

CUSTOMIZED PRIVATE TOUR OF MOROCCO PREPARED FOR:

Menorah: Arts, Culture, and Education

Preliminary

MAY 2 – 15, 2016

IMPERIAL CITIES

DAY 1: DEPART

Depart from your home city.

DAY 2: CASABLANCA AIRPORT / CASABLANCA / RABAT

Mid-day arrival in Casablanca where you meet your expert guide and continue to Rabat.

Approximate driving time 2 hours.

DAY 3: RABAT

Breakfast is at your hotel. Your tour of Rabat begins at the ancient necropolis of Chellah. A thriving city for nearly 1,000 years, Chellah's ruins date from the Roman through the Islamic periods and are a special favorite of bird-watchers. Visit the 18th century synagogue, Azhawi, built against the massive ochre ramparts of Rabat. Visit the picturesque labyrinthine Kasbah des Oudaias overlooking the Atlantic Ocean and the lovely gardens outside the Kasbah.

If time allows, visit the compound of the Royal Palace – assuming that King Mohamed VI is not in residence. The reign of this young king has ushered in an era of newfound optimism and a growing respect for human rights. In 2004, his wife gave birth to a son who will one day rule the Alaouite dynasty.

End your day, as the sun sets over the Atlantic, at the majestic Hassan Tower and the Mausoleum of Mohamed V. It was Mohamed V who brought independence to Morocco in 1956. Revered by both Muslims and Jews alike, his bravery in the face of the occupying Vichy regime during WWII, saved Moroccan Jews from the fate of their European brethren. His son, Hassan II, who ruled Morocco for 38 years, was buried here in 1999.

DAY 4: RABAT / CASABLANCA / MARRAKECH

Following breakfast, we depart Rabat for Marrakech by highway. En route we will have an overview of Casablanca including synagogue and the Jewish Museum of Casablanca. Although its collection is still quite formative this is the first Jewish Museum in a Muslim country. We continue with our overview of Casablanca and visit the exterior of the Mosque of Hasan II, dramatically built at the edge of the Atlantic Ocean. Built by the late King Hassan II at the end of his 40-year reign, this

outstanding edifice is larger than St. Peter's in Rome and is capable of holding 80,000 worshippers. We drive along the Oceanside cornice with a stop at the nearby Marabout of Sidi Abderrahman (a holy shrine built on a rocky outcropping in the Atlantic Ocean to which women travel from all over in search of miracles. We continue to Marrakech

Approximate driving time Rabat to Casablanca 1 to 1-1/2 hours depending on traffic
Approximate driving time Casablanca to Marrakech 3 to 3-1/2 hours depending on traffic

(If you wish to visit the interior of the Mosque entrance fee is 120MAD)

DAY 5: MARRAKECH

Breakfast is at your hotel. Explore the colorful souks (marketplaces) of Marrakech. Each trade – spices, carpets, jewelry, enamel, copper, brass and cedar – is situated in its unique quarter. You might see villagers bringing in their hand-made rugs to sell to the merchants or observe artisans hand-tooling crafts the way it has been done for centuries. You will also visit the medieval Medersa ben Youssef (Koranic university), one of the finest Islamic monuments in North Africa. Architecture aficionados will enjoy the delicate dome of the 12th century Koubba. Close to the Medersa are two of the most interesting cultural showplaces in Marrakech. The Museum de Marrakech is housed in the sumptuous 19th century Mnebhi Palace. Nearby is the Dar Bellarj cultural foundation. Established to showcase Moroccan culture, it is housed in a former hospital for storks. This afternoon you learn about the Jewish heritage of Marrakech. Visit the mellah of Marrakech, containing narrow streets, ancient synagogues and an extensive Jewish cemetery. The mellah was the home of native Spanish Jews famed for their rabbinic schools and scholars.

DAY 6: MARRAKECH

Breakfast is followed by a hands-on private cooking lesson.

This afternoon, visit the opulent Saadien Tombs, 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. Wander through the Dar Si Said Museum of traditional crafts housed in a 19th century palace and the nearby Maison Tisiwin, a private collection of indigenous crafts started by a Swiss collector and now open to the public. Then 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 to 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 then perhaps enjoy the view from the terrace of a rooftop café. The entire Djemaa el Fnaa was recently 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.

