

nearby village that offered running water, electricity, a medical clinic, and a school. Only Shaher and a few others hired as security guards were allowed to remain

For hundreds of years, the xenophobic Bedoul guarded Petra's secrets, denying outsiders access to the Siq-the 1,200-metre-long, five-metre-wide sliver in the cliffs that was, and still is, the only route into the city. But two millenniums ago, their Nabataean predecessors would have welcomed the arrival of visitors

On that day in Jordan when I entered the Siq myself, I tried to imagine how caravan drivers must have felt, already three months into a dangerous journey through hostile, banditinfested desert terrain, as Nabataean sentries guided them into the legendary city of 20,000. Surely it was a huge sense of relief at having made it this far alive, and then utter amazement, like me, at their first glimpse of the treasury (Al Khazneh), the massive rockcut royal memorial and tomb that has become Petra's symbol. Beyond the treasury awaited an urban oasis of elaborate public fountains, pools, beautiful gardens, and luxurious homes with sophisticated plumbing. Hand-carved channels carried precious water into enormous reservoirs-enough to sustain a city five times Petra's population on less than 150 millimetres of annual rainfall.

The Nabataeans also carved grandiose tombs for their famous citizens. Among them was Herod the Great, the Biblical arch-villain best known as the butcher of Bethlehem in the Christmas story, Herod, a Petran prince, was also a brilliant athlete, playboy, and even president of the Olympic Games. His spiteful stepdaughter, Salome, secured infamy for ordering John the Baptist's head delivered to her on a platter. Some scholars even believe that the three wise men of the Nativity story were actually Petran frankincense-and-myrrh

To date, less than five percent of Petra has been exhumed. "It is such a beautiful place and we know so little about it that every day's excavation brings something new." writes archaeologist Patricia Bikai, associate director of the American Centre of Oriental Research in Amman, in an e-mail to the Straight. Bikai has spent decades unearthing Petra's secrets. "By uncovering some of the beautiful things that are there and conserving them and presenting them, we honour the makers of those things."

As I explored the Nabataeans' magnificent lost and found capital of Petra, I was the one who felt honoured. The Glenbow Museum's exhibition helped me discover it all over again.

ACCESS: Petra: Lost City of Stone runs at Calgary's Glenbow Museum (www.glenbow.org/) until February 20, 2006. In April, it moves to the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Ottawa. For more of Vivian Ronay's photographs, visit www.petrapho tos.com/

In light of the recent bombings in Amman, the question naturally arises: is it safe to travel to Jordan? Despite this tragedy, Jordan remains one of the safest countries for tourists in the Middle East, Already-tight security measures will no doubt dramatically increase. Canadians considering travelling to Jordan should consult Foreign Affairs Canada's travel updates at www.voyage.gc.ca/

Royal Jordanian Airlines (www .rj.com/) flies to Amman nonstop daily from Chicago and New York, and connects Amman to European hubs. From Amman, Petra is a three- to fourhour drive south.

Other useful Web sites include the Jordan Tourist Board (www.see-jordan.com/), the Complete Petra (www.isidore-of-seville.com/petra/), and the American Center of Oriental Research (www.bu.edu/acor/). Of course, you can always rent Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade, which was partially shot in Petra.





<u>Ads by Google</u> <u>Rare Jordan</u> <u>Petra Jordania</u> <u>Amman Jordan</u> <u>Jordan Tourism</u>

Post New Comment







Petra Jordan Adventure Travel for Canadians Canada's Small **Group Specialists**









The Eat-Clean Diet Tosca Reno New CDN\$ 15.29 Best CDN\$ 6.25



The Omnivore's Michael Pollan New CDN\$ 12.78 Best CDN\$ 8.90



Gordon Ramsay's Fast Food Gordon Ramsay New CDN\$ 22.05 Best CDN\$ 22.05