

1997 SYRIA AND JORDAN

I had bought a coach ticket and planned to upgrade to business with frequent flyer miles. Then I received a coupon for a system wide upgrade. Delta put me in first for the coupon and handed me back my frequent flyer miles. Who was I to correct them! The first class lounge was most discrete. I am the only woman in it. Everyone else was a businessman, including two Moslems in the corner, who kicked off their shoes and observed the evening call to prayer, touching their foreheads to the carpet! I hope they knew which way was east! We boarded the plane and waited and waited for incoming connecting passengers. Then we waited and waited again for their bags. The weather is really bad and we take off two hours late. The dinner service doesn't begin until 11PM. My seatmate is a young man from Gainesville, FL, who works for Eveready, off for his first trip to Europe. I don't make it through dinner, falling asleep for about 3 or 4 hours in the flight.

Saturday, March 1, 1997. We have made up some time but are about an hour late getting into Frankfurt. What a miserable airport to have to make a connection. It was a long walk to the train to Lufthansa and then there were no signs to direct you when you get off. I felt like I was in a maze, but I finally solve the puzzle and get my boarding pass from LH for the flight to Damascus. And finally I connect with Martha, who had flown in on the flight from Cincinnati. She had been trying to meet my flight but the airport could give her no information on where I was coming in. Finally we board our four-hour flight for "Damascus".

On landing, we meet our escort, Hal Rice and two other couples, Tom & Rusty Vonderhaar from Evansville, IN and Tom and Vivian Chalfont from Westlake, OH. Rusty has arrived minus luggage. We check into the Cham Palace hotel and have delicious falafels in the coffee shop before heading for bed.

Sunday, March 2. I have wanted to make this trip for 17 years and am so excited at finally being here. This is the last piece of the Fertile Crescent that I haven't seen, having traveled to Iraq, Lebanon, Israel and Egypt in the past. So many civilizations came to Syria, Phoenicians, Hittites, Assyrians, Egyptian, Greek and Roman, among others. It is a thrill to be awakened at 4:30AM by the first call to prayer from a nearby mosque! But we drop right back to sleep until our wakeup call at 6:30. The buffet breakfast includes such delicacies as olives, yoghurt and hummus along with more common fare.

We meet our local guide Moutaz and driver Akmed. Moutaz is an ex English teacher who speaks 5 languages and really knows and loves his history. He is a very likable young man and we all became very fond of him. Akmad keeps the bus spotless and provides some color when we tour the sights by getting out his water pipe and smoking it.

Everywhere you look it seems there is a banner or statue showing President Assad or his son Bassel, who was killed in an auto accident. The people really seem to love him and under his regime the country has achieved a measure of prosperity. We saw no really poor people and everyone that wants a job seems to have one. There are a few military bases but basically it is a peaceful country and the people were very hospitable and friendly. Although they do not understand the US support of Israel, they are also more friendly to us since the

Gulf War, since we withdrew and did not try and take control of Kuwait and other Arab countries. As for fear of terrorism, we had none, since terrorism is about as much a part of the Syrian culture as David Koresh is of ours!

It is a three hour drive across the desert to Krac des Chevaliers (Castle of the Knights), a wonderfully well preserved and restored crusader castle built around 1200 AD, a huge fortress, high on a hill, it was one of 20 built along the coast of Syria so the sea could provide an escape route. Lunch followed at a local restaurant. Mezzis, a sort of salad bar of middle east delicacies, followed by lamb kebabs, which was the norm for almost every meal we were served.

Then it was on to Tartus on the Mediterranean coast, where a crusader church has been converted into a museum of antiquities. We walked through the old town hoping to find a shop so Rusty could buy some necessities but all was closed on this Sunday.

An hour later we were in Latakia and checked into the Meridian hotel, right on the beach, but since it is not "the season", the pool and beach facilities are not open. It is chilly enough that we don't care. Hal puts the welcome dinner off so we can recuperate from the jet lag.

