



Dar Ahlam



At a Glance

This incredibly special, 14-room restored Kasbah in the remote desert oasis of Skoura, a five-hour drive from Marrakech, is an ideal retreat for relaxing, but Dar Ahlam is also an entry point into cultural immersion and gorgeous Moroccan landscapes.

Indagare Loves

- The on-property dining, which showcases spices from the best purveyors in Morocco
- The tranquil, expansive gardens filled with palm trees
- The adventures by foot, camel, quad bike or 4×4 into the surrounding desert
- The personal decorative touches that bring warmth to the rooms

Dar Ahlam Review

Tucked away down a dirt road in a remote oasis in southern Morocco, Dar Ahlam, or the House of Dreams, is an exquisite hideaway. Highlights of a stay range from lying by the

pool and dining on some of the best gourmet food in Morocco, to visiting a remote region inhabited by Berbers and Bedouin and exploring a traditional side of the country.

The passion project of a Frenchman, Thierry Teyssier, who fell in love with a little-touristed area, the ancient Kasbah took almost two years to restore. Local craftsmen cut windows in the façade, fashioned wooden ceilings of bamboo and olive wood, carved arched wooden doorways and painted the walls in native *Tadelakt* style but in an innovative palette. Finally Teyssier, who personally oversaw the décor, added his collection of treasures that he picked up on his worldly travels. One suite, for instance, contains antique birdcages and another has an enormous painting from India.

Each of Dar Ahlam's 14 accommodations suites different, but all bear a nomadic taste, which mixes textiles from Paris and Marrakech with straw carpets from Mexico and wool ones from Italy. Some bathrooms have colorful tiles; others have wood-burning fireplaces at the foot of the tub. Every stairway, hallway or courtyard delights with a new mix of lanterns, carpets, tiles or objects.

Seasons bring change as well with heavier curtains and carpets laid down in winter and Moroccan cashmere shawls hanging in each closet. In fact, setting a scene is a motif that dictates each day at Dar Ahlam. There is a main salon, pool area and hammam for spa treatments, but there is no lobby nor dining room. Rather, every meal is served in a new setting. Guests arrive at the salon when they would like to eat and are escorted to a new venue: a table on the lawn, a picnic in the garden, terrace on the ramparts, a cozy alcove in the Kasbah or a candle-lit tent.

Activities, too, are orchestrated for drama, so treks through the Valley of Roses end with a picnic by a river and sunset may be celebrated with cocktails or tea on an isolated hilltop furnished with cushions and carpets. The region offers incredible hiking as well as opportunities to experience traditional village life with Berber guides. For the more adventurous guests, the hotel arranges an overnight in the desert to sleep in tents under the stars. (Note: there is no fitness facility, no phones in the rooms and internet only in the main salon and the junior suites.)

The staff comes from the local village, and Dar Ahlam's nine acres of gardens (one of which supplies the chef with vegetables), were designed by one of the gardeners behind the makeover of the Tuileries in Paris but are now maintained by a team of twenty Berbers from Skoura. The chef, also born in Skoura, has benefited from frequent crash courses with visiting French chefs, who have collaborated with him on combining local ingredients and traditions with international savoir-faire. The results: each meal manages to balance sophistication with an appreciation of the rustic beauty of the environs.

Breakfast at Dar Ahlam may include bowls of preserves and sliced kiwis or pomegranate from the garden with freshly baked breads, honeyed crepes and sugared sponge cake; while lunch could be grilled chicken skewers or minced beef accompanied by carrot and fennel salad and green beans dressed in a pomegranate vinaigrette with peanuts. After one meal here, it is easy to understand why so many Parisians return regularly. This really is, as its nickname says, a house of dreams.

Who Should Stay

Dar Ahlam is ideal for couples looking for a romantic place to relax and families or travelers seeking an authentic adventure in the desert.

Getting There

Ouarzazate, the closest airport, is a thirty-minute drive away, but flights are infrequent, unreliable and are often scheduled for odd hours. Most people charter flights or make the five-hour drive from [Marrakech](#).

- *Melissa Biggs Bradley on February 27, 2014*

