

LIFESTYLE HOLIDAYS – MOROCCO
Atlas Traverse – 10 days ex Marrakech



The Central High Atlas is one of the most unspoilt and beautiful mountain regions in Morocco. It is also one of the best regions in Morocco for mountain biking, with mile upon mile of uninterrupted jeep tracks and trails. On this biking adventure we take on some challenging climbs and superb descents en route from the verdant valley of Ait Bougmez to the striking Dades Gorge in the Moroccan south. The variety of landscape is staggering - from stark mountains and fertile valleys, to rocky gorges, to rivers and pine forests and isolated windswept plateaux. There is also the challenge of a 100km "century ride" on the last day, as well as the sights of Marrakech and the Ouzoud Falls to be experienced and explored. Nights are spent in basic 'gîte' accommodation, with a night camping in the wilderness and a night spent in a local family home. In the evening we have the chance to sample the local cuisine, whilst lunches are normally taken picnic-style, usually in beautifully remote places.

A classic north to south Atlas crossing

This tour is suitable for those with some MTB experience and a good basic level of fitness. We offer a thrilling mountain biking adventure which is perfect for those looking for a challenging off road trip in Morocco.

The Central High Atlas - unspoilt and beautiful

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Ride amongst stark mountains and fertile valleys, to rocky gorges, rivers and pine forests, and isolated windswept plateaux. There's also the challenge of a 100km 'century ride' on the last day, as well as the sights of Marrakech and the Ouzoud Falls to experience and explore. Nights are spent in basic 'gîte' accommodation, with a night of wilderness camping and a night spent in a local family house.

Tour Itinerary



Day 1. Marrakech

Arrive at Marrakech Airport (RAK). Once you have collected your baggage and/or bike you will be met by one of our tour guides for transport to our hotel accommodation in the centre of Marrakech. Flights normally arrive in the evening, so, once checked-in we head out for a get-together dinner and trip briefing leaving time to size-up bikes for those hiring, or for those who have brought their own, assistance in re-assembling them.

Accommodation: Hotel

Meals: Dinner

No biking

Day 2. Marrakech - Ouzoud Falls - Ait Bougmez

After breakfast we are met by our Moroccan mountain guide, who will take us to the Ait Bougmez valley in the Central High Atlas mountains. The journey takes about four hours, but we will have a break half way with a visit to Morocco's most impressive waterfall – the Cascades d'Ouzoud. Arriving at the village of Ouzoud, set in a broad flat valley, one has little idea of what lies beyond. Passing the cluster of restaurants and souvenir shops, the ground drops away dramatically, giving way to a verdant gorge with three beautiful cascades of white water falling into the pools below. Here we take a walk down to the foot of the falls and have a cup of mint tea in one of the cafés overlooking the falls. We continue further up into the mountains for a picnic lunch, before getting on our bikes for a 30km (largely downhill) ride into the valley of Ait Bougmez, one of the most beautiful valleys in the High Atlas, 14km in length and about a kilometre across, it's a wide flat expanse of fruit orchards, fields of barley, and green pastures criss-crossed by streams flowing down from the surrounding M'Goun massif. The village of Tabant is the main administrative centre which lies a couple of kilometres from our gite in the village of Imelghas, at 1860m above sea level.

On arrival we may have time to climb to a hilltop "Marabout" (holy shrine) to get a panorama of our surroundings before heading back to our gite for dinner where we'll discuss our forthcoming ride.

Accommodation: Guesthouse

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Biking: 30km

Day 3. Ait Bougmez

After breakfast set off on a day ride around the Ait Bougmez valley. It's an easy day ride along singletrack valley trails and wider jeep tracks. Today the gradient is gentle, giving everyone time to loosen up before taking to the mountains. Our first port of call is the village of Tabant, where we'll drop in on the Sunday market, or souq. All major villages and small towns have a market day, where people from the surrounding area descend into town to buy goods for the week ahead. Despite the tarmac road to Azilal, the valley is very isolated and the souq performs an important function for villagers, and even nomads from the region. Here we can enjoy a glass of mint tea and soak up the atmosphere of a traditional (and particularly friendly) Atlas mountain market. Moving on, we continue westward through the valley along paths normally used by villagers and their mules. At times it's hard to believe we're in Morocco, as we ride past cultivated fields, orchards, and meadows of wild flowers. Every now and then we're sure to get invited into Berber family houses for tea and bread with olive oil such is the incredible hospitality of people in the Bougmez region. After stopping for a picnic lunch we continue our ride either back through the fields or along a smooth tarmac road that takes us back to Imelghas.

