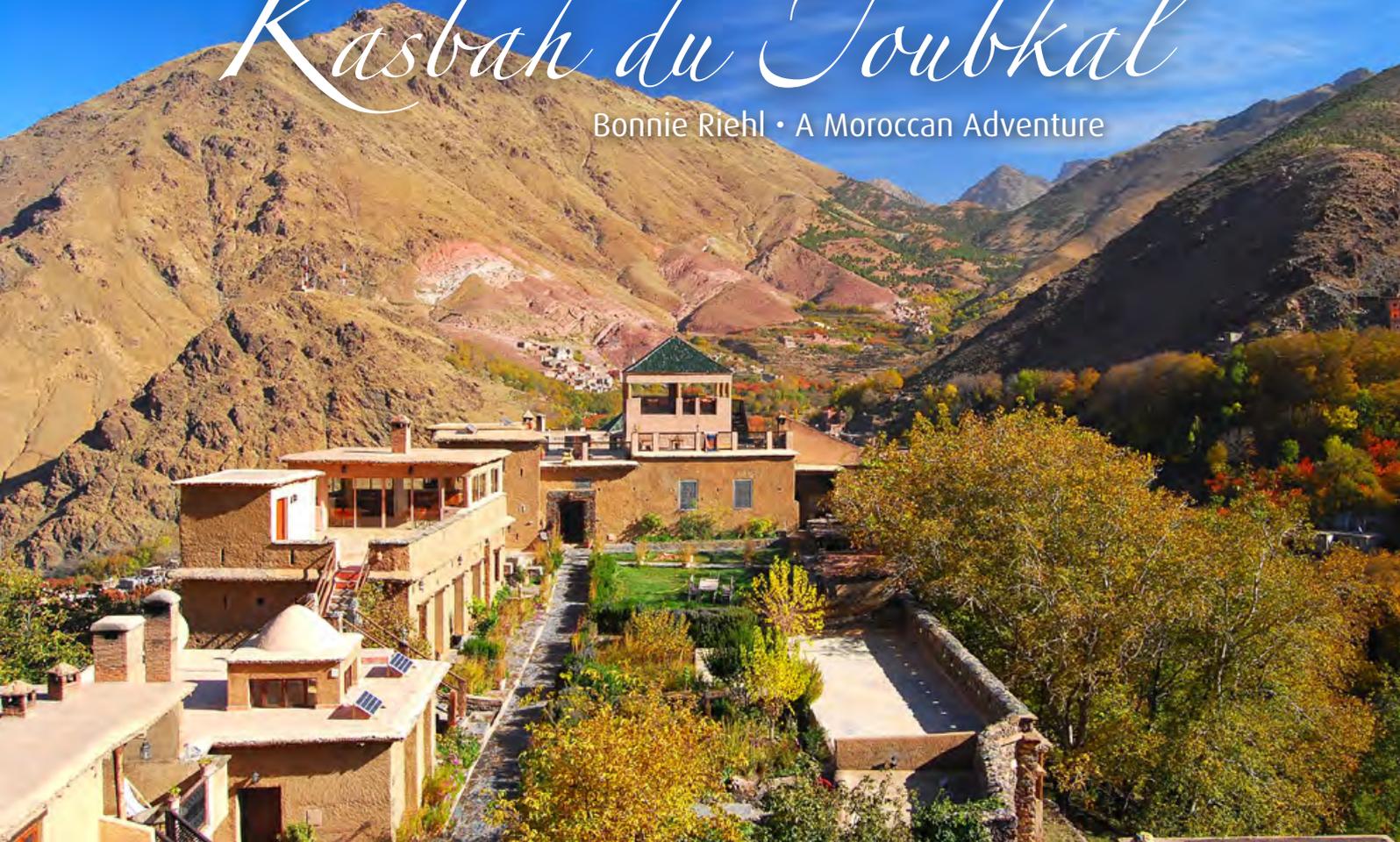


Kasbah du Toubkal

Bonnie Riehl • A Moroccan Adventure



Introduction

As far back as I can remember, images and stories of Morocco have particularly captured my imagination. Growing up in the Midwest of the United States, where everyone looked, dressed, ate and spoke pretty much as I did, everything Moroccan seemed appealingly exotic. For at least the past ten years, I have lovingly paged through every book about Morocco that I could get my hands on. Morocco stayed firmly at the top of my Someday Travel List. I had an intuition that this would be a trip to alter my life and my worldview. I knew I wanted to save it for a very special occasion. Finally, it seemed like the perfect destination to celebrate my 25th wedding anniversary with my husband in November 2011.

