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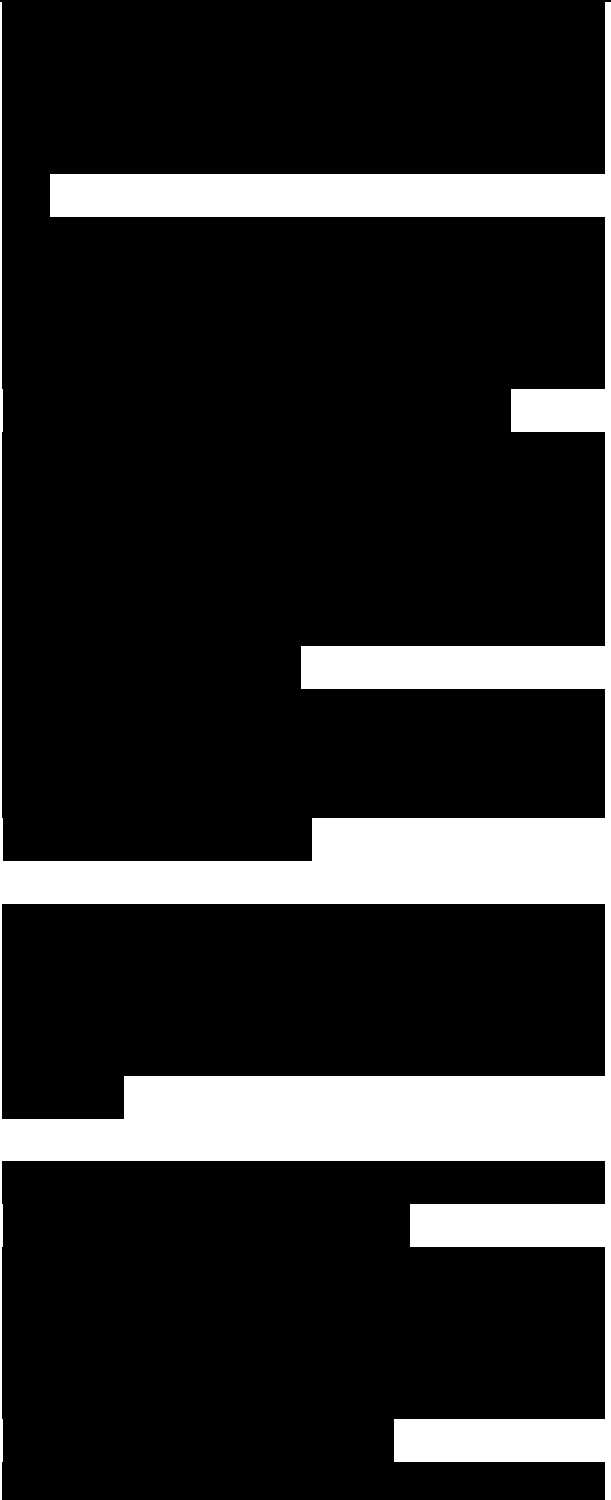
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## CHAPTER 1:

<b>10 things to know before visiting Morocco</b>	<b>10 điều cần biết khi du lịch tới Ma-rốc</b>
<p>Rainbows of color, spice-market smells, an urban orchestra of sounds: Morocco can be overwhelming at first.</p> <p>Lying 13 kilometers, or 8 miles, from the coast of Spain, the North African country mixes Middle Eastern magic, Berber tradition and European flair. Tourism has more than doubled since 2002, to nearly 10 million visitors in 2011. King Mohammed VI wants to increase the annual visitor numbers to 18 million by 2020.</p> <p>The royal ruler's strategy is underpinned by infrastructure development, making traveling around the country even easier.</p> <p>Add to this a program of ongoing social, political and economic reforms, and Morocco is one of the most moderate and peaceful countries in the region.</p> <p><b>Cafes dominate life in Tangier</b> Cafes are the key place to socialize, for Moroccan men at least. They gather to drink sweet mint tea and watch people as they go about their affairs.</p> <p>The northern port city of Tangier has a history of literary bohemianism and</p>	

illicit goings-on, thanks to its status as an International Zone from 1923 to 1956.

The Interzone years, and the heady decades that followed, saw writers, rock stars and eccentrics flock to the city's 800-plus cafés.

Two must-visit spots: **Cafe Hafa**, overlooking the Strait of Gibraltar, was a favorite hangout of Tangier's most famous expat, Beat writer Paul Bowles. Smoky and slightly edgy, **Cafe Baba** is the coolest spot in the Kasbah. A photo of Keith Richards, kif-pipe in hand, still adorns the grimy walls.

### **Most mosques are off-limits to non-Muslims**

Nearly 99% of the population is Muslim, and hearing the muezzin's melodic call to prayer for the first time is a spine-tingling moment.

While very few Moroccan mosques are open to non-Muslims, one exception is the towering **Hassan II Mosque** in Casablanca.

