

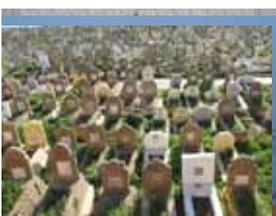
THE PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE OF JUDAISM AND ISLAM IN MOROCCO - NORTHERN SWING

OBTJH03cc 13 DAYS/12 MAGICAL NIGHTS. CASABLANCA/RABAT/LARACHE-LIXUS-ASILAH-TANGIER/TETOUAN-CHEFCHAOUEN/OUAZZENE-AZJEN-MEKNES/ VOLUBILIS-MOULAY IDRISSE-FES/IFRANE-BENI MELLAL - MARRAKECH/ MARRAKECH-OURIKA VALLEY-MARRAKECH/ ESSAOUIRA/SAFI-OUALIDIA-ELJADIDA -AZEMMOUR-CASABLANCA

DAY 1: CASABLANCA. We meet you on your arrival at the Mohamed V International Airport to transfer you to your hotel with



welcome dinner and overnight in Casablanca. Casablanca, the largest city in Africa after Cairo, is home to the largest remaining Jewish community in Morocco with several congregations, active communal institutions and good kosher restaurants. Subject to the time of your flight's arrival and your level of fatigue, after you've had a shower in the hotel, we should leave around 11:00 to visit the Museum of Moroccan Judaism (www.casajewishmuseum.com) (closed on Fridays) thence 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 - 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 where we shall take a seafood lunch before proceeding to the seaside resort of Aïn Diab and 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. While Jews no longer live in the Mellah, kosher butchers are found in the old market, next to other butchers selling horse, sheep and goat meat. The Jewish cemetery in the Mellah is open and relatively quiet, with well-kept white stone markers in French, Hebrew and Spanish. The Rue Djemda Es Souk, one of the main streets of this Quarter, has 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. But a short walk away are the half dozen Synagogues on the long block of the Rue Lusitania, should you feel up to it. 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 in and Oriental show in a restaurant overlooking the Ocean. **LD.**



DAY 2: CASABLANCA - RABAT: After breakfast and luggage loaded, we set out around 8.30 on our tour of Jewish Morocco by a visiting Casablanca's Mellah (Jewish Quarter) with its temples and

synagogues such as Beth-El, Em Habanim and Neve Chalom, thence to depart north for a 1½ hours' drive north alongside the Atlantic Ocean to the Imperial City Rabat, 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, where Jews are believed to have lived during the time of the Phoenicians; once a prosperous Roman enclave called *Sala Colonia* in their Mauretania Tingitane Province, it was 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 Lisbon earthquake of 1755 and is today a beautiful garden of date and banana palm trees, hibiscus, bougainvillea, olive and fig trees set amongst the ruins. From here we continue to the Mohamed V Mausoleum, which has become a pilgrimage site for Jews who do not forget his efforts to defend them against the anti-Semitic policies of the French Vichy Government; located on the southern side of the Great Mosque guarded by the mounted Royal Household Guard, this is the last resting places of the late King Mohammed V and of his sons, the late King Hassan II and his brother Prince Moulay Abdallah. Napoleon Bonaparte's tomb at Les Invalides was the inspiration for the interior's modern Islamic design. We visit also the neighbouring unfinished minaret of the Great Mosque, known also as the Hassan Tower. The tower, according to tradition, was designed by an architect named Jabir who used a similar design plan for a sister tower, the Giralda Cathedral in Seville, Spain. Both of the towers were modelled on the minaret of another one of Jabir's designs, the Koutoubia Mosque in Marrakech, both of which were built during the Almohad Dynasty, twelfth century persecutors of the Jewish people. Begun in 1195, the tower was intended to be the highest 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 (*salaat*) to ride a horse to the top of the tower to issue the call to prayer. We shall proceed to the delightful 12th century Kasbah of the Oudayas located next to the Medina within the ramparts of the old city, once the home of the Salé pirates, some of whom were Portuguese Marranos (Crypto-Jews of the Iberian Peninsula, a term, derived from the New Testament phrase "maran atha" ("our Lord hath come"), denoting in Spanish "damned," "accursed," "banned"; also "hog," and in Portuguese it is used as an opprobrious epithet of the Jews because they do not eat pork). The Oudayas Museum has a display of traditional Moroccan clothing, including a Jewish wedding costume. Historical sources attest to a continued presence of a Jewish community since 1492, located in the Al Buhaira Quarter until the establishment of the Mellah in 1807. Standing next to the Medina within the ramparts of the old town this Mellah, with its narrow lanes and colourful courtyards, home to but a few Jewish families and has a beautiful synagogue just inside its gates, while the main synagogue is found a few blocks onward in the New City. This was the site of the original R'bat from which generations of cavalry have ridden out to subdue the rebellious Bou Raghhouala Berber tribes. It has also been a bastion against repeated attacks by those corsair raiders; the Kasbah's alleyways are reminiscent of a delightful whitewashed Andalusian village. From here you enjoy the view over the Bou Regreg river and 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 Doolittle - the Moroccan Sultan Moulay Ismaïl actually made piracy a state monopoly in 1678. In 1783 the first American ship was captured and ransomed for \$60,000 cash; over the next 10 years a further dozen American ships were captured, the crew being made slaves in Algeria, one of the reasons why the United States Navy was born in 1794 with 6 frigates. We stop for a light lunch overlooking the bay before proceeding to Rabat's Jewish cemetery with tombstones with inscriptions in Hebrew, French and Spanish, including important saints such as Eliezer de Avila and Chalom Zaoui. We cross the bay to Salé, sister city of Rabat, to visit the Mellah, an important centre of Jewish intellectual thought 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. His tomb is the focus of a major hiloula. We turn to our hotel or riad for dinner. **BLD.**

