

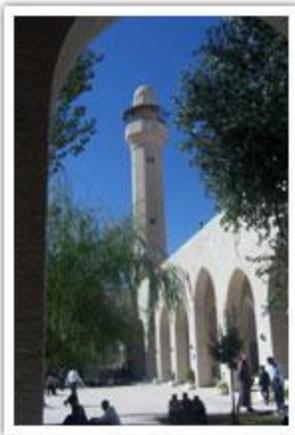


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RELIGION & FAITH

Jordan is a modern country with an ancient culture, a land of which visitors can walk through the valleys, hills and plains whose names have become part of human history by virtue of the simple deeds and profound messages of prophets who walked the land and crossed its rivers during their lives.

Many of the sites where they are said to have performed miracles or reached out to ordinary people have been identified, excavated and protected, and are now more easily accessible to visitors. Jordan is an ideal destination for those seeking cultural knowledge and spiritual enrichment. Jordan values its ethnically and religiously diverse population, consequently providing for the cultural rights of all its citizens. This spirit of tolerance and appreciation is one of the central elements contributing to the stable and peaceful cultural climate flourishing within Jordan. More than 92% of Jordanians are Sunni Muslims and approximately 6% are Christians. The majority of Christians belong to the Greek Orthodox Church, but there are also Greek Catholics, a small Roman Catholic community, Syrian Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, and a few Protestant denominations. Several small Shi'a and Druze populations can also be found in Jordan.



The Mosque at Mazar.

As Jordan is an Islamic state, one may explore the principles of Islam through direct interaction with the people of this monotheistic religion. As the capstone of a long tradition beginning with Judaism and Christianity, Muslims believe that Islam completes the revelation of God's message to humankind. Islam – which in Arabic means "submission" - is an assertion of the unity, completeness, and sovereignty of God. Muslims believe that God, or Allah as He is known in Arabic, revealed his final message to humankind through the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the Holy Qur'an, which is the divine immutable word of God. Islam focuses heavily on the equality of all humans before the one true God, and therefore it is in many ways a return to the original doctrine of the pure monotheism that characterized the early Judeo-Christian tradition.

Islamic tradition has crystallized five fundamental observances, or "pillars," that are as important as faith in defining Islamic identity and strengthening the common bond that ties all Muslims together. They are Confession of Faith, Daily Prayer (five times per day facing the holy city of Mecca), Fasting during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, Alms giving, and Pilgrimage to Mecca.

Bethany Beyond the Jordan



On the banks of the River Jordan.

The site of John the Baptist's settlement at [Bethany Beyond the Jordan](#), where Jesus was baptized, has long been known from the Bible (John 1:28 and 10:40) and from the Byzantine and medieval texts.

The site has now been identified on the east bank of the Jordan River, in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and is being systematically surveyed, excavated, restored, and prepared to receive pilgrims and visitors. Bethany Beyond the Jordan is located half an hour by car from the Jordanian capital Amman.



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The Bethany area sites formed part of the early Christian pilgrimage route between Jerusalem, the Jordan River, and [Mount Nebo](#).

The area is also associated with the biblical account of how the Prophet Elijah (Mar Elias in Arabic) ascended to heaven in a whirlwind on a chariot of fire. (See main Image above).

For more information on Bethany Beyond the Jordan, please [click here](#) to visit the "Baptism Site Commission" website.

Mount Nebo



The basilica at Mount Nebo.

From Mount Nebo's windswept promontory, overlooking the [Dead Sea](#), the Jordan River Valley, Jericho and the distant hills of Jerusalem, Moses viewed the Holy Land of Canaan that he would never enter. He died and was buried in Moab, "in the valley opposite Beth-Peor" (Deuteronomy 34:6). His tomb remains unknown. After consulting the Oracle, Jeremiah reportedly hid the Ark of the Covenant, the Tent and the Altar of Incense at Mount Nebo.

