



Morocco

WORLD TRAVEL AS LIFESTYLE SERIES

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Morocco



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Flag



Coat of arms

Waiting for our flight to Marrakesh from Lisbon in the executive lounge of Air Portugal, Marjan and I had mixed thoughts on visiting this country. Air Portugal is a partner of United Airlines so our miles and stops



counted on our Mileage Plus accounts on United. The lounge was fine with the usual amenities with the Portuguese flavors.

Morocco is a country of 37 million folks; 99.6% of the Islam faith; of which 99.6% are Sunnis with only 0.45% Shias. One of my regrets on this visit was that one afternoon I spotted a Jewish rabbi on the sidewalk in Marrakesh while I was without my camera! There are exceptions to the rule on everything.

Arabic and Berber are the official languages but French (36%), English (14%) and Spanish (4.5%) exist as well.

Marrakesh

The view from the plane before landing showed a land of beige with very little green. The immigration procedures were easy. Our taxi driver was Driss, a young fellow with a ready smile who loved a Hershey kiss with almond anytime. We accepted his offer to be our



driver for the city and the region. He charged by the day for his late model beige Kia rather than by each kilometer. Morocco has contrasting sceneries from the Sahara Desert to the Atlas Mountains with



fertile lands in between. This North African country



has coastlines on the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea. Its capital city is Rabat (1.9 million). Casablanca (3.8 million) and Marrakesh (1 million) were the other cities and environs that we planned to visit. Driss delivered us to the The Marrakesh House

which was an old but a surprisingly large hotel within the action of the city. There was a McDonalds within two blocks.

Morocco has strange currency laws. Their money is the Dirham (Darahim). The exchange rate to the US dollar was 10.17. The Dirham is the currency of the whole Western Sahara. The plot now thickens...By order of the King (Mohammad VI),

“It is unlawful to bring Dirhams into Morocco; it is also unlawful to take Dirhams out of Morocco.”

Ok. You have to visit official currency exchanges to change dollars into Dirhams. No problem. However, when you leave the country they ask you to show your original receipt. If there is no receipt, there is no exchange. Surely, if you have none, they will do the exchange at the airport.

“No, we need your receipt!”

After you receive your boarding passes you are permitted to approach the “currency exchange” window where after a few signatures they will make a reluctant exchange. The

money exchange policy here is unlike anywhere else in the world that we have visited to this date. However,

“When in Rome...”



Because of the extreme traffic, our taxi dropped us off a block before the Souq Semmarine (market). Immediately, we are guided by the horse drawn carriage brigade carrying the folks who felt lazy. It was rich to pause for a look at all the color.





In the plaza
outside the Souq



were many kinds of hucksters selling their wares including the snake guys. They had plenty of cobras to dance to their musical instruments. The moment they caught you looking, they would bring a snake over for you to hold.

“No, no please!”

I have never understood people who love to handle snakes. That very thought gives me the creeps. This fellow suddenly caused a raise in my blood pressure.

The Souq had a vast variety of spices and sweets. Among the goodies was an icky black soap derived from olive oil. Another was the crystals of menthol. A few crystals in a cup of boiling water with a slight inhale will open your sinuses immediately! Please remember to use caution on the inhale.

We found a French restaurant on an upper terrace where we were introduced the tagine (tajine). The moment the waiter raises the lid of the Kamsah the smell of the steam will excite the appetite. The tagine is



offered with all the common meats or vegan. All delicious. See the video. This is the main dish of Morocco with many variations. My

dinner; beef, veggies, prunes, olives cooked in a covered earthenware (Kamsah) with olive oil, garlic and spices made me forget about all the snakes. The food slides down easily with a mango slushy. The meal is properly completed with the hot mint tea.



