Morocco

Atlas to Sahara in Spring



Moussier's Redstart by David Hoddinott

Morocco, with its breathtaking scenery, rich history, mouthwatering cuisine, and superb birding, is an essential destination for both birders and travellers. As a former French protectorate, it stands out among Muslim countries for its warm hospitality, strong cultural identity, and relatively relaxed approach to tourism. The country's diverse geography supports a wide range of habitats—from the snow-capped Atlas Mountains and red sand dunes of the Sahara to lowland woodlands, wetlands, and productive agricultural regions.

Bustling cities and towns provide a cultural feast, where mud-walled buildings flank winding souks brimming with handmade carpets, crafts, and aromatic spices. Birders are equally rewarded: Morocco is home to a remarkable range of North African endemics and regional specialties, including Moussier's Redstart, Tristram's Warbler, Barbary Partridge, Levaillant's Woodpecker, Fulvous Babbler, Maghreb Magpie, Atlas Wheatear, African Blue Tit, and Atlas Pied Flycatcher. One of the tour's primary targets is the Endangered Northern Bald Ibis, now surviving in just two wild colonies in Morocco and a reintroduced population in Spain.

Our journey begins in Casablanca, exploring the productive scrub, wetlands, and fields of Zaër, Sidi Boughaba, Larache, and Merja Zerga, where we search for specialties such as Great Bustard, Double-spurred Francolin and White-headed Duck.

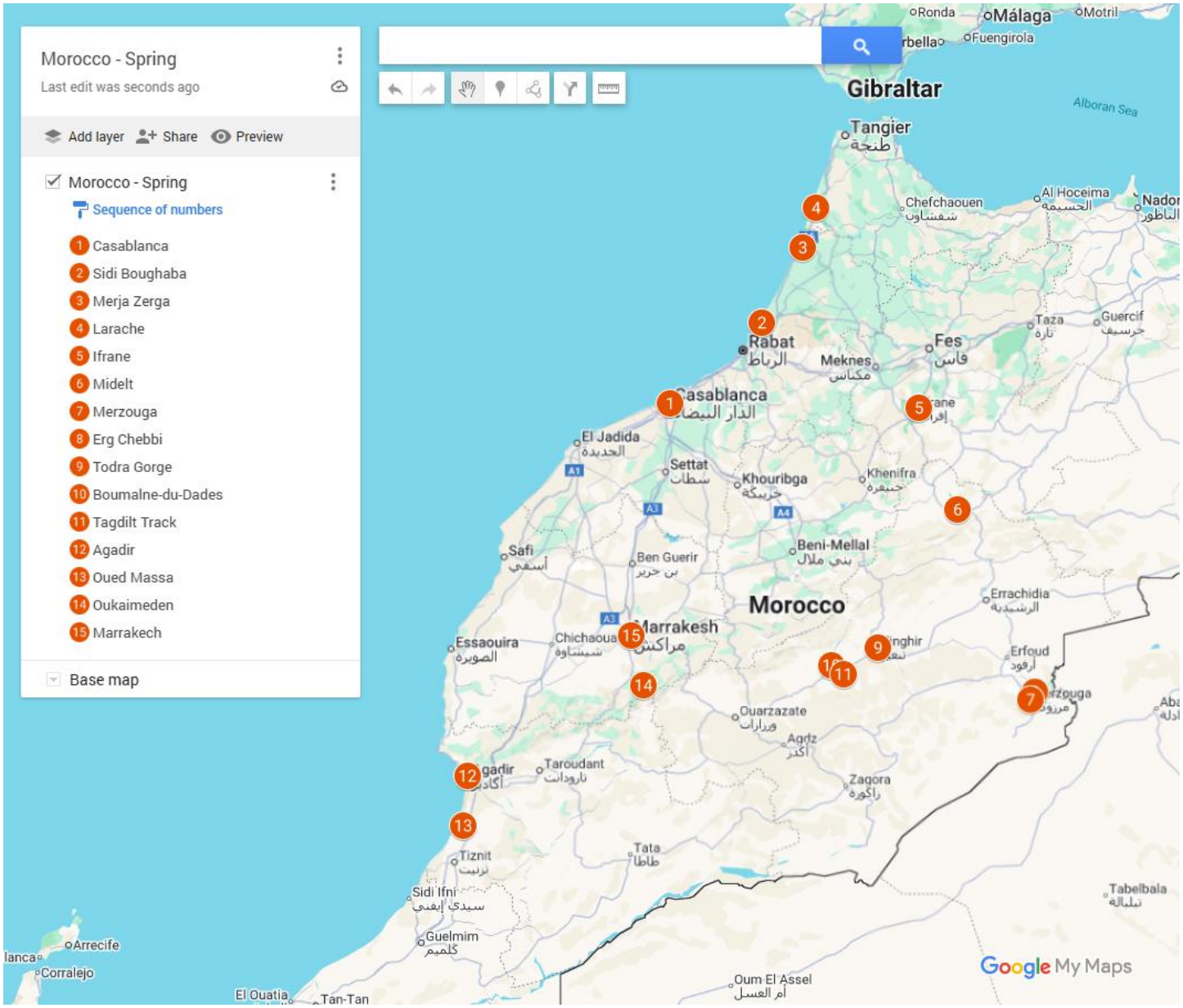
From there, we head inland to the scenic Middle Atlas around Ifrane and Midelt, where we target Atlas Pied Flycatcher, Levaillant's Woodpecker, Houbara Bustard, Moussier's Redstart, and the elusive Dupont's Lark. Entering the spectacular Sahara Desert near Merzouga and Erg Chebbi, we seek desert specialists including Desert Sparrow, African Desert Warbler, Egyptian Nightjar, Cream-colored Courser, Pharaoh Eagle-Owl, and up to four species of sandgrouse.

