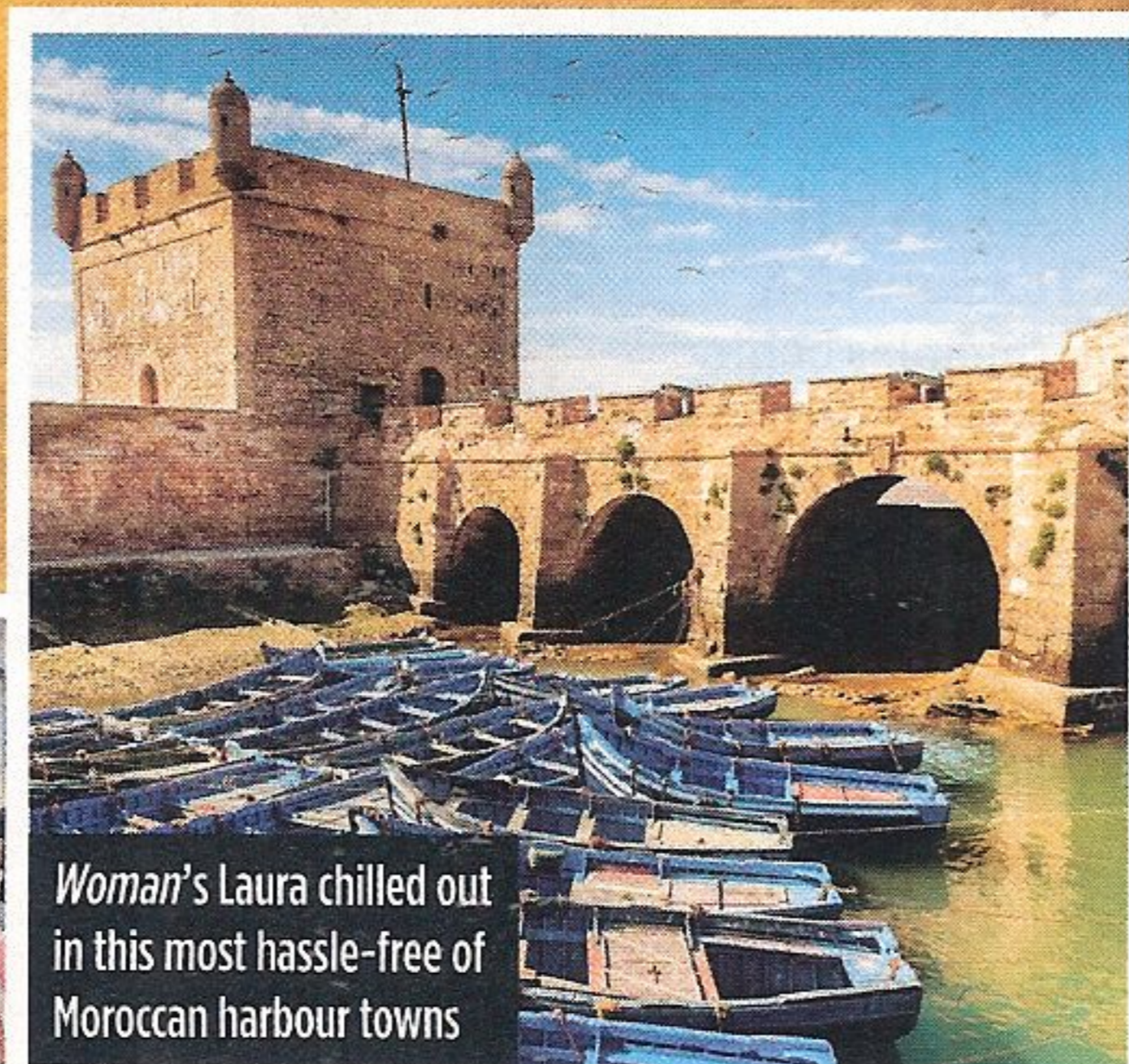


MOROCCO made easy!

