



Red city relaxation

From a boutique *riad* offering quiet seclusion, to a luxury hotel with remarkable levels of service, historic Marrakech has havens to suit all tastes

The riad Almaha Marrakech

Baudelaire's poem *Invitation to the Voyage* inspired the design of Almaha Marrakech, an alluring small hotel in the red city's Kasbah. The poem is an illuminating choice since this opulent retreat delivers on the poet's vision of an enclosed paradise – the place oozes style, tranquillity and comfort.

Belgian architect Charles Kaisin has transformed this collection of old buildings on the site of the former royal stables into a 14-suite *riad* tucked away from the frenetic streets of the Moroccan

city's oldest neighbourhood.

Enter through a huge wooden door on a quiet *derb* (alley) and the striking design soon emerges – traditional craft skills blend harmoniously with contemporary flourishes. Walk into the Pixel Room – at one end of a central courtyard – and you're dazzled by an interior covered in diamond-shaped silk cushions overlaid with pixelated images of scenes from the city's Jemaa el Fna square. At the opposite end, the library houses more than 1,000 books celebrating French literature – the pages of each title folded to reveal a letter on the fore edge which, when linked together, spell out Baudelaire's dream-like verse.

The seductive appeal continues in the spacious suites; behind cedar doors you'll find decorative stucco plasterwork, huge beds with colourful throws, lush carpets, ornate lanterns, and distinctive metal and leatherwork. Most have private roof terraces

Getting there

British Airways, easyJet, Ryanair and Royal Air Maroc fly to Marrakech.

- ba.com
- easyjet.com
- ryanair.com
- royalairmaroc.com

Accommodation

Suites, breakfast, mint tea and pastries at the Almaha Marrakech cost from €310 (£285) per room, per night. Airport transfers included.

almahamarrakech.com

Clockwise from main picture: Central Patio of the Almaha; Salon Pixels; Library Dining Room; the pool; the Terrasse Aperitif

from which you can gaze at the Koutoubia mosque's soaring minaret and, in the distance, the snow-capped Atlas mountains. Stairs lead to a subterranean *hammam* (steam room) lined with mosaic-patterned tiling, offering treatments that could help even the most jaded urbanite de-stress.

Indeed, relaxation and good food are key ingredients of this experience. Breakfasts are delicious: pancakes, traditional breads, honey, yoghurt, fresh fruit and coffee arrive on large platters inside the Pixel Room. In late afternoon refreshing mint tea and scrumptious home-made biscuits are served around the courtyard (water-filled and illuminated at dusk), while dinner in the Library is a feast – tagines of lamb, beef or chicken with locally grown vegetables and followed by exquisite traditional desserts.

Although it's hard to leave the *riad*, you'll want to explore this vibrant city, ideally with a local guide to steer you beyond the



The luxury hotel The Royal Mansour

Getting there

British Airways flies direct to Marrakech airport from Gatwick. Club class tickets start from £135.

ba.com

Accommodation

A one-bedroom *riad* starts from approx 9,000 MAD (£632) per night including VAT and service charge and excludes local taxes.

royalmansour.com

As *Director* arrived in Marrakech for a stay at the Royal Mansour, we were met with two welcome surprises. The first came as we disembarked from the plane to find a member of staff from the luxury hotel waiting for us before passport control. Within 10 minutes passports were checked and we were fast-tracked through security, ready to collect our luggage. The service, we learnt, is extended to all guests of the hotel both on arrival and departure.

After a short drive we came to a small tree-lined street and pulled up outside two large ornately carved doors. The second surprise was how swiftly the desire to drop our bags and head out into the nearby city dissolved, as the doors opened to reveal a stunning lobby with traditional Moroccan tiles, lanterns and a fountain. There came an instant feeling of never wanting to leave, in an atmosphere so homely you knew right away you wouldn't be

disappointed to stay within these walls for the whole trip.

Owned by the king of Morocco, the Royal Mansour takes exclusivity, luxury and privacy to remarkable levels. It offers 53 extraordinary, spacious and opulent rooms, connected by pathways set within a private medina that mirrors the city's souks. The pathways are lined with beautiful flowers and fruit trees, tended to by staff in traditional dress.

Director's riad was set over three floors and featured a living area, kitchen, en-suite bedroom, two small patio areas and a private roof terrace with plunge pool. If you're looking for something more regal, the Grand Riad even features a home cinema, gymnasium and a Moroccan *hammam!*

Three-Michelin-starred chef Yannick Alléno supervises all of the Royal Mansour's restaurants, while the spa – which is situated over three floors and offers a huge range of more than 100 treatments – is set among a beautiful garden bursting with flowers and orange trees.

Time flies in such wonderful surroundings and before we knew it, it was time to check out again. But while your bag-packing will be reluctant, you'll be considerably more content and laid-back than when you arrived.

📍 *Behiye Hassan*

Clockwise from main picture: the pool at the Royal Mansour; the lobby; food courtesy of Michelin-starred chef Yannick Alléno

