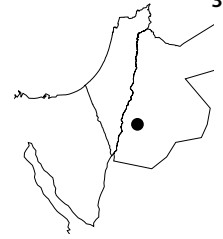


Petra (Jordan)

البتراء



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.

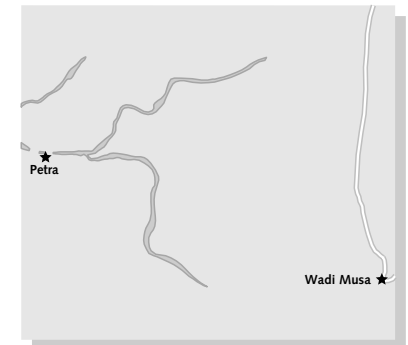
Almost as spectacular as the monuments themselves are the countless shades and Neapolitan swirls formed in the rock. Petra is often called the 'Rose-red City', but even this hardly does justice to the extraordinary range of colours that blend as the sun makes its daily passage over the site.

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 come to grips with the place. From Eilat, Petra is an easy two-hour journey, but don't give in to a day tour. Budget for an extra night 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

- Taking in traditional Bedouin music surrounded by hundreds of candles during the enchanting **Petra by Night** (p364) tour
- Escaping the crowds and exploring unexcavated tombs during a **hike** (p368) around Petra
- Drinking in the spectacular Petra sunset (and a cold beer) from the roof of the **Mövenpick Hotel** (p370)
- Easing aching muscles with a Turkish bath in one of the Wadi Musa hotels such as **Al-Anbat Hotel I** (p370)
- Catching the first sight of the **Treasury** (p365) from the Siq, the cliché Indiana Jones moment you can't help getting excited about



FAST FACTS ON JORDAN**Capital** Amman**Country Code** ☎ 962**Petra Telephone Code** ☎ 03**Language** Arabic**Money** Jordanian dinar (JD), consisting of 1000 fils; JD1 = US\$1.40, £1.10, 6NIS**Visas** Most nationalities can get a two-week Jordanian visa free of charge at the Yitzhak Rabin (formerly known as Arava) or Jordan River border crossings. The Allenby/King Hussein Bridge border crossing does not issue visas. If you don't have a visa while you are in Israel, organise one at the Jordanian embassy in Ramat Gan, Tel Aviv. A multi-entry visa for stays between three and six months (JD20) also needs to be obtained at the embassy. For details see Visas for Egypt & Jordan, p404.**Getting There & Away**

By far the easiest and cheapest way to cross into Jordan from Israel is by way of the **Yitzhak Rabin (Arava) border crossing** (☎ 08-630 0555; ☎ 6.30am-10pm Sun-Thu, 8am-8pm Fri & Sat), which is a short taxi ride (25NIS) from Eilat.

Once you cross over the easiest way is to take one of the taxis, normally waiting on the Jordan side, all the way to Petra (around JD40). However, the cheapest way is to take a taxi into Aqaba and then a local bus from Aqaba to Petra (JD1.75, two hours). Unfortunately, bus services are so irregular (about two per day with no fixed times) that it hardly seems worth it.

Another option is the **Allenby/King Hussein Bridge** (☎ 02-548 2600; ☎ 8am-6pm Sun-Thu, 8am-2pm Fri & Sat), which is easily accessible to/from Jerusalem (45 minutes), but you must have your visa organised beforehand. For more information about visas, see p404. Outgoing passenger fees are almost double what they are at Yitzhak Rabin (Arava).

Bus Nos 963 and 961 depart from Jerusalem and stop on Rte 90, about 100m from the upper entry gate to the border crossing. The border crossing is four hours from Petra.

From Amman, there are three **JETT** (☎ 06-566 4146) buses a week (three hours); a one-way ticket costs JD5.50. The buses leave at 6.30am from the Abdali Station in Amman, and the schedule is 'flexible', so check with

the JETT office for reservations. A taxi from Amman to Petra should cost about JD50.

