



BACKGROUND

Land and Climate

Jordan is slightly smaller than Portugal, or about the same size as the U.S. state of Maine. The Jordan River flows through the Great Rift Valley (Jordan Valley), which forms a flood plain between the Jordan River and the West Bank. Jordanian territory is also referred to as the East Bank, because it lies east of the Jordan River. Jordan shares the Dead Sea with the West Bank and Israel. At 1,312 feet (400 meters) below sea level, the Dead Sea is the lowest point on earth. Jordan's only outlet to the sea is in the south at Aqaba. Central highlands run north to south. Deserts in the east cover about two-thirds of the country. Olive, fig, pomegranate, and citrus trees grow in areas of adequate rainfall.

Winter (November–April) is cold and wet. Some snow falls in the mountains and occasionally in northern cities. The average wintertime temperature in Amman, the capital, is 45°F (7°C). Spring and summer (May–October) are dry and pleasant in the west. In the desert, in the Jordan Valley, and near Aqaba, summer temperatures are much higher, often exceeding 100°F (38°C).

Jordan's internal rivers are shared resources with neighboring countries, and little water remains for Jordanian use. A rapidly growing population increases demand on an essentially unchanging water supply, resulting in the need for water rationing. As a result, non-renewable aquifers are increasingly relied on for general and agricultural use. Some heavily used aquifers suffer from increased salinity.

History

Early Kingdoms

The region of present-day Jordan has witnessed many civilizations throughout its history. The Amorites, Edomites, Moabites, and Ammonites were followed later by the Hittites, Egyptians, Israelites, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Nabateans, Greeks, and Romans. The Nabateans' most famous ruin is the city of Petra, located in southern Jordan. Evidence of the Roman presence remains in large ruins in downtown Amman, Jerash, and Um Qais. Muslim Arabs defeated the Byzantines in the seventh century, and the area became part of the Umayyad Caliphate, with Damascus (Syria) as its capital. Christian crusaders ruled at times (the city of Karak is home to a crusader castle), but the area has been mainly Muslim since the Arab invasion.

Creation of a Nation

The Ottoman Turks ruled from 1516 until the Great Arab Revolt (1916). The Arabs were aided by the British, who in 1923 created the Emirate of Transjordan as a semiautonomous region ruled by the Hashemite prince Abdullah I. Britain gradually turned power over to local Arab officials, and in 1946, Transjordan became independent and adopted its current official name (The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan). The 1948 Arab-Israeli War resulted in a mass exodus of Palestinians from their homes; many settled in the areas of the territory now known as the West Bank and Jordan. In 1950, Jordan annexed the West Bank.

Reign of King Hussein

King Abdullah was assassinated in 1951 while praying at the Dome of the Rock mosque in Jerusalem. His son Talal became king but was in poor health and abdicated the throne

in favor of his eldest son, 17-year-old Hussein. King Hussein (who was present at King Abdullah's assassination) assumed the throne at the age of 18 and within a few years garnered military support by replacing British officers with Jordanians. He also worked covertly to maintain peaceful relations with Israel.

Despite his efforts to maintain peace, a 1966 Israeli cross-border raid against Palestinian resistance groups put Hussein in a difficult political situation. Hussein was criticized in Jordan for failing to defend Jordanians and criticized by neighboring Arab leaders, who considered him a puppet for Western powers. In response, Hussein handed control of Jordan's army to Egyptian generals. Syria, Egypt (and, by extension, Jordan) launched an attack against Israel in June 1967. In what became known as the Six-Day War, Israel claimed territory from each of the countries: the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt, the Golan Heights from Syria, and the West Bank from Jordan. As a result of the land loss, many more Palestinian refugees fled to Jordan. The influx of refugees resulted in more Palestinians in Jordan than Jordanians. Many Palestinian resistance groups emerged and tried to establish Jordan as a base of operations—among them the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). The groups also increasingly sought to establish themselves as a separate state within Jordan, carried out violent attacks in Jordan, and even attempted to assassinate King Hussein. This and other factors led to internal unrest and violence between the government and Palestinian *fedayeen* (resistance members). King Hussein violently expelled the *fedayeen* from Jordan during Black September of 1970.

Even after losing the West Bank in 1967, Jordan claimed the West Bank and provided for Palestinian representatives in the Jordanian parliament. However, in 1988, Hussein dropped claims to the West Bank and eased tensions with the Palestinian Liberation Organization. Hussein also dissolved parliament, and a new all-Jordanian parliament was elected in 1989. Three years later, in 1992, Hussein legalized political parties, paving the way for multiparty elections in 1993 (the first since 1956). A strong turnout brought centrist-minded leaders to parliament. Their support for King Hussein eventually allowed Jordan to sign a historic peace treaty with Israel in October 1994. Not all Jordanians welcomed the treaty, and some were critical of King Hussein's positive relations with then Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin. The treaty with Israel is viewed favorably by some, who want stability in Jordan's relationship with Israel, but many remain hostile to the idea of peace with Israel. The treaty also feeds into tensions between Palestinians and Jordanians.

