

WIMA Morocco Visit
by Zara Strange, WIMA International President
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On a cold Friday morning I set off for my first overnight stop in Bordeaux where I anticipated that the lower altitude to my home village and close proximity to the sea would make it feel a little warmer – wrong. Thank goodness that I had my Scottish winter riding gear to keep me reasonable warm, even though I resembled a Michelin Tyre woman. In fact, it did not really warm up until Sunday when I had reached the ancient Spanish town of Mérida.



My preferred style of travel is to be alone, setting off before 10:00am and riding until 3 or 4:00pm. I enjoy a nice evening meal, preferably local, a glass of wine and a good night's sleep in a room of my own with a decent bed and a private bathroom. I also enjoy meeting with other women motorcyclists, especially WIMA women once the day's riding is done.

So here I was in Mérida in plenty of time before sunset to take in the Roman

Amphitheatre and the Roman Theatre. Unfortunately the Museum was closed (which is a fine excuse to visit this lovely city again) so I just had a nice dinner instead, taken outside.

From here onwards to the rally site in Morocco, I was riding completely new roads for me.

One thing about getting ferries is that they can often disembark you into the middle of bustling cities, Tangier is no exception. The roads are narrow, the drivers in their cars just interested in being fastest and in the front of everyone



else but the moped and scooter riders are the worst as they appear to have no fear and no concept of straight lines, signalling or which side of the road to use. All you can really do in these circumstances is just focus on your own space and follow the satnav instructions. My first night in Morocco was in Rabat, a slightly smaller city than Tangier, still by the sea and it was here that I first learned that Moroccan people are genuinely nice and helpful. A hotel car parking man (they call them Guardians) spent 20 minutes walking me to my hotel to show me the route and was offended when I offered him a tip.



By now the temperatures were up in the high 20s.



The rally was due to start from 2:00pm on the Thursday so I added an extra overnight stop in Marrakech, which left me with a 3 to 4 hour run to Ouarzazate. By now I was quite tired so stayed close to the hotel and ate dinner in a restaurant that offered wine to buy. In fact, the only place where alcohol was not evident or offered was in Rabat.

Once you leave Marrakech the roads change, they are still mostly modern and well surfaced but no dual carriageways. In many places the road was closed for repairs, often for landslips and so there were deviations on old roads or just a temporary beaten track. There is a 7500ft elevation mountain pass which was unlike anything that I have experienced before. Very few cars on the road but slow lorries, mad taxi drivers, modern busses and the mopeds, of course. Most people simply walked, the majority were women with and without babies and there were young men. There were often no houses nearby so the women must have walked miles with their baskets. In the lower areas where there was vegetation, people tended to use donkey and mule carts. I saw very few tractors.

The rally hotel was fine, the welcome very warm with traditional singers and music and WIMA Morocco National President Dalila Mosbah and her husband coming out to welcome me to Ouarzazate. They insisted that I park my



bike on pavements adjacent to the hotel front door where magnificently attired concierge, Mohammed, would keep an eye on it for me.



This was not like any other WIMA rallies that I have attended as most of the people attending were men but the WIMA Morocco members, me, 3 members from WIMA France and 1 from WIMA Germany made our presence known and felt. There was also a group of women from Italy (not WIMA Italy) who kept a fairly low profile.

Next day, Friday, was my first non-riding day after 7 days so I joined WIMAs France and Germany and one of their partners who seems to live and ride in Morocco whilst he can afford it, before he returns to work in Germany. In the morning we visited the old Kasbah and a small carpet making premises. In the afternoon, everyone else visited a Kasbah about 20 kilometres away for lunch and a tour of a carpet factory whilst I just lazed by the swimming pool with a book.

Sunday was the big day when we rode the 130 kilometres to the Gorges du Dadès. Wow, wow, wow is all that I can say.

The roads got narrower, the desert – yes real desert sand encroached more and more onto the road and the road got steeper and steeper until it finally dropped down to the gorge itself where the road passed underneath overhanging sandstone cliffs.



The USA Consul General, Marissa Scott joined us by riding pillion on a Honda Goldwing. Her presence also meant that we had uniformed police all along the route making sure that she and the rest of us had a safe clear passage. I was seated next to Mrs Scott at the luncheon and we had a fascinating conversation about her motorcycling history with her husband and me telling her all about WIMA International, our history and our International Rally next year in Maine, North America.



On return to the hotel a buffet and party continued way past my bedtime as I planned to travel to Casablanca where I bought a new front tyre. The Moroccan roads had taken their toll on my old one (that was fitted earlier this year in preparation for my run to the WIMA Romania Rally). It would have got me home on dry roads but the forecast was for winds, rain – and snow so, for the sake of caution, I decided that a new tyre was a good idea.

My plan was to head back to Merida where I could keep an eye on the weather forecast before making a dash for home, either through Portugal to Northern Spain or straight across the central plateau to Bilbao.

As it turned out, apart

from the cold and frequent fog banks, the trip back was uneventful. Bilbao to Bordeaux was an acceptable 14C with the final run home in 16C.

My bike now needs a good service and I need a good rest 15 days 3,700 miles (6,000km) and memories to last a lifetime.

Try it yourself – you will not be disappointed.



Zara

WIMA International President.

