

Travel

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'It was easy to imagine that we were the only tourists on the island'

Tim Pozzi on Pantelleria

Marrakesh nights from £40

20 great riads

It's as easy to get confused about which riad to book these days as it is to get lost in the Marrakesh souks. Where ten years ago there were only a handful of these traditional Moroccan homes converted into hotels, there are now hundreds, mostly run by French or English owners.

As their numbers have increased, their owners have tried to differentiate them, and many different styles and sizes have emerged.

Most riads still provide an authentic yet good-quality stay, but it is important to look around to ensure that you find the one most suited to your needs. Here Annabelle Thorpe offers her pick of the best — book now for autumn, which is one of Marrakesh's busiest times.

1 For budget stays

Riad Alwachma

A fantastic price for a great location. Riad Alwachma's roof terrace looks across to the Koutoubia Mosque and it's a ten-minute stroll to the Jemaa el Fna. There are nine comfortable en suite rooms, and a small dining room with an open fireplace that's particularly cosy in winter. Traditional Moroccan suppers are available if you pre-book.

Details Doubles from £40 B&B (01239710814, naturallymorocco.co.uk)

2 For romance

Riad Kaiss

One of the first riads to open its doors in the medina, Kaiss somehow manages to be both chic and a touch ramshackle; the courtyard is filled with jasmine and jacaranda trees and the rose-coloured walls lead to cushion-filled alcoves and a cute rooftop pool. Suppers can be taken anywhere in the riad, and there is a small spa with a fantastic hammam offering traditional gommage treatments.

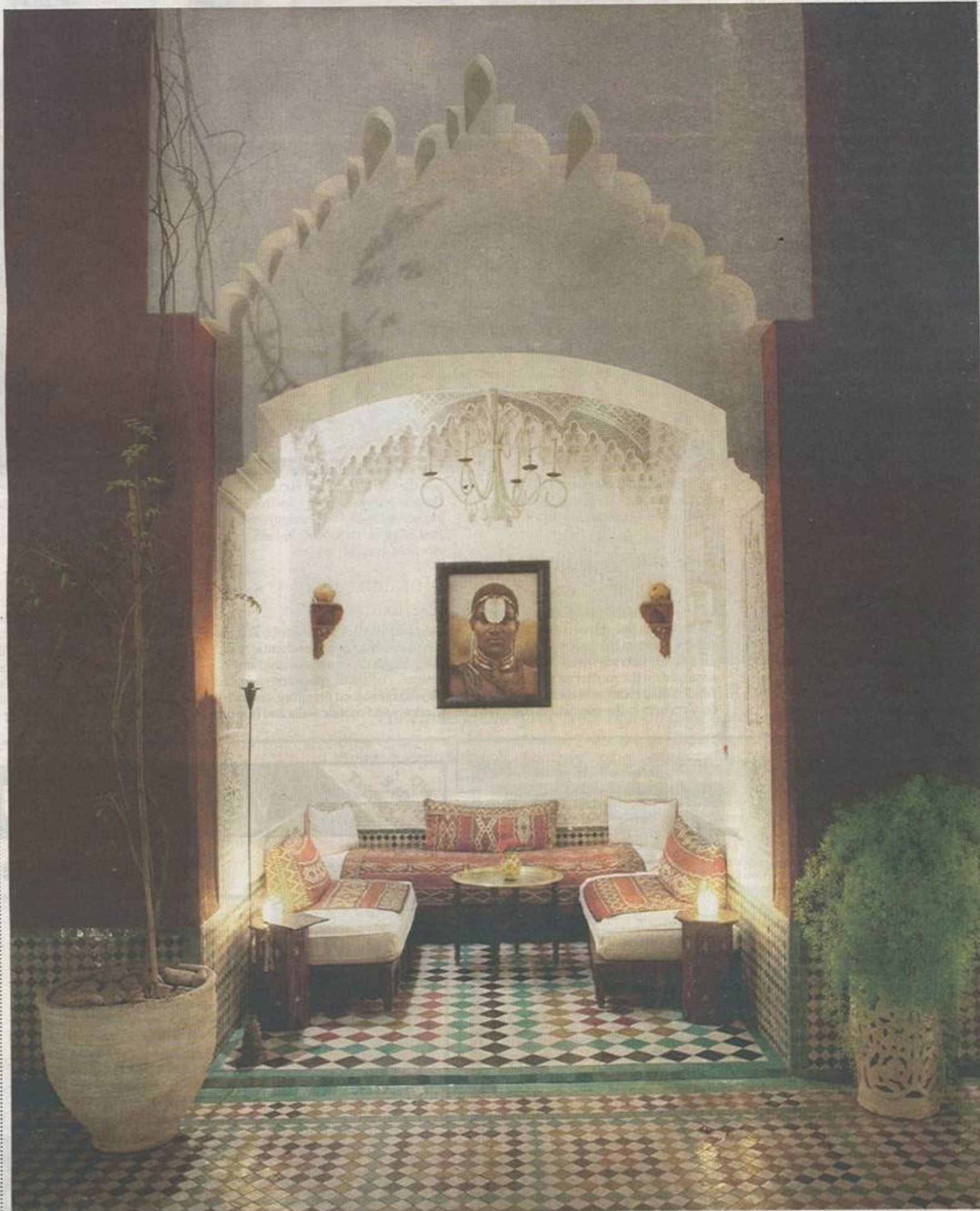
Details Doubles from £147 room-only, (00 212 524 440 141, riadkaiss.com)

