



Morocco Tour 2018 Travelogue 4

In this article we conclude our travelogue series of my 2018 Morocco Tour & Workshop, finishing our shoot of the camels in the Sahara, then photograph some wonderful characters and the Portuguese Cistern at El Jadida.

December 31, 2018

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In the previous episode we looked at a number of photos of the camel handlers with their turbans blowing in the wind as well as leading their camels through the dunes in the Sahara Desert. To stick to our ten images per post though, we left the last couple of images from this shoot until this week, so let's jump right in and look at these now.

Camels at Sunset

We'd waited until the sun was on the horizon for our last few shots, of which this is one of my favorites. You can see now why it wasn't such a bit deal that three tourists had ridden their own camels across the brow of this sand dune, as it was pretty much going to be a silhouette by the time we shot it anyway.

Although I'm not very good in automated shooting modes, because we were sometimes shooting into the sun like

this, and other times shooting away from it, I do work hard to get used to using Aperture Priority with Auto-ISO in situations like this, and it leads to some





nice silhouettes as the camera darkens down the exposure to avoid blowing out the sunset.

I also set the camera to keep my shutter speed relatively high to avoid camera shake, and to capture the walking camels, so it all came together with a

shutter speed of 1/250 of a second at f/13, with the ISO at 200 and a focal length of 97mm.

Rock the Kasbah

As the sun went down, we had the camel handlers walk across this dune a few times, and moved around a little for a



slightly different perspective. For this last shot of the camels I went a little higher to include the top of what looks like a Kasbah, although in reality I think

it is the lodge that we'd stayed in on the previous night before moving to our luxury tents a few hours before this shoot. As there was a lot of clear sky above the



line of camels in this photograph (previous page) I decided to crop it down to a more cinematic 16:9 aspect ratio, which I quite like. The settings for this were a 1/250 of a second at f/13, with an ISO of 640 and a focal length of 97mm. For both of these images I was using my Canon EF 24-105mm f/4 Mark II lens.

After spending the night in the Sahara, the following day we drove back through the dunes in our four-wheel drive vehicles, and switched back to our bus to continue our journey.

Man in the Well

Shortly after starting our drive, we stopped for a shoot that I'd been looking forward to since last year. We visited Karim again, the man who poses for us down

an irrigation channel with a well hole, through which beautiful light pours for what I think are incredible photographs.





I actually shot most of my images down here in portrait orientation, including this one, but with this I've taken it into Photoshop and extended the canvas so

that it is a 3:2 aspect ratio in landscape orientation, and then selected the two areas to either side of the original photograph, hit the delete key, and

then had Photoshop fill in the sides with Content-Aware Fill. With it being so dark I just had to clean up a few artifacts to get a landscape orientation version, which I really like.

Because it's so dark down this well I was also looking forward to using my [85mm f/1.4 L lens](#) down here, which I opened up to f/2, so it was letting in two stops more light than my f/4 lens does wide open.



Aït Benhaddou

This enabled me to capture a brighter image than last year, although my ISO was still at 6400, at 1/20 of a second.

We ended the day at Ouarzazate, where we had a quick shoot of the beautiful fortified town of Aït Benhaddou before

heading to our hotel for the night. We went back the following morning, when I shot this image with the warm morning sun bathing the town.

I used a 6 stop neutral density filter for a 2.5 second exposure to make the water in the river smooth over a little, although we hardly notice that in the photograph with the fortified town being so vibrant. I'd set my aperture to f/14 and ISO to 100 with a focal length of 56mm.





Moroccan Man in Window

When we got into the town itself, our guide arranged a few shoots with the local people, starting with this man who we'd photographed with his donkey outside, before going into his house to photograph him in a window like this. It was funny, because the house was mostly very traditional, with the Berber mark above him on the wall and similar authentic artifact, but just above to the right of the frame here, was a huge Gladiator poster in a frame, which had been given to this man as he was an extra in the movie.

Running with my semi-automated shooting modes, the shutter speed was a little higher than necessary here at 1/320 of a second, but I'd opened up the aperture to f/2.2, and these settings gave me an ISO of 2000 at a focal length of 85mm. With all the rustic red shades in this image, one of my favorite parts is the man's blue turban, which is a nice color contrast against the reds.





Mr. Mohammed

I had also been really looking forward to revisiting the gentleman in the next few photographs, as his images were some of my favorites from last year's trip as well. This is Mr. Jamal Eddine Mohammed who lives in this ancient town and has appeared as an extra in many movies shot here too.