Located on a promontory over the Atlantic Ocean, the mosque was completed in 1993 and can hold 105,000 worshipers inside and out.

Tradition and technology sit side by side, with colorful zellij (mosaic tiles), intricate stucco and carved cedar complementing the retractable roof and heated flooring.

If you can't make it to Casa, Marrakech's 16th-century **Ali ben**



**Youssef** madrassa-turned-museum is open to all and also features impressive Islamic design.

**Multilingual Moroccans will put you to shame**

Moroccans switch languages mid-sentence, reflecting the cultures -- Berber, Arab, French and Spanish -- that have crisscrossed the country.

Arabic is the official language, and you'll hear the Moroccan dialect, Darija, spoken on the street.

French continues to be widely spoken in cities; foreigners are often addressed in this first. Spanish is still spoken in Tangier.

There are also three main dialects spoken by the country's Berber majority: Tashelhit, Tamazight and Tarifit.

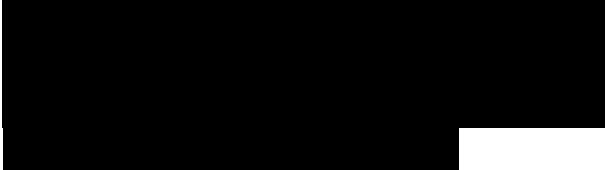
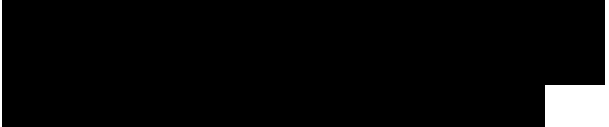
You'll be able to get by with English in the main tourist hubs, although "La, shukran" ("No, thank you" in Arabic) is one phrase to master.

**Don't get stuck in Marrakech**

Marrakech is justifiably popular, but there's so much more.

**Fez** tops the list for its maze-like medina, fabulous foodie scene and annual [Festival of World Sacred Music](#).

For a slice of the Sahara, there's the desert town of **Merzouga**, near the impressive Erg Chebbi sand dunes,



accessible via camel treks.

Active types can hike between **Berber villages** in the High Atlas or head to the blue-hued Andalusian town of **Chefchaouen** to explore the Rif Mountains.

Beach bums will love laid-back **Essaouira** and **Sidi Ifni** on the Atlantic coast, while surfers often head south to **Taghazout**.

For quiet contemplation, Morocco's holiest town, **Moulay Idriss**, is hard to beat. Plus, you'll have the nearby Roman ruins of Volubilis pretty much to yourself.

### **If you don't like cumin, you may starve**

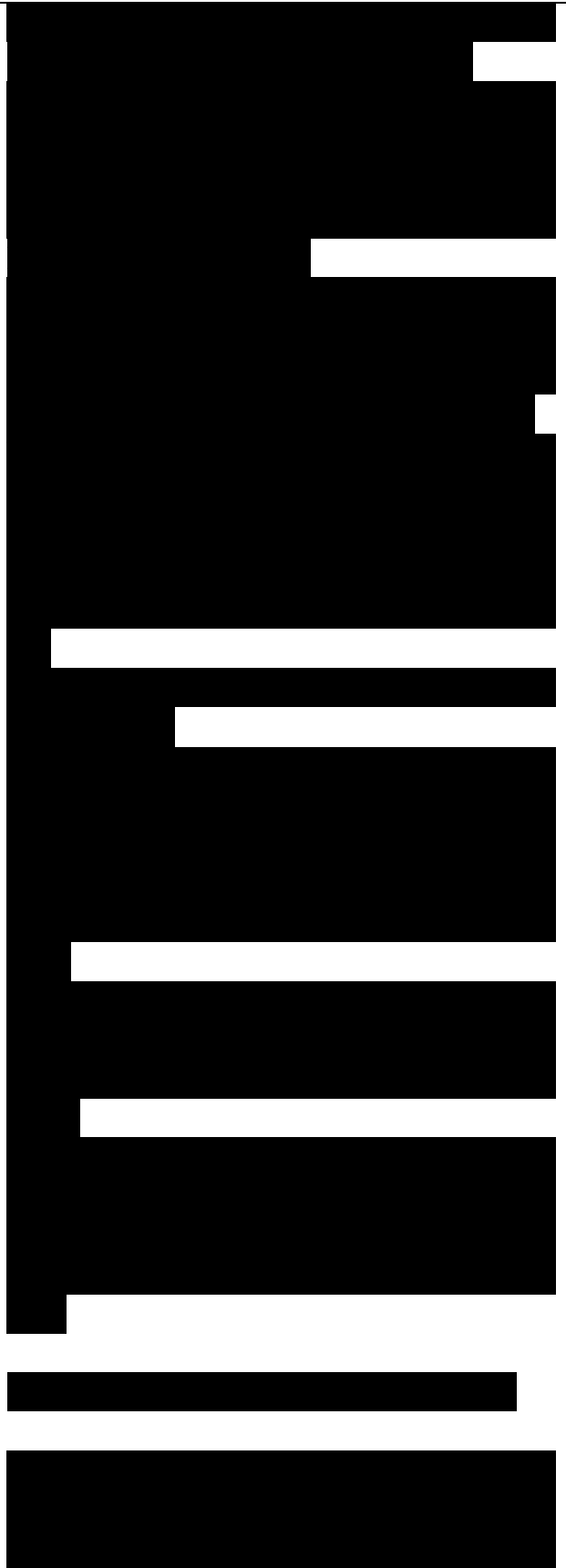
Cumin is one of the main spices used in Moroccan cooking. This pungent powder is used to flavor everything from tagines to mechoui (slow-roasted lamb).

