

KASBAH DU TOUBKAL

MOROCCO'S PREMIER
MOUNTAIN RETREAT



A Bit of a Glimmer

It might be tempting providence to say that there's a light at the end of the world, but with the first vaccinations against Covid-19 taking place worldwide, it's probably safe to say that there is at least a 'glimmer at the end of the tunnel'. And can it really be a coincidence that the first man in the world to receive the virus, an Englishman, is called William Shakespeare? Perhaps there was no Florence Nightingale of the required age group to be the first lady, but it was heartwarming to hear Margaret Keenan, who became the first person in the world to receive the vaccine a few days before her ninety-first birthday, say it was the "best early birthday present". We wish her well and a happy birthday.

So what about the delayed celebration of the Kasbah's own birthday, its quarter century?

It would have been great to have had a proper celebration for the 25th anniversary, but we need to put that aside for the moment and concentrate on getting back to as normal a life and business as soon as we can; just to be able to welcome guests and have the Kasbah full of life again will be a celebration in itself. Everyone knows how welcoming the Moroccan people are, and the pleasure guests will get by being here will be more than equalled by the pleasure our staff will get from welcoming them, many of whom have got to know each other well over the years.

Mike and Chris McHugo

and everyone at KASBAH DU TOUBKAL



**For more information about our
holidays and hotels, email us at
bookings@discover.ltd.uk
or call our Advanced Booking
office on
+44 (0)1883 744667**

An Unexpected Calm

In normal times, visitors to Kasbah du Toubkal appreciate its distinct ambience; space to be quiet, the chance to meet new people or share time with old friends, staff quietly and efficiently going about their business to ensure their guests' comfort. But these aren't normal times, so what's it like to be the only guests at the 'House on the Hill'?

In her role as Head of Political Internal and Programmes at the British Embassy in Rabat, Harriet King works closely with Mike McHugo in helping to support projects for Education For All, and has become a regular visitor to Kasbah du Toubkal, often accompanied by her husband, Will, who works remotely for a finance company in the UK, and their daughters, Martha, 10, and eight-year-old Georgia. But with their daughters in the UK, at the end of November the couple decided to spend a long weekend at the Kasbah as a break from work and life in Rabat.

"It's my 'go to' place where I feel comfortable, calm, and can stop completely," says Harriet. "It's a wonderful place for that. We work pretty hard during the week so it's good to take that break. We're only living here for a finite time so we want to enjoy the country as much as we can, and it's such a beautiful part of Morocco.

"It was different this time. I was quite surprised when we arrived and realised there weren't any other guests, although when you think about it, you shouldn't be particularly surprised, especially at the moment. We'd gone as a couple without our children, which was a bit strange, and, to be honest, it was much more relaxing. We were there for three nights, and on the second day we went for a long hike, which the kids probably wouldn't have been able to handle."

"One of the beauties of going to the Kasbah is meeting like-minded people with tales to tell, who've travelled to far-flung places," adds Will, "but we didn't have that kind of opportunity this time because we were the only people there except for Mike, so we got a chance to have him to ourselves for the evening. "But what was nice, and what remained the same, was the staff and the really nice welcome you get from them. Because we've been there a few times and got to know them, and they've got to know us, they were very pleased to see us on two levels, one because they knew us, and also because we were paying guests who were helping the Kasbah and the



economy, and keeping them in jobs."

"There's such a boost here in trying to promote local tourism, and the second night a really nice Moroccan family stayed," comments Harriet. "I guess that what appeals to many visitors is that the Kasbah gives a real feel of Moroccan culture, which might actually be less appealing to Moroccans themselves. I doubt they want to go away and have a weekend of Moroccan food, although we noticed the food was particularly good this time.

"Everyone was very welcoming. Whenever you go to the Kasbah you're made to feel like a VIP; the Berber welcome definitely comes through. It's not just a job for them, hospitality is a way of life. You still had all the little bits that give it its charm, such as one of the staff pouring water over your hands to wash them when you went into dinner, and the wonderful breakfasts, that was all still the same. Same staff, same charm but it was particularly special this time because

they have been so desperate to have clients.”

