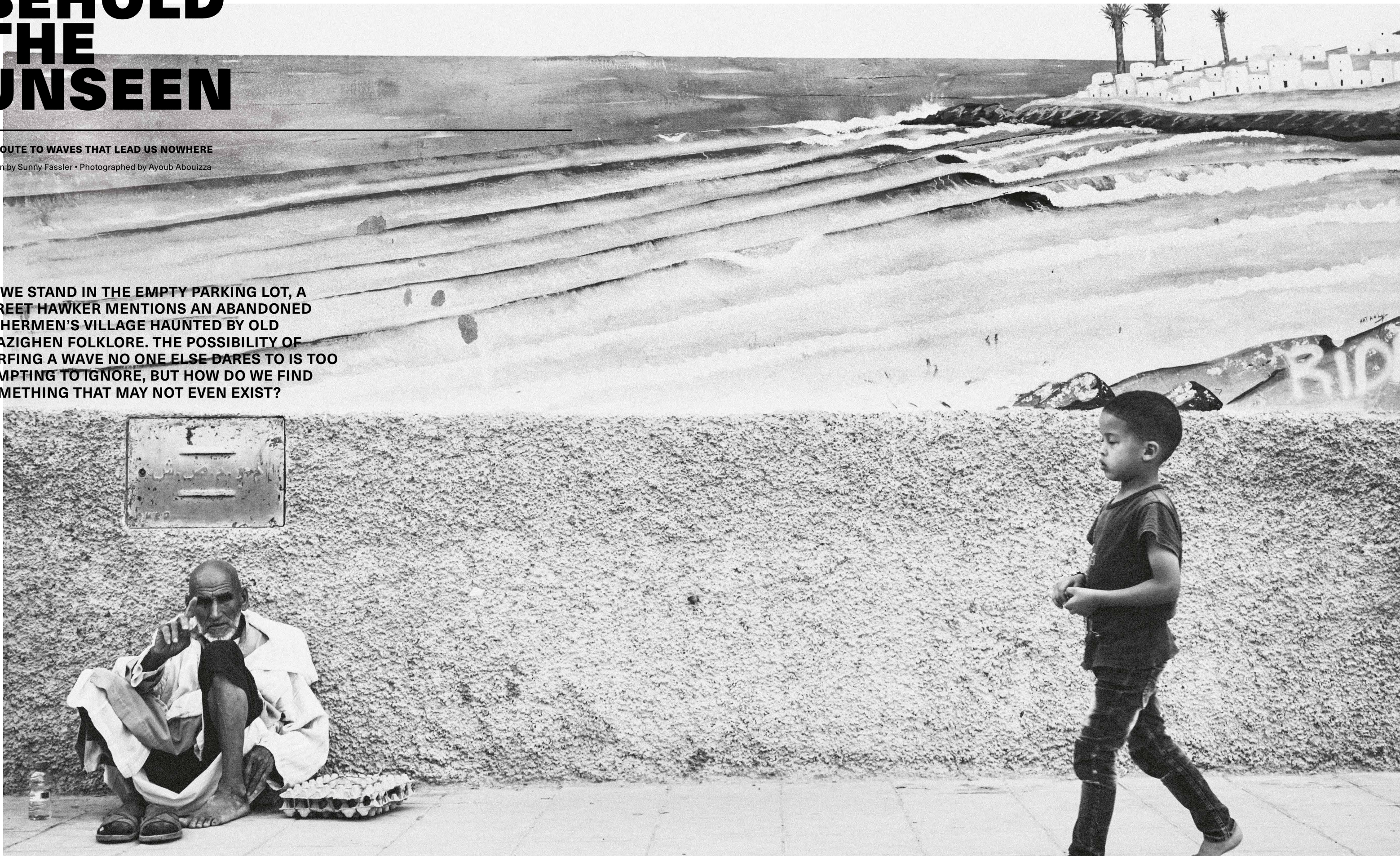


BEHOLD THE UNSEEN

EN ROUTE TO WAVES THAT LEAD US NOWHERE

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AS WE STAND IN THE EMPTY PARKING LOT, A STREET HAWKER MENTIONS AN ABANDONED FISHERMEN'S VILLAGE HAUNTED BY OLD IMAZIGHEN FOLKLORE. THE POSSIBILITY OF SURFING A WAVE NO ONE ELSE DARES TO IS TOO TEMPTING TO IGNORE, BUT HOW DO WE FIND SOMETHING THAT MAY NOT EVEN EXIST?



