

Morocco in Detail

Private Tour

Blue Dot Travel





MOROCCO PRIVATE TOUR

Morocco. Just saying it conjures up the aroma of delicious tagines, images of bustling souks, snow-capped mountains, medinas (ancient walled cities) and camels. It is all of these things and so much more.

The Kingdom of Morocco is about twice the size of Victoria and sits on the North East Atlantic coast of Africa with the Mediterranean Sea directly north. Its location on the continent, coupled with its resources, meant it received much attention from European powers over the centuries: Portugal, Spain and France have all played their part with the latter claiming Morocco as a protectorate state from 1912 – 1956 (Treaty of Fez). The Western (once Spanish) Sahara remains a highly contentious area in the deep south where the local, mainly indigenous Sahrawians, reject Morocco's sovereignty over this vast desert region.

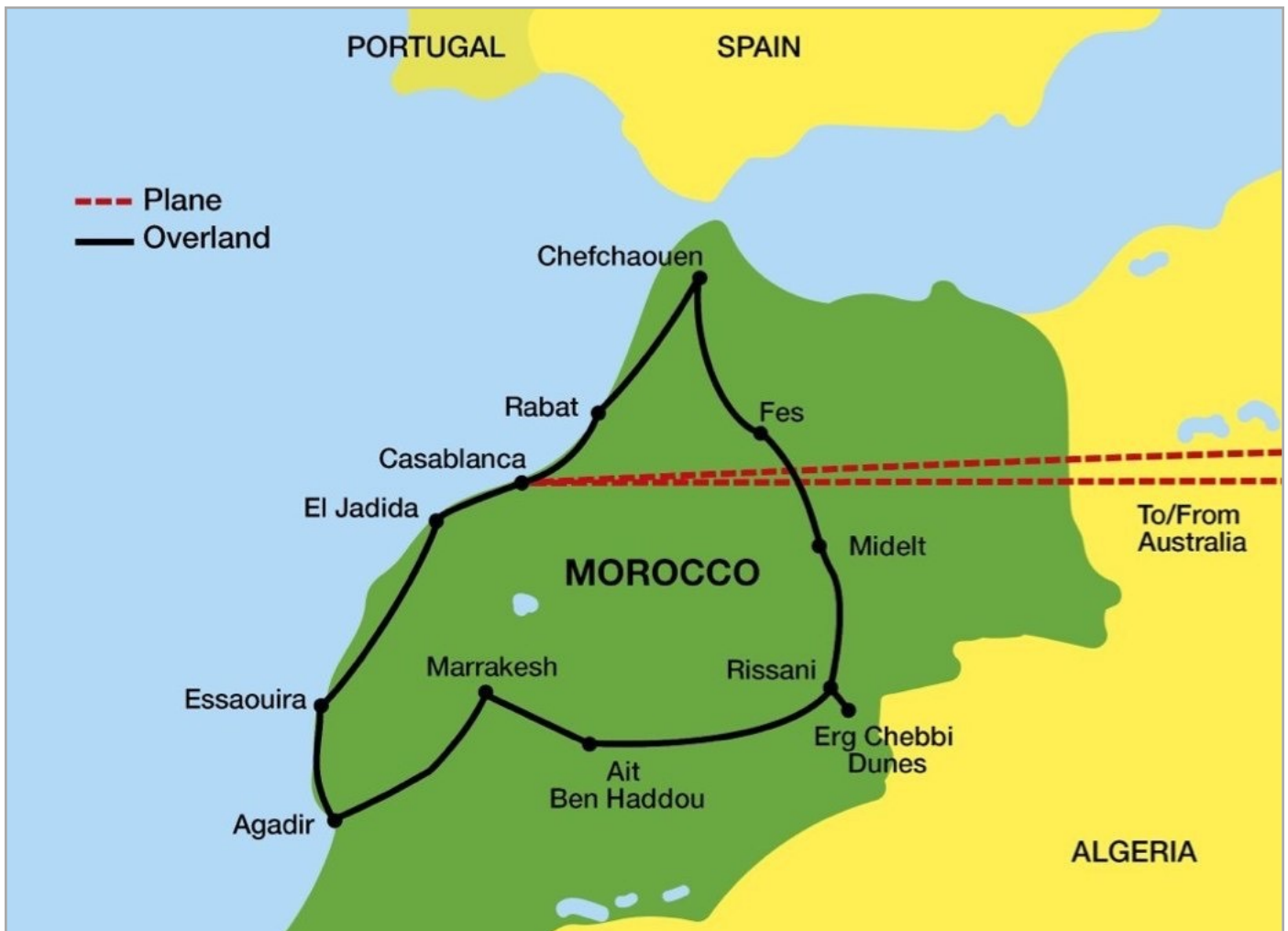
Many people think Morocco is mostly desert however there are fertile valleys, oasis gorges, vast cedar forests and much of the country is mountainous - the Atlas Range averages over 3,500m and the highest peaks are snow covered for much of the year. Casablanca is the largest city with a population of over 3.5 million and the capital of Rabat has around 1.6 million inhabitants.

