

# “You can find anything... and surprises along the way”

Australian-born Angela Mellak who, with her Moroccan husband Mohamed, owns a boutique hotel in Marrakesh, shares her insider tips to the best of her adopted city



**ANGELA MELLAK**  
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## One of the best things about Marrakesh ...

is that you can find anything you're looking for and surprises along the way. I really do believe there is magic in the walls of this Medina. I love that the streets are so plain and everything is uniform – a poor

man can live next to a rich man and no one would know. Contrast is everything here. You come from a busy street that can feel overwhelming with crowds, food and cooking smells, delivery guys on bikes and tourists stumbling along, then you enter a doorway and it's another world. At Riad Botanica, you're hit with orangewood fragrances, then you step into the courtyard and you're swept away by colour, bird song, and the shade of our orange tree – you can immediately feel the calm and the love.

## I really didn't expect ...

to find so much kindness and so many delightful people who welcome me into their community (despite the fact I still can't speak their language). People have so much pride and kindness, you can get cut off in the car but someone will always say sorry, at times even blow you a kiss!

## Some favourite restaurants include ...

Les Jardins Du Lotus, with its huge, candlelit courtyard, gorgeous pink walls,

green palms and serious Marrakesh after-dark glamour. The Mexican chef Clarissa is amazing. Recently opened Flowers is a must for foodies. Farmers, in the heart of Guéliz (the modern quarter), has farm-to-table produce and great service.

## For a rooftop bar ...

try Dar Dar for its panoramic medina rooftop views and golden-hour magic. For sunset views, great drinks and jewel-toned interiors head to El Fenn (though service can be a little hit or miss). Kabana caters to a young, cosmopolitan crowd with its see-and-be-seen rooftop and views of Koutoubia minaret. For theatrical floorshows and live music, you will find dinner turns into dancing at Safran.

## Going to a hammam is ...

a must. It's a centuries-old ritual and a detox renewal. It's not just a spa but a cultural immersion.

## The best way to see Marrakesh ...

is to take your time. Get lost in the souks.



**Historic Marrakesh Medina and the Koutoubia minaret, Morocco; and dining at Riad Botanica, above.**

Explore the architecture. Ride a camel in Agafay, take a hot-air balloon over the mountains, drink cocktails at sunset, enjoy a leisurely lunch, pick up some spices, have a hammam. Then get lost again in the souks!

## Don't miss ...

If you like art, the I-54 exhibition showcasing contemporary African art kicks off at hotel palace La Mamounia yearly. Visit the vast 6th century Badi Palace and the magnificent 19th century Bahia Palace with its intricate paintings and mosaics. Le Jardin Secret, a traditional Moroccan garden, is an oasis in the busy Medina, and the botanical garden Jardin Majorelle is also fabulous.

## Take a tour of ...

Ben Youssef Madrasa to learn about its extraordinary architecture and the role of women inspiring its long history of learning. You must also visit Bacha Coffee Boutique in a former palace, for its old-world elegance, silver service, more than 220 varieties of coffee and Parisian-style pastries (it's worth the three-hour wait!).

## For families ...

I love visiting the new Orcha Farm at the Fairmont Royal Palm – there are ducks, donkeys and more. You can go ziplining in the mountains, or spend a day at the sprawling Beldi Country Club with its six swimming pools. For golfers, Marrakesh has more than a dozen golf courses.

## I don't recommend ...

the main square, Jemaa el-Fnaa. It's super crowded, has monkeys tied on chains, and people everywhere hassling you. If anything was to go wrong it would be here.

## The best time to visit ...

is any time, though it's best to avoid the hottest time of late July to mid-August.

## For a special souvenir ...

consider a tagine, a hand-engraved silver teapot, or a “blessing bottle” or Mrecha, often handcrafted silver or brass, which is used to sprinkle perfume and is a centuries-old cultural emblem.