

# EXPLORE!



## Riads and Kasbahs of Morocco

15 days

Morocco - Trip code DMR

## Riads and Kasbahs of Morocco

From the Imperial Cities of Fes, Meknes and Marrakech to the Saharan Sand Sea of Merzouga, we explore many of Morocco's natural and cultural highlights. We visit local Berber communities in the Anti-Atlas Mountains and travel through the vast Dades Gorge. Along the way we unwind in hand-picked hotels and traditional 'riads', which provide an oasis of calm from the bustling cities.

## Trip highlights

- ★ **Riads and Kasbahs** - The highlights of Morocco from hand-picked, comfortable accommodation in traditional style.
- ★ **Marrakech** - Discover Morocco's vibrant Red City.
- ★ **Meknes and Volubilis** - Two remarkable sites, rich in history and culture.
- ★ **Fes** - The atmospheric medina also known as Mecca of the West.
- ★ **Merzouga Sand Sea** - The impressive sand dunes of the Sahara.
- ★ **Todra Gorge** - Walk in Morocco's Grand Canyon through spectacular rock formations.
- ★ **The Atlas Mountains** - The highest and most scenic mountain range in North Africa.
- ★ **Essaouira** - An atmospheric port town on the Atlantic coast.

#### ACCOMMODATION GRADE:

##### Premium

Our premium accommodation is hand-picked and chosen for its character, location or local importance. These properties have excellent facilities and a higher level of comfort and service. They provide the perfect wind down after an active day.

#### 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 - 16

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 Fes

Your tour starts in Fes. Depending on the schedule of your flights, you may wish to explore the vibrant town independently before meeting your group and Tour Leader at the hotel.



**Accommodation: Riad Ghita** (or similar)



Premium Riad



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

### DAY 2 - Morning sightseeing, afternoon walk through Old 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 Borj 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: Riad Ghita** (or similar)



Premium Riad



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 3 - Visit Meknes, Moulay Idriss and Volublis

Departing Fes this morning we drive onto the city of 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. This morning we enjoy a guided tour of its major highlights, 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. Later this afternoon we head into the hills to the north, to visit the holy city of Moulay Idriss, named after Morocco's most revered saint and creator of the country's first Arab dynasty, before then moving on to explore the ancient site of Volubilis, the capital of the Roman province of Mauritania Tingitana. The detailed mosaics here are still intact and the site provides us with a good idea of the layout of Rome's imperial provincial settlements. From here we return back to Fes.



**Accommodation: Riad Ghita** (or similar)



Premium Riad



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 4 - 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'Tairhem 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 to the on to the desert settlement of Erfoud.



**Accommodation: Kasbah Xalucca** (or similar)



Premium Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 5 - Drive to Merzouga via Rissani

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 to truly appreciate the captivating tranquillity of this desert setting. Please note: due to limited daylight hours during the winter months, we will only be able to offer either the 4WD or camel excursion in combination with the overnight camping.



**Accommodation: Auberge Tombouctou** (or similar)



Premium Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast & Dinner

## DAY 6 - Drive to Boumaine via Tinerhir and the Todra Gorge

Following an ancient route along the southern slopes of the Atlas, we reach the town of Tinerhir, set amongst the dramatic ochre coloured cliffs of the Todra Gorge. There may be time on arrival this afternoon to take a walk amongst 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. From here we then continue west, towards the meandering course of the Dades River and the town of Boumalene, passing into a sparse and dramatic landscape that is home to an array of birdlife that includes buzzards and cream-coloured coursers and even rare Houbara bustards. These harsh lands were once the tribal heartlands of the Ait-Alouane, fierce, seminomadic tribesmen who were the virtual rulers of the Draa and Dades Valleys. Part of a greater confederation of tribes collectively known as the Ait-Atta, these were the last of the Berbers to finally submit to the French during the fierce fighting of the 1930s.



**Accommodation: Kasbah Xalucca Dades** (or similar)



Premium Kasbah



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 7 - Walking in the Dades Gorge

The waters of the Dades River feed the Dades Valley as it flows from the slopes of the High Atlas and across the high plateau, carving the great chasms of the Dades Gorge, before it continues to feed the waters of the Ouarzazate Lake and the Draa. Today we will enjoy a walk through this most remarkable of settings, spending some 3 hours taking in a landscape steeped in natural and cultural

treasures, where Kasbahs and kours (fortified villages) lie amongst fertile fields of almond and walnut trees and towering limestone cliffs. Beginning in the region of Ait Youl we head towards the small Berber village of Ait Oudinar (1600m), following the trails and fields that lie along the course of the river, from where we will return to Boumaine.



