Our Group:

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<tr>
<th>Club &amp; Country</th>
<th>Name(s)</th>
<th># Attend(ee)</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Janet Darrow Winter</td>
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<td>Sunny &amp; Mark Eades</td>
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<tr>
<td>England</td>
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<td>AWC Genoa, Italy</td>
<td>Margaret &amp; Giovanni Canepa, Donne Henderson &amp; Oenone</td>
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<td>AWC Lebanon</td>
<td>Salwa Maasry</td>
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<tr>
<td>AWC Casablanca, Morocco</td>
<td>Uta Galanto, Ingrid Müller</td>
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<tr>
<td>AWC Zurich, Switzerland</td>
<td>Juliane Maggi, Andrea Rusch + Ann Cameron Ruttmann</td>
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Here begins our Diary ...

**Sunday 20th March 2011**

One by one we gathered in the beautiful Le Meridien N'Fis foyer awaiting our departure of the Imperial cities tour organised by Top Voyages; a cultural adventure into the green, fertile lands that connect the 7 imperial cities and Atlas Mountains (the Moroccan Switzerland) in the north of Morocco. Before too long, Ahmed, our official guide d’Office de Tourism arrived, introduced us to Ahmed our driver and Abdulle his assistant, and once we were a “family” we were off “Inshallah”.

The journey from Marrakech in a 32 seat, air conditioned Coach was roomy and very comfortable. About 2 hours later we arrived in Casablanca. Some of us choose to dine at ‘Rick’s Café’ and others decided to have a typical Moroccan supper out or stay in the hotel. - Sunny

**Rick’s Café** : A soft moody atmosphere, tastefully decorated restaurant with a gentle jazz trio (piano, drums and Saxophone) playing delightful Ella, Nat King Cole, impromptu music. You could almost hear Humphrey Bogart say “play it again, Sam”! The food was a fusion of east meets west especially with a French flair very delicious. The service was discreet and we were beautifully pampered. It was an excellent evening to begin our tour. I can definitely recommend it to anyone who has a nostalgic, romantic streak and want’s a special night out in Casablanca. - Sunny

**On the Town**: We ate where the Moroccan’s eat near the hotel and had a pleasant evening with good cheap food! - Oenone

**At the Golden Tulip Farah Hotel**: We could not miss another chance to eat Moroccan food and listen to beautiful music at the hotel – then, Swimming early in the morning to be fit for the lovely day ahead. - Julian & Andrea
Monday 21st of March 2011

Casablanca Tour: Royal Palace, The Medina, Mosque Hassan II

Mosque Hassan II: The Mosque in Casablanca is the 3rd largest in the world with the other two being in Saudi Arabia. The scale is enormous and hard to capture in a photo. The doors are huge and the tiles intricate work of turquoise blue. It is situated on the Atlantic Ocean coast, and the breeze from the sea tempered the heat of the sun. – We all agreed it’s a MUST SEE especially the interior. – Janet

It’s interesting to note that everyone in Morocco donated 1 years’ salary to pay for this magnificent structure that was designed by a French architect and all the material used to build it was obtained in Morocco! - Sunny

Kings Palace: Now used as an official Government building.

We visited the magnificent King’s Palace with cedar ceilings, glorious tiles and intricate stucco walls. They then took us to the front door as we had entered in the back! – Donne

United Nation’s Square & Post Office Building: We drove past this very nice square given by the French to the Moroccans. It is quite a meeting place, buzzing with people. – Sunny

En Route to Rabat (capital of Morocco & official home to King Mohammed Vis Royal Palace) we stopped for a ‘light’ Moroccan snack lunch and noticed dozens of Albatross circling overhead. This would be the first of a plethora of sightings of flora and fauna blessed to this area of the country. – Sunny

Rabat: Ahmed our guide, said it means ‘the city of happiness’.

