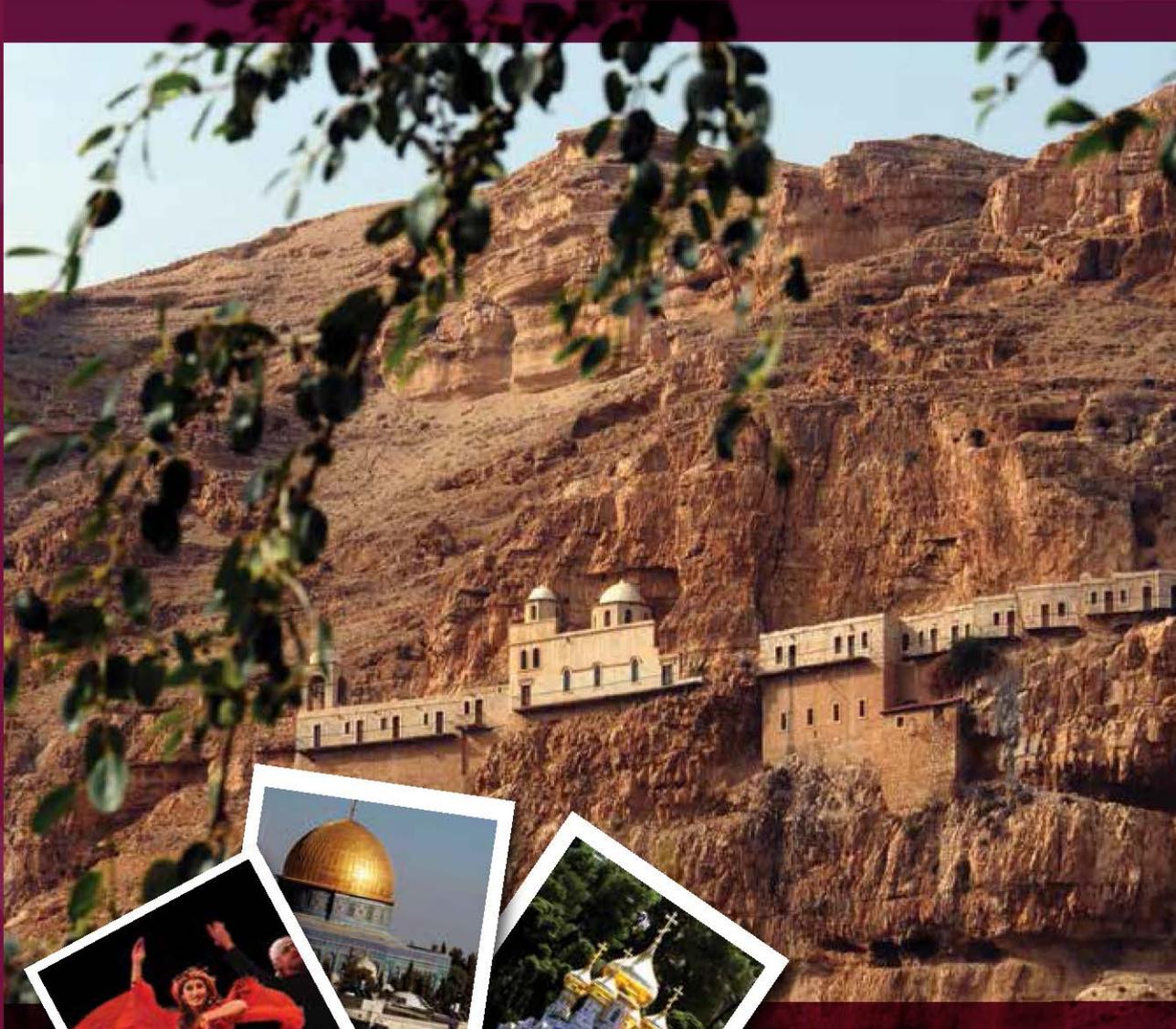




Palestine

Inspiring Destination



كشافة فلسطين

JERUSALEM (AL-QUDS)

The Holy City



Jerusalem, as a holy city for Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world. Archaeological excavations show the history of the city began over 5,000 years ago. Among its 220 historic monuments are the Al-Aqsa mosque and the Dome of the Rock, built in the seventh century, which stand as magnificent pieces of architecture. It is also home to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which houses Christ's tomb.

The city has been known by different names through its history: Urusolim, Jebus, Aelia Capitolina, the City, Beit Al-Maqdis, and Al-Quds. Jerusalem's sites and long history present an exceptional testimony to vanished civilizations: the Bronze Age, Iron Age, and the Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, Crusader, Umayyad, Abbasid, Fatimid, Ayyubid, Mameluk, Ottoman periods.

The old city of Jerusalem and its walls is one of the best-preserved medieval Islamic cities in the world. It is divided into four main quarters: the Muslim Quarter, the Christian Quarter, the Armenian Quarter and the Jewish Quarter. The old city has been home to many diverse cultures, which are reflected in the architecture and planning of the city and its sacred buildings, streets, markets, and residential quarters. Today, Jerusalem's living traditions continue, making the city the heart of human history.

In 1982, Jerusalem was inscribed on the list of the cities of World Heritage in Danger by the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

Al-Aqsa Mosque (Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa)

Also known as the al-Haram ash-Sharif (the noble sanctuary), the grand mosque includes in its compound the Dome of the Rock. This mosque is the third holiest shrine for Muslims, after the Kaaba in Mecca and the Prophet's Mosque in Medina, Saudi Arabia. With rows of colonnades and gardens, the compound stretches over one-fifth of the Old City, occupying a vast area of 140,900 square meters. The mosque itself is silver-domed, and was built as a place of worship next to the Dome of the Rock. Originally built between 709-715 AD by Caliph Walid Ben Abdul Malik, al-Aqsa was reconstructed at least six times and very little of the original mosque remains in the present structure.

The Dome of the Rock (Qubbat As-Sakhra)

Situated in the Old City's Muslim Quarter, it marks the spot where the Prophet Mohammed ascended into heaven following the miraculous journey of one night from Mecca to Jerusalem, known as the Israa and Mirag. It is also the oldest and most exquisite Muslim shrine in the world. Built at the end of the seventh century by the Umayyad Caliph Abdul Malik Ben Marwan, the mosque has a rectangular octagon exterior and a specular gold-covered dome.

Church of the Holy Sepulchre

Preserving the most holy sites of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, this church is the holiest of shrines for the world's Christians. Situated in the Old City's Christian Quarter, the church was first built in the fourth century by Constantine's Mother Helena, over the site of a pagan temple built during the Roman period. Also re-built over successive generations, the present structure was built by the Crusaders in the twelfth century, and contains the last five Stations of the Cross. It also contains the Chapel of Golgotha where Jesus was crucified, the Sepulchre itself where Jesus was buried, and the Chapel of Mary Magdalene where the risen Christ first revealed himself.

The Garden Tomb

Located outside Jerusalem's city walls and close to the Damascus Gate, the simplicity, beauty, and peaceful atmosphere of the Garden Tomb makes it a favourite spot for prayer and meditation.

Some Christians find worshipping near the rock-hewn tomb helpful as they seek to relive the crucifixion and resurrection experience, since it gives a clear picture of what the place of crucifixion and burial must have looked like at the time of Jesus.



Via Dolorosa (The Way of the Cross)

The traditional route that Jesus followed as he carried the cross from the Antonia fortress where he was condemned to death, to the Calvary, where he was crucified. The walk is commemorated in fourteen stations: two are located at Antonia, seven in the streets of Jerusalem, and the last five inside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

Mount of Olives

The Mount of Olives is located east of Jerusalem, across the Kidron Valley. From its heights a magnificent view of the Old City and a striking panorama as far as the Dead Sea and the mountains of Moab in the East can be seen.

Beyond its striking sunsets, the Mount of Olives is associated with some of the most important events in Jesus' life. It was here that the man Christians believe to be the Son of God ascended to Heaven (the location of which is marked by the Chapel of Ascension), where he foretold the destruction of Jerusalem, taught his disciples the Lord's Prayer (Pater Noster), and wept over Jerusalem on his way to the Holy City on Palm Sunday (Church of Dominus Flevit). Perhaps the most striking feature of the mount today is the Russian Orthodox Church of Saint Mary Magdalene, with its striking onion-shaped spires.

Garden of Gethsemane (Church of all Nations)

Located at the foot of the Mount of Olives, the Church of All Nations was originally built by the Byzantines in 379 AD over the place made holy by Jesus' prayer and agony. The present church is considered one of the most beautiful in Jerusalem, and was built between 1919-1924. It is called the Church of all Nations, because sixteen nations contributed to its construction.

Today, the Garden of Gethsemane appears as it did more than 2,000 years ago, and within it are some of the world's oldest olive trees. The garden was a spot favoured by Jesus, and one that served as a site for retreat and prayer, most notably where he spent his last night.

The Kidron Valley

The Kidron Valley separates the Mount of Olives from the City of Jerusalem. Jesus crossed the valley many times, including on the evening of Holy Thursday when he went with his disciples to Gethsemane. The ancient tombs of Absalom, Jehoshaphat, and Saint Zacharias are located along the Kidron Valley. Tombs of Christians, Muslims, Jews line the valley, as it is closely associated with the Day of Judgement.



The Tomb of the Virgin Mary

According to tradition, the Virgin Mary, who died in Jerusalem, was buried in the Kidron Valley. The Crusaders built the present church over the ruins of a Byzantine basilica to mark the place of the Virgin Mary's tomb and her assumption.

BETHLEHEM

Follow the Star



The city of Bethlehem is holy to both Christians and Muslims. It is acknowledged as the birthplace of Jesus Christ or, in Arabic, Issa, who is known as the Son of God in Christian belief and a divinely inspired prophet to Muslims. The Church of the Nativity, a Byzantine basilica, was built by Helena (the mother of the Emperor Constantine), to commemorate Jesus' birth. It is built on top of a cave where, according to a tradition first documented in the second century AD, Jesus was born. It was first dedicated in 339 AD.

The city itself has a long pre-Roman history documented first in the fourteenth century BC in the Amarna letters. Archaeological evidence from the Chalcolithic period, Bronze, and Iron Ages show that the earliest human presence was on the eastern slope of the city's central hill, and in the middle of the fields of Beit Sahour. It was probably here that the Iron Age city lay, but by the tenth to eighth centuries BC, the town was located on the high ridge of today's Bethlehem in the area of gardens around and east of today's Nativity Church. At this early period the caves beneath the church were still in use. By 700 BC, the town had lost some of its significance but became an important centre once more during the Hellenistic and Roman periods, when the construction of the Jerusalem aqueduct meant part of its water was diverted to the city.

Jesus' birth in Bethlehem at the end of Herod's reign determined the destiny of the town. Under Constantine, the first Christian emperor, the Church of the Nativity was built as one of three imperial churches in Palestine. At the end of the fourth century AD, Saint Jerome settled in Bethlehem and built two monasteries with the help of St. Paula. The Church was destroyed in 529 AD and was rebuilt on a much grander scale under Justinian, and this structure remains essentially the church that stands today. The city was depicted on the Madaba mosaic map in the 6th century AD.

The Church is the central feature of Bethlehem, and is surrounded by other important sites related to Christ's birth. Among these is the Milk Grotto, an irregular cave hewn in the soft limestone, located southeast of the basilica, where according to Christian traditions, Mother Mary nursed baby Jesus while hiding there from Herod's soldiers. The shepherds' fields, where the angel of the Lord is believed to have appeared before the shepherds bringing them the good tidings of the birth of Jesus, are roughly 2 km east of Bethlehem. There are two competing sites: one belonging to the Roman Catholics, and the other to the Greek Orthodox Church.

Bethlehem's old town is the place where a wide range of religious and

traditional activities take place. The Patriarch Route, which runs along Star Street, is the route of a religious parade, which passes through each year during Christmas celebrations. The Nativity Square hosts a grand celebration each year, marking the anniversary of the birth of Christ.

The Church of the Nativity

The oldest church in the Holy Land that is still in use, the original was constructed under the patronage of Constantine's mother, Helena, who came on a pilgrimage to Palestine in 325 AD to investigate the sites associated with the life of Jesus Christ, revered since the early days of Christianity.

Helena chose the Grotto of the Nativity, the traditional birthplace of Jesus, as the site for the huge basilica, which was completed in 339 AD. Inside the Church, two sets of stairs on either side of the main altar lead down into the grotto, the site where Jesus was born. A silver star embedded in white marble and bearing the Latin inscription 'Here of the Virgin Mary Christ was born' marks the site. In 2010 a Palestinian presidential committee was established to restore the roof of the church, in bad need of repairs. In 2012, the Nativity Church and the Pilgrimage Route were inscribed on the World Heritage List.



