



From the MixCache.com library

SAMPLE COPY

Visiting Jordan

MixCache.com

SAMPLE COPY

Table of Contents

- **Introduction**
- **Chapter 1** Introduction to Jordan
- **Chapter 2** Getting to Jordan
- **Chapter 3** Best Time to Visit
- **Chapter 4** Getting Around
- **Chapter 5** Accommodation
- **Chapter 6** Top Destinations & Attractions
- **Chapter 7** Activities
- **Chapter 8** Food and Drink
- **Chapter 9** Culture and Etiquette
- **Chapter 10** Safety and Health
- **Chapter 11** Practical Information
- **Chapter 12** Shopping
- **Chapter 13** Itinerary Suggestions
- **Chapter 14** Petra: A Journey Through Time
- **Chapter 15** The Mystical Wadi Rum
- **Chapter 16** Experiencing the Dead Sea
- **Chapter 17** Exploring the Vibrant Capital: Amman
- **Chapter 18** The Ancient City of Jerash
- **Chapter 19** Aqaba: The Jewel of the Red Sea
- **Chapter 20** The Dana Biosphere Reserve
- **Chapter 21** The Mosaics of Madaba
- **Chapter 22** Standing with Moses on Mount Nebo
- **Chapter 23** The Enigmatic Desert Castles
- **Chapter 24** A Hiker's Paradise: Trails of Jordan
- **Chapter 25** Festivals and Cultural Celebrations

Introduction

Jordan, a haven of natural beauty and historical marvels, beckons travelers with its myriad offerings. Situated at a pivotal junction of continents, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan serves as a gateway to the awe-inspiring landscapes and rich legacies of Western Asia. As a region where past and present seamlessly coexist, Jordan offers an unparalleled travel experience that spans historical epochs and captures the contemporary spirit of hospitality.

The allure of Jordan is undeniable, largely due to its remarkable array of historical sites. Petra, often referred to as the "Rose City," stands as a towering testament to the bygone Nabataean civilization, its intricately carved rock facades drawing millions worldwide into its enchanting stories. Equally striking is the contrast offered by the sprawling desert expanse of Wadi Rum, a place where the sands meet the sky and timeless landscapes await adventurous exploration. Such iconic landmarks encapsulate Jordan's historical richness and diverse geography, making it a dream destination for enthusiasts of history and nature alike.

Equally captivating is the cultural matrix that Jordan provides. A country steeped in tradition, it marries the modern with the ancient, presenting a society where the values of community and hospitality remain paramount. From the warm embrace of the people's greetings to the shared meals that symbolize unity, visitors are continuously invited to partake in a cultural exchange that is as profound as it is genuine. This generosity of spirit defines Jordan and sets it apart from many other destinations.

Traveling to Jordan is not just a stroll through history but also a dive into diverse ecosystems. The stark beauty of the Jordan Valley and the therapeutic waters of the Dead Sea offer respite and reflection, while the vibrant capital of Amman pulsates with modernity alongside its archaeological treasures. Jordan invites the wanderer to not only traverse its capital city but also engage with the echoes of ancient civilizations that have shaped today's cultural landscape.

In crafting an itinerary through Jordan, travelers are guided by classically beautiful landscapes interspersed with moments of serene discovery. Whether enjoying a traditional dish like Mansaf or sipping tea infused with sage, visitors encounter Jordan's singular blend of flavors that reflects its diversity. Food, much like the Jordanian spirit, welcomes the traveler into a narrative woven through time, heritage, and tradition.

Ultimately, this book seeks to offer prospective tourists a comprehensive guide,

shedding light on Jordan's layered history, diverse attractions, and the cultural wealth inherent in its society. With careful planning and open hearts, your journey through Jordan will inevitably transform into a series of unforgettable experiences, where every step taken is accompanied by the whispers of history and the warmth of its people. Welcome to Jordan, where the road upon which you embark promises memories that will last a lifetime.

SAMPLE COPY

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction to Jordan

Welcome to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, a nation poised elegantly at the crossroads of ancient history and vibrant modernity. Nestled in the heart of the Middle East, this land offers a journey unlike any other, a place where the echoes of prophets mingle with the bustle of contemporary life, and where dramatic natural landscapes form the backdrop to millennia of human endeavor. Jordan occupies a unique space, both geographically and culturally, bridging continents and traditions. It's a country compact enough to explore thoroughly yet diverse enough to continually surprise and enchant. From the moment you arrive, you'll sense a palpable connection to the past, woven into the very fabric of the present day.

