

# A MYSTICAL MOROCCO OF EXTRAORDINARY HORIZONS

**OBTIC32teesc 17 DAYS/16 NIGHTS. TANGIER/CHEFCHAOUEN/FES - MEKNES - VOLUBILIS - FES/MIDDLE & HIGH ATLAS MOUNTAINS - MERZOUGA (SAHARA)-VALLEY OF 1000 KASBAHS - OUARZAZATE - MARRAKECH/ESSAOUIRA - EL JADIDA - CASABLANCA**

**DAY 1: TANGIER.** You will be met on arrival at Tangier's International Airport or Port and transferred to your hotel. Subject always to the time of your arrival, today's itinerary is as shown below. **D.**



Modern Tanjah (Anglicised to Tangier) was first known as a Phoenician trading port in the 15<sup>th</sup> century BC and later a Carthaginian settlement. Or perhaps founded by the Numidians, the then native population, ancestors of the Berbers. Its name is possibly derived from the Berber goddess Tinjis (or Tinga). Ancient coins call it Tenga, Tinga, and Titga, Greek and Latin authors giving numerous variations of the name. According to Berber mythology, the town was built by Sufax, son of Tinjis, wife of the Berber hero Antois. The Greeks ascribed its foundation to the giant Antaeus, son of the Greek god Poseidon whose tomb and skeleton are pointed out in the vicinity, calling Sufax the son of

Herakles (Hercules) by the widow of Antaeus. The cave of Hercules, a few miles from the city, is a major tourist attraction. It is believed that Hercules slept there before attempting one of his fables 12 Labours Tangier; gateway to Africa. Tanjah to the Moroccan; Tangier to the French; Tangiers to the English. Tangier, the 'Bride of the North'. According to Greek legend, it was Hercules (Herakles), that impetuous demi-god, who created the Straits named Gibraltar, who separated the European and African continents with a blow of his sword (or shoulder!) and raised the famous columns, The Pillars of Hercules (the hills on the two sides of the Mediterranean Sea, Jbel Tariq - "Gibraltar" and Jbel Musa in Morocco). It is said that he left a large hole in the caves that bear his name on the Sparte promontory at the end of the bay to the west of Tangiers to observe the sea and admire his work. If the legend is true, the Moroccans, North Africans or Africans in general would have great reason to be angry with Hercules, for his thoughtlessness and all the gods of ancient Greece, for what a strange idea it was to separate the land and to create these geographic fictions that are continents! Had Hercules contained himself just a little bit, history would have followed another course; the many candidates for clandestine immigration who risk their lives to cross the Straits each day, would only have had to climb a wall or cut the barbed wire fence to cross to the other side, as they do between Mexico and the United States. Fortunately, Hercules was not too efficient in his work: the two continents are not far from each other. At the closest point, the straits are only 14 kilometres apart. It is for this reason that men sometimes think to repair the mistake the hero made by creating a fixed link between Spain and Morocco. It was the capital of the Roman province of Mauretania Tingitana under the Emperor Marcus Salvius Otho, later to be occupied by Vandals, Byzantines, Visigoths and Arabs. Captured by the Portuguese in 1471, it was then to pass to England in 1662, as part of the dowry of Catherine of Braganza on her marriage to King Charles II. In 1679, the Moroccan Sultan Moulay Ismail made an unsuccessful attempt to seize the town but imposed a crippling blockade which ultimately forced the English to withdraw. The English destroyed the town and its port facilities prior to their departure in 1684. Under Moulay Ismail the city was reconstructed to some extent, to later become a lair of Barbary Coast pirates but it gradually declined until, by 1810, the population was no more than 5,000.

Tangier, a place where the street signs are in three languages; in fact, no less than 12 nations have occupied the city at one time or another since the fifth century. Tangier, of the wealthy Berber brigand chieftain Sherif Moulay Ahmed er-Raisouli, appointed Governor by the Sultan in the early 1900s; he who kidnapped real-life American victims Ion Perdicaris and his step-son Cromwell Varley (and who was played by Sean Connery in the 1975 film "The Wind and the Lion"). From 1923 Tangier and a small surrounding enclave became an international zone, administered by Spain between 1940-45. In 1956 it was transferred to independent Morocco to become a free port in 1962. With a history of intrigue and mystery, Tangier is the country's most cosmopolitan city; – a city that has everything you'd expect from Morocco.

