

Magical and Authentic Morocco

Rich deserts, epic mountain ranges, salty breezes, ancient cities and hidden alleys, and warm hospitality...

Trip Length: 29 days / 28 nights

Minimum 8 guests / Maximum 16 guests



September - October 2023

8-10 USD \$4950 / person, 11-12 USD \$4500 / person, 13- 16 USD \$4350 / person

Single Supplement (hotels only, 11 nights): USD \$400 (2020 prices quoted. 2023 prices to be confirmed)

Included meals marked each day. B = Breakfast, L = Lunch, D = Dinner

There are many sights, faces and sounds of Morocco - experience them all!

Our adventure starts in Casablanca and doesn't let up until Marrakesh. In between we'll visit mausoleums, mosques, medinas and ruins; experience the Sahara Desert's sand between our toes; take a camel to a Berber camp in the desert; trek along the breathtaking Rif and Atlas mountains and maybe climb North Africa's highest mountain, Djebel Toubkal, before coming back down to earth along the windswept coastline of the northern Atlantic Ocean.

Except for a night camping in the desert, day 9 (*a local camp providing food, mattresses and blankets), we stay in three-star hotels, guest houses, auberges, refuges and gites.

This is truly a land of undisputed charm and a trip of a lifetime!

Day 1: Monday Arrive Casablanca (D)

As you make your way from the airport to our group hotel, you'll have your first glimpses of Morocco's largest city and economic powerhouse as you drive through swaying palm tree-lined streets to our hotel. About six million people live in the financial capital of Morocco.

There will be a group meeting at 6pm where you'll meet your Aussie Take A Walk leader, and our local Moroccan guide .

Overnight hotel



Casablanca Beach

Hassan II Mosque

Day 2: Tuesday Casablanca - Rabat - Chefchaouen (B,D)

Drive time: Casablanca to Rabat - 1.5 hours

Drive time: Rabat to Chefchaouen - 5 hours

Before leaving Casablanca, we'll take about an hour to visit the impressive Hassan II Mosque (originally intended to be the largest in the world, now the third largest after Mecca and Medina). We'll then drive to Rabat, Morocco's capital city and the centre of politics that houses about two million people. Here, we'll experience life in the alleyways of the kasbah and then take a look at Tour Hassan (Hassan Tower), a minaret of the incomplete mosque. Begun in 1195 AD, the tower was intended to be the largest minaret in the world. In 1199, Sultan Yacoub al-Mansour died and construction on the mosque stopped. The tower only reached 44 m, about half of its intended height. Lunch will be at a family house in the medina. From Rabat we'll head north to Chefchaouen, with a short stop along the way in Larbaa Elgherb. Chefchaouen is a city set against the dramatic backdrop of the Rif Mountains in North Morocco, and known for its white-washed homes with distinctive shades of blue trims.

Overnight Hotel 3*

Day 3: Wednesday Chefchaouen - Akchour - Chefchaouen (B,L,D)

4 hours walking, around 8 km, Grade moderate, carrying a day pack



Today we can pull on our walking boots to discover the beauty around the Rif Mountains, the most northerly of Morocco's mountain chains. We'll drive to Akchour to begin our hike to the Cascades d'Akchour. These consist of a lower and much higher upper waterfall, punctuated with a handful of smaller waterfalls and cascades. We'll start from a dam and hike up to the Bridge of God (Le Pont de Dieu), an impressively tall natural rock bridge, then on to Petite Cascade, the lower waterfall - this will take about 1.5 to 2 hours and is our turn around point. Beyond here, the route is often wet and slippery. We'll either carry our own picnic lunch, or stop at one of the small tea shops dotted along the whole trail.

Overnight Hotel 3*

Day 4: Thursday Chefchaouen - Fez (B,D)

Drive time: 5 hours

After a tour of the picturesque town of Chefchaouen, we'll head to the imperial city of Fez, often referred to as the country's cultural capital, and home to the world's oldest university, established in 859 and given university status in 1963. It has an ancient walled city, that is often compared to the walled city of Jerusalem. We'll stop along the way to buy our lunch.