He's a wonderful character and great looking gentleman to photograph. When I told him that I thought he looked like Sir. Alec Guinness, he smiled and then reeled off a string of other actors names who he's been told he looks like, and they were pretty much all in there in his rugged good looks.

I framed this up with him directly in front of the dark area of a gateway at the foot of his house, but I used my 85 mm lens opened up to f/2.5 to give me a nice shallow depth of field and some separation between him and the background. This also resulted in a shutter speed of 1/250 of a second and my ISO was at 125.





Inside an Adobe Building

We also went back into the adobe building that we'd photographed Mr. Mohammed in last year as well (next page) and although I have another great shot of him close up, looking up into the light again, here is a wider framed image showing him in his environment, with the dusty Tajine pots lined up along a ledge.

Once again the dark conditions resulted in my ISO going up to 6400, the maximum that I set for my Auto-ISO range, and my shutter speed was then forced down to a 1/20 of a second exposure at f/4, and my focal length was at 35mm.

As I've mentioned many times though, it's better to let your ISO go higher and record a brighter image than to resist the higher ISO resulting in a darker image, because brightening up a dark image introduces more grain than the higher ISO does.







Marrakesh Waterman

After our shoots at Aït Benhaddou, we continued our journey to Marrakesh, the last place that we'd spend two nights at before heading back to Casablanca via El Jadida.

To be completely honest with you, I'm not a huge fan of Marrakesh. I find the people to be more aggressive than the rest of Morocco, and even just getting out an audio recorder to record the ambient sounds of the market square there instantly resulted in two young men rushing over to hold out their hats for tips.

On the other hand, if you prearrange a shoot with people, as our guide did the morning after we arrived, with a number of the

watermen, you can still get some nice shots. For me this year, this image of an aged waterman with a great toothy smile is about the only shot from Marrakesh that has made it to my final selection.

Portuguese Cistern

These watermen are fun to shoot, as they are colorful and have a certain showmanship element, although I do wonder if people actually ever drink their water these days, with it being so much more available than it would have been when this quant tradition originally formed.

My settings for this shot were a 1/200 of a second exposure at f/4, and my ISO was at 100 with a focal length of 105mm.

The following day, we drove over to the coast to a town called El Jadida, for the final real highlight of the tour, which is a visit to the old Portuguese Cistern there, as we can see in the final few images for this series.

I'd negotiated to allow us to take and use one tripod inside the cistern, so with my Arca Swiss standard Really Right Stuff quick release clamp on my tripod, and the fact that many guests had compatible plates and brackets on their cameras, we took my tripod in.



I of course let all the guests that wanted to use it do so for as long as they wanted, so the image on the previous page was shot at ISO 5000, as I continued to do most of my shooting handheld. It works fine though, and unless you zoom in to 100% and inspect the shadows you can't really see any grain. Even printed this would look fine as grain shows up even less in prints.

This is a wonderful rugged environment that I really enjoy photographing. I generally just expose to the point that the highlights in the hole in the roof and the brightly lit area below it are just starting to blow out, and then bring out the shadow detail in post using the Highlights and Shadows sliders in Capture One Pro. My other settings were a 1/40 of a second shutter speed at f/5.6 and a focal length of 45mm.

I made a few more exposures after getting my tripod back to use before we left, and this final image (following page) is one of them, shot now at ISO 100, for a ten-second exposure at f/14. It's hard to tell the difference without really jumping in and inspecting the shadows, but it is a slightly cleaner image.

My focal length was 35mm for this final photo of this travelogue series. After this, we drove for a few more hours up the coast back to Casablanca where we'd started our trip almost two weeks earlier.

By the time we got to our hotel and recorded a comment from each member of the group as you'll hear in the recording I'd almost completely lost my voice from the cold that I'd caught. It turns out that we'd find from blood tests after I got back to Japan that I had also been infected with some sort of virus and some of the values in the test results later showed one of the doctors that I talked to a week or so ago that I probably should have been hospitalized.

Luckily I made it back to Japan OK, although a little worse for wear, and it took me another ten days and a seven-day course of antibiotics to fully recover, but I did really enjoy this year's Morocco tour, once I got in after my fiasco with the customs officials on arrival.

