

## **Executive Summary**

### **State Party**

Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

### **State, Province, Region**

Aqaba Special Economic Zone

### **Name of the Nominated Property**

Wadi Rum Protected Area

### **Geographic Coordinates to the Nearest Second**

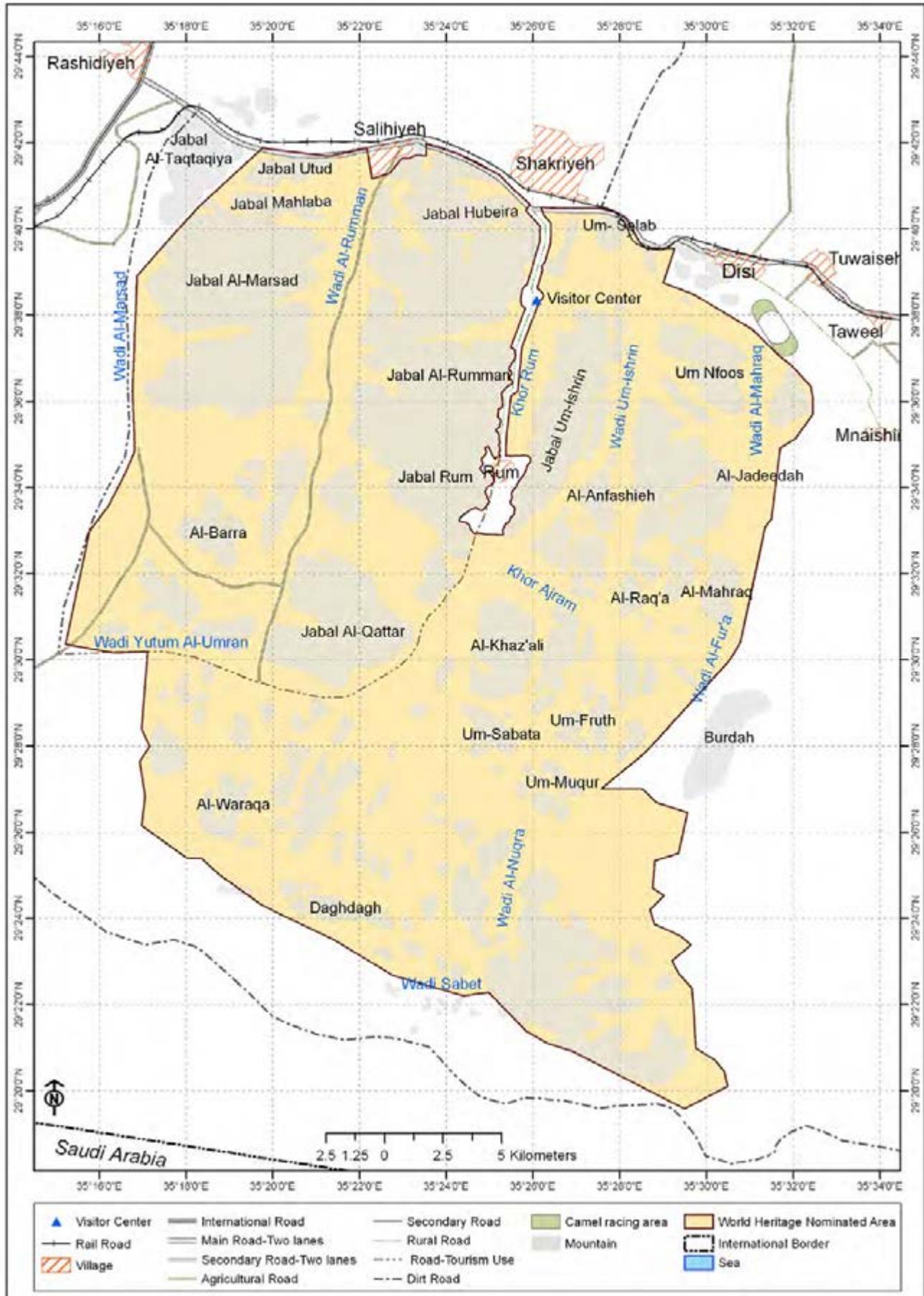
Central Management Station: N 29 38 22.60 E 35 26 02.32

