



Living And Working in Dar Asni

WHO WE ARE:

Education For All Morocco is a charity organisation that provides opportunities for girls in rural Morocco to access a college education. The girls come from remote areas and their parents do not have adequate funds



to send them to the local government run boarding houses. EFA was established in 2007, with the house opening in its current location in April 2008. In the first year of operation, there were 10 girls at the house and in 2008 a further 8 girls joined the house. There will be an intake of 6 girls per year in the future. EFA was established by people who live and/or work in Marrakech and the local village of Imlil, with the core belief that to educate a girl is to educate the future generation. Dar Asni, the boarding house for girls, is situated at the Asni turnoff from Marrakech heading towards Imlil. The girls stay in the house every weeknight, however they go home every second weekend to visit their families.

JOB REQUIREMENTS:

There is currently one house mother who lives in the house full time in Asni. Her name is Latifa and she is a 28 year old Moroccan woman. She is responsible for the daily running of the house, the preparation of meals and the monitoring of the girls' educational progress. Your main role is to assist her in her daily tasks, but other beneficial traits include:

- ❖ A willingness to spring out of bed in the morning to assist in preparing the breakfast;
- ❖ You would like to learn how to cook delicious Moroccan food, and you would like to share your favourite recipes;
- ❖ Maintain a sense of wonder... and a sense of humour – everyday brings new and varied experiences of Moroccan life;
- ❖ Don't be afraid to ask for help or to suggest new ideas about how things may be done differently;
- ❖ Be prepared to help the girls when they need it – with their French, English, Information Technology and anything else they require;
- ❖ Assist with households jobs such as cleaning and gardening;
- ❖ Remember your job is not of the "9 to 5" variety. However, if you need time out, all you need to do is ask. If you wish to pursue other interests throughout the day you are most welcome;
- ❖ Show a genuine interest in getting to know the girls. This may involve weekend visits to their villages.



WORKING FOR THE CHARITY:

With any charity organization, one of the most crucial aspects of getting funding is to connect with the donors. This occurs in Education For All in a number of ways. The website (www.efamaroc.org) is a dynamic

site where donors can check on the progress of the house and the girls. There is a blog which you should update occasionally to show the general happenings of the house. As well as this, you may wish to assist the girls in communicating with the donors twice a year (October and February). You may also wish to contribute to the EFA Newsletter with stories from your visit. There is the opportunity for you to be dynamic and innovative in communicating with the outside world. It will be a key part of your role that you will drive some activity in the house in this manner. If you have ideas, by all means charge forward with them to bring this charity to life for the donors.

SUPPORTING EACH OTHER:

Possibly the biggest single aspect which will affect the success of your life out here is how you get along with Latifa and the girls. As well as *working* with them you must be able to *live* with them, accepting their way of life. The fortunate thing is that Latifa and all of the girls are open to trying new things and to hearing your explanations as to why you may do something differently. Subsequently, it is beneficial for you to take the same approach. You may not agree with the way something is done, but if you ask why, you will soon find out their reasoning and you will gain insight and hopefully understanding. It is important to know yourself and to be able to take a break when you need to in order to maintain friendly relations!

THE GIRLS:

There are currently 18 girls who live in the house. They are aged from 11 years to 17 years old. They all have their own different personalities, which you will soon get to know. It is important to respect their culture, religion and values to ensure that they feel safe and comfortable in the house. The girls will pray at certain times during the day, but as this is such an integral part of their life, it just slots in alongside everyday activities. They prefer to be warned before photos are taken as some of them will not be photographed without their headscarf. But, they do LOVE to have their photo taken when they are ready! The girls speak some French and minimal English, however if you take the time to communicate using simple signs and gestures, they will understand what you are saying. They are pleasant and friendly girls who will love getting to know you. They may be curious as to why you do things a certain way, and they will not be afraid to ask!



THE LOCALS:

Dar Asni is a well-respected establishment in this area. As the local people are becoming aware of our presence and our goals, they are becoming extremely supportive of the organisation. We have a good working relationship with the local government officials, as well as the other two government-run boarding houses. We also have help from local associations and the Kasbah du Toubkal. We assist each other in a true sense of community which is essential in times of need. It is important to maintain this amicable relationship with all members of the local community. When you are out and about you'll inevitably meet the locals and although the ability to speak Arabic, Berber or French is an advantage, that good old smile is also effective in maintaining the existing friendship. You are bound to pick up some of the local language the longer you stay.

LIVING IN THE HOUSE:

You will be provided with a bed and bedding for the duration of your stay in the house. Note that it does get very cold in the house in winter and very warm during summer. There are three running, hot showers in the house for you to use. You may also like to visit the local hammam with Latifa or the girls, but be prepared for life in its most natural form! This costs 10MAD.

There are four toilets for you to use, however they are squat toilets. For this purpose, you should have a pair of plastic shoes or flip-flops to wear in the bathroom. You will need to be responsible for maintaining your own supply of toilet paper but PLEASE do not flush anything down the toilets! It can be difficult to purchase suitable sanitary items in the local village, so you may wish to have a supply at hand.

You will be provided with your meals, including:

- Breakfast, consisting of bread, olives, butter, oil and confiture (jam);
- Lunch, which is usually a communal tagine with salad, or beans/lentils and bread;
- Dinner, a soup or pasta dish served with bread;
- Fruits are served after lunch;
- Coffee in the morning or mid-afternoon;
- Mint tea with your breakfast and after dinner.