DAY 3: RABAT - LARACHE - LIXUS - ASILAH - TANGIER: We set out today towards the north, skirting the town of Kenitra to the



town of Larache (El Araich). Larache is an important, laid-back harbour town founded in the 7th century when a group of Muslim soldiers from the Arabian Peninsula 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 Saïd 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. We shall 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). Some of the Greek Ancients located here the mythological garden of the Hesperidia, keepers of Hercules' mythical Golden Apples. 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 from the Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Byzantines, Romans, Arabs, Normans, to the Portuguese and Spanish. The Portuguese built the large 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, later to serve as an authorised major haven for corsair raiders from the 18th 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. From here we make a short dash up to the throbbing city of Tangier and our hotel.



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, 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 Spartel 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 that of 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, for the many candidates of clandestine immigration who risk their lives to cross the Straits each day would only have had to climb a wall or cut a 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, for 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 tunnelled link between Spain and Morocco. Tangier 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. Tangier has no formal Mellah, but has instead an unprotected Jewish Quarter dating from the second half of the 19th century where many synagogues were

once concentrated in one narrow, winding street, "Synagogues Street," recently renamed "Synagogue Street" because only one now remains open. One of them, the Aben Danan Synagogue, the Temple Benatar, has been restored and is superbly decorated. A small, unobtrusive door opens on to a narrow alleyway that hides the monumental size of the synagogue itself. Like most other synagogues in Tangier, it is rectangular and divided by pillars into three naves. A wall painting of the Tablets of the Law and a crown appear above the ark on the eastern wall. A large sculpted wooden lectern is placed near the eastern side. The only exception to the exuberant Tangier model is the Moishe Nahon synagogue where the *tevah* (lectern for Torah reading) is placed in the centre of the southern wall. The walls are painted sky blue or yellow and verses from the Bible mentioning the name of the donor of the synagogue are inscribed on them. The Assayag or Mass'at Moishe Synagogue is similar, named for its founder, Moishe Azencot, who was sanctified shortly after his death. The women's gallery extends along the northern, eastern and southern sides of the synagogue and opens out on to a terrace where the *sukka* can be built for the Festival of Tabernacles (*Sukkot*). Daylight enters through a square skylight and the windows in the upper gallery. One characteristic common to all Moroccan synagogues is the abundance of *qandils* (oil lamps in memory of the deceased) suspended by chains and ending in a silver or copper ring in which the lamp is set. The wick has been replaced in many lamps by electric light bulbs which remain lit all day. These two synagogues in Tangier have yielded particularly interesting discoveries. One is a *Shavuot Ketuba* (a "marriage" contract

for the Festival of Shavuot) similar in all points to a regular marriage contract, except that the bride and groom are God and the Jewish people, and the witnesses are Moïse and Aaron. In addition to the standard *ketuba* text, there is a liturgical poem on the unity of God and the Children of Israel written by Rabbi Israel Najjarah, a Kabbalist from Safed. We visit the Office of the Jewish Community with its 1935 French translation of the Royal Declaration of 1864, negotiated by Moses Montefiore, affirming that the Jews would be treated as equals under the law, with justice and impartiality, and that anyone mistreating them would be prosecuted. A 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 to pass by the now closed to the public Forbes Museum (Malcolm Forbes of Forbes 500 – he lived here, too); the American Legation and the Merinid College. We shall also visit the old Jewish cemetery, where the saint Mordechai Bengio is buried, displaying some anthropomorphically - shaped tombstones and on to the Oued Lihoud, the bay where Sephardic Jewish exiles from the Spanish Inquisition landed. **BD.**

DAY 4: TANGIER - TETOUAN - CHEFCHAOUEN: After breakfast, we leave for ‘The White Dove of Culture’, setting out some 60



km to the south-east across fertile plains and through a narrow pass to Tetouan - in the Tamazight language of the Berber “Tittouan”, meaning springs - situated on a rocky plateau detached from the southern flank of the Jbel Dersa overlooking the fertile Martil Valley and to the north of the er-Rif Mountains, set in the middle of a belt of orchards that contain orange, almond, pomegranate and cypress trees. Behind it rise rugged masses of rock, the southern wall of Fahs Anjera countryside, once practically closed to Europeans; across the valley are hills which form the northern limit of these 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 Abou Thabit to serve as a base for attacks on Ceuta. Around 1399 it was destroyed by the Castillians of King Henry III as Barbary pirates were using it as a base for their attacks on his shipping. By the end of the 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 kasbah, well-preserved walls; any number of mosques, fountains, fondouks (caravanserais 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 souq many white, low houses with weavers, jewellers and leather workers carrying out their artistry. We shall visit the Museum of Moroccan Art (closed, unfortunately, on Tuesdays) and the Handicrafts School. Light refreshments are taken in a café near the Bab el Oukla before continuing our tour of the city.



