POSITIVELY

PALESTINE

MAGAZINE • VOLUME 1

DEVOTION IN JERUSALEM | WEAVING AND EMBROIDERY | THE SECRET OF KA'AK AL QUDS | HIKING WADI AL QELT | THE LADY OF AL AQSA | 10 DO'S AND DON'TS WHEN VISITING PALESTINE | THE EXQUISITE TASTE OF KUNAFEH | FAMOUS PALESTINIANS | DISCOVER PALESTINIAN WINE

POSITIVELY

PALESTINE

MAGAZINE

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Cover image by Afif Amireh

WIDEOYSTER
WideOysterCreative.com

Positively Palestine Magazine is co-created as part of a series of travel storytelling masterclasses created and given by the travel storytelling team of WideOyster Creative. All contents are produced by the Palestinian talents in the editorial team. For more information on WideOyster Creative, check www.wideoystercreative.com or email Marco Barneveld at marco@wideoyster.com.

Co-funded by the European Union

german cooperation
DEUTSCHE ZUSAMMENARBEIT

Implemented by giz

This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the editorial team and do not necessarily reflect the views of the EU or the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development or GIZ.

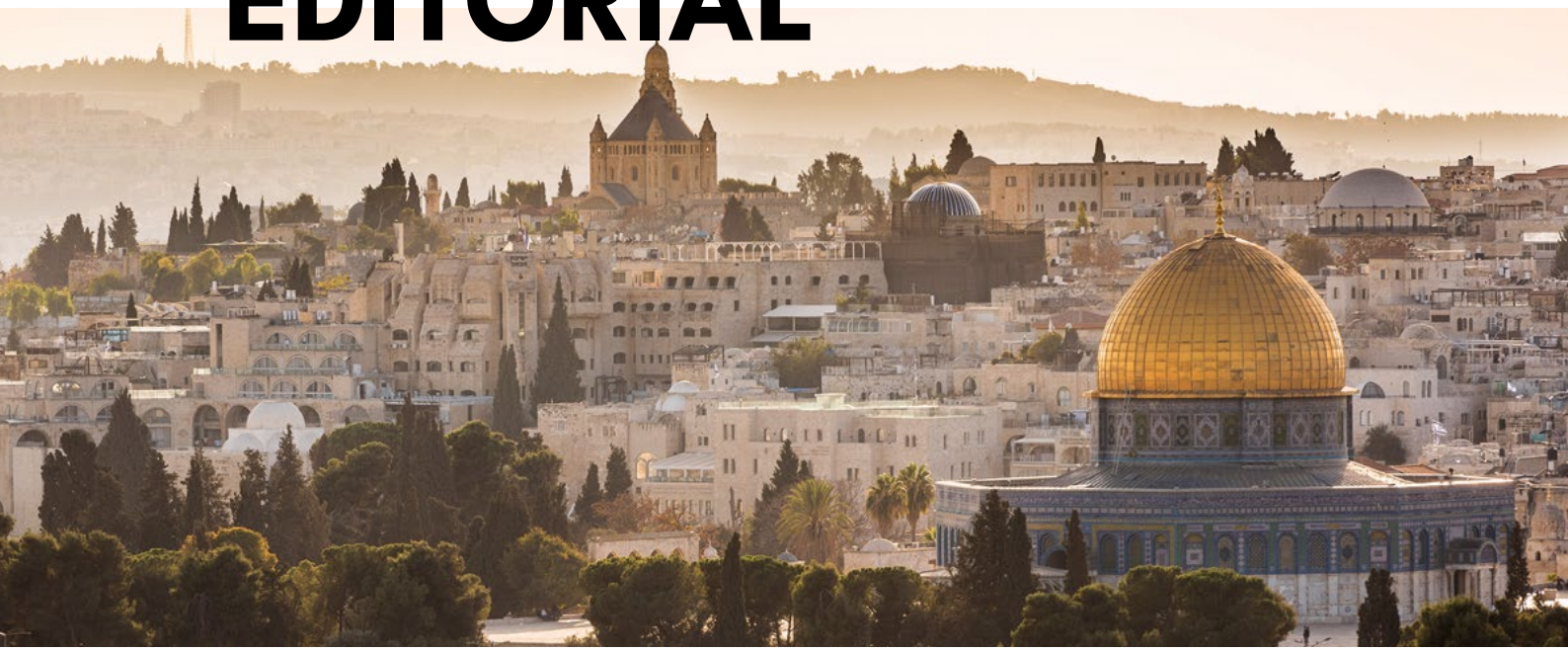
Proud

The Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities of Palestine (MoTA) is pleased and proud to be part of Positively Palestine Magazine. Throughout the last months, we hosted the Masterclasses given by the WideOyster Team to our extraordinary Palestinian talents in our ministry in Bethlehem. We saw up closely how this new magazine was conceived and created. Some of the talents in the editorial team are also on the tourism promotion content team of the Ministry. Their enthusiastic stories created a lot of expectations from our side. The anticipation is well rewarded.

Positively Palestine Magazine is rich of articles with great photography that show the diversity, history, and beauty of Palestinians and the Palestinian culture and people, offering an insight into the spirit of Palestine. We hope you will enjoy this voice of a fascinating culture and that you will enjoy your (future) stay in Palestine. Spread the positive word.

Mrs Rula Maa'yaa
Palestine Minister of Tourism and Antiquities

EDITORIAL



If there was no Palestine, we had to invent one!

