

# Travelers' Intercom

— Readers' opinions, tips & recommendations —

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**'Petra By Night'** I visited the famous UNESCO World Heritage Site of Petra, Jordan, in October '07. A daytime visit is a long and hot walk but definitely worth the effort. For me, however, the highlight was the lesser-known night trip to the Siq and Treasury.

Starting at the Petra Visitors Center, you walk down the road through the kilometer-long Siq (a narrow gap between rock faces) to the famous Treasury. The entire route is lit only with lanterns on the ground (actually paper bags each with a candle inside) and moonlight.

At the Treasury, the lanterns cover the ground in front of the monument, where visitors sit and rest with a small cup of tea while enjoying the Bedouin music echoing around the gorge. After the short concert, you can wander around the Treasury and make your own way back up the Siq.

At the start of the trip, everyone is asked to remain quiet ("Even a small whisper will carry") and not use their camera flash. Sadly, the average tourist is unable to do either of these simple things.

The environment is beautifully quiet, dark and peaceful. Even hushed chatter can ruin it. And your eyes adjust to the low light, so camera flashes seem worse than usual.

My tip is to hang back from the main group, following a few minutes behind the flashing and chatting masses. You might miss the start of the festivities at the Treasury, but you'll be rewarded by the music wafting up the Siq as you approach.

This is something to take in and savor, not photograph. If you want to try anyway, I suggest a close-up of a single lantern with more of them in the background. You could try wider shots with a monopod or tripod. Whatever you do, turn off your flash!

At other places, such as the Pyramids in Cairo, they have a sound-and-light show with electric lights, loud music and sonorous narrations, but "Petra by Night" is an entirely more subtle and gentle attraction. I highly recommend it.

"Petra by Night" currently runs at 8:30 p.m. on three nights only (Monday, Wednesday and Thursday); check locally for the latest info. Tickets cost 12 dinars (near \$17).

To ensure getting a ticket, it's best to ask your guide or hotel staff early in the day. You can buy a ticket at the Petra Visitors Center before the event starts but not earlier in the day.

Following the night walk, we took a cleansing ale at the *Cave Bar*, in a hotel up to the left after exiting the main gate. The bar is part of a 2,000-year-old Nabataean crypt, and you can drink in one of the (now empty) niches or outside where it's cooler and less noisy.

Jordan Direct Tours (phone +962 6 5938238, fax 5920704, [www.jdtours.com](http://www.jdtours.com)), an efficient company, worked out a custom 3-day tour for me via e-mail before my arrival. I had my own good, English-speaking driver/guide, an air-conditioned car, single rooms in 3-star hotels with breakfasts plus entry fees to sites all for \$692.

**PETER DEEGAN**  
Ersleville, NSW, Australia

**Hurdles in Russia** My wife, Barbara, and I enjoyed a trip to Russia, Estonia and Finland, Sept. 3-28, 2007, and have some advice for travelers to Russia.

Barbara, on the recommendation of several travel books (including "Fodor's Moscow & St. Petersburg," seventh edition, published in 2006), bought American Express Travelers Cheques. In Russia, however, we found that there was very limited