

MOROCCO THROUGH ITS ARCHAEOLOGY AND MOORISH BERBER HISTORY

OBTIC26ctfm **19 DAYS/18 MAGICAL NIGHTS**. CASABLANCA/RABAT/TANGIER-CHEFCHAOUEN-FES-MEKNES-VOLUBILIS-FES/MERZOUGA (SAHARA)/SKOURA/ ZAGORA (SAHARA)/ OUARZAZATE/ TAROUDDANT/ ESSAOUIRA/ MARRAKECH/OURIKA VALLEY-MARRAKECH (CASABLANCA)

DAY 1: CASABLANCA. We meet you on your arrival from your flight at the Mohamed V International Airport to transfer you to your hotel with welcome dinner and overnight in Casablanca. Subject to the time of your flight's arrival and your level of fatigue, after you've had a shower and perhaps a light lunch (optional) in the hotel, we should leave around 13:15 at the latest to visit 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 Earth - to welcome to prayer 25,000 believers inside and 80,000 on the adjoining esplanade. Embedded in the axis of the southern facade, a 210 metre-high minaret, boasts a laser beam of 30km reach pointing towards Mecca. This magnificent Mosque also encompasses a Medersa (School of Koranic learning), a Library, a National Museum and immense lecture halls, all beautifully decorated by artisans from all over Morocco: frescoes and zelliges in traditional geometrical motives, painted and sculptured woods, stuccos of intricate designs, arabesques in decorative drawings and writings in brilliant colour inaugurated in 1992 and a masterpiece of Moroccan architectural design and craftsmanship. On now to the Corniche running alongside the Atlantic Ocean, the seaside resort of Aïn Diab, down 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. **D.**

DAY 2: CASABLANCA - RABAT: After breakfast we set out on a 1½ hours' drive to the administrative Imperial capital since 1912 of the Kingdom of Morocco, Rabat (R'bat al Fat'h) – one of the four Imperial Cities, founded in the 12th century (R'bat meaning fortified convent). 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 into the ancient Medina at the heart of the military history of Rabat to the **Kasbah of the Oudayas and Museum** whose alleyways are reminiscent of a delightful blue and whitewashed



Andalusian village (blue being the colour of Judaism). This was the site of the original R'bat from which generations of cavalry have ridden out to subdue the rebellious Bou Raghhouala Berber tribes. It has also been a bastion against repeated attacks by corsair raiders. The museum is situated in the opulent lodge built by Sultan Moulay Ismail in the 17th century as his Rabat residence. This spectacular lodge is known for its breathtaking garden, the first of its masterpieces, that is a maze of pathways, surrounded by lush vegetation, endless beds of vibrant flowers which soften the strict geometry of those paths, together with beautiful ramparts and fountains making it amongst the very finest of all Andalusian gardens.



Over and above the immaculate gardens that attract many visitors each year, the museum building itself is an awesome sight. Its spacious rooms and ancient interior, which is decorated in true Moroccan fashion, instills an atmosphere of royalty, wealth and absolute luxury. From marble halls, priceless carpets, works of art and unmistakable elegance, the Oudayas Museum is a gateway into the past and the rich hypnotic history of Morocco. At the far end is a room reproducing an ancient Moroccan interior with a vast bay opening onto this glorious spectacle with its magnificent use of colours finished off with beautiful cushions in brocade, silk and gold cover the divans all around the room. A little further on, in a cool marble room, stand rows of very old illuminated Korans, jewellery, pottery and musical instruments. The carpets exhibited here are not just woven masterpieces, but extraordinary feats of meticulous stitching and detailed work. A true Rabat carpet can have more than 150 thousand stitches to just one square metre. The motifs and patterns found on these carpets are traditional and often refer to the specific craftsman; styles and techniques used to produce these rare carpets being unique to Morocco. Using a less elaborate technique, the rural carpets, called Berbers, demonstrate a powerful

sense of composition, colour and ornamentation which is an art of its own with a unique appeal. You may also view the market place, furniture displays, diamond cutting exhibitions, statues, sculptures, textiles, fabrics, metalworking (with both silver and gold) exhibits, decorative arts and displays of costumes. On now to the **Archaeological Museum**. Built in 1932 and enlarged a few



years later to display the finds resulting from intense archaeological research, this museum has housed the National Museum collections since 1986. It is one of the most sumptuous in Morocco and should certainly not be missed. The prehistoric section brings together human remains from the middle Palaeolithic period (probably Neanderthals) to the Neolithic (4000 B.C.), proving the continuity and size of the population at this time. The Islamic archaeology section is constantly growing with finds coming from the excavations of 8th and 9th century sites, enabling us to have a clear idea of their potters, herdsmen, surgeons and bakers who have left us the legacy of their tools, while their womenfolk have left us their jewellery and the animals their harnesses. There is a collection of superb bronzes

recovered from the excavations at Volubilis, the Romano-Berber capital of Mauritania Tingitana. When Rome ordered the evacuation of Volubilis in the third century, the citizens, expecting to return shortly, buried their works of art outside the city, where they were to remain undisturbed for 17 centuries. These pieces are kept apart in the Salle des Bronzes. Pre-Roman and Roman civilisations are particularly well-represented by some of the finest pieces to have survived from those periods. There is a first-rate collection of Hellenistic-style bronzes, so exceptional that it is difficult to know where to look first: the "Drunken Donkey", passionately lyrical, an incomparable masterpiece from the time of the Emperor Augustus; the "Volubilis Guard-Dog" (centrepiece of a fountain) with its stunning realism, the "Young man Crowned With Ivy", a marvel of elegance and grace; the Rider and the busts presumed to be those of Cato the Younger and the young King Juba II of Mauritania Tingitana - the "Heads of Young Berbers" in marble, remarkable for their technical perfection and the vigorous strength of their expression. Perhaps, instead, you'd like to visit the **Natural Science Museum**? This reasonably good museum is filled with impressive displays that chronicle the origins of the earth and the creatures that have lived on it over the ages. Amateur archaeologists will delight in the many fascinating discoveries that are on display here. The most impressive display here is that of a harmless herbivore sauropod dinosaur some 15 metres long unearthed in 1979 in the Azilal regions of the High Atlas Mountains, after which archaeologists spent years of painstaking and careful digging to reveal it. The results were surely worth it since now all the bones in this large skeleton are completely authentic. The animal measures a whopping fifteen metres in length and it is estimated that it must have lived approximately 150 million years ago. Of course, seeing a large skeleton is one thing, but some may find it hard to imagine such a framework of bones with skin, eyes, scales and nails. Therefore a massive, full-scale reproduction of this gentle giant has been created, complete with compelling scales, eyes and teeth. As you stand and stare up at this memorial to a massive but harmless herbivore, it is easier to imagine what it must have looked like when it actually roamed the earth all those millions of years ago.

