

EXPLORE!

BEST SELLER

Imperial Cities and Desert
15 days

Morocco - Trip code MR



Imperial Cities and Desert

Enter the world of ancient Morocco on this journey through the imperial cities of Rabat, Meknes, Fes and Marrakech. We explore colourful souks, walk through gorges in the towering Atlas Mountains and discover desert oases, with the option of spending a night in the desert. We enjoy time with the locals as we travel through the land of Berbers and to the beautiful Atlantic coast where we relax in the tranquil port town of Essaouira.

Trip highlights

- ★ **Marrakech** - Discover Morocco's vibrant Red City
- ★ **Meknes and Rabat** - Explore two fascinating imperial cities
- ★ **Fes** - The atmospheric medina also known as Mecca of the West
- ★ **Merzouga Sand Sea** - Take an optional camel ride through the impressive sand dunes of the Sahara or an overnight under the stars
- ★ **Todra Gorge** - Walk in Morocco's Grand Canyon through spectacular rock formations
- ★ **The Atlas Mountains** - Beautiful mountain scenery in the highest mountain range in North Africa
- ★ **Essaouira** - Relax in the atmospheric port town on the Atlantic coast

ACCOMMODATION GRADE:

Standard

Our standard, mid-range accommodation offers a good level of service, often with other amenities such as a restaurant, bar, garden or swimming pool. Generally rooms will be comfortable with en suite facilities.

TRIP PACE:

Moderate

Moderate pace tours are ideal if you want a holiday which combines exciting activities and experiences with plenty of time to relax and unwind. Typically you'll be active and busy for part of the day but then also have time to rest and recharge your batteries.

GROUP SIZE:

10 - 15

Maximum group size ranges from between 6 to 20 people, depending on the type of trip, the transport and accommodation used and activities included. We rarely have groups that are smaller than five or six people and the average is 12 people plus an Explore leader.

Itinerary

Itineraries on some departure dates may differ, please select the itinerary that you wish to explore.

DAY 1 - Join tour Casablanca

Join the tour in Casablanca and meet your group and Tour Leader.



Accommodation: Moroccan House Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

DAY 2 - Visit to Hassan II Mosque and Sightseeing in Rabat; continue to Meknes

This morning we visit the Hassan II Mosque in Casablanca before we set forth along the coast heading north, towards Rabat, the city that was established as the capital of their protectorate by the French in 1912 and since independence has served as the capital of a modern Morocco. Rabat's history stretches back as far as 8BC, when settlers arrived in what is now the Chellah area, a district that went on to become a prosperous Roman town, before being transformed by the Merinids into a cemetery, On arrival we will have an opportunity to explore something of the city's historic heart, with a guided walking tour of the area around the Hassan Tower and the Mausoleum of Mohammed V, before wandering through the engaging Kasbah des Oudaïas, originally a fortified town that is now infused with a distinctly Andalusian flavour. After taking in the sumptuous grandeur of the Royal Palace we will continue our journey to Meknes, once the heart of the Moroccan Sultanate, lying amidst the landscapes of the Oued Boufekrane River valley. The Sultan loved Meknes, and he would have liked never to leave it once wrote a chronicler to the tyrannical Sultan Moulay Ismail. Ismail (1672- 1727) was a tireless builder, and his greatest efforts were reserved for his capital at Meknes, which at its peak, with

over 20 grand gateways and 50 palaces, must have been a sight to inspire any who looked upon it.



Accommodation: Hotel Akouas (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 3 - Sightseeing in Meknes; drive to Fes via Volubilis

This morning we enjoy a guided tour of the major highlights of Meknes, including the old granaries of the Heri es-Souni and the Mausoleum of Moulay Ismail himself. In spite of Ismail's seemingly unquenchable blood lust and far from benevolent treatment of his subjects, the sultan still seems to be held in high regard and his tomb is something of a place of reverence even today amongst a people who still see his rule as Morocco's Golden Age. We'll also take in the Bab el Khamis Gate and walk through the city's spectacular centrepiece, the Bab Mansour, en route to the Place el Hedim and the city's Medina, where we can try our bartering skills in the busy markets. From here we head next for the nearby ancient site of Volubilis - the capital of the Roman province of Mauritania Tingitana. The detailed mosaics here are still intact and the site gives a good idea of the layout of provincial settlements. The afternoon then sees us taking the road northeast, travelling via Nzala des Beni Ammar to the country's cultural capital, Fes. Probably the oldest of the imperial cities, its fascinating history is rich with wars, murders and political intrigue. It has played an important part in Moroccan trade, culture, religion and politics as well as being the seat of learning for science. The old and new towns are adjacent but totally separate entities and the panoramic views of Fes El Bali (the old city), seen from the North Borj (tower), are very useful to help you orientate yourself for when you are in the narrow alleyways.



