

What will we be eating?

Absolutely delicious organic vegetables, fish, spice and fruit, wherever we are on the trip. Morocco's specialities are couscous and tajine (a tasty stew made of meat, poultry or fish with braised vegetables and olives), and Harira, a thick lamb soup. Breakfast will be continental style, and picnic lunches of cheeses, salads, fruits and always fresh bread are something else entirely. If you have any special dietary requirements please note these on your booking form and we will do our best to accommodate them.

The main drink apart from water is mint tea ("Whisky Berbere"), made with green tea, fresh mint and masses of white sugar. Coffee is most commonly drunk black & strong. Fruit juices, especially the freshly squeezed orange juice, are excellent. It should be noted that alcohol is forbidden to Muslims, so do not expect this to be widely available in the city and not at all in the mountains and the desert, though Riad Omar Nour stocks a small but select wine list for guests.

What will the climate be like?

You can expect temperatures around the late 20s C / 84 F to mid 30s C / 91 F, typically for May/June and in November during the day around 24 C / 75 F with the evenings cooler.

What should I wear?

Both the warm climate and the expected dress code in Morocco make it advisable for both sexes to wear comfortable loose-fitting clothes which do not accentuate the figure and that cover the greater part of the arms and legs. This means no tight fitting jeans or t-shirts and in particular, no shorts (men and women). Sensitivity to this dress code will signal respect for the culture, and also avoid any unwanted attention or alienation from local people. Note how the locals dress – and not how other tourists choose to. Cotton is literally a cool fabric to go for. Generally for men, the advice is long sleeved shirts and trousers rather than shorts. Take warm clothes for the evenings in November in case it's a bit chilly e.g. sweater, warm trousers.

Footwear: Sandals, in preference to closed in shoes, in the city. Pack a pair of good boots for the mountains.

Is there anything in particular I need to remember to pack?

- **Water bottles** If you would like to reduce waste from plastic bottles of mineral water, you could bring a reusable plastic bottle and **iodine tablets** and **neutraliser** (available from good outdoor equipment stores in your home country).
- **Binoculars** if you wish, for when we are up in the mountains
- **Daybag/small rucksack** for your day to day needs. Your main luggage will be carried on top of our vehicle..
- **Wet wipes** to refresh yourself with during the day & for washing in the desert
- **Hand hygiene gel** for washing hands before mealtimes. No water or towel required. Moroccan water reserves are at a historic low and existing water may soon be redirected away from subsistence farmers in the Atlas mountains to support growing urban centres. Hand gel helps this situation.
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- **Spare loo roll** highly recommended. Moroccan toilets do not always feature such luxuries and it may be useful in the desert
- **Travel wash**, tho' small packets of Omo are generally available in village shops
- **Suction bath plug**, as we can't guarantee your washbasins/baths will have one.
- **Supply of plastic bags** if you find that you need to dispose of sanitary waste. Discretion needs to be employed here – i.e. not down the toilet. We will make arrangements for disposal of, as necessary.
- **Matches!** These may aid in the disposal of any sanitary waste or for burning toilet paper if you're caught short in the mountains and desert
- **Notebook** which you can use as a diary if you want to keep a written record of your trip and in particular for noting down cooking tips. Good for revisiting when you're back on home ground.
- **Phone & camera battery rechargers & adaptor.** Please note that electricity may not be available 24 hours a day in the mountains and definitely not at all in the desert

Is there anything else I should take?

Yes. Bring along photos of your own family e.g, your parents, any children you may have, your partner, or your friends, along with photos of your home, if you have them. The family is very important in Moroccan culture, so people are always interested in where and how you live and with whom, in your home country. It helps to break the ice.

Take a spare supply of pencils/coloured pencils/biros. Both schools and parents very often can't afford basic supplies for their children's education, especially in the mountains, and it is likely that you will soon get used to the phrase 'donnez-moi un stylo' – give me a pen. We try not to create a culture of dependency but use our discretion to give out these basic supplies where they are most needed.

School Project, Marrakech

We are supporting a new initiative to develop a school for marginalised special needs children in a needy area of Marrakech. If you would like to bring some school materials to donate, please contact Ingrid who can advise on what would be of most use. We can also arrange a visit to the school if you would like to do this at the end of our trip.

How do I get hold of Moroccan currency & Other Money Matters

The major unit of currency in Morocco is the dirham (dh), **obtainable only inside the country.** You will be able to change your money at our hotel. We will provide you with a quick currency calculator to help you get used to the new money.

Bring cash sterling with you (and a good moneybelt) – there is a fixed exchange rate for changing notes and no commission ought to be charged for this. Travellers cheques are usable in Morocco but can attract a bad exchange rate and bank machines may also charge unfavourably for each transaction. The latter are widely available around the main square.

Spending money. We would advise that you take around £100 with you and this should easily be sufficient. The only essentials will be a tip for the guide and driver (£12 and £6 respectively) bottled water each day (5 dh/30p) if you don't bring iodine & neutraliser with you, £10 for our last night meal together and any soft drinks taken in cafes.

General Guide prices. As a general guide, 100 dh = £6. Coffee is around 10 dh (about 60p) and a meal out will be between 40–100 dh (£2.90 - £6). We will give you a quick currency calculator to help you get used to the new money and advise you on fair prices for what you want to buy.

To Buy or Not To Buy – It's a Bargain

Bargaining for items is a way of life in Morocco and can take time and a bit of getting used to! The following rules will help if you stick to them:

- 1) Do not negotiate unless you are really interested in the item
- 2) Never offer a price – ask what the seller wants, first of all
- 3) Offer a third of this price. The seller will appear to be horrified but will begin to negotiate a price on which you can both eventually settle. Remember the intended outcome of striking a deal is for both seller and customer to be happy
- 4) Move up in small amounts. Keep a notebook and pencil on you to write down your price: this saves confusion with the language and is quite a usual way of doing business
- 5) Ask yourself what it would be worth to you in sterling
- 6) Do not go higher than the price you have decided you will pay
- 7) If you are not happy about the final price asked, walk away

And lastly, keep a sense of humour – it helps!

Attitudes and Behaviour

Moroccans are amongst some of the most hospitable peoples in the world and positive contact with them, rather than avoidance, will greatly enhance your understanding and your stay. You will find that it is not out of the ordinary for friendships to be formed quickly within this culture, both up in the mountains and down in the city, and for you to receive an invitation to dinner, for example. People you only meet in passing are likely to remember you and greet you warmly the next day and it is considered polite to stop and ask how they are doing. Moroccans are generous with their time and will help you where they can.

You will continue to find this generosity & hospitality up in the High Atlas mountains and down in the desert, where many of the non-nomadic Berber people have a completely self-sufficient lifestyle and live quite simply. In certain valleys, mule tracks are the only channel of communication with the outside world and the inhabitants of these remote valleys live by the pattern of the seasons and the round of work in the fields. If you are invited in to share some mint tea, it is customary to remove your shoes before entering the inner rooms. See our advice on photographing below.

Since family is a big focal point for Moroccans, you are more likely to be asked about your family relationships, marriage status and how many children you have, rather than what you do in your spare time.

Is it okay to take photographs?

The golden rule, especially in the Marrakech souks or in the mountain markets and villages, is to **always ask permission** beforehand and respect the answer if it is no. A handy tip is that the answer is more likely to be yes if you take the time to get to know the person first, or, for example, if you are in a souk, buy from the seller. The same applies when we are in the desert. A fair exchange generally goes a long way to creating positive impressions & relationships. You can also offer to send a copy of the photograph to the person to say thankyou – do your best to keep this promise if you make it.

On the main square in Marrakech, it is more appropriate to tip for photographing animals or people (a tariff of around 10 dirhams (60p) is suitable; we ask you not to give more than this in order not to contribute to a culture of dependency on the foreign visitor and definitely not to give money to children to obtain a photograph.

Film is readily available in Marrakech if you are not digital. It is best to stock up before we leave for the mountains, though at larger villages or in the towns that we pass through, you will be able to replenish supplies. Take spare batteries for your camera, but please remember to take them home with you. Harmful chemicals can leak from discarded batteries and cause damage to the environment. Morocco's waste management system is not prepared to deal with this kind of waste. You can print from digital quite easily in Marrakech at 2 / 3dh a print (about 19p).

