



## Journey Through Morocco's Exotic Landscapes

Join English artist, Noel Bensted as he takes you on a journey through Morocco's ancient cities, hidden oases, to an artist's retreat on the edge of the remote Sahara Desert.

### **17-DAY JOURNEY THROUGH MOROCCO (APRIL 25 - MAY 11, 2023)**

Experience the kaleidoscopic wonders of Morocco through the eyes of renowned English artist Noel Bensted on this 17-day Painting and Sketching journey. Step back in time in a country whose rich colour palette inspired famous artists Matisse and Delacroix. From the vibrant bazaars of Marrakech, to a faraway oasis town and spectacular gorge in the Atlas Mountains, to Café Tissardmine, an artists' retreat on the edge of the Sahara Desert, to the medieval city of Fes and finally, the charming blue town of Chefchaouen.

### **ABOUT THE ARTIST**

Noel's love of colour and light and his fascination with the people and culture of Morocco have developed into a passion for travelling, painting and exploring the country. "I first went to Morocco 10 years ago on a painting expedition and was instantly captivated by the contrast between the harsh sunlight and intense shadows and the cool, soft pools of light which define its interiors." Noel's artwork is driven by a love of narrative, capturing fleeting moments in time and imbuing them with a filmic quality. For this reason, he always works from life.

Noel has a BA and MA from the Royal College of Art, London. He has exhibited extensively throughout the UK and the USA, including solo shows from 2004 at the Medici Gallery in London. As well as his regular painting expeditions to Morocco, he has travelled through the cities and landscapes of America, Cuba and Europe.

## **MARRAKECH**

Marrakech is a feast for the senses; an intoxicating city known for its souks, spices, snake charmers and hidden palaces as well as its trendy art galleries and elegant hammams. Travellers gravitate to the dark, narrow alleyways of the medina, with its endless mosaic of souks, enticed by the alluring scents and brilliant colours, the sounds of musicians, the rich folds of carpets, acrobats, delectable foods, and perfumed gardens.

## **AIT BEN HADDOU**

This fascinating traditional 11<sup>th</sup> century fortified mud brick castle (Ksar) is on the edge of the High Atlas Mountains. It is on the UNESCO World Heritage list and has featured in many films, including Lawrence of Arabia, Jewel of the Nile and Gladiator.

## **TODRA GORGE**

Todra Gorge is a trench of gigantic rock walls that run through the High Atlas Mountains to form one of the most spectacular natural sights in Morocco.

## **ARTISTS' RETREAT AT CAFÉ TISSARDMINE**

Situated in an oasis on the edge of the Sahara Desert, is Café Tissardmine, an artists' retreat created by Australian artist, Karen Hadfield in partnership with the local Berber community. Deserts are places of mystery, have always inspired writers and artists. Café Tissardmine provides an environment that is restful and inspirational and an opportunity for travellers to engage with the local culture and camp in the desert under clear, starry skies.

## **FEZ**

Fez is the most complete medieval city in the world; a living museum and UNESCO World Heritage site. It's an assault on the senses, a maze of narrow alleyways and covered bazaars, bursting with aromatic food stands, craft workshops, mosques and colourful inhabitants. Donkeys, piled high with merchandise, force their way through the dark tunnels to fragrant souks, with their conical display of colourful spices. A perfect place to sit, sketch and watch the passing parade.

## **CHEFCHAOUEN**

Chefchaouen, perched beneath the raw peaks of the Rif Mountains, is one of the prettiest towns in Morocco. This mountain village with its distinctive palette of blue-washed buildings appears to have been created from an artist's imagination.

## **ACCOMMODATION (3 - 4 STAR)**

Throughout our journey, we will mainly be staying in what were once, beautiful, historic homes or Riads. These enchanting spaces include elegant columns, intricate carved wooden panels, tranquil internal atriums and courtyards - they give the traveller a real window into the soul of Moroccan life.



## **17 DAY JOURNEY THROUGH EXOTIC MOROCCO 2023 - ITINERARY**

### **DAY 1 - CASABLANCA (1 NIGHT) - APRIL 25**

Salam Aleikum! Welcome to Morocco. On arrival at Casablanca Airport, you will be met by our representative and transferred to your accommodation. A welcome meeting will be held later today (time TBC). The remainder of the day is at leisure.

*Overnight Barcelo Anfa Hotel or similar*

### **DAY 2 - MARRAKECH (3 NIGHTS) - APRIL 26**

Your driver will meet you in the lobby of your hotel at 9am for your departure to Marrakech. Upon arrival, check into your hotel. Enjoy a light lunch on arrival and you will meet Noel, the artist. Marrakech is a feast for the senses. Be enticed by the alluring scents and brilliant colours of the spice markets, the sounds of the musicians, the rich folds of carpets, delectable foods, acrobats and perfumed gardens. Explore the amazing Medina and the seemingly endless mosaic of souqs. Each is devoted to a separate trade: pottery, woodwork, copper, leather, carpets and spices. A wander amongst them is a sensory delight. After lunch, enjoy a short orientation walk with Noel and your tour escort.

