



# Middle East



THIS EDITION WRITTEN AND RESEARCHED BY

**Anthony Ham,**

**Sofia Barbarani, Jessica Lee, Virginia Maxwell, Daniel Robinson,  
Anthony Sattin, Andy Symington, Jenny Walker**

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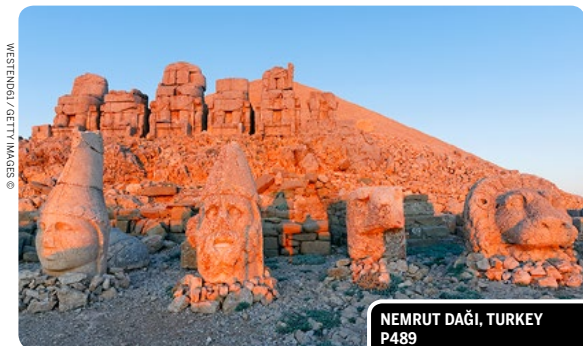
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**HOT-AIR BALLOONS OVER**  
**CAPPADOCIA, TURKEY P474**

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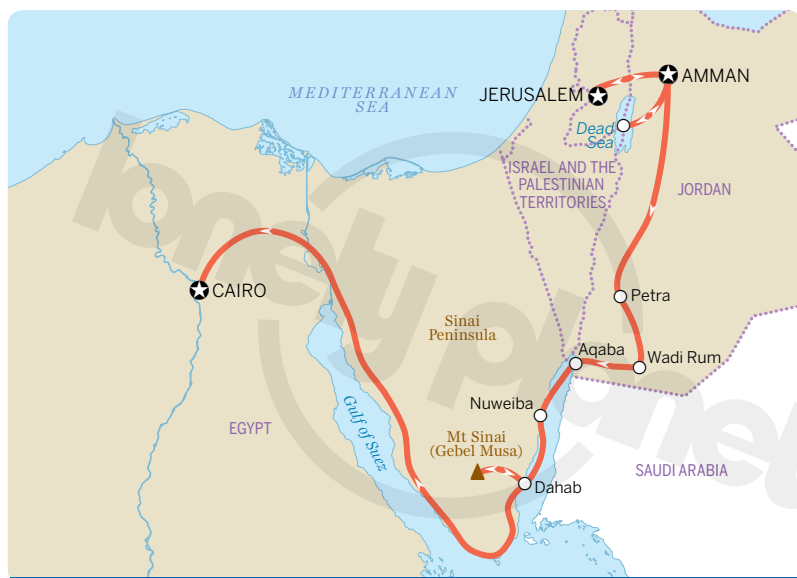
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# Itineraries

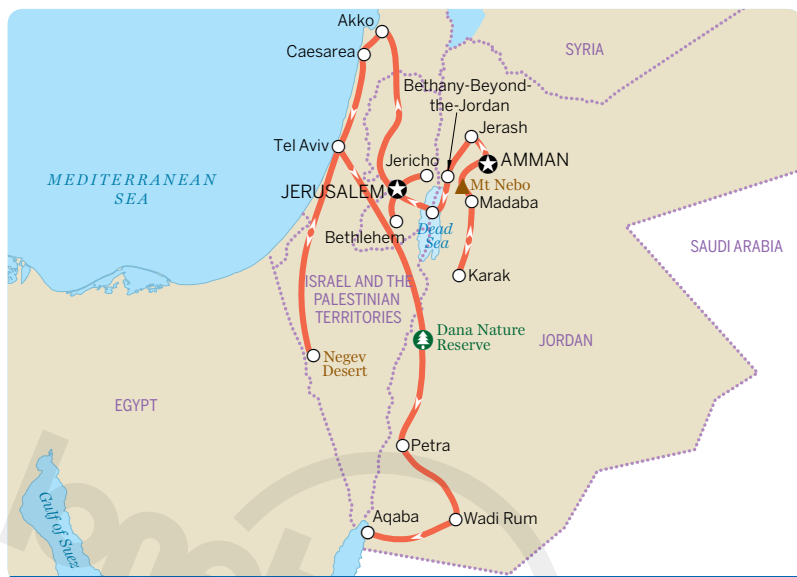


2  
WEEKS

## Amman to Cairo

This journey represents a shorter version of the old Istanbul-to-Cairo traveller favourite (no longer possible due to the war in Syria) and includes some of the Middle East's premier attractions.