When it's time to leave Petra, there are a few minibuses departing for Aqaba (two hours) between 6.30am and 3.30pm; for Amman between 5.30am and noon; and one to the resthouse at Wadi Rum (1½ hours) at 6am; all are JD5.

THE ANCIENT CITY History

Petra, the 'Rose-red City', was built in the 3rd century BC by the Nabateans, who carved palaces, temples, tombs, storerooms and stables from the rocky cliffs. From here they commanded the trade route from Damascus to Arabia, and through here the great spice, silk and slave caravans passed. In a short time the Nabateans made great advances. Their great success in commerce led to the development of skills: they mastered iron production, hydraulic engineering, copper refining, stone carving and sculpture. Archaeologists believe that it was several earthquakes, including a massive quake in AD 555 that forced the inhabitants to abandon the city.

Information

The first stop for all visitors should be the **Petra visitors centre** (☎ 2156029; fax 2156060; ☎ 6am-9pm year-round), just before the entrance. It houses a helpful information counter, the ticket office, a couple of shops, and toilets.

The information counter is 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.

A magical way to see the old city is by experiencing **Petra by Night** (adult/child under 12 JD12/free), which starts from the visitors centre at 8.30pm on Monday and Thursday and lasts two hours. The tour takes you along the Siq (lined with hundreds of candles) as far as the Treasury, where traditional Bedouin music is played and mint tea is served. Tickets are available from a few travel agencies in town or from the Petra visitors centre.

ENTRY TO SITE

Purchase tickets for entry to Petra at the **ticket office** (☎ 2156029; fax 2156060; ☎ 6.30am-5pm Oct-Apr, 6am-5.30pm May-Sep). Although tickets are not sold after the times specified here, you can remain in Petra after this time, usually until sunset.

PETRA IN...**Two Days**

Start early with a good breakfast before heading to the visitors centre and arranging a guide for a full day of heavy ruin hopping, taking in the main sights such as the Treasury, Monastery and Qasr al-Bint, as well as the wonderful amphitheatre and Royal Tombs. When your legs feel like they are beginning to give way, make your way to a roof terrace – the Mövenpick is our choice – for a cold drink before focusing the cameras on a superb Petra sunset. If Petra by Night is on, follow the candles down the Siq for an evening of mint tea and Bedouin music or learn how to create a Jordanian dinner with the help of local women at Petra Kitchen.

The next day, head back into Petra for some off-the-beaten-path hikes or arrange a horse-riding trip to Jebel Haroun. If there's still time take a taxi out to Little Petra, not as dramatic as the main Petra site but picturesque and fun to explore. Round the day off with a drink in a 2000-year-old Nabatean rock tomb at the Cave Bar behind the Petra visitors centre.

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. Multiday tickets are nontransferable; signatures are checked. Children under 15 are half price.

Once inside Petra the only toilets are opposite the theatre at the back of Qasr al-Bint and at the two nearby restaurants, Basin Restaurant (run by the Crown Plaza Resort) and the Nabataean Tent Restaurant.

Sights

There are over 800 registered sites in Petra, including some 500 tombs, but the best things to see are easy to reach.

The **Treasury** (Al-Khazneh) is the first main monument you come to after the trek through the incredibly narrow 1.2km-long defile known as the **Siq**. The carved façade of the Treasury is the finest of all of Petra's sites, and familiar to viewers of *Indiana Jones & the Last Crusade*.

Although carved out of the solid iron-laden sandstone, to serve as a tomb for the Nabatean 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 solid rock urn is pockmarked by rifle shots, the results of vain attempts to break it open. The date of the Treasury's construction has been a subject of debate; estimates range from 100 BC to AD 200.

Similar in design to the Treasury, the spectacular **Monastery** (Al-Deir) is far bigger (50m wide and 45m high) and just as

impressive. Built in the 3rd century BC as a Nabatean tomb, perhaps for King Obodas I, 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. It 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. The climb to the Monastery takes about 40 minutes, and is best started mid-afternoon when there is welcome shade along the way and the Monastery is at its most photogenic. The spectacular but uphill ancient rock-cut path of more than 800 steps follows the old processional route (when the building was used as a church) and is easy to follow. If you really don't want to walk, donkeys (with a guide) can be hired for about JD3/5 one way/return.

