

SHERPA: MOROCCO – THE ATLAS MOUNTAINS

8-day / 7-night self-guided walking holidays

(JMO - Revised: October 10)

Highlights: High Atlas Mountain Scenery, visit the Souks of Marrakech, views of Jebel Toubkal - North Africa's highest peak, walking in the Beautiful Ourika Valley



If you have been on guided treks in Morocco, or even if this is your first time in the country, you can now explore the Atlas Mountains, (the home of the hardy Berber people) in your own time and at your own pace with this unique trekking opportunity. The scenery and ambiance is much different to anything else you may have encountered before in our "Hotel Treks" program, including the really wild beauty of the Haut Atlas region and its surrounding green, settled valleys. The views of Mt. Toubkal are stunning from parts of the trail, there's the chance to see ancient carvings at Oukaïmeden and the Oukar Valley is a well-known treasure.

The routes are not arduous and you will find plenty of time to explore villages and consume the odd glass or two of mint tea... maybe even three! This trek provides a unique blend of adventure with some of the refinements that one expects from a self-guided walking tour. The walking routes are clearly explained in the accompanying briefing pack with maps and route notes.



This is a self guided tour in the broadest sense of the word because you will be accompanied by both a mule who carries your baggage, and a Berber guide who will be able to steer you in the right direction should you stray from the path! An ideal combination for a unique and memorable all year round break.

Cost: \$1105 per person twin share Single room supplements \$260

Departs: All year round – subject to weather constraints. During winter months January/February, you can expect snow on higher ground, but it normally stays clear in the valleys where most of the walking takes place. In winter we suggest you should be more experienced as a walker, used to winter walking (without ice axes). During July - August temperatures can soar up to 35C at Oukaïmeden and into the 40Cs in Marrakech.

Contact Outdoor Travel for more itinerary details and reservations

Level of Difficulty: The tour, although not particularly challenging, is designed for people with an adventurous outlook, who can cope with a much different environment to their normal walking haunts. Hence it should appeal to the more experienced walker, who can cope with the general "differences" of travelling in a "developing country," however one may define it.

Fitness: We graded the tour as Easy - Moderate; i.e. it is harder than 'Easy' with some strenuous sections. Most of the walking is of a more moderate nature. A lot of the paths are gravel or dusty. There are various options on some days and the walk should present no difficulties for anyone in reasonable condition and accustomed to walking in hilly areas.

We must emphasize that this is NOT a trek for beginners, or for people who are expecting accommodation conditions, as you would find on our European hikes; you should have some experience of walking, and preferably having travelled in similar less developed countries with an adventurous spirit. You will have to cope with the enthusiastic attentions of local people and children, usually very friendly, but often trying to sell something.

You should be respectful of the local traditions, especially in terms of dress conduct near religious sites and careful with photography. Homosexuality is considered a criminal offence in Morocco. Sexual relations outside marriage are also punishable by law and there have been a number of arrests (in 2007).

Although we aim for the tour to run logistically as smoothly as possible, we cannot guarantee that things will be quite as smooth as our operations say in France or Italy. In spring for example, snowmelt can wash away sections of road on the way up from Azni to Imeli, which will mean that this section will take longer to negotiate.

Included: 7-nights accommodation, transfers between airport and first hotel at the beginning and back to the airport at the end assuming that you have given us your flight details: Numbers and timings. Road transfers between Marrakech - Aroumd and Setti Fadma - Marrakech, baggage transfers between the hotels by car and mule. Accommodation with breakfast only in Marrakech for 2-nights, half board elsewhere. Route notes and basic maps also provided. You will also have a Berber with you. He is merely for your convenience, security and for 'driving' the mule carrying your baggage, and fixing your lunch!

