

MOROCCO'S TRADITIONAL FOLK ART AND CRAFTS

OBTAC02cc 14DAYS/13 MAGICAL NIGHTS. CASABLANCA/RABAT/CHEFCHAOUEN/FES/VOLUBILIS-MEKNES-FES/MARRAKECH/ESSAOUIRA/CASABLANCA

DAY 1: CASABLANCA: You will be met on arrival at Casablanca's airport after your flight and transferred to your hotel. At your earliest convenience



you will be taken for a tour of this bustling metropolis, the second largest city in Africa after Cairo, when we board our awaiting vehicle to proceed first to visit the interior of the nearby 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 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. We continue along the Corniche where a stop is made for a light lunch overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. Suitably refreshed, we continue to Anfa, the elegant residential district built on a hill dominating the city. This is the original site of Casablanca (the *Anafa* of the Phoenicians) where 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 down to past the main entrance to the King's Palace which now houses the administrative offices for the region of Casablanca and the New Medina, or Habous Quarter. The fast development of Casablanca attracted thousands of people from all over the country in search of employment to settle down at first near the ancient Medina, then around the city, in miserable encampments. To reduce these '*Bidonvilles*', the new Medina was constructed in 1923 during the period of the French Protectorate respecting the traditional style whilst applying the rules of modern town planning. The immediate neighbourhood around the old Mosque and especially that part of the Medina to the northeast offers picturesque alleys lined with arches under which shopkeepers of every sort ply their trade and where you'll find the Brass Souk, where artisans shape and polish cauldrons, trays, teapots and an entire space dedicated to the sale of olives. Here, too, is the renowned Patisserie Bennis Cake Shop which opened in 1938, Casablanca's oldest Patisserie and whose sign is the only thing distinguishing it from the rest of the buildings, but whose interior, decorated with amazing mosaics, shelters one thousand and one delicacies. We turn back up to visit of the interior of the Mahakma Court of Islamic Law (if we are visiting on a Saturday or Sunday, only an external visit of the Mahakma Traditional Court Palace will take place); this beautiful building was erected in 1952 with no fewer than 60 rooms, delightfully-decorated in the Hispano-Mauresque style to be used simultaneously a Law Court and the Pasha's (Governor's) Reception Hall. On now to the Church of Notre Dame de Lourdes finished in 1956 following the design of a Mr. Dangleterre. The interior deserves to be seen for the large stained glass window by Gabriel Loire, chief glassworker in Chartres, contrasting with the wooden copula of the choir, depicting the dogma of the Immaculate Conception and the visitations at Lourdes and other visitations of the Virgin Mary. From here we continue to the Mohammed V Square which groups buildings of some main administrative departments in attractive modern architecture inspired by national traditions. To the west, a monumental fountain was built in 1976: at certain hours, one can admire water shows accompanied by Arabic, European or Asian music. On the other side of the Avenue Hassan II, there is a public garden bordering the Law Courts and the Préfecture. Between these two buildings, behind the railings of the French Consulate, is the statue of Marshal Lyautey by François Cogné, sculptor of the Clemenceau of Champs-Élysées in Paris. From here past Art deco buildings to the bustling Central Market, a kaleidoscope of colour, charm and street musicians; of fresh fish, freshly-cut flowers, fruit, and spices; thence to the busy United Nations Square. Under the walls of the old Medina, at the beginning of the 20th century, there was but an empty space where the souk was held. It very quickly became the heart of the modern town. We may make a stop here for shopping, should you so wish, before returning to your hotel. 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. L.



