

## THE MOROCCAN HIGH ATLAS RANGES MOUNTAIN COUNTRY AND VALLEY HIKES

Escape the *heat*

NICE 'N EASY ANY DAY SAME DAY DEPARTURES FROM MARRAKECH

LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY: -GRADE ONE:-

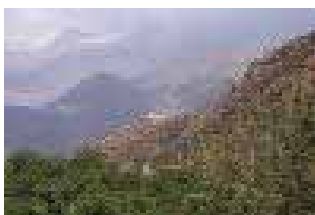
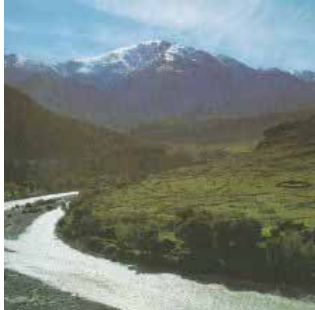


EASY. GOOD TRAINERS ESSENTIAL. YOU SHOULD HAVE HAD PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE OF HILLSIDE HIKING OR RAMBLING AND OF VARIATIONS OF CLIMATE. CLEARLY THERE ARE MANY DIFFERING FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE DIFFICULTY OF A PARTICULAR HIKE, INCLUDING LENGTH OF DAY, TERRAIN, ALTITUDE AND WEATHER CONDITIONS. SINCE 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.

## HIGH ATLAS VALLEYS & THE ANCIENT TIN-MAL MOSQUE

OBTRAK05m. 4 HOURS ROUND TRIP DRIVE AND A 3 HOURS' RAMBLE IN THE OUED N'FIS VALLEY

**MARRAKECH - IJOUKAK - KASBAH GOUNDAFA - OUED N'FIS - TIN-MAL - MARRAKECH.** Departure by car from Marrakech



around half past eight in the morning for an exhilarating 2 hour drive south along the Route S501, crossing the Plains of Glaoua towards the High Atlas Mountains, passing through the major villages of Tahanaoute and Asni. At Asni, with the spectacular Toubkal Massif to our left, we drive towards the south-west through the Ouirgane Plateau Valley and up along the switchback road towards the Tizi n'Test to the Berber village of **Ijoukak**. Here we alight from our vehicle to set out for our 3 hour, 11km circle 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 and Ikhfe N'Boul until we arrive, after the first half an hour, at 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 17<sup>th</sup> century (or late in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, depending on whom is telling the tale). This area is the traditional land of the Berber Goundafa tribe, one of several powerful tribes who strove to control the High Atlas Mountains in the 19<sup>th</sup> 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. 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 sometimes full of trout, 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 12<sup>th</sup> 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 east, crossing the river on an easy half an hour stroll through stands of Holm-oak to another kasbah, once a prison - the partially ruined Goundafa stronghold of Talâat n'Yâcoub. From here and for a further half an hour, we hike to the village of Souk Larbâa, passing through this village until we reach **Ijoukak** at around 3 in the afternoon, to say goodbye to our

mountain guide and rejoin our vehicle for long drive back over peaks and plains to the Imperial City of Marrakech.

OUR PRICES WILL INCLUDE: Private transportation Marrakech - Ijoukak - Marrakech. An experienced licensed bi-lingual mountain guide throughout. A field picnic lunch. Field picnic lunch - fresh Moroccan salad, cheese, tinned tuna fish\*, mint tea, bread, fruit. \*If **vegetarian or vegan** please pre-advise. Medical and Accident Insurance.

OUR PRICES WILL NOT INCLUDE: *Accommodation pre & post, nor transfers from/to Marrakech's' airport.* Gratuities to chauffeur and guide. 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. Rambler pole (optional), hats, sunscreen, sunglasses; nibbles and/or power bars; hygienic 'wipes'. Walking socks; day pack 'bum bag', insect repellent, camera and filled water bottle, possibly some biros and sweets for the local mountain Berber children.

Should you wish to hire a mule to accompany you on this hike, there'd be an additional sum to pay per beast.