

# PETRA: CRUELTY MUST END IN THE 'ROSE-RED CITY'

APRIL 2018



## BACKGROUND

More than 1,300 animals – including donkeys, mules, horses, and camels – are forced to give rides and pull carriages ferrying tourists around the Petra Archaeological Park, a UNESCO World Heritage site.

The mules and donkeys must climb the 900 steps to the monastery and down again with people on their backs, and the horses toil pulling carriages on gruelling 10-kilometre treks through the ancient city multiple times a day.

When donkeys ascend to the monastery, they're allowed a short break, while tourists take photos or rest at the café. During this time, eyewitnesses have not seen donkeys offered water before carrying tourists back down.

Likewise, eyewitnesses didn't see any water available for animals on the 10-kilometre route within the city. Water troughs are empty. While waiting for customers, most animals were tied in various spots around the city without access to shade or water. Water is apparently available only when animals return to the stables.

Concerns about the conditions for animals in Petra are longstanding. International media outlets, including the *Daily Mail*, *The Jordan Times*, and, most recently, the BBC, have reported on these problems for nearly a decade. But in 2018, animals are still being abused.

For 30 years, non-profit organisations have been working to improve conditions for animals in Petra. Efforts go back to 1988, when Brooke established the Princess Alia Veterinary Clinic, which, since 2010, has been operated by the Ministry of Agriculture. Other organisations, including Four Paws and SPANA, have built stables for horses and donkeys and have provided animals with veterinary treatment. SPANA, which was established in 1989, continues to run a veterinary clinic in Wadi Al-Seer.

And in recent years, the "Care for Petra" campaign, also run by SPANA, has put up posters at the park's visitor's centre suggesting that tourists think carefully before riding an animal.

## INSPECTION REVEALS A DIRE SITUATION FOR ANIMALS USED IN PETRA

After receiving innumerable complaints from tourists from around the world who had visited Petra, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) Asia visited the site. The group accessed public areas available to ticket-holders of the Petra Archaeological Park and documented rampant abuse. Blatant cruelty and neglect are entrenched, widespread, and out in the open.

PETA released a video exposé in January 2018, which was picked up by the BBC and international media outlets, including *The Jordan Times* and several others which publish in Arabic. The video – which shows men and boys hitting exhausted animals repeatedly with plastic pipes, ropes, chains, and whips to keep them moving – was viewed more than 2 million times worldwide. Clearly visible are ropes and chains digging into the animals' necks and camels with open, fly-infested wounds caused by men who aggressively yank on their bridles to force them onward.

Between rides, the animals are tied up so tightly that they can't lie down but must stand in the sun until the next customer comes along. Often, no veterinary or farrier care is provided, and many animals were seen suffering from lameness, colic, and exhaustion.



**"As this shocking picture shows, animals in many destinations visited by hundreds of thousands of tourists a year still have to endure great suffering as they are treated like 'machines' by their impoverished owners and visitors."**  
 – *Daily Mail*



Following the video exposé, the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities claimed that it would take the issue seriously. It promised to “follow up on the issues raised in the [PETA] report to ensure all violations are stopped”.

Yet in March 2018, PETA returned to Petra and saw that nothing had changed. Animals were still being deprived of water, food, and shade. They were found with open wounds and chains so tight that they dug into their skin. Working animals were still being viciously beaten, whipped, and jabbed with various objects. A PETA eyewitness even documented that camels were crying out while handlers forcibly tied their mouths shut.

## WIDESPREAD ANIMAL ABUSE

Cruelty to animals is a crime punishable by law (Article 472 of the Penal Law), and regulations implemented in 2016 allow handlers to be removed from the park if engaged in animal abuse. Yet laws and regulations are disregarded, and the handlers abuse and neglect animals in full view of patrolling police officers, who take no action. During the investigation, several handlers demonstrated that they knew they were abusing their animals, because they stopped when they saw someone openly filming them. They repeatedly beat and whipped animals when they thought they weren't on camera.

Petra Archaeological Park rangers also appear to ignore animal-welfare laws and regulations. While it's possible to report animal abuse to park rangers or tourist police or at the visitor's centre, tourists aren't informed of this, and no action appears to be taken in the event of a complaint. There is a sign at the park entrance about reporting mistreatment, but it's in such severe disrepair that it's illegible.

Some tourist guides have also complained to handlers about animal welfare, but nothing appears to have come of that.



