



# THE WILDERNESS TRAIL OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Follow in the footsteps of John the Baptist to deepen your faith and understanding of his message. Learn why he is the patron saint of Jordan for Roman Catholics.





A scenic view of a desert landscape. In the foreground, there is a stone wall made of large, rectangular blocks. Behind the wall, a wooden walkway with railings leads up a sandy, eroded hillside. In the background, there are several wooden structures, including a large pavilion-like building and a smaller one. The sky is clear and blue, and there are some trees and shrubs in the distance.

## AN IDEAL EXPERIENCE FOR ANY CHRISTIAN GROUP

I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way – a voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'"

And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. — Mark 1:2-4

## THE RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE

### Key Scripture References

Luke 1:67-79 (The Canticle of Zechariah)

1 Corinthians 10:1-4

John 1:19-34

Matthew 11:1-15

Mark 1:2-4

Mark 6:17-26

John 3:1-4

### Biblical Reflections to Incorporate

Significance of Wilderness in the Christian Journey

The Wilderness of John the Baptist

The Baptism of Jesus

The imprisonment of John the Baptist

John the Baptist's inquiry from prison

The death of John the Baptist



## **DAY 1 — AMMAN**

Upon afternoon arrival, you will receive your orientation for the journey. Prepare yourself to encounter Christ, Community, and Culture that Jordan has to offer.

(Optional Add-On) – Evening Meal or Fellowship with local church members.

*Spend the night in Amman*



## **DAY 2 — AMMAN-MADABA-MOUNT NEBO**

*Introduction to Jordan, Holy Land map, Holy Mountain and the Wilderness of John the Baptist.*

### **Amman**

Explore the Jordan Museum, and receive an introduction to the history and culture of Jordan. You will also be treated to a sightseeing tour of Amman, including the Citadel and Roman Amphitheater.

## **Madaba**

See the famed sixth-century “Madaba Map,” the oldest surviving mosaic map of the Holy Land. You will view this stunning world heritage map on the floor of the Orthodox Church of St. George in Madaba – the City of Mosaics. Afterward, stroll through the markets on your way to lunch.

## **Depart for Mount Nebo**

On the way, stop by a mosaic workshop where you will learn how mosaics are made in the style that has been handed down for generations. See for yourself the exquisite workmanship, then get a chance to shop nearby.

## **Mount Nebo**

A short drive away is Mount Nebo, where the Bible says that Moses saw the land he would never enter and was buried nearby by God himself. (Deuteronomy 34:1-6)

Enjoy a guided tour that includes history and recent archaeological discoveries, capped off with the stunning panoramic view shared with Moses millennia ago. Afterward, your group may enjoy quiet time, worship, or join any celebrations inside the Memorial of Moses. (The Franciscans often accommodate pre-arranged groups inside their monastery, and are sometimes able to celebrate the Eucharist with small groups in their private chapel.)

After 40 years leading his people in the desert, Moses stood on the widespread summit of Mount Nebo to view the land of milk and honey – knowing he was forbidden to enter it. The mountain first became a place of pilgrimage for early Christians, and a small church was built here in the fourth century to commemorate Moses. Mount Nebo is now tended by the Custody of the Holy Land (Franciscan missionaries). Today, pilgrims can visit and worship in the newly restored Memorial of Moses, which houses splendid remains of mosaics from earlier churches. Those who visit the mountaintop sanctuary – easily accessible by bus and car - are rewarded with stunning panoramic views of the Jordan River, Dead Sea, Bethlehem, the hills of Jerusalem and various other sites, just as Moses would have seen all those centuries ago. (Some scholars believe that God gave Moses a supernatural vision, because it is not possible to see the Western Sea, also known as the Mediterranean.)

Afterward, just as early Christian pilgrims did, you will travel down from Mount Nebo to Bethany beyond the Jordan.

## **Bethany beyond the Jordan**

Check in at your pilgrim guest house, steps from the Jordan River, where you will carry on the tradition of pilgrimage that dates back to the earliest days of Christian travel to the Holy Land.

*Spend the night in the pilgrim guest house at Bethany beyond the Jordan Baptism Site.*





## DAY 3 — BETHANY BEYOND THE JORDAN

*Immerse yourself in his story. Follow Joshua, Elijah, John the Baptist and Jesus to The Crossing Point. Walk where the heavens opened twice. Follow early pilgrims to the very place where Jesus was baptized.*

Your guided tour begins at Elijah's Hill, believed to be the very place where Elijah ascended to heaven. Next, you will follow a winding path through trees and reeds to the very place where John baptized Jesus (John 1:28). See the remains of early churches that include the world's oldest baptistery. Here, Christians continued to build churches despite the earthquakes and floods that would destroy them. Surely this is a place worth remembering!

