

## Morocco: Marrakech, Foothills of the High Atlas & Essaouira

### Tour-Only Itinerary

Experience Berber hospitality as you are welcomed in for a lunch of tagine and fresh-baked bread. Explore Marrakech on a walking tour of its labyrinthine medina where you'll find market stalls and henna-painting women, and hear the distant call of a muezzin. In the ancient port of Essaouira, enjoy a camel trek along the beach as the sun sets over the Atlantic. At the center of this transformative journey are majestic foothills of the High Atlas Mountains, believed by Moroccans to be second only to heaven for their peaceful beauty. Trace legendary caravan routes along scenic valleys and hills, stopping near age-old salt mines to learn about the region's history. A beautifully constructed casbah, a garden-festooned alpine retreat, and an elegant former riad inject luxury into your hiking tour of Morocco while sumptuous cuisine fuels your explorations.



### Highlights

Trace salt-mine trails along an ancient caravan route in the foothills of the stunning High Atlas Mountains. Experience traditional Berber hospitality as you stroll into mountain villages and are invited to share mint tea or a lunch of tagine and fresh-baked bread.

Indulge in traditional couscous and seafood tagine prepared with fish hauled in from the Atlantic earlier in the day.

Thrill to a seaside jaunt astride a camel at sunset during your visit to Essaouira, former haunt of Jimi Hendrix, Cat Stevens and countless other artists.

Savor lunch and a wine tasting at Morocco's prestigious Val d'Argan, lovingly tended by a Rhône Valley expat and plowed by two trusty dromedaries.

## On all Guided Adventures you can count on ...



Expert local guides to introduce you to the best of your destination.



Gracious accommodations that are a clean, comfortable home away from home.



Off-the-beaten-path places you'd never find on your own.



Experts to handle all the details.



A maximum of 18 fun-loving fellow travelers to share the journey.



Flight + Tour Combos include plane tickets, airport car service, and pre- and post-tour accommodations.



Delicious, authentic multi-course meals—virtually all are included.

## Activity Level

Morocco is one of our Guided – Full Walking Adventures, rated easy to moderate. Walks in the foothills of the High Atlas Mountains are on the moderate side, averaging 3 to 6 miles per day, with options on most days. There are daily ascents and descents, with climbing time on the ascents ranging between 15 and 40 minutes. The terrain varies from paved and cobblestone streets (during organized city tours and other easy village explorations) to uneven, single-track trails that can be rocky, or laid with loose gravel and/or hard-packed dirt. Most trails are exposed with little coverage from the sun; depending on the temperature,

this can increase the challenge of the tour. The pace is leisurely with stops en route to explore villages, engage with locals, and visit historical sites.

## DAY 1

### **Join your *Morocco: Marrakech, Foothills of the High Atlas & Essaouira* tour**

High Atlas; 4-6 miles, easy to moderate

Breakfast is included at your hotel. Your guide(s) meet you at 8:30 a.m. in the lobby of your Marrakech hotel. Your guide(s) will be wearing a Country Walkers shirt. Please be dressed for walking.

Transfer this morning to the town of Amizmiz, nestled in the foothills of the stunning High Atlas Mountains. This magnificent range is a surprise to many travelers who typically associate Morocco with endless desert sands. But they evoke their own inspiring beauty and drama—the tallest peak, Jbel Toubkal, soars to 13,671 feet! For its part, Amizmiz is a social hub for the mountainous Berber villages of the region, hosting a weekly *souk*, or market. Life is lived here much as it has been for centuries; while here, you will witness a Moroccan mountain life that few travelers see.

Upon arrival, you set out into the countryside of lush pine forests as snow-capped mountains rise in the distance. Throughout the day's trek, you walk past clay Berber houses, perhaps encountering villagers as they bake (and package) traditional anise cookies to bring to market or put finishing touches on pottery and clay tagine pots to be heated in the sun. As is tradition, you are sure to be invited for mint tea or even lunch in one of the modest homes. (Walk options can be tailored with the use of our driver and vehicle. Your guides will explain options locally.)

After a rewarding walk among the spectacular foothills, you arrive at your hilltop retreat late afternoon, modeled after the many casbahs that grace the area. Enjoy a welcome drink in the lovely gardens, then settle in to your room, adorned with locally made carpets and textiles and pottery from nearby villages. Dinner tonight is at the cozy restaurant.

