

Travel

Edited by *Cathy Adams*

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MOROCCO

Marrakech is well trodden but on a vintage bike tour **Lisa Kjellsson** found plenty to see beyond the Medina

IT'S mid-morning in Marrakech and I'm whizzing through a palm grove, sitting in the sidecar of a racing-green vintage motorbike. The sun is shining and there's a warm breeze on my face. I've just been picked up from my hotel, Amanjena in the Palmeraie neighbourhood, 15 minutes' drive south-east of the Medina. Having relied on friendly locals to point me in the right direction for my first few days, I'm going on a guided ride — an excursion launched by the hotel — to go beyond the walled Old Town and reveal places that escape most visitors.

But first my guide, Thomas Chabrières, wants to show me his favourite places: and so we head into the hub of "organised chaos". The cars, motorcycles, horse carriages and donkeys make my head spin, and the air isn't the purest; but it's impossible not to be intrigued and enthralled by Marrakech. Its Arabic, Berber and Mediterranean influences are everywhere — not least in the mix of Moorish and Art Deco architecture.

Chabrières, from Aix-en-Provence, set up his motorbike business, Insiders, in Shanghai, where he lived before moving to Marrakech. He knows the city inside out and steers us to the Spanish quarter and a quaint little side street off Rue Mohammed el Beqal. I eye the row of peach-coloured houses with mounting interest as Chabrières tells me that for decades the street belonged to a French lady named Madame Gruyère (yes, really) who would go from door to door and collect rent every week: "She was stingy and not very well-liked, so when she died in 1983 nobody missed her — and nobody has paid any rent since."

Chabrières is full of anecdotes like this,



Alt side of the Red City

and his love of the city is infectious. When I spot a huge mural — a portrait of a man so realistic it almost looks like a photo — at the crossing of Boulevard Mohamed VI and Avenue Hassan II, he tells me it's part of a series depicting tradesmen whose traditional crafts are in danger of disappearing. They are spray-painted on buildings all over the world by German street artist Hendrik Beikirch. This one, which faces the exit of the train station, is of a local stonemason called Aziz, who coincidentally worked to repair the wall now adorned with his portrait.

The concept of these guided rides, all led by long-term expats, is that they're

bespoke. As such, I visit some of the city's best shops in the French quarter of Guéliz — Tapis & Co which sells beautiful Berber carpets; Lalla for gorgeous handbags; and interiors concept store Some, where I browse the books and tableware.

However, Chabrières has saved the best for last, and on the way back to Amanjena we stop by a very smart address in the Palmeraie. Across the street from the residence of the king's mother and next door to a villa owned by Paloma Picasso is Casa Gyla, a mansion that once belonged to interior designer Jacqueline Foissac, a friend of Yves Saint Laurent who was a frequent guest. We

Art attack: above, one of Henrik Beikirch's murals of tradesmen. Left, Thomas Chabrières takes Lisa Kjellsson on a guided tour



traipse through a reception room with a bar in the corner and peek into the bijou hammam and the bedroom Saint Laurent and lover Pierre Bergé stayed in when they visited. On the roof terrace, the view alone is worth the trip. The Palmeraie spreads out before us, framed by the Jbilet and Atlas mountains.

In the space of just a few hours I've seen more of the city than I would normally manage in a couple of days, and it's been great fun. This definitely won't be my last motorbike adventure.

DETAILS MARRAKECH

Rides booked via Amanjena (aman.com) from £258. Rooms at Amanjena from £446 per night. easyJet flies to Marrakech from London Gatwick from £68 return.

FOREIGN OFFICE WARNING OVER TAKING CBD OIL TO EMIRATES

TOURISTS visiting the United Arab Emirates have been warned not to bring CBD oil into the country as it is illegal there.

The Foreign Office has told visitors to the UAE that some skincare products and e-cigarette refills could contain CBD, short for cannabidiol, a non-psychoactive compound found in cannabis that some people use for medical purposes.



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