

THE MOROCCAN HIGH ATLAS
MOUNTAIN COUNTRY AND VALLEY HIKES
NICE 'N EASY PRIVATE ONE DAY ANY DAY HIKES
IN THE OUED N'FIS VALLEY



LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY:- GRADE ONE



WALKING MOSTLY ON PATHS AT LOWER LEVELS, SOMETIMES ROCKY, SELDOM FLAT, FOR ABOUT 3-6 HOURS EACH DAY. GOOD TRAINERS WOULD DO, BUT TAKE BOOTS IF YOU ARE USED TO THEM. FOR ANYONE WHO LEADS A REASONABLY ACTIVE LIFE. HIKING ALWAYS INVOLVES SOME EFFORT.

THE OUED N'FIS VALLEY & TIN-MAL MOSQUE

OBTtoRAK10m 5½ hours' ramble.

OUIRGANE CENTRE - IJOUKAK - KASBAH GOUNDAFA - TIN-MAL MOSQUE - MOULDIKHTÉ - OUIRGANE CENTRE.



Meet up with your Mountain Guide in Ouirgane (or at La Bergerie) at 09:00 to drive with him south to the Berber village of **Ijoukak** in the High Atlas Mountains. Here, at the juncture of the Oueds n'Fis and Agoundis, we alight from our vehicle to set out for our 5 hour, 16km hike, first down what can best be compared to a country lane in the foothills of the Jbel Erdouz (3579m) passing the Berber villages of Souq Ijoukak, Tagountafte, Souk Larbâa and Ikhfe N'Boul until we arrive, after the first half an hour, at the exterior of the riverside tribal kasbah of the once-powerful feudal chieftain Sultan Caïd Goundafa. The inner part of this now decaying palace-fortress, with storks nesting on the ramparts, still retains traces of its original Hispano-Arabesque decoration seems to have been built either in the late 17th century (or late in the 19th century, depending on whom is telling the tale). The entire kasbah is now being renovated by a Scotsman. The region is the traditional land of the Berber Goundafa tribe, one of several powerful tribes who strove to control the High Atlas Mountains in the 19th century. This feudal warrior of the old tradition constantly waged war with the neighbouring Glaoui clan, who burned down his kasbah of Talâat n'Yâcoub. As a result, this castle of Agadir n'Gouf was built. It was here that the Scottish author R.B Cunningham Graham had been detained at the Sultan's convenience. In the 1920s, this became an outpost of the French Foreign Legion. On now to the partially ruined Goundafa stronghold of Talâat n'Yâcoub. From here we continue our easy walk down alongside the river, following contours of the high valley of the Assif N'Fis, amidst stands of olive, walnut and almond trees until we come across the hauntingly-beautiful hidden Valley of Ijoukak, with its stream of clear, cool, slow-moving water full of seasonal trout in summer, (to become a fast-flowing river in autumn to spring with the snow and snow-melt) lined with hillside hamlets, orchards and ancient terraced irrigated fields. After a further half an hour, we come to the small, remote stronghold settlement of Tin-Mal high up on the opposite bank of the river, giving all the appearance of a Lhasa-in-Muslim miniature, set amidst brown slopes, green shrubbery and seasonally snow-capped mountains. We are here to visit the fortress (and one-time state treasury) of high walls and strong towers, the sole survivor of the once holy 12th century city built by the founder of the Almohad (Unitarian) dynasty, Mehdi Ibn Toumarte, the only mosque in Morocco - other than the new mosque of Hassan II in Casablanca - into which a non-Muslim may enter. We may enter the mosque, built by Abd el Moumen between 1153/54 (and sacked in 1276,) through a small, sturdy door in the corner of the main tower. Now roofless, deep shadows thrown by the surviving bas relief pisé columns and carefully restored arcades and horseshoe arches contrast with the large sunbaked wall. Intact amongst the ruins we witness the fine examples of the ancient, intricate and variety in Almohad décor of rosette, scallop and palmetto. The mosque is T-shaped with a central aisle; but was there ever a minaret? There are three towers, which are unusual in that they are built above the actual prayer hall, yet minarets are always free-standing. Is the final restored work going to respect the original aura of austere puritanism of that once theocratic Almohad Islam? Cedar from Azrou is now used for the ceilings; a special lime has been imported from Spain; no cement or concrete is being used and the several cupolas have been restored in some areas with richly decorated stalactite plaster work. In the actual village there is another small kasbah in ruins, a Medersa and an old water tank which produces a regular supply of the French gastronomic delight - edible frogs. And you might buy a litre of Tin-Mal olive oil from the olive press and mill down towards the river, where we shall have our picnic on the river's banks. Refreshed, we set off towards the south down the valley of the Oued N'Fis through stands of juniper, Barbary fig, apricot, cherry and walnut tree, bypassing many Berber hamlets on the lower slopes of the Adrar Adafelt until we reach the town of Mouldikhte at the beginning of the corkscrewing road up through the Tizi n'Test (3080m), where we rejoin our vehicle for long drive back up the delightful valley to Ouirgane.

Essentially, this walk takes you up and down a maximum of 600 metres and is not at all strenuous. It does take you up into charming hidden valleys and to meet the hardy mountain Berber families in their own environment.

This hike may also be made from La Bergerie Auberge at no additional cost.

OUR PRICES WILL INCLUDE: An experienced licensed bi-lingual mountain guide throughout. Private transportation Ouirgane (or La Bergerie Auberge) -Ijoukak/Mouldikhte-Ouirgane (or La Bergerie Auberge). Gratuity to the Tin-Mal Mosque guardian. Light field picnic lunch. FIELD PICNIC: Fresh Moroccan salad, cheese, tinned tuna fish *, fruit, bread, mint tea. * If [vegetarian or vegan](#) please pre-advise. Medical and Accident Insurance.

OUR PRICES WILL NOT INCLUDE: *Accommodation pre & post in Marrakech and Ouirgane, nor transfers from/to Marrakech's hotel/riad or 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.