### Accommodation: Kasbah Xalucca Dades (or similar)



Premium Kasbah



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 8 - Drive to Ouarzazate via the Valley of 1000 Kasbahs

Known as the Valley of One Thousand Kasbahs, the Dades Valley region can boast some of the most authentic Berber settlements of all the Southern Oasis Valleys, each of the oasis towns benefiting from its own distinctive feel and, whilst many of the original Kasbahs now lie in ruins, there are still enough to give a real flavour of Morocco's ancient heritage, with some of the valley women still favouring the traditional colourful dress and ornaments worn by their forebears. We'll pass through this fascinating landscape this morning, heading for the town of El Kelaa des M'Gouna, lying 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. Later this afternoon we make our way towards the small, fortified Berber settlement of Ait Ben Haddou, 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. Our final destination for the evening is the town of Ouarzazate.



### Accommodation: Dar Daif (or similar)



Premium Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 9 - Drive to Taroudant via Tazenakhte

This morning we head through the landscapes of the Anti-Atlas, travelling via the settlements of Tazenakhte and Taliouine, with its magnificent, decaying Kasbah, towards Taroudant stopping to visit some saffron cooperative en route and arriving later this afternoon.



### Accommodation: Dar Zitoune (or similar)



Premium Riad



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast & Dinner

## DAY 10 - Visit Tiout and Taroudant

Today you will make a trip out to the village of Tiout south of Taroudant in the Souss Valley at the foot of the Anti-Atlas Mountains. Here we can walk through the fields and palm groves of this idyllic spot and discover the caid's kasbah once part of the extensive feudal holdings of the Glaoui empire. We enjoy some of the most famous views of the Sous Valley from the kasbah promontory and may be sample the local mint tea. Later we will visit Taroudant known as the 'Pearl of the Sous'. It has lain at the centre of political life of the Sous Valley for generations. Lying before the imposing backdrop of the Anti-Atlas Mountains, amidst a landscape of olive groves and orange orchards, the town lies behind an impressive bastion of fortified towers and some of the best-preserved walls in the country. Strategically important and site of the region's most important market, Taroudant once commanded a network of major trading routes and even today its bustling market lies at the centre of life.



**Accommodation: Dar Zitoune** (or similar)



Premium Riad



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 11 - Drive to Essaouira

This morning we will leave Taroudant and continue north towards the Atlantic coast and the historic port of Essaouira. The town is a delightful haven of whitewashed houses and dramatic medieval walls set before a scene of empty beaches and crashing waves. One of Morocco's most popular resorts it has gained a reputation over recent years as a venue for International wind surfing competitions, the local winds creating perfect conditions amongst the Atlantic rollers. Arriving in Essaouira late this afternoon there should be time for a short orientation tour of the city before dinner.



**Accommodation: Riad Mimouna** (or similar)



Premium Riad



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: Riad Mimouna (or similar)



Premium Riad



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 13 - Drive to Marrakech; Afternoon optional walking tour

A morning drive takes us east to Marrakech, where we'll have the better part of two days to explore a city that has for centuries been a meeting place for the mountain Berbers and the desert peoples of the south. This afternoon there will be an opportunity to explore something of its rich heritage with an optional sightseeing tour of Morocco's fascinating Red City. Like many North African towns, Marrakech is divided into two distinct parts, the Gueliz and the Medina, a place where trade and barter amongst the colourful souks still renders its ancient heart a glittering cacophony of noise and colour. Journeying into this vibrant city with a local guide affords a chance to discover some of its most enthralling sites. 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 you 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, boasting 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: Hotel Hivernage (or similar)



Premium 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, however photogenic they look, as the Moroccans are very sensitive about such things. If you are unsure, it is always best to ask.



## Accommodation: Hotel Hivernage (or similar)



Premium Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 15 - Tour ends Marrakech

Your tour ends in Marrakech after breakfast. Depending on the schedule of your flights you may wish to spend some additional time exploring Marrakech independently or buying the last souvenirs.

 Meals Provided: Breakfast



## What's included?



### Included meals

Breakfast: 14  
Dinner: 2



### Transport

Bus  
4WD



### Trip staff

Explore Tour Leader  
Driver(s)



### Accommodation

5 nights premium hotel  
2 nights premium kasbah  
7 nights premium riad

## 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**

Erg Chebbi - Overnight camp (including bedding) £20. Merzouga - 4WD excursion £20, camel ride (1 hour) £15. Marrakech - Guided tour of Old City £6. Hammam £5

### **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: Days are usually warm but much 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 between December and January. 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 you bring sandals and strong trainers or lightweight walking shoes (ideally with good grip and ankle support).

### **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**

At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Tour Leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

#### **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 £25 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.

Please note that as the riads have individual rooms which can differ quite dramatically in size from one to the other, your tour leader will take this into consideration in an attempt to allocate rooms fairly amongst the group throughout the tour.

## 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](http://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.

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