Tetouan's Jewish community, originating from the time of the expulsion of the Sephardic Jews from the Spanish inquisition in 1492, was for many centuries the intellectual and religious centre of the North of Morocco. Over half of the more than 500 Jews (7500 in 1950) now live in a well kept Mellah built in 1808 in the traditional Andalusian style. The Tetouan Mellah enjoys the distinction of being the only one - apart from the new Mellah of Meknes built more than a century later - that still houses a majority of the resident community who faithfully maintain their Judeo-Spanish language, traditions and customs. The city's large and excellently-preserved cemetery comprises another historical landmark of great interest, most particularly the Castillian section; the burial ground for those earliest settlers from Spain, whose unusual anthropomorphically-shaped and inscriptionless tombstones have furnished material for a number of scholarly articles. In the Mellah there were three Synagogues that have been turned into private houses and museums; the ex-Synagogues of Rabbis Isaac Ben Gualid, Pintada and Crudo.



The major synagogue still in use is in the European part of the city. A Jewish social club is used by some 150 Jews still living in Tetouan, as well as by Muslims. Tetouan is the site of the first Alliance Israelite Universelle School, established in 1862 after Morocco regained control of the city from the Spanish. The cemetery, located on Jbel Dersa, is vast. The major saint from this region is Isaac Ben Oualide.



We now continue south to Chaouen and our hotel. Chaouen, Xaouen or Chefchaouen? You may take your pick. Chefchaouen is situated at 600metres above sea level 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 one of their colonies. 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 serious tourists as the delightful 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, reputed to be one of the most picturesque towns in the world, takes in the Palace El Makhzen and the famous (3000m²) square of Ouatta el Hammam; the maze of alleyways with the fine doorways in the Medina; the crumbling ochre and toffee-coloured kasbah; 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 same pigments as that 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 air shipped to him. **BLD.**

DAY 5: CHEFCHAOUEN - OUEZZANE - AZJEN - MEKNES: After breakfast, we set out on a longish drive to the Imperial City of



Meknes (a UNESCO World Heritage Site). We shall pass through the town of Ouezzane, once controlled by an important Muslim fraternity who encouraged Jewish traders and agriculturists to live near-by. We shall take a side trip to the northwest to the village of Azjen, where the tomb of the most important Jewish saint, Amram Ben Diwane, is found. The Lag b'Omer pilgrimages to his grave attract hundreds of Jews from both inside and beyond Morocco.



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". Birthplace (1696) of Ribbi Hayyim Ben Moses Ibn Attar, the famous 18th century scholar and cabbalist, known throughout the Jewish world for his bible commentary, the "Or Ha-Hayyim ", Meknes is alone of all cities in Morocco where the Mellah does not adjoin the Royal Palace. It is also the only city where Jews decided to create a new Mellah (which harbours eleven Synagogues, eight of which are still in use) after the French Protectorate was imposed. After checking in at our hotel, we shall set out for the new Mellah, still the home for some of Meknes' 200 Jews, to visit a beautiful synagogue, the El Krief,

not far the new cemetery. On the other side of the new Mellah and adjoining the old Mellah - known for its historic Jewish street names - is the old Jewish cemetery. Several saints are found buried in both cemeteries, including the tombs of renowned Ribbis Chaim Messas, David Boussidan, Daniel Toledano, Raphael Berdugo and the 'Patron of Meknes' Rabbi David Benmidan. The Mausoleum of Moulay Ismail memorialises the Alaouite Sultan who protected the Jews while securing control of the Moroccan empire. You will also see Greek inscriptions that appear in local Synagogues. We shall also visit a good part of its 40 km of Ramparts and monumental gates such as Bab Mansour, the Christians' Prison, the Dar el Mar or Heri es Souani, the ancient Granary and once Royal stables for the sultan's 12,000 'Barb' horses and the Hedim Square before returning to our hotel or riad and dinner. **BLD.**

DAY 6: MEKNES - VOLUBILIS - MOULAY IDRIS - FES: After breakfast we shall set out for the well-preserved ruins of the



Roman city of Volubilis where you will see a Hebrew epitaph proving the existence of a Jewish community during the Roman occupation; 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 Cortège 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 Knight's 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 take our kosher lunch here at the Volubilis Inn before continuing to the holy city of Moulay Idriss, a small hilltop town named after the Sultan Moulay Idriss II the Elder, the founder of Fes who oppressed the Jews, forcing many of them to convert. 70 years ago, it was prohibited to non-Muslims to enter the town. His tomb, enshrined in a beautiful mausoleum, here is a major pilgrimage site, especially for those from Senegal and Mali who cannot afford the Haj, or Pilgrimage, to Mecca. In 788 (or 787) A.D, an event occurred that was to forever change the path of Moroccan culture. Idriss Ibn Abdallah (or Moulay Idriss I as he is called in Morocco), the great-grandson of the Prophet Mohammed, had fled west from Baghdad to settle in Morocco. As 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 (and which is the most venerated pilgrimage site in all of Morocco). 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.



