

2009 MOROCCO

Friday, January 31, 2009. It was an inauspicious beginning. When I made my limousine reservation, I inadvertently made it for the time of arrival in JFK, NOT the departure time from Atlanta. Fortunately I checked online this morning and discovered my mistake. I called Carey Limousine¹. And I called and called getting nothing but please wait messages for half an hour. It was getting time to go to the airport and I still couldn't get through. I lugged my suitcases downstairs and into the car. I will have to drive myself or I will miss my plane. Parking at Wally Park² will cost a small fortune but it is offset by the fact I don't have to pay the limo.

I told the Wally Park driver the problem and she set off at once for the airport. We found a skycap and he took me to the special skycap check in. There was now only an hour until my departure but I made it! A wheelchair took me to the departure gate on Concourse A. There were lots of people milling around but I finally found a seat. We actually left with a full plane about 15 minutes late. The first good news of the day was that the plane was headed for Ghana so it was one of Delta's overseas planes with reclining business class elite seats.

A wheelchair in JFK³ took me to the wheelchair bus that in turn took me to Terminal 1. Here there was no wheelchair but it was only a step to Royal Air Maroc's⁴ check in, one counter surrounded by Air France. I requested a wheelchair and waited and waited. Mary finally appeared. We both had our boarding passes when the wheelchair finally appeared to take me through security and Air France's Business Lounge⁵. We still had about 2 hours until boarding time.

The plane to Casablanca was due to leave at 7:00 PM. A wheelchair took me to the wrong gate but we finally got to Air Maroc as they were in the final boarding.

Evans had told me that Royal Air Maroc was the way to go to Casablanca rather than through Paris for it is a shorter ride. Royal Air Maroc is also a code-share with Delta so I will get my miles. As we got on the plane I started to realize what a mistake it is to travel on a third world⁶ air company. The plane was old (and not overly clean). The worst part was that business class seats were the old kind and bore only a small resemblance to Delta's Business Elite. The seat was as narrow as coach. The only way I could get my seat to recline was to call the stewardess. Then if I leaned forward at all it came right back up. The leg rest worked the same way. I played musical chairs in the cabin until I found a seat that reclined. There were only 8 business travelers in a section of 12. Although the back reclined the leg rest did not come up. I decided it was a good idea the flight was only six hours long since I will not get much sleep. It was not worth the outrageous cost!

Sunday, February 1, 2008. There was no wheel chair in Casablanca but Mary and various people helped me schlep my bag and we got through customs without any trouble. Our plane must have been early for Aboud did not appear until I had gone to bank and changed some money. I didn't want to use the ATM until I knew how much money to ask for. It appears there are about 8.5 dirhams to the dollar. We checked into the Sheraton⁷ and I crawled into bed, clothes and all, and slept until 1:30.

Then I tried to fire up my Kindle⁸ but all I got were lines. Could the battery be dead? I plugged it in. The next time I fired it up half the screen came on with lines at the top. I am devastated. I was counting on all those books and now I have nothing to read! Mary and I walked out to a nearby bar to buy some water. They want \$8 for a liter bottle in the Sheraton. They also want \$26 for 24 hour Internet in the room. At least in the business center you can get 45 minutes free. And then the storm moved in. It has been very windy with spotty rain but this is a real storm complete with thunder and lightning. We went down to the Hotel restaurant and I had a delicious chicken and almond Moroccan dish washed down with wine. Mary had another Moroccan chicken dish baked in a pastry shell with almonds and pronounced it delicious as well.

¹ <http://www.carey.com/carey/>

² http://localbusinessreview.com/LocalBusinesses/p/Wally-Park-Atlanta_102474981/

³ <http://www.panynj.gov/CommutingTravel/airports/html/kennedy.html>

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Air_Maroc

⁵ http://www.airfrance.us/US/en/local/guidevoyageur/aeroport/salons_liste_ameriques.htm

⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Third_World

⁷ <http://www.starwoodhotels.com/sheraton/property/overview/index.html?propertyID=307>

⁸ <http://www.amazon.com/Kindle-Amazon-Wireless-Reading-Device/dp/B000F173MA>

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Monday, February 2. I actually slept until 8:00. Mary likes to get up leisurely so it was after nine before we went down for breakfast. The hotel puts on a big buffet. I tried the Moroccan pancakes⁹ but was not impressed. Mary and I checked out our email in the lobby. The keyboard is strange. Q and A has been switched. The M and “,” are switched. I can't figure out what they did with the “” at all!

We walked over to Le Meridien Hotel¹⁰ in hopes of finding a newsstand with something in English to read. No luck, but it is a lovely hotel with a Moorish flavor. It is also across the street from the Toubkal where I stayed last November but I never investigated the Meridien then. We returned to the Sheraton. Walking is difficult because cars park here like a swarm of bees in any open space and you cannot get between them. There are no crossing lights although people in cars seem to honor the crossing zones. Also most of Casablanca seems to be a construction zone and the sidewalks are torn up or being built.

Back at the hotel we found a wonderful cake in the room marked Joyeux Anniversaire for my birthday. It only came with one fork and knife but Mary and I declared it lunch and wolfed every delicious morsel down, Mary making do with the knife.

Mary flipped on the TV but I could not get interested and soon was sound asleep. Mary woke me in time for our massages. The girl did a wonderful job starting with my legs and working up to the neck. Then when I turned over she did the arms stomach and face. I felt wonderful. Mary and I checked out the email again and I got birthday wishes from many people. Then I found a Time Magazine in English at the shop and bought it despite its outrageous price. Any reading material will be a treat. Meanwhile Mary made arrangements for us to go to Rick's Cafe for dinner. Moroccans usually don't eat until eight, but we are still full of cake.

The hotel found us a cab but gave us no time to dicker. We were told the fare would be 20 Euro, which is a rip-off but the driver promised to come back and get us at 9:30 pm. Rick's Café¹¹ would never have existed except for Humphrey Bogart in Casablanca¹². I assumed going there would be somewhat of a tourist trap. Instead we found a lovely restaurant with Moorish décor and 1940s music being piped in. We were told the movie Casablanca was being shown in the room above. Sam's piano sat unattended amid the palms. Dinner was truly delightful. I had the lamb chops and Mary the salmon. We got talked into a shared cheesecake desert.

Tuesday, February 3. We had to change hotels. Our Journeys International tour¹³ is using the Ramada Almonhades¹⁴. The Sheraton doorman loaded us into a petit taxi and the driver drove like a kamikaze pilot to the Ramada. When we got there we realized we had left our passports, money, etc in the room safe back at the Sheraton! We had to take a taxi back and security came up to the 6th floor with us to let us in. Then the waiting taxi took us back to the Ramada.

The hotel seems pleasant with its own bar and restaurant. Best of all there is free Internet on my own computer in my room. Unfortunately the hotel is undergoing renovation and the sound of jackhammers made it hard to rest for the hour before our city tour. Mary's husband Tom had arrived. He came two days late so he could see the Super Bowl.

There is a step down right after you get off the elevator and of course I did not see it and came a cropper in the lobby. Everyone rushed over to pick me up and they put me in a chair with some water while I tried to regain my dignity. It's these darned glasses I am supposed to wear.

Our guide Mohamed Talar was waiting. He is a big tall man who speaks perfect English. In fact he is an American citizen, who lives in Las Vegas. His American wife is a Christian from Wisconsin whom he met on one of his tours in Morocco. He comes back to Morocco twice a year to visit his 78-year old mother. She has had a stroke and has many problems.

The tour of Casablanca¹⁵ started out like most city tours with him pointing out the judicial building and the post office. This is the largest city in Morocco and with its large harbor, its commercial

⁹ <http://www.recipezaar.com/Moroccan-Honeycomb-Pancakes-Beghrir-296705>

¹⁰ <http://www.starwoodhotels.com/lemeridien/property/photos/index.html?propertyID=1816>

¹¹ <http://www.rickscafe.ma/about.htm>

¹² [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casablanca_\(film\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casablanca_(film))

¹³ <http://www.journeys.travel/destinations/africa/morocco/667/>

¹⁴ http://www.ramada.com/Ramada/control/Booking/property_info?propertyId=15839&brandInfo=RA

¹⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casablanca>

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capitol. King Mohamed VI¹⁶ wants everyone to have TV and even the poorest neighborhoods sprout satellite dishes.

