

## MARRAKECH

SOUNDING OUT

## GOING TRAVELLING?

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Marrakech is the dusty pink jewel in the Moroccan crown. For centuries sultans have built palaces here and merchants have exchanged exotic goods – a place where traditions converge, fuse and erupt like tectonic plates. Morocco contains dozens of musical strands drawn from different elements of its cultural heritage – Al-Andalus music from the north; rasping Berber styles from the Atlas and Rif mountains; mystic Sufi chants of scattered brotherhoods; and hypnotic Gnawa music brought from sub-Saharan Africa by the slave caravans. These tangled rhythms form the fabric of daily life in Marrakech, but paradoxically, finding the repertoire in a live context is a hard nut to crack.

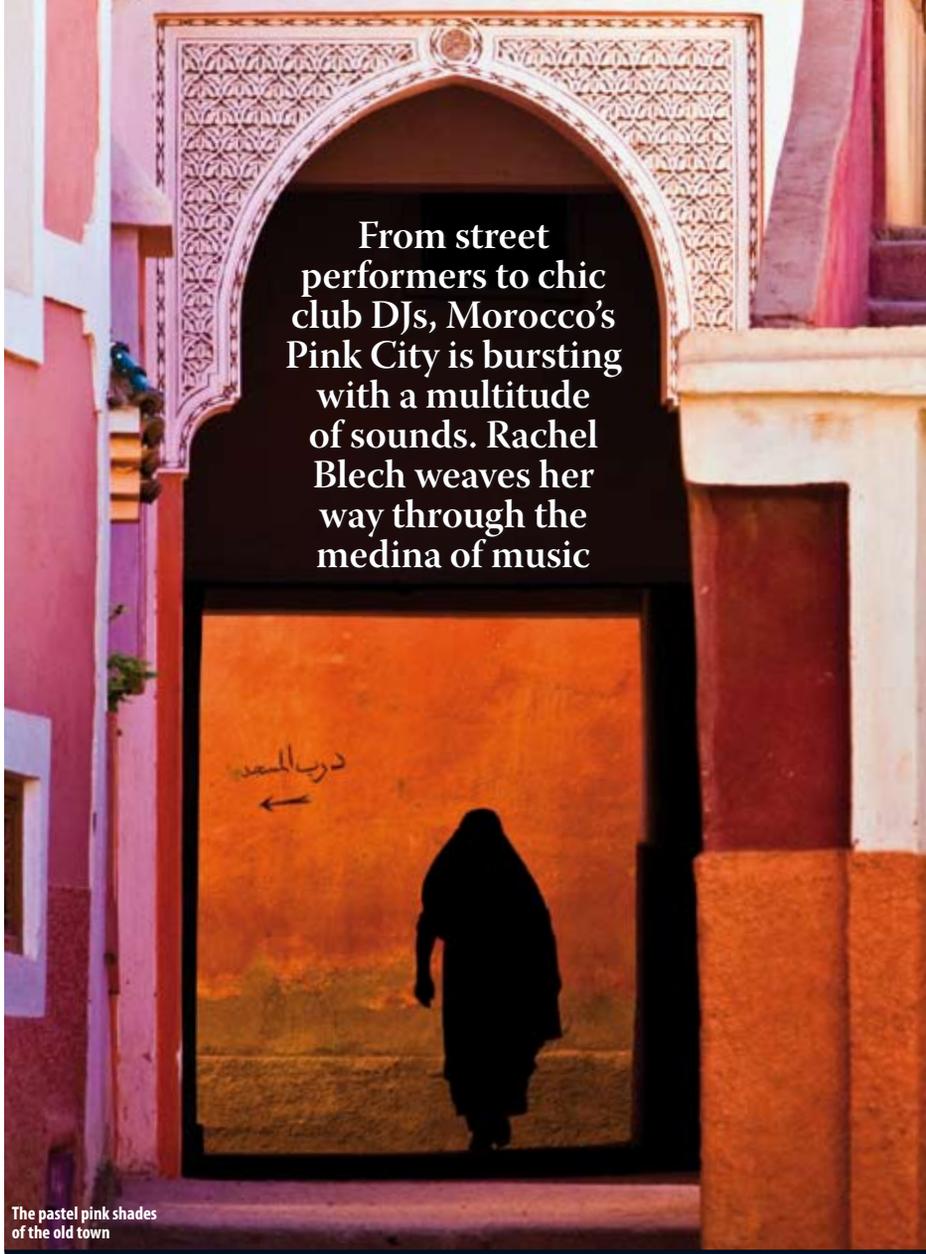
The narrow alleys of the ancient *medina* ring out with popular *chaabi* and *rai* music from stalls selling pirated CDs, while in the smarter areas of Hivernage and Guéliz – in the new town – the music scene is cool and chic, with DJs spinning homogenous techno grooves or more ambient chill-out vibes at premier clubs such as Pacha. Marrakech makes its living from tourism – the Moroccans come for the nightclubs, the non-Moroccans for the mystique, the beautiful *riad* hotels, the *souks* and the sun. The dilemma? The live music scene is confined to venues where the punter can afford to pay: restaurants, hotels and nightclubs. Sadly, in many cases this means that talented and accomplished players are placed in a dark corner simply to add a touch of oriental ‘musak,’ but some are better than others, so check out listings for recommendations.

