

Trek the Sahara

8 Days | Starts/Ends: Marrakech



Trek through the heart of Morocco's magnificent Sahara Desert on this unique walking holiday. Follow in the Berbers' footsteps, marvel at towering sand dunes, snaking wadis and beautiful deserted villages, and wild camp for three nights under the Saharan sky on one of our most adventurous tours.

- 7 breakfasts, 6 lunches and 7 dinners
- 2 nights simple hotels, 2 nights fixed camps and 3 nights wild camping
- Return airport transfers on days 1 and 8
- A full service trek including food and all equipment (excluding personal equipment)
- Escorted by an English speaking Moroccan tour leader
- All land transport involved in the itinerary
- Group size - Minimum: 4 Maximum: 12

a little exploration. Marrakech is a friendly city and quite easy to get around and most people head for the central square of the Djemaa-el-Fna beneath the imposing tower of the Koutoubia Mosque. Our evening meal will be taken at the group hotel for ease. **Overnight - Marrakech (D)**

Day 2 : Tichka Pass (2260m)



Marrakech - Ouled Driss. This morning we depart Marrakech and travel across the High Atlas via the Tichka Pass (2260m), the highest road in Morocco. After crossing the mountains we descend to Ouarzazate where we enter the Draa Valley. This is the largest palm grove in the country and stretches for more than 100km along the banks of the River Draa. Next we pass Agdz, Zagora, and Tagounit to reach Ouled Driss on the edge of the Sahara desert. During the journey we are rewarded with ever-changing scenery and opportunities to stop and take photos.

HIGHLIGHTS AND INCLUSIONS

Trip Highlights

- Walking through the heart of the magnificent Sahara - the third largest desert in the world
- Experiencing an incredible variety of rich desert landscapes from dry wadis to the sweeping crests of dunes
- Hiking on little-used trails and enjoying the incredible feeling of remoteness
- Enjoying sunsets, sunrises and star gazing amongst the magnificent dunes of Zahar
- Camping amongst magnificent dunes and beneath star-filled Saharan skies - a true wilderness experience
- Exploring magical Marrakech and the colourful UNESCO listed Djeema El Fna

What's Included

What's Not Included

- Tipping - an entirely personal gesture
- International flights and visa

DETAILED ITINERARY

Day 1 : Marrakech



On arrival at Marrakech airport you will be met by a representative who will assist with the short transfer to the group hotel in the city. Depending on your flight arrival time, after settling in you may have the opportunity to do

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We'll arrive at our fixed camp in Ouled Driss late in the afternoon where we'll experience a traditional Berber camp with tents or 'Khaimas' which have been upgraded with certain western comforts such as hot showers. Tonight we'll enjoy dinner surrounded by the desert. **Overnight - Ouled Driss - fixed camp** (B, L, D)

Day 3 : El Ghizlane



Ouled Driss - El Ghizlane. Whilst we are enjoying breakfast the camels are loaded and we'll prepare for our desert adventure. We set off and travel in an eastwardly direction crossing palm groves to reach the edge of the sands. We'll be able to see the dramatic cliffs of the hamada of Draa to the south. Our camels will follow slowly and meander their way through the dunes towards El Ghizlane. We'll pass through a small, deserted village before reaching a flat plateau and our first golden dunes. Stopping for an early lunch at Rass Nkhel we enjoy the shade of a large tree and the stillness that surrounds us. This afternoon we walk for around two hours to reach the holy shrine of Sidi Naji. After making camp and settling in, we'll have dinner among the dunes and enjoy one of the magnificent sunsets.

Time: 7 - 8 hours of trekking
Ascent: 35m / Descent: 70m
Distance: 22km

Overnight - El Ghizlane - wild camp (B, L, D)

Day 4 : Dunes & Desert



El Ghizlane - Zahar. After breakfast we hike along the left bank of the Draa surrounded by a desert landscape shaped by the wind. The Sahara Desert has its own special vocabulary to describe the different forms. 'Wadi' is a dry river valley, 'hamada' a wind-swept stony plain whilst 'reg' is plain of gravel. The classic desert of everyone's imagination is a vast sea of sand rippled with sand dunes and known as 'erg'. Today we'll encounter all these forms as we walk from our camp towards the distant dunes of Erg Ez-Zahar. After a morning of walking we'll be joined by our camels as we head to Malga Ouedane - the meeting of Wadis and stop for lunch. After a leisurely break we continue through a vast empty expanse to reach the magnificent dunes of Zahar. Here we make camp among these dunes and as we sip tea we can watch the incredible sunset. Finally we'll enjoy dinner before settling down for another night beneath the stars.

