

Trekking

You don't have to be an experienced trekker to get out and about in the mountains nor to discover that this is one of the most exciting and rewarding things you can do in Morocco. The country is blessed with some of the world's most dramatic and beautiful mountains, many of which only see a handful of travellers every year; others remain totally unexplored by foreigners. With such a variety of terrain on offer there is something for everyone, from leisurely strolls through the cedar forests of the Middle Atlas to gruelling climbs up the steep, rocky slopes of the High Atlas.

Morocco's broad range of climates is a blessing for trekkers. When December snows make Jebel Toubkal (4167m), North Africa's highest peak, impossible to trek, Jebel Sarhro, on the southern side of the Atlas and at the edge of the Sahara, is passable. At the same time, when the summer sun makes the Rif too hot to trek, it also melts the snow off Toubkal, enticing crowds up to the summit.

Not every trekking area or mountain range is covered in this chapter. Instead we have selected some of what we think are the most exciting and interesting walks in a country overendowed with walking possibilities. Some are obvious – the ascent of Toubkal, for instance. Others, such as the M'Goun walk, are less so, but no less extraordinary.

Trekking in Morocco is growing in popularity, and even without using an agency you shouldn't have much difficulty in finding a guide, essential for getting the most out of visiting Berber villages, and for hiring mules, which will make walking all the more fun.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Admire the blue skies, red rocks and green valleys of the **High Atlas** (p411)
- Reach the summit of **Jebel Toubkal** (p419), the highest mountain in North Africa
- Track the Barbary apes through the cedar forests of the **Rif** and **Middle Atlas** (p428)
- Wade through springtime flowers on the remote **Tichka Plateau** (p423)
- Test your stamina with a hard trek in the **Jebel Sarhro** (p434) and be rewarded with some of the most rugged and stunning scenery in Morocco
- Get away from the crowds in the remote **M'Goun Massif** (p424) and be inspired by its spectacular valleys



GETTING STARTED

MAPS

Morocco is covered by 1:100,000 and 1:50,000 topographical map series. However, some of the 1:50,000 series are unavailable to the public (the coverage of the Jebel Sarhro, Eastern High Atlas and Middle Atlas is patchy). Due to the restrictions placed upon map purchases, travellers exploring wide areas are advised to stick to the 1:100,000 series. The Soviet military also made 1:100,000 maps of Morocco and although marked in Cyrillic script these are as topographically accurate as any.

Division de la Cartographie (☎ 037 295034; fax 037 230830; Ave Hassan II, Rabat; www.acfcc.gov.ma in French; ☹ 9am-3.30pm Mon-Fri), of the Moroccan Survey stocks a range of topographical Moroccan maps and town plans, many prepared by the French IGN. Staff can be touchy about selling maps, particularly to regions they consider to be sensitive. For some of these, you may need to make a written request (in French), explaining who you are and why you want the maps. A panel meets on Friday, so you'll get a decision on Friday afternoon or (more likely) Monday morning. Most maps cost Dh70 a sheet. You must bring your passport for ID.

If you get no joy in Rabat, you may find maps of the Toubkal area, the M'Goun Massif and Jebel Sarhro in shops in Marrakech, Imlil and elsewhere. Photocopies of maps of some parts of the High Atlas are sometimes available at the reception of **Hôtel Ali** (☎ 024 444979; www.hotel-ali.hostel-marrakech.co.uk; Rue Moulay Ismail) in Marrakech, at the marked-up price of Dh140 or more.

Several sources in the UK may be able to supply maps. **Stanfords** (☎ 020-7836 1321; www.stanfords.co.uk) has one of the world's largest collections of maps for sale. At the time of writing, they only had the four-sheet, 1:100,000 Toubkal map, but others are sometimes available. The map room of the **Royal Geographical Society** (☎ 020-7591 3050; www.rgs.org; 1 Kensington Gore, London SW7 2AR) has a considerable collection of maps of Morocco and is open to the public. Some maps can also be ordered online.

