

JORDAN

Despite being badly chopped up as a result of the 1967 Arab-Israeli conflict, Jordan is one of the most interesting and friendly of the Middle East countries and also the easiest to visit.

History

Jordan was another country which escaped from a long period of Turkish rule when the Ottoman Empire collapsed after WWI. A period of semi-independence followed with the British pulling the strings from above. After WWII Jordan became completely independent but almost immediately was embroiled in the first Arab-Israeli war of 1948 and ended up with a large swag of Palestinian refugees. Despite Jordan's relatively amenable attitude towards Israel its front line position has meant it has continued to bear the brunt of the following conflicts and in 1967 Jordan lost the west bank of the Jordan river, the most fertile and densely populated part of the country, and the Jordanian half of the city of Jerusalem. Jordan has enjoyed a relatively stable government under King Hussein who has ruled the country since the assassination of his grandfather in 1951. He has kept Jordan strongly aligned with the west.

Facts

Jordan's population is about three million and the country occupies an area of approximately 97,000 square km, much of it uninhabited desert. Jordan shares none of its southern neighbours' oil wealth and is mainly agricultural although there are some mineral resources.

Climate

The climate is pleasant on the west bank of the Jordan, now occupied by Israel, with some rain in winter and spring. The east bank is hot, dry and barren and the country eventually shades into the Syrian desert.

Language

The Jordanians are proud of their literacy rate of 68% and many people speak English, so communication is no problem. The people in general are very helpful and friendly, some travellers say the most hospitable on the entire Asia overland route.

Amman

Amman is quite an interesting city and one of the most ancient in the world, dating back to 300 BC. Set amongst seven hills it is now a fast growing, modern city but also has well restored Roman ruins including a 6000 seat theatre, a forum and a street of columns. Jerash is the most popular day trip from Amman but you can also visit Madaba where there are some good mosaics but little else of interest.

Jerash

This beautifully preserved Greco-Roman city was abandoned after an earthquake in 726 AD and disappeared into the desert. It was finally rediscovered in 1806 but not excavated until the 1920s. There are temples, churches, three theatres, Roman baths and an avenue of magnificent columns over a km long.

Petra

Like Jerash this lost city was forgotten by the outside world for a thousand years. Rediscovered in 1812 excavations only commenced in 1929 and the central city was not uncovered until after 1958. The spectacular city was commenced in the 3rd century BC by the Nabateans who carved palaces, temples, tombs, storerooms and stables from the rocky cliffs. From here they commanded the trade route from Damascus to Arabia and through here the great spice, silk and slave caravans passed. The city is marvellously preserved and the effort and/or expense required to get there should not dissuade you from going.

CUSTOMS FORMALITIES

Mr Zhudi from Amman should meet you at the border provided you have faxed ahead with group list and dates.

If you don't get a group visa you will have to pay a departure tax of 6JD p.p.

Costs: **Diesel tax** 80.0 JD = US\$ 116 **Insurance** 21.5 JD = US\$ 31

Entry Permit/Customs 8.0 JD = US\$ 10 **Total** 108.0 JD = US\$ 157

ROUTE: Like Syria, the route depends on which order you want to visit places. See Jordan route planner.

JERASH 1 hr from border. Entrance 7JD p.p. (Jul '97) Guide fee (paid by E.M.'S) min 8 JD + tips.
Also small museum.

Camping Good rough camp 12 km out of Jerash - Dibbein National Park. Good and quiet amongst forest.

Beer - from ruins car park turn right go straight over the roundabout and down the hill for couple of mins see 'AMSTEL' sign on left. Can also sleep in ruins car park, check with tourist police.

JERASH - AMMAN

Driving time - Approx. 2 hrs

Take brand new highway via Zarqa; have to drive back through Jerash town to find it. V. slow and hilly motorway.

RAMTHA - AMMAN DIRECT (East of Suez)

Driving time - 2 hrs

Follow signs to Zarqa and Amman for new highway.

Park on RHS as you approach amphitheatre on dual carriage way.

Coming north on this route head out of Amman to Ar Zarqa on M'way (from amphitheatre).

Take exit to 'Syrian Border' and follow to Al Mafraq. Just past Al Mafraq turn left to Irbid

(There is still no border crossing point for the new road), the right for Ramtha.

AMMAN

Bank - Arab Bank head office,
Shmeishani,
Jabal Amman.
Amman.

- For collection of funds from E.O.L. - USUALLY Should give it all to you in US\$ cash.

