Contemporary and Imperial Morocco

MARCH 1–12, 2021

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.

MARCH 1: DEPARTURE

- Depart the USA

MARCH 2: RABAT R, D

- 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.

MARCH 3: RABAT B, L, D

- This morning, meet with Kathya Berrada a research associate at the Moroccan Institute for Policy Analysis, a Moroccan based think tank. Ms. Berrada is co-author of the book “Islamic Foundations of a Free Society” that addresses how many in the West view Islam with a mixture of fear and suspicion.
- Later, enjoy a leisurely stroll through the cobblestone alleys of the millennium-old Oudaya Kasbah, a former lair of Barbary Coast corsairs, with 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. This ancient site was almost completely destroyed during an earthquake of 1755, but thankfully parts still stand, along with the medieval Muslim tombs buried deep in the sand.
• After lunch at a local restaurant, visit the offices of the Moroccan Center for Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship, a not-for-profit dedicated to finding entrepreneurial and innovative solutions to social challenges in Morocco. It was founded in 2012 by a group of 17 people enthusiastic about social change in Morocco and believing that supporting social entrepreneurs with system-changing ideas can provide benefits for Morocco and the wider global community. Meeting the group will be Adnane Addiou, an Ashoka Fellow, social commentator, social entrepreneur and disruptive thinker, who has committed his life to work in the MENA region, particularly Morocco, enabling creative thinking, entrepreneurship and innovation for the common good. He is a co-founder of the Moroccan Center for Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship where he currently serves as Chief Visionary.

• Continue on to discover Rabat’s colonial district and its impressive Art Deco architecture including the dazzling white art deco 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.

• Stop at the semi-built Hassan Tower of 1196 which stands tall amongst a sea of stone columns. Next door is the Mohamed V Mausoleum which is a perfectly preserved example of the Alawite dynasty’s architectural style and the final resting place of three significant members of the royal family. Although one cannot enter the mosque, it is one of the few holy sites in Morocco that is open to the public.

• Dinner this evening is at a local restaurant.

**MARCH 4: CASABLANCA**

**B, L, D**

• Today, enjoy a full day excursion to Casablanca. The city’s French colonial legacy is seen in its downtown Mauresque architecture, a blend of Moorish style and European art deco.

• Begin with a visit to the Hassan II Mosque. This flamboyant building was built at enormous expense to commemorate the former king’s 60th birthday. Set on an outcrop jutting over the ocean and with a 210m-tall minaret that serves as the city’s major landmark, it is a showcase of the very best Moroccan artisanship: hand-carved stone and wood, intricate marble flooring and inlay, gilded cedar ceilings and exquisite zellij (colorful ceramic tiling) abound. The mosque is commonly thought to be the world’s third-largest mosque after those in Mecca and Medina, and can accommodate 25,000 worshippers.

• Drive to Galerie Atelier 21 where we will meet with contemporary art consultants Kristi Jones and Kenza Amrouk. Kristi, an American, has been living in Casablanca for 10 years and will share with the group her experiences as a woman in the country where contemporary art is just beginning to become accepted. Also joining the group will be gallery owner Aicha Amor who sees the burgeoning art scene of Casablanca as a reflection of the cultural interests of King Mohammed VI, an enthusiastic collector. The king is convinced that Morocco is one of the few Muslim countries able to show that it has peacefully managed an Islamic Enlightenment.

• Enjoy lunch at Rick’s Café. Opened in 2004, Rick’s café was designed to recreate the bar made famous by Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman in the movie classic Casablanca. Set in an old courtyard-style mansion built against the walls of the Old Medina of Casablanca, the restaurant–piano bar is filled with architectural and decorative details reminiscent of the film: curved arches, a sculpted bar, balconies, balustrades, as well as beaded and stenciled brass lighting that cast luminous shadows on white walls.

• Later meet the young street artist, Ed Oner, and accompanied by him, look at some of the murals he has painted in the area.

• Hear from representatives from the three parties that constitute Morocco’s alliance of the Federation of the Democratic Left, namely the Unified Socialist Party, the Socialist Democratic Vanguard Party, and the National Ittihadi Congress party. Founded in 2016, the Federation has been hoping to create a viable alternative in a Moroccan political scene sharply divided between the conservative Justice and Development Party (PJD) and the pro-monarchy Party of Authenticity and Modernity (PAM).

