

Ouarzazate

IN MOROCCO





Ouarzazate



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A panorama to take your breath away

Editorial



The timeless draw of the deep south

There are certain places that draw the traveller irresistibly to them, and Ouarzazate is one of these. Set at the crossroads of the Drâa, Dades and Ziz Valleys, the city stands guard over treasures coveted by the moguls of Hollywood, keeping jealous watch over its remarkable heritage and breathtaking natural surroundings. Here, in the midst of the desert, far away from the turmoil of modern life, in a world where the sand imperceptibly fashions its dunes and palaces and where precious water brings forth lush green oases and valleys, you will come to understand the true meaning of the word mirage...

Ouarzazate marks the beginning of the journey... the traveller spellbound by the magic of the deep south. Along the way, in the midst of nowhere, fortified villages out of another age appear shimmering out of the blue, sheltered from the sun by the palm trees that stand basking against their walls, and watered by lazily flowing rivers. Time comes to a standstill...



Ouarzazate, haven of serenity



*Girls from the deep south
in traditional costume*

The town of Ouarzazate was first and foremost a trading centre for camel caravans from sub-Saharan Africa on their way to Fez or Marrakech. Adobe villages and kasbahs, lush green oases and lunar landscapes – such phantasmagorical surroundings could not fail to work their magic on those who passed through them, and the town lost no time in becoming a tourist destination for those in search of new worlds – a haven of serenity, generosity and hospitality.

Ouarzazate has developed a full range of quality infrastructures to ensure visitors enjoy a comfortable and carefree stay, including an international airport, luxury hotels, holiday clubs, conference centres, restaurants, and a golf club.

Beneath its sheltering palm trees, Ouarzazate lies on the edge of a vast rocky wilderness swept by the winds of the Sahara – a town gently preparing its visitors for the extreme experience of the desert itself.



Taourirt kasbah



Carpet making, an art based on age-old tradition



Departure point for the road to the oases, Ouarzazate is also a point of arrival for crafts and cultures. In its souk, henna, dates, roses, spices, and Artemisia are to be found side by side with Berber pottery, artefacts fashioned from stone, blankets, and those Taznaght carpets so famous for their intricate geometrical motifs.

The arts and crafts centre

This modern building houses workshops for sculptors in stone, copper and silver. Embroidery work and carpets of original design, woven in vibrant colours from the silkiest of wools, are also to be found there. And it's also the perfect place to enjoy a refreshing glass of mint tea while admiring the Taourirt kasbah.

The Kasbah Trail

The Kasbahs - sandcastles beyond the reach of time

Great rose-coloured citadels stand proudly on the hillsides, defying anyone who passes to ignore them. These are the far-famed kasbahs of the Moroccan south, residences built from adobe, a mixture of clayey earth and straw, their architecture of striking originality and rare elegance. Morocco's kasbahs retain all of their poetry, serene in their power and living witness to the victory and apogee of the mountain culture that brought them into being. Perfectly adapted to their natural surroundings, they are also an expression of the social life of a sedentary mountain people. Standing eternal, they are southern Morocco's dearest heritage.

The Taourirt Kasbah

The majestic Taourirt Kasbah is listed as a national heritage monument. It was built in the 19th century, and was the Pasha

of Marrakech's largest residence. Its architecture, with its many crenellated towers, geometric motifs, and interior richly attired in painted stuccowork and cedar wood, is a marvel to behold. The Kasbah has just been restored throughout, and now houses exhibition galleries, a library and an amphitheatre.

The Tifoultout Kasbah

Built in the 17th century to accommodate the Pasha of Marrakech's guests, the Tifoultout Kasbah was renovated thirty years ago and is now a hotel and restaurant.

It stands beside the village of Tifoultout, near Oued Drâa, a spot where tranquillity and peace of mind reign supreme.

From its terrace, you can enjoy magnificent views of the city of Ouarzazate below, and of the surrounding mountains.



Majestic and immortal, the Kasbahs stand in careless defiance of travellers and the passage of time



Less well preserved, but equally well worth seeing, is the **Kasbah of the Storks** (Talmasla), a group of buildings on three levels, the highest of which has been specially decorated and has become a favourite stop-off for migrating storks.

Set in the midst of the Skoura palm grove, the great **Amridil Kasbah**, with its square patio, four storeys, and four wide towers, differs architecturally from its peers. Its interior layout, however, is faithful to tradition, with the first floor given over to the kitchen, the other floors to living space, and the towers to storage of food.

