



FAR FRONTIERS TRAVEL

FOCUS ON MOROCCO

Fiona's family adventures – Summer 2011



26 July - Fly to Marrakech

“Delicious hot North African desert wind envelops us as we step off the aircraft in Marrakech. It is 7.00pm and 35 degrees C! I've brought my husband and our two young sons for their first visit to Morocco. The plan is to have a couple of nights in Marrakech and then escape the heat by heading for the mountains and then the coast. As we make our way down a narrow dusty alley deep in the old souq, I can see the family wondering where I am taking them and I love it when their faces light up as the brass-studded wooden door creaks open to reveal the stunning courtyard of our riad hotel. Bougainvillea-clad walls, gorgeous tiled plunge pool and six richly decorated bedrooms. We have drinks and a simple supper on the roof terrace, listening to the distant sounds of the souq and the gentle fluttering and cooing of the pigeons roosting in a nearby date palm.

27 July - Our day in Marrakech

Breakfast on the rooftop where hot fresh Moroccan bread and the sweetest honey is a huge hit with our boys. Fortified by good strong coffee, hot chocolate, pastries and dried fruit, we venture into the souq. It's a cacophony of sound and activity but the boys take it all in their stride. Leather and spices, cobblers and lantern sellers, delicious heaps of nuts and strings of figs, tagines, mirrors, thuya wood and fabric – it's a riot of

colour and experience. We head for **Koutoubia Mosque**, a landmark by which to orientate oneself. The day flies by – it's hot but bearable if you pace yourself and keep drinking water. We visit the stunning **Majorelle Gardens** – a profusion of bamboo, palms, cacti and rare plants and a glorious blue oasis in the heart of the city. Dusk falls as we take a caleche (horse drawn carriage) around the old city. We've felt more like family than guests here in the riad and will miss Mohammed's ready smile and the exceptionally kind owners when we leave tomorrow.

28 July - We head for the mountains

One and a half hours' drive south brings us into the foothills of the **Atlas Mountains** – and to our mountain adventure! We've all pulled on our boots and we're ready to trek. We have a delightful mountain guide, Driss, who takes us first to a local market where the boys marvel at the huge piles of watermelons and watch fascinated as a mule is shod.

At the meat market, goats and chickens are slaughtered on demand and we see piles of goats' heads for sale – nothing is wasted. We meet Boisin and his two mules and, in due course, the boys enjoy many rides. We are all hot and start our trek up a dusty track out of the colourful village of **Imlil**, a crossroads for all types of trekkers. Then we dive off the track out of the sun into a gorgeously cool walnut grove and stop to pour lovely fresh mountain water on our heads from a nearby irrigation channel. By late morning we have climbed three quarters of the way up our valley, passing mischievous boys playing in the mountain streams, mule caravans, colourfully clad ladies bent double with heavy bundles of grass, as well as the odd trekker. We round a stony path and find ourselves in the most delightful shady spot, where Mimoun, our cook, is preparing a lunch of Moroccan salads, breads, couscous, fruit and mint tea. No simple sandwich for us! After a leisurely stop we repack the mules and continue on the opposite side of the valley to arrive late afternoon at our halt for the night. It's a simple Berber village which is a series of mud-walled houses clinging to the hillside and we are guests of Boisin. He sets aside

a room for us in his house which is simple but clean – mattresses and cushions on a rug on the floor and a small table. Boisin's wife and daughter bring us mint tea, bread and honey and delicious yellow omelettes. We stroll around the village, find our mule in its stable and a couple of sheep, some chickens and, everywhere, cats! Later, as the stars come out, we dine on couscous and lamb and juicy fresh melon and we sleep!

29 July - In the shadow of Mount Toubkal

We've fed the sheep, the mules are brought up ready to be packed and we've spent the morning having a hilarious cooking lesson. We prepare chicken and lemon tagine – all the family – with Mimoun our cook giving laughing encouragement as the boys make a game attempt at peeling the vegetables with a small knife. We tour the rest of the village while our tagine sizzles on the charcoal. Eating it later we're impressed by our efforts. Following a mule path out of the village it's hot and dusty and the boys take turns to ride, following the trail which zig-zags down through the trees to our next night stop. It's a Kasbah hotel and a gem of a place – a sandstone fortress in the shadow of **Mt. Toubkal**, North Africa's highest mountain. Yet again, we are treated royally by our berber hosts. Our rooms are in a tower above the rooftop and we sit on one of the numerous balconies watching flocks of mountain choughs wheeling in the hot skies and listening to the wind whistling through the high mountain passes. The boys are eager to try a hamman before supper and we all leave the steam room and plunge pool feeling totally rejuvenated.

30 July - Adventures by the sea

We spend our final morning in the mountains on a two and a half hour trek to a pretty mountain village. None of us want to leave but there's more fun in store. There's no motorable road to the Kasbah so we leave on foot and mule to meet our transport in the local village for the four hour drive to the coast. By early evening we're in **Essaouira**, one of my favourite places. It's noticeably cooler here (but still deliciously warm) and not called the windy city for nothing. Putting our bags in a small tin cart we negotiate the narrow alleys of the old town to our riad home for the next three nights. Just 10 rooms, with two resident tortoises and a rooftop with views to the sea, and it's sheer magic.

