

Our First Trip to Israel (and Jordan)

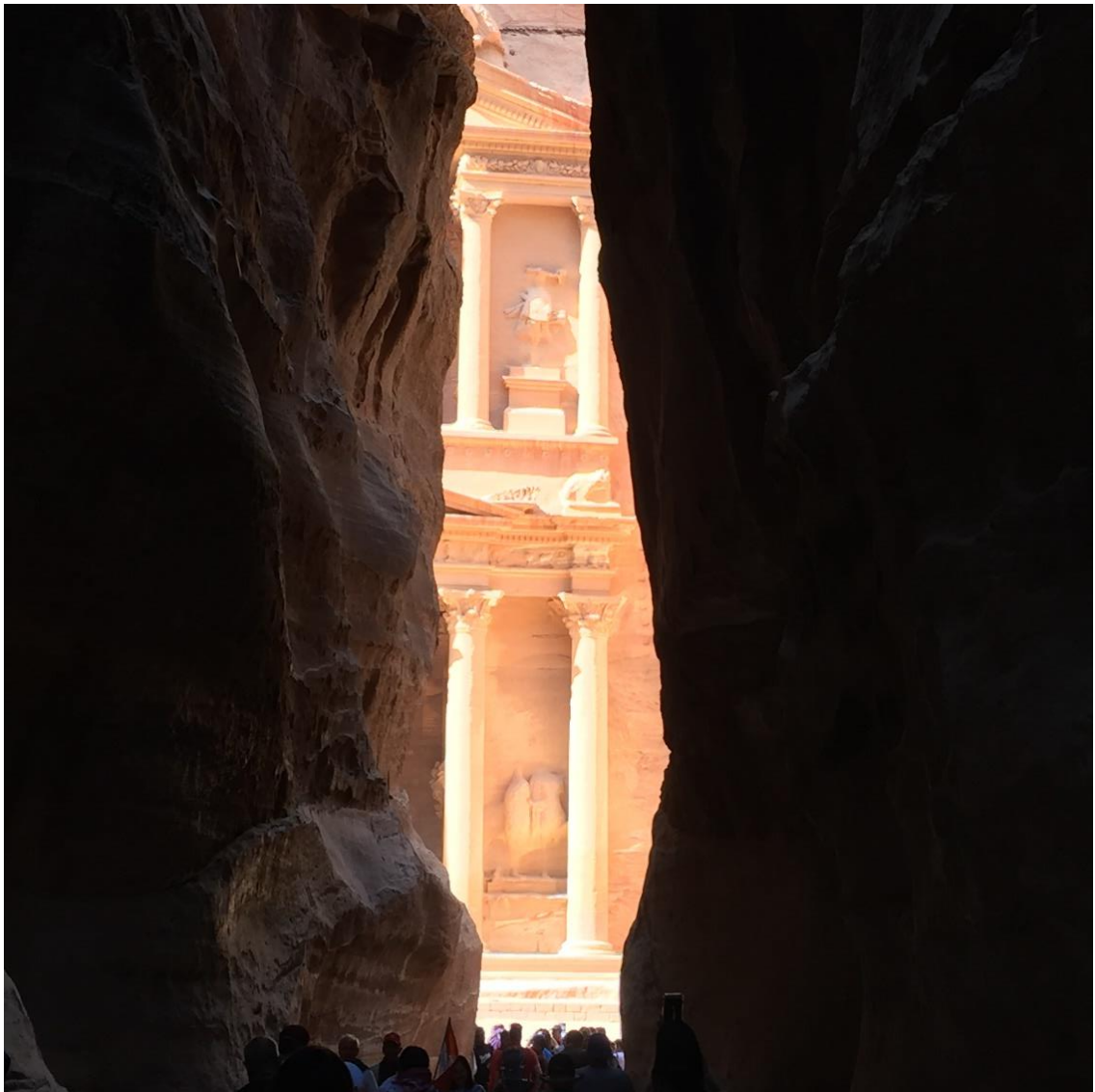
By Larry Martin

Part 5 – Petra

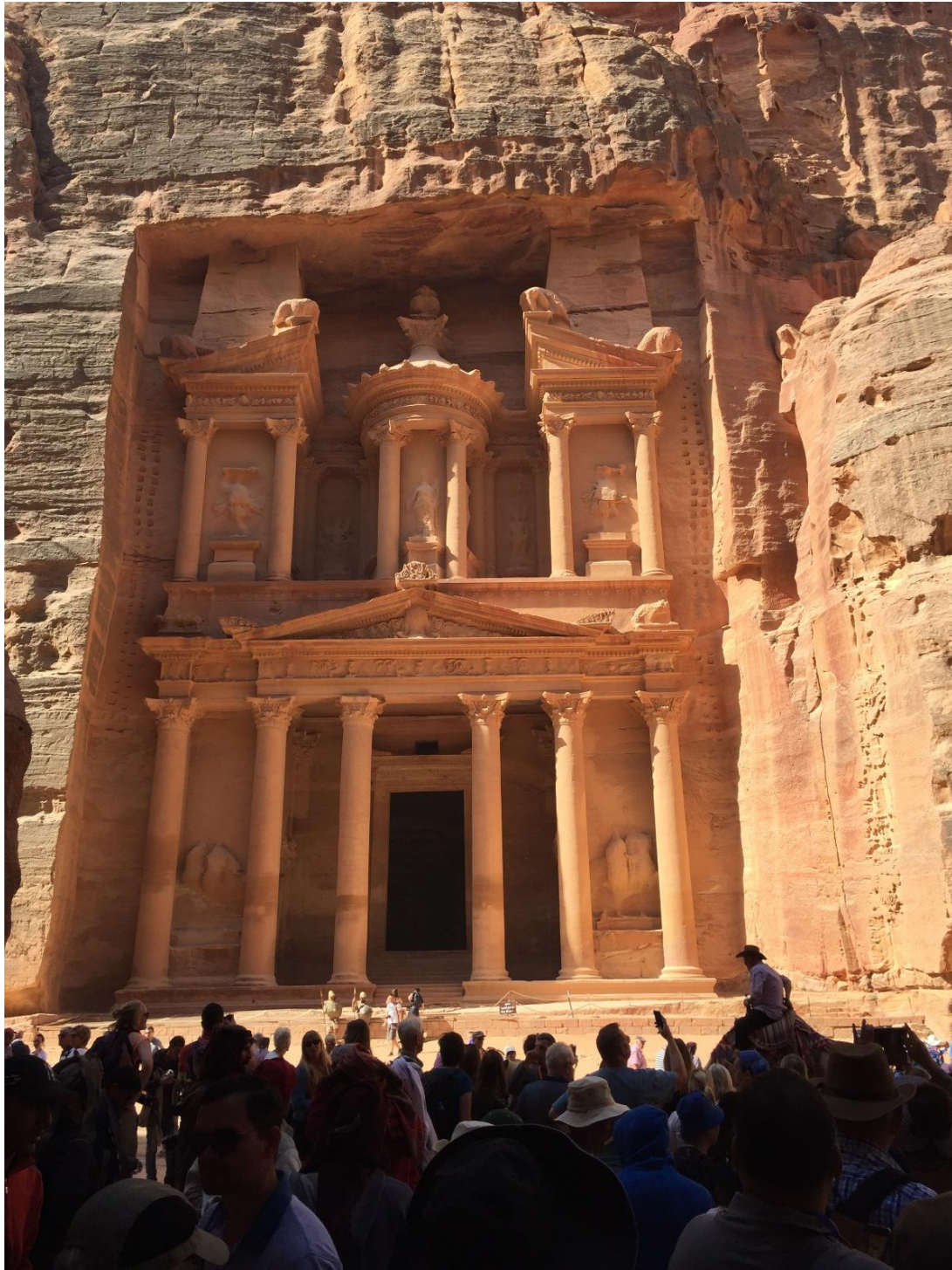
[Note: Part 5 continues an account of the trip my wife Ruth and I took to Israel and Jordan, October 14-28, 2017. Pictures from the internet have a red border; all the others were taken with my iPhone. As each part is completed it will be posted on the internet, at <http://www.lakesidepress.com/IsraelTrip.html>.]

Sunday, October 22