From the streets of the Old City of Jerusalem to the gold leaves of the Dome of the Rock, from the astonishing views of the Mar Saba monastery to the quietness of the local olive trees, Palestine has so much to offer that showcasing all its richness seems impossible!

And yet, despite the challenge, this is the mission that Positively Palestine has given itself, with the support of Germany and the European Union, implemented hand in hand with GIZ, the German Cooperation Agency. We value this initiative that comes at the right time to fill a gap, by putting together and under a magnificent light pieces of information that are too often scattered and known only through specialized networks.
So, whether you are a pilgrim eager to visit and pray in the Holy Land, a professional hiker whose ultimate challenge is crossing Wadi El Qelt, an old-stone lover searching for the secrets of the past or a simple tourist who wants to discover this magnificent part of the Middle East, we hope that Positively Palestine will help you discover and understand the magic behind the landscapes.

On your way to Palestine and to East Jerusalem where its heart lies, deep in the Old City, do not forget to meet warm-hearted and hospitable Palestinians. There is no trip without personal encounters. Meeting the vibrant and welcoming people of Palestine, listening to their stories of a past between legend and history and a present marked by the daily struggle under occupation and hope for a better future while sharing a piece of local bread, some tea or a typical knafé, will be a most rewarding experience.

Positively Palestine will be a most useful guide and a beautiful key to discover this wonderful country, and its people. As the great traveller from the XIVth century AD Ibn Battuta once said "Traveling – it leaves you speechless, then turns you into a storyteller". Upon your return home, I am confident that Palestine will remain in your heart and your mind as an unforgettable experience.

Sven Kühn von Burgsdorff
European Union Representative

Mr. Oliver Owcza
The Representative of the Federal Republic of Germany

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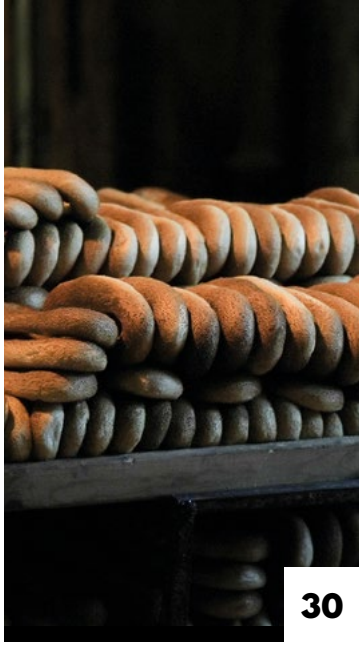

