

KASBAH DU TOUBKAL

MOROCCO'S PREMIER
MOUNTAIN RETREAT

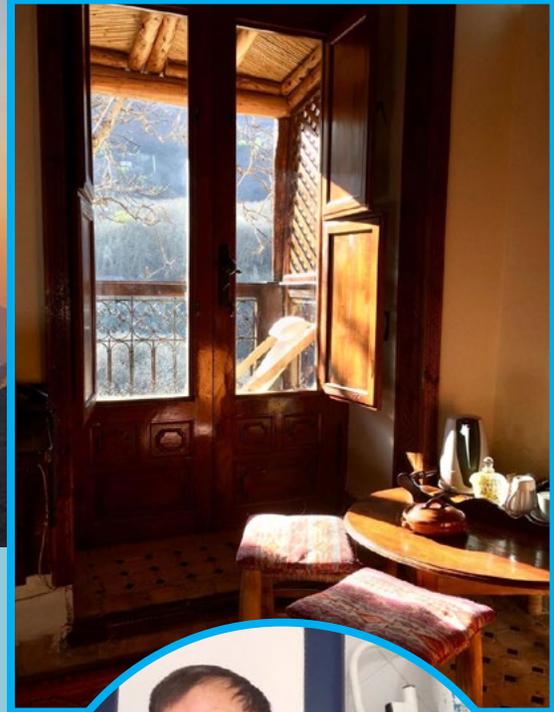
Morocco's king kicks off country's virus vaccination



Morocco is the first African country to begin vaccinations for COVID-19, with His Highness King Mohammed VI being the first person in the country to receive a vaccination, setting the tone for a national campaign that aims to protect 80 percent of the population. Localised vaccination centres and high public acceptance of the importance of the vaccination for both individuals and the community will ensure a rapid rollout throughout the country.

Vaccinations began in Imilil on 15th February, with two of the first recipients being Hajj Maurice and his wife Hajjah Arkia from Kasbah du Toubkal. The first phase of inoculations is for people over 65, followed by those in the age group 55+. Within the next two to three months, everyone in the region over the age of seventeen will receive a vaccination, ensuring the safety of both the local population and our guests.

We look forward to welcoming you to the High Atlas Mountains and Kasbah du Toubkal when the skies open once again.



Hajj Maurice gets his jab

Our Cancellation Policy – COVID pandemic:

- (i) Up to 90 days before departure for reasons related to COVID pandemic, you may postpone your stay with no penalty, and receive a credit note valid for 12 months.
- (ii) If Morocco is closed or your Country Of Departure is closed on or up to 21 days before your departure date due to COVID you may have a credit note valid for 12 months or a full refund.

(Download the full document [HERE](#))

**For more information contact
bookings@discover.ltd.uk
+44 (0)1883 744667**

A Journey into Sustainable Tourism

Leaving school at eighteen, Aine Donnellan had no idea what she wanted to do, other than travel. Six years later she's still travelling, but this time her focus is on sustainable tourism and its impact in Morocco

At twenty-four, I have worked in, lived in, or visited, twenty-nine countries, which has made me acutely aware of the double-edged sword that is mass-tourism. On the one hand, tourism is a key-driver for socio-economic development in many lower-tier countries, it has increased our collective environmental awareness and is the source of innumerable happy holiday memories. On the other, it has caused environmental damage on both a local and global scale, leading, in some cases, to the decline of living standards for local communities, and has turned many cultures into commodities. Witnessing its many layers, I became fascinated by the impact tourism was having on all those involved; the tourists, the hosts, the environment, the economy, the country, the culture, the language - the list goes on.

When I began the final year of my Bachelor Degree in Journalism at Stirling University in Scotland, I was asked to choose a project to write about on any topic of my liking. The choice was easy: I was to explore sustainable tourism in Morocco, a country becoming known for developing such practices.

The majestic Kasbah Du Toubkal was the first example that came up as I began my research. Anyone who has visited the Kasbah or read about it will know that since the moment its doors opened a quarter of a century ago, its whole premise has been based on such practices, long before the phrase 'sustainable tourism' was even thought of. As Mike McHugo, joint owner and founder of the Kasbah, says, "The main aim is, and has always been, to be a good neighbour - it all comes down to common sense to me."

Before arriving in Morocco, I believed it to be a focus on the environmental impact of tourism; of eco-buildings and organic operations. But seeing the impact the Kasbah has on

its local community made me realize it runs deeper than that. It also entails a sustainable relationship between guest and host - a win-win situation.

This realization was soon to be echoed in the other sustainable tourism projects that I encountered, one such being Pikala Bikes; a Marrakech-based not-for-profit organization aiming to better the world through bicycles.

