

welcome to the Middle East



History Writ Large

In the Middle East, history is not something you read about in books. Here, it's a story written on the stones that litter the region, from the flagstones of old Roman roads to the building blocks of Ancient Egypt and the delicately carved tombs and temples from Petra to Baalbek. This is where humankind first built cities and learned to write, and it was from here that Judaism, Christianity and Islam all arose. From wonderfully preserved ruined cities to modern settlements whose origins date back to the dawn of time, from the aspirational architecture of the great faiths to conversations that touch on the astonishing complexity of a region where the past

is always present, history is the heart and soul of the Middle East.

Home of Hospitality

At some point on your visit to the Middle East, something will happen to challenge every stereotype you've ever heard about the region's people. You'll be sitting in a coffeehouse or looking lost in a labyrinth of narrow lanes when someone strikes up a conversation and, within minutes, invites you home to meet the family and share a meal. Or someone will simply approach and say with unmistakable warmth, 'Welcome'. These spontaneous, disarming and utterly genuine words of welcome can occur anywhere. And when they do, they



The Middle East is one of history's grand epics – a cradle of civilisations and a beautiful, complicated land that's home to some of the most hospitable people on the planet.

(left) Ruins of Baalbek (p377), Lebanon
(below) Muslim Quarter (p192), Jerusalem, Israel & the Palestinian Territories



can suddenly (and forever) change the way you see the Middle East. Put simply, in this land of historical, architectural and all manner of other treasures, it may just be the people who'll live longest in your memory.

Cities & Wilderness

The Middle East's cities read like a roll-call of historical heavyweights: Jerusalem, Damascus, Beirut, Cairo, İstanbul, Erbil. Aside from ranking among the oldest continuously inhabited cities on earth, these ancient-modern metropolises are places to take the pulse of a region, from the latest instalments in the gripping drama of the Arab Spring to Iraqi Kurdistan's headlong

rush into the future. Beyond city limits, the Middle East is a land of mighty rivers (the Nile, Euphrates), even mightier deserts (the Sahara and peerless Wadi Rum) and green landscapes of exceptional beauty. Exploring these wilderness areas – from snow-capped summits in Turkey and Lebanon to the kaleidoscopic waters of the Red Sea – only adds to the appeal of the region. The message is simple. Forget the clichés that masquerade as Middle Eastern truth – a visit here is one of the most varied and soulful travel experiences on earth.