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knows a place to suit in Morocco's laid-back seaside city



The rambling riad-hotel Villa Maroc

Bright doubles — which can actually sleep up to three people — cost from £96, B&B. An additional £43 buys you a sea view, or £57 a two-bedroom family suite (villa-maroc.com).

On a wide main avenue in the old centre

Set in a series of interlinking houses, this is riad-style atmos on a larger, more glamorous scale. Spot chic French guests waffling around in newly bought kaftans.

Each is different: some have minimal, black-and-white palettes, others feel more Moroccan, in bold red and orange. But they're all whitewashed and fresh.

Daily changing evening menus of lobster *pastilla* or lamb *tagine* are served up in various, antiques-filled nooks. Morning glasses of OJ are taken on the rooftop.



The on-site shop, stocked with Villa Maroc's own olive oil and pottery to die for.

For a property this size, it's a shame there's not a pool. Though they'll shuttle you to the one at their sister hotel, Les Jardins de Villa Maroc (see Or try... right) for the day, for £22 return, with lunch included.

Sign up for one of its hands-on cookery courses — Moroccan classics or Moroccan pastry (£41 for four hours).



The family escape Le Jardin des Douars

Doubles cost from £115, B&B, although if you're travelling with kids you'll want to upgrade to the spacious suites (from £230, B&B), which sleep families of five or six (jardindesdouars.com).

In atmospherically remote, scrub-clad hills. You're 15-20 minutes' drive from the city, but the hotel puts on a shuttle (£9 one-way).

With buildings inspired by traditional kasbahs, it feels like an upmarket resort, with couples steaming in the hammam and families lazing by the pool.



Moroccan trad, with rich reds

Three options: a casual, kid-friendly dining area; an alfresco lunchtime grill; and the best — a candlelit, adults-only restaurant.

The family-friendliness doesn't spoil it for everyone else. A dedicated family pool means child-free couples can relax by the palm-lined main one in total tranquillity.

Meals are a bit hit and miss — we had a disappointing lunch of bland pasta and salmon — and there are few other dining options nearby.

The bedrooms located straight off the restaurant courtyard are subject to noise as families pass by en route to breakfast. If you want to sleep in, ask for one elsewhere.

Or try...

£49 Dar Adul

Because: Homely and arty — it's filled with the owner's vibrant paintings — this seven-room riad by the city's sea wall is not as private or spacious as some. But it's hard to argue with the price. Doubles from £49, B&B (daradul.com).

£90 Les Jardins de Villa Maroc

Because: The sister hotel of Villa Maroc, a 20-minute drive outside town, feels like your own private abode, with a lovely pool and epic barbecue lunches. Doubles from £90, B&B (lesjardinsde villa-maroc.com).

£100 Rebal Riads

Because: It's a 30-minute drive from Essaouira town, but on a sandy beach. You can hire villas sleeping up to six, with private pool, from a very fair £300. Doubles from £100, room-only (rebalriads.com).

£108 Madada Mogador

Because: The clutch of rooms attached to Essaouira's most famous restaurant, La Table by Madada, are simple yet romantic. Don't miss its ace adjoining homewares shop. Doubles from £108, room-only (madada.com).

Get me there

EasyJet flies from Gatwick and Manchester to Marrakech, from £33 one-way. Ryanair flies to Marrakech from four UK airports, from £25 one-way. Essaouira is a three-hour drive from Marrakech; buses cost £7 one-way with supratours.ma. See also visitmorocco.com.

