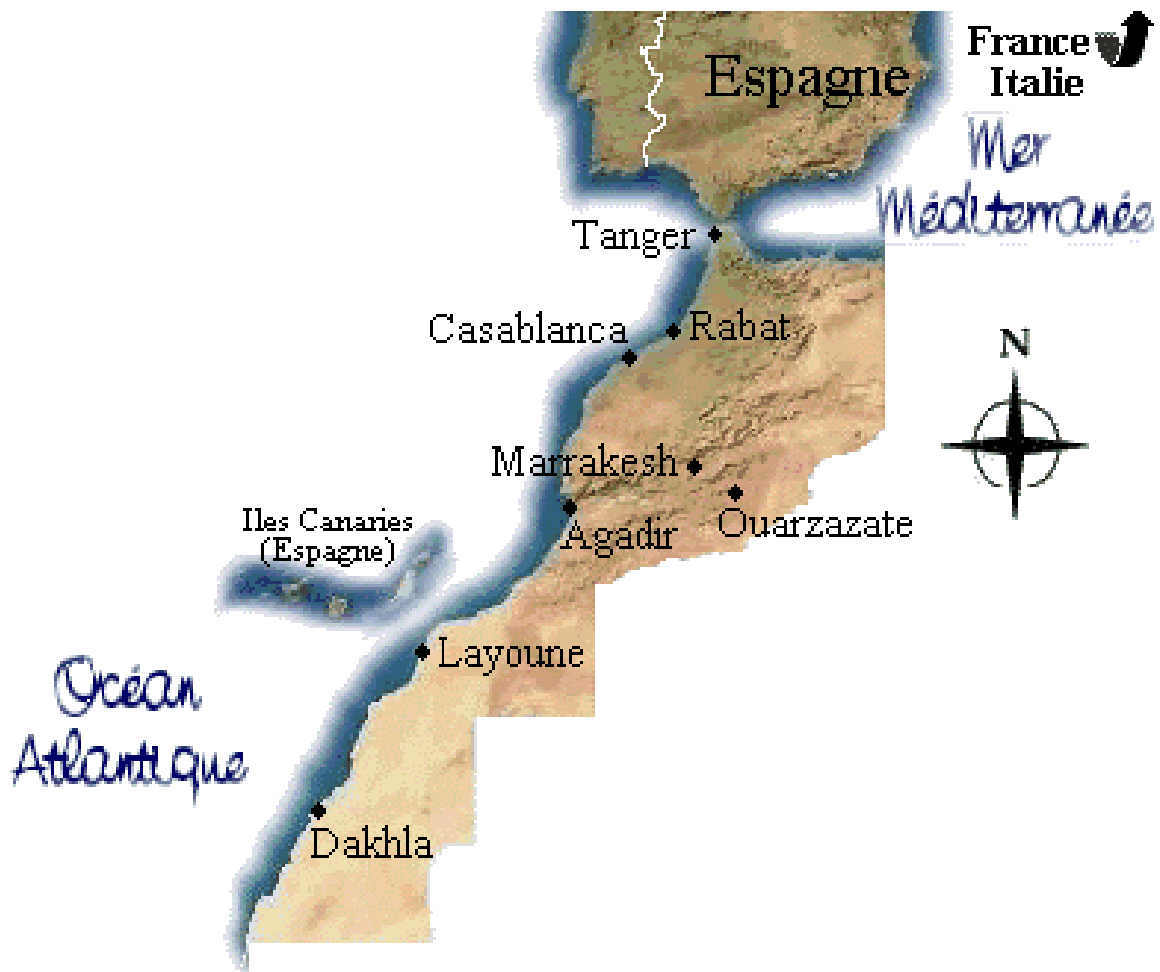


# Morocco Reception Booklet 2011

Morocco Map



**The Country:**

**Full country name:** Kingdom of Morocco.

**Area:** 710,850 km<sup>2</sup>.

**Population:** 34 million.

**Capital city:** Rabat.

**People:** Arab, Berber and foreigners.

**Languages:** Arabic (official), other dialects, as well as French, Spanish and English.

**Religion:** Islam.

**Government:** Constitutional Monarchy.

**King:** King Mohammed VI.

**Major industries:** Agriculture, manufacturing, fishing, tourism.

**Major trading partners:** EU, US, Japan, Saudi Arabia, Brazil.

**Currency:** Moroccan Dirham.



**Overview:**

Morocco is in many ways a country apart. It nestles on the north-western tip of Africa, separated from the rest of the continent by the towering Atlas Mountains and by the Sahara itself. Its climate, geography, and history are all more closely related to the Mediterranean than to the rest of Africa, and it is for these particular reasons that visitors are often struck by the odd sensation of having not quite reached Africa in Morocco. In the north, its fine beaches, lush highland valleys, and evocative old cities reinforce this impression. Yet, as one moves south and east, into and over the starkly beautiful ranges of the Atlases, Morocco's Mediterranean character melts away like a mirage. The Sahara stretches out to the horizon, and forbidding Casbahs stare.

**Location, Geography, and Climate:**

Morocco is situated on the extreme north-western corner of Africa and is bordered by Mauritania and Algeria, both to the south and east.

Morocco's varied geography includes no less than four separate mountain ranges, in addition to lush river valleys, beautiful sandy coasts, and wide expanses of desert. The three most prominent mountain ranges, which run parallel to each other from the southwest to the northeast, are the Middle Atlas, the High Atlas, and the Anti-Atlas. The ascent of the country's highest peak, Jebel Toukbal (13,665 ft./4,165 m.), is a spectacular and not particularly difficult High Atlas trek. The Moroccan coastline, which fronts onto both the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, offers plenty of great beaches as well as a number of fascinating old coastal cities. In the southeast, Morocco's mountain ranges yield inexorably to the desolate expanse of the Sahara. The rivers that flow down this side of the High Atlas support long, narrow, and lush river valleys that resemble linear oases.

