



THE NABATEAN KINGDOM (Saudi Arabia - Jordan)

2011-07-15

KINGDOM of SAUDI ARABIA

The lesser visited Mada'in Saleh (KSA) and Petra (Jordan) !

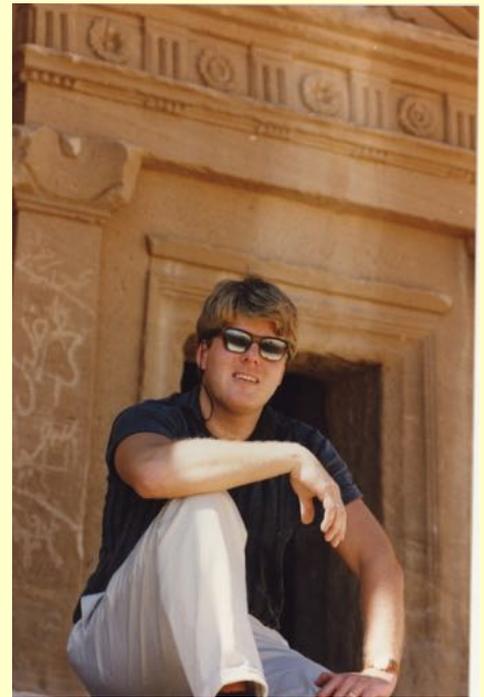
Al-Hijr Archaeological Site (Mada'in Salih)*
UNESCO World Heritage Site



A row of tombs from the al-Khazneimat group, Mada'in Saleh

Country	 Saudi Arabia
Type	Cultural
Criteria	i, ii
Reference	1293 
Region**	Arab States
Inscription history	
Inscription	2008 (32nd Session)

For historical dates and more in-depth information on the nabatean kingdom, I am recommend visiting the websites which are loaded with details. In order to get to the archaeological site in Saudi Arabia, you do need to get a permit prior to visiting. Needless to say, you first need an invitation (business only applicable) to get into the KSA!



When Posted in Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia during the first Gulf War (1989-1991) working for Tetra Pak, I took the opportunity of visiting some of the ancient sites in the country. Not knowing the significance at the time and long before I had the chance of visiting the by far better known "sister-site" in Jordan - Petra. Al Hijr (Mada'in Saleh) is a UNESCO World Heritage Site as is Petra of course.

This Pre-Islamic archeological site dates back to 1st century C.E. and is the second largest and southern most city of the Nabatean Kingdom after Petra itself. Having seen both sites Madain Saleh in 1989 and Petra in 2000, I can truly say the Madain Saleh is just as impressive and well preserved.

The road from Jeddah to to Medinah is superb (picture below). It is the last three hours onward to the city of Al Ulah nearby Madain Saleh which is pretty bad (not to mention dusty and hot). You are now midway to Petra from Medinah (i.e. 50 km south of Petra and 40 km north of Medinah). This is also along the main stretch of the former railroad - **The Hejaz Railway** - which was built in the beginning of the last century (I'll get to this later).





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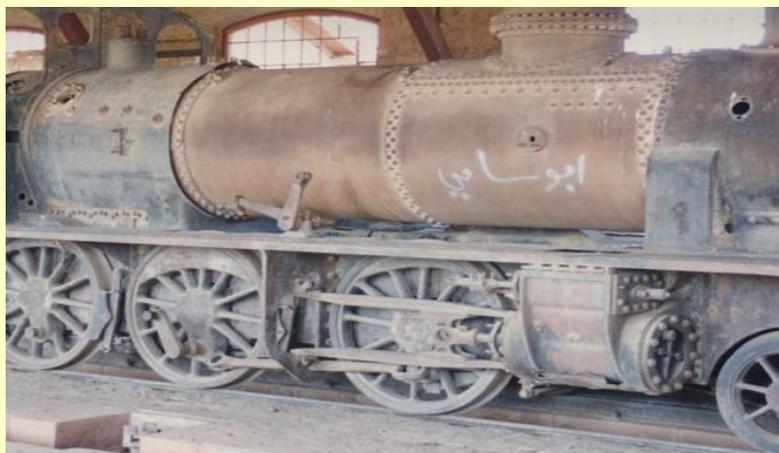
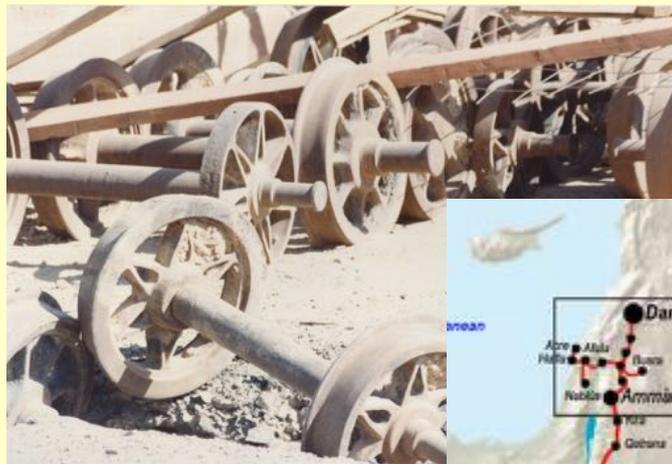
The Hijaz railway between Medinah and Damascus !

