



# Compass Odyssey

## Morocco Safari

(escorted and accommodated)

16 days/15 nights

3 July ~ 18 July, 2011

US\$3300 p.p.

Join writer, photographer, tour guide and Compass Odyssey co-founder, Darren (Crusty) Humphrys – author of the prestigious *Frommer's Morocco* guidebook – on our 2011 Morocco Safari.

At the crossroads of Africa, Arabia, and Europe – and once known as the western edge of the then known world – Morocco is an exotic, vibrant, and exciting land of intriguing culture, mesmerizing landscapes, great shopping and renowned hospitality. It is also a country of contrasts, where tradition and modernity can be seen living & working side-by-side every day. Journey to Morocco today and you can still marvel at the quintessential North African images of ancient walled cities, desert-crossing camel caravans, mud-walled *kasbahs* shaded by tall date palms, *minarets* silhouetted against the setting sun, Arab intellectuals, and Berber nomads. However, this is also a youthful country that is fast becoming a leading nation bridging the differences between *l'Orient* (the East) and *l'Occident* (the West). Independent from the French since 1956, Morocco's largely under-40 population is being led into a complicated 21st-century by a young king – the jet-skiing, mountain-hiking Mohammed VI – who is intent on retaining his kingdom's unique diversity and traditional customs, while encouraging tourism as a major form of economic development. Morocco is filled with unforgettable travel experiences just waiting for you to embrace, and we welcome you to come join us on our annual journey through this wonderful country.

The per person cost is based on two adults travelling together, and is quoted in U.S. dollars. Should you be travelling solo, we do charge a single supplement but will first try to match you up with a fellow solo traveller should you wish. No special level of fitness is required to enjoy our safari.



# Compass Odyssey

## Morocco Safari

### SAFARI OVERVIEW

- Day 1: Merhaba to Morocco, welcome to Casablanca
- Day 2: Essaouira
- Day 3: Essaouira
- Day 4: Marrakech
- Day 5: Marrakech
- Day 6: High Atlas Mountains & Kasbah of Aït ben Haddou
- Day 7: Todra Gorge
- Day 8: Todra Palmeraie & Erg Chebbi Saharan sand dunes
- Day 9: Erg Chebbi Saharan sand dunes
- Day 10: Middle Atlas Mountains & Fes
- Day 11: Fes
- Day 12: Meknes & Volubilis
- Day 13: Rif Mountains & Chefchaouen
- Day 14: Tangier & Rabat
- Day 15: Rabat & Casablanca
- Day 16: Ma'sallama & Farewell Morocco



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## Morocco Safari

### SAFARI DETAILS

- Dates:** 3 July – 18 July, 2011
- Duration:** 16 days/15 nights
- Cost:** US\$3300 p.p. (twin share)  
US\$480 (single supplement)
- Group Size:** Minimum 10, Maximum 16
- Included:** All transport, meals and twin share accommodation as per itinerary  
Entrance to Hassan II Mosque, Ben Youssef Medersa, Bou Inania Medersa & Mausoleum of Moulay Ismail  
Entrance to Ait ben Haddou Kasbah  
Entrance to Marrakech Museum, Tangier American Legation Museum, & Volubilis World Heritage site  
Guided walks of Hassan II Mosque, Marrakech, Todra Palmeraie, Fes, Roman ruins of Volubilis and Tangier American Legation Museum - all with specialist guides  
Camel trek with overnight desert camp  
Fully escorted tour with Moroccan expert, Darren Humphrys  
Arrival & departure airport transfers (Casablanca)  
Gratuities for all guides, drivers, domestics, and wait staff  
Bottled mineral water with all included meals
- Not Included:** International airfares and accompanying airport/airline taxes  
Any meals not included in the itinerary  
Personal travel insurance  
All other personal expenses, such as laundry and beverages with meals

## *The colour & imagery of Morocco awaits your – and your camera's – eye...*

### **Jemaa el Fna, Marrakech**

There's nowhere else in the world like it, and it happens every day. Marrakech's famed square is the setting for an incredible spectacle that begins in the morning with snake charmers, West African-descended *Gnaoua* musicians, and veiled *nakkachat* women ready to tattoo any bare piece of flesh with their henna-based designs. Come late afternoon, they are joined by all manner of performers-acrobats, dancers, musicians, and storytellers called *halkas*. Also at this time of the day, the square's heart converts to the country's largest open-air restaurant, with over 100 food carts offering traditional dishes such as cous cous and tagine, along with specialties like boiled *escargot*, and roasted sheep's head. All the while, surrounding the 'show' is a circle of stalls selling freshly squeezed orange juice, and dried fruits and nuts. It all adds up to a visual extravaganza, and each 'performer' is ready and willing-upon payment of a few *dirham*-to be photographed.

### **Chouwara Tannery, Fes**

The largest and busiest of Fes el Bali's traditional tanneries, Chouwara is a scene straight out of medieval times. The skins of camel, cow, goat, and sheep are firstly stretched, cured-in a concoction that includes cow urine and pigeon droppings-and laid out to dry. Shorts-wearing workers then stomp around in various earthen pits, where the skins are dyed in natural colours originally emanating from indigo (blue), mint (green), poppy (red), and turmeric (yellow). It makes for a stunning picture from the viewing points above-strategically placed within the various leather shops-though the rancid smell emanating from the cocktail of chemicals certainly makes you earn it.

### **Seffarine Square, Fes**

This busy square - bordering one side of the spiritual Kairouine Mosque - is home to the ancient city's brass and copper workshops. Although the noise generated by the constant banging and clanging can't be captured on film, there's still plenty of scope for great images. Coppersmiths sit cross-legged while shaping everything from small decorative plates, to huge cauldrons and vats, and are generally receptive to camera-wielding visitors requesting a photo or two.

### **Majorelle Garden, Marrakech**

Within this popular city sight is the former studio of the original owner, artist Jacques Majorelle, and it's brilliant cobalt-blue exterior contrasts strikingly with the surrounding flora of this now botanical garden. *Jardin Majorelle's* most recent owner was the very colourful and fashionable Frenchman, Yves St-Laurent, who ensured the small building received a regular fresh lick of colour-now sometimes simply described as 'Majorelle blue' due to it's unique combination of brightness and depth-and maintains it's standing as a popular visual for Moroccan postcards, and coffee table-style books.

### **Camel Caravans in the Sand**

It's the quintessential desert image, and is easily captured in Morocco's Erg Chebbi sand sea. Here you'll find men dressed in the flowing blue caftans and robes of the famed Tuareg nomads, walking alongside trains of loping one-humped *dromedaires*, into the seemingly never-ending dunes of Saharan sands. Whether in the soft glow of the morning light, or silhouetted against the often rapidly-setting sun, the exotic image is the stuff of postcards, and as a screen-saver will impress your workmates no end.

### **The Coloured Doors of the Medina**

Most architectural beauty within Morocco's ancient, walled medinas is to be found behind the doors of its houses, *maisons d'hôte*, *medersas*, and mosques. Often overlooked, however, are the doors themselves. The only obvious external feature distinguishing one establishment from the other, the doors of the medina are often a very visual reflection of the status of the family that lives behind it. They can range from the simple and practical-often painted in bright blues, greens, reds, or whites-through to castle-like creations complete with brass knocker, and mosaic archway.

