

# History

Jordan is a young state with a long history. Born out of the ruins of WWII, the modern state and its territory east of the Jordan River can claim to have hosted some of the oldest civilisations in the world. The region has always sat at the fringes rather than the centre of empires but its strategic position ensured that all the great early civilisations passed through. The Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Hittites, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Turks and Crusaders all traded, built cities and fought their wars here, leaving behind rich cultural influences.

'History is but a series of accepted lies' – TE Lawrence (of Arabia).

## ANCIENT HISTORY

Evidence of human habitation in the area dates back about 500,000 years, when the climate of the Middle East was considerably milder and wetter than today. Archaeological finds from Jericho (on the other side of the Jordan River, in the Palestinian Territories) and Al-Beidha (near Petra) date from around 9000 BC and can rank among the world's first cities, whose inhabitants lived in circular houses, bred domestic animals, made pottery, practised a form of ancestor worship and used sophisticated agricultural methods.

The innovation of copper smelting during the Chalcolithic (copper) Age (4500–3000 BC) was a major technological advance for the region. Remains from the world's earliest and largest copper mines can be found at Khirbet Feinan in Jordan's Dana Nature Reserve. Sheep and goat herding produced milk and wool for the first time and crops such as olives, wheat and barley were introduced, creating a split in lifestyle between the nomad and the farmer, the 'desert and the sown', that would endure for millennia.

During the Bronze Age, crafts such as pottery and jewellery-making came under the dominant cultural influence of Egypt. Permanent settlements were established in modern-day Amman and in the southern desert regions. Foreigners introduced the idea of mixing copper and tin to create bronze, a harder material that allowed the rapid development of tools and weapons.

The Early Bronze Age (3000–2100 BC) also saw the occupation of the Jordan Valley by the Canaanites, a Semitic tribe. Along with other tribes in the area, the Canaanites raised defensive walls against invaders, creating a string of emerging city states. Trade gradually developed with neighbouring powers in Syria, Palestine and Egypt.

The later decline of Egyptian influence (though artistic influence continued) around 1500–1200 BC created opportunities for nearby tribes, such as the Hebrew-speaking people who later became known as the Israelites. The innovation of the camel saddle in the middle of the first millennium BC gave a huge technological boost to the native peoples of the Arabian peninsula.

By the Iron Age (1200–330 BC) three kingdoms had emerged in Jordan: the Edomites in the south, with a capital at Bozrah (modern Buseira/Busayra, near Dana); the Moabites near Wadi Mujib; and the

Neolithic skulls with holes drilled in them show that an early and crude form of brain surgery was practised (unsuccessfully!) thousands of years ago.

## TIMELINE 1.5 million years BC

Herds of wild animals graze on the shore of large lakes in the Jordan Valley

## 8000 BC

Domestication of animals and crops sees some of world's earliest settlements at Jericho, Ain Ghazal and al-Beidha

Ammonites on the edge of the Arabian Desert with a capital at Rabbath Ammon (present-day Amman). According to the Old Testament, this is the age of the Exodus, during which Moses and his brother, Aaron, led the Israelites through the wildernesses of Egypt and Jordan to the Promised Land. The Edomites barred the Israelites from southern Jordan but the Israelites managed to wind their way north, roughly along the route of the modern King's Highway, to arrive at the Jordan River. Moses died on Mt Nebo, in sight of the Promised Land, and it was left to Joshua to lead his people across the Jordan River onto the West Bank.

Several hundred years later came the rule of the great Israelite kings David and Solomon. Trade reached a peak during the golden age of King Solomon, with trade routes crossing the deserts from Arabia to the Euphrates, and huge shipments of African gold and South Arabian spices passed through the ports of Aqaba/Eilat. However, in about 850 BC the now-divided Israelite empire was defeated by Mesha, king of Moab, who recorded his victories on the famous Mesha Stele in the Moabite capital of Dhiban (see p165). In 586 BC the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar sacked Jerusalem and deported the exiled Israelites to Babylon.

### THE GREEKS, NABATAEANS, ROMANS & BYZANTINES

In 333 BC, Alexander the Great stormed his way through Jordan on his way to creating the largest empire the world had ever seen, eventually ruling everything from the Nile to the Indus. On his death in 323 BC, Alexander's empire was parcelled up among his generals: Ptolemy I gained Egypt, Jordan and parts of Syria, while Seleucus established the Seleucid dynasty in Babylonia. Many people in Jordan at this time spoke (or at least wrote in) Greek, and classically influenced cities such as Philadelphia (Amman), Pella and Gerasa (Jerash) were prospering in trade with Egypt. In 198 BC the Seleucid ruler Antiochus III defeated Ptolemy V and took control of western Jordan. By this time the Jews had gradually reestablished themselves and by 141 BC controlled much of northern Jordan.

Southern Jordan at this time was controlled by a nomadic tribe known as the Nabataeans. The Nabataeans were consummate traders and middlemen (they didn't actually produce anything apart from bitumen for waterproofing boat hulls and copper) who used their almost exclusive knowledge of desert strongpoints and water supplies to amass huge wealth from the trade in incense and spices. Their empire, based in Petra, eventually spread from Arabia to Syria, peaking around the time of Christ. Speaking a form of Aramaic, the language of the Bible, the Nabataeans gradually transformed themselves from their desert trading roots into masterful architects, hydraulic engineers and craftsmen, whose influence connected Arabia to the Mediterranean.

After their conquest of Syria in 64 BC, the powerful Romans began eyeing the wealth of the Nabataeans. The Emperor Trajan finally annexed the Nabataean empire in AD 106 and absorbed it into the new Roman province of Arabia Petraea, with a capital in Petra and later Bosra (modern Syria). The Romans constructed a new road through Jordan, the Nova Via Traiana, and built a string of forts in the eastern desert at Qasr al-Hallabat, Azraq and Umm al-Jimal, to shore up the outermost

borders of the empire. The sophisticated cities of Jerash, Umm Qais and Pella blossomed as members of the Decapolis (see p109), a league of provincial cities that accepted Roman cultural influence but retained their independence.

The decision by Byzantine emperor Constantine to convert to Christianity in AD 324 changed the face of the eastern Mediterranean, as well as its soul, and the young faith quickly became the official religion of Jordan, ushering in a period of prosperity and stability. Churches were constructed across Jordan (often from the building blocks of former Greek and Roman temples), and most were decorated with elaborate mosaics that are still visible today at Madaba, Umm ar-Rasas and Petra. Byzantine Christian pilgrims began to make the arduous trip to the Holy Land, visiting sights and building churches at the Jordanian biblical sites of Bethany, Mt Nebo and Lot's Cave. It was the archaeological rediscovery of these churches 1400 years later that confirmed the lost location of these biblical sites to a forgetful modern world.

In AD 614 the Persian Sassanians reoccupied parts of Jordan as part of their invasion from the east. Although the Byzantine emperor Heraclius forced them into a peace agreement, it was the beginning of the end for Byzantine rule and Christian rule in the region. A storm was brewing in the deserts to the south.

### THE ADVENT OF ISLAM

After the Prophet Mohammed's death in AD 632, his followers began to push north, exploding out of the desert. The armies of Islam lost their first battle against the Byzantines at Mu'tah (near Karak) in 629, but defeated them seven years later at the Battle of Yarmouk. Jerusalem fell in 638 and Syria was taken in 640, as the Arab forces quickly supplanted the Byzantine and Sassanian empires. Islam became the dominant religion and Arabic replaced Greek as the cultural unifier and lingua franca of the region.

When an assassin murdered the fourth caliph (and son-in-law of Mohammed), Ali (see p40), he was succeeded by the Syrian governor, Mu'awiya, who established the Umayyad dynasty (661–750), based in Damascus. The ensuing bitter dispute over Ali's succession split Islam into two branches, Sunni and Shi'ite, to create a powerful schism that continues unresolved to this day.

The Umayyads' rich architectural legacy included the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus and the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. In eastern Jordan, the Umayyads' close attachment to the desert led to the construction of a string of opulent 'desert castles' (p133), which includes the still-impressive Qasayr Amra (built in 711) and Qasr Kharana (710).

The huge earthquake of AD 747 shattered huge swathes of northern Jordan and Syria, weakening the Umayyads' hold on power to such a degree that they were soon overthrown by a rival Sunni faction, the Abbasids. The change of dynasties marked the beginning of an important political shift from Damascus to Baghdad, and from Arab ethnic superiority to Persian cultural dominance. The Abbasids followed a stricter form of Islam, and were far less tolerant of Christianity than the Umayyads.

The words 'Semite' and 'Semitic' derive from Shem, the eldest son of Noah.

The amazing big-hipped, bug-eyed fertility statues created at Ain Ghazal in Jordan around 7000–6500 BC are some of the earliest sculptures in the world; check them out at the National Archaeological Museum on Amman's Citadel (see p71).

The legacy of Roman rule in Jordan includes the tourist attractions of Jerash and Umm Qais, as well as the Jordanian currency, the dinar, which gets its name from the Roman *denarius*.

The well-respected scholar Bernard Lewis has written several excellent books on the Middle East, including *The Middle East: A Brief History of the Last 2000 Years*. It's excellent big-picture stuff.

### 8300–4300 BC

Neolithic Era

### 4000 BC

Bronze Age revolution

### 2900 BC

Emergence of city states in Middle East, including the growth of towns at Amman, Pella, Deir Alla and Tell Irbid

### 2300 BC

Sodom and Gomorrah destroyed in a cataclysmic disaster on the southeast corner of the Dead Sea

Still, the 8th, 9th and 10th centuries saw an Arab intellectual flowering that rekindled the artistic and philosophical advancements of Ancient Greece and developed standards in medicine, biology, philosophy, architecture and agriculture that were unprecedented in their day. These achievements spread into Europe through Spain and Sicily and were the major factor in sparking the European Renaissance. Far from the sophisticated mainstream of the Arab court, Jordan was virtually ignored.

In 969 the Cairo-based Fatimids (the Shiite dynasty named after Mohammed's daughter-in-law Fatima) wrested control of Palestine, Jordan and southern Syria from the Abbasids. Less than a century later the Seljuk Turks, pushed west by waves of nomadic incursions from Central Asia, conquered what remained of the Abbasid territory and took over Trans-Jordan.

### THE CRUSADES & HOLY WAR

The armies of Islam and Christianity had already clashed, primarily in the 7th century, but the next struggle would be bloodier and more bitter than anything that had gone before it, and its consequences and language of religious conflict resonates to this day. Pope Urban II kicked off the 'holy war' in 1095 as revenge for the ongoing destruction of churches and to protect pilgrim routes to the Holy Land. Within five years the Crusaders had captured their goal, the holy city of Jerusalem, slaughtering countless inhabitants in the process.

By about 1116 the Crusader armies took control of most of 'Outre Jourdain' (Trans-Jordan – literally the 'Land Across the Jordan'), and built a string of fortresses to control the roads from Damascus to Cairo. Their hold was always tenuous, and only survived as long as the local Muslim states remained weak and divided.

In the 12th century, Nureddin (Nur ad-Din – literally 'Light of the Faith'), son of a Turkish tribal ruler, was able to unite the Arab world and defeat the Crusaders in Egypt. His campaign was completed by Saladin (Salah ad-Din – 'Restorer of the Faith'), a Kurdish scholar and military leader who overthrew his Fatimid employers in Egypt, declared a jihad (holy war in defence of Islam) on the invaders and occupied most of the Crusader strongholds in Jordan. The Damascus-based Ayyubids, members of Saladin's family, squabbled over his empire on his death in 1193, and the Crusaders recaptured much of their former territory along the coast.

The Mamluks, the name given to a vast group of adolescents taken from foreign lands to serve as a soldier-slave caste for the Ayyubids, had gained so much power by 1250 that they overthrew their masters. It was the Mamluks who finally turned back the rampaging Mongols, after the armies of Genghis Khan's son had taken Baghdad and killed the last caliph (the Mongol armies reached as far as Ajlun and Salt in Jordan). The Mamluks took control of Jordan and finally expelled the Crusaders. The Mamluk sultan Baybars rebuilt the castles at Karak, Shobak and Ajlun, which they used as lookouts and as a series of staging posts for message-carrying pigeons.

Just 150 years after the departure of the Mongols, the brutal Central Asian invader Tamerlane destroyed much of the Mamluk empire, the final ripple of a wave of invasions from Central Asia that by the 15th century had changed the face of the Middle East.

To see the Crusades from a Muslim perspective read Amin Maalouf's lively *The Crusades Through Arab Eyes*. The book recasts the West's memories of knights in shining armour as ruthless barbarians who pillaged the Middle East, the horrors of which still reside in the collective memory of the Middle East.

The main remnant of Ayyubid rule in Jordan is the magnificent Qala'at ar-Rabad at Ajlun – see p114.

You can visit Crusader castles at Karak (p166), Petra (p200 & p188) and on Pharaoh's Island (p231) just offshore from Aqaba.

### THE OTTOMAN STAGNATION (1516–1918)

The Ottoman Turks took Constantinople in 1453, and defeated the Mamluks in Jordan in 1516 to create one of the world's largest empires. The Ottomans concentrated on the lucrative cities of the region, such as the holy city of Jerusalem and the commercial centre of Damascus, and Jordan again became a forgotten backwater. However, four centuries later the Ottomans did build the Hejaz Railway linking Damascus with the holy city of Medina, via Amman. Jordan was briefly occupied by the Egyptians in the 1830s.

The last years of the Ottoman Empire marked the ascendancy of the European powers over the Middle East, starting with European conquests of Algeria and Morocco. By the end of WWI the entire Arab world was under European domination. The debate over how Islam and the Arab world should respond to the resurgent West has dominated the last 200 years' history of the Middle East. The West may have shifted roles over the years – 'from conqueror to seducer', in the words of one historian – but the debate over the response still rages. One response – a return to the early principles of Islam, an Islamic 'fundamentalism' – continues to shape Middle Eastern politics to this day.

### WWI & THE ARAB REVOLT

During WWI Jordan was the scene of fierce fighting between the Ottoman Turks, allied with the Germans, and the British, based in Suez (Egypt). By the end of 1917 British troops occupied Jerusalem and, a year later, the rest of Syria. Their successes would not have been possible without the aid of the Arab tribes, loosely formed into an army under Emir Faisal, who was the *sharif* (ruler) of Mecca and guardian of the Muslim holy places, and had taken up the reins of the Arab nationalist movement in 1914. The enigmatic British colonel TE Lawrence, known as Lawrence of Arabia (see p204), helped coordinate the Arab Revolt and secure supplies from the Allies.

In June 1916 the Arabs under Emir Faisal and his brother Abdullah joined the British drive to oust the Turks, following British assurances that they would be helped in their fight to establish an independent Arab state. This was one month after the British and French had concluded the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement, whereby 'Syria' (modern-day Syria and Lebanon) was to be placed under French control and 'Palestine' (a vaguely defined area including modern Israel, the Palestinian Territories and Jordan) would go to the British.

This betrayal was heightened by the 1917 Balfour Declaration, the third of three utterly contradictory British declarations, which stated that:

His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a National Home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object.

