

MANCHESTER TO MARRAKECH

OVERVIEW

Tour Date: 8 September 2017 – 7 October 2017

Tour Duration: 30 days

Tour Cost (\$AUD): \$19,990

Single Supplement (\$AUD): \$3,640

Manchester to Marrakech is the latest addition to our expanding portfolio of rail tours. But it is not just for rail buffs: it is a remarkable journey from the heart of the Industrial Revolution in England to the mighty sands of the Sahara Desert in Morocco.

Our tour begins in the great industrial city of Manchester before traversing the Pennines to North Wales. Here we visit Snowdonia National Park and the iconic Welsh villages of Portmeirion and Porthmadog. Heading south-east we reach London and board Eurostar to Paris and onto the volcanic city of Clermont-Ferrand in the French heartland. We explore this spectacular region of the Pyrenees by historical narrow-gauge steam trains which allow us to visit remote valleys where no roads run. These are authentic and unspoiled pockets of Europe. Leaving France, we cross the mountains to Aragon's Zaragoza at the southern fringes of the Pyrenees, before moving across to the Mediterranean coast and the city of Valencia. An absolutely unsung highlight of Europe, this city is steeped in historical significance, and its elegant old architecture sits side by side with ultra-modern buildings. From here we move south to Andalusia and the Moorish heart of Cordoba where Christianity, Judaism and Islam simmer in an ancient urn. We then plunge into British memorabilia as we board Mr Henderson's Railway for the historically and scenically epic train journey to the south coast of Spain where we cross into the British enclave of Gibraltar. Leaving 'The Rock' we take the short journey to an entirely different world, Morocco. In one of the most diverse countries in Africa, we immerse ourselves in the exotic, where great souks, kasbahs, mountains and desert sands leave a lasting impression on the mind. Manchester to Marrakech is a journey of nearly 6,000km; an ultimate *Adventure of a Lifetime!*

Tour Fitness Level: Active

MANCHESTER TO MARRAKECH – 8 SEP 2017

TOUR ITINERARY

08/09/2017 Australia – Dubai

Depart from your chosen Australian airport on the Emirates flight to Dubai. On arrival we connect with our flight to Manchester.

09/09/2017 Dubai – Manchester (D)

Depart Dubai Emirates EK017, 07.25

Arrive Manchester 11.55

On arrival in Manchester we complete our customs and immigration formalities then transfer to our hotel.

The Midland Manchester

Manchester

10/09/2017 Manchester (BLD)

Today we begin our exploration of the city starting with a visit of the old docks area. Originally a working port, the last of the working docks was closed in 1982 when it was redeveloped into a thriving arts centre with museums, residential apartments and office buildings. Our tour continues with a visit to the Museum of Transport, a reminder of a tranquil age when mighty buses and trams were the most familiar forms of transport for this working city. This afternoon we enjoy a canal boat tour along Manchester's waterways.

11/09/2017 Manchester – Bangor – Caenarfon (BLD)

Built in 1842, Manchester's Piccadilly station is one of the most historic railway hubs in England. This morning we transfer to the station and board our train travelling the famous South TransPennine route to the Welsh town of Bangor.

Depart Manchester TransPennine, 08.50

Arrive Bangor 10.51

On arrival in Bangor we transfer to Llanberis station for our two hour journey on the fabled Mt Snowdon railway for sensational views over Snowdonia National Park. We travel to Snowdon's summit – the rooftop of Wales – before returning to Llanberis. Here we board another famous narrow-gauge steam train for the journey around Llanberis Lake, taking in Llyn Peris and the Llanberis Pass. Soon we see the great Dolbadarn Castle and the village of Llanberis on the opposite shore as the incredible mountain ranges of Snowdonia slowly unfold. From here the line starts to run on a ledge built right on the shore of the lake before arriving at the terminus of Gilfach Ddu station. We then transfer by bus for the short journey to Caenarfon.

