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AMMAN

wordtravels

Originally spread over seven hills, or jabals, the capital of the Hashemite kingdom now sprawls over 19 hills and is home to well over a million people, almost half of Jordan's population. Known as the White City, the hills are covered in a jumble of light-coloured stone houses, consistently box-like in shape with flat roofs characteristic of a typical desert city. Faded minarets, pavement markets, Arabian sweet shops and the crumbling remains of ancient civilisations contrast wonderfully with the contemporary edifices, fashionable boutiques and international restaurants. This blend of the old and the new combines in the noisy and chaotic downtown area where the city's extraordinarily friendly residents go about their business.



Amman © Judith Duk

At the heart of downtown is the Ottoman-style King Hussein Mosque, around which the buzz and bustle is at its most interesting. Even busier at prayer times, the surrounding streets are filled with the essence of Arabia, exotic smells and rows of glittering treasures in the souq (market) amid the noise of frenetic haggling.

Just as overwhelming is Amman's sense of history, dating back 5,500 years to its position as the ancient capital of the Ammonites, Rabbath-Ammon of the Old Testament, and later as Philadelphia, the Roman city that became part of the Decapolis. Overlooking the city from atop Jabal al-Qala'a is the Citadel, the site of the ancient Rabbath-Ammon, and at its foot lies the impressive Roman amphitheatre that is the most remarkable remnant of ancient Philadelphia.

Amman is one of the oldest, continuously inhabited cities in the world, and today functions as a thriving commercial and administrative centre with modern facilities, historical attractions and a longstanding tradition of hospitality. It is an excellent base from which to explore the surrounds, even the rest of the country, being no more than five hours drive from anywhere, and is surprisingly agreeable for a capital city.

Basics

Time: Local time is GMT +2 (GMT +3 from April to October).

Electricity: Electrical current is 220 volts AC, 50Hz. European two-pin plugs are the most common.

Money: The official currency is the Dinar (JOD), which is divided into 100 piastres or 1,000 fils. Foreign currency and travellers cheques can be changed at any bank or moneychanger, although the latter will usually give a better rate of exchange. Banks are closed on Fridays. Better hotels will also exchange money. American Express, Visa, MasterCard and Diners Club are the most widely accepted credit cards and can be used at major hotels, restaurants and tourist shops; cash can be withdrawn from inside banks. ATMs are available, though acceptance of foreign cards is limited.

Currency Exchange Rates				
JOD 1.00	JOD 5.00	JOD 10.00	JOD 100.00	JOD 1,000.00
A\$ 1.71	A\$ 8.55	A\$ 17.09	A\$ 170.91	A\$ 1,709.13

Note: These rates are not updated daily and should be used as a guideline only.

Language: Arabic is the official language, but English is understood by most people involved in the tourist industry and by middle to upper class Jordanians.

Entry requirements for Australians: Australians require a passport and a visa.

Passport/Visa Note: Most nationalities require a visa, which can be obtained prior to arrival, or they can be issued at the airport if arriving by air. A single entry visa costs JD10, is valid for one month and is payable in Dinars only. Extensions are possible for up to three months and are available at any police station. All visitors require a passport valid for at least six months after date of arrival in the country and all tickets and documents for onward travel.

Health: Inoculations are not required unless travelling from an area infected with yellow fever, in which case a certificate will be requested on arrival. Although not necessary, it is recommended that a vaccination for typhoid be had before travel to Jordan, except for short-term business travellers who restrict their meals to major restaurants and hotels. It is advisable to drink bottled water, which is cheap and widely available, although better hotels have their own water filtering systems. An outbreak of bird flu was detected in poultry in the north of the country, but the risk to travellers is low. However, close contact with live birds should be avoided and all poultry and egg dishes should be well cooked as a precaution. Medical services are good throughout the country with clinics, hospitals and medical centres in every city or village, and many doctors in the larger towns or cities speak English. Most hospitals are privately owned. Travellers should carry their own prescription medicines and medical insurance is recommended.

Tippling: Most of the better hotels and restaurants will add a 10-12% service charge to the bill, but smaller establishments usually expect a tip. It is customary to round up the price of a taxi trip instead of tipping.

