

Morocco: Marrakech, Foothills of the High Atlas & Essaouira

Tour-Only Itinerary

In a hillside village of terraced houses, a woman sits weaving at a tall outdoor loom. Nearby, others bake khobz in a communal clay oven, and men pack mud into wooden molds for bricks. A Berber family welcomes you for a lunch of flatbread and lamb cooked with cumin, cinnamon, and saffron. Afterwards your hosts brew fresh mint tea, pouring out each glass in a traditional gesture of hospitality. The country's uncommon charm is only ever a few steps away on this hiking tour of Morocco, whether following age-old caravan routes in the foothills of the Atlas Mountains or watching the sunset over the Atlantic in Essaouira. And while the country's iconic sights are truly indelible—bustling medinas, spice markets, hidden gardens—it's the generous welcome you'll remember most.



Highlights

- Trace salt-mine trails along an ancient caravan route in the foothills of the stunning High Atlas Mountains.
- Experience traditional Berber hospitality as you stroll into mountain villages and are invited to share mint tea or a lunch of vegetable tagine and fresh-baked bread.
- Thrill to a seaside jaunt astride a camel at sunset during your visit to Essaouira, former haunt of Jimi Hendrix, Cat Stevens, and countless other artists.
- Savor lunch and a wine tasting at one of Morocco's prestigious wineries, owned by a Rhône Valley expat whose two trusty dromedaries plow the fields.
- Relax in a traditional hammam or indulge in a herbal massage treatment at your remote hotel's world class spa.

On all Guided Adventures you can count on ...



Expert local guides to introduce you to the best of your destination.



Gracious accommodations that are a clean, comfortable home away from home.



Off-the-beaten-path places you'd never find on your own.



Experts to handle all the details.



A maximum of 18 fun-loving fellow travelers to share the journey.



Flight + Tour Combos include plane tickets, airport car service, and pre- and post-tour accommodations.



Delicious, authentic multi-course meals—virtually all are included.

Activity Level

Morocco is one of our Guided Walking Adventures, rated easy to moderate. Walks in the foothills of the High Atlas Mountains are on the moderate side, averaging 3 to 6 miles per day, with options on most days. There are daily ascents and descents, with climbing time on the ascents ranging between 15 and 40 minutes. The terrain varies from paved and cobblestone streets (during organized city tours and other easy village explorations) to uneven, single-track trails that can be rocky, or laid with loose gravel and/or hard-packed dirt. Most trails are exposed with little coverage from the sun; depending on the temperature, this can increase the challenge of the tour. The pace is leisurely with stops en route to explore villages, engage with locals, and visit historical sites

DAY 1

Join your *Morocco: Marrakech, Foothills of the High Atlas & Essaouira* tour

High Atlas; 4-6 miles, easy to moderate

Your guides meet you at 8:30 a.m. in the lobby of the designated meeting point hotel in Marrakech. They will be wearing Country Walkers shirts. Please be dressed for walking.

Travel this morning to the town of Amizmiz, nestled in the foothills of the stunning High Atlas Mountains. This magnificent range is a surprise to many travelers who typically associate Morocco with endless desert sands. The mountains evoke their own inspiring beauty and drama, the tallest peak, Jbel Toubkal, soars to 13,671 feet! For its part, Amizmiz is a social hub for the mountainous Berber villages of the region, hosting a weekly souk, or market. Life is lived here much as it has been for centuries; while here, you will witness a Moroccan mountain life that few travelers see.

Upon arrival, you set out into the countryside of lush pine forests as snow-capped mountains rise in the distance. Throughout the day's trek, you walk past clay Berber houses, perhaps encountering villagers as they bake (and package) traditional anise cookies to bring to market or put the finishing touches on pottery and clay tagine pots to be heated in the sun. As is customary, you are sure to be invited for mint tea or even lunch in one of the modest homes. (Walk options can be tailored with the use of our driver and vehicle. Your guides will explain options locally.)

After a rewarding walk among the spectacular foothills, you arrive at your hilltop retreat late afternoon. Modeled after the many casbahs that grace the area, you'll enjoy a welcome drink in the lovely gardens, then settle into your room, which is adorned with locally made carpets, textiles, and pottery from nearby villages. Dinner tonight is served in the cozy restaurant.

