

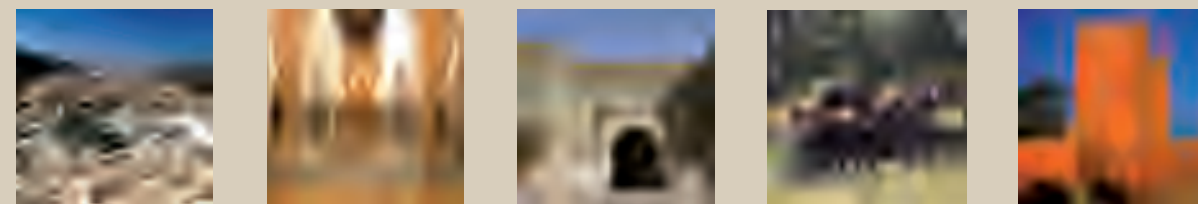
Meknes

IN MOROCCO





Meknes



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Editorial



*Moulay Idriss Zerhoun
minaret*

Meknes

Moulay Ismail's city, whose beauty is only equalled by the glory of its history, has been blessed by nature with a geographical setting of extraordinary diversity. An obligatory point of passage between the Atlantic plains and the high plateaus of the Oriental region, and between the North Middle Atlas and the foothills of the Rif Mountains, Meknes has made the utmost of the breath-taking natural contrasts that surround it.

A Moroccan imperial city with a medina listed as a World Heritage site, Meknes casts a spell over all who visit it. A stay within its walls is an experience never to be forgotten, leaving memories of historical grandeur, good living, and true authenticity.

Meknes is a treasure house of imposing ramparts and magnificent palaces, of mosques and medersas, of kasbahs and museums, of lush green gardens and shimmering pools a masterpiece of architectural splendour and a paradise for all those who love history.

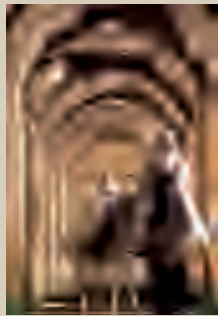
The Meknes region is the Kingdom's orchard, famed for the succulent varieties of fruit it produces, while its fertile soil nurtures the very finest vineyards and olive groves. But it is also a land of mountains and mineral springs, of forests of cedar trees and green oaks.

Setting off in discovery of Meknes and its many riches is an adventure without parallel, whisking you away to other worlds and other times.



Bab El Mansour

Meknes in history



The royal stables, built in the era of Moulay Ismail

Meknes, Imperial City

Meknes was founded in the 10th century by the Maknassa Zenetes, a tribe native to the Oriental region who came to settle in the area, drawn by its fertile soil and plentiful water, and by the charm of its gardens. Conquered by the Almoravids, it was first of all a military outpost (11th century), before expanding under the Almohad dynasty (12th century) and further developing in the following century under the rule of the Merinids. By the dawn of the 17th century, Meknes had become a prosperous city.

It was not, however, until the late 17th century and the coming of the second Alaouite sultan that

Meknes took its rightful place as one of the greatest of imperial cities. Under Moulay Ismail it was to rise to unprecedented glory.

The first palace built, Dar el Kbi-ra, encompasses two mosques and over twenty pavilions, while Dar el-Makhzen presents visitors with a superb perspective of arcades open to the sky above. The Moulay Ismail Mausoleum is altogether worthy of the sultan's grandeur, with its succession of richly worked rooms, its courtyard decorated with dazzling mosaics, and its sculpted doorways, intricate marble fountains, cedar wood ceilings and floors strewn with sumptuous carpets...



Inside the Moulay Ismail Mausoleum

In the heart of the imperial city

Meknes the Magnificent

Separated by Oued Boufekrane, two worlds eye one another disdainfully across the river, embodying the history of Meknes. Bab Mansour and Bab Berdaine – gateways that open on to untold wonders and make Meknes “the capital of grand gateways”.