Rabat Tour: Ancient ruins of Chella, The Oudaya Kasbah, Royal Palace and Hassan Tower

Ruins of Chella: also called the Necropolis of Chella. It was once a Roman olive production site and abandoned by them in the early 1100s. About 800 years ago it then became a cemetery for royalty, with sultans adding their own touches to the outer walls and inner sanctums to honour their dead. On the day we visited the area was full of artists trying to capture its warm, golden tones and fading beauty in the mellowing afternoon sun. In this serine setting we saw storks mating or perched atop ruins, cats lazing around the eel pool and horticulturists busy with a variety of flora to test your knowledge. Guess spring is here. - Sunny
Oudaya Kasbah: A fortified village circa 14th Century (Merinid dynasty), built in an Andalucian Style. This evocative Kasbah (think a time of Andelous Corsairs) with it’s unique white and Andalucian blue washed walls was erected to protect the Moors against invasion from Spain and Portugal. The rest of Rabat is a terracotta colour. It sits high on the craggy cliff top, so be prepared for a lot of steps! At its summit you’ll find ramparts with fabulous views of the Atlantic Ocean. It’s a fortress city within the walls of the old Medina of Rabat and is full of narrow passages, little galleries, pretty cafés and endless examples of doors, doors and more doors garnished and quaintly personalised. After our decent from the summit, we were quite ready for replenishment and enjoyed a delightful ‘Atay’ (Moroccan mint tea), Moroccan pastries, and almond delicacies as the gentle breeze cooled us from the Atlantic – Sunny

Royal Palace: The royal palace lies right in the heart of Rabat, and the area in front of it is open to the public. Its’ gateway is impressive. Sadly, that is all we saw from the front car park area.

It is guarded as palaces should be and as with most of the structures in Morocco the true beauty lies within the walls not outside of them.

The Royal Palace sits at one end of a wide square and the King’s own mosque is located at the other. They are what they are, modern structures still exhibiting the fine craft of Moroccan artisans but in an understated fashion. – Sunny

Tour for the day done we ended up in what Donne and Oenone called a ‘Red-light’ hotel next to the Train Station in Rabat. - Sunny
Tuesday 22nd March 2011

Hassan Tower Mosque & Mausoleum: The Hassan Tower, we entered past a guarded gateway by uniformed men on horseback to the imposing minaret of a colossal yet incomplete mosque. Ahmed said it is Rabat’s most famous landmark. Work began during the early 12 century with great ambitions to create the largest mosque in the Muslim world. However, it was abandoned after the death of sultan, Yacoub al-Mansour and the tower is stunted at just around 140 feet, a little over half its’ intended height. The site is marked by two hundred columns indicating the area where the mosque should have stood. The area is so vast that the columns turn a pale blue in the distance! This site also houses the Mosque (see below right) and Mausoleum of Mohammed V, the grandfather of the present king of Morocco. Mosques are normally not open to non-Muslims and though we were hopeful to visit this one it was closed on our arrival. However we did visit the Mausoleum! – Sunny

Tour Hassan Mausoleum: Built in 1961, the decorative art of the Mausoleum is gorgeous. It is interesting to have the tomb of the grandfather and king and then his two sons on the side. The former king on the left and his brother Moulay Abdullah on his right who by the way, is still survived by this Lebanese wife - the daughter of the Lebanese former Prime Minister in the 50’s and is considered one of the fathers of independence of Lebanon in 1943. - Salwa

Driving from Rabat to Meknes – Volubilis – Fez

I’m enjoying a trip in royal Morocco. I saw a lot of Arab architecture; I have eaten good Moroccan food, I saw crowded markets and a lot of sheep. Everything is alright but I’m looking forward to sleep in my bed Saturday night. Ps: Excuse my English and my Spelling – Giovanni

Pss: ... I don’t know what he means. His English and spelling were perfect! – Sunny 😊
On our way to Meknes we stopped briefly to admire the sacred village of Moulay Idriss, Nestled in the hills and named after the most important saint in Morocco, great-grandchild of Maometto, who founded the first true dynasty in the Country. - Oenone

**Meknes, The City of Moulay Ishmail:**

Founded by Moulay Ishmail whose ‘Corsairs’ raided countries in the mid to late 17th Century for 55 years and used the prisoners (known as ‘White Gold’) as bargaining tools with foreign governments and as slave labour to build the ancient Medina walls. We visited his mausoleum in Meknes - Sunny