Reign of King Abdullah

In February 1999, just before he died of cancer, King Hussein appointed his eldest son, Abdullah II, then aged 37, as heir. King Abdullah has worked to revitalize and modernize the economy; Jordan joined the World Trade Organization in 2000. However, corruption and regional instability, such as conflict in neighboring Iraq, has hindered economic progress. Abdullah's close affiliation with the United States and other Western nations has been condemned by some Jordanians. Amid allegations of fraud by the opposition Islamic Action Front (IAF), pro-government politicians won key victories in

November 2007 elections to increase their number of seats. In 2012, King Abdullah tried to revive peace talks by hosting Israeli and Palestinian negotiators in Jordan but was unable to achieve progress on the subject.

Calls for Reform

Inspired by protests in Egypt, Tunisia, and elsewhere in the Middle East, Jordanians took to the streets in early 2011 demanding democratic reform. In contrast to the violent rebellion that took place in neighboring Syria, Jordanian activists showed restraint during demonstrations. But protests broke out again over an announcement of rising gas prices in 2012. In attempts to restore public support and manage reform tasks, King Abdullah appointed four successive ministers between 2011 and 2012 who were responsible for developing political reforms and speeding up election processes. Parliamentary elections were held in early 2013, resulting in the reelection of many government loyalists and tribal figures. Despite reform efforts, many Jordanians are dissatisfied with Jordan's current political and economic climate.

Recent Events and Trends

- **Water project agreement:** In December 2013, representatives from Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority signed an agreement that will create a new source of fresh water and increase water levels in the Dead Sea (an ancient salt lake). A new desalination plant is to be built in Aqaba, Jordan, that will pump water to southern Israel and Jordan; the remaining brine from the desalinated water will be pumped into the Dead Sea through a pipeline.
- **Syrian refugee burden:** In January 2015, the United Nations refugee agency called on the international community to help improve the living conditions of refugees in Jordan. Since the start of the civil war in Syria in 2012, about four million Syrian refugees have fled to neighboring countries such as Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and Egypt, with 620,000 refugees living in Jordan. The influx of Syrian refugees has put a strain on Jordan's health, education, and water resources. Syrians are not allowed to work in Jordan, so they live in poverty.
- **Jordan mourns:** In February 2015, the Islamic State (IS) released a video confirming the death of Jordanian pilot First Lieutenant Moaz al-Kasasbeh, who was captured by IS militants when his plane crashed in Syria in December. In response to the brutal murder, Jordan launched air strikes against IS strongholds in Syria and Iraq and executed two terrorist prisoners.

THE PEOPLE

Population

Except for small minorities of Circassians (1 percent) and Armenians (1 percent), all Jordanians are Arabs. While many Jordanians are of Bedouin descent, few remain nomadic. Nomadic Bedouins move about (mostly in the south and east) to take advantage of seasonal changes and to graze their livestock.

Jordanians of Palestinian descent comprise about half of the Arab population. They are either refugees from the West Bank (having crossed into Jordan after the 1948 and 1967

wars) or were born in Jordan. While Palestinian and Jordanian Arabs may enjoy the mutual respect that comes from their common heritage, a visible social divide exists between them and may sometimes be bitter. Many Jordanians of Palestinian descent are quick to claim their Palestinian heritage first and their Jordanian citizenship second. Jordan has a large refugee population, including more than 450,000 Iraqis and 620,000 Syrians. Roughly 1 million people live in Amman.

Language

Arabic is the official language. The Arabic alphabet consists of 28 letters written and read from right to left. Modern Standard Arabic is used in schools and the media, but people speak colloquial Arabic in their everyday lives. Slight dialectal variations exist in different areas—for example, between city-dwellers and nomads. Older generations of Circassians, Armenians, and Chechens may speak their respective languages as well as Arabic. French is taught at many private schools, and some radio programs are offered in French. English is widely understood among the upper and middle classes and is taught as a second language in all levels of education. Signs, government forms, and passports are in both Arabic and English.

Religion

Islam is the official state religion, and Islamic values and laws are an integral part of society. About 97 percent of Jordan's people are Muslims, mostly Sunni. Christians (Greek Orthodox, Catholics, Protestants, and others) represent about 2 percent of the population and are free to worship publicly. Muslims and Christians maintain good relationships, and the monarchy has done much to secure the rights of Christians in Jordan. Each religious community has the right to regulate personal matters such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance according to its religious laws in ecclesiastical courts. Religious affiliation is listed on government-issued identity cards.

