

BEYOND THE MEDINA

Katy Hoogerwerf, Owner of Good Trips, invites travelers to explore Northern Morocco, where landscapes, cultures and history converge in one immersive itinerary

Off-roading with Mustafa, in a green Land Rover, we bumped along endless orchards of olive trees, herds of goats and sheep scattered across hillsides, and the occasional man and burro walking the road. We reach the top of a hill just as the sun begins to drop into the sea. Arriving at La Fiermontina, on Northern Morocco's Atlantic edge, already feels far removed from where my day began.

Just hours earlier, I'd been on Morocco's Mediterranean coast, where daily life is lived in close proximity to Europe and the outside world. Spanish, French, Arabic, and English overlap easily, without ceremony. Ferries run back and forth to Spain. People come and go. The north, here, is shaped by what passes through as much as what stays behind.

I came to the region to see a different side of Morocco. Curious about its reputation as a creative stronghold and drawn by a growing group of considered hotels catering to well-traveled guests valuing discretion, space and a sense of place as much as comfort and high-touch service. My journey was curated by Mario Teixeira, Founder of Asibi and a seasoned destination expert.

Start with the Sea

To understand the north, it helps to start with the sea rather than the sand. Rain falls here regularly outside the dry heat of summer and fall, keeping the land green for stretches of the year. The sea has always been the primary point of entry, and with it came people, ideas, languages, and various dogmas.



WORDS Katy Hoogerwerf. IMAGE ©

At Royal Mansour Tamuda Bay, five Prestige villas overlook the Mediterranean; each two-story, 630-square-meter private retreat offers unspoiled views and rare seclusion



Phoenicians. Romans. Andalusians. Portuguese and French. Sephardic Jews. Berber communities. Traders, fishermen, pirates, artists, and exiles. Some arrived deliberately, others by necessity, intending to leave but never did. Knowing which language to speak, and when, has always been part of daily life. Along the Mediterranean, Spanish mixes easily with Moroccan Arabic (Darija), Berber, and bits of French. On the Atlantic side, Darija dominates, with most people speaking French fluently.

I started in Tangier, a city belonging to many and to none, as international as it is local, as Mediterranean as it is Moroccan. Writers, artists, diplomats, musicians, royalty, and spies passed without attention. According to my Guide, Laila, “Tangier has never been a place to see and be seen. People come to be left alone.” But what happens here often resurfaces later, recast as legend.

The city remains notably lived-in. In the whitewashed *kasbah*—where decorative doors alone are worth the visit—and throughout the medina, daily life takes precedence over tourism.

Markets provide necessities, and shopkeepers know their regulars. In peak summer months, that balance shifts, but for much of the year, Tangier is shaped more by residents than by visitors.

Further along the Mediterranean coast sits Tetouan, quieter and less traveled, its Andalusian heritage expressed through its unique architecture and urban layout. Its blanched medina, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is among the country’s most intact. Workshops open directly onto narrow streets. Doors remain ajar. The medina functions as it always has: workshops at street level, family homes above and trades passed from one generation to the next.

Chefchaouen, tucked into the base of the Rif Mountains, was founded for protection rather than beauty, though its beauty—and its fabled blue façades—draws travelers today. Strategically positioned between mountain and sea, with fresh spring water in abundance and enough distance to deter opportunistic piracy, Chefchaouen became a refuge for Moors and Jews fleeing the

Above: Nestled between Tetouan and Tangier, the Royal Mansour Tamuda Bay celebrates the unique art de vivre of the Alboran Sea, where continents, cultures and civilisations converge

Opposite: At the Royal Mansour Tamuda Bay, three remarkable chefs have created four gastronomic journeys from the shores of the Mediterranean to the ends of the earth

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Spanish Reconquista in the late 15th century. Its indigo-washed medina is iconic, but the city’s structure, scale and daily life are the result of centuries of Andalusian and Berber culture.

My Guide, Mohammed—a well-known Berber in the community—greeted nearly everyone. “In this city, everyone knows and helps one another,” he said. Leading me through backstreets, he nods to every artisan and merchant, describing what is made locally. When I ask about rugs, we duck into a small riad. “This is where you buy your textiles.”