3 For indulgent luxury

La Sultana

One of Marrakesh's most expensive riads, La Sultana is also one of the swankiest; lounges filled with antiques and a spacious roof terrace with bar, massage areas and luxury loungers. The elegant spa has a colonnaded pool that shimmers against the tadelakt walls.

Details Doubles from £260 B&B (00 212 524 38 80 08, lasultanamarrakech.com)



Rose-coloured walls, cushion-filled alcoves and jasmine and jacaranda-scented gardens make Riad Kaiss (2) the ideal retreat for a romantic weekend in Marrakesh

20 great riads

4 For garden lovers

Jardins de la Medina

Although still classified as a riad, the Jardins de la Medina is more of a mansion. But it lives up to its name with 3,000sq m of gardens and shady terraces filled with palms, olive and jacaranda trees. Suppers, eaten by candlelight in the garden, are magical, although lazing on one of the roof terraces looking down at all the greenery is pretty relaxing too. **Details** Doubles from £140 B&B (00 212 524 381 851, lesjardinsdelamedina.com)

5 For insider information

Riad Kniza

Elegant, welcoming and authentically Moroccan — the same words could be applied to the Kniza's delightful owner, Mohammed Bouskri. To sit on the roof terrace, glass of wine in hand, listening to Bouskri, a professional guide for 34 years, is an unforgettable experience. **Details** Doubles from £145 B&B (00 212 524 37 69 42, riadkniza.com)

6 For foodies

Dar Les Cigognes

Whether you want lazy rooftop lunches, candlelit suppers, afternoons in the kitchen learning how to make tangia and pastilla, or a book of recipes to take home, Dar Les Cigognes can deliver. As well as sleek, comfortable rooms, the kitchen is one of the best in the city; fresh bread and pastries for breakfast and Moroccan specialities for lunch and dinner. **Details** Doubles from £130 B&B (00 212 524 38 27 40, lescigognes.com)

7 For great views

Riad 72

This small, traditional riad, with only four rooms, is situated in the old medina. It's a cool, stylish place, but the real selling point is the roof terrace — one of the highest in Marrakesh — and its fabulous views. Fatouma, the cook, serves up some great home cooking, and there's a hamman and swimming pool, too.



