

Jordan October 4 – 19, 2017

October 4-5 A very long, 13 hour, flight from O'Hare to Abu Dhabi, complete with screaming baby much of the way. A 5-hour layover before the final flight to Amman. It took us very little time to get through immigration and customs in Amman and collect our luggage. The AKJ agent who was supposed to meet us was late, so other agents helped us call the emergency number we had been given. The AKJ agent did finally show up and said he had gone to immigration to look for us (but obviously too late); we finally got our hotel transfer. We had an uneventful drive into the city in the dark, and checked into the Crowne Plaza Amman (very nice) and got some sleep.

October 6 Woke at 4:45 am and organized some of our luggage until breakfast opened. The hotel had a lovely breakfast with tables of breads, fruits, really good yoghurt, and hot foods. Most mornings we had a fresh omelet (very thin, with cheese, tomatoes and mushrooms). I had dates and apricots with my yoghurt most mornings. I quickly discovered that the croissants were extremely fresh so I often had one with sesame seeds and one with za'atar, a mixture of thyme, sesame seeds, marjoram, and sumac. We discovered the 3rd day that you could order a cappuccino, so that's what I had from then on, with Steve ordering the latte.

We took a hotel taxi to the theater (10 dinars=\$15) and went directly into the Roman theater. It is really well maintained and admission was only 2 dinars. The theater was probably built during the reign of Antoninus Pius, when Amman was one of the Decapolis cities, Philadelphia. There are two small museums in the theater, The Museum of Popular Cultures, with costumes, jewelry and face masks, and a separate room with a lot of mosaics, and the Folklore Museum with dioramas and costumes. There is also a small side theater with 500 seats, in very good condition, called an Odeon. We spent a lot of time climbing around the theaters.

We then walked around the old downtown area on the Lonely Planet walking tour. Since Friday is their Sunday, a lot of the little shops were closed but enough were open to get the "feel" of the area. We stopped briefly at the Nymphaeum, which is still under restoration, and dates from 191 AD. We did the vegetable suk, the women's suk, and the gold suk. Then we had lunch at Hashem a very famous vegetarian falafel restaurant. We had hummus, falafel, baba ganoush, bottled water, pickled vegetables, large flat bread, and salad (that we were afraid to eat) for 2 dinars each! It was really fun. We walked around the shops a bit longer, then took a local taxi back to the hotel for 2 dinars.

We thought we would rest during the remainder of the afternoon, and Judy fell deeply asleep so was very groggy when she woke up. Poor Steve kept trying to sleep but couldn't. The group met in the lobby at 6:20 for a lecture by our leader Yorke Rowan on what to expect on the trip, then dinner in the hotel.

October 7 We again woke early and went to breakfast as soon as they opened. We met the group at 8:30 to start the official touring. We started at the highest hill in Amman, Jebel al-Qala'a, at the Citadel, which includes ancient Roman, Byzantine, and Umayyad ruins, including the stone-carved columns and vaulted chambers of the Temple of Hercules and Umayyad Palace and cistern. The National Archeology Museum is on the

Citadel site, and has a wonderful collection of artifacts, including some of the Ain Ghazal prehistoric statues (the oldest known statues, dating from 7500 BC). These statues are half-size human figures with a core of twisted reeds covered by white plaster. The eyes are astonishing, made with cowrie shells with a bitumen pupil and diopside highlighting. The 32 statues were found in two caches, 15 of them full figures, 15 busts, and 2 fragmentary heads. Three of the busts were two-headed. Only a few are on view in this museum, and some are on view in the new Jordan Museum. The Citadel Museum also has some pottery, a few mosaics, and some artifacts from Petra.

From the Citadel, we went to the new Jordan Museum, which is a lovely modern museum, still not completely open. The Ain Ghazal statues on view are in cases in a dark room, so stand out in their spotlighting. The museum has a lot of information about the Nabatean Culture and they have a fascinating display of copper Dead Sea Scrolls.

We were taken to lunch at the Iraq-al-Amir Women's Co-Operative Society west of the city. There are Women's Co-ops around Jordan with the goal of helping women make money from serving meals and selling handicrafts.

We then went to the Qasr-al-Abad Greek Palace, which was most likely a fortified villa. There are wonderful lion decorations on the outside, and other animal sculptures. It is the only standing Ancient Greek building in Jordan.

