

## **A Jordanian Adventure Part.2 – Attachment B**

Despite not intending to join Sharon and Tash to watch the sunrise on day 3, not closing my curtains meant I was awake at about 6:45, just in time to see the sun come up over



*Figure 13: The sunrise at Wadi Rum.*

the cliffs across the desert from our domes, as well as spot the two hot air balloons go past. After breakfast and packing we had two camps to check out – Hasan Zawadieh Camp and Captain's Camp. The latter of which was owned by the same family that owned the restaurant and hotel we had dinner at that evening (more on that later). Both camps ticked a lot of boxes for us all, and we were subject to the wonderful hospitality of the locals, being fed dates and sweet biscuits, offered herbal tea

and cardamon coffee whilst we looked around. We were all fans of the cave rooms at the Captain's Camp, complete with hatch in the ceiling to stargaze through!

Climbing back in the minivan, we headed off to Aqaba, Jordan's only piece of coastal city, and the country's access to the Red Sea. A shorter drive of about an hour, we headed straight to the Royal Diving Club (after a brief bit of redirecting due to road closures on the approach and some unclear road signs). We thought we'd just be doing some snorkelling, but we were given the opportunity to do a Sea Trek, using bubble helmets, so of course we all said yes! After receiving a safety talk and getting changed into wetsuits and swim shoes, we were walked to the end of the pier and one at a time descended down the stairs where we stopped whilst the helmets were connected to the oxygen tubes and then placed over our heads, before the diver then escorted down the rest of the steps to the seafloor. Then,



*Figure 14: SeaTrek Aqaba*

having equalised our ears, we had a handrail to follow as we moved along the sand past a coral reef teeming with fish. The drop off from the level we were at to where the diver was taking photos from was quite something! At one point some larger fish did pop up from the depths to have a brief swim before returning into the darker blue. This is something I never thought I would do, and certainly won't forget doing, what an experience!



Figure 15: Sayadieh - baked fish with rice and almonds

After surfacing and drying off we headed into central Aqaba for lunch at the Ara Revolt Plaza, with its 130m tall flagpole. We ate lunch at Mirwas, and when offered, chose the local speciality fish option; Sayadieh. We thought, as we had had meat for dinner and lunch so far, a fish dish would be best. It was delicious, and just as filling as every other meal we'd had so far. It was such a large piece of fish, it probably didn't need all the usual starters, but we ate them all

anyway! Hungry work, trekking along the seafloor!

We were then off to our Hotel, the Hyatt Regency Aqaba, the hotel that has since ruined all other hotels for me (except maybe where we stayed at the Dead Sea). It was huge, it was very fancy, and it was amazing! We had some free time before dinner and some evening hotel inspections, so we took full advantage of the hotel. We met down at the private beach to discuss everything so far and have a bit of a swim and a relax before heading back to change into our evening wear. Meeting Basim and Abdullah at the front desk we headed first to the Oryx hotel for an inspection, a 4 star hotel, used to hosting sports and e-sports teams it could be good for groups if they have gone as far south as Aqaba. Hopping back in the minivan we headed to the Sharif Hussein's House Museum where we learnt all about the Arab Revolt with the Jordanian Heritage Revival Company, seeing weapons, letters, and clothing from the period. Then it was over to the Captain's Restaurant for dinner.



Figure 16: The Hyatt Regency beach

After a second round of salad and Sayadieh for dinner, we had a brief inspection of the Captain's Hotel, a 3 star hotel that would be great for groups staying in Aqaba. The restaurant allows for HB, there's a separate diner for groups at breakfast, it's all been refitted recently so is modern and up to date, and the on-site pool meets all STF standards. After that it was back to the hotel to pack and sleep ahead of the journey to the Dead Sea on day 4.



Figure 17: A triple room at the Captain's Hotel, Aqaba

We were all up early enough to get down to breakfast in good time, and what a buffet spread it was! I went for the simple option this time and had eggs benedict, (made to order), and some pastries. It was a long drive from Aqaba to the Dead Sea and our visits on day 4, just under 4 hours or so, though we were able to stop several times (once, unfortunately, due to a flat tire). Just like with the drive from Amman to Petra, the changing landscape as we left the flat plains outside Aqaba to the more mountainous area near the Dead Sea was something that really stuck out, about halfway along the journey we used Google Maps to tell we were the other side of the mountains and gulleys that hide Petra. We also enjoyed the wild camels that occasionally caused roadblocks whilst they crossed the road! After a little while in the minivan we reached the bottom of the Dead Sea and you then have mountains and cliffs on your right, and the salt pans of the Dead Sea on your left. We drove past the Museum at the Lowest Point on Earth and Lot's Cave, which may be of interest to some groups with religious studies students.



Figure 18: Camels crossing!