Details B&B doubles from £103 in low season, through Mr & Mrs Smith (0845 0340700, mrandmrsmith.com)

8 For a family gathering

Riad Souika

Worried about the kids disturbing other guests? With only three rooms and a short walk from the souks, Souika is ideal for a family getaway; meals can be arranged on the roof terrace or in the small dining room, and there are plenty of cosy corners in the downstairs courtyard

and the sun terrace for relaxing in peace. **Details** A three-night break from £520pp, including flights (six sharing) through Best of Morocco (08450 264585, morocco-travel.com)

9 For authenticity

Dar Sbihi

Saad and Sibylle's ambition for Dar Sbihi was to create a simple, authentic riad using Moroccan craftsmanship and designs. The small, charming rooms have carved cedarwood furniture, coloured windows and mosaic walls and floorings,



while the central courtyard is lined with zelij, traditional Moroccan tiles. **Details** Doubles from £105 B&B, (00 212 524 38 59 58, www.riaddarsbihi.com)

10 For privacy

Riad Al Jazira

The problem with smaller riads is that it can be hard to have a romantic moment *à deux* if there is only one small roof terrace or courtyard. Al Jazira is three riads that have been combined to create a 15-room hotel, with enough cosy corners, roof terraces and lounge areas for everyone to

One of the bedrooms at Dar Les Cigognes (6), top left, the raspberry-walled pool at Riad Noga (19), bottom left, an open-air eating terrace at Riad 72 (7), above, and the central courtyard at Dar Sbihi (9), top right



See more pictures of these stunning Marrakesh riads

thetimes.co.uk/moroccotravel



artworks while the roof terrace — ablaze with flowers and bougainvillea — is a great space for group suppers. The in-riad concierge will organise everything from guided tours to restaurant bookings. **Details** Exclusive use £653 per night, (00 212 524 387 731, riadmeriem.com)

19 For charm

Riad Noga

Noga is delightfully laid-back, with five rooms decked out in rich colours. There is a good-sized pool on the ground floor, surrounded by deep-raspberry walls, and lush courtyards with cushion-clad alcoves. The vibe is relaxed, unpretentious and very welcoming. **Details** Doubles from £144 B&B, (00 212 524 377 670, riadnoga.com)

20 For hipsters

Riad Farnatchi

Riad Farnatchi is a sleek, minimalist affair with nine rooms decked out in neutral colours and filled with every 21st-century mod con; iPod docks, wi-fi, on-demand movies and Egyptian linens. The riad is made up of five interconnecting buildings, with elegant dining rooms, cool terraces and a stunning hammam and pool area. **Details** Doubles from £231B&B, (00 212 524 384 910, www.riadfarnatchi.com) **Annabelle Thorpe**
More information from marrakech.travel

shopping with you and advise on the best haggling techniques.

Details Doubles from £60 B&B, (dareliane.com)

18 For a house party

Riad Meriem

For a big birthday, or anniversary, a house party in Marrakesh can be an unforgettable experience and the Riad Meriem is a great choice. The five rooms mix neutral colours with striking

“A guide will come shopping with you to advise on the best haggling techniques”

have their own intimate nook. **Details** Doubles from £72 B&B, (00 212 524 426 463, riadaljazeera.com)

11 For spa lovers

Riad Bab Firdaus

One of six riads in the city run by the Banyan Tree chain, Bab Firdaus has a small Angsana spa, which offers classic treatments, a hammam and large jet pool surrounded by Moroccan carved plasterwork. Ensure that you book treatments in advance as guests from all other Angsana riads have use of the spa. **Details** Doubles from £86 B&B, (00 212 524 385 491, angsana.com)

12 For a cooling dip

Riad el Zohar

The one drawback with staying in a riad in the hotter months is that most have space for only a small plunge pool, if that. El Zohar's sizeable pool, therefore, is a real find. There are five delightful rooms, all full of antique furniture and mosaic and tadelakt (traditional Moroccan plasterwork) bathrooms. **Details** Doubles from £60 B&B, (01239 710814, naturallymorocco.co.uk)

