

Episode 47: Return to Morocco

Summary

Six years after their first overwhelming experience in Morocco, Nick and Wendy returned. In this conversation, they talk about their second trip to Morocco.

Transcript

Nick: Hello and welcome to part two of our little mini-series about travelling to Morocco. So, last time we talked about how we were overwhelmed when we went to Morocco the first time. Umm, we were both younger and we were travelling separately, we were travelling alone and we didn't really know what to expect and weren't really prepared. And then six years later, we went back together. So why do you think we decided to go back again? Because we usually don't do that that much, to go back to a country that we've been to before.

Wendy: Yeah, that's true. I think it was because we recognised that we hadn't really done it properly the first time. Or, we barely even remembered it. I mean, we had some very clear impressions, but, you know, when you talk about, like, the sights that we had seen ... I mean, you did remember Fez quite clearly, and I remembered Fez in a very fuzzy¹ kind of way. I had very strong impressions that it left on my mind but I didn't really remember specifically what I had seen, and ... because it had just been so much, you know, an overload of the senses. And, so I think we both thought that we needed to go back again and do it differently and see what we thought of it.

Nick: Yep, and so in between we'd been to countries like Egypt, we'd been to countries like India, so we'd experienced, uhh, developing countries, countries with, you know, a lot of noise, a lot of hassle² and all of that, and so we were much better prepared the second time. And we decided to spend a month there, so we could really, you know, travel around and see all the things and do all the things that we wanted to do in the country. And, yeah, I was actually really excited and intrigued to see what I would think of it the second time, umm, because the viewpoint just wasn't going to be the same, umm, having been so young and been so raw the first time, everything was just extraordinary. But then having been to some of these other countries I wondered if it would be like that again in Morocco. And, certainly, yeah, I was much better prepared, umm, but I still found it a fascinating country.

¹ fuzzy: unclear, blurred

² hassle: difficulties, annoyances

Wendy: Yeah.

Nick: Umm, and so I think we had a lot more fun, or we enjoyed it a lot more, because we were so much more aware of the religion, we'd been to a lot of Muslim countries in the interim³, umm, and, you know, we were just so much better prepared.

Wendy: Yes, yes, that's very true.

Nick: And so I remember going back to Fez, really wanting to go back to Fez because that had left such an impression on me the first time. And do you remember, it snowed?

Wendy: Yes.

Nick: And so it was a strange ... it was just a strange situation.

Wendy: We were there...

Nick: It seems like we get into this a little bit, because we've done an episode about snow in Berlin, umm...

Wendy: Right, it also snowed when we were in Jerusalem.

Nick: Yeah, it snowed in Jerusalem, and it snowed in Fez because we were there in January, so it was in the northern hemisphere winter. And, because the first time when I went to Morocco it was July, and when we went to the desert it was fifty degrees Celsius. So that was quite a change to go to Fez and have it snow. But I still found it incredibly fascinating. I was much ... in a much better position to deal with it but I really loved it even the second time, umm, and I was really glad that it still left a strong impression on me even though I'd visited a lot of countries in between. And so I really have those two memories of visiting Fez twice and having a different perspective but still really finding it fascinating both times. And so for some reason, because Marrakesh is everybody's, more or less everybody's, favourite city in Morocco, but Fez is the one that really struck me⁴ more. And I don't even remember my first trip to Marrakesh at all, because I was sick, Sam was sick, and, umm, yeah, I don't think we really got much out of it at all. But then of course we went back the second time and really enjoyed it. We went to, uhh, Meknes and Rabat and so the four of those cities are the four imperial cities of Morocco, so we spent a good deal of time in all of those and they all had to offer and a lot of different things to offer, so I was really glad that we did that.

³ interim: period in between

⁴ struck me: impressed me, left an impression on me

Wendy: Yep, and I remember in Marrakesh we stayed in a hotel that was right on the Jemaa el Fna, which is the main square in the heart of the city. It's a huge square and it's where everything happens. So you have, uhh, orange juice stalls where they sell fresh squeezed orange juice and, you know, you can buy other food and things like that. And then at night, you just have all these kinds of buskers⁵ and street entertainers, snake charmers and acrobats and things like that.

Nick: Storytellers.

Wendy: Storytellers, yeah. And it really is like something out of the medieval ages.

Nick: Yeah, I remember ... it was funny, because it was a very budget hotel but it had this incredible location and so we just paid hardly anything for it. And, of course, in Marrakesh, there's a lot of classy hotels or upscale hotels you can stay in too, but we were backpacking so we were in this cheap hotel. But, yeah the view was just amazing. You could just sit at the window, and I remember doing that, just sitting at the window and just looking out for a long time because there's always these things happening, and so, yeah, that left a big impression on me as well.

One of the amazing things about Morocco is, in terms of the nature and the landscapes, you've got a bit of everything, and you can see a bit of everything all on the same day.

Wendy: Right.

Nick: And so we went out to the desert, and I remember going out there the first time as well, and so it was good to back and see it again. And so you really just see the beginning of the Sahara, so that's always something that's pretty amazing to see. And so luckily it was in winter so it wasn't as hot as it was the first time that I went there. Umm, and so basically you've got the Sahara in the east of the country and you have coast in the west, and so you have these famous beaches, for example Essaouira. In between you've got gorges, you've got mountains, and so you've got a bit of everything.

Wendy: Yeah.

Nick: And so we tried to see as much as we could of all of those things. We stayed in this gorge⁶ called the Todra Gorge, which is really amazing. These ... you're in a ... you know, you're in the gorge and you have these rocks, these red rocks rising on both sides, and just the way that they are when you have the blue sky in the background, the sun shining on it, it's just an incredible view. You have palm trees, as well. And then, yeah, just a few hours later on a bus and then suddenly you see

⁵ buskers: street musicians, who play music for tips

⁶ gorge: small canyon, narrow area with cliffs rising on both sides

snow-capped mountains of the Atlas Mountains which is the mountain range in Morocco.