Muslims believe the *Qur'an* (Muslim holy book) contains the word of *Allah* (God) as revealed to the prophet Muhammad. They demonstrate their faith and devotion through the Five Pillars of Islam: *shahadah* (professing there is no god but *Allah* and Muhammad is his prophet), *salat* (praying five times daily while facing Mecca, Saudi Arabia), *hajj* (making at least one pilgrimage to Mecca), *zakat* (donating money to the poor), and *sawm* (fasting from sunup to sundown each day during the holy month of *Ramadan*).

General Attitudes

Jordanians respect those who are good-natured, friendly, and hospitable. They are proud of their rich cultural heritage and their country's accomplishments. Jordanians are generally socially conservative; family values and family honor are strongly defended. While many emphasize the importance of tradition, many also embrace Western influences. For example, young people enjoy wearing European fashions and owning the latest high-tech products, especially cellular phones.

The wealthy are powerful and therefore command respect. Aggression is not admired, but bravery and patience are.

Depending on social status, excessive religious zeal may be seen as a positive or negative quality. Views of religious devotion also vary between religions. For Muslims, making a pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia, becomes increasingly important as one ages, though contributing financially to someone else's pilgrimage is an acceptable alternative.

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict is a major feature in many aspects of Jordanian culture, including music, poetry, art, idioms, and political rhetoric. Palestinian-Jordanian views on the subject are complex. While Palestinians have been granted Jordanian citizenship, they are sometimes regarded as refugees. Additionally, while some Palestinians may desire a national homeland, their presence in Jordan since 1948 means that many have established lives that they may not be eager to leave should a Palestinian state materialize. Finally, the peace treaty of 1994 between Israel and Jordan places Palestinians between two countries, neither of which seem to fully accept them.

Many Jordanians are suspicious of the peace treaty with Israel and are generally ideologically hostile toward the Israeli state. For example, professional unions ban their members from interacting with Israel in a way that makes relations between the countries look normal, as opposed to hostile. Ordinary citizens fear domination by Israel's larger and more developed economy. Some express concern about the possible influences of secular Israeli attitudes. Many oppose any peace with Israel until a Palestinian homeland is established, and others (primarily Palestinian-Jordanians) are not willing to lay aside the history of animosity between the two peoples. Nevertheless, the majority of people are not interested in an open war.

Personal Appearance

Most men wear Western clothing, sometimes accompanied by the traditional *keffiyah*. The *keffiyah*, also called a *hattah*, is either a white-and-red checkered headdress (traditional for Jordanians) or a black-and-white checkered headdress (traditional for Palestinians). Urban women also wear Western clothing. Younger women often prefer casual attire such as jeans. Many Muslim women wear the Islamic headscarf, or *hijab*, which is worn in many different styles. More conservative Muslim women wear traditional floor-length dresses and headscarves. On special occasions, women might wear embroidered dresses. In Western or traditional styles, clothing is always modest and never revealing. Shorts are worn by men primarily for sports. While wearing shorts in other contexts is largely inappropriate, they are becoming more acceptable as Western influence comes into the country. Jewelry (mostly gold) is an important part of a woman's *mahr* (the valuables or money given to the bride by her husband) and a symbol of her wealth and financial security.

CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

Greetings

Jordanians warmly greet each other with a handshake. Likewise, when one joins or leaves a small gathering, it is

customary to shake hands with each person. In many Islamic communities, physical contact between men and women (even handshakes) is considered inappropriate. Although Christians may feel comfortable greeting the opposite gender with handshakes or embraces, they tend to avoid such contact in public. Close friends of the same gender often kiss on both cheeks. Common verbal greetings include *Assalaam 'alaikum* (Peace be upon you), *Ahlan wa sahlan* (roughly “You are welcome in this place”), *Sabah al-khayr* (Good morning), *Masa' al-khayr* (Good evening), and the more casual *Marhaba* (Hello). After initial greetings, each person inquires about the other's welfare. In very conservative settings, men do not inquire about female members of another's family out of respect.

People are most commonly referred to by their first and last names, but those of the same gender or age may address one another by first name after an initial introduction. Other people are referred to by various titles. For instance, adults are often respectfully addressed as the *um* (mother) or *abu* (father) of their eldest son. So the parents of a boy named Ali would be *Um Ali* and *Abu Ali* to family friends and relatives. It is a sign of great respect to use *al-haj* (for men) or *al-hajjah* (for women) as honorifics for those who have completed a pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia. Acquaintances may be addressed as *akhi* (my brother) or *ukhti* (my sister). A young person may address an older person as uncle or aunt as a sign of respect, even if they are not related.

Gestures

Jordanians use several hand gestures to communicate. When speaking of money, one rubs the thumb and index finger together. One might emphasize a point by punching a fist in the air or shaking the index finger at the person being spoken to. “No” can be expressed by tilting the head quickly upward and making a “tsk” sound. To show respect, one touches the fingers briefly to the forehead and bows the head slightly forward. It is impolite to point the sole of one's foot at or to turn one's back to another person. Good posture is important, especially at social events.