Construction started on the **Telouet Kasbah** in 1860, and further buildings were added over the course of the decades. The result is a masterly work of art, fortress, chateau and caravanseraï all rolled into one, a marvel of painted woodwork, wrought iron, sculpted stucco and colourful zellij. Legend has it that it took 300

craftsmen three years to sculpt its ceilings and walls.

Tamdakht Kasbah is a remarkably impressive edifice, comprising no fewer than five storeys and nine towers. It was built in the 19th century, and has been undergoing restoration. Its inner courtyard is framed by magnificent archways affording unrestricted views of the fortified village.

Tamnougalt Kasbah dates back to the 16th century and is one of the oldest in the Kingdom. Its interior boasts sumptuously painted wooden ceilings, sculpted plasterwork, and geometric motifs. An altogether perfect example of a ksar!

The walls of **Amzrou Ksar** overlook the M'hamid road. The village is divided into two, a Muslim half with its requisite mosque and a Jewish half with its synagogue and mellah (Jewish quarter).



A Ksar is a fortified village made up of several kasbahs built side by side, forming an architectural ensemble of rare beauty



Telouet Kasbah

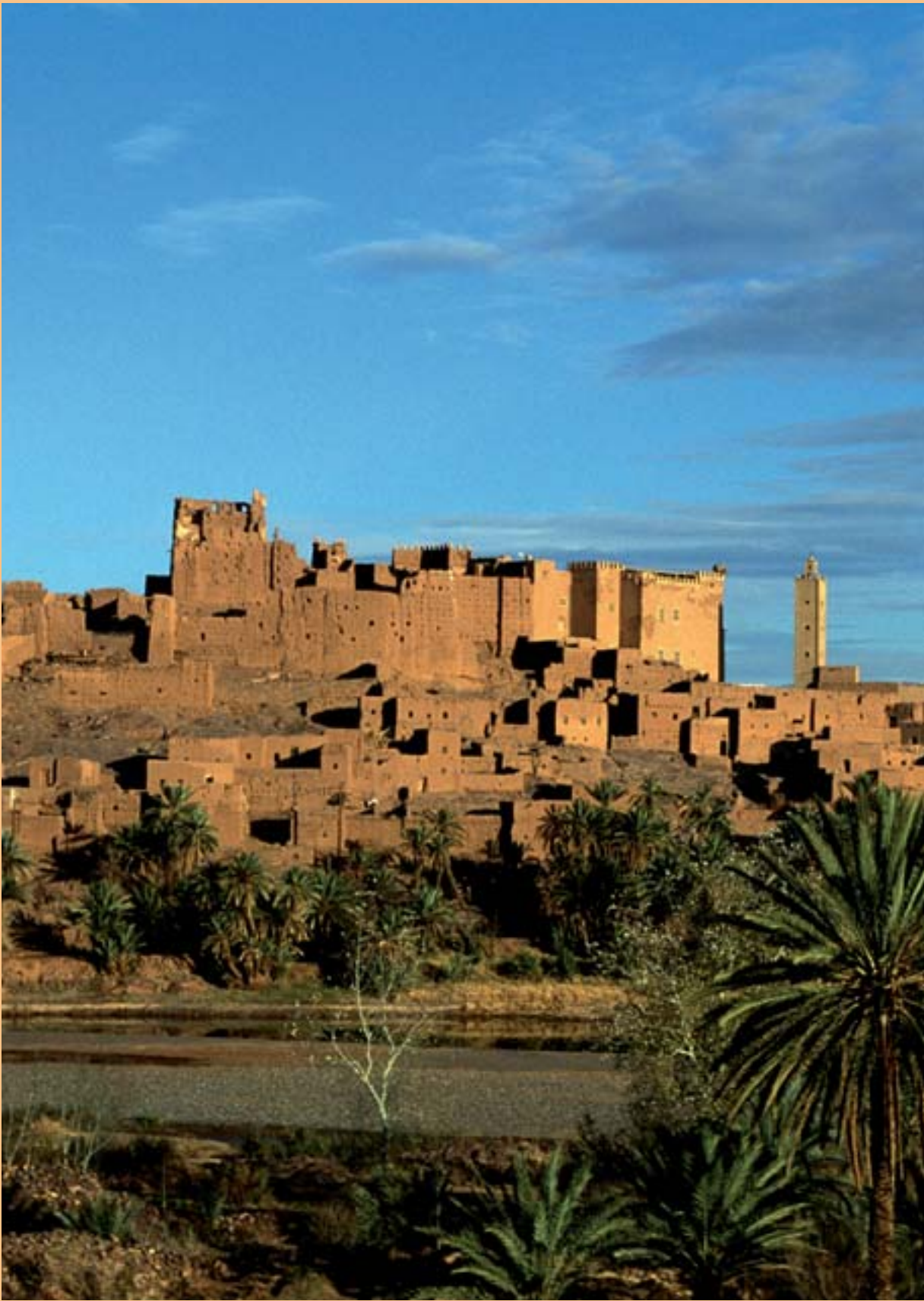
The Kasbah of Aït Ben Haddou



A fortress of sand

A revelation of pure beauty listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site, the Aït Ben Haddou Kasbah is a stunning work of architecture overlooking the Ounila Valley. A graceful ensemble of adobe kasbahs, this is one of the oldest and most impressive ksars in all Morocco. The earliest of its buildings, a granary standing on the hilltop, dates back to the 11th century. The village gradually grew up around it over the course of the centuries, adding houses, more granaries, cowsheds, a well, and protective surrounding walls.

Architecturally, this museum-village, located some thirty kilometres from Ouarzazate, is without parallel. Its outer walls sport few shutters and only two doors, making sure that its inhabitants knew who was coming and going, while inside, a public square, a mosque, a Koranic school and the village residences jostle for space. Immortalised in such films as “Lawrence of Arabia”, “Babel” and “Indiana Jones”, this magnificent fortress stands radiant and untouched by time, an uncut diamond shining proudly forth from its rocky setting.



The Aït Ben Haddou Kasbah

Ouarzazate, cinema city



The world's greatest directors, Americans, Italians and French alike, flock to Ouarzazate to shoot their films in its sumptuous surroundings

Ouarzazate, the new Hollywood