Milk Grotto

According to tradition, the Milk Grotto is where Mother Mary nursed baby Jesus while hiding from Herod's soldiers before going to Egypt. Located southeast of the Basilica, it is an irregular Grotto hewn out of soft white rock. It is believed that some drops of Mary's milk fell onto the rock, turning it white. Revered by Christians and Muslims, the milk-white rock is known for its healing powers and reputed ability to make nursing easier for women.



Saint Theodosius' Monastery

Built by Theodosius in 500 AD, the monastery is located west of the historic village of Ubediyeh, 12 km east of Bethlehem. A white-walled cave marks the burial site of Saint Theodosius, and tradition has it that the wise men rested here after God warned them in a dream that they should not return to Herod.

Mar Saba Monastery

Built into the rock overlooking the Kidron Valley, 15 km east of Bethlehem, this magnificent monastery is a spectacular sight when it first comes into view. It preserves a way of life unchanged since the time of Constantine, and maintains a tradition of not allowing women to enter. The great monastic leader Saint Saba (439-532) AD, the monastery's namesake, founded the site in the Byzantine period.

Masjid Bilal (Rachel's Tomb)

This small building marks the traditional Tomb of Rachel, Jacob's wife. It is considered holy to Christians, Muslims, and Jews. The present sanctuary and mosque were built during the Ottoman period and are situated on the Jerusalem-Hebron Road near Bethlehem's northern entrance.

Artas

A small village located in a fertile valley, 3km south of Bethlehem. The name Artas is derived from the Latin word hortus meaning Paradise, It was likely named for its lush plants and rich soil. The village is also home to many ruins, including a Crusader convent, the foundations of a Crusader church, a castle as well as several Roman, Byzantine, Islamic, and Crusader sites. Artas has a breath-taking view of the spectacular Convent of Hortus Conclusus (closed garden) and the surrounding hills with their terraced green fields.

Solomon's Pools

Hidden among pine trees in a small valley 4km south of Bethlehem, Solomon's Pools consist of three huge rectangular reservoirs of stone and masonry that can hold 160,000 cubic meters of water. Although tradition attributes these to King Solomon, the pools almost certainly date from the time of Herod, and may have been conceived by Pontius Pilate. In the past, the reservoirs collected spring and rainwater and pumped it to Bethlehem and Jerusalem. They continued to function until the time of the British Mandate.

Qalat Al-Burak, an Ottoman fortress dating back to the seventeenth century is located near the pools, built to protect their water sources.



Herodion (Jabal Al-Furdais)

Built in a circular shape on top of a hill 6km southeast of Bethlehem, this fortress includes the remains of a huge palace built by King Herod for his wife in 37 BC. The palace contained a luxurious, round-walled building, fortified chambers, baths, and terraced gardens. Herodion fort hill dominates the landscape of the area, and offers an impressive view of the Dead Sea from its peak.



King David's Wells (Biyar Daoud)

Located north of Bethlehem, David's Wells mark the site where David's men broke through a Philistine garrison to bring him water.

Beit Jala

This quaint town 2km west of Bethlehem is an old Canaanite city whose name in Aramaic means, 'grass carpet.' Today it is the home of a theological seminary and several old churches and convents, of which the Church of Saint Nicholas, with its square tower and golden dome, is the most famous. The Salesian Monastery of Cremisan, housing a school and a library, is at the edge of the town, and is reputed for its excellent wine. Beyond the Cremisan winery, Beit Jala is known for its first-rate olive oil.

Located up a steep hill, the town is cooler in the summers than either Bethlehem or Jerusalem, and coupled with its attractive scenery, made it a popular summer resort.

St. George's Church– Al-Khader

It was built in 1600 AD and rebuilt in 1912. The pilgrimage is in honour of Saint George (in Arabic al-Khader), the soldier monk who slew the dragon; he is venerated for being able to ward off the evil eye. Islamic tradition has it that he left his native Lydda, where he was born, and settled here in this village which bears his name. Muslims and Christians come together annually on St George's feast days

(5 May-6 May), to celebrate their common protector, to whom many different blessings are attributed. Saint George is also the patron saint of farmers, travellers and the mentally sick. According to a popular belief, lunatics were chained to a ring in the walls of the courtyard here in order for them to be delivered from their insanity due to the intervention of Saint George.

Beit Sahour

This historic town, whose name means "Place of the Night Watch", in reference to the Shepherds who keep watch over their flock by night, lies 1km east of Bethlehem. In the past, the Canaanites inhabited its numerous caves, and today it is the home of many churches and convents. Churches now mark the sites of Shepherds Field, the Field of Ruth and the Well of the Lady.

Shepherds' Fields

Located in the town of Beit Sahour 2 km east of Bethlehem, this is the site where the angel of the Lord is said to have appeared before shepherds bringing them good tidings of the birth of Jesus. Joined with a multitude of heavenly hosts, the angel sang 'Glory to God in the Highest and on Earth, Peace among men.'



Al-Baryiah:

The wilderness of the mountain desert, caves and monasteries.

The Al-Baryyah area is a semi-arid zone, with a mountainous desert habitat. Essentially a treeless, thin-soiled, arid and dramatically eroding limestone plateau, it is dissected by a valley (a wadi) draining towards the Dead Sea. It lies in the rain-shadow of the central highlands, and is classified as a hot area that receives very low annual rainfall (recently between 400 mm to 150 mm from west to east).

Its unique geological formation, bio-geographic location, and an abundance of water from flash floods and permanent springs, a natural diversity exists within this desert habitat that is rare, if not unique. Birdlife International calls the area one of the most important bird areas in the region, and one of the major migration routes for many bird species worldwide.

El-Baryyah is also rich in cultural heritage. Archaeological investigations have shown continuous occupation in different parts of it, extending from the Lower Palaeolithic period to modern times. Evidence of habitation in early prehistoric times (100,000- 10,000 BC) is particularly well-attested along the north side of Wadi Khareitun where three caves –Iraq Al-Ahmar, Umm Qala, and Umm Qatafa— once provided homes in a wooded landscape overlooking a river. Umm Qatafa, across the wadi opposite the Old Laura Monastery, is the site where the earliest evidence of domestic use of fire in Palestine was identified.

Throughout its history Al-Baryyah has been a place to take refuge, as Jesus himself experienced during his '40 days and 40 nights.' After the growth of Christianity, hermits began to inhabit caves in the area, and built a series of monasteries which subsequently formed a monastic centre. During the Islamic period, a series of shrines (maqams) were established in the area, including Khan al-Ahmar and Maqam an-Nabi Musa. These sites are important places on the Muslim pilgrimage route to Mecca.

