

# MOROCCO - A RIOT OF COLOUR, FANTASY AND MYSTIQUE

OBTIC13cec **11 DAYS/10 MAGICAL NIGHTS.** CASABLANCA-RABAT-FES/MEKNES-VOLUBILIS-MOULAY IDRISSE-FES/ERFOUD-MERZOUGA/TINEHRIR - TODRA GORGES - BOUMALNE DU DADES - DADES GORGES - Q'LAAT DES M'GOUNA - KASBAHS OF SKOURA/ZAGORA/OUARZAZATE - KASBAHS AIT BEN HADDOU, TIFFOULTOUTE & TAOURIRT/MARRAKECH - AIT MIZENE VALLEY - MARRAKECH/CASABLANCA

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



National Guide and, depending on your time of arrival, after clearing Immigration and Customs we shall leave for 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 continue along the Corniche 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 30<sup>th</sup> 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 m<sup>2</sup> of carved cedar wood; 67,000 m<sup>2</sup> of plasterwork and some 10,000 m<sup>2</sup> 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. We leave Casablanca behind for 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 12<sup>th</sup> century (R'bat meaning fortified convent). Our sightseeing tour begins 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 5<sup>th</sup> century, thence to fall into ruins to be transformed, late in the 14<sup>th</sup> 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 12<sup>th</sup> 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 as we take lunch overlooking 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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. We cross the now turn eastwards to Fes and to our accommodation and dinner in your hotel or riad. BLD.

DAY 2: FES: Fes, the city that was once, after Mecca and Medina, held as one of the holiest cities of the Islamic world; the city whose merchants were travelling to China in the 15th century; the city that, least in importance, gave its name to the red cylindrical, brimless hat used over most of the Moslem world. Moroccans say that Marrakech, Rabat and Casablanca live in the present, but that Fes definitely lives in the past. It should come as no surprise. European chroniclers of the Middle Ages wrote with awe of the city that for several centuries was the most civilized Western outpost of the Semitic world. Its scholars introduced astronomy and medicine to the West via Spain when it was under Moorish rule. Historians of the time said that Plato and Aristotle first reached Western Europe in Arabic translations - from Fes. Welcome to a different world. With its two hundred mosques and holy shrines, Fes contains more places of worship than any other Moroccan city. At its peak, early in the thirteenth century, Fes el-Bali alone boasted almost eight hundred mosques and mausoleums for its 125,000 inhabitants.



When you awaken to the call of the moaddin from the beautiful, towering Bou Inania Mosque, the sun rising in all its splendour over ancient ramparts set against a magnificent backdrop of the not-too-distant Middle Atlas Mountains, you'll know a different kind of day has begun; one that doubtless will be filled with our professionally guided visit to the bustling maze of alleyways of the Medina and souqs, offering every possible variation of beautiful pottery, Berber carpet, Fassi brassware, Jewish originated silverware, traditional and modern jewellery, leather and wrought iron, all amidst the pungent aromas of spices, herbs and oils. Take in with us the many ancient living monuments and modern museums this city of a Thousand and One Nights has to offer you as a serious tourist.



Is it Fes or Fez? It is both, and neither. The Western name for the city is drawn from the Arabic *Fas*, and there is no one correct way to transliterate Arabic words into Western characters. In the French language, the city is referred to as "Fès", while Americans tend to use "Fez". Fassin, or Fassis, as the residents are called, themselves use "Fas", so derived from three Arabic letters: - *fa* (f) *alif* (a) and *sin* (s). As soon as you are ready, we shall make for the impressive Dar el Makhzen to make 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. A *Mellah*, in Morocco coming from the Arabic word *melh*, or salt, literally means the place where salt is prepared or sold. After a riot here, the Sultan obliged most residents to leave and gradually the place became inhabited only by Jewish refugees, enticed by tax incentives. A Mellah is thus now the Jewish section of a town, once usually with

