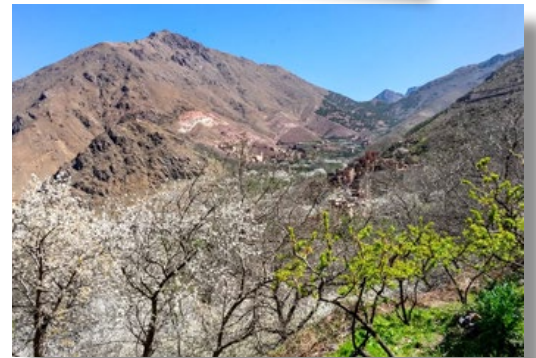


# KASBAH DU TOUBKAL

MOROCCO'S PREMIER MOUNTAIN RETREAT

*Spring is in the Air!*

From the snowy depths of winter with breakfast served in front of a cozy fire, to the valley bursting into bloom and tea served in the spring sunshine.



And SUMMER is just around the corner, when soft breezes cool the mountain air and our glorious infinity swimming pool comes into its own

*For more beautiful photos of*  
**KASBAH DU TOUBKAL**



# Fifteen Years On...

*In an era of crowded cities and over-tourism it's easy to think "I'll never go back!"  
But one family did, and found everything even better the second time around.*

The very first time Koki and Shawn Austin visited Morocco, in the company of their two-year-old son, Oliver, was what she describes as 'entry-level' Morocco, a quick trip to

Marrakech in 2007. An Australian couple for whom the two years they intended to live in the UK had expanded to twelve, a return trip to Morocco was always on the books, and as they prepared their return to Australia in 2010, they decided it was the ideal time to take a look beyond the walls of the 'Red City'. By this time, their family had increased to include a daughter,

Jemima.

"When we went back on our second visit in 2010, we had a five-year-old and a two-year-old and we really wanted to adventure a little bit," says Koki. "We were interested in the High Atlas, but having small children we weren't really able to do any very technical climbing or because they were quite little, but we were interested in the people that lived in the mountains, the Berber people. We did a bit of reading which came up with some really interesting things the Kasbah du Toubkal was doing, such as rubbish collection and girl's education. That piqued our interest."

"When we arrived it was awesome," recalls Shane.

"I remember the person that met us in Imlil with the mule. We walked up together, with one of the children sitting on the mule. It

was so friendly and supportive, and it felt very natural, very welcoming, and that continued all the way into reception. Pretty much everyone that we met in and around the Kasbah and even in the mountains when we were walking was the same."

Fifteen years later they were back in Imlil, taking the rough path up to the Kasbah's stout wooden door. But why decide to go back after all this time?

"The purpose of the whole trip was because our daughter Jemima had just finished school, and so it was a bit of a 'school's out forever' family time together," Shane explains. "She has often said about things that we reflect on that, because she was so young, she never really had her own memories and recollections of them, and she was really keen to make her own memories. So we sat down at a family meeting about nine months ago and said, well, where are we going to go on our world trip? I laid a huge map out on the kitchen table, and everyone had their pens and their sticky notes and stuff, and we said everyone just pile in, you just put a sticky note where you think you might go, and we'll see what happens."

There were sticky notes all around the globe, but there was one country that everyone had decided





nothing was ever too much trouble. They were very accommodating, and we remembered that from last time. Obviously it was a notch more upmarket, but it still felt very warm and familiar, and everyone was very gentle, just very gentle.

With limited time the family wanted to make the most of the mountains, so it was important to have an experienced guide. They arranged walks on two days with Abdeslam Maachou, a local guide with an almost encyclopaedic knowledge of the region. "It helped us make the most of our time, being with someone who knew the locality. His knowledge of the area, of the families, the history of the villages in that valley, the context he could put it in, and how he could illustrate it added so much colour. It wasn't 'this is a set route that I do', it was just looking at the day, the conditions, the weather, thinking about what we liked, whether we might have needed it harder or easier at times."

they'd like to go back to, and that was Morocco. When narrowing down time came the decision was for a mix of revisiting old favourites and trying new ones. The trip started and ended in Marrakech, a two-and-a-half-week loop, which included Kasbah du Toubkal and the Atlas Mountains.

"Because we talked so fondly of being at the Kasbah fifteen years ago or so, we were all quite keen to go back and just sort of revisit, to remember and create new memories, but also, in Jemima's case, who has only the photos to go on rather than her own memories, to develop brand new ones."

