



# MOROCCO CAMEL TREK

FINAL ITINERARY ~ February 20 - March 4, 2011

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☞ This trip begins with a rendezvous at the airport in Marrakesh, Morocco on the morning of February 20.

*For those doing the Essaouira Extension:*

## **Essaouira Pre-trip Extension**

Essaouira is a 17th-century Portuguese harbor fortress on the Atlantic Ocean, and in the 18th century became home port to Sultan Mohammed Ibn Abdullah's corsairs. We'll visit the ancient citadel, ramparts, and bastion where Orson Welles filmed *Othello*. We'll have time to explore the souk, where women in white *haïks* and men in *burnooses* haggle over spices, dates, and olives, and wander past Portuguese-style tiled and carved stone doorways, peek into hidden courtyards, and meander down winding lanes. The historic beauty and relaxed atmosphere of the city makes Essaouira a great place to begin your journey in Morocco.

## **FEB 18 ~ Drive to Essaouira**

Meet with the guide (Kristy!) in Marrakesh and drive to Essaouira, a delightful coastal town with its old quarter surrounded by battlements from the 1700s. This afternoon we'll explore the old town and visit the harbor, ramparts, the woodworkers, spice, and silver markets, and the ancient Jewish section.

*D...Hotel Riad Al Madina, Essaouira*

## **FEB 19 ~ Essaouira**

We'll take a morning hike along the beach to the Kasab River, where we'll explore the crumbling ruins of a pasha's palace where Jimi Hendrix camped out in the 1960s. We'll continue to the village of Diabat, where we'll have a magnificent view of Essaouira and the coastal beaches. In the afternoon we'll continue to visit the souks, medina, and other monuments of the town.

*B,L,D...Hotel Riad Al Madina, Essaouira*

## **FEB 20 ~ Marrakesh**

Drive back to Marrakesh and meet your fellow travelers for lunch and the trip briefing on Day 1 of the main itinerary.

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### *Main Itinerary*

#### **February 20 ~ DAY 1 ~ Arrive in Marrakesh**

A Mountain Travel Sobek representative will meet you outside the customs and immigration area at the airport upon your morning arrival. He or she will escort you to your hotel. After lunch (around 1pm) and a trip briefing by the leader at the hotel, we'll take an optional afternoon walk to the medina, the fabulous "old town" of Marrakesh, where we'll wander its narrow streets and enjoy the circus of entertainments of Marrakesh's famous square, Djemma El Fna, with its snake-charmers and fire-eaters—a veritable scene out of *The Thousand and One Nights!* Dinner at a contemporary restaurant in the French Quarter.

*L,D...Es Saadi Hotel, Marrakesh*

#### **February 21 ~ DAY 2 ~ Sightseeing in Marrakesh**

Marrakesh, the "pearl of the south," was founded in the 11th century and is one of Morocco's oldest and most beautiful cities. With the mountains of the High Atlas in the distance, the city is replete with pink Moorish-style buildings and gorgeous gardens. We will spend the day exploring this mysterious, walled city, and be overwhelmed by its sights, sounds, and smells. We'll visit some of the most important religious and public monuments and the medina (the old Arab town) with its maze of souks. If you are looking for exotic herbs, love charms, or golden slippers, you can easily get lost in the dark alleys of this endless bazaar. Welcome feast at one of the fine restaurants in the medina.

*B,L,D...Es Saadi Hotel, Marrakesh*

#### **February 22 ~ DAY 3 ~ Scenic Drive to Ouarzazate**

The snowy peaks of the High Atlas come as a surprise to those who think of North Africa solely as desert. The vast arc of the Atlas runs 1,200 miles across the northern shoulder of Africa and its highest peaks are just south of Marrakesh, where a dozen summits top 13,000 feet. These ramparts rise above a picturesque landscape of great escarpments, oasis-like pastures, groves of willow and poplar, and the small villages of Berber farmers and shepherds. We leave the hotel early in the morning for a scenic overland drive to Ouarzazate, crossing the High Atlas by the Tizi-n-Tichka Pass. Shortly after leaving the hotel, we'll visit a large and colorful rural souk in the village of Ait Ourir. Here we'll see locals arriving by donkey-back and filling their saddle baskets with their weekly supplies. Other items besides fruits and vegetables are for sale, including furniture, tools, clothing, donkeys, and sheep.

After the market, we'll stop for delicious local fare (try the tagine!) en route to Telouet, where we explore an old Glaoui palace, now abandoned and half-destroyed. We'll take a dirt road down the Salt River Valley, which was the original caravan route to the Sahara, passing through villages where Berbers farm their crops on the fertile land and finding crumbling kasbahs perched on rocky promontories above the river. We also stop at the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Ait Benhaddou, the best-preserved and most exotic kasbah (mostly rebuilt as it was used for film sets in the past, including *Lawrence of Arabia*). Arrive in Ouarzazate, the gateway to the Sahara.