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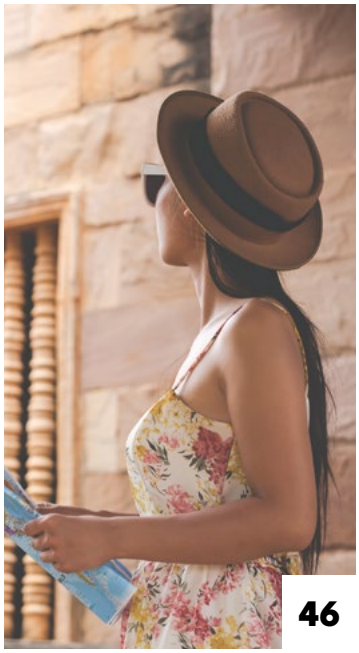

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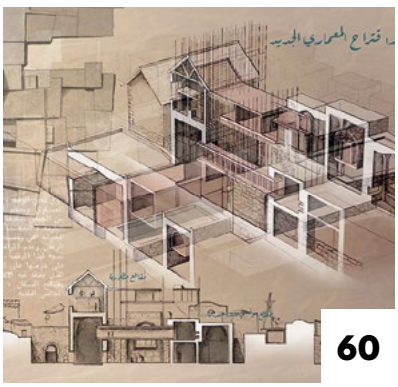

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Each door holds a minor mystery, a hidden history. In this series, we knock on a door to retrieve the story behind it. Part one: Dar Al Sabagh.

WHAT'S HAPPENING

Do you want to know the hotspots to eat, drink, sleep, shop and see in Palestine? Search no further.

EAT

Maklouba

Maklouba, or 'Victory dish', is a traditional Palestinian dish that dates back to the 12th Century AD. It was first prepared when the famous Muslim General Salahuddin Al-Ayyubid ('Saladin') captured Jerusalem from the crusaders in 1187.

Ingredients:
Meat or chicken, eggplant, tomatoes, carrots, garlic, and cauliflower. Spices: turmeric, cumin, bay leaves, garlic powder, salt, and pepper.

Recipe:
Cut the chicken or meat into cubes and fry them, with the spices, for ten minutes until they are crispy. Add water, thus making a broth.
Fry the vegetables in a different pan. Add the fried vegetables to the meat/chicken soaked in broth. Place the chicken/meat on the bottom of a big round pot, add layers of fried vegetables, and top it with rice and broth. Cook the pot for 45 minutes over a medium flame (120 degrees Celsius). Finally, let the pot rest for 30 minutes. Then flip the contents upside down. Serve with yogurt.

'Sahtein!'('Enjoy!').

SLEEP

5 reasons to stay in Mary's House

Welcome to Mary's House, a unique and beautiful guest house right in the heart of Bethlehem. If you are looking for a place to stay in the city of the Nativity, well, you've found it! We'll give you five reasons why.

1. Mary's House consists of a number of characteristic houses, all more than 200 years old, which have been converted into a guesthouse and a small monastery. The Bridgettine sisters have managed this monastery since 2002.
2. The guest house has 14 rooms, a chapel, a dining room, a lecture hall for 60 persons, and a lovely garden.
3. Mary's House is located near the Manger Square and the Old Market, 10 minutes walking distance from the Nativity Church.
4. The views from the top of the guesthouse – the city and the surrounding hills and mountains – are truly magnificent.
5. The whole place truly breathes authenticity, simplicity, spirituality, and modernity. Adding to this: the House cuisine serves mouth-watering dishes for local and foreign visitors upon demand.

