



morocco & trans saharan

trip notes

Valid for trips starting on or after 01 April 2005

Valid To: No change planned

Length: 5 Weeks

Rating: Challenging.

Crew: 2 crew, local guides as necessary.

Vehicle: Classic Dragoman truck.

Accommodation: Mainly campsites, some wildcamps, hostels/hotels.

These trip notes are designed to give you details relative to this particular trip. More general information such as health and vaccinations, luggage list, money, security, etc. will be given to you in an "Advance Information Dossier" with confirmation of your booking.

Information that is liable to change such as visa requirements and costs, group make-up, joining details, etc. will be given to you in a "Trip Update and Joining Instructions" about 8 weeks before you join the trip.



is this trip for me?



Ain't no mountain high enough or ancient ruin remote enough. The Discover trip has wonderful sights, many different destinations and a variety of journey lengths (some as short as 2 weeks). Riding in the comfort of a purpose built Classic Dragoman Overland truck with two or three crew members (including a cook in some areas) and of course local guides, with a mix of hotel stays and camping. You'll get well off the beaten track to see areas crucial to the understanding of a country as well as the highlights. There'll be the chance to help out with community projects, to try new activities while discovering a new world. Short or long, these trips give you their all.

A trip of two parts, easy relaxed travel through Morocco, with good facilities and roads. Then expedition style journey across Western Sahara and Mauritania. Flexible itinerary in Sahara to explore but limited facilities. Excellent trip for the adventurous traveller. Itinerary liable to change depending on time needed to explore.

We intend following the route detailed below but exact nightstops cannot be guaranteed. It sometimes happens that we decide to make a change to our basic planned itinerary. This may be for a variety of reasons - climatic, road or bureaucratic conditions may demand it. Or it may be because we find a better, more interesting route. While actually en route, unexpected hospitality, a local festival or a great place to chill out can determine our exact route and itinerary on any given trip.

This trip will be run as a traditional overland trip, with time built in to be as flexible as we can. We will probably spend more time than is in the written itinerary exploring the desert and oases of the Mauritanian Sahara. The exact route will depend on group wishes, local circumstances and conditions. Although Dragoman has travelled this route many times over the past 10 years, there are numerous routes in Mauritania that are either new to us or have only been done a number of years ago. As long as conditions are favourable, we will try to explore some of these routes.

what's included?

- Cross western Europe through France and Spain through to Ceuta
- 2 nights and guided tour to explore the ancient medina city of Fes
- Guided visit of the ancient Roman ruins of Volubilis
- 2 night break to roam the backstreets of historic Rabat

- Overland across the High Atlas into the Valley of the Kasbahs
- 2 nights to explore the vast Todra Gorge, to hike and to visit the local palmery
- Overnight at and wander through the stunning Ait Benhaddou Kasbah
- 3 nights in Marrakech to soak up the unbelievable atmosphere
- 2 night stay in the Medina beach town and colourful port of Essaouira
- 4 day Western Saharan Desert crossing to Mauritania
- Time for Saharan Desert Exploration, flexible itinerary to allow us to explore
- Possible areas to visit, the dunefields around the ancient Ksour, such as Chinguetti
- R&R and civilisation time in Nouakchott
- Visit to the atmospheric city of St. Louis

what else can I do?

The following optional extras are usually available and which cost US\$20 or more:

Imllil - 2 Day Mt. Toubkal Trek	\$85
Merzouga - Overnight Saharan Camel Trek	\$35

* = depending on group size

Please bear in mind that costs do change from time to time and the above are meant as a guide only. Also, some activities may no longer be available, and others may have been added.

IMPORTANT NOTE: We list the above activities for your information. They are not necessarily endorsed or recommended by Dragoman. If you do any of them, you do so entirely at your own risk and it must be clearly understood that your participation is your own decision and does not form part of your contract with Dragoman.

Along the route we take, you will come across many activities, some of which are likely to be high-risk such as parachuting, microlighting, etc. Before participating in such activities, you should think carefully whether you wish to participate and whether you will be covered by your insurance policy - many policies do not cover you for such activities.

itinerary

We must emphasise that the routes, activities and places visited described in these Trip Notes are intentions and are meant as a rough guide only.

