

HIKING JOURNEY

# Mystical Morocco

WALKING & YOGA TOUR IN THE ATLAS MOUNTAINS, SAHARA DESERT AND  
DRAA VALLEY IN MOROCCO

11 DAYS



**WALKABOUT**  
GOURMET ADVENTURES

## Journey Overview

Morocco's sensuous beauty is legendary, from imperial cities with labyrinthine and souks to the awesome grandeur of the Sahara. Our journey begins in Marrakech and takes us across the Tizi n'Tichka pass to the outskirts of Ouarzazate which is now a small Moroccan Hollywood (numerous films took place and are still shot here). In the afternoon we continue to the Dades Valley. It is an amazing area in the High Atlas Mountains - a photographer's paradise! The valley has lush green fields, spectacular gorges, and slot canyons of rose-coloured sandstone.

The Dades Gorge has a fairy-tale feeling and the strength of the colours will never escape your memory. The Dades area is filled with lush valley oasis towns and many of the Kasbahs are in ruin, contributing to the mysterious atmosphere.

We settle at the foot of Erg Chebbi where Morocco's tallest sand dunes stretch to the horizon and admire the magnificent sunsets.

The next morning, we try not to miss the sunrise over the Erg Chebbi dunes. They stretch over kilometres and kilometres and are sublime at sunrise as they change colours from pink to ochre and from red to orange.

We cross the desert where only a few villages brave those difficult living conditions. Eventually we enter the Draa Valley and the oasis of Agdz, which is renowned for its fine dates. It is located in a vast palm grove on the old caravan route, linking Marrakech and Timbuktu.

We leave Agdz and travel north through the lush Draa Valley and travel to the lovely town of Ouirgane. It is surrounded by the High Atlas Mountains and in the heart of Berber country. Ouirgane is also known as a health resort - perfect to enjoy the spa and yoga.

Together with our local guide, we discover the Toubkal National Park in the High Atlas Mountain range. It covers an area of 100,000 hectares and boasts the highest mountain peak in North Africa - Jbel Toubkal at 4,167 metres high.

Immerse yourself in the spiritual practice of some gentle yoga and pranayama meditation in the majestic Moroccan lush gardens of your hotels in Agdz and Ouirgane. Get ready to uncover some of Morocco's secret natural remedies to heal the mind and slowly come to a complete state of relaxation. Here the only thing breaking your peace of mind may be the running water fountains with scents of jasmine luring you into a complete state of bliss and finding a deep peace within. Spa facilities and various massages can also be organized throughout the tour. Our last day takes us to Marrakech where our journey ends.

# Journey Schedule

**DAY 1**

Marrakech - Boumalne De Dades

**DAY 2**

Boulemane - Rose Valley

**DAY 3**

Morning Walk in The Dades Gorge - Erfoud - Merzouga - Erg Chebbi Desert

**DAY 4**

Merzouga - Erg Chebbi

**DAY 5**

Erg Chebbi - N'kob - Agdz

**DAY 6**

Agdz - Berber Villages

**DAY 7**

Optional Yoga and Meditation - Walk through The Palmerie

**DAY 8**

Agdz - Tizi N'test Mountain Pass- Ouirgane

**DAY 9**

Toubkal National Park

**DAY 10**

Wellness Day

**DAY 11**

Asni - Kasbah Toubkal - Marakech

## Journey Itinerary



### DAY 1

#### Marrakech - Boumalne De Dades

We meet at 9.00 a.m. at

##### **HOTEL CHEMS**

**Avenue Houmane El Fetouaki,**

**Medina**

**40020 MARRAKECH**

We leave the city and follow the N9 across the Tizi n'Tichka Pass, which is 2,260 metres high and an engineering prowess originally built for military purposes.

We continue to Ouarzazate and time permitting we will stop at the UNESCO world heritage site – the exotic Kasbah of Aït Benhaddou. This is filmmaking country, the backdrop to such films as Laurence of Arabia, the Gladiator and Jesus of Nazareth.

