

Saïdia
IN MOROCCO





Saïdia



- 5 Editorial
- 6 Saïdia in all its glory
- 8 The Mediterranean bay
- 10 Saïdia in a new light
- 14 Sports and leisure activities
- 16 Not to be missed out on
- 18 Excursions in the region
- 22 An out-of-the-ordinary destination
- 24 Information and useful addresses



A holiday to put you back on your feet again

Editorial



*Beach in a cove
near Nador*

Morocco's Oriental region - from the Mediterranean to the gates of the desert

A vast area stretching across eastern Morocco, from Saïdia on the shores of the Mediterranean to the Saharan oasis of Figuig, bordered to the west by the Central Rif Mountains and the Moulouya Valley and to the east by the Algerian frontier, the Oriental region offers visitors an unparalleled diversity of reliefs and landscapes. It enjoys a Mediterranean climate with scant rainfall in the north (Saïdia), while the low-lying Beni Snassen Mountains receive their fair share of rain, the high steppe plateaus of Tendirra and Bouarfa are arid, and conditions in the south (Figuig) are truly pre-Saharan.

In the past, few tourists cared to venture into this remote frontier region. Not that it lacked potential – it was just waiting for its merits to be recognised. The development of Saïdia as a seaside holiday destination culminated in the creation of the new Saïdia resort, just a couple of hours' flight from major European cities and served by two international airports (Oujda and Nador) – a perfect arrival point and an ideal base for exploration of the region as a whole.



Saïdia in all its glory



Saïdia's architecture is a harmonious blend of ancient and modern

Saïdia: a long tradition of bathing

A particularly mild climate, 14 kilometres of fine sandy beach, shallow, crystal clear water teeming with fish and seafood, a coastline fringed to the west with 200 kilometres of magnificent bays, and a varied hinterland ideal for excursions of all shapes and sizes – just some of the natural riches that make Saïdia such a rewarding holiday destination.

The town of Saïdia dates back to 1883, when the Sultan, Hassan I, built a Kasbah there which can still be visited today. In 1913, under the French Protectorate, resident Europeans discovered the site, which came to enjoy a certain measure of popularity as a small local seaside resort.

Following Independence, its fine beach continued to attract bathing enthusiasts, and the town became one of North-eastern Morocco's most frequented centres of national tourism.

More recently, major investment has opened the resort up to international tourism, with the creation of an 840-berth marina, construction of 4 and 5-star hotels, residential apartments and the "Medina Center" shopping and leisure complex, and laying out of three golf courses... In a nutshell, Saïdia has become a new-generation seaside resort boasting every facility under the sun.





Marina Saïdia offers all the services to be expected of a major yachting harbour, and is set in elegant residential surroundings

Saïdia, “Blue Pearl” of the Mediterranean

Along the seafront, the resort’s luxury hotels offer a full range of top-quality services and amenities for all kinds of leisure activities are at hand, including golf courses, tennis courts, paddle-tennis court, spa, and a fitness club.

Medina Center, with its gateways, narrow little streets, squares, terraces, shops and cafés, has all the atmosphere of a classic Moroccan medina – great for shopping or for just hanging about in – while the resort’s 6-kilometre corniche, “Paseo Marítimo”, provides the perfect setting for a leisurely stroll at whatever time of day or night.

Marina Saïdia currently has over 800 moorings available, and there are plans for a full 1350 in the near future, which

will make it the Mediterranean’s third largest yachting harbour. The marina offers a full range of services, from a harbour master’s office providing meteorological and communication service to maintenance, security, a yacht club, and a shopping precinct.

There is certainly no lack of restaurants in Saïdia, serving a vast choice of fish and seafood dishes based on produce caught at the resort itself, or brought in from Nador or Ras El Ma (“Cape of Water”) nearby. There’s also plenty of international cuisine on offer, along with typically Moroccan gastronomy, delicious sea-bean paella or rather more classic suggestions such as chicken or beef brochettes – even pizzas!



Ras el Ma

The Mediterranean bay



The coastline is fringed with a succession of magnificent sandy beaches

Saïdia is also an endless succession of beaches, each vying with the other in character and charm. Bordered by lush greenery, they offer everything you could wish for in unparalleled natural surroundings. Here in Saïdia, you can laze away the time as much as you like and still come up with daily fresh discoveries!

