

## Desert Nomads: Exploring the traditional and modern lifestyles of the Saharawi and desert Berber people of Southern Morocco



A fascinating journey exploring the huge contrasting landscapes and the ancient and modern traditions of the desert people of Southern Morocco. Our journey will start in bustling Marrakech and take us through the high snow-covered Atlas, to the ancient trade capitals of the arid foothills of the Atlas and Anti-Atlas and drop to the desert which is the gateway to the Sahara. We will then explore the traditional and more modern life of the desert. Travelling with camels and setting up temporary camps to gain first hand experience of the desert landscapes and desert life of the Saharawi people, being hosted by modern Desert Nomads and ultimately travelling across the off-road routes to experience the multi-dimensional and changing natures of the desert landscapes.

### Highlights of the journey:

- **Trevel from Marrakesh through the high Atlas to the arid foot hills of the Atlas**
  - Traveling through the snowy hight Atlas
  - Visiting villages and Kasbahs (fortified villages) of the north African trade routes
- **Explore and stay in the ancient heart of iconic UNESCO listed Ait Ben Haddou: A filming location of numerous films (including Lawrence of Arabia, Game of Trones, Gladiator).**
  - Exploring the adobe and rammed earth houses of this ancient fortified trade capital of North Africa.
  - Stay in the heart of the 11<sup>th</sup> Century old town in one of the few locally owned guest houses that is conserving the local architecture and heritage.
- **Led by local Berber guides, walk from Ait Benhaddou across a sunning sand and rock landscape to the palm lined Asif Ounila river valley.**
  - Traditional lunch in the palm groves of ancient Tamdahte Kasbah learning the art of traditional tea making by camp fire and eating local food and dates.
  - Visit the hidden ancient labyrinthine cave dwellings of Tazaght
- **Undertake a 4 day journey with a Camal train and led by our local Sahrawi guides**
  - Walk with the camel trains and learn the importance of the camel to travel, trade and livelihoods in the Sahara.

- Spend 4 nights in wild camps – set up with beautiful communal tents and lantern and camp fire lit at night and sleep in private tents or under the stunning night skies of the Sahara.
- Experience true Sahara hospitality with amazing food, conversation and music.
- **Be hosted by a Berber Nomad Family to understand the modern life of the traditionally pastoral nomadic people who live by herding goats and camels.**
- **At the end of our wild and local exploration, spend a final night in a fixed luxury camp in the huge Erg Chegega (sand dune) area.**
  - Climb the highest sand dune in Morocco to see the sun set across the dunes.
- **Travel by 4WD on the off-road modern highways of the desert and see the stunning transitions of the desert- through dune, rock desert, fossil encusted hills, dried lake beds, palm oasis, sculpted sandstone cliffs back to the road head.**



### Journey logistics

- **Trip length: 12 days (11 nights) from and to Marrakesh**
- **Trip numbers: 8 to 10 people** (the trip will be confirmed when we have 8 participants)
- **Leadership:** An international group leader (Gavin Anderson) will accompany the whole journey. In Ait Ben Haddou we will have local Berber guides for our day walk. We will then meet our local desert and Saharawi guide Ali Bouhouda who will lead us through the 6 days of desert exploration. Ali speaks fluent English and his family has ancestral traditions of desert livelihoods and is an experienced guide.
- **Accommodation: 11 nights**
  - 6 nights in hotels: 2 nights in Marrakesh, 2 nights in Ait Benhaddou, 1 night in a luxury camp at Erg Chegega, and 1 night in a hotel in Agdz on our return journey.
  - 5 nights wild camping: very comfortable camping 4 in wild locations with our local team and one beside a modern Nomad family who will host us. Tents and Mats are provided

Note on camping: The camps are set up beautifully with a communal tent with traditional rugs and mats and people can choose to sleep in the larger tent, or small pop-up tents or under the amazing star lit skies. The team will light the camp with lanterns and wild wood campfires. A wash tent will be established and a screen for ablution/toilet.



- **Supported Camp trekking** – During camping our luggage will be transported by Camel or 4WD and camps will be set up for us by our team.

