

Morocco - 2006

Background: The calendar showed nearly three months between our Fiji trip and our New Hampshire trip so there was time to squeeze in another outing (28 April through 15 May). Since it would be spring in the Northern Hemisphere there were various good candidate places and I/we picked up several library books on them. Decided on Morocco as it was the absolute right time of year and has always sounded like an interesting place to visit. Tickets were pretty expensive although we did end up getting a bit of a discount from a spot I found on the web that seemed to have its act together. Got more books on Morocco from the library, Amazon.com, and a local bookstore and did the trip planning. As always, Lonely Planet (LP) was the most useful book. Also discovered (and bought) a new series called Special Places to Stay (SP) that was both interesting and useful. Will have to examine them for other countries in the future. Laid out a plan that started in Marrakesh, used a car to see some interesting countryside and eventually got to Fes, and then did the 3 or 4 northern Imperial Cities via public transportation. Deliberately did not try to squeeze in any of the coast portions of Morocco. Then used the internet to try and stay at neat places in our two major cities. This meant booking Riads in the medina (old town) parts of M&F. These are places buried in the very complicated/old areas that people (mostly Europeans) have fixed up to be nice and traditional and pretty and relatively costly - B&Bs that have 3-6 rooms or so. Got a lot of "we're full" responses for Marrakesh but eventually connected with a place where we could stay at a desired spot the first night and at a secondary Riad they owned the next 3 nights; so took it. For Fes we lucked out sooner getting a suite (the regular rooms were taken) for all 3 nights at a place that was in both LP and SP. Did some internet investigating of car rentals and the prices were very high. The (British) lady who owns the two places in M gave us a contact there for car rental but also said things were competitive and that Simo (the chap running the places for her) could likely get us a good deal after we got there. Exchanged e-mail with her mentioned rental car person, the price was better than the Majors had been but still fairly high so decided to wing it with Simo.

Friday/Saturday-1: Betty Burows picked us up at 4:30 AM and to SFO we went, Checkin took forever but eventually happened. I had gotten a window for myself and an isle (not my row) for Dawna, the latter being a sort of an emergency exit. The plane was pretty full but I lucked out and didn't have a person next to me (of the 3 on a side arrangement). SFO-JFK went fine and Dawna was the first person to walk off the plane (a first time experience). Had to change terminals and used their new air-train and didn't do it efficiently but we had plenty of time to recover. It is marked extremely poorly in my opinion. Had a snack and beer (Brooklyn Brewery) and then boarded the plane to Morocco. This time we had two seats together in a situation where there are only two and then an isle so window-isle like we prefer. Trip across the pond was nominal and did some eating of what they served. The plane was a Delta code share run by Royal Air Morocco. Landed in Casablanca and changed planes to go to Marrakesh. Full sized plane like we'd crossed the ocean on but really empty so we moved to a couple of window seats in the back section and were the only two people there.

Arrived M, cleared customs, got money, looked for Simo and he showed up a few minutes later. A driver with him took us to as close as you can drive to our Riad and we walked through tiny streets the rest of the way. Certainly could never have found the place on our own! Our room, which supposedly was the best one in the Riad was quite nice, what with tile, woodwork, plaster carving, and other touches of traditional old Moroccan architecture. In fact, we'd rank it second in

uniqueness to the cave we stayed in in Turkey awhile ago.

Rested a bit and then walked to the nearby main square, Djemaa el-Fna. This is The Place in M and only a five-minute walk from our lodging (using a carefully drawn map by Simo). It was just like the movies and like thousands of years ago with large crowds, snake charmers with their instruments and cobras, story tellers, orange juice vendors, water vendors, people selling merchandise, food vendors, and on and on and on. Superb. Walked around, gawked, and then had dinner at a spot overlooking the square. We were very early for eating so able to get a table easily. Had traditional food - tajine (stew like dish, with lemon chicken being our selection), Harira (traditional soup), and a couscous dish. All good. Was able to find our Riad, go to bed early, and sleep pretty well.

