

# KASBAH DU TOUBKAL

MOROCCO'S PREMIER  
MOUNTAIN RETREAT

## *Happy New Year and a Happy New.... ....Ambulance?*

As we turn our backs on what has been, to say the least, an 'interesting' time, as in the ancient Chinese curse 'may you live in interesting times', (although no actual curse exists), we are beginning a major new project to enhance the lives of our community, the Berber people of the seven villages of the Imlil Valley - the purchase of a new, specially equipped, mountain ambulance. For this project the Association Bassins d'Imlil, the village-elected organisation who disburse grants to community projects, has agreed to use future funds gathered through the Kasbah 5% for the purchase of a new ambulance, a service little known outside the region but of sometimes life-saving importance to the people of the local communities and visitors to our vallies, and we invite you to participate at no extra cost to yourself - and it might even save you money! Page 4 gives full details of the project, one of the most important Discover have sponsored.



A much appreciated workhorse  
nears retirement Full story Page 4

*The Kazbah meant a lot to the town of Imlil and its people, we are so happy to hear it's done in the building and it's ready to be open! Opening the Kazbah du Toubkal is not just for itself but also for the communities of our High Atlas Mountain and its villages. Thanks lot for the new News and God bless imlil area.*

Hassan Amzil, Tour Guide

## NINE YEARS ON

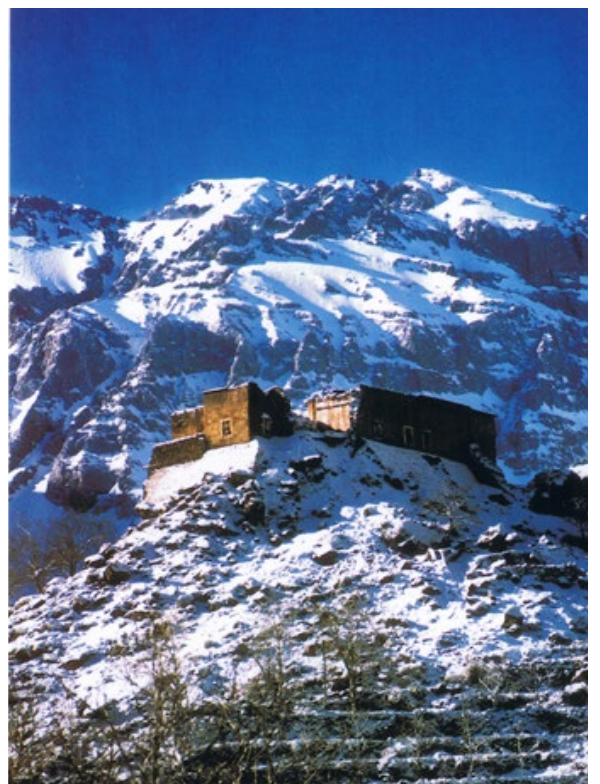
**I**n January, 2015 the first edition of Kasbah du Toubkal magazine went out. For twenty-one, 16-page issues we brought you stories, information and images about the Kasbah, the High Atlas Mountains and cities and adventures from throughout Morocco. When the country closed its doors in mid-March, 2020 we determined that however the situation developed we would maintain contact with clients and friends via a newsletter, keeping them as up to date as possible with events in Morocco via links to world media, given that we were unable to travel in the country in search of new material.

Nine years and thirty-six quarterly issues on, this issue brings us close to the end of our first decade, and as such we are going to 'blow our own trumpet'. But it isn't just our own trumpet, it's the trumpet cavalcade of everyone who works at the Kasbah, works with us, the people of the Imlil Valley who have taken us to their hearts and made us part of their community, and our guests who have, without a single exception since the levy was introduced in 1997, accepted the 5% added to their account, money that has done so much to improve the lives and welfare of our neighbours and beyond.