Celtic Royal Hotel

Caenarfon

12/09/2017 Caenarfon (BLD)

A Royal town with some 10,000 inhabitants, Caenarfon has been inhabited since pre-Roman times. It is dominated by King Edward I's impressive medieval fortress, built to secure his foothold in Wales after the death of the last Prince of Wales. Indeed Caenarfon's Royal connections go from ancient Celtic chieftains to the present day, with the investiture in 1969 of Prince Charles as the present Prince of Wales. This morning we explore what is without doubt one of the most impressive castles in the world.

13/09/2017 Caenarfon – Portmeirion (BLD)

After breakfast we board the Welsh Highland Railway for the 40km journey to Porthmadog. Originally built in 1922, the line fell into receivership during World War II before a group of railway enthusiasts formed a restoration society and worked tirelessly for more than 20 years to restore the line and commence services again. On arrival in Porthmadog we connect with the oldest independent railway in the world, Ffestiniog, a 21km single line railway which passes through incredible scenery, before reaching the town of Blaenau Ffestiniog. On our arrival we transfer by bus to our hotel in Portmeirion.

Portmeirion Village Hotel

Portmeirion

14/09/2017 Portmeirion – Tallylyn – Portmeirion (BLD)

This morning we make the one-hour journey to the small village of Tywyn, where we board the narrow-gauge steam train that will take us through the most beautiful countryside in mid-Wales. Stopping at several stations en route, the train continues to the wooded ravine of Dolgoch where we alight and walk through the woods to view stunning waterfalls. Rejoining the train we finally arrive at the remote terminus of Nant Gwemol where we disembark. This afternoon we return to Portmeirion and explore the Italianate village which was famously used in the 1960s TV Show 'The Prisoner' starring Patrick McGoohan.

15/09/2017 Portmeirion – Porthmadog – London (BD)

After breakfast we transfer to Porthmadog train station for our journey to London.

Depart Porthmadog 07.47

Arrive London 14.15

On arrival into Euston Station, we transfer to nearby Kings Cross Station and check into the beautifully restored and historic St Pancras Renaissance Hotel.

St Pancras Renaissance Hotel

London

16/09/2017 London – Paris – Clermont-Ferrand (BD)

Our journey today starts at St Pancras station, the terminus for the Eurostar service and gateway to the continent. Opened in 1868, St Pancras is a masterpiece of Victorian Gothic architecture, recognised as one of London's finest Victorian buildings. Here we board the high-speed Eurostar for the lightning-fast journey to Paris.

Depart London St Pancras 07.55

Arrive Paris Gare du Nord 11.27

Some 40 minutes after leaving London the train slows to about 160 km/hr and we enter the Channel Tunnel, to emerge in France 20 minutes later. The scenery continues to flash by during our 300 km/hr trip until, 2¼ hours after leaving St Pancras, we pull into Gare du Nord station in Paris. We then transfer to the train that will take us into the heart of France and the capital of Auvergne, Clermont-Ferrand.

Depart Paris Gare de Paris-Bercy 13.00

Arrive Clermont-Ferrand 16.28

On arrival we transfer to our hotel.

Mercure Clermont-Ferrand Centre Jaude

Clermont-Ferrand

17/09/2017 Clermont-Ferrand (BLD)

Clermont-Ferrand is a vibrant city that sits in the shadows of the Puy-de-Dôme volcano, located at the end of the Chaîne des Puys, a row of 80 volcanoes which also form part of the Tour de France circuit. It is the only city located in Massif Central, a region of dormant volcanoes and wildly beautiful landscapes. This morning we head out to the volcanoes which offer fantastic vistas of the mountains and back

towards the city. In the afternoon we explore the historic centre of the city, where many of the gothic buildings have been carved from volcanic rock from the Volvic quarries. Just minutes from the city centre is the home of Bibendum, better known as the world famous Michelin Man! Our fascinating tour of the exhibition centre includes many objects from the Michelin Heritage collection, some of them unique and on display for the first time including a Bréguet 14 biplane, a Michelin rail car and the Bibendum fountain.

