Morocco

Atlas to the Sahara in Winter



Northern Bald Ibis by Adam Riley

Morocco, with its breathtaking scenery, rich history, mouthwatering cuisine, and superb birding, is an essential destination for both birders and travellers. As a former French protectorate, it stands out among Muslim countries for its warm hospitality, strong cultural identity, and relatively relaxed approach to tourism. The country's diverse geography supports a wide range of habitats—from the snow-capped Atlas Mountains and red sand dunes of the Sahara to lowland woodlands, wetlands, and productive agricultural regions.

Bustling cities and towns provide a cultural feast, where mud-walled buildings flank winding souks brimming with handmade carpets, crafts, and aromatic spices. Birders are equally rewarded: Morocco is home to a remarkable range of North African endemics and regional specialties, including Moussier's Redstart, Tristram's Warbler, Barbary Partridge, Levaillant's Woodpecker, Fulvous Babbler, Maghreb Magpie, Atlas Wheatear and African Blue Tit. One of the tour's primary targets is the Endangered Northern Bald Ibis, now surviving in just two wild colonies in Morocco and a reintroduced population in Spain.

Our journey begins in Marrakech, from where we head up and over the Atlas Mountains, exploring the productive woodlands of the Tizi n'Tichka Pass before enjoying our first taste of gravel desert birding en route to Boumalne-du-Dades. We'll bird the famed Tagdilt Track, set against the backdrop of snowcapped High Atlas, in search of desert larks (including Thick-billed and Greater Hoopoe-Lark), several wheatears, Trumpeter Finch, and multiple sandgrouse.

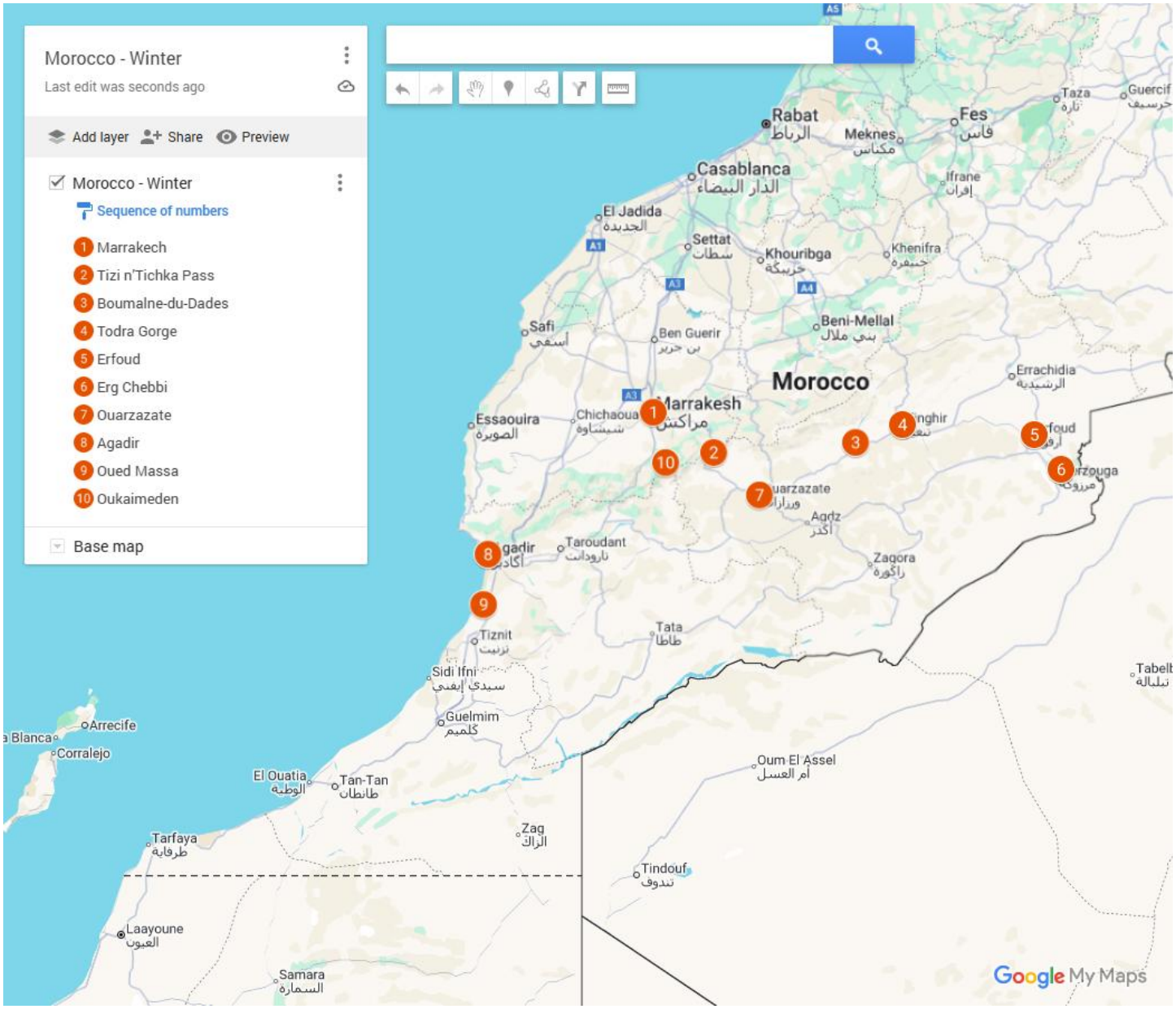
Heading further east, we'll enter the spectacular Sahara Desert near Merzouga and Erg Chebbi. We'll be