Then we went to the huge King Hassan II Mosque¹⁷ with its tall four-sided tiled minaret. All the minarets in Morocco are four-sided, one corner indicating the direction of Mecca. The entry was 120 dirhams (\$15) each but since it is not included in the tour, we had to pay. I was surprised it was not included since it is the main sight in Casablanca. The Mosque is the third largest in the world and St Peter's Cathedral would fit inside. 30,000 people can worship inside. Its tiled minaret is 689 feet high and can be seen all over Casablanca. On top of the minaret is a spire going through three balls. We were told these represent the three monotheistic religions, Jewish, Christian and Muslim. If there were four balls on a spire they would represent the four elements: water, air, ground and fire. If there are five balls they represent the five pillars of Islam: confession, the Hajj to Mecca, daily prayers, fasting in Ramadan, and charity to others. The minaret also serves as a lighthouse.

The Mosque was built between 1987 and 1993 with donations from the populace. 2500 workers and 10,000 craftsmen worked on the building. It was built out over the water supported on huge concrete pillars for his late Majesty Hassan II was inspired by the Quranic verse, which says, "The throne of God was on water." Everything is covered with tiled geometric designs for people and animals are never depicted in Islamic buildings. Green is the holy color, blue represents the spiritual, yellow represents the desert that covers a quarter of Morocco, and black represents Atlas who carried the world on his shoulders.

Inside we found heated marble inlaid floors. Above the main sanctuary were carved cedar balconies where the women could worship. And of course there was the Mihrab¹⁸ to show the faithful the direction of Mecca. The Mimbar¹⁹ seemed small but perhaps it was because the building was so large. The ceiling can be slid open in good weather.

Below the sanctuary were the washing rooms. The 41 marble fountains are shaped like lotus flowers. Mohammed is very proud that all the building material used in the Mosque was native to Morocco. Only the chandeliers were not, being made of Venetian glass. We climbed back up about three flights and then Mohammed wanted to lead us down some more stairs to see the Turkish baths. I was getting tired and wanted no more stairs so I waited while Mary and Tom went down to see.

We drove along the corniche road where hotels and apartments are under construction. Then we were shown the wealthy section of the town where people seem to live in miniature palaces. The Mirador where Eisenhower once lived comes with a large American Flag. When Mary tried to take a picture the security guards waved her off.

We stopped to walk into an old palace built in 1897 once the home of the Governor of the Prefecture. It now houses government offices. What made it interesting was that it was a sort of miniature Alhambra²⁰, complete with a Lion's Court. The cut plaster arabesque designs and tile work were all exquisite. We walked briefly through the Medina (old city) and finally returned to the hotel.

Dinner in the hotel was awful. We walked into the dining room and were escorted to a lovely table. As soon as we announced we were on the pension plan the whole tone changed. They snatched back the menus and said what do you want chicken or fish. We ordered wine and beer and were curtly told that was extra which we agreed but even that didn't seem to please them. Bread was brought but not up to the standards we have come to expect. We were served a tepid potato soup and the chicken finally arrived. It was cooked in the skin, which I don't really like but I peeled the skin off and found it edible. The vegetable medley did not appeal. We had crème caramel for desert. Tom commented he didn't get enough to eat. They never did offer coffee or tea. In short it was so bad we will have to figure out something else when we return for our last night.

¹⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mohammed_VI_of_Morocco

¹⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hassan_II_of_Morocco

¹⁸ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mihrab>

¹⁹ <http://www.google.com/search?q=pulpit+in+a+mosque&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&aq=t&rls=org.mozilla:en-US:official&client=firefox-a>

²⁰ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alhambra>

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Wednesday, February 4. Mohamed had ordered bags out at 7:45 and we were to leave at 8:30. The first problem was that he didn't even show up until 8:35. When we asked if we had a new van, he told us it was the same as yesterday. That van didn't have room for our bags and us. Also one person would have to sit on the jump seat where they couldn't see anything. We told him he could sit on the jump seat. When he said his legs were too long we pointed out that ours were too long as well. He promised to find us a new car and left.

We sat and waited. An hour later I went out to find him and the driver in the old van waiting. I said I wanted to go to an ATM and he said it wasn't safe to go alone. He said he had called for a new van and it was at the airport and would be here shortly.

An hour later we were still waiting. I again went to the van and told him I was becoming angry. He said he had heard from the new van, which was coming from Marrakech, and it was inside the city limits and would soon be here. It pulled up as we were speaking. I went in the hotel to tell Mary and Tom and we all came out to get in the van. Reluctantly Mohamed went back to the hotel to fetch the bags but Tom was told he had to tip the porter. The van is not as luxurious as the first car, which was brand new with leather bucket seats, but it will do!

We set off for Rabat²¹, which is one of the four Imperial cities, the others being Meknes, Marrakech and Fes. Morocco has been a monarchy since the 17th century only briefly interrupted when the European powers were fighting over Morocco.

Rabat is the capital of government in Morocco. It is the third largest city in Morocco and its thick wall dates from the 12th century. Small holes in the wall are there for ventilation. We paused at the handsome Gate of the Winds²² and then drove in to admire the palace, the second largest in Africa. It was built in 1868 and is the main residence of King Mohamed VI. Near the palace are a library and museum under construction. Also nearby is a handsome white building known as the Pentagon of Morocco but it no longer houses the military whose leadership is now vested in the King. We passed the American Embassy and went to the unfinished Hassan Mosque²³. It dates to the 17th Century and was planned to be the second largest in the world commemorating Morocco's success in its battles with Spain. However the Almohad Sultan Yaqub al-Mansour died and his sons were too busy with wars to finish it. The Lisbon earthquake in 1755 destroyed what was left.

Adjoining the site is the Royal Mausoleum guarded by a colorful horse guard. Huge bronze incense burners decorate the entrance. The Mausoleum was built 1961-1971 and is very beautiful. My mind overflowed looking at the hand carved mahogany and cedar as well as the beautiful ceramic work. Polished Portuguese marble forms the floor of the mausoleum and it shines so much it looks like the sarcophagi are floating in water. Buried in the hall are King Hassan 11 who died in 1999, Mohamed V who died 1961, and Prince Abdullah who died in 1984. Verses from the Koran are read twice daily in the sanctuary. Their wives are buried elsewhere.

Leaving the site Mary was accosted by a vendor and Mohamed flew into a rage shouting at the man and then entreating the police to do something. It seems he is a noted pickpocket and Mohamed even escorted him once to jail. We felt Mohamed rather overdid the scene and Mary pointed out he should have said something to her before the man approached. We will never know what was really going on.

We headed next to the Old Fort or Kasbah, passing the US and other embassies. A settlement has been here since Phoenician times. The Romans had a fish oil processing plant here. We entered the Kasbah and walked through a once lovely but now unkempt garden to reach the coffee shop and a welcome pit stop. Many cats live in the garden for people come here and feed them. We saw many cats all over Morocco.

We drove on to Arget where Mohamed treated us to a Moroccan barbecue. Aziz, our driver, joined us. Mohamed selected veal pieces and lamb chops from hanging carcasses and took them to be cooked. While we waited some wonderful olives were brought to the table as well as French fries. The Moroccan olives²⁴ are pale pink in color and somewhat sweet. The barbecue

²¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rabat>

²² <http://www.marocveasions.com/rabat.htm>

²³ <http://www.journeybeyondtravel.com/travel/morocco-features/rabat-morocco.html>

²⁴ <http://www.american.edu/ted/OLIVE.HTM>

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came when done as well as grilled tomatoes and onions. The best mint tea²⁵ I have ever tasted washed everything down. It was all great fun and not at all touristy. While we ate beguiling cats sat below the table waiting for nibbles. One perched on Tom's travel bag if asking him to take him along.

We drove on and the scenery became more and more interesting as we entered the foothills of the Atlas Mountains. There were truffles²⁶ being offered for sale and groves of oak trees along the road with the bark peeled off the trunk²⁷. The bark is sent to Europe where it is used to make corks for wine bottles. Since the bark grows back it can be reharvested every ten years

We climbed to 2000 feet above sea level passing through rich agricultural land. Women tended herds of sheep or cows and men were plowing the fields with horses. We spotted several hard working donkeys, carrying people or goods. Wine, olive oil and beer are all manufactured near Meknes.

