Tour Code
JS10

ADVENTURESABROAD

JORDAN & SYRIA

Desert Sands & Ancient Wonders

16 days

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Day 1 Arrive in Amman

Welcome to Amman, Jordan's vibrant capital. As we begin our journey, take in the sights and sounds of this ancient city, where traditional and modern culture blend together. Over the coming days, we'll explore Jordan's iconic sites, meet its warm people, and experience the famous hospitality.

Overnight in Amman.

Included Meal(s): Dinner

Day 2 Amman: Jerash & Amman City Tour

We begin by exploring the heart of modern central Amman, starting with the Archaeological Museum where fascinating artefacts reveal the region's layered history from prehistoric times through Islamic periods. We then encounter the impressive Roman Amphitheatre, a magnificent 2nd-century structure carved into the hillside with capacity for 6,000 spectators. This remarkably preserved monument still hosts performances today. We also wander through ruins of the Temple of Hercules atop the Citadel, where massive stone columns frame panoramic views across the sprawling modern city below, offering perspective on how ancient Philadelphia has evolved into contemporary Amman.

After our Amman exploration, we board our bus and journey north to extraordinary Jerash, considered one of the best-preserved Roman provincial cities in the world. During its heyday as part of the Decapolis - a league of ten great Roman cities - Jerash prospered through agriculture and trade. Remarkably, much remains visible today.

We stroll through the unusual elliptical forum, a design rarely seen in Roman architecture, then explore the grand South Theatre where acoustics still astound visitors. Even a whisper from the stage carries clearly to the highest seats. We walk the Cardo, the columned main street, imagining chariot wheels on ancient paving stones. The Temple of Artemis showcases true Roman grandeur - its surviving columns tower overhead, giving genuine sense of this prosperous city's scale and ambition.

We enjoy our evening meal en route back to Amman, making efficient use of travel time after this full day of Roman archaeological discoveries.

Overnight in Amman.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Amman - Madaba - Mt Nebo - Shobak - Petra

We get an early start this morning for a full day of travel and sightseeing. Our first stop is Madaba, a town justly renowned for its mosaic floors. Our first stop is St. George's Church, home to an impressive 6th-century mosaic map of the Holy Land. This cartographic masterpiece depicts Jerusalem, the Dead Sea, and the River Jordan in remarkable detail - a historical atlas laid out beneath our feet.

Next we travel to Mount Nebo, perched on the edge of the Jordan Valley. According to biblical tradition, this is where Moses and the Children of Israel first glimpsed the Promised Land. On clear days, the views stretch across the Dead Sea, the Jordan River, and even Jerusalem beyond. We also examine another large mosaic depicting hunting scenes, found in the remains of a Byzantine church.

From Mount Nebo, we head south, following a route where castles and towns were once conveniently spaced a day's travel apart. Later in the day we explore Shobak Castle, a Crusader fortress built in 1115 and later captured by Saladin's forces. The weathered stone walls and strategic position remind us of turbulent times when this region witnessed constant conflicts between Crusaders and Muslim armies.

Finally, after our full day of mosaics, biblical vistas, and medieval fortresses, we arrive at Petra, ready to rest before exploring that remarkable site.

Overnight in Petra.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Petra: Site Tour

Petra served as capital of the Nabataean Kingdom from the 4th century BCE to the 2nd century CE, controlling lucrative trade routes that brought frankincense from Arabia, spices from India, and silk from China through this hidden valley. After the kingdom's decline, Petra faded from Western knowledge for centuries, becoming a closely guarded secret of local Bedouin tribes. When Swiss explorer Johann Ludwig Burckhardt "rediscovered" it in 1812, he revealed to an astonished world this 'rose red city half as old as time' - a site rivalling Egypt's pyramids in grandeur.

