

## North Africa Travel Journal – Volume 1

Saturday, May 9, 2026 – Casablanca, Morocco

*Salam Alaikum* from Casablanca, Morocco, where we landed this morning and met up with our friends Ann and Rich Pulido. Morocco, located in the northwest corner of Africa just across the Strait of Gibraltar from Spain, is a majority-Muslim country that recently normalized relations with Israel under the Abraham Accords. So we're rewarding them with our tourist dollars.

Casablanca is Morocco's largest city and economic capital, perched along the Atlantic Ocean. Despite the romantic name, this isn't quite the Humphrey Bogart movie set we envisioned; it's a bustling, modern metropolis with a coastal backdrop. Kind of like Miami, but not as chic.



Originally settled by Berbers, the indigenous people of North Africa, Casablanca today blends French colonial architecture, wide boulevards, and traditional Moroccan life. It's where old-world Morocco meets business suits and espresso.



After settling into our hotel, we enjoyed a relaxing lunch before setting off in search of a popular sight. We confidently walked in the completely wrong direction for over an hour, violating an important travel rule of sticking to the main tourist areas. We did, however, get to see parts of Casablanca we otherwise never would have seen. Good thing we're saving the important sightseeing for tomorrow's guided tour. We've also relieved Rich of his Google Maps duties.

We later headed to an Indian restaurant for dinner, because nothing says "immersing yourself in Moroccan culture" quite like Indian food.

Sunday, May 10, 2026 – Casablanca, Morocco

Today we had a guided tour of Casablanca, starting at the Hassan II Grand Mosque, one of only two mosques in Morocco open to non-

Muslims. The mosque is among the largest in the world and can hold up to 25,000 worshippers inside and another 85,000 in the outside courtyard. Its minaret is the tallest religious structure in the world, and nearly half of the mosque extends over the waters of the Atlantic Ocean. At night, lasers shine from the top of the minaret toward Mecca. This is no ordinary mosque. If I were Muslim, this is where I would want to be indoctrinated.



We then visited the old town and walked through the historic markets. There were surprisingly few flies around all the fresh fish and meat hanging in the stalls. After lunch at Rick's Café, where we dined alongside every other tourist in Casablanca, we visited Mohammed V Square, the administrative heart of the city, famous for its Neo-Moorish architecture, large fountain, and countless pigeons waiting to become someone's dinner.

We then strolled through the Quartier Habous, a "modern" medina built in the 1920s, featuring vendors selling all sorts of authentic Chinese imports.



We had dinner at Le Cabestan restaurant, renowned for its spectacular panoramic views of the Atlantic Ocean, luxury Mediterranean dining, and reputation as a gathering spot for the city's elite, celebrities, and socialites. I'm sure we saw plenty of these people there, but we didn't recognize a single one of them.

Monday, May 11, 2026 - Casablanca – Rabat, Morocco

This morning we left Casablanca and drove to Rabat, the political capital of Morocco. It's known for its palm-lined avenues, ocean views, and surprisingly relaxed vibe for a political center. Think Washington, DC with minarets, fewer lobbyists, and lots of mint tea.

Our first stop was Chellah, an historic archaeological site featuring a medieval fort built on the ruins of an ancient Roman city. After that our city tour highlighted Rabat's blend of cultural influences and relics of its Moorish past. The city's most famous landmark is the 12th-century Hassan Tower, located beside the mausoleum of Mohammed V, the founder of modern Morocco and grandfather of the current king. The

unfinished tower was intended to be the largest mosque in the world before construction abruptly stopped in the 1100s, probably due to cost overruns.

Because our guide could tell we're so cultured, or maybe because he sensed we needed some culture, he took us to the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, displaying works by Moroccan artists alongside historical photography. As with most modern art museums, there were several pieces that we were convinced we could have easily created in a few minutes.

After lunch, we explored the Oudaya Kasbah overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. This historic fortress and fortified quarter once served as the residence of the ruling elite. Its massive gate is considered one of the finest surviving examples of Moorish architecture. Within the walls, we wandered through a Berber museum and peaceful Andalusian gardens. We properly ended our day in Rabat with a traditional Moroccan dinner of various salads, lamb tagine and cous cous.



