

Jordan 2025

Wed Mar 12

Qatar Airways flt. 720 to Doha, Qatar, left on time at 5:05. Aisle seat in row of 3. Empty seat in middle, but I offered to trade with man who wanted to be near his family. Another aisle seat, but with neighbor. Boeing 777. Free Starlink. First flight of my life where people were making phone calls!

My seatmate: friendly 33 y.o. Iraqi American, lives in Utah with wife & 3+ kids. Was flight attendant for Emirates. Now owns truck, home every 2nd night. 48 y.o. brother died of heart attack, so he was going to Iraq to be with family. He was once kidnapped in Iraq. They tortured him 2 days until brother brought \$70k, my seatmates' life savings. He says it changed his life for the better, inspiring him to move to US and have a great life. His father was a chef for Saddam Hussein, and "part of the family" for 27 years. Seatmate is brain cancer survivor!

Food wasn't very good. Two meals plus snacks.* Poor video selection. Light turbulence. No crying babies. * curry pocket, rice crackers
chicken, mash potatoes

2

14 hours to Doha. Arrive 5:30.

Had to go through security - why? -
and drink my water.

Slept about half the flight. Stiff
neck & headache, but otherwise not
too bad.

Airport quiet, ultra modern. Decorated
for Ramadan. It felt so good to walk!
Faux pearl chandeliers because this
area once main economy of pearl diving.
Now it's oil. Ultra luxury shopping,
raffles for luxury cars. Lots of
jobs at airport - security, info,
cleaning - mostly Black Africans.

The Orchard is a new tropical
garden in C terminal. Sounds of water
& birds, Great antidote to travel stress.
"Grass", pavilions, and wood huts to lie
down in. I'm gate C8 adjacent.

Airport sound system crystal clear.
Too many bright flashing LED screens.
Airport famous for huge teddy bear
sculpture.

Call to prayer about 7:15. Great
singer.

Packing:

Same as Camino, plus charging brick, binocs, & big camera. These added weight & bulk, so I brought a zipper shoulder bag. Doubles as under seat bag on flights & duffel for things I won't hike with.

met Julie from Indiana, about 30 y.o., teaches HS orchestra, ~~is~~ married to Jordanian, coming back to visit his family for Ramadan, bringing gifts of makeup & electronics. Julie lived 5 years in Jordan. Her husband's family lives near Petra. Marguerite van Geldermalsen's daughter is a friend of hers.

They loaded us onto cold (AC) busses and drove 15 minutes out to plane. Airbus 320 regional, 6 seats across. A bit claustrophobic, my seatmate coughed a lot - hopefully just a smoker's cough. He had to urgently get up during the meal, which required quite the juggling act. Luckily the flt. attendant held our trays. Later he spilled milk all down my pant leg. But the Arab chicken was delicious.

A compass on the flight display on both flights showed a mecca (makkah) symbol and direction arrow.

Watched ~~cute~~^{sweet} movie based on true story, my Penguin Friend. Arrive Amman 11:45 pm. Chatted with American guy who is hiking the Jordan Trail. 400+ miles.

Paid 40 dinar (\$56) for visa. Short lines for visa & passport. Irina picked me up and drove me the 50 km to Carob Hostel, owned by her 35 y.o. son. Heavy traffic due to Ramadan, people go out late to eat. The weekend is Fri & Sat, so it's also the weekend, because it's early Fri morning here. Irina estimates 75% of Ammanians observe the fast.

Gas .86+ dinar per liter. Exchange is 1.41 dinar/liter.

In bed (hitting the pillow) at 1:30 am. Comfortable bed & pillow, bunk has light, power, curtains. Orange cat named Pauli.

Fri March 14

Up once to pee and awake at 9:30. Others still sleeping. I'm the second one to breakfast. Irina working the cafe on the lovely, quiet

roof deck. 59° blue sky with light film of cloud. Breakfast 4 dinar (\$5.20): potatoes or poha (potato + rice), felafel with hummus or eggplant, fresh fruit (kiwi, apple, pear, strawberry, banana, cantaloupe), green salad, pita, mint tea. Vegan café. (1 amazing grapefruit)

Irina is Russian, married Jordanian man. Her son modeled the Carob Hostel on places he stayed in his travels. It's got everything travelers look for. It's 5 years old, and I don't think there was a hostel in Amman before it. It's usually full except during the early part of the recent Gaza war. No shoes in the rooms — they provide crocs.

A quiet morning. Friday is prayer day, no school, ^{no buses} no work. People sleep in b/c up late for Ramadan. Stores open late if at all.

Walk to Citadel. Wanna-be guide shows me the way. No cell service for me here.

Texts + outgoing emails not working with wifi.

Sidewalks here are aspirational — they hope to be sidewalks when they grow up. For now they are incomplete, uneven, parked on, garbage strewn. Lots of litter here. Ugly city, hilly. Hills covered in drab, tan cement boxes, very few trees.

6

Talk of tattoos, shamans, how to get into Syria, Iraq.
"making content."

Lots of intrepid travelers here, going
all over Middle East + Asia. Many Americans.

Eurasian hoopoe on a nest in a stone
wall.

Didn't have cash for the Citadel (3 dinar)
but they took the \$5 bill I didn't need for
a tip last night. Toasty day, happy for a
light breeze. The light is very bright, even
with sunglasses + hat. Little crested birds,
lizards.

