

HARVARD

ALUMNI TRAVELS



MOROCCAN DISCOVERY

MARCH 12 – 25, 2023

PROGRAM SCHEDULE

ITINERARY HIGHLIGHTS: Casablanca, Rabat, Fez, Marrakech

- Encounter ancient ruins and sacred mosques, endless desert and storied mountains, and imposing *kasbahs* and spirited *souks*.
- View the breathtakingly beautiful dunes of Merzouga.
- Experience Morocco's colorful mix of Berber, Arab, African, Jewish, and European influences, which have created a unique pulse of life.
- Explore Old Marrakech, taking in the Koutoubia Mosque and the El Bahia Palace with its Andalusian influence.
- In Casablanca, visit the Grand Mosque of Hassan II, the world's second largest Islamic house of worship, with a 656-foot minaret.

ACTIVITY LEVEL: Level 3

SCHEDULE BY DAY

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

SUNDAY, MARCH 12 DEPART U.S. FOR MOROCCO

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

MONDAY, MARCH 13 ARRIVE CASABLANCA / RABAT

Arrive this afternoon in Casablanca, Morocco's chief port, economic capital, and largest city. After clearing customs and picking up your luggage, proceed to the airport meeting point where you will be greeted by a tour representative.

After a one-hour transfer to Rabat, check in at your hotel near famed Hassan Tower. You have a short time to rest and refresh before meeting your fellow travelers at a welcome briefing and enjoying dinner at the hotel.

Overnight: *La Tour Hassan* (D)

TUESDAY, MARCH 14 RABAT

Spend today touring this unique city, starting inside the vast square of Dar al-Makhzen, the primary home of Mohamed VI, the king of Morocco. Next, visit the Roman site of Chellah, and see 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 a number of curious cats and majestic storks. Cross the

river to Sale, where you enjoy lunch in a private home.

After lunch, admire the stunning architecture of the 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: standing across a wide plaza from the 12th-century Hassan Tower. From here, visit 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 on this tour.

Enjoy dinner together at Dinarjat, an acclaimed restaurant in Rabat's Old Town serving traditional Moroccan fare.

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

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 15 RABAT / VOLUBILIS / MEKNES / FEZ

In the morning, depart by motor coach for Fez, with a few stops along the way. First, explore 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. While learning the history from a local guide, you have ample time at this UNESCO World Heritage Site to explore and take photos.

After lunch in a local restaurant, continue on to Meknes, Morocco's youngest Imperial City and also 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 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. We see the impressive Bab el Mansour gateway and visit the ruins of the imperial granaries and stables.

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

Overnight: *Riad Fes* (B, L, D)

THURSDAY, MARCH 16 FEZ

Known as the "Athens of Africa" for its wealth of cultural, educational, and religious institutions, Fez is the country's oldest imperial capital, and perhaps its most fascinating.

This morning we start with a tour of the old Mellah (Jewish quarter) and its 17th-century synagogue and the royal gates. Then we 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 truly the highlight and 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.

We enjoy lunch in an interesting property hidden within the *medina*, then continue this afternoon to visit 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.

After our touring, we dine tonight in our hotel's international restaurant.

Overnight: *Riad Fes* (B, L, D)

FRIDAY, MARCH 17 FEZ

We begin today with a walk through some of the oldest and most authentic handcraft streets in the *medina*.

Then we visit the Al-Attarine Madrasa, whose highlight is a small courtyard showcasing intricately detailed tilework and carving decorations dating to the early 1300s. We then continue our discovery of the labyrinthine *medina*, focusing on the artisans' quarters, the 14th-century Koranic schools, and Al Karaouine, the medieval theological university. This last spot is of particular interest, as the University of Al Karaouine was founded in 859 CE, giving it a host of superlatives: world's oldest continually operating university, world's first degree-awarding educational institution, and oldest school founded by a woman (Fatima al-Fihri).

After lunch on our own, we visit the Borj Nord Arms Museum, an authentic Saadi fort that dates from 1582 and one of Morocco's only European-influenced forts. After exploring the Moroccan armaments here, we are free this afternoon for independent exploration or relaxation.

In the evening, enjoy a private dinner at an intimate family-run riad in Fez.

