Palestine Tourism Sector

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Introduction

The tourism sector in Palestine is of significant importance to the Palestinian economy, due to its developing capacity and comparative advantage, and a combined variety of religious, historical and natural sites that formulate an attractive package to tourists with different backgrounds and varying interests. Considering the current economic situation in Palestine and the limitations imposed by the Israeli government, the performance of the tourism sector has been underperformed and unsatisfactory.

The Tourism sector consists of an instant source of capital inflow, which can spur economic recovery and valuable foreign exchange revenues. The latter should cover part of international aid on which the Palestinian economy is almost dependent. Therefore, development of tourism will empower the Palestinian government in the progress of a viable Palestinian economy and thus strengthen the Palestinian private and public bodies influencing the performance of the sector. Consequently, the empowerment of the main actors will weaken the consequences of the Israeli Occupation, as an external direct actor, and will reduce any losses made as a result of its restrictions.

Through Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis, this study examines the current capacity of the Palestinian government; the effect of the governmental policies on the tourism sector; the current performance of the private sector and the main obstacles that negatively affect processes and efforts for improvement. In addition, the negative consequences of the belligerent occupation on tourism are addressed, as Israel's illegal measures are constantly escalating, preventing the development of the sector by imposing Israeli policies and - illegal measures throughout Palestine.

Furthermore, the main tourism types are highlighted and evaluation of the sector's performance is made, taking into consideration the domestic visitors as well as foreign visitors. Finally, recommendations are presented based on the SWOT analysis. The analysis was necessary to comprehensively assess the sector's performance. Also, the analysis indicates that the sector's weaknesses and threats must be addressed based on joint efforts carried by the Palestinian private and public sectors. All information provided in this study was extracted from various documents, studies and articles (see annex 1 and annex 4) and through focus group meetings with several key experts in the tourism field. (See annex 2).

Although the tourism sector is currently underperformed, as a consequence of either external limitations imposed by the Israeli government or internal obstacles including the lack of a clarified promotional strategy and weaknesses in the financial capacity, the sector's contribution to Palestine’s GDP is estimated to be 14%.

The sector's performance lies in the availability of different types of offered touristic activities. The main types of tourism that currently exist are the following:
The architectural and historical heritage: Besides the universally well-known architectural, religious and historical heritage of East Jerusalem, i.e. the Dome of the Rock / Temple Mount and the Holy Sepulchre, and the ones of Bethlehem with the Church of the Nativity, there are other enchanting sites nearby Nablus (Sebaste), Hebron (Cave of Patriarchs), Jericho and many others.

Religious tourism. This area is considered an essential destination for religious tourist from all over the world; therefore specific programs must be developed to guide religious tourism flow in the area of Bethlehem as well as in East Jerusalem and other related areas.

Artistic craftsmanship. Artistic craftsmanship is an integral part of the Palestinians’ cultural identity, as a cultural heritage. Armenian ceramics, olive wood sculptures, blown glass, artistic weaving, and the olive oil soaps, all are culturally important products that can attract the attention of foreign consumers, also at competitive prices.

Local cuisine. This includes the traditional mezes, salads or grilled meat. There are other dishes from the traditional cuisine that are lamb and chicken based, and excellent sweets, which often do not find space in the more commercial restaurants, yet which should be appropriately utilized and brought to people’s awareness.

Environment: There are some striking landscape areas that could be strengthened and developed. At this point, there are some on-going initiatives aimed at fostering the rural tourism.

Population. There is also the aspect of human relations: Opportunities can be created for contact with the daily life of the population, outside of the traditional tourist itineraries. An organization can be envisaged of specific opportunities for meetings at universities or cultural centres, and also on the occasion of local feast days, etc., at least for the more sophisticated and culturally evolved type of tourism.

Business Tourism. As a result of the rapid development and political changes in Palestine, the international delegations and donor projects have formed a new type of tourism in Palestine through the frequent visits to Palestine for business meetings and supervising projects under implementation.

Major Touristic Cities:

The most updated information on the major cities and archaeological sites in Palestine, are available on the Official site of Tourism in Palestine. The site is
made and updated by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA). The following information is taken from the official website of MoTA (see Annex 4). The major cities include:

**Jerusalem:** known as the holy city, with an estimated age of 4500. Jerusalem includes several Christian and Islamic sites, including the Dome of the Rock, Al Aqsa Mosque, Church of St. Anne and the Pools of Bethesda, Via Dolorosa, Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the Mosque of Omar among others. The aforementioned sites combined with the beautiful nature of Jerusalem, attract tourists from all over the world especially during holidays. (More details in annex 4)

**Bethlehem:** is a host to thousands of tourists each year mainly because it houses the Church of Nativity at Manger square built over the cave, which is the birthplace of Jesus Christ, many sacred Christian sites, churches, and monasteries are located in the city including the Church of St. Catherine, (Milk Grotto; The Old City; Dar Mansour; Shepherds Field; St. Theodosius Monastery; St. Saba Monastery) (further details in annex 4)

**Jericho:** The city of Palms and the oldest city in the world. According to the official site for tourism in Palestine, "Travel Palestine" 2013, Jericho is considered a most attractive Palestinian city with the highest number of tourists. The main sites visited in the governorate of Jericho include The Dead Sea; Ein es-Sultan; The Jericho Mosaic Centre; Tell es-Sultan; Mount of Temptation; St. George Monastery and Wadi Qelt and Deir Hajla

**Nablus:** Known for its industrial and trade center that is surrounded by many important archaeological sites. Nablus is known around the world for its exquisite olives, olive oil, and olive-wood products, and most importantly, it is the center of natural olive oil soap, which is espoused all over the world. Nablus is also the largest Palestinian city, including very interesting sites and areas such as the old city, roman city ruins, olive oil soap factory and the old baths. (See annex 4)

**Ramallah and Al Bireh:** Ramallah and Al Bireh have moderate and pleasant temperature and climate making them attractive in the summer, especially for the refreshing breeze at night during summer. The cities host dance and folklore festivals throughout the summer. Ramallah is very well serviced for visitors, and is known for its nightlife, with comfortable hotels and motels, restaurants, good transport and other tourism-related services. Whilst El-Bireh was first built by the Canaanites. It is known as a center of learning and for its political and cultural activities. Both cities include important archaeological sites (see annex 4).

**Jenin and the North:** The Garden Spring, located in the northern part of Palestine, Jenin is the ancient En-gannim of the Bible and is the same village referred to as Ginaea. The Romans were the first to name the city of Jenin in the sixth century. The name was derived from Ein Ganim, meaning the spring of Ganim and referring to the region’s plentiful springs. Attractions include a Byzantine Church.
Northern Region

Zababdeh: Zababdeh is built over the site of a Byzantine village. A beautiful mosaic of a sixth century church, which can be found at the convent of the Rosary Sisters, as well as a Roman building, known as boubariya. (Travel Palestine 2013).

Qalqilya: has its roots and origins in the Canaanite era. The city witnessed Roman time and the European medieval era. It contains a big stadium, where national competitions are held. It also includes the only zoo in Palestine and other entertaining activities for children such as electric cars.

Tulkarem: Tulkarem was settled by the Canaanites, the Romans and the Ottomans. The Tulkarem Archaeological Museum, which is located in the center of the town, includes numerous artifacts from the Roman period onward. The city includes many historical places, the Tomb of Jacob's Daughter and the Roman Press in Irtah.

Umm Al-Rihan Forest: northwest of Jenin. According to the MoTA. "The site is the main and the biggest natural forest remaining in the West Bank that represents the Mediterranean bio-geographical ecosystem". It is a natural reserve that is rich in resources including wild original species of wheat, fruit trees and barley, and is also a host for thousands of migratory birds yearly.

Hebron (Al Khalil): As one of the oldest cities in the world, many believe that the city was inhabited by Adam and Eve after their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Historically speaking, the city includes many archeological sites as it was also inhabited by the Canaanites. Hebron include religious sites in the city center, such as the Abraham Mosque, which houses the tombs of the Patriarchs. According to the MoTA " Hebron is known for its lush grape vineyards, pottery, glassware, leatherworks, and other inventive arts. Lively, colorful, and creative are the most common words used by tourists to describe this city." (See annex 4)

Gaza: Gaza is the coastal part of Palestine, known as the gateway to Asia, as it has been a trading port for many years. Towns such as Khan Younis and Deir Balah, have unique historical and cultural sites. Despite the unstable political situation, Gaza is rich in cultural and archeological treasures, famous for beaches and seafood. Gaza was conquered by Alexander The Great and later ruled by the Romans, and then the Islamic Empire followed by the Ottomans and the British, a beautifully landscaped British war cemetery can be found in the city. According to the MoTA, there are many attraction sites in Gaza, including the Byzantine ruins and tombs that have recently been excavated in the northern part of Gaza. Another site that is interesting to see is a design gallery, including the Arts and Crafts Village, inspired by the Islamic architecture, and exhibitions of modern art made by national and international artists.
SWOT Analysis:

The aforementioned information indicates the growth potential that can be achieved in the tourism sector in Palestine, by utilizing the available resources and types of tourism. Nevertheless, the current tourism performance implies that there is a need for a SWOT analysis, to study the influential actors' effects on the sector, in addition to identifying the responsible bodies for developing and promoting the different types of tourism in Palestine.

Strengths:

Religious Destination

The strengths of the tourism sector in Palestine are directly related to being known worldwide as the “Holy Land”. The Holy land refers to the religious and historical importance that overshadows any other tourism activity in Palestine. Palestine embraces a large number of historical, cultural, touristic and religious sites that enrich the tourist experience. In other words, Palestine is considered the center-point of the three monotheistic religions, which highlights the large potential market that can be targeted for attraction of tourists.

Fast Recovery

According to the Palestinian government, the Palestinian Ministry of Tourism’s (National Development Plan 2011 - 2013), several years after the second intifada, the tourism sector witnessed a rapid recovery that reached 1.3 million visitors in 2008, 2.6 million in 2009, and 4.6 million in 2010. In 2010, approximately 577,000 guests stayed at hotels throughout the Palestinian territory, staying on average more than 2 days. This significant recovery presents the uniqueness of Palestine, as a tourism destination that recovers quickly and attracts visitors shortly after political stability is achieved.

The presence of an existing large number of tourists that come to Palestine is a source of strength, since it is an indicator that Palestine is already known to potential tourists. According to the Diagnostic study conducted by Paltrade in 2013, 3.5 million visits to touristic sites in Palestine were made between January and August 2012 whereby the percentage of tourists per visiting countries indicated that 3% of the visitors come from Germany and Indonesia, 5% from the United States, Poland and Italy, 12% from Russia, while the highest percentage remains for visits by Palestinians living in Israel (35%). The current sector performance and the diversification in the visitors’ nationalities present an important strength that can be built on any future plan for developing the sector.

Sector Development

With reference to the expansion of the sector, it is worth mentioning that between 2000 and 2009, the private sector has invested approximately 300 million
dollars in the tourism sector either through upgrading hotels, establishing new hotels or opening new restaurants, resorts and recreational parks\(^1\). Number of the hotel and motel rooms significantly increased between 2001 and 2011. This increase, therefore, indicates that the investment in the sector is motivated by the increase of touristic activities in Palestine and thus the availability of hotels and motels that can accommodate the constantly increasing number of foreign and domestic visitors. (Figure no.1)

**Political & Business aspects**

The expansion in the tourism sector can also be attributed to the increase in demand by business and political tourists between 2001 and 2011, whereby political and business delegations visits to Palestine have increased. Moreover, even though the political environment has affected the tourism in Palestine, but it also contributed to increasing the number of solidarity visits to Palestine, resulting in a higher demand for rooms in hotels, guesthouses and motels in Palestine.

**Figure no.1: growth of number of Hotel rooms in Palestine\(^2\)**

Furthermore, the hotel and motel local distribution in Palestine also indicates the main areas that attract tourism investment. Based on the current hotels and motels distribution in Palestine, the middle and southern cities of the West bank along with Jerusalem contain more than 80% of the existing accommodation facilities with a capacity of 4807 rooms and more than 10 thousands beds, while northern cities of the West Bank and Gaza (7.8% and 11.6% respectively) comprise the remaining 20% with 721 rooms and more than 1400 beds.

The hotel indicators show the significant investment that Palestine has witnessed in the recent years, with the number of rooms doubled since 1996 and

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\(^2\) Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics – 2012 – growth of the tourism sector – number of hotel rooms
number of hotels increased by approximately 30%. Furthermore, the current
distribution present that hotels exist in areas that contains religious and historical
sites including the following:

- The hotel distribution indicates that cities attracting foreign visitors have
the largest investment share of hotels.

- Targeting the domestic market is very minimal

According to PCBS 2010 Tourism Activities report, the number of entities
operating in the tourism sector has exceeded 4700 entities with labor force of
36000 employee. Approximately 60% of these entities work in the restaurants
sub-sector and absorb 53% of the tourism labor force (approximately 18,500
employee) and 28% of the entities works in the handicraft and souvenir industries
and absorbs 22.9% of the tourism labor force. Even though the hotel entities
consist of only 1.7% of the total entities in the sector, it employs 13% of the sector
total labor force. This is a strength that is indicated through the fact that the sector
has absorptive capacity for creating employment. The following table shows the
number of employees in the Palestinian territory in relation to tourism activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ISIC</th>
<th>Tourism Activity</th>
<th>Compensation of Paid Employees</th>
<th>Paid Employees</th>
<th>Unpaid Employment</th>
<th>No. of Employed Persons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16292</td>
<td>Manufacture of wooden antiques</td>
<td>1992.70</td>
<td>23.20</td>
<td>351.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47736</td>
<td>Retail sale of souvenirs, craftwork and religious articles</td>
<td>12699.10</td>
<td>2390.30</td>
<td>1975.00</td>
<td>520.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55101</td>
<td>Short term accommodation activities</td>
<td>17518.60</td>
<td>3302.50</td>
<td>1628.00</td>
<td>289.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56101</td>
<td>Restaurants</td>
<td>16452.30</td>
<td>130.10</td>
<td>3147.00</td>
<td>35.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49221</td>
<td>Passenger road transport by scheduled long-distance bus services</td>
<td>1957.50</td>
<td>18.20</td>
<td>277.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77101</td>
<td>Renting and operational leasing of passenger cars (without drivers)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79110</td>
<td>Travel agency activities</td>
<td>3369.60</td>
<td>1815.80</td>
<td>242.00</td>
<td>139.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79902</td>
<td>Provision of visitor assistance services</td>
<td>305.50</td>
<td>98.20</td>
<td>86.00</td>
<td>35.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79122</td>
<td>Haj and omra operator activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>54295.3</td>
<td>7778.30</td>
<td>7706.0</td>
<td>1029.0</td>
<td>6121.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Weaknesses

Clearly, several actors negatively influence the performance of the sector. The main obstacles to the sector’s development are the Israeli policies in Palestine; the Palestinian capacity (Public and Private sector) reflected in the current financial capacity, rules and regulations; the capacity to cope with any increase in demand and the ability to promote Palestine tourism both domestically and internationally.

