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Morocco



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Photo: Aina Svagarna



A BIT ON SURF IN MOROCCO



Set out to Morocco's endless Atlantic coastline and you're in for one grand surfing seaside adventure. You'll find busy spots, like Mehdia in the north, said to be the cradle of surfing in Morocco, and beaches in the south where your solitary surfing starts. There's a good chance you'll find unpopular spots, just you and your buddy surfing side by side. Or you could stay mainstream, share waves with the many around well-known breaks such as Imsouane and Taghazout.

Reportedly there were people surfing in Morocco as early as the 1950s. That would have been military personnel, stationed at the US Air Base in the north of Morocco, near Kenitra and the seaside resort of Mehdia. In those days, word of mouth may not have travelled as fast as the Facebook and Instagram posts of today, but it did travel anyway.

Around the late 60s to early 70s, together with the hippies, hobos and free-spirited travellers, came the first surf tourists from Europe, Australia and the US. Along with a handful of locals and expats, they started discovering the seemingly limitless surf options of this beautiful North African country, from easy beach rollers to world-class pointbreaks. Surf magazines began to publish articles and photos. At times surfers searched, magazine in hand, comparing rock formations and harbour walls with the photo features, to find that perfect right-hander.

Although you're certainly among today's adventurous, travelling in a campervan or hire car, boards on top; think back to those days, when the roads along the coast were largely potholed and sand covered. And surf travellers lived cheap as chips, without GPS, and drove their battered old cars or vans to unexplored areas and unnamed spots, maps and magazines in hand!

Nowadays, Morocco's a popular surf destination, and has brought forth the likes of charging Meryem El Gardoun, 4-time national female surf champion, and WSL surfer Ramzi Boukhiam, amongst others. There are surf schools and camps galore, but also still (amazingly) some spots to be discovered. And always, seen from whatever lineup, a backdrop that's beyond amazing.





Photo: Marie-Therese Pfisterer

TRAVEL INFO

If all you need's a ride from the station or airport to your surf camp, hotel or guesthouse, you can take a shared Grand Taxi. Some even come with roof racks. They're dead cheap but you can't plan your travels exactly to the minute; they'll only drive when full. Many hotels offer pick up and drop off from the airport to save you having to think about anything more than carrying your bag.

BY AIR

A few international airports offer direct flights to/from Aéroport Essaouira Mogador (ESU). The airport sits south of the city, on the N1 to Agadir.

w. onda.ma

Many European airlines fly directly to/from Agadir's Al Massira Airport (AGA). The airport is situated east of the city.

w. agadir-airport.com

BY BUS

A luxury coach shuttles between Essaouira and Agadir (3 times a day, takes 3.5 hrs) and Marrakech (5 times a day, 3 hrs).

w. oncf.ma / ctm.ma

CTM and Supratours offer regular buses from Agadir to Taghazout or Tamri. Or there's the local bus (32) from Agadir to Taghazout.

