

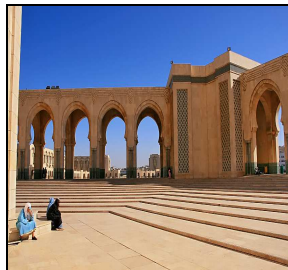
PROGRAM

THE IMPERIAL CITIES AND THE SOUTH OF MOROCCO

Day 1– Welcome arrival- Casablanca - Rabat
Approximately 1 hour drive

Arrival into Casablanca airport, you will be welcomed by your English speaking guide and be transferred by car to your hotel in Rabat.

En route short visit of Casablanca and visit the remarkable Mosque Hassan II, one of only two mosques in Morocco open to non Islamic believers. Built by the late King Hassan II at the end of his 40-year reign, this astounding edifice is larger than Saint Peter's in Rome and capable of holding 80,000 worshippers, (**the inside visit ends at 14h00pm**).



- ❖ Check in and accommodation at your hotel in Rabat.

Day 2 – Rabat

At **9h30 am**, your guide will meet you at the lobby of your hotel for half day tour of Rabat:

Continue to Rabat. recently granted UNESCO Heritage Site status, Rabat, the administrative capital of Morocco, was founded in 1146 by the Almohads, as a fortress (the name Rabat comes from the Arabic ribaat, meaning 'fortified place') from where to launch attacks on Spain A few years after the capital of the Empire was moved there by Yaqub al Mansour, under whose reign the Koutoubia in Marrakech had been built. He started to build in Rabat what would be the world's largest mosque at the time, but works stopped when he died; the unfinished minaret known as **Hassan Tower** – less than half its intended height – bear witness of this attempt. Yaqub al Mansour also erected the city walls and expanded and restored the **Kasbah of the Udayas**, former stronghold of the Almoravids in the area. He also turned the ruins of the Roman city Sala Colonia, the **Chellah**, into a royal necropolis, which was further enriched by the Merenids in the 14th Century with the addition of monuments and buildings, and the magnificent main gate, dated 1339. Nowadays the Chellah is home to the best Archaeology Museum in Morocco.

After the death of Yaqub al Mansour the city fell into a period of decline. However, the arrival of Moriscos and Jews expelled from Spain in the early 17th Century revitalised it. Together with the neighbouring Sale, Rabat formed the independent Republic of Bou Regreg in 1627 – a corsair republic which was to cause much trouble both to European and Muslim ships until its collapse in 1818.

In Rabat is located also the Mausoleum of Mohamed V, grandfather of the current King of Morocco. A masterpiece of modern Moroccan architecture, it can be visited by non-believers.



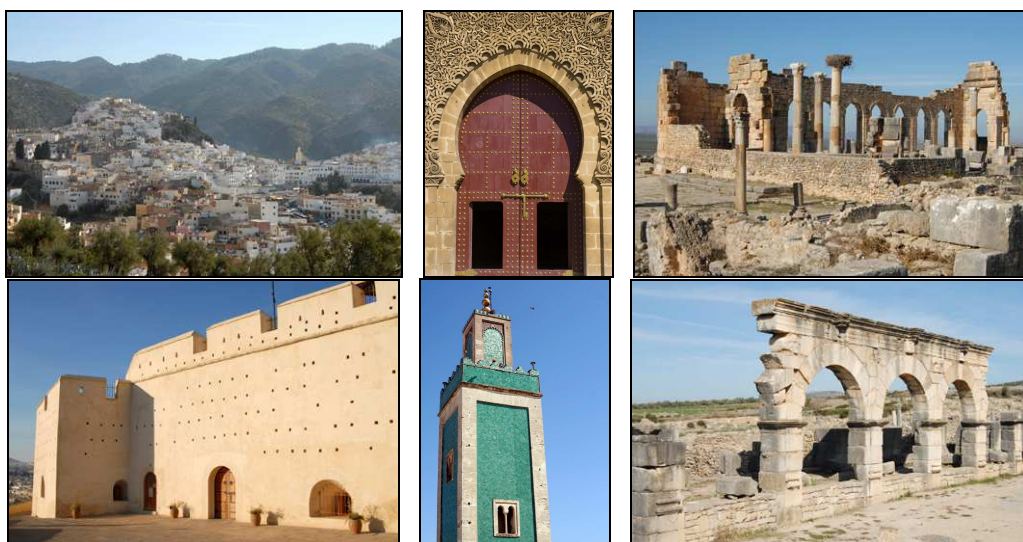
The remainder of the day is at your leisure.