Weaknesses in reaching the foreign tourists and Palestine Image in Foreign propaganda and media

The main sources that present the extent of safety in Palestine and highly influence the type of tourism and number of foreign visits to Palestine are public and private sources. These include:

- Public Forums - Experience.
- Foreign Governmental agencies (embassies, Consulates).
- Palestinian Private companies. (Visit Palestine, This Week in Palestine)
- Palestinian Government. (Ministry of Tourism).

These resources shape the image of Palestine and provide different guides on tourist sites and insights on tourism activities in Palestine. However, they do not necessarily shape a unified perception on tourism in Palestine, due to different political beliefs and different agendas. This section examines the image of Palestine in foreign media, the unfair perception of Palestine and the consequential weaknesses in the tourism sector.

The most important tool to reach foreign visitors is to present them with an attractive image through various methods including the Internet, cultural events in other countries, workshops and art. Palestine has a unique history and an outstanding cultural heritage but it stands in a complex political situation that distorts its image and makes it vulnerable to foreign criticizing and false assumptions. Unfortunately, the common image of Palestine shared among tourists around the world is false. However, similar to any country in the world, with regard to tourism, it is evaluated based on safety and reputation. Unfortunately, Palestine is constantly under changing political sphere and operates under an unstable economy. Due to the latter, foreign propaganda presents that Palestine does not guarantee safety to foreign visitors and tourists. Thus, Palestine's reputation is based on the assumption shared among foreign media, that it is a conflict area with high safety risks. Also, adding the financial and human resources shortages of the Palestinian, private and public tourism institutions, the preferential guides for tourists on tourism in Palestine are not Palestinian sources. However, the case changes, once tourists visit Palestine and have a personal tourist experience, they start to make use of Palestinian resources...
and the difference between foreign and local media becomes fairly understood. The Palestinian sources become distinct and more reliable. The most popular and top two Palestinian sources are Visit Palestine and This Week in Palestine. Both sources give a legitimate clarification about tourism in Palestine, and prove the efforts made by many Palestinian institutions in creating and encouraging a positive image of tourism in Palestine.

The most used research method for touristic and attraction sites is the internet, which refers to foreign and local media, newsletters, political news and advices made by embassies and consulates to tourists in Palestine. Despite the efforts made by tourism agencies and responsible bodies for the promotion of tourism in Palestine, the foreign media creates a distorted image of Palestine. Also, tourists use reference that their governments' agencies abroad and embassies in Israel provide on tourism in Palestine. Thus, tourists conclude that they found the most reliable information, since its referenced by the government.

Foreign government usually provides their citizens with security and safety measures that must be acknowledged before departure to Palestine. Thus, before conducting visits, the tourists perception of safety and history of cultural sites in Palestine, is aggregated from foreign sources and is shaped mostly by foreign media, whereas Palestinian sources are taken as secondary.

As shown below, there are two examples of foreign countries, including the USA and Canada that illustrates warning type of messages targeting foreign tourists visiting Palestine. The message clearly differentiates between Palestinian territory and Israel. Thus, affecting tourism activities in Palestine and implicitly encouraging tourists to remain in Israeli territory.

Not surprising that visits to Gaza strip are not advised by the Canadian Embassy, also it is not even mentioned in the message provided by the American Embassy. These messages indicate that foreign countries do not advice or encourage tourism in Gaza at all, thus preventing any possible foreign investment or foreign visits to Gaza, despite the fact that Gaza lies on the coastal part of Palestine, with beaches and hotels. These types of messages highly alter any promotional efforts made by Palestinian tourism agencies.

Example number one: USA Embassy advises to its citizens:

"The American Embassy: “The Department of State urges U.S. citizens to exercise caution when traveling to the West Bank. Demonstrations and violent incidents can occur without warning, and rocks, Molotov cocktails, and gunfire on West Bank roads regularly target vehicles. U.S. citizens can be caught in the middle of potentially dangerous situations, and some U.S. citizens involved in political demonstrations in the West Bank have sustained serious injuries.”"

Example (2): The Canadian embassy advises to its citizens:


Weaknesses in reaching the Arab tourists:

While there are relatively a large number of tourists from EU and USA, the situation is different regarding Arabs, including Muslims and Christians from Arabian countries. Data shows that Arabs visits to Palestine compromises only 3% of total tourism in Palestine.

The latter partially results as a consequence of the Israeli occupation. The occupation restrictions and Israeli foreign relations with other countries, highly defining and decide what groups and of which nationalities have access to occupied Palestine. For instance crossing border to Palestine need Israeli visa, which is in many cases very difficult to obtain by Arab visitors; several Arab governments prohibits/discourage its citizens to visit Palestine because of the complex and undefined borders with Israel; two examples are Syria and Lebanon.

On the other hand, a large percentage of the Arabs refuse to visit Palestine because of the Israeli occupation as they consider it a form of normalization. For instance, the main Islamic site (i.e. Aqsa mosque) is under the Israeli control; the latter discourage and limit the promotional activities by the Palestinian side (government and private sector) due the aforementioned political consideration.
Weaknesses in reaching the Domestic visitors:

Locally, the tourism sector is reaching less than half of the Palestinian population. According to Palestinian Center Bureau of Statistics in the table below (no.1). Palestinians residing in Palestine make up 37.8% of total tourism in Palestine. Moreover, the Palestinian territory average households expenditure in Domestic Trips is 51$ with $20.6 of their total budget spent on food and drinks, and $16.9 on telecommunication and transportation. The low expenditure level on accommodation ($1.1) is related to several reasons. Most trips conducted are a one-day trip with no activities conducted with possibility of a need for accommodation. The low expenditure level on accommodation, present a margin of improvement that can be found if the hotels and tourism agents started introducing offers targeting domestic markets.

Table no.1: percentage of Palestinian families conducting tourism trips based on region - PCBS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conducting Domestic Trips</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Palestinian Territory</td>
<td>West Bank</td>
<td>North of West Bank</td>
<td>Middle of West Bank</td>
<td>South of West Bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducted</td>
<td>37.8</td>
<td>34.2</td>
<td>41.3</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>34.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Conducted</td>
<td>62.2</td>
<td>65.8</td>
<td>58.7</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>65.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Moreover, through the Percentage of Households that Travelled for Domestic Trips by Destination of the Trip and Region in 2010, Table (no.2), the data clearly shows that the travelled distance is a deciding factor for the domestic tourism.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Destination of the Trip</th>
<th>Palestinian Territory</th>
<th>West Bank</th>
<th>North of West Bank</th>
<th>Middle of West Bank</th>
<th>South of West Bank</th>
<th>Gaza Strip</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jenin</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tulkarm</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nablus</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qalqilya</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramallah and Al-Bireh</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jericho and Al-Aghwar</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>38.8</td>
<td>33.8</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaza</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>33.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North of Gaza</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khan Yunis</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>38.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Governorates</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*According to PCBs, and due to the sample size and results, Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Hebron were all included in other governorates.

**Weaknesses in ensuring free movement and access to touristic areas.**

On the local level, the underperformance of the domestic tourism is due to the difficulties faced by the Palestinian citizens in moving across cities and reaching a large number of sites, because some touristic sites are located in areas that Israel placed under its full control and the Palestinian tourism companies face difficulties to reach.

According to Paris Protocol,

"Tourist buses or any other form of tourist transport authorized by either side, and operated by companies registered and licensed by it, will be allowed to enter and proceed on their tour within the area under the jurisdiction of the other side, provided that such buses or other vehicles conform with the EEC technical specifications [I. currently adopted.] All such vehicles will be clearly marked as tourist vehicles." Article X, 4
Based on the mentioned article, the Tourist busses from the Palestinian side, which is granted a license by the Palestinian authority, must be allowed to enter and have tours in areas under Israeli control. Moreover, according to (Article X, 6), the Palestinian tourism companies and agents must have access to tourism related facility equally to the one enjoyed by the Israeli companies and agents.

Due to the constant violation of Paris protocol by the Israeli government, the limitations in movement and access for the Palestinian tourism agents, buses and guides have resulted in strengthening the tourism package offered by the Israeli companies and hence a higher preference by the foreign visitor to the Israeli companies.

It is also extremely important to consider the impediments to free access of movement of tourists across Palestine, especially to Gaza strip, because the impediments have prevented Palestinian government and police from reaching areas that are of high touristic value and potential for development. Also, the latter proves that the weakness in the Palestinian tourism sector is partially a result of the Palestinian institutional weakness and also the lack of sovereignty by the Palestinian government, and thus the inability to reach touristic areas for the protection of tourists and the administration and implementation of the rule of law.

*Weaknesses in the infrastructure, human resources, public-private sector relations:*

The tourism nature is rich in religious historical sites and unique in natural features such as the Dead Sea and other cultural and heritage sites and activities. Palestine generally is rich in landscape and wildlife. However, the weaknesses to develop tourism include a lack of a clear national tourism development strategy; a lack of resources, financial and human, to manage, develop and promote Palestinian destinations. In addition to insufficient data to conduct reliable planning; run down tourism infrastructure and limited diversification in tourism offering.

In addition, the tourist sector is very far below its potential. Many foreign tourists stay in Jericho for examples, just for one day and visit a few cultural sites. Internal tourism uses holiday houses, so that income related to hospitality is low. There is a lack of high quality services and facilities for tourists, like a proper market for the selling of typical local products (cheese, dates, etc.); and the handicraft sector is not developed. There still a narrow vision of tourism, without connections to the different key attractions and with other sector such as agriculture.

Currently, the approach to heritage is that cultural heritage is listed in official sources as having monumental value, not including rural heritage or urban frameworks, and there is no effective mechanism for the protection of cultural heritage of the study area and the archeological sites. More specifically, mud...
houses in Jericho and other cities still are considered as “outdated” buildings and thus are generally abandoned.

Moreover, Palestinians and stakeholders do not seem to have adequate awareness of the advantages found in the cultural heritage and what it can offer to local development plans and the local economy. Thus, it is important to shape a common interest in the preservation and development of the cultural and archeological sites located in Palestine.

The Regulations on heritage sites are often weakly motivated. The latter negatively affect the urban development dynamics. The pressure of big development projects, the constructions of new buildings even in very sensitive areas (for instance along wadis) are really putting in danger local cultural heritage. At the same time environmental problems, like uncollected garbage and littering, irregular tourism and the overuse of water resources that can cause a loss in biodiversity, will seriously affect the landscape.
Opportunities

Regardless of the current factors that play a role in the failure of the sector to reach its potential, the Palestinian tourism sector has a wide margin on both local and international level for improvement.

**Opportunity for new tourism activities to be offered:**

Expansion of the Tourism activities will decrease the sector vulnerability and dependence on the seasonal holidays such as Christmas and eastern holidays and hence decrease the liquidity problems which is faced by the sector in the off season period.

There were attempts by several local and international sponsored camps to integrate activities other than visiting religious and cultural sites which either aim for more entertaining experience or/and to show the current existing situation and the struggle between the Palestinian people and Israeli occupation.

As it was mentioned, the Palestinian indicators of domestic trips are considerably low in relation to both the percentage of households doing trips and the expenditure level per household. These two main indicators present an opportunity for expansion and economic benefit by the entities working in the sector by improving the tourism packages and offering activities.

**Opportunities to attract Arabs, including Muslims and Christians, from Arab countries:**

It is well known that Muslims go to Mecca for Hajj, with an estimated 1.7 million visitor\(^5\) arriving in Saudi Arabia in 2012 (Hajj period only). One of the main opportunities for the tourism sector in Palestine consist of the need of the Muslims conducting the Hajj rites to visit the Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem as a complimentary part for their Hajj, which could open the potential for millions of visitors to Palestine per year.

Additionally, an activity that will attract foreign visitors could be promotion of the experience of Bed and Breakfast, which is able to compensate at least in part for the lack of bed places in hotels, motels and guest houses and to ensure a significant additional income for the local population and to provide opportunities for closer contact with them, this experience is preferred by foreigners because it is much cheaper than hotels. To this regard, it is important to consider that during the celebrations of Bethlehem 2000, many houses in the village of Beit Sahur were organized to be used as B&B. Moreover, the emotional importance of Palestine to the Islamic and Arab world is considered an advantage in attracting a large number of visitors as part of knowing Palestine in addition to

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\(^5\) Hajj Survey Results - Ministry of Economy and Planning
showing support to the Palestinian cause. This opportunity was realized in the past couple of years by the Palestinian authority and it can be presented in Rula Ma’ay’a, the Minister of Tourism, statement: “Visiting Palestine is not a form of normalization with the jailer, but an empathy with the prisoner.”

And hence, attracting the Arab and Islamic tourists, for different types of tourism, will have a major impact on the Palestinian tourism sector since it will guarantee that the financial and economic benefits will mainly be gained by Palestinian businesses, and consequently, changing the current situation whereby the Palestinian economy only benefits from 5-7% of tourism's economic value, while the rest of benefits goes to Israel.

**Opportunities in Investments:**

Despite the expansion of investments made in the last ten years, tourism requires a development in the infrastructure and in the operating entities. On the other hand, any increase in demand in the Palestinian sector requires a significant improvement in the sector capacities. According to the Palestinian experts; the current sector capacity is sufficient considering the current obligations.

The Following table presents the current tourism sector with all inventories currently existing in the sector that can be accessed/reached by foreign visitors. According to several experts, it will not be sufficient in case of a dramatic increase in demand such as the ability of citizens from Arab countries to enter Palestine, an increase of the number of visitors who stay in Palestine overnight or even an increase of the market share of the Palestinian tour guides.

