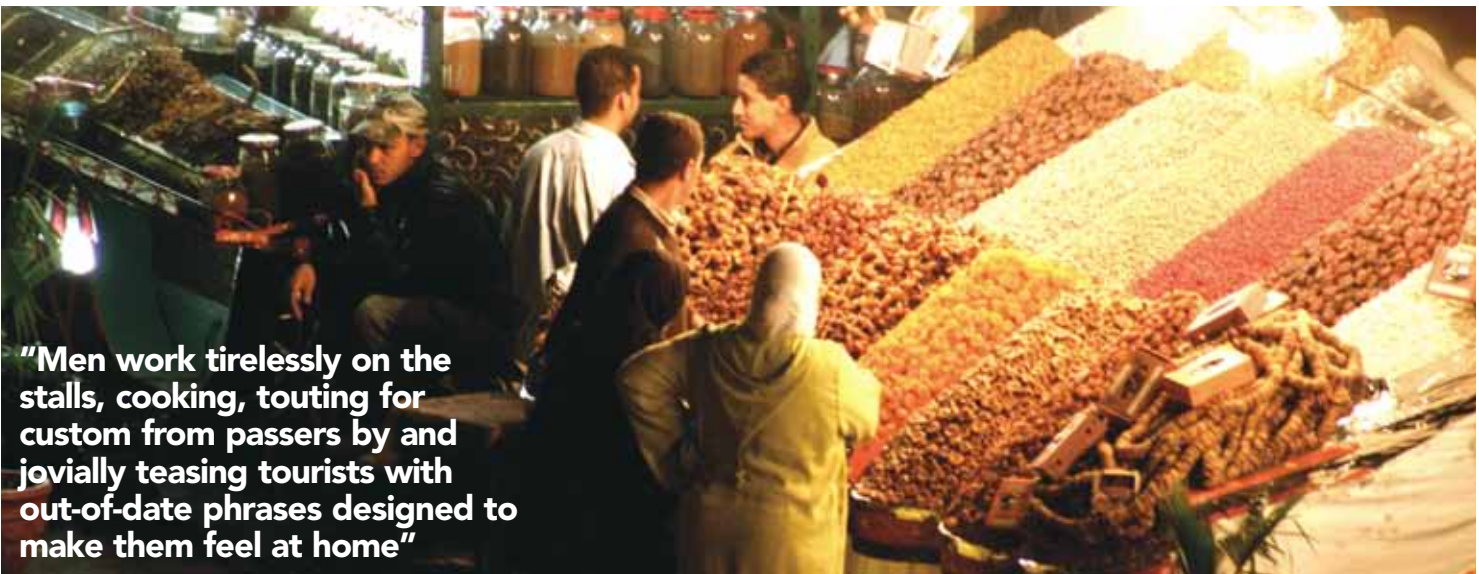
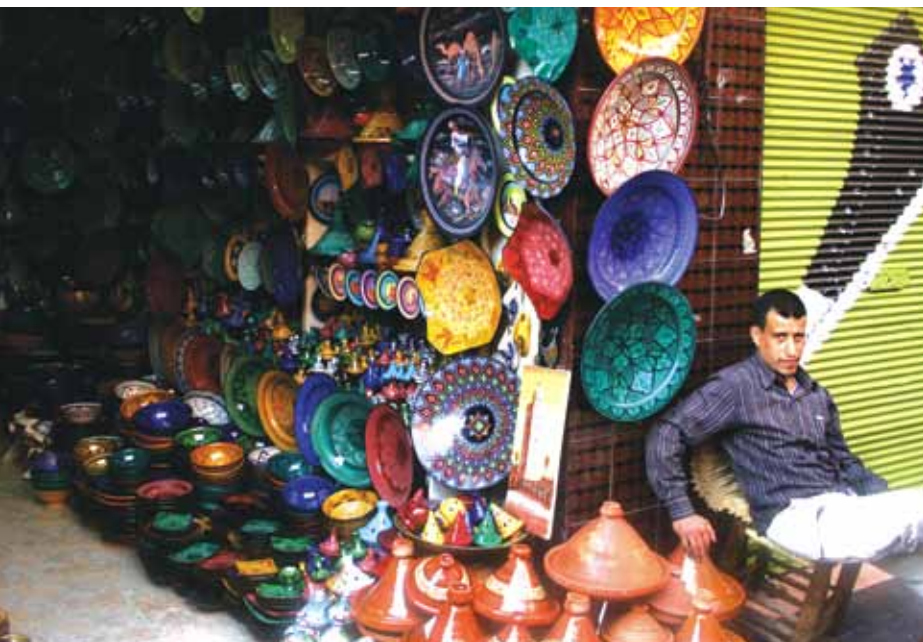


