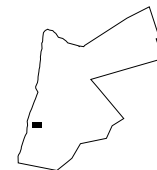


Petra

بترا



If you only go to one place in Jordan, make it Petra. Hewn from towering rock walls of multi-coloured sandstone, the imposing façades of its great temples and tombs are an enduring testament to the vision of the desert tribes who sculpted them. The Nabataeans – Arabs who dominated the region in pre-Roman times – chose as their capital a place concealed from the outside world and fashioned it into one of the Middle East's most remarkable cities.

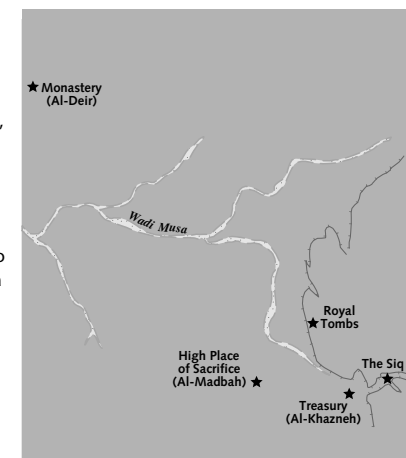
Almost as spectacular as the monuments themselves are the countless shades and Neapolitan swirls formed in the rock. Petra is often called the 'Rose-red City' but even this hardly does justice to the extraordinary range of colours that blend as the sun makes its daily passage over the site.

Few buildings in Petra are freestanding; the bulk were chiselled and bored out of the rock face. Until the mid-1980s, many of these caves were home to the local Bedouin and a handful of families still pitch their black goat-hair tents inside Petra, or even live in the caves.

The site itself is huge and you need a couple of days to get to grips with the place. Budget an extra day here – you'll thank yourself for it later. There are tombs and carvings in every nook and cranny, which makes the place perfect for some off-the-beaten-track exploration.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Feel the excitement build as you walk the **Siq** (p181), the long, dramatic chasm that links the ancient city with the outside world
- Stare in awe at the **Treasury** (p182) – Al-Khazneh, as it's locally known – arguably Petra's most spectacular and most photographed sight
- Explore the towering **Royal Tombs** (p184), offering great views of the old city centre
- Hike steps up to the **Monastery** (p188), perched surreally on a mountain top, and just as impressive as the Treasury
- Get your lungs moving on the great hike to the **High Place of Sacrifice** (p184), along a Nabataean processional way, with superb views and hidden tombs on the way down
- Exploring the Siq and the Treasury in silence and by candlelight during **Petra by Night** (p192) is an unforgettable experience and one that evokes the lost atmosphere of past Petra



History

Excavations in the 1950s unearthed a Neolithic village at Al-Beidha, just to the north of Petra, which dates from about 7000 BC (see p201). This puts it in the same league as Jericho on the West Bank as one of the earliest known farming communities in the Middle East.

Between that period and the Iron Age (from 1200 BC), when the area was the home of the Edomites, little is known. The Edomite capital Sela (mentioned in the Bible) was thought to have been on top of Umm al-Biyara (p190), although the actual site of Sela may lie to the north, about 10km south of Tafila.

The real stars of Petra were the Nabataeans, a nomadic tribe from western Arabia who settled in the area around the 6th century BC, pushing the Edomites west into Judea (where they became known as the Idumaeans). The Nabataeans soon became rich, first by plundering and then by levying tolls on the trade caravans that traversed the area under their control. The most lucrative of these trades was the frankincense, myrrh and spices that were transported by camel caravan to Petra along the Incense Route from southern Arabia. The Nabataeans enjoyed trade agreements with the Minaeans and the Sabaeans of southern Arabia that made them sole handlers not only of the region's famous frankincense but also the spices that had been shipped to Arabia by boat from traders in Somalia, Ethiopia and India.

FAST FACTS

- Petra means 'rock' in Greek
- The local Nabataean (ie Aramaic) name of the city was Rakeem or Rekem
- Petra was once home to 20,000 inhabitants but almost no residential buildings have been discovered
- Only 5% of Petra has been excavated
- Petra's al-Siq was created by tectonics not water erosion
- The Cave Bar in Wadi Musa is built inside a Nabataean tomb – surely the most unusual place you've ever downed a pint!

Suburbs at the four corners of Petra received the caravans and handled the logistics, processing products and offering banking services and fresh animals before moving the goods west across the Sinai to the ports of Gaza and Alexandria, to be shipped to Greece and Rome.

The Nabataeans never really possessed an 'empire' in the common military and administrative sense of the word; instead, from about 200 BC, they established a 'zone of influence' that stretched to Syria and Rome. As the Nabataean territory expanded under King Aretas III (84–62 BC), more caravan routes came under their control and their wealth increased accordingly. At their peak they controlled and taxed trade throughout the Hejaz (northern Arabia), the Negev, the Sinai, and the Hauran of southern Syria. Nabataean communities were influential as far away as Rome and Nabataean tombs still stand at the impressive site of Madain Saleh in Saudi Arabia.

Petra's glory days came under King Aretas IV (8 BC–AD 40), when the city was home to around 30,000 people. Expert hydraulic engineers, the Nabataeans built dams, cisterns and water channels to protect the site and grand buildings were raised in a blend of Greek, Roman and local styles. They also created their own cursive script; the forerunner of Arabic.

The Roman general Pompey, having conquered Syria and Palestine in 63 BC, tried to exert control over Nabataean territory, but the Nabataean king, Aretas III, was able to buy off the Roman forces and retain his independence. Nonetheless, Rome exerted a deep cultural influence and the buildings and coinage of the period reflect the Graeco-Roman style.

The Nabataeans weren't so lucky when they chose to side with the Parthians in the latter's war with the Romans, finding themselves obliged to pay Rome heavy tribute after the defeat of the Parthians. When the Nabataeans fell behind in paying the tribute, they were invaded twice by Herod the Great. The second attack, in 31 BC, saw him gain control of a large slice of territory.

By the time of the Nabataean King Rabbel II, the Nabataeans had lost much of their commercial power – with Palmyra having taken much of the Silk Rd trade from Asia and a knowledge of the monsoon winds had

'IBRAHIM' BURCKHARDT

Johann Ludwig (also known as Jean Louis) Burckhardt was born in Switzerland in 1784. As preparation for a long-planned expedition to the source of the Niger River in West Africa, he moved to Aleppo (Syria) for two years, where he learned to dress, eat, sleep and speak Arabic like a Bedouin. He converted to Islam and took the alias of Sheikh Ibrahim bin Abdullah, travelling around Syria to hone his disguise.

In 1812, while en route from Damascus to Cairo, he visited Jerash, Salt, Amman, Shobak and Karak, where he was detained for 20 days as a 'prisoner' of the local sheikh, forced to sleep in a different house each night to appease the locals' numerous offers of hospitality.

On the way south, he heard locals tell of some fantastic ruins hidden in the mountains of Wadi Musa valley, but the people of the region were suspicious of outsiders. To make the detour, he had to think of a ploy so that suspicions were not raised by his guide and porters, as he explained in his posthumously published journal, *Travels in Syria and the Holy Land*:

I, therefore, pretended to have made a vow to have slaughtered a goat in honour of Haroun (Aaron), whose tomb I knew was situated at the extremity of the valley, and by this stratagem I thought that I should have the means of seeing the valley on the way to the tomb.

He was able to examine, albeit very briefly, a couple of sites including the Treasury (Al-Khazneh) and the Urn Tomb, and reported that 'it seems very probable that the ruins at Wadi Musa are those of ancient Petra', concluding that:

the situation and beauty of which are calculated to make an extraordinary impression upon the traveller, after having transversed...such a gloomy and almost subterranean passage (the Siq)...it is one of the most elegant remains of antiquity existing.

Burckhardt later discovered Abu Simbel in Egypt and explored the holy city of Mecca, still in disguise, but contracted fatal dysentery in 1817. He died at only 33 years old, and is buried in the Islamic Cemetery in Cairo.

boosted sea trade routes up the Red Sea to Rome, bypassing Petra. Finally in AD 106 the Romans took Petra, creating the province of Arabia Petraea, with a capital at Bosra (Syria), and set about imposing the usual plan: a colonnaded street, baths, and so on. The Emperor Hadrian visited the city in AD 131. Later in the 3rd century the region was reorganised into the province of Palaestina Tertia, with Petra as the capital.

During the Byzantine period, a bishopric was created in Petra and some Nabataean buildings were turned into churches. Earthquakes in 363 and 551 ruined much of the city and, by the time of the Muslim invasion in the 7th century, Petra was fast passing into obscurity. The only activity in the next 500 years was in the 12th century when the Crusaders moved in briefly and built two forts.

From 1189 (when Saladin conquered the Crusader castles) until the early 19th century, Petra was a forgotten outpost, a

'lost city' known only to local Bedouin. These descendants of the Nabataeans were reluctant to reveal its existence because they feared (perhaps not without reason) that the influx of foreigners might interfere with their livelihood. Finally, in 1812, a young Swiss explorer, JL Burckhardt, ended Petra's blissful isolation, riding into the city disguised as a Muslim holy man.

Petra soon became caught up with the Victorian-era's romantic obsession with the Orient. The site was visited by a slew of amateur archaeologists, travellers, poets and artists (including the famed painter David Roberts in 1839) and a powerful myth grew up around the 'Rose-red City'. The first English archaeological team arrived in 1929 and excavations continue to pull up major finds. In 1992 the mosaics of the Petra Church were unveiled and in 2003 a tomb complex was found underneath the Treasury. After 150 years of attention, Petra still has many secrets left to reveal.

Orientation

Petra is only a three hours' drive from Amman, two hours from Aqaba and 1½ hours from Wadi Rum.

The village of Wadi Musa is the transport and accommodation hub for Petra, as well as other attractions in the vicinity that are well worth seeing if you have more time (and energy).

In the 1980s many of the B'doul Bedouin who had lived in Petra for generations were resettled to hastily built breeze-block villages, such as neighbouring Umm Sayhoun, an arrangement many are less than happy with.

Dangers & Annoyances

Many find the constant hard sell and frequent overcharging in both Petra and Wadi Musa a little wearying; remember that most traders are just trying to scratch out a living in what is a very competitive market. Once you break down the barrier with a smile, you'll find almost all will reciprocate in kind.

Some locals have a mischievous sense of humour, with camels being offered as 'air-conditioned taxis' and at least one inventive young woman offering handicrafts with the words 'Look for free and buy for money or look for money and buy for free'.

If you are hiking through the wadis, especially from November to March and in September and October, pay careful attention to the weather, as these narrow canyons are susceptible to flash flooding.

Getting There & Away

Petra is just three hours' drive from Amman and two hours' drive from Aqaba. See p199 for details on transport options.

BROOKE HOSPITAL FOR ANIMALS

Just to the left of the main entrance to Petra is a large expanse of ground dotted with horses. At the back is the **Princess Alia Horse Clinic** (☎ 2156379; fax 2156437), affiliated with the London-based **Brooke Hospital for Animals** (Map p194; www.brooke-hospital.org.uk), which has a number of animal hospitals in Egypt, Pakistan and India.

Founded in 1988 at the request of Princess Alia, the clinic in Petra aims 'to improve the condition and wellbeing of working equine animals'. It cares for abused horses, educates locals and children in the area about the treatment of animals, provides free preventive measures against disease and operates mobile clinics to remote regions. It also provides sun shelters and water troughs for horses, and gives (second-hand) saddles and other equipment to owners of working animals. Over 20,000 horses, and 250 other animals, were treated by staff in 1997.

If you see a genuine case of any animal being badly treated (rather than being worked hard) please contact the clinic.

Getting Around

Horses with guides can be rented for JD7 for the 800m stretch between the main entrance and the start of the Siq. The price can be negotiated down to as little as JD2 going back up to the entrance. It costs around JD20 for a two-hour horse ride around the surrounding hills.

Horses and carriages with guides are only allowed between the main entrance and the Treasury (2km). These are officially for the disabled and elderly, but are often rented by tired hikers. They officially cost JD20 for a two-person carriage; JD40 to the museum.