At an altitude of 1,612 metres, surrounded by the majestic mountains in the very spine of the High Atlas range is the Dades Valley, which is a photographer's paradise. The valley has lush green fields, spectacular gorges and slot canyons of rose-coloured sandstone.

The Dades Gorge has a fairy-tale feeling and the strength of the colours will never escape your memory.

Thanks to the Dades River, the valley and gorges are always green and the Dades valley is a very fertile area with orchards, wheat and corn.

From the dining room we enjoy panoramic views and savour some of the country's traditional cuisine – a delicious couscous, the famous pigeon pie, the Moroccan soup – Harira or the many varieties of tagine with meat.

#### **BOUMALNE, DADES GORGE, MAROCCO**



## DAY 2

### Boulemane - Rose Valley

This morning we take the short drive to Kelaa Mgouna from where we follow the picturesque Valley of the Roses. Together with our local guide we start our walk in the small hamlet of Tamaloute, past ruined hilltop kasbahs and along valley-floor gardens. The roses are emerging around the fields of cereals to prevent goats and sheep from entering cultures.

We pass a few forgotten Berber villages with their traditional adobe houses and occasional rose gardens. The "Rosa Damascena" rose withstands cold and dry conditions and could have been introduced in Morocco by pilgrims coming back from Mecca around 1100. At first it was cultivated for local use, as rose water, but now also for exportation and the perfume industry. Currently, 3 to 4 thousand tons are harvested each year, during a week that ends with the Festival of the Roses.

Nomads still live their traditional life in this region. The most important tribe is called Ait Sedrat but these nomads settled some time ago. Their main resources are their herds (lambs, goats and camels) and the profit made from selling the wool. We finish our walk on the terrace of the Gite Tamaloute with some mint tea.

We return to Boumalne where you can relax and spend the remaining afternoon at the pool of our hotel. The evening dinner is at our hotel.

 **3 - 4 HOURS**

 **BOUMALNE, DADES GORGE, MAROCCO**



## DAY 3

### Morning Walk in The Dades Gorge - Erfoud - Merzouga - Erg Chebbi Desert

Today we leave our comfortable hotel and continue along the 'Road of the 1,000 Kasbahs to Erfoud. Along the way we meet our local guide and start our walk near the village of Aït Oudinar, which takes us along the plots and gardens. Fig and olive trees mix with silver poplars, one of the emblematic trees of the valley.

The wealth of the region can be seen in the number of kasbahs. Defensive architecture was justified in the times of constant war between the tribes. A kasbah is a large squared fortress-style building with thick strong walls, very often with four towers at the angles. Inside were the quarters of one or more families, the servants, a granary, and room enough for the cattle when necessary.

The Dades area is filled with lush valley oasis towns and many of the kasbahs are in ruin, which lends to the mysterious atmosphere. However, there are a few that remain in perfect condition where Berber families continue to live along the fertile riverbeds.

We cross the river and finish at Hotel Tamlalte for a late lunch. In the afternoon we continue to the small town of Erfoud, which was established during the French colonial period. It is known for its rich black fossil marble. The stone is sculptured to bring the fossils into relief on everything from ashtrays to washbasins. Erfoud is also the last town before we reach the desert fringe villages of Rissani and Merzouga. They are at the edge of the spectacular Sahara Desert sand dunes and the largest is Erg Chebbi. They are a drifting chain of sand dunes, only 40 kms from the Algerian border and rising up to 150 metres in some places. They resemble moving sculptures in the form of draperies and their colours vary according to the intensity of the light.

We reach our hotel, the Kasbah Tombouctou, which is literally at the foot of the sand dunes. Before its renovation, it used to be one of the oldest inns of Merzouga and built according to the spirit of the ancient caravans with an immense Moroccan common room where one talks about his adventures. After dinner we will walk just a little way into the sand, away from the lights, to appreciate the immense clarity of the desert and the amazing sky!

