

# Ayelet TOURS

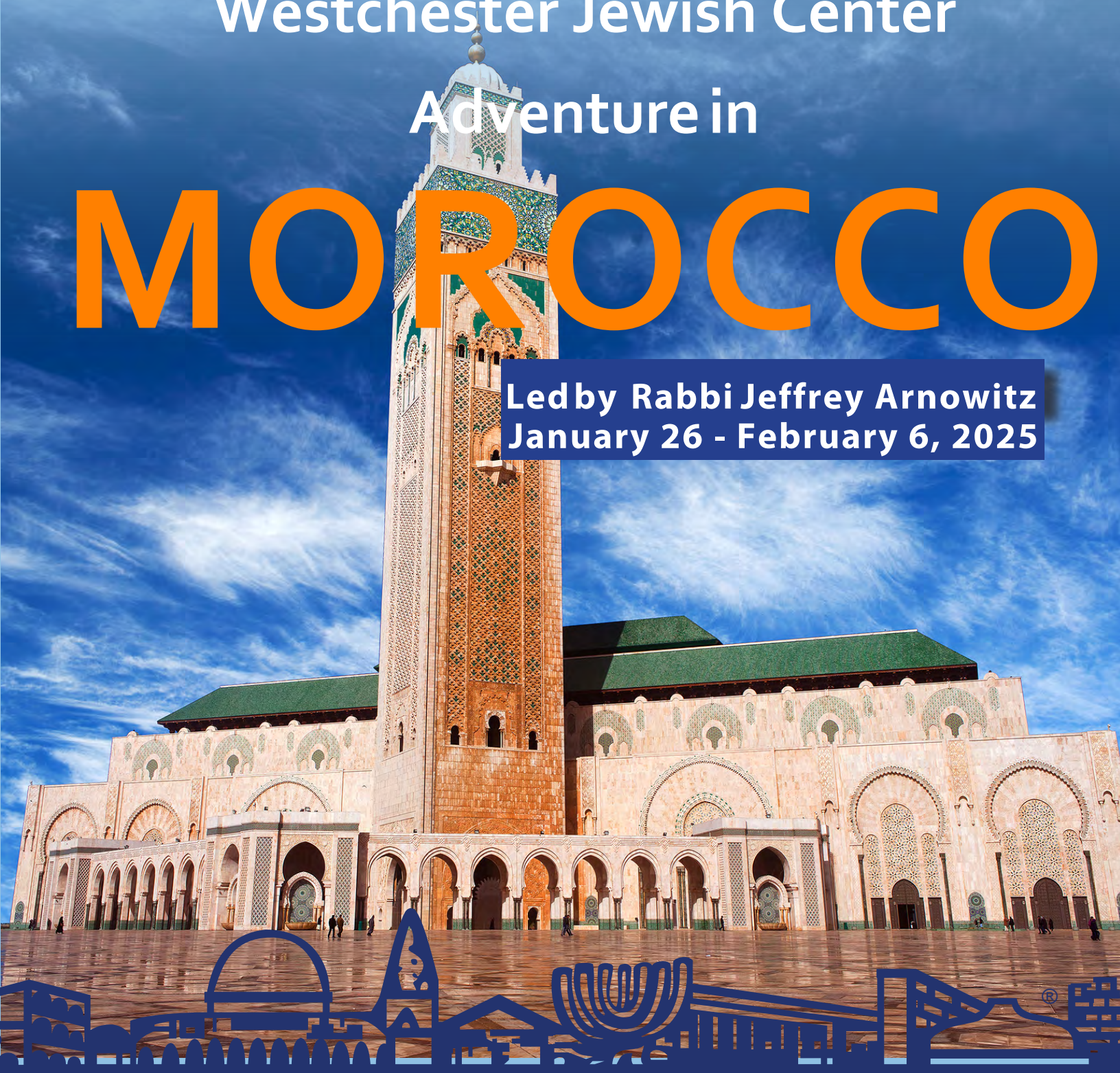
THE MEMORIES LAST FOREVER!

## Westchester Jewish Center

### Adventure in

# MOROCCO

Led by Rabbi Jeffrey Arnowitz  
January 26 - February 6, 2025





# Westchester Jewish Center Adventure in Morocco

January 26 - February 6, 2025

## DAY 1 SUNDAY, JANUARY 26, 2025 OUR JOURNEY BEGINS

- We depart the United States on your overnight flight to Morocco. (Contact Ayelet Tours for assistance booking flights.)

