



# Meknes

## On the Traces of Marrakech

JAMAA El Fna has from now on a new competitor with Meknes. It acts indeed of the famous historical place Lahdim. This one opens with animation. The spectacles of street abound and give life to the site. The "halquates" attract a public many throughout the day. And for one week there, one has also found art of cooking. To mark the event, the local authorities on the spot organized a lunch to which was invited in particular Mohamed Boussaïd, Minister for Tourism and the Craft industry. Skewers, lamb barbecue, local specialties... were with the menu. The objective is to present, to some extent, the new vocation of the Lahdim place.

Being spread out over more than 20.000 m<sup>2</sup>, Lahdim is intercalated between the médina, the imperial kasba or quoted and madinat Riad El Anbari. According to historians', this esplanade was designed and arranged under the reign of Moulay Ismaïl (1672 - 1727) in order to celebrate national and religious festivals there.

For the small history, name "Place Lahdim" wants to say in Arabic "Places embankments", "demolition Places" or "Places debris". The site continues, as in the past, with being the place more attended by the tourists and the inhabitants of Meknes.

Today, the place accommodated kiosks of information of which that of the regional Council of tourism (CRT) and gastronomical stands.

The "halquates" pay homage to the popular inheritance of the capital ismaïlienne. Restored with the inhabitants of the city, this historical place is such, by its imposing architecture, a theatre gréco-Roman sheltering each day the inspiration of popular artists, like the gnaouas and aïssawa.

The objective is to attract thousands of visitors as on the place Jamâa El Fna. It is not a question for all that to copy the site of Marrakech. But to give a seal particular to the place of

Meknès and to promote the art and the culture of the area.

Also, the professionals of the sector ask for the support of the ministry for Tourism. This one is already engaged in the development of the Program of the regional development of tourism (PDRT). A program which should equip the area with a global vision. "But while waiting, it is necessary to promote the city abroad. Meknes is non-existent on the transmitting markets. One does not even find it on the national tourist guides", underlines an operator. And to add that it is also necessary "to improve the road infrastructures, the service roads and indications". The effort must be also focused on the quality of the reception, the capacities of lodging and the offer in animation. The formation of the guides is also lacking.

Classified in December 1996 universal Inheritance of humanity by the intergovernmental commission of UNESCO, Meknes recently carried out a vast operation of valorization of its inheritance. Vestiges and various ramparts were put at new: rare are the guides which know that certain places became accessible. One can quote, in this respect, Lahri Souani which was the subject of an operation of restoration.

Located at some 500 m in the south of the royal palate, this monument includes/understands a series of relatively exiguous rooms around a 26,3 m length roomy central room 10,7 m broad and 9m height. It was a place of storage of the foodstuffs. It contains 10 rooms with ten norias. Those fed at the time as well the building as the basin Souani, large constituent water tank with this monument only one entity.

### Royal but Divided

Meknes has been called the Versailles of Morocco, but the grand scheme for a royal palace was never completed. Today the city is the

centre of a productive area, producing olives, wine, cereal crops and citrus. The old city is not among the finest in Morocco, but the royal palace is filling a considerable part of it. The palace was erected during the rule of Sultan Moulay Ismail, who reigned for 55 years around 1700. He was a true tyrant, and one believes that he had around 30,000 people killed during this period, but the figures are far higher if you include the ones killed in his battles he conducted. His motto was: "My subjects are like rats in a basket, and if I don't shake the basket, they will gnaw their way out."

Despite Ismail's great interest in building, he never succeeded in making Meknes the great imperial city he planned it to be. Meknes has for always been stamped by its feeling of emptiness. Not even the newer French city, situated on the other side of the gorge that divides the city in two halves, managed to change this.

### Practicalities

#### Understand

Fez driving you nuts? Nearby Meknes is a vibrant, modern city bustling with nightlife, restaurants and an impressive royal palace. Since it's relatively ignored by most tourists, it's also free of the usual hassles (touts, faux guides, etc) that plague the other tourist centers.

While Meknes is an imperial city with a lot of historical monuments and natural sites; It is also the nearest city to the Roman ruins of Volubilis (Oualili). The prices in Meknes are among the most reasonable in Morocco and the people are much more polite and nicer than in the other cities.

#### Get in

The main bus station is west of the medina, while CTM has its own, brand new station, near

Meknes train station (east of the new town). The smaller train station called El-Amir Abdelkader is more centrally located in the new town.

Grand taxis arrive and leave from several places, the most popular being El-Amir Abdelkader train station and to the left of the main bus station.

### Get around

Petit taxis (small blue cars of Fiat Uno or Peugeot 205 brands) abound, as well as an efficient and comprehensive, if cramped local bus service. The minimum cost for a petit taxi is 5 dirhams (the price is calculated based on 1.40dhs + 0.20dhs/100m but you should predict a an exceed of 50% after 20:00), while the bus is slightly cheaper. Buses are, however, quite difficult to navigate because they are, in the majority of cases, very crowded and operates to transport people between agglomerations and the ville nouvelle and Medina.

The ville nouvelle (new town), which is known as Hamrya in Arabic, is easily navigated on foot, as is the medina. The two sides of town are connected by a bridge over the dry Oued Boufekrane (river), with a McDonald's placed conveniently in between for weary (or wary!) travelers.

Hamrya is a new town with all entertainment facilities, You can find all what you need there, but there is no monuments or things to see except if you like to chat with people. Medina is the other side is the ancient Meknes and it contains all the monuments of this wonderful city.

### See

\* Bab Mansour: Bab means "gate" or "door" in Arabic, and Bab Mansour is the largest and most striking of Meknes' many gates. It's directly across from Place Hedim, the medina's main square.