

MCC

9 days

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Day 1 ***Arrive in Casablanca***

Arrival in Casablanca.

Casablanca is believed to have been a Phoenician settlement and later a Berber town. Conquered by the Almohads in 1188, this city was developed by Sultan Abd el-Moumen as a port. In the 14th century the Portuguese established a settlement here on the site of the village of Anfa, but when it became a pirates' base in 1468, they destroyed it, repeating this act in 1515. The Portuguese re-established themselves in the late 16th century, renaming the town Casa Blanca, staying until 1755, when an earthquake destroyed the settlement.

Overnight in Casablanca.

Day 2 ***Casablanca - Rabat - Meknes***

This morning we will make an early departure from our hotel and head to the corniche for our guided visit of the Hassan II Mosque, a glorious structure believed to be only second in size to Islam's most important site, Mecca in Saudi Arabia.

From Casablanca we travel north to Rabat, Morocco's third oldest Imperial City and modern capital. Among the sites in Rabat that we will visit are the Palais Royal, home of the royal family in Morocco; the Hassan Tower and the Mohammed V Mausoleum.

After a break for lunch we will depart from Rabat and travel toward Meknes, Morocco's youngest Imperial City. During our tour here we will see the Bab El Mansour gate dating from 1752, complete with its Corinthian columns. We will also visit the Medersa Bou Inania, a theological college founded during the reign of the Merenid Sultan Abou El Hassan, circa 1340.

Depending on the timing of our day we may move some of this sightseeing in Meknes to tomorrow morning.

Overnight in Meknes.

Meal Plan: Breakfast

Day 3 ***Meknes - Volubulis - Moulay Idriss - Fes***

Departing Meknes, we pass a countryside dotted with koubbas (small whitewashed tombs) on our way to the impressive Roman site of Volubulis. Situated on the ledge of a long plateau, the dramatic site was once one of the Roman Empire's most remote outposts. With its well preserved mosaics, palaces, baths and soaring arches, Volubulis is considered one of Morocco's most important archeological sites.

A short ride from Volubulis bring us to the sacred town of Moulay Idriss. As we come around the last bend from Meknes, Moulay Idriss is a dramatic sight! Here we see houses and mosques piled up around two rocky outcrops, with the 'zaouia,' or sanctuary, in between. Moulay Idriss is a pilgrimage centre, and home to the tomb of its namesake, the great-grandson of the prophet. Moulay Idriss was closed to non-Muslims until 1912, and even today is primarily a Muslim sanctuary.

We then continue on to Fes for our overnight. The historic city of Fes lies in the Oued Sebou basin, astride the traditional trade route from the Sahara to the Mediterranean and the path from Algeria and the Islamic heartland beyond. For centuries the dominant axis within Morocco was of Fes and Marrakech, two cities linked by their immense power and rivalry.

Overnight in Fes.

Meal Plan: Breakfast

Day 4 ***Fes: City Tour***

Today Fes is still considered to be the spiritual and cultural capital of Morocco, and the city holds an enduring fascination for visitors. Here we will discover one of the largest historic medina's full of monuments reflecting the different periods of Morocco's imperial past. Today we will have a walking tour of Fes El Bali, the extraordinary medieval walled city. Once inside the gates of this great spectacle, we will see an entirely different view of life in Morocco. By contrast to the well-planned ville nouvelle, the old city is a labyrinth of alleys and lanes lined with shops, mosques, homes and schools. Our guide will take us to the medina to view the souqs (market shops). We will see the famous dying works with the brightly coloured cloth hanging to dry. A visit to the Royal Palace, several mosques, theological schools, and shops where we can see craftsmen tailoring their work will round out the day's tour.

This afternoon is free for you to explore Fes on your own. Today's walk is an amazing look into the life of the Moroccan city dweller where little has changed over the centuries.

Overnight in Fes.

