

# Geminids Meteor Shower

15 Days | Starts/Ends: Marrakech



*Become starstruck! Camel trek into the Sahara for an unforgettable night of stargazing at the peak of the spectacular Geminids Meteor Shower. In fifteen action packed days, you'll also get to Wander through the labyrinthine souks of Fes and Marrakech, explore legendary Casablanca, relax by the Atlantic coast in Essaouira and chart Roman ruins at Volubilis.*

## HIGHLIGHTS AND INCLUSIONS

### Trip Highlights

- Experience the amazing Geminids Meteor Shower in the heart of the Sahara Desert
- Marrakech – UNESCO-listed medina, mosques, palaces and souks (explored independently)
- Casablanca and its incredible Hassan II mosque
- Rabat - Morocco's lively capital
- Meknes - Amazing Imperial city
- Rif Mountains
- Chefchaouen – overlooked by the Goat Horns mountains
- Volubilis – UNESCO-listed Roman ruins
- Fes – the world's oldest medieval city
- Erg Chebbi/Merzouga sand dunes - beginning of the Sahara

- Todra Gorge – Morocco's Grand Canyon
- Essaouira – UNESCO-listed medina, great beaches and surf
- Valley and waterfalls in the Atlas Mountains

### What's Included

- 14 breakfasts, 2 lunches, 5 dinners including Berber camp dinner
- 13 nights 3 star hotel, 1 night camping - Berber camp in the Sahara
- Guided sighting in Chefchaouen, Volubilis, Fes and Ait Benhaddou
- Specialist local guides at some sites
- Arrival transfer from Marrakech airport - on day 1
- Camel trek into the Sahara
- Escorted by an English speaking tour leader
- Transportation and transfers in private 4x4 or mini van/touring vehicle, public bus Essaouira - Marrakech day 13
- All entrance fees to included sights
- All road taxes and tolls

### What's Not Included

- Tipping Kitty: USD\$65pp, paid in USD or local currency
- Gratuity for your tour guide. Budget approx USD\$2 - 3 per person per day. Tipping your tour guide is an entirely personal gesture
- International flights and visa

## DETAILED ITINERARY

### Day 1 : Marrakech

6th December 2019. Welcome to Morocco! You'll be met at Marrakech Airport and transferred to your hotel. Be sure to arrive in time for our welcome meeting and dinner at 18:00. **Overnight - Marrakech (D)**

### Day 2 : Casablanca

Marrakech - Casablanca. En-route this morning we travel up to Casablanca. Made famous by Humphrey Bogart in the film "Casablanca". We then have the option of visiting the stunning Hassan II mosque, which has the tallest minaret and the third largest mosque in the world, it can hold 25,000 worshippers at any one time.

**Overnight - Casablanca (B)**

### Day 3 : Rabat & Meknes

Casablanca - Rabat - Meknes. This morning we head straight to Rabat, Morocco's capital city. We will spend the morning visiting Oudaia Kasbah, Hassan tower, the Royal Palace and Chellah. After lunch we will move on to the third of our Imperial cities Meknes to enjoy some free time. **Overnight - Meknes (B)**

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## Day 4 : Chefchaouen



Meknes - Chefchaouen. Today we'll embark on a tour of the Roman ruins at Volubilis, the largest ancient site of Morocco. UNESCO-listed, the site dates back to AD40 and once ruled the entire Roman province of Mauritania. We'll then head on to Chefchaouen for a guided tour this afternoon. High up in the Rif mountains, Chefchaouen boasts a beautiful blue door and white walled medina that was originally a Berber post. The main square is the heart of Chefchaouen, with the Kasbah (built back in the 18th century), central mosque and cafes with authentic menus. The busy market is a mix of traditional Moroccan and tourist fare. **Overnight - Chefchaouen (B)**

## Days 5-6 : Fes



Chefchaouen - Fes. Enjoy some free time in Chefchaouen this morning - relax at the hotel or spend your time exploring this beautiful city. We travel on to Fes in the afternoon. Fes is the oldest and largest medieval city in the world, and its medina is a heady mix of aromas, sounds and sights. To navigate, follow one of the five, themed tourist circuits. There are plenty of mosques and palaces to visit, but be aware that only Muslims can enter Mosques in Morocco.

On day 6 we embark on a fully guided tour of the city of Fes. Explore the tanneries, souks, potteries, and the Medina, and learn

the fascinating history of the city. We'll later return to the hotel to get ready for an optional night of Moroccan entertainment and food at a restaurant in town. **Overnight - Fes (B,2)**

## Day 7 : Midelt

Fes - Midelt. This morning we journey over the Moyen Atlas to stop at Midelt. This is a beautiful alpine area. Surrounded by huge pine trees and a tranquil mountain setting, this is a great spot to cool down and relax after the hustle and bustle of Fes. We will enjoy a small hike in the afternoon. We spend the night in this mountain location. **Overnight - Midelt (B, L, D)**

## Day 8 : Geminids Meteor Shower



Midelt - Erg Chebbi. Today we embark on a scenic drive followed by an optional tasty Moroccan lunch (not included) and an afternoon relaxing and swimming. Then we head out to towards the Erg Chebbi dunes located near the remote frontier town of Merzouga. The dunes are renowned for their incredible height and size. In parts the vast sand pile reaches skyward to heights of 150 metres! Transferring to our camels we trek into the Sahara for a night at our Berber Camp. Tonight, we enjoy a local meal, music and an amazing night out under the Saharan stars.

The stars in the Sahara are fantastic at the best of times - however tonight they should be extraordinary as we hope to witness the peak of the Geminids Meteor Shower. This annual event has been observed for over 500 years and gets its names from the constellation Gemini, because it is said to emanate from here. The shower is one of the world's brightest, has been known to produce fire balls and can create 100-150 meteors an hour at its peak.

Please note: Although blankets are provided at the campsite you will need to bring your own sleeping bag for extra warmth. **Overnight - Merzouga (B, D)**

## Day 9 : Todra Gorge

Erg Chebbi - Todra Gorge. Leaving the desert, we move on to Todra Gorge. This 1000ft gorge is hemmed in on all sides by vertical limestone cliffs and is also called Morocco's Grand Canyon. We will have an early lunch at the village co-operative where you can see and buy authentic, Berber, handmade rugs, kilims and carpets. The afternoon can be spent exploring the Gorge, walking through the palmerie or if you're feeling adventurous, there is the option to rock climb (this activity is dependent upon weather conditions, book/pay locally). **Overnight - Todra Gorge (B, L, D)**

## Day 10 : Ait Benhaddou



Todra - Ouarzazate - Ait Benhaddou. We bid fond farewell to Todra this morning and travel on to Ait Benhaddou via Ouarzazate, where we stop for lunch and an optional tour of the film studios, famous for films such as Gladiators, The Last Temptation of Christ and the Living daylights (book/pay locally). On a hill along the Ouarzazate River we find Ait Benhaddou, a UNESCO World Heritage site, that boasts great examples of kasbahs, some of which remain inhabited. This afternoon we have a guided tour of the famous kasbah and village where Lawrence of Arabia and Gladiator were filmed. **Overnight - Ait Benhaddou (B, D)**

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## Days 11-12 : Essaouira



Ait Benhaddou - Essaouira. Today's drive offers panoramic views as we traverse the high Atlas Mountains on our way to Essaouira. A colourful old city and fishing village is located within 15th century Portuguese fortifications. Just outside the town great beaches and an Atlantic surf beckon.

Relax on the beach or alternatively explore the UNESCO-listed medina with its various souks and woodcarving workshops. Any city gate leads to the Medina, so you're unlikely to get lost. The beach is in front of the Medina and there are plenty of cafes with terraces, both ideal for relaxing for a few hours. Blue doors and window frames abound as do the artists shops – buy a carpet or Thuya wood carving or sit on the beach sipping a mint tea as the sun sets, an antidote to the bustle of the Imperial cities. During our time here there's the option to take part in horse trekking or quad biking (book/pay locally). **Overnight - Essaouira (B:2)**

## Days 13-14 : Djemaa el Fna



Essaouira - Marrakech. We take a supratours public bus from Essaouira back to Marrakech this morning, to explore the last of Morocco's four Imperial cities we visit on this tour. Marrakech set against the snow-capped Atlas Mountains. Its great pride and landmark is the Koutoubia Tower, sister to the Tower of Hassan in Rabat and the Giralda Tower in

Seville. It is said that after the third of these was completed, the sultan had the eyes of his architect put out, lest he should build another more beautiful tower elsewhere. No visit to the city is complete without a visit to the city's UNESCO-listed medina & Djemaa-el-Fna, an extraordinary gathering and market place. **Overnight - Marrakech (B:2)**

## Day 15 : Marrakech

20th December 2019. Marrakech - breakfast. Spend the morning relaxing or picking up a few last minute souvenirs. Our tour concludes upon hotel check out at 12 noon.(B)

### HOTELS

The hotels listed below are ones which we frequently use on this tour. We reserve the right to substitute these hotels to ones of a similar standard when necessary.

#### Moroccan House Hotel

In the centre of Casablanca, Moroccan house is a charming hotel. Designed similar to a traditional Riad, this quirky residence offers delicious Moroccan food as well as getting the chance to prepare it yourself. Guest rooms include comfortable beds, complete with frilly lace canopies and all the modern conveniences you could ask for. Located a few steps away from the port and a short drive to the Hassan II mosque.



#### Hotel Akouas

The Akouas is a comfortable and modern hotel, with traditional Moroccan architecture and comfortable rooms.



#### Hotel Madrid

Hotel Madrid offers a fantastic location in the centre of Chefchaouen, just 300 metres from the blue streets of the old town and a short stroll from the bustling Place Outa el Hammam and Kasbah. Its standout feature is its traditional décor, with the hotel's Moroccan lounges and guestrooms all painted in bright colours and patterns, giving the property a very authentic feel. Some of the rooms also feature four-poster beds and the patio is a great spot to unwind after a day of sightseeing.



#### Hotel Sofia

#### Kasbah Asmaa

The Kasbah Asmaa Midelt is a traditional style hotel with spacious and comfortable rooms. The hotel is surrounded by gardens and mountains.

#### Desert Camp

Set amongst the towering dunes of Erg Chebbi, the Berber camp is designed with a traditional Moroccan theme. The permanent tents include multiple beds and electricity (after night fall) Camping out in the desert is a wonderful experience, due to the lack of light pollution, the stars come out in abundance and really are a sight to behold.



#### Hotel Amazir

#### La Rose Du Sable

#### Hotel Miramar

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Enjoying an enviable location just a 15-minute walk from the beach and some of the city's key sights, Hotel Miramar combines 4-star comfort with local convenience. Each of the 45 guest rooms' benefit from a separate sitting area, room service and satellite television, there's also free WiFi throughout the property. After a day of sightseeing guests can unwind in the on-site spa, which offers a variety of treatments, or those that prefer to relax during the day can opt to head to the hotel's private sand beach.



## El Andalous Hotel & Spa

Just 10 minutes from the airport, the El Andalous Hotel and Spa offers a welcome respite from the hubub of the city. Evoking the golden age of Arab-Andalusian culture; exotic and romantically rich. Guest rooms are well furnished with excellent en suite facilities as well as private balconies. The hotel pool is great place to relax by and enjoy a tasty beverage or two. The medina is just a 20 minute walk from here or a cab can get you there in a few minutes!



## Our Partners in Morocco

**This tour is operated in conjunction with our trusted partner and you will join travellers who booked through different operators, not solely On The Go.**

The sightseeing group may vary in size from 2 – 16 persons.

## Pre and Post Tour Accommodation

Pre and post tour accommodation in Marrakech can be booked upon request. Please contact us for rates. If you are arriving

early and book pre tour accommodation with us then you will still qualify for our complimentary airport arrival transfer.

## Arrival Transfers

We provide a complimentary airport arrival transfer on day 1 of your tour from Marrakech Airport or if you arrive early and have booked pre tour accommodation with us. Please proceed to the arrivals hall and look for our representative holding an On The Go Tours sign. If you are arriving earlier and have booked your accommodation independently, you will need to make your own way to our start hotel, which will be centrally located. The hotel name and address can be found on your tour voucher.

If, for any reason you have trouble locating our representative (after waiting 20 minutes in the arrival hall) or your flight to Morocco is delayed, please call or send a text message to the emergency contact number as stated on your tour voucher.

Departure transfers are not included. A taxi to the airport will cost approx MAD100 and can be booked locally.

## Optional Activities

During the free time offered on this tour you are welcome head out and independently explore, relax or take part in one or more optional activities. The optional activities listed at the end of this Go Guide, may be available on your tour, though not guaranteed. Prices may vary and bookings can be made locally.

The half day hot air ballooning excursion from Marrakech includes: Land rover transportation, a traditional breakfast, a 1 hour hot air balloon flight in front of the High Atlas Mountains, a visit to a local Berber house and a camel ride in the palmerie of Marrakech.

Rock climbing at Todra Gorge is not offered if it is raining or very windy. Please also note that rock climbing is not suitable for travellers under the age of 16.

## KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

### Essential Packing

- A sleeping bag for the Sahara Desert camp if travelling between Oct - Apr. From May - Sep a cotton sleep sheet

will be adequate. If booking our 'Sahara Hotel Upgrade' (available on our Totally Morocco, Road to Casablanca, Best of Morocco & Casablanca to Essaouira tours) you will not need to bring either of these.

- Lightweight cotton garments in summer, warm clothing for winter (temperatures can get quite low at night)
- Comfortable walking shoes or hiking shoes
- Electrical adapter. Standard voltage is 220V, 50Hz AC. Sockets require a Continental or European style plug (two round pins)
- DEET based mosquito repellent and antihistamine cream
- Personal first aid kit including Dioralyte
- 2 spare passport photos & a photocopy of your passport
- A small daypack for your day-to-day needs
- Sunglasses, hat, sunscreen, swim costume, torch, money belt
- Either a rucksack or suitcase is suitable
- A towel for swimming

## Group tour Tip Kitty & Entrance Fees

A tipping kitty (the amount is noted under 'what is not included' on page one of this document), will be collected by your guide at the welcome meeting on day 1. This is payable in Moroccan Dirhams. USD, Euro or GBP can also be accepted, at the current exchange rate. The tipping kitty is used for the following; hotel porters, hotel waiters, local guides for city tours, airport transfer drivers, Berber camel herders and local restaurant tips.

The tipping kitty does not include a tip for your tour leader or driver and as a guideline we recommend you budget approx USD\$2-3 per day for the tour guide and USD\$1-2 for the driver for a job well done (payable in local currency). Naturally the amount is up to you though, this is simply a suggestion.

Entrance fees are not included on our Signature tours. On all other group tours they are included. If Entrance fees are payable locally on your tour, the amount will be noted under 'what is not included' and this amount will also be collected by your guide at the welcome meeting on day 1. This is payable in

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Moroccan Dirhams. Again USD, Euro or GBP are accepted at the current exchange rate.

## Morocco Country Guide

### Morocco Visas

Please be advised that visa requirements are subject to change and that visa procurement is the responsibility of the traveller and not On The Go Tours. Please also ensure that your passport is valid for at least 6 months from your planned date of departure from Morocco. UK, EU, Australian, New Zealand, Canadian and USA nationals do not require a visa at present to enter Morocco. Please check if you are from another country.

RSA (South African) passport holders need to obtain visas in advance of arrival. Please check your personal visa requirements with the embassy.

### Tipping in Morocco

In Morocco it is customary to tip and on our group tours a tipping kitty (the amount is noted under 'what is not included' on page one of this document) will be collected by your guide at the welcome meeting on the day you arrive. This is payable in Moroccan Dirhams. USD, Euro or GBP can also be accepted, at the current exchange rate. The tipping kitty is used for the following; hotel porters, hotel waiters, local guides for city tours, airport transfer drivers, Berber camel herders and local restaurant tips.

The tipping kitty does not include a tip for your Moroccan tour leader or driver and as a guideline we recommend you budget approx Euro 2-3 per day for your tour guide and Euro 1-2 for the driver for a job well done (payable in Moroccan Dirhams. Naturally the amount is up to you though, this is simply a suggestion.

### Climate

Morocco is a great year round destination, blessed with lots of sunshine and a temperate climate. It can become incredibly hot in the summer months with temperatures 38°C or higher, particularly in July and August so use plenty of sun screen, cover up and drink plenty of water. The nights can be cooler especially in the mountains or in the desert and it is windy along the coast throughout the year.

During the winter months (November to February), temperatures usually remain pleasant in the cities, averaging around 20°C, but it is very cold at nights, in the desert and in the Atlas Mountains. There is often snow in the Atlas Mountains from November through until March and temperatures can drop to below freezing - so take plenty of warm clothes including jacket, long-sleeved tops, jumper, gloves and trousers.

### Sleeping bag & torch

A lightweight sleeping bag is required for the Sahara Desert camp or a cotton sleep sheet will be adequate if travelling from May to September. You will also need to bring a torch for your night in the Sahara.

Please note that the sleeping bag/sleep sheet and torch are only required if you are camping and will not be needed if you have booked our Sahara Hotel Upgrade.

### Time & Voltage

Morocco is on Greenwich Mean Time (GMT). Daylight Savings is currently being observed; however, it changes frequently and is not observed during the holy month of Ramadan. Standard voltage is 220 volts. Primary sockets require the European, 2 pronged variety. We recommend that you pack a universal travel adaptor. You will need a voltage converter, and plug adaptor in order to use U.S. appliances.

### Currency & Holiday Money

The currency of Morocco is the Moroccan Dirham.

Pound Sterling, US Dollars and Euro can be exchanged in Morocco at various bureau de changes in major cities and towns (please note Australian and New Zealand Dollars as well as South African Rand are often tricky to exchange and often not accepted so we advise against bringing them for exchange), and most banks have ATMs. Credit cards are virtually useless outside main cities and towns. It's advisable to request bank notes in smaller denominations, as it can sometimes be hard to get change from large notes and smaller notes are handy for smaller purchases and gratuities. Traveller's Cheques are not recommended as they're often difficult to exchange and incur high fees.

How much you spend depends largely on individual tastes and often how much you eat, drink or shop. We currently recommend an average of Euro 20 - 30 per day on top of optional excursions.

### Shopping

Morocco is a shoppers' paradise. The souks of Fes, Marrakech and Meknes are full of pottery, carpets and kilims, leather goods, spices and cloth. Keep space in your backpack for your purchases! Our best buys are: carpets – from the High Atlas mountains or a woven and embroidered Kilim; the burnoose, an elegant hooded cape; spices; or traditional pottery and leather from Fes.

**IMPORTANT:** Set your budget and don't be swayed, remember the caveat – 'Let the buyer beware'. Any purchases made whilst on holiday with us, irrespective of whether the store is recommended by us or other, are at your own discretion. Please make sure that you are completely happy with the product you are purchasing and the delivery arrangements (we would recommend you take away with you any purchases rather than rely on shipping services). On The Go cannot be held responsible or accountable for items bought in country or shipping arrangements. Proceed with caution.

### Hotels in Morocco

The hotels on our group tours in Morocco are simple, clean, comfortable and centrally located. We try to use local and traditional hotels with plenty of character wherever possible. In smaller towns, the choice of accommodation may be limited, but we will always book the best accommodation available for our groups. Please be aware that hotels in Morocco are not of the same standard as Western hotels and facilities are often basic.

### It's not like home

Travel to far-flung corners of the earth involves lifestyles and conditions that are sometimes very different from what you are used to back home. You must come prepared to cope with unusual situations, local inadequacies and unpredictable events as and when they occur. Foreign travel is definitely not suitable for people who expect

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or demand everything to go exactly as planned. With the greatest respect and in the interest of your ultimate enjoyment you must understand this. Things can and do change in foreign countries.