18/09/2017 Clermont-Ferrand – Nimes – Perpignan (BD)

Depart Clermont Ferrand 06.47

Arrive Nimes 11.51

Leaving Clermont-Ferrand this morning, our spectacular journey takes us through the upper end of the Allier Gorge across the Massif Central and on through the Cevennes Mountains travelling through a series of twists, viaducts and tunnels that eventually drop down to Nimes. This 2,000-year-old city is home to magnificent Roman masterpieces, contemporary architecture and wonderful gardens that are laid out within an ancient sanctuary. At the centre of the city lies the amphitheatre, built in the 1st century AD, which is simply one of the best-preserved in the world. It is still used for classical music concerts and bullfighting! After our visit to the amphitheatre we continue our walk through the labyrinth of narrow streets which characterise the old walled city. Later we board the train for the short journey to Perpignan.

Depart Nimes 16.12

Soon after leaving Nimes, the train skirts the Mediterranean and then moves inland, threading its way through salt lagoons that are home to vast flocks of flamingos. As we pull into Perpignan we see the shadows of the Pyrenees rising to the west.

Arrive Perpignan 18.45

Quality Hotel Centre Del Mon

Perpignan

19/09/2017 Perpignan (BLD)

Depart Rivesaltes 09.00

Arrive Vers Gorges de L'Aude 11.40

Today we travel to Rivesaltes where we board 'Le Train Rouge' for the magnificent journey to Axat. This 100-year-old narrow-gauge railway is just 60kms in length and takes us through a wide valley, past vast vineyards and castles before climbing through craggy terrain to Axat. Here we take our bus back to Perpignan where we explore the old city along its unique red-marbled pavements.

20/09/2017 Perpignan (BLD)

This morning we board what is perhaps the most famous gem in France and one of the great railway journeys in the world. The Little Yellow Train of the Pyrenees is the historic metre-gauge electric railway which opened in 1909.

Depart Villefranche 09.00

Arrive Mont Louis 10.20

Starting at the town of Villefranche de Conflent, the line rises through a dramatic narrow valley until it reaches the summit of Bolquere Eyne and the mountain station of Mont Louis. Here we leave the train to visit Four Solaire, the world's first giant solar oven. Simple and ingenious technology allows this incredible oven, developed after the Second World War, to reach temperatures of more than 3,000 degrees celsius. We then continue by bus onto a plateau to the nearby village of Saillagouse. After lunch we return to Villafranche by road – a journey which offers fantastic views of the viaducts that we crossed by train earlier in the day. Arriving in Villefranche, we enjoy a walk through this historic UNESCO world heritage site. The entire old city is crammed into a narrow valley floor and is circled by walls which were strengthened

and fortified by the great military architect Vauban in the 17th century. Later we return to Perpignan.

21/09/2017 Perpignan – Zaragoza (BD)

Boarding our Spanish train this morning, we head south travelling through tunnels and terrain flanked by low lying hills, crossing the transparent border after only 30 minutes. Soon we skirt Barcelona, before turning west and entering into the vineyards of Aragon.

Depart Perpignan 11.15

Arrive Zaragoza 14.23

Our fast train will take just over three hours to arrive at our destination Zaragoza, an elegant and fascinating city located on the banks of the fast flowing Rio Ebro. On arrival in the 'city of tapas' we commence a walking tour of one of the great monumental towns in Spain. It was founded some 2,000 years ago, and since then Old-Iberians, Romans, Goths and Arabians have left their indelible mark on the Spanish soul. Yet Zaragoza also has a wealth of wonderful Baroque buildings and museums in a centre that is surrounded by the remains of great Roman walls.

