

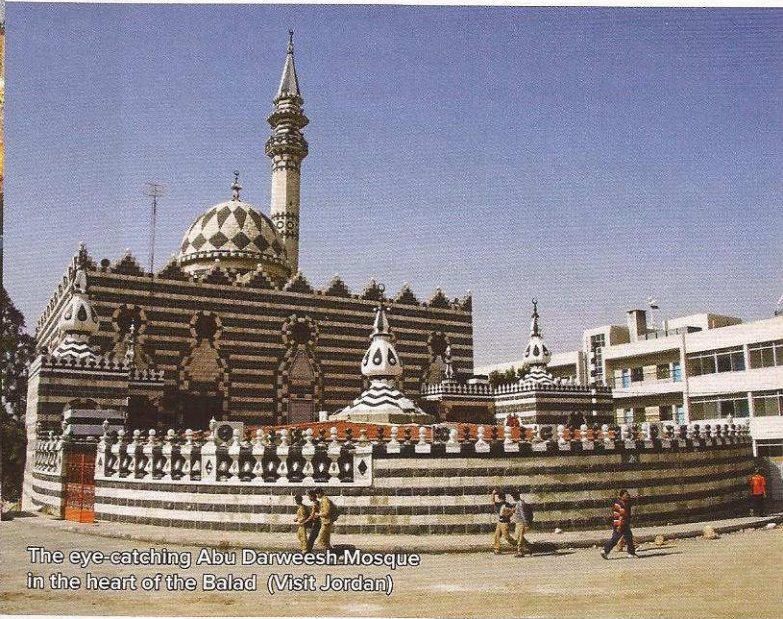






# Amman

## A MODERN ARAB CITY



The eye-catching Abu Darweesh-Mosque  
in the heart of the Balad (Visit Jordan)

**WORDS JOSEPH REANEY**

Most cities in the Islamic world can be divided into two camps: the great cultural hubs of antiquity, such as Damascus and Istanbul, and the great Arab centres of the future, like Dubai and Doha. Yet Amman is unique in the way it straddles the two archetypes, offering a refreshing blend of the past and the future. A capital with many memorable millenia behind it, and a confidence about the years ahead; a city where time-honoured temples and mosques jostle for space with soaring skyscrapers and picket-fenced villas.

This endless contrast between old and new, conservative and cosmopolitan, East and West makes the Jordanian capital one of the most fascinating tourist destinations in the Middle East.

