



## PETRA ARCHAEOLOGICAL PARK

# Visitor Experience Research Report

Shuttle Bus & On-Site Experience Survey | February 2026

Commissioned by  
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Field Survey Conducted: February 2026

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Survey Responses Collected: 246  
Nationalities Represented: 40+

## Map: The Basin-to-Shuttle Route



This map traces the visitor journey from the Basin (1) to the Shuttle Bus Stop (2), which formed the primary focus of this study's service design analysis alongside overall visitor satisfaction.

## Executive Summary

This report presents findings from a field-based visitor experience survey conducted at Petra Archaeological Park in February 2026. A team of four surveyors collected 246 responses from international visitors at the shuttle bus boarding point in the Petra Basin, capturing quantitative satisfaction scores and qualitative feedback across two primary touchpoints: the overall Petra visit experience and the journey from the basin to the shuttle bus stop.

Visitors rate their overall Petra experience highly, reflecting the site's extraordinary heritage and natural beauty. However, satisfaction drops significantly when it comes to the shuttle bus journey — a critical service touchpoint that is undermined by poor wayfinding, misinformation from vendors and donkey operators, physical accessibility barriers, and a general lack of information infrastructure. These are operational and service design issues that are highly actionable and correctable.

**Key finding:** The gap between overall experience satisfaction (avg. 8.9/10) and shuttle bus journey satisfaction (avg. 6.3/10) indicates that service design failures — not the site itself — are eroding visitor satisfaction at the final and most fatiguing stage of their visit.

### Key Metrics at a Glance

**246**

Total Responses

**8.9/10**

Avg. Overall Experience

**6.32/10**

Avg. Bus Journey Satisfaction

**57%**

Unaware of Last Bus Time

**88%**

Rated Experience 8–10

**36%**

Rated Bus Journey ≤5

**82%**

Arrived on Foot

**18%**

Arrived by Donkey

## Methodology

### Survey Design

The survey instrument was designed and built by the research lead, then administered in the field by a team of four surveyors. Interviews were conducted in-person at the shuttle bus boarding area near the Turkmaniyya Tomb past the Petra Basin, targeting visitors at the point following their on-site visit and capturing feedback while their experience was fresh. The survey covered six core areas:

- Overall Petra visit satisfaction (scored 1–10)
- Mode of travel from the basin to the bus stop
- Awareness of the shuttle bus service and last departure time
- Satisfaction with the basin-to-bus-stop journey (scored 1–10)
- Visitor profile: nationality, age, length of stay, airline
- Open-ended qualitative feedback on both the overall experience and bus journey

## Sample Overview

A total of 246 responses were gathered across the survey period. The sample represents a genuinely international visitor base, with over 40 nationalities recorded. The largest cohorts by nationality were German (20), British (17), American (15), Italian (14), Chinese (14), and Turkish (13). The most represented age group was 25–38 years old, with a significant share of visitors over 60, a group particularly sensitive to physical accessibility.

Nationality	Responses
German	20
British	17
American	15
Italian	14
Chinese	14
Turkish	13
Indian	12
French	11
Polish	10
Sri Lankan	7

Nights Staying in Petra	Responses
1 night	89
2 nights	86
Day trip	53
3+ nights	18

## Key Findings

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### 1. Overall Visitor Experience: Strong, But Undermined at Key Touchpoints

The majority of visitors rate their Petra experience highly. 88% gave a score of 8 or above, and the average score was 8.9 out of 10, reflecting the site's world-class heritage appeal. Only 2% of visitors scored their experience at 5 or below; a remarkably low dissatisfaction rate for a site of this scale and complexity, and a strong indicator that Petra's core visitor experience is performing at an exceptional level. Analysis of their qualitative feedback reveals that low scores are driven not by the site itself, but by specific service environment failures that are within PAP's control:

Top reasons cited for poor overall experience: • Aggressive and persistent vendor harassment and unsolicited sales approaches • Misleading information provided by donkey operators (falsely extending distances to pressure visitors) • Insufficient on-site information about transport, routes, and services • Animal welfare concerns related to donkeys • Cost concerns around Petra by Night and shuttle bus pricing

### 2. Shuttle Bus Journey Satisfaction: A Significant Pain Point

Visitor satisfaction with the journey from the basin to the shuttle bus stop was considerably lower than overall site satisfaction, with a mean score of 6.33/10. A full 36% of respondents rated this journey at 5 or below. This data point is particularly significant given that this is the final interaction visitors have with PAP infrastructure before leaving — meaning it disproportionately shapes their lasting impression.

A closer look at the data reveals that mode of transport to the bus stop has a dramatic effect on satisfaction. Visitors who took a donkey ride rated the journey 8.25/10 on average, with 68% giving a score of 8 or above. Visitors who walked rated the same journey just 5.91/10, with 41% scoring it 5 or below, totalling a gap of 2.34 points. This is a telling finding: the journey itself is not inherently unsatisfying. It is the pedestrian experience specifically — the distance, heat, lack of shade, inadequate signage, and absence of rest points — that is driving dissatisfaction. Improving the walking route, therefore represents the highest-leverage intervention available to PAP for this touchpoint.

