

# Morocco at a Glance...

Morocco has much to offer the inquisitive student who desires to experience the wonders of a world where the past meets the present, Europe meets Africa, and you can wash everything down with mint tea (the national drink).

Morocco's original inhabitants were known as the Berbers, or *Imazighen*, which means 'men of the land.' Starting with the Phoenicians in the 12th century BC, Morocco was inhabited by a succession of civilizations that each left their cultural mark. The Romans introduced Christianity to the region, which was followed by Islam when the Arabs arrived in 682 AD. Since then, dynasties (Muslim religious groups) have ruled the country.

The 19th century saw European powers competing for control of Northern Africa, and by 1912, Morocco had become a Protectorate of France. France recognized Morocco's independence in 1956, and it became a constitutional monarchy on May 8, 1958. Throughout these centuries, however, the indigenous Berber culture continued to persevere and assimilate other religions and lifestyles while maintaining Berber traditions. This patchwork of Morocco's cultural and religious heritage provides students with a rich and varied experience.

Moroccan culture is a fascinating cross-section of the diverse cultural influences that have saturated the country's past and present. Its music developed from the classical style of Muslim Spain and the storytelling musical traditions of the Berbers. Today it mixes with the diverse influences of African, French, pop, and rock music. Also prevalent is *rai* music, which utilizes European electronic and traditional African instruments.



Another defining aspect of Morocco is Islam, the state religion. Many of Morocco's yearly festivities center on religious holidays, such as Ramadan (the ninth month of the Muslim calendar). Ramadan is a time of fasting, when Muslims are not allowed to eat or drink during the day. The fast provides an opportunity for people to concentrate on their faith as well as spending time visiting family and friends.

Morocco has many famous landmarks, from the romanticized Casablanca to the international city of Tangier, the cultural center of Marrakesh, and the symbolic heart of Morocco, the imperial city of Fez. Morocco's beauty can be seen in its natural landscape, its ancient cities, and its modern development. The country has the charm associated with open-air markets bursting with native jewelry, fabled carpets, and some of the softest leather in the world as well as stunning medieval medinas (ancient quarters) and mosques. However, that charm is intertwined with the hustle of a modernizing society - the ringing of cell phones and honking of cars that herald progress throughout the world.

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Morocco's economy today is mainly agrarian-based, despite efforts by the government to encourage manufacturing, tourism, and other industries. Currently fishing, manufacturing, and tourism are three of the biggest sectors of the economy besides agriculture.

Morocco is steadily working to improve the country's education system, and currently has over four-dozen universities, institutes, and polytechnics. Some of the leading universities include Muhammad V University (the country's largest, in the capital city of Rabat), Hassan II Agriculture and Veterinary Institute, and Al Akhawayn University. Al Akhawayn University (AUI) was founded in 1995 as a private university by King Hassan II of Morocco with contributing financial support from King Fahd of Saudi Arabia. It is the first and only English language university in Morocco, and is a modern university developed from the US higher education model, with advanced science and technical research facilities and partnerships with US Universities. Fez, the oldest of the imperial cities (once the capital of Morocco and now a protected World Heritage site) is the home of

Al-Qarawiyn University, the country's main center for Islamic studies -- one of the world's oldest universities. It was founded as part of the Al-Qarawiyn Mosque in 859 AD, and was part of a grand university-Mosque complex, centuries older than Oxford, that attracted scholars, religious leaders, and courtiers to Fez, along with merchants and laborers to meet the needs of the burgeoning population.



Morocco provides education that is both practical and profound, with its graceful demonstration of how to capitalize on the modern and the ancient and the best of the many cultures that have found their way there over time.

## Online Resources

**Kingdom of Morocco – Ministry of Communication**

[http://www.mincom.gov.ma/english/e\\_page.html](http://www.mincom.gov.ma/english/e_page.html)

**Morocco – A Cultural Profile Project**

<http://www.settlement.org/cp/english/morocco/>

**World InfoZone:**

<http://www.worldinfozone.com>

**Lonely Planet:**

<http://www.lonelyplanet.com>

**CIA Factbook:**

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook>



## Morocco Fast Facts

**Population:**

32,209,101 (July 2004 est.)

**Capital:**

Rabat

**Currency:**

Moroccan dirham (MAD)

**Religion(s):**

Muslim 98.7%, Christian 1.1%, Jewish 0.2%

**Language(s):**

Arabic (official), Berber dialects, French often the language of business, government, and diplomacy, also Spanish and English

**Major Events:**

Independence Day, November 18  
Throne Day, July 30 (accession of King MOHAMED VI to the throne)

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