Cumin is used as a condiment on most Moroccan tables, along with salt and chili. It's also a popular natural remedy for diarrhea.

"Cumin has anti-parasitical properties, so if you've got an upset tummy, a spoonful of cumin knocked back with water will help," said food guide Gail Leonard with [Plan-It Fez](#).

### **Trains are cheap, comfortable and reliable**

Train company [ONCF](#) operates one of the best train networks in Africa, making it the easiest way to travel between cities.



It's worth paying extra for first class, which comes with a reserved seat and A/C. First class carriages have six-seat compartments or open-plan seating. Stock up on snacks, or buy them onboard, as it's customary to share food. When it comes to traveling to smaller towns and villages, buses and grand taxis, usually old Mercedes sedans that can seat six (at a squash), are best.

### **Couscous is served on Fridays**

You'll see it on every restaurant menu, but traditionally, couscous is served on Fridays, when families gather after prayers.

This is because the proper (not packet) stuff takes a long time to prepare.

Coarse semolina is hand-rolled into small granules to be steamed and fluffed three times. It's pale in color, deliciously creamy and served with vegetables and/or meat or fish.

Bread is the staple carb and is served with every meal, except couscous.

It's baked in communal wood-fired ovens, one of five amenities found in every neighborhood (the others being a hammam, or bathhouse; a drinking fountain; a mosque and a preschool).

### **Riad rooftops rock**

The traditional Moroccan house (riad) is built around a central courtyard with windows facing inwards for privacy.

They're decked out with elaborate zellij, stucco and painted cedar and are easily the most atmospheric places to stay.

While Moroccans tend to use their



rooftops as clotheslines, a riad roof terrace is the place to be come sunset.

In Marrakech, Italian-designed **Riad Joya** has prime views of the Koutoubia Mosque minaret, while five-star **La Sultana** overlooks the Atlas Mountains.

Top picks in Fez are the bohemian **Riad Idrissy** and its suntrap terrace, while **Dar Roumana** has sweeping views of the world's largest living medieval Islamic city.

#### **When you hear 'balak!' watch out**

Morocco's souks are not for the faint-hearted. The narrow streets teem with hagglers, hustlers, mule-drivers and motor scooters.

Rule No. 1 is to step aside when you hear "Balak!" It means there's a heavily laden handcart or mule bearing down on you.

You'll inevitably get lost, as maps don't usually include the warren of small alleys that make up the medina.

A guide can help you get your bearings and fend off touts, but be aware that anything you buy will have his commission built in to the price.

Alternatively, taking snaps of landmarks with your smartphone can help you find your way back to your accommodation.



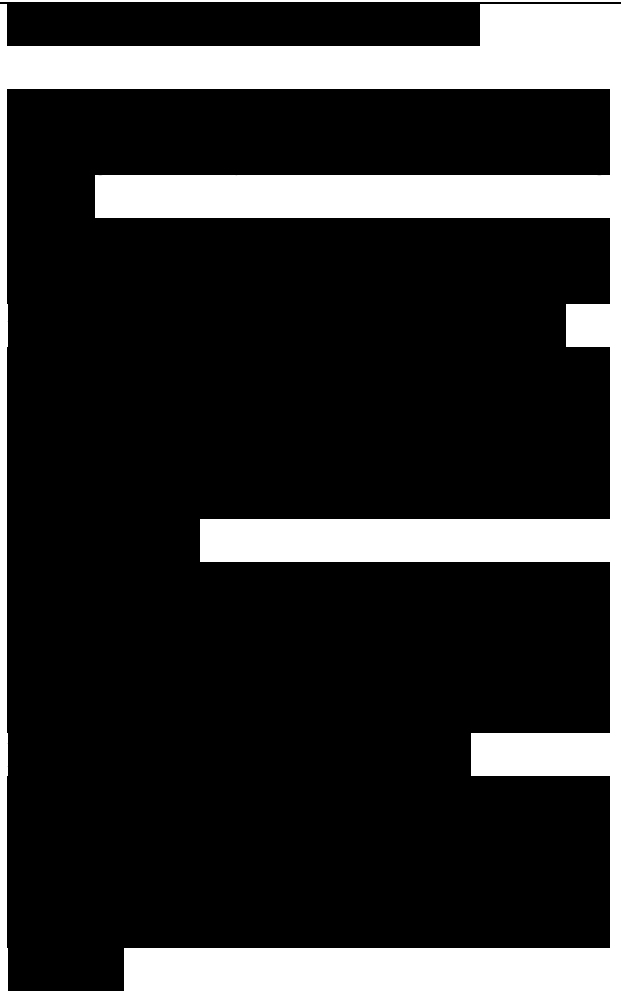
**It's not weird to be bathed by a stranger**

