



How To Spend A Weekend In...

48 Hours in Fez: Morocco's Spiritual Capital



By: Ginny Weeks

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Spend 48 hours in Fez, Morocco's 'spiritual capital' to delve into the world's largest medina filled with colourful bazaars, aromatic food and drink and ancient charm. Until recently it was all about Marrakech but Fez, the country's second-largest city, is catching up fast...

Before you book, CF's fashion editor Lisa Haynes gives us her perfect Fez packing wardrobe.

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WHY GO?

Surrounded by the lush green Atlas Mountains, the city of Fez is famous for its peach hued medina, a

UNESCO World Heritage Site. Walking through the old

rabbit warren of 10,000 car-free streets and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Within the walls you'll find narrow winding alleys, souks, mosques, boutique hotels, restaurants and donkeys laden with goods just like ancient times. Oh, and cute cats, lots of cats.



It's almost impossible not to get lost amongst the maze, but that's part of the charm. Take your time; everything in Fez is done at a relaxed pace and given the city sees fewer tourists than the capital Marrakech you're pretty much left to your own devices.

December is a great time to visit with warm days and cool nights – ideal weather to walk around the sites.

WHAT TO DO

Your first stop should be the Medersa Bou Inania, located in the medina and one of the most beautiful buildings in Morocco. The ancient Merenid monument, with its awe-inspiring mosaic tile work, intricate stucco and carved cedar wood, is still in religious use today. It's also the only religious building that non-Muslims can visit (check visiting times beforehand).

Head east into the medina and wander along the pleasantly cool and clean worn cobbled streets, encased by the tall walls of houses and stalls. There are historical sites peppered throughout, including mosques and grand buildings that are guarded by huge carved wooden doors. A real sense of mystery permeates this place – what lies behind the walls? One door could lead to a stunning palace, one a communal bakery. As Moroccan houses face inward rather than outward like Western houses, there is little way of telling.



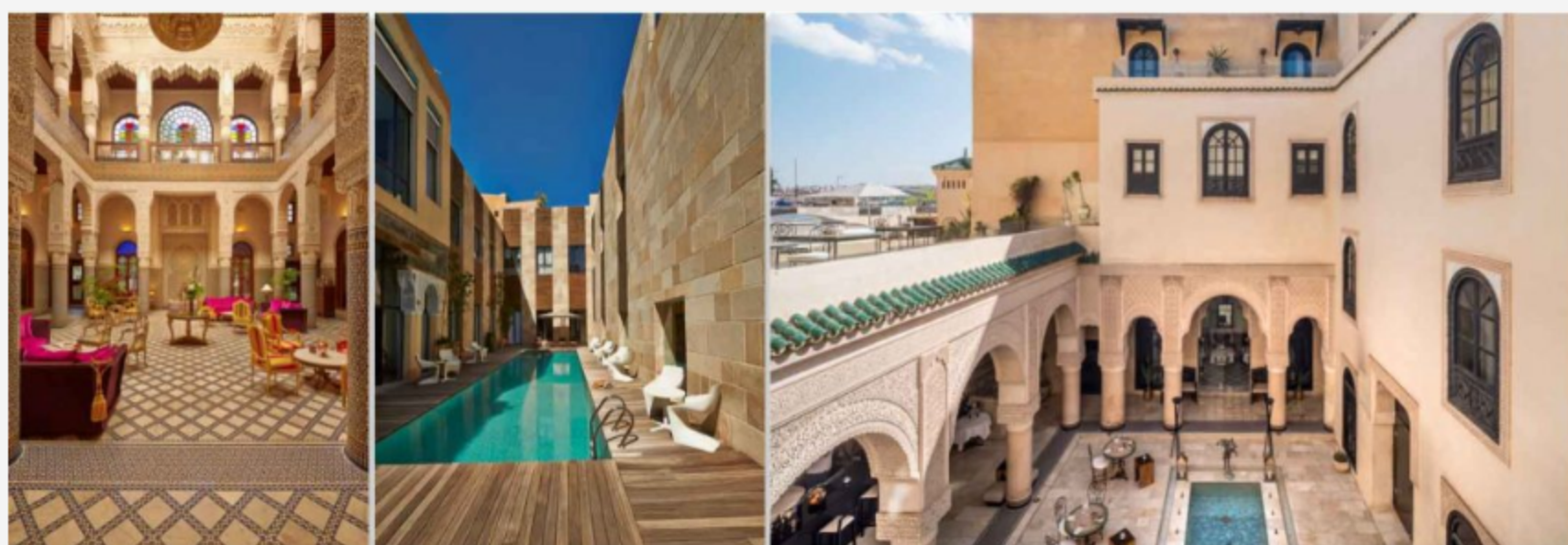


It's easy to spend a couple of days exploring the old town. Each area specialises in something different, from the tanneries, to pottery and mosaics, clothes and jewellery, and finally the food market. Join the locals shopping for their dinner the old fashioned way (no supermarkets here) and browse the stalls of heavily fragrant dried herbs and spices, fresh vegetables, baked bread, olives, sticky pastries and live chickens (slaughtered on site, so be prepared).

