

Kasbah du Toubkal

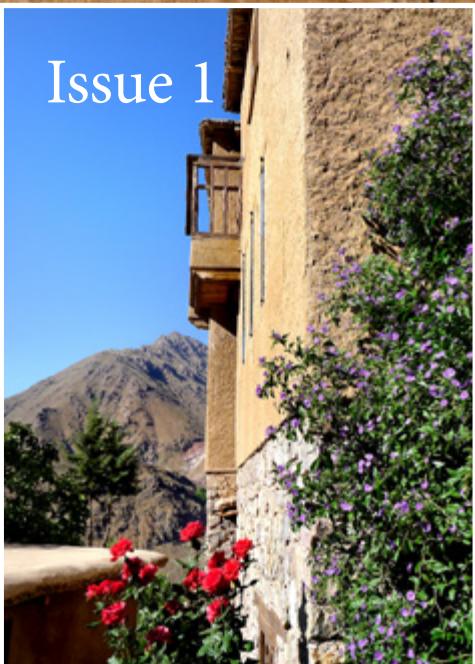
MOROCCO'S PREMIER
MOUNTAIN RETREAT



Number Sixteen • October 2018

FOUR YEARS ON....

Issue 1



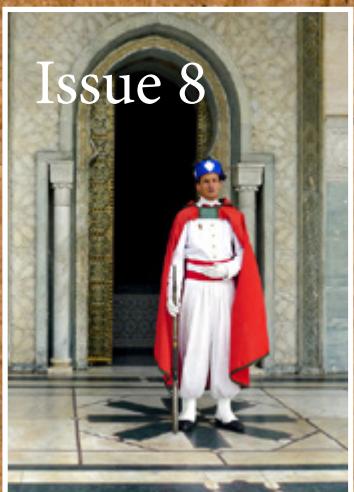
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*Visit the
Archives...*

Issue 14





*Our fourth anniversary – doesn't time fly! – and we've covered a lot of ground.
(To see how much we've covered, visit our archive.)*

We are in one of the most beautiful times of the year in Imlil; the searing summer heat of July and August (when Marrakchis escape the Red City to savour the cool of the mountains – although it's all relative!) has settled into the more comfortable months of September, October and November, before the cold and snows of winter settle on the peak of Jbel Toubkal and in the high valleys of the Atlas Mountains. But each season brings its own rewards.

As a complete contrast to the mountains we have partnered with Agafay Desert Camp for you to enjoy the delights of living under canvas but with all the comfort and service you would associate with Kasbah du Toubkal; we introduce you to the largest collection of historic photographs of Morocco, and share the story of Thomas Reilly, the British Ambassador to Morocco as he reminisces about his first year in the job.

I hope you enjoy this anniversary issue, and we look forward to our fifth birthday with you.

Until next time,

Derek Workman

Editor

...and everyone at

KASBAH DU TOUBKAL

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images of history

Maison de la Photographie

'Here Antiquity is everywhere.'

Eugéne Delacroix, Painter,
on Marrakech

It's curious how the same images from a century ago fascinated the photographer of the day just as they do now; a loaded donkey in the narrow alleys of the medina, the sun and shade dappling the street from the slatted roof; the snow-capped Atlas Mountains seen over the top of the ramparts of the city, although in 1920, when the photo was taken, sheep grazed in front of the walls, instead of the view these days of roads and passing traffic.

Opened in May 2009 to display the collection of Hamid Mergani and Patrick Manac'h, the Maison de la Photographie has been getting rave reviews ever since. The private collection of around 10,000 original prints, a large collection of postcards, including an exhaustive collection on Marrakech, and the oldest collection of glass negatives on the High Atlas, it also has regular showings of *Sceneries and Faces of the High-Atlas*, the first full-color documentary about the Berber tribes of the High Atlas, produced by Daniel Chicault in 1950.

Set in a beautifully restored riad, complete with ornate metal balustrades and window grills, the collection climbs three floors in Marrakech Medina, close to the Ben Youssef Madrassa. A slim, elegant jasmine scales the building, fanning out onto the roof terrace.

The Maison de la Photographie is primarily an archive of original photographs, containing work both from the famous photographers of the day and the unknown, but the focus is on Moroccan daily life from the 1870s to the 1960s, offering a unique and fascinating insight into the lives of those who inhabited Morocco during these times.