From there we went back to the hotel to rest before going to American Center of Oriental Research (ACOR) for a tour and snacks. They have a beautiful view of the Citadel, which had spotlights for the night.

October 8 Woke up again at 3:30. Bummer! After breakfast we met at 8:30 and headed for Jerash, another Decapolis city. The area of Jerash was inhabited from the Neolithic, with some Hellenistic remains still visible, and then the Roman conquest. The site is vast and wonderful. It includes an elegant oval Forum surrounded by columns, a long colonnaded street, two theaters, city walls, two temples (Zeus and Artemis), a hippodrome, etc. Hadrian's arch was built for his visit in 129-130 AD.

Next stop was lunch, then on to the 12th century Ajloun Castle. This is the last standing castle built by Muslims to defend themselves against the Crusaders. From the castle we could see parts of the north end of the Rift Valley.

Dinner was "on your own" so Roberta, Bruce and Pat went with us to a restaurant called Wild Jordan, whose profits support protecting wildlife in Jordan. It was a nice friendly restaurant with a beautiful view of the Citadel. The food was good, but I think not as good as what we would expect in the US for an organic, farm fresh vegetables place, and totally cheap by comparison of course. There were huge lovely salads with lots of choice. I had salad and lentils that had some kind of greens in them, Steve had a salad and a great mushroom soup. Roberta had a date with mint smoothie, a salad, and something called a Freekeh Caponata, which was mixed grains. It was arranged very artistically on the plate. The vegetables that we all had were tiny fresh potatoes, a tiny slice of corn on the cob, and some greens. Pat and Bruce had a variety of salads and vegetables. They had really nice washrooms which would have been in a chic US restaurant, so way above any we've seen here. And they had a shop of green products that support their wildlife protection efforts. We took a hotel taxi to the restaurant, but had the restaurant call a taxi for us for the return trip. It turned out to be an Uber (which

is technically illegal in Jordan), and the driver was a master's student in mathematics. We made his night with a big tip!

October 9 We again woke up at 3:30am (Judy) and 4:30am (Steve) but this morning we finally managed to get back to sleep for another hour. It was great! After breakfast we headed for Pella (another Decapolis city), an hour-and-a-half on the bus. We could only view the ruins from above, but there was a herd of goats going through the area, which was very picturesque.

We had lunch at the Gadara site (another Decapolis city! Our 5th, since we had done Bet She'an in Israel 17 years ago!) and then walked through the ruins. We actually should have done it the other way around, because halfway through the site it started to rain so we were drenched by the time we got back to the bus. We had taken rain gear to Jordan, but it was back at the hotel in Amman! The site of Gadara was very interesting. There was a great view down to the Sea of Galilee, and fortunately the clouds held off long enough for us to see it. As we drove to the site we were beside the border with Israel, and had to go through a check point. At one point we were 7 miles from the Syrian border. The site was really interesting because a lot of the basalt was used for the columns. There were two theaters, a basilica, a colonnade, a market area, etc. A Roman aqueduct supplied drinking water to the city through a qanat which ran 94 km underground, the longest known tunnel in the Roman Empire. Much of Gadara was destroyed in the earthquake in 747 ad. But we rushed through much of this because we were wet. This rain broke a 9 month drought in Jordan, so the Jordanians were very happy. Apparently, this also meant that the olives could be harvested, which was good for the olive growers.

We were so happy to get to the hotel and shower and change into dry clothes. We hung everything up overnight to dry since luggage had to be out at 7:30 am in the morning and we had to be checked out and in the lobby by 8:30 for our trip out to Azraq.

For dinner, we were taken to "the best restaurant in Jordan", Fakhreldin Restaurant, and it really was lovely, but huge quantities of food. They first brought several platters of cold dishes...eggplant, cheeses, humus, salads, pickled vegetables, and fresh Pita bread (which they kept bringing). There was one dish based on raw garlic which irritated my tongue, but was delicious! Then they brought a bunch of hot appetizers...fried cheese, fried dough-encased things like cauliflower etc.. Then a main course. And then desert which was huge bowls of fresh fruit and a set of small pieces of fruit that had been steeped in honey...apricots, figs, and something that might have been melon with orange rind. Oh, my, yum! There is really good rice with every meal in Jordan, and good bread and yogurt, of course.

