There is something inexplicably alluring and romantic about Morocco. Its colorful mix of Berber, Arab, African, Jewish, and European influences have created Morocco’s unique pulse of life. Morocco is one of our favorite destinations. It offers it all—friendly and outgoing people, rich cultures, dramatic beauty, and ecological diversity. From its snowy Atlas peaks to the undulating dunes of the Sahara, Morocco delivers startling contrast and striking images around every turn.

This program goes beyond the well-trodden sites, unveiling treasures ignored to mass tourism. Among them are prehistoric drawings etched into boulders in a remote corner of the Sahara; the traditional Salé medina, once a lair of corsairs, with its 14th-century restored religious college; the Museum of Moroccan Judaism, unique in the lands of Islam; and Berber hamlets deep amid pristine mountain realms.

Also explore the Kingdom’s most famed attractions, its millennium-old Imperial Cities, with their medinas, souks, mosques and shrines, to indulge in rich architecture and deep cultural history. Throughout your journey notice the details and textures that are Morocco’s true magic—round loaves of bread stacked high on wood tables, the stirring calls to prayer echoing among alleyways, the oranges that dangle like ornaments off the trees in Gueliz, the aromas of olives and spices emanating from open-air stalls, coppersmiths toiling away in ways unchanged in ages.

GROUP SIZE: 12 to 25 guests

PRICING: $5,295 per person, double occupancy / $1,545 single supplement

STUDY LEADER: CAROL R. SAIVETZ is a research associate at Harvard’s Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies and Senior Advisor to the Security Studies Program at MIT. During this trip, she will discuss Morocco after the Arab Spring, the Syrian complexities and US-Russia relations, and the Saudi-Iranian Cold War.
SCHEDULE BY DAY

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

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 14
DEPART U.S.

Take independent flights to Morocco. There are many overnight departures from the U.S. to Casablanca or Rabat. (Non-stop flights are available from New York JFK and Washington Dulles on Royal Air Maroc to Casablanca; connecting flights through a number of major European gateway cities are available to both Casablanca and Rabat.)

MONDAY, OCTOBER 15
TO RABAT

Independent landings by midday in Casablanca or Rabat, with private transfers to your hotel in Rabat.

Your visit to the Kingdom’s stately capital, added in 2013 to the World Heritage list, begins this afternoon with a leisurely walk through the whitewashed Oudaïa Kasbah. Once a lair of Barbary Coast corsairs, the former fortress boasts an Andalusian Garden, as well as the Oudaïa Gate, a reference of Almohad Dynasty architecture.

Next stroll through the Chellah fortress, its lush gardens, Roman remains and the intricate 14th-century necropolis of the Merinid Dynasty.

Dinner this evening is at the hotel.

Overnight: Villa Mandarine (B, L, D)

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 16
RABAT AND SALÉ

In the morning cross the Bou Regreg River for a walking tour of Salé, once a haven for the Salée Rovers Barbary pirates, and now a residential town. Visit the restored 14th-century medersa (religious college), a gem overlooked by mass tourism, decorated by intricately carved stucco and woodwork.

Back in Rabat, explore the country’s sole archaeological museum, renowned for its Roman and prehistoric collections.

For lunch, head to the Center for Cross Cultural Learning within Rabat’s medina, where you will have a lecture on U.S.-Moroccan relations from the 18th century to the present.

In the afternoon, visit the new Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, the Kingdom’s sole museum built to world standards, in a magnificent structure of neo-Moorish architecture.

The day ends with a stop at the mausoleum of Mohamed V, the “father” of modern Morocco. The memorial is located on the grounds of the ruined Hassan mosque from the 12th century, which was meant to have been the world’s largest at the time.

Tonight enjoy a welcome dinner of Moroccan specialties at the Dinarjat, a former palatial home in the old city.

Overnight: Villa Mandarine (B, L, D)

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 17
VOLUBILIS, MEKNES AND TO FES

This morning drive east for two hours to the ruins of Volubilis. The lonely remains of the remote Roman outpost dating back to the 2nd and 3rd century are dwarfed by the vast surrounding plains and the backdrop of Mount Zerhoun. It is one of the finest archeological sites in Morocco and equal to any other great Roman city in North Africa.

Continue south to the Imperial City of Meknes, which 17th-century Sultan Moulay Ismail built as his capital. See his mausoleum, still a pilgrimage site, and Bab el Mansour, the largest city gate in Morocco, perfectly proportioned and decorated with thousands of green and white glazed tiles. Visit the late-16th-century granaries, built as giant vaulted halls meant to hold a year’s supply of grain for the city’s population and the Sultan’s thousands of horses. Still standing today as a UNESCO World Heritage site, its thick mud and pebble walls maintain a constant temperature of 55°F—even in the heat of
FRIDAY, OCTOBER 19
ACROSS THE ATLAS

During this travel day, experience an array of fascinating, ever-changing landscapes as you cross the Atlas ranges south all the way to the edge of the Sahara.

Begin with the Middle Atlas and its last forests of the giant Mediterranean cedars (of Lebanon fame), passing mountain station Ifrane, site of Africa’s most esteemed international university, and stopping in the heart of the forest to look for the indigenous Barbary macaques (of Gibraltar fame).

Break for lunch in the Berber enclave of Midelt before crossing the wild, multi-hued expanses of the Eastern High Atlas, down into the dramatic Ziz Valley, and concluding in the administrative center of Arfoud.

Arrive in time for a buffet dinner at the hotel.

