



SIMPLY TRAVEL

Royal Mansour Marrakech

As part of British Polo Day 2014, we were privileged to be invited to the Jnan Amar Polo Club to attend the exclusive Moroccan leg of the worldwide tour. While there, we had the singular opportunity to enjoy the resplendent luxury of the world-class Royal Mansour Marrakech Hotel.

The Royal Mansour Marrakech was created as an inspiring and spectacular masterpiece to surpass the dreams of even the most seasoned traveller. Effortlessly reflecting a testament to Moroccan architecture and craftsmanship, it provides guests with an incredible, unparalleled experience on many levels.

Nestled within the city walls and adjacent to La Mamounia, the spacious site was created as an authentic replication of the traditional medina architecture. Within the stunning estate,



over fifty traditional Moroccan houses, known as riads, are gathered together, individually presented, traditionally decorated and expertly serviced via a network of underground tunnels by discreet and impeccable staff.

From the moment your plane touches down, you will discover why the service at the Royal Mansour is unsurpassed. As we alighted at Marrakech Menara Airport, we were greeted by a representative of the hotel, who escorted us through the VIP passport control lounge with butler service, and then onwards to meet the chauffeur who had been provided by the hotel. He, along with a Range Rover, awaited to deliver us safely and swiftly to our destination.

Passing through the main gate, we walked into a delightful and beautiful courtyard. Vivid colours intermingled with sweet-smelling flowers and trees, and plants cascaded around in geometric glory as we discovered the spectacular central fountain. The courtyard's symmetrical design, reminiscent of the gardens of the Alhambra Palace in Granada, is nothing less than enchanting and lends to the aura of an exquisite and peaceful retreat.

We were soon escorted through the main reception to Royal Mansour's inner medina – an area of exclusivity and privacy inaccessible to non-residents. We felt privileged to be guided through the mysterious, labyrinthine marble-paved paths and courtyards, surrounded by olive groves and age-old palms, as we were led to our own private accommodation in the form of a traditional riad.





There are 53 uniquely designed, private riads at the Royal Mansour, each set over three floors and comprising one to four bedrooms. The rooms are arranged around a central open-air courtyard and ours, like the other riads on the property, featured a living room, lobby and outdoor patio on the ground floor. We were delighted with the private roof terrace with a plunge pool – perfect for cooling off after a day in the Moroccan heat.

The riads feel distinctive and characterful; the individual decoration and design loses none of the craftsmanship of the communal areas. Beautiful furnishings and quality fabrics abound to create a homely, traditional feel but with the clever, unobtrusive inclusion of state-of-the-art technology – like the ingenious open roofs that close at the merest hint of rain, or the touch panel controls on the wall.

The overwhelming feeling we got as we set off to explore was one of pure indulgent quality. The fusion of traditional architectural details and luxurious flourishes created a balance of calmness, serenity and coolness, juxtaposed with the rich, warm palette of traditional Moroccan colour, to make you feel utterly alive and fortified by it all. The simply stunning ceramic tile work and fabulously carved wooden details continued the theme of symmetry from the courtyard, reminiscent of the traditional Moorish architecture typical of North Africa, Spain or Portugal.



In keeping with the exemplary standards throughout the Royal Mansour brand, there are three restaurants here under the consultancy of Michelin-starred chef Yannick Alléno: French haute cuisine, traditional Moroccan, and the international La Table. Guests may also dine in the privacy of their riads, either in the cool interior or on the open roof terraces, allowing for a genuine freedom of choice when it comes to meal times – which is vital, as experiencing the outstanding food at the Royal Mansour is almost beyond description with mere words, as Jordana and I discovered when we dined there.

First was a delicate starter of spinach with orange blossom foam. The spinach was fresh salad leaves, bitter and delicious, in perfect contrast to the light and sharp orange foam with tiny chunks of fruit. The combination of the two was exquisite and incredibly successful.

