

JORDAN

History & Culture

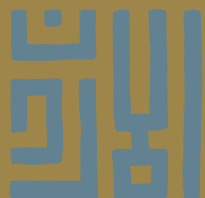
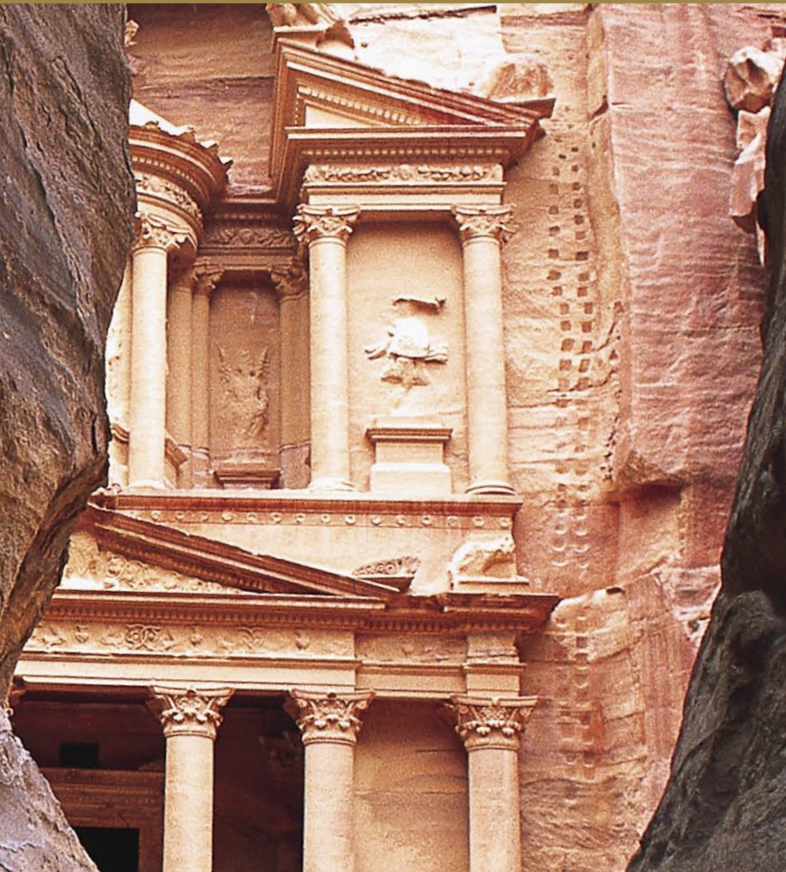


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



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 Tel: +962 6 5678444. It is open daily (08:00-16:00) except Fridays. You can also visit the Jordan Tourism Board's website www.VisitJordan.com



MAP LEGEND

-  Historical Site
-  Castle
-  Religious Site
-  Airport
-  Road
-  Highway
-  Railway
-  Bridge



JORDAN'S HISTORY & CULTURE

Jordan is a land rich in history. Since the dawn of civilization, Jordan has played an important role in trade between east and west because of its geographic location at the crossroads of Asia, Africa and Europe. It has been home to some of mankind's earliest settlements and relics of many of the world's great civilizations can still be found today.

Jordan played a vital role in Roman, Biblical, the early Islamic and Crusader periods. From the moment you arrive, you get a sense of the past. All around are remnants of civilizations long since relegated to the history books, yet they still remain, stamped into the very fabric of this amazing Kingdom and etched into the soul of the people who live here.

From the ancient Nabataean city of Petra, the miracle of the Dead Sea and Jordan Valley, the wonders of the Red Sea and Wadi Rum to the fine hotels, shopping centres and art galleries of modern Amman, Jordan truly is a nation rich in history and culture.

All around are remnants of civilizations long since relegated to the history books





DID YOU KNOW?

The Jordanian flag symbolizes the Kingdom's roots in the Great Arab Revolt of 1916, as it is adapted from the revolt banner. The black, white and green bands represent the Arab Abbasid, Umayyad and Fatimid dynasties respectively, while the crimson triangle joining the bands represents the Hashemite dynasty. The seven-pointed Islamic star set in the center of the crimson triangle represents the seven verses of Surat Al-Fatiha, the first sura in the Holy Qura'n.

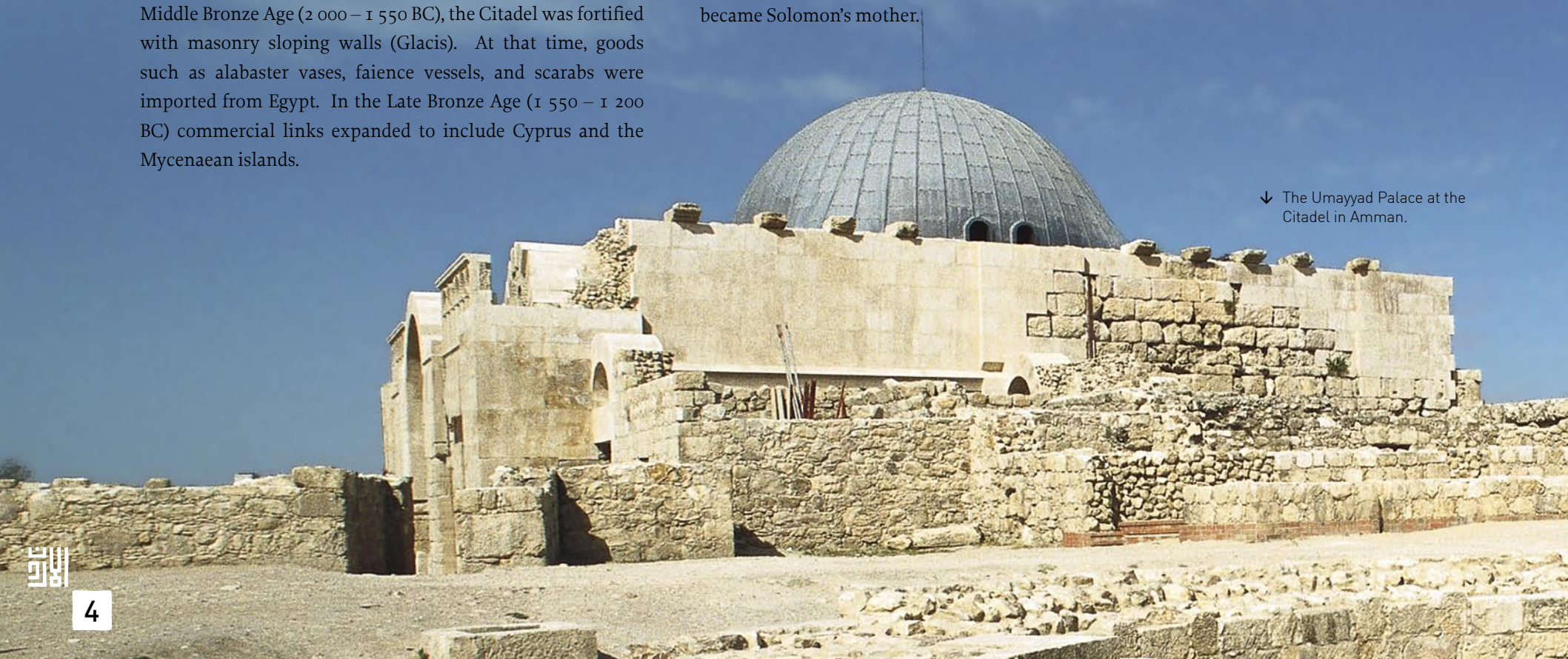
AMMAN

Amman's history spans nine millennia dating back to the Stone Age. It boasts one of the largest Neolithic settlements (c.6500 BC) ever discovered in the Middle East.

Amman's Citadel (al-Qala'a) became the focus of settlement from as early as the Early Bronze Age (3 200 – 2 000 BC). However, structural remains from this cultural phase are scanty and attested only in a few rock-cut tombs. In the Middle Bronze Age (2 000 – 1 550 BC), the Citadel was fortified with masonry sloping walls (Glacis). At that time, goods such as alabaster vases, faience vessels, and scarabs were imported from Egypt. In the Late Bronze Age (1 550 – 1 200 BC) commercial links expanded to include Cyprus and the Mycenaean islands.

The Iron Age (1 200 – 539 BC), which coincides with biblical history, is when iron began to be used. In this period Jordan was split up into small states: Gilead in the north, Ammon and Moab in the centre, and Edom in the south. At the beginning of the 10th century BC King David conquered Rabbath Ammon as part of his expansionist policy. Uriah the Hittite, one of David's officers, was killed in the front line of battle and David coveted his beautiful wife Bathsheba who became Solomon's mother.

↓ The Umayyad Palace at the Citadel in Amman.



The Romans rebuilt the city with colonnaded streets, baths, a theatre and impressive public buildings.

Towards the 10th century BC Ammon regained its independence and Rabbath Ammon became the capital of the Ammonite State. A line of border fortresses forming a well-integrated defensive system protected the western approaches to Rabbath Ammon. These fortresses or towers were built in the megalithic style and were square, rectangular, or circular. The latter form can be seen on Jabal Amman in the immediate vicinity of the offices of the Jordan Department of Antiquities. From the 8th century BC the area was ruled in succession by the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians. By the 3rd century BC the city had been renamed "Philadelphia" after its Ptolemaic ruler Ptolemy II Philadelphus.

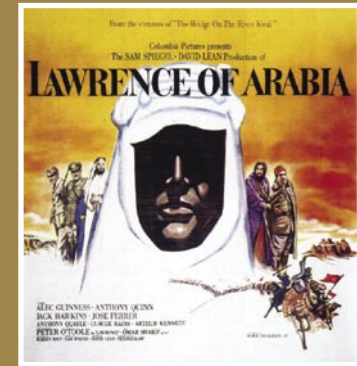


↑ Visitors enjoy a sunset at the Citadel.

Seleucid and Nabataean rule followed until 63 BC, when it was absorbed into the Roman Empire and the Roman general, Pompey, annexed Syria and made Philadelphia part of the Decapolis League – an alliance of ten free city-states with overall allegiance to Rome. The Romans rebuilt the city with colonnaded streets, baths, a theatre and impressive public buildings. Philadelphia flourished as one of the centres of the new Roman province of Arabia and of lucrative trade routes running between the Mediterranean and an interior which stretched to India and China as well as routes north and south.

During the Byzantine period, when Christianity became the official religion of the Eastern Roman Empire the city was the seat of a Christian Bishop and two churches were constructed. By the early 7th century, Islam was spreading northwards from the Arabian Peninsula and, by 635AD, had embraced the land as part of its domain. The city returned to its original Semitic name of Ammon, or as it is known today, Amman.

→ A Limestone figurine 'Ain Ghazal' dating back more than 7000 years.



DID YOU KNOW?

The Royal Film Commission of Jordan is a committee that aims to contribute to the development of the Jordanian audio-visual production industry by developing and cultivating 'Film Culture' and by encouraging Jordanians to use film and audio-visual media to express their ideas. It also provides opportunities for audiences to get together with filmmakers to watch independent films and exchange ideas.

For further information, you can visit their website: www.film.jo

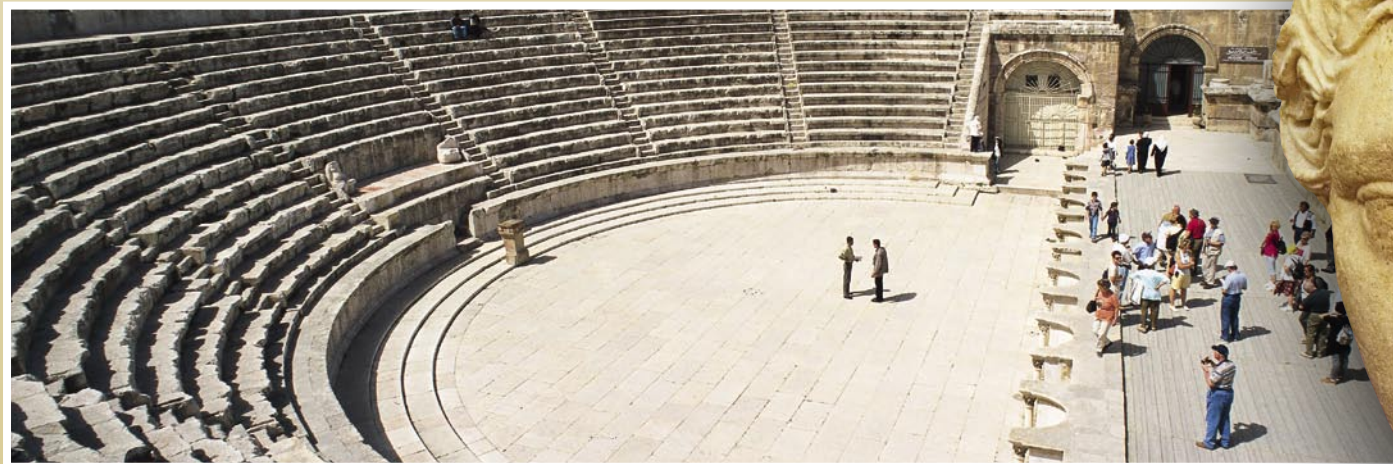
With various shifts in political power over the following centuries, Amman's fortunes declined. During the Crusades and under the Mamlukes of Egypt, Amman's importance was overtaken by the rise of Karak in the south. By 1321 AD, it was reported that Amman was "a very ancient town and was ruined before the days of Islam... there are great ruins here and the river al-Zarqa flows through them."

Under the Ottoman Empire, Amman remained a small backwater with As-Salt being the main town of the area. By 1806 the city was reported to be uninhabited except for the Bedouins.

