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# COOKING CLASSES IN MARRAKESH



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*"I urge you to travel – as far and as widely as possible. Sleep on floors if you have to. Find out how other people live and eat and cook."* **Anthony Bourdain**

To get under the skin of a country, try getting busy in the kitchen when you're there. Local food can teach you much about a society and its traditions; learn to cook a signature dish or two and you also have a souvenir that you can easily recreate at home. After all, what better way to evoke the memories of a trip than with the same mouth-watering smells that wafted through the markets and restaurants you visited?

Morocco – and Marrakesh in particular – is a perfect destination for cookery classes. Its cuisine is rich, both in terms of history and the breadth of ingredients. At root Marrakeshi cuisine is Berber in origin, and flavoured with a host of spices from the Indian subcontinent, particularly cumin, cinnamon and ginger. By taking a class, you'll learn not only how to identify the quality of these spices, but how to use them effectively – and you'll be told repeatedly that couscous is most definitely not something you make in ten minutes from a bag.

If you want to learn to cook in Marrakesh, you'll need to decide between a cookery school, where you'll be taught at a workstation as part of a larger group, or a private class, a more intimate and personalised affair, usually in the kitchen of a *riad*. The cookery schools are a good option if you want something more social and not too intense; the private classes are better if you want some hands-on tuition and are keen to try out the intricacies of particular dishes.

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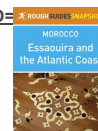
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## COOKING SCHOOLS IN MARRAKESH

A good introduction to Moroccan cooking, in one of Marrakesh's top hotels, is the class at [La Maison Arabe](http://www.lamaisonarabe.com/en/ateliers-cuisine.html) (<http://www.lamaisonarabe.com/en/ateliers-cuisine.html>). After an overview of classic Moroccan dishes and cooking techniques, each group (of ten or fewer) visits a local bakery and spice shop, before spending a couple of hours in the kitchen making bread, *zaalouk* (an aubergine and tomato dish), tagine and dessert. It's all very relaxed, and a monitor at your workstation allows you to see what the *dada* (chef) is doing. Afterwards guests get to tuck into the fruits of their labour in the patio beside the pool.

Another excellent cookery school is [Faim d'Epices](http://www.faimdepices.com/index.php?lang=en) (<http://www.faimdepices.com/index.php?lang=en>), located 20 minutes outside the city on a tranquil farm surrounded by olive and citrus plantations (they will pick you up and drop you off from your accommodation for free). The maximum group size is ten and everyone gets their own workstation. Host Michel kicks things off with some blind tasting of spices, and then the friendly chefs teach you how to make flatbread, any one of a range of tagines, and *msemen* (Moroccan pancakes). Drinks and a meal on the very pleasant terrace follow.

Also worth a mention are [Souk Cuisine](http://soukcuisine.com/index_ENG.html) ([http://soukcuisine.com/index\\_ENG.html](http://soukcuisine.com/index_ENG.html)), where the classes begin with a trip to the markets to buy all the ingredients, and [Riad Monceau](http://www.riad-monceau.com/cookery-school) (<http://www.riad-monceau.com/cookery-school>), which has smaller group sizes (maximum five) sometimes led by Rachida Sahnoune, head chef of the acclaimed restaurant in the *riad*.



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## PRIVATE COOKING CLASSES IN MARRAKESH

If you want to cook something specific, are more confident about your cooking, or would prefer to not be in a group, the award-winning cooking classes at [Dar Les Cigognes \(http://www.lescigognes.com/cooking.php\)](http://www.lescigognes.com/cooking.php) and [Riad Kaïss \(http://www.riadkaiss.com/cooking.php\)](http://www.riadkaiss.com/cooking.php) come highly recommended (as do their restaurants).

Unlike the cookery schools above, where the menu is largely fixed, here you'll be asked in advance what you want to cook – specific dishes, or culinary traditions (Jewish Moroccan, Berber, Fassi etc), or how to pair flavours, or particular techniques (like how to roll couscous). General manager Pierre – who has a very dry sense of humour – will start you off with a tour to meet his market suppliers, and owner Eben Lenderking, an expert on Moroccan cuisine, may come in for a chat. The authenticity and quality of what's made in the kitchens of these *riads* is such that Yotam Ottolenghi recently filmed here. Expect a real gastronomic education.

An alternative private class is [Ateliers d'Ailleurs \(http://www.ateliersdailleurs.com/ateliers\\_cuisine-en.html\)](http://www.ateliersdailleurs.com/ateliers_cuisine-en.html), which offers courses in arts and crafts as well as cooking. Again the approach is very flexible: you can choose start/finish times and the size of your group, and specify what main dish you'd like to make. Uniquely, lessons take place in a Moroccan home, using the host chef's kitchen (an interpreter is on hand). The chef also takes you on a tour of the markets beforehand. A great choice for authenticity, and good value too.

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