As the family made their way up the zig-zag track to the Kasbah, Koki began to wonder would the new Kasbah match up to her memories of the old one.

"As we were approaching, I was not so much nervous, but we have such brilliant memories, and the Kasbah had grown only fonder and more amazing in our minds, in a way I was slightly concerned. Have I just talked this up way too much? But it wasn't even close. It was even better and more wonderful because we were able to be a little bit more adventurous too."

Oliver had more than just photos to remind him, so how much did he recall from that trip fifteen years ago?

"It was a little bit like I remember. I remember the mules on the pathway up towards the Kasbah, I remember the doorways, the surroundings and the chess boards on the ground and things like that. I don't know whether that's vicariously through photos or whether I truly remember them."

And his impression when he saw the newly-rebuilt Kasbah?

"It was absolutely beautiful, tucked away up in the mountains, just incredible views, beautiful architecture. I loved the walking and I was obsessed with the snow and being up in the mountains. I had a great time."

"It oddly just felt very familiar, and a lot of it was the same," says Koki. "The staff were very warm, and



### Koki's letter from the Kasbah

## KASBAH DU TOUBKAL

MOROCCO'S PREMIER MOUNTAIN RETREAT

*Koki here live from the Kasbah!*

*We arrived at the Kasbah 48 hours ago. Much has changed in the village and the Kasbah but equally it felt warmly familiar and our room is just as I remembered. Walking up from Imlil I recognised a man with his mule from our last trip! The children thought I was crazy but I found the photo and the staff when we arrived confirmed it was Ahmed. One of the young men pointed out quite matter of factly that he was still around but that his mule is now a different one from the picture. From the photographs they recognised another face and were pleased to tell me that Omar (chef) was still here and we met him this morning. He was just as kind and gentle as I remembered.*

*We have had an incredible visit. As we speak Oliver has gone to play on the outdoor chess board (one of his vivid memories) He is also very pleased that he is being constantly mistaken for a Moroccan!*

*We have had two magnificent walks in the mountains with our guide Abdeslam Maachou, and a lunch today that is probably the best backdrop for a picnic we've ever experienced. Chef Yousef out-did himself. When we see the Kasbah gates after hiking it is like coming home and the perfect place to recharge. Sadly it is our last evening. We have been looked after so well and been so very, very comfortable.*

*We continue our road trip tomorrow after check out. We are all talking about returning (we won't wait fifteen years) the children may come without us and summit Toubkal with us slowing them down!!*

# A Stroll Down...



There are two Rue Riad Zitoun running off Jemaa el-Fnaa, Marrakech's hectic night market, 'el Jdid', which means 'new', and is mainly souvenir and clothing orientated, and 'el Kdim', meaning 'old'. It's the old one to look for, entered under the stone arch between the Waffle Factory and Ben Allal Optique, bringing almost instant relief from the raucousness of 'La Place', as Jemaa al-Fnaa is known locally.

There are plenty of shops to pick up a souvenir at, but the pleasure of the street is as much in slowly strolling, exploring in the morning, when crowds aren't on the street and it's mainly inhabited by locals shopping at cupboard-sized supermarkets, herbalists, traditional coffee shops and four-table restaurants. If you need your clothing laundered and pressed after being crushed in the case, a small semi-basement on the right is at your disposal, and if you have time to linger you can snack on briouat, a sweet or savoury puff pastry filled with meat or fish and shrimp, mixed with cheese, lemon and pepper, washed down by a glass

of mint tea at the tiny shop opposite while you wait, presided over by a large lady in grubby pinny. If you've heard of Henna Art Café, there's a mural that leaves you in no doubt you've arrived. Specialists, as the sign says, in traditional Moroccan vegetarian, fusion, vegan, gluten-free and international cuisine, although I was informed by



a Moroccan chef that there's no such thing as 'traditional Moroccan vegetarian', it's just vegetarian, always a staple of Moroccan cuisine, while vegan and gluten-free are johnny-cum-latelies. Tradesmen looking for work sit on the street, their tools of their trade their only advertisement. A shoe repairer sits in a shade of an arch, slowly threading a pair of broken sandals, three rubber soles and two heels his only stock, a small tin of shoe polish to finish the job

off properly. If your case is broken and you need a second-hand one or a rucksack split and needing repair, a row of four small repairmen will fix them for you.

