Ayelet TOURS

THE MEMORIES LAST FOREVER!

Ayelet Tours Traveling University Jewish Heritage Adventure in

MOROCCO

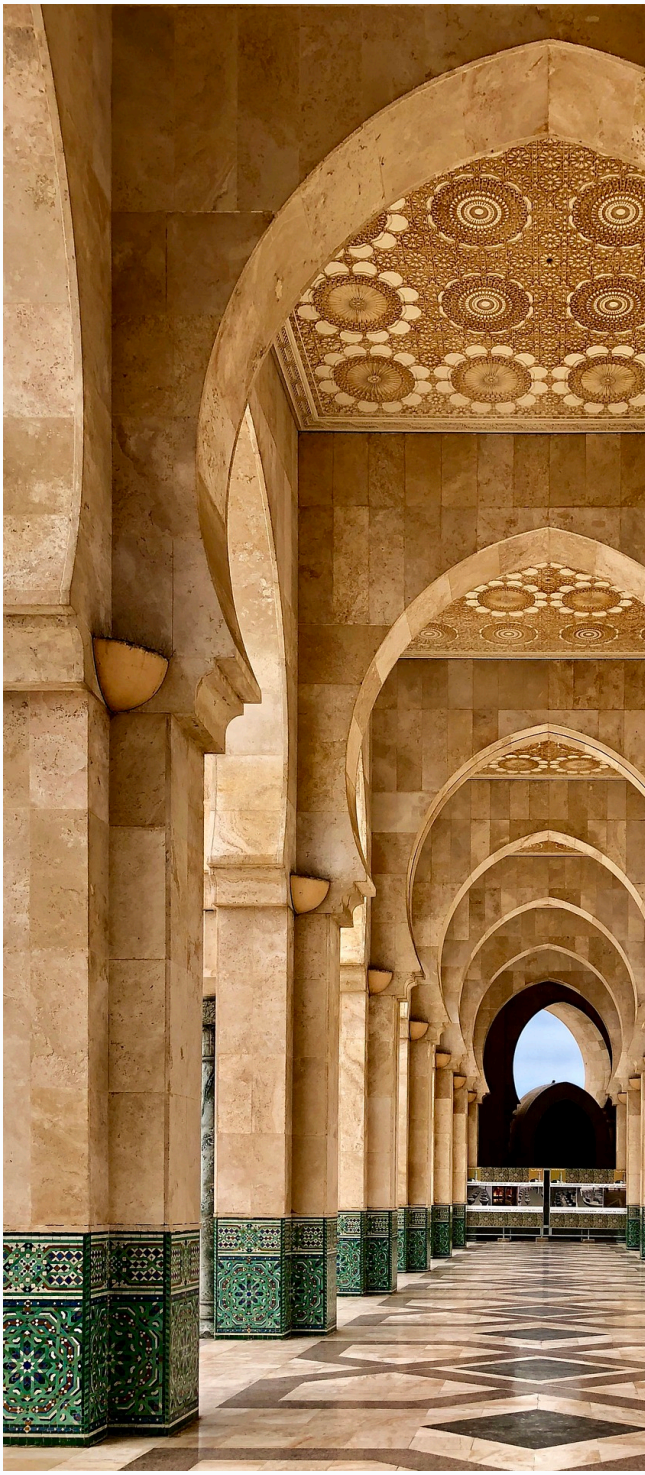
March 25 - April 5, 2025

with Professor Yale Strom & Dani Rotstein



Ayelet Tours Traveling University
Jewish Heritage Adventure to
Morocco

March 25 - April 5, 2025



DAY 1 TUESDAY, MARCH 25, 2025
WELCOME TO MOROCCO!

- We depart the United States on our overnight flights to Morocco.
  (Contact Ayelet Tours for assistance booking flights).

DAY 2 WEDNESDAY, MARCH 26, 2025
WELCOME TO MOROCCO!

