



The Toubkal Trek 2014.

A fundraising challenge for The Book Bus Foundation and CHICKS.

Introduction

Morocco evokes visions of the untamed and exotic. It conjures images of the Sahara desert and nomads herding their camels and sheep. Morocco is a world apart from Europe, despite being a near-neighbour. When you arrive in Marrakech (which is not, as you might think, the country's capital) you feel you've reached the mythical "end of the road": it's as if you've entered a time-warp and are visiting a different, earlier century. Marrakech remains, even in 2014, one of the liveliest and most exciting of cities.



Mziq village in the Atlas Mountains

Getting there

We use the BA flight from Gatwick directly to Marrakech. The 3 hour flight across Europe arrives in Morocco and crosses the great Jbilet plain, flat as a table-top, to land in Marrakech with the High Atlas Mountains away to the south.

Morocco today

Morocco's survival as an independent democratic kingdom is little short of miraculous, sandwiched as it is between the restless young countries of Africa's Maghreb and turbulent West Africa. France was the principal colonizing power and French, together with Arabic, remain the main languages. Morocco is part Arabic sultanate; part hereditary kingdom; part Christian and part Islamic; part developing world complete with souks and medinas and part modern world with good internet connection and smart French cars. Above all, Morocco is a kaleidoscope of people: the desert Arabs blend with High Atlas Berbers, and cosmopolitan "suits" sit cheek-by-jowl with traditional herbalists. Morocco is proud of its own unique vibe, its mix of people and blend of cultures.

The High Atlas Mountains

Three mountain ranges constitute the Atlas: in the south the Jebel Sarhro and Anti Atlas (strictly speaking two distinct ranges, but let's treat them as one) lie closest to the Sahara and mark the end of the great Sahara sand seas. The middle of the "sandwich" is formed by The High Atlas, with Jebel Toubkal being the highest peak at 4,167 m. And finally the Middle Atlas descend to the Maghreb, the

fertile part of the country where wine, sugar and wheat is produced.

Day 1. Friday 26th Sept 2014.

We are met upon arrival at Marrakech airport by our Berber guides. Evening is fast approaching; we check-in to the hotel and set off for a walking tour of the Jemaa el F'naa (literally "place of the dead") which is Marrakech's central sq. A maze of covered passageways lead away from the square into the Madina (old city) where you can buy everything from skein of silk to a bundle of fresh coriander!



Kasbah du Toubkal – Home for night 3.

Day 2. Sat 27th Sept.

The road to the mountains leads south and before you know it we are climbing through the Moulay Brahim gorge along precarious roads with stunning drops and amazing views. After 1½ hrs the tarmac ends and a small dirt road leads to the village of Imliil where we rendez-vous with our mules: it doesn't take the muleteers long to transfer bags from bus to backs and we're off! The trail leads through a peaceful grove of mature walnut trees, with a busy stream running through.

The gradient is very do-able: not too steep and not so narrow that you can't enjoy the pristine views to the east. This is a rich farming area (rich by Berber standards, rather than Cotswold farmer standards!)

And this is harvest season, so you'll see wheat and millet being cut and a host of tree-crops; most impressive of all being the walnut harvest.

We pass a tiny shrine, Sidi Chamharouch, the guardian of the spring, which is a great spot for a picnic lunch. The afternoon is "short" and after about six hours total walking time, we reach Neltner Refuge. This is a "mountain saddle" which is right at the tree line; beyond are the barren rocky slopes of the massif of Toubkal. Our camp for the night (two man tents) is at 3,207 m. Showers are available. [Full board. 6 hrs walking; 3,207m]

Day 3. Sun 28th Sept: Summit Day

It takes about 5 hrs to trek from Neltner camp to the summit (4,165 m) which is the highest peak in North Africa. The views get better and better as you gain altitude and from the top (on clear days) you can see Marrakech to the north and endless ridges running away south towards the Sahara sand-seas.



Toubkal summit: 4,165 m

Return to Neltner for lunch and continue descending to Imlil. Tonight we stay in the kasbah itself! As you walk beneath the portcullis and enter this huge property with hidden paths and passages, you step back in time. We will have dinner in the salon and breakfast on the roof terrace. [Shared rooms 3 to 5 persons; shared facilities; picnic lunch, D & B.]

Day 4. Mon 29th Sept

This morning we have an easy start to the day before re-joining the bus for Marrakech.



Tamatert Village

When we arrive in Marrakech we have a treat for those weary limbs! Morocco is famous for its hammams (steam baths) and there is time for a 30 min steam followed by a 30 min massage (optional and approx £35 paid locally).

Lunch (included) is taken around the pool before a short drive to the airport, with a shopping stop en route for a couple of last minute presents. Late afternoon BA departs for Gatwick. [B & L; D in flight].

Grading - Is it for me?

This Venture, whilst strenuous at times, is suitable for anyone in good health and with a reasonable level of fitness.

Trek conditions and what to expect:

Toubkal is an extended mountain walk that lasts 2 longish days: there are a couple of sustained ascents and descents. You will be camping for 1 night on the trail. There will be full support from local staff but you will be carrying a day pack whilst walking (5 – 10kg). Walking days usually involve 6 to 8 hours on the trail and possibly longer. Climate and remoteness may also play a part. Previous trekking experience is not essential but you must have a good level of walking fitness.

Morocco is a developing country - be prepared to leave Western expectations behind, a little patience and a sense of humour are essential.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Food and Accommodation:

Marrakech hotel – 1 night; all meals

Camp - 1 night; all meals

Kasbah– 1 night; all meals

Transport:

We travel on scheduled BA flights between London and Marrakech. Terrestrial transport is by private bus.