 **2 HOURS**

 **MERZOUGA, MOROCCO**

## DAY 4

### Merzouga - Erg Chebbi

Today you have to get up early if you would like to see the sunrise over the dunes! Don't forget your torch and be ready for a walk up the sand dune ridge - well worth every effort! Dawn gives the sand a fascinating range of subtle colours.

After breakfast we explore the small town of Merzouga and take a walk across the sand dunes. We return to our hotel for lunch and enjoy the many facilities. There are not many swimming pools with views right up to the sand dunes! You can also relax in the hamman, spa or with a massage.

Later in the afternoon we return to the sand dunes. The most adventurous will be offered to go on camel back for a perfect "desert adventure" while going on foot remains a possibility. Up in the dunes we enjoy sunset over the desert, a moment of majestic beauty. Thereafter we make our way back into the twilight and our comfortable hotel.

 **2 HOURS**

 **MERZOUGA, MOROCCO**



## DAY 5

### Erg Chebbi - N'kob – Agdz

After breakfast we bid farewell to the dunes and cross the Tafilalet palm groves through the town of Rissani. It has been the old economic capital of Morocco and was also the first imperial city of the country. Today it is famous for its large souk.

We continue to travel on the old caravan way between Rissani and the Draa Valley, passing the oasis towns of Alnif and N'kob. For hundreds of kilometres the desert landscape is immense.

From Tamezmoute we head north on the N9 into the lush Draa Valley, which is supposed to have 7 million palm trees.

Water is channeled through the oasis in a complex system of watercourses. At first, the oasis seems to be entirely natural but soon you start to pick out its patterns. Date palms grow at the edge of the valley, sheltering fruit trees almond and fig trees from the dry winds. Then in the centre, nearest to the river, is a patchwork of small fields, their light fresh greens standing out against the darker foliage of the palms. Early in the year, the rivers flow strongly and almond blossom scatters the oasis with white.

We continue north and at last the road brings us to Agdz. Located in the middle of a huge expanse of fertile land with palm groves and fields all around, it was once a resting point for caravans going to Timbuktu.

We traverse Agdz and reach Amazrou, our base for the next 3 nights. This peaceful Riad, inspired by many Moroccan kasbahs, is in the heart of the palm plantation and has a scrumptious restaurant, open to the pool area. It offers a fine choice of Moroccan or European cuisine. The chef will prepare such dishes as: Beldi chicken, sardines, delicious BBQ, bean tagines, dates, prunes, and of course, couscous.

#### **AGDZ, MOROCCO**

## DAY 6

### Agdz - Berber Villages

We meet at 7.00 a.m. and start our day with an hour dedicated to grounding ourselves in nature with yoga (optional). After breakfast we meet up with our local guide who will take us through the palms of the Draa Valley. Here we get to see life scenes - villagers at wells busy drawing water or perhaps collecting grass and dates. We see ruined kasbahs, deep riverbeds and oasis. The Dra Valley grows the best dates in the country - or so the locals will tell you; from velvety dawn through to gleaming black, a huge variety of sizes, colours and tastes. We continue to some of the picturesque Berber villages near-by, seeing firsthand, how the traditional Berbers live among their livestock and at peace within their natural surroundings. Two thirds of Moroccans are Berbers and the original inhabitants of Morocco. It is said that they are Afro-Asiatic, a group with a mixed origin that includes European and Saharan people. Not a homogeneous group, the Berbers arrived in Morocco (and other regions of North Africa) at different times. They refer to themselves as Imazighen, meaning "free people." They fled to the mountain regions when the Arabs invaded the Maghreb in the 7th century and witnessed several invaders come and go such as the Carthaginians, Romans, Vandals and Byzantines. Since the Arabs conquered Morocco, the Berbers have maintained ancient traditions and preserved a unique, semi-nomadic lifestyle that is authentic Moroccan. Berbers are Muslims but their conversion to Islam took centuries and, in many areas, Islam was not dominant until the 16th century. Berber Islam tends to incorporate traditional belief of former religious practice. We return to our hotel to relax in the peaceful garden of our kasbah, laze around the pool and watch the traditional mint tea ceremony. Moroccans are famous for their hospitality and it is etiquette to offer tea to any visitors that might stop by. Although the tea is usually prepared with a generous amount of spearmint leaves, other herbs such as absinthian or wild mint might be used. In the evening we meet for an aperitif before dinner.