Wendy: There was actually a little bit too much snow when we were there. Umm, because it was January, I believe, it was the dead of winter⁷. And I guess we didn't really think that there would be that much snow in Morocco because, you know, like you said, the last time that you were there, it was fifty degrees, and you thought, 'Oh, it can't really be covered in snow.' But yeah, up on the mountains, it can.

Nick: And we'd also just come from the desert, so we went to the mountains and we decided to do this hike, we were going to do a two-day hike and you could stay at the, kind of, halfway point in a kind of mountain hut. And so we did that, and that was all ... that was amazing. And we loved it on that first day and I think there were a group of, umm, off-piste skiers.

Wendy: Oh, maybe.

Nick: Do you remember that? And they were staying there and they were going to climb up somewhere and ski down it. And so from this hut, the next day you go over a pass, and I think even the guy at the hut said, 'You know, there's a lot of snow, maybe you shouldn't do it.' And we said, 'No it's OK, we'll do it.' And so we got to the pass and there was so much snow we couldn't see anything, we couldn't see the path, umm, and it was ... yeah, it looked like it would be dangerous to continue, so in the end we actually went back the way that we came where there was less snow. And, umm, and so we went up and back rather than doing a kind of, umm, a loop⁸ that we were going to do originally. Umm, but we were knee-deep in snow at one point.

Wendy: Yeah.

Nick: So that was interesting!

Wendy: Not what we expected in Morocco. But Morocco is always full of surprises, even when you think you're prepared.

Nick: Right, yeah, we were much better prepared for certain things but evidently not for the snow that time.

Wendy: Yeah.

⁷ the dead of winter: the middle of winter. It can only be used for winter, not the other three seasons.

⁸ loop: circular shape that ends where it started

Nick: And then we went to the coast, and we went to Essaouira which I mentioned before. It's this famous beach town. It started as a kind of hippie beach town in the sixties...?

Wendy: Yes, uhh, Jimi Hendrix visited there and if you know the famous Jimi Hendrix song about castles in the sand (*Castles Made of Sand*), that was inspired by Essaouira because there is kind of a castle that is very eroded by the elements because of the sea water and the salt and everything and that was the inspiration for the song.

Nick: And then we travelled up the coast and there were other interesting things. We saw an old Portuguese colonial town, and there was a castle. We also saw an underground cistern⁹ which was really quite interesting and we've only ever seen one other thing like that, I guess, ever, which is the Basilica Cistern in Istanbul. And so, yeah, everywhere you go there's just different things to see. We went to Chefchaouen which is a famous village. Umm, a lot of the houses are painted blue and so it's just spectacular and very picturesque¹⁰ to walk in the little alleyways and see all this blue everywhere, umm, which is like Jodhpur in India, but actually more picturesque. And so, you know, we spent a month there and we saw and did amazing things basically every day.

Wendy: Yeah, it was a fascinating trip and I really loved it. I will say that the touts were still there, you know, the people who were trying to hassle us and get our money in some way or take advantage of us. Uhh, they were definitely there, and they were definitely annoying, but we were better prepared for that. We knew to expect that. Even so, it was still annoying and sometimes our tempers flared a little bit when we were dealing with them. But, you know, looking back on it after the fact, you can forget about that and then just remember all the amazing things like we saw.

Nick: Absolutely.

⁹ cistern: large space for water storage

¹⁰ picturesque: charming, worth taking a picture of

Comprehension Questions

1. What was special about the hotel Nick and Wendy stayed in in Marrakesh?
2. What did Nick like about the nature in Morocco?
3. Why happened when Nick and Wendy tried to hike over a mountain pass?

Exercises

Use the words and expressions in the footnotes of the transcript to fill in the gaps.

1. If you fly in and out of the same city but want to travel around the country, you can do a _____ and finish back where you started.
2. The stone village was very _____. I took a lot of photos.
3. In many European cities, in particular, you can sit outside at restaurants and enjoy listening to _____ play music while you eat.
4. It can often be a big _____ to cancel or change a flight. Sometimes you have to speak to a lot of different people and they aren't always helpful.
5. If you hike through a _____, you often get to walk alongside a river while looking up at the cliffs.
6. Of all the cities I visited in Morocco, Fez _____ the most. The way of living in the old city was fascinating.
7. In _____ in Iceland, there's only a few hours of sunlight every day. It gets dark in the early afternoon.
8. They haven't had any rain there for a long time. Their _____ is almost empty, so soon there won't be any water left.
9. He was taking a lot of medication at the time so his memory of what happened that day is a bit _____.
10. Our meeting has been delayed until 4pm. In the _____, can you review the notes of the last meeting?

Discussion Questions

Discuss these questions with a partner or in the [English in 10 Minutes Listeners group on Facebook](#):

1. Nick and Wendy talked about experiencing both the cities and the nature of Morocco on this trip. Do you prefer to visit cities or nature when you travel? Why?
2. Of the four natural landscapes that they mentioned (desert, gorges, mountains and coast), which do you prefer? Why?
3. Have you ever been hiking when something went wrong, like Nick and Wendy described?

Answers

Comprehension Questions

1. It had an amazing view over the Jemaa el Fna despite being a budget hotel.
2. He liked that there was a bit of everything, from desert to gorges to mountains to the coast.
3. There was too much snow on the pass, so they had to turn back and return the way they came.

Exercises

1. loop
2. picturesque
3. buskers
4. hassle
5. gorge
6. struck me
7. the dead of winter
8. cistern
9. fuzzy
10. interim