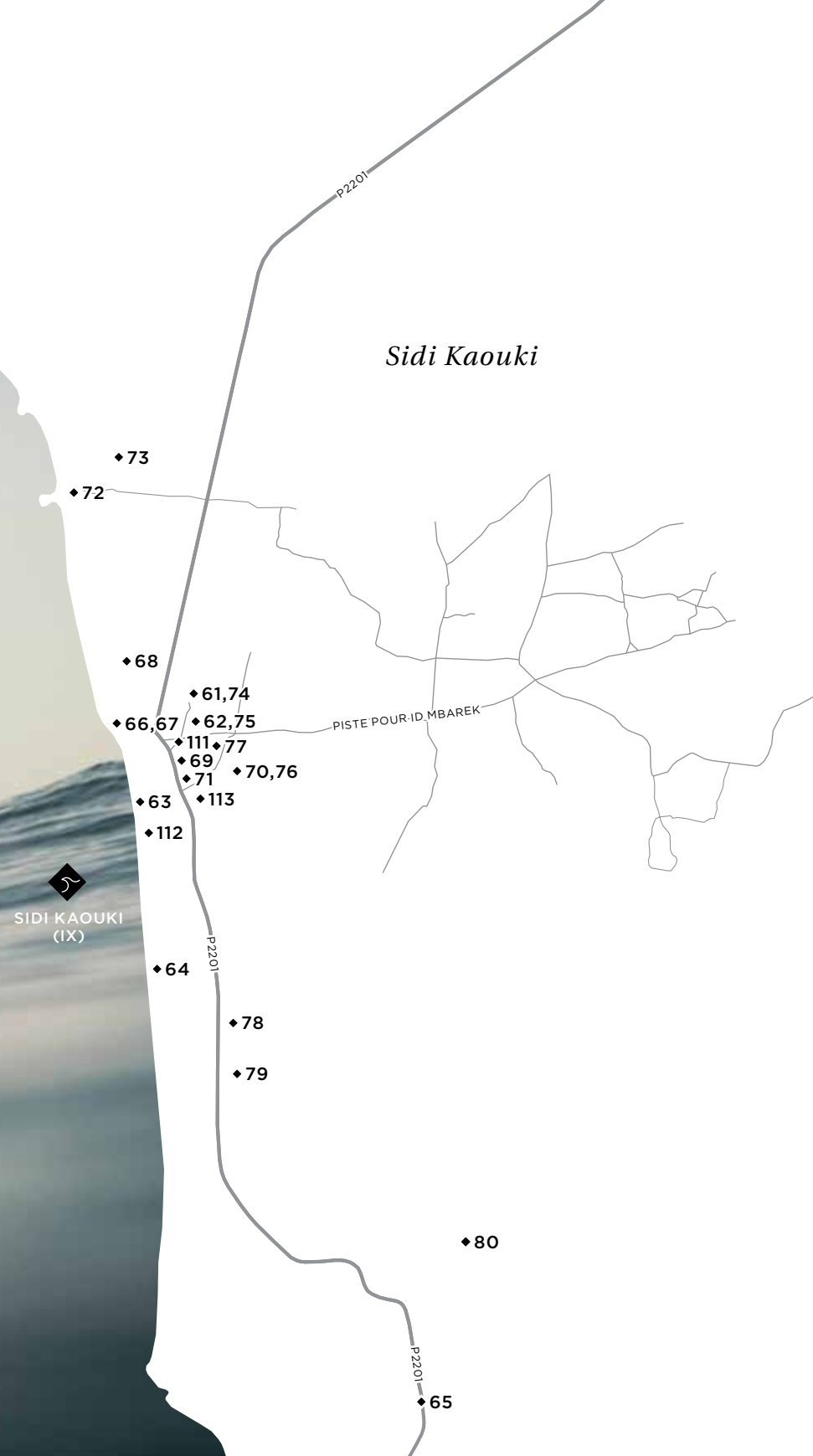
w. ctm.ma / supratours.ma



Photo: Marie-Therese Pfisterer







IN AND AROUND SIDI KAOUKI

Ever so small, ever so lovely. Sidi Kaouki's hardly a town; more of a fishing settlement, with some shops and eateries around a tiny square, and an ocean road where a few campsites, restaurants and guesthouses reside. The name derives from a 19th century marabout - saint - whose mausoleum you can't miss when entering town. (Hey, looks familiar? Check the cover again...) Contrary to Sidi Kaouki's small size, the vast beaches extend way away in both directions. Like Essaouira, it's much loved by kite and windsurfers because of consistent wind and wave days, but is oh so much quieter than its neighbouring city. In fact, there's not much more to do than either wait for the wind to drop, if you're into surfing, or wait for it to rise if you're equipped with a kite or sail. And isn't the thought of not a lot to do just ever so enticing?





Photo: Marie-Therese Pfisterer



Photo: Marie-Therese Pfisterer

TO DO

◆
Yoga (61) classes are available by reservation on Windy Kaouki's rooftop terrace. When it's too chilly outside, they've a large yoga room on the very same roof. Classes are officially only for guests, but if you ask nicely... Open all year.

- a.** Plage de Sidi Kaouki (100 m from the beach), 44000 Sidi Kaouki
t. +212 661 256 366
w. windykaouki.com



Alessandro, the owner of Auberge de la Plage, is a passionate cyclist. He rents out a few quality mountain bikes from his guesthouse, and offers **guided bicycle tours (62)**. The latter, a guided tour, we recommend because

Alessandro knows a thing or four about bicycles, the surrounding nature and routes. Open all year, upon reservation.

- a.** Auberge de la Plage, Plage de Sidi Kaouki (100 m from the beach), 44000 Sidi Kaouki
t. +212 661 102 664
w. kaouki.com



There are drivers with **camels and horses (63)** offering rides along the beach, but unable to guarantee a permanent 'service' we leave it to you to decide whether you think the animals are treated kindly. If in doubt, ask the guys from Kaouki Surf School, right at the beach when you enter town, if they can recommend someone; owner of the school, Brahim, is a reliable source of knowledge.