Understanding Jordan begins with appreciating its distinct geography, which profoundly shapes its character and attractions. The country can be broadly divided into three main longitudinal zones running north to south. To the west lies the Jordan Rift Valley, or the Ghor, a dramatic geological fault line that includes the Jordan River Valley, the Dead Sea - the planet's lowest terrestrial point - and continues south through Wadi Araba towards Aqaba and the Red Sea. This region is characterized by intense heat, particularly in summer, and a unique, arid environment surrounding the saline waters of the Dead Sea. The valley itself has been a vital corridor for life and migration for countless generations.

East of the Rift Valley rise the Highlands, a plateau often called the Mountain Heights Plateau. This is where the majority of Jordan's population resides, in cities like Amman, Irbid, Salt, Madaba, and Karak. This region receives more rainfall than the rest of the country, particularly in the north around Ajloun and Jerash, supporting pockets of Mediterranean woodland and agriculture. The elevation brings cooler temperatures, especially in winter when snowfall is not uncommon in higher areas like Amman. This relative fertility made it a desirable location for settlements throughout history, including the great Roman cities of the Decapolis. Driving along the plateau offers stunning views westward over the Rift Valley.

Further east stretches the vast expanse of the Jordanian Desert, or Badia, which covers around eighty percent of the country's landmass. This isn't just one uniform desert; it varies significantly. In the northeast, near the borders with Syria and Iraq, you find stark plains of black basalt, remnants of ancient volcanic activity. Further south and east, this gives way to the dramatic sandstone landscapes most famously exemplified by Wadi Rum, with its towering jebels (mountains) and shifting reddish sands. This arid region has traditionally been the domain of the Bedouin, nomadic peoples whose culture and resilience have been shaped by this demanding environment. It's a landscape of stark beauty, silence, and immense open spaces.

The southern tip of Jordan offers a precious opening onto the Red Sea at the Gulf of Aqaba. This coastline, though short, provides the country with its only maritime access and a completely different environment. Here, the desert mountains meet the sea, sheltering vibrant coral reefs that make Aqaba a prime destination for diving and snorkeling. Its strategic location has made it an important port city for millennia, connecting Jordan to maritime trade routes through the Red Sea and beyond. The transition from the inland deserts and highlands to this coastal resort area is yet another example of Jordan's surprising geographical diversity packed into a relatively small area.

This varied landscape rests upon a bedrock of profound history. Human presence in Jordan stretches back to the Paleolithic era, with evidence scattered across the country. Its strategic location made it a crucial land bridge between Africa, Asia, and Europe, a corridor traversed by early humans, nomadic tribes, migrating peoples, and conquering armies. Ancient trade routes, most notably the King's Highway, snaked through the highlands, facilitating the exchange of goods like frankincense and spices, and fostering the growth of settlements along its path. This constant flow of people and ideas has left an indelible mark on the land and its culture.

Jordan features prominently in the narratives of the Abrahamic faiths – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Sites mentioned in the Bible are found throughout the country, including Bethany Beyond the Jordan, believed to be the site of Jesus's baptism, and Mount Nebo, where Moses is said to have looked out over the Promised Land. These locations draw pilgrims from around the world, seeking connection with the roots of their faith. However, their significance transcends religious tourism; they are integral parts of Jordan's historical identity, recognized and respected across different communities within the country, contributing to a unique atmosphere of interfaith coexistence.

Perhaps the most iconic historical inhabitants were the Nabataeans, an Arab people who emerged from nomadic roots to establish a sophisticated kingdom from their desert capital, Petra, around the 4th century BCE. Masters of hydraulic engineering, they harnessed scarce water resources to create a thriving city amidst the sandstone cliffs. Their control over key trade routes brought them immense wealth, funding the creation of the breathtaking rock-carved monuments that draw visitors today. Petra wasn't just an architectural marvel; it was the hub of a powerful trading empire that stretched across the region before eventually being absorbed by the Roman Empire.

The arrival of the Romans in 63 BCE ushered in a new era. Jordan became part of the Roman province of Arabia Petraea. The Romans, great builders and administrators, left their mark across the land. They expanded and beautified existing cities like Philadelphia (modern Amman) and Gerasa (modern Jerash), incorporating them into the Decapolis, a league of ten Hellenistic cities. Roman roads, aqueducts, temples,

and theatres were constructed, many of which remain remarkably well-preserved, offering some of the best examples of Roman provincial architecture anywhere in the world. The Roman presence integrated the region more firmly into the Mediterranean world.