If you are looking for a pocket-sized memento, a gentleman at a small stall will inscribe a calligraphy message on a choice of illustrated cards and bookmarks for only 30 dirhams. Beautifully executed, they are worthy of a frame as a gift or as a keepsake. As you approach the end of the street it becomes more work-a-day, and to my mind vastly more interesting, ending with a mattress shop where hands take the place of machines, where a man spends his days rapidly pushing stuffing into one, shoving it by hand as he goes along to get an even filling.



If you would like to continue your stroll, take a left and enter the maze of the Mellah, the ancient Jewish quarter, by the small arch beside the *Love Morocco* sign to the left of Herbalis de Lamliith. The main spice market of the city, where the tall wooden shutters enclosing the small shops have weathered well since the UNESCO-funded restoration of the Mellah a decade ago, not much appreciated by the shopkeepers at the time, but they were grateful that the renovation was only for the facades and they didn't have to move their stock during the Disneying up. If you want a view of what a really local market looks like, turn right at the end of Rue Riad Zitoun el Kdim and on the left is the small arched entrance to it, second arch on the left. Mainly a vegetable market, there are also small shops selling budgies,

their incessant twittering enough to grind teeth. Around prayer times a small space just beyond the first fruit stalls has rugs spread on the passageways to serve as a mosque, so be sure not tread on the them when men are praying. At the complete opposite end of the shopping scale, Medina Mall is for mortgage-price frivolities where the staff outnumber the punters and while away the hours flicking through mobile phones. Strolling the narrow aisles of fancy clothes, rugs, babouches – soft leather slippers – you soon realise that if ever there was a wrongly positioned business, this is it, sandwiched between a gaudy fabric shop and another doing small electrical repairs. But if your feet are aching, the Mall kindly offers a 'Chill Zone' to rest your weary bones.



## Education for All Morocco Spreads it's *Wings*

When the first boarding house of Education For All opened its doors in 2007 in a rented apartment in Asni in the foothills of Jbel Toubkal, the highest mountain in North Africa, to provide safe, homely accommodation for girls from some of the poorest families in the most remote villages in the High Atlas Mountains, enabling them to continue their secondary education, it welcomed thirty-six nervous young ladies. Now known as Education For All Morocco, the lives of the 769 girls and young women have been enriched, thanks to this far-sighted project; 283 girls have enrolled in university and three have completed postgraduate degrees. Since 2024 EFAM has spread its wings to support girls

and young women through a range of organisations dedicated to the same goals, expanding the possibility of secondary and higher education for girls whose situation in life would otherwise have seen little way forward. While most of the organisations supported by EFAM are for scholastic education to improve the lives of young women limited by their environments, one in particular is designed to improve life itself, Centre Malaika, where children with Down syndrome are encouraged to show that their disability is not a barrier to having a chance to grow in the community.



*Click on the logo for more information about the projects Education For All Morocco supports.*

# A Flock of Angels - Centre Malaika

*"Malaika means angel. And I think that name accurately represents these children."*

In 1984, life expectancy for a person with Down syndrome was twenty-eight years. Four decades on, advances in medical care, particularly for congenital heart defects, now enable many to live long, productive lives into their sixties and seventies, and it continues to climb.

Darya Mazdaoui has been working with the Down syndrome children of Centre Malaika in Marrakech since its inception in 2011, giving up her work as a pharmacist to become President of the Association in 2024.

"Centre Malaika supports specifically children with Down syndrome from poor, uneducated families. In many cases the birth of a disabled child is seen as a stigma on the family, and for those children their destination in life is to stay home with their families. When parents see the results of their children studying with us they change completely their idea about the disability. Really, it's our first success, changing the vision for those parents, for those children."

The aim of Malaika (which means angel in Arabic) is to guide and support children with Down syndrome from early childhood through to adulthood, grouped into classes based on their level of disability and learning capacity, following a curriculum that includes reading, writing, and mathematics. Entirely volunteer run, it includes a team of specialist doctors who provide services as needed, and the Association works closely with interns from speech therapy schools, social sciences faculties, and vocational training programmes. But even before a child reaches a formal education stage there is work to be done.

"There are two main groups of children supported by Centre Malaika. The first one is for children from eight months to four years old. It's called Parental

Guidance. The children receive speech therapy and practise their motor skills, and attend the centre two days a week with their parents to meet with specialists who explain to parents how to work with their babies at home to help them learn how to speak, to grow, and to walk. They also meet with a psychologist, who works with them to accept their child, to explain to them how to be with the Downs child in the family, with their siblings. We have forty



children in this group, with one hundred and twenty from four years to twenty years old who receive specialised education and vocational training. "For each child attending the centre we create a specific, personalised programme adapted from one for normal school children provided by the Ministry of Education, created by specialists working with Down syndrome children."

