

IRAQ

MESOPOTAMIA & THE JEWELS OF ASSYRIA

October 17 - October 31, 2025

Led by Dr. Barbara A. Porter, Archaeologist and
Former Director of ACOR Jordan

Mesopotamia—the land between the great rivers Tigris and Euphrates—was the home to the world’s earliest civilization. To walk on such sites as Eridu, Uruk, Ur of the Chaldees and Babylon is to trace the history of the first cultures to build cities, invent writing, develop the wheel, and to rule the known world. Some have claimed that the Garden of Eden was located in Iraq, and biblical history touches this land too. When it became an independent country in 1932, Iraq had been home to ancient Sumer, Babylonia, and Assyria, and had been conquered by Persians, the Macedonian army of Alexander the Great, the armies of the Islamic conquest, the Mongol hordes, and the Ottoman empire of Turkey. At many points in its history, Iraq could be said to have been at the center of the civilized world, and you will see elements of this ancient history along with remnants of more recent times, including the regime of Saddam Hussein and the Coalition occupation. For the first time in our history selling tours to Iraq, we are now pleased to visit sites that we have never been able to see before the Assyrian ancient cities of the north: Ashur, Nimrud, and Nineveh as well as Hatra. With many of them having suffered heavily under the occupation of ISIS the last few years, and now that ISIS has been mostly pushed out of this region, there are multiple international projects focusing on restoring part of the glory of those ruins.

Ihab Zaki
Managing Director

Friday, October 17

Arrive in Basra (IRAQ)



Upon arrival in **Basra**, meet and transfer to *Horizon Hotel* or similar for check-in and overnight.

Note: Standard check-in time is 3:00 pm. If you arrive on October 16 or in the early morning of October 17, an extra hotel night needs to be booked.

Saturday, October 18

Basra



After breakfast, head to visit the new **Basrah Museum**, which was once one of Saddam’s opulent palaces. Then begin the sightseeing in the old city along the stretch of the canal lined with Ottoman **Shenashil Houses**. It is a sad shadow of Basra’s former glory as most of them are unoccupied and falling apart. Possibly visit one of them, which were owned by a wealthy Greek merchant in the 19th century. Then visit **Ali’s Steps**, a mosque with an original minaret from 635. After lunch, ride in a boat on the **Shatt Al-Arab**, which is the river following the merge of the Euphrates and the Tigris. Return to the *Hotel* for dinner and overnight **(B,L,D)**

Sunday, October 19

Basra - Nasiriya



In the morning, visit the ancient Mesopotamian town of **Al-Qurnah**, which claims to be the site of the **Garden of Eden** and contains **Adam’s Tree**, also known as the Tree of Knowledge. Continue to the **Marshes** for a canoe ride. This immense wetland at the entrance of the Shatt Al-Arab, the river formed by the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, is one of the largest ecosystems in the world. A rare aquatic landscape in the desert, it is home to **the Marsh Arabs** and provides habitats for important wildlife populations. The Marsh Arabs, descendants of ancient Sumerians, live in secluded villages of elaborate reed

houses that often are reachable only by boat, and practice fishing, buffalo breeding, and reed weaving. As shown in Sumerian bas-reliefs, this region was already inhabited 5,000 years ago. The Marshes are currently being rehabilitated after the aggressive drainage policy of Saddam Hussein. Continue to **Nasiriyah**, the capital of the province of Dhi-Qar, near the ruins of the ancient city of Ur on the Euphrates River. In the afternoon, stroll around the **souk** of Nasiriyah before dinner. Transfer to *Sumerion Hotel* or similar for check-in, dinner & overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Monday, October 20

Nasiriya (Ur, Al, Shatrah & Tello)