Ninety nine percent of the population are Sunni Muslims of Arab, Berber or Arab/Berber ancestry. There is a very small Christian and even smaller Jewish population that have had some influence on the region. Arabic is the official and most widely spoken language, French is used for administration and legal affairs including government business and there are several different Berber dialects including Tachelhit, Tamazight and Tarifit.

Family is the centre of Moroccan life with marriage and children being life goals for most. The marriageable age is officially 18 for a woman and, increasingly, they pick or approve of their husband although in more traditional areas arranged marriages still take place.

Morocco is famous for its arts and crafts – pottery, metalware, leather goods and rugs can be found in almost every souk and shopping always involves haggling over the price.

This tour of Morocco will cover off all the must-sees along with the hidden gems of this incredible country.



**Day 1
IN TRANSIT**

Depart Australia likely via Doha. (Note, flight schedule subject to change). *Meals in flight*

**Day 2
TRANSFER TO RABAT**

Arrive Casablanca airport mid afternoon, clear immigration, security and customs. (Note: entry into Morocco could be considered highly bureaucratic and frustrating. Much patience is required). Meet your English speaking guide and transfer to Rabat – about 1.5hrs drive along the motorway. Check in and enjoy some down time at your hotel accommodation after the long journey. Dinner is in the hotel. *B/D*

**Day 3
RABAT – CHEFCHAOUEN**

After breakfast, take a tour of Rabat which will include; Chellah Necropolis, an archaeological site on the ancient Roman town of Sala; the Kings Palace constructed on the site of an 18th century palace; the Kasbah of Oudayas which was named after the tribe sent here to defend the city against the Andalusians and the Mausoleum of Mohamed V who saved Moroccan Jews from the occupying Vichy regime during World War II. From Rabat we'll transfer to the beautiful "blue" city of Chefchaouen in the Rif Mountains. Check into your riad for two nights including dinners. *B/D*

**Day 4
CHEFCHAOUEN**

After breakfast, a tour of the medina (the old walled city). Visit all of the highlights and then you are free to have lunch in the square. After lunch return to the riad and enjoy the pool or stroll the township at your leisure. Your guide will agree a time to come and collect you or, you may prefer to walk back to the riad. *B/D*

**Day 5
CHEFCHAOUEN – FES**

Today, drive to Fes via Volubilis and Meknes, arriving late in the afternoon. The highlights of Volubilis are the ancient Roman ruins and mosaics and the highlights of Meknes being the Bab al Mansour Gate and Moulay Ismail Mausoleum. Check in to your hotel where you'll stay for three nights. Dinner is in the hotel this evening. *B/D*

**Day 6
FES**

After breakfast, a walking tour of Fes Medina (Fes el Bali and Fes el Djedid) to include as much of the following as time will permit: Medressah (Quoranic School) Attarin or Bou-Inania - a school of Koranic study with carved cedar wood and alabaster; mosaics and marble at Quarauiyine Mosque, founded by Fatima Bint al-Fihria in C9th, whose minaret is one of the oldest in the world (non-Muslims are not permitted to enter but we are allowed to look in through the door); Nejjarine fountain and museum; Bab Boujloud, the blue and green gate; Mausoleum of Moula Idriss II

where many Moroccans come on pilgrimage; Chouara tanneries where leather is cured through a centuries old process (very smelly) and you'll feel as if you have taken a step back in time; the water clock dating from the 14th century; Dar Batha museum; Ibn Danan synagogue; various souks (markets). In the afternoon, visit the traditional potteries and Merenid Tombs for a wonderful view over Fes. Dinner tonight is at a local restaurant. *B/D*

Day 7 FES

After breakfast you will be transferred to the Fes Medina for a walk to the Café Clock and to participate in a Moroccan cookery lesson during which you'll prepare a traditional meal to be sampled for lunch. After lunch, a free afternoon to explore more of the medina on your own. Just ensure you agree a pick up time and place with your guide. *B/L/D*



