

Casablanca to Essaouira

13 days | Starts/Ends: Casablanca



Combining the best of culture and coastal bliss, this two week tour of Morocco ensures you won't miss out on any of the key sights - the Imperial Cities of Marrakech, Fes, Rabat and Meknes, the dunes of the Sahara, ancient ruins and more, and then rewards you with a few days of rest and relaxation the Atlantic Coast in Essaouira.

HIGHLIGHTS AND INCLUSIONS

Trip Highlights

- Essaouira - Spend three days in this charming seaside city on the Atlantic Coast
- Marrakech - UNESCO-listed medina, mosque, palaces and souks
- Casablanca - Morocco's largest city
- Rabat - The lively capital city
- Meknes - A great Imperial city
- Volubilis - UNESCO-listed Roman ruins
- Fes - The oldest medieval city in the world, medina dye pits and tanneries
- Erg Chebbi sand dunes - Beginning of the Sahara
- Todra Gorge - Towering red canyon
- Ait Benhaddou - UNESCO Listed ancient kasbah

What's Included

- Private transfers from Marrakech - Essaouira and Essaouira - Casablanca
- 12 breakfasts, 3 lunches and 3 dinners including a traditional Berber meal our Sahara camp
- 12 nights 3 - 4 star hotels & riad, 1 night camping - Berber desert camp in the Sahara Desert (Hotel upgrade available)
- Airport arrival and departure transfers on day 1 and day 13
- Guided sightseeing of Casablanca, Rabat, Volubilis, Fes, Merzouga, Todra Gorge, Ait Benhaddou and Marrakech
- Escorted by a licensed English speaking Moroccan tour guide from day 1 to 9
- Specialist local guides at some sites
- Camel trek into the Sahara
- All transportation and transfers in private air-conditioned tourism vehicles
- All road taxes and tolls

What's Not Included

- Tipping Kitty: USD\$45-55pp, paid in local currency
- Entrance Fees: USD\$75-85pp, paid in local currency
- International flights and visa
- Gratuity for your tour guide & driver. Budget approx USD\$2 - 3 per person per day. Tipping your tour guide and driver is an entirely personal gesture

DETAILED ITINERARY

Day 1 : Casablanca



Saturday. Upon arrival at the airport in Casablanca, you'll be met and transferred to our hotel in the city. The remainder of the day is free for you enjoy at your own leisure. Why not find a restaurant in town to try the local cuisine? **Overnight - Casablanca**

Day 2 : Marrakech City Tour



Casablanca - Marrakech. This morning after breakfast we head to Marrakech to meet the rest of the group before embarking on

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a guided city tour of Marrakech. Inside the rose coloured medina walls is a tangle of winding streets and alleys that open onto verdant gardens and bustling souks. At the heart of the medina is Djemaa El Fna, the city's exuberant market place and towering over it, is the famous Koutoubia Mosque, the tallest building in the city.

Journey time: Approx 3 hours **Overnight - Marrakech** (B, D)

Day 3 : Ait Benhaddou



Marrakech - Ait Benhaddou - Ouarzazate. Departing the city this morning we travel across the plains of haouz and reach the great High Atlas mountains. Climbing over the pass of Tizi n Tichka, we stop for lunch and then continue onwards with great views over the Mountains and valleys to Ait Benhaddou. This incredible ancient fortified Kasbah was built for defence purposes high on a hill and is a stunningly well preserved medieval city which has famously featured in many blockbuster movies, including Gladiator and Laurence of Arabia as its beauty is unequal to any other fortified kasbah in south Morocco. Carrying on we continue south to the Hollywood of North Africa – Ouarzazate (pronounced war-zazat). Ouarzazate is famous for being the filming location for many other Hollywood blockbusters and famous TV shows including James Bond – The Living Daylights, The Mummy and more recently Game of Thrones.

Journey time: Approx 4-5 hours **Overnight - Ouarzazate** (B, L, D)

Day 4 : Camel trek into the Sahara



Ouarzazate - Todra Gorge - Merzouga (Sahara). This morning we begin our journey into the Sahara with a medley of palm trees, rose fields and magnificent gorges. Travelling from Ouarzazate, there is a possibility of visiting the kasbah Amherdhil in Skoura before seeing the rose fields and reaching scenic Todra Gorge. Surrounded by towering vertical limestone cliffs reaching heights of 1000ft, it is known as Morocco's Grand Canyon. The charm of Todra lies in its changing colours as the sun slowly moves from east to west. After time to wander through Todra we hit the road again for Merzouga – our base before we head into the Sahara. Depending on the time of year, spend the afternoon relaxing and swimming before climbing aboard our camels for an incredible trek into the Sahara Desert to watch a beautiful sunset and spend the night at our remote Berber Camp, nestled amongst the towering dunes of Erg Chebbi. We enjoy local food, music and an amazing night camping in the Sahara.

