

THE JEWEL OF MOROCCO PAST AND PRESENT

OBTIC31tm. **9 DAYS/8 NIGHTS. TANGIER/RABAT/CASABLANCA/- MEKNES - VOLUBILIS - FES/MIDDLE ATLAS MOUNTAINS - MARRAKECH-OURIKA VALLEY-MARRAKECH**

DAY 1: TANGIER. You will be met on arrival at Tangier's International Airport or Port and transferred to your hotel. Subject always to the time of your arrival, you may wish explore the fascinating city on foot with your guide, strolling through the mysterious winding alleyways and souks of the Medina, thence to the Caves of Hercules on the Atlantic Ocean and back to our hotel for dinner.



Modern Tanjah (Anglicised to Tangier) was first known as a Phoenician trading port in the 15th century BC and later a Carthaginian settlement. Or perhaps founded by the Numidians, the then native population, ancestors of the Berbers. Its name is possibly derived from the Berber goddess Tinjis (or Tinga). Ancient coins call it Tenga, Tinga, and Titga, Greek and Latin authors giving numerous variations of the name. According to Berber mythology, the town was built by Sufax, son of Tinjis, wife of the Berber hero Antois. The Greeks ascribed its foundation to the giant Antaeus, son of the Greek god Poseidon whose tomb and skeleton are pointed out in the vicinity, calling Sufax the son of Herakles (Hercules) by the widow of Antaeus. The cave of Hercules, a few miles from the city, is a

major tourist attraction. It is believed that Hercules slept there before attempting one of his fables 12 Labours Tangier; gateway to Africa. Tanjah to the Moroccan; Tanger to the French; Tangiers to the English. Tangier, the 'Bride of the North'. According to Greek legend, it was Hercules (Herakles), that impetuous demi-god, who created the Straits named Gibraltar, who separated the European and African continents with a blow of his sword (or shoulder!) and raised the famous columns, The Pillars of Hercules (the hills on the two sides of the Mediterranean Sea, Jbel Tariq - "Gibraltar" and Jbel Musa in Morocco). It is said that he left a large hole in the caves that bear his name on the Spartel promontory at the end of the bay to the west of Tangiers to observe the sea and admire his work. If the legend is true, the Moroccans, North Africans or Africans in general would have great reason to be angry with Hercules, for his thoughtlessness and all the gods of ancient Greece, for what a strange idea it was to separate the land and to create these geographic fictions that are continents! Had Hercules contained himself just a little bit, history would have followed another course; the many candidates for clandestine immigration who risk their lives to cross the Straits each day, would only have had to climb a wall or cut the barbed wire fence to cross to the other side, as they do between Mexico and the United States. Fortunately, Hercules was not too efficient in his work: the two continents are not far from each other. At the closest point, the straits are only 14 kilometres apart. It is for this reason that men sometimes think to repair the mistake the hero made by creating a fixed link between Spain and Morocco. It was the capital of the Roman province of Mauretania Tingitana under the Emperor Marcus Salvius Otho, later to be occupied by Vandals, Byzantines, Visigoths and Arabs. Captured by the Portuguese in 1471, it was then to pass to England in 1662, as part of the dowry of Catherine of Braganza on her marriage to King Charles II. In 1679, the Moroccan Sultan Moulay Ismail made an unsuccessful attempt to seize the town but imposed a crippling blockade which ultimately forced the English to withdraw. The English destroyed the town and its port facilities prior to their departure in 1684. Under Moulay Ismail the city was reconstructed to some extent, to later become a lair of Barbary Coast pirates but it gradually declined until, by 1810, the population was no more than 5,000.

