



Morocco - High Atlas Singletrack

INTRODUCTION

Travel deep into the Atlas Mountains on remote trails known only to our local, experienced mountain bike leaders.

Stunning singletrack, challenging terrain, beautiful scenery and seldom visited villages, that's what this holiday is all about. This is Moroccan mountain biking at its very best.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Miles and miles of amazing singletrack
- 4x4 support for uplifts and bag transfers
- Minimum drive time, maximum ride time
- 2 professional mountain bike guides

OUR MOROCCAN MTB PARTNERSHIP

Every CycleActive tour is led by an SMBLA qualified, highly experienced CycleActive guide from the UK. For this tour we have teamed up with the most experienced mountain bike guides in Morocco, with 17 years experience of riding and leading in the Atlas Mountains. This combination gives us unprecedented access to remote mountain trails and flexibility with routes for different group members too. Their skills as leaders, mechanics and instructors will make sure your rides run smoothly and safely, ensuring that you have a truly memorable holiday.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT HOLIDAY

At CycleActive we carefully grade our trips according to both the level of fitness you need and, for mountain biking, the level of skill you need. We also offer personal advice to anyone who needs it, by email or on the phone, to ensure that you find a holiday suitable for your abilities and desires.

Fitness grade 3. This means you need to be quite fit even though the trip has a good downhill bias. There are some climbs and combined with the high mountain terrain and full days on technical trails there is an element of physical challenge.

Skill grade C & D. There is a great deal of singletrack riding, sometimes on narrow, rocky trails which cling to the sides of the mountains. In places there are options to avoid the most technical riding, but a good level of skill and confidence is required throughout the tour.

SUMMARY ITINERARY From the UK

Day 1 (Saturday). Fly to Marrakech. Explore the Djemaa el Fna and souks. Dinner in a great French/Moroccan restaurant.

Day 2. Transfer through the mountains to the Kasbah at Telouet. Descend the Ounila Valley to Tamdaght and Ait Benhaddou.

Day 3. Ride from Tichka Pass, hugging the cliffs, then through the high plateau village of Afra before descending into the Zate Valley.

Day 4. Ridges and Red Rock ride, taking us through fertile lands to the lush green slopes of the Ourika Valley.

Day 5. Explore Ourika, with a choice of epic freeriding from the high slopes of Ikis to cruisy valley trails. Enjoy the best tagines for lunch too.

Day 6. Transfer to the high pass at Tadmamt for an epic mountains-to-plains ride. Drive to Oukaimeden, the high mountain ski village, to overnight.

Day 7. A breathtaking last day of technical, rocky riding with the summit of Toubkal looking over us. Descend out of the mountains then transfer to Marrakech.

Day 8. Morning to explore the souks (if time) then fly home.

Full details of dates, prices and what is included can be found on our website.



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Detailed Itinerary

Day 1 – Arrival in Marrakech

There are many flights into Marrakech from the UK, including Easyjet, Ryan Air and British Airways. Most land in the morning so once we've taken you to the hotel (15 mins from the airport) there is time to build bikes, freshen up then head into the heart of the city.

Our destination is the Medina, or old walled city, where you can head into the narrow alleys known as souks. This covered labyrinth contains stalls that sell just about everything, and it's a great place to test your haggling skills if you want to buy something. As evening comes it's great to explore the main square, Djemaa el Fna. There is no place on earth like it, with its snake charmers, musicians, acrobats and entertainers. From here we head on to a great French/Moroccan restaurant for dinner, followed by a good rest before the first day of biking.

Day 2 – The Kasbah Trail

This morning we get away early for the 2.5 hour transfer high into the Atlas Mountains. This is the first and last such transfer of the trip – there are other short drives later in the tour but mainly to get us from the valleys to the high passes so we can get in as much varied and top-notch biking as possible, without wasting time in vehicles.

Our destination is the remarkable Kasbah at Telouet, a beautiful yet crumbling place which once hosted such famous visitors as Winston Churchill and Charlie Chaplin. While you enjoy a tour of the Kasbah and its inner palace, followed by a superb traditional lunch, we get the bikes ready to ride.

Today's ride begins with a warm up on a quiet backroad before the rocky, loose and sometimes steep 36km track along the Ounila Valley. The semi-desert scenery is stunning, and unlike anything you'll see elsewhere in Morocco, with craggy mountains looming over a lush green river valley. Villages appear out of nowhere, disguised by their simple construction using the soil and rock of the surrounding mountains. After passing by the next impressive Kasbah of Tamdaght we arrive at the most famous of all – Ait Benhaddou – and spend the night at a hotel close by.

Day 3 – Tichka Pass Singletrack

This morning we take the chance to explore the magnificent Ait Benhaddou Kasbah before anyone else has the chance to arrive. This location is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and was used for the filming of "Gladiator".

