

The Secret Gardens of Essaouira



Morocco is often associated with densely packed medinas in the city of Marrakesh, congested and usually overheated. And where Marrakesh has the perks of a city life flaunting Moroccan culture promising a lively getaway, the more underrated souks are left unexplored, especially in the port city of Essaouira.

She isn't a UNESCO World Heritage site for no reason. Essaouira, aptly translating to 'well designed' was renamed by the city's Sultan in 1764, due to her alluring Moroccan and European mix.

Perched on the Atlantic Coast, the 'Wind City of Africa' is a second home for surfers and avid kite surfers. You aren't too far from the famous cloven-hoofed goats that typically climb argan trees and definitely not far from freshly caught fish, wonderfully grilled to perfection.

Essaouira has a very different feel to it; you feel a little disconnected from the rest of Morocco, due to its European influence and history engraved and etched into the golden stone city walls. You can quietly enjoy the breeze on the beach or people-watch at the energetic and bubbly 'Port of Timbuktu', where gold and spices would traditionally meet the shore in order to greet foreign friends across the sea.

Explore the narrow streets and the medina packed full of art, spice and the city's cafe and practice the often underrated skill of haggling.

But, not too far from the port and the main attraction, lies a secret garden, a perfect place to stay when you just want to unwind, yet be quite close to nature.

Set in the Essaouira hills, Le Jardin des Douars is a romantic, rural hotel that happily shelters you from the rough winds the coast can greet you with. The hotel is a palace in itself, and somehow manages to entwine simplicity with grandeur, relaxation with excitement, and heritage with comfort.

It doesn't feel like you are at a hotel or even so close to the hustle and bustle of the Port. Yet you somehow manage to travel back to a simpler time without having to give up any of the luxuries of today, in their traditional Moroccan style rooms, with antique furnishings, traditional bejmat (terracotta-tiled floors) and tactile Berber rugs.

The botanical gardens, bursting with colour and life, are breath-taking themselves, but to admire them whilst relaxing in an infinity pool is something else. And I am sorry to say, but taking an evening stroll will never quite be the same again...listening to the quarrelling crickets when strolling across the courtyard, passing by flora and fauna along the candlelit terrace whilst sipping on some Rose? Yes please.

If you have brought your children with you, worry not. There is a separate pool area for them to splash around, as well as afternoon BBQs, where you can sit and admire the dusty pink palace under the warm African sun.

And whether you have brought your children or not, you must treat yourself to a rejuvenating and traditional hammam spa treatment. With Morocco being famous for its argan oil, the spa spoils your skin to its healing qualities in their spacious, cavern-like treatment rooms, that send you to another realm. With starry sky lights teasing you with sunlight, you feel like you are resting underneath a starry sky, when you are having a hot stone massage or a black soap exfoliation. You leave feeling like a new person.

Whether you are looking for a family treat or a relaxing getaway, the year-round destination will undoubtedly make you feel reconnected with yourself and nature. And where the hotel itself feels like an undiscovered secret, you will be wanting to tell everyone about your stay here, as it is truly one of a kind.

Find out more about Le Jardin des Douars here: www.jardindesdouars.com

