

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 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 and the small but superb Berber Museum within, and the Yves Saint Laurent Museum. Delicious lunch at a women's NGO, then free afternoon.

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 switch to 4x4 vehicles to enter the Erg Chigaga region of the Sahara Desert and head to our comfortable encampment set among the dunes (2 nights).

Day 7

We spend the morning exploring this unique protected desert ecosystem on foot. We spot for wildlife and learn about the Beduin way of life among the dunes. Lunch is cooked for us by our guides and served under the shade of ancient tamarisk trees. Further exploration in the afternoon.

Day 8

Today we exit Erg Chigaga through the village and palmeraie of Foum-Zguid and head back north, stopping 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

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, set among extensive gardens, in late afternoon (2 nights).

Day 11

Starting from our lodge we set off on foot on a guided walk through the surrounding Ouirgane Valley valley (3 hours). A delicious traditional lunch will be cooked and served for us at a local Berber home. For those who wish to walk back to our accommodation we can do so (1h).

Late afternoon at leisure at our lodge with its lovely pools and gardens.

Day 12

Today we descend from the mountains and head for the coast to Bohemian Essaouira (Total travel time 4h). This fortified, 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 (A rare conifer found only in Morocco), 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 local market and have it simply cooked for us. Later we offer the option to drive 30 minutes down the coast to a long, sandy beach popular with surfers where one can stroll, paddle or even swim.

Day 14

Depending on flight timings, leisurely departure from Essaouira and transfer to Marrakesh Airport (3h) for flights back home.

