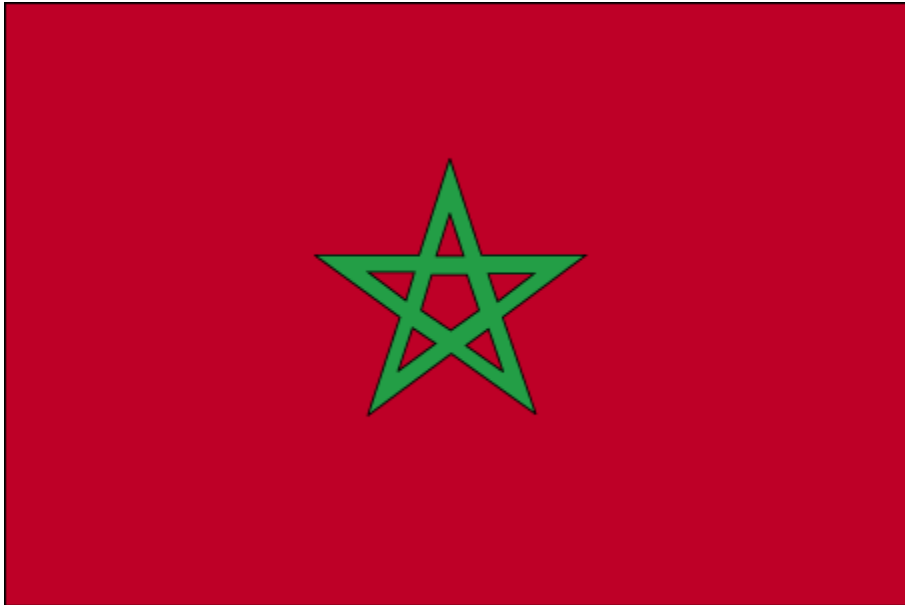


# Morocco

المغرب



NAME: Kingdom of Morocco  
CAPITAL: Rabat  
LANGUAGE: Arabic & Others  
RELIGION: Muslim  
CURRENCY: Moroccan Dirham

## Getting Started

### When to Visit

When to visit [Morocco](#) is primarily based on where you want to go and what you want to see. For example, summers are great along the coasts and mountains, but brutally hot in the desert, while the mountains offer great skiing in the winter while the desert is more approachable.

During the summer, the coasts are hot, but generally Mediterranean and Atlantic breezes cool the coasts. The mountains are great for hiking during this time, but the deserts are unbearable and typically go over 110°F (40°C) for daily highs. In winters the coasts are again comfortable, but at this time due to the cooler air temperature and the occasional rain. The Atlas Mountains generally get snow and provide skiing, but the still improving infrastructure means only a limited number of ranges are accessible. The deserts can also get cool as nightly temperatures drop to the 40s°F (4-10°C). The spring and fall (autumn) tend to provide the best weather for visiting as the deserts are hot, but approachable as the coasts are comfortable and relatively dry. During the spring the mountains may still contain snow and the waters off the coast may be a little cool, while in the fall the snow is gone and the waters warm, although temperatures are more unpredictable.

In general, the summers are the busiest time for tourists as the Europeans come down on holiday and even the locals take this time to travel, meaning busier sights and higher prices. Fortunately, this tourism is primarily focused on the coasts, although sights everywhere will be more crowded compared to travel to Morocco during any other time of year.

A final point to consider before planning your travel is local holidays. Holidays can make travel either more attractive, such as for large festivals, or less attractive due to tourist site closings and more expensive transportation options, so make sure you look into this

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before booking your trip. In general, most festivals in Morocco take place in the summer months. One holiday to be aware of is Ramadan (ninth month of the Islamic calendar, which rotates every year compared to the Gregorian calendar) as this month tends to close shops, restaurants, and coffee shops.

## **Weather**

Although weather can be generalized based upon years past, for more up to date weather patterns and predicted future weather patterns, visit weather websites like [weather.com](http://weather.com); many local news sources also have information for international weather forecasts.

## **Tours & Cruises**

If you're looking for a pre-arranged trip, that involves little effort on your part, then you should consider going on an organized tour or cruise. Organized tours and cruises vary from all expenses included to only daily tours and perhaps hotels included in the price, but all the options below will help you arrange all the details so you don't have to worry about finding the best deal or right hotel.

[Costa Cruises](#): Costa makes an effort to cater to all styles of cruisers, so you should be able to find a cruise that fits your interests.

[Experience It Tours](#): A tour company focusing on North Africa, Experience It Tours rarely gets a poor review from travelers.

