

**m & it**

meetings & inc



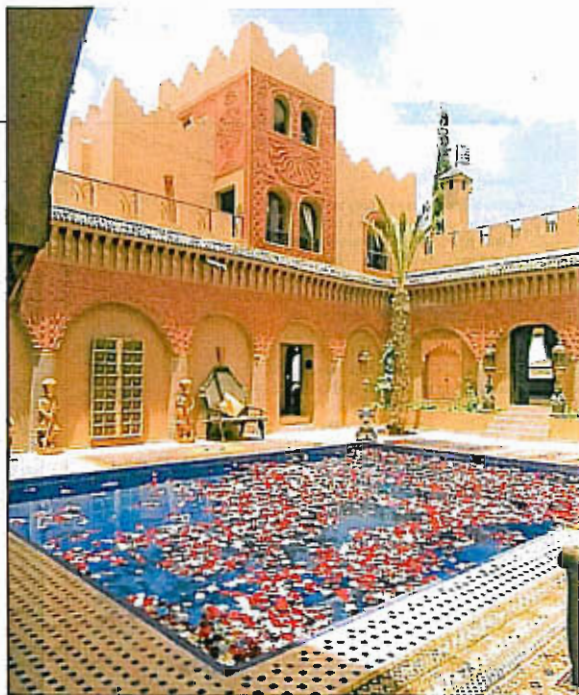
**'Let the delegates play'**

No kidding – it helps adults learn

+ Is sustainable attainable? + Case studies: Lloyds TSB, BT, Roche, T-Mobile, Alliance & Leicester + MIMA report

MARRAKECH

# A touch of the exotic



Richard Branson's Moroccan retreat: Kasbah Tamadot

Marrakech offers the scents and spices of Arabia with a flight time of just three and a half hours from London. Dave Saunders reports

Marrakech is about the nearest destination to the UK that is truly exotic. Just eight miles from the southern tip of Spain, North Africa beckons with images of blanketed Berbers, hooker pipes, red-decked water sellers and an abundance of scents and spices to stimulate the creative juices of the most jaded event planner. A three and a half-hour flight from London, the value for money city has the flavour of Arabia, a clement climate and no time difference.

Culturally, this is beyond our collective comfort zone. Yet, combine this out-of-the-box trissoon with the increasing supply of haute cuisine, high efficiency and a high degree of comfort, and you have a recipe for a high-impact meeting or incentive trip.

At its best, Marrakech delivers quality with a Franco-Arabic accent. But beware service providers that may be hot on charm and cool on results. "Our experience with a local OMC is echoed by other event organisers," says Cheryl Davis,

senior account manager at Blueprint, who took 15 sales staff and partners on an incentive to Marrakech in March-April 2006. "We couldn't be sure that what we'd arranged was definitely going to happen when we thought it would. It's not that the OMCs and some of the venues were unhelpful, but they weren't used to the level of detail required for an incentive group. Also, traditional restaurants did not offer much variety, so catering for vegetarians was a real challenge."

On the positive side, the group was moved by the humanitarian interaction with a school in a Berber village, where the client made significant donations, and staying a couple of nights at Richard Branson's Moroccan retreat. "The Kasbah Tamadot was a great example of what is possible in terms of service; the venue pulled out all the stops to make things happen for us," adds Davis.

Located in the High Atlas region, 45 minutes from the city, Kasbah Tamadot is an oasis of courtyards and landscaped gardens, packed with antiques from the Arab world,

India and the Far East. During 2007 an outdoor treatment area was opened, followed by a second terrace restaurant and a shop selling local produce. Up to 30 non-residents can stop by for lunch.

Also out of town is the expensive, and expanding, 312-room Palmerale Golf Palace (PGP). Besides refurbishing all its rooms in March 2007, a 44-suite hotel, Pavillon du Golf, was added to the property, along with the 26-suite boutique hotel, Les Jardins d'Ines, as well as a conference centre incorporating a plenary hall seating 1,500 and 15 additional rooms for up to 200.

