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# My Guide to Essaouira, Morocco: Hotels & Things to Do

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The “Bride of the Atlantic,” Essaouira, Morocco, is equal parts culture hub and boho resort town. Set along the country’s central Atlantic coast, the city’s known for its fresh seafood,

beautiful beaches and relaxed medina experience. Read on to learn what makes the town a worthy addition to any Morocco itinerary.

# Top sites & things to do in Essaouira, Morocco

Essaouira, one of Morocco's best places to visit, is a breezy oceanside destination perfect for culture connoisseurs and relaxation-seekers alike. Its Old Medina is a UNESCO World Heritage Site recognized for its cultural significance. Then the city's namesake beach draws surfers and kiteboarders, especially in summer when the Atlantic's trade winds are at their strongest. Essaouira is also an excellent destination for foodies, with fresh seafood and a bevy of local and international restaurants.

## 1. Medina of Essaouira: walk the ocean ramparts & shop the souks



Essaouira's medina is unique among Morocco's historical trading hubs. Whereas the souks (traditional Moroccan markets) in cities like Marrakech and Fes are known for their lightning

pace, boisterous vendors and labyrinthian alleys, the Medina of Essaouira is quieter and comparatively hassle-free.

You can stroll through the markets at your own pace, taking in the variety of local artwork, craft goods, spices and more while engaging with traders and artists in a more relaxed setting. You can find a lot of locally made souvenirs (and often meet the artists themselves when you find an item you like). Some sections of the medina border Essaouira's lovely coastline, too.

## 2. Check out Port Essaouira (one of the best spots for sunsets)

More than anything, Essaouira is a port city, and a significant portion of Morocco's seafood comes through the fisheries here. But the port's real draw is the series of ramparts and walls that line Essaouira's shores. Many of the battlements date back to the colonial era, yet stand remarkably well-preserved hundreds of years later. You won't find a better view of the ocean almost anywhere else in the city.

There are also plenty of restaurants where you can plan your day around sunset to snag a spot by the water over drinks.

## 3. Surf at Essaouira Beach





Most surfers visit Agadir and its surrounding beaches further south to take advantage of the Atlantic trade winds. But Essaouira also benefits from these winds. They're particularly strong in July and August, and may be a little too rough for some beginners. Otherwise, consistent waves and a soft, sandy beach are great for beginner and intermediate surfers throughout the rest of the year. Plus, there are a ton of places offering surfing lessons and rentals (many places offer kiteboard and wakeboard rentals, too).

## Where to stay in Essaouira, Morocco: 3 great options

Here are a few of my favorite choices for where to stay in Essaouira, Morocco.

1. **Heure Bleue Palais**: the best place to stay in Essaouira for a laid-back experience



Image courtesy of Heure Bleue Palais

Heure Bleue Palais, a Relais & Châteaux property, matches the city's bohemian energy well. The property was once a luxury home before it was converted into a hotel, and features about 30 rooms. Much of the design is reminiscent of a traditional Moroccan riad, with a central garden courtyard and a rooftop pool and bar area. While all the rooms are well decorated — with an emphasis on traditional Moroccan designs — there's also a homey feel.

