

Jordan Historical Days and Arabian Nights

By Lisa Loverro

"Yalla Yalla," my tour guide, Ibrahim, shouts over to me. It's a term I have become familiar with during my trip to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. "Yalla Yalla" in Arabic translates to "Let's move it," or "Hurry up," a phrase I came to ignore, as I wanted to soak in every bit of beauty Jordan was offering up to me.

I visited Jordan this past February while attending the Jordan Tourism Board's third annual Travelmart. The Jordan Travelmart, held at King Hussein Convention Center on the Dead Sea, was teeming with tour operators and agents such as Goway and Virtuoso, along with journalists and photographers, primarily from the Americas, to meet with the local Jordanian suppliers. It was all business by day with presentations from Albert Herrera, VP of Hotels, Destinations and Tours for Virtuoso and Phil Otterson, President of American Tourism Society and Partner of the Cragmont Baron Group. Otterson presented some compelling facts about the state of tourism in Jordan, for example, "U.S. visitation in Jordan from 2007 to 2008 increased 8.4% while Canadian visitation increased 16.5% year over year."

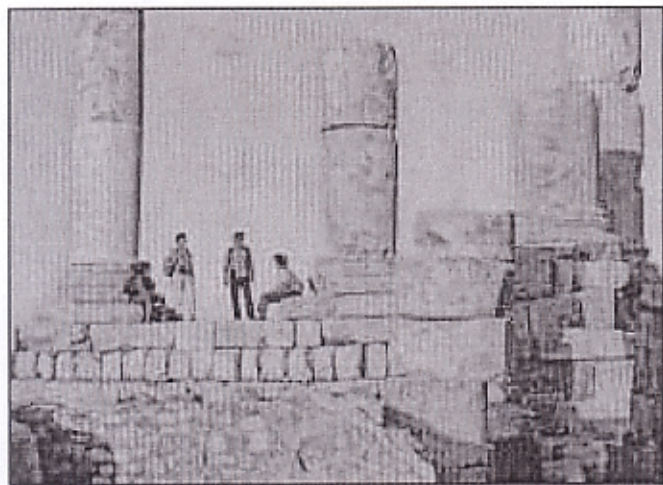
The Jordan Tourism Board North America, with Malia Asfour at its helm as director, has made huge strides in positioning this peaceful Middle Eastern country as a viable mainstream destination for Americans, and with Petra recently named one of the New Seven Wonders of the World, they may have finally been rewarded with a well-deserved prize.

By night, the Jordan TravelMart transformed itself into one large Middle Eastern dance festival with its host hotels, the Movenpick, Marriott and Holiday Inn orchestrating live bands, hip DJs and endless buffets.

So, how to effectively sell this destination? If you look at the facts, it's pretty simple. For clients who are a bit skeptical about visiting the Middle East, Jordan may be the perfect introduction. The country is a U.S. ally with western attitudes and Middle Eastern tradition. And, with English as their second language, maneuvering one's way around the country is no sweat. Its biggest selling point, besides housing one of the new Seven Wonders of the World, is its place in biblical history.

Roman Holiday

A visit to the ancient Roman city of Jerash, lying just north of their capital city of Amman, dates back to 63 BC. One of the greatest cities during the Roman Empire, set in a field of flowers and green grass, one could easily spend an entire day mesmerized by the sight of Roman columns in the Middle East. The capital city of Amman is a good starting point and it's home to a number of higher-end hotel chains. The Kempinski (www.kempinski.com), The Four Season (www.fourseasons.com) and the Grand Hyatt (www.amman.grand.hyatt.com), just to name a few, would make any foreigner feel at home when first arriving in Jordan.



A visit to the Amman Citadel (above) is a perfect day trip as is strolling through the outdoor markets for an authentic taste of everyday life.

Jesus Was Here

Religious tourism plays a major role in Jordan, with groups from around the globe flocking to Bethany Beyond the Jordan, where Jesus is believed to have been baptized, some even making the journey for themselves to be baptized, as I witnessed while visiting. Another historical sight is Mount Nebo, the sight from which Moses viewed the Promised Land. It's not until one visits these sites that you can begin to understand their place in history. We have all read how Moses stood on Mount Nebo or parted the Red Sea, but when you actually stand at these locations, it becomes real, something you can hold on to—a tangible piece of history.

Desert Delights

A particularly spiritual experience exists in Wadi Rum with a chance to sleep under the stars with the Bedouins. As British officer T.E. Lawrence so eloquently described in his "Seven Pillars of Wisdom" referring to the romance of Wadi Rum: "No man can live this life and emerge unchanged. He will carry, however faint, the imprint of the desert, the brand which marks the nomad; and he will have within him the yearning to return, weak or insistent according to his nature. For this cruel land can cast a spell which no temperate climate can match."

If your client chooses to overnight in Wadi Rum, be sure to have them pack warm clothing as it can be an extremely cold and an uncomfortable experience if not properly prepared.