searching for desert specialists including Desert Sparrow, African Desert Warbler, Egyptian Nightjar, Cream-colored Courser, Pharaoh Eagle-Owl, and up to four species of sandgrouse.

Leaving the sand dunes behind, we set out west for Atlantic coast, visiting the seaside city of Agadir and the famous Oued Massa wetland, key areas for the Northern Bald Ibis, as well as the range-restricted Marbled Duck and a variety of wetland and estuarine species. The tour concludes in the High Atlas Mountains at Oukaimeden, where we'll search for high-altitude species such as (African) Crimson-winged Finch, Alpine and Red-billed Choughs, as well as opportunities for Levaillant's Woodpecker and Moussier's Redstart.

Itinerary & Map

Day 1	**Arrival in Marrakech**
Day 2	**Marrakech to Boumalne-du-Dades via Tizi n'Tichka Pass**
Day 3	**Tagdilt Track**
Day 4	**Boumalne-du-Dades to Merzouga via Todra Gorge & Erfoud**
Day 5	**Erg Chebbi & Merzouga**
Day 6	**Merzouga to Ouarzazate**
Day 7	**Ouarzazate to Agadir**
Day 8	**Oued Massa & Oued Souss**
Day 9	**Tamri area to Oukaimeden via Tizi n'Test Pass**
Day 10	**Oukaimeden**
Day 11	**Oukaimeden to Marrakech & final departure**


Morocco - Winter
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Sequence of numbers
1 Marrakech
2 Tizi n'Tichka Pass
3 Boumalne-du-Dades
4 Todra Gorge
5 Erfoud
6 Erg Chebbi
7 Ouarzazate
8 Agadir
9 Oued Massa
10 Oukaimeden
Base map
Rabat
Fes
Meknes
Casablanca
El Jadida
Settat
Khouribga
Khenifra
Beni-Mellal
Safi
Ben Guerir
Morocco
Marrakesh
Essaouira
Chichaoua
Errachidia
Ouarzazate
Agadir
Taroudant
Zagora
Tiznit
Tata
Sidi Ifni
Guelmim
Arrecife
Corralejo
El Ouatia
Tan-Tan
Oum El Assel
Tarfaya
Zag
Tindouf
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Birding sites in detail

Tizi n'Tichka Pass. This high pass takes us above the treeline and then drops into beautiful, wooded valleys. Here we will search for any woodland species such as the striking Common Firecrest and Short-toed Treecreeper and this site also provides our best chance for Red Crossbill. With a little luck, we may have our first sightings of Levaillant's Woodpecker, while Eurasian Goshawk is a species worth keeping an eye out for. Time permitting, we'll make a stop at a local Argan Oil store.



Levaillant's Woodpecker by David Hoddinott

Tizi n'Tichka Pass to Boumalne-du-Dades. Descending into the Dades Valley, we'll make periodic stops en route for raptors such as Long-legged Buzzard, Bonelli's Eagle and (Barbary) Peregrine Falcon and our first chances for Moussier's Redstart, African Chaffinch, Blue Rock Thrush or House Buntings. We'll see our first Argan Trees, one of the oldest trees in the world, endemic to just a small region of only 8 000km^2 in southwestern Morocco. If we are fortunate, we may find Western Orphean Warbler in the area. Having departed the Atlas Mountains, the trees will become scrubbier and the countryside drier until we reach the 'Hollywood of the desert', Ouarzazate before continuing onwards to the quiet town of Boumalne-du-Dades.