Overnight Hotel 3*

Day 5: Friday Fez (B,D)

Mausoleums, mosques and medinas are the order of the day as we spend our time whipping around the city with a local guide. The city is primarily known for its Fez el-Bali walled medina, with medieval Marinid architecture adorned with elaborately decorated cedar carvings and ornate tile work; vibrant souks, world-renowned tanneries, and an old-world atmosphere.

We'll take care not to lose ourselves in one of the



9,000 narrow cobbled streets (the world's largest car-free urban area). The maze of streets are lined with spices, food stalls and tanneries. We may even hunt down a Hammam and shed our dignity and a few layers of dead skin!

Overnight Hotel 3*

Day 6: Saturday Fez - Meknes (B,D)

Drive time: Fez to Volubilis - 1.5 hours

Drive time: Volubilis to Meknes - .75 hours

Volubilis is a partly excavated Berber and Roman city, surrounded by very Tuscanesque scenery. Walking around the well-preserved ruins, replete with bathhouses and brothels, you're sure to get a good idea of Roman living and partying during 3rd century BC. We continue on to the city of Meknes, commonly considered the ancient capital of the kingdom, where time permitting we can walk through the city. We'll stop on the way to Meknes to buy our lunch.

Overnight Hotel 3*



Volubilis

Day 7: Sunday Meknes - Azrou (B,L,D)

The Middle Atlas Trek

Drive time: Meknes to Azrou - 1.5 hours

5 - 6 hours walking, between 10 - 15 km, Grade easy, carrying a day pack, picnic lunch

From Meknes we head to Azrou over the middle Atlas Mountains. We'll pass through numerous olive groves, and copses of cedar trees. Almond trees should be ripe for the picking, and figs, cherries, dates and apples also grow in this area. We'll start walking from Azrou through the orchards and up a gentle hill into the cedar forest. We'll pass two enormous cedar trees thought to be well over 1000 years old. As we walk higher into the hills we will have breathtaking views of Azrou and the surrounding farmland and mountains. We may encounter Barbary macaques. Although they are wild, these inquisitive animals are somewhat used to visitors, so please remember to keep your backpack zipped! The contrast between the lush cedar forests and the dry, round pebbled river bed is obvious as we descend through the valley and along a small creek. There are more stunning views as we wind our way down. Barbary macaques also call this place home. Finally, we will enter Azrou through the highest part of the village, navigating back through alley ways, between houses and into the marketplace. The final distance will depend on the weather and the wishes of the group.

Overnight hotel 3*

Day 8: Monday Azrou - Erg Chebbi - Merzouga (B,L,D)

Sahara Desert Experience

Drive time: 7 hours

It's a travel day, so we'll start off early this morning and drive through Midelt, situated in central Morocco's high plains between the Middle Atlas and High Atlas mountain ranges. We will have lunch along the way, then continue on to reach Merzouga, a small town in the Sahara Desert, near the Algerian border. The Sahara's red dunes (Erg Chebbi) rise above the village and for many travellers this typifies the desert they have always imagined. After dinner there will be a short walk over the sand dunes to watch the sunset.

Overnight auberge

Day 9: Tuesday Sahara Desert Experience (B,L,D)

2 hours walking, Grade easy

We'll rise early and climb Erg Chebbi dunes to see the sunrise before returning to our auberge for breakfast. After a restful day beside the pool, we leave our main luggage in the auberge then mount our camels around 5 pm for a 1 hour ride to a tented camp in the heart of the Erg Chebbi dunes. Legend tells of a poor woman and her son being refused hospitality from a wealthy family. This offended God, so He buried them under the majestic mounds of sand called Erg Chebbi. Extra water, sunscreen, sunglasses and a scarf / buff are a must, and we carry our own personal overnight gear. From camp, there is a short walk to the top of a huge dune for sunset.

*** Overnight camping, four to a tent - mattresses and blankets provided.**

Note: The Moroccan Government has removed some of the tented camps from the sand dunes for environmental reasons so the actual location will be decided as it gets closer to the departure date.



