

MOROCCO

Your itinerary is highlighted



Sunday, April 12, 2015 Travel Day

My day started off with me being very anxious and feeling like nothing was in place. At 1:45 PM Norman and Marco arrived to take me to Sue & Larre Hoke's house. We arrived at 2:30 PM. Sue had gone to pick up Jean Sedar. I met Victoria (Vicki) who was to be my roommate. I put my money holster on. Shortly after 3 PM we were taken to airport via Rapid Rover for a 6:35 PM flight to Madrid, Spain.

Life became interesting when I went through security. There were three lines and I went into the middle line which did the X-ray. My Pandora bracelet on my right wrist, my security money holster under my left arm as well as something on my left ankle showed red on the scan. I had to remove my C-Pap machine from my backpack. I was taken into a private room by two TSA women & undressed from the waist up. My money holster was gone through with a fine tooth comb. My bracelet was taken off & my ankle was searched. There I stood in my bra with all my belongings in my backpack spread out before me. I do not have words for how "naked" I felt. I need to remember not put on my money holster before going through security.

I was able to change seat because my seating area was very cold. We didn't fly out until 7:25 PM. I was very concerned that we would miss our connection in Madrid, Spain. After watching two movies and getting only 1-1/2 hours sleep, we arrived in Madrid. I was very confused to the point that I left my glasses on the plane. I had to go back to the door of plane and a flight attendant went in search of them. Finally I had my glasses!! *Robbie Thornton*

Monday, April 13, 2015 Day 1 Travel/Casablanca

We arrived in Madrid at about 8 AM (2 AM in Philadelphia) to make our connection to Casablanca. I had to go through another security. This time there wasn't a private room. I had to figure out how to remove my shoulder money bag right in public. OH MY GOD! Going home I won't have to worry about security & being searched because of money. I will be broke!! LOL!!

Finally, we boarded the plane for Casablanca and arrived there at 11 AM after 1½ hour flight. We went back in time one hour. The group had grown before we left Madrid and now everyone went in different directions to get through customs. It seems that some of us couldn't follow arrows to customs & to baggage. We were in the airport for more than 1½ hours. After collecting everyone (9) we went outside where we met



the drivers. After we were driven to the Hotel Novotel, we met our guide, Ali Alami, who comes from Fez. We gave our passports to Ali and he checked us into our rooms. Room was very nice. The power went out almost

immediately and the twin beds were put together. We were unable to get changed to twin beds for some time as there was a call to prayer which occurs 5 times a day. On our return from dinner we had twin beds. The lights went out again. It turned out to be our coffee pot which caused the problem.

Dinner was in the dining room and was included.

After dinner, our guide, Ali informed us that we are his 13th FFI group.

We were given the following information:

- What was & wasn't included in our tour.
- We are not to tip in restaurants. Tips are already included even for tour guides.
- We are to make sure that guide or driver knows which bags are ours.
- Drink lots of water as there are lots of 5 star bathrooms.
- Bring toilet paper to bathroom.
- If something is wrong let him know immediately.
- When checking out, bring key to desk. That way we don't have to wait for them to check for key.
- Pictures - it's ok to take general pictures. Ask if ok to take pictures. Some people think taking a picture is taking their souls.
- Food by recommendation. Ask with a smile.
- Never use tap water even to brush teeth even in hotel.
- Gifts for families/children

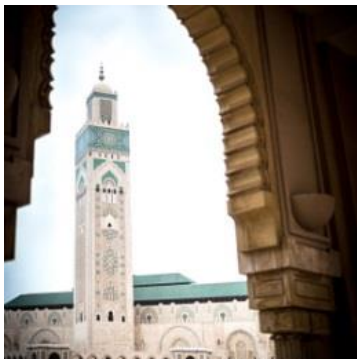


After our meeting with Ali, Vicki and I went to our room and to bed post haste. I have never been so glad to have a day or two days end. However, I am looking forward to Ali. He is a character and funny. *Robbie*

On Sunday morning I received a call from Leila Van Dyke who had heard at 4 AM that her flight had been cancelled. After several calls, it was decided that she would take the flight the next day and miss the first day of the tour. I informed Experience It of the changes. Today, we heard that Kitty and Blanche's flight was delayed. After dinner and the meeting, I went down to the lobby and waited until they arrived so I could welcome them. Ali was also there and while we were waiting I saw a group of crew for Royal Air Maroc. One of the pilots was a woman wearing a head scarf and then her hat. After seeing Kitty and Blanche off to their room, I went up to bed. *Sue Hoke*

Tuesday, April 14, 2015 Day 2 Casablanca/Marrakech

Casablanca is the third largest city in Africa with 5 - 6 million people. It was founded in the 10th century B.C. It is named for its white buildings. It is the only city in Morocco that is painted this color because the white color produces a glare and makes it too hard to see.



Our first stop was the Hassan II mosque. It is the largest mosque in North Africa and the second or third largest in the world. It was built between 1987 and 1993 by people working 24



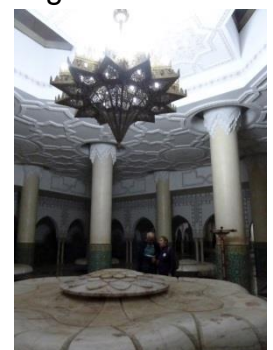
hours/day. It can hold 25,000 people inside and 100,000 if all the terraces outside are used. It has beautiful mosaics, wooden and plaster carvings and large metal doors. There are cedar wood painted ceilings that can be opened for natural air conditioning. There are balconies with wooden screens for the women to stand behind. The balconies are supported by metal, titanium, buttresses that were also decorated. Titanium is lightweight and does not oxidize. Devout Muslims pray 5 times a day. The call to prayer is broadcast over loudspeakers on the minaret. An Imam gives a sermon once a week on Fridays. The government



pays the Imam and no money is collected during the service. The mosque was built by contributions. It contains 57 chandeliers of Venetian glass, a heated floor, and 360 loud speakers hidden in the granite pillars. The floors are marble. The minarets in Morocco are square and there is only one per mosque. The minaret on the Hassan II mosque is the tallest in the world and has a laser light on top that can be seen for 20 miles. The mosque is on the shore of the Atlantic Ocean so it has replaced the old light house. The mosque was designed by a French architect.



For all of its beauty I was struck by the fact that there was no furniture. There were no tables, chairs, or couches. I wrote this in my notes. I do not know if anyone else will say this but, according to Ali, the first son is always named Mohammed and the first daughter is named Fatima.



The children go to school 6 hours/day but the day is split with 3 hours off from 11 - 2. Children go to school until age 16 and the education is free. Many people cultivate and raise prickly pear cactus for its fruit. They also use them as living fences."
Rose Anne Austin

After touring the mosque and taking a group picture, we drove along the corniche (*road along the coast*), had time for a short walk along the seaside and drove to the restaurant L'Etoile Central on Rue Allal Ben Abdellah. Leila had arrived from the airport.

Those who were interested went across the street to the Marché Central to see the market – mostly flowers, foods and fish. Then we went back to the restaurant. We were the only customers. We had tagines and other traditional Moroccan foods in a

beautifully tiled room classically decorated in Moroccan style. After lunch Ali said there was a problem with the bus, so while we were waiting for it to be fixed we had a meet and greet and everyone introduced themselves. When we left the restaurant, we had to stop at the airport to pick up Doug & Peggy's luggage which did not arrive yesterday. Then we set off for Marrakech.





We drove through very green areas of farmland and also saw lots of palm trees. After a while the topography changed. It became less green and we began to notice the High Atlas



Mountains rising from the plain. As we got closer to Marrakech, we saw some larger towns. There was a nice sunset before we reached Marrakech. We drove to Hotel Mogador Gueliz, our home for the next two nights. Ali handled check-in very efficiently. We went to our rooms, then had dinner and went to bed after a long but interesting day. Sue

Wednesday, April 15, 2015 Day 3 Marrakech



After breakfast we got on the bus and were

dropped off near the Koutoubia Mosque. We walked through a beautiful park with a rose garden and palm trees and took some photos of the guerrabs or traditional water carriers whose dress and head gear identify them. They wear little cups and carry water but now exist mostly to pose for tourists for a few dirhams. We had a group photo taken with two guerrabs and the minaret of the Koutoubia Mosque in the background. The photographer followed us around all morning taking pictures and appeared later in the day with




prints of the photos to sell us. We were also followed by people trying to sell us things.

Ali told us not to buy from them but some people did.