Mount Nebo became a place of pilgrimage for early Christians from Jerusalem and a small church was built there in the 4th century to commemorate the end of Moses' life. Some of the stones from that church remain in their original place in the wall around the apse area. The church was subsequently expanded in the 5th and 6th centuries into the present-day large basilica with its stunning collection of Byzantine mosaics.



The serpentine Cross at Mount Nebo.

The Serpentine Cross, which stands just outside the sanctuary, is symbolic of the bronze (or brazen) serpent taken by Moses into the desert and the cross upon which Jesus was crucified.

In addition to Bethany Beyond the Jordan and Mount Nebo, there are three other holy sites in Jordan that were designated by the Vatican as [Millennium 2000 pilgrimage sites](#).

Amman

The Jordanian capital, [Amman](#), and its surrounding regions is referred to in the Bible as Ammon, or the Ammonite Kingdom, and was famous for its springs and citadel. This is the place where David sent Uriah the Hittite to the front lines of battle. The massive fortifications, where David, an ancestor of Jesus, brought about Uriah's death so that he could marry his widow Bathsheba, are still standing.



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Umm Qays



Ruins at Umm Qays.

The old [Decapolis](#) city of Gadara (modern-day [Umm Qays](#)), with its spectacular panoramic views overlooking the Sea of Galilee, is the site of Jesus' miracle of the Gadarene swine. It is here that He encountered a demented man who lived in the tombs near the entrance to the city; Jesus cast the bad spirits out of the man and into a herd of pigs, which then ran down the hill into the waters of the Sea of Galilee and drowned.

A rare five-aisled basilica from the 4th century was recently discovered and excavated at Umm Qays. It has been built directly over a Roman-Byzantine tomb and has a view into the tomb from the interior of the church. It is also located alongside the old Roman city gate on the road from the Sea of Galilee. Everything about this distinctive arrangement of a church above a tomb at this particular place, strongly indicates that it

was designed and built to commemorate the very spot where the Byzantine faithful believed that Jesus performed his miracle.

Anjara

It is believed that Jesus Christ, his disciples, and the Virgin Mary, passed through Anjara once and rested in a cave there during a journey between the Sea of Galilee, the [Decapolis cities](#), Bethany Beyond the Jordan and Jerusalem. The cave in Anjara has long been a holy place for pilgrims and has now been commemorated with a modern shrine, the Church of Our Lady of the Mountain. The cave was also designated by the Catholic Churches of the Middle East as one of the five pilgrimage sites for the year 2000.

Khirbat Al-Wahadina

Pilgrimage to the birthplace of St Elijah.

Mukawir



The hill where King Herod's fortified palace was situated.

The 1st century AD Roman-Jewish historian, Josephus, identifies the awe-inspiring site of Mukawir (Machaerus) as the palace/fort of Herod, who was the Roman-appointed ruler over the region during the life of Jesus Christ.

It was here, at this hilltop fortified palace, overlooking the [Dead Sea](#) region and the distance hills of Palestine and Israel that Herod Antipas, the son of Herod, imprisoned and beheaded John the Baptist after Salome's fateful dance.



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Madaba



The mosaic map of the Holy Land at St. George's church.

[Madaba](#) and its hinterlands were repeatedly mentioned in the Old Testament. Then it was known as Medeba and it featured in narratives related to Moses and the Exodus, David's war against the Moabites, Isaiah's oracle against Moab and King Mesha of Moab's rebellion against Israel.

Between the 4th and 7th centuries AD, the prosperous ecclesiastical centre of [Madaba](#) produced one of the world's finest collections of Byzantine mosaics, many fine examples of which are well-preserved. Several church floor mosaics can be seen in their original locations, while others have been moved for protection and displayed in the [Madaba Archaeological Park](#).

Madaba's real masterpiece, in the Orthodox Church of St. George, is the 6th century AD mosaic map of Jerusalem and the Holy Land – the earliest religious map of the Holy Land in any form to survive from antiquity.

The Dead Sea & Lot's Cave



Lot's cave.