"The initiative is based on four main pillars," explains Khaoula El Haidi, Project Manager at Pikala, "Environment, youth employment, education and eco-tourism. It runs itself, by itself; we all do our part in helping it grow - and in turn, it helps us do the same."

Khaoula explains that she owes a lot to the project, which she joined three years ago fresh out of university, "clueless, and jobless." It has allowed her to meet people from across the world, given her a true purpose, and her vision is for Pikala to eventually conquer all of Morocco.

Set up by a Dutch expat named Cantal Bakker, Pikala - Moroccan street language for bike - runs a number of projects with social and environmental benefits, including bike-tours, workshops, cycling classes and educational initiatives. Although many of them have been put on hold due to COVID, the Pikala team are still eagerly at work. Each week since the outbreak of the virus, they have been working with local cafes to distribute over 250 food packages to people in need. Additionally, they have been touring schools on a



Aine Donnellan



Allae Hammioui, Djebli Club

mission to spread awareness about COVID-safe living, along with covering other health related topics. Another inspiring project I encountered during my trip is Djebli Club, a participatory hostel created by Moroccan-born Allae Hammioui. Having guests pay for their accommodation with knowledge rather than cash is seeing a diverse influx of artists to the area, paving the way for social change in the rural village of Moqrisset, where Djebli Club is located.

“We invite people with a variety of skills to devote a few hours per day to workshops for the local community,” explains Allae, who is aiming to empower the younger generation through art and education while at the same time putting Moqrisset on the map. Allae inherited the land the eco-hostel sits on from his father, and returning home after five years of living in Paris, he set to work. Building by hand, with the help of volunteers, he is crystalizing his vision at a sustainable pace. Although it took a while, Allae has by now earned the trust of nearby schools, allowing for exciting projects to take hold amongst them.

I was also able to spend time at Bab Zouina, an organic farm/retreat-center near Ourika Valley at the foot of the Atlas Mountains. It is run by Karim Zein, a German-Lebanese yogi who worked with sustainable development across Africa and the Arab world for fifteen years prior to Bab Zouina.

“I grew tired of the bureaucratic practices of the sector and decided to go grassroots instead,” explains Karim, who is heavily involved in all aspects of his sustainable business. Hiring only local staff, building all eco-friendly facilities by hand, serving home-grown food and hosting holistic retreats, Bab Zouina is a prime example of how to operate sustainable tourism. “Thanks to Bab Zouina, I’ve been able to put my kids through school,” explains Aisha Ait Hammou, the establishment’s talented head chef.

Many local children also attend the additional schooling set up by Karim in collaboration with the local village association of Douar Sbiti; their parents’ experience reflecting that of Aisha. Her son, Ayoub



Hélène Goarzin and Karim Zein of Bab Zouina

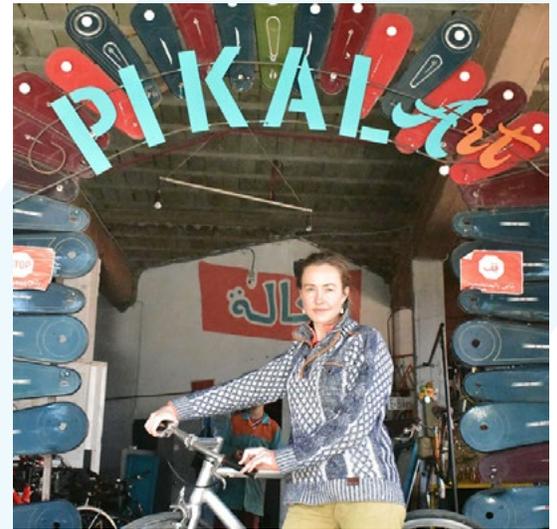
Boutgayout, who’s in his first year of a Physics Degree at Cadi Ayyad University in Marrakech, works extra hours in the garden.

“This place is like my second home, we’re all like family here,” he says. It appears this genuine focus on community - both internally through their

operation and externally through their impact - is what all these projects have in common. Seemingly, that is the secret ingredient for a sustainably run touristic project.

There are of course many other, less romantic factors at play too - such as keeping on top of social media and providing competitive rates. For any business to be sustainable, it needs to be able to do just that; sustain itself and those involved. As Mike McHugo, inspired by the Dalai Lama, puts it, “It is better to be good selfish, than bad selfish.”

The question of what is good and bad is in a category all by itself. Applied to the present-day situation with COVID-19, the halt of travel and the impact that has had on Morocco, different people have different replies; Allae is grateful for the break it’s given him; Pikala would argue for the opposite, having handed out food to the many left starving on the streets. In a similar manner, the question of what sustainable tourism actually is remains unanswered this far into my research, and I am pretty certain I will not be much closer to an answer once it draws to a close either. Because the truth is, there is no definite answer, only various attempts of finding one, but if projects contain the secret ingredient of community they might be heading in the right direction.

