he once considered buying the property himself. With four riads seamlessly merged, the hotel remains a true sanctuary, steeped in history, deeply respectful of Moroccan craftsmanship, and defined by a timeless elegance that continues to attract travellers from all over the world.

THE ROOMS

With just twenty-one rooms, Villa Maroc retains the intimacy of a private home while offering the refinement of a boutique hotel. Each room is unique, styled with a chic but understated elegance that combines Moroccan tradition with pared-back comfort. Whitewashed walls, antique wooden doors, and handwoven textiles create a sense of authenticity, while carefully chosen furnishings add warmth without clutter.

It's a simplicity that feels luxurious, letting the character of the building, the light, and the atmosphere take centre stage.

Rooms range from Small Doubles to more spacious Double Rooms with city or courtyard views. Suites add adjoining sitting areas, ideal for quiet afternoons reading or entertaining, while Sea View Suites open onto the Atlantic itself, their breezes drifting through shuttered windows. For families, the Family Suites provide generous two-bedroom layouts, balancing comfort and practicality.

During our stay, we were welcomed into one of Villa Maroc's Double Rooms, styled in a timeless palette of black and white. The space felt chic yet unpretentious, with crisp white sheets on the bed. Traditional Moroccan touches added layers of character: intricate mosaic tiles, carved wooden furnishings, and handwoven textiles that softened the monochrome scheme with warmth and texture. The bathroom was equally striking, a serene space where understated design met thoughtful detail, finished with Villa Maroc's indulgent orange flower-scented toiletries. The fragrance seemed to drift through the entire riad, a signature scent that lingered in every corner and became part of the memory of our stay.



AFTERNOONS

The pace here is gentle. Afternoons are for downtime, reading in sun-dappled courtyards, unwinding in one of the riad's quiet lounges, or retreating to the rooftop terrace where the sea breeze drifts in with the sound of waves. Villa Maroc itself feels like a sanctuary, with hidden corners designed for rest and reflection, whether that's a peaceful nap, a mint tea in the shade, or simply immersing in the atmosphere and timeless history of the beautiful building. For those who wish to venture out, meandering through the souks reveals local artisans shaping wood, weaving textiles, and polishing silver by hand, a slower rhythm of Moroccan life.

The Medina is alive with Essaouira's character, less frantic than Marrakech, yet no less rich in its sensory tapestry. Cinnamon, cumin and saffron scents spill from spice stalls; woven rugs ripple in the coastal wind, musicians fill the air with Gnaoua rhythms.

By late afternoon, the rhythm of Essaouira draws you back to Villa Maroc. The rooftop terrace becomes a stage for sunset, while glasses of Moroccan wine or mint tea are poured. If you prefer a cocktail they also have a great selection! From this vantage point, the Medina hums quietly below, the call to prayer mingling with the sound of waves.



HAMMAM EXPERIENCE

In the afternoon we experienced the authentic Moroccan hammam, a ritual of relaxation and renewal. The treatment begins with a purifying black soap cleanse, followed by a mineral rich clay application that leaves your skin silky smooth and refreshed. Wrapped in warmth and steam, the process felt both soothing and restorative. The experience was completed with a blissful massage, easing away every trace of tension. It is a great combination of tradition and indulgence, and an unforgettable way to unwind together for couples.



DINING IN THE EVENING

Evenings are best spent within the cocoon of Villa Maroc itself. Dinner at the hotel is intimate, set in candlelit dining rooms that were once family salons. Plates of tagine and couscous arrive fragrant with herbs, each dish is a reflection of Morocco's culinary tradition elevated by Essaouira's own produce and coastal freshness.



BREAKFAST

The next morning begins with breakfast on Villa Maroc's terrace, where the view stretches across the Medina rooftops to the Atlantic beyond. Freshly baked breads, eggs, yoghurt, pancakes, local honey, fruit, and mint tea set the mood for the day.