JERICHO



Located 36 km east of Jerusalem, Jericho is on the road to Amman and at the junction of the highway to the Galilee. In Jericho is Tel As-Sultan, the ancient city of Jericho, which is the lowest (258 m below sea level) and the oldest town on earth, dating back more than 10,000 years. It grew up around a perennial spring, Ain As-Sultan, in an area of fertile alluvial soil which attracted hunter-gatherer groups to settle and start the process of plant and animal domestication. Ain As-Sultan is biblically known as Elisha's spring, where the prophet Elisha cleansed the water of Jericho. Jericho's moderate climate makes it a favourite winter resort, as it is always a number of degrees warmer than other parts of Palestine owing to its low elevation and the height of the surrounding mountains. It is an important agricultural area, producing fresh fruits, and vegetables year round. Jericho dates, bananas and citrus fruits are especially famous.

Tell As-Sultan (ancient Jericho), the Oldest City in the World

The site of Tell As-Sultan is located in the lower plain of the Jordan valley, approximately 10 km north of the Dead Sea. At a depth of 250 m below sea level, and with a history dating back to the Neolithic period, it is the lowest and the oldest town on the earth. The mound where the ruins of the town were found covers an area of about one acre.

The city of ancient Jericho was mentioned in historical sources, a recent find has the name appear on a scarab from the second millennia BC.

Successive excavations at the site uncovered its cultural history stretching 10 thousand years. The earliest remains belong to the Natufian culture (10th-8th millennia BC), and consist of flint tools, which attests to the presence of a hunting Natufian camp near the spring. The remains of the early Neolithic settlement are represented by a small settlement, with round houses built of mud brick and surrounded by a wall and a round tower, representing the earliest preserved piece of a fortification system.

Jericho played a major role in the early stages of Christianity. In the late Roman and Byzantine periods, the town was reduced to the area of modern Jericho. It was mentioned in several classical sources, including the sixth-century Madaba Mosaic map, where it was marked by the symbol of a church and a palm tree, along with the inscription, "Of St. Elisha." Archaeological excavations in the last century have revealed archaeological

remains from various sites in the historic core of modern Jericho which shed light on the history of Jericho during the Byzantine period. A considerable number of churches from the Byzantine period have been found in the vicinity of Jericho, including Tell Al-Hassan, the Coptic Church, the Greek Orthodox Church of Abuna Anthimos, and Khirbat En-Nitla. Byzantine remains, including a colourful mosaic floor, were uncovered in 1962. In 2010, during construction work of the Russian museum in Jericho, a salvage excavation was carried out in the area by a Palestinian-Russian expedition, under the direction of Dr. H. Taha and Dr. L.A. Beliaev. The expedition uncovered more architectural remains, including a mosaic floor, which was found during bulldozing work, and a series of buildings dating to early Roman, Byzantine Umayyad, Medieval, and Ottoman periods.

A series of rehabilitation work was carried out in the site by the Palestinian Department of Antiquities during the last decade, within the framework of cooperation with the University of Rome La Sapienza and UNESCO. The site continues to reveal information of some of the earliest civilizations on earth, as well as details about their ways of life and habitation.

Monastery of Temptation (Deir Quruntel)

The summit of the Mount of Temptation rises sharply 350 m above sea level, commanding a magnificent view of the Jordan Valley. The 30 to 40 caves on the eastern slopes of the mountain have been inhabited by monks and hermits since the early days of Christianity. It is the site where Jesus spent forty days and nights fasting and meditating during the temptation of Satan. A monastery was built in the sixth century over the cave where Christ stayed. The path leading to the monastery is very steep and difficult to climb, but is well worth the walk. Alternatively, a cable car scales the heights of the cliff, providing a spectacular view of the surrounding valley.

Hisham's Palace

Hisham's Palace is located on the northern bank of Wadi Nueima, 2 km north of Jericho in the Jordan Valley. It was identified as the ruins of Kh. Al-Mafjer. The site was built by Caliph Hisham bin Abed el-Malik who reigned between 724 to 743 AD. The site was used as a winter resort. The spectacular palace was destroyed in a severe earthquake in 749 AD.

The excavation was carried out by the Palestinian Department of Antiquities, between 1935 and 1946 under the direction of D. Baramki and R. Hamilton. The excavation uncovered a significant part of the palace complex. In 2006 excavation was carried out in the bath area, under the direction of H. Taha and between 2010 and 2013 a joint Palestinian-American expedition uncovered the north gate of the palace and remains of the Abbasid occupation in the northern part of the palace

The site is composed of a palace, a thermal bath complex, a mosque, and a monumental fountain within a perimeter wall that was never completed. The three first principal buildings were arranged along the west side of a common forecourt, with a pool covered with a pavilion in its center.

The palace was two stories with towers at the corners. The entrance to the palace was through a vaulted passage, lined with benches on both sides. It was planned around a central courtyard that was enclosed by four arcaded galleries. On the southern side a small mosque was found. In the western gallery of the central courtyard a stairway led to an antechamber paved with mosaics, which lead to an underground vaulted room, or sirdab, with benches and a mosaic floor. The common mosque is attached to the northern wall of the palace.

The large bath is located in the northern part of the palace. It consisted of a domed porch on the east, a great reception hall, a series of small bathing rooms and a latrine. The reception hall was paved with 38 colorful mosaics. In the southern part of the bath, a large swimming pool was found.

At the northwest corner of the reception hall is the diwan, a small guest

room, with benches along the walls. The floor of the diwan was paved with fine mosaics, depicting the scene of the tree of life. The palace was supplied with water through an open channel from the Ein Deuk and Ein Nueima springs at the foot of Mount Quruntul.

Following the transfer of authority to the Palestinian side in Jericho, a large restoration and rehabilitation program was carried out by the Palestinian Department of Antiquities at the site, in cooperation with UNESCO, the Italian Cooperation, ANERA and USAID. The archeological park now includes a modern interpretation centre, a mosaic laboratory, and a site museum, as well as a new bridge and access roads.

The Sycamore Tree and Russian Museum

The sycamore tree that Zacchaeus climbed so as to see Christ on his walk to Jerusalem has been housed since 2010 on the grounds of the Russian museum in Jericho. A salvage excavation was carried out on the lands of the building in June-September 2010 by a Palestinian-Russian expedition, the fruits of which are on display in the museum itself.

Just north of the Russian compound, remains of a mosaic floor appeared during bulldozing work. Excavation teams revealed a series of buildings, and mosaic pavements dating to the early Roman, Byzantine Umayyad, Medieval and Ottoman periods.