Bab Mansour, “the magnificent” description given by Pierre Loti requires no commentary: *«Rosettes, stars, intertwinings that know no end, broken lines, unimaginable geometric combinations that throw the eyes off track like so many brain-teasers but which never fail to bear witness to a most original and meticulous sense of taste, have all been brought into play here, with myriads of tiny pieces of glazed terracotta, sometimes concave sometimes in relief, so as to give from afar the illusion of a brocaded and re-brocaded fabric, shimmering, dazzling, beyond price, that has been draped over these ancient stones to break the monotony of the towering ramparts»*.



Minaret of the Medersa
Bou Inania



Today, **Bab Mansour** inner room houses an art gallery.

Bab Berdaine, played a major role in the city's economy, being not only the city's centre for trade but also for diplomatic dealings with the north and therefore with foreign lands, and it is hardly surprising that Moulay Ismail provided this entrance to the medina with a gateway worthy of a royal residence.

The great mosques that enrich the city's cultural heritage have deservedly led to its other nickname, “city of a hundred minarets”.

Heri Souani dates from the days of Moulay Ismail, and has wrongly been referred to as the sultan's “granary” or “stables”. Legend has it that the building stabled up to 12,000 horses. Of colossal proportions, it is made up of 23 naves supported by pillars and arches. It was also used to store foodstuffs, with 10 rooms and wells equipped with water wheels. The wells served to supply the building and the pool, a large reservoir

that earned the place its name “Dar El Ma” (water house).

From the building's terrace, which has been laid out as a garden, there are unrestricted views over the Agdal Basin and the whole of the imperial city. The edifice has been used as a location in the making of such international films as “The Last Temptation of Christ” and “Jesus of Nazareth”.

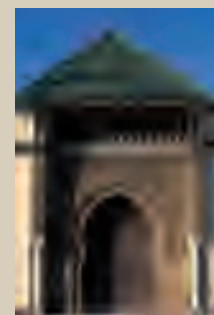
The Agdal Basin, a gigantic reservoir, irrigated the harem and the gardens. With a full 4 hectares of surface area and supplied by several kilometres of underground pipes, it was a major source of drinking water.

The Moulay Ismail Mausoleum, was built in 1703 and is one of the few religious monuments open to non-Muslims. A series of patios leads to an ablutions courtyard surrounded by a colonnade. The mausoleum room is divided into two parts, one sacred the other secular. On the right are the royal tombs, where Moulay Ismail

lies at rest surrounded by members of his family.

Not far away is the Ambassadors' Pavilion, where Moulay Ismail received foreign delegations. The building is perfectly preserved, and its zellij, sculpted stuccowork and roof of glazed green tiles bear ample witness to the skills of the craftsmen of the time.

The Qara prison or the Underground Silos. This subterranean building was most probably created and used for storing grain. A persisting legend, however, pictures it as a gigantic prison, the work of a Portuguese captive to whom Moulay Ismail had promised his freedom if he managed to build a gaol that would accommodate up to 40,000 people. It is reached by way of a stairway of irregular steps going down into the ground, leading to a vast vaulted area dimly lit by small openings cut into the ceiling. Only some of the rooms are open to the public. The original underground galleries were some 7 km in length.



The gateway to the
Moulay Ismail Mau-
soleum, decorated with
sculpted stones and
topped with green tiles



The Agdal Basin

In the streets of the Medina



Dar Jamaï Museum

Edifices that defy the passing of time... The city ramparts are almost 40 km long, and are punctuated by fortified gateways, towers and bastions (Bab Lekhmis, Bab Bardaïne, Bab Al-Mansour, Bab M'Rah, Bab Rih, Bab Jamaa Nouar, and Bordj Ben Kari, to name but a few). At first sight, the medina looks like a near impenetrable fortress. Meknes is always full of surprises! Here, the gateways are works of art and the souks an invitation to wander a picturesque world all of its own.

Al-Hedim square, a vast esplanade leading visitors to the souks, is the departure point for exploring the medina. Its south side is bordered

by a covered food market crammed with stalls selling olives, preserved lemons, spices, mint, and an endless variety of other local produce.

