



## MOROCCO

### BIKING THE HIGH ATLAS TO THE SAHARA BY BIKE & FOOT 10-DAYS

This 10-day Morocco cycling tour features mountain and desert biking through the deep south, a land of big skies and stark mountain ranges. Adobe kasbahs are scattered throughout the desert amongst palm-fringed oases framed by snowcapped mountains. We ride along a network of dirt paths that wind from Marrakech to the highest pass in the Atlas Mountains, and then head southbound to the Sahara Desert. The riding is along rocky, jeep tracks covering an average of 50 km / 31 mi per day. We pedal through traditional villages, visiting the ancient kasbah of Ait Benhaddou and stop for tea breaks to experience the legendary hospitality of the Berbers. As we descend from the High Atlas, the landscape changes and the Sahara desert starts to make its imprint. We head into the dunes in 4x4 jeeps, with the chance to ride camels before feasting on a desert barbecue and a night of slumber under starry Saharan skies. For mountain bike enthusiasts, this trip is your calling.



## Day 1

### MARRAKECH

#### ARRIVAL

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A BikeHike Adventures representative will greet you at the airport and transfer you to a comfortable hotel in the centre of Marrakech. The remainder of the day is at leisure to wander through the beguiling labyrinth of tiny alleys and passageways in the ancient medina (old town).

**Accommodation:** Hotel

**Meals:** None



## Day 2

### MARRAKECH - TELOUET

#### MOUNTAIN BIKING

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After our first Moroccan breakfast, we set off in Land Cruisers for a scenic drive to the kasbah of Telouet. The crumbling fortress is set in a remote valley overlooking mud villages and fertile gardens. We climb on switchbacks up the Tichka Pass, one of North Africa's highest paved roads. Over the pass we have a few more kilometres to drive before reaching the ruined kasbah. We'll break for a picnic in the gardens, then hop on our bikes to begin our Morocco cycling tour. The ride begins at 1,800 m / 6,000 ft, so the first section might feel a bit tough. After about 10 km / 6 mi we start off-roading down a 32 km / 20 mi jeep track to Tamdaght, set in a desert palm oasis near Ait Benhaddou. The surface is occasionally very poor and sometimes rocky but there are some fun fast sections too as we descend through numerous mud villages and canyonland scenery to an altitude of 1,200 m / 4,000 ft. We aim to arrive well before sundown for some great photo opportunities from the terrace of our converted kasbah hotel. Overnight in a converted kasbah.

**Biking Distance:** 42 km / 26 mi

**Ascent:** +207 m / 679 ft

**Descent:** -665 m / 2,181 ft

**Accommodation:** Hotel

**Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

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## Day 3

### AIT BENHADDOU

#### MOUNTAIN BIKING

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This morning we'll pack our gear onto Land Cruisers, then have a post-breakfast tour of the Ksour of Ait Benhaddou. This complex of adobe kasbahs is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is still inhabited by a handful of families. It's surrounded by date palms and rugged mountains and is probably the best-preserved village in the south of Morocco. It made an appearance in the film *The Gladiator*. Afterwards we set off in our support vehicles to the start of our 3-day ride through the remote Jebel Sirwa region. With no hotels and few village lodgings available we spend the first night under canvass and the second night in a basic village house. In Agouim we mount our bikes and pedal along a well-maintained dirt path westbound into the heart of the Sirwa. The path we tackle is hilly with one significant climb up to our wilderness campsite. En route we pass through some very remote villages and start to get a flavour for the area, although be prepared for constant changes in character and landscape throughout the three days we spend here! After a lunch break we climb onto an expansive plateau and set up our campsite. With luck, we'll have clear skies and panoramic views of the craggy mountains peaks of the High Atlas and the dark tabletop peaks of the Sirwa range. We're now at about 2,100 m / 6,889 ft above sea level so temperatures can drop below freezing

so wrap up warm for a cold night of wilderness camping. Overnight in tents.

**Biking Distance:** 41 km / 25 mi

**Ascent:** +1,202 m / 3,944 ft

**Descent:** -586 m / 1,922 ft

**Accommodation:** Tent

**Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## Day 4

### ASKAOUN

#### MOUNTAIN BIKING

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This morning we're back on our bikes, continuing along yesterday's path. Riding on the plateau is invigorating and we frequently pass nomads herding their flocks of sheep, goats and horses. Crossing the first village we descend along a dry riverbed, which is the "main drag" of the settlement. The buildings are all traditional. Women dress in bright costumes and the children are absolutely fascinated by us. We'll stop for a mint tea in a Berber hut and experience some of the local hospitality. Moving on, we climb onto another plateau along a rough track, an area strewn with volcanic boulders and stone houses which are inhabited by nomads. The scenery is wonderful and it's here that we reach the highest point of the day, meaning there's some great downhill to follow! As we cross the final pass, the landscape changes and it's obvious we've crossed the continental divide. The remainder of the day is mostly descending through a pleasantly rolling landscape with some fast riding possible along great trails. Arriving at the town of Askaoun we do one

final descent to a house in a nearby village where we will enjoy a typical Moroccan home-cooked meal and spend the night in very basic conditions. Dinner and overnight at village house.

