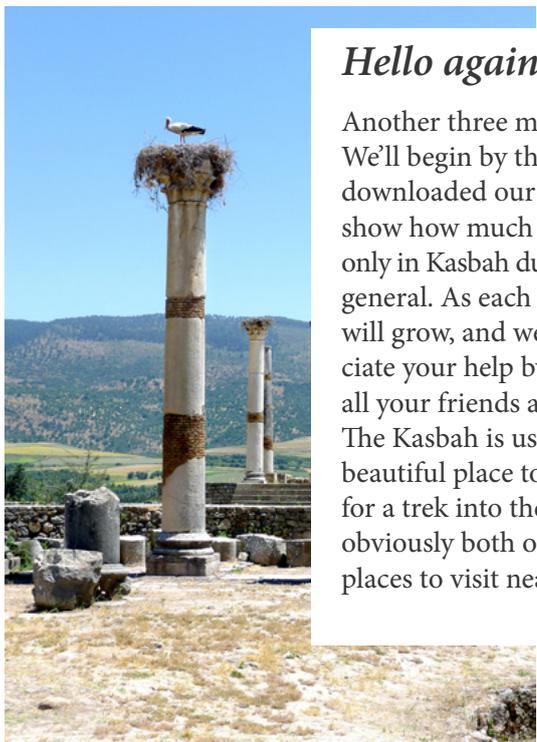


Number Fifteen  
July 2018

# Kasbah du Toubkal

MOROCCO'S PREMIER  
MOUNTAIN RETREAT

# KASBAH du TOUBKAL *Magazine*



## *Hello again*

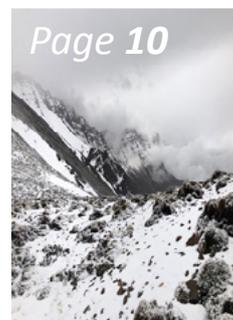
Another three months has flown by! We'll begin by thanking everyone who has downloaded our archive, which goes to show how much interest readers have, not only in Kasbah du Toubkal but in Morocco in general. As each issue goes out the archive will grow, and we would very much appreciate your help by sending the link below to all your friends and acquaintances. The Kasbah is usually thought of as a beautiful place to relax or the starting point for a trek into the High Atlas. While it's obviously both of these, there are plenty of places to visit nearby that make it an ideal

place to stay for a few days, venturing out to discover the locality and returning to the comfort of our Berber Hospitality Centre. Over the next issues we will be introducing some of these, and we begin with a trip to Asni souk, the most important weekly market in the area. We also focus on Marrakech; a glorious hotel, a beautiful garden and a wander in the medina through the eyes of a reader. Add to that the joys of trail and ultra running, updates on Education for All and the Marrakech Atlas Etape, and we hope there's something in this issue for everyone to enjoy.

*Mike and Chris McHugo*  
and all the **Kasbah du Toubkal** team

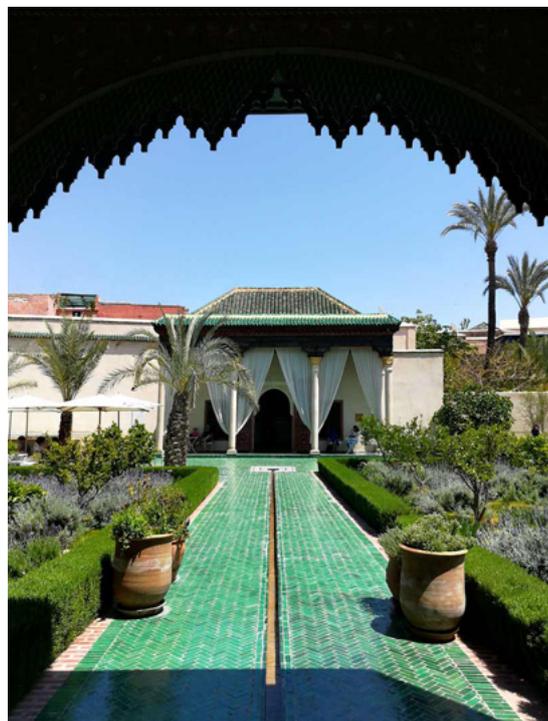
## Contents

- Page 3 • Can You Keep a Secret?
- Page 5 • A Stroll Around the Souk
- Page 7 • Medina Meander
- Page 8 • Beautiful Blue Eyes
- Page 10 • Cool Running
- Page 12 • Education for All
- Page 14 • Marrakech Atlas Etape
- Page 15 • Morocco in the Media



*Read the Archive* **HERE**

To subscribe to the magazine  
click **HERE**



# CAN YOU KEEP A SECRET?

I sit on a concrete bench, thinking to myself that I'm not sure what's secret about the Secret Garden, given all the publicity it gets, although it's certainly a pleasant place to relax away from the bustle of the city for a short while. A nice collection of plants to wander through, some casually cosy places to sit, but not quite living up to the hype it gets nor the admission fee. It's only when my friend, Ted, points out that a lot of people seem to be going into a building at the end of the garden, that for some reason I've taken to be the toilets, and not coming out again that we realise there may be more to the place than meets the eye, so we investigate. For someone who supposedly spends his time trying to find the unexpected I feel a bit of a buffoon when I discover that's where the secret lies, through a hidden entrance that leads to the Secret Garden itself.