- **Difficulty/ level of fitness:** This journey does involve moderate trekking of 2 to 4 hours a day and without large inclines (apart from the ascent of the highest sand dune which is optional). A good walking fitness and willingness to camp is required for this trip.

- **Food:** The food in Morocco is great with an abundance of fruit and vegetables. We can accommodate special dietary requirements.



- **Time of year and temperatures:** The trips will be organised in the Northern Hemisphere winter (Late November to early March). Expect warm days (up to mid-20s Celsius) but cold nights down to perhaps 8 degrees Celsius).

- **Equipment:** All camping equipment is provided (including tents and sleeping mats). Participants are required to take their own warm sleeping bag. A kit checklist will be provided on booking the journey.

- **Cost:** US\$3700 (around £2750 at rates in February 2026) based on 2 people sharing (a \$250 supplement would be required for single occupancy in hotels etc). This includes all hotel and accommodation costs, guiding (local and international), transport and all food (except lunches in Marrakesh). It does not include international flights, airport transfers, and tips for local staff (optional).

- **Booking process:** Ask for a registration form to register interest in this journey. We ask for a downpayment of US\$800 to confirm a place on the trip with the balance requested 6 weeks before departure.

- **Consumer Protection:** Nomadic Skies Expeditions is a full member of the UK Travel Trust Association (TTA) which provides 100% [consumer protection](#) on all bookings and full refund if the trip does not happen. You will be provided with a travel protection certificate as soon as the first payment is made.



## Summary Itinerary

Day	Description	Night
Day 1	Arrive in Marrakesh	Marrakesh hotel
Day 2	Drive through the High Atlas to Ait Ben Haddou	Ait Ben Haddou Hotel
Day 3	Explore Ait Ben Haddou and hike with Berber guides. (about 12 km / 7.5 miles)	Ait Ben Haddou Hotel
Day 4	Drive to Mhamid (start of the desert). Short hike to temporary wild camp at Ras Enkhal	Wild Camp 1
Day 5	Hike with camel train to Sidi Naji oasis	Wild Camp 2

Day 6	Hike with camel train to Erg Ezahar	Wild Camp 3
Day 7	Hike with camel train to Erg Ess mar	Wild Camp 4
Day 8	Walk and then 4WD to Nomad Family	Camp with Nomad Family
Day 9	4WD exploration and to Chegega Erg	Luxury fixed camp
Day 10	4WD off road travel through the desert to Fom Zguid and then by car to Agdz town	Agdz Hotel
Day 11	Travel by car back to Marrakesh	Marrakesh hotel
Day 12	Potential departure day	

## Detailed Itinerary

### Day 1 Arrival in Marrakesh

Marrakesh is a bustling, dynamic and vibrant centre of commerce and tourism. We will be staying in a high-quality guest house in the Medina (walled town) close to the numerous souks (shops) cafes and restaurants. We can book accommodation for those who would like to arrive earlier than the start day to enjoy and explore Marrakesh. In the evening of the first official day, we will have a group welcome dinner.

### Day 2: Travel by car through the Atlas to Ait Benhaddou

We will travel by vehicle from Marrakech and on a winding road that takes us on a pass through the snow-capped high Atlas. As we drop from the Atlas we will take a small back road weaving through colourful chalk and salt lined hills with small villages and Kasbahs (fortified buildings and settlements) stopping on the way at points of interest and for lunch. We will visit the crumbling but impressive Kasbah Tamdakte, the ancient centre of the infamous Glaoui dynasty and a modern filming location for movies such as Gladiator.

We will then arrive in the later afternoon at our destination of iconic Ait Benhaddou. Perched on a rocky hill across the often dry Asif Oumila River. Ait Benhaddou is a UNESCO listed site and its buildings of red adobe (rammed earth) are set wonderfully against the sandstone rock landscape and palm trees. We will



avoid the tourists (who usually arrive late morning and leave by afternoon) and we will cross the river by a private small causeway and enter the ancient town through one of the original gates



direct into our guest house. Our luggage will be transported by animals across to our guest house. We will be staying in the heart of the old town in one of the only guest houses run by a local family who has owned the property for generations. The guest house is part of the ancient old town and tourism is supporting the architectural conservation. Our group will take over most of this wonderful small guest house. We will have a chance to explore the old town as the sun drops and the light ignites the red of the hills and adobe buildings. We can watch the sundown either from our guest house balcony or from the top of the small hill on which Ait Benhaddou is built.

