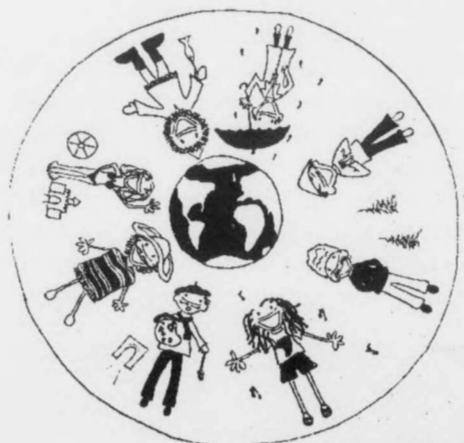


d i s t r i c t i o n s

Tommy Travels

A Deaf, Dumb and Blind Travel Guide For The Debutante Traveler

as told to Murray Thorpe by Warren Watson



Artwork by Nina Botten

Well, it was a few years ago, and I was travelling throughout Europe by Eurail. One of my best decisions besides visiting the Iberian Peninsula itself was to take the ferry from Algeciras, Spain to Tangier, **Morocco**.

Morocco is the land of the Atlas Mountains, good soccer players and of course, Casablanca. Casablanca was not on the itinerary, but I think, one of these days, I should watch the movie in its entirety. This was the sum total of my knowledge of the mystic land of Morocco as I got onto the ferry in Spain.

During the ferry ride of a few hours, I hung out with the other people lugging backpacks around. I met Gavin who had just come from the rock of Gibraltar, the place where both monkeys and British Currency can be found. Gavin was a South African doing the Eurail thing and had split up with his South African buddy several days earlier because this friend needed a VISA for what seemed to be every country they went to. Gavin had a British Passport because of his mother being British and did not use the more restrictive South African passport.

On the ferry, Gavin and I decided to team up. We did not want to do the obvious tourist things such as travelling to Casablanca. Instead we decided to travel to Fes, a vibrant city recommended to us by another traveller.

Once the ferry landed at Tangier, I went through customs and waited by the dock for Gavin to clear customs. Just leaving the slip, I was approached by an extremely friendly local. "Hello, Welcome to Morocco ... I am a student (of life) and I will help you." I was impressed, naively so, by my own personal welcome and we exchanged introductions.

Ten minutes later along came Gavin with a guide of his own. Neither one of us had agreed to a guide at this point. On the ferry, we were told that we would be approached by a lot of guides until we hired one, and then we would not be bothered by other guides. The trick was then to get the guide to show you the sights and not shop after shop which tends to happen because of commission. The guides, not only get paid for bringing you into a shop, but they also get a percentage of whatever you buy.



The Inner City of Fes

We did not take either guide since we were on our way to Fes. The train station was next to the ferry terminal, but we found it surrounded by crowds. The daughter of a head of state was boarding the train, so we watched the proceedings. As we watched the train pull away, I said to Gavin, "I guess we were supposed to be on that train as well."

The next plan of action was to spend the rest of the day touring Tangier, and then to take the night bus to Fes. I used night transportation a lot while travelling in Europe as this combined travel and accommodation expenses. So we now decided to take a guide. We didn't have to look far, there were at least six surrounding us as we were discussing our plans. We couldn't decide which one was the least persistent so we said, "no thanks" to them and started walking.

Two minutes later, we heard, "guide?" We said "sure" and we agreed on a price to show us around. We saw the Casbah and the inner city, as well as four shops before calling the tour short. Our guide was not very happy because we did not buy anything. The handicrafts, the rugs and the leather we saw were all splendid, but I couldn't carry a rug with me for two months around Europe. The rugs could be shipped, but I declined.

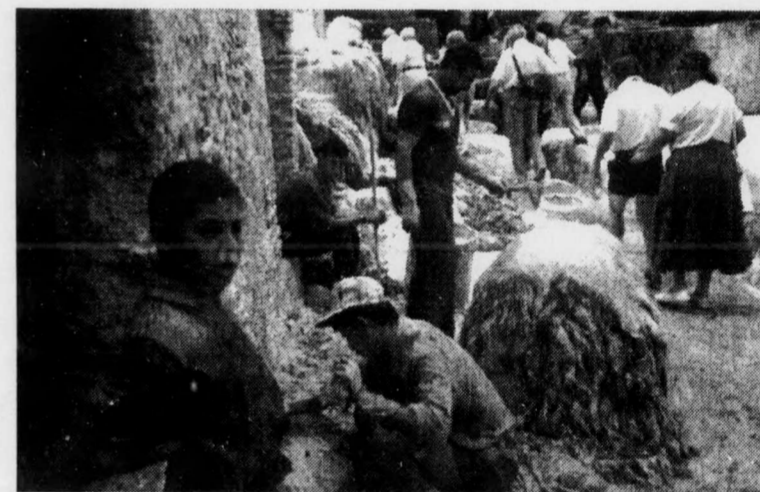


Roof-top View of Fes

We found American currency went a long way, and our guide took the money and left us alone. That night we travelled to Fes. Half way through the trip, our bus stopped and in what looked like a desolate spot, a small portable restaurant popped up. This was a good opportunity to get out of the very cramped and smokey bus and stretch our legs.

Sunrise saw us in Fes just outside the Casbah. We entered the walled city and found a guide. He spoke French with a little English. This suited me just fine as we could converse in French. We agreed on a price and off the three of us went. We were taken into a mosque, a leather factory and a wide range of shops.

The leather factory relied on child labour and the working conditions were appalling. While walking through the outdoor factory we passed a tour group from France. All of them were carrying mint leaves and some of them had the leaves in their noses. After Tangier, I had gotten used to the smell of sewage, but I didn't get used to the smell of the factory. The images of rotting animal carcasses and of children



A Leather Sweat Shop

toiling in the leather factory were fixed in memory. After the factory, it was back into the bustling streets of the inner city of Fes.

We were toured through shops selling rugs, metalwares and leather products. We were offered tea on several occasions but we politely declined, citing stomach problems (which we would have had if we drank nonpotable water). We got the hard sell constantly on the merchandise but politely said, "non merci." Our guide tired of us, and after collecting his fee he left us in the middle of the inner city.

We then realized, paying our guide before he had taken us out of the inner city was a mistake. It was like a maze but we were fortunate that there was enough of a slope to the entire area that we could follow the slope back to our starting place. We then took the train back to Tangier and caught the ferry back to Spain the following morning. Gavin and I then parted, he for Gibraltar again, and I for the Moorish fortress city of Granada, Spain.



And So Ends Another Trip!

photos by Warren Watson