So: see you at Mary's House!
maryshousebethlehem.wordpress.com

SHOP

Yasser Barakat Gallery

Next to the only fountain in the Old City of Jerusalem and a few meters away from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, you can find the unique Yasser Barakat Gallery. It is a family-owned business first established in 1905. Yasser Barakat currently owns and manages the gallery with his son Ihab
The gallery has a great diversity of high-quality artwork, including old Palestinian embroidery, antique engravings, ethnic jewelry, original Persian handmade carpets, antique maps and books printed pre-19th century, and the essential collection of Armenian ceramics made before 1948.
Let Yasser and Ihab help you explore the richness of their gallery while you enjoy a cup of tea or coffee. Father and son will treat you to a beautiful learning experience.
www.yasserbarakatgallery.com

SLEEP

3 beautiful & sustainable guesthouses in Palestine

For eco-conscious travelers visiting Palestine, here are three genuinely charming low-impact guesthouses that will make guests feel at home with the warm welcome of Palestinian hospitality.

Turquoise Guesthouse

The Ottoman Era Turquoise Guesthouse in the ancient city of Nablus is a newly renovated traditional Nablusi merchant's home. It's part of a social enterprise that implements sustainable tourism and cultural revitalization within the local community. Guests can enjoy the vibrant social life at the guesthouse, participate in local cultural events of music and art, indulge in the local food culture, and unwind at some of the best local historical Turkish Baths.

Address: Nasser Street, Nablus

Mosaic Guesthouse

Located in the oldest parts of the village of Sebastia is the beautiful Mosaic Guesthouse, an artistically unique boutique guesthouse with displays of vibrant and colorful handmade mosaic artworks created by local artists. The guesthouse offers only locally made Palestinian products, such as handmade soap, jams, and ceramics, as well as providing traditional Palestinian meals prepared by local women. It's also equipped to accommodate people with disabilities, as it allows for wheelchair accessibility.

www.mosaicguesthouse.org

Auberg Inn Guesthouse

The family-style Auberg Inn Guesthouse in Jericho has the ambiance of a serene sanctuary. It's surrounded by a sweetly scented garden that provides fresh produce for everything on the seasonal menu. Guests can enjoy picking fruits from the garden, interacting with gentle farm animals, and gathering around the evening bonfire for hot tea and argileh (water pipe). The guesthouse offers many activities integrated with the local community, such as hiking, e-biking, cooking classes, yoga meditation, horse-drawn carriage rides, and tours.

www.auberginn.ps

EAT

Coffee at the Singer Café

In the heart of the old city of Beit Sahour, there is an old building that dates from the Ottoman Era. They named it Singer Cafe because the café is nicely decorated with antique Singer sewing machines. Besides a cozy and welcoming coffee bar, it has a unique non-smoking library room with books, magazines, and newspapers. The café also has a terrace with an incredible view and boasts a giant graffiti by the Palestinian artist Ayed Arafah. Their motto is coffee, art, and education, and their coffee is considered the best in the town.
www.singercafe.com

EAT

Great falafel at Afteem's

Afteem is a family business. It's the first Falafel restaurant in Bethlehem, founded in 1948 by the Salameh family, who came from Yaffa as refugees. The restaurant is named after the son of the founder.

The restaurant is always full of locals and tourists from around the world. It is a nice little place for a quick lunch or breakfast when touring Bethlehem. Not only does it serve delicious traditional food, but it is also wonderfully located, right next to the Nativity Church. So if you visit the Nativity Church, step inside Afteem. Afteem makes the best falafel and hummus in town. Ask any local.

Address: Manger Sq. 009, Bethlehem

SEE

The Nativity as Holy Art

In the words of a British visitor to the International Nativity Museum: 'What a fascinating place! Wonderful to see how many cultures were represented here and how they each portray that famous scene'.

Christmas is undoubtedly the most logical time of the year to visit the place. But it is open all year. A lovely experience at any time. The museum boasts more than 300 nativity scenes in all sizes, shapes, and materials.

Once you enter the museum, you feel the place's magic, warmth, and holiness. Wandering from one room to another, experiencing the beautiful pieces of art while listening to classical music, stops time and takes you back two thousand years.

