

# Sahara Desert Trek & Hospice Project

6th - 13th October 2012



Experience the immense Sahara desert on this 3-day trek and learn about the lives of the Berber people. After your trek help out at a hospice near Marrakech by helping to refurbish, paint, garden and more!



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# The DIFFERENT TRAVEL

## Sahara Desert Trek Challenge and Project

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### About Morocco

The Kingdom of Morocco is the most westerly of the North African countries known as the Maghreb and is bordered by Algeria to the east and Mauritania to the south. The country, which covers an area of 458,730 sq km has a diverse geography with both Atlantic and Mediterranean coastlines in addition to a rugged mountainous interior. Although only separated from Europe by the straits of Gibraltar, Morocco is a world away in terms of culture and experience. This is due to the country's turbulent history. Since the days of the Phoenicians, Morocco has attracted foreign interest, from the Romans, Vandals and ancient Greeks until the coming of the Arabs in the 7th century who brought Islam. Later France and Spain battled for control, until nationalism triumphed and the Kingdom of Morocco gained independence in 1956. The vast majority of Morocco's 29 million people are Sunni Muslim and their head of state is King Mohammed VI, seen by many as a force for progress and modernisation. It should be noted however that the King is the supreme head of the armies. In addition he chairs the Council of Ministers, chooses the Prime Minister and names the ministers proposed by him. The government is responsible to the King and Parliament.



### Berbers



The Berbers are an ethnic group indigenous to Northwest Africa whose culture can be traced back at least 4,000 years. The term Berber does not exist in their language; instead they refer to themselves as Imazighen. There are thought to be between 14-25 million Berbers most of whom live in Morocco and Algeria. Before the advent of Islam most Berbers were Christians. Now the majority are Sunni Muslim and most live in the mountains, which can be traced back to the days of Arab conquest when the Arabs took control over the cities, but left the countryside to itself. There is a tendency in Morocco to regard the Berbers as backward, partly because their culture is strongest in the less-developed rural areas. Many of the children in these regions drop out of school because they are taught in what to them is a foreign language - Arabic. The Berber language is still not officially recognised.

### The Project

The project is based in Marrakech and there are many activities you could be involved in during your time helping there. You will spend time helping out at a hospice, and there is a rundown courtyard in need of renovation so patients can use it to enjoy the fresh air, socialise and meet with family and friends. There is also lots of redecorating needed, some gardening, building book shelves to create a library area and many other activities. Your help will go a long way to improving the lives of the patients and the staff at the hospice and you will leave feeling as if you have really made a difference.

### Itinerary

#### Day 1 (6<sup>th</sup> Oct): London / Marrakech / Ouarzazate

Fly from London to Marrakech. Upon arrival you will be met by your guide and commence the drive across the High Atlas Mountain range for an overnight stop in the village of Ouarzazate (approx 6hrs drive). (Meals included: Dinner)

#### Day 2 (7<sup>th</sup> Oct): Marrakech – Ouarzazate / Oulaid Driss

After an early start, we leave Ouarzazate and continue our drive to Zagora (approx. 4hrs drive) along ancient caravan routes and into the arid scenery of the Sahara desert. Here we will be welcomed by the villagers and briefed about some of the local traditions. After lunch, we will commence the trek into the vast and arid Sahara desert, stopping overnight to camp out under the stars (weather permitting) either in local bivouacs or a Saharan camp site. (Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner)

#### Days 3 – 4 (8<sup>th</sup> - 9<sup>th</sup> Oct): Sahara Desert

Our trek continues through the desert as we traverse sand dunes and a rocky, almost lunar landscape. We are aided by our

local Berber team comprising of the guides, cook and camel owners (the camels are our porters, carrying our luggage and equipment!). Together, at a camel's pace we are able to appreciate the Saharan landscape and begin to understand just how important it is to respect and comply with the forces of nature in the desert. On average we will cover between 15-20km per day. As the trek progresses we learn how the nomadic people of the Sahara live: from cooking (for example how to cook bread in the sand) to sleeping out under the stars and reading the magnificent Saharan night sky. We spend our nights under canvas or out in the open, under the vast African skies. (Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner)

#### **Day 5 (10<sup>th</sup> Oct): Oulaid Driss / Marrakech**

This morning it's the final leg of the trek back to the village where we bid farewell to the trekking team and head back to Marrakech (approx. 8 hours drive). A farewell dinner and overnight at a central hotel. (Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner)

#### **Day 6-7 (11<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> Oct): Marrakech**

Spend two days helping on a range of tasks at a hospice in Marrakech. This could include renovating a courtyard, painting the rooms or gardening depending on the need at the time.