[Gecko's Adventures](#): Active in "responsible" tourism, Gecko's Adventures provides local transportation, housing, and food in small group settings.

[Holland America Cruises](#): Cruises for all ages and families.

[Intrepid Travel](#): Boasts more "off the beaten track" destinations; do your research though since some tours are very adventurous and involves camping and local hotels.

[Journey Beyond Travel](#): A US-based tour company with Moroccan roots only offering tours to Morocco.

[Kensington Tours](#): Only offers personal tours for you and your family/friends, which allows greater flexibility, but also means slightly higher prices.

[Road Scholar](#): For older adults, Road Scholar offers tours with an educational emphasis; formerly known as Elder Hostel.

## **Guidebooks**

If you are just traveling on business and have little free time or are already familiar with [Morocco](#), you may not need anything more than this guide! However, if you need more detailed and up to date information, there are a number of great country-wide, region-wide, and city-wide guidebooks available for travel in Morocco.

[Eyewitness Guides](#): Incredible pictures and detailed maps of popular tourist sites including museums. Those living abroad can't put these books down.

[Frommer's](#): Incredible number of lists, which divide travel into various categories based upon your interests. Travelers looking to spend most of their time in a single location or on organized tours enjoy these books.

[Lonely Planet](#): Great maps and updated often with comprehensive housing information, restaurants, & transportation options. Backpackers and adventurers love these guidebooks.

[National Geographic Traveler](#): Almost more of an information book about Germany, than a guidebook; offers great pictures, maps, history, and culture. Popular with armchair travelers and history buffs on organized tours.

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# Culture

## Personality, Culture, & Identity

[Morocco](#) is pivotal. Based solely on location, Morocco is and always has been on the crossroads of travelers, traders, invaders, and explorers. Despite its modest state, Morocco sits on the edge of [Europe](#), [North Africa](#), sub-Saharan Africa, the Atlantic Ocean, and the Mediterranean Sea. It has been a prized land as the Carthaginians, Romans, Berbers, Arabs, [French](#), Spanish, and [Turks](#) among others have all sought the land.

Due to location and historic foreign invasions in what is today [Morocco](#), the people are a diverse mix of people coming from as far as the [Middle East](#), sub-Saharan Africa, and [Europe](#). Over time this diversity has made Morocco a center of trade, economics, and religion, but more influentially, it has become a state that is open to new ideas, culture, and learning. While not all want to be included in this modern nation state, Morocco remains as it has for centuries: a center for the world to come, learn, and exchange everything from food and spices to ideas and philosophies.

The [Moroccans](#) today identify in many ways and even many of those who identify by the same name differ on what defines that identity. Many see themselves as being Berber, Arab, [French](#), or as being another ethnicity. In much the same way, some identify by their language or, more commonly, see language as an important aspect of their larger ethnic identity. Others attach themselves first by politics and others by larger region; many Arabs see themselves as a part of the Muslim world, while Berbers view themselves as [African](#) and the French as [European](#). Generational differences also change the definition of each as older people tend to see religion as an integral aspect of who they are, while many younger people do not. At the end of the day however, the Moroccans unite as "Moroccan" and will proudly tell visitors this no matter their ethnicity, religion, or language.

## History

The people of modern day [Morocco](#) originate from the Berbers and dozens of other ethnic peoples. Due to Morocco's location between the Mediterranean Sea, Atlantic Ocean and within reach of both [Europe](#) and [Africa](#), the region has always been a cross roads and trade center. Due to these foreign influences, the people are a mix of many people.

The original inhabitants in the region were the Berbers and were somewhat isolated from outside rule. However, all this ended in when the Romans arrived in the region after defeating Carthage, which was located in modern day [Tunisia](#) and was the protector of much of [North Africa](#). A couple hundred years after the fall of Carthage in 146 BC, came the invasion of the Romans into the region of [Morocco](#). For the next 400-500 years the Romans ruled the lowlands as they settled in the region and the coasts became Christianized and the recipient land of immigrating Jews. Meanwhile, the Berbers remained nearly isolated in the mountains.

In the 600s the Arabs overran much of [North Africa](#), reaching [Morocco](#) and converting many of the people to Islam. Despite the Berbers' conversion to Islam, the Berbers and Arabs maintained two separate ethnicities as they rarely intermarried. In the 700s the Berbers rebelled and from that point until the 900s the region was essentially self-ruled as it became known as a liberal Muslim region, which invited traders and academics to the region.

These political, religious, and economic freedoms ended in the 900s when the ruling political entities collapsed. This led to a decline in free thought as the region was primarily ruled by local and regional Berber groups from this point until the 1500s. Despite numerous attempts to unify the people under a singular rule, Berber culture is, in many ways, based on independence and these moves of unity always failed.

By the 1600s the [Moroccan](#) shores were being settled by the Spanish and [English](#) as few of the local Berbers paid attention so long as they were to remain free to live as they wished. During this century a new

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group came to rule over the region and expelled many of the foreigners with the help of slaves and mercenaries. However, to maintain support of the Berbers, they were primarily left to rule themselves although this dynasty became the nominal rulers.

The 1800s thrust modern day [Morocco](#) back on the [European](#) stage as many European countries began colonizing, or trying to colonize the [African](#) continent. The [French](#) landed in neighboring [Algeria](#) as the Spanish landed in Morocco. In the early 1900s the French were also trying to get into Morocco and soon after what is today known as Morocco was divided between the French and Spanish.

By World War II (WWII) [Morocco](#) was almost completely controlled by the [French](#). Prior to the war, the French improved Morocco's infrastructure and communication among other technological advancements. Although this was well accepted by some people, the still isolated Berber people in the mountainous interior rejected these advances into their lands. As WWII came, the region became a staging and transportation post for the Allied countries, both transporting goods and people into the region through their coastal cities and by being used as a springboard for battles in [North Africa](#).

After WWII, with an Allied victory, the people demanded independence from the [French](#). The Moroccan Sultan, who remained a figurehead under French rule, supported his people and called upon the French to grant his country freedom. After a brief stint in exile, the French and Spanish gave up their claims on [Morocco](#) and the country gained freedom under their Sultan.

Since independence in 1955, [Morocco](#)'s government has been stable, but inconsistent. Morocco proved itself to be a member of the Arab nations by sending forces to support [Egypt](#) in the Israeli-Arab Conflict in 1973. Additionally, some rulers have taken more power than legally authorized and border battles have occurred with the [Algerians](#) as there are regular independence demands from the people in the south. The most noticeable of these is Western Sahara's demands for independence.

While the [French](#) granted [Morocco](#) independence in the 1950s, the Spanish held their southern lands and didn't give up rights on this territory until a couple decades later. This possession was the territory of Western Sahara and when Spain gave up rights, the region proclaimed independence from Spain, Morocco, and Mauritania, which claimed its southern lands.

As Spain hesitated on which political entity to recognize as the official ruler of the region, [Morocco](#) and Mauritania took control over the areas each claimed. Spain eventually recognized Morocco's and Mauritania's claims, but the local people started a revolt. Mauritania quickly gave up their claim on the land they controlled as Morocco took their former region under Moroccan rule. In 1991 a cease fire was reached between Morocco and the Western Sahara independence movement, but both political entities maintain a claim on the land as Western Sahara is essentially self-ruled.

Since about 2000, with a new leader in power, the country has opened up and introduced a large number of social and political reforms. The country has shifted focus on international relations and on trade, particularly with [Europe](#) and [North America](#). Part of these opening relations have come as a result of [Morocco](#)'s support on the [United States](#)'s "War on Terrorism."

## **Dress & Behavior**

As a primarily Muslim country, there are a number of religious laws which should be obeyed by everyone in [Morocco](#), including tourists.

It is considered inappropriate for women to leave their hair uncovered, however this has almost entirely changed in [Morocco](#), especially among foreigners. Women covering their heads will show great respect to their culture, however most Moroccans understand if you don't cover your hair.

Both women and men are expected to cover their legs and shoulders; showing your knees can be offensive. 3/4 length pants, like Capris and

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short sleeve shirts are only looked down upon by strict Muslims, however wearing full length pants and long sleeves at all times is the best course of action. Staying at a seaside resort often times allows these rules to be ignored, but follow the example of locals in these places.

Islamic law forbids pork products and alcohol. Being a fairly liberal Muslim country, drinking alcohol is not completely unheard of by the locals, but public drinking or intoxication is strictly forbidden. Pork products are difficult to find in [Morocco](#) since there is little market for pork. Avoiding these foods is easy due to its inaccessibility. To learn more about dining etiquette in Morocco, continue reading below.

# Food

## Dining Etiquette

[Moroccan](#) dining is fairly straight forward, but may be fairly different from your home country. When dining with locals, dress conservatively and bring pastries as these are a great gift for a host. If at a local's home, remove your shoes and greet every person individually, beginning with the oldest or most senior male. Although [Morocco](#) is generally liberal on Muslim standards, among some people, women and men should not make physical contact so observe the local women to determine how to behave and wait for them to initiate any contact, like a handshake.

Depending on the individual family or company you are dining with, men and women may eat separately, but this is rare. Just to be safe, don't sit until your host has shown you your seat. Before sitting though, you are expected to wash your hands; the locals will do this as well so just follow their lead. Once back in the dining area, you may find that the tables are low and there may not be any chairs, as sitting on the floor is common in [Morocco](#).

Once the food is served, it will most likely be served family style, except in some restaurants, where individual plates are ordered. Some families will begin the meal with a prayer, then let the host lead with the serving; he or she may ask you to help yourself first, but wait until directed to do so. Once you have your food though, do not eat until the host indicates the meal has begun, sometimes this is done by clapping his hands.

Once you begin eating, only use your right hand, this rule must be followed for touching food, eating utensils, and even for drinking. One food that you'll most definitely be offered is bread, which may be used to pick up your food and eat. However, you'll also get a fork and spoon so there's no obligation to dine with your hands. You'll also be given a napkin, but use this to dab your mouth as opposed to wiping your

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hands on it. Water is the most common beverage served with a meal, but many times tea will also be offered.

You will most likely be presented with vast quantities of food and do accept a second helping as your host will view this as a compliment. Once you are finished, leave a small amount of food on your plate to show your host has provided more than enough. But as you finish, leave some room for dessert as sweet pastries are many times served. With or without pastries, there is little doubt that you'll be offered mint tea to finish the meal.

## History & Influences

[Moroccan](#) food has been altered numerous times over history as the region has been exposed to a number of outside influences, but even today, the base of their diet has changed very little. Much like most [North African](#) food, Moroccan cuisine is based on the traditional Berber diet and what ingredients were locally available. Morocco has great growing seasons, being between the [Mediterranean](#) and Atlantic. Fruits and vegetables are abundant and, along with *couscous*, a flour-based product, have become the foundation of their cuisine.

In the 600s, the Arabs took over the region and brought with them a huge number of spices along with Islam, which demands a couple dietary restrictions, including the abstinence of eating pork. The people quickly added these new spices to their local foods and have since heavily seasoned many of their dishes.

In the 1500s and beyond, both the Spanish and [English](#) landed on the shores of [Morocco](#), with the Spanish introducing many more spices and cooking techniques. Soups and desserts became more popular and again, new spices were introduced and quickly incorporated into the local diet.

This Spanish influence returned a number of times throughout history after this point, but due to [Morocco](#)'s location, Spain was just one of many influences. The [Turks](#) controlled much of [North Africa](#) and this

influence spilled over to Morocco as they, like neighboring [Algeria](#), adopted sweet Turkish-influenced desserts. The French also arrived and encouraged new cooking techniques.

Today, the base of the [Moroccan](#) diet remains with the fresh fruits and vegetables that are grown in the country. This begins with flour production, the base of *couscous*, which remains the country's primary staple and is commonly served with stews and other dishes. Plus, the locally produced almonds, hard-boiled eggs, raisins, and *harissa*, a spicy sauce, are commonly found in traditional Moroccan dishes.

## Staple Foods

**Couscous:** semolina, which is a made of flour; typically served with a meat or vegetable stew spooned over it

## Regional Varieties & Specialties

**Tajine:** lamb or poultry stew, which is very common and varies from house to house and restaurant to restaurant

## Drinks

Although nearly every non-alcoholic beverage is available in [Morocco](#), one of the more authentic drinks is green tea with mint.

As a primarily Muslim country, [Morocco](#) has very little alcohol available, but it can be purchased, as there is some demand from more liberal Muslims.

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# Practical Information

## Visas

Many foreign nationals need a visa to enter [Morocco](#), however the requirements for citizens of different nationalities varies. To learn more about who need visas, what type of visa is needed, what requirements are needed to obtain a visa, and visa costs, please visit the [Official Website of Morocco's Department of Foreign Affairs & Cooperation](#) (French and Arabic only) or contact your nearest Moroccan Embassy.

## Health & Insurance

Every part of the world has different health concerns and diseases, including [Morocco](#). Before traveling, consult with a physician to learn more about your destination and what steps you can take to prevent illness. At the time of writing, Morocco didn't have any health immunizations that are required prior to arrival, although a number of immunizations are strongly recommended.

Many health insurance providers don't cover health care that is provided outside your home country. Before going abroad check with your health insurance to see if they cover international care. If not, consider purchasing an international medical insurance option, preferably from a company that specializes in international medical insurance.

## Transportation

Unless you're on an organized tour or working with a travel agent, you will have to arrange some transportation. The below links can greatly help you start your planning, first by finding a flight to [Morocco](#), then with domestic airlines and car rental agencies. If you don't know

where to begin, try the "Flight & Rental Car Search Sites" to learn competitor's prices during your trip.

**Largest International Airlines:** [Air France](#), [American Airlines](#); [British Airways](#); [Cathay Pacific](#); [China Southern Airlines](#); [Delta](#); [Emirates](#); [KLM](#); [LAN](#); [Lufthansa](#); [Qantas](#); [Singapore Airlines](#); [United Airlines](#).

**Largest Rental Car Agencies in Morocco:** [Alamo](#); [Avis](#); [Budget](#); [Europcar](#); [National](#); [Sixt](#); & [Thrifty](#).

**Flight & Rental Car Search Sites:** [Expedia.com](#); [Farecast.com](#); [Kayak.com](#); [Orbitz.com](#); & [Travelocity.com](#).

## Housing

Housing options are numerous in most tourist destinations, but every individual seeks out something different when it comes to housing. The below links should help you get started, with low- to high-end hotels, hostels, and camping options.

**Popular International Hotel Conglomerates:** [Accor Group](#) (various price ranges); [Choice Hotels](#) (low- to mid-price range); [Hilton](#) (various price ranges); [Hyatt](#) (high-end to resorts); [InterContinental Group](#) (mid- to high-price range); [Marriott Family](#) (various price ranges); [Starwood Hotels](#) (high-end); [Wyndham Hotels](#) (low- to mid-price range).

**Hotel Search Sites:** [Expedia.com](#); [Kayak.com](#); [Orbitz.com](#); & [Travelocity.com](#).

**Hostels:** Although there are many hostel websites, some of the most popular and reputable include [hostels.com](#), [hostelworld.com](#), & [hostelbookers.com](#).

**Camping:** Camping is still a foreign concept in Morocco, plus camping is not safe in most locations. The desert is unforgiving

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and there are some extremists outside the major cities so setting up a tent is not a good idea.

## Opening Hours, Expenses, & Tipping

Opening hours in [Morocco](#) at local shops, restaurants, and stores vary. Some open earlier or later than 9:00 am, while they are just as varied for closing times. Most do tend to take a long lunch break, closing shops down at about 11:30 am and opening back up at about 1:00-2:00 pm; dinner begins after work. Restaurants don't begin to fill up in the evening until 8:00 pm or later, although in tourist locations, restaurants and shops tend to be open all day to cater to the foreigners. Morocco typically follows a Saturday-Sunday weekend.

The one time of the year that shops and restaurants are closed more often than not is during Ramadan (ninth month of the Islamic calendar, which rotates every year compared to the Gregorian calendar), when fasting is required from sunrise to sunset. Due to this Islamic requirement, most shops close down and it can be difficult to find an open restaurant anywhere outside major hotels catering to tourists.

Most of [Morocco](#)'s tourist attractions aren't overly expensive and most of the sites are a good value for the cost. Hotels prices can range from 125 dirham (\$15) for a private room or hostel bed to well over 1,500 dirham (\$200) in business hotels or hotels catered to tourists. Food prices also vary greatly; street food can cost as little as 15-25 dirham (\$2-3), but eating in a nice hotel restaurant can cost up to 400 dirham (\$50). Transportation in Tunisia is also fairly reasonable, particularly if you travel by bus; most flights are roughly equivalent to costs associated with a flight in [Europe](#) or [North America](#) at a similar distance.

Tipping is common in [Morocco](#) as it is more and more a part of Moroccan culture and a means to supplement a meager income. Many Moroccans are willing to help foreigners in their country, but many times this assistance comes with an expected tip of 5-10 dirham (about \$1). In restaurants, 10-15% is a standard tip depending on service,

while hotel porters should get about 5-10 dirham (\$1) per bag. Taxi drivers don't expect tips, but rounding up is appreciated. If you hire a tour guide, tips are also expected, however the amount is at your discretion.

## Crime & Safety

[Morocco](#) is a relatively safe country, however is more susceptible to violent outbreaks than much of Europe. Most religious and political extremists have little voice in Morocco and there are few violent attacks by these groups, but they do exist and going to the wrong town can be dangerous, especially to desert towns. Always check with your country's foreign (State) department for any travel warnings to Tunisia.

Pick pocketing is not extremely common except on crowded public transportation and is growing in tourist centers, so use street smarts wherever you are in [Morocco](#). Often times fellow travelers, particularly in youth hostels pose a bigger threat than the locals.

Another annoyance to most tourists in [Morocco](#) is from tourist touts and scams, so be careful whom you trust when it involves parting with your money. If anyone who gave you assistance asks for a tip, tip at your discretion; if they provided a service to you, it is expected you tip them, although this amount does not have to be large.

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