**DAY 2: TANGIER - ASILAH -TANGIER.** Tangier has no formal Mellah, but has instead an unprotected Jewish quarter dating from



the second half of the 19th century where many synagogues were once concentrated in one narrow, winding street, "Synagogues Street," recently renamed "Synagogue Street" because only one now remains open. You may enter again the medieval Medina, a vast, picturesque, vibrant souk - the 'Grand Socco' (Spanish for 'souk'); tea houses; the Mendoubia Gardens with their eight-hundred-year-old trees; the Sidi Bounabid Mosque, its minaret decorated with multi-hued faiences dominating the Medina, the Kasbah Square with its portico of white marble columns and the great Méchouar where the pashas once granted audiences; the Moulay Ismail Mosque; the Tangier American Legation Museum and the Merinid College. The Tangier American Legation Museum, the first property acquired abroad by

the United States Government, is a thriving cultural centre, museum, conference centre and library in the heart of the old walled Medina, housed in the only historic landmark of the United States located abroad and saved from destruction by a small but dedicated group of American citizens who established a public, non-profit organization. The first property acquired abroad by the United States Government, this complex structure contains the two-story mud and stone building presented to the United States in 1821 by the Sultan Moulay Suliman and until 1956, the U.S. diplomatic mission to Morocco was located here, the longest period any building abroad has been occupied as a United States diplomatic post. With the end of the French Protectorate in 1956, all embassies moved to the capital, Rabat, but the American Legation continued as a Consulate for another five years until a new consulate was built outside the old Medina. Thereafter, the American Legation building served as an Arabic language school for American diplomats and a Peace Corps training centre. In 1976 the Old American Legation stood empty and in a sad state of disrepair. Concerned about its fate, the group obtained a lease from the Department of State to rent the Legation building. Since the American Bicentennial celebration in 1976 the Legation has been operating a museum and cultural centre and is symbolic of the 1786 Moroccan-American Treaty of Friendship, which is still in force today. The complex expanded over the years as the surrounding houses were bought up. During World War II it served as headquarters for United States intelligence agents.

Leaving Tangier to set out towards the west on a zigzag road passing through the wealthy residential district of the Marché aux Boeufs and along the new mountain road edged with elegant, sumptuous villas, ornate gates and beautiful gardens, the Governor's Residence and the King's Summer Palace, we follow the mountain road towards the seaward extremity of Jbel el Kbir at Cape Spartel, set on the Atlantic Coast, considered by political convention to be the most north-western point of Africa, the African intersection of the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea. Just before reaching the striking, square-shaped lighthouse the scenic drive comes upon long golden ocean beaches and the blue Atlantic Ocean. Here they may stop briefly to marvel at the panoramic view. In the 17th century, this wooded hill area provided cover for the Moors in their battles against the Portuguese and the English. Beyond this area you continue along through, forested hills covered with a uniquely Mediterranean variety of pine tree that were all planted by volunteers. In these westernmost hills of Morocco there are large forested areas of oak, juniper, cork-oak, cedar, fir and pine. The lighthouse, 312 ft. above sea level, built in 1864 at the cost of the Sultan of Morocco and maintained at the joint expense of England, France, Italy and Spain, is the only one on the western coast. It is provided with a large fixed intermittent



white light for the safety of passing ships. They may carry on to enjoy a visit of the Caves of the Oracle of Herakles, where legend has it he breathed his last breath after separating Europe from Africa, having completed his 12 Labours. The mouths of these caves, partly man-made and partly natural, open up onto the Atlantic Ocean to be flooded at high tide when water gushes up through these massive holes in the ground and cliffside; it's quite impressive. No-one is exactly sure how the caves were created; some say that for some reason an ancient civilization used to carve millstones out of the solid rock that caused giant caves to form over the years. How these Neolithic people managed to cut into solid rock with simple and crude tools is still a mystery. At low tide, the views from inside the caves looking out over the ocean are stunning, the colours in particular; the blue Atlantic Ocean and sky above may seem to resemble an upside-down silhouette of Africa. Some people would have it the caves were once joined under the sea to St Michael's Caves on the Rock of Gibraltar and that this is "possibly" how the Barbary Apes crossed over. We now continue on south alongside the Atlantic Ocean to Asilah, a picturesque Andalusian-like small fishing village whose history stretches back nearly 3,500 years. The reason for this is that Asilah, already known for its beaches, is also a natural harbour that has been used by many invaders throughout the centuries including the Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Byzantines, Romans, Arabs, Normans, and Portuguese. The Portuguese built the large walls, ramparts, and fortifications that give the town its distinctive appearance to this day. Its fortunes declined when John III, the fifteenth King of Portugal and the Algarve, the "Grocer King" decided to abandon it in 1549. In 1692, Moulay Ismail Ibn Sharif took back the town, again serving as an authorised major haven for corsairs during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. This picturesque "Bohemian" Andalusian-style town, after centuries of virtual anonymity, thrives once more - this time as an oasis of culture. As with Larache, Asilah was part of Spanish Morocco from 1912 until independence in 1956. Asilah is a very interesting blend of laid back and busy port, of culture and tourism and everything in between. It's story is of a town of once great importance in Morocco and



fame that then wasted away with the inevitable changes of time, but in the past several decades has worked to make itself one of the centres of culture in the entire Muslim world – and thus bring the town back into modern relevance. It is a far quieter place now, with pirates and wars long forgotten, though the city walls and ramparts remain in beautiful shape because of restoration work. Today it is a popular tourist destination, in part because of the aptly named Paradise Beach, a relaxing pace of life and a series of cultural festivals that have made Asilah one of the great cultural centres of the Muslim world. After stopping for a light lunch of sea food, we make a short dash back up to the throbbing city of Tangier to return their rented car. **BL.**

