Tour Code
AG2

ADVENTURESABROAD

ALGERIA & TUNISIA

18 days

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Day 1 Arrival in Algiers

Today we arrive in Algiers - welcome to Algeria!

Algiers, originally called Al-Jaza'ir, is built into the Sahel hills and runs for ten miles along the Bay of Algiers, located on the Mediterranean coast. This coastal location made it perfect for the Barbary pirate stronghold it would become in 1529, when the pirate "Redbeard" expelled the Spanish from the island of Penon, gaining control of the city for the Ottoman Empire. The country's turbulent history is writ large in the city's richly textured architecture: wide French-built boulevards and elegant apartments and villas, Socialist-era monuments and public buildings, and an enduring Islamic heart secreted in the steep, hillside Casbah.

Overnight in Algiers.

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

Day 2 Best of Algiers City Tour

Located on the Mediterranean coast, Algiers is a city of contrasts, with a blend of modern and traditional architecture, as well as stunning natural beauty. Tourists to Algiers can explore its rich cultural heritage, including its Ottoman and French colonial influences, or take in the breathtaking views of the Bay of Algiers. Algiers is a city full of culture and history, and a great destination to explore.

Today we'll tour Algiers including the historic Kasbaha built in the 16th century, a maze of pretty small alleys and whitewashed houses. There are also quite a few nice boulevards dating back from the days of the French who come in Algiers in 1830 and stayed for 130 years.

Overnight in Algiers.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Algiers - Djemila - Constantine

This morning leave the city and travel through attractive hilly farming countryside to Djemila (a World Heritage Site), Arabic for 'pretty town', considered to be the most outstanding Roman site in Algeria. Situated 900m (2,950 ft) above sea level, Djemila, with its forum, temples, basilicas, triumphal arches and houses, is an interesting example of Roman town planning adapted to a mountain location. While the site itself is not one of the largest in North Africa, Djemila stands out as one of the best-preserved Roman ruins of North Africa and the adjoining museum is packed with the most amazing Roman mosaics.

We end our day in Constantine after a full day of travel and sightseeing.

Overnight in Constantine.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Constantine: Timgad & Lambaesis

We start the day with a 2-hour drive to Timgad, Roman Thamugadi (a World Heritage Site), located on the northern slopes of the Aures Atlas Mountains. It was founded as a military colony by the Emperor Trajan in AD 100. Originally designed for a population of around 15,000, the city quickly outgrew its original specifications and spilled beyond the grid in a more loosely-organized fashion, an excellent example of Roman town planning. Although only partly excavated, Timgad is spectacular in both its scale and its setting.

We continue to the remains of the Roman town of Lambaesis (Lambessa), which includes two triumphal arches, temples, an aqueduct, an amphitheatre, baths, and many private houses. The camp of the third legion, charged with defending North Africa, was moved to Lambessa between 123 and 129 ce. The modern settlement was founded in 1848 by French agriculturalists attracted by the fertile soil. A large convict prison for French political deportees was established there in 1852.

We return to Constantine.

Overnight in Constantine.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Tiddis & Constantine City Tour - Travel to Algiers

This morning we visit Tiddis, hovering on a barren mountain slope, some 30km from Constantine. The ruined Roman town is perhaps the most impressively situated of all Algeria's Roman sites. The Romans arrived during the age of Augustus, but built much of what can now be seen in the 3rd century AD, adapting their fundamental rule of town planning – two straight central streets that cross at the heart of the community – to the curves of the site. Tiddis had no water sources, so one of the most interesting features of the houses here are the channels and cisterns.

We return to Constantine for a city tour and visit the museum of Cirta. We spend the afternoon enjoying this breathtaking city; Constantine is set astride a spectacular gorge that splits the city in two. We'll explore the suspension bridges, the Constantine Museum, Kasbah, and Palace of Ahmed Bey.

After our visit we travel by road back to Algiers.

Overnight in Algiers.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

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

Today we travel west to the ruins of Tipaza (also Tipasa), originally a Phoenician trading post but a Roman colony in the 2nd century AD onwards. Later it became one of the most important Christian settlements in Northern Africa. With the coming of the Vandals and their Arian Christianity in 430, most of the inhabitants fled to Spain. According to legend, the inhabitants had their tongues cut out, but by a miracle they could still speak! One the most interesting sites at Tipaza is the mausoleum built in the 5th century where there are 14 places for sarcophagi. The museum is small but full of valuable mosaics taken from the Basilica dating back to 1st century AD.

After a break for lunch in Tipaza (known for its excellent seafood), we continue to Cherchell and the ruins of the former Roman port of Caesarea. Today Cherchell is the seat of Cherchell District in Tipaza Province; under the names Iol and Caesarea, it was formerly a Phoenician, Carthaginian, and Roman colony and the capital of the kingdoms of Numidia and Mauretania.