*B,L,D...Hotel Mercure, Ouarzazate*

#### **February 23 ~ DAY 4 ~ Dadès Valley**

This is "kasbah" day (we'll see perhaps a hundred of them!). We head east along the fantastic Dadès Valley, visiting the Skoura oasis and its kasbahs, and hike in the Berber region of Toundout in the Atlas Mountains foothills. We'll meet local villagers and children as we hike along the river valley and enjoy a

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picnic lunch along the river (this is about a two-hour hike). We return to the Skoura oasis valley and take another short hike to explore more kasbahs hidden in the date palms and almond and olive trees. Return to Ouarzazate for dinner and overnight.

*B,L,D... Hotel Mercure, Ouarzazate*

### **February 24 ~ DAY 5 ~ Zagora**

We head south along the Drâa Valley, first visiting a small desert souk in the village of Agdz, whose turbaned vendors are descendants from the slave trade. After checking out the carefully displayed produce, we'll continue our exploration of the valley as we drive along dirt roads through Berber villages. We'll stop for a two-hour hike through the villages and date palm oases, where we have our picnic lunch. As we continue through the valley, we'll note the distinctive dress of the local women, who wrap themselves in long black sheets of cloth decorated with shiny silver sequins and beautiful embroidery; red woolen woven belts are worn tied around their waists. Arrive in Zagora, a former French colonial outpost.

*B,L,D...Hotel Palais Asmaa, Zagora*

### **February 25 ~ DAY 6 ~ Remlia**

We head east into the Sahara on basic 4-wheel-drive roads, passing first through rocky terrain then progressively entering sandier landscapes after we pass the desert villages of Tissmoumine and Oum Jrane. At Maider, an area nomads use to graze their herds of camels, we may have the opportunity to visit one of the families who live in hand-woven goat and camel hair tents. We continue deep into the desert to Tafraout and have great fun 4-wheeling through the sandy river basin of Oued Rheris (Mud River), where we meet our camels and guides at our camp in the sand dunes near Remlia.

*B,L,D...Mountain Travel Sobek Camp*

### **February 26 ~ DAY 7 ~ On Trek in the Sahara**

We'll start the day with camel riding lessons (including the very challenging mounting and dismounting techniques!). Our camels are all trustworthy, friendly, and handpicked for their ground-covering stride. Their saddles are cushioned with traditional blankets to make our safari a comfortable experience over the magical seas of orange dunes and contrasting spaces of black shiny volcanic rock. We'll rotate hikers and camel riders periodically, hiking and riding about seven hours over this incredibly variable desert terrain. We'll cross alluvial fans, ridges, dry river basins, and sandy areas en route to our camp in the sand dunes of Ouzina. Along the way we may find some *Orthoceras*, trilobite, and ammonite fossils from the Devonian geological era.

*B,L,D...Mountain Travel Sobek Camp*

### **February 27 ~ DAY 8 ~ Erg Znigui**

We continue with our camels and on foot about four hours along the north side of the Ouzina dunes and meet our vehicles around lunchtime. Boarding the Land Rovers, we'll ride to Erg Znigui, a remote erg just south of Erg Chebbi. Here we experience the isolation and silence of the desert and watch a magnificent sunset and sunrise over the great dunes. (We drive instead of walk to Erg Znigui so we can have more time at this special place. Our camels and camel guides will meet us here in the early evening.)

Afternoon optional hike up the high dunes or just relax at camp.

*B,L,D...Mountain Travel Sobek Camp*

**February 28 ~ DAY 9 ~ Erg Chebbi**

On foot again with our camels, we head north from Erg Znigui to the remote eastern side of Erg Chebbi, whose spectacular range of dunes—the largest in Morocco—runs north to south. Occasionally we'll pass nomads tending to their herds. The terrain is mostly sandy, but sometimes interspersed with shiny fields of volcanic rock. Erg Chebbi is set amid miles of mountains of pumpkin- and squash-colored sand, and our camp is at the base of one of the largest dunes, situated amid the great sand sea (no wonder the Arabs called the Sahara *bahr bila maa*, an “ocean without water”). About 7-7½ hours hiking.

*B,L,D...Mountain Travel Sobek Camp*

**March 1 ~ DAY 10 ~ End Trek – Erfoud**

We spend the day exploring the dune “mountains” (some of them up to 800 feet tall). From the top we'll have spectacular views and can often see the snow-capped mountains of the High Atlas. Hike down to a small oasis where we meet our camels and guides and continue through the dunes. After lunch we'll stop for a Coke or coffee at a desert café and finish up our trek at the northern end of the Erg in the mid-afternoon. (Four to five hours hiking.) Late afternoon drive to Erfoud, the main town of the Ziz Valley. After looking at sand for days, the lushness, vitality, and variety of the green Ziz Valley is stunning.