### **A Rainbow of Babouches**

Morocco's traditional slipper is the leather *babouche*, and is worn by men and women of all ages and backgrounds. Styles range from pointed to round-toe, and in colours covering the whole spectrum of the rainbow. Walk through any market or souk throughout the country, and you're bound to find the local *babouche* quarter, where literally hundreds of different collared babouches are displayed from floor to ceiling. Politely ask the shopkeeper if you can photograph his 'collection', and you'll usually be made more than welcome and may end up with a pair for yourself!

### **Souk des Teinturiers, Marrakech**

Marrakech's dyer's souk is one of the most photogenic-and photographed-areas of the city's medina, with good reason. While jellabah-wearing shopkeepers sit outside their shops, the top of the frame within your camera's viewfinder is filled with overhanging fabric and wool, still wet from being recently dyed in bright blues, oranges, reds, and yellows. The colourful subject matter is better some days than others, but give yourself a few consecutive days and you'll more than likely be able to find your preferred picture.

### **Spice Cones**

Spices are an everyday ingredient in the cuisine of Morocco, and can be purchased from establishments ranging from small medina stalls, through to large nation-wide supermarket chains. At the front of most spice-seller's stalls you'll see the various spices displayed in tall, conical-shaped mounds within brass or steel vats. The vibrant colour of these mounds of henna (green), orange (chilli), paprika (red), and turmeric (yellow), are easy subjects for an image that sums up the exotic sights and smells of the country's medinas.

### **Jellabahs and Donkeys**

A *jellabah* is the traditional robe with a pointed hood, still worn throughout the country by both sexes, and all ages. Many Moroccans transport their goods - and themselves - on the back of their donkey. An everyday visual, this combination makes for a fascinating picture, especially in the larger towns and cities, where the contrast of traditional and modern can be captured as the four- and two-legged subject plods by a KFC or McDonald's restaurant, or perhaps a store selling satellite dishes, and the latest wide-screen TVs.

# SAFARI ITINERARY

Day 1: Sunday, 3 July

Merhaba to Morocco, welcome to Casablanca

Merhaba and Welcome to Morocco!

Today we pick you up from Casablanca's Mohammed V International Airport and transfer you to our hotel in the city's downtown French Quarter, or *Ville Nouvelle*. We are at your service today to ensure you settle in, recover from your flight if necessary, and to offer any recommendations or advice. Here you can relax for the remainder of the day, or you may wish to head out onto the bustling streets for a wander around this vibrant and cosmopolitan neighbourhood of Casablanca. Try to resist the temptation to shop, as during our tour we'll have plenty of opportunities in more authentic and traditional surroundings.

This evening we have a short **pre-departure get-together** covering all the necessary information to help you feel comfortable with being in Morocco, as well as a brief overview of the Compass Odyssey Morocco itinerary. This also gives everyone a chance to meet Darren and the Compass Odyssey crew, before we enjoy a relaxed, informal dinner and the beginning of your tastebuds' own journey through Morocco.

*(Dinner included)*

Accommodation: Hotel Guynemer

Day 2: Monday, 4 July

Essaouira

This morning we visit the nation's premier contemporary architectural showpiece - Casablanca's Hassan II Mosque. Our guided walk through its impressive interior is a unique opportunity for non-Muslim travellers in Morocco. This is followed by an afternoon's drive to perhaps the finest, and definitely the most popular, of Morocco's Atlantic coast's settlements, the alluring port-town of Essaouira. We stay in Essaouira's medina for the next two nights, in one of Morocco's foremost environmentally-responsible *maisons d'hôte*, complete with its own restored *hammam* and popular restaurant serving organic produce.

*(Breakfast, lunch & dinner included)*

Accommodation: Hotel Lalla Mira ([www.lallamira.net](http://www.lallamira.net))

Acknowledging Casablanca's lack of any great historical monuments, on his birthday in 1980 King Hassan II stated his desire for the city to "be endowed with a large, fine building of which it can be proud until the end of time". Thirteen years later, he inaugurated the **Hassan II Mosque**.

As a house of prayer, it is one of the largest in the world, able to house 25,000 worshippers under its retractable roof, and another 80,000 in the courtyards and squares outside. To see the mosque's interior (normally denied to non-Muslims in Morocco) we take an excellent one-hour guided tour, where the handiwork of the country's master craftsmen can be truly appreciated. These craftsmen were working with marble from Agadir, cedar wood from the Middle Atlas, granite from Tafraoute, and Venetian glass, the only imported material. Added to this is perhaps the mosque's most exquisite examples of Moroccan craftsmanship - blankets of *zellij* mosaic tiling, some designs over 10m (33ft) high. There's also an ablutions hall with over 40 fountains and two public wash houses, called *hammams*.

**Essaouira** is one the most enchanting spots in all Morocco. Both laid-back port-town, and chic seaside resort, it has quietly become one of the 'must-sees' for travellers, surfers (wind, kite, and stand-up), art enthusiasts and crafts shoppers and for those just looking for a pleasant break from the hustle and bustle of other destinations within the country.

It was the Saadian ruler, Sidi Mohammed ben Abdallah, who in 1765 entrusted French architect, Théodore Cornut, to re-design Essaouira into a free-trade port, the only one south of Tangier to provide an integral link between Morocco and its Saharan hinterland, with Europe and the rest of the world. Cornut designed a walled city different to the country's other hap-hazard Arabic medinas and more along the French grid-like street system. Liking what he saw, the sultan re-named the city Essaouira, meaning "well designed", and it prospered from both it's free-port status and a subsequent wave of immigrants that included wealthy Jewish traders, and influential European merchants along with thousands of local Arabs and Berbers as well as a small community of African ex-slaves who brought along their distinctive *Gnaoua* trance music.

Upon the establishment of the French protectorate in 1912, the town, renamed Mogador by the French fell into decline due to the favoured port of Casablanca. Upon independence in 1956, when the city reverted back to "Essaouira", this decline intensified with the exodus of the Jewish community to Israel. Although the town enjoyed irregular bursts of international attention over the ensuing decades - Orson Welles shot his 1950s "Othello" here, and a brief hippie fling in the late '60s and early '70s occurred after much talked-about visits by Cat Stevens and Jimi Hendrix - it has only been in the past decade that the sleepy backwater has come back into its own.

Essaouira received a boost in 2001, when the medina was awarded UNESCO World Heritage status in recognition of it's unique mix of European and North African architecture. It continues to welcome all manner of creative types - artists, photographers, movie stars, musicians - but now also hosts those more interested in wind and surf, along with travellers more intent on relaxation. Many of these visitors have fallen for Essaouira, restoring some riads and dars into beautiful *maisons d'hôte* and restaurants. Without boasting any one defining attraction or sight, Essaouira's appeal is it's special blend of charming 18th-century medina, temperate climate, slightly alternative atmosphere, photogenic port and wide sandy bay. Add to this the renowned warmth and easy-going nature of the local inhabitants called *Souiri's* and you'll undoubtedly enjoy our stay here for the next two nights.

