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## GEEO ITINERARY

Morocco Express 3/17/2024

### **Day 1: Casablanca Arrive in Casablanca at any time. Meet your group for a welcome meeting around 6:00 or 7:00 p.m.**

Arrive in Casablanca at any time. Please note that this tour does not spend any time in Casablanca, and we recommended arriving a day or two early to fully explore the city. This will also give you time to adjust to the time difference, overcome any jetlag, and avoid any disruption to your trip due to flight delays or cancellations. We can book extra hotel nights for you in Casablanca before the trip. If you arrive early, you can explore Casablanca's small medina, beachfront, and classic examples of Art Deco architecture. Be sure to also visit the spectacular Hassan II Mosque; entrance is only permitted via guided tours, which operate from Saturday to Thursday at 09:00, 10:00, 11:00, and 15:00. Tickets can be purchased at the mosque. Please double-check times with your hotel as they are subject to change, especially around Ramadan. Please note that check-in at the hotel is usually around 2:00-3:00 p.m. There are no planned activities until an intro meeting around 6:00 or 7:00 p.m., usually in the hotel lobby. Check for a sign or ask at the reception desk about the exact time and location of the group meeting. Please make every effort to arrive in time for this meeting. If you are delayed and will arrive late, please inform us. Your tour leader will then leave you a message at the front desk informing you of where and when to meet up tomorrow. After the meeting, you might choose to get dinner at a nearby restaurant with your traveling companions and your tour leader to further get to know one another.

### **Day 2: Casablanca/Fès (B, L) Enjoy a G Adventures-supported traditional lunch before taking a guided tour of the ancient Roman ruins of Volubilis. Continue on to Fès.**

Explore the labyrinth of streets within the famous Fez medina with a local guide. Take in a view of one of the ancient tanneries from above and marvel at the myriad of colors and processes.

### **Day 3: Fès (B) Explore the labyrinth of streets within the famous Fez medina with a local guide. Take in a view of one of the ancient tanneries from above and marvel at the myriad of colors and processes.**

The Fez medina is the world's largest living medieval medina and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Enter through one of the great gates into the chaos and follow a local guide through this 1.4-sq. mile medina with more than 9,000 winding streets. Some buildings in the medina date back to the 9th century; there are 350 mosques in the medina that are still in use today. We will explore the artisan quarters, sample treats from the carts, and visit the mausoleum and the Al Qarawiyyin University. A highlight is the view of the famous Fès tannery from the balcony of a leather shop, where you can observe the men hard at work treating and dyeing the different hides. Take some time to shop for leather goods before returning to your hotel. Please note: Only certified local Fez guides are allowed to guide in the medina. During your free time, your tour leader (a nationally certified guide) cannot accompany you here. Enjoy free time this afternoon. This evening there may be the chance to partake in an optional dinner in a grand old Fès riad that has been converted into a spectacular restaurant. Enjoy a delicious meal of local specialties while enjoying an evening of entertainment that includes singing, music, and belly dancing.

### **Day 4: Fès/Merzouga (B, D) Drive south towards the desert and embark on a camel ride into the dunes to watch the sunset. Head back to your hotel for a night of entertainment under the stars.**

Today we have a full travel day through the diverse landscapes that make Morocco so unique. As you pass through cedar and pine forests, keep an eye out for Barbary Macaques. Pass over the Middle Atlas Mountains through the pre-desert countryside with its deep gorges filled with a splendid oasis of green palm groves, finally arriving at the sand dunes of the Sahara Desert. Keep your eyes open for a glimpse

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of Barbary apes en route. Upon arrival, settle into your hotel at the edge of the dunes and enjoy a warm welcome with mint tea. In the late afternoon, take a camel ride deep into the dunes to watch the sunset. Local guides will teach you how to mount and dismount and other handy camel-related safety tips. Be sure to get them to teach you the trick of tying your turban to keep the desert sun off your face and add a little flair to your photos. We spend the night in a desert auberge, located right on the edge of the dunes, where we will have a local-style dinner. Please note: some rooms may have shared bathroom facilities. After dinner, gather around a campfire under the stars near your hotel. Listen to stories about life in this region and, perhaps, some traditional music on the drums. Approximate travel time: 10-11 hrs, including stops

**Day 5: Merzouga/Todra Gorge (B) Rise early to watch the sunrise. Walk through local village farmlands before exploring the cliff-sided canyons of the mighty Todra Gorge.**