Day 8 FES – MIDELT

This morning, head south across the Middle Atlas, to the town of Midelt. The route passes through Ifrane, Azrou and cedar forests where Barbary Macaques live (one of the rare examples of wildlife where the males play a major role in raising the young). There is time to stop for coffee, lunch, views and a few leg stretches. Check in to the riad. Dinner at the dinner. *B/D*

Day 9 MIDELT – ERG CHEBBI

Today, continue your journey south to reach the dunes of the Erg Chebbi sand sea. Along the route you will pass through Er-Rachidia, Erfoud and Rissani. In Erfoud, learn about the geology and fossils found in this area, once upon a time beneath the sea. Late in the afternoon, arrive at the edge of the great dunes for a transfer by camels (yes, camels) to your luxury tented camp where you'll stay two nights. You can safely walk a short distance in these vast dunes to watch the sunset. The beauty and serenity is extraordinary. A 4WD will transfer your luggage - and you - if you prefer not to make the 40 minute journey by camel. After dinner, Gnawa musicians will play traditional instruments. *B/D*

*Note. We will provide tips and advice about this visit to the desert in your tour update letters. The luxury desert camp is in the small dunes close to the dune line and consists of bedroom tents and a dining tent. The bedroom tents are raised off the sand with wood flooring. Each tent contains a quality bed, mirror, rugs and seating. The attached bathroom tents contain a hand-wash basin, shower and flushing toilet.

Day 10 ERG CHEBBI DUNES

Today you will experience desert life, walking in the immediate dunes and exploring in 4x4s. You drive to the hammada (flat black desert) on the far side of the dunes to visit a Berber Desert family (how do they survive in such a barren environment?). You'll also visit a garden oasis that the locals use for growing vegetables and fruit, plus witness some northern African music at a small café/restaurant

before returning to your desert camp for some down time before dinner. *B/D*

Day 11 ERG CHEBBI – DADES GORGE

Wake early to climb the nearby dune and wait, in the pre-dawn stillness, for the sunrise across a desert landscape. Then, after breakfast, transfer to Boumalne Dades with a detour at Tinerhir to drive along Todra Gorge, the highest gorge in Morocco with walls over 200m high and a mouth just 20m across. As you drive along the valley you will see old deserted villages and gardens where the local community grow crops. You'll leave the main route at Boumalne Dades and to drive along Dades Gorge past ruined hilltop Kasbahs, valley-floor gardens and the strange rock formations of the Tamnalt Hills. Check in to the hotel for overnight and dinner. *B/D*

Day 12 DADES GORGE – KELAAT MGOUNA – OUARZAZATE – AIT BEN HADDOU

After a leisurely breakfast, transfer to Ait Ben Haddou via Kelaat Mgouna, Skoura and Ouarzazate. The drive is spectacular, with hundreds of Kasbahs lining the route, winding through stunning desert landscapes and villages.

Arrive first at Kelaat M'Gouna, also known as Rose Valley. Kelaat Mgouna is famous for cultivating roses.

Expect to find many fine, rose-infused products there.

Continue through Skoura, with a pause to visit the traditional Kasbah Amidril, and the modern administration town of Ouarzazate home to the Atlas Studios – one of the world's biggest film studios. From Ouarzazate head north for 30 minutes to reach Ait Benhaddou and visit the World Heritage Site. This is one of Morocco's "postcards" and most spectacular ksours (fortified villages). It once stood on the route of the trans. *B/D*



Day 13 AIT BEN HADDOU – MARRAKECH

Today, transfer along the Ounila Valley and over the Tizi-n-Telouet, passing Animeter and the pink salt mines, to the traditional Berber village of Telouet. Visit the Kasbah of el Glaoui, former Berber War Lord and Pasha of Marrakech. We will cross the highest Atlas road pass of Tizi-n-Tichka, with mountain hair-pin bends and far reaching views of the villages that cling to the mountain sides, to Marrakech. Check in to your hotel where you'll stay for three nights. Dinner tonight is in the hotel by the pool. *B/D*

