

# KASBAH DU TOUBKAL

## MOROCCO'S PREMIER MOUNTAIN RETREAT

Issue Number Four  
October 2015





VOTING ENDS 30 SEPTEMBER



The Eco Award

## Kasbah du Toubkal shortlisted for Smith Hotel Awards 2015 Eco Hotel of the year

Kasbah du Toubkal is delighted to have been shortlisted for the Mr & Mrs Smith's Hotel Awards 2015, one of only 20 hotels worldwide.

To help us reach the No 1 spot we would very much appreciate it if you could vote for the Kasbah by clicking the link below, scrolling to the Kasbah section and casting your vote. Voting ends on 30 September, with the winner chosen on 5 November.

Anyone can vote, and you have the chance to win a gift voucher worth £1,000 (US\$1,500 or AU\$2,000) to spend on a stay at any of the 950+ hotels in the Mr and Mrs Smith collection, including the winner of Best Smith Hotel 2015.





## Contents

Travels with a Hobo	4
Education For All	6
Fatima's Journey	7
Kasbah House Party	7
The Artizans of Fez	8
A day at the Kasbah	10
Kasbah Staff	11
Hitting the High Spots	12
Ancient Pathways	14
Buying a Carpet	15



## Welcome To Autumn in Morocco

The long, lazy days of summer are softening into the cool evenings and soft muted colours of Autumn, one of the most beautiful seasons in the Imlil Valley

Our fourth issue, and a big thank you for all your encouraging emails and reader submissions. Please keep them coming, and if there is anything you would like us to include, Morocco-wide, please let us know.

We've brought you this issue early so that you can help us – and yourself – by voting in the Smith Hotel Awards 2015. Not only do you have the opportunity to win a stay at one of Mr and Mrs Smith's wonderful hotels but you could also help us to become their number one Eco Hotel 2015. But don't delay, voting ends at the end of September.

The summer heat is waning and trekkers are returning to the beautiful slopes of Jbel Toubal, although it's still plenty warm enough to lounge in the sun on the Kasbah's roof terraces. If you would like to sample the 'Kasbah magic' without actually staying here, we invite you to try a day out with a visit to a local souk, a short guided trek, or a relax in our private hammam, with lunch served either in our restaurant or on the roof terrace, depending on the weather.

Long before the Kasbah du Toubkal was the beautiful Berber hospitality centre it is now, travellers slept in tents staked over groundsheets – without even the tents if the weather was good. *Travels With a Hobo* tells of the early days of Mike McHugo and friends as they started their travel business with an old Landrover.

We travel to Fez to meet the artisans who carry on their ancient crafts; catch up with the girls at Education for All; and show that cycling in Morocco isn't only about stiff mountains climbs.

We look forward to hearing from you and, as ever, you can contact me directly at

[kasbahmagazine@gmail.com](mailto:kasbahmagazine@gmail.com)

to discuss your own contribution or with suggestions for future issues.

Until next time,

Derek Workman  
Editor

...and everyone at

**KASBAH DU TOUBKAL**



# Travels With A Hobo

*A black and white photo from the early 1980s shows a group posed in front of a Land Rover, dressed in the refined casual mode of the era – neat shorts or floral frocks, with a braveheart carefully balancing an ungainly Fez on her head. Slightly to the right are two bearded, dissolute looking characters, the original hobos of Hobo Travel.*

In 1981 Andy Phillips decided that the kids he was teaching at Feltham Comprehensive (you could call them 'kids' in those days) could do with something a bit more exciting for their fieldtrips. He'd spotted an advert in *Teaching Geography* for Hobo Travel, who were offering expeditions to the exotic land of Marrakech, and thought that getting lost in the souks of Fez and camping under the Saharan stars would be just that bit more adventurous than the North Downs and Swanage that had been their usual fieldtrip fare.