DRINK

Arak Muaddi: pampering your taste buds

As I enter the Muaddi Craft Distillery in the village of Beit Jala, the fragrant aniseed-scented smell of arak tickles my nose. No wonder: this is the place where Nader Muaddi creates what he calls an ultra-premium spirit, made with passion, artistry, and respect for heritage. After welcoming me to his place, Nader brings out two long transparent glasses, drops two ice cubes in both of them, and then slowly pours out his valued drink. As he adds some water, the contents of the glass become crystal white. While we enjoy every sip of our arak, Nader tells me how he started his family-owned and operated boutique distillery in 2017. 'The history of arak itself goes back at least a thousand years. It is the ideal company of a mezze or a mixed grill because it refreshes the palate with every sip.'

www.muaddi.com

DRINK

Enchanting date seed coffee

Did you know you can turn date seed into a beverage reminiscent of coffee without caffeine? Date seed coffee has a more subtle flavor and is delicious.

Date seed coffee is one of the most unique products in the world. The idea originates in the city of Jericho, where palm trees full of dates grow naturally without the need for chemicals or pesticides. The production provides many job opportunities there.

The date coffee is made from the kernel of the date, which is roasted and crushed into a beautiful brown powder that tastes and smells just like coffee. Not only is it caffeine-free, but the date seeds are also jam-packed with minerals & vitamins, and fatty acids.

When drinking a cup of date seed coffee, you can genuinely say: to your health!
www.holylandhands.com/product/date-seed-coffee/

DRINK

Try some Palestinian wine

Did you know that Palestine produces some really extraordinary wine? Enoteca Espresso and Wine Bar is the perfect place to try some. Or drink an amazing coffee, if that's your thing.

Enoteca is the perfect little coffee and wine cafe located in the Christian quarters of the Old City. They serve a wide variety of Palestinian wines, which will leave you surprised by its quality. Try the wines from Ashkar Winery, a boutique winery started by Nemi Ashkar, a second generation Palestinian of the displaced community of Iqrit. Previously an Arab, Christian village, Iqrit was seized and forcefully depopulated in 1948 and later destroyed on Christmas eve in 1951. But Palestinians are resilient. It didn't hold Nemi Ashkar back creating some amazing wines. Try them at Enoteca.

Address: Hanotsrim 18, Jeruzalem.

SLEEP

The Jerusalem Hotel

The Jerusalem hotel is located just outside Damascus Gate, the main entrance to the Old City. From here, guests can visit all the historical and religious sites or roam around the nearby bustling markets. The hotel's architecture is considered authentically Arab.

The hotel has 14 rooms decorated with antiques inspired by Middle-Eastern culture and traditions. All furniture is hand carved, inspired by early Islamic and Andalusian designs. The garden simulates a Palestinian village, while the 300-year-old cross-vaulted ceiling cellar serves as the breakfast room.
www.jrshotel.com

DEVOTION IN JERUSALEM

East Jerusalem:

WELCOME TO THE SACRED CITY

Welcome to Jerusalem, the world's most divine and photogenic city. Considered holy in three major religions, it holds more mystical and sacred sites than any other place. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre, for instance. It stars in this episode of Photogenic Palestine; Devotion through the lens of photographer Afif Amireh.

Photography: Afif Amireh

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre, also known as the Church of the Resurrection, is the holiest church in Christianity. The dome is built over the tomb of Jesus Christ. Followers of the Christian faith believe that Jesus was crucified on Calvary (Golgotha), also located under that dome. Subsequently, his body was taken down and buried in the tomb.

UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage:

WEAVING AND EMBROIDERY IN PALESTINE

Palestine has an incredible cultural heritage. One of the most beloved is the 3000-year-old tradition of weaving and embroidery. In 2021 UNESCO recognized its unique value by adding this tradition to their Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Time for us to tell you a bit more about this unique Palestinian phenomenon.

TEXT: Ihab Barakat | PHOTOGRAPHY: Ahed Izhiman

Weaving (naseej' in Arabic) and embroidery (tatreez) are two of the oldest crafts in Palestine. Girls from the age of six used to start doing embroidery work. From the age of ten, they would start making embroidery for part of their wedding dress: a garment that will only be worn on their wedding day.

Of these, hats from Hebron are considered the most expensive. It is a tradition that wealthy families lend them to people who cannot afford one for their wedding day. The Hebron wedding headdress is called Weqyet Al-Darahem ('The Coins Headdress') and is adorned by beautiful rich embroidery and full of silver and gold coins.

Uniquely, the Palestinian dress is designed and adorned by the women themselves. The dress design contains information about the status and identity of the person who wears it. One of the 'stories' a dress design tells us is whether the woman is a town dweller, a villager, or a Bedouin. It also tells us from which region she comes.

In Bethlehem, couching embroidery was influenced by the West, and the cross stitch was influenced by the Sarma dress of the Ottoman period. Palestinian women developed other techniques using cross stitch, half stitch, and full stitch.

Small quantities

The craft of weaving textiles was widely spread all over the country before 1948. The main weaving cities were Safad, Nazareth, Galilee, Nablus, Beit Jala, Hebron, and Gaza, with their Majdal weave, which originates from the village of Al-Majdal Asqalan (Ashkelon). Palestine counted over 300 weavers in those days, but almost all have gone today. However, in very small quantities, weaving carpets by hand is still being practiced in areas like Hebron, Bethlehem, and Gaza.

This traditional practice goes as follows. In springtime, the wool is gathered from sheep, and the process of segmenting and cleaning the wool starts. Then wool is provided to various village women to start the spinning process.

After spinning, the wool is gathered where the weaving will occur, and the wool's dying (coloring) process starts. In the past, dying was done using vegetable dyes, but nowadays, dye

The craft of embroidery in Palestine started in the second half of the nineteenth century and is still ongoing today. It is a craft that proudly narrates what Palestine is and preserves our people's heritage and history. Palestinian embroidery has strong geographical connections: each region has its own embroidery motifs, techniques, and colors. The embroidery of a dress is far more than just a matter of embellishment. In fact, it is rich in meaning and tells us a lot about the woman and her life, such as her social, marital, or economic status.

Henna Nights

Embroidery is a preserver of identity for the women of Palestine. To this day, embroidery is produced and practiced as a craft in many Palestinian households. Sometimes as a hobby and in some households as the primary source of income for the family. Embroidery and weaving are dominant in the Palestinian heritage because both have been used for ceremonial and functional purposes over the years. Some women embroider dresses and fashion pieces to be used in modern ceremonial events like Henna Nights (Henna is a night for women only, which takes place a day or two before the wedding night). It is a traditional practice where women wear their traditional Palestinian dress (thobes) and celebrate the bride-to-be. You might compare it to the bachelorette parties in the West.

In Palestinian embroidery, colors are very important, and the most dominant color is red, or shades of red. This color is a sign of happiness and joy, whereas blue is used in times of grief. The use of the colors blue and green symbolizes paradise. The abundance of the embroidery demonstrates wealth.

The Coins Headdress

The headdress or hat worn on a woman's wedding day is particularly important. It differs from one region to another. Headdresses in places like Ramallah, Bethlehem, and Hebron are the most distinguished and show wealth.

is imported from countries like Turkey and India.

The last step in the process is weaving the carpet using a loom. In doing so, the weavers can either select traditional colors and designs or choose a more personal input. Most weavers used to select the first option.

Marriage

Carpets were traditionally made for brides and grooms to celebrate their marriage. After that, the carpets would be used on special family occasions. It was customary for the carpet owner to be carried in during their burial. Subsequently, the rug would be donated to the village mosque as a charity to whoever would need it.

As mentioned, Palestinian embroidery's glory and artisanal strength declined after 1948. One major reason was the 1948 war with Israel. Others are the limited availability of the material used for the dresses and the time needed to produce these unique pieces. If we compare today's Palestinian embroidery with the pre-1948 period, we see a massive gap in quality, stitches, creativity, colors, and design. Women of Palestine used to be naturally creative artisanal embroiderers without any reference to books or tutorials. They would gather in circles, each competing in embroidering her masterpiece. They took their inspiration from their natural surroundings and could be creative and different because they practiced their hobbies in peaceful, flourishing times.

