

Destination Jordan

So it's official. Petra, jewel in the crown of Jordan's antiquities, has been declared by popular ballot as one of the 'new' Seven Wonders of the World. Jordan's authorities, together with tour operators, hoteliers and even the Bedouin of Petra themselves, have been quick to understand the commercial value of this marketing coup, and prices have risen accordingly. The magnificent rock-hewn city of the Nabataeans hardly needed further billing. Since Johann Ludwig Burckhardt rediscovered it in the 19th century, it has been a favourite destination for Europeans – and at sunset on a winter's day, when the rose-pink city catches alight, it's easy to see why it has charmed a new generation of visitors.

Not to be outdone by Petra's success, Wadi Rum – that epic landscape of TE Lawrence and David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia* – is a contender as one of the Seven *Natural* Wonders of the World. Surely two such accolades would be entirely disproportionate to the minimal size of Jordan.

But Jordan, straddling the ancient Holy Land of the world's three great monotheistic religions, and once an important trading centre of the Roman Empire, is no stranger to punching above its weight. Stand on Mt Nebo, newly consecrated by Pope John II, and survey the land promised to Moses; unfurl a veil at Mukawir, where Salome cast a spell over men in perpetuity; float in the Dead Sea, beside a pillar of salt, reputed to be Lot's disobedient wife. Go just about anywhere in Jordan and you'll find every stone bears a tale.

With so much history wrapped up in this tiny desert kingdom, it's easy to overlook the modern face of Jordan – something the government is trying to address in ambitious tourist developments at Aqaba and along the Dead Sea. And 'ambitious' is an appropriate word. In a country of minimal resources – where water is in critically short supply, arable land accounts for less than 5% of the landmass, and unemployment and inflation are hovering around 15% – the disproportionate investment in Jordan's coastal pleasure domes appears to border on the reckless.

This is especially so when you consider the neighbourhood it shares. Wedged between Iraq and Israel and the Palestinian Territories, Jordan has had to shelter millions of refugees in recent decades, straining health care and education systems and changing the demography of the country forever. Palestinians now account for the majority of the population involved in all aspects of government and trade. The Bedouin population, meanwhile, contends with a minimum wage of \$155 a month.

If the Seven Wonders of the World ballot showed anything, however, it was the extent to which, despite the mixed origins of its people, the current economic difficulties and the insecurity of life in a volatile region, Jordanians are united in their pride for their country. And there's a lot to be proud of. The monarchy under King Abdullah continues the acclaimed role of peacemaker between Arab and Western interests, Jordan is a regional leader in protecting the environment and promoting sustainable tourism, and its capital city is enjoying a modern renaissance.

In common with many Arab countries, Jordan is at a crossroads as it shapes up to integration within the modern, global community. Unlike many of its neighbours, however, Jordan has recognised that the past is part of its future, and while the politicians plan a way to maximise on the country's unique legacy, the Bedouin still herd their sheep across an unchanged landscape in effortless continuity with the ancient past.

FAST FACTS

Population: 6.2 million

Population growth rate: 2.3%

Inflation: 15.5%

GDP: US\$31.01

Main exports: clothing, pharmaceuticals, potash, phosphates, fertilisers, vegetables

Average annual income: US\$5000

Average male life expectancy: 76 years

Average female life expectancy: 81 years

Male literacy rate: 95%

Female literacy rate: 85%

Getting Started

Jordan is an easy and enjoyable country to visit. The logistics of travel, from obtaining visas on arrival to accessing the liberally-sprinkled ATMs, are a breeze. Best of all, as Jordan is a compact country and travel times are short, you can enjoy a range of world-class sights within a relatively short period of time. You can even combine a visit with other Middle Eastern top spots from Jerusalem to Damascus, both just a few hours by road. Jordan is one country where it pays to have a little more cash at your disposal. Enjoying a dive in the spectacular Red Sea, taking a 4WD excursion in Wadi Rum, hiking with a guide in Dana Nature Reserve or staying at a luxury spa on the Dead Sea are highlights well worth saving for.

WHEN TO GO

For a small country, Jordan has an extraordinary range of climates. The best time to visit is in spring (March to May), when wildflowers put on a spectacular display, and autumn (September to November), when the daytime temperatures are not too extreme.

Winter can be surprisingly cold. Snow in Amman is not unheard of (even Petra gets the occasional fall) and the deserts can be freezing, especially at night. Aqaba is the exception, with average daytime maximum temperatures of around 20°C in January.

In high summer (July and August) the weather in the humid Jordan Valley is oppressive, with suffocating daytime highs exceeding 35°C. It's also fiercely hot in desert areas, though the dry heat is easier to tolerate. Festivals are welcome summer distractions.

It's best to avoid the month of Ramadan as visitors are obliged to refrain from eating, drinking or smoking in public during the day and many restaurants close for the whole period. See p296 for more on Ramadan.