Noon prayer service is obligatory on
Fridays. Minarets visible all around from
this highest hill in town (2800 feet).

All are broadcasting over speakers so
there was a cacophony of sound on the
hill until about 1 pm. It was irritating in
a way, but also sort of thrilling. Inside
the copper-domed reception room it echoed
and was quite magical. That cool, well-
preserved stone carved interior was my
favorite part of the Citadel. Also liked
the (formerly) colonnaded street leading to
the ruins of the Umayyad Palace, and
the Temple of Hercules. Pricky borage
with neon blue flowers. Rosemary
pruned into square hedges, buzzing

with bees. It rained last week so maybe a bit greener than usual.

Spanish was third language on plaques. Traditional but interesting archeology museum.

Temple still has two tall columns with plinth. View down to Roman Theater. Fahwaz asked me to take pictures of him, then invited me to hang out. Jordanian EE, a bit shy, not the charmer type. I said no thank you. I got the sense he was a bit lonely traveling alone.

No t.p. in toilets here. (Don't flush it.) Doesn't say this at hostel, however.

Friendly but pushy driver as I left Citadel. I need to just say "no thanks" instead of engaging. Stairs backside of Citadel direct to Roman Amphitheater were closed, so I took road down.

Children on playground run over to say hi, ask my name, practice English. When they asked for money I shook my finger at them and said "La Tamam" which I think means "not OK."

Wound down roads & stairs to downtown. Crowded, lots of honking, hard to cross streets. Scents of rose water, incense, spices, sewer gas. Feral cats, some in really bad shape.

Women out shopping, most in hijab or burka. I didn't make eye contact with any men.

Indoor market packed with shoppers who can't eat the food til sundown. Olives, spices, sweets so enticing.

Most streets one way.

ATM confused me so I'll go back later.

I found my way back to the hostel by retracing my steps because I had no GPS. Whew. Lots of one way streets make it easier to walk in the street. 77 degrees high today.

Lots of hostel travelers smoke. Met Jen from Chicago, 50-something, full time on the road, retired Spanish teacher.

Lentil soup with pita chips at hostel cafe. 4 dinar, more than I could finish. Hope it doesn't give me terrible farts!

Imam did a long song at sunset.

Walk to town, carefully in the dark. Got cash. Normally I would avoid ATMs at night and if I'm only one in lobby, but Lonely Planet & Irina says it's

super safe here.

Downtown streets absolutely packed with families strolling & snacking. Shops brightly lit. Coffee roasters tumbling. Chestnuts & beans roasting (fava? soy? garbanzo?). 9 pm some vendors just setting up. So much honking! Taxis do a short honk to see if you want a ride.

Popped my head into the famous Hashem restaurant, but it didn't seem anything special... Felafel place, but I didn't see a menu.

As I climbed the steep hill back to the hostel, a group of women in burkas passed me and one said a very cheery "Hello, how are you?" as she breezed down the hill.

Five teenage boys wanted to chat but mostly giggled a lot and didn't speak much English. "What is your ~~na~~ name?" and movie phrases like "F U hick!"

Back to hostel terrace at 10. 67°. Hubby bubbies (hookahs) going.

Sat March 15

At 4:15 AM a drum could be heard outside on the street. Irina says it's an old tradition where a volunteer alerts his neighbors that it's to eat before the fast.

The hostel quilt is heavy & I mostly used my cloth wrap. AC at night but a little stuffy with curtain closed in cubby.

Breakfast on terrace: dill fried potatoes, felafel & baba ghanouj (no hummus avail. today), fruit, tea. I asked for no salad or pita so they gave me a nice package of tea biscuits. Felafels heart-shaped! Irina showed me the mold. Fruit incl. pomegranate seeds.

Put pack in storage, leave hostel 9:15. Walk to Roman Theater. Streets quiet and empty, sticky with litter and spills from last night, but men with brooms out sweeping.

Without the crowds & intense traffic it's easier to see some of the charms of this gritty city. Restaurant names like Chick N' Chew, Hop 'N Dogs "better food better mood", Potato Land,

Roman Theater partially restored and used for events. Steep stairs, no rails! Two great onsite museums: Popular Traditions (loved the textiles, outfits, & jewelry), Folklore (great lifesize dioramas of daily life). 2~~3~~ dinar for all.

Walk to Jordan Museum. Peds do not have right of way here! Souk not so crowded today and more

fun to ~~peruse~~ peruse. 11 am. Men with prayer (worry beads). Man reading Koran while listening to Koran sung on recording.

Poor street trees get most of their branches pruned. So much for shade, but maybe there isn't enough ground water to support larger trees?

The city is gritty, dirty, ugly, pedestrian unfriendly, and a feast for the senses.

Love the people in caftans, burkhas, Keffiyeh scarves. Love the smells of incense & spices, & the songs.

Jordan museum is very good. Lots of prehistory and artefacts. Good exhibits on Dead Sea scrolls & modern life. I appreciated the bag check for my shoulder bag (left backpack at hostel). Also appreciated outlet to charge phone, bench to rest and eat my biscuits, and restroom. 5 dinar. Met a French woman about my age who said she was "absolument handicapée" by not speaking English.

