

# 10-Day Morocco Imperial Cities & Sahara Desert Adventure from Casablanca



Experience Morocco's most iconic destinations on this comprehensive 10-day adventure that seamlessly combines imperial cities steeped in history, dramatic Sahara desert landscapes, and authentic Berber cultural encounters. This carefully paced journey takes you from Morocco's Atlantic coast through ancient medinas, across golden desert dunes, and over the High Atlas Mountains before concluding in vibrant Marrakech.

Begin your journey exploring Morocco's coastal and northern treasures, from modern Casablanca's impressive Hassan II Mosque to the enchanting blue-washed streets of Chefchaouen and the UNESCO-listed medieval medina of Fez. The adventure intensifies as you journey to the Sahara for unforgettable experiences including camel trekking, ATV rides across towering dunes, and nights under star-filled skies in a luxury desert camp. Discover nomadic Berber traditions, explore dramatic gorges and valleys, visit Morocco's most famous kasbah, and immerse yourself in Marrakech's legendary atmosphere. Each day reveals a different facet of Morocco's extraordinary diversity, from ancient history to natural wonders and warm hospitality.

## Tour Facts

Group Size:

**12**

Duration:

**10**

Language:

**English**

Tour Type:

**continuous**

## Tour Itinerary

### Day 1 : Casablanca Arrival and Optional City Introduction

Welcome to Morocco! Upon arrival at Casablanca's Mohammed V International Airport, you'll be greeted by your private driver who will transfer you to your hotel in Morocco's largest city and economic capital. After checking in and settling into your accommodation, you have the remainder of the day at leisure to relax and recover from your journey, or begin exploring this cosmopolitan metropolis at your own pace.

If you're feeling energetic and your arrival time permits, you might opt for an introductory sightseeing tour of Casablanca. The crown jewel is the magnificent Hassan II Mosque, one of the world's largest mosques and among the few in Morocco open to non-Muslim visitors. This architectural masterpiece sits partially over the Atlantic Ocean and features the world's tallest minaret at 210 meters. Take a walk along the Corniche, Casablanca's waterfront promenade lined with cafes, restaurants, and beach clubs where locals gather to enjoy the ocean breezes. The mix of Art Deco architecture, modern buildings, and traditional elements creates a unique atmosphere that sets Morocco's cosmopolitan character. Dinner tonight is at your leisure to explore local restaurants.

## Day 2 : Capital City Exploration and Journey to the Blue Pearl

After breakfast, depart Casablanca for the approximately one-hour drive to Rabat, Morocco's elegant capital city. Your morning is dedicated to exploring Rabat's most significant landmarks, beginning with the Hassan Tower and Mausoleum of Mohammed V. The unfinished minaret of Hassan Tower was intended to be the world's largest in the 12th century, while the adjacent mausoleum showcases exquisite Moroccan craftsmanship with its white marble, intricate tilework, and ceremonial guards in traditional dress.

Continue to the picturesque Kasbah of the Udayas, a fortress overlooking the Bou Regreg River and Atlantic Ocean. Wander through its blue-and-white painted streets reminiscent of a Greek island village, discovering tranquil Andalusian gardens and enjoying stunning ocean views. After lunch, continue north toward Chefchaouen, approximately four hours through changing landscapes as you approach the Rif Mountains. Arrive in this enchanting blue-washed town by late afternoon, where nearly every building in the old medina is painted in varying shades of blue. Check into your riad and spend the evening exploring the atmospheric streets as locals go about their daily routines. The cooler mountain air provides welcome relief, and the relaxed pace offers a perfect introduction to northern Morocco.

## Day 3 : Roman Ruins, Imperial Meknes, and Ancient Fez

Depart Chefchaouen after breakfast for a day of historical discovery en route to Fez. Your first stop brings you to Volubilis, the remarkably well-preserved Roman ruins that showcase Morocco's ancient past as part of the Roman Empire. Walking among triumphal arches, basilicas, and capitol buildings, you'll discover intricate floor mosaics depicting mythological scenes, testament to the sophisticated civilization that thrived here 2,000 years ago. The setting amid rolling agricultural land with Mount Zerhoun as backdrop creates a dramatic scene. Your guide explains the site's significance as Rome's southwestern African frontier and its role in producing grain and olive oil for the empire.

Continue to Meknes, one of Morocco's four imperial cities, where Sultan Moulay Ismail created his 17th-century capital. Stop to photograph the monumental Bab Mansour gate, considered Morocco's most beautiful city gate with its intricate tilework and carved details. Visit the Mausoleum of Moulay Ismail, one of the few Moroccan shrines open to non-Muslims, to appreciate its serene courtyards and ornate interior. By evening, arrive in Fez and check into your traditional riad tucked within the ancient medina's maze-like streets. These restored merchant houses feature ornate courtyards, carved cedar ceilings, and traditional tilework that create peaceful sanctuaries from the bustling city outside.

