

MOROCCO'S SCENTS OF ADVENTURE

OBTIC06cc **8 DAYS/7NIGHTS**. CASABLANCA - MARRAKECH/OUARZAZATE-TODRA GORGES-TINEHRIR-DADES GORGES -TINEJDAD/ERFOUD-MERZOUGA/ FES/ MEKNES-VOLUBILIS-RABAT-CASABLANCA

DAY 1: CASABLANCA-MARRAKECH.



You will be met on arrival at Casablanca's airport by our English speaking guide and visit the interior of the amazingly-beautiful Hassan II Mosque, the second largest mosque in the Islamic world after the Masjid al-Hamra 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. We continue on via the Corniche to the elegant residential district of Anfa, the original site of Casablanca, with its green parks and Art Deco villas. 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. On now straight to the Pink City of Marrakech and your hotel or riad. D.



DAY 2: MARRAKECH.



After breakfast we shall go for a ride in a caleche around the magnificent ramparts, quite the best introduction to the Pink City, on to the Majorelle Garden and Museum of Islamic Art of the recently-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 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-Koutoubiyyin* 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 stucco work 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 El Badii Palace. The remnants of a magnificent palace built by the Saâdien Sultan Ahmed Ibn Moussa al-Mansour in 1578(?) designed by Mohammed el-Heqqs under the influence of the Alhambra in Granada, which took some 16 years to complete, was named ‘Badi’ (the Incomparable), one of the 99 names of Allah (moreover, *ksar l-bdi* in Moroccan Arabic means ‘the porcelain palace’, which could refer to the rich ceramic panels that profusely decorated the building). Montaigne, in his *Voyage en Italie*, reported that Italian craftsmen near Pisa were cutting ‘for the King of Fes in Barbary’, 50 very tall Italian marble columns which were paid for in sugar, weight for weight. Workmen from different countries, including in Europe, were recruited to execute the work. For three-quarters of a century, the Badi was the venue for all of the great ceremonies and parties given by the Saâdien Sultans and ended up with a reputation, more or less deserved, for excess and debauchery. This was the main reason why the Alaouite Sultan Moulay Ismail (1672-1727) ordered the complete destruction of the once fairy tale building and used the materials to decorate his own palace in Meknes. Consequently all that remains today is a section of the 2 metre-thick outer wall, the esplanade, with remains of its pools and orchards, one of the pavilions with its columns and some decorative elements (stucco, marble, zellige - small tiles). However, excavations carried out in the 20th century, the discovery of two drawings of the palace (one Portuguese and one English) and the reports of contemporary chroniclers and foreign visitors give us a reasonably precise idea of how the Badi would have been in its heyday. The palace, thought to have consisted of 360 rooms, was symmetrically planned around an enormous rectangular courtyard measuring 135 m by 110 m, including a long central pool measuring 90 m by 20 m that contained a monumental fountain and had hollows on either side planted with trees and flowers and four small rectangular basins at the ends whose ceramic mosaic paving is still visible. The east side of the palace looked out over a large garden known as ‘the Crystal Garden’. Two pavilions measuring 15m by 16m were built halfway along the shorter sides of the courtyard and two more measuring 23m by 15m in the middle of the longer sides. Truncated-pyramid towers stood in the corners of the courtyard. The pavilions were crowned with domes whose ceilings were encrusted with gold from Sudan and precious *muqarnas* (honeycomb work) supported by marble columns with capitals covered with golden leaves. The floors and walls were covered with faience mosaics, the doors were made of sculpted cedar wood and, throughout, the fountains gushed water from the mouths of lions, leopards and pythons sculpted in solid silver. It also has a small, underground, tunnel-like jail with about four cells where the king kept his prisoners. 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 Said 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 Said, a half-brother of grand vizier Bou Ahmed who expanded the Bahia Palace. In fact, Dar Si Said 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 Almohad 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 and the Bert Flint Museum in the Maison Tiskiwin. Displayed in a riad constructed at the turn of the twentieth century in Hispano-Mauresque style, Bert Flint, a Dutch anthropologist and art historian, displays his excellent collection of costumes, jewellery, arms, basketwork, musical instruments, Moroccan art, popular traditions and artefacts, carpets and furniture collected over a period of 50 years as he travelled along the Gold Road from the Atlas Mountains to Timbuktu, crossing the regions of the Sahara and the Souss Valley. Flint was born in Groningen in Holland in 1931 and after studying Islamic and Hispanic art and culture moved to Marrakech in 1957 where he taught art while continuing to study Andalusian-Arab culture. Over the years his focus had increasingly turned to rural culture shown here in all its glory and variety. We continue on through the 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. Back at your hotel,



you may either lounge around in the late afternoon or decide to venture further into the bustle of this cosmopolitan city until dinner late this evening. BLD.



