

# THE MOROCCAN SOUTHERN HIGH ATLAS RANGES

## MOUNTAIN COUNTRY HIKES

### PRIVATE ANY DAY DEPARTURES

Lunar landscape, rocky canyons, stony valleys, stark peaks, ruined kasbahs; an area of the Moroccan High Atlas Mountains slowly becoming better known to serious ramblers. Hours of simply nothing, no trees, no people, but barren, striated mountains, sudden canyons, table volcanic plateaux and rock towers. A year-round wilderness challenge for those seeking something off-the-beaten track to Jbel Saghro, or Sarhro – the 'Dry Mountain'.

#### LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY:- GRADE TWO TO THREE



BETWEEN MODERATE AND SOMETIME STRENUOUS. GOOD BOOTS ESSENTIAL. YOU NEED TO BE REASONABLY CONFIDENT OF YOUR FITNESS AND ENDURANCE LEVELS, PREFERABLY HAVING HAD PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE OF TREKKING ON EASY ANGLED SLOPES AND AN OCCASIONAL DIFFICULT DAY WITH VARIATIONS OF CLIMATE. FULL SUPPORT TEAM. 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. PERHAPS BEST VISITED BETWEEN **OCTOBER TO MID-JUNE** AS THE LATER SUMMER MONTHS COULD BE TOO HOT FOR SOME AND RUNNING WATER IS SCARCE.

## THE WILD, CHALLENGING, VOLCANIC JBEL SAGHRO

### 7 DAYS/6 NIGHTS OBTJS01m

#### DAY 1: MARRAKECH - OUARZAZATE - DADES VALLEY - AÏT HADDOU N'AÏT YOUL. Departure at around 8 o'clock from



your hotel in Marrakech towards the southeast across the Haouz Plain and an exhilarating drive up the twisting bends of the road over the Western High Atlas of the Glaoua Country, passing through the Berber villages of Aït Barqa and Taddert, up through the spectacular Tizi n'Tichka (2260m) - and hold on to your hats, for the winding road takes us through the highest mountain pass in Morocco - then gently down alongside the Assif Imini, through the 'Beau Geste' city of Ouarzazate and a stop for our picnic lunch in a small restaurant just outside of the city. We now set off towards the east towards El Qlâa't des M'gouna - "The Village Of The Rose" in English and the beautiful, harsh and dramatic gorge of the Dadès Valley. On our way through this magnificent Valley, the "Valley of the Roses", through lands once trodden by Alexander the Great and his invading armies, we travel along what is a vast flood plain whose southern horizon is blocked by the sun-blasted Anti Atlas Mountains and to the north by the jagged High Atlas mountain ranges. On the edges of the verdant palmeraie of Skoura, one-time capital of Moulay Essmaïl, the nearby river reflecting the intense blue of the sky, the brilliant green of the palmeraies and the red earth, we shall stop to photograph one of two magnificent kasbahs of singular beauty ('kasbah' translates to 'tighernit' in the language of the Berber) - Amerhidl – a museum-piece of past implements and customs (and whose image is to found printed on the current 50 dirham bank note). Continuing along further east we come face to face with an imposing set of kasbahs blending harmoniously with the environment, yet all in various stages of ruin, all shouting out their last defiant cries against the eroding desert winds. 20kms further on we enter the valley full of rose bush plantations and palmeraies, magnificent Berber villages and more kasbahs, the Jbel Saghro (2332m) – the last high rocky barrier before the Moroccan Hamada - to our right, Jbel M'Goun (4071m) - the second highest peak in the Maghreb to our distant left - until we reach the large village of El Qlâa't des M'gouna (1433m), where roses are grown to be sold and their essences distilled to make the rose water so favoured by the Berber people. From here we carry on to the Berber village of Aït Haddou n'Aït Youl where, after a total of some 6 hours driving, we shall spend the night in a Gîte d'étape and dine midst the bare brown and purple surrounds of the Kasbah n'Aït Youl and the gaunt broken black-red volcanic peaks and limestone pinnacles of distant Jbel Saghro. **LD.**



#### DAY 2: AÏT HADDOU N'AÏT YOUL - ANO N'IGHDAD - ANO N'ELMERSSE. We set out this morning with our mule team on our



6hour hike across the Ouaoouchene Plateau to the Assif Imi n'Ouaoouchene, which we shall follow across the arid plain, dotted with the occasional isolated almond tree and, with luck, some small herds of Edmi gazelle or Addax antelope, until we arrive at the small fields of Ano n'Ighdad ('Ano' in Berber means "well"), where we shall stop for our picnic in a region known for its sand grouse, desert lark, eagle owl, courser and falcon. This afternoon we hike on by the oued and up to the sand-blasted Tizi n'Elmersse (1500m) to descend to the Assif n'Elmersse, back up to the desolate Elmersse Plateau and our dinner and campsite by the well and little palmeraie at Ano n'Elmersse. **BLD.**



#### DAY 3: ANO N'ELMERSSE - ASSAKA N'AÏT OUAZZINE - TAJALAJT. Breakfast tucked away and camp struck we set off on



today's 6 hour hike up the stony and wild slopes to traverse the Tizi n'Tagmout (1624m) and carry on down past the copper mines at Tagmout to the Tagmout Plateau and the Berber hamlet of Assaka n'Aït Ouazzine. Here we stop for our picnic on the riverbank amidst corn and barley fields, fig and almond trees. This afternoon, we strike out up along the dry river bed between glass-like rocks and boulders, on through the remote hamlets of Akerkour, Berqiq and then of Tigniza, through pastureland and the occasional rock hut of the nomadic shepherds and up to the village of Tajalajt (1332m) for our dinner and overnight bivouac. **BLD.**



**DAY 4: TAJALAJT - TIZI IGHZOUN - TIZI TAGOURT - IGLI.** Today's hike is of some 7 hours so, after a leisurely breakfast we shall trek along the dry river bed to pass near Maghabout Moulay Houssine and up the Tassghdelte n'Ssi El Haj Plateau to the isolated hamlet of Tifdoussine. From here we strike out towards Talâat n'Ourioul and up through the Tizi Ighzoun (1930m), down to the remote hamlet of Ighzoun (1426m) to picnic on the river bank. From here we hike up the Assif n'Anoums to traverse the Tizi Tagourt (1580m) and continue across the Plateau alongside Afourar Range and the Isk n'l'fssan Hills to meet up with a strange eroded rock formation in the shape of a camel's head. From here we set out down to the tilled fields of the hamlet of Igli, where we shall set up camp near the well of the little palmeraie and almond trees belonging to the fiercely-independent, semi nomadic Aït Atta Berber tribe to dine amidst clumps of broom, gorse and thyme, goatskin tents and awesome silence. **BLD.**



**DAY 5: IGLI - TIZI N'OUARG - JBEL SARHRO SUMMIT - IMI N'OUARG.** Our 5 our hike today starts after breakfast up for 1½ hours through rocky promontories, each with their individual name:- Tamjgalt, Tissigdelte, Quintirhane and Isk n'Eferdj - to continue across an almost flat stretch of pampas for further 90 minutes and traverse the Tizi n'Ouarg (2350m) to picnic near a spring of the Assif n'Ouarg on the Kouaoutch Plateau. From here we strike out on an easy hike through century junipers, acacia, rosemary and esparto grass to the what is now accepted as the summit of Jbel Sarhro (2592m) which rises starkly from the Plateau of several peaks. The lunar landscape, eroded pinnacles, sheer cliffs, dramatic canyons and splintered limestone rock towers lead our eyes across the sun-blasted volcanic tableland and entire massif to the distant Western High Atlas peaks of Jbel Toubkal (4167m) and her closer and slightly-smaller sister, Irhil M'Goun (4068m). Some of these rock towers have been given names, such as Isk n'l'fssan, (the Tiara of the Pond) Isk n'Alla (My Sister's Head-dress), Isk n'Eferdj (the Horns of Plenty). We shall now strike down to the feet of Adrar Kouaoutch (the local name for Jbel Sarhro), with its sheer cliffs and basalt rock needles to meet up again with our mule team and hike on for some 45 minutes to our campsite and dinner for the night at the oued of Imi n'Ouarg, possibly with the tents of the Berber nomads nearby. "Isk", in the regional Berber dialect, is the name given to a simple tiara-like head-dress worn by the regional tribal women, decorated with coloured glass and beads and two horn-like projections. **BLD.**



**DAY 6: IMI N'OUARG - TIZI N'EMRHARNE - IMI N'TERHSA -TAGDILT.** Our 6 hour trek today starts after breakfast up through the Tizi Bou Ichlif (1980m), then through the Tizi n'Emrharne (2004m), down through stands of juniper trees and a rocky oued. We hike towards the north-east along this oued, past the black felt tents of the nomadic herders and goatskin tents of the fodder-gatherers to picnic near a spring at Imi n'Terhsa ('Imi', in the local dialect meaning "Mouth"). This afternoon we shall strike out towards the east along the dry river bed to eventually rejoin a faint piste which leads us to the village of Tagdilt (1660m), our dinner and overnight in a Gîte d'étape. **BLD.**



**DAY 7: TAGDILT - BOUMALNE DU DADES - OUARZAZATE - KSAR AIT BEN AHDDOU - TADDERT - MARRAKECH.** After a leisurely breakfast we join our vehicle for our long drive up north to Boumalne Du Dadès, along the hairpin bends of the Dadès Valley, through Ouarzazate to the magnificently exotic Kasbah and Ksar of Aït Ben Haddou, declared, and rightly so, a World Heritage Site. Here we alight from our vehicle to visit these various kasbahs, so closely-knit that they appear to be but one complete building, backed up against the looming mountain in a stretch of unforgiving Hamada. The thick, high, sheer, elaborately decorated pisé walls, stepped-up housing, turreted, crenulated ramparts, and balustrades and arched 'babs' are a sight not to be missed. One of the more spectacular sights in the Atlas ranges, set upon a rock above a reed-strewn assif, commanding the area for miles around, this kasbah controlled the route to Marrakech until the French blasted a road through the Tizi n'Tichka in the late 1920s up to which we now drive to make a stop at Taddert (1650m) for a light lunch amidst the surrounding peaks and valleys, prior to continuing on down to the Haouz Plain, to arrive at Marrakech quite late in the evening. **BL.**



**OUR PRICES WILL INCLUDE:** Private round trip transportation from your hotel or riad in Marrakech to trailheads and return to the hotel/riad or airport in Marrakech. An experienced English-speaking licensed mountain guide throughout. Tents and undermats; cook and equipment; all meals and accommodation as detailed; mules and muleteer/cook. Medical and Accident Insurance. Clients are always requested to check their own personal travel insurance to see if any adrenaline activities are precluded.

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

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**IT IS RECOMMENDED YOU BRING WITH YOU:** Stout mountain walking boots; change of socks, sleeping bag (3-4 seasons); rucksack, windcheater or duvet jacket (seasonal); lip balm; LED head lamp or torch with batteries (optional); earmuffs, ski cap or balaclava, slickers, thermal underwear, gloves (all seasonal Nov-Apr); filled water bottle (bottled water or water purification drops - usually iodine); rambler pole(s); penknife - do not pack in hand baggage for flights; personal toiletries and towels; hygienic 'Wipes';

insect repellent; sunscreen, nibbles (muesli or dried fruit) drinking chocolate if preferred. Extra toilet rolls and a trowel would come in quite handy.

N.B: Meals during the hike are normally:-

Breakfast - mint tea, coffee, chocolate powder, milk, bread, butter, jam, cheese, cereals.

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

Dinner - Tagine (chicken or mutton\*), couscous or spaghetti rotated according to the duration of the trek; bread, coffee, mint tea, cake, fruit. \* Those vegetarians or vegans amongst us need to pre-advise at time of reservation.