

4 WHEELS, 4 LEGS, 4 DAYS IN MOROCCO'S HAMADA

4DAYS/3NIGHTS

OBTFFDD06

DAY 1: MARRAKECH - LA FIBULE DU DRÂA, ZAGORA - AMEZROU - ASRIR IGNAOUN - TILLOUGUI: Departing from your



hotel in Marrakech at 06:45 at the latest, we set off south in our air-conditioned Land Cruiser 4x4 over the Glaoua Plain to cross the High Atlas Mountains via the fabulous Tizi n'Tichka Pass (7412ft) – so hold on to your hats - to continue down alongside the Oued Ouarzazate to the ex-French Foreign Legion town of Ouarzazate and on down the surprising Valley of the Oued Drâa until you arrive at the small, charming kasbah-like Hotel La Fibule Du Drâa in the oasis village of Zagora, where you will have your midday lunch of tagine. Time to relax around the swimming pool before setting off with our cameleer at 3pm (September to May) or 4:30pm (June, July & August) on our ships of the desert for some 2½ hours towards the south-west through the oases and kasbahs at Amezrou and Sart and the Jewish Cemetery in Asrir Ignaouïn, to cross the Oued Drâa leading onto the Fajia Plain. 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 sway on across the Reg until we reach our established nomads' black-tented bivouac site at Tillougui nestling amidst some small dunes in a private oasis. Whilst we settle in to enjoy an awesome sunset (rare cloud cover permitting), our traditional welcoming mint tea is taken; our dinner for the evening is prepared to be enjoyed under the immeasurable canopy of the starlit heavens. **LD.**



DAY 2: TILLOUGUI - FOUM ZGUID - ZAQUIAT SIDI ABDENBI - LAKE IRIQUI - CH'GGAGA DUNES: Breakfast tucked away



after an incredible sunrise, we now venture further south-west with our driver for some 120km alongside the Jbel Bani (1095m) - the first settlements of the Berber tribes were founded in this region - past wells and irrigated fields of vegetables, cantaloupe and watermelon clawed out of the desert by the once-warrior tribesmen of the Zagora, on into the blackish, brackish, stony plain dotted with acacia, the occasional baobab tree and dunes of varying shapes and sizes until we reach the 'Beau Geste' village of Foug Zguid, a Touareg emplacement once controlling the trans-Saharan trade routes of salt, slaves, spices and gold and a French colonial military outpost during their early 1920s Protectorate. Here we stop for our field picnic in the welcoming shade of a small oasis, thank you very much, to continue on east-south-east through the village of Zaouiat Sidi Abdenbi to the flat dried clay bed of the Lake Iriqui, some 35 miles long by 20 miles wide and not so long ago the seasonal paradise of millions of migratory birds. With any luck, we could still stumble across crocodile teeth or hippopotamus tusks, iron meteorites and dinosaur fossils. After these further 87km into the harsh and naked countryside we arrive at the now-famous and more impressive dunes of this western extension of the Sahara - Dayet (Pool) Ch'Gagga (6° 15' W) and our established nomad tented bivouac site, set, apparently, in the middle of nowhere. Whilst dinner



is being prepared, we might take time out to stretch our limbs, set up our photo-shoot for the oncoming sunset as the rarefied heavens turn 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), or take a shower or simply crash out! **BLD.**

