

Fez

A tourist's dream come true

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Fez is the capital of kings, palaces, museums, luxury and authentic, traditional Moroccan life. Travel writers have likened it to Florence in Italy and Athena in Greece. Every visitor who comes looking for natural beauty, cultural heritage, rich and varied life and a pleasant aroma will not be disappointed.

The history of the city of Fez is very rich. In 818, several hundred Moslem families settled there after having being expelled from Andalusia. They brought back with them the taste of the rich Islamic civilization. This influence can be seen in the Andalousian quarter which is particularly impressive due to the profusion of fine buildings as if the palaces were competing with one another, each with its sculpted woodwork, engraved bronze, polychrome carving, moucharabies, columns and sculpted plasterwork.

In the Andalousian quarter, you will be attracted by an exquisite minaret with its white and green colours. It is the minaret of the Andalousian mosque and the medersa house where you can listen to the voices of chanting children. A sensitive ear will be able to discern vibrations that link a whole people to their culture.

El-Qaraouiyn mosque, which was built in 857 with its scintillating roof of emerald tiles, is still one of the main intellectual centers of North Africa. Its library contains over 30,000 books, including a superb ninth century copy of the Koran.

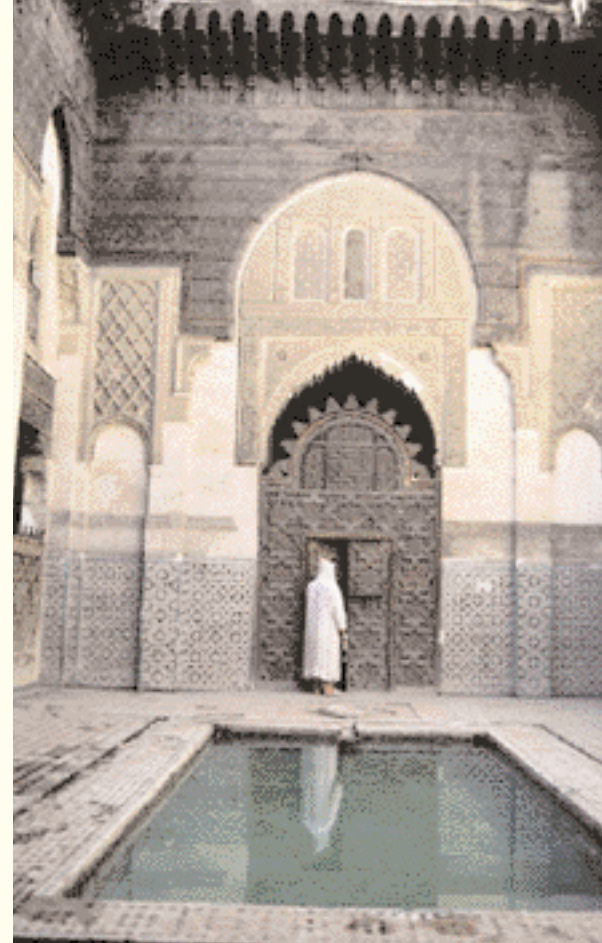
Fez was extended in the 13th century and became known as "The New Fez". New mosques, Koranic schools, public gardens

and markets were added. To the south of the city you can find broad avenues, with trees, pools beneath and lights that bestow an incredible beauty.

The best way to experience the city is to make your way through the streets at a leisurely pace, where you will be met with a glass of scalding tea from the locals, the smell of the herbs and spices in the spice merchants' souk, the succulent kebabs and honey cakes, the ceaseless sound of voices and the dull thud of craftsmen's tools, and above all, the kind, hospitable people of the city who feel immense pleasure when they serve their guests.

Traveling a few kilometers from the city you find the forest of the deepest green, the imposing mountains of the Middle Atlas and the clean and pure water of the springs. Even a game of golf is possible. Nearby is the village of Imouzuer du Kandjar where you can see the beauty of nature, the mountains, springs and fresh air, all come together to welcome you. Also nearby is the village of Sidi Harazem, famous for its hot water spring rich in magnesium. You can enjoy this water in a modern bath in the middle of eucalyptus, palm and pink laurel trees.

You can also visit the city of Sefrou with its green pastor, springs, valleys and water



falls. The city of Taza, has many ancient places and museums and you can visit the Great Mosque, with one of the most beautiful bronze chandeliers in Morocco bearing 514 oil lamps. You can also enjoy walking in the forest of oaks, cedars, tall ferns, springs, water falls, lakes and snow covered mountain tops.

Fez is also famous for being the capital of taste. It is the birth place of the legendary and succulent pastille made of flaky pastry as light as rice paper stuffed with a subtle blend of minced pigeon, sugar, almonds and spices.

Before the end of your journey don't miss Firouato Cavern, 180 meters deep resembling an underground palace. Halls and galleries are haunted by other-worldly forms-the stalactites and stalagmites reaching out into the void. The water of Moulay Yacoub is warm and curative. It relieves rheumatism, nose and throat infections, skin problems and gynecological disorders. The water has a new bathing station where doctors treat a variety of complaints.

The city is a tourist's dream come true combing rich cultural treasures, enticing shops and markets and the chance to rejuvenate the mind and body in therapeutic waters. ■