

Morocco Tour March 2023
Dates: March 4 – March 16, 2023
Trip Leader: Beth Whitman

HIGHLIGHTS:

- A **journey through the Sahara** on the back of a camel
- **Two cooking classes** to learn Moroccan cooking skills
- Visiting with two **women-run cooperatives** that help local villagers earn income
- Wandering the streets of Morocco's **fantastical Blue City**
- Meandering the streets of **medinas and shop at souqs** for locally-produced handicrafts
- Experiencing **World Heritage sites** and grand architectural buildings unlike anything you've seen

The adventure starts in Casablanca on March 4, 2023. If you'd like to arrive early, we can arrange additional hotel nights prior to the tour.

The tour ends in Essaouira. You can return home or to your next destination via Casablanca or Marrakech (see Day 13 for more info).

ITINERARY

Day 1 – Casablanca
Saturday, March 4, 2023
Meals: Dinner

Upon arrival at Casablanca's Mohammed V International Airport, you'll be met by a driver and head to the hotel. You'll have a chance to relax on this day prior to our welcome dinner at **Rick's Café!**

You might know Rick's from the iconic movie, *Casablanca*. Though this is not the original restaurant from the movie, it is **filled with details** reminiscent of the film—including the architecture and décor. **The food is great, too!**

Overnight at Barcelo Anfa or similar in Casablanca.

Day 2 – Casablanca – Chefchaouen
Sunday, March 5, 2023
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today will be our first full day of touring. After breakfast, we'll visit the most spectacular mosque that non-Muslims are allowed to enter, the **Hassan II Mosque** on Casablanca's waterfront.

We'll spend time visiting both the exterior and interior of the mosque on a **guided tour**, with plenty of time for photos.





Afterward, we'll make the drive to **Rabat**, less than two hours away. There, we'll visit a **local female artisan** who creates beautiful leather goods including purses, bags and other accessories. We'll have lunch at a wonderful restaurant in Rabat and then drive onward to **Chefchaouen** (the Blue City), about a five-hour drive away.

We'll arrive at our hotel in time for dinner at Lina Ryad.

Overnight at Lina Ryad and Spa and Casa Perleta or similar in Chefchaouen.

★ **HIGHLIGHT!** Hassan II Mosque is the largest mosque in Africa with the **world's tallest minaret** at 689 feet. It's hands down one of the most beautiful buildings in the world and, likely, one of the least known. **It definitely rivals the Taj Mahal.**

**** Due to limited availability, the group will be split between two hotels on this night.**

Day 3 – Chefchaouen
Monday, March 6, 2023
Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Today after breakfast, we'll take a guided tour of this beautiful city perched on the side of a hill. We'll meander through the alleys and (mostly) pedestrian streets to photograph the sea of blue walls, windows, doorways and steps.

Lunch will be on your own to give you time to **wander the streets** and to have time to **photograph this charming village**. This will also be a great chance to browse the shops tucked away down all the alleys.

In the late afternoon, we'll walk the slight uphill climb to the **Spanish Mosque** and enjoy the sunset there.

Afterward, we'll have **dinner at a fantastic local restaurant**.

Overnight at Lina Ryad and Spa and Casa Perleta or similar in Chefchaouen.

**** Due to limited availability, the group will be split between two hotels on this night.**

★ **HIGHLIGHT!** Chefchaouen may be one of the **most beautiful cities** you'll ever visit. Make sure you have camera (or your phone) because it's difficult to *not* capture a great image in this Blue City, where everywhere you look, you feel like you might be **swimming in the Mediterranean**.



Day 4 – Chefchaouen – Fes
Tuesday, March 7, 2023
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch



After a wonderful breakfast at our ryad, we'll start the drive to Fes. Along the way, we'll stop at **Nzala Women's Cooperative** for a **bread-making workshop**. It's here in the tiny town of N'zalat Bni Amar (pop. 2,000) that these women have also started an **embroidery cooperative** to help bring income to their families and to the village. We'll have an amazing **homemade lunch** with them and learn all about their projects.

We'll then drive to **Fes** and check in at our hotel. (Total drive time is about five hours from Chefchaouen to Fes.)

You may want to rest in the late afternoon / evening and have a **relaxing dinner** (not included) at one of the hotel's restaurants or bars. You might also take advantage of the hotel's spa for a massage or **hammam** visit or soak in the hot tub.

Overnight at Hotel Sahrai or similar in Fes.