DAY 2. CASABLANCA - RABAT. You will be met on arrival at Casablanca's airport from your flight by your English-speaking National Guide and, after clearing Immigration and Customs we shall leave for an hour's drive to the administrative Imperial capital since 1912 of the Kingdom of Morocco, Rabat (R'bat al Fat'h) - one of Morocco's 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**, once a prosperous Roman enclave called *Sala Colonia* in their Mauretania Tingitane Province, to be 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 earthquake of 1755 and is today a garden of date and banana palm trees, hibiscus, bougainvillea, olive and fig trees. Legend has it that Jews came to Sala Colonia five centuries before the Carthaginians, in the days of Solomon, to purchase gold. On now to the **Archaeological Museum**. Built in 1932 and enlarged a few years later to display the finds resulting from intense archaeological research, this museum has housed the National Museum collections since 1986. It is one of the most sumptuous in Morocco and should certainly not be missed. The prehistoric section brings together human remains from the middle Palaeolithic period (probably Neanderthals) to the Neolithic (4000 B.C.), proving the continuity and size of the population at this time. The Islamic archaeology section is constantly growing with finds coming from the excavations of 8th and 9th century sites, enabling us to have a clear idea of their potters, herdsmen, surgeons and bakers who have left us the legacy of their tools, while their womenfolk have left us their jewellery and the animals their harnesses. There is a collection of superb bronzes recovered from the excavations at Volubilis, the Romano-Berber capital of Mauritania Tingitana. When Rome ordered the evacuation of Volubilis in the third century, the citizens, expecting to return shortly, buried their works of art outside the city, where they were to remain undisturbed for 17 centuries. These pieces are kept apart in the Salle des Bronzes. Pre-Roman and Roman civilisations are particularly well-represented by some of the finest pieces to have survived from those periods. there is a first-rate collection of Hellenistic-style bronzes, so exceptional that it is difficult to know where to look first: the "Drunken Donkey", passionately lyrical, an incomparable masterpiece from the time of the Emperor Augustus; the "Volubilis Guard-Dog" (centre-piece of a fountain) with its stunning realism, the "Young man Crowned With Ivy", a marvel of elegance and grace; the Rider and the busts presumed to be those of Cato the Younger and the young King Juba II of Mauritania Tingitana - the "Heads of Young Berbers" in marble, remarkable for their technical perfection and the vigorous strength of their expression. From here we continue to the **Mohamed V Mausoleum**, located on the southern side of the Great Mosque guarded by the mounted Royal Household Guard, the last resting places of the late King Mohammed V and of his son, the late King Hassan II. Napoleon Bonaparte's tomb at Les Invalides was the inspiration for the interior's modern Islamic design. It was the King Mohammed V who prevented the mass deportation of Moroccan Jews in the early years of World War II. We visit also the minaret of the Great Mosque, known also as the **Hassan Tower**. Begun in 1195, the tower was intended to be the largest 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 (*sala*) to ride a horse to the top of the tower to issue the call to prayer. The tower, according to tradition, was designed by an architect named Jabir who used a similar design plan for a sister tower, the Giralda in Seville, Spain. Both of the towers were modeled on the minaret of another one of Jabir's designs, the Koutoubia Mosque in Marrakech. From here we shall proceed into the ancient Medina at the heart of the military history of Rabat - historical sources attest to a continued presence here of a Jewish community since 1492 after their expulsion by the Catholic Kings and the subsequent Inquisition - located in the Al Buhaira Quarter until the establishment of the Mellah in 1807. Here we enter the **Kasbah of the Oudayas and Museum** whose alleyways are reminiscent of a delightful blue and whitewashed Andalusian village (blue being the colour of Judaism). 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 corsair raiders. The museum is situated in the opulent lodge built by Sultan Moulay Ismail in the 17th century as his Rabat residence. This spectacular lodge is known for its breathtaking garden, the first of its masterpieces, that is a maze of pathways, surrounded by lush vegetation, endless beds of vibrant flowers which soften the strict geometry of those paths, together with beautiful ramparts and fountains making it amongst the very finest of all Andalusian gardens.