There are actually two gardens, the exotic garden, where I'd been sitting, filled with plants from around the world, and an Islamic garden, tucked away in true riad style following an eighteenth century layout; an oasis of peace where you could relax under shade trees with the scent of oranges in the air and the tinkle of fountains playing on the ear, hidden away from public view.

## *Drift back to the past*

Sit in the pavilion in the centre of the Islamic garden; relax and de-focus your eyes. Ignore the chatter of people strolling the grounds and instead concentrate on the chirruping of the birds and the melodic splashing of fountains. Slowly let yourself drift back to the mid-nineteenth century and the palace of *kaid* al-Hajj Abd-Allah U-Bihi, one of the

most influential governors of the Atlas Mountains at the time. His wasn't the first palace to be built here, its origins go back to the latter half of the sixteenth century, when the Saadian Sultan, Moulay 'Abd-Allah, began the urbanization of what is now the Mouassine district of Marrakech. Sadly, with the decline of the Saadian dynasty near the end of the seventeenth century 'Abd-Allah's palace was



destroyed, along with many important buildings in Marrakech, the land on which his palace was built lying dormant until kaid U-Bihi built his new home. Unfortunately, U-Bihi didn't get to enjoy his delightful home for long, as Sultan Muhammad IV grew suspicious of him, suspecting power intrigues, and the kaid was despatched with poisoned tea.

Through various exchanges and exiles the palace became the home of al-Hajj Muhammad Loukrissi, the former head of the watchmakers' guild in Marrakech, where he lived until his death in 1934, after which the property fell into a state of disrepair. The idea of restoring the building complex and opening it to public took root in 2008, and Le Jardin Secret came into being eight years later.

### *Islamic garden*

The four-part layout of the Islamic garden originated in the Persian gardens of the sixth century BC, coming to Morocco at the turn of the twelfth century, and is a metaphor for heaven, a sacred place laid out according to rigid geometrical rules. At opposite ends of the raised, green-glaze tiled walkway are pillared porticoes with wispy drapes fluttering in the gentle breeze, shading double doors carved and painted in traditional geometric designs of deep red and yellow ochre that flank a marble horse-shoe arched entrance to two grand pavilions.

I watch as a group of ladies of indeterminate language dressed in flowing ensembles, their faces shaded under large straw hats, take turns not only posing at the grand doors of the pavilions but also being videoed by their friends as they part the curtains and stroll out into the shady porticoes, as if they were in

some louche David Lean film.

The opulence of the building demonstrates the wealth of the owner as well as its importance; *zellij* and *bejmat* tiles from Fez, hand-carved stuccos, inlaid cedar wood, large expanses of *tadelakt*, a waterproof plaster surface used to make baths, sinks, interior and exterior walls, ceilings, roofs, and even floors; a complex and time-consuming process. A private hammam, the *qubba*, (an Arabic tomb) and the tower further underlined the wealth and the power of the owner. Rising as high as some of the city's minarets, with views over the

medina to the High Atlas Mountains off in the distance, the tower is one of the few of its kind remaining in the city.

In the eleventh century the first *khettara* was built in Marrakech. An ancient hydraulic water-gathering system using underground tunnels to bring water from the Atlas Mountains and distributed to the city's mosques, the hammams and fountains, it also reached some of the great houses, including that of Le Jardin Secret, giving it its own water supply to irrigate the gardens, and serve the kitchens, the hammam and fountains. A rare privilege and an additional sign of wealth.

Having found the garden's 'secret' I wander peacefully, appreciating the quiet that can exist even in a busy tourist spot like this. For a few minutes I sit on a bench watching a pair of caged parrots chattering at each other, occasionally flaring their wings as the ladies in the straw hats flared their summer frocks as they exited the pavilions posing for the camera, then I wander off once more to the bustle of the medina.

*Ladies in flowing ensemble and large straw hats*



# A stroll around the souk

*Even before you pass through the horseshoe-arched gate of Asni souk you are assailed by noise and bustle, a hive of activity and a cacophony of colour, a hectic introduction to what lies inside.*

**B**read stalls piled high with khobz, flat round loaves, fruit and veg spread out on barrows, mobile phones displayed in glass cases, gelabas and gando-ras hanging from chains draped across a canopied stall. This is the main weekly market for the area, supplying all household needs and more.

Historically it was the man of the house who did the shopping, often walking many kilometres to buy, sell and barter, although these days he's as likely to ride in one of the battered old vans that ply their trade as mountain buses as arrive on the back of a mule or donkey. The latter will be parked on the edge of the souk, where an itinerant farrier takes care of their shoeing needs while the owner does his weekly shop. Next to the mule park bright yellow saddles are for sale or repaired by an elderly man who stuffs straw into ancient, much used versions.