The sooner the support and training begins in a Down child's life, the greater the likelihood of them being able to live what many would consider a 'normal' life as they approach young adulthood. Setting Centre Malaika up in a primary school was no accident.

"Centre Malaika is in a State school, the Sidi



Belabbas Primary School in Marrakech, where we organise many things for our children to integrate with other children, not to be alone in their world, so the students are actually growing and learning with children without a disability. In the beginning, we explain to the school children that Down children are like them but that they are just a little different, but this difference, it's not a problem. We participate in theatre together, which is very important because when they are in theatre, there is no



difference between them, each child has a role. And you know, it's a very nice experience, because children with Down syndrome are very friendly."

Changing the ideas about a disabled child within a family is one thing, changing the ideas of a whole community is a different matter.

"Unfortunately, too many people don't see a disabled child as a normal person, so we invite many schools to visit the Centre to play with our children, to integrate with disabled children. We try to show them that Down syndrome is a disability, it's not a barrier for having a chance to grow in our community and to serve and work, so we work together to change mentalities. But it's not very easy."

Society's reluctance to hire individuals with disabilities remains a challenge in Morocco, and when a student reaches the age of sixteen, the question of a future career arises. The integration of Down's

children into society is Malaika's primary objective, but how understanding are they finding employers who perhaps would not have employed disabled people previously?

"This is the next step for us, getting business owners and hotels to change their idea of children with a disability. At sixteen the students begin studying for a diploma, which takes three years. They do the training in hotels because Marrakech is a tourism city where there are many hotels, many restaurants. When they receive their diploma we then get them a job. Currently, we have eight students studying and four in paid work. I would hope it would be automatic that a young person with a disability, whatever their disability is, is given the chance to find employment, and we are working very hard to change this, but it's not easy because we have to change the vision of a whole community. But now, when they see that we have children working in big hotels in Marrakech, they are beginning to believe that a child with Down syndrome can have the same chance as any other child if we give them the opportunity to learn, and give them attention and love."

Unfortunately, the older a Down child is before they begin training, the more difficult it is for them to reach a level to enable them to be able to work or to be independent. What happens then?

"Until now, they stay with Malaika. For those children we are working to create a programme for them, like to work in gardens. We never leave them because it's our mission to work with them and with their families. Perhaps when we see that it's okay, they are capable of existing and living on their own, we'll see. But until now, it's too early to leave them alone."



I am happy because my daughter is no longer condemned to stay at home. I finally found her a school, God bless them. It was an opportunity for hope.

I come here to study, I learn, I grow up. And when I grow up I will have a job.

It's a place where there is magic, the magic of love, the magic of self-giving, the magic of service. And all that has no price. It's beautiful..



Click on the logo to watch Centre Maliaka's heartwarming video

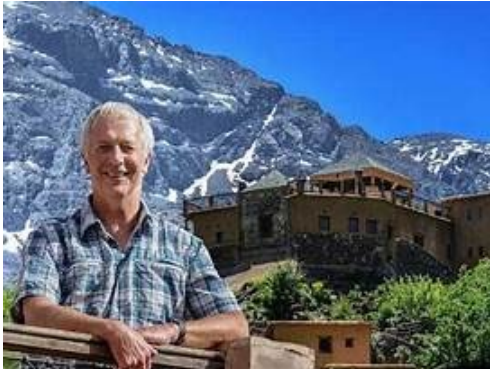


Click on the logos for more information





## Honouring Mike McHugo of Education for All Sallie Grayson



I first met Mike in 2009 and we just knew we could work together. Mike is now stepping down from

day-to-day trustee work and we want to say a huge thank you to him and wish him well in his new role. Here's the announcement from Education for All Morocco.

“After many years of service as Chair and as a Trustee of Education for All, Mike is stepping down from the Board – a shift that recognises both EFAM’s continued growth and the strength of the foundations he helped to build. He will now be the Honorary President. This honorary position celebrates Mike’s extraordinary contribution over nearly two decades and ensures he remains closely connected to EFAM’s mission as a respected ambassador and guiding voice for the organisation’s future.

Mike founded what was then Education For All (EFA) in 2007, after a visit to the High Atlas Mountains where he noticed something that would change the course of his life – and the futures of many young girls.