Our approach through the Siq creates unforgettable drama. This narrow gorge twists between towering rock walls that rise over 80 metres overhead, sometimes squeezing so close that only a sliver of sky remains visible. Ancient water channels carved into the walls once brought water from distant springs. After nearly a kilometre of anticipation, the gorge suddenly opens and there stands the Treasury (El Khazneh) - an impossibly graceful façade carved from living rose-pink rock. Morning light illuminates its Hellenistic columns and elaborate pediments, revealing artistry that seems too delicate for such colossal scale.

Beyond, the valley widens into a vast necropolis. Elaborate tomb façades pierce multi-coloured cliff faces where sandstone swirls in shades of red, orange, yellow, pink and white - nature's abstract art. The Roman amphitheatre, carved directly from mountainside, seats 3,000 spectators. We continue to the Royal Tombs including the massive Palace Tomb and colour-streaked Silk Tomb. We visit the temple of Dushara, the Nabataeans' supreme deity, and explore the Temple of the Winged Lion before our formal tour concludes at the excellent Petra Nabataean Museum.

You may now explore independently. The strenuous climb to El Deir (the Monastery) - involving 750 rock-cut steps and approximately one hour ascending - rewards the determined with Petra's largest façade and spectacular valley views.

NOTE: Experiencing Petra requires considerable walking on uneven paths with limited shade. We include lunch on-site today instead of dinner, maximising exploration time while providing a proper sit-down meal. Your Tour Leader assists with evening meal arrangements in Wadi Musa village (not included).

Overnight at Petra.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 5 Petra: El Beidha & Leisure Time

This morning we take a short journey by coach to 'el Beidha', affectionately known as 'Little Petra'. This charming Nabataean site served as a suburb and trading post for ancient Petra, where caravans arriving from Arabia would rest before entering the main city. The miniature siq (gorge) and rock-cut façades echo Petra's grander architecture in more intimate scale, making it feel like a secret annex to the main wonder.

What makes el Beidha truly extraordinary lies beneath the Nabataean remains. Here archaeologists have uncovered evidence of a Neolithic settlement dating back a staggering 8,500 years - one of the oldest sites in the entire Middle East. These "Pre-Pottery" people were among humanity's first experiments in settled agriculture, transitioning from purely nomadic hunting and gathering to cultivating crops and domesticating animals. Stone foundations reveal round houses that gradually evolved into rectangular structures as architecture developed. Storage bins, grinding stones, and decorated walls show how these pioneers created permanent community life in this challenging environment. Standing here connects us to the very dawn of civilisation, long before pharaohs, long before written language existed.

Returning to our hotel by late morning, the remainder of the day is yours to enjoy at leisure. You might relax by the pool, explore Wadi Musa's shops and cafés, or return independently to Petra's main site for further exploration. The site offers numerous scenic walks and optional hikes for those with energy remaining - the High Place of Sacrifice trail provides spectacular aerial views, while various tomb groups reward curious wanderers. Your Tour Leader happily provides suggestions, directions, and practical advice for independent exploration.

Overnight at Petra.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Petra - Wadi Rum

This morning we depart Petra and journey south toward Wadi Rum, descending into a landscape that seems from another world. As we approach, the desert reveals itself gradually - first as distant crimson smudges on the horizon, then as towering sandstone mountains rising like ancient sentinels from the desert floor. This is the legendary landscape where T.E. Lawrence rallied Bedouin tribes during the Arab Revolt, a place he described as "vast, echoing, and god-like."

After lunch, we transfer to smaller 4x4 trucks driven by local Bedouin guides who know every canyon and dune. Wadi Rum's otherworldly beauty unfolds around us - sand glowing in shades of deep red and burnt orange, coloured by iron oxide oxidised over millions of years. Towering rock formations, some reaching 1,750 metres (5,740 feet), loom like giant sculptures, their stratified layers telling stories of ancient seas. Wind-carved arches pierce the massifs, while narrow canyons slice through like knife cuts.