Dar Jamaï
This harmoniously designed Hispano-Moorish style palace stands around a superb Andalusian garden and is a perfect example of the kind of residences built for wealthy Moroccan families in the late 19th century. Located on the edge of Al-Hedim square and the medina, it now houses the regional museum of ethnography, where collections of gold-thread embroidery work, antique earthenware and jewellery provide visitors with an exhaustive survey of the Kingdom's past splendours.



Al-Hedim square



Medersa Bou Inania

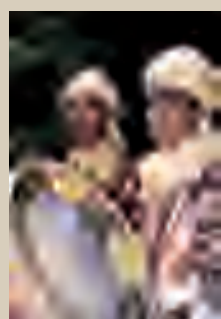
Rue Nejjarine provides access to most of the souks, which are often roofed with climbing vines or reeds.

The craftspeople, who were mostly grouped together by activity in the fondouks in bygone days, ply their trade in the little workshops lining the streets, which are as a-bustle with activity as they ever were.

Medersa Bou Inania was built by the Merinid sultan Abou El Hassan and completed by his son Abou Inan (1350-1358), who gave his

name to the edifice. This architectural masterpiece was built in full compliance with classical Koranic-school layout – a central courtyard with basin, surrounded by a gallery and a prayer room. The courtyard walls, adorned with zellij, sculpted stuccowork and magnificent cedar wood carvings, are a marvellous example of Moorish decoration.

Only in Meknes...



The "hadra" is practised by the Aissaoua brotherhood

The mausoleum of Sidi Mohamed Ben Aissa (Cheikh El Kamel)

Born in 1465, he was head of the Aissaoua brotherhood. He travelled Morocco, preaching the Muslim faith, and was famed throughout North Africa as well as further afield. His mausoleum is located at Bab Siba and was built in 1776 by Sultan Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdelah. His followers hold an annual moussem around the time of Mouloud (the Prophet's birthday).

The Aissaoua "hadra"

One of the fundamental practices of this religious brotherhood, which was founded in the 16th century,

is the "hadra". This is a collective entering into a state of trance, preceded by religious chanting. It lasts all night long and is an essential feature of Aissaoua festivals.

Meknes by night

As night falls, El-Hedim square and its market become the stage for street-vendors, acrobats, storytellers and fire-eaters. Every evening, a folk culture untouched by time is reborn and the great esplanade is the busiest place in Meknes, swarming with locals and visitors alike...



Sidi Mohamed Ben Aissa Mausoleum



The city at nightfall

Louis XIV's clocks

Paying tribute to the passing of time and the history of Meknes, two superb examples of the clockmaker's art continue to tick off the days! They were sent by King Louis XIV of France as a gift to Sultan Moulay Ismail, to mark the importance of the diplomatic relations between the two monarchs.

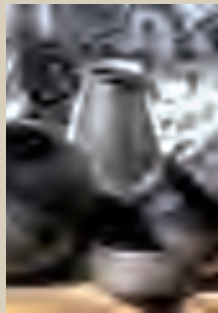
It was in the year 1699 that the renowned ambassador Ben Aicha travelled to Versailles to discuss a political alliance and returned home overcome by the luxury of the French court – and by the beauty of the Sun King's daughter, Anne-Marie de Bourbon. Back in Meknes, he eulogised the French princess to such an extent that the sultan ended up by asking for her hand in marriage. Fearing competition from the dozens of other "queens" in the royal household, the princess turned down his proposal. Louis XIV palliated her refusal by sending him the two magnificent clocks that now hold majestic sway in the mausoleum where Moulay Ismail lies buried.





Bab El Mansour

Meknassi art



Damascening is an art only to be found in Meknes

Craftwork

More than 50,000 craftspeople live and work in Meknes and its region, perpetuating age-old skills and know-how. The city has an authentic style all its own in such arts as carved and painted woodwork, weaving (carpets, hanbel rugs, embroidery, etc.), wrought and damascened iron, and leatherwork (fine leather goods, book-binding and babouches).