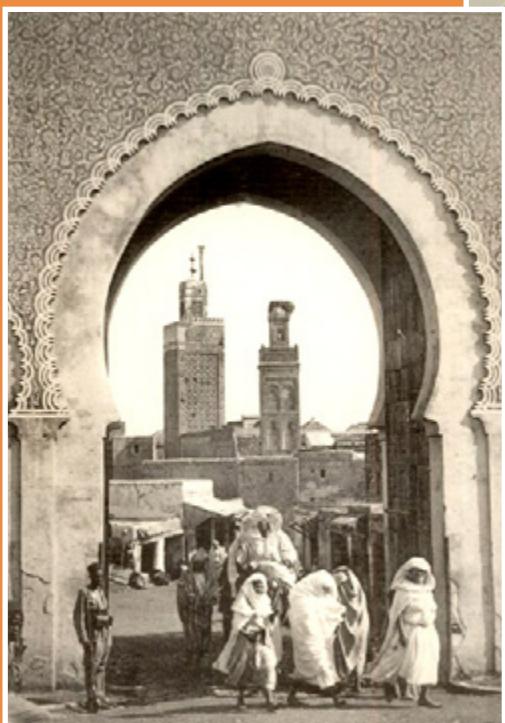
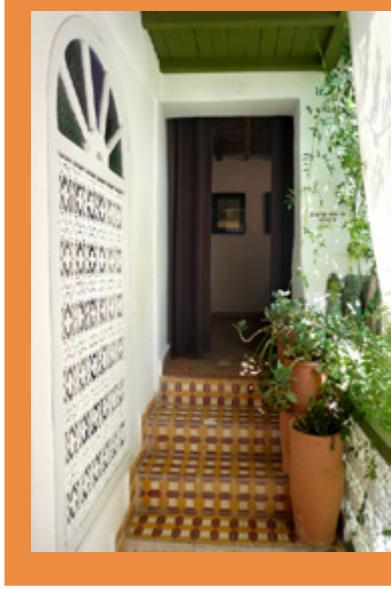
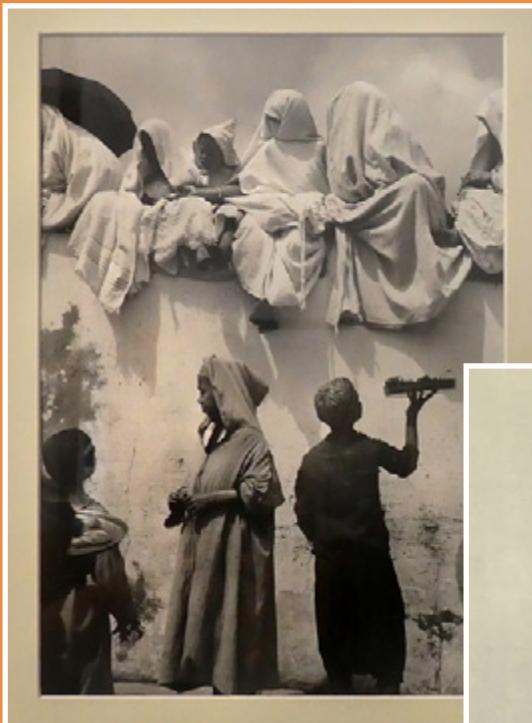
Sepia photos, hand-coloured postcards from 19th-century, a beautiful collection of the posed and unexpected but often more intimate details of every-

day life. The work in Tangier in 1941 of Hungarian photographer Nicolás Muller, famous for his street photography, shows a delightful tongue-in-cheek; a boy offering a tray to a group of ladies in white gelabas perched on a high wall, the slinky exposed leg of a seated lady as she takes a cigarette from a packet offered by a grinning chap, a companion besider her playing on a *doumbek*.

A tiny darkened room at the top of the riad houses a collection of autocromes (a form of early colour photography invented by the Lumière brothers, Auguste and Louis) and it's curious to see images by Lucien Ray of the Madrassa Ben Youssef with a collection of boats on what appears to be a quay – not something you would have expected to see in Marrakech, even a century ago.