## *Snake oil salesmen*

A circle of men often indicates someone selling pills and potions, the ubiquitous snake-oil salesman, sat cross-legged in front of a blanket on the ground where his products are displayed. Like the storytellers of Jmaa el Fna in Marrakech, he will weave his tale of vicious skin ailments cured, marital difficulties remedied and youthful energy brought back to ancient bones. Every one of his

potions guaranteed to cure a multitude ailments or your money back.

A major business worldwide is secondhand clothing and shoes and there are plenty here to kit out your wardrobe. The trick for checking the size of a pair of trousers, at least for men, is by zipping up the fly and trying the waistband around the neck. If the ends touch, they will fit. Surprisingly, it usually works.

Mounds of shoes, bundles of herbs, piles of brightly-coloured knickers and bras, legs of lamb and piles of chicken wrapped at speed, plastic toys to keep the kids happy for hours, baskets of mint, dates and biscuits, mounds of olives glistening in the sun, big bunches of purple onions. Most of the vegetables are recognisable from any western supermarket but here they have the vividness of the real thing, not the plastic-wrapped and bagged versions we are used to.

## *Food, food, food*

There's not much in the way of daily necessities that you can't find at Asni souk, but a major part of the sales activity involves food, either in the raw, take-home-for-dinner state



or cooked in one of the small food shops around the outer wall.

In wire cages chickens and pigeons cluck and coo. Choose a chicken from its cage at the back of a shop; dispatched with a sharp blade and dumped in a big pan of boiling water, the worker holds it by its legs as he swirls it around to make plucking easier. He hands it over to a young man who plucks and guts it, and it will be in your hands by the time you have picked up your bag of veg to accompany it in a tajine. Crude it might appear, but can anything better be said about the vast factory farming businesses in Europe and elsewhere or the time spent in transporting it to a supermarket where it will sit on a shelf slowly deteriorating? At least you know that what you are eating for dinner was alive and kicking as you thought about its preparation.

The meat and fish section is a revelation for anyone used to the sterile butchery departments of supermarkets. Halves and quarters of beef are suspended on hooks hung from wooden poles, while whole lambs dangles in rows. This may appear unwholesome to a foreign eye but the meat is all stamped to show that it has been inspected for quality and provenance. Select your joint and the butcher will cleave it for you there and then.

(As I'm leaving the meat market I see a man wiping down a pile of cows' livers with

what I take to be a bundle of cloth. It slips out of his hands and lands at my feet. I bend down to pick it up and realise it's a sheep's heart. Too late to turn back, I gingerly pick it up with three fingers and hand it back to him. He gives me a big grin and a thumbs-up, probably not expecting a westerner to do such a thing.)

### *Smell of the grill*

The smoke and smell of grilled foods fills the air; sardines, the livers and small slices of chicken, slivers of lamb and an assortment of offal create a mixed plate of meats. Cooked on small griddles and served with salad and a khobz, it makes an excellent lunch, if you are lucky enough to find a space on the elbow-to-elbow tables.

At the back of the market tiny, dark and narrow food-shops display ancient tajines slowly cooking at open windows. Fish is deep fried in blackened pans, stews of various meats of indeterminate origin simmer in beat-up five-gallon aluminium pans. Every country seems to have a version of this stew, a cheap



tables are fixed the length of the walls with small stools to sit on, or a thin table running down the centre of the arms-width room, it's a communal dining experience of a basic level but definitely worth trying.

Complete a circuit of the souk by the northern wall, where shoe repairers make and repair sandals and shoes; on past a row of shops selling simple earthenware tajines and into the metalworkers section where a small boy turns a

*Select your joint and it will be cleaved for you there and then.*

wall-mounted bicycle wheel attached to a belt that connects to a bellows that keeps the forge of an ironsmith burning brightly as he does small

repairs on household implements.

Leaving the hectic clamour of the souk you pass pick-up trucks and chunky tuk-tuks, a hefty motorbike with a small truck attachment at the rear, used equally for carrying people as goods, piled with aromatic yellow melons, bright oranges, curvaceous bananas and lusciously-red strawberries, set off against a bright blue sky pocked with fluffy white clouds. Perfect representations of the vivid colours and aromas of Asni souk.

*Asni souk is open from 08:00 to 16:00 every Saturday. Transport to visit the souk can be arranged with Kasbah du Toubkal reception.*

filler, although in some parts of Greece it's served in the early hours of the morning to soak up the alcohol after a late night's over-indulgence. **Narrow**



# Beautiful Blue Eyes

After six days in the cold and fog of the High Atlas Mountains, experiencing some of the strangest weather most Moroccans have ever seen at this time of year, I finally feel relaxed.

I take mint tea, sit in a Colonial easy chair at the side of the pool, nothing to disturb the silence other than the chirruping of birds and the low murmur of staff going about their business. The scent of citrus floats on the air, the sun filters through orange trees and a stand of bamboo.