The picture below is the iconic ‘teaser photo’ of what visitors to Petra see after they’ve walked over a mile from the Visitors’ Center. The canyon-wall path to that point is called the Siq, its rock walls in some places only a few yards apart.



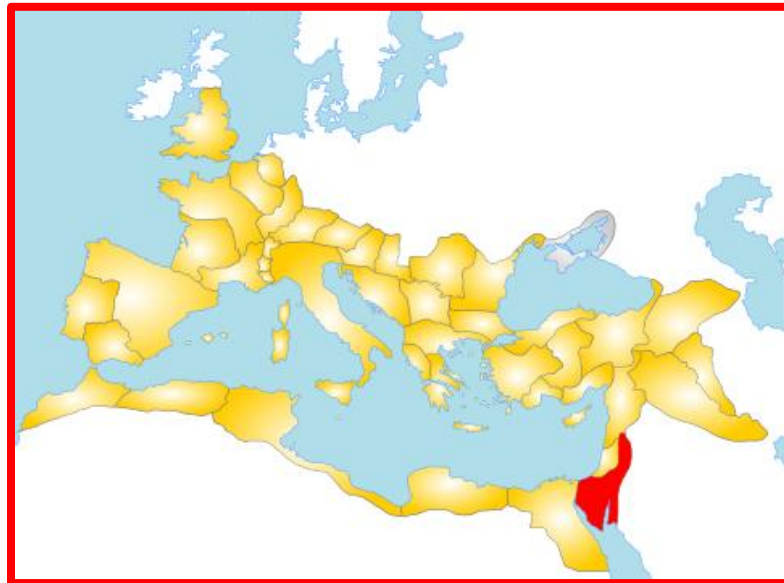
Once past the narrow passageway, you come upon a giant façade carved into the rock, known as the Treasury, shown below. It is the most famous of dozens of rock carvings that make up this vast archeological site.



