

Memories of Morocco **(21-28 NOVEMBER 2013.)**

Hosted by **Anatolian Sky** I recently visited Marrakech, Essouria and Agadir in Morocco.

Our group of 13 left Gatwick on a cold grey day in late November on an Easyjet flight direct to Marrakech where we arrived 3.45 hours later into blue skies, warm sunshine and a balmy 24C.

On arrival at the airport we had to hand in our boarding cards and get our passports stamped, we were then advised to go straight to the currency exchange and **KEEP OUR RECEIPT** in order to change back any money at the end of our trip because the local currency is not allowed to be taken out of Morocco.

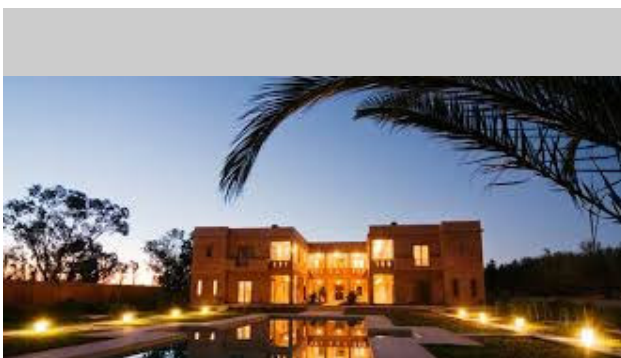
We met our wonderful guide Sharyn (Sharyn Naamane, **Complete Tours** completetreks@yahoo.co.uk) a Scots girl who lives in Agadir and is fluent in Moroccan Arabic and a mine of information.

Marrakech lies on an immense flat plain cradled by the snow-capped Atlas Mountains, some 40 miles away by road, but a world away in feeling. We caught tantalizing glimpses of vibrant and exotic Marrakech as we sped towards our first destination in the foothills of the High Atlas Mountains;

After a 30 minute drive our mini-bus turned down a dusty, bumpy lane and we all wondered where we were going to. We drew to a halt outside a large gate and stepped inside into another world...

RIAD CAPALDI

<http://www.thecapaldi.com/riad-capaldi/>



This beautiful property was an absolute delight, lovingly restored by the owner to the highest standards and with great attention to detail. Large gardens with 2 pools, one of which is always heated in winter. Each room is individual and there are several categories including de-luxe suites with

their own private pool,(an idyllic choice for a honeymoon.) The restaurant has a rooftop terrace with views over the Atlas Mountains and a glass sliding roof. There are numerous outside areas to eat and the French chef at the restaurant has a fine reputation (Richard Branson held his mother's birthday party here !).The hotel is **adults only** at the moment but there is a 4 bedroom villa with a large private pool for families to use.

Having wine and dined at the Capaldi we made our reluctant goodbyes and ventured higher into the mountains for our 1st overnight stop at the

Kasbah Angour www.kasbahangour.com



Built in the style of an old Berber Castle the Kasbah Angour is in fact newly built. The English owner Paul Foulsham used local craftsmen and local materials to create a truly original hotel. Although sunny during the day at night in the mountains the temperature plummets and the open fires in the restaurant and lounge were very welcome. The rooms vary in size and location but all have air-conditioning and under floor heating. I preferred the Adrar rooms with their views of the gardens and mountains but ask for a room that is single storey as I had somebody walking overhead in heeled shoes on the stone floor!

The mountain area is very popular with walkers of all standards and the hotel supplies guides for walking, mule trekking, 4x4 and car tours.(subject to a charge) They have a good programme for families and there are lots of activities in the locality that can be arranged. Being only 30 mins drive from Marrakech one can enjoy the hustle and bustle of the city but come back to this quiet mountain retreat at the end of the day.

After a lovely meal in the restaurant we were lucky enough to see shooting stars in the clear night sky on our way back to our comfortable rooms.

Day 2.

Waking up to a cloudless blue sky we were soon on our way to our next destination in the mountains **The TATFI de L'ATLAS** .