Climate: July and August are the hottest and driest months of the year, especially in Amman and the Jordan Valley, and in the desert areas, with temperatures over 97°F (36°C). Spring and autumn are the most pleasant times to visit with clear, sunny days and moderate temperatures. The winter months from November to April can be very cold, particularly in Amman, with snow, rain and wind, but there is little rainfall in the desert regions and in Aqaba, which makes a pleasant wintertime resort. About 75 percent of the country can be described as having a desert climate with very little annual rainfall.

Safety: There is a high risk of terrorist attacks throughout the Middle East including Jordan and foreigners should maintain a high level of vigilance particularly in public places frequented by tourists and at tourist sites. US citizens in particular are advised to keep a low profile if travel to Jordan is necessary. A gunman opened fire on a group of tourists in Amman in September 2006, killing one and injuring five others. In November 2005 bombs exploded in three hotels in Amman - the Grand Hyatt, Radisson SAS and Days Inn - killing 67 people and injuring over 100. Al-Qaeda in Iraq claimed the attack saying the hotels were targeted because they were widely used by Americans, Israelis and Westerners on business. The situation in Iraq has had an impact on local opinion, as well as the violence between the neighbouring Israelis and Palestinians, and foreigners should avoid all public demonstrations and political gatherings. Care should be taken at the borders with Israel and Iraq. Crime is not a serious risk for travellers although on buses and in crowded places visitors could be the target of pickpockets or petty thieves.

Customs: The consumption of alcohol is strictly forbidden in the streets. It is advisable to respect local Muslim conservatism regarding dress and women in particular will be better respected if their legs and shoulders are covered in public places. It is advisable to ask permission before photographing people. Bargaining is expected with merchants especially in the markets. Religious customs should be respected, particularly during the month of Ramadan when eating, drinking and smoking during daylight hours should be discreet as it is forbidden by the Muslim culture. Homosexuality is illegal. Bedouin hospitality is genuine, but custom requires that visitors should leave some small gift in return for a meal or a glass of tea.

Business: Business in Jordan is conducted with an emphasis on modest, formal attire. Women, in particular, should be sure to dress conservatively. As with most Arab countries, business is very male-dominated and therefore women should clarify their role early in meetings. Meetings often start very late, but it is always advised to be punctual nonetheless. Most business is conducted in English, although using a few words of Arabic (particularly for titles) will be appreciated. Business cards are often exchanged. It is common to be invited for meals by one's host, who will usually pay the bill, although it is appreciated if the guest pays for the final meal or gives a small gift. Business hours are usually 9.30am to 1.30pm and 3.30pm to 6pm Sunday to Thursday.

Communications: The international dialling code for Jordan is +962. The outgoing code is 00 followed by the relevant country code (e.g. 0027 for South Africa). Jordan has international direct dialling with most countries. City/area codes are in use, e.g. (0)3 for both Aqaba and Petra, and (0)6 for Amman. Mobile phone companies have roaming agreements with most international mobile phone operators. There are Internet cafes in Amman and most major towns.

Duty Free: Travellers to Jordan over 18 years do not have to pay duty on 200 cigarettes or 25 cigars, or 200 grams of pipe tobacco; 1 litre of alcohol, 1 or 2 bottles of perfume and eau-de-Cologne or lotion for personal use; and gifts to the value of JD50 or US\$150. Restricted items include firearms, sporting guns and other weapons without prior approval from authorities of country of origin and destination country. Prohibited items include all narcotics and birds or bird products.

Transport: Amman is a relatively small city and is thus easy to negotiate. Metered private taxis are available at reasonable prices, and yellow, shared taxis cover fixed routes. Locals are usually very friendly and helpful regarding directions and drivers are usually forthcoming about route information. Regular Airport Express buses run from the arrivals terminal to Abdali Station in downtown Amman.