Next, make your way to the river, where you and your group members may enjoy quiet time, fellowship, worship, or other celebrations.

Bethany beyond the Jordan, the wilderness of John east of the River Jordan where Jesus was baptized, is like no other place on earth. According to Scripture, the heavens opened twice here – first as Elijah was taken up to heaven on a chariot of fire, and second at the baptism of Jesus, when the Holy Spirit descended like a dove upon him, and His Heavenly Father proclaimed His beloved Son.

This is the same wilderness area of "The Crossing," where Joshua and his people crossed the Jordan after their long Exodus journey. In this wilderness, the prophet Elijah lived in a cave on a hill. The early Christians revered the site, and Byzantine monks built a monastery and a church around the cave. John the Baptist, who lived in the cave of Elijah and had a prophet's authority, came here preaching in the spirit of Elijah. So it is no coincidence that Jesus came to this very place for baptism, before crossing from east to west to begin his public ministry.

From the time of Jesus until the 6th Century AD, the area and its settlements were known by several names, including Bethabara, Bethania, Ainon, and Saphsaphas. It is depicted and named on the 6th Century Madaba Mosaic Map of the Holy Land as "Ainon (spring) where now is Saphsaphas." Today the area's Arabic name is al-Maghtas – the Place of Baptism.

The actual site has now been identified as the area that extends between Tell al-Kharrar (Elijah's Hill) and the Church of St. John the Baptist that was mentioned by the early pilgrims. Tell al-Kharrar is believed to be the very spot where Elijah ascended to heaven in a whirlwind on a chariot of fire. Wadi al-Kharrar is believed to be Kerith Ravine, the natural stream "east of the Jordan" where God commanded Elijah to seek refuge from King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. Centuries later, Jesus himself would seek refuge here after being threatened with stoning in Jerusalem.

"Then Jesus went back across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing in the early days. Here he stayed and many people came to him. They said, 'Though John never performed a miraculous sign, all that John said about this man was true.' And in that place many believed in Jesus." John 10:40-42

Now a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Bethany beyond the Jordan welcomes pilgrims from around the world. Located just north of the Dead Sea, the lowest place on earth, visitors can walk the pilgrim trails of this protected park, following the same path as the early Christians. Today, new churches and guest houses of varied traditions offer places of worship and rest for individuals and groups alike.

*Spend the night in the Evason Ma'in Hot Springs Resort.*



## **DAY 4 — MUKAWIR-BANI HAMIDA WEAVING PROJECT-MA'IN HOT SPRINGS**

*Follow the footsteps of John the Baptist. Discover the art of traditional bedouin weaving. Experience the healing springs that drew the ancients.*

### **Mukawir**

"On his birthday Herod gave a banquet for his high officials and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. When the daughter of Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests. The king said to the girl, 'Ask me for anything you want, and I'll give it to you.'" Mark 6:21-22



Within an hour's drive from Madaba along the picturesque Kings' Highway is Mukawir, the hilltop fortress of Herod the Great. Upon his death, his son Herod Antipas inherited the stronghold and it was here that he imprisoned John the Baptist and ordered his beheading after Salome's fateful dance. Here, the voice crying in the wilderness was silenced. But the message he proclaimed can still be heard by those who have ears to hear.

Pilgrims who walk the winding path to the barren hilltop are rewarded not only with sweeping views of the Dead Sea and surrounding area, but also with peaceful stillness. If you stay long enough, you may hear sheep in the distance, or even a call from a shepherd.

John the Baptist, who started and ended his mission in Jordan, is the patron saint of Jordan for Roman Catholics.

### **Bani Hamida Weaving Project**

In the villages south of Madaba city, in the mountains overlooking the Dead Sea, live the formerly nomadic Bedouin tribe of Bani Hamida. Today "Bani Hamida" is synonymous with the weaving project started by twelve women of the tribe in 1985. The women carry on the traditional Bedouin techniques of weaving and sewing passed to them from their mothers and grandmothers. They are supported by Her Majesty Queen Rania, who is very involved in promoting handicrafts from Jordan.

However modern the approach to marketing, the rugs are still woven on the traditional ground looms, constructed of stones, sticks and other available objects. The project is centered in the village of Mukawir, where you can visit the weaving rooms and admire the quality of the work. The women of Bani Hamida also produce decorative candles. Bani Hamida products are now featured in outlets all over the country and internationally.

The project has put money back into the hands of the women to feed, clothe, and educate their children. Recently a girls' school was built near the Bani Hamida villages, partially funded by the money earned through this weaving project

### **Evason Ma'in Hot Springs Resort**

Experience for yourself the healing waters of the natural hot springs that drew the ancients to this area. Your free afternoon will give you an opportunity to recharge and reflect as you prepare for the next part of your journey. Besides the hot springs, you will have a chance to enjoy the spa and other activities, or simply just relax. In the evening, dine on fare that is flavored with ingredients from the resort's own organic herb and vegetable garden.