Visiting

Social visits play a fundamental role in Jordanian society, and hospitality is considered a duty. Friends and family are expected to visit those who are sick. Other occasions for visits include births and graduations. In urban areas, close friends and relatives may visit without prior notice, but advance arrangements are expected otherwise. Men and women traditionally socialize in separate rooms, though Westernized couples or close relatives might socialize in mixed company. Guests are promptly invited into the home; it is impolite to leave a guest lingering outside the door. Regardless of the length of the visit, hosts nearly always offer their guests tea, coffee, cola drinks, or fruit drinks. During a longer visit, coffee often is served shortly before guests are expected to leave; one does not leave before this coffee is served. Guests not originally invited for a meal may be invited to stay if their visit extends into a mealtime. It is polite to decline initially—even as many as three times—before accepting the offer.

Guests might take gifts to hosts on special occasions or present hosts with sweets, flowers, or fruit if visiting after a long absence. The recipient does not immediately accept the gift, out of modesty. If the gift is wrapped, the recipient does not open it in the giver's presence.

Eating

Lunch is usually the main meal of the day and is eaten between 2 and 4 p.m., when children come home from school. Breakfast and dinner tend to be small. After washing hands, the family gathers together for a meal either around a table (in many urban homes) or on the floor (common in rural areas). Before eating, some Muslims may offer a short prayer, *Bismillah al-rahman al-rahim* (In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate). Some use the shorter *Bismillah* (In the name of God). Many families eat meals from a common platter. Utensils and separate plates are used for some foods. If guests are present, they are served first and are given large portions of the meal, and a wider than usual assortment of food is prepared.

Coffee, served in small cups, is served after meals. Turkish coffee is most common; one drinks it slowly and does not stir it, so as to keep the thick grains at the bottom of the cup. Although not taken seriously, a popular cultural activity of some women is to offer an informal fortune reading by deciphering meaning in the grains of coffee at the bottom of the cup. *Qahwah Saadah*, a bitter Bedouin coffee, is served on special occasions such as weddings, funerals, or holidays and drunk quickly. To indicate one is finished, one shakes the cup back and forth.

LIFESTYLE

Family

Structure

The family is the core unit of Jordanian society. Jordanians traditionally desire large families, but family sizes are declining due to economic pressures. The government promotes birth control awareness to help aid in family planning. While urban family planning tends to limit the number of children to between two and four children, rural families tend to have larger families, as more children can help with farming or with family businesses. In the past, a household often consisted of parents and their married children and families living in one house. Today, in urban areas, extended family members more often live close to each other, in the same apartment building, neighborhood, or city. In rural areas, families have much stronger ties, as they live closer to each other.

Traditional family structures are, however, growing weaker as young adults move away for work opportunities and are less available to socialize with their families. The extended family, while once central to the family unit, has become more peripheral and may only gather during holidays or major family events like weddings and funerals.

Parents and Children

Parents are expected to care for their children until they get married or move out of the house. Depending on the financial

situation of the family, urban youth rarely get summer or part-time jobs in high school or even college. Young women tend to have chores and responsibilities around the home; young men generally do not. Rural children often help with farming or with family businesses. Sons, especially the eldest, hold an elevated position in the family hierarchy. Daughters are expected to respect their brothers and parents.

Regardless of age, unmarried children continue to live with their parents. Some young married couples choose to live in their own home or apartment because they are either financially independent or prefer the freedom of living on their own. Adult children, generally the eldest son or daughter, are expected to care for their elderly parents. Although some nursing or retirement homes exist, placing a parent in such a home is usually considered taboo. The younger generation is taught to respect the elderly.

Gender Roles

The father is the head of the family and is expected to support it financially; the mother is expected to raise the children and maintain the home. Although gender roles are more rigid in rural areas, traditional roles are found to some degree in all social strata. Employment opportunities are limited, especially for women. Only about 15 percent of Jordanian women work outside the home. Women commonly work in the fields of education and health or are civil servants.

With few exceptions, women are not found in leadership positions, including the government. Women may be assigned to minor cabinet positions (such as minister of tourism or social development), but major cabinet assignments are reserved for men. The Jordanian parliament has a quota of 12 female members in the 120 seat house; it is rare that the quota is exceeded.

Housing

Urban

Urban homes tend to be made of brick and are faced with limestone. While some Jordanians live in large homes (called *villas*), most people live in apartment buildings. Apartment buildings are likewise covered in limestone, and the cityscape is very uniform in color. Most people do not have landscaped yards, due to Jordan's lack of water. However, some people plant olive trees (which require little water) in front of their homes for the trees' cultural and religious significance. Urban homes in Jordan have electricity and running water, though the government regulates water distribution. Most homes and apartments have a water tank on the roof that is filled up weekly by either a municipal water service or a large water truck. If a family uses all of their allotted water, they can purchase additional water.

