

MOROCCO'S IMPERIAL CITIES, HIGH ATLAS MOUNTAINS & SOUTHERN SYMPHONY

OBTIC09cec **9DAYS/8 MAGICAL NIGHTS**. CASABLANCA/RABAT-MEKNES-VOLUBILIS-MOULAY IDRISSE-FES-ERFOUD-ERG CHEBBI-MERZOUGA/ERFOUD-TINEHRIR-TODRA GORGES-BOUMALNE DU DADES-DADES GORGES-Q'LAAT DES M'GOUNA-OUARAZATE-/MARRAKECH-OURIKA VALLEY-MARRAKECH (CASABLANCA).

DAY 1: CASABLANCA . You will be met on arrival Casablanca airport by your English-speaking National Guide. Perhaps a late drink at Rick's Café (www.rickscafe.ma) - "Casablanca" without 'Rick Baines', Ingrid Bergman, Clause Rains and Peter Laurie? Subject to the actual time of arrival of your flight, in the afternoon we may visit part of tomorrow's tour of this the largest city in Africa after Cairo.

DAY 2: CASABLANCA - RABAT - MEKNES - VOLUBILIS - MOULAY IDRISSE - FES: After breakfast we shall now set for a tour of



this bustling metropolis to visit the exterior of the Dar el Makhzen, or King's Palace, with its magnificent doors, the New Medina - or Habous area - designed by French architects in the 1930s to resolve a housing crisis and create a modern, twentieth century Kasbah - here perhaps to stroll through the reasonably-modern (1923) souk and on past the Pasha's Mahakma Court of Islamic Law. We continue on to 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 Earth - 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. On now 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. We leave Casablanca on a 1½ hours' drive to 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). We start



our tour with a 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 Cartaginians, 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 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 modelled 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. You will enjoy the view over the Bou Regreg river and the one-time lair of famed Moroccan corsairs of the Barbary Coast at the Salé Fortress; 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 Dolittle - 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 set out alongside a forest of cork-oak to the Imperial City of Meknes (whose Medina is a UNESCO World Heritage Site). Here we shall visit the easily most beautiful Bab, or gateway, in all of the Maghreb - the Bab Mansour. From here to the El Heri es-Souani - the granary of huge vaulted structures and stables built by 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 Moulay Ismail Mausoleum and the Place el-Hedim. We leave Meknes for 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 Cortège 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 to lunch overlooking the ruins to drive alongside the dark, outlying ridges of the Zerhoun Hills to stop for a visit of the town of Moulay Idriss, the holiest Islamic town in the kingdom of Morocco, where thousands of Moroccan faithful come on pilgrimage (*moussem*) every August to pray at the tomb of this descendant of the Prophet Mohammed. Arriving at the elongated square we see above us the green-tiled pyramids of the Zaouiat with its two conical quarters on either side and stroll amidst the labyrinth of alleyways before leaving for the Imperial City of Fes and your riad to rest up for a while before going out to the delightful Riad Dar Anebar for dinner where you'll doubtless be exchanging impressions of this day full of contrasting culture and journey into some 1,200 years of history. Today's journey will be all of 8 hours including visits. **BLD.**



DAY 3: 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 *fa* (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 and amazing 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 to arrive back at your riad where you might like to dine out (optional) at the splendid restaurant of the Riad Al Andalous. **BL.**