**DAY 3: TANGIER - TETOUAN - CHEFCHAOUEN.** After a late breakfast, we leave for 'The White Dove of Culture', setting out some 60 km to the south-east across fertile plains and through a narrow pass to Tetouan - in the Tamazight language of the Berber "*Tittouan*", meaning "Springs" - situated on a rocky plateau detached from the southern flank of the Jbel Dersa overlooking the fertile Martil Valley and to the north of the er-Rif Mountains, set in the middle of a belt of orchards that contain orange, almond, pomegranate and cypress trees. Behind it rise rugged masses of rock, the southern wall of Fahs Anjera countryside, once practically closed to Europeans; across the valley are hills which form the northern limit of the once-impenetrable er-Rif Mountains. Founded in the 3rd century BC, (artefacts from both the Roman and the Phoenician era have been found in the nearby site of Tamuda, a major town in the Roman Province of Mauretania Tingitana which was finally laid waste in 40 AD when the Romans put down a revolt by a freedman of Ptolemy - Aedemon) - around 1305 the town was rebuilt by the Merinid king Abu Thabit to serve as a base for attacks on Ceuta. Around 1399 it was destroyed by the Castillians of King Henry III as Barbary pirates were using it as a base for their attacks on his shipping. By the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century it had been rebuilt by refugees from the "Reconquista" (reconquest of Spain from the Moorish Empire, completed by the fall of Granada in 1492), when those Andalusian Moors first erected thick walls to fill the enclosure with small houses. It was to be captured on 4<sup>th</sup> February 1860 by Spaniards under Leopoldo O'Donnell (a descendant of an old Irish royal family, O'Donnell of Tyrconnell, who was made hereditary Duke of Tetouan, later to become Prime Minister of Spain). In 1913 it became the capital of the part of Morocco under the Spanish Protectorate to be governed by the Caliph - a Moroccan prince, serving as Viceroy for the Sultan - and it remained its capital until 1956 when it became part of the independent state of Morocco. Many people in the city still speak Spanish and you'll notice road signs often bear names written both in Spanish and in Arabic, though others are in Arabic and French, the second language of Morocco.

Like Rabat, Fes and Salé, Tetouan is a "hedrya" town; that is, a centre of culture and refinement. The town contains many monuments: a fort, well-preserved walls; any number of mosques, fountains, fondouks (caravanserai or taverns) and, last but not least, the Khalifa's old palace which used to be the residence of his Majesty's representative at the time of the Protectorate, a palace built in the 17th century to be renovated and restored in 1948 retaining its ideal example of Hispano-Mauresque architecture. With streets fairly wide and straight, many of the houses of aristocratic Arabs - descendants of those expelled from the Moorish Spain during the Spanish Inquisition - possess marble fountains and small groves planted with orange trees. Within the houses the ceilings are often exquisitely carved and painted in Hispano-Mauresque designs, such as are found in the Alhambra of Granada; the tile-work (zellige) for which Tetouan is also known may be seen on floors, pillars and dados. Traditional industries include this tile work, inlaid with silver wire. Home once also to an important Sephardic Jewish community who once lived here in their Mellah, or Jewish Quarter, separated from the rest of the town by gates which were closed at night.

These delightful streets wind among bluish white walls to open on to small squares, centres of intense activity. Each street is occupied by a trade guild; the street of dyers adjoins that of gunsmiths offering much-appreciated flintlocks, not far from weavers of artistic cloths used as capes and skirts by women of the rural areas and jewellers. Manufacturers of the thick-soled yellow slippers (babouches) and leather workers are close to the tanneries and other craft workshops. Early in the morning country women arrive to sell their wares, wrapped in their candy-striped clothes, wearing gaiters laced to the knee and wide-brimmed straw hats decorated with pompoms, to offer butter, honey, vegetables and herbs to a lively, hurrying clientele. They may visit the Hassan II Square, situated at the point where the old and modern parts of the town converge to constitute the heart of the town. Reminiscent of Andalusia with its kiosks, fountains and flower boxes, the square remains an ideal meeting point for afternoon strollers from the time of the Spanish Protectorate; buildings with wrought iron balconies and shop windows filled with imported commodities to fascinate the passers-by.