Ouarzazate's magnificent landscapes, radiant light and ideal climatic conditions have always drawn filmmakers to the region. Louis Lumière himself filmed his "Chevalier Marocain" there as far back as 1897! Jacques Becker made his version of "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves" there in 1954, with the unforgettable Fernandel in the starring role, and David Lean's masterly "Lawrence of Arabia" followed in 1962. In the 1980s, the movie industry began a full-scale assault on the region, and numbers of big-budget films have since been made there, including Martin Scorsese's "Kundun",

Lewis Teague's "Jewel of the Nile", Bernardo Bertolucci's "Sheltering Sky", Ridley Scott's "Gladiator" and "Kingdom of Heaven", and Alain Chabat's "Astérix et Obélix". The town now contains three large studios. The Atlas Studios were set up in 1983, are open to the public, and are certainly well worth going out of your way to see. Behind their doors, guarded by gigantic pharaohs, you can wander through a host of amazing sets, peek into the workshops where they are created, and get a real idea of what goes on behind the scenes in the movie industry.



From Tibet to Ancient Egypt, and from Ancient Rome to the Sudan, all the sets are created in Ouarzazate itself

Ouarzazate's movie industry school

Ouarzazate attracts filmmakers from all over the world, along with those enamoured of the seventh art and its creations. In order to meet the very considerable demand for human resources in terms of movie-making professionals, Ouarzazate now has its own training institute, whose students learn the ins and outs of the industry and its various branches – "film sets and machinery", "production management", "set decoration and props", "hairstyling and makeup", "costumes and dressing", and "special effects".

Another attraction is the town's Museum of Cinematography, which is housed in a former Italian studio from the 1990s. The exterior may appear typically Moroccan, but once across the threshold, visitors find themselves stepping from Ancient Greece to the Middle East of days gone by, from church patio to grim dungeon. Amazingly authentic as they may seem, all the sets here are created out of plaster! All in all, a novel way of acquainting yourself the remarkable know-how of the local craftsmen.





The Ait Ben Haddou Kasbah, listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site

The timeless desert

The Valley of Roses

Roses from Kalaat M'gouna Valley are celebrated throughout Morocco, prized for their beauty and heady fragrance. They are gathered in the month of May, during which the great "Rose Moussem" festival is held.