Morocco *morsels*

Avid traveller and photographer **Amy Edwards** visits Morocco for an adventure of the palate



"Men work tirelessly on the stalls, cooking, touting for custom from passers by and jovially teasing tourists with out-of-date phrases designed to make them feel at home"



Disembarking from the bus, I crossed Place de la Foucauld with the mission of finding my hostel. In the distance I could see a glow across the horizon and hear a faint beating. As I continued, the beating grew louder and the lights brighter, until I found myself on the cusp of the mesmerising square of the Djemaa El-Fna: Marrakech's beating heart, enveloped with excitement.

Djemaa El-Fna has two guises. During the day it is a vast square, littered with carts selling fresh squeezed orange juice, or piled high with mountains of dried figs, apricots and dates – people amble around nibbling as they go, stopping occasionally to watch the snake charmers or have a monkey placed on their shoulder.

Cafes frame the paradoxically nonchalant energy and there is a general quiet buzz in the air. At night, the vast square transforms into a warren of stalls offering Tagines (one of Morocco's most traditional dishes – a stew of meat, fruit, vegetables and potatoes, named after the clay pot in which it is cooked); Briwat Bil Kefta (meat cigars); and seafood grills. The air hangs heavy with the scent of preserved lemons, boiling lambs' heads and the mix of more than 30 spices - Ras el Hanout - which creates the distinctive flavours of the pots that bubble away through the evening.

Men work tirelessly on the stalls, cooking, touting for custom from passers by and jovially teasing tourists with out-of-date phrases designed to make them feel at home. Being from England, I was called 'Fish n Chips' on numerous occasions!

Old friends and new commune round the stalls, dipping fresh cooked bread into plates of whatever that stall has to offer, and dishes are hurriedly passed back and forth by the fraught waiters. Deliciously sweet Moroccan mint tea flows freely into glasses smeared by fingertips covered in tasty tagine juices not yet licked clean by the diners.

For those that venture beyond the Djemaa El-Fna, there awaits a plethora of stimulation for the senses in

TRAVEL MOROCCO



“Steaming bowls of Harira (a thick soup of chickpeas, lentils and tomatoes, infused with the flavour of marrow bones) are devoured before the Tagine is presented and the pallet is later cleansed with oranges while Sufi music is played”



the souks beyond. Ras el Hanout mingles with amber soap and argan oil, scented with oranges and cloves as tourists and locals alike haggle over the price of various wares. It's not unusual to be invited into the little shops by hospitable owners for a glass of tea, flavoured with orange or mint and plenty of sugar, and all manner of business is conducted as the tea pot steams in the background.

Marrakech is not the pinnacle of the culinary delights that Morocco has to offer though. Just half an hour out of the busy and vibrant city, you will find yourself in the Ourika Valley in the High Atlas Mountains, where roadside cafes sell Tagines made with uncomplicated finesse, melting together seasonable vegetables, fruits and meat flavoured by the refined balance of the all important ras el hanout, cooked according to taste, not recipe. The result is a dish which delicately marries the sweet and savoury with a subtle spice which heats you from within as cool mountain air creeps in.

Those who choose to travel at all around Morocco's stunning mountain scenes or desert-scapes will undoubtedly stop to refuel a weary body. Typical fare in roadside cafes is omelette, served sizzling in a Tagine pot base presented in a multitude of colours from the added spices, tomatoes, vegetables or meat. The fried and buttery semolina-based Harsha bread may be served on the side for you to mop up the juices as you devour the sustenance that will revive you for the next leg of your journey.