It's a city of hills. To get to Rainbow Street I had to climb many stairs. Lots of stairs in this town, and many smell like wine. Rainbow Street is upscale shopping street with villas, cafes, galleries, popular at night.

A few people asked me for money.

Down the big hill and back up another to hostel. Arrive 1:30. 78°. At 2:30

I got an Uber to the tour meet point at the Liwan Hotel in the Sweifieh neighborhood. It would have been a 2 hour walk! 9 km and took about 25 minutes. Nice driver spoke great English and ~~was~~ is retired middle school Arabic teacher. He grew up in downtown Amman. City has grown from 1-5 million in his life.

Liwan Hotel is far from downtown. Nice room but no place to put anything. Restaurant has Western food only. Seems a shame.

Fish & chips, hot dogs... Room 412. My roomie is adorable Inese. 66 y.o., retired journalist from Latvia, lives in UK, travels a lot with Intrepid. She's very friendly.

6 pm meet & greet with guide Mohammad, age 30. 7 m.o. baby girl.

Originally from Palestine. 10 people in group: Peter & Amina, Rebecca, Chip, Simon, Matt all from UK. Inese is Latvian but lives in UK.

Laura from Portland, Charles from California.

Walked to Mawwal Restaurant 1/2 km away. Smoking allowed

inside - ugh! Loud TV on with mix of talking & music. We could turn down the sound on the set above our heads. Our end of the table each ordered a dish to share: arayes (pita w/ minced beef), dolmas (called something else), baba ghanoush, tabbouleh, tahini salad (cuke, tomato), chicken kabob, roasted tomato. 5 JD (\$7) with tip.

Back to hotel at 9. A lovely 68°. The restaurant brought us each a bit of harissa, a sweet made with farina - Didn't like it.

Sun Mar 16

Inese mentioned some of the expensive travel lessons she's learned and said "All universities are expensive."

It was a loud night, with music until about 4 am and motorcycles revving & racing, and people carousing. But I felt refreshed when alarm went off at 6 am.

Buffet breakfast with many choices. I had scrambled eggs, baba ghanoush (mutabel), hummus, pita, labneh (thick creamy yogurt), fruit, & halva.

Intrepid had another tour group of 20 there.

17-passenger bus. Our driver is silver-haired Taisir, appears to be 70-ish. Left at 8 am.

Drivers here tailgate, straddle lanes, drive on shoulder. We drove 3 hours to Dana Biosphere

Reserve. On the way ~~have~~ stopped to buy big jugs of water, but hard to find shop open before noon during Ramadan. Speed limit 110.

Stopped after 2 hours for pee break at a shop with restaurant. Over the top souvenirs that looked mass produced, semi-precious jewelry (galactite found in desert is midnight blue with sparkles like stars), glossy furniture inlaid with mother of pearl. Everything expensive. Lots of tour groups.

Mohammed ~~selecte~~ collected 47 dinar each to cover tips for local guides, water, and lunch today. Intrepid doesn't use individual water bottles (disposable). Jordan is the 2nd poorest water country. They get a lot of their water piped in from desalination plants in Israel.

70% of Jordanians smoke!

Inese is a companion to an 86-year-old woman who owns a dairy empire in the UK.

Sheep & goats along route. Brown desert landscape, few trees. USAID & ~~a~~ other orgs. supporting reforestation projects. Overgrazing is a problem here too.

West Jordan has more water & crops are grown there. Fish comes from Aqaba.

Cement plants, solar panels, small towns.

Little Petra Dana Reserve

15

Iron, copper, & potash mines. What is there for sheep & goats to eat? Wind turbines near Dana. Dana villagers relocated to new village created nearby. A few families now live in Dana Village to serve tourists. It's at 4500 feet. Overlook of valley. Sky hazy.

We met ~~another~~ ^{Ahmed} ~~who~~ who was our local hiking guide. Down into valley, more of a scramble than a hike. Saw turtle, falcon, sage, oak. Goats & sheep grazing. A couple other hiking groups. Pine & juniper, green perennials everywhere due to recent rains. medicinal plants like sage.

Very reminiscent of Canyonlands areas in Utah. Swirls of white, red, and ochre sandstone. Stopped for lunch in a spot with juniper shade. Wished I'd known to bring a sit pad. Ahmed chopped tomato, onion, garlic & cooked it over a small fire. Fried potatoes in another pan. Served with bread, hummus, babaganoush. Delicious.

Hiking back uphill it was very hot & I was overheating. Sad to see some plastic bags & rubbish. Back to bus at 3:30.

Drive one hour to Little Petra, stopping at a nice overlook. Arrive Luxury Bedouin Camp at 4:30. We're staying in small cabins with Bedouin fabric ~~inter~~ walls & ceiling like tents. Nice bath house. Courtyard with seating & fire pit. Large common

16

area with red Bedouin fabric banquettes
+ two large fireplaces. places. 33-y.o.
Mohammed purchased the land + started
building before Covid. Designed + built
much himself. Capacity 140, but quiet
since Gaza war began. 30 people here tonight,
his biggest group in a while.

Area looks like Joshua Tree with
rounded mounds of rock like melted scoops
of ice cream. Climbed onto rocks to watch
sunset, but road + fences detracted.
Rocks didn't get much color. I'm spoiled
by US places like Joshua Tree.

Fab dinner in "cave restaurant".

