

THE MOROCCAN CENTRAL ATLAS VALLEYS AND RANGES

MOUNTAIN, COUNTRY AND VALLEY HIKES

NICE 'N EASY PRIVATE ONE DAY ANY DAY HIKES FROM FES



LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY:- BETWEEN GRADES ONE AND TWO 

WALKING MOSTLY STRAIGHT UPHILL WITHOUT ZIGZAGS, SOMETIMES ROCKY, THENCE EASY DOWNHILL FOR ABOUT 5-6 HOURS EACH DAY. BOOTS ARE ESSENTIAL. 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.

OF MIDDLE ATLAS CEDAR FORESTS AND BERBER TOWNS

OBTFES01 5 HOURS' HIKING.



Departure from **Fes** at around **8.30** in the morning for an exciting **2** hours' drive towards the south across the breadbasket of Morocco to the foothills of the Middle Atlas Ranges. After some 30 minutes, we arrive at the small 1920s French-built hill station of Immouzèr Du Kandar (1220m). Here we'll pause for ten minutes by the kasbah for a look at the little Medina and take in the pleasant Saiss Plateau and distant Fes, continuing on to the squeaky-clean Moroccan pseudo-Swiss town of Ifrane (1650m), with its slanted, russet-tiled roofs hidden amidst a forest of cedar, which cannot grow below 1600m. Ifrane - in the Tamazight language of the Berber means "grottos (singular "Ifri") - is mainly a winter ski resort and a summer hideaway for rich Moroccans wishing to escape the hustle and heat of the large cities. We now drive through to the first real town in the central Atlas - Azrou which, in the local Tamazight means "rock," for next to the mosque is the massive outcrop from which this town takes its name - and was for a long time a strategic settlement established to effect some form of control of the independent mountain Berber peoples. On Tuesdays there is a souq to where the Beni M'Guild tribes come to trade. This particular tribe of the Sanhaya Berber is renowned for its intricately-designed carpets of 80 knots to the square metre. The region is also renowned as being the first to carve figures from cedar and nut woods, the woods being stored for one year prior to carving. From here we set out on our relatively-easy hike up through forests of evergreen Holm oak, cork and juniper until we reach some 1600m where we shall find the stands of young cedar trees. Our hike now gets harder as we continue straight up alongside coves and little gorges to the summit of Ras Kharzouza (1900m), where we shall stop on a ridge for our field picnic overlooking the verdant Tigrigra Valley, Azrou and the important Amazigh village of Ain Leuh, with ruined kasbah and flat-roofed houses in tiers overlooking the valley and with Ifrane beckoning in the distance. When ready, we descend down the other side of the mountain through stands of cedar along a plateau which the semi-nomadic Berber shepherds use to fatten their animals and where, doubtless, during the months of April to October, we shall be welcomed by these Berber tribes people who have set up here their large, black felt nomadic tents. We hike gently on down through the Tizi Tioumliline (1600m), where we'll get to see and possibly feed the Barbary (macaque) Apes which patrol this area before taking a long, winding mule track alongside Oued Sebbab with its little waterfalls until we reach the traditional Amazigh green-tiled roofed arcades of Azrou's Kelâa or casern, the market square, Medina and ruined kasbah - built by the unusually ruthless and notorious Sultan Moulay Ismail in 1719 - the delightful bustle of the local Souq and our awaiting transport, at around 4.30 in the evening, to take us back to the Imperial City of Fes.

OUR PRICES WILL INCLUDE: Private round trip transportation Fes - Azrou - Fes. An experienced licensed bi-lingual mountain guide throughout. Light field picnic lunch. Medical and Accident Insurance.

PICNIC LUNCH: consists normally of fresh Moroccan salad, cheese, tuna fish *, fruit, bread, mint tea. * If **vegetarian or vegan** please pre-advise.

OUR PRICES WILL NOT INCLUDE: *Accommodation pre & post, nor transfers from/to Fes' airport.* Gratuity to guide and chauffeur. 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: Good trainers or walking boots; hats, rambler pole (optional); day pack; sunscreen, sunglasses; binoculars, camera, nibbles; filled water bottle; biscuits to feed the Barbary Apes.

NB: 48 hours' notice is required when booking for 3 or more people, due to the scarcity of minibuses in Fes.