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green travel

The world's **BEST** eco-lodges
& earth-friendly hotels



Fodor's Green Travel: The World's Best Eco-Lodges & Earth-Friendly

Jagged dry-stone walls lying like broken teeth tumble down a steep gully, and exposed boulders are strewn across the harsh and unforgiving landscape like gravestones. But it's the scorching noon sun that is most memorable. It has done a perfect job of bleaching this land, as well as the half-dozen tourists scrambling towards a pine tree to seek shade. The five-hour walk down the Wadi Dana to the desert floor at Feynan passes through stark, elemental beauty and rocky desert-like hills – it's a novel way of reaching a bed for the night.

The trek through Dana Nature Reserve to the Feynan Ecolodge is a wonderful introduction to its complex system of mountains and wadis, which cover some 320sq km (125 sq miles). They plummet into the desert lowlands of the Wadi Araba and embrace a kaleidoscopic array of biodiversity. But don't worry if you're not up to the hike in, as you can do it the easy way instead, in a Bedouin truck or 4WD.

Arriving on foot, the sight of the lodge comes as welcome relief. It looks like everything you'd expect of a desert dwelling. Incorporating traditional adobe techniques, the building is a post-modern take on the arabesque architecture of the region. Lines of serrated rocks embedded into the walls break up the surface, lending it the feel of a citadel. Gloriously isolated, it's something of a triumph that blends comfortably into the surroundings.

Local Bedouin staff the lodge, an initiative created by the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (RSCN) as a response to protecting the environment and alleviating high unemployment and poverty. Candles light the place at night, creating dappled shadows and an atmosphere that verges on the monastic. Romantics beware.

The food is simple too. Delicious vegetarian dishes – think hummus, local vegetables and lentils – are liberally served up with traditional Bedouin hospitality. But it's the naturalness of the place, subtly reflecting the superb and austere desert views that will live with you. Egyptian cotton bedsheets are perhaps the one concession to luxury.

Hiking in the surrounding countryside on trails ranging from easy to extremely tough is a must. A guide is definitely useful to help locate some of the archaeological remains that litter the place. Nabataean tombs, Iron Age sites and Byzantine churches vie with the Roman copper mines in Wadi Feynan, which are rated as being second only to nearby Petra in terms of importance. The wildlife is interesting, too, and you may be lucky enough to spot an endangered wolf or Nubian ibex. Birdwatching is another specialty, as 200 species have been recorded in the reserve, 33 of which have global importance.

Leaving the lodge is a lot easier said than done, but for those with time and energy there's no better way than to head out on another long-distance trail. Climbing out of a wadi up into the brilliant sunshine and watching a kestrel arc overhead is hard to beat.