The most frequently cited issues in qualitative feedback were:

Top themes from poor bus journey ratings (qualitative analysis): • Distance — the walk to the bus stop is perceived as excessive, especially after a full day of walking • Signage — consistently described as inadequate, confusing, or absent • Misinformation — donkey operators routinely mislead visitors about distance and bus availability to pressure them into paid rides • Heat and shade — the walk is exposed and physically taxing, particularly for

older visitors and families • Accessibility — multiple respondents with mobility challenges, injuries, or accompanying children cited the route as a barrier

Representative visitor feedback:

"Too far, no signs, and the locals tell you it's even further."

"We waited 25 minutes at the wrong stop, there was nothing telling us where the actual bus stop was."

"The donkey guys told us there was no bus and tried to charge us. The walk was fine once we found it."

"Not logical — the bus stop doesn't go all the way to the basin. Needs to be closer or better marked."

"My husband is in a wheelchair. The rough road was very difficult and there was no support."

### 3. Awareness of Shuttle Bus Schedule — Majority Uninformed

57% of visitors surveyed did not know what time the last shuttle bus departs the Petra Basin meaning the majority are navigating the most logistically critical moment of their visit without essential scheduling information. While 43% arrived at the bus stop with some awareness of departure times, this figure should be interpreted cautiously: the survey did not verify whether the time cited was actually correct, and anecdotal responses suggest that misinformation from operators and informal sources means a portion of this 43% likely had inaccurate information. This was a deliberate methodological compromise; capturing departure time accuracy would have required additional questions that were consciously omitted to keep the survey brief and respectful of visitors who were already tired at the end of a long day. The true proportion of visitors arriving with reliable scheduling information is therefore likely lower than 43%.

The discovery data — adjusted for split responses across 262 mentions — reveals a more nuanced picture than initially reported:

Awareness of Last Bus Departure Time	Responses
Unaware of last departure time	140 (57%)
Aware of last departure time	106 (43%)

How Visitors Discovered the Shuttle Bus	Responses
Word of mouth / told by someone	64
On-site signs	63
Visitor centre	34

Guide	27
Website / online research	24
Donkey/local operators	19
Hotel	13
Map	8

Word of mouth is the single leading discovery channel at 24.4%, narrowly ahead of on-site signs at 24.0%. This means that for roughly one in four visitors, knowledge of the shuttle bus exists only because another visitor or member of the public told them — an entirely informal, unreliable, and uncontrollable information chain. Guides and the visitor centre together account for a further 23%, reinforcing the picture of a service that visitors discover through people rather than through systems.

Internet and digital sources account for 9.2% — a figure that likely underrepresents potential, given how powerful AI and proactive online publishing are for visitors planning their visits to sites. Notably, locals selling donkeys rank higher than hotel staff as a discovery channel, which raises a conflict-of-interest concern: the same operators who profit from donkey rides are informing visitors about the bus service they compete with.

This is not a signage problem alone — it is a systemic information infrastructure gap. Visitors should not need to rely on other tourists, their guide, or a donkey seller to find out that a shuttle bus exists and when it leaves.

#### 4. Mode of Travel to Bus Stop — Walking is the Default

82% of respondents walked to the shuttle bus stop, while 18% took a donkey ride. Given the distances involved and the physical fatigue of a full day at Petra, the experience of the walking route has an outsized impact on visitor satisfaction. The lack of infrastructure supporting pedestrian visitors — particularly shade, signage, distance markers, and accessible paths — is a significant service gap.

### Actionable Recommendations

The following recommendations are drawn directly from visitor feedback and quantitative data. They are prioritised by potential impact on visitor experience and feasibility of implementation.

#### Priority 1 — Critical (Immediate Action Recommended)

<b>HIGH</b>	<p><b>R1: Comprehensive Wayfinding Overhaul — Basin to Bus Stop</b></p> <p>Install clear, consistent, and frequent directional signage along the full route from the Petra Basin to the shuttle bus stop. Signage should include: directional arrows,</p>
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estimated walking time (not just distance), and visual confirmation markers every 200–300 metres. The current bus stop at the "benches" roundabout area is a known confusion point — a large, unmistakable terminal sign is essential. Consider colour-coded trail markers on the road surface.

HIGH

### R2: Establish a Formal Information Infrastructure for the Shuttle Bus Service

Word of mouth and opportunistic sign-sightings are not a sustainable information strategy. PAP should treat shuttle bus information as a core visitor service communication by acting across multiple touchpoints: prominent departure policy displays at the visitor centre entrance and basin restaurants; standardised information provided to hotels and accommodation partners at check-in; and a dedicated, accurate shuttle bus listing on the PAP website and Google Maps. The goal is to ensure every visitor — with or without a guide — encounters this information through an official, reliable channel before they need it.