• Return to Rabat and enjoy dinner at the hotel this evening.
MARCH 5: FEZ  B, L, D

- Meet with feminist Houda Zekri who will discuss some of the challenges Muslim women face being caught between two perceptions: a conservative Islamic approach and a liberal Western approach. At the heart of this debate Muslim women are seeking to reclaim their right to speak in order to re-appropriate their own destinies, calling for the equality and liberation that is at the heart of the Qur’an.

- 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. Enter the mausoleum and step inside a small entry room, painted buttercup yellow with a small fountain marking the center of the room.

- Meet with Abdelmalek El Kadoussi, a communication professor in Meknes who has been looking at the role of the media in Morocco. Mr. El Kadoussi will talk about the practice of self-censorship and the list of stories that journalists do not report on to avoid fines or imprisonment.

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

- Drive a short distance to the vast ruins of Volubilis, Rome’s commercial capital for the region up to the 3rd century. In the fertile area that the ruined Roman city is located, it’s difficult to remember you’re in Morocco and the ruins stand as a testament to an empire that changed the world forever.

- 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 down rutted streets where wagons and chariots once drove. The Appian Way runs through the ruins and it’s almost surreal to stroll along the paving stones of a road that was begun in 312 BC. 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.

- Check in to the Palais Faraj Suites & Spa, housed in a lavish 19th century former palace. Located just outside the medina walls, it’s a wonderful base from which to discover the labyrinth of Fez – the largest pedestrian zone in the world. Within minutes of the hotel you will find soaring minarets, shrines, pungent tanneries, copper beaters souks, traditional djellaba tailors and a wide selection of restaurants.

- Enjoy dinner at the hotel this evening.
MARCH 6: FEZ

**B, L, D**

- After breakfast depart the hotel and walk to the heart of the medina where we will meet with Naima Lahbil who will talk about the preservation of the Fez medina. Naima is a professor of Economics at the Faculty of Law, Economics and Social Sciences in Fez and has published several articles on the medina of Fez. She has a strong interest in the changing face of urban Morocco and published a novel several years ago in which she explored issues surrounding the pace of change. She has long been a champion of the cultural and historic heritage of Fez and has worked with UNESCO and the World Bank on many projects. Also joining the group will be American-born director of the city’s Arab Language Centre, David Amster, who has lived in the Fez medina for more than a decade. Mr. Amster is passionate about ensuring that any renovation be completed to the same exacting standards achieved by the original craftsmen.

- From here walk to the Glaoui Palace. Among the medina’s many hidden palaces, the extraordinary Dar al Glaoui is one of its most atmospheric. The Pasha of Marrakesh’s second home—he ruled over most of southern Morocco in his day—has fallen into disrepair since Morocco’s independence from France in 1956, when his power waned. But amid the crumbling ruins, evidence of its former grandeur is visible in the exquisite cedar wood doors, intricate stucco, tiled salons, and the carved wooden balconies that line its patios. The large estate was comprised of 17 buildings and two gardens, with ornate salons, an enormous kitchen, Koranic school, garages, stables, a harem, and a hammam. As you walk into the courtyard surrounded by great white pillars with a fountain in the center you can sense the grandeur of a feudal warlord’s palace.

- After lunch at a local restaurant, continue exploring Fez. A short distance away is the Fez water clock, the oldest form of time keeping in the world. Built by the “muwaqkit” (time keeper) Abou al-Hassan Ibn Ali Ahmed Tlemsani, the clock was finished on May 6, 1357, and kept inside Dar al-Magana, a house built by the Marinid Sultan Abu Inan Faris.

- Explore Nejjarine Square. 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. At the centerpiece of the city’s extraordinary cultural and intellectual heritage is the Al-Karaouine complex which was founded in the ninth century by Fatima al-Fihri, daughter of a wealthy merchant from Tunisia’s Kairouan. The complex includes the Qarawiyyn Mosque, the Qarawiyyn Library and the Qarawiyyn University, the oldest higher education institution in the world. Later, end the day at the ancient leather tanneries. Perhaps the spirit of Fez is felt strongest at the tanneries, whose dying vats have endured since the days of Harun al-Rachid.