Used to seeing Imlil busy with trekkers and tourists, the lack of both felt strange to Will, but the thrill of arriving at the Kasbah was unchanged.

“It was slightly out of season when we arrived, and Imlil was quieter, in the sense that there weren’t any other tourists. I think I saw one. The fact that when you arrive, for the last ten minutes you have to go up to the Kasbah by mule. I love that bit. You park and walk up through those lovely walnut groves, you go past local people, the clapping of the mules, then those wonderful big doors. The girls love that ride, and it’s a great start to the visit.”

“We live in Morocco so it’s slightly less surreal for us,” continues Harriet. “We had my sister and her husband and her two little girls visiting last year, and they were completely overawed. The two kids thought it was the most exciting thing ever. It’s those tiny bits of charm that make it something different and a little bit more magical.”

“I love it. When we first went I made some silly comment that Will laughed at. “When I die, this is the place I want my ashes to be scattered.” Everything from the views from the windows, the welcome of the staff and that feeling of calm, I just love it.”



King Mohammed VI decrees free anti-Covid vaccine

King Mohammed VI has given instructions to the government to introduce free anti-Covid vaccine for the benefit of all Moroccans, a statement from the Royal Palace announced on Tuesday, December 08.

It was originally intended that immunization would be paid for by the recipient, the cost refundable by insurance companies, but this would have left a large segment of the population without access to the vaccine. With the King’s decree, the 2,888 vaccination stations being set up throughout the country, aims to vaccinate 80% of people over 18, a total of twenty-five million inhabitants, in three to four months, free of charge.

Morocco has experience of mass vaccination. The largest organised vaccination campaign in the history of the country took place in 2013, when eleven million people between the ages of nine months and 18 years were inoculated against measles and rubella in only four weeks. The campaign started from a situation where these diseases were present in all homes, to a situation where there are barely four or five cases of measles per year.

Dr. Mohamed Benazzouz, National Immunization Program Manager with the Moroccan Ministry of Health, commented that the vaccine must be accessible to everyone, “...because vaccination is an individual immunity for a collective need.”



WISHING EVERYONE A
Happier
NEW YEAR!

SEASON’S GREETING FROM EVERYONE AT
KASBAH DU TOUBKAL



Time To Think, Renew, and Plan

When Kasbah du Toubkal opened its doors in 1995 the idea of ecological development and being part of the local community was at the core of its plans. In 25 years this sense of community has become important world-wide, and, especially in tourism, a selling point.

Mike McHugo was able to visit Morocco in mid-November after an absence of nine months. What was his impression of the situation in Marrakech and Imlil after the disastrous effect of Covid-19, and, given that the Kasbah's twenty-fifth birthday celebration was put on hold – although there will still be a celebration at some point – how would he like to see the Berber hospitality centre and region develop over the coming years?

"Morocco was a pleasant interlude from lockdown in France, and it was refreshing to see that Marrakech New Town life was pretty normal, with shops, restaurants and cafes open. The old town had a few tourists but was very quiet. I had a couple of nights at one of our riads in the Medina, Les Yeux Bleus, and it's looking good after a recent refurbishment that added a new restaurant and bar, and an extra room. I suppose one of the few benefits of Covid is that it has given us the opportunity to catch up on things.

"I was very pleased to see how well the Kasbah was looking. The staff have done an excellent job in maintaining it and it feels as if we could open up tomorrow without any glitches. Imlil gets some local tourists and some from Casablanca and Rabat at weekends, and the Kasbah has had a few occasional clients, with a group of Russian visitors who trekked Jbel Toubkal. "I suppose you could say another bonus is that the closure has prompted people to go back to basic agriculture, and the terraces around Imlil and other mountain villages are being brought back to the level of when agriculture was the main business of the area. I think we sometimes forget how productive the region is, but it's good to see life being brought back to the hillsides."