These, and ruins of Byzantine churches in the area are a testament to the major role Jericho played in the early stages of Christianity.

Ain Ad-Deuk Synagogue

The site of the Ain Ad-Deuk synagogue is located on the northern Bank of Wadi Nueima, northwest of Jericho. The site was exposed in 1918 by a shell fired by the Turks at the British in the area. Excavations in 1919 revealed a mosaic floor decorated with menorahs and Aramaic inscription.

The synagogue consists of a main hall, a narthex, and an adjoining courtyard surrounded by a wall. The entrance of the courtyard was to the north. The hall had a basilical plan and was divided by two rows of six columns into a nave and two aisles. The entire hall was paved with mosaics, while the narthex was paved with a white mosaic laid in black frame.

A series of conservation activities were carried out at the Synagogue by the Palestinian Authority Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage in 2002 and 2004 aiming to maintain the mosaic pavements.

Shahwan House Mosaic

In 1936 a synagogue was discovered north of Tell As-Sultan in what is today the house basement of the Shahwan family. The remains revealed a building with a rectangular plan, divided into a nave and two aisles by two rows of square pillars. The pavement of the building is of mosaic with stylized geometric and floral design. In 2008 a series of restorations were carried out, including the restoration of the mosaic pavement.

Tawaheen As-Sukkar (The Sugar Mills)

Located in the lower foothills of the Jordan Valley, the original function of the once industrial zone is preserved in the name of the site, 'the sugar mills.' The mills give visitors an opportunity to take a look at an industrial installation for manufacturing sugar that was part of the economic activity in the Jordan Valley during the medieval period.

The Jordan Valley's sugar cane cultivation and mills were mentioned in several early medieval sources, which described Jericho in 1225 AD as a city famous for sugar cane and dates. Three different components of the manufacturing process can be seen in the ruins of a water aqueduct, a courtyard, press, mill house, refinery, furnace, kitchen and a storage house.

These represent three parts of the process: a water system, refinery, and the agricultural land.

Sugar cane was planted and harvested on the land, then shredded, crushed, and pressed. It was later boiled, and the resulting crystallized sugar was removed from the containers. The mill was powered by water brought by aqueducts from the springs of Ain Nueima and Ain Deyuk at the north-eastern foot of Mount of Temptation.

Qumran

Located 15km south of Jericho on the western shore of the Dead Sea, this is the site where the famous Dead Sea Scrolls were found. A Palestinian shepherd looking for a stray goat made the discovery of the scrolls in 1947.

The scrolls consist of copies of biblical and apocryphal literature, the writings of the sect, including the Commentaries, the Rule of the Community, the Scroll of the War of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness, and the Damascus Document. The dates of these scrolls range from the second century BC to 68 AD, but mostly dated from the first century BC. The study of the scrolls developed into an academic discipline known as Qumranic studies. It provides us with valuable information about the history of Judaism and the early phase of Christianity.

Following the find, several excavations were carried out in the site and the surrounding caves. The excavated site revealed a large complex of buildings, including communal facilities, a sophisticated water system, a library, and a large cemetery.

Wadi Qelt and the Monastery of Saint George

Wadi Qelt is a natural rift with high, sheer rock walls extending 45 km through the hills between Jerusalem and Jericho. Hermits have inhabited the wadi since the third century. Today, it is a wonderful place for hiking, especially in the winter. The Monastery of Saint George, Deir Al-Qelt, is an impressive structure carved out of the rock of the cliff walls. Built in the fifth or sixth century, the monastery was destroyed during the Persian invasion of Palestine. Most of the present monastery dates back to a 1901 restoration done by the Greek Orthodox Church.

The Good Samaritan Inn

Located 10 km east of Jerusalem on the main road to Jericho, the Good Samaritan Inn (Al-Khan Al-Ahmar, literally 'The Red Inn') is a sixteenth-century structure that once served as a rest stop for travellers. Today, the inn is occupied by a souvenir shop and a Bedouin tent serving refreshments to tourists. On the other side of the road are the remains of Saint Euthymius Church, which was built in the fifth century to commemorate the biblical story of the Good Samaritan.

Maqam An-Nabi Musa

Nabi Musa is the Arabic name for the Prophet Moses, who is recognised as one of the most important prophets in Islam, as well as Christianity and Judaism. Maqam An-Nabi Musa has been the site of an annual pilgrimage since the time of Salah Ad-Din. Set in an awe-inspiring landscape 20 km east of Jerusalem, the shrine is a splendid example of medieval Islamic architecture. The shrine, mosque, minaret, and some of the rooms at the site were built in 1269, and successive additions were added in 1475.

The Jordan River

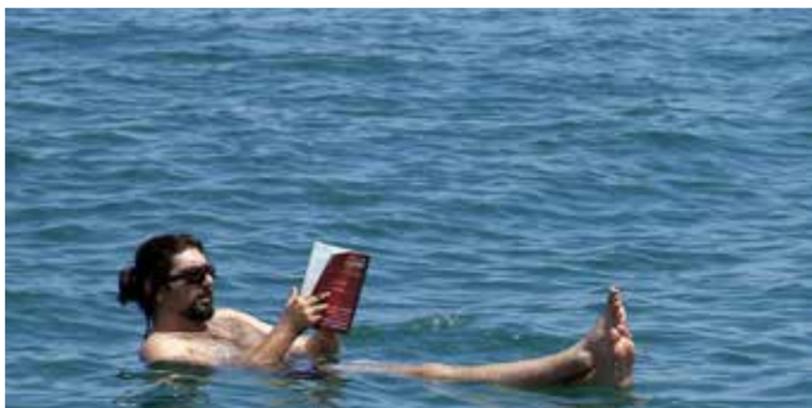
The Jordan River flows from Mount Hermon in Syria, about 3,000 feet above sea level, to the Dead Sea, which is 1,300 feet below sea level. The winding Jordan River, with an average width of 100 feet, covers a distance of only 65 miles as the crow flies. However, if it were stretched out, the riverbed would cover 160 miles end-to-end. Jesus was baptised by John in the Jordan River, and ever since, the river has been a holy site for Christians, with many pilgrims visiting the river every year to be baptised.



The Dead Sea

The Dead Sea, also known as the Salt Sea and the Sea of Lot, is a unique body of water in the Jordan Rift Valley. The Dead Sea is 85 km long and 17 km wide and covers an area of about 677 square km. It lies about 417 m below sea level, making the Dead Sea the lowest point on Earth. In addition, the Dead Sea is the world's saltiest large water body, with a salt concentration ten times higher than the Mediterranean. The earliest traces of nearby human habitation date back to the Chalcolithic period (approximately 4500 to 2500 BC). It was mentioned in the Bible and described by many Greek, Roman and Arab writers.

