

North Route of the Rif

Morocco

Duration: 6 days

Itinerary

DAY 1. Tetouan



Known as the white dove, the city of Tetouan, Titawin, former capital of the Spanish protectorate of Morocco, 63 kilometres from Tangier, is the population that retains the most Andalusian features of the entire country. The arrival of Muslim and Sephardic refugees from Al-Andalus at the end of the 15th century led to a relatively long period of prosperity in the city. It is at this time that the main nucleus of the old city was built and Tetouan was fortified.

The medina of Tetouan, declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1997, is small, with low white houses, safe from outside influences, making it one of the most authentic and well-preserved medinas in Morocco. Surrounded by a wall of about five kilometres long, with seven gates, inside we find a maze of streets and squares dotted with houses, mosques, Arab baths, schools and craft stores in a true fusion of Arab and Andalusian culture. Its strategic position, facing the Strait of Gibraltar, has served as a base throughout history for the exchange and unity between two countries and cultures, Spain and Morocco, and two continents, Africa and Europe.

Located very close to the sea, in the surroundings of Tetouan, the beaches of Mdiq, Martil, Marina Smir and Cabo Negro are frequent destinations for Moroccan tourism. To the south, crossing the Martil River, the ruins of Tamuda are located. This ancient Carthaginian city, which later became Roman is a silent witness to the history of Morocco. The city became established most likely in the third century BC, and is considered the only pre-Roman city in North Africa.

DAY 2. Chaouen



Located at the foot of the Tisouka and Megou mountains of the Rif mountains, the city of Chaouen, or Chefchaouen, was founded in 1471 on the site of an old Berber village.

Considered for years as a holy city, hidden and protected among the Rif mountains, its medieval physiognomy has remained intact over time. Known as the blue city of Morocco, Chaouen originally welcomed a large number of Muslim and Jewish exiles from ancient

Al-Andalus. Its streets of irregular layout and its blue limestone houses, still retain an appearance reminiscent of the villages of Andalusia. In the old medina of Chaouen, located on a hillside, next to the fountain of Ras el Ma, with its narrow streets and the sound of water running through the cobbled ground, the living memory of the Moorish culture of the 15th century is preserved.

In the main square of the city, Outa el Hammam, an essential transit point, the Chaouen Mosque, Jamaa El Kebir, with its characteristic octagonal minaret, built by the founder of the city Moulay Ali Ben Rachid, and the kasbah, or citadel, of the 15th century, with its gardens, palace and watchtowers, take us back to a common Arab and Andalusian past.

Chaouen is one of the most recognized craft centres in Morocco. In the old caravanserai, a place of passage and accommodation on the route of the caravans that travelled on long commercial or pilgrimage journeys, today full of small shops and artisans' workshops, and in some squares and corners of the medina, one can appreciate, in situ, the complete process of elaboration of traditional pieces of basketry, ceramics, leather, wool or linen, or hand painted polychrome wood. The handcrafted carpets of degraded colours, the woodwork and the ironwork complete the tour of the different types of crafts that are shown in the city.

DAY 3. Akchour



To the east of Chaouen, the Talassemtane National Park extends over a calcareous ridge of the western Rif. With an area of 54,000 hectares, the park contains the only mass of fir forest in Morocco. With over 700 plant species, 38 endemic and 26 rare or very rare, Talassemtane is one of the most ecologically valuable forest systems in the Rif.

Only 30 kilometres from Chaouen, Akchour, a small town located in the Talambote Valley, in the Talassemtane National Park, is the starting point of a hiking route to the Bridge of God, a natural stone arch of 35 meters high, product of the continuous erosion of the water, which joins the two ends of a rocky gorge on the Farda River. The route runs parallel to the course of this river, at the foot of the mountains that surround the canyon.

A possible second route leads us to the Akchour waterfalls following the course of the Kelaa river. A first, simpler stage ends at the Petit Cascade, or small waterfall. The second, more strenuous stage, runs through large stone walls, gorges and forests and ends at the Great Waterfall, or Monkey Waterfall, a geological formation over 70 meters high. Crossing the river and changing banks on successive occasions, the natural pools of crystalline water offer different opportunities for swimming in the river. The constant erosion of the water on the limestone rock has created impossible shapes that are shown in different sections of a journey that can take, in total, about five and a half hours to complete.

The mission of the Chaouen Rural Association, integrated by tourist operators of the rural area, owners of rural houses, agricultural cooperatives, artisans and other local associations, is to facilitate the visit of the travellers in the area of Chaouen, helping them to get to know the territory through its history, culture, nature, crafts and gastronomy. By contacting the Association one can arrange visits to several initiatives launched in order to promote the associative fabric, the sustainable productive development and the conservation of the natural and cultural heritage in the rural environment of Chaouen.

DAY 4. Bellouta



Just 50 kilometers from Chaouen, on the road heading south towards Ouazzane, we arrive at Bellouta, in the rural community of Brikcha.

