

Jordan

Ahlan wa sahlan! – ‘Welcome to Jordan!’ It’s the first and sometimes only piece of English most Jordanians learn, and from the Bedouin of Wadi Rum to the taxi drivers of Amman you’ll be on the receiving end of this mantra every day. The thing is, it really is genuine, and it’s this open-armed welcome that makes travel in Jordan such a delight. In the midst of a very tough neighbourhood, Jordan retains a calmer air; a peacefulness not prevalent in surrounding countries.

One thing that overwhelms travellers in Jordan is the sense of history, with every stone seemingly carrying some historical significance. Amman, Jerash and Umm Qais were cities of the ancient Roman Decapolis, while biblical sites range from Bethany-Beyond-the-Jordan, where Jesus was baptised, to Mt Nebo, where Moses is said to have looked out over the Promised Land. Grandest of all, before Christ was born Nabataean stonemasons carved out their awe-inspiring capital at Petra from dramatic towering sandstone walls.

Jordan is also a great place to put down the history books and get active, whether it be diving off the coast of Aqaba, trekking with the Bedouin in the camelprints of Lawrence of Arabia, or hiking through stunning river gorges. Jordan’s excellent nature reserves in particular offer some of the most exciting adventure options in the Middle East.

Like much of the Arab world, Jordan is trying to balance its tribal traditions and its cherished values of Islam with a push towards the global lifestyle; it’s a tricky balancing act. In the meantime travellers in Jordan can still manage to combine the best of both worlds.

In comparison with other Middle Eastern countries, Jordan can be a little expensive for travellers, but it’s very compact and has enough compelling attractions (including some spectacular landscapes) to keep you interested for a couple of weeks. On no account should you miss it.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 89,206 sq km
- **Capital** Amman
- **Country code** ☎ 962
- **Language** Arabic
- **Money** Jordanian dinar (JD); US\$1 = JD0.704; €1 = JD0.831
- **Official Name** Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan
- **Population** 5.8 million



HIGHLIGHTS

- **Petra** (p389) From the labyrinthine canyon of the Siq to the spectacular high places, ancient Petra is simply unmissable.
- **Wadi Rum** (p393) Enjoy camel rides, Bedouin camps, and experience the ghosts of Lawrence of Arabia in this stunning desert landscape.
- **Jerash** (p377) The echoes of Rome still linger in the columns, amphitheatres and chariot races of this magnificently preserved city.
- **Mt Nebo** (p386) Christian pilgrims flock to this site where Moses finally cast eyes on the Promised Land.
- **Wadi Mujib Nature Reserve** (p382) High adventure by the Dead Sea means splashing down a slot canyon or rappelling down a 20m waterfall in this ecotourism venture.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Average daily maximum temperatures in Amman range from 12°C in January to 32°C in August. Weatherwise April/May and September/October are probably the best times to visit Jordan and these months are considered peak season.

Summer is an uncomfortable time to visit the Jordan Valley, Desert Castles and Wadi Rum: daily temperatures are well in excess of 36°C and can peak at 49°C. At the other extreme, snow in Amman and Petra is not unheard of in winter, when desert nights can be very cold. Even during winter Aqaba remains balmy.

Note that most nature reserve facilities are closed from November until 1 April. One date for the calendar is the excellent Jerash Festival (p377), staged at the end of July.

See Climate Charts p643.

HISTORY

Jordan has always been a crossroads for the Middle East’s great civilisations, although most invaders have simply passed through en route to more prized possessions.

In 333 BC, Alexander the Great stormed through Jordan on his way to Egypt. After Alexander’s death in 323 BC, Ptolemy I gained Egypt, Jordan and parts of Syria. In southern Jordan, the Nabataeans, a semi-nomadic Arabian tribe that controlled lucrative trade routes, built its splendid capital at Petra, while the Roman Empire controlled much of the rest of the country.

HOW MUCH?

- **Souvenir keffiyeh** from JD2
- **Cup of tea** 200 to 400 fils
- **Midrange dinner** JD7
- **Daily rate for budget travellers** US\$15 to US\$20
- **Midrange hotel room** JD15 to JD35

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **Litre of petrol** 350 to 450 fils
- **1.5L bottle of water** 350 fils
- **Bottle of Amstel beer (in restaurant)** JD2.50
- **Souvenir T-shirt** JD5
- **Street stall felafel** 250 fils

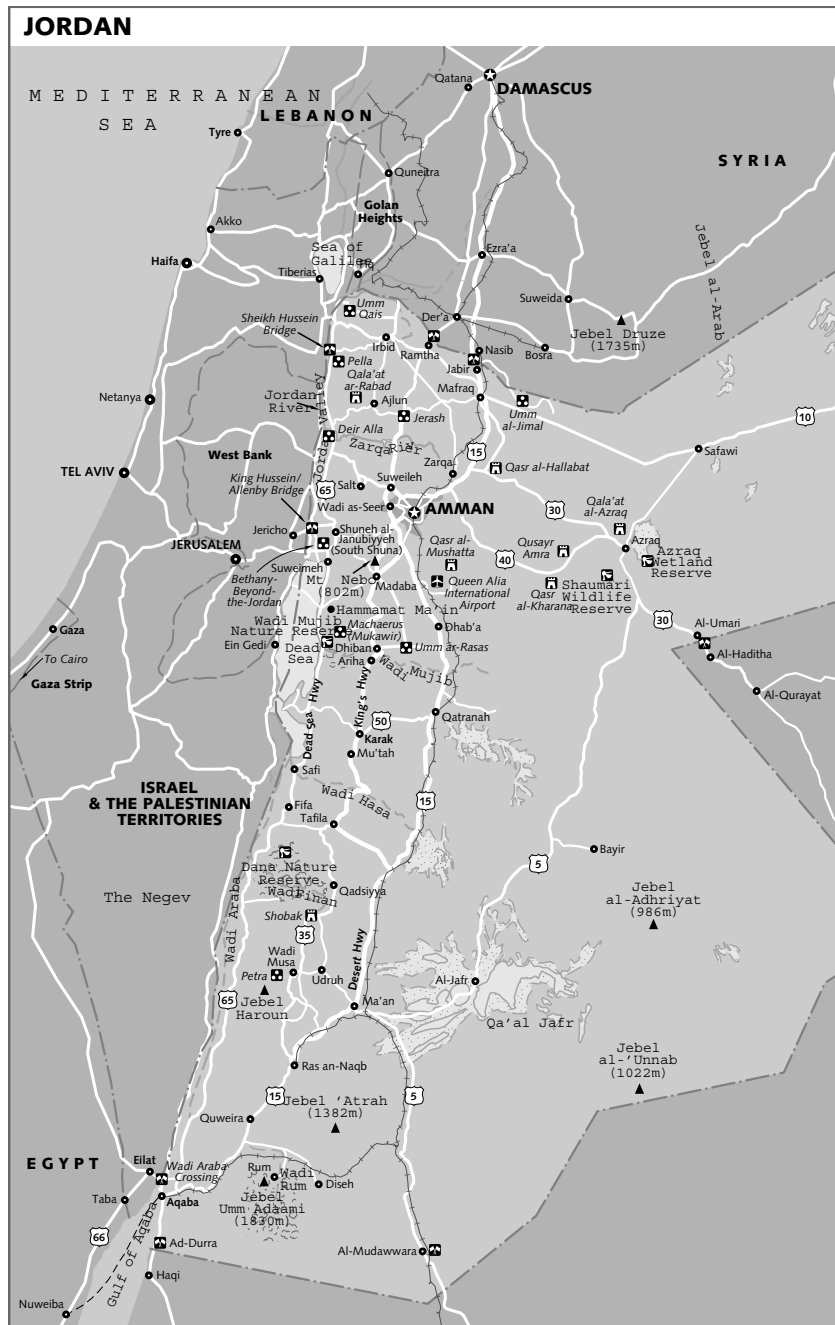
After periods of occupation by the Seleucids, Sassanians and Byzantines, Jordan was the site of several initial key battles between the Byzantines and Arabs, before it was overrun by the armies of Islam in the 7th century AD. In the late 7th century, Jordan came under the control of the Umayyad Empire centred in Damascus.

In AD 747 an earthquake devastated much of Jordan, ushering in the rule of the Abbasids, who were in turn followed by the Cairo-based Fatimids in AD 969, and then, from 1037, by the Seljuk Turks.

In the 11th century, Pope Urban II launched the Crusades, capturing Jerusalem in 1099, slaughtering countless inhabitants and devastating the area. The Crusaders took control of most of Jordan by about 1115, and built fortresses at Karak, Shobak and Petra.

In the 12th century, the armies of Nur ad-Din, and later Salah ad-Din (Saladin), reunited the Arab and Islamic world and occupied most of the Crusader strongholds in Jordan. The Mamluks, former soldier-slaves, finally expelled the Crusaders in 1250. The Ottoman Turks defeated the Mamluks in 1516 and ruled until WWI.

In June 1916 the Arabs, with the assistance of TE Lawrence (‘Lawrence of Arabia’), launched the Arab Revolt and helped the British drive the Turks from the region. In return, the Arabs were given British assurances that they would be allowed to establish an independent Arab state.



The newly formed League of Nations instead gave Britain a mandate over Palestine, and shortly afterwards the state of Transjordan, lying between Iraq and the East Bank of the Jordan River, was made a separate entity under King Abdullah. What remained of Palestine corresponded more or less to present-day Israel and the Palestinian Territories.

Directly after WWII, the British threw in the towel and handed over the mess to the UN, which voted in favour of the partition of Palestine into separate Arab and Jewish states. But, agreement could not be reached and the Arab-Israeli War broke out in 1948, prompting many Palestinians to flee to Transjordan and ending with a comprehensive victory for Israel; it ensured Jewish occupation of the zones allocated to them under the UN partition plan as well as almost all those assigned to the Palestinian Arabs. Transjordan exploited the situation and occupied the West Bank and part of Jerusalem. This done, King Abdullah shortened his fledgling country's name to Jordan.

King Abdullah was assassinated in 1951. He was succeeded the following year by his grandson Hussein, who took the throne at the age of just 17 and managed to hold it for 48 years through insurrection attempts, two wars with the Israelis and a virtual civil war with the Palestinians. He reigned until his death in 1999.

In the 1960s aid poured in from the USA and Jordan enjoyed a boom in tourism, mainly in Jerusalem's old city. The situation was radically altered by the Six Day War of 1967, in which Jordan lost the West Bank and its half of Jerusalem to occupying Israeli forces. In return it gained a huge influx of Palestinian refugees.

As the Palestinians, particularly the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), became more militant against the Israeli occupation in the early 1970s they also posed a danger to King Hussein, given that most operated from Jordanian territory. They came to contest power in the kingdom, angered in part by Hussein's claim to be the leader of the Palestinian people. After some bloody fighting in 1971, the bulk of the radicals were forced to cross the border to Lebanon, where they would later become one part among many of that country's woes.

King Hussein's diplomatic skills were stretched to the fullest when, during the

1991 Gulf War, he refused to side against Iraq, fearing unrest among Jordan's Palestinian populace. For the third time in 45 years, Jordan experienced a massive refugee inflow, with as many as 500,000 Palestinians previously working in the Gulf states fleeing to Jordan.

Jordan recovered remarkably well from that conflict and, despite fears of the threat of Islamic extremism, King Hussein went ahead and signed a full peace treaty with Israel in 1994.

When King Hussein finally succumbed in February 1999 to the cancer that had been ailing him for so long, his son and nominated heir, Abdullah II, became king of a comparatively stable and prosperous country.

Jordan Today

King Abdullah has impressed most observers with his ability to protect the moderate and largely democratic legacy of his diplomatically adept father, though some grumble about the pace of change. Like much of the Middle East, Jordan faces tensions between tradition and modernity, and dilemmas between Islamisation and Westernisation that remain to be resolved.

The Palestinian intifada (uprising) and the US invasion of Iraq has hit Jordan's tourism industry hard and has stirred deep passions among Jordan's population, suggesting that Jordan's future stability may hinge on events largely beyond its borders.

This last point was brought home with a bang in November 2005 when a series of suicide bombings killed 60 people at Amman's Grand Hyatt, Radisson SAS and Days Inn hotels.

Whether King Abdullah responds to the attacks with an increased rate of reform or a security crackdown remains to be seen.

THE CULTURE

The National Psyche

Jordanian people are extremely hospitable with initial conversation inevitably leading to a heartfelt 'welcome'. This traditional sense of hospitality is mixed with an easy modernity and wonderful sense of humour that make Jordanians easy to get along with.

In many ways the modern Western outlook of Amman's young middle and upper classes contrasts strongly with the conservative Bedouin morality of the country-

side. This tension, along with the rapid social change linked to the rise of tourism has led to a clash of values in places such as Wadi Musa.

Shared values include a deep respect for the Jordanian royal family, which is part of the ingrained tribal respect for elders. Islam dominates Jordanian views of the world, of course, as does the Palestinian experience, which is hardly surprising when you consider that 65% of Jordanians are Palestinian.

Being physically and ethnically so close to Iraq, most Jordanians are often frustrated and at times angered by American policies towards Palestine and Iraq but they are always able to differentiate a government from its people. You'll never be greeted with animosity, regardless of your nationality, only a courtesy and hospitality that are humbling.

Daily Life

More than 40% of Jordan's population lives in Amman, reflecting a big split between rural and urban lifestyles. The middle and upper classes of Amman shop in malls, drink lattes in mixed-sex Starbucks and obsess over the latest fashions. Mobile phones dominate life in Jordan as they do abroad. Yet urban unemployment is high, and entire neighbourhoods of Amman are made up of Palestinian refugees.

At the other end of the spectrum is traditional Bedouin life, deeply rooted in the desert and centred on herding. For more on the Bedouin see p394.

Family ties are essential to both groups and the sexes are often segregated. Most Jordanian women socialise with other women only and often inside the family group only, while men chat in male-only cafés. Attitudes to women remain quite traditional. 'Honour killings' are not infrequent and the Jordanian judicial process seems unprepared to take a stand against them.

Women were allowed to vote for the first time in the 1989 elections.

Population

The population of Jordan stood at about 5.8 million in 2005. Some 900,000 of these are still registered as refugees (primarily from the wars of 1948 and 1967).

About 1.8 million people live in the capital Amman, and 700,000 more in neighbouring Zarqa. The majority (98%) of Jordanians

are Arab (which includes Bedouin); about two thirds of these are Palestinians. There are also small communities of Circassians, Chechens and Armenians who moved to the region during the Ottoman period.

SPORT

Jordanians are football crazy, and watching football in the bars and coffeehouses is free and can be lots of fun. Amman's two main teams are Wahadat (generally supported by Palestinians) and Faisaly (supported by other Jordanians). Games are mostly played on Friday at the Amman International Stadium near Sports City in Shmeisani (JD2).

RELIGION

Over 92% of the population are Sunni Muslims. A further 6% are Christians living mainly in Amman, Madaba, Karak and Salt. There are tiny Shiite and Druze groups.

Most Christians belong to the Greek Orthodox Church, but there are also some Greek Catholics, a small Roman Catholic community, and Syrian, Coptic and Armenian Orthodox communities.

ARTS

In general Jordanian arts, especially literature and music, are dominated by Egyptian and Lebanese artists, as well as Western imports. Palestinian artists are an influential force and much of their inspiration comes from the often first-hand tragedy of recent Palestinian history.

Literature

Mounis al-Razzaz, who died in 2002, was regarded by many as the driving force behind modern Jordanian literature. His works spoke of wider turmoil in the Arab world, notably in his satirical final work *Sweetest Night*, and of Amman's transition from a small village to a modern metropolis.

Diana Abu-Jaber, a celebrated Jordanian-American author, draws on her family's memories of Jordanian cultural identity, a love of Jordanian food and her life as an immigrant in the USA. Her works include *Arabian Jazz*, *Crescent* and *The Language of Baklava*.

Other modern novels include the Palestinian Yasmin Zahran's *A Beggar at Damascus Gate*, and *Pillars of Salt* by Fadia Faqir, the tale of two women in a Jordanian asylum.

Cinema & TV

David Lean's epic masterpiece *Lawrence of Arabia* was partially filmed in Wadi Rum. Everyone headed to Petra will get to see *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* with its famous parting shots of Petra's Siq and Treasury.

Most Jordanians have access to satellite TV, which shows programmes from across the Arab world. Most of Jordan went berserk in August 2003 when a Jordanian singer won the first ever *Superstar* competition, an Arab version of *Pop Idol*.

Music

In general the airwaves are dominated by Egyptian and Lebanese superstars but Jordan's traditional Bedouin music remains distinctive and vibrant. The most popular instrument is the *rubaba*, a melancholy one-stringed violin.

Painting

The 7th-century Umayyad frescoes at the desert castle, Qusayr Amra, in Jordan's eastern *badia* (basalt desert) and the Byzantine mosaics of the Madaba region are high points of Jordan's historical visual arts.

To check out Jordan's contemporary art scene, visit the Darat al-Funun (p371) and the Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts (p371) in Amman.

Traditional Crafts

In Jordan, jewellery is an important indicator of wealth and status, especially among the Bedouin, who also produce wonderful weavings. Today more than 2000 Palestinian and Bedouin women produce rugs, carpets and camel bags under the guidance of several Jordanian organisations such as Beni Hamida. Palestinian embroidery is another important craft, and most visible on the Palestinian dresses known as *roza*.

ENVIRONMENT

The Land

Jordan can be divided into three major geographic regions: the Jordan Valley, the East Bank plateau and the desert. The fertile valley of the Jordan River is the dominant physical feature of the country's western region, running from the Syrian border in the north, down the border with Israel and the Palestinian Territories and into the Dead Sea. The

valley (part of the larger African Rift Valley) continues under the name Wadi Araba down to the Gulf of Aqaba. The majority of the population lives in a 70km-wide strip running the length of the country on the East Bank plateau. The remaining 80% of the country is desert, stretching to Syria, Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

Wildlife

Spring is the best time to see some of Jordan's two thousand flowers and plants, including the black iris, the national flower.

Two of Jordan's most impressive animals are the Arabian oryx and Nubian ibex which can be spotted at the Shaumari (p384) and Wadi Mujib (p382) nature reserves, respectively. Jordan is an important corridor for migratory birds en route to Africa and southern Arabia.

Nature Reserves

The **Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature** (RSCN; www.rscn.org.jo) operates six reserves in Jordan, of which Wadi Mujib (p382) and Dana (p387) are the undoubted highlights. The Azraq Wetland Reserve (p383) in eastern Jordan is a good place for bird-watching.

Environmental Issues

According to the Environmental Sustainability Index for 2005, Jordan ranked higher than any other Arab country. Still, a chronic lack of water and increasing desertification remain pressing environmental problems. There are ambitious plans to build a pipeline connecting the Red and Dead Seas to provide desalinated water and also raise the dropping levels of the Dead Sea.

The RSCN was a pioneer in reintroducing several endemic animals in Jordan and creating sustainable tourism programmes.

FOOD & DRINK

For those on a tight budget, there are the normal street eats – felafel, shwarma, fuul, roast chicken and hummus. In midrange restaurants, the most common way for a group to eat is to order *mezze* – a variety of small starters followed by several mains to be shared by all present.

The Bedouin speciality is *mensaf*, delicious spit-roasted lamb that is basted with spices until it takes on a yellow appearance. It is served on a bed of rice and pine nuts, some-

times with the head of the lamb plonked in the centre and the cooking fat mixed into the rice. Honoured guests get the eyes, less honoured guests the tongue. The dish is served with a sauce of cooked yogurt that has been mixed with the leftover cooking fat.

Another local favourite is *maqlubeh* (sometimes called 'upside down') – steamed rice topped with grilled slices of eggplant or meat, grilled tomato and pine nuts.

In Wadi Rum you might be lucky enough to be offered a Bedouin barbecue from the *zarb*, a pit oven buried in the desert sand.

Dessert here, as in many parts of the Middle East, may be *kunafa* or *muhlabiyya* (a milk custard containing pistachio nuts).

The universal drink of choice is sweet black tea (coffee comes a close second); as soon as you enter a compound you are sat down on the floor and offered tea, then tea, then more tea. Other options include *yansoon* (aniseed herbal tea) and *zaatar* (thyme-flavoured tea).

Bottled mineral water (350 fils) is widely available, as are the usual soft drinks, Amstel beer and locally produced wines.

AMMAN

عمان

☎ 06 / pop 1.8 million

Amman is not one of the great cities of antiquity. Indeed for those arriving from Damascus or Cairo, it can feel disappointingly (or refreshingly) modern and Westernised. Its obvious tourist attractions – the 6000-seat Roman Theatre, Odeon and Citadel with its great views – can easily be visited in a few hours.

But Amman has lots to offer the visitor, not least the balance it strikes between the demands of the past and the vision of its next generation. Residents talk openly of two Ammans, although in truth there are many. Eastern Amman (which includes Downtown) is home to the urbanised poor; conservative, more Islamic in its sympathies and with vast Palestinian refugee camps on its fringe. Western Amman is a world apart, the preserve of leafy residential districts, trendy cafés and bars, impressive contemporary art galleries and young men and women openly walking arm in arm.

Don't come to Amman looking for medieval bazaars or grand mosques. But do

come to Amman to catch a glimpse of a tolerant and thoroughly modern Arab city, embracing an international and culturally diverse vision of the future. It's also a great base from which to visit Jerash, the Dead Sea and the Desert Castles of the east. Whatever your reason for visiting, the welcome is sure to be warm.

HISTORY

The site of Amman has been continuously occupied since 3500 BC. Biblical references to the city are numerous and indicate that by 1200 BC 'Rabbath Ammon' was the capital of the powerful Ammonites. When King David was insulted by the Ammonite king, Nahash, he sent Joab, commanding the Israelite armies, to besiege Rabbath. After taking the town, David burnt alive many inhabitants in a brick kiln.

Amman was taken by Herod around 30 BC, and fell under the sway of Rome.

Philadelphia (as it was then known) was the seat of Christian bishops in the early Byzantine period, but the city declined and fell to the Sassanians (from Persia) in about AD 614. At the time of the Muslim invasion in about AD 636, the town was again thriving as a staging post of the caravan trade.

Amman was nothing more than a little village when a colony of Circassians resettled there in 1878. In 1900 it was estimated to have just 2000 residents. In 1921 it became the centre of Transjordan when King Abdullah made it his headquarters.

ORIENTATION

Built originally on seven hills (like Rome), Amman now spreads across 19 hills. This is not a city to explore on foot, apart from the Downtown area – known locally as *il-balad* – with its cheap hotels and restaurants, banks, post offices and Amman's ancient sites.

The main hill is Jebel Amman, home to embassies and midrange/top-end hotels and restaurants. The traffic roundabouts (some now replaced with tunnels and major intersections) on Jebel Amman are numbered west of Downtown from 1st Circle to 8th Circle. The Jebel Weibdeh and Abdali areas have more hotels, the distinctive blue dome of the King Abdullah Mosque, and the JETT and Abdali bus stations. West and south of these areas are glamorous Shmeisani and Abdoun, the most upmarket areas of Amman and the places to go for nightlife.

Maps

If you plan to stay for some time or intend to visit places out of the centre, *Maps of Jordan, Amman and Aqaba*, published by Luma Khalaf, is reliable and worth picking up from bookshops in Amman.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Al-Aulama Bookshop (Map p368; ☎ 4636192; 44 Al-Amir Mohammed St; ☎ 8am-8pm Sat-Thu)

Amman Bookshop (Map p370; ☎ 4644013; Al-Amir Mohammed St; ☎ 9am-2pm & 3.30-6.30pm Sat-Thu) The city's biggest.

AMMAN IN...