*B,L,D...Hotel Xaluca, Erfoud*

**March 2 ~ DAY 11 ~ Fès**

Drive through the Ziz Valley (another caravan route to the Sahara from Fès), stopping for a walk through the Berber village of Aoufouss where we can visit a walled *ksar* (fortified stronghold). Continue through the Atlas Mountains to cedar forests where we are likely to see groups of Barbary Macaques—stub-tailed monkeys that roam freely here. Arrive in the imperial city of Fès, considered the most “complete” medieval city in the Arab world.

*B,L,D...Le Meridien Merinides, Fès*

**March 3 ~ DAY 12 ~ Fès**

Sightseeing in Fès. This medieval city, surrounded by walls of marvelous old masonry, is like no other place in the Arab world—it really has the flavor of another age. An important religious center, Fès contains a huge and ancient medina in which thousands of craftsmen ply their trades. We'll observe the magnificent medina from north and south scenic viewpoints and then visit the King's palace, Fes el-Jedid with its old Jewish quarter, and Fes el-Bali (the oldest section with original old walls), where we'll wander through some of the best and most authentic souks in the world, including the henna, brass, and leather tanners souks. We'll marvel at the fabulous architecture, passing by Bab Bou Jeloud (the main entrance to Fes el-Bali), Zawiyya Moulay Idriss II, and the great Kairaouine Mosque. We'll enjoy lunch at a palace right in the center of the action, and enjoy a festive farewell celebration dinner in the medina, where we'll enjoy a wonderful feast with traditional Moroccan entertainment.

*B,L,D...Le Meridien Merinides, Fès*

**March 4 ~ DAY 13 ~ Fly Home**

Early morning group transfer to the Fès airport and depart on homeward-bound flight via Casablanca. Your flight can depart at any time, though most opt for the 8am flight to Casablanca.

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### **What's Included**

- ◆ expert leadership
- ◆ accommodations in hotels
- ◆ tent accommodations and all trek arrangements in the field, including camp and cook staffs, sleeping bags, group camping and commissary equipment (comfortable, well-designed two-person dome tents with small veranda, kitchen and dining tents, bath and toilet tents)
- ◆ meals as noted (B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, D=Dinner)
- ◆ sodas, tea, coffee with meals
- ◆ airport transfers
- ◆ sightseeing as noted in the itinerary
- ◆ ground transportation
- ◆ additional guides where necessary
- ◆ entrance fees and permits
- ◆ tips for hotel, restaurant, and camp staff and camel staff
- ◆ basic medical and evacuation insurance

### **What's Not**

International airfare to Marrakesh and return from Fès; flights within Morocco; insurance other than basic medical and evacuation insurance noted above (we strongly recommend you purchase the supplementary trip insurance offered by Mountain Travel Sobek, which includes trip cancellation insurance); optional tipping to trip leader, lead Moroccan guide and drivers; excess baggage charges; airport taxes; cost of medical immunizations; items of a personal nature (alcoholic beverages, laundry, etc.).

## **WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT**

### **Activity Level**

Mountain Travel Sobek trips are designed for flexible, energetic people who like to be active and intellectually involved, and have a spirit of adventure and a positive attitude. We expect participants to be strong, experienced hikers in good physical condition. Most gear and camp supplies will be carried by the Land Rovers, leaving you free to carry only a light daypack.

### **Seasonal Considerations**

From November through February, you can expect daytime temperatures to range between the 50s and 70s, pleasant temperatures for walking in the desert; average nighttime temperatures can dip close to freezing but may be as high as 50°. March and October are warmer; the desert near Marrakesh can have temperatures from the 70s to 90s during the day. On the camel trek, days are in the 80s. Nights are pleasant, in the 50s and 60s.

### **Note on Itinerary**

Although we will do our best to adhere to the itinerary schedule as listed, it is subject to change. Please read the Limitation of Liability and Booking Conditions in the four-page Participant Information Form. You can find all this information on our website at [www.mtsobek.com/faq](http://www.mtsobek.com/faq) and the form itself at [www.mtsobek.com/pdf/participant\\_info.pdf](http://www.mtsobek.com/pdf/participant_info.pdf).

**Terms & Conditions**

Once you have made a deposit for a trip, you agree to be bound by all our terms and conditions including the Limitation of Liability Clause. The full Terms and Conditions can be found at [www.mtsobek.com/faq/#liability](http://www.mtsobek.com/faq/#liability) or call 1-888-MTSOBEK (687-6235) for a copy. These are partial conditions. Your participation is contingent on your signature on the full list of terms specified in the four-page Participant Information Form ([www.mtsobek.com/pdf/participant\\_info.pdf](http://www.mtsobek.com/pdf/participant_info.pdf)). Any dispute concerning, relating or referring to the Terms and Conditions, to any literature concerning this trip, or the trip itself, shall be resolved exclusively by binding arbitration in San Francisco, California, according to the then existing commercial rules of the American Arbitration Association. Such proceedings will be governed by substantive California law (but not procedural law) without regard to the California Arbitration Act.

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