**Table no.3: Palestine Tourism Inventory 2012 (West Bank, Gaza and E. Jerusalem)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Palestine Tourism Inventory 2012 (West Bank, Gaza and E. Jerusalem)</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Jerusalem</th>
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<th>Gaza</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Accommodation</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hotels</td>
<td>93</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rooms</td>
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<td>Guest Houses</td>
<td>70</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rooms</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Tour operations</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Licensed T.O</td>
<td>43</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Agents</td>
<td>20</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Any opportunity can be driven by the announcement of Palestine as a state at the UN. The fact that Palestine is a member state of the UNESCO opens doors for foreign investors and tourists. For many years, main touristic sites were neglected, however, under the current situation, development projects are planned in many areas, including the Jordan Valley, due to its cultural heritage importance and the availability of it as a golden opportunity to utilize its resources for tourism and having Palestine as the sole beneficiary. The UNESCO laws provide wide range of protection for cultural heritage sites and for unique touristic areas. Being a state wave the way for the proper application and implementation of international principles and laws and thus place Palestinian touristic areas under the supervision of international bodies that, at least, are showing solidarity with the Palestinian cause and the importance of investing in Palestine, the mother of the main three religions of the world.

Business Tourism

In recent years Business tourism has been growing in Palestine and it is one of the main driving force behind the latest investment which can be proven by the number of halls and conference rooms that currently exists. With a stability in the political situation and considering the development projects that is expected to take place in Palestine (donors and private sector), the business tourism can play a major role in the tourism sector.

Competitive prices:

As a comparison between the services provided in Palestine and Israel, it was clear that the Palestinian service providers in the tourism sector have lower prices which can be one of the major factors to built on it if Palestine image concerning safety and stability improved.
Threats

 Israeli occupation impact on Palestinian Tourism:

 Israeli measures in holy places and throughout occupied Palestine explicitly target religious and cultural heritage, including damaging and demolition of mosques and ancient sites. Constant military incursions and unilateral measures taken in occupied Palestine, severely damage tourism through creating threats to any developments or investments in the sector. For example

 Threats to the Development of the tourism sector:

 The development of the tourism sector is the responsibility of the Palestinian private and public sectors, however, the Israeli limitations highly limit the sovereignty of the Palestinian government in many areas and thus affecting the governmental performance regarding improving and supervising the sector and mainly by closing roads, placing random checkpoints and through military power prevent any Palestinians from accessing certain areas that have potential for development and tourism growth. Consequently, the Palestinian (private & public sector) is unable to access many touristic places and sites for infrastructure development or sites development, due to the fact that significant number of the locations and sites in Palestine are in areas which are controlled by the Israeli military (area C), according to Oslo II - (Article XI), area C is supposed to be transferred to be under Palestinian authority control but in the redeployment phase, but since the peace agreement was freeze due to the Israeli policies, the transformation never happened and hence a permit should be granted from the Israeli military administration to the Palestinian government to implement any development activities, which as a result limits the development progress and weaken the management ability of Palestinian government.

 Discouraging investment environment

 Any development in the tourism sector must be backed by financial investment either provided by the government or the private sector and aside from the physical impediments affecting access to inputs, supply chains, and markets which already reduce the sector ability to perform, the uncertainty in the short and long term future has increased the risk level and hence discourage local and/or international investments to establish large and long term commitments.
High unemployment and "brain drain":

Due to the limited investment in the tourism sector, the rate of job creation in comparison to the supply of labor in the market has resulted in a high rate of unemployment and hence the Palestinian society is witnessing “brain Drain” with many youth seeking work abroad.

The brain drain can be also attributed to the Palestinian workers being easily tempted by the high income that can be earned in the same job level in other countries. According to the head of the Tourism department in Bethlehem University, 50% of the graduates travel to work abroad every year.

The Christians of the Holy Land as a disappearing community:

The Israeli policies has resulted in a significant migration of Palestinians to Europe, US and Latin America in search of better living conditions which is threatening to transform Palestine from a vibrant land with prosperous Christian community to a museum that only contains religious sites without an existing culture.
Government Strategy and main tourism institutions

Since the government is the main actor in shaping tourism policies and driving its development, studying the current performance of the tourism sector and conducting SWOT analysis are not sufficient. To complete the study, it is significantly important to view and assess the government strategy for utilizing and identifying the right tools for the sector's development. Additionally, the main institutions and agencies responsible of the implementation of the national policy are identified.

⇒ Palestinian National Strategy

The 2011 - 2013 national strategy indicates that the Palestinian Government (represented by the Ministry of Tourism and culture) jointly with the private sector has identified the needs of the sector in developing the infrastructure, improving Palestine tourism reputation locally and internationally and developing the private sector to form a strategic partner for the government. These needs were translated to strategic activities that consist of:

- Institutional reform
- Promotion of tourism & private sector development
- Rehabilitation and conservation of heritage sites
- Developing museums

According to budget, promotion of tourism & private sector development budget for 2011, 2012 and 2013, is approximately 5m, 10m and 13m dollars respectively, although it is a relatively low budget (when compared to other countries or the needs of the sector), the budget indicates that infrastructure is the governmental priority as three out of the four strategic activities target infrastructure development.

Looking at the national strategy, and considering the tourism sector contribution which is estimated to be 14% of the total GDP, the total budget dedicated to the development of sector ($8.7m in 2011, $17.8m in 2012 and $22.9m in 2013) is considered low when compared to other sectors, such as the manufacturing sector and agriculture. Both have an average of 28.6% and 44.6% of the total budget of the development of the economic sector while the tourism sector average share is 12.3%. Moreover, the development budget for the sector consists of 1.5% of the total dedicated development budget of the Palestinian government.

Moreover, considering the unstable situation in the previous years and the unique circumstances in Palestine, the economic development in general and the
tourism sector in specific remain in third place after governance development (e.g. justice and security,) and social development (e.g. Health and education) and hence any development initiatives for the tourism sector must be done through the private sector since the government efforts are politically and financially more limited.

⇒ Government approach

Due to the unstable political situation and the deficit in the government budget, the limited budget dedicated to the tourism sector was not received and hence most of the goals set were not achieved.

The national strategy goals were not achieved due to the financial restrictions limitations and to the unwillingness of the Israeli government to cooperate with the Palestinian government to improve the tourism sector in Palestine. Accordingly, the national strategy was replaced by an alternative plan. According to the former minister of tourism, the focus become on internal issues that aim at improving the performance of the sector, such as the organizational capacity (private and public sector); improve the relation between the private and public sector institutions through establishing the Tourism board, setting requirements and standards to be followed by all service providers (tourism agents, transportation companies, hotels... etc.) along with other issues.

Although the government approach, had significantly contributed in maintaining the sector and reducing the decline that resulted from the economic situation and political instability in Palestine, The government was unable to duplicate the approach on a strategic long term level that take into consideration the Israeli challenges and the development goals of tourism in Palestine.

Moreover, according to tourism experts working in Palestine, the data used in Palestine is either taken from PCBS or from the tourism police and it lacks the accuracy and can only serve as an indicator. Hence any future planning and policy development should also consider the improvement of the data collection and analysis process as it forms an obstacle for planning by the government and private sector

⇒ The Main Tourism institutions/ agencies

The National strategy approach is reflected in many tourism institutions and agencies work and policies, both in public and private sectors. Regardless of the efforts made by the main actors influencing the tourism sector it is surely important to have a unified vision of the sector's development to ensure progress and to have a unified plan to face the existing challenges, how to promote opportunities and plan joint successful projects. The following are the main tourism institutions that influence the decision making process of the tourism policies in Palestine:
• **Palestinian Ministry of Tourism and Culture:** the Public Sector institution specialized in all issues related to Tourism in Palestine, in addition it is the main institution responsible for implementing the Palestinian government national strategy related to tourism.

• **The Arab Hotel Association:** The Arab Hotel Association (AHA) is non-profit, officially registered organization representing Palestinian hotels throughout the Holy Land and assisting other related tourism associations in Palestine.

• **The Holy Land Incoming Tour Operations:** The Holy Land Incoming Tour Operators Association was established in the summer of 2005. HLITOA compromises 43 member Tour Operators working in the (Inbound) incoming tourism. The HLITOA members are the main source of tourism in general and pilgrimage in specific.

• **The Tourism Board:** serves the tourism industry, both the public and private sectors, as they are working on strategizing their efforts toward achieving the ultimate goal of a developed, sound Palestinian tourism environment. The tourism board for a public-private partnership aims at ensuring that both sides are working coherently through implementing a common strategy.

• **Municipalities and chambers:** presenting the local authority and governmental bodies in every Palestinian city, community and village. The municipalities and chambers have a large influence on the performance and activity implementation in relation to tourism.
Challenges

The previous sections indicate the willingness of the government to develop the sector through its National Development Strategy, on the other hand, the tourism institutions and agencies exist to serve the sector and work toward its development through various campaigns, events, activities and many more tasks to create an attracting tourism environment in all over Palestine. Nevertheless, challenges to the sector, including the Israeli occupation, the weaknesses in institutional legal framework and challenges facing the private sector, all create new facts on the ground and alter the purpose of the developmental projects, converting the purpose of development to survival of the sector, rather than reviving it. Thus, before deciding recommendations for the development of the tourism sector, it is necessary to identify the challenges that face the Palestinian institutions responsible for carrying the developmental plans.

- The main reason for the tourism sector not reaching its potential is Israel's unilateral control of the borders and the method of controlling the entrance of visitors and indirectly preventing Arab pilgrims, through various policies, from visiting Palestine and hence preventing an expected 4 million visitors yearly only to al Aqsa mosque as part of el Hajj rites.

- Limiting the Palestinian tourists guides from working in Israel by not granting licenses either under security claims or through administrative requirements which are hard to obtain by Palestinian guides, thus pushing the tourists groups to choose Israeli tourists guides for both locations under Israeli control and locations in Palestine. Currently only 40 of the 300 west banker guides are allowed to work in Israel.

- The full control of the Israeli tourism agencies has limited the time spent by the foreign visitors in Palestinian locations and sites, the latter significantly minimize the economic benefit.

- Negative Israeli campaign worldwide resulted in branding Palestine as unsafe place to visit and hence reducing the number of visitors to Palestine

- Issuing entry visa by the Israeli government, limits the number of visitors to only areas under Israeli government control.

⇒ Challenges that face current infrastructure, Policy and Legal Framework

- The current legal framework needs significant updates that offer protection to the sector, tourists and touristic sites, and guarantee fair competition.

- Unfortunately, negligence of the sector is presented in the government policy and strategy, due to lack of dedicated resources for the development of the sector.
• Weak coordination between the private and public sector to enhance the efforts to develop the sector and address the gaps in policies and laws.

• Lack of a marketing strategy that serves as promotional strategy promoting Palestine to potential visitors and counter the current marketing campaign led by the Israeli government which significantly affects the tourism sector in Palestine

• The current physical infrastructure needs to be developed further and improved to attract and accommodate potential increase in the number of visitors

• The current institutional capacity is weak and hence the data and information about the sector and its needs are very limited

⇒ Challenges that affect the Private Sector's performance:
• Lack of awareness by the Palestinian private sector on new methods and strategies that can be used to attract more visitors

• Lack of financial resources to develop the current capacity and provide more services

• Lack of human resources and staff qualified to develop and manage strategies aimed at strengthening tourism. Lack of the private sectors' to many potential sites and thus the challenge to implement any strategies for development.
Recommendations:

Finally, the preceding study of the current Tourism sector and the identification of the influential actors and the challenges they face was used in order to create a viable and implementable set of recommendations. The following are the major recommendations which are considered as an important requirements to the sector development:

1. Considering the previous Government budget dedicated to the Tourism sector, and the current legal and policies which doesn’t give any favorable conditions to the institutions working in the sector, the Palestinian Government in its new expected Plan (2014 – 2016) should consider the tourism sector as one of the most important economic sectors, that should be reflected in setting new policies as well as dedicating more fund for the development of this sector.

2. Jointly, the Palestinian government and Private sector should consider all possible political channels such as International organizations (Quartet, Kerry team), Business – to – Business, Private sector institutions (PALTRADE – Pares Center) and/or government political negotiations as a platform to advocate the removal of all impediments (ex: movement and access problems) imposed by the Israeli Occupation impact negatively the performance of the sector

3. The Palestinian government with full coordination and cooperation with the Private sector must focus on creating a marketing strategy for Palestine that target specific markets/countries based on certain criteria that will have a stronger impact on the sector

4. Advocate and encourage the Palestinian government to use diplomatic relations and pressure to encourage Arab and Islamic governments to change their policies and to consider to facilitate their citizens visiting Palestine as a support to the Palestinian cause and not an act of normalization with the occupier.

5. Currently, the relation between the private and public sector is considered weak and dependent on individual efforts, which resulted in several policies, by the government that had negative impact on the sector. One of the main tasks will be strengthening the cooperation between the Public and Private sector through Institutionalizing Private Public Partnership by reviving the ministerial committee led by the prime minister to be the counter part to the private sector coordination council in all policy issues related to the private sector needs and requirements through public
private dialogue which gives the private sector a bigger role in the policy making process

6. Since Palestine main competitive edge in tourism consists of the large numbers of historical and cultural sites, all working institutions in the sector must be responsible for further developing the Historical and Religious sites in addition to promoting it not only on the local level, but regionally and internationally. The development plan for the sites should include increasing the financial returns from these sites.

7. As part of developing the sector, the Palestinian government must introduce incentives that will result in first, Attract investment in the tourism sector, second, expand the potential of the sector to include all the Palestinian cities.

8. One of the weaknesses of the Tourism Sector in Palestine is that it only offers religious and historical tourism with little or no other types of tourism. This has resulted in transforming the tourism in Palestine to be seasonal and only attract certain segments of tourists. In order to be able to attract larger and more tourists segments and to avoid liquidity problems to the tourism businesses in Palestine. The Palestinian private sector supported by the government should work on creating alternative tourism as well as new tourism activities and products.

9. One of the main pillars for a strong policy making process is having accurate data and information about the sector and hence all key institutions working in the sector must cooperate in improving the data collection and analysis through the Development of a long term program that includes capacity building of the current staff, introducing new methodologies for data collection and create a data exchange mechanism between the institutions. The long term program should include the establishment of a study center in the Tourism ministry that will further strengthen the government policy making process.

10. To improve the performance of the sector, and to be able to absorb an increase in the demand without a decrease in the quality of services provided, the Development of the infrastructure in Palestine should be considered a priority.

