

MOROCCO, PART ONE: 24 HOURS IN THE FES MEDINA

MAY 30, 2019



{Press Trip} My travel experience in Morocco was so incredible, that I don't know if I'll adequately be able to put it into words. But I'm going to try my very best to recapture some of the magic, for you. And here is part one of my travel diary: the first 24 hours of our trip, which we spent inside the Fes Medina...



GETTING TO FES, MOROCCO

We arrived in Fes, late at night, last Wednesday, after flying direct on [Air Arabia](#) from London Gatwick. The London to Fes route is fairly new, and currently runs on Wednesdays and Saturdays. And, at just a few minutes shy of three hours, we were all so impressed by ease of flight. It's not much longer than a flight to the



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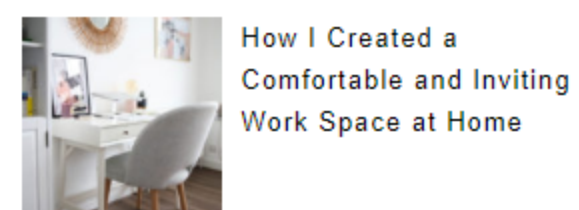
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This was my very first time in Morocco (and in Africa, for that matter). So, although we were all quite tired after the flight, I found it impossible to nap during the short car journey to Riad Fes, where we would be spending our first night in the city.

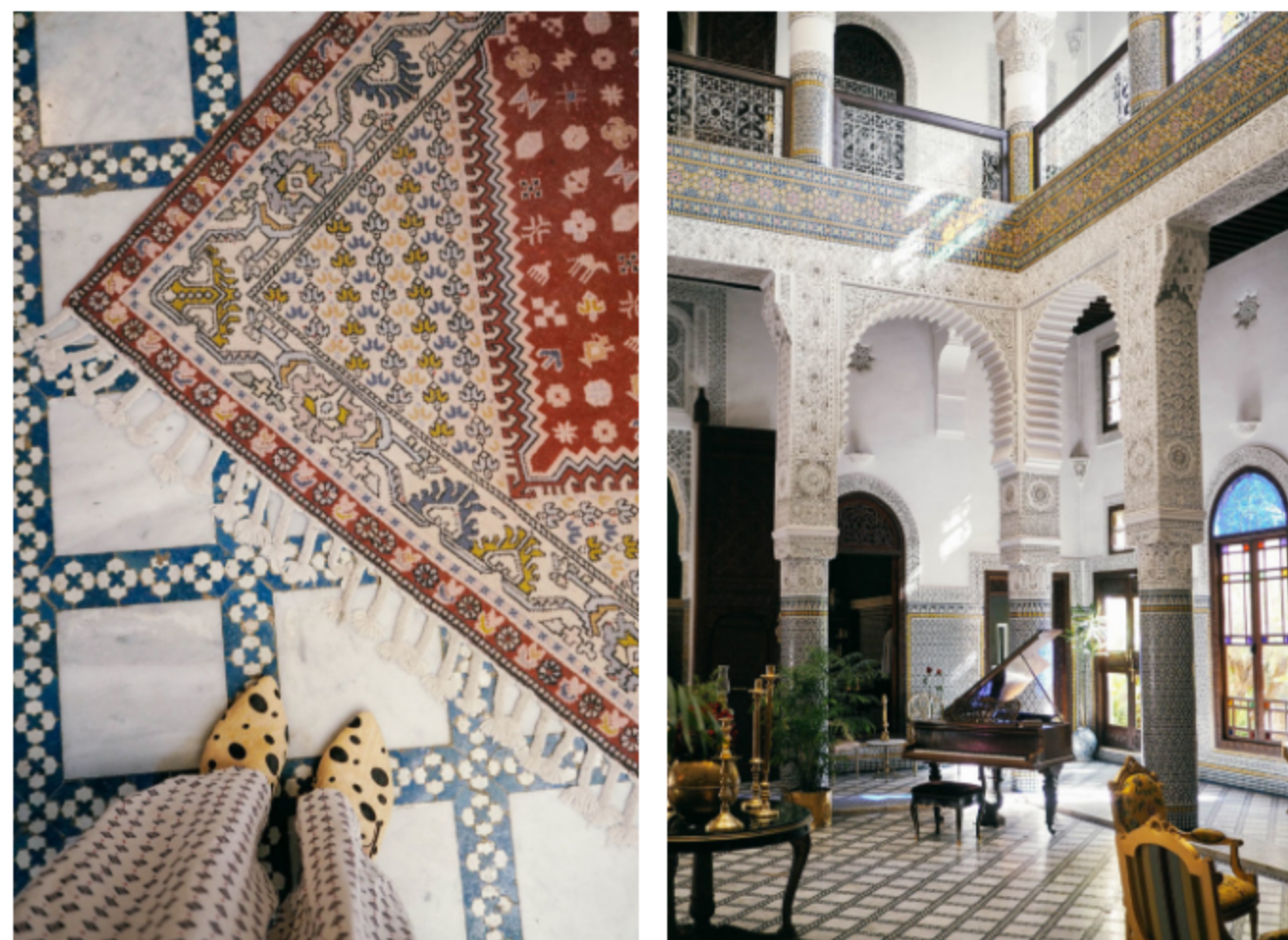
It was the penultimate week of Ramadan, when we arrived, so the streets were bustling with late-night activity. Everyone was out socialising with friends and family over dinner, and it was so much fun to people-watch as we drove to the hotel.

