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Kristy Larson, MTS trip leader

TRIP DETAILS

14 days ~ Morocco

9 days moderate to strenuous
hiking on varied terrain
(max. elev. 9,514')

Some long drives

6 nights camping,
7 nights hotels or lodges

2008 DATES

June 1–June 14

LAND COST

\$3,395 per person
(6-15 members)

\$3,695 per person
(4-5 members)

\$3,995 per person
(3 members)

\$700 single supplement

HIKING MOROCCO'S ATLAS MOUNTAINS

TRIP LEVEL
MODERATE TO STRENUOUS



HIGHLIGHTS

- Trek through a stunning oasis-like valley of Morocco's High Atlas Mountains
- Discover remote Berber villages where traditions and culture have not changed for centuries and hospitality ranks high
- Enjoy in-depth visits to Marrakesh and Fès, whose cultural monuments are testaments to an illustrious history

Printed January 23, 2008



HIKING MOROCCO'S ATLAS MOUNTAINS

Morocco is an enchanting country steeped in culture and tradition with incredibly diverse landscapes—the orange sand dunes, volcanic outcrops, and crumbling *kasbahs* of the Sahara; the blue-gray peaks of the Atlas Mountains; plus intriguing walled cities full of tiny winding alleys where veiled women peek from behind doorways. It's also a great country for hiking (it's not all desert), and this trip zeroes in on a fabulous trek through the remote M'Goun Valley, an oasis-like valley with cultivated crops, a string of Berber villages, and a backdrop of the snowcapped High Atlas Mountains (the snowy peaks of the High Atlas come as a surprise to those who think of North Africa as solely desert). This is one of the most stunning areas in Morocco, with spectacular canyonlands and escarpments reminiscent of the American Southwest.

We begin with a two-day trek in the mountains south of Marrakesh, where a dozen summits top 13,000 feet, including the highest peak in North Africa, Jebel Toubkal (13,671'). We'll wander through small villages of Berber farmers and shepherds and enjoy the picturesque landscape of great escarpments, oasis-like valleys, and orchards of almond and walnut trees.

Next we'll drive through the Dadès Valley, with its fabulous *kasbahs* and date-palm oases, for a trek through the remote M'Goun Valley. Walking upriver through towering narrow canyons, we share the trails with proud white-robed Berbers astride sturdy mules. Then we'll meander through a series of remote villages strung out along the M'Goun River as it flows through a fertile, cultivated valley. Traditional dress and cultures have not changed here for centuries (some say this is the way Nepal used to be in the early days of trekking), and hospitality ranks high among the local Berbers (be prepared to sample offerings of sweet mint tea).

Our adventure is enhanced by in-depth visits to Fès and Marrakesh, whose grand walls, ornate gates, and striking mosque are testaments to an illustrious history.

A pre-trip extension to the 17th-century Portuguese harbor-fortress of Essaouira is available. See page 7.



ITINERARY

☞ This trip begins with a rendezvous at the airport in Marrakesh, Morocco, on the morning of Day 1.

DAY 1 ~ Arrive in Marrakesh

Your tour leader or a Mountain Travel Sobek representative will meet you outside the customs and immigration area at the airport upon your morning arrival and escort you to your hotel. You should plan on arriving by 10:00 a.m. (If you arrive later, you may miss some of the easy sightseeing planned for this day.) After lunch and a trip briefing by the leader at the hotel, we'll take an optional afternoon walk to the medina, the mysterious old town of Marrakesh, where we'll wander its narrow streets and enjoy the circus of entertainment of Marrakesh's famous square, Djemma El Fna, full of snake-charmers, storytellers, and entertainments of every kind—a veritable scene out of *The Thousand and One Nights!* Dinner at a marvelous restaurant in the French section.

L,D... Es Saadi Hotel, Marrakesh

DAY 2 ~ Sightseeing in Marrakesh

The very word “Marrakesh” drums up visions of the exotic. Called the “pearl of the south,” Marrakesh was founded in the 11th century and is one of Morocco's oldest and most beautiful cities. With the mountains of the High Atlas in the distance, the city is replete with pink Moorish-style buildings and gorgeous gardens. We will spend the day exploring this mysterious, walled city, and be overwhelmed by its sights, sounds, and smells. We'll visit some of the most important religious and public monuments and the medina (the old Arab town) with its maze of souks. If you are looking for exotic herbs, love charms, or golden slippers, you can happily get lost in the dark alleys of this endless bazaar. Tonight we'll enjoy a “welcome” feast at one of the fine palace restaurants in the medina.

