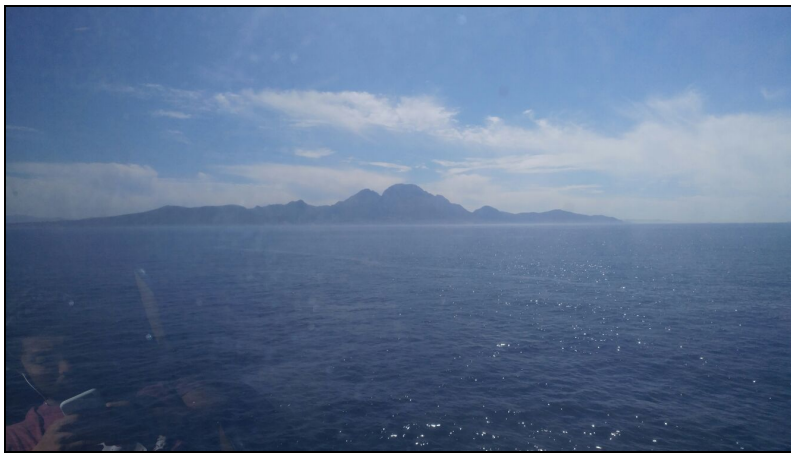


Marueccos

Gabriella Sonnenschein

The life changing experiences you hear about studying abroad are true. Being in Morocco this past weekend really did change my life! The whole ICS group saw cities of blue, lands of green, and water...lots and lots of water! We left promptly Friday morning in order to catch the ferry in the south of Spain in a city called Algeciras. The city is right across the bay of Gibraltar. Little did I know this boat ride would be as beautiful as it was. On the ferry we had a balcony so we could feel the breeze and enjoy the beautiful views of the Mediterranean and the land surrounding it. I felt like I was a pirate in a video game exploring the seas!



View from inside the ferry!

We got off the ferry saying, "We've made it to Africa!" Although we didn't realize we were actually in Ceuta, one of two Spanish territories in Northern Africa. It is a beautiful city with outstanding clearwater beaches. We then ventured on into the Moroccan border. We could finally say we were in Africa!

To say the least, it was a non-stop trip. Meaning no time to waste going to our hotel. We immediately started our tour with Hercules Cave in Tangier where the famous “Map of Africa” is located. The opening when looked at straight on looks exactly like the continent!



Photo credit to Kait Moreno!

See the resemblance? Our first view of Africa was so beautiful. The water was crashing into the cave and the smell of minerals was abundant.

Our trip to the cave was short because we had to visit our camel friends along the beach a little further down the road! The camel ride was definitely a highlight for the group as a whole. Camels are such interesting and fascinating creatures. The way they move their body is unlike anything else. The scariest part was when my camel descended from walking position. It felt like he dropped 4 feet at a 90 degree angle. I did a pretty good job of laughing it off, but boy was it an experience! The actual ride was beautiful along the shore with the sun shining on us. It was a bit bumpy but not as much as people said it would be. The important part was bonding with other students along the beach...on camels. These camels were not originally from Morocco, but were brought from the south so we could ride them!

Here are some amazing photos from our beloved student, Geraliz Jimenez:



Hey look! There's me riding a camel on the beach. :)



Lifting your arms up is harder than it look when you're riding a camel!

Are you in love with Morocco yet? Yeah, I know you are. But wait, there's more! After our camel adventures we rode the bus to the meeting point of the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. Although a short stop, still beautiful. Here's a picture!



After a long day of traveling and stopping along the the northern shore of Africa, we went to our comfortable beds that were so desperately needed! I roomed with two amazing girls and we had the best conversations. I love these school trips especially because of the people I bond with and getting to share a room with my friends. We had dinner and rested up until the next morning.

