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2011 Walking with Nomads

Through the Jebel Saghro with the Ait Atta nomads

During the month of May in the south of Morocco, the Ait Atta tribe of nomads begin their migration from the sun-scorched Jebel Saghro to the cool high pastures of the High Atlas mountains. "Walking with Nomads" is a unique week-long pioneering adventure which follows the migration of one family in particular through the Jebel Saghro, a wild and dramatic volcanic range of mountains six hours south of Marrakech. During the course of five days of isolated mountain trekking you get a rare opportunity to experience a way of life that has been handed down through generations of Ait Atta nomads. Travelling at the gentle pace of the nomads and their extended family of goats, sheep, mules and dromedaries we follow a trail over rocky passes, crossing bright oases. Camping in wilderness locations beside natural springs and grazing pastures. Walking for 4 – 5 hours per day there's plenty of time to enjoy the landscape and the relatively easy grade of hiking makes this trip suitable for a wide range of participants. As this is a largely exploratory, cross-cultural trek, an open mind and adventurous spirit are as important as physical fitness.



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The Adventure and Itinerary

Day 1: Arrival Marrakech

On arrival in Marrakech you will be met by your tour leader and taken to our hotel in the centre of Marrakech. Giving us enough time to head out for a get-together meal and short briefing. Overnight hotel.

Day 2: Marrakech | Jebel Saghro

After breakfast we are met by our transfer vehicle(s) to take us the six hours or so to the village of Hamdor in the Jebel Saghro. The route takes us through the High Atlas over one of the highest paved passes in North Africa, the Tizi-n-Tichka, and down into the largely desertified south of Morocco. En route we'll stop for lunch at an oasis not far from the town of Ouarzazate before continuing through the Draa Valley to the town of N'kob in the Jebel Saghro. From here we take a jeep road towards Hamdor and the last part of the journey we complete on foot, just to loosen up prior to the start of tomorrow's trek.

Days 3 - 7: Trek: Hamdor to Tagoudilt

Setting off from Hamdor, the next five days will take us on a route traversing the Jebel Saghro from south to north until we reach the village of Tagoudilt on the plains directly to the south of the High Atlas mountains. The route we take follows the traditional migration route of the Ait Atta nomads and, although subject to variations – dependent on climatic conditions and the state of grazing lands – the route follows the following approximate course:

Day 3 : Hamdor to Ighazoun - 4 hours hiking

Day 4 : Ighazoun to Ifalghun - 4 hours hiking

Day 5 : Ifalghun to Tafraoute Noustif - 4 hours hiking

Day 6 : Tafraoute Noustif to Ifard Nouarghi : 5 hours' hiking

Day 7 : Ifard Nouarghi to Tagoudilt : 5 hours' hiking

Day 8: Tagoudilt | Marrakech

Tonight we explore the main square – the Djemaa el Fna – to witness one of the world's most animated nighttime spectacles. At night the square is transformed into a giant open air restaurant where men in white coats serve anything from sheep's head stew to snails in hot sauce. The rest of the square is dedicated to other forms of entertainment such as snake charmers, story tellers, acrobats and dancers. Later we will enjoy a farewell dinner in a restaurant before exploring what Marrakech has to offer in the way of nightlife.

Overnight hotel (B,L).

Day 9: Depart Marrakech

Most flights depart in the afternoon so there's more time to explore the city and pick up a few last minute souvenirs. (B)



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Trek Information

The Nature of the Nomad Trek

This special departure following the migration of a nomad family is a largely exploratory trip with a pioneering aspect that will appeal to the more adventurous. Although the route taken is a well-established one in nomad circles, some of it is uncharted territory for commercial groups, as this is the first departure of this nature that we know of. For that reason it is important to understand that certain aspects of the trip will have a somewhat experimental nature! It is intended to be a cross-cultural experience where visitors, in a relaxed and unobtrusive way, can understand more about a way of life so radically different from our own.

Our 'hosts' for the trip are a family of six, comprising husband and wife, three children under six and their grandmother. They have a flock of around 200 sheep and goats, 7 dromedaries, several mules, a couple of sheep dogs and some chickens, all of which will be migrating north. The family have by no means had this 'trek with tourists' imposed upon them but are more than happy to welcome us along. Moreover, as they supply our pack animals for the hike, it's a way of earning some extra income whilst not disrupting their natural pattern of life. As you'll discover in your visit to Morocco, hospitality is so deeply ingrained in the psyche that visitors seldom feel they're in any way imposing.

The Trek Itself

As suggested in the itinerary, each day will follow a similar pattern of an early start, morning hike, arrival at camp and afternoon free. That adds up to an average of 4 – 5 hours hiking per day, with afternoon hiking options always possible for those who require more. We will generally walk at the pace of the flock but there is a certain amount of flexibility (given the large size of the team) for those wishing to walk at a faster pace. Of the nomad group it is normally the shepherd who arrives last, his nomad ration pack of figs and dates sustaining him till camp.

