

## Travelling tough by Sara Jones

My two weeks in the country were exhausting, frustrating and disheartening — and yet, they were also full of joy, awe, and wonder. It's hard to explain. How could one country fill me with such joy and such angry? Here is why...

I arrived in Marrakech fully expecting to dislike it and ended up surprised when I fell in love the second I arrived. Yes, it was chaotic and noisy and polluted, but it was also a beautiful, exciting city, full of history and culture.

My guide helped keep the touts at bay as we navigated the medina quarter, it's tangled streets chasing us around and round in circles, like a dog with its tail. The following day, without my guide, I found simple wanderings to be more challenging. Yet I never once felt like I was in any real danger as I explored the city's hidden wonders. The fantastical citadels straight from ancient fairy-tales, markets that would have swallowed me whole, and the sanctuary of the city's many hidden gardens, each an oasis of calm amidst chaos. Marrakech was divine beauty and human madness rolled into one addictive weekend.

By contrast Essaouira seemed like a breath of fresh air after the mayhem of Marrakech — a hippie town full of rumours that Bob Dylan and The Rolling Stones had made this their home throughout the 70's. I love hippie beach towns and I love my classic rock so it immediately felt like the perfect place for me to be. It was mellow and relaxed and took only a few minutes for me to decide to extend my stay.

I spent my first few days relaxing on the beach, bemused at seeing everybody sunbathing while covered from head to toe. I wandered through the photogenic maze-like medina by day and spent my evenings fascinated by the local fisherman trying to desperately sell their freshly caught fish and manta rays to passing tourists — there were dozens of hole in the wall restaurants just a few metres away that would happily cook your newly purchased fish for you right there and then.

But then everything changed.

A music festival came to town, bringing with it hundreds of thousands of rioting tourists. The population increased from 60,000 to 400,000 overnight. It became impossible to walk down the street without being grabbed, handled, terrified. For the intoxicated revelers every woman was a prize. I took to wearing my long coat during the day as a kind of shield against unwanted attention. Nighttime was most dangerous. But one morning, at breakfast, I found myself losing it at one of the men. He touched my arm. I whirled like a video-game character, action ready. "Don't touch me." I screamed with such venom, my spit splattered onto his face. My arm raised, axe-like, ready to fell my foe.

Of course, it was just a waiter, asking if I wanted tea or coffee. Apparently he had asked me twice and I had ignored him.

It was time to book my flight home.