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**GUIDE**

THE PROVINCE

*Quarzaqate*



# *Touristic Guide of the Province of Ouarzazate*

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# Ouarzazate

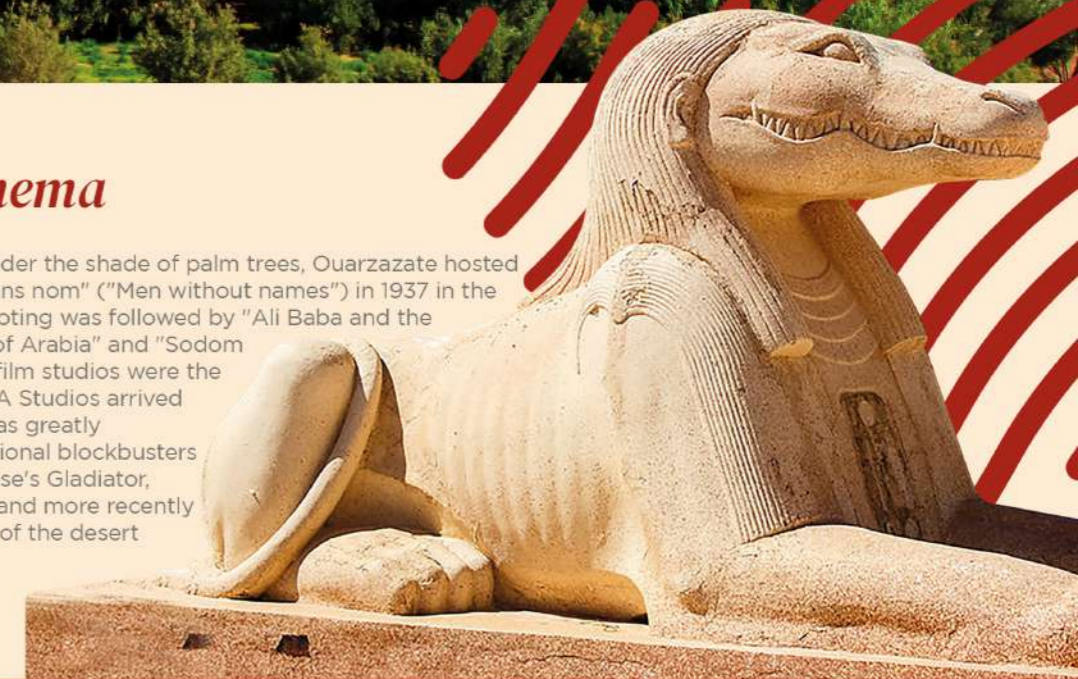
## *The Gateway to Oases and Verdant Valleys*

*The pearl of the Moroccan South East is known to be a privileged place for filming Hollywood cult movies. Its ksours, its kasbahs, its valleys and its oases make of it a province, with magnificent landscapes, which has become thanks to its 300 days of sunshine the hub of solar energy in Morocco.*

The province of Ouarzazate is home to nearly 297,502 inhabitants in a haven of peace with minimal traffic. Between oases, kasbahs and flourishing valleys, the province offers majestic landscapes with a climate that is very hot in the summer and mild in the winter despite temperature drops during the winter nights. Its high quality light and its landscapes made it a place not to be missed for the world's major film shootings.

## *Ouarzazate : The Mecca of Cinema*

Located in a vast desert plateau under the shade of palm trees, Ouarzazate hosted its first film shoot: "Les Hommes sans nom" ("Men without names") in 1937 in the middle of the colonial era. This shooting was followed by "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves" in 1954, "Lawrence of Arabia" and "Sodom and Gomorrah" in 1962. The Atlas film studios were the first to settle in the city in 1983. CLA Studios arrived later in 2004. This infrastructure has greatly contributed to the arrival of exceptional blockbusters such as The Mummy, Martin Scorsese's Gladiator, Ridley Scott's Kingdom of Heaven and more recently the Prison Break series and Queen of the desert starring Nicole Kidman.