Overnight: *Riad Fes (B, D)*

SATURDAY, MARCH 18 FEZ / MIDELT / ERFOUD

Today's transfer from Fez to Erfoud in the Sahara Desert is long, but your reward is the breadth and beauty of the passing scenery. 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 the hotel.

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

SUNDAY, MARCH 19 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 Alawait dynasty, Rissani boasts some striking architecture with its 18th-century *ksar*, a virtually impenetrable warren of alleys.

After lunch, set out in a caravan of 4x4s for the breathtakingly beautiful dunes of Merzouga, one of the highlights of our tour. Reach Morocco's only Saharan dunes late this afternoon where, in the enormous silence, you watch the sun set over the desert as you take a camel ride along the *erg*.

Following this experience, enjoy dinner together in this desert setting before returning to the hotel tonight.

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

MONDAY, MARCH 20 ERFOUD / TINEHIR / TODRA GORGE / OUARZAZATE

With a long travel day ahead, leave Erfoud this morning bound for Ouarzazate in the snow-topped High Atlas Mountains, passing one scene of natural beauty after another.

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. Here you visit 984-foot Todra Gorge, a spectacular natural chasm with sheer rock faces rising on either side, which is home to a variety of rare plant and bird species. Briefly disembark to explore the river cutting through the bottom of the gorge and look for climbers scaling the walls on either side.

After lunch at a local restaurant, continue to El Kelaa des Mgouna, Morocco's "rose capital," before beginning your 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 the hotel.

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

TUESDAY, MARCH 21 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 (including *Gladiator*). 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. The fragility of the buildings – and their state of conservation – means that the group may have to stop outside the city itself depending on conditions at this UNESCO site during the visit. Then, as you descend 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.

Later 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 the hotel.

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

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 22 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*.

We start by traveling 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 we are likely to see many of the 15 species of birds native to North Africa. Following a tour of the gardens, we visit the Yves St. Laurent Museum directly adjacent to Majorelle, where we have time to wander through and learn about the famed French designer and his deep connection to Morocco.

We return to our hotel for lunch, then set out for a full afternoon of touring. First we visit Dar El Bacha, a formerly private palace full of fountains, *riads*, and orange trees, which was once owned by the Thami El Glaoui, the most powerful figure in Morocco’s south in the early part of the 20th century. Then we explore the city’s *souks*, including those of yarn dyers, wrought iron and lantern makers, herbalists, and wood carvers and painters.

Next, we venture to Djemaa El Fna, the heart of Marrakech where our fantasies of Morocco come to life. Here are snake charmers, storytellers, acrobats, and musicians asking only a few *dirhams* to enlighten, fascinate, and entertain. It’s a circus atmosphere that has existed since the city’s earliest days, serving as a *mecca* for both locals and tourists who come here for food, for fun, or to find a brief respite from daily life.

Dinner is on your own in this exotic city.

Overnight: *Sofitel Marrakech (B, L)*

THURSDAY, MARCH 23 MARRAKECH

On today’s excursion we concentrate on Old Marrakech, taking in the Koutoubia Mosque with its distinct 282-foot minaret, an architectural highlight visible from miles away; the relatively contemporary (19th century) El Bahia Palace with its Andalusian influence and fascinating harem quarter; and the ruins of

360-room Palais El Badii, built in 1578 in the style of Granada's Alhambra and lavishly decorated with Italian marble and gold. The palace took 15 years to construct and its name translates to "the incomparable palace," but none of that mattered to Moulay Ismail, the warrior king who brought Meknes to prominence, when he looted the palace less than 100 years after its construction to enhance *his* palace. Though robbed of its opulence, El Badii's massive footprint and infrastructure still impress.

On the way back to the hotel, we 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.

Overnight: *Sofitel Marrakech (B, D)*

FRIDAY, MARCH 24

MARRAKECH / CASABLANCA

Depart Marrakech this morning for the 3½-hour motor coach ride 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. It is also Morocco's only functioning mosque that is open to non-Muslims and this tour affords you the opportunity to see the palatial interior with its polished marble floor, Venetian chandeliers, and Moorish arches with 70 cedar-paneled cupolas. You also may have time to visit other highlights of Casablanca, including Notre Dame de Lourdes, a Catholic Church boasting impressive stained glass.

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

Overnight: *Hyatt Regency Casablanca (B, D)*

SATURDAY, MARCH 25

DEPART FOR U.S.

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