



10 OF THE Best ROOFTOP VENUES

Get a legal high with North Africa's best open-air spots

@Katie_McGonagle

Every child loves to hear how their mum and dad met, but my parents' story was more exotic than most.

A day after upping sticks and moving to work in – of all places – Tripoli, capital of Libya, my mum decided to go sunbathing on the rooftop of her new apartment block, no doubt to enjoy the warmth of the North African sun after her native Belfast.

A group of fellow ex-pats in the building – my dad included – had the same idea, and 30-something years after that chance encounter, they're still happily married.

So my brother and I clearly owe a lot to that quirk of North African architecture, which turns a practical rooftop into a space in which to socialise and admire the views by day and stars by night.

And while some parts of the region remain off the tourism map for the foreseeable future, the enduringly popular countries of Egypt and Morocco offer ample opportunity to enjoy such rooftop venues, whether it's an open-air bar or restaurant, a rooftop pool or your own private terrace. There's no guarantee you'll meet your future husband or wife up there, but you never know.

1 LA SULTANA Marrakech

Anyone looking to immerse themselves in Morocco's rich traditions will find what they are looking for here: La Sultana is a 28-room boutique within the kasbah, the district

which has been home to the sultans of Morocco since the 12th century, just moments from the impressive Bab Agnaou city gate and within sight of the ruins of El Badi Palace.

Its rooftop restaurant reinforces this heritage feel, with dishes of lamb couscous and a Moroccan tasting menu – assuming diners can take their eyes off the cityscapes for long enough to concentrate on dinner, that is – while guests can watch storks nesting on neighbouring turrets over breakfast. Three nights' bed-and-breakfast starts at £867 with Classic Collection, including Gatwick flights and private transfers.

classic-collection.co.uk

2 CAMEL BAR Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt

Once a relaxed hangout for Red Sea divers, this well-known Sharm El Sheikh bar now has its own resident DJs, live bands and karaoke, showing sports matches inside and serving cocktails up on the roof.

Red Sea Holidays deputy managing director Jason Hilton says: "The Camel Bar on the main strip offers the best views of Naama Bay and is definitely one of my favourites. You can sit back and relax with a freshly-made mojito, watching the hustle and bustle of the bazaars, cafes and entertainment below, surrounded by stylish decor and laid-back music. Just a short stroll from some of our best-selling properties, the Ghazala Beach

Hotel and Ghazala Gardens Hotel, this rooftop bar is definitely a hidden gem."

cameldiver.com

3 VIEW LOUNGE Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt

Any regular visitor to Sharm will have stopped in at Soho Square at some point. Love it or hate it, this shopping and entertainment complex certainly comes alive after dark. Amid its range of bars and clubs, the new View Lounge on the terrace is a worthy contender for those who like their evenings lively but not raucous. With funky LED-powered chairs that light up at night, and a great bird's-eye view across the dancing fountain and main-stage entertainment, this is a great tip to offer clients heading for the Egyptian resort.

soho-sharm.com

4 BEDOUIN CAMP Egypt

It's not strictly a rooftop, but an evening in a traditional Bedouin camp embodies all the open-air excitement of a man-made venue but with added natural beauty. Head to the desert camp just before sunset for tea in a Bedouin tent, with the option to ride a camel or try a shisha pipe, followed by a barbecue dinner with home-made flatbreads.

After dark, things liven up even more as the desert is a prime place for a spot of star-gazing, without interference from light pollution in the city. There's an

expert on hand to point out stars, galaxies and craters of the moon, with a digital telescope for those who want to take their own space photos.

Sharm Direct Tours offers a Stars and Dinner excursion from £29 per adult and £15 per child. sharmdirecttours.com

5 MAYFAIR Egypt

With nothing but sky up above and the lush banks of the Nile to either side, a cruise down Africa's most famous waterway should feel utterly timeless, passing the same landscapes and monuments as the ancient Egyptians did thousands of years ago. Until, that is, passengers look over and see two Jacuzzis, a swimming pool and a row of sunloungers on the well-appointed sundeck of five-star cruise ship *Mayfair*. Operated by Orbital Travel, this cruiser offers old-fashioned elegance without having to forgo the luxuries of our 21st-century lifestyle. Prices lead in at £765 full board, including 12 Egyptologist-guided excursions. Flights extra. orbitaltravel.co.uk

6 KASBAH DU TOUBKAL Morocco

This Berber-owned kasbah should come with a warning: stay a night or two here and you might never want to leave. With the snowy peak of Mount Toubkal to one side and the pretty village of Imlil and its surrounding valley

→ to the other, the 360-degree views from its red rooftop terrace will make guests feel a million miles away from civilisation, even though they're just 40 miles outside Marrakech. A five-night break with breakfast, British Airways flights and private transfers leads in at £591 with Kuoni, travelling in September.

kuoni.co.uk

7 THE PEARL Marrakech

This Jacques Garcia-designed boutique has a bold, contemporary feel, with a red circular building surrounded by metal fretwork and dark, exotic furnishings throughout. But its standout feature is the Sky Lounge, a rooftop restaurant and lounge centred around a circular pool, open from lunch until late evening. Diners can sip cocktails made by the in-house mixologist as they admire views across the medina, the

orange and lemon groves of the Agdal Gardens, the rosy ramparts of the old walled city and the Atlas Mountains in the distance. Rates for a deluxe room start at £138 room-only or £164 bed and breakfast through Small Luxury Hotels of the World. slh.com

8 LE FOUNDOUK RESTAURANT Marrakech

"A foundouk is traditionally a merchants' inn," says Penny Higgs of Anatolian Sky Holidays. "But this stylish restaurant reinterprets the classical Moroccan experience and gives it a contemporary twist. The rooftop terrace is one of the most romantic spots to dine in Marrakech, as it comes to life with magical candlelight across its tables to echo the stars above and the warm glow of the medina below."

The restaurant is spread across three floors, with plenty of spaces for an



The Pearl,
Marrakech



Le Foundouk Restaurant



La Villa des Orangers

**DO**

Remind clients to bring layers so they can enjoy rooftop venues even on chillier evenings

DON'T

Forget to check whether riad roof terraces are open to all guests or just selected room types

→ intimate table for two, but do advise clients to book ahead as the rooftop terrace is always in demand.

foundouk.com

9 LA VILLA DES ORANGERS Marrakech

With so many romantic spots on this list, you might be forgiven for wondering where to send clients who want a rooftop of their very own. That's where this Moroccan riad comes in, offering deluxe rooms and suites with their own private terraces. Not only do they offer unobstructed views across the medina,

Koutoubia Mosque and the Atlas Mountains, but they're also ideal spots for a quiet coffee in the morning or an after-dinner drink under the stars.

Kirker Holidays offers three nights for the price of two until September 11, starting at £849 including flights, private transfers, a private city tour, concierge and a guide to local sightseeing.

kirkerholidays.com

10 MOVENPICK HOTEL Casablanca

Every spa and wellness centre should dedicate

itself to making guests feel better, but when that wellness centre is set on the 16th floor with a rooftop pool and breathtaking city views for good measure, feeling good is pretty much guaranteed.

This property is a retreat from the otherwise busy and industrial city of Casablanca, offering a good vantage point from which to watch the bustling streets below. It's also a short drive from the incredible Hassan II Mosque, the largest in Africa, and the Old Medina. Room rates start at €102 a night.

movenpick-hotels.com 

Movenpick Hotel,
Casablanca