## Mosques & Religion

Although freedom of religious faith is permitted by the Moroccan law, about 99% of people are Sunni Muslim. About 1% of the population is Christian, and less than 0.2 percent is Jewish. With the exception of the Hassan II mosque in Casablanca, it is not permitted for non-Muslims to enter mosques in Morocco. If you are entering the Hassan II mosque, please remember to dress conservatively. Ensure limbs are covered and shoes removed when entering any mosque. Men must refrain from wearing shorts, as must women.

## RAMADAN

Ramadan is a month of fasting observed by Muslims throughout the world and adherents of the Muslim faith fast during daylight hours and break their fast with lavish meals and lively celebrations in the evening. Ramadan culminates a month later in a 3 day celebration called Eid al - Fitr. Many shops (excluding those which cater mainly to tourists) and attractions close earlier during Ramadan. As such we will start our tour earlier during this period to make the best use of time and itineraries will be slightly altered to ensure we visit all attractions, leisure time will be offered in the late afternoon. Non-Muslims are not expected to fast over Ramadan, but it is considered impolite to eat food or drink on the street.

Note: Traffic is exceptionally heavy during Ramadan, especially toward the time of breaking the fast. Forthcoming Ramadan dates are as follows, (approximate) -

05 May – 04 June 2019

24 April – 23 May 2020

14 April – 13 May 2020

## Etiquette

Despite the inevitable ups and downs of travelling abroad, you will generally be shown great hospitality in Morocco. In return, please demonstrate sensitivity and respect for the local customs. Morocco is a Muslim country;

so care should be taken to dress respectfully in local towns or villages.

- Ladies should avoid wearing 'clingy, tight or suggestive' attire, and stick to cool, flowing, cottons in small towns, local villages and in rural areas
- Take care to dress conservatively and ensure that limbs are covered and remove footwear prior to entering a mosque
- Ex-military style clothing should not be worn
- Ask permission before taking photographs of people
- The standard form of greeting is a handshake. Men and women do not kiss at any time as a form of greeting

## Calling home from Morocco

It is currently not always possible to use VoIP (voice over internet protocol) services like Whatsapp, Viber, Skype and Facebook Messenger in Morocco. The text options on these services are still fine to use but the calling functions might not always work. It is understood that the Moroccan telecom providers have done this in order to push as much voice calls onto their networks rather than people being able to use these free services.

## Troubleshooting

These things will most likely never happen, but it's good to be prepared if they ever do. Here are a few tips to keep your trip hassle-free. Morocco is no worse than anywhere else when it comes to crime. The biggest problem seems to be petty theft, including pick-pocketing and bag snatching. Minimise your chances of being robbed with these tips:

- Leave valuables in the hotel safe deposit or better still, at home
- Carry your passport on your person or a photocopy as ID
- Carry your bag close to your person rather than over your shoulder
- Travel in a group or pair, especially if you are female
- Don't catch cabs late at night on your own
- Never drink anything offered to you in the street, unless you opened it yourself

Please note On The Go Tours will not be held liable for loss or damage to personal property under any circumstances

## Health Requirements

You should seek medical advice before travelling to Morocco from your local health practitioner and ensure that you receive all of the appropriate vaccinations. As a guide, Tetanus and Hepatitis A are strongly recommended. While tap water in Morocco is generally considered safe to drink in main cities, it is not advisable in smaller towns and remote areas. It's recommended to only drink bottled mineral water, which is readily available in hotels, shops and restaurants.

## Drones Not Permitted

It is forbidden to bring drones into Morocco (even small ones that might fit in hand luggage), a special permit has to be arranged with the appropriate department in Rabat and this can take months to arrange.

## OPTIONAL ACTIVITIES

### Morocco

Essaouira - horse riding 1 hr 250DH

Essaouira - horse riding 2 hrs 300DH

Essaouira - horse riding 3 hrs 390DH

Fes - 3 course meal & entertainment 250DH

Marrakech - hammam 150DH

Marrakech - hot air ballooning (half day excursion) 2000DH

Ouarzazate film studio 50DH

Todra Gorge - rock climbing 1 hr 250DH

Todra Gorge - rock climbing 2 hrs 390DH

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