Inside Jordan: Literature, History, and Culture

April 15–25, 2019

Explore the arts, history, and culture of Jordan through the eyes of locals. Enjoy guided private tours, social events, and presentations by journalists, writers, historians, and entrepreneurs who are experts in their fields. This itinerary is subject to change and will be updated prior to booking deadlines.

Sunday, April 14: Depart the U.S.

Monday, April 15: Arrival in Amman (Cocktails, Dinner)

Upon arrival at Queen Alia International Airport, you will be met at the gate, escorted through immigration, and transferred to the Four Seasons, a luxurious five-star hotel located in the center of Amman. The elegant white stone and glass building has first-rate amenities, including indoor and outdoor pools, restaurants, a speakeasy-style cocktail bar, and a spa offering local rituals with indigenous ingredients from the Dead Sea. Relax and settle in before joining your fellow travelers for a welcome cocktail and dinner.

Tuesday, April 16: Ancient Amman (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)

After breakfast at the hotel, explore the balad—the older, downtown area nestled in the heart of four of Amman’s seven hills. Visit ancient sites, such as the Citadel, the Amphitheater, and the Jordan Museum, which houses the most important archeological findings in the country.

Wander the downtown souks—or markets—and taste traditional and beloved street food, such as falafel and the Arab dessert knafeh. Explore some of the book markets and kiosks and meet with a local bookseller.

Take in the magnificent views of the old city of Amman over a healthy, organic lunch at Wild Jordan Center. The Center is owned by the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature, promotes ecotourism, and has a Nature Shop which generates income for families living in RSCN reserves.

Head to Sijal Institute for Arabic Language and Culture for an introduction to Arabic over tea in the garden of their historic villa.
Rest at the hotel in the afternoon, then take an evening walk down Rainbow Street, a lively, cultural hub full of cafés, restaurants, and shops. Visit the Jordan River Foundation Showroom, a shop offering high-quality contemporary and traditional handicrafts created by women from local communities.

Later, enjoy dinner at Fakhreldin Restaurant, one of the most acclaimed restaurants in Amman, located in one of the city’s oldest neighborhoods. The fine Lebanese cuisine is served mezze style in the elegance of an authentic Jordanian home, which was built by the late H.E. Mr. Fawzi Al-Mulki, the first prime minister of Jordan under the reign of the late H.M. King Hussein and has been the home of several prominent dignitaries in Jordan.

Wednesday, April 17: Northern Jordan (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)

Rise early and drive to Umm Qais in the northwestern corner of Jordan. Located in the hills of the Jordan Valley, Umm Qais contains the ruins of the Decapolis city of Gadara and offers stunning views of Jordan, Syria, Palestine, and Israel. Attend a lecture with a noted expert on the history of the region at Umm Qais Rest House while taking in the view.

Have lunch in locals’ homes and learn about their daily life and experiences on the border.

In the afternoon, explore Jerash, previously known as Gerasa, one of the largest and most well-preserved sites of Roman architecture in the world outside Italy. The ruins, including colonnaded streets, theaters, plazas, baths, and arches, are in impeccable condition. Within this site, archeologists have found ruins from the Neolithic Age and proof of human occupation for more than 6,500 years.

Enjoy a special dinner back in Amman with your fellow travelers.

Thursday, April 18: Umayyad Desert Castles and Azraq Wetlands (Breakfast, Lunch)

Begin your day with an early visit to the Umayyad Desert Castles of east Amman, fortified palaces built in the 8th century and scattered over the arid regions of eastern Jordan. First, we will see Kharanah, a former rest stop for traders on routes between Amman, Damascus, and other destinations and a meeting place for tribal issues. Next, we will go to Qusyer Amra, a UNESCO heritage site, located in Wadi Butum, a valley named after the terebinth trees which still grow there. Qusyer Amra is known for its wall paintings, which represent a formative stage in the development of Islamic art. Finally, we will visit Azraq, a fortress in the basalt region where T.E. Lawrence based his operations during the Arab Revolt.
Druze, an ethnoreligious group in Azraq, will host us for lunch at their home, where we will learn about the Druze people and their history in the Middle East, especially in Jordan, while dining on customary dishes. The Jordanian Druze community is believed to be 32,000 people, constituting 0.5% of the Jordanian population.