Stay tuned for lots more.  
Love, Lori and Stephen

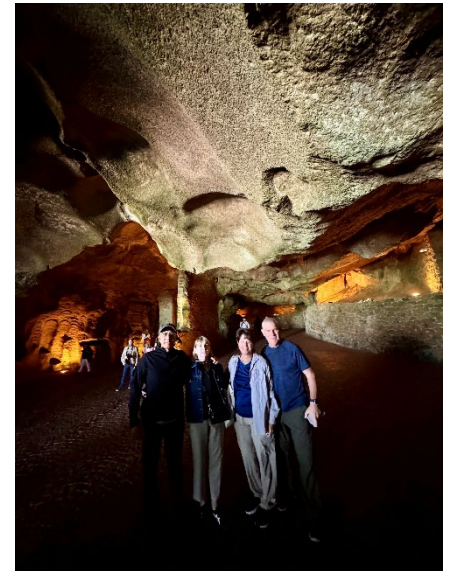
Tuesday, May 12, 2026 – Tangier, Morocco

So as not to be accused of lingering in one place too long, we departed Rabat this morning for Tangier, the city that dominates northern Morocco. Tangier sits at the crossroads of Europe and Africa, where the Mediterranean Sea meets the Atlantic Ocean. It has long been considered one of the world's great strategic locations. In other words, people have been fighting over this prime piece of real estate for thousands of years.



During our drive along the Atlantic coast, we stopped at the legendary Caves of Hercules, a site emblematic of Morocco's beauty and mystery. According to mythology, Hercules supposedly rested here after separating Europe from Africa. Talk about a serious infrastructure project! How times have changed. These days it would take a lot more than one guy to pull that off, not to mention the environmental impact studies that would be required.

We wandered through chambers carved by the sea and chiseled by humans as Atlantic waves crashed against the rocks below. The cave's most famous opening is naturally shaped like the map of Africa and frames the ocean in a view that is both surreal and stunning. If I were on social media, this is definitely where I would post a carefully staged photo of myself pretending to contemplate life. We were ushered frenetically through the cave by a local guide who insisted on photographing us in dozens of poses against various backdrops while barely giving us enough time to actually enjoy the scenery.



Before arriving in Tangier, we stopped at the Cap Spartel lighthouse, where the Atlantic meets the Mediterranean, for beautiful views of the sea. There's just something reassuring about a lighthouse, which is basically a centuries-old GPS system.



Upon arriving in Tangier in the afternoon, we walked along the Corniche, the oceanfront promenade lining the shore, before checking into our beautiful hotel, formerly a palace of the king's representative.

Wednesday, May 13, 2026 – Tangier, Morocco

For centuries Tangier has attracted artists, writers, spies, and various other eccentric people looking to disappear in style. Appealing and cosmopolitan, with Moroccan, African, and European influences all blending together, Tangier has long been a cultural melting pot. Henri Matisse called it a "Painter's Paradise,"

while writers such as Paul Bowles, Truman Capote, Tennessee Williams, and William Burroughs made it their home.

Our tour guide Elhasani and our driver Adil, the A-team of guides who have been and will be with us the entire time in Morocco, picked us up this morning and took us to the Medina (old town) and Kasbah (fortified quarter) of Tangier. We

started at the Kasbah Museum of Antiquities and Moroccan Art, then walked through the bustling fish, meat, and vegetable markets where the sensory overload of shouting vendors, hanging meat, fresh seafood, and unfamiliar smells was immediate and unavoidable. We strolled through the narrow streets of the medina to the Jewish quarter where we visited an old Jewish synagogue and the Jewish cemetery.



We ended with a visit to the American Legation, a historic, Moorish-style building that served as the first American diplomatic mission abroad. It is the only U.S. National Historic Landmark located in a foreign country, now functioning as a museum, library, and cultural center. It's a symbol of the

friendship between the U.S. and Morocco, which was the first country to recognize the United States in 1786. You really do learn something new every day, usually right before stopping for gelato.



We thoroughly enjoyed Tangier, although unlike some of our predecessors, we failed to paint any masterpieces, write any great novels, or conduct any international espionage operations that I can mention during our stay.

Thursday, May 14, 2026 - Chefchaouen and Fes, Morocco

We departed Tangier this morning and headed into the Rif Mountains to Chefchaouen, a picturesque village known for its blue-painted walls and mesmerizing alleyways. Founded in 1471, Chefchaouen served as a Moorish fortress for exiles from Spain. Nowadays it's a rich cultural blend of descendants of those exiles, Berber

tribespeople, Muslims, and far too many tourists. We admired the beautiful view of the village from above and explored the narrow blue alleyways of the Medina filled with vendors selling Chinese-imported "Moroccan" goods. The only thing missing was a Señor Frog's restaurant.

After touring Chefchaouen, we continued on to Fes, Morocco's cultural and religious capital. The heart of Fez is divided into two areas: Fès el-Bali, literally "Old Fez", the oldest part of the city, and Fès el-Jedid, the "new" section founded in the 13th century. "New," from 800 years ago? Makes me feel a bit younger.