On our way back to Algiers we'll stop at the pyramid-like structure of the Tomb of the Christians, set on a hill with wonderful views over the surrounding countryside. The tomb pre-dates the Christian era and probably belongs to the pre- Roman era of the Numidian rulers.

Late afternoon flight Algiers to Ghardaia. Located in the UNESCO World Heritage region of the M'Zab valley. We'll transfer to our hotel and, time-permitting, explore the markets and architecture unique to this region.

The valley, on the edge of the Sahara, is actually a cluster of five towns: Ghardaia, Melika, Beni Isguen, Bou Noura, and El-Atteuf. Often referred to collectively as Ghardaia, the once distinct villages are gradually sprawling together, but retain separate identities.

Overnight in Ghardaia.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

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

The M'Zab is home to a conservative Muslim sect known as the Ibadites, who broke from mainstream Islam some 900 years ago. This is, some say, a country unto itself, with ancient, unchanging social codes. The traditional white haik (a head-to-toe wool wrap) is worn by most women, who cover their entire face, exposing only one eye. Men sport extravagantly pleated baggy trousers called saroual loubia. While locals here can be reserved, it's a friendly and surprisingly laid-back place.

Today step back in time as we enjoy the local customs and culture while visiting the historic cities and sites in the M'Zab valley. We spend a full day visiting traditional market places, enjoying the lively atmosphere and lively colours and unique architecture. We wander narrow streets, visit important religious monuments and mosques, and enjoy the natural beauty.

Overnight in Ghardaia.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Ghardaia - Fly to Algiers

Today we fly back to the capital.

Overnight in Algiers.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Algiers, Algeria - Tunis, Tunisia

Today we fly from Algiers to Tunis - welcome to Tunisia!

Tunis, the capital of the country, is a bustling metropolis and the home of one-sixth of the country's population. Situated in the Gulf of Tunis on the Mediterranean Sea, the modern city extends along the coastal plains and to the surrounding hills. It is a city of many contrasts, with its modern office buildings, shopping malls and European cafes, the colonial French style of the Ville Nouvelle, and the dynamic Arab souks of Tunis' old Medina.

Overnight in Tunis.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Tunis: The Medina, Bardo Museum, Sidi Bou Said & Carthage

We begin the day with a walking tour through one of two UNESCO sites we visit today (two of the eight in the entire country) -- the old medina of Tunis with its narrow lanes crowded with mosques, tombs, and palaces. This was Tunis until the arrival of the French in the late 19th century, who subsequently built their quarters outside of the "Sea Gate" -- now the Ville Nouvelle. En route we will see the Great Mosque of Tunis, Jemaa Zitouna, and the elegant Place du Gouvernement.

We then visit the Bardo Museum, which houses the largest and finest collection of ancient mosaics in the world. These mosaics were discovered in the wealthiest of Roman villas in the many ancient cities found in Tunisia. Rich patrons commissioned a vast array of subjects and themes, from scenes of gods and goddesses, daily life (hunting, fishing, harvesting), the zodiac, seasons, amphitheatre games. From their exquisite details, we can understand why the North African school of mosaicists was the finest in the ancient world, and whose masterpieces can be found throughout the Mediterranean.

We then head to Sidi Bou Said, a charming hilltop village famous for its beautifully decorated blue and white architecture. Visited by the likes of Cervantes, Simone de Beauvoir and Jean Foucault, Sidi Bou Said made an indelible impression on the works of Paul Klee, August Macke and Louis Moilliet who stayed here together in 1914. You will have some free time for lunch and to explore this beautiful village overlooking the Mediterranean Sea.

We continue to Carthage – the legendary city of Queen Dido and Hannibal (today's second UNESCO site). We will begin with a visit to the ancient Punic cemetery -- the Tophet, or sanctuary to Baal and Tanit. Roman propaganda, hostile to their enemy, stated that the Carthaginians ritually sacrificed their children here to the gods. Our next stop is the Punic ports, once the foundation of Carthage's prosperity. Here we see the remains of what was once a sophisticated naval harbour, complete with ship sheds for dry-docking their warships, and a elaborate merchant harbor, for their fleets of cargo ships which engaged in trade throughout the Mediterranean. From here we visit Byrsa hill -- the ancient acropolis and the first area to be settled by the Phoenicians. Crowning the hill is the 19th century Cathedral of St. Louis and the Carthage museum with finds excavated from the city. Our final stop is the Antonine Baths -- the monumental public baths of the city. In the 2nd century AD, these were the largest baths in North Africa and the 3rd largest in the Roman world.