The climate in Morocco is reliably dry, although small amounts of rain do fall between November and March. Temperature varies considerably by season and locale. While the southern and south-eastern desert regions can reach extremely high temperatures during the hot summer months, the higher altitudes of the mountains are cool in summer evenings and freezing in winter. Most travellers find the early summer months to be the most comfortable time to visit, as rain is not a threat and temperatures are warm during the day and pleasantly cool at night.

### **History:**

Morocco's history began with the Berbers, the aboriginal people who have inhabited the country since the end of the 2nd millennium BC. Rome extended its rule over the area after defeating Carthage in 146 BC, and testimony to its presence still exists in the fine Roman ruins at Volubilis. As Rome fell into decline, Morocco was invaded first by the Vandals and then, in the 7th century, by the Arabs. Although external Arab rule lasted little more than a century, the arrival of Islam proved to be a permanent addition to Moroccan culture. In the ensuing centuries, a series of ruling dynasties came to power, including the Idrissids, the Almoravids, and the Almohads, but none seemed capable of long maintaining the critical support of the Berber leaders.

By the 15th century, Spain and Portugal began to intrude into Morocco, after having expelled the Moors from their own lands. Although Morocco successfully repulsed these invasions, the tide of European imperialism eventually proved too great. By the middle of the 19th century Morocco's strategic importance had become evident to all of the European powers, and they engaged in a protracted struggle for possession of the country. Finally, in 1911, France was formally acknowledged as protector of the greater part of the country, with Spain receiving a number of isolated locales. French rule came to an end in 1953, although its cultural influence on Morocco remains strongly in evidence. Today the country is ruled by King Mohammed VI, who is leading the country towards both long-term stability and a greater degree of economic prosperity.

### **Arts and Culture:**

Morocco is an ethnically diverse country with a rich culture and civilization. Through Moroccan history, Morocco hosted many people coming from East (Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Jews and Arabs), South (Sub-Saharan Africans) and North (Romans, Vandals, Andalusians (including Moors and Jews)). All those civilizations have had an impact on the social structure of Morocco. It conceived various forms of beliefs, from paganism, Judaism, and Christianity to Islam.

Each region possesses its own specificities, thus contributing to the national culture and to the legacy of civilization. Culturally speaking, Morocco has always been successful in combining its Berber, Jewish and Arabic cultural heritage with external influences such as the French and the Spanish and, during the last decades, the Anglo-American lifestyles.