★ **HIGHLIGHT!** Bread is a staple at every Moroccan meal. And while you may tire of it at some point, you can be sure that when you get home, **you'll be wishing you knew how to make it for yourself!** Today we'll get to do just that. And the ladies who'll be teaching us? They'll charm you with their hospitality!

Day 5 – Fes
Wednesday, March 8, 2023
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

We'll start this morning with breakfast and then a tour of Fes including the **Royal Palace**, the **Jewish Quarter** and the **Qarawiyyin**—the oldest existing, continually operating, higher educational institution in the world. And, it was **started by a woman** (YES!). We'll also visit a **pottery** workshop where you'll see artisans making pottery of all sizes and styles.

Afterward, we'll take a **tasting tour of the medina**. This will be during lunch and will be all you need (and then some!) for a lunchtime meal.

After the tasting tour, we'll continue through the medina for a tour of the **tanneries**, **souqs** and **artisan quarters**, building in some time to shop.

Tonight dinner is on your own. You may not be hungry after the tasting tour but if you are, you can always grab a bite (or more) to eat at one of the hotel's restaurants or bars. And if you didn't get a chance the previous night, consider a massage, hammam visit or soak in the hot tub.

Overnight at Hotel Sahrai or similar in Fes.



★ **HIGHLIGHT!** The **Fes medina** is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and a massive area of alleyways filled with **shops**, **cafes**, **restaurants** and **residences**. It's mind-boggling that anyone could find their way around, so we'll be guided to help us through the maze.

Day 6 – Fes – Sahara
Thursday, March 9, 2023
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today will be a long drive to get to the Sahara (approximately 10 hours), so we'll want to start early.

Along the way, we'll stop for lunch and other breaks to stretch our legs, take some photos, grab a drink and snacks, and use the restroom.



We'll arrive at the **edge of the Sahara** in the late afternoon and then take a (optional) camel ride to our **Luxury Camp**. Our overnight bag, along with anyone interested, will be taken by vehicle. The **camel ride** will take about an hour and we'll have the chance to stop for photos along the way!

We'll settle into our tents and enjoy a **campfire before dinner**. After an amazing dinner in the **dining tent**, we'll then have a chance to sit by the campfire again, **star gaze** and listen to the **drumming and singing** by the employees who are all quite talented!

Overnight at Luxury Camp or similar in the Sahara.

★ **HIGHLIGHT!** You'll feel both **isolated** and **luxuriously relaxed** at the camp. You'll be able to (mostly) only see sand dunes and stars, and you'll be so comfortable, you'll forget you're in a "tent."

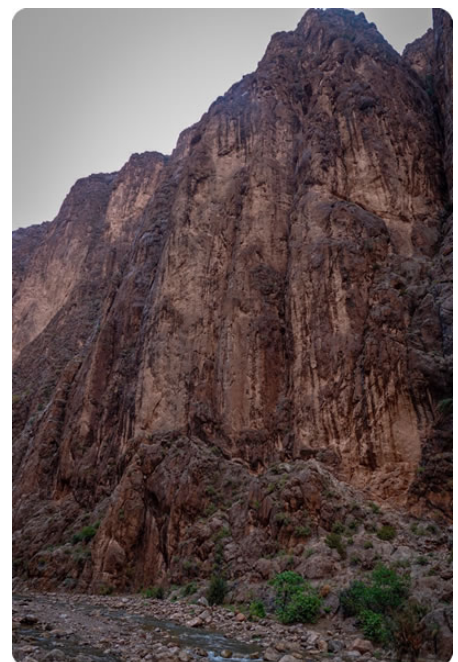
Day 7 – Sahara – Ouarzazate
Friday, March 10, 2023
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

This morning, we'll have a leisurely breakfast before taking the **short drive** (no camels this time!) back to the main road and town where we'll meet up with our vehicle for the **drive to Ouarzazate**.

Along the way, we'll stop at **Todra Gorge**, where we'll be able to walk along the road and through the gorge and also have lunch.

This will be another longish day of driving (7.5 hours) so we'll continue on to our hotel to relax this afternoon and evening. This town is really just a **stopping-off point** for us so that we can break up the long drive from the Sahara to Marrakech.

Dinner and overnight at Ksar Ighnda or similar in Ouarzazate.