The trail to the Monastery starts from behind (to the northwest of) the Basin Restaurant. The path 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.

Other interesting sites include **Qasr al-Bint**, one of the most important temples in the ancient city. One of the few free-standing structures in Petra, this temple was built in around 30 BC by the Nabateans, changed extensively for the Roman emperors and

destroyed in about the 3rd century AD. It was almost certainly built as a dedication to the Nabatean god Dushara (and possibly the fertility goddess Al-'Uzza).

Also make sure you see the 8000-seat **amphitheatre**, the **colonnaded street**, the **Temple of the Winged Lions**, the ruins of the **Byzantine church** with possibly the world's oldest Byzantine mosaic, and the façade known as the **Royal Tombs**. Walk to the Royal Tombs (known as the 'Urn', 'Corinthian', 'Silk' and 'Palace') to examine their eroded façades and colourful interiors.

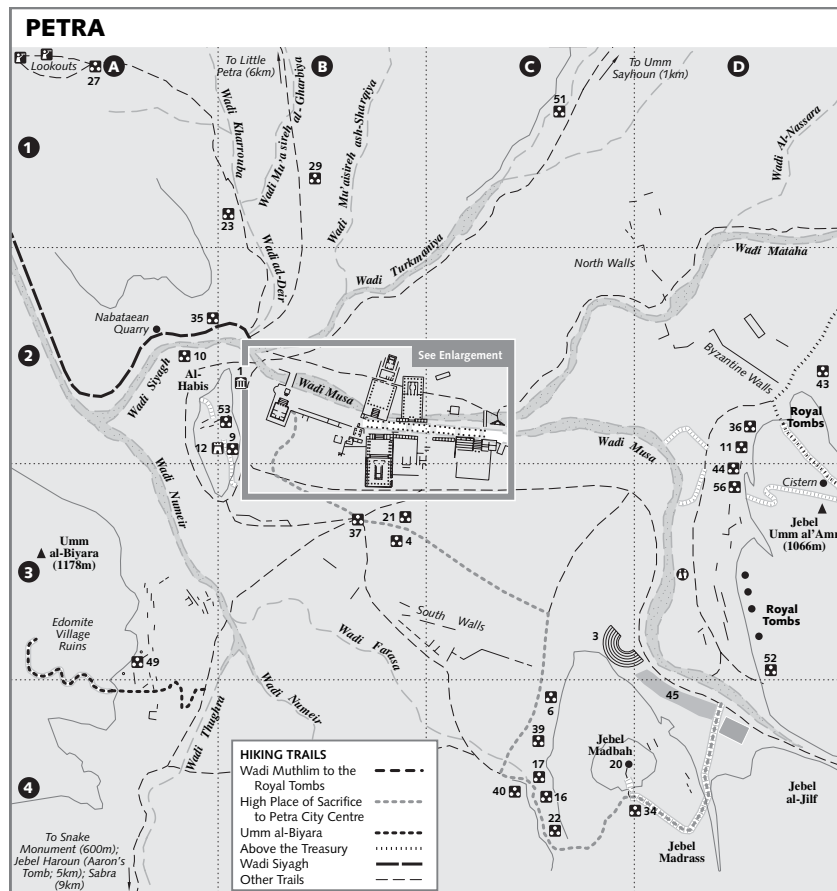
LITTLE PETRA

Siq al-Barid (Cold Canyon) is colloquially known as **Little Petra** (admission free; ☒ daylight

hr) and, hidden away in the centre of a mountain it is beautifully preserved with a number of notable tombs to explore. It was thought to have served as an agricultural centre, trading suburb and resupply post for camel caravans visiting Petra.