With the division of the Roman Empire, Jordan fell under the influence of the Eastern Roman or Byzantine Empire from the 4th century CE onwards. Christianity flourished during this period, becoming the dominant religion. Churches were built across the land, often adorned with intricate mosaic floors, a craft that reached its zenith in towns like Madaba. The famous Madaba Map, a 6th-century mosaic depicting the Holy Land, is a stunning testament to the artistry and geographical knowledge of the era. Byzantine rule continued until the rise of Islam in the 7th century.

The arrival of Islam in the 7th century brought another profound transformation. Arab armies brought the new faith, and the region became part of the expanding Islamic caliphates. The Umayyad Caliphate, based in nearby Damascus, showed particular interest in Jordan, using it as a strategic hinterland and a place for leisure. They constructed remarkable structures known as the Desert Castles – hunting lodges, bathhouses, and caravanserais – scattered across the eastern desert. These buildings showcase early Islamic art and architecture, blending imperial Roman, Persian, and Arab traditions, offering a unique glimpse into the lives of the early Islamic elite.

Subsequent centuries saw Jordan pass under the control of various Islamic dynasties, including the Abbasids, Fatimids, and Ayyubids. The Crusader period, from the 11th to the 13th century, left its own mark, primarily in the form of imposing castles built to control the region and protect routes to the Holy Land. Fortresses like Karak and Shobak stand as powerful reminders of this turbulent era, witnessing fierce battles between Crusader knights and the forces of Islamic leaders like Saladin. The Mamluks, based in Egypt, eventually ousted the Crusaders and ruled Jordan for several centuries.

In the early 16th century, Jordan became part of the vast Ottoman Empire, remaining under Turkish rule for four hundred years. While this period saw some development, including the construction of the Hejaz Railway in the early 20th century (designed to transport pilgrims to Mecca but playing a key role in the subsequent Arab Revolt), much of the region experienced relative neglect compared to other parts of the empire. Local administration often rested in the hands of powerful families and tribal leaders.

The dynamics shifted dramatically during World War I with the Great Arab Revolt against Ottoman rule. Led by Sharif Hussein bin Ali of Mecca, and famously aided by figures like British officer T.E. Lawrence ("Lawrence of Arabia"), Bedouin tribes and Arab nationalists fought alongside the Allied forces. Their aim was independence and the creation of a unified Arab state. Although this dream was ultimately thwarted by

post-war political arrangements between Britain and France, the Revolt was crucial in ending Ottoman control and shaping the modern Middle East.

Following the war, the League of Nations mandated the territory east of the Jordan River to Great Britain. In 1921, Britain established the Emirate of Transjordan, installing Abdullah bin Al-Hussein, son of Sharif Hussein, as its Emir. This marked the beginning of the Hashemite dynasty's rule. Transjordan navigated the turbulent interwar years under British guidance, gradually developing its own institutions. Full independence was achieved on May 25, 1946, when the country became the Hashemite Kingdom of Transjordan. In 1949, following the first Arab-Israeli War and the annexation of the West Bank (a status relinquished in 1988), the country was renamed the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

Modern Jordanian history has been significantly shaped by regional conflicts and the enduring leadership of the Hashemite monarchy. King Hussein, who reigned for nearly half a century (1952-1999), skillfully steered Jordan through numerous crises, maintaining stability and forging a distinct national identity despite external pressures and internal challenges, including the hosting of large waves of Palestinian refugees. His son, King Abdullah II, ascended the throne in 1999 and continues to navigate the complexities of the region, focusing on economic modernization, political reform, and maintaining Jordan's role as a voice of moderation and stability. The presence of significant refugee populations, most recently from Iraq and Syria, has added further complexity but also reinforced Jordan's long-standing tradition of hospitality.

This rich and often tumultuous history feeds directly into Jordan's multifaceted culture. While rooted in Arab and Islamic traditions, Jordanian culture possesses its own unique flavor, heavily influenced by the enduring legacy of the Bedouin. Even among urban Jordanians, Bedouin values like honor, generosity, and unwavering loyalty to family and tribe remain deeply ingrained. Hospitality, or 'diyafa', is not just a custom but a cornerstone of the national identity. Visitors are often overwhelmed by the genuine warmth and welcome they receive, frequently invited into homes for tea, coffee, or even a meal. This openness to guests is perhaps the most immediate and memorable aspect of Jordanian culture.

Life in Jordan presents a fascinating blend of the traditional and the modern. In Amman, you'll find gleaming shopping malls, contemporary art galleries, trendy cafes, and a dynamic, youthful population embracing global trends. Yet, just a short drive away, you can enter villages where life proceeds at a much slower pace, governed by age-old agricultural rhythms and social customs. Even within the cities, traditional souks (markets) filled with the scent of spices and the calls of vendors thrive alongside modern supermarkets. This juxtaposition is part of Jordan's charm - it's a country comfortable in its own skin, respecting its past while looking towards the future.

