

Morocco, without any of the mayhem

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The king's plan to plough millions into Agadir means it will soon be like a Med resort minus the hassle

Two friends were comparing trips to Morocco. 'After three days in Marrakech, constantly being hassled for money, I just wanted to escape,' said one. The other was worked up about Tangier. 'You have to haggle for everything, including taxi fares,' the other complained. 'It's exhausting and puts you permanently on edge.'

That's why people go to Agadir. It lacks the charm and edginess of Marrakech. Its old town was destroyed by an earthquake in 1960, leaving a modern souk in its place. But the beach resort - which sees Ryanair flights arriving from Stansted from October 28 - gives visitors a taste of 'Morocco-light' without the hassle.



Beach front: Part of Agadir's four-mile promenade

Morocco has been hailed as a new property hotspot thanks to King Mohammed VI's Plan Azur. With heavy investment in six coastal resorts - including Agadir - Morocco wants to attract more flights and draw ten million tourists a year by 2010 - five times the current number.

But for anyone who wants a holiday home where they can walk without feeling preyed upon as a tourist, buy alcohol freely and not have to haggle for every last thing, that watered-down Moroccan experience is what buyers are increasingly looking for.

As you stand on Agadir's golden beach, lined by a four-mile promenade, you could be on the Costa Blanca or the Algarve. The hotels --soon to be joined by a five-star Four Seasons - pay a passing nod to Arabic decor, with fountains, mosaics and lavish lanterns dotted around their vast lobbies, but with menus and a service culture safely familiar to international tastes.

Everyone speaks English. There's even an English karaoke bar. Only the Arabic inscribed on the hillside, a tribute to God and the king, remind you this is not Western Europe.

'That sense of hustle and bustle you find in Marrakech is exciting for a weekend, but for regular holidays, you want

somewhere clean where you can walk around safely and a great beach,' says Henry Emson, a 27-year-old company director from Fulham, West London, who bought a beach-front house just outside Agadir last year for £50,000. He has spent a further £17,000 renovating it and says the house is now worth £90,000.

'I wouldn't hesitate in bringing my parents or friends with young children to Agadir. It's a great winter-sun destination three hours from London, and Ryanair flights will boost rental demand, which is good news for property owners.'



Agadir is set for huge development in the coming years, making it a hotspot for investors

Alain Huart of the Benisha Group says: 'Agadir was forgotten about for decades after the earthquake, but now it's seeing a tourist explosion.' His company is building Les Terrasses d'Agadir, the first 'aparthotel'. Apartments start at £109,000 through Bridgehouse International, allowing owners four weeks' use a year and providing an eight per cent guaranteed annual rental income.

Little in Agadir merits straying beyond the frontline beach hotels, but Les Terrasses, taking shape next to the new Expomedia, is a huge cultural and conference centre aimed at encouraging more foreigners to invest and retire there.

'The ugly areas have been transformed. In ten years, the place will be unrecognisable,' says Huart. 'It'll be like a Mediterranean resort, though not overbuilt, as the king is careful to preserve the coastline.'

Low-cost flights will open up Agadir's holiday market, now dominated by package-deal tourists, and a new motorway will bring Agadir within two hours of Marrakech.

Alex Andjel of Bridgehouse International sees Morocco's west coast - with its untouched beaches and crashing Atlantic waves - as a new Algarve, with Agadir as its Vale do Lobo, an upmarket destination of golf resorts and big-brand hotels.

'Prices and demand are starting to appreciate aggressively in Agadir,' Andjel says.

'The Middle Eastern market is really keen on Morocco's west coast and major developers are looking to build here.'

Apartments at the forthcoming 500-berth marina are selling from £2,000 per sq m, which places it price-wise above Bulgaria's Sunny Beach and on a par with Croatia.

Milestone Residential is selling two-bedroom marina apartments from £180,000.

Estate agent, Tracy Clifford, lives in Naama Residence, a new development ten minutes from the beach, where a few two-bedroom apartments are on sale for £150,000.



'Most people are buying in Agadir for capital growth,' Clifford says. 'They use the properties for holiday and rent them out when they're not here. The cost of living is cheap. My week's shopping, with lots of fresh meat, vegetables and wine, costs £45.'

Henry Emson has bought a beachfront home outside Agadir

Further north from Agadir, the small bohemian surfers' town of Taghazout is attracting investors. Local families pack this beach at weekends, with women wading into the sea in full-length djellabas and camels plodding along the sand.

But that could all change when Colony Capital's 21,000-bedroom new Taghazout Bay opens, with a 36-hole golf course and villas to cost from about £600,000 - although no agents are marketing the project yet.

Bridgehouse International, 0845 450 7358, bridgehouseinternational.com; Milestone Residential, 020 8144 3081, milestoneresidential.com; Naama Residence, 00 212 28 84 70 15, naamaresidence.com.

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