

# OLO SURF & NATURE

*A sustainability-focused surf school and guesthouse.*

**During the long months that Amine Lamriki would spend in the desert near the city of Ouarzazate during his career in the Moroccan film industry,** all that he could think about was located just a few hours away: the surf hitting Morocco's Atlantic coast. 'I used to drive six hours to Taghazout to try to get two waves on a Sunday,' he says, 'only to drive back by the evening and, at 4am, start shooting again.'

It wasn't necessarily that he didn't love his job. He quit school at 15 to join Morocco's fast-growing film industry (the country has been the backdrop to movies like *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time* and TV series like *Game of Thrones*) and worked his way up from an assistant to running sets. But after 20 years of grueling projects – some with 16-hour days, stretched across 10 months – it was either move up the career ladder or take a chance on building something from his passion for surfing.

So, Olo Surf & Nature, his surf school and accommodation business, was born. First, he had to find the right location. Nearby towns like Taghazout felt too built up. He thought of a small fishing village, Imsouane, set well off the main highway, perched on a cliff between two renowned surf spots: Cathedral, with reliable left and right breaks (the direction that a wave's peak moves), and Magic Bay, with a mythical right break that stretches 700 meters (roughly a two-minute ride) on its best days.

He'd been coming to the spot since it was really undiscovered, camping or renting cheap rooms with few

amenities. 'It was so random and empty, and I really fell in love with it,' he says. Over time, it had become a destination for tourists and Moroccans seeking the country's best surf. So, he rented a house to see if he could create a business where people could stay, surf and see what he'd fallen in love with. His first guesthouse quickly booked up.

While many hotels along Morocco's coast were built and are run with little regard to the natural environment, Amine has kept sustainability at the core of Olo. His team compost waste, grow their own herbs and vegetables, source products from local farmers, collect rainwater for watering plants and produce their own environmentally friendly shampoos and soaps.

That said, it hasn't always been as blissful as a surf in the sun. When Morocco closed its borders as the pandemic hit, the business had to be pared back to survive – Amine refocused on delivering a quality experience to those who *were* able to visit. Now, his expansion efforts are based on connecting with surf and nature enthusiasts, not just holidaymakers – he recently opened a surf shop with specialty boards and has plans to build off-grid accommodation in a remote spot further along the coast.

'We work hard, that's for sure. But we work in an environment where people are happy – you see the waves, and you go and share two hours surfing with your friends and guests. That's why I'm here,' he says, before adding: 'I can now check the surf from my bed. It's life-changing.'





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As surfing has become more popular – and people have become more willing to travel further to find a wave – many surf towns have become overcrowded and built up. Just down the coast from Imsouane, Taghazout is packed with resorts.

Benefiting from being far away from the main highway, Imsouane has maintained more of a community feel. 'It's all small businesses everywhere. It stays quite human-sized,' says Amine.

This may change as new developments are on the horizon. But any expansion for Olo will be rooted in ecological awareness and keeping this human-sized mentality, building on the sustainability practices that Amine has already developed.



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Going from running movie sets to running surf camps was something of a learning curve. Initially, Amine (*right*) thought he'd base himself in Imsouane and go back to Ouarzazate if a film project came up. Olo was a far cry from the movie stars and fancy sets he worked on in his previous career.

