

Morocco Roadtrip



Bernardo

Hey, I'm Bernardo!
I'm a Portuguese filmmaker and
YouTuber who loves to tell a good
story.

I started my channel in India, where I
lived for 8 months. Since then, I've
been traveling and searching the
world for different stories I can help
share. I recently transformed my van
into a tiny home on wheels so I can
travel to more places.

Although I've been to over 40
countries, Morocco continues to be
one of my favorite places to visit and
will always hold a special place in my
heart.



In this course, journey through Morocco, as Bernardo highlights many of its most popular places. In addition to giving you a better understanding of Morocco's culture and terrain, this course will teach you everything you need to know to stay safe and tailor a Moroccan road trip to your liking.

This course guide summarizes everything we talk about in the video. This is a digital file you can download and print out or keep on your phone, tablet, or computer.



Morocco, Explained

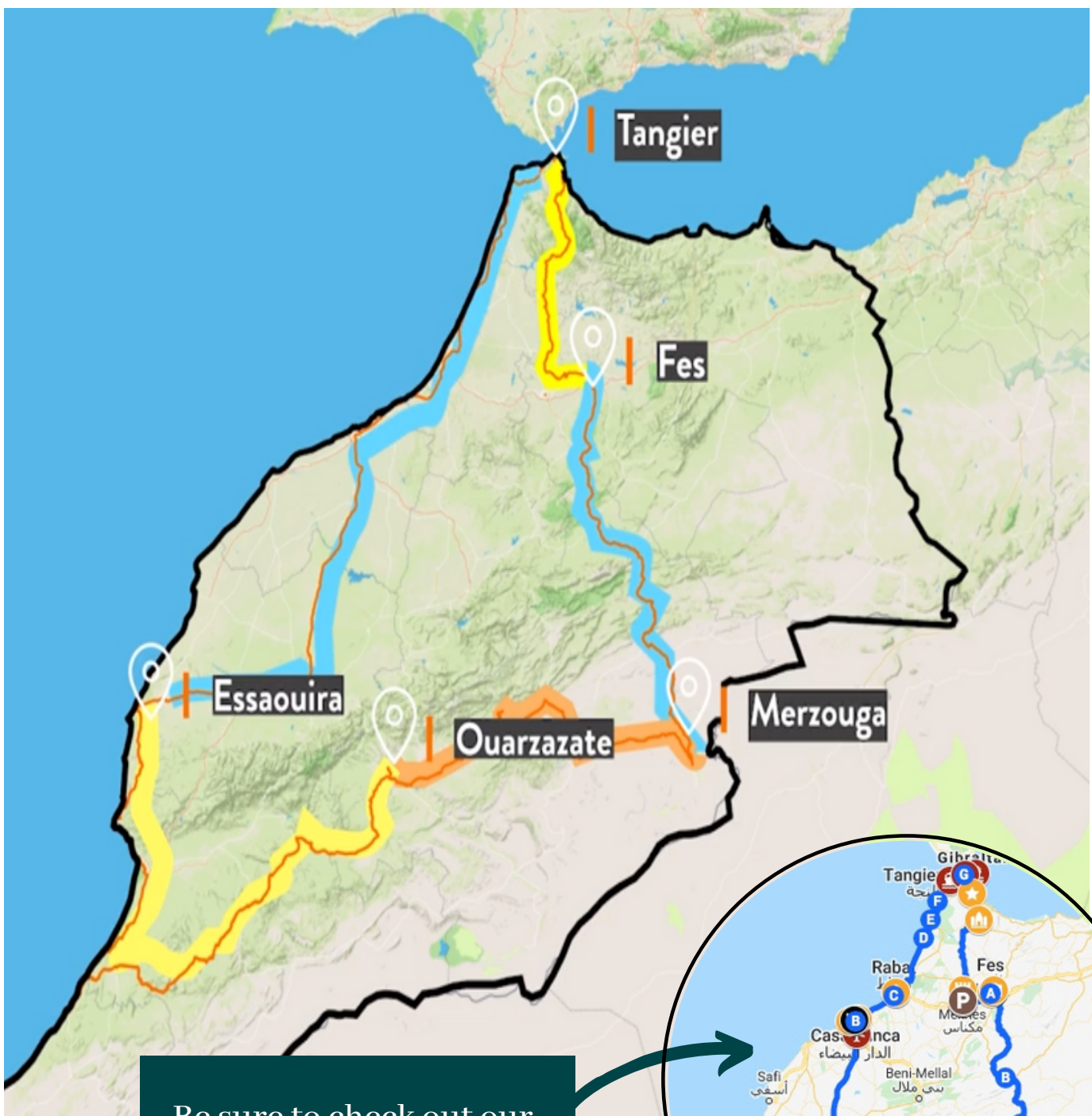
- Morocco is located in northwest Africa, and it shares a physical border with Spain.
- Morocco is about 450,000km², which is about the size of the US state of California, and almost as equally populated, with around 37 million people as of 2021.
- The capital of Morocco is called Rabat, which is curiously not the biggest city, nor the second biggest, but the seventh biggest city in the country, preceded by cities like Casablanca, Fez, and Marrakech.
- The Sahara winds (called The Sharqi) can blow for days and push over the mountains down to the coast, warming the lowlands on the other side and even stretching to Europe. This, in general, makes for a fairly warm country.
- The north, by the water, can get cooler and rainier, and the south, further inland, is more arid and hot.
- I would recommend making this road trip in either spring or fall when temperatures aren't too hot, and you're less likely to encounter snow in the mountains.
- Summers can get pretty hot in many parts of the country, with temperatures sometimes hitting above 50°C in desert regions.
- Winters are cooler, pleasantly so in some inland areas, though it can be wet and cool along the coast, and some parts can even get snow. Sometimes even mountain roads close because of the snow. However, since many parts of Morocco are so warm, especially in the hot summers, winter is another peak season for tourist visits to mainland areas.
- Morocco has a monarchy, so you'll likely be seeing Royal Palaces in almost every city you visit, which are ornate and majestic — but unfortunately, no, you cannot go inside them since they are closed to the public.
- The official languages are Arabic and Berber, although many people speak French too, due to the history of French colonization in this area. However, you'll likely be understood in touristy areas if you speak English or Spanish.