The Souq provides marketing, entertainment and social life



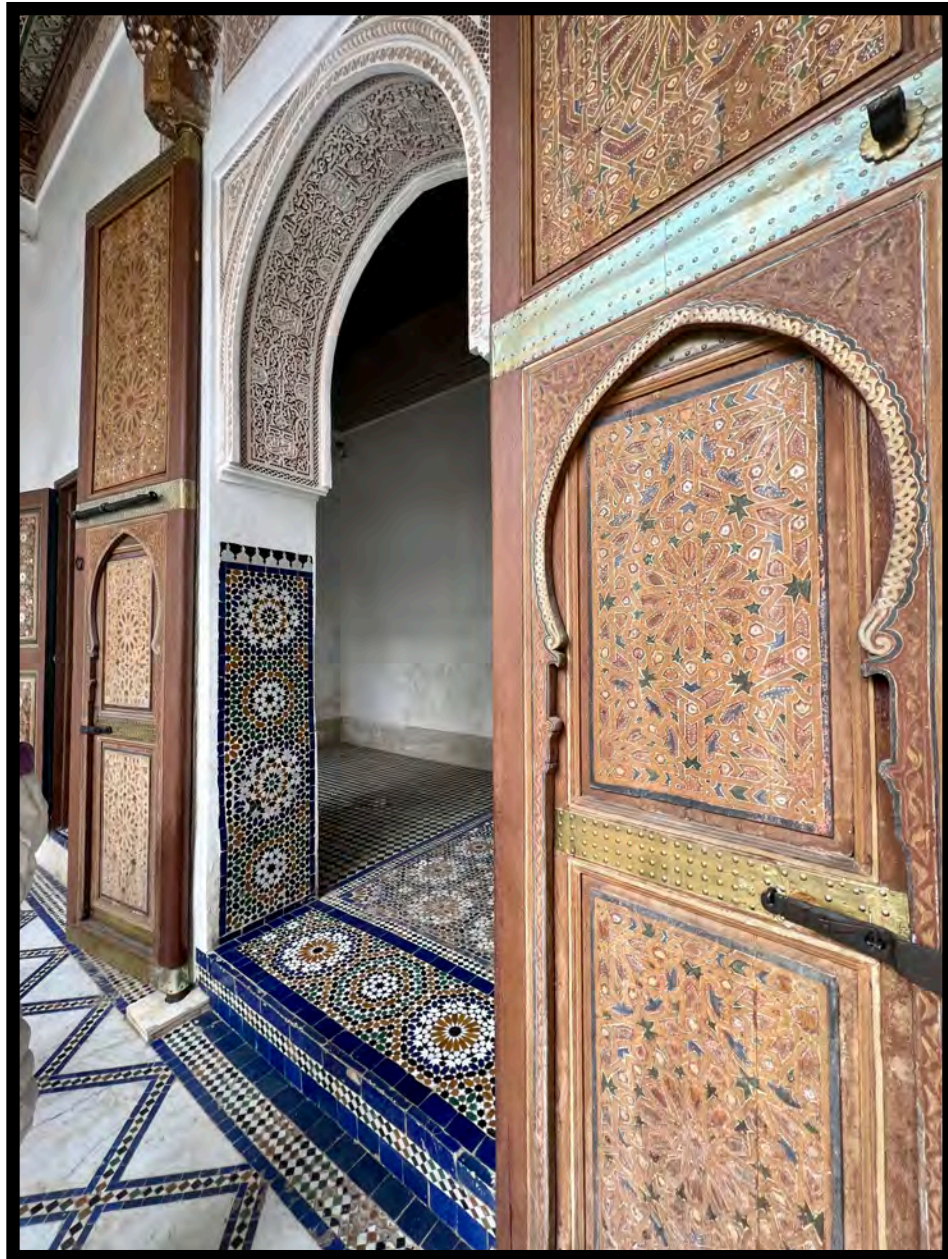
daily
for
all.



The Bahia Palace is located near the Medina in the old



Jewish quarter. It has some of the most unusual architectural works in the country. With its gardens it covers over 8000 square meters. The builder was a former black slave who rose to be the grand vizier of Sultan Abdelaziz. He was a cruel ruler who held a strict grip on all of Morocco. He began the building in 1894 and the project was



completed in 1900 using the services of 1000 craftsmen. The 160 rooms overlooked many gardens. The vizier had 4 wives and 24



concubines. Their quarters opened onto the courtyard of honor.



Today, only one third of the rooms are open to the public. When the vizier died, the family went into exile with all the furnishings but the beautiful mosaics, arches and fountains remain today.

Ahmed, the carpet dealer was a super salesman aided by his



formable, basso profundo voice. His shop had many rooms with multi choices of merchandise. I was interested in a cheap carpet runner for my bathroom hall at home. In no time, his workers had 10 carpets on the floor, all of which were too big. When we finally got the correct size, the carpets were too thick and fancy. He demanded that I make a bid, I told him that I had no idea of value. So he responded, "Well, this one is 1200



Euros!”