Six mezzes with bread, then chicken magluba,
aka "upside down". They invert the big cooking
pot with a bang + the chicken, rice, and
veggies spill onto a platter. Delicious. I especially
loved the eggplant.

Group meeting in tent room. Mint tea
and a dessert of milk, pistachios, + bread
I think. Good, but I was too stuffed to
finish it.

There are serious trekkers in this group
and I hope I can keep up!

Amina + Peter went to Jerash, north

Petra

17

of Amman, and said it was very green up there with olive groves & vineyards.

Mohammed wowed us all by "lighting up the mountains" and turning on dozens of lights he has installed in the rocks around camp. Lovely.

Mon March 17

63° at 7 am. Quiet night except for loose fabric strip flapping in the wind. Up once to pee and it was warm out. Inese said she coughed all night but I never heard her.

Breakfast buffet. I had eggs, hummus, veggies, yogurt, fruit, oatmeal. Took some halvah for trail snack.

Walked 1/2 mile or so to Little Petra entrance. This suburb of Petra was a place of leisure, our guide (Mahmood) said analogous to Las Vegas. Food, drink, belly dancers. Our guide spoke excellent English. Official guides are highly educated.

Petra engineers of old created elaborate system of pipes & cisterns.

Little Petra caves had high painted ceilings. There is one surviving partial fresco.

Nabateans had statues of multiple gods. Removed when Christians took over after Romans? Petra had fields & vineyards.

Guide says it's been driest year in 100 years.

The onion-like perennial is aisanan.

From Little Petra we hiked the back way to Petra with guide Suleiman, who was also extremely knowledgeable with excellent English. It was a nice hike, first some up and down easy on wide flat trail with stones.

Donkey guides galloped past. The Berber men are very exotic, with dark skin & eyes & long dark hair, and scarves piled rakishly on their heads.

We had to show our tickets and passports. The guy looked at my truly hideous passport photo & said I was "so beautiful!" I cracked up b/c it was so obviously a practiced line.

We stopped at overlook where we could see Great Rift Valley & Palestine in the distance.

Arrived Monastery at noon.

wow wow wow! Incredible! It was actually a temple and place of worship for various civilizations. Priests lived in nearby caves. I couldn't believe it but there were no other people there! Tourism is down due to Gaza War.

Restaurant at Monastery had nice seating to view Monastery. Quiet & didn't detract from experience of being there.

We came in the "back door" starting with Monastery & ending with Treasury. Most people go in main entrance straight to Treasury via 1.2 km "sig" (narrow gorge).

Our route was also downhill 800 steps instead of uphill, a huge blessing in the heat (80° today).

My quads were burning going down all those steps! Glad for my trekking poles.

Arrived at Nabatean Restaurant around 1 pm after walking about 7 miles. Inese and I shared a felafel and a shawarma sandwich. Both good, felafel better. Pomegranate juice fabulous.

Continued Petra tour with Suleiman, seeing the Roman town center and more carved tombs. Interesting to see all the caves and imagine the Bedouin community that lived here

until they were relocated in 1983.
(See "Married to a Bedouin" book.)

Vendors had become so pushy and disruptive that guides and tourists complained, so the government evicted most of them and only allows a few permits. I was ecstatic to learn this. military presence prevents their return.

Saving the best for last, we came to the Treasury. Unbelievable. Better than I could ever imagine. I cried with emotion thinking of how long I've dreamed of coming here, and remembering seeing Indiana Jones with my dad.

Walked 1.2 km through sig with few other people. A mystical place, cool & special. Electric carts transport people, which detracts a little, but at least they're quiet.

Arrive Silk Road Hotel 3:30. Nice room w/ balcony. Hot & sweaty - shower felt amazing. And fresh clothes.

my mom's Recipe restaurant at 6:30. Charming place on roof with breeze & view. Inese & I shared tabouleh & mutabel (pured eggplant with

tahini. Here, babaghanoush is chunky.
3 JD (\$4.20) for dinner.

Mohammed told us about his marriage. They chose each other & her parents had to approve and do an effective "background check" into his means & character. He made written agreement to buy her gold, clothes, and makeup, plus furniture, and pay for the wedding. He says it all cost him \$20 k.

Around 1000 guests each gave gifts of 20-50 JD, so in theory he came out ahead...

Some of us went to Petra by night. 17 JD (\$24). The siq is lined with candelaria and the front of the Treasury. Maybe 200 people there? Flute & rababa (instrument with single string played with bow) music was hauntingly beautiful in that setting. Front of Treasury then lit with soft colored light. They served small cups of sweet tea. Ended with a prayer for peace & the end of war. Really lovely evening.

Back to hotel 10:15. 66°, perfect sleep temp with screen door.

Tue mar 18

In case I didn't mention it yesterday, workers in Petra can live onsite with their animals & families, in caves.

Slept pretty well. Balcony door open. Some street noise. Up 6:45. 63°.

Hotel breakfast nothing special. I had cereal, yogurt, fruit, egg.

Start hiking at 8. Madras Trail was beautiful, like desert SW USA. Moderately strenuous with steps in some places and a few easy scrambles. Up & down (mostly up) to the High Place of Sacrifice, a tower, and two obelisks. About 6 km.

Then Wadi Farasa trail, easy downhill 6 km. to center of Petra ancient city.

