1. Banking and Credit Cards

Q: How will I pay for things in Morocco? Should I bring a credit card?

A: Morocco is mainly a cash society, so expect to make frequent trips to the ATM. A credit card may be used in some places like grocery stores and hotels, but make sure you carry enough cash for your daily expenses.

Q: What bank should I use to avoid high ATM fees?

A: Check with your current bank to see what they can offer you in terms of avoiding foreign fees. If your current bank charges fees, try one of these free or low cost options:

- Capital One High Yield Checking
- Citibank
- Charles Schwab

Remember to clarify the terms and conditions before traveling.

Q: What if I lose my debit card or it expires while I’m overseas?
A: Unfortunately, mail service to Meknes is not very reliable. Make sure you check your expiration dates now and get new cards before you travel if necessary. Most banks will issue you a new card before yours expires if you explain the situation.

If you lose your card while abroad, the best option is express shipping through FedEx or DHL, both of which deliver to Meknes. It’s also a good idea to keep some cash in a safe place (either dirham or USD that you can exchange) in case of emergency.

Q: Can I use ATMs on weekends?

A: Yes, but remember that the banks are usually closed from Friday afternoon until Monday morning. This means if there is a problem with the ATM or it eats your card, you will have to wait until Monday to get it resolved. If possible, try to get cash during the weekdays.

2. Cell Phones and Internet

Q: Can I use my smartphone in Morocco? Do I need to buy a new phone?

A: Most phones, including Android and iPhones, will work in Morocco once you buy a new SIM card. Older iPhones will need to be unlocked with your US carrier before travel, but anything newer than an iPhone 5 will work without being unlocked. However, it is still a good idea to check with your carrier before you go.

If you prefer, you can also buy a cheap and simple phone to use while in Morocco. Either way, you must have a local Moroccan cell phone number for safety reasons while abroad.

Q: Do I need to buy a data plan to use mobile internet on my phone?

A: Yes, but you do not need to sign a long term contract. Most phone companies in Morocco work on a pay as you go system, so you can simply top up your phone each month instead of signing a yearlong contract. Usually buying recharges throughout the year will end up being cheaper.

You can top up your phone plan by visiting your cell phone provider store or by visiting many hanoots. If a hanoot sells recharges, you will see a sign in the window with the Meditel/Itsalaat/Inwi logo.
Q: What cell phone provider should I use?

A: There are 3 main cell phone providers in Morocco, and they all have strengths and weaknesses. See the chart below to find out which plan would work best for you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meditel</td>
<td>Near Cinema Camera and throughout Hamriya, one near Bab Mansour in the Old City</td>
<td>Best coverage in cities, will visit the store with the program on day 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maroc Telecom/Itsalaat</td>
<td>Hamriya near the main post office</td>
<td>Best coverage in rural areas, good for frequent travelers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inwi</td>
<td>Inside Carrefour</td>
<td>Best internet/data packages, good texting plans</td>
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Q: Can I call the US from my Moroccan phone?

A: It depends on your plan, make sure to ask when you get your SIM card. To avoid costly international calls, try the app MagicJack, which allows you to make free calls to the US using wifi or data.

Q: Will there be wifi in my house or apartment? How will I access the internet at home?

A: Internet and wifi setups will vary by household, so your host family may or may not have wifi. If there is no internet at home, you can either visit a café with wifi or buy a mobile internet hotspot. If you purchase a data plan for your phone, you can also use your cell phone as a mobile hotspot. If you are in an apartment, you can also buy your own wifi setup.

Mobile hotspots plug into your computer via USB and can be used anywhere there is coverage. These are sold by the phone companies, and work in the same way as mobile data. Again, avoid long term contracts and instead opt to buy recharges as needed. If you do end up in a long-term contract, make sure to ask about how to cancel your contract so that you can do so before leaving. Remember that even if you cancel a contract, you will still be required to pay out the year.
Q: Do all cafés have wifi?

