



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 road to 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 to Tarouddant we could well see small herds of goats perched on the branches of the Argan tree, endemic to the Souss Plain. 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.

44 km from Agadir, we pass through the township of Ouled Teima, the agricultural centre of the region. Just before entering Tarouddant, 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.



Our tour of this, one of Morocco's oldest towns, starts with a tour of the magnificent enclosing **ramparts** to lead us to the **Place Assaraq**. Getting off our vehicle we shall now stretch our legs for a short walk to the **souqs** where, amidst the authentic atmosphere of an everyday Berber market, we shall visit a spice stand to listen to an explanation of each spice and its local culinary use in the very varied Berber cuisine. From here we shall go to see the proud Berber womenfolk at work producing the prized **argan oil**. Time now for some **light refreshment** and Moroccan pastries prior to boarding our vehicle and return to our ship, having been immersed, if only for a little while, in the culture of a people not even the French, during their Protectorate, could really dominate.



OUR PRICES WILL INCLUDE: Private circle trip transportation in an air-conditioned vehicle from Agadir Port. Medical and Accident insurance. Private guided sightseeing excursion and all related entrance fees as listed in the itinerary. An English-speaking Licensed National Guide throughout. Bottled or gaseous water en-route. Light refreshment.

OUR PRICES WILL NOT INCLUDE: Gratuities to guides, driver and the argan womenfolk. Any expenditure of a personal nature, nor anything not specifically mentioned in the itinerary.

IT IS RECOMMENDED YOU BRING WITH YOU: pullover (seasonal); hat, day pack; hygienic 'wipes;' camera and Ziploc bags for sensitive lenses; sunglasses, sunscreen.