Countries of North Africa

- Map It: Africa
- Map It: North Africa
- Map It: Regions of Africa
- Student Activity: Country Profile
- Post Travel Reprint: “In Morocco, 44 hours of lingering in village leaves a big impression”
- Post Reprint: “A Morocco empty of tourists”
- Student Activity: Photo Essay  |  My Place
- Crossword Puzzle: Africa on the Mediterranean
Shifting Sands and Sea Breezes

Its ancient civilizations are revealed in artifacts, hieroglyphs, pyramids, papyrus fragments and the records of historians and pharaohs as well as its conquerors. The five countries that compose North Africa held wonders of the ancient world and today’s Cultural and Natural World Heritage sites — including Rock-Art sites of Tadrart Acacus (Libya), Memphis and its Necropolis, the Pyramid Fields (Egypt), the fortified city of Kairouan (Tunisia), archaeological site of Volubilis (Morocco), Timgad (Algeria) and Trans-Sahara Trading Routes.

Rabat is on the Atlantic Ocean and Cairo is on the Nile River. The other three capitals of the five countries of North Africa rise from the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. It was inevitable that the other countries of the Mediterranean would trade, eye its coastline and culture, conquer and concede its lands. The countries’ proximity, culture and heritage attracts today’s tourists — with cautionary notes where civil disobedience or unrest exists.

Activities in this resource guide encourage students to do a crossword puzzle and to profile a country. Post features provide two perspectives on Morocco: the Travel article, “In Morocco, 44 hours of lingering in village leaves a big impression,” takes readers into the interior when tourism abounded; “A Morocco empty of tourists,” a photo essay composed by a local photographer, reveals life during a pandemic. They make for a comparison and contrast of style, medium and point of view as well as inspiration for your students to create their own photo essays.

Countries of North Africa introduces students to the people living on the land between the shifting sands of the Sahara and Mediterranean Sea.
Map It | Africa
Map It | North Africa
Map It | Regions of Africa

- Northern Africa
- Western Africa
- Central Africa
- Eastern Africa
- Southern Africa

PETER HERMES FURIAN/ADOBESTOCK
Country Profile

Diverse people populate the 193 sovereign states recognized by the United Nations. Their geography, culture, history, demographics and stability influence their relations with other countries.

Explore five sources to learn more about one of these sovereign states. There are travel and history books, country and U.S. State Department country websites and CIA World Factbook to learn about the past and present conditions. Talk to citizens and embassy representatives or people who have travelled there.

Country (Official name) __________________________________________________________

1. Why did you select this country to study?

2. Location — Where in the World?

3. Geography

4. Size (Compare to a U.S. state or another country)

5. Capital

6. Currency (Name and images)

7. Flag (Colors and symbols)

8. Population (Number, Religions, Education level, Demographics)

9. Form of Government

10. Main Products/Income Sources

11. History Highlights

12. Culture Highlights

13. Current Relation with the United States

14. Current Relations with Other Countries

15. Person, event or condition that has had the most influence on forming the national character.
I had been feeling sick for a couple of days and was happy to be in a guesthouse with almost no guests in a village with only one paragraph in the travel guide. In front of me was a steaming bowl of pumpkin soup, sweet with onion and nutmeg, the perfect thing for a queasy stomach.

I’d had enough of destination travel. For the next couple of days, I thought to myself, I could stay right where I was — the town of Bhalil (pop. 12,000) in the Middle Atlas region of Morocco.

I had been visiting a friend who had an art residency in the northern city of Tetouan, but he was in a fit of creativity and had no time for sightseeing. I had rented a car, headed south, and visited Meknes, Volubilis and Fez for a week. Now, I was heading back, looking only for a place without much traffic. Lonely Planet called Bhalil a “curious village . . . worth a visit if you have your own transport.”

My 44 hours in Bhalil turned out to be the most memorable time of two weeks in Morocco. It was also a testament to the idea that travel without a plan is sometimes the best plan.

I was in the old part of town, in a stucco guesthouse called Dar Kamal Chaoui Maison d’Hotes. The only other guests were a couple from Germany with two children, who had eaten earlier. Now it was dinner time for the staff — my Moroccan host, Kamal, and his cook, Naima — and me.

As we finished the soup and prepared for the next course — chicken tagine with pears — a knock came on the door. Naima answered it. After a minute she returned and whispered to Kamal, her lavender scarf framing her pale face.