Meknes²⁸ was once the capitol of Morocco. It is a city of minarets. There are 165 many built in the 13th through the 15th centuries. The people dress and talk differently than the rest of Morocco. It was here that Islam was first established in the country.

We drove through a gate in the 40-kilometer long medieval walls; a handsome affair decorated with green or blue into what had been the Jewish quarter of the city. The Jews had come here after the Inquisition. Many of these Seraphic Jews have migrated on to Israel. Mohamed pointed out an ancient synagogue.

Ninety thousand people live in the Kasbah and everything is colored green brown or brownish yellow. These colors help keep it cool in the summer. There are many bitter orange trees.

King Moulay Ishmail²⁹ built the city. He was a colorful king who had 500 wives in the 500 bedrooms of his harem. The present king doesn't believe in polygamy and has only one wife and two children.

We had pointed out the ruin of the royal stables where thousands of horses died in the same 1755 earthquake that destroyed the unfinished mosque in Rabat. Nearby was a huge granary³⁰, which was restored in 1987. It has wonderful arches and high domed ceilings. There is also a noria³¹ or waterwheel. Mohamed tells us many movies have been made here, such as Abraham³².

Prisoners and slaves built the granary between 1675 and 1682. Cara, the architect, was given his freedom on its completion. There were 4000 slaves to look after the horses. Nearby the Roman city Volubilis³³ was quarried to bring columns to decorate the stables. There were a few capitals that are all we will see of Volubilis for our late departure from Casablanca means it will be dark when we get there.

We passed through the main gate of the palace³⁴ that is called the Versailles of Morocco because of its size. We admired its soft colors and then drove on the road between the palace wall and the medina wall. There are no windows in the walls on this street and prisoners used to have to walk along it from the prison to the court. Mohamed told us prisoners are not executed but sometimes are used in prisoner exchanges. Later he talked about prisoners who were executed but they were apparently the harder criminals.

We visited King Moulay Ismail's mausoleum. Handsome tiled walls surround his casket. In each corner of the room are tall clocks that had been presented to him by Louis XIV when there was talk of a marriage between the King and one of Louis' daughters. Apparently the marriage did not take place for she was not one of the 500 in his harem. A stand near the sarcophagi tells us that beside King Moulay Ishmail, his senior wife, Lalakhnata is also here, along with his sons Abdulvarhanan and Mullah Achmed.

²⁵ See youtube.com Moroccan Mint Tea - cookingwithalia.com

²⁶ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Truffles>

²⁷ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oak#Uses>

²⁸ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meknes>

²⁹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ismail Ibn Sharif>

³⁰ <http://www.virtourist.com/africa/morocco/meknes/16.htm>

³¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Noria>

³² <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0109036/>

³³ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Volubilis>

³⁴ <http://www.looklex.com/e.o/meknes.htm>

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Nearby is the courthouse and under that is supposed to be a huge jail. Mary saw, but I did not, one of the stork's nest for which the town is famous. I also was too tired to get out of the car to view the Gate of Al Mansoor supposedly one of the most beautiful in Africa.

We crossed the river into the modern town of Meknes with high-rise buildings and continued on to Fes. There have been scattered showers all day and I have lost count of the rainbows we have seen.

It was dark when we arrived at the Menzeh Zalagh Hotel³⁵. I was assigned a huge room with king bed on the backside of the hotel but I traded with the Sesniaks when I heard they were in twin beds. My new room had a balcony from which I could see the lights of Fes. Dinner was a buffet, a big improvement over last night. There was also free WiFi Internet in my room but it was slow. In the middle of the night I happened to be awake and tried it again and it was somewhat faster. The Sesniaks reported that the loud Disco in the basement of the hotel kept them awake all night but I did not hear it.

Thursday, February 5. Fes. Fes is between the Riff and the Middle Atlas Mountains. A magnificent 24-kilometer wall surrounds it.

We started our tour at the royal palace³⁶. It is the second largest in the world after the one in Beijing. It was built in the 13th century and has been restored and remodeled many times. In each guardhouse were three military men representing each branch of the service. King Hassan II enlarged it in 1975.

Nearby is the mellah³⁷ or Jewish ghetto and Mohamed explained that every royal palace has an adjoining mellah. The word mellah means "salt" for the Jews ran the salt market, an essential ingredient not only for the diet but also to preserve the heads of felons that were strung up to deter other people from emulating them. Later the Jews expanded into gold and silver jewelry. There have always been large Jewish settlements in Morocco for most came here at the time of the Spanish Inquisition³⁸. We walked through the ghetto to the Ben Danen synagogue, which dates from the 17th century. This has been restored and comes complete with a beautiful Ark and Torah. There is a round hole in the floor, called the bride's hole that was used so people could observe the bride while she bathed before her wedding.

We got hit up for an entry fee but felt it was worth it and it had not been mentioned on our itinerary. Mohamed bought us some choros as we left the quarter and we found them a delicious pastry snack.

We drove to an old fort on a nearby hill to get a panoramic view of the city. The wind was blowing so hard that I thought I would be lifted off the ground and transported to Oz!³⁹ I snapped a quick picture and fought my way back to the van. When I checked the picture later it was not that much better than the one I got from my hotel balcony.

We then went to a Famille Fekhari art and pottery factory school that has been in business 150 years. Our tour showed us every step of the process from one poor soul named Claude who does nothing but knead the clay all day. We saw three men throwing pots and then went to where the kilns are. They use olive pits as fuel and the fire is so hot that it is four days before they can open the kiln and remove the green ware. In another room there were perhaps 20 artisans putting the traditional designs on pots and bowls with horsehair brushes. There are 125 traditional patterns that the students must learn.

Then we went to where they cut the tiles. An adz is used and the men are so deft they cut different shapes and even the tiniest mosaic pieces with this one tool. At last we came to the inevitable showroom where we saw a nifty table for about \$3500 including shipping. I thought the fountains were nice but they were even more money.

³⁵ <http://www.flickr.com/search/?q=Menzeh+Zalagh+Hotel%20Fez&w=all>

³⁶ <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic-art/392604/99995/Royal-Palace-Fes-Mor>

³⁷ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mellah>

³⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish_Inquisition

³⁹ http://books.google.com/books?hl=en&id=HldvIEXYSeQC&dq=oz&printsec=frontcover&source=web&ots=3xOSJAbKS1&sig=W_yeEPRJrmhkeuhe4YMP7-801sw&ei=D46aSeznOo-ctwfb7b27Cw&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=12&ct=result

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I am very disinterested in buying anything when a guide is with me for even if the price isn't higher the guide gets a cut. It was very evident that Mohamed could hardly wait to get his cut after Mary bought a few souvenirs.

Then Mohamed took us to the Medina or old town and we plunged into the labyrinth. At the entrance is a donkey taxi stand for no motorized vehicles are allowed into the narrow streets and alleyways. Martha should take note that if her donkey business⁴⁰ ever falters she can go to Fes and set up a taxi business! The taxi business is flourishing and we were constantly dodging these donkeys as they carried building materials, goods or people through the Medina. They must be on a meter for they never paused as they hurried through the streets. Incredibly we only saw one spot where a donkey left some manure and he was unattended.

It is a great Medina with all manner of goods for sale. We saw stalls of meat and fish, all beautifully arranged. One stall announced they were selling camel meat for a camel head hung out over the street. There were dates and figs, fruits and vegetables.

Mohamed led us up a somewhat hidden stair to a leather shop. It overlooked the tannery. We were given mint to sniff if the smell bothered us. It didn't at this time of the year for it is so cold. The skins are first placed in vats of pigeon droppings. Second they get washed and then are hand scraped. Lastly they are dyed in various vats of natural colors. It was so interesting to watch but we did not buy any leather goods.

Next we came to a monastery established by a Senegalese Sufi Saint. Sufi is sort of Yoga and spiritual mixture. People come here to pray that they will get pregnant and so forth. They went to a weaving shop supported by UNSECO. They are attempting to preserve the weaving industry. These are the last weavers in the country and they work in silk, cotton and wool. We looked at the looms and then were invited to buy some of the wares.