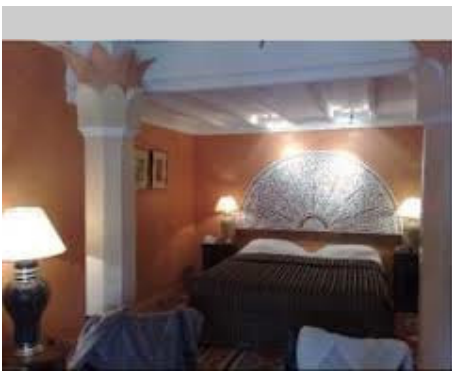
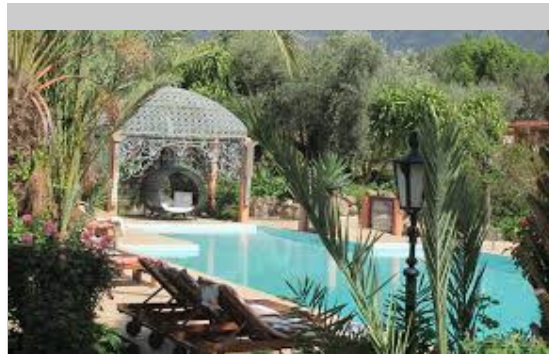
We were given the very warmest of welcomes at this rustic property from the delightful owners .Nestling in the mountains it is close to the National Park of Mount Toubkal which has the highest peak in North Africa at 4165 mtrs. As you can imagine there were great views all around. This would make a delightful base for a walking holiday. The hotel has a lovely pool and restaurant where their own organically grown produce is served. The accommodation is in single storey apartments dotted around the hotel gardens .They are quite basic, especially the bathrooms, but clean and comfortable with both air conditioning for the summer and delightful log fires for the colder evenings in the autumn.

The hotel will happily arrange guides for walking and a packed lunch !

All too soon we were on our way to the next hotel.

Hotel La Roseraie

www.laroseraiehotel.com

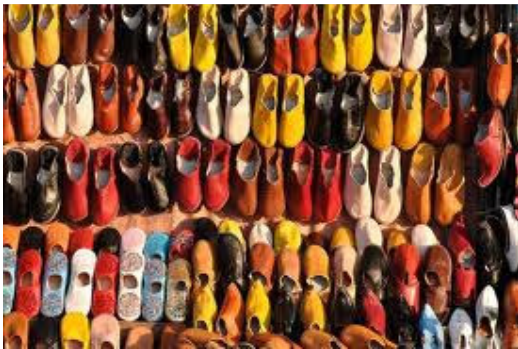


Still high in the mountains about 60km from Marrakech you will discover La Roseraie. Secretly hidden in the middle of 60 acres of natural parkland this is the perfect retreat.

One of the first hotels to be built in this area it has a thoroughly deserved excellent reputation. The accommodation is built in cottage style rooms and suites throughout the lovely gardens. Very opulent in style and furnishings. There is a super main pool and a smaller one for the exclusive use of clients staying in the new villas. The restaurant and lounge /bar area are separated by a huge open fire which was a delight to sit by while we waited for our meal to be served.

The hotel unusually has its own stables and the luscious Vigo Mortesaan (Lord of the Rings star) and his film crew were currently staying there !

Day 3



All too soon it was time to leave the peace of the mountains and head back to the mayhem and magic of Marrakech. This exciting city offers a unique mix of vibrancy and escape, the noise and aromas and the sheer multitude of teeming people were in complete contrast to the tranquillity we experienced in the mountains. Soak up the fascinating culture in the seductive souks and then relax under the desert sun back at your chosen hotel or enjoy a fragrant massage in a spa or hammam- Marrakech will not disappoint.

To experience the old Marrakech stay in one of the traditional Riads within the walls of the old Medina. Because the alley ways are so small transfer cars are unable to drop you right outside many of the hotels within the Medina and you are dropped off at a central point and have to negotiate with the local "barrow boys" who literally put your luggage into a barrow and take you through the alleyways to your hotel. I must admit I would be a bit worried about doing that on my own !

