

Travellers' Notes Cooking

We hope that the information contained in these Travellers Notes will answer any questions which you might have. We aim to travel responsibly and help you do the same. If there is anything not covered here, please feel free to contact Ingrid Wagner directly and we will be pleased to answer any further queries. Full contact details are given at the end of the Notes.

How will we travel?

Inward and outward flights will be either from London Heathrow or Gatwick (group departure point) or from the airport nearest to you. Please let us know at the time of booking which is more convenient for you so that we can arrange airport pick ups in Marrakech with our Moroccan team. Your travel times and meeting point arrangements (London) will be sent out to you either by email or hard copy if you do not have access to email, approximately 4 weeks prior to departure. **Alternatively**, you can fly halfway to Malaga and make the rest of the journey by bus, ferry & train, or make the journey completely by rail, travelling through France and Spain to reach Morocco. Check out www.seat61.com for more information and let us know if you would prefer to travel in an alternative way.

What about travel insurance?

Real World Journeys is an ATOL bonded tour operator, giving you full protection on your flight tickets and holiday travel. You are, however, responsible for taking out your own travel insurance for health and personal effects. If you are a regular traveller, a year's insurance cover might prove to be beneficial, otherwise single journey travel insurance is available. Make sure that it covers illness, injury and loss of money, baggage and tickets. We would be happy to provide advice if you are not sure.

Where will we stay?

On our first and last 2 nights, we will be staying in comfortable centrally located accommodation in ensuite rooms based on 2 people sharing. In the mountain villages we will stay in comfortable and clean local auberges. Some will have ensuite facilities and others will not and you may sometimes be sharing with one or two people. In the desert, we will be under canvas (or the stars) and therefore sharing.

If you prefer to have a single room, it may be possible to arrange this and we will do our best as far as possible to accommodate your preferences. Please be aware that there may be a supplement to pay.

What will we eat?

Well, what can we say? You'll be the cooks most of the time! Delicious vegetables, fish and spices, tajines of meat, poultry or fish with braised vegetables and olives, couscous, the culinary speciality of Morocco, along with Harira, the delicious Moroccan thick lamb soup. Oh, and those fabulous pastries. Any special dietary requirements should be noted on your booking form and we will do our best to accommodate these.

The main drink apart from water is mint tea ("Whisky Berbere"), made with green tea, fresh mint and masses of white sugar. Coffee is most commonly drunk black & strong. Fruit juices, especially the freshly squeezed orange juice, are excellent. It should be noted that alcohol is



forbidden to Muslims, so do not expect this to be widely available in the city and not at all in the mountains and desert.

What will the climate be like?

During the day on our mountain journey, expect temperatures of around 25 degrees, falling to around +5 at night. The desert will be around the same, with Marrakech slightly warmer in the evenings.

What should I wear?

The expected dress code for women in Morocco is comfortable loose-fitting clothes which do not accentuate the figure and that cover the greater part of the arms and legs. This means no tight fitting jeans or t-shirts. Sensitivity to this dress code will signal respect for the culture, and also avoid any unwanted attention or alienation from local people. Note how the locals dress – and not how other tourists choose to. For men, the advice is long sleeved shirts and trousers rather than shorts. A good pair of boots is also advisable for the mountains and desert, and comfortable sandals to relax in. Take warm clothes for the evenings in case it is a bit chilly: e.g. sweater, warm trousers

Is there anything in particular I need to remember to pack?

