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RCGS: HIGHLIGHTS OF MOROCCO WITH ALIYA JASMINE

Delve into the unexpected in Morocco accompanied by award-winning reporter and television producer, Aliya Jasmine. From reporting for NBC News and covering South Sudan after civil war to traveling to the hear of Canada's Great Bear Rainforest to see the potential impacts of a proposed pipeline and covering the 2010 earthquake in Haiti for Discover Channel, she'll have plenty of stories to share throughout your two weeks in this magical corner of the world.

Dazzling peaks, bustling cities and riads adorned in colorful mosaics come alive as you make your way through the imperial cities of Marrakech, Meknes and Fez before continuing on to the mountain ranges to the south, where sand dunes and kasbahs are scattered among palm oases inhabited by friendly Berbers. Head out into the Sahara on a camel ride and spend the night in a Bedouin camp, explore picturesque villages in the High Atlas Mountains, visit lush palm groves and desert oases, stroll through artisan workshops and sandy beaches in the fishing port of Essaouira, and so much more.

Please note: travelers on this tour must be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 with the last dose having been administered no less than two weeks prior to travel. The total number of doses must have been given, as required by the vaccine manufacturer (in most cases this is two doses).

At a Glance

- 10 nights boutique hotels and premium riads, 1 night auberge, 2 nights mountain gite and 1 night Bedouin camp
- Group normally 9 to 16, including RCGS guide plus local leader. Min age 16 yrs
- Travel by private minibus and camel
- Countries visited: Morocco

Trip Highlights

- Explore the imperial cities of Rabat, Meknes, Fez and Marrakech.
- Head into the Sahara on a camel ride then spend a night in a Bedouin camp.
- Experience a traditional hammam in the village of Tijhza.
- Walk from a remote Berber community into the magnificent High Atlas Mountains.
- Enjoy free time to relax in the charming fishing port of Essaouira.
- Discover the highlights of Morocco with award-winning reporter and TV producer, Aliya Jasmine.

Is This Trip for You?

This trip provides an insight into the enormous variety that Morocco has to offer, including cities, history, architecture, desert and mountain scenery. We spend quality time in the places that matter, the pace is not rushed but a couple of the journeys are long, up to 4 hours. We are not confined to our vehicle though, as there are plenty of photo stops and opportunities to stretch your legs.

Accommodation standards are comparable to that of Sub-Saharan Africa and on this Premium departure, we have upgraded to premium riads and hotels in some towns and cities. The temperatures in the cities may also be hot in the summer months but we try to make the most of the coolest parts of the day.

Following a review of all our trips we have categorised this trip as generally not suitable for persons of reduced mobility. However if you are a regular traveller on such trips, please contact customer services to discuss the trip and your personal condition.

Group

This departure will have a Royal Canadian Geographical Society Guide plus an experienced Exodus English-speaking local Leader throughout the trip, along with a driver and local guides where needed.

Adult min age: 16 **Min group size:** 9 **Max group size:** 16

ITINERARY

Land Only

Start City: Marrakech
End City: Marrakech

Land Only Itinerary

Day 1

Start Marrakech.
In the early evening, there will be a welcome briefing with your tour leader, followed by an optional group dinner if you would wish to join.
Accommodation: : Riad Hamdane or similar

Day 2

Visit Hassan II Mosque; to the capital Rabat.
A modern and commercial seaport, Casablanca is a complete contrast to the Morocco we are soon to explore. This morning we make our way 3 hours to Casablanca to visit the Hassan II Mosque, one of the largest in the world. Afterwards, we drive 2 hours to Rabat for lunch, the political capital of Morocco, but second to Casablanca in

importance. Although mostly modern, Rabat has an excellent old quarter that we take time to explore.
Accommodation: Hotel le Musee or similar
Meals included: Breakfast

Day 3

Explore the Roman site of Volubilis and Meknes; to Fez.
This morning we strike out from Rabat over the Northern plain towards Meknes, a drive of around 3 hours. The scenery changes as the land becomes more cultivated, this being one of the most fertile areas of Morocco. Sultan Moulay Ismail's old capital of Meknes is our first example of one of the imperial cities of Morocco. We meet our guide and wander the narrow streets of the old city, and explore the souk, perhaps having your first chance at bartering for souvenirs. In the after noon we take a short drive to the largest and best kept Roman ruins in Morocco – Volubilis, once a large Roman town and now a UNESCO World Heritage site. After exploring this site we continue our journey to the ancient city of Fez, where we spend two nights.
Accommodation: Riad la perle de la medina or similar
Meals included: Breakfast