Walking Erg Chebbi Dunes



Day 10: Wednesday Merzouga - Todra Gorge - Ait Youl (B,L,D)

Drive time: 4 hours

This morning we are up before sunrise to mount our camels for the 1 hour ride back to the auberge. It's a magical experience as we set out in the dark and gradually watch the dawn creep across the Erg Chebbi dunes. This is the land of the Tuareg people (Sahara nomads). They are usually of Berber decent, but being a Tuareg is not defined by a certain race or family tree. The important thing is as long as lifestyle, traditions and language are accepted, the people are seen as Tuareg. They once travelled the desert in huge numbers, but invasions and war reduced the populations to small groups that are scattered across the sandy dunes. Back at the auberge it's breakfast and a quick shower before we leave the desert dunes behind. We'll break the journey with a one-hour walk through the Tineghar palm groves to Tineghar Berber village for lunch. Then we'll set off again towards Todra Gorge, a canyon in the eastern High Atlas Mountains, near the town of Tinerhir. Both the Todra and neighbouring Dades rivers have carved out cliff-sided canyons on their final exit from the mountains. A 300 m deep fault in Todra Gorge splits orange limestone into a deep ravine sometimes only wide enough for walkers to squeeze through one at a time. After a short stroll through Todra Gorge we'll transfer to our auberge in Ait Youl.

Overnight in auberge

Day 11: Thursday Dades Gorges (B,D)

Drive time: 1 hour both ways

3-4 hours walking. Grade easy

On our drive to Dades Gorges we'll pass through palm groves and Berber villages. The Dades Gorges are a series of rugged gorges ranging from around 200 to 500 metres, carved out by the Dades River and its tributaries. The Dades River eventually empties into Morocco's largest river, the Draa. Our walk will lead us into the heart of the Dades Valley, a haven of freshness and surprising landscapes inhabited by incredibly welcoming people. Here we'll discover gardens of almond, palm, poplar and walnut trees with neat terraces of corn and vegetables. We'll continue past orchards before reaching the mountainous Atlas foothills where you'll discover unusual rocky outcrops called the 'monkey fingers'. This geological curiosity is particularly enchanting at sunset. On the other side of the oued (wadi), you can explore the ruins of an ancient kasbah, a landscape steeped in mystery and melancholy.

Overnight in a family auberge



Sandstone Formations Dades Gorge

Day 12: Friday Ait-Youl - Issommar (B,L,D)

The Southern High Atlas Trek (three days)

Day 1: 7 - 8 hours walking, about 17 km, Grade easy, carrying a day pack

Today we'll meet with the muleteer team who will carry the food, our sleeping bags and other gear needed for the trek. We'll need water shoes (sandals), an umbrella if you carry one and toilet paper. Surplus gear will go on our mini bus. We then start our High Atlas trek from the auberge. On the Tamassint Plateau (1884 m) we will take in the spectacular views into the delightful McGoun Valley as we walk towards the small village of Ait M'Rao (1800 m). After lunch and a siesta we'll cross the M'Goun valley, reportedly some of the best walking in Morocco. On the way to Issommar village (2260 m) we may pass Berber shepherds tending their flocks and keeping a watchful eye on us. Showers in the gites range from 10 - 20 dirhams.

Overnight gite



Day 13: Saturday Issommar - Alamdoune (B,L,D)

Day 2: 6 - 7 hours walking, about 15 km, Grade moderate, carrying a day pack

After breakfast we'll leave the gite. Today we'll walk through the Mgoun River valley, and cross the Mgoun River. Be prepared to get wet feet or just plain wet! The crossing may be over a little log and stick bridge, supported by sandbags. It may have sagged into the surface of the muddy river. Trekking poles will be handy here. We'll pass through a landscape of imposing high ridges and summits. By afternoon it changes to lush green vegetation surrounding our destination, the village of Alamdoune (1734 m).

Overnight gite

Day 14: Sunday Alamdoune - Boutaghrar (B,L,D)

Day 3: 7 - 8 hours walking, about 15 km, Grade moderate, carrying a day pack

It's the final day of this trek and we'll be traversing another beautiful gorge and passing more Berber villages. As the valley flattens out, we'll see settlements along the riverbanks where Berbers can cultivate the land. Another river offers up yet another challenge! Once we are across, we have reached the village of Boutaghrar (1600 m), after travelling through the Mgoun Valley (or the Vallée des Roses, as it's known in Morocco). It's not sure how roses first made their way to Morocco. Legend has it they were carried from Damascus by a Berber merchant. However they got there, they are now an important export, picked before dawn by the women from these High Atlas Mountains, to sell to the co-ops throughout the valley, from where they make their way to distilleries or to perfumeries, especially in France where they command big prices.