Getting a panoramic view of the Moulay Idriss from a hilltop, we continue to Fes alongside the dark Zerhoun Hills to check-in at our hotel for an evening at leisure. 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.**

DAY 7: FES: Jews played an important role in the commercial and cultural life of the once capital city, with the golden age of the



Jewish community in Fes lasting for nearly three hundred years. Sultan Idriss II created the city of Fes in the early ninth century, developing it from a village that is believed to have been inhabited by a small Jewish tribe and 'inviting' the Jews to live there together with Arabs and Berbers. While restricting the freedom of the Jewish community in accordance with Islamic law, he also created economic conditions that allowed some Jews to become prosperous. A Berber tribe from the Sahara desert, the Almoravids, were subsequently to create an Islamic empire in Morocco and Spain in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. They founded their capital of Marrakech near Aghmat, a Berber Jewish settlement. Although Jews were not allowed to enter Marrakech at night, they had sufficient freedom to move throughout Morocco and Spanish Andalusia. Jewish scholars migrated to the Almoravid Empire, producing some of the religious writings associated with the "Golden Age" of the Jews. From the 9th to the 11th centuries, its Yeshivot attracted brilliant scholars, poets and grammarians. In the twelfth century, the Almohades, a Berber mountain people, developed a fundamentalist Islamic doctrine and built an empire that spread from Spain to western Libya. Unlike the Almoravids, they did not take the Jews under their protection;

instead, they expelled them from Marrakech and tried to eliminate their presence from Morocco. Under the Almohad leader Abdel Moumen, Jews were persecuted to the point that their communities in the oasis communities of the Drâa and Sijilmasa were utterly destroyed, those Jews who did not convert being massacred. During this time, Maimonides had left Cordoba to spend several years in Morocco, living, from 1159-1165, in this old city of Fes. Maimonides' full name was *Moshe Ben Maimon*, to the Arabs *Abu Imran Mussa Ben Maimun Ibn Abdallah al-Qurtubi al-Israïli*. He is, however, most commonly known by his Greek name, Moses Maimonides literally "Moses, son of Maimon", Many Jewish works call him Maimoni, מימוןי, or refer to him by the Hebrew acronym of his title and name - Ribbi Moshe Ben Maimon - the RaMBaM or the Rambam "רמב"ם". Persecution of Jews was become so intense that Maimonides counselled all Jews to leave the country and, by 1224, there may have been no synagogue left in Morocco. The Almohades were overthrown in the mid-thirteenth century by the Merinids, who gave preferential treatment to the Jews. Resentment of the Sultan and his close ties to the Jews incited a pogrom in Fes in 1276 so the Merinid Sultan then



established Fes-el Jdid (New Fes) as his capital, where he could provide Jews with greater security. During the 14th century, when the Merinids had relatively firm control of Morocco, Jews and Muslims coexisted with few problems. But, by 1438, the Merinids could no longer easily control the country or protect Jews living in urban areas which obliged those Jews to move into a fortified area adjoining the Royal Palace in Fes-el Jdid. As Fes declined in political and economic importance in the late 16th century, many wealthy Jews left, whilst new Jewish arrivals from Ethiopia brought diversity to the remaining Jewish community. However much of its original Hispano-Mauresque character was to be lost. During this period, Jews were involved in manufacturing gold thread, lace, embroidery with certainly many tailors. In 1790, Jewish synagogues were destroyed and the Jews were expelled from the city. They were allowed to return in 1792; however the community again diminished significantly. In the 1800's, Jewish learning was reawakened and a number of Jewish schools opened, including 5 Yeshivot. In 1912, two weeks after the establishment of the French Protectorate in Morocco, a revolt broke out, resulting in the Jewish community being ransacked and their property burned. In 1925, most of the Jews in the old Mellah (Jewish Quarter) left to settle in the new sections of Fes. The Jewish

population reached 22,000 in 1947, decreasing significantly during the 1950s and 1960s when many Jews emigrated to the new State of Israel, or to France and to Canada.



