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## How To Get Moroccan Bound This Fall and Winter

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by Gretchen Kelly



On Sept. 6, **Royal Air Maroc** [tweeted](#)

(<https://www.business-traveler.com/business-traveler-usa-story/royal-air-maroc-tweets-opening-of-morocco-to-travelers>) that US travelers (as well as travelers from other visa-exempt countries) are now able to book flights to the Kingdom.

We spoke with Kenn Laya, CEO of **Vuitton Travel**, (<http://www.vuittontravel.com/>) a bespoke travel concierge company that specializes in Middle East and Africa about the recent opening of travel to Morocco and the best way for savvy travelers to take advantage of the opportunities provided by Royal Air Maroc, which is part of the One World Alliance.



**BT:** What are your initial thoughts on Royal Air Maroc's tweet that they were going to start allowing visa-exempt travelers to come to the Kingdom of Morocco in October?

**Laya:** Indeed it's good news. But I don't think that people should rush out like a bull out of a gate and book themselves without doing the proper research and putting some thought into their trip, but they should start planning now. A good trip can take four or five months to properly plan (less if you work with a dedicated Moroccan expert like Vuitton Travel). I would be planning as soon as possible.

**BT:** What COVID-19 regulations has the Kingdom and Royal Air Maroc mandated?

**Laya:** On arrival, passengers need to have an updated COVID-19 negative test, taken within 48 hours. It is also mandatory that they have proof of hotel accommodation. You can't just arrive and wing it as you go along. I think the reasons for that are very clear. Occupancy levels in hotels are mandated at 50 percent right now. You can't go wandering from hotel to hotel creating your own program.

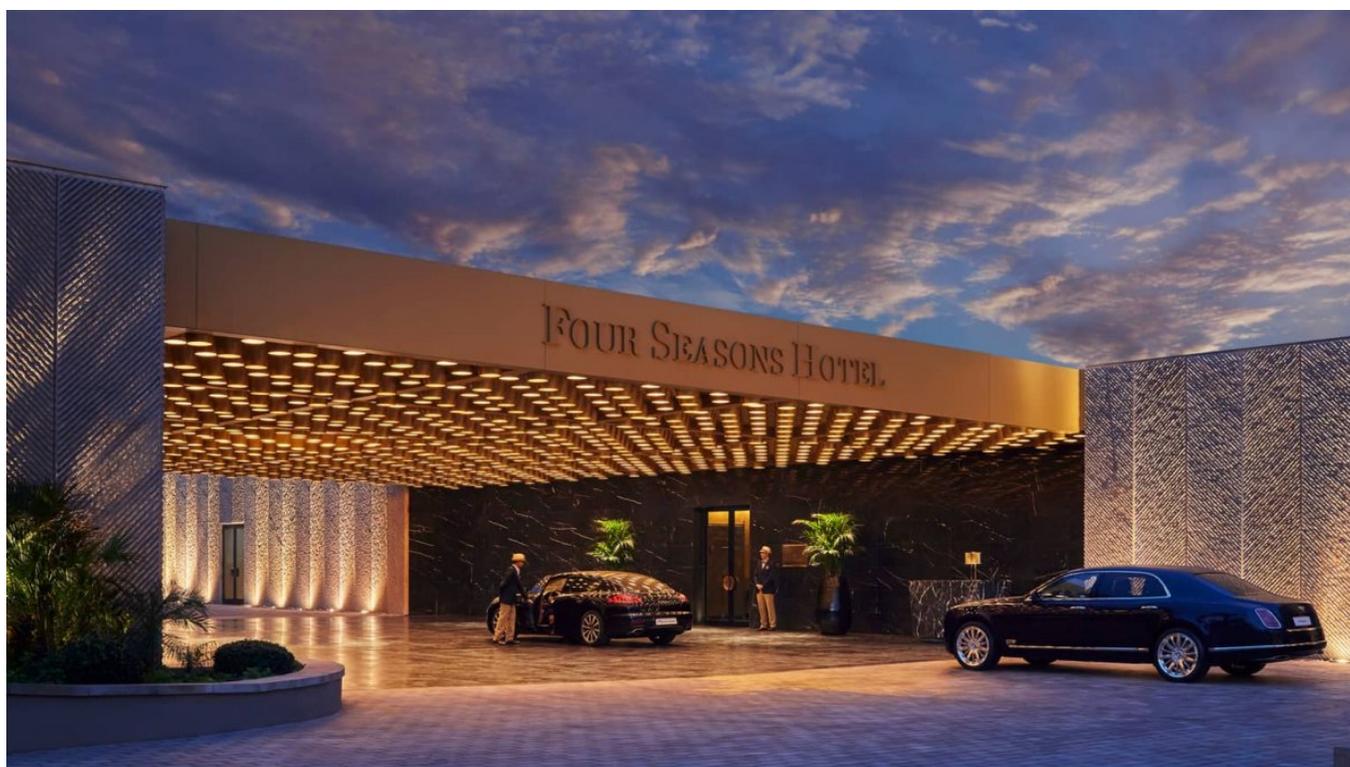
**BT:** What would you suggest for a five-star experience in a 7-day trip to Morocco leaving this autumn or winter?