### Day 3: Tuesday, 5 July                      Essaouira

Today we will explore Essaouira's compact, **traveller-friendly medina**, with its eclectic mix of art galleries, fine restaurants, pavement cafes, and bustling souks - with names such as "Souk des Bijoutiers" (the Jeweller's souk), "Place Marché de Grains" (the old corn market), and "Marché d'Epices" (the spice souk) - selling everything from local *thuya* woodcrafts and argan oil-based products, to hippie clothing, jewellery, and handmade leather goods. There's also a large open square, great for a coffee break and a spot of quality people-watching which leads onto a quaint port where fishermen still bring in the daily catch and mend their nets. The long, wide **Essaouira Bay** begins directly outside the medina's walls, and is just perfect for a swim, some sunbathing, and a slow stroll along its golden sandy shore. This evening we'll dine in one of Essaouira's best restaurants, enjoying the culinary benefits of this seaside port's location.

*(Breakfast & dinner included)*

Accommodation:                                      Hotel Lalla Mira    ([www.lallamira.net](http://www.lallamira.net))



Day 5: Thursday, 7 July

Marrakech

Today is your day for some personal exploration of Marrakech. You may wish to do some more sightseeing, try out a new restaurant, 'attack' the souks for some bargains, head out to the boutique shops in the *ville nouvelle*, or hop aboard the "City Sightseeing Bus" for a leisurely drive around the city. Again, Darren will be on-hand to provide helpful advice and directions.

Tonight we will meet up again for a *Spectacle Marocain* feast complete with Berber musicians and dancers performing in between the sumptuous 5-course meal. For those that wish, after dinner we can visit some of this exotic city's nightlife, or head back to Jemaa el Fna for a last look at this unique spectacle.

*(Breakfast & dinner included)*

Accommodation: Riad Amssaffah or similar ([www.riad-amssaffah.com](http://www.riad-amssaffah.com))

Some of our optional sightseeing suggestions include (*admission prices are 2011 estimates only*):

**Dar Si Saïd** This small palace was built by Si Saïd, *vizier* (minister) under Moulay Hassan, the last effective sultan of pre-colonial Morocco. An attractive building with shady, pooled courtyards, it is now home to the Museum of Moroccan Arts. Exhibits include a fascinating display of Berber daggers and jewellery made of amber, ivory, and silver; beautiful carpets from the High Atlas; Taroudannt oil lamps; Marrakchi leatherwork; and distinctive blue pottery from Safi, and green pottery from Tamegroute, near Zagora. At the end of the main entrance corridor is the museum's oldest and most treasured artefact - an 11th-century rectangular marble basin originally transported from Islamic Spain by the Almoravids and left undamaged for centuries. Prominent throughout the building is the collection of finely carved, mainly Berber, woodwork. The exhibit explanations are in Arabic and French only, but it's still definitely worth a look.

Admission 20dh per adult, 10dh per child 5 to 12 yrs. Open Wednesday to Monday 9am to noon, 3pm to 6pm.

**Souk Larzal and Souk Btana and Place Rahba Kedima** Within the medina is a small square, Place Rahba Kedima. To the right of the square is Souk Larzal, an early morning wool market and afternoon second-hand clothing bazaar, and the aromatic Souk Btana, which deals in fresh sheepskins. In the middle of Place Rahba Kedima is a cluster of old women selling woollen hats, woven baskets, and other souvenirs. Place Rahba Kedima is home to many of the medina's apothecary stalls, called *herboristes*, or sometimes referred to as "Berber chemists" by the city's tour guides. Herboristes are instantly recognizable by the array of animal skins, dried herbs and caged tortoises at their shop entrances. Besides selling spices they also specialize in herbal medicines and oils. Constipation, diabetes, slimming, depression, bladder, liver or skin problems, and of course impotence are just some of the ailments that can be miraculously cured with the concoctions that are paraded in front of you. A good herboriste is a pharmacist, salesman and entertainer all in one.

**Souk Zrabia** Still on Place Rahba Kedima, a passageway in the far left leads to yet another, smaller covered square and the carpet souk known as Souk Zrabia, or *Le Criée Berbère* (the Berber auction). Prior to the French occupation in 1912, this was the site of Marrakech's slave auctions, held just before sunset every Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. The slaves were mostly kidnapped West Africans who had been brought in with the caravans plying the route between West and North Africa and farther east into the Levant. Nowadays you'll find carpets—and lots of them.

**Souk des Teinturiers** Marrakech's colourful and photogenic dyer's souk, where wool and fabric are dyed and left hanging across the alleyways to dry

**Jardin Majorelle** This small botanical garden was created in the 1920s by French artist Jacques Majorelle and reflects his affection for contrast and strong colour. The scent and colour of bamboo thickets, huge cacti, multicoloured bougainvillea, and towering palms is offset by the brilliant cobalt-blue of Majorelle's former studio, now a small Museum of Islamic Arts. Inside are some of the artist's engravings and paintings of the Atlas range as well as a collection of North African artefacts largely belonging to the garden's most recent owner, Algerian-born designer Yves Saint Laurent, who holidayed in a villa nearby until his death in 2008. The garden is one of the city's more popular sights and, at only 4.8 hectares (12 acres), can become a little crowded at times. Nevertheless, the layout of the garden lends itself to a feeling of tranquillity and is a welcome break from the busy streets outside. There's a charming café tucked behind the museum, open the same hours as the gardens and serving tasty breakfasts and light lunches. A nice way to reach the garden from the medina is by horse-drawn *calèche*. The gardens are also a stop on the Marrakech City Sightseeing bus's Romantique circuit.

Garden admission 30dh adults, 15dh children 5-12; museum 15dh adults, 10dh children 5-12. Open daily Oct-April 8am-5:30pm; May-Sept 8am-6pm.

**City Sightseeing Bus** This bright red, open-top double-decker bus offers two continuous hop-on, hop-off circuits - named Marrakech Monumental (18 stops) and Marrakech Romantique (7 stops) - on a first come, first served basis. The buses are equipped with a multilingual - English, French, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish - audio system that provides a brief commentary of the major points of interest. Of the two circuits, Marrakech Monumental is by far the more popular, as it includes stops in both the *ville nouvelle* as well as within the medina. Marrakech Romantique heads out to the city's *palmeraie* and golf courses via the Jardin Majorelle, and is more of a scenic drive.

Tickets for each circuit, valid for 24 hours, can be purchased at various pick up/drop off points, and cost 130dh for adults and 65dh for kids aged 6 to 16, and free for 5 and under. The Monumental circuit runs every 30 minutes commencing at 9am and finishing at 7pm. The Romantique circuit takes 1 hour 10 minutes and commences at 1pm and finishes at 5:30pm.