Tangier, a place where the street signs are in three languages; in fact, no less than 12 nations have occupied the city at one time or another since the fifth century. Tangier, of the wealthy Berber brigand chieftain Sherif Moulay Ahmed er-Raisouli, appointed Governor by the Sultan in the early 1900s; he who kidnapped real-life American victims Ion Perdicaris and his step-son Cromwell Varley (and who was played by Sean Connery in the 1975 film "The Wind and the Lion"). From 1923 Tangier and a small surrounding enclave became an international zone, administered by Spain between 1940-45. In 1956 it was transferred to independent Morocco to become a free port in 1962. With a history of intrigue and mystery, Tangier is the country's most cosmopolitan city; - a city that has everything you'd expect from Morocco.



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 may enter again 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. The Tangier American Legation Museum, the first property acquired abroad by the United States Government, is a thriving cultural centre, museum, conference centre and library in the heart of the old walled Medina, housed in the only historic landmark of the United States located abroad and saved from destruction by a small but dedicated group of American citizens who established a public, non-profit organization. The first property acquired abroad by the United States Government, this complex structure contains the two-story mud and stone building presented to the United States in 1821 by the Sultan Moulay Suliman and until 1956, the U.S. diplomatic mission to Morocco was located here, the longest period any building abroad has been occupied as a United States diplomatic post. With the end of the French Protectorate in 1956, all embassies moved to the capital, Rabat, but the American Legation continued as a Consulate for another five years until a new consulate was built outside the old Medina.



Thereafter, the American Legation building served as an Arabic language school for American diplomats and a Peace Corps training centre. In 1976 the Old American Legation stood empty and in a sad state of disrepair. Concerned about its fate, the group obtained a lease from the Department of State to rent the Legation building. Since the American Bicentennial celebration in 1976 the Legation has been operating a museum and cultural centre and is symbolic of the 1786 Moroccan-American Treaty of Friendship, which is still in force today. The complex expanded over the years as the surrounding houses were bought up. During World War II it served as headquarters for United States intelligence agents.

Leaving Tangier to set out towards the west on a zigzag road passing through the wealthy residential district of the Marché aux Boeufs and along the new mountain road edged with elegant, sumptuous villas, ornate gates and beautiful gardens, the Governor's Residence and the King's Summer Palace, we follow the mountain road towards the seaward extremity of Jbel el Kbir at Cape Spartel, set on the Atlantic Coast, considered by political convention to be the most north-western point of Africa, the African intersection of the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea. Just before reaching the striking, square-shaped lighthouse the scenic drive comes upon long golden ocean beaches and the blue Atlantic Ocean. Here we may stop briefly to marvel at the panoramic view. In the 17th century, this wooded hill area provided cover for the Moors in their battles against the Portuguese and the English. Beyond this area we continue along through, forested hills covered with a uniquely Mediterranean variety of pine tree that were all planted by volunteers. In these westernmost hills of Morocco there are large forested areas of oak, juniper, cork-oak, cedar, fir and pine. The lighthouse, 312 ft. above sea level, built in 1864 at the cost of the Sultan of Morocco and maintained at the



joint expense of England, France, Italy and Spain, is the only one on the western coast. It is provided with a large fixed intermittent white light for the safety of passing ships. They may carry on to enjoy a visit of the Caves of the Oracle of Herakles, where legend has it he breathed his last breath after separating Europe from Africa, having completed his 12 Labours. The mouths of these caves, partly man-made and partly natural, open up onto the Atlantic Ocean to be flooded at high tide when water gushes up through these massive holes in the ground and cliffside; it's quite impressive. No-one is exactly sure how the caves were created; some say that for some reason an ancient civilization used to carve millstones out of the solid rock that caused giant caves to form over the years. How these Neolithic people managed to cut into solid rock with simple and crude tools is still a mystery. At low tide, the views from inside the caves looking out over the ocean are stunning, the colours in particular; the blue Atlantic Ocean and sky above may seem to resemble an upside-down silhouette of Africa. Some people would have it the caves were once joined under the sea to St Michael's Caves on the Rock of Gibraltar and that this is "possibly" how the Barbary Apes crossed over. We now make a short dash back up to the throbbing city of Tangier and our hotel for dinner. **D.**

DAY 2: TANGIER - RABAT. After breakfast, today we set off towards the south via the expressway to the to the administrative Imperial capital since 1912 of the Kingdom of Morocco, Rabat (R'bat al Fat'h) - one of the 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. 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 (*salat*) 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 to take our lunch in a restaurant overlooking the Bouregreg 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. Suitably refreshed, we continue to the nearby 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 XVIIth 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, instills 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. From here we turn to our delightful accommodation for this night. **BL**.