Rise early to watch the sunrise. Opt to spend the morning exploring the undulating golden sand of the dunes and discovering the surrounding communities on a land cruiser desert excursion. After breakfast, continue by private bus into the Todra Valley. The Todra River has carved out cliff-sided canyons through the mountains with the final 300 m of the gorge being the most spectacular, as the canyon narrows to a flat stony track as little as 10 m (33 ft) wide in places with sheer and smooth rock walls up to 160 m (525 ft) high on each side. Today, the Todra River looks more like a stream as it runs its way through the gorge, with hotels and restaurants huddled against the steep walls. It is easy to walk through the gorge, as there is a well-maintained dirt road to walk along. This scenic and serene spot is great for hiking, relaxing on the edge of the river, or sampling some local Amazigh (Berber) delicacies. Approximate travel time: 3.5 hrs, including stops

**Day 6: Todra Gorge/Aït Ben Haddou (B) Visit the Aït Ben Haddou Kasbah, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Opt to participate in a tagine cooking class for an intro to Moroccan cuisine.**

This morning, we continue along the "Route of 1,000 Kasbahs" to the thriving town of Ouarzazate for a lunch stop. This town is home to Atlas Film Studios, where many films have been shot over the years, including *Lawrence of Arabia* and *Gladiator*. Continue on to the fascinating and beautiful village of Aït Ben Haddou, a wonderful example of a kasbah (a type of fortress). Explore the UNESCO World Heritage Site with your tour leader. Of all the remaining kasbahs in Morocco, the walls and interior of this area are the most intact. Like many of the earthen-built fortresses in Ouarzazate, Aït Ben Haddou has been used in many film and television productions like *Gladiator*, *Babel*, and *Game of Thrones*. In the evening, there may be a chance for an optional cooking class. Learn the secrets of how to make the perfect tagine and then sample your skills for your dinner. Approximate travel time: 4 hrs

**Day 7: Aït Ben Haddou/Marrakech (B) Drive to Marrakech for a medina tour with a local guide. Opt to visit Djemaa el Fna Square in the evening to see the musicians and street performers that gather there.**

In the morning, we continue our journey to Marrakech with breathtaking views through the High Atlas Mountains via the Tizi n'Tichka Pass (7400 ft). Once you arrive in the "Red City," join your certified city guide for a tour of the Marrakech medina. Shop to your heart's content in the souks with their narrow, winding streets as you search out spices, traditional jalabas and slippers, or the famous Moroccan lanterns. Visit the historical Koutoubia Minaret and gardens, the Mellah, and the Saadian Tombs, a complex of sepulchers and mausoleums that house the remains of Saadian Sultan Ahmed Al Mansour Ed Dahb. The tombs were sealed off until their re-discovery in 1917. Tour the grounds of the Bahia Palace, marveling at the intricate decoration, and experience the sights and sounds of the bustling Jemaa el-Fnaa square. Once the tour is finished, you are free to discover the secrets of this amazing, ancient city at your leisure. Once you've tired yourself out, relax at one of the tea houses around the square, indulging in the ubiquitous sweet mint tea and watching the hustle and bustle from your shady spot. End the day like a local with an optional group dinner in the famous food stalls of Jemaa el-Fnaa. The square changes its offerings throughout the day. In the morning, you can find fresh orange juice stalls, water

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sellers in colorful costumes with traditional leather water bags and brass cups, and snake charmers reminiscent of an era past. As the day progresses, the snake charmers are replaced by Chleuh dancing-boys, story-tellers, magicians, and peddlers of traditional medicines. As the sun sets, the square fills with dozens of food-stalls, packed with locals and the entertaining chefs and waiters. Grab a spot on a bench with the other diners and try the Tanjia (slow cooked lamb), Harira soup, grilled seafood, famous Moroccan couscous, tajine, snails or even sheep's head for the truly adventurous, and wash it all down with some spiced tea. Approximate travel time: 4 hrs by private vehicle

### **Day 8: Marrakech (B) Depart Marrakech at any time.**

There are no planned activities today, so you may depart Marrakech at any time. If your departure flight is out of Casablanca, affordable transfer options include a 3.5-hour train that runs a few times a day or direct flights from Marrakech to Casablanca. If you wish to extend your stay in Marrakech, consider booking post-tour accommodation with us. Please note that check-out time from the hotel is usually mid-morning, but luggage storage services are available at the reception desk. Want more adventure? Book two or more GEEO programs in the same school year and receive a discount! GEEO will give you 10% off of the lesser value program(s) (up to 3 programs per year). If you would like to extend your time abroad but don't see another GEEO program that interests you, let us know. We can work with you to find a trip from our tour operator's much larger catalog. Their tours are open to the general public and not designed specifically for educators, but we can still offer you and your travel companions a discounted educator price on any additional tours that you book.