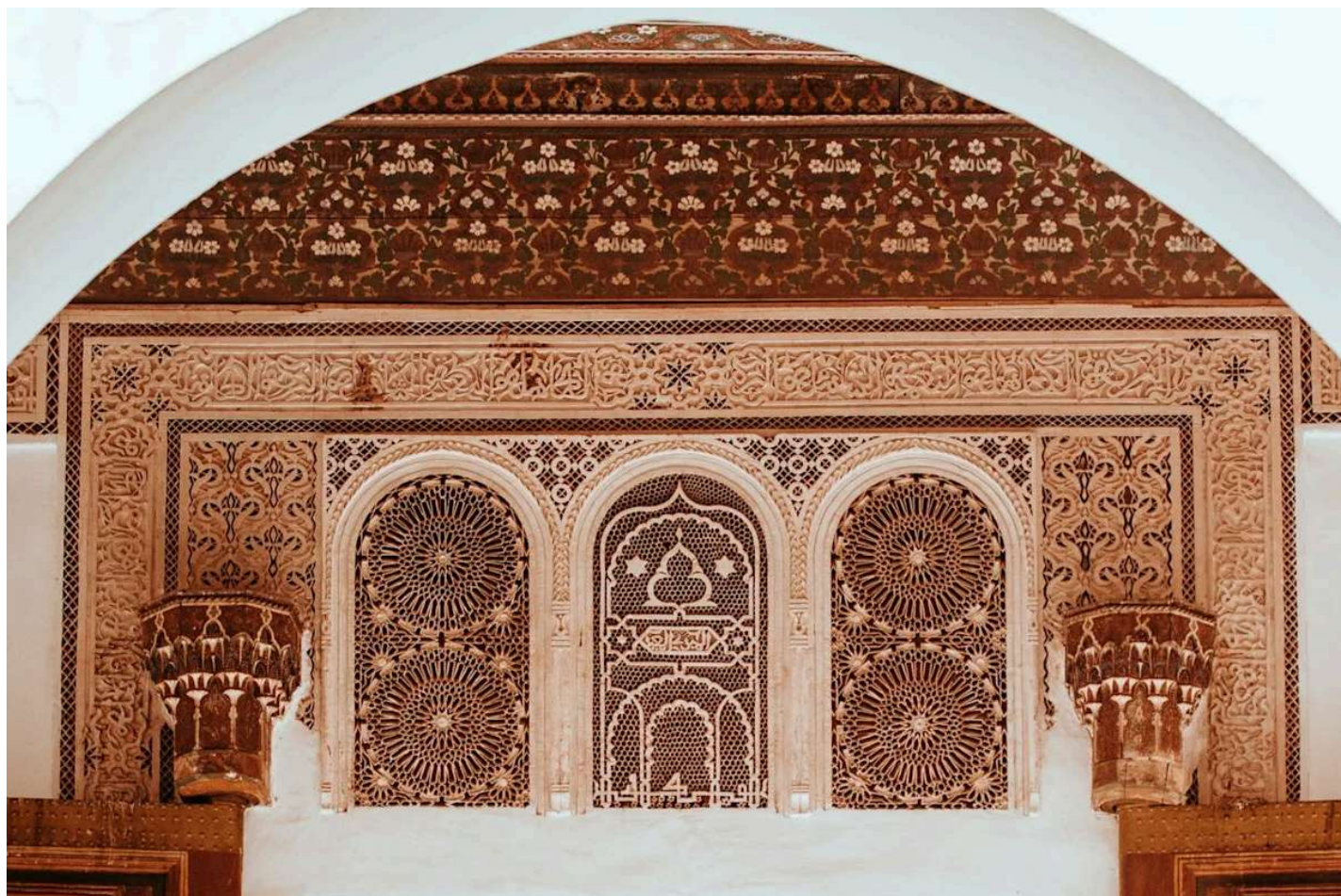
Perhaps best of all, Heure Bleue Palais' location is fantastic: both the beach and the Medina of Essaouira are only about five minutes away on foot.

### **Fora Perks at Heure Bleue Palais:**

- VIP welcome, breakfast daily.

## **2. Riad Dar Maya: a boutique take on Moroccan riad-style properties**





Riad Dar Maya is a design-forward property that puts a contemporary boutique spin on Moroccan riads. There are only five rooms, and each is as spacious and artful as the next. Location-wise, the riad is only a couple blocks from the beach as well as the entrance to the Essaouira Medina.

Riad Dar Maya also hosts a traditional hammam, an intimate lounge and a seafood restaurant that sources ingredients locally and seasonally. (Even the welcome pastries are delicious.) Enjoy complimentary breakfast on the riad's rooftop terrace, in the communal dining room or outdoor courtyard.

### 3. Le Jardin des Douars: an upscale resort set in the city's scenic outskirts





If you don't mind staying further from Essaouira proper, or prefer to stay closer to the city's main airport, consider Le Jardin des Douars. The property melds a breezy, rustic vibe with a lavish Moroccan flair. Choose between expansive rooms or suites while enjoying well-manicured gardens and courtyards.

All of the experiences here celebrate local Moroccan culture. The onsite restaurant sources everything locally, as does the spa, whose wellness treatments draw from local traditions.

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