

6 THINGS YOU MUST DO IN... MOROCCO

OUTSIDE the eurozone, and very affordable, this stable kingdom on the north-west coast of Africa is one of the year's most desirable short-haul destinations. **GARETH HUW DAVIES** reveals how Morocco offers a choice of ancient cities with modern twists, the grandeur of the Atlas mountains, an eclectic mix of music and culture and some intriguing dishes to try...



NICE AND BREEZY: Fishing boats at Essaouira on the fresh Atlantic coast

1...AL FRESCO MOVIES
Tangier is entry-level Africa, a short hop across the Straits of Gibraltar on a day trip from Spain, and is resurgent. A single plan – part of a larger project to save Tangier's historic buildings – sums up the new mood. In 2006, the run-down Art Deco Rif cinema reopened as the Cinéma de Tanger (www.cinemaquetanger.com), showing arthouse films. On summer nights, the projectors switch the films on to the terrace at Cafe Hafa for an epic view across the Straits or head for Nord Pinus (www.nord-pinus-tanger.com), a smart new inn in an 18th-century pasha's palace on the sea wall.

2...MARRAKECH EXCESS
Marrakech, a sea of terracotta roofs under the setting sun, is a strong contender for the chicest stop in North Africa. There is a catalogue of swish places to stay, and many high-end restaurants. But inside its sophisticated wrapping the old city – the Medina – retains its maze of tight streets winding into the souks. Browse 1,000 years of history, from the 11th Century Koutoubia Mosque and the thronging market of Jemaa el-Fna Square to the fragrant, tiled walkways of Jardin Majorelle, a botanical garden once owned by Yves Saint Laurent.

3...RHYTHMS OF AFRICA
Essaouira comes with city-wide air-conditioning – the Atlantic

Ocean. This resort of blue-shuttered, whitewashed houses built around an 18th Century Portuguese port is Morocco's big summer escape as the interior heats up. The old inner city slumbers on behind the sandy walls until three days in June (25-28) when it wakes for the annual Gnawa Music Festival (www.festival-gnawa.net). There are often free performances of this African roots music, as well as rock, reggae, Brazilian and Afro-Cuban styles.

4...ANCIENT LABYRINTHS
The dignified old walled city of Fez comes closest to undiluted, original Morocco, with the world's largest medieval Islamic settlement and the world's oldest university. Architectural masterpieces include palaces, mosques and fountains adorned with mosaics, marble and carved wood. The old city has changed little in two centuries. I defy any GPS system to make sense of the labyrinth of thousands of narrow alleys.

5...A PLATTER OF PIGEONS
Pastilla – sweet pigeon pie – is the signature dish of Fez. And don't be put off by the key ingredient: it doesn't come from the local market square. The meat is cooked with onions, parsley, spices and beaten eggs, under a layer of crushed almonds and pistachios, covered in pastry sprinkled with sugar and cinnamon. Another Moroccan speciality, apart from couscous, is tagine, ideally cooked in the namesake clay

dish. Dar Moha in Marrakech (www.darmoha.ma) serves a fine beef tagine with figs, walnuts, cinnamon and argan oil.

6...PEAK EXPERIENCE
The Atlas mountains, 40 miles from Marrakech, are an easy day trip from much of Morocco. And now there is a great new place to stay in the mountain area. The Kasbah du Toubkal (www.kasbahdutoubkal.com) is an impressive mountain retreat at 5,400ft, in the shadow of Jbel Toubkal, the highest peak in North Africa. This is a hostel for all-comers, from school walking parties to celebrities. (If you don't want to stay with a boisterous group, they will tell you the quiet times to book.) The air is pure, the views are majestic and you can take a gentle day's hike up to Kasbah's trekking lodge, with its en suite bedrooms, solar powered underfloor heating and a terrace looking up to snow-capped 12,000ft peaks. More information at www.visitmorocco.com for nine-day packages from £1,395.