Continuing west, we bird the famed Tagdilt Track, set against the backdrop of snowcapped High Atlas, in search of desert larks (including Thick-billed and Greater Hoopoe-Lark), wheatears, Trumpeter Finch, and more sandgrouse.

Reaching the Atlantic coast, we visit Agadir and Oued Massa, key areas for the Northern Bald Ibis, as well as the range-restricted Marbled Duck and a variety of wetland and estuarine species. The tour concludes in the High Atlas Mountains at Oukaimeden, where we'll search for high-altitude species such as (African) Crimson-winged Finch, Alpine and Red-billed Chough, as well as further opportunities for Levaillant's Woodpecker and Moussier's Redstart.

Itinerary & Map

Day 1	**Arrival in Casablanca**
Day 2	**Zaër region, Sidi Boughaba & Merja Zerga**
Day 3	**Larache & surrounds**
Day 4	**Merja Zerga to Ifrane**
Day 5	**Ifrane to Midelt & Zaida Plains**
Day 6	**Zaida Plains to Merzouga**
Day 7	**Erg Chebbi & Merzouga**
Day 8	**Merzouga to Boumalne-du-Dades via Todra Gorge**
Day 9	**Tagdilt Track**
Day 10	**Boumalne-du-Dades to Agadir**
Day 11	**Oued Massa & Oued Souss**
Day 12	**Tamri area to Oukaimeden**
Day 13	**Oukaimeden**
Day 14	**Oukaimeden to Marrakech & final departure**


Morocco - Spring
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Sequence of numbers
1 Casablanca
2 Sidi Boughaba
3 Merja Zerga
4 Larache
5 Ifrane
6 Midelt
7 Merzouga
8 Erg Chebbi
9 Todra Gorge
10 Boumalne-du-Dades
11 Tagdilt Track
12 Agadir
13 Oued Massa
14 Oukaimeden
15 Marrakech
Base map
Gibraltar
Tangier
Rabat
Casablanca
Fes
Meknes
Taza
Guercif
El Jadida
Settat
Khouribga
Khenifra
Beni-Mellal
Safi
Ben Guerir
Morocco
Marrakesh
Essaouira
Chichaoua
Errachidia
Erfoud
Ouarzazate
Agdz
Zagora
Taroudant
Tiznit
Tata
Sidi Ifni
Guelmim
Tabelbala
Oum El Assel
Arrecife
Corralejo
El Ouatia
Tan-Tan
Alboran Sea
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Birding sites in detail



White-headed Duck by David Hoddinott

Zaër region. An early morning start is necessary to give ourselves the best chance of finding the scarce Double-spurred Francolin as well as Barbary Partridge. As the morning brightens up, we're likely to pick up a large lits of species such as Black-winged and Black Kites, Crested Lark, Sardinian Warbler, African Blue Tit, Maghreb Magpie, European Serin, Common Kestrel, Common Wood Pigeon, Eurasian Collared and European Turtle Dove, Common Cuckoo, Eurasian Golden Oriole, Common Swift, Barn Swallow, Common Nightingale, Common Blackbird, European Goldfinch and Corn Bunting.