UNESCO

In an important event for Palestine culture, UNESCO inscribed 'the art of embroidery in Palestine, practices, skills, knowledge, and rituals' on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2021.

By doing so, it rightfully documented that this valued cultural tradition, which dates back 3000 years, should be continued and celebrated by all Palestinians. Palestinians are very proud of their embroidery and one can see it represented in every house in Palestine and outside of it.

It is a unique and precious gift for visitors to be taken back home. Many places in Palestine sell Palestinian embroidery in the form of personal items or home accessories. Please visit them and share our cultural richesse. You'll be surprised – and delighted.

Dar Al-Tifel Museum: a must-visit destination

When in Jerusalem, check the Dar Al-Tifel Museum, established by the late Ms. Hind Husseini in 1962. It shows the art of embroidery through a unique collection of Palestinian Embroidery and Kilims weaved in Palestine.

The Dar Al-Tifel Museum is situated just behind the American Colony Hotel in Jerusalem. It features a collection of Palestinian embroidery dresses that are over 100 years old, exhibited in a building with old Mamluk-style architecture. The late Ms. Husseini established the museum to educate the world and the local community for generations to come about the rich ancient Palestinian art and traditional heritage.

Ka'ak

THE SECRET OF KA'AK AL QUDS

All breads are created equal, but some breads are better than other breads. When in Jerusalem not eating Ka'ak is not an option. There is nothing better than sinking your teeth into fresh, still warm Ka'ak.

TEXT & PHOTOGRAPHY: Afif Amireh

Four o'clock in the morning. Not a soul is walking the cobbled, meandering alleys of the Old City of Jerusalem. There is a chill in the air. Spring is near, but not yet. A cold wind caresses my face. And while I breathe in the early morning air, the warm scent of fresh Ka'ak enters my nose. "Whoever visits Jerusalem and doesn't taste Ka'ak Al Quds (Sesame Ring Bread) has not truly experienced the Holy City," says Abu Loai Razem the moment I step into his bakery.

Sesame-studded

All Palestinians agree that the sesame-studded Ka'ak bread made in Jerusalem tastes better than those made anywhere else in the country or even the world. That may be a myth or a fact, but there is no doubt that the taste of this bread made here is unique.

I ask Abu Loai, the owner of the old wood bakery in the Christian quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem, about this specific taste. He explains it with a broad and happy smile. "This city was demolished and built up again seven times. Jerusalem is the city of both war and peace. Our houses and stores are ancient and very small, we can't expand or renovate our places.

Wood fire

My family has operated my bakery for the past hundred and fifty years. Like most of the bakeries in the Old City, we use traditional wood-fired ovens: they are old but completely original. We still make the dough for the Ka'ak with our own hands, without machinery.
By doing so, we feel we carry the history and legends of this city into the future. The Ka'ak absorbs these stories combined with the wood fire's smell and taste. That's the secret."

Ka'ak carries the history and legends of this city

Hiking in Wadi Al Qelt:

A PLACE THAT NEVER DISAPPOINTS

It started like this. I saw a large black cross, peaked in-between the deserted hills. It looked both ominous and surprisingly thrilling. And then, more metal crosses started to appear in the distance. They were in perfect contrast with the solid blue sky and the yellow hills of Wadi Al Qelt. I knew I had arrived.

TEXT & PHOTOGRAPHY: Malak Hasan

The first time I visited Wadi Al Qelt, I was completely stunned by its beauty. But what surprised me most was seeing these large black crosses peaking in-between the hills. When I asked, I was told that these crosses signaled the presence of an important religious site at the end of the trail. It was the start of a never-ending love story between me and Wadi Al Qelt. So I visit it again and again. Like today.

