

Lebanon-Syria-Jordan, June 4—June 23, 2010

Itinerary

Jun 4 Your ticket should route you to Beirut, leaving home on June 4, and returning from Amman (to arrive home on June 23) or Tel Aviv (to arrive home on June 28). Use your FF mileage, if you can.

Jun 5 We arrive in Beirut, surrender \$17.00 for our visa, and begin our Levantine experience. Often called “The Jewel of the Mediterranean” and home to a friendly and exuberant people, Beirut is the capital of a mixed Christian/Muslim nation of about 4 million population. We meet our English-speaking guide, who sees us to our hotel, where we enjoy dinner together.



Jun 6 Today we tour Beirut in our air-conditioned bus. Beneath the pitted downtown area, now under reconstruction, lie traces of Ottoman, Crusader, Abbassid, Ommayyad, Byzantine, Roman, Persian, and Phoenician presence. We visit the National Museum and the famous natural area known as Jeita Grotto. We visit Harissa by cable car, then return to our hotel.

Jun 7 After breakfast we drive to Lebanon’s North, to Bcherry Jubran Museum, the Cedars Reserve (where remnants of the famed Cedars of Lebanon are still preserved), and to Byblos (a Phoenician trading center three thousand years ago). In late afternoon we return to our hotel in Beirut.

Jun 8 Today we travel along the Mediterranean coast to the port cities from which the Phoenicians launched their maritime trade empire. We visit Sidon (modern Saida), and Tyre (modern Suor), places where Jesus once visited, Alexander spent six month subduing Tyre and building a causeway that connected it to the mainland. Tyre is now a World Heritage site, and at its Al Bass archaeological park we’ll see Roman monuments and a well-preserved hippodrome. Our hotel again is in Beirut.



Jun 9 Following breakfast, we leave Beirut and cross the Lebanon range to visit the Roman temples, built on far more ancient foundations, in mysterious Baalback. We continue

into Syria, pay our \$25 visa fee at the border, then drive in the semi desert to Palmyra, where we spend the night. Syria was the Seleucid part of Alexander’s partitioned empire, later conquered by the Romans. Although predominantly Muslim today, it has Aramaic-speaking Christian communities that date from the first century.

June 10 The Syrian desert was the farthest eastern reach of the Roman Empire, where the Romans channeled trade westward from the Silk Road and defended the Empire against the Medes and the Persians. We see colonnades and a Roman theater in Palmyra, then drive to Mari, Dura Europos (a Greek trading city), and Der Ezzour, a modern agricultural town on the Euphrates River. We overnight in Der Ezzour.

June 11 This morning we drive to Aleppo, Syria’s second city, whose site -- midway between the Euphrates River and the Mediterranean Sea -- has been occupied for at least 7000 years. We’ll see and be astonished by the Great Citadel, the Grand Mosque, and the souks in the Old Quarter. We stay overnight in Aleppo.

June 12 After breakfast we drive to Hama, a city on the Orontes River famous for its ancient norias, or water-wheels. Not far from Homs we’ll visit the magnificent Crusader castle known as the Krak des Chivaliers, perched on a hill where for a short time in history it dominated the region. Late in the afternoon we arrive in Damascus, where we spend the next two nights.



June 13 We’ll learn of the long history of Damascus, one of the world’s oldest cities, as we tour the National Museum, the Azem Palace, the magnificent Omayyad Mosque, the Shrine of Saladin, and the busy souk. Damascus was the site of Paul’s epiphany, and we visit the Street called Straight, the St. Paul Window, and the Chapel of Ananias. Late in the afternoon we drive to the nearby Qassion Mountain for a magnificent panoramic view of this ancient/modern city of 2.5 million people.