Sunday-1: We had forgotten to ask what time breakfast was served (on the roof terrace) and gave it a try around 8 AM, learning that 9 AM was the time. So eventually had breakfast in a nice surrounding with good coffee, OK croissants and bread, and good jam. By the way, I'll try not to repeat that nearly every breakfast was something about like this. The meal was relaxing but also meant half the morning was over before we got onto the task at hand - being a tourist.

Hit the souqs just north of the main square seeing millions of things to procure and actually buying some shoes and some yarn (after watching them dye it). Quite a place to wander what with all the artisans, craftsman, and shopkeepers. The hassle by folks wanting you to come into their shop (carpet or you name it) was not as bad as I had expected based on so many warnings/comments in the literature, although plenty bad enough. Also took in some key cultural sites; namely Ali ben Youssef Mosque and Madersa with its fine stucco decoration, carved cedar rafters, tile work (zellij), etc. Did the Musee de Marrakesh that is next door to it and filled with good stuff; and also a spot next door where excavation is in process. The latter was just so so, while the museum was quite nice both in terms of the building itself and its contents.

Back to our Riad to get walked over to our change of venue. Our new place/Riad was again near the main square but down different tiny alleys. Not as high-class (or costly) as the first place but still quite unique and we had the best room of the bunch (having asked for it via the internet and having that confirmed by others who were staying there. It was on the top floor, actually above the nominal top floor with a small patio of its own. Good for our before dinner drinks; which we then had. For dinner we went back to the square and ate from the vendors there - excellent fish. I slept well and DSW did just OK (the second night is often the hardest).

Monday-1: Decided to skip (the late/relaxed breakfast) and get out earlier so as to beat the tour bus crowds to one of the main attractions in M - Saadian Tombs. Walked there having a nice coffee along the way. Arrived around 9:15 AM, it had been open since 8:30 I think, and it was packed. So, much for outfoxing the tour buses. A better approach would have been at the heat of noon when the tour folks are having lunch. But waited our turns to see into the key tombs and they certainly were spectacular in their carvings (both stone and wood) and zellij. The enormous gate into the tomb area was also impressive with its woodcarvings and was our first (of many later on) encounter with storks. Turns out they have nests on many, many high spots of walls and mosques and whatever and this time of year there was almost always a parent stork standing on the nest feeding one or two baby storks in the nest. Needless to say, we spent time with our trusty binoculars observing all

this.

Walked/wandered this part of town gradually getting back to the Koutoubia monument, which is a landmark as its minaret is 70 m high and visible from afar. Supposedly twice the height of its counterpart in Cordoba, oldest and best preserved of three famous ones of similar design, etc. In all fairness we weren't overly fond of it. The rose gardens around it were quite nice to wander through as they were in full bloom and quite extensive. Had a late lunch at the place we had dinner the first night - having to wait awhile for a table on the top floor overlooking the square. More good and different/interesting food.

Rested a bit and then hit the streets some more going to a different museum and a palace. At the palace they were setting up for a concert that night and a nice lady told us all about it and gave us an invite/ticket, so we decided to take it in. Back to the room, relax, cleanup, and then the concert. It being in the palace was neat. It was put on by an organization that has been sponsoring German-Moroccan cultural exchanges for 50 years. The performers were a chap playing flutes (one of which was enormous - a bass flute I'd call it) and one playing an acoustic guitar (the lady who told us about the concert that afternoon said he was Germany's best guitar player and he certainly was good). Fun but also chilly for me, I should have brought a sweater. Walking home Dawna slipped and took a could-have-been-bad fall but came out of it pretty OK.

An aside or two or three, Dawna was into giving beggars a small amount of money; especially ladies with children, and it was interesting to see how they did or didn't respond. There were enormous numbers of cats and kittens in the cities, with the kittens being cute since they were often just days old; but still such a very large number. Another aside, as has been the case for a decade or so now it sure is nice to be able to procure bottled water in foreign countries and we did it continually.