This evening we enjoy a welcome drink and dinner with the group, including our local tour escort, Kerri and Noel, at the very elegant restaurant Le Foundouk. Note additional drinks will be at your own expense. (B,L,D)

*3 nights Marrakech, at Riad Elegancia or similar*

### **DAY 3 - MARRAKECH - APRIL 27**

This morning after breakfast, meet your local guide and set off on a morning tour of the old medina, through the bustling souks that are the lifeblood flowing through the city. Explore tranquil courtyards filled with the scent of orange blossom, and the many salons and chambers that make up Bahia Palace. This splendid mansion was built in 1866 for a former slave who rose to power within the government. Continue to the Photography Museum, which brings together a photographic collection that's spans the 1870s to the 1950s. Stop by the Koutoubia Mosque; its famous minaret is the prototype for others of its kind around the world, including La Giralda in Seville. Stop for a short coffee break, then walk back through the streets of the old medina to the Jemaa el Fna.

The afternoon will be spent sketching with Noel. At sunset we will wander back through the streets of the old medina to Jemaa el Fna, Marrakech's colourful hub, and experience a visual feast of food stalls, snake charmers, acrobats and musicians. We can then sip cocktails on a rooftop terrace watching the sun smoulder behind distant peaks and reflect on the day's adventures. (B)

### **DAY 4 - MARRAKECH - APRIL 28**

Today after breakfast we will spend the morning sketching with Noel in the exotic Majorelle Gardens, the former home of famous designer, Yves Saint Laurent. Lunch today is at Maison le Maroc des Photographes (Payable locally). After lunch, you will meet your local photography expert at the Photography museum as you set off to explore Marrakech's old Medina: Rahba Lakdima, Dyers' Souk and Ben Youssef Square. The remainder of the afternoon is at leisure. (B)

### **DAY 5- AIT BEN HADDOU (2 NIGHTS) - APRIL 29**

Today at 9am we will travel to Ait Ben Haddou an ancient Ksar in the Atlas Mountains (approx. 4.5 hours) where you will have time to take in the remarkable scenery – sprawling green valleys and rocks sculpted into stunning formations by the wind. The afternoon will be spent with Noel exploring the Ksar, drawing and painting. (B, D)

*2 nights at Ksar Ighhada or similar*

### **DAY 6 - AIT BEN HADDOU - APRIL 30**

Under Noel's guidance, the day will be spent drawing and painting in and around Ait Ben Haddou. (B, D)

### **DAY 7 - 10 - CAFÉ TISSARDMINE (4 NIGHTS) - MAY 1 - 5**

Today after breakfast, we will drive to Toda Gorge (approx. 3 hours), a massive trench that rises over 250 metres to form one of the most dramatic and spectacular natural sights in Morocco. Todra Gorge sits above the old town of Tinerhir and the ruined Glaoui Kasbah, a palatial structure intentionally built to intimidate invaders. The gorge is a dramatic canyon in the mountains, whose massive walls rise steeply, cutting off sunlight from the gravel riverbed far below. Mountain goats and eagles can sometimes be seen on the high cliffs.

Later you will be transferred to Chez Michel in Erfoud where you will meet your driver for accessing Café

Tissardmine in Rissani (approx. 2.5 hours). (Lunch payable locally).

Café Tissardmine is situated in an oasis, near a tiny traditional Berber village, perched on the edge of one of the Sahara's most extraordinary natural phenomenons, Erg Chebbi, a large dune stretching 22 kms long and 5 kms wide with peaks up to 150 metres high. Formed by wind and sand, Erg Chebbi is famous for its unique golden-orange sand formations. At Café Tissardmine, you will be sleeping in simple adobe rooms with en-suite bathroom and shared courtyard. It includes breakfast, lunch and dinner and even a hot water bottle for those chilly nights. The next 4 days will be spent developing your visual diary of sketches and photographs into paintings. **Note: At Café Tissardmine there is no internet or telephone.** (B,L,D)

**Suggested Activities (optional):**

- A camping expedition travelling by either 4WD or camel for 1 or 2 nights into the desert.
- A trip to the markets in Rissani (every Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday).
- You can help make berber pizza for a picnic lunch or learn how to make a delicious tagine.
- An evening performance by the Gnaoua dancers and musicians
- Visit an ancient ksar in the Tafilalet near Rissani

**DAY 11 - FEZ (3 NIGHTS) - MAY 5**

After breakfast, you are dropped off at Chez Michel in Erfoud by Cafe Tissardmine - your driver and tour escort will meet you here, where you will be picked up in the minivan and travel through the remote Moroccan countryside to the living museum of Fez. The drive is approx. 8 hours. We will be staying at Riad Myra, a former home recently renovated in the purest tradition of Fez. Dinner this evening is included at the riad. (B,D)