Accommodation: Hotel Zahrat al Jabal (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 4 - Exploring Fes

We have a full day today to take in the artisan capital of Morocco and during the morning's sightseeing we will have a chance to take in the mosques and souks of the Fes el Bali, view the Royal Palace and drive out to North Bori for some great views back across the city. Craftwork made and sold in the Fes medina is considered amongst the finest in Morocco and a wander through its artisan districts reveal weavers and brass workshops, coppersmiths and tanners, producing beautiful pieces much as they have for generations. Beautiful buildings abound in this city as well, including the Sanctuary of Moulay Idriss 2nd, the Karouine Mosque and the Al Andalus Mosque (viewed from the outside only). After lunch our exploration of the city continues with a tour of Fes El Bali (Old Fes), exploring the souks in the backstreets, wandering past the spice stalls and taking in the opulent majesty of the 14th century Attarin Medersa, whose intricate decoration and elegant design makes it one of the city's most captivating medieval colleges.



Accommodation: Hotel Zahrat al Jabal (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 5 - Drive over the Middle Atlas to Erfoud

Turning south today we climb steadily into the dramatic landscapes of the Middle Atlas, heading first towards to Immouzer and Ifrane and passing near the small mountain village of Azrou, which in the Berber tongue translates as 'the rock'. This is the land of the fiercely independent Berbers, the Lords of the Atlas, whose traditions and ways still hold sway up here in their mountain strongholds far away from the cities below. The Berbers present us with a unique view of a way of life lost to the rest of North Africa, where music and dance, even language and religion, are far removed from their Arab neighbours. Continuing into Berber sheep raising country we head to Timadite and over the Col du Zad, before crossing the Tizi N'Tairhemt Camel Pass and continuing via the Gorge du Ziz to Er Rachidia. Finally we traverse a broad plateau past Meski Oasis, the so-called 'Blue Spring' bordering the arid desert plains, from where our journey brings us at last on to the desert settlement of Erfoud.



Accommodation: Salam Hotel (or similar)



Premium Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 6 - Drive to Merzouga via Rissani; Afternoon optional camel ride and desert camp

Our day starts by following the meandering Ziz River towards Rissani, the last sizeable community and the end of the vegetation belt before the dunes of the Sand Sea begin. The settlement is the homeland of the Alaouite dynasty, which reigned in this region for 300 years, and this morning we'll have an opportunity to visit the founder's Mausoleum and explore something of the local ksour (fortified villages). After lunch, we then drive on to the settlement of Merzouga, which lies on the edge of Erg Chebbi, an area of spectacular high dunes that are amongst some of Morocco's most spectacular natural landscapes. The afternoon is then free to simply relax, take a 4WD trip around the dunes to explore the surrounding area, or take a camel ride into the haunting V-shape dunes that seem to creep slowly across the desert floor. Alternatively, you may choose to appreciate their vastness by climbing them. The word erg is Arabic for great sand dune area and although many people imagine the Sahara as an endless sea of rolling golden sand dunes, they actually cover only about one fifth of its surface, the rest being covered by vast rock and gravel plains. Today even affords an opportunity to spend tonight camping out in the desert in a traditional Berber-style tent (optional), to truly appreciate the captivating tranquillity of this desert setting.



Accommodation: Kasbah Le Touareg (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 7 - Drive to Todra Gorge area

This morning we will leave the southern desert behind and head for the mountains once more. Following an ancient route along the southern slopes of the Atlas, we reach the town of Tinerhir, our base from which to explore the towering vistas of the Todra Gorge. Arriving in the afternoon there is usually time for an initial exploration of the area and perhaps a walk in the famous lush palmeries that line the banks of the nearby Todra River (optional). Extending some way along the river's course, the gardens are a lush oasis of produce, with date palms and olive groves, fruit orchards and almonds, all littered amongst a fertile landscape of grain and

vegetables.



