

### Morocco: Jbel Toubkal

#### Classic Two-Week Trek in the High Atlas Mountains

Tour code: MJT

Revised: October 08

*Huge escarpments, deep gorges and flat-topped summits characterise the Atlas mountain range in North Africa. It runs for 1,000 miles all the way from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean. It is just south of the great red city of Marrakech, the third largest town in Morocco, that the Atlas is at its most spectacular. In a tiny section of this chain, just nine miles long, is some of the most appealing mountain walking country anywhere. This is where the Toubkal Massif rises to a lofty 4,167 metres (13,672 feet), where there are fine ridge traverses, challenging scree slopes, and where remote Berber villages cling to the terraced hillsides and the terminal moraines of long vanished glaciers.*

*With all these aspects of the mountain walking experience, plus ease of accessibility, it is not surprising that this region is increasingly popular, and yet, in many ways the life of the Berber peoples often seem little effected. Some of the men carry mobile phones now, but their women are still mostly off in the fields cutting and carrying huge loads of animal feed on their backs. These people have remained fiercely independent of government intervention for years, and only fairly recently have they allowed the authorities the concession of building little prefab village schools for the 7-13s.*

*While we will tackle the non-technical ascent of Toubkal, a highlight of any trek in the range, our main aim is to pursue a classic circular route, which will take us into more isolated valleys and across less frequented passes than most walkers will experience on their standard march up Toubkal. This is not, however, a wilderness experience; even in the remote valleys we will come upon tiny Berber settlements and villages where we maybe welcomed with hot, mint tea, the traditional drink. The hospitality of the Berbers is legendary, despite what is essentially a close knit and inward looking society, where women are rarely seen unless out in the fields. We will admit that tourism has had some impact in blunting this, but there should be opportunities to observe the friendliness of the Berbers close at hand. Apart from our day reaching the summit of Toubkal and the long previous day over the Tizi-n'Ouanoums pass, you will find most days are straightforward and enjoyable, with plenty of time for photography, or chilling out with a book!*

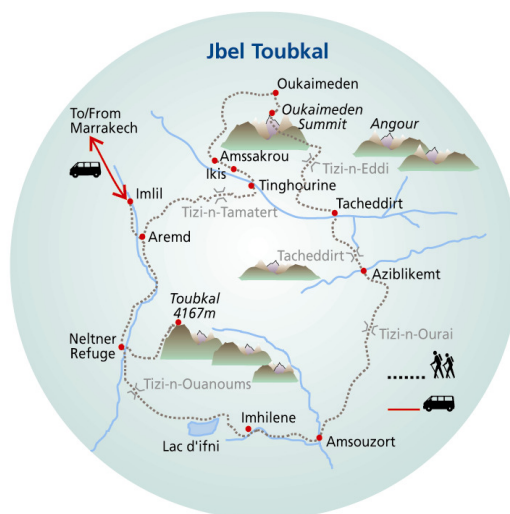
#### Grade: Moderate to Challenging

3 to 9 hours walking a day and up to a top altitude of 4167m. Most ascent gain in one day: 1337m. Basically the going is moderate to strenuous and rough underfoot; gravel paths and scree slopes. The ascents of Toubkal, Oukaimden, Tizi Likemt and the Tizi n' Ouanoums are quite steep and tough; but fine for normal reasonably fit hill walkers. Altitude problems may effect some people on Toubkal, although our carefully managed trek itinerary enables most people to acclimatize very well for the final ascent.

#### Climate

Our tours to go trekking in the Jbel Atlas Toubkal region are between June and September; outside these months there is a high chance of late or early snow obstructing high passes or

peaks. Expect average daytime temperatures to vary between 15-35 C, depending upon altitude etc. There can, however seldom, be some grey skies, rain and even snow at the highest altitudes of the trek. Night time temperatures can vary from warm to cold. At the highest camps, temperatures may drop below freezing overnight. The summit ascent will normally commence in near freezing temperatures during the early morning (Even colder with wind chill). Note that on occasion Marrakech ( at 475 metres) has a heat wave and has recorded summer temps. Of approaching 50 C! Of course this is unusual and it is a dry heat, but it is possible. Such high temperatures are not found in the mountains where you will be at an altitude of around 1900m (Aremd).