Next were traditional tagines – lamb shoulder Mechoui-style, and chicken with olives. The lamb shoulder is slow cooked for an incredible twenty-six hours, then steamed and crisped in the oven for guests to sprinkle salt and cumin over it to taste. A mouthwatering, tender, full-flavoured dish that perfectly evokes Marrakech's rich, traditional heritage alongside its contemporary verve. The chicken dish was refined and smooth, served with onions, olives and lemon, cooked until almost purée in form. Added to this was a delicious vegetable couscous, paired with a perfect tomato sauce to provide a delectable, piquant meal as light as it was flavoursome.



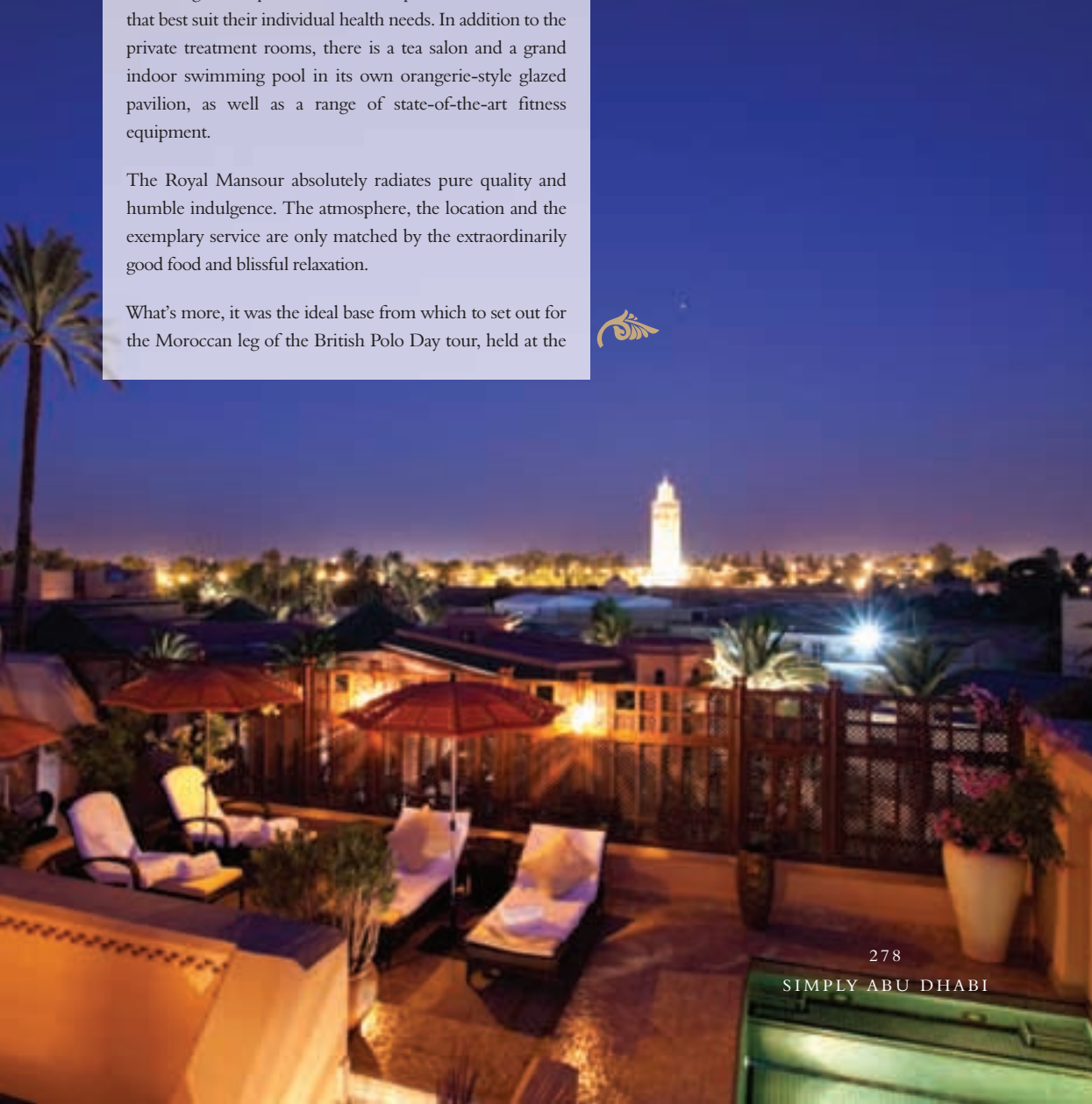


The finale was Royal Mansour Orange Pearls – a signature dish made of multiple tiny exploding orange balls of flavour, sitting atop a soft orange jelly, garnished with a slice of date, a sprinkle of cinnamon and a tiny mint leaf in delicate orange foam. A scintillating desert with a zest that complemented the main course, as well as leading on to the captivating coffee with aplomb, it was the perfect ending to an incredible meal.

We'd be remiss if we didn't mention the Royal Mansour Spa, a true paradise of luxurious relaxation. A thoroughly unique experience, the spa is based on traditional Moroccan rituals, but also offers the latest in contemporary spa technology and treatments. Located in the cool alcoves of an impressive white, wrought-iron atrium, evoking an elaborate birds' cage, the spa offers its guests expert consultation to personalise treatments that best suit their individual health needs. In addition to the private treatment rooms, there is a tea salon and a grand indoor swimming pool in its own orangerie-style glazed pavilion, as well as a range of state-of-the-art fitness equipment.

The Royal Mansour absolutely radiates pure quality and humble indulgence. The atmosphere, the location and the exemplary service are only matched by the extraordinarily good food and blissful relaxation.

What's more, it was the ideal base from which to set out for the Moroccan leg of the British Polo Day tour, held at the





Ben Vestey, George Meyrick, Sir Richard Branson, Edward Olver, Jamie Morrisson, Tom Hudson

