

Jordan

SPECTACULAR WADI RUM, MADE FAMOUS BY LAWRENCE OF ARABIA, IS AN EXPERIENCE NOT TO BE FORGOTTEN

About Jordan

A country which figures prominently in Muslim, Christian and Jewish holy books, the population is predominantly Muslim (92%) with Christians at about 6%. It is bordered by Iraq, Syria, Israel, the West Bank and Saudi Arabia.



When To Visit

Spring or autumn is the ideal time to visit. Summers are very hot and the winters biting cold in most of the country.

Visa Requirements

All foreigners need a visa to enter Jordan. You can get one either from a Jordanian consulate in your country or at the airport when you arrive. Always keep your passport on you, especially near the Israeli border.

Getting There

The only international air link is to Amman. There are buses to and from Syria, Iraq, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.



Bahrain Connection

Bahrain and Jordan are both kingdoms, with both countries' rulers – Bahrain's King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa and Jordan's King Abdullah – ascending to power within four months of each other in 1999.



Travel Tip

Patience is the key at borders, particularly in Middle Eastern countries, where formalities can seem to go on forever.

By Deirdre Fitzgerald

OUR JORDAN JOURNEY BEGINS IN THE ANCIENT city of Petra. Built in the 3rd century BC by the Nabataeans, Petra was actually carved into the rocky cliffs that lined the city. One of the most spectacular aspects of the site is the rose hue of the rock which is mostly sandstone littered with iron.

The entrance of the city is the Siq, a passage over a kilometre long with cliffs reaching 80 metres up on both sides. This chasm in the rock was caused by tectonic forces and is worth the trip in itself. The Siq allowed the city to be easily defended as the Nabataeans took command of the trade routes from Damascus to Arabia.

The wealth of the city is very apparent as tombs, temples, a theatre, and countless other carved structures stretch along the length of the city. We were convinced, thankfully, to mount donkeys for the sweaty hike up to the monastery. The climb includ-



The Friendship Tour vehicle at Wadi Rum, where T.E. Lawrence both fought and wrote.

ed 856 steps and incredible views of Petra as well as the distant hills of Palestine. As our donkeys raced each other down the hill, and back through the city and Siq, the amazing expanse of Petra became even

PAGE OPPOSITE:
Camels in the ancient city of Petra.





Awad makes tea outside his Bedouin tent in the desert.



The city of Petra was actually carved into the rocky cliffs.



Travel Tip
If you're unfamiliar with sand dunes and wadis, don't take risks with trick driving. Experience counts in desert terrain.

more apparent to us. We didn't even see the entire site and were thoroughly convinced that at least two full days could have been spent there. Later, we relaxed over lunch on the roof of the very lovely Mövenpick Hotel, a perfect spot to contemplate the city's 2,300-year history.

UP THE ROAD FROM PETRA IS THE VILLAGE OF Taybeh, built in the mid 19th century by the Layathineh Arabs. It is a typical of Jordanian mountain villages. In 1990, the Jordan Tourism

Investment began to develop a plan to restore part of the old village into a five star hotel resort. The result is a re-creation of an authentic village, including a suq and bakery, that functions as a comfortable and sought-after hotel.

The construction, or rather re-construction, of the village was done in such a way as to conserve as many resources as possible and also to avoid impacting the local environment. Taybet Zamen is definitely worth a visit and the authentic Turkish *hammam*, while perhaps not typical to a mountain village, is a perfect



The dunes at Wadi Rum are arguably the most spectacular in all of Arabia.



way to refresh the body after hiking around Petra.

Racing the sun across desert and over rocky outcroppings, our expectations were high as we approached the famous Rum at sunset. Wadi Rum is spectacular and humbling. The area became known around the world with the Arab revolt in the early part of the last century. TE Lawrence both fought and wrote there.

The sky was still light when we reached the valley, but the desert floor was already in the shadow of the majestic jewels, or hills, and red-stained cliffs that

surround the immense wadi. We were lucky enough to meet Auda Karim Al Zlebia, a resident of the little town that is nestled at the entrance to the Wadi Rum Protected Area. He took us into his home for an unforgettable evening of food, music, conversation, and of course...tea.

After the meal, Auda put us in the hands of his brother, Awad, who took us out into the desert to spend the night in a Bedouin camp. It was the camp of their mother's family and we were offered a warm fire, sleeping mats, and more tea upon arrival. Then,



it was the silence of the desert and the brilliance of a million stars keeping us from sleep. Not for lack of peace, but rather because falling asleep would be wasting the experience.

There are sand dunes in much of Arabia, but arguably none quite as special as those at Wadi Rum. The dunes actually appear to start changing colours as the sun goes down. As the light of the sun finally slipped into the sky, we felt a chill and were happy for the fire that Awad rekindled. He showed us how to toast the Bedouin bread on the coals. The goats started calling to each other in complaining rhythm and the camp came to life.

FROM HERE, IT WAS ON TO AMMAN. IT IS NOT ENOUGH to spend only two days in the capital, but we made the most of our time. A bossy octogenarian guided us efficiently around the very impressive Roman Amphitheatre.

The structure includes the theatre itself as well as two museums that offer beautiful examples of historical life in the region. The clothing exhibits are especially noteworthy. Later we wandered around the suq.

We also visited Wild Jordan Centre, a destination you should put on your must-see list if you visit Amman (read more about it at www.rscn.org.jo).

It would be difficult to truly do justice to the quality of the food, which is all natural and delicious, or to the architecture which despite being very recently constructed was designed to meld perfectly with the much older neighbourhood.

The centre itself is much more than a fabulous café. It is a “revolutionary centre devoted to promoting Jordan’s natural heritage” offering meeting rooms and gallery spaces to activists and artists. The architect utilised recycled and natural materials to create the building, which is an artwork in itself.

WHILE JORDANIANS IN GENERAL ARE EXTREMELY welcoming to people from Bahrain, it was a little unfortunate that the country’s tourism officials did very little to assist us during our stay there. So we were especially thankful that one of our trip sponsors MTC-Vodafone and their Jordanian affiliates MCI Fastlink went the extra distance by helping us organise a press conference and by providing us the use of mobile phones with a local number.

The well preserved Roman amphitheatre in Amman.

