The Aqaba Marine Park: a walk along the Red Sea reef south of the city

Established 1997 along the southern Aqaba coast, the Marine Reserve protects 25 km of fringing reef and 30+ dive sites. Most visitors only see it from a boat — the walking tour is better.

Anas Hu · May 5, 2026

Most travellers who come to Aqaba for the diving experience the Marine Park from the back of a boat — five minutes by RIB from the dive shop, into the water, out at the next site. But you can also walk the southern Aqaba coastline along the corniche road, watch the corals through the windows of the glass-bottom boats, and snorkel from shore at the public access points. In 1997, the Aqaba Marine Reserve was established within the southern boundaries of the Gulf of Aqaba, and the protected area now covers 25 km of fringing reef with more than 30 dive sites.[1]

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1Why visit the Marine Park

The Gulf of Aqaba is the only place in Jordan with sea — and the reef that fringes its eastern shore is one of the northernmost coral-reef ecosystems on Earth. The reef is fed by the Indian Ocean through the Bab el-Mandeb and the Red Sea, but the cold-current dynamics here mean the corals grow in patterns and species combinations not seen further south. The Marine Reserve protects this ecosystem and runs the visitor infrastructure that lets you see it without damaging it.

2What's in the reef

The Aqaba reef hosts approximately 500 fish species, including lion fish, octopus, sailfish, and whale sharks. The wider Gulf of Aqaba region also supports hawksbill sea turtles, bottlenose dolphins, and over 390 bird species including greater flamingos and pelicans.[1]

The reef itself is mostly fringing reef (running along the shore rather than offshore atoll), with depths from 1 m at the wall edge to 60+ m at the deepest dive sites. Distinctive features:

- **Acropora and Pocillopora corals.** Hard corals that build the reef structure.
- **Lyretail anthias schools.** Pink and orange — the fish cloud of the Aqaba reef.
- **Red Sea anemonefish.** The endemic species found only here and the Red Sea.
- **Picasso triggerfish.** Distinctive yellow-and-blue patterns; aggressive when nesting.
- **Whale sharks.** Seasonal — May–June. Rarely seen but present.

> One of the northernmost coral reefs on Earth. Five hundred species of fish in twenty-five kilometres.

3Where to access the reef

- **South Beach access points.** Several public access points along the corniche south of central Aqaba — the Berenice / Berenice Beach Club is the easiest. Snorkel gear hire on-site.
- **Tala Bay.** A small resort beach with house reef access — Japanese Garden dive site is here. See the dedicated post.
- **Glass-bottom boats.** Run from Aqaba's central marina. 60-minute tours over selected reef sites; modest fee in JD.
- **Marine Science Station Aquarium.** Indoor aquarium with the same species as the reef — useful for kids or for a rainy half-day.

4Getting there

Aqaba is on the Red Sea coast, the southernmost city in Jordan. From elsewhere in the country:

- **From Amman.** JETT bus 4–5 hours via the Desert Highway, or a 1-hour Royal Jordanian flight from Amman to King Hussein International Airport (Aqaba).
- **From Wadi Rum.** 60 km / 60 minutes by 4×4 or shared taxi.
- **From Petra.** 130 km / 2 hours.
- **From Eilat (Israel).** Cross at the Wadi Araba / Yitzhak Rabin border post; 5-minute drive on either side.

> **For solo travellers**
>
> Snorkel gear from the Berenice Beach Club is cheap; spend a half-day on the South Beach. Combine with a glass-bottom boat tour for a different angle.

5Practical tips

- **Best season.** Year-round, but October–April for the most comfortable water temperatures (22–25 °C). Summer is hot but the water is warmer (26–28 °C).
- **Reef etiquette.** Don't touch the corals — they take decades to regrow.
- **Dive certification.** If you don't have an Open Water cert, the dive shops run 3–4 day PADI courses.
- **Combine with.** Wadi Rum (60 km north) for a desert + sea combination.
- **Photography.** Underwater housings are essential. Tropical light is bright; neutral white balance is your friend.

References

1. Wikipedia — Aqaba

Verified by locals: TBD — this article will be reviewed by an Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority (ASEZA) marine biologist or a PADI dive instructor before final publication. Drafted from Wikipedia.