Day 3 :- Rabat -- Meknes / Volubilis - Fes
Approximately 3 hours and half drive

Morning transfer to Fes. En route visit of the ancient Roman ruins of Volubilis sprawled over a wildflower-dotted hillside. Excavated by the French in 1915, these Roman ruins date back to the 3rd century AD and should not to be missed.

Continue to the Imperial city of Meknes known as the “Moroccan Versailles” and founded in the 17th century by King Moulay Ismail. Meknes is famous for its 25-milelong walls. There are numerous historic sites to see and here we name but a few; The massive gate of Bab Mansour, The Bassin de L’Agdal a massive 400m x 100m pool dating back some 300 years. The Mausoleum of Moulay Ismail is one of only three Moroccan shrines that non-Muslims can visit.

The Bou Inania Medersa, an Islamic educational institution, was built by Merenid Sultan Abu el Hassan and finished by his successor Sultant Abou Inan around 1340 – 1350. This is the Meknes version of the educational institution by the same name in Fez, more beautiful and better preserved than its more famous twin.

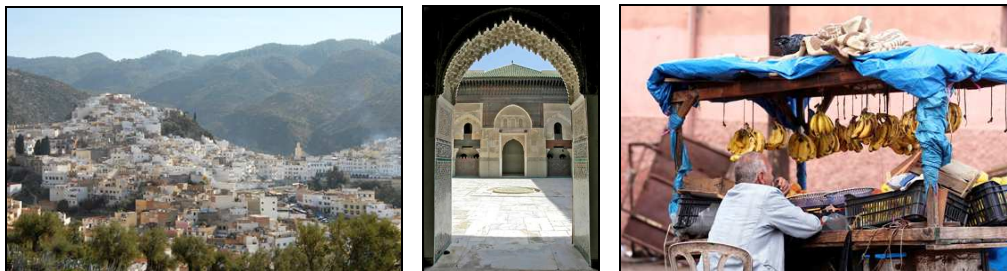


Time for lunch (on own) and continue to Fes.

❖ Check in and accommodation at your hotel in Fes.

At **9h00 am**, your guide will meet you at the lobby of your hotel for full day tour of Fes:

Fes el Bali is a UNESCO World Heritage Site was founded in the 9th century and home to the oldest university in the world, Fez reached its height in the 13th–14th centuries under the Merinids, when it replaced Marrakech as the capital of the kingdom. The urban fabric and the principal monuments in the medina – madrasas, fondouks, palaces, residences, mosques and fountains - date from this period. Although the political capital of Morocco was transferred to Rabat in 1912, Fez has retained its status as the country's cultural and spiritual centre.



Artisan workshops in the medina are as active today as 100 years ago, and strongly contribute to the city's industrial economy. Trades such as metal and leather working, ceramics, silk, tapestries, and sculpting are still practiced in these workshops. Original ramparts still protect the ancient city and its' 9000 passageways and narrow streets.

Your sightseeing tour will include the following:

New Medina

The “nouvelle Ville” of Fez, or the new city, provides a startling contrast with Fès el Bali. Wide and elegant avenues are lined with numerous cafés and restaurants. The modern aspect of the new city highlights the economic differences of the suburbs and the city center.

The Medersa

This theological college, marked by its green tiled roof, is a prime example of Merinid architecture, and it's the most beautiful of Kairaounie University's residential colleges. Inside, elegant calligraphy graces the ceramic tile walls. The marble floors, sculpted cedar, and carved stucco walls—made with a concoction of plaster and egg white—have held up since this masterpiece Medersa was built in 1350. Since it is still in use, non-Muslims must depart during prayer time.



Bab Boujloud

Constructed in 1913, this gate is about 1,000 years younger than the buildings behind it. It's proof that age doesn't matter—the relatively youthful structure is the most strikingly beautiful entry point into the old city. Painted flowers and calligraphy embellish its outer blue ceramic tiles and, depending on one's interpretation, the green mosaic interior either represents peace or the official color of Islam. Stop by at sunset for some excellent photo opportunities.

The Splendid fountain at Place Nejjarine

The square, with its splendid and unusual fountain, takes its name from the Souk Nejjarine (Carpenter's Souk) which is situated behind a wooden door in a narrow street below the square.