DAY 4: FES - AZROU - MIDDLE ATLAS MOUNTAINS - MIDELT - HIGH ATLAS MOUNTAINS - ZIZ GORGES -er RACHIDYA -



ERFOUD - MERZOUGA - ERG CHEBBI: After breakfast we now set off south to the Sahara, This will be all of an 8 hours' drive, with en-route "comfort stops", lunch (optional) in Midelt and many photo-op opportunities provided by 4 different, dramatic countrysides. After some 30 minutes, we arrive at the small 1920s French-built hill station of Immouzèr Du Kandar (1220m). Here we may pause for ten minutes by the kasbah for a look at the little Medina and take in the pleasant Saiss Plateau and now-distant Fes, continuing on 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. We now drive through 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 - was for a long time a strategic settlement established to effect some form of control of the independent mountain Berber peoples. We continue on now through the Cedar Forests of the Middle Atlas Mountains, perchance to feed some of the resident Barbary Apes, to emerge at the Oued Gigou Valley and on now through the Tizi n'Zad (2178m). Down now through a bleak plain of scrub and desert to the Berber mountain town of Midelt, where we may want to stop for a light lunch at the El Ayachi 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. Our route takes us on through striking countryside, marking the change from mountains to desert. This region was once notorious for raids on caravans by the nomadic Ait Haddidou tribe, who were not pacified, with great difficulty, by the French until the mid-1930s. Now on through a lower Pass (Tizi) of the High Atlas Mountains - the Pass of the She-Camel - Tizi n'Talrehmt (1907m), on across a deserted plain through the town of Ait Messaoud, passing a French Foreign Legion fort with all the reminders of *Beau Geste* and then to the first southern ksar of Ait Kherrou, a river palmeraie (oasis) at the entrance to a small gorge. From here on in, ksours start to dot the countryside as we carry on down alongside the River Ziz (the Berber name meaning Gazelle). On now through the town of Rich, once an important fort during the era of the French Protectorate, on and through the Tunnel Du Légionnaire, built by the French to have ease of rapid access to the rebellious southern tribe of the Ait

Atta, to have appear before us a 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 close to the Barrage (Dam) Hassan Addakhil to continue 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. Onwards still through the small palm grove at Meski, watered by a natural spring - the famous picture postcard image of La Source Bleue - and the final sector of the Oued Ziz. We cross an arid reddish belt of desert to drop, suddenly, into the valley and the Tizimi Palmeraie (Oasis) to arrive around 4pm at the French-built town of Erfoud which will give you your first impression of the over-powering proximity of the Sahara and the surrounding dunes. Here, at the Hotel Tizimi, we set out on our hours' drive in our air-conditioned 4WD towards the south, crossing the Oued Ziz, first along an asphalt road for some 16km, then another 35km of sandy piste trails carved out of the sandy crust by motorbikes and other adventurous vehicles to the tiny desert town of Merzouga in an enormous palmeraie. We shall see, in a dramatic line almost perfectly from north to south, the incredible panorama of the sea of sand dunes of the Erg Chebbi, the highest and longest stretch of dunes in the Moroccan Sahara. Once we've arrived at Merzouga, we alight to enjoy a traditional welcoming glass, or two, of mint tea at the Auberge Du Sud whilst your baggage is being loaded onto the pack animals. At around 4pm we set off, one person per dromedary, for some 2 hours across this sea of golden dunes for some 7kms into the only 'true' desert area of the kingdom of Morocco and an area where meteorites continue to be found, as were crocodile teeth, shark, pterosaur and spinosaurus fossils. We stop in the middle of nowhere to witness, from the high dunes, Nature's incredible light show of sunset over ever-changing colours of dunes, to continue on under the star-filled heavens to our bivouac site of a carpeted Berber tent in a small oasis. First things first, a glass of mint tea once our packs are being unloaded. You'll need to stretch your limbs after your ride on your ship of the desert and one of the best ways is to clamber up to the top of the dunes to enjoy a magnificent panorama. You need to be a bit fit, but the slide down is oh so much easier! Our tagine dinner has been prepared and, after dessert, tea or coffee, we sing and chat to our heart's content around the camp fire, accompanied by musicians and a dancer - more limbering up - and welcome. **BLD.**



Atta, to have appear before us a 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 close to the Barrage (Dam) Hassan Addakhil to continue 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. Onwards still through the small palm grove at Meski, watered by a natural spring - the famous picture postcard image of La Source Bleue - and the final sector of the Oued Ziz. We cross an arid reddish belt of desert to drop, suddenly, into the valley and the Tizimi Palmeraie (Oasis) to arrive around 4pm at the French-built town of Erfoud which will give you your first impression of the over-powering proximity of the Sahara and the surrounding dunes. Here, at the Hotel Tizimi, we set out on our hours' drive in our air-conditioned 4WD towards the south, crossing the Oued Ziz, first along an asphalt road for some 16km, then another 35km of sandy piste trails carved out of the sandy crust by motorbikes and other adventurous vehicles to the tiny desert town of Merzouga in an enormous palmeraie. We shall see, in a dramatic line almost perfectly from north to south, the incredible panorama of the sea of sand dunes of the Erg Chebbi, the highest and longest stretch of dunes in the Moroccan Sahara. Once we've arrived at Merzouga, we alight to enjoy a traditional welcoming glass, or two, of mint tea at the Auberge Du Sud whilst your baggage is being loaded onto the pack animals. At around 4pm we set off, one person per dromedary, for some 2 hours across this sea of golden dunes for some 7kms into the only 'true' desert area of the kingdom of Morocco and an area where meteorites continue to be found, as were crocodile teeth, shark, pterosaur and spinosaurus fossils. We stop in the middle of nowhere to witness, from the high dunes, Nature's incredible light show of sunset over ever-changing colours of dunes, to continue on under the star-filled heavens to our bivouac site of a carpeted Berber tent in a small oasis. First things first, a glass of mint tea once our packs are being unloaded. You'll need to stretch your limbs after your ride on your ship of the desert and one of the best ways is to clamber up to the top of the dunes to enjoy a magnificent panorama. You need to be a bit fit, but the slide down is oh so much easier! Our tagine dinner has been prepared and, after dessert, tea or coffee, we sing and chat to our heart's content around the camp