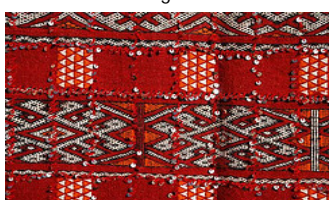


Over and above the immaculate gardens that attract many visitors each year, the museum building itself is an awesome sight. Its spacious rooms and ancient interior, which is decorated in true Moroccan fashion, instill an atmosphere of royalty, wealth and absolute luxury. From marble halls, priceless carpets, works of art and unmistakable elegance, the Oudayas Museum is a gateway into the past and the rich hypnotic history of Morocco. At the far end is a room reproducing an ancient Moroccan interior with a vast bay opening onto this glorious spectacle with its magnificent use of colours finished off with beautiful cushions in brocade, silk and gold cover the divans all around the room. A little further on, in a cool marble room, stand rows of very old illuminated Korans, jewellery, pottery and musical instruments. The carpets exhibited here are not just woven masterpieces, but extraordinary feats of meticulous stitching and detailed work. A true Rabat carpet can have more than 150 thousand stitches to just one square metre. The motifs and patterns found on these carpets are traditional and often refer to the specific craftsman; styles and techniques used to produce these rare carpets being unique to Morocco. Using a less elaborate technique, the rural carpets, called Berbers, demonstrate a powerful sense of composition, colour and ornamentation which is an art of its own with a unique appeal. You may also view the market place, furniture displays, diamond cutting exhibitions, statues, sculptures, textiles, fabrics, metalworking (with both silver and gold) exhibits, decorative arts and displays of costumes. We break for a light lunch in the Restaurant Borj Eddar overlooking the estuary of the Bou Regreg river, its bay being 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 Dolittle - the Moroccan Sultan Moulay Ismail 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. From here we turn to our delightful accommodation for this night. LD.

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DAY 3: RABAT - SALE - KENITRA - OUEZZANE - CHEFCHAOUEN: We set out today to Rabat's **Ensemble Artisanal** in an 18th century warehouse, once



used as a school and now a carpet workshop where we shall see the prized High Atlas Mountains Tazenakht carpets; prayer-sized rugs from Ben Smimm from the Middle Atlas Mountains and the famed Rabat carpets of deep red with central medallions before continuing on towards the north via Salé, sister city of Rabat, its Mellah, an important centre of Jewish intellectual thought which was 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. Salé (from the Amazigh (Berber) word *asla*, meaning "rock"), Rabat's sister city and home to around 800,000 people, was once a self-contained, self-ruled Republic with

international scope, is situated on the opposite mouth of the estuary - Wadi Sala - of the Bou Regreg River. Referred to as *Sala* by Ptolemy, Salé was apparently colonised around the 7th century B.C. and at approximately the same time that of Chellah by the Phoenicians (whose name means "*new town*") and who were nicknamed "*The Purple People*" from the purple dye they manufactured in Mogador (present-day Essaouira) obtained by crushing the spiny dyemurex shell. The Greeks called them '*Phoinikes*'; the Phoenicians called themselves Canaanites - also known as the 'Sea People' - and are the ancestors of today's Lebanese; Phoenicia in Latin is '*Punicus*', therefore, Rome's wars with Carthage (a former province of Phoenicia) are often called the Punic Wars. The Romans were later to call the place Sala Colonia, when, in the 1st century A.D. it became part of their province of Mauritania Tingitane; Pliny the Elder mentions it in his great work *Naturalis Historia* as a desert town infested with elephants! The Vandals captured the area in the 5th century A.D. to leave behind a number of blonde, blue-eyed Berbers. The invading Umayyad Arabs (a Muslim dynasty ruling from 661 to 750 A.D.) from Babylonia in the 7th century A.D. kept the old name and believed it to have been derived from Salah, son of Ham, son of Noah; they maintained that Salé was the first city ever built by the Berbers. Early in the 10th century the area around Salé became the capital of the strong tribe of the Beni Ifren. Berbers in Morocco call themselves some variant of the word *Imazighen* (singular *Amazigh*), meaning "free men". Historically Berbers have been variously known, for instance as Libyans by the ancient Greeks; as Numidians (202 B.C. - 46 B.C.) and Mauri (named after the tribe of the same name, after whom the Moors were named), by the Romans. The best known Berbers were the Roman author Apuleius, the Roman emperor Septimus Severus and St. Augustine.