11. The private sector companies must create tourism packages with special rates for domestic market in order to revitalize the domestic tourism.
12. As part of attracting new tourism and protecting the sector from future decline in demand due to low satisfaction from the costumer. The Ministry of Tourism has already initiated a rating process for the hotels, unfortunately the system is still limited to the assets and construction of each property and doesn't take into account the services provided by the hotels as well as international standards. Building on the Ministry of Tourism rating project, it is necessary to continue the development of a Quality Standards and Quality control systems and to be followed by all working institutions in the sector (not only hotels) and to be conducted and revised on yearly basis.

13. Since Tourism are culture are interconnected, the ministry of Culture should be involved in promoting tourism in Palestine from a cultural point of view and utilize the different cultural events both locally, regionally and internationally to promote Palestine tourism.

14. The Palestinian Private sector must cooperate with the academic sector in Palestine to develop the human resources to match the market needs. Moreover, and with the support of both the Private and Public sectors on the financial and policy levels, the market demand should be covered through the establishment of new educational institutions taking into consideration the geographical distribution in order to address the lack of qualified human resources both in specialization and numbers.

15. Through cooperation between the private and public specialized institutions, develop a yearly event calendar with all expected activities in Palestine to be a cornerstone in all promotional activities.

16. As part of improving and protecting the Tourism in Palestine, the introduction of awareness program for the local community that presents the importance of tourism for the development of Palestine and clarify the responsibility of each member of the society in developing and improving the sector.

17. The historical and cultural importance in Palestine which is shared which intersect with other countries in the region should encourage the effort to establish a Regional cooperation between the neighboring countries and to start promoting as one block. The coordination between regional countries should be on all levels including public; private and academic level in all issues related to tourism will also contribute on eliminating several procedures and barriers, which are currently affecting the performance of the sector.
Annex 1

Bibliography


# Annex 2

## Focus Group Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Organization</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Dr. Hanna mou</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Ms. Judy Bandak</td>
<td>DaraKalama</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Ms. Marianne Michael</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Mr. Elias Alarja</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Dr. Nabil Mufdi</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Ms. Ghadeer Najjar</td>
<td>CCHP</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>Mr. Fathi Farasin</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>Mr. Michel Awad</td>
<td>Siraj Center</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>Mr. Abdu Edress</td>
<td>Hebron Chamber of Commerce</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Mr. Monjed Abu Mansour</td>
<td>Albani</td>
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<td>12.</td>
<td>Mr. Iyad Horoub</td>
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<td>13.</td>
<td>Mr. Nasser Abdul Hadi</td>
<td>Arab Hotel Association</td>
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<td>14.</td>
<td>Ms. Ghadeer Herzallah</td>
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<td>Mr. Hamzeh Dalieh</td>
<td>Ramallah Municipality- Tourism Center</td>
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<td>Mr. Salah Attalah</td>
<td>JT Tours</td>
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<td>Mr. Sami Thaljieh</td>
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<td>Mr. Samir Hazboun</td>
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<td>20.</td>
<td>Mrs. Khouloud Daibes</td>
<td>Former Minister of Tourism Ministry</td>
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<td>Ms. Nida’ Oraib</td>
<td>Dar Al Nadwa</td>
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<td>25.</td>
<td>Mr. Yusef Daher</td>
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Annex 3

Paris Protocol

⇒ Article X

1. The Palestinian Authority will establish a Palestinian Tourism Authority, which will exercise, inter alia, the following powers in the Areas.

   • Regulating, licensing, classifying and supervising tourist services, sites and industries.

   • Promoting foreign and domestic tourism and developing the Palestinian tourist resources and sites.

   • Supervising the marketing, promotion and information activities related to foreign and domestic tourism.

2. Each side shall, under its respective jurisdiction, protect, guard and ensure the maintenance and good upkeep of historical, archaeological, cultural and religious sites and all other tourist sites, to fit their status as well as their purpose as a destination for visitors.

3. Each side will determine reasonable visiting hours and days for all tourist sites in order to facilitate visits at a wide variety of days and hours, taking into consideration religious and national holidays. Each side shall publicize such opening times. Meaningful changes in the opening times will take into consideration tourist programs already committed to.

4. Tourist buses or any other form of tourist transport authorized by either side, and operated by companies registered and licensed by it, will be allowed to enter and proceed on their tour within the area under the jurisdiction of the other side, provided that such buses or other vehicles conform with the EEC technical specifications [I. currently adopted.] All such vehicles will be clearly marked as tourist vehicles.

5. Each side will protect the environment and the ecology around the tourist sites under its jurisdiction. In view of the importance of beaches and maritime activities for tourism, each side will do its best efforts to ensure that development and construction on the Mediterranean coast, and especially at ports (such as Ashqelon or Gaza), will be planned and carried out in a manner that will not adversely affect the ecology, environment or the functions of the coastline and beaches of the other side.

6. Tourism companies and agencies licensed by either side shall enjoy equal access to tourism-related facilities and amenities in border points of exit and entry according to the regulations of the authority operating them.

7.
· Each side will license, according to its own rules and regulations, travel agents, tour companies, tour guides and other tourism businesses (hereinafter - tourism entities) within its jurisdiction.

• Tourism entities authorized by either side, will be allowed to conduct tours that include the area under the jurisdiction of the other side, provided that their authorization as well as their operation will be in accordance with rules, professional requirements and standards agreed upon by both sides in the sub-committee mentioned in para 9. Pending that agreement, existing tourism entities in the Areas which are currently allowed to conduct tours that include Israel, will be allowed to continue to do so, and Israeli authorized tourism entities will continue to be allowed to conduct tours that include the Areas.

In addition, any tourism entity of one side that the tourism authorities of the other side will certify as fulfilling all its rules, professional requirements and standards, will be allowed to conduct tours that include that other side.

8. Each side will make its own arrangement for compensation of tourists for bodily injury and property damages caused by political violence in the areas under its respective jurisdiction.

9. The JEC or a tourism sub-committee established by it shall meet upon the request of either side in order to discuss the implementation of the provisions of this Article and resolve problems that may arise. The sub-committee will also discuss and consider tourist issues of benefit to both sides, and will promote educational programs for tourism entities of both sides in order to further their professional standards and their ethics. Complaints of one side against the behavior of tourism entities of the other side will be channeled through the committee.

Note: It is agreed that the final wording in the last sentence in para 4 will be adopted according to the final wording in the relevant provisions of the Agreement.
Annex 4

(The Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities Official site for Travel Palestine 2013)

Jerusalem:

*The Old City of Jerusalem* – "the holy city" and its walls, are marked important world heritage by UNESCO World Heritage one of the oldest cities in the world with an estimated age of 4500 years. Sultan Suleiman built Jerusalem walls in the sixteenth century and it is considered an example of the Arab Islamic architecture. The walls were following the course of the walls built by the romans in the second century and it stretch for 12 miles.

*Dome of the Rock* –with its magnificent golden dome is the most famous building contained in the El-Haram ash-Sharif or Noble Sanctuary of the Old City of Jerusalem. The sanctuary features eight gates. The site is one of the most beautiful Islamic sites in the world and is known as the landmark of Jerusalem. It is considered the third most holy Islamic site in the world and the Caliph Abdel Malik, the Umayyad Caliph, built it in the 691 AD. The mark seen today on the dome is the footprint of Prophet Mohammed when he ascended to heaven. The eight gates include:

- Damascus Gate (bab al-Amud)
- Golden Gate (Bab al-Rahma)
- Zion Gate (Bab Sahyun)
- Dung Gate (Bab al-Magharbeh)
- Herod Gate (Bab al-Zahra)
- Lions Gate (Bab al-Asbat)
- New Gate (Bab al-Jadid)
- Jaffa Gate (Bab al-Khalil)
•Al Aqsa Mosque - Located next to the Dome of the Rock, this silver-domed mosque is part of the third holiest shrine to Muslims. Originally built between 709-715 AD by Caliph Waleed Ben Abdul Malik, al-Aqsa was reconstructed at least six times and very little of the original mosque remains in the present structure.

•Church of St. Anne and the Pools of Bethesda – the two large pools, which are located next to Lions Gate, were built as part of a water supply system. Based on Gospel of John, Jesus healed a paralytic man. Several churches were built to commemorate Mary’s birthplace traditionally in this area and as an honor to the miracles. Moreover, the location contains St. Anne church, which the crusaders built in the 12th century.

•Via Dolorosa – also known as the Way of Sorrow and it is the path that Jesus took while carrying the cross in the final hours of his condemnation to his crucifixion. The root passes through the Muslim quarter and Christian quarters.

•Church of the Holy Sepulchre - Is known in Arabic as “Al – Qiyame” meaning resurrection. Emperor Constantine and his mother Helena originally built it in 326 AD. The crusaders built the existing church in the 12th century. The Church is built upon the traditional site of the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus.

•The Mosque of Omar - Built in the 638 AD, came to the after being invited into the Church to pray by the Patriarch Sophronius, Omar Refused as he fear the Muslims later will come and ask to claim because ‘Omar prayed here’. As a result, Omar prayed outside the Church and the story serves a cornerstone to the Mosque.

•Church of St. Alexander Nevsky - During the establishment of a Hostel for the Russian Consulate and Pilgrimage, remains of the “Judgments gate” was found which Jesus passed on his way to Golgotha. Currently, the Church is built over these remains.
• **St. James Cathedral** – located in the old city in the Armenian quarter, built in the 12th century over the tombs of the patron saint of Armenians, James the Wise, the apostle and martyr. In response to the ninth century Muslim ruling that forbids the ringing of church bells, the James Cathedral uses a wooden panels struck with bronze mallets to signal the beginning of service.

• **Western Wall** – known by Muslims as Hait El Buraq. The wall is thought to be part of Solomon’s mythical template.

• **Lutheran Church of the Ascension** - it was built between 1907-1910 after Empress Augusta Victoria, the wife of German Kaiser Wilhelm II. It is located on the north side of the Mount of Olives, the Augusta Victoria is a hospital and church. During World War II, the British converted it into a hospital. The bell tower of the church is one of Jerusalem’s skyline landmarks, towering some 60 meters high. The interior of the church is covered with beautiful frescoes, mosaics and other decorations.

• **Mount of Olives** - The Mt.of Olives is located east of Jerusalem, across the Kidron Valley. It offers a magnificent view of the Old City and a striking panorama as far as the Dead Sea and the mountains of Moab in the East. The Mt. of Olives is associated with some of the most important events Jesus’ life. Here, Jesus ascended to Heaven (Chapel of Ascension), foretold the destruction of Jerusalem, taught his disciples the Lord’s prayer (Pater Noster), and wept over Jerusalem on his way to the Holy City on Palm Sunday (Church of Dominus Flevit). The Russian Orthodox Church of St. Mary Magdalene, with its striking onion-shaped spires is also located on the Mt. of Olives.

• **The Garden Tomb** - Located north the Old City’s Damascus Gate, the simplicity, beauty, and peaceful atmosphere of the Garden Tomb makes it a favorite spot for prayer and meditation. Some Christians find worshipping near the rock-hewn
tomb helpful in reliving the crucifixion and resurrection experience. The Garden Tomb gives a clear picture of what the place of Crucifixion and burial must have looked like at the time of Jesus.

**Garden of Gethsemane (Church of All Nations)** - Located at the foot of the Mt. of Olives, the Byzantines originally built the Church of All Nations in 379 over the place made holy by Jesus’ prayer and agony. The present church, considered one of the most beautiful in Jerusalem, was built in 1919-1924. It is called the Church of All Nations because sixteen nations contributed to its construction. Today, the Garden of Gethsemane appearing as it did 2000 years ago, and within it are some of the world’s oldest olive trees. The Garden was a spot favored by Jesus and it was here that He often came for His retreats and prayer. It was also here that, on His last night, Jesus spent the most sorrowful hour of His passion. Kidron Valley

**The Tomb of the Lady** - According to tradition, the Virgin Mary, who died in Jerusalem, was buried in the Kidron Valley. The Crusaders built the present church over the ruins of a Byzantine basilica. The site marks the traditional place of Virgin Mary’s tomb and her Assumption.

**The Kidron Valley** - The Kidron Valley separates the Mt. of Olives from the city of Jerusalem. Jesus crossed the valley many times, including on the evening of Holy Thursday when he went with his disciples to Gethsemane. The ancient tombs of Absalom, Jehoshaphat, St. James, and St. Zacharias are located in the Kidron Valley. According to local tradition, the Kidron will be the site of the Last Judgment.

**Rockefeller Museum** - The Palestine Archeological Museum: Founded in 1927 by an American-Jewish oil magnate, the museum was called the Palestine Archeological Museum until 1967; it contains archeological treasures from Palestine and the entire Near East, dating from prehistoric time until the eighteenth century. Amongst the masterpieces in the museum’s collection is a sculptured lintel from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (Crusader period), carved wooden panels from the al-Aqsa Mosque (ninth century), stuccoes from the Umayyad Palace of Hisham in Jericho (eighth century), and some fragments of the Dead Sea Scrolls: the remainder having been transferred to the Israel Museum after the occupation of East Jerusalem in 1967. Going further back in time, the museum also has on exhibit a skeleton of ancient man (homo carmeliensis), dated 100,000 BC, which was discovered near Atlit, on the coast near Caesarea.

**Orient House**: This huge private house, built in 1897 by Ismail Musa al-Husseini, has a long diplomatic history. A year after its construction, it hosted Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany (Kaiser Bill) for a tea party. The Ethiopian Emperor Haile

**Museum of Arab Palestinian Folklore Dar at-Tifl** - This museum of popular Palestinian is one of the best museums of its kind today. Its collection of Palestinian costumes and robes as well as its reconstruction of different handicraft techniques and scenes from traditional daily life in the first half of the twentieth century is the main attractions of the museum.

**Dominican School for Biblical Research** - The Dominican monastery of Saint Stephen was built in 1891 on the ruins of a Byzantine church discovered during excavation work. The monastery houses the Dominican School of Biblical Research in Jerusalem, the oldest biblical and archeological research centre in Palestine. The institute is renowned for its photographic collection (taken in Palestine and the entire Near East from the late nineteenth century to the first half of the twentieth century), its archeological and epigraphic discoveries and its exegetic work.

**The Dormition Abbey** - The Dormition Abbey is an imposing church in neo-Roman style. Christian tradition holds that it marks the place where Mary lived her last days in an “eternal sleep”. The Madaba Map shows a huge basilica on this spot in Byzantine times. The pavement inside the church is inlaid with beautiful mosaics, while the walls are decorated with representations of biblical women personalities: Eve, Ruth, Judith, and Esther.

