

Tangiers:

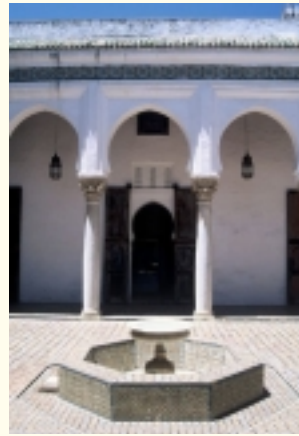
The bewitching bride of North Morocco

Casablanca - Nour-eddine Saoudi

A point of convergence between the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean and between civilizations, the Moroccan city of Tangiers is rich in history, its geographic location, the beauty of its architecture and the diversity of its cultural and artistic contributions. The city of Tangier, door of Africa into Europe, is also a tourist city of great interest with its historic monuments, its beautiful beaches and its vast spaces of greenery that inspired numerous international artistic works.

Tangiers is a city that inspired ancient mythology and bewitched artists throughout history. There is an oral tradition which explains the origins of the name: After the deluge, Noah's ark drifted on. Close to Tangiers, a bird came and landed on the bridge with a little clay on its claws. The occupants of the ark exclaimed then: "Tin jaa" ("The mud came") which means the land is near: hence the name Tangiers. However, it is more likely that the name of the city comes from the Amazigh language, where the term "Tanja" designates a marsh.

The most beautiful legends about the city date back to the time of the Greeks, whose tales describe the formation of Gibraltar. It was at the time of the titanic battle between the gigantic Antes and Heracles that Heracles opened Gibraltar with a sword stroke. Antes had in fact given the name of his wife "Tinga" to the region. Thereafter, Zeus son raised two columns on both sides of the water that were going to carry the name of Heracles. For many centuries it was believed they designated the extremities of the earth. Tangiers, and the surrounding region, were also the stumping ground of Odysseus', hero of the famous Odyssey of Homer.



Since its establishment in the IV century BC, under the name of "Tingis", the city has been coveted by several powers: Carthaginian, Romans, Phoenicians, Vandals, Portuguese, Spaniards, and English.

One of the most famous events in the Arab history of the city was its conquest by Mosa Bin Nuser, in 705 AD. It is also famous for the departure of Tariq Ibn Ziad in 711 from its shores towards "The Green Island" during the conquest of Spain (Andalusia). His instructions to his troops, after having burnt their boats: "The sea is



behind you and the enemy is before you, arm yourselves with patience and courage," has been enshrined in history.

In the 12th century, Ibn Tofail, one of the most famous Arab philosophers and scientists, and author of the famous novel "Hay Ibn Yaqdane", lived in Tangiers.

The famous traveler Ibn Battouta, was born there, at the beginning of the 14th century. He traveled from Tangiers to discover the world (Africa and Asia); which he recorded in his famous work "Ar Rihla" (journey).

During the 14th century, Tangiers was ➤

City Tourism



considered one of the most important ports on the Mediterranean, next to Marseille, Venice, Genoa and Barcelona. After its occupation by the Portuguese from the 15th to the 17th centuries, the city passed to the British, as a "dowry" for King Stuart II, in 1684 it was liberated by, its liberation by Sultan Alaouite, Moulay Ismail, following a long siege. The consumption of green tea by the Moroccans dates back to this time.

The golden age

During the 18th century, the location of the city close to Europe and its relative distance from the imperial capitals, Fez and Marrakech, permitted Tangiers to welcome embassies of European countries. It was thus the diplomatic capital of Morocco. This contributed to its blossoming; visitors and tourists from various countries: France, Britain, Spain, the United States, Portugal and Italy, stayed there. In the middle of the 19th century it was the home of the Italian general Garibaldi who wrote his memoirs there. And in 1905, the German Kaiser, Guillaume II, visited the city to express his country's interest in Morocco.