Around 1630 Salé became a haven for Moriscos-turned-Barbary pirates. A *Morisco* (Spanish for 'Moor-like) was any Muslim in Spain or Portugal who converted



to Roman Catholicism during the Reconquista of Spain. The term also became a pejorative regarding those 'Secret Jews' - Sephardic Jews - who, for form's and safety's sake, also became Roman Catholic converts to assimilate to society, but who were suspected of secretly practicing Islam. Those Converted Jews, or 'conversos', maintaining their ancestral traditions as crypto-Jews by publicly professing Roman Catholicism but secretly adhering to Judaism were called '*marranos*' which, in Spanish meant 'pigs' and in turn was derived from the Arabic word 'muharram' meaning "ritually forbidden", stemming from the ritual prohibition against eating pork. In both Portuguese and Spanish, the term *marrano* acquired the meaning of "swine" or "filthy" (but in contemporary Spanish it has no further association with Jews).

These Muslim Barbary pirates, sometimes called Ottoman corsairs, operated from the North African ports of Tunis, Tripoli, Algiers and Salé from the time of the Crusades until the early 19th century to prey on shipping in the western Mediterranean Sea. Their stronghold along the extensive stretch of northern Africa became known as the Barbary Coast. They continuously made raids, called *razzias*, between the 16th to the 19th centuries on European coastal towns villages in Portugal, Spain, Italy, France, England, Ireland

and even Iceland and North America to capture some 1 million Christians to sell as slaves. The impact of these raids was devastating - Spain, Portugal, France and England each lost thousands of ships, and long stretches of coast in Spain and Italy were almost completely abandoned by their inhabitants and were to discourage settlement along the coast until the 19th century. The Salé pirates (the well-known "Sallee Rovers") are those mentioned in Robinson Crusoe, Daniel Defoe's novel by the same name, whose hero spends time in captivity of the local pirates and at last sails off to liberty from the mouth of river. Salé has played a rich and important part in Moroccan history. The first demonstrations during the 1950's for independence against the French and their Protectorate, for example, were sparked off in Salé and the people of Salé, the *Slawis*, have always had a tribal sense of belonging, a sense of pride which developed into a feeling of superiority towards '*berranis*', i.e. outsiders. We continue for some 17 km to the **Dar Belghazi Museum** where generations of the renowned Belghazi family have religiously amassed a fantastic collection of traditional Moroccan Islamic and Jewish arts and crafts, including 17th century carpets, intricately embroidered Moroccan bridal wedding belts, delicately carved cedar wood minibars or pulpits; 16th century doors and ceilings, intricate gold and silver jewellery, miniature copies of the Q'uran and beautiful pottery and embroidery from Fes. We continue now inland to skirt the town of Kenitra and on inland to the Rif Mountains and the town of Ouezzane, with its Crafts, Weavers and Blacksmiths souqs in the winding, cobble-stoned alleyways of the Medina. Founded in 1727 by Moulay Abdellah Cherif, Ouezzane was once controlled by an important Tabiya Islamic fraternity who encouraged Jewish traders and agriculturists to live near-by. We continue on to Chaouen and our hotel. **BLD.**

DAY 4: CHEFCHAOUEN: Chaouen, Xaouen or Chefchaouen? You may take your pick.



Chefchaouen is situated at 600m 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 a colony. 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 many serious tourists, as the town offers some native handicrafts that simply can not be found in most other places in Morocco. After checking in to our hotel, our guided walking tour of this delightful blue and white village takes in the Palace El Makhzen and the famous (3000m²) square of Ouatta el Hammam and the ancient fondouk (inn) where we shall make a quick visit of the small **Ethnographic Museum** in the centre of the Medina, a haven of peace in a magnificent Andalusian garden with its incomparable collections illustrating the customs and popular art of the Chefchaouen region together with those from all over northern Morocco, featuring embroidery, wooden caskets, pottery, arms and musical instruments, all set within red walls and battlements blending with the ornate kasbah built by the Pasha Ahmed Errifi; 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 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. We shall also visit a **Woodpainting Workshop** to watch the artisans at work decorating hand-carved pieces of delightful artistry. **BLD.**