October 10 We had breakfast, then set the luggage outside the door to be collected. After a very long bus ride, our first stop was Umm el-Jimal. Most of the blocks are basalt, so there is a dark hue to everything. We spent over 2 hours at the site but it wasn't nearly enough, it's so large. We started with a short talk by Bert de Vries, the directing archeologist at the site. He later joined the group for lunch and sat with us. We had read some of his papers. One of the people who works for him took us around the site and talked about the ruins. The ruins of an ancient village lie in the midst of modern Umm el-Jimal. The ruins date from the Nabataean through the Abbasid periods. In AD

106, the Romans took over the village as Emperor Trajan incorporated the area into the empire. In the village, the Romans erected a number of buildings including the Praetorium and the large reservoir near the castellum. The earthquake around 749 AD did major damage.

We had lunch at the Women's Co-operative before continuing to Qasr Amra. This is a desert castle, built early in the 8th century, between 723 and 743, by Walid Ibn Yazid, the future Umayyad caliph Walid II. The frescos are unique, and with more nudity than one would expect in a Muslim household. The "castle" is no longer standing, but the building we could visit was very interesting. Workers were restoring the frescos while we were there, and it turned out that the directors were staying at our hotel in Azraq.

Our last stop before the hotel was the Azraq Castle, where Lawrence of Arabia spent the winter before leading the Arabs on to Damascus. The guide pointed out Lawrence's room in his talk, then we were allowed to dash around the castle on our own. At this point we were close to Syria, Saudi Arabia and Iraq. We saw the 2 big Syrian refugee camps (really towns of 75000 people each) and military bases.

The hotel in Azraq was very basic but it turned out that there was internet in the lobby. We had internet on the bus, which was great, and I had bought international roaming for my phone, so we were usually in touch with the world. There were no phones in the rooms, and we had to carry our own luggage up a flight of stairs.

October 11 We were right next to an air force base and the planes were really loud when they took off at 4am! There were American military here with bases inside the Jordanian bases. After a much more basic breakfast than the one in Amman, but perfectly adequate, we headed out to Wadi al-Qattafi, a main dig site for Yorke and Morag (no internet in the supposedly 4-wheel drive cars!). We were with Roberta and Yorke, which was perfect. We were the lead car since Yorke knew the way to his excavation. Once out of town we were 'cross country through the desert, with rough rock and sand roads and no markings. The drivers were so slow that instead of taking 2 hours to get there, it took 4. We drove into the desert in 7 4-wheel drive cars, with regular tires instead of the big tires Yorke wanted. The desert was first small rocks scattered on sandy ground, then larger rocks, with lots of deep gullies. There was some cultivation, including a corn field. The drivers were an odd lot of macho Arabic city boys who really just wanted to smoke, talk with each other, and complain. They had driven the cars out from Amman this morning, and had clearly never been in the desert before. At some point, the drivers said that they didn't have enough gas to go on, so we would have to turn back. It turned out that after driving 2 hours out from Amman, they had not refueled the cars before heading into the desert! But we made it!!! (We were going to have our own little rebellion if they tried to turn back!!) We could see the Saudi Arabia border on the drive.

Yorke led us through a field of stones to some Neolithic structures and talked about the current interpretations, then led those of us who wanted to climb the mesa up to the top. It was hard, because the large stones we were climbing on were very unstable, so we had to watch every step. On top were wonderful views of the other mesas and lots of Neolithic walls. We were especially enthralled by all of the remains of the Neolithic settlement from the 7th millennium and into the 6th BC. Yorke and Morag

are involved in the Eastern Badia Archaeological Project, so both had hands-on experience in the excavations, and have been involved in the use of drones to map the area. When we came down, the people who had not gone up had finished their lunch so we quickly ate bread and hummus and dates and cheese and bananas and then we headed back.

We actually did better on the way back, though the drivers kept complaining. Then one car did almost run out of gas and another had a flat tire. They made a big production of 7 drivers putting on the spare tire which turned out to be flat, delaying us about half-an-hour.

We had a reasonable dinner. Yorke and Morag had bought drink things in Amman for a celebration after dinner in Azraq (It was the day before her birthday), and it was fun to sit around on the patio chatting with the other people on the tour. Then we packed. To my astonishment, I slept through the jets at 4am as they roared overhead.