Telex - Public Telephone and telex at PTT

Agent - Mr. Zudhi Mr Ziad ABUZEID(AQABA)

Telstar Travel Tel: 0331 - 3678/9 -
Riyadh Centre OR 0331 - 5123/4
Third Circle P.O.Box: 8
Jabal Amman Tlx 62294 - 62243 TLSTAR JO
Tel 640213/4 - 624104/5/6/7 Fax: 962-331-2679
Tlx 21604 TLSTAR JO
P.O. Box : 194
Fax 962 6 640168

All communications should be made through Mr Ziad in Aqaba,

Very helpful ie., ferry bookings Aqaba - Nuweiba, West bank permits etc.

- possible to park near the amphitheatre in town, or poss drive way from the centre pass the Arab Bank to the top where there is another bus station with parking facilities.
- Here's a quick and painless way to do Amman

Park near Telstar by the 3rd circle - if you take the first left past Telstar at the lights and go up the hill, there is usually space on quiet side streets. From here group can walk to downtown area, (back to 3rd circle and down the hill, for post office , banks etc - note if northbound buy Syrian pounds here better rate than Syria) shoppers and bar can take a cab to Safeways (open 24 hours) cost about 1USD each way (all cabs metered in Amman) meanwhile you can pick up funds if nec, only 5 mins away by cab.dont forget to tell group to ask for " 3rd circle" to find their way back.

From this spot getting out is easy - carry on up the hill, right into Zahran Street, and keep going out to the underpass where you can get onto the desert highway, south to camp in the national park about 15kms, or to dead sea (turn right to Na'ur) - or north to Jarash. Easy!

- good market in King Talal Street
- many money changers will sell US\$ cash shop around for best rate for Syrian pounds
- For cash get your syrian pounds from the exchange offices downtown, better than Syria.
- Beer - small shop on Third Circle. big shops downtown.
- Shopping, take taxi to Safeways supermarket (about 1 JD), its better than home !

Syrian Embassy - 100m from Telstar Riyadh Centre. Open 9.00 - 11.00 PROMPT for put in. (Busy be there 8.30)

Collect 1.30 same day.

Costs - Brits: 37.50 JD!! Australians: Gratis, New Zealanders: 4 JD, U.S.A.: 9.750 JD.

*NB Only require these visas if the group is of less than 10. Otherwise arrange in advance for a group visa with Kiwan.

Bader Hotel, Amman **HAS NOW CLOSED DOWN** but Guarded overnight parking available about 1 km from Baber Hotel - head towards third circle past Jerusalem restaurant and old P.O. (red phone boxes outside), fork right at first lights, right again at second lights, dirt car park in on your right, entrance about 100 m after lights. Ols man charges 1.50 JD overnight.

Camping - Some good campsites at pine forests 10-12 kms south of Amman, follow sign posts to national park its marked as a picnic area on the Jordan map (available from Telstar or tourist office at the border) there are woods and rubbish bins - locals come here for picnics and smooching on Thursday nights and

fridays, but there is quite a lot of room if you drive far in - can make a fire but not much wood lying around. There are two parks - the one slightly further out of Amman is quieter - its about 3 ks past the entrance to the first.

MT. NEBO - From Amman follow signs to Madaba, turn right and follow signs to Siyagha or Mt. Nebo. Church with mosaics. Supposedly where Moses is buried. As you approach the Monastery, off to the left is a quarry where it is ok to camp but not great.

HOT SPRINGS - (Hamnamat Ma'in) I dont recommend this place - costs about 7JD p p and no camping or picnics allowed.

AMMAN - DEAD SEA (See Map 1)

Driving Time - 2.5 hrs

Have passports available for checks.

Follow signs to Aqaba and Airport on the bypass and take exit to Naur. Go through on main road and follow signs for West Bank, after the sign for 'sea level', you veer left at Military check point. Follow signs for Dead Sea Restaurant (Tourist Centre). Can sleep in Dead Sea Rest House car park for 2 J, or on beach. Have to pay for showers. Entrance to the Dead Sea Resthouse 2JD P/P. Hot Springs/Waterfalls about 20mins drive south along sea from resthouse. You can drive freely along this road now, where there used to be strict security checks. There are two sets of "springs" - first is substantial stream/falls to left of road which flow under the road, but there is no access to the dead sea here. Better to drive about 5 km further on and you'll see an area on the dead sea beach with small hot pools - you can drive down to the beach here and float in the sea then soak in a hot pool or stand under a hot waterfall - great in winter, but best avoided on fridays or if you have mostly girls in your group as local men can be a nuisance - great for the guys though. Can be a bit grubby , with cans and picnic rubbish but if it ever gets cleaned up it will be excellent. Good rough camps along dead sea shore between here and the rest house - gret sunsets, and the flies go to bed after dark .Dead Sea to National Parks rough camp takes 2 hrs.

