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**Experience
Jordan
Now!**

Through Rose Colored Lenses

by Diana Baker, Jordan Tourism Board



For the love of Jordan. Five words that have fueled passion, drive, sacrifice, valor and duty above and beyond the call. Five words that have shaped destinies, transformed lives, gave purpose, a reason for being. Five words that have turned the eyes of the world towards a small country formerly obscured by history, now renowned for it. Five words that focused the lens of a petite British photographer on its treasures.

Jane Taylor first came to Jordan in 1978. Entranced by its wonders, her photos took on a quality unknown to the young Hashemite Kingdom. If awe can be translated from a lens to a photo, then Taylor was able achieve this in a grand manner. As a pioneer in Jordanian aerial photography, her photos inspired the creation of her first book, *High Above Jordan*, released in 1989. However, her photos were not the only awe-inspiring attribute. The woman herself was cause enough to evoke this impression. The sight of Taylor marching into the Ministry of Tourism to request a helicopter for the day was a common occurrence during the mid 80's. "There was plenty of resistance at first, no one could understand why I wanted to do this. The only helicopters in Jordan at that time belonged to the military. Reluctantly, I was introduced to the officer in charge and, to my surprise, soon I was offered a couple of days on board to photograph Jordan," said Taylor. In a land where reference materials, photo archives and international interest were new concepts, she caused quite a stir.

Taylor is the utmost authority on photography in Petra and to this day has published the only aerial photography book in the country. The first book on Petra was published in 1993, then a book titled. "Petra, The Lost Kingdom of the Nabateans" following in 2001. Her love affair with the Rose City began with her introduction to the Bdoul, Petra's tribe of Bedouins. "Anyone who has experienced Petra will understand its magic, its drawing power. But, I am particularly privileged to know the people of Petra. They are so much a part of my experiences there. They have helped me to discover the real Petra, to find photo opportunities I couldn't have possibly found on my own. They have welcomed me into their homes and have become as much my family as anyone in Amman. Their generosity is renown and they have made me an honorary member of their tribe," said Taylor. She is now known to all in Wadi Mousa as the "British Bdoul."

With the support of Queen Noor, who encouraged the late King Hussein to write the forward to her book, *High Above Jordan*, Taylor received the impetus needed

to proceed with her books on Petra. The monarchy continued to contribute substance to her publications and welcomed the triumph of each finished product. In her book, "Petra," King Hussein wrote, "Jane Taylor has succeeded in capturing both the physical beauty and the human drama that have defined Petra since its establishment...its timeless message speaks to us still of an eternal human capacity to dare, and therefore to achieve bold feats and beautiful wonders....it has been so beautifully captured in this book."

Fast forward to October, 2004. Sitting with Taylor in her home in the Jabal Amman section of the capitol city, I felt a kindred spirit to her philosophical approach to life. She laughs easily and finds humor in the human condition. A modest individual who surprisingly has none of her work on display in her home, Taylor opts to admire the work of others before her own. Formerly declared a "Ramadan-free zone," we sipped coffee and discussed life in Jordan. As a fellow ex-patriot, I was eager to compare notes. Taylor patiently fielded my questions about her choice to remain in this magical, yet sometimes difficult environment. "I love being here. Amman is a very cosmopolitan city and yet a small one with a sense of community. The people I've met look after each other. They are generous with their time and truly care for others," Taylor continued, "All of us foreigners who arrive here are all elbows and edges. It takes a bit of time to become "Jordanized." But if you allow it to happen, one becomes more aware and much gentler."

Gravitating to the reason for my visit, Taylor shared the logic for her latest contribution to the country that has become her own. A revised version of the book on Petra first published in 1993 was recently released and is currently in bookshops throughout Jordan. "It occurred to me that the book needed updating. There are so many more excavations that have taken place, so many more archeological finds, so much more to photograph, it was time to capture these for posterity," said Taylor. Her passion is also manifesting itself in a pictorial tribute to Jordan scheduled for release in 2005.

Still full of wonder for this country after all these years, Taylor related a recent experience that took her to an area near the Dead Sea. "I looked at the glorious landscape and it gave me an indescribable feeling. There is so much of history just there. Sometimes you don't notice the figures standing by the roadside, the monuments, the ancient stones. But when you do, it's an amazing discovery," said Taylor, "so to answer your previous question, this is Jordan and that's why I'm here."

Leaving Taylor's house on a beautiful, sunny Ammanian day, I took a look around the area at the buildings, the people walking by. A stranger smiled at me and said, "Ahlan Wa Sahlan." I thought about her observations and suddenly a thought struck a chord deep inside my heart. I was feeling it too. The reason for it all became clear even to me....those five little words.

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