Note also that many of the excellent trails operated in Jordan's Dana, Wadi Mujib and Ajloun nature reserves only operate between April and October.

COSTS & MONEY

By neighbouring standards, Jordan is not a cheap country, and the rising price of oil is fuelling inflation to such an extent that prices in this

See Climate Charts (p292) for more information.

A FAMILY AFFAIR

Eid al-Fitr, the great celebration at the end of Ramadan, is primarily a family occasion. At this time, public transport is heavily booked and hotel rooms are hard to find, especially in Aqaba.

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

- Your driver's licence (p317) and Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI) diving card
- A Syrian visa if you are heading north (see p303)
- A Jordanian visa if heading from Israel and the Palestinian Territories across King Hussein/Allenby Bridge (see p310)
- A sleeping sheet if you're staying overnight in Wadi Rum
- A torch (flashlight) for exploring archaeological sites
- Mosquito repellent and net if you intend to hike and camp through wadis or sleep on hotel roofs (as permitted, for example, at some smaller hotels in Petra)
- A hat, sunscreen, sunglasses, long sleeves and covering for your neck if you're planning a summer visit. A water carrier that fits a 1.5L bottle is also useful.

book, especially for accommodation and transport, may have increased by the time you read this. That said, you can still find value for money, especially if you can afford a few extra dinars for a midrange hotel, or for a purchase from a quality craft shop. If you're on a tight budget, there are plenty of cheap sleeps and eats in major towns if you don't mind stripping back to basics (JD4 for a rooftop mattress, for example, or JD8 for a bed in a dorm).

More liveable budget hotels charge about JD15/20/25 for a single/double/triple. A good midrange single/double costs from JD25/35 up to JD65/75, while top-end doubles start at JD80.

Street snacks such as a felafel or shwarma sandwich cost just a few fils and you can get a decent budget meal for JD1 to JD3. In mid-range restaurants, main courses start from around JD4. Jordan's top restaurants offer excellent value for money (especially in comparison with Western prices), with main courses starting from JD8, sumptuous buffets from JD15 and quality dining experiences from JD35 (usually including wine).

Public transport costs about JD2 per hour in a comfortable, long-distance private bus, or less than JD1 per hour of travel in a public bus or minibus. Public buses and minibuses can be exasperatingly slow however, as most towns are linked by sporadic services that only leave when full. Car hire is reasonable and recommended, especially for exploring the King's Highway, the Dead Sea Highway and remote Eastern desert.

The entrance fee to Petra (JD31 for three days) hasn't increased for a number of years. If you're on a tight budget it may seem steep but it's worth every dinar! Entry to other popular sights such as Jerash costs JD8, but most places are free or cost just a dinar or two.

TRAVELLING RESPONSIBLY

In a region only recently concerned with conservation, it's refreshing to find that Jordan is ahead of the game. Not only are the authorities – especially through the work of the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (RSCN) – keen to promote sustainable tourism with regard to Jordan's natural heritage, they are also keen to maintain the country's cultural heritage by preserving Islamic values, supporting arts and craft initiatives (such as soap-making at Ajloun, see p136) and supporting traditional lifestyles (as with the employment of Bedouin drivers in Wadi Rum).

Of course it's not easy balancing the need for increased tourism against the environmental cost of more visitors. While tourism revenue at Wadi Rum, for example, is needed for the upkeep of the protected area, it's hard to minimise the impact of more feet and wheels upon a fragile desert ecosystem. A balance can be achieved, however, with the cooperation of visitors.

If you'd like to know how to minimise the negative impact of your visit, or contribute positively through your travel experience in Jordan, then you may like to use the following checklist to inform the choices you make on the road.

- **Save water** Jordan has a critical water shortage (see p73 and p154 for the consequences of excessive water use).
- **Use local guides and services** Not only is interacting with local people, such as the Bedouin in Wadi Rum and Petra (see p55), an opportunity to learn about a unique way of life, it's also a way of helping preserve local traditions.

HOW MUCH?

Souvenir keffiyah (scarf) from JD5

Postcard 200 fils

Cup of tea 500 fils

Cup of Western coffee JD2

See also Lonely Planet Index, *inside front cover*.

COSTS PER DAY

The minimum cost per day for budget travel is between JD15 to JD30.

Upgrade to midrange hotels and chartered taxis for JD60. For JD100, you can throw in the cost of some car hire.

RSCN & SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

The Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (RSCN) is a byword in Jordan for sustainable tourism. See www.rscn.org.jo for details.