There are plenty of posh hotel hammams, but nothing beats a visit to a no-frills public bathhouse.

Spotting the entrance can be tricky, as most signs are written in Arabic. Look for a shop selling toiletries or a mosque, as these are usually nearby.

It's advisable to stock up on black olive oil soap, ghassoul (clay used as hair conditioner), a kiis (exfoliating glove) and a mat to sit on. Visitors need to take their own towels, comb and flip-flops.

Women strip to their knickers (no bra), and men wear underpants. Then you'll be steamed, scrubbed and pummeled until you're squeaky clean.

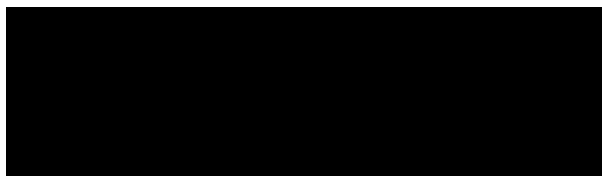




**Music, magic and art in Morocco,  
Africa's festival capital**

Morocco is Africa's cradle of rhythm and music with internationally recognized music and art festivals showing off Arab, African and Berber influences.

In one summer, you can strutt your way through the beats of traditional Gnaoua music in Essaouira as performers enter a trance-like state, then head to Agadir



to discover Berber sounds and culture.

You can headbang through metal guitar solos in Casablanca's urban music festival then soothe your soul courtesy of Sufi master Egyptian Sheikh Yassine El Touhami at the World Sacred Music festival in Fes.

### *1. Dakhla Festival: Dakhla*

Woodstock might be over but its spirit is alive in a remote corner of Morocco.

Dakhla offers a quiet and cool "West coast atmosphere of the 1970s," as José Kamal, founding director of the Sea and Desert Festival, puts it.

Festival-goers can mingle with local and international artists and sports champions here. The New York Times ranked this town one of the [top 2012 travel destinations](#).

"What attracts tourists is first the magic of the place: the wilderness that embraces the ocean with the bay with turquoise waters, it is simply sublime," Kamal says.

The Dakhla Festival features a "Women from here and there" corner to honor



female African artists and athletes. It also celebrates various ancestral musical influences as Dakhla is at the crossroad between Sahraouian culture (from the Sahara desert) African, Maghrebi and European cultures.

**Date:** February 2013.

**Website:** [www.dakhla-festival.com](http://www.dakhla-festival.com)

**Getting there:** There are almost daily local flights from Casablanca to Dakhla.

**Good to know:** It is worth walking on the fine sand of the 25-meter high white dunes. You can also taste great seafood as Dakhla farms oysters, clams, mussels and the south coast of the Atlantic Ocean is full of lobsters.

## ***2. Mawazine World Rhythms Festival: Rabat***

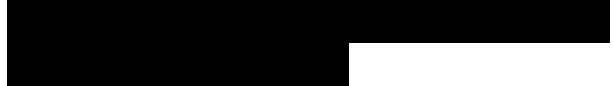
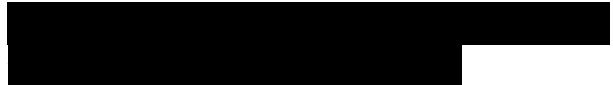
“Music has no border” is the motto of the Mawazine World Rhythms Festival.

The nine-day celebration of world music offers a fusion of dances, folk traditions and eclectic music. It embraces musical styles from Indian folk to Electro, Balkans folk, Rai (Algerian music), Reggae, R’n’B and Rock.

The Mawazine World Rhythms also



[www.dakhla-festival.com](http://www.dakhla-festival.com)



celebrates street shows with young drummers, capoeeristas and choreographers. Previous sessions showcased Yusuf Islam (Cat Stevens), Scorpions, Lionel Richie, Jimmy Cliff, Khaled and Youssou N'Dour, to mention a few.

It is also an occasion for travelers to attend panel discussions and workshops about Morocco's music and art.