Donkeys accompanied with guides are available all around Petra for negotiable prices. They can go almost to the top of the Monastery (about JD3 one way), and all the way to the High Place of Sacrifice (about JD5 one way), and can be rented for trips as far as the Snake Monument and to Jebel Haroun. Leading donkeys is a genuine occupation for local Bedouin, but animal lovers may think twice about hiring one to climb the incredibly steep and narrow paths.

Camel rides are more for the novelty value, and are available for short rides and photographs near the Theatre and Qasr al-Bint. A trip between Qasr al-Bint and the Treasury, for example, costs about JD7.

If you happen to see any animal being cruelly treated, please report it to the Brooke Hospital for Animals (see below).

THE ANCIENT CITY Orientation

If you are coming down the hill from Wadi Musa, head for the Petra visitor centre plaza across from the Mövenpick Hotel.

MAPS

Very little in Petra is signposted or captioned so a map and guidebook are essential. For most visitors planning to see the major sights over one or two days, this book will be more than sufficient.

If you plan to hike long distances in Petra without a guide, the best map is the Royal Jordanian Geographic Centre's contoured 1:5000 *Map of Petra* (2005). It's usually available at bookshops in Wadi Musa and at the small stand next to the Nabataean Museum for JD3.

The *Petra: The Rose-Red City* brochure, published by the Jordan Tourism Board, has an easy-to-read map, a few explanations and useful photos that help identify certain places. Try to get one before coming to Petra as the visitor centre often runs out.

Information

The **ticket office** (Map p194; ☎/fax 2156020; ☎ 6.30am-5pm Oct-Apr, 6am-5.30pm May-Sep) is located in the visitor centre. Although tickets are not sold after the times specified above, you can remain in Petra after this time, usually until sunset.

Entry fees are currently JD21/26/31 for one-/two-/three-day passes. If you bring an international student card you can get a 50% discount. A three-day pass is valid for longer than three days but you'll need to get the extra dates written on the back of the ticket and stamped. Multiday tickets are nontransferable and signatures are checked. Children under 15 get in for half price.

If you're contemplating trying to enter Petra without paying, don't. Apart from the fact that tickets are checked, it's worth remembering that the ongoing preservation of Petra depends on the income from tourists. It may be a lot of money, but it's worth it.

Don't underestimate the size of Petra and the heat in summer. Always take a good hat, sturdy footwear, sunscreen, plenty of rolls of film or a large memory card, snacks and/or a packed lunch and, especially in summer, lots of water.

In general the best time to visit Petra is from mid-October to the end of November, and late January to the end of May. This avoids the coldest, wettest (when floods are possible) and hottest times of the year.

PETRA ON THE WEB

- For background and general travel info on Petra visit **Go 2 Petra** (www.go2petra.com)
- 'Everything you wanted to know about the Nabataean Empire' can be found at **Nabataea Net** (http://nabataea.net)
- See the online Petra exhibition at the **American Museum of Natural History** (www.amnh.org/exhibitions/petra)
- Take an online tour of the excavations of the Great Temple at **Brown University** (www.brown.edu/Departments/Anthropology/Petra)
- A great collection of current and archived links on Petra can be found at the **Complete Petra** (www.isidore-of-seville.com/petra)

BOOKS

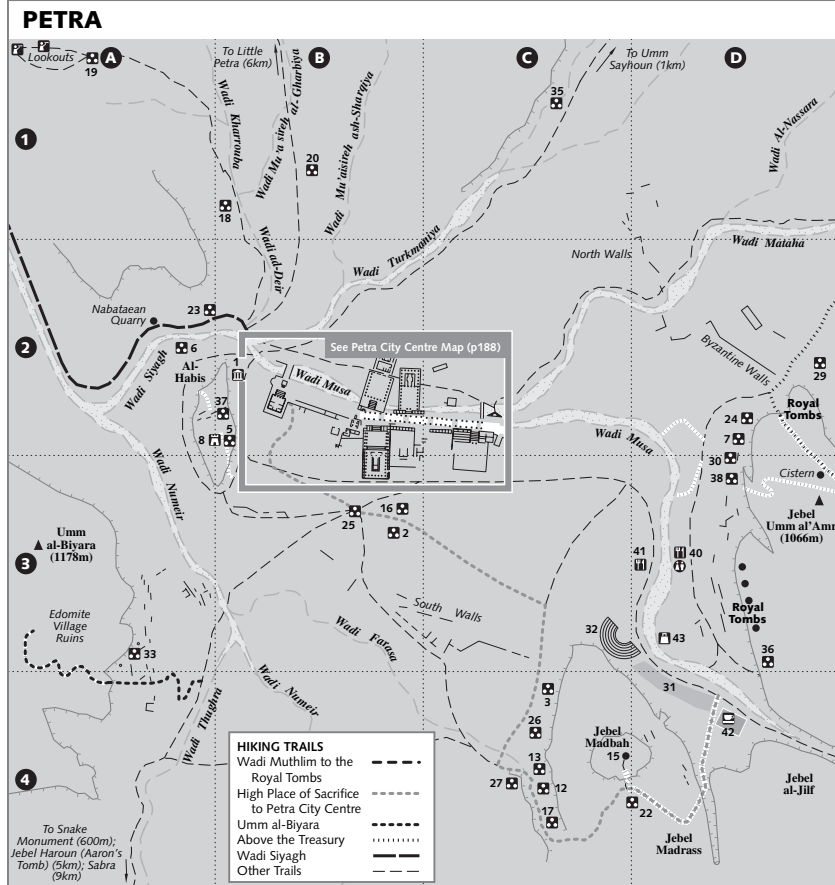
There are plenty of souvenir and coffee-table books about Petra. One of the best guidebooks, *Petra: A Traveller's Guide* by Rosalyn Maqsood, includes lots of history and culture, and describes several hikes. The pocket-sized *Petra: The Rose-Red City*, by Christian Auge and Jean-Marie Dentzer, is lightweight and excellent, especially on Petra's historical context. Jane Taylor's *Petra* (JD10) is another good paperback introduction to the site. Taylor also writes the excellent but heftier *Petra & the Lost Kingdoms of the Nabataeans*, now available in paperback.

There's a chapter on hiking in Petra in Tony Howard and Di Taylor's *Jordan - Walks, Treks, Climbs & Canyons*. For reconstructions of how Petra's monuments once appeared, *Jordan, Past & Present - Petra, Jerash, Amman* isn't bad.

These books are generally available at shops and stalls around Wadi Musa and Petra but will probably be cheaper to buy at home.

TOILETS

There are toilets at the visitor centre, opposite the Theatre (set in a gorgeous rock-hewn cave and worth a visit in itself!), at the back of Qasr al-Bint and at the two nearby restaurants. If at all possible, avoid going



to the toilet elsewhere as it spoils it for the people coming after you.

TOURIST INFORMATION

The first stop for all visitors should be at the **Petra visitor centre** (Map p194; ☎/fax 2156020; 6am-9pm), just before the entrance. It houses a helpful information counter, a couple of shops and toilets. There are plans to rebuild the visitor centre as part of a much larger complex with an auditorium and shops.

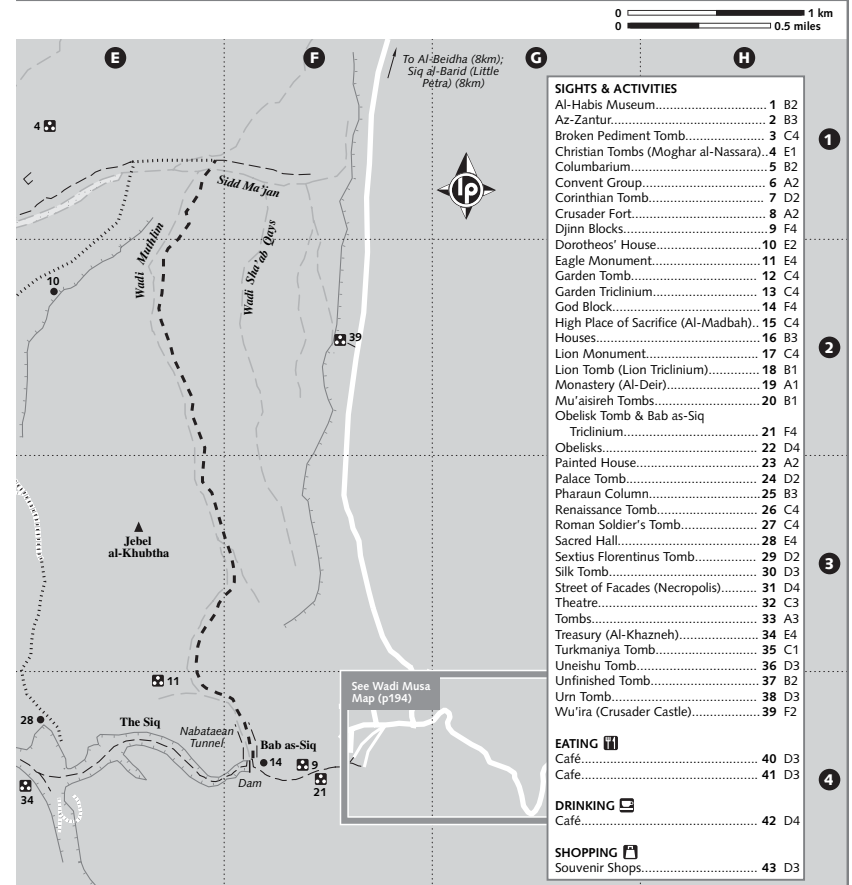
The information counter is also the place to arrange a **guide** (2½hr tour JD15, full-day incl Monastery or High Place of Sacrifice JD35). Tours are available in English, French, Spanish and Arabic.

Sights

There are over 800 registered sites in Petra, including some 500 tombs, but the best things to see are easy to reach. From the gate, an 800m path heads downhill through an area called **Bab as-Siq** (Gateway to the Siq).

DJINN BLOCKS

Five minutes' walk past the entrance are three enormous monuments, known as the Djinn (Spirit) Blocks (map pp180-1, built by the Nabataeans in the 1st century AD. (The Arabic word *djinn* is the source of the English word 'genie'). Their exact functions remain a mystery, but they could have been tombs, or built as dedications to the Nabataean god, Dushara. The largest block has



a depression on top, thought to have been used during funeral rites.

OBELISK TOMB & BAB AS-SIQ TRICLINIUM

Further along the path to the left is a tomb (map pp180-1) with four pyramidal obelisks, built as funerary symbols by the Nabataeans in the 1st century BC. The eroded human figure in the centre, along with the four obelisks, is believed to represent the five people buried in the tomb. The combination of Greek, Egyptian and local styles is intriguing.

Underneath is a Nabataean triclinium (three-banked dining room; map pp180-1), with its three small chambers, where annual feasts were held to commemorate the dead. The carved columns flanking the entrance

give a sense of the original façade, while the Doric frieze above the door is also worth a look. Inside, the U-shaped bench is all that remains.

Further down the track, a detour up a signed track to the right leads to several tomb chambers and stepped tombs carved into the top of some domed hills. It's a secret little place, missed by almost everyone in their rush to get to the Siq.

THE SIQ

The 1.2km *siq* starts at an obvious bridge, which is, in fact, part of a new dam. The dam was built in 1963, on top of one built by the Nabataeans in about AD 50, to stop water from Wadi Musa river flowing

Map pp180-1

through the Siq. To the right (north), Wadi Muthlim heads invitingly through a Nabataean tunnel – the start (or finish) of a great hike (see p189).

The entrance to the Siq was once topped by a Nabataean monumental arch. It survived until the end of the 19th century, and some remains can be seen at twin niches on either side of the entrance to the Siq.

The Siq often narrows to about 5m (at some points to just 2m) wide, and the walls tower up to 200m overhead. The original channels cut into the walls to bring water into Petra are visible, and in some places the 2000-year-old terracotta pipes are still in place. One section of the Roman paving was revealed after excavations in 1997 removed 2m of floor accumulation.