Damascus roses (*rosa damascene*), the variety that grows in the valley, are highly resistant to cold and drought. They are said to have been introduced into Morocco in the 10th century, by pilgrims returning from Mecca and scattering seeds along their way. Ever since their passing, the valley has been adorned with rosebushes, filling the air with their fragrance. A highly scented variety, the flowers are grown in a series of magnificent rose gardens, and are used in the making of a delicate and much sought after rosewater. In early May, at the first light of dawn, the local women begin gathering the precious blooms, one by one – some 3 or 4000 tonnes a year in the course of a single week! Once harvesting is over, it's

time for festivities to begin. The inhabitants of all the neighbouring villages gather at Kalaat M'Gouna for a three-day festival that includes exhibitions of farming produce and locally made jewellery and carpets, musical events, and competitions. The women from the valley's cooperatives will be more than happy to show you exactly how they distil rosewater and demonstrate the techniques behind the beauty creams and perfumes they produce.

The great Date Festival

When Morocco's deep south is bathed in its most radiant light, you know that October's great Date Festival is close at hand. No less than a million date palms grow in the region, and production is widespread (Bouzekri, Boufegous, Majhoul, and Bouslikhan). The festival is an opportunity for southern tribes to gather together to celebrate the fruit in song and dance in the purest Berber tradition, and a traditional camel race is held in the dunes to mark



The Rose Festival, a gathering paying homage to the country's most beautiful flower, the Damascus Rose



Traditional regional festivals succeed one another in accordance with the harvest calendar, giving visitors an idea of the deep south's rich cultural heritage



the occasion. You can gorge yourself on sweet, melt-in-the-mouth dates, delicately matured in the sun throughout the summer and flavoured any which way you choose, or enjoy them in a bread roll garnished with eggs, onions and spices – medfouna, a treat for the taste-buds!

A celebration of Ahwach culture
The annual National Ahwach Festival is held each September at

the Taourirt Kasbah, celebrating and perpetuating an age-old oral heritage. The festival is a non-stop round of entertainment that includes drums, dance, improvised poetry, and solo and choral singing. Every tribe from the deep south has its own troop, and the continuous show is an altogether unique experience. Alongside the festivities, exhibitions, parades, films, plays, and lectures are also on the programme.

Ouarzazate in a new light



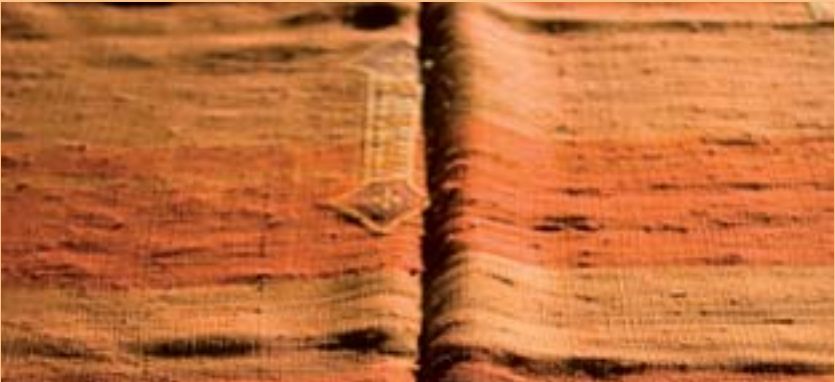
Excursions in the region are truly unforgettable experiences, whether your means of transport is 4-wheel drive, mountain bike, camel, quad, or simply your own two feet

A night in the desert

Imagine it – absolute silence reigning, and the feeling that you could reach up and touch the stars... a night spent in the desert is an experience unlike any other, and one you'll never forget. Bivouacking immerses you totally in the world of the desert dunes. Under cover of fully equipped Berber tents, you can steep yourself in the timeless wonder of your surroundings, struck dumb by the magic of the sunset and held spellbound as dawn creeps over the horizon.

The Garden of Eden

Lost in a desert landscape of ochre stone a few kilometres from Ouarzazate, Lake Fint and its seemingly impossible oasis of luxuriant greenery appears before the traveller like a mirage. Palm trees, eucalyptus, cedars, cypress, and bamboo surround a vast stretch of water that supplies the valley's rivers. This is a bird paradise harbouring a multitude of species, including eagles, falcons, buzzards, storks, passerines, swallows, magpies, blue tits, and chaffinches.



A Taznakht carpet



Bivouacking in the desert

Taznakht carpets



Carpets have been produced in Taznakht since time immemorial, and are the pride of Morocco's craft industry. Originating in the High Atlas, they are composed of knots on two lines, their deep red, dark green and off-white geometric motifs set against a saffron yellow background.

