The Amman Roman Theatre: 6,000 seats cut into the hill across from the Citadel

Built in the 2nd century under Antoninus Pius and oriented north so the sun stays out of spectators' eyes — the largest surviving Roman theatre east of the Mediterranean.

Anas Hu · May 5, 2026

From the Hashemite Plaza in downtown Amman you look up at a hillside that has been carved into a half-bowl with thirty-three rows of stone seating climbing the slope. The acoustics still work. Stand at the centre of the orchestra floor, speak in a normal voice, and a friend on the back row can hear you. The Roman Theatre at Amman seats approximately 6,000 people, and an evening concert there will fill them.

It is the largest surviving Roman theatre between Asia Minor and Egypt — and you can walk into it for the price of a coffee.

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1Why visit the Roman Theatre

Roman Philadelphia (the imperial-era name for Amman) had two theatres, a forum, a temple of Hercules, and a colonnaded street system. Most of the urban fabric is gone — buried under modern downtown — but the theatre survived because it was cut into a hillside rather than built up free-standing. Its capacity, geometry, and acoustic engineering all survive intact.

The theatre was built in the 2nd century CE under Emperor Antoninus Pius (138–161 CE), with a Greek inscription on one of the pillars confirming the

dating. It is oriented north to keep the sun out of the eyes of the spectators — a deliberate engineering choice that you appreciate the moment you sit down on a hot afternoon.[1]

2What to see, in walking order

1. **Walk the orchestra floor first.** Stand at the centre point and clap once. The echo carries up to the back rows in roughly half a second. Speak; a friend at the top can hear you.
2. **Climb to the top.** Three horizontal sections divide the seating: lower (citizens of standing), middle (general public), upper (women and slaves under Roman convention). The view from the top row reaches the Citadel across the wadi.
3. **Look at the columns of the proscaenium.** The stage front had three rows of columns originally. The bases survive; the upper drums are gone.
4. **Sit through a 5-minute concert.** If you can — there are local performances from time to time, and the acoustics in person are the only way to understand the space.

> Stand on the orchestra floor and clap. The echo answers from the back row.

3The Odeon next door

Immediately east of the main theatre, the smaller **Odeon** survives as a partly-restored 500-seat performance hall. The Odeon and the Theatre flank the new Hashemite Plaza from the south and the east respectively — the modern plaza was deliberately laid out between them. The Odeon was the more intimate venue, used for poetry readings, philosophical lectures, and chamber-music style performance.

4The two folklore museums

Two small museums occupy rooms behind the side entrances of the theatre wings — both worth 20 minutes:

- **The Jordan Folklore Museum.** Bedouin tents, costumes, musical instruments, traditional household items.

- **The Jordan Museum of Popular Tradition.** Jewellery, mosaics, mid-20th-century everyday objects from across Jordan.

> **For solo travellers**
>
> The theatre is one of the few places in downtown Amman where you can sit quietly for an hour without anyone bothering you. Top row, late afternoon. Bring a paperback.

5Practical tips

- **Tickets.** A few JD; covered by the Jordan Pass.[2]
- **How long.** 60 minutes for the theatre + Odeon; add 30 minutes for both museums.
- **Best time of day.** Late afternoon — the north orientation keeps the sun off and the light is warm on the columns.
- **Combine with.** Citadel (15 min walk uphill, 1.5 km), Rainbow Street (20 min walk uphill, 1.8 km), or the King Hussein Park if you have a half-day spare.
- **Photography.** Tripods are fine. Drone use is restricted in central Amman without a Department of Antiquities permit.

References

1. Wikipedia — Roman Theatre (Amman)
2. Jordan Pass — official site

Verified by locals: TBD — this article will be reviewed by a Department of Antiquities-affiliated guide before final publication. Drafted from Wikipedia and the Jordan Pass official site.