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Our author's recommendation



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MARRAKESH & CENTRAL

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Morocco



Marrakesh

Join the party on the Djemaa el-Fna (p59)

Taroudannt

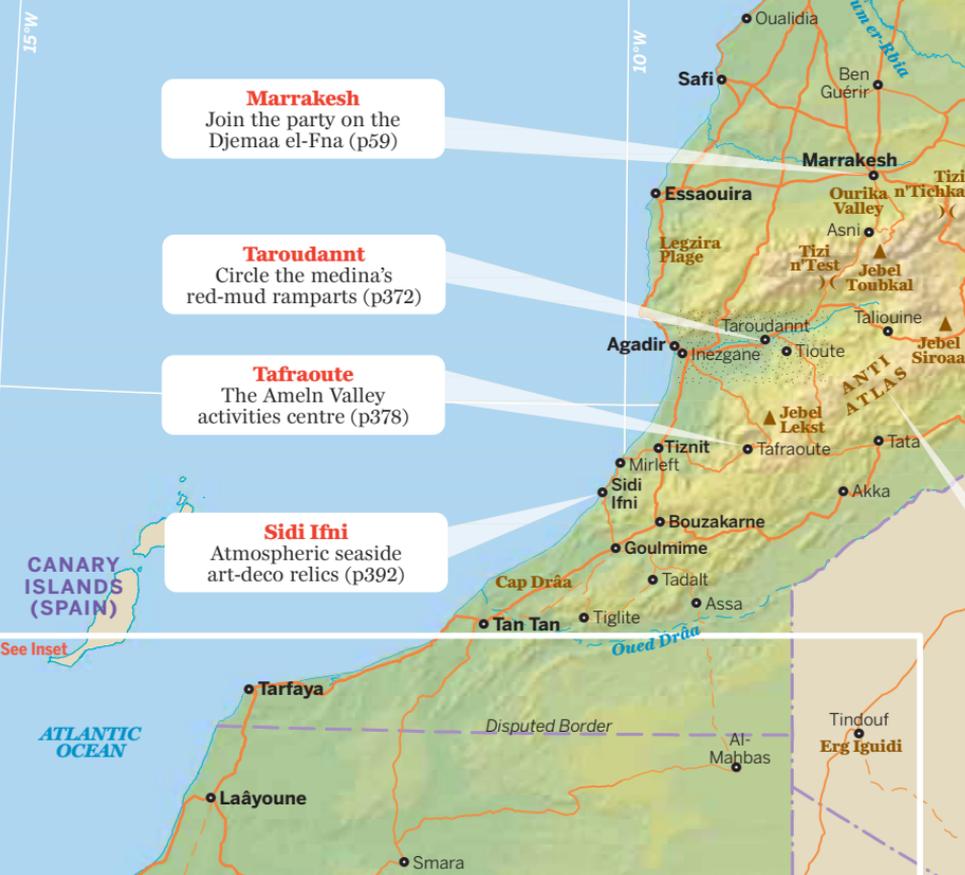
Circle the medina's red-mud ramparts (p372)

Taфраoute

The Ameln Valley activities centre (p378)

Sidi Ifni

Atmospheric seaside art-deco relics (p392)



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itineraries

Whether you've got six days or 60, these itineraries provide a starting point for the trip of a lifetime. Want more inspiration? Head online to lonelyplanet.com/thorntree to chat with other travellers.