DAY 5: CHEFCHAOUEN - FES: After breakfast we set out on a six hours' drive through the spectacular Rif Mountains, first towards the east along a winding



road as far as the town of Kelama, then south along a zigzagging road of curves and bends between the Jbels (mountains) of Tidirhine and Tifelhous in the valley of the Oued Sra offering several photo-op panoramic views until we reach the market town of Taounate where you might like to take a break for a light lunch. The road ever south now become more straightforward as we pass through the town of Ain Aicha and on through the low-lying hills of the Cheraga to our accommodation in the exciting, fascinating and two thousand year old Imperial City of Fes, surrounded as it is by 9 miles of ramparts situated in a narrow valley, strategically positioned on the old caravan crossroads which once connected the one-time Saharan empires with the Atlantic and Mediterranean trading routes to Europe. 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. **BD.**

DAY 6: FES: In 786, one hundred and fifty years after the death of the Prophet Mohammed Bin Abdullah Banu Hashim, his grandson was to set foot in



Morocco. This man was Idriss Ibn Abdallah, destined to become Moulay Idriss, patron saint of Morocco and founder of Fes. Implicated in a failed rebellion against the Arabian Abbasids, he fled Baghdad to come with his bedraggled army to this 'Land of the Setting Sun', beyond which one could travel no further by land. Here, in Fes, on the eastern bank of the seasonal Oued Fes, after a set-to with the indigenous Berber tribesmen, he started to build what was to become the first Islamic settlement in Morocco.



Welcome to this different world, so reminiscent of a Jerusalem of 1000 years ago. With its two hundred mosques and holy shrines, Fes contains more places of worship than any other city in Morocco. At its peak, early in the 13th century, Fes el-Bali alone boasted almost eight hundred mosques and mausoleums for its 125,000 inhabitants. By the 17th century, however, the Scottish traveller William Lithgow reported that places of worship were far outstripped by some twelve thousand licensed brothels and, as the Victorian era traveller Budgett Meakin remarked: "Fes us at once the most religious and the most wicked city in Morocco...the saints and sinner being for the most part, identical..." With ancient ramparts set against a backdrop of the not-too-distant Middle Atlas Mountains you'll know you're in for a very different experience; one that our professionally-guided visit will take you to the bustling maze of alleyways of the fascinating medina and souks offering every possible combination of beautiful pottery, Berber carpets, Fassi brassware, Jewish-originated silverware, traditional and modern jewellery, beautiful leather goods all amidst the pungent aromas of spices, herbs and oils. Take in with us the ancient living monuments this city of One Thousand and One Nights has to offer the serious tourist. Fes, one of the pillars of Islam, harboured the most celebrated of Jewish communities and scholars. Is it Fes or Fez? It is both; and neither. The Western name for the city is drawn from the Arabic *Fas* and, as there is no one correct way to transliterate Arabic words into Western characters, in the French language, the city is referred to as Fés, while Americans tend to use Fez. Fassin, or Fassis as the residents call themselves, use the pronunciation of Fas, so derived from three Arabic letters fa (f), alif (a) and sin (s). So everyone wins.



As soon as you ready after breakfast, we enter the ancient Fes Medina and Mellah (a UNESCO World Heritage Site) to make for some **workshops** to witness the continuing ancient art of making the distinctive **Fassi pottery and zellige 'azulejo in Spanish** (terra cotta tile work in the form of geometrical mosaics chips covered with enamel in the form of chips and set into plaster - one of the main characteristics of Moroccan architecture, used mainly as an ornament for walls, ceilings, fountains, floors, pools, tables, etc. Each piece has a different shape and a different name). We shall break for lunch in the Medina at the Palais Medina Restaurant, then suitably refreshed, we continue to the potteries, perfumes and beauty products at the Souq el-Henna; to the **workshops of silk brocade weavers, silversmiths, brass and copperware artisans** at es-Saffarine and the colourful es-Sabbaghine with its Street of the Dyers, a **grass mat workshop** and antique shops. We now drive to the Borj Sud, here to take in the panoramic view of the Medina before returning to our riad or hotel for dinner. **BLD.**



DAY 7: FES: After breakfast we're off now to the impressive Dar el Makhzen and a 15 minute stop at the Royal Palace with its magnificent seven bronze gates.