The social fabric is strongly woven around family and community ties. Extended

families often live close to one another, and major life events – weddings, births, funerals – are significant communal affairs. Respect for elders is paramount. While traditionally patriarchal, the role of women in Jordanian society is evolving. Jordanian women are increasingly visible in higher education and professional fields, contributing significantly to the country's development, although societal expectations and opportunities can still vary between urban and rural areas and different social strata.

Artistic expression finds many outlets in Jordan. Traditional music, often featuring the oud (lute), tabla (drum), and mijwiz (double pipe), fills the air during celebrations, frequently accompanied by the energetic group dance known as the 'dabke'. Crafts passed down through generations are still practiced, including intricate embroidery, Bedouin rug weaving, pottery, glassblowing (especially in Hebron tradition), and the remarkable art of sand bottle creation found in Petra and Aqaba. Madaba remains a centre for mosaic artistry, keeping ancient Byzantine techniques alive. Alongside these traditions, a contemporary arts scene thrives, particularly in Amman, with galleries showcasing modern painting, sculpture, and photography.

The rhythm of daily life is often punctuated by the Islamic faith. The call to prayer echoes from minarets five times a day, serving as a regular reminder of the spiritual dimension of life for the observant Muslim majority. Friday is the main day of congregational prayer and rest, with the Jordanian weekend officially falling on Friday and Saturday. During the holy month of Ramadan, the pace of life changes significantly, with fasting during daylight hours followed by festive evening meals (iftar). While non-Muslims aren't expected to fast, understanding and respecting these rhythms enhances the visitor experience.

While Islam is the state religion and practiced by over 95% of the population (predominantly Sunni), Jordan is notable for its long-standing Christian minority and its commitment to religious tolerance. Christian communities, primarily Greek Orthodox but also including Catholics and various Protestant denominations, have existed in this land since the earliest days of Christianity. Churches stand alongside mosques, and Christians participate fully in Jordanian society. Major Christian holidays are often acknowledged, and key historical Christian sites are protected and accessible to all. This atmosphere of relatively peaceful coexistence is a source of national pride.

The official language is Arabic. For the visitor, it's useful to know that the formal, written Arabic (Modern Standard Arabic or MSA) used in news broadcasts and literature differs from the spoken dialects. Jordanians speak a Levantine dialect, similar to that heard in Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine, though with its own local characteristics. While learning MSA is valuable for reading signs or formal communication, picking up phrases in the local dialect will earn you smiles and facilitate interaction. Useful greetings like "Marhaba" (Hello) or "Shukran" (Thank you) are always appreciated.

However, tourists need not worry excessively about language barriers. English is widely spoken and understood, particularly in areas frequented by tourists, such as hotels, major archaeological sites, airports, and larger shops and restaurants. Many Jordanians, especially the younger generation and those working in professional sectors, have an excellent command of English due to its emphasis in the education system and its importance in international business and tourism. Road signs often include English transliterations, making navigation easier for self-drivers. While knowing some Arabic enhances the experience, English is generally sufficient for practical needs.

A word on the currency, the Jordanian Dinar (JOD). It's a strong currency, officially pegged to the US Dollar (1 USD is approximately 0.709 JOD, or conversely, 1 JOD is about 1.41 USD). This peg provides stability but means Jordan can feel relatively expensive compared to some neighboring countries like Egypt. The Dinar is divided into 100 piasters (or qirsh) or 1000 fils. Prices might be quoted in any of these denominations (e.g., 500 fils or 50 piasters for half a Dinar), which can initially be confusing, but you quickly get the hang of it. Coins come in various fils and piaster denominations, while banknotes range from 1 to 50 Dinars. Understanding the relative value helps in budgeting and bargaining.

In essence, Jordan offers a compelling package for the discerning traveler. It's a land steeped in history, offering archaeological wonders that span millennia. Its landscapes are diverse and often breathtaking, from the depths of the Dead Sea Rift to the heights of the Ajloun forests and the vastness of the eastern deserts. But beyond the sites and scenery, it's the Jordanian people themselves, with their deep-rooted traditions of hospitality and their quiet pride in their nation's heritage and stability, who often leave the most lasting impression. This guide aims to equip you with the practical knowledge to navigate your journey, but the true discoveries await you in the experiences you'll have and the connections you'll make along the way. Prepare to be captivated by the Hashemite Kingdom.

This is a sample preview. Purchase the book to read the full content.

Visit MixCache.com to purchase the complete book.

SAMPLE COPY