Your journey starts in **Amman**, a cosmopolitan city with Roman ruins and brilliant restaurants. After visit to the **Dead Sea** (an easy day trip from the capital), detour to **Jerusalem**, the Middle East's spiritual heart. Returning to Jordan, spend some time exploring fabulous **Petra**, the Middle East's most beguiling ancient city. Further south, Petra's rival to the title of Jordan's most spectacular site is **Wadi Rum**, a soulful red-hued desert landscape that rewards those who spend a couple of days exploring. From here, leave Jordan behind and cross the Red Sea at **Aqaba** to **Nuweiba** in Egypt. Where you go from here depends on the prevailing security situation, with much of the Sinai Peninsula considered risky at the time of research. Assuming all is well, continue on from Nuweiba to **Dahab**, for Red Sea snorkelling and an excursion to catch sunrise from atop **Mt Sinai**. From Dahab (or from Nuweiba if security is uncertain) make for clamorous, attraction-rich **Cairo**.

3  
WEEKS

## Jordan, Israel & the Palestinian Territories

Welcome to the Middle Eastern heartland for a trip through the best that Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian Territories have to offer. Although distances can be small, there's a lot to pack in. Most of this trip is best accomplished using public transport.

**Amman** may lack the cachet of other Middle Eastern cities, but most travellers end up staying longer than planned. From here, it's easy to make side trips to many of Jordan's must-see destinations; the echoes of Moses at **Mt Nebo**, the mosaics of **Madaba** and the Crusader castle of **Karak** all deserve your time. When you're ready to move on, head to **Jerash**, a quiet yet rewarding ancient site with a wonderful colonnaded way running through its heart. Travelling south, **Bethany-Beyond-the-Jordan**, the place where Christ was baptised, resonates strongly with pilgrims, while floating in the buoyant waters of the **Dead Sea** is a signature Middle Eastern experience.

Across the Jordan River, roiling **Jerusalem** is the starting point of so much Middle Eastern history. From Jerusalem, your ability to visit the biblical towns of **Bethlehem** and **Jericho** will depend on the security situation. In the country's north, timeless **Akko** and the world-class ruins of **Caesarea** are worth as much time as you can give them. On your way back, don't miss **Tel Aviv**, a lively place to let your hair down and discover the hedonistic side of Israeli life. Its antithesis, the **Negev Desert**, is a wilderness area that you simply don't expect to find in this ever-crowded corner of the earth.

Crossing back into Jordan, the spectacular scenery of **Dana Nature Reserve** shouldn't be missed, while **Petra** is an astonishing place, where reality outstrips even the most lofty expectations. If time allows, spend at least a couple of days here, so you can savour the main tombs as well as visit the site's more outlying areas. The same applies to **Wadi Rum** – you could get a taste of this soulful place in a day, but you'll gain a deeper understanding of its gravitas if you sleep out under the stars for at least one night. The laid-back Red Sea port of **Aqaba**, with world-class diving and snorkelling, provides the perfect place to rest at journey's end.



## Turkey & Iran

From marvellous Istanbul to the fascinating cities of central Iran, this itinerary takes you from the Middle East's most Western-oriented corner to its least. Neither, however, conforms to stereotypes and the journey between the two is like traversing the region's complicated soul. Allow two weeks for each country.

**Istanbul** is at once a destination in its own right and the starting point of so many Turkish journeys. After a few days, make for **Ankara**, the country's underrated capital, and then take a detour to conservative but welcoming **Konya**, the spiritual home of the Sufis. Perhaps returning via Ankara, make for the otherworldly landscapes of **Cappadocia (Kapadokya)** that seem to have sprung from a wonderfully childlike imagination. Linger as long as you can here – it's a landscape that really gets under skin the longer you stay. When you can finally tear yourself away, begin the long journey east to the brooding statues of **Mt Nemrut**, surely one of Turkey's most thought-provoking sights. By the time you reach **Erzurum**, you'll have left the last remnants of tourist Turkey, and your reward in this eastern city is a fine open-air gallery of Seljuk- and Mongol-era monuments. Consider climbing **Mt Ararat** (although you need to plan well in advance to do so), before crossing the border into Iran.

Your first stop in Iran should be **Tabriz**, not least because its bazaar is one of the finest, most evocative of all Middle Eastern markets. Spend a day or two in **Tehran**, itself home to an overwhelming market as well as fine museums. But after a couple of days, stop resisting the temptation and head on to **Esfahan**, one of the Middle East's most beautiful, most bejewelled cities (at least in the centre), with its utterly exquisite gardens, arched bridges and tiled mosques. **Shiraz** is a cultured, appealing city, not to mention the gateway to **Persepolis**, that towering monument to all that was good about ancient Persia. Continue to **Yazd** and check into an atmospheric traditional hotel in the old town. Spend two days exploring the old city, the Zoroastrian Towers of Silence and perhaps making a trek into the desert. Finish up in **Kerman**, from where you can take a tour to the remarkable 'sand castles' of the Kaluts.