Accommodation: Kasbah Angour, Tahnaout

## DAY 2

### Tahnaout and surrounding villages

4-6 miles, easy to moderate, 1,000-1,200 ft. elevation gain and loss

Rise to the songs of chaffinch or skylark as the sun emerges from behind the Atlas Mountains. Get fueled for a morning of walking with fresh juice, café au lait, Moroccan pancakes or cooked eggs. Thus energized, lace up your shoes for a hike that leads you into pristine wilderness and delivers you to nearby villages. A local guide joins you and provides insight into village life and the small and large natural wonders you'll witness along the way.

Begin with a descent along a rocky trail before a short climb into the village of Agadir, whose name translates into "granary." Indeed, you will see much farmland here, likely passing by locals plowing the land with mules and Berber women shepherding goats, collecting wood and picking fresh fruit—cherries in the spring and apples in the fall. Alfalfa, lentils and other crops are cultivated here, too, all against a stunning backdrop of the Haouz Plain and rugged mountains—including Jbel Toubkal. (Guests seeking a slightly shorter walk option this morning can transfer over to Agadir with the minibus and driver and continue from there with the group for the four-mile walk to Outghal. Guests seeking a really short, but steep, two-mile option, depart on foot from the hotel with the group and then retrace their steps from the village of Agadir back up the hill to the hotel for a relaxing morning at the casbah.)

Continue along a lovely small valley that points you into a lightly forested area of Toubkal National Park. Overhead, you might spot kestrel and hawks taking wing while below your footfalls, you might spot the shimmering quartz stones of orange, white and sky-blue for which the region is known. Pass clusters of dwarf palm, pine and juniper trees and cork oak trees to Outghal, a remarkably picturesque village of baked-earth houses that seamlessly blend into the surrounding clay and rocks. Locals here are likely to be busy with daily chores or preparing lunch by the time you arrive. You might ask about the time Tom Cruise and his film crew came by to film one of his *Mission: Impossible* movies.

Your driver (and minibus) meets you here for your return to the hotel, where a buffet lunch of lentil stew and vegetables awaits. Your afternoon is free to enjoy the amenities and spectacular setting and culture of the property. Tonight, savor a bountiful dinner of lamb tagine with apricots, coriander, and garlic grilled chicken, or perhaps a savory vegetable couscous. Before retiring, be sure to spend time gazing into the

sky, a glittering blanket of stars in the Moroccan night.

Accommodation: Kasbah Angour, Tahnaout

## DAY 3

### Transfer to Ouirgane with a walk en route

5 miles, easy to moderate

Leave your kasbah accommodation behind this morning as you transfer to your next breathtaking destination. You traverse deep-cut valleys past tiny villages clinging to hillsides. Emerald-green terraces spilling down steep slopes are cultivated by local Berbers here. The starting point for today's walk was once an important stop along the caravan route to and from Marrakech. Your footpath leads you through diverse terrain. Past an old salt mine, you mingle with patches of cactus and olive, juniper and eucalyptus trees. Carob, fig and walnut trees appear as you approach a small hamlet that has only recently been equipped with electricity and running water. From here, a dirt path follows dry river beds into a landscape that might remind you of the American Southwest: red sandstone rock formations rising from the red earth. Marvel at their sheer drama as you make your way past villages that took their names from the valley's salt mines. Later, arrive at your next hotel, a charming, rose-festooned treasure renowned for its cuisine. You can find out why in fast order as you sit down for a lunch that incorporates fresh produce grown on the property.

After a relaxing afternoon here, gather for a generous dinner of traditional couscous and an array of salads. Perhaps begin with *zaâlouk*, a smoky fried eggplant and tomato salad (*zaâlouk* literally means "crushed" in Arabic) and cooked baby carrots with coriander.

Accommodation: Domaine de La Roseraie, Ouirgane

## DAY 4

### Ouirgane Valley: Agni to Anghaz

7 miles, easy to moderate, 1,000-ft. elevation gain

Take your delicious breakfast on the outdoor terrace if you wish, savoring a piping hot café au lait (coffee with steamed milk). Then set off on foot directly from the hotel on a rewarding loop that connects several neighboring villages. Today's trail leads you into the pine forests of the Ouirgane Valley, with ample opportunity to pause and admire spectacular views. After a sustained (30-minute) climb, you traverse a few villages (including one whose minaret rises not far from its synagogue, reflecting the history of the Jewish and Islamic populations living side by side.) You arrive to a charming hamlet, where a Berber family invites you for a lunch of home-prepared favorites. After, you return to your hotel by foot, enjoying a walk through a landscape thick with olive, walnut and plum trees. (Those preferring a shorter, one-mile, walk today can walk to the lunch stop and back to the hotel with the group.)

