



USEFUL INFORMATION ABOUT MOROCCO

1. SAFETY AND SECURITY

Morocco is characterized by relative calm and stability. You should however be aware that Morocco has not been spared from terrorism. On 28 April 2011 a bomb was detonated in the centre of Marrakech; 18 persons died and several were injured. Suspected assassins were arrested a week later. Caution is recommended at tourist attractions.

On 20 January 2011 peaceful demonstrations took place all over Morocco, following a call for socio-economic and constitutional reforms on Facebook. Some demonstrations led to incidents of vandalism and looting in March and May, but they have otherwise been peaceful. The protest movement has resulted in a new constitution which was approved by a referendum on 1 July 2011.

Please avoid political gatherings and demonstrations, and respect any advice or instruction from local security authorities. Follow news reports and be alert to developments in the Middle East that might trigger public disturbances.

Morocco's relation with Algeria remains tense; especially Western Sahara is subject to conflicts. Clashes between government forces and the Polisario Front occur, though less frequently, in the areas of Western Sahara. Don't wander off track; this region is heavily-mined.

A few years ago the *brigade touristique*, tourist police, was set up in the principal tourist centres to clamp down on notorious *faux guides*, false guides, and hustlers. This has reduced but not eliminated the problem. The main interest of these guides is the commission gained from hotels or on articles sold to you in the *souq*, market. If offered the services of a guide, you should ensure that the guide is authorised by or operating with the agreement of the local tourist authorities, and displays an official badge.

Violent crime is not a major problem in Morocco. Occasional incidents involving theft at knifepoint in the major cities and along beaches do however take place. Petty crime, such as pickpocketing and bag snatching, occurs.

The Rif Mountains is a major cannabis growing area. You may be approached by drug dealers. The penalties for possession of even small amounts of drugs are up to 10 years of imprisonment.

This travel information does not include detailed information on Western Sahara. We always recommend you to check up-dated travel recommendations with your foreign ministry/home office prior to your travels.

Emergency phone numbers

Police: 19

Fire Brigades: 15

Ambulance: 15

Highway Emergency Service/police in rural areas: 177

Information: 160



The traffic

The standard of roads and vehicles vary and compliance to traffic rules cannot be taken for granted. You are recommended to avoid driving at night. Keep in mind that weather conditions, especially in the mountains, can change rapidly. Heavy cloudbursts turn dry river beds into rapids and affect road conditions.

2. INSURANCE

Prior to your departure, be sure to arrange comprehensive travel and medical insurance covering the time of your stay in Morocco.

3. MONEY

The local currency is the Moroccan Dirham (Dh or MAD), which is divided into 100 centimes (c). The Dirham is the only currency officially accepted in Morocco.

Money exchange

Money should be exchanged at official *bureaux de change*. Changing money in the street is illegal. Keep the receipt to enable changing Moroccan currency back into the original national currency. Euros and US Dollars are widely accepted.

It is illegal to bring local currency out of the country. By law, exchange rates should be the same at all banks and official exchanges in Morocco. Besides banks and exchange offices, major post offices provide exchange, and usually work until late hours.

ATMs

Guichets automatiques, ATMs, are widely spread in Morocco. ATMs are easily available near tourist hotels, in modern shopping districts, and near the main gates of the *medinas* in larger cities. Many accept Visa, Master-Card, Electron, Cirrus, Maestro and InterBank systems. Make sure that the ATM accepts foreign cards before entering your card.

Credit cards

Major credit cards are widely accepted in the main tourist centres. Note that credit card use often attracts a surcharge of around 5% from Moroccan businesses.

Travelers' checks

American Express, Visa and Thomas Cook travelers' checks are widely accepted by banks. To avoid additional exchange rate surcharges, travelers are advised to take travelers' checks in Pounds Sterling, the Euro or US Dollars.

4. VISAS

Most visitors to Morocco do not require visas and are allowed to remain in the country for 90 days on entry. There are however exceptions and visa requirements are subject to change. Always check with the Moroccan embassy/consulate in your country prior to departure. The Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla have the same visa requirements as mainland Spain.



