

A Moroccan Odyssey: From Timeless Medinas to Cinematic Sands

Our Moroccan adventure began with an impressive arrival in Fes—a city where history pulses through every winding alley. We flew in from Stansted with Ryanair (a cool £100 per person, extra legroom essential for Keefy who is 6ft 4”) on the first Saturday of half-term, when prices were at their peak. Despite the cost, passport control was a breeze—just 25 minutes from landing to stepping outside, cash exchanged for Dirhams,

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and we were ready to explore.



**TOUCHDOWN IN FES:
NAVIGATING THE**

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WORLD'S OLDEST MEDINA

To ensure a smooth start, we pre-arranged a transfer through our riad. With vehicle access restricted inside the historic medina, the driver coordinated with the staff, who then expertly guided us through the labyrinth of over 9,000 twisting streets to our Riad, **Riad Alassala Fes**

After a quick check in, we were whisked onto a private tour, arranged through the riad, which led us through the maze of streets and alleys, including an alley only 30cm wide, to marvel at a 1,000-year-old tannery, the world's oldest library, vibrant food markets bursting with aromas and colors, and the

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14th-century Al-Attarine Madrasa. It was an unforgettable initiation into Morocco's rich tapestry of history and culture.

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They give you mint to hold by your nose to
counteract the smell of the leather

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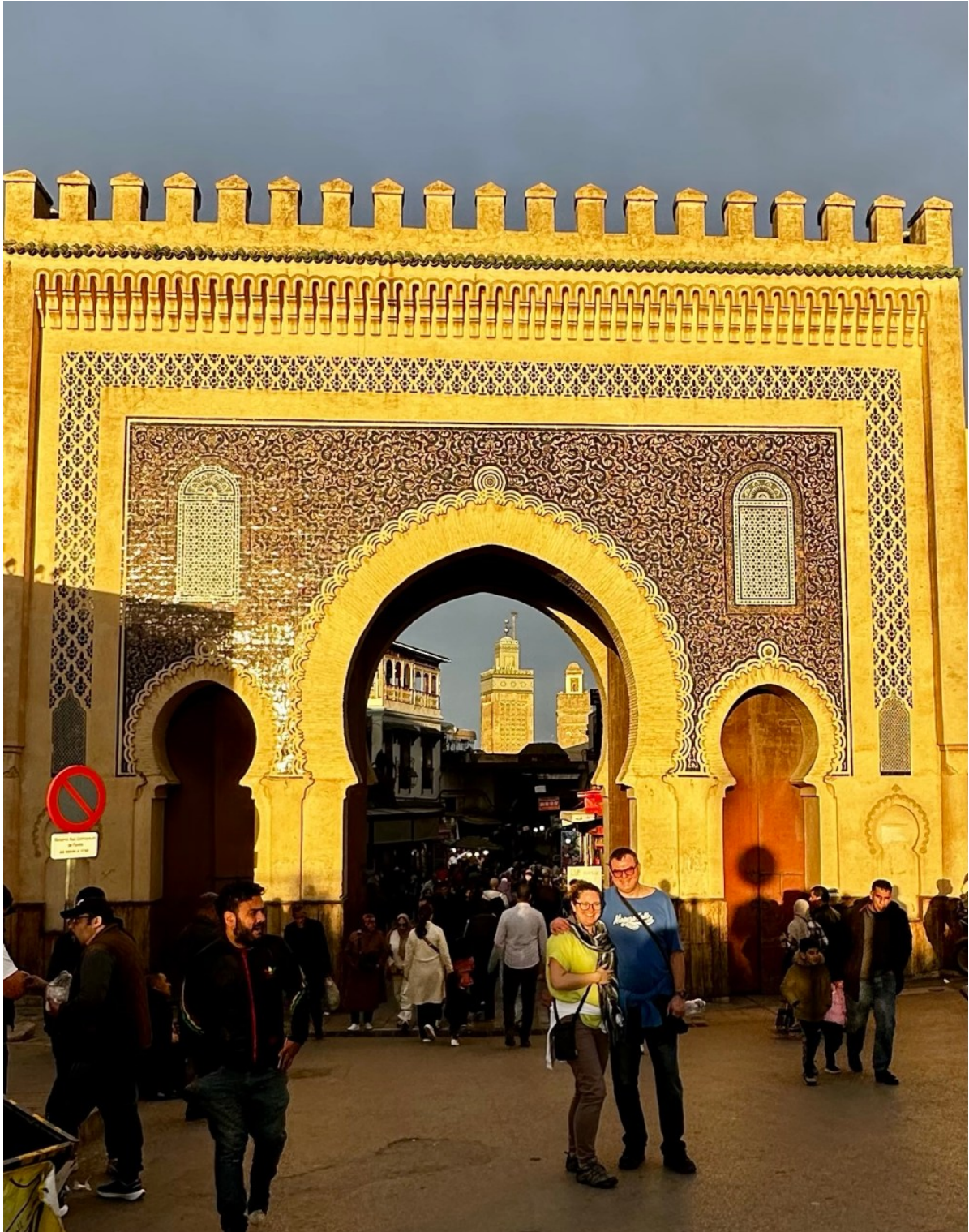
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On our return to the riad, we watched the sun go down whilst sipping mint tea on the