Sidi Boughaba. Here we hope to find the scarce White-headed Duck and Purple (Western) Swamphen and if we are particularly fortunate, Water Rail. Other waterfowl species we may encounter include the sought-after Marbled Duck, Gadwall, Mallard, Northern Shoveler, Ferruginous Duck and both Common and Red-crested Pochards. We may also encounter Common Moorhen, Red-knobbed Coot, Little and Great Crested Grebes, Great Cormorant, Black-crowned Night Heron, Little Egret, Eurasian Hobby, Common Sandpiper, Lesser Black-backed and Yellow-legged Gulls, Sand Martin, Zitting Cisticola and Cetti's Warbler.

Merja Zerga. This is a fantastic waterbird site, occasionally host to such rare gems as Spotted Crake. Most of our time here will be spent searching for Common Buttonquail, Marsh Owl and Moustached Warbler - a rare and localised breeder in Morocco. Commoner denizens include Glossy Ibis, Squacco Heron and Red-knobbed Coot, while smaller numbers of Garganey, Marbled Duck and Red-crested Pochard are typically present. Shorebirds are numerous with large numbers of Black-winged Stilt, Black-tailed Godwit, Greenshank and Ruff, while a few Northern Lapwing and Green Sandpiper can normally be found. Other species we may come across include Black Stork, Caspian Tern, Common Kingfisher, Collared Pratincole and possibly change Brown-throated Martin. We'll make a special attempt to find Marsh Owl in the afternoon.



Double-spurred Spurfowl by David Hoddinott

Larache & surrounds. We'll visit several sites inland of Larache where Great Bustard is known to occur still. Its now very scarce in Morocco, so any sighting



Atlas Pied Flycatcher by David Hoddinott

would be considered very lucky. Whilst scanning various plains for the bustard, we may find Common Crane, White Stork, Little Owl, Collared Pratincole, Western Cattle Egret, Western Marsh Harrier, Western Yellow Wagtails and perhaps Montagu's Harrier.

Ifrane. This town is situated in the middle Atlas Mountains, and the surrounding habitat consists predominantly of pine and oak woodlands. Some key North African endemics occur here, and these include the delightful Moussier's Redstart, Levaillant's Woodpecker and Atlas Wheatear. Our biggest target here is the recently split Atlas Pied Flycatcher which should have begun nest building in the area. Other species we may encounter in this area include European Scops Owl, Wood Lark, Tawny Pipit, Short-toed Treecreeper, Firecrest, Hawfinch, Common Chaffinch, Cirl Bunting, Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Eurasian Skylark, Common House Martin, Eurasian Wren, European Robin, Common Redstart, Mistle Thrush, Coal and Great Tits, Eurasian Nuthatch, Western Jackdaw, Common Raven, European Greenfinch and Common Linnet. Barbary Macaque is quite often encountered in this area.

Zaida Plains. Well head out just before dawn, braving potentially below-freezing temperatures and drive a short distance into the desert plains around Zaida. This patch of gravel desert, interspersed with tall Halfa grass is the best site in Africa to look for the rare and localized Dupont's Lark. We will walk across the desolate plains in the dawn light listening out for calling birds, trying to locate these fast and shy larks that have a beautiful oriole-like song. Typically, the larks only sing during these colder hours, and this will give us our best opportunity of hopefully seeing this difficult species. Other great birds in this area may include Eurasian Skylark, both Greater and Mediterranean Short-toed Larks, Black-bellied Sandgrouse, Fulvous Babbler, and possibly rarer species such as Houbara Bustard and Crowned Sandgrouse.



Dupont's Lark by David Hoddinott

Midelt to Erfoud. Our drive takes us through increasingly desolate and arid habitat. Birds that we will be on the lookout for include Desert Lark and the social Fulvous Babbler. We will also stop to check out an area for the localised Streaked Scrub Warbler, recently placed in its own monotypic family.

