

Welcome to Palestine

A Land of the Heart



By H.E. Rula Ma'ayah

A journey through Palestine offers visitors an encounter with myriad religious, historical, natural, and archaeological sites. The uniquely varied landscape is perfect for walks and hikes through the extensive valleys and desert hills, as well as along its coasts, through towns, ancient city marketplaces, and picturesque villages nestled in the heart of breathtaking landscapes. Visitors will enjoy Palestine's sumptuous cuisine and, most importantly, feel the warmth and hospitality of the Palestinian people, who will share the hopes and aspirations of a nation that is in the process of rebuilding. A million years of human history and generous hosts who offer courteous hospitality combine to give Palestine a hearty message of welcome to all visitors: Make yourself at home!

The last months have brought good news for the Palestinian tourism industry. Despite the difficult situations in the region, tourism in Palestine is booming. The first half of 2017 has witnessed an increase of 44 percent in the number of foreign visitors and 40 percent in overnight stays in Palestinian hotels, in comparison to the same period last year. This increase is a result of the recent marketing campaign that was conducted by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities.

On Friday, July 7, 2017, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Committee declared the old city of



Photo by Ala Badarneh.

Hebron a Palestinian world heritage site. It is the third site inscribed under Palestine since UNESCO recognized it as a member state in 2011, in addition to the old city of Jerusalem and its walls, which were inscribed in 1982. Hebron (in Arabic Al-Khalil) is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world. Founded nearly 6,000 years ago, it is sacred to the three monotheistic religions as the burial place of the prophets Ibrahim (Abraham), Isaac, Jacob, and their wives. The tombs are located in Al-Haram al-Ibrahimi (Abraham Mosque) in the old core of the city.

A key factor in the success of tourism in Palestine is sustainability, and thus, with the help and support of the international community, the Ministry has made tremendous strides in the rehabilitation of cultural heritage sites, such as Hisham's Palace and Nabi Musa in Jericho, and in opening tourist information offices and museums throughout the country.

The Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities is working toward developing the industry and encouraging investment in the tourism sector.

Millions of dollars have already been invested in developing tourism infrastructure, facilities, and services. Hotels have been upgraded, and recreational parks, resorts, restaurants, cultural centers, and transportation fleets have been among the key investment priorities over the past few months.

The Ministry is cooperating with the private sector to penetrate new markets and to create packages under innovative themes that include hiking trails to lesser-known sites in Palestine. A priority is the development of socially responsible tourism – creating better places for people to live and better places for people to visit. Through this initiative, the Ministry seeks to provide tourists with enhanced services, cultural activities, economic opportunities, and experiential tourism. The aim is to create an inviting environment for tourists to explore Palestinian cultural heritage and enjoy the beauty and diversity of the Palestinian landscape.

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