



# MARRAKECH MAGIC

MARRAKECH BEATS WITH COLOUR, DIVERSITY AND MYSTIQUE. EXPLORE THE NEW-WAVE RIADS, FUNKY NIGHTCLUBS AND ANCIENT SOUKS, BEFORE RETIRING TO A SUMPTUOUS ABODE. LEO BEAR RECOMMENDS THE MAJOR HOTEL PLAYERS IN THIS LUXURY LEAGUE\_\_

Portrayed as a perplexing yet enchanting city full of contradictions in Esther Freud's autobiographic 1960s novel *Hideous Kinky*, Marrakech is still brimming with secrets to this very day. In the As Wal quarter, away from the tenacious street sellers and vaudeville snake charmers of Place Jamaa el Fna, little has changed since the 16th century. A gargoyled cast-iron wall fountain still provides locals with drinking water and narrow winding passages are alive with chatter. Careful as you go though, men weaving Agave silk leave strings of it hanging in the air. Whatever your malaise, herbalists selling all manner of lotions, potions and powders in every colour of a Pantone book, will supply a remedy, and if you poke your nose through enough creaky wooden doors, eventually you'll find a derelict guesthouse exactly as Freud described.

Oh how times have changed. For hotel junkies, there are few better destinations. Just when you think the city has reached saturation point, another splendidiferous hideaway is unveiled, cranking the noise right back up.

Most of the big names have descended outside the city in the burgeoning Palmeraie region, but for those who like to be knee-deep in the action, the new Delano is a must. Walking distance from the main square, and flanked by Louis Vuitton and Missoni boutiques, it's brought a new level of chic to the Hivernage district. As you would expect from the Delano in Miami, this new outpost delivers plenty of va-va-vroom. Seventy-three rooms line a honeycomb-encrusted rotunda. The mood is devilishly dark throughout with swathes

of deep-purple velvet and lashings of silk and tassels. Throw in an arresting collection of Moroccan modern art and it is Jacques Garcia at his finest. The lobby, a Guggenheim-esque atrium with a baroque twist, buzzes night and day with mademoiselles in Manolos and locals drinking mint tea, and at Pomiroeu, the hotel's Italian restaurant, Michelin-starred chef Giancarlo Morelli doles out bowls of glistening risotto. But who are we kidding? It's all about the Sky Lounge on the roof. Boasting 360-degree views of Marrakech's imperial ramparts and a glowing donut-shaped pool, it is undoubtedly the definition of north African cool.

For something more tranquil, away from the hubbub of the medina, our favourite newcomer is the Mosaic Palais Aziza, a gentrified bolthole in the aforementioned Palmeraie area. It opened last year and word is spreading like wildfire. Labyrinthine paths fringed by pomegranate trees and rose bushes lead to 28 villas featuring traditional zellig and tadelakt decoration paired with chapel-like ceilings, ornamental brass lanterns and colossal beds stretched tight with Egyptian cotton. With no plans to expand, the whole place operates in a very bijou manner.



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Beyond the sleeping quarters, there are two pools, a spa and gym. But the hotel's star attraction has to be Chef Daniele Turco (formerly of Gritti Palace) who toils away behind kitchen doors reconstructing traditional Italian fare with delicate flair. Marinated sardines, spaghetti with chunky pistachio and basil pesto, and scorpion fish in a broth of anis brimming with hair-thin ribbons of vegetables, are a few of his stand-out dishes.

Sitting on the terrace at the Palais Aziza watching the sun go down over the majestic snow-capped Atlas Mountains, it's easy to see why Freud fell hopelessly in love with Marrakech. ©





## BEST OF THE REST

### LA MAMOUNIA

Despite turning 90 this year – and in spite of all the ritzy new hotel openings – La Mamounia still has what it takes. There’s a unique mix of papas in towelling robes who’ve been coming for years, and trendy young Americans, blissfully lounging poolside. Originally built in 1922, and subsequently spruced-up by Jacques Garcia, La Mamounia has a way of constantly reinventing itself. One can lose days strolling up and down the hotel’s vast marble lobbies marvelling at the ornately tiled ceilings, or prowling around its 17 acres of gardens that once provided the medina with all its fruit and vegetables. Suites are sumptuous and service is unfaltering, but above all, it’s the history that keeps people coming. Winston Churchill’s favourite room remains the top reservation. [mamounia.com](http://mamounia.com)

### AMANJENA

Set on the road to Ouarzazate about 20 minutes outside Marrakech, Amanjena is the epitome of serenity. Come here to de-stress. Rose-filled rooms are private and palatial with roaring log fires, wool rugs and deep marble baths. The centrepiece of the hotel is a vast ancient basin inspired by the city’s 12th century Menara Gardens. Guests are spoilt with daily gifts of straw hats, babouches or pouches of pot pourri, a nod to local customs, and the Moroccan restaurant serves some of the finest fare in the city. Walk around the gardens which heave with olive trees, date palms and orange-flame bougainvillea, take out quadbikes or go hiking in the Atlas mountains, and return to 1,001 lanterns lighting up the land. [amanresorts.com](http://amanresorts.com)

### ROYAL MANSOUR

No expense has been spared for this, the king of Morocco’s pet project. Mohammed VI made it his business to oversee every detail of the hotel’s inception from the pink gold-leaf in the bar to the acres of ‘zellig’ laid piece by piece in the lavish spa by skilled craftsmen. Rooms are individual riads equipped with living rooms, dining rooms and rooftop pools. The three-storey riads come with lifts, natch! [royalmansour.com](http://royalmansour.com)

### THE SELMAN

Recently opened by a horse-mad family, The Selman offers a brilliant blend of Moorish architecture and baroque flair (Jacques Garcia designed the interiors – who else?). Lounge by the pool, one of the largest in Marrakech, and watch the hotel’s string of thoroughbred Arabian horses cantering around their pens, or have a word with the concierge and he’ll whip up a horse ride in the Atlas Mountains for you. [selman-marrakech.com](http://selman-marrakech.com)

### PALAIS NAMASCAR

Seven years and €50 million in the making, this chic new hideaway is a member of the famous Oetker Collection. All 41 rooms offer a private pool or outdoor Jacuzzi and are serviced 24/7 by butlers. Design lovers will appreciate the inventive aesthetics – there’s a giant salt-crystal art installation in the bar for good luck – there’s even a private jet on standby should you need to make a quick getaway. °



## WHAT TO DO

- Take a hammam at Les Deux Tours  
» [les-deux-tours.com](http://les-deux-tours.com)
- Lose your head on a hot air balloon  
» ride courtesy of Ciel D’Afrique  
[cieldafrique.info](http://cieldafrique.info)
- Crack the whip horse riding in  
» the Agafay desert at La Pause  
[lapause-marrakech.com](http://lapause-marrakech.com)
- Sign up for a cookery class at  
» La Maison Arabe  
[lamaisonarabe.com](http://lamaisonarabe.com)
- Explore modern art amid cactus  
» gardens at the Musée de la Palmeraie  
[museepalmeraie.com](http://museepalmeraie.com)
- Dance the night away at Bô Zin  
» [bo-zin.com](http://bo-zin.com)

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