

Ksar El Badii: The Incomparable Palace of Marrakech

Ksar El Badii, or **El Badi Palace**, stands as one of the most iconic landmarks of Marrakech, symbolizing the grandeur of the **Saadian dynasty**. Situated in the southern part of the medina, this architectural marvel was built in the late 16th century by **Sultan Ahmed al-Mansur** to commemorate his victory over the Portuguese at the **Battle of the Three Kings**. Today, the palace is a must-see historical site, showcasing the remnants of its former splendor.

Historical Significance

Ksar El Badii was commissioned by **Sultan Ahmed al-Mansur** after his decisive win in 1578. Using the Portuguese ransom and wealth from the kingdom, he envisioned a palace that would not only reflect his personal taste but also the influence of multiple cultures. The palace was constructed over **16 years**, blending **Moroccan craftsmanship** with elements from across Europe, Africa, and the Middle East.

Cultural Symbolism

The palace was designed to showcase the wealth and power of the Saadian dynasty, bringing together **Italian marble**, **Indian onyx**, and **Sudanese gold**. These materials were sourced from different parts of the world, making Ksar El Badii a symbol of Morocco's international connections and influence during this period.

Palatial Layout

The Main Esplanade

At the heart of El Badii is an expansive esplanade, formerly lined with lush gardens, fountains, and reflecting pools. Today, visitors can walk through this vast area, now planted with **orange trees**. The esplanade is dominated by a large central **bassin**, which once served as a focal point for ceremonial gatherings.

Subterranean Structures

One of the palace's intriguing features is its **underground passages**. These tunnels once allowed slaves and servants to move discreetly between different sections of the palace, and today they offer visitors a glimpse into the daily operations of the royal household. The underground area also contains **prisons** and a **hammam**, further adding to the complexity of life within the palace.

The Koutoubia Minbar

In the northern corner of the palace, an annex houses the **Minbar of the Koutoubia Mosque**, a beautifully crafted wooden pulpit once used by the imam during prayers. This **masterpiece of Hispano-Moorish art** is one of the most significant relics preserved within the palace walls.

The Decline of Ksar El Badii

Following the death of Sultan Ahmed al-Mansur in 1603, El Badii fell into decline. Civil unrest and disputes over the throne weakened the Saadian dynasty, and over time, the palace deteriorated. In the early 18th century, **Moulay Ismail**, a ruler of the subsequent Alaouite dynasty, stripped the palace of its precious materials to build his own royal complex in Meknes. Over the next **12 years**, mosaics, marble, and gold were removed, leaving El Badii as a majestic ruin.

Current Use and Events

Though largely in ruins, El Badii remains a focal point of cultural events in Marrakech. Since 2011, the palace has served as a venue for the annual **Marrakech du Rire festival**, organized by Jamel Debbouze. Additionally, the palace hosts **art exhibitions** and **historical displays**, allowing visitors to engage with Morocco's rich cultural legacy.

Visitor Information

- **Location:** Ksibat Nhass, Marrakech, Morocco, near the Kasbah district.
- **Entrance Fee:** 70 DH (as of 2022).
- **Opening Hours:** Open daily from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- **Recommended Visit Duration:** 1 to 2 hours.
- **Tips:** It is advisable to visit in the morning to avoid the midday heat, as the palace is an outdoor site. Also, make sure to bring cash in **dirhams** or **euros** since credit cards are not accepted.

Ksar El Badii, despite its decline, continues to captivate visitors with its **historical richness** and **architectural beauty**, standing as a monument to Morocco's vibrant past.