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## GEEO ITINERARY

MOROCCO 7/2/2021 - Summer

### **Day 1: Casablanca Arrive at any time in Casablanca.**

Today is an arrival day and, as travelers are arriving from all corners of the world, there are no planned activities. You are free to arrive in Casablanca at any time. Hotel check-in is 2 p.m., and luggage storage is available if you arrive before your room is ready. Please note, this tour does not spend any time in Casablanca. You may wish to come a day early in order to 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 (closed Fridays) at 09:00, 10:00, 11:00, and 14:00. Please refer to the optional activity section of these notes for prices. Please double check times with your hotel as they are subject to change, especially around Ramadan. In the early evening you will meet your tour leader and fellow group members for an important group meeting. Check the hotel notice board (or ask reception) for the exact time and location of this meeting. Afterward, there will be the option to head out for a meal together in nearby in a local restaurant. If you arrive late, your group leader will leave you a message at the front desk.

### **Day 2: Casablanca/Tangier/Chefchaouen (B) Stop in Tangier for a guided tour of the medina, continue on to Chefchaouen for the evening.**

Depart in the morning by private van for Tangier. Take a guided tour of the city including: the medina; kasbah; Grand Socco, a bustling square at the entrance to the medina; and Petit Socco, a little square in the medina perfect for people-watching and mint tea-drinking. In the afternoon, continue on to Chefchaouen. Tangier is an exotic mix of influences, located at the northern tip of Morocco. With culture, cuisine, and language coming from North Africa, Spain, Portugal, and France, this bustling port city is unique and fascinating. Chefchaouen is a gorgeous mountain town in northern Morocco. It is often skipped when traveling the standard route around Morocco but is truly one of the most special places to visit. Set in the Rif Mountains, this town's white-washed buildings with blue accents make it one of the most picturesque places in the country. Known as the Blue City, the distinctive blue color was added by the city's Jewish population who lived there as refugees in the 1930s. The main square is lined with cafés and shops selling handicrafts that are often not available elsewhere in the country. Approximate travel time: 5 hrs (Casablanca to Tangier) by private vehicle; 2 hrs (Tangier to Chefchaouen) by private vehicle

### **Day 3: Chefchaouen (B) Opt to hike in the Rif Mountains, explore the town, try a traditional hammam, or visit a local weavers' cooperative.**

Enjoy a free day in Chefchaouen to explore. The city, whitewashed in different shades of blue, is spectacular on its own but with the surrounding mountains, it's a sight to behold. Options to hike in the Rif Mountains, visit a Hammam (Roughly \$22), visit a local weavers' cooperative (Free), and explore the town.

### **Day 4: Chefchaouen/Meknes/Volubilis/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.**

We leave Chefchaouen and drive to Meknes where we visit a Planeterra-supported traditional lunch program that benefits rural Moroccan women and children. The proceeds from this lunch help support access to education opportunities and health care services, including vocational training for rural women to work from home so they can support their families and children. Enjoy a traditional home-cooked Moroccan meal and learn a bit of Arabic while you meet some of the women who are part of this program. In the afternoon we make our way through the rolling hills for a guided visit of the impressive Volubilis, the best-preserved Roman ruins in this part of Northern Africa. Once an important Roman town, the site is situated near the westernmost border of the Roman Empire. In 1997, UNESCO listed Volubilis

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as a World Heritage Site. Wandering through the deserted streets where chariots once passed, you can envision the vibrance the town once had. Listen to your certified local guide explain about life in the Roman Empire as you peer into old bathhouses, marveling at the still-present mosaic floors and gazing up at the towering marble pillars. We leave the Roman Empire to make our way to Fès. We will be staying in the new city of Fès, built by the French during their Protectorate of Morocco. This area has the feel of a French provincial town with its cafés, restaurants, and wide boulevards. Approximate travel time: 4.5 hrs (Chefchaouen to Meknes); 45 mins (Meknes to Volubilis); 2 hrs (Volubilis to Fès)

**Day 5: Fès (B) Explore the labyrinth of streets within the famous Fès medina with a local guide. Marvel at one of the ancient tanneries and take in the view from above.**

