**CONTEMPORARY & IMPERIAL MOROCCO | APRIL 24 – MAY 5, 2019**

*To travel in Morocco is to move from one era of history to another experiencing a culture that fuses indigenous Berber traditions with Arab, Jewish, Andalusian, and other European influences.*

**APRIL 24: DEPARTURE**

Depart the USA.

**APRIL 25: RABAT**

- Arrive in the stately capital city of Rabat and transfer to the Villa Mandarine.
- This evening enjoy a welcome reception and dinner with fellow travelers.

**APRIL 26: RABAT**

- Attend a briefing with Spanish journalist David Alvarado, who has covered North Africa for more than a decade as a correspondent for Spanish-language CNN. Mr. Alvarado will talk about the role of democracy in Morocco which has been ruled by King Mohammed VI since 1999.
- Afterward stroll through the cobblestone alleys of the millennium-old Oudaya Kasbah, a former lair of Barbary Coast corsairs, which features an Andalusian garden. Just a short walk up the hill, the vibrance of the kasbah disappears into an enveloping history; the remains of the old Roman city appear out of the earthy hills in the Gardens of Sala Colonia in Chellah.
- Discover Rabat’s colonial district and its impressive Art Deco architecture including the dazzling white cathedral. The local post office still stands as it did back in the 1920s, surrounded by an old police station and courts built in the 1930s. The wide avenues lined with palms provide a perfect shady opportunity for a quick mint tea before visiting the semi-built Hassan Tower of 1196.
- Stop at the ornate mausoleum to modern...
Morocco’s “father” Mohamed V, set on the grounds of a ruined mosque that was meant to have been the world’s largest in the 12th century.

- After lunch visit the offices of the Moroccan Center for Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship - a not-for-profit dedicated to finding innovative solutions to social challenges in Morocco.

- Before dinner meet with Asma Lamrabet, a feminist who is part of a school of thought often referred to as “Islamic feminism”. Ms. Lamrabet argues from a religious basis because she believes that religion is the number one weapon used against women today.

- Enjoy a dinner at a lovely local restaurant.

**APRIL 27: FEZ**

- Depart Rabat to drive east two hours to the imperial city of Meknes, a UNESCO World Heritage site and the 17th century capital offering a fusion of color, culture and history. The great sultan, Moulay Ismail made Meknes his imperial capital and it is there that he is entombed.

- Meet with Abdelmalek El Kadoussi, a communication professor in Meknes who has been looking at the role of the media in Morocco including the practice of self-censorship.

- Experience a private tour and wine-tasting at Chateau Roslane, the main production facility of Celliers de Meknes. Enjoy lunch at Villa des Pins, a manor amid vast olive and fruit tree groves.

- Visit the ruins of Volubilis, Rome’s commercial capital for the region up to the 3rd century.

- In its heyday this was a sophisticated city that housed and fed 20,000 people from the time when B.C. turned to A.D. Walk through the stone and down rutted streets where wagons and chariots once drove. Enjoy the outstanding collection of mosaic floors that rival any in the world.

- Later, arrive at the fabled city of Fez, Morocco’s 1,200-year-old spiritual capital. This is a perfect time to visit Fez which is enjoying a subtle transformation along its medieval alleyways. Ancient buildings are being restored, designers are breathing new life into age-old crafts, and chefs are opening exciting restaurants.

- Overnight at the Sahrai Hotel.

**APRIL 28: FEZ**

- Meet this morning with the American-born director of the city’s Arab Language Centre, David Amster, who has lived in the Fez medina for more than a decade and will discuss its preservation.

- Spend the balance of the day exploring Fez, a World Heritage Site and the only medieval Arab city that’s still intact. Wander through the city’s labyrinth of narrow streets where you are surrounded by age-old traditions. The medina is believed to be the world’s largest car-free urban area, so donkeys and mules are piled high with goods; shouts of “balak” will warn you to get out of the way.

- For centuries, Fez has been a regional hub for artisanal craft production – leather, textiles, brass and ceramics. To this day, many parts of the old medina are divided into quarters by area of craft production.

- Explore Nejjarine Square and Museum. Located near the carpenter district in the middle of the
medina, this beautiful square is dotted with Andalusian-style architecture dating from the 18th century.

- Stop at Madrasa Bou Inania, one of the few religious buildings non-Muslims can enter in Morocco. The Islamic school, founded in the 14th century by Sultan Abu Inan Faris, is beautifully decorated with intricate carvings and tile work all the way up to the top of its minaret.

- End the morning with a private visit to the Palais el Mokri. Built in 1906 by Si Tayeb El Mokri, its rich mosaics, Venetian glass, and delicate wood carvings are a stunning example of traditional Moroccan artisanship.