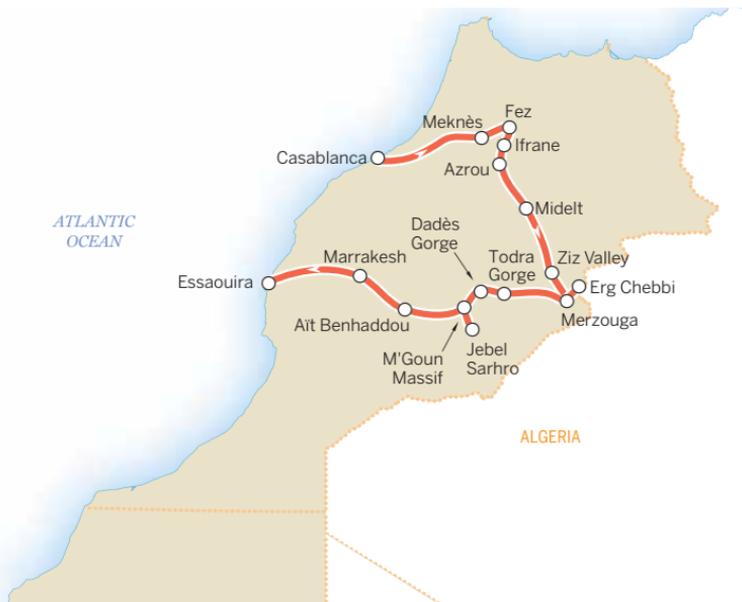
Two Weeks

Kasbah Crawl

Start with an all-singing, all-snake-charming bang on **Marrakesh's** Djemaa el-Fna, where acrobats, Gnawa musicians, meat grillers, dentists and storytellers converge at sunset. Toast the madness with a freshly squeezed juice from a stall piled with oranges. You could easily spend a week here, getting lost in the medina, buying a carpet, soaking in the hammam and getting lost again. But tear yourself away after a few days and take the **Tizi n'Tichka** pass (2260m), surrounded by the High Atlas mountains, to **Ait Benhaddou's** mudbrick kasbah.

Unless you're making a film, only hang around in **Ouarzazate** long enough to watch the crowds disappear up the Dadès Valley, then head down the kasbah-dotted **Drâa Valley**. At the far end is one of Morocco's open seas of Saharan dunes, **Erg Chigaga**, where you can appreciate the desert's silent majesty on a moonlight hike.

If time allows, take a different route back to Marrakesh via **Taliouine**, the saffron centre beneath the Anti Atlas mountains. Cross the High Atlas on the **Tizi n'Test** before ending your trip on **Essauira's** Atlantic-facing ramparts, a few hours from Marrakesh and Agadir.



One Month Moroccan Odyssey

With a month at your disposal and taking a little time to rest, you can get a taste of the best Morocco has to offer, by journeying from the sea to the Sahara and back again. Touch down in northern Morocco at **Casablanca**, the commercial capital, and if you get caught overnight, start the next day with a tour of Hassan II Mosque, the world's third-largest mosque. Head to the easternmost imperial cities and plunge into the more romantic, historic Morocco in their medieval medinas. In **Meknès**, wander between the buildings and squares left by Sultan Moulay Ismail and his followers; in **Fez**, venerable heart of Moroccan religious and cultural life, seeing donkeys carrying animal skins to the tanneries is like looking back in time.

Next, leave behind the noise and hassles of the city and head south to the relatively under-visited Middle Atlas around **Ifrane**. The resort stands at the heart of some stunning mountain and woodland scenery, offering enticing possibilities for hiking. Further south, the Barbary apes in the forests and hills around **Azrou** are one of Moroccan wildlife's most mischievous sights, and the landscape is even more scenic around **Midelt**. The road through the delightful palm-and-*ksar* (fortified stronghold) terrain of the **Ziz Valley** is one of the country's most beautiful journeys, crossing the eastern High Atlas to **Merzouga**, southeastern Morocco's gateway to the Sahara. Lorded over by towering dunes, the village is an ideal spot to saddle up a camel or strap on a sandboard, and sleep under the stars amid Morocco's largest sand sea, the perfectly sculpted **Erg Chebbi**.

Shadowing the High Atlas as you head west brings you to the sharp cleft of the **Todra Gorge**. From here, you can travel through dramatic boulder-strewn valleys, full of nomad camps in springtime, into the **Dadès Gorge**. If time allows, strike out from Boumalne du Dadès for some spectacular trekking around the **M'Goun Massif** or **Jebel Sarhro**, before heading past Ouarzazate to **Ait Benhaddou**, with its fairytale-like 11th-century kasbah.

