

Morocco

Golf in Morocco: more sun, more golf, more emotions

Golf has been played in Morocco for more than 100 years.

Its first fairways appeared in 1914 with the opening of the Diplomatic Country Club, now Royal Golf Tangier, in the northern port city of Tangier - long before golf courses arrived across the Straits of Gibraltar along southern Europe's Mediterranean coastline.



Peter Ellegard

Red course at Royal Golf Dar Es Salam

Designed by British architects Cotton & Pennink, it was followed over the next two decades by Royal Golf Marrakech and Royal Golf Mohammedia, on the Atlantic coast between Casablanca and capital Rabat.

Morocco's visionary late ruler, King Hassan II, was a keen golfer who saw the potential of the sport for the country. He instigated an ambitious golf

course expansion programme in the 1970s that saw the construction of numerous courses including Morocco's largest golf development, the 45-hole Royal Golf Dar Es Salam in Rabat. It is the host venue for the prestigious Hassan II Golf Trophy tournament, held annually since 1971 and a fixture on the European Tour calendar since 2010.

Royal Golf Tangier is Morocco's oldest golf club



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TRAVEL FOR REAL





*Atlas Mountain views
from Michlifen's 9th
and 18th double green*

The country's golf offerings continue to grow. There are now almost 40 courses, a figure set to reach 45 during 2020 with even more in the planning stages beyond that.

New golf facilities are largely concentrated on the coast as part of a plan that also includes large-scale coastal tourist resorts around Tetouan, Nador and Saidia on the Mediterranean and Larache on the Atlantic as Morocco looks to target the American and Asian markets besides Europe. However, there are also more planned projects in the Atlas Mountains region to add to the recently-opened Michlifen Resort & Golf in Ifrane.

Marrakech has seen the greatest increase in the number of golf courses and now boasts more than a dozen. Underlining Morocco's golf tourism ambitions, the city hosted the International Golf Travel Market in October 2019.

Golf is part of a diverse tourism offering in Morocco, its wide range of hotels spanning traditional riads to resorts offering activities from wellbeing to nature, adventure, water sports and more. New four- and five-star hotels are being built in resorts being created along its coastline.



Morocco also offers excellent air connections with key tourist markets including direct connections from the USA, making it an ideal golf break destination. Located less than three hours' flight away from major European capitals, Morocco offers sunshine and year-round golf on courses designed by famous international architects.

Throughout Morocco, golfers can experience the game in Atlantic beach resorts, at the foot of the Atlas Mountains, alongside the Mediterranean or in cities famous for their history, culture and gastronomy, providing different ways to enjoy golf in a variety of settings.

Among other advantages are highly competitive green fees and low caddies' fees.

Morocco's golf courses are concentrated in seven clusters - they are...



*Snow-capped Atlas Mountains
behind Amelkis Golf Club*

Marrakech-Essaouira - [imperial Marrakech]

Diversity, a huge choice of golf, top-drawer accommodation and warm hospitality characterise this world-class twin centre.

Voted Golf Destination of the Year for Africa, the Indian Ocean and Gulf States in the 2015 IAGTO Awards, one-time capital Marrakech is Morocco's pre-eminent city of golf and is now firmly established as a winter golf break destination. It has 13 facilities offering at least 18 holes in addition to the nine-hole Atlas Golf Marrakech course.



The courses are spread around the Red City, some just a few minutes from the airport and all within half an hour of the city centre. Wherever golfers play, the nearby Atlas Mountains provide a stirring backdrop to the lush fairways and greens, their peaks capped by snow during winter months.



The oldest golf course in Marrakech is Royal Golf Marrakech, the first four holes of which were inaugurated by the Pacha of Marrakech in 1927. In its early days it was graced by dignitaries including British politicians Winston Churchill and David Lloyd George and, later, by American president Dwight D Eisenhower. A nine-hole course augments the original, modernised 18 holes while facilities have been enhanced with the opening of a grand, new clubhouse.

The early 1990s saw the addition of the PalmGolf Marrakech Palmeraie course, designed by Robert Trent Jones Sr, and the Amelkis Golf Club course, by Cabeil B Robinson. Both now offer 27 holes.

Since then, Marrakech has seen a golf course building boom featuring several by leading golf architects or their design companies. They include the Montgomerie Marrakech and the Tony Jacklin Marrakech, respectively designed by Europe's Ryder Cup winning captains Colin Montgomerie and Tony Jacklin, the Kyle Phillips-designed Al Maaden Golf Resort, and Samanah Golf Club, a Nicklaus Design layout. Among other courses opened in recent years are Assoufid Golf Club, Noria Golf Club, PalmGolf Marrakech Ourika and the Royal Palm Marrakech, now managed along with the adjacent hotel by Fairmont Hotels & Resorts.