Day 4

Guided tour of Fez, including visits to the Medersa Bou Ananiya and the medina.
This fascinating city is the intellectual and religious centre of Morocco. Founded over a thousand years ago, Fez has many mosques and medersas (theological colleges) including the 9th century al-Karaouine University, whose architecture is very similar to that seen in Moorish Spain. The medina in Fez is one of the largest in the world, an immense warren of souks, home to thousands of craftsmen with their tiny shops opening onto the narrow alleyways. Noisy and pungent, the medina of Fez is a totally absorbing and unique experience. Our city guide walks us through different sections of the souk - including those selling leather brass and copper. Of course, no visit to Fez is complete without a visit to the tanneries. Outside the medina we shall visit the Jewish District (mellah), the exterior of the Royal Palace and take a drive up to a panoramic viewpoint over the city.
Accommodation: Riad la perle de la medina or similar
Meals included: Breakfast

Day 5

Drive to Merzouga, on the edge of the Sahara.
Today we have a long journey, approximately 10 hours spent on the road including plenty of stops and some superb scenery along the way. We venture over the stunning Middle Atlas, down through the picturesque Ziz Valley to the Hamada, a flat stony desert gradually approaching the spectacular site of the golden sand dunes of Erg Chebbi. We stay in a small and welcoming auberge (inn) on the edge of the dunes from where it is easy to climb to watch the sunrise.
Accommodation: Auberge Yasmina or similar
Meals included: Breakfast, Dinner

Day 6

Walk among the dunes; camel trek; camp in the desert.
There is time today with a free morning to explore the largest sand sea in Morocco, or to relax in the shade of a palm tree by the dunes. The sand sea is famed for its pink tones that take on a spectacular rose colour at sunset. In the late afternoon, we partake in a genuine Saharan experience - a 1.5-hour camel trek through the dunes, where we watch the sunset. We then come back to the camp at the edge of the desert to spend the night.
Accommodation: Full-Service camping at Luxury Camp Yasmina
Meals included: Breakfast, Dinner

Day 7

To Skoura via the Todra Gorge.
After sunrise, we leave our desert camp and travel by camel back to the auberge where we can have breakfast and a shower. We then head towards the little city of Skoura, nestled on a beautiful palm grove and located near Ouarzazate. En-route explore Todra Gorge, and the picturesque oases they hide in (journey time approximately 4 hours). Following the 1000 Kasbahs Road for approximately another 2 hours, you will marvel at the breath-taking vistas of impressive ancient Kasbahs nestled in lush palm groves.
Accommodation: Kasbah Sawadi or similar
Meals included: Breakfast

Day 8

Skoura, the Palm grove capital of Morocco.
There is the opportunity to take a 1 hour drive to Toundout Valley and enjoy a four hour guided hike crossing through a Berber village and Imi-noulawen valley, where you will learn a little of their culture. Alternatively, relax in and around the

lodge walking through the magnificent lush palm groves. Considered as the palm grove capital of Morocco, Skoura will certainly offer peace and relaxation through its various walks discovering multiple palm groves, and Kasbahs.

Accommodation: Kasbah Sawadi or similar

Meals included: Breakfast

Day 9

Journey to Telouet, via the famous Kasbah Ait Benhaddou.

Leaving Skoura, we re-join the main road and drive west along the 'Route of the Thousand Kasbahs' via the desert city of Ouarzazate and on to the well-preserved Kasbah Ait Benhaddou. This UNESCO World Heritage Site is one of the most spectacular sights of the Atlas, made famous as the location of several Hollywood films including 'Gladiator'. After admiring the view, we may see something of the simple village houses. Continuing into the mountains we branch east through a wide flat mountain valley, finally arriving at Anmiter, where we leave our bus and take a 1.5-hour picturesque walk on a gentle uphill gradient to the village of Tigzha, where we spend the next two nights. Our luggage will be transported to the gite for us. For those who do not want to walk, mules are available (100 MAD, payable locally).