Petra is a historical and archaeological city famous for its rock-cut architecture. It began in 312 B.C. as the city of the Arab Nabataeans, a nomadic tribe. The Nabataeans built here because the area was close to trade routes between Asia and the Middle East. In addition to rock carving, the Nabataeans are known for construction of efficient water-collecting methods in the desert.



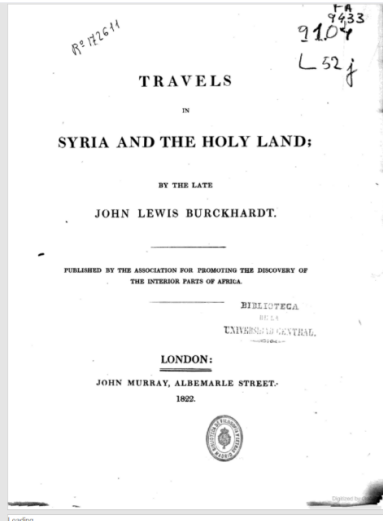
The Nabataean Kingdom, of which Petra was the capital, covered some 77,000 square miles at its zenith. The Kingdom was conquered by the Romans in 106 A.D. and annexed as the province of Arabia Petraea. The map below shows the Roman Empire at its greatest extent, with the Nabataean kingdom in red.



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nabataean_Kingdom



Like many of the Holy Land's ancient ruins, Petra remained unknown to the Western world until the 19th century. In 1812 the site was visited by Swiss explorer Johann Ludwig Burckhardt (1774-1817), the first European to lay eyes on Petra. He came disguised as a Muslim (picture is from Wikipedia), and remained in the region until his death five years later in Cairo (from dysentery). Burckhardt's travels in the Middle East make for fascinating reading. His book, *Travels in Syria and the Holy Land* was published posthumously in 1822, and is available at Google Books.



Once in Syria, Burckhardt adopted the moniker Sheikh Ibrahim Ibn Abdallah to hide his true European identity. In *Travels* he details the arduous journey south on the way to Cairo. Along the way he encountered rumors of ancient ruins in a narrow valley near the supposed biblical tomb of Aaron, the brother of Moses. The tomb was located near the town of Wady Mousa (spelled Wadi Musa today).

His discovery of Petra is detailed in *Travels*, beginning on page 418. The “rivulet” of which he writes was a stream on the floor of the Siq at the time. The monument “Kasr Faraoun” is the Treasury. Note that he had to hide his European identity and show no enthusiasm for the treasures he saw, lest he be outed and robbed. The picture adjacent to the end of this passage shows what he saw in 1812 just before exiting the Siq.

https://books.google.com/books?id=R9N70FsNRNYC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbv_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false

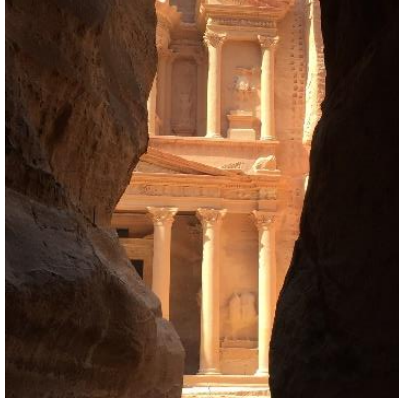
I was particularly desirous of visiting Wady Mousa, of the antiquities of which I had heard the country people speak in terms of great admiration; and from thence I had hoped to cross the desert in a straight line to Cairo; but my guide was afraid of the hazards of a journey through the desert, and insisted upon my taking the road to Akaba...at the extremity of the eastern branch of the Red sea [sic], where he said that we might join some caravans, and continue our route towards Egypt...

...I therefore pretended to have made a vow to slaughter a goat in honour of Haroun [Aaron, brother of Moses], whose tomb I knew as situated at the extremity of the valley, and by this stratagem I thought I should have the means of seeing the valley in my way to the tomb. To this my guide had nothing to oppose; the dread of drawing upon himself, by resistance, the wrath of Haroun, completely silenced him...

...We left the Refaya early in the morning, and travelled over hilly ground....I hired a guide at Eldjy, to conduct me to Haroun's tomb, and paid him with a pair of old horse-shoes. He carried the goat, and gave me a skin of water to carry, as he knew that there was no water in the Wady below.

In following the rivulet of Eldjy westwards the valley soon narrows again; and it is here that the antiquities of Wady Mousa begin. Of these I regret that I am not able to give a very complete account: but I knew well the character of the people around me; I was without protection in the midst of a desert where no traveller had ever before been seen; and a close examination of these works of the infidels, as they are called, would have excited suspicions that I was a magician in search of treasures; I should at least have been detained and prevented from prosecuting my journey to Egypt, and in all probability have been stripped of the little money which I possessed, and what was infinitely more valuable to me, of my journal book. Future travellers may visit this spot under the protection of an armed force; the inhabitants will become more accustomed to the researches of strangers; and the antiquities of Wady Mousa will then be found among the most curious remains of ancient art.