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. We cross the river to Rabat's twin sister of Salé, here to take a light lunch on the Bou Regreg river, its bay being the one-time lair of famed Moroccan corsairs of the Barbary Coast at the Salé Fortress; the corsairs who raided shipping from the time of the Crusades until early in the 19th century; the corsairs who captured Miguel de Cervantes; the corsairs mentioned in Doctor Dolittle - the Moroccan Sultan Moulay Ismail actually made piracy a state monopoly in 1678. In 1783 the first American ship was captured and ransomed for \$60,000 cash; over the next 10 years a further dozen American ships were captured, the crew being made slaves in Algeria, one of the reasons why the United States Navy was born in 1794 with 6 frigates. From here we turn to our delightful accommodation for this night. **BLD.** (Museums of your choice)

DAY 3: RABAT - SALE - LARACHE - LIXUS - ASILAH - TANGIER: We set out today for a 4 hours' drive towards the north via Salé, sister city of Rabat, its Mellah, an important centre of Jewish intellectual thought, was established the same year as in Rabat. The main door to the Mellah and the beautiful Medersa were constructed by the Merinids, who had close ties to the Jews. Sale's



most famous Rabbi, Raphael Ben Mordechai Encaoua (1848-1935) the chief Ribbi of Morocco, is buried in the Salé cemetery. We continue to skirt the town of Kenitra and on to the town of Larache (El Araish). El Araish, *i.e.*, the trellises of vines; vulgarly called Larache, replaced the ancient Liscas or Lixus and Lixa, whose ruins are nearby. The Arabs call it El-Araish Beni-Arous, *i.e.*, the vineyards of the Beni-Arous, a powerful tribe who populate the greater part of the district of Azgar, of which it is the capital and the residence of the Governor. It was, probably, built by this tribe about 1,200 or 1,300, AD. Some of the Greek Ancients located here the mythological garden of the Hesperidia, keepers of Hercules' mythical Golden Apples, 'Arasi being the Arabic for "pleasure-gardens," and whose "golden

apples" perhaps are the familiar oranges. El-Araish is situated upon a small promontory stretching into the sea, and along the mouth of the river Cos, or Luccos (Loukkos), which forms a small, secure port with ten forts, all supplied with old-fashioned guns,

Spanish fortifications in fair condition, the towers whose names are given by Tissot as those of St Stephen, St James and that of the once numerous Jewish populace, with the Castle of Our Lady of Europe, now the kasbah or citadel, those Spaniards who captured this place in 1610, to be re-taken by Moulay Ismail in 1689. Larache is an important, laid-back harbour town founded in the 7th century when a group of Muslim soldiers from the Arabian Peninsular extended their camp at Lixus onto the south bank of the Oued (River) Loukos. In 1471, Portuguese settlers from Asilah and Tangier drove the inhabitants out of Larache, which was to remain uninhabited until the Sultan of Fes, Mohamed es Said ech Sheik, decided to build a stronghold on the plateau above river. He constructed a fortress at the entrance to the port so as to control access. For a long time, attempts by the Portuguese, Spanish and French to retake it met with no success. The Kasbah, built in 1491 by Moulay en Nasser, became a pirate stronghold and it was here that the corsair ships raiding out of Rabat and Salé were built. From 1610 until 1689, the town passed to Spanish hands, who used it mainly as a trading stop, never really administering the town. The somewhat despotic ruler Moulay Ismail Ibn Sharif (1645?-1727), known in Morocco as the "Warrior King", second ruler of the Alaouite Dynasty (all of whom claim to be a descendant of the Prophet Mohammed through his grandson Hassan Ibn Ali), finally retook it in 1689. Attacks on Larache continued but it still remained in Muslim hands. Spain took it again in 1911 and held it until Morocco's independence in 1956. These separate periods of Arab and Spanish rule have left their mark; although the layout of the old town is typically Arab, houses in the newer town appear Andalusian in style, given the influence of the Moorish refugees from the Spanish inquisition. Here we may pay a short visit to the **Archaeological Museum**, formerly the palace of Sultan Youssef Abdelhak el Merini between 1258 and 1281, the history of this impressive building also includes its use by the Spaniards as a setting for state occasions, as a courthouse and even as a weapons room. The view from the palace over the Loukos region is quite staggering. Today, it houses reminders of all the great moments in Morocco's life and here you'll find souvenirs of its struggle for independence, ancient coins, fishing equipment, musical instruments, statues, jewellery and perfume bottles. We shall continue on to make a brief stop at the ruins of **Lixus**, set on a



Tchemmich hillside which dominates the plain 80m above the marshes through which the Loukos flows and some 3 km inland from the Atlantic Ocean at the entrance of the river, bounded to the north and east by forests of cork oak. An ancient city of Mauretania Tingitana, in the 7th century BC it was settled by the Phoenicians to become part of the Carthaginian Empire. When Carthage fell to Ancient Rome it then became a Roman Imperial outpost, attaining its zenith during the reign of the emperor Claudius (41-54AD). Ancient Lixus has an interest attached to its coins, a few of which remain, although but very recently deciphered by archaeologists. There are five classes of them, all Phoenician, although the city when under Roman rule struck coins representing the vineyard riches of this part of ancient Mauritania by two bunches of grapes; others bear the stamp of "two ears of corn" and "two fishes," representing the fields of corn waving on the plains of Morocco, and the fish (shebbel especially) which fill the northern rivers. The site was excavated continuously from 1948 to 1969, an exhaustive work having been undertaken to study the site's rich mosaics, one of which is of sixty meters representing Poseidon. The excavated zones constitute approximately 20% of the total surface of the site.



We continue northwards 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 19th and early 20th 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 of some thirteen kilometres to the east of Asilah to come across the ruins of a once major town of *Constantia Zilis* which, was a commercial centre of strategic importance to the Phoenicians, Carthaginians and, when conquered by the Romans, was named first Zilia and afterwards Zulia to be partially destroyed by the English after their Norman invasion, to be restored by the Cordovan kings in 844AD. The successor to this prestigious settlement since the High Middle Ages is Asilah, then moved to the naked shores of the Atlantic. Finally now up a short distance to the throbbing city of Tangier.

The modern Tanjah (Anglicised to Tangier) was first known as a Phoenician trading port in the 15th 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; Tanger 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. On arrival here we check in to our hotel, later to leave for a tour of Tangier. It 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. We enter 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 faïences 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 we shall 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. We 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 very impressive. The caves are. 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. But nobody knows for sure. This coastline is also where the Barbary pirates (corsairs) of the region were once headquartered. We shall return to our hotel, perchance to explore the fascinating city on foot, strolling through the mysterious winding alleyways and souks of the Medina, stopping to barter for that "essential" souvenir and to admire the beautiful handicrafts. **BLD.** (Museums of your choice)

DAY 4: TANGIER - TETOUAN - CHEFCHAOUEN - FES: After breakfast, we shall visit the Museum of Antiquities. As you walk into the former kitchens of the Sultan's palace, Dar El Makhzen, you will come face to face with Moroccan antiquity and pre-history, for the museum contains an array of objects and artifacts that come from nearby Roman sites, including Banasa, Lixus, Volubilis and Cotta. They contained a number of mosaics and bronze pieces that can now be viewed here. One of the better known mosaics that came out of these locations was "The Voyage of Venus." This mosaic depicts the Goddess Venus sitting on a throne that is situated on a ship. Surrounding the throne are a number of nymphs. The ship can be seen making its way to an unknown destination through clear, blue waters. The history of Tangier and its region is told on the first floor. In Room 3, devoted to antique

funeral rites that took place during the Roman era. Here also stands an amazing life-size model of a Carthaginian tomb, amidst a group of small lead sarcophagi and a child's tomb buried in a clay jar.

Surrounding the museum is a beautiful Andalusian garden where visitors can walk and enjoy the peaceful surroundings. There is also a replica of an ancient necropolis, which is a large and elaborate cemetery that was used by ancient cities. Nearby is the **Museum of Moroccan Arts**. The imposing silhouette of the Dar el Makhzen dominates the Tangier kasbah. Formerly the governor's palace, it was built in the XVIIIth century and is laid out around a splendid patio decorated with enamelled faience.

Before you walk into the palace you will notice a unique and stunning interior courtyard, which is beautifully enameled in glazed earthenware. The Museum of Moroccan Art is situated on beautiful grounds and is located specifically in the prince's apartments at the palace. These rooms are exquisite and decorated with sculpted plasterwork and mosaics completed in coloured marble and glass tile pieces. The prince's apartments are indeed princely: painted wooden ceilings, sculpted plaster work and mosaics, all of them exquisite - a worthy setting for works of art from all over Morocco, which are honoured as prestigious ambassadors of their regions.

In the northern rooms there are a number of firearms decorating the walls. These firearms have been decorated with marquetry, which is a decorating technique that makes use of hot pieces of glass. The hot glass is applied to the surface of the firearm and later, when it has cooled, it is carved to produce a stunning piece of artwork.