- **Buy wisely** Shop at craft centres where profits are returned to local communities (see p197 for an idea of how this helps).
- **Use our GreenDex** The list of sustainable travel options on p358 will help in planning destination-friendly travel. Also see below for a review of Jordan's top sustainable tourism initiatives.
- **Dress and behave respectfully** Many Jordanians see the liberalisation of customs and manners as a bad habit caught from the West and an erosion of their cultural and Islamic heritage (see p56).
- **Spend money...** A few travellers think it's clever to avoid entrance fees and survive on muesli they brought from home. If you're one of them, try to make your visit count more positively by spending a little!
- **...but don't give it away** Give tips only for services rendered (such as buying a souvenir from kids at Petra) to discourage the counterproductive activity of begging.

THE COMMUNITY-BASED TRAVEL TRAIL *Ethan Gelber*

In this age of eco-awareness, responsible tourism plays an important part in community development. Interest in Jordan's nature reserves has, for example, demonstrated how their appeal can economically benefit neighbouring communities. This is certainly true of protected lands in which the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (RSCN) has a hand, especially around Ajloun, Dibeen, Azraq, Shaumari, the Dead Sea, Mujib, Dana and Wadi Rum. But more and more local communities, large and small, are also uniting behind other tourism endeavours that return profits directly to the community.

Feeling the Local Motion

- **Abraham Path Initiative** (p52; www.abrahampath.org; ☎ 02-647 5766, 077-7072212) has waymarked a one-day Al Ayoun Trail through villages in the Ajloun area. Call ahead for a descriptive brochure.
- **JARA** (Jebel Amman Residents Association; www.jara-jordan.com) is a village initiative within a city. It spearheaded the now-famous Souk Jara street market (Fawzi al-Malouf Street, open 10am to 10pm Friday, May to August) and other projects that enhance the historic centre of Amman.
- The nonprofit **Jordan Living History Association** (JLHA) develops and promotes accurate historical re-enactments and supports 65 people in Jerash alone, including many army veterans – a chronically underemployed group. JLHA's most spectacular undertaking is the **Roman Army Chariot Experience of Jerash** (p128; www.jerashchariots.com). It also operates at Petra (Nabataean Court), the Ajloun and Karak castles (Salahadin warriors) and the Roman Theatre (orators).
- **Madaba Tourism Development Association** (www.visitmadaba.org) is a voluntary community-based organisation developing tourism products in and around Madaba that use local skills and resources.
- **Neighbours Paths** (www.foeme.org) are four community-based tours in off-the-beaten-track Dead Sea Basin areas along the Jordan River. It focuses on cross-border issues like water and peace-building.
- **Zikra Initiative** (www.zikrajordan.org) is a fast-developing, homespun program that connects urbanites (Jordanians and internationals) to people living in rural areas. A modest participation fee helps fund activities and provision microloans for local village 'entrepreneurs'.

Getting Crafty

Some Jordan craft shops display quality wares fashioned as part of community-based income-generating programs:

- **Jordan Handicraft Producers Association** (Map p90; ☎ 4626295; 34 Khirfan Street, Jebel Amman; 🕒 8am-4pm Sat-Thu), with 500 members working from home and small workshops, has inaugurated a new showroom in a 120-year-old stone building.

TRAVEL LITERATURE

Johann Ludwig (also known as Jean Louis) Burckhardt spent many years in the early-19th century travelling extensively through Jordan, Syria and the Holy Land, disguised as a pilgrim and compiling a unique and scholarly travelogue detailing every facet of the culture and society he encountered along the way. The result is *Travels in Syria and the Holy Land*, which documents his 'rediscovery' of Petra (see p215).

The redoubtable Englishwoman Gertrude Bell wrote a few memoirs about her travels in the region in the early 20th century, including the somewhat dated and light-hearted *The Desert and the Sown*, though it's mostly concerned with Syria.

TE Lawrence's classic *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* is one of those books that most people have heard of but few people have read. That's not altogether surprising given its long-winded accounts of skirmishes on

- **Jordan River Foundation** (p114; www.jordanriver.jo) has its primary showroom in Jebel Amman, displaying works from its three major projects – Bani Hamida Women's Weaving Project (p197), Al-Karma Centre Jordan River Designs Project (embroidery) and Wadi Al-Rayan Handicraft Project (woven cattail-reed and banana-leaf products).
- Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development's **Beit al-Bawadi** (p114; www.beitalbawadi.com) in Abdoun hosts a ceramics showroom, weekly **farmers market** (Souq al-Ard; ☎ 10am-2pm Sat Oct-Jul) and community-development partners tackling recycling, poverty reduction and hunger alleviation.
- **Made in Jordan** (p242; www.madeinjordan.com), in Wadi Musa, sells crafts from various local enterprises. Products include olive oil, soap, paper, ceramics, table runners, embroidery, camel-hair shawls and bags.
- **Nature shops** figure prominently at the Wild Jordan Centre (p114) in Amman and RSCN visitor centres in Ajloun, Azraq, Mujib, Dana and Wadi Rum.
- **Noor Al-Hussein Foundation** (www.nooralhusseinfoundation.org) maintains a showroom in Aqaba (p259) as well as links to now-independent projects selling NHF-labelled products in Iraq Al-Amir (p119), Salt (p121) and Wadi Musa (Nabataean Women's Cooperative).

