

Sense and the city

The souks, hammams, gardens and cuisine of Marrakech will knock your senses for six. **Carole French** takes it all in her stride

To say Marrakech is a city for the senses is almost an understatement. One minute you'll be cooking and tasting some of the most exquisite food on the planet, the next you're being scrubbed and doused in a hammam. You can mix with the locals, who will almost certainly be engaged in loud, animated conversation, and then slope off to smell the flowers in one of the city's rich gardens. In short, Marrakech is a city that will capture your heart.

First up, no visit would be complete without some time spent in a **souk**. Traditionally, this is where traders in *djellaba* (kaftans) sell their goods, and >>



they've done so for centuries. The tempting aromas from food stalls are sure to draw you to squares like Djemaa el Fna in the centre of the city, where you can buy everything from ceramics to carpets. Plus, as well as cooked food, there's as much fresh produce as you could ever need for cooking your own Moroccan dishes. Spices are an essential ingredient in Moroccan cuisine, and in the souks you'll be able to see stall after stall displaying these wares: some will be in jars, others in colourful mounds.

To learn more about the city's cuisine, Marrakech offers several schools where a *dada* – traditional Moroccan cook – will teach you the necessary skills to rustle up perfect Moroccan dishes. One of the most famous cookery schools is the workshop of the **La Maison Arabe** (1 Derb Asselbâ, Bâb Doukkala, tel. (0)524 387010, lamaisonarabe.com). For around €350/MAD 4,000 – or much less if you can get a group together – you can learn how to prepare a typical appetizer, such as *harira* (a delicious thick soup made with vegetables and spices), and a main dish. Most students ask to cook a tagine; a classic slow-cooked stew of meat that's livened up with lemons, coriander and saffron.

Taking the plunge

When not in the kitchen, you'll probably find the city's locals in a **hammam** (bath house). A shrewd lot, they discovered spa treatments years ago, and the sensation of being washed and exfoliated, combined with the smell of roses and spices, is intoxicating.

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In the historic Hammam el-Bacha, the atmosphere and heat will ensure your senses are challenged

Part of taking a hammam bath involves being vigorously scrubbed with black soap made from olive oil. The therapist will don a *kesso* – a glove used for cleansing – to work the soap into a lather on your skin, leaving you feeling thoroughly cleansed. After you've showered, it's time for a massage with argan oil. A silky, honey-coloured oil, argan is harvested from the kernels of the native argan tree. An organised cooperative of women crack open the kernels, roast the seeds inside, and then grind them to a paste from which the oil is squeezed. You only have to visit one hammam to see how much of a cultural institution this ritual is; both men and women come to hammams to relax, beautify and catch up with the local gossip.



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Historically, hammams were places where locals without plumbing in their homes would go to wash, and they're traditionally housed in the former *riads* (palaces) that line the network of tiny streets in Marrakech's souk district. Each was – and in many cases still is – elaborately decorated, with walls covered in *zellij* mosaic tiles in shades of blue, brown and green. One of the city's oldest is the **Hammam el-Bacha** on Rue Fatima Zohra in the medina. Here the



atmosphere and, of course, the heat, will ensure your senses are challenged.

Nowadays, most of the city's big hotels have a hammam in their 'wellbeing' complex. A clever mix of traditional and contemporary can be found in **La Mamounia** (Avenue Bâb Djedid, tel. (0)524 388600, mamounia.com), probably Marrakech's best-known hotel. Built in the 19th century by architects Antoine Marchisio and Henri Prost, the likes of Winston Churchill, Bill Clinton and Sean Connery have all passed through its doors. Legendary filmmaker Alfred Hitchcock was captivated by the hotel, and shot scenes for some of his films here. Whether any of these famous visitors enjoyed the

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hammam we'll never know for sure, but the spa manager tells me most guests do.