Above: Nemrut Dağı  
(Mt Nemrut; p489),  
Turkey

Right: Aramgah-e  
Shah-e Cheragh  
(p165), Shiraz, Iran

GO NZALO AZUMENDI / ROBERT HARDING ©



3  
WEEKS

## Lebanon & Turkey

For this Mediterranean sojourn, count on a week to 10 days in Lebanon and two weeks in Turkey.

Begin in **Beirut**, a glamorous metropolis, the Middle East in complicated microcosm and filled with Mediterranean joie de vivre. If it's safe, head south to the Phoenician heartland – **Sidon**, the **Temple of Echmoun** and **Tyre**. East of Beirut, **Baalbek** is one of the Middle East's premier Roman sites, though you will need to check the security situation before you set off. Head north, to the pretty fishing port of **Byblos**, then finish up with some hiking through the **Qadisha Valley**, finally putting on your skis at the **Cedars**.

From Beirut, fly to **Istanbul** for a few days in that most glorious of cities. Three days should give you a taste before you move on to visit **Gallipoli**, with its poignant echoes of WWI, and **Troy**, where altogether more ancient battles took place. Work your way around the coast, pausing at the mighty ruins of **Ephesus**, which rank among the Middle East's most imposing, and lingering in the delightful Mediterranean villages of **Kaş** or **Olympos**, where you'll wonder why life can't always be like this.

4  
WEEKS

## Among the Kurds

Begin in **Ankara**, the heart of Turkey's secularist Atatürk cult of personality, where you'll find a splendid museum and a fine citadel. On your way southeast into the Kurdish heartland, make the obligatory stop in **Cappadocia (Kapadokya)** and **Mt Nemrut** before exploring the rarely visited but always fascinating cities of **Gaziantep** and **Şanlıurfa**. Nearby **Mardin** combines a beautiful setting with equally beautiful architecture and a fascinating cultural mix. By the time you reach **Diyarbakir**, with its intriguing architecture, you're deep in Kurdish territory. Head for **Doğubayazit**, one of eastern Turkey's most extraordinary sights, with a legendary castle and stunning views of **Mt Ararat**; the mountain can be climbed, although most travellers content themselves with not-so-distant views from the town. Further south, **Van** is home to the lovely Armenian church on Akdamar Island. If you've come this far, it's likely you're en route to Iraq. If it's safe, cross into **Zakho** with its iconic bridge, then spend as long as they'll let you getting to know **Amadiya**, **Dohuk**, **Al-Kosh**, **Lalish** and **Gali Ali Beg**, before finishing up in **Erbil**, one of the oldest cities on earth, but one rushing headlong towards the future.



## Land of the Pharaohs

There's so much to see in Egypt that it deserves its own itinerary. Count on a week for Cairo and Alexandria, a week for the Western Oases, and another week for the country's south. When security returns to the Sinai Peninsula, you could spend an extra week there.

So many Egyptian journeys revolve around **Cairo**, and you'll return here again and again. Apart from being the Middle East's largest and most clamorous metropolis, Cairo is also home to the iconic Pyramids of Giza, the Egyptian Museum and a wonderful coffeehouse culture. Return to Cairo, then head north to **Alexandria**, Egypt's sophisticated and quintessentially Mediterranean city. It feels like nowhere else in the country, and a combination of terrific museums and great food gives you further reason to visit. A *really* long journey west is worth it for your first sight of **Siwa**, one of the Sahara's great oasis outposts and home to an ancient temple in the sands. It's the sort of place where you can stand on the outskirts of the village, just as Alexander the Great did, and contemplate eternity. Dusty desert trails lead to the **Bahariya Oasis**; you'll need to rent a private 4WD to reach Bahariya, but why not make it part of a deep desert expedition from Bahariya into the White and Black Deserts.

It's back to Cairo to enjoy the pleasures of civilisation for a day or two, then jump on a train south to **Aswan**, one of Africa's loveliest riverside spots. There's a monastery and museum to anchor your explorations of the city, but its real charm is its proximity to the Nile. Take the detour south into Nubia to **Abu Simbel**, one of Egypt's most extraordinary temples, then from Aswan sail slowly up the Nile aboard a felucca, savouring the slow rhythms of life along this, the world's longest river all the way to **Luxor**, home to the richest collection of Pharaonic sites in the country. Here you'll find so much of what drew you to Egypt in the first place, including the Temples of Karnak, the Valley of the Kings and the Valley of the Queens.