In summer its best to head up the hills and rough camp somewhere with a view for sunset where you can catch the breeze - dead sea can be suffocatingly oppressive in hot season.

WEST BANK ('97/'98 this was impossible) Check with Telstar (Should you decide to visit it)

Obtain permits from Telstar, no photos needed. US\$ 5 p/p. Need original group visa list, which will be returned later, should only take couple of hours to obtain. Will issue group visa on border. There is a fine if the Jordanian group visa has expired (one weeks duration). Alternatively, can obtain permits from Ministry of Interior but takes 2 days.

1. Jordan Express Transport bus (JET) from Amman to WB.

2. ALLENBY BRIDGE BORDER - the border is only open from 8am to midday. Closed Friday and Saturdays.

- Get slips, NOT PASSPORTS, stamped at border

- Baggage inspection, they will take a picture of the roof of the customs building to prove no funny things in cameras

- Entry tax 2.5 shkls. (2.20 skls = US\$1 on average - July '94)

- Money change will take US\$ cash and JD but not TC's, get group to change all together. Better rate in Jerusalem though.

2a. AQABA FLAT - The border is now open here, but you WILL get your passport stamp.

Hopefully the lady from the JET bus takes you through all this procedure.

3. Then taxi to Jerusalem approx 26 shkls p/p, and bus ? shkls p/p. Bus can take up to three hours)
4. Accommodation in Jerusalem best in Arab part, or at hostels inside Jaffa gate but still very expensive (approx US\$ 5-10 per person per night)

SATURDAY is the Sabbath, when all government and Jewish operated places are shut.

Buses at Damascus Gate to Bethlehem and taxis back to border.

Exiting WB, there is a departure tax of 43 skls (approx. US\$19)

REMEMBER, IMMIGRATION CARDS - NO STAMPS IN PASSPORTS

5. JET bus back to Amman 1.5 JD each (approx.) JUNE 1990 prices...

XCH \$1.00 = 2.05, Entry tax 3.5 NIS, Exit tax 43.5 NIS

Taxi Border to Jerusalem 26 nis Taxi Border to Jericho 5.5 nis Bus Jericho to Jerusalem 2 nis.

Accommodation either cheap hostels inside Damascas gate for \$5.00 or Hotel Al Gazar, East Jerusalem, \$15.00 to \$20.00 including breakfast.

TO AQABA VIA KINGS HIGHWAY (2 DAYS)

(Can go via desert highway which is faster unless you want to see Wadi Mujib then take the Kings Highway. If you want to visit Kerak and Shoback it is quickest to take the Desert Highway and turn off it.

Dead Sea to Kerak via the Dead Sea coast - road in now open (May 1996). Permits are no longer required.

Two passport checks, but no probs

Driving time: 3 Hours

Camping: Good rough camps between Dead Sea Guesthouse and Potash City with good views of the Wadi.

This route saves doubling back to Na'ur / Amman

Driving times Nat Park to Kerak - 2 hrs via Desert Highway

Kerak - Shouback - 3hrs via Desert Highway

Shouback - Petra - 1hr

Petra - Aquaba (direct) 3.5 hrs

Camping - Possible to rough camp. Good camp approx 4 hours after Wadi Mujib in valley on RHS.

Some Bedouins about but no hassles. In spring stream normally runs through.

- Shoubak castle.

- Plenty of good rough camps on road joining Shobak and Kerak with desert highway.

KERAK - Good castle, 1 JD P/P - excellent market.

SHOUBAK - Castle worth a look. Not much room to turn truck and trailer at top!!! Can sleep in castle overnight but may have to wait until after 7.00pm and leave by 7.00am. Locals very friendly.

PETRA (See map No. 2 and 3)

Camping - Alanbat Hotel and Restaurant

Tel 03 83265 Fax 03 - 83888

Just down from Musa Spring Hotel. Excellent facilities. 2 JD to camp in car park and sleep in dormitory. Rooms neg. off season, excellent group buffet for 4 JD p/p

Rough camp, NOT ALLOWED TO ROUGH CAMP ANYWHERE NEAR PETRA NOW DUE TO INCREASE IKIN TOURISM WITH THE PEACE TREATY, AND SOME DODGY GROUPS SNEAKING IN THE BACK WAY TO AVOID PAYING THE 20JD FEE. THIS IS VERY STRICTLY IMPOSED - DO WHAT YOUR TOLD OR OVERLAND GROUPS COULD BE BANNED!

Shopping - In Wadi Musa. Can buy beer from Resthouse, very expensive. Best to stock up in Amman or Aqaba.

