

MAGICAL, MYSTERIOUS MOROCCO UNVEILED

OBTIC10cec **10 DAYS/9 MAGICAL NIGHTS.** CASABLANCA-RABAT/- MEKNES -VOLUBILIS- MOULAY IDRIS-FES/-ERFOUD-ERG CHEBBI/MERZOUGA-ERFOUD-TINEHRIR-TODRA GORGES-BOUMALNE DU DADES-DADES GORGES-Q'LAAT DES M'GOUNA-KASBAHS SKOURA-OUARZAZATE/MARRAKECH.

DAY 1: **CASABLANCA-RABAT:** You will be met on arrival at Casablanca's airport from your flight by your English-speaking



National Guide and, after clearing Immigration and Customs we shall leave for an hour's 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). Sightseeing here will start 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 Carthaginians, in the days of Solomon, to purchase gold. On now to the **Archaeological Museum**. Built in 1932 and enlarged a few years later to display the finds resulting from intense archaeological research, this museum has housed the National Museum collections since 1986. It is one of the most sumptuous in Morocco and should certainly not be missed. The prehistoric section brings together human remains from the middle Palaeolithic period (probably Neanderthals) to the Neolithic (4000 B.C.), proving the continuity and size of the population at this time. The Islamic archaeology section is constantly growing with finds coming from the excavations of

VIIIth and IXth century sites, enabling us to have a clear idea of their potters, herdsmen, surgeons and bakers who have left us the legacy of their tools, while their womenfolk have left us their jewellery and the animals their harnesses. There is a collection of superb bronzes recovered from the excavations at Volubilis, the Romano-Berber capital of Mauritania Tingitana. When Rome ordered the evacuation of Volubilis in the third century, the citizens, expecting to return shortly, buried their works of art outside the city, where they were to remain undisturbed for 17 centuries. These pieces are kept apart in the Salle des Bronzes. Pre-Roman and Roman civilisations are particularly well-represented by some of the finest pieces to have survived from those periods. There is a first-rate collection of Hellenistic-style bronzes, so exceptional that it is difficult to know where to look first: the "Drunken Donkey", passionately lyrical, an incomparable masterpiece from the time of the Emperor Augustus; the "Volubilis Guard-Dog" (centre-piece of a fountain) with its stunning realism, the "Young man Crowned With Ivy", a marvel of elegance and grace; the Rider and the busts presumed to be those of Cato the Younger and the young King Juba II of Mauritania



Tingitana - the "Heads of Young Berbers" in marble, remarkable for their technical perfection and the vigorous strength of their expression. 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 modeled on the minaret of another one of Jabir's designs, the Koutoubia Mosque in Marrakech. From here we shall proceed into the ancient Medina at the heart of the military history of Rabat - historical sources attest to a continued presence here of a Jewish community since 1492 after their expulsion by the Catholic Kings and the subsequent Inquisition - located in the Al Buhaira Quarter until the establishment of the Mellah in 1807. Here we enter the **Kasbah of the Oudayas and Museum** whose alleyways are reminiscent of a delightful blue and whitewashed Andalusian village (blue being the colour of Judaism). 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 corsair raiders. The museum is situated in the opulent lodge built by Sultan Moulay Ismail in the XVIIth century as his Rabat residence. This spectacular lodge is known for its breathtaking garden, the first of its masterpieces, that is a maze of pathways, surrounded by lush vegetation, endless beds of vibrant flowers which soften the strict geometry of those paths, together with beautiful ramparts and fountains making it amongst the very finest of all Andalusian gardens.



Over and above the immaculate gardens that attract many visitors each year, the museum building itself is an awesome sight. Its spacious rooms and ancient interior, which is decorated in true Moroccan fashion, instill an atmosphere of royalty, wealth and absolute luxury. From marble halls, priceless carpets, works of art and unmistakable elegance, the Oudayas Museum is a gateway into the past and the rich hypnotic history of Morocco. At the far end is a room reproducing an ancient Moroccan interior with a vast bay opening onto this glorious spectacle with its magnificent use of colours finished off with beautiful cushions in brocade, silk and gold cover the divans all around the room. A little further on, in a cool



