

YORK COLLEGE GOES TO MOROCCO

15 days

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Day 1: *Arrival in Casablanca*

Welcome to Morocco!

A modern city and the trade capital of Morocco, Casablanca is a magnificent mix of modernism and tradition. It is the largest metropolitan city in the Maghreb and is characterized by elegant buildings, great avenues and unique architectural art forms and Moorish finishes featured throughout the numerous domes and columns.

Overnight in Casablanca.

Day 2: *Casablanca - Rabat*

We start our day with a brief tour of Casablanca before heading to Rabat. Nearby we'll visit the impressive Hassan II Mosque, the second largest mosque in the world after Mecca in Saudi Arabia. The mosque is open to non-Muslims as a daily shared tour, which highlights its impressive modern interior.

We then continue with a visit to the Museum of Moroccan Judaism in Casablanca, the first of its kind in the Arab world, created by the Jewish Community of Casablanca in 1997 with the support of the Foundation of Jewish-Moroccan Cultural Heritage.

We then travel by road to Rabat, the nation's capital. Here we visit the Royal Palace, the wild gardens of the Chellah, a 14th-century Merinid necropolis; and walk through the Andalusian Gardens within the walls of the Kasbah of the Oudaya. We visit the Hassan Tower, a huge unfinished minaret built mostly at the end of the 12th century. We also visit the Mohammed V Mausoleum, dedicated to the founder of modern Morocco and grandfather of the current king, as well as the newly-opened Museum of Contemporary Art.

Overnight in Rabat.

Day 3: *Rabat - Lixus - Tangier*

Today we head for Tangier visiting the site of Lixus along the way. The site was a trading center for first the Phoenicians, then the Carthaginians, and finally the Romans, but its history is thought to be much older than these conquerors. The ruins include a temple, theater, acropolis, and baths, and although the site is overgrown, it's highly atmospheric. In nearby Larache we visit the Archaeological Museum, which feature a collection of finds unearthed from Lixus, including an interesting display of perfume bottles and jewellery.

We continue to Tangier and have a tour of the city and its surroundings, including Spartel Cape and the Hercules Caves, with its picturesque views of the Atlantic Ocean and the famed Strait of Gibraltar. We'll explore the Kasbah district located next to the port before heading towards the old Medina. We pass the Grand Sacco and the Mendoubia Park and visit the Petit Sacco, with its multitudes of boutique hotels and riads. This historic location has hosted a variety of famous artists, including Matisse and Paul Bowles.

Overnight in Tangier.

Day 4: *Tangier - Tetouan - Chefchaouen*

Today we travel to Chefchaouen, visiting Tetouan on the way.

Tetouan is a jewel of a town in a striking location at the foot of the Rif Mountains, just a few kilometres from the sea. The ancient medina, a UNESCO World Heritage site, looks like it has not changed in several centuries. The modern centre that abuts it gleams in white, its Spanish facades given a recent facelift. This beautiful city is located on the rift of the mountainous region between the Mediterranean Sea and the Iberian Peninsula.

We continue to Chefchaouen, known worldwide for its medina of shady alleys, whitewashed houses with blue turquoise doors, wrought iron windows and colourful tile-covered roofs, busy squares, and steep alleyways. The best way to discover this holy town is to wander around on foot, taking in the atmosphere. We can sit on the terrace of a cafe and take in the view of the grand Tarik-Ben-Ziad mosque. Examples of Andalusian architecture can be found in the kasbah and its gardens. We'll visit the interesting ethnographic museum, featuring collections of embroidery and various pieces of clothing; the famous djellaba, the long and ample garment worn by the men and women of North Africa, was created here. For something different we will visit a traditional oil mill (there are more than 1500 of them!). Chefchaouen is also renowned for its basket-making and its pottery.

Overnight in Chefchaouen.