DAY 3: RABAT - CASABLANCA: This morning we set out on a short drive further south to Casablanca, the second largest city in Africa after Cairo. We shall drive through the seaside resort of Ain Diab and the elegant residential district of Anfa, the original site of Casablanca, with its green parks and Art Deco villas. 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. We continue along the Corniche to take lunch overlooking the Atlantic Ocean before proceeding to the nearby truly magnificent Hassan II Mosque the second largest mosque



in the Islamic world after the Masjid al- Haram in Mecca. An architectural masterpiece, 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 carry on down through this bustling metropolis down via the King's Palace precinct to the Habous Quarter - the New Medina - a delightful 1920s souk and thence past the Mohammed V Square to the busy United Nations Square. Here, but a few yards from your hotel, under the walls of the old Medina at the beginning of the 20th century, there was but an empty space where the souq was held. It very quickly became the heart of the modern town. Back in your hotel, your guide will be at your side to advise you on any other points of interest you may care to visit together. Perhaps a drink at Rick's Café (www.rickscafe.ma) – "Casablanca" without 'Rick Baines', Ingrid Bergman, Clause Rains and Peter Laurie? **BL**.



DAY 4: CASABLANCA - MEKNES - VOLUBILIS - FES. As soon as you are ready after breakfast we set out towards the north-east along the highway 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 Meknassa Berbers as *Meknassa 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 Saiss 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, the Place el-Hedim and the Dar Jamaï Museum. Before housing the Meknès collections, the Dar Jamaï had a number of different uses. Built in 1882 to be the residence of the illustrious Jamaï family, which included two of Sultan Moulay el-Hassan's ministers (1873-1894), it was used as a military hospital after 1912, only becoming the Museum of Moroccan Art in 1920. Today, the palace still displays much of its wealthy beginnings, with a luxurious garden that has been landscaped in an Arab-style and features fruit trees and beautiful cypresses. The building boasts elegant painted windows, detailed tiles, painted wood and even sculptured plasterwork. It still oozes a feeling of luxury and is a symbol of the wealth and prosperity that was enjoyed by the Jamaï family. The

elaborate decoration with sculpted plaster and painted wood as well as the Andalusian garden planted with cypress and fruit trees, gives an accurate idea of the degree of luxury enjoyed by the prosperous bourgeoisie of Meknes. Wrought iron work, wooden sculpture, weaving, leather working, brass and copper ware, metalwork... this museum is devoted to the crafts of the region. Local talent and skill of the craftsmen of Morocco are displayed through vast and colorful exhibits of painted wood panels, decorated chests, moucharabieh and breathtaking pottery pieces decorated in the use of rich colours and in the magnificent multi-hued embroidery for which they are so famous. You'll no doubt be astounded at the detail and time-consuming effort that is evident in every piece of wrought iron, brass, woodcarving, ceramics, metal work, coppersmith items and leatherwork. The museum also



has a wonderful collection of jewelry, traditional costumes and rare carpets. We shall take lunch here before proceeding 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 Cortege 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 now set out to the nearby town of Moulay Idriss, the holiest Islamic town in the kingdom of Morocco, where thousands of Moroccan faithful come on pilgrimage (*moussem*) 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 setting out now down to Fes and our accommodation and dinner. **BL.**