Tagdilt Track. This famous track allows us to search for hardy species that make these stony deserts their home. The high, snow-covered Atlas Mountains contrasting with the stony desert below, makes for dramatic scenery and a memorable birding experience. The area supports a wide range of exciting desert species such as Black-bellied and occasionally Crowned and Pin-tailed Sandgrouse, scarce Cream-colored Courser, Greater Hoopoe-Lark, Temminck's, Mediterranean Short-toed and the very special Thick-billed Lark, Red-rumped, White-crowned and Desert Wheatears, Great Grey Shrike and Trumpeter Finch. Large diurnal gerbils called Fat Sand Rats are common here, often seen scuttling to their burrows, mouths stuffed with vegetation.



Thick-billed Lark by David Hoddinott

Todra Gorge. We'll drive through the amazing Todra Gorge, scarred by bizarre limestone erosion, decorated

with impressive, fortified villages and a stunning 1 000m deep cutting flanked by pink cliffs. The impressive Bonelli's Eagle, European Red-rumped Swallow, Eurasian Crag Martin, Blue Rock Thrush, Black Wheatear, Grey Wagtail, and the lovely Tristram's Warbler are all possible on the drive.



Tristram's Warbler by David Hoddinott

Little Owl can often be seen perched on walls and buildings as we pass by, and (Barbary) Peregrine Falcon has bred in the gorge, sometimes seen in flight or perched on the cliff face.

Todra Gorge to Erfoud. Our drive takes us through increasingly desolate and arid habitat. Birds that we will be on the lookout for include Desert Lark and the social Fulvous Babbler. We will also stop to check out an area for the localised Streaked Scrub Warbler, recently placed in its own monotypic family.

We'll reach the French-built administrative town of Erfoud, a small and relatively modern town dotted with both fresh produce and a few handicraft stalls. While not particularly impressive, the town is surrounded by some of the most attractive scenery in Morocco. The area to the south has extensive palm groves and lush gardens that eventually give way to vast stony plains, wadi beds and the spectacular red sand dunes of the great Sahara Desert. Time permitting, we'll make our first forays into the surrounding desert landscape for African Desert Warbler.

Erg Chebbi. Today will be an exciting one indeed as we explore the great sand dunes and surrounding stony deserts, cultivated oases and villages in 4x4 vehicles. First, we head towards the spectacular Erg Chebbi dune-fields (the largest in Morocco and said to be the highest free-standing dunes in the world). Here we search for the rare and declining Desert Sparrow and chances for many other gems such as the stunning Cream-colored Courser, Bar-tailed Lark, Greater Hoopoe-Lark, and Spectacled Warbler.



Desert Sparrow by Clayton Burne

Specials in the area include African Desert Warbler and, if we are extremely fortunate, the endangered Houbara Bustard. This bird was hunted to near extinction by Arab falconers, but improved protection and reintroduction projects have boosted their populations a little. Chances also exist for various sandgrouse species including Pin-

tailed, Crowned and Spotted. Our last few tours have even found Egyptian Nightjar in this area, though this is by no means an expected species and is normally more regular in early Spring. We will also visit a known stake-out for the majestic Pharaoh Eagle-Owl.



Greater Hoopoe-Lark by Clayton Burne

Merzouga. A nearby freshwater lake (depending on water levels and seasonal conditions) is a magnet for migrating ducks and waders, which may include Marbled, Ferruginous and Tufted Ducks, Black-necked Grebe, Black-tailed Godwit, Dunlin and Yellow Wagtail. We should also see Brown-necked Raven while driving through the desert, as well as the recently split Maghreb Lark. Date palms and orchids clog the oases and clumps of Tamarisks in the dune-field hold overwintering and migrating passerines. These may include the beautiful Bluethroat, Lesser Whitethroat, Spectacled Warbler, Eurasian Blackcap and Common Chiffchaff.

Ouarzazate. This former French Garrison and administrative centre has retained its traditional style despite recent development. The Kasbah serves as an excellent example, with the smouldering red-brown walls of the towering façade making for an impressive and memorable site. A fabulous White Stork nest rests right on the walls of the Kasbah.



Pin-tailed Sandgrouse by David Hoddinott

Barrage El Mansoor Eddabhi. Depending on water levels and shoreline access, we may pay a short visit to this large manmade lake on the edge of town. In favourable conditions, the area can support a selection of waders such as Kentish and Little Ringed Plovers, along with Western Yellow and White Wagtails, Northern Shoveler and Ruddy Shelduck. However, fluctuating water levels and reduced access in recent years have made this site less reliable than in the past. With luck, we may also encounter scarcer species such as Black Stork or the endemic Moroccan race of White Wagtail.