The weakening of Ottoman authority in the region coincided with the exodus of large numbers of Circassian and other

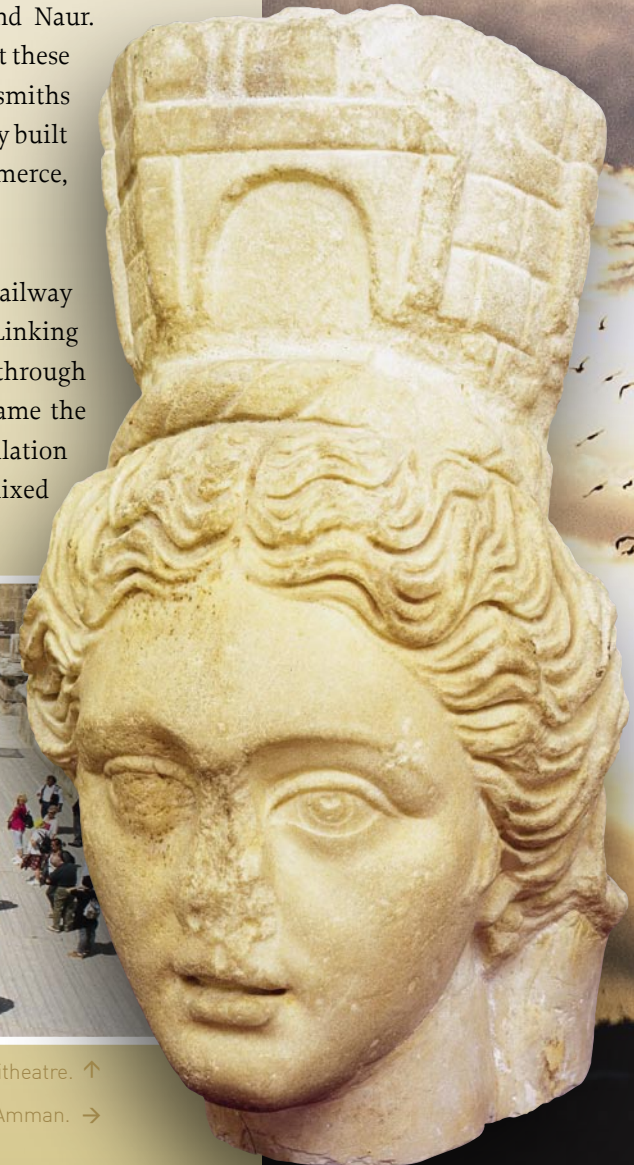
persecuted Muslims from the Caucasus. They found refuge in the area and established settlement in Amman and other towns, e.g. Jerash, Suweileh, Wadi Seer, and Naur. Although they were mostly farmers, amongst these early settlers there were also gold and silversmiths and other craftsmen. It wasn't long before they built rough roads linking these settlements. Commerce, once again, began to flourish.


But it was the construction of the Hejaz Railway which really brought the city back to life. Linking Damascus with Medina, the railway passed through Amman. In 1902, once again, Amman became the centre of a busy trade route and its population began to grow. By 1905 the city held a mixed population of some 3000 people.



Amman's impressive amphitheatre. ↑

A bust from the Jordan Archaeological Museum in Amman. →





On 15th May 1923, the Emirate of Transjordan came into existence, with Emir Abdullah, a Hashemite and direct descendant of the Prophet Mohammed, Peace Be Upon Him (PBUH), as its undisputed leader. On 22nd March 1946, Transjordan secured its independence. Two months later, Abdullah's title of Emir, was changed to King, and the country was renamed the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan with Amman as its capital.

Over the ensuing decades the city has expanded and flourished to become a modern, lively, commercial metropolis of well over two million people. Excellent hotels and accommodation, gourmet restaurants, coffee shops, shopping centres, offices, and luxury villas have replaced older dwellings. However, there is still much of the old city to be admired.

In addition to its numerous archaeological sites, Amman has many museums, art galleries and cultural centres, as well as theatres and cinemas.

The Temple of Hercules at the Citadel in Amman. ↑

Historical Sites

Amman offers a variety of historical sites from the Neolithic, Hellenistic, as well as late Roman to Arab Islamic periods. The Citadel is a good place to begin a tour of the archaeological sites of the city. It is the site of ancient Rabbath-Ammon and excavations have revealed numerous Roman, Byzantine and early Islamic remains. Located on a hill, it not only gives visitors a perspective of the city's incredible history but also provides stunning views of downtown Amman.

Places of interest at the Citadel include: The Umayyad Palace complex, dating from about 730 AD; the Temple of Hercules, built during the reign of Emperor Marcus Aurelius (161-180 AD); and the Byzantine Church, believed to date from the 6th or 7th century AD. Nearby attractions include: the restored Roman Theatre, which dates back to the 2nd century AD; the Roman Forum; the Nymphaeum; and Grand Hussein Mosque, built by Emir Abdullah in 1924 on the site of a much older mosque from the Umayyad period.



↑ A steam engine from the Hejaz Railway.

Archaeological Centres

A number of local and international archaeological centres have been established in Amman, a reflection of its significant historical worth:

- *American Centre for Oriental Research*
- *Council for British Research in the Levant*
- *French Institute of Archaeology for the Near East*
- *Friends of Archaeology*
- *German Protestant Institute for Archaeology*
- *Department of Antiquities*



The Grand Hussein Mosque in downtown Amman . ↑

Statue from The Jordan Archaeological Museum. →



Wherever you go in Jordan you will find plenty of opportunities to shop.

Museums

Local museums offer significant insights into local history and culture:

- *Jordan Archaeological Museum*
- *Jordanian Museum of Popular Tradition*
- *Jordan Folklore Museum*
- *The Archaeological Museum / University of Jordan*
- *The Anthropological Museum / University of Jordan*
- *The Numismatics Museum / Central Bank of Jordan*
- *Royal Automobile Museum*

Handicrafts / Shopping

Wherever you go in Jordan you will find plenty of opportunities to shop. For visitors there is a wide range of locally made handicrafts and other goods available at all the popular sites as well as within the boutiques of the leading hotels and at the various visitors' centres. There you will find

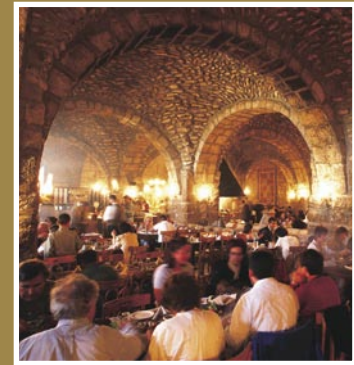
hand-woven rugs and cushions, beautifully embroidered items and clothing, traditional pottery, glassware, silver jewellery embedded with semi-precious stones, Bedouin knives, coffee pots, narghilehs (water-pipes), marquetry work, antiques, and other artefacts.

Take time to visit the souk in downtown Amman. This is a treasure trove for those seeking something a little bit out of the ordinary. Within the souk are excellent gold and silver outlets, where some great bargains can be found. Also worth visiting are the busy market shops, especially for exotic spices, herbs, and seasonings.

Amman also has sophisticated shops and designer boutiques selling the very latest fashions in jewellery, clothing, accessories, leather, and electronic goods.

Almost everywhere in Jordan you can find the world-famous Dead Sea products. All are of excellent quality and produced under strict clinical conditions. They are also very reasonably priced.

In all cases, the shopkeepers are helpful and friendly. Most speak at least a little English but even if they don't, there is usually someone around who will be only too willing to assist.

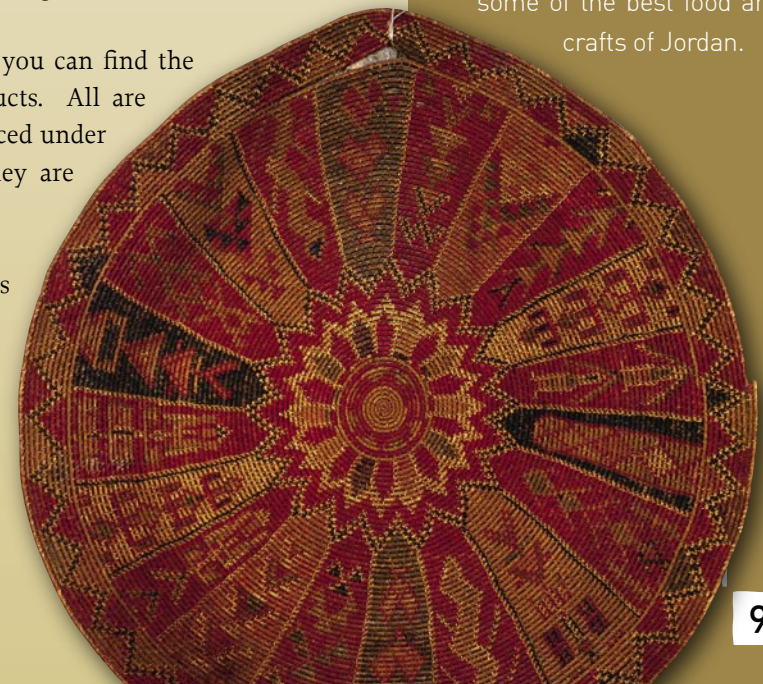


DID YOU KNOW?

Kan Zaman, sits on a hilltop about 12 kilometres south of the city. It is a renovated complex of stables, storehouses and a residential complex, which has become a major tourist attraction. Kan Zaman, which means "once upon a time" combines a turn-of-the-century atmosphere with some of the best food and crafts of Jordan.



↑ A spice shop in Amman's downtown souk.



Traditional basketwork platter. →

Festivals

Global Village

An annual festival, which takes place throughout the month of July. It includes, many different ‘Country Pavilions’, built to reflect the individual country’s heritage, folklore and tradition. There is also a ‘Main Theatre’ that hosts international and national activities, a ‘Fun Fair’ that covers 16,000 m². with thrilling rides, and a ‘Food Court’ where visitors can find great international and traditional cuisines. Services such as banks, security, parking, etc., are provided for all visitors and participants. For more information please visit www.globalvillagejo.com

Souk Ukaz

An annual mid-summer music festival, this fair takes place either in Amman or in nearby Jerash. Souk Ukaz includes music, song, and dance from both local and international artists and lasts from mid-July until mid-August. For more information on Souk Ukaz, please visit www.meccad.org

Art Galleries

Jordan has a rapidly developing fine arts scene and in Amman, in particular, there are excellent exhibition centres and galleries. These have transformed the city into a focal point for local and international artists who regularly exhibit here.

National Gallery of Fine Arts

Founded in 1980 and situated near the King Abdullah Mosque, the Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts is one of the major art museums in the Middle East. Its unique and vast permanent collection of modern art from the developing world is internationally recognized.

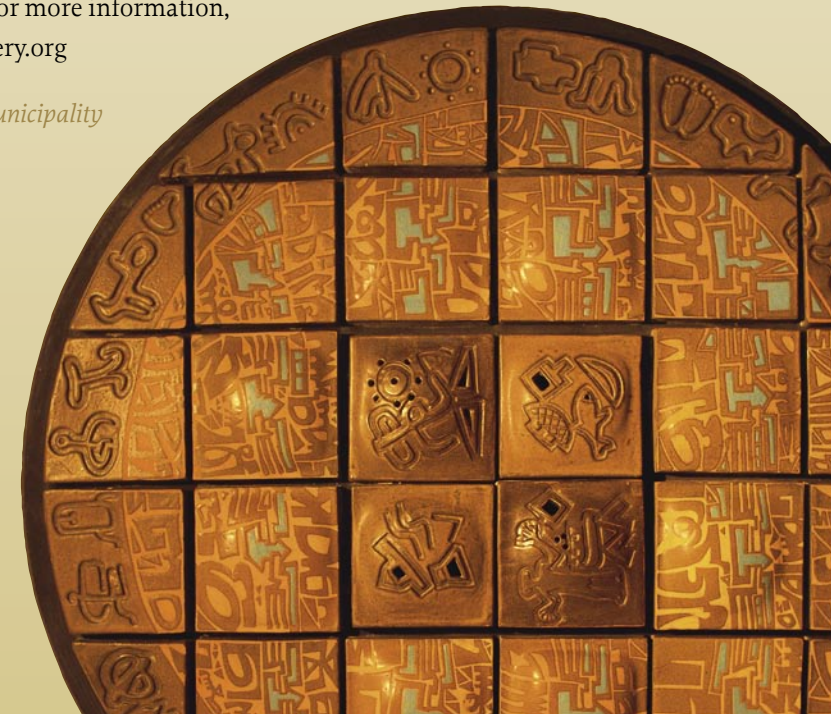
From its inception, the Royal Society of Fine Arts had pursued the highest professional standards of excellence in acquiring art work and running the Gallery. The collection comprises over 2000 works including paintings, prints, sculptures, photographs, installations, weavings, and ceramics by more than 800 artists from 59 countries in Asia and Africa. For more information, please visit: www.nationalgallery.org

- *City Hall / Amman Greater Municipality*
- *Al Mashreq Gallery*
- *Lines Gallery*
- *Zara Gallery*
- *The Gallery*
- *Baladna Gallery*
- *Orfali Art Gallery*
- *Foresight Gallery*
- *Dar Al Anda*
- *Makan*
- *Darat Al Funun*
- *Broadway*



↑ The National Gallery of Fine Arts in Amman.

↓ Art Exhibit at the National Gallery of Fine Arts.





Cultural Centres

An increasing number of venues are hosting cultural activities. The English-language newspapers The Jordan Times and The Star carry details of individual events.

- *The Royal Cultural Centre*
- *Haya Art Centre*
- *Zaha Cultural Centre*
- *Emirates Cultural Centre*
- *Turkish Cultural Centre*
- *Goethe Institute*
- *The French Cultural Centre*
- *The British Council*
- *Spanish Cultural Centre*

Theatres & Cinemas

Foreign-language films are shown with the original soundtrack and Arabic subtitles. Schedules can be found in The Jordan Times. Film shows are also often organised by the various Cultural Centres. The Jordan Film Festival is held here every year in May, while Amman also participates in the European Film Festival and the Franco-Arab Film Festival.

↑ The Museum of Popular Tradition in Amman.



Cinemas:

- *Plaza*
- *Century*
- *Gateway*
- *Galleria*
- *Cinema City*
- *Le Royal Cinema*

Theatres:

- *Ammoun Theatre*
- *Opera*
- *Hisham*



DID YOU KNOW?

The Royal Automobile Museum depicts the history of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, from the early 1920's until the present day.

The featured cars highlight the life of His Majesty the late King Hussein and his reign, as well as the many aspects of his leadership.