I'm entertained by a young lady decked out in white who sits on the steps of the pool and leans

*The peacefulness and comfy beds have that 'napping' effect*

back, looking up, her left foot dangling languidly in the water. I follow her sight-line and

see a young man, presumably her partner, taking a photo. It's that sort of pool, and Les Yeux Bleus is that sort of riad. I begin to doze. Registration done, I'm shown to my room, a sumptuous ensemble of deep blue walls, armchair in lush pink velvet and a bed the size of a small island, on which I flop and continue my doze for another half-hour.

Recently renovated under the direction of Dutch interior designer Willem Smit, one of the most innovative designers working in



Marrakech at the moment, Riad Les Yeux Bleus is a delightful blend of traditional and modern, made vibrant and cosy at the same time with the use of rich colours – yellow, blue, green, deep maroon for the interiors that set off the opulence of the colourful decoration perfectly. I'm particularly taken by the beautiful blue and white hand-painted hexagonal floor tiles used throughout the riad, a complete change from the zellige mosaic tile usually found in ancient riads, and wonder how many

it took to refurbish the building. Each of the eight rooms distributed around two patios has its own character, some with an open fire, but all of them make you feel as if you want to curl up with a good book and let the day drift on by – although you would miss the escapism of the roof-top pool and terraces if you did.

## *Cooling in the pool*

I drag myself from the lethargy of my island bed to the lethargy of the roof terrace, where I sit under an awning of woven camel's hair, the traditional material for a *jaima*, a Berber tent. I defocus my eyes and while I might not be able to imagine myself in the desert, I'm certainly in a more peaceful place than I usually find myself.

The second, roof-top pool, is more



for splashing and cooling than taking photos, as the downstairs version is, and varying levels of terrace create lounging areas of long daybeds and shady canopied sofas, ideal for stretching out on if you think you can get away with it. The warmth of the early afternoon sun as I lean against the large cushions laid on the banquette of rich velvet makes me think that there is nowhere I would rather be at that particular moment. Warm colours everywhere, the



deep reds, maroon and light beige ubiquitous in Morocco. Bougainvillea of purple, orange and pink climb the walls of the three-storey building. Through a tiny horse-shoe-arch wooden door I glimpse a hammam, one of my favourite elements of Moroccan culture. I picture myself taking an aperitif later at the terrace bar.

*Ten minutes to the Medina*

Stirring myself, I take a walk into the narrow alleyways of the Medina. The famous Jmaa el Fna with its nightly open-air food stalls, the largest of its kind in the world, is only a ten-minute walk away, and after a pleasant hour gawping at the brilliance and colour of the tiny shops I wander back to LYB in time for a nap and to change for dinner (the peacefulness and

comfy beds have that ‘napping’ effect on me). Dinner is served in the beautiful Beldi patio, smaller than the Pool patio and roofed-over to create an intimate sitting room with a wall-mounted fireplace as the centrepiece, that also serves as a dining room, but as I’m alone I accept the offer of a table set at the end of the pool. The twinkling of candle flame from the lanterns placed along the poolside reflect in the gently moving water, lulling me into a soporific state of mind, and pretty soon I’m back in my island bed, all thoughts of the previous six days in the cold and fog in the High Atlas banished from my mind.

You can learn more about *Riad Les Yeux Bleus*, at their website [HERE](#)



*Les Yeux Bleus* works in association with *Kasbah du Toukbal* on a number of tours that offer the best of exotic Marrakech and the beauty of the High Atlas Mountains, plus a visit to the fishing port of Essaouira. Click [HERE](#) to see the full programme.

**THE LATEST FROM DISCOVER LTD**

Always looking for new experiences for our clients, Discover Ltd offers the opportunity to spend a night under canvas - but with King-size beds, toilets, hot showers and superb local cuisine - at the Agafay Desert Camp. Unlike the rolling dunes of the Sahara, the Agafay is a stone desert, with undulating vistas off to the snow-capped High Atlas Mountains in the distance. A place to relax away from the magnificent chaos of Marrakech.



For more information please contact [bookings@discover.ltd.uk](mailto:bookings@discover.ltd.uk)

## Medina Meander

On his first visit to Marrakech, Ted Ruwe sets off to discover the medina - and finds out that life isn't laid-back in the narrow alleys of the Red City



What are you looking for? A photo with a monkey on your shoulder, a snake wrapped around your neck or just a photo of the snake

charmer getting his cobra to sit up for you, a henna tattoo or a glass of fresh squeezed juice, a bowl of snails or a meal at the world's largest open air restaurant? You'll find these and plenty more at the Jemaa el Fna in Marrakech, Morocco.

Before sharing the evening delights of Jemaa el Fna with a hundred thousand other people wander the souks where you will find not just bric-a-brac but also high-end quality goods – and they'll ship it home for you. The shops in the souks range from cubbyholes to grand palaces and each one is full to overflowing. Souks meet the shopping needs of locals as well as tourists so you'll find butcher shops, fish-mongers, spice dealers and some of the best looking fruits and vegetables you've ever seen. If it's a consumer good of any type the odds are it's sold somewhere in the souks.