Similarities ~~to~~ between Bedouin & Navajo?

Bedouin may feel they're treated as 2nd class or looked down on? Navajo are sovereign and own & manage any monuments on their land.

Good interpretive signs in all of Petra. Good trail signs. They also have a decent trail map & site brochure. The town & visitor center are actually quite nicely done. Mohammed thinks tourism

is down 80% since Gaza War! Israel bombed Gaza again this morning "

Nice view & breeze from up on the high place. Only saw one other hiker.

Guy playing flute in valley down below sounded amazing & magical in that setting. Oleander aren't blooming yet. Goats can't eat them, thank goodness. Several shrubs & low greenery in places.

At the Garden Hall monument a man and his wife sold coffee, tea, and souvenirs.

The setting was absolutely gorgeous. We sat on fabric-covered benches ~~inside~~ the cool interior. The tea was sweet and delicious. The woman sat outside in the hot sun next to a small fire, heating the water and making tea & coffee. The man was the flute player. His flute was made of a piece of trekking pole! Like everyone I've encountered here, he spoke great English.

We arrived in "downtown" ancient Petra about noon. We had the afternoon free. Inese and I had an ice cream bar for lunch. We weren't that hungry and just wanted something cold.

Then we walked to the Byzantine Church, which had beautiful frescoes. It was 79° and I was hot, but I just kept

drinking water.

Next we climbed up to the Royal Tombs. The swirly red stone is absolutely gorgeous, like red marble. Inese said, "Today isn't Tuesday, it's Tombsday!"

So many tombs. Chatted with a sophisticated vendor who spoke perfect English and has traveled extensively. Inese bought a polished stone. Prices for souvenirs are very high and everything looks "made in China."

Inese dragged me up one last flight of stairs to see some non-descript tombs and they turned out to be a highlight, with stunning red swirls with white, black, and ochre, like a painting. The only unfortunate was a refrigerator carcass. Inese is indefatigable. The younger folks in the group climbed a mountain this afternoon!

It felt like a long slog back to the visitor center in the heat. Electric carts ferry people to the Treasury. They're quiet but intrusive.

The museum was boring - just artefacts from Petra.

The aisan plants that ~~are~~ grow

Petra

25

in profusion are *Urginia maritima*, also called "sea squill." Pottery shards everywhere.

Very different to be without a guide. Vendors more persistent but not bad. Most seem to speak quite a bit of English.

Back to hotel at 4 for rinse & chill. Nine miles today according to my Fit app.

At 7 we climbed into 3 taxis (trucks) that drove us up the hill to Elan Restaurant in downtown Petra^{Wadi Musa}. Watched guy making fresh pita bread. Another guy ~~made~~ making kunafah, a dessert of goat cheese, vermicelli or cous cous, pistachios, and sugar syrup, over ~~at~~ high flames on a big platter. We split one four ways. Loved it! Didn't taste goaty.

I had Chicken Sawary, stew with potato, tomato, onion, bell pepper (I removed the pepper). No rice or bread and I still couldn't finish all. Delicious. I felt I needed protein after all the walking.

Inese and I walked back from the restaurant around 9. Lovely warm evening, 63°. Petra seems like a nice small city, lively & well lit at 9 pm. 10 miles total today.

Wadi Rum

27 26

Wed. March 19

52° at 6:30. Some loud car noise but I slept well. Breakfast today: egg, cheese, yogurt, hummus, chunky corn flakes, nescafe, halvah (saved for morning snack).

On the bus at 8:40. Heading south to Wadi Rum via the steep streets of Wadi Musa. Stop at viewpoint: mt. Arun, Petra Valley, dust haze, & clouds gathering behind mountains to the west. (They never made it to our side.)

Everyone refers to the money here as "JDs" (Jordanian Dinars).

About 2.5 hours to Wadi Rum with stops. Landscape bleak, barren, brown, rocky, no trees or plants. Mohammed says only 1% of Jordan is green. Evidence of plowing but fields brown except one green field with corn sprouts. Dams here, and irrigation.

Mohammed says kids wear uniforms, schools are poor b/c teachers underpaid. 50 kids in a class.

Stop at souvenir shop. Expensive, plus nothing I wanted. They had three beautiful old tribal hats.

Mohammed says the King is well liked. He and the PM work together to make all decisions. He says the Parliament doesn't do anything, they just talk. The King works hard & is a good leader

and anti-war. Jordan has no oil or other lucrative resources & is dependent on foreign aid. Foreign aid also supports their refugees from Gaza. Trump's defunding of USAID is a huge problem.

Camels grazing with babies! Walled residences with date gardens.

Stopped to see old trains. In 1900 the Ottomans opened a railway from Damascus to Mecca, 1500 km. Reduced pilgrimage from 40 days to 4 days, and protected pilgrims from bandits. Railway also used for military & commerce. 30k pilgrims used in 1914. War for Arab state starts 1915. Lawrence of Arabia's troops cut line in 1916 to stop Ottoman supplies. Train hasn't been used since.

Interesting to listen to Mohammed and Taisir chatting in Arabic. I catch a few words here & there. The driver sings in Arabic.