**Church of St. Peter in Gallicantu** - was built here in 1931 on the site of the house of the Roman Procurator of Judah, High Priest Caiaphas, where Jesus was imprisoned the night before he was condemned by Pontius Pilate, and where Saint Peter denied that he knew Jesus, thus fulfilling Jesus ‘prophecy: ”Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice.” (Mark: 14:72.). The church commemorates Saint Peter’s repentance as he heard the cock crow (gallicante in Spanish). There are Byzantine and Herodian remains here at the entrance to the church.

**Silwan** - A Palestinian village located on a ridge that slopes downhill south of the present Old City of Jerusalem. The village is built over an area which was once surrounded by a city wall and considered to have been the original Jerusalem. The area includes several sites of archaeological interest, notably Hezekiah’s tunnel (a water supply system, where the Siloam inscription was found), Warren’s shaft (an
earlier water supply system), and the Pools of Siloam (the presently extant Byzantine-era pool, and the recently discovered Second Temple-period pool). All these water supply systems drew their water from the Gihon Spring which lies on Silwan’s eastern slope, and is generally considered the original reason that the City was built at this location.

- **Museum of Islamic Art** - The Museum of Islamic Art has a good collection of mostly mediaeval, interesting pieces. In the first hall, which dates to the Ayyubid dynasty, are small exhibits: amongst them Quranic calligraphy and illuminated manuscripts, porcelain and other ceramics, vessels, coins, instruments of astronomy and swords. The second hall, a former refectory built by the Knights Templar in the twelfth century, is devoted to architectural and decorative ornaments from the Dome of the Rock. Here, too, may be seen Umayyad panels of carved cypress wood, and the remains of the magnificent minbar donated by Saladin, which was burnt in the fire of 1969.

- **Jerusalem Souqs – Markets**: Souk Khan ez-Zeit is the busiest, most picturesque and colorful shopping street in the Old City. Above all, the souk is a popular market selling all the food products used in Palestinian cooking – spices, dried fruit, herbs, coffee, and pastries – as well as more ordinary food supplies. Halfway along, the market street splits into two roofed passages; Souk al-Attarin, where there are many clothes shops, and Souk al-Lahamin, the meat market. Souk al-Qattanin (The Cotton Merchants’ Market) had shops with living quarters above it, public baths (Hammam al Ein and Hammam al-Shifa) and a caravanserai.

⇒ **Bethlehem**: A few miles south of Jerusalem lies the city of Bethlehem. Christians around the world know it as the little town where Jesus Christ was born. Still small, Bethlehem has retained a friendly atmosphere and is host to thousands of tourists each year. Many sacred Christian sites, churches, and monasteries are located in the city. A major attraction is the Church of the Nativity at Manger Square, built over the cave where Jesus Christ was born. The adjoining Church of St. Catherine possesses marvelous wood carvings of the Stations of the Cross. The attraction sites include:

- **Church of the Nativity** - This is the oldest church in the Holy Land still in use. The original church was constructed under the patronage of Constantine’s mother, Helena, who came on a pilgrimage to Palestine in 325 AD to investigate the sites associated with the life of Jesus Christ which had been revered since the early days of Christianity. Helena chose to the Grotto of the Nativity, the traditional birthplace of Jesus, as the site for the huge basilica that
was completed in 339 AD. Inside the Church, two sets of stairs on either side of the altar lead down into the Grotto, the site where Jesus was born. A silver star embedded in white marble and bearing the Latin inscription “Here of the Virgin Mary Christ was born” marks the site.

• Milk Grotto - According to tradition, the Milk Grotto is where Mother Mary nursed baby Jesus while hiding there from Herod’s soldiers before going to Egypt. Located southeast of the Basilica, it is an irregular Grotto hewn out of soft white rock. It is believed that some drops of Mary’s milk trickled, turning the rock white. Revered by Christians and Muslims alike, the milk-white rock is famous for its healing powers and reputed ability of making nursing easier for women.

• Manger Square - This vast esplanade between the Mosque of Omar and the Church of the Nativity constitutes the tourist centre of Bethlehem. The square as well as much of the Old city underwent renovation from 1998 to 2000. Many events throughout the year take place here, culminating in Christmas Eve, or eves, since the birth of Jesus is celebrated three times: on December 25 by Catholics, January 7 by the Orthodox, and January 19 by Armenians. There are frequent cultural exhibitions, concerts and conferences at the Bethlehem Peace Centre at the square and at the nearby International Centre of Bethlehem.

• The Old City - Pope Paul VI Street, which is in the center of the town, leads down to Manger Square in the heart of the Old City. The numerous convents and churches built by European religious congregations have firmly marked the urban landscape, but Bethlehem is above all an oriental city. The neighborhoods around Paul VI Street, and the popular Star and Farahiya Streets offer visitors a model of Arab architecture typical of the Ottoman era.

• Dar Mansour - the ”House of Mansour” (Star Street), is a good example of the architectural style of bourgeois homes at the end of the nineteenth century. Contrasting with the activity of the town’s main arteries, the sleepy narrow side streets run between houses arranged in close clusters on the steep slopes around the Old City. Most of these alleyways have stone stairs that are sometimes overhung by passageways in order to connect two dwellings belonging to the same family. One of the distinctive features of the houses in Bethlehem is their orientation. Despite the fact that the houses are arranged around a closed space, the traditional interior courtyard often has a liwan (a vaulted living room open on one side) looking out over the cultivated land. The tremendous variety of architectural openings, doors, windows and the liwan greatly adds to the picturesque charm of old Bethlehem.
• **Shepherds Field** - It is located in the town of Beit Sahour 2km east of Bethlehem. This is the site where the angel of the Lord appeared before the shepherds bringing them the good tidings of the birth of Jesus, joined with a multitude of heavenly hosts, who sang ”Glory to God In the Highest and on Earth, Peace among men”.

• **St. Theodosius Monastery** - Built by Theodosius in 500 AD, the monastery is located east of the historic village of Ubediyyeh12km east of Bethlehem. A white-walled cave marks the burial site of St. Theodosius. Tradition has it that the wise men rested here after God warned them in a dream that they should not return to Herod.

• **St. Saba Monastery** - A drive of about 6 kilometers east of Shepherd’s Field down a winding road takes you to the Greek Orthodox Monastery of Mar Saba. Built into a cliff, it has a spectacular view overlooking the gorge of the Kidron Valley and was part of the grand tour of Palestine during the 19th century. The founder, St. Saba, came from Cappadocia in the fifth century. There are legends about St. Saba having lived in a cave with a lion for many years. St. Saba died at age 94, and his corpse is still preserved in the Church at the monastery. The monastery has 110 rooms, though today there are only a few monks residing in it. The monks are friendly and hospitable, but long-established tradition prevents the entry of women, who must enjoy the scenery from outside.

• **Herodium** - Built in a circular shape on top of a hill 6km southeast of Bethlehem, this fortress includes the remains of a huge palace built by King Herod for his wife in 37 BC. The palace contained luxurious, round walled buildings, fortified chambers, and baths and terraced gardens. Fort Herodion hill dominates the landscape and offers an impressive view of the Dead Sea.

• **Rachel’s Tomb – Belal’s Mosque** - This small building marks the traditional Tomb of Rachel, Jacob’s wife. It is considered holy to Christians, Muslims, and Jews. The present sanctuary and mosque were built during the Ottoman period and are situated on the Jerusalem-Hebron Road near the northern entrance of Bethlehem.

• **Solomon’s Pools** - Hidden among very tall pine trees in a small valley 4km south of Bethlehem, Solomon’s Pools consist of three huge rectangular reservoirs of stone and masonry that can hold 160,000 cubic meters of water. Although tradition attributes these to King Solomon, the pools almost certainly date from the time of Herod, and may have been conceived by Pontius Pilate. In
the past, the reservoirs collected spring and rainwater and pumped it to Bethlehem and Jerusalem.

- **Qalat al-Burak** - an Ottoman fortress dating back to the 17th century is located near the pools. The fortress was built to protect Solomon’s Pools water source.

- **St. George’s Church– Al-Khader** - Every year on May 5, there is a pilgrimage to the Al-Khader Church, which was built in 1600 AD and rebuilt in 1912. The pilgrimage is in honor of Saint George (in Arabic al-Khader), the soldier monk who slew the dragon; he is venerated for being able to ward off the evil eye. Islamic tradition has it that he left his native Lydda, where he was born, and settled here in this village which bears his name. Muslims and Christians come together annually on this day to celebrate their common protector, to whom many different blessings are attributed. Saint George is also the patron saint of farmers, travelers and the mentally sick. According to a popular belief, lunatics were chained to a ring in the walls of the courtyard here in order for them to be delivered from their insanity due to the intervention of Saint George.

- **The Green Market** - The Green Market has existed since 1929 on the square opposite the Syrian Orthodox Church. Tradesmen and farmers from the Bethlehem area and even Hebron come here to sell their fresh produce. This picturesque spot was renovated in 1999 as part of the Bethlehem 2000 project.

- **The Mosque of Omar** - Located at the corner of Paul VI Street and Manger Square, the mosque was built in honour of the second Caliph, Omar Ibn al-Khattab. A companion of the Prophet Mohammed and his father-in-law, he entered Bethlehem after taking Jerusalem and prayed in the southern aisle of the Basilica of the Nativity. However, he guaranteed that the Basilica would remain a Christian place of worship in the Pact of Omar, which stipulated that Muslims would be allowed to pray here only individually and which prohibited calling for prayer (al-Adan) from the church walls.

- **Anatra Quarter** - Located south of the Church of Nativity and in close proximity to Manger Square, Anatra Quarter is a prototype of the hosh clusters, housing complexes of small-scale harmonious buildings of similar colour and texture with residential, commercial and institutional functions.
· **Arab Women’s Union Museum** - the museum includes a recreated diwan (a traditional living room) and displays of traditional clothing, jewelry, old photos, and personal items from the British Mandate era. A tour of the museum offers a taste of the gracious refinement Palestinian families enjoyed in the pre-1948 era.

· **Palestinian Heritage Center** - At the entry to Bethlehem, the centre has a small museum (one may try on traditional Palestinian clothing), and a gift shop with extremely beautiful embroidery work, among other products.

· **The Olive Press Museum**: The olive press (al-Najajra Street) is the only press conserved in the Old City and dates back to 1792. It is a reminder of the all-importance of the olive tree in the life of Bethlehem and of Palestine as a whole.

· **Ibdaa Cultural Center** - In Arabic, idbaa means”creativity”. Inaugurated in 1995, the centre offers a wide range of activities (day-care centre, bookshop, Internet centre, oral history project, to name a few). Ibdaa also owes its reputation to the 60 young people in its famous folk dance troupe. It is a good place to meet foreigners, who come to learn more about the situation of the refugees, their status, rights and claims. The centre has recently started to show documentary or fictional films about Palestine and has an Internet centre ($1 per person), a restaurant and hostel rooms.

· **Al-Liqa’ Center for Religious & Heritage Studies** - Founded in 1983 by Palestinian Muslim and Christian community leaders, Al-Liqa’ (“the meeting” in Arabic) aims at furthering dialogue between the different religious communities. It organizes and participates in frequent conferences and publishes a newspaper in English: Al-Liqa’ Newspaper focuses on issues such as the Palestinian historical heritage and the religious patrimony of Muslims and Christians.

**Committees for the Refugee Camps** - These committees provide visitors with an overall view of the situation of Palestinian refugees; they also organize visits and contacts in Aida, Beit Jibrin and Deheisheh camps to explain the role citizens’ committees play in the internal organization of the camps.
· AROUND BETHLEHEM

· Beit Jala - Approximately two kilometers west of Bethlehem is Beit Jala, a town set among olive groves and vineyards with stunning stone masonry and a spectacular view of Jerusalem. The town’s unique location and moderate weather make it a popular summer destination for visitors in search of a clean, peaceful environment and beautiful scenery. In recent years, Beit Jala has become well known for its modern hotels and good restaurants, which offer a variety of food to please different tastes. Olive oil is one of the town’s main products. It has a unique taste characteristic of the trees in the area. One of the most important sights in Beit Jala is the Orthodox Church of St. Nicholas, established in 1925 and named for the patron saint of Beit Jala.

· Beit Sahour - Beit Sahour is located southeast of Bethlehem. It is the scene of the fields of olives, well-known as Shepherd’s Field, the place where the angel announced to the shepherds the birth of Jesus Christ. There are two points of interest here: a Franciscan chapel, and a Greek Orthodox church that was built over a cave in the fifth century. There also are some exceptionally old olive trees in the field. While in the town, be sure to ask about the Beit Sahour Municipality Folklore Museum.

· Wadi Artas - is a fine example of the fertility of Palestinian valleys. Its ideal landscape calls to mind the paradise lost, said to have been King Solomon’s garden, which was said to have inspired The Song of Songs, or Song of Solomon, in the Old Testament “A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse. A spring shut up, a fountain sealed. Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits;” (Song of Solomon 4:12-13). The name Artas, more recent, is derived from the Latin hortus, or “garden”. Nowadays, the Convent of the Sisters of Our Lady of the Garden and the Convent Hortus Conclusus symbolically associate the image of Mary with her virginity and fertility. Located just above the mosque, is The Artas Folklore Centre which was created to preserve the local rural heritage and contributes to the preservation of customs and traditional practices, by producing documents on Palestinian culture and collecting archives. The Palestinian Ethnographic Centre (museum) is a fascinating part of the project. It is responsible for several old houses, recently renovated, on a site inhabited for thousands of years. In addition to a tour of the homes and museum, the Centre will also serve a traditional Palestinian meal and organize an evening with folk music and dancing (for a minimum of 10 people). The Artas Lettuce Festival takes place every year from March 21 to April 11, featuring Palestinian Dabka (folk dancing) contests and horse races.

· A Stroll in Wadi Artas, from Qal’at al-Buraq to Herodion - Spring is without question the best season for a walk in Wadi Artas, when the scenery is at its
greenest and flowers are everywhere. It is an easy three-kilometer walk in the wadi to Solomon’s Pools. Between the second and third pool, one finds the old pumping stations first installed by the Germans, and then by the British at the beginning of the last century. The road traverses a hill where there are ruins of a Roman village called Khirbet al-Khoch, which some think was the biblical village of Etam. Herodion is located twelve kilometers away from Artas.

· The World Heritage Committee has inscribed during its 36th Session held in Saint Petersburg, Russian Federation (26 June to 4 July 2012), Birthplace of Jesus: Church of the Nativity and the Pilgrimage Route, Bethlehem, Palestine on UNESCO’s World Heritage in Danger List. Bethlehem is on top of a list of inventory of twenty cultural and natural heritage sites of potential outstanding value that reflects the cultural and natural diversity of Palestine and have the potential to become on UNESCO’s World Heritage List too.

· Jericho - The oldest city in the world. "the city of Palms" and the most attractive Palestinian city with the highest number of tourists, interested in the area of the Dead Sea. After a relative improvement in the political situation in 2008, the number of tourists increased by approximately 50%. The main sites visited in the governorate of Jericho include:

· Ein es-Sultan - a significant water source according to UNESCO. It is an area of fertile alluvial soil which attracted hunter-gatherer groups to settle down, and to start a process of plant and animal domestication. Archaeological excavations carried out in the mid-20th century evidenced 23 layers of ancient civilizations at the site. The earliest remains date back to the Natufian period.

· Sugar mills - dating to the prosperous Umayyads. One of the main economic activities in the Jordan Valley during the medieval period was the sugar industry as both the historical and archaeological records show. The Jordan Valley’s sugar cane cultivation and mills were mentioned in several early Medieval, Arab and Frankish sources Yaqut el-Hamawi described Jericho in 1225 AD as a city famous for sugar cane and dates, and the sugar production process was described by Burchard of Mount Sion in 1283 AD.

· The site of Tawaheen es-Sukkar (Sugar Mills) - is located in the lower foothills of Mount Quruntul in the Jordan Valley. The original function of the industrial zone is still preserved in the name of the site, Tawaheen es-Sukkar which
means sugar mills. The site of Tawaheen es-Sukkar in Jericho features a relatively well preserved industrial installation for manufacturing sugar. Two seasons of excavations (2000-2001) were carried out at the site on behalf of the Palestinian Department of Antiquities. The site of Tawaheen es-Sukkar is composed of three components: the water system, the refinery and the agricultural land. The remains of the industrial installations of sugar production consist of a water aqueduct, a courtyard, press, mill house, refinery, furnace, kitchen and a storage house. The refinery is situated on five man-made terraces of considerable size on the slope below the higher aqueduct. The mill at Tawaheen es-Sukkar was powered by water that was brought by aqueducts from the springs of Ain Nueima and Ain Deyuk at the north-eastern foot of Mount of Quruntul. The production of sugar consists of several stages: planting the sugar cane, harvesting the cane, shredding, crushing, and pressing, boiling the juice, pouring it off and finally removing the crystallized sugar from the containers. The mill system can be dated from the Crusader/Ayyubid period to the end of the Mamluk period. A more precise date was provided by several coins from the early Ayyubid period. The last phase in the history of the factory is associated with Mamluk pottery. The excavation has revealed that Jericho was one of the main production centers in the Jordan Valley for sugar during the Crusader, Ayyubid and Mamluk periods.

**The Jericho Mosaic Centre** - Established in 2000 as part of the “Requalification and Valorisation of the Tourist and Archaeological Resources of Qasr Hisham” project, the main objective of the Centre was to train specialized personnel in all aspects of mosaic production, with particular attention to ancient mosaics conservation. The Mosaic Centre is not only a handcraft laboratory, which produce and sell new mosaics in Palestine and abroad, but also a cultural promotion and training centre. The Centre also provides special tours for groups and individuals. The Tours focuses on areas in which the Mosaic Centre- Jericho has been working since several years, such as Jericho, Sabastiya and Jerusalem (4).

**Tell es-Sultan site** - The site of Tell es-Sultan is located in the lower plain of the Jordan Valley, approximately 10 kilometers north of the Dead Sea. At a depth of 250 meters below sea level, and with a history that dates back to the Neolithic Period, it is the lowest and oldest town on earth. The mound rises approximately 21 meters and covers an area of about one acre. The site is located close to the perennial spring of Ein es-Sultan and a mid-fertile land of alluvial soil, suitable for agriculture and associated with tropical climate in summer and mild in winter. The Neolithic Period at Tell es-Sultan represents the transformations during the first period of human history from a prehistoric subsistence pattern based on hunting and gathering, to a new subsistence pattern based on domestication of plants and animals of the first settled society. The production surplus of agriculture enabled human beings to free part of their time, which was dedicated in the past to securing food, for building houses and creating art. The material culture of this period indicates the growing social complexity of Neolithic society.
The town was deserted in the Late Bronze Age (14th century BC), and the city wall of Jericho, of Joshua-invasion fame, was not found by archaeologists, thus indicating a contradiction between the biblical narratives and archaeological evidence. There are scant remains from the Iron Age and Persian periods, when the site was fully abandoned, and the centre of ancient Jericho shifted to Telul Abu Alyeq in the Greco-Roman period. Rehabilitation work was carried out on the site by the Palestinian Department of Antiquities during the last decade, within the framework of cooperation with La Sapienza University and UNESCO. The Palestinian-Italian excavation uncovered a huge mud brick building outside the Middle Bronze Age fortification wall, indicating occupation outside the city wall. The Middle Bronze Age tombs in Jericho preserve a unique testimony to domestic life as evidenced in pottery vessels, personal belongings, and furniture. (2)

- **Deir Hajla** - the Monastery of St. Gerasimus who, according to legend, befriended a lion. The site was founded by St. Gerasimus in 455AD, this Greek Orthodox Monastery is one of the oldest in Palestine. The history of the Monastery is also closely linked to other Christian narratives. Mary, Joseph, and the infant Jesus were believed to have found refuge in a Cave here during their flight from Herod. An underground chapel was build on the spot where tradition has it the Holy Family spent the night. (4)

- **the Monastery of St. John the Baptist** - According to Christian tradition, John the Baptist baptized Jesus here.

- **Deir Quruntul (Mount of Temptation and its monastery)** - where Jesus fasted for 40 days; the monks who lived here during the 4th century slept in caves in the cliff. The site is a Greek Orthodox Monastery on Mount of Temptation also known as Jabel Quruntul dates back to the 12th century. The Greek Orthodox Monastery lies about 350 meters above Jericho, perched on a rocky ledge northwest of the town. Originally, the Crusaders built two churches on the site. One was in a cave half way up the cliff and the second one on the summit. (5)

- **Ein Dyuk**, a farming village in an area first settled during the Roman era

- **Khirbet al-Auja al-Tahta** - a present-day village built on the remains of a Roman city built by Herod’s son Archelaus.

- **Maqam Nabi Mousa (sanctuary of the Prophet Moses)** - according to Muslim tradition, it first became a site for pilgrims when the Crusaders barred Muslims from visiting and praying in Jerusalem.
Qasr Hisha (Hisham’s Palace), the most magnificent architectural site in the area, was once an Umayyad winter retreat. It is located on the northern bank of Wadi Nueima, ca. 2 kms north of Jericho in the Jordan Valley. The architecture and the decoration of the palace were influenced by both Byzantine and Sassanian traditions. This is represented by the architectural style, paintings, fine stucco ornaments, and rich mosaic pavements. The palace was supplied with water through an open channel from the double spring Ein Deyuk and Ein Nueima at the foot of Mount Quruntul, eight kilometers to the west. The channel crossed the wadi at two different points over arched bridges and led to a large reservoir at some distance from the palace. Following the transfer of authority to the Palestinian side in Jericho, a large restoration and rehabilitation programme was carried out on the site by the Palestinian Department of Antiquities, in cooperation with UNESCO, Italian Cooperation, ANERA, USAID and Chicago University. The archaeological park now includes a modern interpretation centre, a mosaic laboratory, and a site museum, as well as a new bridge and access roads.

Qumran and Ein al Fashkha: 20 kilometres south of Jericho: some twenty km south of Jericho is Qumran, the site where the famous Dead Sea Scroll were discovered by a Bedouin shepherd Mohammad Al Deeb in 1947. The scrolls were hidden in clay jars inside the cliffs high above the Dead Sea. Among the findings were books of an unknown religious community identified as the Essenes. The writing of the scrolls covered a period of some 300 years. It is believed that the site of Qumran was actually occupied during the Greco Roman period (around 150BC-68AD). In 68AD, the settlement came to an sudden end when it was destroyed by Roman legion en route to Jerusalem to quell a revolt.

Today, there are many remains for visitors to admire. Archeologists have uncovered the remains of a tower, kitchen, dining halls, cisterns, aqueducts, cisterns as well as the Scriptorium where it is thought the actual Dead Sea Scrolls were written. Qumran is where the Arab shepherd boy found the ancient Dead Sea Scrolls.

Monastery of St. George - Stretching from the suburbs or Jerusalem to Jericho and the Jordan Valley, the path of the Wadi Qelt is an amazing experience for hikers and nature lovers. Besides being a breathtaking hike, you can also travel by car or bus through the narrow Wadi Qelt road and visit the beautiful Monastery of St. George in Kosiba. Clinging to the slide of the Wadi Qelt and overlooking the spring, this beautiful and serene Greek Orthodox Monastery was transformed by John of Thebes from a small oratory to the monastery of today in 480 CE. It is also believed that the Monastery was damaged during the Persian invasion and restored by the Crusaders back by the 12 century with several new traditions being introduced. The present structure of today was restored by the Greek Orthodox Church back in 1878-1901. Finally, the large bell tower, was added by Timothy back in 1952.
Telul Abu Alayeq: The Palestinian heritage site of Telul Abu Alayeq is located along the river banks of Wadi Qilt, 3 kms southwest of Jericho. It is identified with the garden city of Jericho during the Greco-Roman period which was described by the historians during the Hellenistic and Roman periods, such as Strabo, Pliny, and Josephus. In addition to being the winter resort of the Herodian family, Josephus tells of Mark Antony gifting Herod’s cherished Jericho balsam groves to Cleopatra.

The garden city also contains a network of water channels and aqueducts which were constructed to exploit the water from the surrounding springs of Ain Es-Sultan, Nueima, Ed-Deyuk, and Wadi Qilt. The first investigations at Telul Abu Alayeq were carried out by C. Warren in 1868, and by E. Sellin and C. Watzinger between 1909 and 1911. Their work showed the impressive size of the city during the Late Hellenistic and Early Roman period. Excavations were again renewed in 1950 and 1951 by J. Kelso and D. Baramki and J. Pritchard. From 1973 to 1983 and again in 1986 and 1987 excavations were carried out in the site. The excavations uncovered a substantial part of the ancient city. The late Hellenistic palaces were uncovered in the northern mound as well as an entire complex to the east, with two elaborate swimming pools, paved areas, bathing installations and gardens.

In the last major building phase to the south, two villas (“The Twin Palaces”) were built on the same plan. This palace was replaced by three successive palaces built by Herod the Great. The first palace square was built south of Wadi Qilt. It was excavated by J. Pritchard, and misinterpreted as a gymnasium. It was followed by Herod’s second palace constructed above its ruins. The new palace was built on an elevated artificial mound (the northern mound) in which the main building of the Hellenistic palaces were built, along with a large swimming pool, a garden, and a Roman bath.

The third palace, the most elaborate, was built toward the end of the 1st century BC. It was built as a complex on both sides of Wadi Qilt.

The Roman building technique was evidenced by the use of Roman concrete covered with small stones in the opus reticulatum and opus quadratum methods. The palace contained a garden to the south, a large pool for swimming and boating, and a round reception hall on the southern artificial mound. North of the valley, was a large wing that contained a large reception hall, two peristyle courtyards, various rooms, and a Roman bath.
A large industrial zone dating from the late Hellenistic period and Early Roman period was uncovered in the northern area. A series of industrial installations were found in this area associated with pools, ovens, treading pavements, and drainage channels. With a square building used to store liquids, these installations may have been part of the cultivation of balsams and persimmons reported in various historical sources.

At the edge of the ancient city, northeast of the palaces, a large necropolis of approximately 50 tombs was discovered between 1975 and 1977. The cemetery dates from the middle of the 1st century BC to the 1st century AD. The tombs were hewn in the limestone rock with a square burial room with loculi, ranging from one to nine loculi each. The tombs were blocked with hewn sealing stone or brick stone and earth masonry. Wall paintings were found in few tombs and some ossuaries contain inscriptions in Aramaic, Hebrew and Greek. Pottery, glass vessels, and coins were also found in these tombs. (3)

- **Russian Museum and park complex in Jericho** - Russian Museum & park complex in Jericho is situated in so called "Joseph land plot" which has belonged to Russia since 1883. In 2010-2011 by the edict of D.A. Medvedev, the former president of Russian Federation, a museum construction was built and archaeological excavations were carried out. Our museum is about several subjects. First, "Russia in the holy land" on bases of photo materials and copies of items from the Hermitage Museum in Russia. Second, Byzantine Jericho on bases of findings of the 1st BC - 18th BC. third, Islamic and Roman times on bases of coins found in the excavation place. Finally, there's the huge Sycamore Tree in the land plot. it's over 2000y/o which is mentioned in the Holy Bible

- **Sycamore Tree** - The Sycamore tree is over 2000 years old and is located at the Al-Jummezeh Square in the City Center. Tradition has it that this is the tree Zacchaeus climbed when Jesus was passing through the town. "Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through it. Now a man named Zacchaeus was there; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to get a look at Jesus, but being a short man he could not see over the crowd. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, because Jesus was going to pass that way" (Luke 19:1-4)

- **The Jericho Cable Car** : A must see attraction is Jericho’s famous Cable Car ride which takes visitors to the top of the Mount of Temptation and its caves. The complex not only houses the first Cable car in Palestine, it was in the Guinness Book of World Records as the longest cable car under sea level. A ride in the cable car enables you to get a bird eyes view of Ancient Jericho and Tell As-Sultan. A restaurant, coffee shop and souvenir shops are located at the top and at the foot of the complex.
· The Spanish Garden Park: Located near the town center is the Spanish Garden which was officially opened in 1999. The development of the site was funded by the Spanish Government and was established over 30 dunums of land. The site is a beautiful public garden ideal for late-night picnics. The site becomes alive in the evenings after sunset with local families, small children and teenagers enjoying some nice Arabic music, coffee, and the famous nargileh.

· Wadi al-Qilt: Nature, Culture & Religion: The valley is a wonderful place for hiking tours, especially in the winter. The valley stretches from the suburbs of Jerusalem in the west to Jericho and Jordan River in the east. All along the beautiful path of the wadi hikers will enjoy the natural view of rocks, caves and the eroded pebbles in the bottom of the valley. Trees and bushes are permanently green forming an oasis in the desert valley, and along the aqueduct. The main landmark of the valley is the Monastery of St George, Deir al Qilt, which is carved out of the rock and clings to the canyon walls impressively.

Many natural caves and shelters are spread along the wadi and are used by Bedouins and their livestock. Before the end of the wadi, Jericho appears a wide flat plain with a very beautiful natural scene. From the top of the mountains by the valley gorge the Dead Sea and most of the Jordan Valley is visible. The importance of the wadi commences with Herod who built an aqueduct to supply his winter palace and garden with water during the Roman Period. The structure of the Roman aqueduct is still visible in the valley. The recent water aqueduct used now was built in the Jordanian times along the same line as the Roman one.

The availability of water made the valley one of the known Roman roads. This road was continued in the Byzantine Period and used as a pilgrimage road. Many of the caves and shelters along the wadi were therefore densely populated by monks during the monastic movement in the Byzantine Period and later developed into a monastery. The Hike: The hike often starts near Ein Qilt, but can also start either in Jericho, going upwards or at the very beginning at the Wadi near Ein Fawwar.

· Jericho Culture & Art Centre: Established in 1991 following extensive refurbishment of the old Rivoli Cinema, the Jericho Culture and Art Centre was gutted by a devastating fire in 1992. Since that time it has been completely rebuilt. The Centre’s goals are: to enhance the cultural, educational and artistic life of the ancient city of Jericho in particular and in Palestine in general; to develop the educational and cultural abilities of Palestinian children and to shape their talents; to create opportunities for people of different groups and ages to practice their hobbies and to experience and participate in cultural
activities; and to strengthen brotherly relations and build bridges of understanding and friendship between peoples, especially in the fields of art and culture. The Centre currently comprises a 700-seat auditorium and spacious foyer which host a regular programme of music, dance and theatre activities, including the annual Jericho International Music Festival and an annual Children’s Summer Camp.

• Palestinian Equestrian Club / Horse Riding club - The First of its kind in Palestine and founded back in 1997 under the patronage of the H.E. the late President Yaser Arafat, the Equestrians Club is dedicated to teaching people of all ages and from all walks of live the principles and skills of good horsemanship. The Club is part of a large recreational complex that includes a botanical garden, a youth hostel, and playing fields.

Nablus:

Nablus, approximately 63 kilometers north of Jerusalem, is the second largest city in the West Bank. It is thriving industrial and trade center full of archeological sites and ruins in varying stages of excavation. Visitors have been particularly enthralled with the Roman Theater near the heart of the city. It has a steady stream of visitors throughout the year.

Nablus is known around the world for its exquisite olives, olive oil, and olive-wood products. In the Old City, one can wander for hours through the market. Nablus is famous for its appetizing sweets. Sampling knafe, made from a delicate combination of melted cheese, shredded grain, and a sugary honey sauce, is a must for any visitor to Nablus.

Another significant site is Jacob’s Well, 2 kilometers east of Nablus by the village of Balata. It’s the site where Jesus is said to have asked a Samaritan woman to draw water from a well for him. Today Jacob’s Well is located in a Greek Orthodox monastery and is open to the public. Soap in Nablus has been made for years from soda and olive oil. Although the manufacturing methods have changed slightly over the years, soap made in Nablus is still renowned for its purity and is exported throughout markets in the Middle East. Several traditional soap factories in Nablus offer tours of their soap-making process. The soap is made from olive oil, so it’s a slippery tour. After the soap tour, you can test your samples at one of the city’s recently restored Turkish baths.

The rooftops of Nablus and surrounding villages, such as Kor, often include a keyzan, which allows a person to look outside without being seen. This distinctive triangular motif is a natural air conditioner because it collects and cools rain water inside its clay vessels.

• Old Town of Nablus: This remarkable old town in the city center is a bustling market, or Souq, with impressive mosques, Turkish baths, and
traditional soap factories. Its architecture rivals that of Jerusalem. The Great Mosque, al-Kabir, is on the eastern edge of the Old Town of Nablus. West of the Great Mosque lies al-Shifa Turkish bath. Built around 1840, it is the oldest operating Turkish bath in Palestine.

- **Tel Balata – Shechem**: Located 3 km east of Nablus, Tell Balata, or Shechem, was one of the earliest and most powerful Canaanite cities. Destroyed and rebuilt several times, the ruins of this ancient city occupy a hill rising 525m above sea level. A fortress temple on the summit of the hill is the largest and most impressive surviving Canaanite temple in Palestine. Other visible ruins include two monumental gates, massive city walls, and a governor’s palace with a small private temple, guardrooms, an assembly, living quarters, and a kitchen.

- **Jacoub’s Well**: Located 1.6km south of Nablus, Jacob’s Well is where Jesus met the Samaritan woman who offered Him a drink of water. Jacob dug the well for himself, his children, and his flock on a plot of land he bought upon his return from Mesopotamia. The Crusaders restored it over the well. Today, it stands within the walled complex of the Greek Orthodox Monastery.

- **Neopolis – Roman City Ruins**: The modern name of Nablus is a corruption of the Greek name. ‘Neopolis’, the new city, which was founded in 72 AD by the Flavian Emperors. The Roman city was built on the northern slope of Mount Gerizim, ca. two km west of Tell Balata. The city developed as a major center in during the second century AD. Major building projects were launched, including the hippodrome, the theatre and other public buildings. The Roman temple of Zeus was erected on Mount Gerizim. In some places excavations have revealed portions of these roman buildings and in some places these are still visible.

- **Gerzim & The Samaritans**: Standing at 881m above sea level, Mt. Gerzim offers a magnificent panoramic view of Nablus and the surrounding area. Ancient ruins at the summit include an octagonal church built by Zeno in the fifth century, and the remains of a mosque and a castle dating back to the time of Salah ad-Din. A small Samaritan community, inhabiting the plateau below the summit for the past 2500 years, holds Mt. Gerzimas sacred. Believing that Mt. Gerzim fitted Abraham’s description better than Mt.Moriah; the Samaritans built a rival temple to the one in Jerusalem. Though the temple has long been destroyed, the Samaritans still point out a rock that they believe is the place where Abraham prepared to sacrifice Isaac.
• **The Olive Oil Soap Factories:** It is easy to understand, after a trip around the north of the West Bank, why the industry based on olive oil, especially soap-making, was established in Nablus. Despite the development of the modern cosmetic industry, Nablus soap is still widely popular in the Arab world because of its natural properties. Today, many factories are active and open to the public. A visit is particularly interesting and allows every secret of the fabrication of this pure soap to be seen, before the truly artistic drying process.

• **The Hammams – Baths:** The tradition of baths is ancient and has its origin in Roman times. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, an important part of Nablus’s social life revolved around its public baths (hammams).

   Today, two public renovated baths carry on the tradition. They provide an opportunity for a unique moment of escape and of well-being. In both hammams, bathers can prolong an agreeable moment with inexpensive refreshments and a smoke on a water-pipe.

• **Caravanserais – Khans:** There are ruins of many Ottoman caravanserais on the road between al-Bireh and Nablus. Some of them, from the Ottoman era, merit a visit, for a good visual impression of these halts. In the past, caravanserais played a major role in the organization of commerce. They were above all places where traders stopped to rest, sleep and take on provisions before continuing their journey. In addition, they served as postal relays and sometimes as military bases.

• **Modern Nablus: Souqs, Soap, Gastronomy (Knafeh):** Today, Nablus is considered the major commercial, industrial and agricultural center in the northern West Bank. Olive oil soap, produced from olive and caustic soda, is a Nablus specialty, which has been produced for more than 250 years. Nablus is also renowned for its talented goldsmiths and its Kenafa, a tasty oriental pastry.

Around Nablus

• **Sebastia**

   The ancient royal city of Sebastia, or Samaria, is one of the largest archeological sites in Palestine. Located 12km northwest of Nablus, the ruins of ancient Sebastia extend on a hill overlooking the present village of Sebastia.

   Excavations at Sebastia indicate that it was first inhabited during the Chalcolithic period in 4000 BC. It did not gain political importance, however, until King Omari built his royal city there and named it Samaria. The visible remains at ancient Sebastia include Roman tombs, a Hellenistic tower, a Severan basilica, and Herodion gate towers at the entrance of a colonnaded street with
6000 columns on both sides. According to religious tradition, the head of John the Baptist was found in Sebastia and a Crusader church, later converted to a mosque, was built in his honor.

- **The Village**

  In the village of Sebastia one can see the remains of the fine church or sanctuary of St. John the Baptist, built by the Crusaders in 1165 on the ruins of a Byzantine basilica, in the crypt of which were the relics of the Precursor and the relics of the prophets, Eliseus and Abdias. The only remains of the 12th century building are the apse, a few large pieces of the wall, together with a considerable portion of the western façade and a few clusters of pillars. The presbytery and the apse were transformed into a mosque called Nebi Yahya.

⇒ **Ramallah and Al Bireh:** The twin cities Ramallah and El-Bireh are 16 kilometers north of Jerusalem. Built across several hills some 900 meters above sea level, Ramallah also is known as “The Bride of Palestine.” Its pleasant, temperate climate makes it a favorite summer resort, and the town hosts dance and folklore festivals throughout the summer.

  Ramallah is very well serviced for visitors, with comfortable places to stay, some of Palestine’s best restaurants, good transport and other tourism-related services, and hospitable, friendly people. El-Bireh was first built by the Canaanites. It is known as a center of learning and for its political and cultural actives. The Friends Boys School was established here in 1886, the Palestinian Legislative Council is located in the town, and Joseph and Mary rested here on their return trip from Jerusalem to Nazareth. The cool summer climate, the physical proximity of Jerusalem, and the relatively peaceful atmosphere make it an ideal break for a night or two.

- **Berot – Al-Bireh:** Ramallah’s twin-city, al-Bireh, was first built by the Canaanites around 3500 BC. According to Christian tradition, Joseph and Mary rested in al-Bireh on their way from Jerusalem to Galilee when they discovered that Jesus was missing. A Crusader church, known as the church of the Holy family, marks the spot where they stopped.

- **Ein Kenya Nature Reserve:** A beautiful nature reserve 7-km northwest of Ramallah, EinKenya is named after its natural springs. A variety of wild plants, birds, and animals make EinKenya a great place for walks, picnics and hiking.

- **Tell al-Nasbah:** Located at the southern entrance of al-Bireh, Tell al-Nasbah is an important Bronze Age site. Visible ruins include a gate dating back to the ninth century BC, a massive wall, the
remains of a Byzantine church, and an Ottoman Khan. Tell al-Nasbah is believed to be the site where Saul was crowned king.

- Palestinian Association for Cultural Exchange (PACE): This association organizes tours to sites of archeological and historical interest as well as urban and rural areas in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The main focus is on the daily life of Palestinians, the customary alternative tourism approach. Individuals can join PACE tours offered on its weekly calendar.

Around Ramallah

- Beitin - Beitin is an ancient village located on the outskirts of al-Bireh. Habitation in Beitin dates back to prehistoric times, and excavations have uncovered flint tools, pottery and animal bones dating back to the 5th century BC.

- An old tower, known as the tower of Beitin, is believed to be the site where Abraham, on his way from Hebron to Nablus, built an altar. It is also believed to be the site where Jacob dreamt of a ladder reaching up to Heaven.

- Beitin was a prosperous town during the Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine periods. The remains of a Hellenistic tower and a Byzantine monastery are still visible.

- Nebi Samwil – Prophet Samuel: Located 120km southwest of Ramallah, Nabi Samwil is the traditional site of Prophet Samuel’s Tomb. Holy to Christians, Muslims, and Jews, the site consists of a large turreted building and a cellar with the cloth-covered tomb of Samuel. The mountain top village, also called Nabi Samuel, is built around a mosque whose minaret offers an extensive view of the hills of Jerusalem.

- Gibeon Al-Jib: Located a few kilometers north of Nabi Samwil, the picturesque village of al-Jib is the site of the Biblical city of Gibeon. In the seventh century, Gibeon was a prosperous wine-producing city. Excavations in the area have uncovered 63 wine cellars, each capable of storing 42 large barrels of wine. Other interesting excavations include a well-preserved ancient water system.

- Birzeit: Located 20 km north of Ramallah, Birzeit's fame is due to Birzeit University. Founded in 1924, Birzeit includes Birzet University which is the largest and most important university in Palestine.
• **Jifna**: Located near Birzeit, Jifna is a small scenic village that was once an important Roman-Byzantine city. Previously known as Gophna of Josephus, Jifna was a regional capital during the first century AD. Today, Jifna is a popular summer resort, offering a variety of fine out-door restaurants, bars and coffee shops.

• **Taybeh**: Taybeh is mentioned several times in the Old Testament as Ophra and, in the New Testament, as Ephraim. Today, the villagers are particularly proud of the Christian tradition that identifies Taybeh (Ephraim) as the place where Jesus chose to stay with his disciples on the night before his Passion (John 11:54). The villagers even claim to have perpetuated Christianity from its early roots here. The al-Khader church, originally Byzantine, then rebuilt by the Crusaders, was abandoned at the end of the Crusader occupation. The Taybeh Beer Brewing Company is the only beer company in the Middle East. Taybeh beer (taybeh means “delicious” in Arabic) is a high quality natural beer, and is found in all Palestinian cafés serving alcohol.

• **Wadi Natuf & Shaquba Caves**: The Shaquba Cave lies east of the present village of Shaquba, in the western part of Jerusalem hills, approximately 20 km northwest of Ramallah. Shaquba cave is one of the largest prehistoric caves in Palestine, located on the right bank of Wadi en-Natuf. The discovery and characterization of the Natugian culture at Shuqba cave marked a major step forward in understanding early human history in the region, and much work throughout southwest Asia stemmed from them.

⇒ **Jenin and the North : The Garden Spring**

Located in the northern part of Palestine, Jenin lies on the border of the Samarian Hills. It served as a transit station on the trade road. Jenin is the ancient En-gannim of the Bible and is the same village referred to as Ginaea. The Romans were the first to name the city of Jenin in the sixth century. The name was derived from Ein Ganim, meaning the spring of Ganim and referring to the region’s plentiful springs. It was 4 kilometers from Jenin, at the village of Burqin, where Jesus cured the 10 lepers residing in a cave at the edge of the village. Today visitors can see interesting ruins of a Byzantine church, which was built on the cave.

Jenin was occupied by the Crusaders in 1103 and then liberated by the Muslim leader Salah Din Al-Ayyoubi in 1187 during the famous Battle of Hitteen.
A beautiful drive through the countryside takes you to Jenin, where you may enjoy the delicious shish kebab and musakhan dishes. Jenin is a characteristic oriental town, with its houses built on the slopes of a hill and surrounded by gardens of carob, fig, and palm trees that are irrigated by a tiny brook.

- **Burqin Church** Located 3km west of Jenin, the village of Burqin contains the ruins of a Byzantine church and the cave where lepers who were healed by Jesus once lived. The church has been restored several times and is still being used by the village’s Christian Greek Orthodox community. It is composed of the leper cave and an 18th century hall and nave. Tradition suggests that on His way to Jerusalem, Jesus passed by the village and miraculously healed the lepers.

- **Belama’s Tunnel** Khirbet Belama is located at the southern entrance of Jenin and is the site of the Canaanite city of Ibleam whose residents resisted the tribe of Manasseh. The tunnel was apparently cut during the late Bronze Age-Early Iron Age and was reused during the Roman Byzantine period. The entrance of the tunnel has a large Roman Vault, probably rebuilt during the Crusader period. At its entrance, a large cistern was found that might be identified with Bires-Sinjib/Sinjil, a corruption of the Crusader name St. Job. The second part of the tunnel shows evidence of reuse from the medieval period, while the end part yielded mainly Early Roman pottery. A large number of lamps were found, mostly in the second part of the tunnel. Additional sites include Arrabah – Ottoman Castles and Tell Dothan

Northern Region

- **Zababdeh City** Located 6km south of Burqin, Zababdeh is built over the site of a Byzantine village. A beautiful mosaic of a sixth century church can be found at the convent of the Rosary Sisters, as well as a Roman building, known as boubariya.

- **Qalqilya** The city of Qalqilya, located northeast of the est Bank, has its roots and origins in the Canaanite era. The name “Qalqilya” goes back to the Roman time, and European medieval sources, like its contemporary, refer to it as “Kalilia.” Qalqilya is situated 12 kilometers from the Mediterranean coast on the border between Israel and the West Bank. The city’s altitude ranges from 45 to 125 meters above sea level. It has 45,000 inhabitants and an annual growth rate of 3.8 percent. Qalqilya has a temperate, Mediterranean climate: rainy and warm in winter and hot in the summer with humidity levels reaching 70 percent during July and August. Annual average rainfall is 550 millimeters. A local council was first established in Qalqilya in 1909 during the last decade of Ottoman rule. Its first municipal council was established in 1945.
• The city has a large stadium, which hosts important national competitions and tournaments. The city also boasts the only zoo in Palestine, which was established in 1986 and comprises 20,000 square meters. The same complex houses an entertainment park, which includes electric cars, trains, and other entertainment for children. During a visit to Qalqilya, you can enjoy the beautiful scenery, the specialized food, and spend a relaxing day in the country.

• **Tulkarem:** Located on the border of the Samarian mountains, Tulkarem was settled by the Canaanites in 3000 B.C.E. Tombs from the early Canaanite period were discovered in the vicinity of the city. It later became a Roman post called Birat Soriqa and from the Islamic period onward it was known as Tulkarem. The city took its importance when the Ottomans made it the capital for the region.

The Tulkarem Archaeological Museum, which is located in the center of the town, includes numerous artifacts from the Roman period onward. There are many historical places in Tulkarem, including the Tomb of Jacob’s Daughters and the Roman Press in Irtah.

• **Umm Al-Rihan Forest:** Umm Al-Rihan Forest is located in the extreme of the West Bank, northwest of Jenin, bordering the Green Line that divides Israel from the Palestinian territories. The site is the main and the biggest natural forest remaining in the West Bank that represents the Mediterranean biogeographical ecosystem. Moreover, this site is considered as one of the main bird areas in the West Bank, mainly for migratory birds of which some pass in thousands yearly. This nature reserve is considered of high importance for wild genetic resources, in Palestine particularly the wild original species of barley, wheat, and fruit trees.

⇒ Hebron:

**Al Khalil** Situated to the south of Bethlehem, Hebron is one of the oldest continuously inhabited towns in the world. History shows the Canaanites were living in Hebron as early as 2000 B.C.E. It is believed that Adam and Eve lived in Hebron after their expulsion from the Garden of Eden.

Holy to Muslims, Christians, and Jews alike as the burial place of Abraham, Al – Khalil. The Abraham Mosque, which houses the tombs of the Patriarchs, dominates the city center’s landscape. Inside the mosque, stunning stained – glass windows soften and transform sunlight falling upon the marble floors and stone-inkscribed walls. The huge symmetric stones in the walls of this mosque are in the style of Herod the Great.

Hebron is known for its lush grape vineyards, pottery, glassware, leatherworks, and other inventive arts. Lively, colorful, and creative are the most common words used by tourists to describe this city.
To the north of town are the famous Hebron glass factories, world-renowned for producing exquisite blue glass. Visitors can watch the process of glass blowing from beginning to end and choose from a colorful selection of vases, jars, and ornaments. Visitors also can find interesting pottery in Hebron, some of it painted and other pieces left natural. Fanciers of leather goods will want to check out Hebron tanneries. Hebron also is famous for its beautiful colorful rugs.

Hebron market (souq) is a wonderful adventure of arched roofs, alleyways, and shops, where you can buy everything from olive wood, spices, dried fruits (the raisins are particularly delicious), jewelry, and avant-garde baskets made from old rubber tires. In step with its focus on the arts, Hebron is creating a museum for archeological and cultural artifacts in an old hammam (bathhouse).

Approximately 3 kilometers north of the town center is the Beit Ilanim site, where an angel told Abraham and Sarah that she would bear a son, Isaac. Another compelling site is Masqobiya, where a huge oak tree stands, indicating the place where Abraham invited the angels to rest and eat.

- **Abraham’s Mosque – Haram Ibrahimi**: Al-Haram is a formidable rectangular building, which looks like a fortress. The construction of the walls and pavement is the work of King Herod. Inside, a vaulted Crusader church has been turned into a mosque housing the tomb of the prophets and their wives.

  Inside the mosque is the Mihrab made of multi-colored marble and fine mosaics. The carved walnut Minbar, or pulpit next to it is a masterpiece of intricate workmanship. Another fine pulpit brought by Salah Ad-Din from Egypt, stands near the praying alcove.

  Additional Crusader and Mamluk structures combine to make al-Haram one of the most impressive ancient monuments in Palestine. There are six tombs in the Mosque of Abraham, which are said to stand directly above the graves of the prophets and their wives buried in the Cave of el-Anbia.

- **Mamre Haram Al-Ram**: After separating from his nephew Lot, Abraham came to Mamre where he pitched his tent. Here, Abraham received the three angels who announced to him that his wife Sara would have a son. Abraham went to rescue Lot from Mamre, and there, he pleaded for Sodom and Gomorrah. Excavations at the site found remains of different Herodion, Byzantine, and Muslim buildings.

- **Oak of Abraham – Moscoby Church**: An oak tree 2km west of Hebron marks the legendary site where Abraham pitched his tent. Excavations in 1926-28 revealed a Herodion enclosure with a well in its southwestern corner. Until recently pilgrims used to peel pieces of the trunk for good luck. Now,
however, the Russian Orthodox Church who owns the site and the nearby monastery has wrapped the trunk with steel braces for protection.

· **The Old Town:** The old town of Hebron is one of the oldest towns in Palestine. The market, or Souq, with its arched roofs and maze of alleys is definitely worth exploring. The shops and stalls sell everything from pottery, olivewood, blown glass, and a wide array of aromatic spices and dried fruits.

· **The Hebron Museum:** In the heart of Hebron’s historical centre, near the Haram, the municipal museum is in the old Ibrahim al-Khalil Hammam.

**Around Hebron**

· **Yatta:** This old village has some particularly beautiful examples of traditional dwellings, which specialists describe as a living example of what could have been the Byzantine habitat, embodying an unbroken architectural continuity across the centuries.

· **Samu’:** The village of Samu’ looks out over fields of olives and vineyards. The known history of the village dates back to the Bronze Age and Canaanite ruins are present everywhere inside underground galleries.

**Gaza:**

Gaza strip part of Palestine, known as the gateway to Asia, is situated at the crossroads between Africa and Asia. Famous for its beautiful beaches, delicious seafood, and archaeological treasures, Gaza has been a trading port and cultural center for thousands of years. Alexander the Great conquered Gaza in 332 B.C.E. Later it was ruled by the Romans. In 637, Gaza became part of the Islamic Empire. The Crusaders invaded Gaza in 1100 and were defeated by Saladin in 1187. The Ottomans took control of Gaza in 1517 and stayed in power for more than 400 years. Napoleon Bonaparte came to Gaza on his route through Palestine in 1799. During World War, Gaza was the scene of famous battles, and today there is a serene, beautifully landscaped British war cemetery in the city.

Gaza also is known for its rich archaeological resources and its known for its diverse archeological and cultural sites. Byzantine ruins and tombs have recently been excavated in the northern part of Gaza. One can visit these archaeological sites and see splendid mosaics with colorful animal and plant figures. Another must-see in Gaza is the Arts and Crafts Village. A beautifully
designed gallery inspired by traditional Islamic architecture, the village offers for sale embroidery, copper, rugs, and pottery. It also exhibits modern art from renowned national and international artists. And don’t forget that the Gaza Strip includes other towns, such as Khan Younis, Rafah, and Deir Balah, rich with unique cultural and historical sites.

Sites in Gaza include:

· **Great Omari Mosque**

Located in downtown Gaza at the end of Omar Mukhtar Street, al-Umari mosque with its beautiful minaret used to be a Norman church built by the Crusaders in the 12th century. It is said to occupy the site of the first ancient temple of Marnas.

· **Church of St. Prophyrus**

This fourth century church is where St. Porphyrius died and was buried (420 AD). It is located in the Gaza’s old city and is still in use by the Greek Orthodox Community.

· **Napoleon’s Fort – Qasr AL-Basha**

Located on Al-Wahda Street in downtown Gaza, this imposing stone building dates back to the Mamluk period. It is known as Qasr al-Basha because Napoleon spent a few nights here on his way through the town in 1799.

· **Anthedon Harbour**

The archaeological site of the ancient harbor city of Anthedonis located along the Mediterranean Sea, in the northern corner of the Gaza Strip. Anthedon is the first known seaport of Gaza. It was inhabited from 800 BC to 1100 AD.

Anthedon represents a clear example among seaports along the Eastern Mediterranean coast, demarcating the ancient trade route that linked Europe with the Levant during the Phoenician, Roman, and Hellenistic periods. Abundant archaeological evidence provides a complete and comprehensive picture of the historical and archaeological evolution in the region, which reflects the rich socio-cultural and socio-economic interchange between Europe and the Levant.

· **Tell Umm Amer**

The site of Tell Umm Amer is located in Al Nusairat village on the Mediterranean Coast, 8.5 km south of Gaza City. The first settlement in the
site was established during the Roman era. It appears on the Madaba map with the name Tabatha. The Site contains the ruins of Saint Hilarion (born 291 AD), which consist of two churches a burial site and a baptism hall, a public cemetery, an audience hall, and dining rooms.

The site is tangibly associated with the phenomenon of the flowering of Monastic desert centers in Palestine during the Byzantine period. St. Hilarion’s monastery was perhaps a center of missionary work in Gaza region, seemingly isolated in the desert but actually at the center of affairs at communications cross-roads between Egypt, Palestine, Syria and Mesopotamia.

- **Arts & Crafts Village**

The centre contains an art gallery and handicraft workshops which offer high quality articles for sale. Don’t miss the highly agreeable Café Abu Nawwas in the complex.

- **The Pottery Workshop**

Situated near the el-Faras market, the pottery workshop is unique. Pottery-making in Gazah as inherited a long tradition. From the Greek to the Byzantine period, amphorae called ” Gaza jars” filled with olive oil, wine or brine could be found all over the eastern Mediterranean. Today, the jars are principally decorative in purpose. They are usually of generous proportions, but one may also find smaller versions: in particular, water coolers whose unglazed clay is perfect for keeping water fresh and cool. The techniques of fabrication, firing and storing these pieces of pottery give their workshop a character of its own.

- **Khan Younis**

Khan Younis, located in southwest Palestine, is the second largest city of the Gaza Strip next to Gaza City. It is 25 kilometers south of Gaza, 20 kilometers north of the Egyptian borders, and 4 kilometers from the Mediterranean Sea.

The city’s name is formed of two words—Khan meaning hostel and Younis, which refers to Prince Younis Dawadar who built a garrison in 1387 for soldiers guarding travelers and pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem and Mecca. The town square is bordered by this impressive historic fortress that dominates the view.
In the old times, the city functioned as a station for commercial caravans. It gained special significance for its strategic location connecting the Nile Valley to the Fertile Crescent, Egypt, and the Arabian Peninsula.

Khan Younis is a market town for agricultural produce from the surrounding villages. It is worth a visit on Wednesdays and Thursdays during the weekly, colorful Bedouin Market, where merchants sell everything from embroidery to fish. There also are several cafés around the town center where you can sit down to eat local food or sip Arabic coffee.

- Rafah

The ancient city of Rafah is and has been for many years the southern port to Palestine, a port that was the cause of many battles fought against invaders of Palestine in the north and Egypt in the south.

One of Palestine’s oldest cities, Rafah formed a natural border between Egypt and the Fertile Crescent. Marble colonnades and obelisks were erected to mark the boundary between Palestine and Egypt.

The name of the city, currently home to 130,000 residents, appeared alongside the name Gaza in pharaohs’ scripts dating back to the 16th century B.C.E. The city was used as a primary guard point along the Hawras coastal road, which witnessed increased activity when the pharaohs came into full power.

Rafah was known in the Islamic era as a rest station for travelling merchants. Historians in the 11th century described the city as an industrious hub, featuring a market, a mosque, and several hotels and shops. Archaeologists believe that the sands of the western part of Rafah cover ruins belonging to the Roman era.

Wadi Gaza Coastal Wetlands

Wadi Gaza springs from the Negev hills and the southern heights of Hebron. The length of the Wadi is about 105 km from its source, and extends from the Truce line in East Gaza to the coast where it discharges into the sea.

The Wadi is distinct for its twists and turns, notably it makes eight curves when it crosses the Gaza Strip.

The Wadi Gaza is considered as one of the most important coastal wetlands located on the Eastern Mediterranean Basin, very rich in Biological diversity (both Flora and Fauna). The wadi is also a station point for the migratory routes from north to south and from south to north.