Route Overview



3000km or 1860 miles ~ 15 to 20 days
Shorter version: 2000km or 1240 miles ~ 8 to 10 days
I recommend traveling in a clockwise direction.



Be sure to check out our interactive map of this course, that shows the entire route and points of interest along the way.

Arriving to Morocco

By land or by sea

- There are 8 major international airports in Morocco so you can choose to fly into any of these to begin your trip.
- Marrakesh or Casablanca are usually the cheaper options, and are the busiest airports in the country.
- If you're coming from Europe, consider taking the ferry that crosses the Mediterranean and arrives in Tangier.



Bringing a foreign vehicle into Morocco

- If you bring a car from Europe, don't be surprised if customs checks your car and puts it through a scanner once you arrive in Morocco.
- To take a foreign vehicle into Morocco, you need to complete a vehicle import form which is usually given to you when you buy your ferry tickets.
- You may also need to buy separate insurance for your vehicle as many European companies don't cover driving in Africa. So check with your current insurance to see what their policy is, and in case they don't cover it, you can always purchase what you need at the ferry port — there's an office at the port specifically dedicated to car insurance.

If you're a passport holder coming from the EU or the US, you can enter the country without a visa for up to 90 days. But in order to keep this up to date, we've included a link to a site called [VisaHQ.com](https://www.visahq.com) where you can check if you need a visa to enter Morocco depending on where you're from.

Getting Set Up

Getting Connected

- Check with your cell phone provider to see if they have international options to get data in Morocco.
- Another great option for the best internet speed and coverage in Morocco is to get a prepaid SIM card for your phone.
- You can get a pre-paid SIM card at any airport, at the ferry port, or at any convenience store you find along the way.

Navigating Around Morocco

- It's just so much easier to get around using GPS, especially if you want to follow the recommendations we give in this course.
- As of 2021, Google Maps doesn't work in navigation mode in Morocco, so you'll probably want to download the app [Waze](#). The Waze app works perfectly throughout the entire country and it'll take you anywhere.

Much of Morocco operates mainly with cash, which means you want to carry bills and coins with you anywhere you go.

This doesn't mean you'll need to pay cash everywhere; touristy spots are usually prepared to receive card payments. But once you move away from the big cities, it's usually a good idea to carry some physical money with you. It's tricky to say exactly how much, but because ATMs can be sparse in certain areas, I would play it safe and carry larger amounts — so around at least 1000 or 2000 Dirham.

Pro tip: don't keep all the cash in the same place. Spread it around your belongings. This will help make it easier to negotiate with sellers and also will keep your money safe from theft.