Overnight: Kasbah Xzuca (B, L, D)

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 20
SIJILMASSA, TAFILALET OASIS AND ERG CHEBBHI DUNES

Depart for the Tafilalt Oasis, Morocco’s largest, and the 17th-century cradle of the Kingdom’s current ruling Alaouite Dynasty. Explore their old crumbling Oulad abd el-Halim fortress and observe the local people working the fields and date palmeries much the same as they have for hundreds of years. See the remains of the former important trade center of Sijilmassa, one of the largest settlements in Western Africa until the 14th century.

After a lunch of local Saharan specialties, board Land Rovers and head out to the great Erg Chebbhi dunes, rising 600 feet above the desert’s floor and representing the northernmost edge of the Sahara’s vast expanse, which continues far to the south all the way to Timbuktu.

En route to the dunes, stop at a vast fossil quarry that supplies museum shops around the world.

At the dunes, you can hike, scramble, or take an optional camel up the dunes to witness
sunset over the Sahara, before returning to Arfoud in time for dinner.

Overnight: Kasbah Xzluca (B, L, D)

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 21
TODGHA GORGE, FOGGARA AQUEDUCTS & ACROSS THE SAGHRO

Head west along desert hills until you reach a lush valley thick with date palm gardens and Berber villages until the narrow Todgha River Gorge, flanked by rock escarpments over 1,000 feet high.

Along the way, admire an incredible foggara underground canalization system dug up as of the 9th century to supply water to the Tafilalet.

After lunch overlooking the valley,

Continue South through the moonscape of the Saghro Mountains, passing isolated adobe hamlets, with an early evening arrival in the village of N’Koub, above a vast oasis.

Dinner this evening is at the hotel.

Overnight: Kasbah Imdoukal (B, L, D)

MONDAY, OCTOBER 22
ROCK ART ON THE SAHARA & TO MARRAKECH

In the morning board all-terrain vehicles and head to the area of Aït Ouazzik, one of Morocco’s largest assemblies of prehistoric petroglyphs, with dozens of zoomorphic and symbolic images etched into rock faces. The petroglyphs are over 5,000 years old and have depictions of elephants, rhinos, ostriches, and giraffes.

Then head back west to the Draa Valley and over the Saghro range to Ouarzazate, the international film-shooting center whose exotic surroundings have been used ever since “Lawrence of Arabia.”

After lunch view the UNESCO World Heritage site of Kasbah of Aït Ben Haddou, one of the most memorable sites of the arid south. Aït Ben Haddou is a village made up of several small adobe fortresses, the ksour, reaching up to five stories high, some dating back to at least the 16th century. The importance of the site was due to its position on the route for camel caravans carrying gold, ivory, and slaves from across the Sahara. It is now often-used as a film backdrop (e.g., “Gladiator”).

Continue north over the spectacular road of the Tizi-n-Tichka pass, with views on deep verdant vales and their adobe hamlets.

Anticipate an early evening arrival in legendary Marrakech, with dinner at the hotel.

Overnight: La Maison Arabe (B, L, D)

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 23
THE RED MEDINA & MAJORELLE GARDEN

This morning see Marrakech’s prime monuments: the 12th-century Koutoubia minaret, a masterpiece of Almohad Dynasty art and a reference of World Islamic architecture; the 16th-century Bahia Palace of vizier Ba Ahmed, a prime example of Moorish-Andalusian art spread over 20 acres; and the necropolis of the Saadian Dynasty, the last window into the splendor of early 17th-century Moroccan interior art.

After lunch, take a stroll in the exotic garden created in the 1930s by French Orientalist Jacques Majorelle, restored by the late Yves St. Laurent, and see its exquisite Museum of Berber Culture.

This evening dinner is on your own to sample the city’s vast variety of excellent eateries.

Overnight: La Maison Arabe (B, L)

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 24
MT. TOUBKAL NATIONAL PARK

Depart early in the morning for the picturesque village of Imlil, located at the foot of 14,000-foot Mt. Toubkal, the highest summit in North Africa. The Moroccan High Atlas is a paradise, offering an incredible variety of scenery, climate and terrain at any time of year. Here we undertake a mule ride
through walnut-shaded terraced fields to observe the ways of life of the Berber tribesmen, Morocco’s indigenous inhabitants, nearly unchanged in centuries. After enjoying a tea break in a local home, continue on to the refurbished Kasbah du Toubkal for lunch. The Kasbah was formerly owned by a local chief and is furnished in Moroccan style, retaining the traditional building techniques and wood decorations of the mountains. At nearly 6,000 feet above sea level, the Kasbah unobtrusively looks out over the major valleys carved out of majestic rocky mountains. The film “Kundun” was filmed here, an indication of how magnificent and dramatic the landscape is. Return to Marrakech, where the remainder of the evening is free to explore and enjoy dinner on our own.

Overnight: La Maison Arabe (B, L)

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 25
INTO THE SOUQ
This morning we penetrate the vast reed-covered bazaars, the country’s largest, exploring quarters where all types of crafts are still fashioned by hand (and foot!). Visit the Ben Youssef Medersa, the largest Koranic school built by the 14th-century Merinid Dynasty. Explore the courtyard, prayer hall, and student cells, noticing that every surface is decorated with carved wood or stucco-work.

The remainder of the day is free for personal pursuits: additional sightseeing, shopping, or relaxing.

Tonight gather for a farewell dinner of Marrakchi specialties in the heart of the old city.

Overnight: La Maison Arabe (B, D)

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 26
RETURN TO U.S.

Transfer to the Marrakech airport for your homeward journey. (B)