

Eurolink

Capturing the Allure of Morocco

Newsletter October 2010



Dear Travellers

The extra day in Casablanca meant we could discover all the beautiful Art Deco and Mauresque buildings dotted in the back streets. Our favourite was the fully airconditioned, spacious Hotel Lincoln featuring Michelangelo arches.

Late at night, we were charmed by the cardboard loaded rubbish cart, pulled by a tiny little donkey. A dangerous pastime crossing the street but 11 of us made it (just!) to the Hotel de Fleur for a nice cold Casablanca beer. A few of us took a crazy taxi ride to the great mosque where 25,000 inside and 80,000 outside were devotedly praying to Allah. It made us feel quite emotional.

Zaid took the wheel again this year and off we went to Rabat, which will be remembered for the aggressive henna painting which was not so easy to remove! Moulay Idriss shone and glistened in the sun and hustled and bustled.

We witnessed the frayed tempers of Ramadan fasting and one man got carted away by the police and his wife got a clip round the ear for her protests!

A lovely place to buy an ugly hat or two. Another scrumptious picnic at Volubilis then a guided tour of exquisite mosaics. Traveling to Midelt an enduring memory will be the Berber nomads racing up the hill to our van. We gave them a bag of clothes as we knew from last year this is what they wanted. Unforgettable the little girl pleased as punch clutching her new jersey -there was no way she was giving it up!

Fes, pure quality and old world charm and our Riad an inner sanctum of peace and tranquility. Our dinner was a spread of colourful salads and the tenderest meat tagine by the rose petal strewn fountain!

We were most entertained by the antics of the carpet salesmen (car salesmen could learn a few tricks!) The tannery lay before us like children's paint pots but the leather poofs (like the salesmen) were all hot air as one of our group discovered. Actually two of us did get lost in Fes but locals were so helpful and we soon found our way back to the group! Fes overwhelms all the senses - tasting camel meatballs, smelling sweet shebbakia the special sweet eaten at Ramadan and all the colours. Some of us braved the cultural evening, which included a very suspect magician, strange white wine and some very dodgy dancing!

Midelt was a magical evening walk from our Kasbah out into the nothingness of the High Atlas and a noisy dinner beside the Gnoua musician spinning the tassel on his hat.

Two weeks before we got to the desert it had been 65 degrees celcius!! As we sat with a Berber family having lunch out beyond the dunes(at 40 degrees) we pondered on how they coped with this heat with just the shade of a Berber tent. The children had nothing to play with and did not go to school and the father walked the camels to the lake each morning then back in the evening.

The camel ride was tough on certain parts of the anatomy and one client wanted to know if his testicles would stay flat on the bottom !

Todra gorge was glorious as we potted alongside the river testing the crops and delving into a still inhabited ancient kasbah We couldn't resist peeping through doorways to see that in some ways time has stood still. The best place to sleep was under the stars by the pool with the towering rockface above. A romantic setting. At Ait Benhaddou our self appointed guide brought the place alive and revealed the polystyrene frontage! All is not as it seems in the movie world. Watch Gladiator and see if you can see this picturesque setting. In Marrakesh we enjoyed the oasis of Jacques Marjorelle's garden then contrasted that with the craziness of the Place. Some of us gels tried the local bathhouse and one of our group was quick to describe us as white scrawny chickens compared to the fuller figured Moroccan woman. One little chicken was sitting innocently when a dark shape loomed up behind, grabbed her, bent her back and proceeded to scrub from head to toe (and all the bits in between!). One little chicken lost an earring so there we were scabbling about on the floor awash with all sorts of unmentionables! The cooking class was a real highlight actually shopping for the ingredients (tricky explaining some things!) then making and eating the special Moroccan delights. Some shopped 'til they dropped and one of the group nearly made the mistake of joining the shoppers group thinking they were going for a Berber lunch! Next day in Ourika after a hairy river crossing it was lovely to see Malika and what a feast of chicken couscous she prepared for us over her little open fire. We stopped on the way home at our drivers house and were invited in. Conveniently there was a wonderful lightshade shop next door as well! Another stop to see our Tangia dinner being cooked in a clay pot in the embers of a fire under the bathhouse and later that night what a delicious casserole we all shared in our Riad (it felt like a family Xmas dinner.) Asni market was full on! full of men and a taste of real life in the Atlas mountains. Then it was a peaceful walk up to our little hostel perched atop the village with stunning

views of Mt Toubkal. One brave soul took the mule ride and looked very comfortable I might add. We ate too much, did a lovely walk down through the apple orchards, learnt a new game like hopscotch then ate some more. A great sleep!

Essaouira was a delight and the much promised cheaper shopping came up to expectations. One of us showed cougar tendencies daring to wear a skimpy top inevitably a young boy took a shine to her and kissed her on the bare shoulder! The beers never tasted so good watching the sun go down over the Atlantic.

A cold dip in the Atlantic and a feed of sardines at Oualidia and we were happy following the coast to Safi (gorgeous pottery) and El Jaddida (charismatic underground cisterns). Getting lost in Casablanca was not in the plan but a lovely lad jumped in our van guided us right to the Hotel (without expecting anything in return!)

Heading up the coast we stopped in Kenitra where the toilet door handle was handed over on request for the toilet. Ah but only one handle which posed a problem for those of our group not in the know stuck on the inside with the handle on the outside! Consequently they are still there.

Asilah was a real treat with classy artwork, tempting shoes and water in the swimming pool!

Spain was a fantastic contrast to Morocco so much freer for women. It was pork chops for tea and bacon for breakfast! After casting aspersions on Spanish integrity warning the group to watch their bags one of our group left a bag at the railway station and I had to eat my words because it was still there half an hour later!! Ronda was culturally rich with live musicians playing in the piazzas and exhibitions of Picasso and the like. Granada architecturally rich well rich in every way and you have to see the Alhambra at night!!

The only downside of Spain is we don't spend enough time there!

Thanks to a wonderful group they made it a fun and a memorable experience.

Looking forward to Morocco 2011