Before heading to our hotel, we stepped back in time to the Middle Ages with a visit to Old Fes, the world's largest living medieval medina-city. We explored some of the chaotic 10,000 narrow lanes, alleys, and souks that make up the labyrinth of the city's old quarter, including the neighborhood





where Maimonides, one of the Middle Ages' most influential Jewish scholars, philosophers, and physicians, lived during the 12th century before eventually fleeing Morocco to escape religious persecution. It was chaotic, colorful, and completely unforgettable. Medieval urban planning at its finest.

That's all for now. More to come.

Love, Lori and Stephen



Friday, May 15, 2026 – Fes, Morocco

We covered a lot of ground today, starting with a trip to Volubilis. This UNESCO World Heritage Site is home to the largest and best-preserved Roman ruins in Morocco, proving the Romans really did get around. We saw triumphal arches, basilicas, and public buildings that have survived for nearly two thousand years. Apparently the Romans built things to last, unlike the wheels on my suitcase.

The greatest treasures of Volubilis, however, are the superb mosaic floors, many of which remain beautifully preserved in their original locations. Considering how many civilizations, wars, earthquakes, and tourists have passed through here over the centuries, it's remarkable that any of them still exist.



We then headed to

Meknes, one of Morocco's four imperial cities, known for its rich history as the nation's capital in the late 17th century. We saw the monumental Bab Mansour gate and the Heri es-Souani granaries, which were designed to store enough food and water to survive a decades-long siege, along with provisions for the adjacent Royal Stables that once housed 12,000 horses. Clearly the sultan believed in being thoroughly prepared.



Next up was Château Roslane, located between the foothills of the Rif and Middle Atlas Mountains, in a region influenced by both the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea. While Morocco may not be the first country that comes to mind when thinking about wine, it is considered to have exceptional natural conditions for producing high-quality vintages thanks to its elevation and cooling coastal influences. This area has been producing wine for over 2,000 years. With picturesque views of green vineyards set against blue skies, we enjoyed a delicious wine-



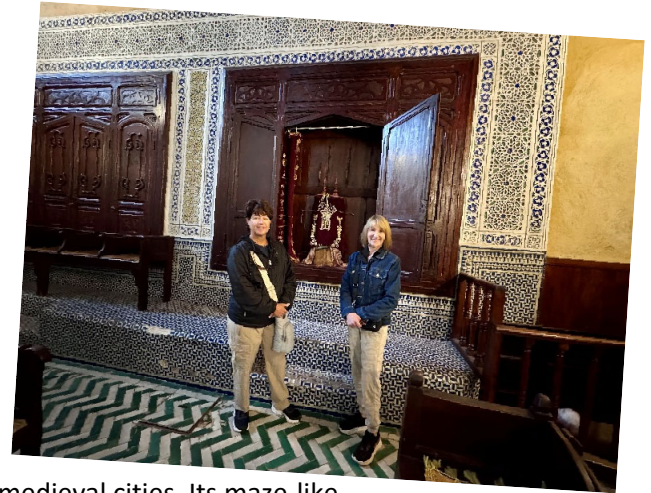
paired lunch. For a brief moment, North Africa felt surprisingly like California wine country, but with more tagines and fewer Teslas.



Finally, we visited a pottery factory to see how Morocco's famous zellij tiles and mosaics are made. These intricate tiles are classic examples of Arabo-Andalusian craftsmanship and are also used in the production of the iconic tagines found throughout Morocco. The manufacturing process was interesting, but the sales tactics were even more impressive. Hopefully all the pottery and tile pieces we "needed" arrive at our house intact.

Saturday, May 16, 2026 – Fes, Morocco

It was another jam-packed day today, because the goal of this trip is to see all of Morocco before collapsing from exhaustion. We first headed to Fes El Jedid (New Fes), built in the 13th century. In Fes that's considered new. Most notably to us, Fes El Jedid is home to the Mellah, the old Jewish quarter, which provided an interesting insight into Jewish architecture. We visited a synagogue from the 19th century, now a museum, then walked to the Royal Palace and admired one of its many gates.



We continued on to Old Fes, dating back to the eighth century and considered one of the world's oldest continuously inhabited medieval cities. Its maze-like medina is home to the University of al-Qarawiyyin. While it may not have as many Nobel Prize winners as the University of Chicago, it was founded in 859 AD and is often cited as the oldest continuously operating university in the world. In a neighboring building is the Attarine Medersa (Koranic college), a jewel of Hispano-Moorish architecture built in the 14th century.



We walked past Nejjarine Square, whose centerpiece is a beautiful fountain made up of mosaics and elaborate tilework. The nearby Fondouq (Caravanserai) has now been converted into a museum of carpentry artifacts.

