Jordan

Location

Jordan is located in the heart of the Middle East, northwest of Saudi Arabia, south of Syria, southwest of Iraq, and east of Israel and the occupied West Bank. Jordan has access to the Red Sea with the port city of Aqaba, located at the northern end of the Gulf of Aqaba.

Geography

The territory of Jordan covers about 91,880 square kilometers. Until 1988, when King Hussein relinquished Jordan’s claim to the West Bank, that area was considered part of Jordan, although only officially recognized as such by Britain and Pakistan. At that time, the West Bank, which encompasses about 5,880 square kilometers, had been under Israeli occupation since June 1967 in the war between Israel and the states of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. Jordan is landlocked except at its southern extremity, where it has nearly twenty-six kilometers of shoreline along the Gulf of Aqaba, which provides access to the Red Sea. A great north-south geological rift forming the depression of Lake Tiberias, the Jordan Valley, and the Dead Sea is the dominant topographical feature.

Climate

The major characteristic of the climate is the contrast between a relatively rainy season from November to April and very dry weather for the rest of the year. With hot, dry, uniform summer and cool, variable winters during which practically all of the precipitation occurs. The country has a Mediterranean-style climate. In general, the farther inland from the Mediterranean Sea, the greater are the seasonal contrasts in temperature and the less rainfall. Atmospheric pressure during the summer months are relatively uniform, whereas, the winter months bring a succession of marked low pressure areas and accompanying cold fronts. These cyclonic disturbances generally move eastward over the
Mediterranean Sea several times a month and result in sporadic precipitation.

History

The kingdom of Jordan is steeped in history and has been a major site for civilization since the Paleolithic Age. New findings of habitation are being found constantly. In 331 BC, the armies of Alexander the Great conquered the Near East, bringing Hellenic culture to the area. Jordan’s modern history dates from 1921, when Emir Abdullah, the second son of Sherif Hussein, established the Emirate of Trans-Jordan as self-governing territory under British mandate. In May 1946, Emir Abdullah was proclaimed king of the independent Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. The formal union of Jordan and the West Bank was declared in 1950. In 1953, King Hussein ibn Talal took over as king. He ruled until 1999 when he died of cancer at the age of 63. People say he will be remembered as a peaceful man because of his efforts in establishing and maintaining peace in the Middle East. Shortly before Hussein's demise, he relieved his own brother and Crown Prince for more than 34 years, Prince Hassan, from his duties and appointed his eldest son, Prince Abdullah, as Crown Prince.

Important Dates


Population

The population of Jordan is 4,322,255 with an average population density of 48 people per sq km. The population of Jordan is almost entirely Arab. The only sizable racial minorities in the country are the Circassians and Armenians and each does not account for even one percent of the population.
Jordan is 72 percent urban, and nomads and semi-nomads make up about five percent of the population. Approximately 78 percent of Jordan’s people reside in major cities such as Amman, Zarqa, Irbid, Salt, and Mafrag. Amman, the capital, contains about 38 percent of the country’s population.

**Currency**

The legal currency of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is Jordan Dinar, commonly abbreviated JD. This was introduced on July 1, 1950. The Jordan Dinar is divided into 1000 fills. A JD equals $1.4 U.S. dollar in 2002. Coin denominations are: 5, 10, 25, 50, 100 fils and 0.25, 0.5, and 1 dinar. Paper denominations are: 0.5, 1, 10, 20, 50 dinars.

**Education**

Education is free and compulsory for kids from 6 to 15 years old. The general paths for education are broken up into four parts. Primary, which are grades 1-6; preparatory, which are grades 7-9; secondary, which are grades 10-12; and postsecondary, which is any other higher education. Standardized written examinations are used to control the jump from secondary to the postsecondary programs. The Ministry of Education, which controls all education, administers the examinations. About 75 percent of students attend the free government schools. About 15 percent of students attend other free schooling programs and 10 percent attend private schools.

**Language**

Arabic is the official language in Jordan. English is taught at schools as a second language, and is widely used in governmental correspondence with international organizations and by most private sector companies.

**Religion**

More than 90 percent of Jordanians adhered to Sunni Islam in the late 1980s. Although
observance was not always orthodox, devotion to and identification with the faith was high. Islam was the established religion, and as such, its institutions received government support. The 1952 Constitution stipulates that the king and his successors must be Muslims and sons of Muslim parents. Religious minorities included Christians of various denominations, a few Shia Muslims, and even fewer adherents of other faiths.

**Agriculture**

Jordan’s agriculture suffered a disaster in 1967 after the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, which is about half of the country’s agricultural land. Before the war, the West Bank produced 25 percent of Jordan’s grain, 40 percent of the vegetables, and 70 percent of the fruit produce. The workforce in agriculture went from 37 percent to seven percent in a matter of 20 years in 1965. Only five percent of Jordan’s remaining land is arable and irrigation is often a problem, because the entire area depends on rainfall. The major grain crops are wheat and barley, but these need to be heavily supplemented by foreign imports. Some fruit crops are grown for export. These include olives, figs, almonds, grapes, and apricots. Main vegetable crops are tomatoes and cucumbers. The major livestock is sheep, cattle, goats, and poultry. Approximately one-in-six households in the capital of Jordan, which is 1.8 million people, grow their own fruit, vegetables, and herbs...some even raise chickens and goats.

**Trade**

After several years of sluggish growth, Jordan’s economy is beginning to stage a recovery. Jordan was just admitted to membership in the World Trade Organization in April 2000, after agreeing to a package of trade and investment liberation measures, as well as improvements in protections for foreign-owned intellectual property. The United States and Jordan concluded a bilateral free trade treaty in October 2000.
Food

Food is a very important aspect within the Jordanian culture. In most villages, meals are a community event with the immediate and extended family present. In addition, food is commonly used by Jordanians to express their hospitality and generosity. Jordanians by nature are a very hospitable people and, often, it is presented within minutes of a person’s invitation to a local house. Jordan’s national dish is known as mansaf. This is a whole stewed lamb, cooked in a yogurt sauce and served on a bed of rice. Maglouba is meat, fish, or vegetable stew served with rice, and musakhan is a chicken dish cooked with onions, olive oil, and pine seeds. This is baked in the oven on a thick loaf of Arabic bread.

Landmarks

About 60 archaeological sites appeal to the mainstream tourist. There are some 100 significant biblical sites and 60 to 70 noted Islamic sites. Mountains, including Jabal Ramm and Tal’at al Jamaah, and Jabal Mabrak, are known worldwide. The major lake is the Dead Sea. The Wahat al Azraq Rivers are major features in Jordan. The Ard as Sawwan Syrian Desert is also a landmark in Jordan.