



ESSENCE OF MOROCCO

You'll see all the colours of exotic Morocco on this extraordinary journey.

Tailor-Made Journeys, Suggested Itineraries



North Africa & Middle East,
Morocco



17 days from AU\$20,145 pp



Private

Journey Overview

You'll see all the colours of exotic Morocco on this extraordinary journey: the deep blue of the Atlantic Ocean, the dazzling white buildings of Tangier, rainbow hued spice stalls, golden desert sands, green palm groves and the earthy terracotta of the kasbahs. Against this vibrant backdrop are the patterns of mosaic tiles, handmade pottery, stitched leather and handwoven rugs – the essence of Morocco's craft heritage and everywhere impressive monuments, gardens and a rich, flavoursome cuisine.

Journey Highlights

- Amble through the enchanting alleyways of the blue city of Chefchaouen
- Breathe in the sophisticated bohemian vibe of Tangier
- Wander through the beguiling souks of Fes
- Sleep Bedouin style in A&K's Private Desert Camp
- Marvel at the tribute to fashion legend Yves Saint Laurent at the YSL museum
- Explore the fortified port city of Essaouira



Itinerary

Day 1: Arrive Casablanca

Welcome to Morocco with express arrival services and transfer to your boutique accommodation. Originally settled by Berbers in the 7th century, today Casablanca is Morocco's bustling, French-influenced business centre.

Le Casablanca Hotel

Day 2: Casablanca

A morning to unpeel the layers of this fascinating city. Step inside the magnificent Hassan II Grand Mosque, one of the few that can be visited in Morocco. Built on reclaimed land, almost half the mosque lies over the waters of the Atlantic with a partial glass floor enabling worshippers to kneel directly over the sea. The mosque is amongst the largest in the world and can house as many as 25,000 worshippers. Its minaret is the tallest religious structure in the world.

Next, head to the Museum of Moroccan Judaism, the only Jewish museum in the Arab region. A former children's home, the building was redesigned in the 90s and now showcases important Jewish exhibits including garments and jewellery, art and artifacts and photos that capture the past but also show the ongoing effort to restore cemeteries and synagogues in remote towns throughout Morocco.

Stroll around bustling Mohammed V Square, United Nations Square and the Arab League Park before wandering through the Quartier Habous which was reimagined in the 1930s to resemble a modern-day medina. Browse the market stalls or relax with mint tea and a pastry at one of the many cafés.

Le Casablanca Hotel / Meals: BL

Day 3: Casablanca - Tangier

Head up the Atlantic coast today stopping first in the Moroccan capital, Rabat, where a city tour highlights Rabat's cultural influences and the superbly preserved relics of its Moorish past. Visit the 12th century Hassan Tower, an excellent example of the Moorish style with its incomplete minaret of the great mosque built by Yacoub al-Mansour. Next door is the mausoleum dedicated to Mohamed V, the founder of modern Morocco and the grandfather of the current king.

You also pay a visit to the Oudaya Kasbah which is built on a bluff overlooking the ocean. Its gate is one of the most beautiful surviving in the Moorish world and within its walls you'll explore a delightful craft museum housed in a former palace, as well as an Andalusian garden, complete with tinkling fountain and sweet-smelling orange trees.

Finally, visit the Mohamed VI Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, a great introduction to Moroccan history and modern-day Moroccan artists.

Your final destination today is the cosmopolitan coastal city of Tangier which dominates the north of Morocco and is the gateway to Europe. From the 1930s to the 60s, Tangier was under international administration and attracted a bohemian crowd of bon vivants and pleasure seekers. Billionaires and heiresses built palaces while artists from the Beat Generation, such as William Burroughs, Paul Bowles and Truman Capote, made it their home. Its interesting mix of North African, Spanish and French cultural influences is unique in Morocco and today it gleams with a new air of confidence.

Fairmont Tazi Palace / Meals: BL

Day 4: Tangier - Tetouan - Tangier

Head out of town today to Tetouan, also known as Small Jerusalem. After expulsion from Spain at the end of the 15th century, the Sephardi community settled here and lived in the Jewish quarter which was separated from the rest of the town by gates which were closed each night. Uncover this period of the country's history when you visit the Jewish quarter and the Moorish synagogue. Learn about local life and culture and walk through the modern town to see landmarks such as the Royal Palace, mosques, palm-fringed squares and Spanish-style buildings.