Day 5: *Chefchaouen - Akchour*

Today we travel to Akchour, a beautiful natural area near Chefchaouen, which features stunning mountains gorges and lush vegetation in a country better-known for desert landscapes. Here we're able to enjoy the natural side of Morocco and have a chance to stretch our legs with some light hiking, possibly to a waterfall for which the region is famous.

Our accommodation-or hermitage-comprises several free-standing cabins scattered across whimsical gardens, romantically lit at night. The main house is a diaphanous, open-plan space for dining and hanging out, with a well-stocked library and a music room filled with drums and a baby grand.

Overnight at Akchour.

Day 6: *Akchour - Meknes - Fes*

Early this morning we depart for Fes (this is a full day!)

Along the way we will make a stop at Meknes, the famed Ismailia capital known for its 40 km long walls and numerous gates. Next we visit Bab Mansour, the Royal Stables, the amazing markets and also the popular Jewish quarter.

Before arriving in Fes we will explore the ruins of the ancient city of Volubilis, the most important and extensive remains of a Roman city in Morocco. This was one of the most distant of the Empire's domain, thanks to the powerful Berber tribes who showed themselves to be more than a match for the conquering legionnaires. Once one of the most important regions producing grain to feed the voracious Roman appetite, and wild animals to keep the crowds entertained as they tried to devour gladiators in the arena, this prosperous provincial city was home to some 200,000 residents at the height of its glory. The importance of the city is reflected in the Capitoline temple, the Basilica, said to be one of the most beautiful in Africa in its day, and its 1,300 square

meter Forum, with sumptuous mosaics still to be seen in some of the most luxurious homes.

We continue to Moulay Idriss, the oldest town in Morocco, founded by Moulay Idriss I in 789, who fled Mecca because of religious and tribal conflicts. It was here that the Idrisid dynasty was founded, and the town has the only round minaret in Morocco.

Finally we arrive in Fes, one of Morocco's four Imperial Cities and the cultural heart of Morocco.

Overnight in Fes.

Day 7: Fes: City Tour

Founded in the eighth century by Moulay Idriss I, this imperial capital was a renowned center of medieval learning. Also known as Fes el Bali, this UNESCO World Heritage Site was founded in the 9th century and is home to the world's oldest university. The city of Fes reached its true economic and cultural height in the 13th–14th centuries under the Merinids, when it replaced Marrakech as the capital of the kingdom. Although the political capital of Morocco was transferred to Rabat in 1912, Fes has retained its status as the country's artisan centre.

Today we stroll the labyrinthine old quarter, with its 9,000 narrow lanes, alleys and souks. Artisan workshops in the medina are as active today as they were 100 years ago and strongly contribute to the city's industrial economy. Trades such as blacksmithing, leather working, ceramics, silk, tapestries, and sculpting are still practiced in these workshops today.

We proceed to the intricately detailed 14th-century Karouine Mosque, one of the oldest, still-functioning universities in the world, and Nejjarine Square. We also see the Royal Palace and Mellah, the Jewish Quarter.

Overnight in Fes.

Day 8: Fes - Erfoud - Merzouga

Today we travel to desert-fringed Erfoud, pausing for lunch in Midelt. En route we marvel at everyday life, passing Berber villages, endless date palm plantations, and the majestic Atlas Mountains. Our journey continues along the dramatic Ziz Gorge, passing the ancient holy city of Rissani, once a stop for the caravans of the 8th century. After a full day of travel we will arrive at our final destination, Erfoud.

Upon arrival at our camp you will witness the sunset from over the desert dunes and enjoy the changing colours of the landscape. If you're up to it you can also ride a camel! This evening 4x4 vehicles take us to the dunes of Erg Chebbi, a strikingly strange natural formation.

Overnight Chergui Sahara Camp, Merzouga.