Meknes is the only place in Morocco where damascening is practised – a delicate art consisting of inlaying metal with smooth or twisted gold, silver or copper wire - while Meknassi cabinetmakers

have much to be thankful for, given the abundance and variety of trees to be had in the region's forests (cedar and thuja, among other species).

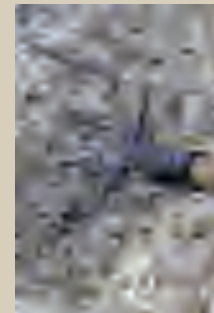
Meknassi embroidery is famed for its tight cross-stitching applied over very extensive surfaces.

A rich and varied musical tradition

"Malhoun" is Meknes' favourite music. According to historians, this particular form dates back to the 12th century, and has been influenced over the passing years by the rhythms of Andalusian music and popular song.



Living in Meknes



Orange blossom

Local produce

The Meknes-Tafilalet region has more than enough resources to count on to consider itself an eco-tourism destination without parallel. Known as "Morocco's water tower", and boasting extensive forest, pasture and farmland, Meknes has made the utmost of its terroir, whose products are sought after throughout the Kingdom and beyond.

Renowned for its olive oil, wines and dates, and well as for horse-breeding and trout farming, Meknes is a treasure house for tourists looking for something different in their travels.

The Meknes region is blessed with soil ideal for the cultivation of olive trees, a climate to match, and, above all, an age-old olive-growing tradition coupled with all the consequent expertise.

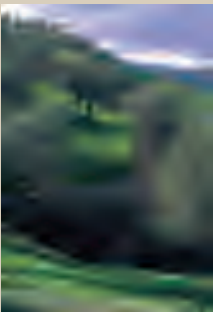
The project underway for the planting of 1000 hectares of olive trees in the region, as part of an overall sustainable development plan, will make Meknes the Kingdom's olive capital.

Olive oil from the Meknes region is gaining recognition as some of the very finest produced anywhere. Extra-virgin at international level: the ninth (2009) edition of the Italian "Extravergine" guide awarded its first prize to Morocco for the quality of its olive oil. The prize is awarded each year to an international player in the olive farming sector.

In 2006 in Rome, Meknes region olive oil carried off the prize for the Best Extra-virgin Olive Oil of the Year, awarded by the Italian "Extravergine – 2006" guide to the "best certified quality olive oils in the world" of the Guide Cuisine & Vini.



Meknes in a new light



Fields of olive trees

Golf: an imperial course

History hangs in the air at the Royal Golf Club in Sultan Moulay Ismail's imperial city of Meknes. The murmur of the mosaic fountain and the venerable walls surrounding its clubhouse, with the medina rooftops and minarets on the horizon, are just a few of the club's many charms. In the garden, the air is heady with the mingled scents of orange, plum, palm and olive trees. Created in 1969, the club and its 9-hole course are open day and night all year round.



Meknes Royal Golf Club

A priceless jewel in a luxuriant green setting

With its age-old forests, its lakes, and its inexhaustible springs of crystal-clear water, Meknes is a joy whatever the season, adorning itself in fresh colours with every month that passes, to the delight of all those who seek to experience nature in all its variety and glory.

On horseback

Majestic Meknes, City of Kings, boasts one of the country's finest stud farms. Located on the Azrou road, it was set up in 1914 and is open to visitors. Some 150 stallions are kept there – Arab thoroughbreds, barbs and Arab-barbs, breeds much sought after by riding enthusiasts.



Arab thoroughbreds

A look around the Region



A mosaic in Volubilis

Moulay Idriss Zerhoun

Twenty or so kilometres north of Meknes, set on a rocky peak overlooking the Oued Erroumane Valley and the plain upon which the Ancient Romans built their city of Volubilis, the quiet little town of Moulay Idriss harbours the mausoleum of the founder of the Idrissid dynasty, who travelled from Arabia to convert the local Berber peoples to the Muslim faith, and who continues to draw thousands of pilgrims to his resting place every year in the month of August.

