

THE AUSTRALIAN

TRAVEL+ LUXURY

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From REEF *to* RAINFOREST *and* BEYOND

Three dramatically different Australian
landscapes in seven days

ART OF AFRICA

Marrakech's creative
credentials on show

WINE AND DINE

Must-try restaurants
in the Hunter Valley



Dar al Dall, This Time Tomorrow's residence in Marrakech; Izza Marrakech, right; Bahia Palace, below left; interior of Dar al Dall, below right

ARTY MARRAKECH

TALENT TIME

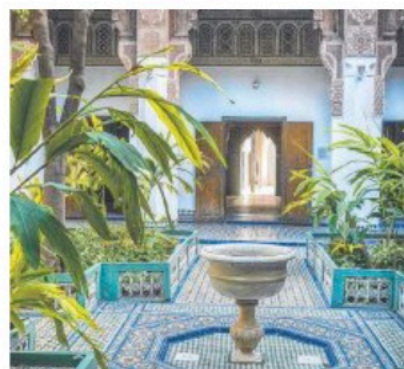
The lively Moroccan city is on a creative roll

EMMA VENTURA

Sitting at a cultural crossroads between Africa, Europe and the Middle East, Marrakech has always been an incubator of creative energy. But with the success of 1-54, the international contemporary African art fair, a new culinary and creative hub DaDa, plus a coalescing of countercultural energy in modern neighbourhoods such as industrial Sidi Ghanem and gallery-studded Gueliz, there is a definite buzz in the air. Add a vibrant mix of new art spaces, restaurants and festivals and it's clear this city is on a creative roll.

"The craft and talent rooted in Morocco's ancient arts have always been alive and thriving," says Pierre Ferland, co-founder of This Time Tomorrow, which recently opened an art-focused riad in the Red City. "But today that talent is evolving in new directions. Art fairs, a wave of new gallery openings, and the return of Moroccan artists from abroad have all contributed to this creative explosion."

Here is how to experience Marrakech's cultural highlights.



1 Set the scene

For many, a trip to Marrakech begins in Jemaa El Fna, the city's gloriously chaotic central square, listed by UNESCO as a site of Intangible Cultural Heritage for its musical, storytelling and artistic traditions. Meander among the snake charmers, henna painters and fruit-juice carts groaning with pineapples and papayas, then pause at DaDa, a new cultural and culinary hub that stands as both counterpoint to and continuation of Marrakech's traditional creative scene. Occupying the reimagined site of the square's old bus terminal, DaDa is the brainchild of local restaurateur Kamal Laftimi, whose grandfather once worked as a driver. A modernist facade with orange motifs nods at the fruit sold in the square outside; inside are 4000sq m fusing traditional Moroccan artisanship – zellige tiles and tadelakt plaster work – with sleek contemporary style. There's a performance space, a bookstore and an art gallery with a rotating roster of international talent, plus a cocktail bar and two restaurants, one leading to a rooftop terrace with unbeatable views across the vibrant square below.

jemaa-el-fna.com
dadamarakech.com

2 Picture this

The House of Photography of Marrakech (Maison de la Photographie) was among the first of Marrakech's new wave of galleries. Opened in 2009 by avid photo collectors Marrakshi Hamid Mergani and Parisian Patrick Menac'h, the private collection, displayed in a lovely riad in the heart of the medina, now numbers some 10,000 printed images of the city and Morocco, dating from the 19th century to the 1960s. Outside of the medina, the just-renovated and reopened Museum of African Contemporary Art Al Maaden meanwhile brings you right up to date with its collections of textiles, painted and digital artworks, sculptures and video installations, and its new permanent "Seven Contours, One Collection" showcasing more than 150 works from across the continent.

maisondelaphotographie.ma
macaalo.org

3 Look up

Amid the mayhem of the medina's maze-like alleyways lie architectural treasures, including the Ben Youssef Medersa, completed in 1565 and located just around the corner from the Marrakech Museum. Historically the country's most important Islamic school, today it offers a cool break from the teeming streets, with soaring archways fashioned in Carrara marble and cedar from the Atlas Mountains and interior walls of intricately patterned plaster and mosaic zellige tiling. For more of the same – plus leafy, fountain-filled courtyards and what's thought to be Africa's earliest example of stained glass – head to the Bahia Palace, built in the 1860s by Grand Vizier Si Moussa and later expanded by his son as a base for his wives and considerable collection of concubines.