We next went to Karaouine Mosque and University⁴¹, which Mohamed proclaimed one of the oldest in the world. A woman named Fatima al Fihria founded it in 869. It is one of the leading spiritual and educational centers in the Muslim world.

In the heart of the Medina was a sacred spot cordoned off from the donkeys. It was the Mosque of Mullah Indris. People come here to ask for miracles.

We also went to the old El-Nejjarine caravansary⁴² that has been restored. Tom and Mary explored the upper floors but I was getting pretty tired and just sat in the entrance courtyard.

Finally we got to Nejjarine (pronounced Nazarene) Square named for the sound of the metal workers hammers that are here. Nearby was the Restaurant Nejjarine⁴³ in a restored private home. It was beautifully decorated and we had a wonderful lunch. We ordered pigeon wrapped in pastry and a beef dish to share. With twelve tapis plates for a first course there was more than enough food. The bill came to about \$50 and it was well worth it, even though it made a trip to an ATM necessary.

To finish our tour of the Medina Mohamed took us to the Mysteries of Fes. This was a shop in another restored house. They had all sorts of furniture pieces and some jewelry, all of which were for sale. We looked but were not tempted.

And so we went back to the hotel for dinner and the night.

Friday, February 5. We left at 8:30 for what had been billed as a scenic drive over the Middle Atlas Mountains⁴⁴. Unfortunately the weatherman had other plans. As we climbed we saw more and more snow that was heaped on the branches of the pine and cedar trees. When we got to Ifrane⁴⁵ we found the King in residence and security guards manned boxes every 30 yards or so around the palace. The town is known as the Switzerland of Morocco because of the steep roofs on the houses and is a favorite of vacationers. The road was very slushy and then the men found that the road would be worse if we proceeded. Aziz has never been here before and couldn't get over it. Mohamed knew of a longer but lower altitude road and we detoured forty or fifty miles

⁴⁰ <http://donkeys.net/>

⁴¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_Al_Karaouine

⁴² <http://www.trekearth.com/gallery/Africa/Morocco/photo318071.htm>

⁴³ <http://www.frommers.com/destinations/fes/D65770.html>

⁴⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Middle_Atlas

⁴⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ifrane>

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through Arsou and Kniffra. The later pink city is the home of the King's wife. She will never be known as Queen for Morocco does not have queens, only wives of kings. A horse and codfish fountain is in the town commemorating that this is horse country and the mountain fish are very good.

The weather was getting very rainy and was sometimes mixed with snow. The secondary road twisted and curved and had large potholes so it took us a long time to get to Midelt. We had lunch there. I had a Berber couscous⁴⁶ but was not impressed. The restaurant had a mural of a map of the area so we could see where we had come. As we left we met some Japanese tourists just arriving. They had left our hotel an hour and a half before us but had come by the high road.

Peering through the rain we had spotted storks on nests and one horse wrapped up in a raincoat but we were so behind the men did not or perhaps could not stop for a photo op. We left the snow for a time but then we climbed into it again.

Along the road was honey being sold in old coke bottles. The area looks so much like the American west with flat somewhat barren land leading to mountains that rise abruptly from the plain. South of the town of Rich we came to the Legionaires canyon and start to see date palms. How do they survive in this cold climate? We passed the snaky swollen River Ziz that feeds into Lake Hassan Dakkel (Dakkel means conqueror).

El-Rachidia was a military base established because of the nearness of the Algerian border. In El-Rachidia Aziz spots a vintage car for sale and comes to a screeching stop so he can investigate but the man wanted \$4000 for a car Aziz thought was worth \$400. Aziz is a mechanic by trade and this is his first try at tour driving. He is a sweet thoughtful man and we like him very much.

Finally after a long tiring day we pull into Erfoud⁴⁷ and the Hotel Belere. It is a new hotel with a huge swimming pool and various buildings for the rooms around the grounds. My room was lovely with two queen beds. Unfortunately I had a terrible time with the key and had to get help from the staff. Tom helped me another time. There is Internet but only in the lobby.

We went to dinner and in the middle of dinner Mohamed came over and told us it would cost us \$60 apiece to go see the dunes. When we pulled out the itinerary and showed him the dunes were included, he launched into a tirade about he had been given no money for all this and he was only a tour guide and so forth. I left to send an email to our travel agent Susan. Mary and Tom were embarrassed by the fuss in the dining room and finally made Mohamed call Horizon tours⁴⁸ in Casablanca that said that the Merzouga Dunes were indeed included. Mohamed has been making us tip the porters for our bags and says we are not entitled to coffee with dinner and in general been irritating with his flagrant way of trying to make as much money out of us as he can. He is a strange man who can be charming one minute and the next he is sleeping in the van as we drive around. Perhaps he has narcolepsy. His quick temper makes us think he is bi-polar. After Mary and I admitted we had each been travel agents at one time he mellowed and said he wanted to give us his email so we could pass his name around to our friends in the travel business. I am sure Susan will be delighted to hear he can arrange things better than a middleman can.

Saturday, February 7, 2008. We got up at 5:00 am to go see the sunrise over the Merzouga sand dunes. A Bedouin drove us in a land rover to where we rented dromedaries⁴⁹ to take us up on the dunes, which rise almost 150 feet in places. I was glad to pay the \$30 each for I could never have made it on foot in the dark. It was a highlight of the trip to ride the dromedaries. The strangest part about riding one is when this one-humped camel gets up. He kind of unfolds like a steamer chair and you hang on for dear life until he is all the way up. Riding him is somewhat uncomfortable for the saddle is only a blanket draped over a wood frame. The Bedouins kept teasing us that it was only 55 days to Timbuktu! The men kept taking our cameras and taking pictures of us so we have lots of proof of this adventure. At last we reached our destination and they spread blankets on the sand so we could watch the sunrise. It was a beautiful daybreak for

⁴⁶ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Couscous>

⁴⁷ <http://www.traveljournals.net/pictures/morocco/erfoud/>

⁴⁸ http://www.my-morocco.com/directory_00/en20070303_000012.php

⁴⁹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dromedary>

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we have at last outrun the bad weather. It is now clear and sunny although still unseasonably cold. The men gave us a Sahara sled ride pulling us sitting on the blanket down the dune.

Then they broke loose their small bazaar of fossils. This area was once an inland sea and there are fossils dating back hundreds of thousands of years. I only wanted one soap dish but the men were fixed on wanting \$30 and so they kept adding to the pile until we at last struck the deal. I look at it as a tip for a really fun day.

We viewed a large lake in the desert and then stopped at the Dravidian and Jurassic Gallery where we had a tour to show us how they cut the fossils. Potassium hydrochloride is used to remove the stone from the fossil. There were tables and fountains, even a counter top, all of which carried large price tags. I thought I had lost my soap dish from the Bedouins so I bought another for 200 DH (about \$25). Mary later found my soap dish later in her luggage. While we were in the shop Horizon Tours called me from Casablanca in response to last night's email. I commented on having to pay the porters for the baggage and was told that was Mohamed's job. I passed the phone to him so he could hear for himself and we witnessed another fine example of his temper while he talked to headquarters. It did work however for butter would have melted in his mouth afterwards. We spotted two cute kittens as we left. There are so many cats in this country!

We were back at the hotel by 8:00 and had a belated breakfast before checking out. Mohamed tells us we will see many Ksars⁵⁰ and Kasbahs. A Ksar is a sort of pueblo. The Kasbahs are small forts where several families used to cluster together for protection against marauding tribes. Some have now been converted into expensive guesthouses.

We learn that there are three Berber dialects spoken in the country and the other languages are Arabic, French and English. Women are fully emancipated in Morocco and can vote and own businesses. They wrap themselves in a long black cloth called a haik⁵¹. Berber women place a tattoo under their lower lip if they are married and they add other tattoos above their eyebrows to show they have children.

We passed a large area of small mounds each housing a manmade well for there is lots of water underground. One young man demonstrated how he could dive in one well and emerge from another. The charge was \$5 to watch him. Everyone seems to ask for a tip but it is better than seeing them beg.

