

How to Travel Independently to Morocco in Your  
Motorhome or Campervan

# Motorhome Morocco

Second Edition



An OurTour Guide

Julie and Jason Buckley

# OurTour Guide to Motorhome Morocco

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Motorhome or Campervan

By Julie and Jason Buckley

*Second Edition*

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Cover photo: Ait Mansour Gorge, Anti-Atlas Mountains, Morocco

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# Overview Map of Morocco

Morocco is about twice the size of the UK, and is roughly the same distance from top to bottom as Norway. Agadir is around the same latitude as Texas and northern Mexico, Pakistan and the northern edge of Nepal.



## Introduction

The extraordinary landscapes, vibrant ancient towns, cool oases, incredible people and dream-like deserts of Africa are just a stone's throw away from the southern edge of Europe. At the narrowest point of the Strait of Gibraltar the continents are less than 10 miles apart. If you fancy it, in the same day you can easily enjoy the hospitality of an English fried breakfast in Gibraltar, and tuck into a tagine after watching the sunset over the Atlantic from the ramparts of Asilah, south of Tangier in Morocco. If you took a ferry across the Bay of Biscay, and used Spain's fast roads to cross the country quickly, you could realistically travel from the UK to Morocco in just a few days, and be sat alongside the edge of the Sahara desert in just a few more.



The Saharan Erg Chebbi, Morocco

We wrote the first edition of this book because we struggled to find information in English when we wanted to take our motorhome and dog to Morocco. After spending a month touring the country independently in our motorhome in January 2012, we'd gathered enough information to help others do the same, so we wrote the book and published it. This second edition was written after spending three months in the country from January to March 2017.



The Aït Mansour Gorge, Anti-Atlas Mountains, Morocco

Prior to our first tour of Morocco we were very nervous about travelling to the country. We'd also been nervous about driving from France into Spain, for that matter. Our feeling was we weren't experienced enough to complete a trip to Africa, having only spent a couple of months in our 1991 Fiat Ducato Hymer motorhome. On our second tour we met a couple on the southern Atlantic coast in Morocco, who had bought a new motorhome, having never had one before. They also bought a copy of our book and after reading it had driven directly from the UK across Spain and into Morocco. They were very much enjoying the experience. Our own experience in 2012 was one of feeling stretched, of finding the country both fascinating and confusing. Culture shock hit us hard in the first few days of that tour, but we quickly started to understand something about how the country works, and our place in it.

Our aim with this book is to provide you with enough information to allay any nerves, to give new visitors to Morocco an idea of what to expect on entering the country, and to provide practical help on various aspects of touring independently in a motorhome or campervan. Although Morocco is considered an 'easy introduction to Africa', it isn't Europe, it's far from that. It's a developing, progressive Islamic country, and will immediately feel different to anyone brought up in the Western world.

It seems fairly certain all but the most hardened traveller will experience sights and smells you'd prefer not to. But at the same time Morocco is an enthralling place, where each and every day brings something new, some sight you can hardly believe your eyes to see.



Camel racing in the Oued Drâa, Nomad Festival, M'hamid

In feedback to the first edition of this book, one reviewer thanked us and said it swayed him to take a guided tour instead. We're pleased we helped him reach that decision, as he'll enjoy Morocco all the more for doing it his own way. Our choice not to use a guided tour company for any of our North African trips was partly driven by budget, we didn't want to pay around £2000 per tour for a guide. In the end we found we simply didn't need a tour company, and to us the freedom to travel where and when we wanted was intoxicating. Tour companies have their advantages, offering a sense of security. You can also draw on the experience of your guide to ask questions about the Moroccan way of life, as you're sure to have plenty of them! That said, there are excellent guidebooks available, and you'll find plenty of Moroccans keen to help you find your way around the cities, some of whom speak good English.

