

## MOROCCO

Morocco is an Arab kingdom in the western part of the Maghreb in North Africa and is officially known as the Kingdom of Morocco. Morocco borders Algeria to the east and south west and the Western Sahara to the south and across the Strait of Gibraltar from Spain. It covers an area of 446,550 kilometers and has a population of 36.3 million. Rabat is the capital but Casablanca is the country's largest city. The official language is Arabic but Berber dialects and French are also spoken. Islam is the main religion and there are many beautiful mosques and minarets in the country. Morocco has a rich culture and heritage that stems from Arabic, Berber, African, French and European influences due to different rulers and protectorates over their history. It is a semi constitutional monarchy with a king and an elected parliament.

It has a rich history dating back to Paleolithic times through Berber, Arab, Saadi and Alawites dynasties and in recent history Spanish and French Protectorates up until 1956 when the French Protectorate ended and independence formed the Kingdom of Morocco.

Tourism is one of the most important sectors of the economy focusing on its culture and ancient cities and sites which focus on the rich heritage of ancient Berber, Roman and Islamic history.

Moroccan cuisine is very diverse taking influences from Moorish, French, Mediterranean and European cuisines. Spices are used extensively in cooking and the most commonly eaten dishes are couscous, tagines and a popular soup Hahira to break the fast of Ramadan. Mint tea is the most popular drink and always offered to visitors often in small glasses.

Architecture often consists of beautiful mosaics and buildings set around a middle courtyard. Literature and art are influenced by Arabic, Berber, French and Spanish and over centuries has attracted many artists and scholars. Music is mainly of Arabic and Berber origins however western music is becoming more popular amongst the younger generations.