Accommodation: Guesthouse

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Biking: 28km

Day 4. Ait Bougmez - Telmest

After breakfast we set off on a ride, which over the course of the next five days will take us from the verdant valleys of the north to the rugged canyons of the Moroccan south. Heading off from our guesthouse, we follow the Bougmez valley northwards, climbing gradually and passing through some typical adobe villages. The jeep track follows the valley before climbing sharply out of Ait Bougmez and up to a pass at 2600 metres above sea level. It's a tough 8km climb, but you'll be well rewarded with some fantastic views southward over the valley. Up at the pass, the scenery changes as the greenery of the valley gives way to more stark, wild mountains punctuated with simple stone shelters (azibs) used by nomads in summer, when they migrate from the burning hot south with their flocks of animals. It's also good terrain for sighting Bonelli's Eagles and Ospreys. After a fast descent we stop for our picnic lunch in a river valley, where another souq is held once a week. After a good rest we have another 6km climb, before a glorious downhill to our overnight stop. This time we climb to 2700m – enough altitude to notice a shortness of breath in the lungs – but it's all worth it, as we descend through some wonderful scenery along a rough trail to the village of Telmest, set in a cultivated valley which seldom sees other tourists and where we stay in a Berber family house for the night.

Accommodation: Familyhouse

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Biking: 53km



Day 5. Telmest - La Catedrale

Today we make a leisurely start, taking time to enjoy our surroundings after a tough day's riding yesterday. In spring the valley is awash with wild flowers and fields of corn and barley, and it's a beautiful sight to watch the locals out in the fields.

Today's ride takes just a couple of hours with the aim of arriving at our destination for lunch. After a short climb up a precipitous track, we descend for 15km through pine forests and along a superb winding trail. We pass some beehives en route where the local people cultivate honey in clearings in the pine forest, and then the huge limestone monolith of 'La Catedrale' appears. The rock is so named as it resembles the piped masonry found on the exterior of some cathedrals. Here we settle into our guesthouse and have lunch by a river.

The afternoon is free for some optional trips. You can spend some time exploring the area by foot (there are several half day hikes in the region) or the support vehicle can take you up to the top of another monstrous climb and you can bike back down. The choice is yours....

Accommodation: Guesthouse

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Biking: 22km

Day 6. La Catedrale - Anergui Plateau

Today's ride is a tough one with most of the day spent climbing. The first part of the day is a 35km section, following a rough track alongside a stream that joins the main channel at the Cathedrale. It's a gradual ascent through a beautiful gorge where water flows year round. The route is lined with incredible cacti and there are plenty of opportunities to cool off in the river. After 35km we arrive at our lunch stop near the village of Anergui, a small settlement set in a wonderful location lost in the heart of the Central High Atlas.

Re-energized, we have the afternoon to tackle the toughest climb of the tour - a 12km haul up from Anergui onto a plateau perched at 2500m above sea level. That's 1000m of climbing, before a short downhill takes us to our wild campsite where we set up camp and spend the night with only a small stream and the surrounding hills for company.

Accommodation: Camping

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Biking: 51km

Day 7. Anergui - Agoudal

After a hefty camp breakfast we bike straight out of camp for a day of undulating riding. Today has several small passes in store for us, as well as some superb and varied descents through some more classic Central Atlas scenery. After a gradual warm up climb there's a rough exciting descent with some singletrack trails used by villagers and their mules. Spare a thought for our support vehicles as they struggle to find a path along the jeep track, which at times is merely the bed of the river that flows down the valley. At the foot of the descent there's a river crossing and we make our way through a gorge before climbing again onto an exposed plateau dotted with farmhouses. Our lunch spot will depend on how far we advance but we'll find a suitable location that makes the most of our surroundings.

The final leg of the day's ride is a winding descent to the first tarmac road seen since our arrival in Ait Bougmez. The feeling of returning to civilization doesn't last for long! Here we hop into our support vehicles for a transfer to Agoudal, passing through the village of Imilchil en route. Imilchil is famous for its annual brides' festival where young people parade along the streets of the village in search of a partner whilst their parents handle the negotiation procedure with the prospective partner's family. There is little else to explain the cluster of hotels in what's otherwise a one-horse town. We pass through the town and continue along dirt roads for another 25km to our overnight stop in the village of Agoudal.

Accommodation: Guesthouse

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Biking: 42km



Day 8. Agoudal - Dades Gorge

Today is a big challenge; 100km of riding taking us from the high plateau of the Central High Atlas into what is the start of the deep south of Morocco. By the time we arrive in Agoudal we can clearly notice the change in character from previous days with the tougher and harsher south stamping its imprint on the landscape, the villages and the people – a character that continues to change as we descend to our destination, the spectacular Dades Gorge. As today's ride is a difficult challenge for any rider, we have to set off early and keep a steady pace up throughout the day. The first part of the ride is a gradual, but nevertheless taxing, climbing up to the highest pass at 2500m above sea level. It's a rough track in places and the hardest part of the climb is about 5km long. After this we have a fantastic reward – a glorious sweeping 20km descent across an immense and barren landscape, including some excellent single track. That leaves another 20km of dirt road, through villages and largely downhill, before a 35km tarmac section takes us into the Dades Gorge and our overnight stop in a comfortable maison d'hotes guesthouse.