Previous: A Moroccan surf mural lends a little escapism to a setting where modern and ancient worlds regularly collide.
Top: A right point takes on a ghostly quality as a surfer seeks to match the offshore velocity with front-foot throttle. **Below:** When the sea is a source of livelihood.

Achraf shrugs his shoulders. “Can you pass me the tea, please? Shukran.”

I watch him prepare his cup of tea – first, the leaves. A soft ‘ting’ when the spoon hits the tea cup, follows. Boiling water pours from heights most of us wouldn’t entertain. The teaspoon wraps the porcelain cup a second time.

“Sugar. I need more sugar.”

I nod, trying to get the waiter’s attention. Achraf clears his throat and takes a sip of his tea, which takes much longer than anticipated.

“There’s no way I’ll go there with you, but I can show you where it is.”

His words echo through the busy roadside cafe in the vortex of Taghazout. “What now?” I ask, still trying to chase up some sugar.

On our third day in the country’s South West, we crossed paths with a street hawker trying to sell us mint tea, and Moroccan delights, at one of the more exposed breach breaks between Taghazout and Imsouane. We were the only ones in the parking lot. As the wind turned onshore, and the sun was about to go down, we exchanged pleasantries with a man we got to know as Taib. In a country with a vibrant trade culture, such small talk seemed familiar.

Taib moved to Agadir as a teenager, but he’s originally from a small village about two and a half hours north of Anchor Point. A village with sun-bleached houses built into cliffs and ridges to escape the sun.

“All we used to do is fish. My father is a fisherman. My grandfather and uncle too.

We live by what the sea provides us. You must visit my village.”

“Any waves around there?” I wanted to know. Taib paused. His demeanor changed. The wrinkles on his face vanished, and a sense of urgency replaced the nonchalance in his voice.

“Yes, many. Many good waves. Fish too, but not many people go there because of the rumours. Stories of ghostly figures wandering the village, capsized boats, and strange occurrences happening in and around the abandoned buildings in the village. But I can’t say if any of it is true. All I know is that my father would sometimes fish around the village when food was scarce where we lived, but he would always go with others. Alone is not good there. He would take me sometimes too. On Sundays, we used to play at the edge of the dirt track that leads into the abandoned village, but we’d never venture beyond that imaginary safety line.”

I took a sip of my tea, my mind racing with thoughts. A haunted town? It was like something out of a movie. But the idea of surfing a wave that no one else dared to was too tempting to ignore.

We kept nagging him about the wave and the village, but he refused to say more, only repeating that it was best to stay away. Despite his warning, we couldn’t shake the idea of seeing the mystical wave, which local villagers were too afraid to go near, for ourselves.

We had to find it. But how do we find something that may not even exist?

The next day, our obsession with chasing the supernatural took a back seat. It was the opening day of the first African Surf Expo, and we had a raft of commitments that required our presence. The day passed in a blur of meetings, photography

sessions and interviews, but as the sun set on the horizon, the thought of the mysterious, abandoned village crept back into our minds.

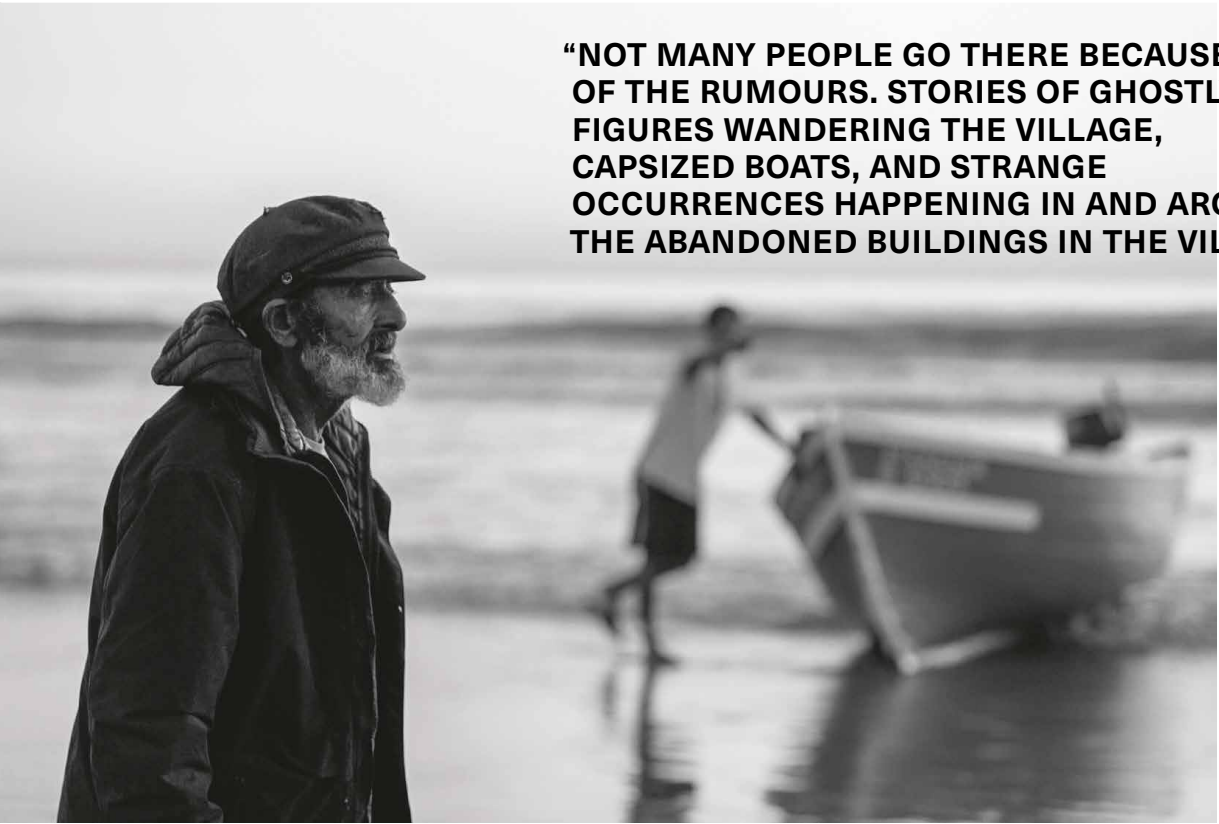
However, despite our excitement, we dedicated the next few days to our responsibilities and obligations at the Surf Expo and explored the heartbeat of Moroccan surf culture; Tamraght and Taghazout.

In the midst of all the distractions, mouth-watering tagines, and perfect right-hand points in the area, we continued searching for clues about the haunted village and its sand-coated point break. We asked around, trying to find anyone who had heard about the legend of the abandoned fishermen’s settlement.

We talked to locals, surfers, and even other travellers, but no one wanted to talk or seemed to know anything about it. We even scoured local papers and the Internet for any information or hints that could lead us to the village but came up empty.

As the Surf Expo drew to a close, our journey to uncover the mysterious village seemed to have hit a dead end. Time was running out, as we had four days left in the country. Unfortunately, our search for the elusive wave had been fruitless so far, and it seemed as if we were destined to return home empty-handed. But as luck would have it, one final encounter changed the outcome of our trip.

Earlier in the day, I’d met a French surfer who doesn’t want to be named, but let’s call him Lou. If you are familiar with Morocco you know it’s a land of many faces. From the bustling streets of Casablanca to the winding alleys of Marrakesh, each city in Morocco has its unique character and charm. But it’s not just the megacities that are diverse – the entire country is a melting pot of cultures and traditions.



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Previous: A committed goofy footer runs the gauntlet along a point where he can almost hear the rocks rattling. **Top:** Coping with Morocco in a different way. **Bottom:** Rolling wonders where the Sahara’s fringes meets the sea.

Take the coastal town of Essaouira, for example. This enchanted city is known for its beautiful beaches and laid-back atmosphere. But it’s also steeped in history and culture, with influences from the Imazighen, Arabs, and Europeans evident in its architecture, music, and cuisine. Jimmy Hendrix famously fell in love with the myriad wonders of Essaouira and tales of his visit in 1969 remain a part of the folklore.

Heading inland, you’ll find the Atlas Mountains, home to some of the most stunning landscapes in the country. This is the land of the Imazighen, the Indigenous people of Morocco, who have lived in this region for thousands of years.

Further south, you will find the desert township of Merzouga, known for its vast sand dunes and the nomadic people who call it home. The Sahara desert is one of the most iconic landscapes in the world. As the sun sets, the sky turns into a million shades of orange, gold, and red.

Throughout history, Morocco has been a hub for traders, travellers, and adventurers. The country’s strategic location at the crossroads of Europe, Africa, and the Middle East has made it an important destination for merchants, explorers, and colonisers.

As a result, many cultures have left their mark on Morocco – from the Phoenicians and Romans to the French and Spanish, which still rings true today. Morocco continues to attract artists, writers, entrepreneurs and surfers looking to be inspired by its unique blend of cultures and traditions.

This is where our story intertwines with Lou’s. His grandfather was a French textile merchant who came to Morocco

in 1931 during the French colonisation of the country and never left. His father was a kind of outlaw by nature and had foregone taking over the family textile empire to search for waves further south in the late 70s and 80s. He then passed on his passion for waves and adventures to his son – Lou, who pioneered surfing around the Dakhla Peninsula in the 2000s.

Lou became instrumental in opening up the region and introducing surf tourism as we know it to the rest of the country. He is deeply embedded in Morocco’s surfing history and has created an exclusive network of contacts all around the country.

Originally Lou and I agreed to meet for an interview segment about Dakhla and the waves beyond, but once the tapes were off, the conversation quickly turned to the deserted village and the mystical right-hand point. Lou put his hands in his pockets. His gaze drifted – we were on to something.

“That wave leads you nowhere.” He smiles, but behind that smile, I can tell there is more than he wants to reveal. His gaze returns back to the room.

“I heard the rumours, but I think it’s just bar talk. Stories parents tell their kids to stay out of trouble. I can’t say if any of it is true or not, but I think I might know someone who can help. Give me your phone. Someone who used to work for me is from that area. I remember him talking about it. Here you go.”

Lou handed the phone back to me. “Achraf Omar. He is a good guy. I’ll tell him you’ll text.”

I thanked Lou and quickly sent Achraf a message introducing myself, asking if he

knew anything about the wave and the village. But as the hours passed, anxiety replaced optimism, and I began to concede it wasn’t meant to be.

But just as I had all but given up hope, my phone vibrated. It was a message from Achraf. “Can you meet me tomorrow at 10:30 am?” it said, accompanied by Google Maps coordinates.

“Sounds good. I’ll see you tomorrow. I appreciate the help, man.” I replied.

The next morning. We sat at the second-last table from the window overlooking Hash Point. Fabricio ordered a Coke. I stuck to coffee. We were a few minutes late. Achraf was already sitting across from the empty chair I was about to occupy, typing on his phone.

“I’ll show you how to get there,” he said, his voice low and serious.

“But you should know, not many people go there. Not because it’s dangerous, but because of the legends surrounding it. Old Berber folklore says the abandoned fishermen’s village at the foot of the sand-coated point is haunted.”

“Haunted? Out of Achraf’s sight, I kicked Fab, a former Argentinian ex-basketball pro turned surfer and cameraman, in the shin. “So it’s true,” he mumbled.

“No one knows for sure, but I don’t want to find out”, Achraf said, somehow embarrassed.

“But if you’re determined to go there, I’ll tell you how to get there. It’s easy. Take the road out of Taghazout and head north to Smimou. Look for the old mosque.

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Below: A rebounding corner provides Pat Gudauskas with the juice for a soaring frontside pop.



Once you pass it, take the first left turn and follow that road for about 10 minutes until you reach a fork in the road. Take the right path until you get to a small dirt road on your right. Follow it until you reach the village. The forecast looks perfect for the next few days, too, by the way.”

I nodded, thanking Achraf for his help. We said our goodbyes, paid the bill and rushed out of the cafe. We were off – and there was no way of knowing what would be waiting for us at the end of that road.

The next day, we set out early in the morning. We followed Ashraf’s directions and studied the maps as well as we could. We were confident about where we were heading, but it required some guesswork and luck on our part.

We drove through winding roads and rocky terrain, passing small villages and stretches of desert. The further we went, the more the landscape changed until we reached the edge of a ragged embankment.

As the road cleared, we could see a small cluster of buildings. “That’s it”, Fabricio said. “And that”, I added, pointing at a rock formation covered in white lines stretching out along the horizon, “is the wave we’ve been looking for.”

Unfortunately, we didn’t get to surf that day. For reasons unbeknownst to us, the waves stopped pulsing, despite plenty of swell and offshore winds further south. It seemed as though the waves had just vanished as soon as we arrived. I couldn’t shake the feeling that someone – something – was trying to tell us; ‘this is a sign!’

But despite all this, it was one of the most incredible adventures I have ever been on. We may not have caught any waves that day, but we caught a glimpse into a world of mystery and legend. Taib and his stories of growing up near the village, the narrow dirt track, the empty, cracked houses, and the anticipation of finding something that was only a whispered truth had left an indelible mark on our hearts and minds.

As we drove back to Taghazout, we couldn’t help but feel a sense of awe and wonder at the beauty of the ocean and the stories and legends that had been passed down through generations. We might never find out the whole story, but we concluded that some things are perhaps better left undiscovered.

And so, we left Morocco with a newfound appreciation for the beauty and magic of the unorthodox, the memories of the tea-sipping conversations, and the legends of the haunted village that will stay with us forever. ●