This type of carpet is woven from finely spun pure wool or high-quality cotton, and the pigments used for dyeing are obtained from local plants. Motifs are of Berber origin, their design inspired by the natural world and borrowing characters from the Amazigh alphabet.

In the heart of the oasis



Known as the Road of a Thousand Kasbahs, the Dades Valley boasts unspoilt landscapes of stunning grandeur

Ouarzazate makes an ideal point of departure for a wide and varied range of excursions. Just follow the rivers, and they will lead you into some of Morocco's most beautiful valleys.

The Dades Valley

This has to be one of the most amazing landscapes in Morocco. Flowing past countless kasbahs and hemmed in by Jbel Sarho on one side and the High Atlas massif on the other, Oued Dades winds its way through arid desert countryside, eating away at the strip of greenery that borders it. Passing through lovingly nurtured palm groves, the road continues on to the rose gardens of Kalaat M'Gouna, after which the valley

draws in its giddy slopes to become the Dades Gorge.

The Dades Gorge

A huge block of limestone, cleft in two by a single sword stroke. A stark, jagged landscape, where kasbahs blend in with the mauves, russets and fawns of the rocks upon which they stand. An icy river flows through depths of the gorge, and the more adventurous can follow its course, either by kayak or simply by wading barefoot for one or two kilometres. Further on, the road becomes no more than a track, crossing the Dades, zigzagging up to the top of a giddy canyon, and finally leading you into a realm inhabited only by birds and moufflon.



Almond trees, date palms, fig trees and olive trees – an oasis of refreshing greenery in a stark world of jagged rock

The Todra Gorge

Continuing along the same road, gardens give way to ochre red countryside where rock takes the upper hand, hollowed out into starkly impressive gorges. The most fascinating of all is the Todra Gorge, the Grand Canyon of Morocco. Its 300-metre high pink limestone cliffs form a sheer drop into a narrow corridor through which flows Oued Todra. Between these eternal walls of stone, rough pathways follow the river's sombre banks, and you can slither and

climb your way along its course for a good 600 metres. And here, in the very depths of the gorge, you finally come across the sacred fish spring, a hot water spring alive with fish that are forbidden to anglers, whoever they may be.



The Dades Gorges

The desert attraction



The Tinghir palm grove

From Tinghir to Erfoud

The first place to stop off at is the town of Tinghir, departure point for 4-wheel drive expeditions across the desert. Built in terraces at the mouth of the Todra Gorge, Tinghir is overlooked by a mound upon which stand the ruins of a former kasbah.

The Ziz Valley

Nearing Errachidia, Oued Ziz cuts its way through the limestone rock of its valley, hemmed in on either side by arid, russet coloured cliffs. The river carries its extraordinary abundance of emerald waters through a narrow strip of greenery, its banks shaded by apricot trees, lined with a succession of palm groves, and overlooked by ksours. On either side of the road, stand the wells used for digging and maintaining the “foggaras”,

underground channels designed to capture water from the water table to be used for irrigation purposes. The oued continues on its way southwards, where it nourishes the vast Tafilalet palm grove.

The next stop, Erfoud, is Tafilalet’s great oasis, numbering over 700.000 date palms. The little town standing alone in a world of arid stone, is overlooked by a fortified tower (a borj) that affords unrestricted views over the Erfoud palm grove and the desert against which it stands.

Take time off to sample the local speciality, kahlia, a mutton tajine garnished with eggs, onions, tomatoes and peppers, and flavoured with a blend of 44 different spices.



The Ziz Valley



The golden sand dunes are in constant change, at the mercy of the winds, and the quality of the sunlight

From Rissani to Merzouga

Crossing black desert, red dunes, and the blue waters of the highly improbable Dayt Serji, where shimmering flights of pink flamingos take to the air, we finally arrive in Rissani, the town that cradled the Alaouite dynasty. Stop and meditate a while at the mausoleum of Moulay Ali Cherif, the dynasty’s founder. The town used to be a major stop-off for camel caravans, and much trading activity still goes on there today, thanks to its great souk. Filali leather is known for its quality; soft and supple, it is manufactured from goatskins tanned with tamarisk bark.