- We arrive at **Casablanca International Airport**, where we are met by an Ayelet Tours representative who will walk us through customs and baggage claim.
- We drive toward the city of **Casablanca**, Morocco's cosmopolitan economic and business capital. Originally, a Phoenician and Roman city, Casablanca is home to the largest Jewish community in the Arab world.
- We **pick up pre-arrivals** at the hotel around 11am and meet our tour educator who will accompany us on this journey of education and inspiration.
- ***Casablanca – The Beginning of a Beautiful Friendship:*** Get your first glimpse of Casablanca on a tour of Morocco's economic hub and largest city. We'll experience its energy and discuss whether the modern and modernizing Casablanca you'll explore has anything in common with the version seen in the classic Hollywood film starring Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman.
- ***The Glory of Moroccan Jewry:*** We walk through Morocco's rich Jewish heritage at the **Jewish Museum of Morocco**, the Arab world's first Jewish museum. According to legend, Jews arrived in Morocco as early as 800 BCE. By 1948, the Jewish population had grown to an estimated 250-350,000 and was the largest and arguably most integrated Jewish community in any Muslim country. The museum includes displays of traditional Jewish-Berber clothing and a feature on goldsmiths, a common Jewish occupation in Morocco.
- We enjoy **lunch** together nearby.
- Following lunch, we visit **Neve Shalom Synagogue and school**, where we meet with **Rabbi Jacky Sebbag** to hear about the challenges of living a Jewish life in Morocco today.
- After our introduction to the city and the Jewish community of Morocco, we check into our hotel with time to refresh.
- This evening, we enjoy our **welcome dinner** together! The evening and indeed our entire Moroccan adventure will be a chance to experience the unity and diversity of the Jewish world and people. While many of us are familiar with Ashkenazi Jewish culture, Morocco was for centuries one of the great centers of Sephardi Judaism. We'll hear from our tour educator about Morocco's once large and thriving Jewish communities, discuss why Jews left Morocco en masse beginning in the 1950s and find out about the Moroccan Jews of today.

Overnight in Casablanca (L, D)

DAY 3 THURSDAY, MARCH 27, 2025
GETTING TO KNOW CASABLANCA

- Breakfast at our hotel.
- ***God's Throne Upon the Water:*** Fast-moving Casablanca is also a city of faith, as we'll experience at the **Mosque of Hassan II.** This modern mosque has room for over 100,000 worshipers. It is perched dramatically over the ocean to reflect a verse in the Koran that "God's throne was built upon the water." Over 6,000 master craftspeople created its hand-carved marble walls, retractable roof and the tallest minaret in the world at almost 700 feet. See if you agree with the builder's patron, King Hassan II, that this is a monument that Casablanca will be proud of "until the end of time."
- We continue to **Bet El Synagogue**, where we view the beautiful stained-glass windows and architecture and learn about the rich history of this synagogue that many consider the center of Judaism in Casablanca.
- We stop by the **Fhal Jewish bakery** to sample the delicious treats!
- Next, we visit Casablanca's Jewish old age home, **Home Des Vieux La Villa**. While here, we meet residents and connect with the elderly Jewish community members who receive full residential, medical and dental care, as well as social facilities. The home has also been a refuge for elderly who come from the provinces who can no longer take care of themselves.
- This afternoon, we enjoy **lunch at Rick's Café**, created to evoke the architecture and atmosphere of the classic film.
- ***Mellah of Casablanca:*** The mellah was a former Jewish quarter similar to a European ghetto. It tantalizes the senses with a sea of women in brightly colored djellabas carrying and selling fruit and vegetables throughout the cramped, narrow streets. While Jews no longer live in the mellah, kosher butchers are found in the old market.
- ***Boulevard Mohamed El Hansali:*** We stroll down the boulevard with its exotic bazaars, **Mohammed V square**, the new **Medina Royal Palace** and **Anfa Hill**, the meeting place of Roosevelt and Churchill at the Casablanca Conference during World War II.
- This evening, we we set out to explore and enjoy dinner on own.

Overnight in Casablanca (B, L)



DAY 4 FRIDAY, MARCH 28, 2025
ON THE ROAD TO MARRAKECH

- Breakfast and check out of our hotel.
- Today, we depart for **Marrakech**, city of palm trees and gardens at the edge of the Sahara Desert. Jews have lived in Marrakech since the first century. Marrakech sees a lot of Jewish visitors, including many flocking from Israel to experience its unique culture and Jewish history.
- Along our drive to Marrakech, we enjoy a **lecture and music** by Yale.
- Lunch on own en route.