On the walls of the museum you will also observe pottery pieces that have been engraved with motifs of feathers and flowers and other similar decorations, whilst in another room there are exquisite carpets from Rabat, beautifully woven, incorporating the characteristic central medallion associated with the city. In the Fes room you will find silks that have been dyed in every color imaginable. There are superbly bound illuminated manuscripts written using the finest calligraphy and dishes that are centuries of years old and come in an array of vibrant colors from golden yellow right through the famous "Fes blue". There is also embroidery work that has been beautifully stitched with real gold and a number of other Moroccan artifacts, intricate textiles and tile work, a variety of leather goods, stunning pieces of Moroccan jewellery, Moroccan brass and copper products and rural earthenware crockery.



We now 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 Castellians of King Henry III as Barbary pirates were using it as a base for their attacks on his shipping. By the end of the 15th 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 4th 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. We shall visit 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. We shall visit the **Ethnographic Museum**. Here even the most insignificant piece of embroidery reveals a diversity of motifs and colours firmly establishing art at the very centre of everyday life. But then, the Ethnographic Museum is, in fact, a museum dedicated to the art of living. Founded in 1928, then known as the 'Museum of Indigenous Arts' or as the 'Muslim House', the museum and its endless variety of exhibits of the traditions, culture and artistic history of the community were moved to the old military fortress of Sultan Moulay Abderrahman in 1948, which had been renovated to house this relatively new and improved Ethnographic Museum.

The Moroccan Riffian community here can be seen as an extremely natural artistic community. Every object is important and their creative abilities are evident even in the most insignificant items. Baskets are decorated in bright and lively designs, bowls are

painted in a variety of colors, pillows are embroidered and every design that can be seen on the traditional clothing has a specific message or meaning attached to it. Divided into specific sections with authentic recreations of a Tetouani kitchen, celebration rooms, bedrooms and living areas with each displaying their own fascinating collection. From antiquities and costumes to weapons and crafts, each features the detailed and handcrafted designs and decorations commonly seen. One of the most popular rooms is the Trousseau Room where visitors may view the traditions related to one of Morocco's most important celebrations – marriage. Linens, clothing, bridal trousseau, marriage chest and other symbolic items are on display in this room.

Sewing and embroidery is a significant part of the Moroccan tradition, as it is a form of individuality and identity and here you will be able to feast your eyes on spectacular linens, silks and materials. The intricate stitches and braiding techniques are also on display, as are different items of clothing made from wool, cotton and even camel hair. The museum also has magnificent exhibits of jewelry, mosaics, headdresses, bridal bed covers and pillows, paintings, furniture, woodcrafts, weaving, traditional instruments, firearms and weapons. The kitchen also proves to be an exciting exhibit, as you are able to get a little taste of true Tetouan cuisine and even try the non-alcoholic drinks that are made traditionally on the premises.

Light refreshments are taken in a café near the Bab el Oukla before continuing our tour of the city, including a short stop at the **Archaeological Museum** constructed in 1943. Its exhibits are dedicated to the fascinating pre-historic and the pre-Islamic times of Morocco. The pre-Islamic era in Morocco includes the history of the Romans, Phoenicians, Mauritians and the Punic. Islamic history is also looked at through various exhibits in the museum. Throughout the centuries of re-settlements, battles, invasion and revolts, pieces of each occurrence have remained. When these pieces are put together they help us to create snippets of the culture and traditions that have been handed down over the centuries and can still be seen today.

When visitors enter this inspiring museum they will be greeted by the Three Graces. This is a mosaic that has survived since Roman times and depicts the celebration of mythological figures.

Other rooms display objects and instruments which take us back to a way of life far removed from our own. Prehistoric tools, coins, bronzes and pottery bear witness to customs both ritualistic and familiar. For example, the masterful Sumerian ex-voto statuette found close to Asilah. The figurine collection that is on display is extremely important as most of the figurines date back to first century A.D. At the end of the visit, let your imagination roam among the 60,000-odd volumes contained in the vast library dedicated to the preservation of North African literature.

Visitors here can look forward to seeing artifacts such as different currency coins, tools that have been crafted from stone or bone, pottery, bronze items, amphorae, mosaics, architectural discoveries and ancient inscriptions.

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



Chefchaouen is situated at 600m in the er-Rif Mountains. 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. 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 you, 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. Our guided walking tour of this delightful blue and white village takes in the Palace El Makhzen and the famous (3000m²) square of Ouatta el Hammam in whose ornate, crumbling ochre and toffee-coloured Kasbah in the centre of the Medina, built by the Pasha Ahmed Errifi, is housed the **Ethnographic Museum**, a haven of peace with a magnificent Andalusian garden whose red walls and battlements blend in magnificently. With its incomparable collections illustrating the customs and popular art of the Chefchaouen region together with those from all over northern Morocco, here are featured embroidery, wooden caskets, pottery, arms

and musical instruments. On to the exterior of the El Masjid El Andalous with its octagonal mosque, so characteristic of Northern Morocco. On our 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 will 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. We continue 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 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. 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. **BLD.** (Museums of your choice)

DAY 5: FES. In 786, one hundred and fifty years after the death of the Prophet Mohammed Bin Abdullah Banu Hashim, his grandson was to set foot in Morocco. This man was Idriss Ibn Abdallah, destined to become Moulay Idriss, patron saint of Morocco and founder of Fes. Implicated in a failed rebellion against the Arabian Abbasids, he fled Baghdad to come with his bedraggled army to this 'Land of the Setting Sun', beyond which one could travel no further by land. Here, in Fes, on the eastern bank of the seasonal Oued Fes, after a set-to with the indigenous Berber tribesmen, he started to build what was to become the first Islamic settlement in Morocco.



Welcome to this different world, so reminiscent of a Jerusalem of 1000 years ago. With its two hundred mosques and holy shrines, Fes contains more places of worship than any other city in Morocco. At its peak, early in the thirteenth century, Fes el-Bali alone boasted almost eight hundred mosques and mausoleums for its 125,000 inhabitants. By the seventeenth century, however, the Scottish traveller William Lithgow reported that places of worship were far outstripped by some twelve thousand licensed brothels and, as the Victorian era traveller Budgett Meakin remarked: "Fes us at once the most religious and the most wicked city in Morocco...the saints and sinner being for the most part, identical..." With



ancient ramparts set against a backdrop of the not-too-distant Middle Atlas Mountains you'll know you're in for a very different experience; one that our professionally-guided visit will take you to the bustling maze of alleyways of the fascinating medina and souks offering every possible combination of beautiful pottery, Berber carpets, Fassi brassware, Jewish-originated silverware, traditional and modern jewellery, beautiful leather goods all amidst the pungent aromas of spices, herbs and oils. Take in with us the ancient living monuments this city of One Thousand and One Nights has to offer the serious tourist. Fes, one of the pillars of Islam, harboured the most celebrated of Jewish communities and scholars.



Is it Fes or Fez? It is both; and neither. The Western name for the city is drawn from the Arabic *Fas* and, as there is no one correct way to transliterate Arabic words into Western characters, in the French language, the city is referred to as *Fés*, while Americans tend to use *Fez*. Fassin, or Fassis as the residents call themselves, use the pronunciation of *Fas*, so derived from three Arabic letters fa (f), alif (a) and sin (s). So everyone wins.