Volubilis

Located in the foothills of the Zerhoun Massif, Volubilis takes its name from the Berber word Qualili, the name for the colourful flower of the convolvulus, a plant to be found in abundance in the region. Included on the UNESCO World Heritage list in 1997, Volubilis is Morocco's largest archaeological site, with a full 18 hectares open to the public. The site owes its fame to the countless mosaics that decorate its ancient dwellings.

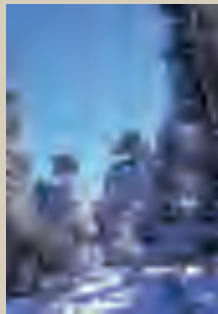


The triumphal arch, Volubilis



Moulay Idriss Zerhoun

Meknes the bountiful, a source of life



Cedar forests in the snow

Nature has bestowed many blessings on the Middle Atlas Mountains, endowing them with breath-taking landscapes and a plenitude of flora and fauna. Vast cedar forests stretch as far as the eye can see, interspersed with lush green valleys, lakes and springs. Lovers of sports and wide open spaces are spoiled for choice between ramble s on foot or on horseback, trekking, mountain-bike or 4-wheel-drive excursions, and river fishing.

Morocco's longest river, the Oum Er-Rbia has its source 40 km from Khenifra, and flows through the midst of the mountains, whose lower slopes are studded with villages of typically Berber architecture.



El Hajeb

The town of El Hajeb is cut in two by a line of cliffs that cross it from northeast to southwest, and from the top of which there are unrestricted panoramuic views of the Saiss Plain. Troglodyte dwellings have been cut into the foot of the cliffs, in the oldest parts of the town near the covered market. There are numerous drinking-water springs in the region, some of which flow in the very heart of the town and in the midst of the pleasant public garden running up to the cliff. The region is also renowned for its caves. The entrance to one of them is clearly visible from the road, and resembles the open mouth of a lion. The El Hajeb cliffs make a great setting for an invigorating ramble in the open air.



Ifrane, pearl of the Middle Atlas

Ifrane

Located at 1650 metres above sea level, Ifrane has been nicknamed the "Switzerland of Morocco", due to the European style of its buildings (stone chalets with sloping red-tiled roofs). A mountain town with wide, tree-lined streets, Ifrane gives visitors the impression that they are wandering through a Savoyard landscape. Anyone with a liking for rambling, trout fishing, or red partridge or wild boar hunting will find much to enjoy in the calm and beauty of the surrounding countryside, while skiers can practise their art to their heart's content on the slopes of the

neighbouring resorts of Michlifien (2036m) and Jbel Hebri (2104m), respectively located 17 and 27 km south of Ifrane.

Azrou

The town of Azrou is home to a craftwork centre famed for the working of cedar wood and the weaving of Bni-M'gild tribal carpets. You can also pay a visit to the Kasbah (fortress), which was built during the reign of Moulay Ismail. The town is also known for salmon trout farming, the produce of which can be enjoyed fresh or smoked.



The town of Azrou

The fascination of the desert



*A girl from the South
in traditional dress*

The Tafilalet region

To the traveller coming from the north, crossing the Tizi'n'Talrhemt ("she-camel pass") at 2900 metres above sea level is like crossing a threshold. You find yourself in a new world altogether - a world of oases and desert. Cut off between the Sahara and the High Atlas, this vast region has given birth to the Tafilalet, a region of stark contrast between the brilliant greenery of the oases scattered along the valleys and the immensity of mountains and plateaus devoid of plant life.

Errachidia

Heir to a rich and turbulent era in the country's history, Errachidia was built in the early 20th cen-

tury, at the crossroads of the great caravan roads to the Dades and Tafilalet. Here, the treasures of an age-old civilisation await your discovery, along with the inexhaustible riches bestowed by a bountiful mother nature.

Erfoud, city of palm trees

Erfoud is one of Morocco's largest oases, watered by Oued Ziz and Oued Rehris, and is the undisputed "City of Palm Trees", with almost a million of them growing in the region. All Mediterranean civilisations have venerated the palm tree, which symbolises the tree of life, fertility and success. King Solomon taught that the palm tree, so rich in nutrition, was a gift from God.



