

# Three-minute guide: Things to do in Rabat, Morocco

Brian Johnston, March 17 2017

<http://www.traveller.com.au/threeminute-guide-rabat-morocco-guver7>



*Kasbah des Oudaias beach in the city of Rabat. Photo: iStock*

**WHY:** Cosmopolitan and glamorous by Moroccan standards, Rabat ([visitmorocco.com](http://visitmorocco.com)) is a good place to acclimatise to Morocco. The capital is a conservative, orderly and uncrowded town of wide avenues and French-era squares with a quirky medina (old town) at its centre and an imposing kasbah (fortress) overlooking the sea and its river. Its history dates back to Roman times, and Rabat is now positioning itself as a cultural centre with a startling, revamped riverfront graced with contemporary architecture.

**VISIT:** The Chellah has the remains of an old Roman trading post and later fortifications, topped with storks' nests and scented with orange trees. Rabat's medina is far less grubby and chaotic than others in Morocco; inspect spices, foodstuffs and handicrafts, and soak up its residential life. The extensive French-created "new" town has grand colonial buildings and pleasant cafe-filled squares. Finally, wander the new riverside promenades to inspect ongoing redevelopments, including a starting Zara Hadid-deigned opera house.

**EAT:** Dine by candlelight at Le Dinarjat (6 rue Belgnaoui) and you won't be disappointed: the traditional Moroccan cuisine is as good as the romantic decor in this Andalusian-style courtyard house in the medina. Le Petit Beur (8 rue Damas) is owned by a Breton and has good mixed French-Moroccan food. In the kasbah, Café Maure (rue Bazo) has a lovely view over the river, making it a nice perch for Moroccan tea and pastries.



*Mausoleum of King Mohammed V. Photo: Brian Johnston*

**LOOK:** Hassan Tower is all that remains of a gargantuan 12th-century mosque, never completed. The impressive 44-metre minaret sits across a column-studded square from the Mausoleum of Mohammed V, the current king of Morocco's grandfather. Its austere exterior, guarded by soldiers on horseback, hides a gorgeous interior of traditional Moroccan mosaics and woodwork. Cross the river to Sale, a medieval trading port and later pirate base whose labyrinthine streets converge on the Grand Mosque.

**MUST:** Kasbah des Oudaias, founded in the 12th century, sits on cliffs overlooking both ocean and river and, despite its massive fortifications, has the appeal of a village with its cobbled streets and blue-and-white houses. Check out its ornate and monumental entrance gate, Andalusian Gardens, old mosque and tea houses before browsing art galleries and admiring the views. Locals gather on Plateforme du Semaphore in the evenings for breezes and sunset. Rabat's beaches are a golden curve beneath.

**SLEEP:** Look no further than Villa Mandarine ([villamandarine.com](http://villamandarine.com)), tucked into a tranquil Rabat suburb and embedded in a fabulous garden shaded by orange and lemon trees, stalked by peacocks and reflected in a swimming pool. It has a cosy, family-run atmosphere without pretention. Colourful, breezy rooms all have their own balcony or terrace. The restaurant has very good French and Moroccan food; the Moroccan salads and fish tagine are particularly tasty.

**TIP:** Australian-owned By Prior Arrangement ([bypriorarrangement.com](http://bypriorarrangement.com)) specialises in handcrafted historical and cultural itineraries in Rabat and throughout Morocco that might focus on food, architecture or interiors. Excellent local guides provide insider knowledge of Rabat's highlights and hidden sights.