Day 8 – Ouarzazate – Marrakech
Saturday, March 11, 2023
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

After breakfast, we'll visit another UNESCO World Heritage Site, **Kasbah Ait Benhaddou**. This area consists of a group of earthen dwellings once used as a stopping point for caravans between the Sahara and Marrakech. If you like, you can **make the easy walk to the top**—via windy alleys and shops—to a **viewpoint** looking over the entire valley. From here, you can look down and perhaps recognize some of the scenery from the movie, *Gladiator*, as part of it was filmed here!



We'll continue on our drive and stop for lunch along the way before arriving in Marrakech in the late afternoon.

At night, we'll tour the **Djemaa el-fna**, Marrakech's main square, and then have dinner on our own at one of the city's many restaurants.

Overnight at La Maison Arabe or similar in Marrakech.

★ **HIGHLIGHT!** Marrakech is a **vibrant, bustling city** that is busy by day, but downright busting with energy by night. We'll visit the main square in the evening where **nightlife explodes** with **vendors, street performers** and **hawkers** of all things.

Day 9 – Marrakech
Sunday, March 12, 2023
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today, we'll take a guided tour of Marrakech's highlights including the **Koutoubia, Bahia Palace** and **Saadian Tombs**—all centrally located. We'll stop for lunch in the medina and then continue with a **guided tour through the medina and souqs**.

For dinner, we'll be taking part in a lively **tagine cooking class** at our hotel's restaurant, which is renowned for its food.

Overnight at La Maison Arabe or similar in Marrakech.



★ **HIGHLIGHT!** Marrakech has much to offer in terms of **history, culture** and **food**. We'll get a dose of all of these today during our tour of this city made quite famous by **Crosby, Stills & Nash**.

Day 10 – Marrakech
Monday, March 13, 2023
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today we'll drive to the **Atlas Mountains** (about 1.5 hours away) to see the countryside, take in some **fresh air** and see how communities outside of the cities live.

Once we arrive in the village of **Imlil**, we'll take a (optional) guided hike to a **Berber village**. The hike will be just over an hour. While it won't be too difficult, consider wearing hiking or walking shoes with some tread and ankle support.

We'll have a **traditional lunch in a Berber home**.

We'll then return to Marrakech where **dinner is on your own** to give you some flexibility and discover food and restaurants of your choosing. You might also schedule a massage or just take a break from all the delicious food!

Overnight at La Maison Arabe or similar in Marrakech.

★ **HIGHLIGHT!** There will be many highlights today, but overall it will be a day of **interactions with the locals** and getting to know them outside of the city!

Day 11 – Marrakech – Essaouira
Tuesday, March 14, 2023
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Today after breakfast, we'll visit **Jardin Majorelle**, a 2.5 acre garden once owned by Yves St. Laurent. This oasis in the city is filled with **exotic plants, trees, flowers, streams and pools** all behind an earthen wall and hidden from street view. We'll also visit the **Berber Museum** here as well as the **Yves St. Laurent Museum**.

Lunch will be at **Amal Association**, a non-profit that empowers women through culinary skills.



We'll then make the drive west toward **Essaouira**, the last stop on this magical trip.

Dinner is on your own tonight. You may eat at the hotel's restaurant, walk into town or just enjoy a light bite in the bar.

Overnight at Villa de l'O or similar in Essaouira.

★ **HIGHLIGHT!** Today's highlights will be the beautiful (and peaceful) **gardens** as well as the delicious meal at **Amal**.

Day 12 – Essaouira
Wednesday, March 15, 2023
Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Today is, sadly, our **last day of touring in Morocco**. We'll make it easy on you and include just a morning of touring the **medina, harbor and sqala** (the city's fort from the 18th century).

You'll then have lunch on your own and an afternoon free to **eat, shop, relax, walk** or **pack**.

This evening we'll have an **unforgettable farewell dinner** at a wonderful local restaurant. (Note that this will likely run late.)

Overnight at Villa de l'O or similar in Essaouira.

Day 13 – Essaouira – departure
Thursday, March 16, 2023
Meals: Breakfast

Today is departure day! We won't have a formal farewell meal, but you will likely have time to say your goodbyes over breakfast. It is recommended that you schedule your flight for later in the day or early the following day so that you don't have to leave too early on this morning.

There are a number of options for leaving Morocco. We can book a car/shuttle to Marrakech for you (preferred option and included if you depart for airport after 10 a.m.), we can book a car/shuttle to Casablanca for you, or you can fly from Essaouira to Casablanca (note that flights are limited).

In our experience, most people will return to Marrakech, overnighing there for their early morning flights out on March 17. But this will all depend on flight availability post-Covid.

**** Itinerary subject to change without notice.**