marble room, stand rows of very old illuminated Korans, jewellery, pottery and musical instruments. The carpets exhibited here are not just woven masterpieces, but extraordinary feats of meticulous stitching and detailed work. A true Rabat carpet can have more than 150 thousand stitches to just one square metre. The motifs and patterns found on these carpets are traditional and often refer to the specific craftsman; styles and techniques used to produce these rare carpets being unique to Morocco. Using a less elaborate technique, the rural carpets, called Berbers, demonstrate a powerful sense of composition, colour and ornamentation which is an art of its own with a unique appeal. You may also view the market place, furniture displays, diamond cutting exhibitions, statues, sculptures,

textiles, fabrics, metalworking (with both silver and gold) exhibits, decorative arts and displays of costumes. We break for a light lunch in the Restaurant Borj Eddar overlooking the estuary of the Bou Regreg river, its bay being 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 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 turn to our delightful accommodation for this night. BLD.

DAY 2: RABAT - MEKNES - VOLUBILIS - MOULAY IDRIS - FES: After breakfast we shall now 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 - once accommodating the Sultan's 20,000 Arabo-Berber 'Barb' horses - 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 Christians' Prison, the splendid Moulay Ismail Mausoleum and the Place el-Hedim



Time for lunch before leaving 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 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 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 hotel or riad for a well-earned rest. 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 Fes Medina and Mellah (a UNESCO World Heritage Site); of the Bou Inania Mosque and the Maimonides' clock; of the Jewish cemetery and the Synagogues of Ben Saâdoun & Aben Danan; of the colourful es-Sabbaghine with its Street of the Dyers; of the brass 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 hotel or riad after a day full of contrasting culture and journey into some 1,200 years of history. BLD.

DAY 4: FES - AZROU - MIDELT - ZIZ GORGES - ER-RACHIDYA - ERFOUD - MERZOUGA: After breakfast we now set off south



to the Sahara, This will be all of a 6½ hour drive, with "comfort stops" and many photo-op opportunities. After some 30 minutes, we arrive at the small 1920s French-built hill station of Immouzèr Du Kandar (1220m). Here we may pause for a few 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 - which in the local Tamazight (Berber) dialect means "caves" - 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, perchance to feed some of the resident Barbary Apes, to emerge at the Oued Gigou Valley and on 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'll 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 - 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, ksour start to dot the countryside as we carry on down alongside the River Ziz (a 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 and the French-built town of Erfoud which will give you your first impression of the over-powering proximity of the Sahara.



We change here to a 4WD for our final stretch is to Merzouga where we stop to change our 4 wheels for the 4 legs of our ships of the desert - one person per beast- for some 2 hours ride across a sea of golden dunes. This is 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 arrive at our carpeted Berber Nomadic camp where, first things first, a welcoming glass of mint tea whilst our packs are being unloaded. You'll need to stretch your limbs after your ride and one of the best ways is to clamber up to the top of the dunes to enjoy a magnificent panorama to witness Nature's incredible light show of sunset over ever-changing colours of dunes. You need to be a bit fit, but the slide down is oh so much easier! After a shower and our tagine dinner, 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 - TINERHRIR - BOUMALNE DU DADES - DADES GORGE - Q'LAAT DES M'GOUNA - SKOURA KASBAHS - 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 to the Auberge Du Sud, where we'll take a shower before boarding our 4WD and our drive back to Erfoud to now set off on a delightful drive westwards across the Marrah Plain passing the oases of Jorf and Mellab to Tinejdad with the low-lying Jbel Ougnat as a backdrop and on to the small town of Tinerhrir, 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. Returning back to Tinehrir we stop at the French-owned Restaurant Chez Michel for a light lunch. 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 Glaoua kasbah at Ait Youl as far as a group of ksours at Ait Arbi built against a volcanic twist in the rocks. We return to the mouth of the Gorge before continuing westwards via 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, on through to the Kasbahs at Skoura and, perchance, 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 - which was, in the late 1980s, a bit of a tourist boom town - for our dinner and overnight accommodation at your hotel or riad. BLD.