On to the very characteristic and traditional walled Medina, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, here to find in the souk many white, low houses with weavers, jewellers and leather workers carrying out their artistry. They will not be able to visit the Museum of Moroccan Art as it is closed, unfortunately, on Tuesdays), and the Handicrafts School. Light refreshments may be taken in a café near the Bab el Oukla before continuing the tour of the town.

We now continue south to Chaouen. Chaouen, Xaouen or Chefchaouen? You may take your pick.



Chefchaouen, situated some 70km south of Tetouan and at 600m in the er-Rif Mountains, was founded in 1415 by Cherif Sidi Ali Ben Rachid and Moorish exiles from Spain; it was to remain unfinished as he was assassinated by the Portuguese. His cousin, Abou Al-Hassan Ali Ibn Rachid was to re-site this citadel town in 1480 to the right bank of the Oued Fouarat, enclosing it with ramparts with 7 Babs, or gates, 5 Quarters – the El Kharrazine, the Rif El Andalous, the Rif El Sabannine, the Houamat El Ansar and the Houamat El Souk. Chefchaouen's appearance will immediately jump out at you; its houses are generally simple, but decorated with bright white, turquoise, teal and powder-blue walls, made by mixing lime and water with paint, and doors of bright or cobalt blue, a tradition

stemming from the town's former Jewish population wishing to preserve their Andalusian heritage, the blue of Judaism said to ward off evil spirits. The streets are remarkably clean by any world city's standards and if these deep blue doors set against brilliant white houses on immaculate streets aren't enough for them, then there is the skyline, for this Berber village mountain retreat nestles snugly between two mountain tops of the Jbel Kelaâ Ou Tissarka (2122m) known as Ech-Chaoua - "the horns", climbing up the valley to end at the water source which provides some of the freshest water in the country. Chefchaouen can thus be translated to mean "look at the horns" - the horns of a goat. Despite how close Chefchaouen is to the European continent, only three Christians ever found their way here; the first in 1883, spent 1 dangerous hour here dressed as a Rabbi; the second, a British journalist, escaped with his life and the third, in 1892, didn't. This region was once one of the most hostile towards Europeans, which is understandable given the town was originally founded by those Moorish Jews and Muslims forcibly displaced from Spain during the Inquisition. This hostility continued when Morocco was fighting the Spanish to avoid becoming a colony. The local chief fought the Spanish, to be captured only with help from French troops. The ferocious inter-tribal battles between Riffian factions led to a man being considered a coward were he to reach old age. None of this hostility remains, however, though the fierce pride of these citizens can still be seen in that they are very slow to take up Western habits, in large part because of this history. For instance, up until 1937, slaves were still being openly sold in the slave souq. Chefchaouen is a popular shopping destination for many serious tourists, as the town offers some native handicrafts that simply can not be found in most other places in Morocco. Tonight's accommodation here is suggested at a riad quite close to the exciting Medina. Our walking tour of this delightful blue and white village takes from the Palace El Makhzen and the famous (3000m<sup>2</sup>) square of Ouatta el Hammam; on into the maze of alleyways with the fine doorways in the Medina; to the crumbling ochre and toffee-coloured kasbah; to the exterior of the El Masjid El Andalous with its octagonal mosque, so characteristic of Northern Morocco. On this leisurely stroll throughout the Medina the first thing that may catch your eyes is a man selling pigment in shades of blue, yellow, pink and orange; the pigment is the same that is used on the walls of the city. You may see cobblers hand making the white and yellow fine leather pointed slippers ('babouches') worn by the local inhabitants; a Berber weaver at his loom producing a local style of red and white blanket; artisans offering many beautiful djellabas sewn with finely embroidered seams and carpenters carving tables and chairs made of fragrant cedar wood displaying delicate Islamic designs. There are beautifully ordained mirrors with hand-painted flowers and a wide variety of woven blankets and wool garments; of native goat cheeses to olives and olive oil and honey, the same honey General Franco had regularly airshipped to him. **BLD.**

**DAY 4: CHEFCHAOUEN-MOULAY IDRIS-VOLUBILIS-MEKNES-FES.** We continue our 225km drive through the town of



Ouezzane, once controlled by an important Muslim fraternity who encouraged Jewish traders and agriculturists to live near-by and on 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 we'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 a light lunch at the Hotel Volubilis Inn overlooking the ruins and Moulay Idriss before continuing 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 Ismaïl 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 they will 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. A quick dash now to the Imperial City of Fes to arrive at your hotel or riad and relax before dinner in the Dar Anebar or the Dar Al Andalous riads. **BLD.**

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.