Accommodation: Kasbah Angour, Tahnaout

Included Meals: Lunch, Dinner

DAY 2

Tahnaout and surrounding villages

4-6 miles, easy to moderate, 1,000-1,200-ft. elevation gain and loss

Rise to the songs of chaffinch or skylark as the sun emerges from behind the Atlas Mountains. Prepare for a morning of walking with a breakfast of fresh juice, café au lait, Moroccan pancakes, or cooked eggs. Thus energized, lace up your shoes for a hike that leads you into the pristine wilderness and delivers you to nearby villages. A local guide joins you and your Country Walkers guides to provide insight into village life and the small and large natural wonders you'll witness along the way.

Begin today's adventure with a descent along a rocky trail before a short climb into the village of Agadir, whose name translates into "granary." Indeed, you will see much farmland here, likely passing by locals plowing the land with mules, and Berber women shepherding goats, collecting wood, and picking fresh fruit—cherries in the spring and apples in the fall. Alfalfa, lentils, and other crops are cultivated here, too, all against a stunning backdrop of the Haouz Plain and rugged mountains—including Jbel Toubkal. (Guests seeking a slightly shorter walk option this morning can travel over to Agadir with the minibus and driver and continue from there with the group for the four-mile walk to Outghal. Guests seeking a really short, but steep, two-mile option, can depart on foot from the hotel with the group, and then retrace their steps from the village of Agadir, back up the hill to the hotel for a relaxing morning at the casbah.)

Continue along a lovely small valley that points you into a lightly forested area of Toubkal National Park. Overhead, you might spot kestrel and hawks taking wing while below your footfalls, you'll see shimmering quartz stones of orange, white, and sky-blue for which the region is known. Walk past clusters of dwarf palm, pine, juniper, and cork oak trees to Outghal. This remarkably picturesque village of baked-earth houses seamlessly blends into the surrounding clay and rocks. Locals here are likely to be busy with daily chores or preparing lunch by the time you arrive. You might ask about the time Tom Cruise and his film crew came by to film one of the *Mission: Impossible* movies.

Your driver (and minibus) meets you here for your return to the hotel, where a lunch of lentil stew (or soup of the day) and vegetables awaits. Your afternoon is free to enjoy the amenities and spectacular setting and culture of the property. Tonight, you may savor a bountiful dinner of lamb tagine with apricots, coriander, or garlic grilled chicken, or perhaps a savory vegetable couscous. Before retiring, be sure to spend time gazing into the sky, a glittering blanket of stars in the Moroccan night.

Accommodation: Kasbah Angour, Tahnaout

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 3

Countryside walk

5 miles, easy to moderate

Leave your casbah behind this morning as you travel to your next breathtaking destination. You traverse deep-cut valleys past tiny villages clinging to hillsides. Here, emerald-green terraces spilling down steep slopes are cultivated by local Berbers. The starting point for today's walk was once an important stop along the caravan route to and from Marrakech. Your footpath leads you through diverse terrain. Past an old salt mine, you mingle with patches of cactus and olive, juniper and eucalyptus trees. Carob, fig, and walnut trees appear as you approach a small hamlet that has only recently been equipped with electricity and running water. From here, a dirt path follows dry riverbeds into a landscape that might remind you of the American Southwest: red sandstone rock formations rising from the dusty earth. Marvel at their sheer drama as you make your way past villages that took their names from the valley's salt mines. Later, arrive at your next hotel, a charming, rose-festooned treasure renowned for its cuisine. You can confirm the hotel's gourmet reputation for yourself as you sit down for a lunch that incorporates fresh produce grown on the property.

After a relaxing afternoon, gather for a generous dinner of traditional couscous and an array of salads. Perhaps begin with *zaâlouk*, a smoky fried eggplant and tomato salad (*zaâlouk* literally means "crushed" in Arabic) and cooked baby carrots with coriander. Finish the meal with a sugary concoction and a glass of mint tea.

Accommodation: Domaine de la Roseraie, Ouirgane

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 4

Ouirgane Valley

7 miles, easy to moderate, 1,000-ft. elevation gain

Take your delicious breakfast on the outdoor terrace if you wish, savoring a piping hot café au lait (coffee with steamed milk). Then set off on foot directly from the hotel on a rewarding loop that connects several neighboring villages. Today's trail leads you into the pine forests of the Ouirgane Valley, with ample opportunity to pause and admire spectacular views. After a sustained (30-minute) climb, you traverse a few villages (including one whose minaret rises not far from its synagogue, owing to the history of Jewish and Islamic populations living side by side.) You arrive at a charming hamlet, where a Berber family invites you for a lunch of home-prepared favorites. After, you return to your hotel by foot, enjoying a walk through a landscape thick with olive, walnut, and plum trees. (Those preferring a shorter, one-mile walk today can proceed with a guide from the hotel directly to the lunch stop and return to the hotel with the group following the meal.)

