

FRENCH IN FRANCE & AFRICA

April Edition 2023

A Long Journey

The transition from Paris to Morocco was nothing short of breathtaking. Swapping out scarves and sweaters for shorts and sandals was nice, of course, and students prepared themselves for a month-full of cultural awakenings, unique food, and long days on the road singing songs and sharing stories.

Our group was lucky to experience the beginning of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, whilst in Morocco. Our journey was unconventional, exciting, and fast-paced. It's difficult to condense an entire month into just a few experiences, but we hope this edition captures our voyage in earnest.

Photo by Hannah Sutherland



Photo by Hannah Sutherland



Poet Abdallah Zrika performing a collaborative reading accompanied by singer Touria Hadraoui

Academics and Learning

Morocco was a busy time for everyone. During a week-long stay in Rabat, students practiced their French with host families and took Darija classes, one of the spoken languages of Morocco. In addition to that course, there were a number of classes on Moroccan history, culture, socio-economics, and Arabic calligraphy. Erica Feild-Marchello also returned for a portion of the trip as a guest lecturer and historical guide.

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Learning extended beyond academics. Students had opportunities to meet with artists, including poet and writer Abdallah Zrika and malhoun singer Touria Hadraoui, and spent afternoons touring different medinas and visiting important historical sites, museums, and mosques.

The group also visited three universities. In Benguerir, we were guests of Ali Benmakhlouf at Mohammed VI Polytechnic University and had the chance to see his lecture about his recent book, *La Réalité du Passé* (The Reality of the Past). We also met with students of Professor El Amrani in Tetouan at Abdelmalek Essaâdi University for a cultural exchange discussion, and subsequently with post-graduate students of Professor Bekkaoui at Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdallah University in Fez for a conversation about Moroccan culture, literature, and translation.



Photo by Sara Barrish



Photo by Hannah Sutherland

A Portrait of Fatima Matousse

By Kevin Ruiz

Born in Agadir, Morocco, Fatima Matousse is an emerging filmmaker who joined us on our journey throughout different Moroccan cities. Born and raised near Agadir, she completed her master's degree in cultural studies at Sidi Mohammed Ben Abdallah University in Fes, after which she pursued an MFA in documentary filmmaking on a Fulbright Scholarship at The City College of New York.

Fatima has worked on several productions, including *The Forgiven* (2021) and *Cherry* (2021). As an artist, she aims to address social issues and shed light on otherwise overlooked groups. Her next project will focus on topics involving women and child abandonment in Morocco.

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Students said goodbye to Fatima after 3 days with her in Essaouria. One week later, she surprised us at the Mohammed VI Polytechnic University (UMP6), and the joy on everyone's faces was a sight to see. It was clear she had become an important member of the group.

It was also there at UMP6 where we got to see her short film, *Family in Exile*, for the second time, a film that she produced while attending The City College of New York. Her film explored her complex family dynamics: her relationships with the women in her life and her father. The film highlights some key cultural themes while capturing the specific story of her family. Throughout the film we see Fatima interacting with her mother, grandmother, and aunt, all while exploring their daily routines. It is shot in her native language, Tashlhiyt.

As students, we could ask Fatima anything, and learned much about Morocco just by talking to her. She provided us with insightful knowledge on each city and their unique traditions. But as individuals, we came to see her as family. She brought a wonderful, lively attitude to the group.

The first thing that comes to mind when I think of Fatima is her contagious laugh, which always spreads from person to person. That's the memory I will carry with me of Fatima Matousse: a woman who never fails to put a smile on the faces of the people she's surrounded by. Thank you, Fatima, for being a part of our FIFAA Family, and for the joy you bring to each place you go.

Photo below by Victor Reinking



Photos by Hannah Sutherland



A Vegan in Morocco

By Sadie Halvorsen

Is it possible to be vegan in Morocco? Yes. Are there drawbacks? Also yes.

To start, I ate a lot of vegetable tagine as it was typically the only vegan option. Tagine is similar to a stew, and that's what I got nearly every time we went out to a restaurant. It was usually pretty good, consisting of potatoes, carrots, and zucchini, with the occasional inclusion of peas or chickpeas. Restaurants were hit or miss, sometimes offering just straight up steamed vegetables with a tiny bit of seasoning. The flavor wasn't always the best.

I think the best tagine I had was with my host family. It had potatoes, carrots, preserved lemons, artichokes, and chickpeas. There's also this great appetizer called zaalouk. It's made of cooked eggplant and tomatoes with lots of rich spices. It's traditionally served cold with bread. Zaalouk is one of my favorite dishes because it's so flavorful.