**DAY 5: FES.** 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 with our Spanish/English-speaking guide 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 agate 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 our Walking Tour of 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 where we stop nearby for lunch. On now to the renowned Tanneries on the bank of the Oued Fes to leave the Medina from the Bab Boujloud, we tour the magnificent ramparts with its beautiful 'Babs' as we make our way to the 16<sup>th</sup> century Saâdîen watchtower at the North Borj to arrive back at our hotel or riad, perhaps to shower and rest up for a while before 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 6: FES.** A day you have at leisure perhaps just (eventually) to revisit the Medina and bargain for some brassware or perhaps strike out further to the east for a day trip to **Taza**, some 120km from Fes as part of the little-visited "Cirque Du Jbel Tazzeke" (1980m) where you'd visit this town, one of the oldest in Morocco, founded by the Berbers in the 5<sup>th</sup> century as a strategic fortress guarding the pass "Trouée de Tazi" from Algeria to Morocco's fertile valleys, perched impressively at 600m on the edge of a plateau where the Rif Mountains transition to the Middle Atlas Mountains. A town of Almohad Dynasty ramparts; of the Bab er Rih (Gate of the Winds) and a Medina of partially-covered souqs and grand houses with beautiful, heavy wooden doors and ornate window grills; of the Jamâa el Kbir Mosque and the Medersa Abou el Hassan (built in 1323), a town where many meteorites have been found. The circle trip would take you to the waterfall at Ras el Oued; to the Caves at Chikr and at the Gouffre Du Friouato – some 180m deep - and an impressive winding road alongside gorges and escarpments. **B.**



**DAY 7: 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 Imouzèr 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 stop for a basic 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 completely pacified, and only then with great difficulty, by the French until the mid-1930s. Now on through a lower Pass (Tizi) of the High Atlas - the Pass of the She-Camel - Tizi n'Talrehmt (1907m), on across a deserted plain through the town of Ait Messaoud, passing a French Foreign Legion fort with all the reminders of *Beau Geste* and then to the first southern ksar of Ait Kherrou, a river palmeraie (oasis) at the entrance to a small gorge. From here on in, ksours start to dot the countryside as we carry on down alongside the River Ziz (the Berber name meaning Gazelle). On now through the town of Rich, once an important fort during the era of the French Protectorate, on and through the Tunnel Du Légionnaire, built by the French to have ease of rapid access to the rebellious southern tribe of the Ait Atta, to have appear before us a scenic highlight of the really dramatic and majestic canyon of the Ziz Gorges, massive



erosions of rock carving a passage through the mountains dominating startlingly green oases and ochre-coloured ksours. They 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. Here, at the Hotel Ati, we exchange our 4 wheels for the 4 legs of their 'Ships of the Desert' and a 7km ride through the dunes to our dinner and overnight accommodation in a nomad tent set near 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 8: ERG CHEBBI-MERZOUGA-ERFOUD-TODRA GORGES-TINEHRIR-BOUMALNE DU DADES-DADES GORGES-Q'LAAT DES M'GOUNA-SKOURA KASBAHS & OASIS-OUARZAZATE.** A final brilliant sunrise, equal almost to last night's



unforgettable sunset, our Bedouin breakfast of tea, 'sand' bread, jam and cheese tucked away, our dromedaries having been saddled up for the return stage, we set off back across the plain around 8:30 for their final Méharée of some 1½ hours to take a shower at the Auberge Du Sud, then rejoin our vehicle which now takes us back up to Erfoud, with its ancient Jewish cemetery, thence 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. 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 to turn back to the French-owned restaurant Chez Michele for lunch, 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 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 buy some of the medicinal and beauty products obtained from this flower - and on through to the Kasbahs at Skoura and the isolated living museum of Amerhidl before carrying onto the new (1920s) once-garrison town of



the French Protectorate - Ouarzazate - for their dinner and overnight accommodation. **BLD.**



**DAY 9: OUARZAZATE-KASBAH TIFFOULTOUTE-KSAR AÏT BEN HADDOU-MARRAKECH.** Refreshed, breakfasted and raring



to go, we now pay a visit to the nearby Kasbah of Taourirt, the Palace of the “Lords of the Atlas”, the Glaoui family, though they never resided here, thence to set forth 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 they alight from our vehicle to visit these various kasbahs, so closely-knit that they appear to be but one complete building, backed up against the looming mountain in a stretch of unforgiving Hamada. The thick, high, sheer, elaborately decorated pisé walls, stepped-up housing, turreted, crenulated ramparts, and balustrades and arched ‘babs’ are a sight not to be missed. One of the more spectacular sights in the Atlas ranges, set upon a rock above a reed-strewn assif, commanding the area for miles around, this kasbah controlled the route to Marrakech until the French blasted a road through the Tizi n’Tichka in the late 1920s. From here we 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 you might like to stop for a light lunch with a vista dominated by peaks of some 2500+m before continuing down across the plain to the Imperial City of Marrakech to arrive, after some 4 hours, at our hotel or riad. **B.**



