
Morocco: Oases, Kasbahs and Medinas

November 13 — 29, 2024 (days in Morocco)

Experience the exotic and little-known Kingdom of Morocco. Populated by the fierce and indigenous Berbers and conquered by the Arabs 1300 years ago, Morocco is the bridge between Europe and Africa, a country where Jews and Muslims have flourished side by side for over 1,000 years. Morocco offers you a glimpse at the Sahara desert, its lush oases and earthen architecture. It offers the magnificent Atlas Mountains and the sophisticated Imperial Cities of Marrakech, Meknès and especially Fès—often called the world’s best example of a living medieval city.

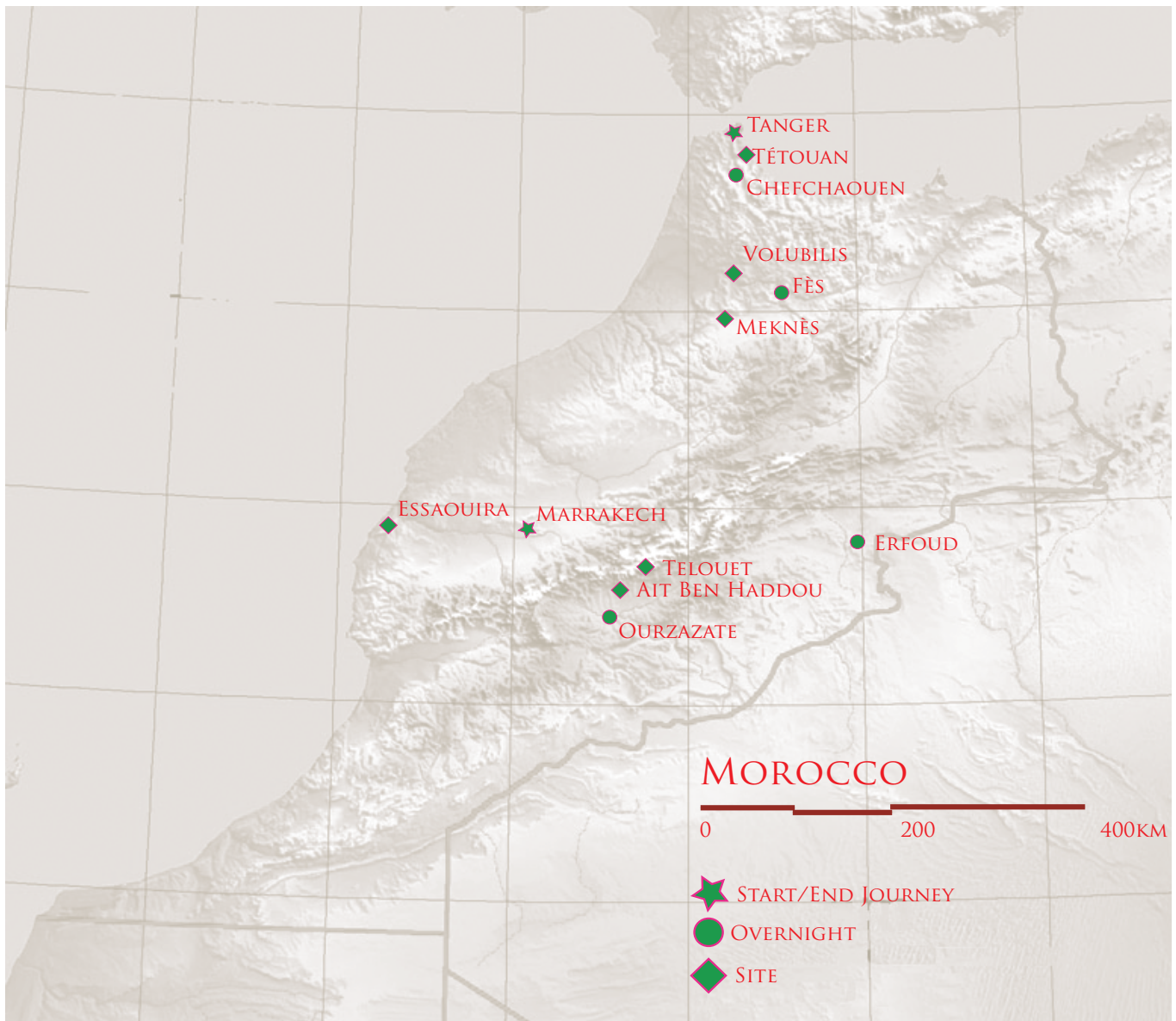


The Kasbah of Ait Benhaddou silhouetted at dusk, and below, detail of a tile pattern at Volubilis.

