



HOOKED on the new spy thriller series *Black Doves*? Keira Knightley plays a starring role as Helen, a secret agent who finds herself caught up in chaos when her lover meets a brutal end.

If you managed to keep calm amid the Netflix drama, you will probably have noticed many London landmarks cropping up in the background.

And do you remember the scene where Sam, played by Ben Whishaw, met Mrs Reed (Sarah Lancashire) in a plush hotel suite?

stay with the stars

Helen strolled down a gorgeous marble staircase? Or maybe when Sam sipped on champagne in a plush bar?

All of those scenes were shot in the glamorous 5★ Royal Lancaster London Hotel, above, opposite Hyde Park. If you fancy sipping on champagne in that same bar or taking a wander up the very same marble staircase, non-guests are welcome to pop in for a drink.

Or you can go one step further and book yourself a room from around £300 per night. For details and to book, see royallancaster.com.

lates ...**SAL GOOD:** A week all-inclusive at the 3★+ TUI Sunco Dunas hotel on Sal, in the Cape Verde Islands, is from £654pp leaving Glasgow airport on January 3. See tui.co.uk.

...**A NEW PAGE:** A night room-only at the nostalgic 4.5★ Page8 Hotel in Trafalgar Square, London, is from £245. Rooms come with retro phones, Marshall radios and mini-bar with complimentary treats like posh popcorn and wine. See pagehotels.com.

...**COLD COMFORT:** A seven-night Alaska Inside Passage cruise onboard Holland America Line's Koningsdam, is from £649pp leaving Vancouver on May 3, calling at Juneau, Skagway and Ketchikan, as well as scenic cruising of Glacier Bay and The Inside Passage. Flights not included but can be added. See hollandamerica.com or call 0344 338 8607.

...**ALL IS WELL:** Three nights self-catering at Raywell Hall Country Lodges, near Cottingham, Yorkshire, is from £899 for up to eight people sharing a lodge with hot tub in December. See hoseasons.co.uk.

essential **WOMENS SHERPA LINED WATERPROOF JACKET** £49.99 twobarefeet.co.uk

YOU may look like you're ready to tackle Mount Everest in this waterproof Sherpa lined jacket — but it's just as good for a wander around Mount Vernon.

As Storm Darragh battered the country, I was wrapped up warm and toasty in this classy coat from Two Bare Feet Boarding Co, loving the cosy feel of the soft and sumptuous Sherpa lining.

The seam-sealed, breathable outer layer didn't let in a drop of rain, while the internal pocket kept my phone safe from the elements and the elasticated hood meant no drips down the back of my neck either.

Regularly walking with friends in the countryside and even up the occasional munro, and this waterproof jacket is the best I've ever had the pleasure to own. It's a brilliant all-rounder and not too bulky either and for the environmentally conscious it's made from 100 per cent recycled polyester. What's not to love?



SOUK UP CITY'S BUZZING MEDINA AND STUNNING RIADS ON A LONG WEEKEND TRIP TO AFRICA



MARRA-DISE . . . Riad Botanica is a haven within bustling Marrakech, with great facilities and accommodation



MOR TO ENJOY . . . James and Rachel loved trip to desert, Marrakech's main square & souks



'Kech refresh is so Morish

ONE minute you're walking along a narrow lane that could be any back street in the world.

The next you're stepping into paradise. Welcome to riad life in Marrakech. In simple terms, a riad — meaning garden in Arabic — is a traditional Moroccan home built around an indoor courtyard.

But Riad Botanica has so much more than that. Moroccan at its core, it enjoys an Australian soul. That is because Melbourne-born owner Angela Makel has spent the last decade seamlessly blending east and west, modern and traditional, to create a unique travel destination.

Not only is Angela an inspiration for riad transformation, she should also be on a retainer for Marrakech's Tourist Board. As we learned over three days here, her passion for her property — and the local area — oozes out in every conversation.

We arrived at Riad Botanica late on a Friday night following a four-hour direct easyJet flight from Glasgow. Nestled in Marrakech's historic Medina, the riad dates back to the 14th century and has passed through a handful of wealthy Moroccan families.

Adding to the family feel, our host on arrival was Angela's husband Mohamed who explained that the facades within the Medina are not allowed to be fancy, based on ancient classless values of the rich living next to the poor.