Melia Zaragoza

Zaragoza

22/09/2017 Zaragoza – Monasterio de Piedra – Zaragoza (BLD)

This morning we head out of Zaragoza to one of the most extraordinary natural parks in Europe, Monasterio de Piedra. Here, in one of the most barren areas of Spain, a network of paths, tunnels, waterfalls and gardens are linked in the dramatic karst topography of the Peidra River Canyon. The park itself is host to endangered fish, flying salmon and diverse forests. After our visit here we return to Zaragoza for lunch.

23/09/2017 Zaragoza – Valencia (BD)

Depart Zaragoza 08.14

Arrive Valencia 13.16

Leaving Zaragoza, the train heads south-east and before long the landscape changes dramatically. Green pastures, mountains and red-earth villages become the new canvas. The mountains continue to rise and impressive views of the road can be seen darting behind the precipices. Huge orange groves now start to dot the panorama and suddenly the formidable sight of Castello de la Plana, sitting atop a mountain, signals our imminent arrival into the Mediterranean city of Valencia. With most tourists going to Madrid and Barcelona, Spain's third largest city is a wonderful hidden gem of authentic Spanish culture. Perhaps even more beautiful than Barcelona, Valencia possesses energy and vibe en-masse as the ancient and modern sit in comfortable harmony.

Vincci Lys

Valencia

24/09/2017 Valencia (BLD)

Walking around Valencia, we feel the pulse of many centuries in its ancient walls and quaint cobbled streets. From the remains of the Roman forum and in the Plaza de la Virgen which gave rise to Valencia, to the emblematic Arts and Sciences Centre, the city has transformed its appearance whilst rescuing monuments that are witness to past eras. Today Valencia has diverted its flood-prone river, Turia, to the outskirts of town and the land created from this diversion is now a green park that winds its way like a beautiful green serpent through the centre of the city.

25/09/2017 Valencia – Cordoba (BLD)

Boarding our train at Joaquin Sorolla Train Station, we make the short journey to Andalusia.

Depart Valencia 08.10

Arrive Cordoba 11.16

Once the largest city of Roman Spain, Cordoba later formed the heart of the western Islamic empire. On arrival we explore the medieval part of the city which is a fantastic warren of narrow streets surrounding the magnificent Mezquita. The lavishly decorated mosque evokes days gone by when Cordoba was at the crossroads of Judaism, Islam and Christianity.

Hotel Las Casas de la Judeira de Cordoba

Cordoba

26/09/2017/2015 Cordoba (BLD)

An infinitely walkable city, this morning we set out to further explore Cordoba. The town centre is compact yet has a vibrancy that defies its size. We pass silent plazas, hidden, tree-lined courtyards, great mosques, and unexpected symbols of sophisticated Islamic culture.

27/09/2017 Cordoba – Ronda – Algeciras (BLD)

This morning we board our train to Ronda.

Depart Cordoba 10.39

Arrive Ronda 12.20

Surrounded by lush river valleys and sitting above a deep ravine which is spanned by an amazing bridge, Ronda is a place that literally takes the breath away. After lunch we embark on a walking tour of the town which is largely hidden away in the heart of the Serrania de Ronda. Amongst its many appealing sights, Ronda's bullring is recognized as one of the oldest of Spain due to its history and architecture.

Depart Ronda on Mr Henderson's Railway 15.46

Arrive Algeciras 17.40

This afternoon we immerse ourselves in British Victorian railway memorabilia. The line between Ronda and Algeciras was originally built between 1890-92 by the Algeciras (Gibraltar) Railway Company Ltd to enable British garrison officers and their families to escape the claustrophobic atmosphere of Gibraltar and enjoy the surrounding countryside. The mastermind behind the railway was British engineer, John Morrison, backed by his friend and wealthy financier Sir Alexander Henderson. Although the trains themselves have changed over the years, the scenery, 20 bridges, 16 tunnels and almost 750-metre elevation that the railway has to contend with, remain as they have from the beginning. The train passes by whitewashed villages, through valleys, orange and olive groves, and across rivers before reaching the stunning cork oak forest of the Alcornocales Natural Park. Finally the train pulls into Algeciras station.