You will be visiting these areas to experience them as they really are - the bad as well as the good. Come and give it a try!

week 1

dakar

The cosmopolitan city of Dakar is a perfect place to stay with its coastal location, temperate climate and vibrant atmosphere. You can spend time browsing around the museums, one of the two major markets, or just relaxing on the beaches. The beautiful Ile de Goree is certainly worth a visit. During the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries, it was a bustling centre for the slave trade. You can visit the many museums housed in the historical buildings or just wander around and soak up the beautiful surroundings.

st. louis

St. Louis is a colonial french town with a unique setting and relaxed atmosphere. Most visitors find St. Louis one of the most genial towns in Senegal.

mauritania

Thousands of years ago Mauritania was covered in lush tropical forests and lakes. Today those forests have given way to an expanse of desert, and the lakes are filled with sand dunes. Most of Mauritania is covered by the vast sands of the Sahara and it is through this country that we make our Sahara crossing. This is a hard land to travel through and we stay well off the beaten track. The local people of the area

are mainly Islamic with the majority being Moors of Arabic or Berber descent. Many of these are still nomadic or semi-nomadic and historically were the ruling elite. To look at they are very similar to their cousins the Tuareg. The other indigenous people are the black Africans, who are made out of two distinct groupings. Firstly the Haratin or black Moors who were the slaves of the Moors and so have become culturally and linguistically intermingled with them. The other group are black Mauritians or the Soudaniens, the peoples who live along the banks of the Senegal River.

nouakchott

Nouakchott is the capital of Mauritania and is the biggest city in the Sahara. It has some great colourful markets where you can buy all sorts of Saharan souvenirs. It also has beaches close to the campsite, some of which are constantly packed with fishermen of various nationalities.

desert route

We now take three days to cross the desert with a guide following a desert track which skirts the bird breeding ground of the Parc National du Banc d'Arguin. This journey is through the kind of desert that most people imagine - vast areas of shifting sands dotted with oases and palm trees, but for the most part utterly barren and totally silent. Camping in the perfect stillness of the desert under a brilliant star-studded sky is an experience you'll never forget.

The most amazing part of this route however is driving along the beach where the Atlantic meets and Sahara, with the tall dunes of the desert tumbling into the waters of the ocean.

week 2

nouadhibou

Nouadhibou is the second largest city in Mauritania and a fairly rich town due to its iron ore shipping trade, also it is famed as a world centre of fishing. This is our entry and exit point to Mauritania in the north of the country. It is also our jumping off point either into the deserts of mauritania or into the no-man's land of the Western Sahara.

western sahara

This part of our Saharan crossing is through the disputed territories of the Western Sahara. This is the territory of the former colony of the Spanish Sahara. When it's former masters upped and left, both Morocco and Mauritania claimed the area. In 1975, King Hassan II organised the amazing Green March, where he forcibly marched 350,000 unarmed Moroccans into the area to once and for all prove Morocco's claim. Since then, a continuing campaign by the Polisario (local

independence fighters) cause civil unrest and disorder. A ceasefire imposed and monitored by the UN has brought stability and peace to the area and it is now safe to travel through.

dakhla

We travel down the Atlantic coast to Dakhla, a seaside garrison town. Here we will have a little R&R by the sea (great place for ocean fishing which can be organised locally), before we head off into the desert again. Dakhla is almost on the Tropic of Cancer and is in a beautiful location with impressive beaches and cliffs.

week 3

essaouira

Along the Atlantic coast, the temperature drops to a beautiful maritime temperature. The small Moroccan resort of Essaouira is a charming town, nothing like the tourist beaches at Agadir, with a distinct Moroccan feel to it. This is where the locals come for their holidays. The old Medina town is completely ringed by restored city walls, and the small streets inside are lined with a plethora of shops and restaurants. This is one of the best places in Morocco to buy wooden objects, such as boxes made of sandalwood and inlaid with patterns of different coloured woods. Hagglng is not necessary, as prices tend to be far more reasonable than in Marrakech. Carpet shops, metal work, shoe shops, everything that you will find in Morocco, is available in the Medina. The local food is exceptional with excellent fresh seafood. It is well worth visiting the seafood market and street restaurants on the way down to the port. Possibly the most charming part of the whole town is the fishing port, complete with working wooden fishing boats, men mending nets, repairing the boats and off loading the days catch. The beaches are an experience and it is well worth spending a couple of hours splashing in the sea along with the hundreds of Moroccans. Think back (if you can) to the 1950/60s beach holiday and you have an idea of the level of sophistication.

