

MOROCCO

We have awoken, skin smelling of smoke, breath still sweet with spices from dinner. The night before, we had driven into the dark down a dirt road outside Marrakech that seemed to lead nowhere but at the end of which was an expansive walled compound filled with rose gardens and patios lit by wood fires, lanterns and candles. There we were served a memorable tajine: a layer of beef topped with onions which had caramelized under their dusting of cumin and cinnamon before being topped with slices of fresh tomatoes. The wine was Gerrouane Rouge, a dry Moroccan wine we actually sell at The Spanish Table. It was like meeting an old friend over dinner.

We have been in Morocco for five nights with Seattle-based National Geographic Lindblad Expeditions. We have spent a day in the high Atlas driving Toyota Land Cruisers up dirt roads through Berber villages shaped out of the local clay mixed with straw. We have toured the twisting, turning alleys of the souk, the bright kabob stalls in the main square, followed women with trays of round loaves of unbaked bread into the subterranean blue tiled room where in one corner a man with a long metal paddle slid them into a wood oven to bake to a crisp brown crust.

We have paused at the wonders, not only of Marrakech, but also Casablanca, Rabat and Fez. We have gazed at the architectural delights from mosques to mausoleums, of walls running for kilometer after kilometer around the city, still intact after 800 years. But best of all, tasted tajine after tajine in endless variety rich with meats, olives and preserved lemons and served with heaps of couscous steamed with vegetables and a side of rich harissa pepper sauce. Guiding us through this is Lonely Planet's *World Food Morocco*, sadly now out of print but still available at The Spanish Table where it is being closed out at \$6.99.

Tonight, we board the NG Endeavor and set sail for Portugal and Spain.