FEZ FEAST: Pastilla, or sweet pigeon pie

Alice Bianchi-Clark tours Florence on the trail of Disney's lovable puppet hero

Follow your nose to Piazza Pinocchio

WHEN you wish upon a star, sings Jimmy Cricket at the start of Disney's Pinocchio, your dreams come true. When the cartoon was released in 1939 at the start of the Second World War, its message of hope might have been expected to chime with the public mood. Sadly, the film did not match the success of Disney's first animated feature, Snow White And The Seven Dwarfs, released in 1936.

Now, Disney has released a lovingly restored high-definition edition of the classic fairy tale of the wooden puppet who turns into a little boy. Pinocchio sparkles on Blu-ray, Geppetto's menagerie of cuckoo clocks fills me with wonder and the heartfelt characterisations of his pets, Cleo and Figaro, hit all the right notes.

When I first watched the film (three times over, with my daddy snoring beside me in the cinema), I was five years old and honestly believed that my nose would grow if I told another lie. Now, years later, I am marking the anniversary by heading to Florence to track down the truth behind Pinocchio's origins.

Walt's preoccupation with timelessness prompted an interest in popular European fairy tales. His 1939 film was based on The Adventures Of Pinocchio, by Italian writer and journalist Carlo Collodi. Collodi's Pinocchio was first serialised in a children's newspaper in 1881 and turned into a book in 1883.

The original version was much shorter, ending with the cat and fox hanging Pinocchio from the great oak in Chapter 15. Thankfully, his young readers protested, and Pinocchio was rescued from

the noose and became a real boy 21 chapters later.

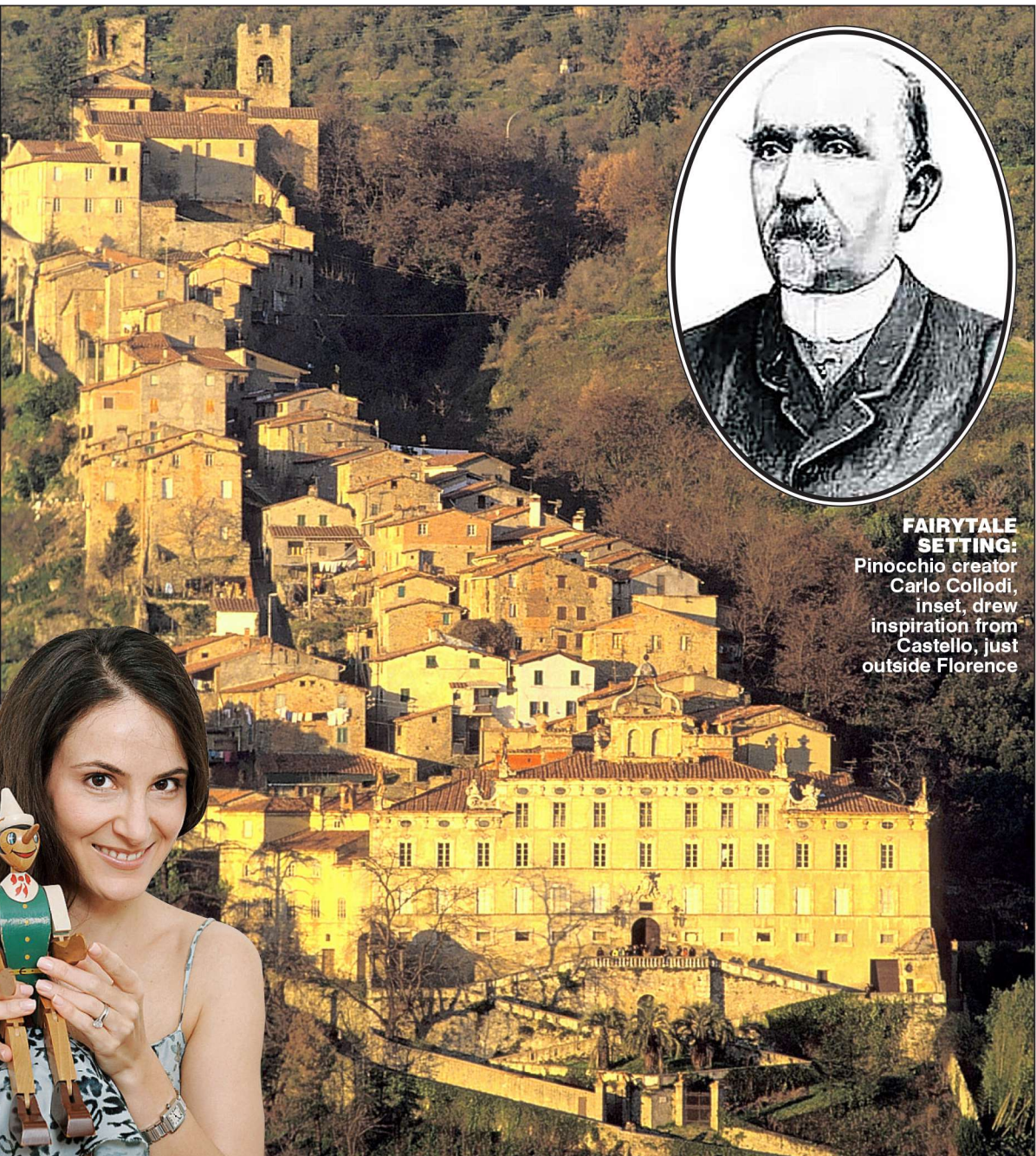
Carlo Collodi is the pen name of Carlo Lorenzini. He chose Collodi as a tribute to his beloved mother's home town, Collodi in Tuscany. The town is now the setting for a child-friendly Pinocchio theme park (www.pinocchio.it) and is a short drive from Lucca, home town of composer Puccini.