[Here he is at the entrance to the Siq] At the point where the valley becomes narrow is a large sepulchral vault, with a handsome door hewn in the rock on the slope of the hill which rises from the right bank of the torrent; on the same side of the rivulet a little farther on, I saw some other sepulchers with singular ornaments. Here a mass of rock has been insulated from the mountain by an excavation, which leaves a passage five or six paces in breadth between it and the mountain...



[Here he is at the end of the Siq]...After proceeding for twenty-five minutes between the rocks, we came to a place where the passage opens, and where the bed of another stream coming from the south joins the Syk. On the side of the perpendicular rock, directly opposite to the issue of the main valley, an excavated mausoleum came in view, the situation and beauty of which are calculated to make an extraordinary impression upon the traveller, after having traversed for nearly half an hour such a gloomy and almost subterraneous passage as I have described. It is one of the most elegant remains of antiquity existing in Syria; its state of preservation resembles that of a building recently finished, and on a closer examination I found it to be a work of immense labor...The natives call this monument Kaszr Faraoun, or Pharaoh's castle; and pretend that it was the residence of a prince. But it was rather the sepulchre of a prince, and great must have been the opulence of a city, which could dedicate such monuments to the memory of its rulers.

— Johann Burckhardt, *Travels in Syria and the Holy Land*

Though Petra has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1985, its popularity soared after Jordan signed a peace treaty with Israel in October 1994, allowing easier access for Western travelers. (For the complete list of UNESCO sites, and a great interactive map, see <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/>.) Petra is the Jordanian site most visitors who come from Israel want to see. And of course people also come directly from many other countries. A recent worldwide poll voted it one of the New 7 Wonders of the World. (<https://world.new7wonders.com/wonders/>).

Hollywood likes Petra, too. IMDB lists 27 movies that have been filmed at least partly in Petra.

http://www.imdb.com/search/title?locations=Petra,%20Jordan&ref_=ttloc_loc_2

The most popular, by far, is *Indiana Jones and The Last Crusade* (1989). Al Khazneh (The Treasury) was used as the entrance to the temple housing the Holy Grail.



Indiana Jones (Harrison Ford), his father, Professor Henry Jones Sr. (Sean Connery) and Sallah Mohammed Faisal el-Kahir (John Rhys-Davies) on their horses in front of Al Khazneh (The Treasury), in the movie the entrance to the final resting place of the Holy Grail.



In one respect Petra is like all the other ancient ruins described previously in this travelogue (Decapolis, et. al) – a city built by an ancient civilization. However, I found it different from them in several ways.

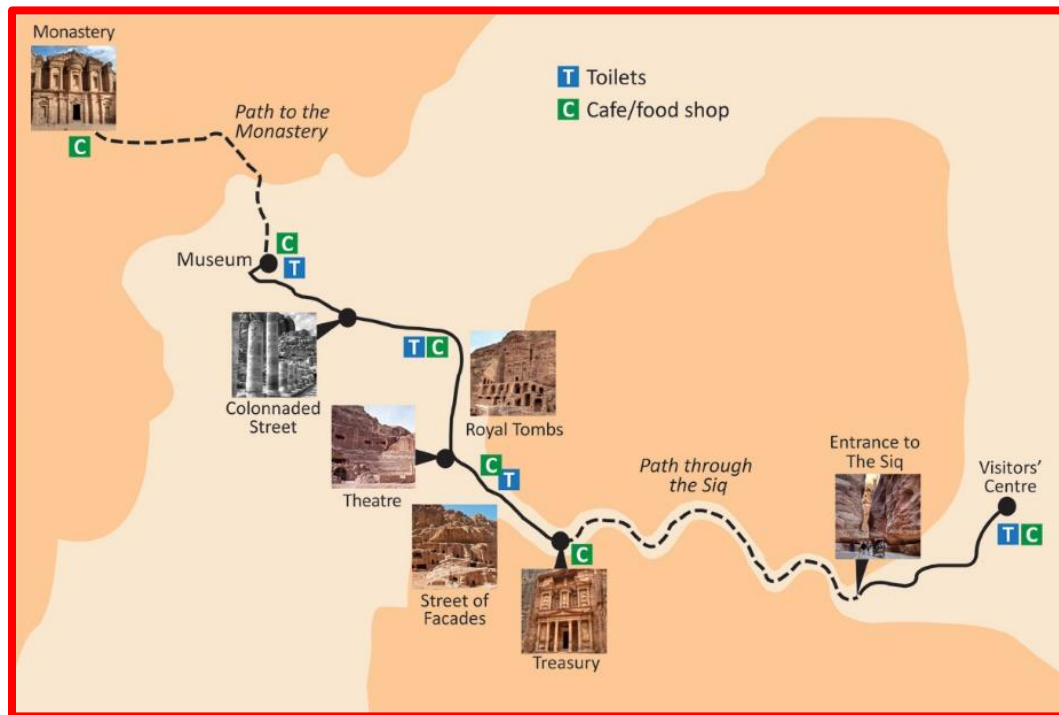
- The Nabateans are not represented in other ruins so far discussed. Also, while they were expert rock carvers, they lived in caves that dot the area; rooms excavated behind the rock carvings were likely places for burial. We did not see any structures built specifically for habitation.
- The Jordanian park containing Petra is huge, an estimated 40 square miles but visitors see only a relatively narrow area that contains most of the rock carvings. The adjacent town (Wadi Musa) is a major tourist area, with many hotels on the streets leading up to the park. The pictures below show the main street leading to