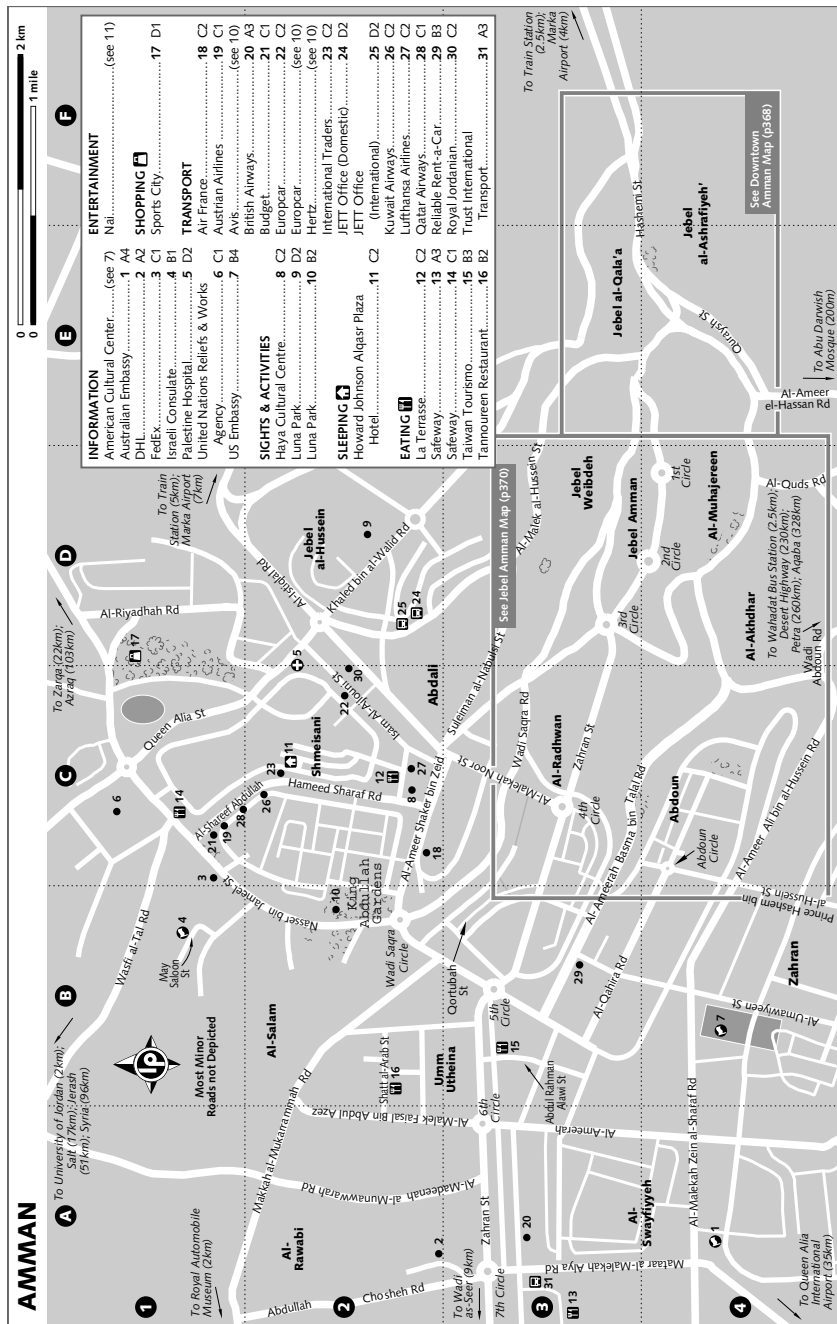
One Day

Take a taxi to the **Citadel** (p369) and check out the **National Archaeological Museum** (p369) and the views. Head east and navigate the steps down to aptly named Downtown to check out the area around the **Roman Theatre** (p369). Depending on time, shop the souqs around the **King Hussein Mosque** (p371), the most interesting part of Downtown, before grabbing a cheap lunch of hummus and mint tea at **Hashem Restaurant** (p373).

In the late afternoon get a sugar hit at **Habibah's** (map p368) and savour a coffee on the balcony of the **Al-Rashid Court Café** (p374), before heading on to Abdoun Circle or the **Blue Fig Café** (p373) for dinner and drinks.

Two Days

Make a half-day excursion to **Wadi as-Seer** (p376), then buy some souvenirs at an Amman nonprofit shop like **Jordan River Foundation** (p375). If you're short on time, make a day trip to **Jerash** (p377), the **desert castles** (p383) or the **Dead Sea** (p381). Enjoy a Lebanese dinner at **Fakhr el-Din** (p374). After a busy couple of days say *salaam* to the city in the relaxing **Al-Pasha Hammam** (p371).



Books@cafe (Map p368; ☎ 4650457; contact@books-cafe.com; Omar bin al-Khattab St; ☎ 10am-11.30pm) Grab a bite to eat (p373) while browsing for books.

Bustami's Library (Map p368; ☎ 4622649; Al-Amir Mohammed St; ☎ 5am-6pm Sat-Thu) Good for international newspapers.

Cultural Centres

The following cultural centres have a library and regularly organise film nights, exhibitions and concerts.

American Cultural Center (Map p366; ☎ 5859102; US Embassy, Al-Umawiyeen St; ☎ 1-4.30pm Sat-Wed, 9am-4pm Thu)

British Council (Map p370; ☎ 4636147; www.britishcouncil.org.jo; Abu Bakr as-Siddiq St; ☎ 9am-6.30pm Sun-Wed, 9am-3.30pm Thu) Southeast of 1st Circle. Has a library with current English newspapers, and a pleasant outdoor café. Library hours are noon to 6.30pm Sunday to Wednesday, 11am to 3.30pm Thursday.

Centre Culture Français (Map p368; ☎ 4612658; www.cccjor-j.org.jo; Kulliyat al-Sharee'ah St; ☎ 8.30am-2pm & 4-6pm Sat-Thu)

Goethe Institut (Map p370; ☎ 4641993; www.goethe.de/na/amm/; 5 Abdoul Mun'im al-Rifa'i St; ☎ 8.30am-2pm & 4.30-6.30pm Sun-Wed, 8.30am-2pm Thu) Northwest of 3rd Circle.

Emergency

- Ambulance** (☎ 193)
- Fire department** (☎ 4617101, 199)
- Police** (☎ 192, 191)
- Tourism police** (toll-free ☎ 0800-22228)
- Traffic police/accidents** (☎ 4896390, 190)

Internet Access

Books@cafe (Map p368; ☎ 4650457; Omar bin al-Khattab St; per hr JD2; ☎ 10am-11.30pm) A professional set-up (see p373) with fast connections.

Internet Yard (Map p368; ☎ 079-5509569; Al-Amir Mohammed St; per hr JD1; ☎ 9.30am-midnight)

Welcome Internet (Map p368; ☎ 4620206; Al-Amir Mohammed St; per hr JD1; ☎ 10.30am-1am)

Media

The *Jordan Times* and the *Star* are the two English-language newspapers and both are worth a read.

Jordan Today (www.jordantoday.com.jo) is a free monthly booklet that includes a yellow pages listing of embassies, airlines and the like. **Where to Go** (www.w2go.com) is similar and includes a useful collection of Amman restaurant menus. Pick them up in the better hotels and restaurants.

Medical Services

The two English-language daily newspapers list the current telephone numbers of doctors and pharmacies on night duty throughout the capital.

- Al-Khalidi Medical Centre** (Map p370; ☎ 4644281; www.kmc.jo; Bin Khaldoun St, southwest of 3rd Circle)
- Italian Hospital** (Map p368; ☎ 4777101; Italian St, Downtown)
- Jacob's Pharmacy** (Map p370; ☎ 4644945; 3rd Circle; ☎ 9am-3am)
- Palestine Hospital** (Map p366; ☎ 5607071; Queen Alia St)
- University Hospital** (☎ 5353444) Situated in the University of Jordan complex, northwestern Amman.

Money

Changing money is easy and the Downtown area especially is awash with banks, ATMs and moneychangers. See p402 for information, and the Downtown map for locations.

Post

- Central post office** (Map p368; ☎ 4624120; Al-Amir Mohammed St, Downtown; ☎ 7.30am-5pm Sat-Thu, 8am-1.30pm Fri)
- Customs office** (Map p368; Omar al-Khayyam St, Downtown; ☎ 8am-2pm Sat-Thu) Diagonally opposite the parcel post office. Come here to send a parcel overseas.
- Parcel post office** (Map p368; Omar al-Khayyam St, Downtown; ☎ 8am-3pm Sun-Thu, 8am-2pm Sat)

Telephone

The private telephone agencies around the Downtown area are the cheapest places for international and domestic calls.

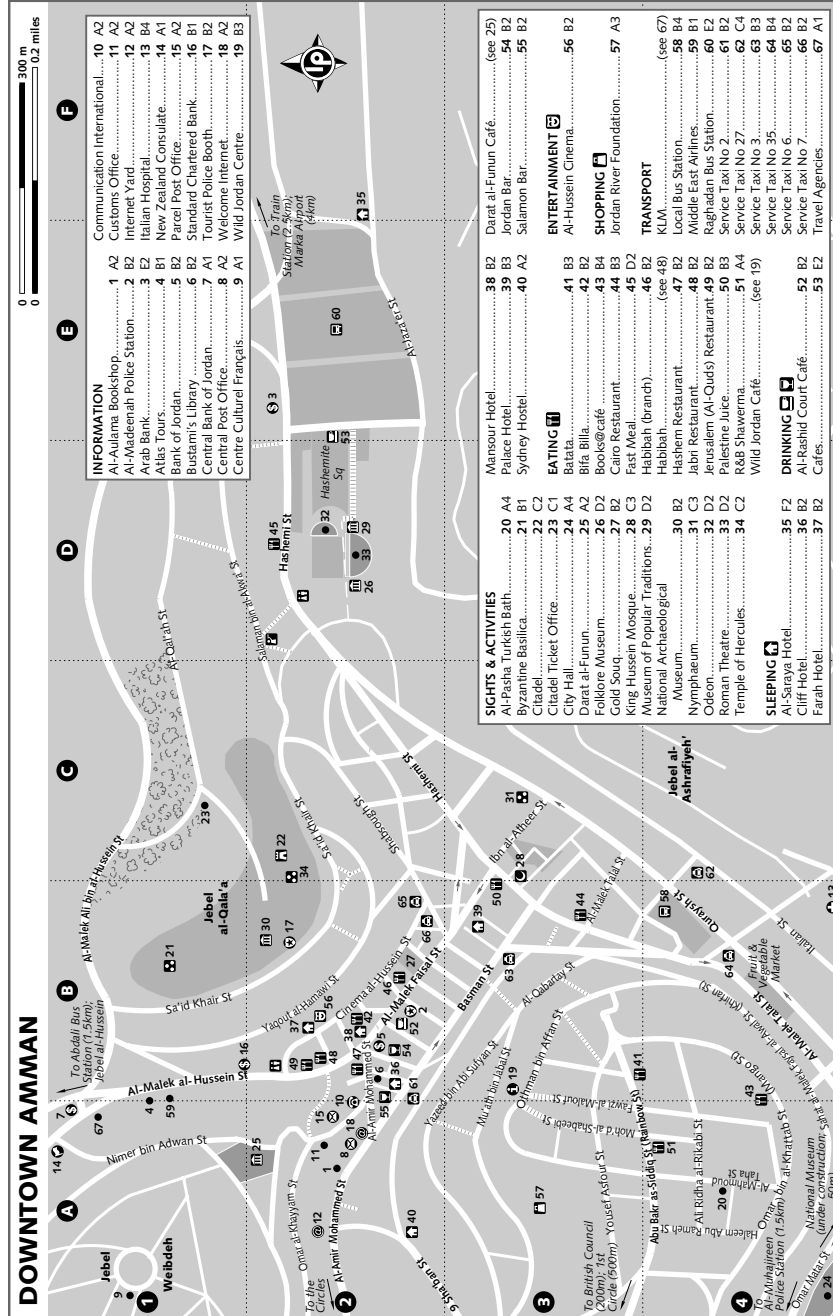
Communication International (Map p368; Nimer bin Adwan St, Downtown) Charges 150 fils a minute to the US or UK.

Tourist Information

Jordan is one country where tourism complaints are taken seriously. If you have a question or problem call the toll-free **Halla Line** (☎ 800-22228).

Ministry of Tourism & Antiquities (Map p370; ☎ 4642311; Al-Mutanabbi St; ☎ 8am-9pm) The information office on the ground floor can answer most queries, or call the Halla Line.

Wild Jordan Centre (Map p368; ☎ 4616523; www.rscn.org.jo; Othman bin Affan St) The place for information and bookings for Jordan's nature reserves, including Dana and Wadi Mujib. There's also a good shop (p375) and café (p373).



SCAMS

Be wary of taxi drivers who claim that your chosen hotel is closed, dirty or 'burnt down', only to recommend another hotel – where they get commission.

Travel Agencies

There is a string of travel agencies along Al-Malek al-Hussein St, near the flyover, in Downtown.

Atlas Tours (Map p368; ☎ 4624262; www.atlastours.net; Al-Malek al-Hussein St) Reliable for airline tickets.

Visa Extensions

If you are staying in Jordan for longer than one month, you must obtain a (free) visa extension. First you will need to get your hotel to write a short letter confirming where you are staying. Your hotel will also need to fill out two copies of a small card which states all its details. On the back is the application form for an extension which you must fill out. That done, take the form, the letter, a photocopy of the page in your passport with your personal details, your Jordanian visa page and your passport to the relevant police station (depending on which area of Amman you're staying in; ask at your hotel). If you're staying Downtown, go to the 1st floor of the **Al-Madeenah Police Station** (Map p368; ☎ 4657788; upstairs, Al-Malek Faisal St), opposite the Arab Bank.

After getting a stamp, take your passport to the **Al-Muhajireen Police Station** (Markez al-Muhajireen; Map p370; Al-Ameera Basma bin Talal Rd), west of Downtown, where you'll be granted a stay of up to three months. From Downtown take a taxi (600 fils) or take service taxi No 35 from along Quraysh St. Police stations are usually open for visa extensions from 10am to 3pm Saturday to Thursday, although it's better if you go in the morning.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The restored **Roman Theatre** (Map p368; admission JD1; ☎ 8am-4pm Sat-Thu, 10am-4pm Fri Oct-Mar, 8.30am-7pm Apr-Sep) is the most obvious and impressive remnant of ancient Philadelphia. The theatre is cut into the northern side of a hill that once served as a necropolis, and can hold 6000 people. The theatre was built in the 2nd century AD during the reign of Antoninus Pius, who ruled

the Roman Empire from AD 138 to 161. Performances are sometimes staged here in summer. The wings of the theatre are home to two fairly interesting **museums** (admission in theatre ticket), with well-presented displays of traditional costumes and jewellery as well as a mosaic collection.

The row of columns immediately in front of the theatre is all that's left of the **Forum**, once one of the largest public squares (about 100m by 50m) in Imperial Rome. On the eastern side of what was the Forum stands the 500-seat **Odeon**. Built about the same time as the Roman Theatre, it served mainly as a venue for musical performances.

Hashemite Square, between the Roman Theatre and Raghadan station, is an ideal place to stroll, sip tea, smoke the nargileh (water pipe) and simply watch the world go by.

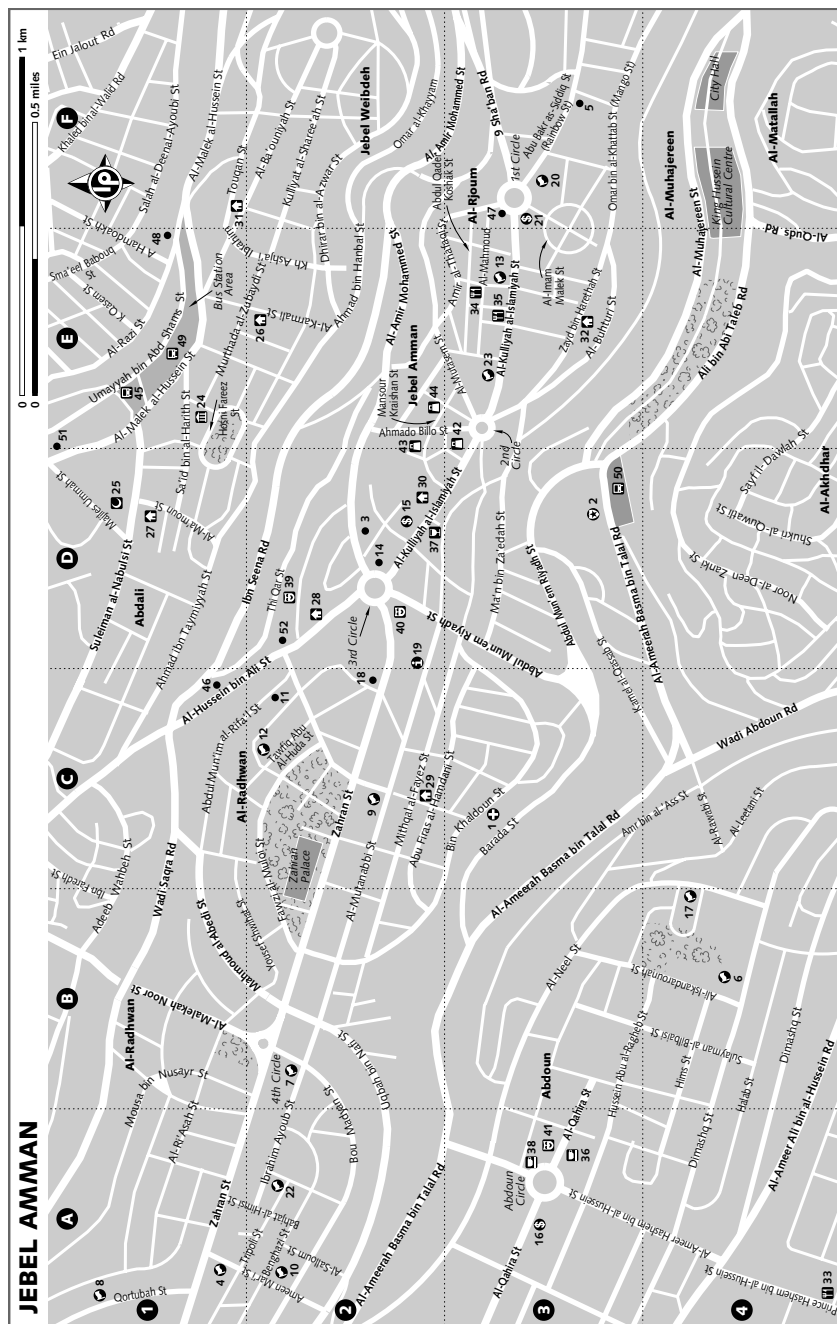
Philadelphia's chief fountain or **nymphaeum** (Map p368; admission free; ☎ daylight Sat-Thu) dates from AD 191 and stands with its back to Quraysh St, west of the theatre and not far from King Hussein Mosque.

The **Citadel** (Map p368; ☎ 4638795; admission JD2; ☎ 8am-4pm Sat-Thu Oct-Mar, 8am-7pm Sat-Thu Apr-Sep, 10am-4pm Fri year-round), on Jebel al-Qala'a, has some excavated ruins of an Umayyad palace, dating from about AD 720, of which the domed audience hall is the most impressive. There is also an Umayyad Cistern; a Byzantine Basilica from the 6th or 7th century AD; and the pillars of the Temple of Hercules which was constructed during the reign of Marcus Aurelius (AD 161 to AD 80). Next to the temple is a lookout with great views of the Downtown area.

Included in the Citadel's admission fee is the **National Archaeological Museum**, one of the best museums in Jordan. Exhibits include three 8500-year-old statues from Ain

GETTING A FACE-LIFT

Amman's interesting and earthy Downtown area is set for some changes. A Japanese-funded redevelopment project has already cleaned up many buildings, reoriented some roads, built panoramic stairways and lookouts, and rebuilt Raghadan bus station. The US\$33 million development also includes impressive plans for a new national museum (currently under construction next to City Hall) and several shopping plazas.



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Ghazal, thought to be the world's oldest examples of sculpture.

Daratal-Funun (House of Arts; Map p368; ☎ 4643251; www.daratalfunun.org; Nimer bin Adwan St; admission free; ☎ 10am-7pm Sat-Wed, 10am-8pm Thu) is a superb, tranquil complex dedicated to contemporary art. It features a small art gallery, an art library, artists' workshops and a regular programme of exhibitions, lectures, films and public discussion forums. It also has a great café (p374).

The attraction at the **King Hussein Mosque** (Map p368; Hashemi St, Downtown) is the surrounding backstreet soups rather than the building. This is definitely the best place in Amman to explore on foot. The first mosque was built on this site in AD 640 by Omar, the second caliph of Islam. The current mosque was built by King Abdullah I in 1924.

King Abdullah Mosque (Map p370; ☎ 5672155; Suleiman al-Nabulsi St; admission JD2; ☎ 8-11am & 12.30-2pm Sat-Thu, 8-10am Fri) can house up to 7000 worshippers, with room for 3000 more in its courtyard. It welcomes non-Muslim visitors but women must cover their hair. Admission includes entry to a small Islamic museum.

The small but excellent **Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts** (Map p370; ☎ 4630128; www.nationalgallery.org; Hosni Fareez St; admission JD1; ☎ 9am-5pm Sun-Thu) exhibits contemporary Jordanian works, including painting, sculpture and pottery.

Car enthusiasts might like the **Royal Automobile Museum** (☎ 5411392; www.royalautomuseum.jo; King Hussein Park; admission JD3; ☎ 10am-7pm Wed-

Mon), which has a display of 70 classic cars and motorbikes from King Hussein's personal collection. It's in the northwestern suburbs, north of 8th Circle.

Al-Pasha Hammam (Map p368; ☎ /fax 4633002; www.pashaturkishbath.com; Al-Mahmoud Taha St; ☎ 9am-2am, last booking midnight) is the perfect antidote to Amman's hills and bustle. The full service (JD15) includes a steam bath, sauna, Jacuzzi, body scrub, 40-minute massage and two soft drinks, all in a superb building architecturally faithful to Turkish *hammam* tradition. Bring a swimming costume.

AMMAN FOR CHILDREN

The **Haya Cultural Centre** (Map p366; ☎ 5665195; Ilya Abu Madhi St; admission free; ☎ 9am-6pm Sat-Thu) is designed for children and has a playground and interactive eco-museum.

Luna Park (Map p366; Khaled bin al-Walid Rd; admission JD1; ☎ 10am-10pm) has rides and amusements. There's another branch at King Abdullah Gardens (Map p366).

TOURS

For information on organised day trips from Amman, see p408.

SLEEPING Budget

Downtown Amman has many cheap hotels. Budget places listed below have shared bathroom facilities unless stated otherwise; all promise hot water and some even deliver.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Palace Hotel (Map p368; ☎ 4624326; www.palacehotel.com.jo; Al-Malek Faisal St; s/d/tr with shared bathroom incl breakfast JD6/8/12, s/d/tr with private bathroom JD11/14/21; 🏠) Definitely the best budget and lower midrange in the area. There's a wide variety of rooms from midrange options with satellite TV to cheaper rooms with (spotless) shared bathrooms. All rooms are very clean and some have balconies. The great management runs the best value local tours (see p408) and there's a laundry service, daily newspaper and free baggage storage.

Cliff Hotel (Map p368; ☎ 4624273; fax 46238078; Al-Amir Mohammed St; dm/s/d JD3/5/6) A long-standing shoestring favourite with friendly staff in the heart of Downtown. Rooms are generally tidy and simple although some of the mattresses feel as old as Amman itself. Hot showers cost 500 fils.