We will begin our 16 night trip (or 17 if you count the flight over) by leaving the US individually on November 12 to arrive in Europe on November 13 and connecting to a flight to Marrakech (if possible) or Casablanca (if not) arriving the same day and where you will be personally met and escorted to our hotel in Marrakech. We will be there for five nights. While there, we will make a day trip to the seaside town of Essaouira. We will then begin our journey through the country, crossing the Atlas mountains at the Tichka pass to stay for two nights at a quite fantastic place, Dar Ahlam, enroute to which we will stop and visit some of the old kasbahs the likes of



which you might remember from having seen *Lawrence of Arabia* or *The Sheltering Sky*. We will continue up a series of stunning valleys in the High Atlas, reaching Fez after one overnight stop enroute. In Fez we will be spending four nights, which will give us plenty of time to explore its rich and teeming medina, and the many Medrasas (schools with rooms grouped around a courtyard) and old palaces. We will also spend a day going to Meknes and the Roman city of Volubilis. The last four nights will be spent in the Rif, the northern most region, where we will spend a night in the Andalusian influenced city of Chefchaouen, before proceeding to Tangiers, an international



zone from the 1920s until independence, and mecca for the beat poets and novelists of the 1960s. You will depart from there or Casablanca for flights to Europe and home.

Our hotels have all been selected for their special and unique qualities, and for their intimacy. (we shun whenever possible the sorts of places that lots of large groups go to). In the case of Marrakech, Fez and Skoura they are converted houses or palaces, referred to as “Riads” all in the center of the old towns and are each unique. Everything (except personal items, eg. laundry and



communications) is included in the trip, once you step off the plane, and with the small group that we will be, we can be flexible and respond to whatever our whims and preferences are at the moment.

You may view an album of images from the 2019 trip by visiting:

<http://www.stephenharby.com/photos/morocco>

Detailed Itinerary

Tuesday, November 12, 2024; depart from US

Depart individually from home cities, crossing the Atlantic and arriving in Europe to connect for flights to Marrakech. Or fly direct to Casablanca on Royal Air Maroc.

Day 1, Wednesday, November 13: Arrival, transfer to Marrakech

Arrival at Marrakech's Menara Airport (RAK), where you will be welcomed and escorted to the hotel.

Check in at the Riad Kniza, an exquisite and unique restored traditional house comprising a number of courtyards. The attentive staff will look after every need, serving daily breakfast and other meals as we choose. We will also explore local restaurants together or individually for dinner.

Day 2, Thursday, November 14
Marrakech

No longer the secret of the travel cognoscenti that it was ten years ago, Marrakech is now recognized as one of the world's great cities. With the design



The Souk in Marrakech (left and right below) is a warren of passageways lit from above. Views can be glimpsed through doorways of tile paved courtyards (above).

flair of Paris, the ethnic diversity of New York, the commercial heartbeat of Hong Kong, and a history to rival any city of Europe, Marrakech is above all a city of heart and soul — a city of sunlight on rough pink walls, of fragrant, richly-hued spices, and of rose petals floating in slowly trickling fountains.

The defining landmark of Marrakech is the 12th century tiled minaret of the Koutoubia mosque, and there is no better place to begin our journey into this enticing city. From here we will begin our exploration on foot in the ancient pink-walled medina.

In the early evening, we will head towards the frenetic Djemaa el Fnaa, the greatest square in all of Africa — and perhaps the world. It was once the ultimate destination for traders from places as diverse as Venice, sub-Saharan Africa, and Asia. Today, it provides ever-changing entertainment for Moroccans and foreigners alike, reaching its climax at sunset when the square is alive with storytellers, healers, snake charmers, acrobats, and countless food stalls. Walk through the square to experience its intensity and to perhaps enjoy the view from the terrace of a rooftop café. The entire Djemaa el Fnaa has been designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Cultural Space (one of only a handful in the world), due to its unique

role in transmitting oral history and tradition from one generation to another. We may have dinner at Tangia, in the mellah (Jewish quarter) of Marrakech, featuring home-cooked Moroccan-style food. Tangia is considered the first Moroccan bistro.

Day 3, Friday, November 15
Marrakech

Today we will make a day trip to Essaouira, a picturesque seaside town about 2-3 hours from Marrakech.

We shall have dinner at Le Fondouk, a chic bar-restaurant featuring Moroccan cuisine with a Mediterranean flare.

Day 4, Saturday, November 14
Marrakech

Today we will resume our walking and driving tour of Marrakech. We will begin at the tropical Majorelle Gardens, lovingly restored under the patronage of the late Yves St. Laurent. Following this we will visit the adjoining small, but excellent Islamic Art Museum located in the home of painter Jacques Majorelle.



The Balance of this day is free for individual exploration and shopping in the many souks.