Day 6: Friday, 8 July

High Atlas Mountains & Kasbah of Aït ben Haddou

Today's stunning drive initially takes us through the Haouz plains surrounding Marrakech before rising up into the western region of the **High Atlas mountains**. Winding past the contrasting landscape of barren cliffs and lush valleys as well as a few small Berber villages seemingly clinging to the cliff-face, we eventually climb up to the 2,260m (7,415ft) high Tizi n'Tichka pass. This spectacular feat of French engineering completed by the Foreign Legion in 1936, was forced upon the colonial ruler due to the enduring control of the original pass by the el Glaoui family - one of the three "Lords of the Atlas" clans whose mud-walled kasbahs are dotted all through the western High Atlas.

Our destination today is the village of **Aït ben Haddou** and it's stunning collection of kasbahs, or *ksour*. For centuries Aït ben Haddou was an integral stop on the Saharan caravan route between Timbuktu and Marrakech, thanks to it's strategic location beside the Dra River. In more recent times, the ksour have gained recognition as a UNESCO World Heritage site and as the location for a string of Hollywood movies such as Lawrence of Arabia, The Jewel of the Nile, Gladiator and Alexander the Great.

Our arrival by mid-afternoon allows for plenty of exploration time including a walk at your own pace up through the winding lanes of the ksour to an old fortified granary, or *agadir* which sits atop a small cliff directly above the village - a great spot to witness your first sunset out in North Africa's barren pre-Saharan plains called the *hammada*. Tonight we stay in one of the village's finest *auberges* which boasts unsurpassed views of the ksour.

*(Breakfast, lunch & dinner included)*

Accommodation: Dar Mouna or similar ([www.darmouna.com](http://www.darmouna.com))

Day 7: Saturday, 9 July

Todra Gorge

This morning we drive through Ouarzazate and come across the oases and *palmeraie* fed by the Dadès River -an area popularly known as the "**Valley of a Thousand Kasbahs**". After a few photo stops we then pause our drive near the town of El Kelâa des Mgouna located in one of the world's premier rose-growing areas, to take **lunch with our friend Mohammed Outaleb and his family**. The lunch typically includes a traditional hands-on feast of *tagine*, *couscous*, and freshly baked bread, accompanied by plenty of music, dance, and fun with this outgoing Berber family.

Mohammed is a master jeweller who specialises in handcrafting silver jewellery in traditional Berber designs, and he is most willing to explain his craft and show off his handiwork to us in between numerous cups of mint tea.

This afternoon we travel along the barren landscape between the High Atlas and Sarho mountain ranges, before making our way up the **Todra Valley**. The lush palmeraie that feeds off the Todra River winds upstream for 15km (9.3 miles) before reaching the entrance to the stunning natural wonder that is **Todra Gorge**. The palmeraie itself is a stunning sight with its river of green slicing through the otherwise endless rocky, brown landscape. Down here is a thriving agricultural industry, palm and fruit trees, crops of cereals and fields of vegetables that supplies the surrounding region all year round. Understandably popular with tour groups, independent travellers and Moroccans, Todra Gorge can be quite busy some days, but the first view from its narrow mouth is nevertheless memorable. Only 300m (985ft) in length, 50m (165ft) across and with 300m (985ft) high walls, this is the valley at its most dramatic. During certain times of the year, the height of the cliffs and the axis of the sun prevents any direct sunlight from reaching the gorge's floor. Mid to late afternoon is generally the best time to visit as the sun is absorbed by the gorge's walls and produces beautiful shades of orange and red. The largely hidden Todra River emerges as a spring here, and the cool stream is a nice spot to dip your toes and watch the comings and goings of visitors and locals.

*(Breakfast, lunch & dinner included)*

Accommodation: Hotel Yasmina or similar

Day 8: Sunday, 10 July

Todra Palmeraie & Erg Chebbi Saharan sand dunes

After a typically tranquil “Todra” beginning to the day, we set off with our **local guide to explore the Todra Palmeraie on foot**. Our guide is from the Aït Ousal clan who have lived here for centuries, and joining him for a few hours walk along the palmeraie floor ultimately leaves us with a greater knowledge of the botany and geology of the Todra and a deeper affection for the people who live here. After our walk, we drive out of the palmeraie and make our way to the edge of the Sahara desert. Our destination is **Erg Chebbi**, a massive sand sea some 30km (19 miles) long and 7km (4.3 miles) wide separated from the main Saharan ocean by Morocco’s *hammada*. Emotions of wonder and excitement usually accompany our first sight of this surreal mountain range-like mass of gold, pink and red. The hot, hard black *hammada* leading up to edge of Erg Chebbi only adds to the dramatic sight. Upon our arrival, the friendly Berber staff of our desert-edged *auberge* will have our camels ready, and hopefully willing for us to embark on our **overnight trek into the desert**. As we sit astride our one-humped steed and slowly trek into the seemingly endless vista of wave upon wave of soft sand, time really does seem to slow down. Before we reach our nomad camp, all thoughts of the busy world back home have usually disappeared. Whether you wish to enjoy your fellow traveller’s company or would prefer to absorb the tranquillity on your own, there are enough dunes within this desert sea for everybody. After an unforgettable dune-top sunset, our desert Berber cameleers will produce an astonishingly tasty and filling dinner from their small cooking tent, usually followed by an impromptu concert of nomad music. Our camp consists of a collection of low-lying tents made from goat’s hair, which are renowned for keeping the sand out and the warmth in. Most travellers however, prefer to sleep outside with just a mattress underneath, a blanket on top, and a ceiling of stars.

*(Breakfast, lunch & dinner included)*

Accommodation:

Nomad Camp, Erg Chebbi

Day 9: Monday, 11 July

Erg Chebbi Saharan sand dunes

The beginning of a new day out in the desert can be deafeningly quiet, and evoke emotions of both inspiration and humbleness. Our cameleers make sure we are awake, if perhaps not entirely coherent to witness the event before we re-mount our camels for the lazy trek back to our *auberge*, where a welcoming breakfast, comfortable bed and restful day awaits us. Our *auberge* is located on the very edge of the sand sea with guaranteed ‘ocean views’ from each room. Today we can indulge in some more quality time “in the sand” by perhaps choosing to further **explore the dunes on foot**, capture some more images of the ever-changing desert colours, or you may wish to simply **relax** with a good book, or write some postcards. For those that wish, this afternoon we can visit the nearby village of Khamlia, which has been inhabited for over a century by a mixture of Moroccan Berbers, Bedouin Arabs, and various tribes of sub-Saharan origin collectively called “Gnaoua” or “Gnawa”. Many of the village’s Gnaoua residents are descended from the Bambara people of Mali, who had made their way to what is now Morocco via the great camel caravans. Traditionally shepherds and camel herders, the Bambara also brought with them their music, now popularized in Morocco simply as “Gnaoua music”. The music played by the Bambara in Khamlia is a unique form of Gnaoua, incorporating Arabic and Berber lyrics as well as their own Bambara dialect. Groupe des Bambaras is the creation of Hamad Mahjoubi, and this afternoon you are welcome to listen, watch, and dance to a performance by the group in Dar Gnawa, Hamad’s family compound-cum-performance venue in Khamlia.