- ***Carnivals and Piety:*** We enjoy an **introductory tour of Marrakech** and get our first glimpse into this whirlwind of a city, which combines the madcap energy of its marketplaces with the serene rhythms of its religious life.
- ***Coexistence, Conflict or Both – Jews and Muslims:*** We tour the **mellah** (the Jewish quarter) of Marrakech. Until the 20th century, most urban Moroccan Jews, including in Marrakech, lived in walled, Jewish-only areas. We'll explore whether these quarters resembled the ghettos of Europe or were something quite different, as we discuss the sometimes close, sometimes brutal relations between Jews and Muslims in Morocco. Our tour will include:
    - **Slat Al Azama Synagogue ("Synagogue of the Exiles"):** This synagogue was established around 1492 by Jews who were expelled or fled from Catholic persecution in Spain and Portugal. The synagogue's ornamentation, attractive blue-and-white décor and small but still active community are all examples of how the Jewish traditions of Marrakech are being maintained.
    - **Marrakech's Jewish cemetery:** The cemetery has been recently restored after years of neglect. Here, we'll see monuments and graves commemorating children who perished during the epidemics that ravished the city's crowded Jewish Quarter in the 17th century. We learn about the great rabbis and kabbalists of Marrakech and discuss why many Jews from around the world make pilgrimages to their graves.
- ***A Square That's Hip:*** The **Djemaa El Fna Square** is an enormous market and a thrilling experience. According to one theory, its name means "the assembly of the dead" and refers to the public executions that used to take place here. Today, this square teems with life. Locals gather to shop, talk and to eat some of the best street food in all of Morocco. There's always something going on, so get ready for a daily carnival of snake charmers, street vendors, musicians, storytellers and acrobats.
- This evening, we join together for **Kabbalat Shabbat** with a local congregation, followed by a delicious **Shabbat dinner**.

Overnight in Marrakech (B, D)



DAY 5 SATURDAY, MARCH 29, 2025
THE FRENCH CONNECTION

- Breakfast at our hotel.
- ***The Holocaust and Morocco:*** Professor Strom will tell us about the Moroccan story of the Holocaust.
- ***OPTIONAL: A Sea Made of Rock and Sand:*** We depart for the stark beauty of the desert in the **Agafay region**. Upon arrival, we **board a camel** for a short ride and take a trip into the past where camels were the main mode of transport in this region. We also enjoy a lovely **desert lunch** at one of the area's eco-camps before returning to the city.
- ***The French Connection:*** Morocco is a melting pot of identities and influences ranging from its indigenous Berber tribes to more recent visitors, including the French, who ruled over much of the country from 1912 to 1955. We'll spend time in the **French Quarter** and visit **Majorelle Garden**, designed by the French painter and botanist, Jacques Majorelle. The garden and buildings took him 40 years to create, but you will think it was time well spent as we wander along the paths by sparkling pools shaded by gorgeous trees and plants from around the world.
- We meet again at sundown for a special musical **Havdallah**, followed by **dinner** together at **Umayya Restaurant**.

Overnight in the Marrakech (B, L, D)

DAY 6 SUNDAY, MARCH 30, 2025
A DAY IN ESSAOUIRA

- Breakfast at our hotel and an early morning departure towards the coast.
- ***Good for the Skin, Body & Soul:*** Along the way, we see many Argan trees, important to the region both economically and ecologically. At the **women's cooperative of Argan oil,** there will be an opportunity to learn about the wide-ranging applications of the oil from cosmetics to medicines.
- ***Essaouira:*** We continue to **Essaouira**, once a majority Jewish city. Although originally Portuguese, Essaouira was fortified by a French-influenced architect named Vauban and also formed the settling ground for a large Jewish population, which is why the city has an eclectic, multicultural feel. The town was once over thirty percent Jewish and contained over thirty synagogues, some dating back to the 18th century.
- ***Rabbi Chaim Pinto:*** The seaport city of Essaouira is still synonymous with the famed rabbi and remained his home all his life. Every year on the anniversary of Rabbi Pinto's death, Jews from around the world pilgrimage in the week preceding Rosh Hashanah and pray at the rabbi's grave situated in the old Jewish cemetery adjacent to the Atlantic Ocean. Essaouira is also home to the **Chaim Pinto Synagogue**, the building that was once the rabbi's residence and is now a historic site.
- After **lunch** at a local restaurant, we check out the impressive **Bayt Dalkira Jewish Museum**.
- We return to Marrakech and enjoy **dinner** together at our hotel.