In the colonial period, the city was accorded a special status due to its standing and location. It did not submit to the Spaniards who colonized the north of Morocco, nor to the French who occupied the rest of the country. It benefited from the "International City" unique regime between 1923 to 1956 which conferred total economic liberty, as well as a political and military neutrality. That was Tangier's golden age: it was a centre of tourism,

commercial, cultural and political activity. The first newspapers in Morocco among them "The Moroccan Dispatch" (oldest newspaper in Morocco) and "The Voice of Morocco" were published in the city. Many local and international radio stations were based there including The International Radio (Arabic and French), Radio Tangiers (Spanish) and Voice of America (English). The Moroccan national movement communicated its positions to international public opinion through these stations. In 1947, the historic meeting between the representatives of the Movements of Liberation of the Maghreb: the "Istiqlal Party", of Morocco, the "National Liberation Front" of Algeria and the "Constitution Party" of Tunisia, took place in Tangiers. In April 9, 1947, King Mohamed V gave his historic speech for the right of the Moroccan people to independence and unity in the city.

In the artistic domain, Tangiers bewitched, by its beauty, many world famous artists (painters, musicians or writers) who stayed or lived there: Eugene Delacroix, Saint-Saens, Pierre Loti, Henri Matisse, Van Dongen, Tennessee Williams, Paul Moran, Jean Genet, Joseph Kessler, William Burroughs and Paul Bowles. They contributed extensively to the fame of Tangiers and Morocco on the international artistic stage. In the same way, it gave to Morocco the intellectuals and the artists of world stature colon, philosopher Abdallah Guennoun, musician Mohamed Ben Larbi Temsamani and many novelists and painters. Since 2000, the city has been hosting Tanjazz, the international jazz festival, the Mediterranean Festival of the short film, as well as other artistic and cultural events.

Main tourist attractions

Tangiers offers visitors two unique landscapes: Cape Malabata to the East on the Mediterranean coastline, where one can admire an exceptional sunrise, and Cape Spartel, on the Atlantic Ocean, that presents a splendid sunset.

Not far from Cape Spartel, where the waters of the Mediterranean and the Atlantic converge, one finds "Hercules'

underground cave", where he rested after having done his miraculous works, according to Greek mythology. Besides its historic dimensions, it also has a special beauty that makes it so attractive to Moroccan and foreign tourists. On the road leading to Cape Spartel, one finds the "Diplomatic Forest" spread over hundreds of kilometers opening its green arms to holly-oaks, pines and cedars to the lovers of hiking, picnics, and sport.

In the heart of the old city is the Kasbah, surrounded by columns of white marble, with its museum (the former palace of the Sultan), with all forms of Moroccan art: wood sculptures, carpets, weapons, dresses etc. One also finds numerous mosques, the most important of which are: "The Big Mosque" and "The Mosque Sidi Bouabid" with the splendid minaret in polychrome, overlooking the "Grand Soq" (big market), where local and imported goods are sold.

The city of Tangiers also offers visitors the gardens of the Mendoubia, whose trees are eight centuries old, as well as a distinguished museum, The Forbes Museum" where 115000 soldiers replay the big battles of history: the battle of the Three Kings, Waterloo or the battle of the Sum.

The most important ecological tourism project is "Rass Al Flouka Dolphin Reserve, founded on the initiative of the Swiss foundation "Firm", which specializes in research on marine mammals. This project aims to create a natural reserve to welcome the dolphins who live in the enclosed basins in order to help them adapt to natural marine life before being freed into the sea.

Since 1991, Tangiers has become a free trade zone again. The link with Spain by tunnel or viaduct, and especially the launching of the Complex of the Port Tangiers-Mediterranean, are going to open vast horizons which will enable it to play a fundamental role in the economic and tourism arenas of the Western Mediterranean. This complex will be the second in the kingdom (after the one in Casablanca), an industrial zone, a zone of free trade and a tourist zone. ■