

Pilgrimages Of Peace: Solidarity Tours To The Holy Land

ITM

Al-Aqsa mosque

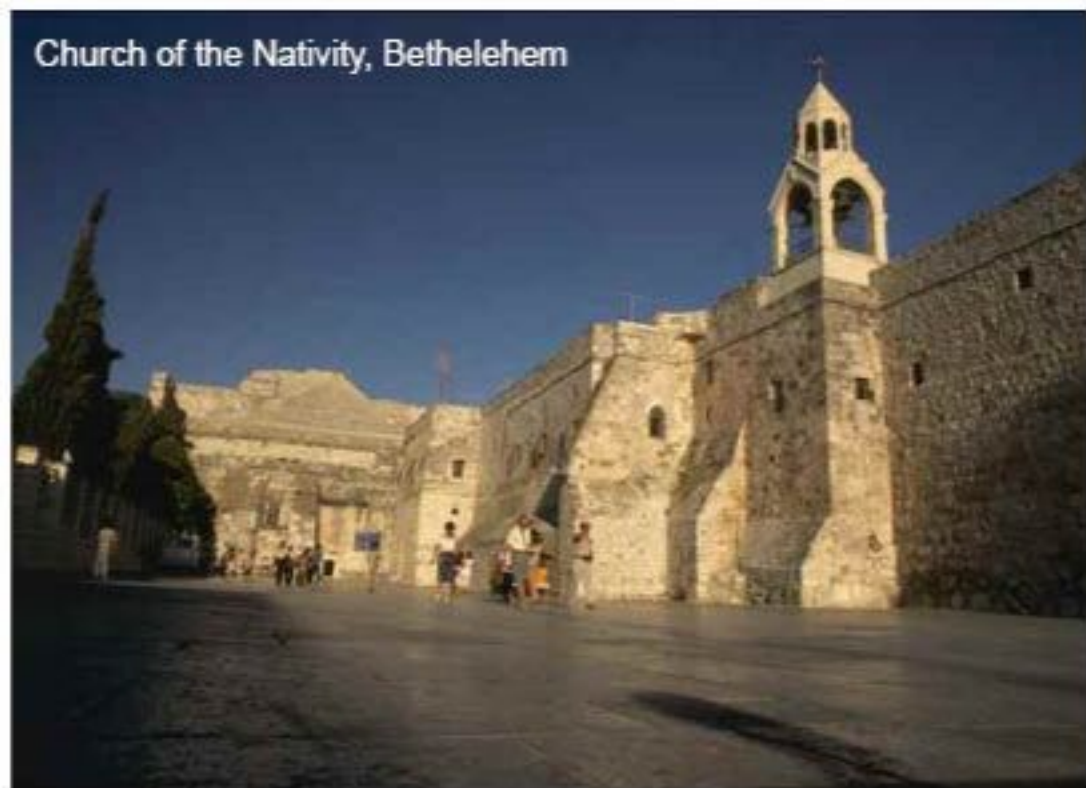


A trip to Palestine is a unique experience where past, present and future intertwine to offer a journey of cultural, religious, social and political dimensions.

Bethlehem-based Hila Tours organises pilgrimages to the Holy Land which combine visits to historic and religious sites with an insight into the social and political situation in Palestine. Meetings are arranged with local NGO's, universities, centres for peace and Palestinian and Israeli politicians. In its mission statement about «solidarity tours» Hila explains that the land of Abraham and Mohammed, a promised land for some, acquired for others, is now divided. "Amongst all this there

are those however, from all spiritual families, who seek peace and work together to establish it. It is in the stable and secure West Bank surroundings that we invite you to better understand the tragic conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians. We stand with the Palestinian people - with their cultural and artistic activities - and support the continuation of their traditions amid the austere regime of the occupation which is both intrusive and oppressive, often coupled with humiliation. This trip

Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem



Tomb of the Patriarchs



Star of Bethlehem
in the Church of
the Nativity



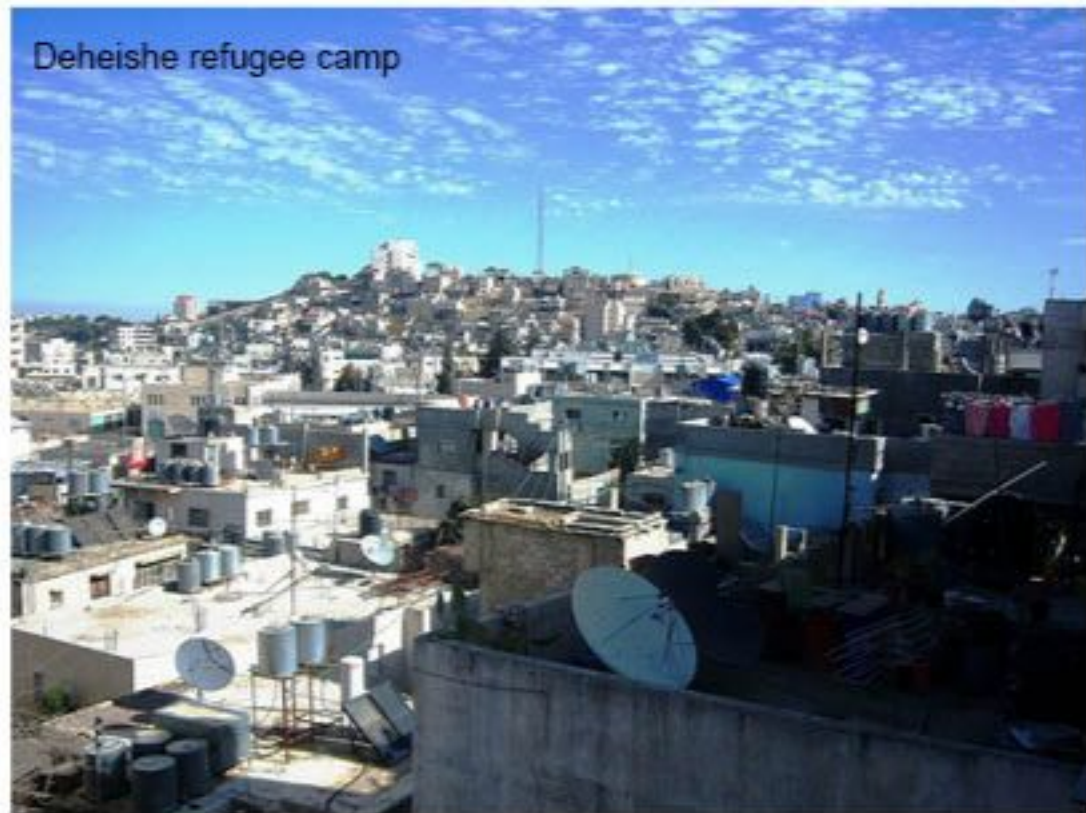
is not intended to pressurise the visitor to adopt a certain viewpoint; it aims instead to open our eyes to a terribly complex situation resulting from some of the West's least glorious moments in history".

The Islamic history of Palestine is connected to some of the most important events in the spreading of the Muslim faith. The Prophet Muhammad prayed in Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem when he ascended to heaven. On top of the rock where he stood to ascend,