Maison de la Photographie
46, Rue Ahal Fès (near the Madrassa Ben Youssef)
Open every day from 9.30am to 7pm
Entrance 40MAD.
Tel: + 212 (0)524 385 721



A desert of stones

Driving on the roads of the Agafay Desert, thirty miles southwest of Marrakech, is like riding on over-sized corrugated sheets, which is probably why only all-terrain vehicles and camels venture

Despite the name, the Agafay Desert is not the sand desert of Sahara and Lawrence of Arabia fame, the dunes replaced by a vast, undulating, stony landscape crisscrossed with tracks and dusty roads, cut through with dried riverbeds and pockmarked with small oases of stunted trees, watched over by the snow-capped peaks of the High Atlas Mountains. In Spring it is decorated with bursts of colourful wildflowers, and pocket handkerchief-sized fields of wheat provide animal feed and a small income for a few hardy families, but its seeding and harvesting on the uneven slopes is no mean feat. Small groups of goats pick at the rough scrub and abandoned villages, sometimes simply a walled compound once shared by generations of the same family, show the result of the severe water shortage that has plagued this area for decades.

These villages would slowly move over time because the buildings are made of mud brick with a lifetime of around ten years. As the buildings crumble it's much easier to simply build a new one than to repair the old. Now the few remaining are more static since

the invention of the breeze-block, but anyone who has lived in a mud-brick building will tell you the difference is noticeable. The mud-brick is cool during summer and retains the heat in the winter, but there's a feel to the building that can't be put into words – it's just different.



As you pass through the barren terrain you see dark shapes flapping in the distance; small tents for day visitors to take tea in and listen to the silence. It's a formidable landscape, but a fascinating one, as evocative in its own way as the rolling dunes of the Sahara.

I take a stroll around Agafay village and watch a group of young boys playing football on one of the few flat areas around the small settlement. Even in the desert the pitch is still fully equipped with goal-posts and nets, although if the ball misses them it goes straight down a shallow ravine to a dried up water-course. There seems to be a debate over who has to retrieve it, the kicker or the goalie. I watch an elderly lady, bent at almost a right-angle, brushing outside her house with a short twig broom. Why? We're in the desert and there's dust everywhere. As I get closer I see she's sweeping away sheep droppings, and with the amount she's collecting it must be a large herd. Beside her a dog and a donkey share lunch from a trough made from a worn-out tractor tyre.

Wandering on I come across one of those curious sites that raise questions, but it's perhaps more intriguing not to have an answer.

Six fishing boats painted the rich blue of those found in the fleet at Essaouiria, 200 km west, lie holed and dilapidated beyond repair at what looks like the





village woodpile. There seems no earthly reason for them being there other than for burning, given the sparsity of trees as far as the eye can see, but who went to the effort of getting them there and how they did it never gets an answer that really makes any sense. Even elderly villagers are reticent to give a definitive answer. Some say they were brought by film-makers, others that a group of men travelled with them from the Sahara on their way to Essouira to become fishermen but gave up when they arrived at Agafay, which seems even less likely than the film-maker story, and begs the question, why have them in the Sahara desert when they are going to Essaouira where they are built? Another has them going in the opposite direction, from the fishing port to some distant lake, but whatever the reason, there they lie.



Comfort with an eye to the environment

I'm on my way to Agafay Desert Camp, a small tented 'village' that blends with its surroundings but is enlivened by brightly painted metal cacti of varying sizes and the rich browns of Bedouin jaimas, traditional tents woven from goat and camel hair. The apparent simplicity of the camp and its situation is perfectly in keeping with the ethos of Kasbah du Toubkal; comfort but with an eye to the environment.

I'm welcomed by Muhammed Monou, dressed in a gelaba and turban of Toureg blue and a smile that is welcome in any tribe. He is attentive and knowledgeable, especially when it comes to describing the superb meal served by candle light later, but for the

moment I'm offered the ubiquitous mint tea and shown my home for the night.

Footpaths marked out by low stone walls lead to tents set on raised terraces. The tents look small as you approach, but like Dr Who's Tardis they are deceptively large when you stoop through the low canvas doorway and step inside. A king-size double bed, comfortable sofa, a desk and stool, a low round coffee table and two bedside tables with cane lamps still leave a spacious feeling, and the peaked ceiling of cream and beige panels and wall linings of woollen panels with a key-hole motif over cream create a cosy atmosphere. Furnishings and decoration are simple but comfortable, and to add a touch of home comforts in the wilderness, I'm immeasurably pleased to find that each tent has a bathroom with a toilet and hot shower.

