

Magical Morocco Circle Tour Itinerary

On this amazing two-week journey you will experience the magic of Morocco. This North African country offers a compelling mix of culture, natural beauty, ancient traditions, and enticing cuisine.

You will experience the real Morocco - its rich culture, magnificent architecture, gorgeous landscapes, the warm and hospitable Berber people and amazing craftsmanship.

We will travel from the bustling cities to the desert dunes, follow the route of the kasbahs into the Atlas Mountains and smell the fresh sea air of the Atlantic.

This adventure is perfect for someone wanting a more intimate travel experience than the big bus tours; for someone interested in other cultures and ways of life; for someone who wants more depth than just a selfie in front of a famous landmark; for someone who wants to feel like they have really traveled somewhere different from home; for someone ready to explore a foreigner land but not wanting to do it alone; for someone wanting to make connections; and for someone ready for a little adventure.

If you want to travel in a small group (of no more than 6) and you long for a culturally immersive experience, this tour is for you.

We will visit the seaside towns of Casablanca, Essaouira and Rabat; the other imperial cities of Fes and Marrakech; the dunes of the Sahara desert; the beautiful Atlas Mountains and the “Blue City” of Chefchaouen.

Please note: this is an active tour. Some days we will be walking 3-5 hours. Some days will be longer days on the road as we move from one area of the country to another. Morocco is a country with lots of stairs so you need to be able to navigate them without assistance. Also some stops may have seating lower than a standard chair height.

Also note: Along our journey we will have some special experiences with families and other local people, which vary as to the day, place and time, dependent on our schedule and theirs so some of these activities are not listed in the day to day itinerary because of these variables.

Day 1- Arrive in Casablanca (LD)

We will meet our private driver for the next 2 weeks and head to the capital city of Rabat. The city is home to over a half-million people and sits on the Atlantic Ocean at the mouth of the Bou Regreg river. After its founding in the 12th century, the city grew to great importance before becoming a haven for Barbary pirates. When Morocco achieved independence in 1955, Rabat became the capital city.

Today we will visit:

- The Mausoleum of Mohammed V, which houses the tombs of the 20th-century king and his two sons.
- The iconic Hassan Tower, commissioned by caliph Yaqub al-Mansur and intended to be part of the world's largest mosque until construction halted in 1199 with his death.
- Have lunch overlooking the walls of the city and be treated to a special tea ritual.
- Walk through the UNESCO-listed site Kasbah des Oudayas walled fortress for a beautiful view of the Atlantic Ocean the stroll amongst the bougainvillea and citrus trees in the adjacent Andalusian Gardens, which were inspired by the Moorish gardens of Spain.

Lastly, we will dine at a local restaurant before returning to our riad for the night.

Day 2 – Salé to Chefchaouen (BLD)

Breakfast at our riad

After breakfast we will be treated to an in-depth tour of Rabat's sister city of Salé, just across the river. Salé, is an old walled city on the Atlantic coast yet off the beaten path for most tourists. It was founded in the 10th century and reached its pinnacle as a medieval merchant port and entrepôt. In the 17th century, Salé became the home of the Bou Regreg republic and the base for the Barbary pirates (or corsairs) known in the West as the "Sallee Rovers." Because of this, the city was frequently bombarded by European naval squadrons. Salé and Rabat grew together until the right bank of the Wadi Bou Regreg silted up and the Salé port

was closed. Our guide today is a university professor who not only led the restoration of Salé but was born and raised there. You will learn the history of Salé and about life within the walls and how the relationship with Rabat has changed over time. We will visit three sections of Salé, including the Marinid Madrasa, once the country's most important Islamic school, and stroll along the Bastion des Larmes, an ancient fortified wall along the Atlantic, and see 13th-century cannons that were stolen from Spanish ships.

After our morning tour, we will head north to the famed Blue City of Chefchaouen, stopping for lunch along the way.

We will arrive late afternoon in Chefchaouen. After a welcoming mint tea, you will have a chance to walk around this charming hillside town before dinner at a local restaurant.

Day 3 – Chefchaouen (BD)

Breakfast at the riad

Today is a free day in Chefchaouen, a hillside town in northwest Morocco founded in 1471. Beautifully perched beneath the peaks of the Rif Mountains, Chefchaouen is one of the prettiest towns in Morocco, an artsy, blue-washed mountain village that feels like its own world. While tourism has definitely taken hold, the balance between ease and authenticity is just right. The old medina reflects Moroccan and Andalusian influence with red-tiled roofs, bright-blue buildings and narrow lanes converging on busy Plaza Uta El Hammam and its restored kasbah.

