



Morocco



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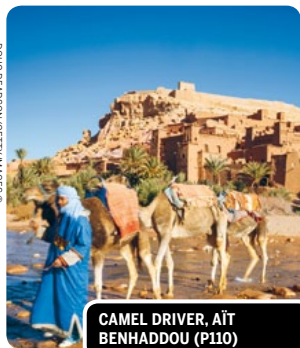
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Itineraries



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WEEKS

Essential Morocco

Touch down in **Casablanca**, the commercial capital, and start with a tour of the stupendous Hassan II Mosque. Head by train to the easternmost imperial city of **Fez**, venerable heart of Moroccan religious and cultural life, with its ancient yet thriving medina.

Next, head south over the Middle Atlas via **Midelt**, for your first startling taste of Moroccan kasbah architecture, and to shop for the region's distinctive Berber carpets. Continue all the way to **Merzouga**, Morocco's gateway to the Sahara. Saddle up your camel 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** for a day's hiking amid the canyons and *palmeraies* (palm groves). From here, head past Ouarzazate to **Ait Benhaddou**, with its fairytale-like 11th-century kasbah.

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



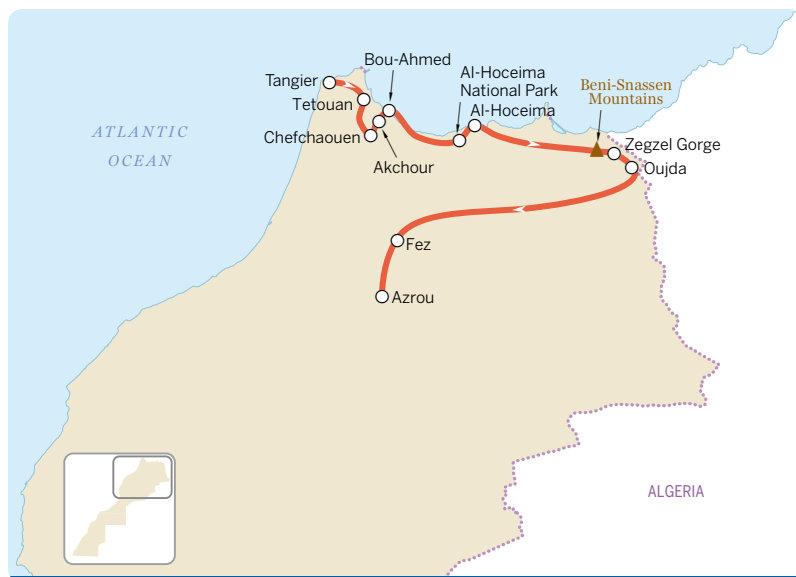
Circling the South

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* 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 **Pierres Bleues** (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 *hammada* (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, the yellow-gold dunes of **Erg Chigaga** are more remote and less visited than Merzouga. In nearby M'Hamid, find yourself a camel to lead you north into the kasbah-littered **Draâ Valley**.

At the top of valley, head back towards the mountains. 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 snow-capped peaks, Taroudannt has hassle-free echoes of Marrakesh. Its souqs and squares are pleasant places to relax, and it's handy for Agadir's Al-Massira Airport.



The Med & the Mountains

In the north the Mediterranean littoral and the Rif Mountains have seen huge investment from the government, and there are plans to push tourism in the area. But 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 gun-runners 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 dry canyons and limestone cliffs of **Al-Hoceima National Park**. 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**.

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WEEKS

Highlights & Hidden Gems

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

After a few days of labyrinthine lanes and dye pits, you'll be ready for 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 tiny villages and deeper into the mountains. **Imilchil**, surrounded by red rock and turquoise lakes, is the site of a wedding *moussem* (festival) in September.

Descend through the Middle Atlas and turn southwest, pausing to refuel in Berber foodie and cultural hub **Demnate**. The next stop is **Marrakesh**, 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. Then take the N10 to **Taroudannt**, the Souss Valley's prettiest market town with its mud-walled medina and kasbah.

Travel barren mountains and empty roads to **Tata**, a Saharan gateway where blue-robed guides can show you the desert. The road back to the Atlantic passes oases, *palm-eraies*, kasbahs, *agadirs* and rock carvings. Near the coast, detour north to the **Tiznit** 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. End your journey on the edge of the Western Sahara in sandy, gloriously isolated **Tarfaya**.

3
WEEKS

Atlantic Adventure

Morocco's Atlantic seaboard takes you from the clamour of the north to the quieter 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**, with its whitewashed charms, and then to **Rabat**, with its colonial architecture and palm-lined boulevards. Follow 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 the beaches and boutique accommodation of **Mirleft** are more appealing, as is art-deco **Sidi Ifni**.

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DAYS

Empire & Atlas

This trip begins in two cities once ruled by enlightened dynasties. 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**, by-passed 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 of **Sefrou**, its medina pierced by the Oued Aggaï, 30km south of Fez. Take the cross-country route via Beni Mellal, skirting the edge of the **High Atlas** 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 Franklin, London, Melbourne, Oakland, Beijing and Delhi, 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



Paul Clammer

Coordinating Author, Atlantic Coast, Fez (sleeping options) Paul has contributed to more than 25 Lonely Planet guidebooks. In a previous life he may even have been a molecular biologist. In 1993 he took a bus from his Cambridge home across Europe to Casablanca, and he has been visiting Morocco regularly ever since, including working in the country as a tour guide. Even after 20 years, he's still able to get lost in the Fez medina if he really tries. Mostly find him at

paulclammer.com, or on Twitter as @paulclammer.



James Bainbridge

Southern Morocco & Western Sahara Morocco is pretty much James' favourite travel destination worldwide, and he has dropped in on the country several times, beginning a decade ago with an overland trip from London to Timbuktu. For this edition he researched the Southern Morocco & Western Sahara chapter for the second time, and loves the south, especially for its hospitable people and wild landscapes. Based at the other end of the continent in Cape Town, James

specialises in Africa, and contributes online at jamesbainbridge.net, www.twitter.com/jamesbains and www.instagram.com/james_bains.



Paula Hardy

Marrakesh & Central Morocco Paula has worked with Lonely Planet since 1999, authoring more than 30 guidebooks and covering the length and breadth of Morocco from Tangier to Agadir. Since first losing herself in medina *derbs* in 2003, she's co-produced a film in Tetouan, lived in Libya for four years and written a cultural history of the Libyan Desert. Armed with a better sense of direction, she returned to familiar territory for this edition where, true to form, unstintingly warm

welcomes awaited. When not contributing to Lonely Planet guidebooks Paula writes and edits for a variety of websites and travel publications. You can find her tweeting as @paula6hardy.



Helen Ranger

Mediterranean Coast & the Rif, Imperial Cities, Middle Atlas & the East

Fascinated by Morocco's diversity, Helen moved to Fez in 2004 and has been writing about the country ever since, contributing to Fez and the previous edition of *Morocco*. She enjoys the ochre walls of the imperial cities as much as the wild mountains of the Rif, the boulevards and dives of Tangier and the remarkable architecture (and tapas bars) of Ceuta and Melilla. Helen 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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