Dwelling on Dwellings

There are a few sustainably run accommodation options in Jordan.

- **Ammarin Bedouin Camp** (p245; www.bedouincamp.net) near Little Petra.
- **Dana Hotel** (p209; dana.hotel@yahoo.com) overlooking the Dana Biosphere Reserve.
- **Ibbin Apartments** (Map p126; ☎ 0795636154; r JD20-40) are 24 community cooperative-owned, fully equipped, two-bedroom lodgings. Experience rural life in Jordan just 15km northwest of Jerash.
- **RSCN** (www.rscn.org.jo) runs ethical and sustainable accommodation with nature and community sensibilities in mind.
- **Bedouin cooperative campgrounds** at Wadi Rum (p272) and Diseh (p275).

Finding Fair Services

- The **Jordan Inbound Tour Operators Association** (www.jittoa.org), a voluntary umbrella organisation, is a good place to research tour operators.
- **Fair Trade Jordan** (www.fairtradejordan.org) has an online database that reviews all tourism-related products and services according to responsible criteria.

TOP 10

Palestinian
Territories

JORDAN

DRIVES

Jordan is a wonderful place to hire a car and go exploring, as the landscape changes dramatically from desert to temperate within a remarkably short distance. For details of some of the most spectacular drives linking the King's Highway and Dead Sea Highway, see the boxed text, p170.

- 1 Umm Qais (p141) to Al-Himma (p145): Along the border of three nations
- 2 Mt Nebo (p193) to Suweimeh: Panoramic views over the Promised Land
- 3 Dead Sea Panorama (p177) to Dead Sea Highway: Views of the salt sea
- 4 Dead Sea Highway, south of Safi (p180): Fields red with tomatoes
- 5 Madaba (p183) to Hammamat Ma'in (p177): Hell's cauldron of sulphurous springs
- 6 Across Wadi Mujib (p198) and Wadi Hasa (p204): The 'Grand Canyons' of Jordan
- 7 Qadsiyya to Dana Guest House (p209): Unravelling views of Wadi Dana
- 8 Around Wadi Rum (p269): Driving in the dunes in a 4WD
- 9 Little Petra (p244) to Feinan (p205): A superb journey through time
- 10 Aqaba (p247) to Azraq (p153): Across the inauspicious *Badia*

ECO-EXPERIENCES

There are heaps of opportunities to support Jordan's conservation efforts while enjoying some of the best hospitality and wilderness areas. Here are 10 'must-dos' if you're keen to travel green.

- 1 Hike to see Ajloun's soapmakers at work (p136).
- 2 Savour a wild-berry smoothie in Amman's Wild Jordan Centre (p95).
- 3 Learn about Azraq's Chechens over a home-cooked feast at Azraq Lodge (p155).
- 4 Buy a hand-loomed rug from the Bani Hamida workshop (p197)
- 5 Wake up to birdsong at beautiful Rummana campground (p210)
- 6 Enjoy a vegetarian supper in candlelit Feinan Lodge (p210)
- 7 Give your sunglasses an embroidered treat from Dana craft shop (p207)
- 8 Buy a handmade string of cloves in Petra (p213)
- 9 Take a camel trip in the company of a Bedouin guide (p289)
- 10 Overnight with the Bedouin at a camp in Wadi Rum (p272)

RUINS

Almost every stone in Jordan has a history, and the stone piles listed here have more history than most.

- 1 Jerash (p124): Superb Roman ruins
- 2 Karak Castle (p199): Biggest Crusader castle in Jordan
- 3 Khirbet Tannour (p204): Minimal Nabataean site in spectacular landscape
- 4 Madaba (p195): Remote Bronze Age dolmens
- 5 Petra (p217): Unparalleled Nabataean capital
- 6 Qusayr Amra (p161): Saucy frescoes in a 'desert castle'
- 7 Shobak Castle (p211): Remote Crusader castle
- 8 Umm al-Jimal (p151): Abandoned basalt village in Eastern desert
- 9 Umm Qais (p141): Roman and Byzantine city
- 10 Umm ar-Rasas (p197): World Heritage site of churches and mosaics

UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITES IN JORDAN

- Petra (listed 1985; p213)
- Qusayr Amra (listed 1985; p161)
- Dana Nature Reserve (Biosphere Reserve, listed 1998; p205)
- Umm ar-Rasas (listed 2004; p197)

horseback. Nevertheless, Lawrence documents the Arab Revolt of 1919 with 'colour and flair' if not without partiality; he is at his most inspired when describing the desert scenery of Wadi Rum.

