

EDUCATION FOR ALL, ASNI, MOROCCO: REPORT FOR TRAVEL – PEOPLE AND PLACES. TINA MEADOWS

29<sup>th</sup> September – 25<sup>th</sup> October 2019

House: Dar Asni 2

The pre departure preparation was very informative. I received very detailed documents about Education For All, the choices of accommodation, the school system and the area. I had access to the reports of previous volunteers through Travel people and Places and the EfA website. I had very helpful conversations with Dianne. Karima, the volunteer co-ordinator for EfA answered all my questions thoroughly by e mail.

When I arrived at Marrakech, I was met promptly by a member of staff from the Kasbah Toubkal who was very welcoming – he even stopped to buy bananas as I was hungry and tired! At the Riad Vallee Verte, the owner, Driss was waiting to meet me and a meal had been prepared even though it was 10.30 in the evening.

I met Latifa, the senior housemother the next day, and she showed me around Asni. The documents call it a market town but I would describe it as a village with lots of satellite villages quite close by. It is possible to buy most daily needs in the local shops but if, for example, you use body lotion, you will not find it locally.

A couple of small points regarding the information about the walk to work. It is 15 minutes downhill from the Riad to Dar Asni 1 but if you are working at Dar Asni 2 or 3, it is a further 10 minutes to walk. The walk back at night is up a gradual hill but it is also hot and at the end of a long day, so it could take me 30 minutes. The walk along the road was also very dusty. In the mornings, you had to be aware of the mules moving much faster than a person, loaded with crates of apples and commandeering the 'pavement'. There were no street lights so it was important to be back at the riad by 7pm before it got dark!! ( **Note from people and places – thank you for this Tina we have added this to our accommodation details**)



I chose to wear scarves, outdoors, to cover my hair in the style of the hijab. I did this to be respectful in a traditional Muslim society. The housemothers (and their friends) loved this. I

found that it helped me to blend in more. Whenever the local people discovered that I was volunteering with EfA, they expressed huge gratitude. Everyone was very welcoming.

I worked in Dar Asni 2 with the girls who were attending the lycee. The house mother Aicha and the cook, Fatima and the cleaning lady, Khadija were all very welcoming. The girls were delightful and very keen to learn. In the first couple of days, I worked with whoever was available. I wanted to gauge the level of English and how much we would need to use French. There could be up to 10 girls around 2 tables and I found that this was too many to interact properly.

I decided to make a large chart of when the girls were not in school and establish smaller groups to be more effective. I had not allowed for the constant challenge of the lycee changing the timetables many times in the first few weeks of term!! If you are there at a different time of year, this should not be such a problem. I eventually created a programme to see each girl 3 times in the week for 30 minutes or so in a group of around 4. This worked well and also helped with the integration of some new girls.



Aicha asked if I could start a volunteer exercise book for each girl to be a record of the work done by myself and other volunteers who would follow. This had been the practice at Dar Asni 1 which seemed to have had more volunteers in the past. Looking at the English textbooks, the first years were learning family words so we started each book with a copy of the girl's family tree. I did this with the older girls as a useful introduction for their book. All the work I did generated conversations between the girls and with me. We also covered the visit of Prince Harry and Meghan to EfA in February 2019. Many of the girls had been involved with that and had met them. My teaching resource was a treasured copy of Hello magazine that the girls had in the library.

I took games to play such as Yahtzee which I left behind. I always take a set of Rory's Story Cubes (you can find them online) with me to generate imaginative story telling and some of the older girls had the vocabulary to be able to create some wonderful stories. I helped with homework issues. With the first year girls, I helped them create their profile for the wall which they then typed in English.

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Over the years, the house had received donations of books for the library. Aicha knew that many of these were too difficult for the girls to read and enjoy so she asked me to sort them. Together with the girls, I did this.

Generally, I had to react to whatever situation arose. One day was spent writing Thank you letters to pupils at a London school which Latifa was taking to London the next day.

The house library had useful reference books and dictionaries that I encouraged the girls to use. We often needed a 3 way translation – Arabic to French to English.

At the end of my 4 weeks, we had a very useful meeting between all the housemothers and their volunteers. We shared ideas and described what we had done with the girls.

The school timetables are very fractured. There were times when there no girls in the house. Then, I worked with the house mother or the other staff. The cook and the cleaner did not speak French or English so at times mime skills were required! I chose to eat lunch in the kitchen with the staff in order to get to know them more. The food was simple but delicious and totally prepared from scratch for every meal. The girls were involved in serving and clearing and some preparation. On Wednesday, after the fish man had been, everybody available went up to the roof to clean fish.

I feel that my whole placement was a success. I had no disappointments. The highlight with the girls was their leaving party for me with speeches and Berber dancing accompanied by washing up bowl drumming.

Other highlights with EfA staff were my housemother taking me to the local hammam and washing my back and my hair for me. One Saturday, I went with her to the market to buy the vegetables and fruit for the week. We also had a wonderful day in Marrakech.

I loved the Riad. I spent time with the owner's children the first weekend. The delightful receptionist, Fatima, took me on a local bus to Imlil one weekend. Another weekend we went to Ouirgane for lunch and walked back to the next village. Then Driss picked us up and we visited the lodge owned by his friend. Leisure time was limited and the lighting in the

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Riad was low so that reading was difficult. A head torch would be a good thing to take.  
(Note from people and places – we have asked the Riad if they could provide more light for volunteers – we know you need to work! If you have a problem with lighting please ask for more light)

I would recommend working with Education for All as a volunteer. It is a well run organisation that provides a very caring and supportive environment for the girls to continue their studies. You do have to be prepared to embrace the Moroccan pace of life. Things can be suggested, you agree but no particular time is mentioned.... Then suddenly they say, are you ready?



Tina Meadows

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