As soon as you ready after breakfast, we make for the impressive Dar el Makhzen and a 15 minute stop at the Royal Palace with its magnificent seven bronze gates. From here we walk to and through the Mellah with its intense atmosphere and fine examples of Mauro-Hispanic architecture. We now drive to the Borj Sud, here to take in the panoramic view of the Medina. Off now down to start our Walking Tour of the labyrinth of the ancient Fes Medina and Mellah (a UNESCO World Heritage Site) and an Escheresque jumble of alleyways; of the Bou Inania Mosque; 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 caravanerai, 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 Boujoud, 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 its **Weapons Museum**. Hard to miss since it is housed in a 16th century fortress that towers above the city, its stark walls clearly visible over quite a distance. The fortress was once a northern tower that formed part of the walled fortifications that surrounded Fes in times gone by. Built in 1582 at the command of Saâdien Sultan Ahmed El Mansour Eddahbi as part of efforts to ensure that Fes was adequately protected, no better location for the museum could have been chosen since the building itself is a testimony to the evolution of military warfare and architecture. Here you will find weapons from virtually every age and corner of the country. The majority of the collection has been donated by royalty and as a result, there are even a number of rare pieces included in the displays. Overall, there are more than 5000 different arms in the collection which include 775 military items. All these articles are displayed in a series of 13 different rooms and collections include everything from pre-historic weaponry to rifles with their inlaid butts to modern day rifles. The collection is also not limited to only Moroccan artifacts and includes Indian, European and Asian articles.



The most outstanding portion of the museum simply has to be the Moroccan weaponry, which is not only dangerous, but decorative too. Daggers are encrusted with precious stones and rifle butts are carefully shaped and inlaid with jewels. These articles are so beautifully decorated that they hold appeal for art lovers too. The largest piece in the collection is a cannon that was used during the Battle of the

Three Kings (Battle of the Wadi Al-Makhazin). This massive weapon is five meters long and weighs a whopping 12 tons! Weapons specialists will appreciate the development of techniques while art lovers will be impressed by the splendour of the objects. We continue to the **Dar Batha Museum**, an Hispano-Moorish palace dating from the end of the 19th century housing some admirable collections of traditional art from Fes. Most traditional forms of art were also practical in nature so they usually took the form of furniture that was given a decorative touch. Therefore you can expect to enjoy intricately carved wooden furniture, wrought iron with decorative finishing touches, carpets, embroidery and jewelry. Of course, there were also less functional pieces, such as artwork made from sculpted plaster or other decorative materials. Sculpted wood, wrought iron, sculpted plaster or decorative

materials that are in fact works of art in their own right. Embroidery, carpets, jewellery and coins compete with one another to attract your attention.

But the museum's centrepiece is to be found in the pottery room where you will find an unbeatable display of ceramic objects that have been masterfully crafted by Fez craftsmen through the centuries. Of particular interest are the articles dating back to the 10th century which contain items of 'Fes blue'. At the time, this relatively groundbreaking way of coloring pottery involved the use of cobalt to obtain the bluish coloring. Typical ceramics feature a white enamel background with stylized floral motives interweaved on them in brilliant shades of blue. The floral motifs are both sophisticated and harmonious and are a delight to behold. Not to be missed are the astrolabes – a display featuring a variety of fascinating astronomical instruments that were created and perfected by learned Arabs. They are not only functional, but wonderfully decorative with intricately worked metal and inset jewels. From here back to your hotel after a day full of contrasting culture and journey into some 1,200 years of history. **BLD.**

DAY 6: 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 Meknassa Berbers as *Meknassa 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, the Place el-Hedim and the **Dar Jamaï Museum**. Before housing the Meknès collections, the Dar Jamaï had a number of different uses. Built in 1882 to be the residence of the illustrious Jamaï family, which included two of Sultan Moulay el-Hassan's ministers (1873-1894), it was used as a military hospital after 1912, only becoming the Museum of Moroccan Art in 1920. Today, the palace still displays much of its wealthy beginnings, with a luxurious garden that has been landscaped in an Arab-style and features fruit trees and beautiful cypresses. The building boasts elegant painted windows, detailed tiles, painted wood and even sculptured plasterwork. It still oozes a feeling of luxury and is a symbol of the wealth and prosperity that was enjoyed by the Jamaï family.

The elaborate decoration with sculpted plaster and painted wood as well as the Andalusian garden planted with cypress and fruit trees, gives an accurate idea of the degree of luxury enjoyed by the prosperous bourgeoisie of Meknes. Wrought iron work, wooden sculpture, weaving, leather working, brass and copper ware, metalwork... this museum is devoted to the crafts of the region.

Local talent and skill of the craftsmen of Morocco are displayed through vast and colorful exhibits of painted wood panels, decorated chests, moucharabieh and breathtaking pottery pieces decorated in the use of rich colours and in the magnificent multi-hued embroidery for which they are so famous. You'll no doubt be astounded at the detail and time-consuming effort that is evident in every piece of wrought iron, brass, woodcarving, ceramics, metal work, coppersmith items and leatherwork. The museum also has a wonderful collection of jewelry, traditional costumes and rare carpets.



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 (*moussem*) 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 7: FES. A day you have at leisure perhaps just (eventually) to revisit the Medina and some of the monuments you may have missed out on the previous day, and bargain for some brassware or, perhaps to 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 5th 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 8: 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'Talrehmt (1907m), on across a deserted plain through the town of Aït 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 Légonnaire, 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 4x4 to continue on to 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. You might like to witness this sunset up in the dunes having reached there on the back of a dromedary, returning later to the camp site. **BLD.**



DAY 9: 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 4x4 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 check in to our tastefully-decorated hotel in the small town of Tinehrir, located at the mouth of the fabulous Todra Gorges, overlooked by a Glaoua Kasbah and which town boasts of the oldest Jewish cemetery in Morocco. Now we set out up the Oued Todra for some 15km into to the deepest, narrowest and most spectacular part of these further wonders of



Mother Nature to explore this remarkable canyon. We return to the mouth of the Gorges, perhaps 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 Aït Youl as far as a group of ksours at Aït 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. 10kms from Qlâa't Des M'Gouna we come to Tiliit, once known as the Ancient City of the Jews of the Dadès. The fortress of Tiliit, its synagogue decorated with geometrical reliefs, has been the centre of a Jewish region ruled by the Spanish-Jewish family of Perez from the end of the fifteenth century until the reign of the despotic Sultan Moulay Ismail in 1672. From here to Skoura, our kasbah-like hotel, dinner and a good night's sleep. **BLD.**



DAY 10: SKOURA - SKOURA OASIS - (OUARZAZATE) - DRAA VALLEY - ZAGORA:



Bright and early after breakfast we set off today through to the Kasbahs of the Skoura Oasis to the outskirts of the new (1920s) once-garrison town of the French Protectorate - Ouarzazate and on down through the delightfully dramatic Draâ Valley, passing many kasbahs and oases to the edge of the Sahara to the dusty, one horse (dromedary) desert 'Hamada' town of Zagora. Draâ translates to 'Black' as most of the inhabitants of this long valley - the Draâ River is the longest river in Morocco - originated from Chad, Mali, Senegal and Mauritania. There is even a sign here telling us the number of days by camel to Timbuctou - "Tombouctou 52 Jours" - by foot or by dromedary to Timbuktu in Mali. We shall take a break here for a lunch at the kasbah-like hotel set in a palmeraie - oasis - La Fibule du Draâ - flanked by the Jbel (mountain) Zagora - some say an Arabised version of the name Caesar from which the town got its name - the Jbel Tadrhart to the east; the Jbel Sarhro to the north-east and the low-lying Jbel Bani to the south. Here you may see real African Berber Touaregs, not just local Moroccans dressed up as the "Blue Men". The *Touareg* name was applied to them by early explorers and historians since Leo Africanus. They call themselves variously Kel Tamasheq, Kel Tamajaq "Speakers of Tamasheq" and Imuhagh, Imazaghan or *Imashaghen* meaning "the Free People". They also call themselves *Kel tagelmust* - "People of the Veil". Most of the inhabitants here are a mixture of Berber, Arab and Jew and the descendants of black slaves. Once it was called 'Tazagourt' the singular of plural 'Tizigirt', a Berber word for 'twin peaks', referring to the almost volcanic form of the wind-eroded Jbel, closely resembling a tagine pot, on top of which the ruins of an Almoravid kasbah may be seen. In ancient European maps the Jbel is already indicated but the town itself was only built in the mid 20th century. Like the expansive succession of oases they are, the palm groves form an abundant canopy of green waving palm leaves that shelter the valley floor from the scorching sun, making this one of the most important date-producing regions in the world. We continue on south to visit nearby Tamegroute with its famous mosques with blue majolica roofs and white minarets. Tamegroute has been a religious centre since the 11th century; its Zaouiat (religious school or monastery) was founded in the 17th century as the seat of the Sufi religious brotherhood of the Naciriyyin. The Naciria got its name and reputation from Sidi Mohammed Bennacer Edderaï (1603-1674) who settled in Tamegroute in 1631. Sidi Mohammed Bennacer was a theologian, scholar and physician, especially interested in mental disorders. Sidi Ahmad Bennacer travelled to Ethiopia, Arabia, Egypt, Iraq and Persia, writing a voluminous series of memoirs of his journeys called the *Rihla* and brought back numerous works from all parts of the Islamic world. The brotherhood of black African origin, nomadic olive-skinned Berbers and light-skinned Arabs decided in the 17th century to found a university of the Koran (Qur'an). When Ahmad Bennacer died, the library (in Arabic '*khizana habsia*') of Tamegroute, with its thousands of manuscripts was one of the richest of North Africa. Fine examples of the collection of manuscripts (now 4200) are still on display in the Zaouiat today. Among them are some 13th century illuminated Koran scrolls written on gazelle hide; a 14th century Koran with beautiful calligraphy in Kufic script (the oldest form of Arabic writing), writings of Abu Ali al Hussein ibn Abd Allah ibn Sina (981-1037), known in the west as Avicenna, the foremost physician and philosopher of his time and astronomer, chemist, logician, mathematician, poet, soldier and theologian; of Abu al Walid Mohammed ibn Ahmed ibn Rushd (1126-1198), known in the west as Averroes, the founding father of secular thought in the western world and philosopher, physicist, astronomer, mathematician; of Mohammed ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi, the acknowledged father of algebra - the words algorism and algorithm stem from *algoritmi*, the Latinised version of his name. There is a translation of Pythagoras together with treatises on theology, astronomy, geography (including original maps of Alexandria) and pharmacology. The building of the Zaouiat, as it stands now with its green tiles, dates from 1869, when it was rebuilt after a fire. A - voluntary - contribution to the upkeep of the Library is always appreciated. From the Zaouiat one can



walk through the tunnelled alleyways of the still-inhabited Kasbah to the ancient Pottery Co-operative where pottery being still produced in the simplest of manners, in the simplest of kilns. As you have been to Fes and have taken photographs of this Imperial





City, here you'll see the famous green glaze associated with its tiled roofs - green, the colour of Islam representing Mother Earth - for the founders of the 'Naciri Religious Brotherhood', wanting to raise the status of the village of Tamegroute to that of a Medina, a thriving caravan hub city, invited merchants, craftsmen and potters to this remote area from Fes to this remote area, a city that enjoyed good relations with Tamegroute at the time. However, today Tamegroute is a little village again, but the pottery has become its main characteristic. The potters cook plates, jugs and jars - all green and brown - in outdoor archaic kilns. Green is obtained with magnesium and copper, brown with antimony and copper. Ancient techniques give the enamel coating infinite variations and the prices are very competitive. We return to our overnight stay at the Fibule Du Draâ. Close to the hotel is the Kasbah Amazrou, once a Jewish enclave and now inhabited by black Berber families to which you might like to take a stroll to chat with them. **BLD.**

DAY 11: ZAGORA - AGDZ - OUARZAZATE: We return up past the endless palm groves and kasbahs of the dramatic Draâ



Valley, to stop at the ancient kasbah at Agdz - where you might like to break for a light lunch - and other en-route points of photo-opportunity until we arrive to spend the night in Ouarzazate - its name comes from a Berber phrase meaning "without noise" or "without confusion" - after visiting the nearby **Kasbah of Taourirt**, the kasbah of the former caïd (meaning "master" or "leader,") and later the possession of El Haj T'hami el Mezouari el Glaoui (1879-1956), the last ruling family of the south (the 'Lord of the Atlas') and a strong contender for control over Morocco who had this palace built in Ouarzazate - but never lived there. Once Pasha of Marrakech from 1912 to 1956, he allied himself to the French in Morocco during the Protectorate and conspired with them in the overthrow of the king Sultan Mohammed V, grandfather of the actual king of Morocco. Until the second half of the 20th century, Moroccan society was in a state of feudalism very close to that which pertained in Europe during medieval times. At the top was the sultan, who held the two positions of king (temporal ruler) and imam (spiritual leader). His court, or central government (Makhzen), was headed by a Grand Vizier. The next tier of government was provided by a large number of Pashas (from the Persian *padshah*, literally: Viceroy and caïds (the equivalent of European dukes, barons etc) whose responsibilities were to collect taxes and keep order, to which ends they often kept private armies. Under them were the mass of ordinary commoners whose responsibilities were to pay taxes, obey their local master and provide him with troops when necessary. In the autumn of 1893, the then ruling Sultan Moulay Hassan and his army were crossing the High Atlas Mountains after a tax-gathering expedition when they were caught in a blizzard. They were rescued by Si Madani and T'hami and the grateful Sultan bestowed on Si Madani *caïdats* from Tafilalet to the Souss Valleys. In addition, he presented the Glaoua arsenal with a working 77-mm Krupp cannon, the only such weapon in Morocco outside the imperial army, which the Glaoua army used to subdue rival warlords and which is located still outside the kasbah's walls. **BD.**



DAY 12: OUARZAZATE - KASBAHS TAOURIRT, TIFOULTOUTTE & AÏT BEN HADDOU - TAZENAKHT - TALIOUINE - TAROUDDANT:



Refreshed, breakfasted and raring to go, we now set forth to the **Tiffoutoute Kasbah**, ancient residence of Glaoui (the former Pasha of Marrakech, thence up towards the north alongside the Oued Ouarzazate via the Assif Ounila Valley to the magnificently exotic kasbah and ksour of **Aït Ben Haddou**, declared, and rightly so, a World Heritage Site. Here we alight from our vehicle to visit these various kasbahs, so closely-knit that they appear to be but one complete building, backed up against the looming mountain in a stretch of unforgiving Hamada. The thick, high, sheer, elaborately decorated pisé walls, stepped-up housing, turreted, crenulated ramparts, and balustrades and arched 'babs' are a sight not to be missed. One of the more spectacular sights in the Atlas ranges, set upon a rock above a reed-strewn assif, commanding the area for miles around, this kasbah, once home to employees of the Pacha Glaoui - the "Lord of the Atlas", controlled the route to Marrakech until the French blasted a road through the Tizi n'Tichka in the late 1920s. We now set off south to Tazenakht and then westwards south of the Jbel Siroua to the small town of Taliouine where you might wish to stop for a lunch at the Auberge Le Safran -



evidentially, its speciality is tagine with saffron. This is a centuries-old major saffron-producing area and we may get to visit the Cooperative of Souktana which sells only truly biological saffron, cultivated according to traditional ways with natural fertilizers (cow and mutton dung). The mountains' dry climate is ideal for such a culture. Weeding is done manually, with regular ploughing that breaks the ground crust before irrigation and limits the amount of water needed. It is a plant very easy to cultivate, apart from the very labour-intensive harvest time. Founded in 1981, the cooperative groups 356 members and, of the 1,200 agricultural hectares, 150 are dedicated to saffron, providing a living for some 1,200 people. Harvesting saffron by hand is very demanding and the whole families will work up to twenty hours a day, first to harvest the flowers before the sun is too high, after that, in a semi-dark room, they cut the dried stigmas that make the spice. Driss, the manager, or Salah, his assistant will do their best to explain you saffron's secrets, and will offer you their delicious saffron tea. A little museum displays traditional items of Berber life, in this area of Tachelhit. You would do well to buy your prized saffron here, in bags of 1 gram, or in boxes of 10 grams. 1 gram is enough for two persons for one or two months. From here we continue on to Tarouddant, 'the Grandmother of Marrakech' and our hotel. **BD.**