### Day 3: Hike above Ait Benhaddou to Tamdakte and the Tazaght Caves

After a relatively leisurely morning and a breakfast on the balcony of our guest house, we will be



taken by local Berber guides on an approximately 12km (7.5 mile) walk taking us out of Ait Benhaddou's main gate and above the town following thin trails weaving over hill sides, along dry river beds and through rock desert to a pass with a stunning vista of patterned rainbow sandstone hills and with the High snowy Atlas usually visible on the horizon. We will drop through the sandstone

hills to the village of Tamdakht (and its Kasbah that we will have visited the day before). We will lunch on the palm fringed banks of the Asif Oumila river in the gardens of the ancient Kasbah and our Berber guides will make basic wood fires and prepare local herbal Berber tea.

After lunch we will cross the river and weave through sandstone cliffs to the hidden Tazaght Caves. These are a complex labyrinth of around 40 interconnected chambers built high into the sandstone rock face. An ancient cave dwelling and a more recent place for secure storage and concealment. We will return across the river to the modern village and be met by our vehicle which will take us back to our guest house at Ait Benhaddou.



#### **Day 4: Drive to the desert of Mhamid and trek to our first desert 'wild camp'**

After breakfast we will drive the 280km (175 mile) route to the desert town of Mhamid. The route takes us through beautiful hills of the Anti-Atlas, villages and Kasbahs. We will see the changing landscape as we drop lower towards our desert destination. After lunch we will enter the lower desert area and by early to midafternoon will reach the small village of Mhamid - a desert frontier town of sand and palm trees at the end of the formal roads and a staging point for the Southern desert of Morocco. We will meet our fantastic Saharawi local guide Ali Boudha who will introduce us to the desert and our camel team (and the camels themselves) who will accompany us for the next 4 days. Our luggage will be loaded onto the camels, and we will walk for around 1 hour with our camel train through the palm groves to our 1<sup>st</sup> desert camp that will have been erected at the edge of the Oud (Area of green vegetation).



Our night camp will comprise of a beautiful communal, insulated and lined) tent, a cook and staff tent, and pop up tents for those who would like to sleep privacy. As night falls and the stars illuminate the sky, lanterns and a bonfire will be lit. After a camp dinner we can hear more about the desert life and relax into the desert environment. People can decide to sleep either in the

communal tent or in the small pop up tents, or even take a mat and sleep under the stunning desert stars.

### **Day 5: Trek to Sidi Naji and an exploration of the desert and desert life.**

In the morning, we will strike camp and see the camels loaded. We will then walk around 4 hours to our next desert camp at Sidi Naji, an Oasis and sanctuary established by a revered holy man. We will experience walking with a full camel caravan arriving at our destination around lunch time. Our team will unload the camels, pitch our communal tent and staff tent and prepare lunch for us. We can explore the desert or spend time absorbing the tranquil nature of the wilderness. We will have certainly left all other tourists and visitors behind and will



have the area to ourselves. We will spend some time talking with our guides in the afternoon and evening to explore more about Sahrawi and desert Berber cultures. We will watch the sun drop on the desert and see the changing colours, shadows and patterns that are so stunning in low light.

### **Day 6: Trek to Erg Ezahar**

We will again move camp and load our camels and walk (an easy 4 hours) to our next camp at Erg Ezahar. Erg is the name for a sand dune area, and these blown dunes change and grow/reduce over time as the winds whip the sand from the rock desert and among the dunes. The dunes form elegant undulating profiles, curving ridges, and textured windblown textures that are particularly beautiful in the early morning and evening light. Our camp will be in a sheltered area among the dunes, and we will have a chance to explore the dunes as the camp is pitched. The dunes are a perfect



setting for contemplation and relaxation and an escape from modern life. Our evenings will provide the potential for further discussion, music and sharing by firelight.

