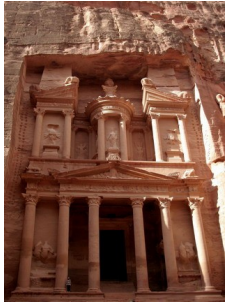


# Petra: Jordan's Ancient and Mysterious Treasure



Among the many fascinating architectural sites around the globe, one of the most striking is the city of Petra, which is entirely carved out of rose-colored sandstone. Some claim it is the Middle-Eastern counterpart to Peru's Machu Picchu. Until 1812, when it was rediscovered, Petra remained a secluded destination in Jordan, inhabited by Bedouin families. It is considered the most gorgeous site in Jordan. Visitors approach it through a long, cool, narrow gorge, one kilometer in length. Once they reach the city, they find, amazingly, more than 800 individual monuments, including tombs, baths, temples, arched gateways, and colonnaded streets. The buildings are scattered over a 400 square miles area.

Various influences on the architecture of the famous red-rose city can be seen. It had been a very prosperous city until it was occupied by the Roman Emperor Traianus in 106 AD. The Roman influence is evident; beyond the spectacular treasury you come across a 7,000-seat theatre. The Christian Byzantine era also left its marks on Petra. A mosaic floor of a Byzantine church has recently been uncovered.

The Bedouins no longer inhabit the nearby caves, having moved away in 1985 when Jordan's government decided to move the 450 families to newly-built facilities in order to protect the UNESCO World Heritage Site. Some 20 families still remain.

For more adventurous types, Petra offers another option, a six-day trek through the desert with local professional guides. Many tourists claim the experience of finally approaching the city after six days full of adventure is a truly rewarding experience.

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