

## 29.11.2016 Casablanca

Today we want to visit Casablanca and start early to avoid morning rush hour into town. The traffic gets heavier the closer we get to the city center, but luckily it is less stressing than we expected.



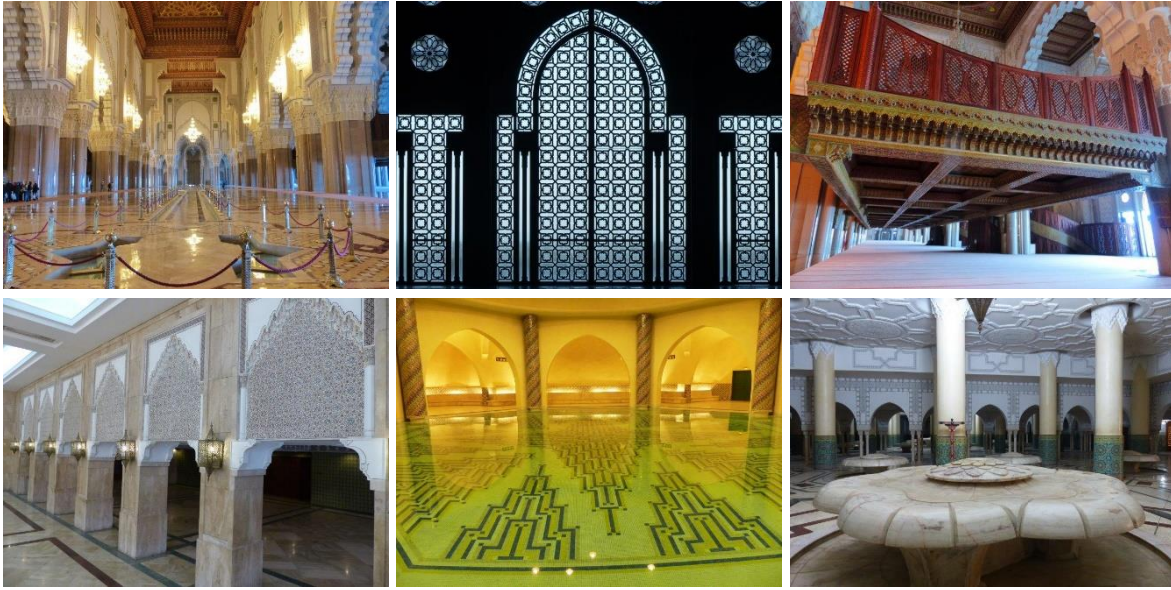
Our destination is the Mosque Hassan II – the main attraction of Casablanca. The mosque was built directly at and even on the water (on pillars).



We find an ideal parking spot very close to the mosque and get to know Elke and Christian, who later park with their Actionmobil directly behind us.



During the guided tour we learn that this mosque is the 3<sup>rd</sup> biggest mosque in the world (after Mecca and Medina). She offers space for 20.000 believers and has cedar wood clad inner balconies where women are allowed in. The mosque stands on 200 pillars 60m long, the minaret with a height of 200m is the highest minaret in the world. The minaret is equipped with a laser beam which can shine 35km towards Mecca. On the outside the mosque is clad with titanium as a protection against the salty sea water. Six years of construction were finished in 1993. They tried to use as much local material as possible, i.e. marble from Ouarzazate or cedar wood from the Atlas Mountains. The roof can be opened electronically, a 'Cabrio Mosque'. The total cost of around 600 Mio. Euro were also financed with donations from the citizens (however these donations were not always fully voluntarily they say).



What a difference to be in a big city again, after so many weeks in the bush and on the tracks. High rise buildings, traffic, a tram!



In Casablanca we want of course to see the medina (old town) and this one turns out to be one of the busiest we have seen so far. And the one with the best pita bread of all of Morocco. It's fresh out of the oven, still very hot and tastes so delicious, that we finish it up on the spot instead of taking it home. We have to go back to get another one. Well, it's not that we didn't have any pita bread in the last two months.



The Quartier Habous (also known as New Medina) has been recommended to us, so we pay a visit. This quarter was built in the 1930s by the French who wanted to create living space.

To find parking is a bit of a challenge, we have to drive through very narrow archways where we thought we would never ever fit underneath. But we manage and can finally explore the area. It is really a pretty area, actually this is how you would imagine "Morocco". The olive souk is a dream, we can't resist and stock up plenty on olives.





However, afterwards we have to fight our way through evening rush hour. The whole street is one big traffic jam, all traffic lights are always on red, pushy taxi drivers barge their way through. About 20km past Casablanca we just park at a fuel stop where a few other trucks are standing. Enough street fighting for today, this was tiring.

### 30.11.2016 Rabat

Today we want to drive to Rabat, the capital of Morocco, the King's residence and home to the biggest university of the country. 1912 the then reigning French governor decided to move the sultan's palace from Fes to Rabat.

On the way we see a big group of storks and can watch a horse market located right next to the road.



The road R322 along the Atlantic coast leads through Skhirat, where a summer palace of the king is located. Therefore the road is kept very clean. We have not seen so many street cleaners in action ever before. Unfortunately, they only pay attention to cleanliness around a royal residence.

In Rabat there is a convenient parking place close to city center where camper vans are officially allowed to camp. It is located between the river mouth of the Bou Regreg and the end of the tunnel undercrossing the old town, near the medina and not far of the Kasbah Oudaias. This hint we got from Elke and Christian, whom we are going to meet here.



