



Highlights of Morocco

For sheer diversity, Morocco is the perfect destination. Explore the imperial cities of Marrakech, Meknes and Fez; mountain ranges where sand dunes and kasbahs are scattered among palm oases inhabited by friendly Berbers.



YOUR
ADVENTURE
AWAITS

15 days/14 nights

ITINERARY

Day 1: Marrakech

Arrive in Marrakech at any time today and transfer independently to your accommodation. Depending on the arrival times of group members there may be a briefing this evening or tomorrow morning.

This program is a small group, guided holiday with between 4 and 16 like-minded people, with an average group size of 12. This trip provides an insight into the enormous variety that Morocco has to offer, including cities, history, architecture, desert and mountain scenery. We spend quality time in the places that matter, the pace is not rushed but a couple of the journeys are long. We are not confined to our vehicle though, as there are plenty of photo stops and opportunities to stretch your legs. Accommodation standards are below that of Europe and more comparable to that of Sub-Saharan Africa. The temperatures in the cities may also be hot in the summer months but we try to make the most of the coolest parts of the day.

Days 2: Casablanca and Rabat

A modern and commercial seaport, Casablanca is a complete contrast to the Morocco we are soon to explore. This morning we visit the Hassan II Mosque, one of the largest mosques in the world. Afterwards we drive two hours to Rabat, the political capital of Morocco, but second to Casablanca in importance. Although mostly modern, Rabat has an excellent old quarter that we take time to explore.

Day 3: Meknes and Volubilis

Strike out from Rabat over the Northern plain towards Meknes. The scenery changes as the land becomes more cultivated, this being one of the most fertile areas of Morocco. Sultan Moulay Ismail's old capital of Meknes is our first example of one of the imperial cities of Morocco. We meet our guide and wander the narrow streets of the old city, and explore the souk, perhaps having your first chance at bartering for souvenirs. In the afternoon we take a short drive to the largest and best kept Roman ruins in Morocco - Volubilis, once a large Roman town and now a UNESCO World Heritage site. After exploring this site we continue our journey to the ancient city of Fez, where we spend two nights.

Day 4: Fez

This fascinating city is the intellectual and religious centre of Morocco. Founded over a thousand years ago, Fez has many mosques and medersas (theological colleges) including the 9th century al-Karaouine University, whose architecture is very similar to that seen in Moorish Spain. The medina in Fez is one of the largest in the world, an immense warren of souks, home to thousands of craftsmen with their tiny shops opening onto the narrow alleyways. Noisy and pungent, the medina of Fez is a totally absorbing and unique experience. Our city guide walks us through different sections of the souk - including those selling leather brass and copper. Of course, no visit to Fez is complete without a visit to the tanneries. Outside the medina we shall visit the Jewish District (mellah), the exterior of the Royal



Palace and take a drive up to a panoramic viewpoint over the city.

Day 5: Journey to the desert

Today we have a long journey over the stunning Middle Atlas, down through the picturesque Ziz Valley to the Hamada, a flat stony desert, gradually approaching the spectacular site of the golden sand dunes of Erg Chebbi. We stay in a small and welcoming auberge on the edge of the dunes where it is easy to climb their summits to watch the sunrise.

Day 6: Saharan camel trek

There is time today with a free morning to explore the largest sand sea in Morocco, or to relax in the shade of a palm tree by the dunes. The sand sea is famed for its pink tones that take on a spectacular rose colour at sunset. In the late afternoon, we partake in a genuine Saharan experience – a 1.5-hour camel trek through the dunes, where we watch the sunset. We then come back to the camp at the edge of the desert to spend the night.

Day 7: Todra Gorge - Skoura

After sunrise, we leave our desert camp and travel by camel back to the auberge where we can have breakfast and a shower. We then head towards the little city of Skoura, nestled on a beautiful palm grove and located near Ouarzazate. From here onwards to explore Todra Gorge, and the picturesque oases they hide in (journey time approximately 4 hours). Following the 1000 Kasbahs Road for approximately 2.5 hours, you will marvel at the breathtaking vistas of impressive ancient Kasbahs nestled in lush palm groves.

Day 8: Skoura

There is the opportunity to take a 1 hour drive to Toundout Valley and enjoy a four hour guided hike crossing through a Berber village, where you will learn a little of their culture. Alternatively, relax in and around the lodge walking through the magnificent lush palm groves. Considered as the palm grove capital of Morocco, Skoura will certainly offer peace and relaxation through its various walks discovering multiple palm groves, and Kasbahs.

Day 9: Route of Thousand Kasbahs

Leaving Skoura, we re-join the main road and drive west along the 'Route of the Thousand Kasbahs' via the desert city of Ouarzazate and on to the well-preserved Kasbah Ait Benhaddou. This UNESCO World Heritage Site is one of the most spectacular sights of the Atlas, made famous as the location of several Hollywood films including 'Gladiator'. After admiring the view, we may see something of the simple village houses. Continuing into the mountains we branch east through a wide flat mountain valley, finally arriving at Anmiter, where we leave our bus and take a 1.5-hour picturesque walk on a gentle uphill gradient to the village of Tigzha, where we spend the next two nights. Our luggage will be transported to the gite for us. For those who do not want to walk, mules are available (approx. 100 MAD, payable locally).