A 10-minute walk from Little Petra is the **Ammarin Camp** (☎ 079 5667771, 2131229; www.bedouincamp.net; per person in tent JD12) in the Siq al-Amri next door. Accommodation is just a mattress in a Bedouin tent but there is a shower and toilet block. The camp offers guided hikes in the surrounding hills.

Little Petra is 8km from the main entrance to Petra; a taxi for four people with a one-hour stop at the ruins will cost JD12 (return).



WADI MUSA

وادي موسى

Wadi Musa (Valley of Moses) appears to have developed almost overnight around Petra. It's a mass of hotels, restaurants and shops stretching about 5km down from 'Ain Musa to the main Petra entrance. Central Wadi Musa is defined by the Shaheed roundabout – all the main services are found near here and this is the place to catch buses to Aqaba and Wadi Rum. It's 2km downhill from the roundabout to the Petra entrance.

Information

EMERGENCY

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

Tourist police station (☎ 2156441, 196; ☒ 8am-midnight) Opposite the Petra visitors centre. A few tourist police can be found inside Petra.

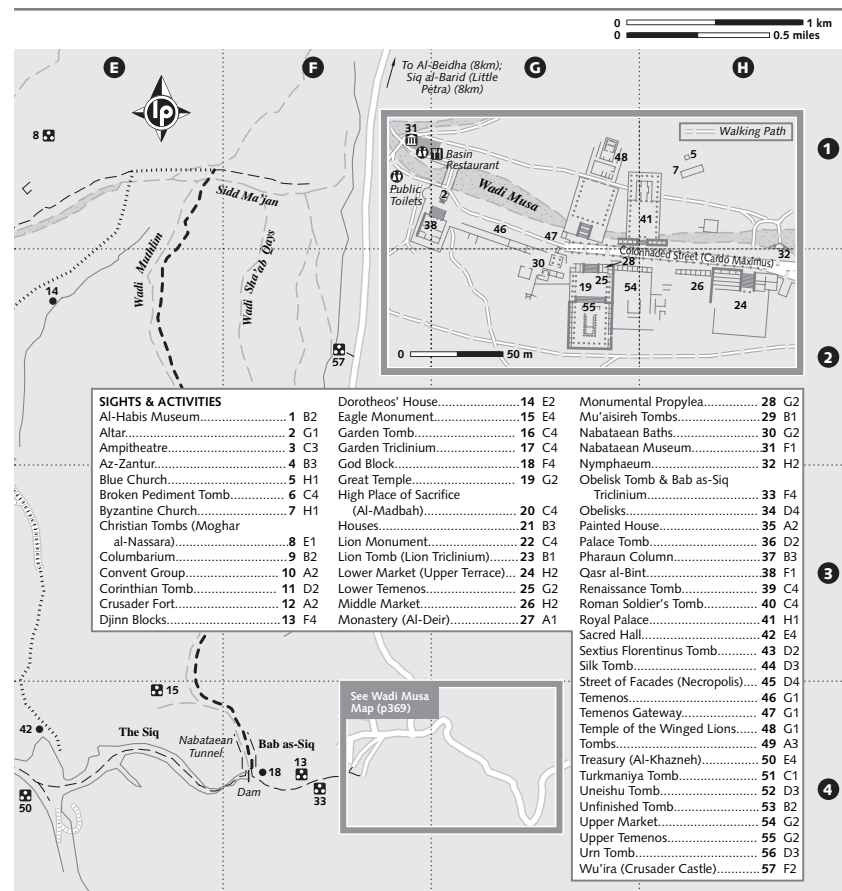
INTERNET ACCESS

Orient Internet Café (hisham_jo5petra@yahoo.com; per hr JD2; ☒ 10am-late) Fastest ADSL connection in town. Just down from the Shaheed roundabout.

Petra Internet Café (☎ 2157264; alpetra@hotmail.com; per hr JD3; ☒ 9am-midnight) There's a 50% discount for guests of most of the local hotels. Located up the hill from the Shaheed roundabout.

MEDICAL SERVICES

The Queen Rania Hospital (located 5km from the Police roundabout on the road to Tayyibeh) is of a high standard and is open



HIKING PETRA

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.