October 12 After a 7 am breakfast and luggage lugged down the stairs, we were off again. The cool crisp air was very refreshing, and we enjoyed the small garden (and the solar panels that powered the hotel) before climbing onto the bus. The first stop was Qasr Kharana, The castle was really cool. It had actually been a rest house, with about 60 guest rooms. There is not much decoration left, but it must have been really great. The corner towers are solid, so fake towers. It could have been a caravanserai around 710 AD, built by the Umayyads

From here it was a long drive to Madaba, which has wonderful mosaics. There are 2 archeological parks that had mosaics, and the Greek Orthodox church that has the famous map mosaic of the Holy Land from around 600 AD. We had read a huge book at home about the Madaba mosaics that had really good photos so it was great to see them for real. Another person on the tour wanted to eat lunch with us and we looked for a place that the guide had recommended, but couldn't find it. We found a cafe with falafel sandwiches (falafel in Pita with slices of tomatoes...I was afraid to eat the tomatoes) and Steve had a wonderful lentil soup.

The next stop was Umm ar-Rasas. There was a 15-meter stylite tower nearby with no stairs. They think monks lived in the top and got up by climbing up a rope. We didn't go to the tower but could see it from the fort. There was a Roman Fort that was damaged by a big earthquake in 716 AD. There were lots of partial walls still standing and lots of arches. There is also a famous mosaic floor, and we spent quite a bit of time there.

The guide insisted on stopping at a very smoky rest stop so he and our driver could have a meal. We bought a bag of potato chips and scarfed them down while waiting outside the building. Our last stop was a photo shoot of Shobak, a crusader castle (we were told it is not safe to go inside), and then on to the Petra Marriott where we stayed 5 nights. The view out into the Wadi was spectacular in the mornings. The hotel was unfortunately not the hotel where we were supposed to stay. The original hotel, intended in the itinerary, is at the entrance to Petra; but for this one, you wind up through a rather ramshackle Middle Eastern town to the top of the hill, and there's the hotel looking over the hills. We had a group dinner in the hotel.

October 13 We slept really well, for the first time on the trip. No jets flying overhead, no half-hour long call-to-prayer...and jet lag seemed to have settled down. Before going down to breakfast we left a pile of laundry for the staff to take and did a little bit of luggage organizing. We had thought that the breakfast at this hotel would be as good as the one in Amman, but it wasn't. I did manage to find a good yoghurt and dried fruit, which I had every day. They did not know how to hard cook eggs, and their bread was dry.

After breakfast, we were taken to the Neolithic site Beidha and then Little Petra, a Nabataean site. On the drive, we stopped for a view down into Petra, from an angle we had not seen before. It was a great photo opp.

Beidha was probably a seasonal camp in the 7200 to 6500BC range, destroyed by fire around 6650, and then rebuilt with rectangular buildings and specialized workshops. We were allowed to walk around the site on pathways through the structures.

Little Petra is a fairly small slot canyon (compared with Petra), and we were given enough time to walk through the canyon and looked at the carvings and some frescos that still exist. The carvings were done by the Nabataeans, probably during the 1st century, probably as a rest stop for travelers on the Silk Road.

We had lunch in a restaurant in the town of Wadi Musa, then went back to the hotel for a quick cleanup and then a talk by Morag.

After Morag's talk we went back to the room for more luggage organization, and the laundry came back! It was so great to have clean clothes. I also loaded a lot of our photos onto Steve's laptop as a backup.

This was an on-your-own dinner night, and we had thought we would go back into Wadi Musa for dinner, but decided we were tired enough that we just stayed in the hotel and ate there.

October 14 After breakfast we were on our way to Wadi Rum (as seen in *Lawrence of Arabia*, and the 2000 film *Mission to Mars*, and more recently the 2015 *The Martian*). We loaded into the back of pickup trucks with a frame on top to hold on to, and cushions on long benches to sit on. Our first stop was the area made famous by Lawrence of Arabia, where we were allowed to climb up a sand dune and take photos of the surrounding valley. It was spectacular. From there, we drove to a small petroglyph area (we were hoping for a lot more petroglyph viewing!) where some of the group climbed onto camels for a short ride to a rest area. At the rest area, there was a wall filled with playing birds, the Sinai Rosefinch. It was a lot of fun watching them. We were given tea and a story by our guide, and a shopping opportunity.

