

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: CASABLANCA - MARRAKECH:** Leaving the Port of Casablanca this morning, we head for 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. From here we drive for some 3 hours across the plain to the Imperial City of Marrakech and the Koutoubia Mosque, which 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-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 shall then check into our hotel, relax around the pool (weather permitting) and take our welcome light lunch, after which we shall go into the Kasbah and Mellah (old Jewish Quarter) 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 stroll 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 12<sup>th</sup> century Medina to stroll through the Escheresque 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 delicate 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 of over 800 students who were housed in this Medersa at one time, 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 nearby 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 later used as 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 stroll back into famous covered Great Souks for a quick visit: 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- AGADIR - CASABLANCA:** After breakfast, luggage packed and loaded, we shall check out of our hotel to



set out for a ride in a calèche alongside 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 tranquillity. 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. We depart now back into the mellah for a light lunch (wine included) after which, suitably refreshed,



we can either go back into the souks for some last-minute shopping or relax over mint tea, coffee of sodas in the Café Glacé overlooking the bustling Djmaâ el Fnaâ before setting off on our 4 hour drive west to the resort city of Agadir on the Atlantic Ocean. In accordance with your ship's embarkation time, we shall make a panoramic tour of this 'new' city. Previously a small outpost of the 11<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Phoenicians; then of 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Carthaginians; 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Mauretanian Berbers and 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Romans, during the Dark Ages of the Medieval Times around 1100 A.D. it became known as Agadir el Arbâa. Not until 1505 did the tiny village of Agadir make its first mark on history when the Portuguese set up a trading post here at what was then a small fortified communal granary ('Agadir Oufellah' in the Berber - Chleuh - idiom meaning High Silo) to be named their Santa Cruz de Berbeira, thence Santa Cruz Do Cabo De Aguer, defended by a small fort on what is now called the Cap de Ghirone to become the furthest South "*frontieras*" (Portuguese enclave) built by a Portuguese nobleman, Joao Lopez de Sequeira, who personally paid for all expenses. At 23:47 precisely on February 29 1960, Agadir was almost totally destroyed by an earthquake lasting but 15 seconds, burying the old city and killing an estimated 15,000 souls. It also mostly destroyed the ancient Kasbah on the summit of Cap Ghir hill, the farthestmost trailing edge of the High Atlas Mountains which stretch from here to Tunisia, the ramparts and Babs (gates) alone having been restored. Complete reconstruction began in 1961, now two kilometres south of the earthquake's epicentre, to make Agadir Morocco's newest city - The Pearl of the South which, with some 350 days of sunshine, has become a prime beach resort for Europeans. **BL.**



**OUR PRICES WILL INCLUDE:** Private transportation in an air-conditioned vehicle from Casablanca to Marrakech to Agadir. 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, pullover and/or slicker (winter seasonal); day pack; hygienic 'wipes;' camera and Ziploc bags for sensitive lenses; sunglasses, sunscreen.