After a tour of the Kasbah we jump into the vehicles for the transfer to the top of Morocco's highest pass, Tizi-n-Tichka, for the start of an incredible 38km bike ride.

Further Information

The bustling centre of Marrakech is a fabulous place to explore, and if you leave valuables at the hotel you can relax as we take in the sights, or escape to a roof-top café, looking down on the busy markets below.

Morocco was a French protectorate until 1956 but the influence over the food, language and parts of the culture remain.

A Kasbah is a walled settlement – either a Moroccan style of castle owned by a person of real wealth, or a rural settlement where many families live together. The common link is that they are surrounded by one wall with a gate that is closed and locked between sunset and sunrise. The examples we see today are some of the largest and grandest in the country, but throughout our trip we ride by many other smaller Kasbahs.

The contrast in scenery today is quite dramatic. The morning start in a semi-desert landscape is so different from the craggy mountains we ride through, flowing into the green valleys of the lower western slopes of the Atlas.



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This route hugs the craggy cliffs like a pencil thin line, winding into the distance. We cross the high plateau and pedal through the remote, inaccessible village of Afra, much to the surprise of the local residents. The journey then twists and turns over approx 18km of pure singletrack until we come right out of the mountains and into the Zate Valley. From here a fast, sweeping track brings us down to the head of the road where we load up for the short drive to our hotel (those who wish can complete the final 20km by bike).

Day 4 – Red Rock Ride

Today we ride through the foothills of the High Atlas, a land of lush valleys, arid hilltops and winding trails across beautiful ridgelines. This ride starts right at the door of our hotel and ends at our next destination – a beautiful French/Moroccan hotel in the Ourika Valley.

The journey is partly on wide tracks and partly on singletrack, giving us time to relax a little after the last two days of challenging and physical biking. Relax, that is, until the final hour and a half of the day when we hit the amazing Red Rock trail. This section is the final descent towards Ourika, but losing height only gradually as we rise and fall on snaking red singletrack, peppered with rocks, drops and sneaky switchbacks.

Day 5 – Ourika Explored

Today we give you a full day of flexible riding choices in this most beautiful and varied part of the mountains. After breakfast together the support vehicle will head out with those that wish to get in a big ride. This is the ride from Ikis Mountain, a challenging and scenic route which takes even the best riders 3+ hours to complete. For those who want an easier day one guide will remain to lead a shorter, 1 hour ride which climbs gently on tarmac before descending on a fine section of singletrack to the river. It even goes past Mick Jagger's Moroccan holiday home!

Whichever option you choose we all meet up for a fantastic late lunch by the river, just upstream of the hotel in the tranquil region known as Setti Fatma. Being a dead-end valley there is little traffic along here, making it a great place to enjoy a lazy lunch and a splash in the river before the option of another afternoon ride.

Day 6 – Mountains to Plains

A winding road leads south into the highest peaks of the high Atlas, and our support vehicles take the strain as we climb to a high point of over 2200m. This is the start of a breathtaking journey which cuts through just about every climate zone, every type of terrain and some amazing village scenes as we blast from high mountains to open plains.

The final 16km singletrack section is a real highlight of the trip, with possibly some of the best mountain biking you'll ever do. Passing through villages as we reach the lower slopes the local children wave, smile and sometimes give chase while the elders look on and laugh. Eventually, tired and smiling, we pop out at the wide dirt road to meet our vehicles for the final uplift of the trip – all the way to the ski village of Oukaimeden.

This is quite a technical ride on rocky terrain and for this reason many people choose to wear some shin/knee pads. This doesn't mean you have to ride like a downhill, but in such remote locations some lightweight pads are always a good idea.

This is a superb cross country journey through the seldom explored lower hills of the western High Atlas. Our guides have explored this area over many years and know every connecting trail and thrilling singletrack, making it a great point-to-point journey.

The head of the Ourika Valley is situated very close to the heart of the High Atlas, cutting deep into the mountains from the west. We stay in a lovely little hotel here, run by a French and Moroccan couple, making it the perfect base for exploration for today. Whether you want to ride hard and fast on highly technical freeride trails, cruise along by the river or just relax by the pool, we can make it happen.

Our local guide, Pierre, discovered this trail after many days of riding from the plains up into the mountains, to see where he'd come out. He keeps the start location as secret as possible, and never lets any of the drivers see it as he wants to protect his "secret spot". This is an amazing biking day with everything from high mountain adventure to fast and furious singletrack, with some stiff climbs thrown in too.



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Day 7 – Toubkal Trails

The village of Oukaimeden is the closest you can get by road to the highest summit in North Africa – Toubkal. Starting with a short climb we can soon make out the full line of peaks which lead to this high point and beyond, stretching south as the High Atlas join the Anti Atlas, winding towards the coast.