If you're a romantic take a ride in one of the ubiquitous horse drawn carriages around the square. You want to ride a camel? Jump on the green line of the hop-on-hop-off bus line and head for the Palmeraie. For the truly adventurous wander into the neighbor-

hoods where the craftsmen and women are making the goods that will be sold in the souks. It's tight, close quarters with next to no line of sight in many areas so getting twisted around and lost are an easy thing to do. Young guys are always headed the way you want to go and will gladly show you the way back to civilization. They will also gladly accept that tip that you will happily give them.

Stroll over to the Palais de Bahia for a glimpse into a 19th century palace designed to be the most elaborate in the world. The inlaid tiles of every room are works of art all their own. Without arrows pointing you in the right direction you could wander the palace for days until someone found you.

Marrakech is not an easy-going laid-back town. The locals yell at each other seemingly without provocation. Taxi drivers will climb all over each other to get your business and the “catchers” at the food stalls in Jemaa el Fna are hoping that you say no to the guy that's currently trying to drag you into his stall so that they get a shot at convincing you that you must eat at theirs, which is always the very best.



# COOL *Running*

Morocco's Atlas Mountains have been a Mecca for trekking for generations but now the intricate connections of mule tracks through areas previously undiscovered by visitors are proving a big draw for another group of sportspeople - trail and ultra-marathon runners

On a crisp mountain morning in April 2014 Howard Chambers set off from Kasbah du Toubkal to run the mule trails of the Imlil Valley. An experienced mountain runner, he knew when he had found something special, and since that initial run he has been back with ten groups totalling over one hundred runners, giving them the opportunity to experience the exhilaration of high-altitude running in the High Atlas Mountains.

The High Atlas is superb country for trail running. Trail runs are done off-road, mainly on mule trails, which are ideal for running because they are well trodden paths, easy to follow.

"The first days I keep it short, around 11 km with about 4000 feet of climb, the second day I either put a long one in, about 23 km and 6000 climb or I break that down to two separate days. And it's day-after-day, of course, it's not just one day then having a rest, you have to get up in the morning with sore, tired legs then you're out again doing the same things. It's not running all the time; for instance we power-walk up the hills, but we're always moving on, always different valleys. All the valleys are very, very different, from browns, to oranges, to grey to slate, every valley is different.

"What we have here is something that not even the most experienced mountain runners will have found, it is an opportunity to spend time with the Berber people themselves, who are known as being the most delightful and considerate of people. You're not just coming over here to trail run in Morocco, you're actually experiencing a whole way

Would you run for nine hours each day through snow, hailstorms and rain, crossing hip-deep rivers of bitterly icy water and rough mountain terrain that could throw you at any step, day-after-day for six days? Most people wouldn't, but Disco Meisch did, as a contestant in the 2018 Trans Atlas Marathon, billed as being tougher than any other stage race in Morocco. So what kept this



of life. What happens when we get to the villages,

for instance, Hassan, our running guide, will take us out and we'll actually walk around the villages. On the last visit we spent an hour-and-a-half playing Frisbee with the kids in the streets and they loved it. It's very, very different."

The first group Howard brought to the Kasbah shortly after his initial run in 2014 were a group of women from Chamonix, and ladies have been the greater part of his clientele ever since.

"Of the hundred or so people I've brought here I reckon about 65% were women. In fact the group of ladies I brought from Chamonix set up their own running group, based on what they experienced here."

As someone who has run mountains around the world, what is it that keeps bringing him back?

"It's just so special. You've got the culture you've got the hospitality, just the friendliness of the people. The diversity of the running is good. There's nothing too technical, and what I mean by that is there are no steep, stumbling descents and no big hands-on-knees ascents. But every day is different. That's one of the nice things."

*The Right Altitude's next Trailrunning takes place from 6th-13th November. For further information visit [The Right Altitude](#)*

thirty-five year-old New Yorker going through the worst weather Moroccans have seen in sixty-five years?

'For me, first of all, the love I have for running, the love I have for discovering. The Atlas is one of the most magical places on earth and to be able to cover this distance and be able to see this distance that otherwise you would never get to was unbe-



one-day ultras this was her first multi-day and her first in Morocco.

'The Kasbah was the first place in the Atlas that I ever went to and that's what made me fall in love with the Atlas - the Kasbah, the people, the villages around there. It's one of the most magical places I've ever been to. Basically everything started there. It was Mike McHugo who suggested that I look into Trans Atlas, so it's all his fault!'

With her first marathon in Tanzania three years ago followed by the Kilimanjaro Marathon, the Two Oceans ultra-marathon in Capetown, a one-day, 100km through Block Canyon in Arizona amongst others, and now the gruelling 250km Trans Atlas Marathon, what is Disco Meisch's next challenge? 'Next year I want to do the Marathon de Sable,' she says, as if what has been described as the toughest foot race on Earth was a walk in the park. And she probably will.