Fes is among the best known cities in medieval Jewish history. Indeed, it was one the home of one of the most influential Talmudic scholar of all times, Rabbi Isaac Ben Jacob Alfasi, born, in 1013 in a small hamlet - Kelaât Ibn Hamid - close to Fes, the author of the 'RIF' (R. Isaac Fassi) Halakot and who had as one of his students Joseph Ibn Migash, the teacher of Maimonides. The Mellah of Fes is over 650 years old. This picturesque neighbourhood adjoins the Royal Palace, noted for its recently constructed bright brass doors. Jews took shelter in this palace during the 1912 pogrom. The nearby cemetery contains the tombs of more Jewish saints than any other cemetery in Morocco. One of the more important saints is Lalla Solica, who was killed for refusing to convert to Islam. Born in Tangier in 1817, at the age of 16, she was courted by a Muslim man, but refused to marry him. To force her hand, the man went to the Caïd, the local government official. The man told the Caïd that Solica could not refuse his offer of marriage because she was no longer Jewish, having converted to Islam of her own free will. When called before the Caïd, she refused to acknowledge having converted. The Sultan called her to Fes, where she again denied her conversion. As a result, she was condemned to death for apostasy and executed in 1834. Throughout the old city of Fes, there are traces of ancient Jewish life, including the home of Maimonides, who lived in the city from 1159-1165. Suffering from the persecutions of the Almohad dynasty, Maimonides emigrated to escape forced conversion. Also in the old city is the mausoleum of Moulay Idriss II, the founder of Fes. His father, Idriss I, fought the Jews to establish the first Muslim State in Morocco. Idriss II, however, encouraged the Jews to move to Fes, so the city could benefit from their skills and finances. Today is devoted to the visit of this, the religious capital of Morocco: the exterior of the Royal Palace; the old Mellah, also called "Fondouk El Yehoudi"; the Jewish cemetery with its engraved tombs; the Ibn Danan renovated synagogue; the el-Attarine and Bou Inania Medersas, the el-Nejjarine fountain and caravanerail - now a Museum of Woodworkers - the exterior of the Karaouine &



the Andalous mosques. The Community Centre, Centre Communautaire "Maimonide," is one of the best organised in Morocco, with a kosher restaurant and modern synagogue on the premises whose restaurant sometimes has available *mahia*, or home-made l'eau de vie, the anise-flavoured alcoholic drink for which Moroccan Jews are well-known. The Centre was created in the early 1980's in a building housing a Talmud Torah synagogue and school. Nearby is the Ruben Ben Saâdoun Synagogue; built in the

1920's, it is decorated with exquisite plaster carving reminiscent of the decoration of traditional mosques and Medersas. It is large by the standards of Morocco, where every rich Jewish family desired its own synagogue. **BLD.**



nights' stay. **BLD.**

DAY 8: FES - IFRANE - BENI MELLAL - MARRAKECH: This morning we set out southwards for a six hour drive into the Middle Atlas range of mountains, passing through Imouzzzer-du-Kandar, the squeaky-clean Swiss Alpine-like town of Ifrane, through the Cedar Forest to Azrou where we may get to see the Barbary (macaque) Apes - those same animals to be seen on the Rock of Gibraltar - as we continue south southwest through Khenifra and Kasbah Tadla and into the town of Beni Mellal, situated between the Plain of Tadla and Jbels (mountains) of Tassemit (2248m) and R'Nim (2411m) where we stop for lunch at the Hotel Chems. We now enter into the region of the High Atlas Mountain Ranges, with Jbels Azourki (3690m) and Irhil M'Goun (at 4071m the second-highest peak in North Africa) to our left, thence to pass alongside the low hills of the Jbilet into Imperial City of Marrakech, the Pink City for our three

DAY 9: MARRAKECH. After breakfast we should go for a ride in a calèche around the magnificent ramparts, quite the best



introduction to the Pink City, on to the Majorelle Garden and Museum of Islamic Art of the recently-deceased fashion icon Yves Saint Laurent. Today, beautiful shaded grounds, an impressive collection of exotic plants and trees and an Islamic Art Museum (*Musée d'Art Islamique*) make this garden one of the must-see attractions in Marrakech. The gardens were once the home and haven of French painter Jacques Majorelle, born in 1886 to a renowned cabinet maker in Nancy, France. Travels to Spain, Egypt and the Mediterranean all pulled him away from his native country, but it was Morocco that beckoned Majorelle most strongly. In 1924 Majorelle settled in Marrakech on a property that would become known as Majorelle Garden where he created a retreat with a stunning home, spacious work studio, and vast garden in which he could indulge his botanical interest by growing plants and trees from around the world. Majorelle's passion for Morocco - especially the south - became evident in his paintings. Later travels to Sudan, Guinea, Niger, Senegal and the Ivory Coast were also to influence his work. Although Majorelle opened his property to visitors in 1947, the garden began to deteriorate following his death in 1962. Restoration of the Majorelle Garden began after Yves Saint Laurent and his partner Pierre Bergé purchased Majorelle's former home in 1980. The house itself is not open to the public. Partially hidden by the foliage of trees, its majestic architecture can be seen from certain vantage points in the garden. Further improvements were made in 2000, including an irrigation system which reduced water costs by 40 percent. Today, the grounds of the Garden are beautifully maintained and create an atmosphere of lush tranquillity. Winding walkways, quaint bridges, gurgling fountains, and shady gazebos add to the landscape. Home to hundreds of exotic plant and tree specimens brought from five continents, these include cactuses, bamboos, palms, blooming potted plants, and aquatic plants. Bird lovers will appreciate seeing the many species of local birds which inhabit the garden amongst which you may spot Pied Wagtails, Kestrels, Storks, Collared Flycatchers and more. The green roofed building that gets