Not Included: Meals in Marrakech, other than breakfasts. Picnic or packed lunches are not included in the tour price, but will normally be provided on the trekking days by your Berber companion at a cost of approximately \$12 per lunch per person (Please pay Monsieur Lahcen in advance). You do need to take with you a light weight sleeping bag: (1-2 season generally and 2-3 season for winter months) for the Gites enroute and if you like on occasion, to sleep out under the stars on hotel verandahs etc. it can be warm at night! Once you are out on trek then a well-trained mule carries your baggage, including sleeping bags for you. Please supply a robust holdall for your gear that can be carried by the mule; a suitcase is not really appropriate! You do need to carry your own daypack etc. including things that you need for the day out on the trail and any valuables.

How the tour runs: Our "self guided tour" has been running for over 10-years now and people who have gone have enthused about it!

From being transported from Marrakech by car to the Haut Atlas villages you soon meet your "crew": The mule carries your kit to the next accommodation while the Berber will make sure that you do not go too far astray. However you communicate with him, we are sure that you will get on well together and that you will learn quite a lot about the Berber way of life – just talking about the wedding ceremony can fill an evening! He will also prepare your lunches on the trek at a cost of approximately \$12 per lunch (please pay Monsieur Lahcen in advance). The Berber will also help you get into your accommodations.

You should bring or buy a lightweight 1-2 season sleeping bag in summer, and a 3-4 season in winter. This is for: 1) staying at mountain refuges and 2) on occasion you may wish to sleep out on rooftops or verandahs. This is particularly popular at our Aremd hotel during the summer, where there are several roof terraces and the stars on most nights are phenomenal!

Accommodation: The range of accommodation varies between a well-appointed Riad in Marrakech and a very basic Gite in Tacheddirt. The rooms in Marrakech have en-suite facilities. There is no other opportunity for ensuite rooms on this tour. Basic Gite accommodation in Morocco is more basic than what you would associate in countries such as France. Warm water is usually not available and a sleeping bag (1-2 season for summer and 3-4 season for winter) should be brought.

Meals: The tour is on a half board basis throughout, except on the first and the last nights where you can eat out where you like in Marrakech.

Picnic Lunches: Whilst on trek there are few stores to buy items for lunch. For this reason packed lunches are prepared by your Berber minder whilst you are on trek (i.e. not in Marrakech). You will be charged approx the equivalent of @ \$12 per packed lunch per person. Bear in mind that local stores do not carry the range of snack produce you would expect from those within France and Britain etc.

Arrival: The start of the tour is in the ancient red city of Marrakech. There are now low cost flights to Marrakech from the UK & France with several airlines eg. Easyjet, Ryanair, Atlas-blue etc. You can also get a train from Tangiers to Casablanca and then on to Marrakech if you are joining land only (the Marrakech Express of Crosby, Stills and Nash fame!).

From the airport 15 - 20 minutes taxi to the first hotel, centrally located. The hotel is not directly accessible by vehicle and from the centre you will need to walk the last 10 mins to the hotel. If you cannot carry your luggage you will need to hire a cart man (about 20-30 dirhams).

End of Tour: In Marrakech after breakfast on Day: 8.

Day Stages: Maximum altitude is 3100m. Walking distances are approximately 10 - 15km per day (2 – 6-hours), with ascents and descents with various options on some days.

Waymarks: There is no traditional waymarking on this route; it is a walk that we have created ourselves, not part of an organised trail although "The Way" has existed for years connecting up various villages and fields. Armed with your walking notes and Berber you should not have any major difficulties!

Please note that although this is a self guided tour, you will be accompanied by a Berber "minder" or accompagnateur / Muleteer. He is there in case of difficulties and to move the mule that will actually be carrying your baggage over the walking sections of the holiday ie- there is no vehicle support once out on the trek. He probably will know only a little English; a bit more French and of course Berber will be his first language. However you will find the Berber indispensable and will be a great help with regards to your navigation.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Escorted Departures: Not available for this particular tour. There are escorted holidays in Morocco to Mount Toubkal and Jebel Sahro – ask us for dates & details.

Hotels: The hotels/gites described are our usual choice of accommodation, however if these are not available then alternatives are used and if these are of a different standard you will be informed at the time of booking.

