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## Satvada Retreats yoga & walking holiday review | yoga holiday, Morocco



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### MINDFUL MOVEMENT (AND CAKE) IN THE ATLAS MOUNTAINS

**The quick read:** Satvada Retreats' 5-day yoga, mindfulness meditation and walking retreat runs on set dates throughout the year and is based at a kasbah at Tahanaout, in the spectacular foothills of the Atlas Mountains. The vibe is gentle, mindful and uncompetitive, so these retreats suit beginners just as much as they do the experienced practitioner. The accommodation is traditional – in a serene setting – and the food rustic and good, including cake and wine if you want it. There are superb guided walks, a hammam (with so-so massages) or it's just a 30-minute drive from Marrakech for the souk. You're almost guaranteed to come back from the holiday feeling inspired and restored.

**Budget: ££**



**Exploring the foothills of the Atlas Mountains**

couples – although heterosexual partners might find the man in a minority of one! The retreat attracts interesting women. In our case, 15 of them. Those who like wine and cake are welcome.

**Who it's best for:** This is a walking and yoga holiday rather than a hardcore retreat for die-hard yogis. It's perfect for beginners, but those with more experience can enjoy going back to basics and whatever your level, you have the option of private workshops (included in the price) in which to work on alignment. The mindful, gentle style won't suit, say, Bikram devotees. It's great for solo travellers, groups or

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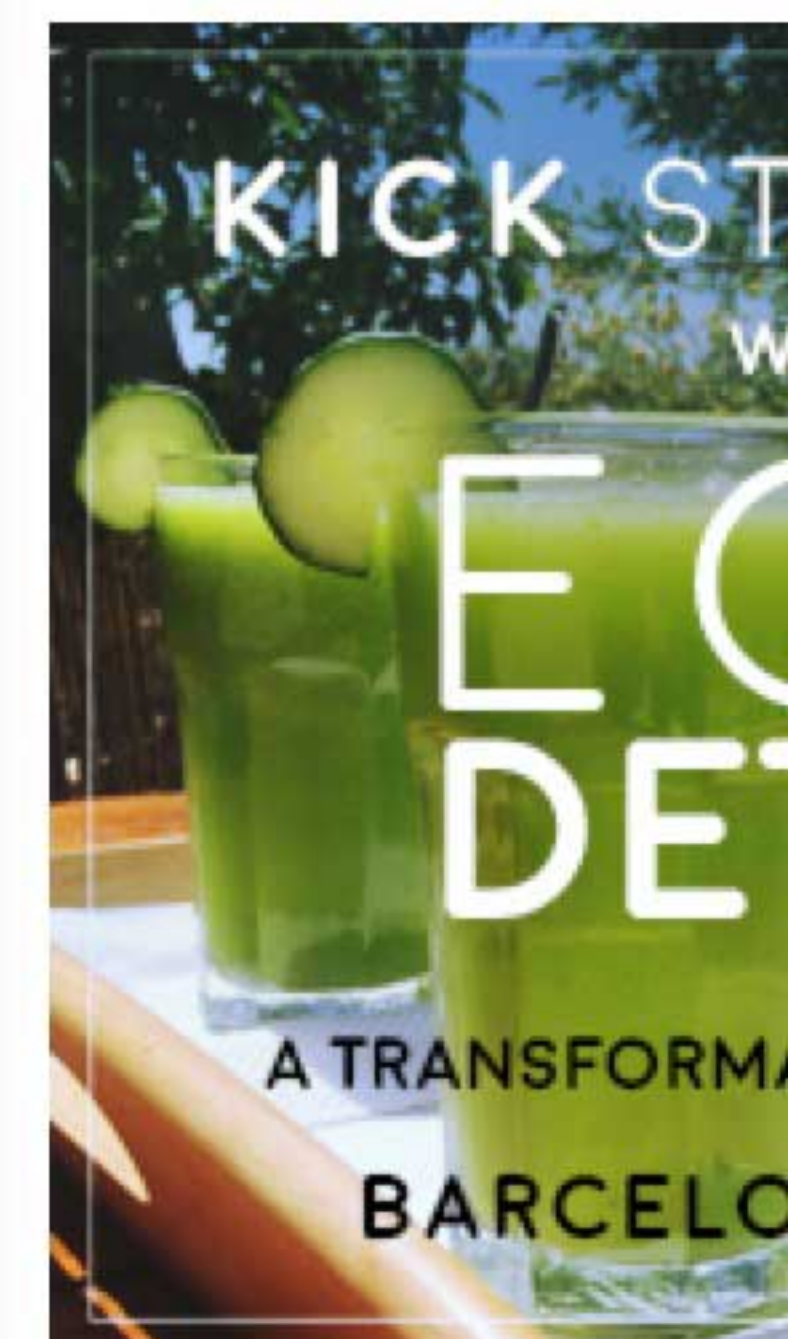
QUOTE