DAY 5: FES. 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. The city that was once, after Mecca and Medina, held to be one of the holiest cities in the Islamic world; the city whose merchants were travelling to China in the 15th century; the city that (of least importance) gave its name to the red cylindrical brimless hat. Moroccans say that Marrakech, Rabat and Casablanca live in the present, but that Fes certainly lives in the past. No surprises here, for European chroniclers of the Middle Ages wrote with awe of this city that for several centuries was the most

civilised Western outpost of the Semitic world. Its scholars introduced astronomy and medicine to the West via Spain when that country was under Moorish rule. Historians of the time said that the writings of both Plato and Aristotle first reached Western Europe in Arabic translations – from 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 thirteenth century, Fes el-Bali alone boasted almost eight hundred mosques and mausoleums for its 125,000 inhabitants. By the seventeenth 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 make for 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. We now drive to the Borj Sud, here to take in the panoramic view of the Medina. Off now down to start our Walking Tour of the labyrinth of the ancient Fes Medina and Mellah (a UNESCO World Heritage Site) and an Escheresque jumble of alleyways; of the Bou Inania Mosque; of the colourful es-Sabbaghine with its Street of the Dyers; of the brass workers at es-Saffarine; of 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, stopping nearby for a light lunch. On now to the renowned Tanneries on the bank of the Oued Fes and thence on to the potteries, perfumes and beauty products at the Souq el-Henna. Leaving the Medina from the Bab Boujloud, we tour the magnificent ramparts with its beautiful 'Babs' as we make our way to the 16th century Saâdien watchtower at the North Borj and its Weapons Museum. Hard to miss since it is housed in a 16th century fortress that towers above the city, its stark walls clearly visible over quite a distance. The fortress was once a northern tower that formed part of the walled fortifications that surrounded Fes in times gone by. Built in 1582 at the command of Saâdien Sultan Ahmed El Mansour Eddahbi as part of efforts to ensure that Fes was adequately protected, no better location for the museum could have been chosen since the building itself is a testimony to the evolution of military warfare and architecture. Here you will find weapons from virtually every age and corner of the country. The majority of the collection has been donated by royalty and as a result, there are even a number of rare pieces included in the displays. Overall, there are more than 5000 different arms in the collection which include 775 military items. All these articles are displayed in a series of 13 different rooms and collections include everything from pre-historic weaponry to rifles with their inlaid butts to modern day rifles. The collection is also not limited to only Moroccan artifacts and includes Indian, European and Asian articles.



The most outstanding portion of the museum simply has to be the Moroccan weaponry, which is not only dangerous, but decorative too. Daggers are encrusted with precious stones and rifle butts are carefully shaped and inlaid with jewels. These articles are so beautifully decorated that they hold appeal for art lovers too. The largest piece in the collection is a cannon that was used during the Battle of the Three Kings (Battle of the Wadi Al-Makhazin). This massive weapon is five meters long and weighs a whopping 12 tons! Weapons specialists will appreciate the development of techniques while

art lovers will be impressed by the splendour of the objects. We continue to the Dar Batha Museum, an Hispano-Moorish palace dating from the end of the XIXth century housing some admirable collections of traditional art from Fes. Most traditional forms of art were also practical in nature so they usually took the form of furniture that was given a decorative touch. Therefore you can expect to enjoy intricately carved wooden furniture, wrought iron with decorative finishing touches, carpets, embroidery and jewelry. Of course, there were also less functional pieces, such as artwork made from sculpted plaster or other decorative materials. Sculpted wood, wrought iron, sculpted plaster or decorative materials that are in fact works of art in their own right. Embroidery, carpets, jewellery and coins compete with one another to attract your attention.

But the museum's centrepiece is to be found in the pottery room where you will find an unbeatable display of ceramic objects that have been masterfully crafted by Fes craftsmen through the centuries. Of particular interest are the articles dating back to the 10th century which contain items of 'Fes blue'. At the time, this relatively groundbreaking way of coloring pottery involved the use of cobalt to obtain the bluish coloring. Typical ceramics feature a white enamel background with stylized floral motives interweaved on them in brilliant shades of blue. The floral motifs are both sophisticated and harmonious and are a delight to behold. Not to be missed are the astrolabes – a display featuring a variety of fascinating astronomical instruments that were created and perfected by learned Arabs. They are not only functional, but wonderfully decorative with intricately worked metal and inset jewels. From here back to your hotel or riad after a day full of contrasting culture and journey into some 1,200 years of history. **BL.**

