



JUST BACK FROM: JORDAN

Exploring the Wilder Side of Jordan –by Nicole Beattie

OCTOBER 2009

The ancient land of Jordan has such a wealth of natural wonders, untouched and undiscovered—it is one of my favorite destinations in the region.



Certainly, Petra is a must for the first-time visitor, and Jerash is a real wow when it comes to Greco-Roman ruins. But, if visitors are looking to connect both with nature and local people in spectacular settings—one should try the hidden, wilder side of Jordan!

My latest visit introduced me to Jordan's Azraq Wetlands Reserve where the Jordanian government is working aggressively to restore the marshes, in ancient times a very important

stopover for camel trains traversing this eastern desert. I walked along the Marsh Trail with my naturalist who pointed out various migratory birds coming from Siberia and Scandinavia on their way to Africa.

Not to be missed for those interested in wildlife/nature reserves is a trek through Dana Nature Reserve with its spectacular wadis and mountains, extending from the top of the Jordan Rift Valley to the desert lowlands of Wadi Araba. The rugged landscape contains a varied plant life, nearly 150 species of bird life and over 200 recorded mammals and reptiles, including the ibex and mountain gazelle. I did not see another person on my trek through this desert region, only the occasional Bedouin family herding their goats, camels and sheep through this stark landscape.

New eco-tourism in this region benefits local communities and provides increased conservation within the reserve. This large biosphere is carefully managed for sustainable use of natural resources and a minimal environmental footprint.

I stayed overnight at the Feynan Lodge, one of the recent environmentally friendly projects supported by the King and Queen of Jordan. It is located at the bottom of Wadi Dana and its electricity is generated by solar power. In the evening the lodge is lit by a multitude of candles that are lit at dusk and scattered throughout the 26-room lodge.



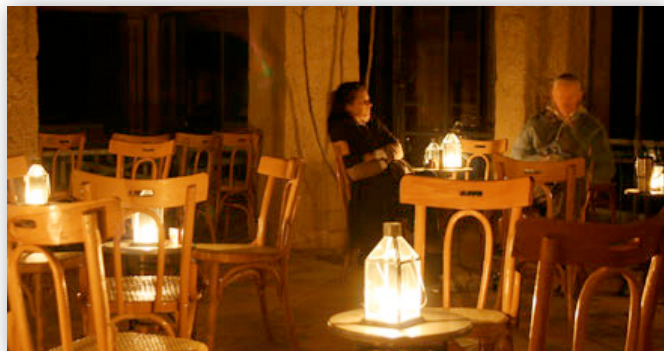


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My room, though simply furnished and lighted by candles and lanterns, was clean, and had an en suite bathroom with hot water and a walk-in shower. The menu uses fresh produce raised by the Bedouins who inhabit this region. My evening at the lodge ended with mint tea served under the stars as we sat on the rooftop terrace in total solitude.



Stays in the Dana Reserve, and other secret gems of Jordan are included on the new Cox & Kings Private Travel Journey called Hidden Treasures of Jordan. Call me for more details and let me customize your next trip to Jordan.