Tuesday-1: Having not tried the public transportation yet, we took a bus over to the new town. Each of these cities has a Ville Nouvelle that was built by the French "recently" and the medina that is the original/old Arabic (or sometimes Berber) city. They are typically a mile or two apart. Walked a bit, had a nice (but awfully slow as was the case everywhere and as had been the case in France last year) lunch, and then continued walking until we got to the Jardin Majorelle (gardens) & Museum of Islamic Art. The latter was closed for some unknown reason while the former was extremely impressive what with wonderful bamboo and cacti and fine other stuff. Quite enjoyable. Walked back to old town and our place. We ate in the square yet again, this time having meat rather than fish. Again interacting with fun local people.

Let's see, this was our last day for M so prior to going to Ville Nouvelle we had sat down with Simo and partner and discussed car rentals. They didn't have good deals, they made several phone calls, the place I could have gotten (a now classified as a good deal) a car over the internet no longer had it; so we got a car at a poor (probably normal/typical) rate. That evening, after returning from our outing, we signed the paperwork and also learned that they wouldn't take a credit card. We didn't have \$660 in Dh and barely had it in US currency since we have stopped carrying a lot of US money when traveling since ATMs are so convenient. But did have enough US cash to settle the deal.

Wednesday-1: Got rolling before nominal breakfast time having a coffee on the square where the chap then picked us up to hand over the car. And off into the countryside we went. We had several items/targets in mind and a rough time frame for our outing; the latter being anchored by our commitment to return the car in Fes in a week.

Headed east into the High Atlas mountains. Fine road, fine scenery, lots of sheep and shepherds, many donkeys, signs of flash floods from the prior week, and snow capped mountains above us. Quite nice. Stands selling minerals/rocks and we bought an impressive crystalline piece. Had lunch in a village where a fellow cut pieces off a hanging lamb to then make our kabobs. Onward toward Ouarzazate with a stop at Ait Bebhaddou along the way. The latter "is one of the most exotic and best-preserved kasbahs in the entire Atlas Region" says LP. Mainly because of repair work done in order to use it for more than 20 films including Lawrence of Arabia, Jesus of Nazareth, and Gladiator. We walked all around it with my liking it better than Dawna. Meanwhile, before getting to it we had stopped for a chap who had the hood of his car up and said his car had broken down and he needed a message given to his brother in O who would then come rescue him. Following directions we pulled into his brothers spot when we finally got to O. Turned out to be a scam (and actually one I had yellow-in in LP but forgotten) but we didn't buy any of the bargain rugs we were offered and did drink their nice tea (in the reverse order of course). In O we got a room at a hotel that was in LP. Our room had a wonderful view out over the Oasis-like palm-tree area and then into desolation/desert towards mountains. Walked the small town making a purchase of a couple bottles of wine. Also needed to procure a cork screw as we had forgotten to add one to our supplies back home, the usual one having been taken by the airline security people on a recent trip after previously passing through OK many, many times. The one we bought was kinda neat, almost qualifying as a souvenir. We also gave the tourist bureau a try but it was closed for the day. Had a so-so (or maybe not that good) pizza dinner and a fine sleep. Turns out nearly every place we stayed had a bathtub, which was an unexpected nicety for me.

Thursday-1: Coffee next door, tried to find the fruit and vegetable market but not there (probably only there on market day), but got some oranges at a stand, and hit the road towards gorge country. Thus heading northeast. Actually, this morning the tourist bureau was open and I picked up one kinda nice piece of literature on the general area we had been in and would be in for the next couple of days (for the most part the tourist bureaus are said to be basically useless by our travel books, and I'd say our couple of tries at using them agrees with that premise).

You may have gathered our general direction was eastward with north and south excursions to see things. We were, by the way, only doing a couple/few hundred km per day so stopping to see/do all sorts of small things along the way as the spirit moved us. The Kelaa M'Gouna area was our next target in case anyone is following this with a map. It's fame is roses and boy were they in bloom and were the kids out trying to sell them to you on the road side. Turns out we were a day prior to their annual Rose Festival, which is actually a big deal. Stopped for lunch and to buy some rose products, ending up with simple soap as our purchase and with omelets for lunch. Strange omelets I must say and the flies didn't help us enjoy the meal. Onward to Dades Gorge. Splendid countryside as you drive up this gorge with stark mountains and desert to the sides while along the gorge and its river it is very green with date palms and some farming and village after village; or more properly speaking kasbahs after kasbahs. Lots of clothes washing going on in the river and drying on the banks and on the sides of buildings. Picturesque to say the least. At the end of the gorge we asked if