This contradictory acceptance of both a Jewish homeland in Palestine and the preservation of the rights of the original Palestinian community lies at the heart of the seemingly irreconcilable Arab-Israeli conflict.

Though bombed by Lawrence and the Arab Revolt, a section of the Hejaz Railway is still in operation – see p261.

Look for the ghosts of Lawrence at Wadi Rum (p203), Aqaba fort (p219) and Azraq fort (p134).

### 1000–800 BC

Emergence of the kingdoms of Ammon, Moab and Edom, based at Rabbath Ammon, Dhiban and Bozrah (Buseira), respectively

### 8 BC–AD 40

Rule of Aretas IV, the greatest of the Nabataean kings

### 111–114

Construction of the Via Nova Traiana Roman road along the route of the King's Highway

### 363

Half of Petra destroyed by an earthquake

## AFTER WWI

As the Arab Revolt swept through Arabia and Jordan, Aqaba fell to Faisal and Lawrence and three months later the victorious Arab forces marched into Damascus. The war ended a month later, by which time Arab forces controlled most of modern Saudi Arabia, Jordan and parts of southern Syria. The principal Arab leader, Emir Faisal, set up an independent government in Damascus at the end of 1918, a move at first welcomed by the Allies. His demand at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference for independence throughout the Arab world was not so kindly greeted.

The British later came to an agreement with Faisal, giving him Iraq, while his elder brother, Abdullah, was proclaimed ruler of Trans-Jordan (formerly part of the Ottoman province of Syria), the land lying between Iraq and the east bank of the Jordan River. A young Winston Churchill drew up the borders in 1921 in his role as British colonial secretary.

Abdullah made Amman his capital. Britain recognised the territory as an independent state under its protection in 1923, and a small defence force, the Arab Legion, was set up under British officers – the best known of whom was Major JB Glubb (Glubb Pasha). A series of treaties after 1928 led to full independence in 1946, when Abdullah was proclaimed king.

## PALESTINE & THE BIRTH OF JORDAN

The Balfour Declaration, and subsequent attempts to make the Jewish national home a reality, was destined for trouble from the start. Arabs were outraged by the implication that they were the ‘intruders’ and the minority group in Palestine, where they accounted for about 90% of the population.

Persecution of Jews under the Nazis in the 1930s accelerated the rate of Jewish immigration to Palestine and violence between Jews and Arabs increased. In 1939 a white paper was drawn up calling for the creation of a bi-national state. This was rejected by both sides, however, and during WWII both sides cooperated with the British.

After the war, the conflict reached its high point. In 1947, the UN voted for the partition of Palestine and on 14 May 1948 the State of Israel was proclaimed. The British Mandate was over and, as troops withdrew from the area, Arab armies attacked the new-born state. Highly trained Israeli forces proved too strong for the ill-equipped Arab volunteers and by mid-1949 armistices had been signed.

King Abdullah harboured dreams of a ‘Greater Syria’ to include all the modern states of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and what is now Israel & the Palestinian Territories in a single Arab state (later to include Iraq, as well). For this, he was suspected by his Arab neighbours of pursuing different goals from them in their fight with the state of Israel.

### THE JORDANIAN FLAG

The Jordanian flag is based on the flag of the Arab Revolt and is very similar to the Palestinian version. The three bands of black, white and green represent the Abbasid, Umayyad and Fatimid caliphates, respectively; the red triangle represents the Arab Revolt of 1916; a seven-pointed white star symbolises the seven verses of the opening sura of the Quran.

For something compact try *The Arabs* by Peter Mansfield, another excellent overview, with a general history followed by specific country overviews, or try the short and impartial *The Arabs: A Short History* by Philip Hitti, a Lebanese Christian Arab. For something more detailed try *History of the Arabs* also by Philip Hitti or *A History of the Middle East* by Peter Mansfield.

At the end of hostilities, Jordanian troops were in control of East Jerusalem and the West Bank. In response to the establishment of an Egyptian-backed Arab government in Gaza in September 1948, King Abdullah proclaimed himself King of All Palestine. In April 1950 he formally annexed the territory, despite paying lip service to Arab declarations backing Palestinian independence and expressly ruling out territorial annexations. The new Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan (HKJ) won immediate recognition from the governments of Britain and the US. However, the first wave of Palestinian refugees virtually doubled Jordan’s population, putting it under great strain.

King Abdullah was assassinated outside Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem in July 1951. His son Talal ruled for a year before being declared schizophrenic, whereupon Abdullah’s 17-year-old grandson (and Talal’s son) Hussein was proclaimed king, finally ascending to the throne in May 1953, after completing his military education at Harrow and Sandhurst. In 1956, Hussein sacked Glubb Pasha (by then chief of staff of the Jordanian Army). After elections that year, the newly formed Jordanian government broke ties with the UK, and the last British troops left Jordan by mid-1957. Hussein then staged a coup against his government, partly because it had tried to open a dialogue with the Soviet Union.

With the (temporary) union of Egypt and Syria in 1958, King Hussein feared for his own position and tried a federation with his Hashemite cousins in Iraq. This lasted less than a year because the Iraqi Hashemite monarchy was overthrown, and British troops were sent in to Jordan to protect Hussein.

In February 1960, Jordan offered a form of citizenship to all Palestinian Arab refugees and, in defiance of the wishes of the other Arab states for an independent Palestine, insisted that its annexation of Palestinian territory be recognised. Despite Jordan’s opposition, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was formed in 1964, with the blessing of the Arab League, to represent the Palestinian people. The Palestine National Council (PNC) was established within the PLO as its executive body – the closest thing to a Palestinian government.

At about the same time, an organisation called the Palestine National Liberation Movement (also known as Al-Fatah) was established. One of the stated aims of both the PLO and Al-Fatah was to train guerrillas for raids on Israel. Al-Fatah emerged from a power struggle for control of the guerrilla organisations as the dominant force within the PLO, and its leader, Yasser Arafat, became chair of the executive committee of the PLO in 1969.

## THE SIX DAY WAR

With aid from the USA and a boom in tourism – mainly in Jerusalem’s old city – the early 1960s saw Jordan’s position improve dramatically. However, all that changed within a week with the outbreak of the Six Day War.

The build-up to the war had seen increasing Palestinian guerrilla raids into Israel from Syria. The Syrians stepped up the raids once President Nasser of Egypt promised support in the event of an Israeli attack. When the Syrians announced that Israel was massing troops in preparation for an assault, Egypt responded by asking the UN to withdraw its Emergency

The Hashemites are named after Hashem, the great-grandfather of the Prophet Mohammed, from whom King Abdullah (the founder of modern Jordan) claimed descent.

*A History of Jordan*, by Philip Robbins, details the modern history of Jordan from the 1920s to the present day and is one of very few specific books to focus on the Hashemite Kingdom. The main other available work is Kamal Salibi’s *The Modern History of Jordan*.

Force from the Egypt-Israel border, which it did. Nasser then closed the Straits of Tiran (the entrance to the Red Sea), effectively sealing the port of Eilat. Five days later, Jordan and Egypt signed a mutual defence pact, dragging Jordan into any future hostilities.

On 5 June 1967, the Israelis dispatched a pre-dawn raid that wiped out the Egyptian Air Force on the ground, and in the following days decimated Egyptian troops in Sinai and Jordanian troops on the West Bank, and stormed up the Golan Heights in Syria.

The outcome for Jordan was disastrous: it lost the whole of the West Bank and its part of Jerusalem, which together has supplied Jordan with its two principal sources of income (agriculture and tourism), and resulted in yet another huge wave of Palestinian refugees.

## BLACK SEPTEMBER

After the 1967 defeat, the frustrated Palestinians became increasingly militant and, although there was tacit agreement with the Jordanian government that they could operate freely out of their bases in the Jordan Valley, the Jordanians were not ready to give them immunity from Jordan's laws. It was not long before the inevitable showdown took place.

By 1968, Palestinian *fedayeen* (guerrilla) fighters were effectively acting as a state within a state, openly defying and humiliating Jordanian soldiers. In June 1970, things deteriorated into sporadic conflict, when Palestinian militants fired on King Hussein's motorcade and held 68 foreigners hostage in an Amman hotel.

On 6 September 1970, the rogue Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (an epithet that will sound familiar to fans of the film *Life of Brian*) hijacked Swissair and TWA flights to an airstrip in Jordan's remote desert. Six days later another hijacked plane arrived, then all three were spectacularly blown up in front of the world's TV cameras. On 16 September, martial law was imposed and bloody fighting between Palestinian militants and the Jordanian army broke out across Amman and Jordan. At the height of the fighting, Yasser Arafat was spirited out of Amman disguised as a Kuwaiti sheikh in order to attend an Arab League summit in Cairo. A fragile cease-fire was signed, but not before at least 3000 lives had been lost. It was not until midway through 1971 that the final resistance around Ajlun was defeated. The guerrillas were forced to recognise Hussein's authority and the Palestinians had to choose between exile and submission. Most chose exile in Lebanon.

In October 1974, King Hussein reluctantly agreed to an Arab summit declaration that recognised the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) as the sole representative of Palestinians with a right to set up a government in any liberated territory, nullifying Jordan's claims to the West Bank. In July 1988 the king severed all of Jordan's administrative and legal ties with the West Bank.

In the meantime, profound and long-lasting demographic changes had been reshaping the region. Economic migration, both from the countryside to the city, and also from Jordan to the increasingly wealthy Gulf States, changed social and family structures. Improvements in education, a huge rise in population and a particularly sharp rise in the percentage of young people further dramatically altered the face of the Middle East

during the 1960s, 70s and 80s. Amman alone mushroomed from a town of 30,000 in 1948 to a city of 250,000 in 1960.

In November 1989 the first full parliamentary elections since 1967 were held in Jordan, and women were allowed to vote for the first time. Four years later most political parties were legalised and allowed to participate in parliamentary and municipal elections.

Although the Islamic Action Front occupied many of the 80 lower-house seats, royalist independents together still constituted a large majority, which continued to ensure that King Hussein remained in power.

## THE GULF WAR

Jordan found itself caught in a no-win situation when Iraq (its major trading partner) invaded Kuwait in 1990. Support for Saddam was at fever pitch among Palestinians in Jordan after he promised to link the Kuwait issue to their own and force a showdown.

King Hussein's diplomatic skills were stretched to the fullest when he refused to side against Iraq, largely out of fear of unrest among Jordan's Palestinian populace. This was misunderstood in the West as support for Saddam, but King Hussein played the game with typical dexterity. Although tending to side publicly with Baghdad, he maintained efforts to find a peaceful solution and complied, officially at least, with the UN embargo on trade with Iraq. This last step won him the sympathy of Western financial bodies and, although US and Saudi aid was temporarily cut, along with Saudi oil, loans and help were forthcoming from other quarters, particularly Japan and Europe.

One UN assessment put the total cost to Jordan of the war from mid-1990 to mid-1991 at more than US\$8 billion. The UN naval blockade of Aqaba, which was aimed at enforcing UN sanctions against Iraq, cost Jordan around US\$300 million a year in lost revenue between 1991 and 1994.

Moreover, for the third time in 45 years, Jordan experienced a massive refugee inflow, this time of 500,000 Jordanians and Palestinians who had been working in the Gulf States. The loss of their remittances was initially seen as a blow to the economy, but the 'returnees' brought US\$500 million home with them and actually helped unleash an unprecedented boom, stimulating economic growth to a huge 11% in 1992.

## PEACE WITH ISRAEL

With the signing of the PLO-Israeli declaration of principles in September 1993, which set in motion the process of establishing an autonomous Palestinian authority in the Occupied Territories, the territorial question was virtually removed as an obstacle to peace between Jordan and Israel.

Compared with Syria, Jordan had long displayed greater willingness to countenance peace with Israel. On 26 October 1994 Jordan and Israel & the Palestinian Territories signed a peace treaty that provided for the dropping of all economic barriers between the two countries and for closer cooperation on security, water and other issues.

The clause in the treaty recognising the 'special role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in the Muslim holy shrines in Jerusalem' sounded

**'In November 1989 the first full parliamentary elections since 1967 were held in Jordan, and women were allowed to vote for the first time'**

For an overview of Arab history, the widely acclaimed work *A History of the Arab Peoples* by Albert Hourani is recommended. It's as much an attempt to convey a sense of the evolution of Muslim Arab societies as a straightforward history, with extensive treatment of various aspects of social, cultural and religious life.

### 1946, 25 May

Independence from the British; Abdullah becomes first king of Jordan

### 1950

Jordan annexes the West Bank and east Jerusalem

### 1951

King Abdullah assassinated at Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem

### 1953

Hussein is proclaimed king of Jordan after his brother is declared mentally unstable

alarm bells in Palestinian circles. The treaty made Jordan very unpopular with the region's governments and people alike, as well as severely straining relations with other countries such as Syria and Libya.

### THE KING IS DEAD, LONG LIVE THE KING

By the time of his death in February 1999, King Hussein was well on his way to becoming one of the great peacemakers of history. From his frantic efforts at diplomacy to avert the 1991 Gulf War to his peace agreement with Israel in 1994, the urbane and articulate king of a country in one of the world's toughest neighbourhoods came to be seen as a beacon of moderateness and stability in a region known for neither attribute. This reputation was secured in 1997 when a Jordanian soldier shot and killed seven Israeli schoolgirls in northern Jordan. King Hussein personally attended the funeral in a public display of grief and solidarity with the Israeli families.

And yet King Hussein also struggled to maintain his credibility among the majority Palestinian population of his kingdom. Numerous assassination attempts, fuelled by accusations that the king had been carrying out secret negotiations with the Israelis and was on the payroll of the CIA after 1957, dogged the early years of his reign. His belief that he was the true representative of the Palestinian people brought him frequently

#### KING HUSSEIN

Like all great figures of history, King Hussein has become a figure of legend. When the first king of Jordan, King Abdullah, was assassinated at Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem in July 1951, his 15-year-old grandson Hussein was by his side. By some accounts, he was hit in the chest by a bullet, miraculously deflected by a medal worn on his uniform. On succeeding to the throne on 2 May 1953 at the age of 18, the youthful, British-educated Hussein was known more for his love of pretty women and fast cars than any great political skill. Yet 45 years later he was fêted as one of the Middle East's great political survivors, still king against all the odds and the de facto creator of the modern state of Jordan.

Hussein married four times and sired 11 children. His first marriage was to the beautiful Dina bint Abedelhamid. After one year of marriage and the birth of a daughter, Princess Alia, they divorced. In 1961, Hussein married Antoinette 'Toni' Gardner, a British army officer's daughter who took the name Princess Muna upon converting to Islam. They had two sons, Prince Abdullah (the current king) and Prince Feisal, followed by two daughters, Princess Zein and Princess Aisha. In 1972 the couple divorced. That same year Hussein married Alia Toukan. They had a daughter, Princess Haya, and a son, Prince Ali, as well as an adopted daughter, Abeer Muhaisin. Tragedy struck the family in 1977, however, when Queen Alia was killed in a helicopter crash. The following year, King Hussein married his fourth and final wife, American-born Lisa Halaby, who took the name Queen Noor (see p41). They had two sons, Prince Hamzah and Prince Hashim, and two daughters, Princess Iman and Princess Raiyah.