## This Second Edition - Things Change

We have spent almost six months touring Morocco and Tunisia by motorhome during three separate journeys, staying in roughly 70 locations. These trips have given us hands-on experience of preparing for journeys to North Africa, entering the countries, travelling across them and leaving them. But we must make this point clear: we do not consider ourselves to be in any way experts in either Morocco, or travelling by motorhome in Morocco. We remain novices, but that's partly the point of this book: you don't need to be an expert to enjoy a trip like this and, if you don't want to, you don't need to travel with an expert.

In the five year gap between visits to Morocco we noticed that many things stayed the same, but also that many things changed. There were more campsites and places to stay available, costs had generally gone up, we met far more British motorhome travellers, and more roads had been surfaced. But behind all of that, the country was fundamentally the same, and the roller coaster experience we had in our first visit was just as thrilling second time around.

We've done our best to check the facts presented in this book, but we're not infallible and, as we have said above, things do change. If any aspect of your journey is critical to you, particularly in terms of safety, please double-check the facts elsewhere. This book includes links to various online forums, websites and books to help. If you spot any glaring errors, we'd very much welcome your feedback, by emailing us at [julieandjason@ourtour.co.uk](mailto:julieandjason@ourtour.co.uk), and we'll include them in future editions of the book.

# Reasons to Travel to Morocco by Motorhome

Why should you travel to Morocco with your motorhome? While only you can answer that question, of course, here are a few reasons to consider.

## Because You Can

Thousands upon thousands of motorhome owners travel to Morocco every year. Many of them are retired French couples who have the advantage of speaking fluent French and, since much of Morocco was effectively under French rule for 44 years last century, many locals also speak French. The other advantage they have is the availability of high quality French language books and forums for travelling in Morocco. That aside, they have no special knowledge which you can't easily acquire yourself, from reading this book and the other reference material we suggest.



Some of the many hundreds of motorhomes in Morocco (Camping Tazerzite near Tiznit)

If you can drive your motorhome in Europe, and are comfortable boarding a ferry, then you have the basic skills you need to visit Morocco. There are some special circumstances which you are likely to only come across in Morocco, and this book aims to help prepare you for them.



As the locals say “you Europeans may have watches, but we Moroccans have time”. All you need to do when you come across something unusual is take your time, use your common sense, and you’ll (at least in hindsight!) enjoy overcoming it.

## For the Sheer Adventure

The first time we parked our old Hymer against the high, wind-sculptured dunes of the Erg Chebbi, the hairs on my arms stood up in awe and excitement. We’d just driven to the Sahara. Us! With no-one guiding us, no-one reassuring us they’d take care of the unknown, we were stood alongside our trusty two wheel drive Fiat, feeling like we’d driven straight through the TV screen and into a film set. We couldn’t quite believe we were there, and felt both elated and proud of what we’d achieved.



Us at Erg Chebbi, north of Merzouga, in 2012

We've felt the same elation a number of times across our two tours. Looking out over the frenetic Djeema el-Fna square from the balcony of Café de France in Marrakech. Standing in the ancient ksar of Aït Benhaddou north of Ouarzazate, which has been used as a film set for *Gladiator* among many others. Staring out from the top of a boulder-strewn hill in Tafraoute in the Anti-Atlas Mountains. Driving the narrow road through the Aït Mansour mountain oasis, the fronds of palms brushing our van sides and the high orange cliff sides visible through the sunroof. Propping our feet on the van dashboard, with sunlight streaming across surfers bobbing about in the crashing waves of the Atlantic at Sidi Ifni. It's a long list.

## Dramatic Landscapes

Morocco's landscapes vary enormously. Along the coastlines you will find long stretches of beach and nature reserves, while the north of the country is relatively mild and green. A series of mountain ranges cross the country from the south-west to the north-east, the high peaks of the High Atlas, the lower Middle Atlas and the jaw-dropping combed rock of the Anti-Atlas. Travelling east, once you're over the mountains the land becomes rapidly arid, and you'll find yourself crossing huge swathes of *hamada* – stony desert, until you eventually reach one of Morocco's two Saharan *ergs*, high dunes of butter-coloured fine sand. In the south the Anti-Atlas mountain landscape is also dry, presenting a variety of backdrops made up from enormous boulders, or rocky hillsides worn into sweeping layers. The exploding green tops of palm trees fill the creases in the hills, giving away the hidden streams of water magically appearing from underground rivers to create life.



