



Majestic Morocco

Jane Slade discovers Kasbah Angour, a hilltop Oasis 30 minutes from Marrakech that offers a walk on the wild side

Winston Churchill once said that Marrakech was the nicest place on earth to spend an afternoon. He loved watching the sunset over the mountains.

In the 1930s when he first discovered Morocco on a painting holiday, the road out of Marrakech into the hinterland did not exist. Neither did Kasbah Angour, a stunning Berber castle that stands 1,000m high surveying the snowy peaks of the Atlas mountains.

Just 30 minutes from the mayhem of motorbikes, souks and searing heat, up a dusty track and you arrive at a haven of stillness, and lushness built by an Englishman from Surrey.

The expression ‘an Englishman’s home is his castle,’ could not apply better to Paul Foulsham. Paul gave up a career in the oil industry to build Kasbah Angour on 10 acres of

hillside, where he has cultivated a verdant paradise of olive, cypress, palms and fig trees and a vegetable garden.

The boutique hotel which opened in 2011, oozes Moroccan charm inside and out. The terrace is peppered with wrought iron tables decorated in colourful mosaic tiles from Fez, and the woven fabrics, bedspreads and rugs in the rooms come from the local Berber villages, which punctuate the surrounding rolling hillsides.

Kasbah Angour’s sandstone façade glows at sunset, a secret jewel that looks as though it has been there for centuries. The moment my husband and I arrive in the airy lobby, we are greeted with warm, friendly smiles. I immediately know ‘this is going to be my kind of place.’

Our spacious, simply-decorated, suite had breath-taking views of lush lawns, an outdoor swimming pool and those beguiling

mountains in the distance. We had everything we needed.

There was no TV and Wi-fi only in the public areas. What joy! Our entertainment would be walking in the Atlas foothills, reading books, lounging by the pool, watching sunsets and listening to the music of the cicadas and calls to prayer from the local mosque.

This is a place for yogis, artists and hikers. So do bring your yoga mat, easel and walking boots.

My hubby and I were on a training mission. We had booked a trek to Everest Base camp a few months after our visit and thought this would be an ideal opportunity to reacquaint ourselves with our walking boots and explore a different mountainous landscape.

Jbel Toubkal (4,167 m) is the highest mountain in North Africa – about half the height of Everest and some thousand metres lower than base camp. Kasbah Angour is an ideal starting point to make the two-day climb. The hotel can organise experienced mountain guides and overnight stay in a mountain refuge.

As tempted as we were, we decided to avoid any possible risk of injury and take two guided walks in the foothills directly from the hotel.

Paul has trekked extensively in the area so was ideally placed for advice. There are all sorts of walks, no matter your fitness or age, ranging from gentle half-day ambles to full-day testing hikes.

We opted for a moderate wander through olive groves, eucalyptus and pine woods. We discovered man-made caves where locals keep their cereals and, in times of war, women and children. We passed through traditional Berber villages meeting friendly local farmers, adorable children, chickens and donkeys.

Other excursions the hotel offers include a visit to the local souk, an outing to the village of Imlil with mule trek and picnic; four-by-four adventures in the mountains; camel rides, and trips to the big city of Marrakech.

Even though it was winter, we had blue skies and sunshine throughout our three-night stay. The unheated pool was a bit chilly for me, but the dry, warm climate was perfect for al fresco lounging.

Winter, spring and autumn are the best times to visit if you



KASBAH ANGOUR FAST FACTS

- B&B is priced from £108 per room per night
- Half-day walk prices range from 295 dirhams (around £24) per person for a group of two to 150 dirhams (around £12) per person for a group of six
- Various carriers operate direct flights to Marrakech from various UK airports including EasyJet, British Airways, and Ryanair

are seeking a dry heat with a gentle breeze. And for winter sports enthusiasts there is a double-peak mountain nearby with a ski area.

There’s a lot to be said for just staying put. The Kasbah has plenty to offer. There’s a table-tennis table, areas for practising yoga including a spacious roof terrace, a hammam and massage room.

There are benches in the garden and comfy chairs in shady alcoves for quiet meditation or uninterrupted snoozing. There is so much space that I can’t imagine the hotel feeling crowded even if all 25 rooms are occupied.

The food is delicious too. We dined in the small cosy bistro; there is a larger dining room for when the hotel is busy. Don’t expect haute cuisine – this is the chance to try tasty tagines mixed with seasonal vegetables picked from the garden. The tender lamb comes from sheep which have grazed on wild herbs in the surrounding fields, and the olive oil is pressed from Kasbah’s own trees. Even the water comes from two wells in the grounds.

The Kasbah is in a remote, unspoilt spot. There are no restaurants or shops or light pollution – or pollution of any kind come to think of it. Some drop in for some star gazing – or to recover from a few days in Marrakech’s medina. One couple we met was doing just that. They were amazed that such an oasis was so close to the big city.

Kasbah Angour is for those seeking a peaceful sanctuary and a good walk and families looking to engage with nature and local Berber culture. As for my husband and I, we are looking forward to returning to tackle Toubkal – it should be a doddle now we have completed our trek to Everest Base Camp.

www.kasbahangour.com

