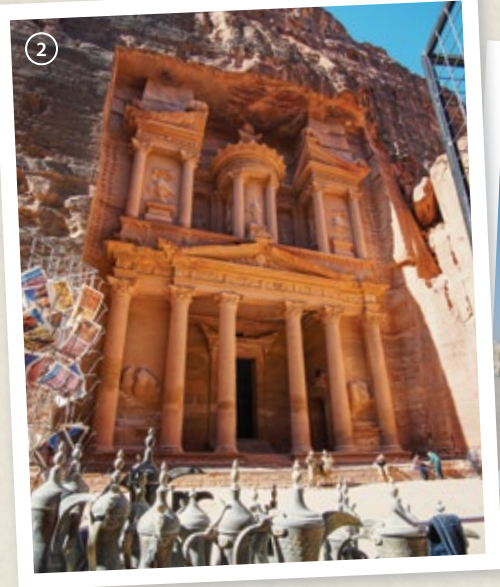


# The Land of Milk and Honey

Text and photos by Dr Wong Tien Hua



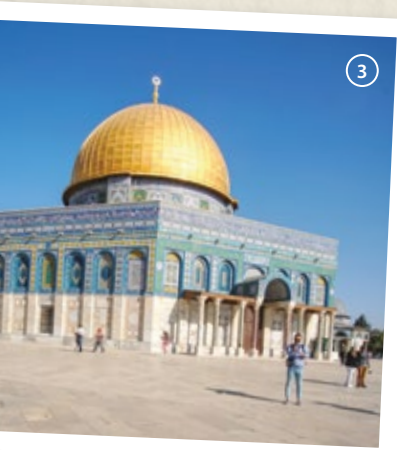
It was late November when we went on a ten-day tour of Jordan and Israel, taking advantage of the cool climate. Our flight landed in Amman, capital city of Jordan – a landlocked country that shares a long land border with Israel.

Travelling southwards, we took a five-hour bus journey to Petra. We stopped by Mount Nebo to view the location where Moses was shown the Promised Land, and Bethany Beyond the Jordan which, according to tradition, was the site where John baptised Jesus in the Jordan River.

The Petra complex is a vast ancient city carved into the rocky terrain, surrounded by mountains, gorges and narrow passages. Dwellings, temples and tombs were carved into the pink sandstone rock face. Petra is accessed via a ticketed entrance, and the walk to the famous Treasury building took about 40 minutes. After making our way through the bottom of a narrow snaking gorge, the passage suddenly opened up into a large courtyard where the famous façade of The Treasury loomed. Our eyes were drawn upwards, leaving our jaws gaping in awe, as we traced the etched rock columns soaring above us. It was larger than life and truly breathtaking to behold. We sat down at an open-air

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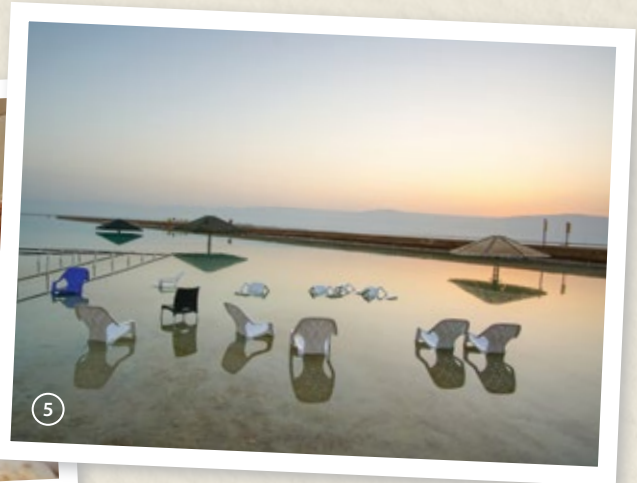




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canteen opposite The Treasury and had a hot brew of spicy thick Turkish coffee as we soaked it all in.

Wadi Rum is a two-hour drive south of Petra and is one of the largest wadis (Arabic for “deserts”) in Jordan. The sand is smooth, powdery and red; coupled with the jagged protruding sandstone formations, the landscape looked completely alien. It was no surprise that this was the filming location of *The Martian* and the latest *Star Wars* movie – *Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker*. We were driven around in an open-top jeep under the late evening sun, and as we gently padded along on the soft sand, it felt like we were skimming the surface on a sand cruiser. We were brought to a rocky outcrop where we enjoyed a spectacular desert sunset. Numerous camps for tourists were scattered around the desert, providing private tents or pods to stay in, each with electricity and an attached bathroom with piped water. A large central tent served as a communal dining hall. We had the experience of “glamping” under the cool and clear starry night.

**Israel**

We crossed into Israel via the southernmost land crossing border point

in Jordan, and the difference was stark. There were modern well-maintained highways that ran the length of the Jordan Valley in Israel, and where we saw arid barren deserts in Jordan, we drove past miles of farms growing bananas, oranges, grapefruits and dates on the Israeli side. All this was possible because of water management and desalination, and high-technology farming methods such as drip irrigation.

A visit to the Dead Sea is a must for any tour to Israel. One can opt to float in the salty water (ten times more concentrated than sea water), which can be described as a unique experience that is not necessarily pleasant. From a photographic point of view, the Dead Sea offers spectacular sunrise photography opportunities since the hotels are dotted along the western shoreline facing east. The still waters of the Dead Sea, combined with the rich minerals within, gives its surface a mirror-like reflective and silvery quality.

**Jerusalem**

Jerusalem is an ancient city that marks the progress of civilisation from antiquity, and is the epicentre of three major world religions. Its history is

found not only on the surface but also deep into the ground, with layer upon layer going back to significant times such as the Roman, Byzantine, Crusade and Ottoman periods. Many of the heritage buildings we see today are also a result of centuries of modification and additions. One cannot understand Jerusalem without personally visiting the multitude of important sites that were mentioned in the biblical narrative and Roman records. The Old City is cramped with narrow streets lined with shops, with markets thronging with traders of exotic wares and where people of different cultures mingle. Jerusalem is a city of contrasts and a photographer’s dream destination. ◆

**Legend**

- 1. The Western Wall, also known as the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, the holiest site for Jews to pray as it is part of the Second Jewish Temple
- 2. The Treasury facade at Petra, Jordan
- 3. The Dome of the Rock, also known as the Blue Mosque, an Islamic shrine on the Temple Mount, Jerusalem
- 4. Mahane Yehuda Market, Jerusalem
- 5. Dawn breaks over the still waters of the Dead Sea
- 6. Spectacular sunset at Wadi Rum, Jordan
- 7. A Bedouin nomad with his transport



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Dr Wong is a family physician practising in the heartlands. He does some photography, mostly during his travels. His pictures are posted on Instagram @docthwong.