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DAY 3: MARRAKECH - OUARZAZATE - TINEJDAD. After breakfast this morning you set out on your voyage of discovery of



Morocco's multi-faceted south across the Glaoua Plains and up to Ait Ourir Taddert (1650m) and the exhilarating hairpin bends of the High Atlas Mountains to alight at the top of the Tizi n'Tichka (2260m) where we stop for a photo-op of a vista dominated by peaks of some 2500+m. Onwards now, to the Ksar of Ait Ben Haddou, now a UNESCO World Heritage Site and backdrop to so many Hollywood films. Here we alight from our vehicle to visit these various Berber and Jewish kasbahs, so closely-knit that they appear to be but one complete building, backed up against the looming mountain in a stretch of unforgiving Hamada. The thick, high, sheer, elaborately decorated pisé walls, stepped-up housing, turreted, crenulated ramparts, and balustrades and arched 'babs' are a sight not to be missed. One of the more spectacular sights in the Atlas ranges, set upon a rock above a reed-strewn assif, commanding the area for miles around, this kasbah controlled the route to Marrakech until the French blasted a road through the Tizi n'Tichka in the late 1920s. Onwards ever south we arrive at the new (1920s) once-garrison town of the French Protectorate - Ouarzazate.



Ouarzazate ("Where no noise (or confusion) is heard"), is a soothing and very airy city, once a small crossing point for the African caravan trade seeking to reach the northern shores of Morocco and thence to Europe. During the French Protectorate period, Ouarzazate expanded considerably as a Foreign Legion garrison town, administrative centre and customs post. It is still the arrival point of different cultures and crafts with a Sunday souq filled with henna, roses, caraway, distilled herb tea, Berber vases, objects in engraved stone, blankets and famous Ouzguita carpets of blue or resplendent gold with beautiful geometric design. Here we make a brief visit of the Kasbah of Taourirt: once belonging to El Haj T'hami el Mezouari el Glaoui (1879-1956), better known in English-speaking countries through Gavin Maxwell's book 'Lords of the Atlas'; Caïd (appointed head, Duke or Baron) of the Glaoua tribe of Southern Morocco, based at the nearby Kasbah of Telouet in the High Atlas and at Marrakech, his family name was El Mezouari, a title given to their ancestors by the Sultan Moulay Ismail in 1700, while El Glaoui refers to his belonging to the Glaoui tribe. Pasha of Marrakech from 1912 to 1956 and ally of the French in Morocco, he conspired with them in the overthrow of the king Sultan Mohammed V. Not a popular man, this Pasha, it could be said and a Krupps 77mm field gun which secured Glaoui power stands outside the Kasbah Taourirt. T'hami at first forcefully supported the French, machine-gun in hand if necessary. He was shaken, however, by the political "reforms" which the French began to demand to consolidate their hold on power, which would have had the same outcome as what he had feared from the nationalists: the eventual removal of the pashas and caïds T'hami now no longer believed in anything the French said, and pointedly refused them support to suppress a student strike. By 17th October, T'hami had decided to



notify the French and their Council that he supported the restoration of Mohammed V as Sultan. Due to court intrigues (surprise!) this notification was never sent. At a later meeting an announcement was drawn up in which T'hami recognised Mohammed V as rightful Sultan of all Morocco. The next day, as soon as T'hami had addressed the Council of the Throne, the announcement was read out to a waiting crowd and simultaneously released to the media by nationalists in Cairo. The whole of Morocco was now united in the demand for the Sultan's restoration, and the French had no choice but to capitulate. T'hami flew to France to kneel in submission on 8th November 1955 before Mohammed V, who forgave him his past mistakes. El Glaoui died of stomach cancer on 23rd January 1956, not long after the return of the Sultan. His properties and wealth were later seized by



the state. Most Moroccans see him still as a traitor and collaborator with the French. We continue south to the Kasbah of Tiffouloute, an old fortress inhabited formerly by a sheik, and then by Glaoui Khalifa, whose rooftops offer a magnificent panoramic view of the valley. Located a few kilometres west of Ouarzazate, built on the upper reaches of an adobe village overlooking the valley of the Ouarzazate oued you are invited to climb up to the terrace where the view is breathtaking! From here you may admire the mountains, the lake formed by Mansour Ed-Dahbi dam, the oasis and the Drâa Valley. This kasbah was transformed into a hotel during the filming of Lawrence of Arabia in 1962. We turn now into the valley of 1000 Kasbahs - the

Dadès Valley - and the luxuriant oasis of Skoura (souq on Mondays) where Mother Nature puts on her show of red earth, yellow dust, green oases and a brilliant blue sky, offers an enchanting view of the "Valley of a Thousand Kasbahs". Founded in the 12th century by Yacoub el Mansour on an alluvial plain in lands once trodden by Alexander's armies, here you'll see the magnificent 17th century Kasbahs ('kasbah' translates to 'tighernit' in the language of the Berber) el Kabbaba, Dar Aïchil, Dar Ait Souss, Dar Ait Sidi El Mati and the most beautiful of them all, the 15th century living museum of Amerhidl and whose image is to found printed on the previous, but still in circulation, 50 dirham bank note. With its several towers with fine decorations, it really is a postcard kasbah with several rooms, garden, rooftop, kitchen and a court where traditional tools had been laid out. (A fee towards the conservation is expected). The Skoura and Amerhidl ravines provide water for a number of date, fig, and almond



orchards; this is where the best dates in Morocco are produced (though Merzouga may take me to task on this) and is also a winter refuge for a number of migratory birds; We continue east to Qlâa't Des M'gouna (Citadel of the M'gouna Tribe) where thousands of small, pink roses, first planted by French settlers, are grown to make the rose oil essence - "Eau de Rose" - so beloved of the Berber people, the most beautiful rose garden of the valley, whose essences are distilled to make the rose water so favoured by the Berber people and where you may purchase this bottled water, body milk and so on - the "Paris" of Yves Saint Laurent is made from these roses' extract. We continue on to the small town of Boumalne Du Dadès situated at the mouth of the Dadès Gorge. This is fig country; The Oued Dadès also originates in the High Atlas Mountains - on a fine day the Irhil M'Goun, the second-highest peak (at 4071m) in North Africa after the Jbel Toubkal, can be seen to the north - to feed a series of oases and hundreds upon hundreds of the Valley's kasbahs. The photogenic scenery is significant with views of interestingly-bizarre rock formations, but one of which is the "Monkey's Feet". Made lush and green by the river, the surrounding area is rocky desert. A deep, narrow slit of pink, mauve and orange rock with a greenish-blue river running through it with simple communities living here in traditional houses, the womenfolk can be seen washing laundry in the river to lay it to dry on the surrounding bushes. To get to the Gorges you go on a stunning drive, somewhat similar to the approach to Petra in that the iron-rich soil is a cameo of reds, on a seemingly never-ending serpentine road, passing fig and almonds orchards and, as you continue to slowly rise in altitude, you notice some awe-inspiring rock formations rarely seen elsewhere in Morocco, Berber settlements and winding rivers. A fairy-tale like feeling with an awe-inspiring landscape; big bright red dirt and rock make up the valley's walls and built up into the hillsides are ancient crumbling Kasbahs, once the fortress hamlets for local royalty. As the sun sets behind these Kasbahs it bathes the hills in warm light, the end result is magical, and as the sun finally sets, everything glows a dark pinkish red. In spring, with the almond trees, the walnut trees, the poplars in flower, it is a "pleasure for the eyes" (as we say here in Morocco). We return to the mouth of the Gorges and on to the small town of Tinehrir, located at the mouth of the fabulous Todra Gorges



and overlooked by a Glaoua Kasbah. A former French Foreign Legion military terraced outpost set above a truly magnificent palm grove, with a wild, craggy, barren landscape, an amphitheatre mixed with green oases. Now we set out up the Oued (River) Todra for some 15km into the deepest, narrowest and most spectacular part of these further wonders of Mother Nature. The Todra River has carved out a cliff-sided canyon on its final 80 miles down from the High Atlas Mountains in the land of the once warrior tribe of the nomadic Ait Atta. The final 600 yards of the Todra Gorge is at its most spectacular when the canyon narrows to a flat stony track as little as 30ft wide in places with sheer and smooth rock walls up to 1000ft high on each side. The tiny glacier stream is something of a misfit; the river which once slashed through to fill the gorge can only be imagined. It is easy to hike in the gorge as there is a well-maintained dirt road to walk along the spectacular scenery though most people take their booked excursion up there. The local people can be seen with their small donkeys, or herding camels. All in all, an unforgettable spectacle of Mother Natures' magnificence, you may even get to see the rare booted eagle soaring above. The final leg of today's episode takes us to the ochre-coloured oasis town of Tinejdad and our dinner and overnight accommodation in a kasbah-like hotel. **BLD.**



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DAY 4: TINEJDAD - ERFOUD - MERZOUGA. After breakfast we set off on our short trip to the Saharan town of Erfoud, another former French Foreign Legion outpost. Here we change our vehicle for a 4WD down to the Hotel Auberge Du Sud in Merzouga, where we now switch those 4 tyres for the 4 feet of our 'Ships of the desert' for a 2 hour dromedary ride which takes us to our Berber tent at Erg Chebbi - the highest dunes in Morocco's Sahara - to witness a spectacular sunset colouring the sands from gold to purple as the sky darkens to show a canopy of a myriad of stars - where we shall dine and stay overnight to the accompaniment of a small folklore group of musicians. **BD.**

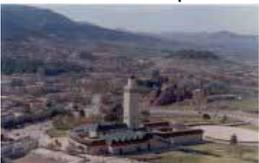


After breakfast we set off on our short trip to the Saharan town of Erfoud, another former French Foreign Legion outpost. Here we change our vehicle for a 4WD down to the Hotel Auberge Du Sud in Merzouga, where we now switch those 4 tyres for the 4 feet of our 'Ships of the desert' for a 2 hour dromedary ride which takes us to our Berber tent at Erg Chebbi - the highest dunes in Morocco's Sahara - to witness a spectacular sunset colouring the sands from gold to purple as the sky darkens to show a canopy of a myriad of stars - where we shall dine and stay overnight to the accompaniment of a small folklore group of musicians. **BD.**

DAY 5: MERZOUGA - ERFOUD - MIDELT - FES. Our last brilliant sunrise, equal almost unforgettable sunset, our Bedouin breakfast of tea, 'sand' bread, jam and cheese tucked away, our dromedaries having been saddled up for the return stage, we set off back across the plain around 8:30 in your 4WD to er-Rissani, the last village on the Oued Ziz set in a beautiful oasis. Sleepy, dusty, sandy and friendly, most of the inhabitants live in the 17th century ksar (a fortified group of kasbahs) in an underground maze of almost troglodyte alleyways. We shall visit the Moulay Ali Cherif Mausoleum (founder of the Alaouite dynasty) - the Mausoleum was rebuilt after a disastrous flood in 1965 - the Kasbah of Oulad Abdelhalim; the 17th century Ksar Akbar, the Zaouiat El Maati and the hilltop ruined Kasbah Tinrheras. Here you'll see women dressed in black djellabas and ha'iqs carrying freshly-baked bread on their heads and find plates made from date palm; ammonites and trilobites a-plenty - there is a picturesque, vibrant local Berber souq every Sunday, Wednesday and Thursday. Don't miss seeing the donkey (60 to 70 braying beasts at a time) donkey market! 5 minutes' walk away is Sijilmassa, the first independent kingdom of the south.



Sijilmassa: (pronounced see-jill-moss-uh), known as the "Mesopotamia of Morocco", is a kingdom of lore in the oral history of the area's Berber populations and was once the fabled and ancient Berber capital of a Tafilalt Kingdom located at the northern edge of the Sahara desert that once rivaled Marrakech. Founded in A.D. 757 by Sufri who established a Midrasid state overlooking the Oued Ziz, Sijilmassa grew wealthy and powerful during the Middle Ages as a gold-trade-route city strategically located at the exit-point of the western Trans-Saharan caravan trade route which extended from the Niger River in the Sudan to Tangier in northern Morocco. From the 10th to the 12th centuries Sijilmassa was the centre of the salt and gold trade between Morocco and both Ghana and the Sudan and its legendary glory owes much to this position. Even after its fall as a great commercial centre and caravan terminus, the region of Sijilmassa remained instrumental in the minting of gold from these distant (by dromedary) neighbours. Until the 10th century, control over the right to mint coins was held by the central government in the Middle East as a means to control the vast expanses of the Arab world. Gold became a key resource in managing the growth of Arab and European economies in the North and when confronted with the lack of it in their own territories, they started spinning myths about the abundance of gold south of the Sahara that greatly increased caravan commerce. Ghanaian and Sudanese gold refined in Sijilmassa in defiance of the then central government also made it to Europe, where it was minted into European coins. Sijilmassa was initially destroyed in 1363 and rebuilt by Sultan Moulay Ismail, one of the first rulers (1672 - 1727) of the Alaouite dynasty - who have Sijilmassa as a shrine to their ancestry - that rule Morocco today. Ultimately, the city of Sijilmassa was conquered by Ait Atta warrior Berber nomads in 1818. The Roman ruins and Grand Mosque, which latter was last rebuilt in 1796, serve as the central feature of this medieval town. Some historians believe that Sijilmassa in Morocco was never really one, united ksour, but more a conglomeration of several ksours that simply lived along the river. The city would at one time have been about 8 miles long from one point to the other, though no definite boundaries have yet been found. Back now up to the Auberge Du Sud and on back up to Erfoud and our original vehicle, thence on a 7½ hour drive, with en-route "comfort stops". We first go through the Tizimi Palmeraie (Oasis) to the small palm grove at Meski, watered by a natural spring - the famous picture postcard image of La Source Bleue - on to the French-built garrison town of Er-Rachidya (previously known as Ksar es Souq, after their Foreign Legion fort). This pleasant garrison town, alive in the evening with students from the University and Lycée, is still maintained after independence to forestall any further territorial claims from Algeria. We continue north via the Barrage (Dam) Hassan Addakhil to enter another scenic highlight of the really dramatic and majestic canyon of the Ziz Gorges, massive erosions of rock carving a passage through the mountains dominating startlingly green oases and ochre-coloured ksours. We emerge from the Gorges and into the Tunnel Du Légionnaire, built by the French to have ease of rapid access to the rebellious southern tribe of the Ait Atta. This region was also once notorious for raids on caravans by the nomadic Ait Haddidou tribe, who were pacified with great difficulty by the French until the mid-1930s. On now through the town of Rich, once an important fort during the era of the French Protectorate through to the town of Ait Messaoud, passing a French Foreign Legion fort with all the reminders of *Beau Geste* on through a lower Pass (Tizi) of the Eastern High Atlas Mountains - the Pass of the She-Camel - Tizi n'Talrehmt (1907m) to the Berber mountain town of Midelt, where we stop for a light lunch at the Kasbah Asmaâ Restaurant, the massive Jbel Ayachi (3722m) rising sheer and stark before us. Midelt is so far inland that its microclimate is one of extremes: bitterly cold in winter and oh-so-hot in summer. We continue on now via the Tizi n'Zad (2178m) into the Middle Atlas Mountains on through the cedar forests to the first real town in the Middle Atlas - Azrou - which in the local Tamazight (Berber) dialect means "rock," for next to the mosque is the massive outcrop from which this town takes its name - for a long time a strategic settlement established to effect some form of control of the independent mountain Berber peoples. On now to the squeaky-clean Moroccan pseudo-Swiss town of Ifrane (1650m), with its slanted, russet-tiled roofs hidden amidst a forest of cedar, which cannot grow below 1600m. Ifrane is mainly a winter ski resort - and a summer hideaway for rich Moroccans wishing to escape the hustle and heat of the large cities. Passing finally through the small 1920s French-built hill station of Immouzer Du Kandjar (1220m) we cross in the pleasant Saiss Plateau to Fes to our riad and dinner. **BLD.**



DAY 6: FES. The exciting, fascinating and two thousand year old Imperial City of Fes, surrounded as it is by 9 miles of ramparts situated in a narrow valley, strategically positioned on the old caravan crossroads which once connected the one-time Saharan empires with the Atlantic and Mediterranean trading routes to Europe. The city that was once, after Mecca and Medina, held to be one of the holiest cities in the Islamic world; the city whose merchants were travelling to China in the 15th century; the city that (of least importance) gave its name to the red cylindrical brimless hat.



Moroccans say that Marrakech, Rabat and Casablanca live in the present, but that Fes certainly lives in the past. No surprises here, for European chroniclers of the Middle Ages wrote with awe of this city that for several centuries was the most civilised Western outpost of the Semitic world. Its scholars introduced astronomy and medicine to the West via Spain when that country was under Moorish rule. Historians of the time said that the writings of both Plato and Aristotle first reached Western Europe in Arabic translations - from Fes.

In 786, one hundred and fifty years after the death of the Prophet Mohammed Bin Abdullah Banu Hashim, his grandson was to set foot in Morocco. This man was Idriss Ibn Abdallah, destined to become Moulay Idriss, patron saint of Morocco and founder of Fes. Implicated in a failed rebellion against the Arabian Abbasids, he fled Baghdad to come with his bedraggled army to this

'Land of the Setting Sun', beyond which one could travel no further by land. Here, in Fes, on the eastern bank of the seasonal Oued Fes, after a set-to with the indigenous Berber tribesmen, he started to build what was to become the first Islamic settlement in Morocco.

Welcome to this different world, so reminiscent of a Jerusalem of 1000 years ago. With its two hundred mosques and holy shrines, Fes contains more places of worship than any other city in Morocco. At its peak, early in the thirteenth century, Fes el-Bali alone boasted almost eight hundred mosques and mausoleums for its 125,000 inhabitants. By the seventeenth century, however, the Scottish traveller William Lithgow reported that places of worship were far outstripped by some twelve thousand licensed brothels and, as the Victorian era traveller Budgett Meakin remarked: "Fes us at once the most religious and the most wicked city in Morocco...the saints and sinner being for the most part, identical..." With ancient ramparts set against a backdrop of the not-too-distant Middle Atlas Mountains you'll know you're in for a very different experience; one that our professionally-guided visit will take you to the bustling maze of alleyways of the fascinating medina and souks offering every possible combination of beautiful pottery, Berber carpets, Fassi brassware, Jewish-originated silverware, traditional and modern jewellery, beautiful leather goods all amidst the pungent aromas of spices, herbs and oils. Take in with us the ancient living monuments this city of One Thousand and One Nights has to offer the serious tourist. Fes, one of the pillars of Islam, harboured the most celebrated of Jewish communities and scholars.



Is it Fes or Fez? It is both; and neither. The Western name for the city is drawn from the Arabic *Fas* and, as there is no one correct way to transliterate Arabic words into Western characters, in the French language, the city is referred to as *Fés*, while Americans tend to use *Fez*. Fassin, or Fassis as the residents call themselves, use the pronunciation of *Fas*, so derived from three Arabic letters *f* (f), *alif* (a) and *sin* (s). So everyone wins.

As soon as you ready after breakfast, we make for the impressive *Dar el Makhzen* and a 15 minute stop at the Royal Palace with its magnificent seven bronze gates. From here we walk to and through the Mellah with its intense atmosphere and fine examples of Mauro-Hispanic architecture. We now

drive to the *Borj Sud*, here to take in the panoramic view of the Medina. Off now down to start our Walking Tour of the labyrinth of the ancient Fes Medina and Mellah (a UNESCO World Heritage Site); of the *Bou Inania Mosque*; of the colourful *es-Sabbaghine* with its Street of the Dyers; of the brass and copper workers at *es-Saffarine*; of the impressive *al-Quarawiyyin Mosque and University* (exterior only) and the *el-Atterine Medersa* (exterior only) passing the aromas of the *Souq el-Atterine* area of spices and groceries to the delightful *el-Nejjarine Square* with its fountain and *caravanserai*, stopping nearby for a light lunch. On now to the renowned *Tanneries* on the bank of the *Oued Fes* and thence on to the potteries, perfumes and beauty products at the *Souq el-Henna*.



