

Experience Morocco: The Hidden Oasis



April 6–20, 2019

Hosted by Travel Concepts' Pamela and Don Rose

Saturday, April 6: Casablanca - Rabat

Salaam Aleikum! Welcome to Morocco. On arrival to Casablanca airport, we will be transferred to our riad (a Moroccan mansion with lush courtyard gardens) in Rabat. Rabat is the elegant capital of Morocco and its first Imperial city. Tonight, we will enjoy welcome dinner at the riad. (D)

Sunday, April 7: Rabat

This morning after a delicious breakfast, we will join our local guide for a tour of Rabat's old medina. It contains numerous fine Arab monuments, some dating from the 10th to 15th century Almohad and Merenid dynasties, and others that are far older. The earliest known settlement is Sala, occupying an area now known as the Chellah, where we will visit the remains of the citadel and Roman ruins. We will also see the vast minaret of the Hassan Mosque and explore the lovely walled quarter known as the Kasbah des Oudaias. Balance of the day is at leisure. Perhaps shop in the souk, take a walk by the sea or relax by our elegant Riad's rooftop pool. (B)

Monday, April 8: Meknes, Roman Volubilis & Fes

This morning we are off to Fes, via Meknes and the Roman site of Volubilis. We will pass cork forests and beautiful lush rolling hills on the drive to Meknes, a city full of history and intrigue, where we will meet our local guide for a walking tour. From the northern gate, Bab Berdaine, we walk to the shrine of Moulay Ismail who, in the 17th century, turned Meknes from a provincial town to a spectacular Imperial city. After lunch we are off to Volubilis which was once a provincial Roman capital, a distant outpost of the empire. As we approach it we can see it prominently sited along the edge of a high plateau. Today it is the most impressive Roman site in Morocco and was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1997. Archaeologists found remarkable mosaics forming the floors of several houses lining the Decumanus Maximus. We can see

representations of the Labours of Hercules, the Chariot of Amphitrite, which is drawn by a seahorse, as well as the famous 'Nymphs Bathing'. Wandering among the ruins of the basilica, the capitol, oil press and the great houses of Orpheus and Ephesus, it's easy to imagine what life was like two thousand years ago. We end the day in a spectacular 17th Century Palace Riad in the vibrant city of Fes (B)

Tuesday, April 9 Fes

The spiritual and cultural heart of Morocco, Fes is vibrant, noisy, fascinating and overwhelming - a visual and pungent assault on the senses. Today we head into the old city, known locally as Fes el Bali, arguably the world's most fascinating and confounding old city. Medieval Fes was one of the world's great centres of education and culture: both Islamic and Jewish. Its religious institutions and its libraries are legendary. Its mosques are of great renown. It was to Fes that many of the Muslims (and Jews) expelled from Spain by Ferdinand and





Isabella came in 1492. As we walk through the streets and alleyways, passing historic khans, medresses and dye-pits, it is not hard to imagine ourselves back in the Middle Ages. We spend the day exploring the old city, visiting Medrasa Bouanania and the splendid Funduk Nejjarine, a beautifully restored 18th century inn. After a day like no other we will return to our Riad where the serenity of the hammam spa and pool may call to you. (B)

Wednesday, April 10: Merzouga

This morning we say good-bye to Fes and drive south, passing through a variety of spectacular scenery as we make our way to Merzouga and the Sahara Desert via Midelt and Errachidia. Our first stop will be at Ifran, referred to as "the Switzerland of Morocco", and then to Merzouga via Midlet and the Ziz Valley. During this journey we'll stop to visit the Barbary apes and experience glimpses of the Middle Atlas and Higher Atlas mountains. We will notice how the scenery changes to reveal hints of the desert as we approach the city Er Rachidia. After a stop in Midelt, our journey continues along the luxuriant Ziz Valley, stopping for panoramic views along the way. We will drive through welcoming Berber villages to Erfoud, and then Rissani, the foundation of the Alaouite dynasty - the current ruling royal family in Morocco. We will arrive in Merzouga at the end of the day where we will be welcomed with a glass of mint tea before we check in to our hotel set right on the edge of the sand dunes. Dinner tonight is at the hotel. (B,D)

Thursday, April 11: Merzouga

After breakfast in the hotel we will start an explorative journey of the area. We will mount our friendly camels, guided by an experienced camel man and explore within the sand sea of Merzouga.

