Full Detailed Itinerary - Morocco: North Africa in a Nutshell

Day 1: Arrival in Marrakech

After arrival in this bustling Moroccan city, you will be transferred to a nearby hotel in the city for a night. There is no birding planned on this day, with the first activity of the tour being dinner tonight.

Day 2: Marrakech to the Atlas Mountains

We will drive up into the tortuous High Atlas Mountains to the mountain ski resort of Oukaimeden, with plenty of possibilities at this high altitude site, (2600m/8530ft). Our chief target will be the Crimson-winged Finch, for which this our only site on the tour, but we will also be on the lookout for other birds like Levaillant's Woodpecker, Red-billed and Yellow-billed Choughs, Atlas Wheatear, Moussier's and Black Redstarts, Rock Bunting, Rock Sparrow, and White-throated Dipper. Raptors like Long-legged Buzzard and Booted Eagle are possible. At the end of an exciting first day, we will descend to the lower part of the Ourika Valley for a single night.

Day 3: Ourika Valley to Boumalne Dades

After some final birding near Ourika, we will spend much of the rest of the day driving over the High Atlas Mountains and into the high desert steppe. The night will be spent at the edge of the desert in the town of Boumalne Dades, and there should be time for some later afternoon birding nearby to seach for Desert and Red-rumped Wheatears, Little Owl, larks, and more.

Day 4: Tagdilt Track to Erg Chebbi Dunes

The Tagdilt Track crosses a vast expanse of desert and offers the best chances at some of the trickier desert birds like Thick-billed and Temminck's Larks, and Red-rumped Wheatear. This is one of the most famous birding sites in all of Morocco, with other possibilities, including Black-bellied Sandgrouse, Cream-colored Courser, and Long-legged Buzzard. These local raptors may well be augmented by migrating birds of a variety of species. After our morning on the Tagdilt, we'll head east and south to the true Saharan habitats of the Erg Chebbi Dunes area. We'll stop along the way to look for the handsome Mourning "Maghreb" Wheatear and hulking Pharaoh Eagle Owl, and a visit to the scenic Todra Gorge will give us a chance to see Tristram's Warbler. We'll sleep at the edge of a monumental system of reddish Saharan dunes, a beautiful and stereotypical desert landscape.

Day 5: Erg Chebbi Area

We have a full day to explore the Erg Chebbi dunes and surrounding gravel plains and palm oases. This is the best area to search for many Saharan specialties and northwestern Africa endemics. Our long list of targets will include Crowned and Spotted Sandgrouse, several larks like Greater Hoopoe and Bar-tailed, African Desert Warbler, Fulvous Chatterer, and the ghostly desert-adapted Desert Sparrow. Sometimes, with the assistance of local nomadic people, we manage to locate the incredibly cryptic Egyptian Nightjar during the day. Possible raptors include Lanner Falcon and a variety of migrants. By the time the day is done, we hope to have seen the vast majority of the area's specialties, and to have truly experienced this beautiful corner of the endless vastness of the Sahara Desert.

Day 6: Erg Chebbi area to Ouarzazate.

We have a final morning to “clean up” on any Saharan specialties that we missed on the previous morning, before heading northwest to Ouarzazate, a convenient stopover on our way to the Moroccan coast. This bustling regional center is famous as the place where Lawrence of Arabia was filmed. There is also a large reservoir nearby which can offer good birding during migration – the odd sight of waterbirds in the middle of the desert. Possible species include Great Crested Grebe, Eurasian Spoonbill, Ruddy Shelduck, “Maghreb” Crested Lark, and a variety of migrating shorebirds and passerines.

Day 7: Ouarzazate to Agadir

On this day we’ll be driving west through the Sous Valley to Agadir on the coast of Morocco, where we’ll spend the next three nights. Along the way, we’ll look for species like Black-shouldered Kite and Western Orphean Warbler. We hope to have enough time for a late afternoon visit to the Oued Sous after arriving in Agadir. This coastal site features a bounty of shorebirds, waders, gulls, and terns, and is likely to feature a frenzy of new additions to the trip list! Two nights will be spent in Agadir, a large, modern, coastal city on the shores of the Atlantic Ocean.

Day 8: Sous Massa National Park

In complete contrast to the tour thus far, we will spend a day in the coastal sites close to Agadir, which are some of the most diverse sites for birds in the entire country. We’ll be birding estuarine habitat around Oued Massa, but may also cover dunes, cliffs and riparian scrub in the national park too. The sheer variety of wetland and drier habitats is sure to give us our single biggest day list of the tour. In the tidal areas, we’ll be looking for shorebirds like Curlew Sandpiper, Bar-tailed Godwit, and Black-winged Stilt. The adjacent coastal scrub and wetlands may hold Black-crowned Tchagra, Sardinian Warbler, and finches like Common Linnet and Eurasian Goldfinch. The estuarine habitats are also good for congregations of migrating birds, including gulls and terns; among them we’ll try to track down Audouin’s and Mediterranean Gulls, and Gull-billed Tern. The park is known as one of two reliable places in Morocco for the critically endangered Northern Bald Ibis. The park is their last stronghold; with two-thirds of their world population, just under 100 pairs, thought to breed in Sous Massa. Another threatened species, the vulnerable Marbled Duck (Teal), can also be found here, but can be tougher to find by virtue of its more reclusive nature. At the end of a bird-packed day, we’ll return to nearby Agadir for a second night.

Day 9: Agadir to Marrakech

We have a final morning of birding, either around Oued Sous or perhaps north to Tamri, another stronghold of Northern Bald Ibis. After lunch, we will head back to the Moroccan capital. Time permitting, we may have visit the bustling and vibrant market square in the center of Marrakech. The final night of the tour will be spent in Marrakech.

Day 10: Departure

The tour ends this morning with transfers to the airport for flights out. If joining the Southern Spain tour, this starts the next day, giving you some downtime to explore Madrid in the afternoon and evening on this day. You will need a flight from Marrakech to Madrid, which you can book yourself, or we can help you book them on request. *PLEASE NOTE: This tour often links directly with Southern Spain: The Europe Introtour, to make a great combined tour of both Morocco and Spain. If joining the Spain tour, you will fly directly from

Marrakech to the Spanish capital Madrid, where you spend the night. If you are not joining our Spain tour, and you wish to stay on for some extra days of cultural activities, of which there are many choices around Marrakech, please contact our office if you need help with this. Some of the many options are visiting the Koutoubia mosque, seeing the Saddian Tombs, and touring the network of souks while working your way through the myriad markets in the city, to name but a few.

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