Annie Caulfield's *Kingdom of the Film Stars: Journey into Jordan* is an entertaining, personal account of the author's relationship with a Bedouin man in Jordan. Similarly, Marguerite van Geldermalsen's *Married to a Bedouin* is a sympathetic account of bringing up a family in the ancient city of Petra. *Walking the Bible* by Bruce Feiler is an engaging travelogue that follows Feiler's travels through Egypt, Israel and the Palestinian Territories and Jordan, searching for the physical roots of the Bible. Feiler shows considerably more empathy for people and places in Israel and the Palestinian Territories than those of the Arab world, but writes well on the archaeology of the Holy Land.

For books on Petra, see p218.

FILMS

Don't miss David Lean's epic *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), starring Peter O'Toole as Lawrence and filmed partly in Wadi Rum. The lesser-known *A Dangerous Man: Lawrence After Arabia* (1991) stars Ralph Fiennes in one of his earliest film roles.

Petra's Siq and Treasury landed a starring role as the hiding place of the Holy Grail in the closing scenes of Stephen Spielberg's *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989), starring Harrison Ford and Sean Connery. The film plays nightly in the budget guesthouses of Wadi Musa.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Bible Places (www.bibleplaces.com) Interesting rundown on biblical sights in Jordan and Israel and the Palestinian Territories.

Jordan Jubilee (www.jordanjubilee.com) The best website about Jordan, loaded with practical tips; offers a wonderful window onto Jordanian society.

Jordan Tourism Board (www.visitjordan.com) Good official website.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com). The Thorn Tree has an active range of Jordan experts who offer good advice if you post a question.

Madaba (www.madaba.freeservers.com) Excellent description of Madaba's attractions and other nearby sites.

Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (www.tourism.jo) Online brochures, maps and more

RSCN (www.rscn.org.jo) Accessible information about Jordan's environmental and ecotourism projects. The 'Adventures' and 'Wild Jordan' sections are particularly recommended.

A CLASSIC THAT NEARLY WASN'T

Lawrence left the manuscript of his masterpiece at 'Reading Station, while changing trains' in 1919. He rewrote a second draft from memory but burned 'all but one page' of it. The third version, partially written in Amman, has endured.

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF KINGS

One Week / Amman to Aqaba

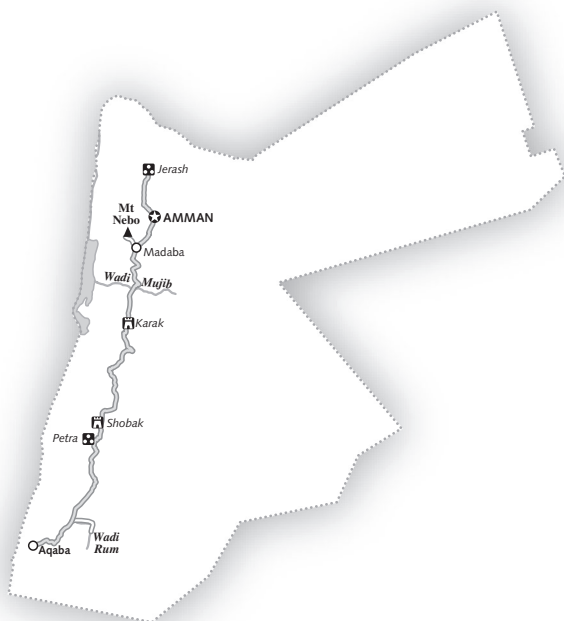
Get a taste for Jordan's Roman history at the **citadel** (p97) in Amman on day one, before cheering on the racing chariots at the spectacular Roman ruins of **Jerash** (p124) on day two. On day three, piece together a biblical history in the mosaic town of **Madaba** (p183) and, like Moses, survey the Promised Land from neighbouring **Mt Nebo** (p193).

Spend day four following the caravans of history by travelling the ancient King's Highway to Petra, crossing the mighty Wadi Mujib gorge. Visit the Crusader castles in **Karak** (p201) and **Shobak** (p211) and listen for hooves clattering through cobbled corridors.

Make an early start on day five to see the **Siq** (p223) at Petra at its best. Climb the High Place of Sacrifice and picnic under an oleander bush. On day six, slither through narrow **Wadi Muthlim** (p231) and end your visit to the rose-red city at the iconic **Monastery** (Al-Deir; p230).

Finish the week at **Wadi Rum** (p260), pacing through the beautiful desert by camel. From here, the lively seaside town of **Aqaba** (p247) is only an hour away.

Unravel a path through Jordan's most famous sites, brushing sides (real and imagined) with Roman legionnaires, Christian craftsmen, Islamic warriors and Bedouin nomads. Hire a car or charter a taxi for the King's Highway and overnight in Amman, Wadi Musa and Aqaba.