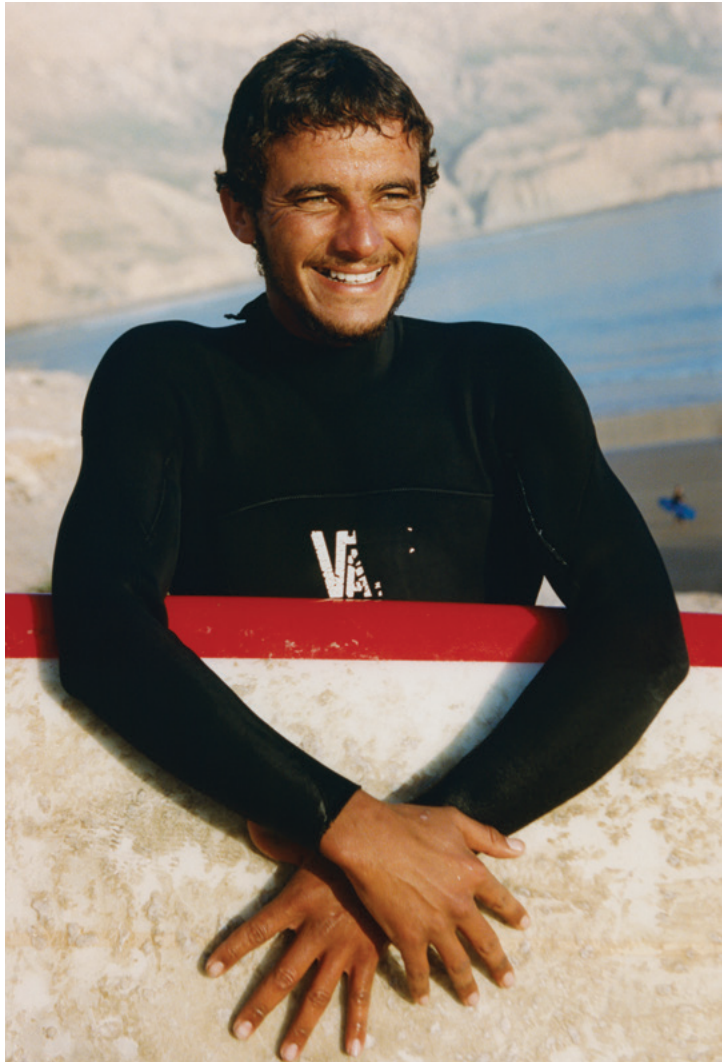
'I'd never had to serve breakfast for people at six in the morning so they could get ready to surf,' he laughs.

But he was hooked. 'It was very challenging and exciting to learn new things and develop the business.'

Olo's villas, perched along Imsouane's cliffs, are designed to be calming and welcoming so that people truly feel at home – with thoughtfully decorated communal spaces and luxury amenities like a built-in pool and terraces overlooking the bay below. Amine wanted

to recreate the feelings of hospitality that he'd experienced on surf trips around the world.

'I wanted to show people what I had enjoyed in my travels – why did I choose to stay in that guesthouse in Indonesia for three months? Because I felt something special. I tried to recreate this experience with Moroccan specificity, as Morocco is known to be warm and welcoming.'



It takes a village to run Olo – Amine has a staff of 30 who are a combination of local Berber villagers, Moroccan surf enthusiasts and people who've traveled from around the world to set up in Imsouane. That said, Amine says that no matter who he's hiring, they need to have an exceptionally welcoming and thoughtful disposition.

'The most important thing is the staff,' he says. 'Without staff that

embrace your mentality, you won't be able to do this. They are your voice.'

The sense of hospitality and friendly nature of his staff are what set his business apart, he says. 'We've managed to create an environment that's very welcoming and peaceful, where everyone feels at home and wants to come back. The first people who booked Olo are still coming back now.'





'It was never an option to just do the guesthouse, not including the surf,' says Amine. 'The bay is one of the best spots to learn surfing. We can guarantee to almost anyone that they'll get the longest wave of their life. It's something we wanted to share with people from the very first day.'

That means Olo had to be a multifaceted business. There's a surf school where people can take lessons or attend up to week-long surf camps, with yoga and video analysis. The team also host workshops on environmental awareness in

local schools, with an eye to keeping Imsouane's natural beauty intact for the future.

Most recently, Amine opened up his collection of specialty boards for enthusiasts who are looking to try out something new – sometimes he'll bring a selection down to the beach to let people try them out.

'I love to see what works in one condition – why should I use a single fin instead of a thruster?' he says. 'I want people to try all the boards. You can take it out to surf two waves and come back and try something new.'