## DAY 2 MONDAY, JANUARY 27, 2025 WELCOME TO MOROCCO!

- Welcome to Morocco! We arrive at **Casablanca International Airport**, where we are met by an Ayelet Tours representative who will walk us through customs and baggage claim.
- We drive toward the city of **Casablanca**, Morocco's cosmopolitan, economic and business capital. Originally a Phoenician and Roman city, Casablanca is home to the largest Jewish community in the Arab world, economic and business capital.
- **Casablanca – The Beginning of a Beautiful Friendship:** Get your first glimpse of Casablanca on a tour of Morocco's economic hub and largest city. We'll experience its energy and discuss whether the modern and modernizing Casablanca you'll explore has anything in common with the version seen in the classic Hollywood film starring Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman.
- **The Glory of Moroccan Jewry:** We walk through Morocco's rich Jewish heritage at the **Jewish Museum of Morocco**, the Arab world's first Jewish museum. According to legend, Jews arrived in Morocco as early as 800 BCE. By 1948, the Jewish population had grown to an estimated 250 - 350,000 and was the largest, and arguably most integrated Jewish community in any Muslim country. The museum includes displays of traditional Jewish-Berber clothing and a feature on goldsmiths, a common Jewish occupation in Morocco.
- We enjoy **lunch** together nearby.
- Following lunch, we visit **Neve Shalom synagogue and school**, where we meet with **Rabbi Jacky Sebbag**. We'll hear about the challenges of living a Jewish life in Morocco today.
- After our introduction to the city and the Jewish community of Morocco, we check into our hotel with time to refresh.
- This evening, we enjoy our **welcome dinner** together at **Cercle de'L Union**, an excellent restaurant, and Kosher too! The evening and indeed our entire Moroccan adventure will be a chance to experience the unity and diversity of the Jewish world and people. While many of us are familiar with Ashkenazi Jewish culture, Morocco was for centuries one of the great centers of Sephardi Judaism. We'll hear from our tour educator about Morocco's once large and thriving Jewish communities, discuss why Jews left Morocco en masse beginning in the 1950s and find out about the Moroccan Jews of today.

Overnight in Casablanca (L, D)



## DAY 3

TUESDAY, JANUARY 28, 2025  
GETTING TO KNOW CASABLANCA

- Breakfast at our hotel.
- **God's Throne Upon the Water:** Fast-moving Casablanca is also a city of faith, as we'll experience at the **Mosque of Hassan II**. This modern mosque has room for over 100,000 worshippers. It is perched dramatically over the ocean to reflect a verse in the Koran that "God's throne was built upon the water." Over 6,000 master craftspeople created its hand-carved marble walls, retractable roof and the tallest minaret in the world at almost 700 feet. See if you agree with the builder's patron, King Hassan II, that this is a monument that Casablanca will be proud of "until the end of time."
- We continue to **Bet El Synagogue**, where we view the beautiful stained-glass windows and architecture and learn about the rich history of this synagogue that many consider the center of Judaism in Casablanca.
- We stop by the **Fhal Jewish bakery** to sample the delicious treats!
- This afternoon, we enjoy **lunch** at **Rick's Cafe**, created to evoke the architecture and atmosphere of the classic film.
- **Mellah of Casablanca:** The mellah was a former Jewish quarter similar to a European ghetto. It tantalizes the senses with a sea of women in brightly colored djellabas carrying and selling fruit and vegetables throughout the cramped, narrow streets. While Jews no longer live in the mellah, kosher butchers are found in the old market.
- **Boulevard Mohamed El Hansali:** We stroll down the boulevard with its exotic bazaars, Mohammed V square, the new Medina Royal Palace and Anfa Hill, the meeting place of Roosevelt and Churchill at the Casablanca Conference during World War II.
- This evening, we enjoy **dinner** together at **Umayya Restaurant**.

**Overnight in Casablanca (B, L, D)**

## DAY 4

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 29, 2025  
ON THE ROAD TO MARRAKECH

- Breakfast and check out of our hotel.
- We depart for **Marrakech**, city of palm trees and gardens at the edge of the Sahara Desert. Jews have lived in Marrakech since the first century. Marrakech sees a lot of Jewish visitors, including many flocking from Israel to experience its unique culture and Jewish history.
- **Carnivals and Piety:** Enjoy an introductory tour of Marrakech and get your first glimpse into this whirlwind of a city, which combines the madcap energy of its marketplaces with the serene rhythms of its religious life.
- **Coexistence, Conflict, or Both – Jews and Muslims:** We tour the **mellah** (the Jewish quarter) of Marrakech. Until the 20th century, most urban Moroccan Jews, including in Marrakech, lived in walled, Jewish-only areas. We'll explore whether these quarters resembled the ghettos of Europe or were something quite different, as we discuss the sometimes close, sometimes brutal relations between Jews and Muslims in Morocco. Our tour will include:
  - **Slat Al Azama Synagogue ("Synagogue of the Exiles"):** This synagogue was established around 1492 by Jews who were expelled or fled from Catholic persecution in Spain and Portugal. The synagogue's ornamentation, attractive blue-and-white decor, and small but still active community are all examples of how the Jewish traditions of Marrakech are being maintained.
  - **Marrakech's Jewish cemetery:** The cemetery has been recently restored after years of neglect. Here, we'll see monuments and graves commemorating children who perished during the epidemics that ravished the city's crowded Jewish Quarter in the 17th century. We learn about the great rabbis and kabbalists of Marrakech and discuss why many Jews from around the world make pilgrimages to their graves.
- **A Square That's Hip:** The **Djemaa El Fna Square** is an enormous market and a thrilling experience. According to one theory, its name means "the assembly of the dead" and refers to the public executions that used to take place here. Today, this square teems with life. Locals gather to shop, talk and to eat some of the best street food in all of Morocco. There's always something going on, so get ready for a daily carnival of snake charmers, street vendors, musicians, storytellers and acrobats.
- After a chance to freshen up, we enjoy **dinner** together at **Al Fassia Restaurant**.

**Overnight in Marrakech (B, D)**





## DAY 5

THURSDAY, JANUARY 30, 2025  
A DAY IN ESSAOUIRA

- Breakfast at our hotel and early morning departure towards the coast.
- **Good for the Skin, Body & Soul:** Along the way, we see many Argan trees, important to the region both economically and ecologically. At the **women's cooperative of Argan oil**, there will be an opportunity to learn about the wide-ranging applications of the oil from cosmetics to medicines.
- **Essaouira:** We continue to **Essaouira**, once a majority Jewish city. Although originally Portuguese, Essaouira was fortified by a French-influenced architect named Vauban and also formed the settling ground for a large Jewish population, which is why the city has an eclectic, multicultural feel. The town was once over thirty percent Jewish and contained over thirty synagogues, some dating back to the 18th century.
- **Rabbi Chaim Pinto:** The seaport city of Essaouira is still synonymous with the famed rabbi and remained his home all his life. Every year on the anniversary of Rabbi Pinto's death, Jews from around the world pilgrimage in the week preceding Rosh Hashanah and pray at the rabbi's grave situated in the **old Jewish cemetery** adjacent to the Atlantic Ocean. Essaouira is also home to the **Chaim Pinto Synagogue**, the building that was once the rabbi's residence and is now a historic site.
- After **lunch** together, we check out the impressive **Bayt Dakira Jewish Museum**.
- We return to Marrakech and enjoy **dinner** together at our hotel.

Overnight in Marrakech (B, L, D)

## DAY 6

FRIDAY, JANUARY 31, 2025  
DISCOVERING THE DESERT/  
THE FRENCH CONNECTION

- Breakfast at our hotel.
- **A Sea Made of Rock and Sand:** This morning, we depart for the stark beauty of the desert of the **Agafay region**. Upon arrival, we **board a camel** for a short ride and take a trip into the past where camels were the main mode of transport in this region.
- We enjoy a lovely **desert lunch** at one of the area's eco-camps before returning to the city.
- **The French Connection:** Morocco is a melting pot of identities and influences ranging from its indigenous Berber tribes to more recent visitors, including the French, who ruled over much of the country from 1912 to 1955. We'll spend time in the **French Quarter** and visit **Majorelle Garden**, designed by the French painter and botanist Jacques Majorelle. The garden and buildings took him 40 years to create, but you will think it was time well spent as we wander along paths by sparkling pools shaded by gorgeous trees and plants from around the world.
- Following our tour, we refresh for the night.
- This evening, we join together for **Kabbalat Shabbat** at the **Marrakech Beit El Synagogue**, followed by a festive **Shabbat dinner** hosted in the home of a local Jewish family with members of the Marrakech Jewish community.

Overnight in Marrakech (B, L, D)



## DAY 7

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 2025  
SHABBAT SHALOM!

- Breakfast at our hotel.
- We'll have a late start today. Sleep in, relax, or enjoy time by the pool at our lovely hotel!
- **Preserving the Past, Building a Future:** Named after the traditional Jewish Moroccan celebrations held at the end of Passover, **Association Mimouna** is an organization of Muslim students who honor the country's Jewish traditions and promote Jewish-Muslim friendship. We'll meet some of the students and hear of their activities, which range from kosher cooking workshops to organizing one of the Islamic world's first conferences commemorating victims of the Holocaust.
- **The View (and Taste) from the Inside - Bringing it Home With You:** We take part in a **Moroccan home cooking workshop** and enjoy **lunch** of our own making.
- **Royal Splendors:** We tour the **medina** (walled city) of Marrakech, one of Morocco's four imperial cities, also known as the Red City for the red walls that surround it. The medina is a thrilling, multifaceted area which includes:
  - **Bab Agnaou:** A huge, superbly decorated gate allowing entrance into the royal city.
  - **The Saadian Tombs:** The tombs provide lavish insights into the wealth and power structure of the Saadian dynasty that ruled Morocco from 1549 to 1659. The greatest of their kings, Ahmed al-Mansour, is buried in the magnificent Chamber of 12 Pillars in a tomb made from Italian marble and gilded with pure gold. Less exalted princes and rulers from the dynasty are buried nearby. The royal wives, chancellors and the king's Jewish advisers were "relegated" to graves in the still impressive gardens.
  - **Bahia Palace:** Built in the late 19th century by Morocco's leading artisans, many consider this to be the finest palace built anywhere in the world during this time. Certainly, its architecture, gardens and design render it a remarkable achievement of Moroccan culture. Among its features is a harem, where vizier Abu Ahmed's four wives and 24 concubines lived.
- We meet again at sundown for a special **Havdallah**, followed by **dinner** at a local restaurant.

### Overnight in Marrakech (B, L, D)

## DAY 8

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 2025  
TO FES

- Breakfast and check out of our hotel.
- Free morning to relax or explore Marrakech on own. Mid-day transfer to the airport for our short **flight to Fes**. A packed **box lunch** is included today.
- **"The Athens of Africa, The Mecca of the West":** Fes is one of the great medieval cities of the world. It gained its nicknames due to its scholars (both Muslim and Jewish), spirituality, trade and culture. In the 12th and 13th centuries, Fez was among the world's most populated cities and the home of the Marinid kingdom. We'll learn about the kings, communities and creativity that drove Fes as we experience the beauty and liveliness of the city today.
- Upon arrival in **Fes**, we check into our hotel and refresh before free time for dinner on own this evening.

### Overnight in Fes (B, L)



## DAY 9

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 2025  
THE MYSTERIES OF FES

- Breakfast at our hotel.
- **A Thousand Years and More – Jewish Life in Fes:** Despite suffering from periodic persecutions, Fes's **Jewish Quarter** was home to brilliant scholars, poets and innovators. We'll travel back in time to the Golden Age for Jews in Fes from the 8th to 12th centuries, when the community included some key figures in the Jewish world, including Rabbi Moses Maimonides (the Rambam), the great philosopher and religious thinker. We'll also find out why the name for a Jewish quarter comes from the Arab word for salt. Our tour will include a visit to the Ibn Danan Synagogue. Recently restored, this is one of the oldest and most important synagogues in North Africa.
- **The Fes Jewish Cemetery:** We will hear stories of some of the city's legendary rabbis and leaders who are buried here and learn about the influence of the tzaddikim, Jewish holy men who were admired by both Jews and Muslims for their scholarship and reputation as miracle-workers. We'll also stop at a plaque commemorating **Sol Hachuel**, a young Jewish woman famed for her beauty who was decapitated in 1834 for refusing to convert to Islam.
- **Finding Fes:** Fes's **medina** is a dense maze of alleyways and streets and the largest car-free pedestrian zone in the world. Don't worry, our tour educator knows the way through this UNESCO World Heritage site that still includes many buildings, mosques and gates from the 12th century. Our visit will include:
  - **Local craftsmen:** Catch a glimpse of the craftsmen at work in their shops as they weave, embroider, carve and chisel using ancient techniques.
  - **University of Al Karaouine:** Believed to be the oldest continuously operating university in the world and founded as a mosque, today, non-Muslims can view it only from the outside. In the 12th century, the Rambam (Moses Ben Maimonides) studied medicine and philosophy here.
  - **Nejjarine fountain:** A traditional public fountain located in the center of Al-Najjarin Square.
  - **Madrassa Bou Inania:** Fes contains some of the finest Islamic architecture in the world. This Madrasa (Islamic religious college) was established in 1351 and is famed for its minaret and geometric decorations. It is one of the few Islamic sites in Morocco that is accessible to non-Muslim visitors.