In 1672 the cruel Alauite Dynasty; Sultan, Moulay Ishmail made Meknes, with its ancient medina and monuments his capital. With great ability and terrible blood thirst he founded present day Morocco. We wondered round the spectacular granaries and stables for his 12,000 horses, all that was left of a vast imperial palace supposedly built from plans of Versailles. We visited his beautifully tiled Mausoleum where the fierce sultan (who had 300 wives and 800 children) finally came to rest. – Oenone

Also, it seems film makers like it here and often use it! ‘Jewel of the Nile’ was recently filmed here. - Sunny

**Volubilis:** We visited the remains of the most important Roman site in Morocco, the ancient Roman city of Volubilis which was the Roman Capital of Morocco. A UNESCO World heritage site of 1997, Volubilis bordered the lands of the Berbers whom the Romans pushed out when they settled this part of North Africa via Tangiers. Volubilis continued to be inhabited and active well into the eighteenth-century, when its marble was plundered for Moulay Ismail’s palaces in Meknes. It covers 40 hectares but was badly damaged by the Lisbon earthquake of 1772. The ruins included exceptional mosaics and the Triumphal Arch of Severian Emperor Caracalla erected by town in 217AD when granted roman citizenship. ceremonial road, Decamanus Maximus, stretches slope to the northernmost gate, Tangier gate. The houses lining up the street from either side contain some of Volubilis’ finest mansions and mosaics. The hierarchy of society, the bath house, the shops and houses make for a striking archaeological site that allows you to actually feel the population going about their daily business. Quite remarkable! – Mark
Fez: The Spiritual and Political capital of Morocco for over a millennium, the city that once was the awe of western civilisation for its mathematics, philosophy and medicine; is now balanced between the Middle Ages and modern life. The Medina(s) still hold a medieval spirit about them. Ahmed told us there were 3 Medinas amongst the narrow alleys and winding streets leading to enclosed courtyards and arched gateways. The 3rd Medina was built under the French Protectorate.

There are 32 Synagogues in Fez; one, for each sect of the Jewish faith and still a place of pilgrimage for many Jews in Africa. The architecture is intricate with courtyards created of lavish marble and ceramic tiles. The madrassas where we heard little children, girls and boys (no head scarfs) busy in elementary school, boldly replying their lessons (shouting actually – they looked like they were having a lot of fun!). The whole city is alive and humming with crafts persons. Anything you want, you’ll find it in Fez! If they don’t have it – they’ll make it! The Souks are extensive, cool, covered pathways and clean (the chicken stalls were a bit smelly – I noticed they had their back to the open air in the souk) with an abundance of fresh produce and spices. If you happen to get lost (like Janet did) just remember to walk down hill, eventually it will lead you out. – Sunny

The Jewish Quarter and Cemetery: We visited the ancient Jewish cemetery, a peaceful place of white rounded mounds, where a skylark was singing. Our guide, Ahmed, brought it all to life telling us of the famous lady benefactress of poor Muslims whose children only discovered that they were Jewish when she asked to be buried in the Jewish cemetery. The surrounding buildings were very evocative of Spain where the Jews were expelled by the Spanish alongside the Moors. The Synagogue itself was small and cosy, in complete contrast to the enormous mosques we had been seeing. – Donne
Kings Palace in Fez: We only stopped for an instant and could only view the palace from outside closed doors that had been donated by the craftsmen of Fez.

Jedid Fez: (New Fez) built circa. 1376.

Wednesday 23rd March 2011

Souk: Handmade mass produce – not a mechanical machine in sight. The industrial revolution ‘Souk’ style is still thriving after a 1,000 years!

Medrassa: Where students not only learnt Islam, French, and other studies but also provided a functioning Mosque for the community. The whole building shifted direction due to the Lisbon earthquake mentioned earlier so worshipers now must pray at an angle to the central arch in order to be due east and facing Mecca.

Borg Sude: A hill top fortified structure overlooking all of Fez and located opposite our hotel: Hotel Les Merinides – beautiful views across the valley.

Ceramics: We were then taken to a family run business. They worked from conception to creation. The men and women of the family work to create pottery, tiles, intricate mosaics, finished panelled tables, fountains ... everything including the exit gift shop. They are quick learners!