Farah Hotel (Map p368; ☎ 4651443; farahhotel@hotmail.com; Cinema al-Hussein St; dm JD4, mattress on roof JD2.500, s/d JD7/9; 🏠) This is a backpacker-savvy place which gets generally good reports from travellers. The rooms are a bit dingy and the shared bathrooms are little more than a shower head above a squat toilet, but the staff are friendly and eager to help.

Mansour Hotel (Map p368; ☎ 4621575; Al-Malek Faisal St; s/d JD5.500/8.800) An old-school place that's central but quieter than most because it's a little back from the busy main road. Toilets are Arab-style squatters. Hot showers cost 500 fils.

Sydney Hostel (Map p368; ☎ 4641122; sydney_hostel@yahoo.com; 9 Sha'ban St; dm/s/d/tr JD4/10/15/20) A short walk from Downtown's bustle. Rooms here are clean and comfortable with hot-water bathrooms, a small balcony and satellite TV. There's only one dorm room.

Midrange

Al-Saraya Hotel (Map p368; ☎ 4656791; www.saraya-hotel.com; Al-Jaza'er St; s/d/tr JD14/18/22; 🏠) One of few midrange options in Downtown and luckily a good one, with clean, spacious rooms. The owner, Payez, is super friendly. It's at the eastern end of Raghadan bus station.

Select Hotel (Map p370; ☎ 4637101; www.select-ammann.com; 52 Al-Ba'ouniyah St; s/d with breakfast

JD12/18; 🏠 📺) This is an excellent upper-end budget hotel. It's quiet and well run, with a family feel. Ask for one of the four rooms with a balcony.

Canary Hotel (Map p370; ☎ 4638353; canary_h@hotmail.com; 17 Al-Karmali St; s/d/ste JD18/22/28; 🏠) This place has a welcoming vibe and is walking distance from Abdali bus station. The rooms are comfortable rather than luxurious, although the (smallish) bathrooms sparkle. The best deal here is the four-bed family suite.

Caravan Hotel (Map p370; ☎ 5661195; caravan@go.com.jo; Al-Ma'moun St; s/d JD15/18) Almost opposite the King Abdullah Mosque, the Caravan is a similarly good and reliable B&B-style place with pleasant rooms, some bigger than others.

Shepherd Hotel (Map p370; ☎ /fax 4639197; shepherdht@joinnet.com.jo; Zayd bin Harethah St; s/d JD30/40; 🏠) Lots of readers recommend this place. The comfortable rooms are great value and prices are somewhat negotiable. The hotel restaurant is good and there's a bar and terrace.

Hisham Hotel (Map p370; ☎ 4644028; www.hisham-hotel.com; Mithqal al-Fayez St; s/d JD30/40; 🏠 📺 📺) Junior diplomats and journalists like this excellent choice in the leafy embassy district, with lots of personal touches and comfortable, spacious rooms. Prices are negotiable. The garden restaurant is great in summer.

Top End

Howard Johnson Alqasr Plaza Hotel (Map p366; ☎ 5689671; www.alqasr-hojo.com; 3 Arroub St; s/d incl breakfast & tax JD60/70; 🏠 📺) This is the closest thing to a boutique-style hotel in Amman, with an excellent range of chic restaurants and bars, free access to a local gym and good service.

Grand Hyatt Amman (Map p370; ☎ 4651234; www.amman.hyatt.com; Al-Hussein bin Ali St, 3rd Circle; s/d JD106/116; 🏠 📺 📺) It's quite a complex with seven restaurants, JJ's nightclub, an indoor and outdoor pool, high-speed Internet, and a cinema next door.

Jordan InterContinental Hotel (Map p370; ☎ 4641361; www.amman.intercontinental.com; Al-Kulliyah al-Islamiyah St; d JD77; 🏠 📺 📺) Midway between 2nd and 3rd Circles, it's suitably luxurious and has a Royal Jordanian office, a good bookstore, a post office, a deli, a 24-hour gym, an indoor and outdoor pool, and wireless Internet.

EATING

Amman's budget restaurants are concentrated in Downtown and, to a lesser extent, Jebel Amman. More upmarket restaurants are found in Shmeisani and Abdoun.

Kunafa-holics are spoiled for choice in Downtown. Get your sugar hit at Jabri Restaurant, Jerusalem (Al-Quds) Restaurant, or, best of all, Habibah, all next to each other on Al-Malek al-Hussein St (Map p368). There's an insanely busy takeaway branch of Habibah further southeast, down an alleyway off Al-Malek al-Hussein St.

Of the larger supermarkets, **Safeway** has a few outlets, one around 500m southwest of the Sports City junction (Map p366; ☎ 5685311; Nasser bin Jameel St; 📺 24hr), and another just southwest of 7th Circle (Map p366; ☎ 5815558).

More central but smaller is **Haboob Grand Stores** (Map p370; ☎ 4622221; Al-Kulliyah al-Islamiyah St; 📺 7am-midnight), between 1st and 2nd Circles.

Budget

There are plenty of felafel and shwarma stalls in Downtown, but be warned that most shut by 9pm.

Palestine Juice (Map p368; Al-Malek Faisal St; 📺 7am-11pm; small/large drink 500 fils/JD1) This is a good juice stand which serves refreshing carrot or orange juice, or banana with milk.

Hashem Restaurant (Map p368; Al-Amir Mohammed St; mains around JD1; 📺 24hr) Overflowing into the alley, this near legendary restaurant is very popular with locals for quality felafel, chips, hummus, fuul, tea, and nothing else.

Cairo Restaurant (Map p368; ☎ 4624527; Al-Malek Talal St; mains from JD1; 📺 6am-10pm) By far the best budget meal in Downtown. The *shish tawooq* (grilled chicken; JD1.750) is excellent, or combine a tomato-y kofta and a yogurt for another great meal.

Jerusalem (Al-Quds) Restaurant (Map p368; ☎ 4630168; Al-Malek al-Hussein St; mains from JD2; 📺 7am-10pm) Specialising in sweets and pastries, this place has a restaurant serving Jordanian standards. The menu is in Arabic so you're at the mercy of the grumpy staff.

Batata (Map p368; ☎ 4656768; Abu Bakr as-Siddiq St; fries 600 fils-JD1.500; 📺 noon-10pm Sat-Thu, 6pm-late Fri) Does one thing and does it well; in this case French fries (and nothing else), with a choice of eight sauces (100 fils).

R&B Shawerma (Map p368; ☎ 4645347; Abu Bakr as-Siddiq St; shwarmas 700 fils-JD1.500; 📺 noon-midnight) This is not your average shwarma

place; it has cheese, chicken and Chinese varieties in three sizes, and good fries.

Books@cafe (Map p368; ☎ 4650457; Omar bin al-Khattab St; mains from JD2.500; 📺 10am-midnight) For a slice of coffeehouse chic, this trendy place serves genuine Italian pizzas and good salads, plus a special brunch on Fridays (JD5). The food is excellent. Hot drinks are a steep JD1 to JD1.250 although the 'hot strawberry' may just be worth it.

Wild Jordan Café (Map p368; ☎ 4633542; Othman bin Affan St; mains JD4.500-7.500; 📺 11am-midnight; 🏠 📺) Another cool and contemporary place worth checking out, along with its shop and RSCN tourism projects. The fresh and zesty smoothies, organic salads and wraps are great and the views over Amman superb. The Friday and Saturday breakfast specials have a devoted following.

There are a few decent fast food places such as **Bifa Billa** (Map p368; Cinema al-Hussein St; mains from 500 fils; 📺 noon-midnight), which does good burgers and shwarmas, and **Fast Meal** (Map p368; ☎ 4650037; Hashemi St; mains from JD1.250; 📺 7.15am-2.30am), serving up superb juice smoothies.

Midrange

Amman has a number of excellent restaurants if you're willing to pay a little more.

Taiwan Tourism (Map p366; ☎ 5924670; Abdul Rahman Alawi St; dishes from JD2; 📺 noon-3.30pm &

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Blue Fig Café (Map p370; ☎ 5928800; www.bluefig.com; Prince Hashem bin al-Hussein St; starters from JD1.650, mains JD4-8; 📺 8.30am-1am) Coffeehouse chic is the vibe in this super-cool place southwest of Abdoun Circle. It's great day and night, from breakfast to late-night drinks. And where else could you get a Kyoto green tea and mint-flavoured *crème brûlée*? The menu is an extensive and imaginative mix of world fusion dishes, being particularly strong on pizza-like dishes. Try the Bedouin-influenced gallai – sautéed tomato, garlic, onion and peppers topped with cheese and pine nuts on Arabic bread (JD3.500). There's also a wide range of snacks from sushi rolls to baked potatoes (JD2), plus a kids menu, wonderful smoothies (JD1.800) and a full bar. Throw in some seductive world music and the occasional poetry reading, and you've got a winner.

6.30-11.30pm) Authentic Chinese food if you have a craving, with great General Tso's chicken or toffee bananas.

La Terrasse (Map p366; ☎ 5662831; 11 August St; mezze JD1.250, mains JD5-9; ☎ noon-1am) Decent European cuisine, strong on steaks, are served in a pleasant setting. The live Arabic music most nights after 10pm makes it popular with well-to-do local families.

Fakhr el-Din (Map p370; ☎ 4652399; www.fakhr.eldin.com; 40 Taha Hussein St; mezze JD1-2; mains JD4-5.500; ☎ 12.30-3.30pm & 7.30-11.30pm) Highly recommended Lebanese food is served in a classy setting. Good for a splurge.

Top End

The classy and expensive places are often in the suburbs, such as Shmeisani. Most top-end places add a whopping 26% tax to the quoted prices.

Tannoureen Restaurant (Map p366; ☎ 5515987; Shatt al-Arab St; mains JD4.500-9; ☎ 12.30-4.30pm & 7.30-11.30pm) This restaurant is good for Lebanese food, especially mezze (try the spinach and pine-nut pie), but it also does Western grills and fish. Bookings are required.

DRINKING Cafés

Some of the cafés in Downtown are great places to watch the world go by, smoke a nargileh, meet locals and play cards or backgammon.

Al-Rashid Court Café (Map p368; ☎ 4652994; Al-Malek Faisal St; tea or coffee 400 fils, nargileh JD1.250; ☎ 10am-midnight Sat-Thu, 1-11pm Fri) Also known as the Eco-Tourism Café. The 1st-floor balcony here is the place to pass an afternoon and survey the chaos of the Downtown area. It's also one of the best places for the uninitiated to try a nargileh. The entrance is hidden down a side alley.

Darat al-Funun Café (Map p368; ☎ 4643251; www.daratalfunun.org; Nimer bin Adwan St; admission free; drinks 300 fils ☎ 10am-7pm Sat-Wed, 10am-8pm Thu) Definitely the most peaceful place to escape from Downtown traffic. Darat al-Funun (p371) overlooks the silent ruins of a Byzantine church.

Tche Tche Café (Map p370; ☎ 5932020; www.tche.tchecafe.com; Abdoun Circle; ☎ 10am-11pm) Far from traditional, this bright, buzzy teahouse is full of Jordanian women smoking the nargileh, sipping fruit smoothies and nodding to Arabic pop. Come early to get a seat.

Caffe Moka (Map p370; ☎ 5926285; Al-Qahira Rd; ☎ 7.30am-11pm) This place serves great pastries (from 500 fils) and delicious cakes (from JD1.200).

A dozen or more cafés can be found around Hashemite Sq, which is a great place for people-watching in summer.

The place to be seen in Amman at night is Abdoun Circle (Map p370), where there are plenty of popular cafés overflowing with young, wealthy Ammanis. The fashion changes frequently in this part of Amman so just walk around and take your pick.

Bars

Living Room (Map p370; ☎ 4655988; www.romero-jordan.com; Mohammed Hussein Haikal St; ☎ 1pm-1am) Part lounge, part sushi bar, the Living Room is so coolly understated that it's easy to miss. The full bar, sofas and fine music make it a great place to hang out.

Blue Fig Café (Map p370; ☎ 5928800; www.bluefig.com; Prince Hashem bin al-Hussein St; starters from JD1.650, mains JD4-8; ☎ 8.30am-1am) This is a great place to spend an afternoon or evening, with a trendy crowd, draught beer, good cocktails, and a pleasant atmosphere. The Blue Fig Café (p373) has live music most Wednesday and Saturday nights.

There are several earthy local bars Downtown, visited almost exclusively by men and tucked away in the alleys near the Cliff Hotel. **Jordan Bar** (Map p368; ☎ 079-5796352; off Al-Amir Mohammed St; ☎ 10am-midnight) and **Salamon Bar** (Map p368; ☎ 079-5902940; off Al-Amir Mohammed St; ☎ noon-midnight) are both tiny local dives full of smoke with cheap beer on tap.

ENTERTAINMENT

There is plenty of nightlife in Amman, although little that's salubrious in the Downtown area. Shmeisani, Abdoun and, to a lesser extent, Jebel Amman have numerous trendy cafés, bars and a few nightclubs that stay open late.

Nightclubs

Nai (Map p366; ☎ 5689671; Arroub St; ☎ 6pm-2am) Currently one of the hottest places in town, Nai is a super-cool Ottoman-style lounge-club-cum-mezze bar. Mondays and Thursdays bring international DJs and a cover charge (JD10; bookings advised) and there's an Arabic band the first Thursday of the month.

Cinemas

Programmes for these modern cinemas are advertised in the two English-language newspapers, the *Jordan Times* and the *Star*. Tickets cost JD5.

Century Cinemas (Map p370; ☎ 4613200; www.century-cinemas.com; 3rd Circle) In the Zara Centre behind the Grand Hyatt.

Cine Le Royal (Map p370; ☎ 4603022; Le Royal Hotel, 3rd Circle)

Galleria Cinema (Map p370; ☎ 5934793; Abdoun Circle)

SHOPPING

Amman is one of the better places to shop for souvenirs in Jordan, with everything from tourist kitsch to high-quality handicraft boutiques, many of which are run to benefit vulnerable communities and environmental groups.

The following are among the better places in Amman, and are generally open 9am to 6pm Saturday to Thursday. Prices are fixed.

Al-Alaydi Jordan Craft Centre (Map p370; ☎ /fax 4644555; www.alaydijordan.1colony.com; off Al-Kulliyah al-Islamiyah St) A large selection.

Al-Burgan (Map p370; ☎ 4652585; www.alburgan.com) Behind Jordan InterContinental Hotel.

Artisana (Map p370; ☎ /fax 4647858; Mansour Kraishan St; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Sat-Thu)

Jordan River Foundation (Map p368; ☎ 4613081; www.jordanriver.jo; Bani Hamida House, Fawzi al-Malouf St; ☎ 8.30am-7pm Sat-Thu, 10am-6pm Fri) An emphasis on home design. Off Abu Bakr as-Siddiq St.

Wild Jordan Centre (Map p368; ☎ 4633587; Othman bin Affan St; ☎ 9am-7pm) Eco-inspired nature products made in Jordan's nature reserves.

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

The only domestic air route is between Amman and Aqaba. For details see p406. For a list of airlines serving Amman see p404.

Bus

The three main bus stations in Amman are Abdali bus station (Map p370), for transport to the north and west; Wahadat bus station for the south; and Raghadan station (Map p368) for Amman and nearby towns.

Tickets for the following private buses should be booked at least one day in advance. The **domestic JETT office** (Map p366; ☎ 5664146; Al-Malek al-Hussein St), about 500m northwest of the Abdali bus station, is the best option for buses to Aqaba (JD4.300, four hours) with

five buses daily. Services to Petra were not running at the time of research.

Trust International Transport (Map p366; ☎ 5813428; Mataar al-Malekah Alya Rd) also has seven daily buses to Aqaba (JD5, four hours) but the location is inconvenient, way out near 7th Circle. **Hijazi** (Map p370; ☎ 4625664) has frequent and comfortable buses to Irbid (870 fils, 1½ hours) from Abdali station.

From Abdali station (which is scheduled to be relocated in the next few years), minibuses leave regularly for the following destinations:

Destination	Cost (fils)	Duration (hr)
Ajlun	500	2
Deir Alla (for Pella)	500	1
Irbid	600	2
Jerash	400	1¼
Madaba	270	1
Ramtha	500	2
Salt	200	¾

From Wahadat station, minibuses depart regularly for the following destinations:

Destination	Cost (JD)	Duration (hr)
Aqaba	3.500	5
Karak	0.800	2
Ma'an	1.100	3
Shobak	1.500	2½
Tafila	1.100	2½

For Petra (actually Wadi Musa) minibuses and service taxis depart when full from Wahadat station between 7am and 4pm. The local fare is JD1.800 but minibus drivers almost always charge foreigners JD3.

For the Dead Sea, minibuses leave from the small station opposite the **Al-Muhajireen Police Station** (Map p370; cnr of Al-Ameerah Basma bin Talal Rd & Ali bin Abi Taleb Rd). You may find a direct service to Suweimeh (600 fils) or even Amman Beach; if not, head to Shuneh al-Janubiyyeh (South Shuna; 500 fils, 45 minutes) and change for Suweimeh (200 fils). From there you'll have to hitch.

The newly renovated Raghadan station in Downtown hadn't reopened at time of research but you can expect it to hold service taxis (for nearby suburbs), local city buses and, probably, minibuses to Madaba, Salt and Wadi as-Seer.

Car

All the major hotels have car rental offices. The largest selection of rental companies is at King Abdullah Gardens (Map p366). See p407 for details.

Service Taxi

Most service taxis depart from the same stations as the minibuses. You'll find that departures are more frequent in the morning than in the afternoon.

From Abdali bus station, there are service taxis to Irbid (JD1), Ramtha (JD1) and Salt (450 fils). Service taxis to the King Hussein Bridge (for Israel and the Palestinian Territories) cost JD2.

From Wahadat bus station, there are departures to Karak (JD1.400, two hours), Wadi Musa/Petra (JD3, three hours), Ma'an (JD1.200, three hours) and also to Aqaba (JD5, five hours). A chartered service taxi to Petra should cost JD15.

Train

See p406 for information on the train between Amman and Damascus.

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

Queen Alia International Airport is 35km south of the city centre.

The **Airport Express bus** (Map p370; ☎ 0880-022006, 4451531) runs between the airport and the upper end of Abdali bus station, passing through 4th, 5th, 6th and 7th Circles en route. The service (JD1.500, 45 minutes) runs every half hour or so between 8am and midnight. The last buses to the airport leave at 10pm and midnight; the first bus leaves at 6am.

A taxi costs JD15 from the airport to Amman, or JD10 in the opposite direction.

Private Taxi

The flag fall in a standard taxi is 150 fils, and cross-town journeys rarely cost more than JD1.500. Make sure your driver uses the meter, although most will do so automatically.

Service Taxi

Most fares on service taxis cost 130 fils and you pay the full amount regardless of where you get off. Some of the more useful routes include the following (Map p368):

No 2 From Basman St, for 1st and 2nd Circles.

No 3 From Basman St, for 3rd and 4th Circles.

No 6 From Cinema al-Hussein St, for Abdali station and JETT offices.

No 7 From Cinema al-Hussein St, past Abdali station and King Abdullah Mosque to Shmeisani.

No 27 From Italian St for Wahadat station.

No 35 From Quraysh St for Al-Muhajireen Police Station.

AROUND AMMAN

WADI AS-SEER & IRAQ AL-AMIR

عراق الأمير & ادي السير

The narrow, pretty and fertile valley of Wadi as-Seer is quite a contrast to the bare and treeless plateau to the east of Amman. The caves of **Iraq al-Amir** (Caves of the Prince) and the ruins of **Qasr al-Abad** (Palace of the Slave) are a further 10km down the valley from the largely Circassian (Muslims from the Caucasus who emigrated to Jordan in the 19th century) town of Wadi as-Seer.

The caves are arranged in two tiers – the upper forms a long gallery along the cliff face. The small but impressive ruins of Qasr al-Abad, thought to have been a 2nd-century-BC villa or minor palace, can be found about 700m further down the valley. The palace was built out of some of the biggest blocks of any ancient structure in the Middle East – the largest measures 7m by 3m.

Minibuses leave Amman regularly for Wadi as-Seer (130 fils, 30 minutes) from the station opposite the Muhajireen Police Station (on the corner of Al-Ameera Basma bin Talal Rd and Ali bin Abi Taleb Rd). From the town of Wadi as-Seer, take another minibus (100 fils) – or walk about 10km, mostly downhill – to the caves.

JERASH & THE NORTH

The relatively densely populated north of Jordan consists of lovely rolling hills, olive groves and classical ruins that sometimes seem transported direct from Tuscany. The two main sites of Jerash and Ajlun are generally visited as day trips from Amman, whereas Umm Qais is accessible from Irbid. You can visit all as part of an overland trip north to Syria.

JERASH

جرش

The beautifully preserved Roman city of **Jerash** (☎ 6351272; adult/student/child JD5/2.500/2.500; ☎ 8am-4pm Oct-Apr, 8am-7pm May-Sep), 51km north of Amman, is deservedly one of Jordan's major attractions. Excavations have been ongoing for 85 years but it is estimated that 90% of the city is still unexcavated. In its heyday the ancient city, known in Roman times as Gerasa, had a population of around 15,000.

Allow at least three hours to see everything in Jerash. The best times to visit are before 10am or after 4pm, but this is tricky if you are relying on public transport.

In July and August, Jerash hosts the **Jerash Festival** (www.jerashfestival.com.jo), featuring local and overseas artists, music and drama performances inside the ancient city and displays of traditional handicrafts.

History

Although there have been finds to indicate that the site was inhabited in Neolithic times, the city really only rose to prominence from the time of Alexander the Great (333 BC).

In the wake of the Roman general Pompey's conquest of the region in 64 BC, Gerasa became part of the Roman province of Syria and, soon after, a city of the Decapolis (the commercial league of cities formed by Pompey after his conquest). Gerasa reached its peak at the beginning of the 3rd century AD, when it was bestowed with the rank of Colony, after which time it went into a slow decline as trade routes shifted.

By the middle of the 5th century AD, Christianity was the region's major religion and the construction of churches proceeded at a startling rate. With the Sassanian invasion from Persia in 614, the Muslim conquest in 636 and a devastating earthquake in 747, Jerash's heyday passed and its population shrank to about a quarter of its former size.

Sights & Activities

At the extreme south of the site is the striking **Hadrian's Arch**, also known as the Triumphal Arch, which was built in AD 129 to honour the visit of Emperor Hadrian. Behind the arch is the **hippodrome**, which hosted chariot races watched by up to 15,000 spectators. In summer 2005, **chariot races** (☎ 6342471; www.jerashchariots.com) were revived here for the first time in 1500 years.

جرش

The **visitors centre** is worth checking out for its reconstructions of many buildings in Jerash (and for its toilets). The **South Gate**, originally one of four along the city wall and built in AD 130, leads into the city proper.

The **Oval Plaza** (Forum) is one of the most distinctive images of Jerash, unusual because of its oval shape and huge size (90m long and 80m at its widest point). Some historians attribute this to the desire to gracefully link the main north-south axis (the *cardo maximus*) with the Temple of Zeus. Fifty-six Ionic columns surround the paved limestone plaza.

On the south side of the Forum, the **Temple of Zeus** was built in about AD 162 over the remains of an earlier Roman temple; it's currently being restored. The next door **South Theatre** was built in the 1st century AD and could seat 5000 spectators. From the upper stalls, there are excellent views of ancient and modern Jerash, particularly the Forum, and the acoustics are still wonderful.

To the northeast of the Forum lies the **cardo maximus** (the city's main thoroughfare), also known as the **colonnaded street**, which stretches for 800m from the Forum to the **North Gate**. The street is still paved with the original stones, and the ruts worn by thousands of chariots can be clearly seen.

Halfway along the colonnaded street is the elegant **nymphaeum**, the main fountain of the city. The nymphaeum is followed by the imposing **Temple of Artemis**, reached via a fine propylaeum or monumental gateway, and a staircase. The Temple of Artemis was dedicated to the patron goddess of the city.

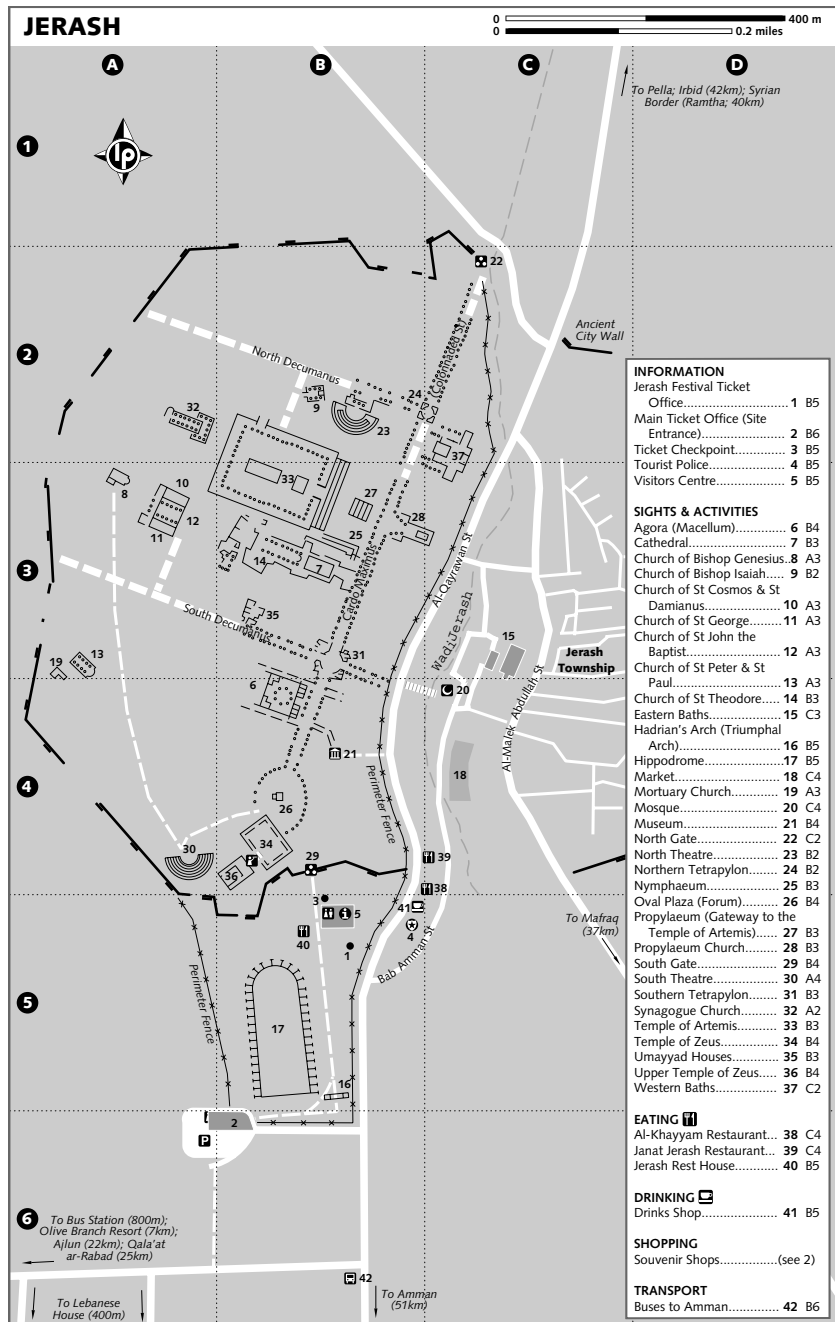
Further to the north is the **North Theatre**, built originally in AD 165 and now wonderfully restored.

The small **museum** (☎ 6312267; admission free; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Oct-Apr, 8.30am-5pm May-Sep) contains a good collection of artefacts from the site.

Sleeping & Eating

Surprisingly, there is still no hotel in Jerash, but it's an easy day trip from Amman.

Olive Branch Resort (☎ 6340555; www.olivebranch.com.jo; s/d JD15/25; 📍) Around 7km from Jerash, off the Ajlun road, this secluded place has modern, comfortable rooms with satellite TV and good bathrooms, as well as great views, a games room and a good restaurant. You can also camp for JD4, or JD5 if you didn't bring your own tent. A taxi from Jerash costs JD2 one way.



Jerash Rest House (☎ 6351437; khader@jerashrest.com; buffet JD5, mains JD3-7, plus 26% tax; ☎ noon-5pm) It has decent à la carte meals but most opt for the lunch buffet.

Lebanese House (☎ 6351301; mains JD2.500-5; ☎ noon-11pm) Overlooking orchards a 10-minute walk from Jerash centre, this is a local favourite, with good Lebanese-style dishes and pleasant outdoor seating.

You'll find cheaper meals opposite the visitors centre, including at **Al-Khayyam Restaurant** (grills JD2.500) or the **Janat Jerash Restaurant** (Al-Qayrawan St; mains JD2.500). Both have nice terraces.

Getting There & Away

Buses and minibuses run frequently between Amman's Abdali bus station and Jerash (400 fils, 1¼ hours). From Jerash, minibuses travel regularly to Irbid (500 fils, 45 minutes) and Ajlun (300 fils, 30 minutes) until mid-afternoon. If you're still in Jerash after about 5pm, be prepared to hitch back to Amman because most buses stop running soon after that. A taxi to Amman costs JD10.

Jerash's new bus station is a 15-minute walk west of the site, at the second set of traffic lights. If you don't fancy the walk you can often jump on buses headed to Amman from the junction southeast of the main ticket office.

AJLUN

☎ 02

Ajlun (or Ajlun) is another popular and easy day trip from Amman, and can be combined with a trip to Jerash if you leave early. The main attraction is the nearby **Qala'at ar-Rabad** (admission JD1; ☎ 8am-4pm Oct-Apr, 8am-7pm May-Sep), 3km west of town. The castle was built by the Arabs as protection against the Crusaders, and is a fine example of Islamic military architecture. It commands unparalleled views of the Jordan Valley and was one in a chain of beacons and pigeon posts that allowed messages to be transmitted from Damascus to Cairo in a single day. The castle is an uphill walk (2.5km) from the town centre. Occasional minibuses (100 fils) and private taxis (JD1 one way) go to the castle from Ajlun.

Sleeping & Eating

Qalet al-Jabal Hotel (☎ 6420202; www.jabalhotel.com; s/d JD24/32) About 1km before the castle, this is probably the pick of the hotels near

Ajlun, though it's a bit overpriced. The outdoor terrace is fantastic.

Ajlun Hotel (☎ /fax 6420542; s/d JD24/32) This cheaper option is about 500m down the road from the castle and isn't bad, though only the top floors take advantage of the fine views.

There are a few good felafel and shwarma places on the town's central roundabout.

Getting There & Away

Minibuses travel regularly from Ajlun to Jerash (300 fils, 30 minutes) and Irbid (320 fils, 45 minutes). From Amman direct minibuses (500 fils, two hours) leave a few times a day from the Abdali bus station. You'll have difficulty finding anything going in either direction after 5pm.

IRBID

☎ 02 / pop 500,000

Irbid, Jordan's second largest city, is a university town and one of the more lively and progressive of Jordan's large towns. It's also a good base for exploring the historic site of Umm Qais, Pella and even Jerash. There's little to see in town apart from the excellent **Museum of Archaeology & Anthropology** (☎ 7271100; admission free; ☎ 10am-1.45pm & 3-4.30pm Sun-Thu) in the grounds of Yarmouk University. In the energetic area around the university, the streets are lined with restaurants and Internet cafés. In the late afternoon in particular, you'll find students out strolling.

Sleeping & Eating

The cheapest hotels are in the city centre in the blocks immediately north of King Hussein St. Most have shared bathrooms.

Al-Ameen al-Kabir Hotel (☎ 7242384; al_ameen_hotel@hotmail.com; Al-Jaish St; dm/s/d JD2/5/8) This is by far the best cheapie: friendly management, simple but well-tended rooms, and clean shared bathrooms (with hot showers).

Omayed Hotel (☎ /fax 7245955; King Hussein St; s/d with private bathroom & satellite TV JD15/20) This is a cut above the rock-bottom cheapies in both price and quality. The frumpy rooms are spacious, clean and most have nice views. The staff are friendly and it's probably the only budget place where women will feel comfortable.

Al-Joude Hotel (☎ 7275515; joude@go.com.jo; off University St; s/d/tr incl buffet breakfast JD25/35/45, ste JD60) This is Irbid's finest hotel, near the university, with a classy ambience, pleasing rooms and friendly staff.

Al-Saadi Restaurant (☎ 7242354; King Hussein St; mains JD2.500; ☎ 8.30am-9.30pm) This is one of the better places in the centre and it also does breakfast (500 fils to JD1.500).

Omayed Restaurant (☎ 7240106; King Hussein St; mains JD2-4; ☎ 8am-9.30pm) Another good choice with pretty decent food, nice décor and superb views over the city. Take the lift to the 3rd floor.

News Café (Al-Joude Hotel; pizza JD2.500) A warm and inviting place for Irbid's cool set to hang out and enjoy milkshakes, pizza and other snacks, along with a slow puff on a nargileh.

There are dozens of restaurants to suit most budgets along University St.

Getting There & Away

Minibuses run from Irbid's north bus station to Umm Qais (250 fils, 45 minutes).

From the large south bus station, air-conditioned Hijazi buses leave regularly for Amman's Abdali station (900 fils, 1½ hours) until 7pm. Alternatively there are minibuses (600 fils, two hours) and plenty of service taxis (JD1). Minibuses also leave the south station for Ajlun (320 fils, 45 minutes) and Jerash (500 fils, 45 minutes).

From the west bus station (*mujama ala gharb al-jadid*), about 2km west of the centre, minibuses go frequently to Al-Mashari'a (400 fils, 45 minutes) for the ruins at Pella.

Getting Around

Service taxis and minibuses going to the south bus station can be picked up on Radna al-Hindawi St, three blocks east of the Al-Ameen al-Kabir Hotel. For the north station head to Prince Nayef St. For the west station take a bus from Palestine St, just west of the roundabout. The standard taxi fare from *il-balad* (the centre) to *al-jammiya* (the university) is 500 fils.

UMM QAIS

☎ 02

Tucked in the far northwest corner of Jordan, and about 25km from Irbid, are the ruins of **Gadara** (☎ 7500072; admission JD1; ☎ 8am-5pm Oct-Apr, 8am-6pm May-Sep), the site of both an ancient Roman city and an Ottoman-era village. The hill-top site offers spectacular views over the Golan Heights in Syria, the Sea of Galilee (Lake Tiberias) in Israel, the Palestinian Territories, which are to the north; and the Jordan Valley to the south.

Sights

From the parking lot and ticket office you'll soon come to the nicely restored **West Theatre**, the nearby colonnaded courtyard and **Byzantine church**. You'll soon hit the **decumanus maximus**, Gadara's main road. West are the overgrown **baths**.

As you head back east, past the Jerash Rest House to the exit, pop into the **museum** for some fine mosaics, statues and other artefacts from the site.

Sleeping & Eating

Umm Qais Hotel (☎ 7500080; s/d with shared bathroom JD6/12, with private bathroom JD8/16) If you want to spend the night in town, this is a comfortable place on the main street, about 400m west of the Umm Qais ruins. The rooms are clean, quiet and sunny, and the management is friendly. It also has a small **restaurant**, or guests can use the small kitchen.

Umm Qais Resthouse (☎ 7500055; www.romero-jordan.com; starters 600-800 fils, mains JD3-4.500; ☎ 10am-7pm year-round, until 10pm Jun-Sep) Inside the ruins, this restaurant is an atmospheric place to linger, with tables commanding spectacular views.

Getting There & Away

Minibuses leave Irbid's north bus station for Umm Qais (250 fils, 45 minutes) on a regular basis. To continue to Pella on public transport you'll have to backtrack to Irbid.

PELLA (TABAQAT FAHL)

☎ 02

Near the village of Al-Mashari'a are the ruins of the ancient city of Pella, 2km east (and uphill) of the road. The ruins require considerable imagination but the setting is superb.

Pella was flourishing during the Greek and Roman periods, and, like Jerash and Amman, was one of the cities of the Decapolis. The city also came under the rule of the Ptolemaic dynasty, Seleucids and Jews, with the latter largely destroying Pella in 83 BC. Christians fled to Pella from Jerusalem to escape persecution from the Roman army in the 2nd century AD. The city reached its peak during the Byzantine era and there were subsequent Islamic settlements until the site was abandoned in the 14th century.

Of most interest are the ruins atop the hill on your right as you enter through the main

gate. These include an **Umayyad settlement** with shops, residences and storehouses, the small **Mamluk mosque** (14th century) and the **Canaanite temple** which was constructed around 1270 BC and was dedicated to the Canaanite god Baal.

Also of interest is the **Byzantine church**, which was built atop an earlier Roman civic complex, and the **east church**, up the hill to the southeast.

Sleeping & Eating

Pella Countryside Hotel (☎ 079-5574145; fax 6560899; s/d half board JD20/25) There's a lovely family feel at this hotel. The seven well-kept rooms each come with a private bathroom and it's a nice place to kick back.

Pella Rest House (☎ 079-5574145; mains JD6, beer JD2.500) This quality place commands exceptional views over Pella and towards the Jordan Valley; Israel and the Palestinian Territories are visible to the right of the communications towers, the West Bank to the left. The chicken and fresh St Peter's fish (from the Jordan River) are worth trying.

Getting There & Away

From Irbid's West bus station minibuses go frequently to Al-Mashari'a (400 fils, 45 minutes). Pella is a steep 2km walk up from the highway which can be punishing in summer. Unlicensed minibuses (100 fils) run reasonably regularly up to the main entrance of Pella, but check the price first as overcharging is common.

THE DEAD SEA & AROUND

There are several reasons to visit the Dead Sea region, not least for a float in the sea itself (p329), especially if you're not visiting the Israeli side. Bethany is an important archaeological site that pinpoints a major event in the life of Jesus to a remarkably specific physical location on the banks of the Jordan River. For something completely different, Wadi Mujib offers some of Jordan's wettest and wildest adventure opportunities.

Public transport is unreliable on the Dead Sea Hwy and this is one place to consider renting a car or taxi for the day. Most

budget travellers visit the Dead Sea as part of a day trip from Amman or Madaba.

BETHANY-BEYOND-THE-JORDAN

المغتس

Known in Arabic as Al-Maghtas (Baptism Site), this important site is claimed by Christians to be the place where Jesus was baptised by John the Baptist, where the first five apostles met and where the prophet Elijah ascended to heaven in a chariot. It wasn't until the 1994 peace treaty with Israel that the remains of churches, caves and baptism pools were unearthed. Pope John Paul II authenticated the site in March 2000.

Sights

Entry to the **site** (foreigner/Jordanian/child under 12 JD5/1/free; ☎ 8am-3pm winter & Ramadan, 8am-5pm summer) includes a mandatory guided tour, due to the nature of the border zone. The shuttle bus makes a brief stop at Tell Elias, where the prophet Elias is said to have ascended to heaven after his death, and then normally continues to the **Spring of John the Baptist**, one of several places where John is believed to have baptised. The main archaeological site is the church complex next to the likely **site of Jesus's baptism**. The trail continues to the muddy **Jordan River**, where you could be baptised if you had the foresight to bring your own priest.

Tours often return via the **House of Mary the Egyptian**, and a two-room **hermit cave**. On the way back you can ask to be dropped at the archaeological site of **Tell Elias** (Elijah's Hill), which includes a 3rd-century church, the cave of John the Baptist, baptism pools and the Byzantine **Rhotorius Monastery**.

Getting There & Away

Take any minibus to Suweimeh, en route to the Dead Sea. About 5km before the town, the road forks; the baptism site is well signposted to the right. From here you'll need to walk or hitch the 5km to the visitors centre.

A taxi from Madaba to the site, taking in the Dead Sea and Mt Nebo en route costs around JD20.

THE DEAD SEA

☎ 05

The Dead Sea is at the lowest point on earth and has such high salinity (due to evaporation) that you just bob about on

البحر الميت

the surface like a cork. (For more on the Dead Sea see p327).

The most luxurious way to swim on the Jordanian side of the Dead Sea is at one of the upmarket resorts, where you'll pay from JD10 (Dead Sea Spa Hotel) to JD20 (Mövenpick Resort & Spa) for access to their private beaches and swimming pools.

Most budget visitors (foreigners and Jordanians) head for **Amman Beach** (☎ 3560800; foreign adult/child JD4/2, Jordanian JD1; ☎ 24hr), a clean public beach with good facilities, 2km south of the hotels. Locals generally swim fully clothed, though foreigners shouldn't feel uncomfortable here in a modest swimming costume.

A free alternative is the popular **Herodus Spring**, about 10km south of the hotel strip. Fresh (but undrinkable) water runs down its narrow canyon – ideal for washing afterwards. There's little privacy here so dress modestly.

Try to avoid Fridays and public holidays, when the hotels and public areas are very busy. Always take lots of water as the humidity and heat (over 40°C in summer) can be dehydrating and there's little shade. You need to shower after a dip in the Dead Sea to wash off the uncomfortable coating of encrusted salt. Don't shave before bathing!

Sleeping & Eating

About 5km south of Suweimeh is a strip of opulent pleasure palaces that offer the latest in spa luxury.

Dead Sea Marriott (☎ 3560360; www.marriott-hotels.com/qmdjv; r from JD93, poolview/poolside extra JD10/20, weekend stay extra JD10; 🍷 🍷 🍷) A stylish and ostentatious resort with a poolside bar, good spa, lots of restaurants and good kids facilities, including a jungle playground and family pool.

Mövenpick Resort & Spa (☎ 3561111; www.moevenpick-deadsea.com; standard/superior/deluxe r JD120/140/160; 🍷 🍷 🍷) The resort to beat, with Moroccan kasbah-style luxury accommodation, tennis courts, the gorgeous Zara spa, nine bars and restaurants and a poolside bar.

Dead Sea Spa Hotel (☎ 3561000; www.jordan-deadsea.com; s/d US\$100/120, ste from US\$220; 🍷 🍷) About 200m south of the Mövenpick, this is a definite notch down in quality but it's still nice if you haven't seen the neighbours. It has a medical spa, a decent beach and a big pool with water slides.

Getting There & Away

The budget hotels in Amman sometimes organise day trips to Madaba, Mt Nebo and the Dead Sea if there are enough people. From Amman (see p375), minibuses run to Suweimeh, from where you need to hitch. Hitching back to Amman from Amman Beach is relatively easy.

From Madaba, minibuses leave from the bus/minibus station to South Shuna (350 fils, 45 minutes), from where you can change for Suweimeh (250 fils, 30 minutes). The Mariam Hotel (p385) in Madaba can often organise a day trip by taxi to take in Bethany-Beyond-the-Jordan and Amman Beach for around JD20 (JD18 without Bethany), with an hour stop at each site.

WADI MUJIB NATURE RESERVE

محمية الموجب
Wadi Mujib Nature Reserve (215 sq km) was established by the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (RSCN) for the captive breeding of the Nubian ibex, but it also forms the heart of an exciting ecotourism project.

First stop is the **visitors centre** (☎ 03-2313059; admission JD1), by the Dead Sea Hwy. The easiest activity on offer is the **Siq Trail**, a lovely 2km splash up into the gorge, ending at a dramatic waterfall; imagine hiking up Petra's Siq, with a river running through it. Bring a swimming costume, towel, and shoes that can get wet.

The most exciting option is the **Maqui Trail** (per person JD40; ☎ 1 Apr-31 Oct), a guided half-day trip which involves a hike up into the wadi, a visit to some lovely swimming pools and then a descent (often swimming) through the *siq*, finally rappelling down the 18m waterfall (not appropriate for non-swimmers or those with a fear of heights). It's not cheap, and you need to have a minimum of five people, but it's definitely one of the most exhilarating things you can do in a day in Jordan.

Other options include the **Ibex Trail** (JD8), a half-day guided hike that leads up to the Nubian ibex enclosure.

The reserve operates a nearby **camp** (s/d/tr per person JD20/17/16) right on the shores of the Dead Sea. Day use of the camp costs JD5. You can't pitch your own tent. Accommodation and guided treks should be booked in advance with **Wild Jordan Centre** (☎ 06-

4616523; www.rscn.org.jo) in Amman. For more details on the reserve see its website.

There's no public transport to the reserve so you need to rent a car or take a taxi from Amman, Madaba or Karak.

THE EASTERN DESERT

The landscape east of Amman quickly turns to a featureless stone desert, known as the *badia*, cut by twin highways running to Iraq and Saudi Arabia. The main reason to go out there is to visit a string of lonely 'desert castles', of which the most impressive are Qusayr Amra and Qasr al-Kharana. Most travellers visit the region on a day trip from Amman.

UMM AL-JIMAL

أم الجمال
The strange, ruined basalt city of **Umm al-Jimal** (admission free; ☎ daylight hr), only 10km from the Syrian border, is thought to have been founded around the 2nd century AD and to have formed part of the defensive line of Rome's Arab possessions. It continued to flourish into Umayyad times as a city of 3000 inhabitants but was destroyed by an earthquake in AD 747. Much of what remains is urban (as opposed to monumental) architecture, including houses, reservoirs, various **churches**, a **Roman barracks** and the impressive **Western Church**. It's a great fun to explore for a couple of hours, though little is labelled.

It's possible to see Umm al-Jimal in a day trip from Amman. Take a local minibus from Raghadan station to Zarqa (150 fils, 20 minutes), a minibus from there to Mafraq (350 fils, 45 minutes) and then another minibus 20km on to the ruins (200 fils, 20 minutes).

THE DESERT CASTLES قصور الصحراء

Most of the so-called 'desert castles' were built or adapted by the Damascus-based Umayyad rulers in the late 7th and early 8th centuries as desert retreats or hunting lodges, rather than actual castles. The most popular ruins can be visited in a loop from Amman via Azraq. It is just feasible to travel this loop in one long day using a combination of public transport and hitching, but most travellers join a tour (JD10 per person) organised by one of Amman's budget hotels. This is a good place to have a private car (it's approximately JD35 return for a pri-

vate taxi from Amman). Grab a copy of the free *Desert Castles* brochure from the Jordan Tourism board (p403) before heading off.

Visitors centres have just been built at many of the castles and you can expect an admission fee of around JD2 to follow soon.

Qasr al-Hallabat & Hammam as-Sarah حمام الصرح & قصر الحلابات

Crumbling Qasr al-Hallabat was originally a Roman fort built as a defence against raiding desert tribes. During the 7th century it was converted into a monastery and then the Umayyads fortified it into a country estate. The site consists of the square Umayyad fort and a partially restored mosque.

Some 2km down the road heading east is the **Hammam as-Sarah**, an Umayyad bathhouse and hunting lodge. It has been well restored and you can see the underground channels for the hot, cool and tepid bathrooms.

From Amman's Raghadan station, take a minibus to Zarqa (150 fils, 20 minutes), where you can get another to Hallabat (250 fils, 30 minutes). The bus should drive right past the two sites.

Azraq الأزرق

☎ 05 / pop around 6000

The oasis town of Azraq ('blue' in Arabic) lies 103km east of Amman. For centuries an important meeting of trade routes, the town is still a junction of truck roads heading north-east to Iraq, and southeast to Saudi Arabia. South Azraq was founded early last century by Chechens fleeing Russian persecution, while North Azraq is home to a minority of Druze, who fled French Syria in the 1920s.

SIGHTS

Azraq Wetland Reserve

Azraq is home to the **Azraq Wetland Reserve** (☎ 3835225; admission JD2, combination ticket with Shau-mari Wildlife Reserve JD3; ☎ 9am-sunset), which is administered by the RSCN and is good for bird-watching. The Azraq Basin was originally 12,710 sq km (an area larger than Lebanon), but over-pumping of ground water sucked the wetlands dry in the 1970s and 1980s. The RSCN is trying to rehabilitate a small section (12 sq km) of the wetlands.

Qala'at Al-Azraq

قصر الأزرق
This brooding black basalt **castle** (admission free; ☎ daylight hr) dates back to the Roman

emperor Diocletian (300 AD) but owes its current form to the beginning of the 13th century. It was originally three storeys high, but much of it crumbled in an earthquake in 1927. The Umayyads maintained it as a military base, as did the Ayyubids in the 12th and 13th centuries. In the 16th century the Ottoman Turks stationed a garrison here.

After the 16th century, the only other recorded use of the castle was during WWI when Sherif Hussein (father of King Hussein) and TE Lawrence made it their desert headquarters in the winter of 1917, during the Arab Revolt against the Ottomans. You can still visit Lawrence's room, directly above the southern entrance.

Shaumari Wildlife Reserve محمية الشومري

This **reserve** (admission JD2, combination ticket with Azraq Wetland Reserve JD3; ☎ 8am-4pm), 10km south of Azraq, was established in 1975 to reintroduce endemic wildlife such as Arabian oryxes (87 now in the reserve), blue-necked and red-necked ostriches (now 40), gazelles (six) and Persian onagers (wild asses; seven). You can spot these animals in their enclosures from a viewing platform.

For more on the Arabian oryx see p81.

SLEEPING & EATING

Zoubi Hotel (☎ 3835012; r JD10) This is the best budget accommodation in town, with comfortable, old-fashioned rooms. It's behind the Refa'i Restaurant, 800m south of the T-junction where the Amman road intersects with the roads to Saudi Arabia and Iraq.

Azraq Resthouse (☎ 3834006; fax 3835215; s/d/tr ind breakfast JD17.500/21.500/28.500) This semiresort is surprisingly good value with plush rooms, satellite TV and a pleasant swimming pool. The turn-off is 2km north of the T-junction.

Azraq Palace Restaurant (☎ /fax 4397144; buffet JD6; ☎ noon-4pm & 6-11pm) This is probably the best place to eat in town and the place most groups stop for lunch. For a light lunch choose the salad-only buffet.

A string of budget truck-stop restaurants lines the 1km stretch of road south of the main T-junction.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Minibuses (650 fils, 1½ hours) run from the post office (north of the castle in northern Azraq) to the old station in Zarqa, which is well connected to Amman and Irbid.

Qusayr Amra قصر عمرا

Heading back towards Amman on Hwy 40, the road passes **Qusayr Amra** (admission free; ☎ 7am-7.30pm Oct-Apr, 8am-4.30pm May-Sep), the best preserved of the desert castles and a Unesco World Heritage site. Amra was part of a larger complex (*qusayr* means 'little palace') that served as a caravanserai, with baths and a hunting lodge, possibly predating the Umayyads. The highlight here isn't the plain exterior but rather the gorgeous internal **frescoes**. The excellent **visitors centre** at the entrance is worth a stop for a detailed explanation of the frescoes and a relief map of the site. There's no public transport (though plenty of traffic) along the busy Hwy 40 so you'll need to take a tour or hitch.

Qasr al-Kharana قصر الحارنا

This well-preserved castle or caravanserai is 16km southwest of Qusayr Amra, standing as a lonely sentinel on the edge of the bleak *badia*. It was built either by the Romans or Byzantines, although what you see today is the result of renovations carried out by the Umayyads in AD 710. Around 60 labyrinthine rooms surround the central courtyard and there are good views from the roof. Again, you'll need to hitch to reach this site.

KING'S HIGHWAY

There are three routes south of Amman to Aqaba: the Desert Hwy, the Dead Sea Hwy and the King's Hwy. The first has the most traffic but the last is by far the most interesting of the three, passing through the historic centres of Madaba, Karak, Shobak and Petra, and the wonderful landscapes of Wadi Mujib and Dana Nature Reserve.

Unfortunately, public transport along the King's Hwy is patchy and stops altogether at the Wadi Mujib Gorge for 30km between Dhiban and Ariha; you'll have to hitch or take a private vehicle for at least part of the way. The Palace Hotel (p372) in Amman and the Mariam Hotel (opposite) in Madaba can organise transport along the highway.

MADABA

☎ 05

This easy-going town is best known for its superb, historically significant Byzantine-era mosaics. Madaba is the most important

Christian centre in Jordan, and has long been an example of religious tolerance.

Madaba is worth considering as an alternative place to stay to Amman: Madaba is far more compact, has excellent hotels and restaurants, and is less than an hour by regular public transport from the capital. Madaba is also a good base for exploring the Dead Sea, Bethany and other sites such as Mt Nebo, Machaerus (Mukawir) and Hammamat Ma'in.

Information

Madaba's **visitors centre** (☎ 3253536; Abu Bakr as-Seddiq St; ☎ 8am-5pm Oct-Apr, 8am-7pm May-Sep) is helpful, with a few brochures and toilets.

Among Madaba's better Internet cafés are **Friends Internet** (per hr JD1; ☎ 11am-midnight) and **Waves Internet** (Talat St; per hr JD1; ☎ 24hr).

All the town's half-dozen banks can change money and have ATMs.

Sights

Madaba's most famous site is the **Mosaic Map** in the 19th-century Greek Orthodox **St George's Church** (Talat St; admission JD1; ☎ 8am-6pm Sat & Mon-Thu, 10.30am-6pm Fri & Sun). Unearthed in 1864, the mosaic was once a clear map with 157 captions (in Greek) of all major biblical sites from Lebanon to Egypt. The mosaic was constructed in AD 560 and once contained more than two million pieces, but only a third of the whole now survives.

For the following places, admission is on a combination ticket (JD2), which covers all three sites.

The **Archaeological Park** (☎ 3246681; Hussein bin Ali St; ☎ 8am-5pm Oct-Apr, 8am-7pm May-Sep) contains exceptional mosaics from all around the Madaba area. The large roofed structure in front of you as you enter contains the **Hippolytus Hall**, a former Byzantine villa with some superb classical mosaics (the upper image shows a topless Aphrodite sitting next to Adonis and spanking a naughty winged Eros). The other half of the structure is the 6th-century **Church of the Virgin Mary**. There are also remains of a Roman road.

The **Church of the Apostles** (Al-Nuzha St; ☎ 9am-5pm Oct-Apr, 8am-7pm May-Sep) contains a remarkable mosaic dedicated to the 12 apostles. The central portion shows a vivid representation of the sea, surrounded by fish and a comical little octopus.

Housed in several old Madaba residences, **Madaba Museum** (☎ 3244056; Al-Baiqa St; ☎ 8am-4pm Oct-Apr, 8am-7pm May-Sep) contains a number of ethnographic exhibits and some more good mosaics.

Sleeping

Madaba Hotel (☎ /fax 3240643; Al-Jame St; s/d with shared bathroom from JD7/12, with private bathroom JD8/15) The only budget option but a good one, with clean, simple rooms and a friendly family feel. The shared hot-water bathrooms are spotless and there's a ground-floor lounge and kitchen. Breakfast costs JD1.

Mariam Hotel (☎ 3251529; www.mariamhotel.com; Aisha Umm al-Mumeneen St; s/d/tr JD18/22/26; ☎ P ☎) Our bet for the best place in town, with spotless rooms, a new pool and some of the most comfortable beds in Jordan. It's two blocks northeast of the Al-Mouhafada Circle. Charl, the super-friendly owner can organise a taxi to/from Amman's Queen Alia airport for around JD10.

Salome Hotel (☎ 3248606; salomeh@wanadoo.jo; Aisha Umm al-Mumeneen St; s/d/tr JD15/20/25; ☎ P ☎) Next door to the Mariam, and run by the same family, this place is equally comfortable. It offers discounts of up to 15% off in the low season.

Black Iris Hotel (☎ 3250171; www.blackirishotel.com; Al-Mouhafada Circle; s/d/tr/q JD15/20/27/32) This is another good value and friendly family-run place that offers good value and comes warmly recommended by readers.

Lulu's Pension (☎ 3243678; fax 3247617; Hamraa al-Asd St; s/d/tr with shared bathroom JD10/20/30, s/d/tr with private bathroom & balcony JD15/25/35) Comfortable rooms and a warm welcome from this family B&B.

Moab Land Hotel (☎ /fax 3251318; moablandhotel@wanadoo.jo; Talat St; s/d from JD20/25, ste from JD30) This place is centrally located directly opposite St George's Church. It's warm and cosy, with friendly staff and a great top-floor terrace. Discounts of up to 15% are available in the low season.

Eating

Most of Madaba's restaurants serve alcohol and there are liquor stores dotted around town. For cheap felafel, shwarma and chicken places try opposite the bus station.

Coffee Shop Ayola (☎ 3251843; Talat St; snacks around JD1; ☎ 8am-11pm) Almost opposite St George's Church, this is a cosy, relaxed

snack bar. It serves delicious toasted sandwiches (JD1), all types of coffee (500 fils to JD1) and cans of cold beer (JD1.500).

Haret Jdoudna (☎ 3248650; Talal St; mains JD4-7, pizzas JD2-4, plus 26% tax; ☎ 9am-midnight) This charming, upmarket complex of craft shops, café, bar, pizzeria and restaurant is set in one of Madaba's restored old houses. The food is a notch above the standard, with good *fatteh* (chicken with yogurt and hummus) and *sawani* (meat or vegetables cooked on trays in a wood-burning oven). Live music kicks in from 9pm, making it the only place in town with any nightlife.

Getting There & Away

The new bus station is 2km east of the King's Hwy.

Minibuses travel frequently between Madaba and Amman's Raghadan, Wahadat and, less often, Abdali bus stations (270 fils, one hour). The last bus back to Amman is around 9pm.

It is possible to travel to Karak on a daily university minibus (JD1.500, two hours) from the main bus/minibus station, although it travels via the less interesting Desert Hwy.

The Mariam Hotel can arrange transport to Petra via the King's Hwy (JD13 per person, minimum three people) and also to the Dead Sea (JD18 to JD20). There is no public transport to Karak along the King's Hwy.

AROUND MADABA

Mt Nebo

جبل نبو
Mt Nebo, on the edge of the East Bank plateau and 9km from Madaba, is where Moses is said to have seen the Promised Land. He then died (aged 120!) and was buried in the area, although the exact location of the burial site is the subject of conjecture.

The entrance to the **complex** (admission JD1; ☎ 7am-5am Oct-Apr, 7am-7pm May-Sep) is clearly visible on the Madaba – Dead Sea road. The first church was built on the site in the 4th century AD but most of the **Moses Memorial Church** you'll see today was built in the 6th century. The impressive main floor mosaic measures about 9m by 3m, and is very well preserved, as are the other mosaics dotted around the sanctuary.

From the **lookout**, the views across the valleys to the Dead Sea, Jericho, the Jordan Valley and the spires of Jerusalem are

superb but often hazy. The new **museum** is worth a quick look before leaving.

From Madaba, shared taxis run to the village of Fasiliyeh, 3km before Mt Nebo (150 fils a seat). For 500 fils the driver will drop you at Mt Nebo. A return taxi, with about 30 minutes to look around, shouldn't cost more than JD4 per vehicle.

Hammat Ma'in (Zarqa Ma'in)

حمامات ماعين (زرقاء ماعين)

The hot-springs resort of **Hammat Ma'in** (admission per person JD5, per vehicle JD5; ☎ 6am-midnight), sometimes known as Zarqa Ma'in, lies 27km southwest of Madaba, reached via a scenic road that drops steeply into the Zarqa Ma'in valley. The top-end hotel and chalet complex was being renovated at the time of research but the swimming pools and hot waterfall are still open to the public.

A taxi from Madaba costs about JD6 one way, or JD15 for a return journey, including around an hour's waiting time at the springs.

MACHAERUS (MUKAWIR)

مكاروس (مكاور)

Just beyond the village of Mukawir is the spectacular 700m-high hilltop perch of **Machaerus** (admission free; ☎ daylight hr), the castle of Herod the Great. The ruins themselves are only of moderate interest but the setting is breathtaking and commands great views out over the surrounding hills and the Dead Sea.

Machaerus is known to the locals as Qala'at al-Meshneq (Gallows Castle). The ruins consist of the palace of Herod Antipas, a huge cistern, the low-lying remains of the baths and defensive walls. Machaerus is renowned as the place where John the Baptist was beheaded by Herod Antipas, the successor to Herod the Great, at the request of the seductive dancer Salome. The castle is about 2km past the village and easy to spot.

From Madaba, minibuses (350 fils, one hour) go to the village of Mukawir four or five times a day (the last around 5pm). Unless you have chartered a taxi from Madaba, you'll probably need to walk the remaining 2km (downhill most of the way). However, your minibus driver may, if you ask nicely and sweeten the request with a tip, take you the extra distance.

WADI MUJIB

وادي الموجيب

Stretching across Jordan from the Desert Hwy to the Dead Sea is the vast and beautiful Wadi Mujib, sometimes known as the 'Grand Canyon of Jordan'. This spectacular valley is about 1km deep and over 4km from one edge to the other. Don't confuse the canyon here with Wadi Mujib Nature Reserve (p382) by the Dead Sea.

Dhiban, on the northern side of the canyon, is where almost all transport south of Madaba stops. The only way to cross the mighty Mujib from Dhiban to Ariha (about 30km) is to charter a taxi for JD5 each way. Hitching is possible, but expect a long wait.

KARAK

الكرك

The evocative ancient Crusader castle of Karak (or Kerak) became a place of legend during the 12-century battles between the Crusaders and the Muslim armies of Salah ad-Din (Saladin). Although among the most famous, the castle at Karak was just one in a long line built by the Crusaders, stretching from Aqaba in the south to Turkey in the north. The fortifications still dominate the modern walled town of Karak.

The **castle** (admission JD1; ☎ 8am-5.30pm) is entered through the **Ottoman Gate**, at the end of a short bridge over the dry moat. The path leading up to the left from inside the entrance leads to the **Crusader Gallery** (stables). At the end of the gallery, a long passageway leads southwest past the **soldiers' barracks** and **kitchen**. Emerging from the covered area, you will see the overgrown **upper court** on your right, and going straight ahead you will go past the castle's main **Crusader church**. At the far southern end of the castle is the impressive **Mamluk keep**, in front of which some stairs lead down to the **Mamluk palace**, which was built in 1311 using earlier Crusader materials. More stairs lead down to the delightful underground **marketplace**, which leads back to the entrance.

Sleeping & Eating

Towers Castle Hotel (☎ 2352489; fax 2354293; Al-Qala'a St; dm/s/d with shared bathroom JD3/8/12, s/d with private bathroom from JD9/16, new r JD12/18) The great location near the castle gates and the friendly reception staff make this the best option. There's a wide range of rooms, most bright and clean, and many with great views.

Al-Kemmam Hotel (☎ 079-5632365; Al-Maydan St; dm/s/d JD3/5/6) This men-only dosshouse in the modern town centre is the cheapest option if you are broke.

Al-Fid'a Restaurant (☎ 079-5037622; Al-Mujamma St; mains JD2.500-3.500; ☎ 8am-10pm) This is a popular place and excellent value with main course, dips and salad for JD3.

Ram Peace Restaurant (☎ 353789; Al-Mujamma St; mezze JD1, mains JD3; ☎ 8am-10pm) This place is similarly good, with some pleasant outdoor seating and friendly staff.

Kir Heres Restaurant (☎ 2355595; Al-Qala'a St; mains JD5-7; ☎ 9am-10pm) If you want to step up a notch, this classy restaurant has a pleasant ambience, good food and attentive service.

Turkey Restaurant (☎ 079-5730431; Al-Umari St; mains JD1.500; ☎ 7am-9.30pm) One of several local restaurants by the central statue of Salah ad-Din, offering roast chicken, hummus and other standard local fare.

Getting There & Away

From the bus/minibus station at the bottom of the hill just south of town, reasonably regular minibuses go to Amman's Wahadat station (800 fils, two hours) via the Desert Hwy. Minibuses also run fairly frequently to Tafila (750 fils, 1½ hours), the best place for connections to Qadsiyya (for Dana Nature Reserve) and Shobak. To Wadi Musa (for Petra), take a minibus to Ma'an (JD1.500, two hours) and change there. Minibuses to Aqaba (JD2, three hours) run about four times a day, mostly in the morning.

TAFILA

الطفيلة

Tafila is a busy transport junction and you may have to change transport here. Minibuses run frequently from Karak (700 fils, one hour) across the dramatic gorge of Wadi Hasa. There are also direct minibuses to/from the Wahadat station in Amman (JD1.100, 2½ hours) via the Desert Hwy, Aqaba (JD1.200, 2½ hours) via the Dead Sea Hwy, Ma'an (JD1, one hour) via the Desert Hwy, and down the King's Hwy to Shobak and Qadsiyya (for Dana Nature Reserve; 350 fils, 30 minutes).

DANA NATURE RESERVE

محمية دانا الطبيعية

☎ 03

RSCN-run **Dana Nature Reserve** (adult/student JD5/2.500) is one of Jordan's hidden gems and

its most impressive ecotourism project. The gateway to the reserve is the charming 15th-century stone village of **Dana**, which clings to a precipice overlooking the valley and commands exceptional views. It's a great place to spend a few days hiking and relaxing.

The reserve consists of a series of wadis which descend through dramatic sandstone bluffs into the Rift Valley of Wadi Araba to the west. The red rock escarpments and valleys protect a surprisingly diverse ecosystem, and the reserve is also home to almost 100 archaeological sites, including the 6000-year-old copper mines of Khirbet Feinan.

The **visitors centre** (☎ 2270497; dhana@rscn.org.jo; www.rscn.org.jo; ☎ 8am-8pm) in the Dana Guest House can advise on hiking routes, most of which require a reserve guide (JD15/30 half/full day).

Hiking routes include the Dana Village Trail (Steppe Trail; three hours, 8km) to Rummana camp site, the Waterfalls Trail (2½ hours, 2.5km) and the short but steep Nabataean Tomb Trail (two hours, 2.5km). The last two hikes require a shuttle to the trailhead (JD6). The main unguided (and thus cheapest) option is the **Wadi Dana Trail** (14km) to Feinan Lodge, which switchbacks steeply down into the gorge (coming back is a real killer!).

Sleeping & Eating

Dana Hotel (☎ 2270537; sdqe@nets.com.jo; s/d with shared bathroom JD5/10, with private bathroom JD8/12) This hotel, ethically run by the Sons of Dana Cooperative, is the best option in the village, with simple but stylish rooms and helpful management. Prices include breakfast and excellent meals (JD4) are served in the rooftop Bedouin tent.

Dana Guest House (☎ 2270497; dhana@rscn.org.jo; s JD34, d/tr with balcony JD43/53, q with bunk beds JD57, s/d with bathroom JD53/57) The RSCN runs this sleek, stylish and highly recommended lodge. The balconies have truly breathtaking views. Book meals (JD7) in advance.

Dana Tower Hotel (☎ 2270226; dana_tower2@hotmail.com; dm/s/d with shared bathroom JD1.500/3/6, s/d with private bathroom JD4/8, full board per person JD8) This funky, slightly grungy place is popular with younger backpackers and it's a sociable option, though the unsightly building sits uncomfortably with the rest of the village.

Rummana Campground (s/d/tr/q tent per person JD18/15/14/13; ☎ 1 Mar-31 Oct) This lovely but

pricey camp site 11km from Dana has several hiking trails nearby. You can hike here in three hours from Dana village or arrange transport with the RSCN (JD6). Book meals (JD7) in advance or bring your own food. This site is reached via a turn-off on the King's Hwy around 5km north of Qadsiyya. Prices include park entry fee and students can get a 20% discount.

Feinan Lodge (Wadi Feinan; per person US\$80) This unique ec lodge is only accessible on foot from Dana (four hours) or by 4WD from the Dead Sea Hwy. At night the monastic-style lodge is lit solely by hundreds of candles. Bring a torch and mosquito repellent.

Getting There & Away

Minibuses run reasonably often throughout the day between Tafila and Qadsiyya (350 fils, 30 minutes). The turn-off to Dana village is just north of Qadsiyya; from here it's a 2.8km (steep downhill) walk to Dana village. A single bus departs from Qadsiyya daily at 6.30am for Amman's Wahadat station (JD1.500, three hours), returning from Amman at around 11am.

The Dana Tower Hotel claims that it will pick up travellers for free from Qadsiyya or even Petra if you ring in advance and stay at the hotel. A taxi to Petra or Karak costs around JD15.

SHOBAK

شوبك

The commanding **Shobak Castle** (admission free; ☎ daylight hr) is another renowned but little-visited crusader fortress. Some readers prefer it to the more frequented Karak Castle.

Excavation on the castle's interior is ongoing and has revealed a market, two crusader churches, and, at the northern end of the castle, a semicircular keep whose exterior is adorned with Quranic inscriptions, possibly dating from the time of Saladin. The court of Baldwin I is also worth a look. The real highlight is the underground **escape tunnel** that winds down seemingly forever into the bowels of the earth, finally resurfacing way outside the castle at the base of the hill. Bring a torch and nerves of steel. A visitors centre has just been completed so expect admission fees to follow soon.

Occasional minibuses link Shobak village with Amman's Wahadat station (JD1.500, 2½ hours) and there are irregular minibuses to Karak from Aqaba via the Shobak

turn-off (ask the driver before setting out). Either way you'll still need a taxi for the last 3km or so to the fort.

PETRA & THE SOUTH

Southern Jordan has a totally different feel from the north and holds some of the country's most dramatic desert landscapes. Petra and Wadi Rum are both unmissable sights and Aqaba is a popular last stop before catching the ferry to Egypt.

PETRA & WADI MUSA بيترا & وادي موسى

☎ 03 If you can only go to one place in Jordan, make it Petra. Hewn from towering rock walls, the imposing façades of the great temples and tombs of Petra are an enduring testament to the grandeur of the Nabataean vision. The Nabataeans – Arabs who controlled the frankincense trade routes of the region in pre-Roman times – chose as their city a hidden valley concealed from the outside world and transformed it into one of the Middle East's most memorable sites.

Orientation

The village that has sprung up around Petra is Wadi Musa (Moses' Valley), a mass of hotels, restaurants and shops stretching about 5km from Ain Musa, the head of the valley, down to the main entrance to Petra. The village centre is at the Shaheed roundabout, with its shops, restaurants and budget hotels, while other hotels are strung out all along the main road for the remaining 2km to the entrance to Petra.

Information

The Petra **visitors centre** (Map p390; ☎ 2156020; fax 2156060; ☎ 6am-9pm), just before the entrance to Petra, has a helpful information counter, several souvenir shops and toilets. The tourist police centre is opposite and there is a small post office behind the visitors centre.

The Housing Bank (Visa; Map p392) and Jordan Islamic Bank (Visa and MasterCard; Map p392), up from the Shaheed roundabout, are good places to change money and both have ATMs. There are a couple of banks (but no ATMs) at the lower end of town near Petra. There are a couple of Internet cafés in Wadi Musa near the Shaheed roundabout.

Sights

The spectacular rose-stone city of **Petra** (Map p390) was built in the 3rd century BC by the Nabataeans, who carved palaces, temples, tombs, storerooms and stables from the sandstone cliffs. From here they commanded the trade routes from Damascus to Arabia and great spice, silk and slave caravans passed through, paying taxes and protection money. In a short time, the Nabataeans made great advances – they mastered hydraulic engineering, iron production, copper refining, sculpture and stone-carving. Archaeologists believe that several earthquakes, including a massive one in AD 555, forced the inhabitants to abandon the city.

