

The mountains of Morocco: an eco-hotel in the Atlas Mountains

Corrie Heale goes for a fascinating hike in the Atlas Mountains before chilling out at a beautiful, remote eco-hotel...



The welcoming pool at the Kasbah Angour

I didn't realise quite how much I needed to get away from the hustle and bustle of city life until I caught a glimpse of the snow-capped Atlas Mountains behind the large head of the camel I was stroking. After politely declining to ride one of the many giant, lumbering beasts that are walking towards us, we eagerly hop back in the taxi and speed off through the desert towards the beautiful mountains that dominate the horizon. We're on our way from the airport to our hotel, the Kasbah Angour, nestled in the foothills of the mountain range.

We almost can't believe it when, just 40 minutes after leaving Marrakech, we're sitting in the hotel's beautiful gardens, sipping sweet Moroccan mint tea. Perched on a hilltop, this eco-friendly hotel offers stunning panoramic views of the highest mountains in Morocco and surrounding Berber villages. It was built eight years ago by British owner Paul Foulsham (some of it by his own hands), who worked closely with local carpenters and craftspeople from the villages to give guests an authentic taste of Morocco. The decor showcases Moroccan craft at its best; everything has either been made by local tradespeople or produced on site using cedar or walnut wood sourced from the Atlas Mountains. The walls have been built from local red sandstone and mud, and the floors laid with handmade clay tiles from Meknes. Oh, and there's also a pool, yes!



Corrie enjoys her dinner

After basking in the warm afternoon sun, we pad up to our room and enjoy the same glorious views from our roof terrace. The suite is large and homely; colourful patterned rugs decorate the floors and the charmingly uneven tiles feel warm under foot. The spacious bed is

comfortable, and the handcrafted wooden furnishings have Berber motifs carved into them, giving the room a sense of authenticity and character. Quiet, peaceful and with nothing but rolling hills surrounding us (seriously, not even a shop), we pop our trainers on and scamper off to explore the villages with local guide Abdul.

There are a variety of outdoor pursuits available, such as day trips to Marrakech, donkey treks, 4 x 4 adventures, camel rides, guided souk visits, rounds of golf, half- or full-day walks and even skiing! But with our salopettes collecting dust back in England, we opt for a six-mile, half-day ramble around the Berber villages with four other guests – private excursions can also be arranged. We weave in and out of villages before dropping down into the valley and passing through Toubkal National Park, all the while entertained by Abdul, who stops frequently to search for scorpions and quartz crystals or simply to tell us historical Moroccan stories. It's brilliant fun and definitely worth my slightly pink shoulders – I really must wear more sun cream. Finally, we pass through Outghal, another village of baked mud huts, before heading back to the hotel for a spot of lunch.

The food at Kasbah Angour is focused on seasonality and good-quality produce. Fruit and vegetables are grown on site and the menu changes daily depending on what is ripe. In fact, to avoid wastage, the friendly Berber staff allow guests to choose their evening meals from the menu in the afternoon, leaving them time to prepare only what food is needed.

Healthy, hearty and with Moroccan and Mediterranean influences, you can expect to enjoy dishes such as pumpkin soup with argan oil and toasted corn croutons; coriander and garlic charcoal-grilled chicken and, of course, vegetable and lamb tagines with apricots and sautéed potatoes. For dessert, I enjoy a plum tart made with fruit from the garden, and most of my boyfriend Jamie's orange and carrot cake – well, I have walked more than six miles!



The hotel's beautiful gardens



Corrie's friend!

After another peaceful night's sleep and breakfast of Berber eggs (cooked in a bed of fried tomatoes), we find ourselves back in a taxi and hurtling towards the airport. I look out the window and see the camel I met a few days earlier chewing happily on some grass by the roadside. I give him a little wave. 'Who are you waving at?' Jamie asks. 'Oh, no one; just a friend,' I reply, smiling to myself.