GET PHYSICAL IN JORDAN'S GREAT OUTDOORS

Two Weeks / Amman to Madaba

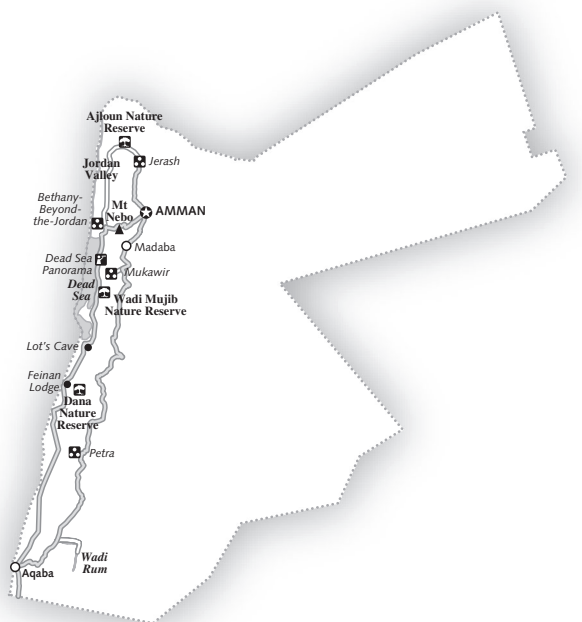
In the first three days, get a taste for the cedar-lands of the north by visiting **Amman** (p86), **Jerash** (p123) and the oak woodlands of **Ajloun Nature Reserve** (p135). Spend day four descending to the Jordan Valley, pausing at the point where Jesus was baptised in **Bethany-Beyond-the-Jordan** (p169).

Follow the river to the **Dead Sea** (p172) and treat yourself to a spa and a night of luxury in one of the **Dead Sea resorts** (p176 and an early morning float on day five at the world's lowest point. Survey the West Bank from a higher vantage point at the **Dead Sea Panorama** (p177) en route for **Wadi Mujib Nature Reserve** (p179). Splash, swim and struggle through 'Petra with water' on the unguided **Siq Trail** (p180). Dry out along the Dead Sea Highway to **Lot's Cave** (p181) and swap stories about the adventure at candlelit **Feinan Lodge** (p210).

Enjoy days six and seven at Aqaba, sparing time for a **dive or snorkel** (p277) in the fabled Red Sea. With batteries recharged, tackle a hike in **Wadi Rum** (p260) on day eight and overnight in a **Bedouin camp** (p272). On days nine and 10 in Petra, join **Petra by Night** (p238) for a magical view of the Siq.

Follow the ancient King's Highway from Petra to Madaba on day 11, calling in at **Siq al-Barid** (Little Petra, p244) and **Shobak** (p211), then staying overnight at **Dana Nature Reserve** (p209). Relax on day 12 taking village walks, or a longer hike with a guide.

Spend day 13 making the most of the King's Highway to Madaba, pausing at **Herod's Castle** (p196) in Mukawir en route. Allow time on the last day for some **souvenir shopping** (p191) in Madaba, the closest town to the international airport, or at craft shops in nearby **Mt Nebo** (p193).



Store up some energy for this ambitious route around Jordan's most magical places, combining some physical effort with the extreme sport of spa-going. Hire a car or charter a taxi into the Dead Sea resorts to Aqaba, and to traverse the King's Highway.

ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

DESOLATELY INSPIRING

Three Weeks / Jerash to Umm al-Jimal

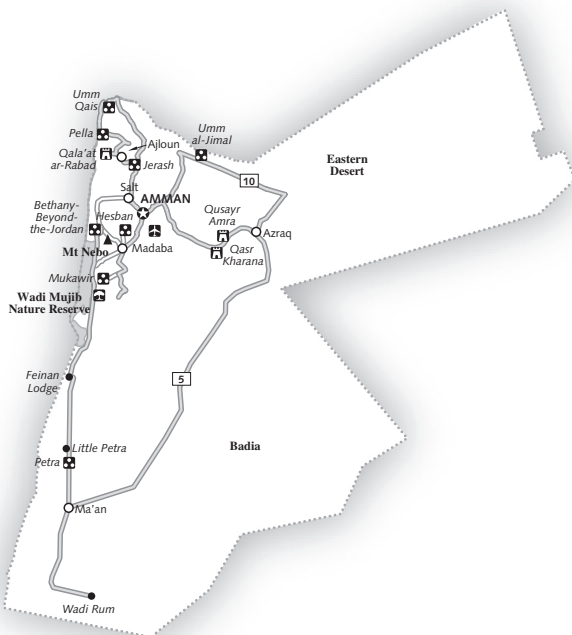
Collect a car from the airport or Amman and head north to **Jerash** (p123), your base for three days. Visit Ajloun and the Islamic castle of **Qala'at ar-Rabad** (p134). Amble on to **Umm Qais** (p141) and edge round the top of the country through numerous checkpoints along the border between three nations. Follow the signs to **Pella** (p146), then return to Jerash.