While King Hussein was active on the world's political stage, his loyalty to his people was also well regarded. In the great tradition of *The Thousand and One Nights*, and in a role emulated by his son decades later, Hussein would disguise himself as a taxi driver and ask passengers what they really thought of the king. In November 1958, Hussein, a trained pilot, flew his air-force plane towards Europe for a vacation only to be intercepted by two Syrian fighter planes who sought to force him down. He escaped back to Jordan, adding to his already growing legend.

#### THE ROYAL HANDSHAKE

Like any royal family worth its salt, Jordan's Hashemites have not been immune from squabbles over the royal succession. While King Hussein was in the USA for cancer treatment, the widely respected elder statesman of Jordanian diplomacy, Hassan bin Talal (Hussein's brother and Crown Prince for 34 years), took temporary charge of the kingdom. Just before his death in February 1999, Hussein returned to Jordan, stripped Hassan of power and unexpectedly announced that Hussein's son from a previous marriage, Abdullah bin Hussein, would be the new king.

While the public appearance was of a smooth transition and happy families, all was not well behind the scenes. Soon after the succession was finalised, reports began to surface from within the palace that Abdullah had agreed to become king only for a limited time, after which the more charismatic but youthful Crown Prince Hamzah, would take the throne. Neither Queen Noor nor her son, Prince Hamzah were at Abdullah's enthronement ceremony.

In 2002, unofficial reports suggested that Abdullah had changed his mind and decided to remain as king. In 2004 the crown prince was stripped of his title, leaving Abdullah's 11-year-old son Hussein next in line for the throne.

into conflict with an increasingly militant Palestinian movement. It was not until his later years, after he renounced all claims to the Palestinian leadership and to the West Bank, that the rift was officially healed. Even then, his 1994 peace treaty with Israel was branded by some Palestinians as a betrayal and this uneasy relationship remained largely unresolved at the time of his death.

After an official mourning period, Hussein's son was enthroned as King Abdullah II on 9 June 1999.

#### KING ABDULLAH II

Abdullah was born on 30 January 1962 to Princess Muna, King Hussein's second (British) wife. He studied in the USA and, like his father, attended Sandhurst in the UK and other military academies in the USA. He was promoted to lieutenant in the Jordanian Army at 22, and became head of Jordan's Special Forces in 1998 after he was involved in the successful (and televised) capture of two assassins.

Abdullah is a keen sportsman, pilot, scuba diver and rally driver; he enjoys Western food and speaks better English than Arabic. He is married to Queen Rania, a glamorous Palestinian dedicated to children's and women's charities, and has three young children, Crown Prince Hussein, Princess Iman and Princess Salma.

Throughout the Palestinian intifada, Abdullah has been one of the voices of moderation within the Arab world, preferring diplomacy as a means of bringing about a peace settlement. This stance has won him much respect in international circles. He has, however, come under attack from many Palestinians and other Arabs for maintaining relations with Israel and being ineffectual in his attempts to bring about a solution to the conflict. Although he has proven to be adept at following in his father's footsteps, it remains to be seen whether Abdullah's diplomatic skills are as enduring, or as ultimately effective, as Hussein's. At home, his drive to stamp out corruption has helped to maintain his popularity.

The Jordanian constitution stipulates that the parents of the king of Jordan must be Arab and Muslim by birth; King Abdullah's mother was English and a convert to Islam.

1967

Israel wins the Six Day War, gaining Jerusalem and the West Bank

1970

Black September – thousands injured in clashes between the Jordanian government and Palestinian guerrillas

1994

Peace treaty signed between Israel and Jordan, ending 46 years of war

1999, 7 Feb

King Hussein dies; King Abdullah ascends to the throne

# The Culture

## THE NATIONAL PSYCHE

*Ahlan wa sahlán!* It's one of the most common greetings in Arabic and one that defines the way Jordanians relate to the people around them, especially guests. The root words mean 'people' or 'family' (*ahl*) and 'ease' (*sahl*), so translated loosely the expression means 'be as one of the family and at your ease'. It's a gracious thought, and one that ends up in English simply as 'welcome', or more commonly to tourists, 'welcome to Jordan'. Among Arabs, it's used to mean anything from 'hello' to 'you're welcome' (after thanks).

Arab traditions of hospitality and kindness are deeply ingrained in the psyches of most Jordanians, especially the Bedouin. Rooted in the harsh realities of life in the desert, these traditions have been virtually codified into all social behaviour. These century-old notions of hospitality mix with an easy modernity and wonderful sense of humour that make Jordanians easy to get along with.

Writers over the centuries have commented on the dignity, pride and courtesy of the Bedouin in particular, characterising them as courageous and fierce fighters yet also intense and loyal friends.

Yet there is an increasing polarisation in Jordanian society and in many ways the modern Western-looking outlook of Amman's young middle and upper classes contrasts starkly with the conservative Bedouin morality of the countryside.

Bedouin concepts of honour (*ird*) in particular run deep, but sit uneasily with the freedoms many affluent Jordanian women have come to expect. Rapid social change connected with the rise of tourism has also led to a clash of social values in places like Petra and Wadi Musa. The effect of tourism on traditional Bedouin hospitality and lifestyle has yet to be studied.

However, Jordanians still share many values, including a deep respect for the Jordanian royal family, which itself stems in part from the ingrained tribal respect for local elders, or sheikhs. Islam dominates the Jordanian view of the world, of course, as does the Palestinian experience, which is hardly surprising when you consider that 65% of Jordanians are Palestinian.

A belief and faith in and submission (Islam literally means 'submission') to God's will sits deep in the Jordanian psyche. Ask Jordanians *kaif halak?* (how are you?) and they will reply *al-hamdu lillah* – 'Fine, thanks be to God'. Ask if peace will come soon to the Middle East, or even if the bus to Jerash will leave on time, and the reply will doubtless be *in sha' Allah* – 'God willing'. Say your goodbyes with *ma'a salama* and you will be told *Allah ysmalakh*, 'God keep you safe'.

Sharing deep ethnic and cultural ties with both Palestine and Iraq, many Jordanians are frustrated and at times even angered by American and European policies towards the Middle East, but Jordanians are always able to differentiate a government and its policies from its people. You'll never be greeted with animosity in Jordan, regardless of your nationality; only a courtesy and hospitality that is deeply impressive and often quite humbling.

## DAILY LIFE

Like much of the Middle East, Jordan is a country that has deep attachments to the desert – the historical source of Arab tradition – but one that has an increasingly urban society. Over 40% of Jordan's population

now lives in Amman, reflecting the deep contradiction between rural and urban lifestyles – the timeless spilt between the 'Desert and the Sown'. There is also increasing economic polarisation, especially in Amman – just compare gritty downtown with affluent Abdoun.

The middle and upper classes of Amman shop in malls, drink lattes in mixed-sex Starbucks and obsess over the latest fashions. Mobile phones dominate life in Jordan as they do abroad. Yet in other districts of the same city, urban unemployment is high and entire neighbourhoods of Amman are made up of Palestinian refugees.

At the other end of the spectrum is traditional Bedouin life, deeply rooted in the desert and semi-nomadic, centred around herding. For more on the Bedouin see p212.

Due to high unemployment, economic migration is common in Jordan and most families have at least one male who is temporarily working away from home, whether in Amman, the Gulf States or further abroad. The remittances sent home by these absent workers are increasingly important to family budgets. Each economically active person has to support, on average, four other persons too.

Family ties are all-important to both modern and traditional Jordanians and the sexes are often segregated. Most Jordanian women only socialise with other women, and often only inside the family group, while men chat with other men in male-only coffeehouses. Attitudes towards women remain quite traditional.

Marriages are often arranged and matches are commonly made between cousins. The marriage ceremony usually takes place in either the mosque or the home of the bride or groom. After the marriage the men of the family drive around the streets in a long convoy, sounding their

Conscription for males aged 18 and over was discontinued in 1999.

The checked keffiyeh headdress is an important national symbol in Jordan – red and white for the Bedouin, or black and white for the Palestinians – held in place by the black rope-like *agal*.

## SOCIAL GRACES

Etiquette is very important in Jordanian (and Arab) culture, and you'll find that Jordanians will respect you more if you follow these few simple rules:

- Stand when someone important, or another guest, enters the room
- Shake hands with everyone – but only with a Jordanian woman if she offers her hand first
- Arab men often greet good friends with a kiss on the cheek
- Do not sit so that the soles of your feet point at anyone
- Never accept any present or service of any kind without first politely refusing twice
- Proactive efforts – such as offering sweets and wishing people *eid mubarak* during the festival of Eid al-Adha – will especially endear you to your hosts
- Don't engage in any conversation about sensitive topics (eg the Jordanian royal family or Judaism) unless you are in private with a person you know well
- An unaccompanied foreign man should not sit next to an unaccompanied Jordanian woman on public transport, unless it's unavoidable
- Remove your shoes when visiting a mosque, or a private house (unless you're specifically told to keep them on)
- Never walk in front of, or interrupt in any way, someone praying towards Mecca
- Foreign couples should not hold hands, or show any signs of affection, in public
- Rather than curtly saying 'no', the way to turn down an invitation is to refuse politely with your right hand over your heart, adding something noncommittal like 'perhaps another time, *in sha' Allah*' (if God wills it)

**BODY LANGUAGE**

Arabs are some of the world's great gesticulators, and a whole range of ideas can be expressed without uttering a word. Jordanians often say 'no' by raising the eyebrows and lifting the head up and back. This is often accompanied by a 'tsk tsk' noise, which can be a little disconcerting if you're not used to it.

Shaking the head from side to side means 'I don't understand'. Stretching out the hand as if to open a door and giving it a quick flick of the wrist is equivalent to 'what do you want?', 'where are you going?' or 'what is your problem?'.

If an official holds out a hand and draws a line across the palm with the index finger of the other hand, they're asking to see your passport, bus ticket or other document.

A right hand over your heart means 'no, thanks'. When a Jordanian puts his thumb and forefingers together vertically it often means 'wait a minute'.

A foreign man asking directions should not be surprised to be taken by the hand and led along by another man; it's quite natural. Male friends often greet each other with a hug and a kiss on the cheek.

Lastly, as the left hand is associated with toilet duties it's considered unclean, so always use your right hand when giving or receiving something.

horns, blasting out music and making as much ballyhoo as possible. After that the partying goes on until the early hours of the morning, often until sunrise.

Many families, especially in smaller towns and rural areas, remain traditional in terms of divisions within the house. As a rule, various parts of the house are reserved for men and others for women. This becomes particularly apparent when guests are present.

Meals are generally eaten on the floor, with everyone gathered around several trays of food shared by all. More traditional families are often quite hierarchical at meal times. The grandparents and male head of the house may eat in one circle, the latter's wife and the older children and other women in the family in another, and the small children in yet another. Usually, outsiders eat with the head of the household.

Foreign women will more often than not be treated as 'honorary males'. In the case of a couple, a foreign woman may be welcome to sneak off to hang around with the Jordanian women and then come back to see how the 'men's world' is getting on. In this way, a foreign woman can find herself in the unique position of being able to get an impression of home life for both sexes.

In the evenings, most locals in the cities will probably window-shop, stroll around the streets, enjoy a leisurely meal, go to the cinema or watch TV. Men may pass the time in a local coffeehouse, playing cards, smoking a nargileh (water pipe), or perhaps watching European league football on the TV, while the kids play the real thing on the streets outside.

**POPULATION**

The population of Jordan stood at about 5.7 million in 2005, a substantial increase from just 586,000 in 1958. More than 1.7 million people were registered as refugees (primarily from the wars of 1948 and 1967) with the UN Relief & Works Agency (UNRWA). In an effort to reduce the expected population of eight million in 2024, the Jordanian National Population Commission is hoping to dramatically reduce the birth rate, through the promotion of family planning, to 2.1 children per family. In 1990 the fertility rate stood at 5.6 children, with the figure reduced to 3.5 by 2001.

Approximately 1.8 million people live in the capital, Amman, and a further 700,000 live in neighbouring Zarqa and suburbs. The majority of Jordanians are Arab; over 60% are Palestinian Arabs. There are also small communities of Circassians, Chechens, Armenians and Western expatriates. There are now anywhere between 200,000 and 500,000 exiled Iraqis living in Jordan.

The Bedouin are the original desert dwellers of Arabia, perceived by many as the representatives and guardians of the very essence of 'Arabness'. They form the majority of the indigenous population but today not more than 40,000 Bedouin can be considered truly nomadic. There are dozens of Bedouin tribes or sub-clans, from the influential Beni Sakr and Huweitat to the smaller but very visible B'doul and Ammareen of Petra. The traditional tribal insignias, known as *wasm*, are still used as brands for livestock.

**Arabs**

Over 98% of Jordanians are Arab, descended from various tribes that migrated to the area from all directions over the centuries.

**PALESTINIANS**

About 60% of Jordan's population is made up of Palestinians who fled, mostly from the West Bank, during the wars of 1948 and 1967 and after the Gulf War in 1990–91. The Palestinians have the country's highest birthrate so this percentage will only rise.

**PALESTINIAN REFUGEES IN JORDAN**

No country has absorbed more Palestinian refugees than Jordan. As at 2005, more than 1.7 million Palestinians were registered as refugees in Jordan by the UN, making up 33% of the local population. The figure is surpassed only by the Gaza Strip (74%) and the West Bank (34%).

Most of the refugees have become an integral part of Jordanian life, with many succeeding in business, politics and cultural pursuits. In the aftermath of the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, as many as 500,000 Palestinian refugees entered Jordan. Although they placed a huge strain upon already creaking infrastructure, they also brought with them an estimated US\$500 million, sparking a booming economy.

Nonetheless, around 280,000 refugees (18% of the total refugee population in Jordan) are housed in 10 camps administered by the UN Relief & Works Agency (UNRWA), which remains responsible for all health, education and relief programmes. The first four camps were set up after 1948, with the remaining six established after the 1967 war. As of December 2002, the largest camps were those at Baqa'a (with 78,163 inhabitants), 20km north of Amman, the Amman New Camp (49,034), Marqa (40,349) and Jebel al-Hussein (27,831), with large camps also at Zarqa, Jerash and Irbid. The original tent shelters have long since been replaced with more permanent structures and often more resemble suburbs than refugee camp.

The UNRWA runs one of the largest school systems in the Middle East with 184 schools in Jordan alone teaching double-shift classes (due to limited space) for 140,000 students up to Grade 10 level. The UNRWA also facilitates university scholarships.

The relief side of the UN operation is targeted primarily at special hardship cases and poverty alleviation, with special emphasis on women's programmes, rehabilitation for people with a disability and microfinance for disadvantaged individuals.

For more information on the work of UNRWA in Jordan, contact the **UNRWA Public Information Office** (☎ 06 5609100, ext 165; jorpio@unrwa.org; Mustapha bin Abdullah St, Shmeisani, Amman). For more general information about Palestinians in Jordan, contact the Jordanian **Department of Palestinian Affairs** (☎ 06 5666172; www.dpa.gov.jo; Abu Hamed al-Ghazali St, Shmeisani, Amman), which is part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Jordan is one of the better-educated Arab countries; about 87% of Jordanians are literate, and about 97% of children attend primary school. School is compulsory for children from the ages of five to 14.