RIAD SLITINE. www.riad-slitine-marrakech.com/



The Slitine is a very traditional Riad within the old Medina. The approach to the Riad was off putting as it was down a none to fragrant alley, but as always once through the outer door inside was an ocean of calm and the fragrant perfume of Orange blossom and Cedar wood soon made us forget the outside world. The Riads are amazingly quiet and tranquil inside and It's hard to believe that you are in the heart of the Medina. Our guide explained that traditional Moroccan breakfast is served at this Riad and guests must ask if they want anything else, the staff are only too happy to oblige but if you don't ask you don't get !

Riad Ksar Anika www.ksaranika.com



I really liked this Riad. It is in such a good position in a quiet corner of the Mellah area of the souq, tucked in against the walls of the Bahia palace with taxi access direct to the front door.

The Djemma el Fna is 15 mins walk away through the souq with a sister property en route five mins walk away – ideal for a stop for a beer, cup of tea or a snack! It is bright and spacious and lovingly modernised by its enthusiastic English/Kuwaiti owners.

An exceptionally large pool forms the centrepiece and is complemented by a lovely spa and Hammam. & rooftop terrace. The whole ethos of this Riad is relaxation and well-being and the individually decorated bedrooms certainly maintain this maxim.

We enjoyed a superb lunch in the very modern restaurant and I would thoroughly recommend the Riad Anika as it has maintained it's Riad Heritage but has all the modern comforts too.

The Taj Palace www.tajhotels.com



This hotel for many of our group was the high- light of our trip. The hotel famously featured in the film "Sex in the City 2" although in the film it was said to be in Abu Dhabi!

Built to resemble the opulence and majesty of a Maharaja's Palace it certainly doesn't disappoint. The sheer scale of the Taj is hard to portray- it makes you feel a bit like Alice in Wonderland as everything is larger than life. Even the drive up to the hotel seems endless. The bejewelled chandelier in the entrance is 25 metres long and was hand made in Jaipur-so you can start to imagine the grandeur that I am trying to portray. The hotel is designed as a series of Riads placed around the huge central pool.



My room was exquisite and really had everything you could wish for. The outer door opens onto a lobby where a state of the art coffee machine ,min-fridge and tea coffee making facilities were placed, Off to the left was a further small lobby where luggage etc. could be stored and there was also a door to the next room for interconnecting. The door to the right opened onto the room above where wine, fruit, flowers and chocolates were waiting for me. From this room was a lovely terrace with huge Moroccan day beds. The shower room, dressing room and breathtaking bathroom were equally sumptuous, with heavenly scented Moroccan Orange toiletries.

We enjoyed a wonderful meal in the evening where once again every small detail seemed to have been thought of including tiny tables placed by the ladies chairs for them to put their bags on.



Breakfast in the morning was taken outside on the terrace overlooking the pool. A German film crew were staying here making a documentary on Dream Hotels of the World, We were also able to visit the amazing royal suite which is the suite featured in the Sex in the City film. It has 3 large bedrooms plus dining room, lounge, huge balcony etc. It would make an ideal venue for a group travelling together for a special occasion ,as the price, divided between 3 families would not be prohibitive and it is certainly a holiday you would never forget!



This is a lovely old traditional Riad, it was busy when we visited and certainly from the remarks of the departing guests it is a well-loved property with lots of repeat visitors. Boasting the oldest restaurant in Marrakech it is not surprising that the hotel is now well known for its fabulous cookery courses.

As with lots of older properties there are many different room types and you need to be quite specific when booking. The hotel has a nice pool area and a dedicated cookery course area which looked great fun and a great idea for both groups and singles for a holiday with a difference!



The hotel has 2 restaurants, the old traditional restaurant serving Moroccan cuisine and a modern pool-side restaurant serving a varied menu (very busy when we visited). The hotel is ideal for winter visits as the pool is heated and in the summer months guests can use the pool set in the luxurious gardens of the private country club annex 15 mins away. The hotel also has a wellness centre and spa.

