



Marrakech at New Year

Palaces and Gardens of the Red City

28 December 2025–3 January 2026

(ML 861)

7 Days • £5,210

Lecturer: Dr Richard McClary

Art and architecture, monuments and museums exploring Marrakech's rich Berber and Islamic heritage.

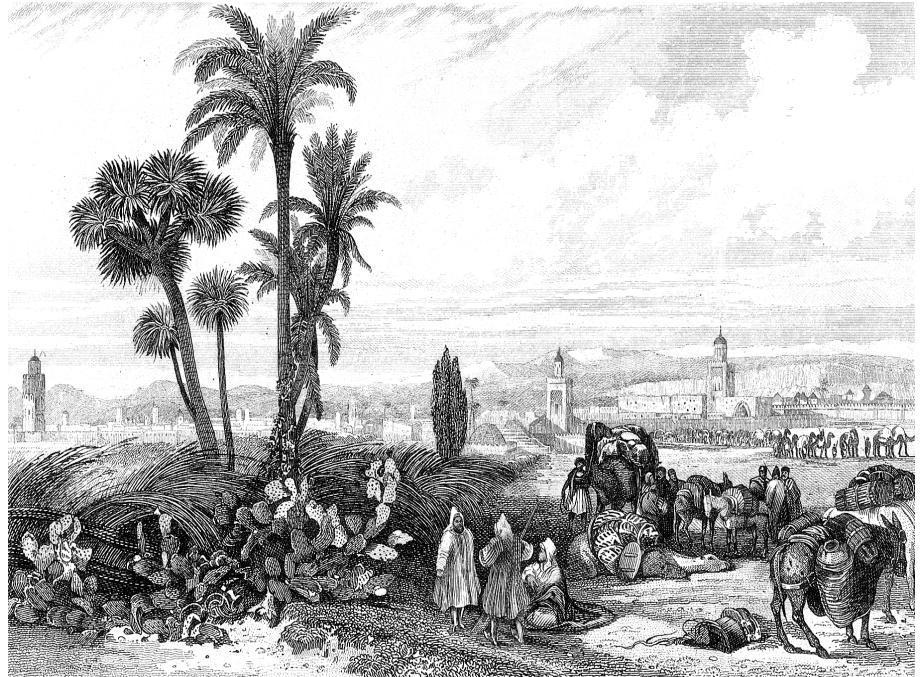
Five star hotel in the heart of the medina, minutes from the bustle of the Djemaa El Fna.

Special arrangements include a day's excursion to the Atlas Mountains, a concert of traditional music and sunset on the dunes.

At the foot of the Atlas Mountains, Marrakech, one of Morocco's four imperial cities, has been a centre of trade, power and learning for almost a thousand years. It has served as the capital of several dynasties, all of which have left their mark. Minarets, palaces, tombs and madrasas dot the city, which was founded by the Almoravids in the early 11th century. Since then, the streets and alleys of Marrakech have witnessed many changes, from the Saadi sultanate in the 16th century, through the French Protectorate to the modern Kingdom of Morocco.

Several significant monuments reflect this fascinating history. From our luxurious base in the heart of the old town, we have time to explore many of these in detail, as well as some impressive modern museums and the living traditions that colour the city. The recently restored Ben Youssef Madrasa, for example, built in the 1560s and an intellectual hub for centuries, embodies the cultural, religious and aesthetic essence of Morocco. Architecturally, it is a masterful showcase of glazed zelij mosaics, carved wood and stucco; at its heart, a pool of water, evoking heaven on earth. The decorative excesses of the Saadian tombs, meanwhile, contrast with the stripped-down ruins of the El Badi Palace; the latter tells its own story of the erstwhile grandeur of Moroccan court life.

Alongside the winding streets of the souk and buildings of the medina, the city is famed for its gardens, refreshing oases offering sanctuary from the busy public spaces. The restored Jardin Secret is sited in a palace complex dating back to the Saadian era, while the fabulous 20th-century Jardin Majorelle, exquisitely restored by Yves Saint Laurent, is famed for its integrated blue painted walls – behind which can be found the Pierre Bergé



Marrakech, steel engraving c. 1840.