Reina Cristina Hotel

Algeciras

28/09/2017 Algeciras – Gibraltar – Algeciras (BLD)

Colloquially known as 'The Rock' or 'Gib', Gibraltar is an overseas territory of the United Kingdom. This strategic point is where the Atlantic meets the Mediterranean and where British pubs and telephone boxes create a complete English ambience. Gibraltar is just seven square kilometres and this morning we begin to explore this unique place, starting in the old town. After lunch we explore 'The Rock' itself, where we find an absolute labyrinth of secret tunnels, caves and internal roads which are up to four times longer than those on the surface! In the afternoon we return to Algeciras.

29/09/2017 Algeciras – Tangier (BL)

Today we board our ferry from the nearby port of Tarifa for the 30-minute journey to Tangier, the enthralling gateway to North Africa.

Depart Tarifa 09.00**Arrive Tangier City Port 08.30**

Tangier is a compact city divided into an old walled settlement and a fantastic maze of medieval alleyways which we explore before lunch. Here we discover a Kasbah as well as the walled fortress of the sultan and the wonderful plaza of Petit Socco. After lunch we reach the superb Grand Socco and the entrance to Ville Nouvelle, the modern city of Tangier.

Royal Tulip City Centre

Tangier

30/09/2017 Tangier – Fez (BD)

After breakfast we board our comfortable train to Fez.

Depart Tangier Med 08.15**Arrive Fez 13.15**

Our journey takes us through vast sunflower fields and date plantations before we reach the lower Atlas Mountains and continue on to Fez. We arrive in the city by mid-afternoon.

Riad Maison Bleue

Fez

01/10/2017 Fez (BLD)

Fez is Morocco's oldest Imperial city and its 'old town' is now a UNESCO World Heritage site. The medina (old town) is called *Fes el-Bali* and behind its high walls is a magical, medieval city teeming with life in every one of its 9,000 narrow streets. Fez is the cultural and spiritual capital of Morocco and today we spend the whole day exploring the labyrinth of the old town.

02/10/2017 Fez – Volubilis – Meknes – Fez (BLD)

Today we head out of Fez to nearby Volubilis, a Roman settlement constructed on what was probably a Carthaginian city, dating from the 3rd century BC. Volubilis was a central administrative city for this part of Roman Africa, but what makes this UNESCO World Heritage site so unique is that, unlike so many other Roman cities, it was not abandoned after the Romans lost their foothold in this part of Africa in the 3rd century. Even the Latin language survived for centuries! The countryside, which is spectacularly beautiful, can be seen from all sides of the ruined site. The city sits on a triangular-shaped, rich plain, bordered on both sides by small rivers.

03/10/2017 Fez – Marrakech (BD)

This morning we depart early as we begin to cross the Middle Atlas Mountains.

Depart Fez 08.40**Arrive Marrakech 16.10**

The track passes ancient Berber villages, forests and jagged rock faces of the Atlas Mountains and soon we reach the mighty frontier of the Sahara Desert. The train passes through the cities of Rabat and Casablanca and soon after we start to see soaring snowy peaks in the distance that form the great spine of the High Atlas Mountains. By late afternoon the train pulls into Marrakech.

Les Jardins de la Koutoubia Hotel

Marrakech

04/10/2017 Marrakech (BLD)

Enchantingly situated at the foot of the High Atlas Mountains, Marrakech is one of Morocco's four Imperial cities, and today we explore the city with its rose-coloured walls, lush green gardens, olive groves and palmeries. After dark, the central square in the medina, Djemaa-el-Fna, comes to life with vibrant colour, noise and smells, as dancers, fire-eaters, acrobats, and snake charmers take to the streets. The shadowy

alleyways of the souks form a vast marketplace selling herbs and potions, carpets and candles, jewellery, spices, meat and metalwork. Marrakech has long been an important crossroads and trading centre for the Arabic, Berber and black African civilisation. To the Arabic northerners, it is seen as the 'beginning of the south'.