A word here even to the wise: don't give in to the modern mania to record and move on, before you have the time to understand. Photographs can give the illusion that one has the time to study these things later at greater depth. Even if you have the time for only the slightest sketch of a building or a landscape, it will imprint the images more vividly than a whole reel of film or digital card.

Language

With its mixed Berber and Arab population, Morocco has, however, successfully maintained ethnic and cultural stability and equality between the Berber and Arabic languages. The official and predominate language in cities is Moroccan Arabic, which has its roots in, but is distinct from, classical Arabic. A large minority, particularly in rural & mountain regions, speak Berber, which has 3 distinct dialects. Of these, Tachelhait is the most common and will be the most useful to you, with Tarifilt in the Rif mountains, Tamazight in the Middle Atlas and Tuareg in the Sahara. Although there is no guarantee that Berbers on one side of a mountain will be able to understand those on the other, a concerted effort is now being made, backed by King Mohamed VI, to encourage the wider use of a standard Berber dialect and to nurture respect for the rich Berber culture.

Many Arabs and Berbers also speak Spanish and French, the latter being the language in which much business and politics is carried out, and is the main vehicle for tourists. We'll provide you with a basic language reference in Arabic and, more importantly because of where we are going to be, some words in Berber to carry in your pocket or bag. Practising a few new words each day will make a difference to your confidence, and the Berber people you meet will really appreciate it. You will, as a matter of course, become multi lingual by the time you return home!

Religion

Much of what will thrill you on your journey through Morocco's culture is inspired by the

Moroccans' deep and abiding faith in Islam, the unifying force in the daily life of every Moroccan. It has been that way, on and off, since AD610. Islam is built on 5 pillars: *shahada*, the affirmation of faith in God and God's word entrusted to the Prophet Mohammed; *salat*, or prayer, ideally performed five times daily; *zakat*, or charity, a moral obligation to give to those in need; *sawm*, the fasting practiced during the month of Ramadan; and *haj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca and the culmination of lifelong faith for Muslims.

On our travels, you will also see small square white domed buildings occasionally dotted around the landscape. These are the tombs of *marabouts* or saints, devout Muslims whose very presence, dead or alive, is considered to confer *baraka*, or grace on the suppliant. Though there are many who claim that the right saint can fix anything from a broken heart to a broken leg, the practice is seen as more in line with ancient Berber beliefs and Sufi mysticism than orthodox Islam. Moroccans do not generally see a conflict between *baraka* and *belief*, and visits to *marabouts* tombs still seem to fairly high on the list of things to do.

Politics & Population

Modern and moderate Morocco is home to both rich & poor, old and new. The current King, Mohammed VI, who succeeded his father, Hassan II, in 1999, faces and has embraced, a nation which is also home to the fundamental problems of underdevelopment, illiteracy, poverty and social inequality. Out of Morocco's population of 33 million, one third is under 15, with 19% nationwide unemployment rates for Moroccans under the age of 25. Social security is provided by the family, not that state, and workers' compensation is nonexistent. Progress, however, is being made, with the new parliament elected in 2002 implementing some promising reforms, including the first ever municipal elections and the introduction of Berber languages in some state schools. And as of 2004, Morocco's Mudawanna legal code guarantees women crucial rights to custody, divorce, property ownership and child support, among other protections. An important new middle class is also emerging in modern Morocco.

Health & Safety

Stomach upsets can sometimes occur due to a change in diet, so pack some immodium tablets. We carry a full first aid kit at all times.

If you need to carry medicine, please make sure you get a doctor's note in case you are stopped by customs or lose your medicine and need to replace it.

It is also advisable to **keep your passport with you at all times**. You will be required to let Real World Journeys have a photocopy of your passport page with picture & number so that in the event of loss, we will have a record of your details. It is also a good idea to **leave a photocopy of your passport and contact details** with a reliable friend or relative in your home country. Please **keep all forms** such as landing cards and currency documents together with any bank receipts for foreign exchange transactions. Lastly, **bring another means of identification** (with photograph).

We take essential advice from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in order to keep you up to date with any other details required to ensure a safe trip. Country specific information and travelling tips can be found on their website at www.fco.gov.uk/travel.