Figure 19: The Baptism Site

The first place on our visit list for the day was the Baptism site and the river Jordan, north of the Dead Sea. I think we were all a little underwhelmed by the Baptism site, especially as the flow through from the River Jordan had dried up. Instead of being treated with the reverence of what should be an incredibly holy site, it seemed more like a standard tourist attraction, though the requirements to even visit it seemed very stringent – permits, permission, a shuttle bus to take you from the security checkpoint to the car park for the site (though we had permission for the minivan to drive down). We then walked down to the River Jordan, which serves as the

line of the border between Jordan and Israel, seeing the colour of the water, I was fine with not taking a dip, though the rest of the group did. There was even a mother and daughter also visiting the site who went in and ducked under the water in a religious manner. Departing the site, we headed to Mount Nebo, where Moses supposedly had his view of the promised land before he died. The remains of the Memorial Church of Moses are situated on top of Mt. Nebo, dating from the 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> Centuries AD. Between 2007 and 2016 a new basilica was basically built over the ancient church, and this now can be used for services, as well as holding mosaics from the site. I got to see mosaics, I was happy! The small museum on site also had some interesting archaeology in from Roman, Byzantine and other periods. We briefly stopped off at a Mosaic Workshop to talk to the staff before heading to Madaba, where we went



Figure 20: A section of the Madaba Mosaic Map

straight to the church of Saint George to see the Madaba Map, the incredibly detailed map of the Holy Land, from Lebanon to the Nile Delta (north to south) and from the Mediterranean Sea to the Eastern Desert (west to east). While incomplete and fragmentary within the church floor, it is still stunning! Unfortunately, we didn't get to see either of the Archaeological Areas or the Museum in



Figure 21: The sunset over the Dead Sea

the city that feature other Byzantine era mosaics, but just gives me a reason to go back! Our very late lunch was at Haret Jdoudna, which seems like a perfect setting for lunch for groups that are spending a day in Madaba to see all the mosaics. It was another full on, absolutely filling lunch, and then we were off back to the Dea Sea to check in to our hotel – the Kempinski Ishtar, which along with the Hyatt Regency, the nicest hotel I have ever stayed in! As we came over the hills on

the way back from Madaba the sun was setting over the Dead Sea and reflecting off the surface, making for an absolutely stunning view, and then by the time we checked in, it was purple hour, which made for a stunning view. We had arrived too late to go into the Dead Sea and float around, and most of the pools were also closed, but I did manage to get into the infinity pool before that closed. Given our lunch was later than usual, we only went for a light pasta and salad dinner from the large buffet choices, before retiring for bed.



Figure 22: Purple hour at the Kempinski Ishtar

Unfortunately, this last full day was when my body decided to come down with some kind of virus/stomach bug, so while the ladies went down to the dead sea to try the floating experience, I spent the time in my room before eating as plain a breakfast as possible. Luckily, Sharon C had some rehydration powder and the journey from Dead Sea to Amman was not that long. Instead of Nadir and the minivan this morning, our journey to Amman was in a Jett coach, like the ones groups would most likely be using for transfers.



Figure 23: The Jett Bus for our transfer to Amman

We had a brief check in with the [Challenger Team](#)'s Academy, who had been at the event in London earlier in the year that had led to the invite by the Tourism Board. Their on-site upgrade was still being finished but there were plenty of Jordanian school groups there having a go at their various activities. As part of this upgrade, they were in the process of



Figure 24: The bright and colourful accommodation at the Challenger Academy

installing new accommodation blocks, and we were given a tour of the whole facility. In the discussions after our tour, we talked about what else they can offer, including being local agents for airport to airport services or smaller services. We then continued on to Amman to inspect a hotel in the city centre that could be of use for groups, though it was more of a business hotel. It was good to have seen a real variety of hotels and camps throughout the country during our stay.

We then left to check into the Intercontinental IHG before eating lunch at the hotel, one last large lunch before departure. Basel had told us day 1 that lunch was the main meal of the day for Jordanians, and that had definitely proven to be true! From then it was onto the workshop, an almost speed-dating experience where Sharon, Sharon, Tash and I were sat around on the room and one by one representatives from various Jordanian travel companies pitched themselves to us. We have now established a good rapport with several and we will be launching our Jordanian tour with one of them this year. We were then interviewed by Abdullah from the Jordanian Tourism Board, for their promotional materials.



Figure 25: Me being interviewed after the workshop

Once the workshop was done, we headed out for dinner at the Majdoline restaurant, during which we celebrated Sharon's upcoming birthday, before we headed back to our hotel. Knowing we were leaving very early the next morning, I convinced the others to jump in a taxi and come with me down to Amman's Roman Theatre and Odeon, as I



*Figure 26: Me very excited to see the Roman Theatre in Amman*

wanted to see them for the purposes of being able to then advise any groups that go on a Jordanian Tour. It was about a 10 minute taxi from our hotel for 5 dinar each way, and while the sites were closed, the large square in front of them was open and bustling at 10pm, with young people hanging out, kids playing catch, older people sat around chatting. We managed to see through the bars of the theatre gates and the wooden slat doors of the odeon to sections of the inside. The nymphaeum just around the corner was also closed, but you could see the entirety of what remains and it was great to be able to tick off these 3 sites in some form, before returning to the UK.

We returned to the hotel and our rooms to make sure everything was packed before bed, I think by the time we had returned and I had packed everything it was 01:00. We were then up and ready to leave the hotel at 06:45 to avoid any

Amman rush hour traffic on our way to the airport. This meant we got to spend a lot of time at Amman airport as we waited for the gate to open, but it also allowed us to get breakfast and hydrate before we got on the long flight home. Luckily, rather than having to navigate various public transport back from Heathrow, Sharon P was able to give me a lift back to Southampton as she lives in the area. This made my journey home about 2-3 hours quicker.

Having been nervous about travelling to Jordan given the ongoing issues in the region, I was so glad that I went in the end! It was a once in a lifetime experience, made up by the people I travelled with, and those we met along the way, the places we saw, and the food we ate. By the end of our time in Jordan, I think it was safe to say that the kindness and welcoming nature of the locals, along with the amazing things we had seen and done, had left quite the impression on us all.