We then headed to a riad-style shop in the medina for a demonstration of Moroccan rugs sourced from around the country. We enjoyed mint tea while our host presented a seemingly endless variety of carpets and explained the styles of each region, all while subtly attempting to convince us that our homes were incomplete without a new Moroccan rug. This time we resisted.



The leather produced in Fes is renowned worldwide, and the manufacturing methods remain largely unchanged from medieval times. We visited a 900-year-old tannery and learned how they process the skins of goats, cows, and camels into leather goods. The experience was fascinating, and the smell alone qualified as a medieval punishment. The haggling over prices in their shop was also taken to a new level.



After more mint tea in the afternoon, we rested at a rooftop café in the medina and enjoyed the sunset with a glass of juice. Even though the word "alcohol" comes from Arabic, most restaurants in Morocco don't serve it because alcohol consumption is



discouraged in Islam. So my blood-alcohol level is low, but at this point, I'm fairly certain mint tea makes up at least 40% of my bloodstream.

Sunday, May 17, 2026 – Fes to Erfoud, Morocco

We left Fes this morning and drove across the Middle Atlas Mountains on our way into the desert, trading ancient city walls for dramatic landscapes and vast open skies. Morocco begins to feel bigger and wider out here. We drove through the Tafilalet region, famous for its tasty dates and gorgeous scenery, passing desert mountains, deep canyons, and centuries-old kasbahs rising from oases nestled among lush palm groves. The scenery gradually shifted from crowded medinas and winding alleyways to landscapes so wide open that even

Google Maps seemed more confident.

In the afternoon, we finally arrived in Erfoud, a largely French-built administrative center and the Moroccan capital of dates (the fruit, not the social activity). We relaxed by the hotel pool (i.e., did absolutely nothing) before dinner and enjoyed a quiet evening.

Thanks for following our travels. More to come soon.  
Love, Lori and Stephen



## North Africa Travel Journal – Volume 4

Monday, May 18, 2026 - Erfoud and Erg Chebbi, Morocco

We started today by exploring the area around Erfoud, known for its date palms, desert scenery, and dramatic landscapes. The town itself looks straight out of an Indiana Jones movie set. We visited nearby Rissani, which from the 8th to the 14th century was the site of the first independent kingdom of southern Morocco. We saw the remains from that era, which required a bit of imagination, before visiting the mausoleum of the first king of that dynasty. After that, we strolled through a centuries-old market, where local dates and produce are sold alongside cheap Chinese imports.

More than six hundred million years ago, this entire area was underwater. When the sea receded, marine life became fossilized in the surrounding rock.

Today, fossils are mined throughout the region and transformed into decorative objects ranging from countertops and tables to souvenir plates and home décor.

We visited one of the factories where these fossils are processed. By this point in the trip, we've learned that whether Morocco produces rugs, leather, pottery, tiles, or 600-million-year-old fossils, someone nearby is very prepared to sell it to you. We haggled over a couple of pieces and hopefully didn't get ripped off too badly.



In the afternoon, we headed farther south, traveling by four-wheel-drive vehicles along the towering Sahara Desert sand dunes of Erg Chebbi. We arrived at the Merzouga Desert Camp, set among golden dunes, to spend the night. It sounds rugged, but I'll be honest: there were cushions. Each luxury air-conditioned tent had a large comfortable bed and en-suite bathroom with running hot water. Before settling in for the night beneath the vast desert sky, we rode camels through the dunes to a place where we admired

the sunset and then had a delicious Moroccan dinner, proving once again that hardship is relative.



Tuesday, May 19, 2026 - Erg Chebbi to Ouarzazate, Morocco

We departed the desert camp after breakfast and continued through the southern slopes of the High Atlas mountain range. We followed the Thousand Kasbahs route past hundred-year-old Kasbahs nestled in lush palm groves. At times, the road seemed to be as old as the Kasbahs, with huge holes and missing pavement.

To make matters worse, there are random speed traps and police stops every so often. We were "randomly" stopped to check the expiration date of the fire extinguisher in our van. In reality, the policeman saw a tourist van, likely loaded

with luggage on top of the extinguisher, and correctly assumed our driver would rather pay him about \$20 cash than take the time and effort to unload the trunk. The fine went right into his pocket. The entire negotiation took less time than unloading the luggage would have. That's Morocco's version of a toll road.

Along the way, we made a stop at a ksar (village) near Tinghir to visit a small museum which displays local art, culture, and history and to have lunch. The goat tagine was especially tasty.

We continued on to the Todra Gorge where we walked along the river and marveled at the impressive cliff faces.