The hobo in question was Mike McHugo, whose love affair with Morocco had begun eight years earlier when, at the impressionable age of nineteen, he'd rebuilt a beat up Volkswagen Beetle and set off for a jaunt around the mystic tip of North Africa.

"When Mike arrived to give a presentation to pupils and parents I had to ask if he would wear some socks, as just sandals might not inspire a lot of confidence in his company," recalls Andy. But obviously he inspired enough, because in April 1982, Andy and eight fourteen and fifteen-year-old students embarked on a two-week trip around Morocco. Mike collected them in his Land Rover from Casablanca airport and took them on a journey of discovery that took in the four Imperial Cities of Rabat, Fez, Meknes and Marrakech, as well as a night with the desert stars as their bivouac – until someone saw a scorpion and everyone made a dash for the Land Rover, with Mike sleeping in a bag on the roof.

By the time Andy Phillips was suggesting Mike McHugo wore socks, Hobo Travel was just beginning to get its toe into the water of the school fieldtrip market after an initial shaky start. Trevor Rowell had been

with Mike 'on the buses' while getting their Public Service Vehicle Licence, but for different reasons.

"I first met Mike at the beginning of 1978 when

we were both working for London Country Buses in Godstone, South London. He was only there to get his PSV to set up Hobo Travel and do Land Rover treks in Morocco; I'd gone there because I'd been teaching for six years and wanted a change. I'd travelled a bit and didn't want to go straight back into teaching as soon as I got back so I'd gone on the busses as well.

We got chatting and I said to him that if he ever needed a driver I'd be interested in doing a bit, although I never thought anything of it and forgot about it."

The whimsical winds of fate blow the pages of the diary over until almost exactly a year later when Trevor picked Mike up as a passenger.

"I said 'how's it going?' and he said, 'terrible, run out of money, can't get the clients.' We met for dinner and I said I'd put the same money in as he'd put in and we'll see where we go. So we did."



But why choose Morocco as the country to set up the fledgling travel company?

"We came to Morocco because I'd been here and Mike loved it. It was easy, relatively accessible, quite wild, but we lived very much hand-to-mouth in the early years, just trying to get some little business off the ground."



But it became clear that Hobo couldn't get enough individual clients to sustain itself, and it was Trevor's time as a teacher that encouraged the pair to take the next step that would become the basis for their growth over the next few years.

"We couldn't reach the individual tour market, so because I'd been in schools for six years I suggested we go for the school market. You only need one contact and you can get ten people, even the adults, into the Land Rover, so that's what we did." Hobo Travel gradually expanded over the next five years. "We had three Land Rovers and they were exciting times," says Trevor with a gleeful grin.

Offering a 'a bit of adventure in the mountains', Hobo's base in the High Atlas Mountains was the trekking centre of Imlil. With no road surface to speak of (tarmac didn't arrive until 2003), the only way in was 4x4 or the nerve-wracking local 'taxis' – pick-up trucks where you held perilously onto the side.

"In the first year of going to Imlil we met Hajj Maurice, Omar as he was then, (he gained the honorific 'Hajj' because of his pilgrimage to Mecca) who was a trekking guide. As we got to know him better we'd sometimes stay in his house in Imlil, which was a three-room little place with no facilities. We used to trek over to the surrounding valleys and stay in somebody else's house."

The rose-tinted spectacles of thirty-seven years can add a romantic gloss to the privations of youth, but Trevor's memories are still pretty sharp.

"The food was terrible, there was no electricity, no toilets, no running water. It was so...just hard." But said with a slight glimmer of fondness in the eye.

Over those first few years Hobo gradually expanded the schools market, to the point where the decision was made to build a specific centre to take students to. The idea was to buy a barn in the Pyrenees because by then they were also running trips to Spain. Their search proved fruitless, but by chance Mike McHugo found a former *colonie de vacances* in the Cévennes National Park, which they converted into the Eagle's Nest, a centre for school fieldtrips.

Meanwhile the trips to Morocco kept ticking over, with universities and an increasing number of schools as clients of the company, which had shed the sock-less-sandal image of Hobo to become Discover Ltd., but most of the focus by then had gone into France.

