

## THE MOROCCAN SOUTHERN VALLEYS AND RANGES

### MOUNTAIN, COUNTRY AND VALLEY HIKING

#### NICE 'N EASY ANY DAY ONE DAY HIKES FROM OUARZAZATE



LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY:- GRADE ONE: WALKING MOSTLY ON PATHS AT LOWER LEVELS, SOMETIMES ROCKY, SELDOM FLAT, FOR ABOUT 6-7 HOURS EACH DAY. GOOD TRAINERS WOULD DO, BUT TAKE BOOTS IF YOU ARE USED TO THEM. FOR ANYONE WHO LEADS A REASONABLY ACTIVE LIFE. HIKING ALWAYS INVOLVES SOME EFFORT. 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.

## MOROCCO'S STUNNING KASBAHS

### OBTOZZ03. 6 HOURS HIKING. OUARZAZATE - DADES VALLEY - SKOURA - QALÂA'T MGOUNA - AÏT HADDOU n'AÏT YOUL - MGOUN VALLEY - OUARZAZATE



Departure south from your hotel or riad in Ouarzazate at around 8 in the morning to visit the magnificently exotic Kasbah and Ksour of Aït Ben Haddou, declared, and rightly so, a World Heritage Site. Here we alight from our vehicle to visit these various kasbahs, so closely-knit that 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. Now onwards towards Qlâa't M'gouna - "The Village Of The Rose" in English. On our way through the magnificent Dadès Valley, the "Valley of the Roses", through lands once trodden by Alexander the Great and his invading armies, we travel along what is a vast flood plain whose southern horizon is blocked by the sun-blasted Anti Atlas Mountains and to the north by the jagged High Atlas mountain ranges. On the edges of the verdant palmeraie of Skoura, one-time capital of Moulay Essmail, the nearby river reflects the intense blue of the sky, the brilliant green of the palmeraies and the red earth; we shall stop to photograph two magnificent 17<sup>th</sup> century kasbahs of singular beauty ('kasbah' translates to 'tighernit' in the language of the Berber) - Amerhidil - surrounded whose image is to found printed on the current 50 dirham bank note - and its neighbour, Dar Aït Sidi El Mati. Continuing along in our vehicle, we come across an imposing set of kasbahs blending harmoniously with the environment, yet in various stages of ruin, all shouting out their last defiant cries against the eroding desert winds. 20kms further on we enter the valley full of rose bush plantations and palmeraies, magnificent Berber villages and more kasbahs, the Jbel Sarhro (2332m) to our right, Jbel M'Goun (4071m) - the second highest peak in the Maghreb to our left - until we reach the large village of Qlâa't M'gouna (1433m), where tens of thousands of Damascene roses are grown to be sold and their essences distilled to make the rose water so favoured by the Berber people. You would do well to buy some of the original beauty products here. At the feet of a bluff of rock separating the two verdant valleys of Dadès and M'Goun at the head of a meandering valley leading up through the mountains, we now alight from our vehicle, to set off on our hike towards the north up the Oued M'Goun between fields of rose bushes and a sequence of kasbahs, apparently fragile but actually of a majestic strength. The meandering path takes us past the villages of Aït Hammou Ou Yahya (1478m) and Aït Saïd (1531m) between the Timassinine and lmi n'Louh Plateaux until we reach the foothills of the Jbel Ta'Louit (2084m) where we turn to the east, following a winding track past the cliffs of the Jbel Riguit (2004m) until, after some 2 hours, we arrive at the Berber village of Aït Haddou n'Aït Youl where we shall picnic in the surrounds of the Glaoua Kasbah n'Aït Youl. Our afternoon hike takes us back towards the north-west, up and down the tracks of the lower valley slopes between Jbel Ta'Louit, lmi n'Louh and finally Jbel Guersif (1847m), through scattered groves of fig and olive trees, stark red cliffs and ochre rock pitons to rejoin our vehicle at Tabarkhacht Hdida at around 5pm taking us down to Qlâa't M'gouna and back to Ouarzazate after a day in Morocco's colourful past.

OUR PRICES WILL INCLUDE: Private transportation Ouarzazate-Qlâa't M'gouna/Tabarkhacht Hdida-Ouarzazate. 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 Ouarzazate's' airport.* Gratuities to guide and chauffeur. 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; hat; 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.