“There are three girls at the door — students — who want to ask me about the history of Bhalil,” Kamal said, turning to me. “Do you mind if they come in?”

Of course not. Now I wouldn’t have to ask all the questions.

Kamal asked about the assignment. “To write and recite, in French, something about Bhalil’s history.” When was it due? “Tomorrow” (which was Tuesday). When was it assigned? “Friday.” Kamal broke into “Monday, Monday” by the Mamas & The Papas, chiding them for procrastination, although I think I was the only one who got the joke.

He tested their French with more questions, and when he judged it inadequate for the urgency of the task, launched into a lecture in Arabic about three things that make Bhalil unusual.

No. 1: Caves formed by the Atlantic Ocean, which the original inhabitants incorporated into their houses.

No. 2: Buttons for djellabas, the traditional caftans worn in the region. A single garment can have more than 100 of the buttons made from knotted thread. Bhalil is where they’re made.

No. 3: The conservatism of Bhalil. This required more explanation. Seventy years earlier, the town fathers had refused to allow a highway to be built through Bhalil — a missed opportunity the place still feels. Kamal put it down as “peur des etrangers”
— fear of strangers — but he told me it was more than that. “There were worries it would bring prostitution and alcohol, but I didn’t get into that,” he said, nodding to the girls.

When he finished his talk, he called the girls to the head of the table. (“I shouldn’t be doing this. They won’t learn,” he said ruefully.) He asked them to repeat, in French, what they had heard. He corrected their grammar and took dictation in Selma’s notebook. (“My English is not good, but I am mad for French,” he said in a stage whisper.) When they were finished he pointed to his eye and said: “Watch me” and read the whole thing in a radio voice. He had each girl read one of the parts. Then we all had dessert to a chorus of “merci beaucoups.”

After the girls left I told Kamal he was a great teacher, but that was an understatement. “Kamal and the Night Visitors” was a virtuoso performance of pedagogy, emotional intelligence and civic pride. ■

To read the rest of this Post Travel article to learn more about Kamal and Bhalil, go to https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/travel/in-morocco-44-hours-of-lingering-in-a-small-village-leaves-a-big-impression/2019/08/29/48406eb6-9f6d-11e9-9ed4-c9089972ad5a_story.html
ARAB STORIES OF A PLAGUE YEAR

A Morocco empty of tourists

PHOTOS BY M’HAMMED KILITO

Each year, Morocco’s ancient cities, bustling souks, beachside resorts and sprawling desert draw millions of tourists. But when the novel coronavirus began to spread, Morocco suspended international flights to try to contain its outbreak.

The ban was a major blow to the country’s tourism industry, which employs hundreds of thousands of people and generates billions of dollars of revenue a year.

The country’s normally lively streets turned eerily quiet. Eventually, authorities began easing some restrictions. But as the crisis dragged on and business dried up, shops that once relied on tourists were hit especially hard. In Rabat, the capital, carpets that once hung inside shops were spread out on sidewalks on a main thoroughfare by merchants hoping to attract customers. Charming street markets of the seaside city of Essaouira were practically deserted.

Left: A boatman continues to offer rides across the Bouregreg River between Rabat and Salé despite the absence of the foreign and domestic tourists who provided the bulk of his income before the pandemic.

Top: Lahbib waits out the drought of tourists at his museum, which displays tools used by nomads in the Tighmert Oasis, near the Atlantic coast of southern Morocco. Tools and other items line the walls of the museum.
Footage from Marrakesh, where throngs of tourists typically shop in a maze of winding alleys, showed hospitals crammed with coronavirus patients.

In September, the country eased some travel restrictions, allowing a limited return of foreign visitors. But since then, several cities have reinforced their measures as case numbers rise.

But the coronavirus cases continued to rise in some regions, with a total of more than 311,000 recorded across the nation of 36 million inhabitants. And fears of a winter surge threaten any return to normal life — for Moroccans and aspiring tourists alike.

