sight for all eyes

Impressions of Toursim, April 7 --Ahmadu

After walking around and admiring the views of the Medina from various points of Fez, I quickly began to think about tourism in Morocco. It is indeed a very big part of life here. In the hotel that we stayed at there were posters made by the office of tourism. Although they don’t play center stage, tourists are represented in cartoons here. Life on the Medina is all about tourism. I’ve started to think about the things that differentiate a tourist and a Moroccan. I imagine a tourist is one who does “touristy” things such as visiting the Tombs of sacred Kings, or even simple things like walking the Medina. In this regard, there is very little difference between the average Moroccan and tourist. Even the act of inviting someone over for tea acts independently from the aspect of tourism. A Moroccan is probably more likely to invite an American stranger over a Moroccan stranger, however the line of tourist/Moroccan is for the most part blurry until you introduce the concept of money. Tourists will buy chess sets and hookahs. They will buy things off the street and sit in at cafes and restaurants. This is a very early look at tourism here, but I hope it becomes clearer as I become less of a tourist. I hope I become less of a tourist.

"the Athens of Africa"
Impressions of the Old City – Lizzie Krasner

Every time I go to the medina I am overwhelmed with impressions and experiences. So many that I can’t hope to capture more than a couple. Donkeys are the “Berber taxis” (just as satellite dishes are jokingly called the national flower) and are everywhere, carrying piles of furniture taller than my head up the steep passageways, jostling Moroccans to the side as they pass, or standing in the sun, waiting to be unloaded. The streets are covered in dung and I now understand the push for closed-toed shoes. The streets are sometimes two narrow for two people to pass (let alone a donkey!) and I imagine this comfort with proximity is linked to the body language between Moroccans in general – standing close while talking, holding hands in the street, etc.

The oddest thing for me to see was the juxtaposition of modern objects in medieval settings. Like the hanging light bulbs in the Medersa or the stall of iron on the street. It seems inconceivable to me to see electrical appliances spread out on a cloth, being bargained for. In the textile square, our guide, Ali, taught all of us to tie scarves around our heads in traditional fashion, like the famous national geographic cover of the woman where only her grey eyes are showing.

weekend trip: visiting ancient ruins, increasing baraka

On the 8th of April we drove from Fez to Volubilis, then Moulay Idriss and then Meknes. Volubilis is an ancient Roman city whose ruins were excavated by archeologists and it is now an attraction for tourists and locals interested in archeology and history. In Moulay Idriss, its namesake, the first Muslim ruler in Morocco and a great grandson of the prophet Muhammad, is buried. The city of Moulay Idriss is quite small and it is located on mountainous terrain. Moroccan Muslims consider the act of pilgrimage to Moulay Idriss’ tomb as spiritually beneficial; it is said to increase a Muslim’s “baraka” which is, roughly, favor in the eyes of God.

The last stop on our trip was the city of Meknes. Here Moulay Ismail, the first king in the current dynasty, built his gigantic palace and here he is buried, in a spectacular tomb that is visited by many tourists and locals. Moulay Ismail is adored as the first Moroccan leader who was able to unite the entirety of Morocco. After visiting the palace and tomb, we spent some time in Meknes.