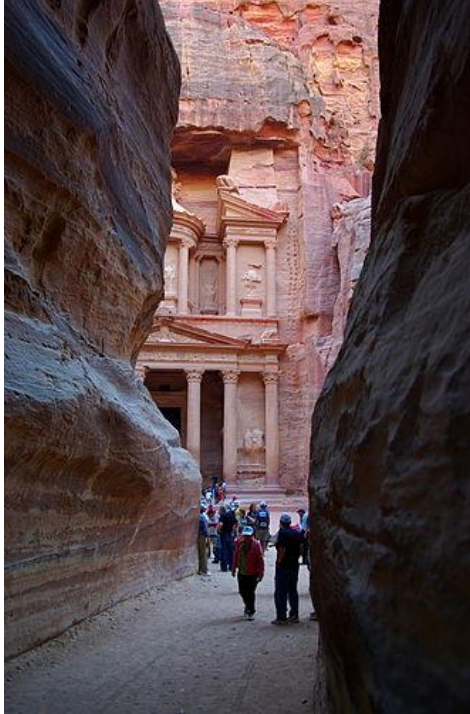
the Visitors' Center (aptly named "Tourism Street"), and our hotel, only a few hundred yards from the Petra Visitors' Center. You don't find this close-by tourist infrastructure at other ruins.



- Memory of the place does not blur with other ruins, but stays with you (like Masada). Of course, part of this may be due to the fact that we spent a whole day there, whereas time spent at other ruins was only 1-2 hours.

For those who have not visited Petra, I will provide an overview of the place. It's about a mile and a half walk from the Visitors Center to the entrance of the Treasury (see map, followed by pictures of the park's entrance and the Treasury).





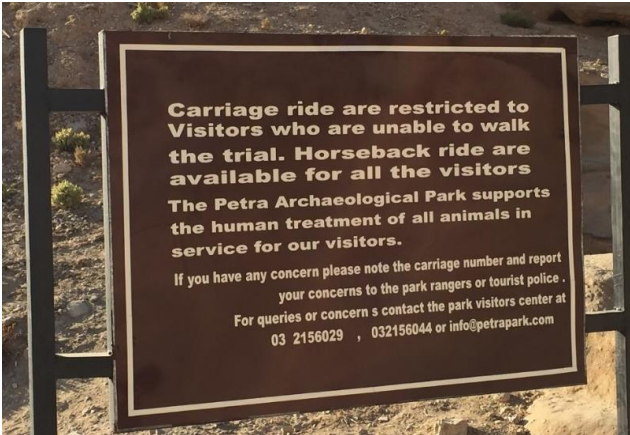
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This Google earth view shows the town adjacent to Petra, Wadi Musa. From the Petra Visitor Center to Al-Khazneh (Arab name for the Treasury) is about 1.5 miles. About $\frac{3}{4}$ of this distance goes through al-Siq, the narrow rock canyon.



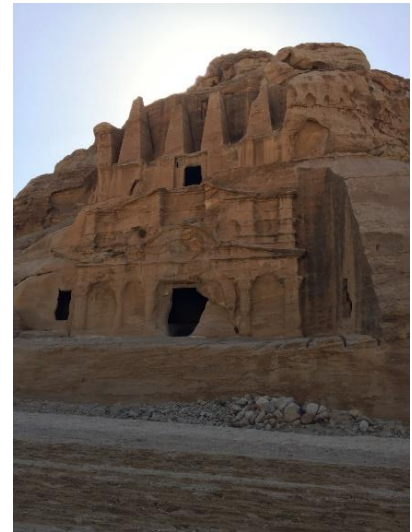
You have two options for this first part of Petra: walk it or take a horse-drawn carriage, designed to carry two passengers (in picture below). Signs near the park's entrance state carriage rides are for visitors unable to walk. (No, I did not tell park officials their sign needs editing.) None of our group took the carriage.