“I thought so, as I told you...they are way out of my league, I am looking just for ‘rags’.”

He was understanding and cordial as he accompanied us to the street for a departing photo. As he passed me to return to his store, he blurted,

“How about 150?”

My answer,

“Credit card?”

“Deal!”

So much for the art of the deal... Hello Morocco!.

On to the Saadian tombs. The Saadians ruled Morocco and parts of West Africa in the 16th and 17th centuries. Their royals are buried in these tombs which are located in the Kasbah area of the Medina. The tiny courtyard is graced by extremely tall palm trees.





The Me'chouer-Kasbah Municipal market (government owned) is priced with no chance of bargaining. The selection of goods was

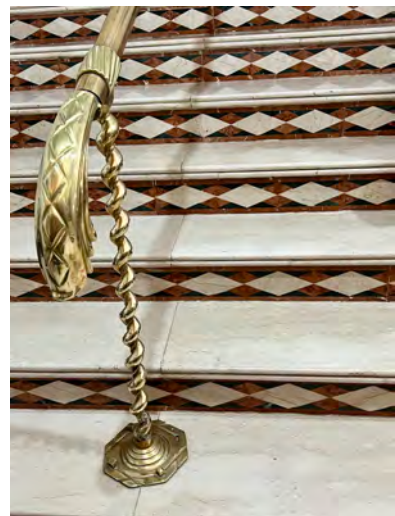


astounding, a panorama of color and texture. It was a wonderment

to walk and look while checking the prices. Some of the pieces were so spectacular that they had prices to match. It was a good place to



by Arabic perfumes, spices and soaps. How about a mother of pearl table with matching chairs for only \$25,000? The



ladies had perfumes for men as well as women. They were able to mix oils to suit the customer. Another ability, they could pour oils out of a bottle into a small vial without a hint of a spill. No need for a tidy



pipette.

The Kutubiyya (Koutoubia) Mosque is the landmark of the city. Built by the Almohads in the 12th century, it remains the most important location of the city. There are no stairs in the 250' high minaret. The muezzin would ride a horse up the ramp for the call to prayers. The top of the minaret has a spire of brass bells that used to be made of gold. They were melted down as a punishment to the sultan's wife for being seen while eating during Ramadan fasting hours. Today the balls are filled with salt from the Atlas Mountains which contains magnesium and nitrates that prevents the spire from oxidizing. The



salt is changed every year at Ramadan to preserve the golden glow. Non Muslims are not allowed inside the minaret. I loved the brickwork that surrounded the many arches of the temple.

The drive to Agafay in the Sahara Desert was a study in recreation. The choices were to ride a 4 wheeler or a camel! There



were those who chose overnight stays. All of the above provided ample views of the endless, brown sand. Note the snowcapped Atlas Mountains on the horizon.





Marrakesh knew how to celebrate Valentine's day at the French



Patisserie near the National Theater. It could be done in Western or Arabic; all lovely.





Our scenery was due for a drastic change as we headed towards Oukaïmeden in the Atlas Mountains. We did get a glimpse of the snow on the Atlas Mountains in the Sahara because it is possible to see long distances on a clear day in the desert. There were substantial trees and sheep grazing along the road so we knew we were headed





towards the mountains. It was about a two and a half hour drive to the skiing. The ski field had the usual style lift but one could rent a



four footed lift also. The animated ski lift (Donkey) accommodated



both skies and snowboards...no discrimination! There were Moroccans who enjoyed throwing snow cakes at one another rather





than to ski. This place was enjoyed by all even though we thought some of the events were unusual. I have now enjoyed the ski



experience at all six continents. One could also enjoy cooked snails and cheese in the parking lot...nouveau après ski! This was not the Swiss alps or the Canadian Rockies; it was the Atlas Mountain peak trip of a lifetime.



On the descent from the skiing there were views of folks and their houses that deserve a photo...A lady returning from the market,





children after school. Driss has a friend who makes bread outside her home by burning twigs in a conical oven. Her warm personality and our Hershey kisses formed an instant camaraderie. She let us help





make the bread, complete with the use of the bellows. When we were finished she treated us to hot mint tea with her bread. Meeting the folks is what a trip to a strange country is all about. She also



showed us a fresh made tagine which Driss bought for his supper. All of her offerings were tasty and her smiles will be with us for a long



time. This is the scene from the rear of her house. Other views of the



Oukaïmeden Region-





Turning a hard right on our return brought us to the region of Sti Fadma, another location in the Atlas Mountain region. We



followed a small stream for several miles to a French restaurant named the “Espace le Noyer.” (A patisserie of Fruits and Glaces). It was an outdoor restaurant that straddled the stream. How unique!



