

**Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh  
Beyond the Casbah: Mission to Morocco  
March 11-20, 2018**



Morocco's rich history is complemented by the influential role that the Jewish population played in the country's art, education and culture.

The Kingdom of Morocco remains one of the only two Arab countries that still has an active Jewish community. Prior to 1948 and establishment of the State of Israel, Jews numbered some 300,000. Estimates are that today's Jewish population is less than 5,000. Emigration at various times in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, particularly in 1948, 1956 and 1967 took many Moroccan Jews to France, Israel, Canada or the United States. However, the Jews that remain in Morocco live freely and can travel as they choose out of the country. The warm feelings that the Moroccan Jewish diaspora retains, still brings many of them back to Morocco for visits. In addition, Morocco's tolerant attitudes also makes it a destination for Israelis who want to safely explore an Arab country, particularly one with the richness of history and architecture of Morocco.

DRAFT – SUBJECT TO CHANGE

The Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh and the Gil Travel Group, reserve the right to make any itinerary changes  
as of May 3, 2017



**Day 1: Sunday, March 11 – Departure from the US**

Departure from JFK for your overnight non-stop flight to Casablanca, arriving the following morning.

**Day 2: Monday, March 12 – Arrival in Casablanca**

Upon your morning arrival in Casablanca, you will be met by your English speaking Moroccan guide. We immediately begin our exploration of Casablanca by visiting some of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) sponsored programs, thus providing an opportunity to understand how Federation and JDC funds help support programs in Morocco:

- Visit Oeuvre de Secours Aux Enfants (OSE) Medical Clinic: With the cost of medical care in Morocco rapidly rising and a lack of state medical facilities, elderly and underprivileged Jews rely on the Jewish community to meet their health care needs. JDC works in partnership with OSE to provide medical care for poor and elderly Jews, emergency care for those who cannot afford private medical services, as well as preventive treatment.
- Visit Casablanca's Jewish Old Age Home and the Fred and Velva Levine Residence for Elderly and Welfare Clients: Meet Residents and & Connect with Elderly Jewish Community Members who receive full residential care, medical care, dental care, and social facilities. The Home has also been a refuge for elderly who come from the provinces who can no longer take care of themselves.
- Tour the Beth El Synagogue, noted for its beautiful stained-glass windows, and visit a kosher bakery nearby

Transfer to your deluxe hotel.

After a bit of time to refresh yourself from the flight, we depart for an orientation of Casablanca, which is home to Morocco's largest Jewish community. The orientation will include the Museum of Moroccan Judaism of Casablanca, which showcases religious, ethnographic and artistic objects that reflect the history, religion, traditions and daily life of Jews in the context of Moroccan civilization, as well as a visit to the famous Hassan II Mosque, the largest in the world outside Mecca (the only Moroccan Mosque that can be visited by non-Muslims.)

DRAFT – SUBJECT TO CHANGE

The Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh and the Gil Travel Group, reserve the right to make any itinerary changes as of May 3, 2017



*Hassan II Mosque*

The Jewish community contributed to the construction of this mosque, which was inaugurated in 1994, as a way of honoring King Hassan's role as a protector of Morocco's Jewish community.

Dinner this evening will be at one of Casablanca's three Jewish clubs, providing the opportunity to meet some of Casablanca's Jewish community.

Optional for young adults joining the trip (and the young at heart): Join the equivalent of a late night pub crawl, Moroccan style, with a visit to a Moroccan haunt with live music, hookahs and more!

Overnight in Casablanca.

### **Day 3: Tuesday, March 13 – Casablanca/Rabat**

This morning, we continue visiting JDC-sponsored sites in Casablanca with a tour of the Neve Shalom Ozar Hatorah School. Ozar Hatorah was founded in New York by the Shalom family in the 1950s. The goal was to open religious but modern Sephardic schools in Muslim countries. At the time, Ozar Hatorah opened 35 schools all over Morocco. Now, only one school remains with an enrollment of 120 students. We will also visit the small Jewish Museum and have lunch at another Jewish club in Casablanca.

Following lunch, we depart for Rabat, the capital of Morocco, located approximately one hour away. Suggestions will be made for your independent lunch. Rabat has numerous options.

Touring continues with a visit to the Jewish quarter of Rabat and the Oudaya Gardens. Rabat touring continues with a visit that includes the 12<sup>th</sup> century Hassan Tower. Begun at the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century under the direction of Sultan Yacub al Mansour, the intent was that it be the largest minaret in the world, at that time.

DRAFT – SUBJECT TO CHANGE

The Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh and the Gil Travel Group, reserve the right to make any itinerary changes as of May 3, 2017

Due to his death within four years of the start, construction stopped and the tower that remains is approximately half the height that was originally intended.

Dinner and overnight in Rabat.

