

CASABLANCA AND MARRAKECH IN A FLASH

OBTIC00cc 5DAYS/4NIGHTS

DAY 1: CASABLANCA: You will be met on arrival at Casablanca's airport after your long flight and transferred to your hotel in the city centre with the remainder of the day at leisure.

DAY 2: CASABLANCA: After breakfast this morning you will be taken for a tour of this bustling metropolis, the second largest city in Africa after Cairo, when we join our awaiting vehicle at 9 o'clock to proceed first to the Mohammed V Square which groups buildings of the main administrative departments in attractive modern architecture inspired by national traditions. To the west, a monumental fountain was built in 1976: at certain hours, one can admire water shows accompanied by Arabic, European or Asian music. On the other side of the Avenue Hassan II, there is a public garden bordering the Law Courts and the Préfecture. Between these two buildings, behind the railings of the French Consulate, is the statue of Marshal Lyautey by François Cogné, sculptor of the Clemenceau of Champs-Élysées in Paris. From here past Art deco buildings to the bustling Central Market, a kaleidoscope of colour, charm and street musicians; of fresh fish, freshly-cut flowers, fruit, and spices, thence for a stroll to visit the interior of the Mahakma Court of Islamic Law (if we are visiting on a Saturday or Sunday, only an external visit of the Mahakma Traditional Court Palace will take place); this beautiful building was erected in 1952 with no fewer than 60 rooms, delightfully-decorated in the Hispano-Mauresque style to be used simultaneously a Law Court and the Pasha's (Governor's) Reception Hall. On now to the New Medina, or Habous Quarter. The fast development of Casablanca attracted thousands of people from all over the country in search of employment to settle down at first near the ancient Medina, then around the city, in miserable encampments. To reduce these 'Bidonvilles', the new Medina was constructed in 1923 during the period of the French Protectorate respecting the traditional style whilst applying the rules of modern town planning. The immediate neighbourhood around the old Mosque and especially that part of the Medina to the northeast offers picturesque alleys lined with arches under which shopkeepers of every sort ply their trade and where you'll find the Brass Souk, where artisans shape and polish cauldrons, trays, teapots and an entire space dedicated to the sale of olives. Here, too, is the renowned Patisserie Bennis Cake Shop which opened in 1938, Casablanca's oldest Patisserie and whose sign is the only thing distinguishing it from the rest of the buildings, but whose interior, decorated with amazing mosaics, shelters one thousand and one delicacies. On we stroll past the main entrance to the King's Palace which now houses the administrative offices for the region of Casablanca. From here we shall continue in our car to the Church of Notre Dame de Lourdes finished in 1956 following the design of a Mr. Dangleterre. The interior deserves to be seen for the large stained glass window by Gabriel Loire, chief glassworker in Chartres, contrasting with the wooden copula of the choir, depicting the dogma of the Immaculate Conception and the visitations at Lourdes and other visitations of the Virgin Mary. Back in our vehicle up to Anfa, the elegant residential district built on a hill dominating the city. This is the original site of Casablanca (the *Anafa* of the Phoenicians) where you'll appreciate the main avenues, green parks and especially the magnificent and variously constructed villas illustrating the evolution of the architectural concepts of the early 1930s to today. Anfa hosted the Conference of Casablanca with President Roosevelt and Sir Winston Churchill, during which the date of the Allied landings on the French coasts was fixed for the spring of 1944 and where the somewhat difficult meeting with them and Generals Charles de Gaulle and Henri Giraud took place. Here, also, at Anfa, President Roosevelt received in secret the Sultan Mohammed V where the possible future of Morocco was discussed in depth. We continue on to the Corniche where a stop is made for a light lunch overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. Back into our vehicle to visit the interior of the nearby amazingly-beautiful Hassan II Mosque, the second largest mosque in the Islamic world after the Masjid al-Haram in Mecca. This architectural masterpiece, a symbol of an Islam open to the world, took 7 years to complete using 50 million man-hours and inaugurated on the 30th August, 1993 was built partially on the waters of the Atlantic Ocean, on the farthest western point of the Maghreb. Conceived by the French architect Michel Pinseau (1924-1999), the Mosque employed 3,300 craftsmen from all over Morocco; has 53,000 m² of carved cedar wood; 67,000 m² of plasterwork and some 10,000 m² of sculpted ornamentation and writings; it contains on the ground floor an oblong Prayer Hall of perfect symmetry measuring 200 x 100m. Supported by seventy-eight pillars where granite, marble and onyx mix their respective reflections, this vast room supports a retractable roof covered with emerald green tiles – the symbolic colour of Islam, representing Mother - to welcome to prayer 25,000 believers inside and 80,000 on the adjoining esplanade. Embedded in the axis of the southern facade, a 210 metre-high minaret, boasts a laser beam of 30km reach pointing towards Mecca. This magnificent Mosque also encompasses a Medersa (School of Koranic learning), a Library, a National Museum and immense lecture halls, all beautifully decorated by artisans from all over Morocco: frescoes and zelliges in traditional geometrical motives, painted and sculptured woods, stuccos of intricate designs, arabesques in decorative drawings and writings in brilliant colour inaugurated in 1992 and a masterpiece of Moroccan architectural design and craftsmanship. The last part of our tour takes us to the busy United Nations Square. Under the walls of the old Medina, at the beginning of the 20th century, there was but an empty space where the souk was held. It very quickly became the heart of the modern town. We may make a stop here for shopping, should you so wish, before returning to your hotel. Perhaps you might like later have a drink at the American-owned Rick's Café, (www.rickscafe.ma) complete with mahogany, wicker and ceiling fans – all without 'Rick Blaine' Humphrey Bogart, Ingrid Bergman, Peter Lorre and Claude Rains. L.