Jnan Amar Polo Club – a resplendent facility, with lush green fields and abundant water features, all located in an incredible venue looking out across a breathtaking vista of the Atlas Mountains. It was the perfect setting to enjoy the Sport of Kings, in an event under the patronage of His Majesty King Mohammed VI of Morocco and attended by a host of VIPs.

For the first British Polo Day event celebrated on African soil, guests in attendance included Sir Richard Branson, his mother Eve, Philip Treacy, British Ambassador to Morocco Clive Alderton, US Ambassador to Morocco Dwight L. Bush Sr and a handful of Virgin Galactic astronauts. Following a day of top polo, there was a Gala Dinner which smashed current British Polo Day philanthropy records, raising over US\$175,000 for The Eve Branson Foundation, which works to improve the lives of women and girls in the Atlas Mountains of the host country of Morocco.

Sir Richard then personally hosted a philanthropists' lunch for all winners of a Charity Auction, including three lucky guests who took to the court in a doubles tennis match with Sir Richard at Kasbah Tamadot.

Sir Richard also has a strong connection to Abu Dhabi, after forming a partnership with investment company Abaar in the space tourism venture, Virgin Galactic. As the first outside investors in Virgin Galactic, the Abaar group provides critical funding to the enterprise, while delivering the potential to significantly expand Abu Dhabi's economic future.

The central aim of British Polo Day is to continue the tradition of playing high-quality polo on a worldwide stage, while also serving as a platform for British businesses in vital emerging markets. Attended by the global elite, a shared love of this fantastic sport is instrumental in creating a network of diplomatic and commercial connections to showcase craft and heritage in new global arenas.

Enjoying this exclusive opportunity, set amidst the relaxed, sporty atmosphere at the Jnan Amar Polo Club, combined with the superb experience at the Royal Mansour, made this trip to Marrakech simply unforgettable. We'd like to take this opportunity to thank our hosts at the Royal Mansour: hotel manager Mr. Philippe Cluseau, and the marketing team of Ms. KENZA ZIZI and Ms. SARRA ESSAIL, for their warm welcome and boundless hospitality. Their efforts, along with the peerless service from the entire staff, ensure that the Royal Mansour will continue to be one of the world's most luxurious destinations.