We may visit a traditional goat-hair Bedouin tent, ducking inside to share sweet tea with tribesmen whose ancestors formed Lawrence's irregular army. The Hejaz Railway line he famously sabotaged still runs along the valley floor. Our three-hour excursion follows the "Siq Al Barra and Om Eshreen" route through this geological masterpiece.

As sunset approaches, we reach our luxury tented camp where traditional Bedouin hospitality meets modern comfort. Tonight we dine under a canopy of stars so brilliant the Milky Way stretches across the sky like a celestial river.

Overnight in Wadi Rum.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 7 Wadi Rum - Dead Sea

Today we travel north along the Dead Sea Highway through historically rich territory deeply connected to biblical narratives. This region witnessed the footsteps of King David, King Herod, Jesus, and John the Baptist. Even the legendary Cleopatra recognised the Dead Sea's extraordinary properties. Historical accounts suggest she secured exclusive rights to build cosmetic and pharmaceutical factories along these shores during the Egyptian conquest, understanding what modern science confirms - these mineral-rich waters and muds possess remarkable therapeutic qualities.

Later, the ingenious Nabataeans discovered the value of bitumen that naturally seeped from the Dead Sea's waters. The Egyptians prized this substance for mummification, creating a lucrative trade route that enriched the Nabataean kingdom.

We aim to arrive at our Dead Sea resort in time for lunch, which you can enjoy at your leisure by the pool or in the restaurant overlooking the water. The hotel sits directly on the shore at approximately 430 metres (1,410 feet) below sea level - Earth's lowest land point. This extreme elevation creates a unique atmospheric pressure and oxygen-rich environment that some find therapeutic.

This afternoon offers the perfect opportunity to experience the Dead Sea's remarkable buoyancy firsthand. The water contains roughly 34% salinity - nearly ten times saltier than oceans - making it impossible to sink. Floating effortlessly provides a peculiar, almost surreal sensation. The mineral-rich mud is famous for therapeutic properties; many guests enjoy applying it as a natural spa treatment before rinsing in the salty waters.

Overnight at the Dead Sea.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Dead Sea - Amman Airport, Jordan - Fly to Damascus, Syria

Today we transfer from the Dead Sea to Amman Airport for our short flight to Damascus, Syria.

Flight-time permitting, our Syrian adventure begins immediately upon arrival. Our bus will drop us at the historic Bab Touma (and then deliver our luggage to the hotel), an iconic north-eastern gate, steeped in centuries of history, serving as the gateway to the old city's charming Christian quarter. We'll wander along the ancient, cobblestone roadway, a path that has witnessed the ebb and flow of countless generations. The air is filled with the vibrant energy of old Damascus, a sensory feast of sights, sounds, and aromas. Our leisurely walk will weave through the heart of this historic district, offering glimpses into the daily life of its residents. We'll pass by traditional homes, hidden courtyards, and perhaps even catch the melodic sounds of church bells.

Our destination is a charming boutique hotel, nestled within the labyrinthine alleyways of old Damascus.

Overnight in Damascus.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Damascus: City Touring

Today we begin our exploration (by bus and on foot) with a drive up Mount Qassioun.* As we ascend, you'll notice the city of Damascus gradually spread out below us. Upon reaching the summit, we'll take a moment to appreciate the panoramic view. It's a great opportunity to get a sense of the city's scale and history, and maybe even find a good spot for a photo or two. It's not about 'unforgettable experiences', but rather a chance to simply observe and reflect on the city's layout.

Next, we'll drive down to the National Museum. Here, we'll wander through the exhibits, taking in the archaeological treasures that offer a glimpse into Syria's long and varied past. It's a chance to connect with the region's history, and perhaps learn a little something along the way. After the museum, we'll stretch our legs with a short walk into the old town of Damascus. You'll see remnants of the city's fortifications, including walls, towers, and gates, and of course, the imposing Damascus Citadel.