We'll reach the French-built



African Desert Warbler by David Hoddinott

administrative town of Erfoud, a small and relatively modern town dotted with both fresh produce and a few handicraft stalls. While not particularly impressive, the town is surrounded by some of the most attractive scenery in Morocco. The area to the south has extensive palm groves and lush gardens that eventually give way to vast stony plains, wadi beds and the spectacular red sand dunes of the great Sahara Desert. Time permitting, we'll make our first forays into the surrounding desert landscape for African Desert Warbler.

Erg Chebbi. Today will be an exciting one indeed as we explore the great sand dunes and surrounding stony deserts, cultivated oases and villages in 4x4 vehicles. First, we head towards the spectacular Erg Chebbi dune-fields (the largest in Morocco and said to be the highest free-standing dunes in the world). Here we search for the rare and declining Desert Sparrow and chances for many other gems such as the stunning Cream-colored Courser, Bar-tailed Lark, Greater Hoopoe-Lark, and Spectacled Warbler.

Specials in the area include African Desert Warbler and, if we are extremely fortunate, the endangered Houbara Bustard. This bird was hunted to near extinction by Arab falconers, but improved protection and reintroduction projects have boosted their populations a little. Chances also exist for various sandgrouse species including Pin-tailed, Crowned and Spotted. Our last few tours have even found Egyptian Nightjar in this area, though this is by no means an expected species! We will also visit a known stake-out for the majestic Pharaoh Eagle-Owl.

Merzouga. A nearby freshwater lake (when it has water) is a magnet for migrating ducks and waders, which may include Marbled, Ferruginous and Tufted Ducks, Black-necked Grebe, Black-tailed Godwit, Dunlin and Yellow Wagtail. We should also see Brown-necked Raven while driving through the desert, as well as the recently split Maghreb Lark. Date palms and orchids clog the oases and clumps of Tamarisks in the dune-field hold overwintering and migrating passerines. These may include the beautiful Bluethroat, Lesser Whitethroat, Spectacled Warbler, Eurasian Blackcap and Common Chiffchaff.



Desert Sparrow by Clayton Burne

Todra Gorge. We'll drive through the amazing Todra Gorge, scarred by bizarre



Thick-billed Lark by David Hoddinott

limestone erosion, decorated with impressive, fortified villages and a stunning 1 000m deep cutting flanked by pink cliffs. The impressive Bonelli's Eagle, European Red-rumped Swallow, Eurasian Crag Martin, Blue Rock Thrush, Black Wheatear, Grey Wagtail, and the lovely Tristram's Warbler are all possible on the drive.

Little Owl can often be seen perched on walls and buildings as we pass by, and (Barbary) Peregrine Falcon has bred in the gorge, sometimes seen in flight or perched on the cliff face.

Tagdilt Track. This famous track allows us to search for hardy species that make these stony deserts their home. The high, snow-covered Atlas Mountains contrasting with the stony desert below, makes for dramatic scenery and a memorable birding experience. The area holds exciting birds including flocks of Black-bellied and occasionally Crowned and Pin-tailed Sandgrouse, Cream-colored Courser, Greater Hoopoe-Lark, Temminck's, Mediterranean Short-toed and the very special Thick-billed Lark, Red-rumped, White-crowned and Desert Wheatears, Great Grey Shrike and Trumpeter Finch. Large diurnal gerbils called Fat Sand Rats are common here, often seen scuttling to their burrows, mouths stuffed with vegetation.

Dades Valley. We'll follow the Dades Valley to the Atlantic coast. The valley offers great birding and spectacular geological formations before we bottom out and see our first Argan Trees. The unique Argan Tree is one of the oldest trees in the world, endemic to just a small region of only 8 000km^2 in southwestern Morocco. If we are fortunate, we may find Western Orphean Warbler in the area.

Agadir. This is a delightful beachfront city in southern Morocco, host to one of the largest of the King's palaces with modern facilities and a superb shoreline. For centuries it has been an important transport hub, an essential port of call for ships and camel caravans and, more recently, for birdwatchers!

Oued Massa. This estuary and wetland area is the culmination of the River Massa's journey from the Atlas Mountains. We will search the reed-lined



Greater Hooepoe-Lark by Clayton Burne



Pin-tailed Sandgrouse by David Hoddinott

shores and sandbanks for Little Bittern, Eurasian Spoonbill, Glossy Ibis, Greater Flamingo, Squacco and Purple Herons, Western Marsh Harrier, and Common Kingfisher amongst many other species.