Bathrooms: On this tour, don't expect hot water outside Marrakech, although in Aremd and Oukaimedene you can normally have hot showers. Other places have very simple bathing arrangements, maybe little more than a cold tap. In Aremd and Marrakech you will find Hammans: Turkish steam Baths, the massage is optional and not recommended for people who have any joint problems etc...

Breakfast: in countries such as Morocco usually consists of tea / coffee, bread & jam, if you want more for breakfast then we would suggest you purchase some extra food in advance.

Special Diets: It is important for you to tell us if you have any dietary requirements when you book your holiday so that we can inform everyone that you are staying with. Specific food choices may not be available in all areas especially remote areas but we will try to accommodate everyone's needs where practical.

Single Rooms: Are payable on most of our tours. The single supplement guarantees the privacy of your own room, however, rooms can at times be small and in some places may not enjoy the same facilities as double/twin rooms. In Morocco, you may not get your own room for a couple of nights because they are basic gite pensions.

Solo Travellers: Supplements are payable when the cost per bag of moving luggage increases.

Language: When travelling in less frequented areas you will not necessarily come across people speaking English. Remember you are experiencing a different culture, buy a phrase book and try to learn a little of the local language, French or Arabic!!

Luggage: When staying in hotels, sometimes your luggage will have been taken to your room awaiting your arrival. However don't be surprised if your luggage is waiting for you to take it up to your room please politely ask someone if you need assistance

Route Notes: Please note that 1 set of route notes per room booked is included in the cost of the holiday. If you require more sets of notes then there is a charge of @ \$60 per set ordered.

Insurance: All clients must have appropriate travel insurance cover for the activities included for the duration of our trip.

Please Note: The itinerary suggested below may be modified depending upon progress and local conditions e.g. snow. Although this is part of our "self guided " program - with all the usual features, (e.g.: baggage transfers, going at your own pace; having a map and a route note package etc.) In effect however a Berber guide will escort you, oh and by his trusty mule as well! You can have extra nights in Marrakech – a flamboyant African city with magnificent craft souks. The cost of the tour will just be adjusted accordingly in this case.

Nights 1 & 7: You will commence with our beautiful, small "non backpacker set" Riad set in a quiet ancient quarter of the Medina in Marrakech. It is approached through narrow streets and the hotel is refined with typical Moorish architecture, giving you the chance to sample by day and night the delights of the Djemaa E'Fna just a few minutes walk away in this fabled city. Each of the six rooms has their own bathrooms. There is a central courtyard with fountains shaded by orange trees and from the roof terrace there is a wonderful view over the city and to the Haut Atlas, especially on a clear winter's day. English is spoken. This is our preferred hotel; on occasion we have had to substitute another hotel for one of these nights if it is booked out, but we aim to book one of a similar standard nearby.

Nights 2 & 3: In Aroumd (Aremd) village at the foot of the Jebel Toubkal massif, the hotel is the peaceful residence of Monsieur Lahcen, where a Berber welcome awaits you. Here, on the threshold of the Atlas, we are in his well-appointed small hotel below the brown and emerald terraces of this town, for two nights. There is a nice terrace restaurant and roof terraces from where you can look up the valley to Mount. Toubkal towering above you. Some prefer to sleep out on the terrace looking at the stars on a summer's night. The rooms are simple, non en-suite, but furnishings and bathrooms are clean. If you want more than just a shower, why not inquire about the Hamman –Moroccan steam bath in the village? Someone from the staff will take you there.

Night 4: At Tacheddirt we stay in a basic Berber run refuge. Conditions are very simple and basic (especially in the washing department). You will need sleeping bags for the night, as you normally will not be provided with blankets. Lightweight 1-2 season bags should be fine for most of the year and 2-3 season bags for the winter months.

Night 5: At Oukaïmeden you will stay at a *Club Alpin Française* mountain gite; which is run by a French couple who escaped here from Paris many years ago. This places has a licence and thus serves alcohol, a nice restaurants and warm showers.