Together we visit the medina, where we can stroll along undisturbed, the mausoleum of King Mohammed V, who led Morocco into independence, and the Hassan Tower. The Hassan Tower, originally planned as a minaret, was never finished and even more destroyed by an earthquake in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.



At dusk we stroll through the worth seeing Kasbah Oudaias located on a cliff above us. She was built in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and extended in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. From the terrace one has a great view over the Atlantic Ocean and the town in its evening lights.

In order to get to terrace one has to pass a little gate where a guard is watching. The guard is pointing at his watch and gesturing that it is late already. But he will do us a favor and let us through anyways. Thankful for letting us through we give him a tip.

And have learned a new trick for free. Because as we pass by again a few hours later after dinner, we realize, that he is still letting visitors on the terrace with the same gestures of pointing at his watch, shrugging his shoulders and opening the gate etc. We also see that most people give him a tip because the guard is so generous...



### 1.12.2016 Fes

We drive together with Elke and Christian via Meknes to Fes. Between Meknes and Fes is a big wine growing area with the biggest state-owned winery of Morocco the Domaine de Sahari. Mainly red wines are produced here. But we couldn't figure out where to buy Moroccan wine and where to be able to give it a try. Although Meknes is one of the four royal cities we give it a miss.



In Morocco it is possible to walk into an oil pressing plant and buy olive oil directly of the producer. We stop at several olive oil pressing plants to do a bit of market research. It is usually possible to taste the oil, mostly they offer some oil poured on a

plate together with some pita bread. It is very interesting how different the olive oil taste from producer to producer. The cold pressed, very fresh olive oil is murky and taste unexpectedly very hot (as in spicy hot), making one cough. Only with time the oil becomes clear, when the polyphenol is evaporating. After a few tasting we feel like the olive oil experts and can talk shop with the traders.



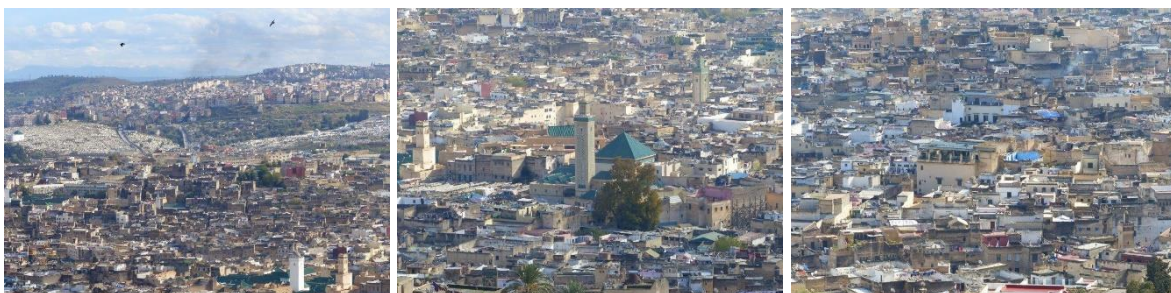
The olive farmers bring their own olives to the press. Several barrels full with olive oil are placed around, all tagged with the name of their rightful owners.

The advantages and application spectrum of olive oil are explained to us in all length and all details. You can eat it for breakfast, for lunch, in fact for any meal, use it as hand cream, for your hair and much more...

We arrive in Fes with a few litres of olive oil on board.

Fes is the oldest of the four royal cities of Morocco – that being Rabat, Marrakech and Meknes. It has about 1 Mio inhabitants and is therefore also the third biggest city of the country, after Casablanca and Rabat.

First we drive to a viewing point, where we can admire the whole city from above. The amount of houses are impressive to watch.



We walk around and discover tanned leather skins which have been dyed and are now spread out to dry. What a colourful spectacle! Only at second sight we realize, that the skins are actually drying on gravestones and that we are in fact standing on a grave yard!



Hundreds of photos later we drive into town. It is possible to park on the Place Bou Jeloud, directly opposite the main entrance to the medina. For a fee we can also stay overnight and the parking is guarded as well. We couldn't possibly park any nearer to the city. Only about 100m away is the blue gate Bab Bou Jeloud, entrance to the old town. The blue gate is supposedly the most photographed gate of Morocco.





We lose no time to start exploring the huge old town of Fes, which is since 1976 under the protection of UNESCO. One alley leads to the next, behind every corner there is something new to discover. A few times we get lost, but find back on track due to the jogging app which we use. Well, we can't get lost as long as we have enough battery life... It's amazing how we don't notice how many kilometers we have walked in the medina.



Fes is famous for its leather goods and leather ware. There are still a few active tanneries around. We discover a small sign and look for the mentioned tannery, but it is not so easy to find, although we ask quite a few people. In fact, the locals like to make an earning by leading tourists to these hard to find tanneries.





**2.12.2016 Fes**

Together with Elke and Christian we want to visit the biggest tannery of Fes. Also this time the tannery is not easy to find. We find a way which leads through the back door of a shop selling all kind of leather goods. It's a big convoluted store, full with bags, shoes, clothes and anything you can imagine made from leather. A few narrow stairs lead upstairs and finally we are on the roof and have full view of the tannery. It's amazing, there is so much to see and discover. Only the smell of ammoniac is very strong and annoying.





We stay for quite a while on the roof and just look before we start exploring the town of Fes again. This time we walk about 15km. Since it is Friday, most of the shops are closed. But now we can see the buildings and their architecture much better, as usually they are hidden behind all the stuff piling up or hanging down on display for sale. Soon the rain starts again and by afternoon it is raining so heavily that we have no choice but retreat into our room.