ENTRY

The **ticket office** (Map p390; ☎ 6am-4.30pm Oct-Apr, 6am-5.30pm May-Sep) is in the visitors centre. Admission fees are JD21/26/31 for a one-/two-/three-day pass (subsequent days are free with the three-day pass). There's a student discount of 50% with an ISIC card. Multiday tickets are nontransferable and signatures are checked. Children under 15 years are free.

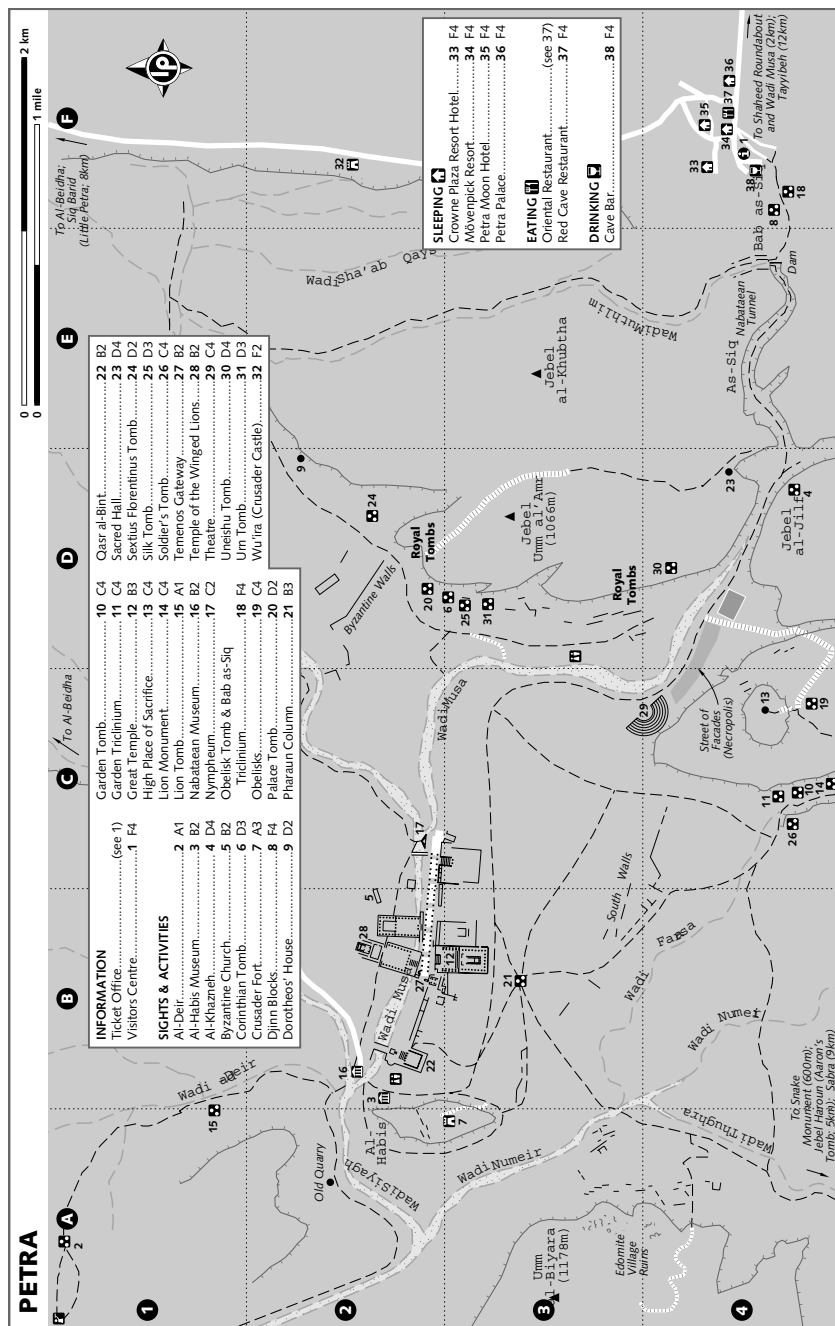
THE SITE

You approach Petra through an incredibly narrow 1.2km-long defile known as the **Siq**. This is not a canyon but rather one block that has been rent apart by tectonic forces. Just as you start to think there's no end to the Siq,

SUGGESTED PETRA ITINERARIES

You really need two full days to do Petra justice. The best advice is to start early; the tour buses start arriving around 8am and the enchanting Siq is best experienced away from the crowds. Al-Kazhneh (Treasury) has its best light around 9am, and Al-Deir (Monastery) and the Royal Tombs are at their best in the late afternoon.

In a **full day** (eight hours) you could cover the main sights mentioned in 'The Site' (above) and then hike up to Al-Deir. If you have a **second day**, perhaps enter Petra via stunning Wadi Muthlim, climb to the High Place of Sacrifice starting near the Theatre and then descend to the city centre via the western side of the hill. A **third day** would allow you to hike to Umm al-Biyara and explore a little off the beaten track.



you catch breathtaking glimpses ahead of the most impressive of Petra's sights, the **Al-Khazneh** (Treasury). Carved out of iron-laden sandstone to serve as a tomb, the Treasury gets its name from the misguided local belief that an Egyptian Pharaoh hid his treasure in the top urn. The Greek-style pillars, alcoves and plinths are masterpieces.

Further into the site is the **Street of Facades**, the highlight of which is the weather-worn 7000-seat **theatre**. Further north above the path are the **Royal Tombs**, standing elegantly in various stages of erosion.

The main path turns west along the **colonnaded street**, which was once lined with shops, passing the rubble of the **nymphaeum** en route to the elevated **Great Temple**, staring across the wadi to the **Temple of the Winged Lions**. At the end of the colonnaded street is the imposing and (unusually for Petra) free-standing **Qasr al-Bint**. The path turns north towards the **Al-Habis Museum** and the start of the winding path that climbs to the monastery.

HIGH PLACES

Although all of Petra's high places are worth visiting, **Al-Deir** (the Monastery) shouldn't be missed. It's reached by a long rock-cut staircase leading north from the museum (a 45-minute walk). Al-Deir has a similar façade to the Khazneh, but is far bigger and the views from the nearby cliff-tops are stunning, especially towards **Jebel Haroun** in the late afternoon. On the way up, look out for the **Lion Tomb**.

The **High Place of Sacrifice** is reached by stairs (45-minute climb) from off the **Street of Facades** and affords stunning views. Descend on the other side of the mountain via the **Garden Tomb**, **Soldier's Tomb** and **Garden Triclinium**.

Other more challenging hikes include those to **Umm al-Biyara** (a steep hour each way) and the day return hike to **Jebel Haroun** (topped with the tomb of the biblical/islamic prophet Aaron/Haroun).

The exciting scramble through the **Wadi Muthlim** slot canyon from the Siq to near the Royal Tombs (45 minutes) is highly recommended, but don't try it if there has been any recent rain as flash floods are possible.

Sleeping

Prices for hotels in Wadi Musa fluctuate wildly, depending on the season and amount of business. Discounts are common.

BUDGET

Unless otherwise noted, all the following hotels are in Wadi Musa village, close to the central Shaheed Roundabout.

Mussa Spring Hotel (☎ 2156310; musaspring_hotel@yahoo.co.uk; rooftop bed JD2, dm JD3-4, s/d with shared bathroom JD7.500/11, s/d with private bathroom JD8.500/15) A pleasant place far removed from the clamour of the village centre. There are daily free shuttles to/from the gate at Petra, 5km away. Some rooms are small.

Al-Anbat Hotel II (Map p392; ☎ 2156265; alanbath@joint.com.jo; s/d JD12/14) This hotel has generally quiet, well-furnished rooms with clean private bathrooms and (unreliable) satellite TV, which makes it good value in the heart of Wadi Musa.

Cleopetra Hotel (Map p392; ☎ /fax 2157090; cleopetrahotel@hotmail.com; s/d with private bathroom & breakfast JD10/14) The Cleopetra has small but reasonable rooms and BBC World in the lobby. It's a sociable place to hang out in the evenings.

Valentine Inn (Map p392; ☎ 2156423; valentineinn@hotmail.com; dm JD2-3, s/d with shared bathroom JD6/8, s/d with private bathroom JD8/10; 📺) The good news here is that for men the Valentine Inn is the biggest backpacker hang-out in Wadi Musa. It's well attuned to a range of budget travel needs, from travel information, laundry, a great veggie dinner buffet (JD3) and Internet access to transport to Amman along the King's Hwy and more. The rooms are decent but nothing special and the dorms are very cramped. Unfortunately, many travellers, particularly women, have complained of pushy, rude staff and a 'bad vibe'.

MIDRANGE

Amra Palace Hotel (Map p392; ☎ 2157070; www.amrapalace.com; half-board JD25/40; 📺) This well-run hotel has very comfortable rooms with satellite TV. The heated outdoor pool, Jacuzzi, summer terrace and excellent Turkish bath (JD15 per person) push this a notch above anything else in Wadi Musa.

Al-Anbat Hotel I (☎ 2156265; www.alanbat.com; s/d JD13/16; 📺 📺 📺) Good value and very well-run three-star resort on the road between Ain Musa and Wadi Musa. Facilities include a Turkish bath (JD12 for guests) and a small pool (in summer). Campers (JD3 per person) can use a designated area with showers and a kitchen.

El-Rashid Hotel (Map p392; ☎ 2156800; s/d from JD10/15) Uninspiring but comfortable rooms at Shaheed roundabout right in the centre of town. The newly renovated rooms are more spacious.

Petra Moon Hotel (Map p390; ☎ 2156220; petra.moonhotel@yahoo.com; s/d JD15/20) This is up behind the Mövenpick Resort and convenient for the entrance to Petra. The rooms are spacious and comfortable, and the staff helpful. The price drops if you spend more than two nights.

Petra Palace (Map p390; ☎ 2156723; www.petra.palace.com.jo; s/d/tr JD31/46/60; 🚗 🚻) This place, about 500m from the Petra entrance, is superb value. Some of the luxury rooms open on to a terrace with a swimming pool and

there's a good restaurant and bar. Renovations planned for 2006 will bring new rooms and another pool, as well as possible noise and disruption. Credit cards are accepted.

TOP END

Sofitel Taybet Zaman Hotel & Resort (☎ 2150111; fax 2150101; s/d US\$146/184, discounted to US\$105) One of Jordan's unique hotels, the Taybet Zaman was built into a reconstructed traditional Ottoman stone village, near Tayyibeh, 10km from Petra. Rooms are superstylish and luxurious; if we had the money we'd live here. A taxi from Petra will cost about JD10 one way.

Crown Plaza Resort Hotel (Map p390; ☎ 2156266; cprpetra@nets.jo; www.crownplaza.com; s/d from JD80/90; 🚗 🚻) A great location and online discounts make this a good option. The heated swimming pool is useful outside summer and there's a lovely terrace. Email the hotel for special rates.

Mövenpick Resort (Map p390; ☎ 2157111; www.moevenpick-petra.com; s/d JD92/112; 🚗 🚻) The most luxurious place in town, close to the gate into Petra, with a lovely Moroccan-style bar, good restaurants and a roof garden.

Eating

Central Wadi Musa, is dotted with grocery stores where you can stock up for a picnic at Petra.

Al-Afandi Quick Restaurant (Map p392; meals from JD1) Just off Shaheed roundabout, Al-Afandi is a simple and friendly shwarma place and one of the few places in town that doesn't habitually overcharge foreigners.

Al-Wadi Restaurant (Map p392; ☎ 2157163; mains JD3-4; ☎ 7am-11pm) One of two good places right on Shaheed roundabout. It does pasta and pizza, as well as a range of vegetarian dishes and local Bedouin specialties such as *gallaya* (meat, rice and onions in a spicy tomato sauce) and *mensaf* (Bedouin lamb dish).

Al-Arabi Restaurant (Map p392; ☎ 2157661; mains from JD1; ☎ 6am-midnight) Almost next door, this is a bright place with helpful staff and simple but good meals.

Red Cave Restaurant (Map p390; ☎ 2157799; mains from JD2.500; ☎ 9am-10pm) This is cavernous, cool and friendly, and the menu has a good selection of Bedouin specialties, including *maqlubbeh*.

Oriental Restaurant (Map p390; ☎ 2157087; mains JD4-5, pizzas from JD2.500; ☎ 11am-9.30pm) A popular place that does Lebanese main courses alongside Western-style pasta and pizza.

Entertainment

There's not a lot to do in the evening, other than recover from aching muscles and plan your next day in Petra. Most hotels screen *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* nightly until everyone is sick of it.

Cave Bar (Map p390; ☎ 2156266; beer from JD2.500, plus 26% tax; ☎ 8am-midnight) If you've never downed a pint in a 2000-year-old Nabataean rock room (and we're guessing you haven't) then a drink here is a must. Some seats are actually in the side tombs, which is a bit creepy. There's live Bedouin music from 9pm (not Saturday).

Getting There & Away

Minibuses generally leave from the bus station in central Wadi Musa (Map p392). Minibuses run about three times a day when full between Amman (Wahadat station) and Wadi Musa (JD3, three hours), along the Desert Hwy. Minibuses and service taxis leave Wadi Musa regularly throughout the day for Ma'an (JD1, 45 minutes), from where there are connections everywhere. Minibuses also leave Wadi Musa for Aqaba (JD3, two hours) at about 6.30am, 8am and 4pm – ask around the day before.

For Wadi Rum (JD3, 1½ hours), there is a daily minibus at about 6am; get your hotel to make a 'reservation' the day before. Be wary of any 'bus boys' who try to charge you JD1 for 'luggage' and attempt to book you on a substandard tour. Alternatively, take a minibus to Aqaba, get off at the crossroads at Rashidiya, and hitch a ride from there to Wadi Rum.

Getting Around

The standard, non-negotiable taxi fare from Petra to central Wadi Musa is JD1.

WADI RUM

☎ 03

Wadi Rum has some of the most extraordinary desert scenery you'll ever see, and is a definite highlight of any visit to Jordan. This area, made famous by the Arab Revolt and TE Lawrence in the early 20th century, not to mention the film *Lawrence of Arabia*,

which was partly filmed here, has lost none of its forbidding majesty. Its myriad moods, dictated by the changing angle of the sun, make for a memorable experience. Unless you're really pushed for time, linger for a few days here, slowing down to the timeless rhythm of desert life, enjoying the night skies and spectacular sunrises and sunsets.

Information

Admission to **Wadi Rum Protected Area** (per person/vehicle JD2/5) is strictly controlled and all vehicles, camels and guides must be arranged either through or with the approval of the **visitors centre**, 7km before the village of Wadi Rum.

Most people visit the desert as part of a 4WD trip arranged on arrival at the visitors centre; half-/full-day excursions cost around JD20/45. Prices are regulated, but do not include overnight stays in a Bedouin camp (around JD25 extra).

Baggy trousers or skirts and modest shirts or blouses will, besides preventing serious sunburn, earn you more respect from the conservative Bedouin, especially out in the desert.

Sights

The enormous, dramatic **Jebel Rum** (1754m) towers above Rum Village. Of the sites closest to Rum Village (distances from the Rest House in brackets), there's a 1st-century-BC **Nabataean temple** (400m) and good views from **Lawrence's Spring** (3km), named after TE Lawrence because he wrote about it in his book *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*.

Further afield, the main highlights accessible by 4WD include:

Barrah Siq (14km) A long picturesque canyon that's great to traverse on foot or by camel.

Burdah Rock Bridge (19km) View this impressive 80m-high bridge from the desert floor or, better, scramble up to it with a guide (one hour).

Jebel Khazali (7km) Narrow *siq* with rock inscriptions.

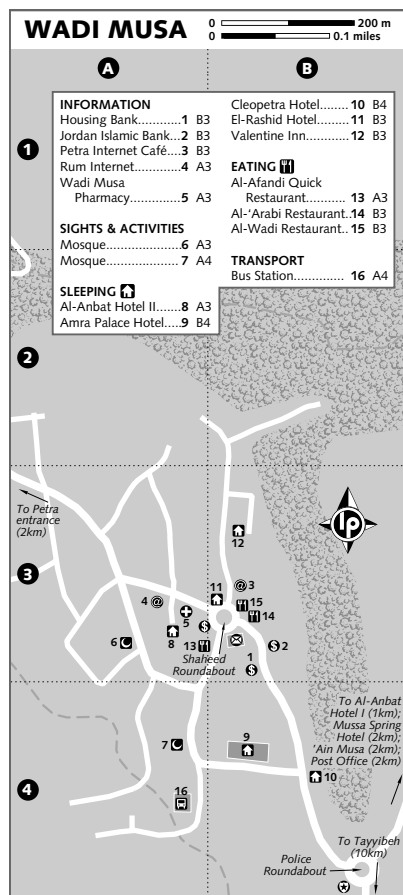
Lawrence's House/Al-Qsair (9km) Remote location and supreme views of the red sands.

Sand Dunes/Red Sands (6km) Superb red sand dunes on the slopes of Jebel Umm Ulaydiyya.

Sunset & Sunrise Points (11km) Superb views from near Umm Sabatah.

Umm Fruth Rock Bridge (13km) Smaller and more visited than Burdah.

Wadak Rock Bridge (9km) Magnificent views across the valley.



THE BEDOUIN

All over the eastern and southern deserts of Jordan, you'll see the black goat-hair tents (*beit ash-sha'ar* – literally 'house of hair') of the Bedouin. The *bedu* (the name means nomadic) today number several hundred thousand, but few can still be regarded as truly nomadic. Some have opted for city life, but most have, voluntarily or otherwise, settled down to cultivate crops.

A few retain the old ways; they camp for a few months at a time in one spot and graze their herds of goats, sheep or camels. When the sparse fodder runs out, it is time to move on again, which allows the land to regenerate.

The Bedouin family is a close-knit unit. Women do most of the domestic work, including fetching water, baking bread and weaving clothes. Men are traditionally providers and warriors, though the traditional intertribal raids that for centuries were the staple of everyday Bedouin life are now a memory. Tents and houses are divided into a haram (forbidden area) for women and another section for the men, where guests are entertained. Men generally wear white robes. Women tend to dress in more colourful garb and rarely veil their tattooed faces.

Although camels, once the Bedouin's best friend, are still in evidence, they are now often replaced by the Land Rover or Toyota pick-up – Wilfred Thesiger would definitely not approve! Other concessions to modernity are radios (sometimes even TVs), plastic water containers and, occasionally, a kerosene stove.

The Bedouin are renowned for their hospitality; it is part of their creed that no traveller is turned away. This is part of a desert code of survival. Once taken in, a guest will be offered the best of the available food and plenty of tea and coffee. The thinking is simple: today you're passing through and they have something to offer; tomorrow they may be passing your camp and you may have food and drink – which you would offer them before having any yourself. Such a code of conduct made it possible for travellers to cross the desert with some hope of surviving in such a hostile natural environment. Whether this code can continue in the face of mass tourism is uncertain.

Activities

You don't have to shell out for a pricey 4WD tour if you don't want to. Ask at the visitors centre for information on the great 2½-hour loop **hike** from the visitors centre to the Seven Pillars of Wisdom and up **Makharas Canyon** (take the left branch of the wadi), curving around the northern tip of Jebel Umm al-Ishrin back to the visitors centre.

With a guide you can make the excellent **rock scramble** through the **Rakhbat Canyon**, crossing through Jebel Umm al-Ishrin.

A **camel** ride offers a great way to traverse the desert. A two-hour trip to the Alameleh Inscriptions, for example, costs JD7. Full-day camel hire costs JD20 per day – see the rates posted at the visitors centre.

For ideas on more adventurous trips see www.bedouinroads.com.

Sleeping & Eating

Most travellers who stay overnight prefer to sleep out in the desert.

Rest House (☎ 2018867; mattress in 2-person tent per person JD3) Has frayed and torn tents out the back, with access to a toilet and shower

block. The tents aren't very secure so keep your valuables with you at all times. The Rest House is at the entrance to Rum village, where the bus drops you off.

Sunset Camp (☎ 2032961, 079-5502421; www.mohammedwadirum.8m.com) This desert camp, around 12km from Rum village, has been recommended by many travellers. A half-/full-day jeep excursion, with accommodation and meals, costs from JD20/27 per person.

Redwan Paradise (☎ 6am-1am) A local café, 500m south of the Rest House, that serves tea, hummus and *lafel* for around JD1.

The **restaurant** (☎ 8am-9pm) at the Rest House offers good value meals like *shish tawooq* with French fries, and salads and dips for JD3.600.

Getting There & Away

At the time of research, there was at least one minibus a day to Aqaba (JD1.500, one hour) at 7am, and maybe another at 8am. From Sunday to Thursday, you should also find one leaving around 12.30pm and possibly again at 3pm. To Wadi Musa (JD3, 1½ hours), there is a daily minibus at 8.30am.

If you are headed to Ma'an, Karak or Amman, the minibuses to either Aqaba or Wadi Musa can drop you at the Desert Hwy (JD1, 20 minutes), from where it's easy enough to hail onward transport.

AQABA

العقبة

☎ 03

The balmy winter climate and idyllic setting on the Gulf of Aqaba make this Jordan's aquatic playground, attracting visitors from across Jordan and even Saudi Arabia. In summer it gets scorching.

The diving and snorkelling south of Aqaba is the region's main attraction, and Aqaba itself is a relaxed place with a good range of hotels and restaurants.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Redwan Bookshop (☎ 2013704; redwanbook@hotmail.com; Zahran St; ☎ 7.30am-12.30pm & 4-9pm)

Extensive selection of newspapers, hard-to-find Jordanian titles and Lonely Planet guidebooks.

Yamani Library (☎ /fax 2012221; Zahran St; ☎ 9am-2.30pm & 6-10pm)

INTERNET ACCESS

Gate Net (☎ 2017677; Aqaba Gateway; per hr 750 fils, after midnight 500 fils; ☎ 24hr)

MONEY

There are plenty of banks (with ATMs) and moneychangers around town – see Map p396 for locations.

POST

General post office (Al-Yarmuk St; ☎ 7.30am-7pm Sat-Thu, 7.30am-1.30pm Fri)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist office (☎ /fax 2013363; Prince Mohammed St; ☎ 8am-2.30pm Sun-Thu) Next to the Aqaba Museum (head for the huge Jordanian flag). Staff offer little more than a limited range of brochures.

VISA EXTENSIONS

Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority (ASEZA); ☎ 2091000; www.aqabazone.com) Behind Safeway, by the Central Bank of Jordan. You need to register here if you got a free visa on arrival in Aqaba and are planning to stay in Jordan for more than 48 hours (see p403).

Police station (☎ 2012411; Ar-Reem St; ☎ 7am-9pm Sat-Thu) Opposite the bus station.

A three-month extension is usually available on the spot

and is free. It's best to go earlier in the day (8am to 3pm). Aqaba is the only reliable place to get your visa extended outside Amman.

Sights

Along the Corniche, and squeezed between the marina and the Mövenpick Resort, is the site of **Ayla** (Old Aqaba), which is the early medieval port city. The ruins are limited, but they are worth a quick look if you're in the area.

Of more interest is **Aqaba Castle** (adult/student JD1/0.150, incl Aqaba Museum; ☎ 8am-4pm Sat-Thu, 10am-3pm Fri Oct-Apr, 8am-7pm daily May-Sep), built originally by the Crusaders and expanded by the Mamluks in the early 16th century. The Ottomans occupied the castle until WWI when it was substantially destroyed by shelling from the British. The Hashemite Coat of Arms above the main entrance was raised soon afterwards as the Arab Revolt swept through Aqaba.

Nearby is the small but interesting **Aqaba Museum** (adult/student JD1/0.150, incl Aqaba Castle; ☎ 8am-4pm Sat-Thu, 10am-3pm Fri Oct-Apr, 8am-7pm daily May-Sep).

