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Tour Notes

Mauritania – A Saharan Odyssey

Tour Duration – 15 Days



Tour Rating

Fitness ●●●○○ | Off the Beaten Track ●●●●● | Culture ●●●●○ | History ●●●●○ | Wildlife ●○○○○

Tour Pace

Busy

Tour Highlights

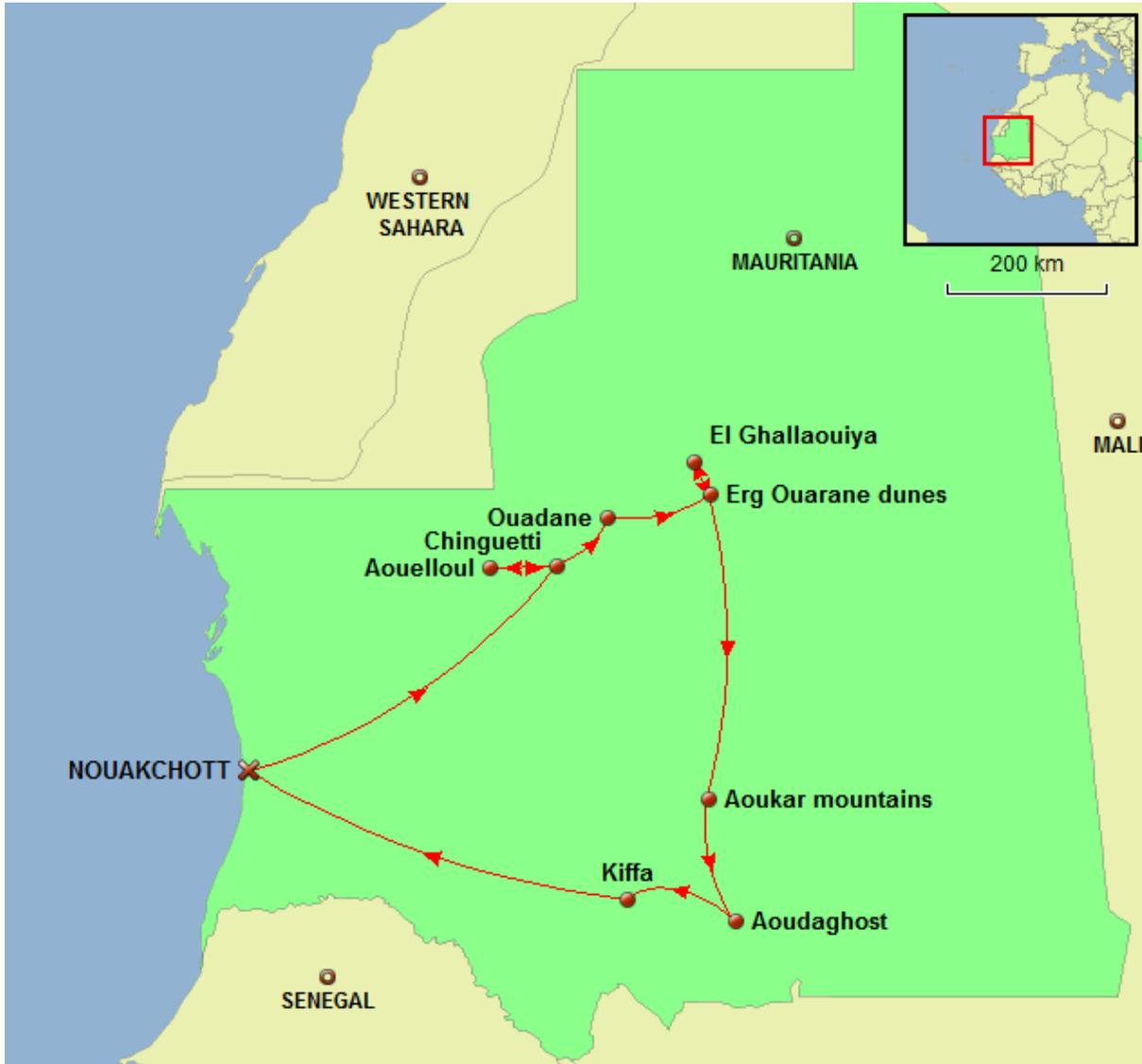
- Visit Chinguetti, one of the most well conserved oases in the whole Sahara
- Go off road to Aouelloul crater, created by the impact of large meteorite more than tree millions of years ago
- Marvel in Ouadane, the remotest oasis in Mauritania
- Drive through the rarely visited El Ghallaouiya canyon, a unique “open sky gallery”
- Aoudaghost archaeological site with miles of ruins hidden by the Aouakar mountains
- In Kiffa, meet with the Moorish women who are renowned for making the traditional glass beads