- Dinner is at leisure this evening.

MARCH 7: MARRAKECH

**B, L, D**

- Depart the hotel for a special visit at the American Fondouk, founded in 1927 at the behest of Amy Bend Bishop, an American traveler who was distressed by the poor conditions of the many working animals in Fez Medina. This unique nonprofit organization is dedicated to providing people-to-people aid by offering free veterinary care for the hard working donkeys, mules, and horses of Morocco. Donkeys are the main vehicles of transportation in the carless Fez medina and they are worked hard and sometimes thanklessly. Meeting the group will be veterinarian, Ghita Cherkaoui.
• Drive about forty minutes to 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. Historically, Sefrou drew the most skilled artisans who came to sell their wares and later to practice their craft. Once Fez was built and made the capital by Idris II, many of those artisans moved to Fez, but some stayed and the medina of Sefrou is still populated by artisans who create beautiful crafts. 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.

• Continue on to the town square and meet with Jessica Stephens where her company, Culture Vultures, has an office in one of the town’s historical fondouks - a medieval building set around a generous central courtyard with rooms on two levels. Nowadays these rooms are often the studios for local craftspeople. We will have a briefing with Jessica who will talk about crafts in Sefrou and provide some background and suggestions for how to engage with local artisans. In smaller groups, set out to meet with some of the many craftspeople located in the area. Return to the office for a chance to share experiences and enjoy a simple, local lunch.

• After lunch drive about thirty minutes to the airport in Fez for a short flight to Marrakech.

• Arrive in Marrakech and check-in to Les Jardins de la Koutoubia, a converted palace on the edge of the medina with panoramic views from the rooftop terrace.

• Visit Djemaa el-Fna square, the city’s main square and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. By late afternoon the square becomes an open-air theater as it begins to fill with food vendors, water-sellers with fringed hats, henna tattoo artists, monkeys and oboe-playing snake charmers.

• Dinner tonight is at the hotel.

MARCH 8: MARRAKECH

• This morning meet with 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 staging what many consider to be the country’s longest protest. They 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 has resulted in pollution of the village’s water supply which farmers rely on for agricultural production. For Bouhmouch telling their story is imperative not just to bring attention to the environmental damage but to shine light on a unique culture, one that is steeped in tradition, history and expression.

• Visit 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. It is a perfect example of the transition from tradition to modernity in Moroccan architecture at the turn of the 19th Century. The ceiling décor is the finest to be seen in Morocco and the garden patios are rooted in tradition.

• Enjoy lunch at Kamal Laftimi’s Le Jardin, in which he and interior architect Anne Favier have created a true magical oasis located within a beautifully renovated 16th century building.

• After lunch, enjoy time at leisure to explore Marrakesh’s souk.

• Later visit Jnane Tamsna, a little paradise of tranquility and the private home and resort of Meryanne and Gary Martin. Mr. Martin, an ethno-botanist, 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. The landscape architecture is inspired by North African agricultural and horticultural traditions. The cultivated spaces are accessed by pathways and terraces festooned with gardenia, jasmine and white bougainvillea.
• Mr. Martin will talk about his work in a valley of the High Atlas Mountains, with its orchards and Berber villages. Learn about the 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. Also learn about EthnoBotanica Café - a new social enterprise based at Jnane Tamsna.

• Enjoy a lovely dinner at Jnane Tamsna.

**MARCH 9: AGAFAY DESERT**

**B, L, D**

• This morning visit 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 two story house painted in Marjorelle Blue. The garden that Jacques built lives on as his creative masterpiece. In fact, 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. AMAL’s ultimate goal is to provide life and job skills so that trainees can achieve economic and social stability.

