

Your definite guide to Morocco, even if you don't speak French or Arabic (part 2: dining)

If you're all about trying ~ authentic, local cuisine ~, then Morocco certainly will not disappoint because 9/10 restaurants you come across will almost always be serving local fare of tagine, cous cous, kebabs and chopped salads accompanied by as many loaves of the ubiquitous, round local bread called 'khobz' your heart desires. Depending on your budget, you could go all out and order an entire lamb (pre-book 24hours ahead) and dine in style in the courtyard of a refurbished riad or stuff your face for a couple of a bucks at the grittier, hole-in-the-wall neighbourhood joint.

The best Moroccan food is of course, always found in someone's home (even the restaurant owners will tell you that), so get acquainted with the locals and try to score yourself an invitation. If you're staying in a riad or dar, ask your host if it's possible to have someone come in and prepare a home cooked meal for you, although be prepared to pay more than you would at a mid-range restaurant! Local fare doesn't vary too much; you'll always find a tagine, cous cous and salad variant wherever you go. Fish isn't very common in Morocco, with the main sources of protein being chicken, beef and lamb, with the occasional camel. Being a predominantly Muslim country, you won't find pork easily, but it is not impossible.

It is common for menus to be written in French, although you will find English, Spanish and German translations at spots that welcome more tourists. Don't worry, most Moroccans (particularly those working in restaurants) will know enough English to understand you, but just in case you (and Google Translate) get stuck, here are some key words to navigate around a menu (*la carte*) in a pinch. Hey, you should at least kind of know what you've ordered for your *entrée* (starter) and *plat* (main).

Meats: poulet (chicken), bouef (beef), agneau (lamb), poisson (fish), fruits de mer (seafood), calamar (squid), kefta (minced beef and/or lamb)

Vegetables: aubergine (eggplant), carotes (carrot), tomate (tomato), haricot vert (green beans), pomme de terre (potatoes), courgette (zucchini), artichaud (artichokes), poivron (capsicums), betterave (beetroot)

Fruits: raisin (grapes), pomme (apple), banane (banana), pêche (peach), orange (orange), frais (strawberry), avocat (avocado), citron (lemon), melon (melon), grenade (pomegranate)

Note: vegetables and fruits are seasonal, but you can get delicious, fresh squeeze orange juice almost year round for next to nothing.

Dairy: yaourt (yoghurt), lait (milk), fromage (cheese), glace (ice cream)

Others: pain (bread), riz (rice), frites (fries)

Pro tip: the khobz and batbou (chewy pita bread) that are served with almost every meal are generally acceptable, even if they've been sitting around for a couple of days. But please, do not waste your calories on the local "baguettes"; for a country that lived under French rule for 44 years, they are bitterly disappointing.

In bigger and more international cities like Casablanca or Rabat, you can easily find everything from sushi to Starbucks, but don't count on that in smaller towns. Moroccan cuisine is delicious, but it can get repetitive quite quickly. Once you've grown tired of beef and prune tagine for like, every meal, here are some alternative spots to check out in Morocco's most visited cities.

Marrakech

Stepping through their doors is like being transported into a different country altogether. **Limoni** serves excellent Italian food (and good bread!) in a refurbished riad complete with lemon trees that make the space reminiscent of Tuscany. If you've been craving pasta, this is the place to go.

Terrasse des épices is a chic, French-owned rooftop terrace with stunning views of the medina that serves up a mix of traditional Moroccan and international dishes. Most importantly, this perpetually-packed spot also serves alcohol, and is a great option for pre-dinner, sunset drinks.

Boasting an impressive wine list of old world and modern French wines, **Le 68 à Vin** is cozy, two-floor wine bar located in "new" Marrakech. The menu features classic French bistro favourites like *Entrecôte* (steak) and *tartines* (open faced sandwiches), and if you don't know your way around wine, the staff are always happy to point you in the right direction.

Fes

Chances are, you'll probably stumble across **Made in M** while you're trying to navigate the medina, and boy will you be glad when you do. The bohemian-chic café is constantly packed with tourists Instagram-ming every corner, but if you do manage to snag yourself a seat, they serve excellent cakes and pastries for breakfast or lunch.

You'll spot **Nacho Mama Burrito House** from a mile away thanks to the bright pink façade. The small hole-in-the-wall spot offers up Mexican burritos packed with smoked vegetables, tender meats and oodles of salsa. *Muy bien!*

Ruined Garden is an oasis in the stifling Moroccan heat. The lush, greenery-packed courtyard that serves as the main dining space is a welcomed mid-day reprieve, whether for drinks or a meal of Fassi (Fes) cuisine. The menu features traditional classics as well as re-imagined, modern offerings like "popcorn" makuda (potato fritters) and berkoula (a wilted green served with olive oil and preserved lemons).

Casablanca

Paprika might make an appearance in plenty of Moroccan dishes, but it has nothing on the spiciness us in Asia (what up, south east Asia) are used to. Once you start craving that chili, check out **Thai Garden Express**, a takeaway-only joint that does very legit Thai food, with generous portions and great service.

Thi Hue Kitchenette comes highly recommended by many locals. Serving up Vietnamese classics like pho and bo bun, this is a great alternative for when you've had your fill of rich and hearty tagines!

Fresh grilled fish, a lovely view overlooking the sea and as much good Moroccan wine your senses can handle, **Restaurant du Port de Peche** is a highly popular seafood-centric restaurant with generous portions and reasonable prices.

Drinks and alcohol

Wander around the cities for a bit and you'll probably realize that Morocco isn't the best country to hold a stag night or party-weekend getaway. As nearly 99% of the population being Muslim, alcohol does not find its way onto menus easily, with mint tea being the beverage of choice for locals.

That being said, it is not impossible to find alcohol if you know where to look! Larger cities in Morocco are usually split into two parts: the old town and the new town. The old town is where you'll find the medinas, and is also where it's much harder to find booze. In the new towns, you can find wine bars, beer gardens and even clubs, if you feel like dancing!

Moroccans might not be very good at replicating French breads, but they've done a stellar job with their wines – and they're cheap to boot. A good bottle of local red can cost as little as 100MAD, with a flavor profile that easily rivals a mid-range Bordeaux. You can pick these up at a Carrefour, but do take note that shops here close a little earlier than you might expect, so do your shopping earlier in the day and enjoy sunset drinks on the rooftop terrace of your riad.