- **Water bottles** If you would like to reduce waste from plastic bottles of mineral water, you could bring a reusable plastic bottle and **iodine tablets** and **neutraliser** (available from good outdoor equipment stores in your home country).
- **Binoculars** if you wish, for when we are up in the mountains
- **Daybag/small rucksack** for your day to day needs. Your main luggage will be carried on top of our vehicle..
- **Wet wipes** to refresh yourself with during the day & for washing in the desert
- **Hand hygiene gel** for washing hands before mealtimes. No water or towel required. Moroccan water reserves are at a historic low and existing water may soon be redirected away from subsistence farmers in the Atlas mountains to support growing urban centres. Hand gel helps this situation.
- **Spare loo roll** highly recommended. Moroccan toilets do not always feature such luxuries and it may be useful in the desert
- **Travel wash**, tho' small packets of Omo are generally available in village shops
- **Suction bath plug**, as we can't guarantee your washbasins/baths will have one.
- **Supply of plastic bags** if you find that you need to dispose of sanitary waste. Discretion needs to be employed here – i.e. not down the toilet. We will make arrangements for disposal of, as necessary.
- **Matches!** These may aid in the disposal of any sanitary waste or for burning toilet paper if you're caught short in the mountains and desert
- **Notebook** which you can use as a diary if you want to keep a written record of your trip and in particular for noting down cooking tips. Good for revisiting when you're back on home ground.
- **Phone & camera battery rechargers & adaptor.** Please note that electricity may not be available 24 hours a day in the mountains and definitely not at all in the desert

- **Torch** in case you feel like going for a midnight walk in the Atlas or a wander through the sand dunes after sunset

Is there anything else I should take?

Yes. Bring along photos of your own family e.g, your parents, any children you may have, your partner, or your friends, along with photos of your home, if you have them. The family is very important in Moroccan culture, so people are always interested in where and how you live and with whom, in your home country. It helps to break the ice.

Take a spare supply of pencils/coloured pencils/biros. Both schools and parents very often can't afford basic supplies for their children's education, especially in the mountains, and it is likely that you will soon get used to the phrase 'donnez-moi un stylo' – give me a pen. We try not to create a culture of dependency but use our discretion to give out these basic supplies where they are most needed.

School Project, Marrakech

We are supporting a new initiative to develop a school for marginalised special needs children in a needy area of Marrakech. If you would like to bring some school materials to donate, please contact Ingrid who can advise on what would be of most use. We can also arrange a visit to the school if you would like to do this at the end of our trip.

How do I get hold of Moroccan currency & Other Money Matters

The major unit of currency in Morocco is the dirham (dh), **obtainable only inside the country**. You will be able to change your money at our hotel. We will provide you with a quick currency calculator to help you get used to the new money.

Bring cash sterling with you (and a good moneybelt) – there is a fixed exchange rate for changing notes and no commission ought to be charged for this. Travellers cheques are usable in Morocco but can attract a bad exchange rate and bank machines may also charge unfavourably for each transaction. The latter are widely available around the main square.

Spending money. We would advise that you take around £100 with you and this should easily be sufficient. The only essentials will be a tip for the guide and driver (£12 and £6 respectively) bottled water each day (5 dh/30p) if you don't bring iodine & neutraliser with you, £10 for our last night meal together and any soft drinks taken in cafes.

General Guide prices. As a general guide, 100 dh = £6. Coffee is around 10 dh (about 60p) and a meal out will be between 40–100 dh (£2.90 - £6). We will give you a quick currency calculator to help you get used to the new money and advise you on fair prices for what you want to buy.

To Buy or Not To Buy – It's a Bargain

Bargaining for items is a way of life in Morocco and can take time and a bit of getting used to! The following rules will help if you stick to them:

- 1) Do not negotiate unless you are really interested in the item
- 2) Never offer a price – ask what the seller wants, first of all
- 3) Offer a third of this price. The seller will appear to be horrified but will begin to negotiate a price on which you can both eventually settle. Remember the intended outcome of striking a deal is for both seller and customer to be happy
- 4) Move up in small amounts. Keep a notebook and pencil on you to write down your price: this saves confusion with the language and is quite a usual way of doing business
- 5) Ask yourself what it would be worth to you in sterling
- 6) Do not go higher than the price you have decided you will pay
- 7) If you are not happy about the final price asked, walk away

And lastly, keep a sense of humour – it helps!