We finally arrived at Ouarzazate (pronounced absolutely nothing like it's spelled), which was once a stopping point for African traders en route to the cities of Morocco and Europe. By this point in the trip, we had determined that Morocco contains more kasbahs than stop signs.

Wednesday, May 20, 2026 - Ouarzazate, Morocco

Ouarzazate is now mainly inhabited by Berbers, who constructed many of the prominent kasbahs and buildings for which the area is famous. It's known as the "Hollywood of Morocco," with ancient kasbahs that have doubled as movie sets



for Lawrence

of Arabia, Star Wars, The Living Daylights, The Last Temptation of Christ, The Mummy, Gladiator, and many more. I suspect that Hollywood has never actually filmed a desert scene anywhere else.

We first visited the Kasbah of Tifoultout. This structure was originally constructed about 250 years ago and has since been converted into an inn. Good thing we visited when we did, because based on its condition, I'm not entirely convinced it'll still be standing next year.



Then we drove to one of the most spectacular Atlas Mountains villages, Ait Benhaddou, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Some of the world's most striking kasbahs are found here, with houses clinging to the steep slopes. We hiked to the top of the village, now occupied almost entirely by tourists, trinket vendors, and cats. By that point, we half expected Russell Crowe or Indiana Jones to come walking around the corner.

That's it for now. If you like keeping up with us, look for another journal in a few days. If not, hit the delete key in a few days.

Love, Lori and Stephen





Thursday, May 21, 2026 – Ouarzazate to Marrakech, Morocco

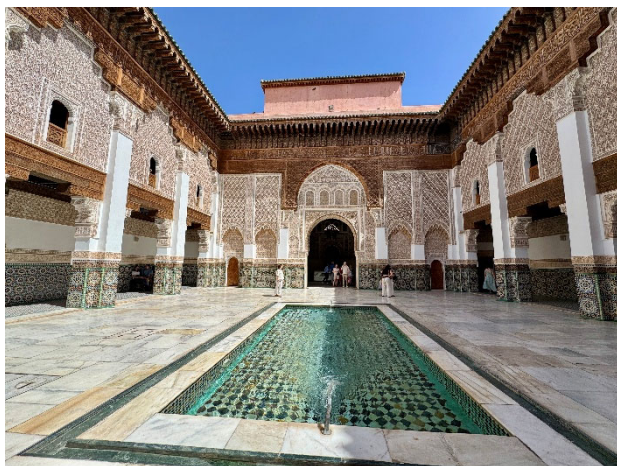


Unlike Crosby, Stills and Nash, who took the express train from Casablanca, we drove from Ouarzazate to Marrakech today. We crossed the High Atlas Mountains via the Tizi n'Tichka Pass, the highest mountain pass in the region at over 7,400 feet. We were pulled over by the police only once on this leg of the journey because our driver traveled about three feet over a solid line while passing another car. A small amount of cash changed hands without any paperwork, and we were back on the road in less than five minutes. Morocco appears to have developed its own version of EZ Pass.

We arrived in Marrakech in time for lunch. Marrakech has acquired quite a few nicknames over the years, including Pearl of the South, Jewel of the South, and The

Red City. The pearl and jewel symbolize its historic importance as the center of Morocco, dating back to its role as a trading and resting place at the crossroads of ancient caravan routes. “Red City” refers to the distinctive hue of its many brick buildings. Part Berber, part Arab, and part African, Marrakech is the heartbeat of Morocco, where palaces and monuments sit alongside snake charmers and the rhythmic pulse of Gnaoua drums echoing from Djemâa el Fna Square, one of the most exuberant marketplaces in the world.

Within minutes of arriving, it became clear that Marrakech operates at a volume level several notches higher than the rest of Morocco. After lunch, we walked through Djemâa el Fna Square, which seemed relatively subdued in the 101-degree afternoon heat, and into the medina in search of shade. The maze of alleys, small squares, and souks was teeming with activity: a colorful blend of chaos packed with vendors, locals, and tourists, with scooters weaving through it all apparently recognizing no traffic laws, no pedestrian rights, and possibly no fear of death.



We stopped at the Ben Youssef Medersa, one of the jewels of Marrakech. The current structure of this Koranic school was built around 1570 and was the largest medersa in North Africa, capable of housing 800 students. It is renowned for its magnificent architecture featuring intricate tilework, carved wood, and stucco, which we can now personally attest to after taking dozens of photographs of the exact same courtyard from slightly different angles.

From there, we went to a spice “demonstration,” which is essentially an elaborate and highly polished strategy for convincing tourists to purchase spices, oils, creams, and various body remedies. We learned about the herbs added to Morocco’s famous mint tea and the spices used to prepare traditional tajines. After filling our shopping bags with products probably available on Amazon for less money and same-day delivery, we headed to our riad hotel in the medina.