Continuing our journey, we'll visit the Hidjaz Railway Station. This historic site, built in the early 20th century, served as a key hub for the Hijaz Railway, connecting Damascus to Mecca. It's a reminder of a time when railways played a crucial role in transportation and pilgrimage. Then, we'll move on to Marjeh Square, the heart of Damascus. This bustling public space holds significant historical and cultural importance for the city. It's a place where you can observe daily life unfolding, and perhaps get a feel for the city's vibrant energy.

From there, we'll delve into the Souq al-Hamidiyeh, a renowned covered bazaar and ancient marketplace. Here, local culture comes alive. We can wander through the stalls, taking in the sights, sounds, and smells of this bustling market. It's a great place to pick up a souvenir, or simply observe the local commerce.

Next, we'll visit the Umayyad Mosque, an iconic landmark and a significant cultural and spiritual centre. Inside, we'll see the Shrine of John the Baptist. Adjacent to the mosque, we'll also pay a visit to the Mausoleum of Saladin, a historical figure of great importance. We'll then stop at the Al-Seida Raqiyeh Mosque, an important Shia pilgrimage site. It's a place of devotion and reflection, and a significant part of the city's religious landscape.

Finally, we'll wrap up our day with a stop at the historic Al Nafoorah coffeehouse. Here, we can relax, enjoy a traditional coffee or tea, and reflect on the day's experiences. It's a chance to soak in the atmosphere and perhaps chat about what we've seen. We'll be able to watch the world go by for a relaxing end to our day.

* If the route is closed due to ongoing upgrades, we will begin our day at the National Museum.

Overnight in Damascus.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Damascus: Touring Continued

Today we begin by descending into St. Ananias Chapel (today's sightseeing will be conducted on foot). It's a humble space, but one with a strong sense of history. This 1st-century Christian place of worship is believed to be where the Apostle Paul regained his sight after his experience on the road to Damascus. Next, we'll visit St. Paul's Church, a significant pilgrimage site for Christians. It's connected to the conversion of the Apostle Paul, a figure whose transformation had a profound impact on early Christianity. You can see how this space has been important to people over many years.

We'll then take a stroll along Straight Street, once known as the Roman-era Via Recta. Walking here, you'll get a sense of the city's long history. It's a place where we can imagine the many people who have travelled this route over centuries. Our next stop is Al-Zeitoun Church, the headquarters of the Greek Catholic Patriarchate. Inside, we'll take a look at the grand vaulted ceilings and the sturdy basalt columns.

After that, we'll wander through the winding alleys leading to the Jewish Quarter (Harat al-Yahud) in old Damascus. This neighbourhood has a rich Jewish history, with synagogues, shops, and homes that were once a part of the city's social and cultural fabric. We'll continue towards Maktab Anbar, an architectural gem within the historic precincts of Damascus. Built in the mid-19th century by Anbar Anbar, a wealthy Jewish businessman, it showcases Damascene architectural style. You'll see ornate embellishments, stonework, and a charming courtyard that reflect a mix of Ottoman, Levantine, and European influences.

Then, we'll walk along Midhat Pasha Street, a vibrant thoroughfare in Damascus. This street is known for its rich history and lively atmosphere, it's a place where you can see the city's blend of tradition and modernity. Next, we'll visit Khan Assad Pasha, an impressive caravanserai. This building stands as a testament to the region's rich trading heritage. Our final structured visit will be to Azem Palace, an architectural gem showcasing the beauty of Damascene craftsmanship. It currently houses the Museum of Popular Traditions.

Finally, we'll have some free time to explore on our own. You can revisit a favourite spot, browse the shops, or simply relax and soak in the atmosphere at your own pace.

Overnight in Damascus.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 11 Damascus - Palmyra - Wadi al-Nasara

Today we depart the capital and travel by road north to Palmyra, once a thriving cultural hub of ancient times.* As we walk through the ruins, we'll bear witness to the historical significance of this ancient city, which was once a major center of trade and culture. Unfortunately, Palmyra fell under the control of Islamic militants during the war, resulting in significant damage to its architectural marvels. We'll see the remnants of the magnificent Temple of Bel, the striking Temple of Baal-Shamin, and the remarkable Roman-era tombs, all of which were tragically destroyed. We'll also visit the ancient theater and the grand Monumental Arch, which suffered partial demolition. Is it still worthwhile to visit? YES! The site's aspect is very dramatic and the ruins that remain are evocative of what the place must've looked like in antiquity. Plus our Syrian guide does well in bringing this fascinating place to life.

