

JORDAN



REGIONAL INFORMATION



General Info

Jordan – the Hashemite Kingdom

Known for its outstanding hospitality and the world-famous tourist sites of Petra and the Dead Sea, tourism in Jordan is booming. This small Kingdom in the heart of the Middle East has much to offer the visitor – from Bedouin music and food to stunning desert landscape and incredible ancient monuments and history. Alongside that, the friendly locals, many of whom speak English, will make any visit to Jordan an unforgettable experience.

People



Religion & Culture

Mostly Muslim, shrinking Christian numbers

Jordan is predominantly a Sunni Muslim country with about 92% of the populace following Sunni Islam. A further 2% are Shia Muslims. About 6% are Christian made up of Greek Orthodox, Catholic and Coptic mainly. Cities like the capital, Amman and Madaba, Salt and Kerkak have higher Christian proportions than the national average. However the Christian population has fallen significantly since 1950 when they made up about 30% of the population. This is mainly due to emigration; to the US, Canada and Europe predominantly.

Population

Young and growing

The population of Jordan is about 6.2m and growing fast. This growth is a result both of a high birth rate (over 2% p.a.) and net migration (at around 0.6% p.a.). This has resulted in a very young population (almost a third of the population are under 15). There are 11 males for every 10 females in Jordan. The literacy rate has risen from around 33% in 1952 (the start of King Hussein's era) to about 91.5% today. Most Jordanians are Arabs though there are small communities of Circassians, Chechens, Armenians and Kurds. Around 60% are of Palestinian extraction.

Language

Arabic, English, French and Russian

Arabic is the only official language in Jordan but English is widely spoken in business and government as well as amongst educated people. Both Arabic and English are taught in both private and public schools. French is also spoken in many schools, in many of which it is obligatory and a vibrant Francophone community exists in the country. Armenian and other related Circassian languages are spoken amongst those communities and Russian is spoken by many older Jordanians.

Food

Arabic and Bedouin styles

Apart from the most common Arabic dishes, Jordanian food distinguishes itself mainly through Bedouin influences. Mansaf, spit-roasted lamb basted in spices, is very popular. It is usually served with rice, pine nuts, and often garnished with the lambs head! In desert areas such as Wadi Rum a Bedouin barbeque is a favourite where a selection of meats are cooked in a pit oven covered with sand. Pistachio nut is used in many deserts and black tea and coffee are ubiquitous.

Environment



Geography

Roughly the size of Portugal

Jordan is a landlocked country and shares borders with Israel, Syria, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. Jordan's land mass covers about 92m square kilometres (roughly the same size as Portugal). Most of the country sits on a plateau at between 700m and 1000m above sea level, with a few mountainous areas. Much of Jordan is covered by desert, particularly in the south and east. The Dead Sea is at the lowest point on the planet with its surface at about 430m below sea level, and the bottom thought to be about 825m below sea level.



Flora & Fauna

Life in the desert

Jordan is not famous for its flora and fauna and indeed it doesn't have a rich haul of either. However Palaeolithic remains show that this area was once home to bears, zebras, lions, elephants and rhinos. Today you can find mongoose, lynx, striped hyenas, gazelles, various foxes and wolves. Plant species that can be found include Cedar, Cactus, Eucalyptus, Cedar and Pine. There are however over 400 species of bird in Jordan including pelicans, cormorants, petrels, herons, storks and various rare species.

Climate

Mediterranean climate mostly

The main contrast in Jordan's weather is between the rainy season from November until April and the dry season for the rest of the year. This Mediterranean style climate means summers are hot and almost completely dry with more variable winters during which almost all precipitation falls. The further from the Mediterranean an area is, the less rain it receives and hence there is more desert further inland.

History & Economy



History

From British control to a Kingdom

Jordan's history began around 2000BC when Semitic Aromites settled around the Jordan river. The area has since fallen under the control of Hittites, Egyptians, Israelites, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Ottomans and British amongst others. In 1921, in the aftermath of World War I, the Palestinian province of Transjordan, originally planned as part of a Jewish state was given by the British to King Abdullah I of the Hashemite family. In 1946, full independence followed. Today called Jordan it is ruled by King Abdullah II.

Economy

Free trade and educated workforce

With little in the way of natural resources Jordan has had to work harder than most to create and develop its economy. It has done this by developing a highly educated workforce, opening more Free Trade Agreements than any other Middle Eastern country and economic liberalisation. Its GDP growth has been at around 7% p.a. for a decade prior to the global economic crisis. Jordan's future growth is pinned on its uranium and oil exports, its IT industry and its growing tourism sector.