The laid-back seaside city of Essaouira offers dreamy hotels, unique shopping and all the seafood you can eat...

WHY GO?

Essaouira is the kind of place where everyone knows everybody else. Taxi drivers wave to friends around town, restaurant owners at lunch recommend their mate's eatery for dinner, activities are run by born and bred locals and haggling at the market is always with a smile. If Morocco is on your bucket list then amiable Essaouira is a relaxed introduction, with none of Marrakesh's hubbub. Flights take a little over three hours from Luton - plus the Moroccan dirham is much better value than the Euro.



Woman's Laura chilled out in this most hassle-free of Moroccan harbour towns

LAURA'S TIP
For home-style cooking, Adwak in Essaouira's Medina is cheap - £14 for two - and the beef meatball tagine is a melt-in-the-mouth lunch.



Meticulously kept gardens add to Le Jardin Des Douars' enchanting, easy atmosphere

SLEEP IN STYLE

The tortoise on the pathway to our room at the hotel Le Jardin Des Douars certainly set the pace for the days ahead. This bolthole, tucked into the hills and a 15-minute drive from the airport, is all about relaxation among nature. The walled

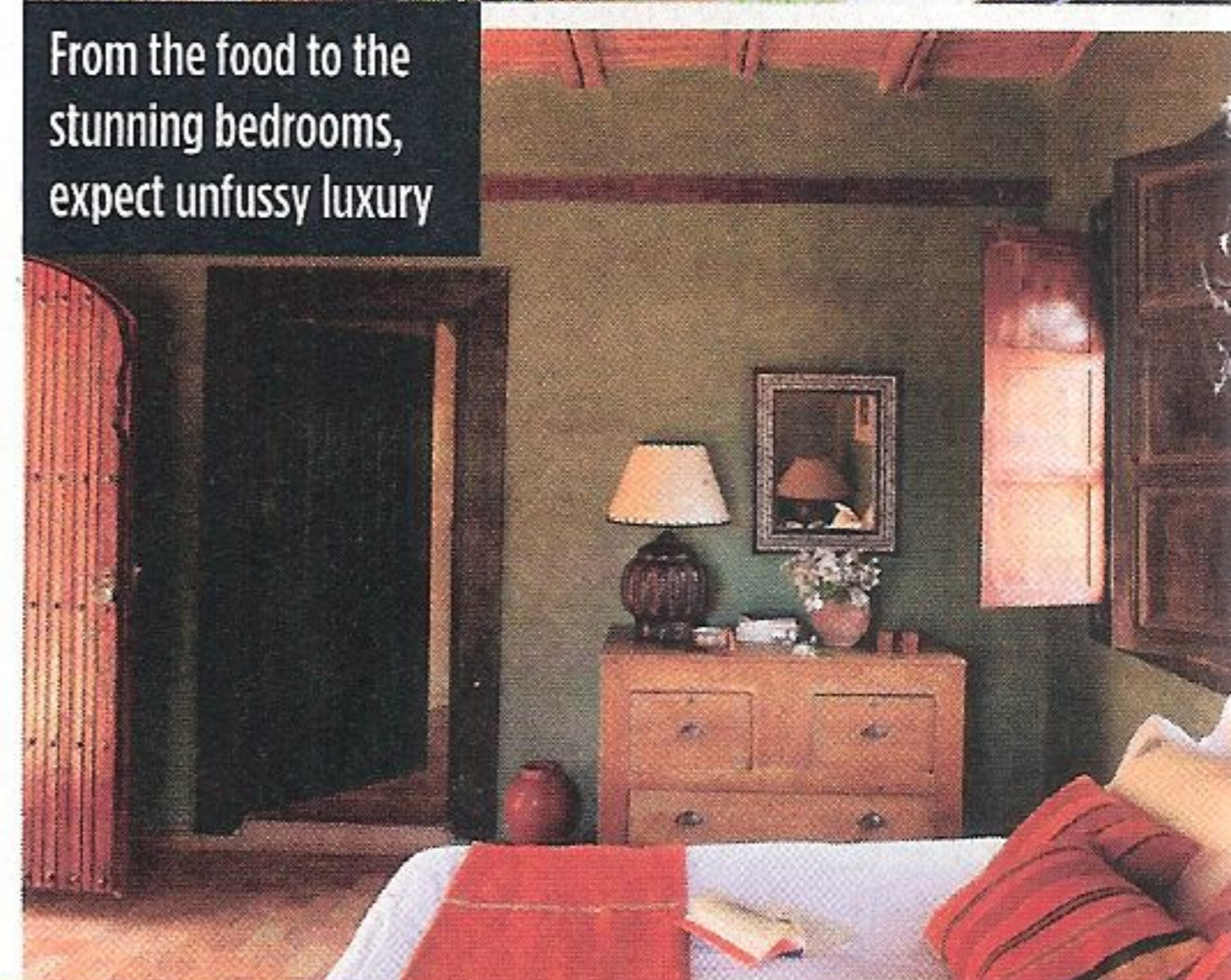
gardens teem with marigolds, crocuses, pines and neat shrubs while rooms are housed in individual red stone buildings, connected by cobbled paths. Our suite, no. 20, had an enormous double bed, a mosaic sunken bath and an open fire should the evenings become chilly. Bring a book because there are no TVs - the only thing disturbing the quiet is the midnight chorus of chirruping frogs.