Les Borjs de la Kasbah www.lesborjsdelakasbah.com



The Borjs de la Kasbah is a luxury spa hotel in the Kasbah quarter of the Medina. With all the character of a traditional Riad but with the added comforts of a modern hotel. It is small and peaceful with only 18 rooms ,a 10metre pool and spa as well as a bar restaurant and lounge area. It is only 200 metres from the Royal Palace. The pool has a nice open aspect and there is a further traditional courtyard with a lovely sheltered area with traditional day beds to relax on. There is an outdoor eating area and a small indoor area.



LA SULTANA www.lasultanahotels.com



Without a doubt this was the most sumptuous and luxurious Riad which we visited. A unique property in the heart of the Kasbah quarter only 100m from the Royal Palace and 10 minutes from Jemaa El Fna square. A member of "Small Luxury Hotels of the World" it delivers on all angles.

Each room is different and the hotel has 28 rooms in a series of 5 Riads, each with its own distinctive theme and colour. Andalusian(white), Scherezade (pink), Moroccan (dark wood) .Almohade (ochre around the pool)

The crowning glory of the hotel is the lovely roof-top terrace with its' eating, sun-bathing and splash pool areas. There are great views including overlooking the gardens of the Saadian Tombs. A beautiful spot to unwind or dine. The hotel's spa is equally luxurious and a tranquil haven.

This hotel would charm even the most discerning guest and is perfect for a very special occasion.

ESSOURIA



Essouria is a charming walled town and working port on Morocco's Atlantic Coast. It is far slower paced and relaxing than Marrakech and has a lazy artistic, bohemian atmosphere which culminates in June at the Gnoua World Music Festival.

The constant trade winds make it a magnet for surfers and kite-surfers. It has a huge beach but it is generally too windswept for comfortable sunbathing.

Instead explore the town, a honeycomb of whitewashed houses and crumbling honey coloured fortifications. Barter with the stall holders selling all sorts of everything and go down to the port when the boats come in and watch the buckets of fish being brought ashore and sold to the highest bidder.

Essouria is three and a half hours drive from Marrakech and makes a lovely retreat from the frenetic pace there.

ATLAS ESSOURIA & SPA www.hotelsatlas.com



The Atlas hotel is right on the sea front with great views of the beach and the small islands opposite. A very modern hotel with lots of facilities, including an outdoor swimming pool surrounded by decking and loungers providing a relaxing sun spot, and light meals and refreshing cocktails are served at the poolside bar throughout the day.

There is a choice of dining venues with the beach restaurant, straight across the road from the hotel, specialising in seafood, the Saffron serving fine Moroccan cuisine and al fresco dining on the terrace can be enjoyed at the Alizes offering an international menu.

A 10 minute stroll along the wide promenade takes you to the port and old town.

DAR L'OUISSA www.dar-louisa.com



This is a charming traditional Riad built right on the ramparts of the medina. The main feature of the property is the lovely restaurant with old reeded ceilings and a huge log fire. There is a roof-top terrace with views across the city ramparts and sea.

The rooms have all been restored by local craftsmen and use local traditional materials such as tadelakt, marble & zellige (intricate stucco work) making this Riad ideal for those looking for authenticity.



RIAD MIMOUNA www.hotelriad-mimouna.com



An atmospheric Riad which began life as a windmill in 1896. Beautifully restored yet retaining its' character it is in a unique position right on the sea walls. The rooftop restaurant with floor to ceiling windows has breathtaking views and depending on the wind there is also a nice roof-top terrace to be enjoyed.





A gorgeous property tucked just inside the old city walls. A member of the Relais & Chateau group of luxury hotels. The hotel's inner courtyard is a delight with lots of plants and comfy chairs, an ideal place to relax. On the roof there is a swimming pool with sunbeds and cabanas and lunch can be taken there.

Food is an important part of any holiday and dinner at the L'Heure Bleue is always a special occasion. There are 4 venues to choose from but a meal in the opulent gourmet restaurant is a real treat.

IMI OUDDAR

ParadisPlage Surf, Yoga & Spa Resort



About 2 hours drive south from Essouria is the small town of Imi Ouddar home to this great water front beach resort. Close to the surfers' mecca of Taghazout. The Paradis is ideal for everyone who likes an active holiday. Families, especially those with sporty children will love it here. Right on the beach the hotel has its own surf shack and yoga pagoda. The accommodation is really modern and there are lots of choices including self- catering apartments for families and cosy beach bungalows for couples.