The interiors of urban homes are generally spacious and feature Western-style furniture. Walls are generally light-colored. Most people have a television connected to a satellite dish, and some have air conditioning. A typical urban home has a greeting room separate from the family areas.

Rural

A typical rural home is made of stone and concrete, has a flat roof, and is painted a neutral color like gray, white, or beige. Rural homes often lack running water and have outhouses. Furniture in a rural home tends to be simple and traditional,

such as floor cushions rather than couches.

Outside major cities, some Bedouin and *ghajar* (Roma, also called Gypsies) live in tents, which are commonly made from animal skins but can also be made from synthetic materials. Bedouin tents are divided into two separate areas, one for men and one for women. Bedouin furniture is also very simple, as it is frequently moved due to the nomadic Bedouin lifestyle. People often relax on a traditional piece of furniture called a *farsha*, or *junbeeya*, a long, flat, rectangular couch that doubles as a bed.

Home Life

Depending on the conservativeness of a family (and generally more common among Muslims), the greeting room is often where male visitors are received, while female visitors are welcomed into a different room. The reception area for females is also the family room and often the place where the television is located. In western Amman, separate greeting rooms are less common due to more relaxed attitudes about gender separation. The kitchen is considered the special domain of women, especially the female head of the household, whose responsibility it is to cook and prepare food. Some families eat their meals in the kitchen and reserve their formal dining area for meals when they entertain guests.

Ownership

The process of buying a home is not difficult. However, home prices are often prohibitive, especially to young couples trying to buy their first home. In such cases, parents may assist by offering money for a down payment on a home. Alternatively, banks offer loans for homes as well. Nevertheless, the financial restraints are such that most people (especially in urban areas) rent their homes.

Dating and Marriage

Dating and Courtship

With few exceptions, dating in the Western sense is rare, especially among teenagers. Some young couples may date in secret, without parental knowledge or consent. When young people are financially established (generally in their mid- to late twenties), they may engage in one-on-one dating, though at this age dating is expected to result in marriage. Couples meet at universities, cafés, offices, and clubs. People also meet through friends and at parties. After parental consent has been granted, and often only after an engagement has been proposed or a marriage contract has been signed, couples may date for several months (sometimes a year or more) before getting married.

Young people often socialize in same-gender groups; young men commonly visit cafés where they can smoke the *shisha* (tobacco water pipe) and play cards. Young women in conservative areas or families are sometimes more restricted in their movements. In such cases, the young women are expected to have a male relative escort them when they go out in groups to cafés and cinemas.

Marriage and Society

Marriage is valued for family and social cohesion and as a means to perpetuate a family name. Arranged marriages are still a part of Jordanian society; mothers are often involved in finding prospective spouses for their children.

While in the past, Jordanians tended to marry in their early

twenties, today the expectation of financial stability prior to marriage has pushed the average marrying age of men back to the thirties (mid-twenties for women). Although parents may help with the cost, it may take several years for men to save enough money to pay for the *mahr* (bride-price) and wedding celebration.

Polygamy is legal but rarely practiced in Jordan. According to Islam, a man may marry as many as four wives on the condition that he can care for them equally (emotionally and financially) and has valid reason to marry again (for example, one wife's inability to bear children). Cohabitation is unacceptable in Jordan. Though illegal, in some cases, women who have been involved in or suspected of having premarital sexual relations may be subject to an "honor killing," where such young women are killed by a male family member. Honor killings are seen as a way to cleanse the reputation of the family. The same concept does not apply to male family members.

Weddings

Muslims wedding ceremonies are formalized in the *Katb al-Kitab* ceremony, in which the couple signs a marriage contract in front of their families and a religious authority figure. Although the Muslim couple is officially married after this ceremony, their families may not allow them to live together until after public marriage celebrations. Christians commonly have a religious service in a church that family and friends attend. Regardless of religious affiliation, newly married couples celebrate the wedding at the home of their parents, in a rented hall, or in a hotel. Muslim reception celebrations are generally divided between genders, but some less conservative families may hold a single party for everyone.

Some Muslim receptions feature the *dabkah* (traditional line dance) performed by the groom and the men in his wedding party. At the bride's party, she dances as her guests sing and dance around her. In some celebrations (depending on the preferences of the family), the bride is seated on a chair on top of a platform and female members of both families adorn her with gold jewelry. The women put on veils and conservative clothing before the groom and the bride's father and brothers enter to present her with gold. Then the new couple dances together at a party with all of their guests. Later, the bride puts on a white cape and leaves with her husband. Family members follow them in their cars until they reach the hotel where the couple will stay for the night.

Divorce

Divorce is uncommon and is discouraged by society. Divorce procedures are influenced by religion. Christians tend to view divorce more negatively than Muslims. Perception of a divorcée varies depending on her individual circumstance. The mother usually has custody of the children immediately after divorce until a child turns seven (for a boy) or nine (for a girl). After that, children may go to live with their father.

