

Palestine: A Unique Tourism Destination



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Palestine is a land rich in religious sites, diverse natural beauty, culture, and the hospitality of its people. It is the land where pilgrimage tourism started almost 2,000 years ago, when pilgrims began to come to Palestine to walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. But besides pilgrimage, Palestine offers many other kinds of tourism, among them cultural tourism, one of the fastest developing tourism trends in Palestine. Cultural tourism, according to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (WTO), “is a type of tourism activity in which the visitor’s essential motivation is to learn, discover, experience and consume the tangible and intangible cultural attractions / products in a tourism destination.” According to WTO statistics, cultural tourism accounts for 37 percent of global tourism, and it is expected to continue to grow by 15 percent annually. Within the Palestinian context, cultural tourism reflects the country’s rich history, the unique Palestinian narrative, handicrafts, folklore, art, traditions, cuisine, and tangible and intangible heritage. Cultural tourism is of great importance for Palestine. In addition to its positive economic and social impact, it establishes and reinforces Palestinian identity, reflects the true image of Palestine and the Palestinians, helps preserve cultural heritage, and builds harmony and greater understanding between Palestinians and visitors from other nations and cultures. The Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA) is making great efforts to engage the local community, Palestinian tourism initiatives, and the private sector in cultural tourism activities

and in the preservation and conservation of Palestinian cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, to better develop cultural tourism.

The MoTA strategy is to restore as many historical and archaeological sites as possible and to open them to visitors. In November 2021, the ministry launched one of the most ambitious cultural heritage projects of the last 20 years, uncovering the marvelous mosaic of Hisham’s Palace and preserving it under an innovative dome shelter. Other important sites are on the list of planned projects, and it is hoped that the international community will offer its support. The ministry provides support to the private sector, the entities involved in experiential tourism initiatives, and, above all, to those who offer community-based packages.

In addition to registering the “Old City of Jerusalem and Its Walls” as UNESCO World Heritage in 1981, the State of Palestine was able to register the “Birthplace of Jesus Christ: Church of the Nativity and Pilgrimage Route, Bethlehem” in 2012, and “Palestine, Land of Olives and Vines: Cultural Landscape of South Jerusalem, Battir” in 2014. In 2017, “Hebron/AI Khalil Old Town” was added to the list as well.

We call upon all Palestinian tourism stakeholders to create new tourism products that reflect the richness of Palestinian culture and give tourists and pilgrims alike the opportunity to explore Palestinian culture through firsthand experience and contact with the local people.

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