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spring 2020

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Mellow down in Morocco

BY AINE MCGINTY



Thanks to the Vichy Célestins Spa Hôtel Casablanca, you don't have to fly all the way across the world to experience a luxurious wellness retreat. Perfectly located less than an hour from both of the international airports in Rabat and Casablanca, the hotel may be out of this world but it is not out of reach.

Boasting 150 rooms and suites, this new five-star hotel in Bouznika overlooks the Atlantic Ocean in the Bahia Golf Beach, in fact no matter where you stay in the hotel you will either have a view of the sea, the magnificent 18-hole golf course or the garden.

The hotel perfectly combines the Vichy method of wellness and nutrition with nods to the culture of its location.

Wellness

The Vichy Célestins Spa Hôtel Casablanca is the home of Morocco's first wellness clinic, a 3,200 m² medical spa which holds a heated seawater pool, a cardio-training studio and various treatment rooms with high tech equipment for a wealth of needs.

Due to the hotel's proximity to Rabat, Moroccan royals tend to visit the spa, so since it is fit for royalty my expectations were just a bit high.

All of the therapists in Vichy Célestins Spa Hotels are Vichy-accredited - travelling to France is a requirement as well as undergoing five years of studies and wow does that show when you experience a treatment. I had the Trilogy of Signature

Treatments and this blew any spa treatment I've ever had before out of the water.

The treatment begins with a seawater hydromassage bath, the multi-jet hydromassage combines with the salts of Vichy waters, delivering deep muscle relaxation as well as chromotherapy benefits. This is inspired by Roman thermal pools as the Romans were the first to discover the benefits of Vichy's thermal waters.

Next up is the phyto-mineral mud wrap where mud with anti-inflammatory ingredients is applied all over your body before you are wrapped in a heated blanket and your therapist leaves the room - although very warm, it's very calming.



The best is saved for last with the Vichy thermal water shower and 2 hand massage—you can also opt for the Vichy 4 hand massage, Vichy's most famous treatment. The water shooting down on you combined with the therapist's magic hands means this is the height of relaxation any tension you have is soon a distant memory - it's so good that I'd almost travel to Morocco again just for the massage.

After your treatments you slip your bathrobe back on and are taken to the relaxation room with the option of either Vichy Cèlestins mineral water or Wright's Herbal Tea to hydrate.

The wellness clinic also offers a variety of high technology treatments including bodysculptor, cryotherapy and LPG endermologie of face or body care.



There is also a Bahia wellness boutique which stocks Vichy cosmetics as well as marocMoroc products and a hairdresser and nail salon, meaning you can look as good as you feel.



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Dining

You can't write about a Vichy retreat or a trip to Morocco without discussing dining, if there's one thing I'm certain about after this trip it's that Morocco is all about the food.

Health and nutrition are at the forefront of a Vichy retreat and of course the Vichy Célestins natural mineral water plays a huge part with the chef, trained in Vichy (France), using the water in traditional and European dishes.

Breakfast at the hotel takes place in the V restaurant which also plays host to brunch and dinner. You can have a continental breakfast including fruit and pastries or have an omelette of your choice made.

The hotel's Sense restaurant is a gastro-diet restaurant where the chef works with dieticians to

ensure that health and flavour become one - this is actually one of the first of its kind in Morocco.

My visit coincided with a Diner d'exception in which Michelin star chef Joel Cezari joined renowned chef Sébastien Bontour to cook a delicious six course meal - featuring delightful French dishes. The hotel organises special nights like these often and they attract local visitors as well as hotel guests.

Lunch can also be eaten at the Italian restaurant, La Bella Vista, which is located at the Beach Club. Both the salad and the pasta are to die for - healthy and delicious, what a combination. You can also dine outside with a beautiful view of the golf course.

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Casablanca Morocco
photo Aymaneh Fehmi

Things to do

Some people could easily go to the hotel and never leave but, as mentioned, in Bouznika you are located in the middle of both Casablanca and Rabat and, if you can bear to drag yourself away from the serene hotel, excursions and cultural visits give you the perfect opportunity to get a taste of Morocco.

The city of Rabat is known for its busy but enjoyable *zouks* - where you can pick up everything from traditional clothing to carpets, handbags, jewellery and art work. These truly are some fantastic bits, although you might have to also buy another suitcase for coming home.

When in Rabat you must also see the Mausoleum of Mohammed V and the Hassan Tower. Whilst the Kasbah of the Udayas provides some excellent views as well as a picturesque walk.

Casablanca is also a must, where you can see the Hassan II mosque, the third largest mosque in the world and quite possibly the most stunning building I have ever seen.

Casablanca also has some wonderful restaurants including the Umayya restaurant where you can enjoy dinner and watch the sunset with a sea view. There is also an outside *shisha* area, an excellent opportunity to get to know some locals. Most importantly though, for all the foodies out there, the traditional dish, *B'stilla*, is a must. It is a Moroccan chicken pie which mixes both sweet and savoury, delighting the taste buds.

Visit the *zouks*, visit the mosques, and try some local cuisine to really get a sense of Morocco before returning to your calm haven.

Ideally located between the cities of Casablanca and Rabat, the Vichy Célestins Spa Hôtel Casablanca is located in Bouznika facing the Atlantic Ocean in the splendid Bahia Golf Beach and its luxurious garden. It is less than an hour from each of the international airports (Rabat and Casablanca), accessible by the highway.

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