Mike said of the initiative: “We understood that the future of any country is in the hands of those who are young now, through education and expanding their physical and mental horizons. We understood that while we couldn’t take education to the villages, we could build a boarding house next to the secondary schools to allow those girls to study in a safe and secure learning environment, a home away from home to become part of Morocco’s future.”

That vision became the very first EFA boarding house in 2007 – the foundation of what is now EFAM.

Today, that simple idea has grown into a network of programmes supporting over 500 girls across Morocco each year, consisting of multiple programmes including secondary education, university access, and inclusive education for girls with Down syndrome.

This support has created a full educational pathway for girls who would otherwise have been excluded from schooling beyond primary level. Many of the students who entered the first boarding houses as young teenagers have now completed the entire education cycle,

gone on to attend university, and are today working in a wide range of professional careers – from engineering and education to



hospitality, science, and cultural arts. Their success stands as a testament to the power of access, opportunity, and the life-changing impact of Mike’s vision. As Honorary President, Mike will continue to champion EFAM’s mission, offering strategic guidance and serving as an ambassador for the organisation as it scales its impact across Morocco.”

# Mr. & Mrs. Smith

**GIRLS TO THE FRONT: THE HOTELS CHAMPIONING FEMALE CHARITIES**

While International Women’s Day brings hope with rousing social-media messages, call-outs to champions and a spotlight on women’s issues, 24 hours isn’t enough to dig into solutions.

# KASBAH DU TOUBKAL

MOROCCO'S PREMIER MOUNTAIN RETREAT

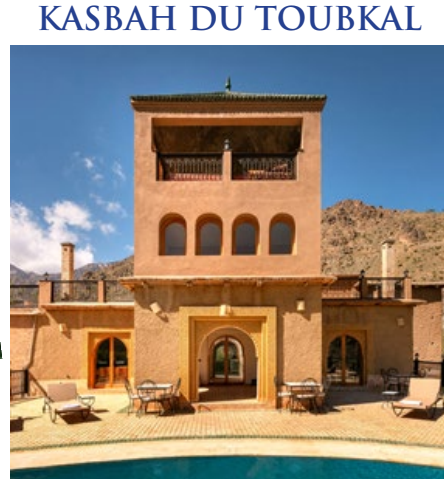
THE BEST THREE HOTELS IN MARRAKECH!



LA MAMOUMIA



VILLA DES ORANGERS



KASBAH DU TOUBKAL

Click on any image to watch the video

**AOL**

INTERNATIONAL  
**Traveller**

*The 2026 travel hot list: Thrills, chills and unadulterated splendour*



## Trek lesser-known stretches and benefit local communities

In a time when stories of queues at Everest and litter at Fuji are commonplace, it's time to look to unexplored landscapes where journeys not only challenge the trekker but are prized for their low impact and community-boosting effects. In Morocco's High Atlas Mountains, Kasbah Du Toubkal is providing a culture-conscious gateway to Jbel Toubkal, North Africa's highest peak at 4,167m. Perfect for those who want a challenge while treading lightly on the earth, its treks feature porters sourced from local villages and profits go towards funding healthcare and education across the Imlil Valley. Visitor numbers are capped too, ensuring that the local landscapes remain preserved for centuries to come.



*Grass Routes*

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# METRO

Morocco's best-kept secret is a welcoming village where community is everything

Here, life is simple. No chain stores or modern coffee shops, just fresh mountain air, mud-brick homes and rolling fields of walnut and cherry trees.



Have you ever wanted to ask Mike McHugo a question about **KASBAH DU TOUBKAL**? Select Green Hotels did it for you.



NASA included couscous in official Artemis II Luna Menu

NASA's 10-day Artemis II mission included couscous with nuts among 189 food and drink items selected for the crew's journey around the Moon.



LabelVie to turn unsold food into charity donations

Morocco launches 'Cashless Pay' plan after record tourism year. Morocco welcomed 20 million visitors in 2025. Paying digitally is now an important part of the travel experience Tourism Minister says.



# The Telegraph TRAVEL

## Kasbah du Toubkal Imlil, Morocco

KASBAH DU TOUBKAL sits above the Berber village of Imlil and beneath North Africa's highest peak, Mount Toubkal, and the journey to reach it is part of the stay. After a 90-minute drive from Marrakech, porters strapped my luggage on top of sure-footed mules for the 20-minute uphill walk to the hotel.



Morocco ranked safest destination in Africa for travellers, according to the 2026 tourism safety index

(Click on a logo or image to read the full stories)



To get the most out of your visit to the Kasbah, download a good read from our library