In the morning, begin the day with a visit to the ancient site of **Girsu** (today, Tell Tello), and perhaps the excavations at al Hiba (ancient Lagash). These cities were of major importance in the 3rd millennium BC from the Early Dynastic period through the Ur III dynasty. Many cuneiform tablets and significant objects were uncovered at Tello by earlier French excavations (hence why many pieces are in the Louvre). Temples were dedicated to Ningirsu (Lord of Girsu) including by Gudea of Lagash (ca. 2150 BC). Continue to visit **Ziggurat of Ur**. Its architectural characteristics are similar to the Tower of Babel mentioned in the Bible, and there are towers of a temple complex dedicated to the lunar god Nanna. Tour the archaeological city of Ur, believed to be the birthplace prophet Abraham. In the afternoon, Return to the *Hotel* in Nasiriya for dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Tuesday, October 21

Nasiriya - Uruk - Najaf



In the morning, drive towards Al-Muthana province to visit the ancient Sumerian site of **Uruk** where the first written script was discovered. Tour the excavated site dating back to 4,000 BC. Proceed to **Najaf**, one of Iraq’s holy

cities and home to Imam Ali shrine, Prophet Mohammad's cousin and son-in-law, and the fourth caliph. Imam Ali was the spiritual founder of the Shi'ite sect, and is revered as a martyr and saint, and the shrine has been an important Shi'a pilgrimage site since his death in 661. One legend claims Adam's body was buried on the site. Najaf is the hub of Shiite political power, not just for Iraq but also for the entire world. Visit the Mosque and the neighboring historical covered bazaar and then transfer to *Royal Eagle Hotel or similar* for check-in, dinner & overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Wednesday, October 22

Najaf (Kifl & Kufa)



Begin your day with a visit to the **Great Mosque of Kufa**. Dating from 670 AD, it is one of the earliest surviving mosques in the world, and the place where Imam Ali was fatally wounded while praying. It contains the tombs of Muslim ibn 'Aqil (Imam Ali's cousin), Hani ibn 'Urwa (his companion), and the revolutionary, Mukhtar al-Thaqafi. Islamic tradition says it is the place, where Noah lived and build the Ark. Also, visit the **Al-Imara Fort and palace**, and see the outside of **Imam Ali's house**. Visit the town of **Al Kifl** with its shrine dedicated to the 6th century BC prophet Ezekiel. The shrine was originally a place of Jewish pilgrimage until 1316 when it passed into Muslim guardianship. It remained a Muslim pilgrimage site until the early 19th century when it was converted back into a Jewish site. In the afternoon, return to Najaf and visit the artificial Al-Najaf Lake, and then continue touring the old city. Return to the *Hotel* for dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Thursday, October 23

Najaf - Ukhaider - Karbala



In the morning, visit **Ukhaider Palace**, an Abbasid fortress erected by Isa ibn Musa, nephew of the Abbasid caliph As-Saffah in 775AD. Located some 31 miles south of Karbala, it represents architectural innovation in the structures of its courtyards, residences, and mosque and was an important stop on the regional trade routes. Excavations there were conducted in the late 19th century by the British explorer, Gertrude Bell. Proceed to **Karbala**, one of the holiest sites in the world for Shi'a Muslims as it is home to the shrine of the Imam Hussein ibn Ali, who was defeated and killed here in 680. He was the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad and son of Fatima the Prophet's daughter. Although Muhammad made statements before his death that appeared to name Ali as his successor, three others were chosen in turn before Ali became caliph in 656. His rule was marked by rebellions, and he was assassinated four years after taking office. Today, millions of Shi'ites visit the shrine each year. Transfer

to *Baron Hotel or similar* for check-in, dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Friday, October 24

Karbala - Babylon - Baghdad



Depart after breakfast for the city of **Babylon**, which was a key kingdom in ancient Mesopotamia from the 18th century when the Amorite king Hammurabi built Bablyon into a major city, to the 6th century BC. It is estimated to have been the largest city in the world at various times, but it waned, was destroyed, was rebuilt, came under the rule of various civilizations, and was pillaged numerous times. The original remains of Babylon are broken mud and debris, and the Babylon of today was significantly rebuilt under Saddam. The entire central palace of Babylon is made of 20th century fired bricks, but it is fascinating to reflect that Alexander the Great died in the throne room, surrounded by his mourning generals. The colorful outer part of the famed **Ishtar Gate** is displayed at the Pergamon Museum in Berlin, but here you can see inner molded brick walls as well as the the processional way. One of the most impressive **Palaces of Saddam** is situated just behind Babylon, with beautiful views over the ruins of Babylon and the Euphrates and may be visited if the authorities allow it. It has been looted to the last light bulb and filled with graffiti. The sheer size and cost of this palace and the fact that he most likely never was there symbolizes the extent of his madness & waste. Continue to **Baghdad** & upon arrival transfer to *Noorland Hotel or similar* for check-in, dinner & overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Saturday, October 25