Types of Vehicles

- You don't need a 4-wheel drive vehicle to do any variation of the itinerary I outline. I've done it twice with a regular sedan, and I never got stuck anywhere.
- This route is really well paved, sometimes surprisingly so given that it goes through some remote areas.
- This doesn't apply if you're planning to detour. There are plenty of secondary roads along the way. Some of them are doable with a regular sedan, but others have lots of sand, in which case you need a 4x4.
- Dune driving is a skill, and therefore you should practice beforehand. Otherwise, you'll probably destroy your vehicle. You should know that you can't simply drive over any sand dunes once you reach the desert. There are rules to protect the environment, and therefore you should do research in advance or seek advice from the local communities in order to understand what is and what is not allowed.
- Caravans, also known as RVs in the US, are another option, and you'll see plenty along the way, especially coming from countries like France and Germany.
- Although caravanning is not the focus of this course, it's an attractive option in Morocco; it's very safe, and there are plenty of camping spots where you can park for the night. There are no rules about sleeping in the wild as of 2021, but I wouldn't recommend parking just anywhere unless there are other caravans at that spot.



Resources for RV/Motorhome traveling in Morocco:

- [Wild Van](#)
- [The Gap Decaders](#)

Rules of the Road

- The rules are similar to those in Europe or the US, and most people respect them.
- The only thing that might be notable in Morocco is the number of control points and speed traps. In my personal experience, it's almost impossible to make this road trip and not be stopped at least 3 or 4 times along the way to check car documents, passports, and so on. Generally, you'll be stopped at control points when you are entering or leaving a town, and that's when you really have to pay attention to your speed.
- The speed limit inside a town is usually 50km/h; on country roads, it's usually 80km/h, and on motorways, it's 100km/h. This is just the general rule, so always pay attention to road signs to ensure you don't miss the speed limit.
- If you are planning to pass a car in front of you, know that you can only go around someone in Morocco if there's a dashed line or no line at all. A continuous line means **no** passing.
- Now, generally speaking, if you want to avoid problems with the police, respect the speed limits and carry the vehicle documents with you and your driver's license and passport.
- "Bribing" an officer is illegal in Morocco, but it can happen, especially in the country's most remote areas. To avoid getting in trouble, I recommend doing this: if the officer doesn't ask for a bribe, don't try to bribe him, it might not end well for you since it's illegal.
- If you're stopped, make sure you're calm, and respect the police officers; they are usually kind to tourists. If you committed some infraction and receive a ticket, you can expect it to typically be between 300 and 400 MAD (this estimate is from my experience as of 2021).
- Since most of this trip is on country roads, it's easy to stop anywhere you want. There are small towns with restaurants now and then, so you don't have to worry about running out of food during the drive.
- The highway portions between Marrakech and Tangier are also well-equipped with rest stops and restaurants, so there's no need to stress about that.
- The towns along the sides of country roads are usually small and don't typically have a gas station, so it's always a good idea to refill the tank whenever you're in a big city, especially if you're about to start a big stretch of the trip. I've seen some people bring a canister of gasoline with them just in case, though I would say this isn't necessary. So, it's up to you if you want to bring extra gas for emergencies or for peace of mind.



Tangier to Chefchaouen (with Tétouan)



- When you take the ferry from Algeciras in Spain, there are three ports in Morocco you can choose to arrive in: Tangier, Tangier-Med, or Ceuta.
- I recommend taking the early morning ferry because that would allow you to get the most out of your first day in Morocco.
- I also recommend visiting the interior of the country first.
- From Tangier, it will take you an hour to drive through a few mountains to reach the first stop, Tétouan.
- Tétouan is a relatively small city but a perfect starting point to discover Moroccan culture. There are traditional restaurants in this city where you could try a delicious Moroccan dish, like a Tagine or Harira soup.
- If you want to walk around, head to the Medina of Tétouan, a UNESCO World Heritage site.
- There are plenty of locals who may offer their services as tour guides, and they will usually charge pretty affordable rates. Going with a guide is totally up to you, but hearing the insider perspective could be beneficial if it's your first time visiting a Moroccan city.
- In the evening, travel to Chefchaouen. Known for its blue buildings, this city is an excellent place to spend your first night in Morocco. You can watch the sunset over the hills.

Medina means “the old city” in Arabic. It describes a walled part of the city, with many narrow and maze-like streets. It's ancient and it's where most of the commerce and tourist attractions are located, in addition to local residences and daily living. Yes, this applies to almost every city you'll visit in Morocco.