Everyday there is a programme of activities ,all beach based, and It's up to you how much you participate ! There is a super spa and beach side massage pavillion. Even in November guests were out on the beach enjoying the warm winter sunshine.

AGADIR



Another hours drive took us to Agadir .A well known beach front resort. The old town and Kasbah were destroyed by an earthquake in 1960 and so the resort does not have the atmosphere of the other resorts we visited.

A new cruise terminal is being built and the busy modern Marina is still being extended.

There is a lovely wide promenade stretching the whole way along the beach-front with bars and restaurants. There is also a " fixed price" shop for anyone afraid of bartering !

SOFITEL AGADIR ROYAL BAY RESORT



A modern hotel right on the beachfront with its own private beach. The hotel has lots of facilities and is really ideal for families. There is a very nice children's play room and Kids Villa play club and baby-sitting can be arranged.

At the heart of the hotel is an enormous pool surrounded by cabanas & hammocks, and enormous sunbeds. There is both a heated and unheated pool. By night there is plenty going on with a choice of dining in its 3 restaurants and entertainment in the So Lounge.

The bedrooms are really comfortable and well appointed.

SOFITEL AGADIR THALASSA SEA & SPA



Right next door to its sister Sofitel Royal Bay hotel the Thalassa hotel is ultra modern. Monochrome black & white being the colour scheme throughout with futuristic sculptures and statement furniture giving an air of complete sophistication. Aimed at couples this luxury spa hotel sets out to be a haven of relaxation.

The whole concept of the resort is its Thalassa Spa where experts will tailor make a course of treatments and exercise for you.(please note access to the spa and therapies are at an additional cost)

Again there is a huge pool overlooking the private beach and there are lots of exercise programmes for the energetic!

RIAD VILLA BLANCHE.



This Riad was an absolute treasure and where I would personally choose to stay.

Calm and tranquil and full of charm it is perfect for those wanting a peaceful relaxing holiday in luxurious surroundings .It is a new build but has been built in the traditional authentic style

The luxury spa was heavenly and the indoor pool enormous .A whole host of treatments are offered by the charming staff.

With a comfortable bar and an exquisite dining room this really is a property to enjoy.

Summary

To summarize I really enjoyed my trip to Morocco and it is certainly a destination that I would like to re-visit. A country of such contrasts it really is ideal for 2 and 3 centre holidays. Being only 3 hours from the UK it is perfect for a winter-sun destination. I can be contacted on 01708 22400 if you need any help or email pampayn@westwayatravel.co.uk

In Marrakech it really pays to use the experience and advice of our preferred suppliers as there is such a marked difference between the properties. As I said earlier I would not personally wish to stay in a property down one of the narrow alleyways where a close drop off is not available, but for anyone with a liking for adventure it would be fine! Likewise none of the narrow streets within the Medina are buggy friendly and although car free the mopeds race along! My top choices would be:-

1. For tradition mixed with luxury my choice would be **La Sultana**.
2. For a traditional Riad but easily accessible I would recommend **LaMaison Arabe**. Also highly recommended for groups and singles alike.
3. For a Riad Experience but with modern comforts my choice would be **Ksar Anika**.(baby-sitting also available here)
4. For a really special occasion or just for that WOW factor the **Taj Palace** (there is at least a 20 minute drive into the city from here)

Essouria.

1. For families **The Atlas Hotel**.
2. For a really traditional stay **The Riad Mimouna**.
3. For a luxury stay the **L'Heure Bleue**.

In The Atlas Mountains.

1. For couples **The Capaldi** .
2. For budget accommodation & especially good for walkers and with lots of space for children to run around **TheTatfi de L'atlas** or for a higher standard **Kasbah Angour**
3. For couples and families and with the added attraction of horse riding **La Roseraie**.

A huge thanks to Anatolian Sky for arranging the trip and especial thanks to Fay and Jo for all their hard work.