Morocco was definitely worth the wait and exceeded my very high expectations in every respect. The sights, the sounds, the smells, the textures, the colors were glorious and evocative of my every Moroccan dream. With dozens of gigabites in hand, I went about joyously snapping hundreds of photos; every turn I made was a photographer's delight.

The biggest surprise was the hospitality, friendliness and generosity of the Moroccan people. I had read to expect this but I was stunned by their universal and genuine warmth. In short, I was truly smitten by Morocco and its people. I loved everything I saw and experienced there.

As one is never supposed to admit to having favorites among their children, I am always

unhappy when I return from my travels and someone asks "What was your favorite part?" How can you choose between the best of the best? It feels petty to subject diverse and sublime experiences to some sort of ordering system.

Having said that, the Imlil Valley of the High Atlas Mountains, Kasbah du Toubkal, the Berber villages and the people within them utterly stole my heart. This was the place where I felt that I was able to fully experience the soul of Morocco. Here you can see and feel the authentic way of life among the Atlas Berbers. The staff see the Kasbah as a Berber Hospitality Center - and that is exactly what I experienced. This is not a commercial Moroccan-style resort, a place whose primary

business is business. Here I felt welcomed and pampered with great comfort by a team of warm and caring local villagers. As I ambled around the Imlil Valley, I was regularly greeted by other locals with the same welcoming friendliness and had the opportunity for wonderful interaction with them.

Before coming to Morocco I had read about the Kasbah and its commitment to the welfare of the local communities. I read so much about 'sustainable' tourism – but the Kasbah is a very special place and a breed apart. The work that the Kasbah has done in conjunction with the Imlil Village Association is nothing short of amazing. In such a remote valley, they have donated the money, time



and resources needed to establish a trash management system in an area where everything that touches the ground goes directly into the natural water supply. They have helped to provide an ambulance and medical services to these villages where the nearest hospital or clinics are far away, a recycling service and a village hammam (the traditional communal bathhouse) and more. The Kasbah is active in its commitment to employ only local people both at the Kasbah itself and with all of the services and activities it provides.

Of all the social activism performed here, the organization Education For All (www.efamorocco.org) is personally dearest to my heart. This is an organization that the Kasbah helped to create and for which it is providing continuing support. Education For All has built three boarding houses for girls from the nearby valleys. For these fortunate girls, Education For All provides room and board and all expenses so that they have an opportunity to continue their education beyond primary school. This is the first program of its kind for Berber girls in the Atlas Mountain valleys. They are now in their sixth year and are

providing over one hundred girls with the means and support to receive continuing education. This effort is humbling and inspiring and will forever change the lives of these girls for the better.

“Educate a girl and you educate a family, a community, a nation.” This is the motto of Education For All and my inspiration. I have now made two trips to the Kasbah in my effort to contribute in some small way to the vital work they are doing here. I have taken many photos to try to capture a small part of the essence of this unique place where I have felt my deepest sense of emotional connection to the Moroccan people. This book has been created with the intention of contributing to the continuation of Education For All in the years to come. All proceeds from this book will go to support Education For All.

www.efamorocco.org

I hope you will enjoy this visual expression of a precious, delicate place that will, I HOPE, delve deep within you and stay with you forever AS IT HAS FOR ME.

Bonnie Riehl, 2012



Driving to Imlil Valley...
a few dozen kilometres, into a different world...