The Moulouya nature reserve

Saïdia beach reaches as far as the Oued Moulouya estuary, a wetland where many species of migrating birds spend the winter. The ornithological nature reserve here is a protected area, and easy to get to from Saïdia itself.

Ras El Ma beach

Cross the bridge over the Moulouya, continue on for a few kilometres, and you come to the fishing village of Ras El Ma and its beach, sheltered by the mighty cliff that overlooks it and all the more appealing for the miniature eucalyptus wooded dunes that adorn it.

Kariat Arekmane

25 km before Nador, Kariat Arekmane beach stretches for a full 7 km, several of which lie to the south of a chain of coastal lagoons. The beach is easy to get to, and is renowned for the excellent bathing on offer there and its fine golden sands.

Mar Chica lagoon

The Mar Chica lagoon at Nador is an altogether magnificent piece of natural seascaping, with a total surface area of some 115 km² and from 0.5 to 7 metres in depth. Separated from the sea by a thin ribbon of dunes 24 kilometres long, it communicates with the Mediterranean via a channel known as the Boucana pass and is bordered by fine shell-sand beaches – an ideal destination for fishing and water sports enthusiasts.



Mar Chica lagoon



Relaxing in the shade of a beach umbrella, with an eternally blue sea stretching before you - the art of living Mediterranean style!



Boucana beach

The fishing village of Boucana, close to Nador's port of Beni Ansar, boasts a delightful horseshoe-shaped beach very well worth the trip. "Whoever visits Boucana will never forget the splendour of its salted landscapes and infinite dunes – an 'earthen tongue' that could recount more than one chapter in the region's history" (Tawiza)

Oued Kert beach

This 8-kilometre long beach starts west of the mouth of Oued Kert and extends as far as Pointe Negri. Its waters reach considerable depth.

El Kallat beach

El Kallat beach, a remote stretch of sand lying between two cliffs 34 km west of Nador, is almost 5 kilometres in length and bordered by a strip of forestland. It is well-known as a bathing spot, and is busiest at weekends and in the summer, a popular bathing and sports fishing destination.

Saïdia in a new light

An endless round of festivals!



*Open-air festivities,
music, dance – so-
mething for everyone!*

The International Raï Festival, Oujda

The festival takes place every July, celebrating a style of music that originated in Algeria and bringing in top Moroccan and Algerian singers and musicians to liven up Oujda's summer evenings. Raï music and the artists who perform it, enjoy enormous popularity, which explains the hundreds of thousands of visitors that the festival attracts – so many, that Oujda is ranked as the number-one audience draw in Morocco outside Casablanca.

Gharnati Music Festival, Oujda

Gharnati means “from Granada”, and refers to a highly sophisticated Arabo-Andalusian musical tradition developed

by the Arabs during their occupation of Spain from the 8th to the 15th century, and perpetuated today by a variety of orchestras and associations. Oujda has become the tradition's preserve, and the Gharnati Music Festival is held there every other year in the month of March.

The Reggada Festival, Saïdia

Held every August, the festival pays tribute to Reggada, a musical form born of Beni Snassen tribal tradition, and part of a local artistic heritage that has broken free of its confines to inspire musicians at national and international level. The festival also features top names in Raï and Gharnati music and in the popular arts.



Reggada folklore troop



*When a treat for the
taste buds is also a
treat for the eyes*

Arts and crafts revisited

Morocco's craftspeople know how to adapt to changing times, and today draw their inspiration from two sources, tradition and modern creativity, combining design, colours and age-old know-how in perfect harmony – a marriage of ancient and modern that inspires novel ideas and has resulted in production of high-quality wares in line with contemporary taste.

Sheep breeding is of major importance in Morocco's Oriental region. Wool is produced in large quantities here, and is processed for manufacture of clothing (djellabas and burnous), blankets (hourabah), and carpets. As elsewhere in the Kingdom, production of woollen carpets follows strictly defined rules with regard to length of interior thread, motif design, and numbers of knots. Wool is used in its natural state in four colours – white, black, grey, and brown. Local crafts people also makes good use of esparto grass from the high plateaus, employing it in the manufacture of matting and basketwork items for household use. The creation of a new range of artefacts combining esparto with wrought iron (tables, stools, and the like) shows that Moroccan craftwork can keep in line with the times while losing nothing of its deep-rooted identity.