**Date:** Late May 2013.

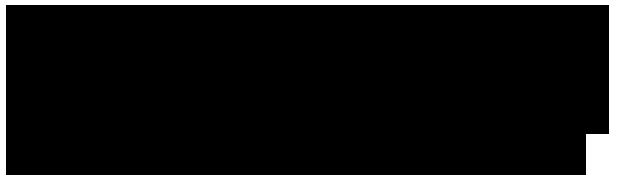
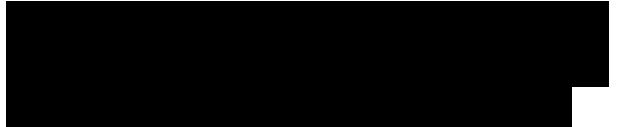
**Website for tickets:**  
[www.festivalmawazine.ma/en](http://www.festivalmawazine.ma/en)

**Getting there:** You can land at the Rabat-Salé airport. The Rabat Ville train station is located in the center of the city so you can hail a little blue taxi to get around (minimum fare is about 50 cents).

**Good to know:** Rabat might not be the most exciting place to visit in Morocco but you can still see some nicely preserved cultural features.

### ***3. The Gnawa World Music Festival: Essaouira***

From The Beatles to Kerouac and Ginsberg, many a godfather of hippiness has paid a visit to one of Morocco's most enticing cities. Even Hendrix reportedly got a little buzz on the beach here in July 1969.



Included are jam sessions with local and international artists, including KyMani Marley, The Wailers, and Paolo Fresu.

The four-day festival celebrates mesmerizing Gnawa (an ethnic group descendant of black African slaves) rhythms, a mystical form of music halfway between African shamanism and Islamic ritual.

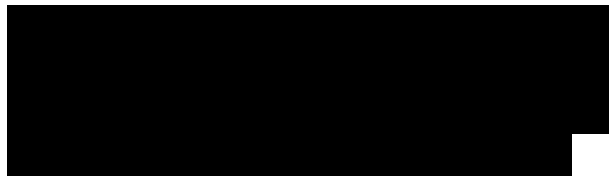
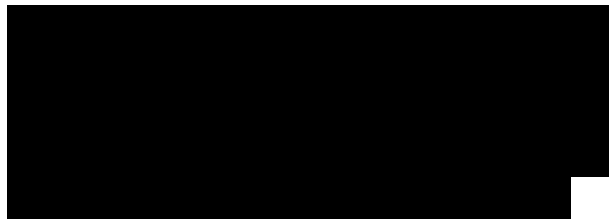
While moving from one stage to the other, travelers will see Gnawa performers rotating their heads, using a minstrel banjo and clacking castanets.

"Essaouira's Festival is often compared to Woodstock or an African carnival. It's a space of freedom where everyone is here in a spirit of celebration and sharing," Hicham El Kebbaj, the festival's artistic coordinator says, as he recalls "wandering freely" in the harbor with Robert Plant.

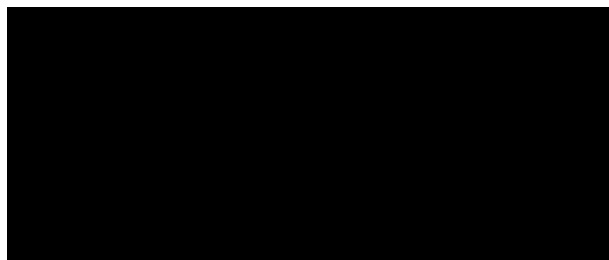
**Date:** June 20-23, 2013.

**Website:** [www.festival-gnaoua.net/en](http://www.festival-gnaoua.net/en)

**Getting there:** You can land at the Essaouira airport. Local flights are available from Casablanca to Essaouira and Marrakech to Essaouira. Bus rides are available daily from Casablanca (US\$12, six hours) and Marrakesh



[www.festival-gnaoua.net/en](http://www.festival-gnaoua.net/en)



(US\$6, 2.5 hours).

**Good to know:** You can visit the local souks (markets) to shop for some Moroccan handicrafts, herbs, spices and delicious cakes in the old Medina (ancient fortified town), which is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage. You can also walk on the ramparts, eat grilled fish, visit art galleries or improve your golf skills.

#### ***4. The Timitar Festival: Agadir***

Berber culture comes alive with this dance extravaganza and folk music fest encompassing jazz, hip-hop, Indian, Spanish and Cuban beats. The Timitar Festival is a cultural project born of the desire to pay tribute to Morocco's Amazigh (Berber) ethnic group.

From artists like American jazz pianist Randy Weston and Nass El Ghiwane, this festival has grown to become one of Africa's biggest music events. It features more than 40 artists in free concerts in three open-air venues.

Curious tourists can also learn about this culture by attending colloquia and workshops on Amazigh culture.

**Date:** June 2013.

**Website:** [festivaltimitar.ma](http://festivaltimitar.ma)

**Getting there:** Agadir–Al Massira airport has direct flights from major European cities. If you are already in Morocco, there are daily bus services from Casablanca (US\$18, nine hours), Rabat (US\$20, 10 hours), Marrakesh (US\$8, four hours) and Essaouira (US\$6, four hours).