The Siq is not a canyon (a gorge carved out by water), but is actually a single block that has been rent apart by tectonic forces; at various points you can see where the grain of the rock on one side matches the other.

At one point the Siq opens up to reveal a lovely square tomb next to a fig tree. A couple of hundred metres further, and a bend in the canyon, look for a weathered but wonderfully evocative carving of a camel and caravan man on the left wall. The water channel passes behind the carving.

Further along, the walls close in still further, and at times almost meet overhead, shutting out the light and seemingly the sound as well. The Siq can seem to continue forever, and the sense of anticipation builds as you look around each corner for your first glimpse of the Treasury. It's a magical introduction to the ancient city.

TREASURY (AL-KHAZNEH) Map pp180–1

Tucked away in such a confined space, the Treasury (known locally as Al-Khazneh) is protected from the ravages of the elements, and it is here that most visitors fall in love with Petra. The Hellenistic façade is an astonishing piece of craftsmanship, with the

SUGGESTED ITINERARIES

Almost everything in Petra is a highlight in itself, and the combined effect of the ancient city is truly astonishing. There are, however, some specific sites that should not be missed. These include the Treasury, High Place of Sacrifice, the Street of Façades, the Theatre, Royal Tombs and the Monastery. Don't restrict yourself to these, but on no account miss them.

It's vital to plan your trip around Petra to make efficient use of your time. Start your exploration early. The tour buses start arriving before 9am and the enchanting *siq* (gorge) is best experienced in quietness and away from large crowds. If you want to see the Treasury bathed in sunlight, you can enter Petra early, visit a few other sites such as the High Place of Sacrifice and the Theatre, and then return at around 9am. The Monastery and Royal Tombs are at their best in the late-afternoon light.

If your time is limited, you may wish to follow these suggestions:

Half-day (about five hours) You will have little time to explore much, so concentrate on the Siq, the Treasury (Al-Khazneh), the Theatre, the Royal Tombs; everything along the Colonnaded Street, Petra Church and the Nabataean Museum.

One Day (about eight hours) One day is really the minimum time needed to do Petra any justice. Try not to rush around in one day if you have time to visit for two: pay the extra for a two-day ticket and explore the site more slowly and thoroughly. In one day, explore the places mentioned above, and allow time for a walk up to the Monastery or the High Place of Sacrifice, or even above the Treasury on Jebel al-Khubtha, if you have any remaining time and energy.

Two Days This is an ideal amount of time, and allows leisurely exploration, hikes to more remote areas, and a long lunch on one or both days. On the first day, allow time to visit the places mentioned under 'Half-day', and climb to the Monastery. On the second day, enter Petra along the stunning Wadi Muthlim; climb to the High Place of Sacrifice from the Theatre and continue along the back of the mountain to the city centre (or vice versa); and hike above the Treasury on Jebel al-Khubtha (best in the morning).

Three Days A three-day ticket allows plenty of time to explore the sites and hike off the beaten track. For the first two days, follow the itinerary listed earlier. On the third and/or fourth days, climb up Umm al-Biyara; explore one of the more remote corners of the site (see p189) and allow some time to explore Siq al-Barid (Little Petra) and the ruins of Al-Beidha village.

NABATAEAN RELIGIOUS PROCESSIONS

Some historians speculate that the primary function of the Siq was akin to the ancient Graeco-Roman Sacred Way. Some of the most important rituals of Petra's spiritual life began as a procession through the narrow canyon, while it also represented the endpoint of the pilgrimage by Nabataean pilgrims. Many of the wall niches that are still visible today along the Siq's walls were designed to hold figures or representations (called *baetyls*) of the main Nabataean god, Dushara. These small sacred sites served as touchstones of the sacred for pilgrims and priests, offering them a link to the more ornate temples, tombs and sanctuaries in the city's heart, reminding them that they were leaving the outside world, and on the threshold of what was for many a holy city.

sophistication, symmetry, scale and grandeur of the carving enough to take away the breath of first-time visitors.

As you pause to take in the view, the individual details become more apparent. Atop the six columns at ground level are floral capitals, while the triangular pediment depicts a gorgon's head emerging from the surrounding flora. The carved figures alongside horses on the ground level are thought to be the sons of Zeus. On the top level, in the sunken niches, are two winged Victories, with four more figures of unknown origin alongside. The central figure above the entrance pediment is the source of much speculation; most scholars believe it to be an assimilation of the Egyptian goddess Isis and the Nabataean goddess Al-'Uzza, while others suggest Tyche, the Roman goddess of fortune. Two eroded eagles stand sentry at the very top. Regularly spaced niches on either side of the façade suggest the builders' secret weapon – scaffolding.

Although carved out of the solid iron-laden sandstone to serve as a tomb for the Nabataean king Aretas III, the Treasury gets its name from the story that the Egyptian Pharaoh hid his treasure here (in the urn in the middle of the second level) while pursuing the Israelites. Some locals clearly believed the tale because the 3.5m-high urn is pockmarked by rifle shots, the results of vain attempts to break open the solid-rock urn.

The date of the Treasury's construction has also been a subject of debate, and estimates range from 100 BC to AD 200.

As with all the rock-hewn monuments in Petra, it's the façade that captivates; the interior is just an unadorned square hall with a smaller room at the back. The Treasury, which is 43m high and about 30m wide, is at its most photogenic in full sunlight between about 9am and 11am.

From the Treasury, the Siq turns off to the right (northwest), and diagonally opposite is a **Sacred Hall**, which may have had ritual connections with the Treasury.

STREET OF FAÇADES Map pp180–1

Heading towards the centre of the city, and just before the Theatre, are over 40 tombs and houses built by the Nabataeans in a 'crow step' style reminiscent of the Assyrians. Colloquially known as the Street of Façades, the tombs here are similar to the hundred or more all around Petra, but are certainly the most accessible. It's easy to forget about these when the majestic Theatre comes into view, but the tombs are worth exploring.

The first tomb (number 67) is unusual in that it has a funeral chamber in the upper story. The low entryway highlights how the valley floor has risen over the centuries thanks to the debris washed down during flash floods. Nearby, tomb 70 is unusual in that it is freestanding, with a ziggurat-style top that makes it look like a miniature fort.

THEATRE Map pp180–1

Originally built by the Nabataeans (not the Romans) over 2000 years ago, the captivately weathered Theatre was cut out of rock, slicing through many caves and tombs in the process. The seating area (*cavea*) had an original capacity of about 3000 in 45 rows of seats, with three horizontal sections separated by two corridors. The orchestra section was carved from the rock, but the backdrop to the stage or *frons scaenae* (which is no longer intact) was constructed (as opposed to carved) in three storeys with frescoed niches and columns overlaid by marble. The performers entered through one of three entrances, the outlines of which are still partially visible.

NABATAEAN RELIGION

Surprisingly little is known about Nabataean religion considering that the Nabataeans' preoccupation with death clearly dominates most of the major structures of Petra.

As the cosmopolitan Nabataeans came into contact with surrounding cultures, the early desert polytheistic religion of the original Arabian tribes absorbed Roman, Greek, Egyptian and even Edomite and Assyrian beliefs, to create a unique faith.

The main Nabataean god was Dushara, the mountain god, who governed the natural world. Over the years he came to be associated with the Greek god Dionysus, the Roman Zeus and the Egyptian god Osiris.

For fertility, the Nabataeans prayed to the goddess Al-'Uzza (the Very Strong), who became associated with Aphrodite and Isis. Al-Kutba was the god of divination and writing, linked to Hermes and Mercury. Allat (literally 'Goddess') was associated with Athene.

Early representations of the Nabataean gods were non-figurative. Divine stones known as *baetyls* marked important wadis, junctions, canyons and mountain tops, representing the presence of the divine, much as the Kaaba stone at Mecca still does for Muslims. Religious processions to Petra's spiritual 'High Places' were an important part of the community's religious life, culminating in a sacrifice (some say human) and ritual purification. You can still see these altars and basins atop the High Place of Sacrifice.

The Theatre was renovated and enlarged (to hold about 8500, or around 30% of the population of Petra) by the Romans soon after they arrived in AD 106. To make room for the upper seating tiers, they sliced through more tombs. Under the stage floor were storerooms and a slot through which a curtain could be lowered at the start of a performance. From near the slot, an almost-complete statue of Hercules was recovered.

The Theatre was badly damaged by an earthquake in AD 363, and parts of it were then removed to help build other structures in Petra.

HIGH PLACE OF SACRIFICE (AL-MADBAH)

Map pp180-1

The most accessible of the many sacrificial places high in the mountains is the High Place of Sacrifice, referred to locally as Al-Madbah (the Altar). Located on top of Jebel Madbah, the altars are fairly unimpressive, but the views of the city to the northwest, Wadi Musa village to the east and the shrine on top of Jebel Haroun to the far southwest are superb. About 50m down (north) over the rocks from the High Place are more staggering views, this time of the Royal Tombs.

The steps to the High Place of Sacrifice, which start about 200m before (to the southeast of) the Theatre just past a couple of souvenir stands, are fairly obvious, but not signposted. The climb up takes about 45 minutes, and is better done in the early

morning when the sun is behind you. It's marginally easier than the hike up to the Monastery, but it's still steep and taxing at times. Donkey owners will implore you to ride one of their poor animals for a negotiable JD5/7 (one way/return).

As you near the summit, the trail leads straight ahead into the flatter valley of Jebel Madrass. While you may wish to explore this area, the High Place is to the right (take the right fork at the rubble of a stone building). At the top, near a small café, pass the two **obelisks** dedicated to the Nabataean gods, Dushara and Al-'Uzza; the altars are further along to the north and at the highest point in the immediate area. The top of the ridge was levelled to make a platform, and large depressions with drains were dug to channel the blood of sacrificial animals. It's not clear whether the site was used to conduct ceremonies honouring the gods or to perform funeral rites, or both.

You can return the same way (ie back along the steps and finishing near the Theatre), but if you have the energy it's better to continue on to the city centre via a group of interesting tombs on the west side of the mountain. See p190 for details of this hike.

ROYAL TOMBS

Map pp180-1

The Wadi Musa river bed widens out after the Theatre. To the right (or north), carved into the cliff face, are the impressive burial places known collectively as the 'Royal Tombs'.

The first (and most southern) is **Uneishu Tomb**, dedicated to a minister of Nabataean Queen Shafialt II (the wife of Aretas IV). It's virtually opposite the Theatre, and easy to miss.

The **Urn Tomb**, recognisable by the enormous urn on top of the pediment, is accessible from a stairway next to the café. It has an open terrace over a double layer of vaults, probably built in about AD 70 for King Malichos II (AD 40-70), or Aretas IV (8 BC-AD 40). Of the three tombs carved between the pillars, the central one still has its closing stone, carved with a bust of the king. Above the four half-columns was an architrave (a decorative space between the columns and pediment) decorated with four figures representing deities. The room inside is enormous, measuring 18m by 20m, and the patterns in the rock are striking. It's difficult to imagine how the smooth walls, sharp corners and three small chambers at the top were carved out with such precision. A Greek inscription on the back wall details how the building was used as a Byzantine church in the mid-5th century.

Further up (north) is the **Silk Tomb** which is the most unimpressive of the group in terms of the surviving state of its carvings, due in large part to earthquake damage. It is, however, noteworthy for its stunning swirls of pink, white and yellow veined rock.

The **Corinthian Tomb** is something of a hybrid, with elements of both Hellenistic and Nabataean influences. The portico on the lower level of the tomb is distinctively local in origin, while the upper decorative features are more Hellenistic in style. The top level is reminiscent of the Treasury. The tomb gets its name from the Corinthian capitals adorned with floral motifs. By no means the most ornate of the Royal Tombs - it has suffered centuries of exposure to the elements - it's nonetheless worthy of a visit.