Life Cycle

Birth

Seven days after birth, some families celebrate the arrival of a newborn by hosting an open house, during which neighbors and relatives bring small gifts. In rural areas, a sheep may be

slaughtered (generally by a butcher) and served to visitors. Christian families serve *moghli* (spiced rice pudding with nuts and candied anise seeds) to celebrate the birth of a baby. The mother's female family members and friends may throw a separate party to congratulate her. Muslim babies are welcomed into the world when the father whispers the *adhan* (Islamic call to prayer) into the child's ear. Catholic or Orthodox children are baptized shortly after birth, while Protestant families sometimes choose to wait to baptize the child. Grandmothers assist the new mother in raising her baby, especially if the mother has to return to work after her maternity leave is over.

Milestones

Children are considered adults at 18; they can obtain a driver's license, vote, and legally buy tobacco and alcohol. Nevertheless, society expects youths to act as adults as early as 15 or 16.

Death

Funerals are somber, formal affairs. According to Islamic custom, the body must be buried as quickly as possible, although no burials take place at night. The body is washed by family members of the same gender as the deceased. It is then covered by a *kaffan* (white cloth) and brought to the mosque during prayer time. Those gathered say the regular prayers in addition to one for the deceased. Male family members then carry the body to the burial ground, where a final prayer is offered. Christians also bury the deceased quickly, though the immediacy of burial is not as urgent as among the Muslims. Christians are commonly buried in formal clothes in a coffin. For the next three days, relatives and friends visit the family of the deceased to offer their condolences, though in urban settings, the length of the wake is shorter. Guests are offered food, which may be prepared by friends and family or a catering service and eaten in remembrance of the dead. Guests are also served bitter coffee and sometimes dates. Anniversaries of death may be commemorated by a visit to the burial site with a religious figure, who offers a prayer for the deceased. Many people also visit graves on major religious holidays.

Diet

Mansaf (a large tray of rice covered with chunks of stewed lamb, including the head) with *jameed* (yogurt sauce) is considered Jordan's national dish. Other popular dishes include *mahshi* (stuffed vegetables), *musakhan* (chicken with onions, olive oil, pine nuts, and sumac), and *meshwi* (barbecued meat). Jordanians often eat *hummus* (a dip made of chickpeas) with fava beans and *falafel* (fried balls of crushed chickpeas mixed with oil and spices). Bread is dipped into *zayt* (olive oil) and *za'atar* (Middle Eastern herb, similar to oregano and thyme, mixed with sesame seeds and other spices). Lamb and chicken are the most common meats. Islamic law prohibits the consumption of pork and alcohol, and most Muslims avoid these. Meals often include locally grown vegetables (such as onions, eggplant, tomatoes, and cabbage) and seasonal fruits (including grapes, apples, oranges, apricots, watermelon, and figs). Although Jordan is a majority Muslim country, and most Muslims do not drink alcohol, alcohol is available in Jordan. Sales of alcohol are,

however, prohibited during *Ramadan* (except in tourist areas).

Recreation

Sports

Soccer is the most popular sport in Jordan and is commonly played by men. Young boys may play in the street using a few stones for makeshift goals and a crushed soda can for a ball. Soccer is also the most popular spectator sport in the country. People follow local and international games and sometimes take to the streets waving flags of the teams they support. In urban areas, basketball, volleyball, tennis, badminton, and rugby are played, but they are less popular than soccer. Women play sports in clubs and school, and Jordan has women's teams that compete regionally in several sports (including basketball, handball, volleyball, and swimming).

Leisure

Watching television and movies are common leisure activities. Cultural activities such as visiting movie theaters (though the cost of movie tickets may be prohibitive for many), lectures, festivals, and concerts provide recreation in urban areas. Men enjoy going to cafés to drink coffee, play backgammon, smoke *shisha* (tobacco water pipe), and socialize. A music festival is held annually in the city of Jerash, where famous Arab singers hold concerts. Families may have picnics in parks. Several parades are held in Amman yearly and are popular family outings.

Vacation

Local vacation destinations include day trips to the Dead Sea or weekend trips to Aqaba, Jordan's only seaside city. Alternatively, families might spend a day in al-Aghwar, an agricultural area that is frequented for barbecues and picnics.

The Arts

A rich blend of Arab and Islamic imagery is reflected in Jordanian crafts, which include handmade glass, earthenware, basketwork, carpets, mosaics, and embroidery. In part because Islam forbids depiction of sacred religious figures (for example, prophets), traditional art forms such as architecture commonly feature complex calligraphy or geometric designs. Both photographs and traditional artwork are common adornments in Jordanian homes today, however.

