

Discovering Casablanca

Great Cities of Morocco

by Jerry W. Bird



After viewing the Atlas Mountains, pounding surf and the world's biggest sand box complete with camels, we were ready for a taste of city

life. As originator of a travel series called Railways of the World, going to Casablanca, Morocco's largest city, by rail was a fitting way to start off the new year (2003). We enjoyed the journey so completely that the route from Marrakech (3 hours in total) seemed far too short. However, as we soon learned from the staff on board, visitors can travel between many of Morocco's principal cities by rail. That includes the Northern port of Tangier, a few miles from Spain with its famous Talgo Train service.

Rail travel is still one of the most practical, inexpensive and relaxing of all modes on transportation, and the Marrakech to Casablanca line was no exception. We traveled in a first class coach enjoying the privacy of having a 6-seat compartment all to ourselves, with ample overhead storage for luggage and carry-ons. The one way tickets purchased conveniently at the counter (without reservations) were less than \$15 in U.S. currency.

A simple lunch was served on board, and the price was nominal. I settled back in the sofa-like seating determined to savor every moment and take in the scenery like a passing parade, which is exactly what it was. The views were varied and unforgettable, from scenes of shepherds and flocks that seemed right out of the bible's Old Testament, to multi-layered desert vistas, lush grassy plains in the foothills country and modern city scapes as we approached our destination. Cattle, sheep and camels grazing side by side was quite different than your typical pastoral scene.

Both the Marrakech and Casablanca terminals are clean, well maintained and



convenient to taxis and other transportation from the heart of the city (this keeps the stress level low and the pleasure scale high). We were in and out of the railway terminal and on our way by Petite Taxi to the Residence Casablanca Apart' Hotel within a very few minutes of arrival. Quite a change from the average plane trip, where it would just takes us that long just to reach the arrivals area to retrieve our luggage. Above photo: Friendly staff to greet you at the Casablanca Appart' Hotel

Getting Around Casablanca

It is now close to a month that we have been visiting Morocco and I am amazed at how easy it is to get around in a city the size of Casablanca. We have found the taxi drivers courteous and knowledgeable, and the prices affordable. I will comment on this aspect later in this series because I had the same

impression on two previous visits to Casablanca, when we saw and photographed many of the city's main attractions in a very short time. Casablanca. Background notes: Morocco's largest city, Casablanca has a population of over three million and is the nation's commercial hub. Being Morocco's hub, it is also the largest port of the Maghreb, a facility that authorities claim has more activity than Marseilles, the French Mediterranean port city on which Casablanca was modeled many years ago. The historic architecture, known as "Mooresque," after the Moors, is a combination of traditional Moroccan design with what were at the time the very latest in Parisian styles.

Visitors to Casablanca will enjoy the seacoast 'corniche' area with its grandiose homes and fine dining spots, famous Hassan II Mosque, bustling central market area, the Habous district, the Royal Palace, the Mohamed V square, and the residential area of Anfa. Located a short drive from the capital city of Rabat, Casablanca is also the site of Hassan II University.

Photo of mosque was taken by Jerry W. Bird during his first stay in Casablanca.

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