

Mediterranean Coast & the Rif

شاطيء البحر المتوسط والريف البحري



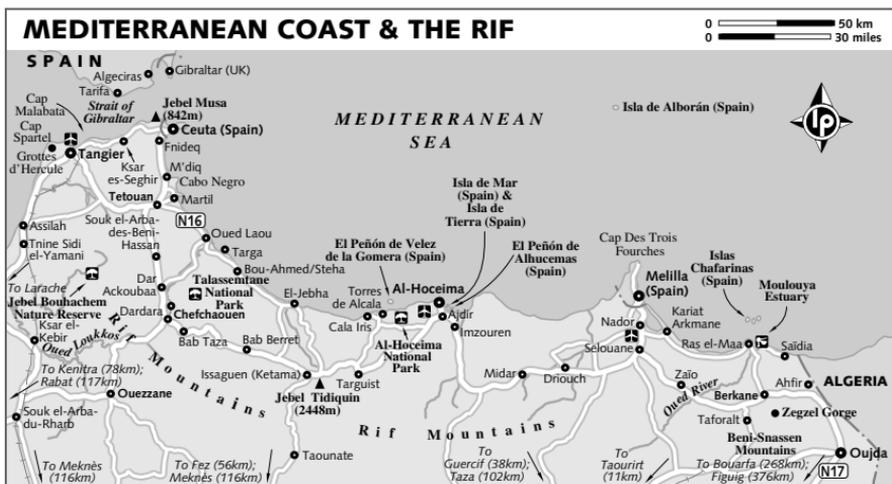
Northern Morocco is like a living dream. Fantastic elements come and go, leaving you wondering, when safely back at home, if it was all real. The gateway to the region is also the historic gateway to Africa: Tangier, where the ghosts of the International Zone can still be found, among scenes straight from *The Thousand and One Nights*. Heading east, you enter the former Spanish Protectorate, beginning with its capital, Tetouan, where the medina still rings with the sound of medieval craftsmen. The wild and rocky coast contains living remnants of that time, including the autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla, with their impressive medieval fortifications and spectacular architectural treasures, and two island fortresses still manned by the Spanish Foreign Legion. Two undiscovered national parks, in Al-Hoceima and the Beni-Snassen mountains, add Barbary sheep and fishing eagles to the exotic mix. Heading inland, one passes through endless fields of marijuana, and finds the mountain village of Chefchaouen, with its central kasbah, set against the dramatic escarpments of the Rif, the home of tough Berber tribes.

Once you're out of Tangier, all of this unfolds with a sense of discovery. This is one of the least visited parts of Morocco, and days go by without seeing a foreign face. But go quickly: the coastline is rapidly being developed into a Moroccan version of southern Spain, with a single highway from end to end nearing completion, and resorts blooming in Martil, M'Diq, Saïdia and even Nador. Unfortunately, that's one more part of this never-ending story.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Stare into the eyes of the Moroccan Mona Lisa in **Tangier** (p176)
- See the dragons launching from the roof of an eclectic palace in **Ceuta** (p191)
- Wander amidst 900 Modernist and art-deco buildings in **Melilla** (p217)
- Smoke sheesha (flavoured tobacco) in the ancient medina of **Tetouan** (p198)
- Discover **El Peñón de Velez de La Gomera** (p214), an exotic fortress still manned by the Spanish Foreign Legion
- Explore the undiscovered **National Park of Al-Hoceima** (p214)
- Stay in a rural Berber house in the picturesque **Beni-Snassen Mountains** (p225)
- Wander the gardens of the kasbah in **Chefchaouen** (p203)





History

Due to its location just across the Strait of Gibraltar, Mediterranean Morocco has long been subject to European influences, especially from Portugal and Spain. During the 15th century, every port on the Mediterranean fell under the control of the Portuguese, with the exception of Melilla, which was Spanish. The Iberian powers were finally pushed out of Morocco in the 16th century, but not for good.

In the 19th century, Morocco was again carved up by European powers, and Spain landed 90,000 troops at Melilla. France and Spain soon came to agreement on a territorial-administrative division for Morocco, which created a Spanish Protectorate along the northern coast, with the capital at Tetouan. Meanwhile, Tangier was made into a special zone under international administration.

It did not take long for colonial rule to give rise to tribal rebellions. In the Rif War (1921–26), the Berber leader Abd al-Krim led a revolt that seized Spanish fortifications and nearly pushed the occupiers completely out of the north. Although a combined French and Spanish force eventually quashed the rebellion, the European powers were never able to completely subdue the fiercely independent Berbers.

Spain finally withdrew from northern Morocco in 1956, after years of independence movements and nationalist uprisings. The exceptions were the *plazas de soberanía*,

the last vestiges of the Spanish empire, which spot the coastline (p187). In any case, the whole region still maintains a strong Spanish flavour, including the dominant foreign tongue, colonial architecture, and cuisine.

Climate

Weather along the coast is generally mild, with a tendency toward cool and wet. Average daily temperatures range from 12°C in winter to 25°C in summer. The mountains are colder, with temperatures reaching 0°C in winter. The north also has more rainfall than other parts of the country. Weather can be cloudy and rainy for days on end, as the clouds get trapped in the mountains. Only the summer months – especially July and August – are dry.

Getting There & Away

Tangier is easily the most convenient gateway into this region, as it is well connected by ferry to Europe and then by rail to the cities along the Atlantic coast. Several other cities along the coast, including Ceuta, Melilla, Nador and Al-Hoceima, have ferry connections to Spain, although some are seasonal. If you are making your way to the region from the south, Chefchaouen is accessible by road from Fez, Meknès and Rabat.

Getting Around

The northern coast is more difficult to get around than some other parts of Morocco. With the exception of Tangier, this region