We got to the large oasis of Tinegar. It is famed for its wool and we see women washing it in the river but had no photo op. Many date palms grow in the oasis. Beyond was the beautiful Todgra gorge⁵² with quarter mile high sides formed by the Todgra River. It is a rock climber's paradise.

After lunch at Tente de Caidale Restaurant in the gorge, we were taken to the Berber House for the traditional rug show you endure in Arab countries. First ceremonial green tea was served and then they started showing us the Kelim⁵³ rugs. The Kelim rugs are in geometric design and tribes used to use them for communicating. Since no one else knew how to read the design it was a secret way to pass a message to another tribe.

Tom made a joke about how he could pick out the most expensive and the proprietor agreed with him and invited Tom to sit next to him for the dicker. Mary said no to him but I got in the act and offered a price. He wrote a new price on his pad and passed it to me. I finally demurred and said it was too much money so he invited me upstairs to see what my last price would buy. Needless to say they were not of the caliber of the first one. Miraculously the big rug appeared upstairs and the dicker proceeded. Mohamed had gotten in the act and told him I should get a good discount for I was a travel agent. I don't know if I got a good price or not. I never do. However we finally struck a deal at half the original price. The rug will look beautiful in the Sesniaks house. Two women made the rug in the high Atlas Mountains. The younger one works 5-6 hours a day and the older one works four. It takes them more than a year to weave this natural fiber piled⁵⁴ carpet.

⁵⁰ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ksar>

⁵¹ <http://sun.menloschool.org/~sportman/westernstudies/first/old1718/class/c/ottoman/algiers/clothing.html>

⁵² http://lexicorient.com/morocco/todra_gorge.htm

⁵³ <http://www.ideasforwomen.com/home/rug-kilim.php>

⁵⁴ http://www.eruggallery.com/learnrugs/learn_detail/pile/lrn_pile.htm

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We drove on through the Dades Valley⁵⁵ and finally came to Ouarzazate⁵⁶ (pronounced war-zat)⁵⁷. This city is known as the city of roses and has a rose festival in the spring. It is also the heart of the Moroccan film industry. The Legionnaire⁵⁸ was filmed here. We checked into another Belere Hotel. This one was all in one building but still had a lovely pool. We seem to be the only guests. Tourism is really down even for the off-season.

Monday, February 8, 2009. We left at 8:30 for Marrakech. Along the road were many Kasbahs. We stopped at Taourirt⁵⁹ with a Kasbah that is about 500 years old. Mohamed showed us one of the living quarters. This entailed dragging me up steep steps that had risers a foot high. I had my usual breathing problems and more.

At the next Kasbah I stayed in the car and rested. Aziz gave me a bonbon and also one for "ma fille"⁶⁰ but he indicated I should not tell Mohamed although I did not understand why. Perhaps Mohamed has told him to leave the tourists alone and stick with his driving.

At Ait Benhaddou⁶¹, considered the most spectacular Kasbah in southern Morocco we enjoyed a coke on the terrace of a restaurant nearby. An aggressive sparrow came right up to the table and grabbed crumbs from a Ritz cracker.

Then it was back in the van to head for the wonderful snowcapped mountains. It reminds me so much of Colorado. We got into the barren foothills and climbed a bit. Then we came to a two hour-long halt and found out only one lane is open over the mountains. We had to wait for the cars coming south from Marrakech. The locals were selling pastries and bread to the stopped motorists.

Finally the Marrakech cars came through. One car was even carrying some cows on top of his van! We started up. It was a spectacular ride with the mountains covered with snow. Switchback after switchback we finally reached the pass 2260 meters in altitude. There were only a few places where the road was only one lane wide but there were also some trees down over the road. We finally met a snowplow! Mount Toubkal⁶² Mountain is 4167 meters high and is the tallest in north Africa.

As we started down we thought we had it made, but not at all. We came to another stop in a small mountain town. Some of these towns are older than the ones in the dry desert we have left. This town was memorable for it had been four hours since the last stop. I needed a toilet and Aziz took Mary and me into a restaurant. I have never been so happy to see a squat toilet in my life! The only coin we had to give the small boy attendant was 5 DH. He was thrilled to get 60 cents instead of 12. Back in the car we inched our way out of town. Finally we found out what the trouble was. One bus tried to pass another but could not and blocked the road. It was getting late and Mohamed proposed we stop in one of the small towns for lunch.

It was a nameless restaurant in a nameless town. It was too cold inside so we ate on the street. They produced a fava bean soup and then we had barbecue veal meat. There were spoons for the soup but we had to eat the meat with our hands using bread for pushers. Our napkins had the consistency of computer paper. Under the table a beguiling black cat waited for morsels. We had really gone native.

Finally we drove on down out of the mountains to the flat plain where Marrakech⁶³ sits. Abu-Bakr Ibn-Umar established the city in 1070 during the Almoravid dynasty⁶⁴. It is sometimes called the red city because of the color in the buildings. Mohamed tells us the first psychiatric clinic in the world was here. They played quiet music to sooth the patients.

⁵⁵ <http://www.fotosearch.com/photos-images/dades-valley.html>

⁵⁶ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ouarzazat>

⁵⁷ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ouarzazate>

⁵⁸ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legionnaire_\(film\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legionnaire_(film))

⁵⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taourirt,_Morocco

⁶⁰ My daughter

⁶¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A%C3%Aft_Benhaddou

⁶² <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/600601/Mount-Toubkal>

⁶³ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marrakech>

⁶⁴ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Almoravid>

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We drove passed the famous La Mamounia Hotel⁶⁵, which has long been under renovation, and down the long wide Boulevard King Mohamed VI with gardens planted in the median. We were a long way from the high rent district when we finally found the Imperial Plaza Hotel⁶⁶. This is an older hotel and not near anything. The lobby theme is from One Thousand and One Nights⁶⁷ with red glass chandeliers. The elevator is embellished with gold. I was given the key to room 415 but the sign in the hall said 401-414 one-way and 416-429 the other. My room does not exist! Mary and Tom have a bed draped with silk curtains. I waited there until the bags come and I am shown my room down a short hallway. My room is more ordinary than the Sesniaks with dark woodwork and dark red counterpanes. It is also too cold. I could not get the phone to work so I went down to reception to inquire how to change the thermostat. I also found out Internet costs 50DH an hour. That's about \$6. However I bought an hour for it has been several days since I have been on. They never did come to alter my thermostat but Tom finally figured it out and as we went down for dinner heat was coming out. Mary showed me how you can keep your room working when you are gone. Usually you have to take your key out of the slot and then everything turns off to save energy. It's a good system unless you want something to work in your absence. Mary stuck a Delta Crown Room⁶⁸ card in the slot and it works as well as a key. Most of our hotels on this trip have been non descript and this one was the most non of them all. Dinner was a buffet and we retired soon after. The days have been so long and I am getting very tired.

Monday February 9. We met Mohamed at 9. Aziz had been sleeping in the van. It is quite a bit warmer. We drove up Mohamed VI Boulevard finding not only an ATM but also a copy of the Herald Tribune⁶⁹, our first newspaper of the trip.

Our first stop was at the Menara Gardens⁷⁰ built about 1130 by the Almohad ruler Abd al-Mu'min. Snowmelt from the High Atlas comes to a huge reservoir that is used to irrigate the large olive grove, some of which were planted 800 years ago. The reservoir is 7 meters deep in the center and is full of carp. Mohamed brought bread to attract the carp but we could not really see them in the murky water. Mohammed says that later in the spring the water becomes clear. The African olive⁷¹ tree has smaller leaves than its European counterpart. It also produces smaller olives. This is a popular place for people to come and picnic but all we saw were tour buses of tourists. Mohamed thinks there is a cruise ship in Casablanca.

We then drove to see the ruins of the Koutoubia Mosque⁷², which also dates from the 12th century. Its minaret was used as a model for the minaret on the Giraldo in Deville and the Hassan Tower in Rabat. The same earthquake that destroyed parts of Meknes in 1785 destroyed it. The Koutoubia Minaret has three globes on top, the topmost being of gold. It was made as a penance for the wife of Yaqub el-Mansour⁷³ who broke the fast of Ramadan⁷⁴. Her jewelry was melted down to form the globe. Koutoubia means librarian for there was a large book market here at one time. There were many books in Marrakech in the 12th century for it was at the time of the apogee of Morocco. The muezzin⁷⁵ hangs a flag from the top on Friday to announce the time for prayer.

