

kasbahdutoubkal

MOROCCO'S PREMIER MOUNTAIN RETREAT

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Happy days are here again... ♪
or at least busier days!

When Mike McHugo arrived at Marrakech Airport in mid-September it was back to queues at immigration, although instead of the chaotic disruption for passengers arriving in the UK over the last few months, their counterparts arriving in Morocco were heading for happier times. "This was one time I was happy to stand in a line because it showed that people were coming back to Morocco on holiday in bigger numbers than we've seen for the last two years." The immediate evidence of this for Mike and everyone at Kasbah du Toubkal is that bookings are even higher than they were in October 2019. "It's all coming back for next year and 2023. The Kasbah, Marrakech and Morocco are booming."

Read on for the full story.

Marrakech Named World's Tenth Most Romantic City

Spices, labyrinthine markets, camel rides, snake charmers define the beauty of Marrakech, which is home to arguably the most romantic boutique hotels in the world, as well as the perfect setting for a romantic getaway. "The Red city offers 1001 nights of sensory pleasures to be shared with a special someone."

mlw LifeStyle



Marrakech Among Best Cities for Relocation Worldwide

Marrakech's blend of modern and ancient culture continues to attract tourists from across the world, including celebrities.

mlw

New Lonely Planet guide shines a light on Britain's hidden Muslim heritage

A new Lonely Planet guide to Great Britain features an entire chapter on the country's little-known Islamic heritage, which stretches back more than 1,200 years.

ARABNEWS



Chef Najat Kaanache Wins "Chef Pioneer" Award

In the early stages of her career, Kaanache worked as an actress before becoming a television cook and one of the most prestigious ambassadors of Moroccan cuisine.

mlw

6 Moroccan Super Spices That Boost Your Health

While many of the colourful spices you see in every Moroccan market are regarded as essential ingredients in the kitchen, some are surprisingly beneficial to your health.

the spruceEats



Morocco to distribute surplus food to UK charity

Britain's leading Charity aimed at tackling food poverty and waste, *FareShare* has reached an agreement with the Moroccan government to redistribute surplus food from Moroccan businesses trading in the country.

MEMO
MIDDLE EAST MONITOR

kasbahdutoubkal

Pure A Pure Experience

LIFE EXPERIENCES

“It's all coming back for next year and 2023. The Kasbah, Marrakech and Morocco are booming!”

Those may seem like brave words after the desperate times of Covid 19, but Mike McHugo has the numbers to prove it, especially where Kasbah du Toubkal is concerned.

“Every room at the Kasbah is booked for the whole of October this year, more than we saw even in October 2019. National Geographic in particular, our largest group booking client, are booking well into the future. They know that with small hotels like the Kasbah they have to book very early if they want most or all of the rooms for specific dates so they've already confirmed block bookings for the whole hotel for 2023 and are reserving for 2024. School trips are coming back. We'll have run five or six by the end of the season, which is more than we ever would have expected. They are booking heavily for 2023. Most people didn't expect school bookings in 2022 and they are all getting very keen. We're running an inspection trip for teachers in November and that's full. It's been very well received. School trips are coming back as a force.”

Group bookings are obviously an important part of any travel company or hotels' survival, but how does he see individual or small group travel developing?

“What we are seeing more of now is that visitors are taking slightly longer trips, one or two longer ones a year instead of several shorter ones, with people looking at their carbon footprint a bit more. It's not vast at the moment, and it was probably going to happen anyway despite Covid, but I think it will carry on.

“Morocco has an advantage because of its geographic location. It's only a three-hour flight from London and a two-hour flight from Marseille, and there are plenty of direct flights from throughout Europe. There are even direct flights from Tel Aviv, so Jewish tourism, heritage tourism is on the increase.”

A PURE Experience

Held annually in Marrakech, PURE Life Experiences is the global marketplace for the high-end experiential travel industry, but like many events associated with travel and tourism, it was cancelled during the pandemic of 2020 and 2021. So what was the reaction to finally be able to get back to Marrakech?

“As the major event worldwide for the international luxury travel market it's very important and Morocco gains a lot of kudos by it being held in Marrakech.

Most people were just happy to be travelling again. Pure gets a lot of people from Australia and New Zealand, which have suffered more than others because of the long lockdowns, so everyone was really buoyant. “Some of the travel agents walking the floor and looking at the stands have never been to Morocco and are generally wowed when they experience it. We've chatted to a number of people who are thinking about including it as a new destination in their programmes. Sometimes they get enquiries from clients about Morocco in general, and by attending Pure and meeting specialists in the country as well as the events surrounding it they are able to go back and speak more knowledgeable about Morocco as a destination.”