The tarmac road is mainly downhill but there's one last sting in the tail with a very steep 1km section right at the end of the ride! Here you'll have to dig in, but the end is in sight and a cold beer waiting on arrival should help to breathe fire into those tired muscles. Remember that the support vehicle will be on hand for those in need of assistance.

Accommodation: Guesthouse

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Biking: 100km

Day 9. Dades Gorge - Marrakech

With our biking mission accomplished we take some time to see the fabulous Dades Gorge before taking a full day transfer back to Marrakech. If we have time en route we can visit the UNESCO site of Ait Benhaddou – an 11th century kasbah surrounded by desert and mountains. From here we take the Tichka pass over the Atlas mountains before dropping down onto the plains surrounding Marrakech.

Arriving back in Marrakech is a real highlight. Having arrived in the evening at the start of the trip we had little time to explore the Marrakech medina (old town). This is another UNESCO Heritage Site and said to be the second largest medieval complex in the world, after Cairo.

Guides are available for those who wish to be guided but we recommend seeing the city at your own pace, taking time to wander through the beguiling labyrinth of tiny alleys and passageways in the ancient medina. You might like to visit the ancient Badi and Bahia Palaces, the museum of Marrakech, or a short taxi ride will take you to the Majorelle Botanical Garden, owned by Yves Saint Laurent. There are also the famous souqs (markets) of Marrakech - ideal for devotees of ethnic fashion and decoration, but worth a look for the sights, sounds and smells of this most exotic of markets. But the real Marrakech experience is more about enjoying its unique atmosphere.



Tonight we explore the main square – the Djemaa el Fna – to witness one of the world’s most animated night-time spectacles. At night the square is transformed into a giant open air restaurant with men in white coats serving anything from sheep’s head stew to snails in hot sauce. The rest of the square is dedicated to other forms of entertainment such as snake charmers, storytellers, acrobats and dancers. Later we will enjoy a farewell dinner in a restaurant before exploring what Marrakech has to offer in the way of nightlife.

Accommodation: Hotel

Meals: Breakfast

No biking

Day 10. Marrakech - Departure

Transfer to airport for homeward flight. Most flights depart in the afternoon so there’s time to explore the city and pick up a few last minute souvenirs.

Meals: Breakfast

No biking

Tour Information



Included in the tour price:

- Accommodation: Hotels , Guesthouses, Family houses, camping
- Meals as listed in the itinerary
- Support vehicle
- Experienced English speaking guide
- Bike Hire
- Airport transfers on days 1 and 10 only

Not included:

- Single Supplement (for single travellers)
- Drinks & favourite snack bars (except bottled water provided while riding and mint tea)
- Travel Insurance and personal expenses
- Guide and local tips
- Travel visa (to be obtained in advance where required)

Tour Grade

This tour is graded 7/8 (on a scale of 1-10 with 9/10 being extreme). **Challenging Tours** are or those looking to have some of the hardest days possible. Terrain will be steep and the adrenalin factor will be extreme. The strenuous effort will be well and truly rewarded when you reach the top but there will be some sweat lost and kilojoules burnt getting there. Options for dropping out will be minimal so you will need to be in for the duration.

Fitness Required: You will be very fit prior to the trip and even fitter when you get back!

Bike Hire information

The standard hire bike is a Giant XTC 4.5s with the following specifications:

FRAME - Aluxx aluminium, Fluid Formed

FORK - Rock Shox Dart 2 100mm travel, TurnKey lock out

HANDLEBAR - GIANT A5 aluminium riser

SHIFTERS - Shimano Deore 27 speed RapidFire Plus

FRONT MECH - Shimano Deore

REAR MECH - Shimano LX top normal

BRAKES - GIANT MPH Root hydraulic disc, 160mm

CASSETTE - SRAM PG950 11-34

CRANKS - TruVativ ISOFlow 3.0 22/32/44

RIMS - Alex DP-17

There are also a few Giant MCMs available: This is a lighter carbon fiber framed bike, but has V-breaks instead of disk breaks. Please note that the rental bikes are about 5 years old and the group sets, rims, front suspension, seats and brakes are different to the rental bike. The frame is a very lightweight carbon frame and a good choice for climbing and riding on gravel roads (it was designed for XC racing, so will satisfy sporty riders as well!)