DAY 3: CASABLANCA-MARRAKECH. After breakfast we shall set off for a 3 hour drive across the plains to the Imperial City of Marrakech where, upon arrival, we shall check into your hotel, thence to make for the Majorelle Garden and Museum of Islamic Art of the deceased fashion icon Yves Saint Laurent. Today, beautiful shaded grounds, an impressive collection of exotic plants and trees and an Islamic Art Museum (*Musée d'Art Islamique*) make this garden one of the must-see attractions in Marrakech. The gardens were once the home and haven of French painter Jacques Majorelle, born in 1886 to a renowned cabinet maker in Nancy, France. Travels to Spain, Egypt and the Mediterranean all pulled him away from his native country, but it was Morocco that beckoned Majorelle most strongly. In 1924 Majorelle settled in Marrakech on a property that would become known as Majorelle Garden where he created a retreat



with a stunning home, spacious work studio, and vast garden in which he could indulge his botanical interest by growing plants and trees from around the world. Majorelle's passion for Morocco - especially the south - became evident in his paintings. Later travels to Sudan, Guinea, Niger, Senegal and the Ivory Coast were also to influence his work. Although Majorelle opened his property to visitors in 1947, the garden began to deteriorate following his death in 1962. Restoration of the Majorelle Garden began after Yves Saint Laurent and his partner Pierre Bergé purchased Majorelle's former home in 1980. The house itself is not open to the public. Partially hidden by the foliage of trees, its majestic architecture can be seen from certain vantage points in the garden. Further improvements were made in 2000, including an irrigation system which reduced water costs by 40 percent. Today, the grounds of the Garden are beautifully maintained and create an atmosphere of lush tranquillity. Winding walkways, quaint bridges, gurgling fountains, and shady gazebos add to the landscape. Home to hundreds of exotic plant and tree specimens brought from five continents, these include cactuses, bamboos, palms, blooming potted plants, and aquatic plants. Bird lovers will appreciate seeing the many species of local birds which inhabit the garden amongst which you may spot Pied Wagtails, Kestrels, Storks, Collared Flycatchers and more. The green roofed building that gets most of the attention, however, is the bright cobalt blue (referred to as *bleu Majorelle*) and yellow building that Majorelle used as a studio workshop from 1931 now houses the Museum of Islamic Art. The same cobalt blue is used with bright yellow to add colour and contrast throughout the garden. This small museum houses a tasteful collection of Islamic art, good examples of Moroccan tribal art - some hundreds of years old - textiles, weapons, carpets from all over North Africa, jewellery, furniture. Some of Jacques Majorelle's art work and engravings of local scenes in Morocco is also on display. There are also exhibitions of marriage curtains and fabrics, embroideries, manuscripts and many other masterpieces. On now down into the Medina to the dramatic Almohad Koutoubia Mosque (entrance to the Mosque is prohibited to non-Muslims), one of the major architectural triumphs of the Almohades, the 12th century dynasty responsible for one of the worst periods of Jewish persecution. The Koutoubia Mosque is the tallest mosque in Marrakech, its construction decided in 1158 by the Almohad Sultan Abdel Moumen soon after his conquest of Marrakech, occupying the square of a former Almohavid palace whose mosque was destroyed, supposedly as it did not face Mecca. Completed in 1199 with the construction of its famous minaret ordered by the Sultan's grandson, the Caliph Yacoub el-Mansour who died the same year, this minaret (from the Arabic word *menara* or lighthouse) was later used as