The entire basin is a spectacular landscape characterised by the abundance of a variety of ecosystems, including semitropical marshland, mudflats, wetlands, semi-desert, and arid desert. The diverse ecosystems surrounding the Dead Sea make this area an important site for biodiversity. It is home to some rare and threatened flora and fauna, such as the Lesser Kestrel. The Dead Sea basin is considered one of the main global bird migration routes, as well as an important bird habitat in the Middle East. Along with its ecological importance, the Dead Sea is rich minerals, attracting millions of visitors who wish to take advantage of the therapeutic qualities of its waters.



RAMALLAH

The Bride Of Palestine



Located 16 km north of Jerusalem, at an elevation of 900 m above sea level at the crest of the Hills. It is known as the “Bride of Palestine” for its general geographical beauty. Ramallah has a pleasant, cool climate and has long been a popular Summer resort. During the twelfth century, French Crusaders built a stronghold in Ramallah, and the remains of a Crusader tower, known as At-Tira, can still be seen in the old part of town.

Modern Ramallah has a lively town centre, museums, art galleries, theatres, parks, booming restaurant scene, and bustling nightlife, Ramallah is a fast-growing cosmopolitan town. It is also much serviced for visitor, with comfortable places to stay, some Palestine’s best restaurants, good transport and other tourism –related services, and hospitable, friendly people

Al-Bireh

Ramallah’s twin city, Al-Bireh, is located on the central ridge running through the mountain of central Palestine, and is 900m above sea level, its location served as a cross-border trade

between the north and south, along the caravan route between Jerusalem and Nablus. The name of Al -Bireh is derived from the Canaanite name Beeroth means “Water Well”. In Roman period named Berta means castle, during Crusader period a settlement was established on al Bireh, and was first known as Mahumeria then its name was changed to Magna Mahumeria means the worshipping. The Crusaders built a tower, administrative building (Curia) which was used as a Crusader headquarter, in addition to a church which was located at the center of the city.

According to Christian tradition, Joseph and Mary rested in Al-Bireh on their way from Jerusalem to Nazareth when they discovered that Jesus was missing. A Crusader church, known as the Church of the Holy Family, marks the spot where they stopped. The church of al-Bira is recorded in September 1128, when it and the other villages appurtenances were confirmed to Holy Sepulcher by Pope Honorius II. Around 1172 the Pilgrim Theodric recorded that the Church dedicated to St. Mary which belonged to the Templars, might have been converted in to a mosque in the Ayyubid period .By 1514 the vaulting had collapsed ,most walls were still recognized until the First World War. The church plan is a three –aisled basilica of four bays, measuring overall about 22 by 34/37 m .Its east end terminated in

to three semi-circular apses, the central one being preceded by a barrel-vault .2.10m deep. The walls were about 2.70m thick, on the inside they were faced throughout with smoothly dressed ashlar, and on the outside with rougher blocks. The main door was probably in the center of the west.

Beitin

Beitin is located approximately 14 km north of Jerusalem and 5 kilometres east of Ramallah. It is identified as ancient Beth El (House of God). The town of Beitin was mentioned in the classical sources as a city fortified by Bacchides, military commander of Ptolemy Soter of Egypt, and destroyed by Vespasian during the uprising against the Romans.

The site of Tell Beitin was excavated between 1934 and 1960 by W. F. Albright and J. L. Kelso on behalf of the American School of Oriental Research. The earliest remains date to the Bronze Age, around 2100 BC. The town was settled throughout the Iron Age and the Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, Arab, Mamluke, and late-Ottoman periods.

New archaeological surveys and excavations were carried out at Beitin by a joint Palestinian-Japanese expedition between 2011 and 2013, from the Palestinian Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, and Keio University, Japan, in cooperation with the local community of Beitin, under the direction of H. Taha and D. Sugimoto.

The expedition team conducted a general survey of the Beitin area, mapping out the main archaeological features, including the tell, the burj, the water system, and the cultural landscape. Burj Beitin is believed to be the site of a Byzantine monastery built of ashlar stones, and which is composed of an impressive triple gate, rooms paved with beautiful coloured mosaics, a two-story tower with a door, a central courtyard, and a cistern within a perimeter wall. The preserved parts of the mosaic floors are decorated with geometric and floral patterns, including bunches of grapes. The excavation in the western area next to the tower uncovered the western door of the tower and courtyards paved with flagstones from the first phase of its construction. The construction techniques and the materials showed that the tower was constructed during the Byzantine period (fourth century AD), and was renovated several times before the beginning of the Mamluk Period. The other important result of this excavation was the identification of the Mamluk town of Beitin. The village of Beitin is a living museum, with its rich archaeological and cultural resources. It has great potential for being developed as an important tourist attraction in Palestine.

Taybeh

The picturesque town of Taybeh is located 12km northeast of Ramallah, from its elevated spot it overlooks the desert wilderness, the Jordan Valley, Jericho, and the Dead Sea. Taybeh is also rich in history and culture. Ruins of a Byzantine church known as "Al Khader" (Saint George) are situated east of town. Still standing are two chapels, an entrance portico and stairway, parts of a mosaic floor, and its well-preserved baptistery. The church was rebuilt by the Crusaders during the 12th century. In 2010 the Department of Antiquities discovered a tomb dating back to Byzantine to early Islamic period. Restoration work was carried out in downtown of Taybeh, an annual October fest is held in the town.

Abud

The village of Abud is located 30km northwest of Jerusalem, lying on the principal Roman road via Gophna (Jifna) to Antipatris (Ras el-Ain). Archaeological surveys have revealed a long history of occupation, stretching from the Roman period to the present. Evidence of Roman, Byzantine, Crusader, Ayyubid, Mamluk and Ottoman occupation was attested in several sites of the village, such as the coloured rock-cut tombs

in el- Maqati', 2 km west. The site was identified with Casale Santa Maria of the Crusader period. Abud was mentioned in the Frankish sources (12th century) as the village of St. Mary sold by Baldwin of Mirabel to the Hospital in 1167. From 1176 the income from the village was devoted to the provisions of white bread for the sick in the Hospital in Jerusalem. In this period three Syriac monks from Abud are mentioned in the colophons of liturgical manuscripts. The first is Elias, who constructed the monastery of Deir el-Kaukab, between Abud and Deir Abu Mashal (Belfort), sometime after 1030; In the Late Medieval (14 century) Yaqut Al-Hamawi described Abud as a small village near Jerusalem. The village of Abud was mentioned in the Ottoman dafters in the late 16th century as part of the Ramla Nahiya. Later Abud was part of the Banei Zeid region.