From here we walk to and through the Mellah with its intense atmosphere and fine examples of Mauro-Hispanic architecture in the Escheresque labyrinth of alleyways to the Bou Inania Mosque and the Maimonides' clock; the impressive al-Quarawiyyin Mosque and University (exterior only) and the el-Atterine Medersa (exterior only), passing the aromas of the Souq el-Atterine area of spices and groceries to the delightful el-Nejjarine Square with its fountain and caravanserai, now a **Museum of Woodworkers Art**, stopping nearby for a light lunch. On now to the renowned Tanneries on the bank of the Oued Fes and thence on from the magnificent Bab Boujloud to proceed alongside the magnificent ramparts with its beautiful 'Babs' to the 16th century Saâdien watchtower at the North Borj and the **Dar Batha Museum** with its collection of carpets, woodwork to arrive back at your hotel or riad after a day full of contrasting culture and journey into some 1,200 years of history. **BLD.**

DAY 8: FES - MEKNES - VOLUBILIS - MOULAY IDRIS - FES. After breakfast we shall now set out alongside a forest of cork-oak to the Imperial City of



Meknes (whose Medina is a UNESCO World Heritage Site). 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 Mekkassa Berbers as *Mekkassa 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 Saïss 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". Here we shall visit its 40 km of Ramparts and monumental gates such as the easily most beautiful Bab, or gateway, in all of the Maghreb - the Bab Mansour. From here to the El Heri es-Souani - the granary of huge vaulted structures and stables - once accommodating the Sultan's 20,000 Arabo-Berber 'Barb' horses - built by Moulay Ismail's soldiers next to a pool fed by underground channels that brought fresh water all the way from the distant Middle Atlas Mountains; the Christians' Prison, the splendid Moulay Ismail Mausoleum and the Place el-Hedim. We leave Meknes for to the wonderful Roman ruins at **Volubilis**, 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 Knights 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 shall break for lunch at the Hotel Volubilis inn with its panoramic view of the ruins to leave Volubilis behind and drive alongside the dark, outlying ridges of the Zerhoun Hills for a panoramic view of the town of **Moulay Idriss**, the holiest Islamic town in the kingdom of Morocco, where thousands of Moroccan faithful come on pilgrimage (*mousssem*) every August to pray at the tomb of this descendant of the Prophet Mohammed. This small hilltop town was named after the Sultan Moulay Idriss the Elder, who oppressed the resident Jews, forcing many of them to convert. It was he who also founded Fes. 70 years ago, it was prohibited to non-Muslims to enter the town. In 788 (or 787) AD, an event occurred that was to forever change the path of Moroccan culture. Idriss Ibn Abdallah (or Moulay Idriss I as he is called here in Morocco), the great-grandson of the Prophet Mohammad, had fled west from Baghdad to settle in Morocco. The 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. 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. We shall see the elongated square, the green-tiled pyramids of the Zaouiat with its two conical quarters on either side and the labyrinth of alleyways before returning to the Imperial City of Fes and your hotel or riad for a well-earned rest. **BLD.**



DAY9: FES - 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 Swiss Alpine-like town of Ifrane, through the Cedar Forest to Azrou, perchance to stop and feed some of the resident Barbary Apes, those same macaques as to be seen in Gibraltar, to 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 nights' stay. Dinner tonight will be in your hotel or riad. **BLD.**



