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Morocco's HIDDEN GEM

There are countless reasons to visit the beautiful boho seaside town of Essaouira. Here are our top seven

Enter the walled city

If you love the idea of holidaying somewhere more exotic than Europe, but worry that Marrakech may feel too intense, head to Essaouira. It offers the perfect blend of colourful street markets and chic accommodation, while its beachside location lends itself to a wealth of fun activities. Step into Essaouira's Medina and you'll be immediately drawn into the hustle and bustle of Moroccan life. Maze-like cobbled streets, adorned with hanging rugs, rustic pottery, and colourful leather goods are a feast for the eyes and senses. Wooden carts piled high with fresh mint, strawberries and other local produce are hauled around the city, and the scent of incense fills the air.



The walls of the historic Medina

Taste excitement

After a morning's shopping, the bustling fishing port is a welcome contrast. Prettily painted boats arrive and the crew auction off their catch. In the market, fish are laid out on wooden tables, where you can watch the locals haggling animatedly, then enjoy a fresh seafood lunch at one of the makeshift harbourside grills.

Culinary delights

The eclectic mix of influences means you don't have to be an adventurous eater to sample local cuisine. Foodies will love the traditional tagine at Restaurant Awrirrte, while stylish vegetarian cafe Mandala Society offers healthy, hearty lunches. Discover some of the best Italian food in the Medina at Silvestro, and if you can bag a table at the tiny but bustling Fishburger, you'll be talking about their crispy batter for days.

Cafe culture

Head to Pumpkin (pumpkinmorocco.com) for delicious lattes and tasty home-baked pastries. The city is best explored while sipping a drink from one of the many cafes – the centre of Essaouira is car-free, making it ideal for aimless wandering as you soak up the atmosphere.



Get active

Situated on the Atlantic coast, Essaouira's wide sandy bay is a few minutes' walk from the city walls. The beach isn't ideal for sunbathing due to the almost constant ocean breeze (it's not known as the Windy City of Africa for nothing), but its beautifully clean stretches of sand are ideal for little ones to run wild. Older kids and adults can get their adrenaline pumping with a huge choice of action-packed activities – learn to surf, kite or windsurf (ion-club.net/essaouira), navigate sand dunes on a quad bike (palmaquad.com), or saddle up for a sunset horse ride (equievasion.com).

Sleep peacefully

Nestled in the hills, a 15-minute taxi ride from the city, lies the subtropical paradise of Le Jardin des Douars. A welcome retreat after a busy day, this exquisitely designed

Shop till you drop

It's impossible to avoid the plush rugs, colourful blankets, handwoven baskets, leather bags, and fragrant spices on offer. Market shopping in Essaouira is a breeze compared to other Moroccan cities: you rarely get hassled and if you do, a polite 'no thank you' does the trick. Bartering is part of Moroccan culture. No prices are



listed so you'll usually be offered a starting price that's twice as much as they expect. Remember to keep haggling light, and that most vendors don't accept cards. If you prefer to avoid bargaining, head to Koulchi Concept Store for four floors of plush interiors with set prices.

Book now

★ **Ryanair operates between London Stansted and Essaouira with flights on Mondays and Thursdays, from £21.99, subject to availability.**
★ **Rooms at Le Jardin des Douars cost from £140 per night on a B&B basis. Book at jardindesdouars.com**



Chilled-out luxury at Le Jardin des Douars

★ **Always check the latest travel advice before booking a trip**