

## Marrakech & Casa Blanca trip Sep 2011

I recently visited the Amanjena Hotel and Le Sultana Hotel in Marrakech , and the Mazagan Beach Resort Hotel in Casa Blanca, courtesy of Sublime Luxury Travel and Westway Travel.



Marrakech is situated at the foot of the Atlas mountains, the imperial city of Marrakech is large and noisy, polluted and smelly BUT it is also fascinating full of history, beautiful and tranquil!! It is one of the most popular city break destinations Summer or Winter and even in the winter a good chance of sunshine.

Getting there is easy you can fly direct from Heathrow with British Midland, or from Gatwick with British Airways or Easyjet and from Stansted with Ryan Air, flying time is approximately 3.5 hours. British Midland and Royal Air Maroc also fly direct to/from Casa Blanca, flying time 3 hours 20 minutes. The transfer time from Marrakech airport to the centre is approximately 20 minutes and Casablanca to/from the airport is an hour.

Firstly we spent 2 nights at the Amanjena it is situated just outside the city of Marrakech on the southern road to Ouarzazate.



Upon arrival at the hotel it certainly takes your breath away absolutely stunning, a myriad of arches that lead you to a beautiful lake. The surrounding features, ie the pool and bar area, the library and restaurants are nicely spaced out, and outdoor dining is encouraged in the Summer months. The main restaurant offers Moroccan/Mediterranean food, and there is also a Thai restaurant. However you can dine in the privacy of your own room if you wish.



The hotel infact only has 39 rooms or pavilions as they like to call them. The pavilions are huge but take a maximum of 3 people, unless you stay in one of the Maisons which is a 2 bedroomed property. The pavilions are interconnecting via the gardens at the rear of the pavilions. The staff were fantastic the service was good always a hello and this was actually more noticeable at how good they were as we visited more hotels. The spa was like going into Aladdins's cave several private treatments rooms. Also tennis and golf are available.

The property did welcome children and at peak times they do provide a club in the library for the children, but I think this is fairly low key. On talking to the Manager, most people tend to stay within their own pavilion especially the ones with a pool.

One night was spent at the Le Sultana Hotel which is located in the Medina in Marrakech, it is a beautiful property it is part of the Small Luxury Hotels of the World, and it is so interesting each room is themed, either named after a bird or animal. It has the most fantastic roof top terrace, absolutely huge and although big it is well proportioned with tents and chairs, and a bar. This is where all the meals are taken. However overall was not impressed with the breakfast or meal that was provided in the evening. So personally would advise clients that although the property is good the food was disappointing. The hotel has a spa and hammam, which at one time was the best in Marrakech.



I have been to Marrakech before and didn't particularly like it, however I did go in February and it was raining, apparently this is the month with the most rainfall!! I stayed in the Medina which I found slightly overwhelming, I found to be a bit too busy for my liking, fine inside the Riads and there are hundreds, but as soon as you come outside hoards of people. Some of the areas are a bit dirty, and beware of mopeds wizzing by and stall holders vying for business, however some people may prefer the busy atmosphere. There are plenty of

things to do in Marrakech the Palaces & Monuments, the Marjorelle Gardens just slightly easier if you stay within the medina, as most things on your door step, other than the Souks, also a trip to the Atlas Mountains is a must and is generally a full day trip. The medina is even busier in the evening, the whole market is alive with market stall restaurants. We did have a guide escorting us around the Medina but you can do it alone, and you will get lost!! The benefits of staying outside the Medina are that the hotels seem more relaxing and tranquil, less frantic and very easy to get into the centre by taxi.

You cannot go to Marrakech and not go and see La Mamounia Hotel, we literally had a spare 45 minutes and did an impromptu visit and I am so glad we did, not sure if I would actually like to stay there (only if I was a Wag or had a rich Russian boyfriend!!!) It is really an experience, I can understand why it took 3 years to refurbish. It really is like going back in time. Not sure who I would send here as the property is rather opulent and the suites a tad ostentatious. Although we only had time to see one of the suites, I understand that the lead in rooms are fine.



After a 3.5 hour transfer from Marrakech I arrived in Casa Blanca ready for our 2 night stay at the Mazagan which is part of the One&Only hotel group. It is a resort hotel, huge with 500 rooms, a golf club and spa. It is a 5\* property and is marketed as such, however not on the One&Only website as although 5\* not a luxury hotel. A few of the travel agents I was with were impressed and comparing it to the Abama in Tenerife which is a 5\* luxury hotel so they felt it was a good 5\* but not luxury.



We were allocated rooms with a sea view and the view was wonderful great private sandy beach (7k in total). If you are travelling with children, they also offer interconnecting rooms as well. Lovely big rooms and bathroom with separate shower. The hotel offers 8 restaurants and the bar area is located in the rear of the main entrance to the property. One thing I did notice is that they allow smoking in a lot of the public areas so this maybe an advantage or disadvantage. The hotel has a casino the biggest in North Africa, and a nightclub.

I would be happy to send people here, they have a fabulous golf club 18 hole links course, designed by Gary Player. Although I do not play golf myself one of the party did and was very impressed. We ate at the golf club and the food was superb. Most people tend to eat in the hotel, it is sold primarily a B&B basis, with supplements for half-board. On the half board arrangement meals are taken in the "Market Place" restaurant. If you want to eat in one of their other 7 restaurants, you get a credit towards the meal and you pay the difference.

The Mazagan is rather isolated, the town of El Jadida is approximately 20 minutes away with not a lot there, and Casa Blanca itself approx 60 miles away, so a fair distance from the hotel but excursions from the hotel are available. There is a trip to the 15<sup>th</sup> Century City of Azemmour which is only a couple of miles away. The hotel has a wonderful spa (I have been to a few myself and this is one of the best I have ever been in). Sea views from the treatment rooms, you even get to choose the music and not the usual piped rubbish!!!

For the children they have a Baby Club, 3 months to 4 years, a kids club, 4-12 years where they offer wonderful activities, and for the teenagers Club Rush a games room with all the latest technology. There is a separate pool for the children and babysitting is provided. Personally I thought a really nice hotel that would suit couples, family groups and golfing/corporate groups. It did have a conference centre as well.

You can visit Marrakech and Casablanca separately, however I think it works perfectly as a 2-centre city first and then beach. The transfer in-between is non eventful but you do see some of the rural areas of Morocco.

Price wise in Morocco the usual if you stay in expensive hotels, food, wine expensive on par with what you would pay in the UK. The Moroccan wine is surprisingly good. However on eating out being a muslim country some of the restaurants do not serve alcohol. I really enjoyed this trip and I am so glad I revisited Marrakech, I really loved it the second time around....it has culture, and variety. The people are friendly, fabulous hotels and restaurants and mint tea!!!!

