

HARVARD

ALUMNI TRAVELS



MOROCCAN DISCOVERY

MARCH 11–24, 2025

PROGRAM SCHEDULE

Encounter ancient ruins and sacred mosques, endless desert and storied mountains, and imposing kasbahs and spirited souks as you travel from the imperial cities of Rabat, Fez, and Marrakech to the High Atlas and vast Sahara.

SCHEDULE BY DAY

B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, R=Reception, D=Dinner

TUESDAY, MARCH 11

DEPART FROM HOME CITY

This evening, depart the U.S. for Morocco with a connecting flight to Casablanca.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 12

ARRIVE CASABLANCA / RABAT

Arrive this afternoon in Casablanca, Morocco's chief port, economic capital, and largest city.

After a one-hour transfer to Rabat, check in at the elegant, well-located hotel near the famed Hassan Tower.

Enjoy a short time to rest and refresh before meeting your fellow travelers at a welcome briefing followed by dinner at the hotel.

Overnight: *La Tour Hassan Palace (D)*

THURSDAY, MARCH 13

RABAT

Capital of the French Protectorate of Morocco from 1912 to 1956, and Moroccan capital since independence, Rabat resembles several celebrated European cities, yet maintains an Islamic character all its own.

Spend the entire day touring this unique locale that also served as one of the four ancient capitals, or imperial cities, starting inside the vast square of Dar al-Makhzen, the primary home of Mohamed VI, the king of Morocco.

Then visit the Roman site of Chellah and the remnants of Sala Colonia, a port that was abandoned in 1154. The gardens, pavilions, and ruins here are spread out over multiple levels, and now house several curious cats and majestic storks.

Visit the Museum of Moroccan History and Civilization and Rabat's impressive new Mohammed VI Modern and Contemporary Art Museum before crossing the river to Sale.

After lunch in a private home, visit the stunning Mausoleum of Mohamed V, built for the grandfather of the current king. The tilework and attention to detail of the building are extremely impressive, as is the setting: it stands across a wide plaza from the 12th-century Hassan Tower.

Continue to the fortified Kasbah des Oudaias, which calls to mind Santorini with its signature blue and white buildings lining narrow streets, beautiful Andalusian Gardens, and a wide plaza overlooking the mouth of the Bou Regreg River.

Finish the day with a short walk through the medina, or old city—the first of many you will encounter—and a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Late afternoon, return to the hotel before enjoying dinner together at Dinarjat, an acclaimed restaurant in Rabat's Old Town serving traditional Moroccan fare.

Overnight: *La Tour Hassan Palace (B, L, D)*

FRIDAY, MARCH 14

RABAT / VOLUBILIS / MEKNES / FEZ

This morning, depart by motorcoach for Fez, with a few stops along the way.

First, visit Volubilis, the largest of the Romans' 17 colonies established in Morocco between the 1st century BCE and the 2nd century CE. The excavated ruins here are particularly noted for their colorful mosaics, and the hilltop setting is a photographer's delight, with freestanding columns and archways framing lovely views across the Moroccan countryside. Learn its history from a local guide and have ample time at this UNESCO World Heritage site to explore and take photos.

Continue to Meknes, Morocco's youngest Imperial City and a UNESCO World Heritage site whose construction was dominated by the Sultan Moulay Ismail, one of Morocco's most powerful leaders. Despite his reputation as a ruthless warrior, the Sultan was also a builder, and during his 55-year reign he developed Meknes from a small town into a majestic capital with gigantic ramparts, monumental gates, more than 50 palaces, and 15 miles of exterior walls.

After lunch at a local restaurant, see the impressive Bab el Mansour gateway and visit the Dar Jamai Museum, which houses a collection of traditional Moroccan handicrafts such as ceramics, jewelry, textiles, metalwork, and cedarwood craft.

Arrive in Fez late this afternoon.

Tonight, enjoy a traditional Moroccan dinner together at your hotel perched on a hill overlooking the Fez medina.

Overnight: *Hotel Sahrai* (B, L, D)

SATURDAY, MARCH 15

FEZ

Known as the "Athens of Africa" for its wealth of cultural, educational, and religious institutions, Fez is the country's oldest imperial capital. "The history of Fez," writes author Walter Harris, "is composed of wars and murders, triumphs of arts and sciences, and a good deal of imagination."