Activities

SWIMMING & HAMMAMS

The café-lined public beaches of Aqaba are aimed at sunset strollers rather than swimmers.

Barracuda Beach (☎ 2109891; admission JD5, towel hire JD1; ☎ 9am-7pm) is a private stretch of nice sandy beach, equipped with hammocks, loungers, a bar, restaurant, pool and lots of water sports.

The **Mövenpick Resort** (☎ /fax 2034020; www.movenpick-aqaba.com; King Hussein St; ☎ ☒) charges JD16/19 for weekday/weekend use of its beach, three pools, health club and sauna; however, the Mövenpick (p398) is by far the best in town and includes JD5 worth of drink vouchers.

Aqaba Turkish Baths (☎ 2031605; King Hussein St; ☎ 9am-9pm) offers the full works – massage, steam bath and scrubbing – for JD8. Readers have recommended this place highly.

DIVING & SNORKELLING

There are some superb sites for diving and snorkelling in the Gulf of Aqaba, south of the town centre and ferry-passenger terminal. Aqaba's dive agencies are very professional. Dives cost from JD17 to JD25 with

equipment. Night dives and PADI courses are available.

Aqaba International Dive Centre (☎ /fax 2031213; diveaqaba@yahoo.com; King Hussein St).

Arab Divers (☎ 2031808; arabdivers@hotmail.com; King Hussein St) Next to Nairoukh 2 Hotel.

Dive Aqaba (☎ 2034849; www.diveaqaba.com; As-Sadah St) Opposite Golden Tulip Hotel.

Red Sea Diving Centre (☎ 2022323; www.redsea divecentre.com; off King Hussein St)

Royal Diving Club (☎ 2017035; www.rdc.jo) Twelve kilometres south of the city.

For snorkelling, all the places listed above rent out flippers, mask and snorkel for JD3 to JD5 per day. Some offer snorkelling boat trips for around JD20 per person.

Sleeping BUDGET

Bedouin Garden Village (☎ 079-5602521; bedwin.jamal@yahoo.com; per person camping JD2-3, s/d JD15/20, large room JD20/30; 🚻) Beach or dive bums will like this place, located about 10km south of the town centre. Accommodation is cramped and a bit overpriced (and there's no air-con) but you can camp or park a camper van for cheap. You can also get meals for JD5.

Jordan Flower Hotel (☎ 2014378; Zahran St; s/d with shared bathroom JD7/8, with private bathroom JD10/11) This place is simple, but the best of a group of three neighbouring cheapies. Rooms vary so look at a few.

Al-Kholil Hotel (☎ /fax 2030152; Zahran St; s/d JD10/12) One of the better places in the area.

It's worth paying an extra JD2 for a balcony as these make the rooms.

Amira Hotel (☎ /fax 2018840; s/d incl breakfast JD12/18) Best of a trio of similar places next to each other. There are clean bathrooms, small balconies and quiet rooms.

Al-Naher al-Khaled Hotel (☎ 2012456; zv51@hotmail.com; Ar-Razi St; s/d from JD8/10) Rooms are pleasant and bright, with TV and a hot-water bathroom. Off-season rates are a bargain. The windows don't quite fit properly so rooms can be noisy.

Other camps, such as the **Mermaid Camp** (☎ 079-5567761) and **Sunset Camp** (☎ 077-7786023; reefdiverjo@yahoo.com) are due to relocate next door to (maybe) create a Dahab-style budget beach community.

MIDRANGE

The following places have a fridge, air-con, satellite TV, telephone and hot water, and prices include breakfast.

Al-Zatari Hotel (☎ 2022970; fax 2022974; King Talal St; s/d/tr from JD18/28/35) Well run and highly recommended. It has well-appointed rooms with balconies and a nice coffee shop. Front-facing rooms are worth a couple of extra dinar as they are bigger and have better views.

Nairoukh 2 Hotel (☎ 2012980; nairoukh2hot@hotmail.com; King Hussein St; s/d JD15/22, JD19/27.500 Apr, May, Oct, Nov) Good value close to the centre with modern rooms, helpful staff and some great views of the gulf.

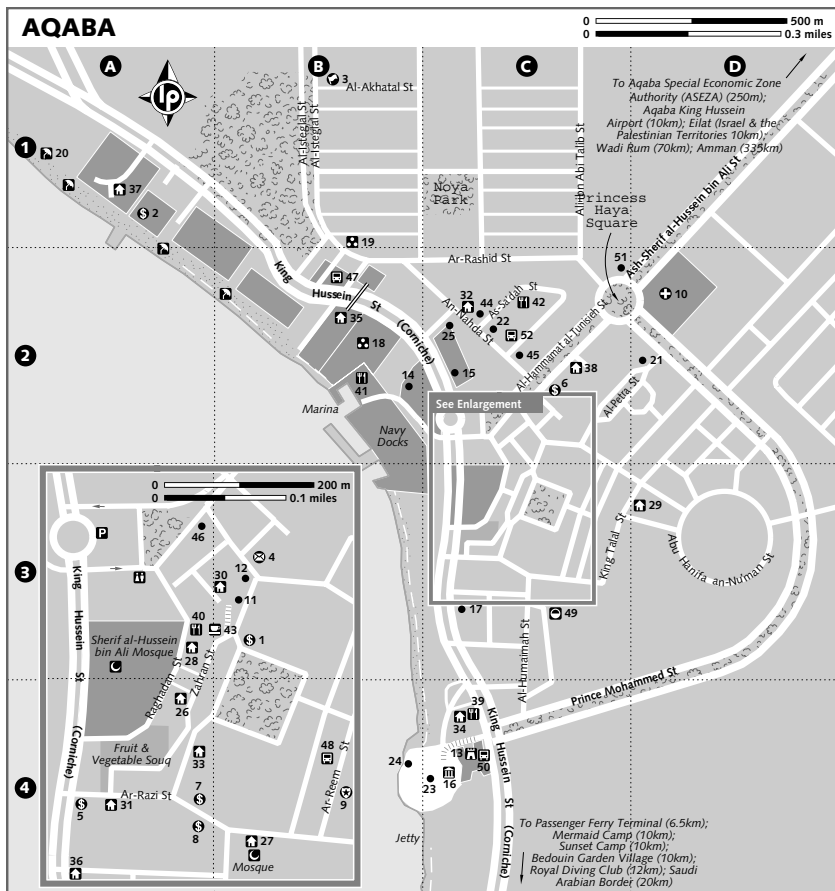
Moon Beach Hotel (☎ /fax 2013316; King Hussein St; s without seaview JD12, s/d with seaview JD17/30) Removed from (but in easy walking distance of) the bustle of central Aqaba. The rooms at the Moon Beach are lovely and the five new rooms come with beach views. Credit cards are accepted.

Crystal Hotel (☎ 2022001; fax 2022006; Ar-Razi St; s/d JD20/30) A comfortable and spacious option, if a little sterile, that feels like a 'real' hotel, with a plush marble lobby to boot. The corner doubles are the best. The official rates of JD40/55 rarely apply.

Al-Shula Hotel (☎ 2015153; alshula@wanadoo.jo; Raghadan St; s/d JD15/20) The Al-Shula is right in the heart of the action. Some of the rooms are smaller than others, but those on the west side have excellent views of Eilat. Add JD5 to the rooms in high season. Don't let the lobby fool you; it's a lot grander than the rooms.

Shweiki Hotel (☎ 2022657; fax 2022659; Al-Hammamat al-Tunisiyah St; s/d/tr JD16/24/28) Another good-value option. Rooms are spacious with good bathrooms and some come with nice coastal views. The rooms without a balcony are a little cheaper; all rates are open to discussion.

Golden Tulip (☎ 2031901; www.goldentulip.com; An-Nahda St; s/d JD50/60; 🚻 🚿) A modern and fresh four-star choice, with an interior atrium, a rooftop plunge pool and a good location. The 110 rooms are all nicely decorated and come with balconies. Rooms are often discounted to JD30/40 for singles/doubles.



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TOP END

Mövenpick Resort (☎/fax 2034020; www.movenpick-aqaba.com; King Hussein St; d standard/sea view/superior JD78/85/96; 🍷 🍷) Aqaba's finest, with lovely interiors, fine gardens and a huge pool and beach complex.

Radisson SAS Hotel (☎ 2012426; aqaba@radisson.com.jo; King Hussein St; s/d JD60/65, sea view add JD10; 🍷 🍷) A comfortable rather than opulent four-star option, with a small beach, kids entertainment centre and a beach bar-grill.

Eating

Aqaba's speciality is its fish, particularly the *sayadieh* – fish, delicately spiced, served with rice in an onion and tomato (or tahini) sauce.

Syrian Palace Restaurant (☎/fax 2014788; Raghadan St; mains JD2-6; 🕒 10am-midnight) This place offers good local and Syrian food at moderate prices.

Al-Tarboosh Restaurant (☎ 2018518; Raghadan St; pastries around 200 fils; 🕒 7.30am-midnight) This hole-in-the-wall pastry shop does a great range of meat, cheese and veggie pastries that are heated up in a huge oven.

National Restaurant (☎ 2012207; Zahran St; mains from JD2.500; 🕒 7.30am-midnight) Under Al-Kholi Hotel. This is a busy place and deservedly so. The meat and chicken dishes come with salads and hummus and are a great deal.

Al-Safarah Restaurant (King Hussein St; mains from JD1; 🕒 11am-10pm) One of two good open-air grills by the entry to the southern end of the public beach. Good shwarma meals and grilled chicken dishes make this the best value place in town.

Royal Yacht Club Restaurant (☎ 2022404; www.romero-restaurant.com; mains JD6-12; 🕒 noon-11.30pm) Situated in the Royal Yacht Club, and with views of the marina, this is an upmarket and romantic place to grab a drink and watch the sunset. The food is Italian.

Silk Road Restaurant (☎ 2033556; As-Sa'dah St; mains JD3-12.500; 🕒 noon-4pm & 6pm-2am) This is one of Aqaba's finest restaurants, with a lovely atmosphere and delicious seafood.

Drinking

Al-Fardos Coffee Shop (just off Zahran St; coffee 500 fils) A traditional outdoor café where local men sip coffee, play backgammon and watch Arabic music videos. Foreign women are welcome.

Baranda Lounge (☎ 077-7232444; Aqaba Gateway; beer JD3; 🕒 until 3am) This 'bar and a lounge' is

the coolest place in town with a lovely terrace that catches the sea breezes at night.

Getting There & Away

For information about crossing the border to/from Israel and the Palestinian Territories, see p405.

AIR

Royal Jordanian (☎ 2014477; www.rja.com.jo; Ash-Sherif al-Hussein bin Ali St; 🕒 9am-5pm Sun-Thu) Tickets to Amman cost JD39 one way.

BUS & MINIBUS

JETT (☎ 2015223; King Hussein St) operates buses (JD4.300, four hours) five times daily to Amman between 7am and 5pm.

Trust International Transport (☎ 2039480; An-Nahda St) has six daily buses to Amman (JD5, four hours) and three daily buses to Irbid (JD8, 5½ hours).

Minibuses to Wadi Musa (for Petra), (JD3, two hours) leave when full between 7am and 2pm; you may have to wait up to an hour for one to leave. Otherwise, get a connection in Ma'an (JD1.500, 80 minutes).

Two minibuses go to Wadi Rum (JD1.500, one hour) at around 6.30am and 11am. If nothing is going for a while, catch a minibus towards Ma'an, get off at the turn-off to Wadi Rum and take a minibus (JD1) or hitch a ride to Rum village.

All these minibuses leave from the main bus/minibus station on Ar-Reem St. Minibuses to Karak (JD2, three hours), via Safi and the Dead Sea Hwy, are the exception, leaving from the small station next to the mosque on Al-Humaimah St.

There is talk of moving the bus station to the northern outskirts of Aqaba.

SEA

For details of boat services between Aqaba and Nuweiba in Egypt, see p406.

SERVICE TAXIS

Service taxis run to Amman (three to four hours) for JD5 a seat. Chartering a taxi costs at least JD25 one way to Petra (1½ hours) and to Wadi Rum (one hour) return.

Getting Around

Minibuses (250 fils) leave from near the entrance to Aqaba castle on King Hussein St for the Royal Diving Club via the south-

ern beach camps, dive sites and the ferry terminal for boats to Egypt.

JORDAN DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Jordan offers a range of generally good-value accommodation. A bed in a shared room in a cheap hotel will cost around JD3 to JD5 and you can sometimes sleep on the hotel roof in summer for around JD2.500.

There is a good choice of midrange and top-end hotels in Amman, Aqaba and Wadi Musa (Petra), and usually at least one or two in other towns. A double costs from around JD20, although discounts are often available when things are quiet. The RSCN (p364) offers some of the country's most interesting accommodation options in nature reserves.

ACTIVITIES

Diving and snorkelling are popular pastimes in the Gulf of Aqaba – see p395 for more details.

Hiking is a great way to get off the beaten track, with Dana Nature Reserve, Wadi Rum Protected Area and Wadi Mujib Nature Reserve particularly worth the effort. Wadi Mujib in particular offers some great canyoning and rappelling. Wadi Rum is the Middle East's premier climbing destination.

For details of outdoor activities in Jordan's nature reserves check out the **Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature** (RSCN; www.rscn.org.jo).

BOOKS

Lonely Planet offers a detailed *Jordan* guide. *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, by TE Lawrence, describes Lawrence's epic adventures in Jordan before, during and after WWI (he wrote a substantial portion of the book in Amman). It's dense going at times.

Annie Caulfield's *Kingdom of the Film Stars: Journey into Jordan* is an entertaining, personal account of the author's relationship with a Bedouin man in Jordan.

Petra: Lost City of the Ancient World, by Christian Augé and Jean-Marie Dentzer, is an excellent and very portable background introduction to Petra.

Tony Howard and Di Taylor's books *Walking in Jordan* and *Walks & Scrambles in Rum* describe dozens of hikes in Jordan, from wadi walks to climbing routes up Jebel Rum.

BUSINESS HOURS

Government offices are open from 8am to 2pm Saturday to Thursday. Banks are open from 8.30am to 12.30pm and 4pm to 6pm Saturday to Thursday. Private businesses keep similar hours but are more flexible. Everything closes Friday lunchtime for weekly prayers.

PRACTICALITIES

- The daily *Jordan Times* (200 fils) and weekly *Star* (500 fils) are the two English-language newspapers and are worth a read.
- Major international daily newspapers and magazines, such as the *International Herald Tribune* (JD1.250), *Newsweek* (JD2.700), *Guardian Weekly* (JD1.500) and *Le Monde* (JD1.500) are available in bookshops in Amman, Madaba and Aqaba.
- Radio Jordan transmits in English on 855kHz and 96.3kHz FM in Amman, and 98.7kHz FM in Aqaba. It's mostly a pop music station. You can find the BBC World Service on 103.1 FM in Amman and 1323kHz AM across the country.
- Jordan TV broadcasts on three channels: two in Arabic, and one (Channel 2) almost exclusively in French and English. Satellite stations such as the BBC CNN, MTV and Al-Jazeera can be found in most midrange and luxury hotels, as well as the homes of most wealthy Jordanians.
- Jordan's electricity supply is 220V, 50 AC. Sockets are mostly of the European two-pronged variety, although some places use European three-pronged sockets.
- Jordan uses the metric system for weights and measures.

COURSES

Jordan isn't a bad place to study Arabic, though living costs are a little higher than in Egypt or Syria.

University of Jordan Language Center (☎ 06-535500, ext 3436; www.ju.edu.jo; University of Amman) Offers two-month summer courses (July to August) in Modern Standard Arabic for JD500, as well as four-month spring and autumn semesters for JD750. Tuition is 20 hours a week and there are six levels of proficiency.

Yarmouk University (☎ 02-7271111; www.yu.edu.jo; Irbid) Fourteen-week spring and autumn semesters cost US\$1500; subsequent courses and an intensive 10-week summer course are cheaper.

CUSTOMS

You can import 200 cigarettes and up to 1L of wine or spirits into Jordan duty free. There are no restrictions on the import and export of Jordanian or foreign currencies.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Jordan is very safe to visit and travel around, remarkably so considering the political turmoil surrounding it. There is very little crime or anti-Western sentiment.

There are fears that this could change. Al-Qaeda and, specifically, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, himself a Jordanian, were blamed for the November 2005 hotel suicide bombings in Amman, which killed dozens of people. You can expect security checks throughout the country to be increased in the wake of the attacks.

DISABLED TRAVELLERS

Jordanians happily help anyone with a disability but cities are crowded, traffic is chaotic and visiting most attractions, such as the vast archaeological sites of Petra and Jerash, involves long traverses of uneven ground.

Some travellers with a disability have reported having little difficulty getting around most of Petra on a combination of donkey, horse and carriage.

The Royal Diving Club (p396) south of Aqaba, is a member of the **Access to Marine Conservation for All** (AMCA; www.amca-international.org) initiative to enable people with disabilities to enjoy scuba diving and snorkelling.

DISCOUNT CARDS

Student discounts of 50% are available at numerous tourist sites, including Petra, if you have an international student card

such as ISIC, not just an ID card from a university.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Jordanian Embassies & Consulates

Following are the Jordanian embassies and consulates in major cities around the world. For addresses of Jordanian embassies and consulates in neighbouring Middle Eastern countries, see the relevant country chapter.

Australia (☎ 02-6295 9951; www.jordanembassy.org.au; 20 Roebuck St, Redhill, Canberra, ACT 2603)

Canada (☎ 613-238 8090; 100 Bronson Ave, Suite 701, Ottawa, Ontario ON K1R 6G8)

France (☎ 01 46 24 23 78; 80 Blvd Maurice Barres, 92200 Neuilly-Seine, Paris)

Germany (☎ 030-36 99 60 0; www.jordanembassy.de; Heerstrasse 201, 13595 Berlin) There's a consulate in Hanover.

Netherlands (☎ 070-416 7200; www.jordanembassy.nl; Badhuisweg 79, 2587 CD, The Hague)

UK (☎ 020-7937 3685, 0870-005 6952; www.jordanembassyuk.org; 6 Upper Phillimore Gardens, London, W8 7HB)

USA New York (☎ 212-832 0119; 866 Second Ave, 4th fl, New York, NY 10017); Washington DC (☎ 202-966 2664; www.jordanembassyus.org; 3504 International Dr NW, Washington DC 20008)

Embassies & Consulates in Jordan

Foreign embassies and consulates are in Amman (Egypt also has a consulate in Aqaba). They mostly open from 9am to 11am Sunday to Thursday for visa applications and from 1pm to 3pm for visa collections.

Australia (Map p366; ☎ 06-5807000; www.jordanembassy.gov.au; 3 Youssef Abu Shahhout, Deir Ghbar)

Egypt Amman (Map p370; ☎ 06-5605175; fax 06-5604082; 22 Qortubah St, btwn 4th & 5th Circles, Jebel Amman); Aqaba (Map p396; ☎ 03-2016171; cnr Al-Isteglal & Al-Akhatal Sts; ☎ 8am-3pm Sun-Thu)

France (Map p370; ☎ 06-4641273; www.ambafrance-jo.org; Al-Mutanabbi St, Jebel Amman)

Germany (Map p370; ☎ 06-5930367; fax 06-5685887; 31 Bin Ghazi St, btwn 4th and 5th Circles, Jebel Amman)

Iran (Map p370; ☎ 06-4641281; 28 Tawfiq Abu Al-Huda St, Jebel Amman)

Iraq (Map p370; ☎ 06-4623175; fax 06-4619172; Al-Kulliyah al-Islamiyah St, near 1st Circle, Jebel Amman)

Israel (Map p366; ☎ 06-5524686; Maysaloon St, Shmeisani)

Lebanon (Map p370; ☎ 06-5922911; fax 06-5929113; Al-Neel St, Abdoun)

Netherlands (Map p370; ☎ 06-5930525; www.netherlandsembassy.com.jo; 22 Ibrahim Ayoub St, Jebel Amman)

New Zealand (Map p368; ☎ 06-4636720; fax 06-4634349; 4th fl, Khalas Bldg, 99 Al-Malek al-Hussein St, Downtown)

Saudi Arabia (Map p370; ☎ 06-5920154; fax 06-5921154; 1st Circle, Jebel Amman)

Syria (Map p370; ☎ 06-5920648, 5920684; Al-Salloum St, near 4th Circle, Jebel Amman)

Turkey (Map p370; ☎ 06-4641251; 36 Al-Kulliyah al-Islamiyah St, Jebel Amman)

UK (Map p370; ☎ 06-5923100; www.britain.org.jo; Wadi Abdoun, Abdoun)

USA (Map p366; ☎ 06-5920101; http://usembassy-amman.org.jo; 20 Al-Umawiyeen St, Abdoun)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Jordan's best-known cultural event is the **Jerash Festival** (www.jerashfestival.com.jo), a programme of traditional music concerts and plays held in the spectacular Roman ruins of Jerash and Amman in July and August.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

There is some confusion over the legal status of homosexuality in Jordan. Most sources state that gay sex is not illegal and that the age of consent for both heterosexuals and homosexuals is 16.

There is a subdued underground gay scene in Amman, so if you're keen to explore it make very discreet inquiries. Public displays of affection by heterosexuals are frowned upon, and the same rules apply to gays and lesbians, although two men or two women holding hands is a normal sign of friendship.

Although the gay and lesbian scene is very much underground, there are a few places in Amman that are gay-friendly, such as the multipurpose Books@cafe (see p373) and Blue Fig Café (see p373), which pull in a young, mixed gay and straight crowd.

HOLIDAYS

In addition to the main Islamic holidays described on p647, Jordan observes the following holidays:

New Years Day 1 January

King Abdullah's Birthday 30 January

Arab League Day 22 March

Labour Day 1 May

Independence Day 25 May

Army Day & Anniversary of the Great Arab Revolt 10 June

King Hussein's Birthday 14 November

Christmas Day 25 December

INTERNET ACCESS

There are Internet cafés in almost every town in Jordan, with costs averaging JD1 per hour.

Connecting to the Internet from your hotel room is possible, although usually only at top-end and a few midrange hotels. **AOL** (local access number ☎ 06-5606241; www.aol.com) offers a local access number as part of its global roaming services.

INTERNET RESOURCES

For a comprehensive list of general Middle East websites see p24. Specific websites about Jordan include:

Jordan Jubilee (www.jordanjubilee.com) The best single website about Jordan, it offers loads of extra detail on Petra and Wadi Rum, among other practical tips.

Jordan Tourism Board (www.see-jordan.com) Good site with links to a range of Jordan-related websites.

Madaba (www.madaba.freesevers.com) Excellent description of Madaba's attractions and other nearby sites.

Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (www.tourism.jo) Lots of tourist information.

Nabataea.Net (http://nabataea.net) 'Everything you wanted to know about the Nabataean empire.'

RSCN/Wild Jordan (www.rscn.org.jo) Ecotourism adventures in Jordan's nature reserves.

LANGUAGE

Arabic is the official language of Jordan. English is widely spoken, however, and in most cases is sufficient to get by. For a list of Arabic words and phrases, see the Language chapter, p679.

LAUNDRY

There are good laundries (mostly dry cleaners) in Amman and Aqaba, although it's often easier to get your hotel to arrange it. Be prepared to pay JD3 for a 5kg load of washing – it comes back smelling better and folded more neatly than you could ever have hoped.

MAPS

The Jordan Tourism Board's free *Map of Jordan* will suffice for most people.

The Royal Geographic Centre of Jordan's 2005 *Map of Petra* (JD3) is worth getting if you intend to do any hiking there.

Jordan by Kümmerly & Frey is good, and probably the best if you're driving around Jordan. GEO Project's *Jordan* (1:730,000) includes an excellent map of Amman.

