Jordan tour: In the desert



Petra is Jordan's most popular tourist attraction, and it's

in an area where many poor Bedouins live. So you're never far from a vendor of some kind, though once you get into the park a ways their wares get a bit tamer.

But neither Indiana Jones tote bags nor simple camel-bone beads can distract you from what you're seeing in the ancient Nabatean city. You walk through a mile-long narrow hallway of a gorge, admiring both the play of light and shadow on sandstone and the sophisticated plumbing system from the pre-Christian era. Then suddenly you're at the treasury, the excavated city's jewel.

Petra has fine ruins from early Christian times as well. We visited Petra Church, a fifth-century nave attached to a large font alongside a cistern (complete with a [rebuilt] rooftop rainwater-collecting system). Later I climbed 800 stairs to see the monastery.
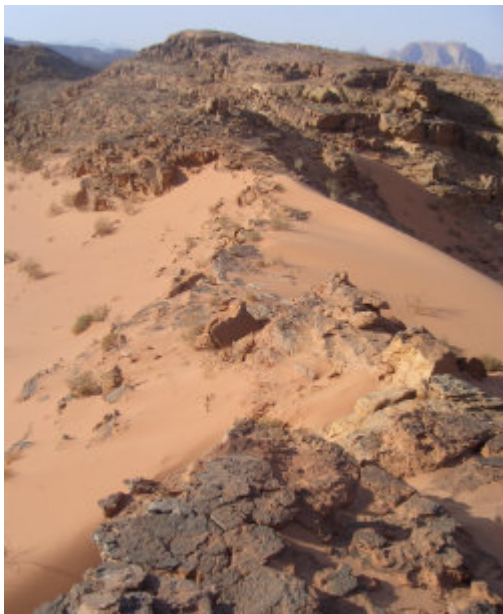
Or rather, the "monastery"—it's from the first century, used by someone, possibly Christians, but it's not clear how. (I was reminded of Nigel Tufnel's perceptive couplet about the Druids: "No one knows who they were/ Or...what they were doing.")

At Petra, one of the seven new wonders, the amazing thing is the juxtaposition of God's creative beauty and humanity's. At Wadi Rum, God mostly has the stage to Godself.

Captain's Hotel offers three ways to stay in the desert: the hotel itself on the



round just inside or a popup private camp deeper in. hoice, hiring drivers to take us in with 4x4s.

On the way: sand dunes and rock formations to admire and climb. Craggy sandstone and endless smooth sand in tan and black and deep, rich red. After a performance by a duo of oud and hand drum, complete with the requisite Very Simple Dance For Tourists, we slept under the stars.

*Disclosure: The Jordan Tourism Board is covering most of the expenses for this trip, though it is not trying to tell us what to say/write/blog about it. Images: Some rights reserved by Steve Thorngate.*