

# DREAMSCAPES

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WINTER 2012/2013

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# CHASING WATERFALLS

HIKING JORDAN'S WADI MUJIB

BY PAMELA ROTH

ONCE I HEARD THE SOUND OF RUSHING WATER ECHOING OFF THE NARROW CANYON WALLS, I KNEW MY RELAXING HIKE THROUGH THE WARM, SHALLOW STREAM FLOWING THROUGH WADI MUJIB WAS ABOUT TO CHANGE DRAMATICALLY.

I had been walking upstream in the ankle-deep water of the peaceful Siq Trail for about a half hour. The clear, sparkling water felt like a warm bath caressing my legs that were fighting the feisty current with each step.

I marvelled at the brilliant shades of brown and red rock in the winding gorge that looked like an artist's creation. Slivers of light bathed the curvy sandstone cliffs, creating a landscape that was out of this world. The small stream snaked its way through the dramatic gorge that rose a few hundred feet, often making it difficult to see the dazzling blue desert sky.

## OUT OF MY COMFORT ZONE

Located 410 metres below sea level on the scenic eastern shores of the Dead Sea in Jordan, the Mujib Reserve is the lowest nature reserve in the world, and one of the country's undiscovered gems.

"You will get soaked from head to toe," said a couple of tourists at the visitor centre who had just completed the two-kilometre Siq Trail before I embarked on the journey. They were beaming with pride after their adventure up the stream. I was feeling nervous.

I had never hiked through a stream before or climbed waterfalls. Water is hardly my forte since I can't even swim. But my trusty mandatory lifejacket gave me a newfound confidence that I could conquer almost anything, and I was ready to experience a new adventure out of my comfort zone.

Aside from the odd pigeon cooing from a nest perched high on a rock ledge, the canyon that afternoon basically belonged to my boyfriend Jay and me.



opposite: Jay Roach takes in the magnitude of the towering canyon walls at Wadi Mujib. Pamela Roth

above: A bridge takes visitors at Wadi Mujib to the start of the Siq Trail. Jay Roach

below: This waterfall is at the end of the Siq Trail at Wadi Mujib. Jay Roach







The sound of rushing water grew louder as we waded deeper into the gorge, which offered few places to step out of the fast-flowing stream. The towering rock shaded me, a welcome reprieve from the scorching sun.

Suddenly, there it was: the first waterfall we physically had to climb. It was about three metres high and looked intimidating.

### CONQUERING HEIGHTS

"Wow. This should be interesting," said Jay, who had wrapped our camera in plastic bags, then strapped it to his head with a shemagh so it wouldn't get wet. Exploring Wadi Mujib had been a last-minute decision on our 10-day visit to Jordan, leaving us little time to search for a highly recommended waterproof bag.

Beside the rushing water was a rope, along with a couple of steel bars mounted to the rock to be used as a ladder. The churning water at the bottom of the fall was waist-deep, making it a challenge to keep my balance. Minnows nibbled at my feet as I waited to make the short climb, which I accomplished with ease.

"No problem," I said once I made my way to the top without being drenched. However the real challenges were yet to come. This was just a warm up.

We chose to hike the Siq Trail because it's the only trail in Wadi Mujib that doesn't require a mandatory guide. The four other trails at the reserve include swimming and hiking for long hours. Some only allow 25 people per day and involve descending the 20-metre waterfall at the end of the Siq Trail before ending at our starting point, the Mujib Bridge.

In order to see the granddaddy of falls in the gorge, we had three more waterfalls to climb, all of them about three metres high.

My adrenalin was pumping. I approached the second fall from the wrong angle on my first attempt and got a face full of water when I took one step into the falls. It threw me off and left me shaken.

"I don't think I can do this," I shouted as I stood in the waist-deep water rushing toward me. But I knew I couldn't give up and quickly regained my composure.

In order to avoid being tossed around like a rag doll, we found a better approach through the middle of the falls that only had a slight trickle of water. Holding onto the rope, Jay pushed me onto the steep rock ledge and I pulled myself up the rest of the gentle slope, determined to emerge victorious. It only took about six carefully placed steps to reach the top, but I felt like I had just climbed Mount Everest.

"If I can do that, I can do anything," I said, beaming from ear to ear. The other falls on the way up were also challenging, but seemed easier with my new-found climbing skill.

Standing below the massive waterfall at the end of the hike and feeling the cool, refreshing mist on my face was worth the effort getting there. It was a majestic, peaceful place, and we had it all to ourselves.

"We made it," I said enthusiastically to Jay, who was snapping photos of the impressive waterfall through the thick mist. I sat on a tiny shoreline nearby and soaked in the beauty around me. We were in no hurry to head back.

### A LAND OF ENDLESS WONDERS

Wadi Mujib is among the many wonders of Jordan, which lures travellers from around the globe. During my visit to the country, which included a seven-day tour with G Adventures, I floated weightlessly in the Dead Sea, rode a camel at sunrise in the desert of Wadi Rum, snorkelled some of the best reefs in the world in the Red Sea, explored colossal ruins in the ancient city of Petra, and visited the site where Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River.

Wadi Mujib, however, offers a unique adventure for those looking to get off the beaten path. Covering 220 square kilometres, the reserve extends to the Kerak and Madaba mountains to the north and south, reaching 900 metres above sea level in some places before plunging into the Dead Sea. More than 400 plant species, 102 species of permanent and migratory birds and 10 species of carnivore call various parts of the reserve their home.

I was beaming with pride when I returned to the visitor centre where the incredible journey through the gorge began. There were two other travellers strapping on their life jackets, about to embark upon an adventure like no other.

"You will get soaked from head to toe," I said with a smile. I wondered if they had any idea what awaited them. ■

### TRAVEL TIPS

Royal Jordanian airlines offers direct flights to Amman from Toronto and Montréal. For information on tours to Jordan, visit [gadventures.com](http://gadventures.com).

Wadi Mujib is located 125 kilometres from the capital city of Amman. There is no public transportation heading in this direction so visitors must hire a private car (cost about 40 JD to 60 JD). The Mujib Reserve Visitor Centre is on the Dead Sea Highway, about 20 kilometres south of the resorts.

This is but one of a handful of small waterfalls to climb along the Siq Trail at Wadi Mujib. Jay Roach

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