

Squiz the World goes to Morocco

Each week, we give the world globe a spin, and see where we land. Then we take the kids of Australia on an audio excursion to visit that country and its people.

I'm Amanda Bower, and today on Squiz the World we're visiting Morocco—a country in Northwest Africa that has beautiful beaches on the Mediterranean Sea; the rugged Rif and Atlas mountain ranges in the interior; and the sand dunes of the Sahara to the south. Let me tell you, there's nothing like riding on a camel at sunset in the Sahara!

So strap yourselves into the Squiz Kids Super Fast Supersonic Jetliner as we take off and take a squiz at Morocco.

JUST THE FACTS

People have been living in Morocco for hundreds of thousands of years. In the early 8th century, Morocco was conquered by Muslims, and now more than 95% of the population are Muslim. So no matter where you are in Morocco, you'll hear the evening call to prayer from the mosques...

36 million people live in Morocco, and its biggest city is Marrakech - in fact, the name "Morocco" comes from Marrakech, which was the capital hundreds of years ago. Nowadays, the capital is Rabat, which is where you'll find the elected members of government, as well as the King.

In Australia, our King - remember, we have one now, after the death of Queen Elizabeth - doesn't have much to do with everyday politics, and doesn't hold much real power. It's very different in Morocco. The king holds enormous power, especially over the military, religious affairs, and Morocco's relationships with other countries. He can issue decrees, which means orders, that have the same power as laws made by Parliament.

In fact, you can go to prison in Morocco if you criticise the King... or the government. You'll also face up to 15 years in prison if you try to convert anyone to a religion other than Islam. For these reasons and more, Morocco is said to have a poor record on human rights - which basically means the freedom to be yourself and express your opinions.

Okay, enough politics!

Whenever you travel, it's important to learn a few words in that country's language. It's a great way to show respect. So, let's....

LEARN THE LINGO

There are two official languages in Morocco: Arabic and Amazigh, which is spoken by the Berber people, who were in Morocco long before the Arabic Muslims arrived. The

Amazigh alphabet is called Tamazight, and it has 38 consonants and just 3 vowels! I've put a link in your episode notes to Tamazight - have a go writing your name!

Now when I went to Morocco, I made a lovely friend named Mustafa... and I am so excited to introduce you to his niece, Hajar, who is going to teach us some Amazigh.

"Azul, maytaanam? Labas ghoron? = Hello, how are you?

Tanmmert non= thank you

Akniaon rbbi= good bye"

Tanmert, Hajar! Your English is incredible...

Now that we can communicate a little bit, it's....

TIME FOR SCHOOL

The Moroccan government has been putting a lot of effort into improving the education system. 20 years ago, about half of all Moroccans could not read or write.

Since then, the government has built a lot of schools, trained a lot of teachers, and provided poor families with extra food and help with housing, encouraging them to send their kids to school.

The World Bank says that now, 20 years later, 95% of young people are able to read and write effectively. But there are still some problems... a survey this year found that only 27% of teachers reported having a proper library, and about 30% said they had access to a printer. Which makes teaching hard.

Then there's the issue of uniforms. Girls in Morocco are expected to wear a long white lab coat to school... like the kind that doctors wear in a hospital... and are sent home if their skirts or dresses are too short. Boys can wear anything they like—and when the school year started in September, girls took to social media to express their frustration. Watch this space to see if that policy changes.

Now HOW kids get to school in Morocco all depends on where they live, of course. But in the ancient city of Fez, if you live inside the walls of the Medina, you can forget about getting a lift - there are no cars!

Going to Fez is like going back in time... let's go and check it out.

TIME TRAVEL

Let's go back... way back... to the 9th century, when Fez was founded. That makes it the world's biggest mediaeval city still active today. And when you step inside one of the

enormous gates that take you through the ancient walls of Fes, you'd be forgiven for thinking that the time machine had failed to bring you back to the 21st century.

You'll see donkeys walking through the narrow cobbled streets, carrying heavy loads. Women carry loaves of unbaked bread from their homes to the wood-fired community oven. You'll pass men banging pieces of copper into cooking pots; peek inside Islamic schools, called madrasas, from the 1300s, still teaching today; and because most buildings in Fes were constructed before there was indoor plumbing, many people will still go to hamams, or bathhouses, to wash.

I didn't see a single supermarket inside the walls of Fes—instead, there are the sprawling souks, or markets, that are like labyrinths. It's REALLY easy to get lost in Fes, and especially in a souk!

And then, there is the city's infamous tannery, where animal skins are turned into leather. The process followed by the men who work there hasn't changed in 1,000 years. When you first arrive, you're given a big bunch of mint. As soon as you get close to the tannery, you know why...

Men stand working at vile-smelling pits of liquid—and if you want to watch them for more than a few seconds, you'll need to stuff that mint right up into your nose. First, the animal skins go into a mixture of water, limestone, and pigeon poo. They stay there for three days. The limestone removes the hair from the skin, and the pigeon poop makes it soft. Then, the skins are washed and dyed with natural colours: red comes from poppies, yellow from saffron, orange from henna. Then, the skins are laid out on the surrounding buildings' rooves to dry, before being cut and turned into bags, shoes, and other leather goods. I'll put a link to a video in your episode notes - be grateful that it doesn't come with smells.

Okay, give me a minute to get my appetite back after that... because I think it's ...

DINNER TIME

Have you ever eaten couscous? If you have, I'm going to bet that it came out of a packet, was put into some boiling water, and a few minutes later, it was ready to go.

Well, couscous is Morocco's national dish, and the traditional way of making it is waaaay more effort.

Groups of people come together over several days to make big batches of couscous out of semolina, which is the hardest part of a grain of wheat. The semolina is sprinkled with water, hand rolled to form small pellets, then sprinkled with dry flour to keep the pellets separate. The pellets are dried in the sun and can then keep for several months.

Once you're ready to cook it, you put the couscous in a steamer over the top of a pot of stew, so that it becomes light, fluffy, and flavoured by the stew. Mmmm.

Of course, your family may not have days spare to make couscous by hand, so grab a box from the supermarket and make a Moroccan beef stew, called a tagine, to go with it. Beef is the most popular meat to eat in Morocco, and a tagine pairs meat with fruit, nuts, and spices. It is YUM.

THE S'QUIZ

This is the part of the podcast where you get to test how well you've been listening.

Question 1. What stinky ingredient is used to soften animal skins at the Fes tannery?

Question 2. Name one of the two official languages of Morocco. Extra point if you name both!

Question 3. What are girls in Morocco required to wear to school?

That's all we have time for today. Thanks for staying curious about the world, and joining me on this incredible trip to Morocco.

Now get out there, and have a most excellent day. Over and out.