A: No, many of the more traditional/beledi coffee shops will not have wifi. You will find cafés with wifi mainly in Hamriya, particularly at Promenade Palace and Olympia Café. Ask your host family or language partner for good cafés to use near your home or school.

3. Transportation

Q: Is Meknes a big city? What is it like?

A: Meknes is a relatively small, blue collar city that is surrounded by agricultural lands. The city itself has two main parts- the old city (the Medina Qadima) and the new city (Hamriya). The old city is more traditional cobblestone paths and houses a large souk for food, clothing, and everything you can imagine. Your classes will take place at a center in the old city.

Hamriya is a modern downtown area. You can find high rise apartment buildings, western style cafés, and large grocery stores like Carrefour and Marjane here. Hamriya is about a 15-20 minute walk from the old city or a short cab ride away.

There are also other, more suburban areas such as Hayy Monsour, Zitoune, and Sbata. Make sure to ask your host family what neighborhood they live in and how to direct taxi drivers to the house. You will find that most people will use a major street or landmark to give directions rather than an address.

Q: How will I get around Meknes?

A: There are 3 main types of transportation within a city: busses, petit taxis, and grand taxis. Busses run on fixed routes and cost about 4 dirham/50 cents for a one way trip. Grand taxis also run on specific routes and cost about 4 dirham/50 cents. These are large gray Mercedes that carry 4 passengers in the backseat and 2 in the front passenger seat. As you can imagine, this is a very crowded way to travel, but it is also cheap and a good option when you have a large group of people. Petit taxis are just like US taxis; they will drive anywhere you need. These will carry up to 3 passengers and the cost varies depending on the length of the trip.

Q: Are there meters in petit taxis? Will I have to bargain with the driver?
A: Yes, there are meters, and the driver should use the meter at all times. This is a strictly enforced law, and taxi drivers will have their cabs inspected by police to ensure the meters are working properly. If your driver does not use the meter, be sure to ask him to turn it on right away. There is a minimum fare for all rides, and this will increase at night, when rates also increase. Most trips around Meknes will cost around 10-15 dirham/1-1.5 dollars. Ask your host family about prices to get an idea of how much a trip should cost.

Q: How do I hail a cab?

A: You can find empty taxis readily available at a taxi stand or simply stand near a busy street and flag one down by pointing the direction you want to go. If the driver is heading that way, he will pull over and pick you up. Keep in mind that transportation is sparse during the middle of day, since many drivers go home for lunch.

Q: How can I travel to other cities?

A: The train runs between cities and is very convenient. Meknes has 2 train stations, referred to as the big station and the small station. The small station is more conveniently located in the center of Hamriya. You can buy tickets for first or second class to most major cities in Morocco. First class tickets have a designated seat, whereas second class does not.

You can also commission a grand taxi to nearby towns that are not near a train station.

For cities not serviced by the train or grand taxis (usually in more rural/remote regions or farther from the center of the country), you can also take long-distance buses. If you choose to take a bus to travel between cities, the best choice is the CTM Bus company, which has offices located near the big train station. While other buses run the same route, CTM is by far the timeliest and most reliably comfortable. Like first class trains, CTM buses have assigned seats so make sure to check your ticket before sitting down.

4. Gyms and Recreation

Q: Can I go to a gym and workout in Meknes?

A: Yes, absolutely. The gym is a popular place for students, even those who don’t go to the gym regularly at home. It’s a great stress reliever and break from school and academics. Many gyms offer separate men's and women’s hours for weight lifting, treadmills, and classes for about $20 a month. A popular gym in downtown
Hamriya is called La Palmiers. Another gym called Club Moving is more upscale and modern, but is also very expensive.

Q: Can I get a student discount for a gym membership?
A: There may not be a standard discount for students, but it is often effective to go join in a large group so that you can bargain for group discounts.

Q: Are there other clubs I can join for sports besides the gym?
A: Yes, there are clubs for swimming, tennis, horseback riding, and more. Just ask your host families, resident director, and friends for suggestions.