Dades Valley. We'll follow the Dades Valley to the Atlantic coast. The valley offers great birding and spectacular geological formations.



African Desert Warbler by David Hoddinott

Agadir. This is a delightful beachfront city in southern Morocco, host to one of the largest of the King's palaces with modern facilities and a superb shoreline. For centuries it has been an important transport hub, an essential port of call for ships and camel caravans and, more recently, for birdwatchers!

Oued Massa. This estuary and wetland area is the culmination of the River Massa's journey from the Atlas Mountains. We will search the reed-lined shores and sandbanks for Little Bittern, Eurasian Spoonbill, Glossy Ibis, Greater Flamingo, Squacco and Purple Herons, Western Marsh Harrier, and Common Kingfisher amongst many other species.

Searching further upriver where the water is less brackish may reveal several ducks, although viewing conditions and species composition can vary with water levels and vegetation growth. Good numbers of waders may also be seen including Eurasian Oystercatcher, Pied Avocet, Little Ringed, Common Ringed and Kentish Plovers, Dunlin, Curlew Sandpiper, Common Redshank and Black-tailed Godwit. A large gull and tern roost should include Yellow-legged, Mediterranean, Slender-billed and Audouin's Gulls, while Sandwich and Caspian Terns may also appear. With a good dollop of luck, we may find the skulking and notoriously difficult to see Water Rail or flush a roosting Red-necked Nightjar. Other species we will search for include Eurasian Stone-curlew, Osprey, Black-winged Kite, Great Spotted Cuckoo, Little Owl, Cetti's and occasionally Subalpine Warbler, Maghreb Magpie, Black-crowned Tchagra and seedeaters including Spanish Sparrow, Common Linnet, European Serin and European Goldfinch.



Audouin's Gull by Stephan Lorenz

A nearby site could produce Sedge Warbler, Brown-throated and Sand Martins and Marbled Duck. Barbary Ground Squirrels often occur in good numbers, and we may well encounter other small mammals and reptiles.

Oued Souss. Access to this fabulous estuary has been significantly reduced in recent times and has consequently lost most of its birding appeal. We may visit the site in the late evening to search for Red-necked Nightjar.



Moussier's Redstart by David Hoddinott

Tamri area. The region just north of Agadir is one of the few localities where it is possible to find the Endangered Northern Bald Ibis also known as the Waldrapp. Once common across central Europe, northern Africa, and the Middle East, today this strange bird only occurs naturally in two areas along the Moroccan coast - just north and south of Agadir (the population is estimated at slightly over 700 individuals as of 2025), and at a recently introduced breeding colonies in Spain and Turkey.

We will visit Oued Tamri and the surrounding coastal regions, one of the best-known areas for this species and, with a little luck, secure a sighting of one of the world's rarest and most endangered birds. Oued Tamri also offers us an excellent opportunity to find Audouin's Gull, while the surrounding scrub is good for the beautiful Moussier's Redstart, Spotless Starling, Blue Rock Thrush, Sardinian Warbler and Spanish Sparrow.

Tizi n'Test Pass. We plan to cross the spectacular Tizi n'Test Pass, one of the most scenic routes in the High Atlas, passing through traditional mountain villages, dramatic valleys, and a range of productive birding habitats. This area offers further opportunities for High Atlas species we may have missed earlier in the tour, and we will keep a lookout for raptors such as Golden Eagle, as well as the possibility of Barbary Sheep near the higher elevations.



Barbary Sheep by Clayton Burne

Please note that access to the pass is dependent on current road and weather conditions, including snow or ongoing maintenance work. Should the route be deemed unsafe or impractical, we will take an alternative route while adjusting our birding plans accordingly.

Ourika Valley. As we travel towards Oukaimeden, the road winds through valleys and impressive scenic passes,

where we will be treated to breathtaking and dramatic views of the surrounding valleys and quaint villages perched atop steep slopes. We will make several birding stops in the lower part of the valley for the unique Moroccan subspecies of White Wagtail, House Bunting and various egrets and herons.