After lunch, we will visit the Azraq Wetland Reserve and learn about the environmental effects of the water crisis in Jordan. Azraq, meaning “blue” in Arabic, is a migratory stopover for birds from three continents. The water resources in this important lush oasis in the middle of the Arabian desert have been depleted over the last 50 years at alarming rates due to pumping to urban areas.

Enjoy a free evening in Amman.

**Friday, April 19: Kerak Castle and Petra (Breakfast, Lunch)**

We’ll journey on the picturesque, 5,000-year-old Kings Highway to Karak, stopping at Qala’at Al Meshneq, the hilltop fortress in Mukawir where Salome danced for King Herod and where John the Baptist was beheaded. You will have the option to hike up to the ruins to take in the stunning panoramic view of the Dead Sea or to stay below and visit the Bani Hamida Weaving Centre & Gallery, where contemporary and traditional Bedouin kilims are created.

In the southern city of Karak, visit the crusader castle and meet with local tribal leaders. Learn about the Christian community in Jordan over a traditional lunch of mansaf, the national dish of Jordan and a Karak specialty, made with lamb cooked in a sauce of fermented dried yogurt (jameed) and served over rice with toasted nuts. (Vegetarian food options will be available.) April is sheep milk season, and locals will show us how jameed and other dairy products are made.

In the evening, we will arrive in the ancient city of Petra and will check in at the Movenpick Resort, a five-star hotel with Arabesque flair located directly at the entrance to the historic city. Unwind in the outdoor swimming pool or take in the stunning desert views from the rooftop terrace and enjoy dinner at the hotel at your leisure.

**Saturday, April 20: Petra and Wadi Rum (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)**

Spend the morning in Petra, the majestic Rose-Red City and one of the new Seven Wonders of the World. Learn about the capital of the Nabataean Empire (from the 1st century BC) and how it prospered through trade until a large earthquake destroyed much of the city in the 4th century AD. There will also be an option to trek up to the famed monastery for those interested.
Have a relaxing buffet lunch at the Movenpick before driving to **Wadi Rum**, also known as the Valley of the Moon. Journey into the desert in jeeps, while learning about the Hejaz railway, a train route built over 100 years ago with the intention of connecting Istanbul to Mecca, the 1916 Arab Revolt, and T.E. Lawrence/Lawrence of Arabia’s role.

Take the jeeps to a private location in the middle of the desert for an ethereal **sunset reception** with local champagne, canapés, and a live musical performance featuring a piano and **qanun**, an Arabic stringed instrument.

Afterward, you will be transported to the luxurious **Sun City Camp** to settle in and have a buffet style dinner complete with zarb, traditional Bedouin barbeque that is cooked underground. Enjoy tea or, if you choose, Shisha (Arguileh) while listening to a live oud performance under the clear night sky. Stargaze with your fellow campers and enjoy the tranquil, majestic desert.

**Sunday, April 21: Wadi Rum and Madaba (Breakfast, Lunch)**

Join Bedouin for traditional tea at sunrise, followed by a **camel ride** through the desert. Horseback riding and cycling will also be available for experienced riders. After your caravan returns, you will enjoy breakfast and then take 4x4 jeeps out into the sand dunes to the great mountain of Al Khazal. You will see vestiges of human activity over several thousand years—pictographs of Thamudic, Nabataean, Greek, and Arabic texts; formal inscriptions; and art depicting hunting scenes—carved into the rocks.