Rare photo archives and video footage are used throughout the museum. A multimedia room, a library, as well as a souvenir shop are available to provide the visitor with a comprehensive historical and educational experience.

AS-SALT

An ancient town, As-Salt was once the most important settlement in the area between the Jordan Valley and the eastern desert. Because of its history as an important trading link between the eastern desert and the west, it was a significant place for the region's many rulers.

The Romans, Byzantines and Mamlukes all contributed to the growth of the town but it was at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, during Ottoman rule, that As-Salt enjoyed its most prosperous period.

It was at that time that the Ottomans established a regional administrative base in As-Salt and encouraged settlement from other parts of their empire. As the town's status increased, many merchants arrived and, with their newly acquired wealth, built the fine houses that can still be admired in As-Salt today. These splendid yellow sandstone buildings incorporate a variety of local and European styles. Typically, they have domed roofs, interior courtyards and the characteristic tall, arched windows.

As-Salt, the capital of the Belqa'a region, has attracted settlers since before the Iron Age, mainly due to the fact that the area enjoys a moderate climate, a plentiful supply of water and fertile soil. The town was also well placed on the north to south trade routes and those running from east to west, linking the interior with Jerusalem, Nablus, Nazareth and the Mediterranean.

Evidence of the Roman period can still be seen and there are several Roman tombs on the outskirts of the town. During the Roman period the town was known as As-Saltos which means forest/wooded trees. In the Byzantine period the town was known as Jadaron/Jader and it was depicted on a mosaic pavement from Ma'in where it is labelled "Jadaron". In the 13th century an Ayyubid fortress was built on the site of the citadel by the Sultan Al Mu'azzam Isa (a nephew of Saladin). The fortress was destroyed by invading Mongols in 1260, but was rebuilt a year later by the Mameluke Sultan al-Zahir Baybars. Six centuries later, in 1840, the forces of another Egyptian potentate, Ibrahim Pasha, demolished it yet again. The Citadel is now the site of a large mosque, which towers over the modern town.

By the early 19th century, As-Salt was a prosperous frontier town on the edge of the Ottoman Empire and the desert. Useful to all, it was ruled by none and the people of As-Salt were said to be 'free from taxation of any kind'. The town was also the centre of lucrative trading between the region and urban centres in Palestine.

The town's fortunes and status declined after World War I, when Emir Abdullah bin Al-Hussein chose Amman to be the capital of the new Emirate of Transjordan.



As-Salt. ↑

A glassware artefact at the As-Salt Archaeological Museum. →



Historical Sites

One of the earliest patriarchal figures in the Bible is Job, whose book is amongst the world's great masterpieces of religious literature. As-Salt houses the tomb/shrine of Job, as well as the tomb/shrine of the prophet Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses. It is also the site of the tombs of Jad and Asher, the sons of Jacob.

The Abu Jaber mansion, built between 1892 and 1906, with frescoed ceilings and paintings by Italian artists, is reputed to be the finest example of a 19th century merchant house in the region. As-Salt has several other places of interest, including Roman tombs on the outskirts of town, and the site of the disappeared Ayyubid fortress from the early 13th century, built by al-Mu'azzam Isa, the nephew of Saladin, soon after 1198 AD.

Museums

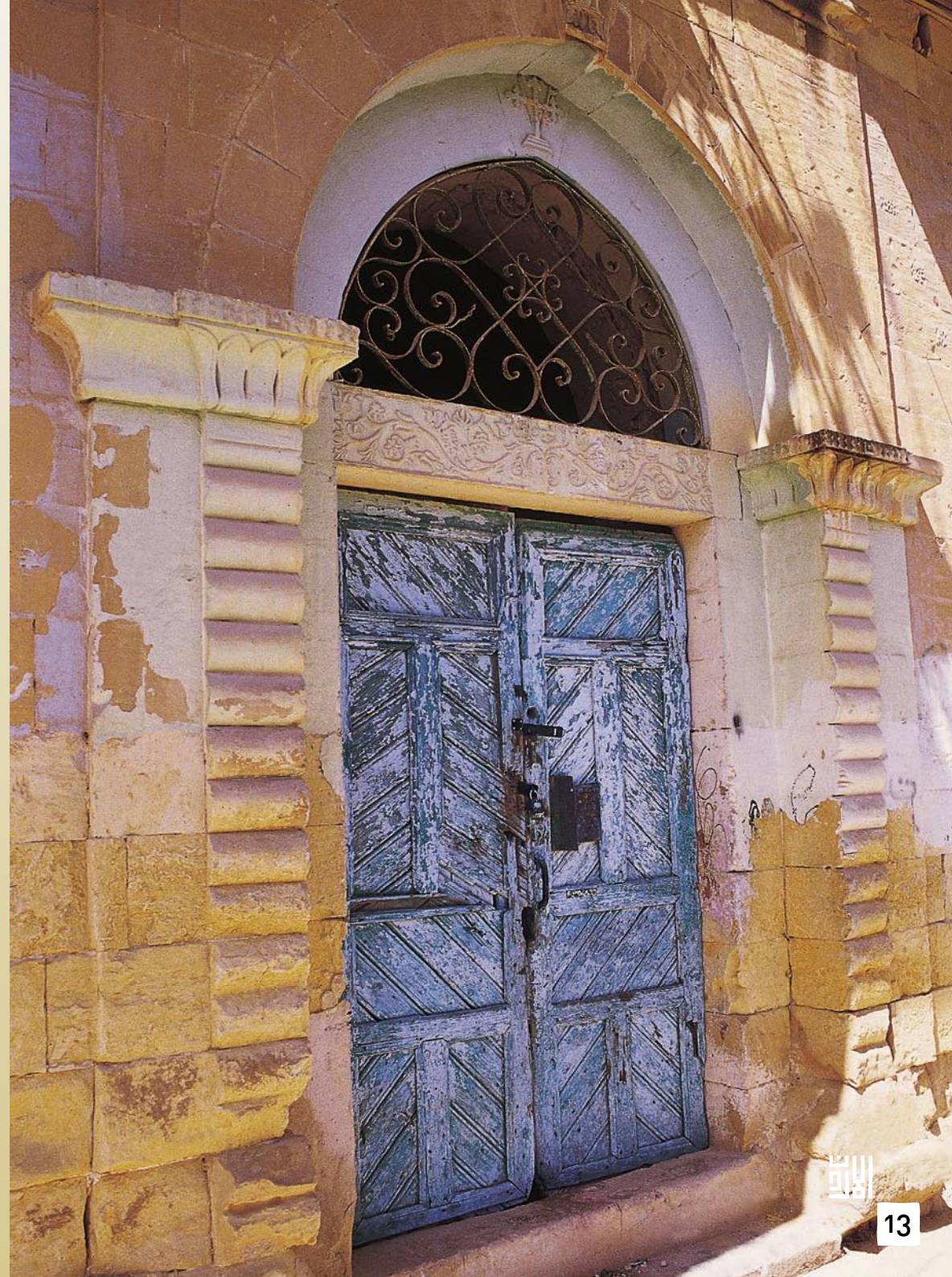
Local museums include artefacts dating back to as early as the Chalcolithic period, as well as traditional Bedouin costumes and further examples of local history and traditions.

- *As-Salt Archaeological Museum*
- *As-Salt Folklore Museum*
- *Salt Historical Museum (Abu Jaber House)*

Directions

As-Salt is located 29 kilometres northwest from the centre of Amman and can be easily reached within a half-hour drive.

An Ottoman style door in As-Salt. →



MADABA

Just 30 kilometres from Amman, along the 5,000-year-old Kings' Highway, is one of the most memorable places in the Holy Land. After passing through a string of ancient sites, the first city you reach is Madaba, known as the "City of Mosaics".

Madaba is an ancient town of the Jordanian Plateau, which was resettled by Christian Arab tribes from the Karak region in 1880 A.D. It is now inhabited by Christians and Muslims alike. A great deal of antiquity has been found here, much of which can now to be seen in its Museum and in the Archaeological Park.

Madaba has a long history, being first mentioned in the Bible at the time of Exodus, about 1200 BC. A tomb of this period has been found in the east of the town.

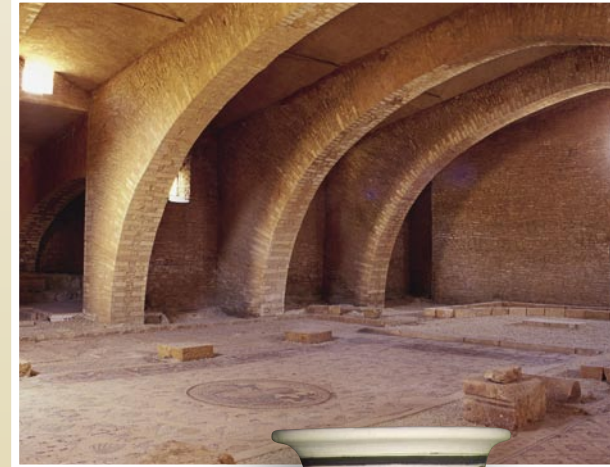
In the Bible, Madaba is recorded among the Cities of the Plain in Moab conquered by the Israelite tribes. According to the Mesha (King of Moab) inscription, the town was liberated by the Moabite King around the middle of the 9th century BC. Towards the end of the 2nd century BC Madaba came into conflict with the Masmoneans, when John Hyrcanus captured the city after a long siege. Later, Hyrcanus II, in exchange for the help he asked for in the war against his brother Aristobolus, promised to restore the city to the Nabataean King Aretas III at Petra, together with other cities in the region. Epigraphical evidence suggests that Madaba remained within the Nabataean sphere of influence until the region was incorporated into the Roman Province of Arabia in 106 AD.

The Romans made it a typical provincial town, with colonnaded streets, fine temples and other buildings, large water cisterns and a town wall. The town continued to flourish through the 8th century and beyond. Traces of the Roman town can be seen in the long stretches of the paved street in Madaba's Archaeological Park.

Historical Sites

Madaba's chief attraction can be found in the contemporary Greek Orthodox church of St. George. It is a wonderfully vivid, 6th century Byzantine mosaic map showing Jerusalem and other holy sites. With two million pieces of coloured stone and a full 25 x 5 metres in its original state - most of which can still be seen today - the map depicts hills and valleys, villages and towns, as far away as the Nile Delta. This masterpiece is unrivalled in Jordan, but there are literally dozens of other mosaics from the 5th through to the 7th centuries, scattered throughout Madaba's churches and buildings.

In keeping with Jordan's commitment to restore and preserve its mosaic masterpieces, Madaba's extensive archaeological park and museum complex encompasses the remains of several Byzantine churches, including the outstanding mosaics of the Church of the Virgin and the Hyppolytus Hall, part of a 6th century mansion.



Madaba Archaeological Park. ↑

Artisan working at the Mosaic School of Madaba. →

Museums

Not surprisingly, local museums are largely dedicated to mosaic discoveries. Worthy of special mention is the Mosaic School of Madaba, which operates under the patronage of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities. The only project of its kind in the Middle East, the school trains artisans in the art of making, repairing and restoring mosaics.

- *Madaba Archaeological Museum*
- *Madaba Archaeological Park*
- *Mosaic School of Madaba*

Directions

Madaba is 33km southwest from Amman. For the fastest trip, take the Airport Road directly to Madaba; for a more scenic approach, use the Kings' Highway.



Mosaic detail. ↑

Mosaic map of the Holy Land. →



UMM AR-RASAS (Ancient Mayfa'a)

Mayphaath is listed as one of the places on the Moab plateau (1 Chr. 6:79; Jer. 48:21). Eusebius in his geographical dictionary (Onomasticon) lists a Roman military camp in Mayfa'a as the village whose inhabitants killed Zayd ibn Amr, a pre-Islamic monotheist, on his way to Mecca to convert to Islam.

The Romans fortified it and the local Christians were still embellishing it with Byzantine-style mosaics well over one hundred years after the beginning of the Muslim rule.

Historical Sites

The rectangular walled city is mostly in ruins but does still include several buildings, as well as four churches and some beautiful stone arches. The main attraction, outside the city walls within the Church of St. Stephen, is a very large, perfectly preserved mosaic floor laid down in 718 AD. It portrays fifteen major cities of the Holy Land from both east and west of the River Jordan. This magnificent mosaic is second only to Madaba's world famous mosaic map of Jerusalem and the Holy Land.

Less than 2km north of the fortified town, the highest standing ancient tower of Jordan puzzles

the specialists: the 15-metre high, square tower with no door or inner staircase, thought to be a stylite tower, is now inhabited by birds.

Directions

South of Madaba, in the town of Dhiban, a road leading east takes you to the site. Alternatively, you can leave Amman on the Desert Highway passing Qastal and Jiza and turn west shortly after Dab'a. Umm ar-Rasas is approximately 85 kms away from Amman.



MUKAWIR

Within an hour's drive from Madaba along the picturesque Kings' Highway, is Machaerus (Mukawir in Arabic) the hilltop stronghold of Herod the Great. Upon Herod's death, his son Herod Antipas inherited the fortress and it is from here that he ordered John the Baptist to be beheaded after Salome's fateful dance of the seven veils.

Directions

Continuing on the Kings' Highway, about 45 minutes after Madaba and turn right at Libb, you eventually arrive at Mukawir.

← The ancient tower at Umm Ar-Rasas.

King Herod's hilltop stronghold at Mukawir. ↑

Ruins on the hilltop. ↑



← The Serpentine Cross.

MOUNT NEBO

Mount Nebo is the place where Moses viewed the holy land of Canaan and is believed to have been buried. It is the most revered holy site in Jordan and a place of pilgrimage for early Christians. Mount Nebo's first church was built in the late fourth century to mark the site.

Historical Sites

Six tombs, from different periods, have been found hollowed out of the rock beneath the mosaic-covered floor of the Moses Memorial Church at Mount Nebo. In the present presbytery you can see remnants of mosaics, the earliest of which is a panel with a braided cross. The Serpentine Cross, which stands just outside the sanctuary, is symbolic of the brass serpent taken by Moses into the desert and the cross upon which Jesus was crucified.