marrakech

Crowded with Arabs and Berbers, the old city of Marrakech is fascinating. You can watch craftsmen busy at their leatherwork, metalwork and carpet making. To escape the heat of the day, you may visit the Saadian tombs, intricately carved mausoleums with elaborate arches containing the graves of kings, queens and princes dating back to the Fifteenth Century. Surrounded by high walls and shaded by palms and shrubs, it seems as much a pleasure garden as a cemetery.

After a tiring day, we head to Djemaa El Fna for a cup of mint tea while watching acrobats, snake charmers and maybe even

a man with a scorpion on his nose!
Perhaps you could take a ride round the old medina in a horse-drawn carriage during the quiet evenings when the noise and bustle of the day have died down.

Marrakech is also a centre for trekking into the High Atlas. You could opt to trek up to the summit of Mount Toubkal - the highest mountain in Morocco. But even for those that don't want to trek the views in this area are breathtaking.

ait benhaddou

We will stop at Ait Benhaddou. This whole area is scattered with kasbahs but the one at Ait Benhaddou is one of the most spectacular, even attracting the film makers of the epic Lawrence of Arabia to use it as one of their film sets.

week 4

todra

At the eastern end of the Valley of the Kasbahs lies the spectacle of the Todra Gorge. The road into the gorge takes us through the densely clustered villages along a palmery. It twists and winds its way to a towering cliff face with no apparent entry point. It is only when you get to the very edge of the cliff, that the narrow opening of the gorge can be seen. As we enter the gorge, the cliffs rise sheer to 300m in places above us. A river that has cut its way deep into the mountains created the gorge and our home for the next couple of nights is a small hotel, huddling under the vast overhanging wall of the cliff. Here we usually sleep under the stars on the roof top terrace of the hotel, as this is the coolest place in the hotel. If you would prefer to upgrade to a room in the hotel this is usually possible and can be organised by the leader whilst you are on the road.

Although the hotel is basic, it has a wonderful atmosphere, with a bubbling spring outside the front door that turns into a crystal clear water stream for paddling and relaxing in. Night is wonderful in the gorge, and once the hotel generator has spluttered its last cough and the kids have finally fallen asleep, the silence is palatable. Above you stretch the over-towering walls to a narrow star filled gap of sky.

During the day, we can organise hikes or donkey trips up the gorge, but these can be quite strenuous. Better perhaps, is to relax by the spring for the day and then to take a guided tour of the palmery and the local villages in the cool of the evening. The palmery is lovely, very relaxed, cool, with friendly local families tilling the fields and always interested in a chat.

merzouga

Heading south we now enter the Erg Chebbi, one of Morocco's most beautiful

desert areas, En route we will pass through the oasis town of Rissani, an excellent place to shop for Moroccan carpets and rugs. We then head for the drifting dunes around Merzouga where we will spend the night in a small campsite. Here we can organise a camel ride into the dunes to watch the sun set over the desert.

the sahara

The Sahara marks a dramatic scenery change - lush grasslands, oaks, ash and oleanders give way to sparse scrub, and even this meagre vegetation soon disappears.

fes

Fes has always dominated Morocco's trade, culture, religion and education, and at one time it was the third most holy city of Islam. The vast old town, known as Fes el-Bali, is a walled medina built by Idriss II in the early Ninth Century. Today Fes is one of the few surviving medieval Arabic cities. All around are scenes expressing Arabic history, culture and customs.