All Palestinians have been granted the right to Jordanian citizenship, and many have exercised that option. Palestinians play an important part in the political, cultural and economic life of Jordan and, although many occupy high positions in government and business, they continue to dream of a return to an independent Palestine. This is partly why so many continue to live in difficult conditions in the 30 or more refugee camps that dot the landscape (see p37).

### Circassians & Chechens

The Circassians (Turkic Muslims from the Caucasus) fled persecution in Russia in the late 19th century to settle in the Jordan Valley, becoming prosperous farmers. There are now about 40,000 Circassians – living mainly in Wadi as-Seer and Na'ur (both near Amman) – but intermarriage has made them virtually indistinguishable from Arabs.

Historically and ethnically related to the Circassians is the small (about 4000) Shiite community of Chechens, the only other recognised ethnic minority in Jordan.

## RELIGION

Although the population is overwhelmingly Islamic, Jordan is officially secular, and freedom of religion is a statutory right of the Jordanian constitution.

### Islam

Islam is the predominant religion in Jordan. Muslims are called to prayer five times a day and, no matter where you might be, there always seems to be a mosque within earshot. The midday prayers on Friday, when the sheikh of the mosque delivers his weekly sermon, or *khutba*, are considered the most important.

While Islam shares its roots with the other great monotheistic faiths – Judaism and Christianity – that sprang from the harsh and unforgiving soil of the Middle East, it is considerably younger than both. The holy book of Islam is the Quran, meaning literally 'reading' or 'recitation'. Its pages carry many references to the earlier prophets of both the older religions: Abraham (known in the Quran as Ibrahim), Noah (Nuh), Moses (Musa) and Jesus (Isa). Mohammed is not considered divine, but rather the last in this series of prophets.

The Quran is believed to be the word of God, communicated to Mohammed directly in a series of revelations in the early 7th century. For Muslims, Islam is the apogee of the monotheistic faiths from which it derives so much. Muslims traditionally attribute a place of great respect to Christians and Jews, whom they consider *Ahl al-kitab*, the 'People of the Book'.

### EARLY YEARS OF ISLAM

Mohammed, born into a trading family of the Arabian city of Mecca (in present-day Saudi Arabia) in AD 570, began receiving revelations in 610, and after a time began imparting the content of Allah's message to the inhabitants of Mecca. The essence was a call to submit to God's will, but not all locals were terribly taken with the idea.

Mohammed gathered quite a following in his campaign against the idolaters of Mecca, and his movement especially appealed to the poorer levels of society. The powerful families became increasingly outraged, and by 622 had made life sufficiently unpleasant for Mohammed and his followers; they fled to Medina, an oasis town some 300km to the north and

### THE FIVE PILLARS OF ISLAM

In order to live a devout life, a Muslim is expected to carry out at least the Five Pillars of Islam:

- Haj – the pinnacle of a devout Muslim's life is the pilgrimage to the holy sites in and around Mecca. The haj takes place in the last month of the year, Zuul-Hijja, and Muslims from all over the world travel to Saudi Arabia for the pilgrimage and subsequent feast of Eid al-Adha. The returned pilgrim earns the right to be addressed as Haji. Women may perform the haj with a male chaperon.
- Salat – this is the obligation of prayer, done ideally five times a day when the muezzins call upon the faithful to pray: before sunrise, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset and before midnight. Communal prayers are only obligatory on Friday, although the strong sense of community makes joining together in a masjid ('place of prostration', ie mosque) preferable to most.
- Shahada – this is the profession of the faith, the basic tenet of Islam: 'There is no God but Allah and Mohammed is his prophet' (*La il-laha illa Allah Mohammed rasul Allah*). It's commonly heard as part of the call to prayer, and at other events such as births and deaths. People can often be heard muttering the first half of the sentence to themselves, as if seeking a little strength to get through the trials of the day.
- Sawm – Ramadan, the ninth month of the Muslim calendar, commemorates the revelation of the Quran to Mohammed. In a demonstration of the Muslims' renewal of faith, they are asked to abstain from sex, and from letting anything (including cigarettes) pass their lips from dawn to dusk every day of the month. For more on Ramadan, see p244 and p58.
- Zakat – giving alms to the poor was, from the start, an essential part of Islamic social teaching and, in some parts of the Muslim world, was later developed into various forms of tax as a way of redistributing funds to the needy. The moral obligation towards one's poorer neighbours continues to be emphasised at a personal and community level, and many Islamic groups run large charitable institutions, including Amman's Islamic Hospital.

now Islam's second most holy city. This migration – the Hejira – marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar, year 1 AH or AD 622.

In Medina, Mohammed continued to preach. Soon he and his followers clashed with the rulers of Mecca, led by the powerful Quraysh tribe. By 630, his followers returned to take Mecca. In the two years before his death, many of the surrounding tribes swore allegiance to him and the new faith.

Mecca became the symbolic centre of the Islamic religion, containing as it did the Kaaba, which houses the black stone that had long formed the object of pagan pilgrimage and later was said to have been given to Ibrahim (Abraham) by the Archangel Jibreel (Gabriel). Mohammed determined that Muslims ('those who submit') should always face Mecca when praying outside the city.

Upon Mohammed's death in 632, the Arab tribes conquered all of what makes up modern Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Israel & the Palestinian Territories. By 644, they had taken Egypt and spread into North Africa, and in the following decades crossed into Spain and, for a while, deep into France. The Arabic language and Islamic faith remained long after the military conquests faded into history and remain to this day a remarkable cultural unifier, from Casablanca to Kashgar, and Syria to Sudan.

The initial conquests were carried out under four successive caliphs, or Companions of Mohammed, of whom three were assassinated. In turn, the caliphs were followed by the Umayyad dynasty, based in Damascus, and the Abbasids, based in Baghdad. For more information see p25.

The Palestinians derive their name from the Greek name for the Philistines, one of the 'Peoples of the Sea' who invaded the Mediterranean coast around 1300 BC, settling in Gaza.

Muslims must cover their entire heads when they pray, which is one reason why Muslim headgear has no peak, whether it be a fez, skullcap or headdress.

Among Muslims it is customary to follow a mention of the Prophet Mohammed's name with the phrase *Salla Allahu Wa Salam*, Peace Be Upon Him (PBUH).

One of the more sensitive and accessible recent accounts of Islamic belief and practice is *Islam: A Short History* by Karen Armstrong. It's compact and also tackles the modern dilemmas facing Islam.

## SUNNIS & SHIITES

In its early days, Islam suffered a major schism that divided the faith into two streams, the Sunnis and Shiites. The power struggle between Ali (the last of the four caliphs and Mohammed's son-in-law) and the Umayyad dynasty in Damascus lay at the heart of the rift that tore asunder the new faith's followers.

The succession to the caliphate had from the first been marked by intrigue. Ali, the father of Mohammed's sole male heirs, lost his struggle and was assassinated, paving the way to the caliphate for the Umayyad leader Mu'awiyah. The latter was related to Ali's predecessor, Othman, in whose murder some believed Ali was implicated.

Those who recognised Mu'awiyah as caliph (who were the majority) came to be known as the Sunnis, and would become the orthodox bedrock of Islam. The Shiites, on the other hand, recognise only the successors of Ali. Most of them are known as Twelvers, because they believe in 12 imams (religious leaders), the last of whom has been lost from sight, but will appear some day to create an empire of the true faith.

The Sunnis divided into four schools of religious thought, of which most Jordanians belong to the Hanafi school.

Northeast Jordan (including the town of Azraq) has small pockets of around 15,000 Druze, who follow a shadowy offshoot of Shiite Islam.

## ISLAMIC CUSTOMS

The first words a newborn baby hears are the call to prayer. A week later this is followed by a ceremony in which the baby's head is shaved and an animal is sacrificed. The major event of a boy's childhood is circumcision, which normally takes place sometime between the ages of seven and 12.

Before praying, Muslims follow certain rituals. They must wash their hands, mouth, ears, arms, feet, head and neck in running water. All mosques have a small area set aside for this purpose. If they're not in a mosque and there is no water available, scouring with sand suffices; where there is no sand, they must still go through the motions of washing.

Then they must cover their head, face Mecca (all mosques are oriented so that the mihrab, or prayer niche, faces the right way – south-southeast in Jordan) and follow a set pattern of gestures and genuflections. Muslims don't technically require a mosque to pray and you'll often see Jordanians praying by the side of the road or at the back of their shop; many keep a small prayer rug handy for such times. Mosques themselves are quite austere places, devoid of the pews, sculpture, paintings and music common in Christian churches.

In everyday life, Muslims are prohibited from drinking alcohol and eating pork (as the pig is considered unclean), and must refrain from fraud, usury, slander and gambling. Followers of Islam believe in angels, the infallibility of the Quran and parts of the Bible, a day of judgement, predestination of worldly affairs and life after death. Denial of these central tenets is considered apostasy (a renunciation of faith), which carries considerable social stigma.

## Christianity

Statistics on the number of Christians in Jordan are wildly contradictory. Christians are believed to account for 5% to 6% of Jordan's population. Most live in Karak, Madaba, Salt, Fuheis, Ajlun and Amman – all with a bewildering array of churches representing the three major branches of

Christianity in Jordan: Orthodox, Catholic (known in Jordan as Latin) and (to a far lesser extent) Protestant.

About two-thirds of Christians in Jordan are Greek Orthodox. This church has its liturgy in Arabic, and is the mother church of the Jacobites (Syrian Orthodox), who broke away in the 6th century. Coptic Orthodox and Armenian Orthodox Christians are also represented in Jordan.

The other third are Greek Catholics, or Melchites, under the authority of the patriarch who resides in Damascus. This church observes a Byzantine tradition of married clergy being in charge of rural parishes, while diocesan clergy are celibate.

## WOMEN IN JORDAN

Compared to some neighbouring countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, women in Jordan enjoy more freedom and privileges: they have access to a full education (in 2002, the number of girls in primary and secondary schools was almost identical to the number of boys); they can vote (Jordanian women got the vote in 1967 but didn't have a chance to use it for the first time until 1989); many work in male-dominated industries and businesses; and they are allowed to drive cars. In 2001, the legal age of marriage was lifted from 15 years old for women and 16 for men to 18 for both, although Islamic judges are still permitted to sanction underage marriages.

### THE ROYAL WOMEN OF JORDAN

Despite claiming unbroken descent from the Prophet Mohammed, Jordan's Hashemite royal family is surprisingly cosmopolitan. King Hussein's second wife (and also mother of the present king, Abdullah) was English and the king himself has blue eyes.

When Hussein's fourth wife, Queen Noor ([www.noor.gov.jo](http://www.noor.gov.jo)) met her future husband, King Hussein, she was simply known as Lisa Halaby, a Washington DC-born architect and urban planner fresh out of Princeton. Born into a distinguished Arab-American family (her father served under the administration of John F Kennedy and was head of Pan-Am for a while), she met King Hussein while working on a project for Royal Jordanian Airlines. After a much-scrutinised whirlwind romance they married in a traditional Islamic ceremony in 1978. The fairy-tale romance, however, was not without its detractors. Many Jordanians were uneasy about an American joining their revered royal family. Although five inches taller than her husband, official pictures always depicted the queen as shorter than him.

Adopting the name Queen Noor (Light of Hussein) upon her conversion to Islam, Jordan's new queen effectively signalled the beginning of a new era. Throughout her tenure she campaigned for women's rights, children's welfare and community improvement, setting up the impressive Noor Foundation. Queen Noor took an important role in explaining Jordan's stand against the 1990 Gulf War to American audiences. Since her husband's death, Queen Noor has scaled back her public presence.

Since the ascension of King Abdullah and his wife Queen Rania ([www.queenrania.jo](http://www.queenrania.jo)), parts of the media have been unable to resist offhand newspaper headlines such as 'Battle of the Queens'. The recent stripping of the title of Crown Prince from King Abdullah's half-brother Hamzah ([www.princehamzah.jo](http://www.princehamzah.jo)) in late 2004 was seen as a blow to Noor's influence, since he is her eldest son.

Queen Rania has assumed a prominent position on a number of issues. Born in Kuwait to a notable Jordanian family of Palestinian origin, and educated at the American University of Cairo, she married King Abdullah bin Al-Hussein in 1993. As Jordan's new first lady she too has become a public supporter of a variety of issues and, like Queen Noor, has established her own charity based on women's handicrafts, the Jordan River Foundation. She can be seen doing everything from campaigning for the rights of women to running the Dead Sea Marathon.

*Bismillah*, literally 'In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate', is the opening phrase of all suras in the Quran and is used in general conversation as an expression of sincerity or to commend something to God.

The spread of Islam in the 7th century has been described by historian Bernard Lewis as 'one of the swiftest and most dramatic changes in the whole of history'.

About 92% of Jordan's population belong to the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam.

You may be surprised to hear that Islam and Christianity share many prophets, including Jesus (Isa in Arabic), John the Baptist (Yahya), Job (Ayyub), Joshua (Yosha), Lot (Lut) and Noah (Nuh).

In recent years Jordanian women have made great progress in male-dominated professions. Jordan gained its first female MP (Toujan Faisal) in the early 1990s (a minimum of six women MPs is guaranteed under a royal-imposed quota system), first female taxi driver in 1997, first female mayor in Ajlun in 1995, first female judge in 1996 and first ambassador to the European Union in 2001. But the rise of a few women to senior positions has yet to be matched by across-the-board equality. A majority of women work in health and education; the highest levels of inequality remain in the media and the political arena. Less than 1% of judges are women. In 1991, 14% of the labour force was made up of women; by 2001, this had risen to 20%.

Unlike some of the neighbouring Muslim countries, polygamy (by men) is rare though legal; segregation is uncommon (except in some homes and restaurants, and all mosques); there are no official restrictions about dress codes; and female infanticide and female genital mutilation are extremely rare. Very few women wear the hejab veil and almost none wear the full body chador, though many women wear a headscarf.

Amendments to the law in 2002 made it possible for women to file for divorce if they repay the dowry given by their husband, though the social stigma remains strong. The legal changes also require men who marry more than once, as Islam allows, to inform both their first and their new wives.

Arranged marriages and dowries are still common, but parents do not often enforce a wedding against their daughter's wish. A woman's 'honour' is still valued in traditional societies, and sex before marriage can still be dealt with harshly by other members of a woman's family (see below).

Women in more traditional societies are starting to gain some financial independence, prestige and self-respect through a number of Jordanian organisations that encourage small-scale craft production (see p248 for more on this).

Over 25% of all solved murders in Jordan are described as honour killings.

### 'HONOUR' KILLINGS

Despite a reputation as one of the most liberal societies in the region, honour killings – where a woman is killed by her brothers and fathers to protect the family honour – are a problem in Jordan. On average one woman every two weeks is murdered for bringing shame onto her family, by having sex out of wedlock, refusing an arranged marriage, leaving her husband, or simply being the victim of rape or sexual assault. Women in the family are often complicit in the murder.