Start with a tour of the old Mellah (Jewish quarter) and its 17th-century synagogue, cemetery, and royal gates.

Then, take a comfortable walk in the medina to discover some hidden treasures, including the Blue Gate, the most picturesque of all the Old City's historic gates; the medieval school of Bouanania; the 12th-century home of Jewish scholar Maimonides;

and the authentic food market. The medina is the heartbeat of this ancient city; its 540 acres contain some 156,000 residents, as well as thousands of twisting, narrow streets; food, spice, and plant markets; and shops selling almost everything imaginable. Donkeys and the occasional scooter break up the flow of pedestrians—with its streets too narrow and crowded for automobiles, the medina here is believed to be the largest car-free urban area in the world.

Enjoy lunch in an interesting property hidden within the medina, then continue to the quarter where Fez's renowned pottery and ceramics are made. Here, artisans create the complex blue-and-white geometric patterns of traditional "bleu de Fez" household and decorative objects.

Gather for dinner tonight in your hotel's international restaurant.

Overnight: *Hotel Sahrai* (B, L, D)

SUNDAY, MARCH 16

FEZ

Begin today with a walk through some of the oldest and most authentic handcraft streets in the medina. Then visit the Al-Attarine Madrasa, whose highlight is a small courtyard showcasing intricately detailed tilework and carving decorations dating to the early 1300s.

Continue through the labyrinthine medina, focusing on the artisans' quarters, the 14th-century Koranic schools, and Al Karaouine, the medieval theological university. (Founded in 859 CE, the University of Al Karaouine is the world's oldest continually operating university, the first degree-awarding educational institution, and the oldest school founded by a woman.)

The remainder of the afternoon is free for lunch on your own and for independent exploration or relaxation.

Tonight, enjoy a private dinner at an intimate family-run riad in Fez.

Overnight: *Hotel Sahrai* (B, D)

MONDAY, MARCH 17

FEZ / MIDELT / ERFOUD

Traveling inland, cross the fertile plains beyond Fez and continue through the Middle Atlas Mountain range and its cedar forests, where you may see the local Barbary apes in their natural habitat.

Cross the Ziz River, passing rows of sky-scraping palm trees and fortified villages before reaching your kasbah-style hotel on the outskirts of Erfoud late in the day.

Built by the French as an oasis fort, Erfoud is now a sizable city and the gateway to the Sahara.

Dinner tonight is at your hotel.

Overnight: *Le Palais du Désert Hotel & Spa* (B, L, D)

TUESDAY, MARCH 18

ERFOUD / RISSANI / MERZOUGA

In the morning, visit the city of Rissani, sitting on the edge of the Sahara and formerly the last staging post on the southern caravan route.

Traders would stop here before embarking on the journey across the Sahara to sub-Saharan Africa and across to the Levant. Once the seat of the Alawit dynasty, Rissani boasts some striking architecture with its 18th-century ksar, a virtually impenetrable warren of alleys.

After lunch together, set out in a caravan of 4x4s for the breathtakingly beautiful dunes of Merzouga, on the edge of the Sahara—one of the highlights of the program.

Reach Morocco's only Saharan dunes late this afternoon where, in the great silence, you watch the sun set over the desert with an optional camel ride along the erg.

Have dinner together in this desert setting before returning to your hotel tonight.

Overnight: *Le Palais du Désert Hotel & Spa* (B, L, D)

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 19

ERFOUD / TINEHIR / DADES OR TODRA GORGE / OUARZAZATE

With a long travel day ahead, depart Erfoud this morning bound for Ouarzazate.

First pass through Tinehir, a stunning mountain oasis rising on a series of lush riverside produce gardens

accented by palm trees and dominated by ornate clay villages.

Continuing your drive, visit either Dades or Todra Gorge, two spectacular natural chasms with sheer rock faces rising from both sides of a narrow river.

After lunch at a local restaurant, continue to El Kelaa des Mgouna, Morocco's "rose capital," and a journey along the "Route of a Thousand Kasbahs," a region of fortresses with elaborately decorated façades.

Arrive in Ouarzazate (the "door of the desert") late this afternoon. Dinner tonight is at your hotel.

