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MY HEART BELONGS TO MARRAKECH

The vibrant Moroccan city of Marrakech may not seem the obvious choice for a relaxing holiday with your girlfriends. But it all depends where you choose to stay, says Grazia's picture editor Sara Rumens

Just three-and-a-half hours from Heathrow and we're submerged in the colourful hustle and bustle of Morocco. Places don't get much more exciting and bewildering than this, and a long weekend was all the time we had to take it in. We knew we must throw ourselves into the labyrinthine souk, haggle to within an inch of our lives and reach that stage of retail nirvana where your arms are weak from carrying so many bags.

Thankfully, respite was at hand in the form of our own personal oasis called the Riad Ezzahra, a palatial style country house in the city's exclusive Palmerie district. Ezzahra has all the elements you'd expect of Moroccan interior – carved furniture, a cool open-air courtyard and fragrant cedar wood. Smaller parties can also stay at the Villa Alkhozama, a two-bedroomed house discreetly tucked away in the grounds.

On our first day, the wonderful housekeeper Maria took us under her wing. Later that afternoon, we retreated to the cool of a cushion-clad Berber tent by the pool for a massage, manicure and facial. As the sun started setting and shadows grew longer, we were served cocktails and, after a delicious banquet of lamb tagine with apricots, we retreated to the roof terrace for an impromptu party. And so the pattern for the weekend was set: shopping, eating, reconnecting with friends – all at that luxuriously slow pace that you only get from a brilliant holiday; a holiday I will remember for many years to come.

Three nights for eight guests at Ezzahra costs £7,000. At Villa Alkhozama, four guests for three nights costs £3,760. For more information call 0035 0 2007 7470 or email info@ezzahra-morocco.com. (Villa Alkhozama is not suitable for children.)



Below and left: The Riad Ezzahra, Marrakech – cocktails by the 'pool, anyone?'

MY MAHE PARADISE

A pristine archipelago of 115 islands in the Indian Ocean, the Seychelles are a nine-and-a-half-hour flight from the UK. But it's worth it, says Grazia's acting news picture editor Anna Dewhurst – you've just landed in heaven

From the moment I got through the door to my own private villa at the Four Seasons Private Residences in Mahé, I felt I had come home. Nestling among the cinnamon trees,

each bungalow is decorated with carefully chosen pieces by local artists and has its own private infinity pool. You're driven around the grounds in golf buggies which appear within minutes of picking up the phone.

Victoria is the capital of the Seychelles – to say it's dinky is an understatement. There's a mini version of Big Ben called Little Ben; a relic of when the island was a British colony. Before that the Seychelles were French, so the streets have colourful buildings with intricate wrought iron balconies. The Victoria market is worth a trip, but be warned: you'll come home with more sarongs than you can cram into your suitcase! But you don't go to the Seychelles for its capital. You go to escape and pamper yourself. We chartered a boat and skipper from the hotel and found an even more remote island – I felt like a Robinson Crusoe who didn't want to be rescued!

Four Seasons Resort Seychelles offers villas from €560 per night with two nights complimentary for every five nights booked. Visit www.fourseasons.com/seychelles or call 00800 6488 6488. Return flights with Air Seychelles from £610 including tax. ■



Above and right: the sandy beaches and idyllic views of Mahé Island, Seychelles



Photos: L. Corries