

Calmness

Jordan is known for being a calm country in a turbulent area, thus attracts a lot of tourists. One can visit big cities like Amman, bob in the Dead Sea, visit Roman ruins, visit religious areas such as Bethany and Mt. Nebo, swim in the Red Sea ,sleep in the desert of Wadi Rum as well as visit the ancient city of Petra.

Amman has a great deal of historical attractions. An old, intact Roman theater built into a hillside with steep steps leading up 33 rows can hold up to 6,000 with its neighboring Odeon seating 500. Not too far away is the Nymphaeum, a fountain dedicated to the water nymphs. All three Classical Period exhibits date to 100 AD.

Great views of the theater are afforded from the citadel perched on top of a hill first fortified in 1,800 BC, but most ruins are from the Roman to early Islamic period. The Temple of Hercules is actually bigger than any temple built in Rome itself and has six remaining columns rising over thirty feet. Nearby are the remains of a church from the Byzantines, which is basically the eastern part of the fractured Roman Empire. The Islamic Period is represented by the Umayyad Mosque with its restored roof. A large cistern, located within an area that is largely residential with small houses and a hammam, is nearly twenty feet deep and could hold up to 250,000 gallons of water.

Perhaps of more interest due its amazing historical exhibits, is a small museum located near the Temple of Hercules. The museum includes Bronze Age exhibits and the first statues of humans which are 8,500 years old. The statue had a square head and shoulders that are rectangular but one can tell it is human. Other exhibits include a Roman area, old coffins and a copy of the Mesha Stele which describes Mesha, King of Moab, thus is the first written confirmation of a story in the Bible. Amazingly, parts of the Dead Sea Scrolls are kept in a back room and with no security, almost an afterthought.

I was taken on an unofficial tour of Amman by a Jordanian I met in Georgia. Rainbow Street has a large numbers of restaurants and young people strutting their stuff. A lookout on Rainbow Street gives a view of the biggest flag pole in the world with, of course, the Jordanian flag hoisted on top. An area designed by Queen Rania has many of the banks and businesses but also a very good ice cream shop. My guest also showed me a couple of international hotels that



had been bombed in the mid-2000's, an exception to the calmness of Jordan.

Bethany is where Jesus was baptized by St. John. It is difficult to reach by public transport but luckily, I hitched with someone who was working at the site. There is a small broken-down church near the actual baptism site of Jesus; however, the River Jordan no longer runs through the Baptism

site. The river is a few hundred feet away near a new Orthodox church. The Jordan River here is green, grimy and rather shallow but I dipped my head in and took a baptism. The reeds along the river made me think of Moses and despite its greenness; it still is the River Jordan. The river is a border with Israel with the Israeli side being built up more than the Jordanian side. Worshippers are baptized in other areas of the River Jordan on both the Israeli and Jordanian side but usually it's performed by an actual religious person.

Mt. Nebo is historically important as the place where Moses was showed the Promised Land. I got a ride for a perverted old man from Madaba to the mountain top. Much like Bethany, it is somewhat anticlimactic as there are modern roads and loud equipment being used to restore the church. There is a small exhibit that illustrates several religious mosaics and the restored church dedicated to Moses that Pope John Paul II visited in 2001. The lookout spot where Moses was to have stood contained a small diagram explaining what visitors were seeing (Dead Sea, Jericho, etc.). In between hoards of noisy and rude tourists on organized trips who seemed to either know or care little about the events that happened here, I could quietly look out on the Promised Land with just the wind blowing. Only then could I get any real sense of what Moses would have felt.



Retuning back to Madaba by foot, I met a couple locals sitting under a tree who shared their sandwich with me. They then wrapped up the rest the bread, stuck in the tree limbs and I continued the hike to Madaba, a city known as the “City of Mosaics”. Madaba’s main sight is St George, a Greek Orthodox Church, which has the Madaba Mosaic map. The map contains over two million stones and depicts modern day Jordan and Israel, including the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem as well as neighboring hills and valleys. Throughout Madaba, several smaller churches and an archeological park display mosaics.

A less religious but nearly mandatory trip from Amman is a visit to the Dead Sea which



can be done in conjuncture with a trip to Bethany. The expensive Dead Sea resorts include access to the Dead Sea while public access areas have somewhat more reasonable access to the Dead Sea. The areas have a swimming pool and lockers to securely protect belongings. Some people

dab mud on to protect against the salt. The water is thick and feels somewhat oily as it is thicker due to the salt, one can reach down and grab chunks of salt. Due to the thickness of the water visitors will bob and not sink, which temporarily cured me of my fear of drowning. It is advised visitors don't open their eyes or mouth but also that one does not shave as any cuts will get salt in them, salt in your wounds. I didn't shave but had small cuts on my feet I didn't know I had as the salt made for a mildly painful reaction with my wounds.

One more day trip from Amman is to Jerash and her well preserved Roman ruins. The ruins are accessed through Hadrian's Arch named after the famous Roman emperor. The Hippodrome where polo and chariot races took place has been reconstructed and has tourist-friendly reenactments. The large forum and surrounding area has an oval plaza and a temple dedicated to Zeus. Close to the forum is the southern theater that held 5,000 with amazing acoustics, no microphone needed for performances. Other impressive areas are the cardo, the long colonnaded street, and the Nymphaeum waterfall. Smaller or deteriorating areas include the agora, smaller temples and smaller churches.

Using Amman as a base, there are numerous religious and secularly historic places to visit. There is a calmness and confidence that the people of Jordan have. Amazingly, I have just described the northern half of Jordan. The south includes Wadi Rum, Petra and the Red Sea and has the same reassuring feel of the north.