

WILDLIFE TRAVEL

19th to 26th December 2019 (1 week)

MOROCCO

Natural history at Christmas



"the Atlas Kasbah is one of the best places we have stayed anywhere in the world"

"Laurie is an excellent leader... calm and organised"

Morocco December 2018

An introduction to the natural history of southern Morocco.

Based for the week at the wonderful Atlas Kasbah in **southern Morocco**, our holiday is an excellent introduction to the flora, fauna and culture of this fascinating country. The short flight to Agadir, 30 minute transfer to the hotel and relaxed pace of the week make this trip ideal for anyone wanting a taste of Morocco in the company of expert leaders whilst enjoying a high standard of accommodation and **easy, comfortable travel**.

With Mediterranean, Macaronesian and African influences, this area has a **fascinating mix of plants** including succulent euphorbias, colourful composites, toadflaxes and lavenders and interesting shrubs, including the endemic Argan tree. The birdlife is very interesting and we should see most of the local specialties, including House Bunting, Moussier's Redstart, Black-crowned Tchagra and, with luck, the endangered **Northern Bald Ibis**. We will visit the Sous Massa National Park, where as well as a variety of birds, we will also look for several species of antelope that have been reintroduced here, including Addax, Dorcas Gazelle and the graceful Scimitar-horned Oryx.

Our traditionally and sustainably-built and run hotel, the award-winning Atlas Kasbah, has spacious rooms with lovely views of the surrounding countryside, attractive patios and a swimming pool. It is situated within the protected argan forest and we will have time to enjoy the area and the gardens of the hotel.

as well as excursions to the coast, mountains, oases, small villages and the attractive town of Taroudant, a 'mini Marrakech', to experience the local **Berber culture**.



Price
£1785

Single Room Supplement
£185

Full board

- Day 1** flight to Agadir
- Day 2** Cap Rhir, Oued Tamri
- Day 3** Taroudant, Tioute
- Day 4** Anti Atlas
- Day 5** Atlas Kasbah
- Day 6** Sous Massa
- Day 7** western High Atlas
- Day 8** return to UK

Leaders

Laurie Jackson
and Philip Precey

winter sun, natural
history,
Berber culture

Wildlife and culture holidays



Our profits are donated to the **Wildlife Trusts**



FOCUS OF INTEREST

This holiday has a very general natural history focus including, birds, plants and other wildlife. Other aspects such as landscape and geology, habitats and ecology are also sometimes included – the topics covered are described in this leaflet. Cultural highlights are included as on most of our holidays.



ITINERARY

Please note that the itinerary may be changed to suit the weather or other practicalities or at the discretion of the leaders.

Day 1 Thu 19th Our early flight takes us to Agadir, from where we transfer (c30 mins) to the Atlas Kasbah, in the hills out beyond the city.

After settling in, and our first delicious Moroccan lunch, we will walk out from the hotel through the **Argan woodland** and discover why the tree is so valuable. The oval fruits sustain the local community and there is an increasing commercial activity selling the sweet rich oil, widely used in Moroccan cooking and cosmetics. Colourful annuals can be a feature along field edges, depending on the rains, and the hillsides nearby are home to the delicate white *Narcissus broussonnetii*, a Moroccan endemic, which can be found growing alongside *Androcymbium gramineum* and *Dipcadi serotinum*.

The local birdlife features local specialities including Common Bulbul, House Bunting and Moussier's Redstart, species we will become familiar with during the week.

Day 2 Fri 20th The Atlantic coast south to the Sahara is wellknown for its unique communities of succulents: *Euphorbia officinarum*, *E. regis-jubae* and *Kleinia anteuphorbia* cover the slopes, mixed with shrubs such as *Nauplius imbricatus* and the desert-dwelling *Warionia saharae*. We will visit **Cap Rhir** to explore these communities, looking for reptiles and butterflies along the way. The nearby wetland of Oued Tamri is home to Spoonbill and Ruddy Shelduck. Over lunch, we hope to find the endangered **Northern Bald Ibis**: the total world population is only around 800 birds, with one of the main breeding sites nearby.

Day 3 Sat 21st Today we visit the attractive town of **Taroudant**, described as a 'mini Marrakech' but with a character of its own reflecting its rich Berber culture. We will enjoy views from ancient city walls and explore the labyrinthine market - full of spices and herbs and traditional furnishings such as rugs and teapots, with House Buntings singing from the buildings. We also visit the oasis at Tioute, the natural habitat of the date palm *Phoenix dactylifera* and visit a nearby women's **Argan oil co-operative**.

Day 4 Sun 22nd This morning we head south to the famous **Sous Massa National Park** to learn about the important conservation work going on here, especially the reintroduction of a variety of **Saharan 'megafauna'** to the reserve; antelopes including Dorcas Gazelle, Scimitar-horned Oryx and Addax, and the North African Ostrich, all of which have become almost extinct across much of their range due to overhunting.



We will have a visit in a convoy of very comfortable four-wheel-drive vehicles to the area where these animals have been reintroduced. We finish our day by visiting the Oued Sous, where Greater Flamingos gather on the estuary and feed alongside various waders, gulls and terns.