Our next stop was the Koutoubia Mosque, by far the largest mosque in Marrakech. It is named after the nearby book trader's souk which dates back to the 12th century. It is best recognized by its magnificent minaret; one of the three ancient Almohad minarets






known as the oldest the world. Non-Muslims are not allowed to enter the mosque or minaret but can visit the beautiful gardens. The minaret is 253 feet in height, includes a spire and orbs. It was completed under the reign of the Almohad Caliph Yaqub al-Mansur (1184 to 1199), and has inspired other buildings such as the Giralda of Seville and the Hassan Tower of Rabat. The minaret is designed in Umayyad style and was built of sandstone. It was originally covered with Marrakeshi pink plaster, but in the 1990s, experts chose to expose the original stone work and removed the plaster. Like most Moroccan minarets it is square. The minaret is topped with copper balls of decreasing size, a traditional design in Morocco. There are usually only three orbs; legend has it the fourth

was a gift from the mother of Saadian ruler Yacoub el Mansour, as penance for breaking her fast for three hours during Ramadan. While Ali was explaining about the mosque, some of the men selling shirts showed up and a fight brought out among them. Ali and the local guide got them under control.

Then we visited the Bahia Palace which was built in the late 19th century and was intended to be the greatest palace of its time. The name means "brilliance". As in other



buildings of the period in other countries, it was intended to capture the essence of the Islamic and Moroccan style. There is a 2 acre garden with rooms opening onto courtyards. This 19th-century palace, once home to a harem, is a wonderful display of painted wood, ceramics, and symmetrical gardens. It was built by Sultan Moulay el Hassan I's notorious Grand Vizier Bou Ahmed who lived here with his four wives, 24 concubines and many children. The palace was completed by hundreds of craftsmen from Fes working on its wood, carved stucco and zellij (terra cotta tilework covered with enamel in the form of chips set into plaster.)



Our next stop was the medina, whose well-preserved walls measure about 33 feet high and 7 feet thick, and are 15 km (9 miles) in circumference. The walls are fashioned from local reddish clay laid in huge blocks. The holes that are visible on the exterior surface are typical of this style of construction, marking where wooden scaffold supports have been inserted as each level is added. All the houses inside and, nearly all outside are pink. The material with which the outside wall is built makes the wall pink, and nowadays people MUST by law paint their houses that way ... to preserve the name of the "Pink City." Marrakesh is orangey pink because the reddish clay found in that area is mixed with straw to make pisé, a sort of adobe used in outer walls of houses and in the making of bricks. The color was chosen because the sunlight in Marrakech is very strong, and walls and buildings painted in this color are friendlier for our eyes.

Until the early 20th century, before the French protectorate, the gates were closed at night to prevent anyone who didn't live in Marrakesh from entering. Eight of the 14 original babs (arched entry gates) leading in and out of the medina are still in use. Bab Agnaou, in the Kasbah, is the loveliest and best preserved of the arches. We entered through





Bab Agnaou but it was undergoing reconstruction so the photos weren't the best. Storks were nesting above the gate. We went to the Berber pharmacy/spice store/natural health food store called Herboristerie Bab Agnaou, Quartier El Kassba, just on the outskirts of the souk. There we were served coffee or tea and a white-coated man talked about several products both spices and medicines, let us try some and sold us whatever we wanted. When we finished and went outside the photographer had the photos spread out for us to look at and purchase.

Then we were off to lunch in an interesting little restaurant. It was served buffet style. Today we had couscous. Ali is trying to introduce us to all kinds of Moroccan cuisine. It was very good.



Next we went to the Saadian Tombs. Sultan Ahmed el Mansour constructed the Saadian Tombs in Marrakech during his rule of Morocco in the sixteenth century as

a burial ground for himself and his descendants. This led to approximately two hundred members of the Saadian dynasty being buried here, including Sultan Ahmed el Mansour who was laid to rest in 1603. True to his name, he did it in style—even those not in the



lavish mausoleum have their own colorful zellij graves, laid out for all to see, among the palm trees and flowers. By the year 1672, Moulay Ismail had taken over power in Morocco and went about constructing his own legacy, but fortunately he could not bring himself to demolish a place of burial. Instead he decided to seal all the entrances to the Saadian Tombs. The only entrance that was not closed was located within the Kasbah Mosque. And so the beauty and detailed woodwork of this amazing tomb slowly started to slip from memory until it was completely forgotten. The complex was rediscovered in 1917 by General Hubert Lyautey during the French protectorate. Passionate about every aspect of Morocco's history,



the general undertook the restoration of the tombs.

The tombs are lavish and breathtaking with the cemetery garden alive with rich fragrances of rosemary and roses, with large palm trees providing shade.



Inside the mausoleums the beauty continues with the stunning domed ceilings, detailed wood and marble carvings, mosaics and intricate plasterwork. The most significant chamber in the tombs is the Hall of Twelve Columns. Here rests the Sultan Ahmed el Mansour and his entire family. This chamber is complete with vaulted roof, columns of Italian marble, beautifully decorated cedar doors and carved wooden screens.

Inside the inner mausoleum lies Mohammed ash Sheikh, founder of the Saadian dynasty, as well as the tomb of the Sultan's mother.

Then we went to the Menara Gardens. The lagoon and villa-style pavilion are set in an immense royal olive grove and orchards. A popular rendezvous for the people of



Marrakesh, the garden is a peaceful retreat. The elegant pavilion—or minzah, meaning "beautiful view"—was created in the early 19th century by Sultan Abd er Rahman, but it is believed to occupy the site of a 16th-century Saadian structure. Moroccan families swarm here during the holidays to picnic in the olive groves. Children can throw chunks of bread to the huge carp in the pool or ride camels outside the garden gate.



Our next stop was Djemâa el Fna, the open square right at the center of the medina, which is a UNESCO World Heritage site. This centuries-old square was once a meeting point for regional farmers and tradesmen, storytellers and healers; today it's surrounded by bazaars, mosques, and terraced cafes. Pedestrians struggle to keep their balance on the tiny cobbled lanes among an endless rush of mopeds, donkey carts, and wheelbarrows selling a mixture of



sticky sweets and saucepans. Ali led us on a walk through the souk. I find it interesting but between watching the ground so I don't trip and keeping an eye on Ali so I don't get lost, I miss seeing much of what there is to see. Also, it has been a long day and we are supposed to come back tonight. We finally go back to the hotel, have a rest and get something to eat at the super market next to the hotel. We ran into some of the others there. Most of us just had snacks. Larre and I had ice cream bars and bananas. I was exhausted but



decided to go on the night trip to Djemâa el Fna. It was a different world and a mob scene. It was much more crowded. There were transvestite dancers, cobras swaying to the tones of snake charmers; henna women painting people's hands; fortune-tellers; and men telling stories to each other the old way, on a carpet around a gas lamp. As it gets later, the center of the square is converted to row after row of restaurants and the tables gradually fill up. We went into a restaurant that was our meeting point and up to their rooftop café. For the price of a drink we could look out over the whole area. We sat on the terrace looking out on the scene until it was time to return to the hotel and a well-earned rest. *Sue Hoke*



Thursday, April 16, 2015 Day 4 *A Day in the Life of a Berber*

Today, we set out for a Berber Village to live a day in the life of a Berber. Upon arrival at the home, we were taught how to brew Moroccan tea aka "Moroccan Whiskey," which is a very sweet mint tea. We were to observe how the tea was made because we would be "tested" to see who brewed the best Moroccan whiskey. We were assigned to our rooms. Later, the group was divided into 3 groups, one to make Chicken Tagine for lunch, another to bake bread in an outdoor oven and the third group was assigned to fetch water from the well in the village. The lunch of tagine and bread was delicious.



We also took a walk to the river and through the town. People in the village were very friendly and obliged some picture taking. We saw some of the people riding or leading their donkeys loaded down with food for their livestock. Along the way back to our home, some of us found a store selling ice cream which is always a treat in warm weather. *Paulette Edmonston*



The family that owns the riad has 2 children. The little girl was singing songs in English. She was really cute. Some of us gave her stickers and balloons, crayons and coloring books. She seemed to like hanging out with us. She covered herself with stickers then put them on Doug and then on me. She liked playing with Robbie's phone.

Before the walk Ali led a game where he had quotations written in Arabic on envelopes. He

would read it in Arabic and I had to read it in English. Then people had to raise their hands if they wanted the quote.

Sometimes they had to have a coin flip. Once you won your quote you got to choose a little charm and Ali would write whatever you wanted on the card. Everyone got a charm and a quote. After a dinner of

couscous and bread, we had our tea-making contest. There were 3 Moroccan judges and 3 ambassador judges. Paulette and Young won. They were each given a certificate and a tea pot. *Sue Hoke*

Friday, April 17, 2015 Day 5

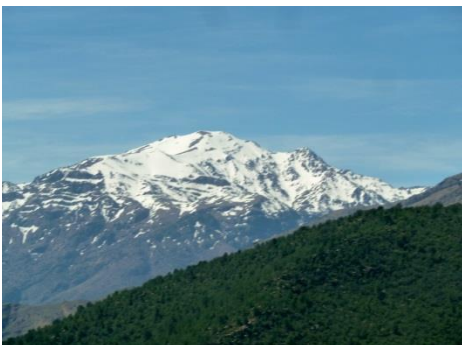
After breakfast with the Berber family, we boarded our bus for a day long journey over the High Atlas Mountains to Ouarzazate.

