

# Magical Fes Brings People of Different Faiths Together

By: Ian Stalker

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Visitors love to work their way through the ancient and storied medina



The old quarter of Fes, Morocco, is holding out a hand of friendship to foreign tourists, inviting them to literally make and break bread with locals in a storied setting and in doing so learn about their daily lives and Morocco's predominant faith while helping ensure Fes' storied medina will receive funds that will help it continue to enchant Westerners.

Ziyarates Fes invites those visiting the 1,200-year-old city to stay in locally owned homes in the sprawling medina, accommodation it says will familiarize tourists with daily Moroccan life and in turn give some Moroccans greater contact with Westerners.

"It's a cultural exchange," says Mezzour Abdelhai, one of those involved in the project.

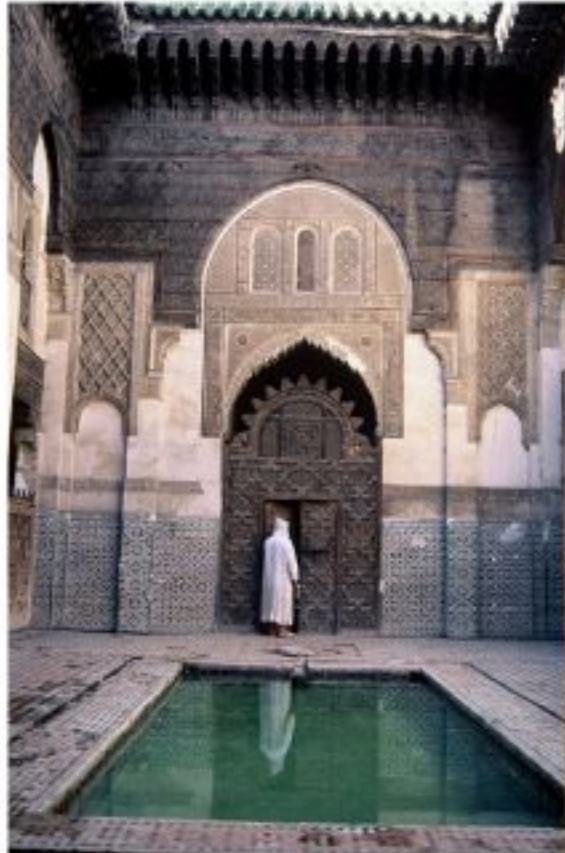
"It's not a hotel. It's not a guesthouse. It's living with a family," he says of "charming" accommodations chosen in part

because of a "warm family ambiance" they provide.

Participating foreigners will actually have breakfast with their hosts, eating the same Moroccan dishes the Fes residents do.

But eating together is only one of a number of areas the visitors will come into close contact with locals, with Ziyarates Fes noting the foreigners can try their hands at such activities as making bread and negotiating with local merchants, part of the daily routine of those they're temporarily sharing homes with.





Abdelhai says the visitors shouldn't worry about communication problems surfacing in a country where Arabic is the foremost language, with some household residents having studied French and English in school, and French widely spoken in the city. Ziyarates Fes began some two years ago, with 10 families participating. That reached some 30 in January and Abdelhai says

program organizers want to see it further expand, eventually reaching 100. Fes, as does its also exotic counterpart Marrakech, is home to many riads, onetime homes of wealthy Moroccans that have been converted into upscale lodging with distinctive Moroccan ambiances. But riads can be pricy, while rates for participating Ziyarates Fes homes are much more modest.

Abdelhai reports that some of the money participating families earn is used to maintain their "very old houses" and be part of a larger effort to preserve the old quarter, which has received UNESCO World Heritage Site status and which Farid Lahlou, director general of the Regional Tourism Council of Fes, describes as "the living museum of Morocco."

And, Abdelhai notes, those who

opt for one of the stays and their hosts alike should develop better understandings of each other's different worlds, with Westerners becoming acquainted with the Muslim inhabitants of Fes.

"It's an opportunity to know each other and each other's culture and each other's religion," Abdelhai points out.

More information is found at [www.ziyaratesfes.com](http://www.ziyaratesfes.com)



Fes residents often dry spices on the roofs of their homes, taking advantage of brilliant Moroccan sunshine