**DAY 10: 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 deceased fashion icon Yves Saint Laurent. Today, beautiful shaded grounds, an impressive collection of exotic plants and trees and an Islamic Art Museum (*Musée d’Art Islamique*) make this garden one of the must-see attractions in Marrakech. The gardens were once the home and haven of French painter Jacques Majorelle, born in 1886 to a renowned cabinet maker in Nancy, France. Travels to Spain, Egypt and the Mediterranean all pulled him away from his native country, but it was Morocco that beckoned Majorelle most strongly. In 1924 Majorelle settled in Marrakech on a property that would become known as Majorelle Garden where he created a retreat with a stunning home, spacious work studio, and vast garden in which he could indulge his botanical interest by growing plants and trees from around the world. Majorelle’s passion for Morocco - especially the south - became evident in his paintings. Later travels to Sudan, Guinea, Niger, Senegal and the Ivory Coast were also to influence his work. Although Majorelle opened his property to visitors in 1947, the garden began to deteriorate following his death in 1962. Restoration of the Majorelle Garden began after Yves Saint Laurent and his partner Pierre Bergé purchased Majorelle’s former home in 1980. The house itself is not open to the public. Partially hidden by the foliage of trees, its majestic architecture can be seen from certain vantage points in the garden.



Further improvements were made in 2000, including an irrigation system which reduced water costs by 40 percent. Today, the grounds of the Garden are beautifully maintained and create an atmosphere of lush tranquillity. Winding walkways, quaint bridges, gurgling fountains, and shady gazebos add to the landscape. Home to hundreds of exotic plant and tree specimens brought from five continents, these include cactuses, bamboos, palms, blooming potted plants, and aquatic plants. Bird lovers will appreciate seeing the many species of local birds which inhabit the garden amongst which you may spot Pied Wagtails, Kestrels, Storks, Collared Flycatchers and more. The green roofed building that gets most of the attention, however, is the bright cobalt blue (referred to as *bleu Majorelle*) and yellow building that Majorelle used as a studio workshop from 1931 now houses the Museum of Islamic Art. The same cobalt blue is used with bright yellow to add colour and contrast throughout the garden. This small museum



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

after his conquest of Marrakech, occupying the square of a former Almohavid palace whose mosque was destroyed, supposedly as it did not face Mecca. Completed in 1199 with the construction of its famous minaret ordered by the Sultan’s grandson, the Caliph Yacoub el-Mansour who died the same year, this minaret (from the Arabic word *menara* or lighthouse) was later used as model for Giralda of Seville then for the Hassan Tower of Rabat. The main function of the minaret was to provide a vantage point from which the muezzin can call out the *adhan*, calling the faithful to prayer. In most Mosques these days, the *adhan* is called not from the minaret, but in the *musallah*, or Prayer Hall, via a microphone and speaker system, the role of the minaret is now largely for traditional and decorative purposes. A jewel of Hispano-Moresque art made up of 16 outlying naves and one larger central nave, its name is derived from the Arabic *al-Koutoubjyyin* 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-Heqqq under the influence of the Alhambra in Granada, which took some 16 years to complete, was named 'Badii' (the Incomparable), one of the 99 names of Allah (moreover, ksar *l-bdii* 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 Badii 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 now 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, 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 10<sup>th</sup> 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'Adiyin, the oldest building in Marrakech and the only Almoravid building to remain standing in Morocco. The Almoravids (1062-1145) were reformers and monastic-type warriors from the desert nomadic



Sanhaja Berber tribe in what is now Mauritania. After conquering their homeland, they expanded to Morocco in 1062 and eventually extended their empire all the way to Algiers. Probably an ablutions annexe for the Ben Youssef Mosque, for centuries it was covered over amid the many rebuildings of the mosque; it was only excavated in 1952. This little building is significant not only because it's very old, but because its style is at the root of all Moroccan architecture. Its motifs of pine cones, palms and acanthus leaves were used in the Ben Youssef Mosque and other later buildings; its beautifully-shaped windows became the distinctive design of the Almohades and Merinids. Also highly influential on later designs are the koubba's pyramid-like battlements, the rib design on the dome, and the sophisticated interior support system, composed of a square and star-shaped octagon. In addition to the koubba itself, visitors can view a large water cistern and remains of fountains for performing ablutions. We now proceed to the Marrakech Museum of Contemporary Art and/or 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 or riad, 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 11: MARRAKECH - OURIKA VALLEY - MARRAKECH.** After breakfast, we shall make a 90 minute excursion south to the beautiful Ourika Valley in those High Atlas Mountains you can see from your hotel, whose stream meanders through orchards, ancient terraced fields, gardens and small pisé (adobe) villages clawed from the mountain sides by the independent Berber tribesmen. We shall continue on up to the last trailhead village in the valley - Setti Fadma. On returning to Marrakech, we shall stop halfway back down the valley at the hamlet of Aghbalou to take lunch at the restaurant Ramuntcho overlooking the oued (river) with the remainder of afternoon at leisure. Your driver and guide will be at your disposition. **BL.**