Accommodation: Kenzi Saghro (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 8 - Optional walks in Todra Gorge

The dramatic ochre-coloured cliffs of the Todra Gorge rise vertically to leave just a narrow pass through which our track and the river struggle for right of way. In the morning Berber women drive their goats through the narrow gorge to the better grazing land higher up and we have an opportunity to follow their daily ritual and admire the stunning views, as we spend the morning exploring these deep, narrow mountain chasms on foot. You may choose to join the tour leader on an optional walk to Abdelali viewpoint for some excellent panoramas across to the Jebel Sahro and down into the gorge. The walk generally takes around 5 hours return and is considered as a moderate trek, but be aware that in high temperatures it can be more demanding (walking boots with ankle support essential). Alternatively you may opt to explore the gorge valley floor following the path of the river and take in the local scenery from one of the nearby cafés.



Accommodation: Kenzi Saghro (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 9 - Drive to Ait Benhaddou via El Kelaa des M'Gouna and the Valley of 1000 Kasbahs

This morning we driving westwards, where we make a short stop in El Kelaa des M'Gouna positioned at the foot of a rocky outcrop that separates the Dades and Mgoun Valleys. Famed for its roses, the town lies blanketed under a landscape of scented blooms each spring, which are then harvested in May during the famous Festival of the Roses and processed into rosewater to be sold throughout the Islamic world. Driving on through the Dades Valley with its fertile oases, we enter the Valley of a Thousand Kasbahs, where each of the oasis towns can boast their own distinctive character, the mud and straw structures becoming more plentiful and more ornate as you progress along the valley. Later this afternoon we make our way towards the small, fortified Berber settlement of Ait Benhaddou, which has been classified by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site and is considered by many to be one of Morocco's most picturesque settings. Studded with crenelated towers and richly decorated, the town's Kasbah is quite spectacular and provided an ideal location for filming scenes from Jesus of Nazareth and Lawrence of Arabia.




Accommodation: La Kasbah (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available

 Single room available


 Meals Provided: Breakfast


DAY 10 - Drive to Ouirgane

Heading north, the parched desert sand and stone gives way to the hills and deep gorges of the High Atlas Mountains as we wind our way up and over the Tizi n' Tichka, the highest vehicular pass in Morocco and often snow covered during the winter months. We will then head to the small village of Ouirgane. En route we may have the opportunity of visiting the local market at Tahanoute and the village of Aguersioual, where we will enjoy a mint tea with a Berber family and experience the everyday life of the people of this region. Depending on our arrival time there may be the opportunity for a short hike around Ouirgane, Imlil or alternatively to the Berber village of Matate.

 **Accommodation: La Bergerie** (or similar)

 Premium Hotel

 Swimming pool available

 Single room available


 Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 11 - Drive to Essaouira via Marrakesh

Today we head via Marrakesh to take the road west to the shores of the Atlantic Ocean. Our destination is the historic port of Essaouira. This afternoon you will have free time to enjoy this charming small seaside town.

 **Accommodation: Hotel Souiri** (or similar)

 Standard Hotel

 Single room available

 Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 12 - Free day in Essaouira

The day is free for independent explorations in this colourful coastal fishing town. Situated within 15th century Portuguese fortifications, the town has a relaxed but lively feel and an experience not to be missed is a visit to the old walled Medina. After passing through the narrow, highly decorated arched entrance, it may be hard to resist snapping up last minute gifts such as locally made rustic leather belts, gleaming gold and silver jewellery, or wooden boxes exquisitely inlaid with ebony and mother of pearl by local craftsmen. The lively throng of the Medina, with its local women carrying out their daily routines, veiled in their traditional dress, forms a sharp contrast to the open golden sands of the harbour area where hopeful seabirds can be seen circling above the fisherman as they return from the blue waters with their daily catches. We suggest a stroll around the old town, perhaps taking in the Mellah (the old Jewish Quarter) or maybe a wander along the fine sandy beach and through the harbour.

