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European Commission

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Es Saadi Gardens & Resort, Marrakech

by Sarah-Jayne Smith

"All that glitters is not gold" said the Prince of Morocco in the Shakespearean tale, The Merchant of Venice. The Prince was busy vying for the affections of the illustrious Portia at the time, and may not have noticed the Es Saadi Palace Hotel being built, a Midas haven where if it glitters its gold; and you're more likely to see a happy go-lucky Porsche, than a damsel in distress.



The Es Saadi Gardens & Resort Hotel in Marrakech, is enchantment and opulence. You feel like royalty entering the Palace between two antique calvary horses, gliding into the anomalous lobby fashioned with a great fountain under a carved cupola.

Traditional mint tea is served to port-time princes and princesses on arrival. The gentleman serving does so in traditional dress, which adds to the sense that you really are in an oasis folded into the middle of the desert.

Situated in the heart of Marrakech, facing the Atlas Mountains, the Es Saadi Gardens & Resort Hotel is surrounded by beautiful tangerine, lemon, bougainvillea and palm trees. This beauty evokes an old movie feel which lingers as the sun sets. The hotel is run by the Bauchat-Bouhliel family and it was first built in the 1950's when the Rolling Stones and the Getty's stayed, though it's difficult to imagine Mick and Keith complaining about 'not getting' no satisfaction here.

The Hollywood feel has been kept alive, and today the Palace plays host to many big screen stars during its film festivals, guests include the refined Sean Connery and a latter day Merchant of Venice, Al Pacino.

Situated in the Hivernage, the quiet residential area of the city, the hotel is half-way from the ancient town of Medina and a modern town called Gueliz. Transport is not a case of getting a camel through the eye of a needle, the airport is only ten minutes by car. You can hire a 'small taxi', usually an old style fiat panda, which can take up to three people, or the medium taxis, usually a Mercedes.

As with the surroundings in Marrakech there is a vast difference in the newly developed Marrakech and the enchanting old town. The feature of the old town is one of the busiest squares in Africa - Djemma el Fna. The square comes alive at night with the bustling of acrobats, dancers, snake charmers and fortune tellers and wonderful Moroccan food is cooked fresh, such as the tagine; or if you are feeling adventurous, traditional sheep's brains which are served still in the poor animal's skull - this experience is possibly where the phrase 'sheepish' comes from.

"...stay in a place where the marmalade at breakfast is made fresh from the orange trees in the garden..."

Each floor of the Es Saadi Gardens & Resort Hotel is themed with a different colour. Our floor was Majorolle blue. Each room is decorated individually, including the marble flooring in the bathroom and the traditional Berber rugs on the floors. The rooms are exquisite, in the kingly sense of the word. The staff couldn't be more accommodating. They even go to the

point of sprinkling fresh rose petals over the bed each day - try not leaving this place as a spoilt little princess! In this respect the Palace is ideal for honeymooners but equally so for business travellers needing to relax.

There are two pools, one which is heated all year round, with a bar in the middle. The Oriental Spa facilities are excellent; with the ancient 'hammam' and black soap rub being offered as a speciality, and special it certainly is. If you are feeling more energetic, there is also a tennis court and an exercise room with a qualified trainer on site.

Different restaurants within the huge landscaped complex offer varied dining. The Lagon & Jardin has an open kitchen and offers international and Mediterranean cuisine next to the gardens and pool; La Cour de Lion has some of the best Moroccan cuisine. It is situated on the top floor of the Palace and its design is inspired by the Alhambra Palace. The Es Saadi also boasts the first Casino to be built in Morocco, completed in 1952, and it has a nightclub described as the 'hippest in Morocco' based within the Casino.

For the business traveller, every room has Wifi, and there are nine meeting rooms, each decorated to the highest Moroccan style. The hotel can also be used for receptions and banquets accommodating up to two hundred people. If you enjoy a little heat then the weather in Morocco should not cause you any concern. Marrakech weather is usually sunny all year round, with relatively warm summers and mild winter days. The nights can be very chilly however. Marrakech is blessed with distinct seasons: its winters are followed by delightful springs, followed by scorching summers after which the land experiences rainfall making autumns

that bit cooler. The Es Saadi Gardens & Resort Hotel is the epitome of opulence and rest within a bustling city, it's a place filled with his-

tory and intrigue. The city seems to cast a spell over anyone who visits, ensuring that you return time and again, if for no other reason than to stay in a place where the marmalade at breakfast is made fresh from the orange trees in the garden. Principally!

Rates at The Es Saadi Gardens & Resort, newly opened Palace start from 5200 Dh (approx £361) per room per night in a Junior Suite

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