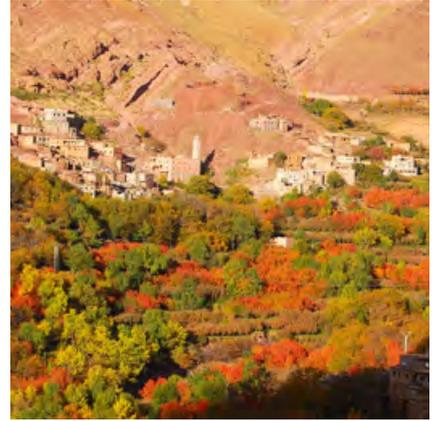
Passing under the endless skies surrounding Marrakech,
through immense orchards of silvery olive trees
dancing in the breeze.

Into the warm and golden foothills with their amazing
hues of amber, umber and ochre, each rolling mountain
with its own Berber village of matching color blending
into the hillside.

The Journey

Finally, into the heart of the starkly beautiful
High Atlas Mountains with their deep,
clear cerulean skies.





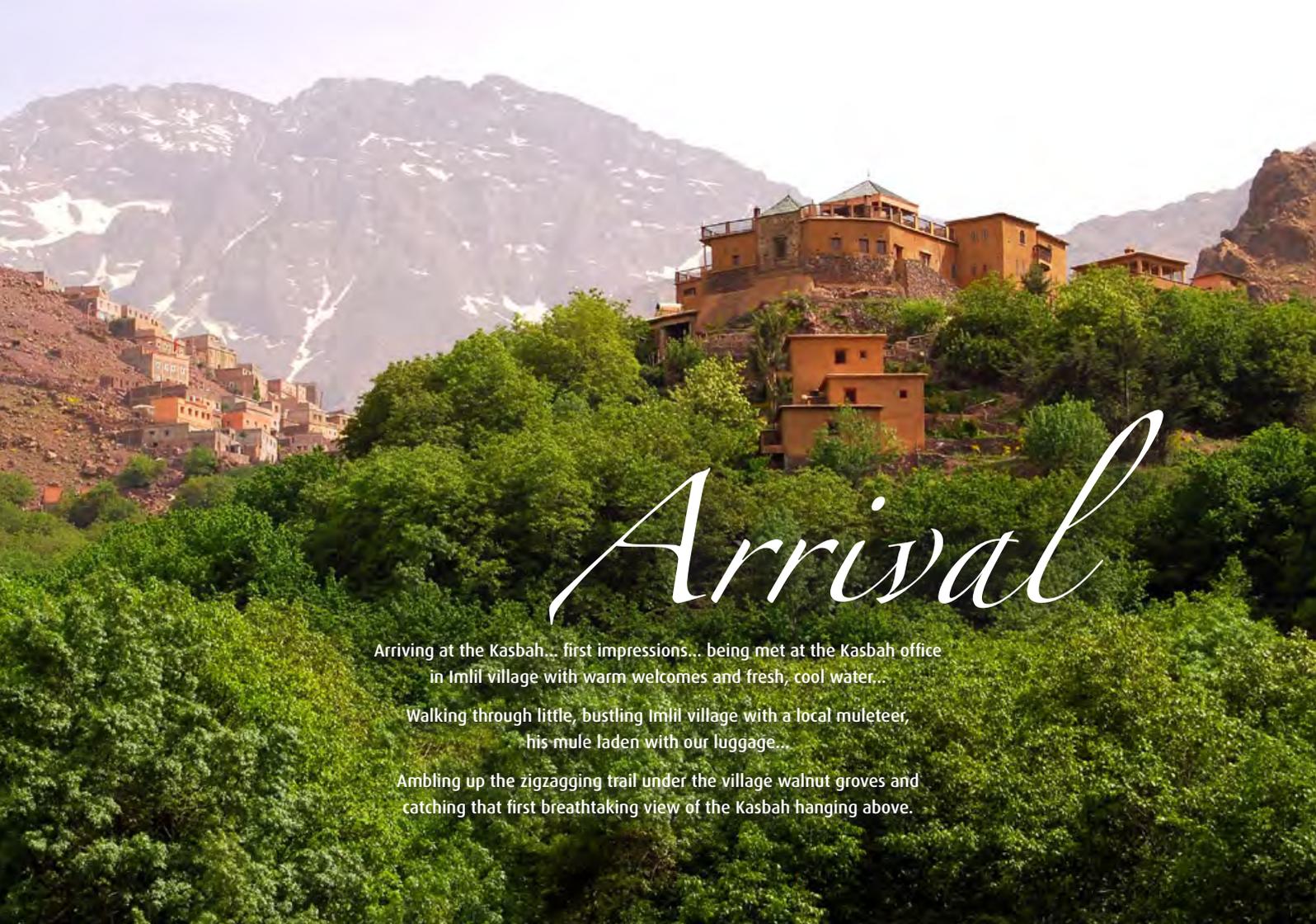












Arrival

Arriving at the Kasbah... first impressions... being met at the Kasbah office
in Imlil village with warm welcomes and fresh, cool water..

Walking through little, bustling Imlil village with a local muleteer,
his mule laden with our luggage..

Ambling up the zigzagging trail under the village walnut groves and
catching that first breathtaking view of the Kasbah hanging above.









Tired and weary from travels and stepping through the huge walled gate, up hand-hewn stone steps and into the Kasbah's flower-filled courtyard.

Being welcomed at reception with warm, fragrant rose water to pour over and cleanse our hands, aromatic mint tea from a silver service and dates and figs to revive our energy...

Welcome

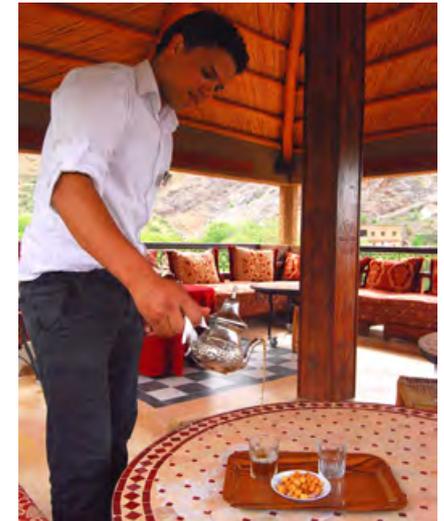




Next, a short stroll up to the rooftop of the Kasbah – where an awesome spectacle awaits – our first full sight of the top-of-the-world view. A 360° of the entire Imlil valley and all of its seven villages, each perched precipitously on the mountainsides.

Above it all looms snow-topped Jbel Toubkal, the highest mountain in North Africa.