The place was popular so the service was slow but that didn't matter because of the views and entertainment. Can you imagine a waiter bringing your food by running across a one board bridge. The current



was swift and close to the bottom of the board. Some of the seating had tables but in other places there were only mats. It



was a first within one meter of a fast flowing mountain stream; truly an all world scene. Driss made a stop at a carpet shop on the edge of the Atlas Mountains which had different kinds of goods than the one



in Marrakesh. The manager was young and endowed with good humor who sold us two small hand made from this region.



The Atlas Mountains have the unique ground squirrels found nowhere else in the world.



Morocco is a car manufacturer. With a collaboration with Renault, they made the Dacia Logan and the Dacia Lodgy. They are not expensive and they represent the number 2 export of the country.

Driss brought his lovely wife to accompany us to the airport who shared her husbands' love for chocolate with an almond.



Casablanca

We flew Royal Morocco (Maroc) to Casablanca which is a



partner with American Airlines. The airport in Casablanca is 30 miles outside of town; our driver drove faster than Jehu, passing everything in sight whether on the right or left. Casablanca's can make a two lane road into a four lane in an instant. He made his \$35 fare exciting and we were downtown at the 4 star Toubkal Hotel in a jiffy. On



mutual agreement we were not going to hire him to be our driver in the Casablanca area. After changing money, we were unable to find an information office near our lodging so we wandered into the Marriot Hotel nearby. The cordial receptionist introduced us to the concierge who introduced us to Issam. He was a large fellow with a sharp eye who was about to become our wonderful driver and friend. He would pick us up at 8:30 am to bring us to the world famous Hassan II Mosque.



Meanwhile we visited the old souq near our hotel. It was dirty with junky stuff with more than enough creeps to harass us.

Issam was a careful driver who willingly pointed out the local sites on the way to the Mosque; as in Rick's cafe, the site of the famous 1942 movie 'Casablanca'.

The Hassan II Mosque is a huge complex. It is the largest functioning mosque in Africa and is the seventh largest in the world. Visiting after the morning rain is a spellbinding experience. The tiles



of the plaza glisten as the sun begins to shine in the cover photo of

this book... a five star sight. The minaret is 150 feet higher than the Washington Monument. It cost 700 million dollars. Construction began in July 1986 and was completed in 7 years. The ticket office was a meeting place of the world. A photo of the price list which listed fees that were dependent on whatever activity.



مسجد الحسن الثاني

لائحة الأسعار

الكبار.....
الصغار (من 3 إلى 10 سنوات).....
الساعة الإضافية.....
*مستلزمات موضوعة رهن إشارة الزائر

الخدمات العادية
فرك وتنظيف بشرة الجسم.....
خدمات الصابون المعطر
فرك وتنظيف بشرة الجسم/تنعيم الجسم.....
الخدمات التقليدية
فرك وتنظيف بشرة الجسم/تنعيم الجسم.....
تنعيم الجسم بالفاصول/تنعيم الجسم.....
الأطلس الصغير
فرك وتنظيف بشرة الجسم/تنعيم الجسم.....
تنعيم الجسم بزيت أركان.....
الأطلس المتوسط
فرك وتنظيف بشرة الجسم/تنعيم الجسم.....
تنعيم الجسم بالفاصول/تنعيم الجسم.....
الأطلس الكبير
فرك وتنظيف بشرة الجسم/تنعيم الجسم.....
بالفاصول من النوع الممتاز/ تنعيم الجسم.....