Night 6: Trek over to a more basic Gite d'Etape at Timichi

Suggested itinerary

Day: 1 To Marrakech – plan to arrive late afternoon; a taxi transfer from the airport to the hotel in the centre of the city will take 15 – 20-minutes. If arrival is early enough you will have time to have a look round the Djemaa E'Fna, the central square which comes alive at night with jugglers, water-sellers, snake-charmers, musicians and story tellers, like no where else on Earth. All this is only a few minutes walk from the hotel.

Day: 2 From Marrakech you will be driven to Aroumd (Aremd) 1.5 hours. This short spectacular drive takes you over the dusty Hoaz plains, through the scenic gorges at Moulay Brahim, past the Hotel Toubkal at Asni, where Winston Churchill used to paint and onto Imelil. From here you can walk 45-minutes up the track through walnut terraces and just past the terraced village of Aroumd (Aremd) to your hotel.

The panoramic view of Jebel Toubkal is great. Later one can visit the cascades of the Mizane valley before relaxing on the terrace of the small hotel of Chez Lahcen at Aroumd.

Day: 3 From Aroumd there is a 6 – 7-hour circular walk in Sidi Chamarouch in order to soak up the unique flavour of the Atlas Mountains. Depending on the time of your visit, you may encounter picturesque apple and peach trees in full blossom or the Berbers harvesting the wheat and maize and the necessary threshing routines. Or in autumn they might be precariously hanging from branches whipping walnuts off the branches with long sticks. You will see women and children burdened with loads of brushwood for fuel and kindling moving over the hillsides... some of the traditional ways of life have not changed in centuries, but tourism is now very important to this area.

Day: 4 The third day on the trail takes you to 2245m with plenty of time to experience the Berber villages like Tamatert, before descending to Tacheddirt and a night in a local Gite where you may choose to sleep under the African stars.

Day: 5 We continue from Tacheddirt and up to a high point at the Tizi nou Addi/Tizi-n-Addi (2960m) pass, before continuing down to the ski village of Oukaïmeden (2500m) where you may decide that you qualify for the only beer normally available on the tour!

Day 6: Quite a tough day, around 11km with 650m of ascent and about 1300m descents. The route crosses over - the high point of the tour - a pass at 3100m before dropping down into the natural beauty of the Ourika Valley and to the Gite d'Etape at Timichi for a very late lunch. This is "a magical valley full of interesting villages, aromatic smells, lovely people and beautiful well cared for animals."

Day 7: Continue on to Setti Fadma (1450m, 11km) for a well-earned lunchtime Tagine or Couscous. The Ourika Valley is full of cascades, flowing water and imaginative boutiques selling local wares, carpets and ceramics.

After lunch you will be collected for the return journey to Marrakech by vehicle leaving the High Atlas and your Berber friend and his donkey (no doubt with a tear in its eye). The journey takes you through the remainder of the Ourika Valley, until eventually you spill out once more onto the Hoaz Plain. It is then a drive back to the throbbing Metropolis of Marrakech and the ensuing calm at your hotel.

Day: 8: Departure from hotel after breakfast, perhaps time for a last minute shopping bid in the souks, before your taxi transfer back to the airport and flight.

Tippling: We do recommend that you tip your muleteer guide: and we don't mean off a cliff either! This is totally discretionary but would recommend something like @ \$5 or 32 Dirhams per person per day. Oh and if you have any old Tee shirts...

Singles: This self-guided tour is not suitable for single female travellers. We recommend our Moroccan escorted tours (Jbel Toubkal and Jbel Sahro)

Other walking holidays – guided in small groups or self-guided with inn-to-inn luggage transfers & meals are available in many parts of Europe through **Outdoor Travel** including France, Germany, Italy, Greece, Ireland and several regions of England and Scotland, New Zealand and Australia.

For long distance or pilgrimage trails we offer the Way of St James or Camino De Santiago from Le Puy in France to Santiago in Spain, the pilgrims Road to Rome – the Via Francigena, the route of Pilgrims along St Cuthbert's Way from Scotland into England, the English Coast to Coast route and the South Downs way in Sussex.

There are also offer literary walking routes or trails in the footsteps of famous painters in many areas and walks that follow wine routes or focus on gourmet foods.

Contact Outdoor Travel for more itinerary details and reservations

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