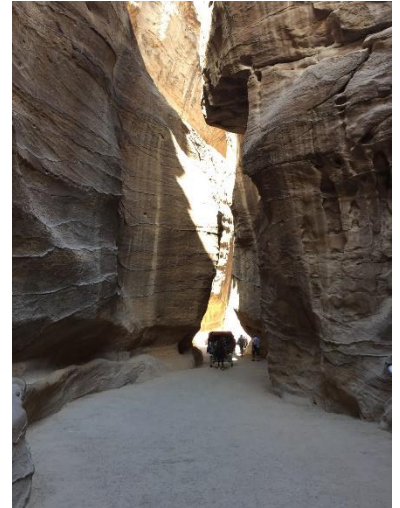
The carriage rides down the Siq, and the camel rides which begin at the Treasury, and just about everything else you might pay money for inside Petra (many hawkers of everything from food to postcards), are all managed by local Bedouins.

From the Visitors Center to The Treasury

Before entering the rock canyon (the Siq) we passed a few ruins, including some caves where the Nabateans lived.



The Siq geography is remindful of parks in Southern Utah. Everyone admired the scenery, but you have to be careful and watch your back. The horse drawn carriages come through fast, and you need to step out of the way or risk being run over.



One treat on this path was a local Bedouin playing a single string instrument called a *rehab*. It dates from the 8th century and (per Wikipedia) spread via Islamic trading routes over much of North Africa, the Middle East, parts of Europe and the Far East.



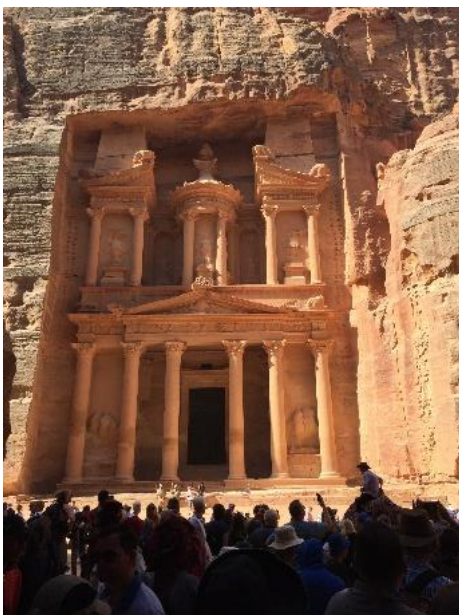
The *rehab* has a limited range, probably an octave. It was later replaced in the Arab world by the violin and kemenche. Ruth posed with the musician. It is not the most melodic of instruments but we (and others) were happy to contribute. I took a short video, posted on Youtube of the Bedouin playing his instrument.

<https://youtu.be/ooOHDzL1Epc>

Also interesting in the Siq were the conduits used by the Nabataeans to bring water to their city, shown below. Without water, of course, there could be no city.



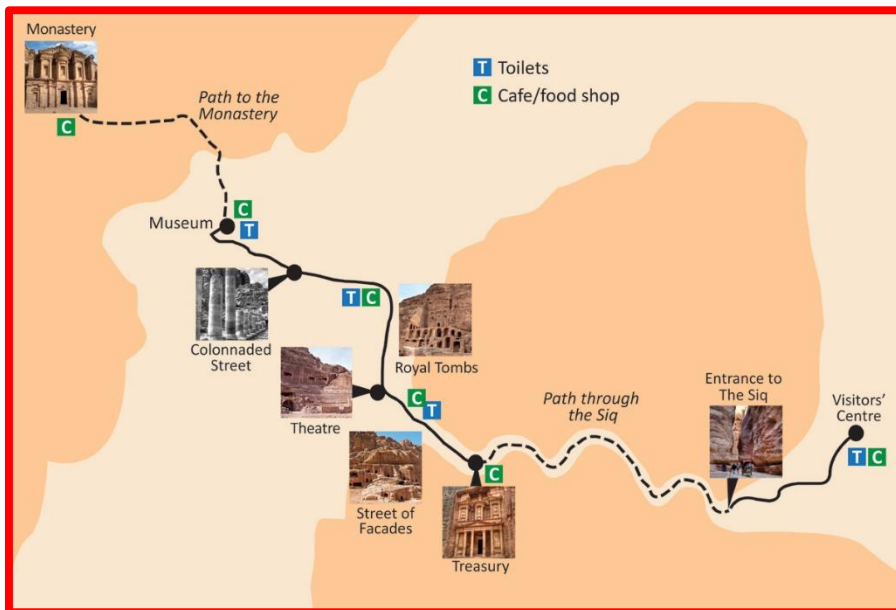
Once we reached the Treasury, in mid-morning, we found a carnival-like atmosphere. There are local vendors selling trinkets, and numerous camels parked for visitors who wish that form of transportation deeper into the park (they do not go through the Siq).





The real exploration of Petra begins at the Treasury. We did not do the camel ride, preferring to walk. From the Treasury we walked another two miles, with several stops along the way, until we reached a restaurant for lunch; that was our end point, though there were other paths to take beyond the restaurant. After lunch we made our way back, stopping to explore various rock carvings. Our total distance walked in the park was about 7 miles. Though we spent 8 hours in the area shown on the map, there were some ruins we did not see (notably, the monastery).