*Spend the night in the Evason Ma'in Hot Springs Resort.*



## DAY 5 — WADI RUM, PETRA

*Journey from the hills to the desert.*

### **Wadi Rum**

Depart your hot springs retreat by heading south through rolling hills that give way to the countryside that eventually reveals the desert moonscape that T.E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia) once called “vast, echoing and God-like.”

Enjoy a jeep or camel ride (or both) through the desert amid sandstone hills and windswept valleys. Enjoy the sunset before making your way to a Bedouin-style camp, where you will enjoy a traditional meal as you listen to timeless music and the whispers of the desert.

Interesting Fact: Sandstone can be a source of drinking water, just as in the time of Moses.

*Spend the night in a luxury camp in Wadi Rum, or in a hotel in Petra.*





## **DAY 6 — PETRA**

*Crossroads of civilizations and commerce – B.C. and A.D.*

Enjoy a full day exploring Petra, the once bustling Nabatean stronghold carved entirely from red rock. In the centuries just before and after Christ, the city of Petra was a strategically located center of commerce, attracting caravans traveling the roads from Egypt, Arabia and the Levant. Influences of many civilizations can be found here, yet so much of this 'rose-red city half as old as time' has yet to be excavated.

Before the Nabateans, the Edomites ruled this region. The area is part of the route that Moses and his people took on their long Exodus journey. The Edomite king denied passage, so Moses had to bypass the land of Edom. It is near Mount Hor, the final resting place of the prophet Aaron.

You will also have the opportunity to prepare a traditional meal under the guidance of a chef and local women.

*Spend the night in Petra-Wadi Musa (The Valley of Moses).*



## DAY 7 — LOT'S CAVE, DEAD SEA

*From rose-red rocks to the sea of salt.*

Say goodbye to Petra as you head north to the area of the Dead Sea. On the way, stop by a local pottery shop where you can learn how Petra pottery and clay artworks are made by a group of women supported by USAID. After a bit of shopping, you will be on your way again.

### Lot's Cave

"Lot looked up and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan was well watered, like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, toward Zoar. (This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east. The two men parted company: Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom." Genesis 13:10-12

The infamous Sodom and Gomorrah and other cities of the Dead Sea plain were the subjects of some of the most dramatic and enduring Old Testament stories. On a hillside above the town of Zoar (modern-day Safi), Byzantine Christians built a church and monastery dedicated to St. Lot where they believed he and his daughters found refuge in a cave after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The Bible says Lot's daughters gave birth to sons whose descendants would become the Ammonite and Moabite people, whose kingdoms were in what is now north and central Jordan.

Enjoy a guided tour of the Byzantine monastery complex near the presumed location of Lot's Cave. Afterward, take a short trip – with a possible photo stop for breathtaking panoramic pictures – to your hotel on the northern tip of the Dead Sea.

### Dead Sea

The Bible variously calls the Dead Sea the "Sea of Arabah," the "Salt Sea," or the "Eastern Sea." Medieval texts refer to it as "the Devil's Sea," but the Arab people have always known it as Bahr Lut (Lot's Sea).

The entire length of the Dead Sea's eastern shore -- from the Jordan River in the north, past the world-class hotels, resorts, spas and thermal springs, to the broad plain at the southern end with its



enormous salt formations – is easily accessible on roads from central and southern Jordan.

Relax and rejuvenate during your free afternoon. Soak up the oxygen and experience the healing powers of the world's largest open-air spa. Boasting the highest content of minerals and salts in the world, the waters of the Dead Sea possess anti-inflammatory properties. The rich mud found on its shores has been used therapeutically for thousands of years. Float, sunbathe and explore the resort at your own pace.

*Spend the night at the Dead Sea.*



## **DAY 8 — UMM QAIS, PELLA, TEL MAR ELIAS**

*Decapolis miracle. Refuge. Birthplace of a Prophet.*

Journey to the north of Jordan to a region dotted with villages, green hills, olive groves, wildflowers, and ancient ruins. In biblical times, the hills east of the Jordan Valley were known for the lush Forests of Gilead. Home to many of the Greco-Roman cities that made up the famed “Region of the Decapolis,” church tradition teaches that Jesus and his disciples traveled back and forth through this area preaching and spreading their Good News.

### **Umm Qais**

“They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee. When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town.” Luke 8:26-27

Your first stop is the Decapolis city of Gadara (modern-day Umm Qais), with its sweeping panoramic view overlooking the Sea of Galilee. This ancient city of poets and philosophers is the site of Jesus’ miracle of the Gadarene swine.