المستلزمات
قفاز للفرك.....
شامبوان.....
سائل الاستحمام.....
سروال تنميتي.....
مناشف للأرجاء.....
قفاز كبيرة (قفاز للفرك، شامبوان، سائل الاستحمام).....
المشروبات
قهوة ماء 50 مل.....
قهوة ماء 100 مل.....
لائحة الأسعار قابلة للتغيير دون إعلان مسبق
للمزيد من المعلوم

THE HAMMAMS

CASABLANCA HASSAN II MOSQUEE

PRICES

Adult rate.....50 dhs / 90 min
Children's rate (from 3 to 10 years).....40 dhs / 90 min
Additional hour.....25 dhs / 60 min
* Supplies available to the customer : black soap, mizar and flip flops

SIMPLE RITUAL
Hamam / Scrub.....90 dhs / 120 min

SCENTED SOAP RITUAL
Hamam / Scrub / Soaping.....120 dhs / 120 min

TRADITIONAL RITUAL
Hamam / Scrub / Soaping / Rhassoul wrap.....200 dhs / 150 min

THE ATLAS
Hamam / Scrub / Soaping / Care with argan oil.....350 dhs / 150 min

THE MIDDLE ATLAS
Hamam / Scrub / Soaping / Rhassoul wrap / Toning treatment with argan oil.....400 dhs / 150 min

THE HIGH ATLAS
Hamam / Scrub / Soaping / Precious wrap / Toning treatment with argan oil.....450 dhs / 150 min

ACCESSORIES
Kessa glove.....35 dhs
Shampoo.....10 dhs
Shower gel.....10 dhs
Disposable underpants.....10 dhs
Rental of futa.....35 dhs
Large bag (kessal grove + shampoo + shower gel + water bottle 50 cl + Futa rental).....90 dhs

DRINKS
Water bottle 50 cl.....10 dhs
Water bottle 100 cl.....15 dhs

* Prices can be modified without prior notice

For more information : 05 22 47 27 63



It was a long walk over the plaza to the mosque where I was



accompanied by a fellow from Israel. As we entered the mosque, we were handed green plastic bags so that we could carry our shoes. The



magnificent sight had a way of bringing a solemn behavior to all the





visitors. Marjan took some good videos. For a while, I joined the Islam folks from Liberia. They knew by heart all the sayings written



on the lofty places within the mosque. The upper section was



occupied by the women during a service while the men worshiped on the first floor. The splendor followed us to the bottom floor which was devoted to the washing and cleansing of the body, especially the feet and the inside of the nose. The place

for this was huge with many bowls. Another feature of the mosque was the absence of seating...no chairs or benches. After the cleansing bowls, there were a few benches and I thought, "Yes, I'm wrong!"



No, I was right. The seating was for the tourists to use while they put on their shoes again and to get ready to exit to the street. This is a common feature between the Russian Orthodox Church (Christian) and the Mosque (Islam). If you want to worship God, you must not sit. The Hassan II Mosque can accommodate thousands of worshippers who do not sit. A few more looks of the Mosque...



We visited The Church of the Sacred Heart, the white cathedral that was built by the French architect, Paul Tournon. It was built in 1930 but its religious connection (Roman Catholic) ceased in 1956 when Morocco gained independence from France. Since then, it is a cultural center visited by tourists. The number of Moroccan Christians existing today is about 4000.



The New Town Market (Habous Souq) is quite different from the one near our hotel. It was clean with many fine articles on



display. Marjan bought 10 pashmina scarves while I settled for 15 more...everyone different. Outside the market was a restaurant for a pause to have some mint tea and pastry. Here is where Marjan broke the ice with Issam. She was getting nowhere trying to tell him a joke



in French.

So then she threw up her hands in despair meaning,
“This is so useless!”



It was now time to slip him a Hershey Kiss with almond and all was well. From that point on our relationship was cordial and warm. Language problems melt quickly with a smile and chocolate. This is the key to unlock fine travel experiences around the world.



A popular restaurant near our hotel was the Les Fleurs. I loved their lamb chops in the mushroom sauce. The other tagines was fine