Back into the trucks for the trek across the desert to the lunch place, which was called a desert camp. There were lots of spacious tents around, complete with bathrooms, which would have made a nice place to stay in the desert. After lunch, to our disappointment, we just headed back out of Wadi Rum and back to the hotel. The tour itinerary had promised a full day, and we could easily have spent several days in Wadi Rum!

Dinner at the hotel was supposed to be at a semi-permanent tent on the terrace, which we were not looking forward to because it was so cold. Fortunately the hotel decided that it was too cold, so gave us a nice special room inside the hotel.

October 15 Our first of two days in Petra. We had a new guide who had grown up in Petra, but we didn't much like him (the guide we had had until then had a previous commitment so had to go to his new group). He seemed much more interested in taking the group to specific shops (where we assumed he got a kickback) than letting us explore. We had been here in 2000, so knew how we wanted to spend our time this trip.

Petra was built by the Nabataeans, possibly as early as 312 BC. They controlled access to the Silk Road so were very rich. And the wadi that they chose made their city very defensible. They were also experts at water management.

From Wadi Musa, the park is entered at the new visitor center which includes a very nice new museum and is surrounded by shops. Walking down the long entry is very easy, and there are carved tombs that are interesting, Djinn blocks and a tomb called the Obelisk tomb. From the entrance to the famous Siq (as seen in *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*) the walk is through a high, really beautiful, slot canyon that has the remains of water dams, water pipes, and some carvings from the Nabataeans. The Siq opens dramatically onto a clearing where the first view is of the Treasury. This was of course not a treasury, but locals decided there must be gold in it and shot up the stone urns thinking gold would pour out. There is now a large shop and toilets to one side of the clearing. The walk then goes along the Street of Facades which includes the Nabataean theater and rock cut tombs on either side of the slot canyon. There are now shops just beyond the theater, and then the area opens up, with the Royal Tombs on the right and the city remains on the left. Our group was stalled at one of the shops for about 45 minutes, which was irritating, and then we split into two groups. One, led by Morag, went on into the city and the rest of us climbed up to the Royal Tombs with Yorke and the Guide. We really enjoyed this, and wanted to go on to the Tomb of Sextus Florentinus, which had not been available 17 years ago. The guide finally let us go, and again the group split. The guide took one group on to the Petra Church and Yorke took our group up to the split of the trail to the climb down to Sextus Florentinus. In the end, Steve was the only one who climbed down, where he was joined by a herd of goats that made a beeline for him (very picturesque!) and then climbed back up. Another couple started a trail up around the hill, but came back when they realized that the viewpoint they wanted was 2 ½ miles away. We gathered together and started for the church and actually managed to catch the other group just short of the church. We were really happy about this. The church has wonderful mosaics and wasn't open 17 years ago. The guide did a good job with the church explanation.

We now headed down to the lunch restaurant, in the park, past the Blue Temple and the Winged Lion Temple without stopping. After lunch we had free time, so we decided to spend more time at the Blue Temple and the Winged Lion Temple, and then climbed around in the Grand Temple (none of these had been open 17 years ago). By this time, 5pm, we were pretty tired, so slowly made our way back out of Petra and joined a small group at the Cave Bar to rest a bit before our 6pm cooking class at the Petra Kitchen.

The cooking class would have been a lot of fun had we been in our intended hotel, but we were tired and grumpy and hadn't been able to shower, so this detracted from the experience. As a group, we did a lot of chopping, dough rolling, and a few people did a lot of mixing, etc. Mostly we made Middle Eastern appetizers and salads.

One person helped make lentil soup. They gave us the recipes. We were not allowed near the ovens! We were then fed the food that had been prepared and left in a much happier state of mind, to be bused back to the hotel.

October 16 After breakfast, we were again bused down to Petra. This time the group was allowed free time, with one group going pretty much directly to the Monastery. We walked at our own pace and took a lot of photos, so we were slower than the main group. This involved a 3 ½ mile hike through Petra (this time we went directly down the colonnaded street rather than up the hill to the church and temples.) to the city center, then a very steep, rocky climb up the hill to the Monastery area. In the 17 years since we last did this, shops have sprung up in every wide place along the trail. We were very happy when we got to the top not too long after the organized group made it up. After walking around a bit and taking photos we decided to start down ahead of the group, since we anticipated taking longer. Going down, we had to be very careful because a lot of the rocks were slippery from wear and sand.