### **Daniel Robinson**

[Israel & the Palestinian Territories](#) Brought up near San Francisco and Chicago, Daniel spent part of his childhood in Jerusalem, a bit of his youth at Kibbutz Lotan and many years in Tel Aviv, where he worked on a PhD in late Ottoman history, covered suicide bombings for the AP, and helped lead the local Critical Mass campaign for bike paths. A Lonely Planet author since 1989, he holds a BA in Near Eastern Studies from Princeton and an MA in Jewish History from Tel Aviv University.

Read more about Daniel at:

[lonelyplanet.com/members/daniel\\_robinson](https://lonelyplanet.com/members/daniel_robinson)



### **Anthony Sattin**

[Egypt](#) Anthony has been travelling around the Middle East for several decades and has lived in Cairo, as well as other cities in the region. His highly-acclaimed books include *Lifting the Veil*, *A Winter on the Nile* and *The Gates of Africa*. His latest, *Young Lawrence*, looks at the five years TE Lawrence spent in the Middle East leading up to 1914. He happily spends several months each year along the Nile and is still looking for a plot where he can tread mud-bricks and build himself

a house. He tweets about Egypt and travel @anthonyattin.



### **Andy Symington**

[Iran](#) Andy is an experienced Lonely Planet author based in Spain who has contributed to numerous guidebooks, articles and other products on countries across the world. He has a degree in Iranian archaeology and has long had a fascination with this beautiful land. On this trip he baked in desert heat, shivered in northern blizzards and marvelled at the country's fabulous culture, landscapes and people.

Read more about Andy at:

[lonelyplanet.com/members/andy\\_symington](https://lonelyplanet.com/members/andy_symington)



### **Jenny Walker**

[Jordan](#) For over a decade Jenny has written extensively on the Middle East for many Lonely Planet guides, and is a member of the British Guild of Travel Writers. She has a long academic engagement in the region (she did her dissertation on Doughty and Lawrence, her MPhil thesis from Oxford University on the perception of the Arabic Orient, and is currently studying for her PhD at NTU). Associate Dean at Caledonian University College of Engineering in Oman since 2008, she has

travelled in 110 countries from Panama to Mongolia.



## 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'.

## OUR WRITERS



### Anthony Ham

**Coordinating Author, Syria** Anthony first landed in Damascus in 1998 and couldn't bear to leave. His first job for Lonely Planet was the Iraq chapter of this guide back in 1999, and he has since written or contributed to Lonely Planet guides to Jordan, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Libya, and five editions of this *Middle East* guide. He has also worked in Australia as a refugee lawyer with clients from the Middle East and has a Masters degree in Middle Eastern politics. Anthony

now divides his time between Melbourne and Madrid and writes for magazines and newspapers around the world. Read more about Anthony at [www.anthonham.com](http://www.anthonham.com).



### Sofia Barbarani

**Iraq** Sofia is Italian but has lived in Iraq's Kurdish region for over a year. She was drawn to Iraq and Kurdistan following a Masters degree in Middle East studies and moved to the region to pursue a career in journalism. Despite her previous knowledge of Kurdistan, travelling the region gave her a better understanding of the enclave and its people. Her favourite trip was undoubtedly to Akre, where the hospitality of the Kurds really shone through.



### Jessica Lee

**Turkey** Jessica first went to Turkey in 2005 and ended up leading adventure tours across the breadth of Anatolia for four years. In 2011 she moved there to live and now calls Turkey home. As a co-author on the last two editions of Lonely Planet's *Turkey* guide, she's travelled to most of Turkey's far-flung corners but especially loves the wild landscapes of the southeast, the ruin-strewn trails of the Lycian Way and the wacky rock formations of Cappadocia. She tweets @jessofarabia.

Read more about Jess at:  
[lonelyplanet.com/members/jessicalee1](http://lonelyplanet.com/members/jessicalee1)



### Virginia Maxwell

**Lebanon** Although based in Australia, Virginia spends much of her year travelling in the Middle East, Mediterranean Europe and North Africa. She has written Lonely Planet guidebooks to Turkey, Egypt, Syria, Iran and the United Arab Emirates, and this is the second time she has worked on the Lebanon chapter of Lonely Planet's *Middle East* book.

OVER MORE  
PAGE WRITERS

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