Overnight gite



Shopping along the way

Days 15: Monday Boutaghrar - Ait Ben Haddou (B,D)

Drive time: 2 hours

From Boutaghrar we drive down to Ait Ben Haddou passing Kelaa M'Gouna and Ouarzazate on the way. We'll visit Kasbah Taourirt in Ouarzazate, one of the most impressive of its kind in Morocco. Filming of Lawrence of Arabia, at a nearby Berber village, helped raise awareness of Kasbah Taourirt, once considered the largest kasbah in Morocco and now classified as a historical monument. From here we continue to Ait Ben Haddou, a World Heritage listed group of earthen buildings, and a striking example of the architecture of southern Morocco. The fortified village lies along a former caravan route between the Sahara and Marrakech. Depending on our arrival time we may be able to do a one hour walk to a lookout point for another sunset.

Overnight in a riad (large traditional house built around a central courtyard and this one has a swimming pool)

Day 16: Tuesday Ait Ben Haddou - Imlil - Aremd (B,L,D)

Drive time: 5.5 hours

The High Atlas Trek (eight days)

Day 1: 1 hour walking, about 4 km, Grade gentle climb, carrying a day pack

From Ait Ben Haddou we'll travel to Imlil (1800 m), a quaint village with stunning views of the High Atlas Mountains, and the gateway of this iconic trek, where we will have the optional chance to scale Jebel Toubkal, the highest peak in Morocco. From Imlil we'll walk to Aremd village (1940 m), higher than Imlil, but it does shorten the next day's ascent a little.

Overnight guest house

Day 17: Wednesday Aremd - Tidli Waterfall - Aremd (B,L,D)

Day 2: 5-6 hours walking, about 10 km, ascent 500 m, Grade moderate, carrying a day pack

From Aremd we walk up to Tidli Waterfall (2500 m). The 25 metre waterfall is in a rocky area, littered with large stones. Our return is down through the volcanic massif.

Overnight same guest house in Aremd



Day 2 - Drink stop at Tidli Waterfall

Day 18: Thursday Aremd - Neltner Refuge (B,L,D)

Day 3: 6-7 hours walking, about 12 km, ascent 1200 m, Grade moderate, carrying a day pack with our lunch. Mules will carry our food, sleeping bags (no blankets provided in the refuge) and other gear needed for the trek.

From the guest house we'll follow a zig-zag path to Neltner Refuge (3207 m), also called Toubkal Refuge. The original Refuge du Toubkal was built and run by French Alpine Club. Three French mountaineers are recognised as climbing the summit in 1923. Like mountain huts in the rest of the world, Neltner is not a place for a peaceful sleep, especially as we will be sharing the refuge with other climbers that will tackle the peak the next morning.

Overnight Neltner Refuge

Day 19: Friday Optional climb Toubkal Summit (B,L,D)

Day 4: Option A - 7 hours walking, about 8 km return, ascent 960 m, Grade hard, carrying a day pack

Option B - Tizi n'Ouannoumsse Pass, 3 hours walking, about 6 km return, ascent 400 m, Grade moderate, carrying a day pack

It will be an early morning for those wanting to tackle the summit. The path from the refuge is steep, and it will be a tiring uphill walk on scree, although much easier than the more serious undertaking in winter and spring. Beginning upstream from the hut the path soon rises to a jumble of boulders, then becomes scree most of the way until the south-west ridge takes us to the summit (4167 m), marked by a tripod. Those opting out of the climb can walk up to Tizi n'Ouannoumsse Pass (3600 m) for views to the Lake of Ifni, a natural lake and one of the highest in Morocco. Its emerald water are overshadowed by Jebel Toubkal. Or you may just want to rest at the refuge. **Overnight Neltner Refuge**



Day 20: Saturday Neltner Refuge - Aremd village (B,L,D)

Day 5: 5 hours walking, about 10 km, ascent 20 m, descent 1200 m, grade moderate, carrying a day pack

We leave the refuge and head off along a different route back down to Aremd village. We'll pass through several Berber villages where you can buy a drink, cooled in the traditional way of the mountain people. Chamharouch shrine seen from one of the 'cafes' is a popular site attracting hundreds of pilgrims each year. There's even a chance of a Hammam option once you reach Aremd village.

