

MOROCCO'S CENTRAL ATLAS VALLEYS AND RANGES
MOUNTAIN, COUNTRY AND VALLEY HIKES
NICE 'N EASY PRIVATE ONE DAY ANY DAY HIKES FROM FES



LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY:- GRADE ONE
 SELDOM FLAT, FOR 3 TO 6 HOURS EACH
 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.



WALKING MOSTLY ON PATHS AT LOWER LEVELS, SOMETIMES ROCKY, DAY. GOOD TRAINERS WOULD DO, BUT TAKE BOOTS IF YOU ARE USED TO THEM. 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.

A TROGLODYTE VILLAGE, SOFT COUNTRYSIDE & BERBER ENVIRONMENT

OBT FES02. 3 HOURS' WALK. Departure from Fes at around 8 in the morning for a short, exciting drive towards the south-east



across the breadbasket of Morocco on the Saïss Plateau through pleasant rolling countryside, with the Middle Atlas (or 'Fazaz') beckoning us from the distance, to turn into the lower foothills towards Bhalil, a hamlet built in a narrow mountain valley. Bhalil - meaning "Beauty of the Night" - claims ancient Christian origins, predating Islam, from those Christian soldiers of the Roman Second Legion fleeing persecution of their latest Emperor. The cobble stoned streets are a mixture of some 1500 pisé and stone block homes of 2 or 3 simple rooms awash in pastel hues of pink, blue and yellow with more modern blue and white wash houses, many small, elegant stone bridges, and women washing clothes and carpets in the communal basin, or at the seasonal river. All provide for a picturesque scene of local Berber village life, far from the hustle and bustle of Fes and Meknes. From here we shall walk up a narrow winding path to some unique troglodyte dwellings, with 40 families still inhabiting these cave homes to, doubtless, be welcomed in for a glass of mint tea. We set off further south-west from behind the village for our 4km walk past a small clearing and some limestone sink holes, which once accommodated prehistoric families who had made their homes in these natural caves to escape other marauding tribes, on past another row of cave entrances to continue along an earthen track through fields of barley, stands of olive and cherry trees, evergreen Holm oak, cork, pine and juniper, all protected by a natural fence of blue agave cactus, until we reach the outskirts of Sefrou. On our walk we may have the opportunity to see the seasonal variety of flora and migratory fauna typical to this region - buzzards, kestrels and eagles, rock doves, larks, buntings, wagtails and finches; butterflies and dragonflies; broom, anemones, wild gladioli, violet calamint, daisies and campanula. To our right is the ravine of the Assif Oued Agai, to our left the homes of the Beni M'Guild populace; we stop to see a small, humble lean-to the "F'ran", or communal oven - where the women of this upper village come to bake their bread - to continue down and across the river, up the tarmacked road to the Cascade Oued Aggaï. Here you might just feel like sitting in the pool or take an alfresco shower under the pouring waters (in season!) whilst our picnic there is being set up. From here we shall set off in our vehicle down the road to one of the more attractive towns in Morocco - Sefrou (souq on Thursday). From the combined Arab words 'as' and 'frou' meaning 'shelter-', this 1st century town, but 30km from Fes, is calm and relatively unspoiled, with ochre pisé walls and turrets and nine 'Babs', or gateways. We make a short stop to visit the 8th century Ksar el Kelâa, once the barracks of the Berber army of Moulay Idriss I, with its old, thick-walled pisé homes and cobble stoned lanes dominating the 'newer' town, passing by the small medina and maze-like *Mellah*, or old Jewish Quarter, for here there had been, since pre-Islamic times, a large Berber population converted to Judaism by roving missionaries living alongside the unrepentant Berber peoples. The town, known for its olive and cherry production, holds a large Fêtes Des Cerises in June, and other smaller festivities throughout the year; it also hosts a flourishing artisan community. We finish our walk by strolling through the bustling souq lined with the booths of potters, tailors, embroiderers, carpenters and cobblers, bread sellers and second-hand goods possibly for last-minute enjoyable - and less expensive - bartering before, around 1.30 in the afternoon, boarding our awaiting minibus for our 1hour drive back along the *triq es soltan*, or old caravan trail, but now a main road, to the Imperial City of Fes.



OUR PRICES WILL INCLUDE: Private round trip transportation Fes - Bhalil/Sefrou - Fes. An experienced licensed bi-lingual mountain guide throughout. Light field picnic lunch. Medical and Accident Insurance. FIELD PICNIC: Fresh Moroccan salad, cheese, tinned 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: Walking boots or good, strong high ankle trainers; rambler pole (optional); hats; anorak or windcheater (seasonal); sunscreen, sunglasses; binoculars, camera, nibbles; filled water bottle.