Drive back to Tangier for a walking tour, beginning with a visit to the colourful fish, meat and vegetable markets. Next, it's on to The Mendoubia Garden, and the famous Kasbah which is located at the highest point of the Medina and was the former Sultan's Palace. Whilst here, visit the Kasbah museum of Antiquities and Moroccan Art (closed on Tuesdays), then stroll down through the narrow streets of the medina to the Jewish quarter where you have chance to the old Jewish Synagogue and the Jewish Cemetery. End your visit with the American Legation, the only U.S. National Historic Landmark located in a foreign country, housing a museum, research library, and cultural centre. Enjoy some fresh mint tea at the Petit Socco, a local haunt for many of the writers and artists who resided in Tangier before returning to your hotel.

Fairmont Tazi Palace / Meals: BL**Day 5: Tangier - Chefchaouen - Fes**

This morning you head inland towards Fes stopping en route in the blue city of Chefchaouen with time to explore its atmospheric alleyways and old medina. Established in 1471, Chefchaouen is famous for its blue-painted walled medina. The colour palette derives from the 15th century when the town attracted exiles from Spain. Jewish refugees fleeing the Spanish Inquisition painted their houses blue to reflect their divinity – a tradition that has continued through the centuries. On arrival, enjoy a walking tour of Chefchaouen's cobbled medina. Admire striking blue-and-white homes, and visit the 18th-century kasbah, with its tower, garden, and museum. See the central mosque and mellah, the former Jewish quarter and the bustling Uta El Hamam main square.

From there, continue towards the cultural epicentre of the kingdom, Fes.

Karawan Riad / Meals: BL

Day 6: Fes

Step back in time to the Middle Ages today when you visit Fes El Bali, the largest living medieval medina-city and the cultural heart of Morocco. Explore some of the 9,000 narrow lanes, alleys and souks that make-up the labyrinth of the city's old quarter, originally founded in the 8th century by Moulay Idriss I. The medieval medina is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The imperial capital was a renowned centre of medieval learning and at its heart lies the Karaouine, one of the oldest, still-functioning universities in the world. In the neighbouring building is the Attarine Medersa (Koranic college), a jewel of Hispano-Moorish architecture, built in the 14th century. You will also visit Nejjarine Square, with its beautiful fountain, made up of mosaics and elaborate tile-work. The nearby Fondouq (Caravanserai) is now converted into a museum of carpentry artefacts.

A visit to the tanneries will reveal how the country's highly esteemed leather is dyed using all natural ingredients before continuing to visit Fes El Jedid (New Fes), built by the Merinid Dynasty in the 13th century. Here you will see the Royal Palace, mosques, medersas, souks and the city wall. Most notably, Fes El Jedid is home to the Mellah, the old Jewish quarter, where the wrought iron-decorated windows and splendid carved wood balconies of the old mansions are particularly outstanding.

Last stop today is a local pottery factory to discover how the beautiful zellij tiles are made. These are the highlights of Arab-Andalusian décor and are also used in the manufacture of the famous tagines. "Tagine" refers to an earthenware pot in which traditional meals are cooked and you're certain to taste many tagines during your stay.

Karawan Riad / Meals: BLD

Day 7: Fes - Meknes - Volubilis - Fes

Travel to Meknes, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the Imperial Cities of Morocco. The impressive monuments here are splendid and were built in the 17th century by the powerful sultan Moulay Ismail, to rival the court of his contemporary Louis XIV of France. During your visit you will marvel at the monumental Bab Mansour gateway - considered one of the finest of the great gates of Morocco.

Afterwards continue to Volubilis, also a UNESCO World Heritage Site, home to the largest and most well-preserved Roman ruins in Morocco. With its triumphal arches, basilicas and capitols, the Volubilis skyline is peppered with examples of great Roman architecture. However, the greatest treasures of Volubilis are the superb mosaic floors, which have been excellently preserved and left in situ.

Karawan Riad / Meals: BL**Day 8: Fes - Erfoud**

Today you travel to Erfoud, a small town on the edge of the desert. Your journey takes most of the day and you pause in Midelt for lunch en route. The latter part of your journey is filled with stunning scenic views of endless palm plantations, Berber villages and the spectacular Atlas Mountains. Arrive at your kasbah hotel in time for dinner.

L'Hotel by Chateau de Sable / Meals: BLD**Day 9: Erfoud - Erg Chebbi**

Today, enjoy a full day of sightseeing in and around Erfoud, with a private vehicle and guide at your disposal. Erfoud is one of the largest oases in Morocco. At East Fort, there are splendid views over the Ziz Valley and the surrounding desert. Inspect Erfoud's quarry, where fossils have been found indicating that this part of the world was once beneath the sea. Fossil mining is a growing industry in this part of Morocco, and the rocks excavated are used to produce beautiful decorative objects ranging from crockery to furniture. In the afternoon, head south by 4WD vehicle over the desert dunes of Erg Chebbi to your tented campsite. The last part of the journey is by camel with a mint tea and pastry on arrival. Settle into your nomadic tented accommodation before a mouth-watering dinner served around the campfire.