Mejboud embroidery, an art passed down from the age of the Ottomans

An authentic regional cuisine

Moroccan cuisine is world famous for its rich and subtle variety of flavours, and you can get a foretaste of its many delights by sampling some of the region's authentic traditional dishes. From local specialities to mouth-watering pastries, the most demanding of gourmets will find nothing to complain of – so dig in!

Le **Karane**, an Oujdi speciality, is a smooth puree made from flour and chickpeas, a close relative of Nice's Socca, Genoa's Farinata and Palermo's Panelle. It would be a real shame if you left the region without trying it!

Berkoukech is a highly spiced soup made from wheat and seasonal vegetables. Traditionally, it is served on the third day following the birth of a child, and is renowned for its nutritive properties.

As for pastries, the region is famous (among other things) for its **Kaaks**, crispy ring-shaped biscuits made from flour, aniseed, cardamom and sesame seeds, and for its **Makrouts**, delicious little semolina cakes stuffed with dates and fried before being immersed in honey. Served with tea or accompanying traditional bread, these and other pastries are the order of the day on special occasions – or simply when you're feeling peckish...



Saïdia – a new perspective on holidaymaking!



Sports and leisure activities



*All the many pleasures
the sea has to offer
await you in Saïdia...*

A Mediterranean playground

Saïdia enjoys constant moderate prevailing winds, warm, calm seas, and a very pleasant climate ideal for water sports and activities of all kinds.

Taking to the sea

Saïdia's marina and yachting harbour are on hand for all those who enjoy living on the crest of a wave – light yachts, cabin cruisers, sailing boats and catamarans, the choice is yours! And those in search of more extreme sensations will find all the equipment and advice they need to practise their chosen sport safely and pleasurably.

Down in the depths

Diving in Saïdia's crystal-clear waters gives you hands-on experience of the flora and fauna inhabiting the seas along the south coast of the Mediterranean. With no strong currents to contend with, a wide variety of diving sites specifically set aside for the activity and all the necessary equipment available in situ, the resort is an ideal destination for divers of all levels of skill.

Sea fishing

Saïdia's coastal waters boast an extraordinary variety of fish species, providing fishing enthusiasts with all the sport they can handle. Locations and equipment are available to all comers, ensuring perfect conditions for a good day's catch.





...along with a good many other pleasures on land!



Getting into the swing

Saïdia has three 18-hole golf courses at your disposal, so get out and make the utmost of the sun and the fresh sea air on over 210 hectares of greens designed by internationally renowned golf architect Francisco Segales, and ranked as some of the finest not only in Morocco itself, but in the Mediterranean region as a whole. 3 courses for 3 times the pleasure!

Off into the hinterland

The surrounding countryside has some truly magnificent landscapes in store for you. Fresh discoveries await you with every step you take – unimagined worlds and breathtaking views over the Mediterranean, along with plenty of opportunity to acquaint yourself with the local plant life, much of which is unique to the region

Atop an Arab thoroughbred

Morocco is famed for the sturdy elegance of its thoroughbreds, and it's a real pleasure to actually ride one. Riding lessons are on offer during the summer season, along with horseback treks along the beach or into the surrounding countryside.

The game's afoot!

Nor do hunting enthusiasts have anything to complain of here. The Beni Snasen Mountains are particularly well stocked with game. As long as you have a hunting license (available on the spot) and depending on season, you can hunt partridges, quail, hares, and wild boar.

Not to be missed out on

The Moulouya River mouth: listed as a Site of Biological and Ecological Interest (SIBE)

The Moulouya river mouth is just a few kilometres from Saïdia and easy to get to by car. It is listed as a SIBE (Site of Biological and Ecological Interest) and is an area of extraordinary biodiversity – over 4500 hectares of wetland, reedy marshland, dunes, and tamarisk forest.

This is one of the very best sites for wintering waterbirds to be found anywhere along the Mediterranean coasts – great egrets, purple herons, herring gulls, Mediterranean gulls and turtle doves all flock here.



