

REST ASSURED:

Fez

Ruined garden, knock-out restoration, Euro-cool design. This city has it all, says **Laura Goodman**



£74 Riad Idrissy 'The hipster's choice – there's something a bit Shoreditch about it'

There are sanctuaries, and then there's Riad Idrissy's 'Ruined Garden', surely the most handsome place on Earth to sip a Campari and orange. It's a magical space, frequented by cats of varying levels of friendliness and full of crumbling columns, old tiling and loads of terracotta. At teatime, tables are loaded with salted orange cheesecake and stuffed dates, while nighttime brings candlelight and *mechwi* – seven-hour spit-roasted lamb marinated in a *ras-al-hanout* spice mix and olive oil.

Indoors, it's just as delicious. The 400-year-old riad was an epic preservation project carried out by the owner, John Twomey (who runs the trendy Ten Bells pub in east London),

and the manager, cook and designer, Robert Johnstone. The duo has hand-selected every cushion, antique, beaded mask and billowing curtain you come across. Consequently, there's something a bit Shoreditch about it. Definitely the hipster's choice.

The garden gets busy at night, so make the most of it during the day and head up to the roof later. If you want a room with pizzazz, go for the one at the bottom, the Shoowaf Suite, which traditionally belonged to the head of the household. So, you can wake up, yank open the colossal doors, and survey your manor.

Doubles from £74, B&B (00 212 649 191410, riadidrissy.com).

£65 Dar Finn 'Each room's a feast of cedar ceilings, carvings and *zellige* tilework'

Fez is bonkers. The heat, the leathery aroma, the tightness of the alleyways. You need a hotel that'll rub your forehead and tell you you're OK. When you arrive at Dar Finn, Mohammed, the 'guardian', will deliver you to one of three roof terraces, where views over the medina and Mount Zalagh will blow your mind. He'll schlep a tray of cold beers up several flights of stairs for you and, later, when you go out for the evening, he'll wait out front on his tiny wooden stool until you're back and ensconced in your room. He doesn't speak much English, but he's one of life's greats.

Dar Finn belongs to Brits Beccie and Paul. It began as a house for 13 families, and the couple's three-year restoration has turned it into a six-room mansion. The result is knock-out. Each room is a feast of cedar ceilings, plaster carvings and *zellige* tilework. Rooms are named after the medina's gates so, in theory, you get a headstart on your bearings.

Breakfast is served at a big communal table: Moroccan breads, lemon curd, olive oil, tapenade and honey – just what you need to prepare you for the souks. Turn left out of the front door and dive into the din.

Doubles from £65, B&B (00 212 535 740004, darfinn.com).



£147 Riad Maison Bleue 'The terrace is breezy and European, the hammam steamy'

Across a three-house combo once owned by an eminent judge and professor, Maison Bleue is big, run like a modern hotel, and has a contingent of returning business folk. The 19th-century buildings are connected by medina-like passageways, but it's nevertheless a 10-minute stroll from the souks.

The riad feels worthy of a special occasion; it's silent and soothing, but quite formal – you

don't get to know the staff as well as you can at smaller riads, though you do feel spoiled. There's an established routine here so staff are firmly in the swing of things: when you arrive, you're taken past the pool, potted palms and mandarin trees to sit down with a glass of orange-blossom milk, awaiting check-in.

The 18 suites come in two styles, so you can choose to go all-out with gold and drapes, or go for a monochrome, urban-style room with crisp, white bedding. The 'bit of both' theme extends into other spaces, too. The terrace is breezy and European, with white cubist seats and cocktails, but the traditional hammam is a steamy, marble heaven. Here, a member of staff will scrub you to silky smoothness on a marble bed and then massage you with amber oil or rose water.

Pad about the house in your robe afterwards for the full aristocratic experience.

Doubles from £147, B&B (00 212 535 741839, maisonbleue.com).

AND THE BEST OF THE REST...

£57 DAR SEFFARINE
Follow Sbaa Louyate, 'street of the seven turns', to this boutique beauty behind high walls (pictured right). It's got the usual irresistible Fez features, plus a dash of Scandinavian starkness. **Doubles from £57, B&B (00 212 671 113528, darseffarine.com).**

£69 DAR ROUMANA
The food served on Roumana's roof is smashing – locals' eyes light up when they talk about chef Vincent's lamb and onion pie. Guests get the run of the restaurant on Monday nights. **Doubles from £69, B&B (00 212 535 741637, darroumana.com).**

£90 RIAD LAAROUSSA
Smack in the middle of the medina, this opulent riad is

only little, with eight rooms and suites arranged around a courtyard – perfect if you don't like sharing your lovely space. **Doubles from £90, B&B (00 212 674 187639, riad-laaroussa.com).**

£126 RIAD FES
This multi-winged house has a mix of Andalucian sunshine and Moorish panache. There are 26 rooms, a swanky pool, and a giant roof terrace with a medina view and a half.

Doubles from £126, B&B (00 212 535 947610, riadfes.com).



Get me there

Royal Air Maroc (020 7307 5800, royalairmaroc.com) flies to Fez from Heathrow, via Casablanca, from £286. **Audley** (01993 838000, audleytravel.com) has six nights (three in Fez, three in Marrakech), from £1,185pp, B&B, with tours, Heathrow flights and transfers.