most of the attention, however, is the bright cobalt blue (referred to as *bleu Majorelle*) and yellow building that Majorelle used as a studio workshop from 1931 now houses the Museum of Islamic Art. The same cobalt blue is used with bright yellow to add colour and contrast throughout the garden. This small museum houses a tasteful collection of Islamic art, good examples of Moroccan tribal art - some hundreds of years old - textiles, weapons, carpets from all over North Africa, jewellery, furniture. Some of Jacques



Majorelle's art work and engravings of local scenes in Morocco is also on display. There are also exhibitions of marriage curtains and fabrics, embroideries, manuscripts and many other masterpieces. On now down into the Medina to the dramatic Almohad Koutoubia Mosque (entrance to the Mosque is prohibited to non-Muslims), one of the major architectural triumphs of the Almohades, the 12th century dynasty responsible for one of the worst periods of Jewish persecution. The Koutoubia Mosque is the tallest mosque in Marrakech, its construction decided in 1158 by the Almohad Sultan Abdel Moumen soon after his conquest of Marrakech, occupying the square of a former Almohavid palace whose mosque was destroyed, supposedly as it did not face Mecca. Completed in 1199 with the construction of its famous minaret ordered by the Sultan's grandson, the Caliph Yacoub el-Mansour who died the same year, this minaret (from the Arabic word *menara* or lighthouse) was later used as model for Giralda of Seville then for the Hassan Tower of Rabat. The main function of the minaret was to provide a vantage point from which the muezzin can call out the *adhan*, calling the faithful to prayer. In most Mosques these days, the *adhan* is called not from the minaret, but in the *musallah*, or Prayer Hall, via a microphone and speaker system, the role of the minaret is now largely for traditional and decorative purposes. A jewel of Hispano-Moresque art made up of 16 outlying naves and one larger central nave, its name is derived from the Arabic *al-Koutoubiyyin* for "bookseller", or "librarian", since it used to be surrounded by the stalls of sellers of manuscripts and books and by scribes. This square tower in finely-worked dressed stone is 77 metres tall, (as high as the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris) including its lantern. Considered to be the *ne plus ultra* structure of its kind, decorated with ceramic tiles forming different patterns on each side, it boasts of six rooms, one above the other, with a ramp leading up around them by way of which the muezzin could ride his horse (or mule) up to the balcony. It is built

in a traditional Almohad style and the tower is adorned with four copper globes. According to legend, they were originally made of pure gold, and there were once supposed to have been only three. The fourth was donated by the wife of Yacoub el-Mansour; as compensation for her failure to keep the fast for one day during the month of Ramadan she had her golden jewellery melted down to fashion this 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. Marrakchis display a sense of irony in retaining the name because the square is the setting for a sort of ritualised bedlam that takes place every day. By early evening, temporary shelters are erected and chairs and communal dining tables laid out. There is plenty of couscous and tagine and kebabs, but the hungry locals can also feast on snails or scoop the brains out of a ram's head (served complete with horns). Just beyond the food stalls,



actors, musicians, snake charmers and acrobats entertain groups of goggle-eyed onlookers; women - *nakkachat* - offer passers-by henna tattoos, brandishing caked syringes menacingly; men lecture their audience on the workings of the human body using plaster of paris models with the outer layers helpfully cut away to reveal gory innards; Touareg merchants sell aphrodisiacs and pills and potions for every imaginable ailment. We should take lunch at the Al Baraka Restaurant overlooking the Square to view from above those stalls of goods, from fruit to alarm clocks; snake charmers and water sellers; fortune tellers and public scribes; tumblers and *nakkachat* - women with syringes full of henna - soothsayers and *gnaoua* musicians. With the touch of a journey back into time we set off into the bustling Kasbah to the lavishly-decorated Saâdien Tombs - discovered in 1917 with some tombs dating from the middle 1550s; this is the ancient cemetery of the *shorfa*, the descendants of the Prophet Mohammed. Here you see the Prayer Hall with its horseshoe arches, the tombs of the Alaouite princes from the 18th century and a large tomb of the Black Sultan, the Merinid Dynasty Abou Hassan. On into the Hall of Twelve Columns, the central mausoleum of Ahmed el Mansour, who died in 1603, with its colonnade of twelve decorated marble pillars and intensely carved upper stuccowork that looks like gilded lace. To his right is his son and successor Zaidan; to his left his grandson Mohammed ech-Cheik. There are 33 other tombs of