The Book Bus (Charity number 1117357)

The Book Bus seeks to raise the level of literacy in underprivileged communities in Zambia, Malawi, Ecuador (operating in Spanish) and India. Volunteers are recruited to act as reading mentors and combined with the resources carried on the busses, visit schools to bring the words to life to reveal the hidden worlds that lie within.

Funds are needed for the capital cost of a new Book Bus and to support our "Teaching the teachers" programme.

www.thebookbus.org

CHICKS (Charity number 1080953)

CHICKS provides disadvantaged children from across the UK a much needed week long respite break at our retreats in Devon and Cornwall. Sometimes childhood can be a tough time, at CHICKS the children that we help include those living in poverty, being neglected or abused, children who have lost parents or full time young carers. CHICKS hopes that through the provision of the respite breaks, children who often feel 'excluded' can feel 'included'. Maybe for the first time in their lives the children can feel cared for and valued. The children are able to enjoy activities and experiences that in their normal circumstances are unavailable to them. Our aim in 2014 is to help 1,200 children to see a brighter future and we need your support to make this possible. www.chicks.org.uk

What's the weather going to be like?

The best time to visit the Atlas Mountains is autumn. At this time of year the Atlas experiences a dry season and there is little or no rain. Mountain weather is generally warm and sunny during the day although night-time temperatures can drop to just below zero.

| Marrakech Climate Chart (Monthly Averages) | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Month | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec |
| High Temperature (C) | 18 | 20 | 23 | 26 | 29 | 33 | 38 | 38 | 33 | 28 | 23 | 19 |
| Low Temperature (C) | 4 | 6 | 9 | 11 | 14 | 17 | 19 | 20 | 17 | 14 | 9 | 6 |
| Precipitation (mm) | 25 | 28 | 33 | 31 | 15 | 8 | 3 | 3 | 10 | 23 | 31 | 31 |

VentureCo staff and safety:

An experienced Venture leader accompanies the group. Our leaders are chosen for their interpersonal skills and mountain leading expertise and are proficient First Aiders. We also employ local guides: not so much to show us the way as to add plenty of Berber authenticity to the trek. The insight from our local guides makes the mountain communities come to life. All local guides are English-speaking and qualified in their area of expertise.

What VentureCo provide:

Return flight Gatwick to Marrakech with BA.
Comprehensive information in "The Field Manual".
Fully supported 3-day trek to Mount Toubkal.
Mules for baggage carriage & a team of muleteers.
All food and accommodation.
All transport in Morocco.
Expert guidance from a VentureCo leader.
Support from resident in-country agent.



The Kasbah's dining salon

Date and Price:

4 day mountain challenge.
26 Sept 2014 – 29 Sept 2014

Price: £745

Not included:

Visas (Not required by UK and IRL passport holders)
Vaccinations.
Insurance: Not included, but mandatory.

Fundraising.

The objective of this mountain challenge is to raise funds for your chosen charity. In addition to the cost of the trek we ask you to pledge a **minimum of £750** which will be donated directly to your charity. Both charities are registered with Just Giving and Virgin Money, so you may raise money via these sites (which will allow the charity to reclaim tax on the donations). Fundraising advice and suggestions are available from Book Bus and Chicks.

Payment Schedule.

When you decide to join this trek a deposit payment of £200 is due; the Booking Form and the £200 deposit should be sent directly to Venture Co (the trek organiser) at the freepost address on this booking form.

Eight weeks before you set off (1st August 2014) the balance of £545 is due to be paid to Venture Co.

Four weeks before you set off (23rd August) half the minimum fundraising amount of £375 must be paid to your charity. If you raise more than the minimum figure, that's wonderful! All additional funds raised should be sent directly to your charity at your earliest convenience, and no later than 4 weeks after the trek 24th Oct 2014.

Equipment Brief:

A detailed clothing and equipment list will be provided but to give you an indication, here is a summary:
Baggage - a holdall (55 to 75 litre capacity) suitable to go on a mule.
Clothing - several layers of clothing are recommended rather than one thick, heavy layer.
Footwear - hiking boots and training shoes or sandals.
Sleeping Bag - a four-season sleeping bag.
General - camping gear such as torch, water-bottle, penknife, toiletries, sunscreens and insect repellent.
Camera - with spare batteries.
Passport - You may need to renew yours.

Health Advice.

For detailed information and advice try www.masta.org Vaccination requirements change periodically so we advise that you check with your nearest specialist travel clinic as soon as possible. All people joining this challenge will be given a free log-in to **InterHealth**, a leading private clinic providing the most up-to-date information for travellers to remote destinations (Venture Co provide this free of charge.)

The Field Manual.

A detailed guide will be mailed to each participant. This booklet is packed full of relevant, up-to-date information including clothing lists, vaccination advice, money matters, suggestions about the level of fitness and emergency procedures.

Itinerary Summary

Saturday 26th Sept – Monday 29th Sept 2014

| | Date | Day | Route | Accom | Notes |
|----------|-----------|-----|--------------------------|---------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Friday | 26-Sep-14 | 1 | London to Marrakech | Hotel | Evening walking-tour of Marrakech old town |
| Saturday | 27-Sep-14 | 2 | Begin trek | Camping | Ascend to Neltner Refuge |
| Sunday | 28-Sep-14 | 3 | Summit; return to Kasbah | Kasbah | Long trek day; fantastic last night in kasbah |
| Monday | 29-Sep-14 | 4 | Marrakech to London | Home | Return to Marrakech. Fly Gatwick. |

Possible changes

Although it is our intention to operate the itinerary as printed above, it may be necessary to make some changes as a result of alterations to flight schedules, climatic conditions, limitations of infrastructure or other operational factors. As a consequence, the itinerary and overnight stops may vary from those outlined.

HAVE A GREAT TRIP!

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