Baghdad (Ctesiphon)



In the morning, visit the **Archaeological Museum** of Iraq and in the afternoon, **Ctesiphon**, an ancient city some 20 miles southeast of Baghdad. Founded in around 128 BC, it was the winter capital of the Parthian Empire and then the Sasanian Empire until the Muslim conquest of Persia in 651, after which it fell into decay. The only visible remaining structure of the ancient site is the **Taq Kasra**, a majestic, vaulted hall that was part of the royal palace of the Sasanian philosopher-king, Khosrow I. The archway is one of the largest single-span vaults of unreinforced brickwork in the world. Return to the *Hotel* for dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Sunday, October 26

Baghdad



In the morning, visit the **Martyr's' monument**, which was constructed between 1981 and 1983, with its official opening in 1983. The rest of the site consists of parks, a playground, parking lots, walkways, bridges, and the lake.

At the center of the two half-domes is a twisted metal flag-pole emerging from the underground museum. On the pole is an Iraqi flag, apparently lightly fluttering in the breeze. When viewed from the museum below, the flag and pole appear to be floating in space. A spring of water runs nearby to symbolize the blood of the fallen. The structure includes references to Iraq's ancient artistic traditions in the form of a marble slab with a Qur'anic inscription in ancient Kufic script. In the afternoon, visit **Dur Kurigalzu** founded by the Kassite King Kurigalzu I in the late 15th or early 14th century BC. The site (modern Aqar Kuf) is situated along an east-west-trending limestone ridge between the Euphrates and Tigris rivers. The city functioned as the capital of Babylonia during the reign of Kurigalzu, and either as the capital or at least an important city until the fall of the Kassite Dynasty in the 12th century BC, when it was largely abandoned. The temple area seems to have been active from the 7th c. BC into the Neo-Babylonian period. Up until recently (mostly between the 9th and 14th centuries AD), there have been smaller occupations at parts of Aqar Quf, with areas of the site being used for burials and for Arab settlement. Return to the *Hotel* for dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Monday, October 27

Baghdad



In the morning, head to **Al-Mutanabi Street**, named after the 10th century classical Iraqi poet, and explore **Souk al-Safareen**, the famous copper market. Then visit **El-Mustansariyya School** (Madrassah), one of the oldest Islamic institutions of higher learning in the world, established in 1227 by the Abbasid Caliph al-Mustansir. In 1235, a monumental water-powered alarm clock located in the entrance hall announced the hours of prayer day and night. Following expansion and restructuring in 1927, the madrassah has continued to function and is now part of the Al-Mustansiriya University. Afternoon, more sightseeing time in Baghdad at the tomb of the 12th century **Sufi saint Abdel Kader Jilani**. The shrine remains the de facto center of Baghdad and the symbolic heart of the Sufi world. The splendid medieval building has a beautiful blue and white dome and is encircled by a large complex to house and feed pilgrims. Some free time for shopping. Return to the *Hotel* for dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Tuesday, October 28

Baghdad (Samarra) - Mosul



Have an early breakfast, and then start the day by driving to Mosul with a stop in **Samarra**. In the medieval times, Samarra was the capital of the Abbasid Caliphate and the only remaining Islamic capital that retains its original plan, architecture, and artistic relics. Visit the **Great**

Mosque of Samarra, a 9th century complex commissioned in 848 and completed in 851 by the Abbasid caliph Al-Mutawakkil who reigned in Samarra from 847 until 861. We proceed to visit the so-called **Love Palace, the Qasr Al Ashiq** ("the Lover" from the medieval Qasr al-Ma'shuq, Beloved) built by Caliph Mu'tamid. Then, we continue to **Ashur (Qal'at Sherqat)**, located on the Tigris River in northern Mesopotamia in a specific geo-ecological zone at the borderline between rain-fed and irrigation agriculture. The city dates back to the 3rd millennium BC. From the 14th to the 9th centuries BC, it was the first capital of the Assyrian Empire, a city-state and trading platform of international importance. It also served as the religious capital and was associated with the god Ashur. The city was destroyed by the Babylonians but revived during the Parthian period in the 1st and 2nd centuries AD. Continue to Mosul and upon arrival transfer to *Nergal Motel or Similar* for check-in, and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Wednesday, October 29

Mosul (Hatra)



In the morning, drive to visit **Hatra**, a ruined city located in the Al-Jazirah region 180 miles northwest of Baghdad and 68 miles southwest of Mosul. A religious and trading center of the Parthian empire, it flourished during the 1st and 2nd centuries BC. The city survived several invasions before being razed in AD 241. It is an important archaeological site with well-preserved ruins. Then return to Mosul to tour the city and **Al-Noory Mosque**, famous for its leaning minaret, which gave the city its nickname "the hunchback". Tradition holds that the mosque was first built in the late 12th century, although it underwent many renovations over the years. The mosque and its distinctive minaret withstood various hostile invading forces over its 850-year history until destroyed in the Battle of Mosul in 2017. Sightseeing in the old city of Mosul and then transfer to *Modern Plaza Hotel or Similar* for check-in, dinner & overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Thursday, October 30

Mosul - Nineveh Nimrud - Erbil



Today head to visit **Nineveh** located on the eastern bank of the Tigris River, which was the capital and largest city of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, as well as the largest city in the world for several decades. Today, it is a common name for the part of Mosul that lies on the eastern bank of the Tigris, and the country's Nineveh Governorate takes its name from it. Continue to **Nimrud**, an Assyrian city located 20 miles south of the city. The name Nimrud was recorded as the local name by Carsten Niebuhr for, the ancient Kalhu (Biblical Calah). Stop at the **Monastery of the Martyrs Mar Behnam & Marth Sarah**, a Syriac Catholic

monastery in the village of Khidr Ilyas close to the town of Beth Khdeda. It was destroyed on March 19, 2015, by Daesh. Continue to **Erbil** and transfer to Ramada *Hotel* for check-in, dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Friday, October 31

Erbil - USA



Enjoy breakfast, then transfer to the airport for your flight back to the US. **(B)**

“We reserve the right to change the order of activities/visits or sites due to unexpected events such as flight cancellations or changes of schedule, or any other reasons beyond our control. We will do our best to ensure that any necessary changes when/if needed to meet the needs of our clients.”

Special Notes on Travel to Iraq:

During this trip, there will be a few checkpoints between provinces and cities, and your patience is appreciated whenever they delay us a little bit longer than expected to verify documents.

***Accommodations** have developed and improved a lot in the last few years, and now most of the hotels we use are very comfortable and with western standard services. You also must understand that our **guides** cannot compare to the “classical” definition of guides in well-touristy places like Europe or Turkey or Egypt, and Morocco; they act primarily as tour managers and coordinators as the country does NOT have any official and licensed expert guides in the real sense of the word.*

*Everyone joining must be in good health, with an open mind and a sense of adventure. Please note that although this trip is not necessarily physically demanding by exertion, the remoteness of some locations, the back roads we sometimes have to take, and the delays can be quite a different experience. The security arrangements may change throughout the trip, and any sudden changes in the itinerary or hotels due to unforeseen conditions are possible. Keep in mind that Iraq’s **weather** is hot even in the ideal months of November to March, so you should protect yourself from dehydration, sunstrokes, etc. Our tours always include an abundant supply of bottled water on your vehicles every touring day.*

The tour includes the area north of Baghdad covering the ancient ruins of Assyria: Nineveh, Khorasabad, Hatra, and Nimrud - all the regions under ISIS occupation for many years and are now liberated. We still monitor any security issues, and if there is any need to alter the itinerary due to difficulty accessing the sites, Spiekermann Travel reserves the right to make any changes to the itinerary if needed. Travelers should be able to accept and adapt to sudden changes graciously.



