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ESCAPES

Edited by
Sarah Tomczak



Away in
STYLE

FROM A CONVERTED BANK WITH A SPA
IN ITS VAULT TO A NILE CRUISE
THAT ESCHEWS THE CROWDS, THIS IS
TRAVEL, ELEGANTLY DONE

LE JARDIN DES DOUARS, ESSAOUIRA, MOROCCO

In this boutique boho oasis hidden among argan trees, at 4pm every day, complimentary mint tea and cake are served to your sunbed. I open with this small, but special 'nice touch' because it sums up what Le Jardin Des Douars is all about – a luxury experience without the five-star bill.



Two elegant pools come with beach-style bars, one adults-only, and another (not in earshot) with a shallow section for children



Meandering through the terracotta buildings, taking in the two-acre gardens of hot pink bougainvillea, heady roses, spiky cacti and rustling palms, is a treat for the senses. Expect to feel like you've landed in Eden as you make your way to one of the 19 rooms, six suites and six private villas (sleeping up to 14, with their own heated pool and housekeeper-come-chef) nestled in the grounds. It's fun to discover a make-your-own face mask kit in the en suite bathroom of our spacious twin, with its soporific tones of reds and oranges, while the styling throughout the hotel champions craftsmanship: plush rugs, eye-catching ceramics, cosy nooks and natural textures.



The hotel's interior blends colour and craftsmanship in a 'Berber chic' style

Then, it's time to claim a spot by the jade-tiled pool, where my mum and I spend 90% of our time. It's hard to tear yourself away, but do ditch your British modesty and try the traditional hammam – being scrubbed down with black soap, and having buckets of water thrown over you is a memorable experience.

Should you feel the need to move during your trip (we don't, really), then a 15-minute shuttle runs to the 'Windy City' of Essaouira. Smaller and more laid-back than Marrakech, it's no wonder that Jimi Hendrix loved it in its hippie 1970s heyday. The historic medina is a maze of arty treasures (you'll need another suitcase) and there are lots of rooftop lunch spots (head for buzzy Le Taros, overlooking the harbour, or Il Mare for seafood and sea views). Or give camel-riding, quad-biking and kitesurfing a go on the huge sandy beach.

Really, though, nothing compares to the magnificent all-you-can-eat barbecue served back at the hotel every Sunday, featuring everything from grilled merguez sausages and lemony monkfish skewers to colourful salads and sides such as falafel with tzatziki sauce, shawarma-spiced potatoes and goat's cheese with courgette briouates. This only happens weekly, but we also love the daily choice of both traditional and European fare. If you've been to North Africa before, you'll know how easy it is to get 'tagine-d out', so the juicy black tiger shrimp burger and creamy zucchini risotto are a welcome alternative.

Regular live entertainment, including jazz music and a magician, makes the terrace a lively place to lounge every evening, and it's here over cocktails that I discuss with other guests what makes Le Jardin Des Douars so special. We agree it's excellent value for money, there's an activity to please everybody (from the spa to the padel courts) and the service is friendly yet unobtrusive. They ask me not to give it too good a review, fearing that others might discover our secret. It's too late for that.



Rooms are styled in soporific tones of reds and oranges, and come with fun make-your-own face mask kits

JESS DENHAM
ROOMS FROM £160 A NIGHT;
JARDINDESOUARS.COM/EN