I take a short walk from the camp and drop into a dried-up river bed, the curious shade of the stone as if it has been painted in camouflage colours by some gigantic hand. With no other signs of life you could be back to the time the world began.

A pair of camels arrive for two young French ladies to take a sunset ride. One of them asks if I'd like to take a ride as her friend is a bit nervous and doesn't want to do it. I've ridden a camel before and decline jokingly, but the banter is light-hearted and between us Mohammed and I convince the recalcitrant rider that she should really try it as she may not get the chance again. The look on her face as the beast begins its ungainly rise seems to indicate she wished she'd stuck to her original idea, but when she returns an hour later she admits that once they got going it wasn't as bad as she had expected; a once-in-a-lifetime experience but they were glad to have done it anyway.





As evening drifts slowly in a fire is lit in the centre of the camp, a place to chat and exchange tales before dinner. The flickering light of oil lamps and white oval globes strategically placed in front of the tents begin to glow almost magically as night falls. The murmur of voices as staff prepare dinner and the twitter of birds is almost all that can be heard. As the cool of the desert night approaches, guests wrap themselves in hooded robes – white for women, black for men – to keep out the evening chill.

After a slightly overcast evening the sky suddenly begins to clear and a narrow rainbow appears, arching over the tents. Dinner is served, and as my table is directly in line with the tent entrance I'm rewarded with the coming of night, the shimmering flames of the open fire outside and the glitter of the candles decorating my table reflecting off my glass.

The quality of food served at Agafay Desert Camp is exceptional, equal to any found in some of the best restaurants in Marrakech. We begin with five small bowls of warm salads, from slightly tart to a sweet salad of beetroot (simmered with orange zest, cardamom, and a *soupcçon* of sugar), by way of soft cauliflower, al dente courgette, a mix of sweet peppers and tomatoes, and eggplant cooked with tomato, onion, parsley, coriander and olive oil. Everything is delicious, with independent flavours enhanced with a variety of sweet and spicy herbs and spices. The ingredients of each dish and its preparation is lovingly described by Muhammed.

Two tajine dishes arrive. One of the things about travelling in Morocco is that you can be served a few too many chicken tajines, but when the conical



lids are lifted I'm delighted to see that in fact one is a tangia, one of my favourite Moroccan dishes, beef cooked with olive oil, pepper, garlic, preserved lemon, ghee, saffron, pepper, salt and cumin, slowly and softly for around four hours so that merely by resting a fork against the meat it separates. The other is a tajine of vegetables cooked in a herb sauce.

I make my goodnights to the other guests and Muhammed and follow the ground-level candle lanterns lit along the footpaths to the occupied tents, the safer to guide yourself home. Pockets of light from the lanterns twinkle like stars low on the horizon, while the glow of the globe lighting the terrace of my tent is like a pale moon drawing me home.

After a night's sleep in almost total silence, the day begins with a washed blue sky spotted with cloud, the makings of a lovely day to come. The warmth of the morning sun and blue sky bring a soft relaxation to the start of the day, accompanied by a wonderful glass of freshly squeezed orange juice, pips and all.

For more information please contact
bookings@discover.ltd.uk



Mountain Yoga & Mindfulness Retreat Morocco

15 to 22 July 2019 (7 nights all-inclusive)

Described as a 'quiet storm,' Mia Forbes Pirie's teaching style is gentle, friendly and powerful. Mia has been a yoga and spiritual practitioner for more than 14 years, studying various styles of yoga, including spending four months in India with the founding father of Ashtanga Yoga. She believes in starting where you are and moving towards your greatest potential.

I absolutely loved Mia's yoga – it's been a long time since I've felt this peaceful.

Rachel Logan



begins with a yoga practice, which includes meditation and breathing. A guided walk will take place each afternoon for those who would like to enjoy the beautiful surroundings of the Kasbah, followed by a gentle yoga and meditation session to help unwind tired muscles before dinner. The outside yoga space

As part of your seven nights spent at the Kasbah du Toubkal there will be two yoga and mindfulness classes on each full day and a guided walk, with one yoga free-day. The morning

at the Kasbah has glorious mountain views, while enjoying the fresh and pure mountain air. There is also an indoor yoga space, and yoga mats, blocks, belts, blankets and cushions are provided for both areas. Beginners and advanced students are all welcome as classes will be suitable for all levels and experience. All meals at the Kasbah are included.

