

# mayfair times

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## Tales from the kitchen

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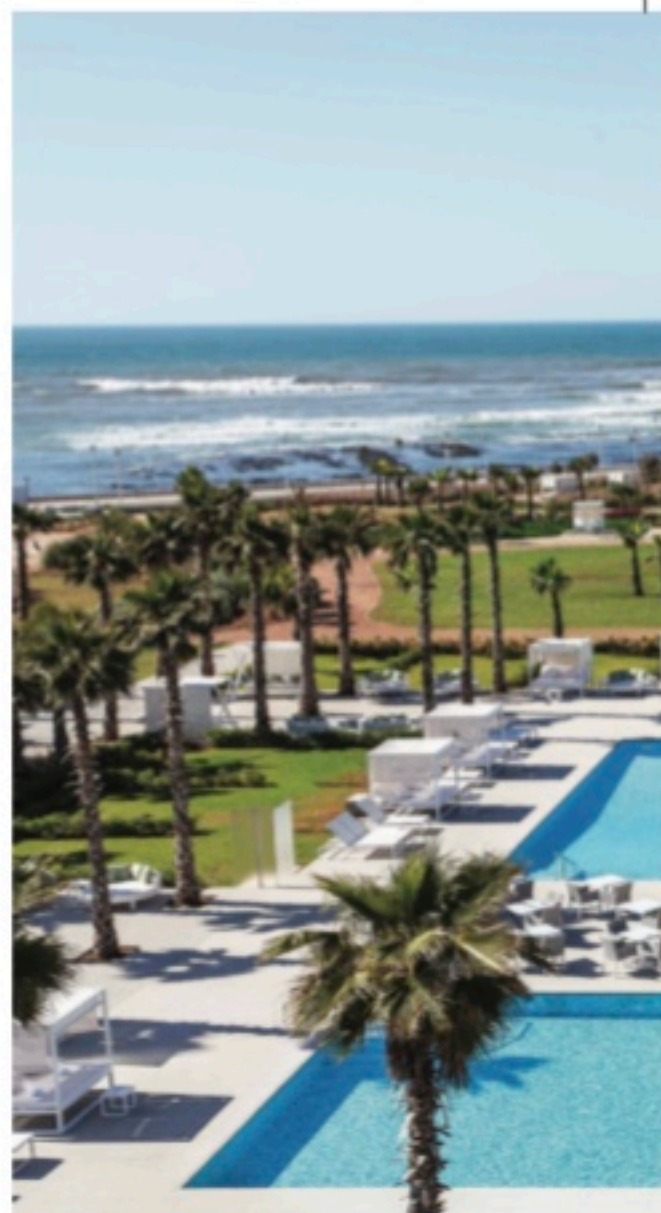
PLUS: ART SPECIAL



# MOVE OVER MARRAKECH

There are few places as evocative as Morocco – and Casablanca and Rabat offer all that plus wellness to boot

WORDS CHARLOTTE PASHA



PRESTIGE SUITE

Marrakech may have its famed red roofs, but the rest of Morocco's architecture – as well as its people, food and history – are equally compelling. To explore two of its key cities, Casablanca and Rabat, Vichy Célestins, which opened in 2018, is the perfect retreat.

Paying homage to the Vichy brand and its love of water – and the fact the hotel is positioned along the coast – the décor is predominantly blue and white. The low, U-shaped modern building with 130 bedrooms has a cascading chandelier of what look like blue, silver and white bubbles in the lobby. Indeed, bubbles are depicted on much of the artwork and adorning the ceiling in our bedroom, which overlooks the two seawater pools and the ocean.

A wellness clinic is at the heart of Vichy Célestins with good reason. At 3,200 square metres, it's groundbreaking in Morocco. It offers everything from weight-loss treatments to mud wraps, salt scrubs and colonic hydrotherapy. People come for R&R – pedis, facials and so on – but also for serious rehab: there are osteopaths, physiotherapists





VICHY CELESTINS CASABLANCA

and a heated recovery pool. Water therapies are at the forefront, like the famed Vichy shower treatment, which involves lying under a horizontal shower as oils are massaged all over. Everything has been thought of: the VIP area for ultimate luxury and discretion, the post-treatment tea room, the choice between Vichy products and marocMaroc, a luxury organic Moroccan brand.

The ethos of choice and good health filters through to the restaurants too; spanning Moroccan and Italian and featuring tasting menus and relaxed poolside dining. Breakfast at Sense is lovely with a pastry basket, fresh fruit and yogurts served with a daily juice, alongside a menu of eggs and Moroccan stews. A weekend highlight is the brunch at V restaurant, where smart Casablanquans come for a lavish spread of seafood, sushi, tagines, barbecue, wok dishes and desserts galore, all accompanied by live music. For a special dinner treat, book in for the tasting menu at the Chef du Table: you pass through the kitchens en route, which feels very exclusive.

During daylight hours, spa treatments lead the way, but we also enjoyed al fresco sunset yoga and an aqua-aerobics class. There's also

sunbathing poolside on large white daybeds, as well as cycling along the corniche, a seaside path, and an 18-hole golf course to keep you entertained.

Staff are charming and go above and beyond to organise wonderful guide-led excursions. In Rabat, the capital, we wander the Kasbah of the Udayas, stop at a mosaic-filled café for mint tea and pastries and see the Mausoleum of Mohamed V, the current King's grandfather. In Casablanca, we find the Hassan II mosque breathtaking; a feat of high ceilings, Murano chandeliers, Carrera marble and a retractable roof with the ability to fit more than 80,000 worshippers.

Currently, most of Vichy Celestins's guests are Moroccan, and weekends are much busier than midweek. But there are easy flights from London to Casablanca, excellent weather conditions (the seaside breeze and balmy temperatures are perfect) and something for everyone, especially those seeking wellness. Soon I envisage luxury Moroccan escapes being treated in the same way as we look upon Spain or Portugal. Watch this space.

[vichycelestinscasablanca.com](http://vichycelestinscasablanca.com)

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## THINGS TO DO IN CASABLANCA AND RABAT



### IN CASABLANCA

visit the souk in the medina, for patterned crockery, leather shoes, carpets and nuts and spices. Top tip: lots of stalls sell the same wares, so don't be afraid to walk away, and bargaining is part of the fun - haggle away.



### IN RABAT

check out the Hassan Tower, the minaret of an unfinished mosque that was commissioned in the 12th century. It's now part of the landscape, iconic in its incomplete state.



### ALSO IN RABAT

don't miss the Chelah, medieval ruins. There are wonderful botanical plants on site, as well as the remains of baths and schools, offering a glimpse into lives gone by.