 **Accommodation: Hotel Souiri** (or similar)

 Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 13 - Drive to Marrakech; Afternoon sightseeing tour

This morning we leave the coast and return to Marrakech. It's a few hours' drive and after we have checked in to the hotel we will take a walking tour of the Red City. Like many North African towns, Marrakech is divided into two distinct parts, the Gueliz (the modern French-built city) and the Medina (the Old City), a place where trade and barter amongst the colourful souks still renders its ancient heart a glittering cacophony of noise and colour. The city's beating heart is the spectacular Djemma-el-Fna, a site not to be missed and a scene straight out of the pages of the Arabian Nights. Here we will find the streets and alleys alive with storytellers and musicians, jugglers and acrobats, snake charmers and clowns. Marrakech is a city like no other; with a staggering array of spectacular architecture and wonderful facades and not to be missed are the Koutoubia mosque and tower, Saadian tombs, Ben Youssef medersa, the Dar Si Said Palace (now the Museum of Moroccan Art) and the Menara gardens. This evening there is also an opportunity to visit a traditional Hammam.



Accommodation: Moroccan House (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 14 - Free in Marrakech

Today has been left free to continue exploring this amazing city at your leisure. You can wander past vendors selling doughnuts and fried grasshoppers, meander through native markets where Muslim women, their hands and feet dyed with henna, call out to sell their wares, and enjoy the sounds and the smells of the exotic. Perhaps you will prefer to take time to enjoy more of the remarkable Medina, haggling for a bargain or two, or simply sitting at one of the local cafés and watching the street tableaux unfold before you. Do remember that many of the mosques will be forbidden to non-Muslims and be careful of photographing women. If you are unsure, it is always best to ask.



Accommodation: Moroccan House (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 15 - Tour ends Marrakech

Our tour ends in Marrakech today after breakfast. Depending on the schedule of your flights, you might be able to spend some additional time exploring the city independently and buy the last souvenirs in the market.



What's included?



Included meals

Breakfast: 14



Transport

Bus
4WD



Trip staff

Explore Tour Leader
Driver(s)



Accommodation

12 nights standard hotel
2 nights premium hotel

Trip information

Country information

Morocco Holidays & Tours

Climate

The climate is both Mediterranean and Atlantic. The dry, hot season is from May to October when summer temperatures can reach 38°C and above (if sight seeing is included we will do our best to avoid the heat of the day during this period). Temperatures may drop significantly at times during the night as the day's heat rapidly diminishes. From December to January snow can be expected on mountain passes and it can be wet. In winter, day temperatures will probably be around 18-25°C, dropping to perhaps 0-5°C.

Time difference to GMT

0

Plugs

2 Pin Round

Religion

Islam

Language

Arabic, Berber, French.

Budgeting and packing

Optional activities

Merzouga - The following optional trips are available to enhance the Sahara desert experience: 4WD excursion £20; camel ride (1 hour) £15, Erg Chebbi overnight Berber style camp (including bedding and dinner) £20 to £40 dependant on numbers. Combinations of these excursions are possible, please discuss with your tour leader. Marrakech - Hammam £20; Walking tour of the city £6.

Clothing

Summer: Clothing should be lightweight. However, a warm sweater is also advisable, as the desert can sometimes get cold at nights, even in the summer. Winter: Usually warm during the day but thicker clothing is essential for cold nights (Nov-Mar). It is advisable to take warm clothing (eg. track suit or thermal underwear) to sleep in, as the quality of heating in Moroccan hotel rooms can be variable. A waterproof jacket, trousers and fleece are recommended in the winter months. Morocco is a Muslim country and it is important to dress with respect for local customs. People may be offended by shorts or revealing dresses, which can attract unwelcome attention. We advise that in general both men and women should cover shoulders, upper arms and knees. Transparent, plunging necklines and tightfitting clothes should be avoided. Women should also cover their heads when entering a sanctuary, though in general, mosques are forbidden to non-Muslims. For those clients on a cycling holiday please bear this information in mind for times that you are not on the bikes. While cycling it is no problem for both men and women to wear your regular cycling gear, tight fitting or not.

Footwear

We recommend sandals and walking boots with good ankle support if planning to do the Abdelali walk in the Todra Gorge.

Luggage

20kg

Luggage: On tour

One main piece of baggage and daypack. Remember you are expected to carry your own luggage so don't overload yourself.

Equipment

A head torch, water bottle, sunhat and high factor sunscreen are all essential, whilst we recommend swimming costumes and towels.

Tipping

Explore leader

You may wish to tip your tour leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you have received whilst on tour.

Local crew

Although entirely voluntary, tipping is a recognized part of life in this region of the world. Some local staff will look to members of the group for personal recognition of particular services provided. In order to make things easier for you, the Tour Leaders may organise a group's tips kitty and if this is the case, they will account for it throughout the tour. Accordingly, you should allow approx. £20 for tipping of crew and local guides used.