Overnight in Marrakech (B, L, D)

DAY 7 MONDAY, MARCH 31, 2025
A TASTE OF MOROCCO

- Breakfast at our hotel.
- ***Preserving the Past, Building a Future:*** Named after the traditional Jewish Moroccan celebrations held at the end of Passover, Association Mimouna is an organization of Muslim students who honor the country's Jewish traditions and promote Jewish-Muslim friendship. We'll meet some of the students and hear of their activities, which range from kosher cooking workshops to organizing one of the Islamic world's first conferences commemorating victims of the Holocaust.
- ***The View (and Taste) from the Inside - Bringing it Home With You:*** *We take part in a* **Moroccan home-cooking workshop** and enjoy **lunch** of our own making.
- ***Royal Splendors:*** We tour the **medina** (walled city) of Marrakech, one of Morocco's four imperial cities, also known as the Red City for the red walls that surround it. The medina is a thrilling, multifaceted area which includes:
  - **Bab Agnaou:** A huge, superbly decorated gate allowing entrance into the royal city.
  - **The Saadian Tombs:** The tombs provide lavish insights into the wealth and power structure of the Saadian dynasty that ruled Morocco from 1549 to 1659. The greatest of their kings, Ahmed al-Mansour, is buried in the magnificent Chamber of 12 Pillars in a tomb made from Italian marble and gilded with pure gold. Less exalted princes and rulers from the dynasty are buried nearby. The royal wives, chancellors and the king's Jewish advisers were "relegated" to graves in the still impressive gardens.
  - **Bahia Palace:** Built in the late 19th century by Morocco's leading artisans, many consider this to be the finest palace built anywhere in the world during this time. Certainly, its architecture, gardens and design render it a remarkable achievement of Moroccan culture. Among its features is a harem, where vizier Abu Ahmed's four wives and 24 concubines lived.
- After an **early dinner**, we transfer to the airport for our **flight to Fes**, checking into our hotel upon arrival.

Overnight in Fes (B, L, D)