DAY 6: FES - BENI MELLAL - MARRAKECH. This morning we set out southwards 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 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. 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. **BLD.**



DAY 7: MARRAKECH. After breakfast we set out this morning around 10 o'clock in a calèche (horse-drawn carriage) on a guided



tour of the famous ramparts Historical Monuments and Souqs, a journey back into time and quite the best introduction to this Garden City. We shall visit the delightful Majorelle Gardens and Museum of Islamic Art of the recently-deceased fashion icon Yves Saint Laurent and on into the Medina via the dramatic Almohad Koutoubia Minaret to arrive at the famous Djmaâ el Fnaâ Square the 'Assembly of the Dead'), where, until the 19th century, were traditionally displayed the severed heads of criminals. Now we see 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. We shall take a break for lunch in the Al Baraka restaurant overlooking the Square before setting off, now by foot, into the bustling Medina 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 Dar 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 to the 14th century 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 around 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 Marrakech Museum of Art and 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 riad, you may either lounge around in the late afternoon or decide to venture further into the bustle of this cosmopolitan city until late this evening when you might like to take in the optional (*touristy*) Chez Ali 'Fantasia' - truly a 1001 Nights' experience - http://www.ilove-marrakesh.com/chezali/index_en.html. That journey this evening would take you out of the heat of the city on a road to palm groves, where twinkling lights beckon us out of the darkness to a magnificent spectacle. As evening progresses, various folklore groups pass through the nomad tents singing and dancing to their throbbing music. The highlight comes at the end of his meal when he'll be invited to

witness charging robed horsemen in a display of their old tribal power as they shout and fire off their muskets and muzzle-loaders, bringing their horses to a sudden halt before him. Above you, in the night sky, Scheherazade and her Prince fly to the heavens on their magic carpet ride whilst fireworks light the sky as your evening of magical splendour comes to an end. Or instead perhaps, just perhaps, later tonight you might like to go and chill out tonight at the Le Pacha night club (<http://www.pachamarrakech.com/pachaen.html>). **BL.**

DAY 8: MARRAKECH - OURIKA VALLEY - MARRAKECH.



After a late breakfast, we make a 90 minute excursion south into the beautiful Ourika Valley in those High Atlas Mountains you can see from your riad, whose valley stream meanders through orchards, ancient terraced fields, gardens and small pisé (adobe) villages clawed from the mountain sides by the independent Berber tribesmen. We continue on up to the last trailhead village in the valley - Setti Fadma - before returning back down the valley to break for a light lunch at the Auberge Ramuntcho overlooking the stream and surrounded by mountains, returning to Marrakech where the remainder of your day would be at leisure. **BL.**



DAY 9: MARRAKECH - HOME.

After breakfast and in accordance with your flight schedule, you will be transferred to Marrakech's International airport in time for your onward flight, taking with you some certainly incredible memories of a Morocco so full of remarkable contrasts and very friendly people. **B.** Should your flight be leaving from Casablanca, we shall take you back directly to that city's airport, again in time for your ongoing flight.

(FOR COUPLES OR SMALL FAMILIES, WE RECOMMEND CERTAIN RIADS BE CONSIDERED FOR MORE ATMOSPHERE AND PRIVACY)

To choose you 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 including taxes, *subject to availability at time of reservation*. Porterage on 1 piece of luggage per person in/out airports, hotels/riads. All meals as shown in the itinerary (not including alcoholic drinks) or as modified un accordance with your instructions. Private circle trip transportation in an air-conditioned vehicle Casablanca to Marrakech (or Casablanca's airport). Sightseeing tours including a calèche tour in Marrakech and all related entrance fees as listed in the itinerary. English-speaking Licensed National Guide throughout the tour; bottled or gaseous water en-route; medical or accident insurance.

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

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

