



Marrakech

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There is so much to see in this medieval Moroccan city, it pays to know where to go if you are exploring with limited time

1 Bahia Palace

Start your journey at one of the city's crowning architectural glories – a spectacular 19th-century palace once home to the wives and concubines of the Grand Vizier to the sultan. Spanning eight hectares, the 150-room riad is a maze of interconnected harems, adorned with vibrant mosaics and cedar wood archways embellished with Quranic verses and Berber designs. In the courtyards, ferns, banana plants and orange trees flourish, while slender pathways lead visitors into the high-ceilinged halls. It's worth investing in a city guide who knows the key attractions well if you've got limited time to explore (Abercrombie & Kent offers city break packages including a guide from £430 for three nights; abercrombiekent.co.uk). palais-bahia.com

2 The souks

Head north and you'll stumble into a labyrinth of terracotta-coloured alleyways inlaid with haphazardly assembled market stalls. This is where you'll find some of the best shopping in North Africa. The stall owners tout everything from leather bags and jewellery to scarves and slippers, plus Moroccan-inspired iterations of the latest fashion from the high street. Native to Morocco, argan oil is also sold in bulk here, though much of what you'll see won't be good quality – head instead to Assouss Argane on Rue Mouassine, which sells quality-regulated creams, serums and oils for use on the skin and hair. In the souk, haggling is sport, and shopkeepers know how much their pieces fetch elsewhere. Playful banter can go a long way, but never pay more than 50 per cent of the asking price.

3 Le Jardin Secret

After an hour's bartering you'll feel like you need a cool drink. Head to Café Sahrij at Le Jardin Secret for a pick-me-up in this oasis of lush greenery, water features and pavilions spread across a complex dating back 400 years. Built by the 16th-century Sultan Moulay 'Abd-Allah, the gardens fell into disrepair in the early 20th century, reopening in 2016 after a decade of restoration. Today, they thrive with tropical foliage, cacti and flowering plants alongside gurgling fountains originally used for bathing before prayer. Order a pot of mint tea and the tarte du jour from Le Jardin's outdoor café and enjoy the sun on your face away from the chaotic medina outside. There's a Dhs 50 (£4) entrance fee to the garden. lejardinsecretmarrakech.com

4 Les Bains de Marrakech

No trip to Marrakech is complete without a visit to a hammam. A common tradition in the Islamic world, the Moroccan ritual uses a clay known locally as ghassoul, taken from the Atlas mountains and combined with natural oils to soften the skin before being scrubbed off with a rough mitt. There are a number of these spas dotted across the Medina (walled part of the old town), but they vary in standard. If you're after guaranteed luxury and faultless service, head to Les Bains de Marrakech, a 20-minute-walk south of Le Jardin, where you can unwind in a soaking tub strewn with rose petals before your treatment. If you've just got an hour, opt for the 45-minute hammam (£17), which you can combine with an algae wrap for the same price. lesbainsdemarrakech.com

5 Musée Yves Saint Laurent

Launched last October, this tribute to the pioneering French designer has raised Marrakech's cultural profile. Yves Saint Laurent fell in love with the city after his first visit in 1966, and shortly after bought a holiday home where he would spend a month each year working on his haute couture collections. He credited the city with much of his sartorial inspiration for decades to follow. Designed by Studio KO, the museum chronicles Saint Laurent's life from his early days as creative director of Christian Dior to his retirement show in 2002, featuring a display of 50 defining garments alongside sketches, photography and video that give insight to his life and career. Don't miss the spectacular portraits of Catherine Deneuve. museeyslmarakech.com **B1**