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Tour Map Mauritania – A Saharan Odyssey



Tour Essentials

- Accommodation:** Simple hotels, guesthouses and wild camping
Included Meals: Daily breakfast (B), plus lunches (L) and dinners (D) as shown in the itinerary
Group Size: Maximum 16
Start Point: Nouakchott – You can arrive anytime on Day 1
End Point: Nouakchott - You can depart in the evening of Day 15
Transport: 4WD vehicles, air conditioned vehicles
Country Visited: Mauritania



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Tour Itinerary Notes

While our intention is to adhere to the day-by-day itinerary as printed below, this is an adventurous expedition with an exploratory element and therefore a degree of flexibility is built in. Overnight stops may vary from those suggested and on occasions alternative accommodation, of a similar standard to that named below, will be used.

The tour is an exploratory expedition – itinerary and visits could be changed at the decision of the tour guide if required. Wind, visibility, land conditions, local authorities' decisions, events of "force majeure", technical, mechanical or other unexpected events may delay or change the schedule. Participants must be flexible to fully enjoy the unique encounters, as much as some unexpected situations that are part of the "African experience".

Tour Guide

Our guides are a key strength, chosen for their knowledge of and passion for the areas in which they work. All of our guides are carefully hand-picked, and are not just passing through these countries, but are usually locally born. Unlike some companies it should be noted we do not send a guide or tour leader from Undiscovered Destinations in the UK as we have every confidence in our locally appointed representative who is responsible for operating the tour on our behalf. On this tour you will have an experienced Saharan expedition leader supported by local staff. Where possible you will have the same guide throughout your trip but on occasions it may be necessary to change the guide at one or more points during the tour.

Itinerary

Day 1, 13th January 2021: Arrival in Nouakchott (Mauritania)

Arrive in Nouakchott and transfer to a comfortable hotel. There are no guided activities or meals included today. Overnight Hotel Azalai or similar.

Day 2, 14th January: Nouakchott – Chinguetti

Today will be a full driving day mostly on tarmac roads in a north westerly direction from the capital. The further we head into the desert the more spectacular the scenery becomes, a beguiling expanse of dunes before later the dramatic Adrar mountains come into view. We expect to arrive for sunset in Chinguetti, and tonight meet your experienced Saharan leader for a briefing of the adventure ahead. Overnight at La Gueila Auberge or similar (BLD)

Day 3, 15th January: Auouelloul Meteorite Crater

Our goal today is to journey from Chinguetti into the desert wilderness to the remarkable Auouelloul meteorite crater. With a diameter of around 250 metres, it is thought that the impact from space causing this crater took place some 3 million years ago. After exploring the vicinity of the crater we return to our base in Chinguetti. Overnight at La Gueila Auberge or similar (BLD)

Day 4, 16th January: Ouadane (UNESCO) - Guelb er Richat

Continue our journey to Ouadane, a historically significant and remote oasis trading post established in the 12th Century. Although now overall largely in ruins, the central old town still has some intact building, some of which are still inhabited. Continue to one of the Sahara's greatest mysteries. Guelb er Richat is known as the 'eye of Africa' comprising three concentric rock rings with an interior depression. The largest ring has a diameter of an astonishing 40 kilometres (25 mi).





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The geological feature is clearly visible from space and there are numerous theories as to its existence, none yet proven. Tonight we start to enjoy the calming experience of camping in the true Saharan wilderness. Overnight wild camping. (BLD)

Day 5, 17th January: To El Ghallaouiya canyon

Our Saharan odyssey stretches further into the desert wilderness, traversing the sandy expanse between spectacular rock formations. Along the way we may encounter desert nomadic people. We reach the abandoned fort of El Ghallaouiya built by the French “camel battalions” and now being taken back by the desert. Continue to the impressive spectacle of Trig Chauail, an open sky petroglyphic museum comprising some 220 panels and 600 subjects, a retrospective exhibition of 6000 years of human activity. This is a truly incredible sight to witness behold in this most barren of landscapes. Tonight, we plan to camp in the Ghallaouiya canyon. (BLD)

