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EZZAHRA

A luxurious yoga retreat in the heart of Marrakech

When I heard that the yoga retreat at Ezzahra (an enormous villa on a private estate in Marrakech) included unlimited beauty treatments, I was both surprised and excited. Beauty and wellness treatments do normally form at least some part of most luxury retreats nowadays, but unlimited? Yes please.

The yoga sessions take place outside on various beautiful pavilions around the estate. It can get very hot in the sun but they're all shaded. The group of about ten yogis is split into two groups for each morning session so that all abilities can be catered for.

Rali Gineva leads the yoga, she trained in California with Ganga White and Tracey Rich and she teaches at the South Kensington Club and at many other exclusive locations. Rali is a fantastic woman with unbounding creative energy and we all find ourselves infected by it. She makes every aspect of the retreat fun and inspiring.



It's two hours of Dynamic Flow in the morning and two hours of Restorative in the evenings. As a regular practitioner of Hatha and occasionally Kundalini, I found the constantly flowing classes very challenging. However with the support of Rali and Edmond Turquieh, I soon gained confidence and strength.

Edmond assists Rali during all sessions offering adjustments, alignment, support or separate tuition if necessary. Edmond has a diploma totalling more than 900 hours of Ashtanga and Iyengar yoga. In addition to the physical practice, Edmond has a good understanding of anatomy and physiology. Edmond is a caring and gentle instructor; he will very carefully provide you with any additional support you may need throughout your stay.

We are asked at the start of the retreat whether we want our poses to be physically corrected and we all agree that we do. It is so valuable and you often don't get that attention to detail in UK classes. HIT (High Interval Training) sessions are also offered every day, I opt out of this and so do some of the others.

In between practice you can do as you please, laze by the pool, venture into Marrakech, or have those unlimited beauty treatments. Ezzahra has its own spa and hammam and the therapists, Fatima and Nasreen, come to the breakfast table each morning to enquire which treatments you would like for the day. I have a massage every day, a foot massage by the pool, a facial and a manicure. What can I say? It's just heavenly. The massages are particularly good for soothing those aching muscles after such intense yoga practice.



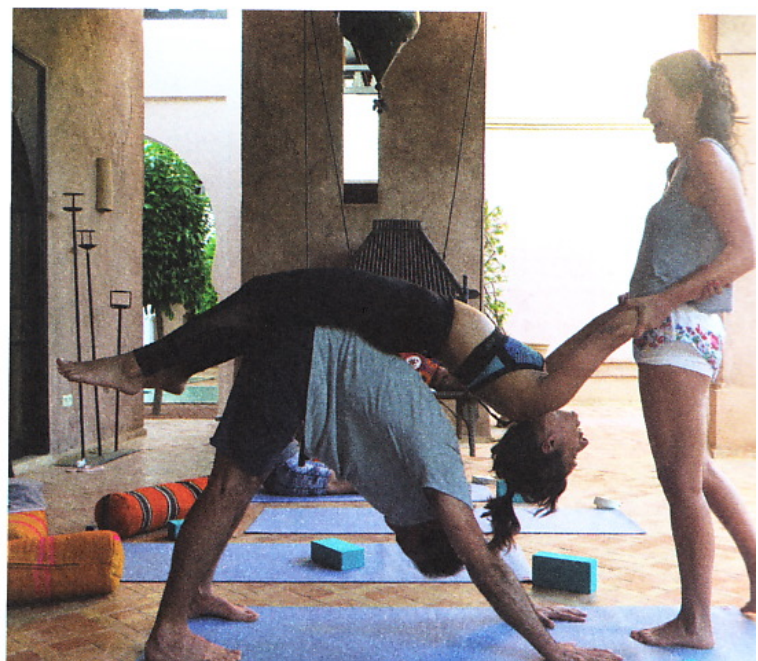
The rooms are spacious and decadent with grand works of local art on display and enormous luxurious beds. Decorated in the traditional Moroccan style but with a contemporary twist. I loved wearing the glamorous white silky kaftans that come with each room, as well as using the gigantic straw handbags by the pool. The bathrooms are filled with delicately scented Moroccan oils for bathing and moisturising.

Your host for the retreat is Tamara Stewart-Wilson; her father built the estate over a decade ago. Tamara is a wonderful woman with exceptional hosting skills. She is kind, genuine and thoughtful and nothing will be too much trouble for her to arrange during your stay. You'll be warmly welcomed into the Ezzahra fold.

It's a diverse group of young and older retreat goers, which makes it all the more interesting - an international mix of inspiring women from all over the world and we all share our unique stories with one another and firm friendships are made. It's very inclusive so if you're thinking about coming on your own you'll be made to feel very comfortable. Tamara, Rali and Edmond make an excellent team and facilitate all aspects of the retreat perfectly.

All meals are shared around a large table and lovingly prepared by the head chef Maria who has been with the family for years. Breakfast is a selection of fresh and dried fruits, homemade jams, marmalades and nut butters, fresh juices, toast, eggs and avocados, Moroccan pancakes and a smooth Moroccan tea made with turmeric.

For dinner there are tagines of every kind, glorious salads with unusual but delightful ingredient combinations, and desserts such as raw chocolate and coconut brownies. Wine is available if you desire it. The rosé, almost pale grey in colour, offers a lovely subtle buzz on the tongue. Much of the produce is grown on the estate.





Each evening before dinner we have pre-drinks and nibbles at a different location within the estate. The Ezzhara staff serve us interesting cocktail combinations and bites of homemade chickpea flatbread with various dips. It's a very considered aspect of the retreat and it makes for a real sense of occasion, and bonds the group even further.



One day we visit the bustling souk in the centre of Marrakech. Everyone buys argan oil, kaftans, and woven baskets to take home as little reminders of the very special time that we've had. We also have the pleasure of seeing the newly opened Yves Saint Laurent Exhibition, which is a definite must-see if you go.

I leave the retreat the fittest I have been for many years with renewed motivation to keep up with my practice. I conclude if I can do hours a day in Morocco then I can do an hour a day at home. I have and I feel fantastic for it. Namaste.



Retreats are held regularly at Ezzahra. Prices are £1350 per person sharing a double room or £1750 for a single room. This includes all yoga classes, meals, local wine, non-alcoholic drinks, spa treatments, and trips to the Souk and Yves Saint Laurent Museum, as well as return transfers from Marrakech airport. For more information, visit ezzahra-morocco.com or email reservation@ezzahra.ma

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