**Good to know:** Agadir, which offers 300 days of sunshine a year, is Morocco’s first seaside resort. You can walk along the shimmering sea and take advantage of the thalassotherapy, balneo-therapy and hammam (public oriental baths) treatments.

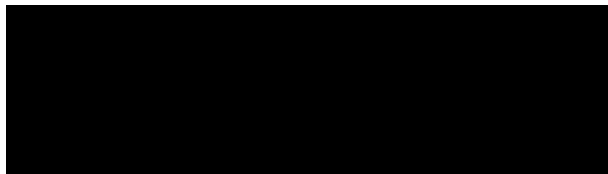
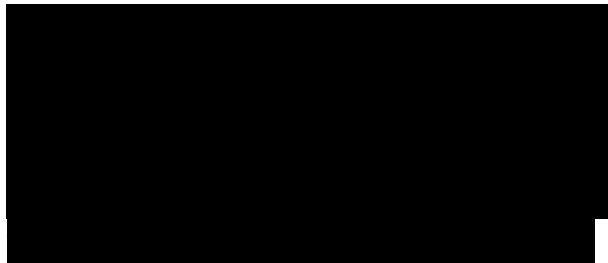
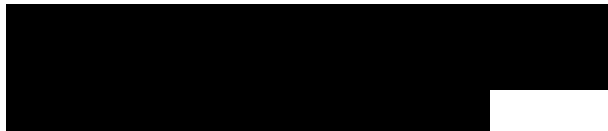
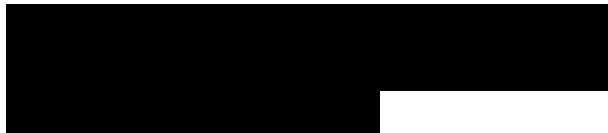
***5. National Festival of Popular Arts: Marrakech***

This festival will enchant sightseers with its extravaganza of music, color, tastes and belly dancers.

As Morocco’s oldest festival (48 years), it promotes traditional culture as an important part of the collective memory.

The five-day event displays exhibition areas with traditional arts and crafts scattered throughout the “Red pearl” city. Travelers can learn how to build rare musical instruments and taste various local products.

The festival also showcases dance shows, photography exhibitions, film screenings and lectures with researchers and specialists on Morocco’s ancestral



culture.

Festival-goers will also witness Morocco's various musical influences from verbal jousting, Melhoun (folk poetry), Andalusia-inspired songsters as well as improvised declamation.

**Date:** June 20-24, 2013.

**Website for tickets:**  
[www.marrakechfestival.com](http://www.marrakechfestival.com)

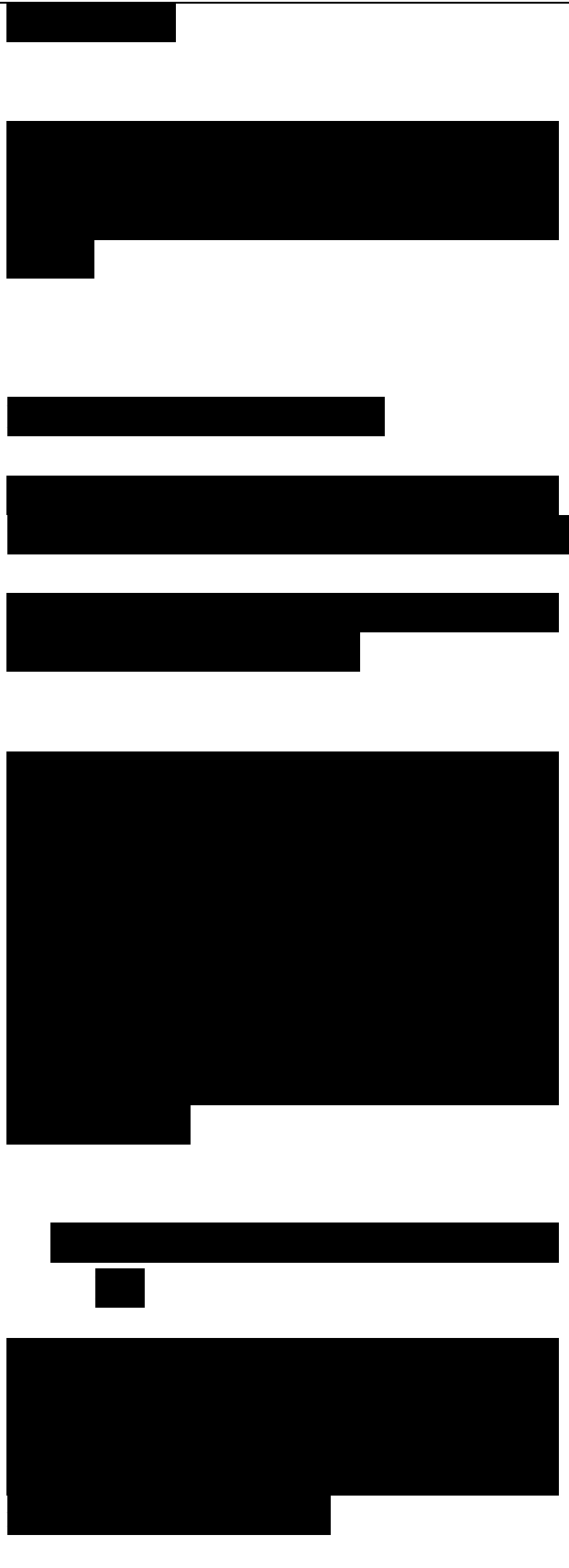
**Getting there:** There is a large selection of low-cost flights to Marrakech airport.