Tannery: This is the oldest tannery in the world dating back around 9 centuries! Armed with sprigs of mint in hand (this was our first clue) we negotiated narrow stairways to the rooftop observation balcony of the shop. This area overlooked the preparation pools of the tannery- a sea of stone vessels filled with lime & salt baths to prep the sheep and goat hides, guano (pigeon droppings) baths to soften and preserve, water baths to rinse & clean and dyes of endless colours and sun dried on rooftop racks. Don’t be put off by the smell (which is pretty bad)– it’s worth the viewing! This process has not changed since the 11th century and we saw the complete process which is done manually; from rawhide to completed leather products of jackets, skirts, shoes, belts, gloves and more. The end product is waterproof, scratch-proof (the leather is dyed completely through) and as light and delicate as anything. Fez mass production! Purchases were made here ...
**Carpets:** We visited a UNESCO restored, typical Merchants’ Souk house in the Medina. Walking through a nondescript doorway we were completely unprepared for the beautiful craftsmanship of tiles, cedar wood and Moroccan marble that adorned every viewable inch of this property. It consisted of a narrow entry hall that opened up to a 3 story rectangular atrium that was flanked by rooms of various sizes all elevated a step or two higher and all at the same standard. Cool in the hot months and in the winter the family would retire to the rooms of the top floors. The whole of the ground floor was ‘flood proof’ and should the winter be a particularly bad one it was easily cleaned. This space was now used for the sale of Moroccan (Arab and Berber) carpets that the women of the country weave. We were told it was a ‘fair-trade’ operation and the women would receive 50% of the sales. Carpets were everywhere, draping balconies and some on the floors ... we were offered the traditional ‘Atay’ (mint tea) in those quaint little cut glasses and the show began! – Yes, some of us succumbed and our purchases were hand wrapped and delivered to our waiting coach.

*A word of caution; we’ve now marked it up to experience and recommend you keep a vigil eye on the carpets that are being wrapped to make sure you get what you paid for!*

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**Weavers:** The narrow passageway suddenly opened up to a large dimly lit, high roofed cavernous space. Your eyes eventually adjust and then you can see what your ears had hinted to ... hand operated looms; working in cotton, satin and Moroccan silk which is a dyed cactus fibre. The final products were for sale and many enjoyed purchasing a ‘light’ travel gift here!

I think we helped the Moroccan economy quite well after our day at the Souk. – Sunny

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On the second night we had a traditional Moroccan feast in a rooftop conservatory of the Palais de Fes Dar Tazi in Fez. Overlooking a large square [http://www.booking.com/hotel/ma/palais-de-fes-dar-tazi-en.html?aid=311076;label=palais-de-fes-dar-tazi-TnARU3mwK7cPD3nNENjNeQS4472590110;ws=&gclid=CO6WyeyLhagCFU8lfAodq1Q0rA](http://www.booking.com/hotel/ma/palais-de-fes-dar-tazi-en.html?aid=311076;label=palais-de-fes-dar-tazi-TnARU3mwK7cPD3nNENjNeQS4472590110;ws=&gclid=CO6WyeyLhagCFU8lfAodq1Q0rA) it is a family run Riad and a cuisine gastronomic Morocaine! We highly recommend it. *(The best in Fez according to Ahmed)*
The Chicken was so delicious we asked for the recipe and as most Moroccan recipes go this is what we got so use your judgment to the amounts:

In a Tagine Pot
1 litre of water per chicken
1 whole chicken, Olive oil & lemon, Ginger, Saffron, Onions, Olives
A bouquet of coriander, parsley (note, we assume this means a whole bunch of it)
Cook everything together in a tagine pot for several hours – Long hours. (note also, we think that means a slow cook for long hours)

**Sunny’s version:**

One roasting casserole –like a Pyrex or Le Creuset with a lid:
One large chicken stuffed with one onion quartered and one lemon halved and about 1oz each of fresh coriander and parsley chopped up and put over the chicken loose or tied in bouquet. A handful of green olives and a drizzle of olive oil.