The scenery along the way was spectacular – a feast for the eyes. The highest point on these mountains is 2260 meters. Along the way we saw a variety of scenery and/or were told some interesting facts:

- Several switch- backs as we cross the mountains with snow on the highest mountains. In some places we could see three other switch-backs above and below the one we were on.

- Stork nests usually on top of the mosques, but seen elsewhere atop a high building.

- Donkeys carrying a variety of loads and sometimes carrying the people alongside bikes, motorcycles and cars, most of which are midsize and modern.



- Innumerable old cactus fences stretching for several kilometers, sometimes functioning as a fence, other times just in thickets [website information – name is *optuna ficus indica*, sometimes called a cactus pear].



- These mountains are of a pinkish color all strewn with rocks, some huge and high on the side of the mountain looking as if they could be ready to fall. In other places the mountains appeared to be formed in layers. Later in the day the mountains were more of a brownish-grey color.

Houses were then of the same color [brownish-grey] and were plastered with a pink color stucco to resemble all the pink colored houses.

- The houses are made of the same rock and are therefore the same color. When a house becomes too dilapidated, a new house is built along-side of the old one. There is nowhere to remove the old structures which were built of clay bricks subject to deterioration. New buildings are made with bricks and cinder blocks using concrete so will last for many more years.



- Villages are located on the incline of the mountain on land which is not suitable for cultivation.

- Most arable land between the mountains is cultivated, some on

fairly steep gradients. The vast majority of cultivated land has been seeded with a variety of produce – wheat and oats and a variety of vegetables. There are some smaller terraced fields which are cultivated, seeded and harvested by hand.



- We did not see the planting process but were told that donkeys are used on the higher gradients and tractors are used for the flatter areas.

• There are no fences but the fields are adjacent to each other and not in a grid as we have at home. There is a common understanding of the ownership of each area. Cultivated land is privately owned and non-cultivated land is government owned.

- There were a multitude of sheep herds, most of which are large – probably 100 – 200 sheep.



They are feeding close to and sometimes adjacent to the planted fields but kept in check by the shepherds.

- Sheep are raised first for food and secondly for wool



- The wild flowers are spectacular - red poppies are mingled with yellow and blue flowers in the areas not cultivated.

- Men were seen going to the mosques as this is Friday.
- Several bee hives
- Some trees, planted in rows, evidence of re-forestation

We stopped for lunch at Assanfou, a high point on the Tichka Pass. A group of tourists, from the US and



Canada, was already seated but one noticed our Friendship Force name badges and asked about

Friendship Force so we may have recruited new members!

On arrival we checked into the Riad Salam hotel where we had our supper. *Diana McIntyre*



In the late afternoon before going to the hotel, we stopped in the village of Ait Ben Haddou. Ali and I decided that it was better to do this tour today so we could have more

time for a rest tomorrow before the camel trek. The fortress, or ksar, dates from the days of the salt trade and was a common stop along trading routes from Marrakech to the Sahara. The UNESCO-listed ksar is made up of different clay buildings and kasbahs, surrounded by high walls. Ali led us on a walking tour though the ksar. The front parts of the village are



well restored, as this has been the setting of many films, from Lawrence of Arabia through to Gladiator.

We saw one villager who had a small room. Her animals lived next door and she did some weaving. We met an artist who demonstrated a traditional local form of painting found only in Ait Ben Haddou. Using just the basic ingredients of saffron, tea, indigo and water, he creates beautiful watercolors. He paints with them and produces a pale but detailed picture. Then he places the picture over a gas flame to caramelize the tea which adds color and depth



to the painting. Most of the group bought some of his work. Many people climbed up to the top for a wonderful view. I was not among them. When we walked back to town, we stopped in a little shop for snacks. I love those pistachio ice cream bars! Sue



Saturday, April 18, 2015 Day 6 Riad Salam to Hotel Kasbah Xaluca Dades.

We started our day in Ouarzazate with a visit to the Kasbahs of Taourist. During the 1930s, Kasbah Taourirt was considered the largest Kasbah in Morocco and today is considered a historical monument. It was a strategic route for the Saharan Caravans.



The Taourirt is made up of buildings with multi-level towers and turrets. There are more than twenty old Moroccan mansions that make up Taurirt with over 300 rooms.

We were told of the former owner who had 4 wives and 16 concubines. We visited the rooms for

the main wife and the other three wives. We saw the mosque which had a separate space for the women and the reception room with the original ceiling. Small sections of the inner sanctum have been restored.



We climbed up many staircases and visited many rooms. Some of the rooms had plaster work decoration featuring floral patterns.

Taourist has been used as a Hollywood backdrop, which included *Sheltering Sky*, *Gladiator* and *Prince of Persia*. The movie business gradually took off in Ouarzazate after the French protectorate left in the 1950s. Exotic backdrops for movies supposedly set in Tibet, ancient Rome, Somalia and Egypt. I watched *Sheltering Sky* on Netflix and remember this Kasbah in the movie.

We next visited a museum which is in a former studio and exhibits a collection of old sets, props, costumes and cinematic equipment. Some of the movies shot in this studio were *Hidalgo*, *Kingdom of Heaven*, and *Babel*. We visited room after room including a jail, a throne room and a cave.

We traveled the route of the 1000 Kasbahs which is lined with kasbahs and unique Berber fortified villages all





along the way. It was a day spent looking out the window of the bus. We had a great lunch with entertainment with wonderful sights out the window and from the patio.

We passed another city with a rose water fountain. We have passed other cities on the trip, each with a different water fountain. They have a rose festival each year.



At the end of a long day we arrived at the Todra Gorge in High Atlas Mountains. It narrows as it towers higher and higher above our heads. The sheer smooth rock walls rise up to 525 ft. high on each side.

As we were marveling at the gorge, a couple of horses with riders passed by. Of course everyone took a picture. We finally arrived at our hotel and were met with entertainers as we entered. The day ended with a massage in the hotel. *Peggy Judkins*



Our trip to-day took us south along the ROAD of "1,000 Kasbah" a route from OUARAZATE to ERFOUD to visit the TODRA GORGE. With our knowledgeable guide ALI in full control describing

points of interest and history along the way. We travelled over the largest chain of mountains in Africa, the High Atlas 1740 m high where we feasted our eyes on the spectacular sights in every direction from the bus windows and advantage stops en route. The highway alone was an amazing piece of engineering.

Red colored villages dotted the mountain side blending into the hillsides. Upon entering the Gorge the sight drew our breath away as we gazed up gigantic 300 m walls of pink and grey granite - the highest in Morocco.



We strolled alongside a gentle flowing stream of crystal clear water that flowed over rocks on its way to explore distant land. Tiny fish found refuge in currents on the other side of the pavement which eventually took them on their way under the road to join the main stream.



There were a few small restaurants accessible by a footbridge across the river. Time to move on, so after boarding the bus, we set off for the mining town of TINERHIR passing Berber villages and local people living as nomads tending their sheep and goats. Olive groves are numerous through Morocco and the fruit served to us in a number of different ways, delicious!

Eventually we arrived at our hotel Kasbah Xaluca Dades, where we were welcomed by musicians and had a delicious dinner. Rest was a most welcome ending to another

perfect day. *Marion Boutillier*



Sunday, April 19, 2015 Day 7

We set off early (7.30) after breakfast. Ali added to our Arabic language skills teaching us how to say, "What's your name?" and "My name is..." in preparation for our homestays and we practiced saying megaan (good). We also had a lesson about camels including the fact that white camels are lucky because Mohammed rode a white camel on his pilgrimage to Mecca (probably fortunate that Dave got the white camel for the trip into the desert to see the sunset). 90% of camels in Morocco are Arabian camels with a single hump. They are ideally suited to the desert with their long eyelashes and ability to go 23-30 days without water. When they do have water they can take 130 litres at once. They have soft feet so prefer the sandy desert to the stony desert, both of which we drove over during the day. Camels can eat a plant that other animals can't, which also makes them suited to the desert. They can travel at 25-30 kph and covering 40 kms. per day carrying 300 kg. They are known for their patience and endurance.

Ali continued our education, explaining about Islam and its five pillars. He explained the call to prayer and the five times for prayer. 99% of Moroccans are Muslim. Morocco is a Sunni country but there are also Shiites. There is tolerance for Jews and Christians also. Friday is the spiritual day and banks, schools, etc. are closed between 11 AM and 3 PM. Islam is a religion of peace. Ali said that terrorism is a big problem but not the fault of religion. He feels that problems occur when religion and politics get mixed. There are few homeless people because almost everyone practices religion. The king, Mohammed VI, is very popular. His priorities are overcoming poverty, education and women's rights.

When asked about 'medication' for a harmonious marriage he asked us to contribute one word each and we came up with this list:

Communication, laughter, respect, consideration, agree to disagree, love, understanding, tolerance, patience, honesty, friendship, Yes, Dear, zip your lips, commitment, take nothing for granted, insurance, curiosity and interest, sharing and enjoying life. It strikes me that Ali demonstrates all these qualities in his dealings with us.