Stop at VC for tickets. meet three trucks and transfer luggage. We sit on benches in the back. Wadi Rum has gorgeous sandstone rock formations! We drove for a while across the flat desert with

these formations all around us. We stopped to climb up a sand slope to a great view. Stopped again to see petroglyphs in Alkazali Canyon.

Ratam shrubs covered in white flowers. Good for grazing, said to improve milk production. My thighs are so sore today I worry I've done damage!

Stopped again and climb up to rock arch. It's very windy.* Lunch in shade, out of wind. Canned stewed tomatoes heated up, hummus from a can, "Istanbul cheese" from a box (soft & salty), plus pita. OK but not great.

Two trucks left and a third is a sag wagon that drives ahead and waits. We can leave our packs and travel light.

Start walking at 3. Intense headwind and walking in sand exhausting. I tried to walk faster to not slow others down, and got exhausted, so I rode in the truck for a mile or so. After that I walked slower and felt stronger. Saw Tristram's starlings.

Sandstone "drips" on many of the rock faces look Gaudiesque, and like dripping frosting or melting candle wax. Never saw anything like it.

* tea & medicinal herb demo at vendor tent

29

Climb down a rocky slope to camp, arrive at 5. My Fit app says 6 miles. High today 72°. Cabins are like Little Petra camp, with fabric interiors. Cozy. Camp has dining area, nice shower block, round common area with chairs.

There are many desert camps here, and most are empty now. Brutal for the local economy.

Watched sunset from rocks above camp. Fab buffet dinner with salads & upside down chicken. Getting chilly. Tired from all the fresh air & exercise. Bed at 9:30.

Thurs March 20

47° at 7 am. A quiet night. Had to get up once to pee. Chilly but not too bad. Solar lights block the stars.

Start hiking 8:30. Camps everywhere. Mohammed says there aren't a lot of hikers even when the camps are full, but there are more vehicles zooming around.

We walked 13.5 miles, first into the White Desert, where the rocks & sand

are white instead of red. After two hours of walking, which flew by, we stopped for a rest & snack. Walking was on soft but not deep sand most of the time. Our sag wagon zoomed ahead, music blaring, to meet us at each stop.

Bank swallows floated around us on the breeze.

Chip is funny & loud. He's the Elf of the group.

Cold wind & I wore gloves and my puffy.

Lunch stop 11:30-1:30. Driver cooked fresh stewed tomatoes, fried potatoes, & fried cauliflower. It took 1.5 hours! Cooked with gas. Also served hummus, cheese, & bread. We sat on a mat on the ground and it got very uncomfortable.

The first spot had graffiti and lots of garbage so we moved. First we collected two bags of garbage. Fried cauliflower is called zahrah - yummy but oily.

Came to a camel farm with a baby camel. Took group's pics at a table rock and a window arch.

The wind blew cold off & on, and otherwise it was a perfect temp in the sun - warm but not hot. The scenery really is majestic here.

Small bitter melons growing on bushes. Walked to the base of a hill with green rocks. Most of the group climbed up to see a spring & pool in a cave, but I stayed to watch 3 camels grazing. One of them ate a plastic bag!

Back to camp at 5, proud of myself for having walked so far! Tea & Scottish shortbread!

Dinner was zarb, rice, ^{lamb} meat & vegies cooked underground for 4 hours! Delicious. Everyone in Jordan seems to use Kleenex for napkins. Big wood stove kept the dining area cozy. An orange cat meowed for scraps.

Wadi Rum is at about 5000' elevation. 50° at 9 pm.

Mohammed says typical Jordanian salary is 300-700 JD per month (\$423-987).

To Madaba

32

Friday March 21

39° at 6:30 AM. 10 hours of sleep!

Drank less so only up once to pee. Small breakfast b/c no hiking today: egg, cheese, yogurt, honey, halvah.

Heathrow airport power knocked out by substation fire. All tourmates' flights at risk of delay.

On ~~bus~~ ~~into~~ truck at 8. Inese and I ride inside, as it's too cold with wind. 30 minutes to village. Great chance to chat with young driver, Rhad (it means thunder). He played great Arab music. Wadi Rum village has 3000 people, 4 schools. Dependent on tourism. Lots of movies filmed locally.

Rhad's dad & mom live just over the border in Saudi, 90 min. away, where there is grazing for their animals. If you don't go too far over the border you don't have to cross legally. His stepmom lives in Wadi Rum village with Rhad's young ~~step~~^{half} siblings.

Onto the bus about 8:30. No one else wanted my favorite spot, upfront with windshield view. I could ask lots of questions too.

Camel crossing & "camel slow down" signs. Taisir sings a song about losing his mom:

332

Rough translation: It's a beautiful night full of stars. But it's the worst night b/c you are dying b/c you are old.

Mohammed starts fasting today. If you're more than 80 km from home you don't have to fast but you should do "make up" days when you return. He read the Quran at prayer times. You can just move your lips when reading. You only have to say (or sing) out loud for the evening prayer.

Share family pictures with mo & Taisir. Say hello to mo's mom - chubby veiled face big smile. On her way to work as nail technician. I can now say "hello, how are you, thanks be to god I am well," and a dozen other words & phrases.

Sky half cloudy, white & gray. Stopped for one brief police check. Driver made sure he & mo were seatbelted as we approached. Taisir showed pics of him driving famous middle Eastern people such as singers.

