

# Marrakesh

## The Charm of Southern Morocco



Marrakesh is perhaps the most famous ancient city in Morocco, its sites and attractions expressing the country's glorious history. It was established in 1062 by order of Youssef Ben Tashfin when the el-Murabitoun first arrived. These were wanderers who came to Marrakesh, an oasis in the Middle of the el-Houz Plain on the Atlantic Ocean, from far-off desert lands. Within less than half a century it became capital of a great kingdom that stretched from Andalusia in Spain to the borders of Sudan. Its influence spread over the whole Arab Maghrebian countries, and its destiny was to be strongly tied to the different successive civilizations, as well as political, economic and cultural traditions, of this region.

In the 12th Century, after nine months of bloody warfare, Abd al-Mu'men el-Muwahadi dispensed with the description, el-Murabitoun, and acceded to the throne. He made the city the centre of his reign and established its pre-eminence on the caravan crossroads, its name eventually becoming deeply connected with the gold and Ivory trade. He re-established the city in the el-Muwahiddin style. However, in the following century the city faced a terrible political catastrophe after the destruction of the El-Muwahidin throne when the el-Merinin came to power in 1269. The latter neglected the city for more than two-and-a-half centuries, moving their abode to the city of Fez instead. ➤

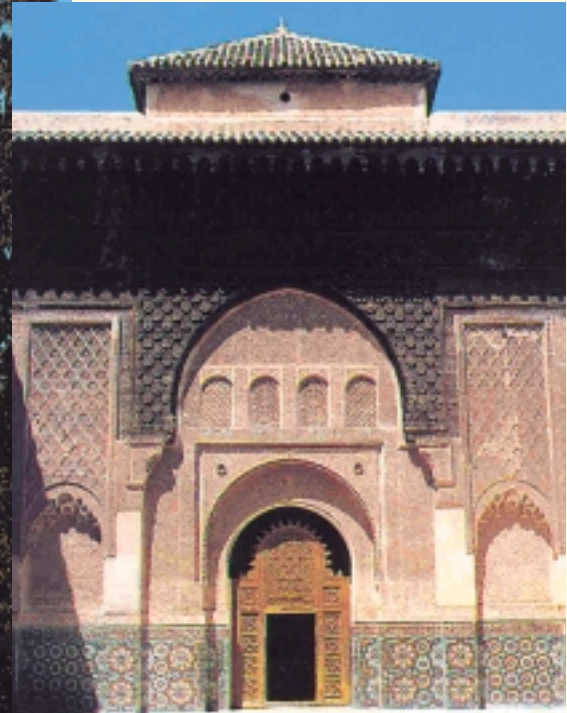
## City Tourism



مسجد الكتبية  
El- Katabeya Mosque

atmosphere. Thanks to such fame, a cultural/religious festival is celebrated here annually, known as the Season of the Seven Men.

After the collapse of el-Saadian the city, with all its attractions and libraries, the latter were by now teeming with precious rare



Ben Youssef School

مدرسة بن يوسف

El Sadeyoun revived the glory of Marrakesh during the reign of Sultan Muhammad El-Mahdi in 1555. Sultan Ahmad el-Mansour in particular had a great passion for the city, taking it as the capital for his kingdom and building luxurious palaces therein, one of the most important being the fascinating El-Badia' Palace built towards the end of 1578. Its establishment lasted around 25 years till 1603. This palace expresses a unique legendary architectural beauty and efficiency, as well as reflecting the accuracy of the workmen involved in its construction. It

houses wonderful treasures and masterpieces, including great mosaics. el-Mansour also made great efforts in reconstruction and re-establishment of many mosques and madressas that attracted large numbers of religious and scientific scholars. It was said, especially during the period of the 17th Century, that Sultan Moulay Isma'il asked Shaykh el-Hassan el-Youssi to elect seven such scholars to reside under his reign, and to be buried after their death in the graveyard of the city, so that the city would be surrounded by a holy

manuscripts, was completely forgotten and in fact largely effaced. By the end of the 17th Century, the city once again regained its former glory during the reign of the Alawites who took great care of its environment and legacy.