While the vegan food in Morocco is really great, it lacks protein. I ate a lot of nuts, which could be found all over Morocco at nut stands. I most enjoyed these candied peanuts coated in sweet honey and sesame seeds. Still, it was hard to create a balanced diet, and the repetitive tagines could be challenging. This didn't bother me too much, but it would've been nice to have a bit more variety. To vegans or vegetarians coming here for travel or school, be prepared!

Photo by
Hannah
Sutherland



Botanical Hiking Adventure with Mountain Monkeys

By Schuyler Dull

We spent one of our many sunny, blue-skied days in Morocco hiking in the Middle Atlas mountains. Taking a van ride up from Fes, we first stopped in Ifrane, a town you would never expect to see in Morocco. We had suddenly arrived at... a Swiss alpine village?

You read that right—all of the architecture in the town of Ifrane was modeled after the kind you would find on an ultimate skiing getaway in Switzerland. Why? Colonial settlers built the town to escape from the heat of the coasts, while also providing a quick fix to any homesickness. The town is a royal favorite, however, as it's home to a palace especially made for the king. Taking a quick stroll through the town, you'll also find... an American university? That's right, the Swiss-style town is also home to Al Akhawayn, an English-language and American curriculum based university.

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Moving on from that enigma, we wound our way up through the forest and shopped at an artisanal center in Azrou. Here we found face creams made of crushed snail shells, argan oil serums, hand-woven rugs, and carved cedarwood objects. It's here that we finally meet our guide, an eccentric botanist and health-guru named Khalid (who Victor swears gets younger every year).

This statement comes at no surprise as he leads us up the steep mountainside and begins rattling off the names of the plants all around us along with their health benefits. We quickly found that a vast range of medicinal herbs, saps and roots surrounded us everywhere we went.

The steep hike up to the top of the mountain was more than worth it for the show-stopping view. Below us laid rolling cedarwood mountains with villages tucked neatly into valleys, and blue sky as far as the eye could see. If you thought it stopped there, though, get ready for this. Should you venture along the mountainsides of Ifrane, make sure you greet the monkeys! Called the barbary macaque, they live in peaceful packs. Just a tip, though: keep your most enticing snacks for the road inside your bag...



Photos by Hannah Sutherland

A Note From the Editor

These newsletters serve twofold: to inform and to encourage. Our goal is to share real, lived experiences with those curious about this program and to provide context. This means maintaining a level of honesty, sincerity, and integrity.

Travel is not always simple; walking into another culture means stepping into the light, as well as the shadows. The following article tackles the issue of racial stereotyping in Morocco. Thank you to the authors for your contribution, and for sharing your stories.

Racism in Morocco

By Sadie Halvorsen,
Sophia Hounton &
Hannah Sutherland

Morocco was an eye-opening experience, especially as people of color. Drawing from our personal experiences as Asian-American and African-American students, we found ourselves in a conflicting relationship with Morocco and its people. Our first impression of Morocco was that it was a warm and welcoming country, specifically in regards to the acceptance of different races. Although this sentiment holds some truth, our personal experiences reflect a different story.

As Asian-American students, we (Hannah and Sadie) experienced street harassment on multiple occasions. People would shout “ni hao!” at us, disregarding the diversity of Asia. In our conversations with Moroccans, we often had to explain and defend our American nationality. Moroccans struggled to grasp the idea that Asians could be American, due to an assumption that the U.S. consists of only white people. There was a sense of ignorance, but also an intolerance to the fact.

As for the Black experience in the country, I (Sophia) had been warned beforehand by Black family members who had lived in Morocco for years to be careful of the anti-Blackness that permeates the country. Morocco, especially in major cities, has a large population of Black African migrants that face discrimination on a daily basis. I had heard recounts from my Moroccan peers about stereotypes of dark-skinned Black immigrants. Skin tone played a large factor into this, as I did not face nearly as much discrimination as dark-skinned Black people.

All of these ideas are accepted by the general public. However, when we met with other university students, they didn't agree with these sentiments, and understood the complex diversity of America. All of these racist experiences left us feeling othered, excluded, and defeated. We did not experience the same level of acceptance which our white peers received, though the trip was overall enlightening. It is known that people of color face more risks when they travel; though our experiences are specific to Morocco, racial stereotyping and discrimination happens both inside and outside of the U.S.

Moments from Students

Pictured right: Sophia Hounton walking along the streets of Essaouira

Pictured below (left to right): Lorenzo Monteiro-Clewell playing the oud on a beach in Tetouan, a monkey in the Middle-Atlas Mountain forest, Schuyler Dull at the American Language Center in Fes



Photo by Victor Reinking



Photo by Victor Reinking



Photos above by Hannah Sutherland



Photo by Hannah Sutherland

An extra special thank you to Professor Victor Reinking for leading us through the streets of Paris and across the mountains of Morocco.

*Et pour ceux qui en rêvent
Comme je fais ici*

~ Jules Supervielle



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