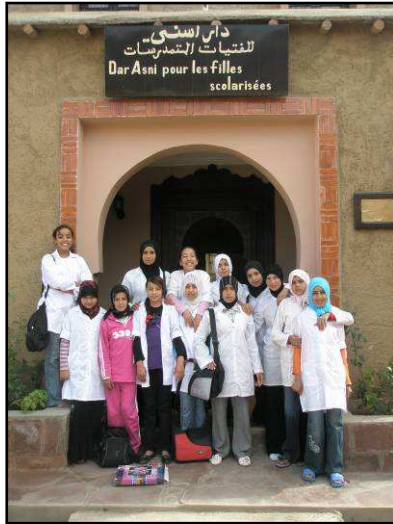




# LIVING AND WORKING IN THE HOUSES

## The houses:

**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 Asni in its current location in April 2008. In the first year of operation, there were 10 girls at the house and today there are 30 girls in Dar Asni. There will be more girls in the future (the house can welcome 36 girls).



The second house, Dar Tinnel, opened in September 2009 with 12 girls and today there are 20 girls.

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.

**Dar Tinnel**, the second house, is situated in **Talat N'Yacoub**, one hour from Asni. The two houses work in a similar way. The girls stay in the house every weeknight, however they go home every second weekend to visit their families.

When they stay in the boarding house during the week end, they do some activities with the volunteers or they also study if they have exams.

A third house is under construction in **Ouirgane** and it will open soon. Ouirgane is situated on the road between Asni and Talat N' Yacoub.

## What we are looking for:

This volunteer position is suitable for those who have something to give, not really as an 'experience' for those who want to receive something from their stay (although you will most certainly get this, it is not the sole aim of the project!). If you simply want to learn and acquire new skills, use this as a platform to develop your own language skills, or just experience life in a different country/culture, this position may not be for you. There are many volunteer programmes around the world which you can take part in and pay for these sorts of experiences. What we are looking for are people who want to give more than receive!

The position is therefore aimed at female volunteers who ideally have significant teaching experience or who are able to share language skills, especially English or French, and IT skills with the girls in the boarding houses and help them to manage their own education and help them to get what they want and need. A key part of the role is to help the girls with their school work in the evenings and during 'free-periods' from school. Ordinarily, this is not a post suitable for 'Gap Year' students, unless they are particularly independent and have other volunteer experience ideally in education.

## Job requirements:

Each house has a house mother who lives in the house full time. **Latifa** lives in **Dar Asni**, she is a 29 year old Moroccan woman; **Khadija** lives in **Dar Tinmel**, she is a 36 year old Moroccan woman. They are responsible for the daily running of the house and the monitoring of the girls' educational progress.

On each house, there is a cook responsible of the preparation of meals.

Your main role is to **assist** them in their daily tasks, but other beneficial traits include:

- **Help the girls** when they need it. It could be by helping them with their homework, by doing your own lessons (French, English, computing or anything else they require) or by organising activities (inside or outside the house).

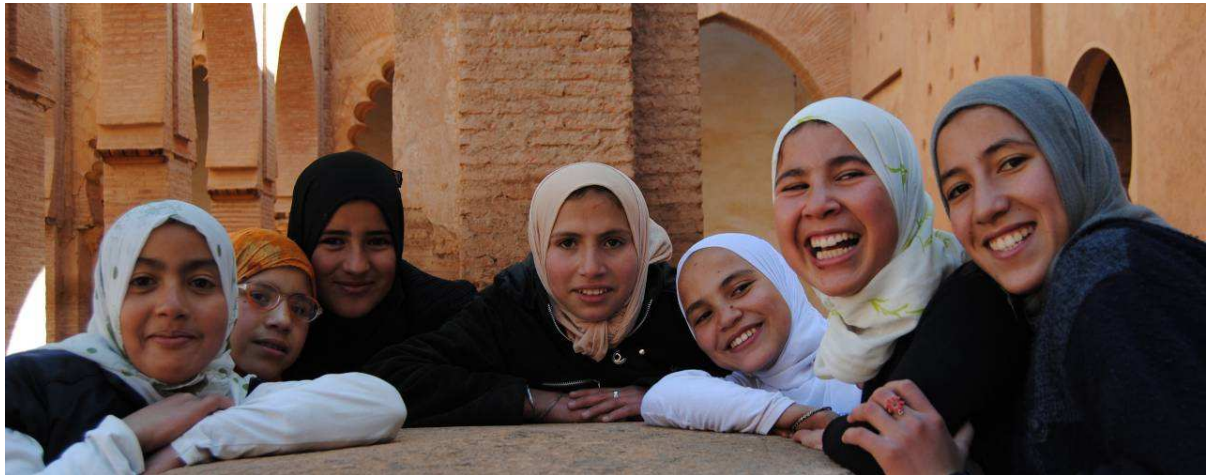
You will need time to familiarise with the Moroccan education system (really different between city and rural areas).