*(Breakfast & dinner included)*

Accommodation:

Dar el Janoub ([www.dareljanoub.com](http://www.dareljanoub.com))

Day 10: Tuesday, 12 July

Middle Atlas Mountains & Fes

An early start today sees us driving through the desert towns of Rissani, Erfoud and Er Rachidia before winding our way through the eastern region of the High Atlas mountains. Shortly after entering the range, we will drive through the **Ziz Gorges**. Around 2km (1¼ miles) long and at times almost as high, the gorges are both dramatic and photogenic, subtly changing colour as the day wears on. The surrounding barren mountain landscape only serves to accentuate the sense of isolation and awe. The Eastern High Atlas was one of the last areas in Morocco to accede to colonial rule, and we pass many cliffside kasbahs, or *ksour* where the local tribes resisted French 'pacification' for almost 20 years. Towards the end of the gorges we drive through the Zaabal Tunnel, also known as *Tunnel du Legionnaire*, a 200m (656ft) passage blasted through the mountains by the French in 1930 to open the route to the Saharan south.

Descending the High Atlas we stop for lunch in the remote town of Midelt, before making our way into the **Middle Atlas mountain range**. With its cool temperate climate and forests of towering cedar, the Middle Atlas often comes as a pleasant surprise after the harshness of the past few days. This is the home habitat of the indigenous Barbary macaque - often incorrectly called the "Barbary Ape" due to the absence of a tail - and hopefully we will see these playful monkeys as we near the mountain village of Ifrane. Ifrane is known as the "Little Switzerland" of Morocco, and we'll stop briefly here for a coffee, a breath of fresh mountain air, and a stroll around its quaint village square.

The ancient metropolis of **Fes** then beckons, and we descend down the northern slopes of the Middle Atlas to (hopefully) arrive in time to hear the sunset call to prayer emanating from the city's 100 mosques. Our accommodation in Fes is situated within the walls of the medina, and is a former residence, called a *riad* or *dar* in Arabic that has been restored and refurbished into a guesthouse, or *maison d'hôte*. Tonight we dine within our riad, which also offers one of Fes's most renowned dining experiences.

*(Breakfast, lunch & dinner included)*

Accommodation:

Riad el Yacout ([www.riadyacout.com](http://www.riadyacout.com))

The very beginning of the state that would become Morocco, occurred when Moulay Idriss I set foot in *el-Maghreb el-Aksa* - "the Far West" - and found shelter on the banks of the Wadi (river) Fes. A great-grandson of the Prophet Mohammed, Moulay Idriss and his son, Idriss II created the first semblance of a unified, independent Morocco, and it was from Fes that dynasties would come and go - no matter where their power was based, the city would always feature strongly in the ruling sultan's plans. Today's Fes incorporates the medinas of Fes el Bali ("old Fes") and Fes Jdid ("new Fes"), bisected by the Royal Palace as well as the *ville nouvelle*, created by the French in the early 1900s. **Fes el Bali** is regarded as the "soul of Morocco" and it is only by staying within its ancient walls that we can truly appreciate one of the world's last remaining and still very much alive medieval cities. Heaving masses of impatient people, mules laden with anything from stinking animal hides to baskets of fresh flowers, giggling girls skipping home from school, grizzly old men playing checkers in a cafe, an impromptu game of street football - all of this and more can be seen and experienced right outside our door.

We stay in Fes el Bali for three nights, and along with some organised sightseeing we have attempted to leave as much free time as possible for personal exploration. We encourage you to venture out on your own, where getting lost in amongst Fes el Bali's maze-like labyrinth (as many

as 9,500) of bustling streets, twisting alleys, blind corners, dark lanes, and frustrating dead ends is almost inevitable, but where an unexpected yet highly enjoyable encounter with the locals could also eventuate. For this reason dinner is not included on the last two nights of our stay here so as to give you the freedom to discover the city's restaurants and eat when and where you wish. After full and rewarding days of sights and history, we've found that perhaps a five-star meal at a recommended restaurant, or a simple 'tagine-to-go' at a pavement café, followed by a mint tea and a stroll within the medina is by far the best way to take in the atmosphere of this living, ancient city.

## Day 11: Wednesday, 13 July Fes

Fes is the most ancient, and indeed the greatest of Morocco's imperial cities and is one of the undisputed highlights of our visit. Fes means different things to different people. To some, it is a centre of the decorative arts, world-famous for its leather and metal work and the skill of its master craftsmen, or *maâlem*. Others may see it as the home of the Kairouine Mosque, the second-largest in North Africa and its neighbouring university the oldest in the world. For others still, Fes conjures up an image of the quintessential fabled Arab city from a time when travelling merchants and their camel caravans from the Middle East traded with nomads from the Sahara and Berbers from the mountains. **Walking with our very knowledgeable, friendly, and humorous local Fassi guide**, this morning we will see a number of sights and attractions within the medina of Fes el Bali including the famous ancient leather dye pits, along with a visit to the city's potter's quarter.

There will be plenty of opportunities for taking photographs, asking questions, shopping, and of course, enjoying a mint tea or two, with the end result being a greater knowledge and affection for the Fassi people and their culture. This evening we will dine in an atmospheric medina restaurant tucked away from the main thoroughfares, first enjoying a sunset drink on its rooftop overlooking the medina

*(Breakfast, lunch & dinner included)*

Accommodation: Riad el Yacout ([www.riadyacout.com](http://www.riadyacout.com))

## Day 12: Thursday, 14 July Meknes and Volubilis

Today we venture further into this historic region of Morocco, beginning with a visit to what was the southern-most outpost of the Roman empire, Volubilis. After a guided walk through the ruins, we travel to Meknes, the lesser-known yet perhaps most relaxed of Morocco's former Imperial cities. Here we will visit the shrine of the country's longest-serving ruler, Sultan Moulay Ismail. We will also take a stroll through the largely non-touristed medina, before returning to Fes el Bali towards the end of the day, where the evening is yours to enjoy a final wander along the cobbled streets of this truly great, medieval city.

*(Breakfast included)*

Accommodation: Riad el Yacout ([www.riadyacout.com](http://www.riadyacout.com))

The existence of a **Roman** city in Morocco surprises some people, and though much has been pillaged to adorn other cities - mainly Meknes - over the centuries, or taken to museums, the structure of **Volubilis** is still clearly visible from the ruins, and a visit to this UNESCO World Heritage site is highly enjoyable.

Although the Roman influence on Volubilis was the greatest, archaeological evidence points to the possibility of a Neolithic settlement whilst recovered tablets show there was a third-century BC Phoenician village here. However, it was under the Berber Mauretanian king Juba II, descendant of Hannibal and husband to the daughter of Cleopatra and Marc Antony, that Volubilis began to flourish and from 45AD to 285AD it was the capital of the Roman province of Mauritania Tingitana. Under the Romans, this province, once in Horace's phrase "the arid nurse of lions" became one of the granaries of the Empire, and Volubilis grew to a city of 20,000 inhabitants on the back of exporting vast quantities of olives and wheat to Rome. The number of olive presses that have been found on the site reflect the importance of the olive to the city's fortunes. Volubilis was also a noted exporter of wild animals, in particular the Barbary lion to figure in the legendary gladiator games in the empire's colosseums. The city was also the meeting point between Berbers and Romans where the two cultures met to trade even though the indigenous nomads of Morocco were never subdued by the Roman legions.