A railway was constructed (1901–08) on the orders of Ottoman sultan Abdul Hamid II to link Damascus and Jerusalem in the north-west with Medina and Mecca, hence facilitating the pilgrimage journey and to politically and economically consolidate the Ottoman administration of the centers of Islamic faith. A station was built north of Al-Hijr for the maintenance of locomotives, offices and dormitories for railroad staff. The railway also pro-

vided greater accessibility to the site - Medain Saleh. However, this was destroyed in a local revolt during World War I. Despite this, several archaeological investigations continued to be conducted in the site beginning in the World War I period to the establishment of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the 1930s up to the 1960s. The railway station has also been restored and now includes 16 buildings.



Not much remains from the old railway....

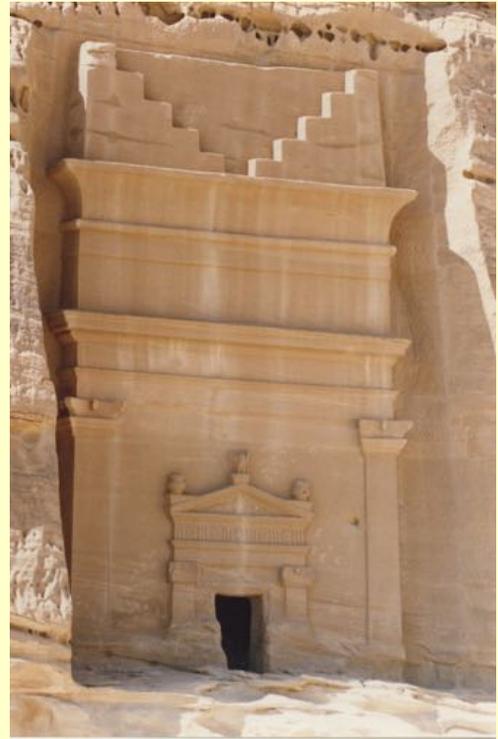




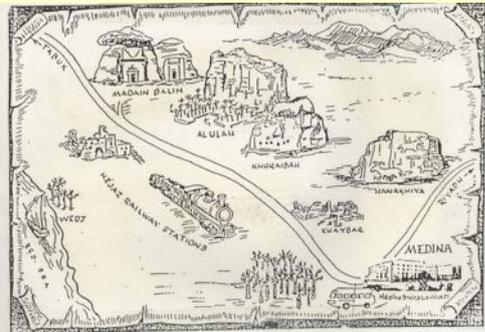
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Medain Saleh is still largely unexplored and unexcavated to date !

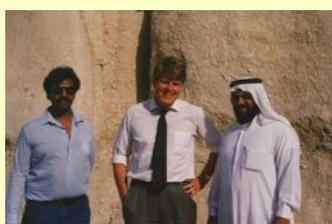


One of the tombs at Al-Hijr lit up in the evening certainly adds to the effects of this already amazing site. It is unbearably hot during the day to try and cover the site by walking - it has to be done in shorter stretches. It is however possible to rest and cool off inside the tombs - highly recommended....



Although this site was proclaimed as an archaeological treasure in the early 1970s, few excavations has been conducted since. It was only in recent years - 2008 - that the site was proclaimed as an UNESCO World Heritage site. Some excavations and archaeolo-

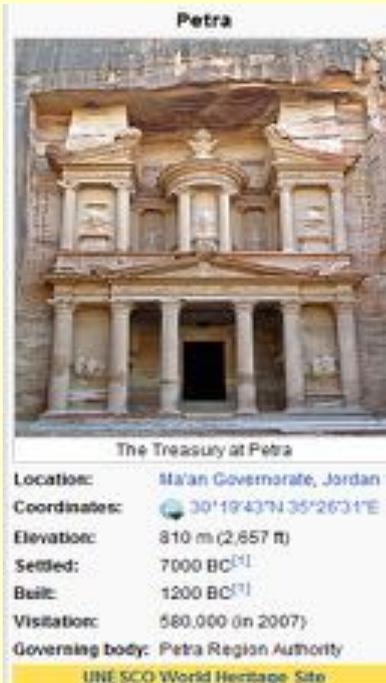
gical explorations have been carried out since 2000 when foreign experts / archaeologist have been invited in to the Kingdom to help out.





