

## Tip Your Hat to Fes

By Ian Stalker

Visitors to Fes' old quarter will find that visiting that medina is anything but old hat. Indeed, touring the district is a unique experience, with Fes' medina dwarfing the celebrated medina of sister city Marrakech, says Farid Lahlou, director-general of the Regional Tourism Council of Fes.

Shop of Traditional Clothing





"Fes' medina is 10 times larger than the one in Marrakech," he says of an area that has UNESCO World Heritage Site status. "You need a guide for at least the first day in the medina."

Fes dates back 1,200 years and the city served as Morocco's first capital, with Lahlou saying that, "Morocco started with Fes."

Indeed, among its claims to fame is the El Qaraouiyin Mosque, described as the oldest centre of learning in the Western world, predating better-known Oxford and the Sorbonne.

Other sides to the long-standing city include city walls, palaces, gardens and souks or markets.

And, tourism authorities say, the medina is clearly at the core of the city's tourist trade, with one brochure stating that "wandering through this labyrinth of narrow streets, staircases, passages and arches and cul de sacs is to become part of the fascinating authenticity of a world that has been jealously preserved."

"Fes is the living museum of Morocco," Lahlou adds.



Cars are banned from the medina, which is home to over 100,000 people who live and work in it.

Even parts of the old quarter that look uninteresting from the exterior can yield spectacular surprises, says Lahlou. "When you go you see small doors and when you open them you have big palaces on the other side.

"Fes is very well known for its culture, its medina and its authenticity."

Lahlou says visitors can easily spend four or five days in Fes and the surrounding area, with

the medina alone deserving of a day or more. Close at hand are Roman ruins and the Atlas Mountains, which offer skiing, with snow being found in their higher reaches.

Among accommodation options in Fes are riads, which began life as homes of wealthy Moroccans and later on were converted into boutique hotels that offer guests Moroccan décor and ambiances.

Among those riads are La Maison Bleue, built as a family palace in the heart of the medina, and the Riad La Maison Bleue, found in an 18th-century structure that once belonged to a

Folk the brides of Fes





**The Fes Royal Golf Club**