Volubilis's weakness was that it was on the fringes of the Empire, only connected to Rome through its ports on the coast. Although numerous emperors had dreams of 'taming' the Atlas and forging on into the dark continent, they never came to fruition. With the empire beginning to crumble, in the late 3rd century Emperor Diocletian withdrew his legions to the coastal areas, leaving Volubilis at the mercy of neighbouring tribes.

With its established olive and farming industries however, the city continued to function for centuries afterwards. Latin was still the common language amongst the city's population of Jews, Greeks, Syrians and Berbers until the Islamic Arabs arrived in the late 700s. The proclaimed sultan in Volubilis, Moulay Idriss preferred his new city of Fes however, and the demise of Volubilis is echoed by the rise of early Islam in Morocco.

A guided walk through the ruins brings the city back to life, and even today we can still marvel at the Triumphal Arch, the Forum, the houses of Dionysus, Euphebus, and Orpheus, as well as some exquisite - though slowly fading - floor mosaics.

From Volubilis we make our way past the olive groves and wheat fields to the former Imperial city of Meknes.

**Meknes** joined the Morocco's select group of Imperial Cities when Moulay Ismail became the second sultan of the Alaouite dynasty that still rules today. Meknes' greatest, indeed it's only golden age was solely due to the reign of Moulay Ismail. His 55-year rule is the longest in Moroccan history, and is regarded as one of its greatest. Inheriting a country weakened by internal tribal wars and royal successions in 1672, the 26-year old Ismail became, at least in European eyes, the most notorious of Morocco's rulers. The builder of an imperial city intended to equal Versailles - Louis XIV was building his palace at the same time and the two grew to become close allies - Moulay Ismail was the sire according to legend of more than a thousand children, yet also a monster of cruelty in his treatment of both his slaves and subjects. For anyone who crossed the sultan's path or was in the wrong place at the wrong time, death was their imminent fate. He constructed his Imperial Palace with captives from military campaigns in Algeria and Mauritania, along with Christian slaves captured from raids on the European mainland. He would often use these Christians as bargaining tools with the European powers, receiving vast sums of money in exchange for their return.

However the sultan was also an extremely able ruler, who kept a tight hold on the country and based his power on a standing army of 150,000 black West African slaves called the "Black Guard". During his reign Ismail expelled the British, Ottoman Turks and Spanish from Morocco's shores, and was a prodigious builder of roads, bridges, kasbahs and mosques. His vision for his beloved

Meknes was grand, and before his death at the age of 80 he had endowed the city with over 25km (16 miles) of protective walls, seven monumental gates, called *babs*, and a vast palace complex. Our visit to the peaceful, almost spiritual burial tomb, or **Mausoleum of Moulay Ismail** is a rare treat in a country where non-Muslims are generally forbidden entry to such places of reverence.

We will also visit the **Bou Inania Medersa**, a former theological college built in 1358, as well as enjoy a stroll through the busy, yet little touristed, **souk** area of Meknes medina. Moroccan slippers, called *babouches* are of an especially high quality, though reasonable price here, and also make sure to seek out the one true specialty of Meknes - souvenirs decorated with silver damascene.

### Day 13: Friday, 15 July                      Rif Mountains & Chefchaouen

Our drive today takes us across fertile farming lands before ascending the Rif Mountains, arriving at the chilled-out village of Chefchaouen around mid-day. Our accommodation, just steps away from the village square within the medina is the Spanish version of a *maison d'hôte* called a *pensión*. Once we are settled in, the remainder of the day and evening is yours to relax, shop, and explore. *(Breakfast & dinner included)*

Accommodation:                                      Casa Hassan or similar ([www.casahassan.com](http://www.casahassan.com))

**Chefchaouen** sits hidden away in the **Rif Mountains**, the wildest of the country's ranges and rests snugly between the twin peaks from which it takes its name. Until relatively recently, isolation by both xenophobia and exploitation was the curse of this little village. For over 400 years the villagers, Andalusian refugees who came here to start a new life after expulsion from re-conquered Christian Spain, determined never again to let the "Christian dogs" rule over them. They denied entry to all westerners, even poisoning one who made it through the village's gates. When the region was finally placed under Spanish 'protection' from 1912 to 1956, rather than a time of prosperity under colonialist rule - as it could be argued occurred in the rest of the country under the French - the country's north west was subject to a reign of plunder and neglect, with little or no construction of infrastructure, support for education, or health initiatives. However this very isolation and lack of development has over the past 10 years seen Chefchaouen deservedly becoming a 'must see' on both the backpacker and mainstream tourist route. Travellers now come here to see the medina's photogenic blue-washed houses, and to 'kick back' at a cafe on the village's small square where breakfast, lunch, and dinner can all blend into a day-long affair.

### Day 14: Saturday, 16 July                      Tangier & Rabat

We now meander our way down the Rif mountains, and make our way to the **Straits of Gibraltar** and the port of **Tangier**. Along the way are clusters of family compounds and small villages, inhabited by the resilient Riffians - the women often clothed in their distinctive traditional dress and wide-brimmed hats. We then follow the Atlantic coastline down to the nation's capital, **Rabat**. Our hotel lies in the heart of Rabat's French-designed *centre ville*, which is adjacent to the city's medina and Andalusian-inspired kasbah. This is an easily-navigable part of the city, and is where many of the city's finer restaurants can be found. *(Breakfast, lunch & dinner included)*

Accommodation:                                      Hotel Bou Regreg

**Tangier** is one of the oldest ports known to man, with evidence suggesting the Phoenicians settled here in 1500BC at the western edge of the then known world. Many nations have since passed through the port and proceeded to accept all the gifts provided by its strategic location, without any real commitment towards bettering its residents or developing its infrastructure. This exploitation reached its peak during the first half of the 20th century when no less than 14 nations, begrudgingly including Morocco were involved in the city's administration. This was the 'InterZone' period of Tangier and was a time of excess, vice, and during World War II, espionage. Americans, British, French (both Free and Vichy), Germans and Italians, many still in uniform moved freely about the city during the war. The Petit Socco and Place de France would be rendezvous points for spies and their secret messages. Neutral nationalities, from Moroccan shoe-shine boys to Portuguese aristocrats were recruited to inform on the enemy, whoever they might be. Americans and Englishmen sat in the same cafes as Germans and Italians, at different tables naturally. Not surprisingly then, Tangier was never attacked, never bombed, and continued with business as usual throughout the entire war. After the war and up to the late 60s, the city kept its exotic allure thanks to the decadently extravagant, and well publicised, parties thrown by Woolworth's heiress Barbara Hutton, along with visits from the Rolling Stones and other creative types. Although Tangier then fell into a long period of neglect, earning itself a reputation amongst travellers as a city to be avoided, the last five years has witnessed a frantic amount of restoration, landscaping, and foreign investment resulting in the city being coined "**Morocco's St Tropez**". It's once seedy past is now looked upon with nostalgia by those westerners old enough to remember the days of writers Paul and Jane Bowles, Truman Capote, Allen Ginsberg, Brion Gysin, Jack Kerouac, Joe Orton and Tennessee Williams, while hordes of Spanish visitors now arrive every morning for a day's exploration of an Islamic kingdom only 2-3 hours by ferry away from their own Christian kingdom. The city's artistic reputation is beginning to rise again, and a steady stream of Europeans are moving back into its compact and atmospheric medina. Moroccans themselves also now come to the city for a beach holiday, and the cosmopolitan atmosphere.

