

MOROCCO & WESTERN SAHARA

THE LAND OF THE UNTAMED DESERT

February 09 - February 23, 2025

Led by Historian and Tour Lecturer, Mohamed Halouani

Few places on earth compared to the Sahara Desert - a natural wonder of vast plains and sand dunes that spreads across the southern and eastern regions of Morocco. It is one of the most sparsely populated territories in the world where nomads still roam the land and Saharan traditions are still upheld. This "off the beaten tracks" experience is for passionate travelers and Sahara lovers combining adventure with refined cultural interactions. Crossing the vast desert and traversing the Atlas Mountains towards the Atlantic coast in comfortable A/C 4x4 vehicles, explore stone citadels and prehistoric rock art sites, visit traditional oases towns and small fishing villages, and meet the hospitable people of the Amazigh (Berber) ethnic group. There may also be opportunities to ride camels in the desert and experience traditional Moroccan fishing. Overnights will mostly be in superior hotels and riads, with one night at a fixed luxury camp.

Ihab Zaki
Managing Director

Sunday, February 09

Arrive in Marrakech (MOROCCO)



Upon arrival in **Marrakech**, meet the local guide and transfer to the traditional but stylish *Sofitel Palais and Spa* or similar for check-in. Located at the foothills of the **Atlas Mountains**, Marrakech is one of four imperial cities in Morocco. This ancient 11th-century fortified "red" city has the largest traditional souk in Morocco, and the **Jemaa el-Fna Square** is an excellent place to sample the sights and sounds of Morocco. Overnight at the *Riad*.

Note: Standard check-in time is 3:00 pm. If you arrive on February 08 or in the early morning of February 09, an extra Hotel night needs to be booked.

Monday, February 10

Marrakech - Ouarzazate (4 hrs.)



After breakfast, leave the main road to discover the rarely visited **Amazigh villages** in the High Atlas Mountains and meet the locals who call this region their home. Crossing the **Tizi-n-Tichka Pass** (7,460 feet), stop at **Ait Benhaddou**, a beautiful ksar (fortified village) and an excellent example of adobe architecture. This partially inhabited village sits along the ancient caravan route linking Marrakech with the Sahara. It is the site of many famous movies such as *Lawrence of Arabia*, *Babel*, *Gladiator*, *Prince of Persia*, and many more. Upon arrival in **Ouarzazate**, a large oasis at the edge of the desert, transfer to *Ouarzazate Riad* or similar for check-in, dinner, and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Tuesday, February 11

Ouarzazate - Zagora Oasis



Begin the day exploring the least visited **Djebel Sarhrho Mountain Range** region, often reaching heights of more than 6,000 feet. While not guaranteed during this time of year, there may be an opportunity to meet with some Amazigh Shepherds while visiting this region. The route follows a small path through rocky valleys and across a spectacular arid mountain landscape, past tiny Amazigh villages, and rare nomad tents. Also, see ancient **rock paintings** and **petroglyphs** that date back to Neolithic

times. Upon arrival in Zagora Oasis, transfer to *Dar Sorfian Riad* or similar for check-in, dinner, & overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Wednesday, February 12

Zagora - Erg Chegaga



After breakfast, begin the day with a drive to visit an oasis in the **Draa River**, Morocco's longest river. Water from the Draa is used to irrigate lush palm groves and farms that flourish along the river, providing green miracles in the middle of the desert. View the high dunes of **Erg Chegaga**. Some of these dunes tower 150 or more feet over the desert landscape. Ride camels to the *Luxury Desert Camp*, where we will have dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Thursday, February 13

Erg Chegaga - Foug Zguid



Begin the day by driving across the sands to **Iriki Salt Lake**. This dry salt lake becomes a temporary wetland during the winter, providing a sanctuary for many migratory birds, including flamingos and geese. Upon arrival in the late afternoon in **Foug Zguid**, a small town located near the border of Algeria, transfer to *Bab Rimal Riad* or similar for check-in, dinner, & overnight. **(B,L,D)**
Note: As the lake recedes, migratory birds that are usually found in abundance may not be present during this period.

Friday, February 14

Foug Zguid - Taznakht - Taliouine - Taroudant



Begin the day with a scenic drive and appreciate the dramatic mountains and highlands framed by lush oases. On the way to **Taliouine**, stop at **Taznakht**, known for its beautiful, traditional Moroccan wool rugs. A large Amazigh community still creates these rugs using traditional weaving techniques and all-natural dyes. Customary tribal rituals complete the weaving process. Head to the **village of Taliouine** before continuing the drive to Taroudant, famous for its excellent saffron. There is a chance to visit an interesting **saffron cooperative** to

learn how the spice is grown using traditional methods. This place is an excellent location to purchase this lavish and flavorful seasoning. Continue to **Taroudant**, and upon arrival, transfer to *La Jasmine Riad or similar* for check-in, dinner & overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Saturday, February 15

Taroudant - Tafraout (3 hrs.)



Begin the day with a visit to **Hebdomadaire Souk**, a beautiful and bustling locale where villagers and travelers trade goods. This is a must-see for those stopping in Taroudant. Head to the stunning **Tajout Oasis** before arriving at **Tafraout**, located in a small valley at the foot of **Djebel Lekest**. Transfer to *EL Malara Hotel or similar*, one of the best hotels in town, for check-in, then enjoy a walk through the old **souk** and take in the aromas of the robust spices before returning to the *hotel* for dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Sunday, February 16

Tafraout - Tiznit - Sidi Ifni (3 hrs. 15 min.)



Begin the day exploring the **medina** on foot or by donkey (depending on your preference), then head to see the spectacular **Les Roches Bleues** - blue rocks painted by Belgian artist Jean Verame stand out against the surrounding earth-colored environment. Travel through the stunning **Ammelne Valley** and continue the drive to **Tiznit**. Spend the day exploring the villages of the **Tiznit Province** in the **Souss-Massa Dra** region of Morocco. **Aglou** is a small village on a hill overlooking the sea and home to one of Morocco's oldest ribats, a fortified monastery. Continue the drive to the coastal town of **Sidi Ifni** and transfer to *Logis La Marine or similar* for check-in, dinner & overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Monday, February 17

Sidi Ifni



Explore the town of **Sidi Ifni**, a magnificent city overlooking the ocean. See the **administrative quarter** on a cliff above the shores or wander down to the beach for picturesque ocean views. **Sidi Ifni** is a vital fishing port town that retains a Spanish atmosphere. Though surrounded by French Morocco, the town features some of the finest Art Deco architecture built in the Spanish Sahara. Enjoy the afternoon free at leisure, where you can walk to the town or the beach. Enjoy dinner and overnight at the *Hotel*. **(B,L,D)**

Tuesday, February 18

Sidi Ifni - Guelmim - Tafnidilt (2 hrs. 35 min.)



After breakfast, begin the drive to **Guelmim**, the "Gateway to the Desert." This walled city contains homes

built from sun-dried clay surrounded by date palm groves. Once an important caravan center, today, it remains a viable gateway to Mauritania. Continue the drive to **Tafnidilt** and transfer to *Ksar Tafnidilt Hotel or similar* for check-in, dinner, and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Wednesday, February 19

Tafnidilt - Tantan - El Ouatia - Akhfennir (2 hrs.)



Before traveling south towards the **Western Sahara** border, stop to see the spectacular **Fort Tafnidilt** ruins at the top of a hill overlooking the western bank of the **Wadi Draa** riverbed. This ghostly military fort still "guards" the ancient borders between the French Protectorate of Morocco and the Spanish Sahara. You may even feel like you are on the set of an old French Foreign Legion movie. Continue the drive to the desert city of **Tantan**, located on the banks of the **Oued Ben Jelil Wadi**, which flows into the **Draa River**. The town is a meeting place for many nomadic tribes of the Sahara. Stroll the crumbling but appealing alleyways, stopping at the craft shops to pick up some local heritage. Stop at the central fishing port town of **El Ouatia**, which provides a large percentage of Morocco's sardine exports. Once we arrive in **Akhfennir**, transfer to *Sahara Beach Hotel or similar* for check-in, dinner, and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Thursday, February 20

Akhfennir - Laayoune (WESTERN SAHARA)
(2 hrs.20 min)



Begin the day traveling south along the coast, passing dramatic riverbeds and sand dunes, crossing into the **Western Sahara**, a disputed territory and one of the most sparsely populated in the world. Explore the **Naila Salt Lagoon**, the largest salt lake in Morocco (62 miles). It is located in **Khenifiss National Park**, a natural protected area that is an important resting point for migrating birds, including flamingos, cormorants, gulls, herons, etc. The dazzling blue waters, occupied by local fishermen, are surrounded by yellow-orange dunes. Not far from here is the town of **Tarfaya**, a stop on the drive to **Laayoune**, where the sands of the beach meet the sands of the desert. It is the largest city in the **Western Sahara**. Much is to be discovered at the **Souk of the Dromedaries**, a famous district known for its extraordinary craft industry and large market. Transfer to *Hotel Parador or similar* in the city center of Laayoune for check-in, enjoy dinner at a nearby restaurant, and then head back to the *Hotel* for overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Friday, February 21

Laayoune - Dakhla (6 hrs.)



After breakfast at a nearby restaurant, begin the day with a long scenic drive with a rewarding desert and coastal view. Get the opportunity to have some photo stops along the way. Upon arrival in **Dakhla**, a coastal city founded by Spanish navigators in 1502 as "Villa Cisneros," transfer to *La Crique Hotel and Spa or similar* for check-in. Enjoy a free afternoon at leisure, dinner, and overnight at the *Hotel*. **(B,L,D)**

Saturday, February 22

Dakhla (Rio de Oro)



After breakfast, head out to explore **Rio de Oro**, a 25-mile-long sea loch of brown sand, black rocks jutting out of the blue ocean, and green seaweed fields, painting a stunning landscape. Drive along the shore and visit a colorful **fishing harbor**, then return to the *Hotel* for lunch. Enjoy the afternoon at leisure, dinner, and overnight at the *Hotel*. **(B,L,D)**

Sunday, February 23

Dakhla - USA

OR Continue to **N. MOROCCO & THE SPANISH ENCLAVES** **OR** to **MAURITANIA**



After breakfast, transfer to the airport for your flight back to the US. **(B)**

OR join us on the exciting journey to **Northern Morocco & The Spanish Enclaves** **OR** to **Mauritania**

Note: For those continuing the journey to Mauritania, please be advised that you will be transferred very early in the morning to ensure a timely border crossing. The transfer will be arranged to have you arrive at the hotel in Mauritania by lunchtime.

"We reserve the right to change the order of activities/visits or sites due to unexpected events such as flight cancellations or changes of schedule, or any other reasons beyond our control. We will do our best to ensure that any necessary changes when/if needed to meet the needs of our clients".



Special Tour Remarks:

- Tourist infrastructure and facilities outside the cities are very limited & may be primitive.
- In the more remote areas, hotels will be basic with few amenities and possible equipment failure such as no hot water, broken toilet handles, clogged drains, etc.
- Rooms at the riads vary and will be different for everyone (some larger, smaller, etc.).
- Tents are equipped with toilets, showers, and comfortable beds.
- Air-conditioners in this part of the world do not cool a room to American standards of comfort.
- Brownouts or blackouts may occur, or limited electricity may be available.
- This tour involves long drives over poorly maintained and bumpy roads in hot weather.
- There is a lack of modern medical facilities, and chronic health problems should be discussed with your physician before joining this tour.
- A high level of flexibility, tolerance, respect, open-mindedness, a sense of adventure, and willingness to go with the flow if things change is expected on this tour.
- Travel protection insurance is highly recommended.