Morocco's Religious Culture

- The Call to Prayer happens five times a day, including before bed and at the crack of dawn.
- On Fridays, you will see men in their Djellabas heading for the mosque at midday.
- The main religion in Morocco is Islam. But perhaps because of the country's location and multiculturalism, visitors will find a mixture of religions here. There are Christian churches and Jewish synagogues in most of the major cities.
- Islam in Morocco is slightly different from what you may know of other Muslim countries. In some ways, certain religious traditions can feel more relaxed here.
- In a large city like Marrakesh, you may see a woman in a sleeveless, short dress walking next to someone with a headscarf. Or, on the beaches in the summer, you are as likely to be sitting next to a visitor in a bikini as a local in a djellaba. I recommend keeping this balance in mind while packing. You'll likely notice more conservative attire outside of the cities.
- "Covering up" for women simply means covering the arms and knees, and for men, it means the shoulders and above the knee. Unless you are going into a religious building, no one will expect you to wear a headscarf. Just be mindful and considerate of where you are.
- As of 2021, most of the workforce are men, and some cafes are filled with men only. In a big tourist city, anyone will be welcomed into most, if not all, places. But, again, visitors should be aware of the urban/rural divide as rural communities will be more conservative. So, you may not want to attract as much attention with more carefree clothing or loud behavior.
- In terms of greetings, handshakes and multiple kisses between the same sex is common. Or you can simply place your right hand on your heart when you meet someone.
- Do not assume you can always take photographs. If there is a person you want to take a picture of, ask permission.
- Be respectful around religious sites — avoid poking your head inside a mosque for a quick look around or for that Instagram moment while people are praying.
- If you are lucky enough to be invited to someone's house (which is not uncommon since hospitality is key to the culture here), follow their lead. You may need to take your shoes off at the door or wash your hands before eating. Another good tip is to arrive with a gift; nothing huge, maybe some biscuits or something for the children.
- It's very unlikely you'll be offered alcohol in someone's home, but it is available in most restaurants in more touristy/urban areas. Morocco produces its own beer and wine, so it's worth trying a local label while you're here. Just don't expect to be able to order a cold beer with your couscous at a rural café.



Moulay Idriss & Meknes (with Volubilis)



- After leaving Chefchaouen, we are going to drive 3 hours south. This drive is lovely: this part of Morocco is usually much greener than you would expect, so take your time and enjoy the ride.
- Moulay Idriss sits on top of two hills and provides amazing views over the medina and mosque. The city is also known for its market on Saturdays. This is not your typical tourist market that only offers souvenirs; instead, it's an authentic market full of locals and animals, and it provides a sense of the local daily life.
- At Volubilis, expect to pay a small fee to enter this site and take in the history. You can see stone carvings, mosaics, statues, numerous dividing walls, a section of an aqueduct, and more.
- Meknes is where you start to see the version of Morocco often depicted in movies. With busy streets, buildings painted in earthy tones, and street markets, this city has one slight advantage: it's way less touristy than cities like Fez or Marrakech. Find parking spots in Meknes on the map ([linked](#)).

If you are cautious about trying street food, I have a few rules that can help ward off potential food illnesses while traveling:

1

Eat at crowded places. If a place is crowded, it means demand is high, which means the food is more likely to be fresh. Also, the more locals in the crowd, the better, since they'll know the food is good.

2

If food stalls or restaurants are pretty empty that's not usually a good sign — not only for taste reasons but because low demand means the freshness of the food could be more questionable.

3

And of course always wash your hands before eating, especially if you're in a country where it's common to eat with your hands.

Fez



- Fez is another UNESCO World Heritage site, and it's located 1 hour from Meknes. It is the biggest city on this first stretch and by far the one with more things to do, so I highly recommend you plan to spend at least two days and two nights here.
- If you can, try to choose a hotel inside the medina itself. This is because some medina gates will close after 7 pm, which can cause problems when returning to a hotel outside the medina walls.
- If you're staying inside the medina, keep in mind that you have to carry your luggage by hand because, as I mentioned, you can't drive in the medina — cars don't fit in the narrow streets. If you have a lot of stuff, you might notice some workers with some pushcarts, and they can carry your luggage for a small fee.
- The majority of the buildings in Fez (and in Morocco in general) have an accessible rooftop, which is a perfect way to get a first look at the city. I recommend trying this in every city you visit, especially if your hotel has a rooftop.
- There are actually two Medinas inside this Medina, the "Old Fez" and the "New Fez."