also. Our waiter knew how to pour

Cuisine marocaine - Moroccan Dishes - الأطباق المغربية		
Tagines Marocain - Moroccan Tagine - طاجين مغربي		
Tagine d'agneau (Aux légumes / aux prunes / aux olives)	Lamb tagin (With vegetable / with prunes / with olives)	طاجين الخروف (مع الخضار / زيتون / زيتون)
Tagine de veau (Aux légumes / aux prunes / aux olives)	veal tagin (With vegetable / with prunes / with olives)	طاجين البقر (مع الخضار / زيتون / زيتون)
Tagine de poulet (Aux légumes / aux prunes / aux citron)	Chicken tagin (With vegetable / with prunes / with lemon)	طاجين الدجاج (مع الخضار / زيتون / ليمون)
Tagine de poisson	Fish tagin	طاجين السمك
Tagine kefta	Kefta tagin	طاجين اللحم المفروم - الكفتة
Tagine de légumes	Vegetable tagin	طاجين الخضروات
Couscouss - couscous - الكسكس		
Couscous aux légumes	Vegetables couscous	كسكس بالخضر
Couscous d'agneau	Lamb couscous	
Couscous de veau	Veal couscous	
Couscous poulet	Chicken couscous	
Couscous de poisson	Fish couscous	
Couscous royal	Royal couscous	
Pastilla - Pastila - البسطة		
Pastilla au poulet	Chicken pastilla	
Pastilla aux fruits de mer	Seafood pastilla	



the tea properly. The manager especially liked Marjan's chocolate. He offered more than once that I could leave anytime and he would take good care of Marjan all day with no problem. Isn't that a keen hospitality?

A walkabout day took us to the modern railway station at the docks. The waiter at the McDonald's Cafe wanted to talk "Futbol (what we know as soccer). Last Fall at the World Cup final in Doha, Qatar, Morocco finished fourth. This was an amazing

accomplishment to finish fourth out of possible 192 countries. He explained that this was done by using all local talent. Normally Morocco has many players in Europe and South America making big money and when the World Cup would come around they



would choose a manager of these guys. This World Cup was different. Their players were not famous locals who hated to lose by playing as a team to win by cooperation and intense desire. They became #4 soaring higher than their professional star countrymen. Today, trains, cars and busses sport their pictures giving the country much needed pride.

It was 11:45 am, too early for lunch in Rick's Cafe, so we headed for the mall across the street by the harbor. Here there were perfumes of high quality which forbid us to walk past and not drop in. We purchased some fine perfumes (oils-musk and white rose)



mixed meticulously by pipette. Marjan gifted me with a sword of the Prince of Oman containing a masculine toilet water. These exotic



odors were confined in equally special containers which made the shopping and use memorable.





After a walk by the restless sea, it was time for a late lunch at Rick's Cafe. The bouncer out front had a poignant approach.

"Are you here for the bar or the restaurant?"

"We're hungry, give us the restaurant."

This was a good way to weed out the gawkers; those coming in for just a photograph. Rick's was the scene of the famous 1942 movie 'Casablanca' which starred Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman. Humphrey Bogart played the role of Rick. One can easily recall the familiar line after



you are seated near the band shell,
“Here’s lookin’ at you kid .”

The timeless story of romance, loss and redemption is considered by some to be the greatest movie of all time. The two floored restaurant and bar was elegant. The band played softly to promote conversation both day and night. We were seated next to an Australian couple from Broken Hill. They live near Ayers Rock and have a small farm of only 3000 acres. He works in mining; he told us that there is no more Hill because it has been mined away. She is a health professional. I saw on the menu a sea food offering for two for only



\$52. I thought,
“Hey this is Rick’s Cafe, let’s do it.”

What came was overwhelming. We shared with our Aussie



friends but it was still impossible to clean the platter. It probably





contained every shell fish variety of the sea in abundance. Here are some photos of the memorable place.

Rabat

Only a 2 hour drive from Casablanca, Rabat is on the Atlantic Ocean also. The sports stadium is the eye catcher before you enter



the city. There are many up scale houses here. The average Moroccan earns \$11,000/year; the residents of Rabat make twelve. Rents in Casablanca (business center) than Rabat (political center).

The Kings Palace is in Rabat. We pulled into the compound and had to surrender our passports. They returned our passports over 20

minutes later. Ok, on to the Palace. Issam dropped us off four blocks from the entrance to the Palace. From the nice fountain near the



entrance we could see the colorfully dressed guards. There was a sweet, elderly couple from Jerusalem there waiting with us to enter. We soon discovered that this was it. Visitors were allowed to see the entrance of the



Palace but not to enter. Here is a photo of King Mohammed VI. We did not understand what the 20 minute security wait was about to just see the entrance door. There were stretches where the trees were trimmed as bushes.