Pinocchio could have been set anywhere. Walt drew his inspiration from the Bavarian medieval town of Rothenburg ob der Tauber, with its ancient cobbled streets and toymaking tradition, while Collodi drew upon Castello, the little town outside Florence where he spent his summers at his brother's villa.

He penned Pinocchio in its tower, working until the small hours. The book is a much darker and more poverty-stricken tale than the one told by Disney. Interestingly, however, all the locations and characters in Collodi's novel were picked from reality. Collodi's turquoise-haired fairy was inspired by a real little girl. Giovanna Ragionieri was blonde with blue eyes, just as in Walt's imagination. She never watched a film and is buried in Castello's Camposanto.

At the start of my whistle-stop tour of Florence, it is carnevale. Children walk the streets dressed in maschere (fancy dress), trailing coloured paper confetti and ribbons in front of the anonymous whitewashed building with mint-green shutters where Collodi was born (Via Taddea 25). Around the corner is Mario's, one of the oldest fiaschetterias/trattorias in town, with

on the trail of Disney's lovable puppet hero



FAIRYTALE SETTING: Pinocchio creator Carlo Collodi, inset, drew inspiration from Castello, just outside Florence

FAMILY FAVOURITE: Alice Bianchi-Clark and the Pinocchio that belonged to her father

chequered paper tablecloths (Via Rosina 2/R). Daddy (who is Tuscan) says that originally these were haunts for the poor, where men such as Collodi would come to play cards, drink and mingle with the ladies. After all, Pinocchio was written to repay a gambling debt.

The smell of cured meats drifts into the piazza from the mercato centrale fruit-and-veg market housed in an Art Nouveau building. Brunelleschi's San Lorenzo church is steps away. Its coarse stone facade belies its serene and delicate interior. Michelangelo's Medici Chapel within the church may have an entrance (and opening times) of its own but it is definitely worth a visit. Just around the corner is Benozzo Gozzoli's Lippituan chapel in the Palazzo Medici Riccardi (entrance €7). This is Florence at its most magical and I am glad I am not alone.

