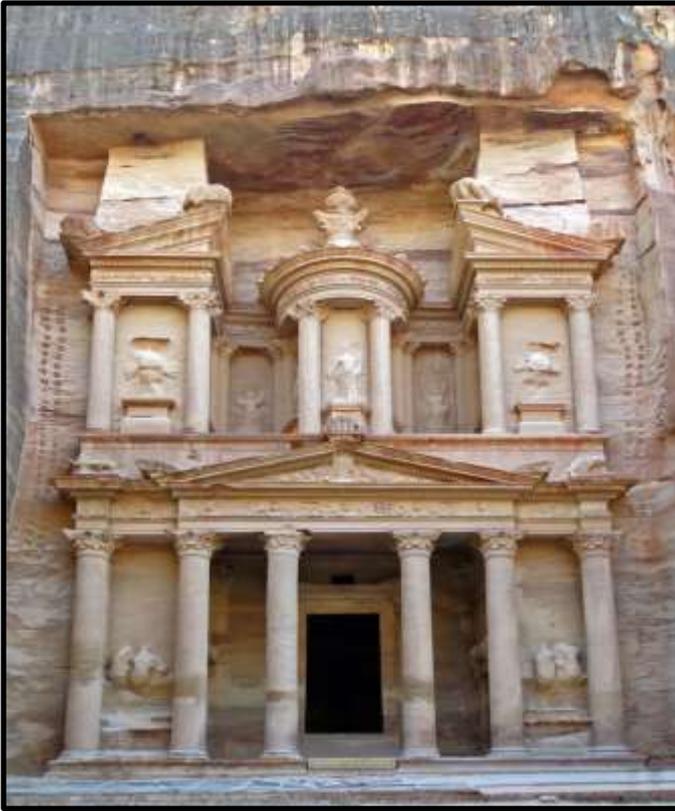


## Petra, Jordan (Ancient Nabataean City)

Photo of al-Khazneh (the Treasury)



Petra was one of the most important cities in the Middle East, 2000 years ago. The name Petra is from Ancient Greek and means rock. It is located in modern day Jordan and was the capital of the Nabataean people. It was a great trading centre and became a very wealthy town. It took the Romans many years to conquer as the only way into the town is through a very narrow gorge, approximately one kilometre in length, called 'Wadi-Musa'. Consequently, Petra was easy to defend and dangerous to any attacker.

The town is now a wilderness inhabited by members of the *Bedouin Tribe* and visiting tourists. Many of its magnificent buildings have survived as they were carved from the

sandstone valley sides. These buildings are decorated in great detail and clearly show how technologically advanced the Nabataean people were.

The most impressive building is called the 'Treasury'. Anyone visiting Petra will not fail to be impressed at its sight as they come out of the gorge into the open valley. It is an immense size and eight/nine people stood shoulder to shoulder can pass through its only entrance without any difficulty. The rooms are very large and they are perfectly carved out of the sandstone (cuboid in shape). It is thought to have been a mausoleum and crypt.

Between twenty to thirty thousand people lived in Petra at its height and when the Romans eventually conquered it in 105 CE rather than destroy it they continued to carve buildings and tombs into the valley sides. At the end of the valley is 'the nine hundred steps'. This is only for the 'fit and well'. The walk up these is arduous but well worthwhile as it ends with the view of a very large monastery, again, carved from the sandstone cliffs.

### The End

Eventually, commerce became less profitable to the Nabataeans with the shift of trade routes to Palmyra in Syria and the expansion of seaborne trade around the Arabian peninsula. Sometime probably during the fourth century CE, the Nabataeans left their capital at Petra. No one really knows why. It seems that the withdrawal was an unhurried and organized process, as very few silver coins or valuable possessions have been unearthed at Petra.