The Erg Chebbi dunes are the most stunning in the country and an experience essential of any visit to Morocco. An erg is a vast sea of shifting wind-swept sand that's formed into picturesque undulating crests and valleys, and the Erg Chebbi is one of the world's classic landscapes of towering dunes, up to heights of over 150 metres. Overnight is at our luxurious desert camp with private bathrooms and showers. We will have dinner and entertainment and marvel at the millions of stars in the night sky. (B,D)

Friday, April 12: Dades Gorge and Valley of the Roses

This morning we mount our camels and have the magical experience of sitting on top of a sand dune in silence as we watch the sun rise between the giant dunes of the Sahara. We then return to our auberge and say goodbye to the desert and make our way towards Dades Gorges and the Valley of the

Roses. It's another classic drive with dramatic changes of landscape. Flanked on both sides by high limestone cliffs, Dades Valley features bizarre rock formations with picturesque kasbahs dotted amongst the crops and palms. We will drive into the gorge for a walk along the valley and have a picnic lunch in one of the shaded palmeries. Tonight we will stay in a Kasbah Inn built by the owner and his family in traditional Berber valley architecture with sun-dried bricks. We will dine on delicious classic Berber dishes. (B,L,D)

Saturday, April 13: Skoura Oasis

Today we travel south for four hours to the Skoura Oasis where we will spend the night. In days of old caravans laden with gold and spice reached Skoura, the camels must've been gasping. After a two-month journey across the Sahara, blue-robed Tuareg desert traders offloaded cargo from caravans in Skoura, where Middle Atlas mountaineers packed it onto mules headed to Fez. These caravans are no longer, but Skoura's historic mudbrick Kasbah castles remain. After checking in to our Kasbah Lodge we will go for a walk past palm groves to visit some of these ancient fortress castles. The rest of the day is free to relax and enjoy the pool and gardens of our Inn. (B)

Sunday, April 14: Ait Benhaddou, Marrakesh

We are off to Marrakesh! But first we have some stops along the way. Passing through the movie making capital of Morocco, Ouarzazate we will arrive at Ait Benhaddou for a visit and a tour. This is probably the best-preserved fortified kasbah in the country. With its dramatic walls of red earth, slit windows and crumbling towers, it is a magnificent example of a traditional stronghold. Chosen as a location for Hollywood films such as Lawrence of Arabia, Jewel in the Nile, and more recently Game of Thrones, Ait Benhaddou sits upon a lofty pinnacle of rock overlooking a river. Dating from around the 15th century, its importance as a trading post gradually waned, and today's inhabitants eke a living from farming ... and as film extras! Then it's over the Atlas range of mountains and spectacular scenery at the Tizi-n-Tichka Pass (2260 meters above sea level). We continue across the plains in to Marrakesh where we will check into our luxury boutique hotel and spa. (B)

Monday, April 15: Marrakech

Marrakech is a feast for the senses. We will be enticed by the alluring scents and brilliant colors of the spice markets, the sounds of the musicians, the rich folds of carpets, delectable foods, acrobats and perfumed gardens. After breakfast today, we will meet our local guide and set off on a morning tour of the old medina, through the bustling souks that are the lifeblood flowing through the city. We will explore tranquil



courtyards filled with the scent of orange blossom, and the many salons and chambers that make up Bahia Palace. This splendid mansion was built in 1866 for a former slave who rose to power within the government. Next, we will visit the Photography Museum, itself a former palace, which houses a fine collection of Moroccan art and sculpture. We will stop by the Koutoubia Mosque; its famous minaret is the prototype for others of its kind around the world, including La Giralda in Seville. Then we will walk back through the streets of the old medina to the Djemaa el-Fna. The rest of the day is free 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. Otherwise, perhaps head back into the medina, where every step brings a new smell, a new sight or a new gift to buy. Watch skilled artisans perfect their craft, practice your haggling skills or take a break from the hustle to sip on tea or share a tajine, filled with the pure scent of Morocco. (B)

Tuesday, April 16: Marrakech

Today is an exciting change of pace. This morning after breakfast we will be going to the world famous cooking school at the legendary restaurant La Maison Arabe. The restaurant which was started in 1946 was a favourite of Winston Churchill and Jacqueline Kennedy. At this half day workshop a Dada (traditional Moroccan cook) will teach us how to prepare a Moroccan lunch which we will then get to enjoy. The rest of the day is yours. Perhaps a shopping trip in the Medina, be pampered in one of Marrakesh's beautiful Hammams or play a round of golf at the 100 year old Royal Golf course. (B,L)