### **Textual Description of the Boundary of the Nominated Area**

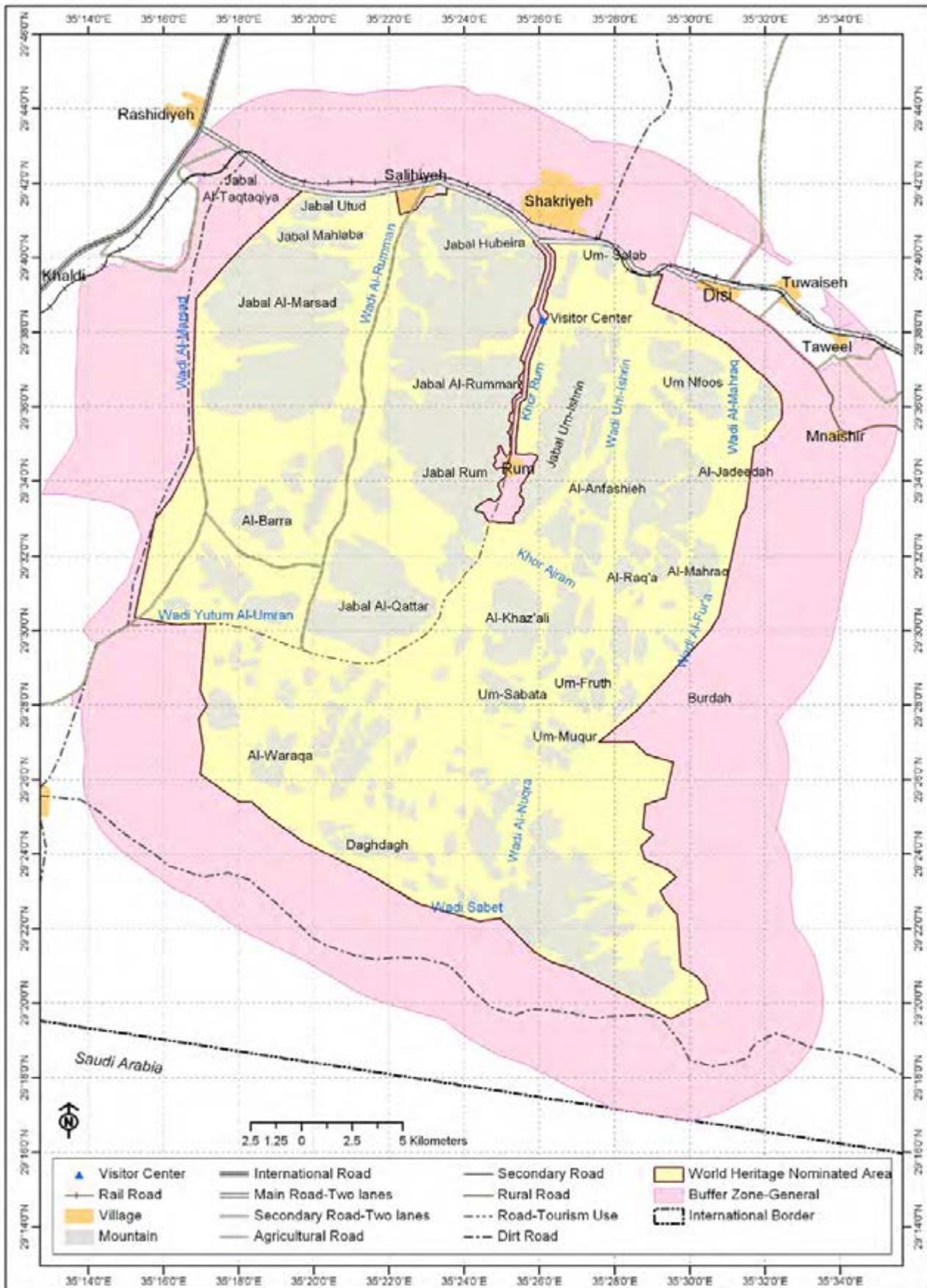
The Wadi Rum Protected Area is located in the southern part of Jordan and lies within the Aqaba Special Economic Zone which is part of the greater Aqaba Governorate, about 310 km south of Amman and about 60 km north east of the coastal city of Aqaba. It covers an area of 74,200 ha (seventy four thousand and two hundred hectares), out of which, 73,300 ha (seventy three thousand and three hundred hectares) are being nominated for world heritage status as mixed site for natural and cultural outstanding universal values. Wadi Rum Protected Area represents the largest protected area in Jordan and the Levant region, and covers almost one percent of the total surface area of the country. Wadi Rum Protected Area forms a major part of the Hisma desert of southern Jordan and northern Arabia, lying to the east of the Jordan Rift Valley and south of the steep escarpment of the central Jordanian plateau. The borders of the Protected Area extend from Qaa' Disi in the North-East to Jabal Al Fara'a in the South-East and to Wadi Sweibit in the South-West.