En route to the Atlantic, check into a luxurious riad in **Marrakesh**, spend as many sunsets as possible on the theatrical Djemaa el-Fna, and then don't stop until you reach **Essaouira's** artsy seaside medina.



Three Weeks Circling the South

Morocco is far more than trendy riads and tourist hordes shuttling between hotel, souq and sun lounger. This itinerary takes you deep into the south for wild mountain and desert landscapes, far from clicking cameras, with plenty of activities to stimulate the mind and body.

Agadir is a handy entry point, but adventurers will want to leave quickly. Head to tiny but vibey **Taфраoute**, surrounded by beautiful Anti Atlas scenery such as the **Ameln Valley**, with its lush *palmeraies* (palm groves) and pink-hued houses. Spend a few days trekking through the valley and up **Jebel L'Kest**, bike past rock formations and engravings to the surreal **Painted Rocks**, and continue south through the **Aït Mansour Gorges**. At the far end of the gorges, where the beautiful scenery belies the ancient slave routes that passed this way, stay in the Afella-Ighir oasis. Use **Tiwadou** as a base for more trekking or discovering the rock carvings at **Ukas**.

By now you've developed a taste for Morocco's secluded southern corners. Once back in Taфраoute, wind east through the Anti Atlas and descend to the equally silent and epic Sahara. The last stop before Jebel Bani and a whole lot of *hammadas* (stony desert), **Tata** makes a convenient base for exploring the oases, kasbahs, *agadirs* (fortified granaries) and magnificent rock engravings in spots such as **Akka**. A dusty journey to the east, **Erg Chigaga's** yellow-gold dunes are more remote and less visited than Merzouga. In nearby M'Hamid, find yourself a camel to lead you north into the kasbah-littered **Drâa Valley**.

At the top of valley, head back towards the mountains (this time, Jebel Sarhro and the High Atlas). Commandeer a bike (mountain or motor), horse, mule or dromedary in film favourite **Ouarzazate**, where the stony desert landscape has been a celluloid stand-in for Tibet, Rome, Somalia and Egypt. Return to the coast via **Taliouine**, where you can buy the world's most expensive spice in Africa's saffron capital. Pause here or in **Taroudannt** for a trekking reprise in a mountainous area such as the **Tichka Plateau**. With its red walls and backdrop of snowcapped peaks, Taroudannt has hassle-free echoes of Marrakesh. Its souqs and squares are pleasant places to enjoy some well-deserved chillaxation, and it's handy for Agadir's Al-Massira Airport.



Three Weeks The Med & The Mountains

While the previous itinerary suggested heading south to escape the crowds, a northern alternative is Morocco's Mediterranean littoral and Rif Mountains. The region has seen huge investment from the government and there are plans to push tourism in the area. If you get in now, you'll be ahead of the pack.

Start in **Tangier**, ideally arriving by ferry across the Strait of Gibraltar to feel the thrill of crossing from Europe to Africa. In the mid-20th century, characters from gunrunners to Beatnik literati mixed in this legendary port city. After a few days taking in the history, nightlife and restaurants, skip inland to **Tetouan**, the old capital of Spanish Morocco, with its charming blend of Arab medina and Andalusian architecture. The Spanish left a lighter imprint on nearby **Chefchaouen**, nestled in the Rif Mountains with its gorgeous blue-painted medina. It's tempting to spend a string of sunsets listening to the minarets chorus each other's call to prayer, but this is a good trekking spot. You can head deep into the mountains on a five-day trek via riverside **Akchour** to **Bou Ahmed**, a fishing village in the Oued Bouchia valley.