 **4 HOURS**

 **AGDZ, MOROCCO**

## DAY 7

### Optional Yoga And Meditation - Walk through The Palmerie

After our optional yoga session and breakfast, we will walk to a nearby Ksar. The valley is wide and the riverbed scoring the bottom of the valley with multiple channels, only flowing in floods. Here we enjoy the relaxing, traditional environment and admire the rural activity of the Saharan oasis. We stop for lunch in one of the shaded roof terraces and enjoy a simple lunch of traditional dishes.

After lunch our guide will take us through the Ksar, a fortified rural village surrounded by solid walls set with crenellated towers.

We return to our hotel in time for a relaxing swim. Dinner will be in our hotel.

 **4 HOURS**

 **AGDZ, MOROCCO**



## DAY 8

### Agdz - Tizi N'test Mountain Pass – Ourigane

After breakfast we leave our idyllic retreat and travel towards Taroudante. Soon we turn off to Road 203, the Tizi n'Test Road which is a mountain road that cuts through the High Atlas between Taroudant to Asni and is one of the most spectacular drives in Morocco.

The road weaves its way up through the High Atlas Mountains and over the Tizi n Test pass at an elevation of 2,092 metres above sea level. Along the way we will stop and appreciate the breathtaking views from numerous points along the way. Tizi n'Test is also a spectacular feat of engineering. Blasted out of the mountains by the French in 1929, it was the first modern road to link Marrakech to the Souss Plains, the mountains to the Sahara. Until then, it had been considered impractical and only a few Sultans could exercise some control on this important pass for trade to the South.

Twisting endlessly, the main road drops to the large valley basin of Ourigane.

On our way we stop and visit the Tin Mal Mosque, an exquisite 12th century Almohad dynasty mosque. The simplicity of the mosque and the magnificent arches gives the feeling of infinity. It is one of the two mosques in Morocco open to non-Muslims.

From here it is not far to the lovely Berber village of Ourigane, which is surrounded by the majestic peaks of the High Atlas. Ourigane is also known as a health resort. The coolness of the summers is said to heal ailments suffered by those who live in Marrakech. Within the village are salt mines that are still in working order.

At an altitude of 1,000 metres, our charming hotel is secretly hidden in the middle of sixty acres of natural parkland. All rooms and suites open on to patios and terraces surrounded by thousands of rose bushes. There is also a very inviting pool where we meet later for a pre-dinner drink, followed by dinner.

#### **OURIGANE, MAROCCO**

## DAY 9

### Toubkal National Park

We start our day again with a meditation and yoga ritual (optional). After breakfast we meet our local guide and discover the Toubkal National Park in the High Atlas Mountains. It is the largest and oldest park in Morocco, located near the Sahara Desert and has an incredible variety of wildlife and diverse ecosystems. The park's natural diversity is extraordinary, with countless species of plants and large populations of oaks, pine and juniper. The landscape alternates between broad plateaus and cliffs with deep gorges crossed by crystal clear rivers.

There are lots of mountain sheep and if we are lucky, we might even see a golden eagle.

There are numerous small Berber villages worth visiting. Many of these still do not have running water or electricity and we often can see small children hauling huge plastic containers of water to their homes on donkeys. The people here are incredibly friendly.