Enjoy a half-day medina walking tour, followed by a free afternoon to explore more of the city. The Fès medina is the world's largest medina with over 9,000 winding streets lying within 365 hectares. Buildings within the medina date back to the 9th century. During the 11th century, Fès was one of the largest cities in the world. There are 350 mosques in the medina where devout Muslims pray five times a day as a part of the five pillars of Islam. We enter through one of the great gates into the chaotic, confusing melee that is the Fès medina. We explore the medina's many artisans' quarters, such as the brass, copper, and wedding adornment souks. Carpenters, bakers, butchers, and spice sellers have their own area of the medina. A highlight is a visit to the famous Fès tannery, where we have great views from a panoramic viewpoint over the men hard at work treating and dyeing the different hides. In the evening, opt for dinner in a converted riad complete with local specialties, music, and belly dancing. (Please note: Only certified local Fès guides are allowed to guide in the medina, so for the free day your tour leader, who is a nationally certified guide, cannot accompany you here but will be able to help you find a local guide if you wish. Of course, you can also just wander at your leisure!)

**Day 6: Fès/Merzouga (B,D) Enjoy a long, but beautiful, travel day across the unique landscape of Morocco to get to the sand dunes of the Sahara Desert.**

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 apes. 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. We spend the night in a desert auberge (simple hotel), located right on the edge of the dunes. Here we will have dinner local-style and spend the night. Please note: some rooms may have shared bathroom facilities at the desert auberge. Approximate travel time: 10-11 hrs, including stops

**Day 7: Merzouga (B,D) In the morning, explore the sand dunes by foot or opt to take a 4x4 safari. In the late afternoon, enjoy a camel ride to watch the sunset before returning to our hotel.**

Today is free until we head out on our camel safari in the late afternoon. Perhaps spend the cool of the morning exploring the undulating golden sands of the dunes, simply relax by the pool, or read a book in the cool communal couch area. We also offer an optional activity of a 4x4 safari into the sand dunes of the Sahara Desert. Ask your tour leader for more details and the current price of this exciting adventure. In the afternoon, take a camel ride deep into the dunes to watch the sunset. Your 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. In the evening, we return towards Merzouga to our hotel on the edge of the dunes to indulge in a traditional dinner under the stars, cooked by your hosts. Listen to stories about life in this region and, perhaps, some traditional music on the drums. Approximate travel time: 1 hr by camel.

**Day 8: Merzouga/Todra Gorge (B) Rise early for a camel ride to watch the sunrise. Walkthrough local village farmlands before exploring the cliff-sided canyons of the mighty Todra Gorge.**

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We rise early for a camel ride to watch the sunrise. Continue by bus to Tinehir and into the Todra Valley. Enjoy a walk in the lush palm groves and learn more about local life in this region, including which crops are grown and how the land is farmed. You may even be lucky to taste some of the fruit in season straight from the source. Head to the stunning Todra Gorge, we spend the night in this beautiful and peaceful area. 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 wide in places with sheer and smooth rock walls up to 160 m 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. The scenery is spectacular. While staying in a hotel nestled in between the sheer cliffs of the gorge, you will have the chance to enjoy a relaxing evening indulging in local Berber cuisine. Please note that due to location, the hotel power is run by a generator that is turned off every night at approximately 11:00 p.m. We recommend bringing a headlamp for getting around at night, if necessary. Approximate travel time: 4-6 hrs, including stops.

**Day 9: 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 a 1,000 Kasbahs" to Ouarzazate where we will take our lunch break. We continue on to the village of Aït Ben Haddou, a wonderful example of a collection of kasbahs (a type of fortress). Tour the UNESCO World Heritage site and Kasbah of Aït Ben Haddou with your tour leader. Of all the remaining kasbahs in Morocco, the walls and interior of this area are the most intact. The Kasbah still houses a few families, but many now live in the adjacent village. 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. Once at home, you can impress your friends with your culinary skills! Approximate travel time: 5-6 hrs, including stops

