

TRIPS & SIPS

Castles Made of Sand

THE BOHO-CHIC MOROCCAN CITY OF ESSAOUIRA BECKONS WITH SUN, SAND, SEAFOOD AND SOUK-ING
BY SARAH BANCROFT



Essaouira is the windy city on the Atlantic coast of Morocco that's known for a laid-back vibe that attracted Jimi Hendrix, Bob Marley and Cat Stevens to it in the late 1960s and early '70s (think Talitha Getty in a flowing caftan). Today it's a draw for Europe's jet set—particularly during summer's Gnaoua World Music Festival, when the town transforms into Woodstock redux. Though we missed the big event this year, our visit to Essaouira's white-walled medina yielded other pleasures—namely, no cars, camel rides, cooking classes and a power shop-worthy souk.

STAY

Skip the hotel and book the **Atlantic Morocco**: a private four-bedroom traditional house with an interior lightwell and roof deck right inside the historic medina. The space is gorgeously done with local textiles and art, Modernist furniture, daybeds for lounging and panoramic views of town and sea. Your house manager can arrange excursions and drivers, and daily maid service is (holiday happily) included. Atlanticmorocco.com

SEA & SAND

When in Morocco, a morning at the beach is a must-do. Head down to Essaouira's sandy waterfront where dromedary rides can be booked caravan style (tip: wear a *djellaba* and head scarf to fit in with the British tourists). Start and finish at **Ocean Vagabond**—a Bohemian beach club that serves a cold local rosé with wood-fired pizzas in an atmosphere reminiscent of Le Club 55 in France's St. Tropez. Oceanvagabond.com

SPA

Book a traditional hammam at **Spa Cocooning** where, in a candlelit wet room, you'll be doused in warm water, rubbed down with locally produced argan oil and loofah-ed from head to toe with black soap made from argan husks. A strong orange blossom-scented massage will—quite literally, and in the best possible way—finish you off. Spacecocooning.com



SOUK

Things to look out for in the teeming traditional markets of Essaouira include Moroccan leather poufs, beautiful hand-loomed cotton blankets with striped edges and pompoms, Berber cashmere floor mats and carpets with embroidery made in the Atlas mountains, Turkish-style bath towels called *foutas* and men's leather slippers. Going earlier in the morning can result in discounted prices “for the first customer of the day” and bartering is expected. Bring an extra suitcase.

SHOP

A brand-new atelier has been added to the popular fashion concept store **Histoire de Filles** comprising a spice market, home décor shop and modern cooking school. Run by a French husband and wife, you'll find high-quality textiles and traditional glassware and tea services to take home as well kid-sized traditional Arabian hooded cloaks. [Facebook.com/histoiredefilles](https://www.facebook.com/histoiredefilles)

SOAK

Les Jardins du Villa Maroc, a 20-minute drive from the medina, is owned by the well-known **Villa Maroc** boutique hotel. For a small fee (\$35) hotel staff will transfer you to the inn's argan forest-nestled gardens and pool and feed you a delicious barbecue lunch on a pleasant patio among free-roaming tortoises and peacocks. Oh, and be certain to pick up a bottle of the Maroc's award-winning olive oil in the gift shop before you leave. Lesjardinsdevillamaroc.com