**Good to know:** Fortune tellers, snake charmers, fire-swallowers and acrobats are a must-see in the city's main square, Jamaa El Fna. You can wander through the dizzying array of food stalls and shops. You can also visit the Koutoubia gardens and minarets and walk along the sun-splashed city walls. You can then attend a fantasia with Arabian horses near the Al Badi palace.

#### ***6. Festival of World Sacred Music: Fes***

This is the most spiritual music festival of the year. The United Nations designated it in 2001 one of the major events contributing to the [dialog between civilizations](#).

This mystical festival offers the opportunity to experience a wide





spectrum of music from European classical to Moroccan Sufi chants, Pakistani qawwali incantations, Egyptian madhi odes to flamenco-style saeta, Bulgarian orthodox choir, ancient Indian gwalior chants, Turkish whirling dervishes and Celtic sacred music.

It brings together artists such as jazz saxophonist Archie Shepp, pianist and vocalist Amina Myers, Icelandic singer Bjork, Ravi Shankar and Miriam Makeba.

Festival-goers can also take part in various seminars and discussions. Every year, the festival brings performers, philosophers, academics, economists and artists from every corner of the planet to debate today's intractable issues.

**Date:** June 7-15, 2013.

**Website for tickets:**  
[www.fesfestival.com](http://www.fesfestival.com)

**Getting there:** travelers can land at Fes Airport located about 10 kilometers outside the city.

**Good to know:** Fes has been Morocco's intellectual capital for many centuries. Along this cultural journey, visit the old medina for the Dar Tazi gardens, or relax on Berber rugs and sip mint tea.

## 7. *Boulevard of Young Musicians*



[www.fesfestival.com](http://www.fesfestival.com)



***festival: Casablanca***

They rap rough. They breakdance. They exhort festival-goers to jump. The Boulevard of Young Musicians Festival in Morocco's romantic city is the best way to get introduced to Casablanca's urban music scene.

With a mix of funk rhythms and shout-along refrains, this four-day festival gives a taste of the live energy and exuberant attitude of Moroccan youth.

The Artistic and Cultural Education (EAC) association organized it as a competition to reward the best talent in four categories: Electro, Rap, Rock/Metal and Fusion. It's a vibrant musical patchwork with other styles like Raga, Jazz, Reggae and Rai.

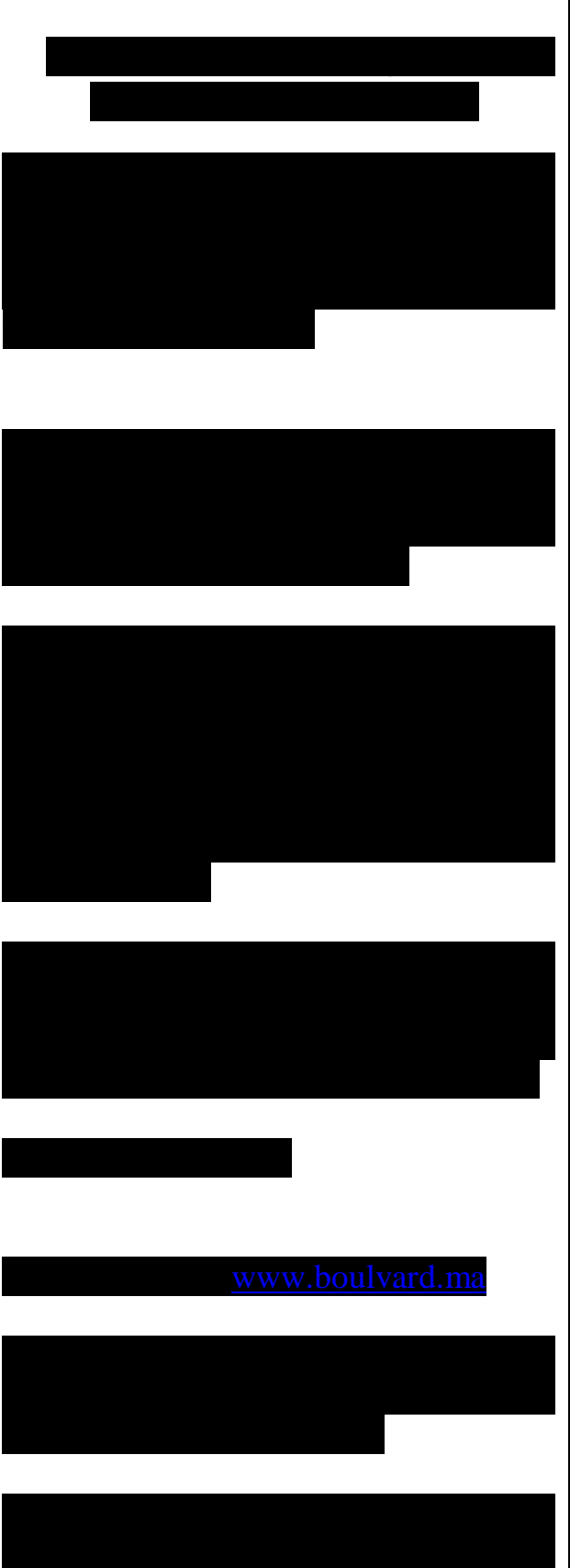
The festival showcases Moroccan and North African artists like four-piece hip-hop group H-Kayne, Darga and Hoba Hoba Spirit and Gnawa Diffusion.