Wednesday, April 17: Essaouira

After breakfast we leave for Essaouira (approximately 3 hours), a city where the medina brushes up against the Atlantic Ocean and where we will spend the next two nights. Enroute we will see the famous goats in the Argan trees and visit a co-operative which employs and supports local women who process the nuts into the famous oil. The narrow streets of Essaouira are ideal for casual exploration. Their size

discourages cars, and on walk through the town it feels as though little has changed since the days of sea pirates. Sandstone walkways contrast with whitewashed houses, bright blue sky and the sand of the surrounding beaches and dunes. It is one of North Africa's most attractive places, and we will soon find yourself slipping into its easy-going rhythm of this Moroccan town with a European seaside twist. The fishing port is a serious commercial operation and there's much fun to be had observing the daily catch and its subsequent auction. Elsewhere there are numerous shops and several fine art galleries to distract a visitor, along with a wide variety of restaurants. Our tour leader and host will help guide you through the maze of options. Our 5 star resort and spa is located right on Essaouira's sandy beach and walking distance to the medina. (B)

Thursday, April 18: Essaouira at leisure

Today is at leisure. We will have time to explore, shop, experience a hammam with the local people and if you wish have a delicious seafood lunch from fish bought direct from the fishermen. (B)

Friday, April 19: Return to Marrakech

Mid-morning we will start the drive back to Marrakech. Once we have settled in to our boutique hotel, we will likely be drawn back to the Jemaa el Fna, and its surrounding medina. Tonight is our last night together and we will enjoy a memorable farewell dinner with a local family at their house. One last chance to experience the Moroccan hospitality and culture while enjoying bites of delicious home-cooked food. (B,D)

Saturday, April 20: Tour ends

Today we transfer to the airport where our trip ends and we say a fond farewell to our tour leader and driver.



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Tour Inclusions and Pricing

WHAT IS INCLUDED:

- Privately escorted by Travel Concepts' Pamela and Don Rose
- **14 nights accommodation**
 - 2 nights Rabat in a historic Riad
 - 2 nights in a beautifully renovated Riad situated in the heart of historic Fes.
 - 1 night in a stunning Kasbah with swimming pool, spa and Hamman. Set in a small oasis at the foot of the great Sahara sand dunes.
 - 1 night in a luxury desert camp.
 - 1 night in Dades Gorge in a hilltop Kasbah which is surrounded by the majestic mountains of the Atlas and Berber villages.
 - 1 night in a beautiful lodge in Skoura Oasis
 - 4 nights in Marrakech in a stunning boutique hotel and spa.
 - 2 nights in Essaouira in a beach front resort just minutes away from the medina, shops and restaurants.
- 15 breakfasts, 2 lunch & 4 dinners
- Services of a local English speaking guide throughout the trip. Local guides where noted.
- Entrance fees as detailed in the itinerary
- Gratuities (guides & drivers)
- All ground transportation & airport transfers

WHAT IS NOT INCLUDED:

- International airfare from Canada to Morocco
- Beverages and other meals not indicated in the itinerary
- Travel insurance (Travel Concepts will assist with this)
- Inoculations - Please see your travel health professional
- Personal expenses (laundry, telephone, shopping...)

THE DETAILS:

- The tour cost may be subject to change due to currency fluctuations and other conditions beyond the control of Travel Concepts
- Limited space, we encourage you to book early!
- A non-refundable deposit in the amount of \$1500 CAD is due at time of booking.
- The final balance is payable by January 29, 2019
- We strongly suggest that you purchase Trip Cancellation Insurance & Out-of-Country Medical coverage. Premiums will be quoted at time of booking.
- Please let us know if you need assistance with flights.
- Single Supplement is **\$1825**

TOUR PRICING:

\$4,999 CDN

Per person based on double/twin occupancy.

Single Supplement: \$1825 CDN

A non-refundable deposit of \$1500 CDN is due at time of booking.

Final balance due on January 29, 2019

Tour is based on a minimum of 12 participants



**For more information or to reserve your place,
please contact Pamela Rose**

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