Lunching on the roof terrace, sitting on an authentic Moroccan carpet and lounging against colorful Moroccan pillows, it feels as if you could almost reach out and touch Toubkal – and the sky.









The image shows the interior of a traditional Moroccan Kasbah. The room is characterized by its arched doorways and windows, which are framed by thick, textured walls. Red curtains hang from the arches, adding a vibrant touch to the warm, earthy tones of the walls. In the foreground, a round wooden table holds a woven hat and a pair of walking sticks. To the left, a wooden chair with a patterned cushion sits on a red rug. In the background, a wooden cabinet with intricate carvings and a brass mirror is visible. The overall atmosphere is one of traditional Moroccan hospitality and comfort.

Nothing prepares you
for the degree of comfort and warmth
while staying at the Kasbah. The highest level
of hospitality is provided in every possible respect,
from the accommodating staff who treat you like a
guest in their own home to the beautiful bedrooms
with all home comforts, including soft slippers,
cozy robes and hot water bottles for your
bed on crisp, cool evenings.

The Kasbah

Everywhere in the Kasbah you find handsome craftsmanship – created by local artisans with indigenous materials in authentic styles.

Delicious, traditional Moroccan meals are prepared using typical local ingredients, much as the villagers would dine on themselves. Naturally ripened and freshly gathered fruits and vegetables are in abundance!

The lovely, cleansing and restorative *hammam*, with its wood-fired steam, warmed mountain water and soft conditioning black soap, is not to be missed! The perfect way to achieve total relaxation either before or after dinner by candlelight.





