*You can find for further information about the Trans Atlas Marathon and watch a beautiful video [HERE](#)*

*Disco Meisch runs to support the charity **Every Mother Counts***

lievable. I was running Alpine terrain, altitudes up to 3,500 metres, which is a good amount. The landscape is just so amazing; it changes so quickly you never know what you are going to see next, so you want to see what the next hour will bring, what you will see from the next summit. And the camaraderie...we laughed so hard we almost cried.'

The TAM is designated an Ultra Run, which is any distance over a marathon – literally any distance (the longest and weirdest being the Self-Transcendence 3100 mile race, where runners make 5649 laps of one extended city block in Queens, New York), and while Disco has taken part in a number of

*If your stay at Kasbah du Toubkal includes trekking, whether for a day, a week or longer, you can be sure of you will be in the safe hands of some of the best guides in the region.*



*Lahcen Amerda*

Eighteen years a guide, Lahcen Amerda shows visitors to Morocco the mountains, the desert, the country from north to south. Born and bred in Targay Mola, ten minutes from the Kasbah he admits that he feels more at home in the High Atlas. He loves his work; trekking the mountain trails is his life as well as his job.



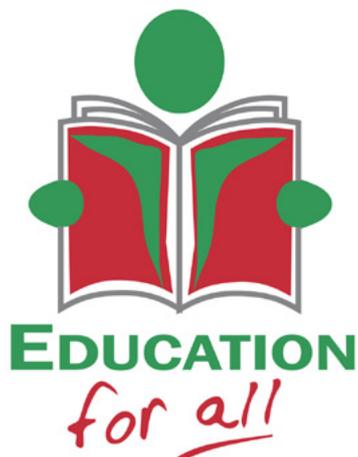
*Abdeslam Maachou*

Abdeslam Maachou is a mountain guide with a specialism, ornithology. When he isn't leading treks during the summer he takes himself off on long walks up into the high reaches looking for the hidden caves where Golden Eagles build their nests. He is a walking encyclopedia of the flora and fauna of the land you are walking through.



*Omar Aziam*

You don't leave the Kasbah on a trek without Omar Aziam knowing about it. He runs the equipment office that supplies everything you need. Fourteen years doing the job, with a widespread network of everyone involved in trekking in the region ensures everything is ready for you when you set foot out the Kasbah door.



# Life as an EFA Volunteer Could you do it?

Ingrid Emerson MBE, CEO of Project Trust, the longest established and most experienced educational charity specialising in overseas volunteering for school-leavers, was recently invited to visit Asni and see for herself the work of EFA, with the idea of including it in Project Trust's programme. 'Rarely have I been so inspired by a project' said Ingrid. 'It is highly successful yet incredibly simple, and I think that's part of its magic.' Such is her enthusiasm that she is hoping to have Project Trust volunteers working with Education for All on their eight month programme, starting in January 2019. 'We would need female volunteers of the highest calibre, with the right mindset, commitment and maturity to work in this kind of environment. Volunteers themselves would also gain an unbelievable amount – a real understanding and passion for a different culture and way of living, and the experience of being part of innovative social change. What an incredible opportunity for Project Trust volunteers to be a part of that.'

While the back-bone of Education for All are the inspirational house-mothers ('Some of the warmest, loveliest people you could hope to meet', says Ingrid) it is the enormous range of skills and life experience brought by many of the older volunteers that broaden the horizons of the girls from EFA, whose world view would at one time have stretched no further than the valley of the remote village they lived in.

## Further reading...

Click [HERE](#) to read the full story of **Ingrid Emerson's** visit to Asni.

**Abbie** was a volunteer in October 2017. You can read her beautifully written story (probably one of the best written about EFA) at [Speck on the Globe](#).

Read about the experiences of sisters **Alison** and **Paula** from the USA and **Jean** from the UK as mature volunteers in the latest issue of the [EFA Newsletter](#).



**One of the earliest volunteers, Karima Targaoui has been Volunteers Coordinator since 2010 (and still volunteers regularly). She answers some questions**

**about the importance of volunteers to the girls in EFA.**

*How do you feel about being recognised by an organisation like **Project Trust**, given their history and influence in gap year volunteering?*

**KT** It's rewarding to be

able to collaborate with an organisation like Project Trust. They are well known, serious, expert, and can provide us high quality volunteers.

*How important is it to have a wide spread of volunteers, from those who are in their late teens and perhaps doing it for the first time, to those with a lifetime of experience and skills?*

**KT** The younger volunteers (who usually come for a gap year) will be like sisters for the girls, they will

have fun with them and the girls will easily confide in the volunteers. On the other hand, the older volunteers have more experience, they will quickly adapt to this new environment, they will be seen as a mother for the girls, give them lots of advice for their future life.

*How big is their influence on the studies and future of the EFA girls?*

**KT** From an academic view, they improve the girls' skills, especially in French and English. They also help them to become more confident, to express themselves in front of people, give their own ideas, make them understand that they have a future, they can make the difference. The volunteers show to the girls that early marriage is not a goal; studies and to find a job to become independent and an active woman in the society come before marriage. They are a great examples to follow for the girls. Besides that, they allow them to open their mind and learn about the other cultures, that's why it's beneficial to have international and multicultural volunteers' profiles.