Try a cookery class at the excellent Fez Cooking School set in splendid surroundings on the rooftop of an old palace. Start with their foodie medina tour to pick up your ingredients and try some local favourites such as fava bean soup, savoury doughnut and fresh herb tea. Then learn to cook Moroccan classics such as chicken tagine or Zaalouk (spiced aubergine salad) and pastries alongside chef Houssam, followed by a meal on the rooftop. [Website](#)

Exit the medina through the magnificent Blue Gate towards the Jnan Sbil Garden, a large public space that once belonged to the Royal Palace next door. It's well worth the few minutes stroll from the medina for a serene walk amongst the bamboo, giant cacti, waterfalls and lake. Further on you can view the palace gates with their huge gold doors and intricate carving. Head further southwest and you'll find the atmospheric fifteenth century Jewish quarter and cemetery.

Later on in the day you can't beat the sunset views of the city from the Merenid tombs on a mountainside above Fez – the setting sun creates a vibrant panorama over the peach hued medina, offset by acres of olive groves and the snow capped Atlas Mountains. Or try one of the rooftop bars in the old town.



Before dinner retreat to a hammam spa. Try the effortlessly luxurious Spa by Cinq Mondes (set in one of the city's oldest Riads) and cool off afterwards with a dip in their swimming pool. [Website](#)

Top Tips

Tip 1: It takes a few days to familiarise yourself with the labyrinth of medina streets so if short on time hire a guide to help you – we hired the help of Rachid Mritakh, a local University Professor, who was excellent.

Tip 2: Friday is the quietest day in the medina when many people take the day off from work.

Tip 3: If you have time, book a day trip to the remarkable historical sites of Meknes, Volubilis and Moulay Idriss, not far from Fez.

Tip 4: In Arabic, hello is marhaban, thank you is shukran.

WHERE TO STAY

Palais Amani





Palais Amani is our ultimate pick. The romantic eighteen-bedroom riad is tucked away behind a giant wooden door off one of the main medina entrances. Inside is a paradise of orange trees, birdsong, beautiful mosaic tiles and a rooftop with spectacular views. The bedrooms are stylish and comfortable and meals are a real highlight – especially the excellent five-course breakfast. It's the ideal base for exploring the city, but also for retreating from it. It has fantastic sunbathing beds on the rooftop, a well stocked bar, cosy sitting room with fire and a hammam spa. [Website](#)

Rooms start from from €160.00 per room per night, including breakfast.

Dar Bensouda

The first project in Fez for veteran Marrakech hotelier Abdellatif Ait Ben Abdallah. The rooms are big and comfortable, arranged around a soaring courtyard. The dining room is an intimate space for top-notch traditional food, and the shaded outdoor seating areas are welcome sanctuaries from the sun. [Website](#)

Rooms start from from €66 per room per night, including breakfast.

WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

L'Ambre:

Popular dishes in Fez include lamb and chicken tagine, sweet and savoury pastries, Moroccan salad and fish with chermoula. In general, eating out is not a common practice for Moroccans. They prefer to eat at family and friends houses and so often the best food is still served at home. Saying that, with new hotels and restaurants springing up in Fez the city has some excellent options. L'Ambre restaurant in the grand surroundings of Riad Fes hotel, serves delicious Moroccan dishes – try the Briouat (crispy puff pastry) with seafood or cheese. After dinner, head upstairs to the rooftop bar for panoramic views across the city.

[Website](#)

Restaurant Nur:

Alternatively, try the tasting menu at Restaurant Nur for modern Moroccan delights by chef Najat Kaanache (ex El Bulli and Noma) [Website](#)

Dar Roumana:

Or the candlelit courtyard setting of Dar Roumana for Moroccan cooking with a Mediterranean twist (the gnocchi is excellent). [Website](#)

Café Clock:

A great lunch spot is Café Clock, an eclectic and popular café with a varied menu (including a camel burger) and a buzzy atmosphere.

Fez Café:

The garden courtyard at Fez Café is also a lovely spot for a lazy lunch. [Website](#)

Hotel Sahrai:

Just outside of the medina is a blow-the-budget option – Hotel Sahrai, which has two restaurants (one French, one Moroccan) in seriously chic surroundings. [Website](#)

Ginny Weeks flew to Fez with Air Arabia Maroc.