## Crossroads of Ancient Trade

Ouarzazate has long been the point of trade meetings with several countries from the north and south of the continent. With the founding of Sijilmasa in Tafilalet in the middle of the 8th century, the province of Ouarzazate was the route taken by caravans carrying goods from Sudan and Sijilmasa to Fez and Marrakech. Ouarzazate was thus the beating heart of the flourishing caravan trade in Morocco. After the decline and the Arab conquest, it was not until the Saadian period that the region was reborn thanks to trans-Saharan trade before the commercial activity was definitively diverted to the Atlantic coast by the Europeans.

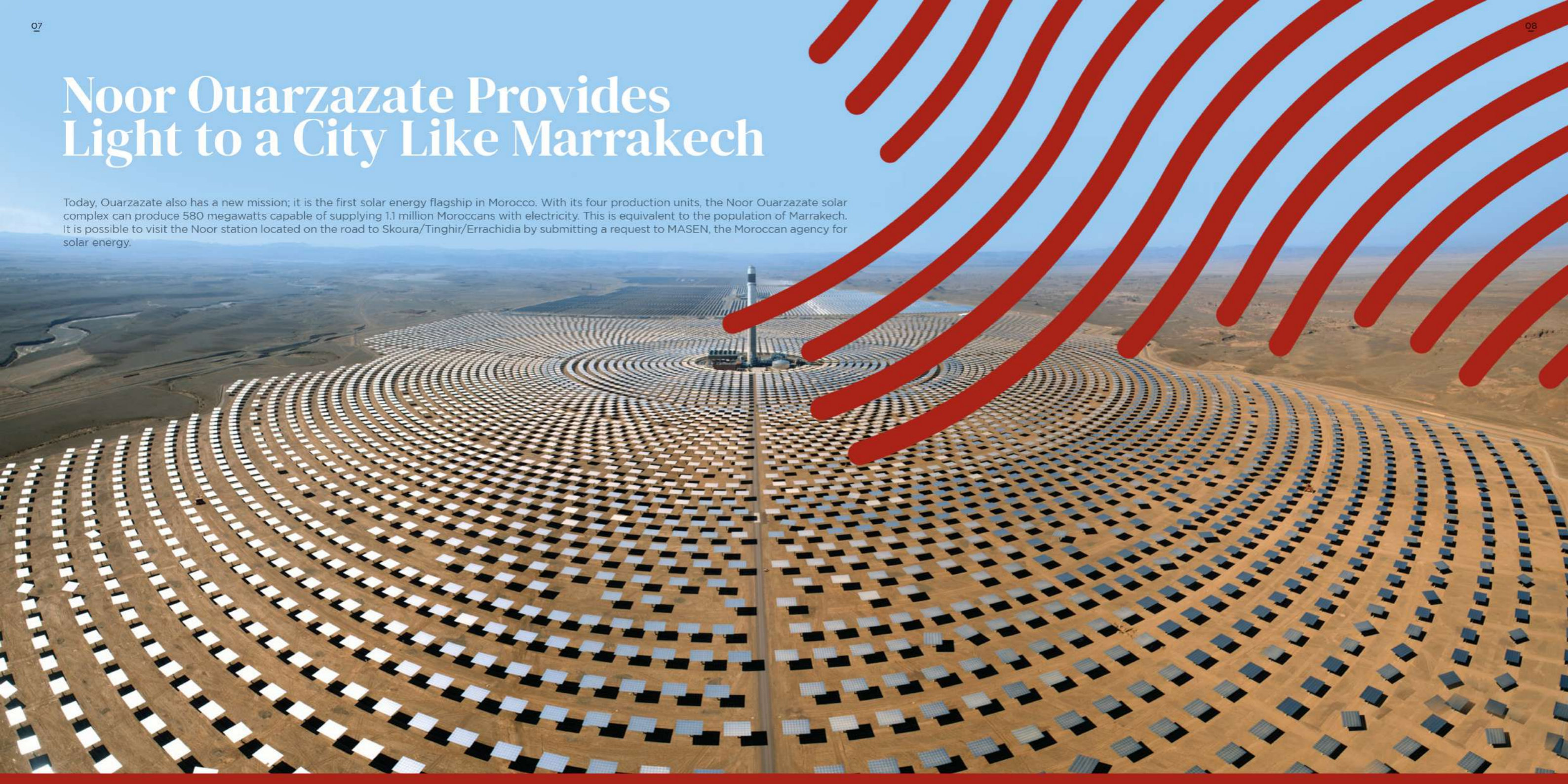


## A Living Berber Heritage

With regard to agricultural activity, the construction of the El Mansour Eddahbi Dam in 1966 gave a new lease of life to the region's agricultural activity based on date palms, saffron and roses. Ouarzazate is also a wealth of intangible heritage including Berber carpets woven by Amazigh women, cultural traditions such as those of Ahwach, one of the largest Amazigh communities in Morocco. Singing, poetry and body movement are combined in a collective and choreographic dance. The Kasbahs and Ksours of Ouarzazate, earthen houses that are scattered throughout the region, represent its architectural heritage. It was the privileged dwelling of wealthy families with economic, social or military power.

# Noor Ouarzazate Provides Light to a City Like Marrakech

Today, Ouarzazate also has a new mission; it is the first solar energy flagship in Morocco. With its four production units, the Noor Ouarzazate solar complex can produce 580 megawatts capable of supplying 1.1 million Moroccans with electricity. This is equivalent to the population of Marrakech. It is possible to visit the Noor station located on the road to Skoura/Tinghir/Errachidia by submitting a request to MASEN, the Moroccan agency for solar energy.