Accommodation: Kasbah Oliver or similar

Meals included: Breakfast, Dinner

Day 10

Full day walking in the High Atlas. Evening hammam.

We start our day with an optional walk through the villages of the Tijhza Valley, heading up into the hills on mule tracks with the peaks of the High Atlas acting as a fitting backdrop to our walk. The length of our walk will depend on the ability of the group, but it is likely to be approximately 4 hours. The afternoon is free to relax with a book, enjoy the mountain views, take a stroll through the beautiful landscape or challenge the village children to a game of football!

Tijhza is just one of four villages in this remote valley that has been supported by Exodus for over ten years on various responsible tourism projects. We will visit the village hammam, built with money raised by Exodus clients. This is a truly authentic experience and terrific fun. It is very much a traditional hammam and you are likely to get the opportunity to mix with the villagers, which further adds to the experience. A standard treatment is included, but you will need to purchase a scrubber and soap for 20MAD plus customary tip of 20MAD. Refreshed, we return to the riad for our final dinner in the mountains.

Accommodation: Kasbah Oliver or similar

Meals included: Breakfast, Dinner

Day 11

Over the High Atlas Mountains to Essaouira.

Leaving the gite, we walk back to our bus for a short drive to the palace of Telouet. This once grand building stands abandoned and crumbling but we can visit a small part of this labyrinthine, fairy-tale like structure. We continue our scenic drive over the High Atlas Mountains to Marrakech, via the Tizi'n'Tichka pass, which at 2,260m is the highest road in Morocco. The scenery is spectacular and there are some wonderful views of the mountains. We stop at a women's cooperative Argan Oil farm, where you can see the trees growing, get a demonstration of the production process as well as have the opportunity to purchase products. Our journey finally brings us to the flat arid plains of Marrakech, and then onwards to the pretty seaside town of Essaouira. You can expect a total journey time of approximately 10 hours today, with plenty of comfort breaks and photo stops along the way.

Accommodation: Essaouira Wind Palace or similar

Meals included: Breakfast

Day 12

Free day in Essaouira.

A free day in Essaouira, a charming old Portuguese fishing port overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. The settlement dates back to the 15th century but the present town was constructed around 1760 by Sidi Mohammed ben Abdullah, who needed a base from which to suppress a revolt from Agadir. Today, the town is extremely relaxed and its whitewashed houses with painted shutters, artisan workshops, boat yards and fishermen provide a marked contrast to the desert, kasbahs and cities we have so far visited. Our hotel is situated in the heart of the old walled city, where we have plenty of time for some shopping in the souks or strolling along the beach. With many pleasant cafes and some outstanding seafood restaurants, there is plenty of choice for our evening meal.

Accommodation: Essaouira Wind Palace or similar

Meals included: Breakfast

Day 13

To Marrakech; guided tour including Bahia Palace, the Saadian tombs, finish in Djemma el Fna.

After breakfast, we drive back to Marrakech, journey time approximately 2.5 hours. In the afternoon we enjoy a guided tour to help us find our bearings and soak up the atmosphere of this amazing city. Our guide will take us to the Bahia Palace

and the Saadian tombs, ending in the Djemma el Fna, where the town becomes a maze of bustling bazaars, palaces and mosques. It is worth seeing this renowned landmark in the evening, as Marrakech revolves around this open-air central square, with food stalls, juice-sellers, snake charmers and acrobats, it is a place of night-time entertainment for both local people and tourists.

Accommodation: Riad Hamdane or similar
Meals included: Breakfast

Day 14 **Free day in Marrakech.**

Today is free in Marrakech and there is no shortage of things to do. You might wish to visit the largest mosque in Marrakech, Koutoubia, or venture through the souks and old streets of the medina. After bartering for souvenirs, there will be time for a short visit to the Koranic School and Museum of Marrakech. After this, you can unwind by taking a ½ hour calèche ride (a bright green horse-drawn carriage) to the Jardin Majorelle. These tranquil gardens are decorated through out in indigo blue and were once owned by Yves St. Laurent, the perfect place to escape the hectic rush of the city.