A number of ruined churches dating to the Byzantine and early Medieval period were identified in and around the village of Abud, including Mar Abadiya church, St. Anastasia's Church, St. Barbara's church, St. Theodore's church and St. Mary church.

The church of St. Mary al-'Abudiyah

church is located in the centre of the old village. The church was dedicated to St. Mary, presumably during the Crusader period, when the village was renamed as Casale Santa Maria. An Aramaic inscription found on the vault of the south aisle indicates that it had been rebuilt during the Fatimid period, in "the 450th year of the Bedouins", which would bring us to the year 1058. The inscription mentions also the founder of the church. According to the popular religious tradition, Jesus Christ passed through this road to Nazareth avoiding the road via Samaria, because of the eminent hostility between Jews and Samaritans. The church is known for its miracles, and therefore occupies a distinguished position among the churches of Abud. It is visited by Christians of Palestine and Jordan, especially on the annual feast of the Virgin Mary, on August 28, for the blessings and making vows.

Nabi Samwil (Prophet Samuel)

Is situated on top of a mountain, 890m above sea level and 4 km north of Jerusalem. The village is traditionally held to contain the tomb of the prophet Samwil from which the village receives its name. It was built around a mosque with a minaret that offers an extensive view of the hills of Jerusalem. Its mosque acts as a prominent landmark. The site consists of a large turreted mosque and a cellar, which holds the cloth-covered tomb of Samuel. In Byzantine period a monastery was built at Nabi Samwil, serving as a hostel for Christian pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem. It was restored and enlarged during the reign of Justinian I in the mid-6th-century AD.

Al-Jib (Gibeon)

Is located at an altitude of 739m above sea level, a few kilometres north of Nabi Samwil, the picturesque village of Al-Jib is the site of the ancient Canaanite city of "Gibeon", meaning a hilltop, and it was mentioned by the Romans and Franks as Gabaon. Archaeological excavations confirmed this identification with the discovery of 56 jar handles inscribed with the Semitic trilateral gb'n. In the seventh century, Gibeon was a prosperous wine-producing city. Excavations in the area have uncovered sixty-three wine cellars, each capable of storing forty-two large barrels of wine. Other interesting finds include a well-preserved ancient water system. The ancient tell is a rocky hill situated in the midst of a beautiful, intensely cultivated plain, the site included an impressive ancient water system (twelfth- to eleventh-century BC) water pool and a cistern which have a spiral staircase of 79 steps cut in solid rock, giving access to a spring outside the walls. This system denied water to attackers while making it available to inhabitants under siege.

Tell Al-Nasbah

Located at the southern entrance of Al-Bireh, 14 kilometers northwest of Jerusalem, the site lies adjacent to ancient road way connecting Jerusalem to Nablus. Tell en-Nasbah was occupied in the Late Chalcolitic and Early Bronze I periods, when it was a relatively small village. After this time the site was virtually abandoned until the beginning of the Iron Age. During 9-8th centuries the site was reused as a walled settlement with massive gate. Archaeological excavations uncovered pottery, coins and other small finds which indicate that some settlement at the site into the Hellenistic Roman period was probably an agricultural estate, occupied by a watch tower, kilns, a few buildings and fields. The tell does not seem to have been occupied in later times, though Byzantine tombs were found in the extra-mural cemeteries and the floor of a Byzantine church near the west cemetery was uncovered

Birzeit

The town of Birzeit is located in the hills around 10 km north of Ramallah. It is identified as ancient Berzetho from the Greek-Roman period. It was first occupied in the Bronze Age as attested by the site Tell Ar-Ras, which is north of the town. It was continuously inhabited during the Iron Age and the Greek-Roman period, as indicated by archaeological evidence at a site known as Khirbet Birzeit. The buildings in the center of town were built during the Mamluk and Ottoman periods. Today, Birzeit is home to Birzeit University, the oldest university in Palestine, which was founded in 1924.



Birzeit University

Jifna

Located near Birzeit, Jifna is a small, scenic village that was once an important Roman-Byzantine city. Previously known as Gophna of Josephus, Jifna was the regional capital during the first century AD. Today, Jifna is a popular summer resort, offering a variety of outdoor restaurants, bars, and coffee shops.

Ein Kenya Nature Reserve

A beautiful nature reserve 7 km northwest of Ramallah, Ein Kenya is named after its natural springs. A variety of wild plants, birds, and animals make Ein Kenya a great place for picnics and hiking.

GAZA CITY



Located on the western Mediterranean seashore, 32 km north of the Egyptian border, Gaza City is considered one of the most ancient towns in the world. Strategically placed on the Mediterranean coastal route, ancient Gaza was a prosperous trade centre and a stop on the caravan route between Egypt and Syria.

Gaza was a major Philistine city in the early Iron Age, and the site of the Canaanite God of fertility, Dagon. Gaza City is mentioned a number of times in the Bible, especially as the place, where according to tradition, Samson brought down the Philistine temple. In 734 BC the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III captured Gaza and the city remained under Assyrian control until the middle of the seventh century BC. In the sixth century Gaza became an important royal fortress under the Babylonians. The city of Gaza flourished during the Hellenistic and Roman periods. It was mentioned by the ancient Greek writer Herodotus as Kadytis. In 332 BC, the city was captured by Alexander the Great after a long siege. During the Roman Period, Gaza became a major urban centre, with temples dedicated to Zeus, Aphrodite, Apollo and the major local deity Marnas. The city was expanded beyond the ancient settlement and the ancient port of Maiumas was established. During the Byzantine Period, the name of the city was changed to Constantia and a large church was built on the site of the temple of Marnas in the fifth century AD. The city was depicted on the Madab mosaic map from the sixth century as a large city with colonnaded streets and a large basilica in the centre. It was shown also on the mosaic floor of the church of St. Stephen at Umm Er-Rasas, from the eighth century. In 636, Gaza came under Islamic rule. It became famous as the burial place of Hashim, the grandfather of prophet Mohammed and as the birthplace of Al-Shafia. The church of John the Baptist was built on the site of the Eudoxiana. In 1187 the city was captured by Saladin and became part of the Ayyubid state. Gaza was a regional capital during the Mamluk period. In 1516 the city of Gaza fell to the Ottoman Empire and became the capital of the province of Palestine. It flourished during this period as a main trade centre and a station on the main trade route between Egypt, Palestine, and Arabia. Gaza was under British rule from 1918 to 1948, and to the Egyptian rule between 1948 and 1967, when it fell under Israeli occupation in 1967. Following the transfer of authority to the Palestinians in 1995, Gaza was again under the control of its people.