*Nature reserve on
the mouth of Oued
Moulouya*

The Moulouya river mouth has plenty to offer any nature lover, and makes a very pleasant outing for anyone interested in exploring this legendary river, the second longest water course in Morocco.

The Beni Snassen massif: nature at its most generous

You really can't spend a holiday in Saïdia without going to have a look at the Beni Snassen Mountains, a small Mediterranean massif reaching a height of 1,535 metres and a natural and cultural treasure house.



A mountain in the Beni Snassen massif



Cape of Three Forks



The Camel Cave

The Zegzel Gorge is one of the region's most spectacular geological formations. The road winding through it, passing back and forth from one side of the oued to the other, may require prudence on the part of the driver, but ensures you miss out on none of the natural splendour around you – terraced orchards planted with fig, pomegranate, orange and medlar trees, and the wild roses and oleanders that flourish along the river's banks.

The Camel Cave, so called because the shape of one of its stalagmites bears a strange resemblance to the beast, is the largest cave in the region. It is lit so that visitors can fully appreciate the stalagmites and stalactites so sublimely sculpted by the hand of nature. The site is also a major attraction for potholing enthusiasts.

The Pigeon Cave is a remarkable prehistoric site, inhabited between 21,000 and 10,800 years BC. Digs there have unearthed the remnants of at least four successive prehistoric cultures.

As you approach Tafoughalt, a superb panorama of the Moulouya Valley and the Mediterranean opens up before you. The town, 44 km from Saïdia, is a little mountain resort set 850 metres above sea level. Pleasantly cool in summer –

thanks to the breezes blowing in from the sea, which is only 30 km away as the crow flies – it makes an ideal base for excursions into the mountains. Tree lovers will be in their element here, for the Beni Snassen massif is home to an amazing variety of species, including eucalyptus, oak, pine, thuja, and doum (dwarf palm). Don't forget, though, that Tafoughalt is a mountain village, and it often snows there in wintertime!

The Great Lakes and the Cape of Three Forks

The Machraa Hammadi and Mohammed V dams on Oued Moulouya have created immense reservoirs to help irrigate the arid region and top up water levels. These great artificial lakes are also ideal for fishing and water sports. Coming from Saïdia, they can be reached via Zaïo to the north, along the El-Aïoun Taourirt road to the south, or directly from the Beni Snassen massif.

For anybody who loves the sea, the Cape of Three Forks to the north of Nador is one of Morocco's most beautiful sites – a mountainous cape teeming with birdlife and plunging down into crystal clear turquoise waters. Breath-taking views await you from the cliff tops and sumptuous beaches at the foot of the lighthouse – not to forget a magical underwater paradise if you're a diving enthusiast...

Excursions in the region



*Bab Al Gharbi in
Oujda's medina*

Oujda - a much underrated city

You won't regret paying a visit to the town of Oujda, a fascinating crossroads between North Africa and Europe, with a long Berber, Ottoman and Arabo-Andalusian history behind it.

The medina

The medina lies in the very heart of the city, filled with life, colour and carefree bustle, and bathed in radiant Mediterranean sunshine. Take a lazy stroll through narrow little streets teeming with people wandering hither and thither about their business. Let yourself be drawn by the scents of a thousand and one spices, of mint tea, coffee, and beignets, happening upon this or that little square or archway-lined courtyard where the local weavers sit busy at their craft... And don't miss out on Souk El Ma (the "Water Market"), where water for keeping local garden green was once sold.

A fascinating variety of architecture

Little remains of the walls that once surrounded the medina except for a couple of its gateways – Bab Al Gharbi and Bab Sidi Abdelouahab. The latter was built in the 13th century and is the better preserved of the two. The square that faces it once served as a resting place for caravaneers arriving in the city from the East.

Built in 1298, the Al Kabir Mosque (the "Great Mosque") with its three fountains is the city's oldest monument. To the left of its main entrance, a narrow little side street (almost impossibly so in parts!) leads, to one of the medina's architectural highpoints – the Merinid Medersa. Although of no great size, it is regarded as a masterpiece of Merinid art, and is a living testimony to the city's rich cultural heritage.