Time for lunch

Continue the tour

The Mellah

The Jewish Quarter. The Jews lived here and received protection from the sultan. The main street is especially interesting with its balconies and Art Deco zellij mosaic. Most Jews in Fez (around 300) now live in the Ville Nouvelle. Visit of the Ibn Danan Synagogue, a recently restored 17th century synagogue.

Souks

The souks of Fez are located in the ancient city center, the medina. Merchants selling the same sort of products are generally grouped together in their own "souk". The tiny alleyways are crowded with the tiny boutiques on both sides. The henna and wood working souks are located in the Nejjarine neighborhood and the scent of cedar is everywhere. The main plaza is planted with trees and provides a shaded haven from the warm sun. Various natural products derived from henna are sold here. Nejjarine is also where the fabric dyers are located. You simply should not miss El Attarine, the spice souk. Without question, this souk is the most colourful in Fez.



Day 5: – Fes – Erfoud Approximately 7 hours drive

Continue with your English speaking driver to the town of Erfoud, a base from which to explore the vast dunes of Erg Chebbi. This is a spectacular drive through the cedar forests of the Middle Atlas to Midelt and on across the Pass of the She-Camel and through the Tunnel of the Legionnaires looking out over the valley of the Ziz to Errachadia.



Arrival to Erfoud in the afternoon.

- ❖ Check in and accommodation at your hotel in Erfoud.

Day 6: – Erfoud - Merzouga

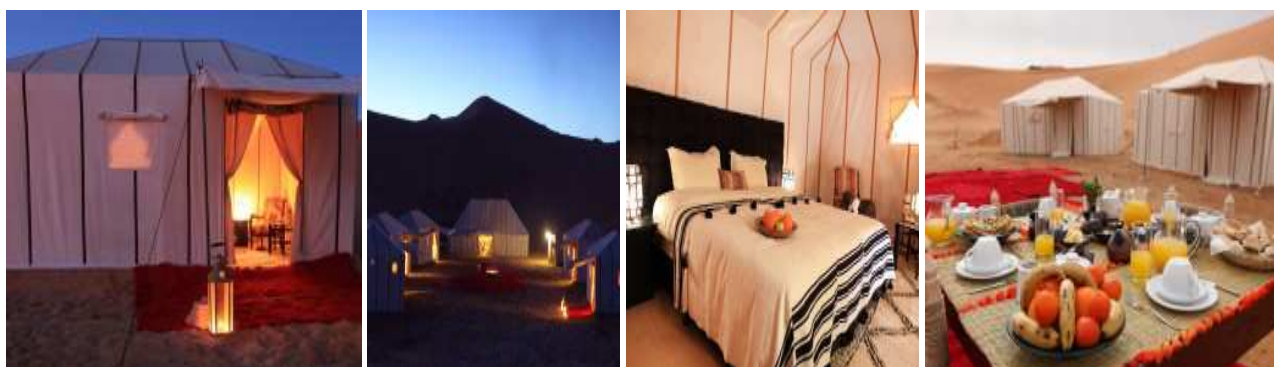
At **10h30 am**, Rendez-vous with a 4x4 WD driver and transfer to the dunes of Erg Chebbi, possibly the largest dunes in the Sahara desert. The dunes of Erg Chebbi are a strikingly strange natural formation. On the top of the flattest area you could imagine, suddenly a long mountain of sand rises. This mountain is surrounded by flat and desolate nature on all sides, and you could end up wondering if it really is real. But so it is, even if its existence is so weird that it has given rise to legends and myths among the locals.

Time for lunch during the tour.

Upon arrival at the dunes you will witness the sunset from over the desert dunes and be astounded by the peace and calm as well as the changing colours of the landscape. Enjoy your special night under the stars at this beautiful Oasis in a premium tented camp. Experience a camel ride at sunset from the top of the dunes. Watching the sun rise or set over the sand dunes of Merzouga may be the most spectacular experience you can have on your trip to Morocco.

- Check in, dinner and accommodation in **private desert encampment**.

One of the most requested parts of Morocco is camping out in the desert. Based around the world renowned dunes at Mergouza to the south of Erfoud, we have a special arrangement with an encampment that is quite unique and private. Excellent accommodation, full WC and shower facilities and first-rate service and dining are all part of this experience.