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Monday, March 3. It's about 20 minutes from Latakia to Ugarit and over 3000 years! Ugarit was a Phoenician city probably established about 1500 BC. When the Tell was excavated a clay tablet dating from 1200 BC was found, showing the first written alphabet in the world. The ruins were interesting. Passing through a gate in the wall, the inner fortress contained slots so that visitors could pass their credentials through before being allowed into the palace courtyard. A large town surrounded the palace and in one mud brick house we examine a burial chamber under the floor, for the family was buried right on the premises. A core sample pit dug by the archeologists showed evidence of earlier settlements. On the acropolis above the city were the remains of the temple to their god Baal. At one time Ugarit was on the coast but now the sea is about a quarter mile away. No one knows what disaster caused the town to be abandoned, perhaps a major earthquake or an invasion.

Back on the bus we start through the mountains, through a lush gorge, in startling contrast to the desert beyond the mountains. Two thirds of Syria is desert but the Orontes River Valley next to the mountains is very fertile and provides Syria with much of its food. Citrus fruits are in season, and I particularly enjoyed the tangerines throughout the trip.

It started to rain and Hal decided to postpone the stop at Ebla, so we continued to Aleppo and check into another Cham Palace Hotel, where from our 16th floor room we can see satellite dishes like mushrooms on every rooftop and minarets in every direction!

After lunch Hal takes us to a handicraft souk in an old caravansari and then to the vintage 1911 Baron Hotel for tea. Framed on a wall is an unpaid bill of T. E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia), and Agatha Christie is supposed to have written Murder on the Orient Express while living in the hotel.

Tuesday, March 4. We drive north from Aleppo, almost to the Turkish border and encountered "dead cities", where 5th through 8th century Syrians built country houses to escape the heat of the city in summer. We stopped to picture one at Talinosos near the back entrance to St Simeons, where figs, olives and almond trees are along the road. Northern Syria is Kurdish and many people still wear their native dress.

We visited the Tell of Ain Dara, which dates from 900 BC. Here is a most interesting temple to Ishtar, the mother of Baal, which the Japanese are restoring and roofing to protect the remains. Great lion statues once lined the walk to the temple but only one is now extant. Inside, giant footprints were carved in the stone paving to symbolize

Ishtar coming to visit her temple. The rock is mostly limestone but Basaltic rock is used in part of the temple, brought from a volcanic area far away.

We continued on to St Simeons Church ruins. St Simeon was an ascetic from the 3rd century AD, who sat on a pillar and prayed. He was somewhat odd, even burying himself like a turnip one summer to meditate. Not liking people, he built higher and higher pillars to sit on until finally one reached 18 meters high. He died in 459 AD and a cult following then built the church around the last pillar. The church became a ruin in 1000 AD. Now partially restored it is a beautiful ruin of arches and Corinthian columns, with a spectacular view over the surrounding valley and toward the snow-capped Belus Mountains in the distance. The pillar is the only disappointment, having been almost all carted away piece by piece by souvenir hunters. It is a crisp clear day and the site couldn't have been better for our picnic lunch! Nearby we visited Qatura, where old roman era tombs are carved into the rock and an interesting stone well provides water for goats.

Back at the hotel, Martha and I go for massages, which is an adventure in itself. Two men gave the massages and it was strange to think of a Moslem man doing it, knowing what they think of women! They only cost about 500 Syrian pounds, about \$12. And it was a great massage.

