

AFRICA Travel

MAGAZINE

Algeria

Egypt

Libya

Morocco

Sudan

Tunisia

Western Sahara

Northern Africa World Edition

Behold what treasures await in the heart of a typical Moroccan Medina.

African Lifestyles

THE RIADS OF



by Muguette Goufrani

Homes of Character

These traditional homes of Morocco, which many referred to as riads, villas, dars, kasbahs or guest homes, range from the simplest structures to the most sumptuous, luxurious palaces. Legendary comparisons are made to the Garden of Eden, with its fruit-laden trees, or a treasure-filled hideaway from *A Thousand and One Nights*. Cascading waterfalls, inner fountains with roses petals and bird baths, interior and rooftop tented patios, refreshing sauna-like hammams - you will find all of this and much more. Many riads are showpieces of Moroccan architecture and culture, a constant challenge to innovative decorators attracted by the opportunity to renovate and improve, with amazing transformations from ugly ducklings to graceful swans. While the concept is the same, each riad is unique in its own way, as in the hands and eyes of the owner or designer. Africa Travel Magazine's editorial team never tires of visiting a riad, whether it be in the heart of a médina, a desert oasis or a retreat high in the Atlas Mountains. In our first Morocco edition, Habeeb Salloum describes the experience this way, "*We stopped to refresh ourselves at the Kasbah Hotel Restaurant Asmaa - a traditional kasbah-style building whose interior is beautified by fountains and tiles in traditional Moroccan fashion. Soon thereafter, we were driving in the barren High Atlas until we passed a spot 1,907 m (6,255 ft) above sea level - the highest point we were to reach during our journey. From this high pass, the road wound its way downward through an arid landscape until we reached the Ziz River - a thin line of greenery in an otherwise barren countryside.*"

At places, the road wound its way high above the river, then suddenly it would descend to the water's edge where vegetables thrive under olive, palm and many other type of trees. The scene brought to mind the words of the poet-astronomer Omar Khayyam, "Between the desert and the sown."



MOROCCO. VIVE LA DIFFERENCE!

How it started

The idea for our World Edition supplement on Moroccan homes and lifestyle was born in 1996 during the first Africa Travel Association (ATA) Conference held in this fascinating country. The venue was Marrakech and the focus was on Cultural and Ecotourism. The stage was set in 2002, when myself, Editor Jerry Bird and broadcaster Ogo Sow toured the major cities from Fez to Rabat, Casablanca, Essaouira and Marrakech. One of the highlights was our visit to several of the boutique hotels, riads and luxury resorts, such as the **Amanjena** with its 32 Pavilions, six, two-storey maisons and the Al-Hamra Maison, with its pools and oasis of palms and olive trees in the foreground and the High Atlas Mountains as a backdrop. Our editor has these comments



about Marrakech, "Where else are all the walls and buildings tinted in a rich pastel peach, the broad avenues and promenades lined with rows and rows of orange trees, with ripe fruit dangling from their branches like holiday ornaments?"

Riads of Mogador

We stayed an extra few weeks through New Years at Essaouira, formerly Mogador. Here we were treated to a visit of the superb facilities and park-like grounds at the elegant **Dar Mimosas**, situated a few miles south of the city. At the Médina, inside the walls of a centuries old Portuguese fortress, a variety of attractive riads offer fine food and accommodation. I was introduced to Les Terrasses d'Essaouira, a luxurious riad which offers a scenic view of the bay. One of our favorite stops while doing business or shopping is the **Riad Al**

Médina. My brother Maurice Goufrani of the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris often stays when he visits the Essaouira Cultural Complex, or attends the popular Ganaoua Festival, a three day banquet of music.

Our current stay in Essaouira has given the Homes and Lifestyles project a giant leap forward. In recent months, we have traveled the Atlantic Coast from Agadir in the South, via Safi, Al Jaddida and Casablanca to beyond Rabat. Other areas are in our sights as we develop the Africa Travel Library through our series of World Editions and supplements.

Living the Moroccan Lifestyle

We are actually living in a riad. When my mother retired over a decade ago, she had an architect friend design her a villa in the traditional Moroccan style and during the interim the place has taken shape. Now that we have arrived to stay it will become the African base for our magazine and growing library of magazines, books and media resources. At the moment we are developing the garden area, which will be a pleasant retreat, with additional shade trees, flowers, birds and fish pools. The roof terrace has an outstanding view of the new world class golf course, with construction well underway - confounding the skeptics who said it could not be done.

Facts About Morocco:

Courtesy of Habeeb Salloum.