Tour Cost (Land Only):

6 - 9 travelers: \$8,495.00

10 - 14 travelers: \$7,495.00

Per person sharing in double occupancy

Single Supplement: \$995.00

Price based on group size minimum of 6 participants and maximum of 14 participants

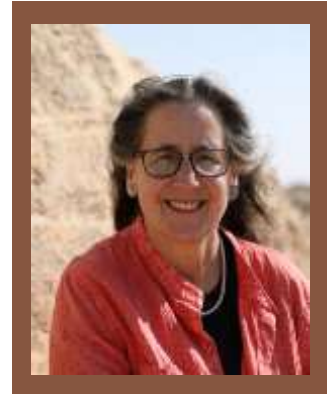
Trip Grade: II Lodging Level: *.******

About your Lecturer, Dr. Barbara A. Porter... she has led numerous archaeological tours from Algeria to Iran in the decade before becoming the Director of the American Center of Oriental Research (ACOR) in Amman in 2006, a position she held until March 2020. She presided over ACOR's 50th anniversary year in 2018 and her public lecture about ACOR is available on their website (www.acorjordan.org). Included there are some 13,000 of her slide images from travels from 1977 to 2005 and subsequent digital photos in ACOR's Digital Archives. She received her A.B. from Bryn Mawr College and her M.A.,

M. Phil., and Ph.D. from Columbia University's Department of Art History & Archaeology. Her dissertation was on cylinder seals from

Syria in the Middle Bronze Age. From 1978 to 1986, she was on the curatorial staff of The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Egyptian Art and Ancient Near Eastern Art) in New York and afterwards lectured frequently in the museum's galleries. In the 1990s, she taught in the Art History Department of New York University.

She grew up in Lebanon in the 1960s and later served as a board trustee for the American Community School at Beirut from 1996 to 2019 so returned to Lebanon often in that period. In the 1980s, she participated in two seasons of the Yale University excavations in northeastern Syria at the site of Tell Leilan. In her 14 years in Jordan, she came to know the country well and was involved in cultural heritage initiatives in many places, particularly Petra. She currently lives in Washington, D.C. and has resumed leading tours to the Middle East.



Tour Includes:

- Airport / Hotel Airport transfers.
- 14 nights' accommodation in Superior 4* & some 5* accommodation in centrally located hotels.
- Travel by modern & air-conditioned motor coach.
- Meals as mentioned in the itinerary (B: Breakfast, L: Lunch and D: Dinner).
- Entrance fees to all mentioned sites and museums.
- Escort of lecturer throughout the trip (provided minimum number of travelers is reached).
- English Speaking local guide.
- All activities described in the tour.
- Gratuities to guide, drivers, and porters (provided minimum number of travelers is reached).

Trip Grade:

II Active - Some hikes, slightly more demanding walks at or to sites, few elevations, comfortable but busy schedule and some long rides and extensive drives.

Lodging Level:

***** Superior** - Lodges and hotels with additional amenities, refined service, and comfort level acceptable to western standards. (3 or 4 stars).

***** Luxury** - Regular style- usually large- hotels, typical western standard with ample venues, and full amenities. (4 or 5 stars).



Tour does not include:

- International airfare into Basra and out of Erbil.
- Iraq Visa (obtainable upon arrival - \$77.00 in cash - Subject to change).
- Beverages with or without meals.
- Items of a personal nature (camera fees, laundry, emails, excess luggage, etc.).
- Transfers if not arriving/departing on tour dates.
- Dayroom/overnights necessitated by changes in airline schedules.
- Trip surcharge to operate below required minimum participants.
- Gratuity to your tour Lecturer (optional).
- Travel protection insurance (HIGHLY RECOMMENDED)