You can buy West Col's *Mgoun Massif* map at several online sites including, at the time of writing, on Amazon (www.amazon

INTERNATIONAL SPECIALIST TRAVEL MAP AND BOOKSHOPS

Au Vieux Campeur (☎ 01 53 10 48 27; www.au-vieux-campeur.fr in French; 2 Rue de Latran, Paris, France and branches)

Map Link (☎ 805-692 6777; www.maplink.com; Unit 5, 30 S La Patera Lane, Santa Barbara, CA 93117, USA)

Map Shop (☎ 016-8459 3146; www.themapshop.co.uk; 15 High St, Upton upon Severn, Worcestershire, UK)

Mapland (☎ 03-9670 4383; www.mapland.com.au; 372 Little Bourke St, Melbourne, Australia)

Rand McNally (☎ 847-329 8100; www.randmcnally.com; 8255 N Central Park, Skokie, IL 60076, USA)

Stanfords (☎ 020-7836 1321; www.stanfords.co.uk; 12-14 Long Acre, Covent Garden, London, UK)

.co.uk). This and the complete range of Soviet maps, some of which you can download, are available from **Omnimap** (www.omnimap.com).

Another trusted source for maps and information is **Atlas Mountains Information Services** (☎ /fax 015-92 87 3546; 26 Kirkcaldy Rd, Burntisland, Fife, Scotland KY3 9HQ), run by Hamish Brown, a specialist author, lecturer, photographer and guide for the Atlas who has been travelling in Morocco for more than forty years. He's often away leading treks, so you are advised to contact him well in advance, preferably by fax.

BOOKS

The Moroccan tourist office, Office National Marocain du Tourisme (ONMT), publishes an extremely useful booklet called *Morocco: Mountain and Desert Tourism* (2005). A French edition should also be available. The booklet has a good introduction to trekking in Morocco and then lists car hire, bureaux des guides, tourist offices, lists of *gîtes d'étape* (trekkers' hostels), huts, refuges, camp sites, souq days and other useful information. You should be able to pick them up at the office of the Association of Guides in Imlil, at the ONMT office in Marrakech or in other major cities, or at Moroccan tourist offices overseas.

Some trekking guidebooks are listed in the boxed text. The ONMT and the publishing house Edisud/Belvisi also publish *Gravures Rupestres du Haut Atlas*, which looks at the rock art of Plateau du Yagour, northeast of

Setti Fatma, and *Randonnées Pédestres Dans le Massif du Mgoun*. These are only sporadically available at tourist offices, in bookshops in Rabat and Marrakesh, the Club Alpin France (CAF) and at the refuge in Oukaïmeden, but should be available online.

CLUBS

The Fédération Royale Marocaine de Ski et de Montagne (Royal Moroccan Ski & Mountaineering Federation) (☎ 022 203798/fax 022 474979; Le Ministère de la Jeunesse et Sport, Parc de la Ligue Arabe, PO Box 15899, Casablanca; frmsm@hotmail.com) runs three basic refuges (see p409) and can provide information for trekkers.

Club Alpin Français (CAF); (☎ 022 270090; www.cafmaroc.co.ma in French; 50 Blvd Moulay Abderrahman,

Quartier Beauséjour, Casablanca) operates key refuges in the Toubkal area, particularly those in Imlil, Oukaïmeden and on Toubkal (see p409). The club website is a good source of trekking information, including links to recommended guides.

ORGANISED TREK

For details of foreign and Moroccan operators offering trekking tours in Morocco, see p441.