Day 7: Merzouga – Tinghir – Skoura Approx 5 hours drive

After Merzouga, you drive towards Skoura, En route you pass by the most spectacular natural environments Gorges of Todra and if still time you will visit also the Dades gorges. The Gorge du Dadès, distinct from the Todra Gorge with its fields of fig and myriad vegetation and continue to the Todra Gorge. Craggy and colourful rock walls up to 1,000 feet high loom over a lush narrow valley dotted with oasis-like date palmeries and irrigated fields of grain. In contrast to the much-anticipated Sahara, these gorges may be the most unexpected pleasure of the trip. You can walk to explore its depths.



After lunch in Tinghir (On own), you then continue your journey to arrive in Skoura late afternoon.

- ❖ Check-in and accommodation at your hotel in Skoura

Day 8: –Ouarzazate – Marrakech – The high Atlas
Approximately 5 hours drive

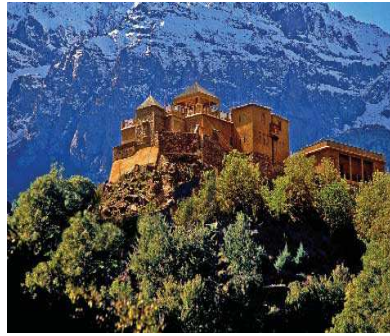
After breakfast, visit the Palace of Glaoui Kasbah Ait Ourir, the studio of cinema and the Ait Ben Haddou Village which is located about ten kilometers on the road from Ouarzazate to Marrakech. Two kilometers before the entrance of the village, a promontory along the road offers a panoramic view of the whole ksar and vegetables along Ouarzazate river. The ksar was classified as one of the World Heritage sites in Morocco and has been subject of many restorations. It is built on the left side of the salty valley on a hill, its unique location and natural decor make the village the main shooting location for famous films such as Lawrence of Arabia and Jesus of Nazareth. Each door, each courtyard holds its architectural treasure and terraces on top of buildings offer beautiful views of the village and the river below.



Continue to Marrakech, via the col of Tizi Tichka, the highest passage of Morocco and all North Africa as you cross over the High Atlas Mountains.



to the High Atlas Mountains and Kasbah du Toubkal / or Kasbah Tamadot . Head south from Marrakech along the hairpin bends which eventually leads to one of only two passes through the High Atlas Mountains. Perhaps make a brief stop at the Berber villages of Tahanoute or Asni and continue to the village of Imlil, where you will take a ten minute walk up to Kasbah du Toubkal. Mules will be available if you prefer to ride! Sited on a hilltop with commanding views of the surrounding valley, The Kasbah du Toubkal was built as a summer palace for the Pasha El Glaoui. It is now a wonderful place to experience Berber hospitality and a great base from which to explore the High Atlas.



- Check in and accommodation at your hotel in Asni / or Imlil.

Day 9: – Imlil.

After breakfast, your Mountain guide will take you for a full day trek in the Mountains and visit the nearby Berber Villages. You trek up to the Tizi n'Tamatert col, descend into the stunning Imane valley. Walk by the village of Tinerhourhine and around to the village of Aguersioual, follow river courses, cross seguias (traditional irrigation canals) and rivulets, past terraces and through walnut groves. Picnic on route.

Duration: 6 to 7 hours walking time.

Day 10: – Asni – Marrakech. Approximately 1 hour and half drive

At **8h30 am**, transfer to Marrakech. En route stop at an eco-garden for cooking class for lunch.

Our cookery experience takes place amongst hectares of olive groves and vegetable gardens in the Berber countryside in the verdant Amezize Valley. You will have the chance to spend the morning exploring the gardens and orchards of the beautiful properties, learning about traditional cultivation techniques and choosing the ingredients with which you will later prepare an authentic two course Moroccan meal, helped by well reputed local chefs that will share with you some of their secrets.

As an artist who would unveil his artwork, **Chief Tarik** will help you to study much. Learn how to make a variety of mouth-watering recipes, how to choose good vegetables, good herbs and take advice on how to cook healthy meals without sacrificing flavor.

"This is the dream of every chef to wander through a garden of herbs and vegetables every day for inspiration. Products freshly picked from the garden to pass the plate in minutes, ensuring ultimate freshness".