- We stop for lunch on our own at a local restaurant along the way.
- We continue to the "**Arabian house**", a gathering place for craftsman still working in the old oriental tradition.
- **The Scent of Fes:** Fes is known for its leather goods and its great stretch of tanneries that give the city its distinctive smell. We'll visit the Chouara Tannery, where traditional ways of making leather are still practiced.
- Time to relax or explore then enjoy **dinner** together at a private riad.

**Overnight in Fes (B, D)**

## DAY 10

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2025  
MEKNES TO RABAT

- Breakfast and check out of our hotel.
- Today, we drive to **Meknes**, located on a fertile plain north of the Middle Atlas and the former residence of the Sultan.
- **City of a Tyrant:** We'll examine the superb architecture of Meknes created during the long reign of Moulay Ismail, with its skillful blend of Islamic and European influences. At this finely decorated **mausoleum**, we'll also consider the less attractive characteristics of "Moulay the Bloodthirsty" who is said to have ordered the city walls to be decorated with the heads of 10,000 of his enemies.
- We enjoy **lunch** together at the **Le Bistro Hotel Transatlantique** overlooking the city walls.
- **Wives and Horses:** While the Torah warns that a king should not acquire extra horses, a multitude of wives, or excessive amounts of silver and gold, Moulay Ismail took a different approach. He is believed to have had 2,000 wives and concubines who bore him 867 children, although he seems to have been fondest of his 12,000 horses. The **Royal Stables** here are under renovation and cannot be visited at this time, but we'll see the opulent **Bab Mansour gate**.
- **What Was and What Remains:** We meet with the **caretaker of a now empty synagogue** and discuss the transformation of Jewish life in Morocco. The mass migration of the country's Jews began after the establishment of the State of Israel and accelerated when Morocco gained independence in 1956 from its French rulers. Today, only a few thousand Jews remain. We'll talk about Jewish life in Morocco in the past and today and find out why people, often Jews but sometimes Muslims, are determined to maintain these once-crowded places of worship.
- We continue to the royal capital city of **Rabat** and check into our hotel before heading out for **dinner** at a local restaurant.

**Overnight in Rabat (B, L, D)**



## DAY 11 WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2025 ROYAL RABAT

- Breakfast at our hotel.
- **The Kings and the Jews:** Our tour of Rabat will allow us to experience the huge role, historically and currently, that the king plays in Moroccan life. We'll walk around the walls of Rabat's **Royal Palace**, the primary (although certainly not the only) residence of the current king, Mohammed VI, and ask whether modern Morocco is an autocracy, a democracy or something in between.
- **Insight to Remember:** We'll enjoy **lunch** in a local restaurant and a **presentation by Dr. Mohamed Chtatou**, Professor of Education Science at the university in Rabat. He is currently a political analyst with Moroccan, Gulf, French, Italian and British media on politics and culture in the Middle East, Islam and Islamism as well as terrorism. He is also a specialist on political Islam in the MENA region with interest in the roots of terrorism and religious extremism.
- **"There are no Jewish citizens, there are no Muslim citizens; they are all Moroccans" – Mohammed V.**  
Next, we visit the magnificent **mausoleum of Mohammed V**, Morocco's king during World War II, and hear why Moroccan Jews today believe that he should be recognized as one of the Righteous Among the Nations for helping to stop Nazis from deporting Morocco's Jews to the death camps of Europe. His burial building is considered an architectural masterpiece. Also buried here is his son, Hassan II, who ruled over Morocco during the so-called "Years of Lead" (1961-1999). We'll visit his tomb and hear about this period of conflict, human rights abuses and assassination attempts on the king's life. It was during Hassan's reign that most of the country's Jews migrated to Israel, Canada and France.
- **A Treat for the Eyes:** We make our way up to the **Kasbah des Udayas**. This citadel is the oldest part of Rabat, dating back to the 12th century. Sitting high above the river and the Atlantic Ocean, it features gorgeously decorated gates, blue and whitewashed homes and French-influenced gardens.
- **What We've Seen and Felt During Our Journey:** Savor, one more time, Morocco's terrific food, with a **farewell dinner** at a local restaurant. There will also be an opportunity to share the experiences and discoveries that have inspired you during our Moroccan adventure as we get ready to say wadaeaaan (goodbye) and see you soon to Morocco.

Overnight in Rabat (B, L, D)

## DAY 12 THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 2025 UNTIL WE MEET AGAIN

- Breakfast and check out of our hotel.
- We transfer to the Casablanca Airport for our flight back to the United States, landing later today.

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\* Itinerary subject to change

\* Visits subject to availability

**THE MEMORIES LAST FOREVER!!**

*\*itinerary subject to change*

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