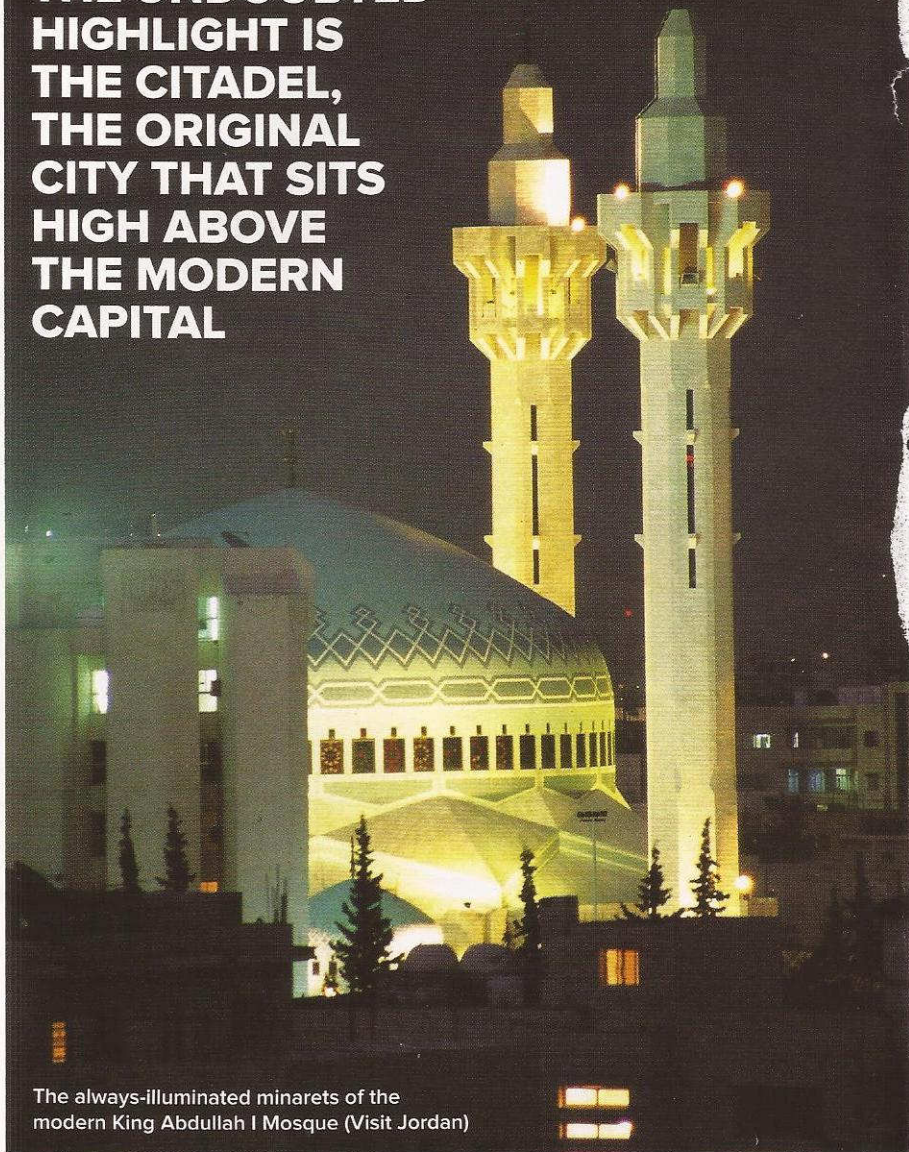


## MOSQUES, MUSEUMS AND MANGO STREET

Although at the centre of a historic kingdom, most of Amman's tourist sights can be experienced during a single weekend visit. The undoubted highlight is the Citadel, the original city that sits high above the modern capital, home to a plethora of historic constructions including the Temple of Herakles, Umayyad Palace and the Byzantine Church (as well as the National Archaeological Museum and some spectacular panoramic views across Amman's many hills), but other ancient highlights include the Roman Theatre and Nyphamaeum, the Ammonite watchtower and the striking black-and-white Abu Darweesh mosque.

Amman is also home to some superb museums and galleries, including the Small House of the Arts, the Folklore Museum, the Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts and the Museum of Popular Tradition, and it hosts several interesting cultural festivals every year. But perhaps the best thing to do here is to simply take a stroll, with the bohemian district Jabal Amman (and its famous Mango Street) a particular delight.

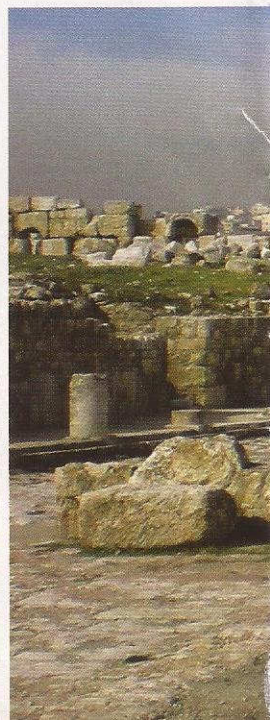
## THE UNDOUBTED HIGHLIGHT IS THE CITADEL, THE ORIGINAL CITY THAT SITS HIGH ABOVE THE MODERN CAPITAL



The always-illuminated minarets of the modern King Abdullah I Mosque (Visit Jordan)