According to Tarik, a large number of aromatic herbs never unveil their qualities unless they are skilfully cooked. It is only through delicious recipes that one discovers or rediscovers the unsuspected flavours of these often under estimated or even sometimes forgotten herbs. Essential in any self-respecting cuisine, be it Moroccan or not, these aromatic plants are nicknamed by the Chef "The Must". There is nothing like seasoning and making the daily cooking more attractive with the fresh and appetizing flavours of some wild herbs.



- Check in and accommodation at your hotel in Marrakech.

Day 11: – Marrakech

At **9h30 am**, your guide will meet you at the hotel for full day guided tour of Marrakech.

Marrakech enjoys a legend status which conveys the ideas of mystery, sensuality, and exoticism. Its influence and fame has been so strong and intense in the history of Morocco, that as a matter of fact the country was named after the city.

Marrakech was founded in 1062 by one of the chieftains of the Almoravid king Youssuf Ibn Tashfin. The Almoravids were desert warriors, very much attached to their Islamic religion; the original garrison developed very quickly into a city where numerous mosques and madrasas (Koranic schools) were built. Andalusian craftsmen built and decorated several palaces, merging their style with the Saharan and African traditions, which gave the city a distinctive architectural flavour. The Almoravids also erected the city walls, and created a complex system of underground irrigation canals to bring water from the High Atlas, the khattara – a system still in use to water the several gardens of the city.

At its height, Marrakech was the capital of the Almoravid empire, which stretched as far as Senegal, most part of Spain, and Algiers. In 1147 the Almohads, tribesmen from the High Atlas mountains who practised orthodox Islam, sacked the city, replacing the Almoravids as rulers of the empire, and destroying many of the palaces and mosques of their predecessors. New ones were built soon, though, including the famous Koutoubia mosque, which dates from this period. Ever since, alternate ages of splendour and decline sculpted Marrakech's unique and charming character, at once decadent and full of life.

Nowadays, Marrakech is a vibrant city which exhibits a curious blend of the ancient and the modern, allowing travellers the chance to experience the genuine medieval atmosphere of the old medina, and visit the trendiest bars, art galleries and restaurants in the French Quarter, Guéliz, built at the beginning of the 20th Century, all in one day.

Highlights of your visit will include:



Djemaa El Fna, the Square

Nobody knows for certain of the origin of this square, whose name evokes, in Arabic, the contradictory notions of assembly or gathering, and that of absence. Probably as old as the city itself, it was a place for public executions during the day, and the meeting point of musicians, mystics, food sellers, pickpockets, acrobats, snake charmers, storytellers, dancers, fortune tellers and other exotic characters at night (happily enough, nowadays it only retains its more playful aspect). Watching sunset from one of its terraces when the

call to prayer from the Koutoubia minaret fills the air is one of these ‘zen’ moments that Morocco offers – do not miss it!

Despite its lack of significant monuments, Djemaa el Fna became an UNESCO Heritage Site in 1985, as one of the last places in the world where old oral narratives are still enacted.

Saadian Tombs

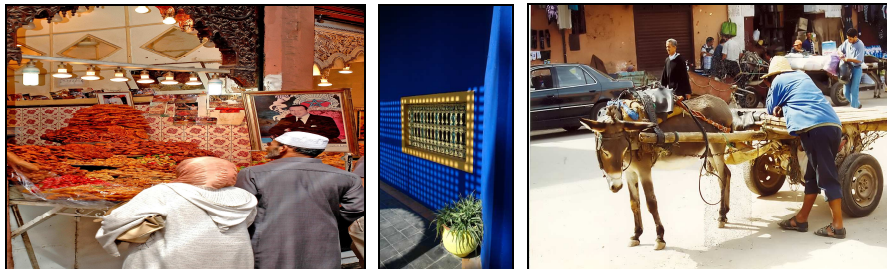
Built in the 16th Century as mausoleums for some Saadian rulers and their families, the Saadian Tombs were unknown until they were discovered by the French in 1917 thanks to aerial photographs. The site comprises more than one hundred graves, distributed in 3 mausoleums whose decoration exemplifies Islamic architecture with floral motifs, calligraphy, zellij and carrara marble, and finely worked cedar wood and stucco. Outside the buildings are a garden and the graves of soldiers and servants.

