



Petra بترا

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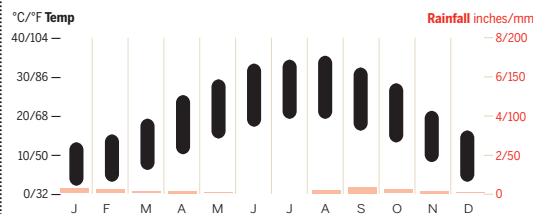
Why Go?

It's dawn. The path winds down towards the Siq, the dramatic rift in the land that leads towards the hidden city of Petra. The only sounds are the ringing of hooves on cobblestones as horse carts pass into the narrow gorge. The corridor of stone narrows and the cliffs cast long shadows across the sacred way. At length, the path slithers into sunlight and there, bathed in morning glory, stands the Treasury, a beacon of hope to the ancients and a promise of 'wonderful things' for the modern visitor.

If this sublime experience isn't sufficient inducement to visit Petra, then the spectacle of the 'pink city' tombs at sunset surely will be. Magnificent as they are, however, these dramatic gestures of immortality may prove less memorable than quiet ambles through forgotten tombs, glimpses of outrageously coloured sandstone, or the sense of satisfaction, perched on top of a High Place, of energy well spent.

When to Go

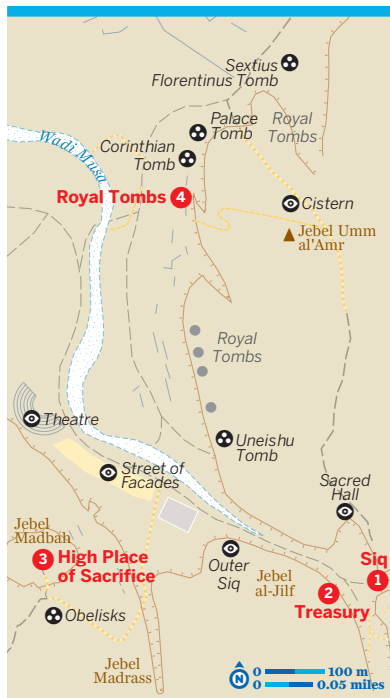
Wadi Musa



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.



Petra Highlights

- 1 Tread the path of history by winding through the **Siq** (p341), the sheer-sided chasm leading to an ancient world
- 2 Catch the early morning sun slanting off the pillars of the **Treasury** (p341), the sublime spectacle at the end of the Siq
- 3 Climb the processional way to the **High Place of Sacrifice** (p341), pause for tea with the Bedouin and return to the valley floor through a garden of wildflowers
- 4 Search the **Royal Tombs** (p341) for spirits, lurking in the rainbow-coloured hollows
- 5 Make the pilgrimage to the **Monastery** (p344) and watch the weather-burnished stones catch alight at sunset
- 6 Let your soul glide through the Siq's shadows, guided by music and candlelight on tour with **Petra by Night** (p345)
- 7 Prepare your own traditional Jordanian supper at **Petra Kitchen** (p345)
- 8 Visit **Little Petra** (p352) and enjoy Nabataean tombs and temples in a miniature siq without the company of tour groups

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 their 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 as 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.

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 (35NIS) to the border. On the Jordanian side, a taxi to Petra costs around JD50. Alternatively, take a taxi into Aqaba (JD8) and a minibus to Petra (JD5, 2½ hours, 120km); these leave when full between 6.30am and 8.30am, and there is also an occasional afternoon service.

The **Allenby–King Hussein Bridge border crossing** (☎02-548 2600; ☀8am-8pm Sun-Thu, to 2pm Fri & Sat) is handy from Jerusalem (45 minutes), but you must have a pre-arranged visa and it's frustratingly long-winded returning to the Palestinian Territories and Israel through this border. From Jerusalem, a sherut to the border costs around 40NIS. From Amman to Petra, there is a daily **JETT** (☎962-6-566 4146; www.jett.com.jo, one way/return JD8/16; ☀6.30am, returning at 4pm) bus and regular minibuses (JD5, four hours, 210km); these leave when full from Amman's south bus station between 7am and 4pm. A taxi from Amman costs from JD70 (or JD120 along the spectacular King's Highway).