

MOROCCO'S MOUNTAIN COUNTRY AND VALLEY HIKING

PRIVATE ANY DAY DEPARTURES

A hike in these Central High Atlas valleys is to enjoy the almost silent, yet beautiful world of streams, waterfalls, gorges, lush vegetation, ancient terraced irrigated fields, orchards of apple, peach, cherry and apricot and the isolated villages and hamlets of pisé homes belonging, since pre-Islamic times, to the hardy Amazigh peoples with whom we shall chat and take tea, perhaps to milk their cows and goats, perhaps to bake some bread. This hike is best undertaken from early spring to late autumn; certain passes, cols (or Tizis) may be closed during January and February due heavy snowfalls.

A STROLL AROUND THE HIGH ATLAS 'HAPPY VALLEY'

THIS HIKING PROGRAMME INVOLVES A SERIES OF ONE DAY CIRCLE HIKES BASED IN THE BERBER VILLAGE OF IMELGHAS TO DIFFERING PARTS OF A DELIGHTFUL AND VARYING VALLEY.

LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY:- GRADE ONE



WALKING MOSTLY ON PATHS AT LOWER LEVELS, MOSTTIMES FLAT, FOR ABOUT 6 HOURS EACH DAY. GOOD TRAINERS WOULD DO, BUT TAKE BOOTS IF YOU ARE USED TO THEM. FOR ANYONE WHO LEADS A REASONABLY ACTIVE LIFE. HIKING ALWAYS INVOLVES SOME EFFORT. CLEARLY THERE ARE MANY DIFFERING FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE DIFFICULTY OF A PARTICULAR HIKE, INCLUDING LENGTH OF DAY, TERRAIN, ALTITUDE AND WEATHER CONDITIONS. SINCE THESE FACTORS ARE NECESSARILY VARIABLE, ANY SYSTEM OF GRADES CAN ONLY PROVIDE A GENERAL INDICATION. WE HAVE TRIED TO MAKE OUR SYSTEM AS CLEAR AS POSSIBLE, BUT IT CANNOT ACCOUNT FOR PERSONAL ABILITIES OR EXPERIENCE.

OBTABG01m 6DAYS/5NIGHTS

DAY 1: MARRAKECH - CASCADES D'OUZZOUD - AZILAL - HAPPY VALLEY - IMELGHAS.



Setting out from our hotel in Marrakech at **7:30** for our 6 hour day, we first drive towards the east for about 1½ hours alongside fields of barley, corn and potato to the foothills of the Middle Atlas range of mountains until we reach the impressive waterfalls of Ouzzoud. We stop here for around 2 hours for a meal and a stroll of the impressive surrounds, or a seasonal swim in one of the natural pools, with a sighting of the occasional Barbary ape - as are also found on the Rock of Gibraltar - plus a visit of the small, ancient water mills. We now drive firstly south and then south-east, bypassing some kasbahs to arrive at the Imazighen town of Azilal (1600m), where dinosaur fossils have been found. The Amazigh tribes here, known collectively as Imazighen, reject the Western name of 'Berber', for this title, to the people of this area, is regarded as an insult. To this day they are taught to write in the pre-Islamic script of Figinagh. Passing through this, the last of the bigger towns of the region, we continue towards the south for another 2½ hours up to the Tizi n'Oughrbar (2400m), which offers us a magnificent panoramic view of the Ithir M'Goun Massif, at 4068m, the second highest mountain, after Jbel Toubkal, in all of North Africa. Now we cross the Aït Abbass Valley (1400m), a lush valley full of pines and oak trees, groves of pomegranate and fig, apple and olive, to arrive shortly at La Vallée Heureuse, the Valley of Aït Bou

Guemès, some say by far the prettiest of Morocco's many valleys. We carry on through this valley up through Agouti (1700m), a trailhead to the Irhil M'Goun range of mountains, to the village of Imelghas (1980m) for an hour's walk around the village to stretch our legs before our hot shower, dinner and overnight accommodation in a Gîte d'étape. **LD.**

DAY 2: IMELGHAS - TABANT - IBAQELLIQUINE - R'BAT AKOURBI - AÏT IMI - TABANT - IMELGHAS.



An early breakfast and the start of our hiking tour - an easy morning's hike of some 3½ hours, followed by an afternoon's 2½ hour stroll through some splendid countryside. We set out at around 8 o'clock along mule tracks beside fields of barley and corn with the stark mountains with peaks of some 3000m around us until we reach the village of Tabant, where the mountain people tend to congregate. We shall stop here in this trailhead village to the M'Goun Massif for an hour a glass, or two, of mint tea and the opportunity to watch cheese being made - or help/learn to milk a cow. Now we set out past orchards of apricot, apple, cherry and nut trees until we arrive at the hamlet of Ibaquellouine (1878m). Here we may see vestiges of the Age of Dinosaurs and of ostrich frozen in

time in plates of basalt. If we're lucky, we'll see white storks nesting on village roof tops. On now to the hamlet of R'Bat Akourbi (1908m), where we stop for our field picnic in the shade of some old nut trees. An hour later we're on our way back to Imelghas, this time alongside a mountain slope past the col of the Tizi n'Aït Imit (2900m) and the village of Aït Imit (1980m). This charming, fortified village was once an important stop on the caravan trails, the Tizi being the sole access north or south in the region. We stop to visit some ancient water mills, surrounded by some impressive escarpments. Onwards back towards the trailhead village of Tabant and our shower, dinner and overnight accommodation in our Gîte d'étape at Imelghas. **BLD.**

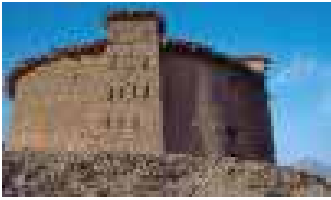
DAY 3: IMELGHAS - ISKATAFEN - IMELGHAS.



After breakfast, today's looping hike of 3 hours' duration takes us first along flat mule trails, seldom used by even the occasional lone hiker, up some 200m of gradual slopes to summer pastures (2100m) for a panoramic view of the mountains dominating this valley. We then take an easy path down through woods of juniper, pine and holm-oak to arrive at some isolated pisé homes in the hamlet of Ahebak (1900m), then on for 10 minutes to the shade of some walnut trees where we'll stop for our field picnic on the banks of a stream near the Berber hamlet of Iskatafen. At around 2 o'clock we take our 2 hour return path to Imelghas via the inhabited yet wild valley to the hamlet of Ikhfr n'Igher, later to reach fields of corn, groves of fruit trees and the pisé homes of several other hamlets, for our dinner and overnight accommodation in our Gîte d'étape. There is always the opportunity here in Imelghas and during the hike to help in the fields,

share work on building homes, help bake bread, herd sheep or cattle, help children with their homework and so on. **BLD.**

DAY 4: IMELGHAS - SIDI MOUSSA - TIMIT - TAKHIDA - AGOUTI - IMELGHAS. An early breakfast before setting out on today's



hike of some 30 minutes to the ancient agadir (collective granary) at Sidi Moussa, perched on top of a steepish 150m slope overlooking a large part of the valley of Bou Guemès. A visit of this agadir, converted from time to time into a marabout, where sterile women go in the hope that..... An easy descent follows through the hamlets of Timit, Aït Ziri, Itoukaln and Aguerd n'Ouzrou (1900m) until we reach the village of Takhida after 2½ hours walk, where we'll stop for our field picnic in the shade of walnut trees by the banks of a stream. From here we set out on our afternoon's 2½ hour ramble down across the plateau to the village of Agouti (1760m) and on to the surrounding yawning gorges, hiking alongside, or in, the waters for some 45 minutes before

swinging back to Agouti, from where we'll take our transport back to Imelghas for our shower, dinner and overnight accommodation in our Gîte d'étape. **BLD.**

DAY 5: IMELGHAS - IKISS CASCADES - IMELGHAS. Another early-ish Berber breakfast before taking a 20 minute ride to the



village of Tameghrit from whence we set out on a sedate walk along mule trails for about 3 hours up to visit some 6000-year old cliff face troglodyte homes in the Arouss Valley. From here we walk on up through stands of holm-oak and small gorges for some 3 hours to the little Cascades at Ikiss (2300m), where we stop for our field picnic in the shade of a cliff dominating the limestone gorge. It is here that we may see some of the migratory choughs and swifts, rock sparrows and larks as they chase insects on a clear day. This is also a Geode Zone where for eons the villagers have been mining these beautiful crystals. At around 2 o'clock, we hike back for 2½ hours via the same picturesque route to Tameghrit, possibly lending a hand en route to the Berber farmers to rejoin our vehicle for our transfer back to our dinner and overnight

accommodation in our Gîte d'étape. **BLD.**

DAY 6: IMELGHAS - AGOUTI - AZILAL - MARRAKECH: Breakfast tucked away, we're off at around 8 o'clock, with our last sight of the Irhil M'Goun (4071m), to pass back through this beautiful "Happy Valley" alongside forestry lookout posts, marabouts, and small pisé kasbahs, stopping on the way back to Marrakech for lunch at Azilal, the provincial capital with its garrison and Thursday souq, to arrive in Marrakech around 2pm. **BL.**



OUR PRICES WILL INCLUDE: Private round trip transportation to Imelghas from and to Marrakech. An experienced licensed bilingual mountain guide throughout. Undermats; cook; meals, visits and accommodation as detailed; pack animals and muleteer. Medical and Accident Insurance.

OUR PRICES WILL NOT INCLUDE: Accommodation pre & post, nor transfers from/to Marrakech's' airport. Gratuity to guide/muleteers. Any expenditure of a personal nature. Bottled or gaseous water, nor anything not specifically mentioned in the itinerary.

To choose you hotel or ryad, please close this page and go to [Find a Hotel](#) or [Find a Ryad](#)

IT IS RECOMMENDED YOU BRING WITH YOU: Good trainers or walking boots; swimming costume (*seasonal!*) sleeping bag (3-4 seasons)(-*optional*); rucksack, windcheater (*seasonal*), slicker (*seasonal*), hat, rambler pole; personal toiletries and towel; hygienic 'Wipes'; small First Aid kit, thermal underwear (Dec-Feb); day pack; filled water bottle; water purification drops - usually iodine; sunscreen, sunglasses; penknife — do not pack in hand baggage for flights; nibbles and/or dried fruit. Drinking chocolate if preferred. Camera and extra toilet rolls could come in handy! Birs, exercise books and sweets for the Berber children of this region would always be welcomed.

N.B: Meals are normally: -

Breakfast - mint tea, coffee, milk, bread, butter, jam, honey, cheese.

Picnic lunch - fresh Moroccan salad, cheese, tinned tuna fish *, mint tea, bread, fruit.

Dinner - vegetable or corn soup; tagine (chicken, beef or mutton *) or chicken cooked in lemon rotated according to the duration of the trek; bread, coffee, mint tea, verbena infusion, cake, fruit. Those [vegetarians](#) or [vegans](#) amongst us need to pre-advise at time of reservation.