The Hassan Tower is actually a minaret for a mosque that was never built. The tower construction began in 1191 by al-Mansur who



was a Berber. The tower and mosque was meant to be the largest in





the Muslim world at the time. When al-Mansur died 1199, the construction stopped. The tower was 44 meters high and the 348 columns were only stubs. Some of the columns were damaged by the Lisbon earthquake in

1755. None of al-Mansur's heirs were able to continue the building for lack of funds, so the Almohad Capitol remained in Marrakech. In the 20th century the French and Moroccan archeologists restored the Southeastern corner of the complex to build a mausoleum and mosque. Today the mausoleum houses the remains of Mohammed



V and his two sons. In 2012, the tower and complex was designated a UNESCO World Heritage site. The entrance is graced with colorfully dressed guards



on white horses. On November 18th, 1955, King Mohammad V came here to hold Friday prayers and to officially proclaim independence from France.



The Kasbah of the Udayas began in the 10th century as a

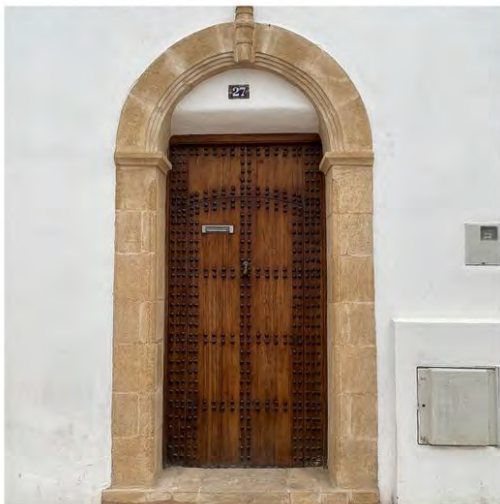
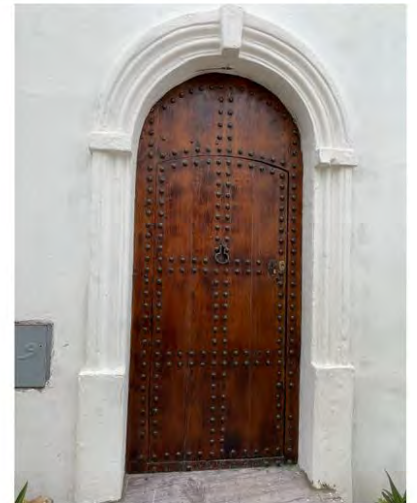
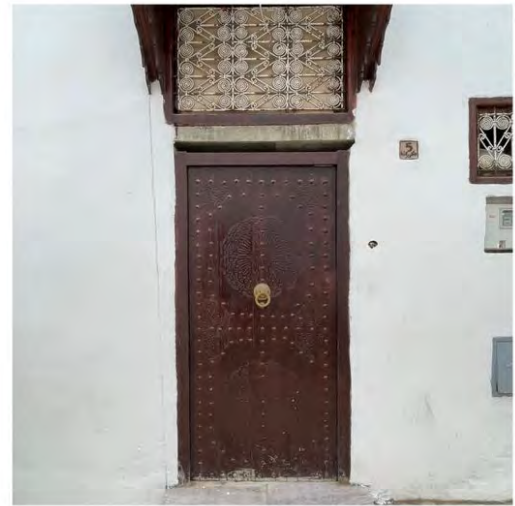


fortified monastery. It is located near the mouth of the Bou Regreg River and the Atlantic Ocean. It has changed hands many times. In 1609, King Philip of Spain banned all Muslims and Moors from his country. About 2000 settled here. In time 4000 more came to form an autonomous republic who gave refuge to pirates and other misfits.



Today, it's a quaint residential neighborhood. The narrow alleyways

feature fine houses with white plastered walls. The doorways were so



photogenic. The 'town' alleys lead to a large, high vista over the River



and the Atlantic Ocean. The mosque here is one of the oldest in Morocco.



There were colorful cemeteries that overlook the ocean. Isaam



has relatives that are buried here. Down at the ocean was the Borj



Eddar, a high end restaurant. We invited Issam to join us for lunch and he was pleased. Drivers do not normally eat with their visitor





clients. We had a good view of the beach on our return to Casablanca.

A few more views...





We had warm feelings about Morocco as we waited for our flight to Porto, Portugal. Our “Au revoir” and “Ma’ a Salama” was genuine. We are forever enriched for the privilege of knowing a bit about this beautiful country in Northwest Africa.

Text by John Bucher Herr

Photos and videos by John Bucher Herr & Marjan Vuurman