With the Eagle's Nest going from strength-to-strength, Mike McHugo's devotion to Morocco kept alive the idea of a similar centre in his adopted country, but stringent property laws prohibited foreigners from owning land.



"I used to look up at the ruin of the Kasbah from the roof of Maurice's house," he reminisces. "There was basically nothing there other than one small building with the roof fallen in and a bit of a wall that stuck up like a rotten tooth. It was just one of those things that was there and you never really gave it much thought." But his brother Chris, one of the directors of Discover, had.

A change of law in 1989 gave the brothers the chance to buy the Kasbah, building on the success of Eagle's Nest.

"We bought the kasbah with a view to setting it up the same as the Eagle's Nest. We converted it initially into salons so that school kids could sleep ten to a room, and that seemed to be quite popular, worked quite well. We built the first two en-suite rooms onto the Kasbah as teachers' rooms with the idea that if the teachers had a bit of luxury they'd want to come back. Then we started to get people coming by asking if they could stay..."

...and that leads to a whole different story.



# Limitation ..or.. Gateway to freedom?

With ten years as a boarding-house boy in his native Holland, photographer Gerard Wagemakers had always seen it as a limitation...until he came across the houses and girls of Education For All

What struck me when I met the girls was that they were very focused on learning, the harmony in the house, the openness and the power of the girls. They are in the transition from girl to woman, they are colourful (inside and outside), powerful in believing in their dreams, and vulnerable, wise and with a childlike innocence. They live in between different worlds and in between past and present. I really enjoyed seeing all those paradoxes they embody.

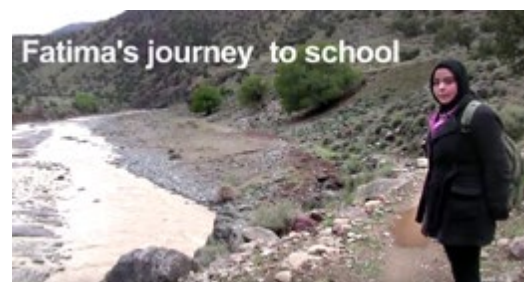
These girls have to travel six to seven hours to get education or to go home, waiting for taxi buses to arrive and never knowing what time that will be. No guarantees. And the villages, they are isolated and not provided with a lot of stuff we take for granted, like gas, water, bread. I was touched by the love and warmth that the families and the girls gave me. It was my birthday when I was shooting at night at one of the boarding houses. I was serenaded by more than thirty girls and they had baked a cake with my name on it. It was heart-warming to be able to experience this; nothing like my experience of boarding school. Here it felt like a gateway to freedom.

You can see more of Gerard Wagemakers images [HERE](#)



# Fatima's Journey to School

Fourteen-year-old Fatima lives in Iznaguen, a Berber village in the High Atlas Mountains. At an altitude of 2000 meters it's a four-hour drive in decent weather conditions to get to the nearest public high school in Ouirgane. But on the day video-makers from UNESCO recorded Fatima's journey home for World Education Forum 2015 it was anything but decent weather. Less than an hour into their journey they found that heavy rains had cause land slips and most routes had been cordoned off to protect travellers. With closure in both directions, they had little choice but to walk long distances, crossing rivers, traversing dirt paths meant for mules and hitching rides from local trucks. You can watch the video and read the full story on the UNESCO website by clicking on the image. The soundtrack is in Arabic, but the captions and images themselves tell the tale.