**“Cruelty is at its peak, and hence these animals used for hauling tourists at Petra should be immediately stopped so they could lead a life without any further pain and suffering or mental distress.”**

**– Dr Naresh Upreti, veterinarian, Animal Rahat**

## **NO RESOURCES TO HELP ANIMALS**

The Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities claims that the “government has co-operated and continues to work with civil society organisations to raise awareness”. Yet clinics that were meant to help animals appeared to be severely lacking in resources.

At Petra’s equine clinic, a PETA eyewitness learned that horses forced to pull carriages have severe problems with their hoofs. Other regularly seen ailments were lameness, colic, and stomach problems, which is because of the poor-quality feed they are given.

The clinic also seemed to lack proper equipment to function. A worker complained to the eyewitness that the X-ray machine was broken and that many of the animals who are brought to the clinic can’t be treated.

The neglect by animal handlers was clear. A worker told the eyewitness that handlers view horses as “money machines”. Workers also told the eyewitness that they kick donkeys, sometimes in the eye, and that the animals often displayed symptoms of exhaustion.

## **RESPONSES TO THE INVESTIGATION**

Following the investigation and public outcry, PETA received letters from the tourism industry and other concerned parties. Some responses follow:

- “First of all, allow me to thank you for your [concern] regarding the mentioned issue, which is very important to us as well, that is why I kindly ask you to contact Petra Regional Authorities, I am sure they will take immediate action.”  
– Mariana Sirbu, Jordan Tours and Travel
- “Thank you for your letter of concerns regarding the animals in Petra[. W]e already expressed our concerns [to the] Ministry of Tourism, HE Mrs Lina Annab to replace working animals with modern motorized vehicles and was highly considered by all parties at Petra, hopefully this issue will be solved ASAP.”  
– Hakam Qawas, Via Jordan

**“The animals in Petra [have] suffered enough and they deserve a better life. My seventeen years of experience in animal welfare [tell] me that this is possible.”**

**– Amina Tharwat Abaza, founder, Society for the Protection of Animal Rights in Egypt**

## **THREAT TO PETRA’S CONSERVATION, PUBLIC RELATIONS, AND TOURISM**

Many tourists visit Petra to see the monastery. The “Visit Petra” website acknowledges that riding animals damages the fragile sandstone and the already eroded steps up it. Allowing animals to continue traversing the steps will inevitably cause further deterioration and pose significant risk to tourists.

In 2017, Jordan made US\$4.7 billion in tourism revenue. Tourism in Petra made up a considerable portion of that, as approximately one-quarter of tourists to Jordan visit the site. It’s obviously in the country’s best interests to safeguard the site, not only to preserve its legacy but also to secure tourism revenue.

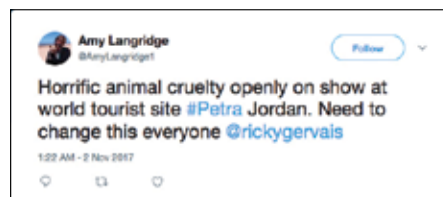
Social media and online review sites play an increasingly influential role in determining where consumers decide to go on holiday. TripAdvisor is one of the most popular travel



sites, with 455 million visitors per month. More than 500 reviews on the site are from people who witnessed the widespread mistreatment of animals and were aghast and appalled. When visitors to Petra go home and tell others that their holiday was ruined because of the abusive treatment of animals they witnessed, ethical travellers will choose to go elsewhere.

Here are some of the reviews on Trip Advisor:

- “I would say please don’t be tempted to get a donkey ride. These poor animals are treated [so] badly. The handlers abuse them all the time, hitting them around the head with whips and wood, the local kids hit them and throw rocks at them.”  
– Teresa P, 2018
- “While the architecture and scenery [were] absolutely amazing the whole visit was spoilt by the dreadful animal abuse I witnessed there.”  
– Heather M, 2018
- “I was horrified to see the conditions in which they were keeping the animals. They had open sores under their saddles and bridles that were filled with bugs and were turning black. They were out in the sun carrying people with no water or food in sight. You could clearly see the ribs of all the animals there. The local riders were whipping the animals with whips and canes, so loud that the sound echoed down the pathways. We yelled at one to stop and he turned to look at us before caning his poor donkey again. I couldn’t possibly enjoy the attractions while I saw this all around.”  
– Nikki K, 2017
- “What ruined it for me was witnessing barbaric disgusting men beating, kicking and screaming at animals. It really made me so angry and sad, that I couldn’t really think of anything else after that.”  
– Miriam W, 2017