THE NABATEAN KINGDOM (1989 & 2000)

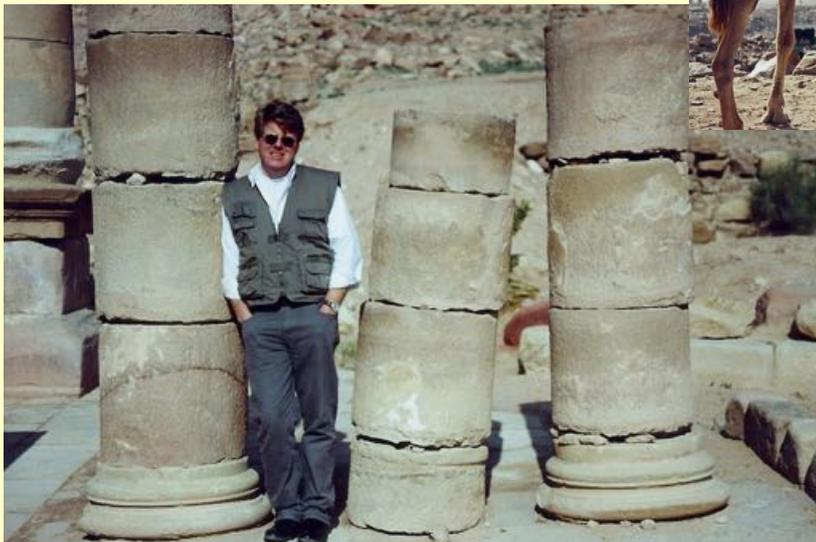
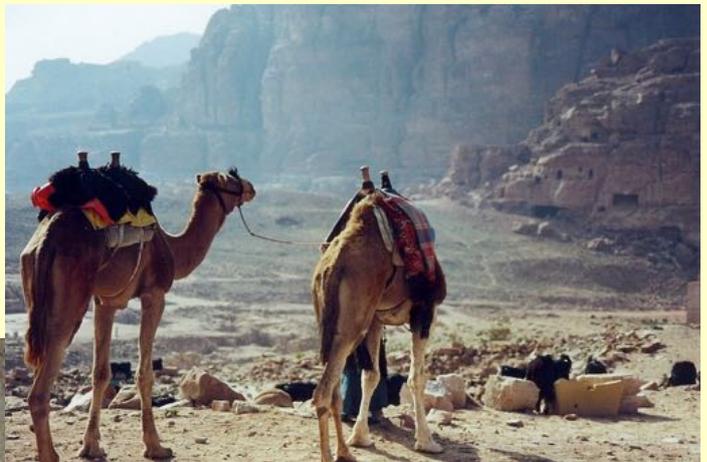
JORDAN



Finally I make to the capital of the Nabataeans !

10 years after my visit to Medain Saleh in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, I finally make it to Petra - the ancient capital of the Nabataean Kingdom with a history dating back some 2000 years. My expectations are naturally high from all that I have read and heard. The five hour drive from Amman on comparatively very good roads only increases my expectations - and I am not disappointed with what I find. I am however surprised by the relatively few tourists and visitors.

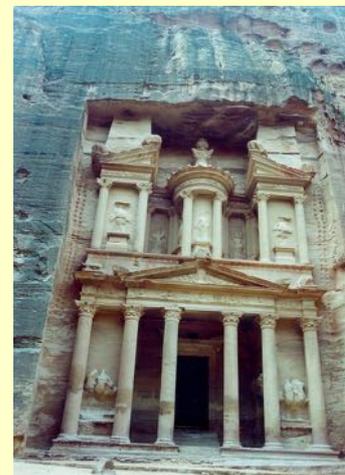
Petra became widely admired for its refined culture, massive architecture, water channels and myriads of complex dam constructions.



The rock in the Rose-red city !

The ultimate destination is the astonishing rose-red city of Petra (see picture to the right). Bring comfortable shoes as you will be spending most of the day walking. There are some spectacular settings deep inside a narrow gorge. From the main entrance you will walk through a narrow and deep gorge where the cliff walls soar some 100 meters. This is also where some of the

"compulsary" pictures are taken... If you get tired of walking (the main stretch is 1,2 km long) there is also the alternative horses-and-cart transport or why not try one of the camels. In all events, do prepare for a hot day. There are foodstalls with readily available softdrinks and water along the route. Petra is indeed worth all the fuzz and is definitely worthy of a detour if you are travelling to Jordan. There are hotells available in the nearby town where one can overnight - should you want to spend 2 days in all.