- For lunch visit Riad Idrissy, the project of John Twomey and designer Robert Johnstone. Complete with dazzling mosaics, traditional zellij tiles and stucco work, its four suites have been furnished with antiques, carpets and objets d’art from all over Morocco. Enjoy lunch set in the romantic remains of a crumbling riad, with mosaic floors, fountains and exotic foliage.

- Meet with Omar Chennafi, a young Moroccan photographer whose images have been featured in *Time* magazine. Omar has been chosen as the official photographer of the internationally prestigious Festival de Fèz des Musiques Sacrées du Monde (Festival of Sacred Music) in Fez, Morocco.

- Stop in at the offices of “Centre des Droits des Gens” (CDG – Close to the People) - one of the biggest human rights organizations in Morocco.

- Enjoy dinner at leisure to explore local restuarants.

**APRIL 29: ERFOUD**

- Departure early from Fez for a full day drive to Erfoud, the gateway to the Erg Chebbi, one of two large seas of sand dunes in Morocco.

- En route travel through the cedar forests of the Middle Atlas Mountains – home to families of Barbary apes and several characteristic small towns – and across a plateau between the Middle and High Atlas Mountains.

- Stop at the small Berber town of Sefrou, a picturesque place situated on the edge of the Middle Atlas and a major trading post for traders crossing from the Mediterranean to the Sahara. It has a small but interesting medina that was designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2013. Sefrou once hosted one of Morocco’s and Africa’s largest Jewish communities (as many as 8000 people, according to some accounts), and it was here that Moulay Idriss II lived while overseeing the building of Fez.

- Enjoy lunch with a local family

- Take a scenic drive over the mountains and through the vast date palm orchards of the Ziz Valley to Erfoud, an oasis town on the edge of the Sahara Desert. Enroute visit ksars (fortified villages) in the ancient town of Rissani and also see the ruins of Sijilmassa, a historic trading post along the trans-Sahara caravan routes.

- After lunch cross the Ziz Gorge and travel down to the entrance to the Sahara and the town of Erfoud.

- Dinner and overnight at the *Kasbah Hotel Xaluca Maadid.*
**APRIL 30: MERZOUGA**  
**B, L, D**

- This morning learn more about the issues surrounding the dispute between Morocco and Western Sahara. In 1975 after the withdrawal of Spain’s forces in Western Sahara, hundreds of thousands of Moroccan civilians marched across the border to lay claim to the mineral-rich territory. Today tens of thousands of Sahrawi refugees live in camps around Tindouf in Algeria. King Mohammed VI has made it clear that no settlement of the Sahara affair is possible outside the framework of the full sovereignty of Morocco over its Sahara. In early 2017 Morocco was readmitted to the African Union, presumably in an attempt to secure the disputed territory of Western Sahara.

- In the late morning a small fleet of 4x4s will take the group, with overnight bags, into the highest dunes in Morocco – the towering Erg Chebbi. It’s an adventurous one hour drive to get to camp.

- Upon arrival at the Sahara Stars enjoy lunch.

- After lunch experience the sand dunes up close with a walk in the dunes and a camel trek around sunset.

- Return to the camp for dinner and overnight. Spend the night in comfortable desert tents with private facilities including shower and toilet.

**MAY 2: MARRAKESH**  
**B, L, D**

- En route to Ouarzazate travel along the “Route of 1000 Kasbahs” across the Dades Valley to the Todra Gorge where we will stop for lunch at a local restaurant. Todra Gorge offers some of Morocco’s most dramatic scenery.

- After lunch continue west with the dramatic High Atlas mountains always to the north, passing through the Skoura oasis before reaching the Noor Solar Power complex which, when completed, will be the world’s largest concentrated solar power plant and could produce enough energy to power over one million homes by the end of 2018 and reduce carbon emissions by an estimated 760,000 tons per year.

- Continue on Ouarzazate which was once an isolated military outpost during French occupation. Today, the city is nestled amongst a barren, rocky plateau south of the High Atlas mountains. A trading stop on the old trans-Saharan caravan route, the city and its provinces are rich in history and fascinating cultures.

- Overnight at Ksar Ighnda Hotel located on the edge of the desert in the Atlas mountains.

- Dinner is at the hotel tonight.

**MAY 1: Ouarzazate**  
**B, L, D**

- Ouarzazate is the center of Morocco’s film industry and two major film production studios are located here as well as a film school and a museum of cinema. Many of Hollywood’s most successful actors, directors and producers have spent their fair share of time in this city. Begin the morning with a visit to Atlas Studios.

- In terms of acreage, Atlas is the world’s largest film studio with the desert providing plenty of space. Several of the Star Wars sagas were shot there and more recently, Game of Thrones. The beauty of the town makes it a perfect and affordable location for many productions. Walking through the perfectly preserved city, it’s sometimes difficult not to believe that the actual town is not a film set!

