



TRAVEL

Jardin des Douars, Essaouria, Morocco

Less than a twenty minute drive from Essaouria Airport in Morocco, and up an unmade, dusty road, almost in the middle of nowhere, is an oasis of calm and tranquillity in the form of the hotel Jardin des Douars. The hotel was opened just over three years ago, and is privately owned by three couples, one of whom run this hotel, which may be why the hotel has such a friendly, personal feel to it.

The gardens surrounding the property are what first make you feel like you are in a very special place, as they are beautifully kept and are abundant in their numbers and species of plants. On the way from the airport our driver told us about the protected forests of argan trees which lined the roads, whose fruit yields Essaouira's "gold": argan oil. Argan oil has subtle properties scientifically recognised for their effects on skin and beauty and many botanists have tried to plant argan trees around the world, all the way to Asia. However, all attempts have failed, so seemingly the tree prefer its native land of Essaouira to all others.

As you enter the property, there are three stunning villas, each with four bedrooms, that are available to rent, and believe me, are breathtaking, and the outdoor areas are perfect, with large swimming pools, comfortable, padded sun loungers, and their own beautiful gardens, just right for family holidays or trips with a group of friends. Each villa has its own staff member, who will come in every morning and make breakfast, and can then also cook dinner for you at an extra charge, or you can choose to eat in the hotel, or cater for yourselves in the well-equipped kitchen. We were told that there is a well stocked supermarket in Essaouira itself, which is about a fifteen minute drive from the hotel. Driving is very safe in this area, so you can either hire a car or take the shuttle or a taxi.

The hotel itself is built in the Moroccan style, with rustic, terracotta walls, floor tiles and bedrooms which all have en suite bathrooms and their own private outdoor space. Some of these spaces are more private than others, and some rooms have rooftop terraces. All the buildings are no more than two stories high, and are built on different levels, so they are not imposing at all, and blend well with the ambience of the entire hotel.

The bathrooms have showers, and some have large, tiled baths, that do take quite a long time to fill up, as they really are large, but well worth the wait if like me, you are a bath lover! The towels aren't the usual soft fluffy type, but traditional cloth which adds to the authenticity of the hotel.

The Jardin des Douars has two restaurants, one for families, with a large glass tiled wall looking out on to beautiful scenery, and a

comfortable communal area around the open fire, whilst the other adult only restaurant, which offers the same menu, is a quieter, more intimate atmosphere. There is also a fabulous outdoor terrace that is used for lunchtimes, and I am sure is popular in the summer, and would be a great place to enjoy a drink whilst chatting to fellow guests, before enjoying the Moroccan cuisine. Each evening there is a set menu on offer, as well as the à la carte menu, and this is the same for lunchtimes, although the menus are different.

Breakfast is taken in the family restaurant, and is continental in style, offering cereals, cold meats, cheese, jam, and then there are four extra options to choose from the menu, including Moroccan pancakes, French Toast, Eggs and Omelettes.

There are two immaculate swimming pools at the hotel, one for families and the other adults only, and both have a sunbathing terrace with thick sun loungers and the occasional waiter service should you require a drink. At around 4pm, Moroccan tea and cake are served to guests by the pool, which incidentally is heated

to a very acceptable level!

The hotel does have a spa which offers the traditional Hamman treatment, but as I had a sun tan and didn't want to lose it, I had a sports massage which was expertly done by one of the masseurs in a candlelit room that was beautifully scented with shafts of daylight shining through tiny holes in the wooden windows, creating a very relaxing and calming atmosphere.

There is a shuttle service or taxi service into Essaouira, should you wish to go shopping or dine in one of the restaurants, and the hotel can also organise picnic lunches to the beach or waterfall.

Flights to Essaouira are run by Easyjet from Luton Airport every Tuesday and Saturday, and take just over 3 hours.

We spent a very pleasant three nights at the hotel, which, if you are looking for peace and relaxation, is a perfect venue, whether you are going with the family or just on your own.

For further information please visit www.jardindesdouars.com