The Koutoubia Mosque

Built by the Almohads in the late years of 12th Century, the Koutoubia Mosque, and specially its minaret, is the most important landmark of Marrakech, and a symbol of the city itself. The minaret served as model for the Giralda in Sevilla and the unfinished Tour Hassan in Rabat, all three being designed by the same architect. Koutoubia means ‘booksellers’, as the trade of books was concentrated in the neighbourhood during the Middle Ages. The minaret of the Koutoubia, 77 meters high, is visible from almost any point of the city – an old ordinance, still in force, forbids any building of Marrakech to surpass the Koutoubia minaret in height.

El Bahia Palace

Built in the late 19th Century, and decorated by the best artisans of Morocco at the time, this palace – intended to be the most magnificent of its age – features an exquisite blend of Andalusian and Moorish styles. Specially interesting are the harem apartments, the trapezoidal garden, and a huge tiled courtyard with fountains.



The Madrasa Ben Youssef

Ancestors of modern universities, the ancient madrasas were theological colleges which concentrated also all scientific and philosophic knowledge of their age, providing both lodging and education to students. The Madrasa Ben Youssef was founded by Merinid sultan Abu-al-Hassan in the 14th Century, and the geometric patterns of its decoration have attracted the attention not only of artists but also of mathematicians, as they exhaust the catalogue of all possible geometric figures. Its 130 student dormitory cells once housed as many as 900 students, and cluster around a courtyard richly carved in cedar, marble and stucco. This masterpiece of Islamic art was in use for centuries, until it closed in 1960.

Time for lunch (on own) and continue the tour

The Souks

Filling the alleys north of Djmaa el Fna is the souk, or traditional market – the largest one in Morocco. It is, in turn, subdivided in some 18 souks, each one of them devoted to a specific trade or craftsmanship – from spices or ironwork, to the ingredients necessary for casting magic spells. The number of shops – often not much bigger in size than a closet - is overwhelming, and in them Moroccans can indulge in one of the activities that they enjoy most: bargaining. Cunning, patience, sense of humour, and strategy are needed for the game. Try your skills at it!

The Majorelle garden

In 1923 expatriate French painter Jacques Majorelle (1886 – 1962) purchased four acres of land at the edge of a palm grove located not far from Bab Doukkala, one of the most popular gates to Marrakech’s ancient medina. He built a villa for himself there in Moorish style, and progressively expanded his property, buying

further parcels of land until it reached nearly twelve acres crowded with the painter's important botanical collection, which he enriched through the years with specimens from all continents.

In 1947, Majorelle was forced to open his garden to the public in return for an entrance fee, in order to cover somehow its costly maintenance. Financial problems aggravated with time, though, due to the painter's poor health and a serious car accident; eventually, to avoid poverty, Majorelle had to sell successive portions of the property. In 1961 he sold whatever remained of it, and returned to France, where he died in 1962.

Neglected and half abandoned, the garden and villa fell into disrepair until they were discovered by Yves Saint Laurent and Pierre Bergé, who purchased both in 1980 in order to prevent a hotel complex from being built in the premises. They restored the old house, enriched the botanical collection, and assumed the maintenance of it, bringing back the garden to its former glory.

The last will of Yves Saint Laurent was that his ashes were scattered in the garden. The villa studio is now home to a Berber culture museum which contains many of Saint Laurent's personal collection of Berber items. The particular, intense blue colour with which Majorelle painted the façade and walls of his villa – a colour that to him symbolised the luminosity and vitality of Africa – bears ever since the name of the painter.



Day 12: – Marrakech

At **9h30 am**, your guide will meet you at the hotel for extra half day guided tour:

Crafts and shopping tour

Marrakech was born as a military garrison, in order to protect the traffic of sub-Saharan trade caravans with their loads of gold, slaves, spices, ivory and other goods, travelling back and forth between North Africa and the kingdoms of the South. It was only natural that the original settlement would turn very soon into a marketplace (souk) that became, with the passing of time, the capital of an empire, and one of the main centres of commerce and commercial transactions in the ancient world.

It's not exaggerated to say, thus, that the souks and their neighbouring square, Djemaa el Fna, are the soul and origin of the city. In them, Moroccans can indulge in one of their favourite pastimes: bargaining, which they take as a game involving quick thinking, psychology, a touch of guile, and a certain sense of drama. In them they also meet and socialise, or enjoy themselves; the atmosphere in the souks is always busy and festive.