Overnight in Tunis.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 11 Tunis - Bulla Regia & Dougga - Tunis

We leave Tunis early this morning for Bulla Regia. This ancient site is famous for its unique subterranean villas, which belonged to the wealthiest of its inhabitants; we descend to see these luxurious villas and their splendid floor mosaics, still in situ.

After lunch we continue to Dougga, the best-preserved Roman city in Tunisia and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The monumental Capitolium temple stands in the city's Forum, with a breathtaking view over the green rolling hills and plains below. The theaters, gymnasia, baths, shops, stone paved streets and lavish villas are all testimony to the golden age this North African city enjoyed during the Roman era.

Overnight in Tunis.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 12 Tunis - Kairouan: City Touring

This morning we head to Kairouan, travelling through the fertile valleys and rolling hills of the North. Since antiquity to the present, Tunisia is still referred to by other Maghreb countries by the epithet, "Tunisia the Green." This area is a favorite haven for storks, who build their nest on top of telephone towers, minarets and rooftops. We head toward into the Sahel, the transitional barren region between the fertile north and the Sahara desert to the south.

The Holy City of Kairouan is not only the spiritual center of Tunisia, it is the first Islamic city to be established in North Africa, and the 4th oldest Muslim city outside of Arabia. Founded as the capital of the region in 670 AD by the Arab general Oqba ibn Nafi, Kairouan soon acquired magnificent ramparts, mosques, palaces and hammams. Our first stop is the Aghlabid basins, enormous artificial reservoirs constructed in the 9th century to store water for Kairouan, as part of a monumental system in which water was brought by aqueducts to the city from 36km away.

We visit the Great Mosque of Kairouan, the oldest, largest and most important mosque in Tunisia. The lowest story of the towering minaret is thought to date to 730 AD, one century earlier than the structure of the present mosque. Inside we will see the colonnaded courtyard with its ancient wellheads and sundials, and the forest of columns of the prayer sanctuary. The hundreds of columns all differ from one another, in marble types, size, shape and capital designs, since most were taken from ancient Roman sites and reused in the mosque's construction. Our final stop before leaving Kairouan is the Mausoleum of Sidi Sahab, also known as the Mosque of the Barber.

We finish our day with a walking tour of old medina of Kairouan -- the entire medina is protected by UNESCO. Meandering through the lanes, we will stop to admire the beautiful traditional doors and architectural styles, the main monuments, markets, pastry shops and traditional workshops.

Overnight in Kairouan.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 13 Kairouan - Sbeitla - Tozeur

We continue to the spectacular Roman city of Sufeitula -- modern Sbeitla. The Roman civic center is incredibly photogenic, due to the excellent state of preservation its three monumental temples dedicated to Juno, Jupiter and Minerva towering over the Forum. Sbeitla, like other North African cities, prospered in the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD under the Pax Romana. Upon entering the site, we will see olive press -- one of many in the city, since the inhabitants here became extremely wealthy from the trade of olives and olive oil. After visiting the forum and its temples, we will walk through Sbeitla's stone paved streets to see the public baths, the theater, and numerous Christian basilicas with their elaborate baptisteries covered in colourful mosaics.

Heading south, we arrive in the late afternoon at the fascinating oasis town of Tozeur. In medieval times, Tozeur was an important cultural and market center, due to its strategic location on the caravan routes. Merchants from North and West Africa gathered in this thriving oasis, trade such goods as wool, dates, gold, ivory, salt and slaves. Some of the finest dates of the world are grown in the region, the deglat nour or "finger of light". Medieval accounts state that over 1,000 camels used to leave here per day, laden only with dates!

On arrival we will visit the palmerie to view the various crops being grown and to absorb the oasis atmosphere.

Overnight in Tozeur.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 14 Tozeur - Douz - Matmata - Djerba

Our journey continues eastwards across Chott El Jerid, Tunisia's largest salt lake, extending over 5,000km2. The chott lies 30m below sea level, and is a remnant from over 1.5 million years ago when the area was flooded by the sea. Water on the surface of the salt floor reflects strange hues of pink and yellow, and the refraction of light on this depression often creates mirages.

Our next stop is Douz, the "Gateway of the Sahara", another ancient oasis town surrounded by vast expanses of sand dunes. The final leg of our journey takes us to the legendary island of Djerba, where we will spend the first of two nights. Our drive takes us through one of the main olive growing regions of the country; Tunisia has over 65 million olive trees (6 for each inhabitant!) and is currently the 4th largest exporter of olive oil in the world.

We stop at Matmata, where the inhabitants live in rock-hewn dwellings ("troglodyte" homes), some of which are over 400 years old. We will visit the pit dwelling of a local family who will happily show us around. We will also stop to see the cave home which appeared in the first Star Wars film (1977) and was later converted into Hotel Sidi Driss.