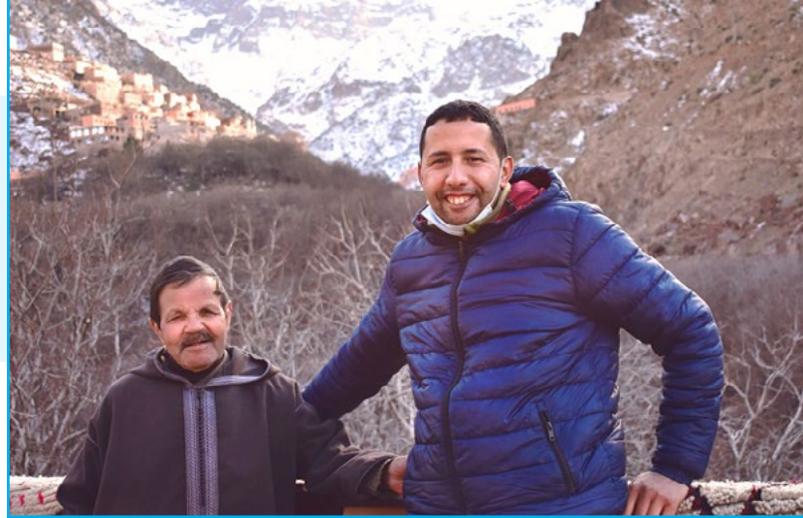


Cantal Bakker of Pikala Bikes

Click on logo for info.



The Corona View From Imlil



Hajj Maurice and Lahcen Igdem

Image: Aine Donnellan

Many readers will know Lahcen Igdem, one of the smiling faces that welcome you when you arrive at the Kasbah. As a young man in his early thirties, it will be a while before he gets inoculated against COVID-19, but what is the reaction of people in Imlil about getting the vaccination? “The general feeling of people getting a vaccination in Imlil is for the safety and good care of their health because of this crazy virus that infected the whole world, but like for most people in the world, what happened in the last year has had a major effect on our lives. Many of us are facing challenges that can be stressful, overwhelming, and cause strong emotions in adults and children. Public health actions, such as social distancing, are necessary to reduce the spread of COVID-19, but they can make us feel isolated and lonely and can increase stress and anxiety. We are learning to cope with stress in a healthy way, which will make ourselves, the people we care about, and those around us become more resilient.”

Despite its popularity as a tourist area, like many mountain villages in the High Atlas, Imlil is quite a small and close community, affected as much by the lives of those around them as the immediate limitations of the pandemic. As with many communities worldwide, loss of contact through their faith is having a strong effect. “As a strongly Muslim community we feel unhappy with losing the daily five prayers at the mosque and celebrating Ramadan and feasts in different ways than usual. Many people have feelings of fear, anger, sadness, worry, numbness, or frustration; some people are worried to lose their families during this pandemic, others about the worsening situation of many people lost their jobs. A number of people from the villages are showing physical reactions, such as headaches, body pains, stomach problems, and a few others are experiencing changes in appetite, energy, and interests and perhaps having difficulty concentrating and making decisions. But it is natural to feel stress, anxiety, grief, and worry during the

COVID-19 pandemic.”

Even a small community like Imlil and the surrounding villages can feel the same sense of loss and frustration as Marrakech, London or Paris, but with the natural inclination towards sharing and caring of the Berber people they are perhaps more emotionally able to see their way through the pandemic that is changing so much of the world that we once knew.

“We have been looking after each other here in the high Atlas Mountains and respecting the rules the government has provided for the safety of each other, especially the old people. As you know we have our Islamic religion, and as a part of our culture we have to help each other as much as possible.”

The media reports almost hourly on reactions worldwide to the pandemic, but rarely from small mountain villages where the personal is usually more important than the global. How has the experience affected Lahcen?

“We hear a lot about the negative side of the virus, and that also has affected us here in Imlil. Some of my friends have died and I haven’t been able to visit others who are ill, or even my family who don’t live nearby. It’s sad to see so many people struggling about the virus and without job or income. But also there has been a positive side. I’ve been able to spend more time with my wife, Bahija, and my eighteen-month-old son, Mohamed, and my close family. Even during these times I have experienced a feeling of freedom from any kind of stress and work.

“I have learned many things from it and we must be aware that one day it might again happen. It has affected our business in general, especially the tourism industry and we must not rely so much on this business in the future anymore.”

COVID-19 VACCINATIONS IN MOROCCO 9 March: over 4 MILLION
No1 in Africa with 94% of all vaccinations given on the continent;
more than any European country except the UK.