The massive souks of Marrakech are a true labyrinth of stalls and artisan workshops, organised in nearly twenty trade corporations that bring together more than two thousand and six hundred craftsmen. Each trade has its own quarter inside the souks, with shops devoted to the sales of everything imaginable, from carpets or lamps, to the ingredients for casting a magic spell. The artisans must undergo a long apprenticeship and are subjected to a strict hierarchy. The apprentice becomes an artisan in full right only after making a piece of craftsmanship that he must submit to the judgement of a board of ancient masters, veritable guardians of the old traditions. At the head of each trade corporation, a well respected artisan, democratically elected by his peers, is in charge of representing them, and of acting as conciliator in the event of dispute between members of the trade, or between them and clients, or members of other trades. He acts in accordance to an unwritten code and his decisions are never challenged.

Whether you are a big shopper or not, visiting a souk is a cultural experience that will allow you to witness the everyday life of Moroccans, partake of it if you wish, try your skills at bargaining, see artisans at work, and wander at the wise and sensible social structure underlying the apparent chaos, all in one go; a morning as packed with wonderful things as any of the shops you will see!

The Museum of Marrakech

The museum is housed in the Dar Menebhi Palace, built at the end of the 19th century by Mehdi Menebhi. The palace was carefully restored by the Omar Benjelloun Foundation and converted into a museum in 1997.

The house itself represents an example of classical Andalusian architecture, with fountains in the central courtyard, traditional seating areas, a hammam and intricate tilework and carvings. The museum's large atrium (originally a courtyard, now covered in glass and fabric) contains a very large centrally hung chandelier-esque ceiling piece consisting of metal plates decorated with fine geometric and epigraphic cuttings. Several features of the original courtyard, including the floor-set basins and mosaics have been retained.

The garden of “La Menara”, and its hundreds of olive-trees, the park extends for over a hundred hectares (280 acres approx) and has in its centre an immense pool dating from the XIIIth century. At the water’s edge is a small Saadien house that has been restored.

The remainder of the day at leisure.

Day 13 – Marrakech - Essauoira **Approximately 2 hours and half drive**

Morning transfer to the city of Essauoira, 105 miles from Marrakech. This magical fortified coastal town is in total contrast to Marrakech and offers many photographic opportunities.

- ❖ Check in and accommodation at your hotel in Essauoira.

The remainder of the day is at your leisure

Day 14 – Essauira

At 9h00 am, your English speaking guide will meet you for half day walking tour of Essauoira.

[Essauoira](#) is a [magical fortified coastal town](#) on the Atlantic Ocean. Built by the Portuguese in the 17th C. In total contrast to Marrakech, the pace of life here is relaxed and slow. Essauoira was made famous by Orson Wells, who filmed Othello here and more recently, by residents like Jimmy Hendrix and the Rolling Stones.

Unlike Marrakech and Fes, there are no single places of major historical note to visit but Essauoira in itself becomes an historic location and is not to be missed.

The fishing port creates a backdrop to the white painted buildings of the Medina. The souk is small by comparison to Marrakech and easy to navigate. Essauoira is a haven for artists and handmade works of art are abundant. Being a fishing port, fresh fish is readily available and lunch on the port is a must as the day’s catch is cooked in front of you. The wide sweeping beach offers windsurfing, kite-surfing, camel and horse riding and quad bike excursions.

This small town was once 33% Jewish and had over thirty synagogues. An 18th century synagogue may still be visited. You can visit the tomb of Rabbi Chaim Pinto in the vast Jewish cemetery, built next to the Atlantic Ocean. Rabbi Pinto is the object of an annual pilgrimage in the week preceding Rosh Hashana. Explore the town, its ramparts, and its lovely street of thuya craftsmen, the [lively port, the colourful souk, the medina](#) and the Squala.





The remainder of the day is at your leisure

Day 15th: – Essaouira – Safi – Oualidia - El Jadida - Casablanca
Approximately a 5 hours ½ drive

Early morning transfer to Casablanca. En route, visit Safi and it's seaport on the Atlantic Ocean. It's a centre for the fishing industry of Morocco and also for the export of phosphates. The city was held by the Portuguese until 1541. Subsequently it came under French control until Morocco became an independent nation in 1956. Continuation to Oualidia by the sea, time for lunch and continue to El Jadida, sightseeing of this town including the famous citadel, a reminder of the Portuguese occupation of the 16th century. Arrival to Casablanca late afternoon.

- ❖ Check in and accommodation at your hotel in Casablanca .

Day 16th: – Casablanca

Transfer to Casablanca airport for your onward flight out

End of Our Services!