**DAY 12: MARRAKECH.** Day at leisure, perhaps to go shopping; perhaps to wander again into the Medina and souks with your driver and guide - armed with your shopping list. **B.**



**DAY 13: MARRAKECH - ESSAOUIRA.** We leave behind the Imperial city of Marrakech for a 2 hours' drive west to the Atlantic coast and the ancient Phoenician town of Mogador - a corruption of the Berber word *Amegdul*, meaning 'well-protected' - and now, since Independence, called Essaouira - 'Little Picture.' Abandoned by the Portuguese in 1541, it was not until 1765 that the Alaouite Sultan Sidi Mohammad Ibn Abdullah transformed Mogador into a fortified city. The ramparts were never that effective in keeping out the marauding tribesmen but now, a charming artists' town with its old port and cannons overlooking the fishing fleet, Essaouira invites you to wander through the narrow alleyways which make up the Medina to witness artisans at work making their wooden tables, boxes and sundry items in thuya, lemon or briar



wood inlaid with mother of pearl or cherry wood – the purple dyes produced by the crushed shellfish were exported from the offshore Purple Islands by the conquering Romans to colour the togas of the rich back home. We check in to our hotel or riad and then leave for a guided stroll around this enchanting city, first to the Battery with its ancient Portuguese cannons and either on to the quayside or through now to the Mellah and the synagogue, thence, perhaps, a welcome dip in the waters of the ocean? A camel ride along the beach? A visit to Jimi Hedrix's "Castles of Sand"? You'll be pleasantly surprised to find what this artist-colony town has to offer. **BD.**

**DAY 14: ESSAOUIRA.** Today is at leisure to explore more of this fascinating seaside town with both of us, your guide and driver to accompany you where you will within the town's precincts, though perhaps you'd just like to relax on the beach, have a go at surfing, wind or kite surfing. Back in the 1960s, hippy travellers and local residents built an almost unique relationship that persists to this day, making Essaouira one of the friendliest and most laid-back beach resorts anywhere. The beach dominates the Essaourians' leisure time. Although the strong wind and currents makes relaxed tanning and swimming a little difficult at times, with good winds for most days of the year, Essaouira is a water sports paradise. The best spots are reported to be Essaouira Bay, Sidi Kaouki, Cape Sim and Moulay Bouzertoune. Equipment can be hired from various hire centres on the beach front. Fishermen sell their catch through market hall and you can get it cooked in small stands nearby. For a relaxing drink, or two, it'll be hard to beat the terrace bar of the *Taros* (2, Rue de la Sqala) for its view over the lively Place Moulay el Hassan and the harbour. **BD.**





**DAY 15: ESSAOUIRA - SAFI - EL OUALIDIA - EL JADIDA - AZEMMOUR - CASABLANCA:** After breakfast today, we set off up



north along the Atlantic coastline first to stop at Safi. Safi boasts of having the first Moslem Mosque in the kingdom, as well as Portuguese buildings dating back more than five centuries. The world-renowned Safi pottery pieces elaborately trimmed with tooled silver overlay are beautifully displayed with their rich designs, styles, and colours, each piece having been wheel-thrown and hand-finished by skilled artisans. Continuing north alongside the Atlantic Ocean via Cap Beddouza to the seaside resort town of El Oualidia, a simple place; time-forgotten, still civilization-forgotten though being "found" by those seeking peace and quiet, lying on the legendary Barbary Coast (according to the Romans, the realm of *barbariani* - those who spoke no Latin - a people we know today as Berbers), whose seawall gazes out at a picture-perfect lagoon. The Atlantic laps the biscuit-coloured sand on the rounded shore, a small breach separating the tidal lagoon from the Atlantic, a blue bobbing line between the rocky bluffs reaching out from either side of the mainland. We see a hilltop Kasbah built by Sultan El Oualid in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. At the foot of the hill, there are the ruins of the once-elegant summer palace of Sultan Mohammed V (the grandfather of the current King Mohammed VI), its regal steps descending to within a few feet of the lagoon. Surrounded by a vista of lofty dark-green stone pines, and tumbled