## World Heritage Nominated Area – General Map



## World Heritage Nominated Area – Map with Buffer Zone



## Justification – Statement of Outstanding Universal Value

The Wadi Rum Protected Area is a mixed property composed of scenically stunning and tightly interwoven natural and cultural attributes in a lived-in desert environment.

The Area is the product of millions of years of geological processes, and thousands of years of interactions between humans and nature in a hostile desert environment. Wadi Rum is the iconic superlative exemplar of a highly varied desert landscape that is the result of the interplay between complex geological controls – both structural and lithological – and climatic influences that have fluctuated considerably over the long period that it has taken the landscape to evolve. Geology has been the ever-present artist; a sculptor playing with abundant possibilities of form, colour and texture.

Widespread petroglyphs and inscriptions eloquently attest to 12,000 years of human history and the very early development of alphabetical writing while on-going land use reflects a traditional but dynamic Bedouin culture. North-Arabian inscriptions have allowed scholars to identify Wadi Rum as a site specifically mentioned in the Qur'an (89: 7-8), the Holy Book for over one billion Muslims. This unique property satisfies all key requirements for an effective long term management and protection process that balances the visions and needs of a wide spectrum of stakeholders.

The property manifests outstanding universal values with respect to five separate, but fully complementary, World Heritage criteria. These can be summarized as: **(iii) exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or civilization, (v) outstanding example of human interaction with the environment, (vi) association with literary works of universal significance, (vii) significant natural beauty and aesthetic importance, and (viii) significant geomorphic features.**

**Criterion (iii):** The Wadi Rum Protected Area bears a unique testimony to the practice of rock art and inscriptions that has been on-going for millennia. The combination of 25,000 petroglyphs with 20,000 rock inscriptions, and their continuity over a period of at least 12,000 years, sets Wadi Rum apart from other rock art and/or inscription sites. The petroglyphs, representing humans and animals, are engraved on boulders, stones, and cliff faces. They trace the evolution of human thought; the long-term patterns of pastoral, agricultural, and urban human activity in the Arabian Peninsula; and the environmental history of a distinct region that has evolved climatically from mildly humid to semi-arid. The engravings indicate an elaborate sense of aesthetics and a

pictorial culture. Numerous inscriptions in four different North-Arabian scripts testify to the very early emergence of alphabets from iconic representations, and widespread literacy among pastoral societies in the Arabian Peninsula. Thus, the open-air library that is Wadi Rum is a critical site for the study and understanding of the evolution of aesthetics, writing and literacy.

**Criterion (v):** The variety of landforms at Wadi Rum has played an essential role in fostering human settlement and, as a result, the development of sophisticated intellectual activity that is documented by abundant petroglyphs and rock inscriptions. This graphic testimony to diverse cultural traditions and civilizations over millennia is one of the world's richest sources of documentation. Nowhere else in the world can one find such a wealth of information that enables the study and understanding of the continuum of settled and mobile lifestyles in a desert landscape. Here is a record of resource use in this desert and mountain environment illustrating the adaptability and ingenuity of human communities who have made the most of scarce resources to sustain continuous presence after the climate became dryer in the Bronze Age (3rd millennium BC). This is why the significance of the Wadi Rum Protected Area goes far beyond its north-Arabian context as it represents a uniquely documented instance of human interaction with dry environments of relevance to other arid areas worldwide.

**Criterion (vi):** North-Arabian inscriptions have allowed scholars to identify Wadi Rum with Iram, where the tribe of 'Ad lived. The site and the tribe are mentioned in the Qur'an (89: 7-8), the Holy Book for over one billion Muslims. According to evidence derived from numerous inscriptions in various alphabets, ancient Iram and the tribe of 'Ad can only have been located in Wadi Rum. The Qu'ranic story of Iram, "the place of the columns", exemplifies divine punishment over a corrupt people. Allah left Iram buried under the sands of the desert, making Iram and 'Ad legends to be spoken of and an exemplary lesson of warning.

**Criterion (vii):** The aesthetic beauty of Wadi Rum is produced by an astonishing and iconic assemblage of landforms. The continuous uplift, tectonic faulting, weathering and erosion have transformed the mountains of Wadi Rum into a visual tableau of towers, pyramids, domes, narrow gorges, mushrooms, wide flat-bottom valleys called "Wadis", sand plains, and sand dunes. Soaring mountain peaks rise vertically from colourful sand plains and dunes. Summit shapes trace pillars, castles, domes and pyramids in the desert sky. Loose sands climb on the cliffs and fill wide wadis. Vertical cliffs with long vertical striations have been sculpted to produce rounded columns of coloured sandstones often featuring magnificent stone arches, inselbergs

and mushrooms. To eloquently express his overwhelming awe when he first entered Wadi Rum in 1916, T. E. Lawrence recorded this passage: "Our little caravan grew self conscious, and fell dead quiet, afraid and ashamed to flaunt its smallness in the presence of stupendous hills" (Seven Pillars of Wisdom, 1926: 342).

