TOUR CODE

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ADVENTURESABROAD

MOROCCO

Imperial Cities & the Sahara

8 days

Updated 06/01/2013

Day 1 ***Arrive in Casablanca***

Today we arrive in Morocco and transfer to our central Casablanca hotel.

Casablanca is believed to have been a Phoenician settlement and later a Berber town. It was conquered by the Almohads in 1188, and developed by Sutlan Abd el-Moumen as a port. In the 14th century the Portuguese established a settlement here on the site of the village of Anfa, but when it became a pirates' base in 1468, they destroyed it, repeating this act in 1515. The Portuguese reestablished themselves in the late 16th century, renaming the town Casa Blanca, staying until 1755, when an earthquake destroyed the settlement.

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

Day 2 ***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 3 ***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 4 *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 5 *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 6 *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 7 *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 8 *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.