Leaving the Medina from the *Bab Boujloud*, we tour the magnificent ramparts with its beautiful 'Babs' as we make our way to the 16th century *Saâdien watchtower* at the *North Borj* and the *Dar Batha Museum* with its collection of carpets, woodwork and jewellery to arrive back at your riad after a day full of contrasting culture and journey into some 1,200 years of history later to dine tonight in your delightful *Riad Dar Anebar*. BLD.

DAY 7: FES - MEKNES - VOLUBILIS - RABAT - CASABLANCA. After breakfast we shall now set out westwards to the Imperial City of Meknes, noted for its carpet weaving and fine wines. Arab historians trace the origins of Meknes to the Roman occupation of Morocco from 3BC to 40AD, perhaps as a forward post for the neighbouring Roman city of Volubilis during the search for timber and volcanic rock required for construction which the nearby Middle Atlas Mountains must have provided in plenty. Recent archaeological finds, however, do not offer convincing proof that there was a virtual Romanisation of this settlement that would later develop into the great capital of legendary Sultan Moulay Ismail.

This, one of the kingdom's four Imperial Cities, was developed in the 10th century by the Zenata tribe of the Meknassa Berbers as *Meknassa es -Zeitoun* ("Meknes of the Olives"), a group of villages built among olive groves around Takarart, an 8th century Berber kasbah or citadel. Situated west of the Saiss plain between the pre-Riffian elevation of Zerhoun and the foothills of the Middle Atlas, Meknes was chosen by Sultan Moulay Ismail in 1672 to be the capital of his empire. Enjoying a strategically-central position vis-à-vis other regions in Morocco, Meknes sits on a plateau serving as a virtual cross roads for the South-North camel caravan traders and settlers. Throughout its history, its importance grew due to the location, clement weather, abundant water supplies and surrounding fertile plains. The city's unity of style lends it undeniable charm, unchanged for centuries, enhanced still further by the beauty of the surrounding countryside. Moulay Ismail's creation was to be much talked of in the East and in Europe, most especially at the French court of King Louis XIV.



This old city may not be among the finest in Morocco, but the Royal Palace - the *Dar el Makhzen* - fills a considerable part of it. Erected around 1700 AD during the tyrannical rule of Sultan Moulay Ismail who reigned for 55 years, he had chosen Meknes as his strategic seat of power in 1672 and then, using famously brutal discipline, he attempted to turn the little university town into a capital that would

rival Versailles. You'll surely marvel at these ruins which once were one of the most sumptuous palaces of Meknes, now still exemplified by this stunning view of arcades open to the sky.

His 25 kilometres of ramparts surrounding the *Dar el-Kebira* (Imperial City) were personally supervised -- Ismail strolled about the construction sites with a pickaxe and whip and decapitated workers who displeased him. Those slaves, captured by corsairs off the Atlantic coast at *Salé*, near Rabat, (these same corsairs whose descendants were to "capture" *Robinson Crusoe*) who died of exhaustion were entombed within the walls they were building. He is rumoured to have had some 30,000 people killed during this period, but the figures are far higher if you include those in his various campaigns. His motto was to the effect that: "My subjects are like rats in a basket, and if I don't shake the basket, they will gnaw their way out." To construct his Imperial monuments, Ismail plundered materials from all over Morocco including the Roman marble from the nearby and otherwise intact ruins of Volubilis.

Meknes, this city of Moulay Ismail, is one of the only cities in Morocco where the Mellah does not adjoin the Royal Palace. It is also the only city where Jews decided to create a new Mellah after the French Protectorate was installed. The European city houses several synagogues as well as a community centre. In this Imperial city of Meknes, the tomb of Moulay Ismail memorialises the Alaouite Sultan who protected the Jews whilst he was securing control of the Moroccan empire. Palaces, mosques, gardens, lakes, granaries and stables were built over a period of 50 years; yet Moulay Ismail's dream city, surrounded by a massive rampart wall, was never finished. The great monuments, the massive walls, the huge gates, the elaborate gardens, the integrated neighbourhoods, the bustling market and the unique crafts and arts point to layers of history compacted and

superimposed in every corner of the city. There is so much history for one to unravel and marvel at that Meknes was classified in 1996 as a World Heritage Site. In the traditional, unusual and picturesque souqs of Meknes, ordinary objects become extraordinary. In the main square, fondouks (inns), hairdressers, blacksmiths and bazaars vie for your custom.

The Bab el-Mansour el-Ali truly is one of the most beautiful gates in North Africa. Built by Christian slaves between the years 1672 and 1727 in the classical Arabic style of which this is probably the best example, you step through its majestic archway to find yourself immersed in Moulay Ismail's unfinished dream. One of the best known and admired of Meknes' grand gates, the Gate leads from the Imperial City and Lalla Aoudad Esplanade to El-Hedim Square. In Meknes, even the ruins are grandiose. Those of Dar el-Kebira, the first palace built by Moulay Ismail, contained two mosques and more than twenty pavilions. Then there are other fabulous monuments, such as the Sidi Said Mosque, the Bab El Berdaine, the Bab El Khemis, Bab Jamaa en Nouar, the Moulay Ismail Mausoleum and the Koumba El Khayatine.

