

REPORT: CWU Morocco Study Tour 2014

For centuries, Morocco's breathtaking landscapes and unique heritage have inspired famous Western artists as Matisse, writers like William Burroughs, musicians from Bob Marley to Jimi Hendrix and the Rolling Stones, as well as filmmakers from Orson Welles to Ridley Scott. Into this dynamic intermingling of cultural and social forces—of Arab, African, Berber and Western influences—an intrepid band of faculty, students and community members from Central Washington University (and several other universities in the United States) ventured on a 2-week study tour of *El Maghreb el Aqsa* ("The Farthest West").

ARAMFO designed this study tour to facilitate cultural tolerance and understanding between Arab people and Americans. It was great that our sojourn in Morocco began with a three-day conference on *Land, Culture & Understanding in the Arab World*. This conference, hosted by University Hassan II in Mohammedia Casablanca, was a stimulating and engaging experience where students and faculty from the United States were able to mingle and interact with their counterparts from Morocco and across the Arab world while simultaneously learning more about Moroccan economics, politics, the media, culture and society. Feedback from our students and community members was that the session on "Media and Culture" was a definite highlight of the conference with the presentations by Jacob Bucher and London Wise on "The Role of Western Media in Fear Mongering" and "Orientalism and Neo-Orientalism in Video Games" by Jihad Elkhalf and Abdelmajid Bouziane garnering special commendation.

Of course, the real "star" of the two-week study tour was the actual cross-country travels to visit the four "royal cities" (Meknès, Marrakesh, Fés & Rabat), the various kasbas, places, museums, souks and Roman ruins along the way as well as tour places of historical and cultural importance—from Casablanca to Ouarzazate, Beni Mellal, Ouzoud, and from the "blue city" of Chefchaouen to Tangier—as well as see the various mountain ranges, ecosystems and agriculture resplendent over much of Morocco. The tour buses were modern and comfortable, the drivers (& their assistants) friendly and professional and the various guides were knowledgeable and personable. Our hotel accommodations were clean and comfortable and the meals provided were a sampling of the varied cuisine represented in Morocco—from French-influenced dishes to traditional Tajine, couscous and a typical "breaking the fast" evening Ramadan meal. Through out, the ARAMFO staff were friendly, accommodating, professional and treated everyone on the study tour as if we were all family... which, in a way, we all became over the two-weeks of shared adventures and experiences.

It is fair to say that for all of the Central Washington University students, faculty and community members on this ARAMFO study-tour of Morocco, it was a trip of a lifetime that will not be forgotten!

Visit <http://www.cwumorocco.wordpress.com> for more on the CWU Study Tour of Morocco!