a gate that would be closed by the gatekeeper at sunset and during the Sabbath. One positive aspect of a Mellah is that it becomes a walled enclave preserving a Jewish way of life, especially on the Sabbath, a kind of ghetto where Jews were only allowed to appear in public in black and were forbidden to have any footwear. The women were shut-ins; the men had menial, degrading jobs such as draining and salting the heads of rebels and criminals before they were spiked and displayed from the ramparts. It's a perverse take on the Jewish holy deed, the mitzvah, of sacrificing animals during the time of the Temple. The men countered that humiliation by changing into white clothing at home, homage to the purity of the Temple. The Mellah of Fes, believed to be the earliest in Morocco, located in the El-Yehoudi Quarter near the Palais Jamaï, was once a typical enclave of small family run businesses, a once-Jewish specialty of goldsmith workshops, synagogues and Talmudic Schools. We now drive to the Borj Sud, here to take in the panoramic view of the Medina. Off now down to start a stroll through the labyrinth of the ancient Fes Medina (a UNESCO World Heritage Site); of the remarkable Medersa Bou Inania; of the colourful es-Sebbaghine with its Street of the Dyers; of the brass workers at es-Seffarine; 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. We shall break for lunch nearby before setting out for the renowned Tanneries on the bank of the Oued Fes to leave the Medina from the Bab Boujloud, and tour the magnificent ramparts with its beautiful 'Babs' as we make our way to the 16<sup>th</sup> century Saâdien watchtower at the North Borj to arrive back at our hotel or riad, perhaps to shower and rest up for a while before leaving for dinner at the Riad Dar Andalous where you'll doubtless be exchanging impressions of this day full of contrasting culture and journey into some 1,200 years of history. BLD.

DAY 3: FES-MEKNES-MOULAY IDRIS-VOLUBILIS-FES: Today we continue with a guided tour to the Imperial City of Meknes (a UNESCO World Heritage Site). 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 King Moulay Ismail. This, one of our 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 among olive groves around Takarart, an 11<sup>th</sup> century Berber Almoravid 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 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. Here we visit the easily most beautiful Bab, or gateway, in all of the Maghreb - the Bab Mansour and into the Medina and Mellah thence to the El Heri es-Souani - the granary of huge vaulted structures 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. On now north for a short drive to 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 (*mousssem*) every August to pray at the tomb of this descendant of the Prophet Mohammed. Arriving at the elongated square you will see above you 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 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 shall take lunch at the Hotel Volubilis Inn overlooking the ruins and Moulay Idriss before returning to the Imperial City of Fes to arrive at your hotel or riad to relax before dinner, either in your hotel or riad, or at one of restaurants in this precious city. Your guide will certainly come up with a few recommendations. BL.



DAY 4: FES - IFRANE - AZROU - CEDAR FORESTS - MIDELT - ZIZ GORGES - er RACHIDYA - ERFOUD - MERZOUGA: After breakfast we set off south to the Sahara, This will be all of an 8 hours' 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 you 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, perchance to feed some of the resident Barbary Apes, to emerge at the Oued Gigou Valley and on through the mountains via the Tizi n'Zad (2178m). Down now through a bleak plain of scrub and desert to the Berber mountain town of Midelt, where we stop for a light lunch at the El Ayachi Restaurant, the massive Jbel Ayachi (3722m) rising sheer and stark before them. 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 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, ksours start to dot the countryside as they 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 a valley and the Tizimi Palmeraie to the French-built town of Erfoud which will give you your first impression of the over-powering proximity of the Sahara. 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. Late this afternoon we set off, one person per dromedary, for some 2 hours across this sea of golden dunes 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.

**DAY 5: MERZOUGA(ERFOUD)-TODRA GORGES-TINEHRIR-BOUMALNE DU DADES-DADES GORGES-Q'LAAT DES M'GOUNA-KASBAHS-SKOURA:**

A final brilliant sunrise, equal almost to last night's unforgettable sunset, your breakfast tucked away, 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 for our drive back to Erfoud to set off westwards to the oasis town of Tinejdad and the start of the Route of 1000 Kasbahs in the magnificent Dadès Valley to arrive at 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 Gorges to stop for a light lunch at the French-owned restaurant Chez Michel, thence to set off towards the west further along the Route of 1000 Kasbahs to the small town of Boumalne Du



Dadès situated at the mouth of the Dadès Gorge, here to 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 Aït Youl as far as a group of ksours at Aït Arbi built against a volcanic twist in the rocks. Returning to the mouth of the Gorge, we continue ever-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 the Skoura Oasis before arriving in time for dinner and our overnight accommodation in a kasbah-like hotel at Skoura. BLD.