Tour Cost (Land Only)

Per person sharing in double occupancy

6 travelers \$7,995.00

7-12 travelers \$6,995.00

Single Supplement \$ 995.00

Price based on group size minimum of 6 participants and maximum of 12 participants.

Trip Grade: III Lodging Level: **-****

elements, as well as archaeology and history. An excellent lecturer on ethnographic and anthropological subjects, he will introduce you not only to the historical jewels of the countries, but he will also reveal to you their culture and history and introduce you to the tribes and villages. He is the Co-founder of the Tunisian Interprofessional Federation for Tourism and President of the Cultural Tourism in Tunisia that was founded in March 2016 and aims at conveying together various operators to have a direct connection with the Tunisian Tourist sector.

Tour Includes:

- Airport / Hotel / airport transfers
- Accommodation at mentioned in standard 3 - 4* hotels, permanent luxury desert camps, & authentic riads.
- Travel by modern a/c vehicles throughout the tours.
- Meals as mentioned in the itinerary (B: Breakfast, L: Lunch and D: Dinner, as well as water with all meals).
- English-speaking local guide throughout the tour.
- All activities described in the tour and entrance fees to all sites mentioned unless listed as optional.
- Bottled water while on drives.
- Escort of lecturer (provided minimum number of travelers is reached).
- Gratuities to guide, drivers, and porters (provided minimum number of travelers is reached).

Trip Grade:

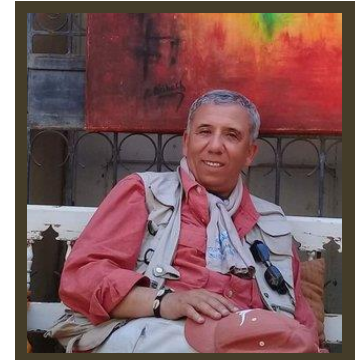
III Challenging: parts of the trip will be physically challenging, involving walking over sand in a hot climate and presence of insects. There will be long drives over rough roads and sand dunes with no defined roads. Lunches may be simple, cold picnic lunches. Expect primitive or no bathroom facilities along the road and remoteness from modern towns or cities.

Lodging Level:

★★ **Basic:** Comfortable yet on the spartan side, usually small but generally with private facilities. Some such lodges and motel-style are in need of repairs, added cleaning, and improvements but they are suitable for one-night stays even if they lack western style amenities. (2 or 3 stars).

★★★ **Superior:** Lodges and hotels with additional amenities, refined service, and comfort level acceptable to western standards. (3 or 4 stars).

About your lecturer, Mohamed Halouani... Mr. Halouani, Tunisian native, He transformed his profound passion for travel and history into a creative and diversified educational career, designing, and carrying out multiple archaeological and cultural trips for various institutions such as The Detroit Institute of Art, the Textile Museum, the American Museum of Natural History, and many more organizations. After having received his degrees in English and Spanish, Mr. Halouani completed his European Master's in linguistics and Hispanic studies at the Sorbonne University in Paris where he now resides. He has extensive knowledge on Islamic architecture and Eastern decorative



Tour does not include:

- International air USA - Marrakech / Dakhla - USA.
- **Moroccan Visa** (currently not required for US Citizens).
- Beverages & alcoholic drinks with or without meals.
- Items of a personal nature (camera fees, laundry, excess luggage, etc.).
- Transfers if not arriving/departing on tour dates.
- Dayroom/overnights necessitated by changes in airline schedules or misconnections.
- Trip surcharge to operate below required minimum participants.
- Gratuity to your tour manager (Optional).
- Travel protection insurance (HIGHLY RECOMMENDED)