**Day: 10 Aït Ben Haddou/Around (B,D) Enjoy a hike to the village of Around, at the base of the High Atlas Mountains. Let a mule carry the bags up to this mountain hideaway and hike alongside. Enjoy views of Mt. Toubkal from the mountain gîte before a home-cooked dinner.**

We leave the pre-desert country for the magnificent High Atlas Mountains landscape, crossing the Tizi n'Tichka pass at 2260 m, before heading into the splendid Toubkal National Park. We pass through small villages on winding mountain roads, arriving at the village of Imlil. With our main luggage transported by mule, we embark on the walk from Imlil to the little village of Around (1 to 1.5 hrs), arriving at our simple mountain gîte for the night. While the walk to the gîte is uphill, we will take it at a slow pace, and it is achievable by anyone of average fitness. Some participants have recommended hiking poles for those with knee issues. Accommodation is multi-share, up to 6 beds in each room. Bedding is provided. You will also need to bring your own bath towel. Bathroom facilities are shared. Tonight we enjoy a homemade dinner of local produce in the cozy salon. Settle in and enjoy the tranquility, fantastic views, and clean mountain air of this magical region. Approximate travel time: 5 hrs (Ait Ben Haddou to Imlil) by private vehicle; 1 hr (Imlil to Around) on foot

**Day: 11 Around/Essaouira (B) Walk back to Imlil and transfer to the coastal town of Essaouira. The day is free for exploration.**

After breakfast, we'll walk back out to meet our transport in Imlil and head to the coastal town of Essaouira, arriving in the mid-afternoon and leaving you free time to explore. Approximate travel time: 1 hr (Aremd to Imlil) on foot; 5 hrs (Imlil to Essaouira), including stops, by private vehicle

**Day 12: Essaouira (B) Enjoy a free day exploring this coastal port town any way**

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Today is free to browse the many shops for the many crafts on sale, watch the brightly painted ships bring their catch into the busy harbor, or take a stroll along the long, sandy beach. It's a perfect place to enjoy some local seafood and unwind. You might even like to enjoy some of the wide variety of activities on offer such as windsurfing and horse riding. Your tour leader can arrange camel riding on the beach in Essaouira for you. Please ask them for more details, if you are interested.

**Day 13: Essaouira/Marrakech (B) Drive to Marrakech for a medina tour with a certified city 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. Once arriving in the red city join your certified city guide for a tour of the Marrakech medina. Visit the historical Koutoubia Minaret and gardens, Bahia Palace, the Mellah, and the Saadian Tombs. Take note as your guide takes you through some of the local souks with their narrow, winding streets. 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. Approximate travel time: 3 hrs by private vehicle

**Day 14: Marrakech (B) Enjoy a final free day to explore.**

Today is a free day to explore. A great place to start your adventure is Djemaa el Fna square, in the heart of the medina. The square changes its offerings throughout the day. In the morning, you can wander past the fresh orange juice stalls, water sellers in colorful costumes with traditional leather water bags, 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. Wash it all down with some spiced tea. To really get a taste of everyday life in Marrakech, head into the maze of tiny streets and alleyways of the ancient medina. Tourists and locals alike will find everything they desire in the souks, whether its spices, traditional jalabas, and slippers, or famous Moroccan lanterns, the selection here is exhaustive, and don't forget to bargain, it's definitely part of the fun. Perhaps end the day like a local with an optional group dinner in the famous food stalls of Djemaa el Fna.

**Day 15: Marrakech (B) Depart Marrakech at any time.**

You are free to depart at any time today. Please note that check-out time from the hotel is normally mid-morning, but luggage storage facilities are available. This program ends in Marrakech. Most international flights depart out of Casablanca. Make sure that you arrange your flights correctly. Keep in mind that there are flights from Marrakech to Casablanca as well as a train that runs a few times a day and that takes 3.5 hours. Want more adventure? Book two or more GEEO trips in the same year and receive a discount! GEEO will give you 10% off of the lesser value program(s) (up to 3 programs). If you don't see a program that interests you that pairs with this trip but still would like to extend your time abroad, let us know. We will work with you to find a non-teacher trip from our tour operator's much larger catalog. Even better, if you are an educator we can still offer you a discounted price on the trip you choose!