

# JORDAN EXPECTS GROWING NUMBERS OF VISITORS



Despite a crippling 16.5% decline in tourism in 2011, travelers are expected to flock to Jordan in droves this summer. While Egypt and Syria are currently undergoing political strife the Kingdom of Jordan has become the premier destination in the Gulf.

It is no wonder that Jordan is a favorite tourist hotspot. The dinar is steady and there are no political upheavals. **A stable economy along with stunning landscapes, ancient ruins and a rich arts and cultural sector create many reasons for tourists to go.**

Officials are predicting a huge influx of tourists, mainly from Europe and the GCC. The current hotel occupancy rate of 80% is expected to climb to 100% within weeks or sooner according to the Jordan Hotel Association. Many will travel to Jordan to beat the heat as it provides a cooler climate than many surrounding countries.

Tourists can take in a number of summer festivals that are spread throughout the kingdom. Ammam's festival is already underway and includes artists, musicians, samba bands, fire-breathing acrobats, stilt-walkers and more. Likewise, Jerash will have concerts, musical shows and a huge array of cultural activities. Other festivals will be held in Karak, Fuhers and other locations.

Officials plan to encourage tourism numbers to soar by making it easier for foreigners to come. Popular destinations, such as Petra and Wadi Rum, will have increased entrance fees in an attempt to increase the tourism revenue which suffered from last year's decline.

To advertise the landmarks in Jordan, officials invited more than four hundred journalists to the kingdom in the last year. Officials hope that journalists will see fit to promote Jordan as a major tourist destination and reap the benefits of a stimulated economy.

The number of tourists has already started growing dramatically. **There were 40% more tourists in the month of May compared to the same time last year.** Tourists from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Dubai and Abu Dhabi have made the most of the economically stable country over the last few months.

According to the Jordan Tourism Board, this year marks the 200th anniversary of the rediscovery of Petra, the ancient ruins built in 6th century BC that are one of the new Seven Wonders of the World. They are promoting it as "Petra at Night" to encourage visitors to take more than a day trip to the world-class cultural site.

The Board is also marketing Jordan as the ultimate family destination. An exciting Children's Museum in Ammam and a resort-style city of Aqaba, labeled as a fascinating city of contrasts, provide lots to see and do. Families can enjoy mountain biking, canyon adventures, discover archaeological ruins and take a tour from some Bedouin guides through some of the world's oldest copper mines.

More adventurous tourists will find the abandoned castles in the desert to be of interest. One of the

largest and most decorative, Quseir Amra, is a world UNESCO heritage site. Its mosaics and frescoes are both stunning and unusual.

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