- 1) Nationals of most countries do not need visas to enter Morocco- only valid passports.
- 2) If you know French, its is easy to get around in Morocco. Everyone speaks French, but many also know English.
- 3) Unit of currency in Morocco is the dirham which fluctuates at around 10 to 12 to a dollar. Exchange money at banks or hotels - rates are all the same with no commission.
- 4) When traveling in Morocco, trains are the most comfortable. Buses are inexpensive - CTM the best. Small autos, with unlimited mileage and fully insured, rent for about \$50. a day, fully insured.
- 5) The mass of hustlers which once

infested the tourist spots in Morocco have been greatly diminished by the strong arm of the law.

- 6) Tips are expected for every service - always carry small change.
- 7) Bargain for all tourist items - never shop with a guide - his commission is usually about 30%.
- 8) At night, avoid dark alleyways. Morocco is safer than many other countries, but muggers still stalk the lonely streets.
- 9) When in Erfoud, for a breath-taking taste of the desert, one should make a trip to Merzouga, an oasis near the Algerian border surrounded by sand dunes - some more than 50 m (164 ft) high. The oasis's lake is a favorite spot for migrating birds, especially in February and March, when the Dayet Srji flamingos appear. On the other hand, if traveling the desert is on one's mind, trips to the desert can be arranged by tour companies in Erfoud.

10) Two good places to stay in Erfoud: Hotel Salem - a 4 star abode - from \$56. To \$80. A room; Hotel Ziz, an excellent 3 star abode located in the heart of town - \$34. a room.

Note: All prices quoted are in U.S. dollars.

This feature continues on the following page.





THE RIADS OF MARRAKECH ARE EVERYTHING

by Muguette Goufrani



While I was born in Morocco and began my career there with our family's tour company and Royal Air Maroc, before working my way

around the world, my return as part of the Africa Travel Association, has been a true rediscovery. Marrakech was ATA's host city for a Cultural and Ecotourism Conference in 1996 and Fez had the same honors in 2002. As Morocco's third largest city and a bustling center of commerce, Marrakech is high on our list as an ideal convention site and place to visit. The metropolitan area comprises the Médina, a walled city built centuries ago as a fortification, surrounded by one of the most

modern communities anywhere, with upscale shops, famous name hotels, leafy parks and treed boulevards.