Once you get beyond the facade though . . . wow! The first thing that hit me was

GO: MARRAKECH

GETTING THERE: easyJet fly Glasgow to Marrakech Mondays and Fridays from £23.99 per person. See easyjet.com. **STAYING THERE:** Rooms at the Riad Botanica start from approx £133, two sharing on a B&B basis. It can be hired exclusively for up to 12 guests or booked by individual suite. See riad-botanica.com.

the smell — a gorgeous aroma to match the stunning courtyard orange tree. Our Nigella Super King room was compact and cosy with en-suite and, being on the ground floor, handy for the small pool and relaxing courtyard area.

Set within the spectacular Darel Bacha Palace and serving over 200 glittering pots of 100 per cent Arabica coffees from around the world, this was a step back in time. The elegant ambience and historical significance — guests have included Charlie Chaplin and Winston Churchill — this was a Saturday morning experience to savour.

While there, we were lucky enough that the Palace was hosting two exhibitions owned by Richard Branson's sister Vanessa and considered one of the best hotels in the world. Surrounded by a boutique store, marble pools and a courtyard

cafe my wife Rachel and I enjoyed sunset cocktails on the rooftop bar opposite the Koutoubia Mosque.

After a Saturday sight-seeing we were ready for a chilled Sunday so headed to Wa Wellness Therapy for a couple's hammam (Turkish bath) and massage. Situated bang in the middle of all the hustle and bustle of the medina this was an oasis of tranquillity and we both

favourite tippie in licensed bars, restaurants and hotels. To respect local culture though, it is advisable not to overdo it. After a fab sleep we rose the next morning to meet our new neighbours. That would be Fate — an Australian native budgie that Angela incredibly spotted flying around the courtyard one day — and Destiny, who joined the family soon after.

If dinner hit the spot then breakfast on the terrace was even better. Fresh fruit was served up with yoghurt and granola, followed by waffles, pastries, jams, chocolate spread, cheese and, if that wasn't enough, there was a third course of poached eggs. Amazing!

After that we were keen to explore and top of our list was Bacha Coffee Rooms. Feeling peckish after all our travelling we headed to the rooftop terrace where Mohamed served us a delicious meal of Moroccan salad, chicken tagine and chocolate mousse — washed down with peppermint tea.

Although it was late, we fancied a wander to soak up a little of the atmosphere. A great thing about Riad Botanica is it's a 15-minute walk from everything within the Medina.

Mohamed recommended Kabana, a cool rooftop bar with views of the Koutoubia Mosque that serves top notch cocktails. While the surrounding area seemed relatively quiet for a Friday night, once inside the place was packed. Now, 99 per cent of Moroccans don't drink alcohol but it is not illegal so you can find your

everything from pashminas, carpets to lamps and herbal remedies and fresh fruit and veg. It is a boisterous medley of buying, selling and haggling and great fun to watch.

Next up was Le Jardin Secret, The Secret Garden. Dating from the Saadian dynasty this hidden oasis offers two green spaces — an exotic garden filled with plants from all over the world, and an Islamic garden described as an oasis of peace.

After all our wandering and coffee drinking it was time for something a little stronger so we ventured into El Fenn — owned by Richard Branson's sister Vanessa and considered one of the best hotels in the world. Surrounded by a boutique store, marble pools and a courtyard

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immediately felt the stress-relieving benefits of the treatments. Suitably relaxed, we set off for some more sightseeing, taking in Ben Youssef Madrasa — dating back to 1564 and once the largest Islamic college in the western world — then on to El Badi, the palace of wonder, also translated as Incomparable Palace.

A trip to Marrakech is not complete without venturing out to the desert, so that evening we headed to Agafay Luxury Camp set within original untouched red rock country.

While the medina has strong Indiana Jones vibes, out here was like being in Luke Skywalker's home town of Tatooine. We arrived just in time for bubbles at sunset — tented pavilions on site, camel riders in the background and canyons and ridges in the distance this is glamping like you have never seen before.

With two pools, outdoor tubs and a yoga room we could have stayed here for days though I'm not sure I'd have had the courage to take on the hot air balloon experience on offer. Instead we had an incredible dinner

at Agafay Tfyara restaurant while being entertained first by a traditional Gnawa band sharing their fez-style Kufi hats with diners, then post dinner by a fab firelight show.

Our final day here we squeezed in a wander round the main square, some say the most important of the medina — others an area to avoid.

Even at 10am on a Monday morning it was lively with street sellers, snake charmers, storytellers and monkeys wandering around. We then headed for the Moro Concept Store where the The Moroccan brand creates many of the fragrances and scents you will smell around Marrakesh.

I mentioned the orange smell that hit me the second we walked into Riad Botanica — well it turns out you can buy an aftershave to match, a nice reminder of our weekend here.

