Encounter ancient ruins and sacred mosques, endless desert and storied mountains, and imposing kasbahs and spirited souks in this land of dramatic contrasts. Travel from the imperial cities of Rabat, Fez, and Marrakech to the High Atlas and vast Sahara. Open your eyes and hearts to a truly foreign land, an age-old culture, and a genuinely hospitable people.

STUDY LEADER: To be announced

GROUP SIZE: From 12 to 24 guests

PRICING: Based on per person double occupancy

$5,929 Air Inclusive from JFK ($5,495 air and land inclusive plus $434 airline taxes and departure fees).
$5,095 Land only rate
$1,395 single supplement

SCHEDULE BY DAY

SATURDAY, MAY 17
DEPART U.S. FOR CASABLANCA, MOROCCO

SUNDAY, MAY 18
CASABLANCA/RABAT

Arrive this morning in Casablanca, Morocco’s chief port, economic capital, and largest city. You’ll meet your Tour Director at the airport then transfer by coach to Rabat, stopping for refreshments along the way. After checking in well-located hotel near famed Hassan Tower, you have the remainder of the day at leisure. For your convenience, lunch at the hotel is included today.

Tonight you’ll meet your fellow travelers over a welcome dinner at Dinarjat, a famous restaurant located in Rabat’s Old Town.

Overnight: La Tour Hassan (L, D)
MONDAY, MAY 19
RABAT

Capital of the French Protectorate of Morocco from 1912 to 1956, and Moroccan capital since independence, Rabat has a European elegance yet maintains an Islamic character all its own. Spend the entire day touring this unique city that also was one of the four ancient capitals, or imperial cities, beginning with the fortified Kasbah des Oudaias that surrounds the 17th-century Royal Palace and the beautiful Andalusian Gardens. Next visit Chellah’s Roman relic where the remnants of Sala Colonia, the Roman port that was abandoned in 1154. This afternoon cross the river to Sale and enjoy lunch at a local restaurant. Visit Rabat’s Archaeological Museum followed by a short walk through the medina.

Later this afternoon return to the hotel, and dine there tonight.

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

TUESDAY, MAY 20
RABAT/MEKNES/VOLUBILIS/FEZ

This morning depart by motorcoach for 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.

Visit the impressive Bab el Mansour gateway and the ruins of the imperial stables and granaries. After lunch in a local restaurant continue on to 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. The setting is a photographer’s delight, and you’ll have ample time at this UNESCO World Heritage site to take photos.

From here travel to Moulay Idriss (time permitting), the town where you see the tomb of Moulay Idriss el Akhbar, descendant of the Prophet Muhammad. Next continue on to Fez, arriving late this afternoon.

Tonight enjoy a traditional Moroccan dinner together at the hotel.

Overnight: Sofitel Palais Jamai (B, L, D)

WEDNESDAY, MAY 21
FEZ

“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.” And a more fascinating city you won’t find anywhere, as we discover on the full-day tour. Begin today with a walking tour of Fez’s fascinating medina, a UNESCO World Heritage site, focusing on the artisans’ quarters, the 14th-century Koranic schools, and Al Karouine, the medieval theological university that opened in 859 and is believed to be older than its European counterparts Oxford and Bologna. Return to the hotel for lunch and some time at leisure then mid-afternoon tour the old mellah (Jewish quarter) and its 17th-century synagogue, the royal gates, and the Museum of Fez.

Tonight enjoy dinner together at an intimate family-run riad, La Maison Bleue.

Overnight: Sofitel Palais Jamai (B, L, D)

THURSDAY, MAY 22
FEZ

This morning travel outside the city to visit a Berber village where residents live much as their ancestors did centuries ago. As a small group highlight you share mint tea with a local family in their cave dwelling. Then continue on to whitewashed Sefrou, an old Jewish town at the foot of the Middle Atlas Mountains.

Returning to Fez, stop at the renowned pottery factories that create the complex blue-and-white geometric patterns of traditional “bleu de Fez” household and decorative objects. The remainder of the afternoon is free for lunch on your own and for independent exploration.
Tonight dine together in the hotel's international restaurant.

Overnight: Sofitel Palais Jamai (B, D)

FRIDAY, MAY 23
FEZ/MIDELT/ERFOUD

Today will be a long day spent venturing out to the Sahara as a substantial distance is covered driving to Erfoud. Traveling inland, you cross the fertile plains beyond Fez and continue through the Middle Atlas mountain range. A stop is made in the small town of Midelt for lunch. Continuing on you cross the Ziz River, passing rows of sky-scraping palm trees and fortified villages before reaching the kasbah-style hotel outside of Erfoud late in the day. Originally an oasis fort built by the French, Erfoud is now a sizable city and the gateway to the Sahara. Dinner tonight is at the hotel.

Overnight: Kasbah Hotel Chergui (B, L, D)

SATURDAY, MAY 24
ERFOUD/RISSANI/MERZOUGA

This morning visit the city of Rissani, with its 18th-century ksar, a virtually impenetrable warren of alleys; then continue on to the ruins of Sijilmasa. Once a central trade point in the Trans-Sahara trade routes, the city of Sijilmasa suffered through years of continuous religious conflict. Today, the ruins lay protected by the World Monuments Fund as they were left after the nomadic tribes of Ait Atta destroyed the city in 1818.

Enjoy a tour highlight this afternoon as you set out on a sunset excursion to the breathtakingly beautiful sand dunes at Merzouga on the edge of the Sahara. In the enormous silence watch the sun set over the desert as you take a camel ride along the erg, Morocco’s only Saharan dunes. Following this experience return to the hotel, and dine together tonight.

Overnight: Kasbah Hotel Chergui (B, D)

SUNDAY, MAY 25
ERFOUD/TINEHIR/TODRA GORGES/OUARZAZATE

Depart Erfoud this morning bound for Ouarzazate in the snow-topped High Atlas Mountains, passing one scene of natural beauty after another. The first stop is in 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 visit 984-foot Todra Gorge, home to a variety of rare plant and bird species.

After enjoying lunch here, continue on to El Kelaa Mgouna, Morocco’s “rose capital,” before beginning the journey along the “Route of a Thousand Kasbahs,” a region of fortresses with elaborately decorated façades. Arrive in Ouarzazate late this afternoon; dinner tonight is at the hotel.

Overnight: Berbere Palace (B, L, D)

MONDAY, MAY 26
OUARZAZATE/AIT BEN HADDOU/ MARRAKECH

Travel to Marrakech today, stopping en route at 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 a stop outside the city itself may take place depending on conditions at this UNESCO site.

Then descend from the High Atlas mountains, passing through typical villages whose stone houses have 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 – and some would say it’s
most beautiful – Marrakech boasts a spectacular location surrounded by rich farmlands and high mountains. Dinner tonight is at the hotel.

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

**TUESDAY, MAY 27**  
**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*. The full-day tour will concentrate on Old Marrakech, taking in the Koutoubia Mosque with its 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, which took 25 years to construct, was then “looted” by Moulay Ismail to use in his palace.

Return to the hotel for lunch then set out 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 your fantasies of Morocco will come to life. Here are snake charmers, storytellers, acrobats, and musicians asking a few *dirhams* to enlighten, fascinate, and entertain you. 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)*

**WEDNESDAY, MAY 28**  
**MARRAKECH**

Today’s excursion begins 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 are likely to see many of the 15 species of birds native to North Africa. Following a tour of the gardens, you’ll visit the newly renovated Berber Museum, located on the grounds of Majorelle Gardens.

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

*Overnight: Sofitel Marrakech (B, D)*

**THURSDAY, MAY 29**  
**MARRAKECH/CASABLANCA**

Depart Marrakech this morning for the 3½-hour motorcoach ride to Casablanca, Morocco’s largest and most sophisticated city, combining French and Moroccan influences. On this afternoon’s tour you’ll 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 your tour affords us the opportunity to see the palatial interior with its polished marble floor, Venetian chandeliers, and Moorish arches with 70 cedar-paneled cupolas.

Other highlights of your Casablanca tour include a visit to the harbor area and central market where vendors sell items such as spices, meats, fish, and flowers; the Habous Quarter (“New Medina”), designed by French architects in the 1930s to resolve a major housing crisis; and the Royal Palace. Tonight gather for a farewell dinner to celebrate your discovery of Morocco.

*Overnight: Kenzi Tower Hotel (B, D)*

**FRIDAY, MAY 30**  
**DEPART FOR U.S.**

This morning transfer to the Casablanca airport for your flights to the U.S.

*Meals: (B)*