

VISITING JORDAN

Stunning Jordanian History and Beautiful Landscapes.



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Anyone who has ever attended one of the legendary WAHO conferences will usually never forget it. These conferences are traditionally embedded in the history and culture of the host country. The Arabian horse has been bred and domesticated on the Arabian Peninsula and the neighbouring western and eastern regions for several millennia. In this respect, those WAHO conferences in the Arabian world of origin have always been a deeply impressive experience. Unforgettable are the pre- and post-Conference tours, through which the host country



establish a connection between the participants and the Arabian horse History and presence in their country. The conferences in Syria and Oman were unforgettable, and Qatar and Bahrain were very impressive, and the discussions and lectures were followed by an insight into the life of the breeders and their horses in a contemporary world.

Jordan joins the ranks of fascinating countries that had a lot to show the participants in an authentic environment. The pre- and post-conference tours made the participation in the WAHO conference an exciting experience with so much learned about a fabulously beautiful country, its people and history.



Front picture by Karsten Scherling

THE DAY VISITS

Jerash Archaeological Site

Jerash was one of the ten biggest cities of the Roman Empire, and one of the largest and best-preserved archaeological sites of Roman architecture in the world, outside Italy. It is also known as the 'City of 1000 Columns,' or the 'Pompeii of the East', possibly because it lay hidden under sand for centuries. It has an unbroken chain of human occupation dating back more than 6500 years. It may look small on a map, but it's packed with historical wonders and authentic local charm. Jerash and Petra are Jordan's two most visited attractions.







Ancient Amman and Jordan Museum

Amman is a city of contrasts, a unique blend of old and new. Modern buildings built around and amongst the remains of ancient civilisations. Originally built on seven hills, it now spans over an area of 19 hills, and almost half of Jordan's population is concentrated in the Amman environs.

Jebel Al Qala'a is one of the original seven hills, and the Bronze Age Citadel ruins are here, both Roman and Islamic, and the Roman Temple of Hercules. Byzantine history is represented by the columns and mosaics from an early church.

There is a stunning view of Amman and one can look down on the Roman Amphitheatre with its 3 tiers of seats for up to 6000 people, and the smaller restored theatre, the Odeon. Visitors get a perspective of the city's incredible history.

The Jordan Museum tells the story of Jordan chronologically and thematically, covering the environment, food production, visual art and architecture, cultural exchange and trade. Politics and the military, communication and writing, industry, religion and daily domestic life. One is encouraged to explore the Kingdom's past present and future.



Mosaics of Madaba and Mount Nebo

Madaba is often called “The City of Mosaics” and there is plenty to explore. The vivid 6th century Byzantine mosaic map shows Jerusalem and other Holy Sites. The Madaba Institute for Mosaic Art and restoration, trains students in the art of making, repairing and restoring Mosaics.

Mount Nebo is believed to be the place where Moses was buried and is one of the most revered holy places in Jordan. At a height of 1000 metres, the top of the mountain, offers amazing views over the river Jordan Valley, the Dead Sea, Jericho and Jerusalem. There are more interesting mosaics in the Moses Memorial Church, and the Serpentine Cross standing just outside, is symbolic of the brass serpent Moses took into the desert, and the cross on which Jesus was crucified.



Al Ma'wa for Nature and Wildlife

The Al Ma'wa Wildlife Reserve in Jerash province is 48 kilometres north of Amman, it covers 140 hectares that were donated by the Jordanian Agriculture Ministry. It was established in 2011 by the Princess Alia Foundation in partnership with the international animal welfare organisation Four Paws. It is the largest sanctuary for rescued and mistreated wildlife in the Middle East. The project provides a regional solution for rescued wild animals and offers emergency relief to animals from war zones, irresponsible private owners, zoos that could or would not look after them properly, and illegal wildlife trading.

Animals that cannot be returned to their country of origin or released into the wild find a permanent home at the sanctuary.

Well cared for, and well fed, all the animals, live in species-specific enclosures that ensure the animals have enough space and appropriate conditions that best suit their natural needs, and they all appeared content and very healthy.





A Day at the Dead Sea

The Dead Sea is totally devoid of life, except for some primitive microorganisms and algae. At just over 400 metres below sea level, the water is 10 times saltier than the sea, and very rich in chloride salts. These mineral salts have healing powers to treat and rejuvenate skin complaints. The thick black mud also has health giving properties for skin ailments. For over 2000 years people have taken advantage of the natural, outdoor health spa. The best-known side effect of this very salty water is that it is very buoyant. Floating and relaxing are supposed to be easy, but putting your feet back down on the seabed, less easy. A challenging and amusing way to enjoy an afternoon dip.