Our final stop of the trip was Beldi Country Club just on the outskirts of the city centre. A fabulous spot with hotel, spas, gardens and even its own souk we were booked in for a half-day lunch and pool pass. Unfortunately, time ran away from us and we only managed a quick dip and 10 minutes on a lounge before, after months without any rain, it started to pour down in Marrakech.

I think it was Destiny the budgie telling us it was time to go home to forever rain-soaked Scotland.

JAMES McIVOR



PEACEFUL . . . limestone gorge at Creswell Crags

HISTORIC CAVE TRIP IS SIMPLY GORGE-OUS

I CERTAINLY expected Creswell Crags to be pretty. But the big surprise is that this beauty spot on the Derbyshire-Nottinghamshire border is also pretty important.

Once upon a time, this spot was essentially the edge of the world.

Near Worksop, Creswell Crags is a limestone gorge. The chunky, bumpy walls rise up either side of Millbrook, looking like they've been made from grey Lego bricks. They're honeycombed by a series of caves. And what has been found inside them is pretty extraordinary.

Before arriving at the gorge itself, the Creswell Crags visitor centre explains a rich history. This begins around 120,000 years ago, when temperatures here were a lot warmer. Back then, rhinos and hippos wandered here.

We know this because a narrow-roofed rhinoceros jaw, plus a hippo jaw and tusk, are on display in the museum section. All of the bones and fossils on display have been found in the caves.

These include a wolf's leg bone, and arctic fox's jaw and hyena droppings filled with the bones of other animals.

The animal bones aren't the only record of the past in these caves, though. Rock art, made with stones tools and painted with yellow, orange, red and purple ochres, also tells a story.

Several engravings from the Ice Age have been found within Creswell Crags. Dating techniques show the flowstone that has grown over some of the art to be around 12,800 years old, meaning it has been there for longer. Many of the engravings show the animals that lived here at the time, such as woolly mammoths and cave lions.

This is believed to be the furthest north Ice Age cave art found in Europe. There is evidence people may have ventured into what is now Yorkshire, but the existence of cave art shows Creswell Crags was livable. For the people who sheltered in these caves, this was the end of the earth, with a carpet of ice to the north.

There are two ways to visit. The first is on your own, taking in the museum section then taking a pleasant stroll along the gorge.

In the meadow on the way, there are wooden carvings of the animals that have been discovered in the caves.

To go inside the caves, however, you need to take a tour. Most of the rock art is inside Church Hole,

GO: CRESWELL CRAGS

STAYING THERE: The 4★ Wildes Inns is a three-mile drive from Creswell Crags. Rooms from £69 per night. See wildesinns.co.uk.

OUT & ABOUT: Entrance to Creswell Crags costs £3 for adults, with children getting in free. The Life in the Ice Age tour to Robin Hood Cave costs £15 for adults and £10 for children. See creswell-crags.org.uk.

where tours run between April and October. Tours to Robin Hood Cave, however, run year-round. This is the biggest of the 24 caves at Creswell Crags, and the one with the most varied story to tell. It's a dry cave, with no flowing water, which made it a good shelter.

The first people who stayed here 13,000 to 50,000 years ago, and the Neanderthals before them, didn't go far into the cave.

Treasure chest

This was partly practical — they didn't have the head torches we have now. But it was mainly about what did venture further inside.

A bear skeleton has been in the inner chambers, as well as evidence lions liked to hang out there, too.

The guide shows how the people who called the cave home would have made tools. Hammers were made out of deer antlers, and sinews from animals were used to tie things together.

Flint has been found in the cave. It is sharper than modern hospital instruments, and would have been used for cutting.

Interestingly, however, it doesn't naturally occur in this limestone.

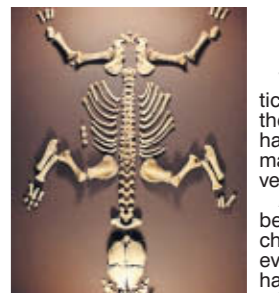
The best explanation is that it is from the chalk belt running through East Anglia, and the people of Creswell Crags either brought it with them or traded for it.

Robin Hood Cave was largely excavated in the 19th century, when it was an archaeological treasure chest. But there's still plenty more to be found. The guide points to fragments of bone in the cave wall that have been left in place.

There's also a mysterious triangle shape engraved on the wall of Robin Hood Cave. The gorgeous gorge outside may have inspired many paintings, but this triangle is part of Britain's oldest art collection.

One thing is for sure. These are more than just caves — they are windows into the past.

DAVID WHITLEY



FIND . . . hyena skeleton



ROCK ON . . . Robin Hood Cave