Further on, tarred roads give way to tracks, and the dunes of Merzouga appear in the distance. Red sand stretching as far as the eye can see, and an ever-changing landscape, blown by the winds and scorched by the sun’s rays. This is Erg Chebbi, a vast ensemble of dunes reaching up to 150 metres in height. Watching the sun rise or set over them is a truly unique experience. Trekking, bivouacking and expeditions on camelback are all on the agenda here, bearing you away to explore the Sahara and its timeless mystery.



Rissani

In the steps of the nomads

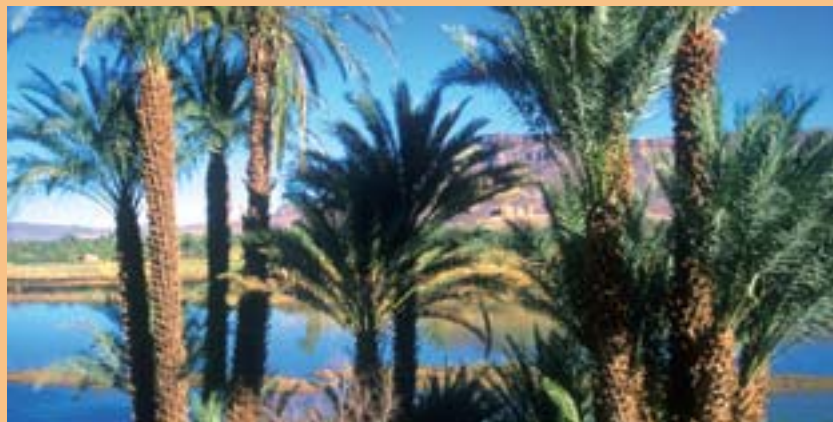


The Drâa Valley

Some fifty kilometres south of Ouarzazate, you enter the Drâa Valley, a full 200-kilometre stretch of lush greenery. Once Morocco's longest river, Oued Drâa waters the valley's slopes, bringing forth cereals, henna, vegetables, and the finest dates to be found anywhere in the Kingdom – no less than sixteen varieties in all!

From Zagora to Tameghroute

Famed for its "Timbuktu 52 days" signpost and the last oasis on the caravan road before the desert, Zagora is set in breathtaking surroundings and is an unexpectedly colourful little town – bunches of yellow dates atop the palm trees, pink oleander blossom, and houses of red ochre clay beneath the dazzling sunlight.



The road crosses the mountains, then winds its way through a strip of cultivated land. There are no lack of ksars well worth visiting along the way, including those at Tamenougalt, Igdaoun, and Tinzouline.

The village of Tameghroute contains a number of mosques with blue earthenware tiled roofs and white minarets, a highly reputed medersa and, of course, the famous Zaouïa Naciria library. It is also known for its hand-worked pottery, and you can visit numerous open-air potter's workshops equipped with simple ovens and producing jars, dishes, pitchers, and other household containers.



Absolute silence and sand as far as the eye can see – in the vast Ch'gaga dunes, you might well be the only person in the world

The Tinfou dunes at M'hamid El Ghizlane



Cars are a rare sight around Tinfou, and shepherds give way to nomads. You feel as if you had reached the very edge of the world. But it's only when you finally get to M'hamid El Ghizlane that the real desert, in all its vast authenticity, takes over. The village comprises seven little douars that have preserved the Saharaoui, Jewish, Berber and Arab influences that brought them into being. This is the epicentre of nomad culture, and an annual international festival

here brings together nomadic peoples from throughout the world in celebration of their age-old traditions. M'hamid El Ghizlane is surrounded by impressive sandy ergs – the largest being Erg Lihoudi, the Bogarn dunes, the howling dunes, Erg Smar and the Ch'gaga dunes. For those in search of adventure, 4-wheel drive and camel excursions, as well as bivouacking under the desert stars, are all on offer.

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

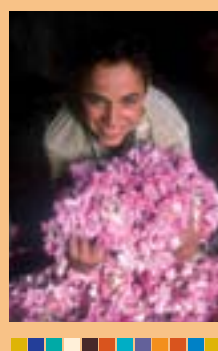
Moroccan currency is the dirham, made up of 100 centimes. Foreign currency must be exchanged at banks or other accredited establishments.

