

Morocco: Culture

Morocco has an interesting cultural mix of people and beliefs. Whilst many looking in would assume the main ethnic group of the people is Arabic, it is in fact Berber (or *Amazigh*, to give them their preferred name). With a history dating back 4,000 years, it is difficult to ascertain exactly how many of the population are Berber, but it is thought to be approx. 40% although twice that make claim to Berber heritage in their family roots. The remaining are Arab, Moor or Jewish. It is difficult to tell how many Algerians have relocated to the cities of Morocco as temporary (legal and illegal) economic migrants. The geopolitical tensions between the two countries as part of the '*Arab Springs*' protests have been raging for decades, and many Algerians have moved to Morocco in search of a better life, perhaps also falling to *bright lights syndrome* in the process.

Berbers can be broadly split into three distinct tribes:

- Riffian (north) – smallest of the groups, remaining in the boundary of the Rif Mountains.
- Zayanes (Middle Atlas Mountains) – many remain nomadic, moving with their livestock with the changing seasons.
- Shilhah (Anti Atlas Mountains) – largest of the tribes and often viewed as being the most 'pure' Berber language.

Their language is commonly referred to as *Tamazight*, although the dialects vary greatly even within miles of each other.

Originally the Berbers followed a Christian or Jewish faith until Islam came in the 9th and 10th century. Until recently, the government had gone to great lengths to reduce the influence of the Berber culture, although with improved education and cultural initiatives, this has begun to change in the last few decades. Mostly now, Berbers live in and around the Atlas Mountains and Arabs and Moors are mostly found in urban areas.

Suggested reading

- <https://www.journeybeyondtravel.com/blog/tribes-history-berbers-morocco.html>

Suggested reading (general)

- <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/morocco>
- <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mo.html>
- <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-14123260>