

MOR**Taroudannt â€¢ Essaouira â€¢ Marrakech****11 days**

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Day 1 *Arrive in Agadir*

Today we arrive in Agadir, Morocco, and meet at our hotel.

Overnight in Agadir.

Meal Plan: Dinner, if required.

Day 2 *Agadir - Taroudannt*

Today we travel by road to Taroudannt. The area is rich in agriculture, producing oranges, bananas, tomatoes and other crops. As the capital of the Souss Valley, Taroudannt has traditionally been an important staging post in the Trans-Sahara caravan routes. Enclosed in red earth walls, Taroudannt has some similarities to the more famous red city (Marrakech), but on a much smaller scale and with a more laid-back atmosphere. Taroudannt is located at the head of the fertile Sous Valley and has often played a strategic role in trade through the south, although it never achieved fame as an 'Imperial City' in Morocco.

Overnight in Taroudannt.

Meal Plan: Breakfast

Day 3 *Taroudannt: Town Tour*

While conquered by various dynasties from the 11th century, Taroudannt's prime time was during the reign of the Saadians in the 16th century, who built most of the circuit of walls around the town. They made Taroudannt their capital for some time, until eventually moving on to Marrakech. The town remains a major market centre with interesting souqs containing a wide variety of traditional crafts, especially the jewelry for which it is famous.

This morning you can join your Tour Leader on a walking tour of the suq area. The town is famous for its two suqs: the Souk Arabe Artisinal and the Marche Berbere. The former specialises in handicrafts and jewelry; the later is famous for house-wares, spices, wooden objects and furniture. This afternoon is free for you to explore on your own. You may wish to visit the leather tanneries or take a walk around the impressive city walls and bastions.

Overnight in Taroudannt.

Meal Plan: Breakfast

Day 4 *Taroudannt - Ait Benhaddou - Ouarzazate*

Today we travel through the Souss Valley to Ouarzazate. En route we visit the site of Ait Benhaddou. As one of the most spectacular sites in Morocco, Ait Benhaddou has received extensive renovations from UNESCO. The site towers high above the El Mellah River, and has some of the most highly decorated dark red pise walls. 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.

Overnight in Ouarzazate.

Meal Plan: Breakfast

Day 5 ***Ouarzazate - Marrakech***

We drive to Marrakech toward the High Atlas Mountains, via the Tiz-n-Tichka Pass at an altitude of 2260 m (7,415 feet). En route we will pass dozens of small communities etched into the mountainside. The tiny villages use every available piece of land to their best ability; terraced fields grow among rocky hillsides. As we approach Marrakech, the scenery becomes flatter and greener, as the city is the centre of a large palmerie oasis. You will notice an abundance of the pink mud-brick buildings amid this tree-filled city. With its unique character and charm, Marrakech lures visitors with a hospitable climate and superb location.

Shortly after our arrival in Marrakech we will take an excursion by caleche, or horse-drawn carriage, through the streets of the new and old cities. Our destination for this evening is 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 you 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. After ample time exploring the Djemma's sights and sounds, we will return to our hotel by caleche.

Overnight in Marrakech.

Meal Plan: Breakfast

Day 6 ***Marrakech: City Tour***

Marrakech is one of the world's most enchanting cities. The city is situated on a lush palmerie and city dates to the Almoravid dynasty circa 1670. Founded by Youssef bin Tachfine, the city became the dominant centre of Morocco. Our morning 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 Museum of Moroccan Arts. The museum houses an extensive collection of Berber jewelry, weapons, wood carvings, wedding ornaments and carpets (NOTE: Exhibits can change without notice). We then proceed to the Palais el Bahia where our guided tour takes us to several grand halls, gardens and the harem quarter. 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 we allow 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 7 ***Marrakech: At Leisure***

Today is yours to explore and enjoy independently.

Overnight in Marrakech.

Meal Plan: Breakfast

Day 8 Marrakech - Essaouira

Today we travel by road northward to the fortified, whitewashed fishing village of Essaouira. Once a pirate community, the town is located on a rock promontory overlooking the sometimes raging Atlantic Ocean. There was a small Phoenician settlement at Essaouira, previously called Magdoura or Mogador, a corruption of the Berber word Amegdul, meaning 'well-protected'. The Romans were interested in the purple dye produced from shellfish, which they used to colour the robes of the rich. Mogador was occupied by the Portuguese in the 15th century, who built the fortifications around the harbour.

Orson Welles stayed here for some time, filming part of Othello at the Skala. From Independence the town was called d'Essaouira, a local name meaning 'little fortress'. In the 1960s Essaouira had a brief reputation as a 'happening place', which attracted hippies, notably the rock star Jimi Hendrix.

Overnight in Essaouira.

Meal Plan: Breakfast

Day 9 Essaouira: Town Tour

Essaouira is one of Morocco's most charming towns. Once a Portuguese annex, Essaouira today has impressive ramparts that still give the city a fortified look. Today is free for you to enjoy this coastal city. The port area offers an interesting look into the fishery industry of Morocco, and the jewelry suq offers some of the best silver items available. Essaouira is most famous, however, for its wooden handicrafts. Almost every shop in the town offers fabulous wooden boxes, chess sets, letter holders, statues, etc. Alternatively, you may wish to visit one of the many art galleries or visit the Musée Sidi Mohammed Ben Abdallah which features excellent displays of marquetry and handicrafts. Be sure to visit the Marché d'Epices (spice market) where you can purchase your cooking spices or pick up some "cures" for whatever ails you.

Overnight in Essaouira.

Meal Plan: Breakfast

Day 10 Essaouira - Agadir

After a leisurely morning in Essaouira, we travel by road back to Agadir.

Overnight in Agadir.

Meal Plan: Breakfast

Day 11 Departure

Departure from Agadir.

BON VOYAGE !

Meal Plan: Breakfast