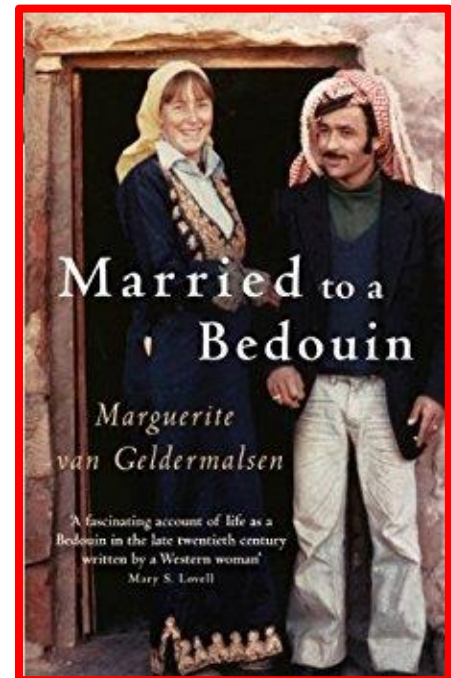
From the Treasury to the Basin Restaurant (point on map labeled “Museum”)



Along the tourist path there were many young boys selling post cards, “ancient coins” and other stuff. Our Jordanian guide Daoud advised against buying from them, stating “They should be in school. Any business just encourages this unfortunate situation.” There were also many stands set up by Bedouin adults, to sell trinkets and other touristy items. In particular, we were told to look for a Caucasian woman who might be out this day selling her book,

Married to a Bedouin. This was the very first we had heard about this remarkable woman from New Zealand, and wondered what it was all about.

We were pleasantly surprised to find that she was in Petra this morning, and we all flocked to her booth, from which she was selling not only her book but also jewelry she and the Bedouin women make.



<https://www.amazon.com/Married-Bedouin-Marguerite-van-Geldermalsen-ebook/dp/B00GVFZ5FS/>

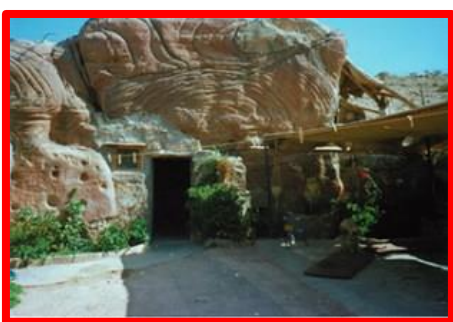
Her name is Marguerite van Geldermalsen and she is from New Zealand, trained as a nurse. She came to Petra in 1978, age 22 with a friend, and met the Bedouin souvenir-seller Mohammad. She fell in love with him and they were married two months later. The following is from the book's Amazon page.

"Where you staying?" the Bedouin asked. "Why you not stay with me tonight - in my cave?"

Thus begins Marguerite van Geldermalsen's story of how a New Zealand-born nurse came to be married to Mohammad Abdallah Othman, a Bedouin souvenir-seller from the ancient city of Petra in Jordan. It was 1978 and she and a friend were travelling through the Middle East when Marguerite met the charismatic Mohammad who convinced her that he was the man for her.

A life with Mohammad meant moving into his ancient cave and learning to love the regular tasks of baking shrak bread on an open fire and collecting water from the spring. And as Marguerite feels herself becoming part of the Bedouin community, she is thankful for the twist in fate that has led her to this contented life.

Marguerite's light-hearted and guileless observations of the people she comes to love are as heart-warming as they are valuable, charting Bedouin traditions now lost to the modern world.

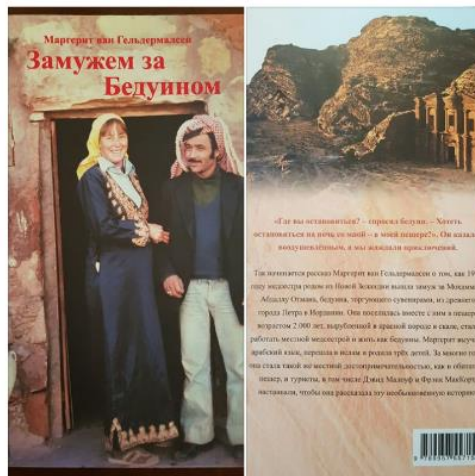


This is the entrance to the cave where Marguerite and her Bedouin husband lived until 1985, when they were resettled to the Umm Sayhoon village on a hillside overlooking Petra. In the cave there was no electricity, bathroom facilities or running water. <http://www.marriedtoabedouin.com/>. Two of their three children were born in this "rock".