FAMILIES WELCOME

With temperatures up to 28° in summer the adults-only infinity pool is ideal if you want to lounge, sizzle, dip and repeat. But Le Jardin is perfect if you're travelling with your little ones too. There's a dedicated family pool and a child-friendly menu with favourites like spag bol. Adults can dine later if they wish in the couples restaurant, with Moroccan dishes including daily tagines. Even breakfast is a treat - don't miss the crêpes with figs and honey.



From the food to the stunning bedrooms, expect unfussy luxury





Browse colourful carpets in the medina before some serious relaxation in the hammam

MAGIC IN THE MEDINA

Head into Essaouira in the late afternoon to avoid the peak heat and shop for goods including polished thuya wood boxes, spices, carpets and pottery in the walled town. The lanes towards the edge of the ramparts are home to the more chic shops, but in general the quality is high. Haggling is even more fun when it's for a pair of beautiful blue and grey suede brogues too!

Taros bar, by the ramparts, has a great terrace for sundowners, but The Table is the place for a dinner to remember. We feasted on squid just plucked from the sea, a spider crab gratin and a chocolate crème brûlée. Mains around £13; www.latablemadada.com/en.

HUMPS IN THE ROAD!

There is only one way to travel along the miles of deserted beach that lie south of Essaouira and that's at speed on a quad bike. A three-hour excursion with Palma Quad takes you down the coast to Cap Sim – a cove popular with surfers where the Atlantic crashes into the rocks – via a thrilling ride up and down the huge sand dunes. My favourite part of the journey was stopping as a family of camels were resting on our path. They didn't mind being stroked and even posed for photos, before we navigated around them! Two hours from £36 – book via the hotel – price includes comfortable safety gear and insurance; palmaquad.com/en

SPA AND STEAM

After all that adventure it was time for some pampering back at Le Jardin. Behind a heavily carved wooden door lies the hotel's traditional hammam – a cavernous steam room where you can have an invigorating scrub down with an exfoliating black soap that turns even leathery skin buttery soft. Treatments are inexpensive compared to many resorts too. I treated myself to a 30-minute express facial with a cleansing ritual, argan oil face mask and scalp massage that left me bleary-eyed with relaxation for £20.

GET ME THERE!

B&B rooms at Le Jardin Des Douars cost from £125 (or £395 per villa); [jardindesdouars.com/00 212 5 24 47 40 03](http://jardindesdouars.com/00_212_5_24_47_40_03). The hotel arranges transfers from the airport.

EasyJet.com offers flights from London Luton to Essaouira every Tuesday and Saturday with prices starting from £22.99 per person, one-way. ¹⁰