TOUR CODE

PS5

ADVENTURESABROAD

PORTUGAL, SPAIN & MOROCCO

'Our Full Iberia & Morocco Programme'

39 days

Updated 06/01/2013

Day 1 ***Arrival in Lisbon***

Today we arrive in Lisbon.

The capital of Portugal since its conquest from the Moors in 1147, Lisbon is a legendary city with over 20 centuries of history. This was the centre of Europe's first and largest overseas empire and, as a result, the city still has a feeling of colonial elegance.

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

Day 2 ***Lisbon: City Tour***

Lisbon is an enticing tangle of past and present -- funky and old-fashioned, unpretentious and quirky, restored and revitalised, booming with new confidence. With cultural diversity combined with a laid-back ambience and an architectural time-warp, this is one of Europe's most enjoyable cities.

Today's half-day city tour takes us along the banks of the River Tagus and the Belem Tower guarding the mouth of the river. We visit Jeronimo's Monastery with the tomb of Vasco da Gamma. We continue on to see Alcantara, Praca do Comercio, and the House of Pointed Stones.

We also drive along the Avenida da Liberdade, a fashionable tree-lined street through the centre of town. We continue on a walking tour through the oldest quarter Alfama, Baixa, Rossio, Restauradores, and Avenida da Liberdade. Afternoon at leisure.

Overnight in Lisbon. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 3 ***Lisbon - Obidos - Nazare - Fatima - Leiria***

Today we travel by road northward to Obidos, a medieval symbol of narrow streets surrounded by walls. Obidos is known for its typical white houses with blue trim, flowered windows, narrow streets and steps paved with beautiful stone. On arrival in Obidos we embark on a walking tour, passing through the 18th century entry arch covered in glazed tiles (azulejos). Small bright white houses lining narrow cobblestone streets, flower pots on window-sills, Gothic and Renaissance churches -- especially the beautiful Church of Santa Maria -- reminds of the importance of Obidos's past.

We continue to Nazare, the most famous fishing town in Portugal. Among the brightly coloured rowing-boats moored on the beach bathed by the Atlantic Ocean, one may watch the fisherfolk bring in the nets. A superb view is enjoyed from the "Sitio" for where you may observe women still wearing the traditional seven-skirted costumes.

Our final stop is nearby Fatima, the well-known Roman Catholic Marian shrine. We visit the Basilica and the Chapel of Apparitions that marks the spot where the three shepherd children had visions in 1917. We continue to Leiria, a

charming town with small homes over archways and behind graceful arcades.

Overnight in Leiria. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 4 *Leiria - Coimbra - Bussaco - Urgeirica*

This morning we travel to the university town of Coimbra, known for its twisting streets and terraced houses. We visit the 12th century Se Velho Cathedral, and 13th-century university with its magnificent library, Manueline doors and chapel. We also visit the charming and elegant 16th century Museu Nacional Machado de Castro, formerly the Bishop's palace and now the depository of some of Portugal's finest sculpture. On display is a mixture of other items including ancient art up to the 20th century.

We continue through the lovely Bussaco, a mountain forest located just northeast of Coimbra. Bussaco is a delightful refuge of cypress groves, ferns, statues, fountains, and formal gardens.

Overnight in Urgerica. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 5 *Urgerica - Douro Valley - Porto*

We depart today for a picturesque drive through a landscape speckled with granite houses with wooden or wrought-iron balconies, before entering the Port Wine region, the Douro Valley, a UNESCO protected site. This is port country and was, in fact, the world's first demarcated wine region, established in 1756. Evidence of the port industry can be seen along the valley with all the famous company names -- Cockburns, Taylors, Sandeman and others -- appearing on large placards on the hillsides. En route we will stop for a cellar tour and tasting.

We will also stop in Amarante to visit the local market and have a brief stop in Viseu to walk through the historical zone before continuing to Porto.

Overnight in Porto. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 6 *Porto: City Tour - Braga - Guimaraes - Porto*

This morning we enjoy a tour of Porto, a World Heritage city. We will see the Church of Sao Francisco which dates to the 13th century. This was originally a Gothic church and has a fine rose window at its entrance. Walls, vaulting, and pillars are generously covered with carved and gilded wood vines, grapes, birds, angels, cherubs; a forest of carved, gilded wood covers the high altar. We will also see the Old Quarter, the modern section of the city, and the low section, fronting the River Douro.