**Liquid measures:**

In a mortar & pestle put 1 teaspoon of saffron and ½ teaspoon of salt and grind them to a power consistency. *(My mother gave me a little marble mortar & pestle which I use only for saffron).*

In a 1 litre measuring jug, put your ground saffron, and a little bit of boiling water to make a paste and continue grinding a little more until the saffron is very fine, (normally, I let the saffron steep to allow the lovely colour and flavour to seep out but it’s going to be in the oven a long time so I didn’t this time) then add one teaspoon of ground ginger and top up with boiling water, (smell the gorgeous aroma!). Now gently pour it over the chicken.

Cover and cook in the oven 180C 350 F for about 20mins per pound + 20 mins. Allow to rest for 20mins. It makes its own gravy/juice and the carcase made fantastic saffron soup; I added vegetables and it tasted like the Moroccan vegetable soup we’d enjoyed during the week!

Enjoy! – Sunny 😊

**Thursday 24th March 2011**

We began our long drive back through the Atlas Mountains via Azrou, Beni Mellal to Marrakech.

We passed Ifrane (called the Switzerland of Morocco) full of Riads, private villas (some that offer B+B or full board). It is a lavish place for Europeans and trendy Moroccans alike.

**Immouzer:** At 1600meter altitude this quiet town is a summer holiday destination for student camps.

**Akhhawane:** University linked with the University of Colorado and concentrates mostly on commercial studies.
2:30pm

My favourite part of this wonderful trip was Fez, even though I almost got traded for 500 carpets and 2 camels to carry them! We bought a lovely Berber Carpet in a beautiful Moroccan palace. Fascinating also was the Souk with the tannery, the ceramics, weavings, and the wonderful shops. Also the blue Kasbah of Rabat was great.

Now we are on a lovely ride through the countryside to Marrakech. – Margaret

Barbary Apes in the cedar forest. The apes are surprisingly tame and eager for any hand-outs, but keep hold of your jewellery and sunglasses as they are a favourite of the little apes. It’s amazing what the Berbers find in these mountains; there are fossils and quartz crystal clusters and of course pottery and weavings. - Sunny

Lunch at Azroe: A tourist café / restaurant of Moroccan cuisine just off the main road to Beni Mellal.

Kenedfra: Town and home of the Queen’s mother and famous for rearing horses. It’s the largest city of the Atlas Mountains and obviously a meeting place for Storks who gathered together to sunbathe in the valley.

Outside Kenifra, we stopped to buy some wild mountain herbs from a lovely little girl. She couldn’t have been more than 8 or 9 just standing on her own, on the main road, selling the herbs she had gathered to coaches and cars passing by. - Sunny

Dam- Moulay Hassan - ”Baraj Hansali” Beautiful hydro-electric facility.

…and we arrived at our wonderful 17 century hotel La Tazarkount that was recently remodelled. It was a welcomed arrival after a long drive. [http://www.tazarkount.com/English/Accueil.english.htm](http://www.tazarkount.com/English/Accueil.english.htm)
Friday 25th March 2011

We started around 9 am for the Ouzad (Ouzoudig) Waterfall. On route we passed forests full of hare and wild boar which the locals hunt for the tourist consumption.

**Ouzad Waterfall:** We were the first coach party to arrive; about 1 hour later. So stopped and saw the source of the waterfall and then passed a number of delightful mountain cafés all along the cliff side with views overlooking the valley. We were spoilt for choice ... which one to choose?! Their tagines were on the go preparing for the lunch time trade and the souvenir stalls lined up with their backs against the mountain; another opportunity to eat, eat and shop, shop, shop... walking past these tantalising treats we made it to a ledge that overlooks the beautiful Ouzad waterfall. We had time for a group photo then up the mountain trail for lunch.
Bin El Oudden Dam: A Hydro-electric plant built 15 years ago by King Hassan II and a Kasbah in the hills.

4:30 - We arrived back in Marrakech. It was an incredible journey with friends who had become ‘family’ for one week. We said goodbye to our guide Ahmed and driver Ahmed and his assistant Abdulle who took such good care of us during the week. Our Guide especially was lovely and his love for his country was contagious. Thank you to the FAWCO Conference 2011 in Marrakech for the opportunity. - Sunny

Ahmad-isms:

Yalla yalla – time is money
Yalla yalla – there is the bus
Hallo, we go left
Hallo, we go right
Hallo, we sit down
Inshallah
Goodnight, have a nice life
Spire = spy
Vulcan = volcano … - Janet😊