Spend the remainder of the day relaxing by the pool, enjoying the gardens, or heading out on a horseback ride. You may also treat yourself to a massage or indulge in treatments at the hotel's on-site hammam. The Domaine de la Roseraie is the only hotel in the Atlas Mountains to have a full-service spa. This evening, sample more of its renowned cuisine, paired with Moroccan wines.

Accommodation: Domaine de la Roseraie, Ouirgane

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 5

Travel to Essaouira

Vineyard walk; .5 mile, easy

Linger over a leisurely breakfast and *café au lait* before departing the Atlas Mountains. This morning's drive (about four hours total) delivers you to the former Portuguese stronghold of Mogador on the Atlantic coast, known today as Essaouira. En route, you stop outside the town of Ounagha to tour and have lunch at Morocco's first organic vineyard. This 128-acre winery was founded by Charles, a seasoned winemaker from France's Rhône Valley—Châteauneuf-du-Pape, to be precise. He brings his expertise in the famed Rhône varieties to his vineyard and is also discovering the joys of Marselan, a Grenache-Cabernet hybrid. In all, he produces a range of red, white, and rosé labels, plus the typical *vin gris*, or gray wine, of Morocco. Many of his wines are offered on menus in Essaouira and Marrakech. Settle in to the onsite restaurant for a tasting with your lunch, enjoying sweeping views of the vineyard and olive groves. Perhaps the resident dromedaries will be out plowing the land to add to the ambiance.

You soon arrive in Essaouira, an important trading port since ancient times. Its vibrant medina and walls were designed in the 18th century by a French prisoner of the Sultan. His city plan won him his freedom. Today, this fortress city, whose name derives from the Arabic word for “rampart,” is a treasure trove of art galleries and atmospheric passageways. Off its shores, kite-surfers take to the water.

Many of the city’s old *riads*—grand mansions built around a central courtyard—were converted into fashionable inns. You end your day at one of them—Heure Bleue Palais—your home-away-from-home in the heart of Essaouira. Step out for an early evening stroll to one of the many cafés or restaurants in town, or enjoy dinner on your own at one of the restaurants within your luxury hotel.

Accommodation: Heure Bleue Palais – Essaouira

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 6

Essaouira walking tour

2-3 miles, easy

Spend your final full day exploring Essaouira on foot. Step into its medina directly from your hotel to take in its sensory delights: Watch for marquetry crafts carved from indigenous thuya wood and vibrant canvases painted by Gnaoua artists while they were under mystical trances.

Fragrant spices, traditionally woven carpets, brass lamps, colorful Moroccan babouche slippers, and artwork from local artists are all on display. Oil made from the local argan nut, said to be an all-purpose beauty treatment, is also sold here. In the mellah, or Jewish quarter of the medina, you may step inside the synagogue, so long as the keeper of the key is in the neighborhood! Your walking tour ends on the waterfront, where you might choose to savor the catch of the day for lunch. As the sun sets over the Atlantic, join your guides at the beach for an unforgettable camel ride on the sands.

This evening, gather for a sumptuous farewell dinner in the hotel’s romantic candlelit restaurant, decorated with red velvet chairs and colorful carpets. Depending on the season, your feast includes traditional flaky pastry pastilla, savory lamb with Berber couscous, or a freshly caught fish tagine, prepared with organically farmed vegetables and paired with fine Moroccan wines—perhaps from the vineyard you

visited yesterday.

Accommodation: Heure Bleue Palais, Essaouira

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 7

Your *Morocco: Marrakech, Foothills of the High Atlas & Essaouira* tour concludes

After breakfast, you travel to the Sofitel Marrakech Palais Imperial. Upon arrival at approximately 1:00 p.m., your tour concludes and you may make connections for onward travel or continue your Marrakech explorations independently. Or, discover more of the country with an extension in Fès, the cultural and spiritual heart of Morocco.

Included Meals: Breakfast

What's Included

Tour Only

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| Exceptional boutique accommodations | ✓ |
| 16 on-tour meals: 6 breakfasts, 5 lunches, 5 dinners | ✓ |
| Local guides with you throughout tour | ✓ |
| Local wine and/or beer with dinner | ✓ |
| Entrance fees and special events as noted in the itinerary | ✓ |
| Travel assistance available 24/7 provided by Allianz Global Assistance | ✓ |
| Telescopic walking sticks provided on tour | ✓ |