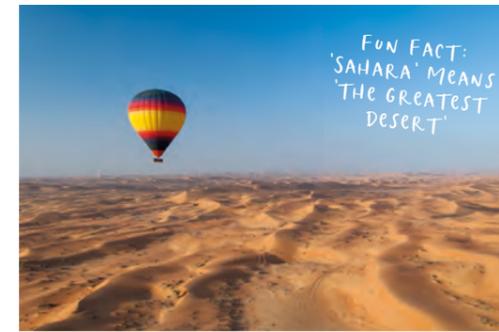


WHAT TO SEE & DO



SAHARA SUNRISE HOT-AIR BALLOON

Listening to the sounds of the desert waking up will surprise and delight, as cocks crow, bells toll, shepherds herd their flocks and you float up and over minarets and local Berber villages at sunrise. Play I-Spy to spot gazelles, cheetahs, ostriches, lizards, foxes, wild dogs and antelopes in this ancient land, where once upon a time dinosaurs roamed. After the tranquil one-hour flight with Marrakech's best pilot, Hicham Zrikem, feast on a traditional Berber breakfast of pancakes, fresh juice and sweet mint tea in an Arabian tent.

From £84pp. Minimum age six months.

Weather dependent. Take jumpers.

NaturallyMorocco.co.uk



JARDIN MAJORELLE AND MUSÉE YSL

Wow the kids with a visit to Jardin Majorelle, arguably Africa's most famous and colourful garden. The winding walkways, water features, soaring palms and giant cacti offer a sanctuary from the midday sun and make a magical kingdom for kids to explore. It was created by French painter Jacques Majorelle (1886-1962); fashion designer Yves Saint Laurent saved it from urban development, regenerated it and gifted it to the city after his death in 2008. Allow time for the Berber museum, café and new YSL museum over the road – one for budding fashionistas.

Garden £5.60, Berber museum £2.50, Yves Saint Laurent museum, £8. Under-12s free.

jardinmajorelle.com, museeyslmarrakech.com



RIDE DONKEYS AND AN ATLAS MOUNTAIN TREK

Wild things can escape the madness of Marrakech with a day trip into the Imlil ('little Chamonix') valley in the foothills of the High Atlas Mountains. Stroll through cherry, apple and walnut orchards, past streams, ravines and waterfalls, as you marvel at Mount Toubkal (4,167m), North Africa's highest mountain. Guide Omar speaks excellent English. Treks can be as short or long as you like between 9am and 5pm. Teenies can ride on donkeys to rest tired legs. Tours start and finish at family-friendly Riad Jnane Imlil (riadjnaneimlil.com), where Mustapha serves a tasty tagine on the panoramic roof terrace.

From £75pp, including transport, drinks and meals. Take jumpers, trainers and hats.

atlasandsaharatours.com



'HIDDEN TREASURES' WALKING TOUR

Take a behind-the-scenes city history tour with English-speaking guide Abdul, who keeps hagglers at bay. Navigating Marrakech's labyrinthine tangle of winding streets, you'll discover spice souks, snake charmers, intricate Islamic architecture (such as the Ben Youssef Koranic school) and a treasure trove of shops in the 'old city'. We learned how the Koutoubia Mosque minaret got its golden globe, why Solvis solar trees (recharge your iPhones here) are symbolic of Morocco as a world leader in renewable energy, and much more. It's advisable to book in advance – Abdul is popular.

Marrakech Magic Tours cost from £45 for up to five people for a half-day. Tips and entrance fees not included. marrakechmagictours.com

wixsite.com/abdulsinat →

72 HOURS IN Marrakech

Morocco's fabled ancient desert rose is a real-life *Arabian Nights* tale of adventures when explored through a child's eyes, discovers **LOUISE HALL**

Floating over the Saharan dunes in a hot-air balloon as this Moroccan fort city glows rose-orange-pink-red at sunrise against the distant snowcapped teeth of the Atlas Mountains is a family wake-up call like no other.

