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Amman to Aqaba Return

Thanks to its relatively compact size, Jordan rewards even the shortest of getaways, especially if you’re prepared to hire a car. This route takes in most of Jordan’s key sites in a journey along the King’s Highway, the ancient backbone of the country.

On day one experience modern Jordan in the souqs of Amman. On day two, piece together a biblical history in the mosaic town of Madaba and, like Moses, survey the Promised Land from neighbouring Mt Nebo.

Spend day three following the caravans of history along the King’s Highway, crossing mighty Wadi Mujib. Visit the Crusader castles in Karak and Shobak and listen for ghostly hooves against cobbles.

Rise early on day four to experience the Siq at Petra and climb to a High Place for lunch. On day five, slither through Wadi Muthlim and watch the sunset at Petra’s iconic Monastery. Proceed to the seaside town of Aqaba, two hours away. On day six, wash off the desert dust in the spectacular Red Sea before returning to Amman (four hours via the Desert Highway) on day seven; with an early start, a desert lunch is possible at Wadi Rum en route.
With around 18 days you can unravel a path through Jordan’s most famous sites, travelling in the footsteps of Roman legionnaires, Crusader craftsmen, Islamic warriors and Bedouin nomads. This route takes in Jordan’s main highlights and throws in a few wild cards too.

Begin with two days in **Amman** and a third at the races – chariot races that is – at the spectacular Roman ruins of **Jerash**. For a springtime flower show, camp overnight at the oak woodlands of Ajloun Forest Reserve or spend day four wading knee-high among daisies at the ruins of **Umm Qais**. On day five descend to the subtropical Jordan Valley, pausing at the point where Jesus was allegedly baptised in **Bethany-Beyond-the-Jordan**.

Follow the River Jordan towards a night of luxury at the **Dead Sea resorts** followed by an early morning float on day six at the world’s lowest point. Survey the West Bank from a higher vantage at the Dead Sea Panoramic Complex en route for **Mujib Biosphere Reserve**. Splash, swim and struggle through ‘Petra with water’ on the unguided Siq Trail. Dry out along the Dead Sea Highway to Lot’s Cave and swap stories about the adventure over a vegetarian supper at candlelit Feynan Ecolodge.

Begin week two chilling in **Aqaba** for two days, sparing time for a dive or snorkel in the fabled Red Sea. With batteries recharged, tackle a hike in **Wadi Rum** on day 10 and stay overnight in a Bedouin camp. Spend the next three nights in Wadi Musa, joining Petra by Night for a magical introduction to the world wonder of **Petra**.

Head north from Petra via the ancient King’s Highway on day 14, sparing time to pause at the imposing castle of **Shobak**. Break the journey at **Dana Biosphere Reserve** and relax on day 15, taking village walks or a longer hike with a guide.

Spend day 16 making the most of the King’s Highway to Madaba, pausing at Karak and Herod’s Castle in **Mukawir** en route. Allow two days for souvenir shopping in **Madaba**, the closest town to the international airport, or at craft shops in nearby Mt Nebo. If energy and extra time allows, end your visit with a day trip to **Azraq** and the Eastern desert castles.
Top: Roman Theatre (p48), Amman
Bottom: Flat breads, Ajloun (p87)
Jordan is plumb in the middle of a richly historic region, making it an essential part of a Middle East adventure. This 12-day route by public transport assumes entry by ferry from Egypt and exit by bus to Israel and the Palestinian Territories. Check the latest travel advisories before making this trip as the security situation in South Sinai (Egypt) is changeable.

Spend the first two days acclimatising to a new country in Aqaba: Jordan has a distinct character, immediately felt in the souqs and open-air restaurants of this seaside town. Spare time for a swim – Jordan’s access to the Red Sea may be diminutive but the coral gardens are pristine and relatively unvisited. On day three take the morning bus and go in search of ‘El Lawrence’ in the magnificent desert of Wadi Rum. Hop astride a camel and head into the red sand dunes for an overnight camping experience with the Bedouin.

On day four rise at dawn with the locals, ready to catch the minibus to Petra. With two days in the pink city you can hike to the High Places, learn to cook Jordanian food at Petra Kitchen and watch the sunset from the Monastery and enjoy an evening in the famous Cave Bar.

On day six head north to Amman on one of the frequent Desert Highway buses via Ma’an. Spend a night sampling city nightlife, including an evening’s stroll downtown through Amman’s Roman ruins. Hike from the Citadel on day seven and reward the effort with the capital’s best-loved Arabic street food at Hashem Restaurant.

Get off the beaten track on day eight by stopping over for two nights at Azraq. Azraq Fort was Lawrence’s winter hideout and the nearby Azraq Wetland Reserve is a reminder of the fragility of life in the black Badia (stone desert). After crossing such barren lands, the shrunken waters of the oasis seem miraculous.

Head for the Roman ruins of Jerash on day 10. After visiting the extensive site on the morning of day 11, overnight in nearby Ajloun. With a crumbling castle and a nature reserve, Ajloun is a peaceful place to spend a last day in Jordan before heading to the border with Israel and the Palestinian Territories.
Travellers often ask: ‘Is it worth making the effort to get to Petra with only limited time?’ The answer is yes! While you can cover Petra in an exhausting day trip from the capital, this route takes you on a more rewarding route through the south if you’re prepared to use taxis.

From Amman, take the bus along the Desert Highway to Aqaba. With plenty of accommodation, a lively ambience and excellent seafood, it’ll be hard to leave town on day three. Take the early bus to Wadi Musa, the town closest to the Nabataean treasures of Petra. Amble through the Siq at midday, missing the morning tour groups. Watch the sunset turn the Royal Tombs pink, and return to the lively travel scene in the town’s Cave Bar.

Follow the ghosts of Crusaders along the King’s Highway to Shobak on day four and stay overnight at Dana Biosphere Reserve. Hike down to Feynan Ecolodge on day five, prearranging transport along the Dead Sea Highway back to Aqaba (or north to Amman) on day six.

Gems in the North

With a long weekend, most visitors head straight for Petra on an overnighter from Amman. For a more rewarding use of time, leave the pink city for a longer visit and focus instead on Jordan’s gems in the north. This trip bypasses the capital.

Hire a car or take a taxi from the airport in Amman and head to the Roman ruins of Jerash. On day two, amble down to the Jordan Valley via Ajloun and the Islamic castle of Qala’at ar-Rabad. Pause at the point where John allegedly baptised Jesus at Bethany-Beyond-the-Jordan and book in for some extreme R&R at the lowest place on earth. On day three, tear yourself away from the fluffy towels of the region’s best spas (which come complete with a bob in the Dead Sea and therapeutic mud pack) and drive via the Dead Sea Panoramic Complex to steaming Hammamat Ma’in. From nearby Mukawir, where Salome reputedly danced for John’s head on a platter, skirt the plateau ridge to the friendly mosaic town of Madaba and on day four visit Mt Nebo or the dolmens of Wadi Jadid. From Madaba, allow an hour to return to the airport.
OUR STORY
A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that’s all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, *Across Asia on the Cheap*. Within a week they’d sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Franklin, London, Melbourne, Oakland, Beijing and Delhi, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony’s belief that ‘a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse’.

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