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CST Permit #2057026-40

Cultural Crossroads of Morocco: Islamic and Jewish Heritage
April 28-May 12 and October 20-November 3, 2011 - 15 Days/14 Nights

Day 1: Arrive Casablanca. You will be met at the airport and transferred to Hotel Le Littoral. (D)
Rest of day free to rest. Evening dinner and orientation with your guide.

Day 2: Casablanca / Hotel Le Littoral (B, D)

Drive along the seaside road to admire the magnificent architecture and Moroccan handicrafts of the monumental Hassan II Mosque, the second largest mosque in the world, and the only one in Morocco that non-Muslims are permitted to enter (scheduled visit inside at 9:00 am).

Visit the Musée du Judaïsme Marocain (Jewish Museum) and meet with Mr. Simon Levi, director of Foundation of Judeo-Moroccan Cultural Heritage. Members of the Jewish community of Casablanca have been invited to join us. There will be a tour of the museum, a one hour presentation on the Jewish history of Morocco and time for social interaction with local Moroccan Jews. Afterwards we drive into the city center for a panoramic tour.

Lunch (pay on your own) and afternoon drive to Rabat (2 hrs), the capital of Morocco.

Day 3: Rabat / IBIS M Hotel (B, D)

Morning- visit the Center for Cross-Cultural Learning. Possibility to meet the director if she is available. Lunch on your own. We suggest a seafood meal on the patio of the lovely La Caravelle Cafe overlooking the sea.

Afternoon. we take a stroll around the Oudayas (Oudaïas) Kasbah, overlooking the mouth of the Bou Regreg River and the Atlantic Ocean. The main entry is the Almohad Gate of Bab Oudaia, built in 1195. Inside are winding narrow streets of faded colors and rich textures. Most of the houses here were built by Muslim refugees from Spain. There are great views over the estuary and across to Salé from the viewing platform. Next to the viewing platform is one of the oldest mosques in Rabat, built in the 12th century and restored in the 18th century. Dinner at restaurant La Péniche.

Day 4: Rabat / IBIS M Hotel (B, L)

Full day to explore the city. Visit to the mausoleum of the late King Mohammed V, a jewel of Hispano-Moorish architecture, then Hassan II and the Hassan Tower. A visit to Salé -the sister city across the river which used to be a stronghold for sea pirates and is now famous for the pottery center in the village Oulja. The pottery center is very modern and commercialized although the quality is quite good; the Old Medina--here you will see many souks (traditional street markets).

Lunch at Restaurant el-Bahia, built in a wall of the Medina, Ave Hassan II; internet cafe across the street.

In the afternoon, visit the Necropolis of Chellah, built by the Merenids in the 13th century. The site is surrounded by walls and exudes a serene beauty. You walk down a path past olive, fig, orange and banana trees, all teeming with birds perched atop. Paths lead through the ruins of a triple arched entry and past the ruins of Jupiter Temple. There are a series of baths and the Pool of Nymphéé, a system of water distribution and beyond the baths and the Islamic complex topped by dozens of storks' nests.

Day 5: Moulay Idriss-Meknes-Fes / Hotel Dar Fes Medina (B,D)

Enroute to Fes, drive to Moulay Idriss, the holy city; visit to the famous Roman ruins of Volubilis, dating from the second and third century.

Afterwards drive to Meknes, the Ismalian capital famous for its 40 km long walls. The Moroccan Versailles was founded at the end of the 17th Century by Moulay Ismail a contemporary of Louis XIV. Our sightseeing will feature the stables, the Bab Mansour, Grenier, the Jewish Quarter and the Moulay Ismail Tomb.

Continue drive to Fes, the spiritual capital of Morocco. A descendant of Hasan, the grandson of the Prophet, established his own rule among the Berbers with his capital in Fez, which has remained ever since the heart of North African Islam.

Afternoon, we visit Nouvelle Ville, the Modern City, along with the more recent part of the Medina and the old Jewish section.

Day 6: Fes / Hotel Dar Fes Medina (B,L)

The whole day will be devoted to an in depth visit of Fes, which dates back to the 9th century. We visit the Old Medina, Fes el Bali, and its small winding and paved alleys. We see the old Koranic Bou Inania Madrassa, the Quaraouiyine Mosque (from the outside only), the Shrine of Moulay Idriss II, founder of the city, Nejjarine (wood products) and Seffarine (copper products) squares and the huge doors of the Royal Palace. Special Moroccan lunch at Restaurant la Medina, in the medina. Dinner on your own.

Day 7: Fes / Hotel Dar Fes Medina (B, L)

Meet the Berbers--the indigenous people. The Berbers were once described as colorful people who like spangles and bright colors and the women had different tribal tattoo markings on their faces. It is rare to see this any more today. Sometimes the elderly women still have the tattoos. We will first drive to the small village of Bhalil, where nomadic Berbers lived in caves while searching for herbs to feed their livestock. The village was founded in the 14th century by two or three Berber families who decided to settle in the caves permanently. We will meet one family and be invited to tea inside their cave.

Lunch at El Blida Restaurant.

Next we'll visit the picturesque ancient Jewish city Sefrou on the return. Sefrou once contained Morocco's largest Jewish community. This city predates Fes by a thousand years. It has played a large role in antiquity as the last stop of sub-Saharan caravans transporting goods for the European markets. We will then visit the shrine of Sidi Lahcen Al Yussi, a well venerated Sufi master considered to be the custodian of this ancient outpost. The majority of Jews only started leaving for Israel in the 1960s following the Six Day War. The Sefrou medina is compact and easy to maneuver around (compared to Fes). We'll visit the mellah (Jewish quarters) inside the medina. Dinner on your own.

Day 8: Fes - Midelt - Erfoud (8 hrs, including a stop for lunch and sightseeing) / Kasbah Xaluca Maadid (B, L, D)

Start early morning with a full day drive across the cedar forests and picturesque scenery of the Middle Atlas Mountains to Erfoud. Stop at Midelt for lunch at Ksar Tinmay Rwstaurant, then drive through the Ziz Gorge and Er Rachidia to reach Erfoud. Situated amongst the impressive sand dunes of the Sahara Desert, it is one of the largest oases in Morocco. Overnight at Kasbah Xaluca Maadid.

Day 9: Erfoud– Tineghir – Boulmane (6 hrs including a stop for lunch and sightseeing) / Hotel La Perle du Dadès (B, L, D)

After breakfast, we depart for Tineghir through the beautiful Valley of 1000 Kasbahs. Tineghir, a former military outpost built on terraces above a magnificent palm grove, is the gateway to the awesome Todra Gorge.

Enjoy lunch in Tineghir at Restaurant Les Roches. A little further on, we pass a holy spring believed to cure sterility in women and continue into the gorge to Boumalne du Dades, a large town at the foot of the gorge, followed by a series of Kasbahs. Dinner and overnight at Hotel La Perle du Dadès.

Day 10: Boulmane – Ouarzazate – Marrakech (6 hrs, including a stop for lunch and sightseeing) / Riad Aladdin (B, L, D)

After breakfast, we depart to El Kellaa des Mgouna and Skoura. Then a mini tour of Ouarzazate, including the 17th century Kasbah Taouririt, which served as the home of the Pasha Glaoui.

Next, we drive to the ancient Kasbah complex of Ait Ben Haddou for lunch, an impressive 11th century structure that has been declared an historical treasure by UNESCO. A photographer's wonderland, Ait Ben Haddou remains home to five families. Next, we set out through a mountainous and semi-desert landscape and continue over the High Atlas Mountains to Tizi N'Tichka Pass (7,400 feet).

We proceed across the fertile countryside of the Haouz Plain to the pink city of Marrakech, about a 4 hour drive. We arrive at the hotel Riad Aladdin approximately 7 pm. Dinner at the hotel.

Day 11: Marrakech / Riad Aladdin (B, D)

The south is quite different in feel and architecture than the north. Enjoy a full day sightseeing--the sequence of activities is subject to change. In the morning, we visit the synagogues (confirmation of schedule and meeting with Rabbi pending) in the Jewish quarter, or mellah. Afterwards we visit these historical monuments: the Koutoubia Mosque, the Saadian Tombs and the Bahia Palace. In the late afternoon, we discover the labyrinth of souks with their numerous tiny shops bustling with activity and Djemaa el Fna Square with its open-air entertainment.

The Negidim Synagogue was built at the end of the 19th century: a window in the ceiling is the only source of light for the synagogue's three small rooms. The entrance is through an unmarked door in a dim alleyway that leads through a portico to a rectangular room reserved for women. The ark is against the wall facing in the direction of Jerusalem. The lectern is located in the center of the western wall. Red clay benches covered with colored fabric and small cushions line the sides. In the center of the synagogue between the lectern and the ark is a row of wooden chairs.

The other synagogue of the mellah is the Salat el Alzama, built at the turn of the century. Strikingly, it is one of a series of buildings constructed around a large, well-tended central courtyard. The eastern side has only recently been embellished by a gallery (ezrat nashim) for women, an innovation in Morocco, where women traditionally remained at the entrance to the synagogue or in a separate room. The original wooden movable lectern has been replaced by one of marble along the eastern wall. Sketches made in the 1950s by the architect Ya'acov Pinkerfeld made it clear that the women's gallery did not exist at that time and that four pillars divided the interior into two naves. The walls are painted in blue and white. The large, rectangular synagogue has a much less intimate feeling than the Negidim synagogue. On the floor above the Alzama synagogue is a Talmud Torah School, a soup kitchen and the community center. There is a local legend that the synagogue was built during the Second Temple period by Jews who had never lived in Eretz-Israel and had not witnessed the destruction of the Temple. Hence they were not bound by the same rituals and prohibitions as other Jews and ate meat during the period of mourning from the 17th of Tammuz to the 9th of Av (the day on which both the first and second Temples were said to have been destroyed).

In the evening, we enjoy Moroccan dinner with folk show and Fantasia (traditional Moroccan horse exhibition/race) called AL KASBAH. Dinner is served in traditional style berber rooms built around a square where the show takes place. The venue is 9 kms out of Marrakech – 20 min drive, surrounded by palm groves, alongside the Atlas snow-capped mountains. The menu includes Harira soup, the méchoui, tender whole lamb slowly roasted on wood fire, couscous with seven vegetables and fresh seasonal fruits, mint tea, 1/2 litre water and 1/2 litre wine.

Day 12: Marrakesh: Day excursion to The Ourika Valley 120kms (75 miles) return trip (B,L)

The green valley of the Ourika River lies just 30 kms (19 miles) from Marrakesh. From its small beginnings in Berber country, it streams down the slopes of the Atlas Mountains, between the Tlemcen peak and the Timeskar plateau. The green landscape of this valley and the lazy meandering torrent of the river, combined with the small red adobe Berber villages hanging on the slopes, will enchant you. We can visit a local country market, held every Monday and Friday, where butchers and barbers, vegetables, cereals and olive oil sellers, blacksmiths and medicine-men gather under canvas & reed shelters, along with a number of small restaurants scattered around in the open air. Then, as we round the bend in the road, the potters village appears, where you can view colorful plates, salad-bowls, flower vases and lamps in both traditional and modern styles; also for sale are collections of precious minerals : quartz, amethyst, and many other rocks that are found in this area. This excursion includes a savory lunch at Restaurant Chez Larbi.

Day 13: Drive to Essaouira (approx 3 hrs) / Riad Al Madina (B)

Essaouira is a coastal town and quite different again. Here we enjoy a leisurely pace, browsing traditional handicrafts and observing daily life. Accommodation is the Hotel Riad Al Madina, in the medina. Lunch and dinner on your own. After a brief introductory walking tour you are independent to explore this charming and quaint little city.

Day 14: Essaouira – Casablanca (B,D)

Morning independent. Lunch on own. Return drive to Casablanca (6 hrs). Farewell dinner at Restaurant Basmane & overnight.

Day 15: Transfer to airport for flight home. (B)

Price \$2630 per person based on min 8 people. Single Room Supplement: \$510

Prices based on current currency exchange. Hotels based on availability. The riads have a small number of rooms so book early.

Includes: Accommodations, daily breakfast, seven lunches, four dinners, escort throughout trip, transport by air-conditioned mini bus, entrance fees and all activities, all taxes and surcharges. Fantasia Show in Marrakech with dinner ½ litre wine, ½ litre water. Hotels are 3-4 stars with private bath, centrally located and have a local Moroccan atmosphere in architecture and decor. Hotels based on availability: 2 N Casablanca/ Idou Anfa, 3 N Rabat/Hotel IBIS M, 3 N Fes/ Riad Mabrouka, 3 N Marrakech/Riad Alida, 1 N Erfoud/Kasbah Xaluca, 1 N Boulmane/Ksar Kaissar, 1 N Essaouira at Riad Al Madina.

Does Not Include: International flight, Airport taxes, Travel insurance, Tips to guides and drivers. Any expenses of a personal nature such as drinks at meals, laundry, phone calls.

About Center for Cross-Cultural Learning (CCCL)-organizes a variety of cultural and educational activities which include language courses, seminars and lecture series on Moroccan society and Arab and Islamic cultures, artistic shows and performances and educational excursions in different parts of Morocco. The aim of these activities is to provide participants with the opportunity to learn from the richness of cultural diversity in Morocco and to develop approaches to the understanding and the appreciation of cultural differences. CCCL is a private institution run by Moroccan academics with years of experience in cross-cultural education. <http://www.cccl-ma.com/CCCL/cccl.asp>

About Jews of Morocco: Morocco, on Africa's northwestern shoulder, was long held up as an example of Jewish-Muslim co-existence, a sign of hope that peace was possible between Israelis and Palestinians. Morocco's ancient Jewish community is the largest in the Arab world. The first Jews settled in Morocco 2000 years ago, about six centuries before the Arabs brought Islam to North Africa. While there have been dark chapters - such as the expulsion of Jews from some Moroccan cities in the 18th century and anti-semitic riots in 1948 - the lot of Jews in Morocco was better overall than that of Europe. During the inquisition in Spain, Spanish Jews found refuge in Morocco. During World War II, Morocco's sultan told the Nazis, "There are no Jews, only Moroccans here." Morocco's government supported the Arab-Israeli peace process from its earliest stages, welcoming Israeli leaders for talks when other Arab nations shunned them. Today, one of King Mohammed VI's most influential advisors, Andre Azoulay, is Jewish – this would be unthinkable elsewhere in the Islamic world. After decades of emigration, there are only 3,000-5,000 Jews living in Morocco, down from 280,000 in 1948. With the dwindling of the Jewish community, Muslims have less and less contact with Jews, so there are fewer chances to break down stereotypes. Before the mass departures, "every Moroccan guy had a Jewish buddy," says Moroccan restaurant owner Joe Kadoch. If the Jewish community disappears, a history of thousands of years would crumble. In Casablanca, a city of more than 3 million people, kosher butcher shops sit on streets lined with Arab groceries. There are more than 30 synagogues where the call to prayer echoes from the minarets of several hundred mosques. Many Moroccans are proud to have a Jewish community. Serge Berdugo, president of the Jewish Community Council, believes Muslim extremists aren't targeting Jews specifically but rather Morocco's open and tolerant society.

About Foundation of Judeo-Moroccan Cultural Heritage: Simon Levy started the foundation as well as the Jewish Museum, to preserve the country's Jewish heritage. Levy's foundation restores crumbling, abandoned synagogues. At those that cannot be saved, treasures such as hammered-silver chandeliers and ornate pulpits go into the Jewish Museum to record Jewish life and history of Morocco. He believes the Jews must stay in Morocco to provide a lesson in tolerance that will fight the spread of Islamic extremism.