DAY 10: MARRAKECH: After breakfast we shall 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 tranquility. 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 (Prince) Yacoub el-Mansour (The Victorious) 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 the 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. We take **lunch** at the Al Baraka Restaurant overlooking the Square to see from above 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. From here to the late 19th century **El-Bahia Palace** (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 **Dar Si Saïd Museum**. Formally a palace originally built by Mehdi Mnebbi (1894-1908), 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 Saïd, a half-brother of grand vizier Bou Ahmed who expanded the Bahia Palace. In fact, Dar Si Saïd 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, skillfully 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 tranquility 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 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**, 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 **Marrakech Museum of Contemporary Art** and 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 rural culture shown here in all its glory and variety. We continue on through the labyrinth of narrow alleyways making up the renowned cool, colourful and aromatic **Souqs** of Marrakech - the Dyers' Souq being the last to be visited - finishing our guided visit in the Djmaâ el Fnaâ Square. Back at your hotel, you may either lounge around in the late afternoon or decide to venture further into the bustle of this cosmopolitan city until **dinner** late this evening at the Djmaâ el Fnaâ Square in the Marrakchi Restaurant. **BLD.**



afternoon or decide to venture further into the bustle of this cosmopolitan city until **dinner** late this evening at the Djmaâ el Fnaâ Square in the Marrakchi Restaurant. **BLD.**

DAY 11: MARRAKECH- ESSAOUIRA: This morning we set out for a short drive west to 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. 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 wooden tables, 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 and then leave for a walk around this enchanting city first to the Battery with its ancient Portuguese cannons and on to enjoy a **lunch** at the Chez Sam Restaurant in this charming historical town. Through now to the Mellah and the synagogue, thence, perhaps, a welcoming late dip in the waters of the ocean? A camel ride along the beach? A visit to Jimi Hedrix's "Castles of Sand"? You'll be pleasantly surprised to find what this artist-colony town has to offer. **BLD.**

DAY 12: ESSAOUIRA: Today is at leisure to explore more of this fascinating seaside town, the **Woodworkers Souqs** in arched chambers underneath the ramparts where some of Morocco's finest woodworkers ply their craft behind these massive doors. Why iron doors embedded rock? Because their workspaces were formerly solid concrete rooms used to store munitions beneath Essaouira's ancient ramparts. The forests around Essaouira are mostly Thuya woods, and these local craftsmen have made a name (and living) for themselves with the quality in-laid woodwork they produce. This soft Thuya wood has a distinctive dark burling grain and a fragrant aroma and they make things ranging from furniture to decorative, polished, inlaid boxes and picture frames. We continue to the **Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdallah Museum of Regional Art** situated in a pasha residence that dates back to the 19th century. The graceful mansion is certainly worthy of attention since it is typical of such buildings at the time. Within its walls it is easy to imagine the graceful lifestyle that a person in such a position of authority must have enjoyed. This particular mansion is the setting of a great Ethnographic Museum where you can get a taste for the local art in its many different forms. You will find traditional garments for special occasions, tapestries, musical instruments (both old and modern) decorated with marquetry (*guembris*) used by the Gnaoua musicians to accompany their dances. The history of the local musical tradition is traced in documents on Berber songs and string instruments. There is a strong focus on the Berber culture and many of the articles originate with this people. There are some articles that are used in Berber rituals and there are a number of handicraft traditions specific to particular tribes, which have been well documented and presented. Of course, there is also an excellent collection of



woodwork and carpets and a wonderful display of old photographs of traditional costumes. Some of the ethnographic parts of the display are located on the upper floor, so make sure that you don't accidentally skip them. Lunch is on your own in any of the many delightful seafood restaurants and cafés which abound in this picturesque town. 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 and the harbour. Perhaps you'd just like to relax on the beach, have a go at surfing, wind or kite surfing. 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. 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. 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. Fishermen sell their catch through market hall and you can get it cooked in small stands nearby. Our dinner tonight will be in the Dar Loubane Restaurant. **BD.**



DAY 13: ESSAOUIRA - SAFI - EL OUALIDIA - EL JADIDA - AZEMMOUR - CASABLANCA: After breakfast today, we set off up north along the Atlantic coastline to stop first at Safi. 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 shall visit the **National Ceramics Museum**, a Kechla citadel built by the Portuguese in the 16th century that offers spectacular views over the roofs of the Medina which descend in a cascade to the Atlantic. But this is only one of its attractions since the Kechla also has on display the very finest pieces of the famous Safiot pottery.