Garden state

Marrakech is also famous for its gardens, and in fact La Mamounia's own garden is an oasis of lawns and date palms standing some 20 metres tall. Not far away you'll find the **Menara Gardens** (Avenue de la Menara) and the **Agedal Gardens** (Rue Bâb Ahmer), both of which were created for the ruling >>

Palmed off

Escape the city in the Palmeraie Desert

If your senses are feeling overloaded, make a journey into the Palmeraie Desert, where the Atlas Mountains fill the horizon and the Terre Resort offers secluded relaxation. Enter the octagonal spa for a hammam and gommage experience, which will leave you revived and ready to return to the headiness of the city. terre.com

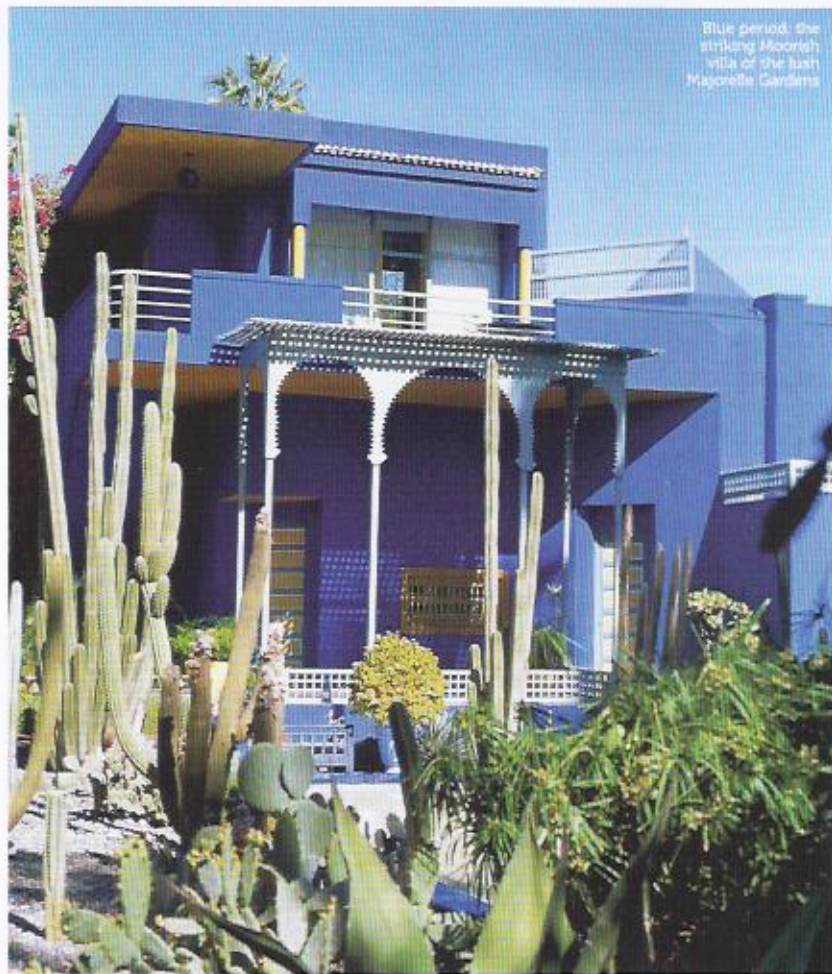
Clockwise from below left:

The scent of roses, used in body soaps and scrubs, fills the air in Marrakech's hammams; Herbs and spices galore in the city souks; Tempting aromas, sights and sounds abound in Djemaa el Fna square; Colourful carpets for sale amid the rooftops

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The spice of life in Djemaa el Fna





Blue period: the striking Moorish villa of the lush Majorelle Gardens

IMAGE: VISITMARRAKECH.COM, TOURIST OFFICE

“ Marrakech is famous for its gardens and the Majorelle, full of succulents, palms, bougainvillea, walkways, lakes and fountains, takes some beating

sultans around 700 years ago. Each has its own character; the Menara is popular with photographers keen to capture its lake and pavilion, with the High Atlas Mountains as a backdrop, while the Aguedal is a haven of tranquillity surrounded by a *pisé* wall.

There's also the modern **Cyber Parc Arsat Moulay Abdessalam** (Avenue Mohamed V), and **La Palmeraie** – a wonderful space on the outskirts of town that contains over 100,000 mature date palms. But for me, the **Majorelle Gardens** (Avenue Yacoub el-Mansour, Guéliz) takes some beating; it's quirky and fun, with bright cobalt blue giving splashes of colour amongst the plants. It was created by the French painter Jacques Majorelle, one of several artistic types of the 1920s who were drawn to what had become one of Europe's most

fashionable cities. Majorelle's villa, designed to a Moorish style and painted, of course, in his favourite blue, became the centrepiece of a garden full of succulents, palms and bougainvillea, walkways, lakes and fountains, which has matured to the fabulous space it is today. A few years back it was owned by the designer Yves Saint-Laurent; now, you can while away many hours here. If you want to know more about Majorelle and his contemporaries, step inside the villa, which also houses the Islamic Art Museum.

