TOUR CODE

MO5

ADVENTURESABROAD

MOROCCO

'Caravans & Kasbahs'

15 days

Updated 06/03/2013

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 - Ait Benhaddou - Taroudannt*

Our first visit this morning is the Kasbah Taourirt, once belonging to the famous El Glaoui governors. We then proceed to the kasbah of Ait Benhaddou, one of the most spectacular sites in Morocco. The site, which has received extensive renovations from UNESCO, towers high above the El Mellah River and has some of the most highly decorated dark red pise walls. We arrive in the new village on the west bank of the river and proceed to cross the river, usually with an entourage of local children.

After a brief tour and time for independent exploration, we continue our journey toward Taroudannt through the Souss Valley. The area is rich in agriculture, producing oranges, bananas, tomatoes and other crops.

Overnight in Taroudannt. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 9 *Taroudannt: City Tour*

As the capital of the Souss Valley, Taroudannt has traditionally been an important staging post in the Trans-Sahara caravan routes. The old city is surrounded by nearly 5 km (3 miles) of rich red-ochre walls. The walls, considered by many to be the best preserved in Morocco, give the town an elegant feeling. This morning we have a caleche (horse-drawn carriage) ride around the walls of the city before beginning our walking tour of the suq area. The town is famous for its two suqs: the Souk Arabe Artisinal and the Marche Berbere. The former specialises in handicrafts and jewelry; the later is famous for house-wares, spices, wooden objects and furniture.

This afternoon is free for you to explore on your own. You may wish to visit the leather tanneries or take a walk around the impressive city walls and bastions.

Overnight in Taroudannt. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 10 *Taroudannt - Essaouira*

This morning we travel toward the Atlantic coast and make a short stop in Agadir. From here we travel northward to the fortified, whitewashed fishing village of Essaouira. Once a pirate community, the town is located on a rock promontory

overlooking the sometimes raging Atlantic Ocean. There was a small Phonenician settlement at Essaouira, previously called Magdoura or Mogador, a corruption of the Berber word 'Amegdul,' meaning ‘well-protected'. The Romans were interested in the purple dye produced from shellfish which they used to colour the robes of the rich.

Orson Welles stayed here for some time, filming part of Othello at the Skala. In the 1960s Essaouira had a brief reputation as a 'happening place', which attracted hippies, notably the rock star, Jimi Hendrix. Before dinner you may want to stroll along the extensive beach or visit the colourful fish market.

Overnight in Essaouira. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 11 *Essaouira: Walking Tour*

Essaouira is one of Morocco's most charming towns. Old Mogador was occupied in the 15th century by the Portuguese who built the fortifications around the harbour. These impressive ramparts still give the city a fortified look.

Today your Tour Leader will take you on a leisurely walking tour of this coastal city. The port area offers an interesting look into the fishery industry of Morocco, and the jewelry suq offers some of the best silver items available. Essaouira is most famous, however, for its wooden handicrafts. Almost every shop in the town offers fabulous wooden boxes, chess sets, letter holders, statues, etc. Alternatively, you may wish to visit one of the many art galleries or visit the Musee Sidi Mohammed Ben Abdallah which features excellent displays of marquetry and handicrafts. Be sure to visit the Marchee d'espices (spice market) where you can purchase your cooking spices or pick up some "cures" for whatever ails you.

Overnight in Essaouira. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 12 *Essaouira - Marrakech*

Today we travel from Essaouira inland to Marrakech. As we approach Marrakech, the scenery becomes flatter and greener, as the city is the centre of a large palmerie oasis. You will notice an abundance of the pink mud-brick buildings amid this tree-filled city. With it's unique character and charm, Marrakech lures visitors with a hospitable climate and superb location.

This evening we visit the famous Djemma el-Fna in the centre of the city. The Djemma el-Fna is like nowhere else in North Africa. This "Assembly of the Dead," offers a spectacle that is a must-see when visiting Morocco. In the busy square you will witness a carnival of musicians, snake charmers, acrobats, story-tellers, witch doctors, dentists, clowns, monkey's and the like. The enduring smells of the Djemma's food stalls, piled high with platters of specialty cuisine, are well worth a visit just for the experience..

Overnight in Marrakech. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 13 *Marrakech: City Tour*

Marrakech is one of the world's most enchanting cities. The city is situated on a lush palmerie and city dates to the Almoravid Dynasty circa 1670. Founded by Youssef bin Tachfine, the city became the dominant centre of Morocco. Our morning walking tour takes us to the Koutoubia, nearly 70 m (230 feet) high and emulating the classic Moroccan design. We will also take a short walk through the Mellah, or Jewish quarter, en route to the Ethnographic Museum, an excellent old palatial home in the Medina converted to a museum housing artifacts from all over Morocco.

We then proceed to the Palais el Bahia where our guided tour takes us to several grand halls, gardens and the harem quarter. We culminate our tour with a visit to the Saadian Tombs where we see the graves of the regime that made this city so important.

This afternoon we allow free time to visit one of the many gardens -- the Majorelle Garden is recommended. Within the gardens is an excellent museum displaying a collection of Berber objects originating from diverse regions of Morocco, from the Rif to the Sahara.

Overnight in Marrakech. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 14 *Marrakech - Casablanca*

Today we travel by FIRST CLASS day train (3-4 hours) back to Casablanca.

PLEASE NOTE: Currently most flights are leaving Casa just after midnight. If this is the case for your chosen departure, you may depart Casablanca just into TOMORROW rather than spending the entire night and entire day in Casa tomorrow. In this case, you would have access to a hotel room upon arrival in Casa and prior to your transfer to the airport this evening.

Overnight in Casablanca. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 15 *Departure*

Departure from Casablanca.

BON VOYAGE!! Meal plan: Breakfast.