Day 9: Merzouga - Skoura

Today we travel toward Ouarzazate, once a stopping point for African traders travelling to the cities of Morocco and Europe beyond. En route we enjoy views of the High Atlas southern slopes, intersecting the Dades Valley's flourishing crops, irrigation canals, and palm trees. We travel the "Road of a Thousand Kasbahs" and make a

stop to visit an amazing, small private museum that houses exhibits showcasing local art, culture and history, before proceeding to Ouarzazate. En-route, we stop at the Dades Gorge; the Dades River provides a life source to the valley's greenery. Our overnight point is Skoura, one of Morocco's beautiful oases, which offers travellers a chance to rest and enjoy a bit of nature.

Overnight at Skoura.

Day 10: Ouarzazate & Ait Ben Haddou

Today we tour nearby Ouarzazate, a city originally built as a French garrison in the 1920s. Today, the city is a regional trade center, known for its pottery and carpets. We see the Taourirt Kasbah, which now consists of simple clay houses and crenelated towers that are beautifully decorated with geometric motifs.

We also visit the village of Telouet, which hosts one of the area's most recognized structures, the palace of the "Lord of the Atlas." This palace was the residence of the once Vizier of Marrakech back in the early 20th Century. Dating back to the period when the Glaoui clan ruled over the Atlas and Marrakech, this palace acted as the family's Headquarters and was situated in a dramatic location on a broad mountain valley, providing sweeping views of the peaks on all sides.

We then head to Ait Ben Haddou, a fortified village or "ksar," ideally positioned along a once frequented, ancient caravan route linking the Sahara and Marrakech. This quaint and picturesque village has been featured in numerous Hollywood film productions.

Overnight at Air Ben Haddou.

Day 11: Ouarzazate & Ait Ben Haddou

Today's full-day journey takes us over the High Atlas Mountains on the impressive zig-zag of Tiz n Tichka Pass. 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 its 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 speciality cuisine, are well worth a visit just for the experience.

Overnight in Marrakech.

Day 12: Marrakech: City Touring

Today we discover the delights of Marrakech, starting in the medina, the old walled section of town that is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Marvel at its architectural jewels, including the soaring Koutoubia minaret, which dominates the skyline of Marrakech and can be seen from almost every approach to the city thanks to a longstanding planning ordinance that forbids any other building in the old city to rise above the height of a palm tree.

We also visit the Saadian Tombs, which were only accessible via the mosque next door. However, in 1917 they were opened to the public and can now be accessed via a narrow passage that leads to an enclosed garden watched over by two mausoleums that include more than one hundred mosaic-decorated tombs.

Next is the El-Bahia Palace. This 19th century palace is elaborate in its decoration and was built over a period of seven years for Ba Ahmed, the son of the Grand Vizier Si Moussa. There are row after row of apartments that once housed Ahmed's harem-a trapezoidal garden, a huge tiled courtyard, and many hidden treasures, both in the form of antique objects d'art and the palace's convergence of Andalusian and Moorish architecture.

This afternoon/evening, we enjoy a Moroccan cooking class at a farm near the city. We prepare starters, tagines and desserts. We'll also have a guided walk in the village to meet the local people.

Overnight in Marrakech.

Day 13: Marrakech - Essaouira

Today our journey takes us to the Atlantic coast and Essaouira, one of the most picturesque towns in the country. On arrival we'll dive into its history and see how as an original Phoenician trading post, it prospered during the Roman era as citizens extracted the Tyrian purple colour from a local shellfish. Explore the fortifications that ring the city; built by the Portuguese, the walls are inherent to the charm of Essaouira.

You will have time to see the other attractions including the port, where a daily supply of fresh fish can be found, and a tremendous beach that stretches away to the south. The easy-going nature of the town, the medina, the dramatic fortifications and the beach, have created an atmosphere quite different from the rest of the country.

Overnight in Essaouira.

Day 14: Essaouira - Casablanca

Today we travel by road back to Casablanca, a journey of about 6 hours.

Overnight in Casablanca.

Day 15: Departure from Casablanca

Airport transfer and departure.

BON VOYAGE!