At our coffee stop Ali gave a demonstration of scarf tying in preparation for our camel rides through the desert. After a frenzy of scarf buying, nine of us modelled different scarf tying techniques.



Then we set off for Erfoud, travelling through Berber country, seeing nomadic people with their donkeys, camels and sheep. Foods which don't require refrigeration make up their staple diet; almonds, dates, figs, flour and honey. They also hunt small animals like rabbits. The government provides wells for water and small schools in remote places.



We visited a site demonstrating an ancient way of getting water from the mountains to the villages by a system of underground tunnels. Nowadays newer technology is used and irrigation is via a system of canals.

Before our delicious Berber pizza lunch, we visited a fossil place for a demonstration of how the fossils and minerals are retrieved from the ground and prepared for sale in a great variety of forms. After some more shopping we went to the Xaluca Hotel for a couple of hours rest before driving in 4X4 vehicles to the Sahara Desert for camel rides. We wimps watched our intrepid colleagues mount their camels and ride off into the sunset.



Elizabeth Sugars

The Berber Tent Experience

We were seated on the camels at about 6:30 PM and headed to the Berber camp. Victoria had a hard time staying on her camel so we stopped and changed camels. We had to stop again when Judi almost went over her camel's head.



After riding through a sandstorm and no sunset visible, we finally arrived at the Berber camp and were shown to the tent where we were to eat our meals. Several people fell asleep and it was a long time before we were shown the bathroom (a tent with a porta-potty) and dinner was served. The tomato-barley soup was delicious as was the chicken tagine but several people were unable to eat much.

They put the married couples in separate sleeping tents and the single women were placed 4 to a tent. There was solar-powered electricity and a little bit of running water. The beds were hard mats with pillows and a folded sheet. The weather was comfortable and we only had to pull our sheets over us at about 2:00 AM.





Breakfast was a meal of yogurt, bread, cheese and fruit spreads. Four ladies elected to come back in a 4-wheel drive vehicle while the rest rode our camels.

Judi Smith

I was amazed by the way the drivers of the 4x4s could find their way across the sand to the hotel. To me there were no landmarks to be seen. Once we got to the hotel we met a family from Eastern Europe with two little kids who were joining us for camel trek. They never complained during the long ride in the sand storm. They were very well behaved. *Sue*

From the Kasbah Xaluca hotel in Erfoud we are taken in Jeep 4x4's to Dunes D'Or on the edge of the Sahara .There, in preparation for their desert trek, our intrepid

companions are enshrouded and turbaned – only their eyes are visible. Following a slight delay while more camels are brought to the scene, the group proceeds to mount the snorting, moaning beasts, and led by a barefooted guide, they slowly disappear into the undulations of the desert sandstorm - the wind must be gusting 10 to 15 knots.

Next the five people who opted for the ½ hour camel trek out to the dunes are garbed and enveloped for their venture, and we watch as they disappear. The remaining four of us, the least venturesome, are left to our own devices while Ali and the drivers go off to watch soccer on TV.

Blanche, Rose Anne and I decide to climb up the stairs to

the roof to observe the sunset, however the wind is

still high and sand obscures everything. As we're leaving, we glimpse an incoming caravan – sure enough it's our people. Finally around 8 PM we assemble in two Jeeps for the ride back to the hotel in Erfoud. The drivers of the 4x4's decide to race each other and we speed through the desert in a swirl of sand – quite enough adventure for me!!

At last we arrive at the hotel, and I manage to find my room and negotiate the intricacies of the double locking system which completely baffles me. Lacking my faithful roommate, Arlene, I push a chair against the door, shower, repack and relax before drifting off to sleep.



PS This is the night when Blanche fell in the hotel grounds, since I knew nothing of this until the following day I don't feel competent to write about it. I can only state that I have great admiration for her. I never heard her complain and she must have been in considerable pain – especially being jostled around in the bus – she's a real trooper!!
Jean Sedar

Monday, April 20, 2015 Day 8 Kasbah Xaluca to Fes



At the camp we rose at 6.00 AM for 7.00 AM breakfast of coffee, flat bread, yoghurt and jams with tea.

The camels were waiting for us to take us for the return trip. Four ladies decided to have a 4x4 drive back as they were uncomfortable with the ride there. On route by camel we stopped to investigate a "sand fish" that the cameleer dug up out of the sand. The ride back was calmer than the ride out as the wind and sand had stopped blowing and calm cool conditions prevailed.



Last night the people who did not do the overnight stay in the desert remained at the hotel Kasbah Xaluca after a view of the sunset. Returning from the desert, we showered and freshened up for the long road trip to Fes. We left the Erfoud and headed to Fes.



We drove north through areas of contrast of villages with terraces and dry dates which grow in this area. Ali spoke about sale/rent of land. Land is very important to own or have the use of in Morocco.

There was a caravan route to the north with towers for tax collection in the past. The colors of buildings changed today from the pink of Marrakech.



We drove through the military city with its airport half an hour from the Algerian border.



Military service was compulsory for 2 years but is no longer required. We stopped at a pharmacy for supplies for Blanche who had a fall last night.

Later we passed by a big dam used for hydroelectric power generation.

Ali spoke about a range of topics including Sharia Law, divorce, and marriage in Morocco. Sharia Law has four areas

of instruction:

How to worship Human law Paradise Stories of ancient prophets

Other topics discussed on the bus were elections to parliament and local municipalities. There are about 60 parties but if the King is not happy with a decision by parliament he can change it.



On the outside of the bus is a view that looks like the Grand Canyon of USA. The river Ziz winds through this. The last mountain lion in Morocco died in 1926.

We drove through the High Atlas Mountains and the beginnings of the Middle Atlas Mountains and later driving through the city of Midelt famous for apples and minerals. This is an area of garments of all colors.

We had a late lunch of trout today at Hotel Taddart in Midelt and then a 3 hour drive to Fes. We met the representatives of the FF Morocco, Lotfi and Karim, at the Azrou service station then drove on to Fes observing some Macaque monkeys in the cedar forests on the way. *Adele Dawson*



Tuesday, April 21, 2015 Day 9 Fes (Golden Ax)

Fes was built before the Turkish Empire by Idris I around 789 and was the Capital of Morocco until 1925. At 9:30 a.m. we started our day. Our first visit was the Royal Palace (outside only). Then we were driven up to view the Fes Medina from the Jamai Palace. What a view it was.



Next we viewed the Bab Boujloud, the Moorish-style gate Blue Gate, on our way to the Medina. It is green on the other side. 91,000 People still live in the Medina. The streets are crowded with merchants and spectators and customers (hopefully). No cars are allowed only bicycles and donkeys. We visited the Ibn Danan Synagogue. The synagogue was once only one of several inside the walls of Fes and not the most elaborate. It is entered through a simple doorway which leads immediately to a short flight of stairs that lead into the high, rectangular space of the synagogue.



We visited the University and Mosque of al-Qarawiyyin. The Madrasa & center of learning for non-vocational science was active from 859 to 1963. It became a State University in 1963. We passed a bakery and were given a piece of bread, which was delicious. We visited the school were small children entertained us.

Next we saw the Dar al-Magana (Arabic for clock house) which is a house built by Merenid Sultan Abu Inan Faris, which holds a weight-powered water clock.

A visit to the carpet place cost me a lot of money. The carpet arrived home before I did.





Next we visited a leather tannery. The smell of raw and washed hide and dyes just clogged my nostrils and everyone that visited the establishment. We received some fresh mint to help us breathe. I wouldn't want that job for all the money in the world.

Time for lunch. After lunch we managed to visit the weavers, where we bought scarves and some bought table cloths. After the weavers we of course visited the pottery. What is a trip to Morocco without visiting my favorite - the pottery. Interesting visit, lots of pots. I have few thoughts about the creation of the green ware, wish I had thought about it when we were there. Later we went to a party. *Val Bolan*



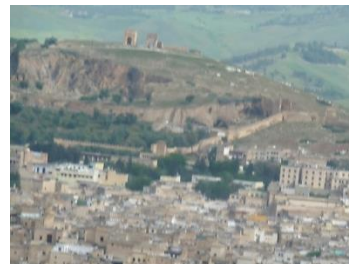
Our first stop was to see the Dar el Makhzen gate and Place de Alaouites. The beautiful Royal Palace is in Fes el Jdid (New Fez), the walled expansion on the Medina and its origin can be traced back to the 14th century and was built by the Mrenid rulers who required extra space for their palaces so that they could remove themselves from the hustle and bustle of Fès el-Bali. Early suburban living! The palace was built in the 17th century. It is strictly forbidden to visit or photograph the palace itself but for some reason, it is okay to take pictures of the doors. The doors are very impressive.