Breakfast of delicious homemade juices,

honey, yoghurts, pancakes, locally made breads, fresh fruit and cereals will be served before class. Lunch and all evening meals are traditional North African dishes. Vegetarian meals are provided as standard and meat, fish or vegan meals are available on request – please advise your preference at time of booking.

Full course information and booking details available
[HERE](#)

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Readers Write

Taking the strain

There comes a time when we all have to realise age is creeping up on us. For Andrew Parsons it was when he was faced with a steep walk up from Imlil

I've been out all day. The weather has been grey and heavily overcast and I'm looking forward to a hot bath. I'm staying up the side of the hill above the Kasbah, where a new road has been cut in to access the small villages. The walk is steep, an uncomfortable experience on the way down for someone who isn't much of a walker. I'm hoping my driver, Brahim, will drop me at the door of Village Kasbah, where I'm spending a few nights. We return to Imlil and I go for a coffee while Brahim checks in at the Kasbah village office. The weather has closed in, heavy dripping clouds are rolling down from Jbel Toubkal and I comfort myself with the thought that I'll soon be deeply immersed in hot water, easing my aching bones. But the best laid plans...

When I get back from my, warming coffee Brahim tells me that he has another job on and they have arranged a mule to take me up to the Village. Hmm.... I've always thought it looks rather embarrassing to see a grown man who isn't a local going about his business, sitting on the back of a mule, especially as it will be led by a muleteer. An adult version of the seaside donkey, I've always felt. But it seems my only other option is shank's pony, a knee-punishing scramble up the hillside, and as I walked down it six hours earlier I still have it clearly in my mind and it doesn't appeal. I suggest that I'll walk up the road through the village, supposedly to stretch my legs after sitting in a car all day. I fool no-one, but they accede to my request and the mule, Mohammed his owner, and I start the slow walk up the village street.

I'm not tall, and Mohammed barely reaches to my shoulder, but twenty years as a muleteer covering the sometimes punishing terrain of the High Atlas Mountains has given him leg muscles like whipcord and he's soon setting a pace, probably gentle for him, that has me thinking that in this case pride doesn't so much come before a fall as before a wheezing stagger up a modest incline. I keep my pace, though, but as we turn off the main road onto a rough track after about one kilometre's walk I concede defeat, climb onto a wall and, with Mohammed's help, sling my leg over the mule's back. I see no stirrups and imagine the discomfort of trying to grip the animal's side with my knees, an uncomfortable experience as I discovered when I rode a camel, but my trusty guide slips my feet into folds in the saddle blanket to give me a modicum of belief that I'm secure.

We set off up a dirt path through a cluster of houses on

the outskirts of Imlil, a narrow aquaduct gurgling alongside, past a couple of young boys playing with (or perhaps supposedly carrying) a blue plastic sack full of hay, an elderly gentleman who passes the time of day with Mohammed, and a mule with fully loaded panniers coming in the opposite direction. My gentlemanly guide steps to the side to allow it to pass and I avoid looking to my right where the path drops sharply away. It's not what you would call a sheer drop of any consideration, but I'm not good with heights and even the metre-and-a-half high I'm on the mule's back gives me minor concern, assuaged by the fact that my only other option is a breathless walk that my aging knees wouldn't thank me for.

Soon we are in open country and Mohammed and his mule plod along peacefully. I've walked this attractive route many times between Imlil and the Kasbah but never before have I taken the rock strewn deviation from the well-worn path I'm used to. It was steep and rough coming down and I quickly discover that trying to hold my camera with one hand while attempting to video the walk, and holding on grimly to the narrow strap attached to the saddle with the other as the mule clammers over the rocks is probably not the best idea I've ever had. There's no doubt he is sure-footed, but it's my lack of practice at being sure-seated that I worry about. But on we go. As the ride wears on I begin to lose my nervousness, settling into the gently rocking rhythm as we climb the hill, with Mohammed warning me to duck my head with a gentle, 'Sorry', as we pass under low-hanging branches. The weather is settling in to a damp and gloomy evening and fog begins to descend as we climb higher, changing the rocky terrain to more well marked paths no more than a mules-width wide.