fire, accompanied by musicians and a dancer - more limbering up - and welcome. **BLD.**



We stop in the middle of nowhere to witness, from the high dunes, Nature's incredible light show of sunset over ever-changing colours of dunes, to continue on under the star-filled heavens to our bivouac site of a carpeted Berber tent in a small oasis. First things first, a glass of mint tea once our packs are being unloaded. You'll need to stretch your limbs after your ride on your ship of the desert and one of the best ways is to clamber up to the top of the dunes to enjoy a magnificent panorama. You need to be a bit fit, but the slide down is oh so much easier! Our tagine dinner has been prepared and, after dessert, tea or coffee, we sing and chat to our heart's content around the camp



We stop in the middle of nowhere to witness, from the high dunes, Nature's incredible light show of sunset over ever-changing colours of dunes, to continue on under the star-filled heavens to our bivouac site of a carpeted Berber tent in a small oasis. First things first, a glass of mint tea once our packs are being unloaded. You'll need to stretch your limbs after your ride on your ship of the desert and one of the best ways is to clamber up to the top of the dunes to enjoy a magnificent panorama. You need to be a bit fit, but the slide down is oh so much easier! Our tagine dinner has been prepared and, after dessert, tea or coffee, we sing and chat to our heart's content around the camp

fire, accompanied by musicians and a dancer - more limbering up - and welcome. **BLD.**

DAY 5: ERG CHEBBI - MERZOUGA - ERFOUD - VALLEY OF 1000 KASBAHS - TINEHRIR - TODRA GORGES - BOUMALNE DU DADES - DADES GORGES - Q'LAAT DES M'GOUNA - KASBAH AMERHIDL - OUARZAZATE: Our last brilliant sunrise, equal almost to last night's 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 for our final Méharée of some 2 hours to the Auberge Du Sud, where we'll take a shower before boarding our 4WD and our drive back to Erfoud and our original starting point at the Hotel Tizimi. We now set off on a long drive westwards via the oasis town of Tinejdad into the Valley of 1000 Kasbahs to the small town of Tinehrir, located at the mouth of the fabulous Todra Gorges, overlooked by a Glaoua Kasbah and which town boasts of the oldest Jewish cemetery in Morocco. Now we set out up the Oued Todra for some 15km into to the deepest, narrowest and most spectacular part of these further wonders of Mother Nature. We return to the mouth of the Gorge to take lunch at the French-owned restaurant Chez Michele, thence to continue now ever-further west along the Route of 1000 Kasbahs to the small town of Boumalne Du Dadès situated at the mouth of the Dadès Gorge. Here we venture up between the wide, high limestone cliffs with their strangely-shaped erosions and green vegetation, ksours, kasbahs and pisé houses ranging in colours from dark red to greenish black and startling lime-white, passing the Pacha Glaoui's kasbah at Ait Youl as far as a group of ksours at Ait Arbi built against a volcanic twist in the rocks. We continue westwards via Qlâa't Des M'Gouna (Citadel of the M'Gouna Tribe) where thousands of small, pink Damascene roses, first planted by French settlers, are grown to make the rose oil essence - "Eau de Rose" - so beloved of the Berber people, on through to the Kasbahs at Skoura and the living museum of Amerhidl before carrying on, after a total of around 170km, to the new (1920s) once-garrison town of the French Protectorate - Ouarzazate - at the crossroads of the Dadès and Draâ Valleys, set between the High Atlas Mountains and the start of the Sahara region of oases and sand - for our dinner and overnight accommodation at your hotel . This is all of a 6 hours' drive, including the two gorges and photo-op stops. BLD.