We finished the day with dinner at a chic rooftop restaurant while the sun set over Marrakech and the call to prayer sounded in the background. It was one of those travel moments that makes you temporarily forget how much you paid for the saffron.

Friday, May 22, 2026 – Marrakech, Morocco

It was another 100-degree day today, quite different from the very comfortable weather we had been enjoying up until Marrakech. Fortunately, the air conditioning in our van and hotel room works well.

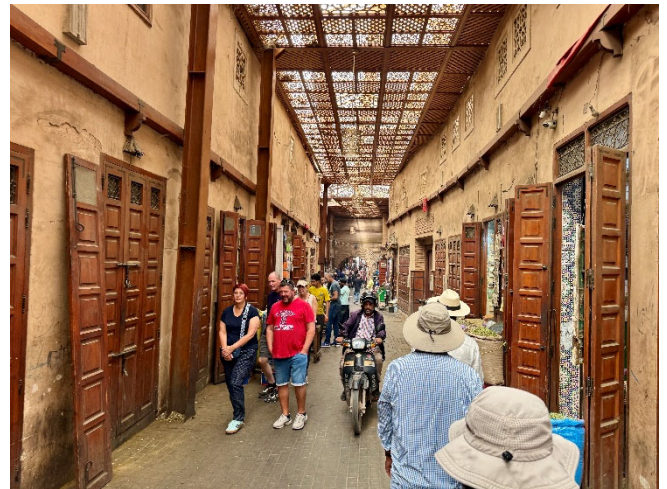
We started the day with a photo shoot in front of the Koutoubia Mosque and its 12th-century minaret, the architectural symbol of Marrakech. From there, we visited Bahia Palace, a beautiful example of Arab-Andalusian architecture where marble, stucco, and mosaics decorate apartments opening onto courtyards filled with fountains, plants, and tourists posing for Instagram photos.



A short walk away was the Mellah, the old Jewish Quarter, where the ancient synagogues and Jewish cemetery were all closed due to the holiday of Shavuot. The Mellah of Marrakech was once one of the largest Jewish quarters in Morocco and served as an important center of Jewish life for centuries.

Next up was Dar El Bacha Palace, the former residence of Thami El Glaoui, who ruled Marrakech during the French Protectorate from 1912 to 1956.

The colorful geometric tiles, painted ceilings, and carved cedarwood are an exhibition in themselves, but the palace also contains an impressive Museum of Confluences featuring Islamic art and artifacts. At this point in the trip, we have seen so much intricate Moroccan tilework that I'm beginning to think about remodeling our bathroom, again.



We took a break from sightseeing for lunch and an afternoon rest before heading back to Djemâa el Fna, the city's main square, which transforms every evening into a giant open-air market filled with food stalls, musicians, performers, and sellers of every item you don't need. We did a food tour in and around the square for dinner, sampling several Moroccan dishes we had not yet tried. Some were excellent, some were mysterious, and at least one that probably should have been avoided. We ate it anyway.



*Snake charmer in Djemâa el Fna Square*



*That's a giant bowl of snails. They were delicious.*

Saturday, May 23, 2026 – Marrakech, Morocco

Known for its sunny weather nearly year-round, Marrakech is home to some of the most beautiful gardens in Morocco. This morning we visited one of them, the Majorelle Garden, originally created in 1924 by French artist Jacques Majorelle. The gardens are famous for their vivid cobalt-blue accents, exotic plants, and peaceful atmosphere, a welcome respite from the nonstop chaos of the medina.



Also on the property were the Berber Museum and the Yves Saint Laurent Museum, which chronicled the designer's life and showcased many of his creations. Saint Laurent and his partner Pierre Bergé later purchased and restored the gardens, helping preserve one of Marrakech's most recognizable landmarks. Berbers are the original inhabitants of North Africa, and they are composed of several tribes scattered throughout the region. Known as proud and hardworking people, a description that applies to almost every group on earth according to themselves, they have their own dialect, customs, and traditions.

Before heading out for the afternoon, we returned to the medina to buy a few items. The negotiation process was far more enjoyable than the actual purchases, which I'm confident we still overpaid for despite all the theatrics.

In the afternoon we had a scenic drive to Chef Tariq's restaurant on the outskirts of Marrakech for a cooking class. We learned how to make a tagine at home, adding another skill to our growing list of things we will likely never use. After it cooked, we ate our creation. Fortunately, it turned out much better than anything we usually cook in our own kitchen.