Before I know it I see the steps leading up to the door of the Village, a final twist in the steep path, a short stroll alongside the steps fitter humans than I would take, and we are on the patio, with Mohammed slipping my feet out of the folds in the blanket and helping me to gingerly dismount. I'm surprised to find that I really enjoyed the ride, and my mind flashes back to the smiles I saw on childrens' faces as the rode along the beach at Blackpool when I took a stroll with my grandchildren three weeks earlier. I thank Mohammed and pat the mule before drifting off to my room for the long-awaited deep, hot bath. Meanwhile, my guide nips into the kitchen for a well-earned cup of mint tea before his trek back down to Imlil.

Lahcen Igdem Mountain Guide

Anyone who has visited Kasbah du Toubkal will recognise Lahcen Igdem, one of the reception team; tall, slim with an ever-ready smile. As a boy the villages and valleys of the High Atlas were his playground and he carried the idea that one day he would show them to visitors as a mountain guide. As soon as he finished full-time education in 2009 he began his training in his chosen career, three days a week studying first aid, geography, geology, fauna and flora, how to deal with clients – subjects associated with tourism. But basic training doesn't allow you to be a full, official mountain guide and as an unofficial guide you are always afraid that something could happen. In the same year Lahcen began working at Kasbah du Toubkal but still cherished the idea that one day he would become a registered, fully official mountain guide. It was almost a decade before the chance came, when the Ministry of Tourism offered the opportunity to unofficial guides throughout Morocco to take an examination to achieve the valued certification that would allow them to be full-time, professional guides in all rural areas throughout the Kingdom, from the Rif Mountains in the North to the Sahara Desert, from the Atlas to the far south and beyond.

The exam took part in three stages; physical, written and oral (Lahcen's in English and French as he's fluent in both languages as well as Arabic and Berber, his native tongue).

Two months from sending off his application Lahcen was certified as an official tourist guide in the Kingdom of Morocco, one of 190 from a total of 620 original candidates. (As Lahcen tells his story he keeps saying 'by chance' when referring to his passing each stage, as if the decision was in the hands of the fairies and not a result of his knowledge, skills and many years of experience.)

"You can do trainings, get certificates and licences,



but most of what is learned comes from actually being in the mountains, walking them on a regular basis, gaining practical knowledge and experience. I have spent my life in these mountains, getting to know the remote valleys and people in the villages, the nature and the local cultures, the things people want to see and experience when they are trekking. But I've also learned a great deal by working with professional guides. Being with people is important.

Most of those we meet are wonderful but sometimes, fortunately rarely, people can be a little bit difficult and you have to know how to deal with them in a polite and safe way."

Taking a walk in the beautiful mountains around the Kasbah might well be enough for some visitors, but being a guide goes far beyond simply being a walking companion.

"Guests aren't here only for eating and sleeping, they usually want to try to learn something about us and from us, such as some local culture and activities. We listen to the guests and try to fulfil their needs, we find out how many hours they want

to walk, how difficult they want the walk to be."

Many of those visitors come because they want to climb Jbel Toubkal, at almost 14,000 feet above sea level the highest peak in North Africa and the third highest peak in Africa after Mount Kenya and Mount Kilimanjaro. Lahcen has trekked it many, many times but still loves walking his mountains.

"I feel very comfortable to be in my own area. If you have free time or an opportunity to visit somewhere else that's good, but mainly it's better to work in your own mountains and valleys. You have to encourage people to come to your area rather than go somewhere else."

We would like to take this opportunity to offer Lahcen our warmest congratulations on his recent marriage to Bahija, and wish them many years of happiness.

A Year in Morocco

Thomas Reilly,
British Ambassador



British Embassy Morocco • Thursday, 16 August 2018

09 August 2018 - A year ago today, my family and I drove into Tarifa to take the ferry across the Straits and begin our adventure in Morocco. As we looked across at the glowering Rif Mountains, we all felt both excited and apprehensive. Although I had been to Morocco three times before, I had never worked here: from previous postings, I was aware that the experience of a tourist is quite different to that of a 'resident'. I had never been an Ambassador before and I had never moved to a new country with two children and two dogs, with schools and a Residence to manage and worry about.