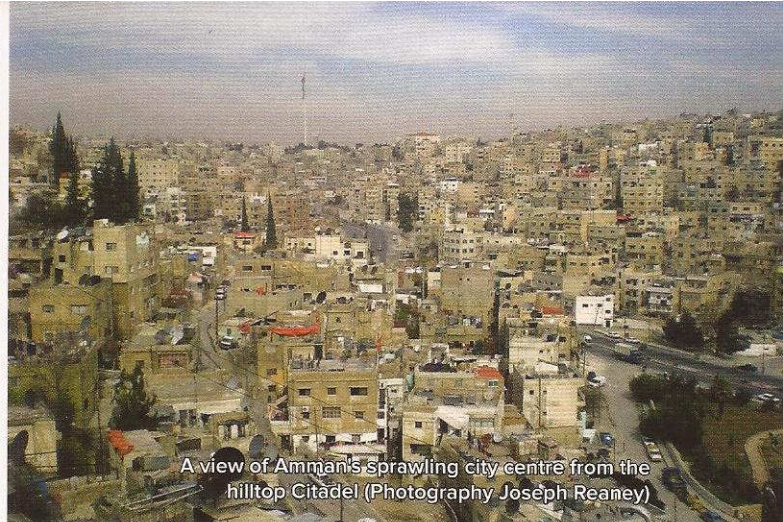
Corinthian columns at the Citadel, the original city looming over Amman (Visit Jordan)







Fireworks above the old city and its famous Roman Theatre (Visit Jordan)



A view of Amman's sprawling city centre from the hilltop Citadel (Photography Joseph Reaney)

## SHOPPING, SHISHA AND SURROUNDING HILLS

Amman mightn't have the medieval souqs and bazaars of most ancient Islamic capitals, but it does have some of the best shopping in the region – from the narrow goods-stacked alleyways of The Balad to the cosy antique stores of Rainbow Street to the international brands of the City Mall. It also happens to be one of the cheapest places on earth to buy gold jewellery, as long as you're willing to bargain hard! But it isn't just shopping that Amman is renowned for... it has a wealth of exceptional cultural facilities too.

While Downtown Amman boasts the city's more traditional pleasures (which often involves a clay pot of tea and a scorching shisha pipe), the contemporary cultural delights are to

be sampled out in the West. Home to the more 'Europeanised' population of Amman, these leafy boulevards boast several excellent English-language theatres, some top-notch art house cinemas and even the odd celebrated concert hall.

Alternatively, if you want to get away from it all, take a hike in the surrounding hills. Although Amman, like Rome, was originally built around seven hills, the sprawling city has reached many more since then.

## HUMMUS AND HOUSE MUSIC

As with the cultural attractions, Amman's dining options differ greatly depending on where you are in the city, so in Downtown Amman you'll find traditional Middle Eastern restaurants, tea houses, shisha bars and Arabic

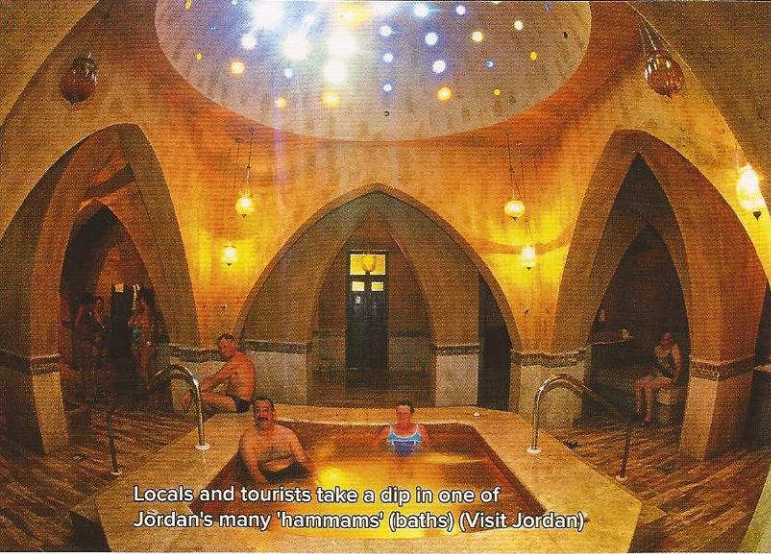
sweet joints, while in West Amman you'll find international cuisine, franchise coffee shops and some of the region's most happening nightlife, from bars to cocktail joints to all-night clubs.