With direct flights, no time difference, a warm, sunny climate and a sprinkling of high-end child-friendly hotels springing from the baked earth, Marrakech has justly earned its reputation as Africa's go-to city break for the more adventurous family. It may not be the obvious choice for little ones, but long gone are the hippy *Hideous Kinky* days and in their place has grown a kaleidoscopic,

exotic, glamorous city that will capture the imaginations of children whatever their age.

Here, intrepid families can swim, trapeze, trek, sand surf and ride new and ancient modes of desert transport (brightly dressed camels, donkeys, Arabian stallions, dirt bikes, dune buggies and even horse-drawn carriages) to their hearts' content – when not getting lost and found in the a-maze-ing souks. Prepare to be hypnotised by snake charmers, visually blown away by ancient palaces, try new flavours and be swept up in *One Thousand and One Nights* tales of derring-do in this Moorish 12th-century 'Red City'.

WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

LE JARDIN MARRAKECH

Step through a small wooden door into a green-tiled courtyard of palms, banana trees, jazz and birdsong. Kids can play with the roaming tortoises – just don't step on them! Tagines and salads, from £4; the kids' menu of mini-burger and crêpes or ice cream is £6.50. 32 Souk Sidi Abdelaziz, Medina.

lejardinmarrakech.com

NOMAD

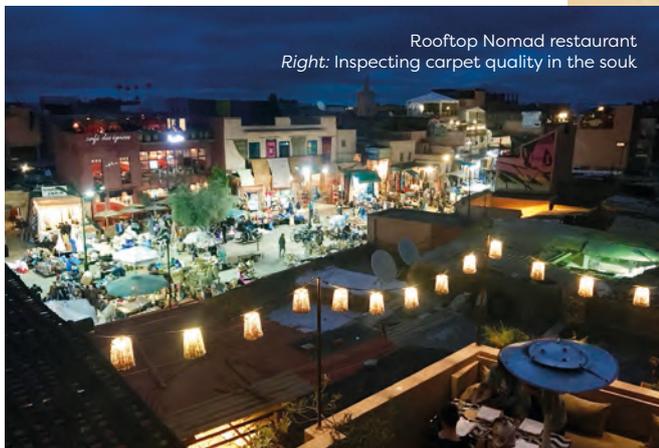
A relaxed rooftop hideaway eatery, sprawled over two terraces in the corner of the Spice Square, Nomad has chilled music and big medina views. Owner Kamal Laftimi serves cleverly crafted dishes (calamari in cumin and salted-caramel ice cream, from £8; a children's chicken dish and ice cream is £5). Outside of Ramadan, refresh over a cucumber martini.

1 Derb Aarjan, Medina. nomadmarrakech.com

HENNA CAFÉ

Don't miss the funky Henna Café for a little body art to show off your Marrakech cultural adventure to friends back home. Dine on a simple local Berber lunch of salads, falafel or sandwiches, or sip coffee on the roof terrace as the local nquasha draws intricate organic henna hand and feet designs, from £4.

Profits go towards educating locals in need. 93 Arset Aouzal Road. hennacafemarrakech.com



Rooftop Nomad restaurant
Right: Inspecting carpet quality in the souk



WHERE TO SHOP

NORYA AYRON'S POP-UP IN CAFÉ LE JARDIN MARRAKECH

Norya Ayron's tiny pop-up is a hidden medina gem, tucked away upstairs in café Le Jardin Marrakech. Follow in the footsteps of fashionistas Bianca Jagger and Kate Moss, and purchase a bright silk kaftan that will bring a splash of Marrakech poolside glamour to any party.

norya-ayron.com

33 RUE MAJORELLE

Trailblazing tastemaker and concept-store owner Monique Bresson has a talent for spotting bright young Moroccan things making positive-impact home and fashion ware. Shop here for handmade modern Morocco crafts pieces, such as a crocheted Hamimi lantern and contemporary Berber jewellery.