One of the few real sights within the medina is the **American Legation Museum**. In 1786, Morocco became the first country to formally recognize the infant United States of America. The Legation building was presented as a gift by Sultan Moulay Slimane to the American people in 1821, and housed the US ambassador for the next 135 years. The building now houses various exhibitions showcasing the connection between the two countries, and pays homage to the many U.S. citizens who have resided in the city over the years. The "Paul Bowles room" is dedicated to the late writer while another room displays a copy of a 1789 letter from George Washington to his "Great and Magnanimous Friend, the Emperor of Morocco", Sultan Moulay Ben Abdallah.

**Rabat** is considered Morocco's most conservative city, the nation's capital displaying a civilized orderliness more akin to Europe with its citizens quietly going about their business, void of the frantic pace experienced in many other African and Arabic capitals. This current state of affairs belies a history that reads more like an adventure novel, including occupation by a notorious band of pirates, along with other tribes and nations.

Rabat has been the nation's capital since the beginning of the Protectorate era in 1912 - the French preferring it's coastal, defensible location to the then nationalistic capital of Fes. Prior to this, the city's fortunes ebbed and flowed with that of the Bou Regreg ("Father of Reflection") River, which as it enters the Atlantic, separates Rabat from it's historical sister city, and now southern suburb, Salé. From 1170 until his death in 1199, the Almohad sultan Yacoub el Mansour, transformed Rabat into a fine imperial capital. During this golden age, the city's imposing medina walls were constructed, along with the kasbah's impressive entrance gate, Bab Oudaïas. El Mansour also began the construction of his empire's showpiece, the Hassan Mosque - intended at the time to be one of the largest in the Islamic world. El Mansour's death initiated the decline of the entire

Almohad dynasty, which subsequently lost its control of Andalusia, as well as much of its African territory. The city's fortunes were revived in the 17th century when an influx of Muslim refugees fleeing the Christian re-conquest of Andalusia settled here, renaming it *New Salé*. Along with these immigrants came all manner of unsavoury types, including a band of **pirates** that became known as the **Sallee Rovers**. Safely entrenched in the Almohad-era kasbah, this community, which included Christians and Moors, owed no allegiance to the ruling Saadian dynasty or their successors, the Alaouites, and for a time enjoyed virtual self-rule as the "Republic of Bou Regreg", trading with some European nations, and entertaining their consuls. The pirates specialised in looting merchant ships returning to Europe with stores of gold from the Americas and West Africa, and roved as far as the southern English coast, capturing Christian slaves for labour.

In the early 20th century, the French built an extensive *ville nouvelle*, as well as a new *centre ville* within the old Almohad walls, both developing within an orderly grid of wide boulevards lined with trees, palms, and impressive colonial buildings. Rabat was quickly established as the diplomatic centre of the country, so much so that upon independence in 1956, it remained the seat of government, and the home of the king, as it still does today.

## Day 15: Sunday, 17 July                      Rabat & Casablanca

This morning we will explore **Rabat's** sights and attractions, while this afternoon we continue south along the coast to the nation's economic capital, the sprawling and bustling metropolis of **Casablanca**. Tonight we don the tuxedos and evening dresses (well, a clean shirt at least) for an evening at **Rick's Café**, perhaps ending our Morocco Safari with a nostalgic cocktail as resident piano man, Issam Chaaba plays "You must remember this...".  
(Breakfast, lunch & dinner included)

Accommodation:                                      Hotel Guynemer

Looming over **Rabat** near the mouth of the Bou Regreg River is *Le Tour Hassan* & the **Mausoleum of Mohammed V**. Le Tour Hassan (the Hassan Tower) was the towering minaret of the Hassan Mosque, which began construction in 1195 under the Almohad Yacoub el Mansour. Intended to be 60m (200 ft.) high - and subsequently one of the tallest in the world at the time - the tower stands today at 44m (145ft) high, having been abandoned upon the death of the sultan in 1199. It is still a formidable structure and looms over the remains of its ruined mosque, flattened by an earthquake in 1755. The mosque was designed to hold 20,000 worshippers and even though all that is left today are rows of reconstructed columns, the scale of its grandness is still visible. The Mausoleum of Mohammed V is the burial shrine of Morocco's post-independence and the current king's grandfather and father, and is a place of reverence for Moroccans and visitors alike. A dignified building watched over by elaborately-dressed Royal Guards, the white onyx tombs of Mohammed V and his sons Hassan II and Moulay Abdellah, can be viewed from an upper balcony.

Rabat's elevated and compact kasbah, the **Kasbah des Oudaïas** looks out over the mouth of the Bou Regreg, and over the centuries has seen dynasties come and go, and also housed the notorious Sallee Rovers. It is a quiet and airy quarter, with a few attractions, and both a cafe and viewing *plateforme* that afford sweeping views of the river mouth and adjoining beaches. A welcoming sea breeze usually sifts its way through the kasbah, making for a very pleasant stroll through its winding alleys, past white-washed houses and brightly coloured doors.

We will also spend a short time in **Rabat's medina**. Along the main shopping streets of Rue Souiqa, Souk Assabbat, and Rue des Consuls, are shops selling everything from high quality carpets and handmade *jellababs*, to hand-carved wooden furniture and jewellery. The major bonus of shopping within Rabat's medina is the relative lack of hard-sell by the shopkeepers.

Rabat's big sister to the south, **Casablanca** is Morocco's beating economic and industrial heartland. This is a new, modern city that in 200 years has grown from abandoned village to heaving metropolis, and is still expanding thanks to a continuous wave of rural migrants hoping to find a better life in the 'big smoke'. 'Casa' was the show piece for colonialist France, and it's town planners were at the forefront of *nouvelle architecture*, now termed "**Art Deco**". Some fine examples can still be seen today on a wander around the downtown neighbourhood where both our hotel and the city's bustling *marché centrale* (central market) are situated.

Day 16: Monday, 18 July

Ma'sallama & Farewell Morocco

After breakfast we shall bid "**farewell**" and "**ma'sallama**" to Morocco as we board our private transfer to the airport. Should you wish to extend your stay in Morocco, Compass Odyssey can organise additional nights accommodation along with any other services that you may require.  
(Breakfast included)

We have a deep affection for this part of Africa, and really do believe Morocco is a country filled with unforgettable travel experiences. We're sure you'll feel the same after travelling on this Compass Odyssey journey with us.

## YOUR GUIDE

**Darren (Crusty) Humphrys** trained as a photographer before joining the Aussie backpacker pilgrimage to London back in 1987, and has been wandering around the globe ever since. His early journeys included numerous explorations of Britain, Europe and Asia plus a two-year meander around Australia, before enjoying a stint as a travel consultant for a major Australian travel wholesaler, based in Perth.