Most *riad*-owners will be able to organise musical soirées upon request and this offers a great opportunity to absorb the music at close range. Gnawa music, with its dulcet-toned *gimbri* and tassel-twizzling dance, is the most popular genre. You’ll probably be seeing Gnawa music out of context as it has a deeply ceremonial function – so organised concerts are the only way of getting a dedicated performance outside of festival time.

For the mass tourism market, displays of horsemanship, regional costumes and folk music can be found in *fantasias* housed in specially constructed ‘kasbahs’ on the outskirts of town. Chez Ali is the most famous, with elaborate dinner-shows every night. But for those in search of music played from the heart they are about as authentic as a politician’s smile.

For ordinary Moroccans, the ‘people’s’ music comes alive every evening in the city’s epicentre – the Place Djemaa el Fna – where regular groups of local musicians armed with banjos, *bendir* (frame drum) and *darbouka* (goblet drum) gather to perform for the throngs. Be armed with loose change to give to the musicians – once you’ve given a few coins you’ll be welcomed to stay and join in! Marrakech’s own music brand is *daqqa marrakchia* – a polyrhythmic music performed using *krakesh* (metal castanets), small goblet *tarija* drums and *n’far* trumpets. Although mainly used for weddings, it can be found on the streets during the Halloween-like festivities of Achoura which takes place ten days into the Islamic year.

For a cross-section of Morocco’s regional music styles, the oldest and most highly-regarded event is the annual Festival National des Arts Populaires in mid-July. In recent years it’s been given a facelift by a new creative team and is an excellent showcase for all different styles of music, drawing big name acts.



From street performers to chic club DJs, Morocco’s Pink City is bursting with a multitude of sounds. Rachel Blech weaves her way through the medina of music

The pastel pink shades of the old town

## FESTIVALS

## Festival National des Arts Populaires

The main cultural event in the calendar, celebrating regional music, dance and folk. Big names have included Nass El Ghiwane and Jili Jilala in recent years.

July 18-25 2009, +212 (0)5 24 43 20 21, [www.marrakechfestival.com](http://www.marrakechfestival.com)

## Awaln’Art

French-style street circus in rural communities outside Marrakech. Visiting music acts have included Burkina Faso’s Djéliya performance troupe and in 2009 a Spanish juggling-cum-flamenco duo called Cie Los Infoncundibles.

June 18-21 2009, +212 (0)5 24 31 10 27, [www.awalnart.com](http://www.awalnart.com)

## Les Nuits d’Achoura

Families come into the streets

playing *daqqa* music and lighting bonfires. Concerts at the Théâtre Royal.

Around December 28 2009 (on the tenth day of Muharram), +212 (0)5 24 43 20 21

## Samaâ Marrakech (World Festival of Sufi Meetings and Music)

A celebration of the spiritual roots of Sufi chant, music and poetry.

May 27-31 2009, +212 (0)5 26 29 74 09/ +212 (0)6 67 23 47 00, [www.samaa-marrakech.com](http://www.samaa-marrakech.com)

## Moonfest World Music Festival

Held at lake Takerkoust 30km from Marrakech. 2009 acts included Ganga Vibes, Hoba Hoba Spirit and several traditional groups.

May 1-3 2009, +212 (0)6 61 43 21 29, [www.moonfestworldmusic.com](http://www.moonfestworldmusic.com)

French performance troupe Réve2 performing at Awaln’Art



## RESTAURANTS

### Dar El Baroud

A cosy riad serving great food. Resident musicians have a wide repertoire of classical, Arabic and traditional Moroccan tunes. The more interest you show in the music, the better they get!

275 Avenue Mohamed V, Derb Saïdalia,  
+212 (0)5 24 42 60 09

### Le Tanja

Wine bar downstairs and stylish restaurant upstairs. Live Moroccan music from *oud* and *darbouka* player from 7-9pm only. Bellydancers and CDs from 9pm onwards.

14 Derb J'did Mellah, Médina, +212 (0)5 24 38 38 36

### Dar Mimoun

A reasonably priced riad restaurant where you can discreetly bring your own alcohol. Resident musicians have been known to lapse into 'By the Rivers of Babylon' but brandish a copy of *Songlines* and the owner will get the real music flowing for you.

Riad Zitoune Kdim, 1 Derb Amrane, Médina,  
+212 (0)5 24 44 33 48

## PUBLIC SPACES

### Place Djemaa el Fna

Marrakech's most famous landmark is a seething hub of storytellers, medicine men, snake charmers, musicians and hustlers.