But Pure is more than just a travel fair, it's a major social event in the travel professional's calendar, with dinners, parties and excursions giving clients from all corners of the globe a chance to meet, talk and schmooze, chatting about new ideas and destinations. The Kasbah makes good use of the socialising element by holding a pre- and post-event lunch at the Kasbah, where attendees at Pure can take a day trip away from the clamour of the city to the peace and quiet of the High Atlas Mountains. Inevitably they leave with fond memories of the Berber Hospitality Centre and the warmth of the Berber people who run it.

“Pure gets a lot of press attention and this year we put on a press trip with EFA to take them for a walk to show them one of the boarding houses, co-hosted by Royal Mansour, the King's posh hotel. The reaction was excellent. The journalists loved it and said it was the best thing they've done for a long time and the most interesting thing they'd done during Pure.”



Morocco Approaches Pre-Pandemic Tourism Revenues

**Do you have an idea for an event
or training programme?**

Kasbah du Toubkal has a wide range of spaces, facilities and equipment to suit most needs. To find out more contact:

bookings@discover.ltd.uk

Tel. +44 (0)1883 744667

'Sustainable'; 'Responsible' - or just greenwashing?

Visitors to Kasbah du Toubkal will know of its total commitment to sustainable and responsible tourism since it opened its doors twenty-six years ago. It's probably best known for the five per cent surcharge added to every guest's bill on a 'don't pay, don't stay basis' that formed the groundwork of community funding for local projects, most especially Education For All, a programme that builds and runs boarding house accommodation near secondary schools to encourage girls from remote villages in the High Atlas to continue their education. Now in its twelfth year, EFA is recognised as the leader in its field in Morocco.

Sustainable and responsible tourism is more than

simply giving young girls from mountain villages the opportunity to improve their future, but what exactly is it? It seems that despite the bandying about of both phrases in gaudily fancy advertising and videos, no-one seems able to agree exactly what it is.

Widely recognised as one of the top travel writers in South-East Asia, Stuart McDonald has spent almost thirty years watching the world of travel change, and not always for the better. In this edited version of an article from his regular newsletter at *Travelfish* he gives his thoughts about sustainable travel in his region, thoughts that would probably be echoed by many travel writers worldwide. Click [HERE](#) for the full version.



'Nice Tourism': Some thoughts on sustainable tourism

by Stuart McDonald

The roots of sustainable tourism lie in sustainable development, a term coined by the Brundtland Commission. This was then adapted for tourism. There is, by the way, no broad-based consensus on what sustainable tourism is. Don't tell that to any tourism minister.

Brundtland, defining sustainable development, states:

"... development that meets the needs to the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

Sustainable tourism slogans are everywhere and an army of consultants butter their bread with it. Yet, there is no broad agreement on what it actually means. Within an industry awash in greenwashing and fantasy peddling, yet another meaningless slogan feels almost normal—I'm surprised it isn't called "nice tourism."

Only the most delusional could look at tourism's state pre-pandemic and not feel alarm. Be it overtourism, environmental degradation, crime or cultural offensiveness, tourism has it all. Who wouldn't want a better form of tourism? This is to say, the goal of the whole undertaking feels admirable—if only I knew what it meant.

The phrase sustainable tourism has been around for over 30 years, yet a clear definition is yet to emerge. Why? It is impossible to define, that's why. Put aside the simple differences around geography (the where), and start with for whom. Sustainable for the resort developer or the family-run bungalow? For the community activist or the politician? For the tax-man or the environmentalist? For the traveller or the local? For the economy or the planet? Being sustainable is a balancing act. One needs to balance the needs of all the above (and a bunch of others) and hope to still make a buck.

It is common for hotels today to stop using single use plastic. This is good for the planet, and they'd argue it is a practice supporting them being a sustainable oper-

ator. That they have one hundred private pool villas out back doesn't enter into the equation. Sustainable tourism needs to take a holistic view—it needs to encompass all aspects of the business.

Net-zero pledges almost always only concern hotel operations. "Removing" residents then carving a scar in the earth and building the joint in the first place doesn't count. This is of course complete garbage. If a hotel wants to claim sustainability, of course its construction needs to be in the equation. Operations should not be Net-zero, they should be Net-Negative. Set a prescribed period of say ten or twenty years to negative out the build out. If that makes the project unfeasible from an economic point of view, then don't build the bloody thing.

There are plenty of easy ways to make a tourism business "more sustainable." There's engaging with the local community in a mutually beneficial manner. There's paying staff well and under good conditions. There's not using single use plastic or low energy lightbulbs. There's using locally supplied food and not importing goodies from the motherland. These are all steps in the right direction and plenty of hotels do these and much more. That doesn't though, make these steps enough, and it sure doesn't make these properties examples of sustainable tourism.

After all, these sort of steps should be a normal part of business—most of them will save the property money. Is it even possible to buy a high energy lightbulb anymore? Why is it noteworthy for a hotel to undertake a beach cleanup? Could the bar be lower? The planet is on fire and we're awarding accolades for using bamboo straws. It seems a bit much.

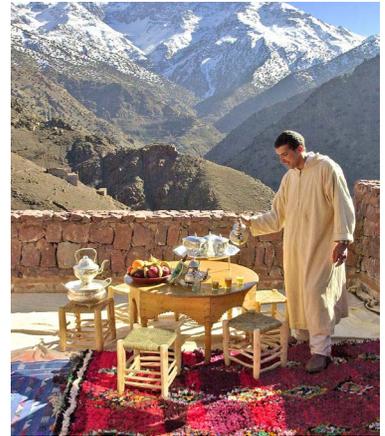
In my view, unless applied in a holistic manner, sustainable tourism is an oxymoron. Even if one wanted to, one can't be sustainable for everyone. One can't equally prioritise people, planet and profit all in the same breath—it's a fool's errand. One can work hard to be "more sustainable," and that's a start—I'm just not sure it needs a round of applause.

25 of the world's greatest hikes — with stylish stays

19. High Atlas, Morocco

The eco-luxe Kasbah du Toubkal has long been a top choice for high-end hikers wanting to explore the Atlas Mountains. It still is, but Millis Potter Travel's new self-guided Morocco trip looks further afield too. It starts with a trek through the little-visited Ouirgane Valley (staying at lovely Domaine Malika), before continuing to remote Azzaden Lodge and then on to Kasbah du Toubkal itself.

It's six in the evening, the time of the paseo, and I sit on a rock on the edge of Aït Aïssa, a mud-brick village clinging to the hillside, the next but last in the Azzaden Valley before the road comes to a dead end at Tizi Oussems. One way in, one way out. Much of the vegetables sold in local markets are grown here; potatoes, onions, cherries, apples, some of which will appear in the meal I'll be eating at Kasbah du Toubkal's trekking lodge, a mini version of the Berber comfort of the Kasbah in Imlil.



Behind me is a five-hour trek from the Kasbah during which my guide, Abdeslam Maachou, a young man who has an encyclopaedic knowledge of the flora and fauna of the area despite his youthful age, has kept me entertained and informed.

On our climb we were accompanied by the insistent clatter of cicadas that retreated into a stony silence as we approached. The air was so crystal clear that I felt as if I could touch the other side of the valley. Stoically climbing with us was Brahim and his mule, and when I ask why he sometimes rides cowboy style, legs either side of the animal, and sometimes side-saddle, he explains that he rides side-saddle on the rockier slopes so that if his mule takes an unexpected tumble he can get off quicker. Good thinking when your livelihood depends on a good pair of legs.

Tomorrow we return to Kasbah over Tizi Oudid, at 2219 metres, but before that I have the pleasure of a chicken tajine to look forward to and a night of silence and twinkling stars. DW

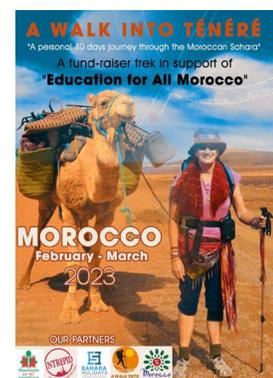
A Gathering of Friends

We have always been immensely proud of the number of people who revisit Kasbah du Toubkal, sometimes on a regular basis. Their love of being here is reflected in their heart-warming comments. As a small thank you we are creating a programme for a five-day stay at the Kasbah where each day's entertainment is free for you to enjoy, either as regular guests or as a way to meet other, like-minded people who have appreciated the Kasbah's special ambience over the years. We're working on the programme now, which might include trekking, yoga, days out to discover the beauty of the High Atlas, and much more. Given the sudden blossoming of tourism in Morocco, we haven't finalised dates yet, although we plan for early 2023. If you would like to be kept up to date with details – without any firm commitment on your part – please contact us by the link below. Numbers will be limited so it will be on a first-come-first-served basis. We look forward to hearing from you.

Tel +44 (0)1883 744667
email: bookings@discover.ltd.uk

Linda's Sahara Trek

In 2020, South African Linda Ricketts worked as a volunteer English teacher with Education For All. Her close contact with the young girls from remote villages, eager to study, develop and be a



credit to their communities and country instilled in her that each Moroccan village girl deserves the education she needs to escape a lifecycle of poverty, marrying too young, and having zero opportunities in life.

Fortunately for Linda, she is able to combine her wish to give back to an organisation that has been very good to her in the past, as a volunteer, with her dream to trek 500km through the Moroccan Sahara Desert, by using her once-in-a-lifetime adventure as a fundraiser for cause so dear to her heart. Click on the image to read more about Linda's trek, *A Walk Into Ténéré*.

A Moroccan winery bringing the flavours of the Rhone Valley to North Africa

"I was not aware that wine was served in Morocco until I sat down for dinner at Umia, one of Essaouira's upmarket restaurants. This is where my journey into Moroccan wine began."



