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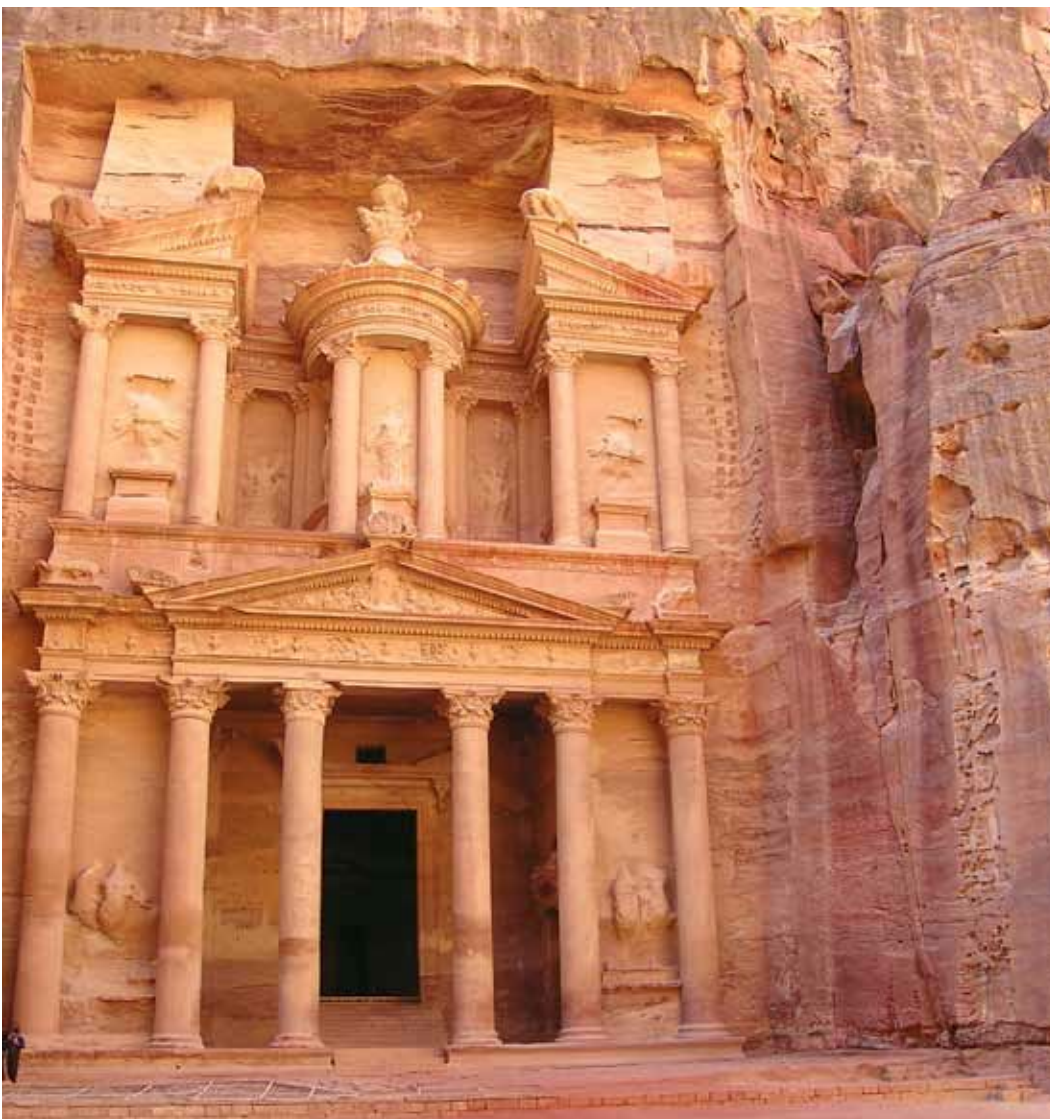
MIDDLE EAST

[jordan]

Lured by the Past

Opposite Page: A crack in the cliffs reveals the lost city of Petra.

This Page: The Nabataeans poured their vast wealth into fashioning Petra entirely from stone.



Hollywood Has Always Had A Fascination With Jordan

By Mark Sissons



Hot on the trail of the Holy Grail in Steven Spielberg's 1989 film, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, Harrison Ford rode on horseback through a crack in the cliffs and into the spectacular lost city of Petra, hidden in Southern Jordan's sandstone mountains.