Attractions

Citadel Hill

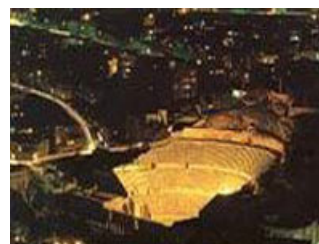
From its position on top of a hill overlooking the city, the Citadel stands testament to the history of Amman, with its ancient ruins and excavated relics, alongside those from throughout the country, housed in the Jordan Archaeological Museum. It is the site of the ancient capital Rabbath-Ammon and numerous excavations have revealed Stone Age remains as well as those from the Roman to the Islamic periods. The site contains several structures including the impressive Omayyad Palace (al-Qasr), a small Byzantine basilica and what was once the Temple of Hercules, the Great Temple of Amman. Also on the site is the Jordan Archaeological Museum, which has an excellent collection of artefacts from Jordan dating back to the earliest settlement in the region over 700,000 years ago. The Dead Sea Scrolls, Iron Age sarcophagi and a copy of the Mesha Stele are its most important exhibits.

Address: Jabal al-Qala'a; **Telephone:** (0)6 463 8795 (museum); **Opening time:** Museum: Daily 9am to 5pm (winter), 9am to 7pm (summer); Friday and holidays 10am to 6pm

Roman Theatre

Below the Citadel is the magnificent Roman amphitheatre, an impressive relic from ancient Philadelphia that is cut into the hill and can seat up to 6,000 people. The theatre is still used occasionally for events today. Two cultural museums form part of the complex: the Jordan Folklore Museum, which has exhibits on traditional life, and the Museum of Popular Traditions with traditional costumes and mosaics from 4th to 6th century Jordan churches.

Address: Quraysh Street, Downtown; **Opening time:** Jordan Folklore Museum and Museum of Popular Traditions: daily 9am to 5pm



Roman amphitheatre, Amman © Jordan Tourism

Excursions

Jerash

Situated about 31 miles (50km) north of Amman is one of the top attractions in Jordan, the ancient city of Jerash, which is considered to be one of the best preserved Roman sites in the world. Its exceptional state of preservation is due to the fact that it was buried in sand for centuries and the magnificent baths, theatres, temples, arches, columns and stone chariot-rutted streets have long attracted scholars and tourists from across the world to admire the most complete city in the Roman Decapolis. Excavations dating to the Neolithic Age have

indicated that Jerash was continuously occupied for more than 6,500 years. Today visitors can marvel as the ancient amphitheatre comes to life at the annual Jerash festival of Culture and Arts in July, where artists from around the globe sing, dance, act and play music on stage in a celebration of Jordanian and international culture.

Telephone: (0)2 635 1014 (Visitor's Centre); **Opening time:** Daily 7am until dark. From July to October a sound and light show takes place every evening

Desert Castle Loop

Stretching to the east of Amman towards Saudi Arabia and Iraq is the vast desert plain where a cluster of historic ruins such as castles, forts, baths and palaces have been preserved and are collectively known as desert castles. Their purpose is largely unknown, but most are thought to have been built as recreational retreats by the Umayyad caliphs during the early Islamic Period (7th to 8th centuries AD). Qasr Mushatta is the biggest and most elaborate of the castles, a fine example of Umayyad architecture although it was never completed. The best preserved and most enchanting is the luxurious bathhouse of Qusayr 'Amra, with its domed ceiling and colourful interior frescoes and mosaics, and is also a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Other desert castles include the black rock fortress at Azraq, which was the desert headquarters of Lawrence of Arabia during the Great Arab Revolt in 1917, the mysterious Qasr al-Kharrana, Qasr al-Hallabat's crumbling remains and the well-preserved complex at Qastal.

Address: East and south of Amman; **Transport:** Most of the castles can be visited on a day trip from Amman via Azraq by using a variety of public buses and minibuses combined with hitching or walking, although it is easier and less time consuming to hire a car or a taxi for the day; hotels can arrange drivers who know the way and speak English; **Admission:** No admission fee is required, but in some cases the castle may be locked and the caretaker will expect a tip to open it

Dead Sea

Situated about 28 miles (45km) from Amman, lies the famous geographic attraction known as the Dead Sea, which is the lowest point on earth at 1,335 feet (407m) below sea level. Devoid of plant or animal life due to the high salt concentration (four times saltier than normal sea water), it is the incredible mineral rich water that has made it an internationally sought-after destination since ancient times, popular for its curative properties as well as for the experience of floating effortlessly on its surface. Most holidaymakers go to the main resort area on the northern shore at Sweimeh, where the Government Rest House provides showers, a restaurant, a beach and the opportunity to smother oneself in the mineral-rich black mud. Accommodation is available at the Dead Sea Spa Hotel where various medical treatments are also on offer.