I will lead a walk around the medina in the morning after breakfast for those wanting to wander with me but you are free, of course, to explore the medina on your own.

Lunch on own

In the late afternoon, we will offer an optional hike up to the Spanish Mosque for great views of Chefchaouen and the surrounding mountains. This is a moderate level hike:

Distance: 1.5 km from medina center

Duration: 45-60 minutes uphill, 30 minutes return
Difficulty Level: Moderate (suitable for most fitness levels)
Elevation Gain: Approximately 200 meters
Trail Surface: Mix of paved roads, dirt paths, and rocky sections

There are other options in Chefchaouen such as cooking or craft classes and spas (at your own expense) which I can assist you with if needed.

Dinner at a local restaurant

Day 4 – Volubilis and Fes (BD)

Breakfast at riad

After breakfast, we will head south toward Fes.

Along the way we will stop for lunch and a private guided walking tour of the Berber-Roman ruins of Volubilis. This UNESCO World Heritage site is a must-visit destination for anyone interested in history. Once the capital of the Kingdom of Mauretania, this partial-excavated archaeological site is renowned for its stunning mosaics. Depicting scenes from mythology, daily life and the natural world, they are testament to the artistry of Volubilis' ancient craftsmen.

Next stop, Fes. We will arrive late in the afternoon. You will have time to relax in the garden with some mint tea, take a dip in the pool or enjoy a spa treatment.

Dinner tonight will be in the riad.

Day 5 – Fes (BD)

Breakfast at our riad

Today we will enjoy a private guided tour of the Fes medina, the spiritual and cultural center of Moroccan life. The country's second-largest city is home to over 1.1 million people and was founded in the year 789 and is home to the oldest continually operating university in the world.

We begin our tour of this amazing city at the Royal Palace, reveling the craftsmanship of the ornate brass doors and exquisite tilework. From here we visit the Mellah, the Jewish quarter, established in 1438 and known for its ornate balconies and wrought iron windows and wedding shops.

View the Bab Bou Jeloud, a blue-tiled gate that exemplifies the Moorish architectural style.

Next we dive deep into the UNESCO-listed Medina of Fes on our private walking tour through the walled city of more than 300 neighborhoods and 9000 alleyways. We will explore the colorful souks, historic tannery, and countless shops exhibiting wonderful craftsmanship in the largest medina in the world. Whether brass workings, loomed scarves, leather, embroidery, coppersmithing, you can watch the craftsmen at work. Along our route we'll sample some local foods.

Late afternoon you will have a little time to enjoy the garden and pool at our riad, some quiet time on the rooftop enjoying the view or an optional spa treatment whether a traditional Moroccan hammam or a massage.

Dinner tonight at our riad.

Day 6 – Fes and Lake Aguelmame (BD)

Breakfast at our riad

This morning we make a number of stops: we will enjoy a panoramic view of Fes; visit an American organization offering vet care to Fes' many working donkeys and visit one of Fes' famed ceramic and tile shops. We'll see craftsmen hand making and painting ceramics and other artisans making, cutting and designing tile works like fountains and tables.

Our travels will now take us further south into the Middle Atlas Mountains, passing nomads with their sheep herds along the way. We will stop for lunch in the charming "Little Switzerland of Morocco, Ifrane. This alpine town offers cooler temperatures, pine forests, and European-style architecture. From Ifrane, we will drive through the cedar forest. Cedar is an integral part of Moroccan

architecture. The cedar forest is home to the Barbary apes. We'll make a quick stop to feed them before continuing our journey south to Lake Aguelmame Sidi Ali, where we will be staying the night.

Located at an altitude of over 6,000 feet, Aguelmame Sidi Ali has a surface area of approximately 500 hectares and a depth of 118ft. It is part of Khenifra National Park. Its relative obscurity within the expansive national park makes Aguelmame Sidi Ali Lake a serene oasis, untouched by the masses. This afternoon you have time to soak up the beauty of the landscape with a walk, take a dip in the pool, and have a spa treatment.

Dinner at our lodge this evening.

Day 7 – Sahara Desert (BD)

Breakfast at our lodge

Today we will traverse the various climatic zones from the middle Atlas Mountains through the scenic Ziz Valley to the gorgeous dunes of the desert. The Sahara Desert in eastern Morocco contains vast fossil and mineral deposits. Morocco is one of the most geo-diverse countries on earth dominated by the Atlas Mountains to the west and the Sahara Desert to the east. The arid conditions mean that large areas of rock are exposed making it easy to understand its geology. Fossils of trilobites, ammonites, and other prehistoric life including dinosaurs, coral, and shark teeth can be found in eastern Morocco. Paleontologists have been able to significantly improve the geological record through excavations in Morocco. As we pass through this area of the desert, we will stop to see some of the amazing creatures memorialized in what once was a shallow sea here hundreds of millions of years ago.

