TOUR CODE

ES4

ADVENTURESABROAD

SPAIN & MOROCCO

'Andalucia & the Imperial Cities'

18 days

Updated 06/01/2013

Day 1 ***Arrive in Madrid***

Today we arrive in Madrid and transfer to our hotel.

The capital of Spain, located in the heart of the peninsula and right in the center of the Castillian plain, is a cosmopolitan city, a business center, headquarters for the Public Administration, Government, Spanish Parliament and the home of the Spanish Royal Family.

Overnight in Madrid. Meal plan: Dinner, if required.

Day 2 ***Madrid: The Prado***

This morning we have a guided tour of the Prado Museum. Our route to the museum likely takes us past Plaza Espana point and the Cervantes Monument.

Originally opened to the public in 1819, the Prado houses all of the finest works collected by Spanish Royalty as well as Spanish paintings gathered from other sources over the past two centuries. The Prado is one of the most important repositories of art in the world, including a vast collection of Italian paintings. For the purposes of our visit, however, we will concentrate on works by Spanish masters -- Velasquez, Goya, Ribera, El Greco, Zurbaran, to name a few.

After our tour, we'll head off on foot for an informal stroll up Gran Via and into the old quarter of Madrid. You'll then have free time for lunch and an afternoon of independent exploration. Your Tour Leader can help you plan your free time, with recommended shopping, other historical sites and galleries.

Overnight in Madrid. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 3 ***Madrid - Toledo - Madrid***

This morning we travel to Toledo, a city with a unique blend of Arab, Jewish, Christian, Roman, and Visigothic elements. Toledo sits on a rocky promontory isolated on three sides by a looping gorge of the Tagus River. The history of several different cultures is contained within this region, represented by the houses, synagogues, churches, and mosques.

Our excursion includes a visit to the Cathedral, as well as the Santa Maria la Blanca Synagogue, which shows the influence of the Granada Moors. It has an ornate ceiling and carved arabesques, not in Arabic, but in Hebrew. The most elaborate Mudejar interior in the city is hidden behind the deceptively humble facade of this former synagogue, built in the 14th century by Samuel Ha-Levi, the Jewish treasurer to Pedro the Cruel. The interlaced frieze of the lofty prayer hall harmoniously fuses Islamic, Gothic and Hebrew geometric motifs below a wonderful coffered ceiling. Adjoining the synagogue is an interesting museum dedicated to Jewish Sephardi culture.

We also see one of Toledo's most outstanding attractions, El Greco's masterpiece "The Burial of the Count of Orgaz" located inside the Church of Santo Tome.

After lunch and some free time in Toledo, we return to Madrid.

Overnight in Madrid. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 4 *Madrid - Cordoba*

Today we travel by fast train to travel by train to Cordoba (+/- 2 hours), crossing the Despenaperros Mountains and the border pass between Castile and Andalucia.

During our time in Cordoba (a World Heritage City), we will gain a sense of the city's long and varied past and multicultural nature. Our tour* starts at the Roman Bridge and the Calahorra Tower, an Arab defensive tower. We continue to the Cathedral-Mosque, the only Catholic cathedral built in the heart of a mosque. Next we arrive at the Alcazar fortress, built by King Alfonso XI, and containing mosaics and sarcophagi. Finally we will have a stroll in the Jewish Quarter where the synagogue is located. We will also have time shopping and independent exploration.

* Our sightseeing will likely be divided between today and tomorrow morning.

Overnight in Cordoba. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 5 *Cordoba - Granada*

This morning we continue with our Cordoba sightseeing program before departing for Granada by fast train (2.5 hours).

Overnight in Granada. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 6 *Granada: The Alhambra*

Today we tour Granada, set in the heart of Andalucia with the majestic Sierra Nevada mountains as a backdrop. Conquered by the Moors in AD 711, Granada blossomed into one of Europe's wealthiest and most refined cities. The legacy of Granada's rich history and heritage remain visible throughout the city centre with its cobblestone streets and lovely plazas. In 1992 Granada celebrated the 500th anniversary of the Christian re-conquest by the Catholic Monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella.

The focus of our sightseeing today is Granada's main attraction, the Alhambra, a mighty fortress that houses an extraordinarily delicate and beautiful Moorish palace begun in the 13th century. This was the palace of the Nasrid Sultans, rulers of the last Spanish Moorish Kingdom. A fantasy of "lace in stone" surrounded by arabesque gardens and fountains, it affords superb views of the Old Quarter and Sacromonte, a mountain occupied by gypsy cave dwellers. In many ways, the Alhambra represents the Moorish concept of life itself -- something glorious to be ennobled by learning and enlivened by every kind of pleasure.