***It costs 40,000 euros to cover the full running costs of one house for one year, making our target for 2015 200,000€. To find out how you can contribute contact Sonia Omar at [sonia@efamorocco.org](mailto:sonia@efamorocco.org)***

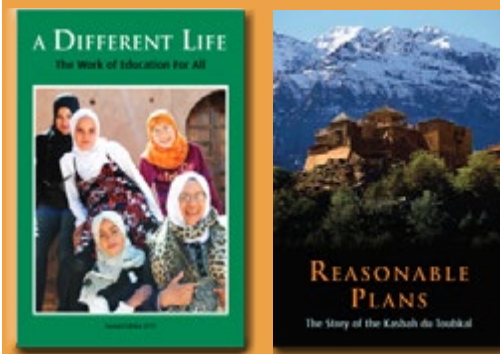
## Kasbah House Party

If you have visited Kasbah du Toubkal it won't have escaped your notice that the ethos of the Berber Hospitality Centre is that everything done there is involved in, and supportive of, the local community. You may have picked up copies of Reasonable Plans and A Different Life, the booklets that tell the stories of the Kasbah and Education For All, or downloaded them from the Kasbah website, but reading about something isn't the same as experiencing it – and now you can.

Mike McHugo, photographer Alan Keohane, Fabrice Cuzin, supervisor of the bearded vulture project, and others involved in the projects associated with the Association Bassins d'Imlil and Education For All, will be holding a series of informal events to go 'behind the scenes' and give a more detailed understanding of what, until now, have been mainly words and photographs on paper for most people.

The 'Kasbah House Party' is intended for past visitors and their friends, independent

You can read the full story of Education For All and Kasbah du Toubkal



travellers who would like to return to the Kasbah in the company of like-minded people, with a programme you can dip in and out of as time and interest prevails. You might choose to visit one of the boarding houses and chat to the girls who have benefited from the opportunity to continue their education, thanks to Education For All; take a trek to have a personal look at the some of the projects supported by the Kasbah and the Association Basin d'Imlil, hear talks by those closest to the projects, or relax with a half-day's yoga.

The first 'House Party', hosted by Mike McHugo, will be held in the last week of January, with transfers, meals and wine included in the price of your stay. Please contact Mike at [mike@discover.ltd.uk](mailto:mike@discover.ltd.uk) for more information and to reserve your place.



# Men at Work

## The Artisans of Fez

The sound is like a drum band, heavy on the cymbal. A perfectly syncopated rhythm. But instead of beating a drum, two men are hammering out the bottom seam of an enormous brass cauldron, the type that will be used at a wedding to prepare the banquet. To keep both rhythm and bowl moving, the lead hammer gives a double beat to the centre, adding a bass tone as he moves the bowl in a circle to the left. They never break the rhythm until, with a triple bass tone, the work comes to an end, and the music echoes away up the narrow alleys.

The 'drummers' work outside a tiny workshop below the enormous plane tree that shades Place Seffarine, by the southeast corner of the Qaraouiyyine Mosque, one of Fez's oldest artisan areas, and home to the makers of teapots, trays, bowls and cauldrons of every size, lamps of filigree decoration, stills that are hired out for the annual distillation of orange blossom. If it is made of brass or copper, you will find it here, or have it made for you. The metalworker's souq is close to the river, where most of the earliest artisan workshops began, some going back to the time Fez was founded, twelve hundred years ago.

The river was the life blood for many of the tiny workshops, most no more than twenty or twenty-five metres square. A few minutes walk from Place Seffarine, the street of the dyers has the permanently damp air of a squalid riverside etching of Victorian London. Water sloshes everywhere; in the heated cans used for the dying, the large metal drums where the clothes and yarns are dumped to flush the salts away, and the huge trough halfway down the alley where the fabric is given its final wash.

Anything small – a jacket, a shirt or a pair of jeans – is dyed in a fifteen-litre can filled with hot water; skeins of fine cactus thread will be boiled in a zinc dustbin. Clothes are simply hung on a hook in the wall of the alleyway to dry, looking like a Technicolor clothes shop



where everything needs ironing. The finer cactus thread will be hung from the roof beams, before being bundled onto the back of a donkey and taken to the weaver's souk.