#### **Day 8 (13<sup>th</sup> Oct): Marrakech / London**

Enjoy some free time to explore the exotic city of Marrakech before your flight back to London. (Meals included: Breakfast)



## **BEFORE YOU GO: AN A - Z OF INFORMATION ON MOROCCO**

**A is for Arrival.** British passport holders do not currently require a visa to enter Morocco.

**B is for Begging.** As with many developing countries, begging tends to be at its worst in the larger cities and popular tourist destinations. In the rural areas begging is practically unknown.

**B is also for Boots.** You will need to wear hiking boots in the desert so please ensure you have some well in advance of departure so you can break them in properly. Make sure you try on lots of pairs before you choose some.

**C is for Communications.** Morocco's international dialing code is +212. Hotels can add a hefty surcharge to their telephone bills; it is best to check before making long international calls. Two mobile GSM 900 networks cover the north of the country. Internet cafes are widely available in tourist areas.

**C is also for Camping.** For the nights in the desert we will either be staying in local bivouacs and igloo tents (two persons per tent) or a Saharan style camp site with a separate cooking and activity tent. Camping foam mattresses will be provided but clients you must bring your own sleeping bags. A qualified guide and cook will be with the group for the duration of the trek. Camels will be used for carrying equipment.

**C is also for Clothing.** Morocco is still a very traditional nation, clearly reflected in their dress. As visitors, please pay attention to your own dress as what you wear could offend locals or cause harassment. Legs and shoulders are considered to be 'private body parts' in most parts of Morocco, and men and women should do their utmost to keep these areas covered. Women are generally covered from wrist to ankle and men are covered elbow to below the knee. This sort of covering will be accepted in most areas of Morocco and women not covered sufficiently will often get harassed. In the cities Moroccan women may don short-sleeved tops with knee length skirts, but it is not suggested that you follow this trend since these women often get unwanted attention. Both sexes should stay away from sleeveless T-shirts, ordinary T-shirts (worn as underwear in Morocco) and shorts. Tight clothing should also be avoided.

**C is also for Clothing on the Trek.** Non-cotton technical t-shirts and trousers etc. These non-cotton garments wick sweat away from your skin. It is very important that you do not wear cotton layers next to your skin. This is because cotton absorbs sweat and then it cools. Having cold damp fabric against your skin reduces your core body temperature leaving you vulnerable to

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hypothermia – which is possible in the desert as nights are cold.

A long sleeved cotton shirt or kaftan is also helpful to keep the sun off your skin. Keeping cool also means keeping covered up. It does get cold at night so thermals and a fleece are recommended.

**D is for Dehydration.** Day time temperatures will rise to mid 30s so it is vital to consume large quantities of bottled water to avoid the risk of dehydration. You must also take some rehydration salts such as Diorylite or Electrolade or a pharmacy own brand of rehydration. Dehydration is a serious risk in the desert. See also W is for Water.

**D is also for Day pack.** Whilst walking in the desert you should have your own day pack containing the following items: sun hat and sun cream, bottled water (minimum 2 litres) and basic first aid kit. Ideally you should pick a daypack which has an air flow section such as on all Berghaus packs. Try them on before you buy. An example is here: <http://www.nomadtravel.co.uk/catalog/browse/daybags/berghaus-freeflow-255> . The daypack must have a hip belt and chest strap.

**D is also for Dietary Requirements.** The majority of special diets, such as vegetarian, vegan, gluten-free, etc., can be catered for. Please ensure that you notify us of any dietary requirements at the time of booking or as soon as possible.

**D is also for Departure Tax.** There is currently no departure tax for tourists flying out of Marrakech Airport.

**E is for Etiquette.** If you have the opportunity to visit a Moroccan's home please remove your shoes at the door. Also, it is a good idea to take a gift of some sort. If you are invited to join someone for a meal, you should always eat with the right hand as the left is supposed to be used for the toilet. Any plans to visit mosques will usually meet with failure as these are considered to be very holy places that only Muslims are allowed access to. The main exception is the Hassan II Mosque in Casablanca. Traditionally, the men take to the streets and the women are in control of their homes. This means that you will not often find woman in cafés or restaurants.

**F is for Food.** Moroccan cuisine has long been considered as one of the most diversified in the world. Typically a meal begins with a series of hot and cold salads, followed by a tajine (a traditional fish, chicken or lamb stew with vegetables served in a clay pot). Bread is eaten with every meal. Often a lamb or chicken dish is next, followed by couscous (made from semolina) topped with meats and vegetables. A cup of sweet mint tea is commonly used to end the meal.

**F is also for Fitness.** This tour is classified as moderate and a good general level of fitness is required. You should start a programme of body conditioning before your departure including walking, cardiovascular workouts and work to improve both your stamina and your ability to walk up and down gradients.

**H is for Health.** You must seek medical advice from your GP before travelling to ensure that all appropriate vaccinations are up to date. For further information contact your GP.

