

Atlantic Coast

شاطئ الأطلسي



It was once literally the end of the earth: those living around the ancient Mediterranean believed there was no land beyond Morocco's Atlantic Coast. Now it's one of Morocco's most prosperous regions, home to the nation's capital, to its major city and some of its finest sights.

Miles of glorious sands peppered with small fishing villages, historic ports and fortified towns weave along Morocco's blustery coast. Throughout history, control of this coast was imperative for both invading forces and local tribes hoping to expand their empires. The Phoenicians, Romans, Portuguese, Spanish and French all fought to control the region and left a legacy in the beautiful walled towns, wide boulevards and relaxed attitude of this part of Morocco.

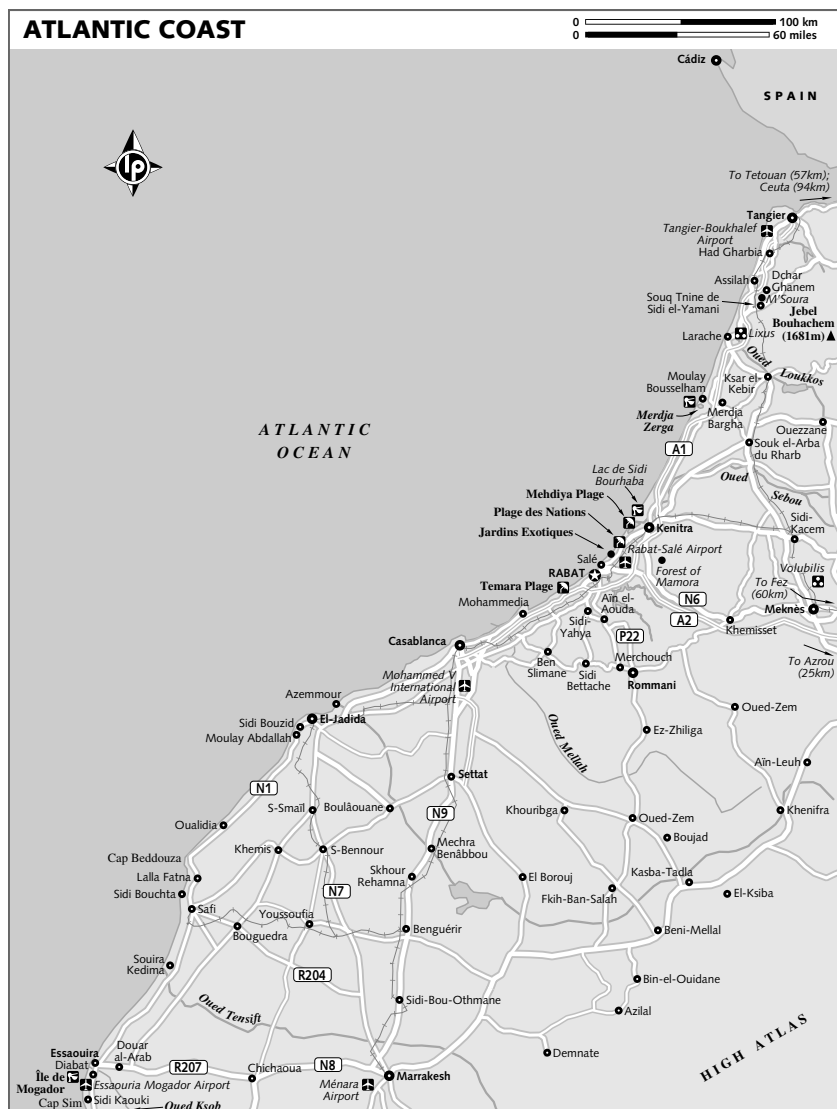
The coast has its beauty and its eyesores. A large chunk of Morocco's population lives in this area and the modern cities are far more cosmopolitan than those of the interior – their art-deco and neo-Moorish architecture, stylish cafés and liberal attitudes a far cry from traditional Morocco, but increasingly valued by locals and visitors.

Beyond these two cities lie Assilah and other fortified towns, and around these are several reserves that showcase the coast's rich birdlife. But the developers are arriving with their plans for mega-resorts, golf courses and huge marinas, hoping in the process to transform a region that, for many, already has more than enough attractions.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Dress to the nines and join the in-crowd at the hip Blvd de la Corniche in **Casablanca** (p114)
- Revel in the whitewashed colonial 1920s architecture in the spotless streets of **Rabat** (p120)
- Wander the ramparts, gorge on fresh fish or just sit back and soak up the atmosphere in laid-back **Essaouira** (p153)
- Drive along the coastal road from **El-Jadida** (p144) to **Essaouira** (p153), where the fields go down to the wild shores of the Atlantic
- Gorge on oysters or a fresh seafood platter and catch a wave at the idyllic, crescent-shaped bay of **Oualidia** (p149)
- Enjoy the quiet pace and authenticity of the old medina in **Azemmour** (p148), between the sea and the Oum ar-Rabia river
- See a cloud of pink flamingos fluttering like huge butterflies in the sunset while boating on the waters of the **Merdja Zerga National Park** (p133)





HISTORY

The French called it *Le Maroc Utile* (useful Morocco), and throughout the country's history, this stretch of the Atlantic Coast has remained crucial to its prosperity. From the 10th to 6th century BC, seafaring Phoenicians found it useful to run trading posts – including Lixs (Lixus), Essaouira

and Chellah – along the coast. Some of these settlements went on to become the western-most outposts of the Roman Empire.

The Portuguese established several trading posts from Assilah to Agadir in the late 15th and early 16th centuries. A period of great prosperity followed, as the spoils from the trans-African caravan routes were