From **Salt** (p120) take the **descent** (p170) to Bethany-Beyond-the-Jordan. Follow signs for **Mt Nebo** (p193) through Bedouin grazing grounds. Stay the next three days in **Madaba** (p183), using one day to explore the town, one for visiting **Hesban** (p195) and another to go to **Mukawir** (p195) and the **Wadi Mujib lookout** (p198). Take an escort to the dolmens of **Wadi Jadid** (p195) continuing on an unmapped road to the Dead Sea Highway. Aiming for **Feinan Lodge** (p210), note an unmapped road to the right signposted 'Bayder'. This **drive** (p170) leads from the desert of Wadi Araba into **Siq Al-Barid** (Little Petra, p244).

After three days in **Petra** (p213) and three in **Wadi Rum** (p260), brave the Hwy 5 from Ma'an across the featureless and forbidding Badin, noting the white boulders that litter the endless plain. After crossing such barren lands, even the shrunken waters of **Azraq** (p153) seem like a miracle.

Use Azraq as a base to explore the desert castles of **Qasr Karama** (p163) and **Qusayr Amra** (p161) before taking Hwy 10 to the brooding basalt ruins of **Umm al-Jimal** (p151), a fitting end to a desolate but inspiring tour.

Want to get away from it all? Then this wild route, zigzagging from high ground to low ground along some of the most spectacular and remote roads in the region, could be the trip for you. Expect only sheep and goats for company.



JORDAN'S NATURE RESERVES

Two Weeks / Amman to Wadi Mujib

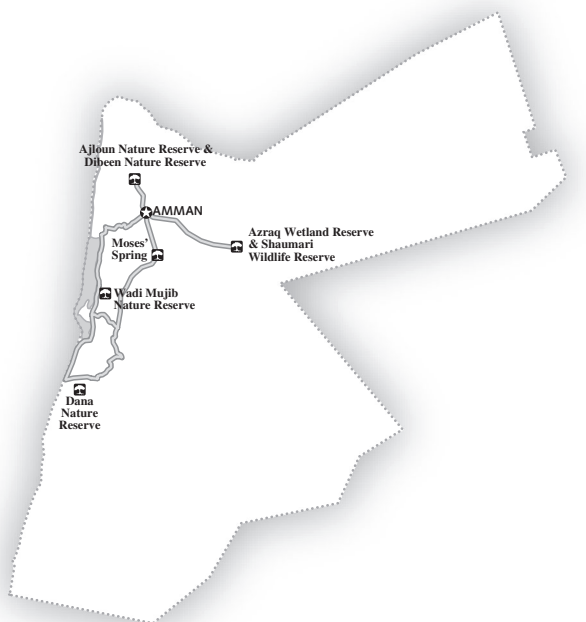
Follow 'a road less travelled' in spring when hiking paths will be knee-deep in wildflowers. Fuel up on organic fare at the **Wild Jordan Centre** (p95) in Amman before beginning this energetic itinerary, and book accommodation and guides for Jordan's reserves at the same time.

Hike through pistachio and oak hillsides in **Ajloun Nature Reserve** (p135) to meet local soapmakers, remembering to buy a bar from the shop before you leave. Enquire about **Abraham's Path** (p52) if you want your hike to take on more epic dimensions in the footsteps of the prophet. The nearby **Dibein Nature Reserve** (p137) is peaceful for a picnic under the peeling barks of strawberry trees, in the company of Jordanian families fleeing the fumes of Amman.

For a complete contrast, head next for the rarely visited **Azraq Wetland Reserve** (p156) and **Shaumari Wildlife Reserve** (p156), for your best chance of spotting oryx. In addition, there's the pleasure of meeting the Chechen locals. Ask at **Azraq Lodge** (p155) for a tour of its cottage industries.

Next, sample the grazing lands around **Madaba** (p183). Strike out for the **Spring of Moses** (p195) and follow any goat track wrapped around the contours: you're bound to find a glass of mint tea with local Bedouin at the end of it. Camp at **Rummana** (p210) and thread your way along the escarpment of **Dana Nature Reserve** (p205) to the terraced gardens of Dana Village. Hike through three bio-zones to **Feinan Lodge** (p210) on the floor of **Wadi Araba** (p181).

Travel along the Desert Highway to wet and wild **Wadi Mujib Nature Reserve** (p179) where you may cross a party of schoolchildren squealing their way up the **Siq Trail** (p180) as you're sliding down.



Although this itinerary through Jordan's nature reserves takes you off-road, it doesn't consign you to a fortnight of your own company. Appreciate the wisdom of the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature's policy of local involvement as you meet the people of Jordan (see p74 for details).