# Ouarzazate's Best Touristic Sites

*Ouarzazate, the ancestral capital of the Berber culture, is full of heritage for cultural and historical visits. Between Kasbahs, movie studios and typical souks, we can't get enough of its treasures.*

## *The Oasis of Skoura*

This palm grove is famous for its position along one of the mythical roads of the thousand Kasbahs going from Ouarzazate to Arfoud via Tinghir. Located 40 km east of Ouarzazate on the N10, this oasis with an area of 25 km<sup>2</sup> where date palms and fruit trees, almond trees, olive trees and pomegranate trees are grown... is the first point of entry to the road that leads to Kelaat M'Gouna, the Dadès and Toudgha gorges. It is fed by the Oued Skoura and formerly used the irrigation system of the Khetaras. Some Kasbahs also adorn the landscape such as the Kasbah Amridil, built in the 17th century. Still preserved, it has been transformed into a museum with a part dedicated to housing. We also find other vestiges such as ruins of Kasbahs, local crafts, Muslim and Jewish places of worship, cemeteries...



## *The Taourirte Kasbah The Symbol of The City*

Located on a hill in the center of Ouarzazate, the Taourirte Kasbah was built in the 17th century. A true symbol of Berber architecture, it is built of earth, straw and lime. Once the palace of the Pasha of Marrakech, Thami El Glaoui, who resided there with his family until 1956, it is now a Unesco World Heritage Site. In 1972, the Taourirte Kasbah was bought by the municipality of Ouarzazate. Its northwestern part was restored in 1996 and the reception rooms and private apartments of the Pasha are open to the public.