We had driven over 5,000 kms from the UK to Tangier without incident, but had only been in Morocco for 20 minutes before we had a gentle greeting from a lorry which bumped into the back of our car as we left Tangier heading for Rabat.

In retrospect, that was an appropriate introduction to Moroccan roads. The driving in Morocco is fast and furious; often scary. Never dull. You need to keep your wits about you at all times. Cars drive just behind you at 130 Km/H flashing their lights to ask you to pull over; cars overtake on all sides; pedestrians can saunter across the motorway at any point; and in the towns and villages it is a glorious mayhem of donkeys, trucks, mopeds, carts, people, cars, dogs, cats and lorries. You cannot afford to lose concentration for a second.

After our tangle with the lorry and our first meeting with the incredibly charming and helpful Gendarmerie Royale, we drove out of Tangier along the road to Rabat. That was our first-time journey along it and as we drove, I was amazed by its geographical variety - as we left the hills of the Rif behind, the amazing Atlantic coast opened up.

That road presages the extraordinary variety of Morocco's scenery. I have climbed Mount Toubkal and looked across, from that snowy, frozen height

to the beautiful Atlas range; down into the infinite desert; and back towards the fecund plains around Marrakesh. My wife has ridden in an international competition with the Moroccan national endurance team out into the desert around Merzouga and come back with stories of an inhospitable and impossibly beautiful region - rolling sand-dunes, sudden oases, camels emerging from dust storms. We have been on holiday to Essaouira and had our legs blasted by the racing sand as we walked along the most extraordinary beaches I have seen anywhere outside of New Zealand. We have visited Ouarzazate and admired the films made there (including Gladiator, one of my all-time favourites). We have driven up the spectacular Dades Gorge and along the Vallee des Roses. We have visited Fes, Volubilis, Meknes, Tangier, Tetouan, Chefchaouen, Marrakesh and Casablanca - place names which conjure up a myriad of magical, mythical images. We have got lost in the Rif and surfed in the Atlantic. We have been entranced by the silence at Kasbah Toubkal and thoroughly immersed in the madness of Jama'a el-Fnaa.

As we drove towards Rabat on that first day, along the flat, agricultural lands between Larache and Kenitra, we saw the new train line and the rural life that goes alongside it. We saw donkeys and horses working in the fields and high ricks of straw and hay. We saw people working hard in their fields under the blazing sun of an African summer.

I had not realised how deeply rooted the 'horse culture' is in Morocco. As we have driven around the country, the equine importance to rural life is clear. From the short ride from Imlil up to the Kasbah Toubkal; to the road which I nicknamed the 'Donkey Highway', leading from Essaouira towards Marrakesh or the Vallee des Roses, the omni-presence of the faithful donkey and mule underlines their centrality to daily life. When we climbed Toubkal, the

mules carried our bags until the balling snow made it too difficult to continue. In the villages around Larache and Asilah and in the Gorge de Dades, transport of people and goods is by donkey for many families. In the hills of the High Atlas, the valleys' paths are too steep for anything but the sure-footed donkey and mule. The caleches in Essaouira and Marrakesh are not just for tourists and for show, but have a great and noble history. The amazing Tbourida relies on the most extraordinarily brave Arab-Barbe horses. And I have been privileged to play polo here on some of the best polo ponies I have ever ridden.

When we finally arrived at the Residence in Rabat, full of wonder and excitement, we were met by smiling guards. The policemen waved in greeting. People at the houses next door put their thumbs up and grinned their welcomes.

Earlier this year, a group of British army veterans who all suffered from PTSD due to trauma suffered or witnessed on the battlefields of Iraq or Afghanistan visited Morocco. They came in the most beat-up cars you can imagine – Citroen Berlingos, whose only qualification was that they did not cost more than £200 each. They came to drive across Morocco's deserts and use the experience to start the process of mental healing. They came to the Residence after their month-long rally. They described the beauty of the desert; the silence of the nights; the challenges of driving their cars across difficult terrains; their sense of triumph at having come through it stronger,

healed, their road to recovery now clear before them. But the thing that had really struck them was the generous hospitality of the Moroccans they met on their way – that same sense of greeting, of welcome, of openness. Of how, whenever they had encountered a problem, there had always been someone there – often from the poorest communities – to offer them help, a bed for the night, food or water.

