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# IMLIL VALLEY

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THE HEART OF MOROCCO'S HIGH ATLAS MOUNTAINS



CROSS CULTURAL  
COURSE



BERBER LANGUAGE  
TIPS



AVERAGE IMLIL  
INCOME



MAKE THE MOST OF  
YOUR TRIP



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THE INSIDER'S GUIDE TO SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN THE REGION

BY IT'S ONE WORLD TRAVEL | SPONSORED BY THE ASSOCIATION BASSIN D'IMLIL & KASBAH DU TOUBKAL

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WELCOME TO IMLIL VALLEY



A BIT ABOUT BERBERS – 80% of Morocco’s Population



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



# IMLIL VALLEY

## MOROCCO

### Welcome to Imlil Valley.

The stunning jewel of the High Atlas mountain range captivates crowds year round. Everyone from adrenaline chasing trekkers to sun-seeking vacationers finds something here.

Fourteen unique villages offer a varied visit. Mountains studded with mud and straw houses line both sides of the lush valley, and inside these homes live some of the most warm and welcoming people in the Kingdom of Morocco.

Undoubtedly one of the first phrases you will hear upon meeting locals is "I am Berber" and it will be said with an undeniable tone of pride.

**After all, Berber hospitality is second to none.**

## A BIT ABOUT BERBERS 80% OF MOROCCO'S POPULATION

Berber is a derivative of the word "Barbarians" which was bestowed upon them many years ago by the Romans. They also identify with the word "Amazigh" which means "free people".

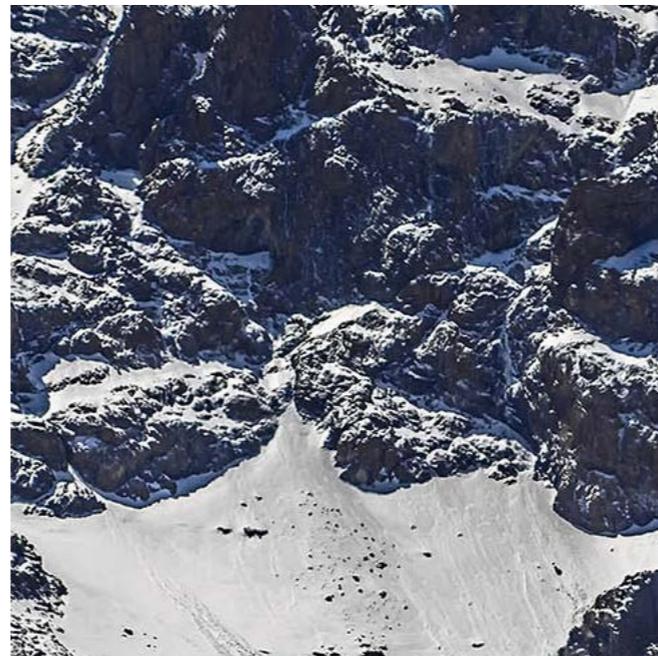
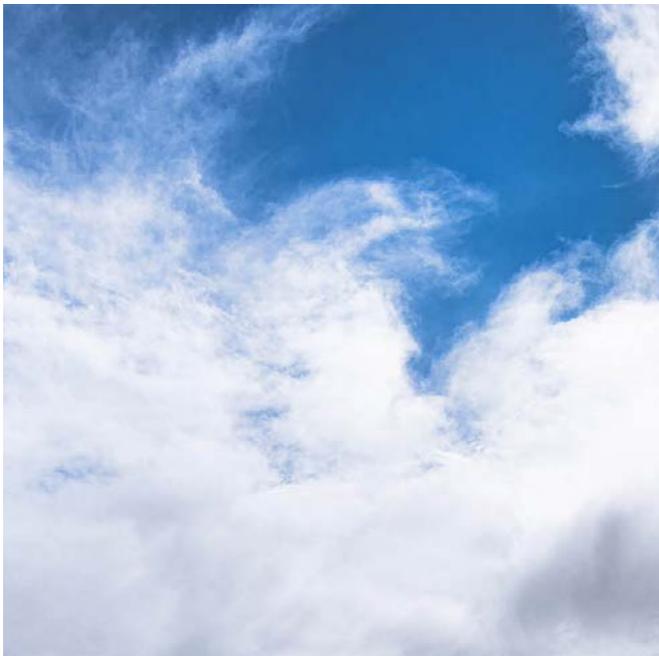
Though there are now more than 1400 different tribes there is one thing all Berbers agree on: **"where there is water, there is life"**. The river careening through the Imlil Valley drew the nearly 4000 residents here with its life-giving sustenance. In spring the valley is green and lush, animals happily graze the land while their owners scythe and stack long grass for the coming dry months; it's then stored in traditional Berber food pantries, called Agadir.