By the end of your adventures in Marrakech, you may feel like your senses have taken a battering, but my bet is you'll be back for more.

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FR Sense and the city

Les souks, les hammams, les jardins et la fabuleuse cuisine de Marrakech mettront vos « six » sens en éveil... Un parcours sensuel de **Carole French**

Aucune visite à Marrakech ne serait complète sans une halte dans un **souk**. Depuis des siècles, les négociants y vendent de tout. Des effluves appétissants vous conduiront jusqu'à des places telles Djemaa el Fna, avec ses étals de plats préparés et de produits frais. Marrakech possède également plusieurs écoles de cuisine, où un *dada* (cuisinier traditionnel marocain) vous enseignera l'art de confectionner rapidement de fragrances tagines; **La Maison Arabe** (1 Derb Assehbé, Bâb Doukkala, lamaisonarabe.com) est une des plus réputées.

Lorsqu'ils ne sont pas dans leur cuisine, les Marocains se retrouvent dans un hammam. Hommes et femmes y viennent pour se relaxer, se mettre en beauté et se raconter les derniers potins du coin. Cette sensation de propreté et de pureté, avec ces savons aux senteurs d'épices et de roses, est un vrai délice. La plupart des hammams sont décorés avec des carreaux d'argile aux motifs *zellij*, comme le **Hammam el-Bacha** (Rue Fatima Zohra) dans la médina, par exemple. Pour une combinaison entre tradition et modernité, essayez le bain du fameux hôtel **La Mamounia** (Avenue Bâb Djedid, mamounia.com).

Marrakech est également célèbre pour ses jardins. La Mamounia est une oasis de verdure et de palmeraies, non loin, le jardin **Menara** (Avenue de la Menara) et l'**Aguedal** (Rue Bâb Ahmer) ont été créés pour les sultans il y a 700 ans. On mentionnera aussi le **Cyber Parc Arsat Moulay Abdessalam** (Avenue Mohamed V), et **La Palmeraie** dans la périphérie, mais la palme revient au **Jardin de Majorelle** (Avenue Yacoub el-Mansour, Guéliz). Conçu par le peintre français Jacques Majorelle dans les années 1920, ce jardin est aujourd'hui un paysage d'exception.

NL Sense and the city

De soeks, de hamams, de tuinen en de fantastische keuken van Marrakech zullen je verstomd doen staan, beweert **Carole French**

Een bezoek aan Marrakech is pas compleet als je wat tijd spendeert in een **soek** waar handelaars al eeuwenlang allerlei koopwaar aan de man brengen. Verleidelijke aroma's lokken je naar pleinen als Djemaa el Fna om er te smullen van succulent bereide gerechten en verse eetwaren. In Marrakech zijn verschillende kokscholen gevestigd waar een *dada* (traditionele Marokkaanse kok) je kan leren heerlijke tajine te bereiden. Een van de bekendste is **La Maison Arabe** (lamaisonarabe.com).

Als Marokkanen niet aan de kookpotten staan, vind je ze in een hamam. Je wordt er gewassen en afgeschrobd in een geurige waas van rozen en kruiden... een geweldige ervaring. Heel wat hamams zijn rijkelijk verfraaid met *zellij* mozaïektegels, zoals de oude **Hammam el-Bacha** in de medina. Of probeer de knappe mix van traditioneel en hedendaags in het **La Mamounia** hotel (mamounia.com).

Marrakech is ook gekend voor zijn tuinen. Die van La Mamounia is een oase van gras en dadelpalmen. Ook de **Menara** (Avenue de la Menara) en de **Aguedal** (Rue Bâb Ahmer), zo'n 700 jaar geleden aangelegd voor de sultans, liggen vlakbij. Daarnaast heb je ook nog het moderne **Cyber Parc Arsat Moulay Abdessalam** (Avenue Mohamed V) en **La Palmeraie** in de buitenwijken, maar vooral de **Majorelle Tuinen** (Avenue Yacoub el-Mansour, Guéliz) zijn moeilijk te overtreffen. De Franse schilder Jacques Majorelle ontwierp ze in de jaren 1920.