For your lunch we would highly recommend the Amal Women's Training Centre and Moroccan Restaurant, which we at Exodus support in their cause to empower women from disadvantaged backgrounds. They are a non-profit organization dedicated to training their students to become self-sufficient and improving their quality of life through acquiring new skills in a professional restaurant setting. For a superb traditional Moroccan meal and the opportunity to support this worthy cause, do pay them a visit.

This evening it's common for the group to enjoy a final meal together on Djemma el Fna.

Accommodation: Riad Hamdane or similar
Meals included: Breakfast

Day 15 **End Marrakech.**

Your trip will end this morning after breakfast.
Meals included: Breakfast

Accommodation

Hotels, Riad, Gite & Bedouin Camp

Accommodation on this departure is a mixture of superior 3* hotels, offering a more premium standard of accommodation. In Merzouga and Skoura, the properties have swimming pools. In Marrakech, you stay in a premium Moroccan riad that simply adds to the traditional exotic experience. The single supplement does not cover nights spent in the desert camp (day 6) and the 2 nights spent in the village of Tigzha (day 9 & 10).

Please note that from the Spring 2019, local authorities have forbidden camps inside the sand dunes in Erg Chebbi. This is for environmental reasons. This means that all Bedouin camps will be set up on the edge of the desert, fairly close to built accommodation.

Please note that in Winter months some of the accommodation can feel quite cold as they are often poorly heated. Some properties in more rural areas may only have power in the evening (which also means only heating in the evning), however blankets are provided to keep you warm at night.

Where a single supplement is available, paying for a single will only guarantee a room for single use. It does not necessarily mean a twin or double room will be provided for sole occupancy.

Please note that a member of the group may be allocated a single room by default if the make-up of the group means there isn't anyone for them to share with. Paying the supplement in advance is the only way to guarantee a single room.

Single supplements cannot be refunded retrospectively.

Accommodation - Pre trip

Pre-tour accomodation available in Marrakech on request.

Accommodation - Post trip

Post-tour accomodation available in Marrakech on request.

Single supplement from $542.50 USD

Food & Transport

Eating & Drinking

14 breakfasts and 4 dinners included.

Moroccan food is, generally speaking, excellent though not particularly varied. Breakfasts usually consist of bread and jam with coffee or tea. Meals eaten out are reasonably priced - kebab and bread cost is approximately 7 CAD/5 USD/4 GBP.

In main towns, it is possible to find very good French and Moroccan restaurants where a meal and French wine will cost anything from 33 CAD/25 USD/20 GBP upwards. Generally, dinner is likely to cost between 8-16 CAD/6-12 USD/5-10 GBP not including drinks. Local beer, wine and soft drinks are reasonably priced, but you can pay western type prices or more for imported alcohol. Your leader will recommend restaurants for each evening.

Vegetarians can be catered for but there is a fairly limited choice of vegetarian couscous, tajine or omelettes. This is particularly the case during the more rural sections of the trip. Please note that if you have any special dietary requirements you should inform the Exodus Office prior to the trip. If you have a specific medical/dietary need (i.e. coeliac or vegan) you may find it helpful to bring some items of food with you from home.

Transportation

For most of this trip, we use a private bus, the size of which will depend on the group size, with a local driver. The roads in Morocco are reasonably good and driving conditions in towns and on the plains are good. On mountain roads, the pace will be slower.

Weather & Seasonality

Weather Information

From April to June, and in September, Marrakech and the north are pleasantly hot, with temperatures averaging 26ºC/79ºF in the day and falling to 16ºC/61ºF at night. It is unusual for there to be much humidity so it is quite pleasant except at midday when the sun is very strong. Desert temperatures are similar to those in Marrakech, with the nights usually a little cooler and the days a little hotter. Mountain temperatures are cooler than in Marrakech.

In the winter months, the daytime temperatures in Marrakech are around 18 to 22ºC/65 to 71ºF with night temperatures falling to 4 to 7ºC/39 to 45ºF. The days should be sunny and a particularly attractive feature of the winter months is the clear views of the snow-covered Atlas. The temperatures in the south are generally a couple of degrees higher than those north of the mountains. There is a small chance of rain and it has even been known to snow very infrequently in January and sometimes February on the higher desert plateau (in which case it is cold at night and early in the morning on the southern side of the Atlas).

Joining Instructions

Travelling land only: 15 days starting and ending in Marrakech.

