

ALGERIA

Roman Ruins, Kasbahs & UNESCO Villages

9 days

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Day 1 Arrival in Algiers - Gateway to the Maghreb

Today we arrive in Algiers - welcome to Algeria!

The Mediterranean sparkles below as we descend toward Algiers, a city whose very name—Al-Jaza'ir, "the islands"—recalls the rocky islets that once guarded this strategic harbour. Built into the rolling Sahel hills, Algeria's capital stretches ten miles along the sweeping Bay of Algiers, its white buildings cascading down toward azure waters like an amphitheatre facing the sea. Today, elegant French boulevards wind between Socialist-era monuments and the timeless Islamic heart of the hillside Casbah, creating a visual symphony of architectural eras.

We settle into our accommodation, preparing for tomorrow's exploration of this remarkable city where three continents converge.

Overnight in Algiers.

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

Day 2 Algiers Unveiled - From Ottoman Casbah to French Grandeur

This morning we step into the labyrinthine Casbah, where centuries-old traditions pulse through narrow alleys lined with whitewashed houses. Built in the 16th century, this UNESCO treasure reveals itself slowly—each turn unveiling hidden courtyards, ornate doorways, and glimpses of daily life unchanged by time. The maze-like streets once confounded invading armies; today they embrace us with their timeless rhythm.

Descending toward the bay, we discover the elegant boulevards created during France's 130-year presence (1830-1962). At the majestic Church of Notre Dame d'Afrique, perched dramatically above Bab El Oued, we witness how colonial architects married European ecclesiastical design with North African sensibilities. The panoramic views from here encompass the entire bay—a vista that has inspired poets and painters for generations.

Our journey through time continues at the 17th-century Ketchaoua Mosque, one of the Ottoman period's finest surviving monuments. Nearby, the remarkable Palais des Rais—actually three interconnected palaces—guards the seafront like a maritime fortress. We explore its secret chambers and terraces, understanding how these buildings served both as residences and defensive positions against naval attacks.

The afternoon brings us to contrasts: the bustling Martyrs' Square with its modern yellow mosque, the palatial Grand Post Office showcasing early 20th-century Moorish revival architecture, and finally, the tranquil Botanical Garden of El Hamma. Here, amid towering trees and cooling fountains, we find respite before ascending to the imposing 92-metre Monument to the Martyrs, whose three abstract arches symbolize the nation's struggle for independence.

Overnight in Algiers.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Through the Atlas to Djemila - Rome in the Mountains

Rolling hills dotted with olive groves and wheat fields accompany us eastward as we leave the coastal plains for the dramatic landscapes of the interior. Our destination, Djemila—"beautiful" in Arabic—sits 900 metres above sea level, where Roman engineers once faced the challenge of adapting classical urban planning to mountainous terrain.

The result, dating from the 1st century CE, astounds with its ingenuity. Unlike the flat, grid-pattern Roman cities of the plains, Djemila flows with the contours of the landscape. We walk streets where toga-clad citizens once strolled, past a remarkably preserved forum where merchants haggled over goods from across the empire. The site's temples, basilicas, and triumphal arches demonstrate how Rome adapted its architectural vocabulary to diverse environments—each column capital and decorative element telling stories of cultural fusion.

In the Djemila Museum, extraordinary mosaics and sculptures reveal daily life in this mountain outpost. Intricate floor designs depicting hunting scenes, mythological figures, and geometric patterns showcase the wealth and sophistication of Roman North Africa. These aren't mere decorative elements—they're windows into a society where African, Mediterranean, and Roman influences created something entirely new.

As afternoon shadows lengthen across ancient stones, we continue our journey eastward. The changing landscape tells its own story of geological forces and human adaptation, preparing us for tomorrow's encounter with another Roman masterpiece. By evening, we reach Constantine, the dramatic "City of Bridges," where we'll rest before exploring one of North Africa's most spectacular archaeological sites.

Overnight in Constantine.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Timgad - Trajan's Perfect City & Royal Mysteries

Morning finds us journeying through the foothills of the Aurès Atlas Mountains toward Timgad, Emperor Trajan's bold experiment in urban planning. Founded in 100 CE as a military colony for retired legionnaires, Thamugadi (its original name) was designed for 15,000 inhabitants—yet prosperity soon burst these boundaries, creating a fascinating study in organic versus planned development.

Standing at Timgad's western gate, we witness Roman city planning at its most ambitious. The original settlement follows a perfect grid, its straight streets intersecting at precise right angles like a textbook illustration. But look beyond the planned core, and we see how success created its own challenges: the expanding city spilled organically beyond its geometric boundaries, creating irregular neighbourhoods that speak to human nature's resistance to rigid order.

We walk the Cardo Maximus, the great north-south avenue, past the magnificent arch of Trajan, through markets where North African grain fed the empire. The theatre, with its soaring stage backdrop, once echoed with Greek tragedies and Roman comedies performed under the African sun. In houses with intricate mosaic floors, we glimpse the daily lives of veterans who traded military service for comfortable retirement in this frontier outpost.

Our afternoon pilgrimage takes us to the mysterious royal Mausoleum of Immedghassen, a circular stone monument predating Roman conquest. Built for a Numidian king whose identity remains lost to time, this tomb represents the sophisticated pre-Roman cultures that flourished across North Africa. Standing 18 metres high with 60 engaged columns, it reminds us that Rome built upon foundations laid by earlier civilizations.