Above the Treasury – 1½ hours return

For dramatic and unusual views of the Treasury take the set of steep processional steps leading up the valley from about 150m northeast of the Palace Tomb. The stiff climb takes about 20 minutes and flattens out at a hill top Nabataean cistern. 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. Just before you get back to the cistern a tiny cleft in the rock to the left reveals worn steps that lead down a gully to a point next to the Urn Tomb. The trail isn't all that clear but is do-able with some care. If you are not sure about it then take the main path back down the way you came up.

Umm Al-Biyara – three hours return

Umm al-Biyara is the flat-topped mountain (1178m) to the southwest of the city centre. Qasr al-Bint to Umm al-Biyara (the Mother of Cisterns) 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.

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.

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

for emergencies without referral. The Wadi Musa Pharmacy is 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.

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.

POST

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

Petra visitors centre post office (☎ 7.30am-5pm)

TELEPHONE

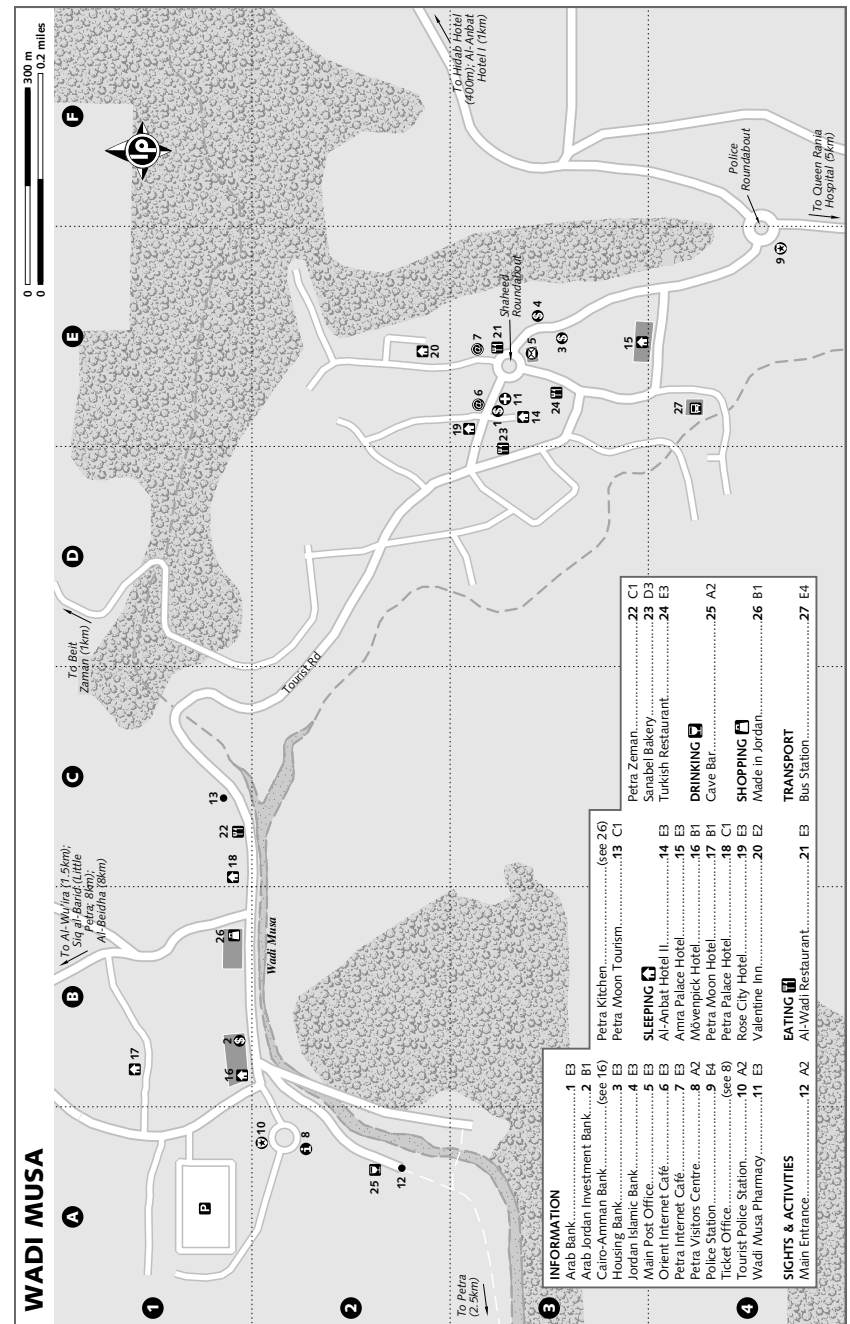
International telephone calls (around 800 fils per minute) can be made from private agencies along the main streets of Wadi Musa. A domestic call costs 150 fils.

Courses

Petra Kitchen (☎ /fax 2155900; www.petrakitchen.com; cookery class per person JD30) offers a nightly cookery course where travellers can learn from local women how to cook Jordanian dishes in a relaxed family-style atmosphere. The menu changes daily and the evening begins at 6.30pm (7.30pm in summer). Reservations are recommended.

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.petramoon.com), which has an office on the road to Petra. It can arrange horses to Jebel Haroun, fully supported (but expensive) treks to Dana



(four to five days), hikes from Tayyibeh to Petra, and camel treks to Wadi Rum. Hiking guides cost around JD70 per day, horses JD40 per day.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Valentine Inn (☎ 2156423; valentineinn@hotmail.com; dm/s/d JD4/8/10; 📍) It's a bit of a slog up the hill (northeast of the Shaheed roundabout), but this place is well attuned to a range of budget travel needs, from transport information to laundry. Rooms are bright and clean, although the dorms are slightly cramped. While this is certainly not the place to come for service with a smile (when we visited we found staff to be downright rude), it continues to be the biggest (if only) backpacker hangout in town. This may have something to do with the spectacular buffet dinner (JD3), which is served with a cold beer and a gorgeous sunset view.

Hidab Hotel (☎ 2156763; www.hidabhotel.com; s/d JD12/18) This good-value option is worth the drive from town (it's on the road to 'Ain Musa), with friendly staff, comfortable rooms and great facilities such as a rooftop terrace perfect for puffing on a nargileh and enjoying a magical Petra sunset. The hotel was also putting in a new rooftop bar at the time of research. The Turkish bath here (JD10 for guests and JD15 for visitors) is highly recommended by travellers.

Rose City Hotel (☎ 2156440; fax 2014132; s/d, with breakfast JD13/18) There's a polite welcome at this quiet place in the town centre, which offers great value and has friendly, efficient staff. The rooms vary a lot, but they are all clean and spacious with a fridge and small TV.

Al-Anbat Hotel II (☎ 2157200; alanbath@joinit.com.jo; s/d JD14/20) The cheaper of the two Anbats, the rooms here are quiet and well furnished, with clean but small private bathrooms. The double rooms at the front are the best choice. While it is pretty good value in the heart of Wadi Musa, the staff are a bit lackadaisical but also friendly.

MIDRANGE

Unless specified otherwise, all the room rates include breakfast.

Al-Anbat Hotel I (☎ 2156265; www.alanbat.com; s/d JD14/22; 📍) Located on the road between 'Ain Musa and Wadi Musa, this three-star

resort just keeps on growing up and out. The attractive rooms have high ceilings and come with satellite TV, and most have a balcony with views over Wadi Musa. 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 (JD2.50 per person) can use a designated area, with showers and a kitchen, and there's an area where you can pitch a tent or park a camper van. Al-Anbat is the Arabic name for the Nabataeans.

Petra Moon Hotel (☎ 2156220; www.petrmoonhotel.com; s/d JD18/25; 📍) Up behind the Mövenpick Hotel, this is convenient for the entrance to Petra. The modern lobby with comfy couches and glass coffeetables lends a touch of class to what is otherwise a very clean, but modest little place. There's some outdoor furniture for taking in the sunset, or just relaxing after a hard day's ruin hopping. The helpful staff can advise on jeep tours.

