

TOUR REVIEW

This twisty road carves through the Iferten Gorge in Morocco's Rif Mountains. "Adventure" may be in the name of this tour, but all roads are paved.



MOROCCAN CARAVAN

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IMTBIKE MOROCCO ADVENTURE TOUR

Living in Madrid in my 20s, my Spanish friends raved about Morocco – the food, the architecture, the people, the scenery – but I never made it across the Strait of Gibraltar. When my brother, EIC Greg Drevenstedt, asked me to join him on IMTBike's Morocco Adventure Tour, I was anxious to see what all the fuss was about. We'd cover more than 1,400 miles in nine days, getting a full sampling of the country – the coast, rolling countryside, the Atlas Mountains, the Sahara Desert, and cities and villages.

Greg and I were joined by our friend Eric Birns, and the three of us flew into Malaga, Spain, where the tour begins and ends, a few days early to shake off the jetlag and eat our weight in tapas. On the eve of the tour, we met our guides and fellow riders for a safety briefing at the hotel.

Our tour was led by Spaniards Chano Lorenzo and Marc Puncernau. Chano was once a member of the motorcycle-mounted Spanish Royal Guard, and he was the first guide hired by IMTBike when the company started in 1997. When not leading moto tours, Marc tests motorcycle tires on- and off-road. Chano and Marc were as amiable as they were knowledgeable.

Our group consisted of 10 Americans, two Guatemalans, and Marco Zepeda from Guadalajara, Mexico, a world heavyweight champion extrovert who charmed everyone we encountered on the tour, including the Moroccan police officers who stopped Marco and me for speeding and would have fined us on the spot if not for Marco's good humor. After the safety briefing, we all walked to a traditional Spanish restaurant in Malaga and got to know one another over a



Above left: The medina at Djemaa el-Fna square in Marrakech. **Above right:** It was a lush paradise inside the walls of our riad in Quarzazate. **Below:** Riding through the city of Boumalne Dades with the Atlas Mountains in the background.



good meal, a ritual repeated throughout the tour.

MALAGA TO RABAT

We woke before dawn to catch an early ferry. A light rain was falling. I chose the R 1250 GS from a wide selection of new BMWs to ride. It took a few miles to get the hang of riding an unfamiliar bike in a large group. I was also getting reacquainted with riding in the rain and in the dark, two things I typically avoid, but by the time we arrived at the port in Algeciras, I had my sea legs.

The Rock of Gibraltar was shrouded in dark rain clouds when we departed. The ferry crossed the strait in about an hour, and Morocco greeted us with sunny skies.

Chano and Marc had the border crossing documents sorted, and we went through customs with little delay.

We slugged it to Rabat, the capital city, and along the way I took note of the ways Morocco is different from home: gas stations with prayer rooms; roadside “fast food” served in an earthenware tagine with crusty flatbread baked in a wood-fired oven; road signs in Berber, a written language unlike any I’ve seen.

Our luxurious resort hotel sprawled along the Bou Regreg River, where colorful wooden fishing boats stood in contrast to the ultra-modern Grand Theatre on the opposite shore. We enjoyed a beer and a dip in the pool as the sun

went down, chatted over dinner, and then turned in early to rest up for the next day.

RABAT TO MARRAKECH

Before leaving Rabat, we stopped at the Hassan Tower, the minaret of a mosque left unfinished when its patron died in 1199. Had it been completed, it would have been one of the largest mosques in the world. IMTBike does a good job of combining scenic roads with cultural discovery, and this was one of several UNESCO World Heritage Sites we visited.

Outside Rabat, the road got curvy and there was little traffic, so we put the bikes through the paces. It rained lightly throughout the day. Shortly after



Left: Our crew at Tizi n'Tichka, a 7,414-ft pass in the Atlas Mountains, on the ride from Marrakech to Ouarzazate. **Below left:** Rain is rare in Morocco, but it was a wet autumn last year. We came upon a flash flood on the ride from Rabat to Marrakech.

a mint tea break, we came over a rise to see a line of cars stopped on the road ahead. A flash flood blocked our route to Marrakech. What had been light rain for us was a deluge up in the mountains, and a muddy torrent flowed over the road.