Continue east along the coast to the proud, modern seaside resort **Al-Hoceima**, gateway to the **National Park of Al-Hoceima's** dry canyons and limestone cliffs. You can walk to the park along the coast, or book a memorable tour including hiking or mountain biking and a homestay with a Berber family. En route to the Algerian border, there's more fine scenery in the **Beni-Snassen Mountains**, which you can enjoy in a swimming pool with mountain views, or a 300-year-old rural lodge. With its gorges, caves, mesa and Barbary sheep, this verdant area is far removed from classic images of Morocco. In the **Zegzel Gorge**, pluck a cumquat and see why the Romans remarked on this small citrus fruit.

From here, head to **Oujda** to refresh yourself with some city comforts, before taking the train to that grandest of imperial cities, **Fez**. Dive into the medina and relax in a riad, but if you find yourself missing the countryside, you can make an easy day (or several-day) trip into the cedar-clad Middle Atlas around the Berber market town of **Azrou**.



Six Weeks Highlights & Hidden Gems

Climb off a ferry in famously decadent **Tangier**, with its Europe-facing medina, and head into the **Rif Mountains**. The influence of that continent across the Med continues in **Chefchaouen**, with its bright blue, Andalusian-tinted medina. Further south, the imperial cities **Meknès** and **Fez** are more quintessentially Moroccan in their ancient medinas.

After a few days of labyrinthine lanes and dye pits, you'll be ready for some more mountains. Wind through the **Middle Atlas** to the Berber village of **Midelt**, then on through the Martian landscape of the **Ziz Gorges**. It's now just a few dusty hours to **Erg Chebbi**, the achingly beautiful expanse of rolling dunes, which you can explore on a camel or sandboard.

Brush off the Sahara and return to the High Atlas at **Todra Gorge**. Hike between the enclosing rock walls, then jump in a market-bound truck through villages where the main activity is sipping mint tea. High in the mountains, **Imilchil**, surrounded by red rock and turquoise lakes, is the site of a wedding *mousslem* (festival) in September.

Descend through the Middle Atlas and turn southwest, pausing to refuel in Berber foodie and cultural hub **Demnate**. The next stop, **Marrakesh**, needs no introduction with its famous riad hotels, medina shopping and Djemaa el-Fna. Hit the Wild West coast at hippie-turned-boutique hang-out **Essaouira**, then head south to vibrant **Taghazout**, Morocco's premier surf spot. Leave the waves for a second time and take the N10 to **Taroudannt**, the Souss Valley's prettiest market town with its mud-walled medina and kasbah.

The mountains get more barren as you travel the empty roads to **Tata**, a Saharan gateway where blue-robed guides can show you the desert. The road from here back to the Atlantic passes oases, *palmeries*, kasbahs, *agadirs* and rock carvings. Near the coast, detour north to **Tiznit's** jewellery souq, particularly if it's a Thursday (market day).

Arcing west and south, you come to **Mirleft**, with its pink-and-blue arches, and **Sidi Ifni**, a jumble of wind-whipped art-deco relics surrounded by coastal walks. Try to pass through **Goulimime** on a Saturday morning, when the camel market takes place, and stay at **Fort Bou-Jerif**, near a ruined French Foreign Legion fort. End your journey on the edge of the Western Sahara in sandy, gloriously isolated **Tarfaya**.



Three Weeks Atlantic Adventure

Morocco's Atlantic seaboard takes you from the clamour of the north to the deserted coastline of the south.

Take the ferry from Spain to **Tangier**, at once a quintessentially Moroccan mosaic and a decadent outpost of Europe. Catch the train south, first to artsy **Assilah**, which is loaded with whitewashed charms, and then to **Rabat**, with its colonial architecture and palm-lined boulevards. Follow Casa's suburbanites to the sleepy 'Cité Portugaise', **El-Jadida**, then take the spectacular ocean road to **Oualidia**, the St Tropez lookalike with a perfect crescent lagoon.

Further south, the hippies once gravitated to **Essaouira**, and its white-walled ramparts, bohemian beat and renovated riads still make travellers linger. When you've eaten your fill at the outdoor fish grills, follow Jimi Hendrix and today's surfers to the peaceful beaches at **Diabat** and **Sidi Kaouki**.