Hiking trails criss-cross this gorgeous valley, starting right outside the Kasbah gate. You can walk down to sample village life and waterfalls, or hike up into the mountains. Every twist and turn amazes with new perspectives of the valley and the seven distinct villages. Everywhere, the view is dominated by the striking and exotic silhouette of the Kasbah. The Mountain air here is so fresh and clean it is a delight to breathe in. There are Oxygen Bars in Los Angeles and New York where people actually go and pay to breathe air this fresh.

The Imilil Valley









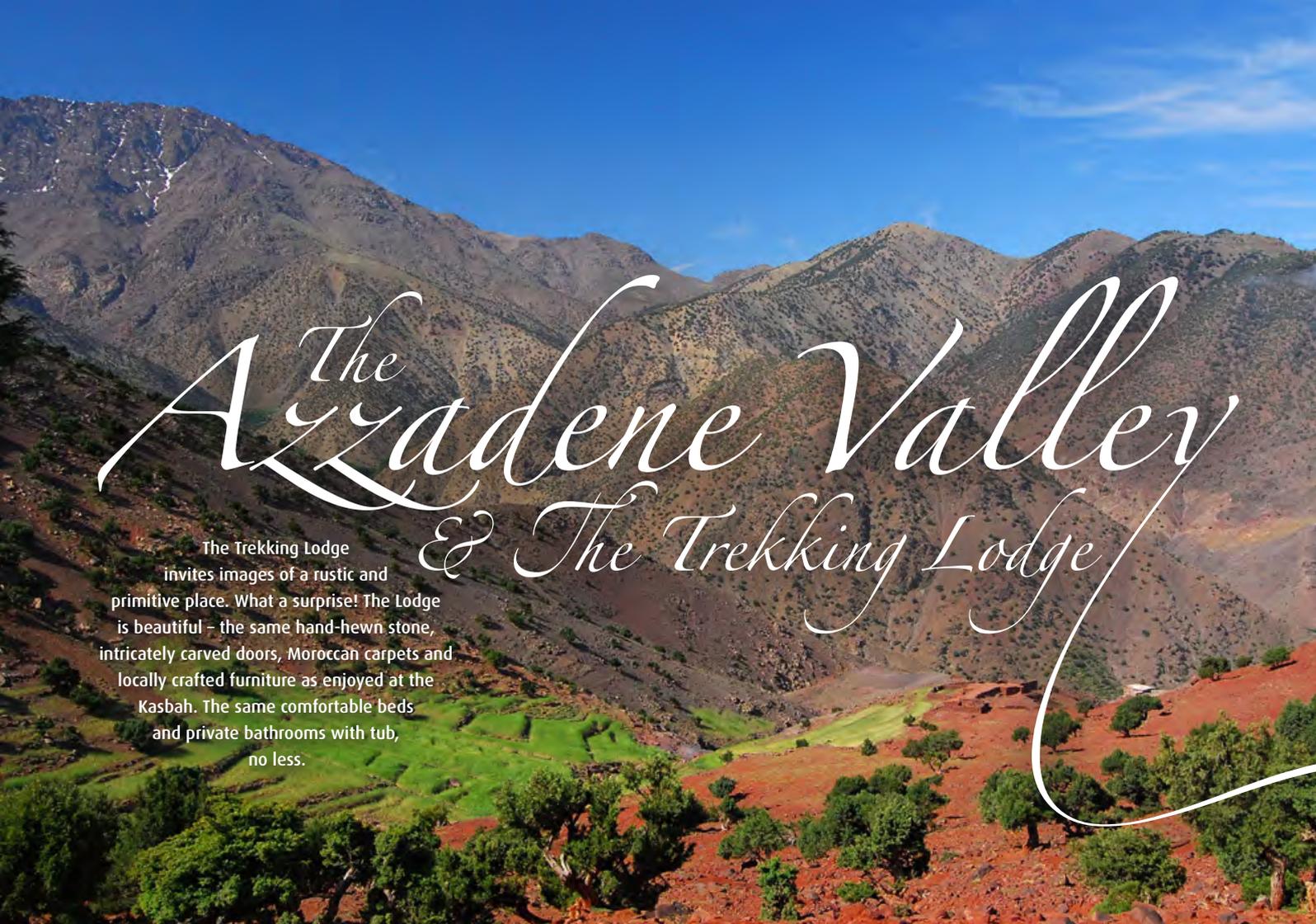












The Azzadene Valley & The Trekking Lodge

The Trekking Lodge invites images of a rustic and primitive place. What a surprise! The Lodge is beautiful – the same hand-hewn stone, intricately carved doors, Moroccan carpets and locally crafted furniture as enjoyed at the Kasbah. The same comfortable beds and private bathrooms with tub, no less.