Overnight in Constantine.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Constantine City Tour - Fly to Algiers*

No city prepares you for Constantine's dramatic revelation. Built astride a spectacular gorge carved by the Rhumel River, this ancient settlement appears to defy gravity itself. Known to Romans as Cirta, it became Constantine the Great's namesake in the 4th century, but its story stretches back over two millennia to Numidian kings who recognized this natural fortress's strategic perfection.

We begin our exploration understanding why this location has been continuously inhabited since antiquity. The gorge—120 metres deep in places—creates a natural moat around three sides of the city. Ottoman, French, and modern engineers have spanned this chasm with increasingly ambitious bridges, each generation adding its own architectural signature to this vertical cityscape.

The suspension bridges become our pathway through time. From these swaying vantage points, we peer down into the gorge where traditional tanneries still operate as they have for centuries, their colourful leather goods drying in the North African sun. The Constantine Museum reveals artifacts spanning millennia, while the Kasbah district preserves the intimate scale of Ottoman residential architecture.

At the Palace of Ahmed Bey, we encounter 19th-century attempts to blend European palatial grandeur with Islamic decorative traditions. The Emir Abdelkader Mosque, one of the world's largest, represents modern Algeria's attempt to create contemporary Islamic architecture that honours both tradition and innovation.

Our afternoon flight returns us to Algiers, though weather and operational considerations may require us to complete this journey by

road—either option offers spectacular views of Algeria's diverse landscapes.

* PLEASE NOTE: This flight has often been subject to delays and, if the situation does not improve in time for your chosen travel date, we may choose to cover this distance by road rather than be held up late into the night. Your Tour Leader will advise while on tour.

Overnight in Algiers.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Algiers: Cherchell, Tipaza & Tomb of the Christians - Fly to Ghardaia

The Mediterranean coast west of Algiers reveals layers of North African history, beginning at Tipaza where Phoenician merchants first established trading posts over 2,000 years ago. What started as a commercial outpost evolved under Roman rule into one of Christianity's most important North African centres. Walking among ruins that cascade toward the sea, we witness how early Christians adapted Roman architectural forms to serve their revolutionary faith.

The site's most poignant story emerges from the Vandal conquest of 430 CE, when most inhabitants fled to Spain rather than accept Arian Christianity. Local legend claims those who remained had their tongues cut out for refusing to renounce their beliefs—yet miraculously continued to speak. Whether historical fact or religious metaphor, the tale captures the spiritual significance this coastal settlement held for early Christian communities.

After sampling Tipaza's renowned seafood, we continue to Cherchell, ancient Caesarea. This former capital of Mauretanian and Numidian kingdoms reveals how local rulers adopted Roman imperial symbols while maintaining African cultural traditions. The archaeological museum's treasures—mosaics, sculptures, and architectural fragments—illustrate the sophisticated fusion culture that flourished here.

Our final coastal stop presents a puzzle: the pyramid-like Tomb of the Christians, its pre-Roman origins challenging assumptions about North African civilization. Built for unknown Numidian royalty, this monument reminds us that sophisticated kingdoms flourished here long before Roman legions arrived.

Late afternoon finds us airborne toward Ghardaïa, leaving the Mediterranean's blue horizons for the golden vastness of the Sahara's edge. The M'Zab Valley awaits—a UNESCO World Heritage landscape where traditional Islamic society has preserved its distinctive character for over a thousand years.

Overnight in Ghardaia.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Ghardaia: M'Zab Valley, El Attefu & Bon Nouria

We awaken in a different world. The M'Zab Valley, home to the conservative Ibadite Muslim community, preserves social traditions and architectural forms virtually unchanged since the 11th century. Here, five fortified towns—Ghardaïa, Melika, Beni Isguen, Bou Noura, and El-Atteuf—represent one of humanity's most successful experiments in sustainable desert living.

The Ibadites, who separated from mainstream Islam nine centuries ago, created these settlements as earthly reflections of spiritual ideals. Every aspect of daily life follows ancient codes: women wear traditional white haïk coverings that leave only one eye exposed, while men sport elaborately pleated saroual loubia trousers. These aren't tourist performances—they're living traditions in communities that have maintained their identity despite centuries of outside pressure.

We explore marketplaces where the rhythm of commerce follows patterns established centuries ago. Narrow streets designed to channel cooling breezes past whitewashed walls demonstrate sophisticated understanding of desert architecture. Each town clusters around its mosque, with residential areas arranged in concentric circles based on social and religious hierarchy.

The traditional palm groves, irrigated by ancient foggara (underground channels), transform the valley into an oasis of green abundance. Here we witness agricultural techniques refined over generations, understanding how human ingenuity has sustained life in one of Earth's harshest environments. The geometric precision of date palm plantations, the careful management of precious water resources, and the integration of livestock grazing all reflect deep ecological wisdom.

Religious monuments reveal how Ibadite theology influenced architecture and urban planning. Despite their reserved nature, our hosts welcome us with genuine warmth, sharing insights into community life that has successfully resisted homogenization by the modern world.

Overnight in Ghardaia.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Ghardaia - Fly to Algiers

Our morning flight carries us from the ancient rhythms of the M'Zab Valley back to Algeria's bustling capital. The aerial view provides perfect perspective on the dramatic landscape transitions that define this vast country—from Saharan oases through Atlas Mountain ranges to Mediterranean coastal plains.

Back in Algiers, we have time to reflect on the incredible diversity of Algerian culture and landscape we've experienced. The contrast between the M'Zab's preserved traditionalism and the capital's dynamic modernity illustrates how contemporary Algeria navigates between ancient heritage and global connectivity.

Overnight in Algiers.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Departure

Departure from Algiers.

BON VOYAGE!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast