

Beaumont House Trek of the Sahara

Trip Notes

These detailed notes will assist you in your preparations for your Sahara trip.

There are two specific elements to this trip when it comes to clothing and equipment; towns/cities and the Desert. The vast majority of your clothing and equipment should be geared towards the trek itself. Earmark specific clothing for your time travelling and in hotels.

Remember that this is a camping trek. Your life will revolve around what you have in a single holdall whilst living in a remote and vast open space with very little privacy! It can be daunting for anyone who has not done anything like this before; we are here to provide as much assistance and support as you need.

General

Morocco is a deceptively large country with a population of about 32m. Approx 99% of Morocco's inhabitants are Muslim. The main languages spoken are Arabic, Berber and French.

The Sahara is the largest desert in the world. Your drive south west from Marrakech will take you over the High Atlas mountains and several additional minor ranges; the scenery is stunning. The Sahara begins just a few miles from the village of M'Hamid; your entry and exit point and where the hard surfaced road stops and the sand begins. This point is approx 500km from Marrakesh. Here you will meet up with your support team and their camels.

You will trek through the Sahara towards Algeria, which is marked by a high range of hills. At times, you will see nothing but sand, sand and even more sand. That said, do not expect it to be the soft sandy beach stuff all of the time; some is quite solid, especially near rivers (when and if they flow) and you will also encounter stone and a surprising amount of foliage. Watch for signs of life in the sand, there is perhaps more than you imagine but it is unlikely that you will encounter snakes or scorpions (too cold). At night, the stars are mesmerising and the sky incredible. The fast moving satellites are easy to spot if you look for just a few minutes.

The weather is likely to get up to around 30– 35 Deg C during the day, although ground temperatures (sand) have been recorded up to 40 Deg C. This area boasts an average of 300 cloudless days a year! Even though the sun rises at approx 7am, the air temperature will take its time to rise into the 20's so do not be surprised if you are walking initially with a light fleece on. Night temperatures can fall to single figures; a light frost on tents is possible.

Clothing and Equipment

The clothing and equipment list (contained in this document) is a guide and should be treated as such. It is influenced by the weather conditions that you are likely to encounter. Feel free to adapt it to suit your own needs and previous personal experiences.

In general terms, whilst trekking you will be in a hot environment. Shorts and T-shirts will be the standard style of dress on a daily basis with sun hats and maybe more protection from the sun. In the evenings you will require several layers of clothing. A T-shirt, fleece, duvet jacket, woolly hat and gloves may all be needed. It will be the difference in temperature between day and night rather than the air temperature that will make you feel colder.

The following items I consider worth highlighting:

- Sleeping Bag. You will need a decent 3 season sleeping bag. The outside air temperature is likely to drop to single figures overnight; light frost on the tents overnight is possible.
- Boots. It is essential that you have a well worn in, comfortable pair of boots. Lightweight, soft style boots are good enough. Comfort is your primary concern.

The clothing that you will wear for your overnight stays in Marrakesh and Ouarzazate should be kept separate. It can be safely stored at the Riad in Ouarzazate so that you have fresh clothing for your return. There is no need to take it into the desert.

Luggage

You will need a daysack and a holdall:

- Daysack. For everyday use and hand luggage. A good daysack will be worth its weight in gold. Remember that it will be on your back for between 5 and 6 hrs a day. It can also act as your hand luggage on the aircraft. It should be comfortable and big enough for your daily needs. Experience has shown that a 30 – 35l sack is about right. Many these days are also fitted with hydration systems or the facility to accommodate one.
- Holdall. Your excess kit is that which is carried by a camel (ie not with you in your daysack) between each night stop. Although you may see the camels en route during the day, they will walk at their own pace and you should therefore not bank on being able to gain access to your excess kit whilst you are trekking during the day. The camels are capable of carrying a large amount of kit but it needs to be easy to load and therefore a soft skinned holdall or kit bag is far more preferable to a hard backed samsonite suitcase for example. It is possible to take both of course, using the more solid piece of luggage for transportation to Morocco and the softer skinned holdall for the trek. The hotel will gladly store your excess kit whilst you are away on the trek.
- Weight Limits. There is no formal weight limit of your kit on the trek itself. The airline luggage weight restriction is enough to limit the amount you have with you but as a guide, your main bag on the trek should weigh no more than about 12kg; your daysack will weigh about 5 - 6 kg (maybe more in winter). Airline luggage weight limits are typically 20kg.

The Sand

The sand will get everywhere! Protect anything that it'll destroy or damage, especially cameras! It is so dry that it will brush off but it will penetrate most things.

Fitness

Fitness is very subjective. Clearly if you have a high level of fitness you are likely to find this trek easier to cope with. It is not massively physical although the sand can be very soft at times making ascending the dunes a little slower than you might anticipate! Provided that you can walk for several hours over varied terrain for several consecutive days carrying a daysack containing essentials such as water, camera and some snacks, then you should be perfectly capable of completing this trek. Ultimately you should aim to be as fit and healthy as possible on your departure day.

Training

You are going to the Sahara to walk for around 5 - 6 hours per day. Your training should therefore be to simply walk, walk and walk some more (preferably with your daysack on). There is no speed involved; it is all about endurance.

Health - Food and Water

If you obey the standard hygiene rules when it comes to food and water then you should complete this trip without sickness. It can of course strike anyone at any time even if you obey the rules and therefore to some degree it is down to luck! I have experienced very fit, strong trekkers who have been unable to trek at some stage due to sickness. It is therefore important that you do all you can to avoid sickness:

- Food. I have found the restaurants and other food outlets in Marrakech to be good; no significant difference to any other major city. On the trek, the food is cooked on a daily basis by a skilled Camp Chef. The presentation and variety of food is excellent. Catering for vegetarians is no problem but please make us aware of your requirements.
- Water. Drink only bottled water in Morocco. Safe bottled drinking water will be provided for you throughout the trek, normally in 1.5 litre bottles. You will collect the water daily. The decision on whether you use a hydration system or bottles to drink from is entirely your choice. The camels will carry the supply of water from start to finish. In Marrakech, buy water as you need it; it is approx 50p per litre.

Daily Routine on Trek

In general terms the daily routine of a trekking day will be:

- 0630hrs - rise and shine from your tents; wash, pack kit and tents down.
- 0700hrs - a hearty breakfast in the dining tent or outside if it is warm enough. Breakfast usually consists of various cereals (including porridge), bread, spreads, tea, coffee and possibly pancakes/eggs.
- 0800hrs - Start trekking. Rests will take place as and when required.
- 1200hrs - Lunch. Your support team will have packed up from breakfast, moved past you and set up again for lunch. The weather will dictate whether a tent is required. Lunches are typically long with a good spread of salad, rice, bread, tea, coffee, biscuits and fruit.
- Mid-late afternoon - Finish trek, set up camp, personal administration, tea and biscuits at about 1630hrs followed by a 3 course dinner at about 1830hrs.

Daily Walking Distance

In general terms, work on 6 hrs per day split over two sessions. Don't be concerned about distances, work on hours on feet. A GPS will be with the group to measure distances covered per day. For sponsorship purposes, you can use 100km as a ball park figure of the trek distance.

Accommodation

Unless you are travelling with your partner or spouse, you will be required to partner up with another member of the same sex for rooming/tenting purposes. Don't be concerned if you have signed up as a sole traveller. We will assist you to pair up at some stage.



A meeting will be held to discuss clothing and equipment; date TBC in July

The following types of accommodation are used:

- 2 man tents will be used on trek.
- Twin bedded rooms will be used in a local Riad (hotel) in Marrakesh and Ouarzazate.

Toilet facilities

Toilet facilities will be western style in hotels; a hole in the ground on trek (toilet tents).

Mapping and Guidebooks

Any really useful mapping of Morocco is difficult to obtain. The border between Algeria and Morocco is disputed and therefore the mapping of this area of the Sahara area is even more difficult to obtain. The best I have found is a 1:1,000,000; obtainable from Stanfords in London.

There are several good guidebooks on the market. If you do intend to purchase one, get it in the UK. It will be cheaper and you are more likely to get the most up to date edition.

Electricity

Morocco works off a standard 220v, 50Hz power system with a round 2 pin plug socket such as the one pictured here.



Passports and Documents

Whilst some paper air tickets are still used, the development of the paperless air ticket (e-ticket) has reduced the amount of documentation carried on journeys (less chance of losing them!). The documents most likely to require some back up or protection are your passport, air ticket (or e-ticket reference) and possibly your travel insurance.

As a minimum, Travel and Trek recommends:

- Passport - scan the passport photo page, reduce to credit card size and laminate. Prior to lamination (or clear taping if you don't have access to a laminator), write down your flight details (including e-ticket number), NOK, emergency home phone numbers and your travel insurance policy emergency details on the reverse and you have a very handy back up with all of the useful information should you need it in a hurry.
- It may also be a good idea to store the scanned passport file on a global web based e-mail server such as Hotmail or Yahoo (ie send them to yourself if you have such an account).
- Passports must be valid for at least 6 months on the day of departure. Currently, UK Nationals do not need a visa to enter Morocco.
- If you have paper air tickets, scan or copy them and carry copies. Ask a colleague to carry copies too. If scanned, store them on your web based e-mail account.

Money

The currency of Morocco is the Moroccan Dirham (MAD). There are approx 12.5 MAD to the pound (Jun 2011).

The best place to change your money is reported to be the airport; unusual but true. There are plenty of official money changing kiosks in the streets of Marrakesh and many hotels act as official money changers too. With the amount of money that you are likely to change, the difference in rates between these places will make little difference.

Credit cards are widely accepted and there are plenty of ATM's.

Travel Insurance

It is absolutely vital that you have adequate travel insurance, primarily for medical evacuation. Travel and Trek is not authorised to recommend specific companies. Previous clients have reported that Insure and Go (Silver cover) appear to have the appropriate cover at reasonable prices. Please ensure that the cover is suitable should you choose to investigate it.

Shopping

Your main shopping area is undoubtedly Marrakech's Medina, the name given to a large covered area occupied by many markets (Souks) in the centre of Marrakech. It is a maze of alleyways and just a few minutes from your Riad. There are lots of things to tempt you to part with your money; leather goods, wood carvings, rugs and carpets to name but a few. If you know your prices, you can pick up a bargain but bargain hard; the Moroccan Arabs are brilliant at it.

Be very careful with hustlers. They will use every tactic in the book to get you to go to their shops or 'friend's' shops. Many are genuinely friendly and may be official Guides but the simple advice is to treat them all as hustlers; they will be after your money! The simple rule of thumb is to know what YOU want to do and not allow any 'stranger' to influence you to do what THEY want you to do. By all means be friendly and take advantage of any hospitality but always have one eye on the end result. Be polite but firm.

Medical Issues



Staying healthy and being prepared for what you may encounter abroad is of paramount importance to the successful completion and indeed enjoyment of your trip. We are not medical professionals and therefore this advice has been compiled mainly from experience on the ground and partly from researching reliable Government sources and other similar websites. It is provided in good faith and is not an authority.

General

This is classed as an adventurous trip; it is in a remote location. You will be trekking in a vast, remote and hot environment. Blisters and the effects of the sun (dehydration, sunburn) are your biggest threat. Should a serious accident occur, the trek staff will act quickly and in the most appropriate manner in order to get you to professional medical assistance. Please ensure that you have adequate travel insurance.

Taking Prescribed Medicines out of the UK

If you want or need to take prescribed medicines out of the country, you should contact the appropriate authority in your home country for advice. In the UK, contact the Home Office website <http://drugs.homeoffice.gov.uk/drugs-laws/licensing/personal/>

Existing Medical Conditions & Medication

It is a good idea to keep a written record on your person of any medical condition affecting you, such as angina pectoris, diabetes and haemophilia, and the proper names – not just the trade names – of any medication that you are taking.

Have a dental checkup

If you have any doubts about your teeth, see your dentist well in advance of departure. It may be difficult and expensive to obtain dental treatment at your destination. Emergency dental kits are available through high street stores such as Boots (cost approx £9) and contain emergency filling putty, clove oil, etc...

Vaccinations. The following are recommended by the websites listed here: Hep A, Typhoid, Tetanus, Polio, Diphtheria <http://www.fitfortravel.scot.nhs.uk/home.aspx> and <http://www.traveldoctor.co.uk/>

Personal First Aid Kit. The prevention and treatment of minor illnesses or accidents can be assisted by each trekker carrying a sensible, useable and tailor made first aid kit to suit you. This check list has some of what you might want to consider carrying. Adapt your kit to suit your own needs/wishes.

Zovirax	Cold sores
Steristrips	
Crepe bandage	
Vaseline	
Safety pins	
Day/Night nurse capsules	Colds/flu (you will need 3 times to number of day capsules as the night ones)
Imodium	Diarrhoea
Strepsils	Throats
Ibuprofen	Pain inflammation
Paracetamol	Pain killer/headache
Asprin	Sore throat/various
Dioralyte	Dehydration
Gaviscon	Indigestion
Insect repellent	
Zinc oxide tape/Compede	Blisters
Melonin	Pads for injuries



Blisters can be debilitating!

Clothing and Equipment List

This clothing and equipment list is a guide to what you should be taking; items considered essential are annotated with a *.

The list is not exhaustive but through experience, should cover just about everything that you will need. There is no need to take it all! Each of us are different and therefore requirements alter accordingly. The list is provided in good faith.

Luggage		
Day sack	1	For trekking. It will double as hand luggage. Capacity of 35L recommended
Suitcase or Holdall	1	For getting your kit to Morocco
On Trek		
Underwear		As much as you feel you need
Socks	2 prs	As much as you feel you need, 3 pairs would be considered min and 4 probably enough.
Shorts		
T Shirts (walking)	2	Min
T Shirts (evening)	2	If you don't mix them with the walking T Shirts, these will stay clean and dry
Long Trousers	1	Consider zip off's. They are excellent and double as shorts. Good to travel in
Boots	1	Essential
Other footwear	1	
Fleece	1	Lightweight one will do, depends if you are carrying duvet jacket
Duvet Jacket	1	Light, compact and very warm
Sleeping bag	1	3 season recommended
Sleeping bag liner		If you use one
Torch	1	Head torches are best.
Wooly hat	1	It can get cold at night
Neck protection	1	Woolen tube to seal the heat in around the neck.
Gloves	1 pr	Only if your hands are susceptible to the cold
Walking poles		
Plastic bags	1	Multi-use
Wash Kit		
Travel towel	1	Use a lightweight travel towel. They will dry easier than a home bath towel!
Swimming costume	1	
Waterproofs	1	
Cape		
Spare batteries		For camera and/or torch
Camera		Advisable to travel self contained for film and/or digi cards. Protect well from the sand
Washing soap	1	Travel Wash type tube. Make sure you can use it in cold water, don't take powder.
Washing line + pegs		Not essential but v useful for hanging out clothes to dry. 6 pegs should do it.
Sunglasses		Strong sunlight
Sunscreen/lip Salve		
Sunhat	1	
Water Bottle(s) or camelbac system		
Medical kit		
Dental kit		
Pocket knife		
Mosquito Net		
Documentation		
Passport		Ensure that it has at least 6 months validity from the date of departure from the UK
Air ticket		
Travel insurance		
Visa		
Driving Licence		Only for additional identity if you lose your passport
Phone details (emergency)		
Passport photos		
Back up documentation		Please read the notes on security of documents in trekking notes
Other Stuff		
Blow Up Pillow		For aircraft. Excellent piece of kit for keeping your head upright when trying to sleep!
Books, music, writing stuff		MP3, iPod, don't forget charging
Money, money belt		
Credit cards, Travellers cheques		
Combination lock		For locking holdalls on flights, alternatively use zip ties
Mobile phone + charger		
Electrical plug adaptor		
Guide book		
Playing cards, games		
Other clothing		Casual clothing when not on trek

Notes to the Clothing/Equipment List

Boots are very important. Whatever type of boots you have, they must be worn in and comfortable.

