

# Surfin' safari

**SEPTEMBER**  
SURFING | Morocco



## LOWDOWN

**Packages:** Homeric Tours, [homerictours.com](http://homerictours.com); Pure Vacations Ltd., [www.purevacations.com](http://www.purevacations.com); Affordable Tours, [affordabletours.com](http://affordabletours.com).

**More info:**  
[travel.marocctour.com](http://travel.marocctour.com);  
[www.morocco-travel.com](http://www.morocco-travel.com)

**Surf and turf: The water's closer than you'd think.**

**A** SINGLE girl could fare far worse in the Muslim world than I did while traveling along the coast of Morocco last spring, or so I was led to believe.

"If anyone asks, say you're from Canada," advised one pal on learning where I was headed. Another suggested I wear a wedding ring.

As it turned out, "pack a wet suit" would have been more useful advice.

People tend to overlook the fact that Morocco is bordered by 2,000 miles of smooth, sandy coastline and that it has a climate comparable to Southern California's. The implications of Morocco's geography, though, are not lost on surfers who come from around the globe to stake out the breaks from the fish-

## STACEY SZEWCZYK does the wave in North Africa

ing villages and resort towns of Morocco's southern coast.

I headed for Essaouira, an old Portuguese fortress that stands out for its stirring architecture, gorgeous beach and overall charm. While overrun with stray cats and tourists — landlocked Europeans love this place, as well — Essaouira's cobblestone alleyways and dusty markets have a sunny charm, and the beach culture is exotic and easygoing.

Orson Welles filmed "Othello" here and, at the time of my visit, it was once again being used as movie set — this time by Ridley

Scott, who was shooting his biblical epic "Kingdom of Heaven," due out this summer.

Winding my way through the maze of streets set-designed to look like 12th-century Jerusalem, I met Ron, a ukulele-strumming surfer from San Diego. He invited me to join him and his buddies for a surf session at nearby Safi Beach, as the howling trade winds on the beach in town had turned the waves there to mush.

They caught some great rides. I watched from a blanket. A surf rat, I enjoy surf culture as much as the sport

itself — a good thing, as the rough waves and cold water were too hard-core for a novice like me. (They're even rougher and colder in the fall and winter, which is when seasoned surfers like to come here.)

Ron et al. then headed about 12 miles south to Sidi Kouki, one of several other spots near town.

More rugged "adventure" surfers, by the way, usually skip Essaouira. Instead, they opt for isolated spots like Taghazoute, a picturesque fishing village about three hours south.

So, yes, you can forget the wedding ring, ladies — unlike the stories I'd heard, I wasn't hassled at all during my trip. But a wet suit? I would have given my ring finger for one.