# Jerash: walking the Roman city the 749 earthquake left behind

Forty-eight kilometres north of Amman, the Decapolis city of Gerasa survives in better shape than almost any Roman ruin outside Italy — until the 749 earthquake.

Anas Hu · May 5, 2026

You walk under Hadrian's triumphal arch, then up a slope, and the city opens beneath you: an oval forum ringed by 56 Ionic columns, a colonnaded street running north for nearly a kilometre, and two theatres cut into the slopes on either side. There are no ropes. You can sit on the column steps. The acoustics in the South Theatre are still good enough that someone tapping their foot at the centre of the stage will fill the upper rows.

This is Jerash — Greco-Roman Gerasa — and it is in better shape than almost any Roman city outside Italy because no later city was built on top of it.


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## 1Why visit Jerash

Gerasa joined the Decapolis league under Roman protection from 63 BCE and "achieved great prosperity" through the second half of the 1st century CE, growing within its walls to about 80 hectares by the Byzantine period.[1] What survived the millennia is the rarity: most Roman cities sit beneath modern ones, with their forums underneath car parks. Gerasa was abandoned after the 749 earthquake and never rebuilt over — so what you walk through is largely what fell, rather than what was demolished.

## 2Getting there

Jerash is 48.3 km north of Amman — a 50–60 minute drive on the Jerash highway. Options:

- **Day trip from Amman.** JETT bus from Tabarbour station (around 7 JD return) is the budget option; departures roughly hourly. Allow 5–6 hours total including bus + visit.
- **Taxi or driver.** Negotiate a half-day round trip with 3 hours waiting (~50–80 JD depending on season).
- **Combined with Ajloun.** Easiest by car — Jerash + Ajloun Castle is the classic full-day from Amman.

The Jordan Pass covers Jerash entry along with most other major sites; check the official Jordan Pass site for current pricing.[2]

## 3What to see, in walking order

From the southern entrance, walk north — the city is essentially linear:

1. **Hadrian's Arch.** Built in 129–130 CE to honour Emperor Hadrian's visit. The first thing you walk under and the most-photographed monument at Jerash.
2. **Hippodrome.** The chariot-racing track, 244 metres long, capacity around 15,000. Re-enactments of Roman cavalry drills run on summer mornings; ask at the gate.
3. **The South Gate.** Where Hadrian's road ends and the city proper begins.
4. **The Oval Plaza (Forum).** An oval forum surrounded by Ionic colonnades, 300 feet long — a singular Roman urban form, with no obvious right angles. Photographers shoot from the South Theatre steps for the wide-angle.
5. **The South Theatre.** Climb to the top row. The acoustics still work; bring a friend to read aloud from the stage.
6. **The Cardo Maximus.** The colonnaded main street, walked the same way Romans walked it, with cart-wheel ruts still visible in the paving stones in places.
7. **The Temple of Artemis.** Six soaring columns at the highest point of the Cardo. The wind moves through the column drums; you can sometimes feel the column tops sway slightly.

8. **The Nymphaeum.** The two-storey public fountain mid-Cardo, its half-dome still framing carved scallop shells.
9. **The North Theatre.** Smaller than the South Theatre, often empty. Better for a quiet 20 minutes than the busier south end.

Hadrian's Arch at Jerash.

Hadrian's Arch at the southern entrance to Gerasa. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

## 4The 749 earthquake

On 18 January 749 CE a major earthquake — the 749 Galilee earthquake — flattened most of Gerasa. Subsequent seismic events through the 8th and 9th centuries finished the job. The Umayyad-era city contracted, the colonnaded streets were never re-cleared, and the population shrank into a small village clustered in the southwest. The reason you can walk a near-intact Roman urban grid today is that nobody built over it — the 749 quake essentially preserved Gerasa by removing the people who would otherwise have repurposed its stone.[1]

> The reason you can still walk a Roman city is that an earthquake removed the people who would have demolished it.

> **For solo travellers**
>
> Take the JETT bus from Amman (cheapest), pack a paperback, and plan to spend 4 hours on-site rather than rushing. The North Theatre is the place to read.

## 5Practical tips

- **How long.** Allow 3–4 hours minimum for a thorough walk. Half a day if you also visit the museum at the southern entrance.
- **Best time of day.** 8–10 am or 4–5 pm. Avoid noon in summer; the Cardo is exposed and there is little shade.
- **Footwear.** Trainers or walking shoes — the paving stones are uneven and sometimes slippery.

- **Water.** Bring 2 litres per person. Tea-stands at the entrance and inside the site sell water and snacks.
- **Festival.** The Jerash Festival of Culture and Arts (mid-summer) brings live music to the South Theatre — check the official festival calendar before you book if your dates overlap.
- **Photography.** No drone permit on-site without a Department of Antiquities authorisation. Tripods are fine.

## References


1. Wikipedia — Jerash (Gerasa)
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.