Country Information

Morocco Holidays & Tours

Food and drink

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Dinner price

£5.00 - 8.00

Beer price

£2.5

Water price

£0.6

Foreign Exchange

Local currency

Moroccan Dirham (MAD).

Recommended Currency For Exchange

US Dollars, Sterling and Euros are readily exchangeable. We recommend you take a mixture of cash and credit cards. Scottish bank notes and Australian dollar travellers cheques and cash are NOT normally accepted in Morocco.

Where To Exchange

Most major towns - your Tour Leader will advise you.

ATM Availability

ATMs are available in main towns/cities, though can be unreliable.

Credit Card Acceptance

Not all places.

Travellers Cheques

Travellers cheques are difficult to exchange and are not recommended.

Transport, Accommodation & Meals

Transport Information

Bus, 4WD

Accommodation notes

Booking a Single Room

All of our group tours are planned and operated on a twin-share basis, meaning that the standard cost is based either on individual travellers sharing accommodation with another group member of the same sex, or people who book together sharing accommodation. Please refer to the tour notes where the single room option availability is detailed on a night by night basis for this tour, and the price for the available nights is detailed on the dates & prices tab by departure date. For Self-Guided trips the Single Room supplement offers the option of a single room each and is charged per person. The Single Room supplement also applies to the third person in a party of three that will be accommodated in a single room.

Morocco is a developing country and as such, the accommodation standards are not equivalent to those in Europe and can be more basic. We generally choose our properties because of their location, cleanliness, traditional style or for their welcoming atmosphere, as we endeavour to provide an authentic Moroccan experience. However, some of the properties might have some outdated or simple furniture and the level of service may vary depending on the location. You may find that availability of hot water is variable or limited in certain locations. Breakfasts are generally continental style. A swimming pool is often available, especially in the cities.

Essential information

FCO Advice

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety and security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. For UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office advice click [here](#).

For more information from Explore about travel advice, click [here](#)

Under 18 immigration guidance

Please note that some countries require proof of parental consent when travelling overseas with under 18s. Please check requirements with the relevant embassy or consular office well in advance of travel if this applies to your party.

Essential Information

Once your booking has been confirmed we guarantee the price will not increase, whatever the circumstances. Before booking please ensure you have read our important tour pricing information. [Booking Conditions](#)

Visa Information

Morocco: Visas are not required by UK, Australian, New Zealand, US and Canadian citizens. Other nationalities should consult their local embassy or consular office.

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may consider applying through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See www.travcour.com to download the relevant visa application for your trip, if applicable (UK citizens only), along with details of how to apply for your visa through Travcour. The Team at Travcour will be happy to answer specific questions relating to visa applications, please call them directly on 0208 5431846.

Booking conditions

Before booking your Explore trip, please ensure that you read both our [Essential Information](#) and [Booking Conditions](#).

Transfers

[Find out more about Trip Transfer Terms and Conditions before you book.](#)

Booking a land only package with Explore

Customers who have chosen to book on the 'Land Only' arrangements of our tour, please ensure that you have checked your tour specific 'Joining Instructions' prior to booking your own travel arrangements. Your joining instructions can be found below in the dates and prices information.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will now receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The transfers will be from the Explore designated airport or train station to the joining point of your tour, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. The exception to this rule is customers who are booked on a tour where the joining and ending point is at the designated airport or train station.

Free transfers are not available for Self-Guided, Tailormade or Tours for Churches customers.

If you are not eligible for the Free Transfer then you will need to make your own way through to the joining and ending point. On a majority of our tours Explore will be able to provide a private transfer at an additional cost. Please ask for a quote at the time of booking.

For more information regarding the Explore Free Transfer [click here](#)

Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Explore that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country. Please ensure your policy includes medical emergency helicopter evacuation in the event of illness or injury and covers the entire duration of your holiday. If you are trekking at altitude please ensure that there is no upper altitude limit which may limit or exclude cover for your trip. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling on trips within the United Kingdom.

Read more information about what travel insurance is required.

Flight information

Explore offers a wide range of flexible flying options to make joining and leaving our trips easy. [Read more about them here.](#)

Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore

We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport.

On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

Morocco Holidays & Tours

Vaccinations

Nothing compulsory, but we recommend protection against tetanus, typhoid, infectious hepatitis and polio. Consult your travel clinic for latest advice on different prophylaxis available against malaria.