Sidi Kaouki's bewildering charm lies in its endlessly long stretch of **beach (64)**, backed by argan forests and hills. You will though, we're sure, feel compelled to combine your morning beach walk, yoga, run, or meditation, with a clean-up of the beach. Shoes, bags, bottles, you'll find it all, especially around the banks of the river to the south. Do bring a few dirham, because you may meet Boujma, a friendly chap riding his donkey up and down the beach, selling freshly baked bread. So you've got your daily bread covered before you head back. The next thing on your mind will be how and where to dump all collected rubbish and debris. Here's a problem; at least up to the date of printing this guide: we hope it's solved already, or will be in the near future,





Richie's (161), at the other end of the same beach, isn't really a beach bar, but more of a beach club. More upscale, hip, pretty fancy, turning up the music a bit louder in the evenings so it feels club-like. It overlooks surf break, K11, used for lessons during the day by Pure Surf Camps, who have their school based at Richie's. Good place to go if you want to go almost-but-not-quite-clubbing. Open all year. ♦♦♦♦

- a. KM11, 80000 Aourir
- t. +212 670 655 274
- fb. Richie's Café Restaurant

SHOP

Since there aren't many banks in the area, it might be handy to know there's an **ATM** on the main street of Aourir, next to the patisserie.



Don't miss a visit to the large **Souk (162)**, the fresh market; held every Wednesday, in a clearing at the far north end of Aourir. When you follow the main road towards Agadir, turn right towards the ocean at the roundabout. A sea of market stalls display their seasonal fruits, veggies, nuts, herbs, dates, carpets, all manner of whatnots and artefacts.

At the last row of houses - on the right if going south, just before the roundabout - you'll find a modern looking café and **patisserie (163)** selling croissants, pastries, and cakes. Their terrace is a wonderful, albeit somewhat noisy, place to join the local folks and watch daily village life go by.

- a. A1, between the ATMs, 80000 Aourir

SLEEP



Azul Guesthouse (164) is run by a local family, all brothers. One runs the guesthouse, the other runs the surf school, each other member enthusiastically making the guests feel at home. You'll learn the ins and outs of Berber life, food and culture, next to your daily portion of surf and yoga lessons. Yoga classes and retreats are held by British Sally Kirby, their certified in-house teacher. Open all year.

♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦

- a. Just off the N1, 80023 Tamraght (a few houses up the street from restaurant Ba bakoul)
- t. +212 673 575 021
- w. azul-guesthouse.com



Boutique hotel **Nice Base (165)** is one of the most delightful places we've seen around here. They've been



genially creative with building outside of the square and concrete house mould - which is the way houses are supposed to be built in this area. Balconies and boardwalks have been added around the house, with the use of wood, thatch and ropes, giving it a unique look and lots of character. Their large garden's a playground for the active and outdoor souls, with a pretty challenging skate bowl and equally challenging climbing wall. From top to bottom there's something for your entertainment or comfort. The rooftop's used as a yoga shala, with twice-daily lessons (non-guests welcome), the basement has an indoor sauna, as well as a storage room for your boards and wetsuits. And then there's the swimming pool, with a swing right above, giving you a panoramic view of the surroundings and ocean. They've several rooms to choose from, from shared to luxurious doubles with private balcony. Another way they distinguish themselves is that they serve solely vegan food. The buffet-style breakfast is included, dinner is served at request. To get there, take the road opposite Banana Beach all the way to the top, Nice Base is one of the last houses on the right, clearly signposted. Open all year.

♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦

- a. Hay Tissalouine, 80023 Tamraght
- t. +212 528 315 843 / 681 696 663
- w. nicebase.club



The Yogi Surfer (166), another gem. This boutique-style guesthouse, is run by a yogi and a surfer. (Could you have guessed?) Two beautiful people with years of experience, in not only surfing and yoga but also hospitality, before they began their own adventure with the Yogi Surfer. They've also been blissfully creative with the area's building restrictions. You can't see it from outside, but once inside you'll see what a little architectonic out-of-the-box thinking can inspire. All rooms are positioned around a spiralling staircase, leaving a roof-to-floor, light and bright opening in the middle of the building, which serves as the communal space. The rooftop has a terrace, a little pool, a shaded yoga deck and a view over the village and surroundings. They



serve varied organic and locally sourced food. All 8 rooms are done up nicely with cute details, like a hammam towel and beach basket which you can use. To find it take the road opposite Banana Beach, and it's one of the first houses on your right. Open all year. ♦♦♦♦