Your passport needs to be valid for at least six months after your entry into Morocco. When entering the country, particularly during the busy summer months, you should ensure that your passports are stamped.

Visa extensions

If your stay is longer than 90 days, a resident permit is required and can be issued by the Police Department of your place of residence in Morocco. You may also opt to leave, for example to the Spanish enclaves, and come back a few days later.

Students traveling with AMBergh are assisted with the visa extension procedures if needed during the language course.

5. GETTING THERE AND AWAY

Land

To and from Spain and Europe

There are land borders to the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla in northern Morocco. Spanish visa regulations are applied. The Moroccan bus company, Compagnie de Transports Marocains (CTM), operates buses from Casablanca and most other main cities in Morocco to France, Belgium, Spain, Germany and Italy. Book your ticket in advance.

Another Moroccan bus service with links to Spain is Tramesa. UK-based companies with services to Morocco include Eurolines and Busabout.

To/from Algeria

The border with Algeria has been closed for some time due to ongoing political disputes.

To/from Mauritania

There is no public transport between Morocco and Mauritania. It is possible to enter Mauritania by car from Dakhla, in the very south west of Western Sahara. Most citizens need a visa to enter Mauritania. Make sure to check with the Mauritanian embassy/consulate prior to departure. The Moroccan/Mauritanian border is heavily mined, so stay on the road.

Sea

There are ferry services between Algeciras in southern Spain to Ceuta, the Spanish enclave, and Tangier in Morocco. You can also take a ferry from Tarifa in southern Spain to Tangier. This is the shortest and fastest route, only 35 minutes. Other Spanish ports that have connections to Morocco are Malaga and Almeria, with ferries to the enclave of Melilla and its Moroccan neighbor town Nador.

Ferry services to Tangier are also available from the port of Sète near Montpellier and Port Vendres near Perpignan in France. The Italian towns of Genoa and Naples have direct connections to Tangier. There is also a boat service between Gibraltar and Tangier. Note that ferries to Morocco are crowded in the summer time.

Air

There are flights from New York, Montreal, and various European cities to Casablanca as well as seasonal-charter flights to Agadir. International flights to Fez, Marrakesh, and Tangier are also available.

There are many airlines flying to Morocco, both budget and regular companies. You may also consider flying to Gibraltar or Malaga and take a ferry from Algeciras, Tarifa or Gibraltar to Morocco.



Morocco's main international entry point is the Mohammed V International Airport, 30 km southeast of Casablanca. Other international airports include: Fès Airport 15 km south of Fès at Saïss, Ibn Batouta Airport 18 km south of Tangier, Ménara Airport in Marrakesh and Rabat-Salé Airport, 10 km east of Salé.

For comprehensive information on all of Morocco's airports, please see the website of the Office National des Aéroports; <http://www.onda.ma/onda/an> (in French & Arabic).

6. TRANSPORTATION WITHIN MOROCCO

By taxi

Travelling by taxi is common in Morocco. There are two sorts: *petit taxi* used only within towns and *grand taxi* which can be used for trips between towns, and for larger groups. According to the law, all taxis in town should have a meter.

The *grand taxi* is a shared, generally long-distance taxi, with a fixed rate for specific routes. *Grand taxis* are usually found near main bus stops. They take six passengers and leave when full. If you want to leave immediately or you want extra space you can pay for any additional empty seats.

By car & motorcycle

If taking your own vehicle to Morocco, you need to bring your vehicle registration document and an International Driving Permit (many foreign licenses, including US and EU, are acceptable). A Green Card, proof of insurance for your vehicle, is required. Not all insurers cover Morocco.

International and local car hire companies have offices in major towns and cities. Car hire is generally not cheap. The minimum age for driving a hired car is 21. Most companies demand a returnable cash deposit unless you pay by credit card.

Fuel is not so common in the countryside so plan ahead and get a good map. Roads are varied and mixed with many cyclists, pedestrians and horse-drawn vehicles. It's compulsory for drivers and passengers to wear seat belts in cars. Road signs are in Arabic and French. Driving safely in Morocco takes practice and patience; be careful.