DAY 8 TUESDAY, APRIL 1, 2025
THE MYSTERIES OF FES

- Breakfast at our hotel.
- ***"The Athens of Africa, The Mecca of the West":*** Fes is one of the great medieval cities of the world. It gained its nicknames due to its scholars (both Muslim and Jewish), spirituality, trade and culture. In the 12th and 13th centuries, Fes was among the world's most populated cities and the home of the Marinid kingdom. We'll learn about the kings, communities and creativity that drove Fes as we experience the beauty ansd liveliness of the city today.
- ***A Thousand Years and More – Jewish Life in Fes:*** Despite suffering from periodic persecutions, Fes's **Jewish Quarter** was home to brilliant scholars, poets and innovators. We'll travel back in time to the Golden Age for Jews in Fes from the 8th to 12th centuries, when the community included some key figures in the Jewish world, including Rabbi Moses Maimonides (the Rambam), the great philosopher and religious thinker. We'll also find out why the name for a Jewish quarter comes from the Arab word for salt. Our tour will include a visit to the **Ibn Danan Synagogue**. Recently restored, this is one of the oldest and most important synagogues in North Africa.
- ***The Fes Jewish Cemetery:*** We will hear stories of some of the city's legendary rabbis and leaders who are buried here and learn about the influence of the tzaddikim, Jewish holy men who were admired by both Jews and Muslims for their scholarliness and reputation as miracle-workers. We will also stop at a plaque commemorating **Sol Hachuel**, a young Jewish woman famed for her beauty who was decapitated in 1834 for refusing to convert to Islam.
- ***Finding Fes:*** Fes's **medina** is a dense maze of alleyways and streets and the largest car-free pedestrian zone in the world. Don't worry, our tour educator knows the way through this UNESCO World Heritage site that still includes many buildings, mosques and gates from the 12th century. Our visit will include:
  - **Local craftsmen:** Catch a glimpse of the craftsmen at work in their shops as they weave, embroider, carve and chisel using ancient techniques.
  - **University of Al-Karaouine:** Believed to be the oldest continuously operating university in the world and founded as a mosque, today, non-Muslims can view it only from the outside. In the 12th century, the Rambam (Moses Ben Maimonides) studeied medicine and philosophy here.
  - **Nejjarine fountain:** A traditional public fountain located in the center of Al-Najjarin Square.
  - **Madrasa Bou Inania:** Fes contains some of the finest Islamic architecture in the world. This Madrasa (Islamic religious college) was established in 1351 and is famed for its minaret and geometric decorations. It is one of the few Islamic sites in Morocco that is accessible to Muslim visitors.
- We stop for lunch on own at a local restaurant along the way.
- We continue to the **"Arabian house"**, a gathering place for craftsman still working in the old oriental tradition.
- ***The Scent of Fes:*** Fes is known for its leather goods and it great stretch of tanneries that give the city its distinctive smell. We'll visit the Chouara Tannery, where traditional ways of making leather are still practiced.
- We return to our hotel to freshen up, followed by **dinner** together this evening.

Overnight in Fes (B, D)

DAY 9 WEDNESDAY, APRIL 2, 2025
EXPLORING THE BERBERS

- Breakfast at our hotel.
- ***OPTIONAL: Taking the High Road:*** A 45-minute drive from Fes will take us to the city of **Sefrou**, known for its historical Jewish population and annual cherry festival. The town was named for the Berber tribe Ahel Sefrou that once lived here.
- ***Where Hospitality is King:*** One of the features and joys of Berber life is their famed hospitality. We enjoy a **traditional Berber lunch** and meet local Berbers. With your guide as translator, we will hear about their background while drinking the beverage closely associated with hospitality and friendship in Morocco, mint tea.
- We return to Fes for a relaxed evening and dinner on own. ***Those note traveling to Sefrou will have the day at leisure in Fes.*

Overnight in Fes (B, L)

DAY 10 THURSDAY, APRIL 3, 2025
MEKNES

- Breakfast and check out of our hotel.
- Today, we depart Fes and make our way towards Morocco's royal capital city of **Rabat**.
- First, we drive to Meknes, located on a fertile plain north of the Middle Atlas and the former residence of the Sultan.
- ***City of a Tyrant:*** We'll examine the superb architecture of Meknes created during the long reign of Moulay Ismail, with its skillful blend of Islamic and European influences. At this finely decorated mausoleum, we'll also consider the less attractive characteristics of "Moulay the Bloodthirsty" who is said to have ordered the city walls to be decorated with the heads of 10,000 of his enemies.
- We enjoy **lunch** together at the **Le Bistro Hotel Transatlantique** overlooking the city walls.
- ***Wives and Horses:*** While the Torah warns that a king should not acquire extra horses, a multitude of wives, or excessive amounts of silver and gold, Moulay Ismail took a different approach. He is believed to have had 2,000 wives and concubines who bore him 867 children, although he seems to have been fondest of his 12,000 horses. The Royal Stables here are under renovation and cannot be visited at this time, but we'll see the opulent **Bab Mansour gate**.
- ***What Was and What Remains:*** We meet with the caretaker of a **now-empty synagogue** and discuss the transformation of Jewish life in Morocco. The mass migration of the country's Jews began after the establishment of the State of Israel and accelerated when Morocco gained independence in 1956 from its French rulers. Today, only a few thousand Jews remain. We will talk about Jewish life in Morocco in the past and today and find out why people, often Jews but sometimes Muslims, are determined to maintain these once-crowded places of worship.
- We continue to **Rabat** and check into our hotel before heading out for **dinner** at a local restaurant.