down for half a century now, the palace has a perfect panoramic view of the whole lagoon and the distant narrow breach into the Ocean. Oualidia's well-kept secret is the oyster beds; from here, oysters are sent out all over Morocco. We should see a fleet of candy-pink fishing boats lies high on the dunes as we eat a fish lunch overlooking the ocean, perhaps to see avocets, cormorants, oystercatchers - of course - stilts and stints, whimbrels and redshanks. Onwards now to El Jadida - 'The New One'; founded in 1513 by the Portuguese as Mazagão, their first and last possession in Morocco, now a UNESCO World Heritage Site and called Morocco's Deauville; a small, delightful coastal town with several 3 metre-thick bastions - L'Ange, Saint Sebastian, Saint Antoine and Saint Esprit which were destroyed in 1769 by the same Portuguese when they were forced to leave Morocco, but which were subsequently restored to their former armed state. Taken back from the Portuguese in 1769, Mazagan was to become a Jewish Mellah (or Quarter). Our first stop would be at the old fortress inside which lies an ancient structure that escaped the destruction of the fleeing Portuguese - the misnamed 'Portuguese Cisterns', as they were actually built by the Romans originally to store grain, then used by the Portuguese as a fresh water cistern to withstand sieges, to be discovered by accident in 1977 by a Jewish spice merchant and where Orson Wells shot the riot scenes for his film Othello. We leave to continue to the Porto do Mar (the Sea Gate) where we may visit the communal bakery. A short walk would then take us to the Bastion of St Sebastian. Here is the old prison compound and the Tribunal of the Inquisition - to continue to the Mellah and an early 19<sup>th</sup> century synagogue, as the Star of David underneath a Moslem

crescent on the wall testifies - surmised by some to symbolise the appreciation of the Jewish population of the time at being accepted by a Islamic country after fleeing Spain and persecution at the hands of the Inquisition and of their desire to integrate into Moroccan life. Integration was never really complete, however, as Jews here always lived under a different set of laws to those of Muslims (one was they were not allowed to wear shoes!). No Jews live here now, as they all left for Israel after the founding of the State, yet their centuries of tradition, artistry and culture are still quite tangible. On now to Azemmour, in the Berber language - wild olive - and *not* the perfumes of Crabtree & Evelyn) for a short tour of this delightful once-Carthaginian, once-Portuguese strategic natural port (*Azama*) where the ochres of Morocco change to white, blue and yellow, where violet bougainvilleas challenge the purplish ramparts; where the Dar el Baroud (powder storage house of the Portuguese) bastion guards the now-ruined kasbah, the Arab Medina and the Jewish Mellah (the synagogue of Rabbi Abraham Moul Niss is still frequently used). On now on our final leg to Casablanca where we enter the elegant residential district of Anfa, the original site of Casablanca, with its green parks and Art Deco villas. Anfa hosted the Conference of Casablanca with President Roosevelt and Sir Winston Churchill, during which the date of the Allied landings on the French coasts was fixed for the spring of 1944 and where the somewhat difficult meeting with them and Generals Charles de Gaulle and Henri Giraud took place. Here, also, at Anfa, President Roosevelt received in secret the Sultan Mohammed V where the possible future of Morocco was discussed in depth. On now down into the bustling metropolis to our hotel. **BL.**

**DAY 16: CASABLANCA.** This morning after breakfast we shall set out around 10 o'clock on a visit of this the second largest city in



Africa after Cairo. We shall drive to the truly 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, closed to non-believers on a Friday) 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 - 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; From here on via the Corniche running alongside the Atlantic Ocean to the seaside resort of Ain Diab and down to the Notre Dame de Lourdes Cathedral with its stained glass window by Gabriel Loire, chief glassworker of Chartres to the King's Palace precinct the Habous Quarter - the New Medina - a delightful 1920s souk and thence past the Mohammed V Square to the busy United Nations Square. Here, but a few yards from your hotel, under the walls of the old Medina at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was but an empty space where the souq was held. It very quickly became the heart of the modern town. You should be back in your hotel by five pm and



your guide will be at your side to advise you on any other points of interest you may care to visit. Perhaps a drink at Rick's Café ([www.rickscafe.ma](http://www.rickscafe.ma)) – “Casablanca” without ‘Rick Baines’, Ingrid Bergman, Clause Rains and Peter Laurie, before leaving for a dinner and Oriental show at the Basmane restaurant overlooking the Ocean. **BD.**

**DAY 17: CASABLANCA - HOME:** After breakfast and in accordance with your flight schedule, you will be transferred to Casablanca's Mohammed V International airport in time for your onward flight, taking with him some certainly incredible memories of a Morocco so full of remarkable contrasts and very friendly people. B.

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

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

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

**OUR PRICES WILL INCLUDE:** Accommodation at specified or similar hotels or riads of your selection including taxes as *available at time of reservation*; meal schedule as shown (excluding alcoholic drinks), or as modified to your specific instruction - except that Half Board is obligatory in Erfoud, Ouarzazate and Essaouira. Porterage on 1 piece of luggage per person at airports and hotels/riads. Private circle trip transportation in an air-conditioned vehicle from Tangier to Casablanca. H24 Emergency Call Service. Sightseeing tours and all related entrance fees as listed in the itinerary including a calèche tour in Marrakech and a dromedary ride to the Saharan Berber bivouac. An English-speaking Licensed National Guide throughout the tour.

**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.