The actions have a cultural base rather than religious one, and the often extreme pressures felt by families are rooted in the deeply conservative tribal-based morality of the countryside, where a family feels it has a duty to protect and control a woman's purity. There is no basis for honour killings in Islamic teachings.

Part of the problem is that the killings take place in a climate of near-impunity. Articles 340 and 98 of Jordan's legal code exempt a husband or close male relative for killing a wife caught in an act of adultery and offer leniency for murders committed in a 'fit of rage'. Most murderers are sentenced to as little as six months imprisonment. King Abdullah has tried to impose tougher sentences for honour killings but in 2003 parliament again rejected a bill proposing this.

Jordanian journalist Rana Husseini has been instrumental in bringing these killings to the public attention and often writes on the subject in the *Jordan Times*.

For more information see the website [www.hrw.org/reports/2004/jordan0404](http://www.hrw.org/reports/2004/jordan0404), or look out for the documentary *Crimes of Honour* by Shelley Saywell, which was filmed in Jordan and the West Bank.

### LITERATURE ON WOMEN IN JORDAN

- One of the better books around in a genre dominated by sensationalist writing is *Nine Parts of Desire: The Hidden World of Islamic Women* by Geraldine Brooks, a former *Wall St Journal* correspondent, who includes an account of her encounter with Queen Noor
- *Price of Honour: Muslim Women Lift the Veil of Silence on the Islamic World*, by Jan Goodwin, also has a chapter on Jordan, though it dates from the mid-1990s
- Two scholarly investigations into the position of women in Islam include *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam* by Fatima Mernissi, with a specific focus on Morocco, and the more historical *Women and Gender in Islam* by Leila Ahmed, from a feminist viewpoint and with particular emphasis on Egypt
- *Into the Wadi* by Michele Drouart is a readable account of an Australian woman's marriage to a Jordanian man and her attempts to gain a greater understanding of Jordanian society

### ARTS

Despite the region's rich tradition of music, literature and arts, the comparatively modern nation of Jordan could not boast much in the way of distinctive arts and literature until the last 25 years. Jordan's emergence as a centre of contemporary arts was recognised by Unesco, which named Amman as its Arab Cultural Capital for 2002.

### Handicrafts

Embroidery is an important skill among Jordanian women and most learn it at a young age. Teenagers traditionally embroider the clothes they will need as married women. Embroidery is done in social groups and provides an occasion for women to socialise, often with a pot of tea and spiced up with a pinch of local gossip. Palestinian embroidery is famed throughout the region and you'll see the characteristic red embroidery on traditional dresses, known as *roza*, in shops across Jordan.

Weaving is the craft of choice among Bedouin women and looms are set up every August/September when work in the fields winds down for the summer. Goat-hair tents, saddlebags and *mafrash* rugs (woven kilim-style rugs) are still the main products.

Jewellery is the other major handicraft. A bride traditionally receives a gift of jewellery on her wedding day as her dowry and this remains her personal property throughout (and after) the marriage. The most common designs are protective silver amulets, such as the 'hand of Fatima' (Fatima was the daughter-in-law of the Prophet Mohammed), which are used as protection from evil spirits known as *djinn* (from which we get the word 'genie'). Antique items such as silver headdresses decorated with Ottoman coins and ornately decorated Bedouin daggers (straight, rather than the famously curved Yemeni and Omani versions) are getting harder to find. Many of the most beautiful antique pieces were produced by Circassian, Armenian and Yemeni silversmiths in the early 20th century. These days gold is replacing silver as the precious metal of choice – for a glittering display of gaudy modern bracelets, chokers and necklaces check out Amman's gold souq.

For good examples of Bedouin jewellery, Jordanian crafts and traditional costumes from across Jordan check out the Folklore Museum and Museum of Popular Traditions at the Roman Theatre in Amman (p81).

Several Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) such as the **Noor Al-Hussein Foundation** ([www.noor.gov.jo/nhf.htm](http://www.noor.gov.jo/nhf.htm)) and **Jordan River Foundation** ([www.jordanriver.jo](http://www.jordanriver.jo)) have recently spurred a revival of locally produced handicrafts,

*Treasures from an Ancient Land: The Art of Jordan*, by the renowned Arabist Piotr Bienkowski, gives an excellent overview of Jordanian culture, particularly pottery, sculpture and jewellery.

In addition to protective talismans, most Bedouin women safeguarded themselves from the evil eye by tattooing their foreheads or chins.

as part of a programme to raise rural living standards and the status of rural women. See p248 for some examples of what's on offer.

## Music & Dance

Arab music reflects a synthesis of indigenous and Western influences. Popular music differs little from that of neighbouring Arab countries, with Egyptian and Lebanese superstars such as Amr Diab and Fairouz dominating the airwaves. Many travellers are eventually caught up in the particular magic of Arabic pop, which is probably a good thing because you'll be hearing it in one form or another wherever you go.

The Bedouin have long had their own simple but mesmerising musical traditions. The sound of men chanting at a distant wedding, drifting across the desert on a still night, is haunting. Up close, the musical aspects of the festivities are clearly rooted in ancient traditions. A row of men will, arm in arm, gently sway backwards and forwards engaged in what appears to be an almost trance-like chant. Songs deal with romantic concepts of honour and chivalry and draw their inspiration from the oral histories – part poetry, part folk song and part story – that have been handed down for generations by elders assembled around a desert camp fire.

The music in the streets of Amman today, however, has little to do with these timeless desert traditions. The most common and popular style of music focuses on a star performer backed by anything from a small quartet to a full-blown orchestra. The resulting sliding strings are more Bollywood than Beethoven, while the singers' voices slip and slide around the notes rather than lingering on them. The highly produced mix is then given a pounding percussive drive that gets the heads nodding. Western-style instruments predominate, next to local instruments such as the *oud* (lute) and *rababa* (single-stringed violin). Instrumentalists generally exist to accompany a vocalist rather than perform in their own right.

The Performing Arts Center in Amman was established in 1987 under the auspices of the Queen Noor Foundation to 'develop the value and understanding of contemporary music and dance by local Jordanians'.

Popular Jordanian singers include Qamar Badwan, the Bedouin singer Omar Abdullat and the female performer Rania Kurdi, part of a younger generation of modern Jordanian pop stars.

## Literature

### CLASSICAL LITERATURE & POETRY

The Quran itself is considered the finest example of classical Arabic writing and gives Arabic poetry and literature a highly regarded, even divine, calling.

*Al-Muallaqat*, which pre-dates the Quran and the advent of Islam, is a widely celebrated collection of early Arab poetry. Prior to Islam, a poet was regarded by Arabs as having knowledge forbidden to ordinary people, supposedly acquired from the demon. *Al-Muallaqat* means 'the suspended', and refers to traditions according to which the poems were hung for public view, possibly on the walls of the Kaaba in Mecca.

As the Middle Ages drew to a close and the Arab world came to be dominated by other forces (most notably the Ottoman Turks), Arabic literature also faded, stagnating in a classicist rut dominated by a complex and burdensome poetical inheritance until well into the 19th century.

One of the few classical Jordanian poets was Mustafa Wahbi al-Tal, also known as Irar. Born in Irbid in 1899, he was renowned for his incisive and humorous poems about Arab nationalism and anticolonialism.

Heather Colyer Ross looks into popular art forms in *The Art of Bedouin Jewellery*, a useful asset for those contemplating purchasing some pieces.

Traditional Arabic music is based on a five-tone scale rather than the Western seven-tone system, which creates its exotic, unique sound.

## CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE & POETRY

Modern literary genres such as the novel have only fairly recently taken off in Jordan, largely due to increased contact with Europe as well as a reawakening of Arab 'national' consciousness in the wake of the Ottoman Empire's stagnation.

Egyptians (such as the Nobel Prize winner Naguib Mahfouz), Lebanese and, to a lesser extent, Palestinians, seem to dominate Middle Eastern literature, but there are now several renowned Jordanian writers and poets. Ramadan al-Rawashdeh has published collections of short stories, including *The Night*. His novel *Al-Hamrawi* won the Naguib Mahfouz Arabic Novel Prize, and more recently he published *The Shepherds' Songs*.

Mounis al-Razzaz, who died in 2002, was regarded by many as the driving force behind contemporary Jordanian literature. His works spoke of wider turmoil in the Arab world (most notably in his satirical final work *Sweetest Night*) as well as the transition of Amman from a small village to a modern metropolis.

Rifka Doudeen, one of an emerging number of female authors, has published a collection of short stories called *Justifiable Agony*, and a novel, *The Outcast*. Another popular Jordanian writer is Yousef Dhamra.

Other writers to watch out for are: young short-story writer Basma Nsour; Hashim Gharaybeh; novelist and playwright Mefleh al-Adwan, who won the coveted Unesco prize for creative writing in France in 2001; Raga Abu Gazaleh; Jamal Naji; Abdel Raouf Shamoun; and Abdullah Mansour.

Many Palestinian Jordanian writers graphically relate first-hand experiences of the Arab-Israeli conflict and their people's struggle for a homeland. Taher al-Edwan's *The Fact of Time*, telling the story of a Palestinian family fleeing to Amman in 1948, is regarded as an important Jordanian novel.

Jordanian-based Palestinian poet Ibrahim Naserallah has had his complex novel *Prairies of Fever* translated into English. Unfortunately few of these other titles are available in languages other than Arabic. The following titles are available abroad in English.

Diana Abu-Jaber is a celebrated Jordanian-American author who draws on her family's memories of Jordanian cultural identity and father's love of Jordanian food. Her first novel, *Arabian Jazz*, is a hit-or-miss tale of Jordanian-American family in upstate New York. Her second novel, *Crescent*, is an eloquent story of Iraqi emigrant life in Los Angeles, with a haunting and luscious tale of exile, love and food, and is recommended. For details on her latest book, *The Language of Baklava*, see p56.

*East of the Jordan*, by Laila Halaby, also deals with the issues of migration and the clash of modernity and tradition among four young Jordanian cousins living in Jordan and the USA.

Palestinian Yasmin Zahran's *A Beggar at Damascus Gate* is a dark novel that mixes mystery and romance, told in flashbacks from a budget hotel in Petra.

*Pillars of Salt* by Fadia Faqir tells the tale of two Jordanian women from different branches of life who meet in an asylum in 1920s Jordan. Her previous novel, *Nisanit*, deals with the Palestinian struggle and is harder to find.

*Story of a City: A Childhood in Amman* by Abd al-Rahman Munif eloquently describes life in 1940s Amman from a child's perspective. Munif's other major work, *Cities of Salt*, follows the development of a village in an unspecified country in Arabia in the 1930s, when oil is discovered. Unusually the main character is the city, and its transformation under

**'Many Palestinian Jordanian writers graphically relate first-hand experiences of the Arab-Israeli conflict and their people's struggle for a homeland'**

### CONTEMPORARY ART

One of the first Jordanian painters to gain any international recognition was the redoubtable Fahrenasa Zeid (the great-great aunt of King Abdullah II), who exhibited works in the galleries of Europe and the USA in the 1910s and 1920s. However, it really wasn't until the creation of the Jordan Artists' Association in 1978, and the opening of the Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts two years later, that contemporary art in Jordan was taken seriously.

Many Jordanian artists are Palestinians who fled the West Bank during the two wars with Israel: Adnan Yahya specialises in gut-wrenching paintings of Palestinian persecution; Ahmad Nawash is famous for his distinctive stick figures in pastel colours; and another famous Palestinian-Jordanian painter is Ibrahim abu-Rubb.

Other popular contemporary Jordanian painters include: Suha Shoman, Yaser Duweik, Ali Jabri, Ahmad al-Safareeni, Mohanna Durra (an internationally renowned Jordanian cubist and abstract painter), Ahmed al-Khateeb and Rafiq Lahham. Lahham is a pioneer of modern Jordanian art. His work interprets traditional Islamic architectural forms in an eclectic mix of styles, with some of his most appealing work incorporating Kufic script along with abstract elements and a striking use of colour. An emerging female artist is Samar Haddadin, whose paintings and drawings capture religious harmony. Other female artists of renown include Karima ben Othman, Basma Nimry, Clara Khreis, Rula Shukairy, Riham Ghassib, Ghada Dahdaleh and Mukaram Haghandouga. The Jordanian sculptor Larissa Najjar specialises in sandstone sculptures with different colours and unusual designs. Also renowned for their sculptures are Samaa Tabaa and Margaret Tadros.

Works by these and other Jordanian artists can be seen in the numerous art galleries and cultural centres of Amman, particularly the excellent **Darat al-Funun** (p83) and **Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts** (p84).

the influence of the West, rather than its inhabitants. The novel was translated by Peter Theroux (brother of travel writer Paul) and banned in Saudi Arabia. In 1992 Munif was awarded the Sultan al-Uways award, the Arab equivalent of a Nobel Prize for Literature.

*Honour Lost: Love and Death in Modern-Day Jordan* by Norma Khouri is the now discredited story of an honour killing in Jordan. The author is accused of making up the supposedly true story.

### Painting

That Islam frowns on the depiction of living beings does not mean that everyone immediately towed the line. Long-standing artistic traditions in Asia Minor, Persia and further east – including Spain and other parts of Europe – could not be completely swept away, and depictions of living creatures continued. The creation of classical-style mosaics (see p154) continued from the Byzantines into the Islamic era.

The 7th-century Umayyad rulers, who comprised the first real dynasty after the demise of the Prophet Mohammed, left behind a series of so-called 'desert castles' across the eastern desert of Jordan; traces of frescoes can be found on the walls of most of these – but none so extraordinary as those in Qusayr Amra (p136).

### MEDIA

By regional standards, Jordan maintains a reasonably free media, although the government does flex its muscle about reports that displease it. The bulk of newspapers (in Arabic and English) tend to push an editorial line similar to the government's position. The Jordanian government maintains more control over local radio and TV than it does over the newspapers.

The English-language *Jordan Times* has good coverage of domestic and international events. The *Star*, subtitled 'Jordan's Political, Economic and

Cultural Weekly', is similar but published only every Tuesday. It also has a double-page supplement in French called *Le Jourdain*.

Of the many local Arabic daily and weekly newspapers printed in Amman, *Ad-Dustour*, *Al-Ra'i* and *Al-Aswaq* are among the more popular.

Jordan TV broadcasts on three channels. Channels 1 and 3 broadcast in Arabic, and Channel 2 airs bad Australian soap operas, worse American sitcoms, locally produced news (all in English) and documentaries in French.

Uncensored international satellite stations, such as the BBC, CNN, MTV and Al-Jazeera, are found in the homes of most wealthy Jordanians, all rooms in top-end hotels and many midrange hotels.

### SPORT

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the most popular sport in the country is football (soccer). The Premier League Championship plays mostly on Friday during winter (from about September to March), and features teams from Amman and most major towns. The fans take the game so seriously that the league was cancelled in 1998 after a referee was beaten up by fans, and the game abandoned. The cancellation was not caused by the horror of the injury to the referee, but by the vehement disagreement about which team should be the 'winner' of the abandoned game.

Other sports that Jordanians enjoy watching, participating in locally and competing in at overseas events, include judo, table tennis, kite flying, volleyball and horse racing (including long-distance endurance races).