- a. Just off the N1, 80023 Tamraght
- t. +212 528 317 474
- w. theyogisurfer.com

Lovely guesthouse **Maison Darna (167)** has only 4 rooms, each with private bathroom, a balcony and hammock to laze away your afternoon. Each room has a minimum of adornments, just a few oriental details, giving a breezy, clutter-free feel. Of course, you can clutter it with your own stuff all you like. Your hosts will

be happy to help you find the obligatory yoga and surf lessons, or organise a visit to the hammam or trip to Paradise Valley, and they also offer activities such as cooking classes and off-road motorbike rides. Located at the back of the village, up on the hill. Open all year. ♦♦♦♦

- a. Hay Tamraght, 80023 Tamraght (ask for directions by phone or email)
- t. +212 661 236 939
- w. guesthouse.maisondarna.com



Protest partner **Solid (168)** surf and yoga house is run by local surfer Ayoub. He and his staff will help take your surfing to the next level, your yoga practice to deeper than ever and your love for Morocco to bigger and stronger than before. Their large





Photo: Adhar Joudi / Blue Morocco

SURF



From seldom surfed spots around Oualidia to the insanely crowded Bay of Imsouane, from kamikaze reefs to easy rollers; this stretch of coast offers a diversity that's rarely matched. Although popular Taghazout to the south is a close winner regarding diversity, eager spirits can still their hunger for exploring the unknown, even a few kilometres from Imsouane. Well, a few kilometres as the crow flies, driving the crazy narrow roads and long trails to get there requires a vehicle with some serious gear shifting ability and uphill power.



A shipwreck at the long stretch of beach of **Azemmour (I)**, north of Oualidia, is the only distinctive difference from the surrounding beaches. The exposed NW-facing spot works on a small to medium W, NW and N swell, and your best bet would be during lower tides. ♦ *All levels/sand/easy parking/restaurants.* ♦

El Jadida (II) has a small but enthusiastic surf community. The main spot is the NE facing beachbreak Plage Deauville, in the centre of town. Works on a small to medium swell at all tides, but we're told it also holds bigger W swells. The harbour wall offers a bit

of protection from strong NW winds. ♦ *All levels/sand/paid parking along the boulevard/restaurants.* ♦



The large **Oualidia Lagoon (III)** offers all the fun for beginners, big boards and SUPs. It needs a bigger N, NW or W swell and works at incoming tide. ♦ *All levels/sand/easy parking/camping/restaurants/surf shop/surf school.* ♦

To surf outside the lagoon requires more skill and surf experience, alongside local knowledge of where and when to enter. **Les Tomates (IV)**,



Photo: Bar van der Kemp



for example, produces powerful and hollow waves and can't handle big swells. The best source of information is Laurent Miramon, from Surfland surf school. He's been around long enough to know all the ins and outs of spots in the area. He's a busy man though, so if he's not available ask at the other surf schools. ♦ *Intermediate to advanced level/reef, sand and rocks/easy parking/camping/restaurants/surf shop/surf school.* ♦

Lalla-Fatna (V) is a large west facing bay, that produces hollow waves, even on the smallest of swells. Not a



beginners' spot, since the shorebreak and currents are strong. Works best on a small to medium N, NW or W swell. It's hardly ever busy because it's nowhere near a town or settlement. Follow the winding road down to get closest to the beach. ♦ *Intermediate-advanced levels/sand/small parking area at beach, big paid parking halfway down the road/restaurant in summer.* ♦

Safi (VI) is one of the most famous waves of this stretch, or maybe even the country's coastline. Here you'll find a long, fast and hollow righthander with your best bet of getting barrelled in



Morocco's murky coloured waters. The thing with waves like this is that you're definitely not the only one, and it's a rare occasion the wave works. When it does, it fires. It spits out local warriors, hot shots from around the world that flew in especially for the occasion, and travelling surfers and tourists that hopefully have a clue as to what they're doing there. Needless to say, be respectful if you do enter the line-up, wait your turn and don't paddle for the peak immediately. Safi's righthander works at low tide in bigger N, NW and W swells. Expect some locals not to be of the most welcoming nature - a





Photo: Pictess Sportswear

SCHOOL RENTAL REPAIR



Dozens of little surf shops are scattered throughout Taghazout, offering surf essentials, repair, second-hand and new surfboards, bodyboards, flip flops and changing robes.