Good road surface & signage. Camels crossing the highway. Parallels to Mexico: raised crosswalks, totes,

garbage, invisible 3rd lane.

Inese had dry cough, grateful for my robatussin gels so she could sleep.

Wind & solar farms - no oil in Jordan so high motivation to be energy self-sufficient I think.

Inese a very positive person, never complains, thanks everyone for a good day, loves Intrepid trips. We've been very compatible.

I've been glad for my power block. No usable outlet in Wadi Rum camp & none on bus.

Mo studying St. George mosaic b4 we arrive Madaba. He works hard to be a good guide.

Starting his own adventure travel biz in Georgia & Armenia b/c it's green there and he wants to take Arab speakers to green places. He also speaks Turkish.

Souvenir & toilet stop 10:45. Cold! Prices very high: 5 JD (\$7) for tiny bead bracelet, 10 JD (\$14) for small soap, 50 JD (\$70) for thin embroidered by machine blouse.

Dry air, dry nose & bleeds like in AZ.

Car charging stations at gas stations.

When we turned west toward Madaba the land got greener, with trees, crops, orchards.

One more week of Ramadan. Eid ("eed") 3-day celebration of visiting family, giving sweets,

& money to children.

Overcast & raining in the north.

Arrive Madaba 1pm. Rain stops but it's cold! St. George's church mosaic is earliest Biblical places map, 1500 years old, partially destroyed by earthquake in 749? Church rebuilt 1869? & mosaic protected. Church now being renovated now to restore to original as much as possible. Sat in on tour guide explanation of how map correlates to Bible places & stories - fascinating. Lots of Christians in Madaba. Three top Christian sites in Jordan: Bethany (Christ baptized here), mt. Nebo, St. George's church.

1:30 stop for 10 JD buffet lunch. I ate rice/chicken/potato & tried several puddings that were pretty good. In general I've found Jordanian sweets & pastries to be underwhelming. View from restaurant of Jericho (West Bank) & mountains to the west under low dark clouds. Elevation ~2500 feet.

2:15 drive down to Dead Sea, 1300 feet below sea level & lowest point on earth.

Arrive 3pm at Dead Sea Spa Hotel. Five star. Upgrade from usual Intrepid hotel. Day pass to use towels, pool, changing area.

madaba

36

Nice lobby but changing areas a bit basic. No private showers so you can't rinse off under your suit. Outdoor cold showers.

Warmer down there but only 59°. Water temp around 75° felt cold to me, but I'd been cold all day. I did not stay in long. So buoyant my hair didn't even get wet! The salt stung a bit, especially my crotch, which I couldn't rinse. Shore is lined with hotels. This one was busy. Big group of Mormon FSY youth here. Sea level dropping 1 meter per year.

Left at 5:30. Check into Aitch hotel in Madaba at 6:15. Nice room but no heat. Shower felt great. Long johns all day - glad I brought them.

Dinner restaurant loud & boisterous. Other big groups. Fireplace burning logs on TV! I had Greek salad - not good - and some mutabel & tabouli of Inese's, with bread. Only the mutabel was good. They served everyone small slice of light cake with nuts. 4 JD (\$5.60).

End of tour speeches drowned out by noise. We gave Muhammed his tip. I gave 30 JD (\$42), about the average recommended by Intrepid.

Sat across from Taisir. Asked him basic questions using Google translate. He has 2 kids & 5 young

grandkids & lives 35 km north of Amman.

Leave restaurant 9:15. First Communion party with loud music & dancing next door.

Moh gave us each a postcard with thank you note & a Jordan magnet.

Sat Mar 22

We're staying at the Aitch Hotel, 3-star, good location, walking distance to Old Town sites. Inese left at 5:15 am. I slept til 6:45. 43°.

They brought me an individual huge breakfast: pita, hummus, labneh yogurt, black olives (they are not kalamatas here, they're like our canned black olives), tomato, cucumber, two small apples, orange slices, jam, butter, cake, & cookies! I ate the hummus, yogurt, veggies - oh, and four delicious little felafel balls - and saved the sponge cake & cookies for afternoon snack.

Walk to visitor center about 8³⁰, past "New Orthodox School for Boys" playing military music.

Madaba known as "city of mosaics" b/c there are so many ancient ones here.

Old Town "Acropolis" (top of hill) has most of the sites.

Visitor center in old stone house has short intro to area video and great interpretive signs in side rooms.

"Heritage trail" mosaic with arrow in sidewalk. Visited "archeological site 1" with mosaics & Roman road section. Stumbled upon Arabella Workshops for mosaics. Five women sat around a table making mosaics. They waved me inside and I watched for a while. They use big clippers to cut the stone, tweezers to hold the stone, dip in glue, & place. The owner spoke good English. I bought a tree of life mosaic made by one of the women. 25 JD (\$35) in a nice wood frame. Takes about 16 hours to make.

"Tourist Street" is an attractive car-free stretch of shops. The vendors weren't pushy.

Next I visited "Burnt Palace" with more old mosaics. They're a bit dulled by dust, but still beautiful & impressive.

Dar Al Saraya is a crafts workshop in an old stone house.

St. John Church & Acropolis are about his beheading. The view belfry was closed. Interesting rooms under the church with old Christian chants playing, mosaic reproductions, and freaky damp tunnels and a 3000 y.o. cistern. The church above is still used.