**H is also for Head Torch.** This is invaluable for finding your way to the loo at camp, reading in the evenings etc. The Petzl Tikka headlamp is an example of a very high quality head torch.

**I is for Insurance.** Different Travel will do everything possible to ensure a safe and enjoyable trip. However, certain risks are involved and should be recognised by participants. Thus, travel insurance is mandatory for our expeditions. Travel Insurance is a cost effective way to protect yourself and your equipment in the event of problems due to cancelled trips, delays, medical problems, baggage loss or damage. Please refer to the booking form for further details.

**I is also for Inclusions.** Flights from the UK (including taxes), all transfers & transport in Morocco, accommodation in 2 star hostels and bivouacs on trek, all meals throughout, local guides & porters on trek, trekking equipment (tents etc), Different Travel Tour Leader. Not included: personal expenses, vaccinations, transport to/from UK airports, any visas required, insurance, tips, drinks, souvenirs etc.

**I is also for Insect Repellent.** There are a few mosquitoes and insects in the desert and in Marrakesh and you will want to take repellent with you. DEET is the most effective repellent available. Despite what you would think, the higher the concentration the less effective DEET is. The Department of Health recommends 50% DEET is the maximum that you should use ON YOUR SKIN. You can use higher concentrations on clothing but test it first because DEET can melt plastic, stain clothes and remove dye. Also be careful when using any DEET product as watch faces can be damaged.  
<http://www.nomadtravel.co.uk/catalog/browse/skin-protection/bugproof-deet-insect-repellent-100ml>

**L is for Language.** Arabic is Morocco's official language, spoken by about three-quarters of the population. The various Berber dialects are still spoken in rural areas but with less frequency. French is also a common second language among the urban educated classes. Spanish is spoken as a second language by many residents in northern cities like Tangier, Tetuan and

Larache.

**L is also for Luggage.** You will only need the following 3 luggage items.

1. A small daypack at around 25-30 litres, which you will carry while you are trekking (and probably as hand luggage). A Berghaus Freeflow daypack, or something similar with an air flow feature will be more comfortable than a pack that sits against your back because the heat will make you feel sticky.
2. A large soft holdall which will hold your entire trekking luggage and will be placed on the camels during your trek. Something like [The North Face Base Camp Duffel Bag in Medium](#), or the [Highlander Loader 65 Holdall](#) is appropriate.
3. A large suitcase or rucksack to hold **your entire luggage** (including the aforementioned bags) for when you check in on the airline.

**M is for Money.** The currency of Morocco is the dirham (Dh). It is divided into 100 centimes (c). Everything is included on the trip, so you will only require a small amount of cash for personal items such as drinks, souvenirs etc. You cannot get Dirhams in the UK but there are many ATMs at the airport you can use.

Spending money depends how much you want to buy but between £50-100 plus approx £25-30 for tips would be fine. You are best to take Sterling and change it to Dirhams or withdraw from the ATM but if you have Euros or US\$ you may still be able to use this currency to purchase things as many currencies are accepted in Morocco, although using local currency often means a better bargain at the market! Don't change Pounds to another currency and then to Dirhams as you will lose out twice!

**M is also for Mobile phone.** You may get mobile phone signal at some points during the trek. To charge your phone you can take a solar powered charge such as the Power Monkey. Better still, switch off your phone and enjoy being out of contact!

**P is for Photography.** When taking photographs of the local people, it would be wisest to ask their permission. Taking a photograph of someone without their permission – especially in rural areas can cause offence. In contrast, taking photographs of someone you have become friendly with is usually very welcome.

**R is for Religion.** Islam is the established state religion of Morocco. Almost the entire population is Sunni Muslim. The monarch is the supreme Muslim authority in the country. About 1 percent of the population is Christian, and less than 0.2 percent is Jewish.

**S is for Safety.** Incidences of petty theft such as pick-pocketing and bag snatching do occur in the larger cities and tourist areas. In rural Morocco such instances are almost unknown.

**S is also for Sleeping bag.** Night temperatures can get down to 0C in the desert so you need a sleeping bag that will keep you warm. To find a sleeping bag, ensure the comfort rating (NOT extreme rating) is somewhere between 3C and 7C. Anything outside this comfort rating will be too hot or cold to sleep in.

**S is also for Sleeping bag liner.** You sweat around 300ml per night in a sleeping bag. So each night we camp you will sweat the equivalent of a can of fizzy drink. Using a liner will absorb this sweat and keep the bag fairly clean. It is also handy to have if you get too hot and night and unzip your sleeping bag but want to be covered by something.