*Do you find bonds forming between girls and vol-*

unteers, or is that more with younger volunteers, nearer to the girls' age?

**KT** The age is not a barrier to form a bond with the girls, I would say it depends on the volunteer's character. If she is open-minded and resourceful it will work, whatever the age

*How different do you think the current lives and futures of the girls would be if there were no volunteers?*

## Monkeybike Mafia

In April, 2018, Molly Beucher and Georgia Maguire crossed Morocco on miniature motorcycles, a.k.a 'Monkey Bikes.' In seven days. Alone.

We'd always wanted to visit Morocco. It's steeped in such a rich and textured history with incredibly diverse terrains, from the Sahara Desert to the Atlas Mountains. It's also a well-known motorcycle touring destination and we, on our a ridiculous little underpowered 49CC bikes, wanted a piece of the pie. It's probably worth pointing out that neither of us had ever even sat on a motorcycle before plotting this mad expedition.

We knew from the get go that this was going to be a female empowerment trip so it was important to us to partner with, and raise funds for, a charity that shared that same ideology. **Education For All Morocco** is an amazing organization and seemed like a perfect pairing. Before we set off we visited the boarding house in Asni, where we were greeted by the house mother Latifa and some of the girls. We spent the entire afternoon chatting with them and they told us about their dreams of becoming maths teachers, pilots, and astronauts. As we were leaving the boarding house, Latifa told us with pride: "There's a big change coming with these girls." We couldn't agree more.

The following day we left for Merzouga and the start of our motorcycle trek. We didn't really know what to expect with our bikes or if our minimal skills were going to hold up under pressure. Over the course of the next seven days, we crossed desert, gorges, mud pits, peaks, valleys, billy goat trails, river beds... you get the idea. We dealt with blistering heat and blustering snowy gales. The challenge was truly greater than anything we have ever experienced. On day seven, when we reached our finishing line in Terres D'Amanar, we had travelled almost 1000km.

Finishing the journey was an accomplishment, something we'll never forget, but we'll be the first to admit that our success was largely due to the unbelievable kindness, hospitality, and impressive mechanical skills of the Moroccan people. **We can't wait to return!**



If you are interested in volunteering to assist the girls of **Education for All** in Morocco, please contact [info@efamorocco.org](mailto:info@efamorocco.org)

**KT** The house mothers are doing a really good job with the girls but having a volunteer with the girls brings something else to them. I think that without the volunteers the girls wouldn't be so open to the world, so confident and they definitely wouldn't have relational ease in French and English.



**Congratulations to Zahira Ait Aablla for her very big day.** On Thursday 20th June Zahira stood on stage at an event at the British Embassy in Rabat to celebrate the birthday of Her Royal Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and told her story to an enraptured 1000-strong audience. Her day began with a visit from the Minister of Education to the houses in Asni and ended with spending the night in the British Residency in Rabat and hearing that she had passed her baccalaureate. An amazing day to remember. Well done Zahira!

Mr Said Amzazi, Moroccan Minister for Education, recently visited the boarding houses at Asni as the guest of Thomas Reilly, the British Ambassador to Morocco and Mauretania and EFA's patron. The Minister was impressed by the houses and the fact that EFA girls achieve much higher exam results than the national average. The Ambassador's hope is that something similar could be done in state-run boarding houses.

**Do you have at least two to 3 months or longer to help girls in rural Morocco?**

**Eduction for All** have five boarding houses for girls, three in Asni (45km from Marrakech), one in Ouirgane (60 km from Marrakech) and one in Talat n'Yacoub (100km from Marrakech).

**We are seeking** volunteers who would be willing to live and work in each of our houses to support the girls with their studies.

- **Your main job** will be to help the girls with their homework and give them extra French and English lessons. You will also help the housemothers with their daily tasks.
- **Help EFA** to be connected with the donors.

**Recruiting for 2018-2019**

# MARRAKECH

# ATLAS ETAPE

UNDER THE ROYAL PATRONAGE OF HIS MAJESTY MOHAMMED VI

Having completed its sixth year, the Marrakech Atlas Etape is drawing riders for further afield and in increasing numbers from local enthusiasts and serious riders alike. Robert Dalback came from furthest afield, travelling by motorbike towing his bike in a trailer all the way from his home in Oslo, Norway, just to tackle to 'Ouka Monster', the zig-zag ride to the ski resort of Okaimenden, Hot Chillee, the UK-based provider of some of the top cycling holidays worldwide for serious riders, used the MAE as their starting ride for a group of thirty before tackling a week-long series of rides through the High Atlas. And the first team at the starting point at seven on a bright Sunday morning were the eight girls chosen to represent Education For All. Over seventy cyclists completed the grueling ride to the top, with the fastest being an incredible ninety seconds short of three hours.

A new element was added to the ride with a stop at Tahanout where the riders were rewarded with refreshments and displays of traditional dance and local artifacts and produce.