<http://www.themanoftwistsandturns.com/2011/04/02/married-to-mohammadmarguerite-van-geldermalsen%E2%80%99s-writing-life-interview/>



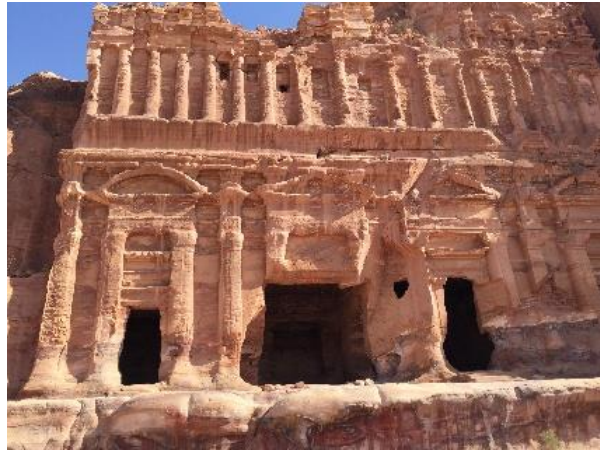
She began writing about her experiences in 1997. Mohammad passed away in 2002, and she continued writing. After two publisher rejections, the manuscript found a home at Virago Press, and was published in 2010. It has since been published in numerous countries, and many of the foreign-language covers are posted on her Facebook page. The Russian one is shown here.



<https://www.facebook.com/MarriedToABedouin/posts/220785014711906>

Marguerite still lives in the area (not in a cave). She is likely the only Caucasian allowed to set up a booth in Petra, as all the other sellers were native Bedouins. Ruth bought the book.

After leaving Marguerite's booth we continued to make our way among the ruins. They are almost all, like the Treasury, carvings in the side of a mountain and not actual buildings, though several had rooms carved out behind the facades. We explored these ruins on our way back after lunch



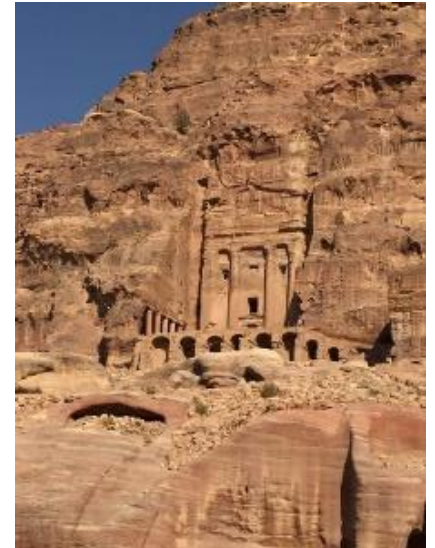
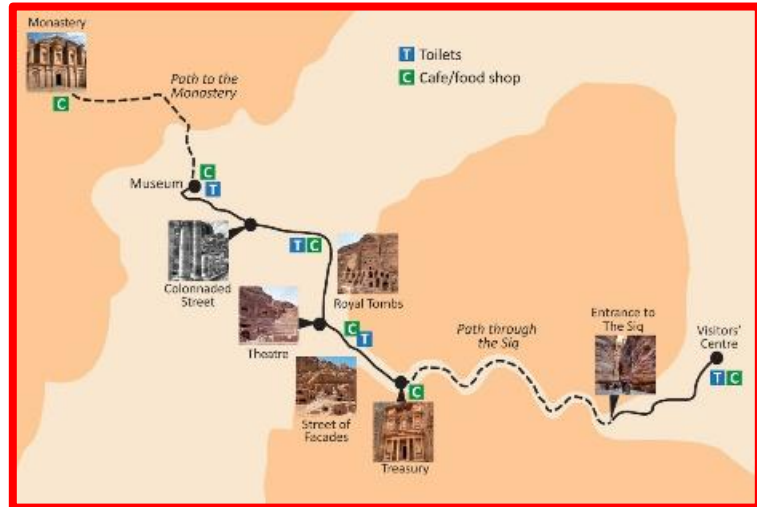
The one free-standing building we saw is called the Temple, shown below left and in a poster at the site.



From the Temple we entered the Basin Restaurant for lunch.



After lunch we considered climbing to see the Monastery (upper left of map), but it would have taken a couple of hours round trip from the restaurant, and as we needed to be out by sunset, we decided against it. Instead, we took a leisurly walk back to the Visitor Center (over 3.5 miles), exploring various ruins along the way.



Each of the ruins pictured above had rooms behind the facades, again likely used for burials. Behind the entrance where we are standing is a huge room (below, left), with very colorful walls. Below, right, is a photo of two members of our group; the colors behind them appear natural to the rock.



This is a view from the entrance to one of the elevated ruins, looking out over the valley.

We continued our walk back and soon reached the Treasury, where camels were resting, waiting for riders. The camel eating the coke can was highly amusing. After a few minutes his Bedouin master removed the can before it was swallowed whole. (As we were going to ride camels in Wadi Rum the next day, we did not opt for camel rides in Petra.)





We exited Petra through the Siq, again careful to avoid the carriages speeding by.



Seven miles and 8 hours after entering the park, we were happy to see our hotel near the exit. Certainly an amazing day visiting Petra.



Next: Part 6 - Wadi Rum, the Dead Sea and Bethany