The official language of the Berbers is Tamazight, though most also speak Darija, a Moroccan dialect combining elements of Arabic, Tamazight, and Spanish.

**Moroccans have a great gift for learning languages and those who work in tourism will often speak three or more languages with apparent ease.** Of course, it's always appreciated when you attempt to reciprocate with some elementary Berber words and phrases. Check out the Language Guide on page 21 to get started now.

When visiting the beautiful Berber land, you'll want to be a respectful and conscientious guest. In the following pages you'll learn how you directly impact the environment, economy, and culture with your visit to Imlil – even if it's just a day trip.





# ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

Imlil Valley has struggled for many years with their trash. It's a slow process of educating locals about the harm that trash can have on their water, air, and eventually food sources.

Though not all the trash comes from locals; many national tourists come from Marrakech or Casablanca for a day trip, picnic and leave behind the remnants. Efforts are being undertaken to dismay day-trippers from using and abusing the land but foreign tourists can do their part by setting a good example, too.

## What's left in Imlil, stays in Imlil

Currently the government does not pick up the trash at the appointed intervals and this leads to a veritable dump in many people's backyard. To avoid this eyesore the trash is burned, plastic and all.

Before it can be burned though, the wind scatters the trash around the valley. Then animals graze on it, it's washed into the rivers and streams which water crops, and children play in it.

## Don't Be Trashy

Given that Imlil supports a lot of tourists each year, the actions of just one person really add up. If it's at all possible to take your trash back to Marrakech (or your next destination) with you, it makes a huge impact in the long run. If not, please ensure that you use the properly labeled receptacles which are placed intermittently around the area thanks to Mountain Propre.