Ruins -Open 5am-6pm. Can stay in for sunset if you want.

Costs have now gone up to 20 JD/person !!!!! - guides and horses available.

Worth at least one full day. Make an early start and take a pack lunch.

Guides available at about 20 JD for the whole day. Normal tour of 3 hours costs 8 JD for the whole group, covers the main sites and then the group can have free time

Groups have to ride horses, at 7JD per person for 5 minutes - htis is a ridiculous system but best go along with it write to the Tourism ministry and complain! maybe this will change soon.

MA'AN good shopping even on Friday but prob wont go this way.

PETRA-WADI RUM (A MUST!!)

Driving time - 3 hours

RUM (See map No. 4)

use 4WD. Can either drop trailer at Resthouse and drive in, camp at night, and drive out the following morning

OR

Desert drive through to Aqaba, half day.

If you come in along the road you have to pay 1 JD p.p. to enter Rum. You will then be given a welcome cup of tea or coffee.

By Road to Aqaba - 30 km to main road then 40 km to Aqaba.

On drive down to Aquaba have your passports available for checks.

AQABA (See Map 5)

- There are hotels around the main beach in Aqaba, half JD for sleeping on roof, 1.5 JD for rooms (costs are approx.)

- National Tourist Campsite - one JD per night, showers.
breezy/open/uncrowded/clean/good views/beach/reef no permits required

Can hire their huge Bedouin tent if its windy - room for 20 peoplle to sleep - good for a party with all the cheap booze you should have bought in Aqaba! - haggle over price first.

- Can park the truck in the campsite for 1 JD per night, recommended for trip to Egypt as Hotel Alcazar car park is a bit dodgy

- Can camp on beaches outside Tourist Camp, but require permits, permission from Aqaba Regions Authority and security Police, no facilities, shade or water though!

When swimming beware of coral and sea urchins (WEAR SHOES)

- Mr Ziad, the Telstar rep in Aqaba is very helpful - can arrange taxis to ferry, mechanics, group meals, cheap hotels, etc. You must let him know the date and on which ferry you intend to return from Nuweiba as he has to arrange for your group visa in advance and be at the ferry port to meet you off the boat. He will need details of the group that will be returning so try to have them from E.O.L. in Amman say. tel

0331 - 5123/4, 0331 - 367/9 Fax: 962-331-2679

- Egyptian Consulate - see lonely planet map

Opens 9.00am, require 12 JD (NO other currency) and one Pp photo. Will do it on the spot.

- 5 minutes drive to Royal Diving Centre from camp.

Open 9.00 - 5.00. 2 JD for snorkel equipment all day 4 JD for diving equipment all day 14 JD for a dive (with a ticket).

- there are showers/cafes there etc but not to do your laundry in ! There is a truck wash 5 mins walk from city centre, Mr Ziad can direct you: 8 JD for chassi, motor and outside clean.

**** NB REMEMBER TO TELEPHONE/TELEX KIWAN RE ENTERING SYRIA ****

Telex - Al Cazar Hotel or Ziad

GENERAL - Aqaba is one of the best places in all of asia for buying food and acohol - excellent fruit veg fish meat in the market, also bakeries nearby and good supermarkets - there are several Duty Free type shops on the street near the post office - local spirits are good and abou 3usd per litre! Also good for truck repairs/welding ets ask Ziad. Northbound try and stock the bar up thru to Turkey, as supplies more difficult in Syria, especially now the Damascus campsite dont stock beer.

EXITING JORDAN NORTHBOUND

Possible exit fees 6 JD/person if no group visa

Don't forget the white entry/exit card for police on the Jordan side.

ENTERING SYRIA

Having telexed Kiwan from Aqaba should be no problem. Similar procedure as Kilis border.

AQABA-NUWEIBA FERRY

Can book it through Telstar in Amman or Aqaba. See Notes on 'EGYPT'. Everyone should try to have an Egyptian visa before ferry - lot less trouble.

If possible to buy Egyptian pounds from official money changers in Aqaba (there's one next to the post office), but for a lower rate than you will get in Cairo. Its worth changing about US\$ 100 though, to cover you for the bus trip to Cairo and your initial few hours in Cairo, as there are invariably no money changing facilities available in Nuweiba when you arrive off the ferry.

NOTE Soon things will get a lot easier through the middle east, but as things stand Dec 95 The Syrians will still not let anyone in who has crossed from Israel to Egypt by land (they will see the Egypt stamp) If anyone was foolish enough to do this they must get a new passport in Cairo or Amman. (If they go in and out thru Jordan the Jordanians wont a stamp the passports so you are OK)