**Biking Distance:** 50 km / 31 mi

**Ascent:** +939 m / 3,080 ft

**Descent:** -1,245 m / 4,085 ft

**Accommodation:** Hotel

**Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## Day 5

### OUARZAZATE

#### MOUNTAIN BIKING

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Those who still feel energetic can make an early start from the village up a gradual 24 km / 15 mi climb. The scenery is wild and volcanic with some rocky passages as well as some smoother undulating tracks. Those craving a rest can take a transfer in our support vehicle up to the top of the pass - the top of one of Morocco's best descents down towards the plains of Ouarzazate. From the top of the pass there's about 35 km / 21 mi of jeep track to our finishing point - that's over 30 km of descent and just one glute-burning 3 km / 2 mi climb after lunch around the village of Tamachocht, an authentic village perched above a fertile valley of cultivated terraces. After our picnic lunch, a quick climb and some more downhill, we transfer out of the Sirwa back to civilization and the town of Ouarzazate. It's an hour's drive across strikingly desolate landscapes to our comfortable hotel overlooking the town's palm groves. Here you can enjoy a hammam, which is a typical Moroccan steam bath, and massage

(women only) to relax any tired muscles. Overnight in a converted kasbah hotel.

**Biking Distance:** 60 km / 36 mi

(24km / 15 mi of the biking distance is an optional ascent)

**Ascent:** +736 m / 2,415 ft

**Descent:** -1,469 m / 4,820 ft

**Accommodation:** Hotel

**Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## Day 6

### OUARZAZATE - AGDZ

#### MOUNTAIN BIKING

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After a leisurely start to the day we have a short transfer towards Zagora, for the start of today's ride. There's an easy start with a thrilling 8 km / 5 mi descent on a dirt path which joins the valley of the River Draa, Morocco's longest river. Today's ride is nice and varied and not too taxing with several short climbs and descents as we follow the upper reaches of the river valley. Some of the villages along the way are startling, with abandoned kasbahs. Our overnight stop is around the town of Agdz where, depending on the size of the group, we will either stay in a beautifully-renovated kasbah just south of Agdz, or a French-run auberge in the palmery.

**Biking Distance:** 26 km / 16 mi

**Ascent:** +352 m / 1,155 ft

**Descent:** -609 m / 1,998 ft

**Accommodation:** Hotel

**Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## Day 7

### ZAGORA

#### MOUNTAIN BIKING

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Riding out from our hotel we continue to explore the Draa Valley as we descend towards the fringes of the Sahara desert. The Draa Valley is one giant oasis of date palms, fruit trees and vegetables. En route we explore the passageways and ruined interiors of the extensive Kasbah Tamnougalt which overlooks the mountain of Jebel Kissane, a backdrop that stays in our view for some time. How far we ride today depends on the group. It's a day of rolling riding through typical villages with a picnic in the palm groves en route to Zagora, our destination. The full route is long so the last part of the journey will be in 4x4s. Zagora is a regional administrative centre which only dates back to French colonial times. From here it's 52 days by camel to Timbuktu. Overnight at auberge. (Distance variable depending on group preferences)

**Biking Distance:** 60 km / 37 mi

**Ascent:** + 506 m / 1,660 ft

**Descent:** - 614 m / 2,015 ft

**Accommodation:** Hotel

**Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



## Day 8

### SAHARA DESERT

#### HIKING

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Today is our desert day (and night). After passing through an ever-changing landscape from High Atlas to desert, today we get our first glimpses of dunes. We have around 70 km / 43 mi of paved road and 60 km / 37 mi of path to cover as we head south-west. It's a harsh environment for biking so we transfer by vehicle as we make our way via Tagnite to Chegaga. It's a landscape of dunes and dry lakes, lost oases and lonely acacia trees; an area frequented by Saharan nomads with their caravans of camels. This is the deep south of Morocco and marks the start of the Sahara desert which stretches for a further 1,800 km / 1,118 mi or so southwards. En route we may get the chance to ride camels. There is no more powerful symbol of the desert than this extraordinarily adapted animal. In the afternoon we arrive at the trip's most southerly point, our desert camp surrounded by dunes and little else. Here our hosts set up camp for us and we spend the night in nomad tents with the "Great Bear" lighting up the desert skies, and enjoy a barbecue meal and a campfire. All day there are opportunities to walk. Overnight in typical nomad tents.

**Accommodation:** Tent

**Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

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## Day 9

### SAHARA DESERT - MARRAKECH

#### TRANSFER

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Today we have a serious transfer back to Marrakech, as we've travelled a vast distance across Morocco. The drive takes about seven hours, but Marrakech is a real highlight. Once we're settled into our hotel, there is time to wander through the labyrinth of narrow alleys in the ancient medina, a UNESCO Heritage Site. You might like to visit the Badi and Bahia Palaces, the famous souks (markets), the Marrakech Museum, or the Majorelle Botanical Garden, owned by Yves Saint Laurent. Tonight we explore the main square, the Djemaa el Fna. At night the square is transformed into a giant open-air restaurant with men in white coats serving anything from sheep's head stew to snails in hot sauce. The rest of the square is dedicated to other forms of entertainment such as snake charmers, storytellers, acrobats and dancers. Later on we head out for a farewell dinner and get a chance to experience what Marrakech offers in the way of nightlife. Overnight in a comfortable hotel.

**Accommodation:** Hotel

**Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch

## Day 10

### MARRAKECH

#### DEPARTURE

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Depending on your flight time home, you can explore Marrakech at your leisure before transferring to the airport for your international flight back home.

**Meals:** Breakfast



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*NOTE about Ascent/Descent numbers:  
The ascent/descent numbers are usually generated using Ride with GPS. The numbers are TOTAL ascent/descent for the day and these numbers do not suggest altitude. There are usually multiple small ascents and descents added up throughout the day to reach this total ascent/descent for the day. (While our numbers are generally consistent with Ride with GPS, depending on the mapping technology used, numbers may vary).*

## TRIP INCLUSIONS

### **Trip Includes**

All accommodation (twin shared), meals as indicated, internal transportation, all equipment (Giant Talon mountain bikes with front suspension and camping gear) and English-speaking guides.

### **Not Included**

Airport departure taxes, meals not indicated, gratuities, and items of a personal nature.

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