The **Palace Tomb** is a delightful three-storey imitation of a Roman or Hellenistic palace, and is one of the largest and most recent monuments in Petra. Its rock-hewn façade, the largest in Petra, is thought to owe more to ornamental exuberance rather than to any religious significance. The two central doorways are topped by triangular pediments, while the two on either side have

THE TOMBS OF PETRA

There are more tombs dotted around Petra than any other type of structure and for years visitors assumed that the city was just one vast necropolis. The simple reason why so few dwellings have been discovered is that the Nabataeans lived in tents, much like some Bedouin do today.

Petra's earliest rock tombs date from the 3rd century BC. The size and design of the tombs depended in large part on the social status and financial resources of the deceased, ranging from simple cave-like tombs to the ornate façades of the Royal Tombs, the high point of Nabataean funerary architecture.

Better sculptors than architects, the Nabataeans quickly realised that it was easier to carve tombs out of the soft sandstone rock than to build free-standing buildings that were vulnerable to earthquakes. The larger tombs were carved out of the rock from the top down, using scaffolding support, and the façades were then plastered and painted (almost none of this decoration remains).

The dead were buried in graves (*loculi*) carved from the plain walls inside the tomb, while the exterior decoration was made to represent the soul (and sometimes likeness) of the deceased. All but the most simple contained banqueting halls where funerals and annual commemorative feasts were held. Some rooms were frescoed and you can still see traces of coloured decoration in Wadi Siyagh's Painted House (see p191) and in the Siq el-Barid in Little Petra (p200).

The Nabataeans were a nomadic desert people without an architectural heritage of their own but as traders they were a cosmopolitan people who readily borrowed elements of art and architecture from neighbours. Thus you'll see Egyptian, Assyrian, Mesopotamian, Hellenistic and Roman styles throughout Petra, as well as unique local architectural inventions such as the Nabataean horned column. If you combine this eclecticism with the organic nature of Petra's cave-like tombs, the stunning natural colour of the rock and natural grandeur of the landscape and it's easy to see how Petra has captured the imagination of generations of travellers.

arched pediments. The doors lead into typically simple funerary chambers. The 18 columns on the upper level are the most distinctive and visually arresting elements of the tomb. The top left corner is built – rather than cut out – of stone because the rock face didn't extend far enough to complete the façade.

A few hundred metres further around (northeast) is the **Sextius Florentinus Tomb**, built from AD 126 to AD 130 for a Roman governor of Arabia, whose exploits are glorified in an inscription above the entrance. This tomb is largely neglected, but is worth the short walk. Narrower than the tombs to the southwest, it has some dazzling rock colourings. The gorgon's head in the centre of the façade above the columns is eroded, but it is still possible to distinguish the vine tendrils emanating from the head. The horned capitals are a uniquely Nabataean creation. Unlike many of the other tombs, the interior is worth a look for the clearly discernible *loculi* (graves), with five carved from the back wall and three on the right as you enter.

There is plenty of room here for wider exploration of more phogenic tombs, and other temples and religious sites in the area. If you have the time and energy, the steps between the Palace and Sextius Florentinus tombs lead to a wonderful position above the Treasury – see p191.

COLONNATED STREET **Map p188**

Further west along Wadi Musa are the re-erected columns of the Colonnaded Street that form Petra city centre. Built in about AD 106 (around the same time as that of the similar street in Jerash), over an existing Nabataean thoroughfare, the Colonnaded Street follows the standard Roman pattern of an east-west decumanus, but without the normal *cardo maximus* (north-south axis). Columns of marble-clad sandstone originally lined the 6m-wide carriageway, while the shops that lined either side were entered through covered porticoes.

At the start of the Colonnaded Street is the **Nymphaeum**, a public fountain dedicated to the nymphs probably built in the 2nd century AD. It was probably here that the waters from the Siq were channelled. Typical of its kind, it had a large semicircular niche decorated with statues and fountains. Little can be

seen today; it's really only recognisable by the huge 450-year-old pistachio tree, a welcome respite from the endless sun in summer.

On the left (south) of the colonnaded street are the limited remains of the market area, archaeologically divided into a **Lower Market** (also known as the Upper Terrace), **Middle Market** and **Upper Market**. Further up on the right (north) are the unrecognisable ruins of the **Royal Palace**.

The street finishes at the **Temenos Gateway**, built in the 2nd century AD with three arches, huge wooden doors and side towers. It marked the entrance to the temenos (sacred courtyard) of the Qasr al-Bint, marking the movement from the commercial area of the city to the sacred area of the temple. Its design is reminiscent of a Roman triumphal arch but with Nabataean touches, such as the floral capital atop at least one column. Look closely for the few remaining floral friezes and a figure with an arrow, which suggest that this was once a very grand structure. Opposite (south) are the decrepit ruins of the **Nabataean baths**.

GREAT TEMPLE **Map p188**

Excavations of the Great Temple have been under way since 1993 and have yielded impressive results. It was built as a major Nabataean temple in the 1st century BC and, despite being badly damaged by an earthquake not long after, was in use (albeit in a different form) until the late Byzantine period. The first set of stairs was fronted by a monumental propylaeum (gateway) while the courtyard at the top of the first stairs marked the lower temenos (sacred courtyard), flanked on the east and west sides by a triple colonnade. The upper level housed the temple's sacred enclosure, with four huge columns (made from stone discs and clad in marble) at the entrance. A *theatron* (miniature theatre) stands in the centre. The temple was once 18m high, and the enclosure was 40m by 28m. The interior was originally covered with striking red and white stucco work.

QASR AL-BINT **Map p188**

One of the few free-standing structures in Petra, this temple was built in around 30 BC by the Nabataeans, adapted to the cult of Roman emperors and destroyed in about the 3rd century AD. Despite the name given

SAVING PETRA FROM ITSELF

Petra is in danger of being loved to death. At its peak in the late 1990s the site was visited by more than 400,000 people a year. The combination of thousands of footprints a day, increased humidity levels from the breath of thousands of tourists in the most popular tombs and the effects of adventurous travellers clambering over the crumbling tombs and steep hillsides is accelerating severe erosion at the site.

Moreover, the Nabataeans built sophisticated hydraulic systems to divert flood waters from along the Siq to their wadis, and for irrigation and storage. After centuries of neglect, erosion and earthquakes, these are ironically causing serious damage to the Siq and various monuments because their bases are now often in underground water, loaded with salt that works its way up the walls and destroys the sandstone. The damage to the Treasury is the most worrying.

Various foreign governments and Non-governmental Organisations have undertaken surveys, including a team of advisors from the US National Parks Service, and some urgently needed restoration of the Nabataean hydraulic system has taken place, notably along the Siq. Germany has been instrumental in cleaning and stabilising some of the tomb faces, though the main benefactor is the Swiss government, which feels some kindred spirit with Petra because the 'discoverer' of Petra, Burckhardt (see p177), was born in Switzerland.

Part of the problem is the lack of a clear structure in the preservation process. About 25% of Petra's ticket revenue filters back to the **Petra Regional Authority**, which is responsible for developing tourism in an area of some 853 sq km, of which 264 sq km have been designated as an 'Archaeological Park'. Add to this the private **Petra National Trust**, which is involved in training guides, studying the impact on Petra from tourism, managing the number of souvenir stalls and creating dedicated walking trails. Then there is the specialist German-Jordanian **Conservation and Restoration Centre in Petra (CARCIP)**, which offers specialist advice on technical reconstruction.

to it by the local Bedouin – Qasr al-Bint al-Pharaun (Castle of the Pharaoh's Daughter) – it was almost certainly built as a dedication to the Nabataean god, Dushara (and possibly the fertility goddess Al-'Uzza), and was one of the most important temples in the ancient city. In its original form, it stood 23m high and had marble staircases, imposing columns topped with floral capitals, a raised platform for worship, and ornate plaster and stone reliefs and friezes – small traces of which are still evident. The central 'holy of holies', known as an *adyton*, would have housed an image of the deities. The sacrificial altar in front, once overlaid with marble, indicates that it was probably the main place of worship in the Nabataean city and its location at street level suggests that the whole precinct (and not just the temple interior) was considered sacred.

TEMPLE OF THE WINGED LIONS **Map p188**

The recently excavated Temple of the Winged Lions is named after the carved lions that once topped the capitals of each of the columns. The temple was built in about AD

27 and dedicated to the fertility goddess, Atargatis, who was the partner of the main male god, Dushara, although some scholars speculate that the goddess Al-'Uzza may also have been worshipped here.

This was a very important temple, centred around a raised altar, and with a colonnaded entry of arches and porticoes that extended down to and across the wadi at the bottom. Fragments of decorative stone and painted plaster found on the site, and now on display in the Nabataean Museum, suggest that both the temple and entry were handsomely decorated. Although there's not much to see, the views are good.

PETRA CHURCH **Map p188**

An unmistakable awning covers the remains of the Petra Church (also known as the Byzantine Church). The structure was originally built by the Nabataeans, and then redesigned and expanded by the Byzantines around AD 530. It eventually burned down, and was then destroyed by repeated earthquakes, before being lovingly restored by the American Center of Oriental Research in Amman.

Inside the church are some exquisite Byzantine floor **mosaics**, some of the best in the region. The mosaics originally continued up the walls. A helpful map and explanations in English are located inside the church.

AL-HABIS **Map pp180–1**

Beyond the Qasr al-Bint is the small hill of Al-Habis (the Prison). From the Nabataean Tent Restaurant steps lead up the face of Al-Habis to the small **Al-Habis Museum** (☎ 8am–4pm). The classical statues, tiny figurines and painted stuccowork on display lend a human dimension to the huge scale of the site, though the Nabataean Museum (opposite) is more impressive.

A lovely trail leads from the museum around the hill for 100m or so to the junction of Wadi Siyagh and Wadi Numeir, continuing around the back of Al-Habis, past the **Convent Group** of tombs, eventually arriving at a series of steps at the southern end of the hill.

At the top of the steps, on top of Al-Habis, are the limited ruins of a small **Crusader fort**, built in AD 1116 by Baldwin I. The ruins

are not impressive, but the **views** of the city centre certainly are. If you poke around the northeastern corner you'll discover chambers, sacrificial altars and ruined Nabataean steps that lead down precariously to the west side of the hill.

At the eastern base of Al-Habis are two interesting remains that can be seen as you descend the hill behind Qasr al-Bint. The **Unfinished Tomb** is unique in Petra and offers a rare glimpse at the way the Nabataeans constructed their rock tombs, starting at the top on a platform of scaffolding and working their way down. Nearby is the enigmatic **Columbarium**, whose multiple niches remain a mystery; some suppose they housed votive images or urns, others say this was a dovecote for pigeons.

MONASTERY (AL-DEIR) **Map pp180–1**

Similar in design to the Treasury, the spectacular Monastery (known locally as Al-Deir) is far bigger (50m wide and 45m high) and just as impressive. Built in the 3rd century BC as a Nabataean tomb, perhaps to King Obodas I (ruled 96–86 BC), the Monastery

gets its name from the crosses carved on its inside walls, suggesting that the building was used as a church in Byzantine times. The building has towering columns and a large urn flanked by two half-pediments. The three-dimensional aspect of the upper level beautifully complements the lower façade, an element thought to be derived from Hellenistic influences. The courtyard in front of the Monastery was once surrounded by columns and was probably used for sacred ceremonies.

It was once possible to climb up a steep trail to a point above the Monastery, but this is currently not allowed for the sake of preserving the Monastery and its tourists – with one visitor falling to her death a few years ago.

Opposite the Monastery there's a strategically placed drinks stall in a cave with a row of seats outside where you can sit and contemplate the majestic sight.

Beyond the drinks stand a trail leads up to two lookouts, with stunning views west over Wadi Araba into Israel & the Palestinian Territories and south to the peak of Jebel Haroun, topped by a small white shrine. A couple of hundred metres behind the drinks stand, tomb 468 is worth exploring for its fine façade, some defaced carvings and excellent views.