a spot that was highlighted in both LP and SP had a room for the night and the answer (not surprisingly) was no, so we had a cold drink there and then went back down the gorge. Somewhere along the way we did a short walk across the river and into one of the villages. When we got to the bottom we headed over to Tinerhir which is at the base of the even more famous Tadra Gorge. Got a room (with lousy air conditioning but a good view). Walked around the "town" seeing if there were excursions into the gorge or between the gorges that might interest us for a day trip but they aren't into that sort of thing much. Dinner at the hotel because we had to since the accommodation was a half board deal. OK meal in a relatively fancy dining room with a tour group or two. Extremely hard pillow that when combined with the poor air-conditioning meant the evening sleep wasn't the best, but was OK.

Friday-2: Up fairly early, had the hotel breakfast and then up the canyon we went. Kinda like the other one but not as long nor as grand with villages along the river; but some nice ones just the same. About 15 km up you get to the narrowest, most spectacular part of the canyon; the Dades Gorge didn't have such a spot. There are 3 hotels there in a fine setting and we regretted not giving them a try the prior PM but I had not wanted to go up and then not care for what we found and go back to town and then go up again this day. Drove beyond the spectacular spot and got to where there was a smaller canyon offshoot and went for a hike for an hour or two. Neat rocks and area, including spots where corrals had been roughly formed with rock for when the shepherds bring their sheep to this level for feeding (I assume). Even had an encounter with a Berber woman who would have liked more treats than we gave her. Back at the bottom of this small canyon we bought a soda and talked awhile with a nice kid who was working there. Then down the main canyon we went.

Oh, yes, on the way up when we stopped to see the canyon wall a chap asked us for a ride back to town when we came back down the canyon. We semi said "Yes" but it would be awhile and he should get a ride with someone else sooner. Well, he was still there and we gave him a ride to town. Was scam attempt-2 when he invited us into his house and after tea and such tried more carpet selling. Actually, when we got to the house he disappeared and it was his "brother" who was host and salesman. No sale and we were beginning to feel that being good Samaritans just wasn't in the cards for us. Oh, well, at this house we did get to see the "sister" making yarn from wool and making a rug from such yarn and Dawna liked the nice dates they fed her along with our tea. You do feel awkward accepting their hospitality (as such) but they push it on you as part of the come-on and we had just been trying to be nice guys. Bought some gas and headed eastward into more and more desolate countryside. But, of course, we like such country. Drove across it, through Rissani where they have interesting fossils and where you begin to see some sand and to Merzouga. This is on the edge of the true Sahara. Went to a spot, driving down dirt paths now, that was in both books and they had one room left (a suite) and we took it. We were sort of a day ahead of schedule by now by the way. Did a short walk into the Sahara, cleaned up, had dinner pool-side at our semi-fancy place; again the deal had been half board and given that there are basically no restaurants in this "town" and all the accommodations do it that way, just fine. A good sleep was had including my getting up at like 3 AM, going up on our private roof, and seeing a fine display of stars.

Saturday-2: The afternoon when we took this "hotel" we also signed up for the camel-desert-outing the next night. This meant killing the day basically by getting up slowly, having breakfast, walking to "town" and around it, driving back to Rissani and buying some souvenir fossil stuff, looking into

