

Congregation Hakafa's Journey to

MOROCCO

Led by Rabbi Bruce Elder

October 30 – November 9, 2024

(As of 2/28/24)

Be ready for the adventure of a lifetime in Morocco! We'll explore the ancient Jewish communities, meander through the medinas, savor the spices and flavors of the local cuisine and soak up the culture from Casablanca to Marrakech to Essaouira and beyond!



Day 1: Wednesday, October 30, 2024: DEPARTURE

- We depart the United States on our overnight flight to Morocco.
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Day 2: Thursday, October 31, 2024: THE START OF A SPECIAL JOURNEY

- We arrive at **Marrakech Menara Airport**, where we are met by an Ayelet Tours representative who will walk us through customs and baggage claim.
- **Marrakech – An Oasis:** As we begin our journey in **Marrakech**, our tour educator will discuss why so many people over the centuries have been drawn to the city.
- **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.
- We check into our hotel and have a chance to freshen up.
- **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.
- **Tantalize the Senses with Sights, Sounds and Smells:** We set out to enjoy an evening tour of the city by **horse-drawn carriage**, followed by a delicious **welcome dinner** at our hotel.

Overnight in Marrakech (D)

Day 3: Friday, November 1, 2024: THE OLD CITY OF MARRAKECH

- Breakfast at our 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.
- **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.



- **Royal Splendors:** We'll 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.
- **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.
- **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.



- As the sun sets over the city, we join together for **Kabbalat Shabbat services** at a local synagogue.
- **Around the Shabbat Table:** A **Marrakech Jewish family** will be our hosts for **Shabbat dinner**. This will be a chance to share the warmth, blessings and food of a Moroccan Shabbat and to talk with local Jews about their lives. Find out why they continue to call Morocco home when so many of their relatives and friends left for other lands, hear about contemporary Moroccan Muslim attitudes toward the Jewish community and discuss whether they believe Marrakech has a Jewish future.

Overnight in Marrakech (B, D)

Day 4: Saturday, November 2, 2024: EXPLORING BERBER LIFE IN THE ATLAS MOUNTAINS

- Breakfast at our hotel.



- **Taking the High Road:** A 45-minute drive will take us from the thriving city of Marrakech to the spectacular nature and traditional villages of **Toubkal National Park**. These mountains are the highest in North Africa and provide a spectacularly different view of Morocco than we have encountered so far. The snow-capped peaks, dense forests and pure mountain air will make for a wonderful day.
- We enjoy a lovely **nature walk** in the area, while looming over us will be the spectacular sight of the 14,000-foot-high **Toubkal Mountain**.
- **The World of the Berbers:** We will stop at the village of **Aroumd** to experience the world of the Berbers, an indigenous people of North Africa. This town, 6,000 feet above sea level and inhabited by around 2,000 people, provides an authentic example of how traditional Berber culture and language remains vibrant today, particularly in the mountain ranges of this area. Explore this remote village, find out about the local economy and learn about changes and continuity in the Berber way of life.
- **Baking and Breaking Bread Together:** Everywhere in Morocco, meals are accompanied by a delicious, thick form of bread. See the traditional method of **baking bread** and try your own hand at this ancient skill.



- **Where Hospitality is King:** One of the features and joys of Berber life is their famed hospitality. Enjoy a **traditional Berber lunch** and meet local Berbers. With your guide as translator, you'll hear about their background while drinking the beverage closely associated with hospitality and friendship in Morocco, mint tea.
- Enjoy a performance of **traditional Berber music** with a local band.
- We return to Marrakech for a relaxed evening and dinner on own.

Overnight in Marrakech (B, L)

Day 5: Sunday, November 3, 2024: FLYING TO FES

- Breakfast and check out of our hotel.
- **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**, visiting **Majorelle Garden**, designed by the French painter and botanist Jacques Majorelle. The garden and buildings took him 40 years to create, but you'll think it was time well spent as we wander along paths by sparkling pools shaded by gorgeous trees and plants from around the world.
- *We enjoy a lunch on own.*
- We transfer to the airport for our afternoon **flight to Fes**.
- **"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, Fes 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, we transfer to our hotel to check in and freshen up before **dinner** together evening.



Overnight in Fes (B, D)

Day 6: Monday, November 4, 2024: THE MYSTERIES OF FES

- Breakfast at our hotel.
- **A Thousand Years and More – Jewish Life in Fes:** Despite suffering from periodic persecutions, Fes's **fe (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:

- **Ibn Danan Synagogue:** Although recently restored, this is one of the oldest and most important synagogues in North Africa.
- **Slat El Fassiyine Synagogue:** This once-vital synagogue fell into disrepair after the migration of most of the city's Jews in the 1950s and 1960s. It was used as a boxing ring and carpet factory until it was recently restored with support from overseas funders and the Moroccan government.
- **The Fes Jewish cemetery:** We will hear stories of some of the city's legendary rabbis and leaders who are buried here. Learn about the influence of the tzaddikim, Jewish holy men who were admired by both Jews and Muslims for their scholarliness 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:** The **Fes 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. Based on timing, our visit may include:
 - **Local craftsmen:** Catch a glimpse of the craftsmen at work in their shops as they weave, embroider, carve and chisel using ancient techniques.
 - **Madrasa 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.
 - A stop for **lunch** at a local restaurant.
 - **Nejjarine Museum of Wooden Arts and Crafts:** Time permitting, we tour this renovated caravanserai that preserves the tools and lifestyles of the traveling merchants who would lodge and sell their goods here.
- **Older Than Oxford:** The **University of Al-Karaouine** is believed to be the oldest continuously operating university in the world. Today, non-Muslims can view it only from the outside but in the 12th century, the Rambam (Moses Ben Maimonides) studied medicine and philosophy here.
- **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.
- We return to our hotel for a chance to freshen up, then set out for an evening at leisure and dinner on own.



Overnight in Fes (B, L)



Day 7: Tuesday, November 5, 2024: LEISURE IN FES/OPTIONAL DAY IN CHEFCHAOUEN

- Breakfast at our hotel.
- **OPTION 1:** Enjoy the day at leisure exploring Fes on own. Optional on own activities include:
 - Return to the medina and get lost in the maze of alleyways and stalls ; enter from Bab Boujeloud (blue gate), stated to be the most beautiful of the 13 gates
 - View the outside of the **Mausoleum of Moulay Idriss**, part of the Karaouine complex and Fes' most important pilgrimage site, which is not open to non-Muslims
 - Explore the **Dar Batha Museum**, a former royal palace and one of the city's most impressive buildings
 - Take in nature at the **Jnan Sbil Garden** filled with colorful flowers, shady trees and a peaceful fountain
 - While the day away relaxing and soaking in a hammam
- **OPTION 2 (Separate cost):** Spend the day in the "Blue City" of **Chefchaouen** to experience the old town's famous Jewish-inspired blue-washed buildings. Originally built as a fortress in the 15th century, the town is picturesquely nestled in the Rif Mountains.
- We see the **octagonal mosque** and **Spanish ruins**, then explore the **medina** and the winding alleys of this charming village, reminiscent of an Andalusian village in Spain.
- Next, we visit the **Plaza Uta El Hammam**, the **Ras el Maa** and the wash houses, where locals.
- We return to Fes later this afternoon.
- **OPTION 3 (Separate cost):** After breakfast at our hotel, we depart to **Ifrane**, the magical city located in the middle Atlas mountains. Known as Morocco's Little Switzerland, this is one the most beautiful, well kept cities in Morocco. Our drive will take in views around the city from skiing slopes to green hills and charming mountains covered with inviting white snow, in addition to flowing rivers and shining lakes. We see the famed stone lion that sits on the patch of grass in the garden of Mohammed the fifth.
- This afternoon after time for lunch on own in Ifrane, we continue our day trip through the stunning Atlas mountains in Azrou, an old Berber town with the largest cedar forest in Africa, a place where we'll encounter **local Barbary Apes (Monkeys)**.
- We return to Fes for a free evening
- **ALL:** This evening is at leisure to explore and enjoy dinner on own.



Overnight in Fes (B)



Day 8: Wednesday, November 6, 2024: MEKNES TO RABAT

- Breakfast and check out of our hotel.
- Today, we depart Fes and travel 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 stop to enjoy **lunch** together.
- **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.
- Later this afternoon, we continue to Morocco's royal capital city of **Rabat**.
- **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.
- We check into our hotel before heading out for dinner on own.

Overnight in Rabat (B, L)



Day 9: Thursday, November 7, 2024: ROYAL RABAT

- Breakfast and check out of our hotel.
- ***“There are no Jewish citizens, there are no Muslim citizens; they are all Moroccans” – Mohammed V.*** Today, 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.
- ***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.
- This afternoon, we depart Rabat and travel to **Casablanca**.
- ***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.
- We check into our hotel and freshen up before a leisure evening and dinner on own.



Overnight in Casablanca (B, L)



Day 10: Friday, November 8, 2024: DISCOVERING CASABLANCA

- Breakfast at our hotel.
- ***God's Throne Upon the Water:*** Fast-moving Casablanca is 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."
- ***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 250,000 - 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 stop by the **Fhal Jewish bakery** to sample the delicious treats, followed by **lunch at Rick's Café**, created to evoke the architecture and atmosphere of the classic Humphry Bogart film.
- After lunch, we meet **Rabbi Jacky Sebbag**, Director of **Ozar HaTorah Neve Shalom Jewish School**. Rabbi Sebbag is a key figure in the Moroccan Jewish community and he'll help us foster a better understanding of Jewish life past and present in Morocco.
- ***The Jews of Casablanca – Then and Now:*** In the 1930s and 1940s, the Jewish community in Casablanca was growing fast as both wealthy merchants and poorer families from villages and towns rushed to the rapidly expanding city. We'll attend **Kabbalat Shabbat services** at perhaps the most beautiful of the city's many synagogues, **Beth-El**, and explore what life is like today for Casablanca's Jews.
- ***Morocco – A Center of the Jewish Sephardi World:*** This evening, we celebrate the end of our journey together with **Shabbat farewell dinner** as we savor, one more time, Morocco's terrific food. 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 Casablanca (B, L, D)



Day 11: Saturday, November 9, 2024: UNTIL WE MEET AGAIN

- Breakfast and check out of our hotel.
- We transfer to Casablanca International Airport for your return flight to the USA, landing later today.

(B)

The Memories Last Forever!!

**Itinerary subject to change*

