

# Morocco tourism show

By Ian Stalker

Moroccan tourism authorities charmers. rolled out welcome map for And, those authorities were much of the world's travel quick to note, host city industry in mid-January with the Marrakech's tourist trade is on the second sediton of the Moroccan the verge of getting a dramatic Travel Market, choosing a venue boost, with the city's historic La for the show that had travel Mamounia hotel slated to stage agents mingling with tattooists, its official reopening in June after and tourist board and tour being closed for around two operator representatives at times years because of an extensive standing side by side with snake renovations program.





"It will be a big event, maybe the most important event of the year," promises Khalid Tijani, director general of the Regional Tourism Council of Marrakech, who has been told there will be "dramatic changes" to a property that has often appeared on lists of the world's top 10 hotels and has drawn the likes of Winston Churchill, who liked to paint from a hotel balcony, and Alfred Hitchcock, who used the hotel as

a setting for the movie, *The Man Who Knew Too Much*.

The travel market – held in what's arguably the most exotic city on the planet – was staged during a slowing global economy but hosts were quick to note that Moroccan exhibitors were out in force, with hotels, tour operators and others involved in the tourist trade from both major cities and remote locales.

"Morocco offers a lot more than the Imperial Cities and [the coastal resort of] Agadir," Abdelghani Ragala, Canadian director of the Moroccan National Tourism Office, told a Canadian delegation of around 16 travel agents and tour operator staff.

"There are new products to sell," he said, citing the likes of

riads, onetime homes of wealthy Moroccans that have been converted into hotels and are found in the old quarters of such cities as Marrakech and Fes.

Another making the journey to the travel market was Cesar Castaneda, director of operations for the Montreal-based World Centre of Excellence for Destinations.





"I think the show is a great effort to promote tourism business not only for Morocco but for northwest Africa in general," he said of an event that drew non-Moroccan exhibitors from as far away as Malaysia as well. "For a two-year-old show, I think that they are doing a great job. I hope that future editions, more countries will participate in order to improve the north-south relationship and contribute to the development of the African economy through tourism."

Martha Tavio of Toronto-based Gateways International joined the Canadian group in visiting Agadir after the show and praised it as "absolutely amazing – the perfect place to end the itinerary when in Morocco." She said the riads also won her over. Also attending the show was Moroccan-born Annie Benayoun, now with Montreal-based Groupe Ideal, who said the MTM "was much needed for a long time."

Benayoun cited a number of selling points for the country, including a "great hotel infrastructure" underscored by the likes of La Mamounia; golfing options; desert safaris that can feature either camels or four-wheel-drive vehicles; long-standing cities with their old quarters; and its being an "affordable destination" with "friendly, warm people known for their exceptional hospitality."

Jean-Pierre Caron of Quebec City's Incursion Voyages said

even though French is widely spoken in Morocco, the great differences between cultures on this side of the Atlantic and the North African country makes it an exotic experience even for Francophones.

Caron, who also made the journey to both Agadir and Marrakech, said hotel development hasn't reached saturation point, and he believes there's room for more properties in such locales as Agadir and the Imperial Cities.