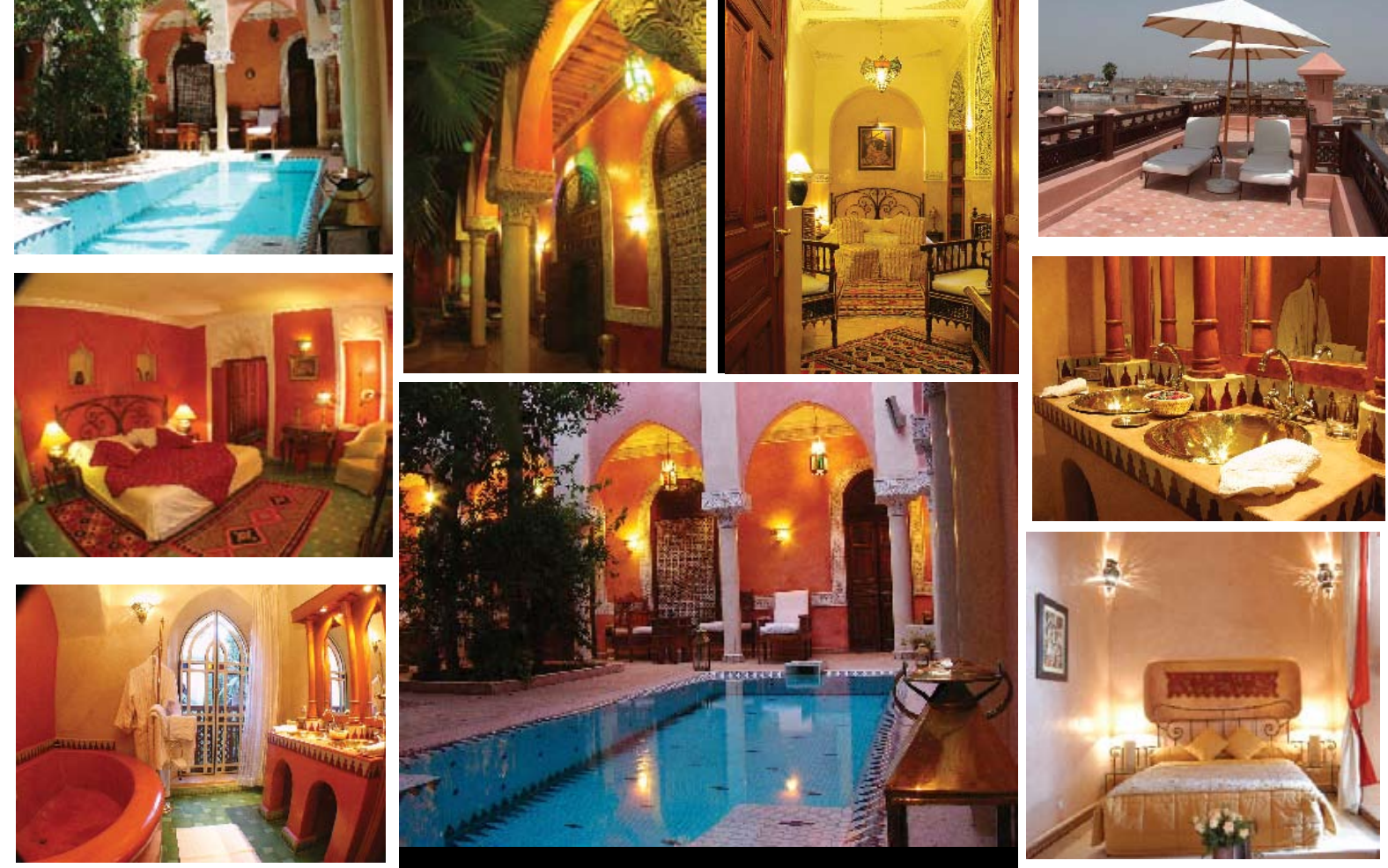
Hidden Treasures

Within the Médina itself you will find several huge doors, which like the entrance to Ali Baba's cave, open up to reveal what North Africans call a 'riad.' During a stop in Marrakech enroute to Casablanca, we had the pleasure of staying at the Hotel Riad Shama, and visiting several others including the Hotel Riad Oasis. Both are operated by the same company and each has its unique attractions - magical Arabian architecture and decor, pools and oriental lounges,

spacious bed rooms, cosy fireplaces and luxury bathrooms. Want to enjoy the fresh air of Southern Morocco and a bird's eye view of the exotic surroundings within the Médina? Each riad provides guests with access to a roof terrace or sundeck. How did we know about these two attractive riads? We spent some time learning about them from the general manager herself - during our weeks at ITB Berlin and the Salon International de Tourism in

Paris. After checking in at the Hotel Riad Shama, we took a walk through the souk, a huge marketplace with products and services of every description - and plenty of bargains awaiting your pleasure. Close





A FINE HOTEL SHOULD BE - AND MUCH MORE

by is Djemaa el Fna, one of the busiest market squares in Africa, with snake charmers, acrobats, story-tellers, dancers, and musicians. By night, the square turns into an open-air restaurant where traditional Moroccan dishes, such as cous cous and tangine are on the menu.

What is a Riad?

A traditional Riad is a Moroccan home or palace, which often includes an interior garden. The ancient Roman city of Volubilis, which we visited in 2002, during our conference in Fez, provides a reference for the beginnings of riad architecture. The design of these courtyard dwellings in the coastal regions of Morocco

were an adaptation and modification of the Roman villa. When the Almoravids conquered Spain in the 11th century they sent Muslim, Christian and Jewish artisans from Spain to Morocco to work on monuments. These artisans brought with them the idea of arranging the rooms of the house around the central open-air courtyard that



has become today's riads. The riads were inward focused which allowed for family privacy and protection from the weather in Morocco. This inward focus was expressed in the central location of most of the interior gardens and courtyards and the lack of large windows

on the exterior clay or mud brick walls. Entrance to these houses is a major transitional experience and encourages reflection because all of the rooms open into the central atrium space. In the central garden of traditional riads there are often four orange or lemon trees and possibly a fountain. The walls of the riads are adorned with tadelakt plaster and zellige tiles. The style of these riads has changed over the years, but the basic form is still used in designs today. Many riads are now used as hotels or restaurants. *Photos from the Riad Shama are on the above page (left) and those from the Riad Oasis are on above page (right). To find out more or to book rooms for yourself or group at either hotel, contact Mugnette Goufrani by e-mail: airhwy@smartt.com* **CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE**



HAPPY RETURNS TO MOGADOR FOR FESTIVAL D'

By Jerry W. Bird



It's been seven long years since we first toured Morocco with the Ministry of Tourism as part of the ATA media team. This time, our purpose is to set up Africa Travel Magazine's first office in Africa, here at

Essaouira, a beautiful Atlantic Coast city, once known as Mogador. A world-class golf course development, with multi-star hotels is underway and many other attractions are on the horizon. Since arriving from Paris on Royal Air Maroc, we have visited Rabat, with brief stops at Safi and Al Jaddida, spent two days in Casablanca and another in Marrakech, meeting old friends and new. Some of our positive impressions were a new Autoroute, with divided highway and the start of a Tramway system in Rabat. Muguette's brother, **Maurice Goufrani** of the Pompidou Centre in Paris, asked us to make sure we covered **Festival Gnaoua** (Gnaoua) Essaouira, a unique musical experience, June 24-29, 2009. This event is high on our agenda and is in the **Venues World Edition**, now available for download at www.africa-ata.org/venues.pdf

Known as the "windy city," Essaouira is Morocco's wind-surfing capital, where the sky is ablaze with multi colored kites from dawn to dusk every day.