**Date:** June 2013.

**Website for tickets:**  
[www.boulevard.ma](http://www.boulevard.ma)

**Getting there:** Travelers land at the Mohammed V airport in Casablanca, Morocco's busiest airport.

**Good to know:** The Hassan II Mosque, one of the largest in the world, is a landmark monument with its remarkable architecture and delicate



carving. It stands right above the Atlantic Ocean. For lovers of the movie “Casablanca,” the legendary Ricks’ café ([www.rickscafe.ma](http://www.rickscafe.ma)) remains the same with its sculpted bar, balustrades and piano (but without Sam!).

### **8. *Tanjazz Festival: Tangier***

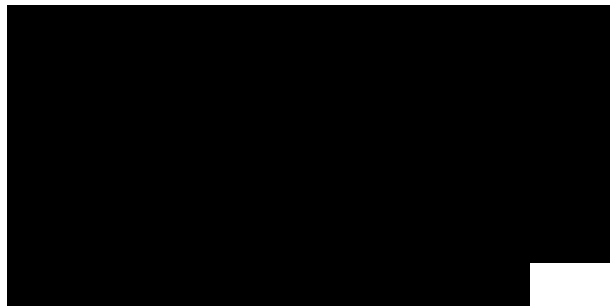
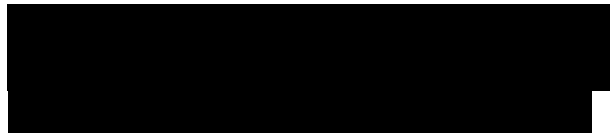
Jazz aficionados will not be left out. In Morocco’s charming port of Tangier, Arabic jazz (jazz rhythms played with the oud, a North African instrument similar to the European lute) meets Western jazz.

This five-day festival blends different sounds and harmonies from upbeat jazz to traditional local music.

Artists include American jazz trumpeter Roy Hargrove, Italian jazz singer Roberta Gambarini, British jive and swing band The Jive Aces, Deutsch band Witchcraft as well as Moroccan jazzmen such as M’Oud Swing Quartet and Gnawa Express.

The festival includes jam sessions, street jazz gigs and free be-bop dance lessons. Some concerts also are free on public stages.

Tanjazz revives the spirit of the 1900s, when Tangiers was a retreat for experimental writers like William Burroughs and romanticized by artists



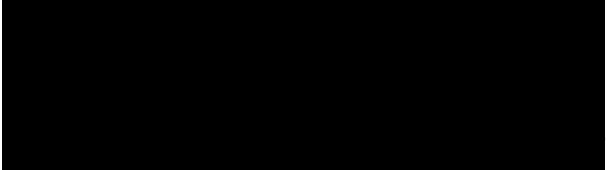
such as Matisse.

**Date:** September 19-23, 2013

**Website for tickets:** [www.tanjazz.org](http://www.tanjazz.org)

**Getting there:** You can either book a flight to Tangier or take the ferry from Spain. There are high-speed ferries from Algeciras, Tarifa and Barcelona to Tangier almost every hour as the Moroccan port is only nine miles from the Spanish coast.

**Good to know:** Sipping a Tangier-style mint tea on the terrace of the Hafa café (open since 1921, which is probably the last time they bought new chairs) is a must. The place offers a magnificent view of the Strait of Gibraltar and the Spanish shores, where the Atlantic and Mediterranean Oceans meet.



[www.tanjazz.org](http://www.tanjazz.org)