Past more surf spots, **Agadir** is a family-friendly seaside resort, but **Mirleft's** beaches and boutique accommodation are more appealing, as is art-deco **Sidi Ifni**. If you're overlanding south to Mauritania, break your journey at **Tarfaya**, like the early-20th-century French airmail pilots, and breezy **Dakhla**.

Two Weeks Imperial Fortnight

This trip begins in two cities once ruled by enlightened dynasties, which crossed the Strait of Gibraltar and pulled Europe out of its Dark Ages. Throw back a shot of Maghrebi exoticism in **Fez**, where modern Morocco and its rich past crowd for space in the extraordinary medina. Next, catch your breath in nearby **Meknès**, bypassed by many travellers despite its echoes of Sultan Moulay Ismail's glory days.

A detour north takes you to **Volubilis**, Morocco's best-preserved ancient city, and testament to the Roman Empire's astonishing breadth. Nearby **Moulay Idriss**, with the mausoleum of the founder of Morocco's first imperial dynasty, is another wonderful antidote to urban clamour.

Unless you're a completist and want to visit all four Moroccan imperial cities, skip Rabat and head into the Middle Atlas. We've suggested a few stops in our Moroccan Odyssey itinerary; another is the Berber town **Sefrou**, its medina pierced by the Oued Aggaï, 30km south of Fez. The route now follows the N8 beneath the **High Atlas**, where there are numerous side trips if you have time, to the icon of contemporary Morocco, **Marrakesh**. The city's souqs, street performers and imperial architecture form an intoxicating mix.



OUR STORY

A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that's all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, *Across Asia on the Cheap*. Within a week they'd sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Melbourne, London and Oakland, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony's belief that 'a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse'.

OUR WRITERS



James Bainbridge

Coordinating author; Southern Morocco & Western Sahara James' travel-writing career began a decade ago with a trip to Morocco. Taking a break from magazine journalism in London, he passed through the country on an overland mission to Timbuktu (and back). Since the resultant article for the *Guardian*, James has written about Africa and the Middle East for worldwide publications, including Lonely Planet guides from *Turkey* to *West Africa*. Morocco has drawn him back several

times since that initial foray, and he continues to sing its praises with the passion of a Gnawa musician. When he's not researching Anti Atlas grand-taxi fares, James lives in Cape Town.



Alison Bing

Marrakesh & Central Morocco When she's not methodically sampling every *mechoui* lamb roast in Marrakesh, diligently inspecting riad rooftop sunsets or personally testing hammam steam levels, Alison co-authors Lonely Planet's *California, USA* and *Italy* guides. Alison has a background in Islamic art, architecture and North African political economy from the American University in Cairo, and holds a masters degree from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, a program of Tufts and Harvard Universities – respectable diplomatic credentials she regularly undermines with opinionated art, food and culture commentary for newspapers, magazines and radio.



Paul Clammer

Imperial Cities, Middle Atlas & the East As a student, Paul had his first solo backpacking experience when he took a bus from his Cambridgeshire home to Casa-blanca. After an interlude where he trained and worked as a molecular biologist, he returned to work as a tour guide, trekking in the Atlas and trying not to lose passengers in the Fez medina. The increasing number of budget airline routes from the UK to Morocco is one of his favourite recent travel innovations and he

hops over to Morocco on a regular basis.

Read more about Paul at:
lonelyplanet.com/members/paulclammer



Helen Ranger

Atlantic Coast; Mediterranean Coast & the Rif Helen moved to Fez in 2004 and has been writing about Morocco ever since. Contributing to Lonely Planet's *Fez Encounter* and 'The View from Fez' blog, she is fascinated by Morocco's diversity. Helen checked out chic city boulevards, untangled Tangier's medina, scrambled down a Beni Snassen mountainside, kicked back in Chefchaouen and enjoyed the curiosities (and tapas bars) of Ceuta and Melilla. She lives in a 400-year-old traditional house where she'll remain until she never gets lost in the Fez medina.

Read more about Helen at:
lonelyplanet.com/members/helenranger

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