Flashback 2002

Here we are, basking in the noonday sun on North Africa's Atlantic Coast at Essaouira, Morocco, following a journey of discovery which began in the Imperial City of Fès and continued via Rabat, Casablanca and Marrakech. In a few days, we will drive south to the resort city of Agadir, with its luxury beach front hotels and lavish casinos, catering to the jet set of Europe, Africa and Middle East. Most North Americans have yet to really discover Morocco's coastal resort cities - and that's a prime opportunity for our magazine, read by travel professionals



and their clients.

We are enjoying a nautical view of Essaouira's historic seaport, once known as Mogador, from our dockside table at "Chez Sam." Highly recommended by locals in the know, this charming waterfront restaurant is surrounded by fishing boats and marine activity. Men repairing fish-nets, shucking shrimp and sorting sardines, looming skeletons of boats under construction add to the scene. The interior of Chez Sam reminds me of Trader Vic's, once a popular hang-out in our home port of Vancouver, and Ivar's in Seattle. The fresh seafood, decor and atmosphere are magnificent and the impressive gallery of celebrity photos; Louis 'Satchmo' Armstrong, Stevie Wonder and others, attests to the fact that the owner comes from the world of jazz. Sam and his huge, jet black dog Nikita joined our table a few days later, and thanks to that rendezvous, I was able to learn the history of this outstanding restaurateur and the origin of the Essaouira (Mogador) seaport's most popular eatery.

Freshness is the order of the day, every day at Chez Sam and also at the many outdoor stalls, perched side-by-side along the dock area. Each offers visitors fresh caught products from the sea to the table and each competes vigorously with its neighbour for our attention. Barkers, menu boards and tempting displays of fresh catch from the Atlantic is their marketing approach. I enjoyed a generous portion of sole fillet and



ESSAOUIRA GNAOUA, A MUSICAL BANQUET

fresh salad for less than five dollars U.S. My two colleagues split a large crab for a similar tab. Overhead a flotilla of sea gulls was dipping and diving against a background of crashing whitecaps, rocky outcrops and rugged remnants of the centuries old Portuguese fort that marks the city's place in history. Some call this the "city of winds ... and when we visited Essaouira earlier this same week, a minor storm was brewing. Gusts swept the area clear of surfers, bathers, wanderers and beachcombers. A few lonesome camel drivers still tended their stalls near the far end of the crescent shaped beach, and the waves grew even more fierce as they pounded the shore. But today, near the end of December,

the weather is as balmy as any spring afternoon, and the buyers and browsers are out in force, filling the Medina with its dozens of shops and stalls. We found an excellent Cyber Cafe right by the entrance and are getting our dozens of e-mail letters ready to send around the world. It's a great way to stay in touch, which is why we always carry our 'portable office - a reliable Macintosh laptop computer.

Arabian Nights On New Years Eve in Morocco

One of my favorite meeting places in Essaouira is the 5-star Sofitel Mogador, located on the main promenade facing the beach. Here's where we spent one of the most enjoyable New Year's Eve celebrations in years. It started with an invitation to a Fashion Show, which continued into the wee hours. For starters, the hotel's dining room staff were all decked like Aladdin (of the lamp), and the entire ballroom looked like a scene from Arabian Nights, complete with belly dancers, mariachis with their Spanish guitars, Magicians and special visual and musical effects. The entire evening was unforgettable.

We then moved to the hotel's beach side restaurant, where the music was going full tilt. One of local girls modeled Muguette's bottle- green gown with shoulder wrap- one of several gifts we received from our friend and former Tourism Minister, Hon. Sylla Diakite of Conakry, Guinea. The Moroccan Khaftan fashion segment of the evening proved highly popular.

Doors of Hospitality

Another friendly, convenient place to meet is the Hotel des Isles. Next to the Medina and offers a full range of services. Since we spent almost two weeks in the immediate area, we are pleased to recommend a stay in Essaouira to any traveler looking for something different. Photos courtesy: Thierry Mareschal and the Essaouira Cultural Center.

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