In November, Minister of Health Khalid Ait Taleb reported "very positive" results of clinical trials of the Sinopharm COVID-19 vaccine on Moroccan volunteers. He said the results confirmed the safety and effectiveness of the vaccine, and agreements with the developer will guarantee self-sufficiency in domestic

COVID-19 vaccine production. Health authorities are currently distributing doses of the vaccine to regional health directorates, and while they haven't given a fixed date to begin a national inoculation campaign, they will be one of the first regional countries to provide vaccinations en-mass.

"I think because everyone is so fed up with lockdowns and uncertainty, tourism demand will come back quickly," says Mike. "When we had to close earlier in the year, a number of people took credit notes, and when tourism demand begins again, I think there will be two years of travel concentrated into one."

"With regards to future plans. We'd like to see the locality more sustainable and better at composting rubbish. Our big thing, which we haven't been as successful at as we would like to be, is to get people to understand how important it is to make the area as sustainable as possible. Now they see it's increasingly a marketable angle, people are more for it, but we would like to improve the rubbish clearance, although to be fair, almost nowhere has a perfect rubbish clearance system.

"Unfortunately, it's not an easy project, mainly because of the pressure it comes under being so easily accessed from Marrakech. We're in a national park, but Morocco doesn't really have the same power to enforce the rules and regulations as it would in Europe. Hopefully the Moroccan people are becoming more aware of the situation and will begin to understand the importance of simply taking their rubbish home with them and getting rid of it in the city, where there's a far better disposal system set up than in the mountain villages."



UNIQUE LODGES
OF THE WORLD

From the pages of MOROCCO WORLD NEWS



The top 10 most
instagramable
places in Morocco

*(Click on the images
to read the articles)*

Major Moroccan Cities,
and how to get around



Six most beautiful
Moroccan gardens



La Marlouf - First
Moroccan Triple Beer



Five healthy late-night
Moroccan meals



Instagram Photography Competition



The prize for Kasbah du Toubkal 2020
Instagram Photography Competition
goes to @kaypeasmith for this beautiful
image.

Alan Keohane of Still Images, who judged the
competition, said, "It really captures the experience
of hiking through the valleys in the High Atlas. Good
composition and very good exposure in backlit sun-
light that captures the vibrant greens of the fields
- and love the sunburst."



The new British Ambassador becomes Patron of EFA and visits the boarding house in Asni

Like his two predecessors, when Simon Martin was appointed Her Majesty's Ambassador to the Kingdom of Morocco, he graciously accepted the role of Patron to Education For All.

"My wife, Sophie, and I were fortunate to have the chance to visit Asni during my first weeks in Morocco. There we met some of the girls living and studying in the EFA houses, to witness their enthusiasm and optimism, and to hear their stories of how their parents and families proudly supported their ongoing education, while recognising that this represented a break with tradition for their families. The desire of these young women to go on to study at university and for many to bring that learning back to their communities was uplifting." After their visit to Asni, the couple spent a night at Kasbah du Toubkal. His impression? "The Kasbah is unique and EFA is amazing," which seems like an excellent start to what we are sure will be a wonderful relationship.



Click on the image above to read the Ambassador's letter, and the EFA logo to visit their Website for more information.

EFA chosen to be part of 24-hr GivingTuesday crowdfunder on December 1st, with donations part-matched by Global Giving



We are so grateful for everyone's heart-warming generosity for our first GivingTuesday crowdfunder. We raised \$18,000 thanks to all of you donating and sharing! That includes a bonus of \$4,000 from GlobalGiving. To achieve this in only 24 hours is amazing. We are still trying to take it all in! It will give us a boost at the end of what has been a challenging year and keep us running our boarding houses with confidence.

And what a year it has been! No one could have foreseen a global pandemic, and EFA certainly didn't envisage a time when we had to close our boarding houses, however the support we have received at a time when everyone is facing many challenges has been deeply inspiring.

Thanks to all of you, we were able to support the girls during 3 months of lockdown with the help of devices which we fundraised for in June and September. And finally we opened the houses safely again this October.