We also visit the nearby Generalife Gardens as well as the old Moorish quarter of the Albaicin.

Overnight in Granada. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 7 *Granada - Ronda: Town Tour*

We continue our tour (by road) to Ronda, a historic town located on a towering plateau in the mountains of Malaga Province. We will walk around the old town where you will learn the origins of this ancient town where Romans, Arabs, and Christians left their traces. We visit the Mondragon Palace, built in a Mudejar style and finally to the Bullring, the oldest in the country.

Time at leisure to enjoy this charming town. Ronda is famous for its dramatic escarpments and views, and for the deep El Tajo gorge that carries the rio Guadalevin through its centre. We suggest a walk to the 18th century Puente Nuevo 'new' bridge, which straddles the 100m / 328 ft chasm below, for its unparalleled views out over the Serrania de Ronda mountains.

Overnight in Ronda. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 8 *Ronda - Sevilla*

Today we follow (by road) the route known as "the route of the white villages" for the singularity of the scenery through the Grazalema National Park. Our destination is Sevilla (Seville), the capital of Andalusia and a World Heritage city. We enter the city through one of the most beautiful avenues: the Palm Trees Road, which leads us to the Plaza de Espana, and the Parque de Maria Luisa, bequeathed to the city after the 1929 world exhibition. Later we will walk along the Guadalquivir riverbank and view historic monuments like the Maestranza Bullring, the Torre del Oro, and the Monument to the Tolerance by Eduardo Chillida.

Overnight in Sevilla. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 9 *Sevilla: City Tour*

Sevilla, the fourth largest city in Spain, is the picture-perfect image of Andalucia, complete with restored Andalusian architecture, orange groves, flower-filled patios, and castanet-rattling Gypsies.

While in Sevilla we visit the largest cathedral in Spain, built in a Gothic style with lovely stained glass windows, choir, and chapels. We visit the Giralda Tower, with its spectacular views of the city. We will also see the Moorish Alcazar Palace, a 14th century palace, the oldest royal residence in Europe and still in use. King Juan Carlos resides here while in Sevilla, as King Ferdinand II and Queen Isabella once did. We finish our tour with a walk through the Old Quarter.

Balance of the day at leisure.

Overnight in Sevilla. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 10 *Sevilla - Madrid, Spain - Casablanca, Morocco*

Today we travel to Morocco.*

Our journey begins with a high-speed train journey to Madrid from where we fly to Casablanca.

* NOTE: On some departures, due to variables such as group size and train / flight schedules, we may travel by road to Algeciras and ferry to Morocco from there.

Overnight in Casablanca. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 11 *Casablanca - Azemmour - El Jadida - Casablanca*

We depart southwards on our excursion to the coastline south of Casablanca.

Azemmour is a charming seaside town that retains a sense of times gone by. Portuguese ramparts surround parts of the old town and a very casual walking tour will give you a sense of the old world feel of the place. Once a sizable Jewish population was here (until the 1960's) and the Mellah, or old Jewish quarter, maintains an old synagogue still visited by practicing Jews.

After our brief stop, we continue south along the coast to El Jadida, also known as Mazagan. The old town is beautiful, yet another star example of the Portuguese influence along the Atlantic coast, with the lanes and ramparts of the old Medina. The Portuguese referred to the town as Mazagan. The medina was awarded World Heritage status in 2004 due to its blend of European and Moroccan influences. After lunch, where you can choose to explore the wonderful seafood restaurants, you will visit the so-called Cite Portugaise, the old town surrounded by the ramparts. A highlight of the old town is the Portuguese Cistern, an underground vault that featured in Orson Welles' version of Othello. The lanes provide wanderers with shops to browse in and ramparts to view the fishing boats.

After our visit to the old town and some free time, we will return to Casablanca.

Overnight in Casablanca. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 12 *Casablanca - Rabat - Fes*

This morning we visit the Hassan II mosque, a glorious structure believed to be only second in size to Islam's most important site, Mecca in Saudi Arabia. The mosque was inaugurated in August 1993, the culmination of five years of intensive labour by over 30,000 workers and craftsmen. Non-Muslims may enter as part of a guided tour.

From Casablanca we travel to Rabat, Morocco's third oldest Imperial City and modern capital. Among the sites in Rabat that we will visit are the the Hassan Tower, the Mohammed V Mausoleum, and the small Musee Archaeologique (Museum of Antiquities), where some of the richest archaeological treasures in Morocco are housed. Leaving Rabat we travel to Fes arriving in time for dinner.

