

Marrakech, pronounced *Marrakch*...Marrakouch - the land of the sons of Kouch, black African warriors from Mauritania – was created by the Almoravid Saharan chieftain Abou Bekr way back in 1062 when his army set up camp in the heart of the Haouz Plain to control the caravan trade north-south; once the capital of an empire stretching from Senegal to Toledo, the very name itself conjures up visions of colourful and aromatic souks bustling with people, fortune-tellers, snake charmers, street acrobats and peddlers to a background of drums and the tingling aromas of a multitude of spices. It is all here, surrounded by reddish-brown ramparts and palm trees, and the soaring peaks of the High Atlas Mountains towering through the summer haze. If you choose to take only one excursion during your cruise, this should be it, for Marrakech, the 'Pink City', is still one of the truly magical, mysterious and exotic places left in the world with its labyrinth of alleyways in the ancient Medina; secluded palaces, riads, museums, mosques, mosaics magicians, musicians and markets.

**DAY 1: AGADIR - MARRAKECH:** Leaving the Port of Agadir early in the morning, our almost 4 hours drive takes us first up to



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 where our ship is docked; 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, 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 before rejoining our vehicle to ride up into the trailing edges of the High Atlas Mountain Tichka Plateau which we shall see to our right, then across a low plain to the Imperial City of Marrakech, where we shall drive past the impressive city Ramparts for a short drive to the Koutoubia Mosque, this for centuries has dominated the skyline of Marrakech. The Koutoubia Mosque is the tallest mosque in Marrakech. Its construction was 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 *mnara* 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-Koutoubiyin* 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 shall then check into our hotel, relax around the pool (weather permitting) and take our welcome light lunch, after which we shall start our visit here with the tranquil Majorelle Gardens, delightfully designed by the French artist Louis Majorelle, overlooked by the High Atlas Mountains with pavilions in a dynamic shade of blue; lush greenery, palm trees, cacti, still pools and shady nooks. We continue down to the southern part of the Medina to visit the lavishly-decorated 16<sup>th</sup> century Saâdien Tombs - some dating from the middle 1550s. This is the ancient cemetery of the *shorfa*, the descendants of the Prophet Mohammed. Here you see the Prayer Hall with its horseshoe arches, the tombs of the Alaouite princes from the 18<sup>th</sup> century and a large tomb of the Black Sultan, the Merinid Dynasty Abou Hassan. On into the Hall of Twelve Columns, the central mausoleum of Ahmed el Mansour, who died in 1603, with its colonnade of twelve decorated marble pillars and intensely carved upper stuccowork that looks like gilded lace. To his right is his son and successor Zaidan; to his left his grandson Mohammed ech-Cheik. There are 33 other tombs of Saâdien princelings. We continue on to visit the Dar el Bahia Palace, once the 19<sup>th</sup> century residence built by the Grand Vizier Ba Ahmed, with its higgledy-piggledy arrangement of close, intimate rooms, beautifully-decorated reception rooms, all with their particular mosaics and ceiling decorations, small gardens and courtyards; of these we get to see the apartments of the Sultan's favourite concubine, the magnificent Council Chamber and the central courtyard paved in marble and decorated with zelliges (intricate tile work), fountains and flowers - the inner courtyards were reserved for the sultan's four wives and twenty four concubines. We set off north to the famous Djmaâ el Fnaâ Square, where we will find a theatre of musicians, acrobats, snake-charmers, food stalls and storytellers and into the famous covered Great Souks: the Souk Smarine of cloth merchants and tailors; the Rahba Kédima of carpets; the Kissaria (so close to what was once the Slave Market) of horse and dromedary saddles; of traditional gandoras and kaftans; of babouches (leather and embroidered slippers); of metal lanterns; of dyers; of the Mouassine Mosque and its plethora of better-stocked tourist bazaars. Entering once more the Djmaâ el Fnaâ we return to our hotel for a welcome refreshing shower before setting off for our dinner (including wine) at a

