

FOUR WHEELS, ONE DAY IN THE DUNES AT CH'GGAGA



See the most in the shortest time; way to go!



OBTFFDD08 11 HOURS IN THE HAMADA DU DRÂA.

ZAGORA - TAGOUNITE - M'HAMID - OUM LÂALAG - CH'GGAGA DUNES - TAMEGROUTE - ZAGORA, LA FIBULE DU DRÂA

ZAGORA: From the small, delightful kasbah-like Hotel Fibule Du Drâa in the oasis village of Zagora we set off at **07:00** with our driver and English-speaking guide further south in our air-conditioned 4x4 for our adventure into a desert surrounded by many small dunes, interspersed with the black gravely 'Reg' stretches of the Jbel Tadrart basin. Driving from this oasis inhabited since the 10th century down the eastern bank of the lush Oued Drâa, passing alongside the Jbel Zagora with its ruined kasbah and through the oases and ksours of Ktaoua, we arrive at the oasis village of Tagounite, (famous for its iron meteorites being found nearby) where we'll stop for a short break before continuing on further south for a further 30km through the Tizi Beni Slimane (747m) to the last village in the Drâa Valley - M'Hamid El Bhali. M'Hamid was once an important trading post and dromedary market for the famous 'Blue Men' (Touaregs from the Sudan, Mauretania and Chad) and is still a meeting point for the nomads from the Sahel and deep Sahara and is where the magnificent Oued Drâa, the longest river in Morocco, finally drains itself into the desert. As the air has heated up and the winds have risen to make the sand swirl about us, you'll notice that older dunes appear darker, for the iron in the sand has finally oxidised. We strike out now towards the west alongside the Jbel Bani (1095m) - the first settlements of the Berber tribes were founded here - through stands of acacia and tamarisk to the oasis at Oum Lâalag (Mother Lalla - the Sacred Oasis), ever-present despite decades of drought, we catch site of the occasional baobab tree casting their precious shade until, after some 12km, we arrive at the more impressive dunes of this western extension of the Sahara - Dayet (Pool) Ch'Gagga (6°15'W). Here we'll stop for our field picnic in a nomad's tent at the foot of these distant dunes. Fossil remains of crocodiles, lions, bears and dinosaurs may still to be found here. Suitably refreshed, the afternoon will be spent retracing our path through Moulht Sellah, Oum Lâalag and the Oued N'Ame to another set of dunes at Erg Lihouïdi (Erg el Yehoudi, so named for the many settlers of Jewish origin who had traded in this region for centuries until the establishment of the State of Israel and a subsequent migration). On now for our last 15km of piste driving across the Reg until we regain the asphalt road to drive north for some 50km to an unusual tightly-knitted grouping of ksours and kasbahs; this is the ancient village of Tamegroute, a seat of learning since the 11th century. We shall stop to visit the Library, with its 13th century illuminated Koran scrolls written on gazelle hide, some works of Pythagoras, some of original maps of Alexandria together with some very early mathematics text. We'll now stroll on through the still-inhabited kasbah to visit the centuries-old Pottery Co-Operative to see pottery being produced in the simplest of manners, in the simplest of kilns. If you have ever been to Fes, or have seen photographs of this Imperial City, here in Tamegroute you'll see the famous green glaze associated with Fes's tiled roofs, for the founders of the 17th century Abou Ben Naceur 'Naciri Brotherhood' in Tamegroute invited craftsmen and potters to this remote area with the intent to turn it into a thriving caravan hub city. Our last 18kms remain until we reach Zagora and the Fibule Du Drâa - around 6pm, for a quick shower and to witness the magnificent sunset, the rarefied heavens turning from bright blue to cobalt, to yellow to gold, to purple to black. The sands and stones change their colour too, in step with the lowering rays. You may have decided to stay here overnight in this pleasant hotel or, perhaps, you have opted to set out now, by the light of the moon, back up the delightful Drâa Valley to the French Protectorate-era city of Ouarzazate and beyond. L.

OUR PRICES WILL INCLUDE: Modern 4 wheel drive air-conditioned vehicle with experienced, licensed English-speaking driver throughout; field picnic of Moroccan salad, kebabs* or chicken* or vegetable tagine, in-season fruit, mint tea and bottled water; visit of the Library, Kasbah and Potteries at Tamegroute. * Those vegetarians or vegans amongst us need to pre-advise at time of reservation. Medical and Accident Insurance.

OUR PRICES WILL NOT INCLUDE: Accommodation pre & post, nor transfers from/to Marrakech's or Ouarzazate's airports. Gratuity to driver. Any expenditure of a personal nature, nor anything not specifically mentioned in the itinerary.

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IT IS RECOMMENDED YOU BRING WITH YOU: Day pack; trainers or sandals; sweater, windcheater (seasonal), broad-brimmed hat (or you may purchase a 'Chèche' before you set out from Zagora; personal toiletries and towel; hygienic 'Wipes'; filled water bottle; sunscreen, sunglasses; nibbles and/or dried fruit. Drinking chocolate if preferred. Camera, film and Ziploc bags for lenses. For those who wear contact lenses, perhaps it would be a good idea to bring along a spare pair of glasses.