Overnight guest house

'The 2018 girls' summit Toubkal (photo credit John Chapman)



Day 21: Sunday Rest Day in the Village.

Day 6.

Its' time to take it easy, unwind after the Toubkal climb and spend the day exploring the village

Day 22: Monday Aremd village - Tizi Oussem (B,L,D)

Day 7: 4-5 hours walking, **about 10 km, grade moderate, carrying a day pack**

It's a shorter walking day today but there are several Berber villages to visit as we walk down through terraces and walnut and apple orchards of the Azaden Valley to Tizi Oussem (1850 m) - 500 m ascent.

We pass through juniper forest on our left and Mzik village on our right before traversing uphill to the Tizi Mzik Pass (2480 m) to reach Tizi Oussem village.

Overnight gite

Day 23: Tuesday Tizi Oussem - Imi n'Tala (B,L,D)

Day 8: 5-6 hours walking, about 14 km, Grade moderate, carrying a day pack

Today we continue walking through the Azaden Valley to Azersen Valley across the national park to reach Ouirgane village, at the end of our walking in Morocco's High Atlas Mountains. After lunch, we will go by bus from Tassa Ouirgane to Maghira and Tizi Ouzla villages, and have a short stop to visit the Amez Miz village and Ait Ouaouzguit people along the way. Our bus stops at Imi n'Tala Berber house, where we can have a shower and rest. Maybe it will be possible to see how the Berber people prepare their local bread.

Overnight Berber guest house



Beautiful Aremd Village nestled below the High Atlas a n d

Day 24: Wednesday Imi n'Tala - Sidi Kaouki (B,D)

Drive time: 4 hours

Back on the bus and we'll head to the town of Sidi Kaouki on the Atlantic Coast. If time permits we can walk along the wild beach or just relax in this small town that surfers and windsurfers have made their own. The surf here can average one to three metres, so the water is not for the faint-hearted. There's a large building on the rocks, a shrine to Sufi saint Sidi Kaouki, who was known for his healing abilities.

Overnight guest house

Day 25: Thursday Sidi Kaouki - Essaouira (B,L,D)

**Drive time: 15 minutes to Ifli Ouassen village from Sidi Kaouki
4-5 hours walking, about 15 km, Grade easy**

We're off on an easy trek along the Atlantic Coast today. We'll head north to Cap Sim and call in at Diabat, a relaxed Berber village. From Sidi Kaouki we'll travel in our bus to Ifli Ouassen douar (an Arabian village consisting typically of a group of tents or huts that encircle an open space). From here we'll walk on and cross the river Oued Ksob for an easy trapse along the sandy beach to finally reach Essaouira.

Overnight hotel 3*



Day 26: Friday Essaouira (B,D)

The hard work is over, so it's time to relax and take a city tour of bright and breezy Essaouira. This is an enchanting, laid-back alternative to the frenetic melting-pot that awaits you in Marrakesh. In Arabic, the town's name means 'little picture', so no wonder it attracts artists from all over to catch the vibrant blue-and-white medina (inner walled city), enclosed by fairy-tale, sand-coloured ramparts and imposing stone gates. Beyond the colourful port, rolling waves and a wide beach complete the canvas.

Overnight hotel 3*

Day 27: Saturday Essaouira - Marrakech (B,D)

Drive time: 3 hours

It's a travel day today as we make our way inland to Marrakech, a city of frenetic energy. A trip to Morocco just wouldn't be the same without a visit to Marrakech.