The girls have different levels at school (middle school and high school) and the girls who are in the same level are not necessarily in the same class, so there are many different school timetables to take into account! Moreover, the girls go to school from 8.00 am to 6.00 pm but it's not full. So during this day time they could have a lot of "free time" which will be a good thing for you and will allow you to spend more time with them during the journey. But don't be afraid, with a little bit of time for adaptation, you'll succeed to organise your lessons and activities with the girls!

However, don't forget that the priority is their study, so don't be disappointed if you cannot play games anytime with them.

- **Teach** English or French to the house mother.
- **A willingness to assist in preparing the meals;**
- **Learn how to cook** delicious Moroccan food and share your favourite recipes;
- Assist with households jobs such as **cleaning and gardening;**
- Show a genuine **interest in getting to know the girls**. This may involve weekend visits to their villages.
- **Maintain a sense of wonder...** and a **sense of humour** – everyday brings new and varied experiences of Moroccan life;
- **Be open-minded and you should communicate** with the people around you, even if it's not easy in the beginning. In fact, it's not useful (for you and for the people around you) to stay alone all through the day.
- **Don't be afraid** to ask for help or to suggest new ideas about how things may be done differently;
- **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;





### **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](http://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 regularly to show the general happenings of the house.
- 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.
- During your stay, you will have visitors in the houses (especially in Dar Asni). It can be schools or just small groups who are interested in the project and would like to see the house and the girls to have more information. Sometimes you will be in charge of the visit and you will have to talk about EFA and answer to the questions.

### **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/Khadija 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/Khadija 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. Don't forget that the communication is the key for the success. You must talk with the house mothers and the girls. Sometimes it won't be easy because of the language barrier but you have to try again so that you can be understood.

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 30 girls who live in Dar Asni, and 20 girls in Dar Tinmel. They are aged from 12 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 in Dar Asni. In Dar Tinmel, they speak minimal French and they are just learning some 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.

Dar Tinmel opened in September 2009, and Talat N' Yacoub is situated in a rural zone of Morocco (more than Asni), so the people are more wary about us. However we are becoming more well-known and like Asni we are a well-respected establishment.

We have a good working relationship with the local government officials, as well as the other 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 houses:*

You will be provided with a bed and bedding for the duration of your stay in the houses. Note that it does get very cold **in the house** in winter and very warm during summer. There are hot showers in the houses for you to use. You may also like to visit the local hammam with Latifa/Khadija or the girls, but be prepared for life in its most natural form! This costs 10MAD. There are toilets in each house for you to use. 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, cheese, oil and confiture (jam) or honey with tea, coffee or milk.
- Lunch, which is usually a communal tagine with salad, or beans/lentils and bread;

- Dinner, a soup or pasta dish served with eggs or cheese, tea and bread;
- Fruits can be served after lunch;
- Coffee in the morning or mid-afternoon;

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 Muslim 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.

In Morocco and in Islam, smoking for a woman is not accepted and particularly in the rural villages. So if you need to smoke, please do it discreetly and far from the girls.

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 houses are situated in a valley, we can be subject to more extreme weather than other parts of the country. Inside the houses 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 houses, 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 Dar Asni, 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! Dar Asni is a lovely 30 minute walk to Kasbah Tamadot and Dar Tinmel is a 3 km to the mosque of Tinmel where you'll find a beautiful view of the valley.

## ***Travelling to and from the houses:***

If you are travelling to Asni or Talat N' Yacoub 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' or "ljoukak, ljoukak, ljoukak" for Talat N' Yacoub. You should jump in his Grand Taxi and pay 15MAD only to Asni and 35MAD to Talat N' Yacoub and you will share the taxi with 5 others.

After your first taxi ride, they are sure to recognise you every time!

For Asni, the taxi will drop you at the souk in Asni. Continue walking up the main road 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.

If you go to Talat, the taxi will drop you near the gas station, you just have to go straight on and the house is just near the taxi station.

Anyway, for your first days you won't travel alone. You will have somebody with you to show you the houses.

## ***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 a back 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/Khadija 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 from cultural differences, you must try to be understanding and patient.

Stay at home and show your sadness is not a good thing for the girls; 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 houses, 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, Khadija, 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.

*Updated in November 2010.*