DAY 3: CH'GGAGA DUNES - ERG LIHOUDI - M'HAMID EL BHALI - TAMEGROUTE - ZAGORA: After breakfast, this morning



will be spent tracing our path towards the east across the desert plain through Moulht Sellah, Oum Lâalag and the Oued N'Ame to another remarkable 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 in the late 1950s). On now 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. 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 Museum and Library, with its 13th century illuminated Koran scrolls written on gazelle hide, some works of Pythagoras, some original maps of Alexandria together with some very early mathematics text books. From here we stroll through the still inhabited Kasbah to visit the Pottery Co-Operative to see pottery being produced in the simplest of centuries-old 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 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; to no avail. Our last 18kms remain until we reach Zagora and the Fibule Du Drâa for a refreshing shower. Your afternoon is now free to relax around the pool, to stroll through the surrounding palmeraie (oasis) or to wander around this desert town to the shops found around the mosque (their souq is on Wednesdays), framed by the distant Jbel Rhart and the peaks of Jbels Sarhro to the east-north-east and Beni to the south-east; you might even get to see real Touaregs, and not just those Moroccans dressed up as the "Blue Men". You should try out, or even buy, the great variety of dates for which this region is renowned.



BLD.

DAY 4: ZAGORA - FINT OASIS - AÏT BEN HADDOU - MARRAKECH. After breakfast, at around 9 o'clock we make our way back



up north for some 30 miles of off-road adventure in the Valley of 1000 Kasbahs, then back onto the main road through the amazing Drâa Valley, perhaps to stop at the ancient kasbah at Agdz or other en-route points of photo-opportunity. Just before reaching Ouarzazate we turn onto a piste to visit the Oasis of Fint. On now to visit the remarkable UNESCO World Heritage Site of the magnificently exotic Ksour of Aït Ben Haddou (guide not included and not really necessary). Here we alight from our vehicle to visit these various still-inhabited stepped up kasbahs, one half plainly-built Jewish section, one half decorated Berber and so closely-knit that they appear to be but one complete building, backed up against the looming hills in a stretch of unforgiving Hamada. The thick, high, sheer, elaborately decorated pisé (rammed earth - adobe) walls, turreted, crenulated ramparts, balustrades and arched 'babs' are a sight not to be missed. Obviously, here Hollywood has shot many of its films, including, as everyone will tell you, "Laurence of Arabia". One of the more spectacular sights in the Atlas ranges, set upon a rock above the reed-and-rock strewn Assif, commanding the area for miles around, this Kasbah controlled the caravan route to Marrakech until the French blasted a road through the Tizi n'Tichka in the late 1920s. We'll stop nearby for a light lunch here at the Haj Tibou Restaurant before continuing ever - further north over the Adrar n'Deren range of High Atlas Mountains to arrive around 7pm at your hotel or riad in Marrakech after a really incredible journey into Morocco's sub-Sahara. **BL.**

OUR PRICES WILL INCLUDE: Air-conditioned Toyota Land Cruiser Marrakech - Zagora/Tillougui - Ch'Gagga - Zagora - Marrakech. Experienced English-speaking driver. Light lunch at La Fibule Du Drâa and use of their swimming pool and showers; field picnic of Moroccan salad, kebabs* mint tea and bottled water. Dromedary ride from Zagora to Tillougui. Dinner of Moroccan salad, chicken* or vegetable tagine, in-season fruit, mint tea and bottled water. 1 night's accommodation in the Hotel La Fibule Du Draâ on HB. Visit of the Library Kasbah and Potteries at Tamegroute. Chemical toilet in Teghramt N'Aït Sultan and Ch'Gagga; portable shower in Ch'Gagga. Medical and Accident Insurance.

* Those vegetarians or vegans amongst us need to pre-advise at time of reservation.

OUR PRICES WILL NOT INCLUDE: Accommodation pre & post, nor transfers from/to Marrakech's airport. Gratuity to driver guide/ cameleer. 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: Trainers or sandals. Rucksack, day pack; long trousers, windcheater and/or sweater (seasonal), broad-brimmed hat (or you may purchase a 'Chèche' before you set out from Zagora; swimming costume; personal toiletries and towel; hygienic 'Wipes'; filled water bottle; sunscreen, sunglasses; nibbles and/or dried fruit. Drinking chocolate if preferred. Camera, film and plastic bags for lenses. For those who wear contact lenses, perhaps it would be a good idea to bring along a spare pair of glasses.