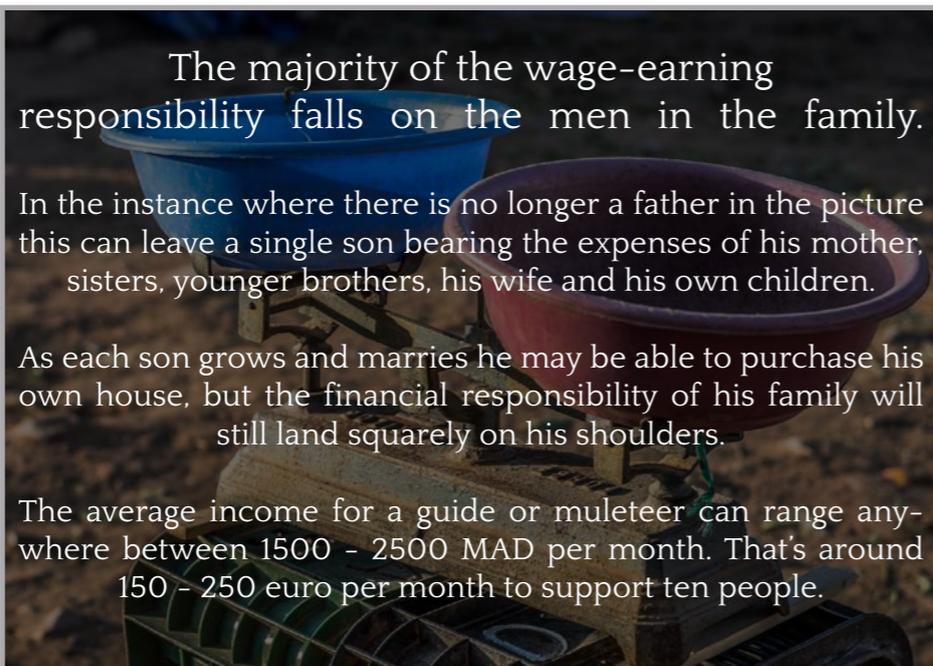
## Throttle the Bottle

Plastic bottles are undeniably convenient but we all know the deep levels of destruction they cause. When possible bring reusable bottles, or at the least, ensure that you do not leave your plastic bottles behind when camping or hiking.

If you're a guest at the Kasbah du Toubkal you will be provided a reusable canteen and there is a triple filtered water fountain available for refills. Every bottle counts!

## PEOPLE ARE THE REAL BOTTOM LINE

Most travelers try to maximize the vacation experience while minimizing expenses. Understanding how your holiday directly impacts the residents may help you to better understand the plight of the people.



The majority of the wage-earning responsibility falls on the men in the family.

In the instance where there is no longer a father in the picture this can leave a single son bearing the expenses of his mother, sisters, younger brothers, his wife and his own children.

As each son grows and marries he may be able to purchase his own house, but the financial responsibility of his family will still land squarely on his shoulders.

The average income for a guide or muleteer can range anywhere between 1500 - 2500 MAD per month. That's around 150 - 250 euro per month to support ten people.

## HOW MUCH DOES LIFE COST?

FOR A FAMILY OF 6-10



250 MAD for vegetables, bread, and some meat most weeks  
400-500 MAD on weeks when flour, sugar, tea, etc are needed  
60 MAD per kilo for beef and lamb  
60 MAD for 2 kilos of sugar

### And utilities?

150 MAD for electricity card (one month for 5 people)  
45 MAD each 12 Kg canister gas. 3 are needed: for cooking, bread oven, and shower. Lasts for less than one month.  
(government subsidised, full rate is 150 MAD each)  
2 MAD per kilo of wood — this goes very fast in the cold winter months in the valley.



## FAMILY COMES FIRST, SECOND, AND THIRD

In villages Moroccan families often live near each other and usually in the same house. **This can mean upwards of ten people under one roof where only one or two people are earning money.**

In the valley it's still quite rare for women to work outside of the home, and in fact it can be seen as shameful for them to do so.

With increased education opportunities in the area, thanks in large part to Education For All, this is slowly changing, but the fact remains that the majority of women don't work outside of the home or pursue education beyond 11 years old.

One guide confessed that 18 people live in his house and he is the only breadwinner.

He said "sometimes my little brother... he gets some work with the tourists... but this year, it's not much. It's very hard. I have to take care of everyone with my money. Each month I am making 1900 dirhams."

Is this enough to live on?

"It's enough sometimes... but nothing is left at the end of the month. Only to start again the next month."

BEAR THIS IN MIND  
WHEN BARGAINING.



## EDUCATION FOR ALL    changing lives, one girl at a time

For economic reasons most girls don't attend school past 11 years old. That's changing in High Atlas Region, though, thanks to Education For All which

provides disadvantaged girls the opportunity to complete secondary, high school, and finish university. Girls are in the program nourishing their dreams of becoming doctors, architects, travelers, and teachers.

EFA now has five boarding houses but there are so many wanting to enter the program only 20% who apply are able to be accepted into the program.

With funding from guests at the Kasbah du Toubkal as well as international fundraising efforts there are hopes to be able to open more.