at Ait Youl as far as a group of ksours at Ait Arbi built against a volcanic twist in the rocks. We continue westwards via Qlâa't Des M'Gouna (Citadel of the M'Gouna Tribe) where thousands of small, pink Damascene roses, first planted by French settlers, are grown to make the rose oil essence - "Eau de Rose" - so beloved of the Berber people, on through to the Kasbahs at Skoura and the living museum of Amerhidl before carrying on, after a total of around 170km, to the new (1920s) once-garrison town of the French Protectorate - Ouarzazate - at the crossroads of the Dadès and Draâ Valleys, set between the High Atlas Mountains and the start of the Sahara region of oases and sand - for our dinner and overnight accommodation at your hotel . This is all of a 6 hours' drive, including the two gorges and photo-op stops. BLD.

DAY 6: OUARZAZATE - AÏT BEN HADDOU - MARRAKECH: Refreshed, breakfasted and raring to go, we now set forth to visit the 18th century Kasbah of Taourirt in Ouarzazate, another of the Pacha's fortresses and on towards the north alongside the Oued Ouarzazate via the Assif Ounila Valley to the Kasbah at Tiffoultoute and the magnificently exotic Kasbah and Ksour of Aït Ben Haddou, declared, and rightly so, a World Heritage Site. Here we alight from our vehicle to visit these various 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, once home to the Pasha's employees, controlled the route to Marrakech until the French blasted a road through the Tizi n'Tichka in the late 1920s. From here set off up into the High Atlas Mountains and the exhilarating hairpin bends to alight at the top of the Tizi n'Tichka (2260m) where we may stop for a photo-op with a vista dominated by peaks of some 2500+m. Onwards, now, via Aït Ourir Taddert (1650m) and down across the Glaoua Plains to our hotel in Marrakech. This has been a 4 hours' drive so, later in the afternoon after check-in, we shall go for a ride in a calèche around the magnificent ramparts, quite the best introduction to the Pink City, to the Majorelle Gardens and Museum of Islamic Art of recently-deceased fashion icon Yves Saint Laurent, thence on down via the dramatic Koutoubia Minaret and mosque (no entry for non-believers) and into the Medina and the famous Djmaâ el Fnaâ Square with



its famed stalls of goods, from exotic 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 and back to your hotel or riad. B.

DAY 7: MARRAKECH. This morning after breakfast and at an agreed time we shall perhaps have a go at shopping, perhaps take a delightfully-relaxing massage and treatment at Les Bains De Marrakech (www.lesbainsdemarrakech.com) (pre-reservation required), or go as you please with your driver and personal guide, to take lunch in the Restaurant El Baraka overlooking the Square. After lunch we'll enter the Kasbah to visit the lavishly-decorated Saâdien Tombs - some 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 Dar el 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 into the Medina to the 14th century 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, it is 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 Art and 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 or riad, you may either lounge around in the late afternoon or decide to venture further into the bustle of this cosmopolitan city. B.

DAY 8: MARRAKECH - OURIKA VALLEY - MARRAKECH. After breakfast, we shall make a 90 minute excursion south to the beautiful Ourika Valley in those High Atlas Mountains you can see from your hotel or riad, whose stream meanders through orchards, ancient terraced fields, gardens and small pisé (adobe) villages clawed from the mountain sides by the independent Berber tribesmen. We shall continue on up to the last trailhead village in the valley - Setti Fadma. On returning to Marrakech, we shall stop halfway back down the valley at the hamlet of Aghbalou to take lunch at the restaurant Ramuntcho overlooking the oued (river) with the remainder of afternoon at leisure. Your driver and guide will be at your disposition. BL.



DAY 9: MARRAKECH - HOME: At the agreed hour you will be transferred to either the airport in Marrakech or in Casablanca in time for your flight home, taking with you some certainly incredible memories of our 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 you 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 hotel/riads or similar as required and as *available at time of reservation* - including relevant taxes. Meals as detailed or as required by your market needs. Porterage on 1 piece of luggage per person in/out airports & hotels/riads. Private transportation in an air-conditioned vehicle from Casablanca to Marrakech or Casablanca. Sightseeing tours, including one by calèche in Marrakech, a dromedary ride to the overnight Sahara bivouac and all related entrance fees as listed in the itinerary. An English-speaking Licensed National Guide throughout the tour. Bottled water en-route. Medical and Accident Insurance.

OUR PRICES WILL NOT INCLUDE: Gratuities to waiters, guide 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.