Today, Gaza City is the economic centre for a region where citrus fruits and other crops are grown. The city is famous for its hand-woven carpets, wicker furniture, and pottery. Famous also for its fresh seafood, Gaza has numerous restaurants along the beach as well as public parks where visitors can enjoy the pleasant Mediterranean breeze.

The Great Mosque

Located in downtown Gaza at the end of Omar Mukhtar Street, the Great Mosque or Al-Umari Mosque features a beautiful minaret. It was originally a Norman church built by the Crusaders in the twelfth century. It is said to occupy the site of the first ancient temple of Marnas.

Napoleon's Fort

Located on Al-Wahda Street in downtown Gaza, this imposing stone building dates back to the Mamluk period. It is known as Qasr Al-Basha (The Pasha's Palace) because Napoleon (referred to as the 'Pasha') spent a few nights here on his way through the town in 1799.

Saint Porphyry Church

This fourth century church is where Saint Porphyry died and was buried in 420 AD. It is located in the Gaza's Old City and is still used by the Greek Orthodox Community.

Al-Zaytun Quarter

Gaza's oldest quarter, Al-Zaytun contains many beautiful old homes with impressive carved wooden doorways. A Catholic and a Protestant Church are also located in this quarter.

Al-Daraj Quarter

This quarter in the Old City that features the Abdulhamid Public Fountain. This fountain was built in the sixteenth century and renovated by the Ottoman Sultan Abdulhamid in 1893.

Sayyed Hashem Mosque

Located in the Al-Daraj Quarter, the mosque is one of the biggest and most beautiful in Gaza. The tomb of the Prophet Muhammad's grandfather Hashem Bin Abdulmanaf, who died in Gaza during a trading voyage, is believed to be under the dome of the mosque.

Anthedon Port

Anthedon is the first known seaport of Gaza mentioned in Islamic literature along with Tida. The city was inhabited from 800 BC to 1100 AD, and witnessed a series of different cultures: Neo-Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Greek, Roman, Byzantine, and early Islamic (Umayyad, Abbasid, Tulunid, and Fatimid).

One km south of the seaport of Anthedon is the ancient harbour of Maiumas, which was once identified as the harbour of Gaza. It has been continuously populated and during the Roman period became a flourishing, well-developed coastal town. Maiumas, which is mentioned only in late classical sources, dates back to an earlier period when Gaza's trade with Greece began. Maiumas comes from an Egyptian word meaning 'maritime place.'



The archaeological site of ancient Anthedon has not been precisely identified. There are several heaps of ruins in various neighbourhoods of Gaza City, which have been considered to be the old harbour. However, the site of Anthedon is probably a hill located to the north of Gaza known to the locals as Tida. In the Middle Ages, Anthedon was known as Tida or Taida.

The present site consists of the ruins of a Roman temple and a section of a wall, as well as Roman artisan quarters and a series of villas. Mosaic floors, warehouses, and fortified structures were also found in the area. The site's archaeological remains date from the late Iron Age, as well as from the Persian, Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine periods. The excavated site is about five acres. It consists of a well-preserved 65-metre mud brick wall, which once surrounded the old commercial city centre. The massive walls stretch 30 metres eastwards at the extraordinary height of 8 m and thickness of 6 m.

Tell Um Amer

The first settlement on this site, Tell Umm Amer, was established during the Roman era in Wadi Gaza close to the seashore. It appears on the Madaba map under the name Tabatha and was inhabited from the Byzantine to the early Islamic period (400 to 670 AD). Tell Umm Amer was the birthplace of Saint Hilarion, who had received an excellent education in Alexandria, and had gone to Antonius in the desert for further instruction. He founded a monastery in the third century, and is considered as the founder of monastic life in Palestine. The monastery was destroyed in 614 AD.

The site contains the ruins of the monastery of Saint Hilarion, (born in 291 AD). It consists of two churches, a burial site, a baptism hall, a public cemetery, an audience hall, and several dining rooms. The monastery had many facilities, including water cisterns, clay ovens and drainage channels. Its floors were made of limestone, marble tiles, and coloured mosaics depicting plant and animal scenes. The floors also include a Greek inscription decorated with circular motifs. In addition, the monastery was equipped with large baths that could adequately serve the pilgrims and merchants travelling from Egypt to the Fertile Crescent through Via Maris.

Khan Yunis

Located 25 km south of Gaza City, Khan Yunis is a market town for the agricultural produce from local villages. It features a fortress built in the thirteenth century as a garrison for soldiers guarding pilgrims on their journey from Jerusalem to Mecca. The weekly market in the town centre is a fascinating picture of traditional life.

Rafah

Located on the southern tip of Gaza, Rafah is a beach town with sand dunes and date palms. This Canaanite town was called Rafia by the Greeks and the Romans, and some ancient mosques and archaeological sites, as well as a mosaic floor have been found there.

Deir Al-Balah

Well known for its beaches and palm trees, recent excavations of this southern Gaza town uncovered a cemetery dating back to the late Bronze Age, along with pottery, tombs, bronze pots, and a mosaic floor. Deir Al-Balah is also home to a monastery that was built by Saint Hilarion, (born in 291 AD).

Wadi Gaza

This wadi is distinct for its twists and turns. It has eight major curves in its path across the Gaza Strip. Its width varies, with its widest point near its mouth where it reaches about 100 m. Six smaller rivers feed into the main valley, the most important of which are Wadi Abu Qatroun to the north and Wadi Ghalbeh to the south.

The location of the Gaza Strip at the corner of the land bridge connecting the continents of Africa and Eurasia, makes it a bottleneck for migratory birds. Thousands of ducks, herons, storks, cranes, flamingos, waders, raptors, quails, passerines, and other birds have been reported to pass through Wadi Gaza. The most common endemic bird is the Palestinian sunbird (*Nectarinia osea*), which is found throughout the year at the Gaza Strip. Studies show that there is an urgent need to protect the Wadi Gaza as a wildlife habitat. The threats to the area are quite severe. Wadi Gaza faces many environmental problems. One of the most pressing problems is that it is used to collect sewage from refugee camps and as a solid waste dumping site.





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