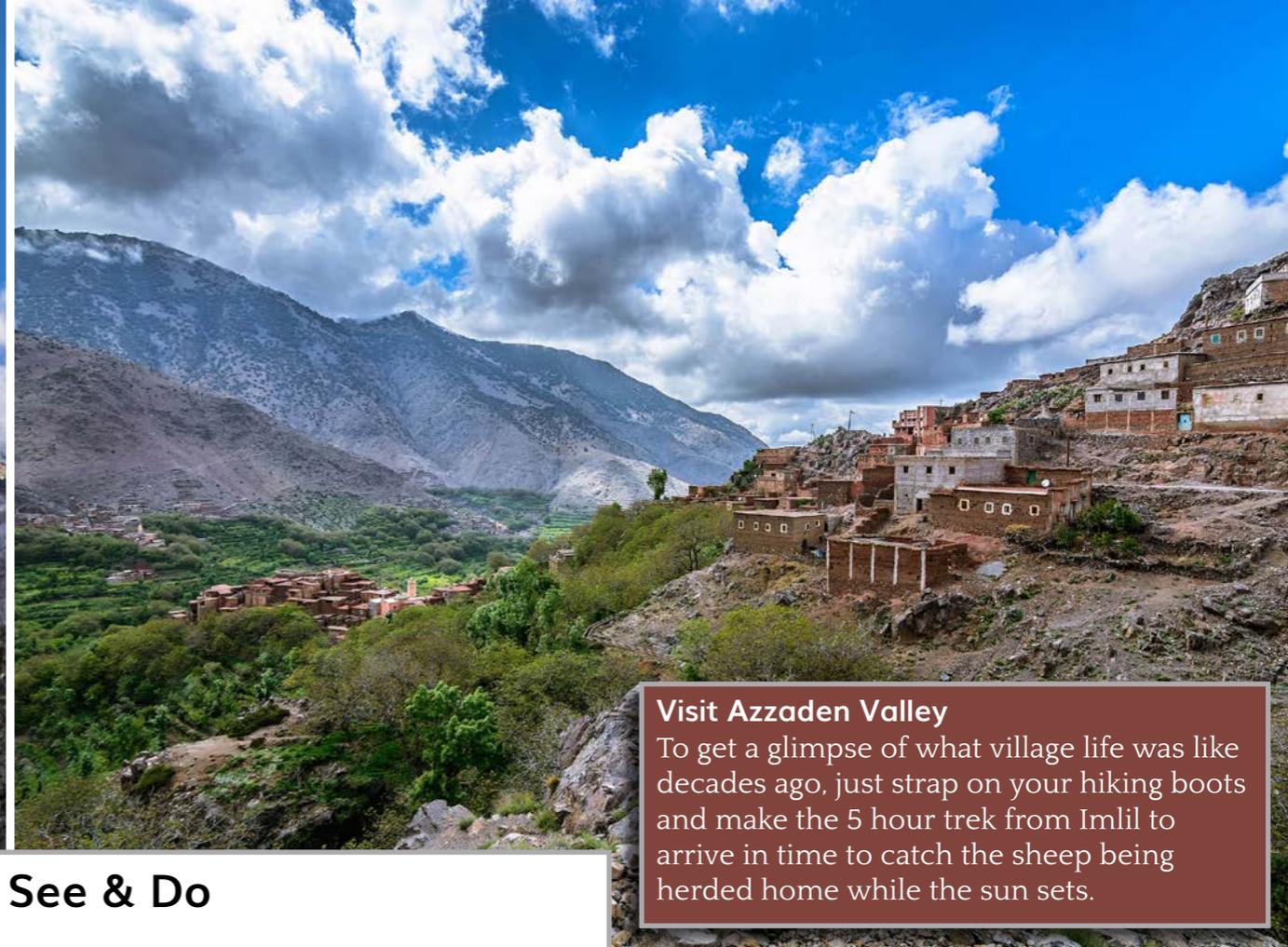
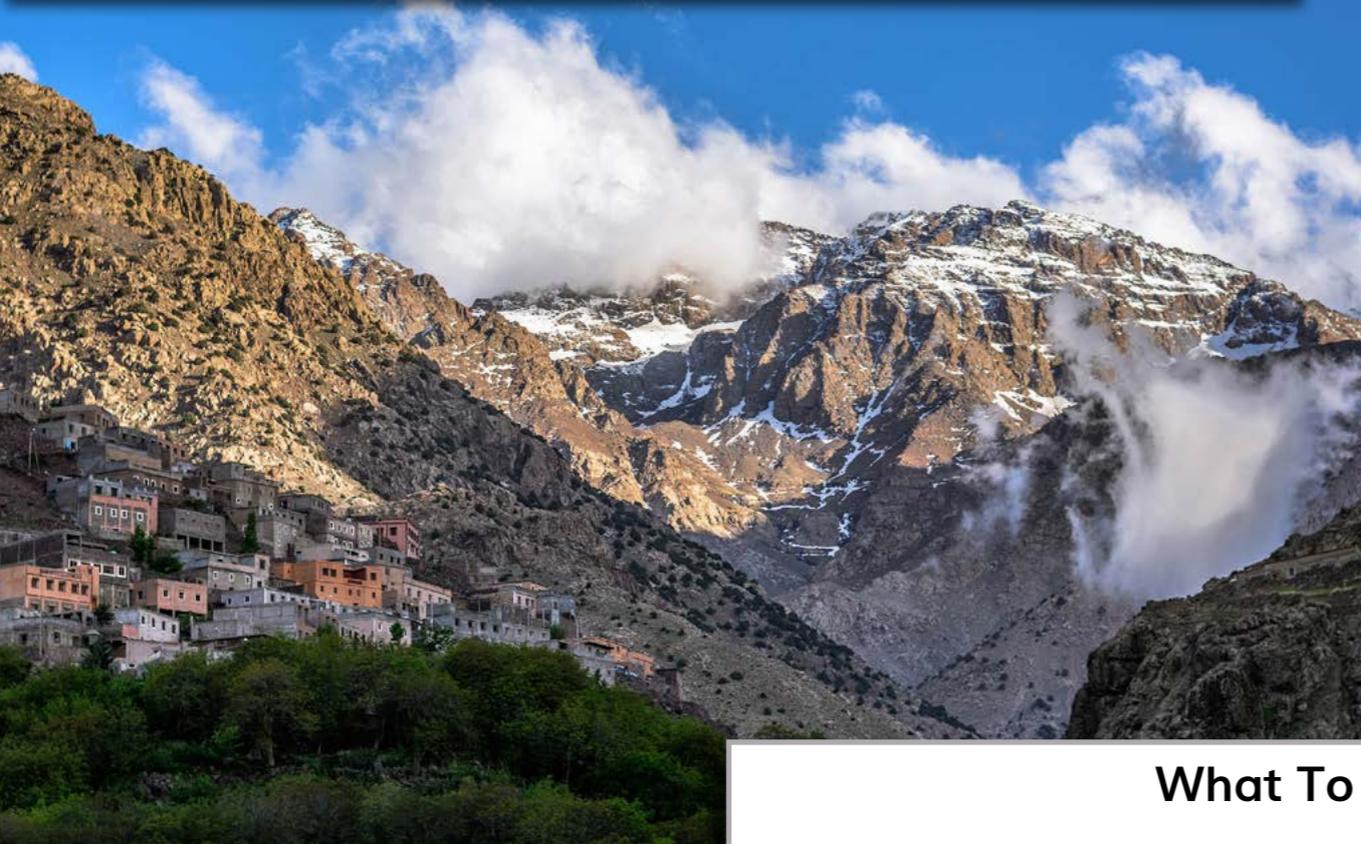
For the full story behind this incredible initiative please view "A Different Life" [here](#).