We will arrive in Merzouga in the late afternoon and board our ships of the desert for a sunset camel ride to our tented camp for the night.

Dinner at the camp

After dinner, we will have a chance to enjoy some Berber music by a campfire. (weather dependent)

Overnight at our luxury tented camp

Day 8 – Merzouga (BLD)

Sunrise is beautiful over the desert in the morning if you like to rise early. Another morning activity if you are so inclined is to try sand boarding, similar to snowboarding but of course on sand.

Breakfast at the camp.

We will have a full day learning about life here in the Sahara Desert, about 30 miles from Algeria. Today we will visit a nomad family to learn about their life on the barren lands of the hameda while enjoying some tea and fresh baked bread. A short distance away we will next visit the ghost town of M'fis, an abandoned mining town, tucked away in the sand dunes of Erg Chebbi in Morocco.

Afterwards we will enjoy some Gnaoua music. Gnaoua music is a fusion of s African rhythms, Arab melodies, and Sub-Saharan influences. Born from the experiences of enslaved West Africans brought to Morocco centuries ago, Gnawa music is a raw expression of resilience, a sonic bridge between cultures.

Now it is time to learn how to make a classic Moroccan dish and a special regional dish in our private cooking class in our Gnaouan chef's home then feast on our creations.

You will have free time this afternoon to relax by the pool or catch a nap.

Dinner tonight at our riad.

Day 9 – Todra Gorge and Dades Valley (BD)

Breakfast at our riad

This morning, we leave the desert for the Atlas Mountains before doing so we will have opportunities to do a little shopping whether in search of a beautiful handmade Berber rug, antiques from the desert, or unique silver jewelry. Again the topography changes before your eyes as we travel from the barren desert to the rich red rocks of the Todra Gorge.

The spectacular Todra Gorge is located in the eastern Atlas Mountains and is one of the most important gorges in Morocco. It begins at the oasis of Tinghir, whose lovely palm gardens form the entrance gate to the gorge.

Lunch at a local restaurant overlooking the Tinghir Oasis.

After lunch we'll drive past small clay villages and ancient kasbahs, gigantic landscapes and dramatic rock faces to the breathtaking Todra Gorge. Time to take a short walk through a gorgeous section of the gorge to admire its full beauty. Next we will head to our riad located in a village of the Dades Valley, known for its impressive red rock landscape, winding roads and hairpin turns.

This afternoon is free to take a walk, enjoy the views or take a dip in the pool.

Dinner tonight at the riad.

Day 10 – Dades Valley (BLD)

Breakfast at the riad.

This morning a local guide will take us on a hike through the valley and part of the slot canyon of Monkey Fingers. You will learn about life here in the valley, the crops grown, and marvel at the unusual rock formations.

Lunch today will

be at a home of a local Berber family. We will have a traditional meal with the ladies of the home and learn a bit more about home life. Our hosts are quite fun and up for doing henna, sharing some of their Berber clothes or applying some traditional makeup.

After we say our goodbyes, we will have a chance to view the gorge from a high vantage point before returning to the riad for some relaxation time.

Dinner tonight at the riad.

Day 11 – Rose Valley and Ouarzazate (BD)

Breakfast at the riad

We will leave the Dades Valley as we head into the Rose Valley. In spring the valley is pink with the annual bloom of the Damascus rose, used to make Morocco's famed rose water. We will stop by a women's cooperative to learn how the rose water is produced and sample some of the products.

We will visit a wonderful old kasbah today, Kasbah Amridil. Our guide will describe life in the kasbah, explain the construction techniques and show us some very clever inventions.

Next stop, Ouarzazate...nicknamed the Hollywood of Morocco given all of the TV shows and movies made here including parts of Game of Thrones and Gladiator.

Lunch in Ouarzazate at a local restaurant

As an optional activity this afternoon, you can visit the Atlas Studios, or lounge by pool.

Day 12 – Ouarzazate to Marrakech (BD)

Breakfast at the riad

We will leave the Atlas Mountains today, heading north to the vibrant city of Marrakech. Along our path, we will make several stops including views of the Ait Benhaddou. This historic fortified village in Morocco, is known for its stunning earthen clay architecture and as a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1987. It has served as a backdrop for many films and is located along the former caravan route between the Sahara and Marrakech.