Day 5, Sunday, November 17
Marrakech

At the opulent Saadian Tombs, we will discover the mausoleum of a great dynasty which once ruled North Africa. This treasure was lost until the beginning of the 20th century when aerial photographs of the medina revealed its existence.

We will wander through the Dar Si Said Museum of traditional crafts housed in a 19th century palace

At the ruins of the Badi'a Palace, we will find the 800-year-old wooden minbar (pulpit) from the Koutoubia mosque restored by New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art. The New York Times writes that the minbar "originally consisted of more than a million differently carved pieces of bone and colored woods, some pieces the size of sesame seeds."



The Kasbah of Ait Benhaddou (above) and that of Telouet (below)

Day 6, Monday, November 18
Marrakech to Skoura Oasis (near Ourzazate)

Today we will begin our journey around Morocco, leaving Marrakech over the precipitous and lofty Tizn Tichka pass of the High Atlas mountains. Nestled among these craggy peaks and valleys are a number of pisé (rammed earth) Kasbah structures, which film buffs will be surprised to learn served as the setting for dozens of movies from *Gladiator* to *Lawrence of Arabia*. We will visit Telouet and the UNESCO restored Ait Ben

Haddou before continuing on to Skoura Oasis (5-6 hours of driving). We will arrive at the Skoura oasis and transfer by desert-ready 4x4 to Dar Ahlam, an enchanted place in the form of a traditional Kasbah: it is likely to take its rightful place among the more special and memorable settings we will have experienced together. During our stay of two nights, everything will be provided here: All meals, snacks, and drinks (except French Wines and Champagne; Hammam (Turkish bath), swimming pool, Jacuzzi; Guided 4x4 excursions (arranged by hotel) to nearby areas of great scenic beauty.

When we have had a chance to refresh and relax, a private dinner will be arranged for us.

Day 7, Tuesday, November 19
Skoura Oasis

Today is at leisure to relax and enjoy the facilities and surroundings at Dar Ahlam and to take excursions organized by the staff to the surrounding points of interest in the oasis. We may be invited to enjoy the sunset at a nearby overlook, where our evening aperitif, snacks and even dinner can be served.





The old Riads of Fès are often packed with caprets for sale. The view of Fès as we approach it (below).



Day 8, Wednesday, November 20 to Skoura Oasis to Erfoud

Today we will head east along the millennium-old trading route (total driving today is about five hours) to Erfoud, stopping in the Dades and Todghra valleys en route. The nearby Tafilalet Oasis once held an enormous importance as the last stop on the trans-Saharan trading route before Timbuktu. This oasis is also the home of the dynasty of His Majesty King Mohamed VI, the Alaouite dynasty, which has ruled

Morocco for the last four centuries. We will spend this night at the Xaluca Maadid Kasbah Hotel or the Kasbah Hotel Chergui.

Day 9, Thursday, November 21 Erfoud to Fès

For those that wish, we can provide an early morning jaunt (about forty minutes) to the legendary dunes of Erg Chebbi at Merzouga, on the edge of the Sahara. As you witness the sun rising from the east over the constantly

shifting desert dunes in the Sahara—one of Morocco’s greatest sights, contemplate that ancient Morocco was at the very edge not only of the Islamic world, but of the known world. Maghreb, the Arabic name for Morocco, means the West.

We will head north to Fès through the scenic cedar forests of the Middle Atlas Mountains following the green Ziz River valley. (about six hours). Our home for the next four nights will be the Riad Fès, a traditional courtyard house



from the turn of the last century. It has been chosen for its intimacy and fine details inspired by Andalusian architects and craftsmen.

Day 10, Friday, November 22 Fès

Scholars, architects, historians and artists travel from all over the world to visit the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Fès, a remarkably preserved city which functions largely as it did in the Middle Ages when it was an important center of culture and famed for its university.

Step back six centuries into the medieval world of Fès, whose cobbled streets are filled with ancient mosques, towering green-glazed minarets and crumbling fondouks (hostels for travelers and their animals). Narrow doorways offer glimpses into private worlds, revealing peaceful courtyards filled with carved cedar, brilliantly colored mosaic tiles and delicately carved stucco ornament. In Fès, veiled women hurry through the winding streets, donkeys, laden with their wares, take their time, and proud artisans craft objects much as their forefathers did centuries ago.

Highlights of our full-day visit include the Bou Inania Medersa (koranic university), the Fondouk Nejjarine (which has an excellent museum), the shrine of Moulay Idriss II, countless souks and Fès' famous tanneries. We will also visit the Attarine, one of the city's most impressively beautiful medersas. It has been newly reopened after four years of careful restoration.