After lunch we will travel to Braga, a city famous for its churches, last count surpassing 300! As the religious centre of Portugal, Braga boasts the highest number of churches per capita in Christendom. The strategic location has always made it ripe for occupation and development. The Goidelic Celts, also known as the Bracari, are believed to have founded the city and given it a name several thousand years ago. The Romans occupied it in 250 BC and made it the hub of five major roads, all leading to Rome. Through them Christianity and the first Bishops of Braga eventually came. The Suevians over ran the city in AD 409, but were replaced in 485 by Visigoth invaders, who, in turn, were vanquished in 711 by a Moorish army. For more than three centuries, the Christians and the Moors jousted over Braga, until the Muslims were finally expelled at the end of the 11th century. In the old quarter of Braga, we will explore the ornate Renaissance and Manueline palaces, baroque churches, and narrow medieval streets.

Later we will proceed to Guimaraes, birthplace of Portugal's first king and for 2012, European Capital of Culture. In this charming town (a UNESCO site) we offer a walking tour of the old mediaeval quarter. We begin in the Largo da Oliveira, with its varying styles of architecture. As we walk through the Old Quarter, notice the window boxes with fresh, colourful spring flowers. On our walk you will see workshops, bakeries, stores, and the like operating like time has never passed.

Overnight in Porto. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 7 *Porto, Portugal - Santiago de Compostela, Spain*

Today we travel by road to Santiago de Compostela (approx 2 hours). Built of golden granite, Santiago is one of the most beautiful of all Spanish cities. The medieval city has been declared in its entirety a national monument, and remains remarkably integrated, all the better for being almost completely pedestrianized. The buildings and the squares, the long stone arcades and the statues, are hewn from the same granite blocks and blend imperceptibly one with the other, often making it impossible to distinguish ground level from raised terrace.

Depending on our time of arrival, we may accomplish some of our sightseeing today after we check in to our hotel.

Overnight in Santiago de Compostela. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 8 *Santiago de Compostela: City Tour*

This morning we have a walking city tour of Santiago, a UNESCO World Heritage city. Our tour begins at Obradoiro Square where some of its more prominent monuments can be seen: the Archbishop's residence which preserves some 12th century lounges; the Town Hall, former Raxoy Palace, with its classical facade; the San Jeronimo College, whose facade shows Roman influences.

We also include the city's famous cathedral, a truly grand building adorned with many statues of St James in his familiar pilgrim guise with staff, broad-brimmed hat, and scallop-shell badge. The cathedral's highlight is the Portico de Gloria, with its striking Romanesque sculpture of a host of figures. Christ presides over the main door, flanked by his Apostles, and surrounded by 24 Elders of the Apocalypse playing music. Saint James sits on the central column beneath Christ. So many pilgrims have prayed at this spot with their fingers pressed in to the roots of the marble Tree of Jesse below Saint James that five deep holes have been worn into the marble.

We also visit the Cathedral Museum, the Cloister and finally, the Platerias Gate, the only Romanesque one that is still preserved. You will have some time this afternoon for independent exploration.

Overnight in Santiago de Compostela. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 9 *Santiago de Compostela - Leon*

This morning we take the train (2nd class) to Leon.*

On arrival in Leon we visit the San Isidoro Collegiate Church, an important piece of western Romanesque, where 23 kings and queens are buried. The cathedral was built in the middle of the 13th century in a gothic style similar to the French cathedrals and is famous for the beauty of more than 100 glazed windows. We also see the facade of the Old Covent of San Marcos, a Spanish Plateresque masterpiece.

Time at leisure.

* NOTE: We use the rail system quite extensively on this tour. YOU MUST BE ABLE TO MANAGE YOUR OWN BAGS ONTO / OFF TRAINS AND IN TRAIN STATIONS. Packing lightly is essential.

Overnight in Leon. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 10 *Leon - Bilbao*

Our Leon sightseeing continues this morning with the old quarter of the city, which conserves a large part of the medieval wall and some remains of the original Roman wall. One can also find the Casa de Botines, a neo-gothic building and an excellent example of the architecture of Antoni Gaudi.