A camel eyeing us up in the Anti-Atlas Mountains

## The Climate

Around the southern Atlantic coastal town of Agadir the campsites are packed in the winter with thousands of motorhomes. Why are they there? Well, perhaps because it's warm and dry, all winter. The average daily highs are around 20°C, even in December and January. Night time averages fall to 8°C though, so you may want to bring an electric heater to keep the chill off! Down this far south the sun shines for an average of about seven hours per day through the winter, not bad at all.

Other parts of the country can get very cold in winter, particularly in the mountains. We've driven past snow several times when in the Middle Atlas Mountains, and were once unable to move campsites as the snow gates were closed along the road.



Snow in the Middle Atlas

## To Learn About the People and Their Culture

Morocco's population is reputed to be between 93% and 99% Muslim, depending on which statistics you believe, and the country is governed under policies anchored in Islam. The current regent, who is effectively in charge of the country, is King Mohammed VI. You'll see photographs of him everywhere, and he has a claim to be a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad. The culture of Morocco is therefore deeply entwined with Islam, which was first apparent to us within hours of arrival, when we were caught out by the sing-song call to prayer ringing out like a siren from the loudspeakers of an adjacent mosque's minaret.

Morocco is a developing country by Western standards. Millions of people live on miniscule amounts of money. [invest.gov.ma](http://invest.gov.ma) gives the legal minimum wage of agriculture workers as around £5.60 per day. Women in rural towns stand knee-deep in cold streams or irrigation channels, washing clothes by hand, or walk bent double for miles on end, along roads through the stony deserts carrying heavy loads of sticks. Men shout at horses or mules as they struggle to work a field using an ancient wooden plough. Hushed stories of corruption and class discrimination faced by the poor of the population bring flushes of anger. The poverty and hardships are clear to see, and the Moroccans bear them with dignity.



A young baker in the Fes medina

According to [moroccoworldnews.com](http://moroccoworldnews.com), 32% of the 33 million population (over 10 million people) were illiterate in 2016. Although this sounds bad, the illiteracy rate was 42% just ten years ago, so it's reducing fairly quickly. Morocco is changing. The most obvious physical evidence of change is Tanger Med port, where you may well arrive in the country. Opened in 2007, at the time of writing it is still under construction and is scheduled to be the largest port in Africa. Another indication of change in the five year gap between our two tours was the rapidly-improving conditions of the roads. The Michelin map we used for navigation in 2012 showed long stretches of road to be *piste* (packed mud and rock), which has since been smoothed and sealed with tarmac. A new motorway has also appeared, running across from Casablanca to Beni Mellal, which wasn't even shown as being planned on the old map.

Despite these modern additions, Morocco and many of the Moroccan people remain stubbornly, well, Moroccan. A French couple we met in Marrakech who'd lived and travelled in Morocco for 20 years told us they'd seen many changes in that time, but it takes longer than 20 years to change the Moroccans. Trying to describe quite what makes the Arabs and Berbers of Morocco who they are, their psyche, their open approach to strangers of all faiths, their view of family life, their approach to work, the way they deal with daily difficulties, the way in which they share their housing and transport, their craftsmanship, their music and much more, is simply beyond us. You really need to travel to Morocco and see for yourself.

## The Infrastructure is in Place

Morocco's road network is easily capable of carrying a two wheel drive European motorhome or campervan to the far edges of the country. An ever-expanding, high quality toll motorway network enables you to leave the port at Tanger Med and drive all the way to Agadir, 500 miles away, without leaving it. The country has a good spread of established campsites, which have been welcoming motorhomes for years and are well used to our needs. There are European-style supermarkets positioned around the larger towns and cities, with fixed prices, good quality food and spacious car parks. If you wanted to, you could almost (but not quite) travel across Morocco without really knowing you were there. That would be a real shame of course, but the level to which you immerse yourself in the country is up to you.



Part of the Moroccan autoroute (motorway) network

## Proximity to Europe

At only ten miles away Morocco is closer to Spain than Calais is to Dover, and you can easily see Africa from Gibraltar. The ferry route we used from Algeciras in Spain to the modern Tanger Med port takes only 60 to 90 minutes (although you may need to allow a few hours waiting time either side of the crossing!). There are also longer routes available if you want to cut out some or all of the drive across Spain.

## Low Day-to-Day Living Costs

Although costs aren't likely to be the biggest factor in anyone's decision to visit a country, it is useful to have an idea, especially if you're on a tight budget. Wild camping isn't widely accepted across most of Morocco (the far south being a notable exception), so it is best to budget for overnight costs, especially for first time visitors. We visited a range of campsites and other types of parking location, and only free camped for two nights. The prices for overnighting ranged from around £10 a night for a high quality campsite outside Marrakech, which rivalled European standards, down to £0.80 for a municipal parking area in Tafraoute. As a very broad rule of thumb, campsites were about £6 a night without electricity, or £8 with electricity.

In 2012 our 30 day tour cost us £1269, around £42 per day, which included these major items:

- Ferry tickets: £153 (€180)
- Vehicle insurance: £78
- Internet access: £15
- Diesel: £170 - 1830 miles
- Campsite fees: £212
- Eating out most days, with the odd alcoholic drink: £255
- Supermarket food: £135

In 2017, our 90 day tour costs worked out at £1960, around £22 per day, which included these major items:

- Ferry tickets: £170 (€200)
- Vehicle insurance: £0 (free Green Card provided with yearly insurance)
- Internet access: £30
- Diesel: £321 - 3992 miles
- Campsite fees: £560 (average £6.22 per night)
- Eating out occasionally: £268
- Supermarket food: £467

## You Don't Need Your Own Motorhome

We took our own motorhome when we visited Morocco, but you don't have to. We saw several motorhomes across the country from Zigzag Camper ([www.zigzagcamper.com](http://www.zigzagcamper.com)), a hire company based just north of Marrakech.

There may be more companies that offer this service too, but with less logos on their campers so we didn't spot them. We don't know what the service is like, but if you don't own a motorhome or you don't fancy taking your own, this could be an option to consider.



# Preparation Before You Go

Before setting out from Europe, here are some things to check for you and your motorhome, to ensure you have a smooth visit to Morocco.

## Preparations for You

### Check Foreign Office Advice

Events in the winter of 2010 precipitated the Arab Spring in 2011, which saw the leadership of numerous North African and Middle Eastern countries toppled. Morocco wasn't left untouched by the Arab Spring. Although the King remained in power, he was forced to enact various reforms as a result of what was happening to the east. Since then the country's leadership has remained strong. While many other countries in the region found themselves struggling with internal conflict and terrorism, Morocco has escaped largely unscathed in this respect.

We've had no issues with regards to being made to feel unwelcome, or feeling at risk of attack in any way. That said, situations change and it makes sense to check out the advice from your country's foreign office before travelling. However, it is best to take this advice in context. At the time of writing in May 2017 the UK foreign office website states "There is a high threat from terrorism in Morocco." This sounds bad, and could force you to put your plans on hold or to visit France or Spain instead. But take a moment to check out what the site says for France: "There is a high threat from terrorism", or Spain "terrorists are likely to try to carry out attacks in Spain". In these times when terrorism can and does strike anywhere, it can be very confusing, especially if you read any of the uninformed banter on forums from people who have never been to Morocco. Make your own decision and if you are still uncertain, speak to people who have recently visited the country.