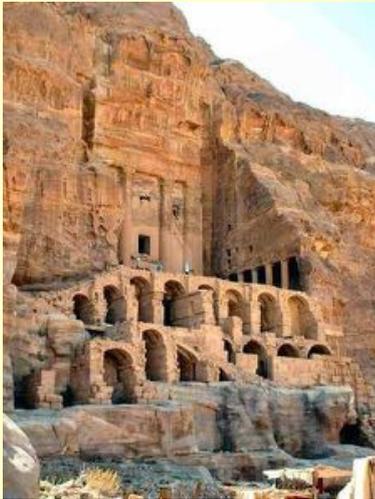




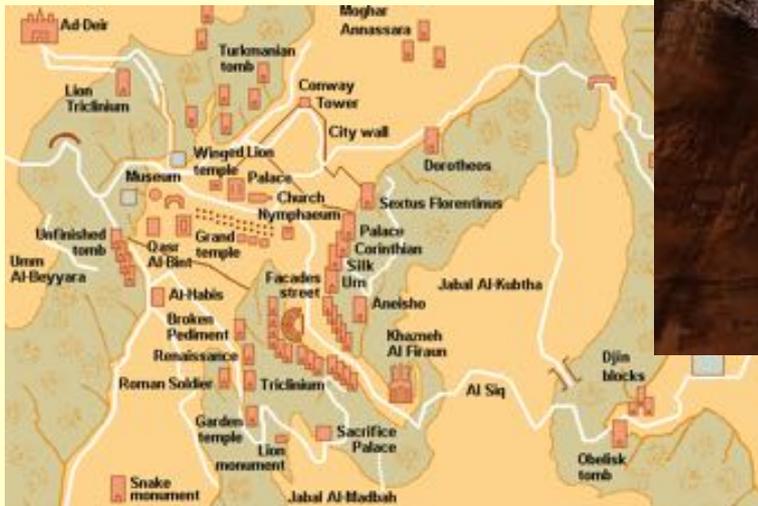
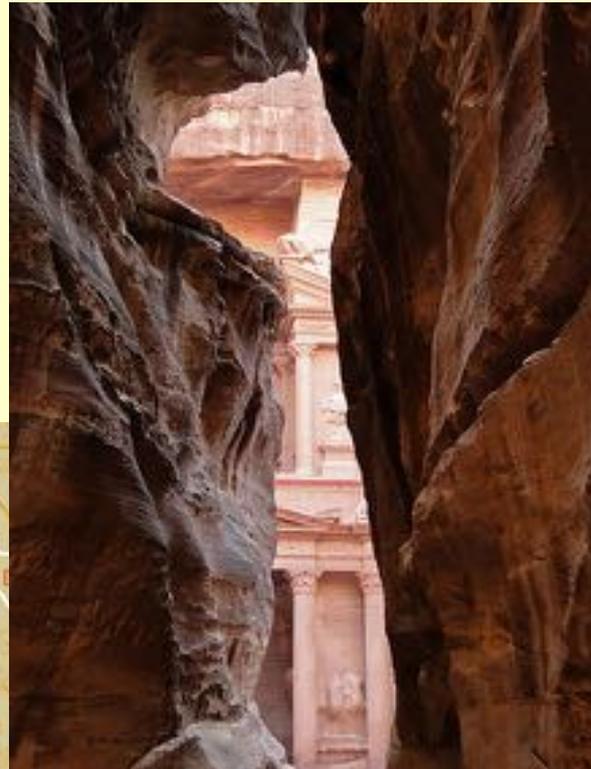
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Petra the centre point on the Arabic trading route !



Petra was the centre from where they controlled and dominated the trading routes of ancient Arabia. They even charged tolls on goods transported through Petra on the caravans, who brought frankincense and myrrh (from Oman - see my travel log from Oman) spices and silk from India and China as well as African Ivory and animal hides. At the height of its power, the kingdom stretched from Damascus in the north and included parts of Sinai and Negev deserts, effectively ruling the greater part of Arabia.



Petra was lost by the 16th century !

...and it so remained for almost 300 years. Then in 1812 the site was rediscovered by a Swiss adventurer, persuaded by his Beduin guide to take him to the site of the rumored lost city and ruins of Wadi Musa - better known as Petra today. Despite this rediscovery it was not until 1924 that the first archaeological exca-

vations were carried out of Petra by the British. **How to get to Petra?** For the fastest trip, take the Desert highway from Amman directly to Petra. For a more scenic approach, use the King's highway through Madaba. Petra is appr. 260 km from Amman. Tourist bus companies operate daily scheduled services to Petra from Amman. There are many to choose from. Once at Petra, you should negotiate your own guide locally...