**Literature:**

Moroccan literature is written in Arabic, Berber and French. It also contains literature produced in Al-Andalus. Under the Almohad dynasty Morocco experienced a period of prosperity and brilliance of learning.

The Almohad built the Marrakech Koutoubia Mosque, which accommodated no fewer than 25,000 people, but was also famed for its books, manuscripts, libraries and book shops, which gave it its name; the first book bazaar in history. The Almohad Caliph Abu Yakub had a great love for collecting books. He founded a great library, which was eventually carried to the Casbah and turned into a public library.

Modern Moroccan literature began in the 1930s. Two main factors gave Morocco a pulse toward witnessing the birth of a modern literature. Morocco, as a French and Spanish protectorate left Moroccan intellectuals the opportunity to exchange and to produce literary works freely enjoying the contact of other Arabic literature and Europe.

During the 1950s and 1960s, Morocco was a refuge and artistic centre and attracted writers as Paul Bowles, Tennessee Williams and William S. Burroughs. Moroccan literature flourished with novelists such as Mohamed Zafzaf and Mohamed Choukri, who wrote in Arabic, and Driss Chraïbi and Tahar Ben Jelloun who wrote in French.

Other important Moroccan authors include, Abdellatif Laabi, Fouad Laroui, Mohammed Berrada and Leila Abouzeid. It should be noted also, that orature, oral literature, is an integral part of Moroccan culture, be it in Moroccan Arabic or Amazigh.

**Music:**

Moroccan music is predominantly of Arab origins. There also exist other varieties of Berber folk music. Andalusian and other imported influences have had a major effect on the country's musical character. Rock-influenced chaabi bands are widespread, as is trance music with historical origins in Muslim music.

Morocco is home to Andalusian classical music that is found throughout North Africa. It probably evolved under the Moors in Cordoba, and the Persian-born musician Ziryab is usually credited for its invention.

Chaabi, popular, is a music consisting of numerous varieties, descended from the multifarious forms of Moroccan folk music. Chaabi was originally performed in markets, but is now found at any celebration or meeting.

Popular Western forms of music are becoming increasingly popular in Morocco, such as fusion, rock, country, metal and particularly hip hop.

**Cuisine:**

Moroccan cuisine has long been considered as one of the most diversified cuisines in the world. This is a result of the centuries-long interaction of Morocco with the outside world. The cuisine of Morocco is a mix of Berber, Spanish, Corsican, Portuguese, Moorish, Middle Eastern, Mediterranean, and African cuisines.

Spices are used extensively in Moroccan food. While spices have been imported to Morocco for thousands of years, many ingredients, like saffron from Tiliouine, mint and olives from Meknes, and oranges and lemons from Fez, are home-grown. Chicken is the most widely eaten meat in Morocco.

**Marrakesh:**

Between the eternal snows of the atlas and the burning desert sand, Marrakesh has been fashioned just like a work of art. Over the centuries, wonderful palaces, great mosques, impressive monuments, riads and luxuriant gardens emerged from the ground. The architects took turns in creating an imperial city, considered one of the landmarks of Morocco.

Marrakesh brings the most outlandish travellers' tales to life thanks to its snake charmers, magic potions and hidden palaces. The pink city has waylaid desert caravans since the 11th century, as visitors succumb to the charms of its bluesy Gnaoua trance music, steamy hammams and multi-course feasts.

Visitors to Marrakesh often disappear down a maze of winding alleys and emerge days later, relaxed and refreshed from their stays in spectacular riads (courtyard guesthouses).

Adventure awaits in the medina (old city), with its *fondouks* (artisans' workshops), seven *zaouias* (saints and shrines) and stalls ladling up steaming bowls of snails and sheep's head soup.

The focal point of Marrakesh is its celebrated square, the Jemaa el Fna. Towering over the scene is the stately Koutoubia minaret, a template for Hispano-Mauresque architecture and a reminder of the importance of Islam to the lives of the city's residents.

Always a byword for the exotic, the city that lured hedonists and idealists in the 20th century now attracts fashionistas and trendy couples in search of the souks, spices, spas, chic restaurants, clubs and riad life.

**Marrakech Landmarks:**



**Al Koutoubia**



**Al Manara**



**Majorelle Gardens**



**Jamaa El Fna Square**