In Ridley Scott's Crusader epic, *Kingdom of Heaven*, a key battle is fought at the massive hilltop fortress of Karak, overlooking the Jordan Valley. And what cinephile can forget Peter O'Toole and Omar Sharif's famous first *Lawrence of Arabia* encounter in the otherworldly desert wasteland of Wadi Rum, just inland from Jordan's Red Sea port of Aqaba.

Hollywood and The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan were made for each other. This tiny Middle Eastern nation, wedged between Iraq, Syria, Israel and Saudi Arabia, has long attracted some of the world's most famous film directors, lured by its fascinating combination of well-preserved ruins and breathtaking scenery. For Hollywood, as it is for thousands of Canadian tourists that visit each year, a journey through Jordan can feel like stepping onto an epic Cecil B. DeMille film set.

From City Of Stone To Temple Of Doom

In the final installment of the Indiana Jones trilogy, Indy's quest for the Grail reaches its climax in the Canyon of the Crescent Moon and the Holy Temple (secret home to the Grail); in reality, Al Khazneh (Arabic for Treasury), the colossal rock-cut royal memorial and tomb that has become the symbol of Petra.

Once the commercial crossroads of the ancient world, Petra was founded in the seventh century BC as a hideout for the Nabataeans, a secretive nomadic desert tribe that plundered camel caravans plying the overland trade route between the Arabian Peninsula and the Mediterranean coast.

Over time, these desert highwaymen realized it was easier and far more profitable to guarantee the caravan's safe passage, in exchange for a hefty toll, than to rob them. They grew preposterously rich, first from their protection racket, then from trading silks, spices, gold,

gemstones, ivory and textiles from as far away as India and China. Their capital of Petra became a bustling nexus of commerce and culture.

The Nabataeans poured their vast wealth into fashioning a city entirely from stone, importing Greek artisans to carve nearly 3,000 elaborate temples, tombs and dwellings. But overland trade routes eventually shifted, sea routes opened and the commercial crossroads of the ancient world gradually fell into decline. By the time the Christian crusaders abandoned their cliff top outpost in the 13th century, Europe was in full retreat from the Arab world. The gulf between cultures would last hundreds of years, in which time Petra, concealed from outsiders by labyrinthine desert terrain, disappeared from most maps and became truly lost.

Over five centuries passed before Swiss explorer Johann Burckhardt, disguised as a Muslim scholar, “rediscovered” Petra in 1812 en route to exploring the source of Africa’s Niger River. Burckhardt’s discovery sparked a Western infatuation with Petra. Today, with over 400,000 visitors a year, it rivals Egypt’s pyramids as the Middle East’s most famous tourist attraction.

Key To The Kingdom

“We must meet Saladin before he reaches Karak,” declares Baldwin IV, the so-called Leper King, in Ridley Scott’s sword and sandal epic, *Kingdom of Heaven*. Set in the late 1180s, during the fragile Christian-Muslim truce that preceded the Third Crusade, the film tells the story of a young blacksmith named Balian (Orlando Bloom) who ventures from his small French village to the Holy Land. There, he becomes a crusader knight and ends up as defender of Christian-held Jerusalem against Sultan Saladin’s Muslim army.

In the movie, much of the action takes place at the Crusader fortress of Karak. Completed in 1161, after 20 years of construction, this magnificent example of Crusader architecture withstood several Muslim sieges before it came under the control of Reynald de Chatillon (Brendan Gleason in the film). He was so notorious for his cruelty that Saladin personally beheaded him after the Battle of Hattin in 1187. That defeat marked the beginning of the end of Crusader power.

Today, as it did almost nine centuries ago, Karak castle dominates the surrounding landscape. Located 124 kilometres south of Amman, near the southern end of the Dead Sea, this crumbling icon of the age of chivalry casts a dominant shadow on the adjacent town, still largely Christian that shares its name.

Beneath Karak Castle’s massive stone walls and towers are dimly-lit rooms and corridors connected by low arches and doorways. Perhaps the Middle East’s most impressive remaining example of Crusader architecture, Karak once anchored a string of desert outposts, each a day’s journey from the next. At night, beacons lit at each castle signaled “all’s well” to Christian-held Jerusalem.

Land Of Sand, Silence & Lawrence

Best known because of its connection with the enigmatic British officer T.E. Lawrence, who was based here during the Great Arab Revolt of 1917-18, Wadi Rum is the epitome of desert romance. It’s a chimerical maze of twisting canyons and towering sandstone and granite cliffs that rise out of the scorching

As it did almost nine centuries ago, Karak castle dominates the surrounding landscape.



Arabian Desert. This mesmerizing desert wasteland is also home to several Bedouin tribes who live in scattered camps throughout the area where much of David Lean's 1962 Oscar-winning biopic *Lawrence of Arabia* was filmed.

Chief gateway is the village of Rum, headquarters of the renowned Desert Patrol. In the distance, shimmering in the intense heat, rise the seven stacked

columns of a mountain Lawrence named the Seven Pillars of Wisdom, also the title of his autobiography.

Today, Wadi Rum is a magnet for adventurous trekkers and rock climbers; keen to tackle vertical walls up to 1,500 metres high, with grades of up to 6. Overnight or multi-day camel, horse and jeep safaris depart daily from Rum, venturing far into canyons where well-equipped campsites await, offering typical Bedouin feasts and musical entertainment. Weary trekkers

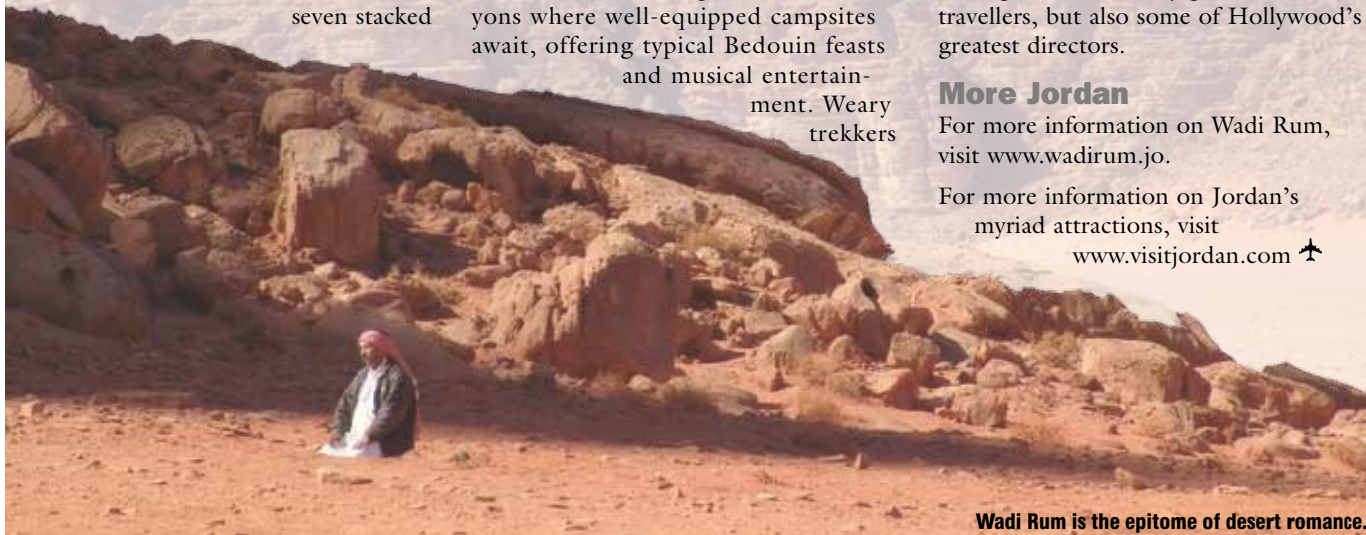
can choose to bunk down after a hard day on the dunes inside spacious, airy tents. Or outside, wrapped in blankets round the campfire.

Drifting off to sleep under a canopy of stars, enveloped in the infinite silence of an Arabian Desert night, it isn't hard to imagine why a place that Lawrence described as "vast, echoing and Godlike" has captivated not only generations of travellers, but also some of Hollywood's greatest directors.

More Jordan

For more information on Wadi Rum, visit www.wadirum.jo.

For more information on Jordan's myriad attractions, visit www.visitjordan.com ✈



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