Julinn Bazley, incentive specialist at Maritz, oversaw a four-day 'Casino Royale' event at PGP in December 2006 for Ford dealer sales managers. "Marrakech offered opportunities for the right mix of cultural experience, luxurious relaxation and adventure-orientated activity, plus the glamorous, mysterious and exotic elements associated with a Bond movie," says Bazley. Local DMC Menara Tours coordinated a programme incorporating a treasure hunt in the souk, Moroccan food and

Continued on page 132

'Traditional restaurants did not offer much variety, so catering for vegetarians was a real challenge'

Cheryl Davis  
Blueprint

## MARRAKECH

Continued from page 131

folklore display, desert rally and black tie dinner at a 16th-century fort.

Within the minaret-dotted, sandstone pink city, high-end medium-sized conference groups opt for the 346-room Sofitel Marrakech in the French quarter, offering five modern meeting rooms seating up to 450. Nearby, the 277-room Le Meridien N'Fi has four meeting rooms for up to 150 and refurbished its guest rooms in November 2007.

The 150-room Es Saadi Gardens & Resort opened a new all-suite building in autumn 2007 called the Es Saadi Palace, with 92 suites and new conference facilities seating up to 500.

Groups with more accountable budgets are drawn towards the 236-room Atlas Medina & Spa or the 661-room Royal Mirage (formerly



Viewpoint: the Atlas Mountains

Sheraton) with its conference centre accommodating up to 800.

Large conference groups gravitate towards the Mansour Eddahbi, located 200 yards from the medina and five minutes drive from Marrakech Menara airport. The 441-room hotel (formerly Kempinski) is joined to a congress centre featuring a ballroom seating up to 1,500, which was the largest in Morocco until matched by the new PGP facilities.

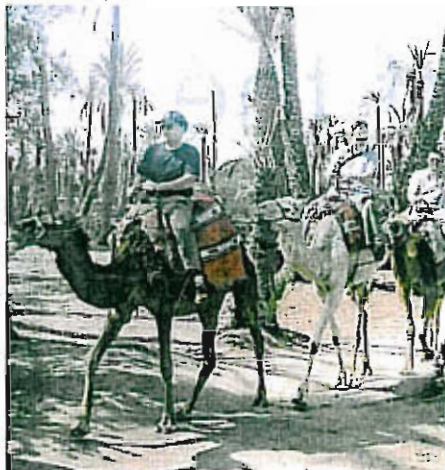
Demonstrating a commitment to the meetings market, the expansion of facilities is due to continue with a dozen more major hotels planned between the end of the 2008 and 2010, from the grandeur of a 400-bed Four Seasons hotel to the large scale properties of Samannah, Oukaimeden Atlas Ski & Golf, Palmerie de Marrakech and Zahrai Annakhil, each with over 1,000 beds

**'Quad biking was a clear favourite; every guest came back covered in orange dust and smiling from ear to ear'**

Hayley Greaves  
Banks Sadler

 **casestudy**

Hayley  
Greaves  
Banks  
Sadler



Get the hump: the group enjoyed camel riding and quad biking

## Drive of your life

Hayley Greaves, account team manager at Banks Sadler, arranged two four-night back to back events in Marrakech in March 2007. As a reward for the top performing managers in both the Parts and Service departments of Peugeot dealerships, a total of 94 winners stayed at the 236-room Atlas Medina & Spa, a city hotel with large gardens, conference room and just five minutes from the lively nightlife of central Djemaa El Fna Square.

"Marrakech gives you a real cultural experience without having to travel too far," says Greaves.

Meal venues included an outdoor lunch within the grounds of a hotel with a view of the Atlas Mountains; a traditional riad in the souks with belly dancing on the menu; the chic, celebrity-magnet restaurant called Yacoub; and a tented evening of music, dance and a display of horsemanship.

"Many of the meals were presented in tagines, and were therefore served family-style, which really helped the group to bond," she adds. "Nothing

is further than 25 minutes by coach, and horse-drawn carriages are also available, although more suited to partnered events."

Each group took part in a mad rally on one day and had a choice of quad biking, camel riding or spa treatment the next. "Quad biking was a clear favourite; every guest came back covered in orange dust and smiling from ear to ear," says Greaves. "In addition, they had plenty of opportunity to explore the more traditional side of the city. We worked with a brilliant DMC who strived to make the programme run the way we wanted it to. The guides had the personality and experience to judge the group just right and held their interest for the cultural parts."

Delegate feedback emphasised the impact of Morocco's contrasting culture, with such comments as: "It was one of the most interesting and daunting places I have ever been," "Certainly a culture shock!" and "It was absolutely awesome!"