DAY 6: OUARZAZATE - KASBAHS TAOURIRT & AÏT BEN HADDOU - MARRAKECH: Refreshed, a late breakfast and raring to go, after paying a visit to the nearby kasbah Taourirt of the former caid (meaning "master" or "leader,") and later the possession of El Haj T'hami el Mezouari el Glaoui (1879-1956), the last ruling family of the south (the 'Lord of the Atlas') and a strong contender for control over Morocco who had this palace built in Ouarzazate - but never lived there. Once Pasha of Marrakech from 1912 to 1956, he allied himself to the French in Morocco during the Protectorate and conspired with them in the overthrow of the king Sultan Mohammed V, grandfather of the actual king of Morocco. Until the second half of the 20th century, Moroccan society was in a state of feudalism very close to that which pertained in Europe during medieval times. At the top was the sultan, who held the two positions of king (temporal ruler) and imam (spiritual leader). His court, or central government (Makhzen), was headed by a Grand Vizier. The next tier of government was provided by a large number of Pashas (from the Persian *padshah*, literally: Viceroy and caïds (the equivalent of European dukes, barons etc) whose responsibilities were to collect taxes and keep order, to which ends they often kept private armies. Under them were the mass of ordinary commoners whose responsibilities were to pay taxes, obey their local master and provide him with troops when necessary. In the autumn of 1893, the then ruling Sultan Moulay Hassan and his army were crossing the High Atlas Mountains after a tax-gathering expedition when they were caught in a blizzard. They were rescued by Si Madani and T'hami and the grateful Sultan bestowed on Si Madani *caïdats* from Tafilalet to the Souss Valleys. In addition, he presented the Glaoua arsenal with a working 77-mm Krupp cannon, the only such weapon in Morocco outside the imperial army, which the Glaoua army used to subdue rival warlords and which is located still outside the kasbah's walls. We now set forth towards the north alongside the Oued Ouarzazate via the Assif Ounila Valley to the magnificently exotic Kasbah and Ksour of Ait 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 controlled the route to Marrakech until the French blasted a road through the Tizi n'Tichka in the late 1920s. We shall take a light lunch at the Riad Dar Mouna on the opposite side of the oued offering a magnificent view of the kasbah and surrounding area before continuing on up into the High Atlas Mountains and the exhilarating hairpin bends to alight at the top of the Tizi n'Tichka (2260m) with a vista dominated by peaks of some 2500+m. Onwards, now, via Ait Ourir Taddert (1650m) and down across the Glaoua Plains to our hotel in Marrakech. BL.



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Your guide will certainly be able to recommend and take you to and from any number of International or Moroccan restaurants in which you could dine on any of the evenings you stay here.

DAY 7: MARRAKECH. After breakfast we shall go for a ride in a calèche 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 retreat with a stunning home, spacious work studio, and vast garden in which he could indulge his botanical interest by growing plants and trees from around the world. Majorelle's passion for Morocco - especially the south - became evident in his paintings. Later travels to Sudan, Guinea, Niger, Senegal and the Ivory Coast were also to influence his work. Although Majorelle opened his property to visitors in 1947, the garden began to deteriorate following his death in 1962. Restoration of the Majorelle Garden began after Yves Saint Laurent and his partner Pierre Bergé purchased Majorelle's former home in 1980. The house itself is not open to the public. Partially hidden by the foliage of trees, its majestic architecture can be seen from certain vantage points in the garden. Further improvements were made in 2000, including an irrigation system



which reduced water costs by 40 percent. Today, the grounds of the Garden are beautifully maintained and create an atmosphere of lush tranquillity. Winding walkways, quaint bridges, gurgling fountains, and shady gazebos add to the landscape. Home to hundreds of exotic plant and tree specimens brought from five continents, these include cactuses, bamboos, palms, blooming potted plants, and aquatic plants. Bird lovers will appreciate seeing the many species of local birds which inhabit the garden amongst which you may spot Pied Wagtails, Kestrels, Storks, Collared Flycatchers and more. The green roofed building that gets most of the attention, however, is the bright cobalt blue (referred to as *bleu Majorelle*) and yellow building that Majorelle used as a studio workshop from 1931 now houses the Museum of Islamic Art. The same cobalt blue -- is used with bright yellow to add colour and contrast throughout the garden. This small museum houses a tasteful collection of Islamic art,



good examples of Moroccan tribal art - some hundreds of years old - textiles, weapons, carpets from all over North Africa, jewellery, furniture. Some of Jacques Majorelle's art work and engravings of local scenes in Morocco is also on display. There are also exhibitions of marriage curtains and fabrics, embroideries, manuscripts and many other masterpieces. On now down into the Medina to the dramatic Almohad Koutoubia Mosque (entrance to the Mosque is prohibited to non-Muslims), one of the major architectural triumphs of the Almohades, the 12th century dynasty responsible for one of the worst periods of Jewish persecution. The Koutoubia Mosque is the tallest mosque in Marrakech, its construction decided in 1158 by the Almohad Sultan Abdel Moumen soon after his conquest of

