

MOROCCO, TIMELESS AND SO ROMANTIC

OBTIC14cetc **12 DAYS/11 MAGICAL NIGHTS.** CASABLANCA - RABAT/FES/FES VOLUBILIS-MEKNES-FES/ MERZOUGA (SAHARA)/DADES VALLEY - SKOURA/OUARZAZATE - MARRAKECH/TAMATERT (HIGH ATLAS MOUNTAINS)/MARRAKECH/CASABLANCA

DAY 1: **CASABLANCA** - RABAT. We meet you on arrival from your flight at the Mohamed V International Airport to set out on



an hours' drive to the administrative Imperial capital since 1912 of the Kingdom of Morocco, Rabat (R'bat at 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. 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 to the 12th century Kasbah of the Oudayas and Museum which has a display of traditional Moroccan clothing, including a Jewish wedding costume. 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. The ancient Medina is at the heart of the military history of Rabat and the Kasbah's 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 those corsair raiders. We take a light lunch overlooking 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. We return to our hotel or riad for dinner and overnight accommodation. LD.

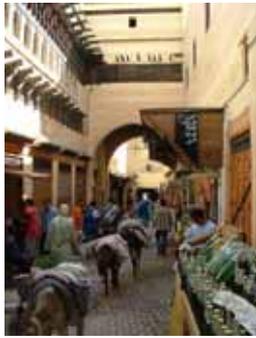


DAY 2: RABAT - FES. Today, after possibly a late breakfast we drive for about 2½ hours to the exciting, fascinating and two



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 check in, 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 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 3: FES - 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). 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 Mekkassa Berbers as *Mekkassa es -Zeitoun* ("Meknes of the Olives"), a group of

villages among olive groves around Takarart, an 11th 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 and was once called "the Moroccan Versailles". Here we shall visit its 40 km of Ramparts and monumental gates such as 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. We leave Meknes for to the wonderful Roman ruins at Volubilis, the Volubilis of really ancient olive presses, mansions, incredible mosaics, monumental



arches and Corinthian columns where you'll have a real sense of Roman lifestyle and of that of a subsequent medieval Berber town. The site contains the Mansion containing the mosaic of the Labours of Hercules, the Baths of Gallienus and Baths of Forum with their fragmentary mosaics; the House of Orpheus and its Dolphin mosaic and Orpheus Myth; the 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 break for lunch at the Hotel Volubilis inn with its panoramic view of the ruins to leave Volubilis behind and drive alongside the dark, outlying ridges of the Zerhoun Hills for a panoramic view 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. This small hilltop town was named after the Sultan Moulay Idriss the Elder, who oppressed the resident Jews, forcing many of them to convert. It was he who also founded Fes. 70 years ago, it was prohibited to non-Muslims to enter the town. In 788 (or 787) AD, an event occurred that was to forever change the path of Moroccan culture. Idriss Ibn Abdallah (or Moulay Idriss I as he is called here in Morocco), the great-grandson of the Prophet Mohammad,



had fled west from Baghdad to settle in Morocco. The heir to the Umayyad Caliphate in Damascus, Moulay had participated in a revolt against the Abbasid dynasty which had usurped the leadership of the Umayyad dynasty to precipitate the split between the Shia and Sunni sects. Forced to flee Abbasid assassins, Moulay initially found asylum in Tangier but soon thereafter tried to establish himself in the old Roman city of Volubilis. Before long he moved to the nearby region of Zerhoun, where he founded the town that is now called either Moulay Idriss or Zerhoun. The local Berber tribes, passionate neophytes of Islam, were convinced of Moulay's power to lead as both sultan and *iman* (spiritual guide) and his exemplary conduct soon ensured his lordship over many of the Berber tribes. We shall see the elongated square, the green-tiled pyramids of the Zaouiat with its two conical quarters on either side and the labyrinth of alleyways before returning to the Imperial City of