Surf Maroc's (173) rental centre and surf shop is located next to Café Mouja, at the north end of Taghazout's main road. More upscale than most of the surf shops, you'll have a big choice of surf essentials, lifestyle clothing, and rental of surf and SUP boards and wetsuits. You'll also find the alternative boards by local shaper FAHD here. Open all year.

- a.** Avenue Mohamed V, 80020 Taghazout (on the road to Anchor Point)
- t.** +212 528 200 230
- w.** surfmaroc.com



Avid surfer and amiable local Fayed, of **FAHD Surfboards (174)**, shapes all sorts of odd and alternative boards. His main goal is not to be hip and happening or anything like that, it's because 'These boards make people smile', he says. To admire or order one of his beautifully hand-shaped boards, or get the best repairs on your own board, meet him at his workshop in Tamraght. His shaping bay is in a more secluded place up in the mountains, to prevent him from being disturbed whilst shaping and glassing. Fayed's been shaping for over 18 years, since he started out fixing broken boards and



Photo: Kelle | Surf Maroc

making new ones out of old blanks in Imsouane. It kept the costs low and it was one of the best ways to learn, practise and familiarise himself with the shaping process. Unlike countries in Europe, the USA and Australia, Morocco doesn't have a longstanding tradition of shaping and exchanging knowledge about making and repairing boards. Moreover, it's no easy task for Moroccan citizens to travel freely to these continents to educate themselves. Or to even get their hands on the necessary materials! Sometimes he asks people to bring materials over from Europe; mostly though, he has to be very creative and inventive to get to the end product, and that makes it all the more admirable. But even without knowing some background, we're sure you'll be impressed by the shape, look and feel of FAHD boards. You can find his workshop 100 metres from the

traffic lights on the N1 in Tamraght, turning left if coming from the north. You can also order online, or check out his boards at Surf Maroc in Taghazout.

- a.** On the corner of Rue Ait Soual, 80023 Tamraght
- t.** +212 601 517 008
- fb.** FAHD Surfboards



Banana Beach (175) surf shop and school's been around for many years, and is a good address for your essentials, rentals and lessons. The friendly staff have lots of knowledge about all the waves around and about. The shop's located along the road towards the beach (and souk area), turning right at the roundabout. The school's directly in front of surf spot K12. Open all year.

- a.** 80000 Aourir
- t.** +212 678 338 415
- w.** bananasurfmorocco.com





Photo: Alex / Getty

FOOD FACTS

FRESH FRUITS AND VEGGIES



If you spend long enough in Morocco you'll notice the seasonal changes first and foremost when you visit the fresh markets. You'll be ordering avocado shakes on a daily basis in winter, or a plate of orange slices sprinkled with cinnamon. In early spring you can add strawberries to your dessert, and you'll notice prickly pears growing on the cacti.

Come summer, enjoy juicy watermelons and the tastiest tomatoes. These are just a very few of the riches the fertile grounds of the Souss Valley and Agadir's coastal area produce.



In the Eat, Drink, Hang out section of this guide, we stopped mentioning 'seasonal and locally produced food on the menu' for good reason. Everywhere has fresh, local and seasonal produce, from top-class restaurants to street food stalls. And shopping at the souks to prepare your own meal is a feast in the making!



Photo: Alex Smith

RECIPE

SALADE CAROTTE A L'ORANGE



This is one easy-peasy and very refreshing carrot salad, serving 4. Eat as a side dish with a tagine, couscous or really just anything - whatever you're having as your main.

INGREDIENTES

4 to 8 large carrots

1 cup of freshly squeezed orange juice

½ a cup of freshly squeezed lemon juice

2 tablespoons olive oil

A pinch of cinnamon

A pinch of salt and pepper

A pinch of cumin

Fresh coriander and/or mint

A teaspoon of cane sugar or honey (optional)

Flaked or grated almonds (optional)

INSTRUCTIONS

Grate your large carrots over a big plate using a large grater. Then depending on how big your large carrots are, you may need more or less. Best way is to grate until you have a portion of 3 or 4 heaped spoons per person. Place the grated carrot in a bowl. Mix, in another bowl, olive oil, lemon and orange juice and all spices and pour over the shredded carrots. Sprinkle your chosen herb(s) and almonds, et voilà!