**DAY 6: SKOURA - ZAGORA - HAMADA DU DRAA/M'HAMID - TAMEGROUTE - ZAGORA:**



towards the end of the Dadès Valley to skirt the city of Ouarzazate and enter the delightfully dramatic Drâa Valley, passing many kasbahs and oases to the edge of the Sahara to the dusty, one horse (dromedary) desert 'Hamada' town of Zagora. Draâ translates to 'Black' as most of the inhabitants of this long valley - the Draâ River is the longest river in Morocco - originated from Chad, Mali, Senegal and Mauritania. There is even a sign here telling us the number of days by dromedary to Timbuctou - "Tombouctou 52 Jours" - by foot or by dromedary to Timbuktu in Mali. We shall take a break here for a lunch at the kasbah-like hotel set in a palmeraie - oasis - La Fibule du Draâ - flanked by the Jbel (mountain) Zagora - some say an Arabised version of the name *Caesar* from which the town got its name - the Jbel Tadrhart to the east, the Jbel Sarhro to the distant north-east and the low-lying Jbel Bani to the south. Here you may see real African Berber Touaregs, not just local Moroccans dressed up as the "Blue Men". The *Touareg* name was applied to them by early explorers and historians since Leo Africanus. They call themselves variously Kel Tamasheq, Kel Tamajaq "Speakers of Tamasheq" and Imuhagh, Imazaghan or *Imashaghen* meaning "the Free People". They also call themselves *Kel tagelmust* - "People of the Veil". Most of the inhabitants here are a mixture of Berber, Arab and Jew and the descendants of black slaves. Once it was called 'Tazagourt'



the singular of plural 'Tizigirt', a Berber word for 'twin peaks', referring to the almost volcanic form of the wind-eroded Jbel, closely resembling a tagine pot, on top of which the ruins of an Almoravid kasbah may be seen. In ancient European maps the Jbel is already indicated but the town itself was only built in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. Like the expansive succession of oases they are, the palm groves form an abundant canopy of green waving palm leaves that shelter the valley floor from the scorching sun, make this one of the most important date-producing regions in the world. We continue on as far south as permitted via a pancake-flat landscape disappearing at a foreshortened horizon line into the brown haze of



airborne Saharan dust to M'Hamid, a somewhat ratty desert outpost set amidst a stony desert with but a few small dunes with a significant military presence due to its proximity to the Algerian border. Somewhere near here the Drâa River finally drains

away into the desert sands, leaving only a dry riverbed stretching from M'Hamid to the Atlantic Ocean at Cape Drâa, south of Sidi Ifni, to support the claim of the Oued Drâa as the longest river in Morocco. We shall turn back north, passing by, once more, the small dunes at Tinfou which appear as if a lorry has dumped some sand in the middle of nowhere to visit Tamegroute with its famous mosque with blue majolica roofs and white minarets. Tamegroute has been a religious centre since the 11<sup>th</sup> century, its Zaouiat (religious school or monastery) was founded in the 17<sup>th</sup> century as the seat of the Sufi religious brotherhood of the Naciriyyin. The Naciria got its name and reputation from Sidi Mohammed Bennacer Edderaï (1603-1674) who settled in Tamegroute in 1631. Sidi Mohammed