Saâdien princelings. The Saâdien dynasty relied heavily on Jewish traders with Sub-Saharan Africa, including Moroccan-controlled Timbuktu, to finance its wars against Portugal and the Turkish Empire. Having made Marrakech their capital and converted land adjoining the El Badii Palace into a Mellah, this became home of a thriving community of native and Spanish Jews, famed for their rabbinical schools and scholars; here we shall also find the Rabbi Hanania Ha-Cohen Cemetery, which is also the burial place of Rabbis Mordechai Ben Attar and Pinhas Khalifa Ha-Cohen Azough (d. 1952), known as the "Patron of Marrakech". This Mellah dates from the 1550's, as noted on the door to the Jewish cemetery and, unlike the Moslem old city or Medina, it has many three story buildings towering over narrow streets, reflecting the crowded conditions of the many Jews who lived there until the 1960's. Synagogues were once found on every street, but only a few remain in open. In the middle of the Mellah is a building that once housed a synagogue and a home for the elderly. Another synagogue is across from the Jewellers market, where several Jewish goldsmiths still produce pendants of the hand of



Fatima, a symbol of good luck to both Jews and Muslims and said to keep at bay evil spirits. From here to the Ksar (Palace) El Badii which overlooks the Royal Palace. The remnants of a magnificent palace built by the Saâdien Sultan Ahmed Ibn Moussa al-Mansour in 1578(?) designed by Mohammed el-Heqqs under the influence of the Alhambra in Granada, which took some 16 years



to complete, was named 'Badii' (the Incomparable), one of the 99 names of Allah (moreover, *ksar l-bdi* in Moroccan Arabic means 'the porcelain palace', which could refer to the rich ceramic panels that profusely decorated the building). Montaigne, in his *Voyage en Italie*, reported that certain Italian craftsmen from near Pisa were cutting 'for the King of Fes in Barbary', 50 very tall Italian marble columns which were paid for in sugar, weight for weight. Workmen from different countries, including in Europe, were recruited to execute the work. For three-quarters of a century, the Badi was the venue for all of the great ceremonies and parties given by the Saâdien Sultans and ended up with a reputation, more or less

deserved, for excess and debauchery. This was the main reason why the Alaouite Sultan Moulay Ismail (1672-1727) ordered the complete destruction of the once fairy tale building and used the materials to decorate his own palace in Meknes. Consequently all that remains today is a section of the 2 metre-thick outer wall, the esplanade, with remains of its pools and orchards, one of the pavilions with its columns and some decorative elements (stucco, marble, zellige - small tiles). However, excavations carried out in the 20th century, the discovery of two drawings of the palace (one Portuguese and one English) and the reports of contemporary chroniclers and foreign visitors give us a reasonably precise idea of how the Badi would have been in its heyday. The palace, thought to have consisted of 360 rooms, was symmetrically planned around an enormous rectangular courtyard measuring 135 m by 110 m, including a long central pool measuring 90 m by 20 m that contained a monumental fountain and had hollows on either side planted with trees and flowers and four small rectangular basins at the ends whose ceramic mosaic paving is still visible. The east side of the palace looked out over a large garden known as 'the Crystal Garden'. Two pavilions measuring 15m by 16m were built halfway along the shorter sides of the courtyard and two more measuring 23m by 15m in the middle of the longer sides. Truncated-pyramid towers stood in the corners of the courtyard. The pavilions were crowned with domes whose ceilings were encrusted with gold from Sudan and precious *muqarnas* (honeycomb work) supported by marble columns with capitals covered with golden leaves. The floors and walls were covered with faience mosaics, the doors were made of sculpted cedar wood and, throughout, the fountains gushed water from the mouths of lions, leopards and pythons sculpted in solid silver. It also has a small, underground, tunnel-like jail with about four cells where the king kept his prisoners. From here back into the Kasbah to the late 19th century Ksar (Palace) Bahia (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 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



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rural culture shown here in all its glory and variety. Nearby is 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 Said, a half-brother of grand vizier Bou Ahmed who expanded the Bahia Palace. In fact, Dar Si Said 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 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. The Koubba is one of the few architectural reminders of the dynasty that presided over the "Golden Age" of the Jews in Spanish Andalusia and Morocco – the most ancient of Marrakech's monuments. 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, thence to continue on through the labyrinth of narrow alleyways making up the renowned cool, colourful and aromatic Souqs of Marrakech - the Dyers' Souq usually being the last to be visited - finishing our guided visit back in the Djmaâ el Fnaâ Square to eventually return to your hotel or riad. **BL.**

DAY 10: MARRAKECH - OURIKA VALLEY - MARRAKECH: After breakfast, we shall make an excursion south to the beautiful



Ourika Valley in the High Atlas Mountains, whose river meanders through orchards, terraced fields and gardens and small pisé (adobe) villages inhabited by the hardy mountain Berbers, here to visit the famous tomb of Rabbi Salomon Ben El-Hans, cared for by one of the few remaining Berber Jews in Morocco. We take lunch in the delightful Auberge Ramancho overlooking the river and surrounded by mountains. Returning to Marrakech, the remainder of day is at leisure with dinner in your hotel or riad. **BL.**