Overnight in Rabat (B, L, D)



DAY 11 FRIDAY, APRIL 4, 2025
RABAT

- Breakfast at our hotel.
- ***The Kings and the Jews:*** Our tour of Rabat will allow us to experience the huge role, historically and currently, that the king plays in Moroccan life. We will walk around the walls of Rabat's **Royal Palace**, the primary (although certainly not the only) residence of the current king, Mohammed VI, and ask whether modern Morocco is an autocracy, a democracy or something in between.
- ***Insight to Remember:*** We'll enjoy **lunch** in a local restaurant and a **presentation by Dr. Mohamed Chtatou**, Professor of Education Science at the university in Rabat. He is currently a political analyst with Moroccan, Gulf, French, Italian and British media on politics and culture in the Middle East, Islam and Islamism as well as terrorism. He is also a specialist on political Islam in the MENA region with interest in the roots of terrorism and religious extremism.
- ***"There are no Jewish citizens, there are no Muslim citizens; they are all Moroccans" – Mohammed V***. Next, we visit the magnificent **mausoleum of Mohammed V**, Morocco's king during World War II, and hear why Moroccan Jews today believe that he should be recognized as one of the Righteous Among the Nations for helping to stop Nazis from deporting Morocco's Jews to the death camps of Europe. His burial building is considered an architectural masterpiece. Also buried here is his son, Hassan II, who ruled over Morocco during the so-called "Years of Lead" (1961-1999). We'll visit his tomb and hear about this period of conflict, human rights abuses and assassination attempts on the king's life. It was during Hassan's reign that most of the country's Jews migrated to Israel, Canada and France.
- ***A Treat for the Eyes:*** We make our way up to the **Kasbah des Udayas**. This citadel is the oldest part of Rabat, dating back to the 12th century. Sitting high above the river and the Atlantic Ocean, it features gorgeously decorated gates, blue and whitewashed homes and French-influenced gardens.
- ***What We've Seen and Felt During Our Journey:*** Savor, one more time, Morocco's terrific food, with a **farewell Shabbat dinner** at a local restaurant. There will also be an opportunity to share the experiences and discoveries that have inspired you during our Moroccan adventure as we get ready to say wadaeaan (goodbye) and see you soon to Morocco.

Overnight in Rabat (B, L, D)

THE MEMORIES LAST FOREVER!!

itinerary subject to change

DAY 12 SATURDAY, APRIL 5, 2025
UNTIL WE MEET AGAIN

- Breakfast and check out of our hotel.
- We transfer on own to the Casablanca Airport for our flights home, landing later today.

YOUR TOUR LEADERS:



Professor Yale Strom *is an acclaimed violinist, composer, filmmaker, writer, photographer, playwright and a pioneer among revivalists in conducting extensive field research in Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans among the Jewish an Romani communities. Initially, his work focused primarily on the use and performance of klezmer music among these two groups. Gradually, his focus increased to examining all aspects of their culture, from post-World War II to the present. For more than 3 decades and 75 such research expeditions, Strom has become the world's leading ethnographer-artist of klezmer music and history. In addition to his klezmer research Strom has researched, composed and played Jewish music that was influenced by various Arab cultures. This influence can be heard even in klezmer music. Strom will have his thirteenth book published (Shloyml Boyml and His Purim Adventure) in spring 2023. It will be a children's illustrated book (English/Yiddish) based upon his ethnographic research he did in Romania. Strom has lectured extensively throughout the United States, Canada, Europe, Asia and taught at NYU for 4 years, where he created the course "Artist Ethnographer Expeditions". At present he is a professor in the Music Dept. at San Diego State.*



Dani Rostein*, content producer, entrepreneur and storyteller, the New Jersey native spent years traveling the world. When he moved to the Spanish island of Mallorca in 2014 to produce TV commercials, he didn't expect there to be much Jewish life there. His surprising discoveries led to his work on the documentary Xueta Island: A Hidden History, for which he is not only a director, but also a subject. He became involved with the local Jewish community founding Limud Mallorca as well as Jewish Majorca, a company that offers educational tours of Jewish heritage sites around the island.*