Days 6 to 8, 18th to 20th January: Erg Ouarane

Now we move into the expanse of Erg Ouarane a seemingly never-ending sea of 800 kilometres of shifting virgin sands. We spend these days navigating the desert through GPS and compass immersed in the majestic Sahara. Each night we will wild camp with the dunes as our companions. (BLD)

Days 9 and 10, 21st and 22nd January: Aoukar Depression

After the thrilling adventure of the Erg Ouarane, our arrival at the Aoukar depression represents a change of landscape comprising sand dunes, salt pans and scattered escarpments. Here there once existed a vast saline sink lake which has now disappeared. The remains of hundreds of villages scatter what would have been the shore of the now extinct lake. We will explore the region and overnight in wild camps. (BLD)

Days 11 and 12, 23rd and 24th January: Journey to Aoudaghost

Continuing through landscapes of dunes, dried lakes, acacia and nomadic camps, we reach the archaeological site of Aoudaghost, believed to be the northern town of the Ghana Empire, the oldest known kingdom in Black Africa dating from the 6th century. Aoudaghost was a rich caravan town, trading mostly in gold. In ancient Islamic manuscripts it was described as being like Mecca and the whole region was once inhabited. We will explore and search for ancient clay granaries whose entrances are fortified by stone walls. Only a few areas of Aoudaghost have been studied by French archaeologists primarily in the early 1960's and sand has largely covered any trace or the research. These days due to the sheer remoteness of the region, these archaeological hidden treasures are rarely visited. Aoudaghost was added to the UNESCO tentative cultural list in the early 2000's. Overnights in wild camps. (BLD)

Day 13, 25th January: Auodaghost to Kiffa

We head now back towards the Atlantic for Nouakchott. Our destination en route is Kiffa, renowned for its traditional glass beads produced by Moorish women. Overnight Hotel Le Phar du Desert or similar. (BLD)

Day 14, 26th January: The Road of Hope

We continue on 'la route de l'espoir', linking south west Mauritania with the Atlantic coast and the capital. Overnight Hotel Oasis or similar. (BLD)

Day 15, 27th January: Nouakchott and Departure from Mauritania

We expect to arrive back in Nouakchott by early evening where you will be transferred to the airport for your onward late evening flight. Day use in a room before departure is available upon request depending on departure time. (B)



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Tour Inclusions/Exclusions

Inclusions:

Arrival and departure transfers
Transport throughout
All accommodation – mixture of camping, guesthouses and hotels
Services of English-speaking experienced guide / tour leader
Meals as listed (B – Breakfast, L – Lunch, D – Dinner)
Soft drinks at nights in the mobile camps – no alcohol is not served in Mauritania
Entrance fees for sites listed as part of the itinerary
Camping equipment, including igloo tents and mattress. Please bring your own sleeping bag though.

Excluded:

International flights
Any airport taxes
Travel Insurance
Visas – Visa available on arrival at the airport (currently 55 euros)
Drinks and mineral water at meals, except for those at nights in the mobile camps
Items of personal nature
Tips (Discretionary)

Important Information

Foreign Office Travel Warnings

Before booking your tour please familiarise yourself with the country specific information provided by the UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) - <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice>. This includes important information such as latest immigration requirements, and details of any travel advisories.

We constantly monitor the advice posted by the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). In particular we will always advise clients of any travel warnings. At present there are no warnings against travel to the parts of Mauritania that we visit on this tour. Please feel free to contact us should you have any specific concerns or would like to know in detail what measures are being taken to ensure visits remain trouble free and without incident.

It should be noted that this information applies to British citizens. Other nationals are asked to check the current position of their respective government.

Accommodation and Meals

Hotel Check-in Times

As a general rule most hotels will allow guests to check-in from 2pm. Please note that the price of your tour does not include guaranteed early check-in. Therefore please advise us if you would like to ensure that your room is available for an earlier arrival. This is particularly relevant on the first day of the tour and for early morning arrivals.