If you're interested in traditional Jordanian fare, make sure you try 'mansaf', a simple yet delicious meal comprised of lamb cooked in a yoghurt sauce, served with rice and typically eaten with one's hands, as the rest of the cuisine is more generally Middle Eastern (you will see falafel, shwarma and hummus on every menu). For an extra culinary experience, you should also pop into a typical Arabic sweet shop to sample baklava – insanely-sweet pastry filled with syrup and chopped nuts. But if you're not feeling so adventurous,

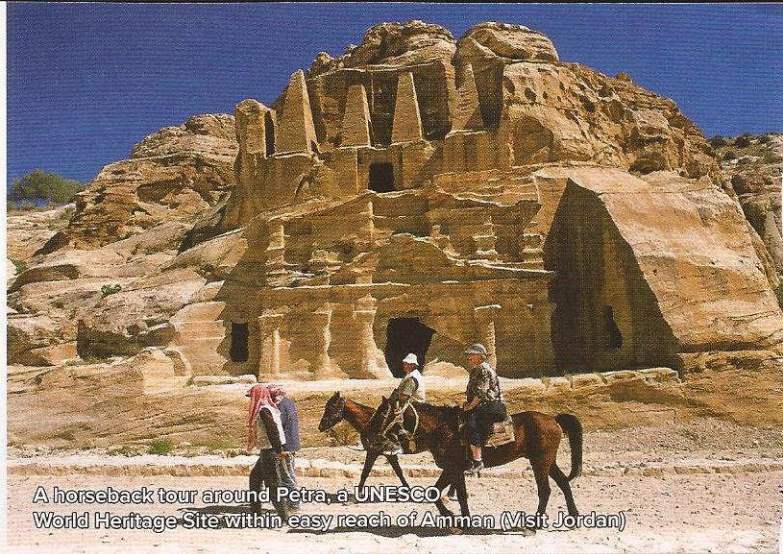


Roman remains at the ancient Citadel, located high above the modern city (Photography Joseph Reaney)