# WHEN YOU START WITH A SHELL ON A HILLTOP, NOTHING'S IMPOSSIBLE!



'Dreams Are Only The Plans Of The Reasonable'



In the thousands of messages we have received wishing us luck with the rebuilding of the part of Kasbah du Toubkal that was damaged during the earthquake, a few have wondered if it will be the same beautiful, welcoming place it was before September 8th. But the building has been changing and evolving almost since the day we opened in 1995; new bedrooms, apartments, kitchen, conference room, most of which wasn't obvious as the work was being carried out. Even the 'Green Hat', the cupola on the roof terrace, wasn't there once-upon-a-time.

We refer to Kasbah du Toubkal as a Berber Hospitality Centre not as a marketing ploy to differentiate us from hotels or guest houses, even though our core business may be the same, but because that's what it is; it's run by Berber people, it's staffed by Berber, it was built by them using local builders and suppliers, and everything from the food at your table to the gelaba you wear against the winter evening cool is sourced locally wherever possible. Our guides are Berber, as are the muleteers that bring you up the steep footpath from Imlil to the Kasbah or accompany you on treks. We may be the main employer in Imlil, but we have always considered ourselves as being part of the community,

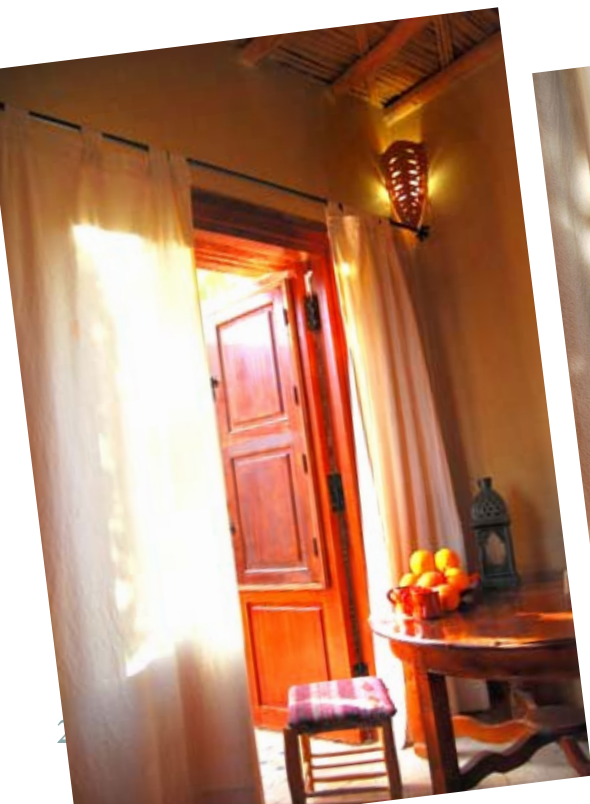
bearing the responsibilities that entails. Our success is their success, and it is the innate friendliness and consideration of the Berber character that has enabled Kasbah du Toubkal to achieve the level of success it has.



When you return to Kasbah du Toubkal it will look a little bit different, at least temporarily, but the Berber welcome will still be the same. Your bedroom will be the same - none of them were damaged; the dining room will look different but the food will still be served to the same high standard as it has always been, with the same warmth and humour as always - neither the kitchens nor the character of our staff was touched by the tremor - and you will still dine in company with a cozy fire. The wide expanse of the view to Jbel Toubkal from the roof terrace is no different from when Condé Nast Traveller described it as having "the best rooftop views in

North Africa'.

Kasbah du Toubkal may have changed physically over the decades, and will again, but the Kasbah as an entity never has, and it never will. It will always be a centre of Berber hospitality, and nothing, earthquake or otherwise, can change that.