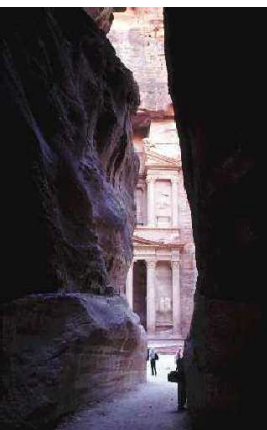
June 14 This morning we leave Syria, cross the border into Jordan, and drive to the capital, Amman, where we spend the next three

nights. Amman occupies an ancient site known in the Old Testament as Rabbat Ammon, or home of the Ammonites. The Greek Ptolemy, successors to Alexander, called it Philadelphia, and it served as the leading city of the Decapolis. Today it is the fast growing capital of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. This afternoon we have free time in Amman.

June 15. Today is a World Heritage treat, as we encounter the breathtaking Roman ruins at Jerash (Roman Gerasa) and Um Qais (ancient Gadara). Both were semi-independent Decapolis cities in Greek and Roman times. From Gadara, on a plateau overlooking the deep Yarmouk River valley, one can see north to the Sea of Galilee. The Gospels refer to the territory of these two cities: "land of the Gerasines," and "land of the Gadarenes"

June 16. After breakfast we take a tour of Amman, noting how it has spread, Rome-like, over seven hills. The Roman citadel and amphitheater occupy one of these rises. We visit a Christian community and church in Amman, then drive north to the ruins of Pella (Tabaqat Fah), another Decapolis city, whose early Christians once sheltered fleeing Jews after the Romans burned Jerusalem.

June 17. We drive first to the church at Madaba, where a 6th century mosaic map of the known world from the Euphrates to the Nile has been uncovered. From here our bus ascends Mt. Nebo, from which Moses was allowed to look into the Promised Land before he died. We'll be able to see the Dead Sea from here, and perhaps also Jericho. From Mt. Nebo we take the ancient Kings Highway route southward, winding down and out of the steep cuts that lead from the plateau to the Wadi Arabah. At length we come to the huge crusader castle at Karak, where we can explore the strength of Norman defenses.



In the evening we arrive at Petra, where we stay for the next two nights.

June 18. Petra is unforgettable. We spend a whole day here, in what was once the chief city of the Nabatean trade empire, active in the region between about 200 BC and 200 AD. Famously described as "the Rose-Red city of the desert", Petra

was "discovered" by European adventurers in the 19th century. We'll enter Petra through the mile-long Siq, a narrow chasm that

opens at length onto the magnificent tomb that has been misnamed The Treasury. Some will wish to ride camels here; others will prefer to discover on foot.

June 19 From Petra we head to Wadi Rum, the desert area where Laurence of Arabia parlayed (in actuality as well as in the film) with Arab tribes to oppose the Ottoman Turks during World War I. We take a two-hour jeep ride through the spectacular beauty of this remote and beautiful desert region. After, we continue to Aqaba, Jordan's sea-port, where we enjoy a free afternoon. We overnight in Aqaba



June 20 We drive to Jordan's pride, the nature reserve and old stone village of Dana, situated on the edge of a deep wadi and preserved through the efforts of the Royal Jordanian Society for the Conservation of Nature. We proceed to the Dead Sea, the lowest place on earth, where we spend the next two nights in a hotel on its shore.

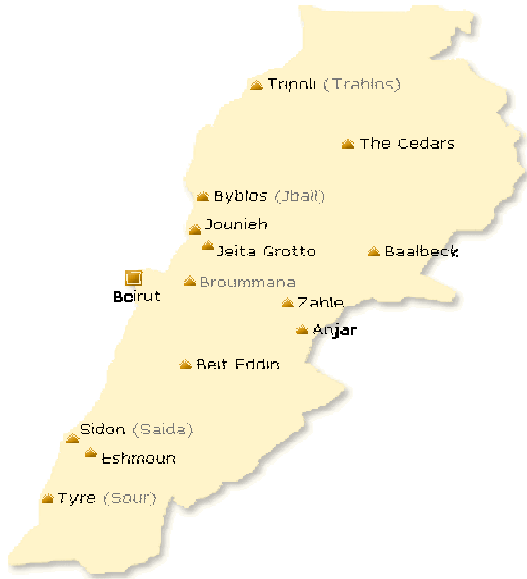
June 21 On this last day of touring, we visit the site on the Jordan River where the baptism of Jesus may have taken place (Israel claims it took place on the opposite bank). From here we head north to Ajloun, a castle used by Saladin and a fine example of medieval Saracen architecture. At length we return to our hotel at the Dead Sea.