Fes and your hotel for a well-earned rest. **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 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 forests to emerge at the Oued Gigou Valley and on through the High Atlas 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 may 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 Aït 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'Talreht (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 Aït Kherrou, a river palmeraie (oasis) at the entrance to a small gorge. From here on in, ksours start to dot the countryside as we carry on down alongside the River Ziz (the

Berber name meaning Gazelle). On now through the town of Rich, once an important fort during the era of the French Protectorate, on and through the Tunnel Du Légionnaire, built by the French to have ease of rapid access to the rebellious southern tribe of the Aït 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. Erfoud, once the major Jewish population centre of the Taffilalet, where Jews worked as merchants and artisans and gunsmiths (making the famed intricately-decorated flintlock muskets) as late as the early twentieth century. Here, at the Hotel Tizimi, we exchange our 4 wheels for those of a 4WD to continue on to the Saharan village of Merzouga where we now change our 4 wheels to the 4 legs of our Ships of the Desert for a 90 minute ride into the dunes to our dinner and overnight accommodation in a nomad tent set amid the sands of Lalla Merzouga, the highest dunes of the Erg Chebbi, here to witness an awesome sunset of Nature's incredible light show over ever-changing colours of the dunes, sat around the campfire, accompanied by a small group of Berber musicians with whom to sing and dance the night away. **BLD.**

DAY 5: ERG CHEBBI - MERZOUGA - RISSANI - SIJILMASSA - ERFOUD - TODRA GORGES - TINEHRIR - BOUMALNE DU DADES - DADES GORGES - Q'LAAT DES M'GOUNA - SKOURA: Our last brilliant sunrise, equal almost to last night's unforgettable



sunset, our Bedouin breakfast of tea, 'sand' bread, jam and cheese tucked away, we set off back across the plain around 8:30 for in our 4WD to take us on down further south for a quick dash again south to the town of Rissani, most of whose inhabitants live within the 18th century ksar (fortified kasbah) in a maze of dark almost troglodyte passageways. 5 minutes away are the ruins of Sijilmassa. Established in 757AD, until the 11th century it was on the exit point for the important camel caravan trade from the Sudan, Mali and Ghana. Laid waste in 1056, rebuilt and again destroyed in 1363 to be rebuilt in the 18th century to be again destroyed and that's what we'll now see - ruins recognised by the World Monuments Fund. We shall also visit the Mausoleum of Moulay Ali Cherif, the founder of the Alaouite Dynasty, which rules Morocco to this day. Back at Erfoud we rejoin our vehicle to continue now westwards to the oasis town of Tinejdad and the start of the Route of 1000 Kasbahs in the magnificent Dadès Valley. We arrive at the small, delightful 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 to 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 to explore this remarkable canyon. We return to the mouth of the Gorges to break for a light lunch in the French-owned Restaurant Chez Michel before continuing to Boumalne du Dadès situated at the mouth of the Dadès Gorge 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 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 to continue westwards via Qlâa't Des M'Gouna (Citadel of the M'Gouna Tribe) where thousands of small, pink Damascene roses, first planted by French settlers, are grown to make the rose oil essence - "Eau de Rose" - so beloved of the Berber people; you'd do well to purchase here some of the beauty and medicinal products produced here. From here to Skoura, our kasbah-like hotel, dinner and a good night's sleep. **BLD.**

DAY 6: SKOURA - OUARZAZATE - MARRAKECH: This morning we set out to the Kasbahs in the Skoura Oasis before carrying on



to the new (1920s) once-garrison town of the French Protectorate - **Ouarzazate** - at the crossroads of the Dadès and Draâ Valleys, set between the High Atlas Mountains and the end of the Sahara region of oases and sand. During the French Protectorate period, Ouarzazate expanded considerably as a Foreign Legion garrison town, administrative centre and customs post. It is still the arrival point of different cultures and crafts with a Sunday souq filled with henna, roses, caraway, distilled herb tea, Berber vases, objects in engraved stone, blankets and famous Ouzguita carpets of blue or resplendent gold with beautiful geometric designs. After visiting the 18th century Kasbah of Taourirt, once

