

WEEKENDER

15 reasons to visit
Fez

A new wave of chefs, spice and honey souks, banquets of flaky pigeon b'stilla, jewel-bright fruits and flower scented pastries make Fez Morocco's latest gastro hot spot

Words TARA STEVENS Map PATRICK O'LEARY

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Tara Stevens is the author of *Clock Book: Recipes from a Modern Moroccan Kitchen*, which she wrote for the Café Clock in Fez (£15, 33books.co.uk). She writes and teaches cookery classes from her small house in the medina.

● Please refer to map on next page

Clockwise from top left: the lounge area of Dar Finn guesthouse; the Rmla sulte; view of the medina, Old Fez; fresh produce at r'Ciif Market



1 Almost no food lover worthy of the name – Heston Blumenthal, Mario Batali and Danny Meyer among them – sets foot in Fez without doing a tasting trail with Gail Leonard of **PLAN-IT FEZ** (from £75 per person, plan-it-fez.com). Follow her deep into the ancient medina for street treats like stuffed camel spleen, makouda (spiced potato cakes) and breakfast b'sarra (broad bean soup).

2 After a morning spent getting lost in the labyrinth, cool off in the secret garden of the **JARDIN DES BIEHN** (13 Akbat Sbaa, jardindesbiehn.com). Its light approach to local cuisine comes across in dishes such as sea bream, black olive and orange salad or cooling courgette flower gazpacho (three courses from £20).

3 Alcohol isn't easy to come by in the medina, and it's expensive, but The Golden Bar at the **PALAIS FARAJ** has a classic cocktail list (Bab Ziat, palaisfaraj.com). As sundowners go, sipping a kir royal, £16, or an americano, £11.50, on an eyrie-style terrace while soaking up the 360 degree views is hard to beat.

4 Get a taste of the traditional diffa – a sumptuous banquet – at family-run **DAR HATIM**, which cooks some of the best Fassi cuisine in town (19 Derb Ezaouia Fundak, 00 212 666 525 323). Come hungry to feast on up to 15 different salads, luscious tagines, aromatic couscous, flaky pigeon b'stilla, and jewel-bright platters of fruit and pastries scented with flower waters. From £30 per head.

5 Watch early morning medina life glide by to the steady tap-tap-tap of the copper beaters souk at the **CREMERIE DE PLACE** (Place Seffarine). Freshly squeezed juices, fearsomely strong nous-nous (espresso with hot milk) and delicate almond gazelle's horn pastries are what locals get up for. About £2.50 to sample all three.



6 Explore the snaking string of fresh produce stalls, street food stands, pastry shops and nougat vendors at bustling **R'CIIF MARKET** (r'Ciif). Olives in every hue, fragrant preserved lemons, deeply flavoured harissa and handcrafted sweets are all good things to smuggle back home.

7 Tucked into a leafy corner of the top of Talaa Sghira, **THAMI'S** little hole in the wall (00 212 070 640 130) is a delightful place to sit and watch the world go by over lunch. Tuck into generous portions of sensational kefta and egg tagines, £5.75, delicately spiced bowls of lobia (baked beans, Fassi-style), £2.50, and crisp makouda with a light chilli sauce, £2.50.

8 **CAFE CLOCK's** legendary camel burger, £7.50, was Fez's first taste of the culinary new wave (7 Derb el Magana, cafeclock.com). Try one on the run, or learn to tell your tagine

from your tangia with a cooking class at on-site sister business **CLOCK KITCHEN**. Chef Souad's smoky zaalouk (aubergine salad), richly spiced harira (chickpea soup), stuffed melawi (fried savoury pastries) and chicken and olive tagines, are the ultimate way to relive the experience back home. Half-day courses from £45.

9 Skip dessert and head for the **HONEY SOUK** (81 Fondouk Kaat Smen) where Nafis Hicham seduces sweet-toothed visitors with 17 different types. Savour the difference between slightly salty honeys, like caper and coriander, with the rich, chocolaty strains of fig and carob. About £7.50 per 100 grams.

10 The nearby city of Meknes is celebrated for the quality of its wines and has recently attracted a serious community of winemakers, many trained in Bordeaux. Stock up at **CARREFOUR** at the Ville Nouvelle's swanky new Borj Fez shopping centre (Avenue Allal Al Fassi, borjfez.com), or at the airport. Look out for sprightly sauvignon blanc by Medaillon, £9.50, a refreshing, salmon pink gris by Dornaine Larroque, £6.50, and rich, supple reds by Volubilia, from £11.50.

11 When French chef Vincent Bonin and his wife Vanessa relocated from Australia to run **DAR ROUMANA**, he added French finesse to Moroccan ingredients (30 Derb el Amer, darroumana.com). The seasonal, three-course menu, £20, fuses the best of both cuisines with dishes like succulent roasted poussin with pomegranate molasses and rose petals, and skate wings in preserved lemon butter.

12 You've never tasted cumin until you've had the freshly ground lemon cumin from **TAHYEB'S SPICE SHOP** (off the Talaa Kebira, near Ain Azliten). Insist on freshly ground spices from his old stone mill (ready-ground spices lack intensity) and don't leave town without a batch of his 49-spice ras el hanout and blood-red Moroccan saffron. From £5 per 100g.

13 Weekend brunch at Robert Johnstone's Ruined Garden at **RIAD IDRISSEY**, £15, features his imaginative take on Fassi street food



(13 Derb Idrissi, riadidrissey.com). Lazy days feasting on doughnut-like 'svenge' stuffed with home-smoked Atlas trout, washed down with a harissa-spiced virgin Mary and followed by dark chocolate cake and strong arabica coffee is what modern medina life is all about.

14 Few visitors to Fez make the short trip up to **MOUNT ZALAGH**, but it is worth the effort for sensational views and a chance to flee the crowds. Paul O'Sullivan and Rebecca Eve of Tours Around Fez organise romantic sunset picnics, from £140 for two, on the site of an ancient caravanserai (toursaroundfez.com).

15 Stephen di Renza's **RESTO 7** is the next word in pop-ups, offering a stage for visiting chefs to experiment with medina ingredients (riad9.com). Forthcoming highlights include Jérôme Wang, head chef of Chez Panisse, who will bring his locavore philosophy to Resto 7 for several months starting next May. Check the website for further details of this and other pop-up events.

For more information, see visitfes.org

HOW TO DO IT

GET THERE Fly from Stansted to Fez from around £85 (ryanair.com)

STAY THERE Splurge on a suite, from £240, at the **Palais Amani**, with its blissfully luxurious blend of traditional and modern, or book one of its food lovers' packages, from £650 per person for three nights (palaisamani.com). Alternatively, check-in to sexy newcomer **Dar Finn**, a

contemporary guesthouse right in the heart of the medina, from £65, b&b (darfinn.com).

ON A BUDGET? The Fez airport shuttle bus, £1.70 each way, coincides with flight arrival and departure times. Doubles at **Dar El Menla** cost from £38, b&b (medinafes.com).

£126*
PER PERSON

*price includes return flights, return bus transfers and a half share of a double room for two nights.

Clockwise from top left: Almond gazelle's horn pastries; The Golden Bar at Palais Faraj; the famous Bab Bou Jeloud (Blue Gate)

