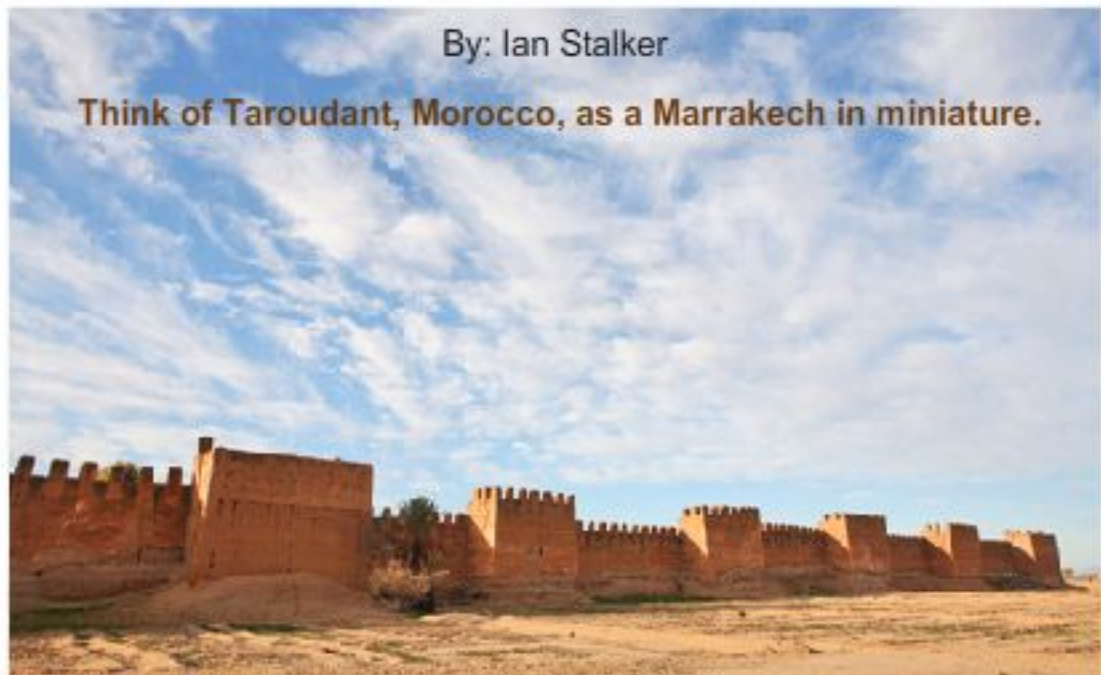


“Little Marrakech” showcases an authentic Morocco

By: Ian Stalker

Think of Taroudant, Morocco, as a Marrakech in miniature.



Taroudant's towering ramparts provide a dramatic welcome for tourists

The community hasn't received nearly as much publicity as its bigger and better known cousin of Marrakech but there are no shortages of Moroccan tourism officials willing to sing its praises – and at least one very weighty European is smitten by the destination as well.

Atlantic Ocean and Marrakech -- has the snow-capped Atlas Mountains as a dramatic and towering backdrop, and the community is ringed by ramparts, which encompass one of the souks (markets) that tourists visiting Morocco appreciate.

Taroudant – found between the

The ramparts, built to protect the town from the Portuguese, who had established themselves on the coast, date back centuries.

"It's a small Marrakech," one tourism official says of Taroudant. "It's a very Moroccan experience."

"This is different [than some of the more-visited parts of Morocco] because there are not many tourists here. It's more authentic," adds Abdelghani Regala, Canadian director of the Moroccan National Tourist Office.

However, the town does draw its share of the rich and famous foreign travelling public, with former French president Jacques Chirac visiting it every year, staying at the La Gazelle d'Or, an upscale retreat found just outside Taroudant's perimeter and hidden from the road by the orange groves that surround it. The property, which began life as a hunting lodge in the 1950s, now has some 30 rooms for its well-heeled guests. Meanwhile, those wanting a look at a more modern side of



Morocco can visit the nearby coastal resort of Agadir, badly damaged by a 1960 earthquake but then rebuilt and which today features beach-fronting resorts, broad boulevards and numerous bars, restaurants and clubs in a tourism-oriented destination.

"This gives us an example of the architecture of the 1960s," says local tourism guide Abdullah Quissart, who notes that Agadir buildings are white, reflecting a coastal Morocco look that contrasts with the reddish structures found in Morocco's interior.

Agadir's tourism development began in the 1970s, with Scandinavians the first foreigners to arrive en masse and today the town has many resorts, including ones belonging to the likes of Decameron, best known in this country for its

properties in the Caribbean and Latin America, and Spanish chain RIU Hotels & Resorts, which also has a large presence in Mexico and the Caribbean.

Other resorts include the Atlantic Palace (www.atlanticpalace-agadir.com) and Hotel Argana (ww.argana-hotel.com). Visitors will find distinctive Moroccan ambiances in all the properties.

Quissart says those vacationing in Agadir can expect to find sunny weather, with the community seeing 300 or more days of sunshine a year.

He adds that Agadir can serve as a good base to explore the region, with those staying there not only able to visit Taroudant but other destinations, such as Essaouira, a long-standing seaside community influenced by both Moroccans and Europeans.