Your trip normally starts at our accommodation in Marrakech in the evening of Day 1 of the itinerary. Details of how to reach the start point are provided in the Final Joining Instructions - sent approximately two weeks before departure.

The airport in Marrakech is famously inefficient, and transit through it can be a lengthy process. Upon arrival, you can expect at 2 hours to be spent in getting through immigration, security and baggage reclaim. You should have a pen with you to complete the arrivals form and have the details of your accommodation to hand also for this purpose. Operators are not allowed to wait inside the terminal building for clients, so please find your Exodus representative outside the main doors.

Upon departure from Marrakech, we always suggest allowing 3 hours to navigate the airport as checking in, bag drop, immigration and security can take even longer on exit for Marocco. The airport doesn't accept mobile boarding passes, so we suggest having a printed boarding pass to avoid subjecting yourself to further delays.

Full joining instructions including local emergency numbers will be sent to you as part of our Final Joining Instructions. If you do not receive these at least a week before departure, or require them earlier please contact our office or your travel agent.

Transfers Details

Free Transfers

Exodus offers FREE airport arrival and departure transfers on any flight for this trip, for all clients. Unless specified otherwise, the transfer will be to the Exodus start (or pre-tour) hotel and from the end (or post-tour) hotel, and will be on the date on which the tour starts/ends; transfers to other hotels in the same city and/or on different dates may attract an extra charge. Transfers may be shared with other Exodus customers on the

same flight, or on a flight with similar arrival times. All those taking advantage of the free airport transfers must provide full flight details for both arrival and departure in advance.

Full joining instructions including local emergency numbers will be sent to you as part of our Final Joining Instructions. If you do not receive these at least a week before departure, or require them earlier please contact our office or your travel agent.

Location start: Marrakech
Location end: Marrakech

What to Take

Essential Equipment

- Refillable waterbottle
- Sunhat, Sun cream, and sunglasses
- Daysack
- Lightweight walking boots with good ankle support and sole protection
- Flashlight
- Towel - essential in Tijhza, (this is due to water scarcity in the region, which means that it is best used for farming than on washing towels for tourists)
- Light jacket and waterproof jacket
- Wet wipes, soap, toilet paper/tissues

For November to March departures you will also need:

- A fleece jacket
- Warm trousers
- Gloves & hat

Plastic bottles are a big issue in many countries where recycling isn't yet widely available; they often end up in landfill sites or get burnt, both processes are harmful to the environment and we would like to reduce our impact here. For your trip we have decided to include drinking water in order to reduce the amount of plastic used. This means that safe filtered drinking water will be available throughout which means all you need to do is bring a bottle to re-fill along the way. Please add this to your packing list!

Optional Equipment

- Some hotels may have swimming pools so we recommend you also take a bathing suit
- Earplugs

As Morocco is a strict Muslim country, we recommend that men, women and children wear suitable clothing, i.e. over the knee skirts/shorts/trousers and with shoulders covered. Additionally, women should avoid wearing close-fitting or revealing clothes.

Practical Information

Passport

All nationalities require a full passport that must be valid for beyond the intended length of stay. It is your responsibility to have the correct personal documents and to obtain your own visa, if one is necessary, in accordance with the regulations of the country you are to visit. The information below is primarily for UK passport holders, and other nationalities should check with their travel agent or the relevant embassies. We are not responsible for the actions of local immigration and customs officials, whether at points of entry or otherwise, and any subsequent effects.

Visa

No visa required by US, Canadian, or British passport holders.

Visa regulations can change without notice: please check the current regulations in good time to obtain a visa if one is required.

Vaccinations

There are no mandatory vaccination requirements. Recommended vaccinations are: Tetanus, Typhoid and Hepatitis A.

Travel health can often be something people forget about before going away, but a little preparation and knowledge can go a long way to help you stay fit and healthy while abroad.

The above information can change at short notice; as we are not qualified to answer all your questions about travel health we strongly recommend you contact your Medical Professional or a Travel Health Clinic at least 8 weeks prior to departure for up-to-date information. Please note: vaccinations that are routinely recommended to residents of the UK, North America or Australasia are not considered to form part of the travel health advice, and you should ensure these are kept up to date where necessary.

For additional information please visit: https://travelhealthpro.org.uk/countries

Insurance - are you adequately covered?

