

## **Imlili – April 5, 2021 – Dakhla to Imlili and back, Morocco**

By Tom Allin

Yesterday was a day of taking it easy and trying to de-sand ourselves, and our clothes, luggage and the 4Runner. As for de-sanding; we made progress and hopefully someday soon we will say goodbye to the sands of the Sahara.

Today we are taking another drive into the desert. However, this drive will be with Martina not Nico and she will do all the driving. Nancy and I will be passengers.

Martina is a knowledgeable guide: (a) a Doctorate degree in Ocean Biology, (b) enjoys the outdoors, (c) has lived in Dakhla for six plus years, and (d) enjoys people. She discussed tourism, government programs, the issue of the Sahrawi independence movement, birds, oceans and of course the desert.

The primary destination is Imlili. Not the very small village but the Imlili sebkha. A sebkha is a depression with a salted bottom. The Imlili sebkha is characterized by small saltwater pools with fish and is approximately 12 km long and 2.5 km wide and 10 km deep. It is 15 km east of the Atlantic Ocean and if you know this area there are several trails to drive – I didn't see trails but Martina said we were on trails.



We stopped here to look across the narrow width of the Imlili sebka. The white is sand and the brown is the crusted sebka.



There is at least one trail across this flat and later we saw camels crossing.



From where we stop to discuss and take photos of the sebkha we drove to a parking area. The photo below is looking back at where we parked.

For the most part the flatten non-crusted areas are walking trails. Although Martina did say every once and a while someone will drive out and most typically get stuck when they drive over a sink hole/area.



Had to be a dozen or more Thekla Lark. They had no fear of humans and I think if I had some seeds they would have eaten out of my hand.



On the edge of the Imlili sabkha there are a few areas with plants growing that are highly tolerant of salt.



Tiny white flowers – it is springtime in the Sahara.

But what was most interesting were the pools of water and the fish.



The pools range in size from less than two feet to up to 120 feet with depths measured in inches to 14 feet. Each pool has its own color of water. Each pool has a break in the bottom that allows salt water to come to the top creating the pool. Additional water occurs during rainstorms and may cause two or more pools to combine for a time period before the water evaporates.



The above is what we are walking across and what I described as a “crusted surface”. Each step you take crushes the crusted surface about an inch or two creating a flat surface that are the trails you see in the photographs.





What you can't see in my photograph is a herd of camels in the far distance walking across what appears to be a lake but is a mirage.

Our next stop is an hour's drive back toward the ocean. A very nice resort with good food. We all ate fish.





You can take advantage of the pool or the ocean.

From our lunch restaurant we drove past an oyster farm and as close to the ocean as Martina dared – didn't want to get stuck. From a long distance we could make out Spoonbills, Gray Herons and a number of wading type birds.

Our time in the Western Sahara was so strange to me. There is an ocean, Dakhla has 70,000 people, there are birds and animals, there are bushes and trees – but it seems so empty and desolate. Glad we made the effort to visit but don't think I want to live here.

Why I might not want to live here: (a) it gets hot, like 120 degrees; (b) the sand is everywhere including in your apartment per Martina, your clothes and you; (c) as interesting as the scenery is it becomes monotonous very quickly; (d) it is relatively expensive because everything must be brought here; (e) Martina noted that during the windy months vs the normal breezy months the blowing sand can take your skin off and any metal must be repainted every 3 to 5 years because the blowing sand is like a sand blasting machine; (f) the food is boring; and (g) you probably have gotten the idea why you also don't want to move here.