

Magical Moroccan Must-Dos



If you've never been to Morocco and want to, then this post is for you. Even if you have been and the ambient autumn temperatures and fragrant air are calling you back, then this post is also for you. The country that offers sprawling deserts to lush landscapes has a truly resplendent culture, as rich in history as it is in culinary excellence. It is one thing to visit Morocco and quite another to *experience* it. That is why we have done the groundwork for you (you're welcome) and discovered 10 things you simply must do and try during your trip.

1. Orange *is* the only fruit

Morocco's capital, **Marrakech** is scattered with orange trees producing the sweetest, juiciest fruit found anywhere. Head over to **Djemaa el-Fnaa**, a square in the **Medina Quarter** housing the market place used by the country's own experts – the locals. Here you will find several stalls selling the nectar of these balls of sunshine. We can assure you, once you've tried this, you'll never settle for concentrate again. So say farewell to your love affair with Mr Del Monte; it was fun while it lasted, but cheating is fine when it's with the real thing.

2. Dancing with the stars

Once you've downed your weekly quota of Vitamin C, the vast **DJemaa el-Fna** is yours for the taking and the dancing (jazz hands optional). Entertainment is free for all as you have at your feet a hot pot of amazing street performers. Choose from snake charmers, acrobats, musicians, and old wise men enchanting the crowd with stories of mysticism or offering a

rogue medical service to rival the NHS (the latter is probably to be taken lightly until cinnamon is *actually* proven to cure toothache FYI).



3. You Souk me all night long

Okay, so that wasn't the exact meaning of ACDC's classic, we admit. BUT we know that had Malcom Young et al been to Morocco, they would have fallen for the multi-coloured market stalls in **Marrakech** known as 'souks', selling not only everything you want but also everything you didn't know you needed. From fresh spices to solid silver tea sets, the souks are a stunning sight to behold and run by the friendliest of vendors who can (and will) talk the hind legs off a donkey (best to leave Eeyore at home just in case). The perfect time to go is at just after sunset when the crowds and heat have died down and the market is illuminated by both fairy lights and the sheer wonder of its visitors. In addition to the mood-altering immersive experience, you will come away with numerous gifts and treasures that you will love forever. We guarantee this will be the only time having 'too much baggage' will be a good thing.

4. Bargain Hunt

Sharpen those bartering skills during your trip and do the people at the BBC proud. Nothing sold in the various souks have a price and for good reason; it is there to be haggled over. For some, this flair for negotiation comes naturally. For those of you burdened with terrible politeness and an overarching need to escape awkward situations, this can feel like torture. We assure you however, there is nothing better than the feeling of victory once you bag that handmade woollen carpet for a bargain. Well nothing except the bragging rights you'll get when friends come over for dinner, admire the new addition to your living room and *ooooohs* and *ahhhhh* when you tell them how much it cost. Just best to leave out the part where it took you 3.5 hours and 1 tantrum to seal the deal. It's okay, we don't believe beginner's luck exists either.



5. 'Ruin' your trip

Not literally. Just make sure that you take a trip to the expansive and tragically beautiful ruins of **El Badi Palace** (*'The Incomparable Palace'*). Reduced mainly to its 4 red walls, playing hide and seek will be challenging. But walking around the grounds you will still get a feel for this wondrous former residence constructed using some of the most expensive material of the time (1500s) and once consisted of 360 rooms and courtyard containing a pool that still remains to this day.

(Opening hours: 8.30 – 16.30 / Entrance fees apply)

6. Hammaming it up

The **Hammam** is an incredibly important part of Moroccan culture and life; the cleansing ritual is often undertaken weekly with many using it as an opportunity to socialise. Men and women bathe separately (or exclusively) but the atmosphere is open and welcoming. Although you should bring your own toiletries, one of the Hammam staff will be on hand to scrub your back so you aren't left to recreate the herbal essences advert on your own in the event you're travelling with a member of the opposite sex. You are then free to venture from steam room to room (usually 4, varying in temperature) over the course of a few hours that will leave you feeling refreshed and recharged.

7. A slightly less ruined palace

The **El Bahia Palace and Gardens** (*'Palace of Brilliance'*) can still be seen in its full grandeur. Built to house **Grand Vizier (Prime Minister) Ahmed Ibn Moussa's** official concubines, the 160 roomed luxuriously decorated mansion in Marrakech suggests Mr Moussa was one, busy lad. Best to hire a guide to talk you through the stunning 19th century architecture and décor and pass on some proper nuggets of information, but in the meantime we do know that the varying room sizes are even directly linked to how much

he liked his ladies. No, we're not sure what happened to the unofficial ones, hopefully they at least got a shed each.

(Opening hours: 8.30 – 17.00 / Entrance fees apply)



8. Eat-y Street, that's where we're gonna be!

Go hungry. Why? Because Morocco has one of the best street food experiences known to (wo)man. If you've yet to come out of the foodie closet for fear of being labelled as a hipster, *now* is the time people. Moroccans care too much about creating flavour infusions to judge your man bun / round rimmed spectacles / vintage Levis. For the brave among you, the market street stalls offer sheep heads and snail soup, but if that doesn't take your fancy (really? We're surprised) then whet your appetite with **B'stilla** (light pastry pie), **Ma'qooda** (fried potato balls) and **Chebakia** (sesame cookie fried in syrup and honey). Yep, we just salivated on the keyboard.

9. Get the 'hole house' to yourselves

Morocco, unlike Britain, does not consider umbrellas as essential as oxygen. So much so, their beautiful traditional homes known as **Riads**, have a hole in the middle. No, it wasn't a failure to pay the builders, but a traditional 11th century Andalucian-style feature to have a courtyard garden, often with a fountain or plunge pool to keep residents cool. The structure is built inwards with few windows to respect the Islamic notion of privacy and the walls are adorned with artisan plaster and tiling, usually with Arabic calligraphy – a true vision. For an authentic experience, we suggest forgoing a hotel and staying in one of the many riads in **Marrakech** or **Essaouira**, which with the help of **UNESCO** have been restored to their former glory.

10. Something to stew over

Always happy to state the obvious, *do not* leave Morocco without having eaten their traditional dish – **tagine**. Whether you're a veggie, pescatarian or possess a carnivorous tooth to rival a T-Rex, there is something for everyone. The stew, which can be made of meat and vegetables, fruit and spices is slow-cooked in a clay pot over charcoal before being served with a side of **Khobz** (Moroccan bread). Get ready for the best food coma of your life. And no, we're afraid we can't accept liability for any waist inches gained due to additional helpings.