

# SOUTHERN MOROCCO



## ITINERARY:

### Meet on arrival at airport in Marrakesh

*This 14 day/13 night trip starts and ends at Marrakesh Airport. It takes in: exotic Marrakesh; the Valley of the Kasbahs with its mud forts and palaces; lush wadis and oases where fruit orchards and extensive palm groves contrast with the surrounding barren geology; the sand dunes of a protected biosphere on the Sahara's western edge; the forested valleys and villages of the High Atlas Mountains; and Bohemian Essaouira on the Atlantic Coast.*

#### **Day 1**

Arrive in Marrakesh and transfer to our lovely Riad in the quiet, residential part of the Medina (3 nights). Time permitting we can take an orientation walk to the Jemaa el-Fna square, before dinner is served at our Riad.

#### **Day 2**

Guided whole day visit on foot of Marrakesh and its Medina. We visit sights such as the Bahia Palace, Ali Ben Youssef Koranic School, and walk through the various colourful souks. Lunch will be at a restaurant along the way.

#### **Day 3**

We head to the 'new city' to visit the wonderful Majorelle Gardens, once owned by Yves St Laurent, and the small but superb Berber Museum. After lunch at a women's cooperative the afternoon is free.

You will have time to enjoy a Hammam (Spa), to further explore the city independently, or even shop.

#### **Day 4**

Today's drive is simply spectacular, crossing the High Atlas Mountains to Ouarzazate and on to the Draa Valley and Zagora (2 nights; total travel time 7h). It is a long but very interesting day with lots of stops along the way. Time for a swim in the pool before dinner.

#### **Day 5**

Morning walk through Zagora's lush Palmeraie, with its fruit and vegetable gardens irrigated by the waters of the Draa River. The town has some fine dilapidated Kasbahs, attesting to its great past.

Lunch will be back at our Riad followed by a free afternoon.



## **Day 6**

Today we venture further south along the Draa Valley, through the historical village of Tamegroute, a hub of learning and religion through its famous Sufi Zawiya and equally renowned for its green glazed pottery. We continue to the end of the motorable road. Here we switch to 4x4 vehicles to enter the Erg Chigaga region of the Sahara Desert and head to our very comfortable encampment (2 nights) set among the dunes.

## **Day 7**

We spend the day exploring this unique protected desert ecosystem. We spot for wildlife and learn about the Beduin way of life among the dunes.

## **Day 8**

Today we exit Erg Chigaga via a different route through the village and palmeraie of Fom-Zguid and head back north, we shall stop at various points along the way. We reach the oasis of Skoura in late afternoon (Total travel time 5h). Our lovely Riad is set in wonderful gardens (2 nights).

## **Day 9**

The day is spent exploring and relaxing in this garden paradise. A locally guided morning walk through the oasis allows us to understand the history, economy, water management system and lifestyle of its people. The afternoon is free to enjoy our Riad's lovely pool and garden or to explore independently.

## **Day 10**

Today we head for the mountains. On the way we visit the impressive Ait Ben Haddou Kasbah (UNESCO WHS and backdrop to the film Gladiator). We then head back over the spectacular Tizi N Tichka Pass, leading to the Toubkal National Park (Total travel time 6h). We arrive at our very comfortable boutique hotel (2 nights), set among wonderful gardens, in late afternoon.

## **Day 11**

Weather permitting we set off on foot on a guided walk in the mountains (4 hours). The route starts with a climb but then levels out and takes us along a good track through forest, over a low pass and down into a picturesque valley dotted with hamlets. We'll enjoy an 'al fresco' lunch on route. For those not wishing to do our 'higher route' we shall provide an alternative guided walk in the lush Ouirgane Valley.

Late afternoon at leisure at our lodge with its lovely pool and garden.

## **Day 12**

Today we descend from the mountains and head for the coast to Bohemian Essaouira (Total travel time 4h). This walled, whitewashed port has the reputation of being Morocco's most 'laid-back' coastal town, and is famous for its excellent fish.

Our lovely Riad (2 nights) is in the bustling Medina and is a perfect spot from which to explore on foot. The surrounding country is the main habitat of the Argan tree, famous for the oil extracted from its nuts, and of the Thuya tree, whose scented and coloured wood is worked locally with great skill. Late afternoon orientation stroll in the bustling Souk.

## **Day 13**

Guided morning visit of Essaouira on foot. This fascinating town, once known as Mogador, was Morocco's main port and is thus rich in history and lore. For lunch we shall purchase fresh fish at the harbour market and drive 30 minutes down the coast to a simple seaside restaurant where they will grill it for us.

Opportunity to swim in the sea or stroll along the endless, unspoilt, sandy beach.

## **Day 14**

Depending on flight timings, free morning in Essaouira before we transfer (3h) to Marrakesh Airport for flights back home (Or extensions in Marrakesh & beyond).