**Criterion (viii):** The Wadi Rum Protected Area holds an exceptional record of the intricate interactions between passive and active geological controls on the evolution of a uniquely diverse landscape within a true present-day desert setting. The present landscape derives from the interplay of changing environmental conditions, lithology, uplift, faulting, weathering and erosion over tens of millions of years and presents an unrivalled level of complexity and inter-dependence. Ongoing weathering and wind erosion sculpts the sandstone between the joints to produce long rounded sandstone columns rising to over 1800 metres asl. Flat-bottom valleys or "wadis", filled with shifting sands and occasional low dunes, are another unique landform that adds to the diversity of the landscape. A continuous line of mud flats (Qaa') lying at 800 metres asl run along the boundaries of the sand stone form a notable case of geomorphic contrast.

According to experts in desert landforms, Wadi Rum is the best place in the world to observe such high cliffs, extraordinary columns and niches, and the full sequence of rock falls of various types produced by weathering of the rock mass. While the landforms of this incredible setting are, without doubt a unique work of art, they also serve to help us interpret the geology as a basic conditioning element of the desert ecosystem. It reveals to us in its magnitude and subtleties the full story of Rum as told by nature.

**Integrity and Authenticity:** The Wadi Rum Protected Area is the largest protected area in Jordan and the Levant region. It was established in response to an IUCN report in 1979 that proposed a national network of protected areas to conserve the representative desert landforms and ecosystems along with their associated cultural values. Covering more than 72,000 ha, the Protected Area encompasses the finest examples of the target natural and cultural values and attributes that are the basis for the claim to outstanding universal value. The area includes the majority of the iconic sandstone landforms in Jordan and the wider Hisma desert, intermingled with their representative desert ecosystems, habitats and species along with their associated cultural values. The Protected Area also encompasses the majority of the rock art and inscriptions of the Hisma basin along with the historical testimonies demonstrating the long established interaction between man and his environment including the Qu'ranic evidence of record of Rum to be the place of the great tribe of Ad.

**Governance and Management:** the Wadi Rum Protected Area lies within the Boundaries of the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority; one of Jordan's strongest decentralised governance structures. The Protected Area satisfies all key requirements for effective long term management and protection of the area's outstanding universal values. The boundaries for the area were designated and delineated through a participatory process with stakeholders, which resulted in special legislation for Wadi Rum. A comprehensive management plan, also the result of a thoroughly participatory process, was developed for the area in 2003 and a full review is planned by the end of 2010. The Protected Area is managed by a competent, well equipped staff that has ample monitoring and enforcement capabilities, and is adequately backed by legal mandates and regulations.

The Management Plan review process will provide an opportunity to develop a strategic approach to the analysis and adoption of actions to deal with management issues requiring long term attention. These key issues include: (1) governance arrangements, (2) the impacts to desert ecosystems and aesthetics generated by the use of private vehicles to transport visitors to major attractions, (3) expansion of the Wadi Rum Village in response to natural growth, (4) diversification of the site's Management Committee to include a broader spectrum of stakeholders, and (5) transformation of Wadi Rum into a model zero carbon Protected Area.

**Political Support:** In his world renowned piercing vision, the late King Hussein of Jordan once said: "Wadi Rum is not for a human; it is for humanity". This demonstrates Jordan's long established understanding of the global significance of the Wadi Rum Protected Area and its commitment to conserve it and present it for the benefit of future generations. His successor, King Abdullah II, firmly follows on his father footsteps and considers the Wadi Rum Protected Area a national icon to be safeguarded as a common heritage of humanity.

## Contact Information

Dr. Salim Al Mughrabi  
Commissioner for Environment  
Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority

### Address:

P.O. Box 2565  
Aqaba 77110, Jordan  
Tel: 962 (03) 209 1000  
Fax: 962 (03) 209 1008  
Mobile: 962 79 999 7212  
Email: [SMoghrabi@aseza.jo](mailto:SMoghrabi@aseza.jo)  
Website ASEZA: [www.aseza.jo](http://www.aseza.jo)  
Website Wadi Rum: [www.wadirum.jo](http://www.wadirum.jo)