

RUFUS READE TOURS



Birdwatching and Antiquities of Jordan

with our guest birder, Ian Andrews

21 March to 6 April 2020



Jordan is home to some of the most iconic ruins in the Mediterranean world at Petra, and the site of extraordinary events in WWI when Lawrence of Arabia turned the tables on his Turkish adversaries. It is also a place for some very good and varied birdwatching. The habitats range from the dryness of the desert, to wet marshland, from the edges of the Dead Sea to the shores of the Red Sea, around excellent Roman ruins to important Biblical sites. A distinguishing feature of the country is that the Great Rift valley of East Africa runs from the south northwards through the country. We are very fortunate to have as our UK birder Ian Andrews who used to work as a geologist in Jordan, and produced the first comprehensive guide book to the birds of Jordan: we hope to post you out a copy once your booking is confirmed. The plan is to combine an understanding of the history and geology of this lovely country with its very interesting birdlife. The tour is led by Rufus Reade.

Highlights

UK Jordanian bird expert, Aqaba, Wadi Rum, Petra, Dead Sea, Jerash Roman city, Mount Nebo, Baptism site on the River Jordan and the Azraq Wetland reserve.

Flights

The tour begins in Aqaba, and ends in the capital Amman. You are invited to get flights which suit you. You may want to fly out a little earlier or leave a little later. There will be transfers to/from our hotels offered for the 'target' flights, at the beginning and end of the holiday. At the time of publishing these details, airlines are not showing their full timetables, but there are likely to be direct flights from London to Aqaba, as well as direct flights from Amman back to London. There are low-cost alternatives with Easyjet and Ryanair which may involve a change of planes. The airlines do not necessarily offer daily flights. If you choose to arrive earlier and leave later we can help with booking your accommodation. Once the tour is confirmed we plan to name the target flights.

JOURNEY DETAILS

Location Jordan
Dates 21 March to 6 April
2020
Duration 16 nights
Min 10 travellers
Max 14 travellers
Price £3750 (based on
sharing a twin/double room).
Single room supplement £430
Deposit £500

What's included: Accommodation in comfortable western-style hotels (approx equivalent to 2 and 3 star, rooms with attached facilities) in RSCN guesthouses and in a Bedouin style tented camp (as per the itinerary), all staff tips, all land transport, entry to all the sites mentioned.

Meals: the cost of the holiday includes all meals from breakfast on 22 March to breakfast on 6 April. Lunches will be in the form of meals in local restaurants, or lunch boxes on 4 occasions, or in our overnight accommodation.

What's not included in the cost of the holiday: your international flights, luggage portage, personal travel insurance, laundry, camera fees, phonecalls, your visa (currently not required for those who begin in Aqaba) and all beverages.

Our Guides: we will have the help and services of a local English-speaking national birder.

Guest birder: the tour is accompanied by a UK guest birder.

Tour Leader: the tour is escorted by Rufus Reade.

Walking: All walks rated moderate.

The tour is organised by Rufus Reade Tours, 40 Pilrig Street, Edinburgh EH6 5AL
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Flights: This itinerary is published before all flight schedules are available: we are envisaging meeting a target flight offered by Easyjet into Aqaba from London Gatwick on Saturday 21 March. There are UK flights from the London and Edinburgh to Aqaba, and return flights from Amman to London over a number of routes, including direct flights (Royal Jordanian and British Airways), as well as via Istanbul (Turkish Airlines) Krakow and Cyprus (Easyjet/Ryanair).



Itinerary

Saturday 21 March Our 'target' flight is the Easyjet direct flight from Gatwick to Aqaba, which we'll meet. Otherwise it's independent arrangements by taxi to our hotel, the 4-star La Costa. First of three nights in Aqaba.

Sunday 22 March A relaxed day to allow ourselves to acclimatise, but we will offer excursions to do some birdwatching nearby, visit local archeological sites, or you may prefer to swim in the Red Sea or pool.

Monday 23 March In the morning we'll visit the Aqaba Bird Observatory, an area of former sewerage settling ponds adjacent to the Israeli border. Here a multitude of migrating birds pause before they make the long flight to Africa or head back to Europe. Anything can turn up! Water birds abound and the tamarisk and eucalypts hold warblers, shrikes and flycatchers. Resident birds include the stunning Little Green Bee-eater. We'll shift our attention south of the port of Aqaba in the afternoon to look for White-eyed Gulls on the Red Sea beaches. Dinner and overnight in Aqaba.

Tuesday 24 March After breakfast we will drive to the desert of Wadi Rum (1 hour). In Wadi Rum village we'll transfer into jeeps to explore the desert, climb a rock bridge, see some petroglyphs and walk through a canyon. We will hope to see the resident Mourning and White-crowned Black Wheatears on our excursion. We'll watch the sunset and then enjoy dinner in a Bedouin camp. Overnight in deluxe tents (with attached facilities) at the Rahayeb Desert Camp.

Wednesday 25 March After some early morning birding in the desert (and breakfast), we'll drive up the escarpment to the plateau. We will pause to look for the special birds of this high-altitude habitat and lunch at a restored, traditional hill-top village. On reaching Petra we'll check in to the Petra Palace (our hotel for the next 3 nights), which is close to the entrance of the ancient site. If there proves to be free time today you might want to visit the newly opened Petra Museum.

Thursday 26 March There are so many ways to see Petra, so many ways to approach the archaeological site. One can walk in at dawn, in the full light of day or in the dark! The first approach has a curious mystical quality, as the light reflects off the red rock. The walk in takes one directly to the Treasury. From there you can climb up to the High Place of Sacrifice and enjoy the marvelous view over this Nabatean city. Find a nice spot with a good view to enjoy your picnic lunch. Make your way back down via Wadi Farasa and see all the colourful tombs and monuments along the way. It's one



of the best areas to see the beautiful rose red coloured Sinai Rosefinch (the National Bird of Jordan). Rock Martins also flit in and out of the tombs. Overnight in Petra.

Friday 27 March In the morning we'll explore the neighbouring Little Petra area. For those wanting to we can birdwatch at Al Tobaq hill where we will look for flocks of migrant birds of prey flying north, including Steppe Buzzards, Black Kites and Steppe Eagles. Overnight in Petra.

Saturday 28 March After breakfast we'll move on towards Dana with a stop at Shobak Castle en route. In the afternoon we will wander between the sandstone domes at Rummana camp with many birds to look for including the Palestinian Sunbird. Dinner and first of two nights in the 3-star RSCN Dana Guesthouse which overlooks the magnificent Wadi Dana with views extending to Wadi Araba below.

Sunday 29 March A day of relaxing birding in the spectacular surroundings of Dana. Even from the veranda we can look for Griffon Vultures, Short-toed Eagles and Blue Rock Thrushes that breed locally. We will spend the morning birdwatching amongst the pomegranate trees of the irrigated gardens below the village and then drive a short distance to look for the near-endemic Syrian Serins in area's evergreen oak woods. Dinner and overnight in the 3-star RSCN Dana Guesthouse.

Monday 30 March Today we'll drive from 1500 m above sea level to 400 m below to birdwatch in the Dead Sea area. We will stop at several places en route to admire the views and we may also see Blackstarts and the aptly-named Dead Sea Sparrow. At the end of the day we'll reach the 3-star RSCN Wadi Mujib Chalets by the shore of the Dead Sea where we will overnight. There will be a chance to swim (or rather float) in the Dead Sea (you will need some form of footwear).

Tuesday 31 March Today we will visit the Baptism site on the River Jordan and enjoy some birding during the day in the Jordan Valley. We then head to Madaba where we'll stay two nights in the 2-star Mariam Hotel.

Wednesday 1 April We'll start with a morning in Madaba, where we'll visit the Byzantine Church of Saint George with its famous mosaics of the Promised Land. Later we'll drive to Mount Nebo from which Moses is said to have seen the Land Flowing with Milk and Honey, which he himself never reached. If there is time, we could explore a nearby wadi on the rift margin. Return to Madaba for our second night.

Thursday 2 April From Madaba we'll drive to Azraq, exploring the Azraq and Shaumari areas and the surrounding flint and limestone. First of two nights in the RSCN Azraq Lodge.

Friday 3 April Early morning birding at Azraq Wetland Reserve. Then visit Shaumari with a chance to see the Oryx, Ostrich and other animals being reintroduced. We will also scour the low wadis for the many species of larks and wheatears that characterise this eastern desert maybe visiting the basalt desert towards the east if there is time. Second overnight at the Azraq Lodge.

Saturday 4 April On our relaxed drive to Amman we will visit Qasr Amra with its 8th century frescoes. Birdwatching in the Atlantic Pistachio trees that line the adjacent Wadi al Butm should prove its attractiveness as site for migrants in this otherwise tree-less desert. The 'desert castle' or caravanserai of Qasr Kharana is also worth a stop. First of two nights in La Locanda Boutique Hotel in Amman.

Sunday 5 April We'll drive north through greener valleys and hillsides to visit the extensive ruins of the Roman city of Jerash. During our morning visit there will also be an opportunity to see flowers and birds around the site. We will particularly look out for Blue Rock Thrushes and Black-eared Wheatears. We will return to Amman via the more Mediterranean habitats of the Northern Rift Margins. Return to Amman for our last night.

Monday 6 April Transfer to Queen Alia International Airport south of Amman. Flight schedules are not yet available.

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