Next we took a walk through the Mellah or Jewish Quarter was built in 1438, near the royal residence in Fes Jdid. The Mellah at first consisted of Jews from Fes el Bali and soon saw the arrival of Berber Jews from the Atlas range and Jewish immigrants from Al-Andalus. Ornamented balconies and forged iron windows characterize the Mellah. The synagogue dates from the 17th century. It was built by Mimoun Ben Sidan, a wealthy merchant. An interesting feature was the wooden bema, topped by a wrought iron canopy of Islamic-style arches and floral forms. We walked around the Mellah, through Bab Semmarine into the Medina. From there we boarded the bus to go to the fortress for the great view of Fez and the Merenid tombs.

Then we spent several hours exploring Fès el-Bali (Old Fez), the ancient walled city with its labyrinth of 9000 alleyways dating back to the 9th century. The school we visited was the

Koranic preschool that Ali attended as a child.

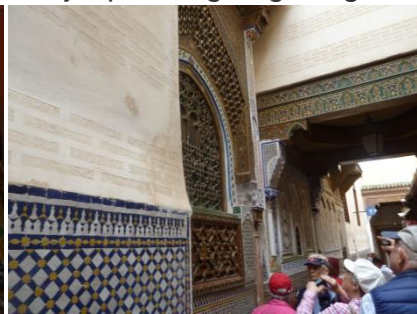
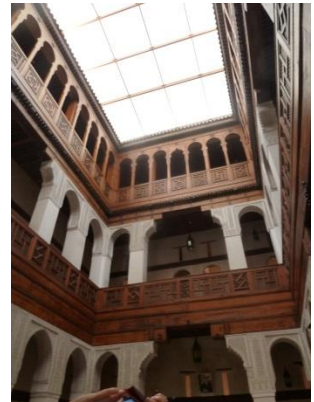
It was a tiny room filled with children. We crowded into the room and the children sang and recited or shouted their lessons led by one precocious little girl. When we were leaving, she and the others said goodbye in many languages including Japanese. We gave the teacher some school supplies for the children.



Next we saw Fontaine Nejjarine, a ceramic-tile, cedar-ceiling public fountain which is one of the more beautiful and historic of its kind in Fez el-Bali.

Then we went into the 14th-century Nejjarine fondouk, or Inn of the Carpenters, which is now home to a fascinating museum. The three-story patio displays Morocco's various native woods, 18th- and 19th-century woodworking tools, and a series of antique wooden doors and pieces of furniture. We had some free time to explore the museum and some people went up to the terrace for a good view. When we were gathering to leave, Larre suddenly collapsed and was caught by Ali. He and Doug walked him to the restaurant and sent the rest of us on our way to see more of the medina with the local guide.

Kairaouine University originally was a mosque founded in 859 by Fatima al -Fihri, a woman. With its associated school, or madrasa, it subsequently became one of the leading spiritual and educational centers of the historic Muslim world. This university is considered the oldest continuously-operating degree-granting university in the world.



The visit to the tannery was interesting. The sheep, goat and cattle skins are first cured, softening the leather, in a solution which includes pigeon droppings - cattle urine was originally used and the new solution can only be marginally better in smell! The hides are then laid on every available surface to dry before the dyeing process.

Traditionally vegetable dyes are used: poppy for red, turmeric yellow, henna orange, indigo blue and mint green. We were told by the owner of the leather shop on whose roof we were standing that natural dyes are still used. I was disappointed that no blue dye was being used today. The sight is quite amazing: barefoot men in shorts walking around in vats of dye, others spreading skins anywhere there is space, washing the skins in a covered corner before the dyeing process. One of the reasons the tanneries are located on the

outskirts of the medina is access to water - the other is to keep the dreadful smell as far away a possible!

We had lunch at Restaurant La Medina Bis in a large restored riad. The ceilings were high and exquisitely





decorated as were the walls. After a leisurely meal and visits to the weavers and pottery factory, we were taken back to the hotel for a rest before our evening at the home of a FF member family - the El Jays - in the medina. They usually have the Moroccan wedding ceremony there but the father has been ill for a few months and was in bed in the other room so we just had dinner. One of the FF Morocco members – Abdellah Tlouki - comes from the Sahara and he demonstrated many ways of tying his scarf. The daughter of the hosts, Imane, is a college student. She and her mother served the meal and Ali and Adil also helped. After dinner there was a question and answer session and then we went back to the hotel stuffed and exhausted. *Sue Hoke*

Wednesday, April 22, 2016 Day 10 Fes to Azrou Homestay

After breakfast we were driven to Ifrane, a small town in the Middle Atlas Mountains known as 'Little Switzerland'. Ifrane was built by the French in the 1930s, during the protectorate era for their administration. Set high up in the mountains, it was to be a "hill station" - a cool place where colonial families could spend the hot summer months. In 1995, an American-curriculum based public university - the prestigious Al Akhawayn University – was opened and Ifrane became a desirable destination for domestic tourism. Ifrane continues to develop as both a summer and winter resort.

We had some free time in the town center before meeting Lotfi and some of the other hosts and FF members at a café. Most people checked out the Lion of Ifrane, a stone statue carved by a German soldier during WWII, when Ifrane was used briefly as a prisoner-of-war camp. It commemorates the last wild Atlas lion, which was shot near here in the early 1920s. We all went to the Salle des Congres, the new conference center, where Lotfi Lamrani gave a presentation about the civic engagement in Morocco with discussions on: Development and reforms in The Kingdom of Morocco, The



Role and involvement of the Moroccan associations and NGOs in the Human Development and their contribution to the economic, social, political life and their support to the Autonomy proposal of the Moroccan Sahara and the Unity of the Moroccan territories. The conference center is beautiful but it was very cold in the room. After the meeting, some photos

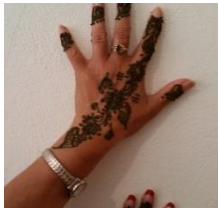
were taken, some people were interviewed, Sue was presented with a gift and the group had lunch at Hotel Perce-Neige.





We were driven to Ifrane National Park which is known for its Atlas cedar trees and the Barbary macaque, an endangered species. These monkeys have no tails and very long fingers. Also in this park is the oldest cedar tree, Cèdre Gouraud, which is over 900 years old.

We then moved onto Lotfi's home in Azrou where we had refreshments and our hands painted with henna ink. We were driven to our first home stay and Val and I met our hosts, Abdullah, his wife Khadija and their two daughters, Lamia (16) and Aya (9). We are spending two nights with them. After dinner and trying our best to communicate with our hosts, we went to bed. *Fay Harrison*



Our original schedule had called for the entire group to go to meet the Governor of the Province of Ifrane, but Lotfi was worried that it would take too much time so while we were looking at the monkeys (one of the macaques loved to jump onto the donkey), it was decided to take a small delegation to meet Governor Abdelhamid El Mazid. Dave and I represented the US, Marion represented Canada and Elizabeth represented Australia. We were driven back to Ifrane to the Provincial office, were shown to a waiting room and then taken up to the Governor's office. We sat in the seating area of

his lovely office and he told us about the area and gave us tea or coffee, delicious chocolates and some sweets. We gave him a small gift and a certificate thanking him supporting Friendship Force. Some photos were taken and then we thanked him and left.

We were driven to Azrou and dropped at Lotfi's house where the rest of group were sitting in the room downstairs that is now a center for children with disabilities. There were several children, mothers and our people there. Our ladies were having henna applied. At some point, cookies were brought out. Then the hosts came for their ambassadors or some were dropped off by the bus. Dave and Rose Anne and Larre and I were staying with Lotfi and his wife and children (they have 7) so we went up to the second floor. We were

shown our rooms, unpacked a little and came out to living room. There were lots of children there, their own, some from the center and kids from the neighborhood. I gave the people from the center one of the bags of school supplies. Tea and bread and cakes were put out. Two ladies in the kitchen appeared to be preparing a meal. I think the non-family members left about 8:30 PM. Eventually those of us staying there were served a big meal about 10:15 PM. *Sue Hoke*



Thursday, April 23, 2015 Day 11 Azrou

Robbie and I woke up to a beautiful spring morning at Mohammed's Aunt Fatima's house, listening to the children laughing and talking on their way to school. We enjoyed an early breakfast on the roof with the hills all around us. His cousin Youness (Fatima's son) joined us. After breakfast we walked through the old section of town, down the hill and pass the biggest mosque in the Middle Atlas, built in 1999. The trees were white with ibises resting in the branches.



We met at the café and began a very hectic tour at 10:45 AM for the elementary school for ages 6 ½ - 13 years. Some boys were playing soccer and other children were happy to take pictures and pose with us. One of the posters at the entrance emphasized the importance of not wasting water. Lofti displayed the pictures painted by the students which will be entered in the FF anniversary peace competition.

Next stop was the ladies co-op, which was started in 2006 by Fatima Baba to help the women to be more self-sufficient. They harvest, dry and prepare herbs and spices and distilled rosewater and other oils for sale. We admired the various flowers drying in the sun. Ali and Lofti explained and demonstrated the distilling process. Agriculture is very important in the area and we observed the fruit trees, vegetables, oak and cedar forests. The region produces the best potatoes.