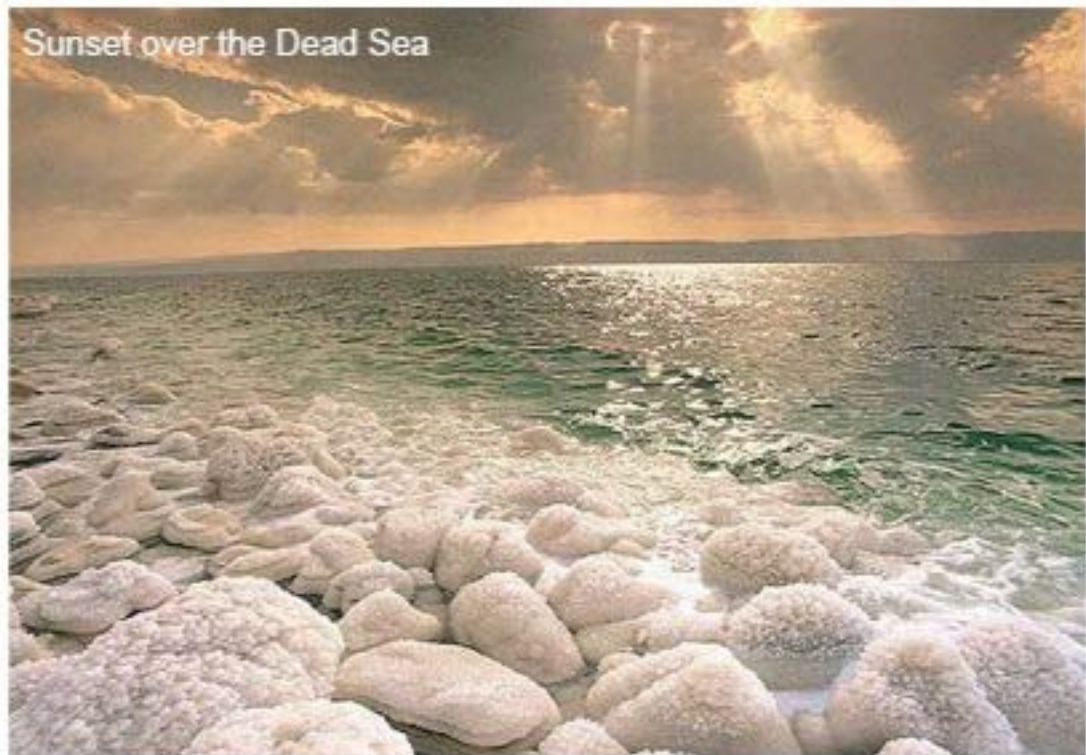
the Umayyads built the Dome of the Rock, one of Islam's most sacred places and a centre of pilgrimage throughout the centuries.

All the Islamic dynasties left their cultural and political mark on the area. This convergence of cultures is evident from the magnificent monuments and buildings in Palestine, particularly in Jerusalem. This city, one of the holiest in the world, was richly

Deheishe refugee camp



Sunset over the Dead Sea



Hila tours logo



embellished by the Umayyads, Ayyubids, Mamluks and Ottomans, and its Al-Aqsa Mosque was a prestigious centre for learning and the development of traditional Islamic religious and scientific knowledge, side by side with the spreading of Sufism.

Other monuments all over

Palestine also testify to this rich cultural heritage, from sanctuaries to madrasas, mosques, zawiyas and caravanserais. Exploring Palestine is a journey through science and religion, admiring magnificent artistic works and monuments which represent a synthesis of the beauty and variety of Islamic art.

Hila Tours tailors its itineraries to both Muslim and Christian pilgrims.

For Muslim pilgrims the tour of the Holy Land can be combined with umrah. After or before umrah pilgrims spend the day in Jerusalem and then travel to Bethlehem where they visit the Church of the Nativity. Hebron a city built by the Canaanites around 4,000BC is the next stop. There is a tour of the Old City, and a visit to the Tomb of the Patriarchs which contains the tombs of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and their wives.

Hebron, the old city



Pilgrims can say their prayers at the Al Khalil mosque. At Deheishe, the local refugee camp in Bethlehem there is an opportunity to meet local residents.

On the final day of the umrah pilgrimage extension there is one more opportunity to explore Jerusalem. A wonderful panoramic view provides another perspective on the holy city. After prayers in the Al-Aqsa Mosque there is a visit

to the Islamic Museum before departure for a green oasis near the Dead Sea and Jericho, the lowest city in the world at 240 metres below sea level. There is a visit to Ibmoussa mosque where, according to the Quran, the prophet Moussa is buried.

Pilgrims leave the Holy Land crossing to Jordan via the King Hussein (Allenby) Bridge.

Old City, Hebron