The surrounding Jbala region is renowned for the north’s most distinctive textiles, including the *mendil*, a red-and-white-striped cloth traditionally woven and worn by women. At L’Art de l’Artisanat Berbère, a cooperative run by Abdel, *mendil* textiles sit amid rugs, blankets and household pieces fashioned by tribeswomen across the Rif Mountains.

The third property in the Royal Mansour portfolio, Royal Mansour Tamuda Bay, is owned by the Moroccan royal family. Introducing

the brand’s rigor north in a setting defined by craftsmanship, discretion and service, it serves as my base while exploring these areas. Villas are arranged across the property. Select beachfront categories offer private pools, while others open onto gardens and courtyards. Interiors lean on natural materials and soft tones, balancing Moroccan craftsmanship with Mediterranean ease. Red-and-white-striped umbrellas line the shore, a subtle reference to Riviera-style without excess.

From here, Tangier, Tetouan and Chefchaouen are all within easy reach (and are often discussed together), as are archaeological sites, mountain trails and working coastal towns. On days spent closer to home, the property’s generous waterfront spaces provide leisure time to slow down and relax. Dining is overseen by chefs whose combined experience spans nine Michelin stars. And the medi-spa is among the largest in Africa. Favored by Moroccan families during the summer months, Tamuda Bay is now drawing a broader international audience beyond peak season, thanks to its accessibility, climate and the arrival of the Royal Mansour.

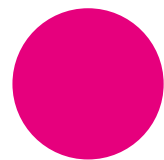


Extending The Journey: A Moroccan Tour

For travelers with more time, the north pairs naturally with the Royal Mansour properties in Marrakech and Casablanca. In Marrakech, the original Royal Mansour offers a medina-within-a-medina experience, where private riads replace traditional rooms and days revolve around gardens, hammams and the city’s historic core. By contrast, Casablanca’s Royal Mansour reflects the country’s modern face: oceanfront, architectural and urban, with sweeping views of the Atlantic, with a cosmopolitan dining scene. Together, these three properties trace Morocco’s spectrum—from the imperial city to the Atlantic metropolis, to the sea-shaped north. royalmansour.com



Tangier remains a lived-in city—its whitewashed kasbah, bustling medina, and everyday markets are shaped more by residents than tourists for much of the year



EMBRAER TIP

Arrive at Tangier Airport aboard the Phenom 300E—its spacious cabin and oversized windows offer a bright, comfortable sanctuary as you descend toward Morocco’s northern coast. After landing, enjoy a scenic drive to the Royal Mansour Tamuda Bay and the blue-washed streets of Chefchaouen.



Above: Located on Larache’s wild coast near Tangier, La Fiermontina is framed by the hills of northern Morocco and faces the Atlantic Ocean

Below: At La Fiermontina, guests discover their inner foodie with hands-on food and wine experiences, learning Italian home cooking techniques

West of the Strait

The route continues due west as mountains gradually cede to the Atlantic. Smaller coastal cities like Larache and Asilah, along with even smaller villages, shift the focus from migration and movement toward stillness. Teixeira put it simply, “The Atlantic here feels older, slower, more archaic. It speaks of a Morocco that existed before tourism.”

My final stay sits along this quiet edge. Standing on the terrace at La Fiermontina, clusters of villas stitched into the hillside overlooking the sea. The view leaves me momentarily slack-jawed. It’s not dramatic or engineered to impress. It is honest and grounded. Majestic comes to mind, though it feels inadequate.

Created by the Filali siblings, the property evolved from a private home rather than a development plan. Guest experiences revolve around shared meals, home visits and time spent with locals rather than staged encounters. At the end of a trip, it’s the ideal place to rest, absorb what

you’ve seen and immerse yourself in the region’s tranquility.

I arrived in Northern Morocco, musing about creative revival, a phrase particularly attached to Tangier—however, little required reviving. Creativity never disappeared here. It imbues daily life—in craft, in conversation and in the quiet confidence of a region that has long known its identity. That quality shapes the kind of traveler connecting with this region. As Teixeira said: “Northern Morocco tends to resonate with slower travelers rather than consumers of travel. People who have already traveled widely don’t need social validation. They feel comfortable with silence, books and long conversations on a foggy day.”

Gazing west toward the Atlantic, La Fiermontina felt like the natural place to adjourn. Not because there was nothing left to see, but because the north had already left an indelible mark. ◀



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