



## Everywhere

### *Two nights in Aqaba—Part 3*

**By Mel Pearlman**

Having made it through the stress of our border crossing into Jordan (described in my previous column of Feb. 28, 2020), my son and I now found ourselves standing in the Jordanian night with our Jordanian greeter nowhere in sight.

We watched as the Jordanian workers, numbering in the hundreds, were returning to Jordan after their workday in Eilat; and were being picked up to return to their homes in Aqaba.

Finally, a sketchy looking fellow drove up in an unmarked van and approached us inquiring whether we were the Pearlmans. We hesitantly identified ourselves, not sure if we wanted to proceed further with the seemingly unkempt fellow, until I remembered that our Israeli tour representative did not look much better. After all, this was the Middle East.

As it turned out he was quite nice, spoke broken English, and was very welcoming. He delivered us to our hotel in downtown Aqaba, which was about 5 miles from the border crossing. Our hotel, named, "MyHotel," turned out to be in the heart of town and very near the beach along the Red Sea. One of our first sights as we drove to the hotel was the lights of Eilat glittering on the waters Eilat shares with the city of Aqaba.

Our check-in was uneventful and we proceeded to our nicely appointed room, still concerned with our irrational thoughts that someone in the reception area might "rat us out" to an Arab terrorist, that two vulnerable American tourists were in their midst. We immediately double locked the door as paranoia continued to plague our good judgment.

Finally, hunger prevailed over anxiety and we decided to go out to explore the environs of the city and to find a local restaurant for dinner. Armed with my son's GPS we walked to the main street. It was a Wednesday night and the streets were crowded with people dining, shopping and just taking advantage of the beautiful night.

We found a local restaurant and had a great dinner. The proprietor came out to greet us in English and welcomed us. This was the first of many conversations with locals who implored us to spread the word that Jordan was safe for tourists, even though this was a time of heightened ISIS activity throughout the region and Jordan was burdened with more than one million refugees from war-torn Syria. That fear and perceived insecurity had seriously impacted the tourist industry in Jordan.

We retired to our very comfortable room in our hotel and awakened to a delicious American-style breakfast, as we waited the arrival

of our tour bus that would take us to Petra. Petra is the site of UN World Heritage ruins of a town built into the sandstone mountainside by the Nabateans.

Petra was a stopping-off point in Jordan's southern desert along an ancient route for caravans carrying goods and people between Damascus and Egypt.

According to experts, the Nabateans were an ancient civilization, that inhabited this mountainous region from around 1,500 BCE to around 363 when an earthquake destroyed the aqueduct that brought water to the city. The last vestiges of Nabatean civilization disappeared when the Arabs conquered the area in 663.

The ruins were spectacular and a day trip to Petra should be on the bucket list of every visitor to Israel. It was also well-worth overcoming our anxieties and misconceptions about staying in Aqaba.

Our tour bus was mostly made up of American, European and Israeli tourists, all of whom except for me and my son, had spent the night in Eilat; They would now be returning to Eilat after the 4 hour bus trip back to Aqaba. We were dropped off at our hotel as the bus headed to the border for the group crossing back to Israel.

It was a little strange being the only two to be dropped off in Aqaba, but we were much more comfortable after our experience on the first night. Our second evening was in fact very enjoyable and free of the anxieties of our first night in Aqaba. We ventured further from our hotel, walked along the promenade that parallels the shore line and came upon the Royal Yacht Club where King Abdullah II moors his yacht.

Surprisingly, the Club dining room was open to the public and we enjoyed a delicious steak dinner with alcoholic beverages. The next morning a car was waiting for us to take us back to the border.

Nothing was more reassuring as we walked toward those Israeli flags and the friendly greeting of Shalom by a very attractive border guard. It was nice to be back in Israel.

If you wish to comment or respond you can reach me at [melpearlman322@gmail.com](mailto:melpearlman322@gmail.com). Please do so in a rational, thoughtful, respectful and civil manner.

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