The historic city of Fes lies in the Oued Sebou basin, astride the traditional trade route from the Sahara to the Mediterranean and the path from Algeria and the Islamic heartland beyond. For centuries the dominant axis within Morocco was of Fes and Marrakech, two cities linked by their immense power and rivalry. Fes is still seen as the spiritual and cultural capital and holds an enduring fascination for visitors with one of the largest historic medinas full of monuments reflecting the different periods of Morocco's imperial past.

Overnight in Fes. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 13 *Fes: City Tour*

Today we will have a walking tour of Fes El Bali, the extraordinary medieval walled city. Once inside the gates of this great spectacle, you will see an entirely different view of life in Morocco. In contrast to the well-planned Ville Nouvelle, the old city is a labyrinth of alleys and lanes lined with shops, mosques, homes and schools. In 1980

UNESCO designated the medina a World Heritage Site.

Our guide will take us to the medina to view the market shops, or suqs. Everything from food to clothing can be purchased. We will see the famous dying works with the brightly coloured cloth hanging to dry. A visit to the Royal Palace, several mosques, theological schools, and shops where we can see craftsmen tailoring their work will round out the day's tour. Today's walk is an amazing look into the life of the Moroccan city dweller where little has changed over the centuries.

Overnight in Fes. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 14 *Fes - Meknes - Volubilis - Fes*

This morning we have an excursion to Meknes, Morocco's youngest Imperial City. We feature the Bab El Mansour gate dating from 1752, complete with its Corinthian columns. The city was built by a massive army of slaves, both Moroccan and Christian, and the Sultan was in particular famed for his barbaric treatment of these people, supposedly interring them in the walls. The city contained within it all that was necessary for such a large population and military machine, with store houses, stables, armouries, exercise areas, gardens and ponds.

Departing Meknes, we pass countryside dotted with koubbas, small whitewashed tombs, on our way to the impressive site of Volubulis, the only Roman site in Morocco. Situated on the ledge of a long plateau, the dramatic site was once one of the Roman Empire's most remote outposts. Our local guide here will take you on tour of the site; we also allow free time for photographs.

We also see the sacred town of Moulay Idriss (photo stop only). Moulay Idriss is a dramatic sight, houses and mosques piled up around two rock outcrops, with the 'zaouia,' or sanctuary, in between.

We return to Fes.

Overnight in Fes. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 15 *Fes - Erfoud*

We have a morning departure for the Middle Atlas, a region of folded mountains and high, windswept plateaux, vast forests of cork oak and cedar, and lakes and streams full of trout. This is Berber country and sheep and goat-rearing is the main occupation of these resilient, friendly people. We drive via the Berber villages of Imouzzer du Kandar; Ifrane, a fairy-tale town unlike any other in Morocco with white-walled French-style villas with steep red roofs and gables; and Azrou where we make a brief stop. As the altitude increases, we come to a bare, arid, sandy plateau with another range of mountains in the distance.

We continue to Erfoud, an attractive town -- red and sandy, exuding desert ambiance.

Overnight in Erfoud. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 16 *Rissani & Merzouga Dunes*

This morning we journey to the historic 8th century caravan town of Rissani to visit the Tafilalt Oasis. The first capital of the Tafilalt and the last stop on the caravan routes south, Rissani has a special place in Moroccan lore. The ruling Alaouite dynasty (from whom Morocco's current ruler, Mohammed VI, is a descendant) launched its bid for power here

before triumphing finally in Fes and Marrakech. Today, a quarter of Rissani's population still inhabits a large 17th-century ksar in the center of town.

Later this afternoon we drive by 4WD vehicle to Merzouga to witness sunset over the dunes. We have time to explore the dunes on foot, or by camel! This is a magical landscape, with huge drifting expanses of sand dunes reaching heights of more than 45 metres (148 ft). Their colour shifts from pink to gold to red to white depending on the time of day.

Overnight at Mezouga. Merzouga Inn. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 17 *Merzouga - Todra Gorge - Ouarzazate*

This morning we depart for the Todra Gorge, one of Morocco's most spectacular sights. It is a vast fault in the plateau separating the High Atlas from the Jbel Sarhro, two sheer cliffs over 300 metres (958 ft) high separated by a narrow corridor only 20 metres (66 ft) wide.

Later we cross the southern slopes of the High Atlas before arriving at the captivating city of Ouarzazate. We stop en route in the heart of the Dades Valley at the oasis of Kelaa Mgouna.

Overnight in Ouarzazate. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 18 *Ouarzazate - Casablanca - Depart*

Today we fly back to Casablanca and connect with flights that generally leave late in the evening.

NOTE: Land only passengers need to take into account the timing of the flight from Ouarzazate before booking their air from Casa.

BON VOYAGE!! Meal plan: Breakfast.