 **5 HOURS**

 **OURIGANE, MOROCCO**



## DAY 10

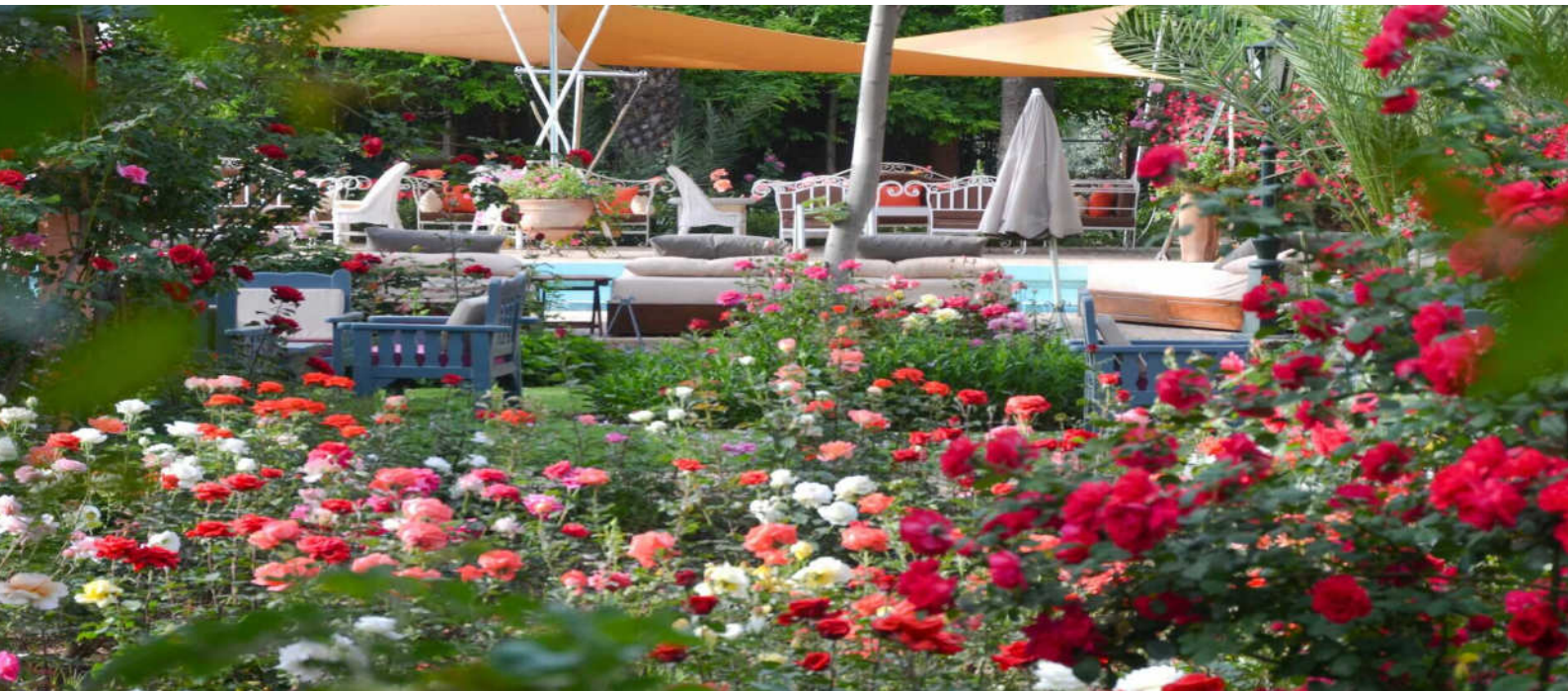
### Wellness Day

After our optional yoga and meditation practice the day is yours to enjoy our beautiful surroundings, smell the roses and treat yourselves to our amazing spa where a lovely team will welcome you.

Nestled in the foothills of the Atlas Mountains, the spa was created 30 years ago by Abdelkader Fenjiro, a pioneer in the Moroccan luxury hotel industry. In 1985, this nature enthusiast, decided to share his involvement by designing a unique place where one could rest and regain strength, drawing from local resources and the Berber tradition.

Aromatic plants, ancestral know-how... In the continuation of this vision, enjoy a moment of wellness at the sauna; relaxing in the indoor swimming pool; getting introduced to the virtues of aromatic plants; discovering the Haman ritual and try out one of their wonderful massages.