- Continue traveling north this morning to Marrakesh over the Tizi-N-Tichka pass. The landscape is stunning as you pass by small villages that dot the side of the road, as well as those perched impossibly on the sides of the highest peaks.
• After lunch drive to Marrakesh and Riad 72. Wrapped around a central courtyard brimming with banana trees, Riad 72 is an art-school version of a traditional Moroccan house in Marrakech's medina district.

• End the afternoon at Djemaa El-Fna, Marrakesh’s main square and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The plaza, whose name means ‘assembly of the dead’ due to public executions which were held there as far back as 1050 AD, is an open-air theatre. By mid-morning the square begins to fill with water-sellers with fringed hats, henna tattoo artists, monkeys and oboe-playing snake charmers.

• Dinner is at a local restaurant close to the hotel.

**MAY 3: MARRAKESH B, L**

• Begin the day at the medina. Built like a chunk of honeycomb, the medina is comprised of several neighborhoods spinning out from its heart – the Djemaa el-Fna square – and woven together by whip-thin lanes and knotty souks. We will experience the emerging arts scene in the old city where contemporary art galleries reside among 16th-century palaces.

• Proceed to the beautiful 12th century minaret of the Koutoubia Mosque – Marrakesh’s iconic landmark – visible for miles around. Continue on to Bahia Palace, a prime example of Moorish-Andalusian architecture.

• For lunch we head to the palm groves just outside the city to Jnane Tamsna, a little paradise of tranquility and the private home and luxury resort of Meryanne and Gary Martin, an ethno-botanist. Mr. Martin will give us a tour of his garden which is a natural paradise of aromatic herb gardens, olive groves, lemon trees, date palms, vegetable gardens and ornamental flower beds.

• He will talk about his work in a valley of the High Atlas mountains, with its orchards and Berber villages. Learn about the Morocco programs he spearheads as Director of the Global Diversity Foundation and a specific project he is coordinating with a focus on plants native to Morocco and their uses.

• End the day at Maison de la Photographie with its extraordinary collection of 3,500 photographs about Morocco between 1870 and 1950. Sip mint tea at the Maison’s secret rooftop café which offers the highest, sweeping panoramic views of Marrakech.

• Joining the group here will be activist Nadir Bouhmouch who is currently making a documentary on the 6-year protest action in a remote Moroccan village in the Sahara Desert. The residents of Imider - who are mostly ethnic Amazighs – are protesting the operation of a silver mine operated by La Societe Metallurgique d’Imider (SMI) and owned by Societe Nationale d’Investissement (SNI), a private holding company owned by the Moroccan royal family. The operation of the mine polluted the village’s water supply.

• Dinner is at leisure

**MAY 4: MARRAKESH B, L, D**

• This morning drive to the upscale neighborhood of Guéliz to visit a garden called Marjorelle. The garden is named after its creator, Jacques Majorelle, a French born artist who settled in Marrakesh in 1919 to continue his career as a painter. Majorelle died in 1962 and the gardens remained unkempt, until 1980, when the French fashion designer Yves Saint Laurent and his partner Pierre Bergé bought the property and restored it.
• **The centerpiece of the garden is his former residence, a house painted in Marjorelle Blue. The garden that Jacques built lives on as his creative masterpiece. The special shade of bold cobalt blue, which he used extensively in the garden and its buildings, is named after him – Majorelle Blue.**

• Close by is the new Yves Saint Laurent Museum which houses thousands of articles of clothing and haute couture accessories, all carefully selected by Pierre Bergé, Saint Laurent’s partner in business and in life.

• **Enjoy lunch at the AMAL Restaurant which is run by the Amal Center, a non-profit organization dedicated to the empowerment of disadvantaged women through restaurant training and job placement.**

• **Afternoon at leisure for independent activities.**

• **Enjoy a private reception and farewell dinner this evening.**

**MAY 5: DEPART**

• **Depart for flights home.**

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**PRICING**

**GROUND PACKAGE PRICING***

Per person double occupancy: **$6,995**

Single supplement: **$1,470**

*Rates are based on standard accommodations. Suites, superior rooms and other upgrades carry an additional fee.

**INCLUDED**

- Accommodation based on double occupancy in hotels as listed
- Meals as listed in the program with wine at the welcome and farewell dinners
- Airport transfers on designated arrival and departure dates
- All sightseeing and activities listed in a private a-conditioned vehicle
- Water on the bus
- The services of a local Moroccan guide who will travel with the group throughout
- Porterage
- All gratuities

**DOES NOT INCLUDE**

- International airfare to and from Morocco
- Any meals not listed as included
- Drinks other than bottled water with meals
- Trip insurance
- Excess luggage charges
- Laundry charges
- Items of a purely personal nature
- Any item not listed