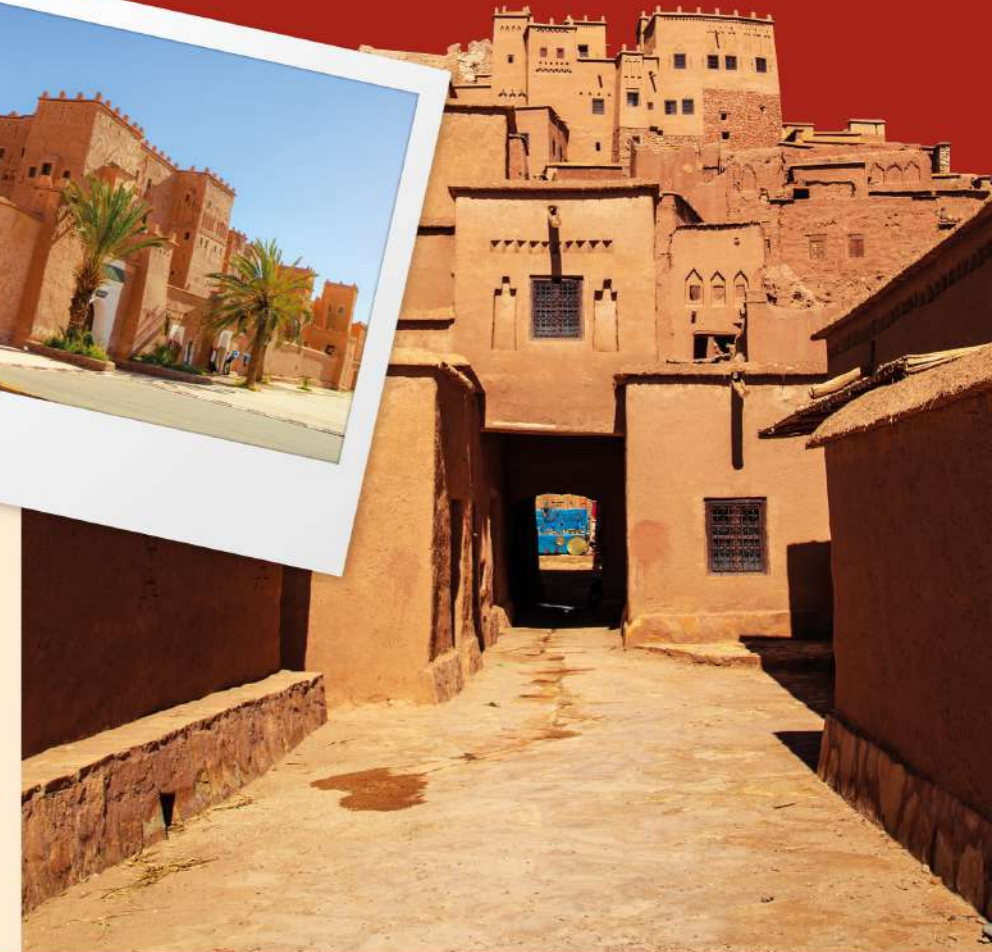


## *The Oasis of Fint*

Very close to Ouarzazate, about ten kilometers away from the city, Fint Oasis is spared from mass tourism. Enclosed in the arid mountains, surrounded by villages with traditional adobe houses and scattered with numerous palm groves, fruit trees and parcels of cultivated land, this charming oasis attracts foreign tourists. It has been the scene of many film shootings such as the movie *Indigènes* by Jamel Debbouze, *Prince of Persia*, *Kingdom of Heaven*, *Babel*....

## *The Ksar Ait Benhaddou*

Located in the foothills of the High Atlas in the province of Ouarzazate, the Ksar Ait Benhaddou is a group of collective dwellings dating back to the 17th century. The site, located 30 km outside of Ouarzazate, has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1987. The Ksar includes modest dwellings, small castles but also buildings and community spaces. Public spaces include the mosque, a public square, grain threshing areas, a fortification, a granary at the top of the village, a caravanserai, two cemeteries (Muslim and Jewish) and the Sidi Ali or Amer shrine.





## Atlas Studios

Located 4 km from downtown Ouarzazate, Atlas Studios were established in 1983 and cover an area of 20 hectares. They have hosted the shooting of famous films such as Asterix and Obelix: Mission Cleopatra, Kundun by Martin Scorsese, Gladiator by Ridley Scott or Prince of Persia. The studios feature impressive Egyptian sets.



## CLA Studios

Less grandiose than Atlas Studios, CLA Studios were established in 2004. They are worth a visit because of their two large film sets and impressive exterior sets of Jerusalem and reconstructions of Mecca. CLA Studios was the shooting location for "Kingdom of Heaven".



## The Ouarzazate Cinema Museum

Opened in 2007, the Ouarzazate Cinema Museum is located in a former film studio and covers two hectares. It traces the history of the famous studios of Ouarzazate and the great films that were shot there.



## The Souks of Ouarzazate

The pretty stores of the Ouarzazate souks are full of local products such as the handmade, green and rustic pottery of Tamegroute but also the rose water that women distill from the rose of KelâatM'Gouna.



## The Berber Carpet Cooperative

It lies in the "Artisanal Complex" of Ouarzazate, a place that encourages local traditional crafts. You can find there the Zarbiya (carpet) of the High Atlas, the Chedwi, the Kharita and the carpets of Taznakhte...



