Merzouga Travel Guide

2 Days in the Golden Dunes of Erg Chebbi · Operational Field Report



Plan a smoother Sahara escape with practical advice on the N13 approach, dune camps, camel trekking, timing, costs, and the small details that make two days in Merzouga easier.

OFFICIAL MOROCCO FIELD EMERGENCY CONTACTS

- **Royal Gendarmerie (Roads): 177**
- **Police: 190**
- **Ambulance / Civil Protection: 150**
- **Motorway Assistance: 5050**
- **International Emergency: 112**

Field Intelligence: Ground Rules

> **Rule #1: Cash, Cards & Verified ATM**
> A locally checked Al Barid Bank ATM is listed in Merzouga village (31.099084, -4.016750). We could not verify an ATM in Hassilabied, so do not rely on one there. Ask your camp what payment methods they accept before arrival. Carry a modest amount of cash for small purchases.

> **Rule #2: Road Arrival & Meeting Points**
> The N13 connects the towns on the approach to Merzouga. Save your accommodation's location and confirm the final meeting point, road condition, and whether a 4×4 transfer is needed for your camp before you lose signal.

> **Rule #3: Saharan Signal & Offline GPS**
> Mobile coverage varies by provider and drops among the dunes. Always download offline Google or Maps.me topographic terrain packages before leaving Tinghir or Errachidia. Install an **eSIM** prior to landing.

Erg Chebbi Desert Cost & Transit Matrix

TRAVEL TIER	DAILY BUDGET	CAMP & LODGING LEVEL	TRANSIT STYLE
Eco / Independent	450 – 750 MAD $45 – $75 USD	Village guesthouse in Hassilabied or shared basic dune tent	Supratours bus from Marrakech/Fes + walking along dune foot
Mid-Range Explorer	1,400 – 2,600 MAD $140 – $260 USD	Private desert bivouac with en-suite chemical toilet & shower	Self-drive rental car via paved N13 + host 4x4 dune shuttle
Private & Luxury	4,000 – 8,500+ MAD $400 – $850+ USD	Ultra-luxury dome tent with heated bedding & power	Private air-conditioned Toyota Prado 4x4 with driver

48-Hour Erg Chebbi Expedition Masterplan

Follow this sequence to avoid midday heat waves, navigate desert staging points safely, and experience unpolluted Saharan stargazing.

Day 1: Arrival, Camel Caravan & Stargazing

02:00 PM — N13 ARRIVAL & HASSILABIED PALMERAIE STAGING



Arrive before 4:00 PM at your designated base auberge in Hassilabied or Merzouga proper. Driving past Erfoud and Rissani on the paved N13 brings the dramatic 150-meter orange sand wall into sudden focus across the black stone desert (*reg*). Hassilabied provides a quieter, less commercial staging ground than central Merzouga village.

Leave heavy hard-shell luggage securely locked inside the base auberge luggage storage room. Repack only a small 25-liter daypack containing your essentials: fleece layer, headlamp, thermal socks, portable charger, and camera gear wrapped in dust-sealed bags.

Check Available Merzouga Base Riads on Booking.com

Prefer to sleep in a solid clay riad before or after your desert night? Discover authentic options.

05:00 PM — SUNSET CAMEL CARAVAN ACROSS ERG CHEBBI DUNES



Mount your dromedary as the harsh afternoon sun drops toward the horizon, softening the heat into deep amber hues. Camel caravans move in single file led by experienced local Amazigh guides who read shifting wind patterns and sand stability with ease. The ride into the interior dunes takes between 75 and 110 minutes.

Halfway through the trek, dismount to hike the final 40 vertical meters of a razor-sharp dune crest for sunset. The fine quartz sand glows fiery red before shifting to deep purple-violet as the sun dips below the horizon.

Browse Verified Erg Chebbi Desert Treks on GetYourGuide

Don't risk booking with unauthorized touts. Reserve vetted camel treks and sandboarding sessions.

08:00 PM — LUXURY BIVOUAC OVERNIGHT & SAHARAN STARGAZING



Arrive at your sheltered desert camp, nestled within an amphitheater of tall dunes that deflect overnight winds. Modern luxury bivouacs feature thick wool carpeting, raised wooden floors, king mattresses, and private bathrooms with running hot water.

