

# kasbahdutoubkal

MOROCCO'S PREMIER MOUNTAIN RETREAT

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## TREES FOR LIFE

*The juniper tree, the indiginous tree of the High Atlas Mountains is in peril; Kasbah du Toubkal steps in to help it survive.*



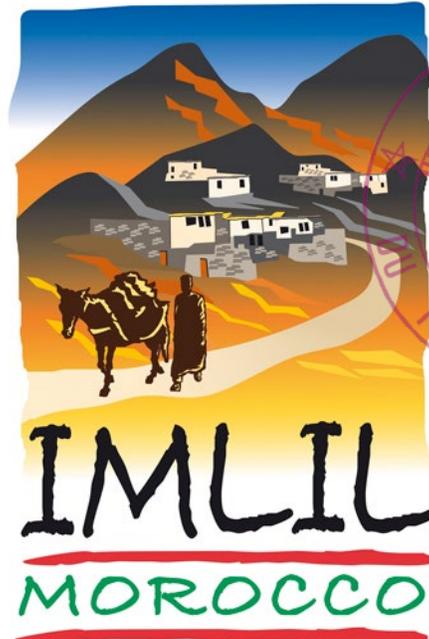
## NAMASTE!

*Interest in Yoga is on the rise in Morocco, but most retreats tend to import European trainers. Jordan Ashley is determined to change that*



## YOUR OWN KASBAH BUBBLE

*As Autumn arrives you can enjoy a visit to Kasbah du Toubkal, safe in the knowledge that everything possible has been done to make your stay safe and secure.*



# KASBAH BUBBLE

## *SPECIAL OFFER – INCLUSIVE 3 NIGHT STAY*



**No requirement for PCR test  
when you return to the England  
if fully vaccinated**

As the British government eases the reins on international travel, there's still time to enjoy the colours and comfort of the High Atlas Mountains and Kasbah du Toubkal as we stroll through Autumn.

To enable you to enjoy a short holiday abroad, while still feeling safe in the knowledge that as much as possible is being taken care of to help you relax in a secure environment, we have created the Kasbah Bubble, a short-stay, but long in pleasure and relaxation – everything from walks in the mountains, lounging on our roof terraces, a steaming hammam, and, of course our excellent Moroccan country cuisine, enjoyed in the candle-lit cosiness of our restaurant. We'll pick you up at Marrakech Airport and drop you back there in plenty of time for your flight. If you are staying in Marrakech, we can collect you from your hotel if you prefer.

Sat on a hill-top above the village of Imlil, with the only access being on mule or by foot, Kasbah du Toubkal is, by its position alone, a venue with a lower risk of possible infection. Most of our rooms are effectively stand-alone rooms in the gardens, and with the majority of them having windows on more than one side there is a free flow of fresh air, negating the need for air-conditioning. Surrounded by beautiful countryside, the Kasbah has spacious gardens and plenty of open areas where guests can remain in their own social group or relax individually.

As part of our commitment to safety, we brought in external auditors to run a course for our staff, 97% of whom have so far been vaccinated, to train them in how to minimize the risk of spreading Covid-19, and assist us in preparing protocols to deal with the current situation and beyond. Kasbah du Toubkal was one of the first hotels to be recognised by the Ministry of Tourism, fulfilling the Covid protocols in their Welcome Safely to Morocco program. We continue to monitor the situation, ensuring we do everything possible to create a safe, secure and enjoyable experience for guests.

## KASBAH BUBBLE

**This special offer is based on two people sharing a twin/double standard room at Kasbah du Toubkal for three nights on a full board basis, for stays before 20 December 2021.**

### ***The price includes:***

Pick up and return to Marrakech hotel or airport.

Double/twin ensuite standard room

Full board (with option of a local mountain walk and picnic lunch on one day included)

Cost per person: €427 (based on minimum two people sharing a room)

Single supplement: €275

Extra days: €113 per person (based on two people sharing)

Single €205

Treks to our mountain lodge in the Azzeden Valley can also be arranged at booking stage at extra cost.

**[bookings@discover.ltd.uk](mailto:bookings@discover.ltd.uk)/Tel+44 (0)1883 744667**



 **ABTA**  
Travel with confidence

# TREES FOR LIFE

A **carbon footprint** is defined as the total amount of greenhouse gases that are generated by our actions. Food, meat in particular, is a major contributor to carbon footprints, with one kilogram of beef having the same amount of emissions as driving your car about 160 miles. While no-one is telling you to forgo your weekly burger, the carbon footprint created by travel, especially by air, is the *cause célèbre* of the carbon footprint world.

The idea of commercial airplanes powered by electricity or hydrogen is the stuff of sci-fi and a weekend on the moon, and while the answer to the problem will need to be



resolved eventually, what can be done at either end of that holiday flight to somehow offset its carbon footprint?

Toward the end of 2019, Mike McHugo and

like-minded others involved with Kasbah du Toubkal were trying to think about what they should be doing within their own environment that might help in some way.

"I believe that any business has to be aware of changes in approaches to sustainability, especially the tourism business because so much of travel creates a major carbon footprint, a phrase that nobody had even heard of when we built the Kasbah."

Before Covid, the group were always looking for ways of improving the experience for the guests, and had planned to do a study on what a guest's carbon footprint was at the Kasbah, which most likely was infinitely less than them living at home, because once

they arrive in Imlil everything's done by walking. Someone came up with the idea of planting trees, so in February 2020 they



met with the Director of Toubkal National Park to discuss the matter, and were surprised by the level of enthusiasm shown. If you go trekking from the Kasbah to the Azzaden Valley, on the high plateau where you have your picnic you will see juniper trees, but they are very old and grow very slowly. Working with the National Park authorities and Fabrice Couzan, a very experienced local botanist and ornithologist, the idea was to set aside a piece of land beside the Kasbah to create a nursery for juniper trees, the trees you see high up in the mountains. The juniper is the indigenous tree of the High Atlas, but is in serious decline because it is very difficult to propagate, which is probably why it's in decline. You don't need a lot of land when you are growing seedlings, and once sufficiently developed, National Park staff would have planted them out in the mountains.

But as the saying goes, 'Man plans, God smiles'; along came Covid and any thought of tree planting was shelved.

"We had been looking into an organisation called the High Atlas Foundation that plant trees," says Mike. "In particular, they help people in rural communities to plant trees that obviously help them economically; walnut trees, olive, fig, and so on. They



have nurseries in the Azzaden Valley, which is where we have our trekking lodge, and it seemed a great idea if we could work with them, not only to help reduce our carbon footprint and provide economic help to the communities in the area, but also show guests how their carbon footprint is being offset, and perhaps in some way even get them involved, rather than just ticking off a box to show where it was going."

In July of this year Mike visited one of the nurseries with Yossef Ben Meir President and founder of High Atlas Foundation, where ladies from a local women's association are employed to look after the trees. When ready for transplanting the trees are sold to farmers at reduced prices to help them be economically viable.

"It was very interesting to see the nurseries and to see how we could work together, but what was an equal pleasure, was to see that

two of the girls who had been with Education For All were working there as part of the women's association," commented Mike. "We tend to hear more about the EFA girls who have gone to university, and obviously we are very proud of them, but we're equally proud of the girls who have gone back to their villages and taken their education and skills with them. In many ways, these are our young advocates, examples of how a girl can develop but still want to go back to her home. Seeing the girls working with the trees was a nice circular story."

Future plans for the Kasbah are to move toward carbon neutrality whilst visitors are staying there, but it's a five or ten year journey establishing these projects.

"We can't personally offset the carbon footprint of a flight full of holidaymakers, but we can try to do our best to link a guest's stay to that offset, and physically show how it works in tandem with helping the economic activity of the whole area."

High Atlas Foundation

مؤسسة الأطلس الكبير

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The High Atlas Foundation was founded in 2000 by former Peace Corps Volunteers committed to furthering sustainable development. As well as programmes for health, education and women's and youth empowerment, it is a leader in sustainable agriculture in Morocco, specialising in nurseries of fruit trees and wild medicinal plants, irrigation infrastructure and efficiency, organic certification, technical skills-building, carbon sequestration, and commercialisation, and is dedicated to local initiatives that community beneficiaries determine and manage. HAF has eleven fruit tree nurseries in Morocco with nine types of trees, planting 1.3 million seeds a year.

**GROWING 10 MILLION FRUIT TREES  
BY 2025, WITH 50,000 FARMING FAMILIES  
IN MOROCCO**



# NAMASTE!

*Interest in Yoga is on the rise in Morocco, but most retreats tend to import European trainers. Jordan Ashley is determined to change that*

Originating in India, during the four thousand year history of yoga it's said that only in the last fifty that women have been allowed to practice the art and exercise form. But if you consider yoga to be more than simply postures, but also includes chanting, ecstatic dance and meditation – all part of the yoga tradition – women have been practicing for a very long time.

Yoga as a practice is becoming popular in Morocco, and with the beauty of the countryside and friendliness of the people, the Kingdom is becoming increasingly important as a place to hold yoga retreats. In 2017, Jordan Ashley held her first Souljourn Yoga retreat at Kasbah du Toubkal, but her retreats go far beyond simply spending a few days of exercise and meditation.

simply spending a few days of exercise and meditation.

“Souljourn is a charity, and our aim is to use yoga as a vehicle for supporting girls' initiatives all over the world, which is how we connected with EFA. We work with

the local community and in partnership with the different

girl's organisations, and part of the way we do that is we include a \$300-500 donation per person that goes directly to our partner organisation.”

It would be easy to simply make a donation to EFA and consider it a job well done, but as part of her PhD dissertation, Ashley has created a course to train a group of EFA girls to be yoga teachers themselves, giving them the opportunity to take the skill into their own families and communities or, hopefully, provide them with a future income. But why specifically chose EFA?