I have loved my first year here – and, more importantly, I think my family has too. The work has been great - sometimes difficult, more often rewarding. I have been so fortunate in my travels round the country - Morocco has an almost bewildering variety of history and geography. Meeting and working with new people from across the political and social spectrum has been a huge pleasure.

Of course, there are also challenges: Morocco is not perfect – what country is? If I could change two things, they would be the driving and the litter. Morocco led the world in banning plastic bags and should be congratulated for that leadership, but the plastic scourge legacy (from which many countries are suffering) is more noticeable in Morocco, since it makes such a stark contrast to the outstanding natural and historical beauty of the country.

I am looking forward to my second year; to continuing to build a real partnership of equals between our two countries; to sharing my experiences; and to visiting more places and learning more about this remarkable country.

The importance of tourism

I believe that tourism is an integral part and parcel of the weft and warp of modern relations between two countries. Responsible tourism breaks down cultural barriers (both of the host country and of the tourist), opens eyes to other ways of life, throws back the doors of opportunity and helps mutual understanding and appreciation: within the tourism sector everyone is an ambassador for their own culture - everyone has a responsibility to introduce the other to their own. So in my view, encouraging more British tourists to come to Morocco is not only good for the economic health of Morocco, but serves directly to strengthen the historic bilateral relationship between our two countries and encourages British investment in Morocco.

Tourism enriches our lives, strengthens our societies, improves economic opportunity and breaks down barriers. It serves to bind us together and remind us once more that there is much more that unites us than divides us: and that in the end is, surely, the principle role of an Ambassador.

You can read more from Thomas Reilly [HERE](#)

Taking care of you at the Kasbah



Brahim Ait Talaoul

A driver with the Kasbah since 2004, Brahim is also Mike McHugo's right-hand-man on bike rides, making sure everything is where it should be at the right time. Married with three children, he lives in the village of Talaoul near the Kasbah. It's not co-incidental that he and the village bear the same name, as only members of the Talaoul family live there.



Rachid Ait Braim

In two years between 2016 and 2018 Rachid Ait Braim drove almost 222,000 kilometres shuttling visitors to the Kasbah here, there and almost everywhere else, all part of a busy driver's life, but he enjoys his work. His favourite drive is a day trip to Essaouira. Married with a two-year-old son Aladin, he lives just behind the new mosque in Imlil.



Fadma Ait Hedouche

From nearby Arghen village, Fadma bakes fresh bread to hotel requirements. An open-minded and independent lady, after the death of her husband and son and two of her three daughters leaving the village she didn't want to become a 'lazy lady'. Her work not only provides an income but also allows her to meet other people, and she's happy for you to take her photo.

A few  and 

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*Dreams are
only the plans
of the
reasonable*

That MAGICAL 5%

Most visitors to Kasbah du Toubkal have heard the story of how Kundun, Martin Scorsese's 1997 epic about the early life of the Dalai Lama, was the cornerstone that allowed the Association Bassins d'Imlil to come into being, supported by the 5% levy on guests' bills at the Kasbah. Fewer people will realise that the Association still does an enormous amount of work in the community and has spread its wings from the original concept of supporting the six villages of the Imlil Valley to provide funding and expertise to other projects further afield.

The Association Bassins d'Imlil has built a reputation for solid projects and management attracting funding from local and international organisations, although it still relies heavily on the 'magical' five percent. The same can be said for Education For All, now recognised

both nationally and internationally as one of foremost providers of access to further education for girls from remote areas. Marrakech Atlas Etape is funded entirely from the Kasbah levy, in turn raising funds specifically for EFA. Its staunch effort was rewarded last year by receiving the Royal Patronage of His Majesty King Mohammed VI. But your five percent carries on bringing benefits to the locality, by funding smaller projects, particularly in sustainability, that slip under the radar of the usual funding bodies, such as supporting the Bearded Vulture Project, following the lammergeyer, a beautiful bird now disappearing from Morocco and on the IUCN Red List, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, the world's main authority on the conservation status of species.

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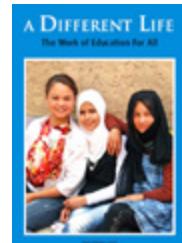
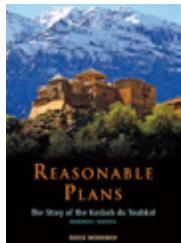
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