



## **An outlook on Tourist Attractions in Morocco: the Booming of Chinese Arrivals**

Tourism in Morocco is well developed, maintaining a strong tourist industry focused on the country's coast, culture, and history. Morocco has been one of the most politically stable countries in North Africa, which has allowed tourism to boost. Tourism is considered as one of the main foreign exchange sources in Morocco and since 2013 it had the highest number of arrivals out of the countries Africa. In 2018, more than 12 million tourists were reported to have visited Morocco. Morocco is quickly becoming one of the world's most sought-after tourist destinations. From Casablanca through Rabat and to Tangier at the tip of the continent; from the infinite blue labyrinth streets of Chefchaouen, and down to Fez, and still further south to the ever-spreading dunes of Erg Chebbi in the Sahara Desert; over to Marrakesh, and the laid-back coastal town of Essaouira, Morocco has an abundance of important natural and historical assets, not to mention a rich and diverse cultural heritage. According to the 2019 Travel Risk Map, in terms of travel safety, Morocco is as safe as most European countries, such as the United States, and Canada, and thereby has a low risk level. By maintaining this level over the last three years, it is the only country to have a low risk level in North Africa. Algeria and Tunisia are at a medium risk level, while Egypt has a high risk level.

### **Booming of Chinese Arrivals to Morocco**

In 2018, Morocco received 12.3 million tourists, up 8% from the previous year, and the tourist arrivals in the country totaled 11.3 million in the first 11 months of 2018, accounting for an average of one million tourist per month and an increase of 8.5% compared to 2017. During 2000-2018, Morocco had an average annual growth of 6% in tourism arrivals, which is two points higher than growth in global tourism.

Chinese tourist arrivals in Morocco grew impressively within three years after the relaxation of visa requirements. These arrivals increased tenfold from 10,000 in 2015 to nearly 180,000 last year. Marrakech, the top Moroccan tourist destination, recorded over 2.4 million tourist arrivals from January to November, in addition to 2.6 million scheduled hotel stays through the end of 2018. Agadir received 1,038,769 tourists in the first 11 months of 2018, up 13% from the same period in the previous year. The coastal city of Essaouira also received 15% more tourists in the first 10 months of 2018 than in the same period in 2017.



*Hassan II Mosque – Casablanca, Morocco.*

China's government-run Global Times have declared Morocco as the best potential destination for 2017, considering visa procedures, tourist flows, and tourist satisfaction. This has resulted in Morocco becoming a trending topic on Weibo, with photos of the Middle Kingdom popular. In addition to that, Morocco has become the star model to showcase the 23 mega-pixel camera on Xiaomi's M1 Note 2 smartphone. Photos of Morocco were prominently featured during Xiaomi's initiating the M1 Note 2. Morocco was also a star attraction and remarkably present at the Beijing International Book Fair in August, marking Morocco's second consecutive appearance at the event.

#### [Morocco – Ctrip: Co- marketing Partnership](#)

Ctrip, Asia's largest online travel agent, has formally signed a strategic co-operation agreement with Morocco's National Tourism Office to boost Chinese tourism to Morocco on the 6<sup>th</sup> of September 2019. The partnership will span over three years, and aims to increase exposure of Moroccan destinations in the China, notably through digital marketing campaigns. With over 60 years of diplomatic relations, a China-Morocco Year of Culture and Tourism was planned for 2020, and a visa exemption policy in place since 2016, Morocco has opened its doors to embrace Chinese tourists.

## **Sino-African reciprocate interest to reinforce cultural and touristic cooperation**

A large Moroccan delegation held a meeting in Beijing on 17<sup>th</sup> of January of this year with Chinese Vice Minister of Culture and Tourism Li Jianzo to explore ways to strengthen cooperation in the tourism and cultural fields between Morocco and China, who will experience an intense dynamic of exchanges this year as part of the organization of a Moroccan cultural and tourist year in China, and a similar event from China to Morocco, through a series of activities, various events and manifestations.

The Moroccan delegation involved, held on the sidelines of the inauguration by the Royal Air Maroc (RAM) of its first direct flight connecting Casablanca to Beijing, the CEO of the RAM, Mr. Abdelhamid Addou, the Director General of the Office National Moroccan Tourist Board (ONMT), Mr. Adel Al Fakir, the Director General of MAP, Mr. Khalil Hachimi Idrissi, the President of the National Museums Foundation, Mr. Mehdi Qotbi and the Ambassador of Morocco to China, M Aziz Mekouar.



*Source: mapexpress.ma*

Mr. Mehdi Qotbi highlighted the interest of the direct airline by recalling the visit of the famous Moroccan traveler Ibn Battouta to China in the 14th century, noting that this line will help to promote the rapprochement between the two peoples and cultures, given that culture has always been the strong link between peoples for better knowledge and understanding and mutual appreciation. In this sense, he announced the organization of a large exhibition at the National Museum of China in Beijing, at the end of February, entitled “Colors of the distant country - The treasures of Morocco”, with the aim of highlighting the heritage traditional and contemporary culture that abounds in the Kingdom, emphasizing in this regard the relevance of the signing of two cooperation agreements between the National Museum of China and the National Museums Foundation. He also expressed the wish to conclude as soon as possible a similar cooperation agreement with the Chinese Academy of Fine Arts, which includes the strengthening of cooperation through the promotion of modern and contemporary aspects of Moroccan culture.

For his part, the Director General of MAP, Mr. Khalil Hachimi Idrissi affirmed that the inauguration of this direct Casablanca-Beijing airline is a daring step and a historic day on the way of strengthening relations between the two countries, adding that this renaissance, driven by HM the King since his visit to China in 2016, strengthens Sino-Moroccan relations, in particular through multiple projects in the tourist, air and cultural fields.

On this occasion, the Chinese official recalled his previous visits to Morocco and his admiration for the richness and diversity of its unique cultural and tourist resources and its characteristics marked by harmony between culture and tourism, underlining the momentum given by the signing by the ministerial departments of the two countries in December 2018 of a memorandum of understanding on the organization of a Chinese cultural and tourist year in Morocco and a similar event from Morocco to China in 2020.

The opening of the Sino-Moroccan tourist and cultural year, was supposed to take place in Rabat on February 13, however the outbreak of Coronavirus have postponed most diplomatic agendas and cultural events. The presence of the Chinese Minister of Tourism and Culture emphasizing the strong will of the two countries to promote cooperation in the fields of culture and tourism, in particular the promotion of cooperation between tourism stakeholders, cultural institutions and museums.

He also expressed his confidence that the inauguration of the new direct airline between Morocco and China will strengthen this cooperation and help attract an increasing number of tourists and promote cultural exchanges between the two countries, recalling that Morocco's removal of the visa for Chinese citizens in 2016 was widely welcomed in China.

The ambassador of Morocco in China, Mr. Aziz Mekouar, for his part, noted that the launch of the direct flight Casablanca-Beijing represents a major event on the path of cooperation between the two countries, recalling that since the official visit of HM King Mohammed VI in the People's Republic of China in 2016, and the royal decision to abolish the visa for the benefit of Chinese citizens, the field of business and tourism has been developed remarkably.

The CEO of RAM ,expressed to the Chinese official the disposition of the Moroccan airlines, partner of the organization of the Moroccan-Chinese cultural weeks, to support all the activities that the Chinese ministry of Culture and Tourism plans to organize in Morocco to introduce and promote the Chinese culture in the Kingdom, adding that Morocco enjoys an ancestral history and culture, which contributes to promoting rapprochement between the peoples of the two countries and makes it imperative to make discover this cultural heritage to the Moroccan and Chinese peoples.