Moroccan Wines

Despite the word 'alcohol' being derived from the Arabic *al-kohl*, it comes as a surprise to many people to hear that Morocco, a Muslim country, produces wine, but wine has been made in North Africa for least 2,500 years, since the Phoenicians colonized its coast around the 12th century BC. During the Roman Empire, wines were exported to Rome, and it's said that in the 9th century, the country's first Arab dynasty gave a dispensation to make wine to the Berber tribes around Meknes.

The immigration of French winegrowers in 1880, plagued by the Phylloxera blight that devastated French vineyards, brought about a rebirth and expansion of Morocco's vineyards, and during the years as a French protectorate in the first half of the 20th century, wine production blossomed in Morocco, most of it produced on the sunny plateau around Meknes. At its peak in the 1950s the country was producing 300 million litres of wine, powerful stuff known as *vins médicins*, wine used to fortify weaker French wines. When Morocco became independent in 1956 the wine industry collapsed and the country lost most of its winemaking expertise, its consumers and its main export market. A limited production continued and developed in the 1990s, and when the European Union banned blending wine from production outside the EU, Morocco turned to creating its own labels.

Morocco is one of the biggest wine producers in the Muslim world, employing about 10,000 people, and even though its production may have fallen to almost a tenth of its output during its heyday of the 1950s, it still produces around 40 million bottles each year. Red wine dominates, with over 75% of production; rosé wines and *vin gris* account for almost 20%, and white wine for the remaining five per cent. *Vin gris* is given the name because its colour falls between white and rosé. It is primarily made from pinot noir, a black grape that can also be used to make rosé or white wine. When the grapes are brought to the winery and crushed, the juice is run off and removed from contact with the skin, leaving the

colour and flavour compounds from the skin behind. The majority of the wine produced is everyday *vin de table*, but with a new breed of producers experimenting with a variety of vines the quality of Moroccan wines has risen enormously, receiving international accolades and an increasing number of awards.

Thalvin, Domaine des Ouled Thaleb

Facing the Atlantic Ocean on the Ben-Slimane plateau twenty miles northeast of Casablanca, Thalvin, Domaine des Ouled Thaleb, is the oldest winery in Morocco. The soil is similar to that of Bordeaux and in particular, the sandy shale and gravel sand of the Medoc region. At its vineyards in Rommani, a region of rolling hills situated at the base of the Atlas Mountains grapes are hand-picked and as there is no use of herbicide or fungicide, technically these grapes are grown organically.

Domaine de la Zouina

The Domaine de la Zouina is an old colonial estate created by the French in the early twentieth century. Under new ownership since 2002, the first vintage was produced in 2005 and since then the wines have won a number of accolades and are improving year on year. The wine it produces is often cited by oenophile Robert Parker as some of the best in the world.

Les Celliers de Meknes Les Trois Domaines

Owned and run by the Zniber family, vine growers for more than half a century and recognised as pioneers of modern wines in Morocco, Les Celliers de Meknès estate covers nearly 2000 hectares of vineyards divided among four of Morocco's most prestigious designations, including *Les Coteaux de l'Atlas* whose best parcels have been graded as Premier Cru. I. The company is responsible for about 20 percent of Morocco's wine production.

Please note: As Kasbah du Toubkal is staffed and run by Berber people, we respect their traditions and culture. We do not sell alcohol, but you are very welcome to bring your own. Glasses will be provided on request.





Morocco's First Women-Led Surf School Inspired by Amazigh Queen

Morocco's five-time female surfing champion Maryam El Gardoum says the ancient Amazigh warrior queen inspired her to build the first female-led surf school in Morocco.



Morocco Shows Off Its ICARDA 'Doomsday Seed Vault'

Deep in the drylands of Morocco, a hidden vault holds the seeds that could save humanity.



Morocco's High Atlas Among World's 30 Most "Instagrammable" Spots

The High Atlas is beautiful to explore by bike, and gives an opportunity to discover the region at your own pace and avoid tourist routes.



Kasbah du Toubkal in the Media



An Eco Haven in Rural Morocco

For anyone who enjoys being surrounded by serenity, nature and traditional Berber hospitality, (and in the cooler months, views of snow-capped mountains) this is the perfect place.



Discovering the Atlas Mountains in Morocco at Kasbah du Toubkal

Camel caravans winding across the Sahara are the images most associated with Morocco but the Berber culture and otherworldly landscapes of the High Atlas Mountains are equally as fascinating.



Morocco - The Kasbah du Toubkal and Jbel Toubkal

Have you ever felt you'd love to tackle Jbel Toubkal but not been sure of what you need or how to do it? Mountain Leader Helen Menhinick takes you through everything you need to know and what you can expect from a trek.

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