



By Malak Hasan

Make Colorful Traditional Tiles in Palestine's Only Tile Factory



This Is Sumud

Making a stop in Nablus is a must for any tourist visiting Palestine. Nestled in a valley between Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal, Nablus is a city whose name is rooted in history. And while we appreciate Nablus's rich history and how it has become synonymous with *kanafa* (a traditional dessert made with white cheese), we think this city has many hidden jewels that deserve to be highlighted as well, including its one and only Aslan Tile Factory.

Established in the 1930s, the Aslan Tile Factory is the last factory in the Middle East that produces handmade colored tiles the traditional way. For four generations, the Aslan family has been protecting the craft from completely disappearing.

The factory is a ten-minute walk from Nablus's Old City. The Aslan family are used to welcoming tourists all the time, given their reputation and unique craft. You cannot miss the factory with its entrance covered with colorful tiles that you can spot from the end of the street.

When you enter the factory, you will most likely get to see the three generations currently guarding the craft. Jalal Aslan, the grandfather; Anan, the son; and Jalal, the grandson.

Colored traditional tile was very popular from the early 1930s until the late 1970s, but Palestinians started to find cheaper options in machine-made tile. It is now seeing a strong comeback. Tiles produced in the Nablus factory come in different colors and designs and are inspired by the Levantine and Palestinian cultures. The designs have the most romantic names, too, such as Vine Leaves and Shami Carpet. Customers can choose from among the factory's 750 designs for their homes and businesses.

As usual, we couldn't simply stand by and watch Anan and Jalal make tiles without trying it ourselves. Anan instructed us to fit a piece of metal in the shape of a frame called the "bracelet" over a metal plate. In the mold that we had just assembled, we fitted the copper design and started pouring the colors into each hole.

Once we poured our colors, we took out the copper design and dusted a four-centimeter layer of white, crushed stone and cement. After we filled the mold, we covered it with another metal plate and pressed it in a pressing machine.

We were eager to take our tile home with us, but Anan told us that freshly pressed tiles need to be left to dry for 36 hours. We promised him that we would return.

As for you, our beloved readers, we highly recommend that you stop by the Aslan Tile Factory to buy a piece or two to take home with you. And if you have no space in your luggage, then maybe just stop to say hello and watch the mesmerizing process of making Palestine's fascinating tiles.



Malak and Bisan are the founders of Ahlan Palestine, a travel blog that promotes tourism in Palestine. You can watch them create traditional tile and much more if you visit their Instagram page @AhlanPalestine.