A father lifts his little blonde daughter to his shoulders. 'Can you see better now?' he coos, her unblinking eyes gazing over the frescoes. 'Daddee, daddee, Rapunzel tower!' she cries, pointing at a distant castle. The father and I exchange smiles; fairy tales are not for old men.

Peering in between buildings, the Duomo, with its diamond-cut greens and pinks, draws me like a magnet. Nearby, a crowd gathers around Ghiberti's Baptistery doors, which gleam like a gold-wrapped chocolate tablet. From there, it is a stroll to Giambologna's statue of the Rape Of The Sabine Women in the Loggia dei Lanzi in Piazza della Signoria. A student is intent on capturing on paper the victim's hand as

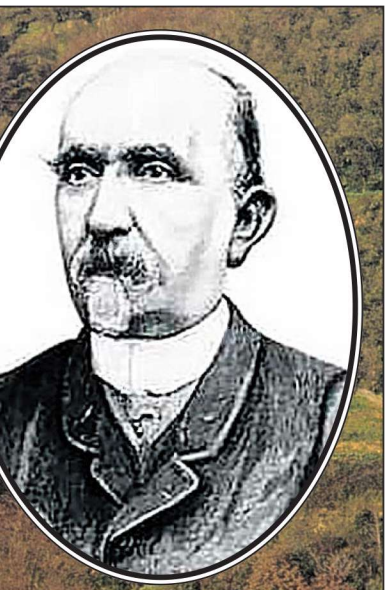
it strains towards the heavens, as if that detail captured the essence of her plight.

Grom's ice-cream parlour justifies a detour (Via delle Oche 24R). I walk past the Uffizi Gallery and its endless queues and take a right on Lungarno, passing the Ponte Vecchio and its huddled jewellers' shops before arriving at the glamorous shopping mecca Via de' Tornabuoni.

FLORENCE'S best-kept secret is the Salvatore Ferragamo shoe museum (Piazza Santa Trinita 5R) and its Creations boutique selling limited-edition replicas of shoes made for Audrey Hepburn, Marilyn Monroe, Ava Gardner and Ingrid Bergman. Coincidentally, the range includes a Harlequin-style cork sandal (Collodi's Pinocchio wears cork shoes and befriends Arlecchino at the puppet theatre).

Roberto Cavalli's Giacosa cafe (Via della Spada 10R) is also worth a stop. This is where the bold and the beautiful meet for espresso and chocolates in zebra-patterned boxes.

The plaque commemorating the



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GETTING THERE

Meridiana flies to Florence from Gatwick from £70 one-way. Visit www.meridiana.it or call 0871 2229319. For a room with a view of the River Arno, try the understated Lungarno Suites (www.lungarnohotels.com) from £250 (£223) a night. For a cheap, central stay, try historic Il Loggiato dei Servi (www.loggiato.deiservihotel.it) from €90 (£81). For dinner, queue at Caffè Cibrino. This gorgeous bistro and chef Picchi's decadent chocolate cake are worth the wait (Via dei Macci 118, tel 00 39 055 2345853). Best Florence guide: www.luxecityguides.com.

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BOOK OF THE WEEK

WITH the Met Office confidently predicting that this summer in the UK will be a scorcher, it would seem wise to start thinking about which bits of the seaside to visit to escape the heat. Britain has some of the best beaches in the world – what wouldn't the Mediterranean give for our lovely swathes of sand? The problem is that sea-bathers usually suffer more from exposure than sunburn.

Miranda Krestovnikoff's Best British Beaches (Pavilion, £12.99) is an excellent guide to more than 100 great seaside places in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. 'There are beaches for relaxing, sandcastle-building, windsurfing, swimming, walking and pottering in rock pools – wherever you are, there's a beautiful piece of coast to discover nearby.'

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Frank Barrett

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THAT'S MY TOY: Walt Disney's Pinocchio and his 'father', toymaker Geppetto

