

# Rooted in antiquity

From the most ancient of ruins has sprung a fast-paced, forward-thinking young and vibrant Amman – but Jordan's capital city will never forget its roots

**T**he economic, political and cultural centre of Jordan may today be considered among the most modern of Arab cities, and one of the hottest tourist destinations, but there is ancient history at every turn. Home to some of the oldest human statues ever found (a Neolithic site known as 'Ain Ghazal' which dates back to 7250 BC), Amman was known as Ammon during the Iron Age;

Philadelphia under Roman and Greek rule; abandoned for much of the medieval and post-medieval period; and reborn when Circassian immigrants settled there in the Ottoman Empire period in 1867.

The city witnessed rapid growth after its designation as Transjordan's capital in 1921 and after several successive waves of refugees: Palestinians in 1948 and 1967; Iraqis in 1990 and

2003; and Syrians since 2011.

Its rolling hills and tolerant attitude have today made for a charming modern city today.

Today, the Citadel towering on Oa hill overlooking downtown Amman is the city's primary archaeological site.

There is a dramatic Roman theatre that has been hosting musical performances for more than two millennia, and the Cave of the Seven Sleepers Roman burial site on the outskirts of the city, shrouded in as much myth as history. The Qasr Al Abad ruined palace outside of Amman is one of the few examples of pre-Roman construction in Jordan, with the story told in one of the Middle East's finest cultural stops, Jordan Museum, which covers Jordanian history from the Stone Age to the modern day.

**Pictured: Temple of Hercules at Amman's Citadel**

Jabal Luwaibdeh is a Bohemian neighborhood with funky cafes, murals and Darat al Funun, a workshop and exhibition space for Arab artists. The complex hosts film screenings amid the columned ruins of a sixth-century Byzantine church.

Explore the studios on the first level before winding up through the gardens and patios leading to the restored villas, the vaulted-ceiling library and rooms displaying contemporary works and video art.

The Royal Automobile Museum holds the late King Hussein's classic car collection, and the Darat Al Funun hosts regular exhibitions and live-music performances.

The National Gallery of Fine Arts explores the best of contemporary Jordanian and Middle Eastern art and the Amman Jazz Festival in April is Amman's most popular music festival, hosting regional and international artists.

Finally, you can't say you've been to Amman until you've eaten at Jordan's iconic falafel and hummus restaurant Hashem Restaurant. ■