13 For a young family

Riad Zamzam

Zamzam positively welcomes children, with all manner of baby equipment to hand, a babysitting service and special meals for tinies. Owned by an English couple, Emma and Marcus, Zamzam has a real “can-do” attitude, with a concierge service that can organise anything from trips into the desert to a trained nanny for the day. **Details** Doubles from £117 B&B, extra bed for a child under 10 is free, (00 212 524 387 214, riadzamzam.com)

14 For simplicity

Riad dixneuf la ksour

If the hectic souk makes you long for a cool, minimalist bolt hole, then Riad dixneuf is a good choice. The six rooms combine white walls, caramel drapes and sleek mahogany furniture, while the chic central courtyard has a small pool. You can have supper on its delightful roof terrace (must be requested by lunchtime). **Details** Doubles from £65 B&B, (00 212 524 384 132, dixneuf-la-ksour.com)

15 For design lovers

Riad Akka

Interior designer Sylvie Dina has combined a traditional riad with modern decor; a palette of charcoal, plum and scarlet, bedrooms with tadelakt walls and modern artworks, and a simple courtyard with giant cacti and low-slung seats. **Details** Doubles from £66, (00 212 524 375 767, riad-akka.com)

16 For a warm welcome

Riad Amirat al Jamal

The staff at the Amirat all belong to the same Berber family so it feels like staying in a private home. With only five rooms you are guaranteed personal attention. **Details** Doubles from £120 B&B, book through Fleewinter (020-7112 0019, fleewinter.co.uk)

17 For shopaholics

Dar Eliane

The souks can be quite full-on, and the chance to dip in and out is the best way to experience them. The Dar Eliane, in the heart of the souks, has a cute roof terrace that is perfect for a post-spree laze. The riad can also arrange for a guide to go



Christmas & New Year Holidays by Rail
Christmas in the Tyrol, New Year on Lake Garda

Enjoy the festive period in two of Europe's most spectacular settings. Celebrate Christmas in the delightful city of Innsbruck and welcome in the New Year on the shores of beautiful Lake Garda.

Days 1-2: London to Innsbruck

We depart St Pancras International by Eurostar for Brussels, then continue to Remagen for our overnight stop. On Day 2 we travel south through the spectacular Rhine Valley into Bavaria and over the border to Innsbruck to check into the 4* Hotel Alpenpark for five nights.

Days 3-4: Christmas Eve and Christmas Day

Christmas Eve is free to explore Innsbruck. We enjoy a special Christmas Eve dinner tonight. On Christmas Day, we join the Stubaitalbahn, a local tram that carries us through beautiful scenery to the small mountain town of Fulpmes.

Day 5: Boxing Day in Innsbruck

Boxing Day is at leisure for you to enjoy the local surroundings. Why not join our optional excursion on the Zillertalbahn, a narrow-gauge railway running along the Inn Valley?

Day 6: Excursion to Seefeld

Our included excursion today is to Seefeld, an attractive town perched 3,937 feet (1,200m) above

sea level. The pedestrianised centre is a delight to stroll around, and there are plenty of walking trails leading into the surrounding countryside.

Days 7-9: At leisure in Garda

On Day 7 we head into Italy to the 3* Hotel Sole in Garda for a five night stay. On Day 8 we embark on a half-day excursion by coach to explore the area. On Day 9, why not join our optional excursion to Verona?

Days 10-11: New Year's Eve and New Year's Day

On New Year's Eve you are free to explore the town at your own pace. This evening we enjoy a gala dinner with live music and dancing to welcome in the New Year. On New Year's Day you can have a leisurely start to the day with a late brunch and maybe take a stroll through Garda's Old Town before our farewell dinner.

Days 12-13: To London

We bid farewell to Garda as we travel back over the border, through Austria and into Germany for our overnight stop in Nuremberg. The next morning we continue onto Brussels, where we join our Eurostar to St Pancras International.

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