belonging to El Haj T'hami el Mezouari el Glaoui (1879-1956), better known in English-speaking countries through Gavin Maxwell's book 'Lords of the Atlas'; Caïd (appointed head, Duke or Baron) of the Glaoua tribe of Southern Morocco, based at the nearby Kasbah of Telouet in the High Atlas and at Marrakech, his family name was El Mezouari, a title given to their ancestors by the Sultan Moulay Ismail in 1700, while El Glaoui refers to his belonging to the Glaoui tribe. Pasha of Marrakech from 1912 to 1956 and ally of the French in Morocco, he conspired with them in the overthrow of the king Sultan Mohammed V. Not a popular man, this Pasha, it could be said and a Krupps 77mm field gun which secured Glaoui power stands outside the Kasbah Taourirt. T'hami at first forcefully supported the French, machine-gun in hand if necessary. He was shaken, however, by the political "reforms" which the French began to demand to consolidate their hold on power, which would have had the same outcome as what he had feared from the nationalists: the eventual removal of the pashas and caïds T'hami now no longer believed in anything the French said, and pointedly refused them support to suppress a student strike. By 17th October, T'hami had decided to notify the French and their Council that he supported the restoration of Mohammed V as Sultan.



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

the state. Most Moroccans see him still as a traitor and collaborator with the French. We continue towards the north alongside the Oued Ouarzazate via the Assif Ounila Valley to the Kasbah at **Tiffouloute**, an old fortress first inhabited formerly by a sheik and then by Glaoui Khalifa, whose rooftops offer a magnificent panoramic view of the valley. Located a few kilometres west of Ouarzazate, built on the upper reaches of an adobe village overlooking the valley of the Ouarzazate oued you are invited to

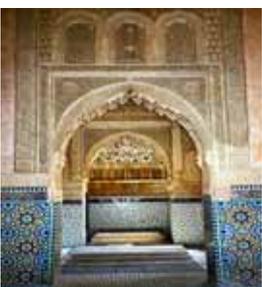


climb up to the terrace where the view is breathtaking! From here you may admire the mountains, the lake formed by Mansour ed-Dahbi dam, the oasis and the Drâa Valley. This kasbah was transformed into a hotel during the filming of Lawrence of Arabia in 1962. We shall not leave without taking a charming stroll along the Ouarzazate oued, to discover the charms of this traditional village located at the foot of this majestic kasbah. On now north 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, once home to employees of the Pacha El Glaoui - the "Lord of the Atlas", it controlled the route to Marrakech until the French blasted a road through the Tizi n'Tichka in the late 1920s. From here set off up into the High Atlas Mountains and the exhilarating hairpin bends to alight at the top of the Tizi n'Tichka (2260m) where we stop to appreciate 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 or riad in Marrakech. **BD.**

DAY 7: MARRAKECH.

