

Timimoun:

The Algerian historic city

> Algiers- Mohamed Bokreta

Timimoun was a former meeting place of caravans bringing gold, cotton and ivory from the south and cereals and spices from the north. In this town whose predominant colour is ochre, the mosque, the Sudan Door and wall sculptures are popular sights for tourists.



The writer in the city centre

الكاتب في مركز المدينة



The High Street

الشارع الرئيسي

Timimoun is situated in the middle of the Gouarrara region at a distance of 1250 km south-west of Algiers the capital. This is one of the most uninhabitable parts of the Sahara due to the incredibly high sand dunes which shift restlessly day after day across the hot sandy planes of the desert. However, despite the region's formidable reputation, Timimoun manages not only survive but to do so in style.

It is situated between palm groves and a salt lake in a little desert oasis. The magnificent sand dunes of the Sahara rise and fall in the distance providing the city with the most picturesque backdrop. The town itself is quite small and can be divided into two sections. The old part is called "ksour" (Small village or Castle) and

most of the houses are built of red mud in a style known as "Sudanese Architecture". These homes seem to compete for space, almost climbing on top of one another as they try to gain the highest ground possible. The streets between them are narrow and in true desert fashion are shaded over by large sheets of cloth so that passing pedestrians can have some sort of relief from the blazing sun.

In the newer sections of the town which were built by the French, much of the original hostel that was once built in this newer section by the French in 1921 is now a cultural centre and a great place to spend a few hours if you are visiting. The most notable feature of this are the "gobbas" or "kobbas" which are buildings

dedicated to the marabouts or saints.

Another place worth visiting is the palmeraie of Ouled Said (30 km from Timimoun) which has a magnificent view of the traditional techniques of palm-growing as well as the foggara irrigation system.

The properties here are enclosed by mud walls which are too high to see over and the shade of the palm trees provides welcome relief. Most visitors to Timimoun use the city as a base for excursions into the uninhabitable Grand Erg Occidental. Timimoun is possibly the definitive Saharan oasis town. It is a very enchanting place, with fantastic views over an ancient salt lake to the distant dunes, especially magical on a moonlit night. ■