

Morocco

Facts and Statistics

Location: North Africa, bordering Algeria 1,559 km, Western Sahara 443 km, Spain (Ceuta) 6.3 km, Spain (Melilla) 9.6 km

Capital: Rabat

Climate: Mediterranean, becoming more extreme in the interior

Population: 32,209,101 (July 2004 est.)

Ethnic Make-up: Arab-Berber 99.1%, other 0.7%, Jewish 0.2%

Religions: Muslim 98.7%, Christian 1.1%, Jewish 0.2%

Government: constitutional monarchy

Languages in Morocco

Classical Arabic is Morocco's official language, but the country's distinctive Arabic dialect is the most widely spoken language in Morocco. In addition, about 10 million Moroccans, mostly in rural areas, speak Berber--which exists in Morocco in three different dialects (Tarifit, Tashelhit, and Tamazight)--either as a first language or bilingually with the spoken Arabic dialect. French, which remains Morocco's unofficial third language, is taught universally and still serves as Morocco's primary language of commerce and economics; it also is widely used in education and government. Many Moroccans in the northern part of the country speak Spanish. English, while still far behind French and Spanish in terms of number of speakers, is rapidly becoming the foreign language of choice among educated youth. English is taught in all public schools from the fourth year on.

Why not learn some useful Arabic or French phrases?

Moroccan Society & Culture

Islam

Islam is practiced by the majority of Moroccans and governs their personal, political, economic and legal lives. Islam emanated from what is today Saudi Arabia. The Prophet Muhammad is seen as the last of God's emissaries (following in the footsteps of Jesus, Moses, Abraham, etc) to bring revelation to mankind. He was distinguished with bringing a message for the whole of mankind, rather than just to a certain peoples. As Moses brought the Torah and Jesus the Bible, Muhammad brought the last book, the Quran. The Quran and the actions of the Prophet (the Sunnah) are used as the basis for all guidance in the religion.

Among certain obligations for Muslims are to pray five times a day - at dawn, noon, afternoon, sunset, and evening. The exact time is listed in the local newspaper each day. Friday is the Muslim holy day. Everything is closed. Many companies also close on Thursday, making the weekend Thursday and Friday.

During the holy month of Ramadan all Muslims must fast from dawn to dusk and are only permitted to work six hours per day. Fasting includes no eating, drinking, cigarette smoking, or gum chewing. Expatriates are not required to fast; however, they must not eat, drink, smoke, or chew gum in public. Each night at sunset, families and friends gather together to celebrate the breaking of the fast (iftar). The festivities often continue well into the night. In general, things happen more slowly during Ramadan. Many businesses operate on a reduced schedule. Shops may be open and closed at unusual times.

The Concept of Shame - *Hshuma*

- . Moroccans' most cherished possession is their honor and dignity, which reflects not only on themselves but on all members of their extended family.
- . Moroccans will go out of their way to preserve their personal honor.
- . Hshuma occurs when other people know that they have behaved inappropriately.
- . A Moroccan's sense of self-worth is externally focused, so the way others see them is of paramount importance.
- . If someone is shamed, they may be ostracized by society, or even worse by their family.
- . To avoid hshuma, many Moroccans will say or do things publicly because it makes them look good or helps them avoid embarrassment or awkwardness.
- . In business it is extremely important to verify anything that has been agreed to in front of others as it may not have been a sincere agreement and the person may have no intention of following through.

Moroccan Family Values

- . The family is the most significant unit of Moroccan life and plays an important role in all social relations.
- . The individual is always subordinate to the family or group.
- . Nepotism is viewed positively, since it indicates patronage of one's family.
- . The family consists of both the nuclear and the extended family.
- . The elderly are revered and respected and often exert a great influence on the rest of the family.