June 22 We spend a relaxing morning on the shores of the Dead Sea before transferring to the airport at Amman. Most flights leave around midnight. Those who are going on to Israel will be taken to the crossing point, where they will be met by their Israeli guide.

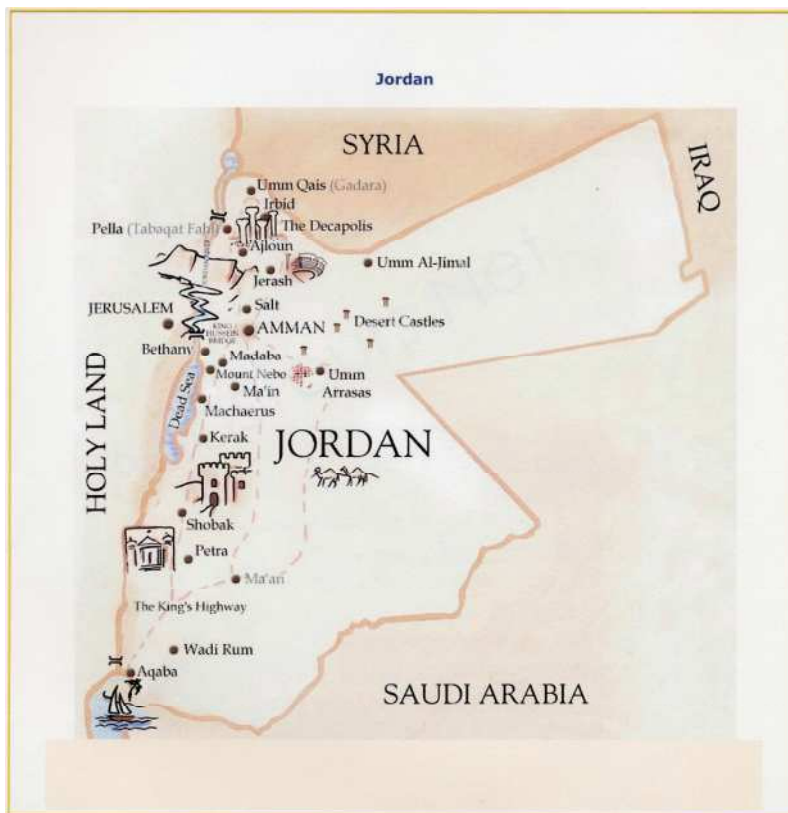
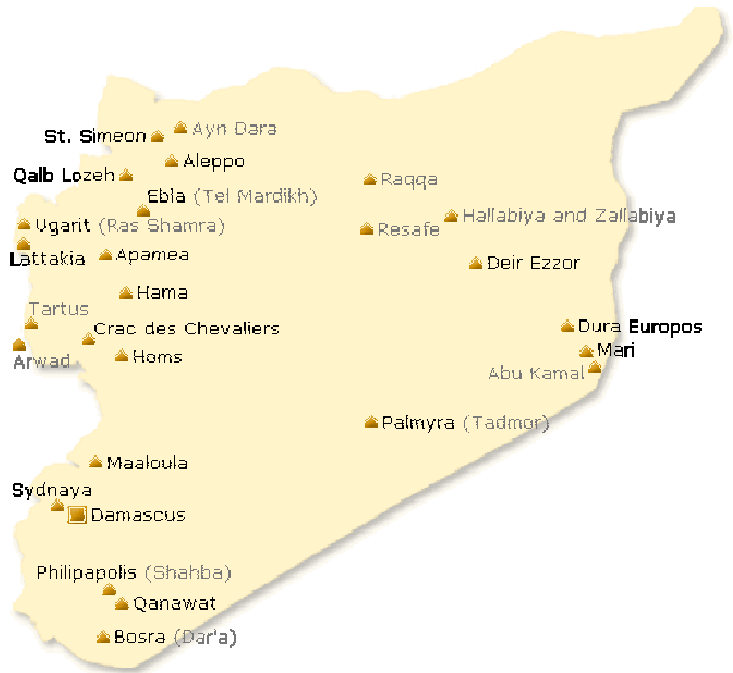
June 23 We arrive home.