**S is also for Socks.** The most important thing to remember when it comes to socks is that they are of good quality, non-cotton and will not slip down or sag in your boots which is one of the main causes of blisters. During your trek you will be wearing your breathable, waterproof boots and so you should wear socks to compliment these. Cotton socks absorb sweat and hinder its evaporation, making them damp and therefore likely to rub against your feet, causing blisters. Socks containing Coolmax (a brand of polyester), nylon, or Merino wool all have wicking properties. This means that instead of the fabric absorbing sweat, it pulls it away from the skin for it to evaporate. When you wear socks like these they will compliment the breathability of your boots, and your feet will stay cool and you will avoid blisters. Changing your socks regularly will prevent athlete's foot and will also allow you to notice and treat any foot conditions that may be developing.

**S is for Sunglasses.** These are so important! Make sure yours aren't going to fall apart, or bring a spare pair just in case.

**T is for Tipping.** Please do remember to tip the guide, cooks and porters at the end of the trek.

**T is also for Tents and hotels.** You will share a tent and hotel with another person during the trip. You can choose who to share with otherwise you will be allocated a room-mate of the same gender and approximate age.

**T is also for Tickets (or e-tickets).** These will be sent to you 2 weeks before departure.

**T is also for Towel.** You won't need this for the hotel as it is provided, but you may encounter some river crossings (believe it or not) where you can have a bit of a wash on the way. In this event, you will need a towel to dry yourself.

<http://www.nomadtravel.co.uk/catalog/view/travelproof-luxury-travel-towel-large>

**T is also for Toilet.** Your toilet tent will be erected over a hole dug into the sand. Please put used toilet paper into a sealable nappy bag or sanitary disposal bag and put into the main trek bin bag. After you have used the toilet, please cover your waste with sand to avoid smells and flies for the next person who visits the toilet tent!

**W is for Water.** A Camelbak or Platypus Hoser is recommended PLUS a 1 litre backup water bottle. Bottled water is provided on the trek and is replenished throughout the day. You may wish to take purification to use at the hotel as water is undrinkable from the taps. Alternatively stick to bottled water.

If you dislike the taste of plain water, consider taking a small bottle of water flavouring or electrolyte tablets to flavour the water. Nuun electrolyte tablets make water taste delicious and help keep you well hydrated.

**W is for Weather.** The Moroccan coastal climate is moderate and subtropical, cooled by the Mediterranean Sea and Atlantic Ocean. The average temperature hovers at around 20°C. In the interior the temperatures are more extreme - winters can be quite cold and the summers very hot. On the trek, temperatures may reach around 30°C in the daytime, and can drop to around 5°C overnight.

**W is also for Wet Wipes.** You won't be able to shower during the trek so to keep clean, baby wipes/wet wipes are essential. Two packs will do.

## Packing List

### Essentials

Tickets (or e-tickets)

Passport & copy

Money/ATM card

Sunglasses

LED head torch (plus spare batteries)

Pen – for immigration forms

Books/ pack of cards

Adaptor (European 2 round pin)

Sewing kit (optional)

### Eating and Drinking

2-litre water bottle

Energy snacks (dried fruit/nuts/glucose sweets etc)

Electrolyte tablets (e.g. Nuun)

Powdered fruit juice/squash (optional)

### Clothing

Casual shoes for camp

Walking boots

Socks

Gaiters (for the sand)

Long sleeved loose shirt x 2

T-shirts/vests x 2

Fleece

Lightweight long (or convertible) trousers x2

Shorts

Hat with wide brim + warm hat

Cotton scarf – a cheche can be bought in Morocco

Underwear

Neck cooling 'Cobber' (optional)

Casual conservative clothing for Marrakech

### Hygiene

Wash bag and washing kit

Shampoo and conditioner

Toothbrush and toothpaste

Antiperspirant / Deodorant

Shower gel / loofah / Shave kit

Hand sanitizer

Wet wipes and toilet paper

Travel towel

Sun block (high SPF) and aftersun

Feminine care products

Spare glasses/contact lenses

### First Aid Kit

Prescription medicine

Paracetamol

Ibuprofen

Plasters

Blister plasters e.g. Compeed

Insect repellent (cont. 50% DEET)

Anti-histamine cream/tablets

Imodium (loperamide)

Rehydration salts e.g. Diorylite

Antiseptic cream

Antifungal cream/powder

Lip balm with SPF protection

Nail scissors/ Tweezers

Throat lozenges (optional)

Eye drops (optional)

Nasal spray (optional)

Zinc oxide tape (optional)

### Optional

Camera

Video Camera

Solar battery charger (optional)

Spare batteries/memory card

Mobile phone + charger

MP3 player/walkman

Hiking poles

### Sleeping

Sleeping bag (comfort rating 3-7°C)

Sleeping bag liner

Eye mask / Ear plugs

### Luggage

Daypack (25-30l)

Holdall (camels will carry this)

Suitcase for entire luggage

If you have any questions or queries about anything on this list please do not hesitate to get in touch with us on [info@different-travel.com](mailto:info@different-travel.com). Please also refer to the A-Z for further details.