In the weaver's souk, large wooden looms weave rich and colourful silk scarves and bed-covers, and the fabric that will be used for the finest djellabas and robes, from silk and fine cactus thread. The Bougeddach family all work together, weaving, sewing, displaying and selling their fine quality products, and son Nourddine loves describing the whole process to his visitors – even in English.

Many of the artisans work in full public view. Mr. Aziz sits in the same place he has for twenty-three years, his glasses perched on the end of his nose, carefully tapping a design into a large tray, using a set of punches that would be recognisable to a metal-worker at the time of the birth of Christ. Patiently he revolves the tray, each sharp tap repeating the design of the one before, until he chooses a punch of a different design and begins to create another pattern, but all in perfect symmetry.

Where you have tools you need someone to make them, and Mr. Driss pumps his right foot up and down on the treddle that turns the grindstone, a metre in diameter, that was brought from the Middle Atlas Mountains. The stone turns on a metal spindle, which is kept lubricated by occasional globs of soap. Today he's making a knife for a slipper maker,







its blade a wide curve from the handle to a rapidly tapering point. Despite the roughness of the stone, Mr. Driss delicately hones it to razor sharpness. The walls of his miniscule shop-cum-workshop are covered with framed photos of his favourite football team, MAS football club, the local boys.

An equal number of artisans are hidden away. Walk into a small, cramped space where someone is carefully brazing a brass lamp stand, and behind you might find an even smaller workshop, where the slipper maker is quietly working away, snipping at the soft, coloured leather – perhaps with a pair of shears made by Mr. Driss – and sewing them together on an old treddle sewing machine. In a curious role reversal, Khadija, one of the few women slipper makers working under the public gaze, has just received an order for specially designed shoes for China. It is a strange concept to grasp, that the world's biggest manufacturer is having footwear made in a two-metre square rustic workshop in the medieval heart of the Medina.

To a western mentality it might seem strange that someone can sit cross-legged in the same place day in, day out, year in, year out, spending a life time reproducing the same small range of products. Mr. Abdellatif, might not agree with you, even if he were ever to give it any thought. At seventy-six, he has spent most of those years making decorative combs and long slim hair pins, a skill he learned from his father, the way in which most artisans learned their trade. He sits cross-legged with the piece he is working on resting on the heel of his left foot, as he carefully files away the horn to create the delicate shapes of his combs. His friendly smile is that of someone perfectly at peace with his work.

Probably one of the best known of Fez's artisan trades is the Tanneries, and at over nine hundred years it is the oldest tannery in the world. The process of moving the sheep and goat skins through the honey-comb of vats, from the lime and pigeon droppings compound that breaks down the hide and helps with the absorption of the dye, through the watercolour palette of vats containing the dyes, is what most people see and photograph from the terraces of the shops that surround the tanneries. But role your trouser legs up and get 'down and dirty' at ground level, and you find tiny rooms where men use the same tools and methods as their forbears did in medieval times. Freshly dyed and dried skins are laid

over a horizontal pole, the worker using a wide curved blade attached to a wooden bar to scrape away the excess wool. The man will spend most of his working life bent double, seeing nothing much more than the blade he guides over the skin.

Sadly, most visitors to the artisan workshops of Fez treat them, unintentionally perhaps, as a human zoo. They will vaguely watch someone working, take a photo and move on. But stop, offer your hand, smile and ask their name. You have just begun to scratch the surface of Fez Medina.



**DISCOVER LTD** organise private tours, corporate events, incentives and private celebrations. All our tours are tailor-made to suit your requirements. Our standard tours can be built on and incorporate different destinations as required. Please [contact us](#) for your own personal itinerary.

# A Day at the Kasbah



As the Barbara Streisand song goes, 'On a clear day you can see forever,' and that's how it feels from the roof of Kasbah du Toubkal; in one direction the magnificent Jbel Toubkal, the highest mountain in North Africa, set against a warm blue sky; in the other the lush green of the Imlil Valley as it disappears into the distance on its meandering way to Marrakech. And you don't have to be staying at the Kasbah to enjoy the superb views.

