

SOUTH INTO THE MOROCCAN SAHARA

3 DAYS/2 NIGHTS. OBTFFDD07

DAY 1: MARRAKECH - OUARZAZATE - ZAGORA - OULAD DRISS - ERG LIHOUDI. Departing from your hotel or riad in



Marrakech by **06:45** at the latest, we set off south in our 4x4 with English-speaking driver over the Glaoua Plain to cross the High Atlas Mountains over the fabulous Tizi n'Tichka Pass – so hold on to your hats - to continue down alongside the Oued Ouarzazate to the ex-French Foreign Legion town of Ouarzazate; thence on for 100 miles down through the delightful and dramatic Valley of the Oued Drâa until you arrive at the small, charming kasbah-like Hotel Fibule Du Drâa in the oasis small town of Zagora, dominated by the tagine pot-dominated Jbel Zagora - an Arabised version of the name Caesar - where you will have your midday lunch (included). Then off we set - around 2 in the afternoon in winter, 3pm in the summer - for your adventure towards the south-east deep into a sub-Saharan desert surrounding of many small dunes, interspersed with the black gravely 'Reg' stretches of the Jbel Tadrart basin. As the air has heated up, 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 there has finally oxidised. Some 34 miles south of Zagora we arrive an hour or so later at the outskirts of the hamlet of Oulad Driss in the Hamada Du Drâa, close to the undefined border with Algeria, once a stop for the trans-Saharan caravans of salt, gold and slaves - and where the longest river in Morocco we have been following – the Oued Drâa - finally sinks into the desert. Here we exchange our 4 wheels for the 4 legs of our ships of the desert for our "méharée" over small dunes of some 3 hours until we reach the dunes of Erg Lihouïdi and our specially-erected nomad's camp in time for Mother Nature's tremendous show of Light and No Sound Sunset (no cloud cover permitting). These dunes are the closest one can get to the Sahara, as one imagines it, from Marrakech. The 'real' Sahara is to be found in the Merzouga region to the eastern border of Morocco with Algeria. After a welcoming traditional glass or two of mint tea, we shall have our dinner of vegetable tagine, or of chicken, or of couscous - which, doubtless, you'll try your hand at preparing - mint tea, bread and fruit. This night may be spent in our tents or out in the open air if you wish, under the awesome canopy of the starlit heavens around a blazing fire to witness the magnificent sunset, the rarefied heavens turning from bright blue to cobalt, to yellow to gold, to purple to black. The sands change their colour too, in step with the lowering rays. **LD.**



DAY 2: ERG LIHOUDI - AÏT ISFOUL - TAMEGROUTE - ZAGORA. Having witnessed an awesome sunset the night before, now is



the hour for an even more startling sunrise you can witness from the top of the dune before our Bedouin breakfast of mint tea, bread, jams and cheeses, after which, your ships of the desert saddled up, you'll somewhat reluctantly strike off back towards the north-east and relative civilisation for your almost 2 hour long dromedary 'méharée' covering some 12 miles of Hamada in the direction of the distant Jbel Beni, to arrive around 10:00 - and now only 50 Days To Timbuktu - to rejoin our 4WD some 11 miles north of M'Hamid taking us close to the trailing edge of the Jbel across the low dunes of Aït Isfoul and through an oasis via the ancient, remote Jewish Kasbahs of Beni Hayoun and Beni Sbih. Back now onto the asphalt road at Tagounite and on north to an unusual tightly-knitted grouping of still-inhabited underground kasbahs; this is the ancient village of Tamegroute, a seat of learning since the 11th century, with its Library of 13th century illuminated Koran scrolls written on gazelle hide, some works of Pythagoras and some original maps of Alexandria, together with some very early mathematics text books; a - voluntary - contribution to the upkeep of the Library is always appreciated. We continue our stroll through the alleyways of the Kasbah to an ancient Pottery Co-Operative, where pottery being still produced in the simplest of manners, in the simplest of kilns. If you have been to Fes, or have seen photographs of this Imperial City, here you'll see the famous green glaze associated with its tiled roofs - green, the colour of Islam representing Mother Earth - 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 of turning it into a thriving caravan hub city. Onwards now to the Fibule Du Drâa to arrive around 1pm for a light lunch. Your day 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 3: ZAGORA - FINT OASIS - KSAR 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 restaurant of the Riad Dar Mouna 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.**

A reservation for 6 persons travelling together would require 2 Land Cruisers.

OUR PRICES FOR THE STANDARD VERSION WILL INCLUDE: Transfer by air-conditioned Land Cruiser Marrakech-Ouarzazate-Zagora/Oulad Driss-Zagora-Fint Oasis-Marrakech. One night's accommodation on full board. Experienced cameleer throughout (desert), trained dromedary, cook; luncheon at the Fibule Du Drâa on first arrival; tagine dinner (alcoholic beverages excluded), overnight and breakfast in Berber nomad tented, carpeted accommodation sleeping on mattresses with sheets and blankets; European toilet. Visit of the Library, Kasbah and Potteries at Tamegroute. Off-road adventure in the Valley of 1000 Kasbahs. Visit of the Fint Oasis. Unguided visit of the Ksour at Aït Ben Haddou (you may hire a local guide, though not really necessary) and light lunch. Medical and Accident Insurance.



OUR PRICES FOR THE DELUXE VERSION WILL INCLUDE: Transfer by air-conditioned Land Cruiser Marrakech-Ouarzazate-Zagora/Oulad Driss-Zagora-Fint Oasis-Marrakech. 1 night's accommodation on full board. Experienced cameleer throughout (desert), trained dromedary; cook. Visit of Library, Kasbah and Potteries at Tamegroute. Lunch at the Fibule Du Drâa on arrival at Zagora; dinner, overnight and breakfast in Caudal tented, carpeted accommodation (maximum 4 persons per partitioned tent); raised bed with mattress with sheets and blankets; European toilet'. Off-road adventure in the Fint Oasis. Unguided visit of the Ksour at Aït Ben Haddou (you may hire a local guide, though not really necessary) and light lunch. Lavabo, mini shampoo, towels, lanterns and candles; dinner (alcoholic beverages excluded) includes Moroccan salad or harira soup, kebabs or 'kefta*', Berber vegetable tagine, fruit, Moroccan pastries and mint tea served by a waiter in traditional costume. **Live Moroccan folklore musicians.** Bar service (BYOB is best). 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, waiters, camp headman and cameleer. Any expenditure of a personal nature. Bottled or gaseous waters/sodas, nor anything not specifically mentioned in the itinerary.

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IT IS RECOMMENDED YOU BRING WITH YOU: Day pack, trainers or sandals; long trousers and sweater, windcheater (seasonal), broad-brimmed hat (or you may purchase a 'Chèche' (Tagelmoust in Berber) before you set out from Zagora; personal toiletries and towel; hygienic 'Wipes'; small First Aid kit; torch with batteries (non-essential); filled water bottle or bottled water from Marrakech; sunscreen, sunglasses; swimming costume; nibbles and/or dried fruit. Drinking chocolate if preferred. Camera, film and Ziploc bags for lenses; extra toilet rolls could come in handy! For those who wear contact lenses, perhaps it would be a good idea to bring along a spare pair of glasses.