model for Giralda of Seville then for the Hassan Tower of Rabat. The main function of the minaret was to provide a vantage point from which the muezzin can call out the *adhan*, calling the faithful to prayer. In most Mosques these days, the *adhan* is called not from the minaret, but in the *musallah*, or Prayer Hall, via a microphone and speaker system, the role of the minaret is now largely for traditional and decorative purposes. A jewel of Hispano-Moresque art made up of 16 outlying naves and one larger central nave, its name is derived from the Arabic *al-Koutoubiyin* for "bookseller", or "librarian", since it used to be surrounded by the stalls of sellers of manuscripts and books and by scribes. This square tower in finely-worked dressed stone is 77 metres tall, (as high as the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris) including its lantern. Considered to be the *ne plus ultra* structure of its kind, decorated with ceramic tiles forming different patterns on each side, it boasts of six rooms, one above the other, with a ramp leading up around them by way of which the muezzin could ride his horse (or mule) up to the balcony. It is built in a traditional Almohad style and the tower is adorned with four copper globes. According to legend, they were originally made of pure gold, and there were once supposed to have been only three. The fourth was donated by the wife of Yacoub el-Mansour. As compensation for her failure to keep the fast for one day during the month of Ramadan she had her golden jewellery melted down to fashion the fourth globe. We continue into the **Djmaâ el Fnaâ Square** (the 'Assembly of the Dead'), where, until the 19th century, were traditionally displayed on stakes the severed heads of criminals. We take lunch at the Al Baraka Restaurant overlooking the Square to see from above stalls of goods, from fruit to alarm clocks; snake charmers and water sellers; fortune tellers and public scribes; tumblers and *nakkachat* - women with syringes full of henna - soothsayers and *gnaoua* musicians. With the touch of a journey back into time we set off into the bustling Kasbah to the lavishly-decorated **Saâdien Tombs** - discovered in 1917 with some tombs dating from the middle 1550s; this is the ancient cemetery of the *shorfa*, the descendants of the Prophet Mohammed. Here you see the Prayer Hall with its horseshoe arches, the tombs of the Alaouite princes from the 18th century and a large tomb of the Black Sultan, the Merinid Dynasty Abou Hassan. On into the Hall of Twelve Columns, the central mausoleum of Ahmed el Mansour, who died in 1603, with its



colonnade of twelve decorated marble pillars and intensely carved upper stuccowork that looks like gilded lace. To his right is his son and successor Zaidan; to his left his grandson Mohammed ech-Cheik. There are 33 other tombs of Saâdien princelings. From here to the late 19th century **Bahia Palace** (its name translates as 'The Brilliant') built by craftsmen from Fes for the black slave Si' Ahmed Ben Musa (or Bou Ahmed) after he had risen to power and wealth as the Grand Vizier of Sultan Moulay al-Hassan. The attractive, well preserved, Harem Courtyard has featured in many Big Budget Movies. It took nearly 15 years to complete; the rooms (nearly 150!), housed Bou Ahmed, his 4 wives and 24 concubines plus servants and guards. The Palace follows the patterns of typical Islamic architecture, with central courtyards, having rooms leading off them, with doorways that are placed so that you can't see beyond (providing privacy). Fountains and gardens are also typical features, along with the decorative stucco panels, tiled floors and zellige work. From here we continue up to the **Dar Si Saïd Museum**. Formally a palace originally built by Mehdi Mnebbi (1894-1908), Moroccan ambassador to London, it was then bought by T'hami el Glaoui, the famous Pasha of Marrakech and 'Lord of the Atlas' during the French Protectorate. Restored in 1997, it houses both traditional and contemporary exhibitions of Moroccan arts and sculpture - the very quintessence of Moroccan art. The building is the work of Si Saïd, a half-brother of grand vizier Bou Ahmed who expanded the Bahia Palace. In fact, Dar Si Saïd is a smaller version of that Palace, with finer and more impressive decoration. On the ground floor you can find clothes, objects in beaten copper, beautifully decorated weapons, skilfully crafted traditional silver Berber jewellery from the southern Anti Atlas region, oil lamps and carvings in the special Tarouddant soft stone. Splendours from



the past? Not at all, for many of the objects on display are still used and worn in mountain areas. Fountains sculpted from pink marble decorate the tiled courtyards that are accented by the turquoise, greens and whites of the mosaic designs. The most important exhibit in the Museum is a marble basin dating back to the 10th century, brought to Marrakech from Cordoba by the Almoravid Sultan Ali Ben Youssef. The first floor salon impresses with its Hispano Moorish decoration and elegant furniture in cedar wood. It is such an accurate reproduction that, at any moment you half expect to see a bride in her ceremonial dress return to the armchair and show herself off to all the admiring guests. Other rooms are filled with an abundance of intricate chests, ancient pottery from Safi and Tamegroute, worked leather from Marrakech as well as a remarkable collection of Berber carpets from the High Atlas and others that originate from every corner of the globe; some have made use of leather while others make use of textiles to create items that accurately reflect the regions from which they originate. Stop a moment to examine coming from the Sahara region, characterised by the use of embroidered leather, and large, pile mats evoking the dry beauty of the semi-desert. A remarkably impressive eighteenth and nineteenth-century collection of door and window frames is to be found around the courtyard, all encrusted with the most delicate and refined ornamentation. We continue up into the Medina and the 14th century **Ali**