What is meant by 'other footwear'? More than two pairs of footwear on any trek is overkill. Your boots are essential leaving you to decide what else to take. The most important factor for me is that they should be able to act as a second set of walking footwear should it be necessary, albeit for a short period of time. However comfortable your boots are, on occasions, they may cause you problems and you need a back up. Tiva type sandals have proven adequate as have trainers.

Sleeping Bags are vital to your comfort. You will need a 3 season bag for this trip; if in doubt call Travel and Trek for advice.

Head torches are much better than hand torches for just convenience. Modern LED torches give good light for long enough to last a good 2 week trek (and more).

Trekking or Walking Poles. Some people use poles, others do not. They are not an absolute necessity for the Desert environment but many do find comfort or security when using them.

Water bottles or hydration system. There are pro's and con's to both. It is best to trail the hydration system before you buy one.

Waterproofs. You are strongly advised to be equipped with a full set of waterproofs OR a cape.

Your Itinerary

Fri 10 Feb – Travel to London for your direct flight to Marrakesh (3 ½ hrs). The group will be met on arrival in Marrakesh and transferred to your traditional Moroccan Riad (hotel) inside the Medina. Once in the Riad, your rooms will be allocated and then you are free to explore the local area. Your Riad is just minutes from the famous Djemaa el Fna square. Your first experience of the square is one of a senses explosion; entertainers performing, a myriad of food stalls all lit up with the smells to accompany them, and the general melee of activity.

Sat 11 Feb – After breakfast, your drive down to the Desert begins. You will drive over High Atlas mountains and down to your overnight stop - Ouarzazate. This is a 5hr journey through some stunning mountain scenery. Ouarzazate is the gateway to the desert and home to many famous films (most notably 'The Gladiator'). Your hotel is a typically Moroccan Oasis. Enjoy a tagine and a glass of wine before you reach the miles of glorious sand that await you the following day.

Sun 12 Feb – This 5hrs drive takes you through the Draa Valley. After a picnic lunch, you will eventually reach the end of the road, literally! M'Hamid is a Desert town and where you will meet your support team, complete with camels and handlers and your trek begins. The first trek is fairly short to introduce you to the terrain and also allow you to get into the routine of camp life, ie set up your tents.

Mon 13 Feb to Thu 16 Feb – For the next 4 full days, you will trek further into the desert, experiencing what life there is (and there is more than you think) and the tranquillity that it can bring. Life is simple here. With no ambient light and the desert to absorb all sound, the evenings and nights are just so dark and quiet. It is quite eerie even just to sit on a small dune overlooking the campsite and just look and listen. The stars are so bright and it is very easy to spot the orbiting satellites as they speed across the skies above you.

Once you begin trekking, it will not be long before you wonder how your Guide is navigating; it all looks so similar with no landmarks to speak of. Until that is, you meet Eric. Eric is a 300m high sand dune and you will sit on top of it (eventually!) at least once.

Some days are longer and more difficult than others and there is also the accumulative fatigue factor.

Fri 17 Feb – Your final day of trekking. This will be a short trek back towards M'Hamid (and perhaps into it) where your transport will pick you up. You say goodbye to your support crew and head back to Ouarzazate. Once in the hotel, you can relax and have that well earned shower!

Sat 18 Feb – After breakfast, it's back towards Marrakesh. We get you back as soon as we can leaving you plenty of time to get out into the Medina and experience the multitude of Souks. The bartering and market activity is something special. In the evening, enjoy a traditional meal in any one of many restaurants or try your chance by eating on one of the street stalls.

Sun 19 Feb – You may have some time this morning before your departure, depending on the flight times.