Day 5 Mon 23rd This morning we head south to the **Anti Atlas**, a low range of very old mountains, which form much of the landscape in the south east of the country. We will travel to Ait Baha and beyond, to visit an ancient 'agadir', a fascinating fortified grain store, typical of the Berber villages in this area. Along the way we will look out for the locally endemic broom *Hesperolaburnum platycarpus*, Barbary Ground Squirrel and the large lizard Bibron's Agama may appear along the roadside, while Bonelli's Eagle soar overhead.

Day 6 Tues 24th Today we will have a free day, with the opportunity to explore the local countryside a bit more, relax around the hotel or enjoy the pool (if the weather permits!).

In the afternoon, we will have the opportunity to immerse ourselves in Berber culture in the company of Helene, Hassan and the wonderful staff of the Atlas Kasbah, culminating in a celebratory meal.

Day 7 Weds 25th Today we head in the opposite direction, for the scenic slopes of the **High Atlas**, making a circuit via the aptly-named Paradise Valley, home to Blue Rock Thrush, Crag Martin and Black Wheatear, and the Cascades du Immouzer. We will find the Berber Thuya *Tetraclinis articulata*, an interesting conifer, as well as hillsides covered in Dwarf Fan Palm mixed in with *Lavandula dentata* and shrubby oaks, where Tristram's Warbler can sometimes be found.

Day 8 Thurs 26th Alas our week is up, and we bid farewell to the Atlas Kasbah and return to Agadir for our flight back to UK.

Accommodation, meals and transport

We will stay for the whole week at the wonderful **Atlas Kasbah**, a new hotel in a traditional design situated amongst the Argan trees in the Arganeraie Biosphere Reserve. The rooms are spacious, the local culture reflected in the furnishings, with lovely views from the rooms and roof terrace. It has an attractive patio, gardens and swimming pool. It has been designed sustainably and is run in an environmentally friendly way. All meals are included. We will travel by minibus for our excursions. Our visit to Sous Massa will be in high clearance 4WD vehicles.

Health and fitness

Please see the General Information leaflet for health and fitness requirements. This is not a strenuous holiday but on some days we will be walking for much of the day, sometimes gently uphill. We will adapt our walking to the weather but we will no doubt be walking in the sun on some days, albeit not for very long walks. All excursions are optional and you can choose to spend more time in the pleasant grounds and rooms of the hotel if you wish. The hotel rooms are on the first or second floor and reached by stairs.



Leaders

Laurie Jackson is an excellent all round naturalist and experienced Wildlife Travel leader, having led many trips in recent years, from Chile to the Isles of Scilly. This will be her fourth visit to Morocco. Depending on group size, Laurie will be joined by **Philip Precey**, a Director of Wildlife Travel who has led many Wildlife Travel holidays in recent years, including nine previous visits to Morocco since 2013.

We will be accompanied by Mohammed Belfakir, our local **Moroccan guide**, together with the assistance of Hassan and Helene, the owners of the Atlas Kasbah.

Weather

At this time of year the weather is usually sunny but not too hot. If we do get hotter weather we will adapt the itinerary as much as possible. There may be some cooler weather and some rain. The nights are cooler.

Flights

Group flights are with Easyjet from London Gatwick to Agadir, as follows:

19th Dec depart London Gatwick 07.10, arrive Agadir 12.05
26th Dec depart Agadir 13.00, arrive London Gatwick 15.45

It is also possible to fly from Manchester with TUI:

19th Dec depart Manchester 15.05, arrive Agadir 19.55
26th Dec depart Agadir 21.00, arrive Manchester 00.05 (27th)

Morocco local time is one hour ahead of the UK.

Passport and visas

If you hold a British passport, you do not need a visa to travel to Morocco. If you do not have a UK passport, please check with your local consulate. Your passport will need to be valid **for at least six months** after your entry into Morocco.



TO BOOK

Contact us to check availability and reserve a place. Complete the Booking Form and send to Sunvil Holidays (CAA-ATOL Licence 808, ABTA V6218), our tour operator, with your deposit. All details about booking are given in the Booking Pack.

DEPOSIT £500 PER PERSON, BALANCE DUE BY 19/09/2019
SEE GENERAL INFORMATION LEAFLET ON HOW TO BOOK

INCLUDED: Return flight from UK to Agadir. Local transport as specified in itinerary. Seven nights accommodation, all meals. Services of leaders.

NOT INCLUDED: Refreshments. Gratuities. Insurance.

WILDLIFE TRAVEL

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Front (clockwise): Atlas Kasbah, Moussier's Redstart, *Narcissus broussonetii*, Scimitar-horned Oryx, *Cistanche phelypaea*. **Inside:** Dorcas Gazelle, *Euphorbia officinarum*, ruined agadir in the Anti Atlas mountains, Northern Bald Ibis, Black-crowned Tchagra, local in Taroudant medina.

Back: *Polygala balansae*, Barbary Ground Squirrel and *Euphorbia officinarum*.