

Where to Go



Old Hebron Museum

By Jack Persekian



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Palestine Hotel, an iconic building in the old town of Hebron that exemplifies the architectural style of the early twentieth century, has recently been transformed into a museum that aims to present the history, culture, and daily life of Hebron's old town to its visitors and the public. Until the mid-1960s, the building served as a hotel and then was used as a shoe factory until 2000.

Since the outbreak of the second Intifada in 2000, it was abandoned due to the unstable security situation, particularly in Hebron's Old Town – that since 2017 has been inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. In 2018, UNESCO's Ramallah Office and Hebron Rehabilitation Committee (HRC), with generous funding from Sweden, initiated a partnership to rehabilitate the Palestine Hotel that now has become the Old Hebron Museum.



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Despite the challenging environment, the Old Hebron Museum provides a unique experience as it contextualizes Palestinian daily life in the face of the Israeli occupation and settler transgressions and provides an overview of the city's history, the holy site of the Ibrahimi Mosque, the traditional crafts, the geopolitical situation in the Old Town, and the work of the HRC. Exhibits include old and new photographs, videos, and tangible objects. Its rich information could precede a tour of the Old Town, where part of the exhibited elements can be seen and experienced. Furthermore, the museum building itself is part of the exhibition, and visitors can discover spaces preserved from the once vibrant hotel and the shoe factory.

The history of Al-Khalil, as its Palestinian inhabitants call Hebron, reaches back more than six thousand years, as evident from basalt tools, pottery kilns and fire stoves from the Chalcolithic period found in local caves. This location features very prominently, as it is home to Prophet Abraham's final resting place and thus revered by the world's three monotheistic religions. Moreover, the city is one of the few Arab Islamic cities that have retained their historic architectural heritage and



is unique as one of the few perfectly preserved Mamluk cities in the Middle East, at least on the ground level in the old city.

As one of the most important Palestinian industrial and commercial centers, Hebron houses many traditional handicrafts. Here, visitors can observe the manufacture of glassware and pottery, Hebron's furniture is sold throughout Palestine, and shoes made in Al-Khalil are valued throughout the Middle East for their fine quality. Thus, the city has in recent years contributed more than 40 percent of the Palestinian GDP.

Yet, in this place, the Israeli occupation and the aggression of its settler community are exposed in their ugliest form, flagrantly visible right in front of the museum building in the Shallala area. Many streets have closed down their shops and are covered by mesh that holds the garbage thrown out of the windows on a regular basis by settlers living above.

In this environment, the Old Hebron Museum stands as a beacon of knowledge and information for anyone trying to understand the history and context of this atypical city that is marred by in-your-face apartheid.

The museum is open from 8:00 to 15:00, Sunday through Thursday. For more information, please call 02 229 1790.

For a virtual tour of the museum (made possible through the support of UNESCO), please visit <https://youtu.be/QEIZ7hMK3S8>.

