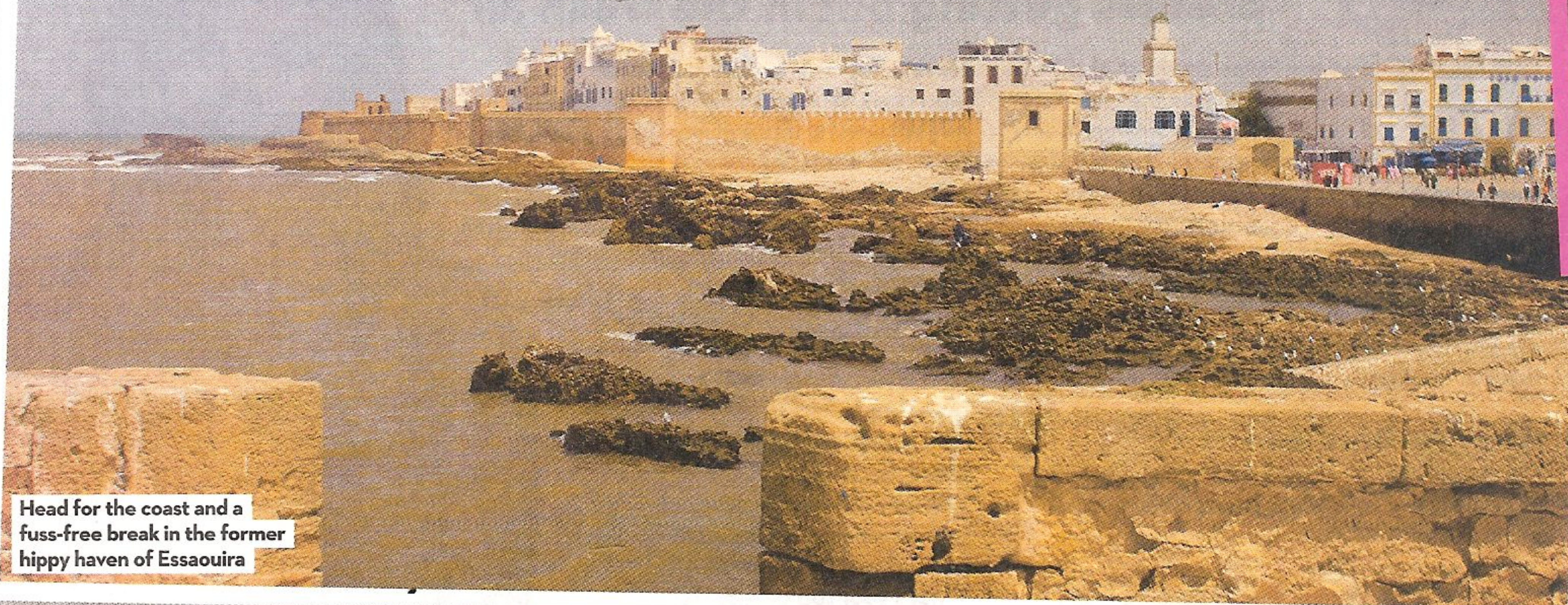


A world away

Discover the magic of Morocco for a beach or city break with added spice



Head for the coast and a fuss-free break in the former hippy haven of Essaouira

ESSAOUIRA

This coastal gem was until recently only accessible via a long coach journey from Marrakesh, but new direct flights mean you can hit the North African beach in a few hours – plus there's no time difference. Bonus!

Back in the 60s, Essaouira was a hippy hangout famously visited by rock legends Jimi Hendrix and Cat Stevens. More recently the makers of *Game Of Thrones* set the fictional city of Astapor here. Now it's a laid-back, purse-friendly choice for anyone looking for a sunshine break minus the clichés.

SURF 'N' SEAFOOD The windy Atlantic conditions make Essaouira a hotspot for windsurfing as well as kitesurfing and good old-fashioned surfing. Try a lesson with one of the surf schools along the beach, then cool off at Ibiza-style hangout Beach & Friends.

This is also where you'll find locals offering the chance to ride along the beach atop a camel or on horseback.

At the other end of the beach is the busy port – you'll smell it before you see it! – famous for its bright blue boats. Stop at one of the fish stalls for the freshest seafood grilled to order.

Or for something French and fancy, head to beachfront restaurant Le Chalet De La Plage

and ask for a table overlooking the sea. The set menu might include traditional French fish soup, tender lamb tagine and dessert of sliced orange sprinkled with cinnamon.

MINI MEDINA Smaller and less daunting than the souks of Marrakesh, you can still get lost down the narrow alleys of Essaouira's medina, where you'll stumble across cafés with inviting roof terraces.

As well as the textiles, spices, leather goods and wooden crafts on offer, there are several studios and galleries where you can check out the local artists' work.

WHERE TO STAY A few miles from the town, Le Jardin des Douars (jardindesdouars.com) is a heavenly hideaway surrounded by botanical gardens on the banks of the river Ksob. With only 28 rooms, there's a laid-back atmosphere and a family-friendly

vibe here, which makes you feel like you're in someone's home rather than a hotel.

If you're having dinner in, you simply chalk your room number on the blackboard then take your pick from the spacious main restaurant, where kids are welcome, or the cosy adults-only area. The hotel also has two pools – one for families and the adults-only infinity pool, where the only sounds are of the local birdlife (including a resident peacock) and the lapping water.

If all that peace and quiet gets a bit much, the hotel offers a regular shuttle bus into Essaouira – just pop to reception to arrange. Make sure you're back on the terrace for cocktail hour to enjoy a caipirinha or a drop of the popular Moroccan rosé.

Rooms cost from £90pp per night with breakfast.

MARRAKESH

Known as the "Ochre city" thanks to the clay used in many of the buildings, Marrakesh is a million miles away from your usual city break. Entering the walled old city, or Medina quarter, is like going back in time. As you pass old men in berber robes, donkeys, and horses and carts, you forget you're in the 21st century – until a scooter whizzes by. Add to this the stunning backdrop of the High Atlas Mountains, only an hour's drive away, and it really does feel like a different world.

No wonder it's a magnet for celebs, including David Beckham, who celebrated his 40th birthday here last year, and *Made In Chelsea's* Rosie Fortescue, who tweeted holiday pictures from the city recently.

SOUK IT UP

Dive straight into the action at the main square, Jamaa El Fna, around sunset, when the street vendors, snake charmers and performers descend for another night of madness.

Just beyond the square are the famous



Le Jardin des Douars is surrounded by botanical gardens



Rosie has just returned from Marrakesh