B,L,D...Es Saadi Hotel, Marrakesh

DAY 3 ~ Oukaïmeden – Tachedirt

Drive about 45 miles to Oukaïmeden (8,528') in the Atlas Mountains. (Oukaïmeden is one of the best ski areas in Morocco—developed by the French—and even boasts a chairlift!) We'll enjoy panoramic views of the High Atlas (including Jebel Toubkal, highest peak in North Africa at 13,671') while hiking over the Tizi n'Edal mountain pass (9,514') to our campsite near the village of Tachedirt at 7,500'. Picnic lunch en route. (5 hours hiking.)

In this region, the slopes of the mountains drop dramatically away to valleys and streams, and there are often small Berber villages terraced on the valley sides. The houses in these villages are stacked on top of each other, appearing almost as though they have grown out of the rocky slopes. The Berbers in the High Atlas have their own distinct culture and traditions; they are the oldest established inhabitants of Morocco and have never adopted a totally orthodox version of Islam. Their language, *Tachelhait*, bears no resemblance to the Arabic language, and their music, dance, and architecture are unique. Until the 1920s and '30s, the Atlas way of life was essentially feudal, based upon control of the major mountain passes, and their kasbahs were used for the purpose of defending the community.

B,L,D...Mountain Travel Sobek Camp

DAY 4 ~ Imenane and Aït Mizane Valleys

In every green valley where there is abundant water, we'll find Berber villages far removed from modern civilization and still living by their ancient traditions. Today we'll trek through the Imenane Valley and the Berber villages of

Tamegguist, Ikkis, Amsakrou, and Aguensioual. Cross a low pass (7,380') into the Aït Mizane Valley. At the end of the day we'll be met by vehicles and return to Marrakesh for an overnight. (5 hours hiking.)

B,L,D...*Es Saadi Hotel*

"Leave behind your time schedules and prepare to open your mind for a bombardment of exotic sights, sounds, and smells. The magical kingdom of Morocco is a strange yet graceful mix of African, Arab, and European cultures whose traditions and customs often differ so much from our own. It is a land of the senses, imagination, and certainly the heart."

*Kristy Larson
Mountain Travel Sobek Trip Leader*

DAY 5 ~ To Aït Saïd

The vast arc of the Atlas runs 1200 miles across the northern shoulder of Africa and its highest peaks are just south of Marrakesh, where a dozen summits top 13,000 feet. These ramparts rise above a picturesque landscape of great escarpments, oasis-like pastures, groves of willow and poplar, and the small villages of Berber farmers and shepherds. We leave early in the morning for a scenic overland drive to Ouarzazate, crossing the High Atlas by the Tizi-n-Tichka Pass. We'll pass through Ouarzazate, the film capital of Morocco, and then head eastward along the Dadès Valley, passing crumbling kasbahs and Saharan villages en route. We'll stop to take a brief walk through the lush Skoura Oasis, with its giant kasbahs, then continue to El Kelaa M'Gouna, known for its abundance of wild roses in bloom in May. From here we'll take a dirt road back up into the foothills of the High Atlas to a very traditional and remote area. At

the trailhead, we'll hike for about an hour to our campsite near the kasbah village of Aït Saïd, which sits beside the M'Goun River.

B,L,D...*Mountain Travel Sobek camp*

DAY 6 ~ Issoumar Camp

We'll begin our trek through another Berber tribal region along the M'Goun River, where kasbahs—once used as fortresses along this "Berber highway"—are scattered on many of the rocky promontories. In this area, Berber women gather baskets of fragrant pink wild roses in the spring, which they dry and make into a potpourri or rose water. A five- or six-hour hike brings us to our camp near the scenic village of Issoumar (5,576'), where we'll have great views of the surrounding mud-bricked villages along the M'Goun River and see local Berbers working in their lush green fields of barley, figs, and almonds. (5-6 hours hiking.)