Major sporting events are often held at the massive Sports City, in northern Amman, and at Al-Hasan Sports City in Irbid. In mid-1999, Jordan hosted the 9th Pan Arab Games, with over 4000 athletes from most Arab countries. Prince Feisal (King Abdullah's younger brother) is closely involved in Jordan's sporting infrastructure and in charge of the country's Olympic committee.

The vast deserts and good roads are ideal for car rallies – such as the 700km Jordan International Rally organised by the Royal Automobile Club of Jordan – and for events such as the Amman–Dead Sea Marathon (about 50km), held every April – see p144, for details.

# Environment

The true servants of the most gracious are those who tread gently on the earth

*Quran, sura 25, verse 63*

## THE LAND

Jordan encompasses 91,860 sq km – it's slightly smaller than Portugal or the US state of Virginia. When King Hussein renounced claims to the West Bank (5600 sq km) in 1988, the country reverted to the same boundaries as the former Trans-Jordan.

Jordan can easily be divided into three major regions: the Jordan Valley, the east bank plateau and the desert. Distances are short – it's only 430km from Ramtha, on the Syrian border in the north, to Aqaba, in the far south. From Aqaba to the capital, Amman, it's 335km – a four-hour drive.

### Jordan Valley

The dominant physical feature of western Jordan is the fertile valley of the Jordan River, the lowest river on earth. Forming part of the Great Rift Valley of Africa, it rises just over the Lebanese border and continues the entire length of Jordan from the Syrian border in the north, past the salty depression of the Dead Sea, and south down to Aqaba and the Red Sea. The 251km-long river is fed from the Sea of Galilee (Lake Tiberias), the Yarmouk River and the valley streams of the high plateaus to the east and west.

The Dead Sea (see p143) is the lowest point on earth, and the highly saline soils of this central area of the Jordan Valley support little vegetation. This half of the Jordan Valley is known to Jordanians as Ghor. Wadi Araba in particular has a distinct Rift Valley ecosystem, with flat-topped acacia trees that owe more to Africa than the Middle East.

The Rift Valley, stretching from East Africa's great lakes to southern Syria, was created as the Arabian plate pulled (and continues to pull) away from the African plate (the tear also created the Red Sea). Wadi Araba, the Dead Sea and the Jordan Valley lie right on this fault line, which is the geological reason that tourists can soak it up in a line of hot springs from Himmah in the north to Hammamat Ma'in and Zara in the south. The 15-million-year-old Dead Sea basin is a direct result of this tectonic movement. Jordan continues to move north 0.5cm a year.

### East Bank Plateau

The east bank plateau is cut by a series of epic gorges carved out in slow motion by the east-west flowing wadis Zarqa, Mujib and Hasa (a *wadi* is a valley, often dry in the summer). Most of the plateau sits at between 600m and 900m above sea level.

This area contains the main centres of population: Amman, Irbid, Zarqa and Karak. It also contains the historical sites of major interest to visitors: Jerash, Karak, Madaba and Petra. The plateau ends at Ras an-Naqb, from where the Desert Highway drops down to the desert around the Red Sea and the port of Aqaba.

### The Desert

About 80% of Jordan is desert and this is concentrated in huge swathes of the south and east of the country. The volcanic basalt rock of the

north (the bottom end of the area known in Syria as the Hauran) gives way to the south's sandstone and granite, which produces the famously photogenic jebels of southern Jordan and Wadi Rum. The area around Wadi Rum ranks as one of the most fantastic desert landscapes in the world, and boasts Jebel Umm Adaani (1832m), the highest peak in Jordan. To the north, the stony wasteland known as the *badia* slopes down for 1000km of nothingness until it hits the Persian Gulf.

## WILDLIFE

With a range of habitat and elevation from desert to pine forest, mountains to marshland, Jordan packs a rich biodiversity into such a small area.

### Animals

Jordan is not renowned for the quantity and variety of its wildlife, and visitors will count themselves very fortunate to see anything more than a few domesticated goats and the odd camel. But this hasn't always been the case. Byzantine mosaics portray everything from bears and lions to zebras, all now extinct in the region. Palaeolithic remains prove that the region was once home to elephants, rhinos and huge herds of wild asses.

The seemingly empty eastern and southern deserts are home to desert and red foxes, sand rats, mountain and desert hares, wolves, Asiatic jackals and several species of rodent, including the jerboa (with its long legs for jumping).

In Shaumari Wildlife Reserve, you'll get a chance to see a number of rare animals such as the oryx, ostrich, gazelle and Persian onager, which are being reared for reintroduction to the wild. The ostrich is the world's largest bird and also the fastest animal on two legs.

One of Jordan's most beautiful but hard-to-spot animals is the caracal (Persian lynx), a feline with outrageous tufts of black hair on the tips of its outsized, pointy ears. It's found in Wadi Mujib and Dana nature reserves. In Petra you'll spot lots of fabulously blue lizards.

The Jordan Valley, and the forested and sparsely inhabited hills of northern Jordan, are home to ill-tempered wild boar, marbled polecats, stone martens, jungle cats and crested porcupines, as well as species of mongoose, hyrax and hedgehog.

In the rocky sandstone bluffs of Wadi Mujib Nature Reserve you can spot the majestic Nubian ibex. In the few wet and swampy areas, such as the Jordan Valley and Azraq wetlands, there are small populations of otters.

For information about underwater wonders in the Gulf of Aqaba, see p227.

### Birds

Jordan's location on the edge of the Great Rift Valley means it is an important migration route for birds. Over half a million birds fly through Jordan during spring, in transit between Russia, Central Europe and Africa. About 365 species of bird have been recorded.

Commonly seen around the eastern and southern desert regions are the many species of vulture, eagle and partridge. Other desert species in the east of the country include Temminck's horned lark, the desert lark, hoopoe lark, desert wheatear and trumpeter finch. For a desert region, Dana Nature Reserve boasts an extraordinary number of bird species, including the warbler, partridge, griffon vulture and falcon. In eastern Jordan, the Azraq Wetland Reserve and the Burqu area attract a large number of migratory water bird species, such as herons, egrets and marsh harriers. You'll see a range of beautiful kingfishers in the lush wadis of central

The 359km Jordan River is known to Jordanians as Nahar al-Urdun and rises near Jebel ash-Sheikh (Mt Hermon) in Lebanon's Anti-Syrian Mountains.

The Dead Sea is the lowest point on earth at 408m below sea level.

Over 80% of Jordan is desert; 95% of Jordanians cram into the remaining 20% of the land.

The Gulf of Aqaba is a diver's paradise, with over 230 species of coral and over 1000 types of fish.

Wild Mammals of HK Jordan by Adnan Y Dajani, and *Mammals of the Holy Land* by Mazin Q Qumsiyeh, are both comprehensive and colourful.

Jordan. Around the Dead Sea, the Dead Sea sparrow, the sand partridge and the quaintly named Tristram's grackle can be spotted. In the northern hills, look for warblers and Palestine sunbirds, while in the rocky terrain off the King's Highway species include Bonelli's eagle, Hume's tawny owl, the blackstart, the house bunting and the fan-tailed raven. Aqaba has a variety of migratory birds, but little has been done to protect them, and their habitats are being eroded by development and desertification.

The Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (RSCN) can organise bird-watching tours.

### Endangered Species

About 20 species of mammal have become extinct in Jordan in the past 100 years. Some were hunted and poached (especially after WWII, when weapons flooded the region), including species of lion, cheetah, gazelle, Syrian brown bear, onager (wild ass) and Arabian leopard. The last Syrian leopard was killed in the area now known as Dana Nature Reserve in 1986, although there have been unsubstantiated sightings since.

The reasons for the number of extinct species – and the continuing threat to animals (24 out of Jordan's remaining 77 species of mammals are globally threatened) and birds include poor land management, such as deforestation, and the pumping of water from vital areas such as the Jordan River, Dead Sea and the Azraq Wetlands; urban sprawl; weak environmental laws; unremitting use of pesticides, especially near water sources in the Jordan Valley; hunting; air and water pollution; and overgrazing.

Officially endangered are the Northern Middle East wolf and South Arabian grey wolf (both are often shot to protect livestock); lynx (always popular with hunters); striped hyena; Persian squirrel; and the Persian, dorcas, goitred and mountain gazelles. A successful breeding programme by the RSCN for the Nubian ibex (hunted to near extinction in the wild) began in the Wadi Mujib Nature Reserve in 1989 with some being re-introduced into the wild.

Endangered birds include the marbled duck; imperial and lesser spotted eagles; houbara bustard; and lesser kestrel. The killifish, unique to the Azraq Wetlands, has recently been saved from extinction but its situation remains precarious (see the boxed text 'What Happened to the Wetlands?' on p131).

Animal species such as the Arabian oryx and onager have been successfully reintroduced to Jordan after becoming extinct, though their populations are still fragile (see p132).

### Plants

Jordan boasts over 2500 species of wild plants and flowers (including about 20 species of orchid) but, due to desertification, urban sprawl and pollution, at least 10 have become extinct over the past 100 years.

Spring is the best time to see wildflowers, particularly at Wadi as-Seer, near Amman, and Wadi Yabis in the north of Jordan. The pine forests of the north give way to the cultivated slopes of the humid Jordan Valley where cedar, olive, eucalyptus and even banana trees are dominant. In a few areas, such as the Dana Nature Reserve, acacia trees thrive. Dense ribbons of green foliage and palm trees follow the deep seasonal wadis of the central plateau. In the deserts, cacti are about the only plants that grow, unless there is heavy rain.

The national flower of Jordan is the black iris, which is actually coloured a deep purple. One of the best places to see this flower is on the eastern walls of the Jordan Valley, particularly around Pella and Wadi as-Seer.

*The Birds of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan* by Ian J Andrews is the definitive work about our feathered friends.

Jordan's national bird is the Sinai rose finch (*Carpodacus synoicus*), which can be found in the Dana and Wadi Mujib nature reserves.

Anyone interested in the flora of Jordan should pick up the detailed *Wildflowers of Jordan and Neighbouring Countries* by Dawud MH Al-Eisawi, with beautiful illustrations and photographs (all captioned in English).

## PROTECTED AREAS

Nearly 25 years ago the Jordanian government established 12 protected areas, totalling about 1200 sq km. While environmental agencies waited for funds and battled with bureaucracy, some potential reserves were abandoned because they had suffered appalling ecological damage.

Established in 1966, the RSCN ([www.rscn.org.jo](http://www.rscn.org.jo)) is both a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) and Jordan's major environmental agency. It is heavily involved in saving animal, plant and bird species from extinction, and has successfully reintroduced several species into Jordan, such as the Arabian oryx and two species of ostrich.

Other activities include conducting public awareness programmes among Jordanians, especially children; sponsoring environmental clubs throughout the country; training guides; promoting ecotourism; fighting against poaching and hunting; and lobbying against mining.

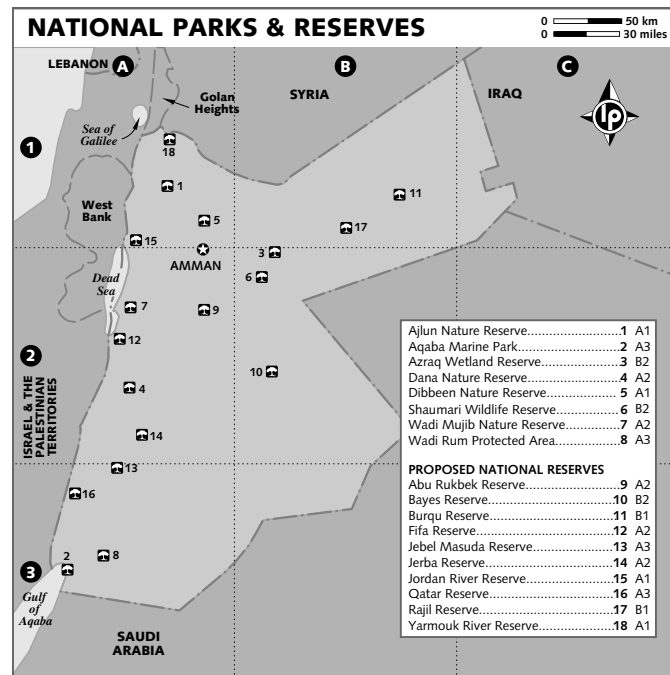
The limited resources of the RSCN are used to maintain and develop six of the reserves listed below (all except the Wadi Rum protected area). These represent about 1% of Jordan's total land area – a small percentage compared with the land allocated in Saudi Arabia (9%) and the USA (11%). Jordan also has several 'national parks' but they are more like recreational parks than protected areas.

**Ajlun Nature Reserve** (13 sq km, 1988) Woodlands, pistachio and oak forest, spring flowers, wild boar and martens, with a programme to reintroduce the locally extinct roe deer. It has a couple of easy trails and a fine tree-house-style campground. See p116 for details.

**Azraq Wetland Reserve** (12 sq km, 1977) This environmentally damaged marshland is home to hundreds of species of migratory bird, who visit in spring and autumn. A wooden boardwalk leads around the reserve, via a bird hide. It's easily accessible. See p130 for details.

Less than 1% of Jordanian territory is covered by forest or woodland.

For a detailed look at Jordan's nature reserves and ecotourism projects see [www.rscn.org.jo](http://www.rscn.org.jo).



**Dana Nature Reserve** (320 sq km, 1989) This spectacular Unesco Biosphere Reserve is home to a diverse Rift Valley ecosystem, from rugged mountains to desert, including about 600 species of plants, about 200 species of bird and over 40 species of mammal. There are walking trails, tented and hotel accommodation and several archaeological sites. See p171 for details.

**Dibbeen Nature Reserve** (8 sq km, 2005) One of the last Aleppo Pine forests left in Jordan, it's home to endangered species such as the Persian squirrel. See p116 for more details.

**Shaumari Wildlife Reserve** (22 sq km, 1975) This small reserve is more like a zoo and is specifically for reintroduced Arabian oryxes; blue-necked and red-necked ostriches; subgutu rosa and dorcas gazelles; and onagers. Nearly 250 bird species have also been identified. There is tented accommodation, or you'll find hotels in nearby Azraq. See p131 for details.

**Wadi Mujib Nature Reserve** (212 sq km, 1988) This reserve near the Dead Sea is used for the captive breeding of Nubian ibexes and has an impressive ecotourism programme, with canyon walks, waterfall rappelling and a Dead Sea camp site. See p146 for details.

**Wadi Rum Protected Area** (540 sq km, 1998) This stunning and popular area was managed by the RSCN but is now under the control of the Aqaba government. Camping, camel treks and the 4WD trail are popular. See p205 for details.

In addition, the RSCN and the Jordanian government hope to create five new protected areas:

**Burqu Reserve** (400 sq km) After the debacle in the Azraq wetlands (see the boxed text, p131), the desert lake at Burqu needs urgent protection.

**Fifa Reserve** (27 sq km) This area alongside the Dead Sea has rare subtropical vegetation, and is home to migratory water birds.

**Jordan River Reserve** (5 sq km) Based around Wadi Kharrar at the Bethany-Beyond-the-Jordan religious site (p141), this is the only section of the Jordan River that has not been ecologically damaged in some way, with environments of marsh wetland, reed beds and tamarix woodland.