Day 11, Saturday, November 23 Fès

We leave Fès on a day trip today which includes the ruins of Volubilis and Meknes (total driving about three hours). Imperial Meknes, whose spectacular city gates are among the finest in the Arab world, was built by the once feared Moulay Ismaïl, who modeled his capital on the image of Versailles. We will see his tomb and other sites of interest, including the underground granaries and the vast imperial stables, which once held 12,000 horses.

Not far away are the extensive Roman ruins at Volubilis, the capital of the province of Mauritania. Here we will find a triumphal arch still standing and some outstanding mosaics still located in situ. Nearby is Moulay Idriss, the

holiest Muslim site in Morocco. At its center lies the tomb (zaouia) of the man who brought Islam to Morocco twelve centuries ago. (Note that as non-Muslims, we will not be allowed to enter into the holy precinct of Moulay Idriss.)

Day 12, Sunday, November 24 Fès

Continuing with our visit to the sites of Fès, we will see the Dar Batha Museum, which has a particularly impressive pottery collection dating to the 16th century. Next we will see the stunning gates to the royal palace and then the adjacent Jewish quarter and 17th century Ibn Dana Synagogue.

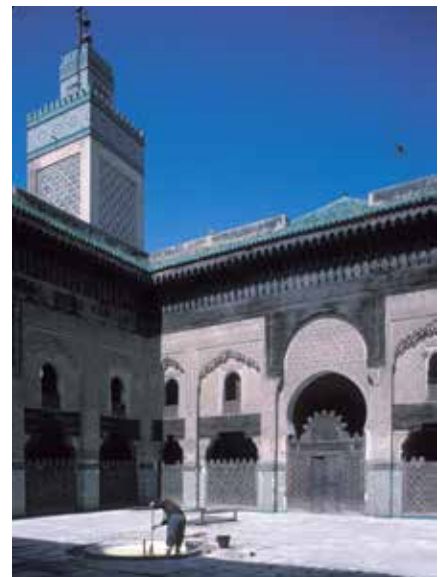
This afternoon is planned for independent exploration or shopping.

Day 13, Monday, November 25 Fès to Chefchaouen

Today we leave the Middle Atlas region and head north into the Rif, the northernmost portion of the country, which is the land mass meeting Spain at the Straits of Gibraltar and separating the Atlantic Ocean from Mediterranean Sea. It was to this region that the Moors from Andalusia fled Spanish persecution in the 15th century, and the cities of



Fès: Medersa Bou Anani (left and right), Najarine (below)





Meknès from the terrace of the Hotel Transatlantique (left) and Volubilis (above and below)

Chefchaouen and Tétouan, which we will visit resemble those parts of southern Spain from which they came. Our four hour drive from Fès will bring us to Chefchaouen (Chaouen for the Moroccans), the “blue city”. It is so named after its blue tinted stucco

walls, said to either repel mosquitoes or symbolize the sea and the sky. We will spend the night in the Riad Lina on the edge of the Medina.

Day 14, Tuesday, November 26
Chefchaouen to Tanger

Continuing up to the Mediterranean coast, we will reach Tétouan and make a stop before continuing to Tanger. Tétouan, Morocco’s second largest port, offers evidence of its many layers of

cultural influence from Phoenicians, to Moors, to Sephardic Jews, to the Spanish, when it became the capital of Spanish Morocco in 1913, which it remained until Morocco’s independence in 1956. Its Medina is a UNESCO World Heritage site.

We will reach Tanger, our final stop, in the afternoon. With its long history of having been fought over, as befits its strategic location at the entrance





Mabrouka, once the secluded sanctuary of fashion legends Yves Saint Laurent and Pierre Bergé, set in lush gardens near the Medina. It has been given new life by London design guru, Jasper Conran.

Day 15, Wednesday, November 27
Tanger

Today we will spend visiting a range of sites within the old city and in the surrounding residential districts, to include some private houses (Dar Hosni /Barbara Hutton/, Dar Sinclair /Hamish Bowles/, Dar Kharroubia/ David Herbert), route de la Montagne, Anglican Church, the Kasbah quarter, including the museum, the Petit Socco square and the Mendoubia garden. [note that our visits to the many private houses will depend on securing permission from the owners.]

Day 16, Thursday, November 28
(Thanksgiving)

Today, Thanksgiving in the US, we will journey south of Tanger to the Atlantic coast, where we will immerse ourselves



View into a courtyard in Meknès (left), agrand villa in Tanger, and Sunset over Meknès (below)

in the remarkable garden, Rohuna, discovered in a dream and created twenty years ago by Milanese horticulturist and garden designer, Umberto Pasti.

Day 17, Friday, November 29 Depart
Tanger for the homeward journey

You will be transferred to the airport at Tanger for your departing flight.



For Pricing and Registration Information

Please Contact:

Stephen Harby Invitational
718 Cedar Street
Santa Monica, CA 90405

310 450 8239

info@stephenharby.org