## The Village of Taznakht

Located southwest of Ouarzazate, the village of Taznakht of the Senhaja tribes is known for its handicrafts of traditional woven and/or knotted carpets. The visit of the old Taznakht and its Kasbah where Jewish and Muslim communities lived is worth the detour. For those who love traditional carpets, women's cooperatives display their handmade carpets to buyers.



## Kasbah of Tifoultoute

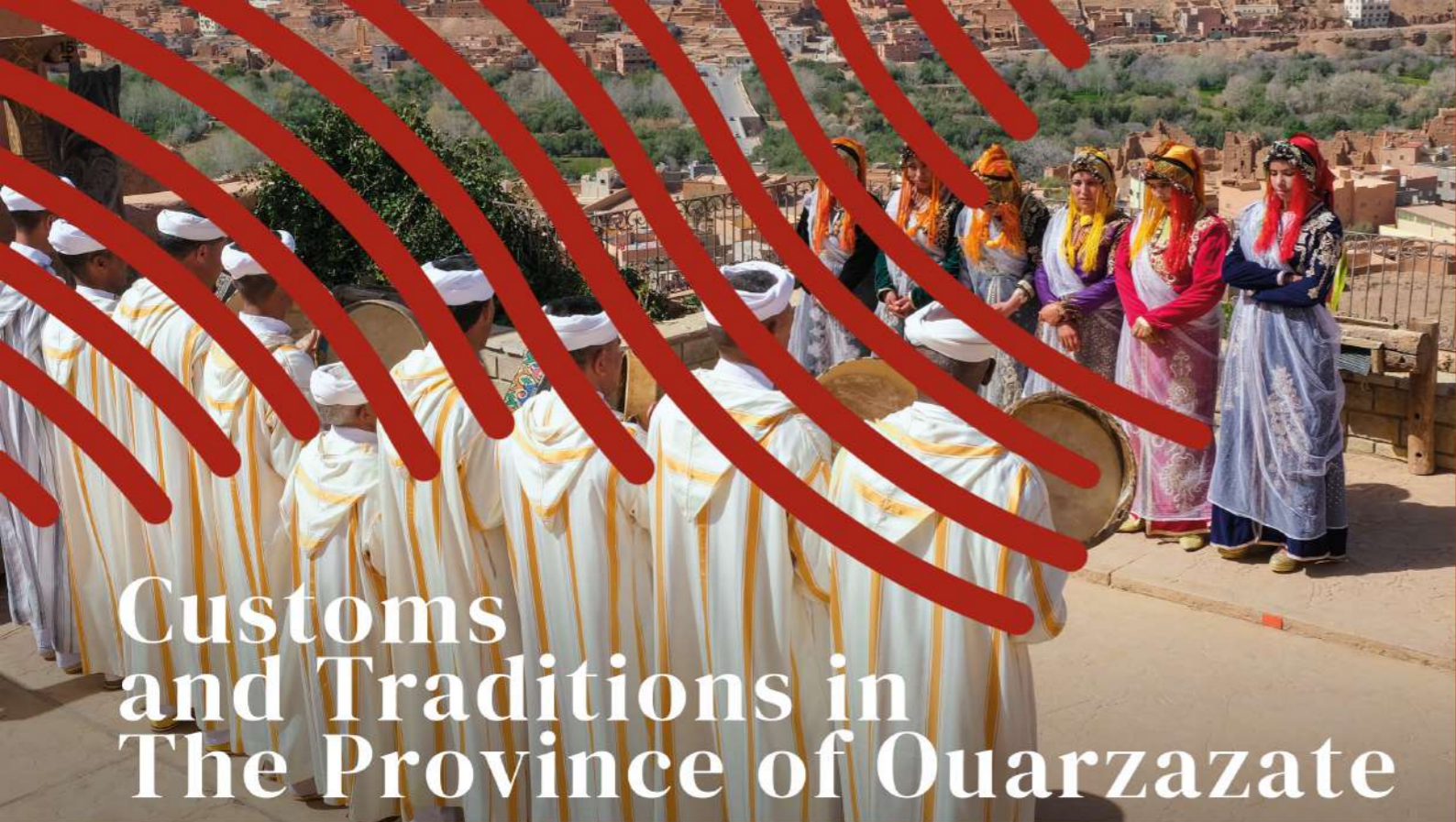
Located in the Berber village of Tifoultoute 8 kilometers west of Ouarzazate, the beautiful village Kasbah has been partially restored. Built in a landscape formed by the valley of the river, it offers a breathtaking view from its terraces. Having served as a set for the films Lawrence of Arabia and Jesus of Nazareth, the Kasbah has quite a history. To visit it, you have to take the national road n°9 towards Marrakech for 6 kilometers. It is still managed by its owner, grandson of the Glaoui and hosts a restaurant and a café.