Wednesday, March 5. The Archeological Museum of Aleppo has Mari artifacts (an ancient city on the Euphrates) and tablets from Gait and Ebla, as well as statues from Ain Dara. Then we climbed to the 11th century citadel overlooking the city. In the 13th century, Mongols conquered the citadel. Mameluke decorations over the door of a small chapel, which still displays the hook where they hung the sacrificed animals. A larger mosque had a madrassa or school attached to teach the children their Koran, and other subjects. The mirab in the mosque was originally lined with wood, which the French carried away. As we walked to the highest point, the noon call to prayer began. In the city below, so many mosques' loudspeakers blare out the call to prayer that

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it is a cacophony of sounds (their clocks aren't coordinated), but here there was only one mosque and we could enjoy the muezzin's call. We left the citadel by an old secret passage and rode to the Grand Mosque, which was founded about 715 AD. Stepping into a huge court, the women in our group had to put on bathrobe like robes with hoods, so our hair was covered. People sat about the courtyard in small groups or alone saying their prayers. Inside the mosque, the interior is under renovation so the rugs have been removed but the Mirab is lined with distinctive blue tiles from Persia, and next to it is the tomb of Zachariah, considered a prophet by the Moslems. This mosque is also one of the places where John the Baptist's head is entombed (I saw another in Israel many years ago). The Moslems also revere him.

A delicious lunch followed at a restaurant in downtown Aleppo, and I caused a near panic in the group by paying an enterprising shoeshine boy on the street to polish my shoes for about \$1. He then pursued our group hoping for more business until we were safely back on the bus!

Next we visited an old Caravansari (a sort of inn for travelers), and then entered the souk, the largest in the Middle East covering several acres. It is divided into areas each specializing in a different product. We spent some time in the spice area and then went to the gold market where we bought gold chains made in the Aleppo fashion, distinguished by flat-sided pieces. Martha and I looked at rugs but did not buy any. Back at the hotel, I was so tired I fell asleep on the bed, shoes and all! That night we finally had our welcome dinner in the newly renovated rooftop restaurant, which we had all to ourselves most of the evening until the manager's private party arrived. Rusty's baggage has finally caught up with her so she has proper clothes to wear. It was a great view of the city. We all ordered a la carte and I had caviar followed by chateaubriand.

Thursday, March 6. It rained during the night but by 8:00 AM when we leave Aleppo, the sun is coming through and by the time we arrive at Ebla it is clear! What a thrill to be at this Tell. Back about 2400 BC Ebla is mentioned in ancient writings from Mari and Karnak. It was a very wealthy and important kingdom of the ancient world.

About 30 years ago, Italian archeologists rediscovered it, and the dig is still continuing. It had been destroyed twice, once about 2200 BC and then again in 1700 BC. The tell, perhaps a half mile in diameter, is enclosed by an ancient wall. This is a dig in progress with the squares still intact. A palace from the 3rd millennium BC has been uncovered and reconstructed with adobe-like material to preserve it.

The archives of the palace contained some 15,000 clay tablets, which cover the whole gamut of ancient life, social, economic and so forth. These tablets have caused international dissent between the Syrians and Israelis. The Israelis claim the material because it refers to Abraham and Isaac. The Syrians claim this is far less important than the social revelations of the tablets and that they doubt the Abraham mentioned is the Abraham of the Bible since in 1900 BC (the time of Abraham), Ebla was in ruins, having been destroyed by the Akkads in 2200 BC. The later settlement 1900-1700 BC was destroyed by the Hittites, after which the tell as deserted except for a Greco-Roman settlement about 200 AD. Perhaps future excavations will identify more of Ebla's history. Atop the acropolis, the remains of a temple were found, and we walked over to examine one of the gates of the city. It was muddy, due to the rain, and Akmed removed the carpets from the bus so it could be kept clean!

Our next stop was Apamea, where the Romans built a military city to help guard the Orontes Valley. A colonnaded street, a mile long, is being reconstructed. The man financing this work is the same person who owns the Cham Hotels. The Cordus Maximus (main street) is most impressive with ruts in the stone paving made by ancient chariots. Remains of an agora, perhaps a temple and a theater hint at what this city of 500,000 was like.

An hour or so beyond we pulled into the Cham Hotel of Hama for a lovely Syrian smorgasbord lunch and a view of the ancient Norias or waterwheels built by the Romans to draw water from the Orontes river for the aqueducts to serve Apamea. Some are still operating.

In Homs we stop to view a mosque and then start out across the desert, where we stop briefly to see some unusual beehive houses once occupied by semi nomadic Kurds, who now live in cement block houses. They come out to greet us and their children are adorable with big black eyes. It is a couple of hours to the oasis of Palmyra and another Cham Hotel. The lobby includes a Bedouin tent area for native visitors who might be more comfortable sitting on the floor.

Early to bed to sleep it off.

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Friday March 7. Palmyra. Our hotel room faces the extensive ruins and we have a crisp clear day to visit them, but it has turned quite cold. Our first stop was the temple to Bel (or Baal) where we are shown the animal's entrance and the altar where they were sacrificed. We also entered the Cella, or Holy of Holies, where only the priests were once allowed to go. The Cella was converted to a church by the Byzantines and to a mosque by the Arabs.

Then we drove out to see the tower tombs, from the 1st and 2nd Century, mostly in ruins, but one was in a good state of repair and we climbed to the roof to see the view. This one tower must have held about 120 people in its various compartments. Later the people used underground burial chambers and we toured another with a frescoed roof. These underground tombs are still being discovered. Just last year a bus was turning around and crashed through the roof of one they didn't know about!

The bus drops us off at the triumphal arch at one end of the Cordus Maximus. This fabulous street is colonnaded the whole mile or so length. There are several temples and a bath along the way and a gem of a theater, almost in its original condition. Since this is Friday, a holiday, there are loads of school children here and they are singing and enjoying themselves very much. It takes us two hours to walk from one end of the street to the other for there is so much to see.

Hal takes us to a local restaurant for lunch, full of Syrians. One church group is having such a good time they are dancing and singing in the aisles. Martha unfortunately is suffering from "Baal's Revenge" and is taken back to the hotel, but the rest of us go shopping along the street of modern Palmyra, buying a donkey saddle for Martha and for myself a Bedouin necklace of silver and Lapis, with a big silver and lapis piece to ward off the Evil Eye!

We went back to the hotel for a short stop before setting off to the 17th century ruin of a citadel to see the sunset. It is really cold, about 40 degrees, with a good breeze, but the sunset was lovely and we had a good panoramic view of Palmyra and the mountains on beyond in the Syrian Desert.

Saturday, March 8. It's a three-hour drive across the desert to Damascus. We stop to visit a Bedouin encampment along the way and inspect their tents and animals. They hospitably offer us some of their very strong coffee. One sip was enough!

Lunch was at a Damascus restaurant and we check back into the Cham for an afternoon at leisure! I get my hair done, do laundry and sleep! Martha and I had supper at the revolving restaurant on top of the hotel.

Sunday, March 9. Damascus. We have two new people on the tour, Evelyn and Larry Thomas from California, a mother and son. Evelyn and I have in common that we both have lost our husbands to Alzheimer's during the year. We tour the old city, starting with the Umayyad mosque, with its mosaiced courtyard depicting a plant and building motif in green and gold. The interior of the mosque contains remnants of an earlier church built on the site, with an alabaster and fossil column, perhaps part of the original baptismal font, now used by the Moslems in their ritual bathing. The whole complex sits on an even earlier Temple to an Aramaen god of Sun and Thunder called Hadad. This mosque is the fourth most important in the Moslem universe after Mecca, Medina and the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. There is a tomb for John the Baptist, (we saw where his head is supposed to be in Aleppo). Near the mosque is Saladin's tomb. He was the one who freed the country from the crusaders.

Then we go to the Azem Palace of Arts and Traditions, once a huge Damascene house, now a series of richly paneled rooms displaying musical instruments and furniture.

One room displays a bride being dressed for the ceremony, another the costumes and traditions of someone setting off on his Hadj, journey to Mecca. We lunched at an underground restaurant in the old quarter with a lot of atmosphere. It was Moutaz' birthday and Hal presented him with a cake and a card with all our signatures.

Then we went on to inspect two more Damascene houses, now owned and protected by the government who are using them for offices. Each surrounded a quiet courtyard shutting out the noisy bustling city beyond their doors. Moutaz took us into a public bath dating from the 12th century and we were somewhat embarrassed by the men clad in towels who had just gotten out

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of the water. Public baths have days for women too. We then drove to a nearby hill for the view and were back at the hotel by 5:00.

Monday, March 10. The National Museum. Wonderful displays from all periods of Syria's history. Most unique was the Dura Europa collection. Dura Europa is a 2nd century tell on the Euphrates near Mari on the Iraqi border. When the wall was breached by invaders it collapsed over the buildings built next to it, and thus preserved under the rubble a unique synagogue, which has been reconstructed in the museum. Images are most unusual in Jewish art but here on the wall are frescos depicting the early history of the Jews: Moses in the basket, the Exodus, the Temple of Solomon and so forth. It is thought that the pictures were allowed since they are somewhat fanciful (with the people's feet not touching the ground) or it may have been that the congregation was illiterate. There are other frescos from Dura Europa in a nearby room. Another reconstruction is an underground tomb from Palmyra. Unfortunately many of the statues in the tomb are copies since a fanatic got into the tomb a few years ago and damaged many of the originals. Here in the museum we get to view the alphabet stone from Ugarit and many of the Ebla tablets. There is also a huge reception hall, the Damascus Salon, a wood and marble paneled hall from an 18th century palace.

Across the street from the Museum, and beyond an old mosque, was a handicraft souk, where I bought a Damascene turquoise and silver ring about 50 years old and a mother-of-pearl inlaid box. Everything was most enticingly displayed.

After lunch we set out for the Christian quarter of the city and off the Street called Straight visited the house of Ananias who, in Acts 9:17, restored Paul's sight and converted him to Christianity. The house is now a small chapel.

Then it was shopping time again but

Martha and I just enjoyed watching Larry buy rugs and Rusty buy boxes for everyone she knows! Back at the hotel we enjoyed dinner in the Chinese dining room with Larry and Evelyn, Hal and Moutaz. At the end of the meal our hostess presented us with "two scoops " of ice cream with fried bananas, but the scoop must have been a coal scuttle since it looked like at least a gallon of vanilla ice cream was in the bowl!

Tuesday, March 11. We drive up into the anti-Lebanon Mountains to Seidnaya convent, which houses an icon thought to have belonged to Saint Luke. A Justinian who was hunting and pursued a gazelle that turned into the Virgin Mary founded the convent. This shrine is supposed to have curative powers and gifts have been made of small metal hands and feet to attest to the cures. We take our shoes off to approach the sacred altar. We could not see the actual icon, which is only shown at certain times, but did visit the altar in front of it and Hal bought some holy water with which to bless us all (and support the works of the convent).

Then it was on to Maloula, where Aramaic is still spoken, and where there is a Christian colony. We stopped at the Convent of St Thecla. She was converted in her native city by St Paul and then was persecuted by her family. She fled to this spot and took refuge in a grotto where she was able to tame wild animals. Persecuted again, she fled up a narrow gorge, which opened for her to make her escape and closed behind her. The grotto contains her tomb and the modern church nearby has interesting icons inlaid with pearls. We climbed the narrow gorge beyond the convent to reach Maloula but it was not a pleasant climb, the gorge being lavishly decorated with pepsi cans, plastic bags and graffiti by the faithful on the walls. Since a stream runs through the gorge it was also difficult not to get our feet wet. There are some things I only do once in my life and this was one of them!

At the top of the gorge we found the church of St Sergius (or Sarkis), named for a martyred saint. The interesting marble altar is in the shape of the old sacrificial altars in the temples, and suggests that sacrificing animals may still be done (but not here). After lunch at the Safir Hotel in Maloula we return to Damascus.

Martha and I walk back to the Handicraft Souk near the museum, where, after some negotiations, she buys a "Nefertiti" Damascene style ring and the earrings she had admired the day before.

Hal took the tour to the Noble Restaurant for dinner, a four million dollar Versailles like palace with a long reception hall suggesting the Hall of Mirrors and a garden restaurant. Much marble with gold decorations and murals on the ceilings all in French style. The meal was equally

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spectacular. Fancier Mezzis than usual and then I had an escargot and toast entree. Moutaz' wife came, all wrapped in her typical white scarf, and Akmed brought his pretty 10-year old daughter who was impressed but seemed to take it all in stride. The only people missing were Larry and Evelyn, in whose honor this "welcome" dinner is being given. Larry has a congenital heart problem and was sick.

Wednesday, March 12. We head south, stopping for a moment to view the modern gold domed, blue tiled, Zainaba Mosque. Zainaba was a daughter of Ali and this is one of the most holy shrines of the Shiite Moslems, and the main one they can now visit, for Kerbala, the most holy one, is in Iraq, where Shiites cannot go. The Hauran Valley we pass through changes from limestone to basaltic rock formations and farming is difficult due to the large number of rocks in the fields.

We stop to view a basaltic quarry carved out of a mountain, then continue into nearby Shabba, where 3rd century mosaics are in situ in a small museum. They had been in the house of Philip the Arab who established the town that was destroyed by an earthquake and the house was not rebuilt. The mosaics depict Greek myths - Aphrodite, Dionysus and Tethys, sister of Oceanus and the goddess of the ocean.

We drove through the Druze town of Sweida where women wear distinctive white scarves and the men sport big mustaches. These people are not Moslems but a small sect that is thought to have originated in Yemen. They believe in reincarnation, much as the Buddhists do. We checked into the Bosra Cham Hotel in time for lunch and have rooms overlooking the ruins.

The Roman ruins of Bosra are of the black basaltic rock and the carvings are not as ornate since basaltic rock doesn't carve like limestone. The city also has a different feel from the ones we have seen since people are still living in the ruins. Some young boys dog our footsteps trying to sell us postcards and "old" roman coins.

Highlights of the ruins are the huge Roman baths with one of the earliest domed roofs and a Christian Church of the 4th century. Best of all was a marvelously preserved theater with almost perfect acoustics. It was preserved since it sat on a hill and the 10th century Arabs made the area their citadel, and built a wall around it.

After the tour, Martha and I do a little shopping and encountered a Syrian who insisted on our sitting down and having refreshment. We accepted water, and then found what he really wanted to do was to confront us over why the US supported Israel and why Americans don't come to Syria. He also was incensed at Clinton killing the UN

Resolution to condemn Israel for building on traditional Palestinian land near Jerusalem. We pointed out that many Americans feel

Israel needs help to exist and that Americans have the perception that Syria is full of terrorists, but it fell on deaf ears. Since we also do not understand why Clinton acted the way he did, after the whole world felt the other way, the last question was hard to answer. He then decided to horrify us and told us that he had seen on Syrian television how an American soldier had cut open an Arab women's belly and aborted her unborn child! Just as he thinks we don't know what goes on in his country, it is obvious that he doesn't know much about us. Hopefully more Americans will visit Syria and change their perception of us. This was the only bad encounter we had on the whole trip, since all the other people we met were more than cordial.

Thursday, March 13, 1979. We head south again through the basaltic landscape of South Syria and at the border say goodbye to dear Moutaz. It takes an hour to clear the border formalities and then our Jordanian guide Razzi joins us. Akmed will drive us on to Amman and then return to Syria. The landscape has changed back to limestone and north Gilead has lush valleys of farmland. The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan seems much more modern and wealthy than Syria. "Hashemite" refers to descendency from Mohamed. I have wanted to visit Jerash for over 17 years, since I was on the archeological dig in Israel. It is one of the best preserved and reconstructed cities of Roman times, with a huge south gate opening into the large oval agora with it's original paving and many ionic columns still standing. To our left was the south theater (there are two in the city), as well preserved as the one in Bosra though not as large. It also has perfect acoustics' walked through the ruins passing several Byzantine churches, one with it's original mosaic floor, and finally reach the acropolis with it's temple to Artemis. Huge columns

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surround it and Razzi points out how they sway slightly in the wind by putting a nail in a crack between the sections of the column and we can see it move. Inserting a finger into a larger crack allows you to feel the motion. Near the temple they have discovered a mosaic factory from Byzantine times and the workers order us to detour around them. We walked down the Cordus Maximus, the colonnaded north-south street, and admire a wonderful Nymphanium, a fountain in the middle of the city, where the people could collect water. Beautiful Corinthian columns still in situ.

Then it was on to lunch at the Green Valley restaurant with the usual mezzis and skewered lamb and french fries. Desert was a delicious tangerine. This restaurant is famous for its breads and we watch them bake the pounded out dough by laying it directly on the coals in the oven. It is an hour further into Amman and the American style Marriot Hotel, complete with drying line in the bathroom. The Chams in Syria were nice but not quite like home! The big news is that a demented Jordanian soldier shot and killed 6 Israeli children. Everyone is holding his or her breath over what will happen next. Since the tour is going on to Israel after we leave there is some uncertainty in the group.

Friday, March 14, 1997. Rainy and chilly. 3 more couples have joined the tour so we are now 14. We head south on the King's

Highway from Amman to the 5th century Byzantine church of St George in Madaba. Here is a famous mosaic map of the bible lands in the floor. Fortunately we are there before the hordes of tourists arrive. Then it was on to Mt Nebo, where Moses first viewed the Promised Land, and near which he died, although his tomb has not been found. The weather has cleared and we can see the River Jordan, Jericho and the Dead Sea, but not the Mount of Olives, which is hidden in the mist. There is a modern Franciscan church here built in the ruins of a Byzantine church and monastery, which has more mosaics in the floor. Wadi al-Mujib, the Grand Canyon of Jordan is over 1000 meters deep and drains down to the Dead Sea. South of this is the Land of Moab. We stop at Kerak, where the ruin of a crusader castle is built within the city walls. After lunch we toured the ruins, but it pales by comparison with Krac des Chevaliers in Syria. On a clear day you can see Masada from here, but we are not so blessed. At least it has stopped raining! We continued down the King's Highway, which was the original way people went on their trips to Mecca, to the Desert Highway, a modern 4-lane highway across the desert and so into Petra about 5:30. The Movenpick Hotel, less than a year old, makes us think we have stepped into the Arabian nights with its Moorish decor.

Saturday, March 15, 1997. Petra. A lot has changed in the 15 years since I was last here. Now there are 3000 tourists each day, so they no longer permit you to ride horses down the Siq, only to the entrance, where an old dam keeps floods from racing down this narrow canyon. Actually walking the 3/4 miles down to Petra is better than riding since you can admire the rock formations, an old aqueduct, the original Roman paving and stop to look at the niches, where statues once stood, along the way. The famous view of the pink sandstone Treasury is at the end, the most dramatic of all the Petra Mausoleums. Nomadic Nabateans migrated to the land of Edom (South Jordan) in the 5th to 6th century BC and their city became an important trade city along the caravan route. It was well sheltered from invaders in its secluded valley. Cultural traditions were adopted from Egypt, Greek and Assyrian visitors. In the first century AD, it was annexed by the Romans and continued to flourish until the 4th century AD. In the 6th and 8th Century AD, earthquakes devastated the area and the city was abandoned and wasn't rediscovered until the 19th century. The pink sandstone has given the city the name of the Pink City. The treasury with its Corinthian columns was a tomb for King Aretas 111 in the first century BC. Walking through the necropolis you pass other marvelous facades. A roman theater was built in one hillside and across from it; we climbed to inspect a Byzantine church, carved out of the sandstone. One big improvement from 15 years ago is the modern WC in a multicolored sandstone cave. Archeological digs are uncovering more and more ruins. We lunch at a rest house with a small museum attached. Two well-fed cats beg morsels off our plates. The group wants to climb to the "high place", a 1 1/2 hour climb to see an ancient altar where sacrificial offerings were made. I decide I could probably do it, but I am already anticipating the 2-mile walk back up to the hotel, so I leave the group and have a lovely walk back to the hotel alone, pausing

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to admire the archeological digs and the theater. Martha reports that Evelyn, who is older than I am and has very poor eyesight, inspired them all to the top, but many in the group were worn out by the climb. Evelyn told me she walks nine miles each day! I am very happy to find my horse waiting for me to take me the last quarter mile or so.

We had our farewell dinner that evening and I wore my Palestinian caftan, bought at Jerash, which drew raves from the waiters and Razzi.

Sunday, March 16, 1997. We stop at Moses' spring where he smote the rock to get water for the Israelites. Legend has it that if you drink the water you will live to be 120, but I decline. I haven't known very many 120 year olds with a good quality of life! Then one more crusader castle, Shobek, in a strategic location on Mont Rial.

It is very windy. Razzi leads us to an old mosque built by the Mameluke after the conquest by Saladin. Here he sings the muezzins call to prayer, which is heard everywhere 5 times a day. He also demonstrates how the Moslems pray touching their foreheads to the ground. It was a moving experience to watch him.

Also in the castle were a restored watchtower and a secret stairway down 300 steps to the spring outside the walls. Then it was back on the bus for the boring ride across the desert back to Amman.

We have lunch at the Kan Zaman, an old caravansari on the outskirts of the city, with an adjoining handicraft souk. I bought an antique mother-of-pearl mirror, which I later found was 3 inches too long to be packed in my suitcase so I have to hand carry it home. I also have no idea where I will put it, but it is elegant.

And lastly, we had a city tour of Amman. We drove by the American Embassy in a pricey neighborhood of elegant homes. The citadel, where the Romans had a temple to Zeus, and a palace, all of which was destroyed in an 8th century earthquake that caused devastation all over the middle east. On the site is a small archeological museum and from the summit of the acropolis we can look down into the roman theater. However, we have seen far more wonderful theaters and temples and so forth that we are antiquitied out! Finally we view the mosque of Abdullah, which dominates the city with its mosaic dome. Abdullah was the grandfather of King Hussein.

Check back into the Marriot and then go shopping with Wu and Hyay Park an attractive Korean couple in our group. Martha and Hyay buy embroidered jackets, and I found a mother-of-pearl "bee" ring. We all had dinner together and said farewell. Travcoa has certainly given us a well-planned and interesting tour.

Monday, March 17, 1997. Fly Air Jordanian to Frankfurt where Edith Yonts and her 11-year old daughter, Saski, welcome us, rent a car and drive to the Hilton in Mainz, right on the Rhine. We have sandwiches and good wine for supper at the Yonts' who are old friends of Martha's from when they lived in Germany.

Tuesday, March 18, 1997. We walk all over the town of Mainz, and I mean all over. Martha leads us into the center of the city and after admiring the Dome (Cathedral) we went to the Guttenberg Museum, which as well as displaying 3 Bibles, is a wonderful museum showing the history of printing. Next we climb to a Lutheran church, which has modern blue Chagall windows. Then it was downhill to the new museum of Roman ships. The Roman Empire extended to the Rhine and they built a number of fortified towns to protect their border. At Mainz they had a shipyard to build their galleys. When the Germanic tribes invaded and pushed them back, they scuttled the ships. The harbor was long forgotten and had been filled in, but recently they decided to build on the site and discovered the ships. One has been reconstructed and another is being reconstructed and there are many models and exhibits, all very interesting. Back at the hotel I get a massage, again by a man, but this one was much more professional than in Syria. In Germany massage is often given on a physicians prescription. Also I got my hair done.

Then it was back to the Yonts'. One of their neighbors has his own vineyards and we enjoyed a wine tasting. Then Ryner Yonts insisted on driving me to the nearby town of Oppenheim, to show me the half timbered buildings and church, after which we all meet in Mainz for a gala dinner of German specialties before heading to bed. And so we returned to Atlanta full of memories.

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