Time: 4 - 5 hours of trekking
Ascent: 40m / Descent: 60m
Distance: 16km

Overnight - Zahar - wild camp (B, L, D)

Day 5 : Draa riverbed walk



Zahar - Tilhatine. This morning after breakfast as we head north and cross a wide bed of the Draa dotted with tamarisk and acacia trees. These incredible desert fauna seem to be able to find water and nourishment from the

dry and stony desert floor. Acacia belongs to a species of plant that is mainly native to Africa and Australia. However they are not only desert dwellers and are at home in rainforests, woodlands, coastal dunes, alpine settings and deserts. Tamarisk trees can grow up to 18m in height and are at home in drier and desert areas. With slender branches and grey-green foliage, the trees tend to flower between March and September, with pink and white flowers appearing on the end of spikes. We shall take lunch in the shade of a dense patch of tamarisk before continuing through the desert to reach the smaller dunes of Tilhatine. Tonight we camp near a well which gives the camels a well-earned drink and us the opportunity to enjoy a wash if we wish!

Time: 7 - 8 hours of trekking
Ascent: 150m / Descent: 180m
Distance: 16km

Overnight - Tilhatine - wild camp (B, L, D)

Day 6 : El Mansour Eddhabi dam



Tilhatine - Ouled Driss. We start today on the right bank of a wadi which has remained dry for the past 35 years since the construction of the El-Mansour-Eddhabi dam near Ouarzazate. Before the dam and during desert rainstorms, the waters would reach Iriki Lake which supported a rich ecology of fish and birds. Today dunes block the passage of any water and the former lake is now a dry plateau. After lunch at Ras Nkhile taken in the shade of the palm trees, we will cross a dry river bed to walk on a plateau dotted with small dunes to reach our fixed camp at Oulad Driss.

Time: 7 hours of trekking
Ascent: 25m / Descent: 120m
Distance: 18km

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Overnight - Ouled Driss - fixed camp (B, L, D)

Day 7 : Atlas Mountains



Ouled Driss - Marrakech. After an early breakfast we drive back across the Atlas to Marrakech arriving late afternoon. After checking in at the hotel there will be some time at leisure before we meet up for our final dinner. Most people head to the remarkable central square of the Djemaa-el-Fna which is the focus of activities for local people and tourists. Tonight we take our final dinner in a local restaurant. **Overnight - Marrakech** (B, L, D)

Day 8 : Marrakech



The day is free for you to relax and explore Marrakech some more if you so wish. The city is a great place to spend a few days and if you wish to extend your stay then we can happily arrange this. Complimentary transfers to Marrakech Airport are provided for anyone departing on this day.(B)

Please Note

This tour is operated by our trusted partner and you will join travellers who booked through different operators, not solely On The Go.

Group Size & Holiday Status

For this trip there is a minimum number of participants required to enable it to go ahead. It is essential that you DO NOT book flights

until we have advised you that the trip is guaranteed to run. Once the minimum number is reached, the departure date will have a 'G' next to it on our website. Other than in exceptional circumstances, we will not cancel a trip once it has achieved this guaranteed to run status and so you are free to proceed with your international flight booking and other travel arrangements.

Travel Insurance

It is a condition of joining any of our holidays that you are insured against medical and personal accident risks including repatriation costs. We advise you to arrange insurance at the earliest opportunity including cancellation cover to protect your deposit and any other payments should you subsequently need to cancel your holiday.

You will need to advise us of your policy details and complete an Insurance Declaration which we will send to you.

CAMPBELL IRVINE DIRECT travel insurance is available to EU residents and will cover all of our Active Tours. It has been designed to provide cover for activities normally excluded by other insurers such as trekking, mountain biking and climbing holidays.

TRAVELEX is a USA based insurer offering travel insurance which can be used by US citizens and US residents only . We recommend the "Travelex Select " package for our holidays.

For residents of any other countries, please carefully select a comprehensive insurance policy which covers you for all of the activities on your tour.