### **Day 7: Trek to our final desert wild camp at Erg Esmar**

After a potentially more leisurely start, we will move with camels for the last time to a second desert area of Erg Esmar (about 2 hours) where we will pitch our last wild camp. We will explore this area and see the differing nature of the dunes and have a more relaxed day as we find ourselves slowed down by our environment. Participants can accompany the camels and staff to collect wild desert wood for our campfire or just relax in the sublime quietness of the desert.

## Day 8: Exploration of modern Berber Nomad life and Nomad Camp

After breakfast we will strike our camp and load our camels for the last time. We will take a final short walk with the camels to meet our modern desert transport – 4WD vehicles which we will load with our luggage for the next section of our desert exploration.



After bidding farewell to our camel crew, we will move to our vehicles and with our guide Ali and our drivers we will drive through the desert to the modern Nomad settlements and oasis North of Mhamid. Modern Berber Nomads are pastoralists who make a livelihood from rearing goats and/or camels. They live in traditional and modern tents and structures comprising of wild twisting desert wood and patchwork fabric of any type (even split open old clothing). From outside, a Berber Nomad homestead feels as if it could have been constructed by a wild Robinson Crusoe with their rough structure and rag-tag of fabrics, but inside the lined tents they are surprisingly comfortable. We will visit a Nomad tented school and be hosted by a modern Nomad Family – pitching our tents close to their homestead and sharing their communal spaces. We will be with the family as the livestock are herded back to the homestead. A meal will be prepared for us by our hosts, and we will learn more about desert Nomad life – both the past and the present.



## Day 9: Desert Oasis and to Erg Chegega and some desert luxury

After a breakfast and saying goodbye to our Nomad hosts, we will visit a Palm Oasis and a wonderful Nomad woman who lives in the area and will show us how traditional 'sand bread' is made – preparing a beautiful vegetable filled bread for a light lunch and with traditional herbal tea. After lunch we will drive about 1 hour keeping a close eye out for the wild Addax Antelope (also known as the white antelope or the screw-horn antelope), that are native to the Sahara. We will travel to the edge of the huge dune area (Erg



Chegega) and arrive at a luxury tented camp – a reward of hot showers, soft beds and sanitation after our time in the wild camps and as our last night in the desert.



After resting and as evening draws in we can begin an ascent of the highest sand dune in Morocco. There is a potential to travel on camel back to the foot of the dune (about 30 minute ride) and then walk up the curving crest of the dune to its peak (about a 30 minute ascent). While we may find a few other visitors (as we are slightly back on the tourist trail), it is unlikely to have many people at the top of the dune... and the views are staggeringly beautiful and as the sun drops the views of the surrounding dunes and distant sandstone hills will get better and better – truly breathtaking! After watching the sun disappear, we will rapidly descend the dune and by twilight make our way back to our camp for an evening meal, bonfire and clean sheets and soft beds.



### **Day 10: Exploration of the varying desert landscape by 4WD and travel to Agdz**

Today we will leave the desert, but we will travel through the desert on the informal desert highways: across sand-blown desert, rock desert, through oasis and sculptured rocks mountains and cliffs. We will experience the modes of modern desert travel (after our experience of the old ways with camel trains) and see the huge contrasting nature of the desert. We will stop in the flat dry lake beds, hill sides covered in rocks encrusted with fossil shells, oasis with palm trees (and even tea being





served to occasional travellers) and then through areas of sculpted sandstone cliff. With skilled drivers, vehicles can travel surprisingly fast on soft sand, but somewhat slower over rock desert.

We will cross the desert and reach the tarmac road at the town of Fom Zguid for a late lunch where we will be met by our road vehicle.

After lunch we will begin our journey North from the desert. A 2-hour drive will take us to the town of Agdz where we will overnight in a locally owned and lovely guest house.

### **Day 11: Travel to Marrakesh**

Today we will travel the 269km (168 miles) back to Marrakesh (a 4½ to 5 hour journey) stopping for lunch and arriving in the afternoon back in Marrakesh. We will have one last farewell group meal on our last official night. The end of a unique journey of huge contrast.

### **Day 12: Departure day from Marrakesh.**