The Ziz Valley



The Merzouga sand dunes

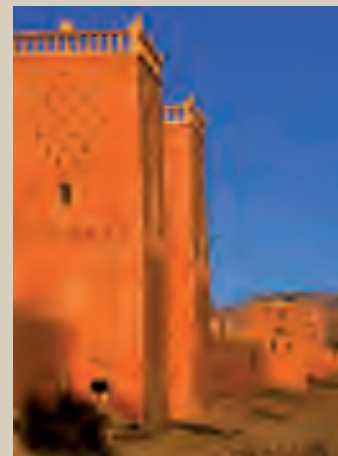
The Merzouga Dunes

The Merzouga sand dunes are an altogether out-of-the-ordinary experience - nature in all its stark grandiosity! Desert as far as the eye can see! The traveller is lost in wonder before the ever-changing colours and extraordinary fineness of the sand. There are a few little oases in the heart of the dunes, where water will flow if you only dig a little...

Rissani, birthplace of the Alaouite dynasty

Located at the southern end of the Ziz Valley, the town of Rissani is

the ancient city of Sijlmasa, capital of the Tafilalet region and cradle of the Alaouite sultans. For eleven centuries, it was the final stop-off for caravans coming from the south. The town harbours the mausoleum of Moulay Ali Cherif, founder of the Alaouite dynasty. Behind it lie the ruins of Ksar Abbar, built in the 17th century by Moulay Ismail as a residence for his sons.



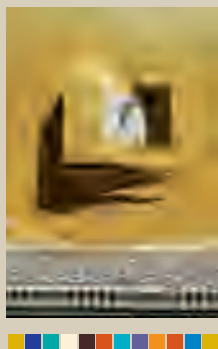
The town of Rissani

Information and useful addresses

Practical information

Entry formalities:

A valid passport for a stay of less than 90 days is required. An identity card may suffice, depending on country of origin, if the trip is organised by a travel agency for a group of over 8 people. A visa is required for some nationalities – enquire at a Moroccan consulate or diplomatic representation in your country. No specific vaccinations are required for entry into the Kingdom of Morocco. If you are bringing your pet along with you, however, you will need to be able to produce an anti-rabies certificate less than 6 months old.



Changing money:

Moroccan currency is the dirham, made up of 100 centimes. Foreign currency must be exchanged at banks or other accredited establishments.

Time zone:

Morocco is in the Greenwich time zone, and time is G.M.T.

Event Calendar:

- Septembre :
- “Cimes d’Imilchil” Music Festival - Imilchil
 - International Desert Music Festival - Errachidia
 - Moussem Moulay Idriss Zerhoun

Mouloud:

Moussem El Hadi Ben Aissa

Useful addresses and contacts

Regional Tourist Office:

27, Place Administrative - Meknès
Tél: 05 35 52 44 26 / 05 35 51 60 22
Fax: 05 35 51 60 46

Regional Tourist Office:

44, Bd Prince My Abdellah.
BP550 Errachidia
Tél: 05 35 57 09 44 / 05 24 62 24 96
Fax: 05 35 57 09 43 / 05 24 62 45 53

Regional Tourist Office:

Place du Syndicat. BP 15 Ifrane
Tél: 05 35 56 68 21
Fax: 05 35 56 68 22

Regional Tourism Council:

Complexe artisanal - Zine Al Abidine
Tél: 05 35 53 17 33
Fax: 05 35 55 68 80

ONCF Railway station:

08 90 20 30 40

Airport: 08 90 00 08 00

Golf: Royal Golf Club

www.royalgolfMeknès.com

Weather forecast: www.meteoma.net

Office des Changes

(Currency regulation authority)
: www.oc.gov.ma

Emergency phone numbers:

Police 19

Fire Brigade 150

Directory enquiries 160

Road safety services 177

For further information: www.visitmorocco.com





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WWW.VISITMOROCCO.COM