We will head over the Tizi N'Tichka, a mountain pass that sits at an elevation of about 7500ft. above sea level, connecting the fertile valleys of Marrakech to the arid landscapes of Ouarzazate. It's much more than just a simple road between two cities; it's a bridge between two worlds, the modernity of Marrakesh and the traditional Berber villages. The road winds through towering mountains, lush valleys, and awe-inspiring landscapes. With every turn, you're greeted by an even more stunning panorama than the last.

Hello Marrakech. Arriving in the afternoon, you will have a chance to relax by the pool or join me on a wander through the medina. Tonight before dinner we'll gather for some wine at the riad.

Dinner tonight at a local restaurant in the medina.

Day 13 – Marrakech (B)

Breakfast at the riad

Today our private guide will take us on a walking tour of Marrakech where we'll visit amongst other places the medina, Bahia Palace, Jemaa el-Fnaa Square, various souks, and a spice store. Plan on walking 4-5 hours with occasional breaks.

Lunch will be at a local restaurant during the walking tour.

Once back at the riad the rest of the day is free. You may choose to visit the Majorelle Gardens, the Yves St Laurent museum, have some custom perfume made at the Perfume Museum, have a henna design done, enjoy a massage or hammam, or simply relax by the pool.

Dinner on own – I am happy to make a reservation for some or all of us somewhere or you can explore on your own. Dinner overlooking the Jemaa el-Fnaa is a nice option.

Day 14 – Marrakech to Essaouria (BD)

Breakfast at the riad

Circling back now near the end of our journey to the Atlantic coast, in particular the delightful seaside town of Essaouira. Along our way we will stop to see how the famous argan oil is made at one of the women's cooperative. Argan trees only grow in Morocco and the magical oil from the nuts is not only part of Moroccan women's beauty ritual but also available as an edible (cold) oil with a nutty toasted flavor.

Lunch along the way

Once checked into our riad within the medina, the afternoon is free to enjoy the sights and sounds of Essaouira. Feel free to wander on your own or wander with me through the medina to the ramparts overlooking the ocean and to the port crowded with fisherman. Essaouira is known for its fresh seafood, especially sardines, but I fancy the crepe stands and gelato. This town has a different vibe – coastal, more French and artsy. It is a great place for last-minute purchases. There are some high-quality silver jewelry stores and gorgeous wooden boxes, trays, etc... a specialty of this area, as well as Safi ceramics.

Tonight dinner at a local restaurant

Overnight at our riad in Essaouira

Day 15 – Essaouira to Casablanca (B)

Breakfast at our riad

Today we will drive north to Casablanca, taking in the beautiful views of the Atlantic coast.

We will enjoy a late afternoon guided tour of only mosque open to visitors, the magnificent Hassan II Mosque, a masterpiece of Moroccan craftsmanship and architecture.

Tonight we'll have our farewell dinner at Rick's Café, originally a part of a Hollywood scene and for 20 years has been part of the dining scene in Casablanca.

Overnight at our Casablanca hotel.

Day 16 – Casablanca, end of Tour day (B)

Breakfast buffet at our hotel

Transfer to the airport for your flight home.

Tour includes:

- 14 nights accommodation in single or double occupancy rooms in riads and a hotel, mostly 4-star accommodations
- 1 night in a tent in a luxury desert camp
- All breakfasts, all dinners except 2, and 4 lunches
- Airport transfers in Casablanca
- A private vehicle and English speaking driver for the entire tour
- Private walking tours with local guides in Rabat, Fes Marrakesh
- Guided tours at sights such as the mosque, Volubilis and a kasbah
- Cooking class
- Camel ride to our desert camp
- Hikes with local guides to enjoy the scenery and learn about the area
- Wine and beer tasting
- Tea with a nomad family
- Lunch with a Berber family
- Opportunities to shop and relax
- Bottled water throughout the trip as well as all gas, taxes and tolls
- Opportunity to learn about Moroccan crafts and craftsmen among many other experiences

Tour price excludes:

- Airfare
- Travel insurance (highly recommended)
- Remaining lunches and 2 dinners
- Drinks
- Tips for guides and driver
- Personal items, souvenirs & optional activities
- Any optional activities like additional cooking classes, horseback riding, spa treatments, etc...

You are responsible for your own flight arrangements. Plan to be in Casablanca by noon on the first day and depart no earlier than noon on the last day.