*Some things don't change*



# IF NOT FOR YOUR SUPPORT...

## *How your future plans can help us buy a new ambulance for the people of the Imlil Valley.*

As an integral part of the mountain rescue team of **Jbel Toubkal**; being first attender at road accidents on the narrow, often rough, rubble-strewn roads of the High Atlas; shepherding pregnant ladies to Asni, the nearest town with a maternity clinic, or on to Tahanoute or even Marrakech for more serious cases, the Imlil Ambulance has at times played a literally life-saving role in a region where medical assistance of any kind is rarely close to hand. But time and rugged terrain take their toll, and the workhorse that has done exemplary service for seventeen years needs to be replaced.

The specifications for a vehicle that needs to deal with the ever-changing conditions, geographical, environmental and ecological, to be found in the High Atlas Mountains reach far beyond the norm. Heavy and deep snow; flash floods that can wash roads away, roads that are ‘roads’ only in the sense that mules have stoically plod their way along them for generations. Even these days, there are still villages so remote that the driver has to get his vehicle as close as possible and with the assistance of volunteers trek his equipment to his patient. But vehicles of this calibre don’t come cheap!



As yet we haven’t come to a firm decision on the model that would suit our specific needs, but we have confirmed that we can expect to pay in the region of £60,000 for a 4x4 ambulance we need to maintain the high-level of service the current one has provided over the last seventeen years. This is a hefty figure to reach, especially as some of the funding bodies we would previously have approached are assisting others as they deal with the aftermath of the earthquake. But as it says on our front door:

*Dreams Are Only The Plans Of The Reasonable*

### How you can help

**Through January and February 2024** we are offering the opportunity to pre-purchase part of your holiday, birthday or special occasion at Kasbah du Toubkal for any time period during 2024 and 2025 at a 5% discount. The prepayment will be deducted from your final account, and covers everything involved in your stay; meals, accommodation, treks, guides – everything to the value of your prepayment, which begins at blocks of £500 and is limited only by your generosity. It will incur you no extra cost whatsoever and gives you an opportunity to possibly reduce the cost of your future stay as we will hold to our 2023 costs for you with this offer.

**So why are we making this offer?** The answer is very simple. The 5% we gather over the next two months will go immediately toward the cost of a new ambulance, instead of perhaps waiting many months to acquire the funds to replace the current vehicle that has done such excellent service in the valley for almost two decades. It’s our way of contributing, and we look forward to working with you to raise the money needed to update this enormously important part of our endeavours to keep the people of the Imlil Valley and visitors safe, secure and healthy.

*For full details see Page 7*

### Even the mules give way

After fourteen years driving over some of the roughest terrain in North Africa’s highest mountain range, Abderrahim Ajdaà handles his ambulance with ease, his confidence built on experience. As it’s my first trip I spend a fair bit of my time concentrating on the Moroccan flag on the dashboard and try to ignore the sheer slope of the mountainside, so close that I can’t even see the edge of the road from the passenger seat. Every pedestrian, mule, jeep and truck gives way as the ambulance climbs the narrow road. After all, it may be someone in their family it’s on its way to.

We’re not on a house call or emergency today, but Abderrahim is demonstrating in a practical way his daily round. The road ends at a flat area of rough ground, where the Reyara River bubbles and sparkles languidly before picking up pace on its way down into the Imlil Valley below. Across an almost non-existent ford is Armed, a village of almost two thousand souls.

If a helicopter is needed for a mountain rescue, this is where it lands, with the patient being transferred to Abderrahim’s ambulance for the journey down the mountain to Asni or Marrakech. But ‘flat’ doesn’t mean ‘smooth’; the uneven surface makes for a rocky and tricky landing. When the river is in flood there is nowhere for the helicopter to land, and Abderrahim has to gather a team of villagers to bring the injured down by stretcher.