Note: If someone notices you're a bit lost or you're looking at your GPS, they might approach with something like, "Hey! Where do you wanna go?" If you tell them and they lead you to your destination, once you get there, they will likely charge you a pretty substantial fee for even a short walk. Even if they didn't mention a fee upfront, they will likely insist until you give the money.



Second Stretch

(Fez, Midelt, Merzouga, Errachidia),



- Before leaving Fez, make sure to fill up your fuel tank and bring extra water with you! If you want to complete this stretch in a day, make sure to leave Fez early in the morning, around 8 or 9 am.
- It's a 7 hours drive to Merzouga, but I recommend you stop along the way to enjoy a few viewpoints and eat lunch.
- I also recommend you leave as early as possible so that you can reach Merzouga before the sunset.
- If you don't want to drive for 7 hours straight, you can spend a night in Errachidia, which is around two-thirds of the way there.
- You'll pass through the Middle and High Atlas Mountains on this part of the trip.
- When you arrive at Merzouga, I recommend watching the sunset over the sand dunes.



Sahara Geology & Climate

- Merzouga is home to a vast fossil deposit, and you'll find dozens on the side of the road.
- Even if you go on a simple walk in this region, you'll see plenty of fossils.
- The vast ocean that once covered this land was known as the Tethys Ocean, and it existed around 250 to 50 million years ago, back in the times of Pangea.

Camping in the Sahara Desert

BUDGET

- If you're on a budget, you can stay at a cheaper campsite and save some money. As of 2021, you'll likely pay something like 300 or 400 MAD per person per night. Keep in mind that with this option, the tents probably won't amaze you, you'll probably share the sleeping space with other people, the bed sheets may be questionable, and the dinner is shared with the whole group.

LUXURY

- If you stay at a luxury campsite you'll pay between 900 or 1200 MAD per person per night. Here you have your own private tent with a private toilet and AC, and the food is very traditional, and you can tell it's cooked with care.

Two-night experience

- The first cool thing about this option is that you'll have the campsite most likely all to yourself, which usually means more interesting experiences — like watching the locals cook a traditional dish, such as Berber pizza.
- You might also have the opportunity to go on a 4x4 trip.
- There are some nomadic families around this area, and you can visit them.
- Another thing you can do is rent ATVs and drive on the sand dunes.
- Make sure you don't miss the sunset and the sunrise on the sand dunes.



Nomadic Families & Berbers

Berber ~ loosely refers to the indigenous people, tribes, and languages in Northern Africa

- Normally, the families live with their animals (for agricultural purposes).
- Locals, like Saida, enjoy sharing an insight into their lives and traditions with people from around the world.
- Berber women and men have slightly different lives.
- The term "Berber" will come up a lot during your trip to Morocco, whether discussing a carpet, jewelry, or a place. The term can be traced back to Roman times, where it stems from the Roman word for "Barbarian." Many tribespeoples have taken ownership of the term and use it with pride, though it can be considered disrespectful.
- Amazigh (a more politically correct term) translates to "noble or free ones" since the tribes throughout the region consider themselves as people who are not defined or confined by any particular borders.
- The Berber and Amazigh are similar in culture and tradition but slightly different in their dialects.
- Berbers speak the language of Tamazight (which wasn't recognized as a language until 2011).
- Tachelhit is a dialect of Tamazight.
- Today, the tribes are located mainly in the more rural Atlas and Rif mountain regions around the Sahara and along the oases around the desert.
- Staying with these communities in the Sahara desert or the Atlas Mountains is an excellent opportunity to learn more about the culture and positively impact the community with your tourist dollar.



Third Stretch

(Ouarzazate, Ait Benhaddou, Atlas Film Studio)



- There are two route options for this section you can choose between.
- In both cases, there are restaurants along the way, so don't worry about getting enough food, but make sure you refuel your car before starting this stretch to avoid getting stuck in the middle of nowhere.
- Ouarzazate is a fairly big city, and it is known as "the door of the desert" since this is where the desert region starts for people driving in the other direction. It is also known for being the Hollywood of Morocco. There's a film studio called the "Atlas Studios," and this is where they filmed a lot of desert-themed movies, like "The Mummy" and "Gladiator."
- For free, you can visit Ait Benhaddou (a UNESCO heritage site where a Game of Thrones episode was filmed).