The [Dead Sea](#) is one of the most dramatic places on earth, with its stunning natural environment equally matched by its powerful spiritual symbolism.

The infamous Sodom and Gomorrah and other cities of the Dead Sea plain, or (Cities of the Valley) were the subjects of some of the most dramatic and enduring Old Testament stories, including that of Lot, whose wife was turned into a pillar of salt for disobeying God's will. Lot and his two daughters survived and fled to a cave near the small town of Zoar (modern-day Safi). The Bible says Lot's daughters gave birth to sons whose descendants would become the Ammonite and Moabite people, whose kingdoms were in what is now central Jordan. Although not confirmed, the sites of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah are

believed to be the remains of the ancient walled towns of Bab ed-Dhra' and Numeira, in the southeastern [Dead Sea](#) central plain. On a hillside above the town of Zoar (modern-day Safi), Byzantine Christians built a church and monastery dedicated to Saint Lot. The complex was built around the cave where Lot and his daughters found refuge.



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Umm Ar-Rasas



Mosaic detail from St. Stephen's church at Umm Ar-Rasas.

A rectangular walled city, about 30km southeast of [Madaba](#), that is mentioned on both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. It was fortified by the Romans and local Christians were still embellishing it with Byzantine-style mosaics well over 100 years after the start of the Muslim Umayyad rule.

Just outside the city walls is the recently unearthed Church of Saint Stephen with its perfectly preserved outstanding mosaic floor, the largest of its kind to be discovered in Jordan and second only to the world famous mosaic map at [Madaba](#).

Umm Ar-Rasas is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

As-Salt

The City of [As-Salt](#), northwest of Jordan's capital, [Amman](#), houses the tomb/shrine of Job, the wealthy, righteous man from the Land of Uz.

[As-Salt](#) is also the location of the tomb/shrine of the prophet Jethro, who was the father-in-law of Moses. It is also the site of the tombs of Jad and Asher, who were both sons of Jacob.

Pella

Some of the most important events in the lives of Isaac's twin sons, Jacob and Esau, took place in ancient Jordan.

Modern day [Pella](#) (ancient 'Penuel', meaning 'the face of God') was so named by Jacob after he wrestled there all night with God in the form of a man or angel (Genesis 32:24-30). A massive Bronze and Iron Age temple recently discovered at [Pella](#), in the northern Jordan Valley, is thought to be the best-preserved temple from Old Testament times anywhere in the Holy Land.

The Kings' Highway

The Kings' Highway is the world's oldest continuously used communication route. It linked ancient Bashan, Giliad and Ammon in the north with Moab, Edom, Paran and Midian in the south.

Abraham - a common patriarch of Jews, Christians, and Muslims - who passed through northern, central and southern Jordan, would certainly have used this route on his journey from Mesopotamia to Canaan.

Moses asked the King of Edom if he and his people could "go along the Kings' Highway" during their journey to Canaan, but his request was refused. The Kings Highway is also mentioned in an earlier story in Genesis 14:5-8, in relation to the four Kings from the north, who attacked Sodom and Gomorrah and the three other Cities of the Plain.



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Petra



Aaron's Tomb.

[Petra](#) seems to be mentioned in the Bible's Old Testament under several possible names, including Sela and Joktheel (2 Kings 14:7).

During the Exodus, Moses and the Israelites passed through the [Petra](#) area in Edom. Local tradition says that the spring at Wadi Musa (Valley of Moses), just outside [Petra](#), is the place where Moses struck the rock and brought forth water (Numbers 20:10-11).

Aaron, the brother of Moses and Miriam, died in Jordan and was buried in [Petra](#) at Mount Hor, now called Jabal Harun in Arabic (Mount Aaron). A Byzantine church, and later an Islamic shrine/tomb, of Aaron were built on the summit of the mountain, which today attracts pilgrims from all over the world.

[Petra](#) was almost certainly the last staging post of the three kings, who took frankincense, gold and myrrh to honour the baby Jesus in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:1-12).