

# Understand Jordan

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See how Jordan thrives in a troublesome region.

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You can't visit Jordan and not think about history – it's everywhere!

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*'Ahlan wa sahlan!'* It's a greeting you can't escape in this land of hospitality.

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# Jordan Today

For a country that only came into existence in its present form less than 100 years ago, Jordan has come far in terms of establishing an independent identity, distinct from neighbouring countries. Its citizens are proud of their nationality and the progress made, with relatively few resources, in developing modern infrastructure, health care and a regionally esteemed education system. It is this investment in human resources that has given Jordan the strength to thrive in a region of troublesome neighbours.

## Best in Print

**Married to a Bedouin** (M van Geldermalsen; 2006) The author tells the story of her marriage to a local Bedouin man in Petra and how she brought her family up in a cave in the early years.

**Into the Wadi** (Michele Drouart; 2000) A readable account of an Australian woman's marriage to a Jordanian man.

**Heroine of the Desert** (Donya al-Nahi; 2006) The author of this true account describes her attempts to reunite children with their mothers after being abducted by their fathers in failed mixed-ethnicity marriages.

**Nine Parts of Desire: The Hidden World of Islamic Women** (Geraldine Brooks; 1995) One of the better books in a genre dominated by sensationalist writing.

**Walking the Bible** (Bruce Feiler; 2005) An enjoyable ramble through biblical locations in Jordan.

## Best on Film

**Lawrence of Arabia** (1962) David Lean's classic.

**A Dangerous Man: Lawrence after Arabia** (1991) Starring a young Ralph Fiennes.

**Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade** (1989) Harrison Ford in Petra caper.

## Jordan circa 2015

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 high-tech service centre and by building ambitious tourist developments, including a 184-acre Star Wars theme park near Aqaba (announced formally in May 2013).

And 'ambitious' is an appropriate word. In a country of minimal resources – where water is in critically short supply, arable land accounts for just 2% of the landmass, and unemployment is hovering around 12% – the disproportionate investment in Jordan's coastal pleasure domes may appear somewhat reckless, especially given the precarious nature of tourism in the Middle East. Suffering under the burden of care towards incoming refugees and affected by the negative press regarding conflict in neighbouring countries, it's both surprising and refreshing that so many Jordanians remain optimistic about tourism in the current climate.

## 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.