

Tata Akka Ride, Morocco November 2014

Just over a month after returning from Catalonia I headed off on my second Ride World Wide trip... Morocco was to be my destination this time!

Thursday 6th November - A good flight into Agadir and transfer to the hotel...so far so good!

Friday 7th November - Delighted to have a friendly taxi driver, who after seeing the look of sheer terror on my face (rabbit caught in headlights springs to mind!) escorted me across Inezgane, (which can only be described as complete an utter chaos) and safely put me on the bus to Tata! Clients booking this ride will not have to do this but because I was arriving half way through the 14 night ride, I had to make my own way to Tata. I felt completely safe... it was just the volume of people and vehicles that made me a little concerned about getting on the wrong bus! After 7 hours on the bus (one way to see the scenery!) I arrived in Tata and I met Rena and the rest of the group - Rena is lovely and the rest of the group were all very friendly.... Phew!

Saturday 8th November - Breakfast at 6.30am before joining the horses, setting up the GoPro camera on my hat and riding away from the camp before 8am...now my adventure really begins!

My little horse for today was an adorable bay mare, there were 2 very well behaved stallions and Rena advised she has no problems with having mares and stallions together. The first test of the day - a new, very deep drainage ditch - after finding the best place to cross, we all dismounted and after lots of gentle encouragement for some horses (not my mare, she jumped straight over) we were across the ditch and back on track.

Whilst preparing for this trip I had envisaged beautiful sand dunes and a sandy desert - funny how we always tell clients to read the information we send but I did not read the information on this particular ride properly (do as we say not as I do!) - If I had I would have known that part of this ride is in fact very stony! However we still had good canters on the plains, and where possible on the narrow winding shepherd tracks, which link the Berber villages.



At approx. 11am in sweltering heat (or I thought so) we came across a watering hole, without wanting to sound too picky, I enquired about lunch (I needed a rest) but much to my surprise, Rena advised lunch would be many hours away and that I had joined on the longest and hottest day of the whole trip! Eventually after some great canters we reached our lunch spot in the middle of green slate hills - I collapsed in a heap under a tree. No time for a siesta today as we needed to crack on to ensure we reached the military base in daylight.....

At 5pm (only half an hour late) we reached the military base - cameras were swiftly put away and we were allowed through. Fast rides along stony tracks in cooler air as the sun set - a desert sunset is a

wonderful sighting! In the village of Akka Iguirn, children ran with us as we rode through the village, now in the dusk... (Perhaps we should have taken our head torches with us!). After approximately 9 hours riding, we reached camp - not quite a luxurious African safari camp but it was going to be an experience of a lifetime! Sweet tea and a desert shower (a hot bowl of water and a jug inside a tent with a wooden floor) was surprisingly refreshing after a very long day riding in the heat! Today we had ridden 61km (38 miles) - gosh, no wonder I was tired!! One by one we slowly drifted off to our little tents - which I soon became very fond of!



Night comes to the desert all at once, as if someone turned off the Light....

Sunday 9th November - Breakfast at 7am of hot bread, jams, cheese spread, yoghurts and of course tea and coffee set us up for the day ahead. Feeling the desert wind in my face as we cantered along stony / sandy tracks with beautiful mountains all around us, the heat of yesterday was forgotten as we rode between the mountains and over the hills.



We soon arrived to a picturesque (although very windy) picnic spot set in palm trees next to a dry riverbed. Lunch today was another salad, eggs, bread, tinned sardines and fruit - basic but delicious!



After a 2 hour siesta, we had endless canters on the plains dodging the acacia trees as the wind blew any cobwebs way! A quick call advised a change to the location of the camp to shelter from the wind... sand flying everywhere and tents nearly taking off was all part of the adventure! 36km was completed by an excellent dinner of Moroccan goat, followed by star gazing!



Monday 10th November - Feeling very refreshed from a good night's sleep (maybe I was getting used to this camping malarkey!) we were all once again ready to ride half an hour earlier than the time we were supposed to be - a very efficient group who just wanted to get on with the day and not waste any time! Brilliant canters today and there was even a sighting of gazelle, the scenery really was fantastic!! Having crossed a beautiful river surrounded by palm trees we arrived at our lunch stop.... I was in paradise! Whilst the grooms washed and swam the horses bareback in the river we had a delicious lunch of salad and chicken, as 3 riders bid their fond farewells not before mentioning I should get down to the river with my camera - apparently a half naked man swimming bareback on a black stallion would be a very good picture to promote the ride!



Another change of horses, it was now my turn to ride the plucky little palomino mare... I was having a great time trying all the different horses! Absolutely stunning is one way to describe the scenery; mesmerising sand dunes, tufts of grass, rolling mountains and vast amounts of sand - this was how I imagined Morocco to be! The ride of 47 km ended as the sun set behind the mountains, a truly memorable and very special experience.



A cauliflower starter, followed by sweet noodles eaten in true Moroccan style out of a tagine - we could never decide on our favourite dish? It's remarkable that Atika could cook such delicious food out of the back of a horse lorry!

Tuesday 11th November - A discovery of Moroccan peanut butter set me up for the day on the grey stallion - Rena's stallions really are relaxed, and are ideal for anyone who wants a particularly laid back ride. Today consisted of lots of dismounting, leading horses over tricky ground, dry river beds as well as good canters over stony ground (I still couldn't believe the terrain we were crossing!). With views of rolling mountains and rocky plains as far as the eye could see and beyond, as well as amazing sand dunes - which the loose horses and some of the ridden horses thought were great to roll in (quite a shock for one rider in particular!) and a sighting of a bright orange spiny tailed lizard. With no sight of shade for lunch, I spotted Nomad tents, camels and donkeys and knew the watering hole must not be too far away! Donkeys, clothes, bottles, bowls etc. all surrounded the well - clearly a popular place for the Nomads.



After a relaxing siesta for both horse and rider, we had a very fast afternoon always trying to reach the skyline, which continued to stretch out ahead of us. With no camp in sight, Rena asked if we wanted one last canter, with that she set off at a rate of knots and we all galloped as fast as we could to catch her - all that could be seen was a huge cloud of dust but then out of nowhere hidden behind beautiful palm trees we reached our destination and surprised the grooms as we weren't expected back until 4pm - gosh we really did ride fast!



Wednesday 12th November - Wow, what a peaceful night it was... I could even hear the horses munching on their hay! Riding very close to the mountains, we rode onto what Rena calls the Chocolate Mountains with hazelnuts - cantering along the top of the ridges - we were on top of the world!



In the afternoon I rode a black mare who I immediately wanted to take home, as we galloped across endless plains, stopping only briefly to let the horses catch their breath before we galloped on again with the mountains surrounding us and stretches and stretches of endless hard sandy plains ahead of us - a perfect setting! One last fast gallop and then we were back for our final night camping. A toast was proposed for Rena, the horses, the grooms and the brilliant fun we had had camping!



Thursday 13th November - Mounted on our favourite horses in glorious (albeit very hot) sunshine, a long 4 hours of very stony sand terrain and lots of acacia trees, eventually brought us to the familiar sight of the blue truck. Collapsed in the shade of the truck with Moroccan sweet tea, (which I had grown very fond of) we consumed our last delicious meal cooked by Atika - Moroccan meatballs, followed by a much needed siesta! By the end of the siesta I had one of the 7 month old German shepherd puppies snuggled up to me - hmm so how was I going to fit him and the horse in my suitcase!!



Eventually we set off to Foam Zguid.... Our final destination. Riding down the main road through the market with 3 of the loose horses with us - we caused quite a stir, before reaching incredible sand dunes and palm trees, which seemed to continue for miles upon miles.... A luxurious hotel awaited us and hours were spent in the showers removing the aftermath of camping but we all missed Atika's incredible cooking!

Friday 14th November - A relaxing morning by the pool before the journey back to Agadir... the trip was really coming to an end and we were all very sad to leave the horses and the desert behind! A farewell dinner in the hotel and a stroll along the seafront was to be the end of my trip as I was leaving at 7am the next morning.

My first time in Morocco and my first taste of a desert ride.... An amazing trip and an incredible experience. I felt extremely safe in Morocco even when I was travelling alone in the cities, something which I have to admit I was a little concerned about! Wonderful horses, exceptional food, an entertaining guide and endless, endless views all for as little 1600 Euros (for the full 14 nights) - this is a trip I highly recommend to anyone who wants to go on a real desert adventure!