**Laya:** I would first say that I would without doubt recommend travelers to stay in brand name properties. Morocco has a wealth of five-star accommodations that are connected to international brands like Relais & Chateaux, Accor, Four Seasons, Small

Luxury Hotels of the World, Kempinski, etc. When I say large chains, I don't mean large, impersonal ones. I mean the well-known, high-end brands that meet a very high level of health and safety measures for guests as far as COVID-19 goes. **Accor** (<http://www.accor.com/>) is very strong in Morocco because of its French connection, particularly in major cities. There is a Four Seasons in both Marrakesh and Casablanca.

**BT:** Would you start a 7-day trip to Morocco in Casablanca?

**Laya:** Yes, I would have travelers fly from JFK or LAX to Casablanca which is usually a non-stop overnight flight. Casablanca is often overlooked as a destination in its own right and that's a shame because there are some amazing things to see and do there. First of all, there is the **Four Seasons Casablanca** ([https://www.fourseasons.com/content/fourseasons/en/properties/casablanca/landing\\_page\\_gclid=EAlaIQobChMIktbhj8H66wIVBeXlCh3LcQsgEAAYASAAEgJqUvD\\_BwE&source=ppc\\_c](https://www.fourseasons.com/content/fourseasons/en/properties/casablanca/landing_page_gclid=EAlaIQobChMIktbhj8H66wIVBeXlCh3LcQsgEAAYASAAEgJqUvD_BwE&source=ppc_c)) which is a stunning beach resort: It's not huge, it's intimate and well appointed. It is right on shore with its own pool that leads to the beach. The spas and steam rooms are closed due to COVID-19 but the beach and the outdoor pool is open.



Also in Casablanca you have the second largest mosque in the world, the Hassan II Mosque. You need to go into it and lie on the carpeted floor and look at the carvings overhead. It has the world's tallest minaret.

Then there is the medina – the old city district with some stunning buildings that are worth seeing, some connected closely with Morocco's strong Jewish heritage, as in

every major city in the Kingdom.

Then I would use a trusted guide/driver for a scenic ride past Rabat, the nation's capital. This city is a mixture of Islamic and French colonial styles and is different from anywhere else in Morocco. The Oudaias Kasbah is located inside an 11th century fortress and is filled with twisting white and blue Andalusian style lanes.

In Fes, I would recommend without question, the Riad Fes, a Relais & Chateaux property. It is a stunner. Magnificent. They are tentatively taking bookings for after the 16th of November. Their sister property, Hotel Sahrai, is open now and will take clients until then.

The Riad Fes is located in the medina in the heart of the city so you can walk the old city, taking in the souks and tanneries. There is the area called Mallah, just north of the Royal Palace, which is the Jewish center of the city. You can find the ancient Home of Maimonides, the Jewish philosopher here (also called the House of the Clock, for a water-based clock that still runs inside the museum).

