

# Passport NY Morocco

Cover your arms in henna and feast on fluffy couscous—we think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship. By **Cristina Velocci**

## BE A MOROCCAN

➔ If your knowledge of Morocco starts with camels and ends with *Casablanca*, *Babel* or *Ishtar*, you need to attend “Africa: Conversations with a Continent,” a panel discussion at the **92nd Street Y** (1395 Lexington Ave at 92nd St, 212-415-5500; 7–9pm, \$20–\$25) on **Wednesday 27**. Berber art professor Cynthia Becker and Moroccan scholar Habiba Boumlik will gather to discuss the country’s art, culture and political history.

➔ Henri Matisse’s *The Moroccans* at MoMA is one of the few permanent artworks in New York City to come out of Morocco, but you can catch the work of native artist Safaa Erruas in *Perspectives: Women, Art and Islam* at the **Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Arts** (80 Hanson Pl at S Portland Ave, Fort Greene, Brooklyn; 718-230-0492; June 4–Sept 13, suggested donation \$4). Her womblike installation of textiles is running in conjunction with the Muslim Voices: Arts & Ideas festival ([muslimvoices.org](http://muslimvoices.org)).

➔ Moroccans believe bodily adornment with henna wards off danger. Set up a house call with henna artist **Lisa Butterworth** (a.k.a. Kenzi) (718-789-1545; \$60–\$100 per hour). She specializes in Moroccan designs, which she describes as “very geometric, incorporating straight lines,” and imports her henna from Marrakech. ➔ Now that your body is exquisitely decorated, head to the **Morocco Academy of Mid-Eastern Dance** (6 W 20th St between Fifth and Sixth Aves, second floor; 212-727-8326, [casbahdance.org](http://casbahdance.org)) for a serious workout. Beginner classes (Mon, Fri 6:15pm, \$15–\$65) teach you the hip-jutting moves of *raqs shargi*, the social



Tagine Dining Gallery

folk dance most commonly (and incorrectly) known as belly dancing: The proper translation is “Oriental dance.” “It’s older than the shifting lines in the sand that we call borders,” says studio owner Morocco, who will be teaching a traditional *shikhhatt* on **Sunday 24** (noon, \$50).

## CONSUME LIKE A MOROCCAN

➔ The long-standing **Cafe Mogador** (101 St. Marks Pl between First Ave and Ave A, 212-677-2226) has been satiating *harissa*-craving taste buds since 1983 via its signature fluffy couscous, garnished with chickpeas, honey-steeped onions and raisins (\$11.50–\$17). Chase your chicken *bastilla* meat pie (\$14.50) with a pot of Moroccan green tea (\$4), served with mint and sugar. ➔ Expats longing for a taste of home head to **La Maison Du Couscous** (484 77th St between Fourth and Fifth Aves, Bay Ridge, Brooklyn; 718-921-2400) for phyllo cigars (\$5.95) stuffed with spiced meat or veggies. Dishes like the *canard à l’orange* (\$24.95) incorporate French influences, a nod to the country’s period as a French protectorate in the early 20th century.



Cafe Mogador



Mosaic House

➔ Dancer Morocco raves about **Tagine Dining Gallery** (537 Ninth Ave between 39th and 40th Sts, 212-564-7292) for its pigeon pie (\$18.95) and traditional lamb tagine with prunes, almonds and sesame seeds (\$21). The restaurant offers a three-hour Moroccan cooking class the last Sunday of every month (\$85). ➔ Chrystie Street gives way to Casablanca behind the unassuming wooden door of **Kush Lounge** (191 Chrystie St between Rivington and Stanton Sts, 212-677-7328). The arabesque archways and North African-inspired cocktails like the Bollywood (\$12) all nod to Morocco. Kush also offers 19 fruity hookah flavors for patrons to puff, adding to the Middle Eastern vibe.

## SHOP LIKE A MOROCCAN

➔ We’re just as sick of our shredded John Belushi poster as you probably are of yours. Bring your apartment measurements to **Mosaic House** (32 W 22nd St between Fifth and Sixth Aves, 212-414-2525) and choose from the decorative ceramic tiles in eye-popping colors, handcrafted in a Fez factory. ➔ Family-run **Moroccan Prestige** (626 W 28th St at Eleventh Ave, call 212-741-1470 for an appointment) has become a go-to source



Morocco Academy of Mid-Eastern Dance

➔ Morocco was the first country to recognize America’s independence, in 1777.



➔ Large Moroccan communities reside in Bay Ridge and Astoria, but there are no mosques officially associated with the nation in the five boroughs. Visit Turkish mosque **Fatih Camii** (5911 Eighth Ave at 59th St, Sunset Park, Brooklyn; 718-438-6919), where Moroccans tend to congregate.

➔ When your boyfriend does something nice, coo “*habibi*” (if it’s your girlfriend, *habibti*), which translates to “my sweetie.” If he screws up, bellow “*hashooma*,” or “shame on you.”

for set designers (items have been featured in the movie *Duplicity* and on *Gossip Girl*). “We call it Aladdin’s cave,” says owner Salaheddine Benyoussef of his 1,000-square-foot bazaar. You can score a bona fide fez (\$35) here, and it’s the only place in the city that sells traditional *caidale* tents.

➔ For more Moroccan goodies, **Sheherazade** (121 Orchard St between Delancey and Rivington Sts, 212-539-1771) stocks gold-leaf tea glasses (\$7) and **dainty babouche slippers** (\$50). Pick up a leather pouf (\$195) and a brass Hand of Fatima (\$16), said to protect against the evil eye—you’ll need it to combat the envious glares from your friends.

➔ **TRAVEL THE WORLD!** We’ve “visited” Jamaica, Australia and more. To see where we’ve been, go to [timeoutnewyork.com/ownthiscity](http://timeoutnewyork.com/ownthiscity).



Lisa Butterworth (a.k.a. Kenzi)