#### OURIGANE, MOROCCO



## DAY 11

### Asni - Kasbah Toubkal – Marakech

On our last morning we can once again enjoy this picturesque yoga space, which has spectacular views over the mountains.

After a final substantial breakfast we drive to Asni and from there have a short visit at the Kasbah Toubkal, which is in a spectacular location below Jbel Toubkal and rises to 4,167 metres high. After stopping for some tea, we drive to Marrakech where our tour concludes at approximately 1.00 p.m. at the

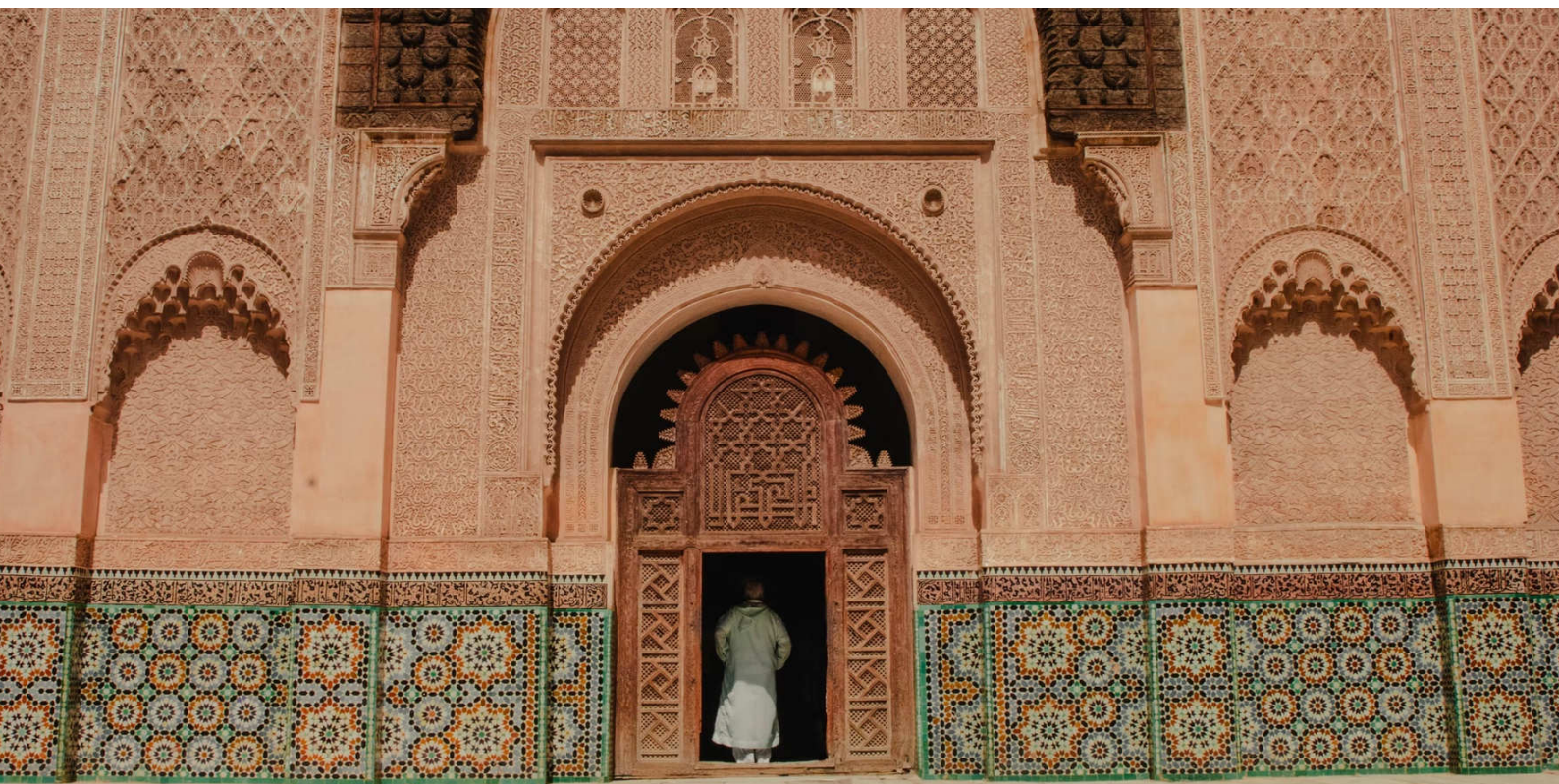
#### **HOTEL CHEMS**

**Avenue Houmane El Fetouaki,**

**Medina**

**40020 MARRAKECH**

Here you are not far from the famous square of Djemma El Fna. In the middle of the old town, it is full of merchants selling everything, along with acrobats, snake charmers, musicians, pickpockets, women making henna tattoos, storytellers and miracle cure vendors.



# Journey Accommodation

Hotel Xaluca Dades, Boumalne

**NIGHTS 1 - 2**



Hotel Tomboctou, Merzouga

**NIGHTS 3 - 4**



## Hotel Tomboctou, Merzouga

**NIGHT 5 - 7**



## Domaine de la Roseraie Resort & Spa, Ourigane

**NIGHTS 8 - 10**



# Journey Notes

## TOUR INCLUDES

- Experienced guides.
- Meeting at 9.00 a.m. at the Hotel Chems in Marrakech on Day 1 and drop off at approximately 1.00 p.m. at Hotel Chems, Marrakech on Day 11.
- Price includes all transport between Marrakech on Day 1 and Marrakech on Day 11.
- Twin share accommodation from Day 1 to Day 10, including 10 breakfasts, some lunches and 10 dinners, all entrance fees and camel excursion.

## NOT INCLUDED IN TRIP COSTS

Transport before and after “the walk”, some lunches, evening drinks, spa treatments, in-between meal snacks, personal clothing, laundry, medical expenses and items of a personal nature

## WHAT TO BRING

Daypack and comfortable walking boots, waterproof raincoat and rain over-pants, sun hat, sunglasses, sun-cream and bathers. A pair of walking sticks makes the walking easier and helps with the balance on rough terrain. The weather in April can be expected to be warm with temperatures in the mid 20°C. As we spend time in the mountains and the weather can often be unpredictable, it is necessary to carry at least one set of warm clothes, just in case.