Day 14 MARRAKECH

After breakfast, take a walking tour of the medina to include; the souks, a vast network of interlinked quarters, each focusing on a separate trades i.e. woodwork and metalwork etc; Mellah, the old Jewish quarter including gold shops and a Jewish cemetery; Palace Bahia, a huge former palace with mosaics, painted doors and fountains; Koutoubia Minaret and gardens; Saadian tombs, only discovered in 1917 through an aerial photograph and where

sultans are buried; Medressah Ben Youssef, a school of Koranic study with carved cedar wood and alabaster, mosaics and marble; Berber Pharmacy (apothecary) – learn about the oils and spices used in Moroccan daily life; and Central Square of Djemaa el Fna with its storytellers, tooth pullers and snake charmers. In the afternoon you'll visit the Majorelle Gardens in the modern New Town of Marrakech. This is a serene garden with a Berber museum and coffee shop started by French painter Jacques Majorelle in the 1960's. It was later purchased by Yves Saint Laurent and his partner Pierre Berge. Return to your hotel and then head out to a local restaurant for dinner. *B/D*

Day 15 MARRAKECH

After breakfast, those interested will visit a traditional hammam for a steam, scrub and massage - men and woman separate of course. (Note, this is not for everyone and those who do not like hot saunas and steam baths should not join). Our update letters and your guide will provide more about this process. The afternoon is free to explore on your own, a great time to shop through the souks. Your



guide will show you a great café to see the famous Jemaa el Fna square and witness the sunset. *B/D*

Day 16 MARRAKECH – IMLIL IN THE HIGH ATLAS

This morning we will say goodbye to Marrakech and drive to the high Atlas region. You'll stay in the traditional Berber village of Imlil (1780m elevation) that lies at the edge of the Toubkal National Park. There will be an afternoon guided walk of about two hours in the Toubkal National Park for those up to it. You may find this walk a little strenuous as it ascends and descends through the villages. Suitable walking shoes and clothing is required. The weather in the mountains is unpredictable! Your guide will provide more information about the suitability of this walk. Check in to the guesthouse for dinner. *B/D*

Day 17 IMLIL IN THE HIGH ATLAS – TAROUDANT – AGADIR

After breakfast, the group will transfer to Taroudant, also known as the "Grandmother of Marrakech". Taroudant looks like a smaller

Marrakech with its surrounding ramparts. In the sixteenth century the Saadians briefly used Taroudant as a capital of Morocco, before they moved onwards to Marrakech. Today it has the feel of a small fortified market town on a caravan route. Unlike Marrakech, almost the entire city of Taroudant is located inside its walls. Then, drive on to Agadir where you will check in to your hotel and have dinner. *B/D*



Day 18 ESSAOUIRA – AGADIR

After breakfast you'll take a city tour of Agadir along the beachside promenade to the marina and then up to the Kasbah fortress (Agadir Ouefellah) for the stunning views. Discover both ancient and modern Agadir to learn interesting facts about the city's history while driving along the Mohamed V Boulevard, past the Wilaya (the Headquarters of the king's regional representative), and through residential neighbourhoods. On the way to Essaouira you'll visit a women's argan oil co-operative en route. The argan tree only grows on the West coast of Morocco and the oil is extracted for salad oil, amlou (mixed with almonds and honey to make a delicious paste) and skin and hair care treatments. Transfer to Essaouira for dinner and two night's accommodation *B/D*

Day 19 ESSAOUIRA AND SURROUNDS

Today we will see the core sights of wonderful Essaouira, founded by the Romans and inhabited by the Portuguese during the 17th century. There'll be



time to wander at your leisure through this relaxed and friendly small town with examples of Moorish and Portuguese architecture including the ramparts with 17th century cannons from Spain, craft shops in the medina, art galleries and the fishing harbour. Late morning, you'll visit a local vineyard - Les Domaines du Val d'Argan Ahmed - for lunch before returning to the riad for dinner. Make sure you take the time to walk around the ramparts before or after dinner. *B/D*

Day 20 ESSAOUIRA – EL JADIDA – CASABLANCA

After breakfast, transfer to Casablanca through El Jadida, a city which was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2004. You'll visit El Jadida's major highlights including the fortress, cannons, old port and the Portuguese cistern. Continue to Casablanca, where we will visit the Hassan II Mosque. (Non-muslims may only enter the Mosque if they join an official walking walk at set times of the day). Drop off at your hotel for check-in. Then transfer to Rick's Cafe for our farewell dinner. (Tip, watch Casablana, the 1942 classic starring Humphrey Bogart, if you haven't seen it for a while). *B/L/D*

Day 21 DEPART CASABLANCA

Transfer to Casablanca Airport and depart for home or on to your next destination. Flights travelling to Sydney are likely to be via Doha with an overnight at the accommodation provided in the terminal. Depending on your return city, your flight may connect straight through without an overnight stay. *B/D*

Day 22 ARRIVE HOME