Searching further upriver where the water is less brackish may reveal Northern Pintail, Northern Shoveler and the highly sought-after Marbled Duck. Good numbers of waders may also be seen including Eurasian Oystercatcher, Pied Avocet, Little Ringed, Common Ringed and Kentish Plovers, Dunlin, Curlew Sandpiper, Common Redshank and Black-tailed Godwit. A large gull and tern roost should include Yellow-legged, Mediterranean, Slender-billed and Audouin's Gulls, while Sandwich and Caspian Terns may also appear. With a good dollop of luck, we may find the skulking and notoriously difficult to see Water Rail or flush a roosting Red-necked Nightjar. Other species we will search for include Eurasian Stone-curlew, Osprey, Black-winged Kite, Great Spotted Cuckoo, Little Owl, Cetti's and occasionally Subalpine Warbler, Maghreb Magpie, Black-crowned Tchagra and seedeaters including Spanish Sparrow, Common Linnet, European Serin and European Goldfinch.

A nearby site could produce Sedge Warbler, Brown-throated and Sand Martins and Marbled Duck. Barbary Ground Squirrels often occur in good numbers, and we may well encounter other small mammals and reptiles.

Oued Souss. Access to this fabulous estuary has been significantly reduced in recent times and has consequently lost most of its birding appeal. We may visit the site in the late evening to search for Red-necked Nightjar.



Audouin's Gull by Stephan Lorenz

Tamri area. The region just north of Agadir is one of the few localities where it is possible to find the Endangered Northern Bald Ibis also known as the Waldrapp. Once common across central Europe, northern Africa, and the Middle East, today this strange bird only occurs naturally in two areas along the Moroccan coast - just north



Northern Bald Ibis by Adam Riley

and south of Agadir (the population is estimated at slightly over 700 individuals as of 2025), and at a recently introduced breeding colonies in Spain and Turkey.

We will visit Oued Tamri and the surrounding coastal regions, one of the best-known areas for this species and, with a little luck, secure a sighting of one of the world's rarest and most endangered birds. Oued Tamri also offers us an excellent opportunity to find Audouin's Gull, while the surrounding scrub is good for the beautiful Moussier's Redstart, Spotless Starling, Blue Rock Thrush, Sardinian Warbler and Spanish Sparrow.

Tizi n'Test Pass. After driving through the Dades Valley, we climb up and over this incredible pass, seeing quaint mountain villages, rushing streams and great birding spots. We will keep a lookout for any High Atlas species we may have missed to date, whilst even Barbary Sheep are possible along this pass.

We will make a stop at the Tinmel Mosque, high in the Atlas Mountains. This 11th century edifice is one of the few mosques that are open to Westerners. In the past a co-operative Tawny (Maghreb) Owl could sometimes be found here, and though it has been a few years since it was last seen regularly, we will give the mosque a cursory look over just in case. Golden Eagle has been recorded soaring over the surrounding mountains, so we shall keep a look overhead for a repeat performance.

Ourika Valley. As we travel towards Oukaimeden, the road winds through valleys and impressive scenic passes, where we will be treated to breathtaking and dramatic views of the surrounding valleys and quaint villages perched atop steep slopes. We will make several birding stops in the lower part of the valley for the unique Moroccan subspecies of White Wagtail, House Bunting and various egrets and herons.

As we wind our way up to higher altitudes, we will keep watching for the scarce Golden Eagle, coveys of Barbary Partridge, Pallid Swift, and further chances for the north African



Levaillant's Woodpecker by David Hoddinott



Crimson-winged Finch by Clayton Burne

endemics; Levaillant's Woodpecker and Moussier's Redstart. In stands of juniper trees, we should find African Blue, Great and Coal Tits, Common Firecrest, Short-toed Treecreeper and Hawfinch. Fat White-throated Dippers reside along the region's fast flowing streams and, if we are fortunate, we may find both Common and Blue Rock Thrushes.

