

Amman: Enchanting Mixture of Ancient and Modern



Amman is the modern, as well as the ancient capital of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, spreading over 19 hills, or jebels. Known as Rabbath-Ammon during prehistoric periods and later as Philadelphia, the ancient city that was once part of the Decapolis league, the city now boasts a population of around 2 million.

Often referred to as the white city due to its low size canvas of stone houses, Amman offers a variety of historic sites and modern facilities that is complemented by wonderfully gracious and welcoming people.

Amman is a busy commercial and administrative center with many fine hotels, restaurants, art galleries and museums. Shopping amenities vary from old markets and souqs full of gold and spices to modern boutiques offering local handicrafts and imported fashions.

Towering above Amman, the site of the earliest fortifications is now subject of numerous excavations, which have revealed remains from the Neolithic period as well as from the Hellenistic and late Roman to Arab Islamic Ages.



Most of Amman's noteworthy historical sites are clustered in the downtown area. The ancient

Citadel, which towers above the city from atop Jabal al-Qala'a, is a good place to begin a tour of the city. The Citadel is the site of ancient Rabbath-Ammon, and excavations here have revealed numerous Roman, Byzantine and early Islamic remains. The most impressive building of the Citadel, known simply as al-Qasr ("the Palace"), dates back to the Islamic Umayyad period. Its exact function is unclear, but it includes a monumental gateway, an audience hall and four vaulted chambers. A colonnaded street also runs through the complex. To the north and northeast are the ruins of Umayyad palace grounds.

Close to al-Qasr lie the remains of a small Byzantine basilica. Corinthian columns mark the site of the church, which is thought to date from the sixth or seventh century CE. About 100 meters south of the church is what is thought to have been a temple of Hercules, today also known as the Great Temple of Amman. The temple was built in the reign of the emperor Marcus Aurelius (161-180 CE), and is currently under restoration.

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At the foot of the Citadel there lies the 6000 seats Roman Theatre which is deep-sided bowl carved into the hill and still used for cultural events. Another newly restored theater is the 500-seats Odeon, which is used for concerts. The three museums found in the area offer a glimpse of history and culture, they are the Jordan Archaeological Museums, the Folklore Museum and the Museum of Popular Tradition.

Amman is an excellent base to explore the environs and many interesting half-day or full-day trips can be arranged. The ancient town of Salt and the traditional villages such as Fuheis and Kan Zaman, are less than an hour away and feature traditional restaurants, handicrafts complexes and picturesque streets from ancient times.

Photos: TR, Jordan Tourism Coalition

Date: 2009-12-28

Article link:

<https://www.tourism-review.com/travel-tourism-magazine-amman-enchanted-mixture-of-ancient-and-modern-article1074>