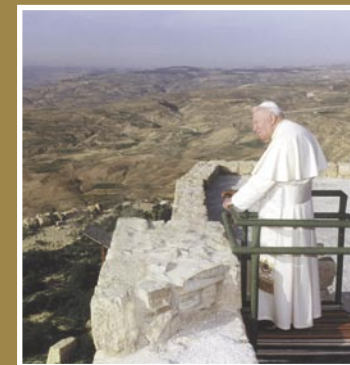
Archaeological Centres

The Franciscan Archaeological Institute in Jordan aims at preserving the archaeological heritage of Mount Nebo, the nearby city of Madaba and the surrounding area.

Directions

Take the Airport Highway directly to Madaba. Road signs will lead you westward from Madaba to Mount Nebo which is about 10 minutes away.

← Mosaic floor in the Moses Memorial Church.



DID YOU KNOW?

During his visit to Holy Land in 2000, His Holiness, the late Pope John Paul II held a sermon for the public (attended by multitudes) at the Moses Memorial Church at Mt. Nebo overlooking the Jordan Valley and the Holy Land. Following his visit to Jordan, the Pope declared Mt. Nebo as an official Millenium 2000 pilgrimage site, together with 4 other sites in Jordan; Bethany Beyond the Jordan, Anjara, Tel Mar Elias and Mukawir.

THE JORDAN VALLEY & THE DEAD SEA

The Jordan Valley is part of the Great Rift Valley that runs from Turkey to east Africa, formed by a series of geological upheavals millions of years ago. The Dead Sea originally stretched the entire 360 kilometres, from Aqaba in the south, to Lake Tiberius in the north.

The therapeutic water of the Dead Sea, combined with the valley's fertile land and warm climate, have attracted people to live, hunt and farm in the area since the Stone Age. Over 200 archaeological sites have been discovered, but there are believed to be many more.

For Christians, this region inspires their faith. This is the place where God first spoke to Man. It is the Holy Land where God gave his Ten Commandments to Moses, where Job suffered and was rewarded for his faith, where Jesus was baptized by John, and where Jacob wrestled with the angel of God.

In the Book of Genesis, God refers to the Jordan River Valley around the Dead Sea, as the "Garden of the Lord", and it is believed to be the location of the Garden of Eden.

The infamous cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and many other places were the subjects of dramatic and enduring Old Testament stories, including that of Lot, whose wife turned into a pillar of salt for disobeying God's will.

Many of these sites and others in the region are also significant

Holy places for Muslims, who can find a plethora of religious destinations that are important to the development of Islam, the religion followed by the majority of Jordanians today.

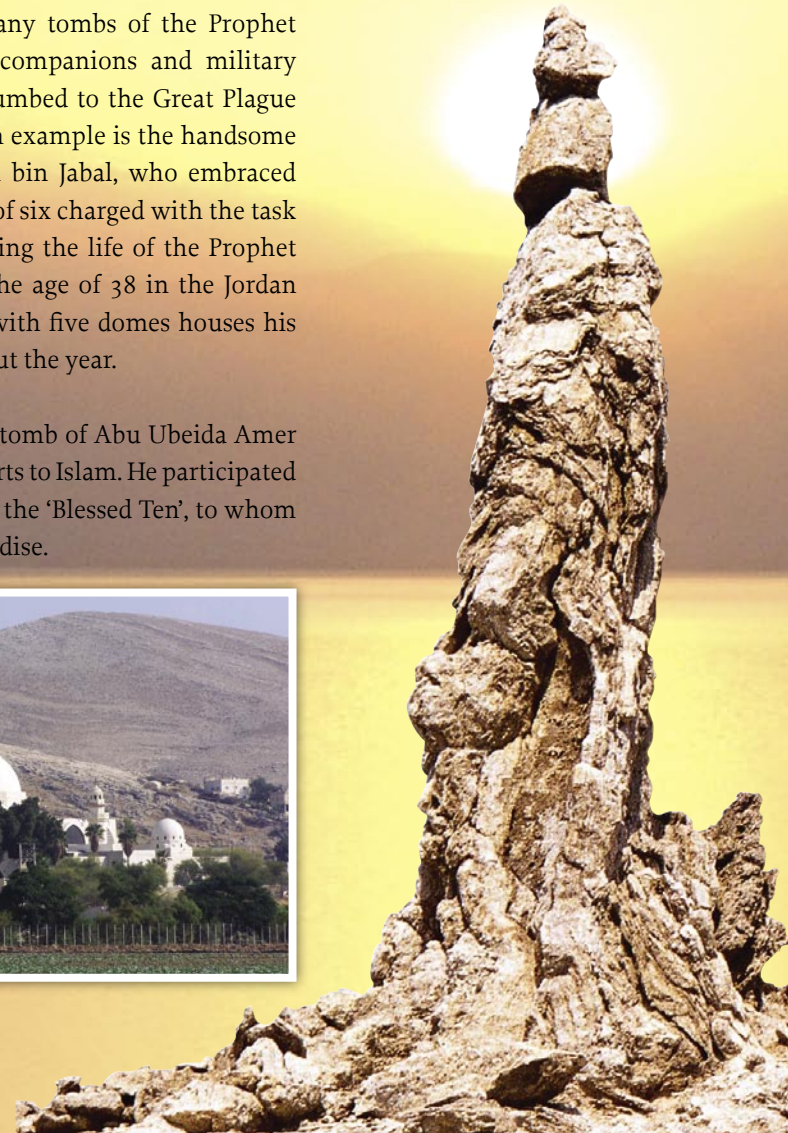
The Jordan Valley is home to many tombs of the Prophet Mohammad's (PBUH) venerable companions and military leaders who fell in battle or succumbed to the Great Plague in the 18th year after the Hijra. An example is the handsome and generous companion Mu'adh bin Jabal, who embraced Islam at the age of 18. He was one of six charged with the task of compiling the Holy Quran during the life of the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH). He died at the age of 38 in the Jordan Valley. Today a modern building with five domes houses his tomb, and can be visited throughout the year.

The Jordan Valley also houses the tomb of Abu Ubeida Amer Bin Al-Jarrah, one of the first converts to Islam. He participated in all major events and was one of the 'Blessed Ten', to whom the Prophet (PBUH) promised paradise.



A mosque houses the tomb of Abu Ubeida Amer Bin Al-Jarrah. ↑

A rock formation believed to be Lot's wife. →





← Lot's Cave.

One of the world's most amazing places, the Jordan Valley is a dramatic, beautiful landscape, which at the Dead Sea, is over 410 metres (1,312 ft.) below sea level making it the lowest point on the face of the earth.

Historical Sites

Although sparsely populated and serenely quiet now, the Jordan Valley region is believed to have been home to five Biblical cities: Sodom, Gomorrah, Adman, Zebouin, and Zoar. The area opposite Jericho has been identified for nearly two millennia as the place where Jesus Christ was baptized by John the Baptist. Stunning archaeological discoveries between the Jordan River and Tell al-Kharrar have identified this area as Biblical 'Bethany-Beyond-the-Jordan', where John was living when he baptized Jesus. Tell al-Kharrar's other name, Tell Mar Elias (St. Elijah's Hill), is named after the Prophet Elijah, who ascended to heaven from here.

St. Elijah's Hill is now the focal point of the Baptism Site and is covered with the remains of a Byzantine monastery with churches, large baptism pools and a water storage system. Findings from the early 1st century AD confirm the site was inhabited during the lives of Jesus and John the Baptist.

A 3rd century building with a white mosaic pavement is believed to be an early Christian 'prayer hall'. Also identified on Elijah's Hill is the cave where, according to numerous Byzantine texts, John the Baptist lived and baptized. The Byzantine church built around the cave, has been excavated in the last few years and can now be visited.

Further south, just outside a place called Safi (Biblical Zoar) is the cave where Lot and his daughters took refuge after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. A small church commemorates the spot.

Directions

The Dead Sea is less than an hour's drive from Amman heading west and is clearly signposted throughout the journey.



↑ A well and water channel at Bethany Beyond the Jordan.



DID YOU KNOW?

The Dead Sea is 80 kilometres (50 miles) long, approximately 14 kilometres (9 miles) wide. The northern and larger part is very deep, reaching at one point a depth of 430m (1320 feet). The southern bay is, on the contrary, very shallow, averaging hardly a depth of 4m (13 feet), its waters are so saturated with salt and other minerals that it is literally impossible to sink.

KARAK

Whether you approach Karak from the ancient Kings' Highway to the east or from the Dead Sea to the west, the striking silhouette of this fortified town and castle will instantly make you understand why the fates of kings and nations were decided here.

An ancient Crusader stronghold, Karak sits 900m above sea level and lies inside the walls of the old city. The city today is home to around 170,000 people and continues to boast a number of restored 19th century Ottoman buildings, restaurants, places to stay, and the like. But it is undoubtedly Karak Castle which dominates.

The famous Arab traveller Ibn Battuta wrote in his travel report that, in 1326, Karak could only be entered through a tunnel hewn in rock. The entrances to two such tunnels (which are now blocked) are still visible – a large one next to the road approaching Karak from the southeast (Salah ad-Din Street) and a smaller one near Baybars' Tower.

The most impressive towers ('burj' in Arabic) of Karak are Burj al-Banawi, a round tower bearing a monumental inscription adorned by two panthers, the emblem of Sultan Baybars; Burj as-Sa'ub, a small fortress in its own right; and Burj az-Zahir Baybars (or Baybars Tower), a massive structure resembling the castle keep.

Away from the castle, visitors can see the Castle Plaza, where

beautiful 19th century Ottoman administrative buildings have been redesigned to house a tourist centre, with restaurants, a crafts centre and other facilities grouped around a central plaza.

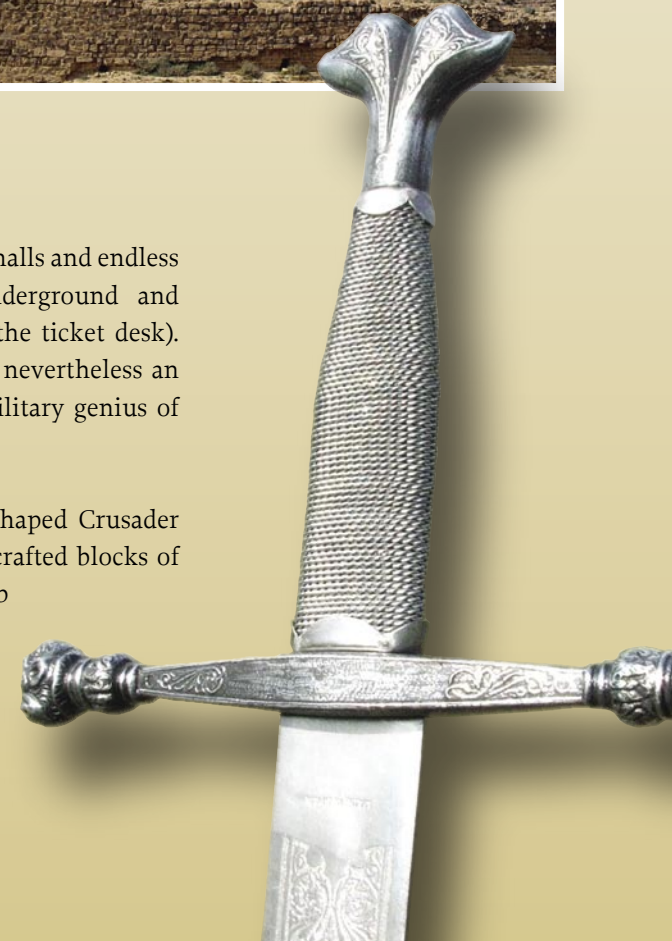
Karak still accommodates a large Christian community, and many of today's Christian families trace their origins to the Arab tribes who lived in the region in the Byzantine period, e.g. Ghassan, Lakhm, and Judham.

Historical Sites

Karak Castle is a dark maze of stone-vaulted halls and endless passageways. The best preserved are underground and can be reached via a massive door (ask at the ticket desk). More imposing than beautiful, the castle is nevertheless an impressive insight into the architectural military genius of the Crusaders.

Throughout the castle, dark and roughly shaped Crusader masonry is easy to discern from the finely crafted blocks of lighter and softer limestone used in later Arab work.

The shrine/tomb of the Biblical figure, Noah, is also located at Karak.



Islam's first expansion beyond the Arabian Peninsula was northwards into Jordan. Here the first contact between Islam and the non-Arab/Byzantine world occurred. Consequently, several strategic 7th century battles took place: the Battles of Muta, Yarmouk and Fahl (Pella). Many of Prophet Mohammad's (PBUH) companions and military leaders were martyred and buried in Jordan, and their tombs and shrines today are important destinations for pious Muslims such as Al Mazar aj Janubi.

Al Mazar Aj Janubi is a 25 minutes drive south along the Kings Highway from Karak.

Museums

There are two vaulted halls in the northern side of the lower enceinte which have been renovated to house the Archaeological Museum. It displays objects dating back as far as 3 000 BC, and items from Roman, Byzantine, Ayyubid, and Mameluke periods.

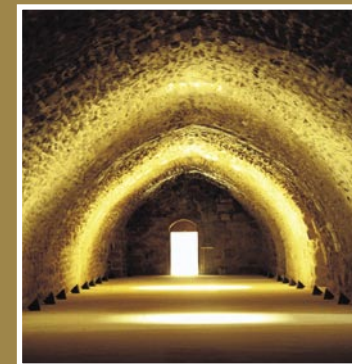
- *Karak Archaeological Museum*
- *Mazar Islamic Museum*

Directions

From Amman, head south on the Kings' Highway. A good map is advisable (obtainable from the Ministry of Tourism or Jordan Tourism Board).



↑ The museum at Karak.



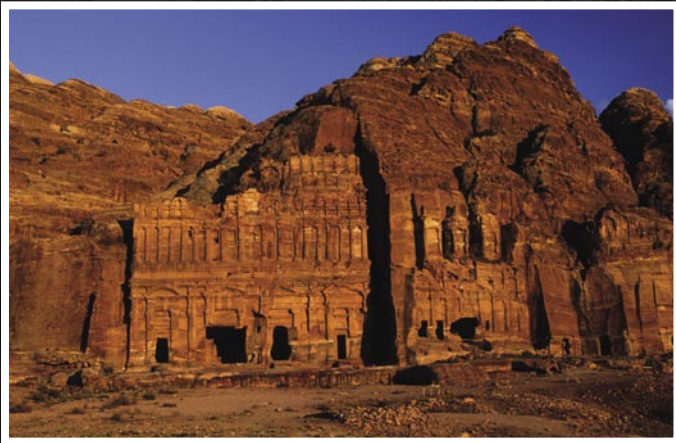
DID YOU KNOW?

Karak's best preserved halls and passageways are located underground and can only be reached through a massive door – ask at the ticket desk.

The city of Karak was the ancient capital of Moab. During Roman times it was known as Characmoba.

PETRA

The ancient city of Petra is one of Jordan's national treasures and by far its best known tourist attraction. Located about three hours south of Amman, Petra is the legacy of the Nabataeans, an industrious Arab people who settled in southern Jordan more than 2 000 years ago. Admired then for its refined culture, massive architecture and ingenious complex of dams and water channels, Petra is now a UNESCO world heritage site that enchants visitors from all corners of the globe.



Although most of what can be seen at Petra today was built by the Nabataeans, the area is known to have been inhabited from as early as 7,000 to 6,500 BC. Evidence of an early settlement from this period can still be seen today at Little Petra, just north of the main Petra site.

By the Iron Age (1,200 to 539 BC), Petra was inhabited by the Edomites. They settled mainly on the hills around Petra rather than the actual site chosen by the Nabataeans. Although the Edomites were not proficient at stone masonry, they excelled at making pottery and it seems they passed this craft on to the Nabataeans. A recently excavated kiln discovered at Wadi Musa, indicates that Petra was a regional centre for pottery production up until the late 3rd century AD, after which it fell into decline.

The Nabataeans were a nomadic Arab people from Arabia who began to arrive and slowly settle in Petra at the end of the 6th century BC. It seems their arrival at Petra was unplanned, as their original intent was to migrate to southern Palestine. No doubt they found this place attractive with its plentiful supply of water, defensive canyon walls and the friendly Edomites, with whom it seems they had a peaceful coexistence.

By the 2nd century BC, Petra had become a huge city encompassing around ten square kilometres, and was the capital of the Nabataean Kingdom.

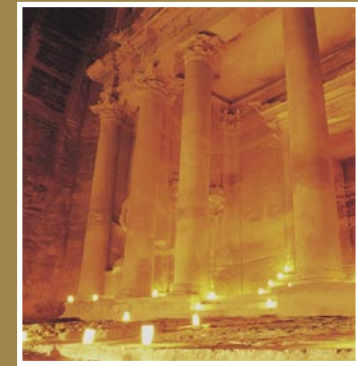
Primarily, the Nabataeans were farmers. They cultivated vines and olive trees and bred camels, sheep, goats and horses. They were skilled at water management and built a complex network of channels and cisterns to bring water from a plentiful source at Ain Musa several kilometres away.

↑ The Royal Tombs at Petra.

Caravans laden with incense, silks, spices and other exotic goods, would rest at Petra.

But their main wealth came from the fact that Petra was an important hub for the lucrative trade routes that linked China in the east with Rome in the west. Caravans laden with incense, silks, spices and other exotic goods, would rest at Petra, which offered a plentiful supply of water and protection from marauders. In return for their hospitality, the Nabataeans imposed a tax on all goods which passed through the city and grew wealthy from the proceeds.

In 64 BC, the Romans arrived and established a Roman province in Syria. They formed the Decapolis League of ten city states, which forestalled any further expansion by the Nabataeans. In 106 AD, they annexed the Nabataean Kingdom, making it part of the Roman Province of Arabia.



DID YOU KNOW?

To visit Petra during daylight is an awe-inspiring experience, to experience it at night by the light of 1,800 candles is truly an out-of-this-world experience! Walk through the Siq to the Khazneh following a candle-lit path and enjoy the haunting music of the Bedouin at the Treasury. Tours run three times a week on Monday, Wednesday and Thursday, they start at 8.30pm and finish at 10.00pm. Tickets can be purchased from the Petra Site Office at the entrance to the site. Allow yourself plenty of time to walk through the Siq, you don't want to miss the show.



Petra flourished under Roman rule and many Roman-style amendments were made to the city, including the enlargement of the Theatre, paving of the Colonnaded Street, and a triumphal arch was built over the entrance to the Siq. When the Roman Emperor, Hadrian, visited the site in 131 AD, he named it after himself, Hadriane Petra.

The Romans took control of the lucrative trade routes and diverted them away from Petra. It was the beginning of the end for the Nabataeans, whose wealth and power gradually fell into decline.

Evidence of the Nabataeans at Petra was dwindling and when Christianity spread across the Byzantine Empire, Petra became the seat of a bishopric and a monument was converted to a church, which is the Urn Tomb. Recent excavations have exposed three churches, one of them paved with coloured mosaics.

↑ The 3000 seat amphitheatre.

In 661 AD the Muslim Umayyad dynasty established its capital in Damascus, Syria and Petra found itself isolated from the seat of power. This, combined with a series of strong earthquakes, marked the end of this once mighty city.

Although there is some evidence that the place was, once again, used as a stopping place for caravans in the 13th to 15th centuries, it was eventually abandoned and became a place inhabited and fiercely guarded, by the local Bedouins. This once magnificent city was forgotten entirely by the western world until the Swiss traveller, Johann Ludwig Burckhardt, disguised as an Arab, rediscovered it on the 22nd August, 1812.

Historical Sites

Petra's most famous monument, the Treasury, appears dramatically at the end of the Siq. Used in the final sequence of the movie "Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade", the towering facade of the Treasury is only one of myriad architectural wonders to be explored at Petra.

Various walks and climbs reveal literally hundreds of rock cut tombs and temple façades, funerary halls and rock reliefs. There's also a 3000-seat theatre from the early 1st century AD, a Palace Tomb in the Roman style, and a gigantic 1st century Deir (Monastery).



The Monastery (Ad Deir). ↑



Pottery artefacts discovered in and around Petra. →



A modest shrine commemorating the death of Aaron, the brother of Moses, was built in the 13th century by the Mameluke Sultan Al-Nasir Muhammed, high atop Mount Aaron (Jabal Haroun) in the Sharah range.

To visit Petra during daylight is an awe-inspiring experience, but to experience it at night by the light of 1,800 candles is truly an out-of-this-world experience! Walk through the Siq to the Khazneh (Treasury) following a candle-lit path and enjoy the haunting music of the Bedouin at the Treasury. This tour happens several times a week and lasts for almost two hours. Allow yourself plenty of time to walk through the Siq - you don't want to miss the show.



↑ The Petra by Night Experience.

← Aaron's Tomb.

Museums

No trip to Petra should exclude a visit to the Archaeological and Nabataean Museums. These are where everything you have seen, or are about to see, will be brought into perspective.

- *Petra Archaeological Museum*
- *Petra Nabataean Museum*

Directions

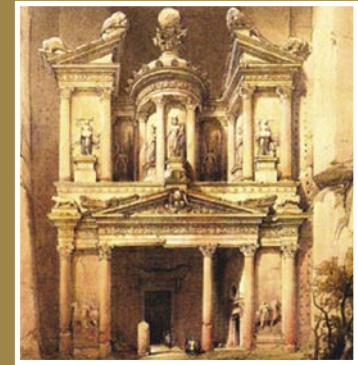
The best times to see Petra is in the early morning or late afternoon, so plan for an early start, or arrive the evening before and stay in one of the comfortable hotels near the site.

By bus:

A Daily bus service is offered to Petra. Please visit www.VisitJordan.com for more information.

By car or taxi:

Petra is a 3-hour drive south from Amman on the modern Desert Highway, or 4 hours on the more scenic Kings' Highway. Leave Amman from the 7th Circle and follow the brown signs, which are indicative of a tourist site.



DID YOU KNOW?

Petra is sometimes called the 'Lost City'. In spite of its being such an important city in antiquity, after the 14th century AD, Petra was completely lost to the western world. It was rediscovered in 1812 by the Swiss traveller, Johann Ludwig Burckhardt, who tricked his way into the fiercely guarded site by pretending to be an Arab from India wishing to make a sacrifice at the tomb of the Prophet Aaron.

Colourful rock striations on an obelisk at Petra. →

AQABA (Ayla)

Famed for its preserved coral reefs and unique sea life, this Red Sea port city was, in ancient times, the main port for shipments from the Red Sea to the Far East. Its museum houses a collection of artefacts collected in the region, including pottery and coins.

From as far back as five and a half thousand years ago Aqaba has played an important role in the economy of the region. It was a prime junction for land and sea routes from Asia, Africa and Europe, a role it still plays today. Because of this vital function, there are many historic sites to be explored within the area, including what is believed to be the oldest purpose-built church in the world.



↑ Ruins of what are believed to be the World's oldest purpose-built church.

Aqaba's long history dates back to pre-biblical times, when it was known as Ayla.



Aqaba's long history dates back to pre-biblical times, when it was known as Ayla. According to the Old Testament, King Solomon built a naval base at Ezion Geber, erroneously identified with the Edomite site of Tell Al-Khaliefeh, near the northern border of modern Aqaba.

Documentary sources suggest that Ayla (variously spelled as Aila, Ailana, Leena, and Eilath) was founded as a Nabataean city. In 106 AD the Roman emperor Trajan annexed the Nabataean Kingdom and incorporated it in the newly created Province of Arabia. The same emperor built the Via Nova Trajana which extended from Aila to Bostra in Southern Syria.

In the late 3rd century AD the Legion X Fretensis, which was based in Jerusalem, moved to Aila and garrisoned there. In the Byzantine period when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman eastern Empire, the city became a

station for pilgrims visiting Mt. Sinai. We are also informed that the architect in charge of building the monastery at Mt. Sinai in the mid 6th century was Stephanos from Ayla.

Muslim rule in Ayla began in 630AD when its bishop, "Yohanna bin Ru'bah" made a peace treaty with Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). One of the articles of the peace treaty guaranteed the inhabitants on Ayla "protection of their ships and caravans on sea and land". This suggests the continued importance of commerce to the city's economy up to the eve of the Muslim conquest.

Two decades later the Arab Muslims founded a new walled town which flourished from the mid 7th to the early 12th centuries. Excavations in the centre of Aqaba, near the beach, uncovered a walled town measuring 165 x 140 metres. The enclosure was a series of U-shaped towers with a single gate pierced in the centre of the city. The intersection point was marked by a tetrapylon (a four-way arch) which in the second half of the 10th century became the residence of a wealthy merchant. The eastern quadrant was occupied by a hypostyle mosque.

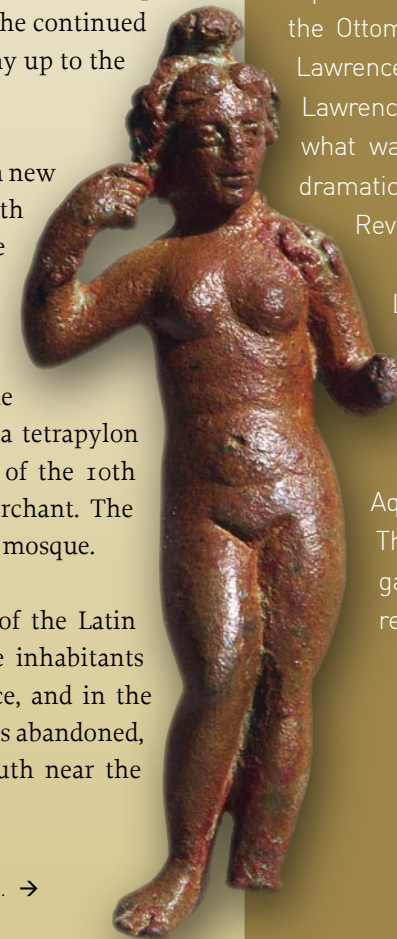
By the 1116 AD when Baldwin I, the king of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, arrived at Ayla, the inhabitants were too weak to offer any serious resistance, and in the course of the 12th century the walled town was abandoned, and a new settlement sprang up further south near the present Mameluke Fort.



DID YOU KNOW?

The Mameluke Fort situated at the end of the corniche in Aqaba was captured from the Ottomans in 1916 by T.E. Lawrence, better known as Lawrence of Arabia, during what was one of the most dramatic victories of the Arab Revolt.

Lawrence and the Arabs made a large semicircular trek through the desert and fell on Aqaba from behind. The surprised Turkish garrison quickly surrendered.



Bronze figurine from the Aqaba Archaeological Museum. →

↑ The Mameluke Fort at Aqaba.

It was the Mameluke Sultans of Egypt who took control of the region, renamed the city Aqaba and, in the early 16th century, built the town's famous Mameluke Fort. The Mamelukes were followed by the Ottomans, who ruled Aqaba for four centuries. Aqaba was taken from the Ottomans in 1917 by Arab forces together with T.E. Lawrence. At the end of the World War I, the British secured Aqaba for Jordan.

Historical Sites

The Mameluke Fort, one of the main historical landmarks of Aqaba, was rebuilt by the Mamelukes in the sixteenth century. Square in shape and flanked by semicircular towers, the fort is marked with various inscriptions marking the latter period of the Islamic dynasty. Excavations at the ancient site of Ayla revealed a gate and city wall along with towers, buildings and a mosque.

Other places of interest include a mud brick-building believed to be the earliest purpose-built church in the world, and the house of Sharif Hussein Bin Ali - the great grandfather of King Abdullah II, where an archaeological museum is now located.