## Kasbah of Telouet

Former home of the Pasha Glaoui, the splendid Kasbah of Telouet built in the 19th century lies 77 km from Ouarzazate on the road leading to Ksar Ait Benhaddou. This jewel of Amazigh architecture and Arab-Moorish style testifies to the greatness of the former Caids of the Atlas. This prestigious and refined Kasbah consisted of a castle, fortress and caravansary. It is now in a state of neglect, having been abandoned to the hazards of the climate since 1956. Only the main residence and some annexes remain of the magnificent Kasbah that tourists can still visit.





# Customs and Traditions in The Province of Ouarzazate

*Whether they stem from the singing, dancing and poetry legacy, from festivals and ceremonies or from the gastronomy of the past, the province of Ouarzazate offers visitors discoveries anchored in the ancestral traditions of the province.*

## Ahwach Singing and Dancing

A well-known oral heritage of the Amazigh people of the villages and Kasbahs of Ouarzazate: Taourirte, Tifoultoute, Telouet and Taskaouine, Ahwach is an art that combines dance, gesture and poetry sung in the Berber Tachelhite dialect. This tradition that has become a folk dance was originally designed and performed by Amazigh men and women to portray their history and their lifestyle and culture with finesse and elegance. Since the arrival of the protectorate and with the growth of tourism, Ahwach has become a visual folkloric show. Women and men from the villages of Taourirte, Tifoultoute and Telouet continue this tradition to the delight of tourists and visitors of the region.

## The Berber wedding

Among the Amazighs, the wedding celebration takes the form of a festival that lasts 7 days in a joyful and cheerful atmosphere. On the first day, the procession makes its way to the house of the bride's parents. It is preceded by a bronze tray filled with henna and hard-boiled eggs carried by an elderly woman and composed of carriages loaded with baskets of gifts, goats and young women singing with bendirs in their hands. Upon arrival, the guests of the bride are served a welcome drink consisting of milk, dates, honey and butter. After the henna ceremony, the bride is prepared to leave the family home. Once the wedding guests are welcomed by the groom at his home, the first ceremony begins followed by the Alaakissa ritual which forbids the groom to spend the first night with his wife. Therefore, she will sleep alone. On the second day, in the early afternoon, the groom's parents welcome the arriving guests who come offering sheep, sugar, tea, mint, flour and other items. During this ceremony, music, singing and dancing continue. After the great feast, comes the wedding night. The guests wait outside to see the white cloth stained with blood: a sign of the man's virility and the virginity of his wife. From the third day on, the young couple is invited four days in a row by four different families who host them with great hospitality and generosity while guaranteeing the continuity of the festivities, with feasts, singing and dancing groups, guests and gifts... On the seventh day, the bride and groom return home and offer a reception to their relatives and close friends. On the eighth day, the new life of the young couple begins.



# The Culinary Specialties of Ouarzazate

## Couscous With 7 Vegetables

The origin of the couscous is said to go back to the antiquity at the time of Massinissa. Declined in various forms, the couscous with seven vegetables (turnip, carrot, pumpkin, zucchini, onions, tomatoes and green cabbage) is the most known in Morocco. Prepared by the Berbers to celebrate Yennayer, the Berber new year, this dish also symbolizes meeting and the reunion. Traditionally served every Friday, it is also the dish of the festivities of marriage, circumcision, death, offerings... that you will find everywhere in the restaurants of the region.





