



# Faith healing in Jordan



## small WORLD

[www.brendanharding.blogspot.com](http://www.brendanharding.blogspot.com)

A kind of travel column

**Set deep in a region surrounded by unrest, the Kingdom of Jordan, as travel writer Brendan Harding finds out, is a peaceful and beguiling place where the tolerance of faiths takes centre stage**

**A**BOVE the sound of the evening traffic, a muezzin is calling the faithful to prayer. In the bar on the thirteenth floor of the Landmark Hotel, the band are running through a warm up. "*Cuando, cuando, cuando, cuando? Tell me when will you be mine ...*"

Outside the window and across the cityscape, the cylindrical barrel-shaped façade of the Royal Hotel is bathed in a constant flux of changing light, like the syncopations of an amorous squid. Out there, as far as the eye can see, light is king; the metropolis is an ocean of twinkling illumination, blazing vehicles and bursting fireworks, aircraft as they take to the cloudless sky declaring their port and starboard in bursts of red and green but silent in their distance.

This is Amman, the capital of Jordan, a city with bustling purpose in a region associated with constant turmoil. But Jordan breaks the mould of its near neighbours Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Israel; Jordan is an oasis in a sandstorm that has raged for centuries.

Up here on my rooftop eyrie, the country's contrasts are reinforced. Nemanja, the Serbian barman, has poured my draught beer, delivered to my table by Anna, a young lady from Manila, and the three-piece band of Aliuska, Iralda and Reuben are swinging their Latin hips to the music of their homeland Cuba.

The fact that I am here at all, enjoying a cold beer, speaks volumes in a country perceived as traditionally Moslem. At the table across the room, a young Jordanian man is celebrating his

birthday. His friends, three young women of stunning, almond-eyed beauty, drag him protesting to the dance floor, a cocktail the colour of a liquid rainbow in his hand.

But it's not just here in the country's capital that contrasts are the norm. At Umms Qays on a hilltop two hours north of the city, overlooking the Sea of Galilee and close to the Syrian and Israeli borders, the Roman columns and amphitheatre attest to the region's colourful past. After the Romans came to harvest the wealth of the land, the Greeks staked their claim with Byzantine churches and places of learning. It was then the turn of Roman Christianity to erect its crosses and celebrate its presence in the lands where Jesus and his disciples had once walked. Again, the baton of power changed hands and the land became the bastion of Islam. Despite the numerous crusades by European kings and knights, their forays were fruitless.

Despite the belief and common misconception that Jordan is a totalitarian Islamic state, the opposite is true and many faiths are embraced. Side by side mosques and cathedrals co-exist in harmony and open friendship. Here in the capital and throughout the country women drive cars and attend universities; couples hold hands and walk the peaceful streets in true Mediterranean style; strangers shake hands with strangers and life is lived with peace at its core.

At Mar Elias – Elijah's Hill – the inter-connectedness of religions is evident among the remnants of two churches whose fading mosaics are roped off from the trampling feet of the many

pilgrims they attract each year. Beneath the church in the valley below dogs are barking among the olive groves, goats are being led home for the evening – their tinkling bells carrying far on the light breeze – and farmers' voices call out across the landscape as they have done since time immemorial. It was here on this hill that the Moslem prophet Elijah was born and died; the same Elijah whose role is also embossed and enshrined in the faith of all Catholics.

Twenty minutes away in the town of Anjara, the Argentinean priest, Fr Hugo Alaniz, stands in front of the altar at the Church of Our Lady of the Mount and tells the story of the statue of Our Lady framed in a gilded glass case behind him. Outside in the sultry heat another muezzin calls another prayer from the minarets of his mosque and the faithful kneel to pray.

"Statues do not create miracles," Father Hugo emphasises in good English. "Only God makes miracles." He continues to recount the story of a Muslim woman who brought her crippled son to the church in desperation back in the 1970s. "The child was cured," he states simply, and turns to smile at the statue.

Another story he recounts is that of a group of cleaners who were in the church one morning in the company of two nuns. As they worked and prayed, one of the group noticed that tears were weeping from the eyes of the statue. Father Hugo tells the story without dramatics, without fanfare, he simply tells it as it is. "The Vatican investigators came and carried out a full examination

of the case," he says, "but nothing could be found." He shrugs his shoulders and turns to the statue once more. "Perhaps She was crying for the plight of the

poor who come here for help, or perhaps She was crying for all of the peoples of these troubled lands."

Outside the church, the priest greets a man carrying Muslim prayer beads in fluent Arabic. They shake hands and smile; they laugh loudly at some joke and the man steps inside the convent wearing a wide smile.

Back in the bar on the thirteenth floor, people – and they are that, just people – are dancing to the same beat in different styles. But perhaps that's the way it has always been and the way it always will be here in Jordan at the crossroads of faiths, cultures and civilisations.

Welcome to Jordan; welcome to a refreshing and peaceful oasis in the deserts of modern unrest.



The view from Mars Elias, a place of pilgrimage for both Muslim and Christian faiths

#### GETTING THERE

Royal Jordanian Airways flies direct from London Heathrow to Amman.

#### STAYING THERE

The Landmark Hotel, Amman, Jordan, [www.landmarkamman.com](http://www.landmarkamman.com).

#### EATING THERE

Green Valley Restaurant, Old Amman Road, Jerash, Jordan, <http://petranights.tours.blogspot.com/2011/06/green-valley-restaurant-jerash>.

The Landmark Hotel, Amman, Jordan, [www.landmarkamman.com](http://www.landmarkamman.com).

#### FURTHER INFORMATION

Jordanian Tourist Board, [www.visitjordan.com](http://www.visitjordan.com), [info@visitjordan.com](mailto:info@visitjordan.com).  
Pilgrimages to Jordan can be arranged through Camino Ways, [www.caminoways.com](http://www.caminoways.com).