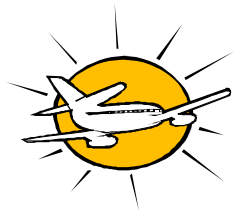


Lebanon



Syria





Israel Add-On, June 22-28, 2010

Itinerary

June 22 Our Jordanian guide will take us from our Dead Sea hotel to the Allenby Bridge Jordan/Israel border crossing. Once through customs, we will be met on the Israeli side by our Israeli guide, who will remain with us for the next six days. The border crossing may go smoothly, or it may take a while. We learn patience. Once through customs, we face an exciting day: Our first stop is at the Qumran caves where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found. From there we take a cable car to the top of the knoll called Masada, overlooking the Dead Sea. Once a pleasure palace for Herod the Great, the fortress at Masada became immortalized in Jewish history as a symbol of resistance to tyranny. Our last stop is at the shore of the Dead Sea. We spend the first of three nights at our Jerusalem hotel.

June 23 We start out at the top of the Mount of Olives, overlooking the Temple Mount (Haram al-Sharif). We descend the Mount of Olives, passing the extensive Jewish cemetery, to reach the Garden of Gethsemane at its base. From here we cross through Suleiman's Wall into the Old City. We stand at the Western Wall, the retaining wall that the Romans had to leave standing when they ravaged the Temple Mount in 70 AD. It has since been sacred space to Jews everywhere and a pilgrimage destination. If all goes well, we will be able to ascend the Temple Mount to visit the Al Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock, the third holiest place in Islam. From there we progress along the Via Dolorosa to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, one of the holiest places in Christendom. We finish this day in nearby Bethlehem, site of the First Christmas.

June 24 Today we visit the Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum, followed by the Museum of the Scrolls. After, we see a model of Jerusalem as it existed at the time of Jesus. The afternoon's itinerary is TBD, but may include a trip to Jericho and the Hisham Palace, a wonderful piece of art from the early Arab period. Alternately, we may have a chance to encounter the long history of Jerusalem at the excellent Tower of David Museum.

June 25. Driving north through the Jordan Valley we have a chance to see Arab settlements and Israeli farms, overlooking the Jordan River and the plateau of Jordan to the east. We reach the town of Beth Shean, the only one of the Decapolis cities west of the Jordan. Here millennia of occupation have been uncovered by archaeologists. We see extensive Roman ruins, destroyed in a massive earthquake in the 7th century AD. From here we proceed to Nazareth, where Jesus spent his early years. If there is time, we will go to Mt. Tabor, also called the Mount of the Transfiguration. We'll overnight on a kibbutz.

June 26. Today we concentrate on the sites of Jesus' ministry along the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. We visit Capernaum and the House of Peter, the Mount of the Beatitudes, and a museum where a fishing boat 2000 years old has been preserved. Then we proceed north to the springs at Banias, once a Roman resort called Caesarea Philippi, where Jesus met with his disciples. From this point we head to the Golan Heights, overlooking Galilee from the east. We spend our second night at the kibbutz.

June 27. From the Galilee, we head westward, following Mt. Carmel to Haifa, where we may have a chance to visit the B'hai tomb of its founder. We stop at Caesarea Maritima, the port that Herod built for the Romans, where we can view an aqueduct and theater, as well as an ancient inscription that mentions Pontius Pilate. Nearby we'll visit the Crusader port of Acco. From there we'll head south through the fertile Plain of Sharon to the modern city of Tel Aviv, for a quick tour of Israel's economic center. Our night's stay is near the airport.

June 28 The night is short, for flights departing Ben Gurion Airport leave early in the morning. Expect thoroughgoing customs procedures. We arrive home this afternoon.