Cosmopolitan Marrakech has a wealth of other options for visitors, from exploring the ancient medina's bustling souks and colourful Jemaa El Fna square to visiting historic monuments such as the ornate Bahia Palace, museums and attractions including the exotic Marjorelle Gardens, or shopping in modern malls, as well as enjoying traditional Moroccan cuisine in its many restaurants and lively nightlife in bars and clubs. The High Atlas Mountains make for a fascinating, adventurous day trip from the city and there is even skiing at Oukaimeden mountain resort.

Just two and a half hours away by road is the city of Essaouira on the Atlantic coast. Visitors can choose from relaxing on its wide beaches to taking in its medina, souks, historic city walls and fortified harbour, and soaking up its Gnaoua culture and music, highlighted by the annual Gnaoua Festival.



Golf de Mogador

Essaouira also has top-notch golf, in the form of two courses by South African golf legend Gary Player amidst trees and coastal sand dunes at the 27-hole Golf de Mogador resort.

Future golf developments include more courses in Marrakech, an 18-hole course at Oukameiden that would be the highest in Africa, and the reopening of the golf course at desert city Ouarzazate.

Agadir-Taghazout - Agadir resort

With 300 days of sunshine annually and cooling Atlantic breezes giving average temperatures between 20°C and 26 °C, golf can be played year-round in the popular seaside holiday resort of Agadir and neighbouring coastal village Taghazout.

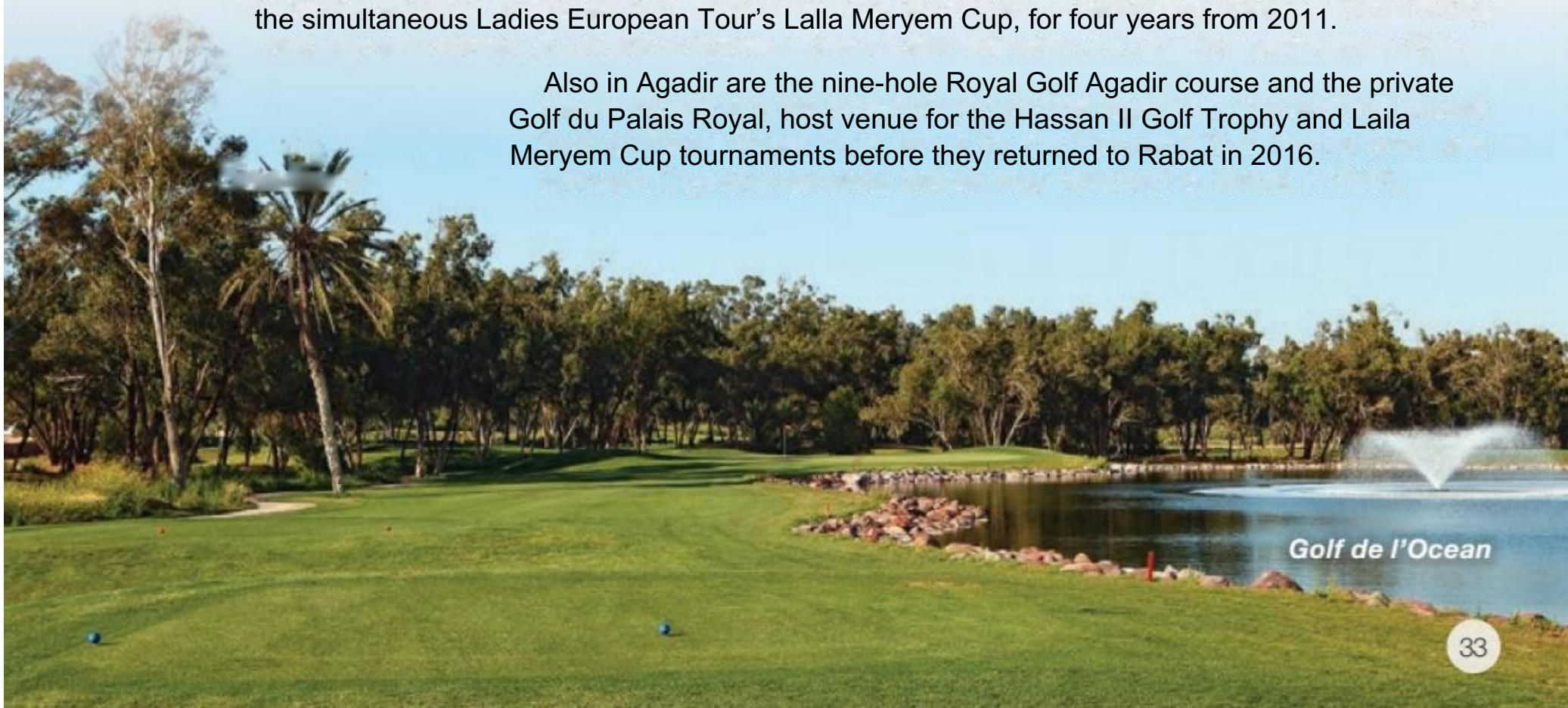
Set between the Atlas Mountains and the ocean on the edge of the Sahara Desert, Agadir sits on a bay edged by 10km of sandy beaches. It is Morocco's second-largest golf destination after Marrakech and features five golf facilities with fairways lined by fragrant eucalyptus trees, brooms and mimosas.

Agadir's golf courses lie close to its beaches and hotels, many of them offering wellness facilities, all-inclusive stays and extensive entertainment and activities for adults and families. Golf des Dunes comprises three nine-hole layouts designed by Cabell B Robinson in 1991. Owned by Club Med, free transfer shuttles operate from its beachside resort hotel to the course. Golf du Soleil offers two 18-hole courses alongside the Tikida Golf Palace hotel, with residents enjoying discounted green fees. Golf de l'Ocean is another combination of three nine-hole layouts and hosted the Hassan II Golf Trophy, and the simultaneous Ladies European Tour's Lalla Meryem Cup, for four years from 2011.



Golf du Soleil

Also in Agadir are the nine-hole Royal Golf Agadir course and the private Golf du Palais Royal, host venue for the Hassan II Golf Trophy and Lalla Meryem Cup tournaments before they returned to Rabat in 2016.



Golf de l'Ocean

The village of Taghazout, 19km north of Agadir, has developed into a laid-back holiday destination that is particularly popular with surfers and windsurfers for the Atlantic breakers that roll into the bay, created by constant trade winds.



Tazegzout Golf Club

The Kyle Phillips-designed Tazegzout Golf Club course lies in the heart of Taghazout Bay Resort and commands panoramic views of the ocean from its cliff-top holes and clubhouse terrace. Early 2020 sees the opening of the Hyatt Regency Taghazout next to the course, adding to the existing Hyatt Place hotel. A second golf course is planned.

Besides golf, visitors can learn about Morocco's Amazigh culture at the Museum of Amazigh Culture, shop for local crafts and products in souks and medinas or simply relax on the beach. The Agadir area is also home to groves of argan trees, the oil from which is used in many health and beauty products globally. Visitors can visit cooperatives to see how they are created and buy some to take home.

Rabat - Royal Rabat

The imperial city of Rabat is Morocco's capital. Just 15 minutes from its historic centre lies the country's foremost and largest golf facility, Royal Golf Dar Es Salaam. It offers 45 holes, all designed by famed golf architect Robert Trent Jones Sr and laid out through mature trees and around lakes.



The Red course is home to the prestigious Hassan 11 Golf Trophy and Lalla Meryem Cup tournaments and has been totally renovated in the last four years. A unique feature is the Roman columns, brought in from the ruins of the ancient city of Volubilis close to Fez, that now grace the fairway on the 11th hole.



Montgomerie Rabat

The other 18-hole course, the Blue, is less challenging but still highly regarded, while Royal Golf Dar Es Salam also has a nine-hole, par-3 practice course and a new training centre, with extensive outdoor and indoor facilities. The luxury Ritz-Carlton Rabat hotel opens alongside the Red course in mid-2020.

A 40-minute drive up the coast from Rabat is one of Morocco's newest courses, the Montgomerie Rabat, designed by Colin Montgomerie and built by European Golf Design. It opened in 2018 and forms part of the Plage des Nations resort development.

Rabat is a real feast for the senses. Among historical monuments are the Hassan Tower, the Oudaya Kasbah, the wall that surrounds the old city and its five monumental stone gateways, and the Chellah necropolis. Cultural offerings include museums, events such as its annual Jidar Street Art Festival and nine-day Mawazine international music festival, and its old medina.



The Red course at Royal Golf Dar Es Salam



Casablanca-El-Jadida-Bouznika - Casablanca coast

This coastal cluster has the second-highest number of golf courses in Morocco after Marrakech-Essaouira, with more than half a dozen 18-hole layouts and three nine-hole courses.

Casablanca itself is mainly a business destination although it does possess tourist attractions, cultural heritage and vibrant nightlife. Several courses in and near the city have opened in recent years, some close to the Bouskoura Forest. Among new 18-hole golf courses are the Tony Jacklin Casablanca, which is part of the new Bouskoura Golf City Resort, the California Golf Resort's PalmGolf Casablanca, and Casa Green Golf Club. The nine-hole Royal Golf Anfa serves up views of the city's Hassan II mosque from the clubhouse roof terrace.



The area also encompasses one of Morocco's original golf courses, the 90-year-old Royal Golf Mohammedia, as well as the 18-hole Bahia Golf Beach course in Bouznika and nine-hole courses including Golf de Bouznika Bay, set by a beach and floodlit for night play.

The old port city of El Jadida, an hour south of Casablanca and formerly called Mazagan, is the main draw for visiting golfers, however. Close to the city, with its beautiful beaches and Portuguese fortifications, is luxury family hotel Mazagan Beach Resort. Besides featuring Morocco's largest casino and a huge spa, it has an adjacent 18-hole golf course designed by multiple Major champion Gary Player, several holes of which play alongside the sandy beach.

Nearby, Royal Golf El Jadida is a design by Cabell B Robinson that opened in 1993 and plays through trees before finishing with holes giving spectacular coast and Atlantic views.

Fez-Meknes-Ifrane - Imperial heartland

Historic former Moroccan capitals Fez and Meknes are both UNESCO World Heritage Sites and key tourist destinations. While they also offer golf, it is the opening of Michlifen Resort & Golf in the Middle Atlas Mountains in 2018 that has raised the profile of this cluster with international golfers.

Set 1,650 metres up in the Middle Atlas Mountains in the town of Ifrane, known as "Little Switzerland" for its alpine-style architecture, Michlifen combines a five-star chalet suite hotel and spa with Africa's first Jack Nicklaus Signature golf course a short transfer away. The 9th and 18th holes provide stunning views over the mountain scenery, culminating in a double green below the clubhouse terrace.



Michlifen's name means snowflake, as Ifrane is sometimes carpeted with snow in winter. However, the course is open year-round and its mountain setting means temperate playing conditions in summer and a peak period between spring and autumn.



Fez has two 18-hole golf courses. Royal Golf Fez was laid out in 1994 in the middle of an olive grove close to Fez Airport, the Cabell B Robinson creation featuring fairways that wind between lakes and large bunkers. Oued Fez Golf is a parkland course located in the heart of the city and has just opened a new clubhouse.

Royal Golf Meknes enjoys Morocco's most unusual setting for a golf course. Its nine holes lie in the lush gardens of the royal palace, surrounded by old walls surmounted by stork nests.

Away from the fairways, golfing visitors can enjoy the area's history, unspoilt nature from mountains to forests, gastronomy, music and cultural heritage - exemplified by the ancient medinas of Fez and Meknes.

Tetouan - Tangier peninsula

Just a 45-minute ferry journey from southern Spain, Tangier was the birthplace of golf in Morocco while the country's northern peninsula is also seeing some of its newest golf developments.

Royal Golf Tangier celebrated its centenary in 2014 and has kept the British feel and spirit imbued in it by its designers even after renovations and modernisation. From the 5th green, the highest point on the course, golfers enjoy a view of the rooftops of the White City.

The new Hilton Tangier Al Houara Resort & Spa, 15 minutes from Tangier's Ibn Battouta International Airport, features a soon-to-open golf course collaboration with an eco-perspective between golfers-turned-designers Graham Marsh and Vijay Singh.



Close to the Atlantic harbour town of Larache, Lixus Beach Resort has an 18-hole golf course located right on the coast alongside a wellbeing-focused hotel 45 minutes south of Tangier. A second course is planned at the resort.

On the Mediterranean side of the peninsula near Tetouan, Cabo Negro Royal Golf Club lies below the Rif Mountains. It was designed by Hawtree & Sons in 1976 and later modified by Cabell B Robinson.

Also close to Tetouan is the planned Tamuda Bay project featuring an 18-hole course by Nicklaus Design.

The Tangier peninsula offers visitors plenty of activities and attractions, allowing golf stays to be combined with seaside experiences, culture and nightlife. Tangier is establishing itself as a popular city-break destination with its easy sea and air connections, while the new Al Boraq high-speed train has been operating to Rabat and Casablanca since November 2018.

Saidia-Marchica - Mediterranean coast

Morocco's Mediterranean coast is largely undiscovered by international golfing visitors at the moment - but that is set to change with new golf resort developments.

In the country's far north-east, the resort of Saidia lies on one of its most beautiful beaches and has several large hotels and a marina. There are also two golf courses at Golf de Saidia, which is part of the Madaef Group that also includes Noria Golf Club in Marrakech, Tazegzout Golf Club near Agadir, Royal Golf Fez and Oued Fez Golf in Fez, Royal Golf El Jadida and Casablanca's Casa Green Golf Club. The original Les Lacs course is an American-style layout that opened in 2009. It has now been joined by the Teelal course, which opened in 2018 and runs alongside the beach. A third course is also planned at the resort



Atalayoun Golf Resort, a leisure development on the shores of a natural lagoon national park in Marchica Bay near coastal city Nador, features three hotels and the Marchica Golf Academy, run by international golf management group IMG.

For more information, go to www.visitmorocco.com

Adapted from information supplied by the Moroccan National Tourist Office

*Les Lacs course
at Golf de Saidia*



الجامعة الملكية المغربية للجولف
FÉDÉRATION ROYALE MAROCAINE DE GOLF