

Wadi Rum

Petra & beyond

Andrew Hunt recently returned to Jordan to research the country for our new North Africa & Arabia brochure.

I first went to Jordan back in 2000, and then, as now, I think of it as a country that surprises you, as it offers so much more than most people expect. I am absolutely delighted to be able to include Jordan in our 2005 North Africa & Arabia programme – it is one of my favourite countries in the world, and I am really looking forward to sending Audley travellers there.

The first surprise is Petra itself – not just the sheer impressiveness of the site, but the fact that after so much exposure on television and film, the view of the Treasury Tomb as you emerge from the Siq Canyon will still take your breath away. The size of the site is something else I was not anticipating – in total it covers nearly 100 square kilometres, but then the city builders were a prosperous bunch. They were the Nabataeans, and grew wealthy through their control of the desert trade routes, where caravans passed heaped high with frankincense destined for the pagan temples of the Roman Empire. Petra was continuously inhabited for almost a thousand years, and another surprise is to see Roman, Greek, Crusader and Byzantine ruins in the city.



Petra

Like many people, I went to Jordan expecting Petra to be the highlight: it certainly lived up to that expectation, but I had barely heard of Jerash, and yet now I consider it to be as impressive as Petra, and a real “must-see”. A Graeco-Roman city dating back to the time of Alexander the Great, the beauty of Jerash is its state of preservation. You can walk down colonnaded streets, past shop fronts and ornately sculpted fountains, or pause awhile in steep amphitheatres before continuing to temples with exquisitely carved columns and mosaics as fresh and vivid as they were two thousand years ago. With very little effort, it is possible to imagine Jerash exactly as it was during its heyday, filled with traders and important provincial officials – that for me is the real attraction.

*... it was here that
Salome danced for the head
of John the Baptist*

As well as large, impressive sites like Petra and Jerash, there are numerous sites that may not have as much in the way of remains, but are the location of key events in biblical history, such as Mukawir. This sits atop a steep outcrop near the Dead Sea, more impressive for the views than the remains: but it was here that Salome danced for the head of John the Baptist. Jordan has a wealth of similar small, atmospheric sights, away from the tourist trail.

Nature reserves are certainly not the first things that jump to mind when you think of Jordan, but the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (RSCN) have created several of them that protect the indigenous flora



The Oval Plaza, Jerash

and fauna and showcase some of the spectacular landscapes and traditional Bedouin life. I knew that Jordan had amazing scenery – the vast expanse of Wadi Rum should be part of any visit to the country – but I was surprised to hear about the wildlife conservation. I've been lucky enough to see the Arabian Oryx in the wild in the United Arab Emirates – but if it had not been for the efforts of the RSCN, and their rebreeding project at Shaumari, these graceful animals with their long, striking horns and beautiful white coats would probably have been extinct.

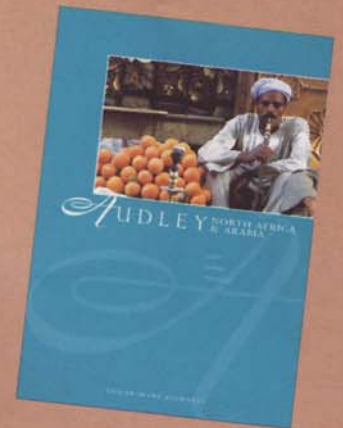
If you are thinking of going to Jordan, do travel beyond Petra and and join the ranks of those who have been pleasantly surprised, returning with superb memories of amazing places and wonderful, hospitable people.



Travel file

A two week tailor-made trip including many of the places mentioned in Andy's article costs from £1,500 per person based on twin share. If time is at a premium, Jordan can be visited in a week, a tailor-made trip costing from £800 per person based on twin share. For further details please call Johanna and Nicola on 01869 276 220.

North Africa & Arabia



Jordan features in our new **North Africa & Arabia** brochure, alongside the established destinations of Egypt and Morocco.

In Egypt there is the opportunity to visit the Western Desert, Siwa and El Alamein, offering the chance to see some of the most spectacular scenery the country has to offer, as well as the opportunity to appreciate a more modern history than that displayed in the temples and tombs of the Nile Valley. For those looking to extend a trip, or returning to Egypt, this northern half of the country is a great option, as is a cruise on Lake Nasser – something we would advise everyone to include in their trip.

Morocco is fantastic for a weekend break, with Marrakesh being hugely popular, and just four hours flying time away. Most people do not realise that there is easily enough to keep you in Morocco for weeks, and we are very keen to get people exploring some of the other areas. Fez is an up-and-coming destination: new direct flights and an ancient medina with few concessions to modernity are going to make it increasingly popular. It can serve as a starting place for your exploration of north Morocco, visiting the Imperial City of Meknes, the Roman ruins of Volubilis and the provincial boulevards of Rabat.