DAY 13: TAROUDDANT. Located only 80 km from Agadir, Tarouddant, closely-resembling a small Imperial town circled by massive ochre-coloured pisé (rammed earth or adobe) walls, will remind you of what you have read about Marrakech. But long before Marrakech was built, Tarouddant, also known as the Grandmother of Marrakech, from 732AD had been the capital city of eastern Emirs of the Idrissid Dynasty from Damascus and a fortified base for the conquest of Islam. In 1036 it was then to fall to the Almoravid Dynasty of the Sanhaja tribe from the south led by Abou Baqr. During this reign Youssef Ibn Tachfine, founder of Marrakech, had his son Ali Ben Youssef extend the ramparts of Tarouddant and build the mosque and first Madrasa (School of Koranic Learning) in 1056 for it to become their capital city dominating the fertile



Souss Valley to place a stricter control over the lucrative caravanserais from Ghana, Mali and the Sudan in north-south trade of gold, silver, slaves and salt. Between 1130 and 1258, Tarouddant was to reach an apogee under the statesmanship of Abou Youssef Yacoub El Mansour of the Masmouda Berber Almohades Dynasty from the High Atlas Mountains; the Dynasty that was to force Jews throughout Morocco to wear blue robes and to cover their heads in yellow shawls and have them live in ghettos called Mellahs. Between 1258 and 1520 followed the Merinides Dynasty of the Beni Marin tribe of Zenata Berbers whose leader, the Sultan Ibn Ouattas, destroyed most of the town and who was to sign a Treaty with the Portuguese ceding them the entire Moroccan littoral. Between 1520 and 1659, Tarouddant fell under the control of the Saâdiens, whose Sultan Mohammed Ech-Cheikh, was to restore the ramparts for the town to become then known as Al-Mohammedia and from whence these Saharan Saâdien Berbers, originally from the Drâa Valley south of Ouarzazate, were to sally forth to defeat the Portuguese blockading the ports - and of Tarouddant's main shipping route - at the Battle of the Three Kings at Ksar Kbir, leading to the death of Portuguese King Sebastian The Pretender. In the 1660s, Tarouddant was laid waste by the plague leading to the subsequent demise of this Dynasty. In 1666, with the absence, now, of a powerful centralised authority, came the first Alaouite ruler Moulay Rachid, descendant of the Prophet Mohammed, which Royal Family rules to this day under a Constitutional Monarchy - with the first ever elected Parliament assembled in 1963 - now led by King Mohammed VI.

Tarouddant, with one of the oldest Medinas in the Kingdom of Morocco. Tarouddant, with its bustling, winding alleyways and streets where, unlike in Marrakech you won't get lost, is filled with pedestrians, mules, donkeys (the 'Berber Taxis') and the occasional dromedary, each alleyway branching out from around the Place Assaraq (meaning Big Area in the local Chleuh Berber idiom), with its hotels, cafés and restaurants leading to colourful souqs and age-old artistry in fine tooled leatherwear, cotton and wool, fine Berber jewellery in silver, gold and copper; antiques and hand-woven Berber carpets in sheep, goat and camel hair;



Argan oil; spices including paprika, cumin, coriander, cinnamon and saffron; kaftans, djellabas and burnous; carved stoneware and delicately-painted pottery and boxes from the rare and highly-prized, deeply-grained aromatic burl wood from the Thuja (pronounced 'thuya') tree - *ârar* in Arabic, a type of mountain cypress from the Middle Atlas Mountains. Here, too, you will find the best henna in Morocco, used for the creation of intricate tattoos worn mainly at marriages; Tarouddant of beautiful gardens, and tanneries (fortunately located outside of the ramparts); Tarouddant, with 7½ km of dusky pink and ochre-coloured ramparts, 6 to 8 metres high in places, one to two metres thick, with 19 bastions and 5 'Babs' or

Gateways; the main gate, Bab El Qasba, leads to an ancient building, Dar El Baroud, thought to be haunted by the spirits of the bricklayers who were assassinated to keep the floor plan secret.

Tarouddant, once the winter home of the vagabond heiress Barbara Hutton; Tarouddant, to the north bordered by the dramatically-stark Western High Atlas Tichka Plateau and to the south by the Anti Atlas, particularly dramatic in winter with the snow capped mountains as a backdrop.

Our tour of this, one of Morocco's oldest towns, where we shall be immersed, if only for a little while, in the culture of a people not even the French, during their Protectorate, could really dominate, starts with the magnificent enclosing ramparts which lead us to the Place Assaraq, but a few yards from the bustling souqs from we shall go to see the proud Berber womenfolk at work producing the prized argan oil. The Argan tree, the Tree of Life as it is known in Morocco for it provides shade, food and hardwood for burning. Encouraged by the goatherders, the kernel with its thick, bitter peel is eaten whole by the goats, passing unscathed



through their digestive system. These nuts are kept separate from those harvested by hand by the Berber farmers and used only for animal feed. The hand-harvested kernels contain oil-rich seeds of 80% unsaturated fatty acids of high nutritional value which are allowed to fall from the tree before being gathered. This ensures that there is no damage to the branches, as can happen with other methods. Part of a rich tradition as they have done for millennia, local Berber women harvest the nuts in August, strip off the husks, and crack them to extract the kernels - in fact, they do all of the processing except the actual pressing. The hand-processing of argan is a time-honoured way for Berber women to gain income and with it financial independence; the nuts are washed, dried, roasted and milled; water is then added and

the paste is squeezed by hand to extract the oil. 1 litre of oil takes 8 hours to produce resulting in nutty flavoured, very nutritional oil used for thousands of years in couscous, salads and dipping bread as an alternative to olive oil. This same oil is now very fashionable throughout Europe and East Coast USA as a very useful cosmetic for massages, hair and nail care. Dry or cold-pressed or 'Berber Roasted' it can last from 12 to 18 months. **BD.**

DAY 14: TAROUDDANT - AGADIR - ESSAOUIRA: Our road from Tarouddant runs along the winding Souss River Valley. Citrus



fruit gardens, tomato greenhouses and alfalfa crops are located on either side of this highway. On our way we pass through ancient olive and argan groves, though the original water source has long since dried up. You may, perchance, see the White Stork, the National Bird of Morocco and the Common Kestrel; you will doubtless see Collared Doves, Burlings, Swifts, Swallows and Bulbuls and could well see small herds of goats perched on the branches of the Argan tree, endemic to the Souss Plain. We arrive at Agadir- Agadir n'Ihrir. Previously a small outpost of the 11th century B.C. Phoenicians; then of 7th century BC Carthaginians; 4th century B.C. Mauretanian Berbers and 4th century A.D. Romans,

during the Dark Ages of the Medieval Times around 1100 A.D. it was known as Agadir el Arbâa. Not until 1505 did the tiny village of Agadir make its first mark on history when the Portuguese set up a trading post here at what was then a small fortified communal granary ('Agadir Oufellah' in the Berber - Chleuh - idiom meaning High Silo) at what was to become Santa Cruz de Berbeira, thence Santa Cruz Do Cabo De Aguer, defended by a small fort on what is now called the Cap de Ghirone to become the furthest South "frontieras" (Portuguese enclave) built by a Portuguese nobleman, Joao Lopez de Sequeira, who personally paid for all expenses. This fortified port was attached to the more official Portuguese presence at Massa, just to the south of Agadir which had been established in 1497. The internal conflicts tearing Morocco apart made it difficult for any sovereign to take these ports away from the Portuguese. When writing about Agadir, Leo Africanus mentions a failed attempt by the local ruler to reconquer the fortress. In 1511, the Moroccans laid siege to the fortified place, and lost many men in battle, but returned home,

vanquished. Leo Africanus writes that despite this defeat, the nearby Berber populations did not abandon the hope of recuperating these lands someday. Led by the man who would later become the first Sultan of the Saâdien dynasty, they waited patiently, gathering men and forces for upcoming battles.