Madaba has a lot of Christians. Ticket room has great old photos of town.

Church of the Apostles, more great mosaics, I'm the only one there.

Back up to Old Town about 12:40, lots of women out shopping with kids. Men's robe called dishdashah. They sell thick fur-lined ones for this cold weather. It's a cold place half the year and no insulation or central heat.

Back to hotel at 1 for phone charge and snack. It's up to 49°. Still overcast.

Uber to mt. Nebo at 3. 3JD + 1JD tip. 7 km. Driver lived in Columbus OH for 5 years but spoke little English. Peds definitely do not have the right of way here! He practically mowed down a woman trying to cross.

Up at the Moses Memorial on mt. Nebo I paid my last money for the entrance fee - I just happened to have exactly

3 JD. A lovely place, quiet & parklike, with olive & pine trees, a panoramic view to the Dead Sea & West Bank, and beautiful mosaics in the gorgeously-restored memorial. Chatted with a nice Franciscan monk who lives in the nearby monastery. Lovely green farms scattered on the hills below. Sun comes out!

Left about 3:45. Decided to walk back - only 4 miles, took two hours. Pine trees and tiny red poppies. Road not too busy. Shoulder narrow but adequate. Cars drive very fast!

People very friendly here, and everywhere I've been. Lots of "Welcome to Jordan." They seem very grateful for visitors.

Two boys about age 9 run over to shake my hand and say hello. I avoid eye contact with grown men, but say hello to young kids, who generally like to practice English.

Tourism Police pull over to make sure I'm okay!

meet four adorable kids and chat in a mix of English & Arabic & take their picture. They ask me if I prefer Israel or Palestine and I say Palestine. Little girl in pink says "I love you" & gives me hug!

For 1.3 km before town there's a wonderful

wide sidewalk and fields growing fava beans. Plastic bags ~~in~~ pile against fences like fish in nets. So much honking!

Drivers are very impatient.

Back to hotel at 5:45. Big portrait of King's family over reception. Pictures of him everywhere. Hotel plays guitar musak.

I'm told that people don't pig out after fasting all day, and often eat a lighter meal than usual.

Hotel guy so kind. Got me water and brought over 2 chocolates, told me I could sleep on the couch if I was tired. I gave him the cloth Intrepid bag and he said his wife would like it "very much."

After 10 miles of walking I'm tired, and I have a stiff neck, so instead of heading out to see Madaba at night, I headed to the airport a bit early.

My Uber driver spoke no English, and I worried about a boring or awkward 30-minute trip. I noticed that he turned down the music and I remembered how to say "I like Arab music" and

Flight home

42

he turned it up. I really enjoyed it, and I think it made the trip more pleasant for him as well. It cost around \$30 (Uber added a bunch of fees I haven't figured out yet).

At the airport there was baggage screening before I got to the ~~the~~ checkin desk. They told me I would need to check my binoculars (I didn't). At the actual security screening they flagged my binocs & big camera, but said I could carry them on. At my gate by 9 pm. Flight not until 1, so I ~~took the electric tram to the Oasis and slept on the hard artificial turf for 2 hours.~~ found an empty massage chair & slept for 2 hours. Pretty comfy. Airport PA very loud. Glad for ear plugs.

Bulkhead seat, no seatmate, mostly empty 3-hour flight. I slept a lot. Meal of chicken fajita wrap (edible), sponge cake (good), lemon mint beverage (didn't like).

Arrive Doha 3:30 am. So tired! Transfers have to go thru luggage screening. Tram to The Orchard tropical garden. Slept two hours on hard astroturf to sound of birds and water. Many people sleeping.

Two more security checks to get to

43

my gate, and had to show passport + boarding pass 5 or 6 times. Because flying to US, we require extra security.

Middle seat with large woman on aisle. Really, really cramped. 3-month-old baby screamed behind me for most of the 14-hour flight. Slept as much as I could. Two hours in they served chicken with wild rice, fruit cup, and pudding, all pretty tasty. Flight left Doha at 8 am.

Nine hours in they served chicken with pesto pasta, carrot & pea cup (inedible to me), and a tasty tropical pudding/mousse.

With 1.5 hours to go, my window seatmate was going crazy so we stood by the door and I showed her pics of Jordan.

~~Passport~~ Passport control at Seatac super easy. Didn't even have to show passport, just took a photo of my face.

Landed about 12:30, home by 2. My seatmates both work at Amazon. One was returning from 6 wks in Kerala, India - her first time home

3 1/2 years. The other was returning from biz trip to Hyderabad.

Guide Mohammed - age 30 7 mo baby ^{starting Georgia Armenia tour co.}

Inese - Latvian journalist lives in UK, companion to owner of Yeo organic dairy empire
age 66

Peter Wrench - UK cameraman

Ameena Wrench - UK age 60 oncology nurse

Rebecca UK - age 37? cybersecurity

Laura - Pediatrician Missouri, moving to OR,
age 42? Fast walker. Caffeine addict.
sleep deprived, lost depth perception.

Chip - Romanian, lives in UK, late 40s, fit
but vapes, electrician, loud & funny
like Elfar

Simon - UK dentist, three kids

Matt - UK, owns travel co., 2 kids

Charles - US, 73, director/producer, Northern
Exposure, etc. mountaineer, drinker.