33ruemajorelle.com

THE MEDINA SOUK IN 'OLD TOWN' AND CHABI CHIC

Discover Aladdin's caves overflowing with silver trinkets, neon-pop 'magic' carpets, spices, handcrafted toys, pointy-toed leather babouches (slippers) and almost anything you could imagine in the old town's souk. Or, for fixed prices, head to Chabi Chic (below Nomad – see above).

chabi-chic.com →

Clockwise from right: Royal Mansour lobby; Riad Anyssates; Royal Mansour pool; Iberostar Club Palmeraie Marrakech



THE LOWDOWN

HOW TO GET THERE

British Airways flies daily to Marrakech from £220 return. Flight time is 3½ hours.

britishairways.com

HOW TO GET AROUND

Taxis and hotel shuttle buses are the best way of getting around. Take a caleche (horse-drawn carriage) for a fun way to tour the Marrakech ramparts and travel in (traditional) style. A one-hour tour shouldn't cost more than £25.

TOP TIPS

Avoid mid-summer – it's hot (40C+). Half-terms (October, February and May) and Easter are best, temperature-wise. Most museums have reduced rates for under-12s. It's a Muslim country, so it's courtesy to cover arms, shoulders and knees. Be careful after dark in the medina. During Ramadan (May 5–June 4, 2019) most Moroccans fast from sun-up to sundown, so try not to eat or drink in public, and be mindful that local tempers can fray and alcohol isn't served outside of hotels. Strollers are impractical in the medina, baby-changing facilities are scarce and, outside of hotels, restaurants make few dietary concessions. All cafés mentioned here are family-friendly.

WHERE TO STAY

ROYAL MANSOUR

For the family who wants the best of everything (including a butler!), there's the Royal Mansour. Built by the king of Morocco, no expense was spared in creating this lavish property set on the edge of the medina, close to all the main attractions. You'll stay in a three-storey riad with plenty of family-friendly amenities: a play tent, mini bathrobes, picture books, inflatable toys for your private plunge pool, even kids' sunscreen. At the kids' club, your children can learn to speak Arabic and dress up like royalty. **Superior 1-bedroom riad from £895 per night, including breakfast and airport transfers.** royalmansour.com

IBEROSTAR CLUB PALMERAIE MARRAKECH

Where else can you high trapeze and sunbathe with a view over craggy Atlas peaks? Arrive at dusk to swirling Sufis and a runway of lanterns. Explore three pools, including one especially for kids with games such as 'splash bucket' and a playground. Boredom is not an option here, with everything from Zumba to cookery classes. At nightfall there's an outdoor cinema and nightclub for older teens. Of the 312 rooms, garden-view ground-floor are best for families. There's a kids' club for ages 4-17, leaving you free to head to the hammam. Free shuttles run to the city, 15 minutes away. **Double rooms with a single bed from £142 per night.** iberostar.com



RIAD ANYSSATES

With a relaxed yet stylish air, this small, affordable riad ticks the boxes for families. It's traditional, with decent-sized rooms (kids' beds can be added on request), and is located near the medina. There's a small courtyard, central pool, hammam and roof terrace. The staff are friendly and the food is good. **A deluxe triple room plus cot costs from £141 per night including breakfast.** mrandmrssmith.com

KASBAH BELDI

This 30-bedroom kasbah is the new rural sibling of the Beldi Country Club nearer town. Opened in 2014, it's a sprawling retreat 50 minutes' drive from Marrakech, in the village of Amizmiz. It has two pools and a hammam, and makes a super base to explore the wilderness. Sunrises and sunsets here are mesmerising, as is dining under the big sky. **Family room from £180** kasbahbeldi.com

VILLA KACY

A good-value, wild and pretty out-of-town family-friendly stay (the city is a 15-minute, £20 taxi ride away) set among lemon groves, Villa Kacy has a good-sized pool, poolside bar and table tennis. Rooms are spacious but no-frills. You can breakfast with peacocks and sunbathe with nuzzles from the friendly resident donkey. **Family suite from £125 per night.** lavillakacy.com