# That MAGICAL 5%

## Just where does your money go?

It’s almost impossible to talk about Kasbah du Toubkal without mentioning the 5% added to guest’s accounts in the same breath. It’s easy to think the tens of thousands of pounds, euros or dirham as generous support from the Kasbah through its parent company Discover Ltd, and while we do fund some projects independently, the 5% added to your account is **your** money, not ours, just as all the money collected over the last 26 years that has been used for the benefit of the communities of Imlil Valley came from the pockets of previous guests, many of whom have returned time and again. Everything goes into improving the life and services of the local community through the good offices of the Association Bassins d’Imlil, a respected group of individuals elected by

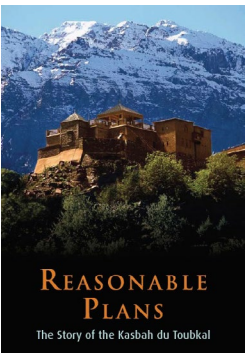
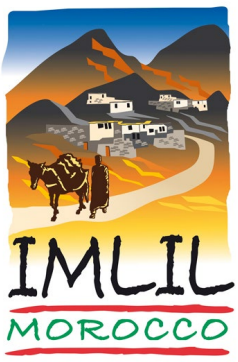
residents of the seven villages of the Imlil Valley. Without the slightest doubt, Education for All is the best known project associated with the Kasbah, but your 5% has spread so much further than that, enabling community projects that have permeated every aspect of life in the mountainous locality. The first major project the Association undertook was the creation of a rubbish clearance system, with funds from Kasbah du Toubkal and the fee from the making of *Kundun*. For more than a decade the detritus had been transported in a mule cart, but the animal was relieved of its duties in 2009, when the Association bought the tipper wagon that now does the rounds of the villages.

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*(These excerpts are taken from Reasonable Plans the story of Kasbah du Toubkal, its origins, its life within the community and the benefits the **Magical 5%** has brought to the Imlil Valley and beyond. To download a copy click on the image below.)*

### Getting my hands dirty

Omar Auuzal picks me up in his wagon at the bridge in Imlil for our day out collecting rubbish in the neighbouring villages. Mohamed Bokare, the second collector in the team, hangs onto his platform at the rear of the truck as we set off for our first stop, Tamatert. For a couple of hours we traipse the village collecting rubbish; worn-out trainers, odd socks, tattered plastic bags, weathered cardboard boxes; even the donkey dung heap gets picked over for wind-blown waste. There’s nothing much different to the basic detritus of anywhere in the world, but the age of double- and triple-wrapped everything hasn’t arrived here yet, and despite the simplicity of the collection process, there’s probably less litter here than you’d see in plenty of European villages. It’s slow and laborious, but it works. When we get back to the truck with our load and begin our descent the rains return, leaving great splashes on the windscreen to obscure the view and wetting the rough stones of the twisting road. At each tight turn, Mohamed jumps off his stand at the back and shepherds Omar as he makes his cautious three-and-sometimes-five-point turns. I don’t comment, but a sideways glance at Omar tells me that he’s only marginally less nervous than I am. With an almost audible sigh of relief, more on my part than Omar’s because I only have to do it this once, whereas he makes the trip weekly, we arrive back at Imlil.



## Water, water, almost everywhere

The communal hammam is central to life in Moroccan communities. Not only does it provide much needed bathing facilities, but is equally important as a place to relax, where villagers (particularly women) can chat, share advice, and generally keep up with the news and local gossip. Before the hammam in Imlil was opened on December 18, 2004, the inhabitants of the seven villages of the Imlil Valley had to travel seventeen kilometres to Asni to use a public bath. Now over a thousand villagers are no more than a couple of kilometres walk from the public hammam in the centre of Imlil, which gives employment to three local people as well providing an important service to the local community.

The hammam is a community health initiative, but perhaps the most important community safety project are the stout walls of the channels that contain the powerful flow of the Rehraya River when in flood. On 17th August 1995 a flash flood hit the Imlil Valley with seventy millimetres of rain falling in just two-and-a-half-hours causing a reported six-metre wall of water to crash through the valleys. An estimated 150 people died (none in Imlil), while around 40 vehicles, which had been parked near the main river, were simply washed away. With money from the 5% fund retaining walls were built to ensure that a similar disaster would never happen again. The project was extended to include the improvement of irrigation channels throughout Imlil, updating those that had fed the terraces and homes for generations.