“We've been involved in different kinds of fundraising or activities and workshops with EFA since 2017, so there's an already established rapport and relationship between the two organisations. I was very much interested in Morocco, especially the Berber community and the students of EFA for three reasons in particular. One, the women are between 16 and 18, which, in my opinion is a really vital time in terms of development, especially when planting ideas that can contribute to self-esteem and self-worth and empowerment as well. The second reason is to see if the different kinds of yoga can be culturally adapted to fit within a Muslim space and Muslim sphere. And then the last part is that the wellness industry is a billion dollar industry, and there's no reason why these young



# yoga

women can't commodify this practice and be able to teach it."

As a two-year programme it's a big commitment, both for the girls from EFA and for Jordan, especially as it also comes at an age when most of the girls will be studying for their final exams and possible entry into university. How will it run?

"Something I wish I'd been able to do when I worked in Rwanda was for the girls to actually learn yoga first instead of learning how to teach it. The plan for this programme is we're going to start off with zoom classes, which will be the girls just learning; what is yoga, what do the different shapes mean, what are the different breathing techniques, and meditation practices so they get familiar with all of the language that comes with it. For the second part, I'll be in Morocco next summer; I'll be teaching them how to teach yoga because they will have had several months of practice and of learning."

EFA is primarily based on the education of girls and their empowerment through education. Does Jordan see what Souljourn is doing as another element to run alongside that more formal study?

"I very much see this as non-formal education. This can be either supportive through higher or secondary education, be it learning

about themselves through the movement practices or the mediation, or it can be an education or a skill set that they're then able to benefit from financially. Something that drives me crazy is that so many different retreat centres or hotels or resorts literally import western yoga teachers. That's a disservice to their community and the women employed by them. Why do these women have to be cleaners or front-of-house? Not that there's anything wrong with that, but they could be making so much more money for themselves and their family and future generations, if they were given the opportunity to get a qualification."

Coming from a western tradition of yoga and about to spend two years researching how a small community of Muslim girls from remote villages of the High Atlas Mountains learn and develop over that time, how much is Jordan prepared to adapt what she thinks now, and what the structure of the training is in the process of doing it?

"All of it. I'm willing to throw all of this out the window and be completely surprised and challenged and I think that's what makes someone a good researcher. You have to be open to the possibility that your hypothesis is incorrect. It's not about right and wrong per se."

Explore. Practice. Give.  
**SOULJOURN YOGA**

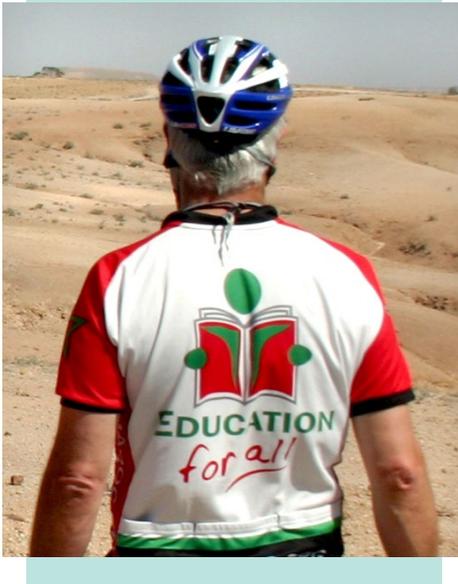


Souljourn Yoga, in association with Alma Retreats, has created a unique five-day Morocco Art + Yoga Adventure, supporting the work of Education For All, from March 30 – April 5, 2022.

*Further information*

***Plan your holiday - With Confidence!***

**[bookings@discover.ltd.uk](mailto:bookings@discover.ltd.uk)**



# WHO IS THIS MAN!

## Mike McHugo: A Pragmatic Pioneer of Sustainable Tourism

By Aine Donnellan

First published in



It would be stretching the point a bit to call Mike McHugo an enigma – you can't go far within Kasbah du Toubkal, Imlil or Education for All to hear his name crop up – but as ubiquitous as his name may be in these circles, not a lot is widely known about the man himself.

Okay, so he first went to Morocco in 1972, started Discover Ltd. in 1978, the company bought what was left of a local caid's mansion on the top of a hill above Imlil, which they opened as Kasbah du Toubkal five years later, was awarded an MBE, presented at the EFA boarding house by Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex. All this is widely known, but what of all the interesting stuff that doesn't get talked about?

Through a series of conversations with close friends and colleagues, most of whom have been at his side since his first foray into Morocco nearly fifty years ago, Aine Donnellan brings together the threads of Mike's early years in the Kingdom, his passion for sustainability and doggedness for ensuring that those who work alongside him share the benefits of Discover's success. Or as he prefers to call it, 'Being a good neighbour.' [\(Read the article HERE\)](#)

media



Time Magazine: Marrakech Among 'Top 100 Greatest Places of 2021'



16 Moroccan Airports Receive 'Airport Health Accreditation'

BROGAN ABROAD

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What Is Responsible Tourism And Why is It Important?