In the Dana Nature Reserve, the Fenyan Eco Lodge (www.fenyan.com) is a 26-room, high-end lodge lit almost entirely by candles, reserving their solar-charged generators for only the restaurant's kitchen and in-room bathrooms. During the daylight hours, the lodge offers hiking, biking and visits to the Bedouin encampments; in the evening, dine by candlelight and star gaze on their outdoor rooftop lounge.

Floating Away

The Dead Sea is a sight to behold...especially at dusk as the setting sun sinks over the Israeli horizon. The locals flock here on weekends (which by the way is Friday and Saturday), to escape the oppressive heat in the summer. Tourists flock here for a variety of reasons, primarily for bragging rights that they have experienced the "Dead Sea Float." The tourist area is no more than a few hotels clustered together along the coastline.

The Kempinski, (www.kempinski.com), the most upscale of them all, houses an Anantara Spa. The newest addition is the Holiday Inn Dead Sea Resort (www.ichotelsgroup.com), which is a surprisingly upscale version of the brand most Americans have come to know. The Marriott (www.marriott.com) and the Movenpick (www.movenpick-hotels.com) are suitable higher-end choices along with the Kempinski for those clients who prefer a full service resort and Spa.

View a Wonder

Petra, one of the new Seven Wonders of the World and a UNESCO World Heritage site, is the real draw and the main reason for everyone's current fascination with Jordan. The ancient Nabatean city, dating back to the 6th century BC, is completely carved into the red stone with mountains towering over the area. After walking almost one mile through a narrow passageway, Petra's main "treasury" building is then revealed in all its glory. A few hundred steps straight up (almost 900 hundred to be precise) will reveal the Monastery building—a tough climb but well worth the effort. A spiritual encounter to say the least, Petra is a must-visit while in Jordan. Lying just outside of Petra, the Movenpick Petra is a solid choice with consistent service and accommodations. A visit to the Petra Kitchen offers visitors a chance to create their own Middle Eastern meal working side by side with chefs. It's a fun evening and a great way to introduce the cuisine of the region to its visitors. Visits to Petra Kitchen can be arranged through Petra Moon Tourism (www.petramoon.com) who will also be able to assist you with itineraries throughout Jordan.

Sea Adventure

The town of Aqaba, a resort town in the far south of Jordan lies directly on the Red Sea and plays an important role as it's the Country's only seaport. Water sports, including diving and snorkeling are readily available as are high-end hotels such as the Movenpick. Sinbad Tours (www.sinbadjo.com) operates sailing excursions on the Red Sea, from which your clients will be able to view Israel, Egypt and Saudi Arabia simultaneously.

Royal Jordanian Airlines and Delta offer non-stop flights from New York City to Amman, Jordan. For more information check www.visitjordan.com.

EL AL Airlines Predicts High Summer Volume

EL AL, Israel's national airline, is recommending that passengers planning a trip to Israel this summer book their flights as soon as possible as the demand for travel via air is substantially higher as compared to the same time period last year. Recent industry reports show that summer airfare demand is growing and summer bookings are 25% ahead of the same time period last year. There are a few EL AL promotions available for travel this summer: one offers a savings of up to 50% for children under the age of 12 when travelling with two adults. Another promotion provides passengers departing from many cities in the USA (who purchase a roundtrip ticket) a free travel cell phone to use in Israel and keep forever. The EL AL flight schedule between the USA and Israel includes 33 nonstop flights every week, 28 of which are from New York (JFK/Newark) plus 5 weekly from Los Angeles (the only nonstops between the West Coast and Israel).

Visit www.elal.com or call 800-223-6700.

Safi Airways Rolls Out New Aircraft

Safi Airways is currently in the process of acquiring two Airbus A320s to complement its short-haul fleet and another Airbus A340-300 for its long-haul routes. A new logo and corporate identity, designed to give a younger and fresher look, will also be phased into its airport branding, advertising and existing aircraft. Safi Airways will fly the Airbus A320 from Kabul on the regional routes, including Dubai. The airline currently operates scheduled flights between Kabul and four international destinations—Frankfurt, Dubai, Doha and Kuwait—all of which serve as strategic hubs linking Afghanistan to the world. Call 877-261-7234.

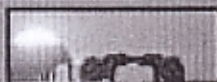
SAA & JetBlue Launch Interline Agreement

South African Airways has launched a new comprehensive interline agreement with JetBlue Airways. This new agreement represents collaboration between two world-class, award-winning airlines that are dedicated to excellence and focused on providing the most comfortable and convenient way to travel. Now, customers will have even more convenient options for traveling between over 60 cities served by JetBlue in the U.S. and Caribbean and over 40 destinations in Southern Africa served by South African Airways via JetBlue's hub and SAA's gateway at New York (JFK Airport). For SAA reservations call 800-722-9675 or visit www.flysaa.com

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