## A FEW OF THE FRIENDLY FACES WHO WELCOME YOU TO THE KASBAH



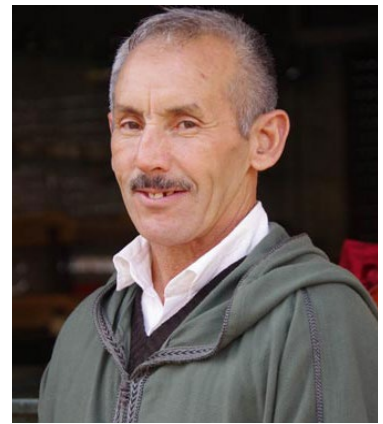
*Lahcen Igdem*

There's little Lahcen can't arrange to make your stay at the Kasbah unique, as well as being a fount of information about life in the seven villages that make up the Imlil Valley.



*Hassan Chajaa*

The longest serving chef at the Kasbah, Hassan has been there since 2001. Lives with his wife, Fatima, and three sons. Fast as fast with the curved parsley cutter, his hands a blur



*Houssain Ait Hmad*

Houssain may be small in stature but he's enormous in smile and warm personality when making you welcome at your table when you dine at the Kasbah.



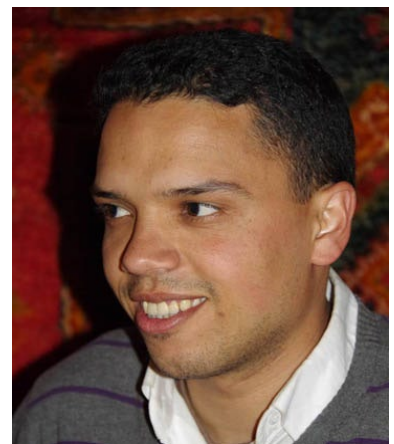
*Abdesslam Ait Idar*

Abdesslam started working at the Kasbah as a mere slip of a lad of twenty, eleven years ago, and is one of the duo who keep your living accommodation spic-and-span.



*Rachid Ouahane*

When not working at the Kasbah, where he is responsible for keeping the public areas clean and tidy, twenty-two-year old Rachid is a part-time muleteer.



*Saïd Id Ahmed*

Twenty-seven-year old waiter, Saïd, came to the Kasbah four years ago to do a restaurant course, and stayed. Saïd makes the seventy-kilometre return journey from his village, Ijoukak, every three weeks.

# We opened on Schedule!



As Kasbah chef Omar Ait Idar pours a welcoming glass of mint tea on the roof terrace and Lahcen Igdem settles behind to his temporary reception desk, we are very happy to announce that we opened Kasbah du Toubkal on 20th December, right on schedule. Guests settled in for lunch on our roof terrace under a bright blue Moroccan sun, and we were delighted to receive probably the best review of our tagine and couscous we have ever had!



*Thank you so much for having us to stay. We were delighted to be amongst your first guests at the reopening.*  
Estée Torok

## A Gentle Reminder – The Kasbah Prepayment offer

This offer extends through January and February 2024 for pre-payment for any time period during 2024 and 2025 to receive a 5% discount. There is no need to make a booking for specific dates to take advantage of the prepayment arrangement. The prepayment can act as full- or part-payment for any time-period during 2024 and 2025, subject to availability.

Beginning at £500, the prepayment can cover everything involved in your stay – meals, accommodation, treks, guides – and will be deducted from your bill at the time of paying the final account. The prepayment is non-refundable, but can be passed on to family or friends, perhaps as a gift or as part of a group celebration

For further information or to make a booking, please contact: [bookings@discover.ltd.uk](mailto:bookings@discover.ltd.uk)

Website: [kasbahdutoubkal.com](http://kasbahdutoubkal.com)

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