Fourth Stretch — To Marrakesh



- Again, remember to fill up your fuel tank before leaving Ouarzazate! This is a 200km (120mile) drive but it takes about 4 hours to complete because you'll be driving through the High Atlas mountains.
- Contrary to what you may think, this road is very busy. Thousands of cars drive between the two cities every day since this is the fastest route connecting the coastline to the desert.
- It's a good idea to leave Ouarzazate in the morning to make sure you complete this drive during the day. Driving here at night without knowing the road is not ideal.
- Also, if you're driving during the winter, always check with the locals, such as a concierge or hotel owner, to see if the road is open and safe to cross.
- This stretch is beautiful which is another reason why you should do it during the day. It's a totally different version of Morocco from the Morocco you see in the movies, so take your time to enjoy the views along the way.



Fourth Stretch

Ouarzazate, Tafraout, Sidi Ifni



- There are a few different routes you can choose from to complete the first part of this stretch. My suggestion would be to reserve two days to complete it and take a break in Tafraout. If you're on a tight schedule and want to complete it in one day, then make sure you leave Ouarzazate early in the morning. Ideally, no later than 8 am.
- A big portion of the drive is along the coastline, and it goes through some villages and beautiful beaches, so feel free to explore.
- Essaouira is known as the "windy city of Africa" so don't expect to enjoy the beach here — you'll most likely get a "sand bath" instead of a sunbath. This is a very famous spot for kitesurfing.
- Once you get to Essaouira, the first thing you'll want to do is park your car. There are a few parking lots near the medina, so try your luck there. I would definitely recommend staying inside the medina (a UNESCO heritage site).
- Right next to the main plaza are the city walls, also known as ramparts. This is one of the city's main attractions, and I would recommend spending some time walking here and seeing all the fishermen and their blue boats in the port.
- If you're not into water sports, you can always walk along the beach or ride ATVs and camels.



Fifth Stretch

Essaouira, Marrakech and Casablanca



- This stretch is over 600 km (370 miles) from Marrakech back to Tanger Med, and it will take 3 to 6 days to complete.
- The medina of Marrakesh is another UNESCO World Heritage site.
- Keep in mind that there can be some pickpockets here because of the abundance of tourists, so do remember to be smart about your possessions.



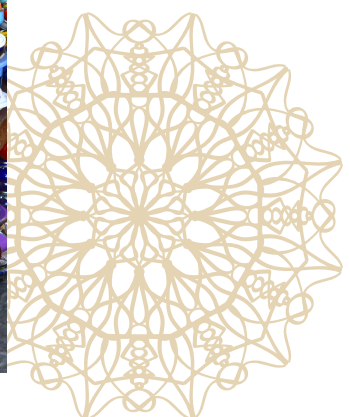
Bargaining, Explained

- 1** Once you find something you want to buy, think about the price you're willing to pay for it — what is the maximum amount you wish to offer? Feel free to convert from dirhams to the currency of your own country first, either using online currency exchange calculators or based on what you've become familiar with over the course of your trip.

- 2** Once you have that value, offer less than that because it's very unlikely they will accept your first offer. Merchants usually try to raise the price a bit, so start low.

- 3** After some back and forth, you should land on a reasonable price for both of you. If, for some reason, the seller doesn't accept your offer and the price is getting too high, you can start walking away to make it seem like you're no longer interested. Sometimes when they see they're losing you, they give in and accept your final offer or something very close to it. So this is a great technique to try!

- 4** If the seller doesn't want to negotiate or refuses to budge on a price, just walk away. There's no follow-up or consequence to backing out of a deal entirely. A refusal to cooperate doesn't happen very often because it's in their interest to make a sale. But if the price is something they don't want to lower, just respect that and walk away.



Back to Tanger



- The last section is roughly 600km (370 miles) in length but takes just 6 hours to complete if you do it all at once since there's a good highway connecting both cities.
- The road on this last section is a multi-lane highway with lots of gas stations and restaurants, so you don't need to worry about food or fuel. If you're running short on time, this highway is the perfect way to get back to the ferry or Tangier airport.
- If choosing to stop in Casablanca, consider visiting:
 - Hassan II mosque - its one of the few mosques you can in fact visit as a non Muslim/tourist. Daily tours (not on Fridays) You will be expected to dress appropriately.
 - Rick's Café- for some stylized vintage nostalgia and a good cocktail
 - The Morocco Mall - one of the biggest in Africa if you need to do a quick spot of shopping before continuing on your road trip]
- Possibly the most exciting thing to see in Rabat is the Kasbah (of the Udayas), an old city surrounded by big walls. You can stroll around and explore the tiny streets.
- If you have time, visit the Rabat lighthouse, which is very photogenic, especially at sunset.
- Potential beach towns to stop at on the way back include Asilah, Moulay Bouselham, and Larache.