If you would like to spend a day in the Atlas Mountains and experience the true spirit of the Berber way of life, Kasbah du Toubkal is open to non-residents. You can enjoy a full traditional lunch on the Kasbah's rooftop terrace, disturbed by little other than the low bubble of conversation and chirruping of birds. This day out also lets you take a walk in the mountains or take a mule to a local village. A unique experience and a day you will always remember.

Your day begins at nine a.m., when you leave Marrakech by either minibus or Land Rover. If you take your excursion on either Tuesday or Saturday you will be offered the opportunity to visit the souk at either Tahanaout or Imlil – an opportunity absolutely not to be missed. The weekly souk is the main market for the

townsfolk and those from the surrounding mountain villages, often involving long treks to either bring produce to sell or buy the families groceries for the week. But it is much more than that; it is a place friends meet to catch up on the news, men go to get a haircut and discuss the merits of a flock of goats, where children gaze longingly at a pile of plastic toys. (Women are rarely seen at a village souk.) An idea of what a European market would have been like a couple of centuries ago, teeming with life and local produce.

Next, to Imlil, and a chance to visit a Moroccan village before walking or taking a mule up to the Kasbah for lunch.

As part of your excursion package you can choose to take a short guided trek or mule ride to an outlying village to take mint tea in a Berber house, your chance to see life as it's lived in a traditional Berber home. You will be back at the Kasbah by four in the afternoon to begin your return journey to your hotel in Marrakech.

For a tantalising look at the Kasbah du Toubkal watch this short video by



For more information download our Discover pdf



# Happy 20th Birthday Kasbah du Toubkal

The Kasbah du Toubkal opened its doors in October 1995 and has been building on its success as a Berber hospitality centre year-in-year out. Here are some of the awards we are proud to have been awarded. We'll tell you the full story in our next issue.



## Taking care of you at the Kasbah

*In this issue we introduce you to some of the staff who create and serve the delicious traditional Moroccan cuisine for which the Kasbah is well known*



*Houssain Ait Hmad*

Houssain may be small in stature but he's enormous in smile and warm personality when making you welcome at your table when you dine at the Kasbah. He has been working at the Kasbah since 2000 and lives with his wife and five children in Imlil.



*Omar Erami*

Omar heads the kitchen team that brings you the traditional dishes of the region. With a ready smile and excellent English you may be lucky enough to have Omar as one of your guides on the Kasbah's daily treks – if kitchen duties don't call.



*Saïd Id Ahmed*

Twenty-seven-year old waiter, Saïd, came to the Kasbah four years ago to do a restaurant course, and stayed. Saïd makes the seventy-kilometre return journey from his village, Ijoukak, every three weeks. His stays at the Kasbah have opened up the world to him via the internet.

# Hitting the High Spots

## Cycling in Morocco

*For a kilometre we take a casual ride, saying goodbye to the croaking frogs on the lake and leaving the sodden football pitch and its herds of grazing sheep behind. And then the descent begins. I tentatively apply the brakes to keep my pace steady. Within a kilometre I'm gripping them so tight that if I wasn't wearing gloves I'd probably be looking at white knuckles. It's cold, very cold, but it's wonderful, as exhilarating as you can get! The views go on and on; mountains, valleys, tiny mud villages, pine forests and water rushing down the mountainside, the colours heightened by the crystal air. It's one of the reasons I never wear sunglasses; I don't want a bit of tinted plastic dimming the radiance of such a view.*

*Taken from High, Ride and Handsome - By bike through the High Atlas Mountains*

Timothy Madden looks the very image of the triathlete, lean with legs like whipcord. Saif, his son, is the opposite, muscular bulk to pound away at the peddles for hours on end. In 2009 Timothy came up with the idea of opening a bike shop, but it entailed more than Saif closing his mortgage banking office in St Louis, Missouri, it was a move to Morocco, to re-connect with generations of family that has its roots in Marrakech. In 2010 Argan Xtreme Sports (AXS) was born, with a shop in Marrakech and a fleet of one hundred Giant bikes for tours and rental, and exclusive distribution rights for the bikes in Morocco.

