



Petra

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Why Go?

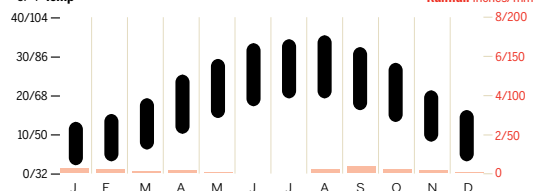
The ancient Nabataean city of Petra, with its elaborate architecture chiselled out of the pink-hued cliffs, is not just the leading highlight of Jordan, a country blessed with more than its fair share of top sites: it's a wonder of the world. It lay forgotten for centuries, known only to the Bedouin who made it their home, until the great Swiss explorer Jean Louis Burckhardt happened upon it in 1812.

Built partly in honour of the dead, the Petra necropolis retains much of its sense of hidden mystery thanks to its inaccessible location in the heart of a windblown landscape. Reached via the Siq, a narrow rift in the land whose cliffs cast long shadows across the once-sacred way, the path suddenly slithers into sunlight in front of the Treasury – a spectacle that cannot fail to impress. Add to this the cheerfulness of the Bedouin people, and it's easy to see what makes Petra a must-visit.

When to Go

Wadi Musa

°C/°F Temp



Mar–May It's peak tourist season and for good reason, with flowering oleanders and safe hiking.

Mid-Oct–end Nov A last chance to visit Petra in good weather before rains put some routes off limits.

Dec–Jan Bitterly cold by night and bright blue skies by day, Petra is almost empty in winter.

History

Petra was established in the 4th century BCE by the Nabataeans, a nomadic tribe from Arabia. In its heyday, the city was home to around 30,000 people, including scribes and engineers who built a city of sophisticated culture with an emphasis on the afterlife. Around 100 CE, the Romans assumed control, leaving trademark features such as the colonnaded street.

Earthquakes in 363 and 551 ruined much of Petra and it became a forgotten outpost, known only to local Bedouin who preferred to keep its whereabouts secret. In 1812, a young Swiss explorer, J.L. Burckhardt, ended Petra's splendid isolation, riding into the city disguised as a Muslim holy man.

During the 1950s, Petra achieved near-mythological status in Israel, and a number of young Israelis risked – and in

some cases lost – their lives trying to visit the site surreptitiously.

A Unesco World Heritage Site since 1985, Petra was elected one of the 'New Seven Wonders of the World' by an international public poll in 2008, proving that its allure has survived two centuries worth of outside scrutiny.

i Getting There & Away

It's almost impossible to cover Petra as a day trip from Israel or the West Bank by public transport.

The **Yitzhak Rabin–Wadi Araba border crossing** (☎ 08-630 0555; ☀ 6.30am–10pm Sun–Thu, 8am–8pm Fri & Sat) provides the easiest access to Jordan. From Eilat it's a short taxi ride (50NIS) to the border. On the Jordanian side, a taxi to Petra costs around JD60 (JD80 return). Alternatively, take a taxi into Aqaba (JD10) and a minibus to Petra (JD5, 2½ hours, 120km); these leave when full between 6am and 7am, and there is also an occasional service between 11am and noon.



Petra Highlights

- 1** Treading the path of history by winding through the **Siq** (p332) leading to an ancient world.
- 2** Catching the early morning sun slanting off the pillars of the **Treasury** (p332), a sublime spectacle.
- 3** Climbing to the **High Place of Sacrifice** (p332), pause for tea with the Bedouin and return to the

valley floor through a garden of wildflowers.

- 4** Searching the **Royal Tombs** (p332) for spirits lurking in the rainbow-coloured hollows.
- 5** Making the pilgrimage to the **Monastery** (p333) and watching the stones catch alight at sunset.
- 6** Letting your soul glide through the Siq's shadows,

guided by music and candlelight on tour with **Petra by Night** (p336).

- 7** Preparing your own traditional Jordanian supper at **Petra Kitchen** (p336).
- 8** Visiting **Little Petra** (p342) and enjoying Nabataean tombs and temples in a miniature siq without the company of tour groups.