Overnight in Djerba.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 15 The Isle of Djerba

We will spend the morning exploring the sites of this splendid island, the country's most recently-named UNESCO site. Originally settled by the Phoenicians, the isle of Djerba is the mythical place where Odysseus encountered the Lotus Eaters during his journey back home from Troy. Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, Vandals, Normans, Arabs, Spaniards, and Ottoman Turks -- all have come to Djerba and left their footprint. Historically Djerba has been known for its sponge fishing and agriculture -- here we can find olive trees which are over 1000 years old. The island today is one of Tunisia's most famous resorts, with its small villages, charming towns, and 125 km of sandy beaches. Today's inhabitants of Djerba are culturally distinct from mainland Tunisians, and are proud of their customs, dress and dialect.

Our first visit is the excellent ethnographic Museum of Patrimonie, which celebrates the island's peoples and traditions. Here we will see displays of marriage festivals and traditional wedding dresses from various parts of the country, traditional costumes of the island, circumcision ceremonies, household and agricultural implements, and displays of typical arts of weaving, calligraphy, jewelry and metalwork. We proceed to the center of Guellala, the pottery producing center of the island where we stop to see the kilns and workshops. Next is El Ghriba ("The Miracle") synagogue: one of the oldest synagogues and most important Jewish pilgrimage sites in the world. Djerba is home to one of the world's most ancient Jewish communities: tradition states that they arrived here after the First Destruction of the Temple by Nebuchadnezzar in 566 BC. This holy synagogue is fascinating for its historic and spiritual importance, as well as for its distinctive style of architecture (a marvelous blend of Jewish, Tunisian, Maghrebian and Sephardic elements). We proceed to the main town Houmt Souq, where

first we shall stop to see the medieval fort, Borj el Kebir; this was the scene of a bloody conflict in 1560 between the forces of Dragut, the Barbary corsair, and Philip II of Spain. In town, we will explore the fruit and vegetable markets, watch the excitement at the daily fish auctions, and wander the narrow lanes and souqs. You will have free time to explore more of this charming town, perhaps do some shopping and have lunch at one of the many restaurants in the center.

The rest of the afternoon is at leisure. You may wish to stay in Houmt Souq, go to the beach, or relax at the hotel.

Overnight in Djerba.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 16 Djerba - Sfax

Our drive continues to the coastal city of Sfax where we arrrive in time for a walk though the medina. This is the second largest city in Tunisia; today Sfax a major commercial and manufacturing centre (mainly of olive oil, almonds, phosphates and textiles) with very little tourism. Inside the massive 9th century ramparts of the old walled city, is the country's finest "living and working" medina.

On arrival we'll walk through the medina of Sfax; part of the Blacksmith's souq was featured in the film, 'The English Patient.' We will do a walk through the historic lanes, markets and workshops before continuing inland to El Djem (ancient Thysdrus).

Overnight in Sfax.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 17 Sfax - El Djem - Monastir - Tunis

Today we travel to the impressive site of El Djem, the final UNESCO site featured on our tour.

Our first El Djem visit is the excellent Archaeological Museum, with its splendid collection of floor mosaics from the villas of the wealthiest inhabitants of El Djem. Just behind the museum is the House of Africa, an opulent villa covering over 3000 sq m which was found in the center of town, dismantled and moved here in its entirety. The villa is named after one of its excellent fine floor mosaics depicting the Goddess of Africa (the only mosaic of its kind in the world).

The sudden appearance of the massive Roman Amphitheatre is an extraordinary sight. With a capacity of 30,000 spectators, it rises 3 stories above the surrounding plains -- though smaller than the Colosseum in Rome, it is in many ways more impressive due to its excellent state of preservation. It was built during the reigns of the (usurper) Emperors Gordion I and his son, Gordian II, both of whom reigned for only a few weeks before being defeated by the legions sent from Rome. Wild beast fights, gladiatorial combats, circuses and games were held here. We climb up to the upper tiers for excellent views of the arena and surrounding countryside, before descending to the basement to see the chambers where scenery, gladiators, prisoners and wild animals were kept. Wild animals were hoisted by a sophisticated (if not theatrical) system of elevators and pulleys into the arena to the delight of the spectators.

Returning to the coast, we go to Monastir to see the 8th century ribat, a kind of fortified Islamic monastery, after which the city is named. The Ribat of Monastir affords wonderful views of the city and the sea. North African ribats were built when the inhabitants were threatened by invading European armies; they served not only a military but religious purpose as well, as fortresses and places of prayer and study for devout soldiers. This spectacular ribat served as a backdrop in numerous films, including Monty Python's 'Life of Brian' and Zeffirelli's 'Jesus of Nazareth.'

Overnight in Tunis.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 18 Departure

Departure from Tunis.

BON VOYAGE!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast