

REST ASSURED

# MARRAKECH

Hip townhouse conversion, desert oasis or bargain boutique bolthole – it's the new Maroc 'n' roll!

## £75 P'tit Habibi 'The four-room bolthole is a mix of Scandi cool and Moorish'

Its name means 'little darling', and this pocket-sized *riad* – an old-style house built around a courtyard – couldn't be cuter. Even better, it has to be the best bargain in Marrakech. Hidden away in the northern quarter of the Medina, it's almost impossible to find – call ahead though, and softly-spoken manager Abdelouafi will meet you at the gate to guide you through the warren of lanes. It's worth the effort to get here – owned by a Norwegian architect, the four-room bolthole is an appealingly quirky mix of Scandi-cool and traditional Moorish: chrome Arco lights curve over hand-painted antique furniture; hot-pink leather poufs nudge intricate fretwork screens; traditional mint tea is served in a glass-sided library scattered with '60s-style shag rugs.

Given the modest room rates, it's a pleasant surprise to find a little plunge pool up on the roof, ringed by sculpted sunloungers that wouldn't look out of place on Miami Beach – a real treat in the scorching summer months. Another unexpected bonus are the alfresco movie nights. In the evenings, guests – mostly style-conscious couples and groups of friends – can watch films (chosen from an impressive DVD library) projected onto the whitewashed walls of the courtyard, while slouching about on giant floor cushions. *P'tit Habibi* (00 212 2437 8887, [www.ptithabibi.com](http://www.ptithabibi.com)) has doubles from £75, B&B.



## £127 Caravan Serai 'Like an ancient fortress at the edge of the desert'

It's not the most promising of arrivals: bumping along a rough track, through a scruffy, sun-baked Berber village. But suddenly, the ochre walls of Caravan Serai loom large, like an ancient fortress at the edge of the desert. Ten kilometres outside Marrakech, this rustic-chic hideaway feels utterly remote, yet it's just a 15-minute drive into town (there are three free shuttles a day). If you want the full-on, heady experience of stepping straight out into the souks, this is not for you – but as a calm retreat, Caravan Serai fits the bill perfectly.

Surrounded by dusty olive groves, the hotel feels like a mini oasis, its lush gardens draped in candyfloss-pink bougainvillea and



patrolled by tortoises. Framed by a huge archway, the inner courtyard hides a gorgeous pool, where guests wallow to a soundtrack of twittering birds. Rooms are simple but restful, with deep-purple drapes, fireplaces made from palm trunks and bathrooms lit by star-shaped skylights. Most secluded are two suites with private pools

and courtyards, but there are plenty of hidden nooks to call your own: the rambling grounds mean it's never crowded. And the lack of TVs ensures that you're practically forced to relax – the on-site hammam doesn't hurt either. *Caravan Serai* (00 212 2430 0302, [www.hotel-caravanserai.com](http://www.hotel-caravanserai.com)) has doubles from £127, B&B.

## £240 Maison MK 'Clean lines, a zen-like calm and a curvy plunge pool'

Cool, but not scarily so, this newly converted *riad* has designer good looks, but still manages to feel homely. The owner is a fashion photographer – and it shows. Rather than plump for trad Moorish trimmings, he's gone for clean, sinuous lines and pared-down chic. There are just enough ethnic touches to remind you of your exotic locale – ornate lanterns, kilim-covered cushions – but the overall effect is uncluttered and sophisticated.

Off a slender alley in the Medina, the hotel has a plum position near Djemma el Fna – the mesmerising main square, which fills at sunset with snake charmers and fortune tellers. From its roof terrace you



can see smoke rising from the kebab stalls, and hear the thud of drums. But inside the *riad* there's a zen-like calm. Six rooms surround a courtyard – which has a curvy plunge pool and a small spa – and there are pre-programmed mobile phones in case you get lost. And bashful types be warned: only a gauzy bolt of fabric separates your bathroom from your bedroom.

At dusk, head to the roof for drinks overlooking the Koutoubia mosque's minaret, before descending for one of manager Jallel's spectacular seven-course feasts: monkfish tagine and Mojito sorbet are among the highlights on a £30 set menu. *Maison MK* (00 212 2437 6173, [www.maisonmk.com](http://www.maisonmk.com)) has doubles from £240, B&B.

## And the best of the rest

**£250 MURANO RESORT** is the exotic offshoot of its hip Parisian sister. Expect designer details and a red-tiled pool. *Doubles from £250, room only* (00 212 2437 7000, [www.muranoresort.com](http://www.muranoresort.com)).

**£245 RIAD FARNATCHI** is an exquisitely restored *riad* (below) in the Medina, with trickling fountains and high ceilings. *Doubles from £245, B&B* (00 212 2438 4910, [www.riadfarnatchi.com](http://www.riadfarnatchi.com)).



**£119 DAR SEVEN** is the cream-and-chocolate-hued holiday home of an Italian princess. Rent one (or all four) of the airy rooms when she's not there. *Doubles from £119, B&B* (00 39 347 733 7098, [www.darseven.com](http://www.darseven.com)).

**£99 RIAD EL MANSOUR** is a cosy conversion, with marble hammam, run by friendly English expats. Handy for the Djemma el Fna. *Doubles from £99* (00 212 2438 1577, [www.riadelmansour.com](http://www.riadelmansour.com)).

**£40 RIAD NEJMA LOUNGE** is a boutique bargain with six compact-but-cute rooms and quirky decor. *Doubles from £40, B&B* (00 212 2438 2341, [www.riad-nejmalounge.com](http://www.riad-nejmalounge.com)).

**EasyJet ([www.easyjet.com](http://www.easyjet.com)) and Atlas Blue ([www.atlas-blue.com](http://www.atlas-blue.com)) both fly from Gatwick to Marrakech. Thomsonfly ([www.thomsonfly.com](http://www.thomsonfly.com)) flies to Marrakech from Manchester and Gatwick.**

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