DAY 7: MARRAKECH / ESSAOUIRA / MARRAKECH

Breakfast is at your hotel. Full day tour to the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Essaouira. A former Portuguese colony on the Atlantic Ocean that has become something of an artists' colony, the enchanting streets of this fortified town were once the setting for Orson Welles' 1952 Othello. Be sure not to miss the picturesque street of the thuya workers, the oceanside ramparts, and the numerous art galleries and boutiques scattered about the whitewashed town. Visit the Mellah (the quarter) where Jewish people lived in the past. (Essaouira was once one-third Jewish, today there is but a handful of Jewish people who live here). We will drive by the Jewish cemetery to view it from the outside.

Approximate driving time to Essaouira 3 hours.

DAY 8: MARRAKECH / AIT BEN HADDOU / OUARZAZATE

Breakfast followed by an early morning drive to Ouarzazate, crossing the high Atlas. Enjoy the scenic drive of contrasting views, a vast valley containing Kasbahs and an oasis below. En route we will stop for a visit at an authentic Berber village. A picturesque day awaits us as we travel through the mountains. Visit of Kasbah aït Ben Hadou. Check in at hotel.

Approximate driving time 4 hours.

DAY 9: OUARZAZATE / ERFOUD / MERZOUGA

Breakfast at hotel. We will visit the Kasbahs "Taourirt and Tifeltout", pass through sandstone fortresses, remote oasis and grand and colorful Todra Gorges with cliffs over 300 meters vertically around you. We then will continue to Erfoud. We will travel in Land Rovers from Erfoud to the Dunes of Merzouga. We will then go directly to the Erg Chebbi where we will find our hotel that looks like a Kasbah in the heart of the dune fields. The quietness of the desert, the enormous stars overhead and the solitude you feel in this area of the Sahara is time that you will cherish. Check in at hotel.

This is a full day tour – driving time on the land rovers – approximately 1 hour.

DAY 10: MERZOUGA / ERFOUD / FEZ

Breakfast. Transfer to Erfoud by 4WD to continue the tour by bus. Departure to Fez via the Atlas Mountains. We will cross both the middle and high Atlas ranges on our way to the Sahara, then travel along forests of giant cedars to the BeniMguild Berber Capital of Midelt. Late afternoon arrival in Fez.

This is a full day tour.

DAY 11: FEZ

Breakfast is at your hotel. Fez is considered by many to be the most complete medieval city in the world. We spend a memorable morning taking a special look at the Jewish history and culture of traditional Morocco. Fez was home to one of the most influential Talmudic scholars of all time, Rabbi Isaac Alfasi as well as

Maimonides in the years 1160 – 1165. Explore the Mellah (Jewish district) of Fez, founded in 1438 and once home to tens of thousands of Jews, immediately adjacent to the Royal Palace. The community included 40 synagogues, the Bet Din, communal ovens, ritual baths and many schools. Visit the vast Jewish cemetery opposite the gates of the Royal Palace, its whitewashed tombstones restored by the French. Visit the restored IbnDanan Synagogue, the oldest extant synagogue in Fez. Its restoration is part of a comprehensive UNESCO project to preserve the monuments and fabric of medieval Fez.

DAY 12: FEZ / MEKNES / VOLUBILIS / CASABLANCA

Following breakfast, we depart for Casablanca. En route, stop at Volubilis (an ancient Roman province of Mauritania, Morocco's largest and best preserved Roman ruins) and Imperial City Meknes built at the end of the 17th century and where Jewish presence is evidenced by Hebraic epitaphs dating from the Christian era. The Mellah (Jewish quarter) contains eleven synagogues eight of which are still in use. In Meknes, visit the tomb of the feared Moulay Ismail, who modeled his capital Meknes in the image of Versailles. Lunch at leisure. Then drive to Casablanca.

DAY 13: CASABLANCA AIRPORT

Following breakfast at your hotel, you will be escorted to Casablanca's Mohamed V Airport (about 45 minutes from Casablanca down town) for your departing flight. Please note that you will need to be at the airport at least 2 hours prior to flight time.

Itinerary and sequence of program subject to change and revisions without notice.