



ADVENTURE  
EDELWEISS TOURS

## ADVENTURE SAUDI ARABIA & JORDAN

Covering another blank spot on our travel map by touring “  
” Saudi Arabia and Jordan

## RIDING DAY 1 : JEDDAH - AL BAHAH

### Standard Route (430 km / 267 miles)

In order to leave the hustle and bustle of the big city as quickly as possible, we take the city highway, which finally brings us onto the main route heading south. At the beginning, city houses and industrial areas line our way, but soon we are surrounded by the monotony of the desert. Parallel to the coast we ride towards the south, every now and then roads branch off that seemingly lead to nowhere. North of Al Lith a sign points to one of the world's largest aquacultures NAQUA, which exports about 50,000 tons of shrimp and fish per year to 32 countries. Unfortunately, the roads that go through are closed to public traffic. In Al Lith we leave the coast and ride inland. We approach the mountain ranges of the Asir Mountains and quite soon we enter one of the valleys. The villages are somewhat off the road and there is hardly any traffic. The first herds of camels appear, the animals do not seem to belong to anyone. At Al Markwah we meet the main road leading from the coast to Al Baha. Boldly built into the rock, it needs not to fear any comparison with the roads in the Alps. Our overnight stay lies at an altitude of 2,270 m above sea level, higher than some of the peaks in the Alps in Europe.

### Highlights:

#### #1: Thee Ain



Thee Ain, Dhi Ayn or Zee Ain Village is located in the Al-Mikhwat province of the Al-Baha region. The village is characterized by houses made of polished stones dating back to the 8th century and is located southwest of the city of Al Makhwah next to the river that comes out of the mountains. It comprises more than 40 houses and a mosque, nearby forts protected it from raids. The village was named after the water that flows from the nearby mountains. The village was founded in the tenth century AD and witnessed numerous clashes between the tribes of the area before the unification of the kingdom by King Abdul Aziz Al Saud. The town is listed as one of the most beautiful "Heritage Villages" in the country and has been included as a candidate for the World Heritage designation.

## RIDING DAY 2 : AL BAHAH - TA'IF

### Standard Route (260 km / 161 miles)

We leave Al Baha and are on the road all day in the mountainous country. Small and larger villages alternate, the road moves along the mountain ridges, most of the time we travel at about 2000 m above sea level. Since the mountain ranges run parallel to the coast and become lower and lower towards the west, sensational views open up to the observer. Again and again you can see the mountain ranges that line up one after the other and get lost in the haze.

Stone towers and fortifications can be seen throughout the region along the route. These structures are commonly referred to as "Qasaba" and were watchtowers, protecting roads, plantations and villages from unwanted visitors. These stone structures have earned the region its name "the region of 1001 towers".

### Highlights:

#### #1: Asir-Gebirge



The Asir Mountains (also: Asyr Mountains) are located on the western side of the Arabian Peninsula in the region of the same name and run parallel to the Red Sea. The highest mountains in Saudi Arabia, Jabal Ferwan and Jabal Sauda, are part of the mountain range. Important cities in and around the mountains are Mecca and Khamis Mushait. Geologically, the Asir Mountains are the eastern rift shoulder of the Red Sea Rift Valley. The residents are predominantly farmers and, like the Yemenis, are rather short in stature. Terraces and defensive towers characterize the landscape.

## RIDING DAY 3 : TA'IF - KING ABDULLAH CITY

### Standard Route (300 km / 186 miles)

We leave At Ta'if and quite soon a big overhead signpost tells us that we as "non-Muslims" can only go in one direction - and that is NOT towards Makkah (Mecca)! So we follow everyone else, and for a while we share the highway with other "non-believers" and trucks. From Al Jumum on, there is finally an old road we can follow. Away from the highway, we now pass through sparsely sown villages, the mountains recede into the background, pasture land spreads out. Here and there herds of camels, of which we will see more, move through the landscape. Our destination today, King Abdulah Economic City, also called KAEC for short, lies directly by the sea.

### Highlights:

#### #1: King Abdullah City



King Abdullah Economic City is a city under construction that is expected to grow into a city of one million people in Saudi Arabia by 2030. Like the Neom project, the KAEC urban development is a core element of the "Vision 2030" for Saudi Arabia after the oil era. The city is located between the two holy cities of Mecca and Medina by the Red Sea and about 125 km north of the port city of Jeddah

and has a total area of 168 km<sup>2</sup>.

In addition to new industrial plants and extensive housing estates, large buildings and tall skyscrapers are planned to shape the appearance of Saudi Arabia and the entire Middle East. The project is expected to cost about 110 billion Saudi riyals (about 22 billion euros). The new city has been projected to accommodate 2 million residents, as well as another 1.8 million in the agglomeration. It will also serve as an urgently needed catchment basin for the approximately 100,000 annually mostly well-educated young Saudis who have not yet been absorbed by the labor market. The city is already served by an international seaport, and an airport will follow. It is already connected to the interior of the country by a high-speed rail track and well-developed trunk roads. Since the start of municipal operations in 2013, around 5,000 residents have settled. In the medium term, the infrastructure is to be designed for 2 million inhabitants.

## RIDING DAY 4 : KING ABDULLAH CITY - YANBU

### **Standard Route (410 km / 255 miles)**

The first part of today takes us north along the coast. Shortly before Rabigh, thousands of power cables seem to lead into the desert. On the coast to our left, smoke rises from various chimneys. Certainly not the most beautiful side of Saudi Arabia, but necessary as everywhere else in the world. The factory facilities are an electric power plant and a large petrochemical plant. A short time later, however, we turn back to the beautiful side and seek solitude in the hinterland. It can hardly be more lonely than the road through the Wadi Al Qaha. In some parts of the dry valley you can clearly see that every now and then plenty of water washes in sand and gravel and the road has to be cleared with construction machinery. Undeterred, goats, donkeys and camels graze in the wasteland. At some point we meet the road from Medina to Yanbu, our destination for today.

## RIDING DAY 5 : YANBU - AL-'ULA

### Standard Route (720 km / 447 miles)

For the next few days we say goodbye to the Red Sea and head inland. But after just a few kilometers, Yanbu al Nakhal invites us to stay. A place full of history at the entrance to the mountains, in former times an important station for pilgrims on their way to Medina. However, we continue northward, feeling more and more the influence of the "Great Desert", sand and boulders alternate between the increasingly low mountains. Instead of dry grassy areas, oases now appear in the valleys that have groundwater. The lush green of the palm trees becomes a treat for the eyes. Shortly before reaching Al'Ula, we encounter for the first time the remains of a building that was part of the infrastructure of the Hedjaz Railway. Before we continue to our hotel, we climb up to the viewpoint Harrat above the village with our motorcycles. A breathtaking view of reddish colored rocks, in between palm oases in deep green and the sand of the desert in the distance makes us hold our breath.

### Highlights:

#### #1: Al Yabiriyah



Yanbu al Nakhl, now Al Jabiriyah, is more than 2000 years old and was one of the most important historical portals in the western part of Saudi Arabia. As a result, it quickly became a commercial center for pilgrim convoys, and the old city is rich in stories and historical facts.

The name "Yanbu" derived from the more than one hundred springs available at that time, according to history, the city extended to the coast of the Red Sea. Already 1400 years ago, the town was a landmark on the trade routes of Sham and Egypt and grew in this role with the spread of Islam and the increasing number of pilgrims. The most prominent building is a castle built by the soldiers of Mohammad Ali Pasha.

## #2: Harrat Viewpoint



The viewpoint above the village is an absolute must! From the village of Al'Ula you follow a road framed by rocks into a valley. At the end of this valley, a winding, steep road leads to a high plateau. You already think you have gone the wrong way, but after a few kilometers you reach the viewpoint, which offers an incredible panorama with a view of the oasis, the rock formations and the desert that begins behind them.

## RIDING DAY 6 : AL-'ULA

### Standard Route (0 km / 0 miles)

After long days of riding we deserve a rest day! With all that Al'ula and its surroundings have to offer, it's hard to choose the right thing. The graves of the Naabtäer in Hegra, the bizarre rock formations, the station of the Hedjaz railroad, the old settlement of Al'Ula, the completely mirrored opera house - contrasts between nature and art, whereby sometimes nature seems to be the artist. One would like to visit everything and at the same time there should be some time to relax at our hotel.

### Highlights:

#### #1: Mada'in Salih



Mada'in Salih is an excavation site located near the oasis of al-'Ula. It is the ancient city of Hegra, a commercial metropolis originally built by the Nabataeans. The city's heavily fortified Nabataean fortress was converted into a frontier garrison on the Limes Arabicus after the Romans took over in the early second century. The town lies on an ancient Nabataean trade route and has a water reservoir

near an old caravanserai. With the construction of the Hejaz Railway at the beginning of the 20th century, Mada'in Salih received a railroad station.

Mada'in Salih is known for its more than 100 rock tombs built during the Nabataean era, dating from the first pre-Christian to the first post-Christian centuries. The site was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2008 for its Nabataean cultural properties.



## #2: Hedjaz Bahn



The Hejaz Railway - also known as the Mecca Railway, Sacred Railway or Desert Railway - is considered a pioneering technical achievement. It was built in its northern part, now in Syria and Jordan, by local construction companies, and further south exclusively by up to 7,000 soldiers of the Ottoman armed forces.

The trunk line is said to have 1532 bridges, two tunnels and 96 operating stations, some of which are also railway stations - some of the reception buildings are architecturally attractive.

The line runs from Damascus via Dar'a and Amman in Jordan to Medina. A branch line ran from Dar'a in Syria to Haifa in present-day Israel and was extended to the Sinai Peninsula during the First World War. Another branch line, started later but never completed, was to run from Ma'an to the Jordanian port of Aqaba.

For the Ottoman Empire, the railway was also of great political importance. Caliph Sultan Abdülhamid II wanted to prove with the project of the Hejaz Railway that the Ottoman Empire was capable of realizing such an extensive project on its own.

Its destination, Mecca, represented another political dimension that was intended to underscore the caliph's role as the leader of all Muslims, including those outside the Ottoman Empire. Since it thus drastically facilitated the pilgrims' journey to Mecca (Hajj), Muslims from all over the world donated for its construction.

In addition, there was the military-strategic function of the railway, which made it possible to better control and connect the Arab border areas, which was primarily directed against the British presence by the Suez Canal and the Red Sea.

Construction of the line began in 1900 and, despite enormous difficulties caused by heat, sandstorms and lack of water, was completed in a record time of just eight years, but only as far as Medina. The Hejaz Railway was opened on September 1, 1908, and the branch line from Dar'a to Haifa in 1904. Five trains ran daily during the pilgrimage season. At a maximum speed of 30 kilometers per hour, they covered the distance in just three days - a camel caravan needed around one and a half months. During the First World War, the railway was a favorite target of rebellious Bedouins led by Lawrence of Arabia.

The last time a train ran the entire route between Damascus and Medina was in 1924.

## RIDING DAY 7 : AL-'ULA - TABUK

### Standard Route (720 km / 447 miles)

We leave Al'Ula and continue north. The roads lead us through untouched mountainous country, the peaks become visibly higher again. Lonely villages hide between impressive rock formations. Black basalt alternates with round granite boulders, with sand from the Great Desert spreading in between. Our overnight stop today, Tabuk, is located at the transition of the mountainous country to the desert and has always been an important traffic junction on the way north.

### Highlights:

#### #1: Tabuk



A city in an oasis, Tabuk is the capital of Tabuk province. It is located in the northwest of the country near the Jordanian border and the Gulf of Aqaba. Tabuk is a rapidly growing industrial center and is also home to Saudi Arabia's largest air base. The city has a rich history and various artifacts and relics have been found in and around the city. It used to be an important station on the Hejaz Railway,

which brought pilgrims from Damascus to Medina.

The city has a large natural water reservoir which makes it a great location for agriculture. Grains such as wheat and various fruit and vegetables are grown in the city. Tabuk is also known for its roses, these roses are not only sold locally but also exported to European countries.

In the center of the city is the old Ottoman castle Tabuk . It is one of the most famous sights of the city and includes a mosque and well-preserved watchtowers. For example, the Hijaz Railway Station (Tabuk Railway Station), founded around 1900 AD, was an important station along the Hejaz Railway. Today it contains a preserved and restored locomotive, freight cars, relics and manuscripts from that period. It is one of the main tourist attractions of the city.

## RIDING DAY 8 : TABUK - AQABA

### **Standard Route (572 km / 355 miles)**

First thing in the morning we head north on the main road. In Al Bir, however, we leave the road that would lead us directly to Jordan and turn west to explore the most northwestern corner of the country as well. At Az Zaytah we take a small road that leads through untouched hinterland. It is hard to believe, but in the winter months there can be snow here for a few days.

At Haql we reach the coast and follow the Red Sea, here called the Gulf of Aqaba northwards to the Saudi Arabian / Jordan border crossing. Patience is needed now in the first place. With Muslim composure and politeness the necessary formalities are completed. After successfully passing the border, it is only a short way to Aqaba.

## RIDING DAY 9 : AQABA - WADI RUM

### Standard Route (70 km / 43 miles)

Today we will take it easy! In the morning there will be enough time to sleep in, to explore the city or maybe even to have a short swim in the Red Sea. Aqaba is an extremely lively tourist town, no wonder, it is Jordan's only seaport. The main attraction for most tourists remains the underwater world, which can be explored as a diver, as a snorkeller or by glass bottom boat.

In the afternoon we start today's short stretch and leave Aqaba on the Aqaba Highway, which soon turns into the Desert Highway. After about forty kilometers we follow the road sign "Wadi Rum" and turn east. After a short stop at the Hedjaz Railway station, we soon pass a check point at the turnoff to Wadi Rum Visitors Center, which is also the entrance to the protected area of the spectacular desert wilderness. We leave our motorcycles in Wadi Rum Village and change into off-road vehicles that take us to the desert camp.

### Highlights:

#### #1: Aqaba



"Aqaba!" - This call may still be vivid in the memory of many moviegoers who saw the British film "Lawrence of Arabia" (1962) starring Peter O'Toole, Omar Sharif and Alec Guinness. During World War I, British archaeologist, officer and secret agent Thomas Edward Lawrence managed to persuade the Howeitat Arab tribe from the area of the legendary Wadi Rum to attack the coastal city of Aqaba

held by the Turks. It was the Sheik Auda Abu Tayi (played in the film by Anthony Quinn) who led his Bedouin army in shouting "Aqaba!". This attack succeeded because all the Turkish cannons were aimed at the sea. They had not been prepared for an inland Bedouin attack.

Aqaba had been the coastal city of the Levant to the Red Sea for thousands of years. When the Suez Canal had not yet been built, trade goods from South Arabia, East Africa and India were unloaded in the city's harbor and then brought via camel caravans to the Levantine coastal cities of the Mediterranean. There they were reloaded onto ships bound for Europe in Gaza, Jaffa, Acre, Sidon, Tripoli or Beirut.

Aqaba is a rapidly growing city. Including the suburbs, a total of about 140,000 inhabitants live there. The city lives mainly from maritime trade and tourism. Over time, the city has adapted to the tourist demand: Cafés, restaurants, souvenir stores, bazaars and promenades provide a mixture of oriental flair and tourist entertainment.

## #2: Wadi Rum



Wadi Rum is a valley in southern Jordan that winds through red sandstone and massive granite. The valley is also home to the Zalabia Bedouin and was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2011. The region is a protected desert wilderness. It has impressive sandstone mountains, such as Jebel Umm Ishrin, marked by its many peaks, and naturally formed arches, such as the Burdah rock bridge. Numerous prehistoric inscriptions and carvings line rocky

caves and steep gorges, including Khazali Gorge.

The Wadi Rum desert has attracted the attention of film makers for its unique landscape and history.

(Star Wars: The Force Awakens (2015); Lawrence of Arabia (1962); The Martian (2015))

## RIDING DAY 10 : WADI RUM - PETRA

### **Standard Route (110 km / 68 miles)**

We will use this morning to visit the Wadi Rum. An off-road vehicle will take us deeper into the desert, towards petroglyphs, striking rock formations, or perhaps even Bedouins who call this seemingly inhospitable wasteland home.

In the afternoon we make our way to our next destination, which is perhaps more famous, but certainly also more spectacular - to Wadi Musa, better known as Petra. We leave Wadi Rum and return to the Desert Highway, where we soon switch to the Kings Highway. Along the ridge of mountains, the road heads north, the valley of the Jordan Rift always in sight. The mountain ridges in the distance already belong to Israel.

## RIDING DAY 11 : PETRA

### **Standard Route (0 km / 0 miles)**

Today belongs entirely to one of the absolute highlights of the tour: Petra. But before you can be impressed by the fascinating buildings, you need to hike a bit. The site can only be reached via a narrow mountain path from the northwest or from the east through a rocky gorge about 1.5 kilometers long and about 70 meters deep, the Siq (english "shaft"), which is only 2 meters wide at its narrowest point. Once you reach the end of the gorge, it opens up to a place where the most famous building of the excavations is located, the Treasury House. A myriad of tombs, a Roman theater and other things invite you to spend a large part of the day here.

### **Highlights:**

## #1: Petra



Petra, a ruined site in present-day Jordan, was the capital of the Nabataean Empire in ancient times. Because of its monumental funerary temples, whose facades were carved directly out of the rock, it is considered a unique cultural monument. On December 6, 1985, Petra was included in the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Located halfway between the Gulf of Aqaba and the Dead Sea, Petra lies at an altitude of between 800 and 1350 meters in a wide valley basin in the mountainous region of Edom. Thanks to its strategic location at the crossroads of several caravan routes that connected Egypt with Syria and southern Arabia with the Mediterranean, the city was an important trading center from the 5th century BC to the 3rd century AD. In particular, Petra controlled an important junction of the Incense Route. This ancient trade route ran from Yemen along the west coast of Arabia and divided at Petra into a northwestern branch leading to Gaza and a northeastern branch leading to Damascus.

In addition to the favorable location in terms of transport, there were the advantages of the special topography. On the one hand, Petra is hidden and well protected between rugged rock faces, and on the other hand, Petra had a reliable water supply in ancient times. Domestic and drinking water were piped into the city via aqueducts carved into the rock, and the highly complex water supply system, which included more than 200 cisterns, fed from all known water sources within a radius of more than 25 kilometers around the city. The secure water supply and the safe location made Petra a preferred stop for caravans from southern Arabia, most of which were loaded with luxury goods for buyers from all over the Mediterranean.

No European had set foot in Petra since the time of the Crusades. By 1800, only a few scholars still knew by rumor of a legendary "city hewn out of the rock" in the Middle East. Petra was not rediscovered for Europe until 1812 by the Swiss Arabian traveler Johann Ludwig Burckhardt. Archaeological excavations in Petra took place only since the 1920s. A little later, the tourist development of the ruins began.



## RIDING DAY 12 : PETRA - DEAD SEA

### Standard Route (220 km / 137 miles)

Continuing north, the next special feature of this tour awaits us. On the whole, we continue to follow the ridge until we reach Kerak. After visiting the medieval Crusader fortress, we climb lower and lower on the Karak Highway until we reach the Dead Sea at Pot Ash City. From now on we follow the Jordan Valley Highway northwards along the shore of the Dead Sea. Maybe we'll find time for a dip in the salty water, but it won't be much of a dip. Otherwise we can try again at the beach of today's hotel.

### Highlights:

#### #1: Crac des Moabites



The historically most important and largest crusader castle in Jordan is Kerak (El-Kerak, Crac des Moabites), located about 140 kilometers south of the capital Amman. It is one of the largest in the Middle East. Built high on a mountain promontory, it dominates the wildly rugged rocky landscape.

There are many crusader castles in the Middle East. But Kerak is one of the largest of its kind, along with Saladin Castle and the famous Crac de Chevaliers in Syria. Its fortress walls, casemates and defense towers had become the model for medieval castle building in Europe. For it was in the Oriental Levant that the Crusaders learned to build massive fortresses, while in Europe simple ramparts were still built around a central keep. The experience gained during the Crusades, with all their sieges and fortress defenses, as well as the symbiosis of occidental and oriental architecture, had finally given a new dimension to castle building in Europe. Kerak is an imposing prime example.

## #2: Dead Sea



The Dead Sea is a drainless lake located more than 430 m below sea level, fed by the Jordan River and known for its high salinity. The Dead Sea borders Jordan, Israel and the West Bank.

The body of water represents the deepest lake on earth below sea level. Its shore is the deepest accessible land on the earth's surface ( - 430 m). The Dead Sea is the most mineral-rich body of water on earth and is therefore suitable for industrial mineral extraction. In particular, the concentrations of potassium, bromine, magnesium and iodine are exceptionally high.

Important for the region is also the bathing tourism. Due to the high salinity, which is almost ten times higher than the oceans, and the associated high density, the water supports the human body exceptionally. The mineral-rich black mud is used for therapeutic and cosmetic treatments in the resorts of the area.

## RIDING DAY 13 : DEAD SEA - GERASA

### Standard Route (150 km / 93 miles)

After a short stretch in the Jordan Rift we leave the same at South Shuna. It becomes more mountainous again, we climb through a wadi, settlements are scattered on the slopes. The agriculture promoted in Jordan gives way to more and more olive trees, the main product of the farmers in the north of Jordan. After about a hundred kilometers we reach Gerasa, once an important city in the Roman Empire. Excavations on an area of almost one km<sup>2</sup> testify to the splendor and wealth of the city. After extensive sightseeing, we get back on our motorcycles and head towards Amman. However, we will not dive into the hustle and bustle of the big city, but retreat to the hills north of the city.

### Highlights:

#### #1: Gerasa



Jerash (or Gerasa, as the city was called in Roman times) is considered the most important Roman city outside Italy. As part of the Decapolis - an association of ten cities - it once had 20,000 inhabitants. Numerous well-preserved remains, located right in the center of modern Jerash, testify to the power of the Romans at that time. Numerous buildings

have been preserved: Temples, theaters, thermal baths, triumphal arches and ruins of Byzantine churches. The ruined site is considered one of the best preserved Roman cities in the Levant and is therefore also called Pompeii of the Middle East.

The former Roman city extends over an area about 2 km long and 0.5 km wide. In fact, the ancient city was hidden in the desert sands for centuries, so much remained exceptionally well preserved. The city experienced its decline around 614 after the invasion of the Persians. It was finally destroyed by a severe earthquake in 749.

## RIDING DAY 14 : GERASA - MADABA

### Standard Route (240 km / 149 miles)

The last day of our trip has arrived and to avoid the hustle and bustle and traffic of the big city of Amman, we will generously ride around the city and visit the desert castles east of the city. Pretty soon we are in the northern suburbs of Amman and the further east we go the more barren the landscape becomes. After passing through the city of Zarqa, the loneliness of the desert welcomes us again. Shortly before Al-Azraq we turn to the west and start our way to Amman. On the way, there are two desert castles, Qusair 'Amra and Qasr All Harranah, which we visit. Soon we reach the first foothills of the big city, but we turn southwest and soon reach Madaba, the end point of the tour.

### Highlights:

#### #1: Qusair 'Amra



Qusair 'Amra is one of the desert castles and is a type of hunting lodge, about 70 kilometers east of Amman in the Jordanian desert, dating from the early eighth century. The word qasr, which these structures often carry in their name, means "castle".

Qusair 'Amra consists of a Roman-style throne room and bath. The rooms are quite small for a palace and suggest only short stays. However, the special feature of the Qusair 'Amra is the rich wall painting, which is still partially present even after 1300 years, but has suffered greatly in recent decades due to vandalism and improper treatment.

## #2: Qasr Al-Harranah



This imposing and well-preserved Umayyad building in the vastness of the Jordanian desert can be dated to before 710 based on an Arabic inscription above one of the doors in a room.

In the center of the south façade once can find the only entrance gate, protected by a quarter-round niche with a vault. Rounded towers stand at each corner of the almost square structure of about 36 meters on a side, and the center of the walls is reinforced by semicircular towers. Small slits in the masonry appear to be embrasures, but they are too high for that, so they may well be narrow window openings and ventilation shafts. This confirms that al-Kharana was not a military "fortress". Initial conjectures were in the direction of a caravanserai, but the structure was not located on any important trade route and did not have sufficient water resources. It was more likely used as a representative palace for political meetings between Umayyad rulers and the leaders of local tribes.



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