After a warm meal of slow-cooked lamb tagine, gather around the central tamarisk-wood fire pit. Local Amazigh musicians play polyrhythmic rhythms on goatskin drums (*bendir*). Step 50 meters away into the black dunes: with zero atmospheric light pollution, the Milky Way forms a vivid arch from horizon to horizon.

Day 2: Sunrise Over the Crests & Cultural Heritage

06:15 AM — DAWN 4X4 DUNE CREST RUN & SANDBOARDING



Wake early before dawn to climb the eastern ridge behind your tent. Watch the first rays of sunlight illuminate the Moroccan-Algerian border peaks to the east. Grab a wooden sandboard from the camp rack to glide down 40-degree sand bowls before morning winds pick up.

Following breakfast, your expedition transitions to a rugged Toyota Land Cruiser or Prado. Expert desert drivers carry you across shifting sand crests, dry riverbeds (*oueds*), and abandoned mining tracks back to the paved road in Hassilabied for showers and vehicle transfers.

Compare Full Coverage 4x4 Rentals on DiscoverCars

Never attempt self-drive dune crossings in standard rental cars. Rent high-clearance 4x4s.

11:00 AM — KHAMLIA VILLAGE & GNAWA DESERT HERITAGE



Drive seven kilometers south of Merzouga to Khamlia, inhabited by descendants of formerly enslaved peoples from Mali, Senegal, and Sudan. Visit Dar Gnawa for an intimate performance of authentic spiritual music. Musicians in white robes chant to the metallic cadence of heavy iron castanets (*krakebs*) and the three-stringed camel-neck lute ().*guembri*

Field Readiness: What to Pack for Erg Chebbi

- **Cotton Cheche (Desert Turban):** A traditional 4- to 5-meter indigo cotton scarf protects eyes, ears, and nose from sharp wind-blown dust better than any ballcap.
- **Fleece Jacket & Merino Underwear:** Without cloud cover, Saharan sand loses heat rapidly. Temperatures often drop to 0°C–5°C at night between November and March.
- **Dust-Sealed Bags & Power Bank:** Fine Saharan sand penetrates electronics. Store them in zip-sealed dry bags and carry a 20,000mAh battery for desert tents.
- **Eye Drops & High-SPF Sunscreen:** Intense UV bounce requires SPF 50+ sunscreen and UV400 sunglasses. Saline eye drops soothe irritation from microscopic dust.

Frequently Asked Questions

HOW MANY DAYS SHOULD I SPEND IN MERZOUGA?

Two days allow you to experience both a sunset camel ride and a dawn 4x4 dune excursion without feeling exhausted from the 9-hour mountain drive from Marrakech or Fes.

CAN I DRIVE A NORMAL 2WD RENTAL CAR ALL THE WAY TO MERZOUGA?

Yes. The entire N13 highway from Midelt through Erfoud, Rissani, and straight into Hassilabied and Merzouga is paved with smooth asphalt. You park safely at your base riad, and the camp's 4x4 shuttle handles the deep dunes.

WHEN IS THE BEST SEASON TO VISIT THE ERG CHEBBI DESERT?

October through April is the best window. Daytime temperatures hover around 22°C to 28°C. Mid-winter nights (December to February) can touch freezing. Avoid June through August, when temperatures exceed 46°C.

ERG CHEBBI (MERZOUGA) VS. ERG CHIGAGA (M'HAMID): WHICH IS BETTER?

Erg Chebbi features higher, more dramatic dunes (150 meters) and is easy to reach via paved highways. Erg Chigaga offers a raw, remote experience but requires three hours of rugged off-road driving.

ARE THERE PRIVATE BATHROOMS IN THE DESERT CAMPS?

Yes, luxury bivouacs provide private en-suite ceramic flush toilets, hot running water, and solar-heated showers inside your tent. Always verify bathroom arrangements with your host.

Direct Travel Desk: WhatsApp Concierge

Unsure about road conditions, weather shifts, or finding an authentic desert camp? Message our verified on-the-ground Moroccan concierge on WhatsApp for prompt transit and bivouac recommendations.

Message the Concierge (+212 670 951 796)

Average response time: < 25 minutes • Free logistical advice

Peer Travel Community

Connect with fellow travelers and get vetted insights for your Morocco trip inside our dedicated community group.

Join the Morocco Travel Advice Facebook Group