

Off to Jordan

Arabian Days & Nights

After nearly a dozen horseback holidays—mostly in the African wilds—I decided to try something different. We were huddled around a campfire in the foothills of Mount Kenya last summer when Jakob von Plessen, my guide, said his dream was to head off to Jordan to ride in the footsteps (or, rather, hoofprints) of Lawrence of Arabia.

Deciding I'd beat him to it, I returned to London and booked a spring trip to Wadi Rum, in the southwest corner of the country, through the UK-based firm Ride World Wide (44-18/378-2544; rideworldwide.com). Nigel Harvey, one of RWW's owners, said the best months to go are April and October and connected me with a tailor-made tour from **Desert Guides Company** (\$250–\$1,000 a person per night; 96-26/552-7230; desertguidescompany.com).

DGC's founder, Hanna S. Jahshan, has filled a niche in the Jordanian market for luxurious tented accommodations. His well-decorated and -furnished Bedouin tents have enough space to hold a large cocktail party, as well as en suite bedrooms and chemical toilets (not quite flush but not all that bad either). Jahshan sets up one end of the tent to resemble an Arabian living room—with plush cushions, colorful rugs, and water pipes with flavored tobacco—and the other as a dining room. The bedroom is beyond a curtain or sometimes

in another tent altogether. There are billowing flower arrangements, and local Cabernet is served in abundance.

For dinners, hummus and baba ghanoush are brought in from the capital, Amman, and served alongside freshly barbecued lamb. Olympiquesque flames glow in the deep sand surrounding the camp, and the tablecloths flutter in the early-evening breeze.

But I had come for the riding, not for a dinner party. Usually beginning near the Seven Pillars of Wisdom, the equestrian itineraries last from three to five hours and are meant for fairly experienced riders. The horses—Arabs, Anglo-Arabs, and part-breds—are forward-going, and cantering along on them through the desert, with towering sandstone cliffs on either side, makes for a most exhilarating experience. (For nonriders there are tours through the area in air-conditioned 4x4s.)

A London banker who recently took his wife on a surprise trip here for their tenth anniversary found the riding "magnificent—both for the scenery and for the quality of the horses," he says. "But for some days after, I was so stiff that anyone who saw me might have thought I was in my nineties."

Best of all for the couple was the privacy. Upon their arrival at dusk, the camp was lit with candles and "utterly magical," says the banker. "We immediately inquired as to where all the people were."

"Oh no," Jahshan replied. "It's just you two."

Jakob would be most envious.

—MICHAEL KALLENBACH

Riding in Jordan's Wadi Rum; a Desert Guides Company tented bedroom, top left.