

# MARRAKECH

## BACKGROUND TO MARRAKECH

### RESOURCE 1

#### OVERVIEW

If you have never been to Marrakech before, prepare to have your senses under full assault! This is a city that provides an excellent opportunity to study first-hand the form and development of a city in an MIC (according to the World Bank, 2017). Its ancient town contrasts well with its untypical growth during the colonial period and its more typical growth during the latter part of the 20th and 21st century.

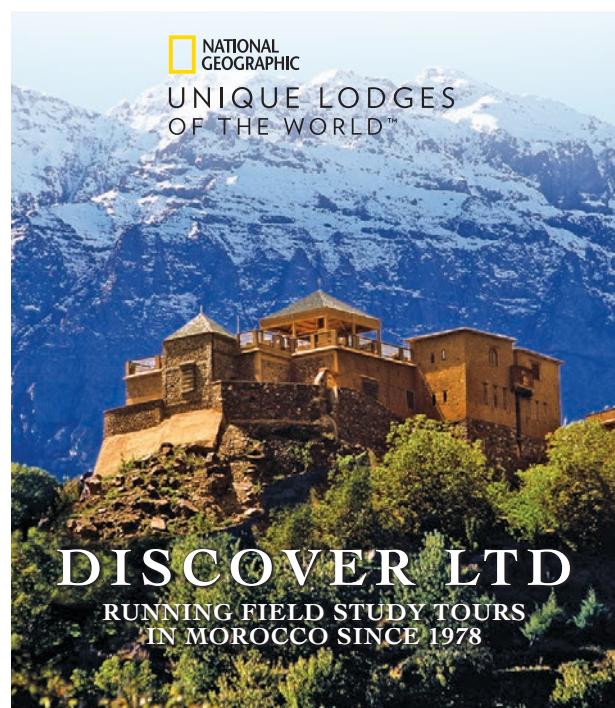
Marrakech provides students with studies into issues such as globalisation, sustainability, water and energy security and issues surrounding climate change. Since independence from the French in 1956, Marrakech has undergone considerable change, with rural emigration from the Atlas and sub-Saharan regions, new methods of cultivation in the plains and the development of a sizeable tourist industry combining to make it today the largest modern trading centre outside Casablanca.

#### Modern Marrakech

Unlike much of Morocco, Marrakech is very much in the present. Its population has risen dramatically from 745,541 in 1994 to 1.7 million in 2018. It has a thriving industrial quarter and remains the most important market and administrative centre of southern Morocco. None of this is to suggest, however, a lack of disparity; there is heavy unemployment in the city (as throughout the rest of the country) and intense poverty but travelling through the city will leave you with a predominant impression of the vibrant life and dynamic activity taking place here. Unusually for this country, this does not apply exclusively to the new town of Gueliz. The medina, part ruin at the beginning of the 20th century, was renewed and expanded over the years of French rule, yet it retains no less significant a role in the modern city. With the exception of the Koutoubia mosque, the medina is not a place of great monuments, instead gaining its beauty and 'pull' as a result of its lively atmosphere and situation - the latter being very spectacular with the tallest peaks of the Atlas stacked hard behind the town and towering through the haze.

#### Development of Marrakech

Marrakech is a Berber rather than an Arab city, embracing the traditional metropolis of Atlas tribes; Mahgrebis from the plains, Saharan nomads and of former slaves originating from beyond the desert



from the Sudan, Senegal and the ancient kingdom of Timbuktu. All of these strands have shaped the souk and the way of life in the city. Its importance historically was as a trading centre on a number of key trading routes between north and south and to the Atlantic ports. As the capital of the relatively prosperous agricultural region of the semi-arid Haouz Plain, it retains this significance today. In recent years its population has grown as a result of in-migration from the rural areas of the Atlas and south. However, it has also been affected by out-migration to the coastal areas of Casablanca and Rabat, as these cities have expanded.

## The medina

The oldest part of the town is the medina that is found within the old city walls. This is an area in which residential, administrative, recreational, industrial and service functions are all juxtaposed in a jumble of narrow streets and alleyways. Few buildings are very tall and it is often very difficult to identify their function from the outside, although within the medina there are distinctive zones or quarters, each of which has a specific function, e.g. the wood working quarter, the textile quarter, the metal working quarter, etc. To some extent, this part of the town is increasingly being influenced by tourism but its essential character remains intact. The CBD does not exist in the European sense and it is impossible to delimit whilst it is also difficult to identify the residential characteristics from outside the buildings. Within each street there are likely to be both rich and poor people.



## Djemaa el-Fna

It is said that prior to gaining Independence, the Djemaa el-Fna was *'by daylight...shockingly disappointing, like a night club in the glare of the honest morning light.'* It was a bland and oddly shaped square that accommodated buses of tourists entertained by traditionally dressed sellers and musicians. After the final call-to-prayer sounded it became a very different square indeed; smartly dressed locals and entertainers would begin to pour into the open, ready to enjoy a meal at one of the many pop-up restaurants that appeared, listen to local storytellers and watch the entertainers late into the night. Barnaby Rogerson says *'in the darkness, there is a precious sense of potential otherness here, for an evening in the Djemaa el-Fna is arguably a truer experience of what it would have been like in a Roman Forum.'* However, following the 1956 independence from France, King Mohammed V quickly went to work at removing the pro-France Berber culture from the square, such was his disapproval of the activities that went on there, and replaced it instead with...a carpark!

Shortly after the transformation of the square, Eleanor Roosevelt and Sir Winston Churchill each visited King Mohammed V in Marrakech. To the King's surprise, both of his guests were hugely disappointed to find out the fate of the square and the loss of such a vibrant atmosphere. He promised to restore the square back to its former glory in time for their next visit, and so he did.

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