DAY 11: MARRAKECH - ESSAOUIRA: Checking out after breakfast, we now set out at around 8:30 for almost a 2 hour drive west



to the Atlantic coast and the ancient Phoenician town of Mogador – a corruption of the Berber word *Amegdul*, meaning 'well-protected' – and now, since Independence, called Essaouira - 'Little Picture'. Abandoned by the Portuguese in 1541, it was not until 1765 that the Alaouite Sultan Sidi Mohammad Ibn Abdullah transformed Mogador into a fortified city, 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 - the purple dyes produced by the crushed shellfish were exported from the offshore Purple Islands by the conquering Romans to colour the togas of the rich back home. We shall check in to our hotel or riad and then leave for a walk around this enchanting town to enjoy a lunch 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 whose two historical synagogues - the Slat Rabbi Chaïm Pinto and Slat Attias - should be renovated soon. 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 (the hiloula of Chaïm Pinto is held in September), 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. Afterwards, perhaps time to take a dip in the waters of the ocean? A visit to Jimi Hendrix's "Castles of Sand"? Board, wind or kite surfing, or just laze around on the beach? You'll be pleasantly surprised to find what this artist-colony town has to offer with its many seafood restaurants where you might take your (optional) dinner. **BL.**



DAY 12: ESSAOUIRA - SAFI - OUALIDIA - EL JADIDA - CASABLANCA: After breakfast today, we set off up north along the



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



Surrounded by a vista of lofty dark-green stone pines, and tumbled down for half a century now, the palace has a perfect panoramic view of the whole lagoon and the distant narrow breach into the Ocean. Oualidia's well-kept secret is the oyster beds; from here, oysters are sent out all over Morocco. We may see a fleet of candy-pink fishing boats lies high on the dunes as we eat our fish lunch overlooking the ocean, perhaps to see avocets, cormorants, oystercatchers - of course - stilts and stints, whimbrels and redshanks. We continue to El Jadida, formerly called *Mazagan* by the Portuguese who seized the town in 1502 and, after 1541, was the only place to be held by Portugal in Morocco. Repeatedly besieged by the Moroccans, it was finally re-captured in 1769. Our first stop is at the old fortress inside which lies an ancient structure that escaped the destruction of the fleeing Portuguese - the misnamed 'Portuguese Cisterns', as they were actually built by the Romans originally to store grain, then used by the Portuguese as a fresh water cistern to withstand sieges, to be discovered by accident in 1977 by a Jewish spice merchant and where Orson Wells shot the riot scenes for his film



Othello. We leave there to continue to the Porto do Mar (the Sea Gate) where we visit the communal bakery. A short walk will then take us to the Bastion of St Sebastian. Here is the old prison compound and the Tribunal of the Inquisition - we continue to the Mellah and an early 19th century synagogue, as the Star of David underneath a Moslem crescent on the wall testifies - surmised



by some to symbolise the appreciation of the Jewish population of the time at being accepted by a Islamic country after fleeing Spain and persecution at the hands of the Inquisition and of their desire to integrate into Moroccan life. Integration was never really complete, however, as Jews here always lived under a different set of laws to those of Muslims (one was they were not allowed to wear shoes!). No Jews live here now, as they all left for Israel after the founding of the State, yet their centuries of tradition, artistry and culture are still quite tangible. After a light lunch here, we continue to the nearby town of Azemmour, in the Berber language – wild olive branch - and *not* the perfumes of Crabtree & Evelyn) for our short visit of this delightful once-Carthaginian, once-Portuguese strategic natural port (*Azama*) where the ochres of

Morocco change to white, blue and yellow, where violet bougainvilleas challenge the purplish ramparts; where the Dar el Baroud (powder storage house of the Portuguese) bastion guards the now-ruined kasbah, the Arab Medina and Jewish Mellah - the synagogue of Rabbi Abraham Moul Niss is still frequently used. A final 45 minute dash brings us to Casablanca for our overnight accommodation. This evening is free for you to stroll around the city centre before your farewell dinner and overnight at your hotel. **BLD.**

DAY 13: CASABLANCA - ONWARDS: Transfer to Casablanca Mohamed V airport in accordance with your flight schedule. Assistance to the boarding formalities and a fond farewell from your driver/guide. **B.**

There is always the possibility of attending a religious service in a Synagogue in a few major cities.



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

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

OUR WILL PRICES INCLUDE: Accommodation at specified hotels/riads or similar as required and as *available at time of reservation* - including relevant taxes. Meals as detailed or as required according to your market needs. Porterage on 1 piece of luggage per person in/out airports & hotels/riads. Private transportation in an air-conditioned vehicle from Casablanca to Casablanca. Sightseeing tours, including one by calèche in Marrakech, all related entrance fees as listed in the itinerary. An English-speaking Licensed National Guide throughout. Bottled water en-route. Medical and Accident Insurance.

OUR PRICES WILL NOT INCLUDE: Gratuities to waiters, guide and chauffeur. 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.