B,L,D...*Mountain Travel Sobek Camp*

DAY 7 ~ Tiranimine Camp

We'll begin the day by hiking through the stark Berber villages that stretch along the M'Goun River. The local women, dressed in brilliantly colored *baïks* or *amalhafes*, will be going about their age-old work in the fields. We'll spend most of the day hiking in and along the M'Goun River, which is bordered by the shiny dark green leaves of oleander trees that burst forth with pink blossoms in the spring. Continue to our camp at Tiranimine (5,904') on a ridge overlooking the village and river. (5 hours hiking.)

B,L,D...*Mountain Travel Sobek Camp*

DAY 8 ~ M'Goun River Gorge walk

Hike in the narrow canyons of the spectacular M'Goun Gorges toward the mountains. These gorges are similar to Zion National Park in Utah and we'll walk in shallow rivers hemmed in by towering rock walls. In this section of the M'Goun, the water is remarkably warm and almost an emerald-green in some places. We'll be "canyoneering" most of the day through this incredible Berber "highway," passing proud Berber patriarchs on their way to market astride their most important possessions—sturdy mules saddled in hand-woven wool tapestries. Then we'll enter a canyon

that has remained unchanged by time in this remote stronghold of Berber culture. Camp near the village of Imi n'Ikcht (6,560'). (6-7 hours hiking.)

B,L,D...Mountain Travel Sobek Camp

DAY 9 ~ Tighermt n'Aït Ahmed

Today we'll meander through the traditional villages of the Ouzirimt Valley, dramatically situated at the base of a great escarpment that is sometimes rimmed with snow. We'll be meeting a people and culture so very far removed from the modern world. Tonight we'll camp at the northwest end of the valley near Tighermt n'Aït Ahmed (7,200'), an ancient granary majestically perched along the river and surrounded by the High Atlas. (6-7 hours hiking.)

B,L,D...Mountain Travel Sobek Camp

DAY 10 ~

Hike up the Tizi n'Aït Imi Pass (9,512'), where we'll have great views of the M'Goun Range and Mount M'Goun (13,356'), one of the highest mountains in Morocco. We'll pass nomads tending their sheep and goats and hike through vast areas of broom that blossom with yellow and purple flowers in the spring. Descend to Aït Imi springs and the Aït Bougoumez Valley. Overnight at a charming Berber lodge where we enjoy a *hamam*, the Moroccan equivalent of a Turkish bath. (7½ hours hiking.)

B,L,D...Berber Lodge

DAY 11 ~ End trek – Afourer

Hike through the Berber villages of the Aït Bougoumez Valley to where we meet our vehicles. We drive through spectacular forested gorges with ancient kasbahs dotting rocky promontories and spend the night in Afourer, a town near Beni Mellal, after having descended from the High Atlas.

B,L,D...Hotel Afourer

DAY 12 ~ Fès

We begin our drive to Fès, stopping to explore the cedar forests near Azrou in search of the once common Barbary ape (that also populate Gibraltar). We continue north through Ifrane, with its Swiss-style village architecture, then on to the city of Fès, considered the most “complete” medieval city in the Arab world. Lunch en route at an old French chalet, where we can dine on pink trout from the King's trout farm in Azrou.

B,L,D...Le Meridien Merinides, Fès

DAY 13 ~ Fès

Sightseeing in Fès. This medieval city, surrounded by walls of marvelous old masonry, is like no other place in the Arab world—it really has the flavor of another age. An important religious center, Fès contains a huge and ancient medina in which thousands of craftsmen ply their trades. We'll observe the magnificent medina from north and south scenic viewpoints and then visit the King's palace, Fes el-Jedid with its old Jewish quarter, Fes el-Bali (the oldest section with original old walls). Here we'll wander through some of the best and most authentic souks in the world, including the henna, brass, and leather tanners souks. We'll marvel at the fabulous architecture, passing by Bab Bou Jeloud (the main entrance to Fes el-Bali), Zawiyya Moulay Idriss II, and the great Kairaouine Mosque, the largest in Morocco. We'll enjoy lunch at a palace right in the center of the action.

B,L,D...Le Meridien Merinides, Fès

DAY 14 ~ Fly home

Transfer to the Fès airport and depart on homeward-bound flight via Casablanca. Your flight can depart at any time.

B...

Stay a Little Longer!

Make the most of your adventure! If you like to explore on your own, plan to arrive a day or two early or extend your trip after the tour. We also offer a two-day pre-trip extension to the coastal town of Essaouira. See page 7 for the details.