Popular culture is expressed in songs, poetry, ballads, and storytelling. Villagers have special songs for births, weddings, funerals, and harvests. Several types of *dabkah* (dances accompanied by a rhythmic stomping of feet) are performed on festive occasions. Favorite instruments include the *oud* (a traditional lute), *gasabah* (cane flute), and *durbakkah* (earthenware drum). Both Arabic and Western music are popular.

Holidays

National holidays in Jordan include New Year's Day (1 Jan.), Labor Day (1 May), and Independence Day (25 May). Other holidays, such as King Hussein's birthday (14 Nov.), King Abdullah's birthday (30 Jan.), and Army Day (10 June), are observed, but businesses and governmental institutions operate during normal business hours. Islamic religious holy days follow the lunar calendar. Catholic and Orthodox

Christians (the two largest Christian groups in Jordan) observe some religious holidays according to different calendars but agree to celebrate them on a single day.

Christian Holidays

Jordanian Orthodox Christians celebrate Christmas according to the Catholic calendar (25 December), and Easter is celebrated according to the Orthodox calendar (the date varies). Christmas is the only nationally recognized Christian holiday. Most Christian families (and some Muslim families) decorate Christmas trees in their homes. Christian families exchange gifts, and some may organize Christmas bazaars. Easter and other holidays are observed, but people are not given days off from work.

Muslim Holidays

During *Ramadan*, Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset. Fasting is a religious duty. Each evening during *Ramadan*, families wait for the *adhan* (Islamic call to prayer) to sound from the minarets of the mosques as the signal that it is time to eat *iftar* (the fast-breaking meal). *Ramadan* is also a time of increased socialization and nighttime outings. Many new television programs begin during *Ramadan*.

Eid al-Fitr is a three-day feast at the end of the holy month of *Ramadan*. On the first day of *Eid al-Fitr*, Muslims attend a special prayer at the break of dawn. During the three days of celebration, families and friends visit each other. *Ma'amoul*, a special pastry filled with date paste or ground nuts, along with Arabic coffee are served during these *Eid* visits.

The Feast of the Sacrifice, also known as *Eid al-Adha*, honors Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son. Muslim families sacrifice an animal (usually a sheep or lamb) and donate the meat to the poor. Some Muslim Jordanians mark *al-Mawlid al-Nabawi*, the birth of the prophet Muhammad, with a prayer service.

SOCIETY

Government

Structure

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is a constitutional monarchy, but King Abdullah's powers resemble those in an absolute monarchy. The king appoints the prime minister as head of government; he can also dismiss the National Assembly or overturn its laws. The National Assembly consists of a 60-seat Senate (*Majlis al-Aayan*) and a 150-seat House of Representatives (*Majlis al-Nuwaab*). Senators are appointed by the king. Members of the House of Representatives serve four-year terms and are either elected directly from single-member districts or through proportional representation based on national party lists. During elections, Jordanians vote for a district representative and for a political party's national list. Fifteen seats in the House of Representatives are guaranteed for women. The voting age is 18.

Political Landscape

Jordan's political landscape is dominated by pro-regime loyalists and tribal leaders. Despite making up a large portion of the population, Jordanians of Palestinian descent are underrepresented in the government. The Muslim

Brotherhood's political wing, the Islamic Action Front, has long served as the country's main opposition party. Political parties are generally small and have little or no power over legislation. Due to new legislation passed in 2012, the creation of new political parties has become easier. Political parties are not allowed to be organized along ethnic, religious, or regional lines.

The government faces many domestic and foreign challenges. While the country struggles to accommodate the large number of refugees fleeing neighboring Syria's civil conflict, the public's demand for political and economic reforms continue. Jordan's political stability depends on the population's preference for status quo and modest reforms over the revolutionary turmoil that is common in the region.

Government and the People

Constitutional freedoms like those of expression, association, assembly, and press are limited. Political activism increased in 2012, when many Jordanians protested against the government to lower the cost of gas and limit the king's absolute powers. Many Jordanians also hope for a more open political system. Past elections have been considered generally free and fair, though some cases of vote-buying and vote campaigning in polling states have been reported. About 56 percent of registered voters participated in the 2013 elections. The voting age is 18.

Economy

Jordan's few natural resources include phosphate, potash, and limestone. While Jordan does not have the oil reserves that neighboring countries do, there is investigation into exploiting the country's tar sands. The most important exports are fruits and vegetables, phosphates, and fertilizers. Agriculture and industry make up a small part of the economy, while services constitute more than three-quarters. The country relies heavily on tourism, foreign aid, and remittances from Jordanians working abroad. Jordan's economy has been hindered by turmoil in oil-rich Iraq, its largest trading partner and main source of energy. When oil prices or supplies fluctuate, Jordan's economy suffers. Slow economic growth has made it difficult for Jordan to find relief from its heavy debt burden; debt payments consume one-fourth of the national budget. Unemployment and underemployment remain chronically high. The currency is the Jordanian *dinar* (JOD).

