

# SAHARA PILGRIMAGE

## DESERT LIFE



WALI & ARIËNNE VAN DER ZWAN  
7 – 18 OCTOBER 2019

*Calling all lovers! It is time to break camp in this material world!*

*From the Universe, I hear the drum of departure calling me.*

*The driver was up long ago and prepared the camels.*

*He says it's not his fault we are still asleep – wake up!*

*The hubbub of departure surrounds us – camel bells behind and ahead.*

*Sand, Silence and Sacredness are qualities that the Tunisian Desert abounds in. The experience of the Desert can be so powerful that many travelers keep returning. On request of many, in 2019 Wali & Ariënne will return to the Sahara for the fifth time. To wander and wonder, to retreat and rejoice, to laugh and love and most of all to be one with the Desert and thus deepen the contact with the inner self.*

### Program



Desert life is deeply connected with the spirituality of the Middle East and North Africa. One day in the desert, alone with the elements, makes you understand more about Unity in Diversity than any book can tell you. Similarly, a desert sunrise can make you feel the First Light the Sufis talk about. Noah was asked to build a boat in the middle of the desert. The Jewish people had to cross the desert to reach the Promised Land – an

allegory that applies to all of us. Many prophets like Moses, Jesus and Muhammad were put to the test in the desert. The powerful image of the caravan for the journey we call life, our sense of direction ('the straight path') and our need of shelter or a guide all are images that rise from the desert sands.

During our pilgrimage, walking the sand as the prophets of old have done, we'll have the opportunity to experience this and dive deeper into the spirituality of the Sufis and beyond.

## Itinerary



After flying in to Djerba, the group will meet in Douz, an oasis town on the border of the Sahara. From there we'll go into the desert to meet the Bedouin and say goodbye to civilization as we know it to be guided into the Desert by the Bedouin into another civilization. One without television, radio, internet, or public transport. We walk by foot, with camels carrying our luggage, so we can feel how the

rocky sand changes into silky sand, can wonder at all footprints from animals that we most likely never will see and be amazed how people actually can live here, as these Bedouin did until some 30 years ago.

We'll walk to a deserted oasis with a nearby well. There we'll stay five days, preparing ourselves for the retreat part of the program with the possibility of an individual retreat with a night out on your own in the desert. All under the caring eyes of the Bedouin. The preparation will consist of Sufi practices, Dances of Universal Peace, sharing circles, stories and the like. All participants will have plenty of free time during the day to digest all experiences. The Bedouin will cook for us (there's nothing like fresh baked desert bread!) and in the evening they'll sing and dance around the camp fire. You may want to join them!

## Impression of an earlier journey



*Our caravan counts 21 participants, 22 camels and 8 Bedouin. We're tiny in the immense Sahara, but a caravan ten times as big would have been just as tiny. 'Sahera jAMIL, how beautiful the Sahara!' old Muhammad tells us. You bet he's right!*

*The Sahara is not only beautiful, she is also inescapable. Everything is brought back to its elementary state and impossible to ignore. We have to let go of our concepts. Washing with water? Sand cleanses too! By the very absence of water dirt doesn't stick. Our nails never were so clean. The extreme absence or presence of the elements makes us aware of them more than ever. Without water everything is literally loose sand. We knew this, but now it can be experienced, just by*

*being in the desert. All we can do is go with the flow, accept what is coming and surrender to it. Concepts fall away and this way we are being cleaned inside too.*



*We sleep under the sky (a million star hotel) and wake up every morning before dawn. The first light is an awesome experience, raising as if to illuminate the whole of nature, including us.*

*Not only the First Light, but the whole journey is a chosen chance to walk in the footsteps of people like the Prophet Muhammad or Abraham, for didn't they live in comparable circumstances? The Bedouin have cell phones, but somehow time stands still here. Sand and dunes everywhere, always the same and always changing. No wonder the image of the world as Unity expressing itself through Diversity started here.*

*Every morning the Bedouin bake bread for us on the fire with ashes covering the bread. Afterwards the ashes are knocked off easily. No water, remember?*

*In the evening we eat couscous. Then it's party time. Leader Khaliefa tells us about life in the desert, other members of his tribe play drum (exciting rhythms: the Arabic culture meets Africa) and sing ballads about Hinda, the local saintly woman buried somewhat further away, and Abdul Kadr, the Sufi Sheikh honored here.*



*They don't see themselves as Sufis or Dervishes. A Dervish doesn't marry and in Tunisia Sufis make music for all sorts of festivities and weddings. No, they are proud to be Bedouin, people that never lose their way in the Desert (even in a sand storm they know their direction), live with camels and need space and freedom. Khaliefa prides himself in never seen a school from the inside. Yet he can read and write in Arabic and French and is by all standards a highly educated man.*

*Now they live in a village, for the oasis where they used to spend the hottest part of the summer has dried up. So the children go to school. Khaliefa's father stayed in the desert, traveling with tent and camel. He cannot sleep between four walls.*

*Back home in the touristic oasis town with all its luxury, we take a shower and open our bags. All we see is sand, sand, and more sand. Someone says: 'I've seen enough sand for the time being!' I look at my partner and without words, our thoughts go to the little bag of sand that we took with us for our home altar, for we cannot bear to go home without being able to see the sand.*

## **Practicalities**

### **Temperature & Physical requirements**

October in the Sahara is not too hot, not too cold, so ideal for traveling. The hike into the Desert is relatively easy and can be done by anyone with

a normal physical condition. On top of that, people have the opportunity to travel on camel back.

### **Further requirements**

Apart from a good sense of humor and an open mind, no further requirements or skills are needed for this trip. The Dances of Universal Peace are easy to learn and physically undemanding circle dances with live music and chant that can have a deep effect on the inner, sometimes meditative, sometimes invigorating and leading to ecstasy.

### **Money & Travel**

The costs for this Pilgrimage are € 880, excluding the trip to Tunisia. Some concessions (€ 750 for low income and soft currency countries) are possible. Surcharge for single room in Djerba and Douz (depending on availability): € 100.

We ask the participants to fly to Djerba, as our journey starts and ends there. From there, we'll go by bus to Douz, the oasis town in Southern Tunisia where the Bedouin live and the starting point of our Sahara experience. All travel from Djerba is included in the price. You will need some money for Desert cloths (shopping for this is an adventure in itself!) and possible souvenirs.

**Wali and Ariënne van der Zwan** are dedicated to the spiritual path since the early nineties. They have been traveling Europe and beyond, serving the Dances by making them available and deepening them through training and retreats.

Both are senior teachers in the Dances and sheikhs on the Sufi path. They guide students in mostly Western and Eastern Europe. Their style of leading combines strength with beauty, depth with lightness, joy with energy, clarity & focus with ease. Their co-teaching allows for interweaving of masculine and feminine energies.



### **Registration**

Your register by wiring your down payment of € 150 to:

W van der Zwan

SEPA: DE59 3705 0299 0341 5533 26 BIC: COKSDE33

PayPal: use our E-mail address below

Please add 'Sahara 2019' and notify us when you wire your down payment, so we can mail you the itinerary and you can book your flight.

We advise you to book your flight early and will offer you some tips for booking.

*Wali & Ariënne*

 *E-mail*

 *Website*