LAND COST

\$3,395 per person (6-15 members)

\$3,695 per person (4-5 members)

\$3,995 per person (3 members)

Rates quoted are per person, based on sharing double accommodations.

Single Supplement—\$700 for “requested” singles; \$350 for “forced” singles. If you prefer single accommodations, you must pay the Single Supplement Fee. If you’re traveling alone and wish to share accommodations, we’ll try our best to find you a roommate. If that’s not possible, we will only charge you half of the single supplement.

Tier Pricing

Adventure travel works best with a small group of people. In order to operate these small groups, our trips are priced according to the number of full-price passengers on the trip. (Mountain Travel Sobek staff, trip doctors, and other discounted travelers are excluded from the count for this purpose.) We initially invoice you at the highest tier level price (the smallest group size we can operate). If the price drops due to an increase in group size, you will be refunded the difference.

What’s Included

- ◆ expert leadership
- ◆ accommodations in hotels or inns in cities and villages
- ◆ tent accommodations and all trek arrangements in the field, including camp and cook staffs, group camping and commissary equipment (comfortable two-person tents, kitchen and dining tents, shower and toilet tents)
- ◆ meals as noted (B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, D=Dinner)
- ◆ airport transfers
- ◆ sightseeing as noted in the itinerary
- ◆ ground transportation
- ◆ additional guides and porters where necessary
- ◆ entrance fees and permits
- ◆ tips for drivers and muleteers, and hotel, restaurant, trek, and camp staff
- ◆ basic medical and evacuation insurance

What's Not

International airfare (U.S./Marrakesh...Fès/U.S.); meals not noted in itinerary; insurance other than basic medical and evacuation insurance as noted above (we strongly recommend you purchase the supplementary trip insurance offered by Mountain Travel Sobek, which includes trip cancellation insurance); optional tipping to trip leader and lead Moroccan guide; excess baggage charges; airport taxes; and items of a personal nature (sodas, alcoholic beverages, laundry, etc.).

Air Travel

Airfare is not included in the land cost of our trips. For air reservations, we recommend you contact the airlines directly, either by phone or the Internet. In addition, many travelers elect to use their "frequent flyer" miles when traveling with us. **But please check with our staff before purchasing or obtaining your tickets.** We need to verify your arrival and departure schedule and ensure we have enough participants to operate the trip.

Essaouira Pre-trip Extension

Essaouira is a 17th-century Portuguese harbor fortress on the Atlantic Ocean, and in the 18th century became home port to Sultan Mohammed Ibn Abdullah's corsairs. We'll visit the ancient citadel, ramparts, and bastion where Orson Welles filmed *Othello*. We'll have time to explore the souk, where women in white *haïks* and men in *burnooses* haggle over spices, dates, and olives, and wander past Portuguese-style tiled and carved stone doorways, peek into hidden courtyards, and meander down winding lanes. The historic beauty and relaxed atmosphere of the city makes Essaouira a great place to begin your journey in Morocco.

DAY 1 ~ Drive to Essaouira

Arrive in Marrakesh. Meet with the guide and drive to Essaouira, a delightful coastal town with its old quarter surrounded by battlements from the 1700s. This afternoon we'll explore the old town and visit the harbor, ramparts, the woodworkers, spice, and silver markets, and the ancient Jewish section.

D...Hotel Riad Al Madina, Essaouira

DAY 2 ~ Essaouira

We'll take a morning hike along the beach to the Kasab River, where we'll explore the crumbling ruins of a pasha's palace where Jimi Hendrix camped out in the 1960s. We'll continue to the village of Diabat, where we'll have a magnificent view of Essaouira and the coastal beaches. In the afternoon we'll continue to visit the souks, medina, and other monuments of the town.

B,L,D...Hotel Riad Al Madina, Essaouira

DAY 3 ~ Marrakesh

Drive back to Marrakesh and meet your fellow travelers for lunch and the trip briefing on Day 1 of the regular itinerary.

B...

Extension Land Cost

\$695 per person (2-14 members)

\$870 per person (1 member)

Rates quoted are per person, based on sharing double accommodations.

Single Supplement—\$150.

Land Cost includes services of guide throughout, ground transportation, museum entrance fees, 2 nights accommodations, tips to drivers, restaurants, and porters, and meals as noted.

Not included are incidental personal expenses, optional tips to trip leader.

WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT

Expert Leadership

Expert leadership is the key to an exciting, unforgettable experience. Our trips feature gifted leaders for whom leading trips is a true vocation. Besides showing you wonders you'd never find on your own, they make sure everything runs smoothly and safely without a hitch. They are knowledgeable about all aspects of your trip, and take great pleasure in sharing their insights with you. More than just guides, they positively elevate your experience by being teachers, companions, and the best of friends.

Although trip leader assignments may change, **Kristy Larson** regularly leads this trip. Kristy fell in love with Morocco in 1982 as a Peace Corps volunteer. After all these years she is still entranced by its seemingly endless mountains and desert valleys, and the colorful, exotic Berber culture living in a long-forgotten age. She has a strong interest in Moroccan handicrafts and traditions, and has created a line of women's handbags and belts combining the ethnic designs of the Moroccan Berber with those of the American Indian. Kristy loves exploring Morocco, whether by horse, bicycle, or on foot. She is fluent in Moroccan Arabic and French, speaks some of the numerous Berber dialects, has a great rapport with the Moroccan people, and will open the doors of understanding for us. You'll be in good hands with her every step of the way.

Leader assignments will be confirmed in the Final Bulletin sent to you three weeks prior to departure.

Activity Level

Mountain Travel Sobek trips are designed for flexible, energetic people who like to be active and have a spirit of adventure and a positive attitude. **We expect participants to be solid hikers in good physical condition.** Most of the time you'll be walking on clear (though unmaintained) foot and mule paths used by local people. There is also some walking along dirt roads unfrequented by traffic. There are a couple of easy river crossings, and diversions of routing may necessitate walking through water in river gorges (we suggest you bring Teva-type sandals or old tennis shoes for this).

Most gear and camp supplies will be carried by the mules, leaving you free to carry only a light daypack. No technical climbing or other special abilities are required. A good physical conditioning program should be undertaken to get in shape for the trek. Jogging, bicycling, and stair climbing are excellent for fitness. Consult your physician for advice.

THE NEXT STEP

Ready to go? Signing up is easy!

Just call us at 1-888-MTSOBEK (687-6235) and reserve your spot! You can also book a reservation online at our website (www.mtsobek.com). If you prefer to use a travel agent, he or she can book your trip at no extra cost and provide other helpful assistance.

Then Leave the Rest to Us

Before you go, we provide you with extensive pre-departure information, including clothing recommendations, suggested reading lists, up-to-date health advice prepared by our consulting physician (an expert in wilderness medicine), and other details.

Why Mountain Travel Sobek is Your First Choice for Adventure

Mountain Travel Sobek is the pioneer in active adventure travel. No other adventure travel company can lay claim to that title. We were the first to take Americans trekking in Nepal, raft the wild rivers of Africa, and open up many previously inaccessible corners of the world to curious travelers. We set the standard for adventure travel and have a strong reputation for excellence that we do everything we can to maintain. Since we are the leading adventure company, we have a lot to live up to, so we make sure we provide safe, quality trips and the best customer service to our passengers.

References

Don't take our word for how great our trips are. We'll be happy to provide you with references of satisfied past travelers.

Questions?

Feel free to call us at 1-888-MTSOBEK (687-6235) if you still have any questions or concerns. We're here to help you. You can also check out our website at www.mtsobek.com.

Note on Itinerary

Although we will do our best to adhere to the itinerary schedule as listed, it is subject to change. Please read the Limitation of Liability and Booking Conditions in the four-page Participant Information Form. You can find all this information on our website at www.mtsobek.com/faq and the form itself at www.mtsobek.com/pdf/participant_info.pdf.

Terms & Conditions

Once you have made a deposit for a trip, you agree to be bound by all our terms and conditions including the Limitation of Liability Clause. The full Terms and Conditions can be found at www.mtsobek.com/faq/#liability or call 1-888-MTSOBEK (687-6235) for a copy. These are partial conditions. Your participation is contingent on your signature on the full list of terms specified in the four-page Participant Information Form (www.mtsobek.com/pdf/participant_info.pdf). Any dispute concerning, relating or referring to the Terms and Conditions, to any literature concerning this trip, or the trip itself, shall be resolved exclusively by binding arbitration in San Francisco, California, according to the then existing commercial rules of the American Arbitration Association. Such proceedings will be governed by substantive California law (but not procedural law) without regard to the California Arbitration Act.

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