## Day 4 : Full-Day Exploration of Fez Medieval Medina and Heritage Sites

Today brings a comprehensive guided walking tour through Fez el-Bali, the Old Medina that ranks among the world's largest living medieval cities and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Begin at the Royal Palace with its impressive golden doors showcasing traditional Moroccan brass work and geometric patterns. Continue to the historic Jewish Quarter (Mellah), learning about the significant role Jewish communities played in Moroccan society and commerce throughout history.

Your exploration continues with an exterior visit to Al Quaraouiyine University, founded in 859 CE and recognized by UNESCO as the world's oldest continuously operating degree-granting university. While non-Muslims cannot enter the mosque section, you'll view this architectural marvel from key vantage points. Navigate the medina's labyrinthine alleys to the famous Chouara Tanneries, where leather has been dyed using medieval methods for over a thousand years. The colorful stone vats filled with natural

dyes create an unforgettable sight (and smell!). Visit a ceramic workshop to witness master artisans creating Fes's distinctive blue pottery using techniques passed down through generations. The afternoon allows time for shopping in the souks or perhaps enjoying a traditional hammam experience before dinner. The option exists for a rooftop restaurant with panoramic medina views.

## **Day 5 : Scenic Journey Through Middle Atlas to the Sahara**

Today brings one of Morocco's most spectacular drives as you journey from the imperial city of Fez to the edge of the Sahara Desert. Depart early, traveling through the verdant Middle Atlas Mountains with their cedar forests, apple orchards, and Berber villages. First stop is Ifrane, often called "Little Switzerland" for its Alpine-style architecture, manicured gardens, and European atmosphere—surprising and delightful in the heart of Morocco. Continue through the cedar forest near Azrou, home to troops of wild Barbary macaque monkeys. Your driver stops for photos and the chance to observe these playful creatures (though feeding them is discouraged to maintain wild behavior).

As you travel further south through Midelt, the landscape gradually transforms from green mountains to arid pre-desert terrain. The route follows the dramatic Ziz Valley, where thousands of date palms create ribbons of green along the river against red rock canyon walls. By late afternoon, arrive in Merzouga at the edge of the Sahara's impressive Erg Chebbi dunes. Check into your hotel before sunset, then perhaps take a short walk to appreciate the immense dunes rising from the desert floor. As darkness falls, enjoy dinner at your hotel while anticipating tomorrow's desert adventures. The clear desert sky reveals countless stars rarely visible in cities, offering a taste of the magic awaiting you in the Sahara.

## **Day 6 : Sahara Thrills - ATV Ride, Nomadic Visit, and Desert Camp**

Your day begins with an exhilarating ATV experience across the golden dunes of Erg Chebbi. After a safety briefing and instruction on operating the all-terrain vehicles, you'll set off across the desert, navigating the towering sand mountains and racing along flat desert plains. The ATV ride provides a thrilling way to appreciate the Sahara's vast scale and beauty while creating unforgettable memories and photos. The contrast between the silence when you stop the engines and the roar of the machines creates a unique desert experience.

After returning to Merzouga and freshening up, continue your desert exploration with a visit to a nomadic Berber family who maintains traditional desert lifestyle. Share mint tea in their tent while learning about how they navigate the challenges of desert living, their seasonal migrations following rainfall and grazing lands, and the ancient traditions they maintain in the modern world. The afternoon offers time to relax before your evening adventure begins. As the sun begins its descent, board your camel for a trek across the dunes, arriving at your luxury desert camp as the sun paints the sky in brilliant oranges and pinks. Your camp features comfortable Berber-style tents with real beds and private facilities. After a traditional Moroccan dinner, gather around the fire for Berber music performed by camp staff, followed by stargazing under one of Earth's most spectacular night skies.

## **Day 7 : Desert Departure Through Gorges to Dades Valley**

Wake early to witness sunrise over the Sahara if you wish, when the first light transforms the dunes from dark shadows to brilliant gold. After breakfast at camp, bid farewell to the desert and board your camels for the return trek to Merzouga (or opt for 4x4 transport). Meet your driver and depart for today's journey westward along the ancient caravan routes. Your first stop brings you to Rissani, a

historic town that served as the seat of the Alaouite dynasty before they moved to Fez. If it's market day (Tuesday, Thursday, or Sunday), explore the traditional souk where Saharan and mountain Berbers trade goods.

