

Maybe it was off the beaten track ten years ago, but my excellent guide pointed out that the city's popularity has exploded in the past ten years, with foreigners moving in and apartments being reborn as Airbnbs. Beyond the trappings of surfer culture, the city center has grown into a place of international cafés and a bustling medina of its own.

So much for relaxation, one could say. Or one could say, "Let's go to the countryside," because now there's a lovely new place to do so. The owners of Essaouira's stylish Villa Maroc hotel have maintained a private three-bedroom villa about six miles from the city center for a number of years now. In late 2019, they added 11 striking new accommodation structures for couples or solo travelers and turned their [Les Jardins de Villa Maroc](#) into a full-fledged hotel.



Les Jardins de Villa Maroc COURTESY OF THE HOTEL

Officially they're called eco domes, although during the course of an overnight on the property, staff described them to me as the *Star Wars* village (perhaps trying to tie themselves to the well-known filming sites in nearby Tunisia) and as a Smurf village, which I take to be a term of endearment.

The rounded, mud-walled structures have locally made furnishings and finishes, like geometric textiles and woven leatherwork. They're compact (because eco, you know?), but they have access to a lovely pool and garden, as well as a restaurant that serves a pleasing breakfast and, on request, a dinner that might begin with olives, smoked eggplant and bread, and finish with a giant dish of oven cooked fish—fresh from the fishing city's market—with tomatoes, potatoes and spices, presented by a cook who can easily be imagined as a doting grandmother.

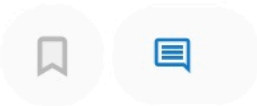
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# Morocco Beyond Marrakech: New Soulful Luxury In The Mountains, The Seaside And The Desert

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*I know the difference between expensive travel and the truly luxurious*

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