medersabenyoussef.ma
bahia-palace.com

4 Play it cool

There are pockets of creative energy all over the city, but the beating heart of Marrakech's contemporary scene is in Gueliz, a modern neighbourhood of boulevards that has become an incubator of galleries and artistic talent. The multidisciplinary MACMA stands for Musée d'art et de Culture Marrakech but functions more as a gallery of sculptures, photography and paintings. As its name suggests, No Border showcases a broad line-up of modern art and international talents, while Loft Art Gallery, founded by sisters Myriam and Yasmine Berrada to highlight Moroccan art, recently expanded its repertoire to cover other African countries and some European



works. If you're looking to discover cliché-breaking Moroccan artists – Mohamed Arejda, Fatiha Zemmouri and Mohammed Kacimi, to name a few – head to Comptoir des Mines Galerie, set in an Art Deco building with a beautifully preserved interior.

museemacma.com
noborder.art
loftartgallery.net
cmgmarrakech.com

5 Feast your eyes

In the Gueliz district, check out Kamal Laftimi's other hotspot, Petanque Social Club which, along with the Australian-influenced #61 restaurant, also in Gueliz, is one of the hottest tables in town. A sybaritic gathering place for creatives, it's a locus of music, food and nostalgic design. Alternatively, if you're in the medina and aren't lucky enough to be staying at IZZA, one of the more wave-making riads of late, you can now book a table for lunch or dinner at Noujoum, its re-launched rooftop restaurant with a sharing-concept menu based on Mediterranean-influenced Moroccan dishes, including a monkfish tagine with charred capsicum and fennel. Afterwards, browse IZZA's multimillion-dollar collection of digital and generative art, including Sebastiao Salgado's Amazonia NFT series and machine-learned works by Turkish-American artist Refik Anadol.

pscmarrakech.com
plus61.com
izza.com

6 Get the blues (and greens)

No trip to Marrakech would be complete without a visit to Jardin Majorelle, the botanical oasis planted by French painter Jacques Majorelle in the 1920s. Famous for its cobalt blue villa blending Art Deco and Moorish styles, home to Yves Saint Laurent and his partner Pierre Berge from the 1980s, the gardens are also where you'll find The Pierre Berge Museum of Berber Arts. Next door is the Musée Yves Saint Laurent Marrakech, a low-slung, gently sculptural building housing exhibition spaces, a library, bookshop and thousands of pieces of YSL clothing, accessories, sketches and other paraphernalia related to the French designer. The queues



Museum of African Contemporary Art Al Maaden; Beni Rugs, top left; Jardins Majorelle, top right; Ben Youssef Medersa, right



for all can be daunting so be sure to book tickets well in advance.

jardinmajorelle.com
museeyslmarrakech.com

7 Hunt for treasure

The best of the new Marrakech boutiques prioritise ethical manufacture and sustainability alongside beauty and utility. Think Marrakshi Life for candy-striped caftans, shirts and parachute pants, or Moro for perfumes, clothing, accessories and idiosyncratic homewares. LRNCE (founded by Laurence Leenaert, who created Rosemary, darling of designer riads) specialises in handmade homewares and clothing with a natural, organic contemporary aesthetic. Rugs are, of course, artworks in their own right, and you can experience these being made on the loom in a one-of-a-kind artisanal workshop and showroom that is just outside Marrakech, courtesy of Beni Rugs.

marrakshilife.com
moromarrakech.com
lrnce.com
benirugs.com

8 Explore the boundaries

At Al Maqam in the village of Tahnaout, just outside Marrakech, artist Mohamed Mourabiti has established a rural haven of light-filled warehouses. Here, by appointment, you can visit and browse both his work and that of those taking part in Al Maqam's artist residencies and enjoy long-table lunches, where the dishes are abundant and the ingredients farm fresh.

Instagram: @almaqamartistresidence

9 Feed your creative soul

Set in the kasbah, Cafe Clock serves as a bridge between local traditional and contemporary international culture, with a fun culinary and creative offering that runs from camel burgers to calligraphy classes. With street art daubed on the walls, belly dancing, henna workshops and a master storyteller from Jemaa El Fna, Cafe Clock packs a crowd that runs from young Moroccans to wide-eyed tourists hungry for scrambled eggs with a chaser of oud music lessons. Don't miss Saturday night, when all-female band Houariyat raises the roof with its Berber beats and leopard-print caftans.

cafeclock.com

BEST BEDS

Drop your bags at Dar al Dall, This Time Tomorrow's luxurious riad in the Kaat Benahid neighbourhood of the medina, where art is all part of the experience. It's in the architecture, the meticulously restored property drawing on both traditional Marrakshi crafts and European design influences, but also on the walls, adorned with 135 albumen prints from the 19th century, vintage travel posters and paintings by acclaimed modern artists such as Paul Ackermann and Paul Jean Revel. Guests have five opulent suites to choose from, each with a private terrace, as well as artistic experiences such as the Artisan Discovery itinerary, a guided visit through the area's wood carving, brass, tile, weaving and pottery ateliers with local creative Abdessamia Bargamane.

this timetomorrow.io