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One option is to pre-book and pay for an extra night at the beginning of your tour which will guarantee your accommodation is available irrespective of what time you arrive. Please contact us for information and costs. It should also be noted that on many of our tours we have set-aside Day 1 of the itinerary as an 'arrival day'. For this reason and because tour participants are likely to be arriving at different times, and often from different countries, guided sightseeing or other activities are not included. If you are arriving early or before the start date of the tour and would like to organise some extra arrangements on a private basis please contact us.

Accommodation Rating

On this tour you will stay a few nights in a mix of simple but comfortable hotel and guest house but most of the time you will wild camp. Whilst camping you should be aware that there are no toilet facilities. When camping in the desert, you will be provided with a small amount of water to wash with. Igloo tents fitted for tropical climate and camping mattress are provided. Please bring your own sleeping bag though. Nights in the Sahara can get quite cold and sometimes windy.

We do not recommend Mauritania to anyone looking for a conventional holiday – comforts are few and far between and conditions are often challenging. It is not comparable to other countries in Africa that you may have travelled to, but the crew travelling with you will do their utmost to make this trip as comfortable as possible. However, for those seeking a true adventure to one of the least travelled parts of our world, Mauritania is hard to beat.

We welcome solo travellers and single rooms will be allocated subject to the applicable tour supplement. Please note that on occasions you may not always be allocated a double or twin room, as some hotels have designated single rooms. These may be smaller in size. However, the supplement payable takes this into consideration.

Food & Drinks

The daily meal basis is shown in the tour itinerary; breakfast (B), lunch (L) and dinner (D). Local conditions and availability dictate that food is fairly simple, so do not expect gourmet cooking. For the meals in the mobile camps, you can expect simple dinners made of preserved and fresh local products.

You may like to take some snacks with you to vary your diet – energy bars, dried fruit or sweets are generally appreciated.

All meals are included while on our tour in Mauritania, apart from the first day, and the evening of the final day. Drinks and mineral water at meals, except for those at the nights in the mobile camps are not included and will be payable locally in cash. After leaving Nouakchott it is unlikely that you will be able to buy any alcohol on the tour.

Dietary Requirements

If you have any special dietary requirements you must notify us at the time of booking. While we will make every effort to cater for you, we cannot guarantee that this will be possible.

Budgeting for your Tour

You will need some extra money to cover meals and drinks not included in the tour price, any optional sightseeing, souvenirs and items of a personal nature such as laundry.

Food

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.



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Lunch £4- £8.00
Dinner £10.00- £15.00

Drinks

The prices for drinks can vary greatly depending upon location and the prices detailed below are an average guide. In general you would expect drinks purchased in a supermarket or local restaurant to be less expensive, whilst drinks in an upmarket restaurant may be more expensive.

Water £0.80
Coffee £0.50

Tipping – Guide and Drivers

Tipping is commonly recognised as a way of rewarding guides and drivers for good service. If you are happy with your guide and driver, please consider leaving a tip for them. We recommend that each member of the tour give a tip of around €50 minimum which will then be divided amongst the tour staff.

Foreign Exchange for Algeria

ATM Availability: ATM machines are available in Nouakchott but we do not recommend relying on them.

Credit and Debit Card Acceptance: You will have limited opportunities to use cards and so should not rely on these.

Local Currency: Ouguiya (MRU)

Recommended Currency for Exchange: US dollars or Euros

Where to Exchange: At banks, some hotels and official bureaux de change. Your guide will be able to give further advice on this. For our scheduled group tour, there is very little to spend money on once you leave Nouakchott.

Joining your Tour

Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Please contact us if you would like a quotation for the international flights. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Joining Your Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will receive an airport transfer, both on arrival and departure, included in the tour price. In order that the transfer can be arranged please ensure that you advise us of your flight information once available. Please advise the date, time and flight number for your arrival/departure. If we have not been advised of this information at least 2 weeks before travel, then you will be required to make your own way to the hotel on Day 1 of your tour.

Travel Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Undiscovered Destinations that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country and be valid for the entire duration of your holiday.



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Visa Information

Most nationals including UK, EU and US visitors require a visa for entry to Mauritania. Visas are issued on arrival only. The current cost is 55 Euros or 60 US Dollars, and need to be paid on arrival, in cash only. The visa issuing process at the border can take several hours.

Passports

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of a full passport, valid for at least six months after the date of return to your country.