The climb to the Monastery takes about 40 minutes, and is best started in mid-afternoon when there is welcome shade along the way and the Monastery is at its most photogenic. The spectacular ancient rock-cut path of more than 800 steps follows the old processional route and is easy to follow (though uphill all the way). It's a spectacle of weird and wonderfully tortured stone and there are several side paths to explore if you have the time. If you really don't want to walk, donkeys (with a guide) can be hired for about JD3/5 one way/return.

The start of the trail to the Monastery starts from behind (to the northwest of) the Basin Restaurant and Nabataean Museum. If in doubt look for weary hikers coming down.

The path to the Monastery passes the **Lion Tomb** (Lion Triclinium), set in a small gully. The two lions that lent the tomb its name are weather-beaten, but can still be made out, facing each other at the base of the monument.

OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

Explore the following hidden corners of Petra and you'll probably have them all to yourself (for locations see Map pp180–1):

- Tombs above Wadi Mu'asireh
- The Christian Tombs of Moghar al-Nassara
- The southern end of the Royal Tombs
- Hillside tombs north of the Theatre
- Tombs at the base of Umm al-Biyara
- Upper Wadi Farasa, north of the Garden Triclinium
- Turkimaniya Tomb, with the longest Nabataean inscription in Petra

NABATAEAN MUSEUM **Map p188**

In the same building as the Basin Restaurant, this **museum** (☎ 9am–5pm, to 4pm Oct–Mar) has an interesting display of artefacts from the region, including mosaics unearthed in Wadi Musa. The historical explanations in English are comprehensive, and will help most visitors better understand the history of Petra. A shop inside the main building sells detailed maps of the area.

Hiking

Anyone with enough energy, time and enthusiasm, who wants to get away from the crowds, see some stunning landscapes, explore unexcavated tombs and temples and, perhaps, meet some Bedouin villagers, should pack an extra bottle of water and go hiking.

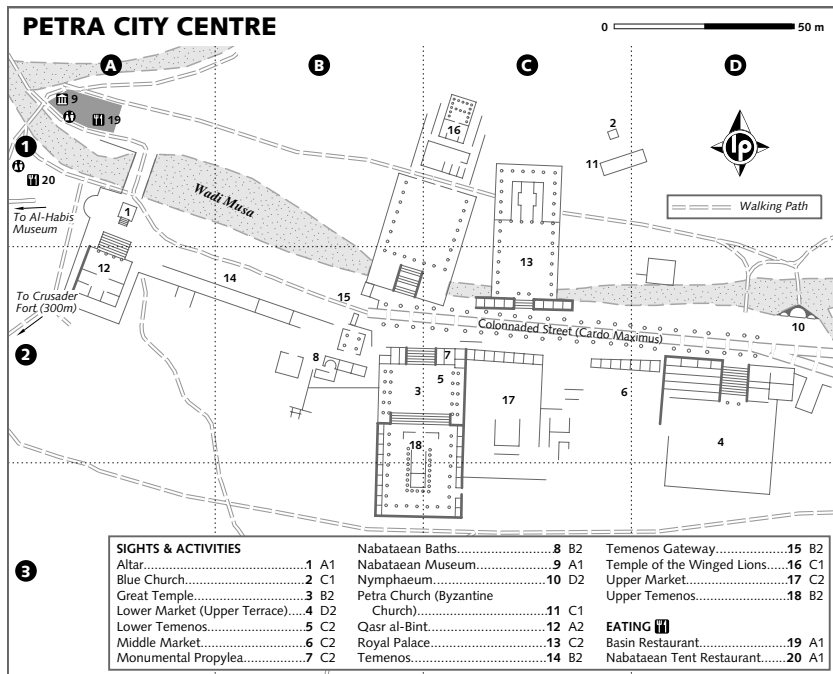
None of the following hikes are all that strenuous and none involve camping overnight (which is not allowed). Only the hike to Sabra really needs a guide. Hikers should pick up the contoured *Map of Petra* mentioned on p179. Please note that the approximate hiking times are just that, and do not include the time needed to explore the site and/or linger to admire the views.

Guides can be hired from Petra visitor centre and travel agencies (priced at JD25 to JD55 per day) or you can find a cheaper Bedouin guide inside Petra.

WADI MUTHLIM TO THE ROYAL TOMBS

Map pp180–1

This adventurous canyon hike (1½ hours) is an exciting alternative route into Petra if



you've already taken the main *siq* path. It's not difficult or strenuous but there are places where you'll need to lower yourself down some boulders. Bring sandals in case you need to wade through small water pools.

The trail starts just before the entrance to the *Siq*, where a trail drops down to the right into an incredible 88m-long **Nabataean tunnel** (there's light at the end of the tunnel). At the far end you'll find yourself in narrow Wadi Muthlim.

Before the tunnel it's possible to make a short side-trip to the **Eagle Monument**, a faint carving of an eagle just northwest of the tunnel. Take the trail to the right of the tunnel, past a god block and over the top of the tunnel, diagonally across to the side valley.

Back on the hike, Wadi Muthlim gradually narrows into a metre-wide *siq* and at a couple of places you'll have to lower yourself down a couple of 2m-high boulder blockages. After 25 minutes look for the remains of a Nabataean dam above you. Thirty minutes from the start of the hike you'll meet a T-junction where the trail hits Wadi Mataha. A painted arrow points to the left; follow this. The sinuous *siq* winds through some residual water pools (you may get your feet wet here) and passes some Nabataean niches before spitting you out blinking into the sunlight 10 minutes later.

(If doing this hike in the opposite direction you can find the entry to the *Siq* by following the curved man-made wall around to the right – more niches mark the entry to the *Siq*).

From here it's easiest to just follow the cliff face to the left, past a series of little-visited tombs, including **Dorotheos' House** and the **Tomb of Sextius Florentinus**, until you reach the Royal Tombs. Alternatively, you can explore the interesting so-called 'Christian Tombs' of Moghar al-Nassara.

Note that some parts of the *Siq* may be impassable if it's been raining. There is a genuine possibility of flash floods along Wadi Muthlim, because the dam at the start of the *Siq* diverts water down this wadi. It's important that you don't start this trek if it's raining, or is likely to.

HIGH PLACE OF SACRIFICE TO PETRA CITY CENTRE **Map pp180–1**

This one-hour hike starts from the High Place of Sacrifice. Refer to p184 for infor-

mation about getting to the High Place up the steps from near the Theatre. It's possible to do this hike in reverse, which makes for a good afternoon exit from the site.

As you face the drinks stand from the top of the path, near the Place of Sacrifice, a trail heads down towards Wadi Farasa (Butterfly Valley). The start of the trail is not immediately obvious, so look for the helpful piles of stones indicating the trail, or ask for directions at the drinks stand.

On the way down is the **Lion Monument**, where water was channelled to pour out of the lion's mouth from the rock face above – an example of Nabataean engineering at its cleverest. The lion is about 5m long and 2.5m high. A stone **altar** diagonally opposite suggests the fountain had some religious function. The steps wind further down the side of the cliff to the **Garden Tomb**, which archaeologists believe was probably a temple. To the right (east) are the remains of a wall, part of the huge water cistern above.

A little further down, on the left (west), is the elegant **Roman Soldier's Tomb**, named for the statue over the door. Almost opposite (east) is the **Garden Triclinium**, a hall used for annual feasts to honour the dead placed in the Soldier's Tomb. The hall is unique in Petra because it has carved decoration on the interior walls. The tomb and triclinium were once linked by a colonnaded courtyard.

A few minutes further down, the trail then branches to the right, above the dry valley. At the ridge ahead take a left (the right branch takes you to the Royal Tombs) and walk past **Az-Zantur**, a 1st-century AD palace that's still under excavation. Nearby is a collection of ruined Nabataean and Roman houses, one of the few traces of habitations so far discovered in Petra. The trail continues west along the ridge to the **Pharaun Column**, the only surviving column of another Nabataean temple. If you're disoriented, the pale-green roof over the Petra Church, north of the Colonnaded Street, is a good landmark for the direction you need to head.

UMM AL-BIYARA **Map pp180–1**

He the Judaeen king, Amaziah was the one who defeated ten thousand Edomites in the Valley of the Salt and captured Sela in battle...

(2 Kings 14:7)

The return trip from Qasr al-Bint to Umm al-Biyara (the Mother of Cisterns) takes about three hours and offers some of the best views over Petra. It's a fairly strenuous hike up hundreds of steps but the trail is easy to follow. Start the hike in the mid-afternoon when most of the path is in shade but don't leave it too late as you don't want to come down these steps in poor light.

Umm al-Biyara is the flat-topped mountain (1178m) to the southwest of the city centre. On top may have been the Edomite capital of Sela, from where the Judaeen king Amaziah (who ruled from 796 to 781 BC) threw 10,000 prisoners to their deaths over the precipice.

From behind Qasr al-Bint, head up to the Pharaun Column and descend to the road that leads along Wadi Thughra to the Snake Monument. The path up the rock face starts from just to the left of the largest of the rock-cut tombs on the southeast face of the mountain – a jeep track leads up to the start of the steps. After a couple of minutes' climbing you'll pass an impressive ceremonial ramp.

On top of the mountain are the ruins of a 7th-century BC **Edomite village**, as well as several cisterns. There are also many unexcavated **tombs** along the base of the eastern cliffs. Take a picnic and savour the views (look for the Monastery to the north).

ABOVE THE TREASURY **Map pp180–1**

For dramatic and unusual views of the Treasury, far from the madding crowds, make this 1½-hour return hike from the Palace Tomb, with the option of returning via the Urn Tomb. Start this hike in the early morning to get the Treasury in good light, or in mid-afternoon when some parts are in the shade.

An obvious set of steep processional steps leads up the valley from about 150m north-east of the Palace Tomb. The stiff climb takes about 20 minutes and flats out at a hill-top Nabataean **cistern**. Along the way there are wonderful views of the Roman Theatre.

Continue south from the cistern along a less obvious dirt path, down the dry wadi for another 15 minutes, and then down a small ravine, until you come to a dramatic position about 200m above the Treasury, with fantastic views of the mighty edifice; watch your step. You may have the place to yourself (there's not a drink stand in sight), and the only noise you can hear is

the echo of the tour groups marvelling at the Treasury below. It is easy to get disoriented while finding the path back to the top of the steps, so look out for landmarks on the way down.

Just before you get back to the cistern a tiny cleft in the rock to the left reveals worn steps (take care with your footing) that lead down a gully to a point next to the **Urn Tomb**. The trail isn't all that clear but is doable with some care. If you are not sure about it then take the main path back down the way you came up.

WADI SIYAGH **Map pp180–1**

For a leg-stretcher that doesn't require walking straight up the side of a hill, try the trail which follows the dry riverbed to the northwest of Al-Habis hill (it's most easily accessed from in front of the Basin Restaurant) and follows Wadi Siyagh. Once a residential suburb of Petra, the wadi and the nearby slopes have unexcavated tombs and residences to explore and offer some nice picnic spots away from the crowds and the noisy restaurant generator.

As you walk down the wadi from the Basin Restaurant you'll soon see steps leading up on the right side to the **Painted House**, one of the very few tombs in Petra that still has traces of Nabataean frescoes. Further down, at a bend in the valley, is a **Nabataean quarry**.

The main attraction further down the valley is the dense ribbon of green bushes, water pools and even waterfalls (in winter) that lines the wadi. In spring, the flowers are beautiful.

The trail along Wadi Siyagh is easy to follow, but becomes a bit rough in parts as it ascends the wadi walls. Just go as far as you want, but remember that you must come back the same way. Don't walk along the wadi if rain is imminent because flash floods are a real possibility.

JEBEL HAROUN

Aaron will be gathered to his people: he will die there. Moses did as the Lord commanded: they went up to Mount Hor in the sight of the whole community.

(Numbers 20:26-27)

This trip from Qasr al-Bint to Jebel Haroun via the Snake Monument takes around six

hours return. Some people hire a donkey (JD20, with a guide) or even a camel for the trip, though this isn't strictly necessary.

Jebel Haroun (1350m) is thought to be biblical Mt Hor, where Moses' brother Aaron (Haroun to Muslims) is believed to be buried. The small white **shrine** on top of Jebel Haroun was built in the 14th century, apparently over Aaron's tomb. There are some excavations of a religious complex under way nearby. The views towards the Monastery and the Dead Sea are worth the effort of getting here, as one reader discovered:

The path passes Bedu settlements and from the top of the mountain the 360° views to Petra's Deir and the Dead Sea rift are stunning...the walk from/to the entrance of Petra is about three hours each way...a total of about 18km return. The track is easy to find even without a guide. My kids found four different species of lizards at the top, including some big ones.

Jeroen Peters

The trail to Jebel Haroun starts at the Pharaon Column, and follows the dirt road past Bedouin settlements to the **Snake Monument**, a curled stone on a rock pedestal that faintly resembles a snake. Just continue to the southwest towards the obvious white shrine (which can look deceptively close); the trail is not steep until the last bit. At the bottom of the mountain, find the caretaker if you want to see inside the shrine. A guide is recommended but not obligatory.

SABRA

The trip from Qasr al-Bint to the suburban Nabataean remains of Sabra takes a minimum of five hours return and takes you to a remote corner of Petra, where trade caravans once unloaded their precious cargoes at the fringes of the main city. The remains at Sabra include some ruined walls, temples, bridges and a small Roman theatre. A guide is needed to even find the trail from Snake Monument. A return trip on donkey costs around JD30.

An exciting option offered by some travel agencies is the adventurous two-day hike from Tayyibeh, through the *siq*-like Wadi Tibn, to Sabra, camping overnight and continuing on to Petra the next day.

Tours

Petra by Night (adult/child under 12 JD12/free) is a magical way to see the old city and can be one of the highlights of a trip to Petra. The walk starts from the Petra visitor centre at 8.30pm on Monday and Thursday nights (it doesn't run when it's raining), and lasts two hours, taking you along the Siq (lined with hundreds of candles) in silence as far as the Treasury, where traditional Bedouin music is played and mint tea is served. There are often performances of Bedouin storytelling.

Tickets are available from a few travel agencies in town or from the Petra visitor centre.

Eating

At the western end of the Colonnaded Street, near Qasr al-Bint, two restaurants offer similar all-you-can-eat buffets.

The upmarket **Basin Restaurant** (lunch buffet JD8.500, beer JD3; ☎ 11.30am-4pm) is run by the Crown Plaza Resort. It's expensive but the food is good and includes a barbecue. Alternatively, pay JD5 for salad and mezze only.

Nabataean Tent Restaurant (lunch buffet JD7, drinks JD1; ☎ 11.30am-4.30pm) is similar and has nice tables on the grass.

Throughout the site, including at the High Place of Sacrifice and the Monastery, stalls sell cold drinks, bottled water and some basic foodstuffs as well as souvenirs. Prices are high, with bottled water around JD1.500.

WADI MUSA

وادي موسى

☎ 03

The village that has sprung up around Petra is Wadi Musa (Valley of Moses), formerly known as Elji but now named after the valley it follows. It's a patchy mass of hotels, restaurants and shops stretching about 5km down from 'Ain Musa to the main entrance of Petra.

After the signing of Jordan's peace agreement with Israel & the Palestinian Territories in 1994, Wadi Musa became a boom tourist town, transformed almost overnight from a small town with few visitors and a traditional Bedouin society to a sprawling competitive place overrun by visitors laden with cash. Large numbers of Israelis began to visit, along with other tourists, encouraged by moves towards peace in the region. Some locals have coped with these changes better than others – see the boxed text, p212.

Many locals are aware of tourists flocking to Petra with big wallets and little time and this is one of the few places in Jordan where you'll get consistently overcharged.

Orientation

'Wadi Musa' refers to everywhere between 'Ain Musa and the entrance to Petra. The obvious village centre is around the Shaheed roundabout, about 3km from the Petra gates, which is where you'll find most tourist facilities. There is a second collection of mid- and top-end hotels, restaurants and souvenir shops a couple of kilometres downhill close to the Petra entrance.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Inside Petra, behind the visitor centre and along the main road through Wadi Musa, souvenir stands sell books about Petra, but everything is more expensive than in Amman. See above for information about books and maps.

EMERGENCY

Police station (☎ 2156551, 191) In Wadi Musa, adjacent to the Police roundabout.

Tourist police station (☎ 2156441, 196; ☎ 8am-midnight) Opposite the Petra visitor centre. A few tourist police can be found lounging around in the shade inside Petra.

INTERNET ACCESS

Petra Internet Café (☎ 2157264; alpetra@hotmail.com; per hr JD3; ☎ 9am-midnight) Fast ADSL connections, with 50% discount for guests of most of the local hotels. Located up the hill from the Shaheed roundabout.

Rum Internet (☎ 2157906; per hr JD1; ☎ 10am-midnight) Located down the hill from the Shaheed roundabout.

LAUNDRY

Most hotels will do laundry for around JD1 per piece, though most of it gets sent to the dry cleaners at the Amra Palace Hotel. The Valentine Hotel washes 1kg of laundry for JD2.500 (JD3 for nonguests).

MEDICAL FACILITIES

Queen Rania Hospital Is of a high standard and open for emergencies without referral. Located 5km from the Police roundabout on the road to Tayyibeh.

Wadi Musa Pharmacy Has a decent selection of toiletries. Located near the Shaheed roundabout.

MONEY

There are surprisingly few moneychangers in Wadi Musa, although many hotels will change money, albeit at a poor rate. It's generally better to change travellers cheques before you come to Petra.

The Housing Bank and Jordan Islamic Bank up from the Shaheed roundabout are good for money-changing; both have ATMs. The Arab Bank is down from the roundabout. Closer to the gate into Petra, the Arab Jordan Investment Bank, and the Cairo-Amman Bank in the Mövenpick Hotel, change cash and (usually) travellers cheques with a minimum of fuss. The banks are open from about 8am to 2pm, Sunday to Thursday and (sometimes) 9am to 11am on Friday. A couple of moneychangers near the Silk Rd Hotel keep longer hours.

POST

Main post office (☎ 8am-5pm Sat-Thu) Located inside a mini-plaza on the Shaheed roundabout.

Post office (☎ 8am-5pm Sat-Thu) Small office by the Mussa Spring Hotel in 'Ain Musa.

Visitor centre post office (☎ 7.30am-5pm) The attraction of using the small post office behind the Petra visitor centre is that mail is postmarked 'Petra Touristic Post Office', rather than Wadi Musa.

TELEPHONE

International telephone calls can be made from private agencies along the main streets of Wadi Musa village for around 800 fils per minute. A domestic call costs 150 fils.

TOURIST INFORMATION

The best source of information is the Petra visitor centre near the entrance to Petra (p180). For information about minibuses and other transport, you're better off asking at your hotel or one of the restaurants around the Shaheed roundabout.

Activities

HAMMAMS

A 'Turkish bath' is perfect to ease any aching muscles after walking the trails of Petra. The two places in town generally only have male masseurs. The service includes a steam bath, massage, scrub and 'body conditioning' for a standard JD15. It's a good idea to book in advance.

In the passage under the Silk Rd Hotel (enter from the main road), **Petra Turkish Bath**

DRINKING
Al-Wajad ad Bar.....(see 29)
Cave bar.....(see 30)

SHOPPING
Made in Jordan.....(see 21)
Rum Studio & Labs.....(see 14)
Sand Castle Shop.....(see 43)
Society for the Development and Rehabilitation of Rural Women.....(see 8)
Souvenir Shops.....45 A2
Wadi Musa Ladies Society.....(see 8)

TRANSPORT
Bus Station.....46 E4
Hertz Rent-a-Car.....47 C1

To Petra (2.5km)
To Al-Anbat Hotel (7km):
Musa Spring Hotel (2km);
Am Musa (2km);
Post Office (2km)

To Petra Market (4km):
Petra Nazama Hotel (5km);
Nabataean Castle Hotel (5km);
Queen Rania Hospital (5km);
Tayyib Zaman (10km)

To Beit Zaman (1km)
To Al-Wajad ad Bar (1.5km);
To Petra (1.5km);
Al-Beduina (8km)

INFORMATION
1 Arab Bank.....1 E3
2 Arab Jordan Investment Bank.....2 B1
3 Cairo-Amman Bank.....(see 29)
4 Housing Bank.....3 E3
5 Jordan Islamic Bank.....4 E3
6 Main Post Office.....5 E4
7 Moneychangers.....6 E4
8 Petra Visitors Centre (Ticket Office).....7 E3
9 Rum Internet.....8 A2
10 Tourist Police Station.....9 E3
11 Visitor Centre Post Office.....10 A2
12 Wadi Musa Pharmacy.....11 A2

EATING
13 Al-Anbat Quick Restaurant.....13 E3
14 Al-Anbi Restaurant.....14 E3
15 Al-Saraya Restaurant.....15 E3
16 Cleopetra Restaurant & Coffee Shop.....16 E1
17 Oriental Restaurant.....17 E3
18 Petra Nights Restaurant.....18 E3
19 Movenpick Hotel.....19 B1
20 Petra Guest House.....20 A2
21 La Beduina.....(see 43)

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES
22 Brooke Hospital for Animals.....13 A3
23 Jordan Experience.....14 B1
24 La Beduina.....(see 43)

INDEX
15 A2
16 D3
17 E3
18 B1
19 C1
20 E3
21 B1
22 E3
23 E4
24 E4
25 A1
26 E3
27 E3
28 D2
29 B1
30 A2
31 B1

INDEX
32 B1
33 E3
34 B1
35 C1
36 E2
37 C1
38 E3
39 E3
40 E3
41 E3
42 E3
43 B1
44 D3
45 A2

(☎ 2157085; 🕒 10am-11pm) is closest to the entrance of Petra, although it's not the cleanest place. It's in the process of building a separate women's baths.

Locals prefer **Salome Turkish Bath** (☎ 2157342; 🕒 4pm-10pm), though it's sometimes booked out by tour groups. Located near Al-Anbat Hotel II.

The Amra Palace Hotel (☎ 2157070; www.amrapalace.com), see p196, also has an excellent hammam, with separate sections for men and women.

Tours

The most professional agency in Wadi Musa for arranging trips inside Petra and around Jordan (including Wadi Rum and Aqaba) is **Petra Moon Tourism** (☎ 2156665; www.petrmoon.com), which has an office on the road to Petra. They can arrange horses to Jebel Haroun, expensive fully supported treks to Dana (four to five days), hikes from Tayyibeh to Petra, and camel treks to Wadi Rum. Hiking guides cost around JD55 per day, horses JD20 to JD35 per day.

Other reliable agencies include: **Jordan Experience** (☎ 2155005; www.jordanexperience.com.jo)

La Beduina (☎ 2157099; www.labeduinatours.com)

Zaman Tours & Travel (☎ 2157723; www.zaman-tours.com) In the same building as the Silk Rd Hotel.

A couple of the budget (and a few midrange and top-end) hotels can also arrange simple day trips around Petra and further afield.

Courses

If you've always wanted to know how to whip up wonderful hummus or bake the perfect baklava, **Petra Kitchen** (☎ /fax 2155900; www.petra-kitchen.com, petrakitchen@petramoon.com; cookery course per person JD30) is for you. It offers a nightly cookery course where tourists can learn from local women how to cook Jordanian mezze, soup and main course in a relaxed family-style atmosphere. Dishes change daily and the evening starts at 6.30pm (7.30pm in summer), or you can arrange to go early to shop for ingredients. The price isn't cheap but includes food and soft drinks. Reservations are recommended.

Sleeping

Things have changed just a little over the years in Petra. Back in 1908, Macmillan's

guide to *Palestine and Syria* had the following advice:

At Petra, there is no sleeping accommodation to be found, and travellers therefore have to bring with them camp equipment, unless they prefer to put up with the inconvenience of sleeping in the Bedwin huts at Elji, half an hour distant from Petra, or spend the night in some of the numerous temples. Such a course cannot be recommended to European travellers, especially if ladies are in the party.