"When I left the Cherif's court (Cherif is a name given to any descendant of the Prophet, Mohammed), he had gathered more than 3000 horsemen and a great many footmen, along with huge quantities of war materials."

A profitable, but brief stay at this natural harbour for, in 1541, they were forcibly ejected after a six month-long siege by the founder of the Saâdien dynasty, Mohammed Ech Cheikh el Mehdi as what he really wanted was control of the caravanserais of gold. The Golden Age of Agadir then followed, with ships arriving every day to take on cargoes of sugar cane, dates, wax, oils and spices from the surrounding areas and gold from Sudan. His son was to build the fortified kasbah of Agadir Oufellah some 30 years later to protect this lucrative trade. In 1760 the Alaouite Sultan Sidi Mohammed Ben Abdallah, jealous of the revenues generated by this port, decided to build one at Mogador - modern day Essaouira - leaving Agadir to fall into decline. In 1911 the arrival of a German gunboat (the *Panther*), sent by Emperor William III of Prussia officially to protect the local German community, was to trigger what became known as the Agadir Crisis between France and Germany whereby, in 1913, France ceded part of its possessions in the Congo to establish a Protectorate over nearly the entire Sultanate of Morocco. It was here in Agadir that, in 1930, Saint-Exupéry made a technical stop on his flight across the Atlantic Ocean and a staging post for AeroPostale. In 1913 the French built a modern port, enlarging the harbour in 1930 and again in 1954; At 23:47 precisely on February 29 1960, Agadir was almost totally destroyed by an earthquake lasting but 15 seconds, burying the old city and killing an estimated 15,000. It also mostly destroyed the ancient Kasbah on the summit of Cap Ghir hill, the farthestmost trailing edge of the Atlas Mountains which stretch from here to Tunisia, the ramparts and Babs (gates) alone being restored. On its front gate can still be read the following sentence in Dutch, who, in 1746, had been permitted to set up here a trading post: "Fear God and honour thy King". On seeing the destruction in Agadir, King Mohammed V of Morocco declared: "If Destiny decided the destruction of Agadir, its rebuilding depends of our Faith and Will." Complete reconstruction began in 1961, two kilometres south of the earthquake's epicentre, to make Agadir Morocco's newest city - The Pearl of the South.

We drive along up 216m to the pisé (rammed earth) walls of the mainly-in-ruins Kasbah on the hill, remnants of a prosperous past dominating the new city of Agadir, to give us a glorious panoramic view of the commercial port; of the fisherman's port; of 9 km of extensive sandy bay and the gentle white city with its main avenues – Mohammed V and Hassan II; the Boulevard 20 Août with its many restaurants and tourist shops; of the very popular Corniche where the residents of Agadir love to come to take a stroll; of the verdant Souss Valley; of the distant Anti Atlas mountains and of the stark savagery of the Tichka Plateau all laid out before us. From here we drive alongside the Atlantic Ocean as far as Cap Rhir where we turn slightly inland past the trailing edge of the High



Atlas Mountains to Essaouira, 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 Abdallah transformed Mogador into a fortified city, charging some prominent Jewish families to promote international trade from the port. 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 inlaid wooden Thuya tables and boxes and sundry items in

lemon or briar wood inlaid with mother of pearl or cherry wood - the purple dyes once 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 shall check in to our hotel and then leave for a walk around this enchanting town to enjoy a lunch (optional) of Essaouira's famed seafood, either on the quayside or in one of the several quaint cafés, thence to visit the fishermen port and the Mellah. Essaouira's Mellah covers 10 percent of the town, but Jews constituted almost 40 percent of the population in the late 1880's. Jewish stars on the doors to the Mellah show the degree to which Jews were accepted in Essaouira, to the point that some of the richer Jews did not even live in the Mellah. Commemorative plaques indicate the buildings in which synagogues were located. The Jewish cemetery, just outside the city gates, is well-kept and whose oldest known gravestone dates from 1776, with about 500 in the old cemetery and about 3,500 in the new. The marble, granite, and sandstone memorial markers are rough stones or boulders, flat, shaped stones, finely smoothed and inscribed stones and mausoleums. From here we shall visit the **Sidi Mohammed Ben Abdallah Museum of Regional Art**. Situated in a pasha residence that dates back to the 19th century, the graceful mansion is certainly worthy of attention since it is typical of such buildings at the time. Within its walls it is easy to imagine the graceful lifestyle that a person in such a position of authority must have enjoyed. This particular mansion is the setting of the Ethnographic Museum where you can get a taste for the local art in its many different forms. You will find traditional garments for special occasions, tapestries, musical instruments (both old and modern) decorated with marquetry (*guembris*) used by the Gnaouas musicians to accompany their dances. The history of the local musical tradition is traced in documents on Berber songs and string instruments.



There is a strong focus on the Berber culture and many of the articles originate with this people. There are some articles that are used in Berber rituals and there are a number of handicraft traditions specific to particular tribes, which have been well documented and presented. Of course, there is also an excellent collection of woodwork and carpets and a wonderful display of old photographs of traditional costumes. Some of the ethnographic parts of the display are located on the upper floor, so make sure

that you don't accidentally skip them. Afterwards, perhaps time to visit Jimi Hendrix's "Castles of Sand"? You'll be pleasantly surprised to find what this artist-colony town has to offer before returning to take your dinner at your hotel. **BD.**

DAY 15: ESSAOUIRA - MARRAKECH: Checking out after breakfast, we now set out at around 8:30 for a 3 hour drive east to our



hotel in Marrakech. After check-in, we shall go for a ride in a calèche around the magnificent ramparts, quite the best introduction to the Pink City, on to the **Majorelle Garden and Museum of Islamic Art** of the recently-deceased fashion icon Yves Saint Laurent. Today, beautiful shaded grounds, an impressive collection of exotic plants and trees and an Islamic Art Museum (*Musée d'Art Islamique*) make this garden one of the must-see attractions in Marrakech. The gardens were once the home and haven of French painter Jacques Majorelle, born in 1886 to a renowned cabinet maker in Nancy, France. Travels to Spain, Egypt and the Mediterranean all pulled him away from his native country, but it was Morocco that beckoned Majorelle most strongly. In 1924 Majorelle settled in Marrakech on a property that would become known as Majorelle Garden where he created a retreat with a stunning home, spacious work studio, and vast garden in which he could indulge his botanical interest by growing plants and trees from around the world. Majorelle's passion for Morocco became especially 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 blue is used with bright yellow to add colour and contrast throughout the garden. This small museum houses a tasteful collection of Islamic art, good examples of Moroccan tribal art - some hundreds of years old - textiles, weapons, carpets from all over North Africa, jewellery, furniture. Some of Jacques Majorelle's art work and engravings of local scenes in Morocco is also on display. There are also exhibitions of marriage curtains and fabrics, embroideries, manuscripts and many other masterpieces. On now down into the medina to the dramatic Almohad **Koutoubia Mosque** (entrance to the Mosque is prohibited to non-Muslims), one of the major architectural triumphs of the Almohades, the 12th century



dynasty responsible for one of the worst periods of Jewish persecution. The Koutoubia Mosque is the tallest mosque in Marrakech, its construction decided in 1158 by the Almohad Sultan Abdel Moumen soon after his conquest of Marrakech, occupying the square of a former Almohavid palace whose mosque was destroyed, supposedly as it did not face Mecca. Completed in 1199 with the construction of its famous minaret ordered by the Sultan's grandson, the Caliph Yacoub el-Mansour who died the same year, this minaret (from the Arabic word *menara* or lighthouse) was later used as model for Giralda of Seville then for the Hassan Tower of Rabat. The main function of the minaret was to provide a vantage point from which the muezzin can call out the *adhan*, calling the faithful to prayer. In most Mosques