Finally, we'll head to Wadi al-Nasara, or the "Valley of Christians", a picturesque mountain resort region nestled amidst breathtaking landscapes. As we explore the valley, we'll discover numerous Christian villages, each with its own distinctive charm and character. The serene and peaceful atmosphere of the valley offers a welcome respite from the hustle and bustle of city life, and we'll have the chance to relax and unwind in this beautiful setting after a full day of travel and sightseeing.

* This is a full day, partly due to the fact that Palmyra's handful of hotels have not yet been repaired/rebuilt, which makes over-nighting here impossible.

Overnight in Wadi al-Nasara.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 12 Wadi al-Nasara - Krak des Chevaliers - Homs - Hama - Aleppo

We have another full day of travel and sightseeing, taking us first to the magnificent Krak des Chevaliers, a medieval castle that stands as a testament to Syria's rich history. Perched on a hilltop overlooking the Homs Gap, this awe-inspiring fortress is renowned for its strategic significance and architectural grandeur. As we explore the castle's imposing walls and towers, we'll gain a deeper understanding of the region's complex history and the importance of this medieval stronghold. Luckily, mostly owing to its centuries-old sturdiness, the castle is only slightly damaged from recent warfare.

Next, we'll head to Homs, a city where the echoes of conflict are still palpable, yet the local community is working tirelessly to rebuild and restore their city. As we walk through the streets, we'll gain a deeper understanding of the profound impact of past adversities on the city and its people. We'll also witness the resilient spirit of the local community, who are determined to restore Homs to its former glory. We'll also visit the Khalid Bin Al Walid Mosque, one of Syria's most significant religious sites, named after the renowned Islamic general Khalid ibn al-Walid. Unfortunately, the mosque sustained damage during the Syrian civil war, but it remains an important place of worship and

pilgrimage.

Next, we'll visit the Khalid Bin Al Walid Mosque, one of Syria's most significant religious sites, named after the renowned Islamic general Khalid ibn al-Walid. Despite sustaining damage during the conflict, the mosque remains an important symbol of faith and community. We'll also explore Hama, a city located on the banks of the Orontes River, famous for its colossal wooden waterwheels known as Norias. These architectural marvels are a testament to the ingenuity of the city's ancient engineers.

Next, we'll head to Hama, a city located on the banks of the Orontes River in western Syria. Here, we'll discover the city's distinctive architectural marvel: the colossal wooden waterwheels known as Norias. These ancient wheels, some of which date back to the 14th century, are a testament to the ingenuity and craftsmanship of Hama's ancestors. Unlike other nearby cities, Hama remains entirely intact.

Finally, we arrive in Aleppo, one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world. During our stay, as we explore the city's ancient streets and landmarks, we'll witness the juxtaposition of beauty and destruction that defines this storied city. Despite the ravages of war, Aleppo remains a city of immense cultural and historical significance, and we'll have the chance to experience its rich heritage firsthand.

Overnight in Aleppo.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 13 Aleppo & St. Simeon

This morning we'll travel north of the city to explore the fascinating history of Saint Simeon, a significant figure in Christian history known for his ascetic lifestyle. In the 5th century, Saint Simeon chose a unique dwelling – he spent 37 years atop a pillar. The site of Saint Simeon, also known as Qala'at Sim'an or the Church of Saint Simeon Stylites, consists of the remains of a 5th-century Byzantine church, which was built around the pillar where Saint Simeon lived. The pillar, which is about 4.5 meters tall, still stands today, although it's surrounded by the ruins of the church and other ancient structures. Despite being a ruin, the site remains an important pilgrimage destination for Christians and a fascinating archaeological site that provides a glimpse into the history of early Christianity in Syria.