a quite peaceful Mosque there and being able to walk around it, using the internet at one spot, etc; and showing up for the start of the camel ride at 4:30 PM. About 10-12 of us and out into the desert we went. Pretty picturesque with the Sun at our back and our shadows on the sand; and the sand dunes being endless. Rode 1.5 hours and that was enough for everyone. They set up camp a bit while we climbed some high dunes to watch the sunset. It was too cloudy to make getting to the top worthwhile so D&I only went about 70% of the way to the top. Eventually, dinner (pretty good really), music around the campfire (really a lantern), and sleeping in a semi-tent, semi-open configuration. Pretty fine stars during the middle of the night yet again. Rather a kick really even if it is for tourists. Our group, there were a couple of other smaller groups around the same site, consisted of a couple from Switzerland, a couple from Italy, two girls from Holland, and us. All the kids were younger than our kids; but we're getting used to that when we do things such as this. Oh, yes, this mixture meant English was the most common language; lucky for us. Also should note, we saw lots of dung beetles and one fine desert fish (which the guides caught and then handed to Dawna after she asked for it). A final comment on this desert outing is that we had very little wind, which meant not nearly the blowing sand in our face that was anticipated. In fact, when there is too much wind, as had been the case a couple days earlier, they cancel these outings.

Sunday-2: Early rise, no spectacular sunrise due to some clouds. Small breakfast, packup and 1.5 hour came ride back. Again the sun was at our backs so better on the eyes and less hot and nice for shadows. Oh, yes, should have mentioned that the initial 1.5 hour ride out was much tougher on Dawna's butt than on mine, surprisingly enough. Back at the lodge we had a cold drink, used their facilities, and then hit the road; back through Rissani and Erfound and further north. Some of this was through miles (Kms) of date palms, much was along the Ziz Valley (great name), some through nice canyons. One place we stopped to examine interesting wildflowers and sand fences (my name for the equivalent of snow fences in the US) and rocks. One place we stopped to see a mineral spring and people lined up to get the good, curing water. Several stops for geologically interested formations; like major upliftings. Stayed in an imitation kasbach (town of Midelt) that night selected because it was that time of day. Again, half-board so we had to eat there as well. I had some quite good trout and Dawna liked her chicken as well; plus the setting was nice. Oh, yes, on this day we stopped for yet another seemingly-in-trouble person, actually man and wife, who had run out of gas. They seemed legit and we gave him a ride to Midelt while his wife stayed with the car. Last we saw of him was at the gas station where we dropped him to get a jug of gas; so I'd say this one finally was legitimate.

Monday-2: We were still running basically a day ahead of schedule. After the usual bfast we continued northward. Moved into higher and greener countryside. Stopped for some great wildflower displayed. Got in a relatively high mountain valley that was lush and watched a variety of birds do their things; a little later it was actually a nature preserve area. Quite nice. Near Azrou we checked out the cedar forests, which had fine trees and were very peaceful. The cedar that is carved and used on all their mosques and gates and towers and such comes from this area. Even saw a few Barbary Apes, which are just the size of monkeys. We then decided to use some of our extra time to overshoot our original plan and take in the Roman Ruins at Volublis, a spot all the tour groups go but we had figured we'd not get around to it having seen plenty of Roman ruins in our life. Nice countryside to the ruins and the mosaics (floors of stone inserted mosaics) were extremely good and in fine shape. A good stop and we spent more time there than anticipated. What to do next given that we were within striking distance of Fes but not supposed to show up

there for another night. Well we headed northwest thinking we might get to a neat sounding village on the Atlantic ocean but after a bit we determined that it was too far to go so we basically just cut over to the city of Kenitra and found a bed – best sounding spot in LP but not very great. The drive over there had been interesting, however, in terms of villages and farms and products and people and carts and donkeys and all that sort of thing. Ate a non-great seafood dinner and retired. The prime problem was the AC didn't do much good so we left windows open and ended up getting mosquito (or something) bitten during the evening; Dawna much worse than myself.

Tuesday-2: Drove down the coast to Rabat, one of the 3 Imperial Cities and one that we had figured we might visit after Fes. Nice medina to wander around and Dawna especially liked the fact that the vendors weren't nearly so pushy as in Marrakesh. Did get somewhat lost and in need of lunch so settled for a stand that was doing something like chicken liver and pepper sandwiches. Actually quite good but in a tight/crowded eating situation. We then took the motorway (tollway with the toll ending up being quite modest) to Fes. We had instructions as to how to get close to our Riad and then call them, but some guy on a motorbike sort of picked us up (tourist with potential money yet again) and he ended up directing us to where we could park the car and walk to our Riad; which we did. Checked into our suite; this meaning that we had a couch to sit on in an area between the bed and the bathroom. Quite nice again where quoting LP "... traditional house – built in 1389 has three elegant suites and set around a lovely, blooming courtyard. The suites are exquisite, done up with fireplaces, zellij and" Maybe a bit overstated, but basically the situation. The AC worked fine by the way but it turned out there was no hot water for an/our evening bath. A chap came and picked up our rental car; always nice when one hands back an undamaged car.