A rare five-aisled basilica from the 4th Century has been excavated here. It had been built directly over a Roman-Byzantine tomb. Everything about this distinctive arrangement indicates it was designed and built to commemorate the spot where the Byzantine faithful believed that Jesus performed his miracle.

## Pella/Penuel

"So Jacob called the place Penuel, saying 'It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.'" Genesis 32:30

Next, you will journey through the picturesque countryside to reach Pella.

Tour the remains here of a massive Bronze and Iron Age temple, considered one of the best-preserved temples from Old Testament times anywhere in the Holy Land. The discovery of this temple strongly indicates that Pella is the site of ancient Penuel.

Scholars debate the precise location of Penuel, but they place the site in connection to the Jabbok River (modern-day Zarqa River), in the northern Jordan Valley. Both Penuel and Mahanaim, in the northern Jordan Valley where Jacob stopped during his flight from Mesopotamia to Canaan, have traditionally been identified with two sites – Telul ed-Dahab al-Gharbi and Telul ed-Dahab al-Sharqi (the eastern and western hills of gold).

Jacob had reconciled with his uncle, Laban, who had caught up with him at Mizpah in Gilead, but he still feared his brother Esau, whose birthright he had stolen. When Jacob camped at Mahanaim on his way to meet Esau, he was greeted by the angels of God who came to protect him. Nevertheless, a frightened Jacob made the first prayer in the Bible that asks God for personal protection.

Penuel (the face of God) was so named by Jacob after he wrestled there all night with God in the form of a man or angel (Genesis 32:24-30). After Jacob's struggle with the angel of God, his name was changed to Isra-el (he who struggles with God). He went on to reconcile with Esau and continued with his family to Canaan to later emerge as the father of the twelve tribes of Israel. Esau remained in southern Jordan, where the Bible describes him as the father of the Edomites in the land of Seir (also called Edom).

Eusebius, known as the Father of Church History, said that early Jewish followers of Jesus fled to Pella for safety before Jerusalem's destruction.

## Tel Mar Elias

"Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, 'As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word.'" I Kings 17:1.

Tour the architectural remains of two churches that were built upon the Tel (hilltop) at the end of the Byzantine period to commemorate the birthplace of the prophet Elijah. After the tour, your group may enjoy quiet time, worship, or other celebrations, or simply take in the views from atop this holy hill.

Tel Mar Elias is very close to the ruins of a village known as Listib. It is believed that this place was formerly Tishbe.

In the evening, join the group for your farewell dinner.

*Spend the night at the Dead Sea, before departing the following day.*



## TRIP HIGHLIGHTS



- Experience a full day of exploration, contemplation, worship, and fellowship at the UNESCO World Heritage Site of “Bethany beyond the Jordan,” the biblical location of the Baptism of Jesus. *Spend the night just steps from the Jordan River in pilgrim guest house.*
- Visit Mukawir, the fortress where John the Baptist was imprisoned, Salome performed her infamous dance, and the prophet was beheaded.
- Experience the healing properties of the hot mineral springs that drew ancients to the hills near Madaba and the Dead Sea.
- Tour Madaba, home to the famed sixth-century Madaba Map of the Holy Land, and Mount Nebo, where the Bible says Moses saw the land he would never enter and was buried by God himself.
- Visit the decapolis cities of Amman, Pella and Umm Qais.
- Immerse yourself in a desert experience in the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Wadi Rum, where you will dine under the stars in traditional Bedouin style.
- Spend a full day of exploring the rose-red city of Petra, part of the ancient Edomite Kingdom, now a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- Explore the Byzantine monastery at Lot’s Cave and spend time rejuvenating at the Dead Sea!



## FIVE TIPS FOR TRAVELERS!

1. A morning walk through the baptism site during the warmer seasons is preferable to midday/afternoon visits.
2. Arrangements in advance can be made by your tour provider for worship, celebrations, baptisms and other ceremonies at holy sites.
3. Most tour operators can customize trips!
4. Remember that Mount Nebo, Mukawir, Madaba and Bethany beyond the Jordan are all within a thirty-minute drive from the Dead Sea. Likewise, the airport and Amman are easily accessible from the Dead Sea.
5. Expanded Descriptions of Holy Sites Available in “Biblical Jordan” guidebook, one of many guidebooks available for free download at [MyJordanJourney.com](http://MyJordanJourney.com).

## ADAPTATIONS AND OPTIONS

1. Extended stay available for spiritual retreat, intensive study, or conference.
2. Venue options include pilgrim guest houses near the Jordan River at Bethany beyond the Jordan Baptism site, Dead Sea hotels, Cabins in Ajloun Forest Reserve, Ajloun Baptist Conference Center and many more.
3. Combined destination programs can easily adapt portions of this program.
4. Fellowship opportunities available with local Christian Church members.