As with all travel insurance policies, it's advisable to pay close attention to the limits of cover for all sections, particularly medical cover, before purchasing the policy. Also please ensure that your policy covers you for hiking up to the maximum altitude you will reach on the holiday.

Is this holiday for you?

This holiday involves walking for 6-7 hours on each of the 4 trekking days, over a variety of contrasting desert terrain, including rugged trails, stony paths and soft desert sand which can be challenging. We wild camp for 3 nights on this holiday whilst in the desert, which is a real highlight. All our camping and personal

equipment is carried by the camels so it is only necessary to carry a small daypack with daily essentials. Winter daytime temperatures in the desert are pleasant and walking at this time of year should be quite comfortable.

Food

On trek, the food is a mixture of local and international, all purchased locally and cooked for us by our trek cooks.

Breakfast is porridge and continental style, with tea and coffee, cereals including muesli, bread, jam and honey. A morning snack is also provided and this can consist of a piece of fruit (apple, orange), or Moroccan "trail mix" of dried figs and dates, peanuts, sugar coated peanuts and other nuts.

Lunch usually starts with the Berber speciality of mint tea, followed by a freshly prepared salad - onion, tomatoes, green peppers, grated carrot, green beans, with tinned sweetcorn or peas, rice, pasta or couscous added. Hard and soft cheeses, tinned fish, olives, biscuits and bread are also on the lunchtime menu.

Dinner starts off with soup and bread. The main course is usually rice, pasta, cous-cous, spaghetti, with a vegetable stew (or tagine) consisting of some of the following - onion, potato, carrot, green pepper, zucchini, turnip, parsnip, green beans, peas. On certain nights there will be some meat (usually chicken, lamb or beef). All dishes come with traditional sauces which are rarely (spicy) hot.

Desserts usually consist of fruit, some fresh but more likely tinned, including pineapple, apricot, pears, peaches or mixed. To round off dinner, there is the usual range of hot drinks.

All meals are included in the holiday price from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 8.

Dietary Requirements

Please note that whilst we routinely cater for vegetarians, we cannot guarantee to provide for special diets. If you do have specific dietary requirements or allergies, please be sure to tell us in advance, and discuss this with your tour leader on arrival and liaise with them during the trip. Please note that we cannot

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provide separate menus for different diets and we cannot accept any liability for any problems arising from specific dietary needs.

Joining Arrangements & Transfers

All clients arriving on Day 1 and departing on Day 8 of the itinerary will be provided with complimentary airport transfers. You need to let us know if Marrakech Airport transfers are not required and please provide us with full details of your flights. Hotel contact details and an emergency number will be provided with your booking confirmation. If you intend to make your own transfer arrangements at Marrakech Airport, taxis are available outside the arrivals hall at all times. They are equipped with meters but most taxi drivers are reluctant to use them and you should either insist on a meter or agree the fare before setting off. The standard fare to the city in a "petit taxi" should be no more than 80 Dirhams though you may have to pay a little more if arriving late at night. The airport is approximately 4 miles from the city and the journey takes 10 - 15 minutes.

Accommodation

During this trip the group will spend two nights at a tourist class hotel in Marrakech. While there are several more expensive hotels in Marrakech, we try to strike the right balance of a comfortable and conveniently located hotel while maintaining a really good value holiday. In Ouled Driss, we will be staying at a fixed camp with four people per room. There are showers and a sheltered comfortable seating area where we will be served dinner. Whilst on trek there will be a total of 3 nights wild camping. All accommodation in Marrakech and camping is based on twin sharing. If you are a solo traveller we'll match you up with another single traveller of the same sex.

It is possible to pay a single supplement for a single tent while on trek (not available for the 2 nights in Ouled Driss) and a single room for the 2 hotel nights in Marrakech.

If you would like to book pre/post tour accommodation in Marrakech we can arrange this upon request.

A typical day

A typical day starts with an early morning wake-up call. After breakfast, during which camp is struck and the camels are loaded, we start walking in the pleasant cool of the morning. Lunch is usually taken at a shady spot after 3 or 4 hours walking, and on some days this stop will be extended into a long break of up to 2 - 2.5 hours to avoid walking in the hottest part of the day. The afternoon session tends to be shorter than the morning and we will usually reach our overnight stop with plenty of time to explore before enjoying a desert sunset. On most days we will be walking for 6 or 7 hours at a reasonably leisurely pace which allows time for stops and to take pictures. As evening comes on the temperature drops and we may light a camp fire. Dinner is a 3-course meal which we will normally eat alfresco. This is a great time of day for reliving the events of the trek so far and for general socialising.