Moroccan restaurant, to return around 9:30 at night to our hotel. **LD.**

**DAY 2: MARRAKECH-CASABLANCA:** After breakfast, we shall check out of our hotel to set out back into the 12<sup>th</sup> century Medina



to stroll through the maze of narrow alleyways to the 14<sup>th</sup> century Ben Youssef Medersa - one of the most beautiful buildings in Marrakech that housed the Islamic equivalent of a monastery; the tranquillity within contrasts with the chaotic pace of life outside in the Medina. Founded by the Merinid Sultan Abou el Hassan in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, it was almost completely rebuilt during the Saâdien Dynasty who made their distinctive mark in its architecture and art. The Medersa centres on a large courtyard with a central pool for ablutions. The buildings are made of carved cedar wood, exquisite stuccowork, and colourful zellige tiles. At the back is a sizable prayer hall where the most elaborate decoration can be found. The interior is covered in an abundance of pine cone and palm motifs used around the mihrab to create a three-dimensional appearance. Throughout the Medersa

are many Arabic inscriptions in stucco and zellige tile, the most common of which is the *bismillah* invocation: "In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful." Above the central courtyard are the small windows of the tiny student dormitories; over 800 students were housed in this Medersa, difficult to imagine. From stairs in the entry vestibule you can explore all the rooms and enjoy a nice view over the courtyard. The rooms are arranged around smaller inner courtyards, rimmed with fine wood railings. We shall go on to see the Almoravid Dynasty Koubba; also called Koubba Ba'Adiyn, it is 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 splendid Marrakech Museum of Contemporary Art and on back through the labyrinth of narrow alleyways to the Djmaâ el Fnaâ Square and on to our light lunch, after which we board our awaiting vehicle to set out on our 3 hour drive north up to Casablanca, the second largest city in Africa after Cairo. Here on arrival we shall drive into Anfa, the elegant residential district of, built on a hill dominating the city. This is the original site of Casablanca. You'll appreciate the main avenues, green parks and especially the magnificent and variously constructed villas illustrating the evolution of the architectural concepts of the early 1930s to today. Anfa hosted the Conference of Casablanca with President Roosevelt and Sir Winston Churchill, during which the date of the Allied landings on the French coasts was fixed for the spring of 1944 and where the somewhat difficult meeting with them and Generals Charles de Gaulle and Henri Giraud took place. Here, also, at Anfa, President Roosevelt received in secret the Sultan Mohammed V where the possible future of Morocco was discussed in depth. On once more to the Corniche where a stop is made for refreshments before continuing on to visit the interior (on Fridays at 9 am only) of the amazingly-beautiful 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 30<sup>th</sup> August, 1993 was built partially on the waters of the Atlantic Ocean, on the farthest western point of the Maghreb. Conceived by the French architect Michel Pinseau (1924-1999), the Mosque employed 3,300 craftsmen from all over Morocco; has 53,000 m<sup>2</sup> of carved cedar wood; 67,000 m<sup>2</sup> of plasterwork and some 10,000 m<sup>2</sup> of sculpted ornamentation and writings; it contains on the ground floor an oblong Prayer Hall of perfect symmetry measuring 200 x 100m. Supported by seventy-eight pillars where granite, marble and onyx mix their respective reflections, this vast room supports a retractable roof covered with emerald green tiles - the symbolic colour of Islam, representing Mother - to welcome to prayer 25,000 believers inside and 80,000 on the adjoining esplanade. Embedded in the axis of the southern facade, a 210 metre-high minaret, boasts a laser beam of 30km reach pointing towards Mecca. This magnificent Mosque also encompasses a Medersa (School of Koranic learning), a Library, a National Museum and immense lecture halls, all beautifully decorated by artisans from all over Morocco: frescoes and zelliges in traditional geometrical motives, painted and sculptured woods, stuccos of intricate designs, arabesques in decorative drawings and writings in brilliant colour inaugurated in 1992 and a masterpiece of Moroccan architectural design and craftsmanship



The last part of our tour takes to the Port of Casablanca and our ship and your continuing cruise of discovery. **BL.**

**OUR PRICES WILL INCLUDE:** Private transportation in an air-conditioned vehicle from Agadir to Marrakech to Casablanca. 1 night's accommodation in Marrakech in either 4 or 5 star hotels on Bed and Breakfast. Private guided sightseeing excursion and all related entrance fees as listed in the itinerary. An English-speaking Licensed National Guide throughout. 1 dinner and 2 light lunches. Medical and Accident insurance; bottled or gaseous water en-route.

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

**IT IS RECOMMENDED YOU BRING WITH YOU:** Good trainers; overnight bag, hat, pullover and/or slicker (winter seasonal); day pack; hygienic 'wipes'; camera and Ziploc bags for sensitive lenses; sunglasses, sunscreen.