Even as recently as 1991, there were only four official hotels in Petra. Visitors now have a choice of over 70 hotels and camping is no longer permitted inside Petra.

Prices fluctuate wildly in Petra, depending on the season and amount of business. The high season is generally from April to mid-May and in October. Outside these times, prices drop quickly from the official rates, especially if you're staying more than a couple of nights. The biggest discounts are in late May to September.

Most hotels have a variety of rooms in a variety of sizes; some with balcony, others with a bigger bathroom but no natural light. It's often more important which rooms are available than which is the best hotel.

In winter (November to March), make sure there is heating and that it works. Surprisingly few places have fans, and only the more expensive hotels have air-conditioning. The views advertised by some hotels are actually of Wadi Musa valley, not of Petra itself.

Places that are some distance from the entrance to Petra will offer free transport to and from the gate (usually once a day in either direction). Although many hotels offer 'half board' (which includes breakfast and dinner) at a higher rate, you can always obtain a room-only rate if you wish to eat elsewhere.

One last word: have a good idea of where you want to stay before arriving in town. If you get off the minibus at the Shaheed roundabout in Wadi Musa with a backpack, you'll likely be besieged by persuasive touts, so stick to your guns.

BUDGET

There is a sameness to the many budget places. Most will attempt to entice you with

offers of watching the *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* video and free shuttles to/from Petra. The choice for women is more difficult than elsewhere in Jordan.

Al-Anbat Hotel II (☎ 2157200; alanbath@joinit.com.jo; s/d JD12/14) The cheaper of the two Anbats, the rooms here are quiet and well-furnished, with clean but small private bathrooms, making it especially good value in the heart of Wadi Musa. It's not perfect; the staff are a bit lackadaisical (but friendly) and the satellite TV keeps packing up halfway during a movie. The double rooms at the front are the best choice. Discounts of 30% are possible, especially outside high season. It may well be renovated soon, with a new restaurant planned for next door.

Valentine Inn (☎ 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 this is the biggest backpacker hangout in town, well attuned to a range of budget travel needs from travel information to laundry, a great veggie dinner buffet (JD3), Internet access, transport to Amman along the King's Highway and more. The rooms are decent but nothing special and the dorms are very cramped. Both male and female travellers have complained of pushy, rude staff and a 'bad vibe'.

Cleopetra Hotel (☎/fax 2157090; cleopetrahotel@hotmail.com; s/d JD10/14) The rooms here, all with private bathroom and breakfast, are reasonable but smallish but it's a friendly place to hang out, with BBC World and an extensive range of movies playing in the lobby. Discounts of up to 50% are common.

Mussa Spring Hotel (☎ 2156310; musaspring_hotel@yahoo.co.uk; rooftop bed JD2, dm JD3-4, s/d with shared bathroom JD7.500/11, with private bathroom JD8.500/15) In the village of 'Ain Musa, this is as far from the clamour of Petra as you can get and one of the first places you reach en route from Amman or Ma'an. It offers daily free shuttles to/from the gate at Petra, 5km away. The rooms are small and some are windowless, but it's a friendly place with a terrace and decent restaurant (dinner JD3). The rooms at the front with windows and small balconies are the best. Rates drop by 30% when things are quiet.

Moon Valley Hotel (☎ 2157131; moon-valley-hotel@yahoo.com; rooftop bed JD2, smaller s JD7, larger s/d JD10/15) Down the hill on the road to Petra, this is a friendly place and one where the

MOSES' SPRING

Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank.

(Numbers 20:11)

'Ain Musa (Moses' Spring) is one of two possible locations in Jordan for the site where Moses supposedly struck the rock with his staff and water gushed forth to the thirsty Israelites. The simple site is marked by a modern three-domed building occasionally visited by local pilgrims but there's not a great deal to actually see.

hard sell is refreshingly absent. It's clean and well-looked after, with a nice lobby sitting area and roof-top café, and gets good reports from travellers. The more expensive rooms are particularly good value.

Elgee Hotel (☎ 2156701; fax 2157002; s/d JD10/15) Across the road from the Rose City Hotel, this is also a passable option, with all rooms having private bathrooms, though the lobby bar and top-floor disco are a bit seedy.

Rose City Hotel (☎ 2156440; fax 2014132; s/d JD7/13) Quieter than most, this is one of the better-value places in the village centre, with friendly staff. Rooms vary a lot, but all have private bathroom and breakfast.

MIDRANGE

All the room rates in this section include breakfast.

Amra Palace Hotel (☎ 2157070; www.amrapalace.com; s/d JD23/35, half board JD25/40; 🚿) The very comfortable rooms, satellite TV, heated outdoor pool, Jacuzzi, summer terrace and excellent Turkish bath (JD15 per person) push this a notch above anything else in Wadi Musa. Rooms at the front have the better views. Visa cards are accepted.

El-Rashid Hotel (☎ 2156800; Shaheed roundabout; s/d from JD10/15) Popular with groups of French tourists, this place is uninspiring but spacious (particularly the new rooms), and has comfortable rooms right in the centre of town. During quiet periods the friendly management is happy to negotiate, which will probably make it good value and accessible to budget travellers. There is satellite TV and a grand lobby.

Sunset Hotel (☎ 2156579; fax 2156950; s/d JD15/20) Handy for the entrance to Petra, with a nice breakfast terrace, but you'll pay for the convenience with average, somewhat gloomy rooms.

Al-Anbat Hotel I (☎ 2156265; www.alanbat.com; s/d JD13/16; 🚿 🚿 🚿) Both a good-value and very well-run three-star resort, located on the road between 'Ain Musa and Wadi Musa. The spacious rooms come with satellite TV, and most have a balcony with views over the wadi. Facilities include a Turkish bath (JD12 for guests) and a small pool (in summer). Breakfast costs JD2 and the good dinner buffets are JD5. Free transport to/from Petra is available. Campers (JD3 per person) can use a designated area, with showers and a kitchen, and you can park a camper van. Al-Anbat is the Arabic name for the Nabataeans.

Petra Moon Hotel (☎/fax 2156220; petramoonhotel@yahoo.com; s/d JD15/20) Up behind the Mövenpick Hotel, this is convenient for the entrance to Petra. The rooms are simple but clean, with decent bathrooms, and the staff are helpful. If you are planning to spend more than two nights, the price per night drops dramatically.

Silk Road Hotel (☎ 2157222; www.petrasilkroad.com; s/d JD25/35) Another decent, if dull, mid-range hotel close to Petra, with spacious rooms. The huge restaurant does a buffet dinner for JD6 and is popular with tour groups.

Petra Inn (☎ 2156403; nabatee@go.com.jo; s/d/tr JD25/35/40, low season JD20/25/30) Similarly good value with comfortable rooms and a convenient location not far from the Petra gate. The rooms can be a bit dark with the notable exception of the fabulous end rooms which offer 120° window views. The excellent roof terrace is a great place to catch the sunset in summer.

Petra Palace Hotel (☎ 2156723; www.petrpalace.com.jo; s/d/tr JD31/46/60; 🚿 🚿) This is a much better-run place, offering superb value and nice details like in-room hair dryers and a washing line. Some of the luxury rooms open out onto 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. Located 500m from the Petra entrance.

Golden Tulip (☎ 2156799; resrv@kingsway-petra.com; s/d JD70/85, discounted to JD30/40; 🚿) Sterile but comforting tour group option from the reliable Dutch chain. It's a bit far from the action, out in 'Ain Musa, and there's no shuttle bus so you'll have to shell out for a taxi (JD1.500) to Petra. It has a pool, a terrace and a decent bar.

TOP END

At all of the places listed here, there are some surprising bargains to be found when business is quiet.

Crowne Plaza Resort Hotel (☎ 2156266; www.crownplaza.com, cprpetra@nets.jo; s/d JD100/110, discounted to JD80/90 plus taxes; 🚿) A great location (close to the Petra gate and overlooking sandstone bluffs) and good discounted online rates make this a good option. The heated swimming pool is useful outside of high summer and a lovely terrace has summer barbecues. The hotel also has a Jacuzzi, sauna, tennis courts, coffee makers in rooms and self-service laundry facilities. The bar and restaurants are good but the pricey (JD6) breakfast isn't included in the room rate.

Petra Guest House (☎ 2156266; ppwwm@go.com.jo; s/d JD50/60, discounted to JD40/50) You can't get closer to the entrance to Petra without sleeping in a cave. It's a step down in quality from its sister, the Crown Plaza, but you can use the facilities (pool etc) of that hotel so it's good value. The chalets are more charming than the main building, which is due for renovation, pushing it up to four stars. Rooms are a bit motel-like but comfortable.

Mövenpick Hotel (☎ 2157111; www.moevenpick-petra.com; s/d JD92/112; 🚿) One hundred metres from the gate to Petra, this is the most luxurious place in town, and as stylish as you'd expect. There are Mediterranean and buffet restaurants, a good bar, a swimming pool, roof garden, the peaceful Burckhardt Library, a children's playground and supermarket gift shops. Even the hotel brochure describes the hotel as 'posh'.

Beit Zaman The Sofitel chain is due to reopen this wonderful village-style hotel, which was built several years ago along the lines of the similar Taybat Zaman in Tayyibeh. The hotel has languished during the recent tourism downturn so hopefully the facilities have been kept up.

The following four luxury hotels are on the scenic road between Tayyibeh and Wadi

Musa. They offer fine views (the terraces are fantastic places for a sunset drink) but transport can be inconvenient if you don't have your own car. Some close outside of high season.

Nabataean Castle Hotel (☎ 2157201; resort.nabataean@moevenpick.com; s/d with half board JD110/120, rm discounted to JD77; 🏠) Mövenpick run this luxury place (with the region's only heated indoor pool) and runs a daily shuttle bus to and from Petra. It's located 5km south of the Police roundabout.

Petra Panorama Hotel (☎ 2157390; www.petrapanorama.com; s/d JD100/115, discounted to JD42/56 full board; 🏠) Like most of the hotels along this road, it offers wonderful sunset views and luxurious rooms. Discounts make this four-star place great value. It is likewise located 5km south of the Police roundabout.

Petra Marriott (☎ 2156408; petramrt@go.com.jo; s/d low season with half board JD45/50, high season JD70/75; 🏠) Superb luxury, around 4km from the Police roundabout, on the road to Tayyibeh. It has an outdoor pool, several restaurants, a Turkish bath and even a cinema for free use by guests.

Sofitel Taybet Zaman (☎ 2150111, fax 2150101; s/d JD102/129, discounted to JD74) One of the most unique hotels in Jordan, the Taybet Zaman is a stylish and evocative reconstruction of a traditional Ottoman stone village, with luxurious and spacious rooms, a terrace restaurant (set meal per person JD11) with superb views (although the food gets mixed reviews), handicraft shops, swimming pool and Turkish bath (JD12 per person). If we had the money this is where we'd retire to! Located in Tayyibeh village, a taxi here from Petra will cost about JD10 one way.

Eating

The main road through Wadi Musa is dotted with grocery stores where you can stock up on food, munchies and drinks for Petra, although the selection is fairly uninspiring unless you are a big fan of processed cheese. Some hotels can arrange picnic boxes but they are rarely up to much. A felafel sandwich travels well and makes a great picnic lunch.

Sanabel Bakery (☎ 2157925; ☎ 5am-midnight), located around the corner from Rum Internet, does a delicious range of Arab sweets and fresh bread that can be handy for a picnic, but check for overcharging.

After a long, dehydrating day hiking in Petra, most find it hard to resist a Swiss ice cream from the window outside the **Mövenpick Hotel** (JD1.300).

BUDGET

Most of the cheapest places to eat are in Wadi Musa village. There are a few places offering felafel and shwarma, especially around the Shaheed roundabout and just up from Sanabel bakery.

Al-Afandi Quick Restaurant (meals from JD1) A simple and friendly place located off the Shaheed roundabout, offering hummus, felafel and shwarma and one of the very few places in town that doesn't habitually overcharge foreigners.

