



Petra

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Best Places to Eat & Drink

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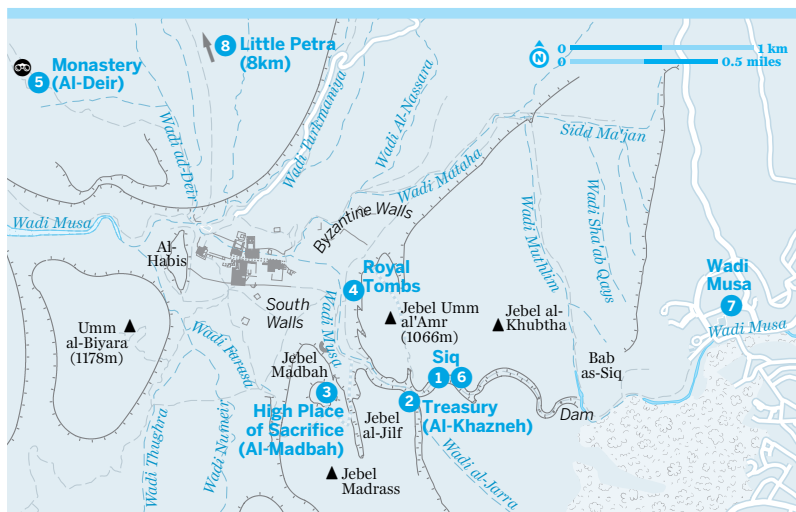
Why Go?

The ancient Nabataean city of Petra, with its elaborate architecture chiselled out of the pink-hued cliffs, is not just the leading highlight of 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, and it's easy to see what makes Petra a must.

When to Go

- ➔ March to May is peak tourist season in Petra and for good reason. Hiking is at its safest, the wadis are seamed with prolific pink-flowering oleander, and climbs to the High Places are accompanied by spears of flowering aloe.
- ➔ Mid-October to the end of November, Petra's second high season, offers a last chance to visit in good weather before rains put some routes off-limits. Bitterly cold by night with bright blue skies by day, Petra is almost empty in winter, allowing for a more intimate engagement with the 'Pink City'.



Petra Highlights

1 Tread the path of history by winding through the **Siq** (p159), the sheer-sided chasm leading to an ancient world.

2 Catch the early-morning sun slanting off the pillars of the **Treasury** (p160), the sublime spectacle at the end of the Siq.

3 Climb the processional way to the **High Place of Sacrifice** (p161), pause

for tea with the Bedouin and return to the valley floor through a garden of wildflowers.

4 Search the **Royal Tombs** (p164) for spirits, lurking in the rainbow-coloured hollows.

5 Make the pilgrimage to the **Monastery** (p169) 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** (p181).

7 Prepare your own traditional Jordanian supper at **Petra Kitchen** (p179).

8 Visit **Little Petra** (p190) and enjoy Nabataean tombs and temples in a miniature siq without the company of tour groups.

History

Think of Petra and you will inevitably think of the Nabataeans, the nomadic tribe from western Arabia who built most of the monuments in the ancient city that are visible today. They were not the first inhabitants of the region, however. In fact, neolithic villages dating from around 7000 BC are in evidence in the surrounding wadis and hill-sides of Petra. Remains of the most famous of these, excavated in the 1950s, can be seen at Al-Beidha, just north of Petra. Built at the same time as Jericho on the West Bank, Al-Beidha is one of the earliest known farming communities in the Middle East.

The Nabataeans arrived in a region around the 6th century BC. They were organised traders and over the next 500 years

they used their wealth to build the city of Petra. In its heyday, under King Aretas IV (8 BC–AD 40), the city was home to around 30,000 people, including scribes (the Nabataeans created their own cursive script, the forerunner of Arabic) and expert hydraulic engineers who built dams, cisterns and water channels to protect the site and its magnificent buildings.

By AD 106, as trade routes shifted from Petra to Palmyra and new sea trade routes via the Red Sea to Rome bypassed Petra altogether, the Romans had assumed control of the weakened Nabataean empire. Far from abandoning the city of Petra, however, the invaders recast the ancient city with familiar Roman features, including a colonnaded street and baths. The city was honoured by a visit from Emperor Hadrian in AD 131, and