We strongly advise that your passport contains a minimum of two blank pages, as this may be a requirement of the local immigration authorities. In addition certain countries will stipulate that the two blank pages are opposite each other. If you are unable to meet these requirements you may be refused boarding by your airline or denied entry by the immigration authorities.

For specific information about the requirements for your destination please check with the country's embassy or consulate. Alternatively UK citizens can visit www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice.

Vaccinations & Protection

As with travel to most parts of Africa, we strongly recommend that you contact your doctor's surgery or a specialist travel clinic for up-to-date information, advice and the necessary vaccinations. For a visit of less than one month, almost certainly you will be advised to have immunisations against the following: Diphtheria and Tetanus, Hepatitis A, Typhoid, Meningitis. The use of a DEET-containing insect repellent is highly recommended.

Malaria prophylaxis: absolutely recommended for the first and last part of the itinerary (From Nouakchott to Chinguetty and from the Aoukar to Nouakchott).

As of now, a Covid test is not a mandatory requirement from the Mauritanian authorities to obtain a visa, although it can be requested on arrival. However, in the mutual interest of each participant, we kindly ask to bring a recent (less than 72 hours) test which grants your negativity.

The legal status and regulation of some medicines prescribed or purchased in your home country can be different in other countries. If you're travelling with prescription or over-the-counter medicine, read this guidance from NaTHNaC on [best practice when travelling with medicines](#). For further information on the legal status of a specific medicine, you'll need to contact the embassy, high commission or consulate of the country or territory you're travelling to.

Preparing for your tour

Climate

Generally speaking, the best time to visit Mauritania is between October / November and March, when the temperature by day will be hot, but not uncomfortably so. Nights in the desert can be cool with temperatures sometimes dipping into single figures in Celsius. At times it can also be very windy in the Saharan desert.

Clothing

Mauritania is quite warm and so light clothes are generally a good idea. You should ensure that you bring warmer clothes for evenings – it can get cooler inland once the sun goes down so a warm fleece is a good idea. Cotton fabric is best when travelling in the desert during the day.



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A light windproof/waterproof jacket is advisable. Please remember that Mauritania has a large Muslim population and conservative attitudes towards dress, and so women should bear this in mind and ensure that clothing is appropriate. Shorts and a t-shirt/ undershirt are not well accepted by the local people.

Equipment

Suncream/sunblock is a must. Insect repellent, including a bite spray will also be useful to have. As this tour involves camping, a torch (flashlight) is essential. You should also bring a towel, a water bottle and toilet paper. Please also bring anti-bacterial hand lotion. You should also bring a lighter / matches (for burning toilet paper). Refreshing tissues and wipes will be a welcome addition to your kit list. If you wear contact lenses, you may wish to consider bringing a pair of glasses and/or a headscarf – it can get very dusty while driving and cause irritation to the eyes. You will also need to bring a sleeping bag. We would recommend a warm sleeping bag, as well as a sleep sheet for any hot nights. You may also like to bring an inflatable pillow, as these are not provided. Sleeping mats however are provided.

Footwear

Footwear is a main priority on this tour. Comfortable walking shoes/boots are recommended, as well as a pair of sandals.

Luggage on tour

Due to the nature of the itinerary, please limit your personal luggage to 45lb (20 kg). Soft luggage are recommended.

Electric Supply & Plugs

Electrical supply is 220V/50 Hz and plugs have two round pins, similar to many European countries.

Travelling in Mauritania with us – Important notes

This itinerary is designed to experience fascinating places where foreigners hardly arrive. We kindly ask you to remain tolerant and flexible in order to fully enjoy and appreciate the unique nature and wildlife, the spontaneous hospitality of the local populations, the African magic and mystery, the metaphysics, ceremonies, life philosophies and religious beliefs that local people are willing to share with us.

This tour is an exploratory expedition. The itinerary and visits as described are subject to changes and adaptations while on tour. The changes are decided by the organizer. Wind, visibility, land conditions, local authorities' decisions, events of "force majeure", technical, mechanical or other unexpected events may delay or change our schedule. We are not responsible for any delays or changes in the itinerary.

Tour Itinerary Versions

Please ensure that you have an up-to-date copy of these tour notes immediately before you travel, as from time to time our itineraries may be amended, either for operational reasons or in response to feedback from customers. You will be informed of any major changes to your tour but small changes may just be added to these tour notes. These notes were prepared on 3rd November 2020.