'In the cave you fear to enter  
seek'

Joseph Campbell

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**What you can do:** Satvada Retreats uses six different teachers on its retreats, so who you get will depend when you go. On our week in Morocco, Lucia Cockcroft taught, assisted by her partner Darren Cooper (who corrects yogis' positions whilst Lucia runs the class). There are twice-daily 90-minute yoga sessions: Hatha flow in the morning on the al fresco terrace, and a mixture of Restorative Yin and Mindfulness in the evening in the yoga hall. (Mindfulness is a large part of the teaching.) Over five mornings the yoga is built into quite a strong practice. But the focus is also on self-care, discovering a new place and going for walks.



**Yoga class with Lucia Cockcroft**



**Trotting out on Arab ponies**

The walks include visits to Berber villages, tea in a Berber house and even a 10-mile hike in the mountains. For an extra charge you can go into Marrakech to shop and sightsee or go horse riding on frisky Arab ponies. Or simply sit on a bench in the pretty garden to read and enjoy the stupendous views.

The outdoor pool is unheated, which makes you catch your breath when swimming in November. Otherwise you can book a body scrub (using traditional black soap containing olives and eucalyptus followed by a clay body mask containing aromatic plant extracts) and massage (at additional

cost) in the hammam. You'll need a lot of patience if you want to pick up your emails – so, don't bother, just enjoy the digital detox instead.

**Where you stay:** It's a kasbah – which translates as an imposing house on top of a hill...and it lives up to this description. It's built in a 'U' shape with its arms cuddling a 10-acre garden-cum-oasis with the Atlas mountains at its fingertips. The design is sensitive and fits in with the local Berber villages with its brown-red local sandstone walls. Plus it boasts hand-made clay tiles floors and interesting eucalyptus wood and cane ceilings.



**A view of the kasbah – the house on the hill**



**Bedrooms are spacious with great views**

The interior décor is traditional, lacks a woman's touch and is a tad uncomfortable. It could do with more squishy sofas, reading lights and comfy chairs in the bedroom and outside. There are 26 bedrooms and suites: spacious with heavenly views, locally made furniture and en-suite tadelak bathrooms. But the towels are scratchy. The yoga hall has a stone floor and three large hanging Moroccan lamps, perfect for meditative moments. The yoga terrace boasts a to-die-for panorama over the rising sun and Mount Toubkal.

Tweets by @Queen

**Queen of Retreats**  
@QueenofRetreats

Reasons to #retreat: rev  
[bit.ly/2i6ViAE](http://bit.ly/2i6ViAE)



♡ ↗

**Queen of Retreats**  
@QueenofRetreats

Check which #yoga #ho  
into QoR founder Carolin  
the @guardian [bit.ly/2iD](http://bit.ly/2iD)



♡ ↗

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**How was it for us:** I love the serene setting and still, clear air which sometimes reverberates with the call to prayer from distant mosques. The morning yoga practice is blissful – overlooking the rising sun and snow-peaked mountains. The practice is slow and gentle and Lucia focuses on making us listen to our bodies. She teaches in a mindful way, taking care of the breath and alignment. My head is full of interference, so I find the mindfulness practice in the evenings challenging – but it is very relaxing.