Attitudes and Behaviour

Moroccans are amongst some of the most hospitable peoples in the world and positive contact with them, rather than avoidance, will greatly enhance your understanding and your stay. You will find that it is not out of the ordinary for friendships to be formed quickly within this culture, both up in the mountains and down in the city, and for you to receive an invitation to dinner, for example. People you only meet in passing are likely to remember you and greet you warmly the next day and it is considered polite to stop and ask how they are doing. Moroccans are generous with their time and will help you where they can.

You will continue to find this generosity & hospitality up in the High Atlas mountains and down in the desert, where many of the non-nomadic Berber people have a completely self-sufficient lifestyle and live quite simply. In certain valleys, mule tracks are the only channel of communication with the outside world and the inhabitants of these remote valleys live by the pattern of the seasons and the round of work in the fields. If you are invited in to share some mint tea, it is customary to remove your shoes before entering the inner rooms. See our advice on photographing below.

Since family is a big focal point for Moroccans, you are more likely to be asked about your family relationships, marriage status and how many children you have, rather than what you do in your spare time.

Is it okay to take photographs?

In the mountains, always make sure that you ask permission beforehand if you want to photograph individuals and respect the answer if it is no. The answer is more likely to be yes if you take the time to get to know the person first, or, for example, if you are in a souk, buy from the seller. The same applies when we are in the desert. A fair exchange generally goes a long way to avoiding misunderstandings. You can also offer to send a copy of the photograph to the person to say thankyou – do your best to keep this promise if you make it. We especially do ask you not to give money to children to obtain a photograph, in order not to contribute to a culture of dependency on the foreign visitor.

Film is readily available in Marrakech if you are not digital and it is best to stock up before we leave for the mountains, though at larger villages or in the towns that we pass through, you will be able to replenish supplies.

Language

With its mixed Berber and Arab population, Morocco has, however, successfully maintained ethnic and cultural stability and equality between the Berber and Arabic languages. The official and predominate language in cities is Moroccan Arabic, which has its roots in, but is distinct from, classical Arabic. A large minority, particularly in rural & mountain regions, speak Berber, which has 3 distinct dialects. Of these, Tachelhait is the most common and will be the most useful to you, with Tarifilt in the Rif mountains, Tamazight in the Middle Atlas and Tuareg in the Sahara. Although there is no guarantee that Berbers on one side of a mountain will be able to understand those on the other, a concerted effort is now being made, backed by King Mohamed VI, to encourage the wider use of a standard Berber dialect and to nurture respect for the rich Berber culture.

Many Arabs and Berbers also speak Spanish and French, the latter being the language in which much business and politics is carried out, and is the main vehicle for tourists. We'll provide you with a basic language reference in Arabic and, more importantly because of where we are going to be, some words in Berber to carry in your pocket or bag. Practising a few new words each day will make a difference to your confidence, and the Berber people you meet will really appreciate it. You will, as a matter of course, become multi lingual by the time you return home!

Religion

Much of what will thrill you on your journey through Morocco's culture is inspired by the Moroccans' deep and abiding faith in Islam, the unifying force in the daily life of every Moroccan. It has been that way, on and off, since AD610. Islam is built on 5 pillars: *shahada*, the affirmation of faith in God and God's word entrusted to the Prophet Mohammed; *salat*, or prayer, ideally performed five times daily; *zakat*, or charity, a moral obligation to give to those in need; *sawm*, the fasting practiced during the month of Ramadan; and *haj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca and the culmination of lifelong faith for Muslims.

On our travels, you will also see small square white domed buildings occasionally dotted around the landscape. These are the tombs of *marabouts* or saints, devout Muslims whose very presence, dead or alive, is considered to confer *baraka*, or grace on the suppliant. Though there are many who claim that the right saint can fix anything from a broken heart to a broken leg, the practice is seen as more in line with ancient Berber beliefs and Sufi mysticism than orthodox Islam. Moroccans do not generally see a conflict between *baraka* and *belief*, and visits to *marabouts* tombs still seem to fairly high on the list of things to do.