A&K Private Desert Camp / Meals: BLD

Day 10: Erg Chebbi - Ouarzazate

After breakfast continue overland to Ouarzazate, once a stopping point for African traders en route to the cities of northern Morocco and Europe. The route takes you through the southern slopes of the High Atlas range, following the Dades Valley passing by flourishing crops, irrigation canals and palm trees. Following the Thousand Kasbahs route, marvel at the breathtaking vistas of impressive hundred-year-old kasbahs nestled in lush palm groves. Stop along the way to visit a small but fascinating private museum near Tingherir which showcases the local art, culture and history.

Le Berbère Palace / Meals: BLD

Day 11: Ouarzazate

Discover the secrets of Ouarzazate today. Built as a French garrison in the 1920s, today it is a regional trade centre known for its pottery and carpets. Start off at one of the most beautiful kasbahs in all of Morocco, the Glaoui Kasbah of Taourirt where a network of luxury apartments, simple clay houses and crenelated towers are beautifully decorated with geometric motifs.

Afterwards you will continue to a location that has played a major role in motion picture history - the fortified village of Ait Benhaddou - a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the most exotic and best-preserved kasbah in the whole Atlas region. The village has starred in many masterpieces of the cinema such as "Lawrence of Arabia", "Jesus of Nazareth", "Gladiator" and "The Mummy".

Le Berbère Palace / Meals: B

Day 12: Ouarzazate - Marrakech

Today you head to the thrilling city of Marrakech, passing small villages and picturesque souks along the way. Pearl of the South, Jewel of the South, The Red City - just a few of the nicknames Marrakech has acquired over the years. Part Berber, part Arab, part African, this city is the heartbeat of Morocco where palaces and monuments of unrivalled refinement sit calmly alongside the most exuberant marketplace in the world.

Later this afternoon, enjoy an off-the-beaten-track excursion. Riding a vintage sidecar, explore the Red City weaving through the medina's lively streets. Experience the magic of Marrakech and see its many monuments from the comfort of your cab.

La Sultana Marrakech / Meals: B

Day 13: Marrakech

Get a taste of exotic Marrakech today when you delve into the mysteries of the medina, the old walled section of the town, where most the city's architectural attractions lie. Explore the labyrinthine souks, looking for treasures and bartering hard. Souk Smarine is a maze of colourful alleys dominated by textiles, clothing and handicrafts – a shopper's paradise.

Next, explore Djemaa el-Fna, the city's main square, which is home to a multitude of street performers and food stalls. Over the years, this square has become the beating heart of Marrakech, where fire-eaters, acrobats, snake-charmers and street musicians perform at every turn. Then it's on to the 12th-century Koutoubia mosque, an emblem of Marrakech. It is not possible to enter the mosque, but its beauty can be admired from the gardens and the square. Its minaret is considered to be one of the finest Islamic religious structures in North Africa. At Bahia Palace, take in a remarkable example of Arab-Andalusian architecture featuring exquisite mosaics, elaborately carved stucco and greenery-filled courtyards dotted with fountains.

This afternoon, enjoy an exploration of Marrakech's most famous and beautiful gardens. First stop: the Menara Gardens. Dating back to the 12th century, this historic public garden boasts a central rectangular basin, extensive orchards and a fabulous view of the Atlas Mountains.

Then it's on to the popular Jardin Majorelle (Majorelle Gardens). Originally designed in 1924 by French artist Jacques Majorelle, this garden is a tropical paradise, featuring hundreds of plants from all over the world, tranquil lily-covered pools, and enormous sculptural cactuses. At its heart is Majorelle's cobalt blue-painted studio, now a museum. Take time to wander through this peaceful haven before visiting the new Yves Saint Laurent Museum. The renowned fashion designer first visited Marrakech in 1966 and the museum is dedicated to his couture and the country that so inspired him. After careful selection by his partner Pierre Bergé the museum exhibits more than 5,000 of his designs and 15,000 accessories.

La Sultana Marrakech / Meals: B

Day 14: Marrakech

This morning, learn some of Morocco's culinary secrets at a cooking class with a local chef or Dada (traditional Moroccan cook). Begin your lesson by sourcing ingredients; Morocco is a country bursting with fresh produce and sensational flavours. Perhaps pick up some saffron from Talaouine, spices from Fes or locally grown mint, before heading into the kitchen to prepare a mouthwatering meal.

Spend your afternoon at leisure, with a guide and private vehicle at your disposal.