Within 25 minutes we'd reached the edge of the Medina, and it was time to depart the car. The Fes Medina is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and is thought to be the largest car-free urban area in the world. The only modes of transport allowed inside the Media are mopeds, bikes and mules/donkeys. So we collected our suitcases and followed followed our guide through a short maze of streets, until we reached the entrance to Riad Fes.



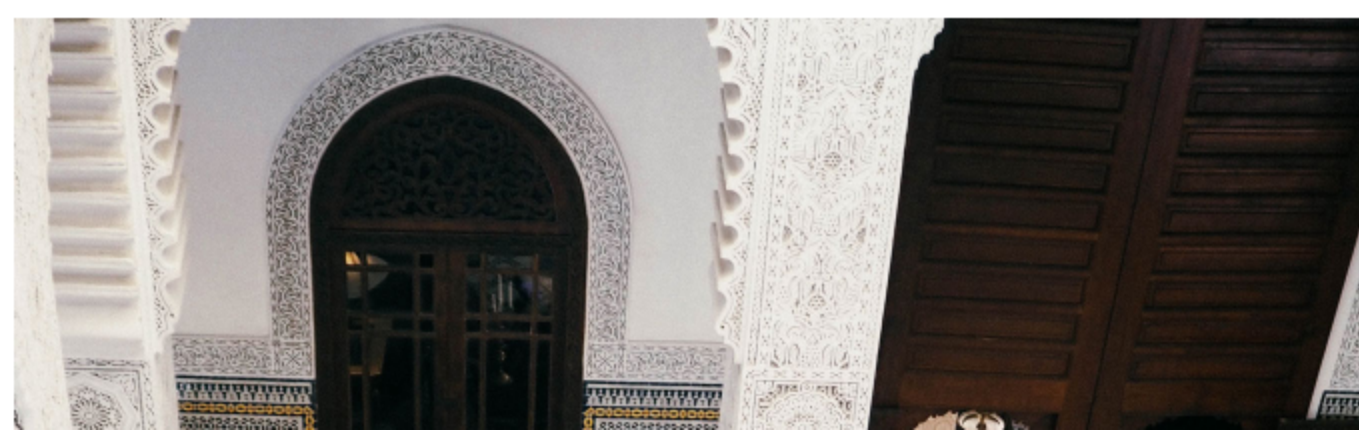
RIAD FES

Riad Fes is really special hotel, located within the ancient walls of the Medina. And, like all Moroccan properties, it is completely unassuming from the outside – just a simple doorway. But once you step inside the Riad you're greeted by *the* most exquisite building. This is where words fail me – and I don't think photos truly do it justice, either.



The foundation of Riad Fes dates back to 1900, and came to be a luxury hotel after a local architect fell in love with its beauty and charm in 1999. He worked hard to restore the Riad to its original glory, and stayed true to the footprint of the building.