We found some of the colorful watermen⁷⁶ and Mary and I posed for a picture with them. Ladles and cups decorate their clothing. They put eucalyptus in the water to purify it. I was not tempted to try some. I had a moment of panic when I reached for the money to pay them. No purse! However Mohamed called Aziz who reported it safely in the van.

⁶⁵ <http://www.mamounia.com/>

⁶⁶ <http://hotels.lonelyplanet.com/hotel/availability/?SearchDetails=K!10000!1.6.15.2.3.4.5.8.9.10.11.12.13.14!-1!194!!!-1!-1!-1!113...!!57.59.27.4.52!!&PreviousSearchId=-1&HotelId=1299686>

⁶⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1001_nights

⁶⁸ http://www.delta.com/traveling_checkin/airport_information/crown_room_clubs/

⁶⁹ <http://www.iht.com/>

⁷⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Menara_gardens

⁷¹ <http://www.gardenguides.com/plants/plant.asp?symbol=OLEUC>

⁷² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Koutoubia_Mosque

⁷³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yaqub_al-Mansur

⁷⁴ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramadan>

⁷⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muezzin>

⁷⁶ <http://www.randabishop.com/africa/moroccowaterman4138.html>

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We passed the 17th century Jewish ghetto to get the Bahia Palace⁷⁷. Bahia means brilliance. The palace belonged to the grand vizier⁷⁸, or prime minister, Bakhmed Benn Moussa. We entered through a garden with Benjamin fichus trees⁷⁹, poinsettia trees and orange trees. Clumps of rosemary⁸⁰ acted as a border for the beds. We had to laugh as a big white tomcat chased a demure gray tabby cat up a tree. She managed to get away.

Fireplaces in the rooms gave heat and the walls were originally covered in velour. In the summer a ventilation system and the thick walls kept the rooms cool. Ornately painted cedar ceilings were different in each room. One courtyard with a fountain marked the area for his four legitimate wives. The concubines in the harem had smaller rooms.

In one room there were verses from the Koran set to music and Mohamed sang to demonstrate them. After Kennedy was assassinated, Jackie Kennedy came and stayed here for two days. It must have been so peaceful.

One part of the palace was a Koranic school. He showed us where the teacher sat with the boys on one side and the girls on the other. They used bamboo styluses to write the verses on tablets. The tablets were then washed clean and the next day the pupils had to recite what they learned the day before. Mohamed learned about half of the Koran in a Koranic school before his parents sent him to a modern school. He told how he learned to shake his head from left to right to remember the poetic texts.

The Dar Si Said Museum⁸¹ on our itinerary was closed so we went to the Dar Tiskiwin Museum⁸² instead. It had rooms furnished in Bedouin style and many Bedouin artifacts saddles and jewelry.

Aziz was late picking us up and we got treated to another example of Mohamed's hot temper as he dressed him out.

We stopped once more on the way back to hotel at the La Porte D'Orient (the Gate of the Orient) but it turned out to be just another place for us to pad Mohamed's pockets. We were there just long enough to admire the furniture and other things. I spotted one table of the marble work you find in Agra. And then we sailed out and were returned to the hotel.

Mohamed had arranged for us to have lunch instead of dinner today. The first course they brought was a lovely rice and vegetable salad and we thought that was it. In fact, Mary left. Then they brought in Tajine Chicken⁸³. It was the best Tajine chicken of the trip but Tom and I could only eat part of it. We refused desert and went up to the room to rest.

At three I went down to the lobby but wasn't there very long before I had a call of nature. When I returned to the lobby I found Mary wasn't going on the tour this afternoon due to some digestive problems. I suggested we postpone the afternoon tour until tomorrow to give both of us a chance to recuperate and this was done. We may have gone a little too native at our mountain luncheon. It was so nice to have an afternoon off.

At 7:45 we were picked up and driven out into the country to ChezAli Fantasia⁸⁴. Ali was a smart businessman who acquired some property in the desert and built an entertainment complex based on Ali Baba and the 40 Thieves. It is like a circus. Armed horsemen were lined up to greet us outside the gate. Inside we found some exhibits of Bedouin artifacts and three models of Bedouin brides. As we entered the main building we passed groups of Bedouins from different tribes all wearing their native costumes and singing and playing native instruments. One had a long horn reminiscent of the one we saw in Tibet. Having run this gauntlet we were escorted to one of the many tents in the complex for dinner. The complex can hold 50,000 people but there were far fewer tonight. I think the cast may have outnumbered the guests.

In our tent was seating for about 50 people. It was only a little over half full. We had a huge table to ourselves. We ordered one chicken Tajine and one veal Tajine with prunes⁸⁵. Then a huge

⁷⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bahia_Palace

⁷⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand_Vizier

⁷⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weeping_Fig

⁸⁰ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosemary>

⁸¹ <http://www.maroc.net/museums/marrakesh1.html>

⁸² <http://www.asiarooms.com/travel-guide/morocco/marrakech/marrakech-museums/bert-flint-museum-at-maison-tiskiwin-marrakech.html>

⁸³ <http://www.tagines.com/>

⁸⁴ http://www.ilove-marrakesh.com/chezali/index_en.html

⁸⁵ <http://mykitchendiaries.wordpress.com/2007/10/06/missing-mums-magical-cooking/>

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Couscous appeared, followed by fruit for desert. During the meal the entertainers came in and approached each table singing and dancing. Mary got up and joined a couple of the groups. After dinner we moved to the bleacher seats outdoors around a large field. Soon the equestrians came in and the show began. The horsemen were very acrobatic lying sidewise on their saddles of half off the horse itself. Then they wheeled in a platform for a belly dancer to perform. The horsemen then rode around shooting their guns. One man was mounted on a donkey. There were also camels. At the end Ali Baba rode his carpet across the stadium. It was fun to see although it was a huge tourist trap. Before we left I went to the restroom and got stuck in one of the stalls! The Jinns⁸⁶ are not being kind to us this trip.

Tuesday, February 10, 2009. We had a lovely morning off. I didn't even get up until eleven. Mary came by and I went down in search of food. I bought a loaf of olive bread⁸⁷ in the hotel bakery and called it breakfast. My digestive system is under control but not 100%.

At three we were picked up and went to see the Saadian tombs⁸⁸. When Moulay Ishmail took over Marrakech, he destroyed the Badi Palace but perhaps superstition kept him from destroying the tombs. Instead the burials were sealed within the city wall. In 1927 a French aerial mapper rediscovered them. They are now almost fully restored.

Here an early royal family is buried in a peaceful garden. The earliest burials date from 1557. Two buildings house the most important tombs. I spotted a cat in the garden and got down to photograph it. When I stood up I tripped and fell. I was okay but my camera is a little under the weather. It still takes pictures but the flap that holds the battery and memory chip in place will have to be fixed when I return home.

We next went to Aux 100000 Epices⁸⁹ spice factory. Hundreds of jars were filled with spices, cosmetics and cures. Lamia invites us to smell as she tells us what the spice is for. It seems she has a cure for everything. At the end we were presented with huge baskets and invited to shop. I only wanted two things. One was some kohl⁹⁰ and the other some Argon oil⁹¹. I really wanted Argon cream like I bought in Morocco last November but they only had the oil. They did have a photo of the goats in an Argon tree for Mary and Tom to see why Argon is called the goat tree.

Next we were taken to the Complex of Artisanes, a huge warehouse-like store where handicrafts from all over Morocco were displayed. The size was overwhelming and I did not find anything I wanted so I walked on through and waited for the Sesniaks. Mohamed appeared. He had been collecting his commission from the spice shop. We walked out and then he disappeared again, this time to get his commission from the artisan shop. He is so obvious about trying to make a buck off of us with everything we do. He also controls us so we have no opportunity to shop on our own. It is so annoying.

We then met Aziz and drove to the famous Djemaa El Fna Square⁹². This huge square is what I remember from my visit so many years ago. Originally it was called the Assembly of death because people were executed here. In the evening it is a market of food stands and Mohamed showed us places where they eat every part of the lamb, including the head. We also saw chebbakia⁹³, the honey cakes that are eaten at Ramadan. Outside of this bustling food market various performers come to entertain in hopes of picking up some change. One man had monkeys and he placed one on each of Mary's arms. The monkeys didn't like it but Mary stayed calm with her arms full of simians for a cute picture.

He showed us a restaurant that had a roof garden and gave us an hour to overlook the square. It was a tough climb and I had to stop and rest once but once there we found a table near the rail where we could watch the action. There was a snake charmer, a couple of bands, an acrobatic group and a fortuneteller although we didn't see her get any business. A large crowd on the far

⁸⁶ <http://www.pantheon.org/articles/j/jinn.html>

⁸⁷ <http://allrecipes.com/Recipe/Mediterranean-Black-Olive-Bread/Detail.aspx>

⁸⁸ <http://www.sacred-destinations.com/morocco/marrakesh-saadian-tombs.htm>

⁸⁹ <http://www.aux100000epices.com/presentation.html>

⁹⁰ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kohl_\(cosmetics\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kohl_(cosmetics))

⁹¹ <http://ezinearticles.com/?Top-10-Tips-For-Buying-Argon-Oil&id=1280042>

⁹² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Djemaa_el_Fna

⁹³ <http://zoukitchenculture.blogspot.com/2005/11/thousands-of-pastries-hundreds-of.html>

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side was there to hear the storyteller. There didn't seem to be as many performers as there were when I was here 20 years ago. It was picturesque but I was glad when it was time to leave. We went to meet Aziz but he was late. Mohamed suggested we take a carriage ride back to the hotel but we demurred. I think he has a date tonight and wants to get rid of us. He flirts with every pretty girl we meet.

We had a quiet dinner and went to bed. Tom is coming down with the bug Mary and I had.

Wednesday, February 11. We were in the lobby at 9:00 but there was no sign of Mohammed. It seems he also has the bug. Aziz had been sleeping in the car. Mohamed keeps telling us the tour company didn't give them any money for meals and hotels, which I find hard to believe. I think he is trying to cut costs so he will have more to take at the end. He finally appeared and we started for Essaouira on the ocean.

The land was flat with the High Atlas snowcapped mountains on our left. We drove past grove after grove of fruit trees. The Royal Family has a large tangerine forest. There were large olive groves and then we spotted vineyards. We crossed a dry riverbed with sheep and goats grazing in it.

Then this fertile land seemed to die out and the land became more and more barren. Mohammed says it is rich in phosphorus and uranium. 75% of the phosphate⁹⁴ in the world comes from Morocco. We passed a large cement factory. At the Complex Kasbah Chichawa we stopped for a rest break.

As we drove on Mohammed tried to teach us some Arabic. I know Martha will be happy to know the jackass is hinar while his jennet is hinara.

Mohamed told us that his ancestors came from the Middle East with the Prophet Daniel⁹⁵, long before the birth of Islam. The Prophet from the Book of Daniel went to Babylon so he must mean some other Daniel of whom we have no knowledge. His ancestors spoke Aramaic. We drove through a town where he has 14 cousins. The town seemed well populated with vintage cars. We learned the answer to the age-old question, "How do you get a baby dromedary into a pickup?" The answer is you get four men to lift and shove! Somewhere in the area Mohamed's Mother has some land, which the cousins farm. His father owned a store in El Jadida. He was considered a Marabout or saint. The Jews used to trade with him because he was so honest.

Then we started to pass groves of Argon trees⁹⁶. These are owned by female cooperatives. We passed one with goats in the tree but did not stop until we came to a tree with one goat standing precariously on the top branch. The shepherd demanded baksheesh⁹⁷ for our picture taking. Then we failed to find any other goats. Since the argon trees I saw near Agadir last September were full of goats, I believe their scarcity here may be because the trees are in a cultivated state and the animals are discouraged.

We started to see Thuya forests⁹⁸. The wood from these trees is used in Essaouira to make furniture and other items. There are wild boar and partridges in the forest. The ground has become sandier and the small hills we see are actually dunes. From an overlook we saw the town of Essaouira⁹⁹ in the haze with Mogador Island beyond. Mogador was known to the Phoenicians and the Carthaginians afterwards. It became a hippie haven in the 60s. Two enterprising men were offering camel rides at the overlook.

As we were driving into down we were pulled over for doing 47 in a 40 zone. Mohamed palavered with the police and paid some money. He complained that Essaouira is a city of pirates!

The Portuguese invaded this area in the 16th century and the British came later followed by the French in 1912. The French were only here for 33 years but they left a lasting mark on Morocco, starting with French being the second language after Arabic. The French restored the Medina. The scene where Iago hangs over the ramparts in Orson Welles' film Othello¹⁰⁰ was filmed here.

⁹⁴ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phosphate>

⁹⁵ <http://www.allabouttruth.org/prophet-daniel-faq.htm>

⁹⁶ <http://claycarau.wordpress.com/2007/05/>

⁹⁷ Ten dh

⁹⁸ <http://www.artisanaltreasures.com/thuyaother.html>

⁹⁹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essaouira>

¹⁰⁰ <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0045251/>

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We had lunch at a wonderful restaurant, the Chalet de la Plage¹⁰¹, Chez Jeannot, where the surf seemed to break on the wall below our window. Great breakers came in over and over. Further down on the beach we could see a soccer team playing and stretching. Two dogs ran in and out of the surf. It was a very relaxing lunch as we ate our fish. Tom was not feeling well so we prevailed on Mohamed to let us check into the Hotel des Iles¹⁰² for 45 minutes and get him into bed.

Then Mary and I and Mohamed headed for the port. A most picturesque boat yard was full of blue painted fishing dories and there were bigger fishing sloops tied up further out. I took tons of pictures but most will probably be thrown away just to keep the volume of my picture album down.

We walked into the fort where a lively fish market was going on. A nearby auction house was where the fishermen sold their catch. In the market we saw sea snakes and shrimp, squid and too many varieties of fish to mention. Hundreds of gulls circled overhead hoping for scraps.

We continued into the Medina where they had a fixed price store selling the thuya wood products. The furniture is beautiful but the tree is now endangered. I spied a wonderful wood cat but they wanted far too much money for it. I took a picture to remember it.

We turned into the Ave. de l'Istiquial that is the jewelry souk. I spied a jewelry store and darted in. I bought a silver ring for about \$30. "You bargain like a Berber woman," he said. I was so pleased. Then I found another store full of Tuareg jewelry. I dragged Mary in and we sat having tea while we debated our purchases. I bought a handsome Berber pendant with a silver chain and we bought a Carnelian pendant and earrings for Mary. I did not have enough cash and had to borrow 1000DH from Mohammed who must have been wondering how he could get a commission when we had found the shop ourselves. We went from the shop to the ATM and I got money to pay him back and he asked for 1100DH! I don't know whether he thought I didn't remember the amount of the loan or if this was how he was to get his commission. I gave him 1000DH. He is a knowledgeable guide I do not like his constant preoccupation with how to gouge us for money.

Tom was feeling better when we went up for dinner. I spied yet another cat in the hotel lobby under a chair. This kitty was obviously looking for a nesting spot!

Thursday, February 12, 2009. We got off about 9:00 and after buying gas took the high coastal road to Safi. We had vistas of the sea most of the way and marveled at all that undeveloped waterfront land. It is very shallow so there must be good surfing. There is lots of rock to make walls around the plots of land where people were trying to farm. More than half the population of Morocco is farmers. Farmers don't pay taxes here.

At a small market we found a donkey near the road and Mohamed showed us how he talks to donkeys. It was the funniest thing to watch. He utters a sort of bray and the donkey became instantly sexually aroused, bared his teeth in a lewd grin and began braying back. Other donkeys got into the act including one who came right up to the car. I don't know what Mohamed said in donkey language but it must have been very sexy! We drove off before we caused a riot.

Safi¹⁰³ dates to Portuguese times although they were only here for 33 years. They exported slaves to Brazil and Central America. When they were forced to abandon the city many of them migrated to Brazil and some cities in Brazil have Moroccan names like Bahia.