Overnight: *Le Berbère Palace* (B, L, D)

THURSDAY, MARCH 20

OUARZAZATE / AIT BEN-HADDOU / MARRAKECH

Depart Ouarzazate for Marrakech today, stopping en route at uninhabited Ait ben-Haddou, one of southern Morocco's most recognizable villages (since it is often used as a location for fashion and film shoots).

A UNESCO World Heritage site, the village's old section consists of deep red kasbahs so tightly packed together they appear as a single building. Because of the fragility of the buildings—and their state of conservation—along with the difficulty in negotiating rough terrain within the city proper, this visit is limited to a panoramic stop to view the city from a nearby hill.

On the descent from the High Atlas Mountains, pass through typical villages with fortified walls and stone houses with earthen roofs.

In Tizi N'Tichka, traverse the Pass of the Pastures (alt. 7,415 feet), where life is much as it was centuries ago: shepherds bring their flocks to the high pastures every summer, then return with them to their villages in autumn.

Late this afternoon, arrive in fabled Marrakech, an ancient intersection of Berber, African, Mediterranean, and Asian cultural and artistic influences. Considered Morocco's most cosmopolitan city, Marrakech boasts a spectacular location surrounded by rich farmlands and high mountains.

Dine tonight at your hotel.

Overnight: *Sofitel Marrakech* (B, L, D)

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FRIDAY, MARCH 21

MARRAKECH

Although its origins are disputed, it is believed Marrakech was settled in the early 11th century; five centuries later it was one of Morocco's dominant centers of art and culture. Today Marrakech is the nation's fourth largest city, with an exciting blend of modern architecture and an ancient walled medina.

Travel via horse-drawn carriage from Menara to the lush Majorelle Gardens, a botanical garden in the heart of the city. French artist Jaques Majorelle created this masterpiece, known for its cobalt blue accents, in 1924 during Morocco's colonial period as a protectorate of France. Here you may see many of the 15 species of birds native to North Africa. Also visit the Yves St. Laurent Museum directly adjacent to Majorelle.

Return to your hotel for lunch, then set out mid-afternoon to explore the city's souks, including those of yarn dyers, wrought iron and lantern makers, herbalists, and wood carvers and painters.

Next, venture to Djemaa El Fna, the heart of Marrakech where snake charmers, storytellers, acrobats, and musicians enlighten, fascinate, and entertain. It's a circus atmosphere that has existed since the city's earliest days, serving as a hub for both locals and tourists.

Dinner is on your own in this exotic city.

Overnight: *Sofitel Marrakech* (B, L)

SATURDAY, MARCH 22

MARRAKECH

Located in the old Marrakesh, Dar el Bacha showcases a vast collection of artifacts and pieces surrounding Moroccan crafts and heritage. Ben Youssef Madrasa was first constructed in 1565 by Sultan Abdullah Al-Ghaleb Assaadi, and has been newly restored and recently reopened. This architectural treasure reflects the colorful history of authentic Moroccan art.

On the way back to the hotel, stop to see the oldest historical gate of Marrakech, Bab Agnaou, built in the 12th century.

The afternoon is at leisure before dinner tonight at a local restaurant in the city's Old Town.

SUNDAY, MARCH 23

MARRAKECH / CASABLANCA

Leave Marrakech this morning for the 3½-hour drive to storied Casablanca, Morocco's largest and most sophisticated city, combining French and Moroccan influences.

On this afternoon's tour, visit the Grand Mosque of Hassan II, the world's second largest Islamic house of worship, with a 656-foot minaret and a prayer hall three times the size of St. Paul's Cathedral in London. A stunning architectural achievement, the mosque boasts an equally stunning setting on the banks of the Atlantic shoreline. It is also Morocco's only functioning mosque that is open to non-Muslims and this tour affords the opportunity to see the palatial interior with its polished marble floor, Venetian chandeliers, and Moorish arches with 70 cedar-paneled cupolas.

Tonight, gather for a farewell dinner at a local restaurant to celebrate your Moroccan adventure.

Overnight: *Le Casablanca Hotel* (B, D)

MONDAY, MARCH 24

DEPART FOR U.S.

After breakfast this morning, transfer to the Casablanca airport for your return flight to the U.S.

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