



ROYAL PALM MARRAKECH

Marrakech, Morocco

It's not often that my jaw drops upon entering a hotel lobby, but at the new Royal Palm, they've pulled out all the stops. It's high-impact Jacques-Garcia wizardry at its finest. My quarters, a suite in the block opposite the Clarins spa, was a tad masculine but had all the hallmarks of haute hospitality: vast vestibules, an egg-shaped tub (with a view) and a futuristic telephone that speaks to Google (no, I couldn't work it). Order room service, and two chaps arrive, wearing gloves, with an antique chest on legs. So far, so stylish.

Outdoors, landscaped gardens and Asian-style swimming pools linked by wooden bridges summon the southern hemisphere, albeit in Vegas-like style. But this is to be expected: it is the newest member of Beachcomber, a Mauritian hotel group. For diners, ancient olive trees and linen tablecloths give L'Olivier, the hotel's poolside restaurant, a breezy Cecconi's vibe, while Le Caravane has a more formal atmosphere with a menu designed exclusively for expensive palates.

One of the best things about the Royal Palm is its splendid isolation. Just over seven miles south of Marrakech on Rue de Barrage, it is one of the furthest hotels from the medina, and the hotel's arrival confirms a growth spurt in the area. First came Beldi Country Club, a rustic rose-strewn enclave for sun-seeking Parisians. Then came The Selman, an elegant equestrian hideaway with a top-notch spa. And Royal Palm, with its Indian Ocean opulence, makes up a triumphant trio – do a hotel crawl along this stretch and you're in for a very good time.

Royal Palm is also a great choice for



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families. Well conceived, with plenty of room to spread out, buggies are no problem. Plus the (free) kids' club is one of the best I've seen, boasting a treehouse, dinky swimming pool and junior tennis courts. I had to stop myself from clambering onto a life-size woolly sheep and bleating!

For grown ups, there's an 18-hole golf course, high-tech gym, squash courts, kickboxing, yoga/pilates and tennis –

it's a great choice for a spring fitness break. But ultimately, it's all about the soul-lifting views over the snow-capped peaks of the Atlas mountains, towards which every table, chair, sun-lounger and floor-to-ceiling window is turned. Smart.

From £288 bed and breakfast

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Leo Bear