

# DREAMSCAPES



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TIMELESS  
JORDAN

FIND ROMANCE IN  
BARBADOS

EUROPEAN GEMS

COOL GUY  
GETAWAYS

FLORIDA  
REAL ESTATE



# TIMELESS AND TANTALIZING: THIS IS JORDAN

BY SANDRA PHINNEY

IT IS NEARING DUSK AS I CLIMB A SMALL CLIFF AND SETTLE DOWN TO WATCH THE SUNSET IN WADI RUM DESERT.

A brilliant orb of red, orange and gold drops out of sight. A dead calm settles and the word “serenity” takes on new meaning in this timeless place. After awhile I turn to leave and gasp at the sight of a full moon hanging over the opposite horizon. Then on the way down from my cliff-side perch, I see 4,000-year-old drawings carved in the rock formations. Surely, I say to myself, the spirits of the Bedouins are smiling—and watching from surrounding caves.

## DESERT EXPERIENCE

My trip to Jordan was so chock-a-block full of memorable moments it's difficult to tease out a mere handful; but the Wadi Rum desert is a great place to start. T.E. Lawrence described Wadi Rum as “vast, echoing and God-like.” The film *Lawrence of Arabia* was shot there. The day my friends and I spent off-roading in Wadi Rum by jeep included sweeping by monolithic rockscapes (like the Seven Pillars of Wisdom) and up, down and around miles of sand dunes.

We hunkered down for the night at a Bedouin campsite and slept in tents made of camel-hair blankets. Dinner was a traditional meal called *Zarp*—lamb that's cooked in a pit deep in the sand. We feasted around a blazing fire, drank *Qahweh* (Turkish coffee) and danced like fools while Bedouins played stringed instruments late into the night.







background: Wadi Musa, translated as the "Valley of Moses," is a town near the archaeological site of Petra in southern Jordan. Jordan Tourism Board

top right: On day trips (or longer) into Wadi Rum, you'll see miles of dunes, carved rock formations, mountains of variegated colours, canyons, Bedouin caves and more. Sandra Phinney

right: In Amman, the streets and back alleyways of the *souq* (food market) come alive with vendors selling an enormous variety of fresh fruit, vegetables, nuts, herbs and spices from dawn to dusk. Sandra Phinney





I awoke just before dawn to the sound of wild camels braying. My first reaction was one of annoyance as I hadn't had much sleep. But I decided to get up and take a walk into the desert. My reward? A technicolour sunrise that gave me goosebumps.

### HOSPITALITY PLUS

Each day in Jordan was dramatically different. Even Amman, the capital, is a city of contrasts. Western influences commingle with Middle Eastern customs and traditions. My favourite part of the city was the old *souq*—a maze of back alley food stalls loaded with fresh produce and every spice under the sun. Older peddlers were a bit reserved, but the young guys were entertaining (and flirtatious).

Before I go on, I must say that I felt safe any time of the day and night, anywhere in the country. And I've never met such hospitable people. For example, one day an old man selling everything from teapots to bags of rice, rope, soap and second-hand men's jackets bid me to come into his shop. From behind the counter he produced a huge pot that he had rigged up on a small propane burner. He poured me a glass of incredibly sweet tea called *Shai*, and we proceeded to communicate with each other using sign language and body motions. Accepting money for such acts of kindness is out of the question; it's simply their custom.

## JORDAN IS AN OASIS OF CALM FROM ONE END TO THE OTHER

Alas, for many people, the Middle East conjures up images of strife. True, Jordanians find themselves in a tough neighbourhood and reports from Israel, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq often paint a disquieting picture of this part of the world. But Jordan is an oasis of calm from one end to the other. The only time I caught a whiff of military presence was en route to the Dead Sea, and only because our destination was close to the Israeli border. Yet even there, guards merely waved and grinned as we drove by.

### THE ONE AND ONLY PETRA

A visit to Jordan would not be complete without spending time in Petra, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the new Seven Wonders of the World. This ancient vast city was carved into multi-hued canyons more than 2,000 years ago by the Nabataeans. A day's hiking in Petra is both exhilarating and exhausting.

By day's end I was ready for a Turkish bath and discovered where the locals go in Wadi Musa (the town adjacent to Petra). I wasn't surprised when the attendant scrubbed off about two pounds of sweat and sand and left me feeling rejuvenated, if not 10 years younger. I also signed up for a class in Jordanian cooking at







“The Petra Kitchen.” Under the guidance of some local women we chopped, diced, mixed, cooked and ate our way through a dozen traditional Jordanian dishes including *Magloubet*—a chicken and rice dish made in a very large pot, then dumped upside down onto a huge platter. Quite dramatic—and delicious!

The next day, I wanted to return to Petra and signed up for a “Petra by Night” tour. Eighteen thousand candles lit the way. Upon arrival I was offered sweet tea then sat on a carpet spread on the sand and listened to a Bedouin chant while he played a *Rabab* (single-stringed instrument.) It was exquisite. Sacred.

During our stay in Jordan we also visited Mount Nebo where Moses saw the Promised Land; Bethany on the Jordan where archaeologists have determined that Christ was baptized; and the ancient city of Jerash where we were privy to some amazing chariot races. We snorkelled in the Gulf of Aqaba (Red Sea), covered ourselves in black healing mud 300 kilometres north at the Dead Sea and floated like corks in the deepest hypersaline lake in the world.

And all this is merely a sliver of my trip. I yearn to go back to this amazing land. But the next time, *Insh'Allah*, will be for two months, not two weeks. ■

**opposite top:** Petra is a Nabataean Kingdom that existed for centuries, but was lost to the West for about 300 years. Rediscovered in 1812, it is now a world treasure and a designated UNESCO World Heritage Site. The Treasury is its most well-known landmark. Sandra Phinney

**opposite bottom:** One benefit to staying at a hotel on the Dead Sea is that you can cover yourself with healing mineral-rich mud, wait 20 minutes until it dries on your body, then walk into the saline sea to wash the mud away and feel rejuvenated like never before. Sandra Phinney

**top left:** Famous for being one of the best-preserved Roman provincial towns complete with temples, theatres, hippodrome, colonnaded streets, baths, fountains, public squares and plazas, the ancient city of Jerash dates back more than 6,500 years. Jordan Tourism Board

**left:** There are many five-star resorts in Jordan, such as the Intercontinental Hotel Aqaba on the Red Sea in southern Jordan and the Kempinski Hotel Ishtar (pictured here) located at the edge of the Dead Sea further north. Sandra Phinney

## TRAVEL PLANNER

For more information, log onto the Jordan Tourism Board at [visitjordan.com](http://visitjordan.com). Royal Jordanian ([rj.com](http://rj.com)), the national airline, flies direct to Amman from Montréal, Chicago and New York.

The local currency is the Jordanian dinar (JD), often called the “jaydee.” The dinar is divided into 100 piasters. Something priced as 4.75 means 4 JD and 75 piasters. It’s easy to figure out. Credit cards are accepted at hotels, restaurants and larger shops but be sure to carry Jordanian currency when shopping in local souqs or paying for local services.

Recommended places to stay:

Amman: Radisson SAS Amman Hotel, [amman.radissonsas.com](http://amman.radissonsas.com)

Captain’s Desert Camp, Wadi Rum Desert: [captains-jo.com](http://captains-jo.com)

Intercontinental Hotel Aqaba: [intercontinental.com](http://intercontinental.com)

Kempinski Hotel Ishtar, Dead Sea: [kempinski-deadsea.com](http://kempinski-deadsea.com)

Mövenpick Resort Petra, Wadi Musa: [movenpick-hotels.com](http://movenpick-hotels.com)