Crimson-winged Finch by Clayton Burne

As we wind our way up to higher altitudes, we will keep watching for the scarce Golden Eagle, coveys of Barbary Partridge, Pallid Swift, and further chances for the north African endemics; Levaillant's Woodpecker and Moussier's Redstart. In stands of juniper trees, we should find African Blue, Great and Coal Tits, Common Firecrest, Short-toed Treecreeper and Hawfinch. Fat White-throated Dippers reside along the region's fast flowing streams and, if we are fortunate, we may find both Common and Blue Rock Thrushes.

Oukaimeden. Situated at an elevation of 2,600m in the High Atlas, Oukaimeden is a popular ski resort surrounded by snow-capped mountains and conifer-covered slopes. Around the resort, we should see flocks of swirling, coughing choughs representing both Alpine and Red-billed at close quarters, along with several Horned Larks from an isolated resident population. Other target species at this high elevation include small flocks of the African subspecies of Crimson-winged Finch (a localized bird whose numbers here are closely tied to snow conditions), Mistle Thrush, Eurasian Wren, Eurasian Jay, Black Redstart, European Robin, Common Wood Pigeon, Cirl and Rock Buntings, Rock Sparrow, Great Spotted Woodpecker, and a range of raptors such as Long-legged Buzzard, Peregrine Falcon, Eurasian Sparrowhawk and Bonelli's Eagle.

Winter conditions can be severe at this altitude, and heavy snowfall may restrict access to certain areas, the ski resort completely, or reduce bird activity.

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease		Moderate. Suitable for most birding / wildlife interest levels.
Birding Ease		Easy to moderate. Most species provide good visuals in open conditions; a handful of target species may require repeat efforts.
Accommodation		Comfortable.
Walking / Trails		Mostly short walks, some on stony/gravel ground, some soft sand (beaches & deserts). Snow/ice underfoot is a distinct possibility.
Vehicles / Roads		Good quality tarred roads for the most part. Comfortable minivan/minibus depending on group size. Some long drives. Some 'birding from the bus' due to habitat.
Photography		Good to very good. Lighting can be challenging. No dedicated hides or feeders.
Annoyances		Temperatures can be variable. Often referred to as a cold land with a hot sun.

Financial Arrangements and Important Notes

Tour dates, prices, single supplement, approximate flight costs and tour spaces are displayed on our website.

Tour inclusions:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to lunch on day 11;
- All lodgings;
- Drinking water;
- All ground transportation during the tour;
- All reserve entrance fees;
- All guiding services
- Tips for local guides, drivers and services.

Tour exclusions:

- Visa fees;
- ANY flights;
- Any beverages (including mini-bar charges at hotels);
- Optional excursions;
- Special gratuities;
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.

Single Supplement: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

Tipping: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc.) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If you feel that they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them at your discretion.

- **Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing. The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates.**
- **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registrations, a small group supplement will be offered to confirm the tour.**
- **Tour prices are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**
- **The designated tour leader/s may be changed at short due to unforeseen circumstances.**
- **The itinerary is indicative only. Changes may need to be made to the order in which the tour is conducted, or some of the venues we visit closer to departure. We will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**

- Morocco is a Muslim country. The drinking of alcohol is strictly restricted to certain tourist hotels and may only be sold to non-Muslims. It is an offence to consume alcohol outside of these specified hotels, or in view of the public. We therefor do not permit participants to purchase or consume any alcoholic drinks for consumption outside of these hotels.
- Much of our time is spent in vehicles, as we do have to cover long distances to get to the best areas for birds. The more luggage you pack the less room there is in the vehicle, so it is important for the comfort of your fellow travellers that you do not over-pack. Kindly stick to 20kg (44lb) for check in luggage and 8kg (18lb) for hand luggage.
- High temperatures can be expected at some locations on this tour. We do not however have any strenuous walks, and it is generally easily manageable. Nights and mornings can get very cold in the desert and High Atlas Mountains so please make sure you bring enough layers.
- Some species may only be seen at distance (waders, gulls, sandgrouse), a personal scope can be useful.

Arrival and Departure Details

Day 1 of the tour is set aside as an arrival day, and you may arrive at any time in advance of our introductory group dinner. The tour will conclude in the late afternoon of day 11 in Marrakech.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your Tour Confirmation package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

Marrakesh Menara International Airport, Marrakesh (IATA: RAK) is the main port of entry and exit for this tour and is well serviced by several airlines.

Visa requirements differ by country, nationality of the traveller and duration and purpose of your intended stay. It may be necessary to obtain a visa or an electronic travel authorization in advance of your travel. It is therefore vitally important that you check with your travel agent/consulate/embassy for exact visa requirements.

DO NOT book any flights until the Rockjumper Team have officially confirmed the tour.