The final ride is every bit as spectacular as the view. The morning is split into two choices – fast, exciting and rocky fire road or challenging rocky singletrack for over 2 hours, with steep ridgeline descents on scree slopes, uncharted descents on loose terrain through high mountain forests and one tough, technical climbing section. This is not for the feinthearted and with a fantastic afternoon of biking ahead we recommend it only for the strong and confident riders in the group.

Lunch is probably the very best you'll have in Morocco, not just for the quality of the food but also for the location. Our local guides know the villagers here and even though there is no official restaurant we get served a fabulous meal, sitting on a wide grassy terrace overlooking the silent, beautiful mountains. It's a real treat for the last day.

After lunch our singletrack contours round the mountain, passing one major Kasbah which, unlike those we saw on the first day of biking, is a living, working place which several families call their home. Our trail hugs the cliff as we pass beneath the Kasbah walls, then blast on down into the valley below. Our aim is to finish the ride in the middle of the afternoon as we have a short drive back to Marrakech to complete, and want a little time to pack bikes and freshen up before heading out for a last night meal together.

Day 8 – Souks then Home

Depending on flight times you may be able to fit in an early visit to the souks. It's fabulous to see the markets as they open up for the day, before the crowds start to arrive. Even if you just visit for an hour before breakfast, then get back to the hotel to pick up your things, its well worth getting a last flavour of Morocco and perhaps picking up some unusual gifts at the same time. Just make sure you allow enough time for the bartering! We will then transfer you to the airport for your flight home.

Today is a very special journey, starting out from a very special location. With our local contacts we've secured fabulous accommodation at the French Alpine Club hostel, right in the heart of the village. With hearty French food, a lovely lounge (see the gallery) and amazing views it's the perfect launch point for the day's ride.

This day also brings us right under the gaze of Toubkal, which at 4167m is the highest summit in North Africa. Frequently covered with snow it forms the perfect backdrop as we ride from 2600m to the lush valleys below.



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TRAVEL FACTS

Geography & Climate

The variety of this tour means we spend time in warm lowland areas as well as the cooler mountain areas of the High Atlas. In general we expect good weather with plenty of sunshine and temperatures ranging from 15 to 25 degrees centigrade as we ride. However, we can experience cold spells in the high mountains and as with all mountain areas there is the possibility of rain, so riders should always come prepared for a mix of conditions.

Accommodation & Food

We have made this tour as comfortable as possible so you can enjoy a good place to finish each night, with a hot shower and tasty food. We use a 3 star hotel in Marrakech, chosen for its character and quality, then a mix of hotels and good auberges throughout the tour, all with comfortable en-suite rooms. We only use a hostel on one night, but this is run by the French Alpine Club and is of a very high standard – the food is simple but very good, there are comfortable lounges to relax in and the shower/toilet facilities are excellent, as are the bunk rooms we use.

Cycling Support

While cycling in Morocco you will not have 4x4 support right behind you as we spend so much time on singletrack trails. Our expert leaders are experienced at looking after groups in high mountains but you still need to be able to carry your own basic provisions and tools. Our leaders carry a good toolkit and will help to fix most bike problems, and always travel with a good first aid kit and contact details for outside assistance, if needed. Our vehicles will be permanently on standby as we ride, drivers have mobile phones, and are ready to give support should it be required. Note that while we do have access to some spares as well as the possibility of getting spare bikes in the event of a major failure, this can be a time consuming/costly process. You must therefore ensure that your bike is in good working order before coming on the tour and ride within your abilities.

Cycle Rental

If you want to use your own bike it is usually easy to find flights which are suitable and we will send you our guideline packing instructions. If you prefer to rent one we have bikes in the UK as well as in Morocco – these are constantly changing and being updated to contact us for latest rental information.

Flights and Transfers

We can book your flight through an ATOL bonded agent and you will have a separate contract for your flight with them. Alternatively you can book your own flights through a range of airlines, including Easyjet, Ryanair and British Airways although you should not reserve any flights until we have confirmed that you can go ahead and do so (as we need to confirm that we have reached minimum numbers for the tour first). We aim to include one transfer for the whole group at the start and finish of the tour, and will let you know when this transfer departs from/for the airport. If you need extra transfers the normal fee is approx £20 to or from the hotel.

Passports and Visas

For entry into Morocco, UK citizens need a full passport, but a visa is not required.

Clothing and Equipment

On booking, a detailed list of useful and essential items will be sent to you. You must bring your own cycle helmet that must be worn for all cycle rides. All clothing and equipment must be packed in one bag, either a soft holdall or soft rucksack. This is the maximum luggage allowed as all luggage is carried on top of the vehicles. A Camelbak or similar cycling rucksack is also allowed and is carried inside the vehicle with you.

Pre-Travel Information

When you book a more detailed pre-travel pack will be sent to you with information on clothing to bring, money, bike packing and other useful topics.



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