By bus or coach

A dense network of buses covers Morocco, with many private companies competing for business alongside the main national carrier, Compagnie de Transports Marocains (<http://www.ctm.ma/>).

CTM, Supratours and some smaller companies provide good comfort to reasonable prices. All bus companies charge for baggage separately. Local buses are cheaper, without air condition, and can be slow as they make many stops. They often take longer routes allowing you to see villages you would normally never get to.

By train

Trains are generally the best option because of their speed, frequency and comfort. The network is however limited. The major cities, Marrakech, Meknes, Fez, Tangier, Rabat, Casablanca, etc are all linked by reliable rail links. There are usually several trains every day to or from major towns. There is also a night train between Marrakech and Tangier.



Morocco's train network is run by the Office National des Chemins de Fer (<http://www.oncf.ma>). People are generally very sociable and friendly on the trains. Your fellow passengers will be more than happy to let you know where you are and when to get off.

By plane

Royal Air Maroc (<http://www.royalairmaroc.com>) operates regular services from Casablanca airport to Agadir, Dakhla, Fes, Marrakech, Ouarzazate, Oujda and Tangier.

By bicycle

Distances are great and those on bikes will need to carry all supplies with them, including any spare parts you may need, food and plenty of drinking water. You can transport bikes on buses and trains. Be careful with the traffic.

7. THE WEATHER

The Moroccan climate varies according to season and region. The coast has a warm, Mediterranean climate. Inland areas have a hotter, drier, continental climate. In the south, the weather is very hot and dry throughout most of the year, though temperatures can drop dramatically at night, especially in the months of December and January. In mountainous areas, like the Atlas range, temperatures often drop below zero. Mountain peaks remain snow-capped most of the year. Northern Morocco gets very wet and rainy during the winter. Rain falls from November to March in coastal areas. In the south, it gets bitterly dry and cold in the winter.

8. FOOD AND DRINKS

Food

Moroccan cuisine is often said to be among the best in the world, offering a generous and varied menu. It is in the Moroccan homes you find the best cooking of local dishes. Couscous, made from semolina grains, is the staple food for most Moroccans. It is commonly served together with a *tagine*, a spicy stew, or mixed with meat and vegetables. Almost all Moroccan restaurants uphold the tradition of serving couscous on Fridays. *Tagine* stews come in many flavors; chicken *tagine* with lemon and olives, honey-sweetened lamb or beef, fish or prawn *tagine* in a spicy tomato sauce. A popular Berber cuisine is *kaliya*, a combination of lamb, tomatoes, bell peppers and onion, served with couscous or bread. A Moroccan delicacy is *Pastilla*, made by layering thin pieces of dough between sweet, spiced meat and layers of almondpaste, baked and coated with powdered sugar. A popular starter is a warming bowl of *harira*, a soup made from lentils, chick peas, lamb stock, tomatoes and vegetables. Soups are also traditional breakfasts in Morocco. *Bissara*, a thick soup made from split peas and olive oil is another popular morning dish.

Water and drinks

As a rule, do not drink tap water in Morocco. It contains much higher levels of minerals than for example the water in Europe. If not accustomed, drinking the tap water will usually result in illness. It is enough to spoil a day or two.

A common drink any time of the day is sweetened mint tea. In terms of local alcohol, you can find locally brewed beer and a sort of vodka brewed from figs and flavored with mild anise.



9. BUSINESS HOURS

Office hours are approximately: Mon-Fri 08:30-12:00 and 15:00-18:30.

Public holidays

The biggest event on the Moroccan calendar is the month of Ramadan, when Muslims fast during daytime. Most restaurants, except the more touristic, are closed for lunch and things generally slow down. It is respectful to refrain from eating, drinking or smoking in public during the fast. At the end of the month is the holiday of Eid al-Fitr, when practically everything closes for as long as a week and transport is packed as everybody heads back to their home villages.

Muslim festivals are timed according to phases of the moon. The dates given below are approximations of public holidays.

