



By Malak Hasan

Overnight in Sebastiya

Sleep amongst the Ruins of Palestine's
Second-Iron-Age Capital



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e know that many of you have visited Sebastiya. You probably arrived during the day, headed directly to see the ancient ruins, visited the Mosque of Prophet Yahya and the Church of Saint John, took a few photos, and then headed to your next destination. Well, we chose to write about this place because we believe that there is an even better way to experience it.

For those who have never been to Sebastiya and do not know this place, we'll provide a little background information. Sebastiya is located ten kilometers northwest of Nablus at the junction of two main historical routes, the northern Nablus-Jenin route and the western route from the Jordan Valley to the Mediterranean coast. What is now a small town surrounded by long stretches of farmland was a regional capital during the Second Iron Age and a major urban center during the Hellenistic-Roman period.*

Sebastiya is considered to be one of the oldest continuously inhabited places in Palestine and has a long history that is revealed in its ancient ruins, including the Roman mausoleum, the columns street, the basilica, and the temple of Augustus, to name just a few of its historical discoveries. The present town of Sebastiya is one of Palestine's major tourist attractions and it deserves to be experienced in depth and with intention. Therefore, we put together the following tips for those who would like to truly experience Sebastiya.

Our first tip is to sleep in Sebastiya. The town has several options for overnight stays, but we chose Al Kayed Palace Guesthouse, which is a newly renovated

Ottoman-era stone complex. Not only can you rent a room with your family and friends, but you can also pre-order your dinner and breakfast, which is prepared in the palace's kitchen that is run by local Palestinian women. We gathered a group of our friends and planned an *oud* evening with a local Palestinian musician. It was the perfect way to unwind and be ready for a day dedicated solely to exploring Sebastiya.

Our second tip is to wake up early and watch the sunrise from the highest point in Sebastiya, which you can reach by walking all the way to the top of the historical site. Don't forget to bring coffee, tea, or whatever you fancy in the morning because you will most probably choose to stay there for a while. As the sun rises, you will start to see the amazing landscapes that surround this beautiful town and maybe weave tales about those who once called this place home.

Our third tip is to hire a local guide to lead you through the ancient city. We have visited Sebastiya multiple times, and each time our friends who work as local tour guides have made our visits much richer and more valuable by not only giving us historical information but also sharing with us insights about their lives and struggles to safeguard Sebastiya.

Private Sector and Social Responsibility

Our fourth and last tip is to not be afraid to socialize with the locals. Many Palestinians can communicate in English, and they are always eager to meet new people from different cultures. Take this opportunity to ask questions, learn about the local culture, and of course do not forget to buy a souvenir or two from the local merchants because for many in Sebastiya, tourism is their entire livelihood and your support would ensure their survival.

Malak Hasan and Bisan Alhajhasan are the founders of Ahlan Palestine, a travel blog that promotes tourism in Palestine. You can get more travel inspiration and tips on Palestine if you follow their Instagram page @ AhlanPalestine.

*Sebastiya (travelpalestine.ps)

For a virtual tour of what you can expect when visiting Sebastiya, please take a look at these videos, courtesy of LionHeart: *Sabastiya - Flythrough the trees* (<https://youtu.be/UfQFGpUYiRs>) and *Sabastiya_side* (<https://youtu.be/l8D07cW90Dg>).



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