After lunch in the restaurant we made our way slowly back out (the 3 ½ miles again), and spent time in the museum before the bus took us back to the hotel. It is a lovely museum.

For dinner that night, we had been told that it was a surprise. We knew it was in Little Petra, so we thought it was going to be a Bedouin experience, possibly on the ground in the cold, and probably not much we could eat. We did find out that it was not sitting on the ground, so decided to go. We were so happy that we did. It had been catered by the Movenpick at the entrance to the Little Petra site, and when we arrived, there was a red carpet lined with luminaires, tables with white linen (and real chairs) and blue lights on the monument, with music being played. As we sat down, the colors on the monument changed. So we had our own private sound and light show while eating a delicious meal. It was all really wonderful.

We were bused back to the hotel and packed for the next move.

October 17 After a very early start, we headed toward the Dead Sea. We had a quick photo opp at Karak Crusader Castle, then another stop at the earlier smoky rest stop. The guide skipped the archeological site of Fife without telling Yorke or Morag that he was going to do it, and we're sure the reason was that he wanted his free coffee from the rest stop (and probably a kickback!). The descent to the Dead Sea was very dramatic, and we drove past an archeological site that was pitted with looters holes. Ironically, one of the most heavily looted areas was across from the police station. Hummmm.

Lunch was at our 3rd Women's Collective and was really delicious. The women had tie-dyed textiles for sale, but unfortunately they were already sold out of the things I liked most. This was the first time we had a meal that really was on the floor, but fortunately there were a few chairs and we were able to snag two. Our knees didn't really want to bend after all the scampering around in Petra!!

We also missed the Museum of the Lowest Place on Earth, but that was because the director of the museum felt that the museum was not in good enough shape for a visit. I really did want our photo in front of the sign, though. Oh, well.

We arrived at the Holiday Inn Resort at the Dead Sea with plenty of time to do a little luggage reorganizing and then meander down to the Dead Sea. We floated in the Dead Sea long enough for a photo opp, then headed back up to the swimming pools and swam a few laps before going in for our showers. We had a nice sunset, dressed up, and went down for our "Final Trip Dinner." It was really lovely!

When we arrived at the room that had been reserved for us, the table had been elegantly set and the room was bathed in blue light. There was an obscene amount of delicious food and we ate ourselves silly. When we couldn't hold another bite, the group broke up, and many of the group left for their flights home in the middle of the night.

October 18 – 19 We slept late and really well, and went down for a very leisurely breakfast. Two other couples were still around so we chatted with them, then went to the room to finish up the packing and so forth. We wandered around the swimming pools and down to the Dead Sea and back. We had been given a special 2pm late check out, so at that point we took our luggage down to the lobby, checked out, and waited for the car to pick us up at 4:30 and take us to the airport. One of the couples who weren't leaving until the next day wandered in and out and chatted with us from time to time.

A very nice driver picked us up about 4:30 and the drive to the airport took about an hour. Once there, we had to open up our luggage for odds and ends that they were looking for (all of the the electronics, an oddly our monoculars! Hummmm.) I insisted on repacking every thing ... he just wanted to toss everything in unzipped. He kept staring and saying "Madame is good!" After that it was pretty easy going through security and we waited in the club until close to boarding time. The flight to Abu Dhabi was no problem, though they bused us to the terminal. It was midnight and about 100 degrees!

We were allowed to use the lounge in Abu Dhabi, and had US pre-immigration, which was great, because we didn't have to do it in Chicago when we finally landed after a 14 ½ hour flight. No screaming babies this time, so we were able to get some patches of sleep.



The Odeon, Amman



The Citadel , Amman



Ain Ghazal statue



Qasr-al-Abd



Hadrian's Arch, Jerash



Oval Forum, Jerash



Umm el-Jimal



Qasr Amra



Wadi al-Qattafi



Qasr Kharana



Map Mosaic, Madaba



Beidha



Little Petra



Wadi Rum



Wadi Rum



The Treasury, Petra



Mosaic at Petra Church



Royal Tombs, Petra



The Monastery Petra



Steve in the Dead Sea