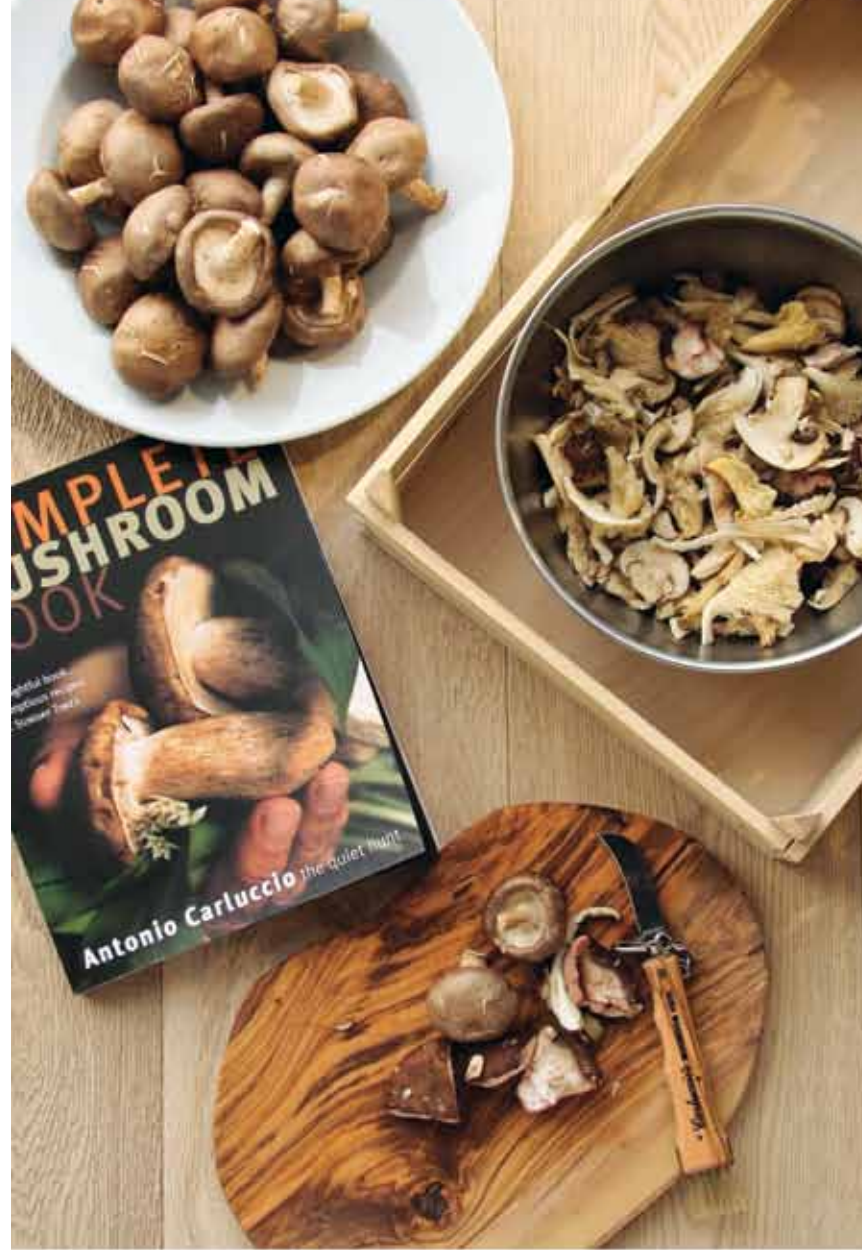
Anyone venturing into the desert areas may be fortunate enough to share a meal with the Berber people, the indigenous race of North Africa. Steaming bowls of Harira (a thick soup of chickpeas, lentils and tomatoes, infused with the flavour of marrow bones) are devoured before the Tagine is presented



and the pallet is later cleansed with oranges while Sufi music is played, using water containers as makeshift drums whilst people dance and celebrate round the campfire under a stunning star-scattered sky.

Returning to Marrakech, enthusiastic tasters may wish to recreate some of the mouth-watering moments in their memories and Marrakech is fully equipped with an abundance of utensils and tagines to help you along the way – some display stunning and intricate designs while others remain plain and raw, certain that its contents need no dressing to make the mouth water.

Bartering to your acceptable fee will certainly leave you feeling in need of refreshment and as you cast your eyes towards any nook and cranny you will surely see bakeries selling Briouat (savoury or sweet pastry covered with warqa - a paper-thin Moroccan dough) or croissants, indicative of Morocco's French influences from times past. Alternatively you could wander back to Djemaa El-Fna and pick up a bag of honey-roasted cashews to carry you through until once again the coal-fires of the night market are stoked and the pots begin to bubble, ready to delight your taste buds.



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