COOKERY CLASSES

We arranged a cookery class with Hayat, the head chef at Villa Maroc, which began with a visit to the local markets. Guided by Hayat, we selected freshly made filo pastry for samosas, alongside vibrant vegetables, tender lamb, and aromatic spices for our tagine. Exploring the bustling market was a cultural experience in itself, full of colour, scent, and tradition. Back in the Villa Maroc kitchens, we learned how to prepare a beautiful lamb tagine, crisp samosas, smoky aubergine, and, to finish, a fragrant caramelised orange cake. This was a true hands-on celebration of Moroccan flavours and culture, and one of my most cherished memories from Villa Maroc. After an afternoon of cooking, tasting, and learning

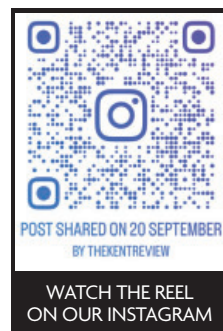
about Morocco's vibrant spices, we sat down in one of Villa Maroc's inviting restaurant lounges to enjoy the meal we had prepared.



FINAL THOUGHTS

As we left Villa Maroc, it was clear why this riad is more than a hotel, it is a living part of Essaouira's history. Its design mirrors the Medina, with intimate staircases, tiled alcoves, and sunlit terraces, while its atmosphere is warm and personal, steeped in the traditions of Moroccan hospitality.

Villa Maroc is also a place where you can truly be left alone to unwind, with service that remains quietly in the background until you need it. The concierge is always on hand, happily arranging anything from transfers to lunch reservations or private excursions, and nothing ever feels like an inconvenience. Its role as a base for exploring Essaouira is unmatched: serene, stylish, and seamlessly connected to the city's culture. Essaouira is a place that lingers in memory; the scent of spices, the rhythm of drums, the softness of the Atlantic air, and Villa Maroc is the key to experiencing it all, a sanctuary where Morocco's coastal charm comes to life.



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ESSAOUIRA

PLACES TO EXPLORE

Whether you're craving fresh seafood by the ocean, a sunset cocktail with unbeatable views, or live music in an atmospheric setting, Essaouira offers a vibrant mix of places to savour. Here's where to eat and drink while soaking up the charm of this coastal haven.

Ocean Vagabond BEACHSIDE DINING

Set directly on the beach, Ocean Vagabond is the ultimate spot for a casual, toes-in-the-sand dining experience. It's the kind of place where you can kick back with a chilled glass of Moroccan rosé while watching kitesurfers dance across the waves.

The menu focuses on fresh, local ingredients with a strong emphasis on seafood – think grilled fish, colourful salads, and fragrant tagines. It's also family-friendly, with plenty of space for children to play while adults relax.

Ocean Vagabond captures the essence of Essaouira's easy-going vibe: laid-back, beachy, and effortlessly cool. It's perfect for long, lazy lunches or a post-surf refuel.

Best for: Relaxed beachfront dining and fresh seafood.



La Capole UNSET COCKTAILS WITH A VIEW

When it comes to sunset in Essaouira, nowhere does it quite like La Capole. Perched overlooking the ocean, this chic bar and restaurant is the go-to spot for evening drinks.

Arrive just before sunset to grab a prime spot on the terrace. As the sky turns shades of pink and gold, order one of their expertly mixed cocktails or a crisp glass of Moroccan wine. The vibe is sophisticated yet unpretentious, making it a favourite for both locals and visitors looking to end the day in style. With the sound of waves below and a perfectly chilled drink in hand, this is the definition of holiday bliss.

Best for: Golden-hour cocktails and stylish sunset views.

Caravane FOOD, MUSIC & SOUL

Hidden away within the medina, Caravane is a feast for both the senses and the soul. Part restaurant, part live music venue, it blends incredible food with a lively, creative atmosphere.

The interiors are warm and eclectic, with lantern-lit tables and art-filled walls that reflect Essaouira's artistic heritage. The menu offers contemporary Moroccan cuisine with international flair – from slow-cooked lamb tagines to vibrant vegetarian dishes – all prepared with fresh, local produce.

As night falls, the space comes alive with live music, often featuring talented local performers. Dining at Caravane feels like stepping into a private gathering where food, music, and culture merge into one unforgettable evening.

Best for: A vibrant night out with dinner and live entertainment