## Outline Itinerary

The following itinerary is intended as a working guide and is subject to variation as a result of weather, local conditions and group progress. We reserve the right to alter (lengthen or shorten) any trek at any time if necessary.

Local time: GMT-1 BST & GMT as British winter time.

**N.B. Occasionally your trek leader may wish to change your free day in Marrakech to the beginning of the trek. This depends on weather and local logistics, and is done entirely for your benefit.**

**Note below that ascents and descents are accumulative on each day.**

□ **Day 1:** Sunday flight to Marrakech. Transfer to the Hotel Foucauld. You can make use of Easyjet or Ryan Air flights (lower cost) as a 'LandOnly' Customer. You will need to make your own way to hotel (15 mins by taxi)

□ **Day 2:** Morning departure and drive across the Haouz plain to Imlil (1,740m) in the delightful Mizane valley, one of the most verdant in the Atlas. Here the Mizane River supports a thriving rural community, as their extensive cultivations and terraced fields indicate. Centuries of laborious irrigation by the Berbers have resulted in these terraces and walnut trees growing among the barren rocks. From Imlil we ascend beyond an old reconditioned Kasbah through walnut trees, before descending to our Berber host's home at the picturesque terraced village of Aroumd (also spelt Aremd) 1950m. The village clings to a steep slope with dramatic views across the Aroumd plain to the Toubkal massif. (200 metres ascent)

□ **Day 3:** From Aroumd we skirt Imlil, concealed in its surrounding groves of walnut trees and from the top of the Tizi-n'Tametert pass (2hrs) look down into the chasm of the Imanane valley. Lunch is beside the river in the enchanting hamlet of Tinhourine after an hour or so of descent. In the afternoon we walk around the deep river valley to our campsite opposite Amsakrou village (1.5hrs) 1880m. Ascent: 754m / Descent: 842m

□ **Day 4:** We leave Amsakrou and walk up to the Tizi-n-Amsakrou pass (1.5hrs), then continue up through cedar groves to reach the dramatic scree bowl of Tarigt. This is traversed on a spectacular path and culminates in the Tizi-n-Oukaimden pass (2683m). Ascend to Oukaimden village for lunch. Afternoon free to explore. There are impressive views across the plains to Marrakech. We stay at the licensed Club Alpin Francais. Beer / wine is available. Dinner is at own expense... and so is the Alcohol! There is dormitory accommodation; good warm showers and a living room. The building is under French management. Ascent: 869 / Desc 219m.

□ **Day 5:** Leaving Oukaimden we have the choice of either contouring round the grassy valley of Assif-a-Ait Irene or, for the more experienced, an ascent of Jbel Oukaimden (2.5hrs), followed by an exciting ridge walk to meet at Tizi-nou Addi pass (2957m) the ridge is very loose in places and we pick our way with care. From the Tizi there is a steep descent through crags to the village of Tacheddirt, slightly, above which we make camp. Ascent: 987m / Desc 1164m.

□ **Day 6:** We follow a path, which zigzags up the screes to the Tizi Likemt col (3554m & 3.5 hrs), first climbed by an English party in 1888. We descend to have lunch adjacent to a spring, and then continue down to camp near the Berber summer hamlet of Azib Likempt (2.5hrs). Hard day today. Ascent: 1337m / Desc 1258m.

□ **Day 7:** From the remote campsite at Azib Likempt, the trek turns a sharp left and passes over a spectacular hidden chasm with a large waterfall in the River Tinzer. The continuing path is beautiful as it meanders adjacent to the river all the way to the green pastures that provides a perfect spot for lunch. A short climb to the Tizi Nourai provides a spectacular view of Toubkal and the Tissili Valley with its rich crop of walnut trees and cacti, before a long descent past some of the most extensive village terracing in the Atlas Mountains. We normally have lunch in the village of Amsouzart amongst the walnut groves before the last 1.5 hours walking takes us across the valley and ascend up to the last village before the terminal moraine which encapsulates Lac d'Ifni. Camp is in the village of Tirhaltine, under the prominent Ksour (fortified village of Imhilene. Ascent: 846 / Desc 1410m.