these days, the *adhan* is called not from the minaret, but in the *musallah*, or Prayer Hall, via a microphone and speaker system, the role of the minaret is now largely for traditional and decorative purposes. A jewel of Hispano-Moresque art made up of 16 outlying naves and one larger central nave, its name is derived from the Arabic *al-Koutoubiyyin* for "bookseller", or "librarian", since it used to be surrounded by the stalls of sellers of manuscripts and books and by scribes. This square tower in finely-worked dressed stone is 77 metres tall, (as high as the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris) including its lantern. Considered to be the *ne plus ultra* structure of its kind, decorated with ceramic tiles forming different patterns on each side, it boasts of six rooms, one above the other, with a ramp leading up around them by way of which the muezzin could ride his horse (or mule) up to the balcony. It is built in a traditional Almohad style and the tower is adorned with four copper globes. According to legend, they were originally made of pure gold, and there were once supposed to have been only three. The fourth was donated by the wife of Yacoub el-Mansour. As



compensation for her failure to keep the fast for one day during the month of Ramadan she had her golden jewellery melted down to fashion the fourth globe. We continue into the **Djmaâ el Fnaâ Square** (the 'Assembly of the Dead'), where, until the 19th century, were traditionally displayed on stakes the severed heads of criminals. We take lunch at the Al Baraka Restaurant overlooking the Square to see from above stalls of goods, from fruit to alarm clocks; snake charmers and water sellers; fortune tellers and public scribes; tumblers and *nakkachat* - women with syringes full of henna - soothsayers and *gnaoua* musicians, returning to our hotel after yet another exciting day, for an inviting bed. **BL.**

DAY 16. MARRAKECH. This morning after breakfast and at an agreed time, with the touch of a journey back into time we set off



into the bustling Kasbah to the lavishly-decorated **Saâdien Tombs** - discovered in 1917 with some tombs dating from the middle 1550s; this is the ancient cemetery of the *shorfa*, the descendants of the Prophet Mohammed. Here you see the Prayer Hall with its horseshoe arches, the tombs of the Alaouite princes from the 18th century and a large tomb of the Black Sultan, the Merinid Dynasty Abou Hassan. On into the Hall of Twelve Columns, the central mausoleum of Ahmed el Mansour, who died in 1603, with its colonnade of twelve decorated marble pillars and intensely carved upper stuccowork that looks like gilded lace. To his right is his son and successor Zaidan; to his left his grandson Mohammed ech-Cheik. There are 33 other tombs of Saâdien princelings. From here to the late 19th century **Bahia Palace** (its name translates as 'The Brilliant') built by craftsmen from Fes for the black slave Si' Ahmed Ben Musa (or Bou Ahmed) after he had risen to power and wealth as the Grand Vizier of Sultan Moulay al-Hassan. The attractive, well preserved, Harem Courtyard has featured in many Big Budget Movies. It took nearly 15 years to complete; the rooms (nearly 150!), housed Bou Ahmed, his 4 wives and 24 concubines plus servants and guards. The Palace follows the patterns of typical Islamic architecture, with central courtyards, having rooms leading off them, with doorways that are placed so that you can't



see beyond (providing privacy). Fountains and gardens are also typical features, along with the decorative stucco panels, tiled floors and zellige work. From here we continue up to the **Dar Si Saïd Museum**. Formally a palace originally built by Mehdi Mnebbi (1894-1908), Moroccan ambassador to London, it was then bought by T'hami el Glaoui, the famous Pasha of Marrakech and 'Lord of the Atlas' during the French Protectorate. Restored in 1997, it houses both traditional and contemporary exhibitions of Moroccan arts and sculpture - the very quintessence of Moroccan art. The building is the work of Si Saïd, a half-brother of grand vizier Bou Ahmed who expanded the Bahia Palace. In fact, Dar Si Saïd is a smaller version of that Palace, with finer and more impressive decoration. On the ground floor you can find clothes, objects in beaten copper, beautifully decorated weapons, skilfully crafted

traditional silver Berber jewellery from the southern Anti Atlas region, oil lamps and carvings in the special Tarouddant soft stone. Splendours from the past? Not at all, for many of the objects on display are still used and worn in mountain areas. Fountains sculpted from pink marble decorate the tiled courtyards that are accented by the turquoise, greens and whites of the mosaic designs. The most important exhibit in the Museum is a marble basin dating back to the 10th century, brought to Marrakech from Cordoba by the Almohad Sultan Ali Ben Youssef. The first floor salon impresses with its Hispano Moorish decoration and elegant furniture in cedar wood. 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 14th



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 14th century, it was almost completely rebuilt during the Saâdien Dynasty who made their distinctive mark in its architecture and art. The Medersa centres around a large courtyard with a central pool for ablutions. The buildings are made of carved cedar wood, exquisite stuccowork, and colourful zellige tiles. At the back is a sizable prayer hall where the most elaborate decoration can be found. The interior is covered in an abundance of pine cone and palm motifs used around the mihrab to create a three-dimensional appearance. Throughout the Medersa are many Arabic inscriptions in stucco and zellige tile, the most common of which is the *bismillah* invocation: "In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful." Above the central courtyard are the small windows of the tiny student dormitories; over 800 students were housed in this Medersa, difficult to imagine. From stairs in the entry vestibule you can explore all the rooms and enjoy a nice



view over the courtyard. The rooms are arranged around smaller inner courtyards, rimmed with fine wood railings. We shall go on to see the Almoravid Dynasty Koubba; also called **Koubba Ba'Adiyn**, the oldest building in Marrakech and the only Almoravid building to remain standing in Morocco. The Almoravids (1062-1145) were reformers and monastic-type warriors from the desert nomadic 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, 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. **BD.**

DAY 17: 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 18: MARRAKECH: A day you have at leisure, your guide and driver being at your disposal to take you where you will within the city's precincts. **B.**

DAY 19: MARRAKECH - CASABLANCA AIRPORT - HOME: Transfer to either the airports at Marrakech or Casablanca in accordance with your flight schedule. Assistance with boarding formalities and a fond farewell from your driver and guide. **B.**

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

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N.B. THESE PROGRAMMES DO 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/riads, *subject to availability at time of reservation*. Porterage on 1 piece of luggage per person. All meals as shown in the itinerary (not including alcoholic drinks). Private circle trip transportation in an air-conditioned vehicle according to family or group size from Casablanca to Marrakech (or Casablanca's airport). Sightseeing tours 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, guides, chauffeur, 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; pullover; day pack; hygienic 'wipes;' camera and Ziploc bags for your sensitive lenses; sunglasses, swimming costumes (seasonal), sunscreen.

MUSEUMS:

Inhabited since prehistoric times, with a culture that goes back thirty centuries, at the cross-roads of Roman, Berber and Arab civilisations, Morocco is rich in museums overflowing with treasures.

The touch of a master transforms the humblest objects into masterpieces. Carpets, pottery, garments or arms, here everything is a work of art. As the representation of humans or animals is contrary to the teachings of Islam, artists have channelled all their creative effort into producing infinite variations of abstract, geometric or stylised motifs. Moroccan museums are very often monuments in their own right. Even empty, they would be well worth a visit.

For the shimmering quality of the colours, the richness of materials and the subtleties of form, a visit to the museums of Morocco is not merely an introduction to part of humanity's heritage; it is in fact an opportunity to experience a total enchantment of the spirit and the senses.

National museums are generally closed on Tuesdays.
Those museums located in government office buildings may be closed at weekends.

Opening hours vary from one museum to another. They open between 08.30 and 09.30 to close between 17.30 and 18.30, usually closing for one hour at lunch time.