Amra Palace Hotel (☎ 2157070; www.amrapalace.com; s/d 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.

TOP END

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

Petra Palace Hotel (☎ 2156723; www.petrpalace.com.jo; s/d JD39/45; 📍) With the feel of a top-end hotel at a quarter of the price, this lovely place about 500m from the Petra entrance offers 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. There is a much more intimate feel here than at the big chain hotels. Credit cards are accepted.

Mövenpick Hotel (☎ 2157111; www.moevenpick-petra.com; d US\$105; 📍) One hundred metres from the ticket office, this is the most luxurious place in town, and as stylish as you'd expect. For the price, it's astoundingly good value. There are Mediterranean and buffet restaurants, a good bar, a swimming pool, a roof garden, the peaceful Burckhardt

Library, a children's playground and up-market gift shops. Even the hotel brochure describes it as 'posh'.

Eating & Drinking

The main road through Wadi Musa is dotted with grocery stores where you can stock up on munchies and drinks for Petra. Or try the **Sanabel Bakery** (☎ 2157925; ☎ 5am-midnight), which does a delicious range of Arab sweets and fresh bread. To find the bakery head downhill from the roundabout and take the main road on the left; it's opposite the mosque.

Al-Wadi Restaurant (☎ 2157151; salads 750 fils, mains JD3-4; ☎ lunch & dinner) On the Shaheed roundabout, this is the best place for a cheap feed. There's a range of vegetarian dishes as well as local Bedouin specialities such as *gallaya* (meat and onions in a spicy tomato sauce) and *mensaf* (lamb), most of which come with salad and rice. All the dishes are big on sauce and taste basically the same, but the portions, for the price, are absolutely huge.

Turkish Restaurant (☎ 0777 447039; mains from JD3; ☎ lunch & dinner) The English menu is in no way extensive, but the Turkish twist makes it a little more inspiring than the run-of-the-mill cheapies. Attentive staff turn out fresh salads and dips, an excellent mixed grill and tasty shwarma. The restaurant is just off the Shaheed roundabout.

Petra Zeman (☎ 0777 993913; mains from JD5; ☎ lunch & dinner) The newest restaurant on the block, Petra Zeman has a good selection of dishes on the menu, but it's the Bedouin specialities, including *mensaf* and the chicken

and rice *maqlubbeh* (sometimes called 'upside down') that are the standouts. Located 500m east of the main entrance to Petra.

Mövenpick Hotel (☎ 2157111; buffet lunches JD12.50, buffet dinners JD16.50; ☎ lunch & dinner) If you need a splurge, look no further than the blow-out buffets at this luxury hotel. For lunch, try Al-Saraya Restaurant downstairs, followed by a famous Mövenpick ice-cream sundae. Head up to Al Ghadeer Restaurant on the rooftop from 4pm for live Arabic music, sunset drinks and a mouth-watering barbecue buffet.

Cave Bar (☎ 2156266; behind the Petra visitors centre; small beer from JD2.500, cocktails JD4, plus taxes 26%; ☎ noon-11.30pm) If you've never been to a bar in a 2000-year-old Nabatean rock tomb (and we're guessing you haven't!) then a drink here is a must. The seats are actually inside the tombs; if that's a bit creepy for you, there's also pleasant seating outside. The cocktails are imaginative and the ambience classy, except when the music suddenly deviates from traditional Bedouin to Crazy Frog on full blast.

Shopping

Made in Jordan (☎ 2155700; www.madeinjordan.com; ☎ 8am-11pm) The best-quality crafts and gifts in Jordan come from various NGO projects, most of which are represented in this excellent shop. Products include olive oil, soap, paper, ceramics, table runners, jewellery from Wadi Musa, and individual pieces from Jordanian women artists. The fixed prices are high, as is the quality; credit cards are accepted.

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