La Sultana Marrakech / Meals: BL**Day 15: Marrakech - Essaouira**

Transfer to Essaouira, a thriving port city and rich source of argan oil, famous for its cosmetic and culinary uses. En route to the Atlantic Coast, stop at a women's cooperative to learn how argan oil is produced. This afternoon head out on a walking tour with your guide.

Essaouira is an attractive coastal town, rich in history having been inhabited since prehistoric times. Discover the creative talents of local artisans, whose stalls and workshops are tucked in recesses under the imposing Skala fortress.

Palais L'heure Bleue / Meals: B**Day 16: Essaouira**

Enjoy a whole day at leisure to further explore Essaouira.

Palais L'heure Bleue / Meals: B**Day 17: Depart Marrakech**

Transfer to Marrakech airport for your departure flight.

Meals: B

Map



Accommodation

A&K Private Desert Camp



A convoy of 4x4 vehicles takes all the equipment necessary to the dunes of Merzouga. Traversing the rocky, flat-baked sand bordering the dunes of Erg Chebbi, you can jump in the convoy or arrive in style by camel, where a traditional mint tea awaits your arrival.

The tents themselves are extremely comfortable and decorated in Berber style to enhance your desert experience. Large rugs keep out the night chills, while your bed space is accompanied by a torch - essential in the desert where the sun is the only source of light - and your campfire, of course. All tents have a small wash basin with cold running water, with towels and basic shower provisions provided. Two chairs stand sentry outside your tent - perfect for watching the permanently shifting dunes and the incredible desert sunsets.

Each tent has use of a bathroom just a few feet away, with a canvas partition separating the sink area (with the luxury of hot and cold running water) from the toilet and shower area at the back.

Why we like it

- Sahara Desert camping in an isolated spot close to the dunes of Merzouga
- Private Arabic caidal tents with wash basin and a separate toilet and shower tent
- Outstanding cuisine served quite literally in the middle of nowhere

- Enjoy a traditional cooked Moroccan dinner around the campfire or in the private restaurant tent, followed by a wonderful array of exotic fruits
- Camel trek through the dunes at sunrise or sunset

La Sultana Marrakech



La Sultana has the atmosphere of an old palace, with Moroccan patterns on the walls and carved into wooden furnishings. The hotel is built in the style of a traditional Moroccan riad, with 28 individually decorated rooms and suites concentrated around a central patio. Every room is enhanced with African-inspired wood and copper accents, a fireplace, antique furniture, a painted or sculpted ceiling and a marble bathroom.

A worthy member of Small Luxury Hotels and of Great Hotels of the World, La Sultana is set in lush gardens bursting with colours and aromas, and where a stroll will bring you to pergolas, caïdales tents and massage cabins. This really is a unique hotel, in both design and atmosphere. No stone has been left unturned, and no original detail neglected in creating a wonderfully peaceful retreat in the heart of Marrakech.

Why we like it

- This intimate hotel is situated at the Imperial City's walls, just next to the Royal Palaces and among houses, mosques and gardens
- La Sultana's outside spaces are filled with beautiful flower-filled patios, old palms, orange trees and hanging gardens
- The French chef serves typical Moroccan cuisine - in the living rooms, on the patios or on the rooftop terrace
- The Sultana Spa offers a variety of refreshing treatments, a traditional Hammam, open-air massage and a solar heated pool
- The heated, ionized swimming-pool is set amongst panoramic terraces and hanging gardens

L'Heure Bleue Palais, Essaouira



A deluxe hotel in the city of Essaouira, Heure Bleue Palais offers its own little world of refinement and elegance, with a liberal sprinkling of traditional North African charm. A former palace, its décor and design echo the town's Portuguese heritage, drawing heavily on tones of blue, gold and burgundy.

On the first floor, the rooms are clustered around a central patio. Tastefully appointed and protected from the sun's glare by stained-glass, shuttered windows, they are attractive and comfortable, offering all the amenities of a fine hotel.

The suites are wonderfully spacious with décor reflecting a range of influences - African, Oriental, Portuguese and British Colonial. They offer everything to make guests feel truly pampered, from marble bathrooms to small details like clothes closets lined with fine wood, whilst some of the Senior Suites have fireplaces.

Why we like it

- The Heure Bleue Palais is built on an ancient fondouq and integrated into the Essaouira Medina
- The Heure Bleue has a rooftop pool with views across the Medina
- Other facilities include a billiard room, a home theatre room offering movies and sports coverage and, nearby, an expansive beach and an 18 hole golf course
- Dining options include a Moroccan-themed, gourmet restaurant, the courtyard patio and a rooftop terrace
- The hotel offers traditional Moroccan wellness treatments known for their beauty and revitalisation benefits

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