Mike McHugo, a self-confessed 'plodder' in his cycling style – if you can call 120 kilometres a day 'plodding' – first came to Morocco in the early 1970s, and instantly fell in love with this enigmatic country; the exotic mix of cultures and the geographic extremes of high mountains, Atlantic coastline, sand dunes and snow-covered vistas. Being a keen cyclist, he crossed the country on bike from the Mediterranean coast through the Rif mountains, on to Marrakech and then up into the High Atlas Mountains. "From a cyclist's point of view the magnificent and varied terrain does not get much better," he says.

In 2012 Mike and his cycling side-kick, Gareth Westacott came up with idea for the Marrakech Atlas Etape (MAE) on a ride through France, and teamed

up with Saif and AXS to create the first etape in Morocco.

"We'd planned to do cyclo-sportives," said Saif, "but when Mike McHugo contacted us it seemed the obvious thing to do to combine forces. It was a couple of years in the planning but everyone is incredibly impressed about the way MAE has developed, and in its own way has introduced cycling in Morocco to a lot of people who would never have thought of it as a cycling destination a few years ago."

Only three years after its inaugural ride the MAE was described by The Telegraph, one of the UK's premier dailies, as one of the six best cyclo-sportives of 2015. But the Etape is more than just an up-and-coming challenge in the international cycling calendar, its aim has been from day one to raise funds for Education For All, a charity that provides boarding houses for girls from impoverished families from the most remote villages in the High Atlas Mountains to continue their education.



*The Marrakesh Atlas Etape is a true cycle-sportive catering for all, it's not only inclusive and friendly it's an adventure, an experience full of sights and sounds you will never forget.*

Nigel Hale-Hunter, BPM Cycling Coach



# Moroccan cycling comes of age

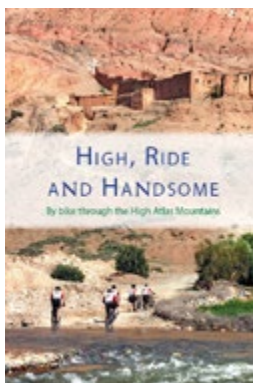
It's not just professional or serious amateur cyclists that are finding a bike ride in Morocco a totally new experience. Riders of all levels including beginners are coming to Morocco to enjoy the country's beautiful landscapes.

AXS offer everything from a Kids and Family Friendly day out around Marrakech, thorough road and off-road to suit all levels of expertise, to multi-days that cover as wide a terrain as you could imagine setting two wheels on, including some seriously challenging mountain-biking.

"I don't think people realise just how much they can experience in Morocco," says Saif Kovach. "We get families and people with not a lot of cycling

experience who just want to see Marrakech and the surrounding countryside in a way that they wouldn't get to do on foot or in a car. We guide them through the souks or out to the Palmeraie and they get a totally different idea of what Marrakech is all about. On the other hand, more-and-more we are being asked to set up training camps for serious riders who will spend a week with us covering terrain they would never likely come across in their home countries, and with weather conditions in Morocco there are more clubs and teams looking here to provide good riding at times of the year when they would be riding in rain or snow at home, if at all."

*To prepare riders for the Marrakech Atlas Etape, AXS offer an all-inclusive cycling holiday-cum-training package of three, four and seven days, with twenty percent of proceeds going directly to Education For All.*



## High, Ride and Handsome By bike through the High Atlas Mountains

Derek Workman sets off in the company of five gentlemen of a certain age on a six-day cycling romp that sees them reclining like pashas on embroidered cushions while being served freshly-cooked tajines and wonderful salads with magnificent vistas of snow-capped

mountains – although they do cover a fair few miles by peddle-power.