Q: Can I run outside?
A: There are places to run outside, including some nice trails and parks, but beware of running alone, especially for women. Try to run with a group of students if possible.

Q: Can I bike for recreation? What about for transportation?
A: Yes! Bikes can be bought used at the Sunday market for about $100-$200, and locks and helmets are also easy to find. There are many bike shops scattered around Meknes. You can ride bikes in the street as well, but be careful of traffic, since the traffic laws are a bit more lax than in the US.

5. Living Arrangements

Q: Should I live with a host family or in an apartment?
A: In the summer, you will live with a host family and one other Capstone student. In the fall and spring, you can choose to live in an apartment or with a host family. The choice is entirely up to you and your preferences,
some students love the language and culture immersion of a host family while others might prefer apartments for the independence and more relaxing environment they provide.

Remember, all host families are different! So if you don’t like your current host family, feel free to try different families as an alternative. This is true for the summer as well as fall and spring. If you are having trouble with your living situation, talk to your resident director as soon as possible.

Q: What amenities should I expect from my host family?

A: All families and houses are different, but you should expect to get 2 meals a day (usually breakfast and dinner), hot water for showers, a bedroom which may be shared with your roommate, and laundry provided. If you have any other requests or needs from your host family, make sure to talk about these on your host family matching form or with your host parents when you arrive.

6. What to Bring and Not to Bring

Q: What items should I bring that I might not think of?

A: See the list below for some helpful items:

• A reusable water bottle. The tap water is safe to drink, although you may want to wait a few weeks to allow your body to adjust first. You can also purchase cold 1L bottles of water at any corner store for about a dollar and refill these.

• A thermos for hot beverages. This will be a great help in the colder winter months, so that you can have tea or coffee with you. Nearly all coffee in Meknes is Nescafe, not brewed coffee like in the States. If you are particular about coffee, you may need to try some different cafés to find one you like.

• A watch. If you are in a crowded bus, the souk, etc. you won’t want to take out your phone to check the time, so having a watch will keep you safe.

• Warm clothes. The importance of these cannot be overstated. Remember, Meknes gets to about 40 degrees in the winter and there is little to no indoor heating and insulation. Your house will regularly be at 50 degrees if you’re lucky. Bring long johns, wools socks, and a thin winter coat.
• A bathing suit for trips to the beach or hotel pools. Also bring flip flops for these occasions as well as for showers in hostels or traveling. Indoor flip flops are also handy for just around the house as walking barefoot is taboo in Moroccan households.

• School supplies if you are particular about things like mechanical pencils, post its, etc. You can buy notebooks, folders, etc. when you arrive, but keep in mind that there is no lined paper. All school paper is graph paper.

• Sunscreen cream. Don’t bring aerosol cans as the TSA will take these, but sunscreen is a must and can be hard to find in Morocco. If you do need to buy it once you arrive, try a pharmacy.

• Any medications that you need. Talk to your insurance about getting a year’s supply in advance, as getting a prescription filled in Morocco can be very difficult. This is especially a concern for birth control and ADHD medications, which are tightly controlled in many other countries since they are amphetamines.

• An external hard drive. Back up often and consider writing papers on Google docs or another cloud service.

• A USB drive. You will need this to print your papers at school.

• Extra/Backup Chargers. While most chargers can be purchased at the souk in Meknes, they are often poorly made and may not last a long time.

• Noise canceling headphones and/or earplugs. These will be a great help on plane rides, in loud host families, and for studying in a crowded café.

Q: Are there any items I should not bring?

A: Yes, in addition to the standard prohibited items like illicit substances and weapons, be wary of bringing anything that may be suspect to Moroccan customs agents. This may include things like more than copy of the Bible (proselytizing is illegal) and offensive or politically sensitive materials, which includes any literature about the Western Sahara. Some other practical items to leave behind include:

• Too many toiletries. Shampoo, soap, etc. can all be easily bought when you arrive. However, do bring some travel sizes for your first night, since you’ll want to shower after the long trip.