The rural guesthouse of Bellouta, a rural tourism project dedicated to the recovery and appreciation of the culture and traditions of the region, is located in an area of mountains and forests near Brikcha, a Site of Biological and Ecological Interest (SIBE).

Characterized by a very familiar atmosphere, Azzouzi's house, serves as a base to enjoy a traditional rural environment where it is possible to participate in workshops on organic farming or gastronomy and to visit some of the local cooperatives dedicated to the production of honey, salt, couscous, or handicrafts.

The excursion to the Izaren forest is a good opportunity to appreciate the natural richness and biodiversity of the protected area of Brikcha. Up to 12 species of mammals, 53 species of birds, some of them endemic or threatened, and 28 species of reptiles have been identified in SIBE. A walk through the forest of cedars, oaks and strawberry trees is a good prelude to a traditional lunch or dinner at the rural house.

DAY 5. Houmar



The parks of Talassemtane and Jebel Bouhachem are part of the Intercontinental Biosphere Reserve Andalusia - Morocco, declared by UNESCO in 2006. The general objective of the reserve is to promote the conservation and sustainable use of resources by local populations and to bring together two territories that, despite the physical division, share various aspects of their natural and cultural heritage.

From the road linking the cities of Tetuan and Chaouen, at the level of Beni Hassan, or from the road leading from Chaouen to Larache, from Tanakoub, it is possible to access the nature reserve of Jebel Bouhachem. Located just ten kilometres from Chaouen, the reserve comprises a mountainous region of high ecological value, with several peaks that surpass 1,500 meters. Between 2007 and 2010, a project promoted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) "Développement de l'Accueil Rural Ecotouristique au Jbel Bouhachem (DARE Bouhachem)" enabled the design of up to five ecotourism circuits in the area.

Located just over 30 kilometres from the Jebel Bouhachem Natural Park, the Houmar gîte, in the rural community of Tanakoub, is a simple, traditional-style accommodation with a garden and terrace, from which visitors can organize excursions, have meals with the family and enjoy the products from the gîte's garden. The visit to the Tanakoub textile cooperative will serve as an introduction to some of the artisan techniques of the women of the community.

DAY 6. Assilah-Arcila



Located on the Atlantic coast, 46 kilometres south of Tangier, Assilah, or Arcila, is a small walled city known for its intense cultural activity and for the murals that different artists have drawn on the white walls of its medina, which are now an inseparable part of its identity. The walls, built by the Portuguese in the 15th century, surround the old city and the medina, a network of paved, clean and silent alleys and white houses painted with murals of the artists visiting the city. The entrance gates to the medina, Bab Homar, Ben Kasbah, in front of the Muslim cemetery, and Bab el Bahar, or Gate of the Sea, next to the square tower that watches over the city, are a reminder of the ancient Portuguese presence in the city.

On the way to the Ibn Khaldun Square, from the Sea Gate, we find the Great Mosque of Assilah and the Hassan II Cultural Centre, home to the city's most important annual cultural event. The annual International Cultural Festival of Assilah brings together artists from all over the world to rethink the city's spaces in ephemeral works that remain until the next festival. If one continues walking towards the walls that surround the city, next to the sea, one approaches the Raisuni Palace, a former residence of the governor of Assilah, today converted into a cultural center. Beyond the palace, at the Mirador de Caraquia, visitors can enjoy a beautiful panoramic view of the medina of Assilah and the sea.

The fine sand beaches located in the vicinity of the city, Playa del Paraiso, Las Palomas, Sidi Mugaits or Oued Tahadart are an excellent resource for visitors who enjoy the beach and sea. A visit to the bazaars or the tour of the promenade and the port of Asilah can complete the tour of the city, before returning to Tangier or Tetouan.

Activities

Chauen Rural

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Accomodation

Gîte-Casa rural Akchour

Zaouia Akchour, Talambote

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Casa rural-Gîte el Houmar

Doaur Houmar, Comuna de Tanakoub, Chefchauen

Tel.: +212 661 761 821

www.chaouenrural.org

Casa rural Dar Aicha à Bellouta

Doaur Bellouta, Brikcha, Ouezzane

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www.agrotourisme.ma

Hotel Casa Hassan

Rue Targui, 22, Chefchauen

Tel.: + 212 539 986 153

www.casahassan.com

Useful information

Language

Arabic (official), Berber, as well as French, Spanish and English.

Visas

Spanish citizens do not need a tourist visa to visit the country. A valid passport is required with a minimum of 3 months validity.

Currency

Moroccan Dirham.

Generally recommended vaccines

Hepatitis A, Tetanus-diphtheria.

Recommended vaccines in special situations

Typhoid Fever, Hepatitis B, Rabies, Influenza, Pneumococcal, MMR.

Climate

The coast has a warm, Mediterranean climate. Inland, the climate is hotter, drier and more continental. The summer is quite dry with high temperatures. In the coastal area, the rainy season is from November to March.

