

Big Five Presents
Jordan

This ancient desert kingdom weaves spellbinding stories of biblical settings, a mythic city carved from rock, Crusader castles, Lawrence of Arabia and age-old cultures.

Its history winds back through the ages even as it echoes on the modern streets and through the traditional neighborhoods of Amman. The city of Jerash, with its colossal, restored hippodrome, is one of the finest examples of a preserved Greco-Roman city in the Middle East. The stunning visual power of the extraordinary "Rose-City" of Petra is unlike any other place on earth. Its precise origins may be forever lost to time, but Petra is famed for its rock-architecture carved into the sheer vertical walls of a narrow canyon more than 2,000 years ago. More than eight times saltier than any ocean, the Dead Sea is 420 meters / 1,378 feet below sea level, and its shores are the lowest point of dry land on the planet. It has attracted visitors from around the Mediterranean basin for thousands of years. It was a place of refuge for King David, and became one of the world's first health resorts, used by Herod the Great. From the Roman city of Gerasa to the striking Wadi Rum, Jordan is home to outstanding achievements by both man and nature.



Suggested Itinerary

Day 1: Amman, Jordan

In addition to its rich archaeological treasures, Amman also features museums, art galleries and cultural centers.

Day 2: Amman / Jerash / Ajlun / Amman

Jerash has extensive Roman ruins while Ajlun is noted for its 12th-century castle.

Day 3: Amman / Mt. Nebo / Madaba / Kerak / Petra

Crusader forts, Biblical settings and Roman ruins make this region endlessly fascinating.

Day 4: Petra

This ancient city is renowned for its remarkable rock-cut architecture.

Day 5: Petra / Wadi Rum / Dead Sea

Prehistoric valleys, towering sandstone mountains and dramatic desert landscapes make for a remarkable day.

Day 6: Dead Sea

These mystical waters have drawn travelers from kings to commoners to its shores for centuries.

Day 7: Dead Sea / Depart

Custom Options

Aqaba (3 days)

Jordan's only seaport, the town is best known today as a diving and beach resort.

Dana Nature Reserve (3 days)

The reserve has four different bio-geological zones that offer spectacular hiking opportunities.

Dead Sea (3 days)

As it has for thousands of years, this fabled sea still draws visitors to its health spas and hot springs along the shores.

Eastern Desert Castles (1 day)

Every mosaic, fresco, stone and stucco carving, and illustration is imbued with a story inspired by the best in Persian and Greco-Roman traditions of the eighth century.

Trekking (3-4 days)

Jordan offers multiple diverse experiences for avid trekking and outdoor enthusiasts including Wadi Mujib's water trails and various paths around Petra.

Wadi Rum (2 days)

Stunning in its natural beauty, Wadi Rum epitomizes the romance of the desert.

About Jordan

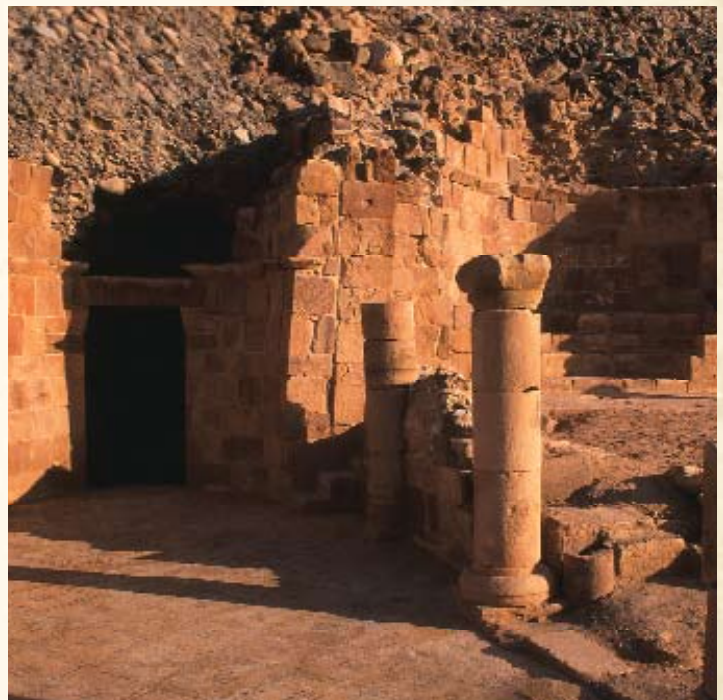
Ajlun: A hilly town some 76 kilometers / 47 miles northwest of Amman, it is noted for the impressive ruins of its 12th century Ajlun Castle. It was one of the few built to protect the country against Crusader attacks from Karak in the south and Bisan in the west. A major objective of the fortress was to protect the development and control of the iron mines of Ajlun. The original castle core had four corner towers with arrow slits in the walls.

Amman: Ancient Amman, Jordan's capital, has a sense of timelessness about it that is seen in the profusion of gleaming white houses, kebab stalls with roasting meat and tiny cafés, where rich Arabian coffee is sipped in the afternoon sunshine. It boasts one of the largest Neolithic settlements ever discovered in the Middle East. Citadel hill contains early Bronze Age tombs (3300-1200 BC). The first settlement on record dates to the Neolithic period, around 8500 BC. Old Amman is filled with souks, bazaars, shops and single-family dwellings. West Amman is less crowded and more scenic. It is one of the richest and most Western-oriented cities in the Middle East, and most of the upscale hotels are here. Amman is among the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world, with a fascinating history.