Back in the city, we'll visit the Citadel of Aleppo, a UNESCO World Heritage Site that has stood the test of time. Perched atop a hill, this ancient fortress has witnessed countless battles and struggles for freedom, earning its reputation as a symbol of resilience. As we walk along its walls, we'll gain a deeper understanding of the city's complex history and the significance of this iconic landmark.

We'll also explore the Great Mosque of Aleppo, an architectural marvel that reflects the city's rich Islamic heritage. Although the mosque was destroyed during the civil war, it remains an important place of worship and a testament to the community's enduring faith. As we walk through its ruins, we'll gain a deeper appreciation for the profound loss felt by the community and the importance of preserving the city's cultural heritage.

Finally, we'll wander through the old markets of Aleppo, a testament to the city's rich history and resilience. These vibrant centers of trade were once filled with textiles, spices, and handcrafted goods, and their stunning stone arches and narrow alleys created a unique atmosphere. Although the markets suffered extensive damage during the Syrian Civil War, restoration efforts are underway to revive their traditional architecture and character. As craftsmen return to the markets, breathing new life into the area, we'll witness the enduring spirit of the people of Aleppo, committed to preserving their heritage and rebuilding their city.

Overnight in Aleppo.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 14 Aleppo - Maaloula - Sednaya - Damascus

Leaving Aleppo behind, we travel southward back to Damascus with a couple stops en route.

Our first visit is the enchanting town of Maaloula, one of the last remaining Aramaic-speaking enclaves in the Middle East. As we wander through the town's narrow streets, we'll hear the ancient language of Jesus Christ still spoken by the locals. We'll explore Maaloula's rich history, from its Roman-era pagan temple, which was later repurposed into a church, to the Byzantine artefacts that dot the landscape.

We'll also marvel at the architectural wonders of the Deir Mar Taqla, a stunning Greek Orthodox monastery, and the Deir Mar Sarkis, a beautiful Greek Catholic monastery with elements dating back to the 5th and 6th centuries. As we visit these ancient monasteries, we'll gain

a deeper understanding of the region's complex history and the importance of these sacred sites.

Next, we'll head to Sednaya, a picturesque town nestled atop a hill. Here, we'll visit the iconic Greek Orthodox Our Lady of Sednaya Monastery, which offers breathtaking panoramic views of the surrounding countryside. Inside the monastery, we'll see an ancient icon of the Virgin Mary, believed by many to possess miraculous powers. As we explore the town, we'll also visit some of its more than 40 chapels and monasteries, each with its own unique charm and character.

We continue back to the capital for dinner and overnight.

Overnight in Damascus.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 15 Damascus: Ezra'a & Bosra

Today, we'll embark on a day trip from Damascus to explore the ancient treasures of Ezra'a and Bosra (not to be confused with Basra in Iraq). Our first stop will be the 1500-Year-Old Church of St. George in Ezra'a, a true architectural masterpiece that stands as a remarkable testament to the region's rich heritage. Constructed of sturdy basalt stone, this historic church has preserved its original fabric to this day, making it one of the world's architectural marvels.

After exploring the church, we'll head to Bosra, a UNESCO Site that holds immense historical significance. As we wander through the ancient city, we'll discover a treasure trove of historical monuments, showcasing a captivating blend of Roman and Byzantine ruins, alongside impressive examples of early Islamic architecture. We'll explore the well-preserved 2nd-century Roman theatre, with its grand colonnades and seating tiers, providing a glimpse into the ancient Roman entertainment culture. We'll also see remnants of early Christian heritage, with the ruins of ancient churches bearing witness to the city's vibrant past.

Return to Damascus for farewell dinner and overnight.

Overnight in Damascus.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 16 Departure from Damascus

Departure from Damascus.

Masa'a Khayr - Bon Voyage!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast