



Cultural Tourism at Dar al-Kalima University

Courtesy of Dar al-Kalima University



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remaining committed to ethical tourism practices and authentic, culturally rooted endeavors.

In addition, Dar al-Kalima University is credited with creating one of the first training programs for Palestinian guides that adopts a holistic approach to tourism. The exceptional tourism itineraries proposed by Dar al-Kalima's Authentic Tourism Program could not be carried out without a competent cadre of qualified professional Palestinian guides, which the industry lacked until the mid-1990s. As such, the training program was created in

1997 to qualify Palestinian guides, especially women, with a new approach to guiding, combining the historical, religious, and cultural contexts of Palestine.

Dar al-Kalima did not stop there! It developed and received the accreditation of its culinary arts program in 2010 and began training chefs for Palestinian restaurants and hotels. Dar al-Kalima University has similarly established both the first bachelor of arts in sustainable cultural tourism and the first master of arts in the management of cultural institutions in Palestine. These

Dar al-Kalima University culinary students.



Dar al-Kalima University has just launched its newest initiative called Palestine Food Stories. It is the latest of its cultural tourism undertakings that integrates its guiding, culinary, and tourism departments, the result of which is a unique form of touristic experience. The program is twofold, in that it offers culinary, guiding, and tourism-related educational opportunities to locals and unique culinary tourism experiences to internationals. At a time when the Israelis are appropriating Palestinian culture, including culinary culture, it is more important than ever to assert the Palestinian authentic culture and heritage. Palestine Food Stories will contribute to a healthy local economy as it partakes in the development of a sustainable and more diversified tourism sector while sharing Palestinian food with visitors and the tourist population.

As the only university with a focus on arts and culture in Palestine, Dar al-Kalima's history with cultural tourism is extensive. It is credited with creating the first-of-its-kind initiative in Palestine, known as the Authentic Tourism Program, which changed the landscape of tourism. It was a groundbreaking concept in Palestine in that it offered an integrated approach to visiting Palestine. International groups were not only exposed to the land in its original Biblical context, but they also explored the current realities, experienced the mosaic of living cultures, and encountered the people of this unique place to hear their personal narratives. The Authentic Tourism Program was internationally recognized for its efforts by receiving the TODO!96 Award for Socially Responsible Tourism at the International Tourism Exchange in Berlin, Germany in 1997. Dar al-Kalima University, known back then as the International Center of Bethlehem, was the first organization in the Middle East ever to receive such a prestigious award. The Authentic Tourism Program continues to be a strong and innovative initiative that has offered life-changing experiences to hundreds of visiting groups from many countries while



Palestinian-European encounter at Dar al-Kalima University.



Dr. Mitri Raheb, president of Dar al-Kalima University, receiving the TODO!96 Award.

programs aim to educate the next generation of leaders of institutions such as art galleries, museums, archaeological sites, and even music festivals.

Individuals and groups who participate in Palestine Food Stories will have the chance to explore Palestine through the lens of cuisine. They will meet Palestinian farmers in the Jordan Valley who will share the challenges they face in growing their organic crops. They will tour expansive Palestinian wineries and experience delicious wine tastings. They will take cooking classes and learn how to make hummus and *makloubeh*. They will participate in olive harvesting and plant new trees. They will learn about the variety of spices in the region and how they are utilized in cooking. They will visit vegetable markets and see the rainbow of fresh produce. They will take home Palestinian recipes and

share them with their friends. They will learn about the Biblical meals that are still consumed today. In getting to know the people and the local foods, participants will have an intimate encounter with the rich culture of Palestine.

Traditional tourist activities can prove bland when culture is described rather than experienced. By offering internationals a sample of local Palestinian cuisine from trained partners, Palestine Food Stories has the potential to educate and engage people from every corner of the world. The hope is that this newly established initiative will seed further innovative tourism programs for Palestine that celebrate and affirm Palestinian culture, heritage, and history.

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