Meal Plan: Breakfast

Day 5 ***Fes - Erfoud***

This morning we depart from Fes and head into the Middle Atlas Mountains, a region of folded mountains and high, windswept plateaux, vast forests of cork oak and cedar, and lakes and streams full of trout. This is Berber country and sheep and goat-rearing is the main occupation of these resilient, friendly people. We drive via the Berber villages of Imouzzer du Kandari; Ifrane, a fairy-tale town unlike any other in Morocco with white-walled French-style villas with steep red roofs and gables; and Azrou where we make a brief stop. As the altitude increases, we come to a bare, arid, sandy plateau with another range of mountains in the distance.

We continue to Erfoud, an attractive town on the edge of the Sahara Desert -- red and sandy, exuding desert ambiance.

Overnight in Erfoud.

Meal Plan: Breakfast

Day 6 ***Erfoud - Todra Gorge - Ouarzazate***

Early this morning we journey to the edge of the Sahara desert to witness sunrise over the dunes. We will have time to explore the dunes on foot, or by camel! This is a magical landscape, with huge drifting expanses of sand dunes reaching heights of more than 45 metres (148 ft). Their colour shifts from pink to gold to red to white depending on the time of day.

Later we will depart for the Todra Gorge, one of Morocco's most spectacular sights. It is a vast fault in the plateau separating the High Atlas from the Jbel Sahro, two sheer cliffs over 300 metres (958 ft) high separated by a narrow corridor only 20 metres (66 ft) wide. After our visit here we will cross the southern slopes of the High Atlas before arriving at the captivating city of Ouarzazate. We stop en route in the heart of the Dades Valley at the oasis of Kelaâ Mgouna.

Overnight in Ouarzazate.

Meal Plan: Breakfast

Day 7 ***Ouarzazate - Marrakech***

This morning we visit the kasbah of Ait Benhaddou. As one of the most spectacular sites in Morocco, Ait Benhaddou has received extensive renovations from UNESCO. We arrive in the new village on the west bank of the river and proceed to cross the river, usually with the aide of local children. After a brief tour and time for independent exploration, we continue via the spectacular Tizi n'Tichka Pass through the Atlas Mountains before descending past charming mountain villages, dense woods and green fields to the ochre coloured city of Marrakech. As we approach Marrakech, the scenery becomes flatter and greener, as the city is the centre of a large palmerie oasis.

This evening we will visit the famous Djemma el-Fna in the centre of the city. The Djemma el-Fna is like nowhere else in North Africa. This "Assembly of the Dead," offers a spectacle that is a must-see when visiting Morocco. In the busy square we will witness a carnival of musicians, snake charmers, acrobats, story-tellers, witch doctors, dentists, clowns, monkey's and the like. The enduring smells of the Djemma's food stalls, piled high with platters of specialty cuisine, are well worth a visit just for the experience. There will be ample time exploring the Djemma's sights and sounds before returning to our hotel.

Overnight in Marrakech.

Meal Plan: Breakfast

Day 8 ***Marrakech: City Tour***

Marrakech is one of the world's most enchanting cities. The city dates back to the Almoravid Dynasty circa 1670. Founded by Youssef bin Tachfine, the city became the dominant centre of Morocco. Our morning walking tour takes us to the Koutoubia, nearly 70 m (230 feet) high and emulating the classic Moroccan design.

We will also take a short walk through the Mellah, or Jewish quarter, en route to the Ethnographic Museum, an excellent old palatial home in the Medina converted to a museum housing artifacts from all over Morocco. We culminate our tour with a visit to the Saadian Tombs where we see the graves of the regime that made this city so important. This afternoon you will have some free time to visit one of the many gardens (the Majorelle Garden is recommended) or perhaps you will want to hire a guide to take you on a tour of the medina.

Overnight in Marrakech.

Meal Plan: Breakfast

Day 9 ***Departure from Marrakech***

Departure from Marrakech.

Meal Plan: Breakfast