Spend the remainder of the day relaxing by the pool, enjoying the gardens or heading out on a horseback ride. You may also treat yourself to a massage or indulge in treatments at the hotel's onsite hammam. The Domaine de la Roseraie is the only hotel in the Atlas Mountains to have a full spa. This evening, sample more of its renowned cuisine, paired with Moroccan wines.

Accommodation: Domaine de La Roseraie, Ouirgane

## DAY 5

### Transfer to Essaouira with wine tasting en route

.5 mile, easy vineyard walk

Linger over a leisurely breakfast and café au lait before departing the Atlas Mountains. This morning's transfer (about 4 hours total) delivers you to the Atlantic coast to the former Portuguese stronghold of Mogador, today's Essaouira. En route, though, you stop outside the town of Ounagha to tour and have lunch at Morocco's first organic vineyard, the Domaine du Val d'Argan. This 128-acre winery was founded by Charles Melia, a seasoned winemaker from France's Rhône Valley—Châteauneuf-du-Pape, to be precise. He brings his expertise in the famed Rhône varieties to his vineyard and is also discovering the joys of Marselan, a Grenache-Cabernet hybrid. In all, he produces a range of red, white and rosé labels, plus the typical *vin gris*, or gray wine, of Morocco. Many of his wines are offered on menus in Essaouira and Marrakech. Settle in to the onsite restaurant for a tasting with your lunch, enjoying sweeping views of the vineyard and olive groves. Perhaps the resident dromedaries will be out ploughing the land to add to



the ambiance.

You soon arrive in Essaouira, an important trading port since ancient times. Its vibrant medina and walls were designed in the 18th century by a French prisoner of the sultan. His city plan won him his freedom. Today, this fortress city, whose name derives from the Arabic for “rampart,” is a treasure trove of art galleries, atmospheric passageways and kite-surfers taking to the water.

Many of the city’s old riads—grand mansions built around a central courtyard—were converted into fashionable inns. You end your day at one of them—Heure Bleue Palais—your home-away-from-home in the heart of Essaouira. Step out for an early evening stroll to one of the many cafés or restaurants in town, or enjoy dinner on your own at one of the restaurants within your luxury hotel

Accommodation: Heure Bleue Palais, Essaouira

## DAY 6

### Essaouira walking tour

2-3 miles, easy

Spend your final full day exploring Essaouira on foot. Step into its medina directly from your hotel to take in its sensory delights: Watch for marquetry crafts carved from indigenous thuya wood and vibrant canvases painted by Gnaoua artists while they were under mystical trances. Fragrant spices, traditionally woven carpets, brass lamps, colorful Moroccan babouche slippers and artwork from local artists are all on display. Oil made from the local argan nut, said to be an all-purpose beauty treatment, is also sold here. In the mellah, or Jewish quarter of the medina, you may step inside the synagogue, so long as the keeper of the key is in the neighborhood! Your walking tour ends on the waterfront, where you savor the catch of the day for lunch. Later, head to the beach for an unforgettable camel ride on the sands as the sun sets over the Atlantic.

This evening, rejoin your group for a sumptuous farewell dinner in the hotel’s romantic candle-lit restaurant, adorned with red velvet chairs and colorful carpets. Depending on the season, your feast includes traditional flaky pastry pastilla, traditional lamb with Berber couscous or a freshly caught fish tagine, all prepared with organically-farmed vegetables and paired with fine Moroccan wines—perhaps

from the vineyard you visited yesterday.

Accommodation: Heure Bleue Palais, Essaouira

## **DAY 7**

### **Your *Morocco: Marrakech, Foothills of the High Atlas & Essaouira* tour concludes**

After breakfast, you transfer to the Sofitel Marrakech Lounge & Spa. After arriving at around 1:00 p.m., your tour concludes and you may make connections by air or rail or continue your explorations independently. Or, keep your explorations going with Country Walkers with an extension in Fès, the cultural and spiritual heart of Morocco.



## What's Included

### Tour Only

Exceptional boutique accommodations	✓
All on-tour meals except one dinner	✓
Local guides with you throughout tour	✓
Local wine and/or beer with dinner	✓
Entrance fees and special events as noted in the itinerary	✓
Emergency travel assistance hotline available 24/7	✓