Have you had Moroccan breakfast? If not, you need to get on that! Crepes with cream cheese and honey, cake, coffee and orange juice. If it wasn't heaven I wouldn't know what is. I scarfed down as much food as possible and we hit the road for Chefchaouen, la ciudad de azul (the city of blue). THIS was the highlight of our trip. Everyone fell in love with Chefchaouen when we saw our first blue alley way. The color is actually indigo, and before the trip we thought the color blue made mosquitos go away but it is actually the smell of indigo that makes them unattracted! So it has two benefits: being the most beautiful city I have seen so far within my time in Spain, and making my spring a bit nicer by not being unbearably itchy.



The best store in Chefchaouen by far was the carpet shop we went to. The workers there were so nice and we could see a man working on carpets on the loom while we looked around! There were carpets, scarves, and everything in between that were made from lamb fur, camel fur, indigo, and even saffron to make an orange brown color. Almost all the students had to buy something, there was no way we weren't getting at least one unbelievably soft rug or sweater. I bought a blue and white rug for my days at the park and at the beach! I was able to bargain for the price and it will always remind me of the blue city.



Our friends showing us the carpets and how they are made.

Something else to remember this amazing city by was our short hike up a mountain to a mosque at the top! I was out of breath by the top of it with the sun scorching down on us, but the view sure was worth it. At the mosque, you can literally see the entire city of Chefchaouen and it's blue beauty. We spent about 30 minutes up there with our tour guide who brought us and took pictures and took in the view of the city and mountain surrounding us. On our way down the mountain, we saw a family who had a small blue house along the trail. There were two kids with their mother and the kids came up to us to see where we were from and what these mysterious people were doing in Morocco! It was nice to see a family living their lives up close in such different conditions than we live in, in both Spain and the United States.



After our long and breathtaking tour in Chefchaouen, we returned to the hotel for a break at the pool and beach. Here was the most obvious example of the roles of men and women in Morocco. A lot of the men were in the water with swimsuits and the women were not. I also noticed the previous night looking out the hotel window that there were absolutely no women out! It was all men walking in the street with their friends. That was the biggest culture shock for me during our trip, but I understand this is their culture. I do think that in the future they could change their ways for a more equal society but I am not living in their country and don't know behind the scenes how both the women and men feel about this situation.



After our relaxing time near the water, we got ready for our fantasy dinner and took the bus into the old city of Tetuan! We walked through the market to get to a restaurant in the depths of the streets. We walked in with these two men in traditional Moroccan clothes playing music on cymbals and drums. We were then led into the restaurant full of arches and mosaics. The food was delicious and gave us a great taste of what people eat on a regular basis! Moroccan soup with spices unimaginable, couscous, chicken, and of course traditional mint tea with cookies! There were entertainers, musicians, and a henna tattoo artists that painted our hands! The night was spectacular and we then regressed to the hotel for a much needed night's sleep.

It was time. Our last day was already there. I couldn't believe how fast time flew by in Africa. We went to a natural pharmacy in the old city of Tetuan and I may have spent a little money there. It was incredible what products they had! I bought oil to treat headaches by rubbing a drop on your temples, 100% argan oil (for an amazing price!), musk perfume, ointments, and magic lipstick that stays on your lips and changes color! I went a little crazy but the workers there were so nice and explained how they made everything so well. Everyone fell in love! The argan oil was definitely the most popular. We also got neck massages that were well needed after all the sightseeing we did. Our last stop in Tetuan before we sadly had to go home was the leather market full of leather goods, carved wood, and trinkets that were up for bargaining! People had very different experiences with bargaining, but I know that it was a good experience for all of us to experience what it is like to do this in countries like Morocco. We were sad to leave Tetuan, but our ferry was waiting for us to go back home to Sevilla.

Morocco is a must see. I feel so lucky to have been able to go to Morocco to see the rich culture and experience situations that I will not get back in the states or even in Sevilla! I am sad that this was our last overnight trip with the school, but I am going to Amsterdam with a few friends this weekend for the beginning of Holy Week and then we take our day trip to Ronda the weekend after! I hope you enjoyed hearing about our life changing trip and please check back in to hear about our first time experiencing Holy Week in Sevilla! Adios!