Marrakech, occupying the square of a former Almohavid palace whose mosque was destroyed, supposedly as it did not face Mecca. Completed in 1199 with the construction of its famous minaret ordered by the Sultan's grandson, the Caliph Yacoub el-Mansour who died the same year, this minaret (from the Arabic word *menara* or lighthouse) was later used as model for Giralda of Seville then for the Hassan Tower of Rabat. The main function of the minaret was to provide a vantage point from which the muezzin can call out the *adhan*, calling the faithful to prayer. In most Mosques these days, the *adhan* is called not from the minaret, but in the *musallah*, or Prayer Hall, via a microphone and speaker system, the role of the minaret is now largely for traditional and decorative purposes. A jewel of Hispano-Moresque art made up of 16 outlying naves and one larger central nave, its name is derived from the Arabic *al-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 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 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 I-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 Saïd Museum**. Formally a palace originally built by Mehdi Mnebbi (1894-1908), Moroccan ambassador to London, it was then bought by T'hami el Glaoui, the famous Pasha of Marrakech and 'Lord of the Atlas' during the French Protectorate. Restored in 1997, it houses both traditional and contemporary exhibitions of Moroccan arts and sculpture - the very quintessence of Moroccan art. The building is the work of Si Saïd, a half-brother of grand vizier Bou Ahmed who expanded the Bahia Palace. In fact, Dar Si Saïd is a smaller version of that Palace, with finer and more impressive decoration. On the ground floor you can find clothes, objects in beaten copper, beautifully decorated weapons, skilfully crafted traditional silver Berber jewellery from the southern Anti Atlas region, oil lamps and carvings in the special Tarouddant soft stone. Splendours from the past? Not at all, for many of the objects on display are still used and worn in mountain areas. Fountains sculpted from pink marble decorate the tiled courtyards that are accented by the turquoise, greens and whites of the mosaic designs. The most important exhibit in the Museum is a marble basin dating back to the 10th century, brought to Marrakech from Cordoba by the Almohad Sultan Ali Ben Youssef. The first floor salon impresses with its Hispano Moorish decoration and elegant furniture in cedar wood. 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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**.

DAY 8: MARRAKECH - CASABLANCA: After breakfast, and at an agreed time, we shall set off back north to Casablanca, the



largest city in Africa after Cairo. On arrival we enter 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 shall continue on alongside the Atlantic Ocean via the Corniche to the El Hank Lighthouse and take lunch over looking the Ocean before setting out to enter the nearby amazingly-beautiful Hassan II Mosque (interior visit not permitted on Fridays), the second largest mosque in the Islamic world after the Masjid al-Hamra in Mecca. On Fridays, we may only pay a visit to admire the exterior's magnificence. 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 to via the Mohammed V Square to the ever-busy United Nations Square where, under the walls of the old Medina at the beginning of the 20th century, there was but an empty space where the souk was held. It very quickly became the heart of the modern town. Our hotel is but a few yards away and you may like to stroll back here for some shopping and hone your bargaining skills. You might just like to take a drink at Rick's Café (www.rickscafe.ma) - all without 'Rick Blaine' Humphrey Bogart, Ingrid Bergman, Peter Lorre and Claude Rains - before venturing out for a dinner in one of Casablanca's many International restaurants. **BL**.



DAY 9: CASABLANCA: After breakfast, we shall continue our tour of Casablanca by visiting the bustling Central Market of



spices, flowers, vegetables, fruit, meat, fish, brassware and the ever-present Berber carpets, thence on down to visit the exterior of the Dar el Makhzen, or King's Palace, with its magnificent doors; the delightful New Medina - or Habbous area - designed by French architects in the 1930s to resolve a housing crisis and create a modern, twentieth century Kasbah - here to stroll through the reasonably-modern (1923) souk and on past the Pasha's Mahakma Court of Islamic Law to the Cathedral of Notre Dame de Lourdes and back to our hotel for an afternoon at leisure, or perhaps you'd like to stroll around the hotel precinct, or make a dash for the nearby old Medina and Souq for some last-minute shopping - again. Your driver and guide are here to assist. **B**.

DAY 10: CASABLANCA - HOME: At the agreed hour you will be transferred Casablanca's Mohammed V International airport 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)

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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 hotels/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 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, driver, camp headman and cameleer. 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.

