

LATE BREAKS

■ KENYA FOR LITTLE ONES: For families wishing to flop after a fly-in safari experience, the Driftwood Club on the Kenyan coast is the perfect choice. The



palm-fringed beach feels safe to younger children, family rooms are thoughtfully positioned closest to the main area, and there's a toddlers' swimming pool plus lots of activities to enjoy. Food-wise, nothing is too much trouble when it comes to kids. A seven-night B&B stay costs £849 per adult or £343 per child (aged 5-11 inclusive, sharing with parents) including internal flights and transfers. International flights extra. Call AITO* member Expert Africa on 020 8232 9777 (www.expertafrica.com).

■ EXPLORE NORTH INDIA: TransIndus (020 8566 3739) offers an 11-day tour of Delhi, Agra, Jaipur, Udaipur and Mumbai, staying at luxurious Taj



hotels with a cruise from Mumbai to Elephanta Caves, a World Heritage Site, from £2,745, saving £1,500, incl 10 nights' B&B, international flights, transfers, internal travel and scheduled sightseeing. Departures in May.

■ COLOURFUL CUBA: DialAFlight (0844 556 6060) offers 11-night beach and city break from £1,329, saving £100, on selected Sept/Oct departures if booked by Apr 30, with return Virgin Atlantic flights, four nights' B&B at Havana's five-star Saratoga Hotel and seven nights' all-inclusive at



Sandals Royal Hicacos Resort & Spa.

■ EASTERN MED: Holland America Line (0843 374 2300) offers 11-night voyage on MS Noordam from £499 (cruise only), or fly-cruise package with Athens hotel stay and transfers from £1,299, departing May 6. Ex-Piraeus (Athens), ports of call



include Crete, Port Said and Alexandria (Cairo), for Pyramids, the Greek island of Rhodes and Kusadasi (for the ancient city of Ephesus)

It is one of the most atmospheric destinations on the tourist map. **Jon Perks** learns how to haggle in the souks of Marrakech

MARRAKECH is an assault on the senses. Every single one. The sights are teeming with colour – from the dyed yarns hanging to dry in the souks to the myriad shades of herbs and spices on sale in perfect pyramids.

Your ears echo with the muezzin's calls to prayer, the chatter of stallholders in the Djemaa el-Fna square and the constant beep of mopeds as they alert you to dive for cover in the narrow alleyways.

Your tastebuds are treated to all manner of delights, from tangy tagines to the freshest of squeezed orange juice and the refreshing mint tea (or 'berber whiskey' as the teetotal locals like to call it).

The smells are every bit as good – the aromas from the apothecary shops, the food wafting from the night-time food stalls in Djemaa el-Fna and the plants in the immaculate Marjorelle Gardens are just a few to mention.

You'll have plenty to touch, too, from silks and pottery to plenty of hands-on food. A visit to one of the

L It's easy to be caught up in the sights, sounds and colours of the souks

Marrakech is so different.

It's like a step back in time.

Apart from the ubiquitous beige taxis and mopeds on the roads, there are very few other acknowledgements that you're in the 21st century. Mobile phones and TVs are a rare sight, while mules and horse and cart (especially the horse-drawn carriages or caleches) are far more numerous.

The city is divided into two parts – old (the Medina) and new – and it's the former where you're most likely to spend the bulk of your time.

We stayed in the Mellah area of Marrakech, the old Jewish quarter to the south-east of the souks and Djemma el-Fna.

As with much of the Medina, it's a real warren of alleyways that all look the same, so it was a relief that our taxi from the airport dropped us right at the door of our riad.

We stayed at two different bases for the three-day visit, both part of the Sanssouci Collection. Le Nid is a four-bedroom villa with its own live-in butler, while Dar Les Cigognes is an 11-room boutique

Marvel at the markets of magical Marrakech

hotel adjacent to the Royal Palace.

The name means 'stork's nest', and a visit to the beautiful roof terrace – where you'll enjoy breakfast – shows just why.

Dotted along the palace walls, on chimneys and roofs within sight are huge white storks and their nests. Quite a sight – and a great photo opportunity.

Mellah is a great base, within five minutes' walk of our riad were the El Badii and Bahia Palaces. Entry is just 10 dirhams (around 77p) each.

Another must-see are the Marjorelle Gardens, a short taxi ride (about £1.95) from the Medina into the new part of the city.

Opened to the public in 1947 by French painter Jacques Marjorelle, they fell into disrepair during the 1960s and 70s until designer Yves Saint Laurent bought the house and gardens and restored them.

If you take a cab to Marjorelle, or anywhere else in Marrakech, it's always worth asking the fare before getting in. The drivers will happily overcharge unsuspecting visitors, but won't object if you haggle.

Haggling is part of the culture, and the souks are the place to be if you're a bargain hunter.

A myriad alleyways teeming with life – the constant stream of mopeds and bicycles and children offering to show you the way (normally to their parents' shop) – it's the real heart of Marrakech.

As each part of the souks is dedicated to a different trade – from leather goods to metalwork, fabrics to woodwork and spices – you can pick up some great souvenirs.

The rule of thumb is to go in with a price you will be happy to pay. The first price quoted by owners will be way over what you have in mind, but they'll never let it go without making a profit, so feel free to throw an 'insulting' sum at them.

We found on more than one occasion that, having come to an impasse, we walked away, the shop owner suddenly coming down in 70p increments for every step we took away from his stall.

It's easy to be caught up in the sights, sounds and colours of the souks, so keep your possessions close and take the minimum with you. It's no worse than the streets of Paris or Barcelona for pickpockets, however.

After the souks, the main square of Djemma el-Fna is another



>> A souk scene in Marrakech, above, and the beautiful El Badii Palace in the Moroccan city, above right, a must-see for visitors

must-see. Snake charmers, fortune tellers, monkey trainers, old men dressed in traditional costume – the daytime square has it all.

Moroccan food is another delight of a visit to Marrakech. From the delicious tagines to couscous to pastillas (beautiful filo pastry 'pies' filled with pigeon or chicken) and great salads, you'll find plenty of good value places to eat.

One perfect oasis is Terrasse des Epices (and its sister restaurant Café des Epices), the former in Souk Cherifia, at the heart of the souks.

A chilled environment, the terrace gets busy at lunchtimes and with good reason – great food and music.

The riads are also a wonderful world away from the hustle and bustle, and Dar Les Cigognes is no exception. Step off the busy street and you're transported into a tranquil world. The rooms all

overlook a central courtyard and are beautifully decorated, with original paintings, traditional tapestries and simple yet elegant furniture.

As well as the roof terrace, Dar Les Cigognes also boasts its own hammam, where couples can share in the cleaning and massage ritual. Public hammams separate the sexes.

Morocco is a Muslim country, so women should respect the customs and not bare much flesh in public, and while alcohol is available at many top-end restaurants, it's not freely available and drunkenness is frowned upon.

Covering up and going without booze is a small price to pay for the experiences of Marrakech.



TRAVEL FILE

JON PERKS stayed at Le Nid and Dar Les Cigognes as guest of the Sanssouci Collection.

■ A night for two people, staying in a superior room at Le Nid in mid-June this year, starts from around £184.

■ A night for two people, staying in an equivalent room at Dar Les Cigognes starts from £138.

■ For special offers including extra nights for free, and discounted deals, see www.sanssoucicollection.com

■ Take a look at The Rough Guide to Morocco before you go – it's invaluable for advice.



>> The roof terrace at Dar Les Cigognes and a souk stallholder, inset