Group Leader & Support Staff

An English-speaking professional local leader will accompany the group throughout the holiday. In addition the group will be supported on trek by a team of cooks and camp staff, baggage animals (camels) and their handlers.

Spending Money

Approximately £100/USD160 should be allowed for miscellaneous expenses. This amount will cover tips for the trek crew, soft drinks and snacks. Marrakech is a great place for souvenir buying and all major credit cards are accepted. If you are intending to buy expensive items, you should budget accordingly. It is not necessary to purchase Moroccan currency (Dirham) outside the country. You can withdraw money in local currency from ATM's in the arrivals hall of the airport or in Marrakech itself, or your travel money can be carried in the form of cash. Sterling, Euros and US dollars are easily exchanged. Credit cards can be used to purchase goods and it is a good idea to carry one in case of emergency.

Guidance on Tipping

Tips are the accepted way of saying 'thank you' to your local guides and porters. They do

not form part of their wages and any tips they receive are seen as a personal thank you from group members. For our part, we advise local teams that tips are not a duty or a prerequisite but are a bonus and entirely dependent on the service that was given. For your trek crew we recommend that you give a tip if you feel that their services have met your satisfaction. We will provide guidelines on how much to tip the local staff along with your joining instructions but it should be remembered that this is your 'thank-you' to the crew and the final amount should be decided by the group. We estimate that approximately £30 / USD50 per group member should provide an appropriate level of tips. However, for the tour leader, we leave the tipping amount totally at your own discretion.

Baggage Allowance

On the trek your personal equipment will be carried by camels. Your baggage on trek should not weigh more than 15kg. Items not required for this part of the trip can be left at the group hotel in Marrakech. We recommend that you bring a fold away bag for this purpose.

Altitude

The altitudes attained on this itinerary are not extreme and the maximum altitude attained is no more than the equivalent of a pressurised cabin on an international flight. You may 'feel' the altitude the first time you are above 2000 metres. The max altitude is 2260m which is when you cross the pass Tizi n'Tichka pass over the Atlas mountains in the vehicle. The walking in the Sahara is all under 1000m.

Equipment List

The following checklist should help you with your packing. As a general rule, you should always try to keep the weight of your equipment to a minimum.

You must bring the following items:

- Hiking boots - light weight for the heat, and ankle height to prevent sand entering
- Socks
- Underwear
- Trekking trousers
- Waterproof over trousers (it can rain in the desert!)

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- Lightweight windproof jacket
- Long sleeved loose fitting shirts or T-shirts (wicking)
- Fleece jacket or warm jumper
- Wide brimmed sunhat
- Warm hat
- Headscarf or buff (to protect against the sun and wind, can be purchased locally)
- Sunglasses
- Lightweight thermal gloves
- Sun protection (including total bloc for lips, nose etc.)
- Water bottles 1 Litre x2 – hydration system e.g. camelbak or platypus useful.
- Sleeping bag (comfort rated -5°C and -10°C for departures from Mid-Oct through to End of February)*
- Antibacterial hand wash
- Body/face wipes (wet wipes)
- Toilet roll
- Water purification tablets
- Wash bag and toiletries
- Small trek towel
- Small padlock (to lock your bag)
- Light daypack 25/30 litres
- Head-torch and spare batteries
- Cash-to pay for water en route
- Basic First Aid Kit, including pain killers, plasters, blister protection (e.g. compeed), insect repellent, and rehydration salts.

The following items are optional:

- Trainers or sandals
- Trekking poles (recommended)
- Thermarest* (note that foam mattresses are provided)
- Shorts (should only be worn outside towns and villages)
- Sleeping bag liner
- Pen-knife (note: always pack sharp objects in hold baggage)
- Repair kit – (eg. needle, thread, duct tape)
- Travel clothes
- Camera

Notes:

*Available for hire/rental (contact us for details).

Please note that showers are not available in the desert and there is a limited amount of washing water, wet wipes are useful to wash in the interim.

