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Wish You Were Here ...

Sand, sea and spectacular surfing: a postcard from a rarefied new escape on Morocco's windswept northern coastline.

by *Alexandra Kirkman*



The rocky Atlantic coast along Taghazout Bay

“IT IS THE BEST, for in it fruits are plentiful, and running water and nourishing food are never exhausted,” wrote the prolific 14th-century Muslim explorer and writer Ibn Battuta of his native Morocco. These – among other myriad gifts of the North African nation – come to life at the new Fairmont Taghazout Bay, which debuted this summer the sun-splashed coastal hamlet of Taghazout, a one-time fishing village 17 kilometres north of Agadir.

Presiding over 18 hectares of pristine beachfront studded with gnarled olive trees and backed by the Atlas Mountains' argan-green foothills, the resort, whose 146 rooms all face the Atlantic, exudes a quiet majesty befitting its prime perch in Morocco's tranquil surfing capital. At dusk, when the sun seems to sink straight into the sea in a violet-and-candyfloss blaze, head to Junipers bar, where the smiling bartender snips a sprig of sage from the surrounding garden to infuse your G&T. Then grab an

Left: revelling among Taghazout Bay's powerful waves

alfresco table overlooking the palm-lined infinity pool and the ocean beyond at Beef & Reef, the hotel's surf-and-turf restaurant, and tuck into the catch of the day (literally plucked from the sea that morning), a hearty ribeye or an aubergine-and-rocket pizza fired in the wood-burning oven and accompanied by a crisp Moroccan rosé.

Floor-to-ceiling windows frame panoramic ocean vistas at the dazzling, 1,400sq m spa, where hand-glazed *zellige* tiles and glossy *tadelakt* plaster showcase the age-old artisanal traditions that permeate the property. A traditional Berber hammam with soothing olive-based soap and a transportive aromatherapy massage, followed by a bracing dip in the magnesium pool, make for a rejuvenating escape within an escape.

Singular opportunities to explore the local culture abound. For starters, visit Toudarte, a pioneering agricultural cooperative a scenic hour's drive away. At its coral-hued campus tucked high in the hills, some 100 women from six rural villages earn an income by producing premium-quality argan oil, cracking the fruit with stones to extract the precious kernels. Alternatively, experience the country's emerging wine scene with a tasting in the lush vineyards of the Domaine du Val d'Argan near Essaouira, or try sandboarding down the almost-otherworldly dunes of the Moroccan Sahara.

In the fading light of late afternoon, stroll the golden beach that fronts the resort, where an occasional camel saunters by as surfers emerge from the crashing waves and don *djellabas* – hooded woollen cloaks – to cut the chill from the gusty breeze. But do it soon: with other world-class hoteliers like Hilton and Marriott setting their sights on Taghazout's sleepy shores, its inimitable charms won't long stay a secret. fairmont.com



From top: outside the hotel's lobby; the area's rocky terrain; camels are a common sight around Taghazout