Of course, the most interesting aspect of the building is not the building or the view, but rather the ceramic gems that are housed inside of it. The Kechla citadel is home to some of the finest pieces of Safiot pottery in the country. Each item housed here has been carefully handcrafted and finished under the hands of a skilled Safi artisan. Such exquisite work has been the pride of the residents of Safi for years, each ceramic masterpiece providing a world of self-expression filled with meaningful designs, styles and colors. The pieces are trimmed with tooled silver overlay which gives a sort of richness to the design and adds to its uniqueness. Techniques used to create these beautiful designs include engraving, stamping, molding and sculpting and a skilled artisan may also use subtle differences in color and relief to further decorate their artworks. If seeing them inspires you to purchase the ultimate conversation piece for your home, you can visit the potter's quarter in the Safi museum where a number of modern-day artists continue to practice this age-old trade. Using a traditional potter's wheel, you will find them shaping, painting and baking a variety of dishes, tiles and other ceramics while you watch and there are always plenty of these items available for purchase.



Continuing north alongside the Atlantic Ocean via Cap Beddouza to the seaside resort town of El Oualidia, a simple place; time-forgotten, 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 that lie 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 now continue to El Jadida - 'The New One': founded in 1513 by the Portuguese as Mazagão - their first and last possession in Morocco, now a UNESCO World Heritage Site and called Morocco's Deauville, it is a small, delightful coastal town with several 3 metre-thick bastions - L'Ange, Saint Sebastian, Saint Antoine and Saint Esprit which were destroyed in 1769 by the same Portuguese when they were forced to leave Morocco, but which were subsequently restored to their former armed state. Taken back from the Portuguese in 1769, Mazagan was to become a Jewish Mellah (or Quarter). 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. On now to Azemmour, in the Berber language - wild olive (and *not* the perfumes of Crabtree & Evelyn) - for our short tour 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). On now on our final leg to the White City of Casablanca and your hotel. Perhaps later you'd like to stroll around the hotel precinct, or make a dash for the nearby old Medina and Souq with your guide for some

last-minute shopping - again. **BLD.**



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DAY 14: CASABLANCA - HOME: After breakfast and in accordance with your flight schedule home (check-out from your hotel is by 12:00) you will be transferred to Casablanca's Mohammed V International airport in time for your flight home, taking with you some certainly incredible memories of a land so full of remarkable contrasts and very friendly people. **B.**

To choose your hotel or ryad, please close this page and go to [Find a Hotel](#) or [Find a Ryad](#)

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 FES AND MARRAKECH COVERING THE PERIOD 24 DECEMBER TO 05 JANUARY.

OUR PRICES WILL INCLUDE: Accommodation at specified or similar hotels/riads of your selection including taxes *and as available at time of reservation*, meal schedule as shown (excluding alcoholic drinks), or as modified to your specific instruction. Porterage on 1 piece of luggage per person at airports and hotels. Private circle trip transportation in an air-conditioned mini-bus with English-speaking driver from Casablanca to Casablanca. H24 Emergency Call Service. Sightseeing tours and all related entrance fees as listed in the itinerary including a *calèche* tour in Marrakech. An English-speaking Licensed National Guide throughout the tour. Bottled water. Medical and Accident Insurance.

OUR PRICES WILL NOT INCLUDE: Gratuities to waiters, guide, chauffeur, camp headman and cameleer. Any expenditure of a personal nature, nor anything not specifically mentioned in the itinerary.

IT IS RECOMMENDED YOU BRING WITH YOU: Good trainers or sandals; broad-brimmed hat; personal toiletries; camera and Ziploc bags for your sensitive lenses; sunglasses, sunscreen and swimming costume (seasonal). For those who wear contact lenses, it could be a good idea to bring along a spare pair of glasses.