TAILORED TRIPS

BIBLICAL JORDAN

The east bank of the Jordan has been repeatedly touched by the prophets, and modern-day pilgrims can follow in the footsteps of such illustrious company as Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, Elijah, John the Baptist and Jesus. Over 100 sites in Jordan are mentioned in the Bible alone.

The single most important site is **Bethany-Beyond-the-Jordan** (p169), where Jesus is said to have been baptised and where Elijah ascended to heaven on a fiery chariot. Just north of here Joshua led the tribes of Israel across the Jordan River into the Promised Land.

From here, it's a short climb along the old pilgrim road to **Mt Nebo** (p193), where Moses finally saw the Promised Land before dying.

A day trip south of Madaba's famous **mosaic map** (p186) are the ruins of **Herod's castle** (p195) at Mukawir, where John the Baptist was imprisoned and beheaded at the behest of Salome.

At the southern end of the Dead Sea is **Lot's Cave** (p181) where Lot's wife turned to salt and Lot's daughters seduced their father, after they all fled the destruction of **Sodom and Gomorrah** (p181).

Back up north, Jesus performed one of his lesser-known miracles at Gadara (modern **Umm Qais**, p141), turning a band of brigands into a pack of swine.



LOCATING LAWRENCE

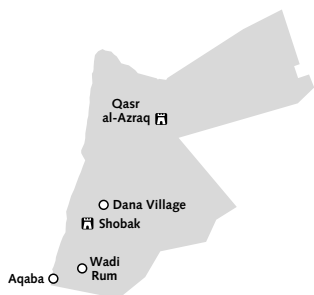
Jordan is 'El-Lawrence' (p250) country, the land the eccentric, camel-riding, dagger-wielding Englishman made his own during the Arab Revolt of 1917–19.

'Rumm the Magnificent' is the natural place to look for Lawrence's ghost. Stride past 'crags like gigantic buildings', now named **Seven Pillars of Wisdom** (p265) in his honour, and go in search of springs where this officer of the British army once took a naked dip.

Advance through Wadi Umran by **camel** (see Tours, p274), the words 'to Aqaba' floating in the wind. You won't meet the Ottomans there: their empire ended as the Arab Revolt swept north. You may pass a goods train though, rattling by on mended tracks that Lawrence once helped blast with dynamite.

Turn north as winter sets in, and pad 'among the walls and snowy roofs' of **Shobak** (p211). Follow the hillcrest to the 'chess-board houses of **Dana village**' (p205), and stare into sunny Araba, 'fresh and green, thousands of feet below'.

Lawrence was proud of riding between Aqaba and '**Azraq the Remote**' (Qasr al-Azraq; p159) in three days. In only one, you can be sitting in Lawrence's room. He and his Arab companions left Azraq 'riding into a glowing west, while...schools of cranes flew into the sunset like the out-drawn barbs of arrows' – a good place to let Lawrence's memory rest.



The Authors



JENNY WALKER

Coordinating Author

Jenny Walker's first involvement with Jordan was as a student, while conducting research for a dissertation on Doughty and Lawrence (BA, University of Stirling). This experience, together with many other firsthand encounters with the Middle East, led to a subsequent thesis entitled *Perception of the Arabic Orient* for a postgraduate research degree at the University of Oxford. Jenny has written extensively on the Middle East for Lonely Planet and with her husband authored *Off-Road in the Sultanate of Oman*, a country they've lived and worked in for more than a decade. Jenny has travelled in over 95 countries – from Panama to Mongolia – on diverse assignments.

For this edition, Jenny wrote the Destination; Getting Started; Itineraries; History; The Culture; Environment; Food & Drink; Dead Sea Highway; King's Highway; Petra; Aqaba, Wadi Rum & the Desert Highway; Directory; and Transport chapters.



MATTHEW D FIRESTONE

Matthew is a trained biological anthropologist and epidemiologist, though he abandoned a promising academic career in favour of spending his youth living out of a backpack. With his best explorer's hat and hiking boots in hand, Matthew blazed a trail across Jordan in the footsteps of Indiana Jones. Although an excursion to Petra failed to reveal the final location of the Holy Grail, Matthew's travels took him from the depths of the Red Sea to the western border of Iraq. He may not have found eternal life, but at least he found a bit of adventure – and a whole lot of sand.

For this edition, Matthew wrote the Amman, Jerash & the North, The Desert Castles, and Diving & Snorkelling chapters.

LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

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Dr Alon Tal wrote *The Dead Sea is Dying*, p173. He founded the Israel Union for Environmental Defense and the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies, and has served as chair of Life and Environment, Israel's umbrella group for green organisations. Professor of the Desert Ecology Department at Ben-Gurion University, he heads the Jewish National Fund's sustainable development committee and still finds time to hike and bike around Israel with his wife and daughters.

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