Outside of Fes on the way to Marrakesh travelers have a wealth of options for drive-through visits. There is Chefchaouen, also called the Blue City because it's painted blue. It's become famous on Instagram. Everyone tries to get there.

You can stop at the Roman ruins of Volubilis on the way from Fes to Marrakesh near the city Meknes or drive to the city of Ouarzazate where Gladiator, Lawrence of Arabia, the Man Who Would Be King, The Mummy, The Last Temptation of Christ, and Game of Thrones were made.

Then on to Marrakesh, the imperial city.

**BT:** What hotels would you recommend in Marrakesh?

**Laya:** Here you're spoiled for choice. The famed **La Mamounia** (<https://www.mamounia.com/en/>) is opening after October 16. It has been newly renovated while closed and is always and eternally stunning. Its rose garden makes its own perfume which you can buy in the hotel's gift shop. The hotel was famous for being a long-term home away from home for Sir Winston Churchill who came here to paint after the war. It has also been host to Marlene Dietrich and was used as the backdrop for the Hitchcock film, The Man Who Knew Too Much, with James Stewart and Doris Day.



I also think that a top hotel in Marrakech has to be the **Royal Mansour**, (<https://www.royalmansour.com/en/>) part of the Leading Hotels of the World. It is just outside of the medina. Every bedroom has its own riad or villa. You walk through your front door and it's a whole, private world inside. You have a kitchen with your own private butler, a courtyard with a fountain and our own pool. On my first day here I didn't even leave the room – just looking, touching and reveling in one of the most luxurious experiences I've ever had.

There is also **La Sultana** (<https://www.lasultanahotels.com/p/marrakech>) which has an exquisite sister property on the coast (Oualidia La Sultana). It reopened on the first of July in a coastal village which is the oyster capital of Morocco. It is on a protected natural lagoon and is breathtaking. La Sultana in Marrakech opens on Nov. 1.

Then there is the **Four Seasons Resort**, (<http://www.fourseasons.com/>) Marrakech with its big golf course and fabulous views of the high Atlas Mountains.

One final recommendation is the Relais & Chateaux Hotel **Villa des Orangers** (<https://www.relaischateaux.com/us/morocco/orangers-marrakech>) in the medina. The opening date is yet to be announced. It really has a spectacular charm about it. It is just elegant with fabulous restaurants. I know my guests will get a spectacular experience while they are there.

In Marrakesh you can visit the Jemaa el Fnaa Marketplace with its snake charmers or just go and get lost in the maze-like medina. I also recommend the Yves St. Laurent house and Majorelle Gardens where the designer lived with his partner. St. Laurent lived in this stunning house until his death and it is now a museum where you can see famous St. Laurent creations like his Mondrian dress.

Before going home, I'd recommend a day and a night at least in the port city of Essouraia. The city is known as the "Ville du Vent," the city of winds for its trade winds coming in from the Atlantic. It was a favorite surfing spot for Jimi Hendrix who wrote the song Castles in the Sand while he was here in the 60s.

I would recommend the riad **L'Heure Bleue Palais**, (<https://heure-bleue.com/en/>) here named after the French phrase for twilight. All of the rooms open into a foliage-filled courtyard with greenery—just breathtaking.



The roads from Essouraia to Marrakesh to Casablanca are all well paved and it's easy to get from either city back to your international flight home at Casablanca in under three hours.

While you are driving you can stop to take in the Instagram-ready images of goats eating Argan nuts in the trees—something they do before the nuts are turned into the famed beauty oil that is sold in all of Morocco's marketplaces, and which has become so coveted by women in the US and beyond for its youth-enhancing properties.

Royal Air Maroc's flight home from Casablanca is not a code-shared flight and just be aware that the airline does not share miles with other One World flights.

**BT:** Do you recommend booking now?

**Laya:** It is up to each traveler to decide whether he or she wants to travel now but one thing is certain, airfares are going to low and hotel availability is likely to be high.

Vuitton Travel also has a very generous cancellation policy so you're not in danger of losing money by booking in advance.

**Royal Air Maroc (<http://www.royalairmaroc.com/>)**

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