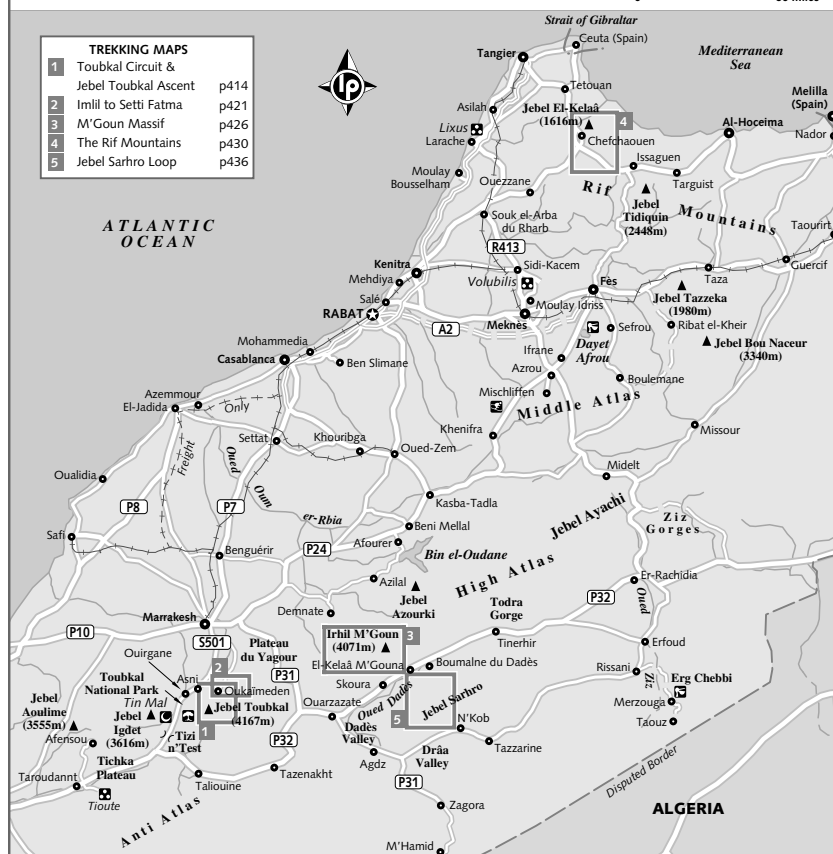
CLOTHING & EQUIPMENT

Strong, well-broken-in walking boots are the key to happy trekking whatever the season, as is a waterproof and windproof outer layer – it's amazing how quickly the

TOP TREKKING GUIDEBOOKS

- *Great Atlas Traverse* by Michael Peyron. Peyron lived in Morocco for decades and his two-volume paperback work is the definitive text (volume one covers the Toubkal region) for the great traverse. Less useful for the casual trekker.
- *Le Massif du Toubkal* (Edisud/Belvisi) by Jean Dresch & Jacques de Lépiney; published in French, it is primarily of use to mountaineers concentrating on the high peaks around Toubkal.
- *Trekking in the Atlas Mountains: Toubkal, Mgoun Massif and Jebel Sahro* by Karl Smith. A guide from the walkers' guidebook publisher Cicerone, intended for experienced trekkers, with route descriptions and a weatherproof cover, but minimal mapping.
- *Trekking in the Moroccan Atlas* by Richard Knight. The most recent guide, with coverage of Jebel Sahro and Jebel Siroua, and detailed sketch maps of each part of the route. Likely to be the most useful of all for inexperienced trekkers, although also the bulkiest.

TREKKING AREAS



weather can change. Light, baggy, cotton trousers and long-sleeved shirts are best in summer (June to August), but prepare for very cold weather during winter (November to March) wherever you trek in the country. Outside the height of summer pack warm clothing, a woollen hat and gloves for trekking in the High Atlas. In summer, even at 1800m, it's cold enough at night to require a fleece or jumper. At the same time, you will need a sunhat, sunglasses and quality sunscreen year-round.

The key decision to make, when planning a route, is whether or not to sleep in tents. A good tent opens up endless trekking possibilities, but you don't necessarily have to bring your own, as most tour operators will rent one. It is also possible to rent them from some guides and from trailheads such as Imlil. If you would rather not camp, in most regions you can choose to stay in villages, either in *gîtes d'étape* or *chez l'habitant* (in someone's home). In both of these and especially in remote areas, rooms may not even have a mattress on the floor, although in places such as Imlil they often come with beds.

Whether you are camping or staying in houses, from September to early April a four-season sleeping bag is essential for the High Atlas and Jebel Sahro – temperatures as low as -10°C are not unknown at this time. In lower mountain ranges, even in high summer, a bag comfortable at 0°C is recommended. A thick sleeping mat or thin foam mattress is a good idea since the ground is extremely rocky. These can usually be supplied by guides.

If you want to go above 3000m between November and May, you will need to have experience in winter mountaineering and be equipped with crampons, ice axes, snow shovels and other essential equipment. Again, this equipment is available for hire through most tour operators or in Imlil.

Many *gîtes* have cooking facilities, but you may want to bring a stove if you are camping. Multifuel stoves that burn anything from aviation fuel to diesel are ideal. Methylated spirits is very hard to get hold of, but kerosene is available. Pierce-type butane gas canisters are available, but are not recommended because of environmental reasons. Your guide will be able to advise you on this.

Bring a basic medical kit and a supply of water purification tablets or a mechanical purifier – all water should be treated unless you take it from the very source.

If you are combining trekking with visits to urban areas, consider storing extra luggage before your trek. Most hotels will allow you to leave luggage, sometimes for a small fee. Train stations in larger cities have secure left-luggage facilities, although many of these offices will only accept luggage that is locked, so make sure you have a lock for your suitcase.

GUIDES

We strongly recommend that you hire a guide even if you are an experienced trekker. If you have considerable experience reading maps in mountain regions, you may not need a guide from a navigational point of view, but you should seriously consider