## LISTINGS

Some handy listing publications which can be picked up around town:

**La Tribune de Marrakech** – monthly magazine.

**Marrakech Pocket Guide** – monthly what's on and where to go, [www.marrakechpocket.com](http://www.marrakechpocket.com)

**Le Matin** – daily newspaper, [www.lematin.ma](http://www.lematin.ma)

Rare collectables at  
Brocante 24 in Guéliz



## RECORD AND MUSICAL INSTRUMENT SHOPS

Record shops don't exist in Marrakech per se – it's all pirated copies sold at about 15 dirhams a piece (around £1) from stalls around the Place Djemaa el Fna. There's a wealth of music simply not available in any other way – but on your conscience be it!

### Brocante 24

A treasure trove of rare vinyl albums of Arabic and Berber artists for the vintage collector.

Rue Yougoslavie, 24 Passage Ghandouri, Guéliz,  
+212 (0)6 78 96 74 25

### Bob Music

Owner Rachid has an extensive knowledge of the instruments he stocks, which include *rababs*, *gimbris* and *ghaitas* – the whole gamut in fact.

21 Rue Kennaria Dabachi, Médina, +212 (0)6 66 74 52 00

## VENUES

### Institut Français

An outdoor amphitheatre with concerts of jazz, classical and some world music acts, including flamenco guitarists Javier Rivera and Juan Campallo.

Route de la Targa, Guéliz, +212 (0)5 24 44 69 30,  
[www.ifm.ma](http://www.ifm.ma)

### Théâtre Royal

A magnificent building, still awaiting the completion of its indoor auditorium. It hosts concerts, plays and festivals in the outdoor amphitheatre.

Avenue Mohamed VI, Guéliz,  
+212 (0)5 24 43 15 16



Domed arts edifice  
the Théâtre Royal

## BARS/NIGHTCLUBS

### Rotana Club

Features a live five-piece *chaabi* band. A dingy underground venue, but the music is gutsy and loud from midnight onwards.

Hôtel Le Marrakech, Rue Khalid Ibn Alwalid, Guéliz,  
+212 (0)5 24 44 63 91

### African Chic

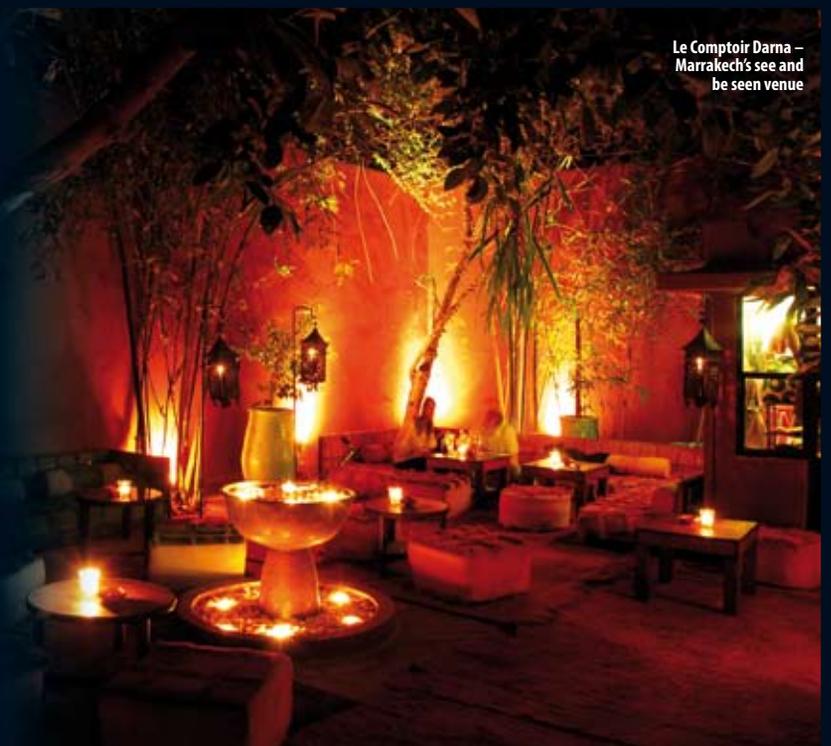
Bar and restaurant with Afro-Brazilian theme and live music from 10pm. Gnawa bands advertised on Sundays, but not always delivered.

6 Rue Oum Errebia, (behind Hôtel Le Marrakech),  
Guéliz, +212 (0)5 24 43 14 24, [www.african-chic.com](http://www.african-chic.com)

### Le Comptoir Darna

A trendy 'bistrotheque' in the Hivernage *quartier*. No live music, but it's the place to be seen – think floor-shows with bellydancers and DJs spinning cool North African beats.

Avenue Echouhada, Hivernage,  
+212 (0)5 24 43 77 02, [www.comptoirdarna.com](http://www.comptoirdarna.com)



Le Comptoir Darna –  
Marrakech's see and  
be seen venue