Ben Youssef Medersa - one of the most beautiful buildings in Marrakech that housed the Islamic equivalent of a monastery; the tranquillity within contrasts with the chaotic pace of life outside in the Medina. Founded by the Merinid Sultan Abou el Hassan in the 14th century, it was almost completely rebuilt during the Saâdien Dynasty who made their distinctive mark in its architecture and art. The Medersa centres on a large courtyard with a central pool for ablutions. The buildings are made of carved cedar wood, exquisite stuccowork, and colourful zellige tiles. At the back is a sizable prayer hall where the most elaborate decoration can be found. The interior is covered in an abundance of pine cone and palm motifs used around the mihrab to create a three-dimensional appearance. Throughout the Medersa

are many Arabic inscriptions in stucco and zellige tile, the most common of which is the *bismillah* invocation: "In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful." Above the central courtyard are the small windows of the tiny student dormitories; over 800 students were housed in this Medersa, difficult to imagine. From stairs in the entry vestibule you can explore all the rooms and enjoy a nice view over the courtyard. The rooms are arranged around smaller inner courtyards, rimmed with fine wood railings. We shall go on to see the Almoravid Dynasty Koubba; also called **Koubba Ba'Adiyn**, the oldest building in Marrakech and the only



Almoravid building to remain standing in Morocco. The Almoravids (1062-1145) were reformers and monastic-type warriors from the desert nomadic Sanhaja Berber tribe in what is now Mauritania. After conquering their homeland, they expanded to Morocco in 1062 and eventually extended their empire all the way to Algiers. Probably an ablutions annexe for the Ben Youssef Mosque, for centuries it was covered over amid the many rebuildings of the mosque; it was only excavated in 1952. This little building is significant not only because it's very old, but because its style is at the root of all Moroccan architecture. Its motifs of pine cones, palms and acanthus leaves were used in the Ben Youssef Mosque and other later buildings; its beautifully-shaped windows became the distinctive design of the Almohades and Merinids. Also highly influential on later designs are the koubba's pyramid-like battlements, the rib design on the dome, and the sophisticated interior support system, composed of a square and star-shaped octagon. In addition to the koubba itself, visitors can view a large water cistern and remains of fountains for performing ablutions. We now proceed to the Marrakech **Museum of Contemporary Art**



housed in a 19th century palace, restored and reopened as a museum in 1997. Items on display include archaeological artefacts, ceramics, jewellery, traditional weapons, garments and uniforms, historic documents and calligraphy, as well as contemporary art exhibitions set within beautiful gardens, lake-sized pools and calm and quiet surroundings. We continue on through the Escheresque labyrinth of

narrow alleyways making up the renowned cool, colourful and aromatic **Souqs** of Marrakech - the Dyers' Souq being the last to be visited - finishing our guided visit in the Djmaâ el Fnaâ Square and so back to your hotel. **BL**.

DAY 4: MARRAKECH-CASABLANCA: After breakfast, you might wish to make a dash back into the Medina or souks for some last-minute sightseeing or shopping before check-out at midday when we set off back across the plains to check into your hotel. Your driver will be at your disposal to take you where you will within the confines of this White City. **B**.

DAY 5: CASABLANCA - ONWARDS: After breakfast and in accordance with your flight schedule (check-out from your hotel is by 12:00) you will be transferred to Casablanca's Mohammed V International airport in time for your onward flight, taking with you some certainly incredible memories in so short a time of a land so full of remarkable contrasts and very friendly people. **B**.

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OUR PRICE WILL INCLUDE: Accommodation at recommended or similar hotels/riads including relevant taxes, *subject always to availability at time of reservation*. Porterage on 1 piece of luggage per person in/out airports & hotels/riads. Meal schedule as outlined in the itinerary or modified in accordance with instructions. Private circle trip transportation in an air-conditioned vehicle from Casablanca to Casablanca. Sightseeing tours and all related entrance fees as listed in the itinerary. Bottled water en-route. Medical and Accident Insurance.

OUR PRICE WILL NOT INCLUDE: Gratuities to waiters, guide and chauffeur. Any expenditure of a personal nature, nor anything not specifically mentioned in the itinerary.

IT IS RECOMMENDED YOU BRING WITH YOU: Good trainers; pullover; day pack; hygienic 'wipes;' camera and Ziploc bags for your sensitive lenses; sunglasses, sunscreen, swimming costume (seasonal).