People who had previously been doing the shorter route preferred the new one because where it had just been a ride out to Ourika and back, now it was more of a route and less the poor relation compared with the Okaimenden ride.

"The long route is fine," say Mike McHugo, "it's what

**Unless you are one of the riders who gets to Oukaimeden** you probably won't know the face of **Chris McHugo**, elder brother of Mike.

An unmistakable figure in his black gelaba – a vast Batman-like cloak – his official role is to time arrivals but being the gallant he is, he welcomes everyone who completes the ride with round of applause and smiling congratulations, and from this year, with a shiny medal on a ribbon the green and red of the Moroccan flag.

"Anyone who's struggled up that incline deserves a warm welcome, although some of them don't seem to struggle too much. The man who came in first was hardly perspiring after seventy kilometres in under three hours. Handing the medals out is new, an improvement that Mike started this year,



the Ouka Monster is known as, and I think what we need to do is make the shorter route just as important, and in that sense coming to Tahanout was a good idea because those that went there enjoyed it because there was a lot going on there. It's a nice undulating circular route with attractive scenery and great views of the Atlas Mountains. With the earlier route it was a straight road out to Ourika and then the same road back, now it's more of a proper route. "I think we also need to look at the 120 km ride, which is good for competent cyclists but not as testing as Ouka is, which is too much for some people. We need to make the two shorter ones a bit more important so that's what we're going to concentrate on. "Hot Chillee thought it was a great success and the gravel ride they held afterwards was also a great success. They want to bring double the number of riders next year. Apart from that it's getting better known locally because it's in the sporting calendar in Morocco and more Moroccans are riding.

The 2019 Marrakech Atlas Etape takes place on Sunday, 28th April. For further information click [HERE](#)

recognising that several people who go to the top don't go back to the bottom, where the medals have traditionally been handed out. It worked very well, everyone seemed very happy.

"The riders at the top who had never been here before were stunned with the Moroccan scenery, stunned by the friendliness of the villages they went through, stunned by how difficult it was at one level and how available it was at another, and felt that Morocco could be the next Mallorca or Spain or France where cyclists come to train. All of those are future possibilities; at least it's heading in the right direction and having the Royal Patronage certainly makes a difference with Moroccans. I think many of the riders see it as a good cycling sportif."

# Kasbah du Toubkal in the Media



Marrakech might already have a spot on your list of places to visit. With photos of winding souks, garden oases, and slick marble spas, the allure is contagious.

## WINSTON-SALEM JOURNAL

Morocco's High Atlas Mountains offer birding opportunities

Ron Morris from North Carolina visits the Kasbah and explores some of the bird-watching opportunities in the Toubkal National Park:



tripadvisor®

Yes, it's unique!

The word 'unique' is often overused in lodging reviews, but ask yourself when is the last time you rode a mule up to a kasbah in Morocco's Atlas Mountains for an overnight (or longer) stay?

## RELEASE TRAVEL

Rock the Kasbah: Toubkal and Tagines



Our experience at Kasbah du Toubkal - with particular thanks to our guides Mohamed, Yousef, and Hassan - was certainly a memorable one and an adventure I will recommend for years to come.

## One for the Diary

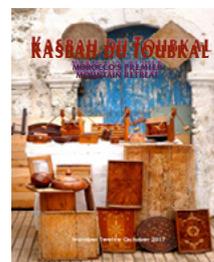


Kasbah du Toubkal is becoming increasingly well known for its yoga courses given by some of the top teachers worldwide. Make a note in your diary for our course booked for July, 2019. For further information contact [bookings@discover.ltd.uk](mailto:bookings@discover.ltd.uk)

## From the Archives...

If you have missed a copy of previous issues of Kasbah du Toubkal's quarterly magazine, we have created an archive to help you search for your favourite topics by subject, title and issue. Click [HERE](#) to see the full archive.

## BACK



Click on covers to open

ISSUES



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



[www.efamorocco.org](http://www.efamorocco.org)

# MARRAKECH ATLAS ETAPE

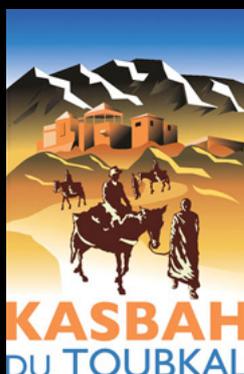
MARRAKECH TO OUKAÏMEDEN

CHARITY BIKE RIDE - SUNDAY APRIL 28 2019

Register online at  
[www.marrakech-atlas-etape.com](http://www.marrakech-atlas-etape.com)



Click on the logos to follow us on  
 Pinterest and Instagram



*Keep up to date with our  
 glorious corner of Morocco...  
 Click on the logo to receive  
 future issues of the  
 Kasbah du Toubkal's  
 quarterly magazine.*

[www.kasbahdutoubkal.com](http://www.kasbahdutoubkal.com)    [kasbah@discover.ltd.uk](mailto:kasbah@discover.ltd.uk)