In the nomads we have the ultimate mountain guides, people who know the terrain better than anyone so they are in an excellent position to advise on extra trekking options, as well as safely guiding us to our destination each day. The route we take is not a manicured one for tourists but instead a real life migratory route with camping areas chosen for their functionality (nearby pastures for grazing, natural spring or river) more than for their natural beauty. The Saghro is a spectacular but harsh volcanic range that is likely to appeal to lovers of

Having completed our trek and bid goodbye to the Ait Atta we transfer back to Marrakech, visiting the kasbah at Ait Benhaddou en route. Ait Benhaddou is the best-preserved of Morocco's kasbahs and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Here we'll have a chance to wander around the site which dates back to the 11th century. Arriving back in Marrakech is a real highlight. Having arrived in the evening at the start of the trip we had no time to explore the Marrakech medina (old town), a UNESCO Heritage Site and said to be the second largest medieval complex in the world, after Cairo. Much of the medina is a beguiling labyrinth of tiny alleys and passageways where men ply their trades in tiny box-like workshops that have hardly changed in hundreds of



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General Information

Passports and visas

British, American, Canadian, Australian, and Irish nationals do not require a visa to travel to Morocco, just a valid passport. Be advised that if your date of exit from Morocco at the end of your trip is less than six months before the expiry of your passport you may be refused entry into the country. Similar rules apply to most EC countries, but please check with the relevant Consulate well in advance of your holiday as it is your responsibility to ensure that you have the correct documentation to enter the country.

Health and vaccinations

You should have a dental and medical check-up before the holiday. On all our trips each guide is a qualified First-Aider and a comprehensive medical kit is carried at all times. Clearly if you require any specialised medication you must bring that with you.

There are currently no compulsory inoculations required for Morocco although we recommend vaccinations against Hepatitis A, Tetanus, Polio and Typhoid as standards of hygiene are generally lower than those you are used to. The water in the major cities of Morocco is said to be potable but we recommend you drink mineral water or use water purification tablets, to be on the safe side.

Money

The local currency is the Dirham which is not available outside Morocco. Change facilities are widely available in Marrakech and cashpoint cards & credit cards such as Visa & MasterCard are accepted for buying goods and paying for food, as well as for withdrawing cash. Since this tour includes accommodation and most meals, we suggest that approximately £100 - £150 will be enough to cover extra meals/bar bills and any tips. Any additional personal expenditure (eg for souvenirs) depends very much on the individual.

Climate

This trip is operated in May which is at the end of the trekking season for the Jebel Saghro. Although temperatures at this time of year can vary enormously there is a high chance that we'll experience some hot days (up into the low 30s °c) and pleasant nights around 10-15 °c. The Saghro is generally a fairly dry mountain range but as this is a mountain trek it is difficult to make too many generalisations so be prepared for all weather. Sheltered valley oases can feel hot whilst exposed high passes can seem quite chilly. Marrakech in May is normally very warm (although normally not blazingly hot as it is in July and August).

Having completed our trek and bid goodbye to the Ait Atta we transfer back to Marrakech, visiting the kasbah at Ait Benhaddou en route. Ait Benhaddou is the best-preserved of Morocco's kasbahs and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Here we'll have a chance to wander around the site which dates back to the 11th century. Arriving back in Marrakech is a real highlight. Having arrived in the evening at the start of the trip we had no time to explore the Marrakech medina (old town), a UNESCO Heritage Site and said to be the second largest medieval complex in the world, after Cairo. Much of the medina is a beguiling labyrinth of tiny alleys and passageways where men ply their trades in tiny box-like workshops that have hardly changed in hundreds of years. The medina is also home to the famous souqs (markets) of Marrakech - ideal for devotees of ethnic fashion and decoration, but worth a look for the sights, sounds and smells of this most exotic of



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Suggested Kit List

You will need to provide the following:

- Holdall or backpack
- Compact bag if you wish to store excess travelling clothes in Marrakech
- Day-pack* (small comfortable sack for camera, sunscreen, snacks, waterproof etc)
- 2-3-seasons sleeping bag
- Sleeping mat
- Torch
- High-factor sunscreen and lip protection
- Toiletries as required
- Basic personal first-aid kit
- Water bottle
- Trekking poles
- Travel wipes
- Toilet paper
- Camera
- Binoculars

Supplementary

As the nomad family we travel with are extremely poor they would be very grateful to receive any old clothes, particularly for their children. Similarly, any small toys would be appreciated by the children who have precious little to entertain themselves.

Fact and Figures

2011 Morocco Trekking With Nomads

Activity

5 or 6 days trekking with family of Nomads in Morocco

Accommodation / meals

- 2 nights gite
- 2 nights hotel
- Remainder wilderness camping

Ref. No. - - - Dates

High Atlas Mountains

MTN112 27 May–5 June

MTN113 2 - 11 Sept

Saghro Desert

MTN111 14 - 22 May

MTN114 17 - 25 Sept

Experience Required

Regular walker

2011 Costs

Land only

Saghro Desert - £545

High Atlas Mountains - £595