Transport: Buses leave from Muhajrin station to the Government Rest House at Sweimeh; **Admission:** Swimming anywhere in the Dead Sea is free, but a fee of JD2 allows entry to the Government Rest House where it is possible to swim as well as make use of their facilities, including showers



The Dead Sea at sunrise

Mt Nebo

The most sacred site in Jordan, Mt Nebo is believed to be the burial site of Moses who climbed the hill in order to survey the Promised Land that he would never enter. Situated on the edge of a plateau about six miles (10km) from Madaba, Mt Nebo affords spectacular views towards Jerusalem, whose spires are visible on a clear day, and across the Jordan Valley and the Dead Sea. A modern day shrine sits on the ruins of a 6th-century Byzantine monastery, and affords protection to the original floor mosaics, while in the grounds stands the symbolic Serpentine Cross.

Opening time: Daily 5am to 7pm (April to October), 7am to 5pm (November to March); **Admission:** 500 fils



Mt Nebo

Madaba

The Medeba of the Bible is today Madaba, 'the City of Mosaics', most famous for its spectacular Byzantine and Umayyad mosaics from the 5th to 7th centuries, which are scattered throughout the town's homes and churches. Located just 19 miles (30km) south of Amman, Madaba is also home to the famous 6th-century mosaic map of the Holy Land, in which Jerusalem and its surrounding regions are depicted. One of the town's most beautiful mosaics covers the floor of the Byzantine Church of the Apostles, and the Archaeological Park features an impressive collection of mosaic collages, where a series of ramps has been built over excavated mosaics to allow people to view them from above. The Greek Orthodox Church of St George is home to Madaba's main attraction and most famous mosaic, the celebrated 6th-century mosaic map of the Holy Land. Millions of pieces of coloured stone embedded on the church floor create a vivid picture of Jerusalem and its holy sites, including the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the Dead Sea, Jericho and the Jordan River. It is the earliest surviving original map of the region and was laid around 560 AD. Madaba is also known for its hand-woven carpets and tapestries and it is possible to see them being made in several shops around town.



Mosaic, Madaba

Opening time: Church of St. George: daily 8.30am to 6pm, Friday and Sunday from 10am to 6pm; **Admission:** A donation to the poor is requested at the Church

Airports

Queen Alia International Airport (AMM)

Location: The airport is situated 20 miles (32km) south of Amman.

Time: Local time is GMT +2 (GMT +3 from April to October).

Contacts: Tel: +962 (0)6 445 3013.

Getting to the city: Yellow metered taxis are inexpensive and readily available. There is also a public bus service.

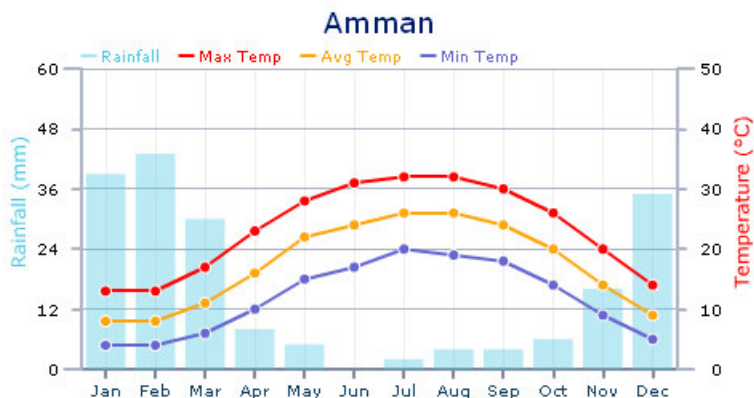
Car rental: Car rental is available and includes major companies such as Avis and Hertz.

Facilities: Facilities include a bank and bureau de change, duty-free shopping, wireless Internet access, bars and restaurants. A tourist help

desk is also available. Facilities for the disabled are good.

Departure tax: None.

Climate



The climate of Amman is pleasantly temperate. Summers are hot and dry, with cool evenings, temperatures remaining at comfortable levels. Winters are cool to cold and wet. Most rain falls between October and March, and snow can occur.

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