The Essebti Palace



Bab Al Gharbi square in the Oujda medina



One of the Great Mosque's fountains

Dar Essebti Palace stands just outside the medina and is of considerable architectural interest. Very well worth visiting, it was built in 1938 and was originally the residence of a wealthy merchant. Today it is a venue for ceremonies, cultural events, and exhibitions, and also houses the head office of the Gharnati Music Research and Studies Centre. The city also boasts some fine examples of architecture left over from Protectorate days (the Banque du Maroc, the former Staff Headquarters, and the old railway station) as well as a number of more recent creations of interest.

A city of parks and gardens

Oujda is a city open to the air, adorned with lovingly tended parks and flower-filled gardens. Not far from the medina, Lalla Aïcha Park, created by Maître René in 1935, is the town's largest green space, covering 17 hectares and containing a

well equipped recreation area, while the tree-shaded pathways of Lalla Meryem Park near the Kasbah provide a perfect setting for a spot of untroubled relaxation. The park accommodates a museum conserving collections of traditional regional weaponry and a wide variety of other curiosities.

4 km from the city, at the foot of Jbel Hamra, Sidi Maâfa Forest has trails specially laid out for sports and walking activities (cross-country, jogging, mountain biking, etc.) – a walker's paradise with panoramic views over the city and its surroundings. 6 km from Oujda, Sidi Yahia's springs water a luxuriant, tree-shaded oasis that shelters the mausoleums of several Muslim Saints, the most revered being Sidi Yahya Benyounes. The Sidi Yahya Moussem is held here every year.

Excursions in the region



The kasbahs, proud guardians of the land

The great orchard of Berkane

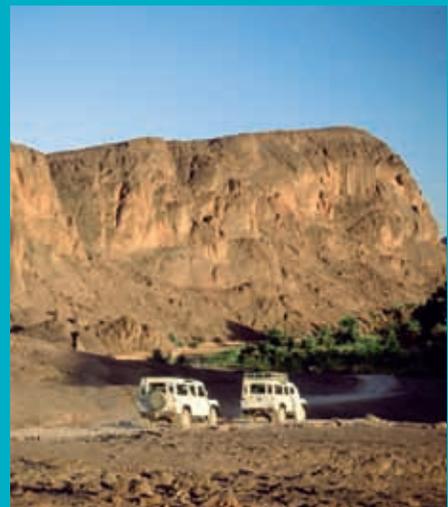
If you'd like to know where all the delicious fruit and vegetables available in Saïdia come from, then pay a visit to Berkane, a major agricultural centre with over 10,000 hectares of irrigated land producing grapes, cereals, orchard fruits, citrus fruits, and vegetables.

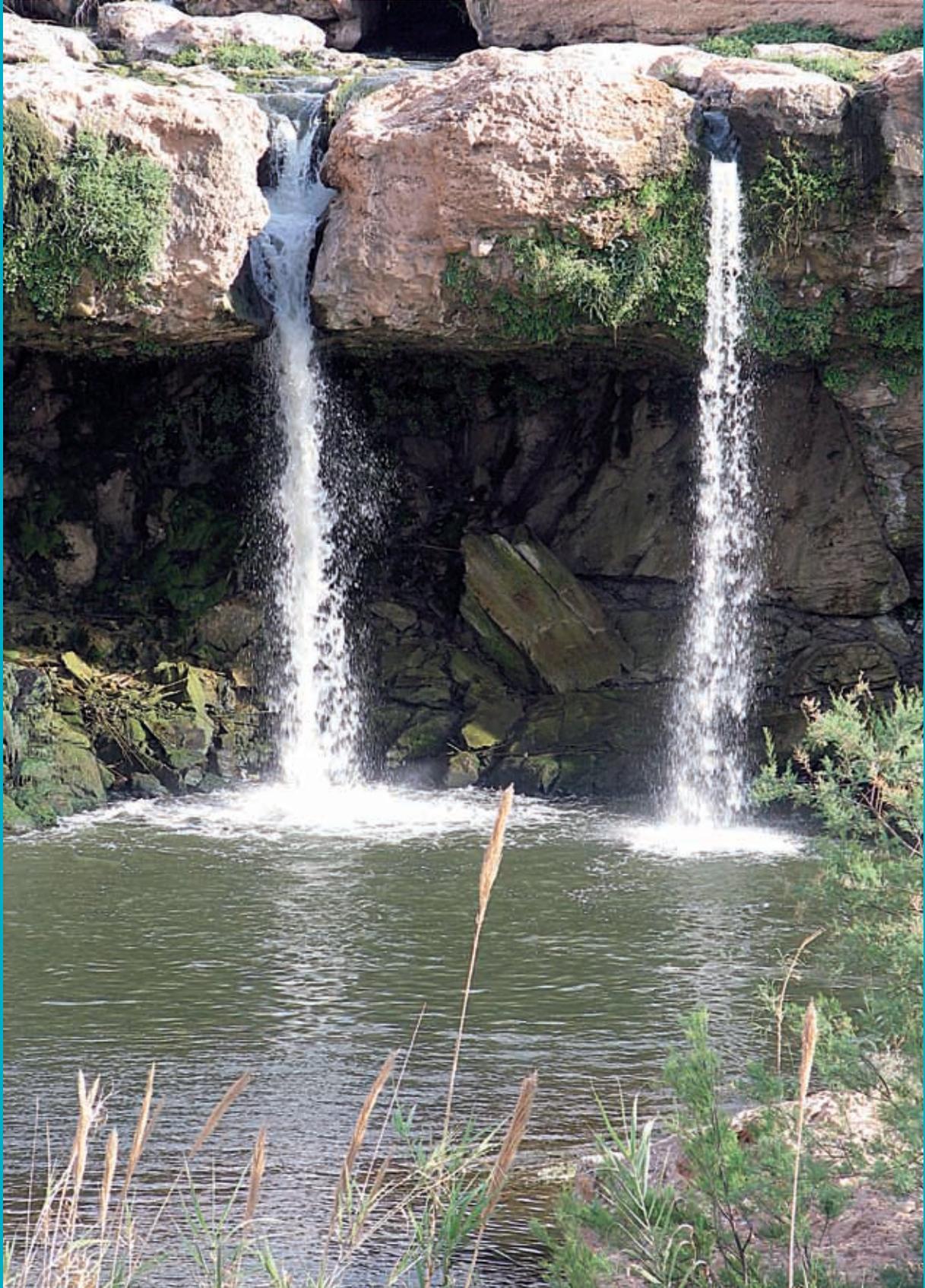
The sheep capital of Taourirt

Located on the road between Oujda and Fez, Taourirt is a former Merinid Kasbah founded in the 13th century (and not to be confused by Ouarzazate's Taourirt Kasbah). The Kasbah was thought necessary because of Taourirt's strategic position at the crossroads of caravan routes running from East to West and from North to South. Taourirt is also Morocco's largest sheep souk. 10 km to the south, the Oued Za Gorges, through which Oued Moulouya's main tributary runs, are very well worth going out of your way to see.

The Merinid town of Debdou

Lying 52 km south of Taourirt, Debdou, is set in a valley in the heart of a mountainous massif, and is surrounded by vineyards and by orchards planted with olive, pomegranate, fig and peach trees. The town's medina has a long history, its mellah once home to one of Morocco's largest Jewish communities, while the nearby Kasbah marks the remnants of the former Merinid principality. The region boasts no lack of tourist attractions, with its douars precariously perched on their hillsides, and its many springs – the largest of which, at Tafrante, supplies Debdou with its drinking water. Beyond Debdou, some 8 km along the El Ateuf road, you can enjoy panoramic views of the valley and the Gaada plateau, a vast expanse of green oak woodland harbouring a wealth of game, including wild boars, hares and partridges.





The Sebbab waterfall

Excursions in the region



Rock carvings

The natural heritage of Bouarfa

Bouarfa lies 330 km south of Saïdia on the road to Figuig. The town is a former mining centre (manganese and copper) set in the midst of steppe land. Its very comfortable hotel is equipped with tennis courts and swimming pool, and also organises 4-wheel drive excursions and accompanied treks on foot, horseback, or camelback, to explore the Oriental region's phantasmagorical countryside and its many prehistoric rock painting and carving sites.

Apart from its esparto grass steppes, Bouarfa's biological reserve is also rich in such medicinal and aromatic plants as rosemary and white wormwood (*artemisia herba alba*), which is particularly well adapted to the area's arid climate.

And then, of course, there are the Dorcas gazelles, living in small groups around the region's rivers, dunes and rocky slopes.



If you're looking for an original way to travel the great open spaces, take a ride on the Oriental Desert Express! The train covers 305 kilometres of track linking Oujda to Bouarfa, and invites you to discover the desert in all its glory – breathtaking Saharan landscapes dotted with majestic dunes, nomad encampments, and tiny isolated villages. The locomotive pulls three air-conditioned carriages, and drinks and hot lunches are served on board. There are a number of stops along the way, including Aïn Benimathar, Tendrara, and Bouarfa, so you'll have plenty of opportunities to immortalise your journey in photographs. All in all, a perfect way of experiencing the magic of a day in the open desert in comfort – an unforgettable experience!



Dorcas gazelles in Bouarfa

An out-of-the-ordinary destination



The mosque in Figuig

Figuig is the nearest oasis to Europe – a town resonating with history, its ancient walls enclosing a mosque dating back to the 5th century Hijri, and preserving the age-old customs and way of life of its imposing Ksour.

Figuig, lost in the midst of the dunes

Figuig lies 433 km south of Oujda, and is one of Morocco's most beautiful oases. Set in an area famed for its Neolithic rock carvings, the town comprises 7 ksours (fortified adobe villages), and is listed as a site with a well-preserved ancient architectural heritage. Ksour are no longer built nowadays, of course, and the whole town is regarded as a national monument. Ksar Zenaga is the oasis' largest and most prosperous. It's also the liveliest and probably the best suited to giving visitors a general idea of oasis life

past and present. Another ksar, Hammam Foukani, accommodates a hot spring, while Ksar El-Oudair also has its springs, including one that produces salt water.

The Figuig palm grove is made up of over 100,000 date palms producing a dozen varieties of dates (including the famous "Aziza"), together with hundreds of other fruit trees and a series of parcels of land irrigated by means of the ingenious traditional "foggora" system – if you want the full tour, you're in for a good thirty kilometres of labyrinthine luxuriance. The centre of Figuig affords superb views over the whole oasis, its minarets shining forth from among the countless palm trees.

The dunes around Figuig are ideal for sand-bathing, reputed to be an effective cure for rheumatism.



A street in a Figuig ksar



Figuig palm grove

Information and useful addresses

Practical information

Entry formalities

A valid passport for a stay of less than 90 days is required. An identity card may suffice, depending on country of origin, if the trip is organised by a travel agency for a group of over 3 people. A visa is required for some nationalities - enquire at a Moroccan consulate or diplomatic representation in your country. No specific vaccinations are required for entry into the Kingdom of Morocco. If you are bringing your pet along with you, however, you will need to be able to produce an anti-rabies certificate less than 6 months old.



*The front door to Morocco's
Oriental region*

Changing money

Moroccan currency is the dirham, made up of 100 centimes. Foreign currency must be exchanged at banks or other accredited establishments.

Time zone

Morocco is in the Greenwich time zone, and time is G.M.T.

Emergency phone numbers

Police 19

Fire Brigade 150

Directory enquiries 160

Road safety services 177

Event Calendar

June : Saïdia Throne Cup golf tournament

July : International Raï Festival

August : "Moroccans of the World" Rally

August : Taourtite Festival

Useful addresses and contacts

Regional Tourist Office :

Boulevard Mohammed V
Place du 16 Août - BP.716, Oujda
Tel: 05 36 68 56 31
Fax: 05 36 68 90 89

Provincial Tourist Office :

88, Bd Ibn Rochd, Nador
Tel: 05 36 33 03 48
Fax: 05 36 33 54 52

Regional Tourism Council :

2, Boulevard des Nations Unies
4ème Étage, Oujda
Tel: 05 35 71 10 44 / 66
Fax: 05 36 68 90 89

Oriental Agency :

12, Rue Mekki Bitaouri - Souissi
Rabat, Morocco
Tel: 05 37 63 35 80
Fax: 05 37 75 30 20

Regional Investment Council :

2, Bd Nations Unies, Oujda
Tel: 05 36 68 28 27
Fax: 05 36 69 06 81

ONCF Railway station :

Boulevard Abdellah Chefchaoui
Call Centre: 08 90 20 30 40
Website: www.oncf.ma

Oujda Angad Airport :

BP 3137 Takadoum, Oujda
Al Aoui Airport : BP 141, Nador
Call centre: 08 90 00 08 00