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rooftop, and then enjoyed a delicious home
cooked meal in the Riad.



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A BLUE ESCAPE TO CHE- FCHAOUEN

Sunday saw us whisked four hours north by minibus to Chefchaouen, the famed Blue City nestled in the Rif Mountains. Founded in 1471 by Moulay Ali Ben Moussa, Chefchaouen's distinctive blue-washed buildings are steeped in history and, according to some accounts, were popularized by Jewish refugees in the 1930s. With four hours of free time, we leisurely wandered through its colorful alleys, browsed charming souvenir shops, savored delicious local fare, and even discovered the city's sole bar serving alcohol—an unexpected treat complete with a taste of Moroccan lager. Our chatty driver, fluent in both English and French, regaled us

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with stories as we passed olive groves, eucalyptus trees, and goat farms producing delightful goat cheese, all framed by majestic views of the Rif Mountains.

Excursion link [here](#)

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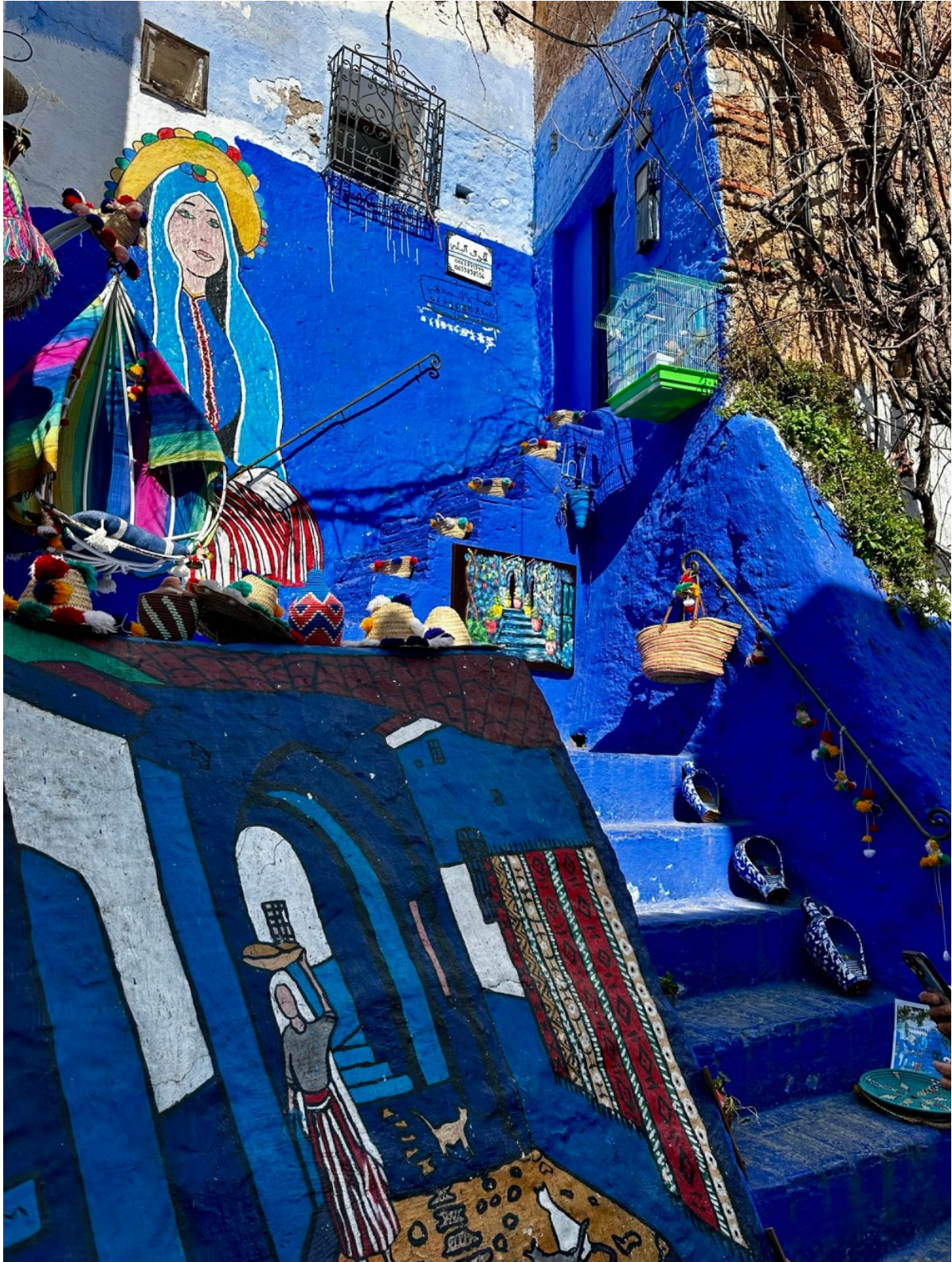
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ANCIENT ECHOES IN VOLUBILIS AND MEKNES

On Monday, our journey took us on another day **excursion** from Fes to the UNESCO Ro-

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man ruins of Volubilis, a sprawling archaeological site that whispers tales of an ancient past. En route, we stopped at the hillside town of Moulay Idriss—home to the tomb of Morocco's first Islamic ruler.



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Although our guide for Moulay Idriss was appalling, the exceptional beauty of Volubilis more than made up for him as we got free time to wander among crumbling columns and ancient mosaics.

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Next, we visited the UNESCO-listed city of Meknes. Here, we were granted the rare privilege of peeking inside a mausoleum—a unique opportunity given that non-Muslims are usually not permitted entry.

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Despite restoration work that left Meknes slightly subdued, the sprawling vineyards around the city reminded us that this region is Morocco's premier wine-making area (though most of the wine is exported, leaving tastings scarce).

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We later found solace in a nice Fes venue where a glass of wine—and a Fes beer—proved the perfect antidote to our busy day.

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A SCENIC SHIFT: THE TRAIN RIDE TO MAR- RAKESH

Tuesday brought us goodbye to Fes and hello to Marrakesh via a comfortable six-and-a-half-hour first-class train journey. Nestled in vintage compartments with eight seats apiece, we relaxed in quiet luxury as the Moroccan landscape unfolded before our eyes.

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However, our arrival in Marrakesh was a mixed bag: our initially booked accommodation turned out to be a disaster, with tense altercations with locals demanding money at the door and a room that looked nothing like the photos. In a flash decision, we abandoned that option and rushed to a **five-star hotel** in the heart of the city—a welcome re-

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treat complete with a jazz club, rooftop bar,
and, most importantly, a well-earned drink
on the terrace after our misadventures.



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The evening was spent enjoying a meal and cultural show at Palais Nawarma. The traditional music and belly dancers made us smile on a particular wet and dismal first night in Marakesh.

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UP, UP, AND AWAY: HOT AIR BALLOONING OVER MARRAKESH

Wednesday was a day of conquering fears. After a couple of Casablanca beers in Chefchaouen, we impulsively **booked a hot air balloon flight**—a challenge neither of us thought we'd ever take. Nerves and sleeplessness nearly got the better of us, but when we finally soared above the outskirts of Marrakesh, the experience was nothing short of magical. Although the weather didn't serve up perfect postcard views, gliding through the sky, catching fleeting glimpses of the Atlas Mountains between the clouds, was serene and exhilarating. That day, we

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discovered that sometimes the scariest challenges yield the most rewarding memories.



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Later, we returned to Marrakesh to explore its bustling souks and iconic landmarks. As if in gratitude for our courage, the rain cleared to reveal a brilliant blue sky. We walked miles on foot, doing a couple of self guided walking tours from GPS My city app.

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Our evening culminated in a **guided street food tour**, where we sampled everything from soul-warming Moroccan soup and crispy pancakes to flaky pastries, spiced nuts, briny olives, and even snails! The tour also introduced us to a dizzying array of teas—mint, absinthe, and even an assertively aromatic eucalyptus blend—leaving us blissfully food-comatose after 2.5 hours of indulgence.

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ASCENDING THE ATLAS: A MOUNTAIN HIKE TO REMEMBER

Thursday, we traded Marrakesh's lively streets for the serene expanse of the Atlas Mountains on a **day excursion out to the mountains**. Departing from the quaint village of Imlil, perched at 1,740 meters, we embarked on a challenging 7.4-mile hike to Talamrout Summit, which stands proudly at 2,600 meters. The steep, rocky terrain tested our endurance, but our knowledgeable guide—who even carried our rucksack—ensured our safety. At the summit, panoramic views of the Imlil and Imnane Valleys, with a majestic glimpse of Mount Toubkal (North

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Africa's highest peak at 4,167 meters), filled us with awe and gratitude.



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Back in Marrakesh, we unwound with sun-
downers at the Mabrouka Rooftop & Sky Bar,

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one of the few spots in the city where one
can savor a well-crafted cocktail.

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CINEMATIC DAYS IN THE LAND OF LEGENDS

Friday dawned with promise as we set out
early on a guided excursion*.

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Our first stop following a scenic journey south was the famed Atlas Studios—an absolute haven for film buffs. Keefy was in his element as we toured the sets where blockbusters like *Gladiator 1 & 2*, *The Mummy*, *Cleopatra*, *Noah's Ark*, and the remake of *Ben-Hur* were filmed.

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We thoroughly enjoyed the tour of the studios, it really was amazing.



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20 minutes down the road, we arrived at Ait Benhaddou, our base for the night.

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This UNESCO-listed ksar is a living piece of history, with its oldest sections dating back over a thousand years. Ait Benhaddou has served as the dramatic backdrop for iconic films such as *Gladiator* (where an arena was built for the film), *Lawrence of Arabia*, *Game of Thrones*, and *Prince of Persia*. Little did we know that we'd also landed in the midst of

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Christopher Nolan's next big production, *Odyssey*. Production teams were busy putting final touches on the set, and rumors even hinted that Nolan himself had wandered the same ancient streets just a day before. Our balcony overlooked the village gates—currently being transformed into Greek-style entrances—and we were just 100 meters from the spot where Russell Crowe once filmed in the dismantled *Gladiator* arena.

We had a guided tour around the village which was FABULOUS.

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That evening, we couldn't resist the allure of staying overnight in the historic Kasbah Tebi. This centuries-old fortress, once home to powerful Berber families, is a stunning example of traditional Moroccan earthen architecture. Believed to have been built in the 16th century, Kasbah Tebi served a strategic role in overseeing trade routes across the trans-Saharan expanse. Lit almost entirely by candlelight, the kasbah exuded a magical atmosphere as Berber musicians serenaded us during dinner. It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience to spend a night enveloped in history and the soft glow of ancient walls.

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*Our day trip today was a guided tour from

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Marrakesh and the group itinerary returned to Marrakesh after the activities. We however didn't travel back and stayed in Ait Benhaddou.

FAREWELL IN OUARZAZATE: THE GATEWAY TO THE SAHARA

Our final day in Morocco was spent in the quiet yet historically significant town of Ouarzazate, often dubbed the “Gateway to the Sahara.” Once a crucial stop on ancient trade routes, Ouarzazate has evolved into a film-making haven, renowned for its preserved kasbahs and cinematic allure. We checked into the opulent five-star La Berbère Palace for

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a well-earned wind-down before exploring the town's Cinema Museum—an intriguing visit, though it left us wanting more detailed insights into its exhibits.

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Back at the hotel, as actors and film crews began arriving for a major Hollywood production, our afternoon poolside relaxation and people-watching took on an extra layer of excitement—even if we didn't spot any A-listers.



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Our journey concluded with a convenient mid-day flight home from Ouarzazate—a small airport on the edge of the Sahara, perfectly situated four hours by road south of Marrakesh. Ryanair's limited weekly flights from here provided a fitting end to our remarkable tour.

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From the ancient medinas of Fes to the breathtaking Atlas peaks and the cinematic sands of Ait Benhaddou, our trip through Morocco was an enthralling blend of history,

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culture, and adventure. Each day unfolded a new chapter in a land where the past and present coexist in the most spectacular ways.

Morocco, you were MARVELLOUS!

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