Wednesday-2: Explored Fes, which meant going through shops and Souqs and craftsman areas, etc, etc. Also seeing a couple of cultural items, the Wood Museum (with so many nice carvings and information on tools used, etc) being a highlight. Another highlight was having a very fancy lunch in a very fancy place at a very fancy price. Tasted quite good too. During the outing we had various interesting experiences with old ladies, kids, and vendors. For example at one stand an old lady was procuring some extruded interesting stuff/food and Dawna inquired about it and was given a taste and exchanged some small item (gum) with the lady. After walking away a bit she decided she wanted to buy some so went back but the amount she wanted was so small the lady just gave it to her at which point Dawna gave the lady a package of dried cranberries. The stuff, by the way, was like marzipan, which Dawna loves. During this outing we went to the amazing area where they do the leather tanning and dyeing and took several nice photos. That night we skipped dinner as we were still full from lunch, had hot water, had a new bottle of wine, and relaxed with some nuts to nibble on.

Thursday-2: More exploring of Fes, on foot. Did the old Jewish area including cemetery. Had some ice cream that I later wondered if it caused our diarrhea. Did lots of walking and looking and some modest shopping. That sort of day. That night we ate at the Riad. They all have meals available if you sign up ahead of time and lots of folks eat there quite a bit figuring it is peaceful and safer, but we hadn't done one yet so now we did. It was fine and also overpriced compared to the typical restaurant.

Friday-3: Did a day trip to Imperial City Number 3, Meknes. Did it by train, which presented some minor challenges including having taxi rides to the train station in Fes and from the train station in

Meknes to the Meknes medina area. Quite reasonable train and fun to look out the window although it was the same countryside (farmland) we had gone through on the tollway a few days earlier. Lots of century plants, poppies, olive trees, and vineyards along with oats/hay type fields. In Meknes we checked out the main attractions (a fine gate, a famous mausoleum, the medina area) and did our usual wandering around places seeing what was and was not going on. The excellent (supposedly) museum was still being remodeled so not available. This being Friday (the Moslem Sabbath) a whole lot of the shops were closed so the medina was rather boring. Had a pretty good lunch in their main square finally sampling some sausages we had seen several places and a couple other typical items that we'd not yet tried. I had forgot to learn the departure schedule when we arrived so we showed up at the train station to head home and had an hour and a half wait. So, I snuck off to a spot and got on the internet for a bit while Dawna held down the fort at the train station and ended up in quite an enjoyable conversation/interaction with an elderly lady and a couple young fellows. Oh, I forgot to mention, Thursday night was our last reserved night at our Riad but we arranged to stay an extra night. They only had the smallest, non-AC it turned out, room available so that's where we spent the night. OK for one night and simply sleeping but nothing very neat about it; of course, it was less than half the cost of the other room so all is fair. Sitting in the garden was still quite nice, however.

Saturday-3: We both had some diarrhea by now but not terrible. It did make us have less ambition/energy however. Anyway, took the train to Casablanca and a cab to our hotel. We had picked one from LP and called ahead to make reservations the day before. It was in the heart of the city and absolutely nothing special but also not terrible. No A/C but the air was pretty cool in this coastal city. After checking in we did our exploring and eating at a seafood restaurant. My swordfish was good but not wonderful. More walking around in the active areas and then to bed.