Continue to the spectacular Todra Gorges, where sheer limestone walls rise 300 meters on either side of a narrow canyon. The morning light creates dramatic shadows and highlights the orange and pink tones in the rock face. Walk through the gorge, feeling the cool air that funnels through this natural wonder, and perhaps stopping at one of the small cafes for refreshment. After lunch near the gorges, the route continues through the Dades Valley, famous for its unusual rock formations nicknamed "monkey fingers" due to their distinctive shapes. The valley is dotted with ancient kasbahs and filled with olive, fig, and walnut trees. Arrive at your hotel in the Dades Valley by late afternoon, where you can relax and enjoy the peaceful surroundings before dinner featuring regional specialties.

## **Day 8 : Valley of Kasbahs and Mountain Crossing to Marrakech**

After breakfast surrounded by the peaceful Dades Valley, begin your journey toward Marrakech along the famous Road of a Thousand Kasbahs. These ancient fortified villages dot the landscape, their earthen architecture blending seamlessly with the surrounding desert terrain. Stop in Ouarzazate, known as Morocco's Hollywood due to the Atlas Film Studios where numerous famous films have been shot. You have the option to tour the studios if you wish, seeing sets from movies like *Gladiator* and *Game of Thrones* still standing in the desert.

Continue to the highlight of today's journey—Ait Ben Haddou, Morocco's most famous and photographed kasbah. This UNESCO World Heritage Site represents the pinnacle of southern Moroccan earthen architecture, its towers and crenellated walls rising dramatically from the valley floor. Climb through the ancient passages to the granary at the summit, where panoramic views reveal why this location was so strategic along caravan routes connecting sub-Saharan Africa to Marrakech. After exploring the kasbah and perhaps enjoying lunch with views of the site, begin the ascent over the High Atlas Mountains via the Tizi n'Tichka Pass. This spectacular route reaches 2,260 meters altitude, with each curve revealing stunning mountain vistas, Berber villages clinging to hillsides, and dramatic landscape changes. Arrive in Marrakech by evening and check into your riad in the medina, ready to explore Morocco's most vibrant city.

## **Day 9 : Full-Day Exploration of Marrakech's Historic Monuments and Souks**

Today brings a comprehensive guided walking tour through Marrakech, the Red City whose vibrant atmosphere has captivated travelers for centuries. Begin at the magnificent Bahia Palace, a 19th-century masterpiece showcasing the finest Moroccan craftsmanship through its painted ceilings, carved cedar, intricate zellige tilework, and peaceful garden courtyards. Continue to the Ben Youssef Madrasa, a 16th-century Quranic school that represents the pinnacle of Moorish architecture with its student cells surrounding an ornate central courtyard.

Walk past the exterior of the Koutoubia Mosque, whose 77-meter minaret serves as Marrakech's most recognizable symbol and has inspired countless other minarets across the Islamic world. Navigate through the labyrinthine souks, each section dedicated to different crafts—spices, leather goods, metalwork, textiles, and ceramics. Your guide helps you understand the traditional guild system and appreciate the quality craftsmanship. Arrive at Jemaa el-Fnaa square, the beating heart of Marrakech and one of the world's most remarkable public spaces. Watch snake charmers, storytellers, acrobats, and musicians perform while countless food stalls fill the air with aromatic smoke. The afternoon allows free time to explore the famous Majorelle Garden if desired, or simply wander more of the medina. As

evening approaches, consider a farewell dinner at a rooftop restaurant overlooking the illuminated medina and square, celebrating the culmination of your Moroccan journey.

## **Day 10 : Marrakech Farewell and Airport Transfer**

Enjoy a final Moroccan breakfast at your riad before preparing for departure. Depending on your flight schedule, you may have time for some last-minute exploration or shopping in the souks. Perhaps visit the Majorelle Garden for a peaceful morning walk through its exotic plant collections and striking cobalt blue architecture, or simply relax on your riad's rooftop terrace, absorbing the morning sounds of the medina awakening—the call to prayer, delivery motorbikes, shopkeepers opening their stalls.

If you'd like to extend your experience, consider a visit to a traditional hammam for a relaxing scrub and massage, or explore additional neighborhoods of the medina you haven't yet discovered. Your accommodation staff can provide recommendations based on your interests and remaining time. When it's time to depart, your private driver will arrive for the transfer to Marrakech Menara Airport, located approximately 15-20 minutes from the medina depending on traffic. As you leave Morocco, you carry memories of imperial cities, desert adventures, mountain crossings, and the warm hospitality that defines this remarkable country. The experiences, photos, and perhaps treasures purchased along the way tell the story of ten extraordinary days exploring Morocco's most iconic destinations.