This morning after breakfast, we shall go for a ride in a *calèche* alongside the magnificent ramparts, quite the best introduction to the Pink City. The city walls of the Medina are huge and have some 200 towers and 20 *Babs*, or gates. First constructed in the 12th century, these ramparts form a neat circuit of six miles of *pisé* or rammed earth, the fortress taking on a pinkish tinge and glow in the setting sun to the Majorelle Gardens and Museum designed by the French artist Louis Majorelle, overlooked by the High Atlas Mountains with pavilions in a dynamic shade of blue; lush greenery, palm trees, cacti, still pools and shady nooks, all very Zen, indeed and now the property of the recently-deceased fashion icon Yves Saint Laurent. On now down through the Bab Doukkala into the Medina and the dramatic Almohad Koutoubia Mosque and Minaret which for centuries has dominated the skyline of Marrakech. 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 Almohad 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 famous Djmaâ el Fnaâ Square- the 'Assembly of the Dead'- where, until the 19th century, were traditionally displayed the severed heads of criminals. Now we see 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. We shall break for lunch in the Restaurant El Baraka overlooking the Square after which we shall continue into the southern part of the Kasbah to visit the lavishly-decorated Saâdien Tombs - some dating from the middle 1550s; this is the ancient cemetery of the *shorfa*, the descendants of the Prophet Mohammed. Here you see the Prayer Hall with its horseshoe arches, the tombs of the Alaouite princes from the 18th century and a large tomb of the Black Sultan, the Merinid Dynasty Abou Hassan. On into the Hall of Twelve Columns, the central mausoleum of Ahmed el Mansour, who died in 1603, with its colonnade of twelve decorated marble pillars and intensely carved upper stuccowork that looks like gilded lace. To his right is his son and successor Zaidan; to his left his grandson Mohammed ech-Cheik. There are 33 other tombs of Saâdien princelings. From here to the late 19th century Dar el Bahia Palace (its name translates as 'The Brilliant') built by craftsmen from Fes for the black slave Si' Ahmed Ben Musa (or Bou Ahmed) after he had risen to power and wealth as the Grand Vizier of Sultan Moulay al-Hassan. The attractive, well preserved, Harem Courtyard has featured in many Big Budget Movies. It took nearly 15 years to complete; the close to 150 rooms 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 to the Dar Si Saïd Museum, a sumptuous palace housing the very quintessence of Moroccan art. On the ground floor you can find clothes, objects in beaten copper, arms and Berber jewellery. Splendours from the past? Not at all, for many of the objects on display are still used and worn in mountain areas. The first floor salon impress with its Hispano-Mauresque 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. The other rooms are filled with an abundance of carpets. Stop a moment to examine those articles from the Sahara region, characterised by the use of leather, and large, simple mats evoking the dry beauty of the semi-desert. A remarkable collection of door and window frames is to be found around the courtyard, all encrusted with the most delicate and refined ornamentation. On now into the central Medina to the 14th century Ben Youssef Medersa - one of the most beautiful buildings in Marrakech that housed the Islamic equivalent of a monastery; the tranquillity within contrasts with the chaotic pace



of life outside in the Medina. Founded by the Merinid Sultan Abou el Hassan in the 14th century, it was almost completely rebuilt during the Saâdien Dynasty who made their distinctive mark in its architecture and art. The Medersa centres on a large courtyard with a central pool for ablutions. The buildings are made of carved cedar wood, exquisite stuccowork, and colourful zellige tiles. At the back is a sizable prayer hall where the most elaborate decoration can be found. The interior is covered in an abundance of pine cone and palm motifs used around the mihrab to create a three-dimensional appearance. Throughout the Medersa are many Arabic inscriptions in stucco and zellige tile, the most common of which is the *bismillah* invocation: "In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful." Above the central courtyard are the small windows of the tiny student dormitories; over 800 students were housed in this Medersa, difficult to imagine. From stairs in the entry vestibule you can explore all the rooms and enjoy a nice view over the courtyard. The rooms are arranged around smaller inner courtyards, rimmed with fine wood railings. We shall go on to see the **Almoravid Dynasty Koubba**; also called Koubba Ba'Adiyn, it is the oldest building in Marrakech and the only Almoravid building to remain standing in Morocco. The Almoravids (1062-1145) were reformers and monastic-type warriors from the desert nomadic Sanhaja Berber tribe in what is now Mauritania. After conquering their homeland, they expanded to Morocco in 1062 and eventually extended their empire all the way to Algiers. Probably an



ablutions annexe for the Ben Youssef Mosque, for centuries it was covered over amid the many rebuildings of the mosque; it was only excavated in 1952. This little building is significant not only because it's very old, but because its style is at the root of all Moroccan architecture. Its motifs of pine cones, palms and acanthus leaves were used in the Ben Youssef Mosque and other later buildings; its beautifully-shaped windows became the distinctive design of the Almohades and Merinids. Also highly influential on later designs are the koubba's pyramid-like battlements, the rib design on the dome, and the sophisticated interior support system, composed of a square and star-shaped octagon. In addition to the koubba itself, visitors can view a large water cistern and remains of fountains for performing ablutions. We now proceed to the **Marrakech Museum of Art** and on through the labyrinth of narrow alleyways making up the renowned cool, colourful and aromatic **Souqs of Marrakech** - the Dyers'