For our trip into the desert you'll need to prepare an overnight pack for the essentials you will need for the night. The remainder of your luggage will stay in Merzouga this evening and we will collect it in the morning

Sahara Hotel Alternative:

If you have opted for our Sahara Hotel Alternative you will not need to pack an overnight bag as all your luggage will remain with you this evening. Hotel Alternative travellers will be transferred to their auberge (simple hotel) with en-suite facilities located in the shadows of the Erg Chebbi sand dunes mid afternoon. Your tour guide will not escort you to the hotel as he will be accompanying

the camel trekking group to the Berber Camp. After check-in and time to freshen up (for those who are interested) please re-group prior to sunset at reception to depart for your camel trek into the desert. The safari runs for approx 1 hour, with short stops along the way for photos. Dinner is included at the hotel this evening as is breakfast in the morning. Your guide will inform you of the time you will be picked up in the morning.

Please note: Should you wish to opt for the hotel alternative at no additional cost, let us know at the time of booking.

Journey time: Approx 5.5 hours
Overnight - Berber Camp (B, L, D)

Day 5 : Merzouga



Merzouga (Sahara) - Fes. Departing early, we climb back on our camels disembarking for a truly stunning sunrise. After freshening up and breakfast in Merzouga we're back on the road heading for Fes. It's a long drive today however there is a lot to see on the way. We'll pass through cedar forests full of Barbary Macaque monkeys on our way through the Moyen Atlas mountains. Just before Fes we stop at Ifrane – a beautiful town often likened to a Swiss Alpine resort. Along the way we also start to see our first glimpse of Morocco's nomadic Berbers – travelling across the mountains and often staying in make shift tents as they head to their next destination. We arrive into Fes in the early evening.

Journey time: Approx 7 hours **Overnight - Fes** (B, L)

Day 6 : Fes

Fes is the oldest and largest medieval city in the world and its medina is a cacophony of aromas, sights and sounds. This morning we enjoy a guided tour of Fes el Bali - the

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old walled city. This fascinating medina is a veritable rabbit warren of 9400 alleys that often finish with dead ends – so be sure to stay close to the group! We also visit the dye-pits and tanneries before lunch in the medina. The remainder of the day is at leisure – why not take part in an optional Tagine Making Class or a night of Moroccan entertainment and food at a restaurant in town (both payable locally). **Overnight - Fes (B)**

Day 7 : Volubilis & Meknes



Fes - Volubilis - Meknes - Rabat. Departing Fes this morning we visit the fascinating UNESCO listed Roman ruins of Volubilis, which date back to AD40. Continuing on we stop at the Imperial City of Meknes, which became known as the Versailles of Morocco due to its impressive buildings and elaborate monuments. After lunch and some free time our final stop of the day is Rabat – Morocco's capital where we overnight.

Journey time: Approx 3-4 hours

Overnight - Rabat (B)

Day 8 : Rabat & Casablanca



Rabat - Casablanca - Marrakech. This morning we take a guided tour of Rabat and visit some of the capital's highlights, including the impressive Chellah - a necropolis and complex of ancient, medieval ruins, the Royal Palace and the Mausoleum of Mohammed V.

After lunch we continue to Casablanca where we visit the Hassan II Mosque, which has the tallest minaret and is the third largest mosque in the world - it can hold 25,000 worshippers at any one time. After our visit to the mosque we say goodbye to our fellow passengers leaving us in Casablanca and continue on to Marrakech for the night.

Journey time: Approx 4 hours

Overnight - Marrakech (B)

Day 9 : Marrakech

Marrakech - Essaouira. Today we have a leisurely morning before starting our journey to Essaouira on Morocco's Atlantic Coast via private transfer, and upon arrival enjoy the rest of the evening at leisure. Why not find a restaurant in the charming old town and try the local cuisine.

Journey time: Approx 3 hours **Overnight - Essaouira (B)**

Days 10-12 : Free time in Essaouira



Essaouira - Casablanca. Spend the next three days exploring the sights and delights of Essaouira at your own pace. Set on the rugged shores of the breezy Atlantic Coast, this charming seaside city offers a welcome respite from the hustle and bustle of Marrakech. While away the days here exploring its winding streets lined with whitewash houses, picking your way through the shops in its ancient medina, or by sitting at an ocean-facing restaurant sipping on a cup of coffee. During the warmer months why not try some water sports too, as the windy shores here offer ideal conditions for wind and kite surfing. On the evening of day 12 a private transfer will take you back to Casablanca for the night.

Journey time: Approx 4.5 hours (day 12)
Overnight - Essaouira (2), Casablanca (1)
(B:3)

Day 13 : Goodbye Morocco

Thursday. Our amazing tour of Morocco ends today after hotel check out. An included onward departure transfer to airport will be provided.(B)

HOTELS

Highlighted below are some of the hotels which we frequently use on this tour, though we reserve the right to substitute these hotels to ones of a similar standard.

Please refer to your Tour Voucher for your confirmed arrival hotel and further arrival information.