Overnight Hotel 3-4*

Day 28: Sunday Marrakech (B,L,D)

Our local guide will take us on a tour of this amazing city. We'll discover the medina in calèches (horse-drawn carriages) and experience the intricate mosaic works of the Saadian Tombs and Bahia Palace. We'll then go to Djemaa el-fna Square – once a trading post for slaves, ivory and gold, now home to anything you could need from snail soup to a dental check-up! Keep in mind the snake charmers and monkey keepers will expect a tip if you want to take photos. Sadly, this will be the end of our incredible Moroccan experience.

Overnight hotel 3-4*

Interesting and vibrant Marrakech



Day 29: Monday (B)

After breakfast we will transfer to Marrakech airport for our departure to home or other places that are calling...
End of our ***Magical and Authentic Morocco*** adventure.

What's Included

- Air-conditioned road transport with driver.
- Baggage transfers. Local English speaking full-time guide and city guides.
- An Australian **Take A Walk Adventures** leader for the complete trip.
- 11 nights twin share accommodation in 3* hotels, 3 nights in auberges, 4 nights in gites. Hot showers in the auberges and gites will cost around US \$1
- 1 night shared accommodation in Berber camp, 1 night riad, 5 nights guest houses, 3 nights refuge
- All meals as noted (**B,L,D**).
- Mules and muleteers to carry food and our gear on Southern High Atlas Trek. Luggage on mules to be limited from 10 to 12 kg. Extra luggage will be taken in the minibus. This will need to be kept to a minimum to give us more space on the minibus.
- Monument entrance fees to Hassan II Mosque, Fes Coranic School, Volubilis, Marrakech Bahai Palace Saadiens tombs.
- Calèche ride in Marrakech.

What's Not Included

- Round trip airfare from Australia to Morocco, or from or to any other destination.
- Transfers from and to airports and lodgings if outside pre-arranged group transfers.
- Any lodging prior to / after the tour dates.
- Entrance fees to museums, and sites of interest not included in the itinerary,
- Entrance fee to Kasbah Taourirt in Ouarzazate, day 15.
- All personal trekking equipment (including backpacks, sleeping bags for Neltner Refuge, liners and pillows).
- Extra meals not noted and all trail snacks.
- Bottled water, it usually cost less than US \$1 per 1.5 litre bottle. Water in Morocco needs to be purified and treated before drinking.
- Alcohol, soft drinks and mineral water.
- Payment to use toilet facilities at coffee shops or petrol stations. 2 - 5 dirhams each (AUD \$1 = about 3 dirhams) or you can buy a coffee or soft drink and use the facilities.
- Medications and personal first aid kits. The guides only carry the basics.
- Personal expenses and other services.
- Travel and accident insurance.
- Tips for the guides and bus driver. These are usually arranged with the trip leader but we have told them we are independent travellers and do not expect our bags being carried into our hotels etc for a tip, unless we ask for the service. We will organise this as a group thing.



Bahai Palace, Marrakech

Other General Information

- **Water** - If it's hot some may consume up to 4 litres per day.
- **Alcohol** - You can find beer in some of the licenced hotels and you can buy it in some supermarkets along the way. Some villages are totally dry.
- **WiFi** - At most accommodation hotels, houses, refuges you can charge your devices's batteries. WiFi depends upon the area where you are.
- **Refuge footwear** - You will need to remove your boots. Don't count on the refuges or gites providing footwear, so it's best to carry your own.
- **Sleeping gear** - Refuges (except Neltner) do provide blankets and pillows, but you may feel more comfortable in your own sleeping bag and laying your head on your own pillow.
- **Moroccan time** - refuge dinners are usually served from 7 pm to 10 pm, and depending on our day's hiking we can usually get breakfast from anywhere after 5 am.
- Your place on this trip will be confirmed upon receipt of your booking form and \$500 deposit.

To ensure the safety and the wellbeing of the group, please bear in mind the itinerary may be altered for reasons beyond our control such as weather and trail conditions, and road or park closures. The final hiking selection is at the discretion of our local tour leaders.)

This itinerary is a living document. Please ensure you download the latest version before confirming travel plans.

Take A Walk Publications and Adventures Pty Ltd
PO Box 66, Camp Hill, Qld 4152 Australia
07 3843 3930 0417 611 810
info@takeawalk.com.au www.takeawalk.com.au



Morocco - come take the journey
Photo credit - Margie Hayler