(Source: Financial Times)

UNESCO adds couscous to list of intangible world heritage

A momentous day for world diplomacy as Morocco, Algeria celebrate addition of dish to UN cultural agency's coveted list.

Couscous, the Berber dish beloved across northern Africa's Maghreb region and beyond, Wednesday joined the UN list of the world's intangible cultural heritage.

The countries that submitted the listing to UNESCO -- Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and Mauritania -- may have their differences, but their common love of the staple grain runs deep.

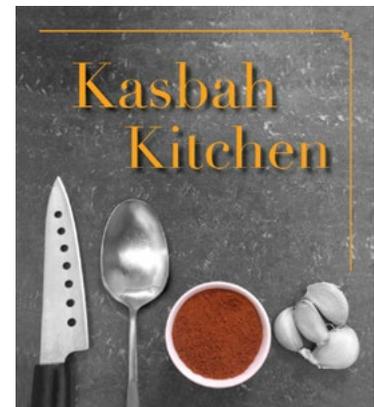
"Couscous, present at every social or cultural event, is at once ordinary and special," their joint presentation argued.

"Ordinary because of the frequency of its use in a family setting, and special because of the unifying and propitiatory role it plays at convivial community occasions at which food is shared."

"Moroccans are crazy about couscous and even children love it," said Moroccan restaurant owner Hicham Hazzoum. "It shows that the couscous flame will never go out."



Read the full story [HERE](#), but if you can't wait until your next visit to Morocco to sample couscous, you can make it yourself at home from a simple recipe created in the Kasbah's own kitchen. Click on the cover image for a free download.



Cook with a master! The girls from EFA will be taking part in a zoom cooking class with a celebrity chef in March - date TBA. Follow them on [Instagram](#) to find out more.

*Making leather goods from fish waste?
Click on the image to find out more*



In The Media



BROGAN ABROAD



The world's most remote hotels

Only 40 miles from Marrakesh, Kasbah du Toubkal has an otherworldly setting perched on a hilltop in the High Atlas Mountains.

A Berber Hospitality Centre

for trekking the Atlas Mountains near Marrakech

15 of the World's Most Beautiful Mosques

Solo Female Travel: Experiencing Moroccan Tourism During COVID-19

A beautifully-written article by Aine Donnellan instills confidence for any single women who would like to discover this delightful country.



LATIFA ALIZA, MOROCCO

The housemother bringing girls closer to school

Latifa Aliza, Senior Housemother at Education For All was chosen by Condé Nast Traveller as one of the changemakers whose work is made possible by hotels and travel companies advocating the education of women.

Marrakech to Host 24th General Assembly of World Tourism Organization



7 Best Day Trips from Marrakesh - Which of course includes Imlil!



2021 Green Future Index: Morocco Best Country in MENA, 2nd in Africa



(Click on image for article)



Discover Morocco Online

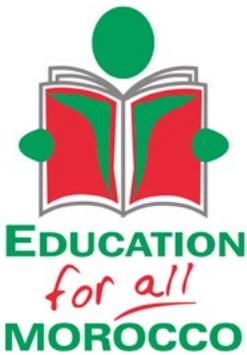
Welcome to Discover Morocco Online, a new set of teaching resources aimed to support the study of key geographical themes at GCSE and A level. In launching Discover Morocco Online, we are focusing on three key geographical topics for which Morocco provides an excellent country case study: Hot Deserts, Development and Resources. We intend to add to these in the forthcoming months.

Written by experienced authors Simon Ross and Andy Phillips, the resources have been deliberately created as 'ready-to-go' units to support both classroom and home learning.

The resources comprise richly illustrated and informative Powerpoint presentations together with student

worksheets, which can be printed or completed electronically. The Powerpoint presentations provide students with a topic overview and the worksheets enable students to create a written summary through a range of engaging - often skills-driven - activities. Additional resources within each topic folder include posters, extension articles, reports and videos. While the content is aimed mainly at young adult students, it is also useful for anyone hoping to visit Morocco when restrictions are lifted, and those not already studying the subject but would like to know more about this delightful country.

We hope that you find these resources interesting, inspiring and engaging. *(Click on the logo to download)*



KOMERA

Self Confidence, One Girl at a Time.

On Valentines Day the students of EFA joined the Sisterhood Valentine's Day Yoga class, hosted by Komera, a group of Rwandan women trained as yoga teachers as part of Souljourn Yoga's *On the Ground Teacher Training*, with participants from UK, USA, Sweden and Morocco. The event was the first stage of a week-long programme of yoga classes offered by Komera to the 200+ EFA girls. The power of these young women coming together will have mutual benefits beyond the yoga mat, creating networks and conversations of support and sisterhood.

For more information about the training, click on the Komera logo, and to find out more about the work of Souljourn, click on their logo.

