

As-Salt: the Ottoman-era city UNESCO inscribed for being decent to its neighbours

Inscribed in 2021 as Al-Salt, The Place of Tolerance and Urban Hospitality — yellow limestone houses with arched windows and frescoed ceilings, a 19th-century merchant city that worked because Christians, Muslims, and Jews lived on the same street.

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In the 19th century, As-Salt was the largest town in Trans-Jordan — bigger than Amman, which was a village across the next ridge. Caravans from Damascus and Jerusalem stopped here. Christian, Muslim, and Jewish merchants lived on the same street, in stone houses built from the same honey-coloured limestone. Then Trans-Jordan was declared in the 1920s and Amman became the capital — and As-Salt's downtown stopped growing. Which is why the Ottoman-era streetscape survives almost intact, and why UNESCO inscribed the city in 2021.

It is a 90-minute drive west of Amman, and the most compact heritage walk in the country.

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1Why visit As-Salt

As-Salt sits at about 790–1,100 metres above sea level in west-central Jordan, on the old highway between Amman and Jerusalem. The city is famous for its distinctive Ottoman-era buildings constructed from local honey-colored stone,

featuring domed roofs, interior courtyards and characteristic tall, arched windows.¹

2The 2021 UNESCO inscription

UNESCO added As-Salt to the World Heritage List in 2021 under the name "Al-Salt - The Place of Tolerance and Urban Hospitality." The inscription is unusual in Jordan in two respects: it's relatively recent (2021, vs. Petra in 1985, Wadi Rum in 2011), and it's not primarily about archaeology. The inscription text emphasises the social and architectural fabric — the way the Ottoman-era city's mixed Christian-Muslim community lived together. The houses, schools, and churches survive precisely because the city's economic decline preserved its 19th-century footprint.

3What to see

- **The honey-stone old town.** Walk the steep streets of central Salt — many are pedestrian-only. The arched windows and exterior staircases are distinctive.
- **Abu Jaber House (Salt Historical Museum).** The flagship merchant house — see the next section.
- **The 19th-century Ottoman schools.** Several survive, some still functioning. The Salt Folklore Museum is in one of them.
- **The 13th-century Ayyubid fortress ruins.** Above the city — partial ruins, mostly walls.
- **Roman tombs.** Outside the city in the surrounding hills.
- **Hammam Street.** The Ottoman-era market street with the renovated bathhouse and the small souk.

4Abu Jaber House

Built between 1892 and 1906, the Abu Jaber Mansion features frescoed ceilings, painted by Italian artists, and is regarded as the finest example of a 19th-century merchant house in the region.¹ It is now the Salt Historical Museum. Allow 60 minutes for a full visit including the rooftop view.

UNESCO inscribed As-Salt for being decent to its neighbours — Christians, Muslims, and Jews on the same street.

5 Getting there

As-Salt is on the old highway between Amman and Jerusalem, about 30 km west of central Amman — roughly 45 minutes by car. Options:

- **Self-drive.** 45 minutes from Amman. Park outside the old town and walk in.
- **Day trip from Amman.** Easy half-day. Combine with the King Hussein Bridge / Allenby Bridge crossing if you're heading to the West Bank.
- **Public bus.** From Amman's Mahatta or Raghadan stations.

For solo travellers

The old town is walkable in 2–3 hours including the Abu Jaber House. Sit in the Hammam Street courtyards for a Turkish coffee.

6 Practical tips

- **Tickets.** Abu Jaber House charges a modest fee in JD; the rest of the old town is free to walk.
- **How long.** Half a day for a thorough walk + the museum.
- **Footwear.** Trail shoes or sturdy trainers — the streets are steep and the old paving stones are slippery in rain.
- **Combine with.** Amman (45 minutes east), the Dead Sea (45 minutes south), or the Jordan Valley.
- **Photography.** Most public spaces welcome cameras; ask before photographing inside private homes.

References

1. [Wikipedia — As-Salt](#)

Verified by locals: TBD — this article will be reviewed by a Department of Antiquities or Salt Cultural Center-affiliated guide before final publication. Drafted from Wikipedia.