HIGH

### R3: Address Vendor and Donkey Operator Misinformation

A significant volume of visitor complaints centres on donkey operators deliberately misleading tourists about distances and transport availability. PAP should establish and enforce clear conduct standards for commercial operators within the site, with visible consequences for misinformation. Consider deploying uniformed information staff at the basin and along the route to provide accurate guidance and serve as a deterrent to bad actors.

## Priority 2 — High Impact (Short-Term)

MED

### R4: Improve the Pedestrian Experience Along the Basin-to-Bus Route

The data makes a compelling case for targeted investment in the walking route: visitors who walked to the bus stop rated the journey 5.91/10 on average, compared to 8.25/10 for those who took a donkey ride — a 2.34 point gap driven not by the service itself, but by the physical demands of the walk. Installing shaded rest areas with seating at key points along the route would meaningfully improve the experience, particularly for older visitors, families with children, and those who have spent a full day on their feet. Distance markers indicating remaining walking time to the bus stop would also help manage expectations and reduce the perception that the walk is longer than it is. Even temporary shade structures would have immediate impact while longer-term infrastructure is planned.

MED

### R5: Relocate or Extend Bus Stop Closer to the Basin

Multiple visitors noted that it is "not logical" for the bus to not reach the basin. While operational constraints may limit full relocation, PAP should investigate whether the

shuttle route can be extended, or whether a secondary pick-up point closer to the basin restaurants is feasible. This is the single change most requested in qualitative feedback.

**MED**

**R6: Address the Conflict of Interest in Donkey Operator Information**  
 Locals selling donkeys rank as the fifth most common way visitors discover the shuttle bus (above hotels and formal information channels) creating a direct conflict of interest, as these same operators profit from discouraging visitors from walking. PAP should introduce and enforce a clear code of conduct prohibiting commercial operators from providing false or misleading transport information. Deploying uniformed PAP staff or rangers at key decision points near the basin and along the route would give visitors a trusted alternative to operator guidance and serve as a visible deterrent to misinformation.

### Priority 3 — Longer-Term Improvements

**LOW**

**R7: Accessibility Plan for the Basin-to-Bus Route**  
 Several respondents specifically cited accessibility barriers — rough road surfaces, long distances, and a lack of support for wheelchair users, injured visitors, and elderly travellers. PAP should commission an accessibility audit of the route and explore targeted solutions such as surface improvements, a dedicated accessible shuttle, or a "ranger escort" service for visitors who are unable to complete the route independently.

**LOW**

**R8: On-Site Information Strategy Review**  
 Beyond transport, visitors repeatedly cited a lack of general information about the site — its history, buildings, and routes. PAP should consider introducing audio guide rental at the visitor centre, QR code markers at key monuments, and improving the depth of interpretation available throughout the site. Petra's rich heritage is its greatest asset; better storytelling infrastructure would significantly elevate the experience.

**LOW**

**R9: Animal Welfare Visibility**  
 Concerns about donkey welfare were raised unprompted across multiple surveys. Publicly visible welfare standards — either through signage, a dedicated welfare notice at the visitor centre, or a visible PAP endorsement of responsible operator standards — would address this concern and align with the expectations of international visitors.

## Conclusion

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Petra is one of the world's most extraordinary heritage destinations, and visitor sentiment reflects this. An average overall satisfaction score of 8.9 out of 10 across 246 international respondents confirms the site's immense appeal. However, the data reveals a consistent and avoidable gap: the service environment surrounding the visitor journey — particularly the shuttle bus experience, wayfinding infrastructure, and conduct of commercial operators — is falling short of the experience quality that the site itself warrants.

The most impactful improvements require no physical changes to the archaeological site itself. Clear signage, proactive information sharing, and better management of commercial operator conduct are within reach and would immediately improve satisfaction scores at what is currently the most friction-heavy touchpoint of the visitor journey.

These findings are offered as a foundation for ongoing visitor experience improvement at PAP. The survey instrument, methodology, and data set are available for further analysis and longitudinal tracking in future survey rounds.

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This report was produced based on 246 field survey responses collected in February 2026 by a team of four surveyors operating under the direction of the Petra Archaeological Park leadership. All quotations are reproduced from original survey responses.

## Acknowledgements

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*Research Lead*

**Laura Hanna**

**Roa Hasanat**

**Feras Al Salameen**

The team who conducted in-person interviews at the shuttle bus boarding point near the Turkmaniyya Tomb, collecting all 246 responses.

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**Fadi Al Rawadieh**

Field coordinator, whose support in organising and facilitating transport and meals during the on-site survey operation was invaluable.

### COMMISSIONED BY

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For entrusting this research and for their commitment to improving the visitor experience at Petra.