It is a condition of joining any of our holidays that you must be fully insured against medical and personal accident risks (to include repatriation costs and air ambulance or helicopter rescue services where appropriate). On arrival in destination for your trip, you will be asked to present details to your leader or local representative of your policy.

If you are resident in the UK we strongly recommend the Exodus travel insurance policy, this is specifically designed to cover all activities on your trip. If arranging your own policy please ensure that you are covered for all activities that are part of the trip, optional activities that you intend to take part in and/or on high altitude itineraries, that you are covered up to the maximum altitude of the trip.

Local Time

Morocco's Timezone: Africa/Brazzaville WAT (GMT +01:00)

Electricity

Morocco's Electricity: 127 & 220 Volts. Plug types C & E; establishments often take two round pin plugs.

Money

Morocco's Currency

The national currency of Morocco is the Moroccan Dirham (MAD), with an exchange rate at the time of publication (June 2017) of approximately 12.4 to the GBP, 9.8 to the USD, 7.4 to the CAD, 10.9 to the EUR, 7.5 to the AUD and 7.1 to the NZD.

ATM Availability

It is easy to use Visa / MasterCard at the ATM machines in larger towns and cities. Credit cards are normally accepted for more expensive souvenirs, such as carpets (please note that most shops will charge up to 5% extra for the use of credit cards).

Extra Expenses & Spending Money

Although most are included, there may be some entrance fees to certain optional historic and religious sites: allow up to 8 CAD/6 USD/5 GBP per person if you intend to visit them all.

Please allow approximately 3-7 CAD/2.50-5 USD/2-4 GBP per person per day to cover postcards, small souvenirs, soft drinks etc. (see also Food).

Tipping

Our local staff are paid well and fairly for their work with Exodus and tipping is at your discretion for both the leader and the local staff. However we would like to advise that tipping is part of the local culture and generally expected. If you do wish to tip, we have found it useful for the group to have a kitty for tipping – about 300 dirhams per person (41 CAD/30 USD/25 GBP).

This can ease confusion and embarrassment of not knowing how much or how little to tip local staff (such as cooks and guides, hotel staff etc). If you do not wish to join in on the group kitty, do not feel pressured.

Many clients also wish to tip their leaders and drivers at the end of the trip, we suggest 30 dirhams a day per person for the leaders (4 CAD/3 USD/2.50 GBP) and 10 to 20 dirhams a day per person for the drivers (1.30-2.70 CAD/1-2 USD/.80p - 1.60 GBP). This is completely at your own discretion and to be used as a guideline only.

Responsible Tourism

Tourism can be a real help to local communities, providing income, positive cultural exchanges and a financial incentive to protect their natural environment. Ours is a 'total approach' to responsible tourism, covering everything from the way we plan and operate our trips to the practices of Exodus as a company.

When in Marrakech, we strongly encourage our passengers to have a delicious meal at the Amal café. The Amal café is a non-profit dedicated to empowering women from disadvantaged backgrounds through restaurant training and job placement to enhance their capabilities and learn new skills. With the skills gained, it increases the chances of them securing a job in a restaurant, hotel or Kasbah and gain financial independence. Exodus Travels has sponsored a number of women through the training process with Amal Café.

On this trip, we also visit Tijhza, a remote valley where Exodus have supported for over ten years on various responsible tourism projects. In conjunction with Baraka Community Partnerships, we sponsored the development of Tijhza by supplying a pipeline system and water tower to the village. We also achieved our aim of building a Hammam to alleviate some of the hygiene issues in the area and to provide a sustainable source of income for the locals. Our passengers have the opportunity to experience an authentic Moroccan massage at the Hammam and have the chance to interact with the villagers.

Exodus Community

Join the Exodus online community

Don't forget to visit the Community area on our website. You can view the range of Exodus videos and podcasts, read trip write-ups which have featured in the national media and take advantage of some special deals on travel gear and equipment.

In the Community Travel Forum you'll find the Departure Lounge where you can discuss your trip with fellow travellers before you depart. When you get back from your holiday remember to upload your images to the relevant trip page on our website. This helps other people see what our holidays are really like and you'll be entered automatically into our monthly photo competition.

To make full use of the Community you'll need to join My Exodus. It's free, registration is simple and easy, so what are you waiting for?