Al-Wadi Restaurant (☎ 2157151; salads 750 fils, mains JD3-4; ☎ 7am-late) One of two good places right on Shaheed roundabout. There's pasta and pizza, as well as a range of vegetarian dishes and local Bedouin specialties such as *gallayah* and *mensaf*, most of which come with salad and rice. It also does breakfast (around JD1.500).

Al-Arabi Restaurant (☎ 2157661; mains from JD1; ☎ 6am-midnight) Almost next door to Al-Wadi is this pleasant place with helpful staff and good meals. A large chicken shwarma with salad and hummus costs JD2.500. Repeat customers get a discount.

Cleopetra Restaurant & Coffee Shop (☎ 079 531 8775; buffet JD3; ☎ 6am-11pm) Just south of the Shaheed roundabout, this canteen does a few à la carte dishes but most people opt for the decent value but average-tasting open buffet, offering a range of Bedouin specialties. You can also get breakfast (600 fils to JD1.500).

MIDRANGE

All of the places listed here are down the hill from Wadi Musa village and near the entrance to Petra. They're all close together and similar in menu and price.

Oriental Restaurant (☎ 2157087; mains JD4-5, pizzas from JD2.500; ☎ 11am-9.30pm) A popular place with a slightly schizophrenic menu that churns out both Lebanese main courses and Western-style pasta and pizza.

Red Cave Restaurant (☎ 2157799; starters JD1, mains JD4-5; ☎ 9am-10pm) Cavernous, cool and friendly and the menu has a good selection. The Bedouin *gallayah* comes with lamb or chicken as well as rice, onions and a spicy

tomato sauce. Bedouin specialties include *mensaf* and *maqlubbeh* (sometimes called 'upside down'). Located a couple of hundred metres east of the main entrance.

TOP END

Sandstone Restaurant (☎ 2157701; starters JD1, mains JD6; ☎ 8.30am-9pm) Next door to the Oriental Restaurant, this is a friendly place with expensive but decent meals. They sometimes do buffets (JD6). The nice outdoor seating is a good place for a beer.

Al-Saraya Restaurant (☎ 2157111; Mövenpick Hotel; ☎ lunch & dinner) If you need a splurge, look no further than the blow-out buffet (lunch JD12.500, dinner JD16.250), or you can just choose the salad, soup and bread for JD6.

Drinking

There's not a lot to do in the evening, other than recover from aching muscles and plan your next day in Petra. Some hotels organise videos or other entertainment, but only when there are enough takers.

Cave Bar (☎ 2156266; ☎ 8am-midnight; small beer from JD2.500, cocktail JD4, plus 26% tax & service) If you've never been to a bar in a 2000-year-old Nabataean rock tomb (and we're guessing you haven't!) then a drink here is a must. The seats are actually in the side tombs; if that's a bit creepy for you, there's also pleasant seating outside. The ambience is classy and there's live Bedouin music from 9pm (except Saturday). When things get busy it has been known to stay open until 4am. They also serve food, including a special menu of 'Nabataean food' served in clay bowls – reserve this a half-day in advance. It's next to the entrance to the Petra Guest House, behind the visitor centre.

Wranglers Pub (☎ 2156723; ☎ 2pm-midnight; beer JD3-5) The Petra Palace Hotel offers this trendy place although it's a bit soulless when things are quiet. Prices are similar to those at the Cave Bar.

Al-Maqa'ad Bar (☎ 2157111; beer from JD2.500, plus 26% tax & service) The Mövenpick hotel bar has a lovely Moroccan-style interior with carved wooden grills and a central chandelier that has to be seen to be believed. The ice-cream specials are fantastic.

Shopping

There are plenty of souvenir shops lining the road down to the entry gate into Petra,

and plenty of blankets piled with jewellery, carvings, coins and pretty rocks, set up by local Bedouins around Petra itself. Throughout Wadi Musa you'll see craftsmen patiently pouring coloured sand into glass bottles; you can even get them to write your name if you give them time. The top-end hotels also have gift shops selling pricey but good-quality handicrafts.

Made in Jordan (☎ 2155700; www.madeinjordan.com, gallery@petramoon.com) The best quality crafts and gifts in Jordan come from various Non-governmental Organisation (NGO) projects, most of which are represented in this excellent shop. Products include olive oil, soap, paper, ceramics, table runners, nature products from Wild Jordan (p70), jewellery from Wadi Musa, baby blankets and embroidery from Safi, camel hair shawls, bags from Aqaba, plus individual pieces from Jordanian women artists and even a Jordanian Monopoly set. The fixed prices are high, as is the quality; credit cards are accepted.

The **Wadi Musa Ladies Society** (☎ 6am-9pm) and the **Society for the Development and Rehabilitation of Rural Women** (☎ 6am-9pm) both have shops at the visitor centre that are worth a visit for a good range of souvenirs, books and crafts.

Sand Castle Shop (☎ 2157326; ☎ until 8pm) You will have to wade past the furry toy camels and Petra baseball caps to get to the kilims and other good stuff out back.

Rum Studio and Labs (☎ 2157467; ☎ 8.30am-10pm) This is the best place for film in Wadi Musa, in front of the Silk Rd Hotel on the main road. A roll of 36 100ASA Kodak film costs JD3; slides cost JD7. To develop and print 36 shots costs from JD4.360 to JD6, depending on the size.

Getting There & Away

Public transport to and from Wadi Musa is less frequent than you'd expect, given that it's a large village and the number-one tourist attraction in Jordan.

CAR

Hertz Rent-a-Car (☎ 2156981) hire cars cost from JD30 per day. A 4WD Pajero costs around JD65 per day.

Petra and Wadi Musa are well signposted all along the King's and Desert highways. The road from Petra to Little Petra has now been extended to rejoin the Wadi Musa to

Shobak road and is one of the more scenic alternatives for heading this way. A new road winds down into Wadi Araba for direct access to the Dead Sea Highway. The road to Tayyibeh is also particularly scenic.

MINIBUS

Minibuses generally leave from the bus station in central Wadi Musa. Most minibuses won't leave unless they're at least half full, so be prepared for a wait. There are far fewer services on Fridays.

At least three minibuses travel every day between Amman (Wahadat station) and Wadi Musa (JD3, three hours) along the Desert Highway. These buses leave Amman and Wadi Musa when full every hour or two between 6am and noon.

Minibuses leave Wadi Musa for Ma'an (JD1, 45 minutes) fairly frequently throughout the day (more often in the morning), stopping briefly at the university, about 10km from Ma'an. From Ma'an there are connections to Amman, Aqaba and (indirectly) Wadi Rum. Minibuses also leave Wadi Musa for Aqaba (JD3, two hours), via Tayyibeh, at about 6.30am, 8am and 4pm – ask around the day before to confirm.

For Wadi Rum (JD3, 1½ hours), there is a daily minibus sometime after 6am. It's a good idea to reserve a seat the day before – your hotel should be able to ring the driver. Be wary of anyone who tries to charge you JD1 for 'luggage', offer to buy you overpriced water and hook you onto a substandard tour. Alternatively take the minibus to Aqaba, get off at the Ar-Rashidiyyah junction and catch another minibus or hitch to Rum.

To Karak, a minibus sometimes leaves at around 8am, but demand is low so it doesn't leave every day. Alternatively, travel via Ma'an.

TAXI

Private (yellow) taxis will travel anywhere around Wadi Musa for a price, but negotiation can be an unrewarding process. A few Pajero 4WD taxis are available for much the same cost. One-way trips cost JD30 to Wadi Rum (one hour) or Aqaba (1½ hour); or JD40 to Karak (1½ hours). If you want to travel to Madaba or Amman via the King's Highway, with stops at Karak and possibly Dana or the Dead Sea, expect to be asked for JD80, though JD60 is more reasonable.

Getting Around

The standard, non-negotiable fare anywhere around the central Wadi Musa area is JD1; a little more if you go as far as 'Ain Musa. There are usually plenty of private (yellow) unmetered taxis travelling up and down the main road, especially in the late afternoon, looking for weary travellers.

AL-WU'IRA (CRUSADER CASTLE) وعرة

Built by the Crusaders in AD 1116, **Al-Wu'ira** (admission free; ☞ daylight hr) was overrun by Muslim forces only 73 years later. A fantastic bridge (previously a drawbridge) leads over the gorge to a gatehouse and the limited ruins.

Look for the unsigned turn-off, about 1.5km north of the Mövenpick Hotel, and on the left (west) side of the road leading to Siq al-Barid (Little Petra).

SIQ AL-BARID (LITTLE PETRA)

سِقّ البِيضَاء (البِتْرَاء الصّغِيرَة)

Siq al-Barid (Cold Canyon) is colloquially known as **Little Petra** (admission free; ☞ daylight hr) and, although nowhere near as dramatic or extensive, it's worth a visit. It was thought to have served as an agricultural centre, trading suburb and resupply post for camel caravans visiting Petra. The surrounding area is picturesque and fun to explore.

From the car park, an obvious path leads to the 400m-long **siq**, which opens out into larger areas. The first open area has a **temple**, which archaeologists know little about. Four **tridinia** – one on the left and three on the right – are in the second open area, and were probably once used as dining rooms to feed hungry merchants and travellers. About 50m further along the **siq** is the **Painted House**, another small dining room, which is reached by some exterior steps. The faded, but still vivid, frescoes of vines, flowers and birds on the underside of the interior arch are a rare example of Nabataean painting, though the walls have been badly blackened by Bedouin camp fires. Cut into the rock opposite the room is a large **cistern**; there are also worn water channels cut into the rock at various points along the **siq**.

At the end of Siq al-Barid are some steps. If you climb to the top, there are some great views and plenty of picnicking opportunities. If you have extra time and interest you could explore the Nabataean quarries and

cisterns of Umm Qusa, located just before the entrance to Siq al-Barid.

If you come prepared, it's possible to **hike** from Siq al-Barid to the Monastery (Al-Deir) inside Petra itself, or to Petra centre via Wadi Mu'aisireh al-Gharbiya. You'll need a guide for this (ask at the car park by the entry to Siq al-Barid) as route-finding is tricky. You must also have a valid ticket to Petra (you can't get one at Siq al-Barid).

A 10-minute walk from Little Petra is the **Ammarin Camp** (☎ 079 5667771, 2131229; www.bedouincamp.net; per person in tent JD8) in the next-door Siq al-Amti. Accommodation is just a mattress in a Bedouin tent but there is a shower and toilet block. Breakfast is included in the price but dinner is rather expensive. A small ethnographic museum on site spotlights the local Bedouin tribe, the Ammarin. The camp offers guided hikes in the surrounding hills.

Getting There & Away

You may find a tour to Little Petra organised by one of the hotels in Wadi Musa. If not, a private taxi should cost about JD8 one way or JD15 return, including an hour's waiting time.

If you're driving, take the road north of the Mövenpick Hotel and follow the signs to 'Beda' or 'Al-Beidha'. From the fork, take

the left road from where it's just under a further 1km to the car park.

It's a fairly pleasant 8km walk following the road. The route passes the village of Umm Sayhoun, the 'Elephant Rock' formation and then 'Ain Dibdibah, which once supplied Petra with much of its water. You can make a short cut across fields to the left about 1km before the junction to Al-Beidha.

Hitching is possible, especially on Friday when local families head out in droves for a picnic.

AL-BEIDHA

البِيدَا

The Neolithic ruins of **Al-Beidha** (admission free; ☞ daylight hr) date back some 9000 years and, along with Jericho, constitutes one of the oldest archaeological sites in the Middle East. The remains of around 65 round (and later rectangular) structures are especially significant because they pinpoint the physical transition from hunter-gatherer to settled herder-agriculturalist. The settlement was abandoned around 6000 BC, which is why it is still intact (latter civilisations never built upon it), and so the ruins therefore require some imagination. Please follow the marked trails as the site is fragile.

To get there, follow the trail starting to the left (south) of the entrance to Little Petra for about 15 minutes.

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