



Morocco, the extreme northwest corner of Africa, is slightly larger than the state of California. Tangier is the oldest continually inhabited city in Morocco, for more than 2500 years people of ancient races and religions have fought to control this strategic point on the southern tip of the Gibraltar Straights. It sprawls over a series of low hills that overlooks a wide sandy bay halfway along the narrow straits of Gibraltar. Tangier has been fabulously described as an 'old man sitting at a bar that has seen and done it all'. Originally settled by the ancient Greeks and Phoenicians as one of the most westerly trading ports in antiquity, it has since been occupied by the Romans, Vandals, Byzantines, Arabs, Berbers, Fatimids, Almoravids, Almohads, Merenids, Portuguese, Spanish, British and French all whom have left their own significant mark that is now the spice of Tangier.

Today Tangier is a city of 500,000 inhabitants; it is a large passenger port, a beach resort and a burgeoning northern city trying to earn a place in the manufacturing market. It has retained much of its old artistic and social glamour, and has remained a tolerant place where cultures continue to mix but never completely blend. The more you travel in Morocco the more you begin to appreciate the compact center of Tangier where you can enjoy a truly urban existence amongst cafes, bars, art galleries, libraries and museums.

Most people's first impression of Tangier is that it is an unpleasant port of entry plagued by hustlers, but the Brigade Touristique has done a lot to alleviate the hassle that gave the city its dubious image and is turning the city back to its vibrant past. Despite vast improvements over the years not all crime can ever be removed from a city and Tangier is no exception. It is still home to some of Morocco's most adept pickpockets and hustlers. If you are planning on wandering through the Grand Socco or the Petite Socco be aware of your possessions, it wise not to take jewelry with you ashore. The worst most people will come across is an aggressive salesman or an unofficial guide who will try to give you a private city tour, a polite 'no thank you' usually does the trick.

Like many of Morocco's large towns and cities, Tangier is divided into 2 very distinct areas, the hectic mazelike streets of the loud Old Medina and the large tree lined boulevards of the New Town. The office towers, Consulates, Banks, best hotels, chic clothing stores and 5-star restaurants are to be found in the New Town, while the Medina holds true to its old walled ways, with the loud small alleyways of the local markets, a plethora of craft and carpet shops, small local cafés and inexpensive hotels. The Petite Socco (little market) is the heart of the Medina while the Grand Socco (big market) lies between the Old and New towns.

Currency

The local currency in Morocco is the Dirham and the exchange is approx. 8.5Dh to \$1US but the Euro and US dollars are accepted.

Dress

Although there is no law that states what visitors and locals must wear, it is local custom to wear clothes that cover your knees and shoulders. This is especially true for ladies.

Shopping

When shopping in Tangier it is customary to bargain for the purchase that you are after. Never accept the first offer and always try for the best deal. It is considered rude to bargain if you have no intention of making a purchase. It's a good idea to repeat the final price a few times just to make sure you are both clear on the final cost.

Taxis

Taxis are near the ship and the hourly rate with a guide is about \$40US make sure that you set a price before entering the taxi. From the pier to the Medina is approx. \$7US.

Museums and sites of interest around Tangier

Medina:

The Medina, the old walled city with its dense mass of narrow twisting alleys, overlooks the port area. To the south and west of the Medina are spread the 20th century streets of a fast expanding northern city viewed by an assortment of Christian spires and Muslim minarets that bears witness to its confused past. To the east of the port, fronting the long sandy bay stretches a line of large beach hotels. To the southeast of the Medina, the port, bus offices and train station are all within walking distance. The Kasbah occupies the North West corner of the Medina and is built in a dominating position on the top of the cliff. The whole Medina is fairly small and is the usual tangle of twisting narrow lanes; you can find your way around, although it can be confusing. It follows the ancient Roman city plan; the walls mark the line of the Roman defenses, the Kasbah is on the old fort, the Grand Mosque rises on the site of a temple to Neptune and the Petit Socco covers the forum area. There is an enormous and innocent fascination in blindly exploring a Moroccan Medina. Its confusing landscape of dark tunnels, worn staircases, twisting narrowing alleys, old secretive closed door ways, veiled women and aggressive youths, is almost like a dream.

Petit Socco:

This is the heart of shopping bazaar area. Rue des Siaghines, is the busiest and widest market street of the Medina, thickly lined with small shops. Off to the right, two alleyways lead into the Mellah, the old Jewish quarter, where there are over ten Synagogues. The most impressive are the old Nahom temple and the Ribby Tahya temple. Back on the main street you pass the locked Spanish Catholic Church. Notice the ceilings of some of the shops with their intricately patterned work.

Kasbah:

The narrow Rue des Chretiens takes you to the Kasbah. When you walk along here you pass shopkeepers, who practically leap out and grab you to come and have a look. It is built on the highest point of the city. You enter from Bab el Assa at the end of Rue Ben Raissouli in the Medina. The gate gives onto a large open courtyard which leads to the Dar el Makhzem, the former Sultan's palace and now quite a good museum. The walls of the Dar el Makhzen enclose a beautifully, mature Andalusian garden. You can leave via the garden and visit the Cafe Detroit on the 2nd floor in the walls. The museum is generally closed on Tuesday and Friday.

Grand Socco:

The Grand Socco was once as full of life as Marrakech's Place Djemaa el-Fna, with its makeshift shops, snake charmers, musicians, storytellers and food stalls, but slowly the draw has lessened over the years due to a bad reputation of too many con artists plying cheap merchandise on unsuspecting travelers. The Grand Socco still comes alive at night especially on Thursday and Sunday. The main buys here are Moroccan leather, carpets, kaftans, jewelry, authentic Berber Jewelry of silver, amber and coral, burnous (traditional hooded black capes), copper trays with hammered designs, teapots and carpets.

The American Legation Museum:

Although the American Legation at 8 Zankat d'Amerique is within the walls of the old city, it can be very hard to find. The most reliable approach is to walk down Zankat Salah Eddine el Ayoubi from the Grand Socco, turn up Zankat Portugal (left at the crossroads) and then left up a flight of steps to enter the Medina through an archway. The shaded gate of the Legation is a few meters further on the left, under a covered arch. It was established here in 1821 on the edge of the Mellah, the Jewish quarter of town, as a gift from Sultan Moulay Sliman. It now extends over both sides of the alley, connected by an overhead arch. Opening hours are from 8:00 am -12:00 noon and 2:00 pm - 5:00 pm. There is no specific admission fee yet a donation to the museum is greatly appreciated.