Golf: Saïdia Resort's 3 Golf courses

www.golfdumaroc.com

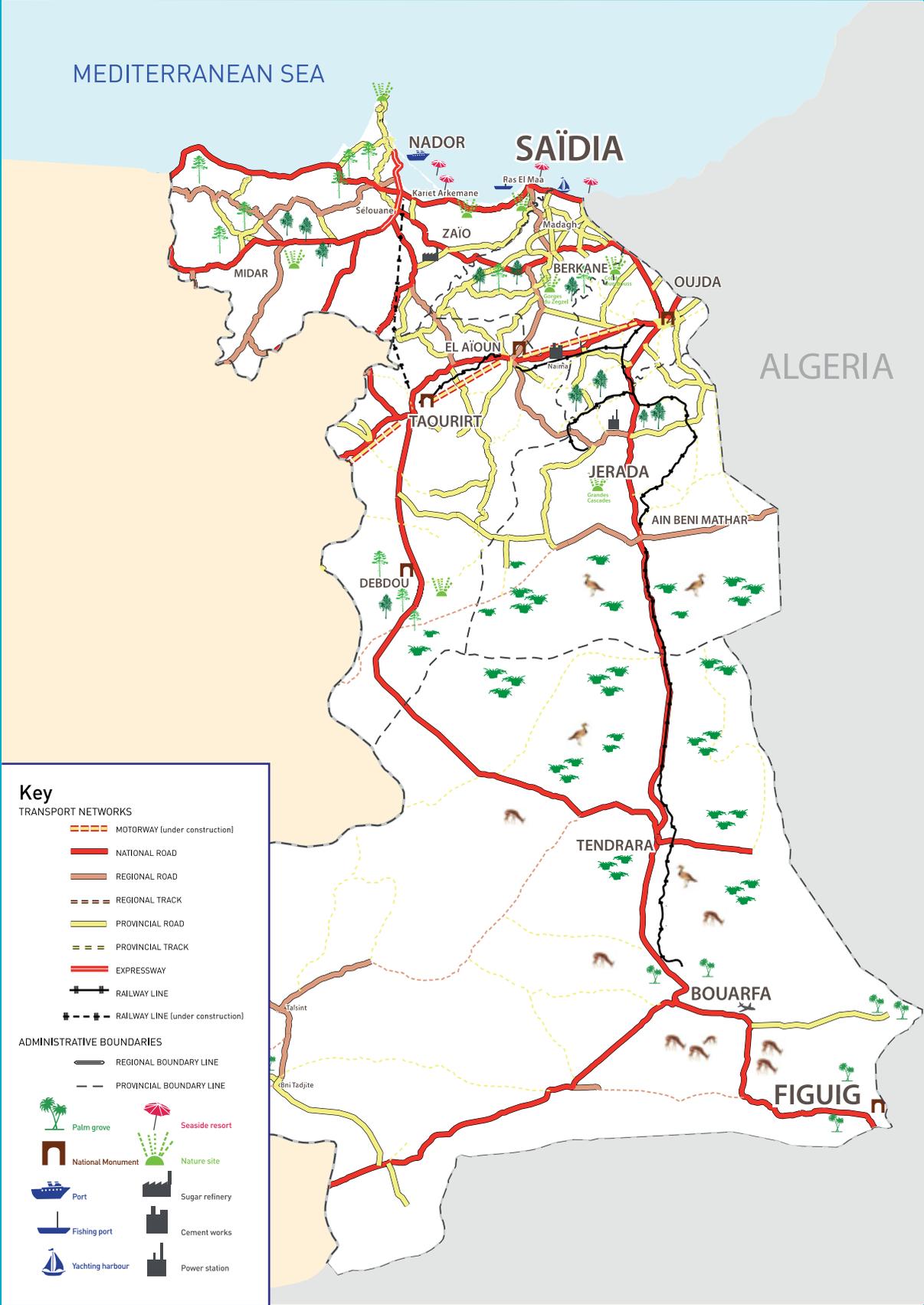
Weather Forecast:

www.meteoma.net

Office des Changes

(Currency regulation authority):
www.oc.gov.ma

For further information: www.visitmorocco.com
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WWW.VISITMOROCCO.COM