

THE MOROCCAN HIGH ATLAS RANGE

MOUNTAIN COUNTRY AND VALLEYS

Escape the *heat*

NICE 'N EASY PRIVATE ONE DAY ANY DAY EXCURSIONS FROM MARRAKECH.

THE KASBAHS OF AIT BEN HADDOU AND TAOURIRT

OBTRAK13. 10 HOURS

MARRAKECH - KSAR AIT BEN HADDOU - OUARZAZATE - KASBAH TAOURIRT - MARRAKECH.



Breakfasted and raring to go, we set forth towards south down across the Glaoua Plains via Aït Ourir Taddert (1650m) up into the High Atlas Mountains and exhilarating hairpin bends to alight at the top of the Tizi n'Tichka (2260m) - the highest paved road in Morocco - which offers an impressive landscape in the heart of the Atlas Mountain chain. We'll see deep valleys and villages clinging to steep mountain slopes, with fields cultivated along the edges of the rivers in the valleys below. We stop for a photo-op of a vista dominated by peaks of some 2500+m to continue now into a totally different countryside, from mountains and plains into the Assif Ounila Valley to ochre earth, oases and the magnificently exotic and remote kasbah and ksour of Aït Ben Haddou, declared, and rightly so, a World Heritage Site. Here we alight from our vehicle to cross the oued to visit these various kasbahs. Originally built circa 1703 by the Sultan Moulay Ismail from Meknes, the first King of Morocco, it was to become home to employees of El Haj T'hami el Mezouari el Glaoui (1879-1956), the last ruling family of the south (the 'Lords of the Atlas') and a strong contender for control over Morocco. The buildings are so closely-knit they appear to be but one complete building, backed up against the looming mountain in a stretch of unforgiving Hamada. The thick, high, sheer, elaborately decorated pisé walls, stepped-up housing, turreted, crenulated ramparts, and balustrades and arched 'babs' are a sight not to be missed. One of the more spectacular sights in the Atlas ranges, set upon a rock above a reed-strewn assif, commanding the area for miles around, this kasbah controlled the route to Marrakech until the French blasted a road through the Tizi n'Tichka in the late 1920s. We shall cross back over the oued to take a light lunch in the restaurant of the Riad Dar Mouna before setting off to the 'new' (1920s) once-garrison town of the French Protectorate - Ouarzazate - at the crossroads of the Dadès and Draâ Valleys, set between the High Atlas Mountains and the beginning of the Sahara region of oases and sand. During the French Protectorate period, Ouarzazate expanded considerably as a Foreign Legion garrison town, administrative centre and customs post. It is still the arrival point of different cultures and crafts with a Sunday souq filled with henna, roses, caraway, distilled herb tea, Berber vases, objects in engraved stone, blankets and famous Ouzguita carpets of blue or resplendent gold with beautiful geometric designs. Here we shall visit the nearby Kasbah of Taourirt, the kasbah of the former caïd (meaning "master" or "leader,") and later the possession of the same Pasha El Glaoui who had this palace built in Ouarzazate - but never lived there. Once Pasha of Marrakech from 1912 to 1956, he allied himself to the French in Morocco during the Protectorate and conspired with them in the overthrow of the Sultan Mohammed V, great grandfather of the actual king of Morocco. Until the second half of the 20th century, Moroccan society was in a state of feudalism very close to that which pertained in Europe during medieval times. At the top was the sultan, who held the two positions of king (temporal ruler) and imam (spiritual leader). His court, or central government (Makhzen), was headed by a Grand Vizier. The next tier of government was provided by a large number of Pashas (from the Persian *padshah*, literally: Viceroy and caïds (the equivalent of European dukes, barons etc) whose responsibilities were to collect taxes and keep order, to which ends they often kept private armies. Under them were the mass of ordinary commoners whose responsibilities were to pay taxes, obey their local master and provide him with troops when necessary. In the autumn of 1893, the then ruling Sultan Moulay Hassan and his army were crossing the High Atlas Mountains after a tax-gathering expedition when they were caught in a blizzard. They were rescued by Si Madani and T'hami and the grateful Sultan bestowed on Si Madani *caïdats* from Tafilalet to the Souss Valleys. In addition, he presented the Glaoui arsenal with a working 77-mm Krupp cannon, the only such weapon in Morocco outside the imperial army, which the Glaoui army used to subdue rival warlords and which is located still outside the kasbah's walls. From here we turn back down to Marrakech after hours in pre-Saharan reds and greens. L.



OUR PRICES WILL INCLUDE: Private transportation Marrakech - Ouarzazate - Marrakech. A light lunch. Bottled or gaseous water. Medical and Accident Insurance.

OUR PRICES WILL NOT INCLUDE: *Accommodation pre & post, nor transfers from/to Marrakech's' airport. Gratuity to chauffeur.* 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: Good trainers, hat, sunscreen, sunglasses; hygienic 'wipes'. Day pack 'bum bag', insect repellent and camera.