

My visit to Morocco this summer was unforgettable; it marked my first return there on my own terms, giving me a direct opportunity to reconnect with my roots and personal heritage at a deeper level. Having not visited since 2021 – a year that profoundly changed my life and my relationship with my family forever – I anticipated a deep emotional experience as I rebuilt my connection to the country in a newer light. My goals were clear: to reconnect with the parts of me I ‘left behind’, and to re-kindle the love I had for my country.

Travelling with my close friend granted me an opportunity to reconcile the pain of family estrangement in 2021 with the pride I felt for my roots. In my apprehension and sadness, I also felt an enthusiasm to share my background with her and to introduce her to the place I grew up loving. Our holiday began in the bustling streets of Marrakesh, where we smelled the warm and aromatic air and ate some of my favorite cultural meals – Harira included, of course. Spending time with the people of Morocco, speaking Darija – which I had been afraid of losing since parting ways with my parents – reawakened something in me that reminded me of who I was. Our first day saw a visit to the Agafay Desert, where we took in the breathtaking views of the sunset and danced to Moroccan music. This was an exhilarating night of sharing culture and energy, and we experienced a speedrun of life in the country.



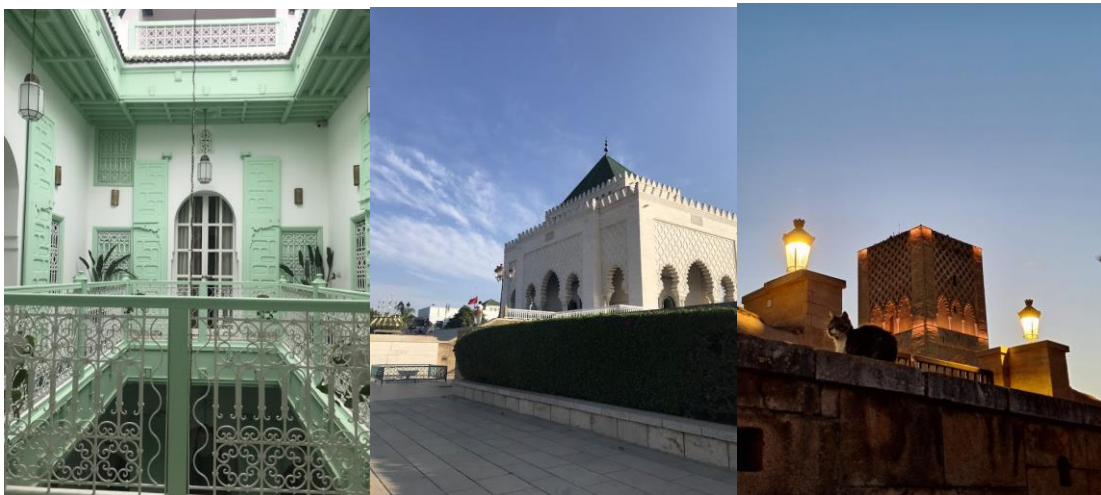
*Left to right: Moroccan food spread (Harira soup, Tajine and Couscous!!), sunset in Agafay Desert, a marketplace view*

In between our intense activities, we had time to introspect and contemplate the beauty of North African architecture; our time at Jardin Majorelle and Bahia Palace struck us with awe as we shared the moment of taking in the beautiful surroundings. It reminded me of my family home growing up; the zellige tiles swimming into an intricate pattern around us, just like the ones in my childhood photos, and I was reminded that no matter what happened, I was always welcome back here.



*Left to right: Jardin Majorelle, Bahia Palace (indoors and outdoors).*

Next, we explored Rabat, which I had never visited before – giving the holiday a novel touch, in addition to the familiarity of Marrakesh. Staying the night in a riad, a traditional Moroccan house, was an incredibly emotional experience. As we strolled the clean, seaside city, I experienced a moment of grief – but also, emotional release – as I thought of how much it reminded me of my own city of origin, Agadir, and I felt empowered in that moment to contemplate visiting there next time. Being there on my own terms, I felt resilient, knowing that there was so much more of my own ethnic background to discover, so much more still yet to see.



*Left to right: Riad Dar Rabiaa, Hassan II Mosque*

Visiting Morocco was an incredibly empowering experience, for my mental health as well as my personal identity. It created a new chapter in my life, one where I felt ready to tackle anything, and I returned to London feeling renewed. While the journey of healing and self-discovery is one that lasts for a lifetime, this expedition was pivotal in reclaiming the parts of myself I felt I had lost. The Expedition Fund was instrumental in making this trip possible; it empowered us to embark on this journey of bonding and exploration. I think the act of travelling with someone close to you is incredibly transformative, as you see new sides to each other, and I am endlessly grateful to have had the opportunity to experience this in 2024.