Souq being the last to be visited - finishing our guided visit in the Djmaâ el Fnaâ Square to return to our hotel or riad. **BLD.**

DAY 8: MARRAKECH - AIT MIZENE VALLEY - TAMATERT: After breakfast, we set off today at 09:00 for a stimulating almost



90 minute drive south past the Moulay Brahim Gorges and the Upper Valleys, snaking up and down the mountain sides in breathtaking loops - so hang on to your hats - to the Berber village of Imlil (1740m), called Morocco's 'Little Chamonix', set way up in the foothills of the Western High Atlas mountains and a main trailhead. Our route to Imlil takes us up past the Berber villages of Asni, Azrou and Tahmoute, of n'Ougmadane, with its old kasbahs, to continue on up the winding road to the Kasbah of Tamadot. We continue through the Ghighia Valley, where the Valleys of Imaradene and Imlil meet, passing below the riverside Berber village of Azrguen n'Moulay Brahim, perched on a bluff overlooking an oued and terraced, irrigated plots of land. We continue up through the valley of the Assif n'Ait Mizane, passing by the Berber villages of Tagadirt and Ait Ali Aguerssiouâl through the Asni Hills - varying in height between 2020m and 2460m. The final stretch of the 'road' from Asni to Imlil is now tarmac and, as we wind our way south, we have before us the awesome sight of Jbel Toubkal (4167m) immediately in front of us, to her left is Jbel Aguelzim (3547m) and to her right Jbel Aksouâl (3847m) in all their glory. At Imlil (1740m), we shall leave our vehicle in the upper level foothills of the Western High Atlas Mountains of the Toubkal National Park. With streams and paths branching out in all directions, we set off by mule up to the hamlet of Tamatert and our delightful accommodation in the Kasbah Samra. When you are ready we shall set off by mule, accompanied by your licensed mountain guide to traverse the Tamatert Valley until we reach the hamlet of Achelm, thence to strike out for some 4km. towards the south towards the Berber village of Aroumd (Aremd) (1843m), passing the hamlets of Taourirt, Targa, and Imoula, up and down the stark slopes, the jagged Western High Atlas peaks of the Jbel Toubkal Massif - at 4167m the highest peak in North Africa - before us, with her awe-inspiring sister peaks the Jbels Aguelzim (3547m), Aksouâl (3847m) and the Adrar Adj (3122m) watching us all the way. We shall stop at Aroumd to visit this rather singular village in the Assif Ait Mizane Valley, built seemingly house upon house on a large moraine



spur overlooking ancient irrigated terraced fields of barley, corn and vegetables and always surrounded by almond and walnut trees. We thence carry on for another 8km to the equally-quaint village of Sidi Chamharouch, a Berber village set beside a waterfall and small stream, again with its pisé homes seemingly built somewhat chaotically one into another. This village is a place of pilgrimage for devout Moslems and it is where there is a marabout shrine - forbidden to non-Moslems - said to be a relic of a pre-Islamic religious and naturalist cult. We take a break for a field picnic, within full view of **Jbel Toubkal**, prior to setting off back down the other side of the valley at a gentle pace back to the delightful Kasbah Samra where you bid farewell - 'b'ssalaama' - to your mountain guide and settle in before your Berber dinner in a Zen-like atmosphere. **BLD.**

DAY 9: TAMATERT - MARRAKECH: After a late breakfast, we shall ride our mules back to Imlil where our car is awaiting us to take us back down this delightful valley to Marrakech, stopping where you will for more photo-opportunities before arriving at your hotel in Marrakech. The remainder of the afternoon is at leisure, accompanied by your driver and guide. Doubtless, your guide will recommend any of many International restaurants to be found in this Pink City. **B.**

DAY 10: MARRAKECH: Today is at leisure to go where you will within Marrakech, accompanied by your driver and guide, for, doubtless, there's a lot you'd like see again or go for last-minute shopping. **B.**