Day 10: High Atlas Mountains

We start our day with a four hour walk through the villages of the Tighza Valley, passing fields cultivated by the Berber women. Heading up into the hills on mule tracks, the peaks of the High Atlas act as a fitting backdrop to our walk. The afternoon is free to relax with a book, enjoy the mountain views, take a stroll through this beautiful landscape or challenge the local children to a game of football! Tigzha is just one of four villages in this remote valley that has been supported for over ten years on various responsible tourism projects. We will visit the village hammam, built with money raised by our clients. This is a truly authentic experience and terrific fun. It is very much a traditional hammam and you are likely to get the opportunity to mix with the villagers, which further adds to the experience. A standard treatment is included, but you will need to purchase a scrubber and soap for 20MAD (£1.50) plus customary tip of 20MAD. Refreshed, we return to the riad for our final dinner in the mountains.

Day 11: To Essaouira

Leaving the gite, we walk back to our bus for a short drive to the fortress of Telouet. Although abandoned and crumbling, we absorb the atmosphere of this labyrinthine, fairy-tale like structure. We continue our scenic drive over the High Atlas Mountains to Marrakech, driving over the Tizi'n'Tichka, which at 2,260m, is the highest road pass in Morocco. The scenery is spectacular and there are some wonderful views of the mountains. The second half of the trip brings us to the flat arid plains of Marrakech and then onwards to Essaouira.

Day 12: Essaouira

A free day in Essaouira, a charming old Portuguese fishing port overlooking the Atlantic Ocean coast. The settlement dates back to the 15th century but the present town was constructed around 1760 by Sidi Mohammed ben Abdullah, who needed a base from which to suppress a revolt from Agadir. Today, the town is extremely relaxed and its whitewashed houses with painted shutters, artisan's workshops, boatyards and fishermen provide a marked contrast to the desert, kasbahs and cities we have so far visited on this trip. Our hotel is situated in the heart of the old walled city, where we have plenty of time for some shopping in the souks or strolls along the picturesque beach. With many pleasant cafes and some outstanding seafood restaurants we have plenty of choice for our evening meal.

Day 13: To Marrakech

After breakfast we head for the 'Pink City' of Marrakech and in the afternoon we enjoy a guided tour to help us



find our feet and soak up the atmosphere of this amazing city. Our city guide will take us to the Bahia Palace, the Saadian tombs – which incredibly date to the 16th century – and the Koutoubia Mosque. We end in the Djemma el Fna, where the town becomes a maze of bustling bazaars, palaces and mosques. It is worth seeing this renowned landmark in the evening, as Marrakech revolves around the open-air central square. With the food stalls, snake charmers, water-sellers and acrobats, it is a place of night-time entertainment for both local people and tourists.

Day 14: Marrakech

Today is a free day in Marrakech and there is no shortage of things to do. You might like to visit the largest Mosque in Marrakech, Koutoubia, or venture through the souks and old streets of the medina. After bartering for souvenirs in the labyrinthine souks, there will be time for a short visit to the Koranic School and Museum of Marrakech. After this, unwind by taking a 1-hour Caliche ride (a bright green horse-drawn carriage) to the Jardin Majorelle. These tranquil gardens are decorated throughout in indigo blue and owned by Yves St. Laurent. A final treat would be a hammam, a traditional Moroccan steam bath.

Day 15: Tour ends in Marrakech

Following breakfast your tour ends. You may choose to fly home from Marrakech or continue on to another interesting destination. The choice is yours and we can help you with your plans.

Details

Group Size: Minimum 4 / Maximum 16

Trip Code:

009390 - W20

INCLUDED

- Arrival and departure transfers
- All transportation and activities listed in itinerary
- Tour leader throughout
- Accommodation as indicated
- Breakfast daily
- 4 dinners

NOT INCLUDED

- International travel to Casablanca and from Marrakech
- Single accommodation supplement
- Any other extra/ optional activities added to your program
- Passport and visa fees, if required
- Vaccinations, if required (recommended vaccinations are tetanus and hepatitis A)
- Items of a personal nature
- Travel Insurance

TOUR NOTES

Ramadan: Please note Ramadan runs from April 23 to May 23, 2020. During Ramadan, our local guides and drivers choose to work and so we continue to run trips in this period. However, it does need to be recognised that the energy levels of our local staff may be a bit lower than usual and that some restaurants may be closed during the day. Having said this, Ramadan is a unique time to visit a Muslim country – each evening the streets empty for an hour while everyone breaks their fast, and there's a feeling of festivity in the air every night.

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