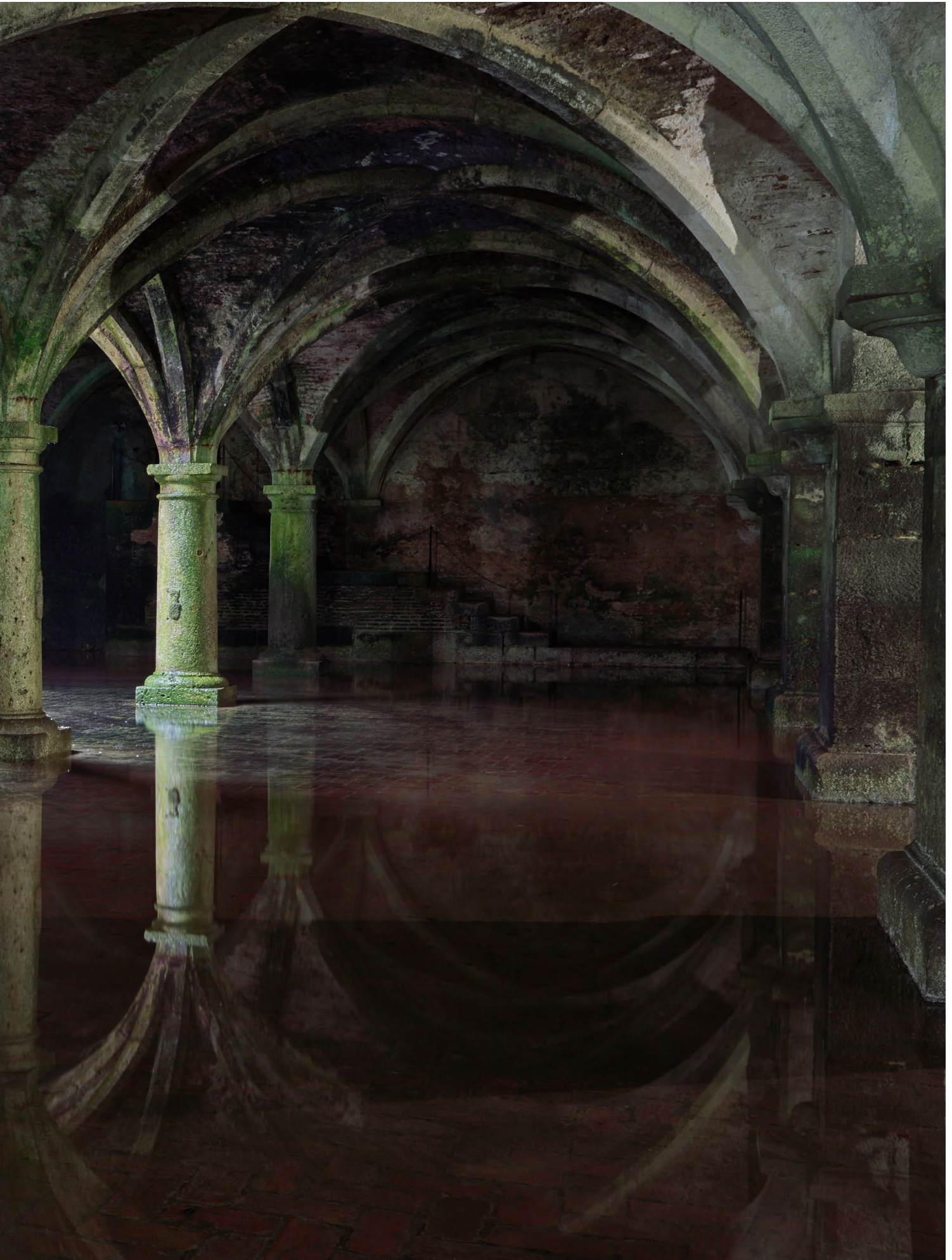
Anyway, at this point in the audio podcast I play the recording of a lovely comment from each of the guests. You'll need to [visit the blog](#) and listen with the audio player to see what they said.

To follow up on the comment made by Ken at the start of these comments, it turns out that the Japanese Rugby Team have the nickname The Cherry Blossoms, which Ken had pointed out early in the tour and reminded me of a number of times, often accompanied by copious amounts of laughter from the group. I'm never going to live that down!

A Happy New Year for 2019!

Finally, I'd like to wish you a very Happy New Year as 2018 draws to an end, and we start 2019 with hope for a peaceful, safe and fruitful year ahead.







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