In 1997 Darren travelled on an overland tour through eastern and southern Africa. A “life-changing” experience, he loved it so much that by the end of the tour he already had a job as a guide. Since then he has been leading tours for various overland-style travel companies through Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. In addition to regular brochured tours, he has researched, constructed, and led inaugural expeditions of Morocco; from Cairo to Tunis via Libya; and from Laos to Singapore, as well as leading educational and training tours in Morocco, in Syria and Jordan, and from Kenya to South Africa.

Combining perfectly with his guiding is his other profession as a photo-journalist. Darren’s photographic images have appeared in numerous international travel publications, such as the *Bradt Nigeria* guidebook, Royal Geographical Society’s *Geographical* magazine, *Time Out* magazine, and the highly regarded *Africa Geographic*.

2007 saw Darren firstly contributing to the 8th edition of *Rough Guide Morocco*, followed by a contract to author the inaugural edition of *Frommer’s Morocco*. Frommer’s is North America’s leading guidebook publisher, and the end result of Darren’s labours – all 448 pages - is due to hit the bookshelves in April, 2008. This year of intense research into all things Moroccan elevated Darren’s stature to that of a true expert and connoisseur of the country. It seemed only natural that he and his partner Kate Hassall, who has also extensively travelled the country decided to add Morocco to their collection of Compass Odyssey African tours.

Morocco’s history, culture, arts & crafts, customs, religion, cuisine, and music will be brought to life in Darren’s renowned enthusiastic, yet easy-going and respectful manner. Darren and Kate’s understanding of both the Moroccan and Western cultures, combined with Darren’s immense (and current) range of contacts within the country’s tourism, accommodation, and restaurant sectors, assures Compass Odyssey clients of a fascinating Moroccan tour studded with unique experiences, memorable moments, and authentic encounters that benefit both local and visitor.

Compass Odyssey also uses the services of specialist local guides as much as possible. All of our guides are officially registered and personally chosen by Darren – indeed they are our personal friends. Each guide speaks fluent English, and brings to our tour their individual passion and personality that only serves to strengthen the essence of a Compass Odyssey journey.



Darren with our expert local guides, Rachid (*left*) from Marrakech and Hassan (*right*) from Fes.

## TRANSPORT AND DRIVING TIME

We will travel in an air-conditioned mini-bus that provides our driver with easy manoeuvrability in the busy cities, but also affords us a comfortable ride for our longer days on the open road. During our journey we will request everyone – except the driver, of course – to swap seats daily, so that we all mingle and get to see Morocco from a different viewpoint. The seats are typically high-backed with ample legroom, and space underneath for a daypack and a few shopping purchases.

We envisage the average driving day to be no longer than 5-6 hours when travelling between destinations. We stop in nine different overnight locations during our tour, of which four are multiple-night stays.

### Distance chart (kilometres/miles by road)

	Casa	Erf	Ess	Fes	Mar	Mek	Ouarz	Rab	Tan
Casablanca	-	637/396	351/218	289/180	238/148	229/142	442/275	91/57	341/212
Erfoud	637/396	-	756/470	430/267	580/360	408/254	376/234	546/339	675/419
Essaouira	351/218	756/470	-	640/398	176/109	580/360	380/236	442/275	692/430
Fes	289/180	430/267	640/398	-	483/300	60/37	646/401	198/123	303/188
Marrakech	238/148	580/360	176/109	483/300	-	467/290	204/127	321/199	579/360
Meknes	229/142	408/254	580/360	60/37	467/290	-	652/405	138/86	267/166
Ouarzazate	442/275	376/234	380/236	646/401	204/127	652/405	-	528/328	783/487
Rabat	91/57	546/339	442/275	198/123	321/199	138/86	528/328	-	250/155
Tangier	341/212	675/419	692/430	303/188	579/360	267/166	783/487	250/155	-

There's also a fair amount of walking involved in our Compass Odyssey Morocco Safari – both on organised guided walks and during your own exploring. However we envisage all walking to be generally very manageable, with no special level of fitness required unless you plan to scale the highest sand dune!

## ACCOMMODATION

We feel we offer an eclectic mix of accommodation styles that define our Compass Odyssey Morocco Safari from other companies. As the author of the Frommer's Morocco guidebook, Darren personally visited a vast array of establishments in the course of his research. This knowledge and our ensuing relationships with the owners and/or managers has enabled us to select a range of accommodations that boast a sought-after combination of clean, comfortable rooms at a reasonable cost in establishments that are operated in a personal and guest-focussed manner.

All accommodation - other than in our desert camp - is in double or twin-bedded rooms with ensuite facilities, and with bedding and bath towels provided. Our select choice of accommodation includes three-star hotels situated in the *ville nouvelle*, country-style inns called an *auberge*, and former residences - called a *riad* or *dar* in Arabic - that have been restored and refurbished into a guesthouse, or *maison d'hôte*. Generally, *maisons d'hôte* offer services similar to what you would expect from a four-star hotel. Initially concentrated within Marrakech, but now found in great number throughout the country, Morocco's medina *maisons d'hôte* have become one of the world's most chic accommodation styles. They are generally owner-managed and each has its own distinctive 'soul' that is a personal reflection of the owners themselves. Inside you're more than likely to find romantic bedrooms, personal service, fantastic rooftop terrace views, and delicious breakfasts if not dinners as well, all in a relaxed, intimate setting amidst the hustle and commotion of the medina.

On the flip side however, your room may be void of air-conditioning and heating, lack privacy due to thin, echoing walls, offer only curtained entrances without any locking device, and might only be accessible by climbing numerous flights of steep, narrow stairs. It must be remembered that this used to be a Moroccan family home, and was intended to be communal and social. Also, most medina *maisons d'hôte* can only be accessed by foot. However, staying within the medina offers the benefit of being within walking distance of the majority of sights and attractions, plus we strongly feel that it also gives our fellow travellers a privileged opportunity to experience authentic Moroccan life.

## MEALS

Most meals are included in the itinerary, except when we feel that it is far more enjoyable and personal for everyone to venture out on their own, and at their own pace, to find a restaurant or cafe that suits each traveller's taste and budget. Our breakfasts consist largely of fresh breads, croissants, or pastries - often accompanied by various *confiture* (jams). At some accommodations we will also be offered fresh fruit, muesli and other cereals, yoghurt, and cooked eggs. Freshly squeezed orange juice, coffee, and tea - both Moroccan mint and English black - are also always on hand. Lunch and dinner is usually taken in a local restaurant where we can indulge in Morocco's famous cuisine such as *tagines*, *couscous*, and *brochettes* (grilled meat on skewers).

Frequenting these local establishments enables us to experience authentic dishes, and provides much needed employment and self-pride in a country of high unemployment. Our meals will always cater for vegetarians, while those who on occasion would prefer something more 'international' can usually be accommodated as well. A surprising number of our restaurants are licensed, offering both local and international beers, wine, and spirits. Bottled water will always be provided - at no personal cost - with our meals. On our driving days we regularly stop at petrol stations or roadside shops, where you are able to purchase bottled water, soft drinks, and snacks.