We detoured, only to arrive farther down the same valley where the flash flood was even worse. By the time we returned to our original route, the floodwaters had subsided, leaving the road caked with thick mud but passable.

That night we stayed in a golf resort outside of Marrakech because, as Marc explained, the city's traffic is bonkers. After getting cleaned up, we all jumped into a party van to go to the medina (old city). Even though it was a Monday night, the streets were jammed with vehicles and pedestrians.

The medina, which surrounds the huge Djemaa el-Fna square, was filled with merchant stalls, open-air restaurants, musicians, dancers, shoppers, tourists, families out for a stroll, and kids on mopeds scrolling on smartphones while weaving through the crowd. After wandering around the medina, we enjoyed a delicious dinner of lamb, prune, and almond tagine at a rooftop restaurant overlooking the square.

MARRAKECH TO OUARZAZATE

Even in light rain, the road over the Atlas Mountains to Ouarzazate is a blast, with sweepers, chicanes, and hairpins, all well-engineered with good asphalt. There isn't much of a police presence outside of Moroccan cities, so your pace is limited only by your sense of



Clockwise from top left: Aït Benhadou is a historic *ksar* (fortified village). Riding out of Todra Gorge. Steeds of a different breed.

self-preservation. It was downright cold when we stopped for a group photo at the 7,414-ft Tizi n'Tichka pass.

We then took a backroad through the Ounilla Valley, passing villages that appeared not to have changed in centuries. The recent rains left lots of mud and debris on the road, so I slowed down and stopped often to take photos. We ate lunch, another delicious tagine, within sight of Aït Benhaddou, a UNESCO-recognized village dating to the 11th century that has served as a location for *Gladiator* and other films.

In Ouarzazate, we rode past the big tourist hotels and made our way down a gravel road through a run-down-looking neighborhood, where we pulled into a covered garage that resembled the inside of a barn. Our accommodations were at a traditional Moroccan riad. I was floored as we walked through the carved wooden doors of a nondescript building into a courtyard filled with fountains, colorful tile work, and flowering plants. As we shook off the trail dust, a young woman offered us almond cookies and mint tea from a large silver tray. We took a refreshing dip in the pool and then had dinner in the courtyard under the stars. All the hotels we stayed in during the tour were top notch, but staying at a riad was a uniquely Moroccan experience.

OUARZAZATE TO ERFOUD

Leaving Ouarzazate, one of the bikes' rear brakes became disabled. The support van contained not only spare tires



but also a spare BMW. The bikes were swapped, and we continued on our way. Kudos to IMTBike for being prepared so that unexpected issues don't derail the tour.

Heading towards the Todra Gorge with the snow-capped Atlas Mountains in the distance, there were long stretches of straight road where I could safely uncork the R 1250 GS. The road got downright serpentine as we neared the gorge, a natural wonder with 600-foot vertical walls that are so narrow there's barely room for the road alongside the riverbed. We were in the deep desert now, occasionally passing oasis towns of earth-colored buildings surrounded by date palms and small plots of farmland, always with groups of children waving excitedly as we rolled through.

Clockwise from left: Having fun in the Erg Chebbi sand dunes. Riding through the Ounilla Valley. One of the lakes that formed during record-setting rains in the Sahara.





Hold your nose! Cow urine and pigeon feces are used to process leather at this centuries-old tannery in Fez.

Ifrane, a village with chalets that looks more Swiss than Moroccan. Our hotel in Fez is perched on a hillside overlooking the medina, another UNESCO site, which dates to the ninth century and is the oldest continuously inhabited walled city in the Arab world.