You may bring anything else that you desire (however alcohol should be avoided) but please be aware that most things you are accustomed to may only be available in Marrakech at the larger supermarkets.

LOCAL CUSTOMS:

As you will be living in a Muslim country, there are a few customs that you may wish to follow. The women living in Morocco are expected to cover up in front of men. This involves wearing a hijab, trousers that fully cover their legs and tops that generally cover their upper legs and their arms. You are not expected to follow these customs strictly, however you may be received more favourably by locals if you show some modesty when dressing, particularly in summer. Moroccan people remove their shoes before walking on any carpet, so you should respect this custom when visiting people's homes.



Moroccan people who practice Islam pray five times a day facing Mecca. The mosque makes the call at these times, however it is not too loud when you are inside the house sleeping! There are also times in the religious calendar when the people fast from sunrise to sunset. You are welcome to have a go, but you are certainly not expected to follow this. You may wish to be discrete with your consumption of food during daylight hours as the fasting is both highly valued and very difficult!

Fridays are a special day where most Moroccan people leave work at lunch time for an extended lunch with their families. The men go to the mosque to pray whilst the women prepare the couscous. It is a lovely family day, akin to the Sunday Roast. At all meals, it is accepted practice that you eat

with your right hand only, never putting your left hand into a communal dish. When eating a communal meal, you only eat from your 'piece of the pie' or the area directly in front of you.

Finally, in Islam, to throw bread in the bin when you have finished with it is not an accepted practice. This stems from the idea that if you disregard the 'daily bread' you might just find yourself without the precious resource one day! Whilst you may not adhere to these beliefs yourself, it is important that you respect the beliefs of the people hosting your stay. There is an area in every house where the bread is placed to later be eaten by animals.

WEATHER:

Yes this is Morocco, but as the house is situated in a valley, we can be subject to more extreme weather than other parts of the country. Inside the house in particular (which is where you will spend most of your time) the temperature varies. Be prepared to expect fog, rain, hail and light snow at the beginning and end of the season with baking sunshine and soaring temperatures in the months between. The days can be warm outside of the house, so you might like to take walks during the day to experience the beautiful weather. If you are in need of any warm clothing you will find some items which have been donated to the house, or you can always ask Latifa.



HEALTH AND SAFETY

In cases of emergency, there is a list of emergency numbers posted in the bureau. You should familiarise yourself with this list and be aware of who to contact should an emergency situation arise. It is advisable for you to carry some of the emergency numbers with you in case you encounter any difficulties.

Please take care in the kitchen as you will spend a lot of time assisting with the preparation of meals and this is where accidents may occur. Also apply caution when walking or riding on the local roads as road rules are not always adhered to strictly! There is a bicycle at the house if you wish to go for a ride. It is also a lovely 30 minute walk to Kasbah Tamadot.

TRAVELLING TO AND FROM DAR ASNI:

If you are travelling to Asni from Marrakech, you need to first make your way to the main Charijl'bagar taxi station that is located between Mohammed VI and Mohammed V at the southern end of the Koutoubia area. It may cost you around 10MAD to get to the taxi station from the main square in Marrakech. Once there, you will find a man calling out 'Asni, Asni, Asni'. You should jump in his Grand Taxi and pay 15MAD only and you will share with 5 others. After your first taxi ride, they are sure to recognise you every time! This will take you to the souk in Asni. You continue walking up the main highway in the same direction until you come to the Imlil turnoff on your left (this is just past the post office). On your left, about 200m up the road (just past the teleboutique) you will find the house. It has a large grey wall, a black door and a sign promoting the charity out the front.

VISA REQUIREMENTS:

Most tourists are welcome to travel within Morocco for 90 days on a tourist visa. After this time, you must leave the country and re-enter to gain a new visa. Your passport must be valid for at least 6 months after the date of entry into Morocco.

GENERAL POINTS:

Moroccan people are incredibly welcoming. You will be welcome to stay with the families of the girls and with friends that you make here. It is not common practise to take gifts to your hosts, and they may be taken aback if you take food to contribute to the meal. You might like to bring small tokens from your own country to share if you wish to say a small 'thank you' for the visit.

You may get frequent looks and the Moroccan people will talk about you whilst you are right there. They love to see the differences in your way of doing things and their comments are not intended to be harmful, they are just pointing out how different you are! This can be difficult to deal with at times, but you must realise that there are no taboos in Moroccan society concerning talking about people when they are present! Laugh it off, enjoy being different and you will have an enjoyable experience. If you have a good reason for doing something, don't be afraid to let them know why you have adopted such a 'quirky' practice!

You may not always be totally content at the house. By all means speak to Latifa about what is bothering you, but try to frame your discontent in a positive manner to try to work things out. If the issue stems to cultural differences, you must try to be understanding and patient. It may be nice to take a walk on your own in the fresh warm air until you have thought about the root cause of the issue. There is internet available at the house, so jump on Skype, call your family, have a laugh about what a strange (but wonderful) experience you are having and you will surely feel better!

CONCLUSION:

If you work here it's because you want to be here. You will never fully know the benefit of your visit to Latifa, the girls and the Moroccan people. The small things that you do everyday to empower the women you work



with, to alter misconceptions about health and to encourage independent thinking are skills that will enrich the lives of these amazing women.

This is a valuable and exciting experience of working abroad in a spectacular, unspoilt and happy environment, with the opportunity to meet many new people and to see how Moroccan people really live! We can't guarantee that everything will be perfect, but you will certainly see real Moroccan life – close up – and this will undoubtedly add to your views of this special culture.

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