Ali engaged us in his version of trivial pursuit on the long but very scenic drive through the countryside to M'RIRT for lunch and afternoon activities. We admired the mountains in the background, rolling hills, apple orchards, areas with rocks and prickly pears, poppy fields and all kinds of wild flowers as well as hundreds of sheep. Ali stopped at a weekly souk (a large one) for picture taking. There were so many tents with goods and animals for sale.



Yippee!! Lunch time and it was worth the long drive. We feasted on roasted mutton, bread, vegetable dish of eggplants, tomatoes and peppers. The final treat was *seffa* (Moroccan noodle dish) – very good but I ate so much mutton that I could only taste it. Some of us took a stroll after lunch and others visited indoors with our hosts Atika Naili and Farid el Bouzidi before leaving to visit the School of the Deaf.



The school is managed by Said Adel, who is deaf. He completed his studies including a PHD and he is the president and founder of the Deaf Association in M'RIRT. His aim is to help others to help themselves, to teach them to never give up or yield to disabilities and to share life



experiences. There are 56 students in the school and it is obvious the devotion, love and trust they have for Said. Student Alima did sign language for us. She would like to be a hair dresser, get married and have two children. Nadir acted being a chicken and Aictam a dog. They were very funny. Youness acted out a short story and he was very expressive. Said explained that his initiative is to make the government more aware - they should have deaf in the government and deaf and disabled people should be accepted everywhere. We talked t a new Peace Corps volunteer from Colorado, Ryan McFarlin. The school and our ED exchanged gifts and we said goodbye after taking a group picture with the school.



Last stop of the day was to the trout and salmon farm and the Argan oil shop, but it was not that easy. There was construction on the road and it was muddy. The loaded bus got stuck in the mud. We got off and some strong men lifted the right front onto solid ground. We boarded and went on to our shopping at the Argan shop.

Time to return to Azrou and relax on the way! We had a shorter walk home but were still tired. After a delicious chicken tagine supper we got more acquainted with our hosts, then called it an early night and packed for leaving early next morning. *Arlene Hanson- Young*



Our host family in Azrou was very kind to us. The first night we stayed with them we gave them an assortment of small gifts - mostly little things for the house. The next evening Ghita, the 14-year-old daughter was very excited as she came into the room with a huge stack of Moroccan shoes – they were giving gifts to us!! In that colorful

array of shoes we made excellent choices except for one person who had a very narrow foot. Immediately Ghita snatched up the remaining shoes and scurried out of the room, ten minutes later she appeared with another assortment of shoes and the proper fit was secured.

We were not the healthiest of ambassadors, the first night one of us had a tryst with an intestinal disorder which our hostess remedied with a special tea – that plus a liberal dose of Imodium restored her equilibrium. The next night Adele succumbed to an attack of extreme vertigo. Since we were scheduled to leave the next morning and she could hardly stand up much less walk, we didn't know how we could get her to the bus. The street was so narrow even a car would have difficulty getting to the house, but our hosts rose to the occasion. Our hostess was employed by the police and was in good physical condition, her husband was a coach so he was very fit. They picked up Adele and carried her down 3 flights of tiled stairs and through the streets to the bus stop!!!

Jean Sedar

Friday, April 24, 2015 Day 12 Azrou, Meknes, Volubilis, Chefchaouen

After breakfast, we said goodbye to our hostess and were taken to the coffee shop to wait for Ali, Adil and our bus. People arrived with their luggage. We set off for our first stop – Meknes, Morocco's third imperial city.

Meknes joined the select group of imperial cities when Moulay Ismail became the second sultan of the Alaouite dynasty that still rules today. Ascending the throne at age 26 in 1672 after his brother's early death from a horse fall, Moulay Ismail promptly moved the seat of power from the desert-fringed Tafilalt to fertile and well-watered Meknes. The town itself had been settled in the 10th century by the Berber Meknassis tribe and had, over different periods, housed Almohad and Merenid sultans. His 55-year rule was the longest in Moroccan history and is regarded as one of its greatest. Moulay Ismail was the builder of an imperial city intended to rival Versailles. He was Morocco's great warrior king (driving out the British and the Spanish from

Morocco) and the Royal Stables we visited reputedly housed his 12,000 horses. Not only did he have 12,000 horses, but each horse had its own groom and slave. Moulay Ismail also had hundreds of wives and at the very least 889 children.

Slave labor built massive walls, massive granaries, massive stables, and massive mosques, all out of stone, mud, and straw. The cavernous galleries of the granaries could hold a twenty year supply of grain. The grain storage rooms, known as the Heri es-Souani, contained tiny windows, thick insulating walls and a



system of underfloor water channels that kept the temperature constant and the air circulating.



We drove through Bab el Khemis which is the main entrance of the former Mellah (Jewish quarter), built in the 17th century on land given by Moulay Ismaïl to a Jewish doctor who cured one of the princesses. Modern buildings have been built on the ruins of the former Jewish quarter and a new Mellah was built on the right of Bab el Khemis in the 20th century. Ali pointed out a building that had a



Hebrew inscription and then we stopped for some photos of the gate.

Next we went to the medina, saw the Bab Mansour and Place Hedim, the medina's main square. The gate was completed in 1732. The design of the gate uses Almohad patterns, has zellij mosaics of excellent quality and the marble columns were taken from the Roman ruins of Volubilis. There wasn't much going on in the square when we were there but I've read that it gets more interesting at night. We stopped at a mall and bought some lunch things in the grocery. Then we drove on to Volubilis.



Volubilis is a Roman (originally Phoenician) city dating back to the 3rd Century BC. All the hallmarks of the Roman Empire are present here, sprawling villas with baths, a basilica, a triumphal arch; all overgrown with wildflowers and overlooking acres of olive groves. The ancient town of Volubilis was settled and began to prosper under the Mauritanian kings, from the 3rd century BC to AD 40. When Mauretania was annexed



by the Roman emperor Claudius in AD 45, Volubilis was raised to the status of municipia (free town), becoming one of the most important cities in Tingitana. After Rome withdrew from Mauretania in the 3rd century, the city declined and it was inhabited by Christians until the site was Islamicized in 788 at the arrival of Idriss I.



The archaeological site was known from the 18th century, but it was not until the late 19th century that it was first investigated. Excavations resumed in

1915 and have continued almost uninterrupted since. We had an excellent leisurely walking tour through the ruins led by Ali and a local guide. Some impressive ones were the Triumphal Arch overlooking plantations of cereals and olive trees, the Basilica, the Solarium and beautiful mosaics and an ancient oil press. There were also many stork nests.



We left Volubilis and started our drive to Chefchaouen. We stopped at a rest stop to break up the ride and to use their 5-star bathrooms. Ali knows all the places that have acceptable Western bathrooms. He told us we would be stopping there again the next day for lunch. We had a brief photo stop overlooking Chefchaouen about 7:30 PM. When we got to Chefchaouen, the bus had to stop outside the wall. Our luggage was loaded into a cart to be delivered to our two hotels. By now it was dark and we had about a 10 minute walk through the narrow street to the first hotel, Casa Hassan. We walked a few doors down the street and had dinner at the restaurant also owned by the owners of Casa Hassan. After a delicious dinner those staying at Casa Hassan walked the few steps back to their hotel and the rest of us were led through the narrow, steep alleys crowded with vendors and people – all uphill it seemed - for about 15 minutes before we reached our hotel, Dar Meziana. It was a charming place but more climbing of steps to reach our rooms. Our room was tiny – the bed was nearly as wide as the room and since it was pushed against the wall the inside person had to climb over the outside one to get in or out– but it was nicely decorated. The bathroom was bigger than the room. I had a nice shower, repacked and went to sleep. In the morning I couldn't find my name tag. I even went back upstairs and looked but to no avail. When I got home and unpacked and didn't find it, I e-mailed Ali. He checked with the hotel and they had found it and it was sent back to me. *Sue Hoke*



Saturday, April 25, 2015 Day 13 Chefchaouen to Rabat

After breakfast at the Hotel Dar Meziana in the medina of the Blue City Chefchaouen, we headed out for Rabat for homestay. Several of us stayed at Casa Hassan in the medina. At 9:00 AM we all gathered in front of Casa Hassan, and walked through the medina for an hour and a half. This medina is very similar to the Fes Medina, but smaller. Around 11:20 AM, we departed the

Blue City for Motel Rif and Cafe, the place we had rest stop yesterday on the way to Chefchaouen. We had a nice lunch under a tent. It was 24 degrees C, a very pleasant morning. Ali pointed out and explained interesting scenery – a university, weekly market, donkey station, fields of sugar beet and chick peas, and a salt mountain while we were passing Rabat Mountain and points of attractions in the region. The temperature was increasing as



the day went on – up to 31 degrees C. We had a long bus ride today from Chefchaouen to Rabat.