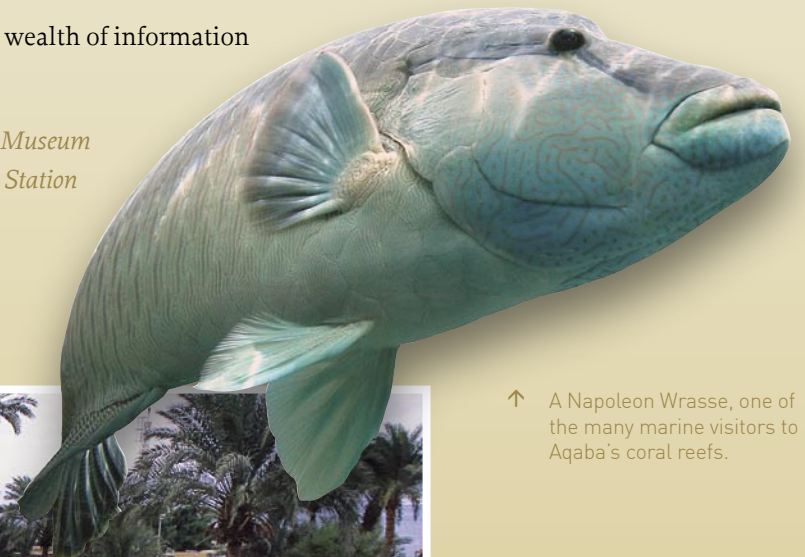
Museums

Local museums offer a wealth of information about this coastal city.

- *Aqaba Archaeological Museum*
- *Aqaba Marine Science Station*
- *Visitors' Centre*

Theatres & Cinemas

- *The Gateway Cinema*



↑ A Napoleon Wrasse, one of the many marine visitors to Aqaba's coral reefs.



Inside the grounds of the Mameluke Fort at Aqaba. ↑

Directions

By air:

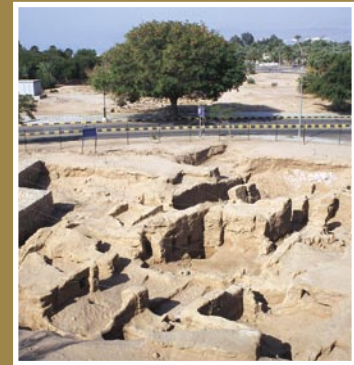
There are regular flights from Amman to Aqaba;
Flight time is about 45 minutes.

By bus:

Several companies offer charter bus tours and regular tours
between Amman & Aqaba. For more information please visit
www.VisitJordan.com.

By car or taxi:

Aqaba, via the Dead Sea road is approximately a 3 hour drive
south from Amman, via the Desert Highway, 4 hours; via the
scenic Kings' Highway, 5 hours.



DID YOU KNOW?

Some of the world's earliest known churches have been recently discovered in Jordan. The remains of a mud brick building in Aqaba may be the world's oldest known purpose built church. This Aqaba early church dates from the late 3rd or early 4th century AD.

JERASH

A close second to Petra on the list of favourite destinations in Jordan, the ancient city of Jerash boasts an unbroken chain of human occupation dating back more than 6500 years. Conquered by General Pompey in 63 BC, it came under Roman rule and was one of the ten great Roman cities, the Decapolis League.

The city's golden age came under Roman rule, during which time it was known as Gerasa, and the site is now generally acknowledged to be one of the best preserved Roman provincial towns in the world.

The modern city of Jerash can be found to the east of the ruins. While the old and new share a city wall, careful preservation and planning has seen the city itself develop well away from the ruins so there is no encroachment on the sites of old.

Historical Sites

Hidden for centuries in sand before being excavated and restored over the past 70 years, Jerash reveals a fine example of the grand, formal provincial Roman urbanism that is found throughout the Middle East, comprising paved and colonnaded streets, soaring hilltop temples, handsome theatres, spacious public squares and plazas, baths, fountains and city walls pierced by towers and gates.

Beneath its external Graeco-Roman veneer, Jerash also preserves a subtle blend of east and west. Its architecture, religion and languages reflect a process by which two powerful cultures meshed and coexisted - the Graeco-Roman world of the Mediterranean basin, and the ancient traditions of the Arab Orient.



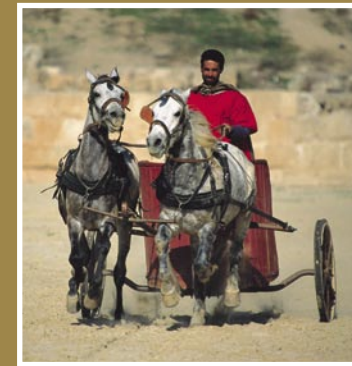
The South Theatre seats 3000 people and is still used today. ↑

The Oval Plaza at Jerash. →

Jerash reveals a fine example of the grand, formal provincial Roman urbanism

Ancient Jerash was an open city of freestanding structures richly embellished with marble and granite. Its engineering was so advanced that large parts of the city still survive today. Much more has been painstakingly restored by archaeological teams from around the world.

The Starting gates or 'Carceres' of the Hippodrome at Jerash. →



DID YOU KNOW?

The Jerash Heritage Company has started daily ticketed performances of the Roman Army and Chariot Experience (RACE) at the hippodrome in Jerash.

The show runs twice daily, at 11am and at 3pm (2pm during the winter months), except Fridays. It features forty-five legionaries in full armour in a display of Roman Army drill and battle tactics, ten gladiators fighting "to the death" and several Roman chariots competing in a classical seven lap race around the ancient hippodrome. For more information, visit their website: www.jerashchariots.com

The main attractions in Jerash are, not surprisingly, the ruins themselves. Guidebooks, maps and further information are readily available from the Visitors' Centres near the South Gate. The ruins are extensive and impressive. Highlights include:

Hadrian's Arch

Built to commemorate the visit of the Emperor Hadrian to Jerash in 129AD, this splendid triumphal arch was intended to become the main Southern gate to the city; however the expansion plans were never completed.



Hippodrome

This massive arena was 245m long and 52m wide and could seat 15,000 spectators at a time for chariot races and other sports. The exact date of its construction is unclear but it is estimated between the mid-second to third century AD. It is now also possible to relive the days when gladiators and charioteers appeared before the crowds, with regular re-enactments by the Roman Army and Chariot Experience (RACE).

Hadrian's triumphal arch. ↑

Oval Plaza

The spacious plaza measures 90m x 80m and is surrounded by a broad sidewalk and colonnade of 1st century AD Ionic columns. There are two alters in the middle, and a fountain was added in the 7th Century AD. This square structure now supports a central column, which was recently erected to carry the Jerash Festival Flame.

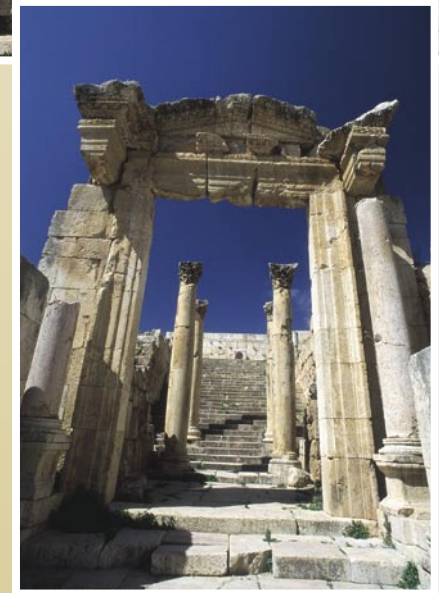


Colonnaded Street

Still paved with the original stones – the ruts worn by chariots are still visible – the 800m Cardo was the architectural spine and focal point of Jerash. An underground sewage system ran the full length of the Cardo and the regular holes at the sides of the street drained rainwater into the sewers.

Cathedral

Further up the Cardo Maximus, on the left is the monumental and richly carved gateway of a 2nd century Roman Temple of Dionysus. In the 4th century the temple was rebuilt as a Byzantine church now referred to as the 'Cathedral' (although there is no evidence that it held more importance than any of the other churches). At the top of the stairs, against an outer East wall of the Cathedral is the shrine of St. Mary, with a painted inscription to Mary and the archangels Michael and Gabriel.



The Cardo Maximus (Colonnaded Street). ↑

Gateway to the Temple of Dionysus. ↑



Nymphaeum

This ornamental fountain was constructed in 191AD and dedicated to the Nymphs. Such fountains were common in Roman cities, and provided a refreshing focal point for the city. This well-preserved example was originally embellished with marble facings on the lower level and painted plaster on the upper level, topped with a half-dome roof. Water cascaded through seven carved lion's heads into small basins on the sidewalk and overflowed from there through drains and into the underground sewage system.

North Theatre

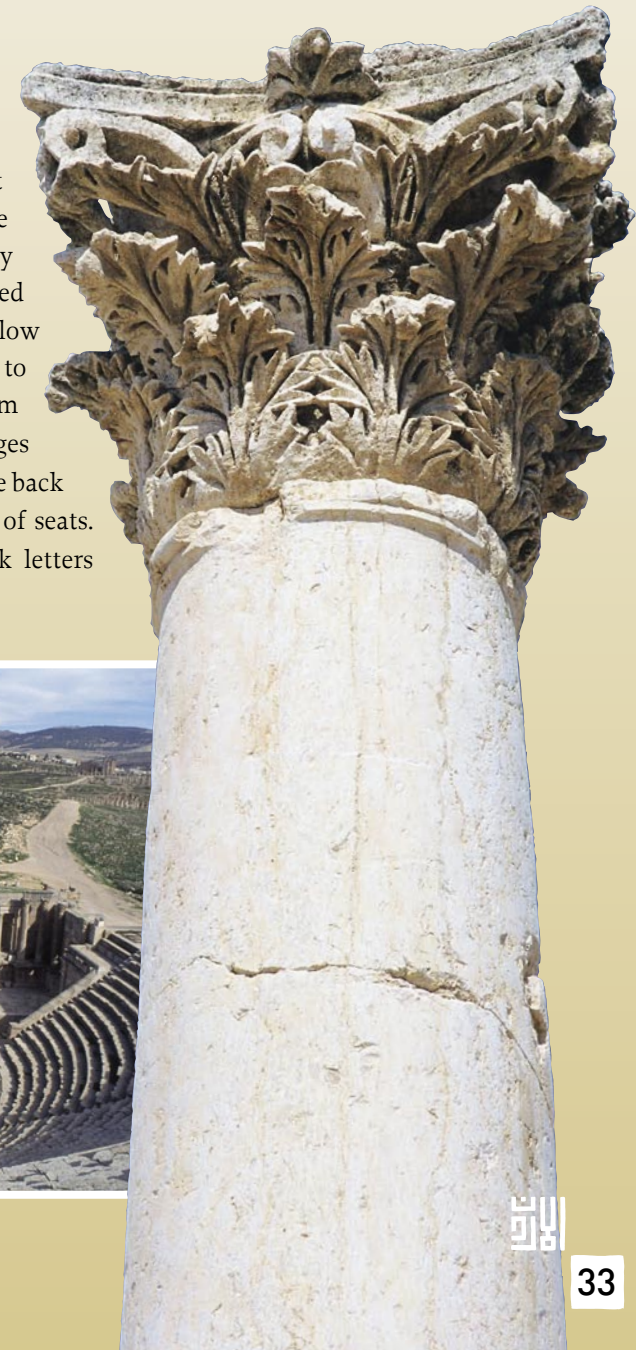
The North Theatre was built in 165AD. In front is a colonnaded plaza where a staircase led up to the entrance. The theatre originally only had 14 rows of seats and was used for performances, city council meetings, etc. In 235AD, the theatre was doubled in size to its current capacity of 1,600. The theatre fell into disuse in the 5th century and many of its stones were taken for use in other buildings.

[The ornamental Nymphaeum.](#) ↑

[The South Theatre.](#) →

South Theatre

Built during the reign of Emperor Domitian, between 90-92AD, the South Theatre can seat more than 3000 spectators. The first level of the ornate stage, which was originally a two-storey structure, has been reconstructed and is still used today. The theatre's remarkable acoustics allow a speaker at the centre of the orchestra floor to be heard throughout the entire auditorium without raising his voice. Two vaulted passages lead into the orchestra, and four passages at the back of the theatre give access to the upper rows of seats. Some seats could be reserved and the Greek letters which designate them can still be seen.



The Jerash Festival

Two thousand years ago, the great urban trading cities of the Middle East were born when Middle Eastern and Western societies came together in a tremendous synthesis of commerce, art, and culture. Their legacy shines today in the splendid cities of the Graeco-Roman and Arab east, such as Petra, Jerash, Gadara, and Palmyra. The full power and glory of that ancient drama is revived in Jordan every summer in the form of the two-week-long Jerash Festival of Culture and Arts.

The Jerash Festival usually takes place during the end of July and beginning of August. It showcases a wide array of singers, musical and folklore troupes, poetry readings, symphony orchestras, ballet, Shakespearean theatre, handicrafts, and art shows. The colonnaded streets, plazas, and theatres of Jerash all provide unique venues for these acts, under the balmy summer skies of central Jordan.

While performances take place in the different arenas, thousands of visitors also enjoy strolling through the ancient streets and monuments of the city, shopping for handicrafts, taking in art and book exhibitions, enjoying a casual meal, or simply absorbing the powerful drama of East and West meeting in a great cultural jamboree. Skilled craftsmen and women display Bedouin rugs, jewellery, embroidery, glass, wood, metal, and ceramic objects, and also demonstrate on the spot how they create their wares.



Inaugurated in 1981 by Queen Noor Al Hussein and now part of the Noor Al Hussein Foundation cultural programmes, the festival has become the premiere showcase for Jordanian performing artists, and an exciting meeting place for artists and people from the four corners of the world. The setting of the ancient Greco-Roman City provides an unforgettable backdrop to this cultural event, with brilliant floodlights dramatically highlighting the colonnaded streets, public plazas, temple precincts, Byzantine churches, theatres and other ancient monuments.

Visitors to the Jerash Festival can easily spend a week taking in the many offerings at the festival, which all take place in the evening from 1700-2300 hrs, while enjoying Jordan's many other attractions during the daytime hours. For further information visit www.jerashfestival.com.jo



Dancers perform in the South Theatre. ↑

Festival performer. →

Its engineering was so advanced that large parts of the city still survive today.

RACE

The Jerash Heritage Company organizes performances of the Roman Army and Chariot Experience (RACE) at the hippodrome in Jerash. It features forty-five legionaries in full armour in a display of Roman Army drill and battle tactics, ten gladiators fighting “to the death” and several Roman chariots competing in a classical seven lap race around the ancient hippodrome.

Museums

Guidebooks, maps and further information are readily available from the Visitors’ Centres. Not to be missed when you visit Jerash is the Archaeological Museum, which houses a fascinating collection of artefacts found at the site. These include gold jewellery, coins, glass and – perhaps the most unusual – pottery theatre tickets!

