

8 DAYS IN MOROCCO

IMPERIAL CITIES AND BEYOND

PRESENTATION



The four imperial cities: Marrakech, Rabat, Meknes, and Fes are the classic visits of Morocco. In the medieval alleys of the medinas, where trade and crafts are lively and colorful, sounds and perfumes are as intense as the scent of spices. The Moorish architecture of the ancient buildings, mainly still in use, is

unique: arcades, arabesques, stuccoes, finely chiselled cedar wood ceilings make this towns special. In addition to the known "musts", our program integrates unique visits that make this trip an “experience” in the pure TransAfrica style.

Enjoy exclusive visits off the beaten track. Meet the people of remote villages and experience first-hand the history of the two more emblematic items from the Magreb: hand-woven carpets and salt bars. Starting from the artisanal production and ending at auctions and markets where these items are sold, in the same way as centuries ago. On the Atlas Mountain range, we will have the privilege to be accepted into a Berber family home. After the traditional welcome tea, meet with the women weaving on wooden looms. Higher in the mountains we will discover rudimentary mines where men dig out salt bars, still manually, cutting them in a traditional shape as it was done at the time of the caravan trades. Further down the valleys, in a protected yard, we will witness a traditional carpet auction where the women coming from the remote villages of the Atlas bring their precious work of months, and the barkers offer it to the buyers: carpet merchants. A timeless show where we will be the only foreigners. In a large rural market, among donkeys, goats and rams, we discover the salt bars ready to be sold.

To make this travel experience even more remarkable, most nights will be spent in Riads selected for their comfort, architecture, and the sumptuous beauty of the traditional interior design.

PROGRAM



Day 1 SUNDAY: MARRAKECH in

Assistance and transfer to the hotel.

Our guide will be waiting for you at the exit of the international area of the airport for the transfer to the hotel.

Free dinner, overnight stay at the Riad Palais Calipau or at the Novotel 4 Stars.

DAY 2: MARRAKECH

Marrakech was one of the most important caravan terminals throughout history. The minaret of the Koutoubia is the symbol of the town, perfectly preserved it is a large tower of 70 meters high dating back to the twelfth century, at the time of the Almohads. The Ben Youssef Madrasa displays the most beautiful carved cedar wood decorations, stucco, and zellij tiles. The sumptuous Bahia palace is built in a typical Arab architecture. An exclusive and trendy visit discover the Al Maaden Museum of Contemporary African Art, the second most important museum dedicated to contemporary African art on this continent. Recently built, it offers a permanent collection, temporary exhibitions, and the "sculpture garden" giving us a picture of the emerging protagonists of the African art scene. Lunch in a restaurant and return to the Hotel for a short relax.

In the late afternoon, we will be in the beating heart of Marrakech: Djemma el Fna square. Strolling through this square is an unforgettable experience: every day a local and cosmopolitan crowd wanders among musicians, jugglers, storytellers, magicians, acrobats, snake charmers, and fortune tellers. Twilight is the ideal time to start the visit of the Souk, which thanks to the mild temperature becomes even more alive: a labyrinth of sounds and colours, people in traditional clothes, spices, perfumes, and the different artifacts created by skilled Moroccan artisans...

In the evening, we will return to Djemma El Fna square that will welcome us with thousands of lanterns.

For dinner, we will be spoiled as we can choose between the "street food" of the numerous stalls offering a wide range of tasty specialties, or the restaurants facing the plaza.

Return to our comfortable Riad Palais Calipau or Novotel 4 Stars.

Day 3: CASABLANCA AND RABAT

Morning departure for an intense day. We will reach Casablanca before lunch. The architecture of the city centre dates back to the French colonial era with buildings inspired by the Art Deco style, we will visit the spectacular Hassan II Mosque, one of the few mosques open to non-Muslims. It is the largest religious building in Morocco with one of the tallest minarets in the world and tens of thousands of wood carvings, Zelig decorations (glazed tiles), stained glass, marble, mosaics, chiselled ceilings, and stucco. The mosque, inaugurated in 1993, is a masterpiece of modern engineering and architecture.

Less populous than Casablanca, Rabat, the capital of the kingdom, is an elegant town, where the King lives, where the parliament is located, and where all the embassies have their delegation. The historical vestiges dating back to antiquity are interesting. Visit to the Casbah des Oudaïas, dating from the 11th century, still inhabited and perfectly preserved with its narrow alleys and walls always whitened with bright colours, and the well-kept Andalusian Garden. Also from that period are the remains of the Hassan Mosque, near the Mausoleum of Mohamed V guarded by royal guards in sumptuous traditional costumes. In the evening we will reach our comfortable Riad for dinner and overnight stay. Riad Dar Alia in local architecture or similar.

Day 4: MEKNES AND VOLUBILIS

Another intense day. Meknes owes its splendours to Sultan Moulay Ismail, who in the 17th century founded this Imperial City and the country's first Arab dynasty. Led by a local guide we visit the spectacular Bab (door) El Mansour built by a renegade Christian who passed into the service of the sultan. It is said that El Mansour was eventually executed by the sultan. Brief visit of the Medina. The ruins of Volubilis are the largest archaeological site in Morocco, already Carthaginian in the third century BC. In the 1st century of our era, Volubilis was the westernmost capital of a vast Romanized but semi-autonomous territory that included a large part of today's Algeria and Tunisia. Continuation to Fez, which we will reach in the evening.

Dinner and overnight stay at Riad Yacout, traditional building, interiors and furnishings are in the style of a Moorish residence, recently restored and equipped with every comfort, it will be our base for two nights.

Day 5: FES

In our opinion, Fes has the most beautiful and complex medina in North Africa, to which we will dedicate the whole day, accompanied by a local guide. The old town, built in a hilly area, is composed of two distinct but communicating parts: Fez al Bali and Fez el Djedid; in this universe of narrow medieval alleys, caravanserais, souks, the crowd is always on the move: donkeys loaded with goods, the scent of spices, Arabic and Berber music, the voices, the calls of the muezzin. At lunch, we will taste the refined gastronomic specialties of this sophisticated town, spicy and mild flavours that have made the cuisine of Fes special. Bab (door) Boujloud, chouwara the court of dyers, leather colorful slippers, in an architectural contest full of cedar wood arabesques as in the madrasa of Boua Inania, the mosque of Kairaouine and much more will fill this day of walking in a lively medieval and urban environment.

Dinner and overnight stay, return to our base: Riad El Yacout or similar.

Day 6: MOUNTAINS AND CEDAR FORESTS

The route will wind through valleys, villages, and mountains of the Middle Atlas: Ifrane will amaze us with its climate and alpine architecture. The town is a popular mountain resort.

We will leave the main road for a path between valleys and peaks through great cedar forests.

Arrival in the afternoon at a tiny Berber village in the mountains.

Dinner and overnight stay in a welcoming structure, locally managed, basic but clean self-contained rooms. Dinner and overnight stay at the Gite Rahhabia or similar.

Day 7: THE CARPET AUCTION

An exclusive itinerary, off the beaten track to discover the most authentic Berber traditions.

Dirt tracks will take us to the most remote villages. We will be received in private Berber homes.

After sharing the traditional welcome tea, we will witness the weaving on an artisan loom what are considered some of the most beautiful Moroccan carpets, produced by the women of the Atlas Mountains. Further up, we will arrive to the rudimentary mines where men dig the millenary bars of salt to be loaded on the mules that will carry them to the valley. In the afternoon we will reach a market on the day of the carpet auction, where the women take the carpets woven for months.

The woman will hand the carpet to a barker who praises its characteristics to a small crowd of merchants coming from all over the country, and the auction starts. We will reach our hotel in the evening.

Dinner and overnight stay at the Continental hotel. Located on the slopes of the Middle Atlas, overlooking the valleys below, swimming pool. Air-conditioned self-contained rooms. Or a Riad.

Day 8: THE SALT MARKET

Departure in the morning, we will stop in a village on the market day, colorful goods, crowds, with a large quantity of rams and goats, local handicrafts, and the salt merchants who propose the bars that we have seen quarried in the mountains, bars with a particular shape that has remained unchanged for centuries.

After leaving the valleys between mountain ranges and having lunch in a restaurant, we will cross the steppes that herald the arrival in Marrakech, which we will reach between late afternoon and early evening.

Day use rooms available and transfer to the airport.