Around 5:30 PM, we arrived at Rabat, the capital city of Morocco and the King's residence. We could see Atlantic Ocean beyond the old port/fort. About 7:00 PM, several host families came to greet us at a home in the medina and took our members to their respective homes for two nights stay. *Young Oh*



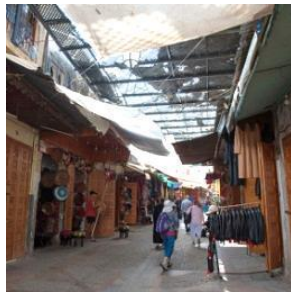
Sunday, April 26, 2015 Day 14 Rabat Homestay

Cock-a-doodle-do! This morning, we woke up with this lovely sound, though earlier than we would have liked!! I haven't heard this sound for a long time. Our host family has a few chickens on a semitransparent fiber glass roof. They give them the eggs they eat.

Our host family consists of the mother, Naima, two daughters: Nabila (19) and Hajiba (20). Kitty, Blanche, Judi and Neil stayed at this house. Kitty and I slept in the daughters' bedroom and Judi and Neil slept in the mother's. The living room and family room are lavishly decorated in Moroccan style couches and furniture. There were two flat screen TVs. The family spent a lot of their spare time watching TV.

The mother bought fresh bread for our breakfast and cooked a delicious lamb and potato dish for lunch served on a big round plate. We just dug in with our fingers (we were later given forks) and finished the whole thing. Yummy!

As we are fascinated with the "Djallaba", Naima and Hajiba took us to the colorful medina in the morning and we bought three Djallabas. We even went to the tailor to have them shortened. The medina has all kinds of vendors selling things from spices, to souvenirs to clothes, bags, jewelry, household items. It was busy and bustling.



We had some free time after lunch and Hajiba treated Judi and Blanche with a massage in the house. Kitty went with Nabila to the hamman. Kitty believed she lost pounds of dirt from her body!

In the afternoon, we joined Ali and toured the magnificent mausoleum with the grave of Mohammed V. We saw the royal guards on horses, the open air mosque, the minaret, Hassan Tower, etc. We toured the Kasbah of the Udayas {built during the reign of the Almohads (AD 1121-1269) with interesting white sidewalks, blue walls, and different designs on doors telling us about the owner of the house. We visited the café and walked around the beautiful garden. Some of us had coffee, tea and cookies. We continued onto the medina, walked around the walls of the medina, saw tower guards, cemeteries and enjoyed the breeze along the ocean front.





In the evening, we went to the house where the local Friendship Force group regularly meets. A traditional wedding ceremony was planned. We all got dressed up in spectacular local Moroccan dresses. Judi and Neil dressed up as the wedding couple. They were adorable! A local band played lively music. Some of us joined in the dancing and clapping. Tea and cookies were served. The host families were all there. It was hard to break up the evening as we went home with our respective host families. The evening was indeed such a fun, happy and memorable occasion that we'll cherish the experience for a long time. *Blanche Kung*



One thing I did with my hostess in Rabat was laundry. Her machine was 1/2 or 1/3 the size of mine but it was powered by electricity. The machine took at least an hour to complete one cycle. We did three loads and hung everything on the roof. The space was full. *Rose Anne Austin*

After breakfast, Robert Velthoven, the Dutch college exchange student living with our host family took us (Fay, Val, Arlene, Larre and me and the granddaughter of our host family) to the souk and then we walked to the waterfront, saw the Hassan Tower, and the Mohamed V Mausoleum. Then he decided we should visit the Chellah, which is both a Roman ruin and Islamic burial place. As the

Roman city of Sala Colonia, it was a bustling trading post of the



empire's southernmost colony from A.D. 40 onward. The city was finally abandoned in 1154 for the new settlement of Salé, across the river. Used as a royal burial ground by the Almohads, the site was extended into a holy necropolis, or *chellah*, by the Merenids, in the 14th century. Robert put 3 of us in a taxi, told the driver where to take us and off we went. There is a law that taxis can in the city can only take 3 people. He said we should wait for the rest of them to arrive. Another cab came after a while with 2 more and then we waited. We were getting concerned when the other two finally came. They couldn't get a cab and walked most of the way. We didn't have much time since we had to get home for lunch but it was an interesting



place. In addition to the gardens and ruins there were so many stork nests. We were able to take only two cabs back – we were outside the city limits. We had a nice lunch of tagine, worked on a puzzle with the two grandchildren then went on our tour.



After the wedding ceremony we had a couscous for dinner about 11:30 PM. The night before we had asked Robert what time they usually ate dinner and he said there was no



usual time but they had served dinner early for us the first night and it was about 10 PM. While we were eating tonight their daughter showed up with her new husband returning from their honeymoon in Marrakesh. She had gifts for the whole family and there was lots of excited talk. Everyone was talking at once. We eventually went to bed but the talking went on for a long time after that. *Sue Hoke*

Monday, April 27, 2015 Day 15 Rabat/Casablanca

After breakfast with our host families at Rabat, the bus picked up everyone. We drove along the coast and went on to meet Lofti. The coastline is very scenic and refreshing.

Ali explained to us that Rabat is the capital of Morocco, as well as the capital of intellectuals. It has good universities, museums, architecture. Morocco is an old country with a lot of history. We went by the main street

and came to the Parliament. Lofti has arranged for us to tour the building and meet Dr. Mohamed Cheikh Biadillah, Speaker of the House of Councillors, in the chamber. We felt so honored and privileged to be there and to meet some of the government officials.



Dr. Biadillah gave us an informative talk on the history, culture, background and current issues of Morocco. He explained the major concerns on new constitution, human rights, women's rights, migrant problems, drug problems, organized crime, terrorist threats, social issues, etc., and how Morocco is dealing with them. He said Morocco is in good economic position, offering free health care and education to its citizens and migrants as well. Women are well represented in different levels of the society. Morocco faces the same challenges as other countries in fighting vast network of terrorists and their attempt to recruit youths in the country. His talk was most enlightening and we are happy to hear Morocco has been able to maintain its unique position amongst all the turmoil in the area and demonstrate itself as an outstanding model in contributing to development of regional peace, prosperity and stability.

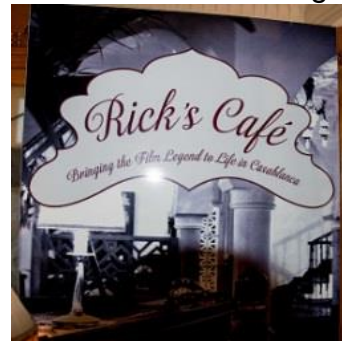


Departing from our wonderful visit to the Parliament, we had lunch at a hotel and continued our 2 hour drive to Casablanca. On the way, we stopped by the cleanest public bathroom at a Shell Station. We are happy to check into Novotel, where we washed up and headed out to our last night at Casablanca at Rick's Café.



By now, we have all found out that the movie "Casablanca" was not made in Casablanca, and no movie was ever made at this Rick's Café. Nevertheless, the excellent dinner and good company marked the appropriate ending to our Moroccan tour. Thank you to everyone. Thank you to our hosts, our organizers (both US and Moroccan), the beautiful weather, our fellow ambassadors and of course, Ali and Adil – our reliable tour guide and driver. Thank you and thank you – for friendship made on this journey, and the bridges we built towards world peace and understanding.

As-salam alaykum and B'slama. Shookran, shookran – until we meet again.



Tuesday, April 28, 2015 Day 16 Casablanca to Madrid

Tuesday, 4 AM, I manage to mutter goodbye to Arlene, my steadfast roommate, as she whirls out the door to catch the bus for departure to the Casablanca airport. After another 3 hours of sleep I'm ready for breakfast. Breakfast at the Hotel Novotel is good - nice variety of food and attentive staff who are quick to replenish whatever is needed. There are no familiar faces in the dining room - guess the others are enjoying a sleep in. Following breakfast I shove all my paraphernalia into my suitcase, do some crossword puzzles, then it is time to leave for the airport. We board the same bus which has carried us through Morocco. As usual Ali, our superlative guide, and Adil, our very

competent driver, stow our belongings and see to our comfort during our departure. It's a lovely spring day - cloudless blue sky and comfortable temperature as we make our way out of the city - streets crowded with people going to work and the Hassan II mosque dominating the skyline.

The Iberia flight from Casablanca to Madrid was uneventful - less crowded than incoming. The Spanish immigration procedure went smoothly and we collected our luggage. Judi and Neil went off to solve their ticket problems. However things deteriorate as we tried to find our way to ground transportation; there were no directions and no personnel that we could ask for assistance. To add to the befuddlement, the elevators and escalators all seemed to go down and everyone was rushing in that direction to catch the train. Finally we realize that we must board the train which took us to the pod where we found the van company and Vicki went back and brought Neil and Judi to us. Our driver drove us to Madrid and the Lusso Infantas Hotel. The hotel was an excellent choice -small and within walking distance of the Prado, the Plaza Major, the Reina Sofia, and the Royal Palace etc. Location is great - Starbucks is nearby, and there's a breakfast bar across the street. What more does one need???



