Morocco

Location

Morocco is unique, in that it is the African country that is closest to Europe. Casablanca, a city near the center of the country is located at 33 degrees, 35’N latitude and 7 degrees, 39’W longitude. The Mediterranean Sea is north of Morocco, while the Atlantic Ocean is to the west, Algeria is to the east and Mauritania is to the south.

Geography

Mountains, coastal plains, and desert add to the uniqueness of Morocco. Along the northern and western borders are coastal areas and beaches. Many fertile plains, plateaus, and ravines spread beyond the coast. The Rif Mountains are in northern Morocco and run along the Mediterranean coast. The peaks are as tall as 6000 ft. As you move down south, three other mountain ranges can be seen. The first is the Middle Atlas with a variety of river gorges and volcanic craters. In addition, two rivers, the Sebou and the Moulouya, flow adjacent to the range. Following the Middle Atlas Mountains are the High Atlas Mountains. This range has some of the tallest peaks in northern Africa, including, Mt. Toubkal at 13, 670 ft. Finally, the Anti-Atlas Mountain range in southern Morocco, is the shortest, most barren, and least populated of all the ranges. Beyond this range is the endless Sahara desert, which stretches throughout the rest of Morocco.

Climate

As a result of the varying altitudes across Morocco, as well as the effects of the Atlantic Ocean, the climate varies throughout the country. In northern Morocco, it is generally hot and dry in the summer and cold and wet in the winter. Farther south, the climate is much more extreme. It is very hot during the day and bitterly cold at night. The coastal areas are usually hot
and humid, though the breeze from the ocean help to keep it cooler. Rainfall averages about 29 in. annually in the northern locations and becomes scarcer the farther south you go. In southern Morocco, more than four inches of rain can’t be expected. Drought affects the land quite often, which has damaging effects on agriculture.

**History**

Berbers, a people of Euro-Asiatic origin were the indigenous people of Morocco. Throughout the sixth and seventh centuries, three other groups have moved in and eventually out of Morocco. These groups included the Phoenicians, Carthaginians, and Romans. Each group developed settlements and brought new ideas to Morocco, such as wheat and grape crops, minted coins, new buildings, sculptures, aqueducts and more.

Soon, Arab immigrants entered Morocco, bringing with them a long-lasting religion and culture. Their principle aim was to convert all people to Islam. In the late eighth century, an Arab immigrant by the name of Moulay Idriss gathered enough followers of Islam to develop an Arab court. Two more Arab groups moved into Morocco in the eleventh century. These groups were the Almoravids and the Almohads.

Throughout the next several centuries, there were prosperous times for Moroccans as well as very poor times. Social and economic problems developed, and differences among the Arab dynasties led to a brief civil war. The Europeans began to take interest in Morocco in the late seventeenth century. They desired to occupy the land, which the Berbers were strongly against.

Then, in the nineteenth century, France and Spain began having a powerful presence in Morocco. They interfered with Morocco’s foreign affairs, causing Morocco’s leaders to be weakened and the government to become financially dependent on France. In 1908, with little
power left, Sultan Hafid of Morocco signed the Treaty of Fes, which gave France and Spain control over Morocco. Though Moroccans had no say in much of what was done in their country, France was able to assist Morocco in gaining financial stability. In addition, the French further developed roadways, railways, and towns. The legal system was reformed and education became more widely available.

In 1955, Morocco was able to regain its independence after Sultan Mohammed V, who was new and quite young, worked and rallied at gaining independence. While the French left a lot of good developments in Morocco, they left no political system or trained Moroccan leaders. Today, Morocco has a French-based legal system with Islam influence. The government is a democratic and constitutional monarchy. There is a single chamber of representatives and no party has gained enough power to form an actual government that is stable. Slow progress is being made to function solely as a democracy, but the people’s lack of power, poverty, lack of education, and poor health services all hinder this process.

**Important Holidays**

There are several holidays that are of extreme importance in Morocco. These include:

Aid es Seghir, which is a week long festival at the end of Ramadan. It is celebrated with special foods and clothing. Aid el Kebir is celebrated to commemorate Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son, Isaac. Sheep are slaughtered and the skins are cured in the streets. Muharram celebrates the Muslim New Year. Finally, Mouloud celebrates the birthday of Mohammed and is a two-day celebration.

**Population**

The majority of Morocco’s twenty-six million person population is Arab, Berber and mixed-race. Most of the population is concentrated in the western part of Morocco, where the
fertile plains and coastal areas are utilized. The population is growing rapidly, which demands attention and focus on family planning.

**Currency**

The Moroccan currency is the Dirham. Currently (2004) 8.66 Dirham is equivalent to one American dollar.

**Education**

Lack of finances, teachers, and schools make it very difficult to properly educate the large number of young people. Morocco requires children between the ages of seven and thirteen to attend five years of primary school, followed by a couple years of secondary school. However, in many smaller, more isolated communities’, children are unable to attend school at all. In addition, priority for education is given to males. A number of students are able to become educated at a higher level and even attend universities. Approximately 50% of the adult population cannot read or write.

**Language**

Morocco’s official language is Arabic. There are many dialects spoken, mainly Maghrib. French is the second official language, remaining from France’s occupation in Morocco. In addition, there are many dialects of Berber that are still spoken. There is no standard Berber script or language, so the differences among the dialects can be quite extreme.

**Religion**

Islam is the sole religion in Morocco and influences many things, including government. In the past, Morocco has been known to be quite hostile towards any other religion. However, with the increase of tourism and western influence, slow changes are being made to avoid such a reputation.
**Economy**

Morocco’s economy has been struggling for many years now, though there are some positive outlooks. There is a very large young population in Morocco. This puts quite a strain on the economy because the needed number of jobs is much too large. Those that are fortunate to get a job are paid very poorly, often a mere six Dirham per hour. Agriculture employs about 40% of the population, followed by fishing and textile production. In addition, an increasing tourism industry is developing in Morocco. Morocco is also blessed with large phosphate deposits, which bring a large amount of money to the country.

**Trade**

Morocco is the largest exporter of phosphate. Their investment in this industry has proven to be worthwhile. Fruits and vegetables, as well as other agriculture products are exported, mainly to Europe. Textile production, including knitting, weaving, and spinning account for 20% of total exports.

Morocco imports a lot of fuel from Saudi Arabia and The United Arab Emirates. They also import milk, fruits and vegetables, and other crops which are difficult to produce because of the hot climate.

**Food**

Almost every Moroccan meal has a bread base.. Often times, it is accompanied by tajine, which is a combination of lamb or chicken and fresh vegetables, hard-boiled eggs, and almonds. In addition, olives and lemons are a very common food that is served pickled. Lamb is the most widely eaten meat in Morocco and is the main ingredient in many dishes. Hot mint tea is served with every meal and Moroccans also love sweet desserts and pastries made with confectioner’s sugar.
Conclusion

Morocco is a very fascinating country with a unique history and an interesting culture. Though there are struggles with economy, government, education, and even climate, Morocco is slowly overcoming these problems and persevering.

Lindsay Krone