

Journal from Jordan

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In the last issue of *GUIDE*, I briefly mentioned a pending trip to the Middle Eastern country of Jordan. The week long trip (February 28-March 7) was the experience of a lifetime, reinforcing my New Year's resolution to try new things. I can't wait to tell you all about it.

The trip was initiated through Calvin College in Grand Rapids as part of an upcoming exhibit called *Petra: Lost City of Stone*. I was one of 12 fortunate journalists from throughout the country visiting these most historic sites.

The first day included a visit to Bethany Beyond Jordan. Located along the River Jordan, this is where Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist. Imagine the joy of dipping your foot in the waters of this river, where Biblical figures once gathered. Later that day, it was off to the Dead Sea and its soothing mud and salts.

Day two included a trek to Mount Nebo, where Moses is believed to be buried. The historic church, with its intricate mosaics, was breathtaking.

On the third day, it was off to Petra - the primary focus of our trip. Petra means "stone" in Greek. We traveled along the Siq - the path that leads to the famed Treasury - and I was amazed at the colorful patterns of the mighty sandstone walls that bordered the path. It was here that *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, *The Mummy*, *The Mummy Returns* and *Red Planet* were filmed.

Despite the onset of a severe cold, I took Petra by storm. In all, they say we walked nearly 10 miles that day - including a 900 meter trek to The Monastery. No matter how bad I felt, it was empowering to know that I walked each and every one of the 800 or so steps to the top. This day also included my first camel ride.

The fourth day brought us to Wadi Rum, where the classic Lawrence of Arabia was filmed years ago. We climbed a sand dune comparable to Sleeping Bear Dunes (only the sand was red), took dune rides throughout the desert, viewed some of the most amazing scenery and then ate lunch at a Bedouin camp.

The final day of our touring included a visit to Jerash. With its Roman influence, we experienced the majestic sounds of bagpipers and drummers in the theater. We saw the sites where chariot races once took place. We

walked up to the Temple of Artemis (daughter of the mighty ruler Zeus and Leto, twin to Apollo --- also known as the goddess Diana). Obviously, this was of interest to me. It is said that Artemis was one of the most independent of the mythological goddesses, one who thrived on challenges. She valued her freedom and personal space, and protected them dearly. Of all the Greek goddesses, she was the most self-sufficient, living life on her own terms, comfortable both in solitude and in holding the reins of leadership. I felt a particular connection at this site.

A trip of this magnitude cannot be adequately described in mere words. It was even more memorable because of the friendships that were molded.

Our tour guide, Ibrahim Abdelhaq, was simply the best. He brought the experience to life with his stories of the Nabataeans and Bedouins and their journeys through Jordan. This summer, Ibrahim is expected to visit Michigan and I can't wait to show off my home state to him (and make him climb our sand dunes!).

Gisele Abrahao, from the Jordan Tourism Board, was a joy to travel with. Always happy and upbeat, even after a week of long hours, she made sure things ran smoothly. Gisele will also be in Michigan this April, to check out the Petra exhibit in Grand Rapids. A brief tour of the area is in the forecast for her as well.

I learned a great deal from the seasoned travelers who were with me on the trip (Jane, Shelley, Deb, Maureen, Myrna, Robin, Stephanie, Amanda, Ron, Denise and Ed). As this was my first international tour, I paid particular attention to how they dealt with varied customs and cultures. I watched as they took notes and snapped photographs, awed by the sites around us. I made mental notes of their particular areas of expertise and look forward to working with them all in the future.

While there's "no place like home," I am hopeful that my travels will take me back to Jordan some day - soon! ■

Websites of interest:

www.seejordan.org

www.calvin.edu/petra