05/10/2017 Marrakech – Atlas Mountains – Marrakech (BLD)

After breakfast we make the short drive to Toubkal National Park, home to the High Atlas Mountains and Morocco's highest mountain, Jebel Toubkal (4,167m). In this spectacular world of beauty we discover unspoiled rustic villages that remain as they were centuries ago. We make a gentle trek and enjoy a picnic before returning to Marrakech.

06/10/2017 Marrakech – Casablanca – Dubai (BL)

This morning we board our bus for the three-hour journey to Casablanca where we board our flight to Dubai.

Depart Casablanca, Emirates EK 752, 14.30

07/10/2017 Dubai – Australia

Arrive Dubai 01.10

On arrival in Dubai we connect with the flight to our chosen Australian capital.

FAQs

Why is the Tour Fitness Level rated as 'Active'?

This is one of our longer journeys, at 30 days, with some long travel days. Due to the nature of the tour, there is a lot of walking and climbing stairs in railway stations and on and off trains, and it will be necessary at times to handle your own luggage. In order to get the most out of this tour it is important to have a good level of fitness.

If I travel alone, do I have to pay the single supplement?

If you do not want to share a hotel room with another person in the group, you will have to pay the single supplement. However, if you are willing to share we will team you up with another passenger of the same sex and similar age in the hotels. If a match-up is not possible, we will upgrade you at our expense.

Is portage included?

In the hotels yes, but at railway stations, no.

What is the suggested luggage?

As with our *Rail Across Europe* tour, it is essential to pack light for this trip. We recommend a soft case or bag, with wheels, with a total weight when packed, of no more than 15kg. In addition, a small day pack is recommended. Where our accommodation is close to the railway station you will be responsible for transporting your own luggage from hotel to trains and vice versa.

How close to the railway stations are the hotels?

In some cases the hotels are within easy walking distance of the railway stations. Where our accommodation is located some distance from the station, we will have coach transfers to our hotel.

Why are lunches not included every day on this tour?

When we are travelling by train during the day it is impossible to organise group lunches. However, breakfasts and dinners are included every day and there will always be the opportunity to grab a snack at a station or on the train itself.

Do we over-night on any of the trains?

No. Like *Rail Across Europe* this entire rail journey is designed to travel on historic and heritage railways, and regular train services, primarily to enjoy spectacular scenery and see the countryside from a different perspective.

What is the standard of the trains?

Wherever possible we will travel in first-class carriages on the train.

Can I extend my stay in Europe or Morocco?

This is possible and we encourage you to discuss this with your consultant. You are normally able to use any point that Emirates flies out of but you may be subject to a deviation fee and any extra applicable airport taxes.

How much money do you recommend I take and what are the best currencies for this trip?

Everybody has different spending habits, but generally we would recommend taking around £350 and €900. Euros can be changed into Dirham in Morocco.

Are credit cards acceptable?

Credit cards are widely accepted throughout the journey and ATMs are available along the entire route. However it is not recommended to rely on these as your main source of funds.

Do I need any visas for this tour?

Australian and New Zealand passport holders do not require visas for this journey.

Do I need vaccinations for this journey?

No vaccinations are mandatory on this route but we would recommend you seek advice from your doctor. Tetanus should certainly be up to date.

Is the water safe to drink?

The tap water is safe to drink in the UK, France and Spain – although in some coastal areas in Spain the tap water is made of desalinated seawater with a high mineral content which may not be to everyone's taste. In Morocco you should drink only bottled water.

Are there internet facilities en-route?

Most of the hotels we use have internet facilities. There are also many internet cafes in the near vicinity of the hotels offering cheaper access.

Do mobile telephones work?

Telstra and Optus mobiles work throughout the entire journey. You will need to ensure you have global roaming. Contact your service provider for further details.

How much should we tip the guides and porters?

There is no need to tip guides or porters as all tips and gratuities are included in the tour cost.