**Day 4: Wednesday, March 14 - Meknes/Fez**

After breakfast, we check out of the hotel and depart eastward, with our first stop being the city of Meknes, where we visit the *mellah*, the old Jewish quarter with its synagogue and six-hundred year old cemetery, which helps provide some of the Jewish history of Meknes, one of Morocco's four "Imperial Cities". Today, the Jewish community is very small.

Following your visit to Meknes, we continue on to Fez, Morocco's fabled city, just over an hour away. Considered the spiritual and intellectual capital of Morocco, we will be seeing the rich architecture of this exotic city as well as learning about its Jewish history.

Dinner and overnight in Fez.



*Cityscape of Fez*

**Day 5: Thursday, March 15 – Fez**

Today is fully devoted to Fez. Our visit will include the *mellah*, the 17<sup>th</sup> century Ibn Danan synagogue, the Jewish cemetery and the King's Palace, one of the most sumptuous complexes in Morocco.



*Ibn Danan synagogue*

You will also have time to walk through the maze of alleyways, which are too narrow for motorized vehicles and with the up and down slopes, a walking tour that is only suitable for hearty and healthy walkers. Perhaps one of the most important sites for Jewish visitors is the home of Maimonides. Moses Maimonides was from Cordova Spain and was a highly revered and prolific medieval scholar and philosopher. When Jews were being told to convert Spain under the rule of the fanatical and rather extreme Almohad Berber dynast at the end of the 12th century, Maimonides and his family chose to go into exile, rather than convert. He had already gained a reputation as a prolific medieval scholar and philosopher. He settled in Fez, where he researched and wrote his famous commentary on the Mishnah. Your touring will include a visit to Maimonides's home in Fez.

Dinner tonight will be at the Jewish club of Fez. Overnight in Fez.



Maimonides's home in Fez



*Carpet shop in the medina of Marrakech*

#### **Day 6: Friday, March 16 – Marrakech**

This morning we check out of our hotel by 8:30 and drive south thru beautiful landscape, with brief stops en route, arriving in Marrakech by early afternoon. Upon arrival in Marrakech, we will have some light touring. You will then have some free time back at your hotel to change for the Shabbat.

Services tonight will be at a local synagogue, within walking distance of the hotel. Shabbat dinner will be in a private home.

Overnight in Marrakech.

#### **Day 7: Saturday, March 17 – Marrakech**

This morning, those who wish to attend Shabbat services, will be able to walk to the synagogue if they choose. Lunch will be in a family home, followed by a walking tour of Gueliz, often referred to as the “new town”, as this was built under the French and is where most of the Marrakech Jews reside.

We regroup mid-afternoon at our hotel for more touring of Marrakech, including a visit to Bahia Palace, the herbalists in the *medina*. There will also be time to walk through the maze of alleyways and shops that make up the *medina* of Marrakech.

Dinner tonight is independent. Searching design and food magazines, as well as online sources, one finds that Moroccan cuisine and the restaurant scene in Marrakech is hot! Numerous suggestions will be provided, as well

DRAFT – SUBJECT TO CHANGE

The Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh and the Gil Travel Group, reserve the right to make any itinerary changes as of May 3, 2017

as instructions on how to get to the restaurant of your choice. You can also visit the famous Djema Fna, Morocco's central square that turns into a circus type atmosphere at night with crowds coming to the market to listen to the variety of local musicians, enjoying the many food stalls and the exotic atmosphere that has carried on for generations in Marrakech, including snake charmers.

For young adults joining the trip – Special group dinner and opportunity to explore the fabulous nightlife of Marrakech.

Overnight in Marrakech.

### **Day 8 – Sunday, March 18 – Marrakech/Ourika Valley**

This morning we visit the old quarter, the *mellah* and its 500 year old Aljama Synagogue followed by our departure for an excursion out of Marrakech to the Ourika Valley. The primary purpose of this excursion is not only to see the relatively remote village, but to meet the last of the Berber Jews remaining in the village. Historically, there were many Berbers of Morocco who converted to Judaism and remained in their rural villages. We will also visit the grave of Rabbi Shlomo Bel Hence, considered a *tzadik*, or righteous scholar by Morocco's Jews. Late day return to Marrakech.

Dinner and show tonight in Marrakech.



*Djema Fna in Marrakech and snake charmer*

### **Day 9 – Monday, March 19 - Marrakech/Casablanca**

DRAFT – SUBJECT TO CHANGE

The Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh and the Gil Travel Group, reserve the right to make any itinerary changes as of May 3, 2017



This morning we depart for a return to Casablanca. Upon arrival in Casablanca, we will have the opportunity to visit more of the city and any JDC sites that we did not visit at the beginning of the tour.

Our “Farewell Dinner” will be in a nice setting.

Overnight in Casablanca – Hyatt Regency.

**Day 10 – Tuesday, March 20 – Casablanca**

Transfers will bring you to the airport for your departure flights back to the U.S.



One of the many gardens of *Marrakech*

DRAFT – SUBJECT TO CHANGE

The Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh and the Gil Travel Group, reserve the right to make any itinerary changes as of May 3, 2017