To learn about how you can get involved please visit [ImlilValley.com](http://ImlilValley.com) or the EFA site [efamorocco.org](http://efamorocco.org)



## Summit Jbel Toubkal

For the brave, fit, and adventurous tackle the 4,167 meter ascent by way of an overnight in the Toubkal Refuge before continuing on to the peak.



### Visit Azzaden Valley

To get a glimpse of what village life was like decades ago, just strap on your hiking boots and make the 5 hour trek from Imlil to arrive in time to catch the sheep being herded home while the sun sets.

## What To See & Do

Nature lovers rejoice in the Toubkal National Park. Home of North Africa's highest peak this protected space houses Barbary sheep, foxes, owls, and more life than the eye can see.



**Make for the Tizi N'Mezzik Pass**  
For a view of the Imane Valley and Aït Mizane Valley this is a moderate 4 hour adventure from Imlil.



### Must See: Toubkal National Park's Museum

To make the most of your visit to Imlil this should be your first stop. This museum is ideal for families thanks to the fun interactive displays.



**FACT:** The use of the traditional Berber bit continues to cause an animal great pain as well as destroying its teeth over a period of time. This bit is barbaric and can make an animal slowly starve to death as chewing becomes too painful.

You should refuse to go out with a mule wearing a traditional iron bit – that will do more to reduce the abuse of animals than any other measure.



**RESPONSIBILITY OF TOURISTS**

A responsible tourist should be sensitive to the needs of the animal and be sure that the animal is not suffering from an injury. They should refuse to travel with a mule that is obviously injured or exhausted.

Like most developing countries life in Morocco still relies heavily on animal power, and often this means you will see less-than-ideal conditions for many working animals, specifically equines.

As a visitor you have the power to shift the tides and choose which practices you support, but there are some key facts to know before you go.

First, be mindful that many of the people are living very, very difficult lives and bear an undesirable burden; sadly these conditions are often passed onto the animals. However you have a variety of ways you can help animals great and small even during your short stay in the country.

Remember that 75 kilos is the maximum for a mule, and it should be half of that for journeys longer than 20 minutes!

Do not hesitate to ask your tour company what they pay their muleteers. If it is not a living wage – insist that you only work with tour operators who care for their providers. **Of course, this comes with the obvious result that you can't expect to pay bargain basement prices – someone is always paying the price, be it human or animal.** Finding a fair price that covers the living expenses of everyone involved should be your priority. **Be a savvy traveler and find the balance between a decent price and doing the right thing.**



Thanks to **Susan Machin of Jarjeer Mules** for her expert advice on how tourists can ensure they are contributing to a happy and healthy life both for the mules and their owners.

**YOU'VE GOT THE POWER**

It only takes one sentence to save an animal a life of suffering. Point to the bit / injuries / overloaded pack / etc and say "No. I will not support this." **Word of mouth travels quickly in small areas and your actions will have a domino effect.**



**Change comes from paying customers — be a force for good.**



## SAVE THE PDA FOR YOUR HOTEL

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Though Morocco is a destination for honeymooners and lovebirds alike this is a very modest country and even hand-holding can be offensive to locals.

Naturally this would mean anything more certainly falls under unacceptable when in public.

Best to let your love accumulate during the day and save it for closed doors; think of it as a great way to rekindle the flame!



## ASSESS YOUR DRESS

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Even though Imlil is only forty miles away from Marrakech the tone is polar opposite. In Marrakech it's not unusual to see women in shorts, skirts above the knee, and scant or see-through tops.

While it's still not appropriate in Marrakech it's much more shocking for people in villages – many of whose homes and front doors you'll be walking past on a hike.

Wide-leg loose pants and lightweight cotton shirts are an excellent alternative that leave you feeling fresh while being modest and respectful. While a headscarf is not necessary, a hat is recommended for saving you from the brutal North African sun.





## PHOTO TAKING ETIQUETTE

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Imlil is a gorgeous area and you're certainly going to have your camera at the ready at most times. While you're enjoying a nice vacation it's important to remember that those around you are locals working to make a living and **it's very disrespectful in their culture to take a photo of them without asking – especially women.**

If you're with a guide you can have them ask on your behalf – but ensure that they do ask. Don't take "it's okay, take a picture" as a blanket answer. It's usually well received when you ask yourself; **An easy way to ask if you can take their photo is by saying "Ya tsouira?" (yah tuh\*swee\*ruh) which means "one photo?"** and if they agree, you're in luck. If not, remember that they have a right to their person and you likely wouldn't enjoy someone coming up to you unannounced and snapping your photo while you're going about your daily life, either.

