



Understand Jordan

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The Arab Spring of 2011 agitated for real change in the Middle East. See how Jordan fared during this and other recent events.

HISTORY249

You can't visit Jordan and not think about history – it's everywhere! We show you how to interpret Jordan's past.

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From steaming mounds of rice and lamb to fields full of organic aubergines, Jordan has something to please all palates.

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population per sq km

JORDAN

UK

SYRIA



= 73 people

Jordan Today

Home to a Seventh Wonder

When Petra was voted by popular ballot as one of the seven 'new' wonders of the world, it was a large accolade for a small country. 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, 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 bares a tale.

Jordan circa 2011

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 by improving productivity, making Jordan a more attractive country for foreign investment, promoting Jordan as a hi-tech service centre, and by building ambitious tourist developments, including a Star Wars theme park near Aqaba.

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 is hovering around 13% – the disproportionate investment in Jordan's coastal pleasure domes may appear somewhat reckless, especially given the precarious nature of tourism in the Middle East. That said, with world class attractions and greater stability than some neighbouring countries, Jordan has good reason to be optimistic about its tourist potential.

- » **Population:** 6.5 million
- » **Population growth rate:** 1%
- » **Inflation:** 5%
- » **GDP:** US\$34.5 billion
- » **Main exports:** Clothing, fertilisers, potash, phosphates, vegetables
- » **Unemployment:** 13.4%
- » **Average annual income:** US\$5000

A Few Facts

- » Education and healthcare are highly developed in Jordan
- » Average male life expectancy is 79 years
- » Average female life expectancy is 81 years
- » Male literacy rate is 95%
- » Female literacy rate is 85%

Travellers' Tales

Travels in Syria and the Holy Land (J L Burckhardt) Account of Petra's rediscovery.

The Desert and the Sown (Gertrude Bell, 1907) The 'brains behind Lawrence's brawn'.

Seven Pillars of Wisdom (T E Lawrence, 1926) The classic.

Top Reads

Married to a Bedouin (M van Geldermalsen, 2006) Bringing a family up in Petra.

Heroine of the Desert (Donya al-Nahi, 2006) Reuniting children with their mothers.

Walking the Bible (Bruce Feiler, 2005) Biblical locations.