Politics & Population

Modern and moderate Morocco is home to both rich & poor, old and new. The current King, Mohammed VI, who succeeded his father, Hassan II, in 1999, faces and has embraced, a nation which is also home to the fundamental problems of underdevelopment, illiteracy, poverty and social inequality. Out of Morocco's population of 33 million, one third is under 15, with 19% nationwide unemployment rates for Moroccans under the age of 25. Social security is provided by the family, not that state, and workers' compensation is nonexistent. Progress, however, is being made, with the new parliament elected in 2002 implementing some promising reforms, including the first ever municipal elections and the introduction of Berber languages in some

state schools. And as of 2004, Morocco's Mudawanna legal code guarantees women crucial rights to custody, divorce, property ownership and child support, among other protections. An important new middle class is also emerging in modern Morocco.

Health & Safety

Stomach upsets can sometimes occur due to a change in diet, so pack some immodium tablets. We carry a full first aid kit at all times.

If you need to carry medicine, please make sure you get a doctor's note in case you are stopped by customs or lose your medicine and need to replace it.

It is also advisable to **keep your passport with you at all times**. You will be required to let Real World Journeys have a photocopy of your passport page with picture & number so that in the event of loss, we will have a record of your details. It is also a good idea to **leave a photocopy of your passport and contact details** with a reliable friend or relative in your home country. Please **keep all forms** such as landing cards and currency documents together with any bank receipts for foreign exchange transactions. Lastly, **bring another means of identification** (with photograph).

We take essential advice from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in order to keep you up to date with any other details required to ensure a safe trip. Country specific information and travelling tips can be found on their website at www.fco.gov.uk/travel.

Electrical voltage & batteries

Most of the country runs on 220V but some towns still have 110V sockets. Hairdryers, for example, will need converters to function properly. Electricity may not always be available in the mountains, so if you're considering packing the eyelash curlers, it might not be advisable....

Recycling batteries

Morocco does not, as yet, have the resources to dispose of used battery waste safely, so if you do not use rechargeable batteries, we would encourage you to take used ones back home with you to recycle safely.

Mobile phones

Just a reminder here to check that your phone will be operational abroad.

Recommended further reading on Morocco:

Cadogan Guides Morocco, Barnaby Rogerson, £15.99

Dorling Kindersley Eyewitness Travel Guides Morocco, £16.99

Insight Guides Morocco (good mix of practical advice & background on Morocco's history, culture & people). Also see www.discovery.com £16.99

Lonely Planet, Morocco £15.99

Maxwell, Gavin, Lords of the Atlas: The Rise and Fall of the House of Glaoua, Eland Publishing £11.99

Morocco Handbook (with Mauritania), Footprint Handbooks www.footprint-handbooks.co.uk

Time Out Guide to Marrakech, Essaouira & the High Atlas (handy smaller size) £12.99

Large hardbacks:

The Bazaar: Markets & Merchants of the Islamic World: Weiss, W.M./Westermann K.M.,
Thames & Hudson £32.00

Imazighen: The Vanishing Traditions of Berber Women, Courtney-Clarke, M.,
Thames & Hudson £36.00

Cooking:

Moroccan Cuisine: Paula Wolfert, RRP £10.99

Couscous and Other Good Food from Morocco: Paula Wolfert, New York Harper & Row
(price not known)

The Moroccan Collection, Traditional Flavours from North Africa: Hilaire Walden, RRP £10.99

Casablanca Cuisine, French North African Cooking: Aline Benayoun, List Price £7.45

Language:

Moroccan Arabic Phrasebook (Lonely Planet), £3.99

N.B. A general Teach Yourself Arabic book will concentrate on classical Arabic which won't help you particularly in Morocco. The Lonely Planet phrasebook is the best we've come across for Moroccan Arabic in a handy pocket size.

Ingrid Wagner and the Real World Journeys Team