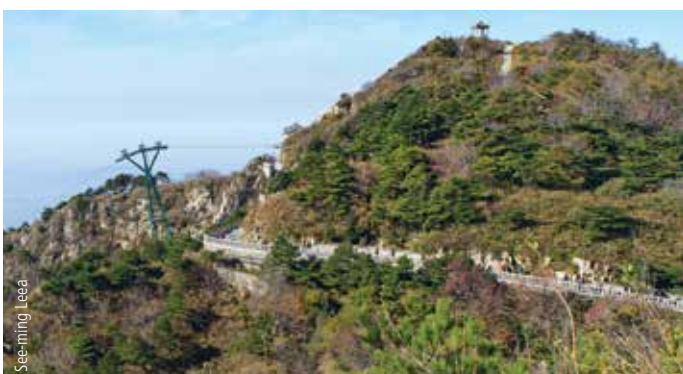
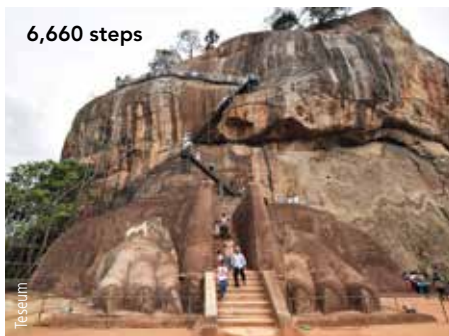
## MODERN, HUMANE TRANSPORT SYSTEMS

In most of the park, it's possible to replace animals with cruelty-free and environmentally friendly vehicles. Petra already has at least one electric golf cart, but when a worker at the ticket counter was asked about hiring it, he said that the cart was only for the park's staff and special guests.

Other UNESCO World Heritage sites offer tourists many forms of transportation that don't require animals. For example, tourists can rent all-terrain vehicles or jeeps when visiting some US national parks. Segways are available to tourists at the Colosseum in Rome and the Acropolis of Athens in Greece, where there are Segway-guided tours. In Asia, electric bicycles, which are silent and environmentally friendly, are available for tourists travelling around the temples of Angkor Wat in Cambodia and Bagan in Myanmar. At Angkor Wat, tourists can also rent traditional bikes.

In the historic city of Melaka in Malaysia, tourists can ride in rickshaws.

When the option to ride an animal doesn't exist, tourists will walk and climb steps, even long series of steep steps. One example is the 1,200 steps at the Lion Rock in Sri Lanka, which continues to receive thousands of tourists every year. In fact, some other UNESCO sites have many more steps than those to Petra's monastery.



At the Great Wall of China and Mount Taishan, both with thousands of steps, cable cars were installed to increase accessibility.

## MAKING THE TRANSITION TO A SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD

Replacing animals with environmentally friendly, cruelty-free transportation is a sign of social progress. It would also be an opportunity to help the Bedouins in Petra, who are desperately struggling to make a living selling rides.

The implementation of other forms of transportation, such as electric bikes, could open opportunities to train the community in easily attainable skills that are useful to career development and more financially rewarding.

Because Petra is a UNESCO World Heritage site, UNESCO could take a more decisive role in improving the local community and further a commitment to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, with development targets related to sustainable communities, poverty alleviation, and many other objectives.

UNESCO has the experience to implement development programmes in Jordan, since it has already been actively working on several projects there to increase communities' resilience.



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## WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY

**"[D]onkeys have self-preservation, so if they are tired, or deem a situation too dangerous, that is when they become obstinate ... because they value their life. All [donkeys] want in return is for us to be kind to them, treat them with compassion and dignity and kindness."**

**– Dr Sameh Nabil, veterinarian, Sameh Veterinary Clinic**

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

- **Never take horse-drawn carriage or other types of animal rides.**
- **Despite local authorities' unwillingness to act on complaints of animal abuse, report it to Petra's Park Rangers or the Tourist Police anyway.**
- **Let your hotel and travel agency representatives know about the animal abuse at Petra.**
- **Write to your local Jordanian Embassy and to Jordan's Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities to urge them to remove working animals from Petra altogether.**

## CONCLUSION

After 30 years, it's clear that improving working conditions for animals at Petra has failed. The immediate goal must be to remove animals from the park altogether. PETA – together with other animal-protection organisations and veterinary experts – is calling for working animals in Petra to be phased out without delay and replaced with environmentally friendly, cruelty-free transportation.

***PETA***

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