We stayed in Fez for our second rest day and toured the medina, a warren of more than 10,000 winding, narrow alleyways lined with vendor stalls offering everything from colorful fruit and freshly butchered meat to clothing, rugs, and leather goods. There are no cars in the medina, so more than once, we had to flatten ourselves against a wall to allow a heavily laden donkey to pass. Our guide, Habib, took us to the shops of several artisans, where we had a chance to test our haggling skills against true experts. The medina is unlike any place I've ever visited, a fascinating human beehive that hasn't changed significantly in centuries.

FEZ TO CEUTA

The Atlas Mountains separate Morocco into two distinct zones, with the desert to the south and a temperate Mediterranean climate to the north. The countryside outside of Fez reminded me of southern Spain, with rolling hills and olive groves.

Arriving at our hotel in Erfoud, the parking lot was crammed with overlander trucks, side-by-sides, and adventure bikes, many coated with mud. Erfoud is the gateway to the Sahara's Erg Chebbi sand dunes and attracts race teams, movie crews, and motorcycle tour groups.

Day 5 was one of two scheduled rest days. We slept in and lounged by the pool until heading out to the dunes that afternoon. Standing in the soft sand surrounded by huge orange dunes stretching to the horizon was mind blowing. We had the unique experience of seeing several lakes that had formed

in valleys between the dunes following record-breaking rains. Marc and Chano arranged for us to rent quads and side-by-sides, and we headed into the desert following a local guide. Riding up and down those enormous dunes was like riding a roller coaster, and Greg and I laughed and hooted like schoolkids.

ERFOUD TO FEZ

Riding out of Erfoud, we had our fill of curves while threading through the Ziz Gorge on the way to the Middle Atlas Mountains. We fed peanuts to monkeys in an alpine forest and rode through

Left: If the street signs weren't in Arabic, you'd think you were in the Alps when riding over the High Atlas Mountains between Marrakech and Ouarzazate. **Right:** One of the many maze-like alleys in Chefchaouen, known as the "Blue City."



In the foothills of the Rif Mountains, the road was scenic and exciting, twisty and uncrowded. We stopped for a stroll and lunch at Chefchaouen, a town sprawled across the side of a mountain with buildings painted various shades of blue.

Our final miles in Morocco were on a coastal road with twisties and views of the Mediterranean coastline. Unlike coming into the country, our border crossing into Ceuta, a Spanish city on a spit of Moroccan coast, took several hours, and we arrived at our hotel after nightfall. This was our last night together, and we enjoyed a delicious Spanish dinner and stayed up late at the bar talking about the sights we had seen and the roads we had ridden.

CEUTA TO MALAGA

Unlike our first ferry trip across the Strait of Gibraltar, we had clear skies for our return to Spain and were treated to beautiful views of the Rif Mountains and the Rock of Gibraltar. Heading to Malaga, we turned off the highway and onto a mountainous backroad for one last session of curves and beautiful views before we arrived at IMTBike's warehouse. After a toast of cava, we said our farewells and headed our separate ways.

No wonder my Spanish friends love Morocco. It is a beautiful country that honors and preserves its unique cultural traditions while also embracing modernity and tourism. IMTBike's Morocco Adventure Tour is a great introduction, leading you from one must-see destination to the next, all connected by beautiful backroads. And we didn't have to plan a thing. The guides and fellow riders were excellent company, and everything ran smoothly. Even when the unexpected occurred, like flash floods or a mechanical issue, Marc and



Marco and Kevin making friends with a couple of locals.

Chano were unflappable. I don't know if I would take off into the interior of Morocco on my own, but I would do it again with the folks from IMTBike in a heartbeat.

IMTBike's Morocco Adventure Tour will run five times in 2025: March 15-24, April 12-21, Sept. 20-29, Oct. 11-20, and Nov. 15-24. The longer 16-day Magical Morocco Tour also runs multiple times in 2025. For more information, visit [IMTBike.com](https://www.imtbike.com).



Paul Drevenstedt bought his first motorcycle, a raced-hard-and-put-away-wet BMW R90S, in 1997. Inspired by the fun he was having, his younger brother, Greg, bought his first motorcycle a year later. They've been riding together ever since. 🏍️



Paul admires the flora and fauna near Marrakech.