

Escape the 

NICE 'N EASY PRIVATE ONE DAY ANY DAY EXCURSIONS FROM **MARRAKECH**.

ESSAOUIRA - PORTUGUESE MAZAGAO

OBTRAK14. 9 HOURS

MARRAKECH - ESSAOUIRA - MARRAKECH.



After breakfast we set out for an almost 2 hour drive west to the Atlantic coast and the 7th century B.C. Phoenician off-shore islands and town of Migdol - a corruption of the Numidian Berber word *Amegdul*, meaning 'well-protected' - and now, since Independence, called Essaouira (*essaaweera*) - 'The Little Ramparts'. In the 11th century A.D., the bay opposite the islands formed the chief port of Morocco and King Manuel of Portugal seized the land to build a fort here in 1506 to name the town Mazagão. Abandoned by the Portuguese in 1541 after a battle with the Saâdien Dynasty, it was not until 1760 that the Alaouite Sultan Sidi Mohammad Ibn Abdullah transformed Mogador into a fortified city when he used his French architect-engineer Théodore Cournut, captured by his Barbary Coast pirates, to design the Medina, which may account for the streets' unaccustomed regular lay out. 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 colourful sardine fishing fleet with their massed nets, Essaouira invites you to wander through the narrow alleyways which make up the Medina to witness artisans at work making their wooden tables, boxes and sundry items in lemon or briar wood inlaid with mother of pearl - the Tyrian purple (crimson) 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. By the early 19th century the port of Essaouira handled most of Morocco's sea trade, importing cottons from Manchester and machinery from Birmingham and exporting almonds, walnuts, ostrich feathers so loved by the hoi poloi; ebony, gum arabic and ivory. Given the Suez Canal had not yet been built, British clipper ships sailing round The Cape of Good Hope from India brought with them tea, a drink previously unknown to Moroccans and which, with the sweetened addition of mint and sugar is now the most popular of drinks. The distinctive Moroccan teapot was first manufactured in Manchester combining existing distinctive Moroccan and Yemeni patterns. We shall leave for a walk around this enchanting city first to the Battery (La Sqala Du Port) where two castellated towers and banks of ancient Portuguese cannons and on to enjoy a lunch (not included) of Essaouira's famed seafood, either on the quayside or in one of the several quaint cafés, or in any of the open-air seafood grills that decorate this charming historical town. Fishermen sell their catch through the market hall and you can get it cooked in small stands nearby should you prefer. In 1906, a Berber chieftain - the Caïd Anflous - rode into town with 200 horsemen and looted the Medina. Back in the 1960s, hippy travellers and local residents built an almost unique relationship that persists to this day, making Essaouira one of the friendliest and most laid-back beach resorts anywhere. This is where Orson Welles shot a good part of his film 'Othello'; where Jimi Hendrix and Cat Stevens (Yusuf Islam) came with their followers to 'gel out'. The beach dominates the Essaouirans' leisure time, although the strong wind and currents makes relaxed tanning and swimming a little difficult at times, with good winds for most days of the year, Essaouira is a water sports paradise - surfing, wind or kite surfing. The best spots are reported to be Essaouira Bay, Sidi Kaouki, Cape Sim and Moulay Bouzertoune. Equipment can be hired from various hire centres on the beach front. Time and choice permitting, you might wish to visit the Ethnography Museum, once the 19th century home of a pasha to be converted into a Town Hall during the French Protectorate era and now containing an exhibition of traditional crafts, carpets, textiles, clothing, musical instruments (Essaouira is home to the original Gnaoua musicians from the Sahara), jewellery, early maps, engravings and sketches of the town, together with a collection of weapons. If not, a camel ride along the beach? A visit to Jimi Hendrix's offshore "Castles of Sand"? For a relaxing drink, or two, it'll be hard to beat the terrace bar of the *Taros* (2, Rue de la Sqala) for its view over the lively Place Moulay el Hassan, a square lined with elegant white houses and blue painted windows and doors, and of the harbour. You'll be pleasantly surprised to find what this artist-colony town has to offer. At your convenience, we shall return to your

riad or hotel in Marrakech.

OUR PRICES WILL INCLUDE: Private transportation Marrakech - Essaouira- Marrakech. Bottled or gaseous water. Medical and Accident Insurance.

OUR PRICES WILL NOT INCLUDE: *Accommodation pre & post, nor transfers from/to Marrakech's' airport. Gratuity to chauffeur. Any expenditure of a personal nature, nor anything not specifically mentioned in the itinerary.*

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IT IS RECOMMENDED YOU BRING WITH YOU: Good trainers, hat, sunscreen, sunglasses; hygienic 'wipes'; day pack 'bum bag', and, of course, your camera.