## Chicken Tajine with Lemon

A great classic of Moroccan cuisine, chicken tagine with preserved lemons and olives is served very often in the south of the Kingdom. This simple family dish is both economical and delicious. It is prepared at least once a week in every household.



## Lamb Tajine with Quince and Honey

A traditional Moroccan dish that is very popular in Ouarzazate, this tagine perfectly combines sweet and salty flavors. During the quince season from September to November, the lamb tagine with quince is served in the guest houses and restaurants of the city.



## The Berber Tchicha

Barley semolina based soup, the Berber Tchicha is cooked with tomatoes, onions and spiced with olive oil and wild mint. It is eaten in the High Atlas mountains, especially in winter when it is very cold, and is offered to women who have just given birth for its nutritional and energetic value.



## Chorba with Pigeons and Nuts

The history of this luxury dish goes back to the time of Pacha Thami El Glaoui, lord of the Atlas. Legend has it that the table of this dynasty had to be furnished with a dish that was out of the ordinary every day. The Chorba with pigeons and nuts is a very refined and extremely rich dish.

# Horseback Riding in The Province of Ouarzazate

## *Crossing The Palm Grove of Skoura on Horseback*

Saddle up and ride through the Skoura palm grove with its magnificent palm and fruit trees and irrigation canals as well as its cultivated plots. The far snow-capped Atlas Mountains embellish the landscape. Beautiful Kasbahs are encountered along the road to Ait Said.

## *Visit of The Valley of Almond Trees*

From the oasis of Tamassinte, the riders, on their barb horses, take the direction of the Atlas and meet different mountainous landscapes. After a stop at Tamsoulte in the valley of the almond trees ( blooming from the end of February to the beginning of March), ride along small paths along villages dug in the mountain until the arrival at Atagra.

## *Ascent of Mounts Assaghmou and Ghassat*

Meet the nomads and cross their camps and their livestock before stopping at Assaghmou, a mountain culminating at 1600m. Going down abrupt paths in the direction of the small fortified village of N'Aij, located after Ghassat (at 1450m of altitude).

## *Crossing The Valley of The Assif Izerki*

The Assif Izerki is a wadi at an altitude of 1104m. Located west of Izlagane, northwest of the Assif Tizerkit, this beautiful valley is inhabited by nomads and dotted with very old picturesque villages. Horse riders go through the whole valley until Taferghouste.

# Useful Information

*To improve the travelers' stay, here is some useful information about the facilities and infrastructure of the province.*

## Climate

The province is distinguished by a hot desert climate. In summer, the average maximum temperatures are around 37°C. On the other hand, winters are quite cold, especially at night. The best time to visit the province is from April to June and from September to October.

## Local Time

Morocco is on a single time zone GMT + 1. During the month of Ramadan, Morocco switches to GMT. The Drâa Tafilalet region is no exception to the rule.

## Spoken Languages

The population speaks Berber and Arabic. The signage is in French and Arabic, sometimes in Tifinagh. The guides, the staff of the hotels and the guest houses speak French, English and other languages considering the tourist vocation of the province.

## Hotels

The province offers palaces and 5-star hotels as well as charming guesthouses. In general, accommodation and restaurants in the province remain affordable and adapted to all budgets.

## Air Transport

Ouarzazate has an airport connected to Casablanca by a regular flight.

## Airport - City cCenter Shuttle

From the airport, it is easy to find different types of transportation on the way out, whether by cabs or tourist transports.

## Land Transportation

The province has a network of land-based tourist transporters offering several options varying from 4x4 all-terrain vehicles to 60-person buses. The CTM (Compagnie du Transport au Maroc) offers routes connecting the cities. Comfort is assured and speed is controlled.

## Travel Agencies

For visitors looking for adapted trips, there is no lack of travel agencies. Several programs are offered, and customized trips can also be made. The travel agent takes care of all the details: advice, reception and accompaniment, reservations, travel and transfers...

## Emergencies

Police : **Tel : 19** | Firemen : **Tel : 15** | Roadside assistance : **Tel : 177** | Phone information : **Tel : 160**



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Région Drâa - Tafilalet



Conseil Régional  
du Tourisme de Drâa-Tafilalet



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