Bennacer was a theologian, scholar and physician, especially interested in mental disorders. Sidi Ahmad Bennacer travelled to Ethiopia, Arabia, Egypt, Iraq and Persia, writing a voluminous series of memoirs of his journeys called the *Rihla* and brought back numerous works from all parts of the Islamic world. The brotherhood of black African origin, nomadic olive-skinned Berbers and light-skinned Arabs decided in the 17th century to found a university of the Koran (Qur'an). When Ahmad Bennacer died, the library (in Arabic *'khizana habsia'*) of Tamegroute, with its thousands of manuscripts was one of the richest of North Africa. Fine examples of the collection of manuscripts (now 4200) are still on display in the Zaouiat today. Among them are some 13<sup>th</sup> century illuminated Koran scrolls written on gazelle hide; a 14<sup>th</sup> century Koran with beautiful calligraphy in Kufic script (the oldest form of Arabic writing), writings of Abu Ali al Hussein ibn Abd Allah ibn Sina (981-1037), known in the west as Avicenna, the foremost physician and philosopher of his time and astronomer, chemist, logician, mathematician, poet, soldier and theologian; of Abu al Walid Mohammed ibn Ahmed ibn Rushd (1126-1198), known in the west as Averroes, the founding father of secular thought in the western world and philosopher, physicist, astronomer, mathematician; of Mohammed ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi, the acknowledged father of algebra - the words algorism and algorithm stem from *algoritmi*, the Latinised version of his name. There is a translation of Pythagoras together with treatises on theology, astronomy, geography (including original maps of Alexandria) and pharmacology. The building of the Zaouiat, as it stands now with its green tiles, dates from 1869, when it was rebuilt after a fire. A - voluntary - contribution to the upkeep of the Library is always appreciated. From the Zaouiat one can walk through the tunnelled alleyways of the still-inhabited Kasbah to the ancient Pottery Co-operative where pottery being still produced in the simplest of manners, in the simplest of kilns. If you have been to Fes, or have seen photographs of this Imperial City, here you'll see the famous green glaze associated with its tiled roofs - green, the colour of Islam representing Mother Earth - for the founders of the 'Naciri Religious Brotherhood', wanting to raise the status of the village of Tamegroute to that of a Medina, a thriving caravan hub city, invited merchants, craftsmen and potters to this remote area from Fes to this remote area, a city that enjoyed good relations with Tamegroute at the time. However, today Tamegroute is a little village again, but the pottery has become its main characteristic. The potters cook plates, jugs and jars - all green and brown - in outdoor archaic kilns. Green is obtained with magnesium and copper, brown with antimony and copper. Ancient techniques give the enamel coating infinite variations and the prices are very competitive. We return to our overnight stay at the Fibule Du Draa. Close to the hotel is the Kasbah Amazrou, once a Jewish enclave and now inhabited by black Berber families which you might like to take a stroll to chat with them. **BLD.**

**DAY 7: ZAGORA - AGDZ - KASBAHS TAMNOUGHALT & TAOURIRT - OUARZAZATE:** After breakfast, we set out around 9



o'clock to return up past the endless palm groves and kasbahs of the dramatic Draa Valley, to stop at the ancient kasbah at of Tamnoughalt near Agdz It is the former capital of the Mezquita region and residence of former caïds. Its name means 'meeting point' in Tachelhit. The history of Tamnoughalt is connected with that of the oasis Mezquita of which it was the capital. When it was built is unknown. Tamnoughalt was possibly a garrison in the Saâdien Dynasty epoch. Its political and economic role began with the coming of the caïd of Taleb El Hassan. He was made caïd by the Alaouite sultan in the 18th century. His sons succeeded in keeping the reign over their territory (as far as the Dadès and the Ksar Ait Hammou ou Saïd) until the independence of Morocco. In 1874 the caïd of Mezquita

was driven out of the territory of Ouarzazate by a new caïd of a family of Telouet, the Glaoua Pasha Mohammed Ibibt. In 1884 Charles de Foucauld visited Tamnoughalt and observed that "it was the capital of the district, governed by the hereditary caïd Abderrahman Ben el-Hassan" and that "it was exclusively inhabited by Draoua (black-skinned people) like the whole Draa valley." In 1907, Si Mohammed, caïd of Tamnoughalt offered his troops of Mezquita to defend the sultan Moulay Hafid against his brother. We continue on past other en-route points of photo-opportunity to the town of Ouarzazate.