Time zone

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

Event Calendar

March : Aïcha des Gazelles Rally
 March : Marathon des Sables
 May : Rose Festival
 September : International Desert Music Festival



Useful addresses and contacts

Regional Tourist Office:

Avenue Mohammed V, BP. 297
 Tel: 05 24 88 24 85
 Fax: 05 24 88 52 90

Ouarzazate Provincial Tourism Council:

Avenue Mohamed V BP. 297 - Ouarzazate
 Tel: 05 24 88 24 85
 Fax: 05 24 88 52 90

Zagora Provincial Tourism Council:

email: cptzagora@gmail.com

Airport : B.P. 30

Call center : 08 90 00 08 00

Weather forecast: www.meteoma.net

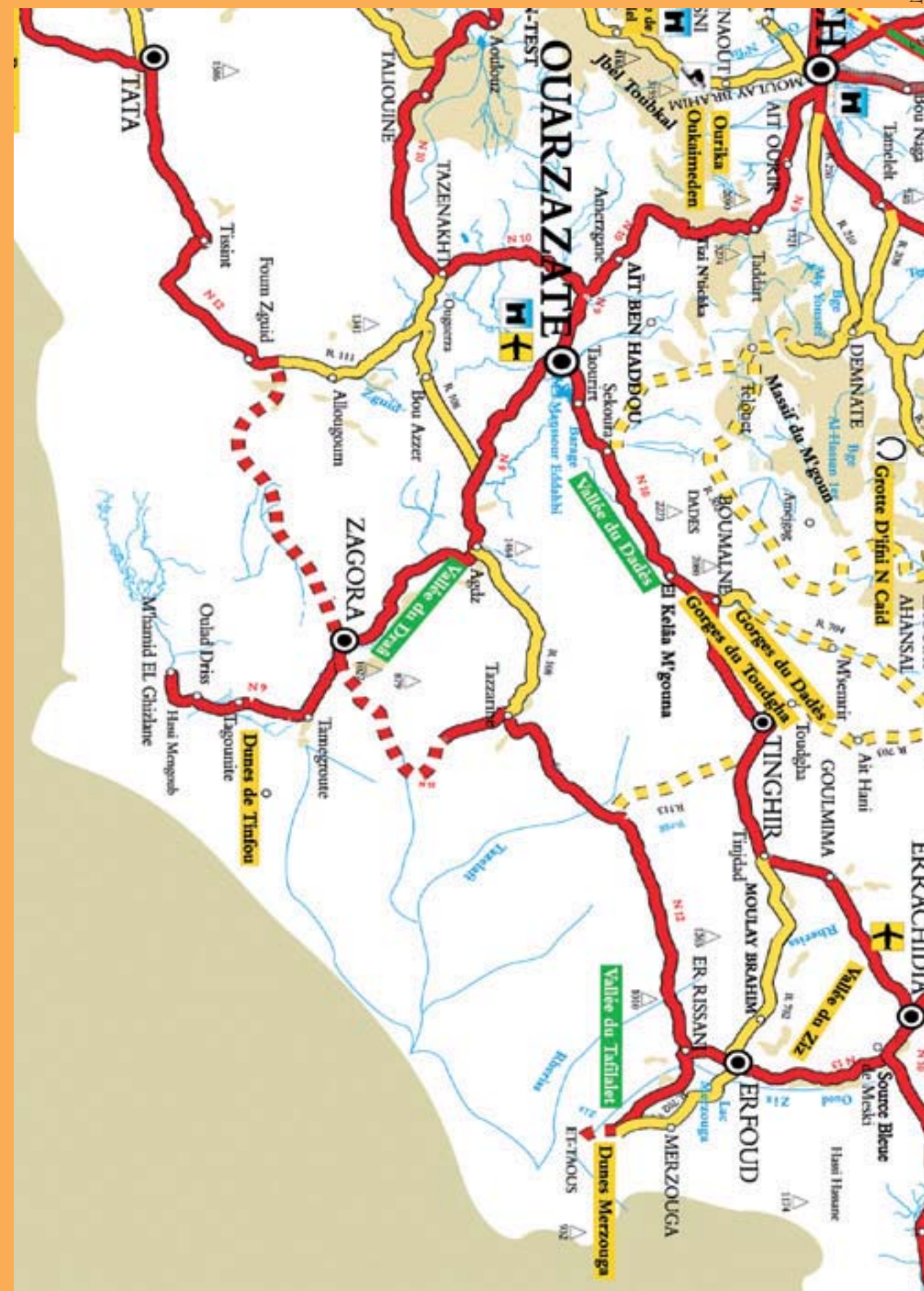
Office des Changes

(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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