2011

New Year's Day:	1 January
Proclamation of Independence:	11 January
Eid al-Mawlid, Birth of Mohammad:	15 February
Labour Day:	1 May
Feast of the Throne:	30 July
Oued Ed-Dahab Day, Allegiance Day:	14 August
The King and the People's Revolution:	20 August
King Muhammed's birthday:	21 August
Eid el-Fitr (End of Ramadan):	31 October
Eid al-Adha (Feast of the Sacrifice):	6 November
Anniversary of the Green March:	6 November
Independence Day:	18 November
Faith Muharram, Islamic New Year:	26 November

2012

New Year's Day:	1 January
Proclamation of Independence:	11 January
Eid al-Mawlid, Birth of Mohammad:	4 February
Labour Day:	1 May
Feast of the Throne:	30 July
Oued Ed-Dahab Day, Allegiance Day:	14 August
The King and the People's Revolution:	20 August
King Muhammed's birthday:	21 August
Eid el-Fitr (End of Ramadan):	19 August
Eid al-Adha (Feast of the Sacrifice):	26 October
Anniversary of the Green March:	6 November
Faith Muharram, Islamic New Year:	15 November
Independence Day	18 November

10. ELECTRICITY

The voltage in Morocco is generally 220 V, and outlets will fit the two-pin plug known as the Europlug. Watch out for American and Canadian appliances, which are made to use with 110 V. If your appliance is not "dual-voltage", you will need a power converter as well as an adapter.



11. TIME

Morocco time follows the Greenwich Mean Time (GMT). Morocco does not operate the Daylight-Saving Time.

12. INTERNET

Internet cafes are open late and are numerous in cities and towns with significant tourist traffic. Speeds are acceptable to excellent in the north, but can be a little on the slow side in rural areas. Most internet cafes will allow you to print and burn CDs for a small charge.

13. TELEPHONE/MOBILE

Country code: 212. Roaming agreements exist with international mobile phone companies. Coverage is mainly available in the cities in western Morocco.

Privately run *téléboutiques* provide phone cards and can be found throughout the country. Public telephones are available in city centres. To dial *out* of the country use 00 as prefix. You can also buy a local simcard in one of the numerous phone shops.

Useful numbers include: Information 160, International Information 120, Telegrams and telephone 140, and Intercity 100.

14. STANDARD MAIL/POSTAGE

The Moroccan postal service is generally reliable and offers a *post restante* service in major cities for a small fee. Items shipped as freight are inspected at the post office before they are sent, so wait until this has been done before you seal the box.

15. CLOTHING

Lightweight cottons and linens are worn during summer, with something warmer to wear in the evenings and in the mountains. Raingear is advisable in the wet season, particularly on the coast and in the mountains. Warmer wear is advisable in the winter months. You are recommended to be modest in what you wear. Shorts are generally not worn by Moroccan men or women; choose something longer. Short skirts and tank tops are also not advisable. Wear a bikini or swimsuit only at a pool or on a beach.

16. WOMEN TRAVELING ALONE

Women can expect a certain level of harassment in the form of nonstop greetings, leering and unwanted attention. It is best to ignore this attention. If need be, threatening to go to the police or the *brigade touristique* is effective.



17. HEALTH

Medicine

It is advisable to seek medical advice before travelling to Morocco and ensure that all appropriate vaccinations are up-to-date.

Malaria is present in the northern, coastal areas of the country but is rare. Take the usual precautions against being bitten; light colored clothing, insect repellent, etc.

Most ordinary prescription and over-the-counter medicines are widely available. Specialized prescriptions may be difficult to fill and availability of all medicines in rural areas is unreliable.

Ambulance

You can call an ambulance by dialing 15.

Hospitals

Adequate medical care is available in Morocco's largest cities, particularly in Rabat and Casablanca. Not all facilities meet high-quality standards. Specialized care or treatment may not be available. Medical facilities are adequate for non-emergency matters, particularly in the urban areas, but most medical staff will have limited or no English skills.

You can find a list of medical facilities and physicians in Morocco on the website of the US consulate, at: <http://morocco.usembassy.gov/service/professional-services/medical-information.html>