We shall check into our hotel or riad, thence to set out for a 40 minutes' tour of the Atlas Studios. In the early 1960s, *Lawrence of Arabia* film director David Lean was the first to take advantage of Ouarzazate's potential as a movie location, the town's exotic scenery, clear skies, and availability of "authentic-looking" locals providing an attractive location for all movies involving ancient, desert-based storylines. In 1983, Moroccan entrepreneur Mohamed Belghmi, recognizing the need for a permanent filmmaking studio in the area, constructed the Atlas Film Corporation Studios on the

outskirts of town. Other studios have since followed, and a string of Hollywood productions have spent time filming here including *Jewel of the Nile*, *Kundun*, *Gladiator*, *Black Hawk Down*, *Alexander the Great*, *Kingdom of Heaven*, and *Babel*; a fun way to spend a little time bordering on a surreal experience as you walk past a Tibetan monastery and an Egyptian temple. We continue on to visit the nearby Kasbah of Taourirt, the kasbah of the former caïd (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. And so back to our overnight accommodation and dinner. **BD.**

**DAY 8: OUARZAZATE-KASBAHS TIFFOULTOUTE-KSAR AÏT BEN HADDOU-KASBAH TELOUET-MARRAKECH:** Refreshed, breakfasted and raring to go, we set out from Ouarzazate 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, this kasbah, once home to the Pasha Glaoui's Jewish and Berber employees, controlled the route to Marrakech until the French blasted a road through the Tizi n'Tichka in the late 1920s. We cross back over the oued to lunch at the delightful Dar Mouna with its panoramic view of the Kasbah and surrounds before continuing to the Kasbah at Telouet along the former route of the caravans from the Sahara over the High Atlas Mountains to Marrakech. It lies at 1800m and was the seat of the El Glaoui family's power. The palace is steadily becoming more damaged and is slowly collapsing. Even after over half a century of decay this Kasbah's interior still stands out with its painted salon walls, the bright zellij (tiles) and labyrinth of locked doors with dangling silver knockers. The Kasbah boasts iron window grilles and finely carved ceilings finely decorated in a painterly fashion using saffron and henna. All of the rooms that still remain include the harem, the kitchens, the cinema and roof top view which is a risky trek but enables you look down upon some of the old courts. Back now on our bumpy ride to the main road up into the High Atlas Mountains and the exhilarating hairpin bends 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, via Ait Ourir Taddert (1650m) and down across the Glaoua Plains to the Imperial city of Marrakech and our accommodation for the remaining nights. BL.

DAY 9: 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 12<sup>th</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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 18<sup>th</sup> 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 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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, the 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. 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 14<sup>th</sup> 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 14<sup>th</sup> 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

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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.



DAY 10: MARRAKECH - IMLIL - MARRAKECH: Departure this morning from Marrakech around 9 in the morning for an exhilarating 90 minute drive south up past the Moulay Brahim Gorges and into the high valleys- so hold on to your hats - through the market town of Asni and on to the Berber town of Imlil (1740m), known as Morocco's 'Little Chamonix', set in the upper level foothills of the Western High Atlas Mountains, a main trailhead with streams and paths branching out in all directions, the jagged snow-capped Western High Atlas peaks of the Toubkal Massif before us - Jbels Toubkal (at 4167 metres the highest peak in North Africa), Aguelzim (3547m), Aksouâl (3847m) and the Adrar Adj (3122m) looking down on us. These are the mountains you see from your riad and this trip gives you an altogether different aspect of Morocco's topography as you drive up alongside the oued through the Ait Mizane Valley, dotted with Berber hamlets built on the stark slopes of the mountains with terraced fields clawed out of the unforgiving soil. You might like to take a snack here in Imlil before returning in the afternoon to your riad. B.



DAY 11: MARRAKECH (CASABLANCA) - HOME: At the agreed hour you will be transferred to the airport either at Marrakech or Casablanca 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)*

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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 riads or similar as required and as *available at time of reservation* - including relevant taxes. Meals as detailed. Porterage on 1 piece of luggage per person in/out airports & riads. Private transportation in an air-conditioned vehicle from Casablanca to Marrakech or Casablanca. Sightseeing tours, including a dromedary ride to a desert bivouac and one by calèche in Marrakech 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.