MONEY

The currency in Jordan is the dinar (JD) – known as the *jay-dee* among hip young locals – which is made up of 1000 fils. You will often hear *piastre* used, which is 10 fils. Often when a price is quoted, the ending will be omitted, so if you're told that something is 25, it's a matter of working out whether it's 25 fils, 25 piastre or 25 dinars! Although it sounds confusing, most Jordanians wouldn't dream of ripping off a foreigner, so just ask for clarification.

It's not difficult to change money in Jordan; most hard currencies are accepted. Below are the rates for a range of currencies when this book went to print.

Country	Unit	Dinar (JD)
Australia	A\$1	0.515
Canada	C\$1	0.601
Egypt	E£1	0.121
euro zone	€1	0.830
Israel & the Palestinian Territories	NIS1	0.149
Japan	¥100	0.609
New Zealand	NZ\$1	0.487
Syria	S£10	0.134
UK	UK£1	1.226
USA	US\$1	0.704

ATMs

It is possible to survive in Jordan almost entirely on cash advances as ATMs abound in all but the smallest towns. This is certainly the easiest way to travel (just don't forget your pin number!).

Banks that accept both Visa and MasterCard include the Arab Bank and Jordan Gulf Bank, while the Housing Bank for Trade & Finance, Cairo-Amman Bank and Jordan Islamic Bank have numerous ATMs for Visa. The Jordan National Bank and HSBC ATMs allow you to extract dinars from your MasterCard and are Cirrus compatible.

If an ATM swallows your card, call ☎ 06-5669123 (Amman).

Credit Cards

Credit cards are widely accepted in mid-range and top-end hotels and restaurants and a few top-end shops but check whether a commission (of up to 5%) is added. In general you'll find it most useful to use your credit card to get cash from ATMs.

Moneychangers

There are plenty of moneychangers in Amman, Aqaba and Irbid, which are useful because they keep longer hours than the banks. Many only deal in cash but some take travellers cheques, usually for a commission. Always check the rates at banks or in the English-language newspapers before changing.

Syrian, Lebanese, Egyptian, Israeli and Iraqi currency can all be changed in Amman, usually at reasonable rates though you may have to shop around. Egyptian and Israeli currency is also easily changed in Aqaba.

Tippling

Tips of 10% are generally expected in the better restaurants and loose change is usually appreciated by low-paid workers in cheaper places. A service charge of 10% is automatically added to most midrange and top-end restaurants.

Travellers Cheques

Travellers cheques are easily cashed by banks and some moneychangers, though commissions vary considerably so shop around. American Express travellers cheques seem to be the most widely accepted.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Reputable brands of film are widely available in Jordan, as are camera batteries and digital memory cards. Prices are similar to what you'd pay at home. Slide film is becoming increasingly hard to find (JD5 to JD8 for 36-exposures).

POST

Normal-sized letters and postcards cost 325 fils to the Middle East, 475 fils to the UK and Europe and 625 fils to the USA and Australia.

Parcel post is ridiculously expensive but efficient. A 1kg parcel to Australia costs around JD11.600, with each subsequent kilogram JD6.200. To the UK and Europe, the first kilogram is JD12.350 and each kilogram thereafter JD3.400. To the US and Canada, it costs JD12.800 per 1kg, and JD7 for each additional kilogram.

For typically reliable but expensive express mail services try **FedEx** (Map p366; ☎ 06-5511460; fax 5531232; Nasser bin Jameel St, Amman) and **DHL** (Amman Map p366; ☎ 06-5857136; info@amm-co

.jo.dhl.com; behind C-Town Shopping Centre, 7th Circle, Amman; Aqaba Map p396; ☎ 03-2012039; Al-Petra St).

SOLO TRAVELLERS

There's not much of a backpacker scene in Jordan, except in Wadi Musa and, to a small extent, Amman. The tours run by the budget hotels in Amman are a good way to share travel expenses and meet other travellers.

Single rooms are generally much smaller than doubles so always try to negotiate a double room for a single price.

TELEPHONE

The local telephone system is quite reliable. For directory assistance, call ☎ 121. Local calls cost around 100 fils. The easiest place to make a local call is your hotel.

Overseas calls are cheapest at private telecommunication centres, which often consist of little more than a guy with a sign and a mobile phone! These international calls range from 150 fils to 500 fils per minute. Local phonecards are more expensive for international calls.

Mobile Phones

Jordan is covered by the GSM cellular network. Mobile telephones can be rented from companies such as **Mobilcom** (☎ 5857777; www.mobilecom.jo) or contact **Fastlink** (☎ 06-5512010; www.fastlink.com.jo). Rates for signing up can start at JD60 including 20 minutes mobile-to-mobile time or 50 minutes mobile-to-land time. If you have your own phone and purchase a local sim card, expect to pay around JD25 to get started.

Phone Codes

Jordan's country code is ☎ 962, followed by the local area code (minus the zero), then the subscriber number. For local area codes, see the start of each city or town section.

TOILETS

Many hotels and restaurants, except those in the budget category, have Western-style toilets. In most others you'll be using squat toilets with either a hose or water bucket provided for flushing.

There is also usually a receptacle for toilet paper – use it or the toilet's contents will return to you as an overflow on the floor. Public toilets are to be avoided except in cases of extreme emergency.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Jordan runs a good network of visitors centres inside the country. You can get most information from the website of the **Jordan Tourism Board** (www.see-jordan.com). The following offices abroad will post you a package of brochures and maps if you contact them in advance:

France ☎ 01-55 60 94 46; gsv@article.com; 122 rue Paris, 92100 Boulogne-Billancourt, Paris)

Germany ☎ 069-9231 8870; jordan@adam-partner.de; Weser Str 4, 60329 Frankfurt)

UK ☎ 020-7371 6496, brochure hotline ☎ 0870-7706933; info@jordantourismboard.co.uk; 115 Hammer-smith Rd, London, W14 0QH)

USA (toll-free ☎ 1-877-SEEJORDAN, 703-2437404; www.seejordan.org; Suite 102, 6867 Elm St, McLean, VA 22101)

VISAS

Visas are required by all foreigners entering Jordan. These are issued at both the border and airport on arrival (JD10) or can be easily obtained from Jordanian embassies or consulates outside the country. The cost is usually around US\$20/40 for single-/multiple-entry visas, two photos are typically required, and the visa is issued within 24 hours. The only reason to apply for a visa from a Jordanian embassy or consulate is if you wish to obtain a multiple-entry visa, as these are not issued at the border, or if you plan to arrive from Israel and the Palestinian Territories via the King Hussein Bridge, where visas are not issued.

One exception worth knowing about is that if you arrive in Aqaba by sea from Nuweiba in Egypt (and, in theory, by land from Eilat in Israel) your visa should be free because Aqaba has been designated as a Special Economic Zone set up for free trade. You will have to register at the ASEZA office in Aqaba (see p395) if you plan to stay in Jordan for more than 15 days.

Tourist visas are now generally valid for a stay of up to a month from the date of entry. If you want to stay more than a month you must register with the police in Amman (p369) or Aqaba (p395), who will give you an extension for a stay of up to three months.

Check your visa, as until mid-2005 foreigners had to register with police within two weeks and regulations may change again. For details of visas for other Middle Eastern countries, see the table on p653.

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Most women who travel around Jordan experience no problems, although there have been some reports of varying levels of sexual harassment. Women will feel uncomfortable on any of the public beaches in Aqaba. Many restaurants usher female customers into their family areas where single men are not permitted. Women travellers should avoid hitching. For both men and women, dress should be modest; baggy trousers or skirts and modest shirts or blouses are acceptable in most circumstances.

Attitudes to women vary greatly throughout the country. In the upmarket districts of Amman, women are treated the same as they would be in any Western country, whereas in rural areas more traditional attitudes and dress codes prevail.

WORK

Work is not really an option for most foreigners passing through Jordan. Those hoping to work with Palestinian refugees might have luck with the public information office of the **United Nations Reliefs & Works Agency** (UNRWA; Map p366; ☎ 06-5609100, ext 165; jorpio@unrwa.org; Al-Zubeidi Bldg, Mustapha bin Abdullah St, Shmeisani, Amman); contact them at least three months in advance.

The only other alternative is occasional vacancies for English teachers at the **British Council** (Map p370; ☎ 4636147; www.britishcouncil.org.jo) or the **American Language Center** (☎ 06-5523901; www.alc.edu.jo) but you need to have solid teaching experience.

TRANSPORT IN JORDAN

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Entering the country

For information on Jordanian visas and entry requirements, see Visas, p403.

Air

The main international airport is **Queen Alia International Airport** (☎ 4452000), 35km south of Amman. Flights to Sharm el-Sheikh and occasional charters to Paris serve the smaller Aqaba airport.

Royal Jordanian (Map p366 ☎ 5678321; www.rja.com.jo; 9th fl, Housing Bank Centre, Shmeisani, Amman) is the excellent and reliable national carrier, but from the main European capitals you

can generally get cheaper deals with other airlines. In Amman there are more convenient offices in the Jordan InterContinental Hotel on **Al-Kulliyah al-Islamiyah St** (Map p370; ☎ 4644267) and along **Al-Malek al-Hussein St** (Map p370; ☎ 5663325), uphill from the Abdali bus station.

The Amman contact details of other airlines flying to/from Jordan are as follows: **Air France** (Map p366; airline code AF; ☎ 5666055; www.airfrance.com) Hub: Charles de Gaulle International Airport, Paris.

British Airways (Map p366; airline code BA; ☎ 5828801; www.ba.com) Hub: Heathrow Airport, London.

Emirates (Map p370; airline code EK; ☎ 4615222; www.emirates.com) Hub: Dubai.

Gulf Air (Map p370; airline code GF; ☎ 4653613; www.gulfairco.com) Hub: Bahrain.

KLM (Map p368; airline code KL; ☎ 4655267; www.klm.com) Hub: Schiphol Airport, Amsterdam.

Kuwait Airways (Map p366; airline code KU; ☎ 5685246; www.kuwait-airways.com) Hub: Kuwait City.

Lufthansa Airlines (Map p366; airline code LH; ☎ 5601744; www.lufthansa.com) Hub: Frankfurt.

Middle East Airlines (Map p368; airline code ME; ☎ 4603500; www.mea.com.lb) Hub: Beirut.

Qatar Airways (Map p366; airline code QR; ☎ 5656682; www.qatarairways.com) Hub: Doha.

Turkish Airlines (Map p370; airline code TK; ☎ 4659102; www.turkishairlines.com) Hub: Istanbul.

One-way regional airfares from Amman include: Baghdad (JD380), Beirut (JD100), Cairo (JD135), Damascus (JD70), Istanbul (JD180) and Tel Aviv (JD80).

Land

Middle Eastern politics being what it is, all border crossing information should be considered highly perishable – things can alter at short notice so always check the situation before setting out.

IRAQ

Minibuses and service taxis leave from Amman's Abdali bus station for Baghdad but the lack of security along the highway (via

Fallujah) made this an extremely dangerous option at time of research.

ISRAEL & THE PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

Since the peace treaty between Jordan and Israel was signed in 1994, three border crossings opened to foreigners (detailed following). Border crossings may be closed on the Israeli holiday of Yom Kippur and on the main days of Islamic New Year and Eid al-Fitr.

Trust International Transport (p375) has bus services from Amman to Nazareth (JD18), Haifa (JD18) and Tel Aviv (JD21) daily except Saturday. Trust also offers services from its offices in Irbid to Tel Aviv (JD21) and Nazareth (JD14).

It is also worth noting that one-month Israeli visas are issued at the Wadi Araba (Rabin) and Sheikh Hussein Bridge crossings, but those issued at the King Hussein Bridge are usually for three months.

King Hussein Bridge Crossing

Also known as Jisr al-Malek Hussein or Allenby Bridge, this **border crossing** (☎ 8am-2.30pm Sun-Thu, 8am-11.45pm Fri & Sat) offers travellers the most direct route between Amman and Jerusalem or Tel Aviv. Public transport doesn't run during the Jewish Shabbat (sunset Friday to sunset Saturday).

Due to the ongoing intifada (uprising) in the Palestinian Territories, no Jordanian buses were offering services across the King Hussein Bridge at the time of research, using the other crossings to avoid the West Bank. Instead you must take a service taxi from Amman's Abdali bus station to the King Hussein Bridge (JD2 per seat, 45 minutes) or the sole daily JETT bus (JD6.500, one hour) at 6.30am. Once at the crossing, service buses shuttle you across the border (JD2). The ride to the Israel and Palestinian Territories side, although extremely short, can seem to last an eternity with repeated stops for passport and bag checks. At the time of research, it was not possible to walk, hitch or take a private car across. There are money-changing facilities on your way to the exit.

If you wish to return to Jordan while your Jordanian visa is still valid, you need only keep the stamped exit slip and present it on returning via the same crossing (it won't work at the other crossings). At the Israeli

border post, you may have to plead with officials to stamp the Jordanian exit slip rather than your passport, especially if you intend going on to Syria and/or Lebanon – if you are, there must be no evidence of any trip to Israel in your passport, including any evidence at all that you have used any of Jordan's border crossings with Israel and the Palestinian Territories. For more information see p353.

To get to Jerusalem from the border, you can catch *sherut* (shared taxis) to Damascus Gate or take a cheaper bus to Jericho and then a *sherut* on to Damascus Gate. Be warned, much of the public transport in the West Bank was not running when we were there recently.

Sheikh Hussein Bridge Crossing

Also known as Jisr Sheikh Hussein or Jordan Bridge, this northernmost **border crossing** (☎ 6.30am-10pm Sun-Thu, 8am-8pm Fri & Sat) into Israel is the least used of the three crossings. It links northern Jordan with Beit She'an in Galilee.

Service taxis and minibuses leave the Irbid's west bus station for the border (750 fkm, 45 minutes). From the bridge it's a 2km walk (or hitch) to the Israeli side from where you take a taxi to the Beit She'an bus station for onward connections inside Israel.

Wadi Araba (Arava) Crossing

This handy **border crossing** (☎ 6.30am-10pm Sun-Thu, 8am-8pm Fri & Sat) in the south of the country links Aqaba to Eilat; it's known as the Rabin crossing to the Israelis. To get there from Aqaba you'll probably have to take a taxi (JD5). Once at the border you just walk across. On the other side, central Eilat is only 2km away. Bus 16 runs from the crossing to Eilat's central bus station or you can take a taxi (50NIS).

SYRIA

Bus

The border crossings between Jordan and Syria are at Ramtha/Der'a and Jabir/Nasib.

Air-conditioned JETT buses make the journey between Amman (Abdali) and Damascus (JD5, seven hours) twice a day in either direction and there's a daily afternoon service to Aleppo (JD7.500). Book a day in advance for either.

DEPARTURE TAX

At the time of research, the departure tax from Jordan was JD5. If you are in the country for less than 72 hours, you are usually exempt from the tax.

If you want to travel directly between Damascus and Amman, it's worth taking the direct bus or service taxi but it is also possible to take a bus from Irbid's South bus station to Ramtha (250 fils), another minibus or service taxi to the border and then transport to Der'a and Damascus beyond. This main reason to travel this way is if you want to stop off en route at Ezra'a and Bosra ash-Sham in Syria, or Jerash and Umm Qais in Jordan.

The Palace Hotel (p372) in Amman offers a useful minibus tour from Amman to Damascus, with stops in Jerash, Bosra and Shaba. You'll need a minimum of four passengers and the price should be around JD20 per person.

Service Taxi

The enormous yellow *servees* (shared taxis) leave regularly throughout the day from the lower (eastern) end of the Abdali bus station for Damascus (JD6). They generally cross at Jabir. From Irbid's south bus station, service taxis go to Damascus (JD4.500).

Train

A biweekly train service still leaves Amman for Damascus (JD3) along the Hejaz Railway on Monday and Thursday at 8am, but few travellers go this way as the dawdling service takes all day, with a change of trains at the border. The quaint old station is on King Abdullah I St, about 2.5km east of Raghadan bus station in Amman. The **ticket office** (☎ 06-4895413) is really only open from 7am on the morning of departure, although you may find someone around at other times. To get to the station, take a service taxi from Raghadan bus station, or a private taxi (around 800 fils).

Sea

There are two boat services from Aqaba to Nuweiba in Egypt. With both, departure times can be subject to change so call the **passenger terminal** (☎ 2013240; www.abmaritime.com.jo/english) before travelling and arrive at least 90 minutes before departure. It's no problem to buy your tickets at the ferry port on the morning of departure (you'll need your passport).

The fast boat (one hour) leaves daily except Saturday and costs US\$36/JD26.

There is also a slower (three hours or more) ferry service which officially leaves at noon but often doesn't get going until 5pm or later. Some days it doesn't leave at all. Tickets cost US\$25/JD18.

Children aged two to 12 pay about half price for both services. Fares from Nuweiba are significantly more expensive and must be paid for in US dollars.

There is a sporadically run twice-weekly catamaran trip between Aqaba and Sharm el-Sheikh (officially US\$45, three hours) but this wasn't operating at the time of research.

There are money exchange facilities at the terminals at Nuweiba and Aqaba, primarily for buying visas on arrival. The Jordanian side offers a decent exchange rate but avoid travellers cheques, which attract a huge commission. You can get an Egyptian visa on arrival at Nuweiba but be sure to ask for a full visa, not one that covers Sinai only. Passports are collected on the boat in both directions and handed back on arrival at immigration.

GETTING AROUND Air

Jordan is such a small country that there is only one domestic air route, between Amman and Aqaba (JD39 one way).

Royal Jordanian operates flights to Amman's Queen Alia International Airport on Fridays and Saturdays. **Royal Wings** (www.royalwings.com.jo), a subsidiary of Royal Jordanian, flies daily between Aqaba and Amman's Marka airport (airport code ADJ), a smaller civil airport in the eastern suburbs of Amman. You can buy tickets for either airline at any travel agency or Royal Jordanian office.

Bicycle

Cycling is an option in Jordan but not necessarily a fun one. In summer the desert is not a good place to indulge in strenuous activity, and cyclists on the King's Hwy have reported stone-throwing by groups of young children. Cycling north or south can be hard work as there is a strong prevailing western wind that can wear you down. Anywhere from the East Bank plateau down to the Dead Sea or Jordan Valley makes for exhilarating descents, but coming the other way will really test your calf muscles. Bring plenty of spare parts (see p666).

Bus

The national bus company JETT operates the most comfortable bus service from Amman to Aqaba (and King Hussein Bridge border crossing). Services to Petra and Hammamat Ma'in are not running at present but may resume as tourism picks up again (see p375 for details).

Other reliable companies with regular services from Amman include Trust International Transport and Afana (both to Aqaba), and Hijazi (to Irbid).

Just about all towns in Jordan are connected by 20-seat minibuses, although the King's Hwy and eastern Jordan are less well served. These minibuses leave when full so you may spend an hour or more waiting for the seats to fill up. Overcharging tourists is rare except on routes to and from Wadi Musa (for Petra), where drivers will probably try to charge you extra for 'luggage'.

Car & Motorcycle

Hiring a car is an ideal way to get the most out of Jordan. Distances are generally short and you'll have freedom to explore off the beaten track. Road conditions are generally good outside Amman.

DRIVING LICENCE

International Driving Permits (IDPs) are not needed. If you're driving, keep your driving licence, rental or ownership papers, and car registration in an easily accessible place.

FUEL & SPARE PARTS

Petrol is available along the Desert and King's Hwys and in most sizable towns. Expect to pay about 350/450 fils for a litre of regular/super, though prices are rising weekly. Best of luck if you're looking for unleaded. Diesel is about 150 fils a litre.

Motorcyclists should be aware that there are precious few mechanics in Jordan able to deal with the average modern motorcycle and its problems.

HIRE

The following are some of the more reliable agencies. Charges, conditions, drop-off fees, insurance costs and waiver fees in case of accident vary considerably so shop around. Daily rates run at around JD25 to JD30, weekly rates at JD140 to JD200. You can

normally drop off the rental car in another city (eg Aqaba), for a fee of around JD20.

Always read your contract carefully before signing; remember that many places require a minimum three days hire and all require a deposit of up to JD400 payable upon pick-up and refunded upon the return of the car.

Avis (Map p366; ☎ 5699420, 24hr ☎ 777-397405; www.avis.com.jo; King Abdullah Gardens, Amman) Offices at King Hussein Bridge and Aqaba, and branches at the airport, Le Royal Hotel and Jordan InterContinental Hotel. The biggest car hire company in Jordan.

Budget (Map p366; ☎ 5698131; budget@go.com.jo; 125 Abdul Hameed Sharaf St, Amman)

Europcar (Map p366; ☎ 5655581, 800-22270; www.europcar.jo; Isam Al-Ajlouni St, Amman) Branches at Radisson SAS, King Abdullah Gardens and in Aqaba (Map p396).

Firas/Alamo Car Rental (Map p370; ☎ 4612927, 079-5846454; alamo@nets.com.jo; 1st Circle, Amman)

Hertz (Map p366; ☎ 5624191, 24hr line at airport ☎ 4711771; www.hertz.com; King Abdullah Gardens, Amman) Offices at the airport, Grand Hyatt Amman, Sheraton and in Aqaba (Map p396).

Reliable Rent-a-Car (Map p366; ☎ 5929676, 079-5521358; www.reliable.com.jo; 19 Fawzi al-Qawegli St, Amman) Cars JD20 to JD25. Offers free drop-off and pick-up in Madaba or the airport, will deliver the car to you anywhere in Amman and will even drive you to the edge of town if you are nervous about Amman traffic. Contact Mohammed Hallak.

INSURANCE

All car rentals come with some kind of insurance but you should find out how much your excess is (ie the maximum you will have to pay in case of an accident). This may be as high as JD350. For JD5 to JD10 extra per day you can buy Collision Damage Waiver (CDW) which takes your deductible down to zero, or sometimes JD100.

ROAD RULES

Vehicles drive on the right-hand side of the road in Jordan, at least in theory. The general speed limit inside built-up areas is 50km/h or 70km/h on multilane highways in Amman, and 90km/h to 110km/h on the highways. Note that indicators are seldom used, rules are occasionally obeyed, the ubiquitous horn is a useful warning signal and pedestrians must take their chances. Wearing a seat belt is now compulsory.

Keep your passport, drivers licence, rental agreement and registration papers handy, especially along the Dead Sea Hwy, where there are quite a few police checkpoints.

Hitching

For information on hitching see p670.

Local Transport

BUS

Local city buses are generally packed, routes are confusing and the chances of being pickpocketed are higher. Take a service taxi instead.

TAXI

Private (yellow) taxis are quite cheap although only those in Amman use the meters.

White *servees* are a little more expensive than minibuses and don't cover as many routes, but they're generally faster and take less time to fill up (there are generally only four seats). Inside cities like Amman, service taxis offer extensive coverage and are a good alternative to walking or taking private taxis. For more details, see p376 and p376.

Tours

The Cliff, (p372) Farah (p372) and Palace (p372) hotels in Amman offer useful day trips from the capital. The most popular ones run to the desert castles (JD10 per person); to Jerash, Ajlun and Umm Qais (JD13 per person); and along the King's Hwy to Petra, via Madaba, Mt Nebo, Mujib Gorge, Karak and Shobak (JD15 to JD25 per person). We've received varying reports about the quality of such tours so it's worth asking other travellers before deciding. The tours are really just transport so don't expect much from the guide.

One option that has been recommended by readers is the tour that leaves Amman at 8.30am and travels to Petra (9½ hours) via Madaba, Wadi Mujib, Karak, Shobak and Dana with time spent at each of the various sites. The Mariam Hotel (p385) in Madaba can arrange a similar itinerary.

There are a few tour companies with a good reputation for comprehensive (but more expensive) tours around Jordan; try **International Traders** (☎ 06-5607075) in Amman and Aqaba or alternatively call **Petra Moon** (☎ 03-2156665; eid@petramoon.com) in Wadi Musa.