There is a large natural harbor here. We came into town passed a large phosphate plant. Other manufacturing buildings and fish processing plants attest to its importance today as an industrial city. The taxis are white here. Each city has a different colored taxi.

We came through a small market and Mohammed bought a bunch of small sweet bananas. They are the first bananas I have eaten this trip and were so good!

Mohamed tells us that kilns have been found in this city for over 300 years and the red clay makes distinctive pottery. We are dropped off at the Serghini pottery store where I bought a small black and white pitcher. We were then taken into a back room where even more elegant pieces were to be seen, some made with golden decorations. This place is licensed to do business with the royal family.

¹⁰¹ <http://www.bestrestaurantsmaroc.com/en/restaurant-maroc/detail/le-chalet-de-la-plage.html>

¹⁰² http://www.tripadvisor.com/LocationPhotos-g298349-d505646-w2-Hotel_des_Iles-Essaouira.html

¹⁰³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Safi,_Morocco

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Part of the pottery was a small café where I enjoyed a delicious shrimp and tomato dish. Begging for a treat was a very friendly calico cat and of course I gave her a few bites. From her size she is eating for eight!

Then we climbed up on the hill to see the pottery itself. It was lunchtime so we did not see the ladies who decorate the green ware. I did, however, buy another pitcher.

And so we were taken to the Golden Tulip Hotel¹⁰⁴ and given the afternoon off. From my room I can see the harbor in the distance. To use the WiFi (pronounced Weefee here) I had to take my computer down to the lobby. That's when I discovered you could get up to the second floor but you cannot call an elevator to take you down. I walked down one flight and caught an elevator there. I had trouble connecting and after conferring with the desk clerk he went and reset the modem so I was online. After a time Mary and Tom arrived. They had not been able to connect before. Mary got her computer and got on and I loaned my computer to Tom so he could read the Houston Chronicle sports pages.

When we came down to dinner I found Mohammed having a beer in the bar where a combo was playing. Alas they did not serve wine in the bar so we moved on to the dining room for our wine and dinner. As usual we had the place almost to ourselves.

Friday, February 13. The last day. We checked out of the hotel and headed out catching a glimpse of the old fort. The two men had some discussion on which way to go and we went around one roundabout twice before we were on the right road to El Jadida¹⁰⁵. This is Mohamed's hometown.

A fog made it hard to see but it was obvious the area was sparsely populated. We caught glimpses of the surf pounding on the beach. Then the scenery turned to farmland. The land seems fertile but very rocky. In clearing the fields the rocks were turned into neat stone walls making me think of the farms in New England. This is the breadbasket of Morocco and the vegetables are in high demand in Europe. We stopped at one point to see the salt fields where they manufacture salt. Mohamed tried to talk with a nearby donkey but the donkey wouldn't cooperate.

Once we stopped to ask directions and I was reminded of when we went to Rosa, Poland¹⁰⁶. One difference however is that I only saw one tractor. Here the donkey is used for plowing as well as being a beast of burden. I took a picture of a man riding a donkey loaded with forage for his other animals.

At times the road was 80 meters above the coast. But we came down to sea level as we reached El Jadida. Here is one of the largest harbors in Africa behind a long breakwater that King Hassan II constructed. A German sub was sunk here during WW 2 and it remains a hazard in the harbor.

There was a huge Thermo energy plant as we entered the town. From the high-tension wires it is obviously supplying power to many other cities.

They have a huge horse festival here in late July and early August. Thousands of horsemen come and put on a far bigger show than the Fantasia we saw in Marrakech as they gallop around firing their rifles.

We drove into Sidi Bouzid¹⁰⁷, which is a resort area with many condominiums and a wide sandy beach. It is very popular in the summer for the sea breeze keeps it cool. The trade wind known as the alizee¹⁰⁸ also causes ideal surfing as the seawater comes into the shallow coast.

Dwarfed by the modern town was the old Portuguese fort¹⁰⁹. When the Portuguese left in 1769 after the siege of Sultan Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdallen, they blew up the place (and many of their enemies as well) but it was restored in 1820 by Sultan Moulay Abd ar-Rachman. Today it is a peaceful and quiet Kasbah for most people prefer to live outside the walls. Near the entrance we viewed the Portuguese Church of the Assumption near the only five-sided minaret in the country. It was an old watchtower that was converted into a minaret. Nearby we entered the ancient

¹⁰⁴ <http://www.goldentulip.com/hotels/eng/hotels-safi-ma.asp>

¹⁰⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/El_Jadida

¹⁰⁶ See my 1999 Baltic and Poland journal

¹⁰⁷ http://i-cias.com/morocco/sidi_bouzid.htm

¹⁰⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trade_winds

¹⁰⁹ http://www.terremaroc.com/news-safi-safi-the-castle-of-the-sea-or-qasr-el-bahr-news-_258.html

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cistern. High crossed arches support the ceiling and make it earthquake proof. The cistern was discovered by accident when a merchant, trying to enlarge his shop, broke into the cistern and was almost washed away by the water pouring out. Today the cistern is virtually empty but shallow pools give wonderful reflections. We are told that the riot scene from Orson Welles' Othello was filmed here. I think they must have filmed it in bits and pieces all over the country for Mohamed has pointed out a number of places where it was filmed.

We paused by the beach for a rest stop and then we headed for the farm owned by Mohamed's aunt, Ninna Massoudia. We are to have a traditional Friday couscous. We were greeted with kisses and went through a tiled room, where we left our shoes, into another room, lined with couches. This is the gathering room, dining room and afterwards even a napping room. They brought in a huge lamb couscous. Mohammed explains it is customary to eat it with your hand but we are given spoons. Thank goodness for it seemed very messy to roll the couscous into a ball before putting it into your mouth. Desert was the biggest naval oranges I have ever seen and bananas. Aziz and Mohamed came with trenchermen appetites and ate almost half the huge dish. The three of us ate more sparingly but it was delicious.

Then we were given a tour of the farm. I was impressed that it seemed almost self-sufficient. It also seemed very disorganized. There were some cows and calves. A ram with magnificent horns was there for the sheep. Then there were chickens and an astonishing number of baby chicks being range raised. I spotted a guinea hen and some large ducks. Then we came to the turkeys and their chicks. All the birds were running loose. In a closed coral we were shown rabbits and a big turkey gobbler and Mohamed went into his talk to the animals act and the gobbler puffed up his wonderful tail for us. The fields surrounding the farm provide vegetables. It was such fun to see and obviously not the usual tourist experience.

We drove into Casablanca and had a wonderful surprise. We were not going back to the Ramada with its jackhammers and poor dinner. Instead they took us to the much nicer Rivoli Hotel. We said goodbye to Mohamed but Aziz will take us to the airport in the morning. It was a much nicer dinner as well. I had salade Nicoise followed by an entrecote. Journeys International does not use 5 star hotels but most of the hotels on this tour have been below par in my opinion. They cater to tours and usually are not conveniently located. The food has ranged from pretty good to poor. At least we have ended up in a nice hotel.

Saturday, February 14. Aziz was at the hotel ahead of time to take us to the airport. He kissed us all goodbye, even Tom, and there were tears in his eyes. I think he was as fond of us as we were of him.

Going through security, they found and took the small pair of folding scissors that I have carried for years. They had been through numerous securities without being detected. I will really miss them for I need them to open such things as the peanut packs they hand out on planes. Surprisingly, the half bottle of water I also carried didn't bother them at all!

We spent an hour or so in Royal Air Maroc's Lounge and then boarded the plane for New York. Thank goodness it was a different aircraft from the one we came over in. The seats were much more comfortable and both the recline and leg rest worked! They were not however up to the standard of Delta's Business Elite.

Because the bags took so long and I had to change terminals, I made the plane to Atlanta just as they were boarding. The only good part was that the immigration made me part of Mary and Toms family and we never did have to pay duty on the rug. However, spare me clearing customs in New York again. It's a real hassle and then we had to switch terminals as well.

In Atlanta, there was another long wait for the bag. I had lost my car keys so I took a taxi home. At least that gave me someone to carry my bag upstairs.

Sunday February 15. Elizabeth kindly took me back to the airport and there were my keys lying on the front seat. The door was unlocked and anyone could have walked off with the car! My guardian angel was back on duty!