**Yarmouk River Reserve** (30 sq km) Because of its close proximity to the border of Israel & the Palestinian Territories, this area has remained undeveloped and is home to many natural features of the forest including water birds, endangered gazelles and otters.

## ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

In 1995, the Jordanian Parliament passed the Law of the Protection of the Environment to set up regulators and funding streams as part of a generally impressive (but recent) commitment by the Jordanian government to environmental protection. This includes the refusal of mining licences in protected areas on environmental grounds.

Jordan is not, however, without its environmental problems, most notably a lack of water, caused by a growing population, rising living standards in the cities, heavy exploitation for agriculture and wastage. Other important issues include air pollution, waste management, erosion (exacerbated by steeply graded agricultural land) and desertification.

### Water

Water, not oil, is the most precious resource in the Middle East. It is fast becoming a major factor in regional relations, and some point to long-term strategic water concerns as an important motive behind the 1967 Six Day War and Israel's invasion of southern Lebanon. As Middle Eastern populations boom, tensions over water can only increase.

Jordan has one of the lowest water-per-capita ratios in the world and currently uses about 60% more water than is replenished from natural sources. By some estimates, Jordan will run out of water within 20 years.

One major problem is simply mismanagement: Jordan's farmers (around 5% of the population) consume as much as 75% of the water (often inefficiently). According to one report, half the water consumed in Amman is lost in leakage. Rationing has been widespread in recent years.

Jordan's only sources of water are the Jordan River and Yarmouk River and several subterranean aquifers that are already in many cases over-exploited (see p131). Since the 1960s Israel & the Palestinian Territories has drawn around one-third of its water from the Jordan River, which has now been reduced to a trickle, half of which is 50% raw sewage and effluent from fish farms.

Since the 1994 peace treaty between Jordan and Israel & the Palestinian Territories, under which Jordan was permitted to extract 50 million cu metres per year from Lake Tiberias, disputes have arisen over whether Jordan is getting its fair share.

In 2000 and 2001, the Jordanian government told farmers and irrigators in the Jordan Valley not to plant the summer crops because the necessary water would have strained resources and paid compensation for lost income.

Both Jordan and Israel & the Palestinian Territories have recently allocated millions of dollars to water projects. The joint Syrian-Jordanian Wahdah Dam on the Yarmouk River was recently completed, giving power to Syria and water to Jordan (mainly for Amman and Irbid).

Jordan is also building a 325km pipeline from Disheh to Amman at a cost of US\$600 million to tap non-renewable fossil water from Diseh near Wadi Rum. Over 90% of Jordan's river water is already being diverted.

One plan on the drawing board is to construct a series of desalination plants, hydroelectric power stations and canals that would link the Red Sea with the Dead Sea (see p143), in an attempt to raise the level of the Dead Sea and create a supply of fresh water.

To make matters worse, Jordan has endured consecutive droughts in recent years: the one in 1998–99 was the worst in 50 years, and cost an estimated US\$200 million in lost and damaged agriculture and livestock.

In the last 50 years, water levels in the Dead Sea have fallen by 18m and 30% of the area of the sea has vanished. For more see p143.

The 2005 Environmental Sustainability Index ranked Jordan 84th out of 146 countries; higher than any Arab country except Tunisia.

### ECOTOURISM AND THE RSCN

In recent years the RSCN has initiated a major ecotourism drive in several reserves, notably Dana and Wadi Mujib, and to a lesser extent Ajlun and Shaumari. Programmes range from hiking trails to local income-generation projects, aimed at creating employment and economic opportunities for local people. The RSCN has also created some of the country's most interesting places to stay, from top-end lodges like Feinan Lodge (p173) and Dana Guest House (p173) to camp sites at Rummana (Dana; p173) and on the shores of the Dead Sea (Wadi Mujib; p147).

Dana in particular has emerged as a model for ecotourism projects in the kingdom. The production of local crafts and organic foods, the establishment of village hotels (which fund a social cooperative) and new opportunities for employment as guides or craftsmen have breathed new life into the partially abandoned village, reversing the economic emigration from the village. See p171 for more details on the project.

These days hiking in Dana and canyoning in Wadi Mujib rank among the highlights of a visit to Jordan. Prices are not cheap but at least you know that the money you spend is going to aid, not hinder, the protection of nature in the land you pass through.

Hiking groups and RSCN camp sites are strictly limited to avoid overuse (only 25 people per day are allowed on some trails) so it's well worth booking guides and accommodation in advance through the tourism department of **Wild Jordan** (☎ 06 4616523; tourism@rscn.org.jo), which acts as the business arm of the RSCN (see p70). The centre in Amman is also worth a visit for its excellent nature shop (p99).

RSCN members get a 20% discount on RSCN accommodation and 50% discount on reserve entry fees. Membership costs JD25 per person. You can also 'adopt' an animal from an endangered species, for JD40 to JD60 per year.

Jordan's Ministry of Environment (www.environment.gov.jo) offers environmental overviews, a list of environmental organisations and regional reports.

For more information on environmental issues in Jordan contact Friends of the Earth (☎ 06 5866602; foeme@ggo.com.jo; Amman) or check out www.foeme.org.



### RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

The environmental problems of Jordan may seem insurmountable, but there is a lot we can all do to minimise our impact:

- Leave it as you found it: for as long as outsiders have been searching for, and stumbling over, the ancient monuments of Jordan, they have also been chipping bits off, hauling stuff home or leaving their contributions engraved upon them. When visiting historical and archaeological sites, please consider how important it is to leave things alone.
- Don't litter: plastic bags are a huge problem in Jordan, accumulating in bushes, fences and valleys all over the country. Try to keep your use of plastic bags and bottles to a minimum and dispose of litter properly.
- Do as requested: please follow environmental regulations, eg don't touch the coral off the coast of Aqaba. Camping and camp fires are not allowed in Jordan's reserves outside designated RSCN camp sites and barbecue grills.

### Effects of Tourism

Only recently have the Jordanian government and foreign NGOs fully realised the impact on the environment of mass tourism.

Tourism has also caused a rapid increase in pollution from cars and industries and demand for precious water, as well as damage to unique sites such as Jerash and Petra (see p187). Other problems are vandalism at archaeological sites, damage to artwork from flash photography, and rubbish left at hot springs and baths.

The RSCN has been at the forefront of attempts to foster ecotourism projects in recent years (see p53). Environmentally sustainable tourism is slowly taking hold as a major means of funding environmental programmes.

### Desertification

Like most countries in the region, Jordan has a serious problem with desertification (the seemingly unstoppable spread of the desert to previously fertile, inhabited and environmentally sensitive areas). According to the RSCN, millions of hectares of fertile land have become infertile and uninhabitable desert. This means there are now fewer pastures for livestock and crops, and there's reduced land for native animals and plants. Jordan is home to about three million sheep and goats, but there is simply no longer enough pasture to feed them.

Desertification is usually caused by human factors such as overgrazing, deforestation and overuse of off-road vehicles, as well as wind erosion and drought.

Jordan has just 140 cu metres of renewable water per capita per year, compared to the UK's 1500, Israel's 340 and the Palestine Authority's 70. Jordan's figure is expected to fall to 90 cu metres by 2025. Anything under 500 cu metres is considered to be a scarcity of water.

# Food & Drink

Eating in Jordan can be a wonderful experience, especially if you can pay a little more than rock-bottom prices. The Lebanese-influenced salads and dips, collectively known as *mezze*, are wonderful and the bread is as good as you'll get in the Middle East – great news for vegetarians. For carnivores, the chicken and grilled meat are similarly good. And, as you'd expect in this part of the world, coffee and tea are an important way of life that quickly open up inroads into local culture.

Jordanian food is made up of Lebanese, Syrian and Egyptian influences blended with traditional local Bedouin cuisine. Historical influences run deep, from the spices of the Arabian trade routes to the Turkish influence of Ottoman rule, while native dates and camel milk have for centuries been the staple diet of the nomadic Bedouin of Arabia. These days in Amman you can get everything from tacos to sushi.

## STAPLES & SPECIALITIES

Menus in the better restaurants are generally divided into cold *mezze*, hot *mezze*, grills and (sometimes) desserts.

### Mezze

The most common way for a group to eat in any restaurant is to order *mezze* – a variety of small starters followed by several mains to be shared by all present.

Hummus is cooked chickpeas ground into a paste and mixed with tahini (a sesame-seed paste), garlic and lemon. Available in virtually every restaurant, it's invariably excellent and generally eaten as a starter with bread. It goes very nicely with any of the meat dishes.

Another local staple, often eaten for breakfast, is *fuul*, a cheap and tasty dish of squashed fava beans with chillis, onions and olive oil.

*Baba ghanouj* (literally 'father's favourite'), made from mashed eggplant and tahini, is another dip eaten with bread. It often has a smoky taste. Similar but blander is *muttabal*.

Tabbouleh is a parsley, cracked (bulgar) wheat and tomato-based salad, with a sprinkling of sesame seeds, lemon and garlic. It goes perfectly with hummus in bread. Fattoosh is pretty much tabbouleh with sumach, tomatoes and little shreds of deep-fried bread in it.

Several types of cheese are available as starters, including *kashkawan* (or *kishkeh*) a soft white cheese, *haloumi* and Lebanese-style *shinklish*, a tangy seasoned cheese fried in olive oil.

### Bread

Arabic unleavened bread, *khobz*, is eaten with absolutely everything and is sometimes called *a'aish* (life) – its common name in Egypt. Tastier than plain old *khobz* is *ka'ik*, round sesame rings of bread, often sold with a boiled egg from stalls throughout Jordan. A favourite breakfast staple is bread liberally sprinkled with zaatar (thyme).

### MAIN DISHES

Most main dishes comprise some combination of chicken, meat kebabs, or meat and vegetable stews.

Chicken (*farooj*) is often roasted on spits in large grills out the front of the restaurant. The usual serving is half a chicken (*nuss farooj*), which

*Recipes and Remembrances from an Eastern Mediterranean Kitchen: A Culinary Journey through Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan* by Sonia Uvezian is a high-quality introduction to the food of the Levant.

The word 'mezze' is derived from the Arabic *t'mazza*, meaning 'to savour in little bites'.

The big five dishes that you'll find yourself eating on a fairly monotonous daily (or twice daily!) basis are shwarma, hummus, kebabs, felfel and roast chicken.

## TRAVEL YOUR TASTEBUDS

The Bedouin *zerb* oven couldn't be simpler. Simply dig a hole in the sand and burn enough firewood to make glowing coals. Seal the oven, cover it with sand and cook for an hour or two. These can be found at all good Bedouin camps in Wadi Rum. It's best done with a whole goat or sheep, which brings us to...

### We Dare You!

Traditionally the prized part of that Bedouin favourite, whole roast lamb, are the succulent eyeballs, which are presented to honoured guests – which, yes, as a foreigner probably means you!

If somehow you miss out on the dubious honour of chewing on an eyeball, you can always invite some serious bacterial infection by ordering from the *nayye* (raw) meat section of one of Amman's numerous Lebanese restaurants. Top that off with an order of steaming ram's testicles, or even fried brains, both favourite mezzes, and you have an unbeatable night (and perhaps next morning) to remember.

comes with bread, a side dish of raw onion, chillies and sometimes olives. Eaten with the optional extras of salad and hummus, it's a great meal.

Kebabs are another favourite, and available everywhere. These are spicy minced-lamb pieces pressed onto skewers and grilled over charcoal. *Shish tawooq* is loosely the chicken version of the same thing.

Another popular chicken dish is *musakhan*, baked chicken served with onions, olive oil and pine nuts on *khobz*. *Kofta* are delicious meatballs of minced lamb, sometimes served in a stew with tomatoes and spices.

Stews are usually meat or vegetable, or both, and make a pleasant change from chicken and kebabs. *Fasoolyeh* is bean stew; *biseela* is made of peas; *batatas* is mostly potato; and *mulukiyyeh* is a spinach stew with chicken or meat pieces. They are usually served with rice (*ruz*) or, more rarely, macaroni (*makarone*).

A Bedouin speciality is *mensaf*. Traditionally served on special occasions, it consists of a whole lamb on a bed of rice and pine nuts, topped with the gaping head of the animal. The fat from the cooking is poured into the rice. You can buy a serving of mensaf in better restaurants in the larger cities. It's not cheap, but should be tried at least once. A tangy sauce of cooked yogurt mixed with fat is served with it.

One Bedouin dish you will see in places like Wadi Musa is *maqlub-beh*, sometimes called 'upside down', steamed rice pressed into a small bowl, turned upside down and topped with grilled slices of eggplant or meat, grilled tomato, cauliflower and pine nuts. *Fareekah* is a similar dish with cracked wheat.

Fish (*samak*) is not widely available, and it's always relatively expensive. *Sayadieh* is an Aqaba specialty – fish with lemon juice on a bed of paella-style rice, with a tomato, onion and green pepper sauce.

## Desserts

Jordanians have an incorrigibly sweet tooth, and their desserts are confectioned accordingly; there are dozens of pastry shops in every town, selling nothing else. Many of the pastry shops are sit-down places and are often good for solo women travellers to relax at. For some reason coffee is rarely served at an Arabic pastry shop, and neither are pastries served in traditional coffeehouses.

The basic formula for Arab sweets involves drenching some kind of filo pastry in honey, syrup and/or rose water (or, hell, all three!) and then cutting the entire mass into pieces with an implement that resembles a

Pork products are taboo in Islam but you can find pork dishes in Chinese restaurants, at a higher price than other meats.

Literary foodies will enjoy *The Language of Baklava* by Diana Abu Jabr (see p45) which combines autobiographical novel with home-style Jordanian recipe book, offering authentic recipes for *muhammara* (a walnut and pepper dip), kunafa and shish kebab, among others.

plastering trowel. Imagine Edward Scissorhands let loose on a giant-sized baklava and you get the picture. The sweetest highlight of travel in Jordan is kunafa, a highly addictive dessert of shredded dough on top of cream cheese, smothered in syrup.

Customers generally order desserts by the piece or by weight (250g is generally the smallest portion). The best thing is to simply walk into a pastry shop and try out a variety; you'll quickly find a favourite.

## DRINKS

### Alcoholic Drinks

Alcohol is widely available in bars and from the occasional liquor store in major towns (especially those with a large Christian minority).

Amstel beer is brewed in Jordan under licence from its Dutch parent company and it's definitely the most widely available (and often the only available) beer. In Amman and Aqaba, beer imported from all over the world – everything from Guinness to Fosters – is available but at prices higher than you'd pay in Ireland or Australia. A bottle of 650ml Amstel beer costs about JD1.400 from a liquor store, at least JD1.750 in a dingy bar in Amman and up to JD3.500 in a trendy nightclub. You may also come across the local Jordanian beer Philadelphia, which is OK if you're not fussy. To get to your destination quickly there's always Petra beer with 8% alcohol content.

Arak is the local aniseed firewater, similar to Greek ouzo or Turkish raki. It's usually mixed with water and ice and should be treated with caution. Various other types of hard liquor are available in liquor stores and bars, including all sorts of 'scotch whisky' brewed locally or imported.

Some local wine is produced in Jordan, including the St George and Machereus labels. Other brands such as Latroun, St Catherine and Cremanis are imported from the West Bank. Wine costs from around JD3 per glass in a restaurant.

### Non-Alcoholic Drinks

Most restaurants offer a jug of free cold (tap) water, but to be safe you are better off buying bottled mineral water; see p276). Ghadeer is one of the better brands (350 fils for a 2L bottle).

All over Jordan, juice stalls sell freshly squeezed fruit juices (*aseer*); these stalls are instantly recognisable by the string bags of fruit hanging out the front. Popular juices include lemon, orange, banana, pomegranate and rockmelon, and you're welcome to request any kind of combination you'd like.

Some stalls put milk in their drinks or, worse, water, which you might want to stay away from if you have a dodgy stomach.

## Tea & Coffee

From the chic cafés of western Amman to the Bedouin tents of Wadi Rum, tea and coffee are the major social lubricants in Jordan. Both are served strong and sweet.

Tea (*shai*) is probably the more popular drink, taken without milk and in various degrees of sweetness: with sugar (*sukkar ziyada*), a little sugar (*sukkar qaleel*), or no sugar (*bidoon sukkar*). In some cafés the sugar will be served on the side in little egg cups. Both tea and coffee can be quite bitter without any sugar.

In most cafés you can ask for refreshing mint tea (*shai ma n'aana*). Zaatar (thyme) and *marrameeya* (sage) herbal teas are especially delicious in Dana.

For the best kunafa join the queues of sugar addicts at the takeaway branch of Habibah, hidden down an alley in downtown Amman (p95).

Coffee originated in Ethiopia before spreading to southern Arabia, the Middle East and, several centuries later, Europe. Its English name is thought to be derived from the Ethiopian village of Kaffa, through the Arabic name *qahwa* and then the Turkish word *kahve*.

'Coffee should be black as hell, strong as death and sweet as love' – Turkish proverb.

### TROUBLE BREWING – COMMUNICATING WITH COFFEE

In traditional Bedouin circles the shared drinking of coffee symbolises trust and good intent between strangers. A visitor who refuses to drink is likely to have come bearing a grudge. If the host pours a cup of coffee and then deliberately spills it in front of the guest, this is an insult or indicates that the host feels wronged by that person. Likewise if a host arranges a toast and one of those assembled refuses to drink or pours away their drink before the toast, it's clear that trouble is brewing between that person and the guest being toasted.

Coffee (*qahwa*) is generally taken Turkish-style in strong, small, sweet shots. Remember to let the grains settle and avoid the last gritty mouthful. You can specify a small espresso-sized cup (*finjan*) or large cup (*kassa kabira*). In traditional Bedouin areas coffee is served in small porcelain bowls. You may get to see the beans roasted and then ground in a decorated pestle and mortar called a *mihbash*. Arabic-style coffee is generally flavoured with cardamom.

Once again you need to make clear the degree of sweetness: ask for sweet (*haaloua*), a little sugar (*sukkar khali*), or without sugar (*saada*). If you just ask for coffee, or order 'American coffee', you may end up with instant coffee. Only the top-end places offer brewed or filtered coffee à la Starbucks.

*Sahlab* is a traditional winter drink, served hot with milk, nuts and cinnamon – delicious, if made properly. Look for it at hot drink vendors (recognisable by their silver samovars), who also offer takeaway shots of coffee or Lipton tea in white plastic cups.

### CELEBRATIONS

During the month of Ramadan (see p243 for a list of upcoming dates) Muslims fast during daylight hours. The daily evening meal during Ramadan, called *iftar* (breaking the fast), is always something of a celebration. Go to the bigger restaurants and wait with fasting crowds for sundown, the moment when food is served – it's quite a lively experience.

Out of respect for those fasting during Ramadan, always eat inside or as discreetly as possible. Restaurants catering to tourists will usually still be open, though it can be hard to find a restaurant in out-of-the-way places that opens before sunset. Most Jordanians stock up on an especially large pre-dawn breakfast called *suhur*.

If you're going to be travelling around during the day, buy some food for lunch (grocery shops normally stay open during the day), and eat it somewhere discreet.

The Ramadan fast is broken by the three-day festival of Eid al-Fitr, when everyone gets dressed up in new clothes, visits friends and family, and eats a big family dinner.

### WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

Some restaurants close on Friday, usually in the evening, but most places frequented by foreigners open every day. A menu in English is usually offered only by restaurants in upmarket hotels, those set up for the tourist trade and outlets of Western fast-food chains. Elsewhere, just ask what's available or point to what other patrons are enjoying. Usually someone in the restaurant will know a bit of English, and 'kebabs', 'chicken', 'salad' and 'soup' are universally understood by restaurant staff.

Before you start ordering, especially at a restaurant frequented by foreigners and where there's no menu in English, ask for the price of each dish.

A host will always refill his guest's coffee cup. A good guest will accept a minimum of three cups but when you've had enough, gently tilt the cup from side to side (in Arabic – 'dancing' the cup). For other drinks put your hand over the cup and say *da'imān* (may it ever be thus).

It's generally impolite to smoke, drink or eat in public during Ramadan.

### Coffeehouses

Jordan's coffeehouses are great places to watch the world go by, write a letter, meet the locals and, maybe, play a hand of cards, accompanied by the incessant clattering clacking of slammed domino and backgammon pieces and the gurgling of a dozen fruity *nargileh* (water pipes). Traditional coffeehouses are generally men-only but foreign women, with a bit of courage and very modest attire, are usually welcome at most coffeehouses in Jordan (see p253).

Few traditional coffeehouses serve food. In eastern Amman, a few trendy Western-style cafés serve meals, as well as alcohol and sometimes host live music or exhibitions in the Western café tradition.

### Quick Eats

The two most popular local versions of 'fast food' are the *shwarma* and *felafel*, both well known to anyone who has travelled elsewhere in the region.

Shwarma is like Greek gyros or Turkish doner kebab ie slices of lamb or chicken from a huge revolving spit, mixed with onions and tomato in bread. The vendor will slice off the meat (usually with a great flourish and much knife sharpening and waving), dip a piece of flat bread in the fat that has dripped off the meat, hold it against the gas flame so it flares, then fill it with meat and fillings.

Felafel are deep-fried balls of chickpea paste with spices, served in a piece of rolled up *khobz* (bread) with varying combinations of pickled vegetables, tomato, salad and yogurt. Super-sized *kabir* felafel sometimes have onion inside.

### VEGETARIANS & VEGANS

Virtually no restaurants in Jordan specialise in vegetarian food, and there are few specific 'vegetarian' dishes. Vegetarians report varying degrees of difficulty in getting by in Jordan. Every restaurant offers a number of different mezza or salads at reasonable prices, and a couple of salads with bread often makes a decent meal. Vegetable soups are common, although they may well be infiltrated by small pieces of meat. Starters such as hummus, and traditional dishes like *fuul*, are meatless and will become staple foods for vegetarians.

### EATING WITH KIDS

You shouldn't have any major problems finding something the kids can eat. Chicken and chips, bread, ice cream and the major soft drinks are all common, while grocery stores stock a wide range of imported Western foods.

#### JORDAN'S CULINARY TOP FIVE

- *Fatteh* at **Fuheis** (p106)
- Seafood and *sayadiyeh* – try **Floka Restaurant** in Aqaba (p224)
- Savour the best mezza at Amman's excellent Lebanese restaurants, such as **Fakhr el-Din** (p93), **Abu Ahmad Orient Restaurant** (p93), or **Tannoureen Restaurant** (p94)
- Desert cuisine – tear into a *mensaf* or *zerb* barbecue at a **Bedouin camp** in Wadi Rum (p212)
- For atmospheric digs – try the restored Ottoman architecture of **Kan Zeman** outside Amman (p102), or **Haret Jdoudna** in Madaba (p157)

*Grumpy Gourmet* (www.grumpygourmet.com) is a light-hearted restaurant guide, mainly for expatriates and well-off visitors living in Amman.

Some restaurants have a 'family' section, set aside for families and unaccompanied (local and foreign) women, where female travellers can eat in relative peace. The entrance may not be entirely obvious but you'll probably be ushered in there anyway.

**DOS & DON'TS**

If you are invited to share a meal, whether at home or in a restaurant, grab the opportunity but bear the following pointers in mind:

- If offered, always wash your hands before a meal, even if you washed them recently
- If eating from a communal plate, and there are no eating implements, always use your right hand
- Avoid licking your fingers during a meal
- Don't put food back on the plate
- Your host will often lay the best cuts in front of you, which it is polite to accept. The best food is often saved until last so remember to pace yourself
- Reaching across the food is considered impolite
- It's good manners to leave a little food on your plate at the end of the meal
- Always commend your host for a wonderful meal and express regret when you have to leave

**HABITS & CUSTOMS**

The most common way for a group to eat in any restaurant is to order *mezze* – a variety of small starters followed by several mains to be shared by all present. Otherwise, simply order one or two starters, bread (which is normally provided free anyway), main course (usually meat) and salad. Some smaller hole-in-the-wall places will specialise in one or two things only, while some just offer chicken or a couple of stews.

**COOKING COURSES**

You can learn how to cook a range of Jordanian *mezze*, main courses and desserts at a nightly cookery course held by local Bedouin women at **Petra Kitchen** (☎/fax 2155900; www.petrakitchen.com, petrakitchen@petramoon.com) in Wadi Musa, near Petra. The price of JD30 per person isn't cheap, but it's a relaxed family atmosphere and the price includes dinner, as soon as you've finished cooking it. See p195 for details.

**EAT YOUR WORDS****Useful Phrases**

**I'm a vegetarian.**

*ana nabaatee* (m)/*ana nabateeyya* (f)

**What is this?**

*ma hadha?/shu hadha?*

**breakfast**

*al-futur*

**restaurant**

*al-matam*

**daily special**

*wajbet al-yum*

**Menu Decoder**

Note that, because of the imprecise nature of transliterating Arabic into English, spellings will vary; for example what we give as *kibbeh* may appear variously as *kubbeh*, *kibba*, *kibby*, or even *gibeh*.

**MEZZE**

*baba ghanouj*  
*balillah*

dip of mashed eggplant and tahini  
snack of boiled salty legumes

*basterma*  
*buraiik*  
*fatayer*  
*fatteh*  
*fattoosh*

*fuul*  
*fuul masrih*  
*fuul medames*  
*gallai*

*kibbeh*

*labneh*  
*makdous*  
*manaqeesh*  
*manoucha/manaqish*  
*mosabaha*  
*mouhamara*  
*mutaffi bethanjan*  
*muttabal*  
*odsieh*  
*sambousek*  
*shinklish*

*tabbouleh*  
*treedah*  
*yalenjeh*

**MAIN DISHES**

*fareekh*  
*fasoolyeh*  
*gallayah*

*kofta*  
*maqlubbeh*

*musakhan*  
*sajieh*  
*sawani*  
*shish tawouq*  
*shwarma*

**DESSERT**

*ftir jibneh*  
*haliwat al-jibneh*

*halva*  
*kunafa*  
*ma'amoul*  
*muhlabiyya*  
*mushabbak*  
*m'shekel*  
*wharbat*

pastrami, popular from Armenia to Lebanon  
meat or cheese pie  
triangles of pastry filled with white cheese or spinach; also known as burak  
garlicky yogurt and hummus, sometimes with chicken  
salad with sumach (a red spice mix), tomatoes and shreds of crouton-like deep-fried bread  
dip of squashed fava beans with chillis, onions and olive oil  
fuul with tahini  
fuul with olive oil  
sautéed tomato, garlic, onion and peppers topped with cheese and pine nuts on Arabic bread  
Lebanese-style kofta made with minced lamb, bulgar/cracked wheat and onion; served raw or deep fried  
cream-cheese dip  
pickled eggplant, walnut and olive-oil dip  
Arabic bread with herbs  
baked breads or pies with thyme (zaatar) and cheese  
hummus with whole chickpeas in it  
walnut, olive-oil and cumin dip  
fried eggplant and sesame  
eggplant dip similar to baba ghanouj but creamier  
hummus inside fuhl  
meat and pine-nut pastry  
tangy and salty dried white cheese, sometimes grilled, sometimes in a salad  
salad of cracked (bulgar) wheat, parsley and tomato  
egg, yogurt and meat  
Turkish-style stuffed vine leaves

similar to maqlubbeh but with cracked wheat  
bean stew  
traditional Bedouin meal of chicken with tomatoes, other vegetables, garlic and Arabic spices  
meatballs, often in a stew  
steamed rice topped with grilled slices of eggplant or meat, grilled tomato, cauliflower and pine nuts  
baked chicken served on bread with onions, olive oil and pine nuts  
baked dish of chicken, onion and bread  
meat or vegetables cooked on trays in a wood-burning oven  
grilled boneless chicken served with bread and onions  
chicken or lamb sliced off a spit and stuffed in a pocket of pita-type bread with chopped tomatoes and garnish

large pastries  
a soft doughy pastry filled with cream cheese and topped with syrup and ice cream  
soft sesame paste, like nougat  
shredded dough on top of cream cheese smothered in syrup  
biscuits stuffed with dates and pistachio nuts and dipped in rose water  
rice pudding, made with rose water  
a lacework-shaped pastry drenched in syrup  
a form of baklava  
little triangular pastries with custard inside, a bit like a Danish pastry

*The New Book of Middle Eastern Food* by Claudia Roden is a classic text that contains 800 mouth-watering recipes.

## Food Glossary

### STAPLES

<i>beid</i>	egg
<i>ejja</i>	omelette
<i>jibna</i>	cheese
<i>khobz</i>	bread
<i>laban</i>	yogurt
<i>ruz</i>	rice
<i>shurba</i>	soup
<i>sukkar</i>	sugar

### MEAT & FISH

<i>farooj</i>	chicken
<i>hamour</i>	a grouper-like fish from the Red Sea
<i>kibda</i>	liver
<i>samak</i>	fish

### VEGETABLES

<i>adas</i>	lentils
<i>banadura</i>	tomato
<i>batata</i>	potato
<i>khadrawat</i>	vegetables
<i>khijar</i>	cucumber
<i>khudar</i>	vegetables

### FRUIT

<i>battikh</i>	watermelon
<i>burtuqal</i>	orange
<i>inab</i>	grape
<i>mish-mish</i>	apricot
<i>moz</i>	banana
<i>rumman</i>	pomegranate
<i>tamr</i>	date
<i>tin</i>	fig
<i>tufah</i>	apple

### OTHER DISHES & CONDIMENTS

<i>fil fil</i>	chillis
<i>sumach</i>	red-spice mix
<i>tahini</i>	sesame-seed paste
<i>tum</i>	garlic
<i>torshi</i>	bright pink pickled vegetables
<i>zaatar</i>	thyme
<i>zayt</i>	olive oil
<i>zaytun</i>	olives

### DRINKS

<i>asir</i>	juice
<i>maya at-ta'abiyya</i>	mineral water
<i>qahwa</i>	coffee
<i>sfeeha</i>	a lemon and mint drink
<i>shai</i>	tea

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