31 July - 1 August

The boys love it here – the narrow colourful stall-packed streets, bustling fish market, the constant to-ing and fro-ing of the fishing boats in and out of the harbour, and the imposing ramparts of the fortress

walls of the old town complete with cannons. The air resounds with the cry of the seagulls and we take to the market to barter for silk brocades, lanterns, carpets and berber slippers. My younger son thinks it's hilarious when I try to explain the intricacies of this time-honoured way of shopping, calling it 'barguing' and then, later, simply arguing! We spend our evenings in courtyard cafes and rooftop hideaways and our days riding camels on the beach and swimming in the surprisingly warm Atlantic.

2 August - Heading home

I can honestly say this has been one of our best family holidays to date. If you want your family to experience something more adventurous and culturally stimulating than lying around a pool, it's the perfect place to introduce them to the idea of more exploratory travel – the Moroccans are friendly, kind and welcoming and they just love children. Flying time from the UK is only three hours and yet it's so different with lots to do in relatively close proximity. I've often been asked how safe Morocco is, and all I can say is that we treasure our family adventure here and would not hesitate to return."



Your feedback

"I have to say straight away that our trip really did exceed expectations. All the arrangements went exactly to plan and we very much enjoyed our experiences of the country, the people and the food. Our guide was excellent and all the organisation that went into our trip and trek was first class. Many thanks for your help in making it such a success."

Pat and Cicely Roche, Morocco, Mt. Toubkal Climb, September 2011

"We were nervous about travelling to Morocco, it's the furthest we have ever been away from home. However the arrangements and the accommodation were amazing, and we loved the experience. The overall experience through Far Frontiers Travel was absolutely fantastic."

Helen Metcalfe and family, Morocco, April 2011

"I just wanted to thank you again for organising such a superb holiday. It's easy today to organise holidays by surfing the internet, but I am just so glad we booked with you. You stuck to our budget and created a fabulous, memorable itinerary for our family of four kids. We met other people en route, covering roughly the same ground, but felt confident we had the better deal – you had found us stylish, family-run hotels, and booked brilliant, appropriate activities with the best local organisations. You also paced the holiday perfectly for the age and stage of our kids. Thank you. I would not hesitate to book with you again."

Lucy Thomson, Morocco, July 2011

Top TIPS for top TRIPS

Fiona's recommendations for an unforgettable family holiday...

MARRAKECH, ATLAS MTS AND ESSAOUIRA

This itinerary mirrors our own journey almost exactly and is designed to fit neatly into a week's holiday – whether at half term or during the summer break.

» when « 1 May – 1 Sept 2012

» prices from « £1,105 per person based on a family of four for 8 days including scheduled flights

FEZ, ERFOUD, DESERT AND OUARZAZATE

Leave behind the hustle and bustle of the tanneries and the medieval atmosphere of the souqs of Fez to head south into the stark dramatic landscape of the Sahara. Starlit desert nights under berber canvas, extraordinary gorges and the pretty oasis villages of this simple region await.

» when « May or October 2012

» prices from « £1,790 per person based on a family of four for 8 days including scheduled flights

CASABLANCA TO MARRAKECH AND TOUBKAL CLIMB

Are your teenage children looking for a challenge? Give them an unforgettable journey into the heart of the Atlas Mountains to climb North Africa's highest mountain, Mount Toubkal. Our warm and friendly guides and accompanying mule men will ensure you all have a memorable trip. Ahead lie beautiful vistas, the warm hearts and hospitality of the berber people and a 4,162m sense of achievement.

» when « August 2012

» prices from « £1,110 per person based on a family of four for 8 days including scheduled flights

SPECIAL OFFER: Early booking discount of £200 per family of four for all bookings taken by 1 March 2012



DESERT HIDEAWAYS

Fabulous new places to stay and enjoy an authentic Sahara experience



Dar Azawad

Luxury desert hotel with desert camping options

If you are seeking luxury in the desert, you'll find it at the new Dar Azawad hotel in South Morocco. Set in an oasis of palm trees at M'Hamid el ghrizlane, 80km south of Zagora, Dar Azawad is built in the traditional Draâ Valley style and is integrated perfectly within the landscape. It is a stunning escape with a heated swimming pool and spa offering traditional hammam steam baths and massages.

From here go by 4x4 or by dromedary to one of the hotel's three upmarket eco-friendly camps:

The Sands luxury desert camp near the Ch'gaga dunes with just six tents of unexpected luxury and comfort; **Les Hommes Bleus**, a peaceful Tuareg night camp for sole occupancy of up to six people serving gourmet food – perfect for honeymooners or a very special occasion; and **Rêve Sahara**: Neither a hotel nor a bivouac, it is a kind of sand inn where the tents have earth walls and are fully insulated against the cold and sandstorms. Enjoy a tagine and couscous by the camp's fire, under an amazing night sky.

Sahara Desert camp

Traditional comfort with optional light aircraft charter

The Sahara Desert is a new private camp situated in impressive sand dunes in the south east of the village of Merzouga, an hour's drive from the city of Erfoud. After a short camel ride to the camp you will be entertained by a local folkloric band over a welcome drink. Dinner is a traditional meal served by candlelight and you sleep in comfortable beds in tents adorned with colourful Berber carpets and cushions.

If your time is short, take the private plane from Casablanca, Fez or Marrakech for a two day/one night stay.



The air holiday packages included here are ATOL protected by the Civil Aviation Authority. Our ATOL number is ATOL 9270. Please see our booking conditions for more information.