• After lunch depart Marrakech and stop at the studio of Popham Design. Founded in 2007 by Americans Caitlin and Samuel Dowe-Sandes, Popham Design is a design studio and bespoke tile workshop. The company designs and manufactures handmade concrete tiles that are exported throughout the world. Their collection draws inspiration from Morocco and its rich history of pattern, along with influences as diverse as the pattern of raindrops cascading down a windowpane, the shadow cast by a palm tree under the blazing African sun, or a delicate crescent moon aloft in a velvety sky.
• Continue on about 20 minutes to the Scarabeo Camp – where 12 oriental-inspired permanent tents are placed in the rocky desert of Agafay, a beautiful corner of Morocco. This rocky desert can be likened to a sand desert. Indeed, its white sand dunes and landscape are similar to the Sahara dunes. The camp’s location offers stunning 360 views of the Agafay’s barren grandeur and beyond to the snow-capped Atlas mountains. Dotted amongst the landscape, the spacious and comfortable tents are decorated with locally crafted artwork and form a harmonious whole with their surroundings. Each tent has private facilities including shower and toilet.

• After settling into your tent, enjoy a sunset camel ride.

• This evening, after dinner, marvel at some of the clearest star-gazing experiences you can imagine!

**MARCH 10: BAB OURIKA  B, L, D**

• After breakfast drive just over an hour and a half to visit the Tamgounssi Weaving Centre which is operated by the Eve Branson Foundation. The weaving center is one of three centers each focusing on teaching a different traditional artisan skill including weaving, woodworking, tailoring and embroidery. The centers provide young people from the local community with the training, tools and space to learn and share new skills. Enjoy lunch at the center.

• Continue on to the Tansghart Woodwork Centre which was set up to help tackle youth unemployment and the lack of vocational training for young men.

• From here drive just under two hours and check into Kasbah Bab Ourika, perched on a hilltop against the soaring backdrop of the tallest mountain in North Africa. The award-winning boutique hotel offers comfortable rooms set among delightful terraces and gardens that offer magnificent views of the Atlas peaks. From the décor of the common rooms to the welcoming rituals to the way you are seated and served your meal, your experience is an enjoyable immersion into Berber culture and the traditions of the area.

• Enjoy a freshly prepared dinner this evening.

**MARCH 11: BAB OURIKA  B, L, D**

• This morning learn more about the threats to Berber life and food cultivation in the area. Visit a local village to learn about the vegetation which includes tamarinds, oranges, figs, guavas, pomegranates, lemons, limes, mulberries, carobs, quince, grapes, and other fruits and nuts.

• We will also learn about carpets as we explore local villages. This area of Morocco is famous for its boucherouite rugs and traditional high mountain rugs that have a variety of colors. Visit Cooperative Tifawin, a women’s cooperative. With the help of the local village Development Association, they have been able to successfully build their own small business. For the women, these rugs are like canvases where they can create new and unique designs. Twelve women have been part of Tifawin since its inception and they create unique designs in a remote and beautiful location.

• Drive a short distance away to the Anima Garden where universal artist André Heller has created an opulent, two-hectare botanical art piece. It’s hard to put into words the beauty of the garden wonderland of gazebos, ponds and mystical artworks. One trail passes a reproduction of Rodin’s “The Thinker,” who appears to contemplate a tall cone ringed with bands of color. Another lands you at a huge metal ark carrying a pyramid, a multicolored camel, a hollow giraffe and far weirder creatures. Turn again and you find a soaring African mask blowing smoke from its mouth.

• Enjoy lunch at Café Paul Bowles where produce from the garden is prepared creatively each day.

• Return to the hotel this afternoon for some free time before enjoying a farewell dinner this evening.

**MARCH 12: BAB OURIKA  B, L, D**

• Transfer to the Marrakech airport for homebound flights.
PRICING

Ground Package Pricing*

Trip price based on double occupancy: $7,480
Single supplement: $1,640
Airfare from Fez to Marrakesh: $110

*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 in Rabat on designated arrival day and in Marrakesh on designated departure day
- All sightseeing and activities listed with a private air-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
- Airfare from Fez to Marrakesh (arranged by tour operator): $110
- Any meals not listed as included
- Drinks with meals other than bottled water
- Trip insurance
- Excess luggage charges
- Any item not listed as included

The Nation purchases carbon offsets to cover the emissions generated by our travel program in order to help mitigate effects on the climate.