Group size and Holiday Status

For each holiday there is a minimum number of participants required to enable it to go ahead. It is essential that you do not book flights until the trip is guaranteed to run. Once the minimum number is reached, the departure will have a G next to it, showing that it is guaranteed to run. You can check the trip status for each departure in 'Prices and Dates'. Other than in exceptional circumstances, we will not cancel a trip once it has achieved this guaranteed to run status and so you are free to proceed with your international flight booking and other travel arrangements.

Visas

Please be advised that visa requirements are subject to change and that visa procurement is the responsibility of the traveller and not On The Go Tours. Please also ensure that your passport is valid for at least 6 months from your planned date of departure from Morocco.

UK, EU, Australian, New Zealand, Canadian and USA nationals do not require a visit at present to enter Morocco. Please check if you are from another country.

RSA (South African) passport holders need to obtain visas in advance of arrival. Please check your personal visa requirements with the embassy.

Health & Vaccinations

You should contact your doctor or travel clinic to check whether you require any specific vaccinations or other preventive measures. You should be up to date with routine courses and boosters as recommended in the UK e.g. diphtheria-tetanus-polio and measles-mumps-rubella, along with hepatitis A and typhoid. A good online resource is: www.travelhealthpro.org.uk/

Currency

The currency of Morocco is the Moroccan Dirham.

Pound Sterling, US Dollars and Euro be exchanged in Morocco at various bureau de changes in major cities and towns (please

note Australian and New Zealand Dollars as well as South African Rand are often tricky to exchange and often not accepted so we advise against bringing them for exchange), and most banks have ATMs. Credit cards are virtually useless outside main cities and towns. It's advisable to request bank notes in smaller denominations, as it can sometimes be hard to get change from large notes and smaller notes are handy for smaller purchases and gratuities. Traveller's Cheques are not recommended as they're often difficult to exchange and incur high fees.

Time & Voltage

Morocco is on Greenwich Meantime (GMT). Daylight Saving is currently being observed. However it changes frequently and is not observed during the holy month of Ramadan. Standard voltage is 220 volts. Primary sockets require the European, 2 pronged variety. We recommend that you pack a universal travel adaptor. You will need a voltage converter, and plug adaptor in order to use U.S. appliances.

Preparing for your trip

It makes a lot of sense to spend some time before coming on a trekking holiday, getting some additional exercise. The fitter you are, after all, the more enjoyable you will find the experience. For this desert holiday you need to be aerobically fit and also capable for walking up to 6 or 7 hours each day on a variety of terrain from hard rock to soft desert sand. We would suggest that you adopt a weekly exercise regime. Regular walking in hill or back country is the best preparation but if this is not possible, regular exercise with your preferred sport or pastime such as jogging, cycling and swimming, will develop better fitness and stamina. Before departure, we suggest that you try to fit in a number of long walks in hilly country.

Know before you go

As a reputable tour operator, we support the British Foreign & Commonwealth Offices 'Know before you go' campaign to enable British citizens to prepare for their journeys overseas, and we recommend that all travellers take a look at the FCO Travel Advice for their chosen destination on the official FCO

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website: www.fco.gov.uk. North Americans can also check out the U.S. Department of State website: www.travel.state.gov for essential travel advice and tips.

We treat the safety and security of all clients as the most important aspect of any trip we organise. We would not run any trip that we did not consider reasonably safe. Should the FCO advise against travel for any reason, we will contact everyone booked to travel to discuss the situation. We receive regular updates direct from the FCO and are in constant touch with our contacts on the ground. If you have any questions about government travel advice, please call our office.

Climate

It is warm in the desert during the day even in the winter months of November through to April. At this time we can expect daytime temperatures to be a pleasant 20 - 25°C, rising to 30°C or more around mid-day. In the evening the temperature will drop to an average of 5 – 10°C but can reach lower than this overnight. The evenings and nights can be chilly and are a dramatic change from the daytime temperatures. Rain is rare in the desert but not unheard of and short-lived storms bringing rain can occur.

Recommended Reading

We recommend the following books when planning a trip to Morocco.

- Lonely Planet Guide – Morocco
- Rough Guide to Morocco
- A Hedonist's Guide to Marrakech. Paul Sullivan
- A Year in Marrakech. Peter Mayne
- Desert Divers. Sven Lindqvist

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