A private trekking guide to lead and educate, a muleteer to load and carry and a personal chef to create delicious feasts for the eyes, as well as the body. What's rustic about that?

If there is a heaven on earth, it surely is to be found when soaking in the *hammam* after an exhilarating day of trekking.

After several days, we come to recognize and love the soothing soundtrack of everyday life in the Azzadene Valley: the soft bleating of the grazing sheep, the happy tinkling of the cow bells, the laughter of children on the trails above and below. The beginning and ending of each day is marked by the lyrical call to prayer of the muezzin.

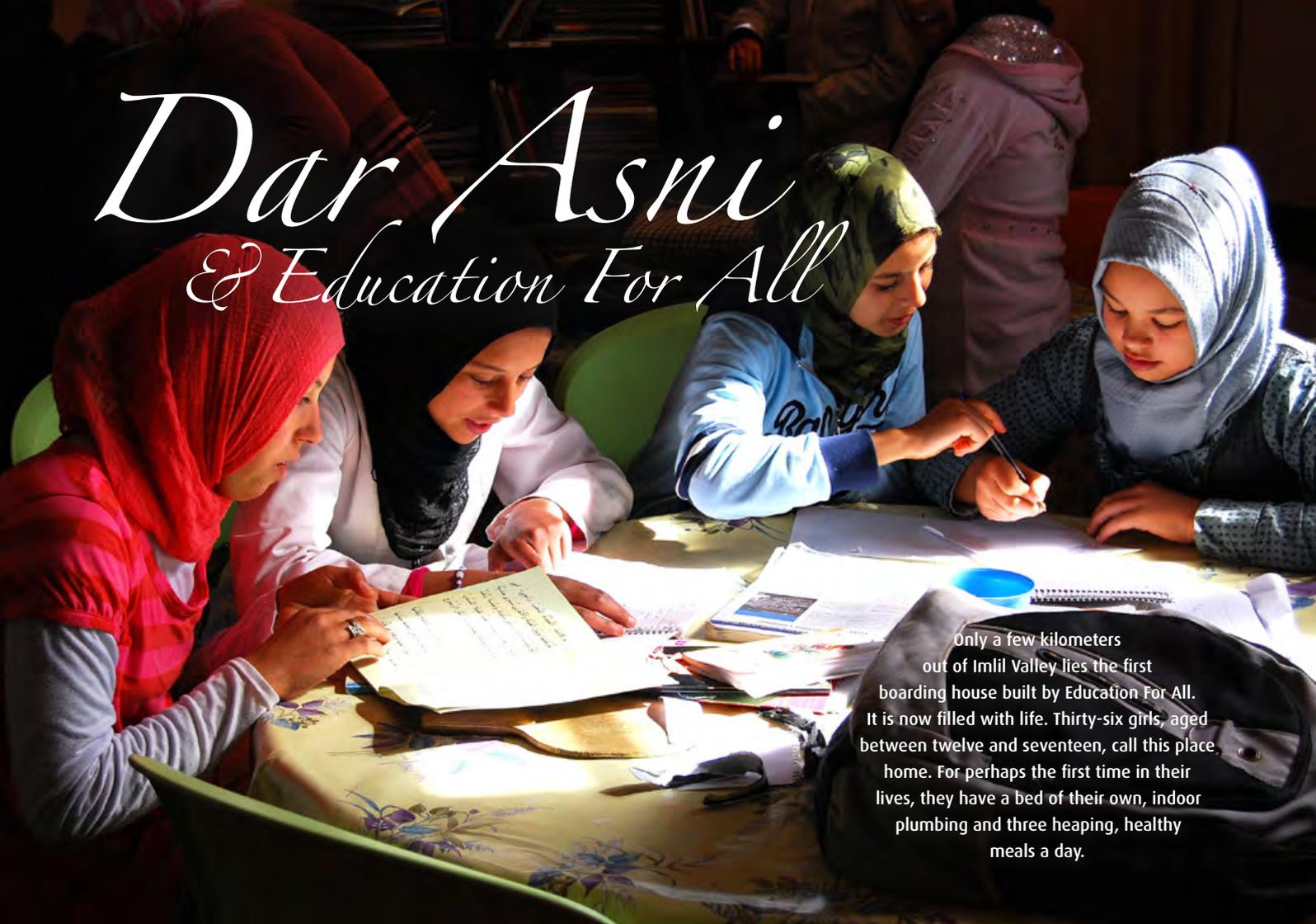
The colors of the valley are even more vibrant, if that is possible. The veins of earth here run copper, sienna and orange. The mountainsides are dappled in brilliant shades of green from hanging fields of barley, beans and corn. Here, one can see the truly authentic and traditional methods of architecture being practiced, virtually unchanged for generations.









