

OBTSETNG03 TETOUAN AND CHEFCHAOUEN OF STARTLING BLUES AND AMAZING MEDINAS

On your arrival at the Port of Tangier you will be met & assisted with Customs formalities and transferred from the Port to start your quick visit of Tangier "The Bride of the North". 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. You will visit the medieval Medina, a vast, picturesque, vibrant souk - the 'Grand Socco' (Spanish for 'souk'); tea houses; the Mendoubia Gardens with their eight-hundred-year-old trees; the Sidi Bounabid Mosque, its minaret decorated with multi-hued faiences 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 Ismaïl Mosque; the Tangier American Legation Museum and the Merinid College. We set out 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 some 60 km to the south-east of the city of Tangier 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. We shall visit Hassan II Square, situated at the point where the old and modern parts of the town converge to constitute the heart of the town. Reminiscent of Andalusia with its kiosks, fountains and flower boxes, the square remains an ideal meeting point for afternoon strollers from the time of the Spanish Protectorate; buildings with wrought iron balconies and shop windows filled with imported commodities to fascinate the passers-by. On to the very characteristic and traditional walled Medina, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, here to find in the souk many white, low houses with weavers, jewellers and leather workers carrying out their artistry. We shall visit the Museum of Moroccan Art (closed, unfortunately, on Tuesdays) and the Handicrafts School. Light refreshments will be taken in a café near the Bab el Oukla or on arrival at Chefchaouen.

Chaouen, Xaouen or Chefchaouen? You may take your pick.



Chefchaouen is situated at 600m in the er-Rif Mountains, just inland from Tangier and to the south of Tetouan. 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 and 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 isn'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. It is also the centre of the illicit marijuana ('Kif' - 'Moroccan Red') trade. The evenings here are peaceful, no need to wonder why. Despite how close to the European continent Chefchaouen is, only three Christians ever found their way here; the first in 1883, Charles de Foucauld, spent 1 dangerous hour here dressed as a Rabbi (he also had himself circumcised - just in case); 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 Moorish Jews and Muslims forcibly displaced from Spain during the Inquisition. This hostility continued when Morocco was fighting the Spanish to avoid becoming a colony. The local chief fought the Spanish, to be captured only with help from French troops. The ferocious inter-tribal battles between Riffian tribes led to a man being considered a coward were he to reach old age. None of this hostility remains, however, though the fierce pride of these citizens can still be seen in that they are very slow to take up Western habits, in large part because of this history. For instance, up until 1937, slaves were still being openly sold in the slave souq.

Chefchaouen is a popular shopping destination for many serious tourists, as the town offers some native handicrafts that simply can not be found in most other places in Morocco. On a leisurely stroll throughout the Medina the first thing that may catch your eyes is a man selling pigment in shades of blue, yellow, pink and orange. The pigment is the same that is used on the walls of the city. You will see cobblers hand making the white and yellow fine leather pointed slippers ('babouches') worn by the local inhabitants; a Berber weaver at his loom producing a local style of red and white blanket; artisans offering many beautiful djellabas sewn with finely embroidered seams and carpenters carving tables and chairs made of fragrant cedar wood displaying delicate Islamic designs. There are beautifully ordained mirrors with hand-painted flowers and a wide variety of woven blankets and wool garments; of native goat cheeses to olives and olive oil and honey, the same honey General Franco had regularly airshipped to him.

Our guided walking tour of this delightful blue and white town includes the Palace El Makhzen and the famous (3000m²) square of Ouatta el Hammam; the Escheresque 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. Late in the afternoon we leave these enchanting towns behind us as we wend our way back to Tangier and your awaiting ship and the continuation of your adventure at sea. **L.**

OUR PRICES WILL INCLUDE: Private round trip transportation in an air-conditioned vehicle. Private guided sightseeing excursion and all related entrance fees. An English-speaking Licensed National Guide throughout. Medical and Accident insurance. Lunch and bottled or gaseous water en-route.

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

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