Plumbing had to be installed, as there was previously no running water in the Riad. So every single tile in the building was painstakingly numbered and carefully removed, before eventually being returned to its original spot. It blows the mind to think how long that job took. But clearly it was worth the effort, because the Riad takes your breath away!



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The hotel is a delicious mix of traditional and baroque styles, with a few contemporary updates here and there. And the rooms and suites are also mix of modern and traditional ([watch a tour of my traditional suite here](#)).





We only spent one night at Riad Fes, before moving onto the second half of our Morocco experience, which was fitness-focused. It was an unforgettable experience, though. And I definitely wouldn't hesitate to go back – perhaps to celebrate a special birthday or anniversary. [Book your stay here.](#) *{FYI: We were guests of the Riad Fes hotel.}*

EXPLORING THE FES MEDINA



Before we checked out of the Riad, and moved onto our second destination, we were treated to a 3-hour walking tour of the Fes Medina. The Medina is a walled part of the ancient city of Fes, and is completely free from cars.

The Medina was founded in 808 AD, and houses the oldest university in the world – University of Al Quaraouiyine – which is still welcoming students through its doors. There are also many ancient mosques within the Medina. So it's no surprise that's a World Heritage Site. It's SO rich in history!





Riad Fes is situated in the centre of the Medina, but our tour guide (arranged by the hotel) lead us out of the Medina, so that we could re-enter through the spectacular Bab Bou Jeloud gate [pictured two above], which is main entrance to the Medina.

There is SO much to say about the Fes Medina. So, instead of rambling on for hours, I'm just going to answer some of the key questions I was asked over Instagram – along with a few others I expect you'd be curious

WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT VISITING THE MEDINA

Is the Medina safe for tourists? Yes, absolutely. I felt perfectly safe throughout our tour. Before we entered the Bab Bou Jeloud gate our lovely guide gave us a quick warning about pickpockets, and advised that if someone approached us trying to sell something we should ignore them completely and keep walking.

But, as he pointed out, there are good and bad people everywhere, and the risk of pickpocketing seemed no larger than it does in London. Also, the businesses in the Medina get a lot of business from tourists, so you feel more than welcomed.



What can you buy in the Medina? Just about everything. The level of craftsmanship and artisanal skill on show is breathtaking. There are stylish Moroccan rugs of every size, style and colour palette you could imagine everywhere. As well as beautiful ceramics, shoes, jewellery and soft furnishings.

The Medina is also famous for its leather goods, and there are three leather tanneries within the walls of the Medina. The Chouara Tannery [pictured below] has been in operation since the 11th century, and the same techniques that were used back then are still in practise today. It was incredible to see!



Is there animal tourism in the Medina? A few readers mentioned upsetting experiences in Marrakech, where they had witnessed animal tourism. And I'm relieved to say we didn't see anything like that in our long tour of the Medina. Horses and donkeys are used to transport goods between shops, as there are no cars, and there are cats *everywhere* (who seem perfectly happy). But that was it.



What should I wear in the Medina? Morocco is a Muslim country, so it's a good idea to dress modestly within the Medina. The Medina is home to 156,000+ people – it's not just a tourist attraction – so be respectful of that. I wore linen trousers, trainers, a camisole and carried a scarf to cover my shoulders. Although, to be honest, bare shoulders didn't seem to bother anyone if the rest of your outfit was on the modest side.

Do I need a tour guide? We definitely would have got lost without our guide, and we loved having him on hand to share the rich history of the Medina. However, part of our group explored the Medina without a guide, and they enjoyed getting lost within the maze of streets. So it really depends on your confidence levels, and what you want to get out of the experience.

If you would like to have a guide, it's probably worth researching and booking a guide ahead of your trip. Because I've read a few stories online about people booking guides on the day, and being pressured into making purchases at every stall they stopped at. So do your research beforehand, and ask your hotel for recommendations.



Have you visited Fes, Morocco, before? And has this post made you curious to see the Fes Medina for yourself, one day? Stay tuned for the second part of my Morocco travel diary – it will be coming soon...

Press Trip: We stayed in the Fes Medina as guests of the [Riad Fes](#) hotel.

P.S. [What I packed for my trip to Morocco](#)