Petra - the “Rose Red City”

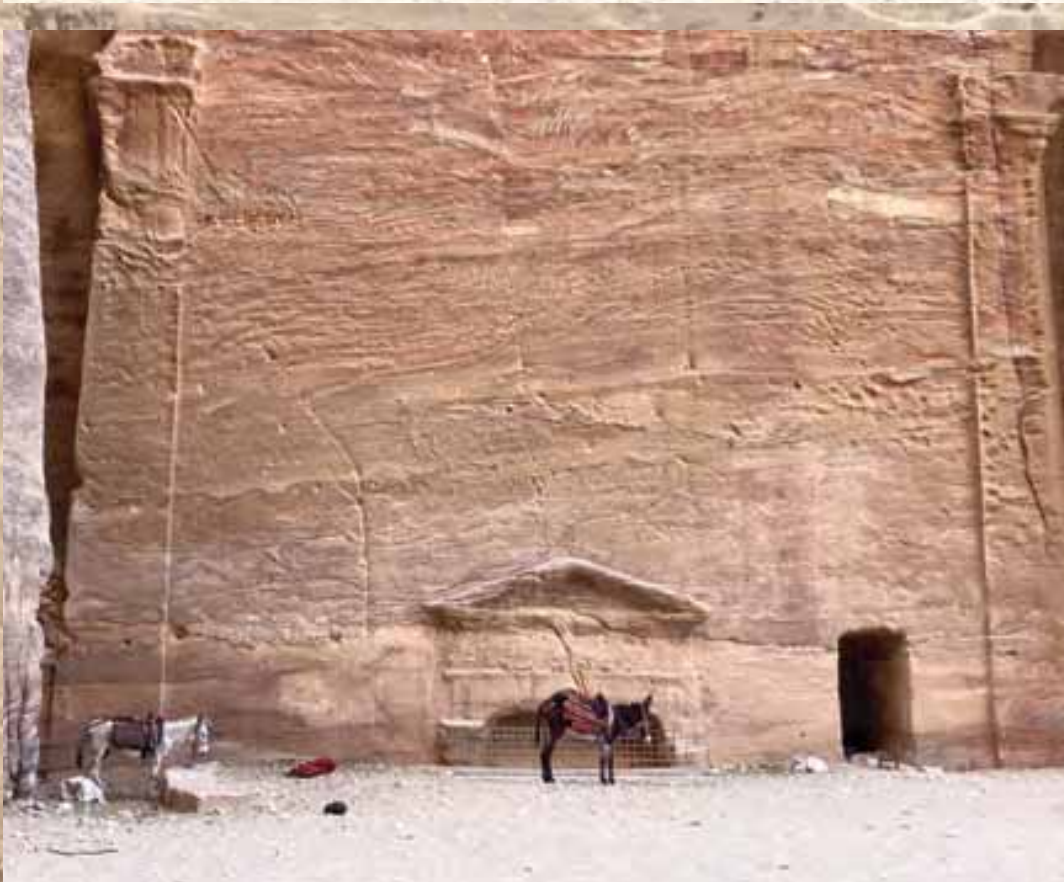
“Petra is one of the world’s biggest mysteries,” says one of the Jordanian guides, “and 65 per cent of Petra is still underneath our feet, hidden by dust.”

The UNESCO World Heritage site of Petra has been well documented and written about because it is such an amazing experience. Nothing really prepares you for your visit. The 2 km walk along Al Siq between the towering rose red rock carvings and hollowed out tombs, gives you time to imagine the Silk Road traders walking along the same route 2000 years ago, to the capital of the Nabatean Kingdom.

The sophisticated water system evolved over hundreds of years and was amazing in its skill and effectiveness. Water from natural springs and rainwater was stored in cisterns. An intricate and ingenious system of channels carved through the rock, and clay pipelines carried water throughout the city. It is estimated that up to 30,000 people had water all year, and could even cope with the arrival of large trade caravans.

Petra is a huge site and there are temples, tombs, monasteries and a theatre carved into the rock face, and guides, tourist, camels and horses. There is so much to see and learn, but however far you walk down the valley or up into the hills, you will end your visit knowing that you have been somewhere special.





Travelling to “The Golden Triangle of Jordan”, 4- Days Tour

The title and description of this 5-days tour was tantalizing and attracted two coach loads of conference attendees to go on the adventure.

Starting with a visit to Petra – “The Rose Red City, half as old as time”, which is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and followed by the less well known, Little Petra.

Wadi Rum and the beautiful desert landscapes promised a memorable experience.

As a complete contrast we would travel to Aqaba, and then end the tour at the edge of the Dead Sea.

We left Amman for the three-hour drive to Petra, and there was plenty to see of the Jordanian landscape and interesting information provided by the excellent guides.



I am sure Petra has been on many people's wish list for years, and images and impressions formed in our minds, but I don't think anything prepares you for the wonder of this historic and archaeological city.

The path or "Al Siq" is almost 2 kilometres long and at times as narrow as 3 metres. The rose-coloured rocks surround you and tower above you making it feel like a fortress in places. It is possible to ride in a converted golf buggy, or on a camel, horse or donkey, but you can sense the history of the old trading routes and burial sites as you walk along the route. Camel trains, incense and spices must have created a heady cacophony of noises and smells.

After about 30 minutes you walk through a particularly narrow passage and catch a glimpse of tall carvings, and suddenly you come out into an area that is dominated by the spectacular Treasury Building, 24 metres wide and 37 metres high.

From there the walk becomes wider and opens into a valley that takes you past the Theatre, Royal Tombs, street of Facades, colonnaded street and many more features.

The historical site covers about 60 square kilometres, so there is more to see than is possible in a short visit, but it is breathtaking and a privilege to have seen and experienced.

Petra is a symbol of Jordan, as well as the country's most-visited tourist attraction, which has up to 1 million visitors a year.

Little Petra is also Nabatean, and lies just to the North of the main Petra site, but receives fewer visitors and appears calmer and more atmospheric. This may be because it is also known as Siq al-Barid, meaning the 'cold canyon', and it certainly felt cooler! It is thought to have housed traders on the Silk Road, and the buildings suggest that it was used by more affluent merchants, especially the Painted Room with its very rare ancient frescoes. Historically less is known, but it is a fascinating visit.

After those two remarkable places, we had a two-hour drive to digest what we had seen, and wonder what the desert trip would reveal.

Gradually the landscape changed and we were in the desert, beautiful red colours and distant hills, another UNESCO World Heritage site, Wadi Rum. It is also known as the Valley of the Moon and is a maze of monolithic sandstone and granite rockscapes. We were divided up into two different hotels/camps, and



prepared for our afternoon activities. Horse or camel ride or a 4x4 jeep tour. Many different cultures have inhabited the area, and we were able to see petroglyphs, inscriptions and temple ruins, as we explored the area in or on our chosen transport.

Just before sunset we were taken by the guides to a suitable position to watch the sun disappear behind the hills. I would like to say that it was romantic and peaceful, but in reality, there were many groups of tourists enjoying the changing colours and waiting for nightfall.

Back at the hotel and we were looking forward to Bedouin Zarb Dinner. When it comes to the culinary delights of the desert, the wadi is well-known for a meal that is cooked underground.

"Zarb is a centuries-old method of cooking, where the bedouins place food on coal and cover it for two to three hours," according to the guide.

Before it was served, we went and watched a pile of sand scraped to one side to reveal a carpet! More scraping and digging, and a lid appeared. When this was raised, two men grasped a metal bar and lifted a tower of shelves covered in vegetables, rice and chicken. Delicious – served with salads and breads and fruit and sweets. Before sleeping, there was an opportunity to sit outside and enjoy the expansive unpolluted skies.

Next morning was unfortunately rather windy so that the Hot Air Balloon trip was cancelled. Such a shame, as flying over desert is particularly enjoyable.

On the way to Aqaba, we had a quick stop at the Al Hijaz Railway. Quite bizarre to see a railway line and reconditioned steam train in the middle of a desert setting.



The journey south was quite short and it was interesting to see Eilat in Israel so close. Aqaba is Jordan's only coastal city, a strategic location at the northeastern tip of the Red Sea between the continents of Asia and Africa, and important port throughout thousands of years. It is considered the third part of the Golden Triangle.

During the afternoon we were taken on board a boat that took us on a short harbour tour.

The water is so deep and clean, that several species of coral can survive, so we boarded a smaller boat with underwater windows and were able to see a few examples. Next morning before our journey to the Dead Sea we stopped for a brief look at Aqaba Fort. It offers a glimpse into Jordan's history. Through the ages it has been used as a Pilgrimage stop for travelers, and as a military base for battles.

Finally, we arrived at the Dead Sea, and having found our hotel rooms, the next experience was to 'swim' in the 'salty lake'. At 430.5 metres below sea level, it attracts many visitors who are amazed and amused by trying to move in such 'dense' water.

Sadly, the Dead Sea is receding at a swift rate, the surface area having almost halved since 1930. Proposals and ideas continue to search for a solution.

We were taken to a special place to watch the golden hour and have dinner. Perched atop the edge of the Zara Mountain range cliffs, the Panorama Dead Sea Centre is famous for the stunning sunsets and excellent food.

A wonderful evening in a unique position with both new and old friends, made during the past 10 days.

Such memorable days. At the beginning of the Conference, we were promised that Jordan would entertain and look after us and they certainly lived up to that statement. ■