*All proceeds from the sale of **High, Wide and Handsome** go to the benefit of **Education For All**. Available for immediate download from [Amazon.co.uk](http://Amazon.co.uk)*



## MARRAKECH ATLAS ETAPE

Registration now open for April 2016

## Reader Contributor: *Nadia Butler - Ancient Pathways*

Mention the word 'medina' and many people think of the maze-like streets of the ancient cities of Marrakech and Fez. In fact, the medina is a section of the city found in many parts of North Africa, the word itself simply meaning 'city' or 'town' in modern Arabic.

With their narrow, twisting alleyways the medina is usually a car-free zone; the Medina of Fez, is said to be one of the largest car-free urban areas in the world. Each twist and turn reveals centuries old fountains, palaces and mosques, but it is the scents and sounds of these historic quarters that are the real experience.

With beautiful photos and lyrical text, Nadia Butler brings the medina to life at

### Reflections on Halcyon Pond



## The Kasbah in the Media



Filming for **Prized Apart** took place all over Morocco, with the adventurers often having to travel over 250 miles between locations. Find out a bit more about the stunning – and sometimes terrifying – places the Team Tasks and Survival Challenges took the adventurers for the Saturday night adventure game show.



**The best of art, food, culture and travel.**

A series of articles telling you the top things to do and visit on your trip to the Red Rose City.

The souks of Marrakech

The top 10 things to do and see in Marrakech

The best street food in Marrakech



# The Subtle Art of Buying a Carpet

There seems to be two main ways people buy Moroccan carpets.

The first is to carefully mull. Will the colour clash with the furnishings in the living room? Will it get too much wear in the hall? Is that orangey one better value than the greeney one?

The second way is to simply have the smiling vendor throw half a dozen down on the floor, take off your shoes and squish your toes in the pile to see which feels good.

And don't think the salesman is taking the mickey when he grins and says, 'You only pay for the front, the back is free,' because in the High Atlas Mountains, where some of the looser pile carpets come from, the shaggy side is for winter warmth while the smoother reverse is for summer wear. And speaking of wear, some rugs actually are

worn as a winter wrap or used as bed covers. Welcome to the slightly unusual world of Moroccan carpets.

Every carpet tells a story – quite literally, although you may not be able to decipher its meaning. Each tribe has its own particular repertoire of imagery, which differs by village and region, but there is no such thing as a pattern or design. Every weave and weft is learned at the feet of a mother and grandmother - and a carpet weaver is always a woman.

The designs tell of the grand ceremonies and minor happenings of the village, but the essence of a carpet is the story of the weaver, the rhythm of her daily life. Her trials and tribulations, her small joys and larger happinesses are woven into her carpet, as a painter puts his emotions on canvas by the subtlety of his brush.

Wander Marrakech's higgledy-piggledy souks and carpets will find you everywhere; piled, rolled, unfolded and folded, spread on floors or cascading from hooks and balconies, casually thrown or elegantly presented like a perfect pearl in a Bond Street jewellers. Technicolor existed in the shades and subtleties of colour in Moroccan carpets long before the idea hit the silver screen. Subtle or screamingly outrageous – they are all there.

But buying a carpet is a serious business, a special moment to be savoured, accompanied by mint tea sweetened with cardiac-arrest levels of sugar. 'There is no need to rush, madam.' 'No hurry, no worry.' 'This price is special only to you so please don't tell your friends.' 'If only I could to give you a better price, sir, but anything less and my children won't eat today.' 'Do you have a credit card?'



## Education for all

An educated girl educates the next generation.  
Help provide a college education for girls in rural Morocco



EDUCATION  
for all



[www.efamorocco.org](http://www.efamorocco.org)



*Keep up to date with our  
glorious corner of Morocco...  
Click on the logo to receive  
future issues of the  
Kasbah du Toubkal's  
quarterly magazine.*

[www.kasbahdutoubkal.com](http://www.kasbahdutoubkal.com)    [kasbah@discover.ltd.uk](mailto:kasbah@discover.ltd.uk)