Hotel Diwan

Located close to the city centre, Hotel Diwan is a contemporary hotel just a short walk from the main train station. The modern guest rooms are air conditioned with flat screen TVs and en suite facilities. The onsite restaurant offers a buffet breakfast every morning as well as an array of international cuisine in the evenings for dinner. The hotel also has an on site gym, spa and complimentary wi-fi is available.



Hotel Club Val D'Anfa

Located between the sea and Anfa mount, Hotel Club Val d'Anfa is in one of the most prestigious residential districts of Casablanca. Combining warm colours, ceramic tiles and fine wood, the interior decor was inspired by Amazigh art. The attractive guest rooms contain all the modern amenities needed for your stay and face either the sea, hotel gardens or the Casablanca Corniche. Boasting three restaurants, two bars, a fitness centre, spa and pool - there's certainly plenty to keep guests entertained.

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Riad dar Chamaa

In the classic kasbah style, Riad dar Chamaa is set within the Ouarzazate palm grove with fantastic views of the surrounding Atlas mountains. All guest rooms are air conditioned with en suite facilities. They are designed in a classic Moroccan riad style with marble floors. The riad boasts a beautiful central courtyard and a refreshing outdoor pool complete with sun loungers for relaxing. The riad also boasts a tea lounge, restaurant and pool bar.



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.



Riad Al Makan

Situated inside the Fes medina, Riad Al Makan is designed in a beautiful Moroccan style. All of the en suite guest rooms are individually designed with beautiful mosaic patterns and marble floors. The riad also benefits from complimentary wi-fi, an onsite restaurant, 24 hour front desk assistance and a gift shop. There is also an outside terrace

perfect for enjoying a cup of Moroccan tea on.



Hotel des Oudaias

On the edge of the medina in Rabat, Hotel des Oudaias is a beautiful riad style property. Guest rooms are spacious and beautifully furnished in a typical Moroccan style with wooden furnishings, marble floors and en-suite bathrooms. Rooms are air-conditioned and have flat screen TVs. The property also boasts complimentary wi-fi throughout and an on site restaurant.



Riad Imilchil

Traditional and stylish, the Riad Imilchil is a beautiful example of boutique Moroccan accommodation. The 6 rooms and 1 suite are beautifully decorated with colourful interiors and gorgeous en suites. Free Wi-Fi is available throughout and there is a stunning rooftop terrace where guests can view the whole of the city whilst enjoying a refreshing drink. At night you can view the famous Djemma El Fna pulsating in the distance. Well located just 10 minute walk into the centre of the Medina.



Adam Park Hotel & Spa

Guests can expect a very comfortable stay at the Adam Park Hotel & Spa. Each of the elegant rooms feature a patio or balcony with views of the surrounding area. Guests

are spoilt for choice when it comes to dining. Several restaurants offer a variety of options including Italian specialities, Moroccan favourites and international cuisine. There are also plenty of ways to unwind after a day exploring Marrakech, with an outdoor pool, fitness centre and a spa offering rejuvenating massage treatments.



Riad Zahra

Located in the residential district, the Zahra offers calm, relaxation and a peaceful stay. Its comfortable guestrooms are decorated in traditional Moroccan style and are equipped with an en suite and satellite TV. The property has a restaurant serving Moroccan and international specialities. There is another restaurant that serves grilled dishes. Riad Zahra is an ideal starting point for nautical activities or to discover Essaouira and the surrounding area. For your entertainment, the hotel proposes numerous activities including desert trips in a 4x4, surfing and kite surfing lessons.



Optional Activities

During your free time in Morocco you are welcome head out and independently explore, relax or take part in any of the following optional activities, time permitting. These activities are not operated by On The Go Tours and it is important that you make sure that Quad Biking and Hot Air Ballooning are covered by your Travel Insurance Policy. Prices vary and bookings can be made locally.

Marrakech - Hammam (starting from) - MAD150

Marrakech - Hot Air Ballooning - MAD2000

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Ouarzazate - Visit to film studio - MAD50

Ouarzazate - Quad biking - MAD450

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

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

Guides & Groups

Some of our group tours are sectors of a larger tour. Some travellers on your tour may only travel with you for part of your tour. It also might be that you end your holiday part way through a longer tour and others in the group continue on.

Time Keeping

In order that we show the best of Morocco in a non-hurried fashion to you, it is imperative you are ready for departure each day. Please do not delay and inconvenience fellow travellers. It is your responsibility to be at the proposed meeting point for the group in time. We will depart at our specified times.

Essential Packing

- A sleeping bag for the Sahara Desert camp if travelling between Oct - Apr. Sheets and pillow cases are optional all year round. If booking our signature tours (Totally Morocco, Road to Casablanca, Best of Morocco, Magical 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

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 In Morocco

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 on our budget tour range and will not be needed if you have booked onto our Signature tour range (Totally Morocco, Road to Casablanca, Best of Morocco, Magical Morocco & Casablanca to Essaouira tours)

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sleeping bags will not be required and bed coverings will be provided.

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 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) -

23 April – 23 May 2020

12 April – 11 May 2021

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

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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.

Trouble Shooting

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.

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