Directions

Jerash is a great day-trip from Amman.

By car or taxi: From the Sport City interchange in Amman, head northwest past Jordan University; Jerash is 51km from Amman.

By Bus: Various companies offer regular trips in air-conditioned coaches from Amman. Please visit www.visitjordan.com



AJLUN

The marvels of nature and the genius of medieval Arab military architecture have given northern Jordan two of the most important ecological and historical attractions in the Middle East: the sprawling pine forests of the Ajlun-Dibeen area, and the towering Ayyubid castle at Ajlun, which helped to defeat the Crusaders eight centuries ago.

Ajlun Castle (Qal'at Ar-Rabad) was built by one of Saladin's generals in 1184 AD to control the local iron mines and to deter the Franks from invading Ajlun. Ajlun Castle dominated the three main routes leading to the Jordan valley and protected the trade and commercial routes between Jordan and Syria. It became an important link in the defensive chain against the Crusaders, who unsuccessfully spent decades trying to capture the castle and the nearby village.

The original castle had four towers; arrow slits incorporated into the thick walls and was surrounded by a moat averaging 16 meters in width and up to 15 meters deep.

In 1215 AD, the Mameluke officer Izz Ed-Din Aybak expanded the castle by adding a new tower in the southeast corner and a bridge that can still be seen decorated with pigeon reliefs.

The castle was conceded in the 13th century to Salah al-Din Yousef Muhammad Ibn Ayoub, ruler of Aleppo and Damascus, who restored the north-eastern tower. These expansion efforts were interrupted in AD 1260, when Mongol invaders



destroyed the castle, but almost immediately the Mameluke Sultan Baybars re-conquered and rebuilt the fortress.

The Ajlun area has a long history of human settlement, due to its Mediterranean climate, dense forests and fertile soil. This rich history is reflected in the many archaeological ruins scattered in the woodlands and surrounding villages.

Historical Sites

Ajlun Castle, known in Arabic as Qal'at Ar-Rabad, is the major ancient monument within the Ajlun region. It towers above the green hills and can be seen from many miles away, betraying its strategic purpose as a military watch post that protected the trade routes in the 12th-15th centuries. It was first built in 1184 by one of Saladin's generals, Izzeddin Usama Ibn Mungidh, to repel the Crusader threats to north Jordan. The castle was expanded into its current configuration in 1214.

The castle is one of the best preserved and most complete examples of Medieval Arab-Islamic military architecture.

The castle is one of the best preserved examples of Medieval Arab-Islamic military architecture. Among its main features are a surrounding dry moat, a drawbridge into the main entrance, the fortified entrance gate, a massive south tower, and several other towers on all sides.

The castle boasts a labyrinth of vaulted passages, winding staircases, long ramps, enormous rooms that served as dining halls, dormitories, and stables, and the private quarters of the Lord of the Castle (complete with a small stone bathtub and rectangular windows that convert into arrow-slits for defensive purposes).

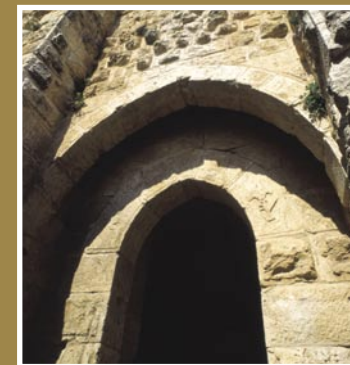
In the nearby village of Tubna, visitors will find a Zeidani mosque and a meeting hall dating back to 1750 AD.

Visitors will also find a structure known as “Al’ali Shreidah”, home of the governor of the region before the establishment of modern Jordan. The governor’s home was much admired by the contemporaries due to the fact that it was the first two-level building in the region.

Settlement in Zubia Village, within the Ajlun district, dates back to the Byzantine period. There is an area in the village known as “the monastery”, which contains the remains of an old Byzantine church. There are also houses and stables dating back several hundred years. A spring located in a valley between Zubia and Tubna served as a major source of water for the surrounding settlements. Today, there are more than ten villages surrounding the Ajlun Reserve. The area is famous for its olive trees and its assorted products.

Directions

By car or taxi: From Amman take the Zarqa-Mafraq highway north and follow the signs. A short journey west from Jerash, through pine forest and olive groves, brings you to the town of Ajlun.



DID YOU KNOW?

During Mameluke rule, Ajlun Castle (Qal’at al Rab-adh) was one of a network of beacons and pigeon posts that allowed messages to be transmitted from Damascus to Cairo in just 12 hours!

Ajlun Castle protected the communication routes between south Jordan and Syria, and was one of a chain of forts, which lit beacons at night to pass signals from the Euphrates as far as Cairo.

UMM AL-JIMAL

The eastern-most of the major northern cities, Umm al-Jimal is located at the edge of the eastern basalt desert plain, along a secondary road that was close to the junction of several ancient trade routes which linked central Jordan with Syria and Iraq.

The paucity of timber in the region led to an almost exclusive use of the hard basalt stones as building materials: door and window frames, sills, lintels, and sometimes even the doors themselves. The use of these stones also introduced a unique roofing system: corbel courses which consisted of long basalt slabs laid across the rooms.

Historical Sites

Among the most interesting structures to visit are the tall barracks with their little chapel, several large churches, numerous open and roofed water cisterns, the outlines of a Roman fort and the remains of several town gates.

Directions

Take the Irbid Highway to Mafraq, and then a tiny road will take you to Umm Al Jimal, 2 hours away from Amman.



The black basalt ruins at Umm Al-Jimal. ↑

some of the world's earliest camp sites and villages dating back 10,000 to 18,000 years.

PELLA (Tabaqat Fahl)

In the foothills of the Jordan valley, at exactly sea-level, Pella is probably the area's richest site. With antiquities dating back to both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible, it is the place to which early persecuted Christians from Jerusalem fled.

Close by this ancient settlement, evidence has been found of some of the world's earliest camp sites and semi-permanent villages dating back to the Natufian and Kebaran periods, 10,000 to 18,000 years ago.

Historical Sites

Together with excavated ruins from the Greco-Roman period, Pella offers visitors the opportunity to see the remains of a Chalcolithic settlement from the 4th millennium BC, evidence of Bronze and Iron Age walled cities, Byzantine churches, early Islamic residential quarters, and a small medieval mosque.

Directions

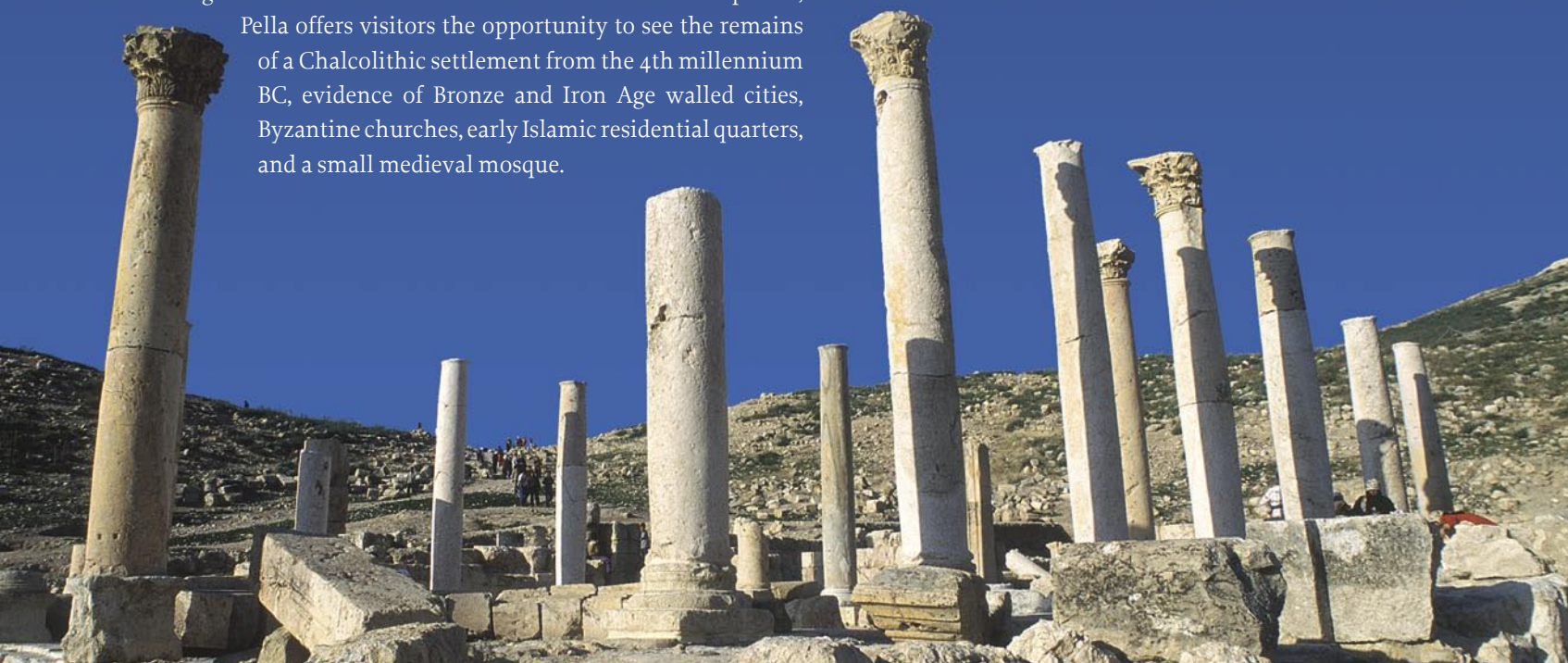
By car or taxi: Take the Jordan Valley road northbound to be reached either by Dead Sea Highway through Naur, or the Arda route through Salt (it is shorter), 1.5 hour away from Amman.

By bus: There are regular services in air-conditioned coaches from Amman to Irbid.



DID YOU KNOW?

Umm Al-Jimal's present Arabic name which means "Mother of Camels" has misled some people to think of the ancient site exclusively as a caravan city, though there really is no evidence to support this assumption. Because of its location on the edge of the desert, Umm el-Jimal can best be thought of as a frontier city.



UMM QAYS (Gadara)

In addition to Jerash and Amman, Gadara (modern-day Umm Qays) and Pella (Tabaqat Fahil) were once Decapolis cities, and each has unique appeal. Perched on a splendid hilltop overlooking the Jordan Valley and the Sea of Galilee, Umm Qays is the site of Jesus' miracle of the Gadarene swine. It is here that He encountered a demented man who lived in the tombs near the entrance to the city; Jesus cast the bad spirits out of the man and into a herd of pigs, which then ran down the hill into the waters of the Sea of Galilee and drowned.

In the past, the city was renowned as a cultural centre. It was home to several classical poets and philosophers, including Theodorus, founder of a rhetorical school in Rome; a poet once described the city as "New Athens".



↑ Underground mausoleum (The Hypogaeum).

Historical Sites

Sites of interest include the stunning black basalt theatre, the basilica, and adjacent courtyard strewn with nicely carved black sarcophagi, the colonnaded main street, and a side street lined with shops, an underground mausoleum, two baths, a nymphaeum, a city gate, and the faint outline of what was a massive hippodrome.



↑ A black basalt sarcophagus.

A rare five-aisled basilica from the 4th century was recently discovered and excavated at Umm Qays. It has been built directly over a Roman-Byzantine tomb and has a view into the tomb from the interior of the church. It is also located alongside the old Roman city gate on the road to the Sea of Galilee. Everything about this distinctive arrangement of a church above a tomb at this particular place strongly indicates that it was designed and built to commemorate the very spot where the Byzantine faithful believed that Jesus performed his miracle.

Museums

Umm Qays Museum contains an intriguing selection of artefacts, mosaics and statues.

- *Umm Qays Museum*

the city was renowned as a cultural centre. It was home to several classical poets and philosophers.



DID YOU KNOW?

Umm Qays is the modern-day name of ancient Gadara, it was mentioned in the late sixteenth century in the Ottoman tax records as "Mkes", which, in Arabic means a frontier station for gathering taxes.



Directions

By car or taxi: Take the Jerash - Irbid Highway north of Amman. Upon reaching the city of Irbid (about an hour's drive) follow the signs that will take you to Umm Qays. Umm Qays is around 60 minutes away from Irbid and about 120 kms from Amman.

By bus: There are regular services in air-conditioned coaches from Amman to Irbid.

↑ Five-aisled basilica at Umm Qays.

→ Statue of the Greek God Zeus.



SHAWBAK

A lonely reminder of former Crusader glory, Shawbak Castle is located less than an hour's drive north of Petra. Once called “Le Krak de Montreal”, Shawbak dates from the same turbulent period as Karak. It is perched on the side of a mountain, with a grand sweep of fruit trees below.

Historical Sites

Shawbak castle's exterior is impressive, with a forbidding gate and encircling triple wall. Despite the precautions of its builder, the fortress fell to Saladin only 75 years after it was raised. Inscriptions by his proud successors appear on the castle wall.

Built during the Crusader times, 887 years ago, Shawbak castle appears as a natural extension of a dramatic hill. The location has provided the castle with a natural moat, through



Shawbak Castle's positioning made it a formidable castle to lay siege to. ↑

a system of valleys that surround a central hill from all directions. The terrain shows unusual geologic activities, rock layers tilted from horizontal to almost vertical, sharp hillsides with rock cliffs, and rugged terrain that gains height towards the west before abruptly dropping into the distant depths of Wadi Araba. All of these geomorphologic features have provided the site of the castle with a strategic location that is, naturally, easy to defend. The shape of the landscape also helped in providing water. Springs gush from valleys facing east; which is unlike the usual trend where springs at villages in south Jordan come out of slopes facing west (Wadi Musa, Tafleeh, Dana, Taybeh, and others). The way in which this castle uses its natural elegant pedestal, both for acquiring its magnificent vertical scale for defence and for benefiting from cool spring water, is part of the overall charming qualities of this monument.

