

# Morocco Travel Guide

## An Interview with Hassan, Owner of Atlas Kasbah Ecolodge

by Amanda Mouttaki on July 6, 2012

Nestled in the Argan biosphere of southern Morocco, Atlas Kasbah Ecolodge offers the first eco-friendly accommodation in the area. This unique resort offers visitors the chance to experience Morocco while maintaining the ecological sustainability of the region. The concept integrates six objectives—water conservation, energy conservation, waste management, purchasing practices, integration with the landscape and environmental education—to achieve a balanced eco-friendly approach.

Hassan Aboutayeb and his wife, Helene, own Atlas Kasbah. Hassan was kind enough to answer a few questions about the ecolodge.

### **Tell us a bit about Atlas Kasbah.**

Atlas Kasbah is an eco-friendly accommodation designed in traditional Moroccan fashion with local materials and style and set in the UNESCO Argan Biosphere Reserve, 20 minutes from Agadir city. As an ecolodge, the Kasbah uses a salt-treated swimming-pool, chemical-free homemade cleaning products and photovoltaic solar panels. We also use the 3RV rule for waste, and we hire local staff from the nearby villages.

### **What led you to opening such a business in Morocco?**

I obtained a bachelor's degree in hospitality management and a master's degree in sustainable tourism. Then I worked as a sustainable tourism consultant for years. At one point I knew that it was time to start my own project. My dream would be that Morocco becomes a real sustainable destination.

What do you hope people will get out of their experience with Atlas Kasbah? We hope that our guests go back home energized and try out some cultural or eco-friendly practices that they have experienced here. Many guests send us pictures of their Moroccan dishes that they've learned while here or go to the hammam in their native country after experiencing it here. What is also nice is when people start to clean their house with homemade eco-friendly products!

### **What services other than unique accommodations do you offer?**

We offer many recreational activities such as cooking classes, mountain biking in remote Berber villages and the Argan forest and guided hikes with inhabitants. Atlas Kasbah Ecolodge also boasts a unique pottery and tadelakt (lime plaster) workshop in the south of Morocco. For the guests that just want to let their minds unwind, there is a salt-treated swimming-pool, a hammam (a Moroccan steam bath), Argan oil massages, a yoga studio and serenity.

### **Most people visiting Morocco are attracted to the big cities. How does a visit to somewhere off the beaten path like Atlas Kasbah offer a different perspective of Morocco?**

The Kingdom of Morocco has so much to offer that it can suit everybody's needs. But you're right, Morocco is known all over the world for its imperial cities. That's why we wish to promote rural tourism. For this reason, we created the Rural Tourism Association in Southern Morocco (RDTR) a year ago and we hope that more and more people will travel to remote areas as one can learn so many values and traditions there.

### **What do you think are the must-see, must-have Moroccan experiences for a first-time visitor?**

I would say of course the tea ceremony, but also to enjoy the hammam, have a stroll in the market and eat couscous in a Moroccan family on Friday!