I adore the guided walks through pine forests, olive groves and up red mountains with cacti and purple mountain flowers. (Particularly enjoyable when the group drops to seven people. I'm not a fan of walking with a big group.) Our guide, Abdul, points out scorpion holes, tortoises and Berber villages new to electricity and water. He shows us where to find quartz – I bring home a beautiful piece – and even takes us for tea in a village house with goats and sheep.

My 20 -year old daughter, Anya, joined me on the trip... She loved the walks in the Atlas Mountains and enjoyed the yoga when she wasn't sleeping – though she found her mind too buzzy to really settle into the meditations.

The Berber staff in the kasbah are delightfully friendly and attentive and the food good. And our group is a lovely one of interesting and open-minded women, ranging from a novelist to nurse. I go with my daughter, and we spend free time (plenty of it) reading and lolling happily in the sun. The only thing I don't enjoy is my hammam treatment: it is not hot enough, and the massage is mediocre. Mornings start early – yoga is at 7:30am. But I find myself bouncing out of bed. Overall I feel relaxed and nourished spiritually and physically.



**This retreat left us feeling supple & restored**

**People watch:** Lucia Cockcroft, a Brit, runs the retreat with passion, with assistance from her (business and romantic) partner Darren Cooper. She gets top points for her calm aura, mellifluous voice (especially when reading mystical poems at the end of sessions) and her ability to vary the practice and step up its intensity day by day.

**Food watch:** Food is good, plentiful, healthy and home-cooked: a mixture of rustic Moroccan and French, and chefs can accommodate specific dietary requirements. For breakfast there are Berber eggs (made with tomatoes and herbs), pancakes and juice from just-picked oranges. For lunch there's a vegetarian buffet, including salads (like French beans with flavoursome tomatoes) and dishes like gratin of cauliflower.



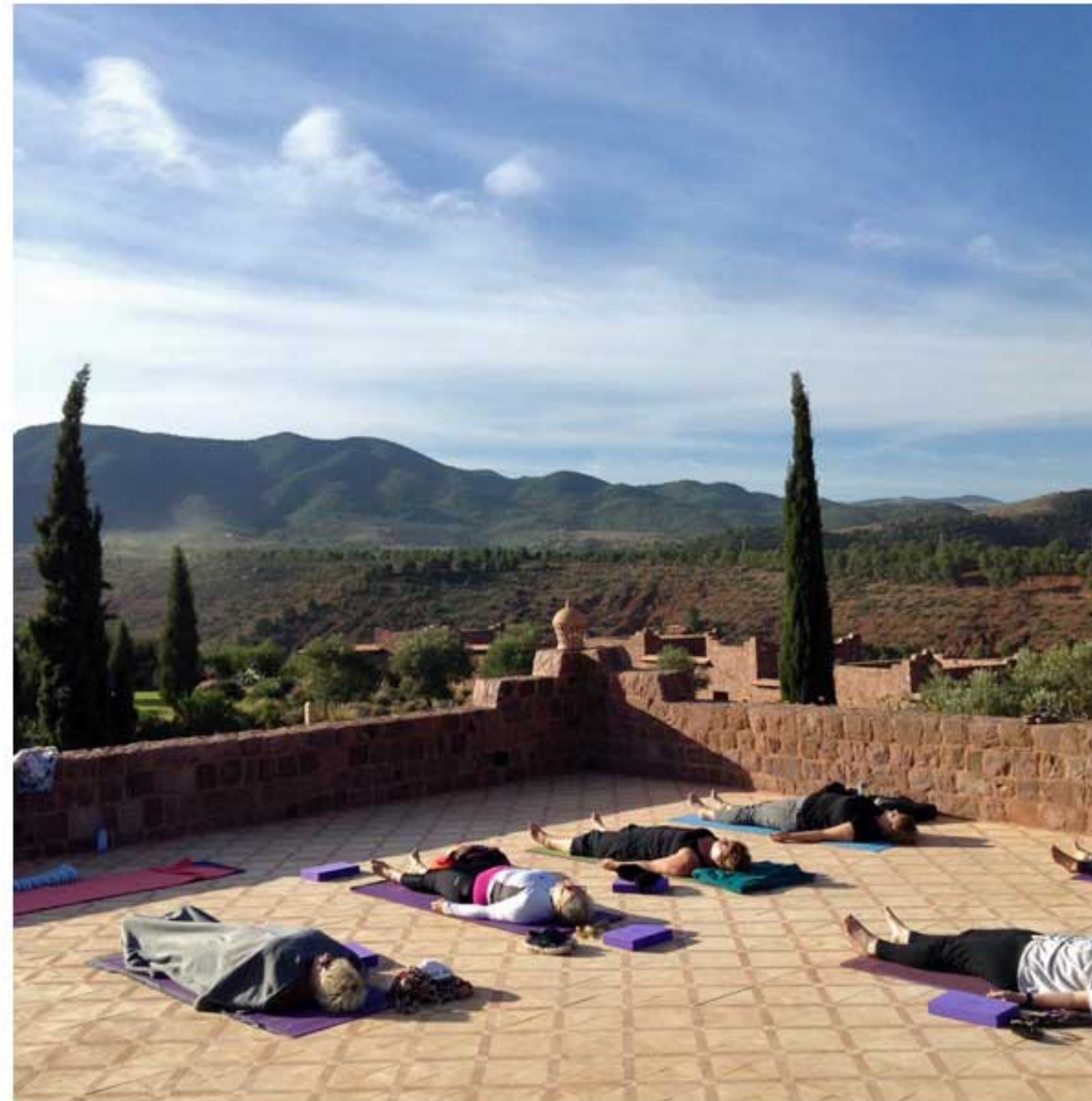
**Mealtime choices are plentiful**



**Reviewer Caroline Phillips having fun with her daughter, who joined her on the yoga holiday**

Dinner includes a choice of three courses (selected from six options) that may include excellent Jerusalem artichoke soup then chicken tagine with preserved lemons and lemon flan.

This is not a retreat for the hair-shirt brigade: there's beer and wine (at an extra charge) for those who want it. And for tea, slabs of delicious cake: think chocolate or plum tart, and Moroccan mint tea poured from on high. They try to use local produce and cater for specific diets. Meals are convivial, taken at a communal table.



**Inhaling clear mountain air**

**👑 What's queenly:** You'd be hard pushed to find a more serene and beautiful spot – with its Moroccan-mint-clear air, outlook over verdant gardens with cypress, almond and olive trees and the mountains cape, and true silence.

**What's lowly:** The resident owner-cum-manager of the kasbah is prone to Victor Meldrew moments (for our global readers, Meldrew's a cantankerous fictional character from the BBC's *One Foot In The Grave*).

**Insider tip:** There's no television and

internet is patchy (at best) in the Atlas mountains, so bring lots of good books and enjoy the enforced digital detox.

**Price with a companion:** From £849 per person sharing a twin or double room, including all meals, guided walks, accommodation and yoga/meditation classes.

**Price going solo:** From £949 per person alone in a room, including all meals, guided walks, accommodation and yoga/meditation classes.

**Value for money:** Good value with no hidden costs.

**Sister retreats:** [Satvada Retreats](#) runs a variety of group yoga holidays in the UK, Croatia and Morocco. We have also reviewed their [Art of Relaxation weekends](#) in Suffolk and their [Wellbeing Weekends in Marrakech](#).