□ **Day 8:** Fancy a day on the beach? We cut up through a steep boulder field to above the Lac d'Ifni (2312m). This is the only lake in the High Atlas and lies in the bed of an old glacier, dammed up by moraines as the glacier retreated towards Toubkal. We descend and then undulate around to the far side of the lake, where there is an Azib (pastoralist area) which has been decked out in a limited way for tourists with plastic chairs, and 'beach huts' where you can lie in the shade. Normally the water is just about warm enough to swim in (the 06 group played a limited game of water Polo and Frisbee!) Lunch is taken at the azib. Depending on the number of other groups around, You will then probably ascend the valley to one of the higher azibs to camp so that tomorrow's climb over the Tizi-n'-Quanoums pass is lessened. Ascent: Varied pending on camp site, up to 950m / Desc 130m.

□ **Day 9:** We walk across the gravel bed of the Assif-a-Moursaine valley and start the climb up to the Tizi-n'Ouanoums pass (4.5 hrs, less if you have camped at one of the higher azibs) it is a big climb of about 1300m, but is one of the most spectacular in the Atlas. From there a steep descent through scree brings us to our camping place near the Toubkal refuge (1.5 hrs). Ascent: up to 1300m, but probably around 850m depending upon the camping site of the previous night / Desc 580m.

□ **Day 10:** The ascent of Jbel Toubkal (4167m) takes about three and a half hours from our campsite and we aim to be back at the Toubkal refuge for a glass of mint tea with our picnic lunch. From our campsite near the hut we make an early morning (around 05:30) rising traverse over grass and rocks, then a short scree scramble up to the base of the South Cwm. We continue the ascent to Tizi-n-Toubkal (3941m), and then traverse a rising crest to the summit plateau. The ascent of Toubkal is at times tiring, but not technically difficult. From the top there is normally an unobstructed view in every direction over craggy peaks, sweeping in- to the Sahara far in the south, the Mgoun to the East and Sahro south east and . The village of Aroumd can be seen seven thousand feet below, the Jbel Siroua fifty kilometres away and the peaks and passes we have already climbed can be traced. Ascent & Desc 1093m.

□ **Day 11:** The morning can be spent at leisure exploring this high altitude valley, usually we have a late start today but it is downhill! We walk down the valley to the holy shrine of Sidi-Chamarouch, and then continue our descent to our base at Aremd. (3hrs). Descent: 1235 m

□ **Day 12:** Day to relax and observe the Berber village life of Aremd. This is a good opportunity to buy some local pieces of craftwork. There should also be the opportunity of going on a day walk of up to four hours in the surrounding area. Such as the Col de Mzik. ( around 500 m ascent + descent) Why not go to the Haman Turkish / Moroccan bath in the village, and

have a thorough scrubbing, (although we wouldn't recommend the massage). You will feel all the better for it...honest!

□ **Day 13:** Walking down to Imlil, a mid-morning drive brings us to Marrakech and the Hotel Foucauld. Afternoon at leisure. It is well worth spending some time in the Djemma-ef-Fna, the busy main square of Marrakech. Your Trek Leader will advise you of other places of interest. There is a post trek evening meal included at the Hotel Foucauld.

□ **Day 14:** Morning tour of the souks (markets) of Marrakech for those last minute presents. Particularly good are the products that are made of wood and leather, but you will find plenty of interesting items including ceramics, musical instruments, dates and walnuts. The leader will be able to help you find items that you may want, but we leave the haggling up to you... it is all, too stressful! In the afternoon we recommend that you go to the Saadian tombs and maybe if you still have clothes to look smart (ish) in, attempt to get into the famous Mamoumia Hotel for a drink...at a price! This was the hotel that Sir Winston Churchill often stayed in, and is still, by World standards, excellent.

Lunch and dinner today is at your expense. You may like to eat in the Djemaa El Fna, the central square in the city, which at night takes on vibrance and personality that is unique in the World, (just watch your pockets though). Quite a few Westerners now eat actually in the square, where there are many barbecues lighting up (and smoking up) the place. The advantage of the place is that you can actually see how your food is being cooked and get them to redo it if necessary.