Sunday-3: As agreed the night before we awoke slowly and decided to not take off for Rabat, which had been the plan when we scheduled two nights in Casa, since Dawna really didn't have more shopping she wanted to do and neither of us were feeling wonderful in terms of diarrhea and its associated tiredness/laziness. Plus I was interested in seeing the Casa Mosque. So, had a coffee and "sweetroll" and then slowly walked through a different part of town to the Mosque. It is new (built from 1987 to 1993), huge (3rd largest in the Moslem world after Mecca and Medina, both in Saudi Arabia), costly (a couple billion dollars), has the highest minaret in the world, and is one of the rare Mosques open to non Moslems. We took the English-speaking 11 AM tour and it was enjoyable. Quite an elaborate place to say the least. Of course as many locals think, the money might have been better spent on the poor.

We walked a different route towards home, stopping at Rick's Cafe for a soft drink. Everyone but me knows that this is famous from the movie Casablanca. Actually, it is only a couple years old and made to look like the one in the movie - guess we should watch that one of these days for the heck of it. Nice spot actually and fun to look around a bit. Onward through the medina with a few shops but nothing like the other cities. Back to the hotel and some resting. Then more bumming around. Boy were the masses out in the central squares (near our hotel) that evening. Took in the scene as well as some particular art-deco buildings; the scene was the better of the two items. Eventually ate some broasted chicken for a light dinner and went to bed somewhat early. Reasonable night sleep and about 3 AM my system began to feel more up-to-par even if not all the way there.

Monday-3: Since our plane wasn't until 11:30 AM we arose at a reasonable time, had our coffee and croissant, and then cabbled to the airport. Couldn't find the right line to do checkin for New York City and learned we needed to go to Terminal-3, we were in Terminal-1. A shuttle bus took us there after a bit of a wait. This terminal was far from the other one and tiny; like maybe it only services a couple flights. Went through many passport/ticket checkpoints and got to the boarding area to find out the duty-free choices were only liquor and cigarettes and there was no bank to exchange our Dh back to \$'s. With enough pleading they let me back out to the main lobby (such as it was) and I did exchange them there (sure didn't need \$94 worth of Dhs!) Boarded the plane, not full, did some seat shuffling so we each had a pair of seats to ourselves, and headed out across the ocean. Did lots of writing on this trip letter until the battery on my Palm ran out. Need to improve on that situation. Arrived NYC/JFK a bit early, cleared customs easily (non-Americans were in an enormous line and we felt sorry for them), had a terrible/weird time getting our one checked bag headed onward to SFO, changed terminals via the air train and again found it poorly labeled, ate some Chinese fast food, and got on the plane to SFO. OK flight although we were running out of steam by now and the lack of Palm battery slowed down my activities (did finish a paperback I was reading). Arrived SFO like 45 minutes early, got our bag fine, tried to call Dick Weaver on Dawna's cell phone and failed, went outside to see if he was waiting there and Helen was there waiting for us. Turned out she was subbing for Dick who had car trouble. Got home practically by the time we should have been landing and that was a nice "present." Read some mail, did some laundry, took a long bath, and went to bed.

Before summarizing, I'll throw in a few more random comments. I don't think I've mentioned it yet but one of the most noticeable aspects of Morocco was that English was not the second language. Arabic was first, French was a very strong second, and we found fewer folks who could communicate in English, even in the tourist areas, than has been the case practically anywhere we've gone. Oh, yes, the beer was lousy, like Budweiser, but the wine was OK to good. The bougainvillea were outstanding. Most cities were doing fix up work to be more attractive so I'd guess the tourism business is going well and paying off. There were huge numbers of sheep, shepherds and donkeys. Also a lot of cops, resulting in relatively frequent stops on the highway, but no hassle.

Summary: It was a good and interesting trip. The end portion was somewhat of a let down because the Imperial Cities were not as neat as Marrakesh and we had done it at the start; we usually save the best to last, which is a good idea. The weather was quite good, so our timing/planning was correct. The Sahara was certainly impressive. The food was fine to good but monotonous in that the menus were mostly quite similar; and we also would have gone for more spicy tastes more often. The next outing is to a science meeting in New Hampshire after which we will go up to Prince Edward Island with Kingsburys for a couple days. As crazy as it sounds we bought those tickets on the Internet the night before going to Morocco. And, speaking of trips, I have never finished the Fiji trip letter and need to.

