



Moroccan Discovery

From the Imperial Cities to the Sahara

This land of dramatic contrasts invites us to encounter its ancient ruins and sacred mosques, endless desert and storied mountains, imposing kasbahs and spirited souks. As we travel from the imperial cities of Rabat, Fez, and Marrakech to the High Atlas and vast Sahara, we open our eyes, and hearts, to a truly foreign land, an age-old culture, and genuinely hospitable people.

Itinerary

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Day-by-Day Itinerary

DAY 1: Depart U.S. for Casablanca, Morocco

DAY 2: Arrive Casablanca/Rabat

Upon arrival this afternoon in Casablanca, the commercial center of Morocco, we transfer by coach to Rabat and our hotel located near famed Hassan Tower. We have time to relax and refresh before dinner tonight at the hotel.

Accommodations: La Tour Hassan Palace

Meals: Dinner

DAY 3: Rabat

One of Morocco's four ancient capitals, or imperial cities, Rabat is again the country's capital, at once historic and contemporary, as we discover on today's tour. We visit the necropolis of Chellah, built on ancient Roman ruins, and the Mohammed VI contemporary art museum then have lunch in a private home. On tap this afternoon: the 12th-century *Kasbah* of the Oudaia, the peaceful Andalusian Gardens, and Rabat's *medina*, a UNESCO site. Tonight we enjoy a welcome dinner of traditional Moroccan fare at the acclaimed Dinarjat in Rabat's Old Town.

Accommodations: La Tour Hassan Palace

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 4: Rabat/Meknes/Volubilis/Fez

This morning we depart Rabat for Fez, stopping along the way in Meknes, Morocco's youngest imperial city (and UNESCO World Heritage site). Here we visit the Dar Jamai Museum, housing a collection of traditional Moroccan ceramics, jewelry, textiles, metalwork, and cedarwood crafts. Then we continue on to the ancient Roman ruins at the UNESCO site of Volubilis, known for its intricate and colorful mosaics. Late this afternoon we reach Fez and our elegant hotel overlooking the *medina*.

Accommodations: Hotel Sahrai

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 5: Fez

Today we explore Morocco's oldest imperial city, considered the "Athens of Africa" for its wealth of cultural, educational, and religious institutions. We begin with a comfortable walk through the Fez *medina*, where we see some hidden treasures, including the Blue Gate, the most picturesque of the Old City's historic gates; the medieval school of Bouanania; the 12th-century home of Jewish scholar Maimonides; and the authentic food market. We also visit the traditional quarter where we watch artisans craft the acclaimed Fez pottery and ceramics. After lunch together in the *medina*, we tour the old *Mellah* (Jewish quarter), its 17th-century synagogue, and the royal gates.

Accommodations: Hotel Sahrai

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 6: Fez

We begin today with a visit to the Al-Attarine Madrasa, whose highlight is a small courtyard showcasing intricately detailed tilework and carving decorations dating to the early 1300s. We then continue our discovery on a walking tour of the *medina*, focusing on the artisans' quarters, the 14th-century Koranic schools, and Al Karaouine, the medieval theological university. The remainder of the afternoon is free for independent exploration and lunch on our own. Tonight, we enjoy a private dinner at an intimate family-run *riad* in Fez.

Accommodations: Hotel Sahrai

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 7: Fez/Midelt/Erfoud

Traveling inland today, we cross the fertile plains beyond Fez and continue through the Middle Atlas mountain range. We stop in the small town of Midelt for lunch. Continuing on we cross the Ziz River, passing rows of sky-scraping palm trees and fortified villages before reaching our *kasbah*-style hotel in Erfoud late in the day. Dinner tonight is at our hotel.

Accommodations: Le Palais du Désert Hotel & Spa

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 8: Erfoud/Rissani/Merzouga

This morning we visit the city of Rissani, with its 18th-century *ksar*, a virtually impenetrable warren of alleys. We enjoy a tour highlight this afternoon as we set out on a sunset excursion to the breathtakingly beautiful sand dunes at Merzouga on the edge of the Sahara. In the enormous silence we watch the sun set over the desert as we take a camel ride along the *erg*. Following this experience, we'll have dinner together in this desert setting before returning to our hotel tonight.

Accommodations: Le Palais du Désert Hotel & Spa

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 9: Erfoud/Tinehir/Todra Gorge/Ouarzazate

Our destination today is in the snow-topped High Atlas. The day features one beautiful scene after another, including the village of Tinehir, a stunning mountain oasis rising on a series of riverside terraces lush with palm trees; and the spectacular 984-foot Todra Gorge, home to a variety of rare bird and plant species. Following lunch here we visit El Kelaa des Mgouna, known for its roses, then set out on the fabled "Route of a Thousand Kasbahs" ancient caravan route, a region of fortresses with elaborately decorated façades. Late afternoon we reach the town of Ouarzazate (the "door of the desert") where we spend the night.

Accommodations: Le Berbère Palace

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 10: Ouarzazate/Ait ben-Haddou/Marrakech

En route to Marrakech today, we stop first at uninhabited Ait ben-Haddou, a UNESCO World Heritage site and one of southern Morocco's most scenic villages that is often used as a location for fashion and film shoots. Its old section consists of deep red *kasbahs* packed together so tightly they appear to be a single unit. Then as we begin our descent from the High Atlas, we pass through typical villages with fortified walls and stone houses with earthen roofs. In Tizi N'Tichka, we traverse the Pass of the Pastures (alt. 7,415 feet), where life is much as it was centuries ago: shepherds bring their flocks to the high pastures every summer, then return with them to their villages in autumn. We arrive in Marrakech late this afternoon and dine tonight at our hotel.

Accommodations: Sofitel Marrakech

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 11: Marrakech

Once the capital of southern Morocco, the imperial city of Marrakech is an alluring oasis with a temperate climate, distinct charm, and fascinating sights. This morning we travel by horse-drawn carriage from Menara Park to Majorelle Gardens, a private botanical garden with some 15 species of birds native to North Africa and known for its cobalt blue accents. Following a tour of the gardens we visit the nearby Yves St. Laurent Museum, housing a vast collection of the designer's haute couture and design works. After lunch at our hotel, mid-afternoon we embark on a walking tour of the *medina*, ending at Djemaa el Fna Square, a UNESCO site and the heart of Marrakech, crowded with snake charmers, entertainers, story tellers, musicians, barbers, and sellers of fruit, water, and spices. Dinner tonight is on our own in this exotic city.

Accommodations: Sofitel Marrakech

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 12: Marrakech

Our day-long tour includes the beautifully proportioned Koutoubia Mosque with its distinctive 282-foot minaret visible from miles away; the lovely Andalusian-style El Bahia Palace (part of which is still used by the royal family); and the ruins of 16th-century Palais El Badii. On the way back to the hotel, we stop to see the oldest historical gate of Marrakech, Bab Agnaou, built in the 12th century. Dinner tonight is at a local restaurant in the city's Old Town.

Accommodations: Sofitel Marrakech

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 13: Marrakech/Casablanca

We leave Marrakech this morning by coach for storied Casablanca, Morocco's largest and most cosmopolitan city. After a brief orientation tour of the city, we visit the magnificent Hassan II Mosque, Morocco's only functioning mosque open to non-Muslims. Sitting on the Atlantic shoreline, the mosque boasts a prayer hall the size of London's St. Paul's Cathedral. Tonight we celebrate our Moroccan adventure at a farewell dinner at a local restaurant.

Accommodations: Le Casablanca Hotel

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 14: Depart for U.S.

After breakfast this morning we transfer to the airport for our return flight to the U.S.

Meals: Breakfast

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