We will depart Wadi Rum to **Haret Jdoudna** for a delicious lunch of mezza. After lunch, visit **Madaba**, the “City of Mosaics,” known for its Byzantine and Umayyad art and high-quality handicrafts. The Greek Orthodox Church there is home to the famous 6th-century mosaic map of Jerusalem and the Holy Land made with two million pieces of vividly colored stone. After a trip to the Madaba Archeological Park, we will learn from local artisans about the production of modern mosaic art. Today will be Palm Sunday in Jordan (Easter in the U.S.), and it might be possible to see local services or the festive procession with drums and singing.

Next, we will visit **Mount Nebo**, a place of pilgrimage for early Christians from Jerusalem, for a lecture on interfaith relations. There, you can enjoy the breathtaking views from the spot where Moses looked out at the Holy Land, as well as the small church built there in the 4th century to commemorate Moses’s life.

Then back in Amman, you will check into the **Four Seasons**, where you will be free to enjoy the evening.
Explore your particular interests in Amman in small, intimate groups. Options, to be pre-selected before arrival, might include a visit to the Royal Automobile Museum and a ride in one of the vintage cars, a trip to the market to select ingredients followed by an Arabic cooking class, a visit to the business park to learn about entrepreneurship in Jordan, or a shopping tour of local artisans and handicrafts. We can also arrange a trip to a hammam for an authentic local spa experience.

Meet for a homemade Jordanian lunch at cozy restaurant Najla’s Kitchen. Enjoy the afternoon at your leisure.

Convene in the evening at NOFA Creative Space, an art venue set in an old Jordanian family home and tucked away down a narrow alley off Rainbow Street. Enjoy cocktails in the garden and listen to a private concert of traditional local music. After the show, walk across the street to restaurant Sufra for an authentic Jordanian dinner in an elegant villa.

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### Monday, April 22: Amman Activities (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)

Spend the day exploring the local art scene. A curator will lead us on a tour of several art galleries, including Darat al Funun and the Jordan National Gallery of the Arts, where you will meet with Jordanian artists and attend a lecture on the art movement in the Levant. We will also meet with local writers and journalists to hear about their work and the writing life in the region.

Enjoy a light lunch of beloved street food, such as falafel and knafeh, on the rooftop of the Art Hotel in the balad (downtown Amman).

Visit the home of Andrea Bronson, the VP of Programs at the Authors Guild, and her husband Hazem Zureiqat for an elegant garden cocktail reception with your fellow travelers and Jordanians. Mingle with locals over drinks and dinner.

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### Tuesday, April 23: Arts in Amman (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner, Reception)

After breakfast, depart to Bethany Beyond the Jordan, the famous site where Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist. Excavation work has unearthed a 1st century AD settlement with plastered pools and a water system, in addition to a late Byzantine settlement from the 5th to 6th century AD with churches, a monastery, and other structures.
Check into the Dead Sea Marriott Resort, a five-star hotel located on the shores of the Dead Sea. Use your free time to unwind with local therapeutic treatments at the spa, float in the sea, or spend some time in the sun at the lowest point on earth, 420 meters below sea level. Have lunch on your own at one of the resort restaurants or by the pool.

Celebrate your adventure in Jordan with a farewell cocktail reception and private dinner overlooking the Dead Sea at sunset.

Thursday, April 25: Departure (Breakfast)

Breakfast at the hotel and perhaps a float on the Dead Sea at sunrise before heading back to Queen Alia International Airport for your flights home. Transfers to the airport will be arranged based on your flight time—feel free to extend your stay at the Dead Sea through the weekend or spend a few extra days in Jordan on your own.

This itinerary is not final, and the Authors Guild Foundation and its contractors reserve the right to alter it at any point either before departure or during the trip if the need arises. Pictures are suggestive of locale, but sites are not guaranteed. Details will be added about specific presentations closer to the departure date. When changes or substitutions are necessary, all effort will be made to provide an experience of equal value and interest.