Transportation and Communications

Urban roads are in good condition and connect all major cities. Modern vehicles are common in cities and rural areas, though individual car ownership is too expensive for many. Taxis are available in cities and are the most common means of transportation. Service taxis (called *serveece*), which travel fixed routes and carry a small number of passengers, are cheaper but are used less frequently today. Buses are also common.

Communications systems, including cellular phone networks, are modern and prevalent—just over 90 percent of the population has a cellular phone. Internet access is available in numerous internet cafés and increasingly in the home. While relatively expensive, internet use is growing rapidly. Jordan has several private radio and television

stations in addition to state-owned outlets. Satellite television is readily available and affordable and provides Arabic- and foreign-language channels.

Criticism of the government, Islam, or the king is a serious crime. The government censors local print media and news websites. Journalists and bloggers are subject to fines, harassment, or imprisonment for violations of speech and association laws. Members of the media are required to register and obtain licenses. Many Jordanian journalists have protested the government's control over freedom of speech and call for a return to self-censorship.

Education

Structure

Public education is free and compulsory for 10 years. An additional two years of education is required to earn a diploma (*tawjihi*). Students can choose from several emphases during these two years, either academic (focusing on the sciences, literature, information technology, or Islamic law) or vocational (such as hotel management, plumbing, or woodwork). Most students choose an academic emphasis, obtain a *tawjihi*, and pursue university education.

Private schools can sometimes offer internationally recognized certificates based on the British system or the International Baccalaureate, which can help a Jordanian student more easily enter a foreign university. The expensive tuition at private schools restricts them to high-income families. Many private schools are funded and operated by religious entities. Catholic schools, for example, were established in Amman, Ajloun, Karak, and Irbid in the early 20th century. Some Muslim families choose Christian schools for their discipline and student productivity.

Access

Jordan has one of the most highly educated labor forces among Arab states. Education is viewed as an expensive but necessary means to a stable career, and most school-aged children are enrolled. Gender equality in education also sets Jordan apart from other nations in the region, where education for girls beyond the mid-teens may be discouraged or institutionally restricted to boys. Jordanian schools enforce the same standards of education for boys and girls at all levels of education. Public schools, and some private schools, are segregated by gender, but there is no gender-specific instruction. However, young men are particularly encouraged to choose a socially prestigious career that will also be financially rewarding; for example, teaching as a profession is more acceptable for women than men. Muslim and Christian students attend the same classes. The literacy rate for those under age 24 is 99 percent.

School Life

Curriculum for schools is generally dictated by the government, although many private schools get exceptions that allow them to teach international curricula. Jordanian education stresses sciences (math, physics, chemistry, and biology) over humanities. Arabic and English are mandatory during public primary education, though French or German may be offered at private schools. Parents are often involved in their children's schoolwork. Families tend to push their children to become doctors, engineers, or pharmacists, and

those courses of study are very competitive.

Teachers maintain a formal relationship with their students and may be employed to offer private lessons to students. The expense of private tutoring limits accessibility to upper-class families. Most in-class instruction is lecture based, and homework is often assigned out of textbooks. As most of the foreign textbooks are very expensive, some students purchase photocopies of the books at discounted prices. Tests are used at all levels to measure student performance. The educational system is geared so much toward test taking that students spend more time preparing for the yearly tests than they do on homework.

Higher Education

Jordan has a number of public and private universities, in addition to smaller institutions of higher education. Vocational students are eligible for community college. More women tend to continue with advanced education, as young men may be required to join the workforce to help support their families. Many universities use foreign textbooks for instruction and offer more courses on language and humanities than primary and secondary schools.

Health

Medical care is available to everyone in Jordan, though the quality varies. Expensive private health care is available only to the rich. Public hospitals may be outdated or crowded. Nearly all Jordanians have access to government-sponsored immunization programs, as well as health clinics where care is provided for a small fee. Higher life expectancy rates and lower infant mortality rates represent significant progress over the past generation. Diabetes and smoking-related diseases are among Jordan's most common health problems. Due to stability, accessibility, and government support, Jordan has become one of the most popular centers for medical tourism, attracting patients from other Middle Eastern and North African countries.

AT A GLANCE

Contact Information

Embassy of Jordan, 3504 International Drive NW, Washington, DC 20008; phone (202) 966-2664; web site www.jordanembassyus.org. Jordan Tourism Board, phone (877) 733-5673; web site www.visitjordan.com.

Country and Development Data

Capital	Amman
Population	8,117,564 (rank=96)
Area (sq. mi.)	34,495 (rank=110)
Area (sq. km.)	89,342
Human Development Index	77 of 187 countries
Gender Inequality Index	101 of 152 countries
GDP (PPP) per capita	\$11,900
Adult Literacy	98% (male); 93% (female)
Infant Mortality	15.73 per 1,000 births
Life Expectancy	72 (male); 76 (female)
Currency	Jordanian dinar

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