



## CMEIS Leads Trip for K-14 Educators to Morocco: Caroline Sibley Reports

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In June 2023, CMEIS collaborated with GEEO (Global Exploration for Educators Organization – a non-profit organization that helps and encourage teachers to travel abroad) to lead a two-week educational study tour across Morocco. Caroline Sibley, Teaching Assistant Professor in Arabic in the Department of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, and Coordinator for the North Carolina Arabic Teacher Council, facilitated the learning experience. Ustaaza Sibley shares her experience below (*ustaaza* meaning ‘professor’ in Arabic).



We hiked all the way up for an overnight stay in the High Atlas village of Armoud, waking up to Toubkal mountain views, the second highest African peak behind Kilimanjaro. (Caroline Sibley is front and center, in blue.)

This June, I had the pleasure of spending 15 days with a group of K14 educators, exploring and experiencing nearly every diverse corner of Morocco. As the representative from CMEIS, I connected with each teacher on conversations about their classrooms and what, if any, they knew or taught about the Middle East.



Taking to the sands of the Sahara for a sunset camel ride with local guides.

Our adventures inspired ideas for their perspective classrooms: Water scarcity and infrastructure for a country rich and reliant on agriculture, alternative energy sources through government sponsored solar, wind and water projects, indigenous languages and identities from pre-Arab civilizations, Eid inspired dishes and community practices during the holy holiday, historical and current African migration to Morocco, the list goes on.

Our journey took us to see a myriad of ancient castles or *Kasbahs*, from the High Atlas Mountains to the edge of the Western Sahara to where the Mediterranean and Atlantic meet at the strait of Gibraltar. From under the desert stars to downtown Marrakesh after the breaking of fast for bustling Eid celebrations, we arrived hungry for more context and perspective on Moroccan history, geography, politics, customs, culture and of course, mint tea (the local day-long drink). We left overflowing with a deeper understanding and

appreciation for all these things, inspiration to share the new knowledge with our students and of course, with the goal of finding tea as hot, fresh, and sweet, stateside (a challenge, indeed).



Teachers become students for a traditional tajine making workshop. The fruits of our labor were quickly polished off.

Laura Isenhour, an English Teacher at Cedar Ridge High School in Hillsborough, North Carolina, noted, “Travel always elicits meaningful insight; it is transformative, educational, and promotes empathy and understanding. The GEEQ teacher travel program in Morocco was all of the above – and more. Having the opportunity to travel with fellow educators adds a magical layer to such an experience. It allowed me to learn not only about the beautiful country that is Morocco, but also to learn and gain inspiration from my peers. Through this travel, I will carry a new cultural competency

into the coming school year, and, by sharing my experience with them, I hope to inspire my students to themselves travel someday and maybe even pursue learning Arabic! (I hear UNC has a fantastic program! 😊)”

Since 2016, CMEIS has collaborated with GEEO to facilitate teacher professional development to increase education and deepen understanding of the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region. CMEIS hopes to continue this impactful outreach and programming for future years to come.



Above, educators explore the 9,000+ old streets of Fez Medina, making a quick stop by al-Qarawiyyin, the oldest university in the world.