For the picnic lunches don't forget your pocketknife. As we are restricted with the amount of luggage, we can carry in our vehicles please ensure that your CASES DO NOT EXCEED 20 KG's per guest and avoid oversized soft bags.

## PRE-WALK PREPARATION

We suggest that prior to your walking holiday you prepare yourself to obtain a level of fitness that will allow you to enjoy your walking holiday.

This, of course, is dependent upon your existing fitness level. Remember, the fitter you are, the more you will enjoy the holiday!

- Start with some short walks which include stairs or hills and increase the length of walks over a couple of months.

- We suggest you carry a backpack with water, camera, jacket, snacks, etc. to assist you with your preparation and allow you to get used to the extra weight on your back.
- We also ask that your boots are comfortable and well-worn in.
- Perhaps enjoy some walks through our local national parks and over uneven surfaces to gain confidence with your boots or new walking shoes.

### **PLEASE NOTE**

All accommodation on tour includes private facilities (toilet and shower/bath).

Single rooms can usually be arranged for a supplement. Please ask for details. We will endeavour to match people together if they would like to share a twin room with another guest to avoid paying the single room supplement.

However, as this is not always possible, 'single' clients will have to pay the supplement.

All walks during the 11-day tour are optional.

Guests can choose to have more free days than the two already included in the itinerary. The walking pace on the walks is leisurely.

Guests do not have to be experienced, although a good level of fitness is necessary.



# Get in touch and book your journey today.

 0461 277 612

 [info@walkaboutgourmet.com](mailto:info@walkaboutgourmet.com)

## Follow the journey.



### Quality Practices

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