



I relished the challenge, of travelling on my own

Sophie Stewart heads into Tunisia's Sahara Desert for a group trek.

I was drawn to the challenge of travelling on my own, and when I book myself on the one-week Sahara Desert Trek in Tunisia, the trip sounds perfect – a short flight away and only a one-hour time difference. There are 16 of us – a refreshing mix, including two Scottish farmers on a 'boys' trip', an oven fitter, a university student and an IT specialist. We fly into the Tunisian island of Djerba, and the next morning take a short 20-minute ferry ride to the mainland. We meet our local guide, the camels are loaded up

with our luggage and we set off.

We reach our camping spot at dusk. The cooks have put up a communal tent and are preparing dinner. Around the campfire, the group swap first impressions while the cooks prepare lamb stew. We have the option of sleeping in a group Bedouin tent, but most of us opt for mats outside. I crawl into my sleeping bag and fall asleep under a starry sky.

We spend the next five days walking across a terrain that ranges from flat plateaux with low-lying lush green plants, to undulating sand dunes that test the calf muscles. It's interesting to



see the group dynamic develop in the absence of alcohol; some people are chatty, others open up over the week.

Mid-week, a sandstorm hits putting a hasty stop to group chat and we are slowed to an arduous four-hour plod. My walking boots are filled with sand and my face cream morphs into an apricot facial scrub.

On the final day, a green smudge appears on the horizon – the oasis village of Ksar Ghilane. En masse, we all plunge into its natural hot springs. We spend our final night back in Djerba. A shower has never felt so good and I appreciate every last water jet. ■

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