— Siobhdn O’Grady  
December 16, 2020

ABOUT THIS SERIES. More than ever, the burden that photographers carry when telling stories from their own homelands has become apparent during the pandemic. These women and men are no mere witnesses but live inside these stories, feeling their full weight. At the same time, they can capture themes and spot tales that foreign eyes may miss. Photographing home is, of course, an intimate act. This visual project, initiated with the Magnum Foundation, supported by the Henry Luce Foundation, gives us a glimpse through this lens.
Photo Essay | My Place

The photo essay combines words and photographs. For photographers, the images are of greatest importance to tell the story and convey an idea. The words support the images by adding context or making personal connection. For essayists, the words are the most important to convey ideas, events and emotions. The photographs support and fill in the empty spaces.

Read “A Morocco empty of tourists.” Read the photographs first.
1. What is the story they are telling you?
2. From the headline, you know Morocco is the place. No tourists are there. What subjects has the photographer used to convey the influence of no tourists?
3. Select one of the photographs that you think captures the emotions and spots a tale that “foreign eyes may miss.” Write a paragraph that explains the angles and techniques used by the photographer to do this.

Read “A Morocco empty of tourists.” Read the text, including captions.
4. What perspective on Morocco and its appeal does the first sentence give?
5. How important is tourism to different areas of the country? Include three specific examples in your response.
6. What percent of the population has tested positive for the coronavirus? Has the writer been able to convey in five paragraphs the impact on the pandemic on more than 400,000 individuals in Morocco? Explain your response.
7. Read the captions. How does the use of specific names of places and people and quotations assured you that this is an eyewitness account of someone who lives there?

You too can capture your home, your neighborhood and community better than someone who visits. Think about your place.
- What distinctions exist in architecture, gardens, meeting places and activities?
- Is this a mix of all ages? Ethnicities? Cultures?
- Have neighborhood activities been curtailed by the pandemic? Think of celebrations, gatherings, play times and competitions.
- Does your homeowners association, community or local official’s office have statistics that you might use? Or counts you can do yourself? See how Siobhdn O’Grady used numbers.

When you have decided on your topic, write the essay. Think of what places, events and people would help to convey the idea.

Having difficulty? You may find taking the photographs of your home, neighborhood or community first will help you to find the words to complete the story the images are telling. You may include photographs of past events to use for contrast.

It’s your place. Introduce it to us through words and photographs.
Africa on the Mediterranean

Many of the terms found in this crossword puzzle relate to North Africa. After you have completed the puzzle, use five of the terms in a paragraph about North Africa.

ACROSS
1. Originally nomadic people from the Arabian peninsula; Semitic people whose language and Islamic religion spread throughout the Middle East and North Africa from the seventh century
5. Opposite of wrong; to make amends
7. Delicate fabric made by looping, twisting or knitting thread in patterns; trim on garments
8. Large, dark African antelope
9. Abbrev. To be announced
10. Opposite of up
11. Flat-topped elevation, bigger than a butte, smaller than a plateau
12. The Mediterranean is a _________.
13. Regret, feel sorry
14. Mountains in North Africa
16. Opposite of yes
18. Adverb used in comparisons
20. Abbrev. Right
22. Birth, having innate qualities
26. Home of an ancient civilization; rich archaeological and cultural heritage
28. Where the Arab Spring protests began
31. Runs along or forms the border; avoids talking about something unpleasant
32. Use of the _____ and social media connected protesters.

DOWN
1. Largest country in Africa and the Mediterranean Basin
2. Past tense of run
3. The ability to make good judgements; keen, quick insight
4. Exist
5. Capital of Morocco
6. Large fish living in warm seas; eaten in sandwiches
9. Acronym of Transportation Security Administration
10. The Sahara
12. Abbrev. of South Africa
15. Mainly in the Sahara Desert, home to Tripoli, Berbers and Muammar al-Qadafi
17. Word indicating choice
19. Arab marketplace, bazaar
21. Way to find out what you know or can do
23. Abbrev. of opus
25. One
27. Acronym of Geographic Information System
28. Abbrev. of trauma score
29. Iridium symbol
30. Short for abdominal

Bonus Question: Which of the five countries of North Africa is not in the crossword puzzle?
ANSWERS. Africa on the Mediterranean

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  1 A R A B  4 B R I G H T  6 T
  7 L A C E A U
  8 G N U T B A D N
  9 E M S E A
 10 R U E A T L A S
 11 I N O I E
 12 A S R T B O R N
 13 N O U E G Y P T
 14 T U N I S I A
 15 A S R T B O R N
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 30 N O U E G Y P T
 31 S K I R T S W E B
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