Respect knows no language and costs nothing to give.

## BERBER LANGUAGE GUIDE

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Morocco is a land of many languages, though the official languages are Arabic and French you'll find that most people speak Berber, which is the language of the nomads. It's very guttural and can be quite tricky, but don't let that dismay you. As with any country, trying to speak at least a little of the local language goes a long way.

Here are some common phrases you'll want to keep handy:

"Ya tsouira?" = one photo?

Oho = no in Berber

Ya = yes in berber

Please = Aafak

Thank You = shukran (arabic) or Tenmirdt

No = Oho

Yes = Ya

Hello - Salaam Aliekum // wuh aliekum salaam

**Bismillah** = literally means "in the name of Allah" and it's used as a cheer (for tea, naturally), said by taxi drivers when they get in the car, chefs before they cook, and used generally as a blessing before undertaking any task.

### The Famous Insha'Allah

More than any other word, this is the one you will hear the most in Morocco. Insha'allah literally means "God willing" and can be used in hundreds of ways. Don't be caught off guard if you try to make a date with someone, say, for a hotel pickup, and they respond with "Insha'Allah" – it's a yes.



## RESPECT AND RELIGION

Morocco is likely one of the safest and most stable Muslim countries you can visit, however that is not grounds for dismissal of the religion that governs 99% of the population. Five times a day you will hear the Muezzin (call to prayer) ring out from the speakers of mosques near and far, beckoning the loyal listeners to kneel in prayer.

Whether it's on a carpet, cardboard, or old cloth you'll see many bend, bow, and repeat the rhythmic process of prayer several times over. Granted, it's an enchanting ritual but restrain yourself from taking photos or video as this is incredibly offensive.

Your patience is appreciated in a shop or public space where the employee or owner needs to take their time to worship. Simply observe in silence and they'll be with you shortly.

## THE RULES OF RAMADAN

Ramadan is a time of holy fasting; loyal Muslims do not eat or drink anything while the sun is shining during this month of cleansing. They must also refrain from smoking and other fleshly pleasures during the fasting hours.

The purpose of Ramadan is so that all can feel the pangs of hunger, thirst, and deprivation the underprivileged experience every day. This leads to a greater understanding between social classes and much more aid is received by the needy during this time.

It's only human to feel "hangry" (anger stemming from hunger) when your blood sugar dips low - this naturally causes tensions to rise. Coupled with lack of sleep due to late night breakfasts Ramadan can be a tough time for locals and your understanding goes a long way.

While visitors are not expected to comply with Ramadan it can be extremely difficult to see someone eating and drinking while fasting. In most destinations there will be a select few restaurants that remain open during the day to cater to tourists. It's best to eat only in these places or in your room - and take the same precautions with smoking. This holy time can require a great deal of patience and understanding.

**Knowing that Ramadan also prohibits pleasures of the flesh means it's an exceptionally important time for women to remain modestly dressed,** as the slightest temptations can feel extreme during these long days. Ramadan dates are told by the moon, so it's impossible to give accurate dates in advance but if your trip to Morocco will be during these dates it's important to stay mindful.

**Your kindness and compassion are of utmost importance to maintaining healthy relations between locals and tourists.**



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Our gratitude goes to the following organisations for the support, cooperation, and information to make this project possible:



المنتزه الوطني لتوبقال  
Parc national de Toubkal



The biggest heartfelt thank you goes to you, the responsible reader. We hope this guide has been useful to you in planning your upcoming visit to the Kingdom of Morocco and the beautiful Imlil Valley region.

For more in-depth information visit [ImlilValley.com](http://ImlilValley.com) where you will find a host of resources as well as more stunning images of the area.

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THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT

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IMLILVALLEY.COM



THERE IS A SHARED BELIEF AMONGST THE BERBER PEOPLE:

THE BEAUTY OF THE HIGH ATLAS MOUNTAINS SHOULD BE ACCESSIBLE TO ALL WHO RESPECT IT

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