More to come. We're not done.  
Love, Lori and Stephen



North Africa Travel Journal – Volume 6

Sunday, May 24, 2026 - Marrakech to Casablanca, Morocco

We left Marrakech this morning and headed back to Casablanca through the Atlas Mountains, North Africa's greatest mountain range. Along the way, we passed views of snow-capped peaks and small Berber villages nestled into the hillsides. The scenery was so dramatic that at times it looked like my computer screensaver.

We stopped in Imlil, a Berber village made up of twelve small hamlets, where we hiked with a local guide who told us about his family, village, and Berber culture.



We were then welcomed into the home of a local family. After some mint tea, we had a delicious lunch. At this point in the trip, I'm fairly certain refusing mint tea in Morocco would trigger some sort of diplomatic incident. We've also learned that no matter where you go, whether it's a luxury riad hotel, a desert camp, or a village home in the mountains, the hospitality

is always genuine, and the portions are always enormous.

We eventually made it to Casablanca and checked into our hotel at the airport in preparation for our early-morning flight to Tunisia tomorrow.



*Old Gate into the Medina*

Monday, May 25, 2026 - Tunis, Tunisia

In an attempt to get even further off the beaten path, we traded Morocco for Tunisia today, marking our fortieth wedding anniversary and beginning the second chapter of our North African adventure. We flew to Tunis, the capital of Tunisia, a city where continents

and centuries collide. Sitting on the edge of the Mediterranean, Tunis blends North African soul with French flair, Roman ruins with Islamic architecture, and the call to prayer with nonstop café chatter. With layers of Phoenician, Roman, Arab, and French history, the city has remained important for more than 3,000 years. We are attempting to see all of it in a day and a half. No problem.



*Zaytouna Mosque*

Upon landing, we dropped our bags at our hotel and immediately embarked on a walking tour of the ancient Medina of Tunis, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It's a maze of souks, courtyards, narrow passageways, and carved wooden doors that feels worlds away from anything modern. We began at the Central Market, where colorful stalls overflowed with fresh produce, spices, seafood, and the constant buzz of daily commerce. Adding to the chaos, the Islamic world is preparing for a major holiday later this week during which families traditionally slaughter a lamb and feast together, so everyone seemed to be out securing a lamb. The sensory overload began immediately and never really let up.



*Soon to be lamb chops on someone's dinner plate*

We continued to Souk Blat, known for its aromatic medicinal herbs and natural remedies. This place is a hypochondriac's dream. Next, we admired the refined architecture of Palace Bach Hambah, a jewel of Ottoman-era elegance, before visiting the Medressa Souleymeniya, a former theological school reflecting the city's scholarly past.

We then visited the Zaytouna Mosque, with its graceful minaret and deep spiritual heritage, where Lori and Ann were required to wear modest cover-ups and ended up blending in far better than



Rich and me. At this point, our tour guide took a few minutes away from us to pray. Not sure if he does that every day or just needed to pray that he could get through the rest of the tour with *us*. We also prayed that it wouldn't be that long until our next meal.

And our prayers were answered. From the rooftop of Panorama Palace, we enjoyed sweeping views over the maze of alleyways below while drinking mint tea, Tunisian-style, and eating some sweets we bought in the market. Morocco isn't the only place that runs almost entirely on mint tea and haggling.



*Souk El Berka*

We then strolled through Souk El Berka, once a slave market and now a lively center for jewelry, before continuing to Souk Chechia, home to the famous handcrafted red felt hats. We ended the afternoon at La Kasba, the historic seat of government. Needless to say, we accomplished quite a lot on our first day in Tunis, although, after a while, all medinas begin to blur together into one giant maze of rugs, spices, cats, and scooters.

We also learned that the word "Mediterranean" comes from Latin words meaning "middle of the earth" ("medi" and "terra"), since ancient civilizations considered it the center of the known world. Judging by the number of empires that fought over it, they weren't alone.

Tuesday, May 26, 2026 – Tunis, Tunisia

We had another full day of sightseeing today to visit sites in the Tunis area that we didn't manage to squeeze in yesterday. We began by driving to and walking through the legendary ruins of Carthage, one of the most important cities of the ancient world.

Carthage rose to power as a wealthy maritime empire dominating Mediterranean trade with a formidable navy and daring leaders like Hannibal, whose military campaigns made Rome fear for its survival. But after three Punic Wars, Rome ultimately destroyed Carthage in 146 BCE, proving that, in the ancient world, being rich, powerful, and strategically located was both impressive and extremely dangerous.



*Byrsa Hill*

Today, Carthage sits quietly along the Mediterranean in what is now an upscale seaside suburb of Tunis, reminding us that even the greatest civilizations eventually become scenic archaeological sites surrounded by expensive real estate.

