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## Secrets of Morocco

*Take in the vibrant highlights of Morocco's bustling cities before venturing out into the desert for three days as you cross the sand the traditional way - by camel caravan. You will camp under the stars, mingle with bedouins and learn of local traditions and folklore. Fill your stomach with locally prepared dishes and explore the lesser visited quarters of the desert and the surrounding towns. Explore cave dwellings and underground cities, buzzing bazaars and tangled medinas. The perfect combination of 'must see' Morocco and the hidden local side to this fascinating country.*

### **Day 1 - Arrival Casablanca**

Welcome to Morocco! On arrival at Casablanca Airport, you will be met by our representative and transferred to your hotel. While this is an arrival day and you may arrive at any time, please note that hotel rooms are generally only available after midday, and that there will be a welcome meeting with your leader tonight. If you arrive with time to spare, then a great option for your limited time in Casablanca is to visit the art deco Villa des Arts. This gorgeous gallery dates back to the 1930s and holds numerous exhibitions of contemporary Moroccan and international art. For a different type of cultural experience, discover the fascinating Museum of Judaism and learn about its unique Moroccan history.

*Overnight Hotel Les Saisons or similar*

### **Day 2 - Moulay Idriss**

Today, you will travel to Meknes, the sixth largest city in the kingdom, and former capital of Morocco. Discover the charming streets of Meknes' medina – the old walled section of the city. Enter via the northern gate, Bab Berdaine, and walk to the shrine of Moulay Ismail who, in the 17th century, transformed Meknes from a provincial town into a spectacular Imperial city.

Continue to the sacred pilgrimage village of Moulay Idriss. Once forbidden to non-Muslims, explore the delightful medina of this ancient town that offers an excellent insight into traditional Moroccan life. See where the faithful gather to pay homage at the tomb of Moulay Idriss I, who was the great-grandson of Mohammed and brought Islam to Morocco. At sunset, enjoy great views over the plains of Volubilis below. Your accommodation tonight is in a homestay with a local family, where you will enjoy a traditional home cooked meal with your host family. Bathroom facilities may be shared and you may be sharing a room with two or three others. (B,L,D)

*Overnight La Colombe blanche or similar*

### **Day 3 - Fes**

Today, enjoy a guided tour of the UNESCO World Heritage listed archaeological site of Volubilis, once a provincial Roman capital, a distant outpost of the empire. The remains of this once bustling city make an undeniably impressive sight, explore the site on foot with your local guide and witness the fantastic mosaics along the Decumanus Maximus, many of which remain intact.

Return to the spectacular Imperial city of Meknes, Sultan Moulay Ismail's own version of Versailles built with a labour force of over 25,000 slaves, where you'll have a few hours to explore. If you're feeling hungry, and adventurous, you might find yourself tempted to try a camel burger for lunch at a local restaurant in the medina.

This afternoon, you will continue on to Fes, where you'll spend the next two nights in riad-style accommodation on the edge of this huge, well-preserved medieval city. Fes is the spiritual and cultural heart of Morocco; vibrant, noisy, fascinating and overwhelming – a visual and pungent feast for the senses.

After checking into your hotel in the late afternoon, enjoy a memorable dinner of one of the city's signature dishes, the salty and sweet Pastille. (B,D)

*2 nights Riad Tafilalet or similar*

#### **Day 4 - Fes**

Fes is made up of three distinct 'cities', and today you will explore the 'old city', known locally as Fes el Bali. Visit the Medresse el Attarine, the tanneries and the splendid Fondouk Nejjarine, a beautifully restored 18th century inn, Fes is arguably the world's most fascinating and confounding old city.

Medieval Fes was one of the world's greatest centres for both Islamic and Jewish education and culture, with religious institutions, libraries and mosques of great renown. Wander through the twisting streets and alleyways, passing donkeys piled high with goods, and explore the speciality sections that divide the souk. Filled with historic khans, medresses and dye-pits, stalls loaded with fruits, herbs and soups. The squawk of chickens, the aromas of exotic spices and the clanging of copper workers fills the air, it's not hard to imagine yourself back in the Middle Ages!

After a full day of exploring, return to your hotel in the late afternoon for a relaxing evening away from the buzz and bustle of the medina. (B)

#### **Day 5 - Bhalil**

This morning enjoy a leisurly breakfast before departing for Bhalil. This charming village splashed with pastel hues of pink, yellow and blue is unique for its troglodyte houses. Dating back to the 4th century, these cave dwellings were built into the picturesque mountainside as a way to keep out the heat of summer, and the cold of winter.

The remainder of day is at leisure to explore and mingle with the friendly locals as they go about their daily lives. Wander the alleyways and witness women working the hundreds of strings and buttons used to create the traditional Jelleba. Cross the stone bridges and climb to the top of the town and take in the view of the beautiful valley below. (B)

*Overnight Inane N'zaha Fes or similar*

#### **Day 6 – Marrakech**

Today you will make your way to the ancient, exotic city wrapped in European modernity, Marrakech. A real feast for the senses! Be enticed by the alluring aromas and brilliant colours of the spice markets and delectable foods. Be mesmerised by acrobats and the sound of musicians performing in the perfumed gardens that line the Djemma el Fna, one of the largest public spaces in the world and unique to Marrakech.

The hive of activity continues as night falls. Snake charmers, henna-painters, performers and storytellers share the square with a street food bazaar, packed with stalls loaded with Moroccan delicacies, including snail soup and the famous Moroccan pastries that can be enjoyed with a glass of

freshly squeezed orange juice. Finish your day with a relaxing cup of tea at one of the roof-top restaurants overlooking this fascinating square. (B)

*2 nights Riad Amina or similar*

### **Day 7 - Marrakech**

After breakfast, you will be met by your local guide and set off on a morning tour of the old medina, exploring the bustling souks that are the lifeblood flowing through the city. Discover the many salons, chambers and tranquil courtyards filled with the scent of orange blossoms that make up Bahia Palace. This splendid mansion was built in 1866 for a former slave who rose to power within the government. Continue to the Marrakech Museum, itself a former palace, it is now home to a collection of Moroccan art and sculpture. Visit the Koutoubia Mosque, its famous minaret is the prototype for others of its kind around the world, including La Giralda in Seville, before walking back through the streets of the old medina to the Jemaa el Fna.

The rest of the day is free for you to explore further or shop in the bazaar. Perhaps visit the tropical gardens of the French painter Jacques Majorelle or check out the ruins of the Palais Badi, once one of the most beautiful palaces in the world.

This evening at 6.00pm, get a real taste of the city as you embark on a guided 'foodie tasting trail' around the streets! (B,D)

### **Day 8 - Ait Benhaddou**

This morning you will drive to Ait Benhaddou (approx. 6hrs) covering some spectacular mountain roads including Morocco's highest pass, Tizi n'Tichka at 2,260m. Found on the edges of the Sahara, perched on a hilltop and almost unchanged since the 11th century, Ait Benhaddou is one of Morocco's most iconic sites.

Once an important stop for caravans passing through as they carried salt across the Sahara, returning with gold, ivory and slaves, today its grand kasbah has been listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site, with its fortified village being a fine example of clay architecture. If you think this fascinating place looks familiar, that may just be because the town has a long list of film and TV credits, including Lawrence of Arabia, Game of Thrones and Gladiator. Explore the winding streets of the old town on foot, a walk up to the top of the hill will be rewarded with beautiful views across the surrounding plains. (B,D)

*Overnight Riad Maktouba or similar*

### **Day 9 - Erg Cheggaga**

This morning you will pass through the rugged and desolate Jbel Tadrart ranges, followed by seas of sand, and even the occasional desert oasis of date palms, arriving at the frontier town of M'Hamid. Here you will meet your camel, and go for a short ride through the dunes. Jumping into 4WD vehicles,

you will follow the rough track running parallel to the Algerian border across the stony Hamada desert, whose only populace is small scatterings of nomadic people and their camels.

You will reach the massive Erg Cheggaga dunes in the late afternoon. An erg is a vast sea of shifting wind-swept sand that's formed into picturesque, undulating crests and valleys. The Erg Cheggaga is one of the world's iconic landscapes, with towering dunes up to 150m in height. A one hour camel trek will bring you to your camp, where you will enjoy a traditional dinner. (B,D)

*2 nights Desert camp*

### **Day 10 - Erg Cheggaga**

After breakfast this morning, you will again climb aboard your camel and make your way to Ait Oum Saleh (approx. 4hrs trek) where you will enjoy lunch. The rest of the day is yours at leisure to relax and enjoy your time in the desert. (B,L,D)

### **Day 11 - Tafraoute**

After breakfast, climb aboard your ship of the desert bound for Fom Zguid (approx. 3hrs trek) where you will bid farewell to your furry friend and meet your driver, who will transfer you to the serene hidden gem that is the village of Tafraoute.

Nestled in a valley and surrounded by rocky granite outcrops, Tafraoute is far away from the buzz of the big cities. Here you can experience the traditional Berber culture of this region, exploring the arts and crafts and their unique way of life. The locals are friendly, the food is fantastic, and the surroundings are nothing short of spectacular. (B)

*Overnight Kasbah Chez Amaliya or similar*

### **Day 12 - Ait Baha**

This morning you will continue your journey south. Visit the unusual land art installation known as the 'painted rocks' as you leave Tafraoute, making your way to Agadir, and then on to the wild and natural beaches of Mirleft. Stop for lunch at the beautiful Legzira beach with its spectacular rock formations before continuing on, heading inland to Ait Baha for the 2 next nights. (B,D)

*2 nights Ksar Massa or similar*

### **Day 13 - Ait Baha**

Today is yours at leisure, you might like to relax in the spa, go fishing or why not enjoy a surfing and yoga lesson arranged by your hotel? (B,L,D)

#### **Day 14 - Essaouira**

Today, travel to the old fishing town of Essaouira, a city where the medina brushes up against the Atlantic Ocean. Sandstone walkways contrast with whitewashed houses, bright blue sky and the sand of the surrounding beaches and dunes. This artists' town was once home to sizeable British and Jewish populations, and its charm has seduced people like Orson Welles and Jimi Hendrix, who spent much of his time here in the 1960s. It is one of North Africa's most attractive places, and you will soon find yourself slipping into the easy-going rhythm of this Moroccan town with its European seaside twist. Your riad features a central courtyard and is beautifully designed and decorated in traditional Moroccan style, cozy yet historical. This is likely to be one of the most memorable stays of your journey. (B)

*Overnight Maison du Sud or similar*

#### **Day 15 - Casablanca**

Today after breakfast you will make your way toward Casablanca, stopping along the way at the fortified Portuguese town El Jadida. Often known as 'the Cité Portugaise' you will have time here to explore the UNESCO listed medina before continuing on to Casablanca, where the remainder of the day is yours at leisure. (B)

*Overnight Hotel Les Saisons or similar*

#### **Day 16 - Departure**

Following breakfast, today is at leisure until it is time for your transfer to Casablanca airport for your onward departure. (B)

#### **Inclusions**

- Return airport transfers
- 15 nights accommodation
- 15 Breakfasts, 3 Lunches, 8 Dinners
- Services of an English speaking local guide in each city
- Services of a fully escorted guide for the duration of the itinerary
- Private air conditioned transportation
- Entrance fees as per the itinerary
- Sightseeing as per the itinerary
- Camels for trekking

#### **Exclusions**

- International flights
- Drinks unless otherwise mentioned
- Visas
- Travel Insurance
- Tips
- Inoculations
- Items of a personal nature
- Anything not mentioned in the itinerary