Museum of Berber Arts.

Marrakesh has a rich food culture which we celebrate on the tour, fusing Arab, Berber and French traditions; one of the highlights will be dinner in the desert at sunset.

Itinerary

Day 1: Fly at c. 11.30am from London Heathrow direct to Marrakech (British Airways). Some free time before dinner.

Day 2: Marrakech. We begin with a morning walk through the medina for orientation. The Museum of Marrakech and the Museum of Photography make a fitting introduction. Visit the Ben Youssef Madrasa adjacent to the 11th-century Almoravid Pavilion. Le Jardin Secret palace complex dates back 400 years, its restored gardens take the form of an exotic garden and an Islamic garden.

Day 3: Marrakech. Visit the 19th-century Bahia Palace, a vast residence built for Si Moussa, the grand vizir of the sultan and occupied by the Resident General during the French Protectorate. Continue to the Musée, Monde des Arts de la Parure in the Kasbah, displaying a unique collection of jewellery and ceremonial garments. The Music Museum in

Mouassine holds a fascinating collection of traditional Moroccan instruments.

Day 4: Imlil, Douar Sbiti. Leave in the morning for an excursion to the Ourika Valley in the High Atlas Mountains. Enjoy a gentle walk through the scenic landscape before exploring the traditional Berber village of Imlil. Return to Marrakech via the enchanting Anima Garden, a lush artistic retreat filled with captivating flora and installations. In the evening, enjoy a New Year's Eve dinner party at the hotel.

Day 5: Marrakech. The morning is free. In the afternoon, visit the Saadian tombs, which commemorate the dynasty in finely decorated pavilions that give a taste of the original decoration of their vast palace, the Badi', which was stripped by their successors.

Day 6: Marrakech, Agafay. In modern Marrakech, we see the Majorelle gardens, famous for their colourful blue buildings, bamboo and cacti. Dar El Bacha, built in 1910 and once home to Thami El Glaoui, the Pasha of Marrakech, is a prime example of riad architecture in the medina. Some free time before an evening excursion to the Agafay Desert for a farewell drink and dinner at sunset.

Marrakech at New Year
continued

Day 7: Marrakech. In the morning enjoy some free time. Transfer to the airport to catch the 3.50pm flight to London Heathrow (arriving c. 6.30pm).

Lecturer

Dr Richard Piran McClary. Senior lecturer in Islamic Art and Architecture at the University of York. He received his doctorate from the University of Edinburgh and has lectured extensively on a range of subjects related to the art and architecture of Central Asia. His monograph entitled *Medieval Monuments of Central Asia. Qarakhanid Architecture of the 11th and 12th Centuries* was published in 2020. He is the author of three monographs and has published articles in numerous journals, including: *Muqarnas*, *Iran*, *Anatolian Studies*, *Persica*, *Iraq*, and *the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*. He has served as a trustee and Research Director for the British Institute of Persian Studies and is managing editor of the *Journal of Islamic Art and Architecture*.

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £5,210 or £4,710 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £6,610 or £6,110 without flights.

Included: flight with British Airways (economy class), airport transfers from and to Marrakech; private air-conditioned coach; accommodation as described below; breakfasts, 4 lunches and 4 dinners with wine or soft drinks (not all restaurants serve alcohol), water, coffee or tea; all admissions; all tips; the services of the lecturer, tour manager and local guides.

Visas: not required for nationals of the United Kingdom, Australia or United States for tourist stays of up to 90 days. Nationals of other countries should check their requirements.

Accommodation: Les Jardins de la Koutoubia, Marrakech (lesjardinsdelakoutoubia.com):

A luxurious 5-star hotel in the heart of the Medina, offering upscale amenities including pools, a spa, and restaurants.
Single rooms are doubles for sole use.

How strenuous? While the pace of this tour is moderate, you should expect a fair amount of walking, standing at sites, and two excursions.

Average distance by coach per day: 20 miles.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.

Combine this tour with: Pharaonic Egypt, 3–14 January 2026