The Imperial city of Meknes with its twenty gates, over fifty palaces and fifteen miles of exterior ramparts counts amongst its most impressive sites the Dar El-Ma with its high vaulted, climate-controlled chambers once serving as storerooms in case of attack or drought. Every Mosque in Morocco is tiled in green. Green is the colour of Islam, representing Mother Earth. The Minaret is never hard to find, towering above the terra cotta tiles of the Medina's souqs and upstairs dwellings. This is the sole rounded minaret in Morocco. The al-Masjid al-Kebira, or Great Mosque, is the largest and at the centre of the Meknes Medina and, although non-Muslims cannot enter, as a consolation across the way is the 14th century Medersa Bou Inania, a college of theology and Muslim Law. The Medersa typifies the traditional Fassi architecture, combining carved cedar from the forests of the Middle Atlas Mountains with stuccowork and *zellij* (tile and mosaics). Bathed in light and outshining the Alhambra and other Mudejar buildings in Spain, the court yard is well preserved by Moroccan standards providing refuge to a few dozen families of cats. Upstairs, surrounding the open square below, are four hallways of small stone rooms, like cells, where students, in pairs, once studied and slept with only a pocket of sunlight. From the terrace above we overlook the Medina and its mass of unruly rooftops and the green tiled minarets of at least a dozen Mosques. Here we shall visit the Dar el -



Makhzen and the Bab Mansour; the El Heri es-Souani - the granary of huge vaulted structures and stables - once accommodating some 10,000 'Barb' horses (a cross-breed of Arab and Berber horses) - built by this despotic Sultan Moulay Ismail's soldiers next to a pool fed by underground channels that brought fresh water all the way from the distant Middle Atlas Mountains; the Christians' Prison, the really splendid Moulay Ismail Mausoleum and the Place el-Hedim - an enormous open-air market with heaps of clay pottery, over which peers the 19th century Dar Jamaï Palace, built by Sultan Moulay Hassan 1. The palace now houses a Museum of Moroccan Art, displaying restored, furnished rooms dripping with ornate plasterwork, inlaid wood and painted ceilings, carved walls, wall to wall hand-knotted Berber carpets and embroidered silk lounges, divans and pillows. The master sitting room is domed with a copula of delicate plaster stalactites. Then there's the Medina which remains to this day a maze of narrow streets of cobblestone and dirt, with traffic of donkeys and children and craftspeople on their way to and from their own unique souq, organised by craft - wood, metal, carpet, food and spices. Our walk today takes us through a twisting labyrinth of wall-holes, each revealing a cluster of men sitting cross-legged on the floor sewing and embroidering with lightning-

quick fingers. They work in the dim shade of the street, where medieval walls are so high there is little direct, scorching sunlight. Hundreds of shades of silk thread are spun and twisted together to make thicker, stronger threads for making dresses and robes and fabrics for upholstery. The men are steadfast in their work, leaning over lapfuls of delicate fabric, skilfully pulling needles with alacrity. At almost every mind-boggling corner where there is no right or left, only deeper and narrower, there is a fountain - an essential component of Islamic life. The fountain at one time was the necessary means by which members of the community retrieved water. Today it is a symbol of community, a wash basin for the vendors at the souqs, a splash station and watering hole for the children. The fountains are decorated entirely with tiny colourful tiles and carved and painted wood. Some have been left to decay and get filthy, some have stopped running altogether, but some remain as useful and integral to the corner as they did centuries ago. We shall drive north to the wonderful Roman ruins at Volubilis, the Volubilis of really ancient olive presses, mansions, incredible mosaics, monumental arches and Corinthian columns where you'll have a real sense of Roman lifestyle and of that of a subsequent medieval Berber town.



The site contains the Mansion containing the mosaic of the Labours of Hercules, the Baths of Gallienus and Baths of Forum with their fragmentary mosaics; the House of Orpheus and its Dolphin mosaic and Orpheus Myth; the Cortege of Venus many of whose mosaics we may only see from the outside yet will get to see the medallions of Bacchus, Diana and the Abduction of Hylas; the Gordian Palace with its bath house and pooled courtyards; the House of the Wild Beast, the House of Nymphs, the House of the Seasons, the House of Flavius Germanus, the Knights House with an incomplete mosaic of Dionysus Discovering Ariadne Asleep, the Triumphal Arch, the Capitol and the House of Ephebus with its pictorial mosaics, especially that of Bacchus Being drawn in a Chariot by Panthers. We leave Volubilis behind us to continue towards the Atlantic Ocean and the administrative Imperial capital since 1912 of the Kingdom of Morocco, Rabat (R'bat al Fat'h) - one of the four Imperial Cities, founded in the 12th century (R'bat meaning fortified convent to drive through this graceful city of parks and gardens along Victory Avenue to the Méchouar Precinct of the King's Palace. Regrettably, the Palace is not open to the public, but we can savour and photograph its impressive arches, redolent of the finest Islamic architecture. Next we arrive at the Chellah, once a prosperous Roman enclave called *Sala Colonia* in their Mauretania Tingitane Province, to be abandoned late in the 5th century, thence to fall into ruins to be transformed, late in the 14th century during the reign of the Merinides Sultanate, into a vast cemetery, their Necropolis, where we find also some Roman excavations. This Necropolis was destroyed by the earthquake of 1755 and is today a garden of date and banana palm trees, hibiscus, bougainvillea, olive and fig trees. Legend has it that Jews came to Sala Colonia five centuries before the Carthaginians, in the days of Solomon, to purchase gold. From here we continue to the Mohamed V Mausoleum, located on the southern side of the Great Mosque guarded by the mounted Royal Household Guard, the last resting places of the late King Mohammed V and of his son, the late King Hassan II. Napoleon Bonaparte's tomb at Les Invalides was the inspiration for the