□ **Day 15:** Transfer to the airport (15 minutes) and Fly Marrakech to London, normally an early morning flight. (Note that most the duty free shops sell items in Euros/dollars, although if you do have a few Dirhams left the airport cafes will serve you drinks for them).

## Accommodation

3 nights accommodation in Marrakech normally in the pleasant Hotel Foucauld boasting a good restaurant (alcohol not available but can be brought in) which on warmer days serves a buffet on the hotel roof, overlooking the majestic minaret of the Koutoubia mosque. Here you have 2 nights on B&B and one night at half board. Rooms are simple ensuite.

In Aremd you will stay in a simple café Hotel for 3 nights during the tour on a full board basis. Rooms are simple hostel style, several beds to a room. Some people sleep on the terrace on hot nights under the stars. Hot water is erratic, but the food is great!

In Oukaimden you stay in a Club Alpin Francais Hostel, on B&B basis with multiple bunked rooms, there is a comfortable living room area. Warm water for showers, Beer and wine is available at reasonable prices.

On night 5, you are staying a night in the Kasbah Tacheddirt (non ensuite rooms). (Full Board)

## Equipment & Clothing

In addition to a good pair of broken in (but not breaking down) walking boots, a 3 season sleeping bag, a fleece, sunglasses a hat and a couple of water bottles (with water purification) are essential. The sun can be excessively strong, and cotton long sleeved shirts and Sunbloc are very important. A detailed list of recommended clothing and equipment is included in our pre-departure information, which is sent with confirmation of your reservation. Also bring with you books and games; you have plenty of time to use them!

## Food

All food is included **whilst on trek**, apart from your evening meal at the CAF hostel at Oukaimden on trek, here the group normally decide whether to purchase a group meal at the hostel (about 65 Dirhams) or to pay the trek crew to prepare you a meal there for about the same price. In Marrakech you will be staying on a Bed and breakfast basis, although there is a post trek group meal at the hotel included. The food that you will eat is very healthy on trek, including Couscous, Tagine, olives, sardines, nuts and fruit; but there is generally little meat. Please decide as soon as possible once you arrive on trek whether you are going to be a vegetarian. This however is not normally a problem for our Berber cook crew, as apart from the fish (Tuna and Sardines) often served at lunch time with vegetable salad; there is not normally a lot of meat and when meat is available separate dishes such as vegetarian tagine, can always be prepared. Many people bring their own treats and food supplements if they have special dietary requirements. It is very difficult or impossible to get a lot of common western items actually once on trek, but things are improving.

Average lunch or dinner costs are about 50-100 Dirhams without drinks. \*

Soft drinks cost between 5 Dirhams and about 10 Dirhams for a Coke. Freshly squeezed orange juice is also highly recommended 5 D - 7D and only 3 D in the Djema el Fna. Berber tea varies between 2 - 9 D. Small bottle of Flag beer (available in only a very few places: 15 -22 Dirhams).

\*Alcoholic beverages are normally impossible to obtain out of the big towns and even then are not particularly good by Western standards. We really recommend making use of your duty free allowance to obtain your favourite tipple. Remember that if you belong to an E.C. country, USA, Aus or NZ then when you fly to Morocco, you are entitled to duty free shopping.

## Tipping

Rather like in Nepal (if you have been) the Berbers expect a tip for good service. We do stress this is voluntary, but more and more they see it as part of their income. On the last night on trek your leader will quietly encourage you to make some kind of presentation; any monies or material items will be gratefully received and shared between the crew.

## Local customs and laws

In Morocco, access to Mosques and holy places is forbidden to non-Muslims. A few exceptions are the Hassan II Mosque in Casablanca, the Mohammed V Mausoleum in Rabat, The Moulay Ismail mausoleum at Meknes and the Moulay Ali Cherif Mausoleum at Rissani.

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.

Avoid provocative clothing

Accept mint tea when offered, it is a sign of hospitality

Avoid drinking, eating and smoking in public in daytime during the period of Ramadan

If you want to photograph somebody, don't forget to ask for permission.

## Escorted Dates 2009

Sunday 28 June – Sunday 12 July

Sunday 06 Sept -- Sunday 20 Sept