

Jordan tour: Our driver from Ramallah

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

October 1, 2012

In Jordan, reports are mixed as to just how good relations are between the Muslim majority and the Christian minority. What's clearer is that a strong divide exists between native Jordanians and the many Palestinian refugees.

The two locals we spent the most time with, our tour guide and our bus driver, represent both differences. Our guide was a Jordan-born evangelical, and he did a fine job balancing the tasks of educating us about the place in general and providing a special focus on things of specifically Christian interest. Our bus driver—whom our guide had never met or worked with before, though they seemed to get along famously—was a Muslim born in Ramallah and later forced to leave.

Along with being a highly skilled driver, he was extremely warm and kind. Our group featured a wide variety of views, experiences and education levels related to the conflict in Israel-Palestine, and while we generally steered clear of controversial subjects, the troubles across the river came up organically on several occasions—often to my chagrin. But when our driver was in or near such conversation, he engaged it with both a gracious generosity and the conviction of someone who knows of which he speaks.

One night, he was describing his enthusiasm for living in Jordan. "My whole life is here," he said. Why would he want to go back to Ramallah when his loved ones are all in Jordan, which is a better place to live? I asked him to clarify—he doesn't have any loved ones in the West Bank anymore? Turns out he does: a sister, several others. Yet rather than demand the right of return, he identifies himself almost entirely with Jordan.

The night before we left Jordan, we sat at dinner with our tour guide and our driver. The former offered some closing words, ending with this: "God bless the United States, God bless Jordan, and God bless Palestine."

I think his point was only to name the homelands of the people present. But it was easy to infer a conspicuous absence on the part of Israel, and it was our driver who

jumped in to name this. "Israel too," he added. "Why not?"

Why not? I can think of several reasons a person in his position might come up with. But that's not where his mind went in that grace-filled moment.

*Disclosure: The Jordan Tourism Board covered most of the expenses for this trip, though it is not trying to tell us what to say/write/blog about it.*