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interior's modern Islamic design. It was the King Mohammed V who prevented the mass deportation of Moroccan Jews in the early years of World War II. We visit also the minaret of the Great Mosque, known also as the Hassan Tower. Begun in 1195, the tower was intended to be the largest minaret in the world along with the mosque, also intended to be the world's largest. In 1199 Sultan Yacoub el Mansour of the Almohad dynasty died, and construction on the mosque stopped. The tower only reached 44m (140ft), about half of its intended 86m (260ft) height. The rest of the mosque was also left incomplete, with only the foundations of several walls and 200 columns being constructed. Instead of having stairs, the tower is ascended by ramps which would have allowed the muezzin, who leads the call (*adhan*) to the faithful to the 5 daily prayers (*salat*) to ride a horse to the top of the tower to issue the call to prayer. The tower, according to tradition, was designed by an architect named Jabir who used a similar design plan for a sister tower, the Giralda in Seville, Spain. Both of the towers were modeled on the minaret of another one of Jabir's designs, the Koutoubia Mosque in Marrakech. We shall proceed to the 12th century Kasbah of the Oudayas in the ancient Medina at the heart of the military history of Rabat. This was the site of the original R'bat from which generations of cavalry have ridden out to subdue the rebellious Bou Raghhouala Berber tribes. It has also been a bastion against



repeated attacks by those corsair raiders; the Kasbah's alleyways are reminiscent of a delightful whitewashed Andalusian village. We shall take a light lunch here as you enjoy the view overlooking the Bou Regreg river and the one-time lair of famed Moroccan corsairs of the Barbary Coast at the Salé Fortress; the corsairs who raided shipping from the time of the Crusades until early in the 19th century; the corsairs who captured Miguel de Cervantes; the corsairs mentioned in Doctor Doolittle - the Moroccan Sultan Moulay Ismail actually made piracy a state monopoly in 1678. In 1783 the first American ship was captured and ransomed for \$60,000 cash; over the next 10 years a further dozen American ships were captured, the crew being made slaves in Algeria, one of the reasons why the

United States Navy was born in 1794 with 6 frigates. From here we finally turn south to Casablanca and our accommodation for this night. **BL.**

DAY 8: CASABLANCA - ONWARDS. After breakfast and in accordance with your flight schedule (check-out from your hotel is at 12:00) you will be transferred to Casablanca's International airport in time for your flight home, taking with you some certainly incredible memories of a land so full of remarkable contrasts and very friendly people. **B.**

(FOR COUPLES OR SMALL FAMILIES, WE RECOMMEND CERTAIN RIADS BE CONSIDERED FOR MORE ATMOSPHERE AND PRIVACY)

To choose your hotel or ryad, please close this page and go to [Find a Hotel](#) or [Find a Ryad](#).

N.B. THIS PROGRAMME DOES NOT OPERATE AS SUCH OVER CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR, GIVEN THERE IS AN OBLIGATORY REQUIREMENT OF FIVE TO SIX CONSECUTIVE NIGHTS' STAY IN MOST HOTELS IN FES AND MARRAKECH COVERING THE PERIOD 24 DECEMBER TO 05 JANUARY.

OUR PRICES WILL INCLUDE: Accommodation at specified or similar hotels/riads - including taxes - *as available at time of reservation*. All meals as specified in the itinerary (not including alcoholic drinks). Private circle trip transportation in an air-conditioned vehicle from Casablanca to Casablanca. Private guided sightseeing excursions as listed in the itinerary including a calèche tour and a dromedary ride to the overnight Sahara bivouac. An English-speaking Licensed National Guide throughout; bottled water en-route; medical or accident insurance.

OUR PRICES WILL NOT INCLUDE: Gratuities to waiters, guide, camp headman, cameleer and driver. Any expenditure of a personal nature, nor anything not specifically mentioned in the itinerary.

IT IS RECOMMENDED YOU BRING WITH YOU: Good trainers; for the Saharan sortie: day pack; broad-brimmed hat (or you may purchase a 'Chèche' before you set out from Erfoud); personal toiletries; long trousers (dromedary ride); camera and Ziploc bags for your sensitive lenses; sunglasses, sunscreen and swimming costume (seasonal). For those who wear contact lenses, it could be a good idea to bring along a spare pair of glasses.