*3 nights at Riad Myra or similar*

**DAY 12 - FEZ - MAY 6**

Today we head into the old city, known locally as Fes el Bali. Descending into the labyrinthine alleyways within the medina is like taking a giant step back to the Middle Ages. Walk through the twisting streets and alleyways, passing donkeys piled high with goods. Different areas of the Medina are known for specific types of food – from natural butters and fats, to pastries, to crepes and soups to dried and fresh produce. Pass dye-pits, stalls loaded with fruits, herbs and spices. With the squawk of chickens, the smell of spice and the sound of hammering copper filling the air, embark on a tasting trail to discover secret ingredients and fragrant flavours. Watch artisans craft pots, manipulate metal and tan leather with skills passed down over the centuries. The afternoon is spent with Noel sketching. (B)

**DAY 13 - FES - MAY 7**

Today you'll explore the nearby Fes el Jedid, meaning New City (but not to be confused with the Nouvelle Ville). Unlike Fes el Bali, which grew organically over the years, Fes el Jedid was an entirely planned city, built by the ruling family of the Merenids in the 13th and 14th centuries. The imposing gateway of Bab Boujeloud will lead you into the medina-contrasting broad streets, where public and private gardens add a splash of colour to the surroundings. (B)

Optional Cooking Course at the Palais Amani from 3 - 7pm, includes market shopping, preparing and eating the meal.

**DAY 14- CHEFCHAOUEN (2 NIGHTS) - MAY 8**

Today we travel to the isolated town of Chefchaouen (approx. 3.5 hours). Chefchaouen, or the 'Blue Town,' is arguably one of the prettiest places in Morocco. Set against a wide valley and nestled between two peaks in the stunning Rif Mountains, Chefchaouen may take you by surprise. Its medina has been lovingly cared for with striking blue and whitewashed houses, red-tiled roofs and artistic doorways. Much of Chefchaouen was recreated by Andalusian refugees escaping the Reconquista, so you might feel like you're in the hills of Spain while exploring its streets. Ease into the relaxed pace of life in this rural retreat. Take a stroll through the ancient medina and shop for handicrafts, go hiking in the Rif mountains or simply sit at a cafe and enjoy the pleasure of time passing by. If you're feeling peckish, the goats' cheese on offer is a popular treat enjoyed by many visitors. Dinner this evening is included at Dar Echchaouen. (B,D)

*2 nights at Casa Perletta*

**DAY 15 - CHEFCHAOUEN - MAY 9**

Today, after breakfast, enjoy a half day painting or sketching in Chefchaouen Medina. The rest of day is free to explore Chefchaouen. Perhaps sample the delicious local goat cheese at a cafe in the Plaza Uta el-Hammam, admire the architecture of the 15th-century Grand Mosque and browse the shops in the square selling woven goods and small sweets. Also within the plaza is the walled fortress of the Kasbah. In the evening, tuck into a tagine at a local restaurant or visit a hammam, a traditional Moroccan spa. (B)

**DAY 16 - FES (1 NIGHT) - MAY 10**

Today we travel back to Fes for our last night. Arriving back in the early afternoon, there is time for last minute shopping. The remainder of the day is at leisure. (B)

*1 night at Riad Myra or similar*

**DAY 17 - FES - MAY 11**

At 10am this morning the group will be driven back to Casablanca (approx. 4 hours) where they can be dropped off at their hotel or airport. Farewell your newly made friends and continue your onwards destination by your own arrangements. (B)

TWIN SHARE PRICE	AUD8,943.00
SINGLE ROOM PRICE	AUD10,906.00
NON PAINTING PARTNERS	AUD8,100.00

**Cost based on a minimum of 6 participants and a maximum of 8. Fully supported tour, with one-on-one tuition**

**Note: This trip involves walking on uneven surfaces, so is not suitable for anyone with mobility issues.**

**INCLUSIONS:**

- ARRIVAL AIRPORT TRANSFER
- ARTIST/TUTOR NOEL BENSTED
- AN ENGLISH SPEAKING TOUR HOST THROUGHOUT
- PRIVATE AIR-CONDITIONED VEHICLE WITH DRIVER
- 16 X NIGHTS ACCOMMODATION
- BREAKFAST DAILY, 4 LUNCHESES & 9 DINNERS
- ARTIST’S RETREAT - PAINTING WORKSHOP
- ENTRANCE FEES TO CULTURAL SITES AS PER ITINERARY
- LOCAL GUIDES IN MARRAKECH
- RETURN AIRPORT/HOTEL TRANSFER
- TIPS FOR LEADER, GUIDES & DRIVER
- TOUR HOSTED BY ATA FOUNDER KERRI AINSWORTH

**EXCLUSIONS:**

- FLIGHT TO MOROCCO
- ANY VISAS REQUIRED
- TRAVEL & HEALTH INSURANCE (COMPULSORY)
- SERVICES NOT MENTIONED IN THE ITINERARY
- SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES
- LATE CHECK OUT AT HOTELS
- LUNCHESES & DINNERS NOT SPECIFIED
- BEVERAGES INCLUDING ALCOHOL
- ART MATERIALS
- EXPENDITURE OF A PERSONAL NATURE
- OPTIONAL ACTIVITIES

**A NON-REFUNDABLE DEPOSIT OF \$750 IS REQUIRED TO CONFIRM YOUR BOOKING**