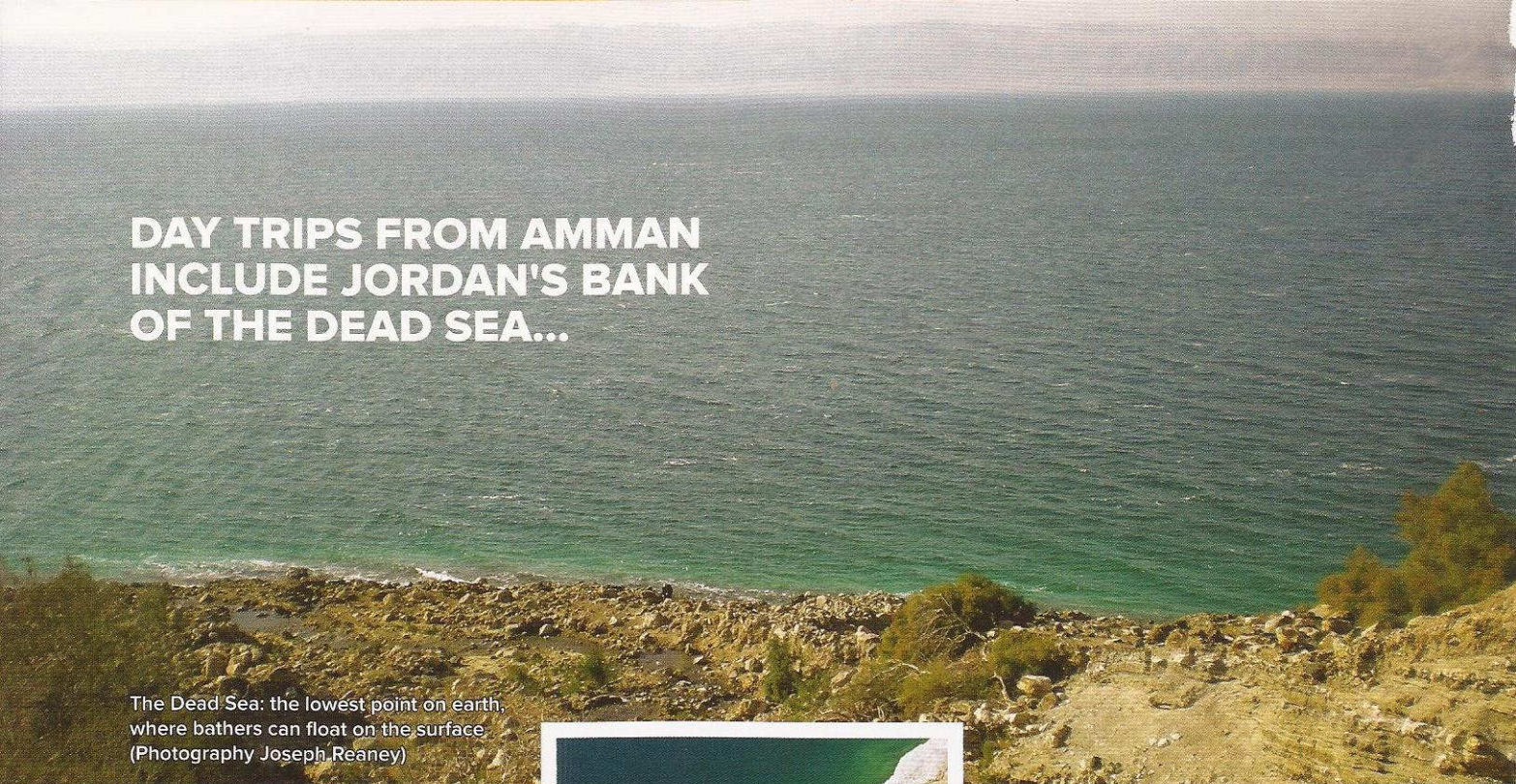


Locals and tourists take a dip in one of Jordan's many 'hammams' (baths) (Visit Jordan)



A horseback tour around Petra, a UNESCO World Heritage Site within easy reach of Amman (Visit Jordan)

## DAY TRIPS FROM AMMAN INCLUDE JORDAN'S BANK OF THE DEAD SEA...

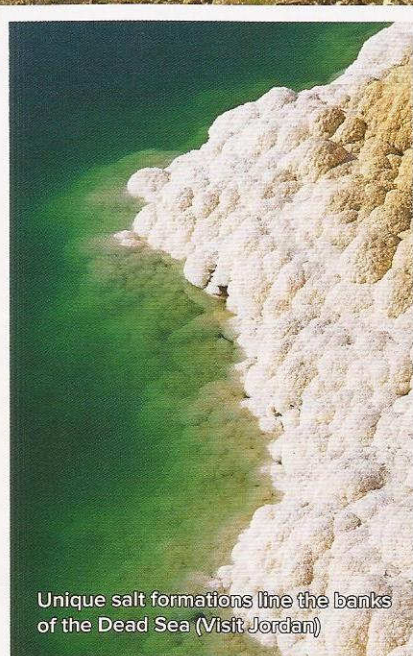


The Dead Sea: the lowest point on earth, where bathers can float on the surface (Photography Joseph Reaney)

that's no problem: there are plenty of more familiar gastronomy options in West Amman.

### DAY TRIPS, THE DEAD SEA AND DAMASCUS

If you have the chance to stay in Amman for more than a couple of days, you'll discover another reason why this city is so special: it's a gateway to some of the most spectacular sights on earth. Day trips from Amman include Jordan's bank of the Dead Sea (the lowest point on earth, where bathers can float on the surface), Wadi Rum valley (a spectacular



Unique salt formations line the banks of the Dead Sea (Visit Jordan)

sandstone canyon where you can camp out with Bedouins) and, of course, Petra (an ancient city carved right out of the rock, a UNESCO World Heritage Site).

Jordan's capital is located for discovering other important cities of the ancient world, with Jerusalem only one hour to the west and Damascus only three hours to the north. Whether you are content to stay in the city or want to use it as a base to venture out, Amman is one of the region's great travel destinations. A magical, multifarious metropolis at the heart of the Middle East. ☺