A guide is essential in the medina to avoid losing your way amongst the labyrinthine alleys. You can visit the dye pits, where the smell of skins is so overpowering that you are given a sprig of mint to hold to your nose as you walk past the rancid pools. There are scores of mosques in the medina, most notably the Kairouyyin Mosque, which houses the oldest university in the world, and the Al Andalus Mosque.

volubilis

Volubilis is home to the largest and best preserved Roman ruins in Morocco. They were built in the First Century AD and are famed for their magnificent mosaics and column-lined streets.

week 5

rabat

The great walls of Rabat enclose a largely modern city, but there remain several quarters to remind you of its rich past, including Sale - home to the corsairs - across the river Bou Regreg. Rabat has a relaxed atmosphere and has virtually none of the hustle and hassle of Morocco's larger tourist attractions. It is a fascinating place to explore with its history.

asilah

Asilah is a small port on the shores of the Atlantic and dates back some two thousand years. The centre of the old town is enclosed by a wall and ramparts, which were built by the Portuguese in the Fifteenth Century.

europe

We travel fairly quickly through Europe as our route takes us through Spain and France, we will probably spend a day in

one of the European cities en-route, such as Madrid. We cross the Straits of Gibraltar by ferry between Morocco and Algeciras.

general notes

Because of the nature of this tour, the itinerary may well vary from that published. This trip will involve crossing remote areas and there will be an element of discomfort. This is a tough but very rewarding trip.

Kitty does not cover food while staying in hotels and hostels.

personal spending

Based on the range that previous travellers have spent on this trip, we recommend you allow between a minimum of US\$5 and a maximum of US\$15 per day.

The minimum is the basic amount a budget traveller would spend on limited drinks and meals when not camping, postcards, laundry, site and museum entrances, etc. The maximum would allow a much more "comfortable" lifestyle as well as covering the cost of optional extras up to US\$50.

luggage + equipment

In addition to the list in the Advance Information Dossier, we also recommend you do not take any irreplaceable valuables on your trip.

visas + documents

On the Trip Update (sent to you about 8 weeks before the start date) you will be told which visas you will require and given a rough estimate of necessary visa costs.

connecting flights

When arranging your connecting flights, please take into account the trip's schedule. Under normal circumstances:

There will be an initial trip meeting at 10.00 on the start date.

The trip should depart Dakar at approx 08:00 2 days after the start date.

The trip should arrive in Dover at approx 20:00 on the end date.

We realise that it may not always be possible, but we do strongly urge you to arrange flights so that you arrive in time for the meeting.

Also bear in mind that you might want to spend some time in the start and finish places and you should arrange your flights accordingly.

adventure travel

The Oxford English Dictionary defines adventure as ..

"Adventure [ME adventure - (O) Fr. adventure - Rom...] ... 4. Chance of danger or loss; risk; jeopardy ME. 5. A hazardous enterprise or performance ME ..."

adventure ratings

As you would expect, no two of our trips are the same. There are all sorts of conditions that can affect their ease or difficulty. These include:

- ~ road conditions
- ~ climate, dust and altitude
- ~ the frequency and regularity of nightstops with "facilities"
- ~ the variety and quality of available food
- ~ the frequency and number of free "relaxing" days
- ~ the likelihood of delays, disruption, etc.
- ~ the list is endless!

These various conditions, as well as comments from previous group members are taken into account when giving a rating to each trip. We use four broad ratings:

- ~ Easy
- ~ Moderate
- ~ Challenging
- ~ Extreme

The ratings are an overall view of each trip as a whole. Some trips with a low rating will have the odd "Demanding" day and other trips with a high rating will have many "easy" periods. The ratings are an attempt to match reality with your expectations.

the kitty

The Kitty is the second part of the price. It's an amount that each passenger puts into a central fund and is monitored by you and the Dragoman Overland crew. It funds accommodation, camp meals and activities that the group take part in as a whole. Dragoman cannot guarantee that extra contributions will not be necessary.

By including campsite fees, hotels, national parks and gamepark entrances and other group expenses in the kitty, it allows greater flexibility and gives the group greater control.

The kitty in the brochure is an estimate at the time of printing. Local inflation and costs vary during the year and so we review kitties on a monthly basis. We do send you through a Trip Update a few weeks before departure with latest kitties at that point, but we urge you to check out our website (www.dragoman.com) just before you join the trip as this is likely to be more accurate. Your tour leader will inform you of the most up-to-date amount on day 1 of the trip.