Since our time is limited, we decide to walk to the nearest pick-up stop of the Hop-on Hop-off bus and take a short tour of the city. As we ride along in the upper floor of the double decker bus I try, in vain, to correlate what I'm seeing with my memories of walking these same streets more than 50 years ago. About two hours later we return to the hotel. Sue and I wait in the lobby for our Spanish friend, Consuelo Fernandez Algora, and the other people go off to find restaurants and food. In a short time Consuelo appears accompanied by her 4-year-old daughter, Lola. After exchanging greetings we decide it's time to eat, so following the hotel manager's suggestion we go to a nearby tapas bar or food court which had once been a huge open air market (the advent of the supermarket spelled its decline). There we find good food and wine and catch up with each other's activities. It's after nine when we decide to return to the hotel, and say goodbye. Lola, who told her mother she was going to be shy, murmurs goodbye in English. It was so nice to see them. Everyone retires early; tomorrow will be a very long day. *Jean Sedar*





We flew from Casablanca to Madrid. We took the Hop On/ Hop Off Bus the first afternoon. We sat on the top deck with great views of all of the statues and decorations on the top of the buildings. The most impressive were two Romans standing in chariots and both being pulled by four life sized horses.



We stayed downtown in walking distance of many of the sights. We chose to visit the Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Museum. There are 3 art museums in Madrid but this one has an especially good impressionist collection. I am not crazy about the old religious art or the non-pictorial modern art. The Thyssen was not crowded and we learned a little by using an audioguide.

We spent a little time in Puerta del Sol, Madrid's lively central square. There were many street performers to entertain for tips. We saw one live statue on a surfboard on top of a wave leaning over at a 45 degree angle. After a few hours in the art museum we decided to go to the Botanical Garden which is near the center of Madrid. Spring is in full bloom here with lots of iris in a wide array of gorgeous colors. The geraniums, pansies, azaleas and horse chestnut trees are all blooming as well as all kinds of roses.



We walked through and enjoyed several plazas with their statues, fountains and sometimes trees. It was nice to be able to walk around without watching out for all the scooters and motorcycles as well as cars and buses. We wanted to see the Royal Palace. It was built by King Philip V who lived from 1683-1746. He was French and was born at Versailles and wanted to copy it. His son Charles III was raised in Italy so he added Italian



flourishes. Each Spanish king since has added his own touches to try to outdo the others. Unfortunately when we were in Madrid, the palace was closed to tourist for official business. We plan to stop before our trip ends because Madrid is the hub for our train connections.

Since the palace was closed we went into the Almudena Cathedral across the street. We were surprised at how beautiful it was. I do not like Gothic Cathedrals. They are too big, cold and dark. This was saved because it took 100 years to build it and by the time it opened in 1993 it had a modern, colorful ceiling and stained glass windows. There were lots of niches around the walls with various saints. The two I especially liked were a black Virgin Mary and baby Jesus and a full size sleeping Peter. Was he the disciple



who was chastised by Jesus for not staying awake?

Next stop Barcelona! *Rose Anne Austin*

Wednesday, April 29, 2015

About 7 AM I go down to the lobby of the hotel and decide to appease my hunger at the small breakfast bar across the street. Soon Vicky, Larre and Sue join me. We walk back to the hotel and a few minutes later, Sue and I find our Japanese friend, Izumi with





her husband and sister! They flew into Madrid from Tokyo last night and are going to spend a few days with our mutual friend Consuelo. We are so lucky they made a special trip from the airport just to see us. Much too soon we must say goodbye and board the van to the airport. Departure goes smoothly although security is tight and several of us are thoroughly patted



down before boarding the plane. We board at the designated time but are delayed about an hour at take-off.

I'm so lucky on this flight, there's nobody in the adjacent seat - what luxury! Service on the plane is good, and food is better than usual. The pilot made up the hour we lost in Madrid, and we land on time in Philadelphia. Everyone's luggage arrives and we trudge through customs and make our way to ground transportation where we have a long wait for the Rapid Rover – it is rush hour. Finally we arrive at the Hokes' house. Robbie's son is waiting for her so we bid her goodbye. Vicki has left her car in the Hokes' garage and she prepares to leave. I put my luggage in the trunk of the Hoke's car and Larre tries to start the engine - surprise, surprise - the battery is discharged!! Finally Larre locates some jumper cables and we manage to make the proper connections to Vicki's battery, Voila! Success - the car starts. Larre and I decide to lead Vicky out to highway and point her toward home, and then we go to small store so Larre can get milk. I stay in the car with the engine running which we're afraid to stop. In a short time he returns, they didn't have any skim milk!! At this point since we're close to my house, we decide to drive there. I get in my car and follow Larre back to his house stopping on the way to pick up milk. Once we are back at the Hokes', Larre stops his car and takes the key from the ignition to unlock the trunk and I retrieve my luggage.

Back at my house as I put the key in the lock, I reflect on what an interesting experience this exchange has been - I have a better understanding of Moslems, I've met some wonderful people and seen some very unusual things - so glad I went!! However, I must add that I am soooo happy to be back with American plumbing!!!! *Jean*

Other Impressions

Morocco is an impressive country – from the lush green north with fruit and vegetable plantations that include bananas and strawberries, deep green cedar trees and wheat and alfalfa fields scattered with bright red poppies – to the arid brown/grey stone desert and the yellow/orange sands of the southern Sahara desert.

Some of the things I will not soon forget include:

- Bread with every meal which is used to pick up/sop up the entrée eaten without knife or fork

- Fabulous tile work in riads and elsewhere – but often no handrails on staircases (which can be slippery)

- Seating in houses consists of low bench sofas placed end to end around the perimeter of a room – no chairs – and low circular tables placed in front serving as dining tables



Men and women in djellabas, some colorful but mostly black or white

The choice of western or eastern toilets

The dramatic presentation of a tagine in a tagine

Little 2" steps with no line of demarcation making it easy to fall on slippery marble or tile floors

Conical mounds of couscous with vertical stripes of powdered cinnamon and sugar

Bargain....bargain....bargain

Pointed backless leather slippers worn by everyone

Massive stork nests perched atop columns, chimneys and radio towers

A long, long camel ride in a sandstorm will definitely be a once in a lifetime experience

The joy and wonder we all experienced with having our wonderful Ali as a guide who managed to bring the Morocco way of life, history and culture to life for all of us
Victoria Leyton

The trip to Morocco exchange was very exciting and memorable for me. First it was very well mapped and organized. The sightseeing and the Atlas Mountains, old medinas and adobe built Berber towns were wonderful but the highlight of it all for me was the first home host in Berber village, learning how to make bread and tea. The adobe house was beautiful, and the foods were oh soooo good. And the village of Chefchaouen or Blue City was by far the best. I wish we could have stayed there longer.
Leila Van Dyke



Azrou Hosts April 22 - 24, 2015

Larre Hoke Sue Hoke Dave Austin Rose Anne Austin Roquia & Lotfi Lamrani Some of the Lamrani children



Fay Harrison, Aya, Val Bolan, Khadijah Aya & Abdellah Rahim Judi & Neil Smith Oussama Elfakih



Victoria Leyton & Jean Sedar Ghita, Hafida Laghrissi & Mohammed Belghiti Adele Dawson & Elizabeth Sugars



Blanche Kung, Mohammed Kassou, Kitty Kwan Hakima, Mohammed, Kitty, Mohammed Robbie Thornton Mohammed Boussefel Arlene Hanson- Young



Paulette Edmonston, Younghee Oh Abdelhaq Bakhalq, Khadija Chrfi & Maryam Douglas Judkins & Peggy Judkins Abdelhaq & Khadija



Marion Boutillier, Karim El Khyati, Ameena & Diana McIntyre Khadijah Ameena El Khyati & Leila Van Dyke



Rabat Hosts April 25 - 27, 2015

Rose Anne Austin, Aicha Gherghouch

David Austin Adele Dawson Elizabeth Sugars

Diana McIntyre, Aoufiya Bellaoula, Marion Boutillier, Leila Van Dyke Maryam



Arlene Hanson-Young, Val Bolan & Fay Harrison

Brahim Baamrane

Batoul Baamrane

Abedellah Ait Baamrane Khadija



Meryem

Ouafaa & Neama

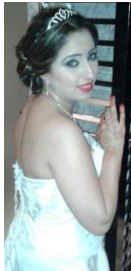
Samira

Khalil

Robert Velthoven

Sue Hoke

Larre Hoke



Young Oh, Peggy & Doug Judkins, Damia, Paulette

Simohmed Idrissi, Damia Belksyer

Kitty Kwan Blanche Kung Neil & Judi Smith, Hajiba, Naima & Nabila Messaoudi



Victoria Leyton, Salwa Ben Slimane, Robbie Thornton, Jean Sedar

Salwa Ben Slimane, Ghita Ben Slimane



Morad Ben Slimane