



The set of the movie Cleopatra in the Atlas Studios



Marinid Tombs in Fes



Hassan II Mosque in Casablanca



In Chefchaouen -- known as the Blue Pearl of Morocco



A part of the luxury camp in the Sahara Desert

Morocco: a timeless wonder



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Nestled between the North Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea, Morocco unveils a treasure trove of vibrant colours, cultural heritage, and centuries-old traditions that captivate a traveller. From the mesmerising Sahara desert to picturesque beaches, majestic mountains, bustling souks, delectable cuisine, and enchanting riads, Morocco seamlessly blends the allure of bygone eras with the modern world.

Surprisingly, this captivating destination is yet to gain popularity among Bangladeshi travellers. In this experience guide, I aim to unlock the wonders of Morocco, offering valuable insights and tips to inspire and assist future adventurers in embarking on a memorable journey to this captivating land.

GLAMPING IN SAHARA DESERT

I was taught about the Sahara desert -- the world's second-largest desert -- and its big



A snippet from the Sahara Desert

The Mummy, Cleopatra, and Alexander were filmed there.

The desert and the Atlas Mountains serve as the perfect base to mimic countries such as Beirut, Lebanon, Egypt, Syria, and even the Himalayas. In other words, Ouarzazate and Ait Ben Haddou (World Heritage Site for harbouring the best preserved kasbah (fortress) complex in Morocco) are the places we see as the aforementioned countries in movies.

After this, our next stop was "Khattara", a tunnel and well network built around the 15th or 17th century to provide a better irrigation system in the desert.

EXPLORING TIMELESS WONDERS OF FES

Often referred to as the "Mecca of the West", Fes is also known as the spiritual capital of Morocco and its medina is a Unesco World Heritage site. After spending the night in a beautiful Riad, the next day was all about exploring Fes and getting subsumed by the alleyways of its medina -- Fez El Bali.

One of the highlights there was the University of Al-Qarawiyyin -- the oldest university in the world. This university was founded by a Muslim woman and to date, it operates as one of the most traditional universities in Morocco.

We continued roaming around the winding alleys of the medina, often getting lost in the smell of the local delicacies and ator (perfume) which gave me a déjà vu of the streets of New Market in Dhaka.

Known as one of the world's greatest craft centres, the streets of Fes filled our ears with the clacking of metals, along with the smell of fresh leather goods and the not-so-pleasant smell of the tanneries. Be it the potters, weavers, wood painters, or leather makers -- all these craftsmen as old as 90 years in age gave a glimpse of the century-old, traditional craftsmanship with their hand-made goods.

Before ending the day, we stopped at some more must-visit places such as the Merinid Tombs, the Royal Palace (the king's palace) in Fes El Jdid, and the renowned pottery stores.

GETTING LOST IN SOUKS OF CHEFCHAOUEN

Amidst the enchanting blue hues of

Chefchaouen, the "blue pearl" of Morocco, a traveller finds themselves unexpectedly disconnected from the world, navigating language barriers in a place where English is scarcely understood. The panoramic view of the Rif Mountains and the entire city of Chefchaouen from the summit left me breathless. Originally built in the 15th century, it was in the 20th century that the city was painted blue by Jewish residents as a tribute to God, faith, and the celestial realm.

DAY TRIP TO ESSAOUIRA

During my 3-day stay in Marrakech, I took a day trip to Essaouira which was a 3-hour drive from Marrakech. I was a bit worried about how the beach area would feel amidst the cold winds of January but when I stepped out of the car, I was blown away not by the winds, but by the soothing charm of this port city.

The sky-blue water, the chilly yet warm wind, the smell of fresh fish and the billowing waves immediately drew me in. I also devoured some reasonably priced, delicious fresh fish from one of the arrays of fish stalls.

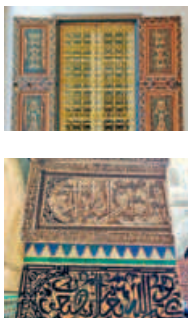
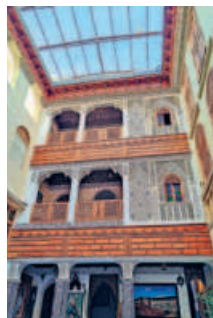
Afterwards, I spent some time roaming around the white and blue alleys of Essaouira's medina. While the medinas in Fes, Marrakech, and Chefchaouen bustle with people and clatters of the potteries, Essaouira's medina was quieter with people simply sipping on mint teas in the small cafés and enjoying traditional Moroccan music performances by the locals.

I also stopped in Casablanca to visit a much-awaited location, the Hassan II Mosque -- the second-largest mosque in Africa and the seventh-largest mosque in the world. It also has the second-tallest minaret in the world.

Immersed in the vibrant medina of Marrakech, I found myself captivated by its bustling streets, enchanting aromas of exotic spices, and the delightful taste of freshly squeezed sugar cane and pomegranate juices. Beyond the popular tourist attractions like Jamaa el Fna Square, Koutoubia Mosque, and the exquisite Jardin Majorelle at Yves Saint Laurent's Mansion, I discovered the true essence of Marrakech by indulging in aimless wanderings through its labyrinthine alleys, savouring the sunrise from the rooftop of my riad, and encountering fascinating sights such as snake charmers. As I explored hidden gems like Bahia Palace, Badi Palace, Ibn Youssef School (madrasa), and Dar Si Said Museum, my love for this enchanting city grew deeper. Marrakech revealed its timeless allure, leaving me with unforgettable memories of a truly magical journey.

TRAVEL TIPS

- I booked a guided tour for my whole trip with Marrakech Desert Travel. They provide great hospitality and will make you feel like family. They will also customise your trip according to your preference. You can find them on Instagram: @marrakechdeserttravel
- Morocco is one of those countries that is best explored with friends and family or, in groups.
- If you have a Bangladeshi passport, you will need a tourist visa by applying to the embassy in Bangladesh and possibly with the help of an agency. However, if you have a Bangladeshi passport and you also have a multiple-entry visa to the US, UK, New Zealand, Schengen countries, Australia, or Ireland which is valid for more than 90 days, you can apply for an e-visa.
- Morocco has a closed currency which means that the currency can be bought after arriving in Morocco. It's best to exchange currency in the shops outside the airport does not give a good exchange rate.
- Maroc Telecom and Orange are the preferable telecoms tourists can use.
- Google maps do not work too well in the medinas.



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Essaouira