DAY 11: MARRAKECH - CASABLANCA: We should leave around 11 o'clock towards the northwest to the largest city in Africa after Cairo - Casablanca - the commercial capital of Morocco to arrive at the seaside resort of Aïn Diab, thence on through to the Corniche running alongside the Atlantic Ocean and a once-in-a-lifetime visit of the magnificent Hassan II Mosque, the second largest mosque in the Islamic world after the Masjid al-Haram in Mecca. This architectural masterpiece, a symbol of an Islam open to the world, took 7 years to complete using 50 million man-hours and inaugurated on the 30th August, 1993 was built partially on the waters of the Atlantic Ocean, on the farthest western point of the Maghreb. Conceived by the French architect Michel Pinseau (1924-1999), the Mosque employed 3,300



craftsmen from all over Morocco; has 53,000 m² of carved cedar wood; 67,000 m² of plasterwork and some 10,000 m² of sculpted ornamentation and writings; it contains on the ground floor an oblong Prayer Hall of perfect symmetry measuring 200 x 100m. Supported by seventy-eight pillars where granite, marble and onyx mix their respective reflections, this vast room supports a retractable roof covered with emerald green tiles - the symbolic colour of Islam, representing Mother - to welcome to prayer 25,000 believers inside and 80,000 on the adjoining esplanade. Embedded in the axis of the southern facade, a 210 metre-high minaret, boasts a laser beam of 30km reach pointing towards Mecca. This magnificent Mosque also encompasses a Medersa (School of Koranic learning), a Library, a National Museum and immense lecture halls, all beautifully decorated by artisans from all over Morocco: frescoes and zelliges in traditional geometrical motives, painted and sculptured woods, stuccos of intricate designs, arabesques in decorative drawings and writings in brilliant colour inaugurated in 1992 and a masterpiece of



Moroccan architectural design and craftsmanship. Down now to the Habous Quarter - the New Medina - a 1920s souk and the King's Palace precinct, returning to our hotel where we may visit the nearby old Medina adjacent to United Nations Square. Not much more than a century old, it is a constant hive of activity, whose cramped, narrow streets abound with a sea of merchants carrying and selling an entire gamut of fruit and vegetables, leather, brass, copper, spices and clothing. The Rue Djemda Es Souk one of the main streets of this Quarter, having amongst its special interest the many shops on Rue de Rabat where a few Jewish goldsmiths still ply their trade and whose windows display jewellery with Hebrew motifs. Many traditions were shared and sometimes even originated with the Arab and Berber population, with different groups worshipping many of the same saints. They also had a mutual fear of the evil eye, or jinn, as it was called, a constant threat, for death, especially the unnaturally high number of deaths due to poor living conditions in the Mellah, was often attributed to the evil eye. To ward off such bad luck, a khamsa was worn as a defence against the jinn. The khamsa (which means five), a flat silver or brass decorated hand, created by the Jewish craftsmen, was worn by Jews and Muslims alike. Perhaps you might like later have a drink at the American-owned Rick's Café, (www.rickscafe.ma) complete with mahogany, wicker and ceiling



fans - all without 'Rick Blaine' Humphrey Bogart, Ingrid Bergman, Peter Lorre and Claude Rains - before dinner at the Basmane Restaurant on the Corniche - with Belly Dancer and live music. **BD.**

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

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

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

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

OUR PRICES WILL INCLUDE: Accommodation at specified or similar hotels or riads including taxes, *subject to availability at time of reservation*. Porterage on 1 piece of luggage per person in/out airports, hotels/riads. All meals as shown in the itinerary (not including alcoholic drinks). Private circle trip transportation in an air-conditioned vehicle from Casablanca to Casablanca. Sightseeing tours, including a calèche tour in Marrakech, a dromedary ride to the overnight Sahara bivouac and all related entrance fees as listed in the itinerary. English-speaking Licensed National Guide throughout the tour; bottled or gaseous water en-route; medical or 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.