During the French colonial occupation of Morocco, in 1913, Marrakesh witnessed a considerable development in various fields, such as the establishment of new quarters in different architectural styles - crowded with high buildings and grand hotels side by side with the older constructs. The city itself became ever more cosmopolitan, increasingly comprising a wealth of different nationalities, ethnicities and races representing various civilizations. This mixture added to the city's inherent charm and it was therefore known as Morocco's tourist capital, attracting huge numbers of visitors from all around the world. Indeed, it remains an unforgettable and fascinating experience.

Marrakesh is known as the Pearl of the South, located about 150km from the sea, and about 200km from the financial capital, Casablanca. Visitors enter the city via the ➤

## City Tourism



إحدى قاعات سي سعيد  
Si-Saeed House



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Si-Saeed House

Aknou Gate which was built during the reign of El-Muwahidin to protect the city from attacks on the caravans.

### El-Katabeya Mosque

"Red" Marrakesh is very much a city under the sun, surrounded by high walls of deep yellow and red. In the middle of the city is the outstanding el-Katabeya Mosque, a living example of the Spanish Moorish architecture. This was established by order of Abd al-Mu'men and finalized by order of Ya'qoub el-Mansour between 1184 and 1189. It is 77m high, its beauty and architectural style one of a kind. It is also the original blueprint for the el-Hassan Hall which was built later on in Rabat in 1195.

Many paintings decorating the halls of the Katabeya Mosque which is surrounded by a wide yard whose base is comprised of a number of columns, each one 2m high, a few meters from the yard of the el-Fana Mosque. This yard is similar to a theatre stage (around 150m x 100m) with a fascinating view. It is an open-air theatre full of displays and shows, always open to visitors, with vendors and musicians adding to the colourful display, as well as snake-charmers and folk dancers in traditional costumes.

There is a remarkable scent of spices in the air mixed with the aromas of delicious foods from restaurants housed in tents offering Moroccan and North African delicacies. There are also fortune-tellers here and the place attracts scholars of literature, researchers, film directors, painters, and artists not only from Morocco but from all over the world, especially Europe.



إحدى قاعات سي سعيد  
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### Sidi Ben Youssef Mosque

In the north of the city is the Ben Youssef Mosque which dates back to the 12th Century. It is distinguished by its 40m high walls, whose ceiling is covered with green tiles. Next to it is the Ben Youssef School, one of the most important Qur'an schools in Morocco. To the south are the tombs of el-Saadian which can be reached through one of the narrow streets. It was discovered in 1917 hidden for several years behind protective walls built by order of Sultan

Moulay Isma'il. The walls themselves were built by Sultan Moulay Ahmed el-Mansour (1574-1603) following the death of his mother in 1591. The tombs are located in several galleries that have huge doors made of engraved (decorated) wood, overlooking a wide garden and a prayer hall. Each gallery is based on a number of marble columns. To the east is El-Manara, a garden complex containing olive trees on a space 1200m long x 800m wide. In the middle of this is a large pool (150m x 20m) established by el-Muwahidin at around the 12th Century. el-Manara was, in the past, a private shelter for kings who would find relaxation and comfort here. Nowadays, it is a fascinating tourist attraction for visitors who enjoy watching the charming sunset.

In 1919, the famous French draughtsman, Jacques Macgaural, visited it and became infatuated. In 1924, he decided to buy a piece of land which later became one of the most fascinating public gardens in the city. After his death, in 1962, the garden was neglected and would almost have completely lost its glamour but for another Frenchman, the fashion designer Yves Saint Laurent, who gradually enabled that lost glamour to return, buying the area and building a gallery on a part of it, which was to become a museum of Islamic arts displaying a rare collection of statues, ➤