While the Crusaders called it “Le Krak de Montreal”, the current name of Shawbak refers to the castle as well as to its surrounding group of ten villages. The recent history of the castle is directly connected to these villages. People of Shawbak still remember when the castle was inhabited (till 1950s), they would tell a story where each tower was occupied by one of the clans, and how the people spread around the castle in villages like Al-Jayeh, Mugar'ieh, Nijil, Al Mansura, Shammakh, and others.

At the castle entrance, on the eastern elevation, is one of the towers with beautiful Arabic calligraphy, using big size letters braded in the Mameluke style and dated to the later rebuilding works of 1290s.



Walking in the ruined parts of the castle you can notice some architectural elements of European style, almost gothic, while other parts are reminiscent architecture from Mameluke Cairo.

The castle plays with its surroundings in an amusing way, windows whistling in the wind, partially collapsed openings squeezing the outside glare to draw shadows on flooring stones, and rooms where the end wall has fallen into the deep valley below. The effects of time are both stunning and entertaining.

In Shawbak, locals talk of passages with no ends, pitch dark and scary. References mention some 375 steps leading down to the areas natural water table, of which archaeologists have reached as low as 150 or so. Adding up the vertical heights of all the steps would give an estimated 75 metres in vertical distance; the prospect of hitting water at these depths is very credible. The investment in digging such a staircase in layers of hard bedrock is definitely worth it, especially when knowing that the siege of castles in such a dry region usually ended with the surrender from thirst.

Directions

Take the Desert Highway heading south, at the Hashmiyyeh Bridge turn right. Shawbak is around 2.5 hours from Amman.

Two supporting arches have long since lost their purpose. ↑

An arched passageway showing well preserved Crusader masonry. →



DESERT Umayyad CASTLES

Jordan's desert castles, beautiful examples of both early Islamic art and architecture, are testament to a fascinating era in the country's rich history. Their fine mosaics, frescoes, stone, and stucco carvings, inspired by the best in Persian and Graeco-Roman traditions, tell countless stories of life as it was during the eighth century.

Called castles because of their imposing stature, the desert complexes actually served various purposes as caravan stations, agricultural and trading centres, resort pavilions and outposts that helped distant rulers forge ties with local Bedouins. Several of these preserved compounds, all of which are clustered to the east and south of Amman, can be visited on one or two-day loops from the city.



Qasr al-Hallabat. ↑

Qasr al-Hallabat

The site comprises a conglomerate of separate and widely spaced units that include a qasr (castle), a mosque, and huge reservoir, and eight cisterns. The site also includes an irregularly shaped agricultural enclosure with an elaborate system of sluices and a cluster of poorly built houses.

The plan of the castle, built of dressed blocks of basalt and limestone, is square, 44 m to the side, with corner towers and a single entrance in the middle of the eastern wall. The north-western quadrant of the interior is occupied by a structure which may have been used for carrying out domestic chores including pressing of grapes.

Clearance work and excavations inside the qasr uncovered a total of 146 Greek inscriptions as well as two Nabataean and one Safaitic engraved on regularly cut basalt stones. The Greek inscriptions belong to an edict issued by the Byzantine emperor Anastasius (491-518) for the administrative and economic reorganization of Provincia Arabia. These inscribed stones were apparently brought from a nearby settlement, possibly Umm al-Jimal, and reused as building material during the Umayyad reconstruction of the castle; in the course of this reconstruction the castle was elaborately decorated with carved stucco, frescoes, and coloured mosaics, thus transformed from a fortified building into a palatial residence.



↑ Detailed arch above a tall window in Qasr al-Hallabat.

Jordan's desert castles are testament to a fascinating era in the country's rich history.

Qasr al-Azraq

About 13 kilometres north of the Azraq Junction, on the highway to Iraq, you will find the large black fortress of Qasr al-Azraq. The present form of the castle dates back to the beginning of the 13th century CE. Crafted from local black basalt rocks, the castle exploited Azraq's important strategic position and water sources.

The first fortress here is thought to have been built by the Romans around 300 CE, during the reign of Diocletian. The structure was also used by the Byzantines and Umayyads. Qasr al-Azraq underwent its final major stage of building in 1237 CE, when the Ayyubids redesigned and fortified it. In the 16th century the Ottoman Turks stationed a garrison there, and Lawrence of Arabia made the fortress his desert headquarters during the winter of 1917, during the Great Arab Revolt against the Ottoman Empire.

The castle is almost square, with 80-meter long walls encircling a central courtyard. In the middle of the courtyard is a small mosque from the Ayyubid period, along with the main well. At each corner of the outer wall, there is an oblong tower. The primary entrance is a single massive hinged slab of basalt, which leads to a vestibule where one can see carved into the pavement the remains of a board game. Above the entrance area is the chamber that was used by Lawrence during his stay in Qasr al-Azraq. The caretaker of the castle has a collection of photographs of Lawrence; in fact, his father was one of the Arab officers who served with the legendary Brit.

The entrance to Qasr al-Azraq →



Qusayr Amra

Qusayr Amra (the little palace of Amra) is a bathhouse constructed during the first half of the 8th century in the Jordanian steppe away from any visible ancient settlement. The monument stands on the edge of Wadi al-Butum (valley of the terebinth trees); its plan consists of three main elements:

A rectangular audience-hall divided into three aisles by two transverse arches which spring from low pilasters. The aisles are roofed by three tunnel-vaults. On the axis of the entrance door is an alcove (the throne alcove); a small door to the right and left in the alcove open into two small mosaic-paved and dimly-lit rooms.

The bath complex consists of three chambers corresponding to the disrobing, warm, and hot rooms.

The hydraulic structures located five metres to the north of the bath. These include an elevated water tank, a masonry coursed deep well, and a Saqiyah, an apparatus for drawing water from the well into the water tank.

What is striking about Qusayr Amra are its extensive fresco paintings which cover virtually all the interior surfaces.

The iconographic repertoire include hunting and bathing scenes, wrestlers, archers, musicians and dancers, as well as panels depicting various crafts and activities connected with construction work. The most surprising in these paintings is the presence of a large number of nude and semi-nude women; these images are puzzling because they run contrary to what one expects from a Muslim patron commissioning such a building in the early Islamic period, perhaps in the last decade of Umayyad rule (740-750). The fresco paintings of Qusayr Amra are particularly important in that they offer a wealth of iconographic themes unrivalled in any other contemporary monuments, and because they represent a key historic moment when Islamic art was in its formative stages, hence its inclusion in the World Heritage List.



↑ Qusayr Amra's early Islamic frescoes.

↓ Qusayr Amra



← One of Jordanian cuisine's early appetizers

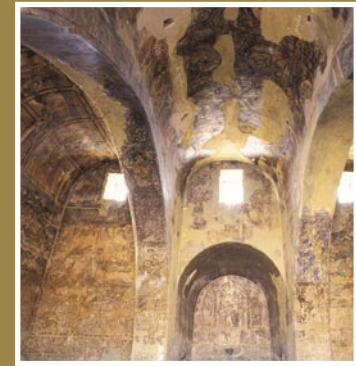
extensive fresco paintings cover virtually all the interior surfaces.

Qasr al-Kharraneh

This well-preserved castle is located about 16 kilometres west of Qusayr 'Amra and 55 kilometres east of Amman. The spot is marked by an assortment of tall radio pylons on the other side of the highway.

Qasr al-Kharraneh remains an enigma to archaeologists and historians. Some experts believe that it was a defensive fort, while others maintain it was a caravanserai for passing camel trains. Yet another theory is that it served as a retreat for Umayyad leaders to discuss affairs of state. With its high walls, arrow slits, four corner towers and square shape, Qasr al-Kharraneh would appear to be a defensive castle. However, the towers are not solid and large enough to have been an effective defence, and may have instead been built to buttress the walls.

The arrow slits are also cosmetic, being too narrow on the inside to allow archers sufficient visibility and too few in number for effective military usage. We do know that an inscription in a second-story room dates the construction of Qasr al-Kharraneh to 711 AD. The presence of Greek inscriptions around the main entrance frame suggests that some of the stones were brought from a nearby site and reused as building material.

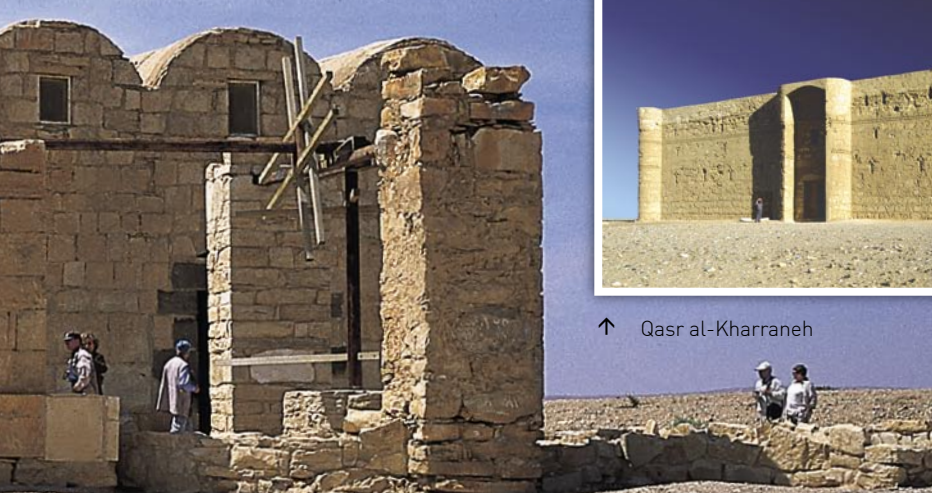
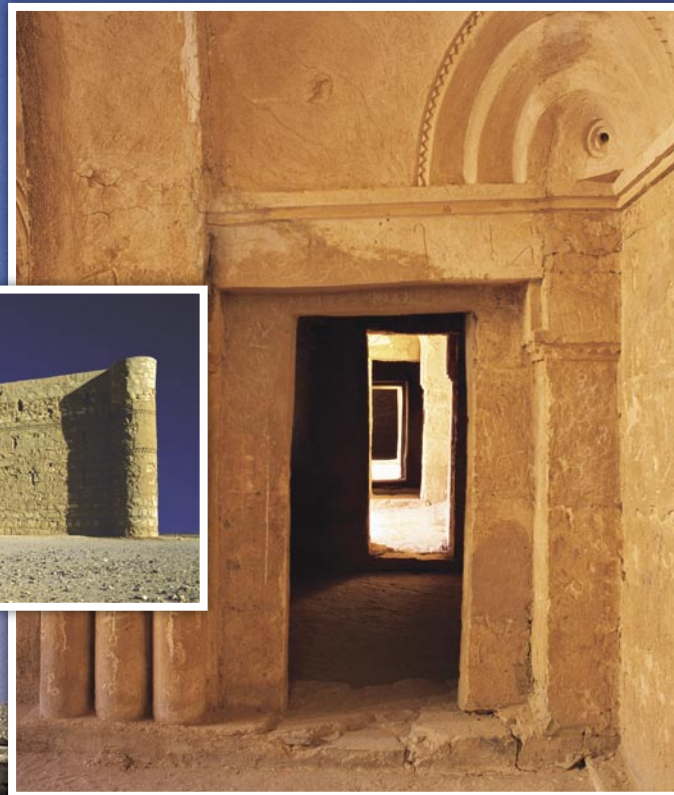


DID YOU KNOW?

The fresco paintings inside Qusayr Amra are particularly important in that they offer a wealth of iconographic themes that are unrivalled in any other contemporary monuments, and because they represent a key historic moment when Islamic art was in its formative stages. It is because of this that Qusayr Amra is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.



↑ Qasr al-Kharraneh



↑ Kebele



Qasr al-Mushatta

Just south of Amman, Qasr al-Mushatta offers an excellent example of characteristic Umayyad architecture. The castle is an incomplete square palace with elaborate decoration and vaulted ceilings. The immense brick walls of the complex stretch 144 meters in each direction, and at least 23 round towers were nestled along these walls. The palace mosque is sited in the traditional position, inside and to the right of the main entrance. Throughout, there is a powerful symmetry in the planning, with a tendency for compartmentalization, often into three sections. The vaulting systems are considered essentially Iraqi, but the stonemasonry and carved decoration betray Sasanian, Coptic, and Classical influences. These influences are modified by their interaction, and this palace presents the most complete fusion of these traditions in Umayyad architecture.

The plan of al-Mushatta is more developed than the other Umayyad desert palaces, and therefore scholars tend to attribute its construction to the late Umayyad period, and to assign it to al-Walid II (died 744 AD).

The most remarkable feature of Qasr al -Mushatta is the delicately carved stone façade which used to stand between the half-round buttresses flanking the half-octagonal towers on either side of the entrance opened in the middle of the south wall.

Directions

The Desert Castles can be comfortably seen on a day-trip or a two-day loop from Amman.

The Desert Castles tour: You can visit Hammam as-Sarh, Qasr al-Hallabat, Qasr al-Azraq and Qusayr Amra during a drive through the Eastern Desert. Qasr al-Kharraneh and Qasr al-Mushatta are both less than an hour's drive from Amman and are well worth a trip if you are staying in the Capital.

By car or taxi: For the Desert Castles take the Airport Highway Road from Amman and head for Azraq. The Azraq Wetlands Reserve is in Azraq al-Janoubi (South Azraq), the Shawmari Wildlife Reserve, 10km further south (follow the road signs). A good map is advisable and can be found from the Ministry of Tourism & Antiquities or from the Jordan Tourism Board offices in Amman.



HISTORY & CULTURE ITINERARIES

1 Day Tour Options:

1. Jerash, Ajlun
2. Amman (City Tour)
3. Madaba, Mount Nebo, Bethany Beyond the Jordan

3 Day Itinerary:

- Day 1. Amman, Jerash, Madaba and Dead Sea - *Overnight in Amman*
Day 2. Petra - *Overnight in Little Petra*
Day 3. Karak, Madaba and Mount Nebo - *Overnight in Amman*

5 Day Itinerary:

- Day 1. Amman, Jerash, Ajlun - *Overnight in Amman*
Day 2. Madaba, Mount Nebo, Karak - *Overnight at Petra*
Day 3. Petra - *Overnight at Petra*
Day 4. Wadi Rum - *Overnight Dead Sea*
Day 5. Bethany Beyond The Jordan





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