A photograph of four young girls wearing hijabs, sitting around a table and studying together. They are looking at books and papers. The scene is lit with warm, focused light, creating a sense of concentration and learning. The girls are dressed in traditional Islamic attire, including hijabs and long-sleeved tops. The table is covered with a patterned cloth and has various school supplies like pens, pencils, and a blue cup on it. The background is dark, making the girls and their activity the central focus.

Dar Asni & Education For All

Only a few kilometers out of Imlil Valley lies the first boarding house built by Education For All. It is now filled with life. Thirty-six girls, aged between twelve and seventeen, call this place home. For perhaps the first time in their lives, they have a bed of their own, indoor plumbing and three heaping, healthy meals a day.



Even more importantly, the girls are provided with supplies, books and computers, as well as personal support and tutoring, to continue their higher education. One moment they are frolicking and laughing like teenage girls anywhere. The next moment they are studying algebra, biology and English.

On a board in the dining room hang photos and self-made profiles of each girl. They hope to one day become teachers, architects, doctors – none of which would be possible without the work of Education For All.





Now that you have spent time at Kasbah du Toubkal and had the opportunity to explore the beauty of the High Atlas Mountains, we hope it has whetted your appetite to return and experience this glorious region further.

We have produced this book not only as a reminder of your time spent here, but also, and maybe more importantly, as a means of supporting a charity which funds education for girls from rural families in the High Atlas. Copies of the book can be purchased at reception, and all profits from its sale will go directly to Education For All (EFA).

EFA is a Moroccan-based charity that builds boarding houses in the local area to provide girls between the ages of twelve and seventeen with all their needs so that they can continue the education denied them in their remote villages. To find out more about the important work undertaken by EFA, please ask at the hotel reception for a free copy of *A Different Life – The Work of Education For All* or visit the website at www.efamorocco.org.

We hope you will have enjoyed your stay at Kasbah du Toubkal. As many of you may be aware, important work is carried out in the local area which is funded by the 5% added to your bill. However, there is more to this

story than you might think. A free copy of this story *Reasonable Plans – The Story of the Kasbah du Toubkal* is available at the hotel reception for you to take away and read at your leisure, or you can download a copy at www.kasbahdutoubkal.com.

The images in this book have been incorporated into a large mosaic which can be seen in the reception area of Kasbah du Toubkal. Details of how to purchase one of these pictures are also available at reception.

We hope you have enjoyed this book and it will provide you with many happy memories.

Bonnie Riehl and Kasbah du Toubkal

Education for all

An educated girl educates the next generation.
Help provide a college education for girls in rural Morocco



www.efamorocco.org