



Traditional Rug Weaving in Southern Hebron



We are huge fans of annual local markets that take place all over Palestine. We try to visit these markets not only because of the unique items we can purchase but also to meet Palestinian artists and crafts persons from every corner in Palestine. A few years ago, during the Birzeit annual market, we met an elderly woman from Hebron who introduced us to the traditional Palestinian art of rug weaving.

That memory stuck with us and we decided to visit the town that has been known as the cradle of this traditional art for over ten generations, dating all the way back to their Bedouin ancestors. We headed to Hebron and its southern villages and towns right at the southern borders of the West Bank. After a long drive and over 100 kilometers from the city of Ramallah, we arrived in the town of Al-Samou' and its cultural youth center in Al-Aqeelii Hosh.



The center is housed in a beautifully renovated complex of old homes that includes several rooms with arched doors. We followed the sounds of chatter, and in one room we found a mosaic of colors and textiles; colorful red rugs hung on the walls, rugs laid on tables around the room along with embroidered bags, jewelry, cushions, and shawls. In the center we saw two elderly Palestinian women wearing white satin headscarves and the traditional Palestinian *thob*. These women, Aysha Abu Awwad and Aysha al-Salamin, are the guardians and masters of the art of Palestinian rug making.

They took us into a large room with a fascinating makeshift *noll* machine, made of two long metal pipes connected to make a large rectangular frame. The process of making these intricate designs starts with the livestock, they said. One of the reasons Al-Samou' has been able to protect this craft is due to the abundance of wool made available from the livestock that people still raise. When livestock owners shear the wool, the women

dye and dry it until it's ready to be spun. Using a wooden spindle, the women spin the wool to make the threads that will be woven into all kinds of items, including the very famous rug or carpet.

As usual, we asked the women to teach us to weave the wool threads, but it was even trickier than we had imagined. They told us that they have been weaving wool for close to 50 years. This craft was passed on to them by their great grandmothers and now, their main goal is to pass it on to new generations to protect it from disappearance.

Handwoven rugs are not just a craft but a medium through which the people of Al-Samou' share their story and their Palestinian and Bedouin heritage. If you want to learn about the diversity within Palestinian culture, we recommend that you visit Al-Samou' and spend a day or two with its generous people. You will leave with more than just a beautiful traditional rug!

Malak Hasan and Bisan Alhajhasan are the founders of Ahlan Palestine, a travel blog that promotes tourism in Palestine. You can follow their visit to Al-Samou' and learn about this traditional art if you visit their Instagram page @AhlanPalestine.