Aqaba: Aqaba is a coastal town in the far south of Jordan. With its balmy winter climate and peaceful setting, Aqaba is Jordan's year-round aquatic playground. Plentiful marine life in the crystal clear waters of the Gulf of Aqaba makes diving and snorkeling among the best anywhere. Skiing, windsurfing and fishing are also popular.

Dana Biosphere Reserve: This is among the world's oldest continuously inhabited areas. It is the largest nature reserve in Jordan, covering over 300 square kilometers / 116 square miles; and encompasses the varied geology of Dana - limestone, sandstone and granite. In the east, elevations reach 1,500 meters / 4,921 feet before descending through canyons and gorges to the low elevations of Wadi Araba. Dana is not only one of the most biologically diverse areas in the country, it is also archeologically rich with evidence of Neolithic villages, ancient copper mines, Roman aqueducts and Byzantine churches. The people of the Ata'ta (or Al Atata) tribe are the native inhabitants. Their original settlement in the area dates back some 6,000 years. Archeological discoveries also suggest Palaeolithic, Egyptian, Nabataean, and Roman settlement as well.

Dead Sea: Jordan shares this salty sea with Israel to the east and the West Bank to the west. The Jordan River is the only major water source flowing into the Dead Sea. The sea has been the source of a variety of products – from balms for Egyptian mummification to potash for fertilizers. People also use the salt and the minerals to create cosmetics. The area has luxurious resorts, trendy hotspots, health spas and hot springs.



Eastern Desert Castles: The main castles east of Amman make for a memorable trek back through the Persian and Greco-Roman history of Jordan. Qasr Amra, Qasr Al Mushatta, Qasr Al Tuba, Qasr Al-Kharrana and Qasr Al Hallabat are well preserved and adorned with priceless mosaics and frescoes. In this area, you will also find Azraq, home of the famous black basalt fort that T.E. Lawrence used as one of his headquarters during the Arab Revolt. These desert castles are beautiful examples of early Islamic art and architecture. They served many purposes from caravan stations to agricultural centers to resorts.

Jerash: North of Amman, Jerash, the Roman city of Gerasa, displays some of the finest, most extensive and well-preserved remains of the former empire to be found anywhere. Colonnaded streets, temples, theaters, bathhouses and the oval plaza are complemented by the superbly restored hippodrome, created on a grand scale that held up to 15,000 people. The Roman Army and Chariot Experience reenactment explores life thousands of years past.

Kerak: Kerak Castle is one of the three largest Crusader castles in the Levant, a large region of the eastern Mediterranean. Construction began in the 1140s. With its position east of the Dead Sea, Kerak was able to control Bedouin herders and the trade routes from Damascus to Egypt. It is a noted example of Crusader architecture, a mixture of European, Byzantine, and Arab designs. The most notable Crusader feature surviving is the north wall with its immense arched halls on two levels. These were living quarters and stables, but also served as a fighting gallery overlooking the castle approach and for shelter against missiles from siege engines.

Madaba: Known as the "City of Mosaics," Madaba has a history beginning in the Neolithic period. The town, once a Moabite border city, is cited in the Bible. It was ruled by both the Roman and Byzantine Empires between the second and the seventh centuries. The famous mosaic Map of Madaba was discovered here in 1896.

Mt. Nebo: Mt. Nebo is most famous as the site where the Hebrew prophet Moses was given a view of the promised land that God was giving to the Israelites.

Petra: This UNESCO World Heritage Site is renowned for its amazing rock-cut architecture, the legacy of the Nabateans, an Arab people who settled in Jordan more than 2,000 years ago. Petra is spectacularly set deep inside a narrow desert gorge. From the main entrance, visitors walk through the "Siq," an immense, natural crack in the sandstone that winds between overhanging cliffs. Petra's most famous monument, the Treasury, appears dramatically at the end. Petra has hundreds of buildings, facades, tombs, and a first century, 3,000-seat theater.

Trekking: From Wadi Mujib's water trails to hikes around the lost city of Petra, to the massive rock monoliths in Wadi Rum, Jordan offers multiple diverse hiking experiences for avid trekking and outdoor enthusiasts. The ancient castle of Ajlun also boasts some spectacular nature trails.

Wadi Rum: Wadi Rum epitomizes the romance of the desert with its stunning beauty. Bedouin tribes live in scattered camps throughout the prehistoric valleys and towering sandstone mountains rising out of the desert sand. Climbers are attracted to Wadi Rum for its sheer granite and sandstone cliffs. Hikers enjoy its vast empty spaces, where one can still capture a sense of solitude.

Best Time To Go

Jordan's climate varies dramatically. The best time to visit is April with moderate temperatures and wildflowers are in bloom. March, May, September, October and November are also best to dodge the baking summer sun and winter's freezing winds. Although winter can be bitterly cold in most of the country, the Red Sea area and Aqaba are very pleasant. Jordan valley can reach 40°C / 104°F, while Amman and Petra occasionally get snow in winter. The plateau area is usually warm and dry, between the low 20°Cs / 70°Fs and high 30°Cs / 90°Fs. The desert suffers extremes of temperature: blazing dry heat interspersed with freezing winds from central Asia. Aqaba boasts winter temperatures in mid-20°Cs / 70°Fs.

Note: Ramadan is a month of fasting between sun-up and sunset. The time varies each year, please be sensitive to the fact that most of those around you are fasting. Ramadan ends with a huge feast.

*\$400 - \$600 per person per day
Land only, double occupancy*

Consider enhancing your adventure by including the following destinations: Egypt (p13-16), Israel (p133-136), UAE & Oman (p145-148), Turkey (p141-144)