• Bulky towels, winter coats, etc. Towels are easy to buy and a lighter, more compact winter coat will be just as warm while saving room in your luggage.
• Al-Kitaab. Consider scanning a few pages with grammar rules if necessary, but remember that you can always ask your professors on any questions. The same is true for Hans Wehr, which can be found online as well. These books will likely add weight and bulk to your luggage without being used very often.

• More than a few outlet convertors. If most of your electronics charge via USB, you can buy iPhone or similar chargers for about $2 that will plug directly into the wall and avoid issues with bulky convertors. However, you may need to buy a few of these throughout the year, as they tend to be cheaply made and not last more than a few months. Also be advised that square convertors will not work, as outlets in Morocco have a raised circle around the plug.

• Your MacBook, if possible. For some reason, MacBooks have a particular issue with the heat in Morocco, and many of them will die from overheating, wiping your hard drive. It is possible to get these repaired in Meknes, but you will likely lose data and your computer may be changed into French. If you do bring your Mac, be extra diligent about backing it up to your external hard drive.

7. Clothing and Modesty

Q: As a woman, do I need to be fully covered at all time?

A: No. Morocco is a relatively liberal country and has a lot of western influence, so t shirts and pants are common for women. That being said, you will likely attract some attention as a foreigner, so your comfort level will determine how covered up you’d like to be. A good rule of thumb is to keep your legs and shoulders covered if you are walking around in the streets, but there are no hard and fast rules on this.

Q: What is the weather like? Do I need a coat?

A: The summer is very hot and the winter is very cold. Yes, you will absolutely need a coat! For the summer, recommended clothing includes lightweight pants, t shirts, and maxi dresses. For the winter, bring layers, including long underwear and a coat.

It also rains a lot in Meknes, particularly in the winter. Be sure to bring an umbrella and/or rain jacket, as well as rain appropriate shoes.
Q: Should I bring shorts or athletic clothing?

A: Yes. Even if you are not comfortable wearing shorts outside, they will be nice to wear around the house, in the gym, or during a summer vacation in Spain if you travel. Sneakers are also important to have, since you will be walking a lot.

Q: Do I need a suit or formal clothing?

A: Yes, but don’t bring too many nice clothes. One outfit should be plenty, unless you are planning to intern somewhere you know has a formal dress code.

8. Harassment and Women’s Issues

Q: I’m a man, can I skip this section?

A: No, these issues will affect you as well. Please understand that it is very difficult to understand how scary it is to be harassed, cat called, and followed in the streets. Your fellow female students need your support, not only in accompanying them in the streets but also emotionally. Avoid making light of the situation or trying to offer advice about how to dress, walk, etc.

Q: As a woman, what should I expect in terms of harassment? What can I wear or do to minimize it?

A: Although harassment in Morocco is not as bad as in other parts of the Middle East, it can still be very jarring to American students. White women will stick out, particularly if they are blonde or redheads, as these are uncommon in the Middle East. The most common forms of harassment are cat calls and stares, although you may occasionally experience a man following you or trying to touch you in the street.

Although you can wear long, loose fitting and minimize some of the attention, women are harassed no matter what they are wearing. Even women in full niqab can be harassed. Please don’t feel guilty about attracting cat calls or stares, or feel that you have provoked this attention in some way. Don’t be afraid to ask a male friend or teacher to escort you home late at night or walk you to the taxi stand. If you are being followed, try to get to a
crowded place like a coffee shop or get in a nearby taxi. Most drivers and store owners are more than willing to help get rid of your harasser.

Q: Can I buy pads/tampons in Morocco? What about birth control and condoms?

A: We recommend bringing as many of these supplies with you as is reasonable. You can buy pads at the grocery store, but they are generally low quality and not as good as American brands. Similarly, it may be difficult to find birth control or quality condoms. Even if you aren’t planning on having a relationship now, it’s better to be prepared than try to find these things in Morocco.