Ironically, most of the ruins at Carthage are not actually Carthaginian but Roman. The Romans destroyed Carthage so thoroughly that much of what we know about the Carthaginians comes from Roman historical accounts, which is the ancient equivalent of hearing only one side of the story. Rome later rebuilt a Roman city directly on top of the destroyed Carthaginian one, and those are the ruins we saw today.

At this point, a brief explanation about these travel journals. I originally started writing them simply as a way to keep track of our trips and help me remember what all my photos actually depict once we get home. I began sharing them with friends and family, who somehow seem to find them entertaining. Since I try not to turn these journals into graduate-level history courses, I've included some additional details about Carthage in a Notes section at the end for anyone interested in a deeper dive. It also helps me remember what exactly I was looking at while taking pictures of piles of ancient rocks. Basically, I write these journals for me, not you, but with you in mind.



*The Carthage Amphitheater*

During our visit, we saw Byrsa Hill, the Punic ports, the Amphitheater, and the Theater, sites that together tell the story of Carthage's rise, destruction, and Roman reinvention.



*The Carthage Theater*

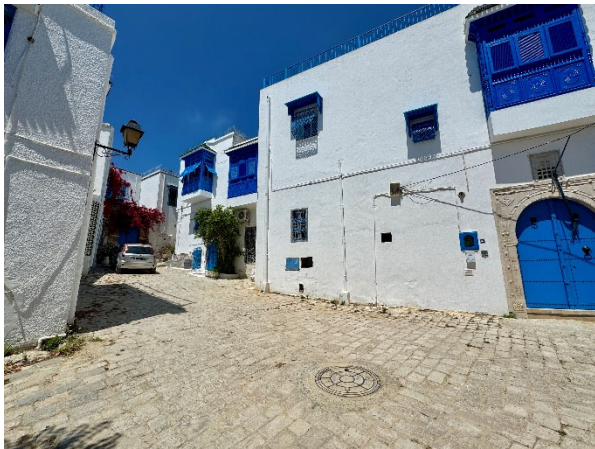
After Carthage, we visited the blue-and-white cliffside village of Sidi Bou Saïd, where we had lunch and wandered through narrow cobbled streets lined with whitewashed walls and bright

blue doors overlooking the Mediterranean. For a moment, I thought I was in Santorini, just with better mint tea and fewer honeymooners posing for Instagram photos.



*Punic ports*

We then visited the Bardo National Museum, home to the world's largest collection of Roman mosaics along with countless artifacts from Tunisia's long and layered history. By the end of the day, our brains were completely full of Phoenicians, Romans, mosaics, and mint tea.



*Sidi Bou Saïd*

In the short time we've been in Tunisia, we've been very impressed by what we've seen and heard here. Tunisia stands out among many Arab Muslim countries as one of the more secular, moderate, and Western-oriented societies in the region. It is known for comparatively progressive laws regarding women's rights, education, and personal freedoms, and is often viewed as culturally sophisticated and highly educated.

Examples frequently cited include the prominent role of women in government, the outlawing of polygamy, strong investment in education, and a generally more moderate public religious environment than in some neighboring countries. Tunisia also emphasizes tolerance toward Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, and is home to one of the world's oldest synagogues. What's not to like?

We completed our whirlwind tour of Tunis today and fly to our next destination tomorrow.

Thanks for following along. More to come.

Love,  
Lori and Stephen

Carthage Notes:

Byrsa Hill was the historic heart of ancient Carthage. It was the original citadel of the Phoenician city founded in the 9th century BCE and later became the administrative and religious center under both Carthaginian and Roman rule. In antiquity, this hill held temples, government buildings, and elite residences. After Rome destroyed Carthage and rebuilt it as a Roman city, Byrsa remained the symbolic and strategic high point. It now provides the most panoramic views of the city.



*Mosaics at The Bardo National Museum*

The Punic ports were the beating heart of ancient Carthage and the reason Rome was so nervous. At its height, Carthage could deploy hundreds of ships, making it one of the Mediterranean's dominant maritime powers.

The Roman Amphitheater was one of the largest in Roman North Africa, built in the 1st or 2nd century AD when Carthage was a major city of the Roman Empire. Modeled after Rome's more famous Colosseum, it could reportedly hold around 30,000–40,000 spectators for gladiator contests, animal hunts, and public spectacles. Very little of the original structure survives today because much of the stone was reused over the centuries for other construction projects around Tunis.

The Roman Theater was built in the 2nd century AD for plays, music, and public ceremonies during the height of Roman Carthage. Unlike the nearby amphitheater, it focused on entertainment rather than gladiator combat. Parts of it have been reconstructed, and today it still hosts concerts and events.