Later today we travel by train (2nd class) to Bilbao,* tucked into the deep lush folds and clefts of Euskadi's coastal range. The name is "Bilbo" in Basque, but its inhabitants prefer to call it the "botxo," Basque for hole, or orifice. The orifice was originally a scattering of fish hamlets, huddled on the left bank where the hills offered some protection from the Normans and other pirates.

* NOTE: In the event that train schedules have us travelling over the dinner hour, we may include lunch today instead of dinner.

Overnight in Bilbao. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 11 *Bilbao: The Guggenheim*

This morning we visit the newest and biggest attraction in Bilbao, the Guggenheim Museum. The 31 329 sq m (349,000 sq foot) colossus is one of the focal points of a $1.5 billion redevelopment plan for the city. The Frank Gehry design features a 50 m- (165 foot-) high atrium, more than one-and-a-half times the height of the rotunda of Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum in New York. The museum is devoted to American and European art of the 20th century, featuring the works of such renowned artists as Kandinsky, Mondrian, Picasso, Ernst, Pollock, Lichtenstein, Oldenburg, Serra, and others.

We also explore the Old Town of Bilbao on a walking tour. We travel back in time to Medieval Bilbao with its cobbled streets, charming corners and squares, and trace its development through the centuries.

Overnight in Bilbao. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 12 *Bilbao - Barcelona*

Today we fly to Barcelona.

Barcelona, located on the Mediterranean Sea in the very north of the Spanish coast, is certainly the most cosmopolitan and economically active city in this country. Of course, Barcelona has an long history, and there are monuments of Romanesque, Gothic and Renaissance periods and before, but most characteristic is what has been built during the last 100 years.

Depending on the timing of today's flight, we may accomplish some sightseeing today upon arrival.

Overnight in Barcelona. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 13 *Barcelona: City Tour*

This morning we will embark on our Barcelona sightseeing programme (mostly on foot - leisurely pace). Our first stop is Parc Guell, a beautiful place in the morning. We have time to visit the Casa Gaudi with its collection of Gaudi-designed furniture. We'll walk through the Parc, ending up at the main entrance to visit the terrace and pavilion unit and Doric columns.

We continue by bus to Barcelona's most famous and most photographed attraction -- La Sagrada Familia Cathedral (Cathedral of the Holy Family), an amalgam of fantasy and Gothic impulses, and Gaudi's most unique piece of architecture. Our bus stops on the side of the Nativity facade (north) from where we walk around to the Passion facade. We explore the interior and also visit the cathedral museum during our stop.

Balance of the day at leisure.

Overnight in Barcelona. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 14 *Barcelona: City Tour*

Today we begin with a stroll down the avenue of Las Ramblas, the exotic "spine of Barcelona," with a stop to look at Casa Mila, another Gaudi creation. We continue to Placa Catalunya and Placa Reial via the central market, St Josephis; a very lively place, crowded with stalls selling caged birds and lush plants and the constant clamor of people haggling and selling.

We then walk into Barri Gotic, a densely-packed area of narrow lanes with a fascinating mixture of medieval and stately Renaissance buildings. Then it's onto the Picasso Museum for a +/- 60 minute visit.

Balance of the day at leisure.

Overnight in Barcelona Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 15 *Barcelona - Madrid: Royal Palace*

Today we travel to Madrid by fast train (2.25 hours).

This afternoon we include a tour of the Royal Palace where we see, among other things, its principal staircase, throne, gala dining room, museum of silver, and principal courtyard. This is the official residence of the royal family, but today it is used only state ceremonies. Otherwise known in Spanish as the Palacio Real, the Royal Palace was built during the 18th and 19th centuries, and is a monumental building. It replaced the former medieval Alcazar, which was burnt to the ground in 1794. The present day Royal Palace of Madrid was decorated to the tastes of Charles III, and is extremely lavish inside.

Overnight in Madrid. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 16 *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 17 *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 18 *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 19 *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 20 *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 21 *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 22 *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 23 *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 24 *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 25 *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 26 *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 27 *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 28 *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 29 *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 30 *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 31 *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 32 *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 33 *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 34 *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 35 *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 36 *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 37 *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 38 *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 39 *Departure*

Departure from Casablanca.

BON VOYAGE!! Meal plan: Breakfast.