Oukaimeden. Situated at an elevation of 2 600m in the High Atlas, Oukaimeden is a popular ski resort surrounded by snow-capped mountains and conifer-covered slopes. Around the ski resort, we should see flocks of swirling, coughing choughs representing both Alpine and Red-billed at close quarters. We'll also find several Horned Larks, of an isolated, resident population. Other target species at this high elevation include small flocks of the lovely African sub-species of Crimson-winged Finch (a very localized bird whose numbers around the resort are directly correlated to snow levels), Mistle Thrush, Eurasian Wren, Eurasian Jay, Black Redstart, European Robin, Common Wood Pigeon, Cirl and Rock Buntings, Rock Sparrow, Great Spotted Woodpecker, and raptors including Long-legged Buzzard, Peregrine Falcon, Eurasian Sparrowhawk and Bonelli's Eagle.

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease	☐ ■ ■	Moderate to easy. Suitable for most birding / wildlife interest levels.
Birding Ease	☐ ■ ■	Fairly easy. Most species provide good visuals in open conditions, but several target species may require repeat efforts. Others are low density (ie: Great Bustard)
Accommodation	☐ ☐ ■	Comfortable.
Walking / Trails	☐ ☐ ■	Mostly short walks, primarily on stony/gravel ground & shorter walks on soft/loose sand (beaches & deserts). Whilst unlikely, snow/ice underfoot is also possible.
Vehicles / Roads	☐ ■ ■	Good quality tarred roads for the most part. Comfortable minivan/minibus depending on group size. Several long drives. Lots of 'birding from the bus' due to habitat & distances.
Photography	☐ ☐ ■	Good to very good. Lighting can be challenging. No dedicated hides or feeders.
Annoyances	☐ ■ ☐	Some long drives. Temperatures can be variable.

Financial Arrangements and Important Notes

Tour dates, prices, single supplement, approximate flight costs and tour spaces are displayed on our website.

Tour inclusions:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to lunch on day 14;
- All lodgings;
- Drinking water;
- All ground transportation during the tour;
- All reserve entrance fees;
- All guiding services
- Tips for local guides, drivers and services.

Tour exclusions:

- Visa fees;
- ANY flights;
- Any beverages (including mini-bar charges at hotels);
- Optional excursions;
- Special gratuities;
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.

Single Supplement: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

Tipping: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc.) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If you feel that they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them at your discretion.

- **Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing. The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates.**
- **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registrations, a small group supplement will be offered to confirm the tour.**
- **Tour prices are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**
- **The designated tour leader/s may be changed at short due to unforeseen circumstances.**
- **The itinerary is indicative only. Changes may need to be made to the order in which the tour is conducted, or some of the venues we visit closer to departure. We will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**

- Morocco is a Muslim country. The drinking of alcohol is strictly restricted to certain tourist hotels and may only be sold to non-Muslims. It is an offence to consume alcohol outside of these specified hotels, or in view of the public. We therefor do not permit participants to purchase or consume any alcoholic drinks for consumption outside of these hotels.
- Much of our time is spent in vehicles, as we do have to cover long distances to get to the best areas for birds. The more luggage you pack the less room there is in the vehicle, so it is important for the comfort of your fellow travellers that you do not over-pack. Kindly stick to 20kg (44lb) for check in luggage and 8kg (18lb) for hand luggage.

- High temperatures can be expected at some locations on this tour. We do not however have any strenuous walks, and it is generally easily manageable. Nights and early mornings can get very cold in the desert and High Atlas Mountains so do ensure you bring enough layers.
- Some species may only be seen at distance (waders, gulls, sandgrouse), a personal scope can be useful.

Arrival and Departure Details

Day 1 of the tour is set aside as an arrival day, and you may arrive at any time in advance of our introductory group dinner. The tour will conclude in the late afternoon of day 14 in Marrakech.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your Tour Confirmation package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

Mohammed V International Airport, Casablanca (IATA: CMN) and Marrakesh Menara International Airport, Marrakesh (IATA: RAK) are the main ports of entry and exit for this tour and is well serviced by several airlines.

Visa requirements differ by country, nationality of the traveller and duration and purpose of your intended stay. It may be necessary to obtain a visa or an electronic travel authorization in advance of your travel. It is therefore vitally important that you check with your travel agent/consulate/embassy for exact visa requirements.

DO NOT book any flights until the Rockjumper Team have officially confirmed the tour.