As I drive to the starting point of my hike, I realize I love Wadi Al Qelt because it never disappoints. Whether you take a vigorous hike or just a short one, the valley will show you something new every time. There are the ancient man-made water canals running through the hills, in winter time carrying crystal clear water down to the city of Jericho. With a bit of luck, you will spot the rock hyrax, also known as the rock rabbit, peaking from one of the many holes in the walls of the valley and enjoy the wildlife. And there are beautiful natural springs that invite a swim.

St. George Monastery

My absolute favorite among all this, however, is the St. George Monastery.
It is one of five monasteries that still stand and function in the Jerusalem wilderness. The remains of over 60 religious structures were found in the area, which is proof of the strong monastic movement that flourished in the valley during the Byzantine period due to the availability of fresh water. Many of the caves along the trail were densely populated by monks.

For me there is something hypnotizing about the drive down to the monastery, one of my favorite points for a hike in the valley. All you can see is endless hills fading into the horizon, merging effortlessly with the sky creating a sense of infinity. The more I drive down the hills, the further I get away from any sign of civilization, creating a sense of both humility and awe. Some minutes ago, I lost my internet connection, which brought my music to a halt. No problem: I listen to the song of the wind rushing through my window.

Tranquil isolation

Then I see a parked car, an umbrella and a young boy laying on his back in a most relaxed way. It looks like he knows the desert by heart, maybe thinks of it as home. I am tempted to stop, but then I decide not to disturb his tranquil isolation. A few minutes later, I reach an arched gate with sellers standing on both sides, setting up their tables with hats, scarfs and food and drinks.

I park my car and get out to be greeted by a Palestinian Bedouin who is selling colorful scarfs and hats for tourists visiting the site. I buy a red scarf and wrap it around my head to shield myself from the scorching heat of the desert. Then I grab my camera and hiking bag and start my hike.

A donkey is nonchalantly grazing on some hay, a man sitting next to it.
'Assalamualaikum', I say.
'Assalamualaikum lady, do you want take a ride on my donkey, down the hill to the monastery?'
'You are very kind, but no thanks', I say politely. 'What is your name?'
'I am called Ragheb and I have been working in this place for 20 years now.'
'Then I am sure you can tell me where I can get a good view of the monastery.'
'I am the right person to ask', he laughs and points towards a small unpaved uphill trail.
'Take this route and you will reach a viewing point to see the Monastery in all its glory.'

Carved out of stone

After some time, the St. George Monastery slowly starts to reveal itself. It feels it is almost intentionally creating suspense and surprise. The monastery looks as if it was carved out of stone and is part of the cliff it hangs on. All I can think of is: 'How?' It takes me a minute to appreciate the brilliance of this structure, its intricate simplicity and deafening peacefulness. I gently place my bag on the stone steps and sit down to drink in the view.

I see a tiny black figure walking gracefully out of the monastery down to the main gate. It looks as though he is one of the monks living there. Four to be exact, as I find out later from the locals working in the area. He opens the small gate and returns to the monastery.

Fed by ravens

I have read online that the monastery is open to visitors from 9am until 1pm every day, except on Sundays, so I get up again to start the hike down and explore the place from within. At that moment, I hear a chatter growing louder behind me. A group of tourists peaks from behind the rocks and their first reaction is amazement. 'Wow! Das ist großartig!' As I understand some German, I smile and think to myself: 'It is amazing indeed.'

Their tour guide explains a little bit about the history of the monastery. 'The monastery was founded around 480 AD by John of Thebes. Accompanied by few other hermits, he settled around the cave where they believed Elijah stopped on his way to Sinai and was fed by ravens. In case you are interested: the relevant Bible verse is 1 Kings 17:5-6.'

Important spiritual center

He gives the group more facts. That the monastery was named after George of Koziba, who lived there in the sixth century. That during his time, the place became an important spiritual center, but the church was damaged during the Persian invasion in 614 AD. The bones and skulls of the martyred monks can still be seen today in the monastery chapel.

The hike down is nothing short of gripping. At first I am greeted by a golden gate with the Tau Phi symbol of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem. There is also a large cross in the distance, that can be seen from between its metal bars. As I reach a corner, parts of the monastery reveal themselves. I rejoin Ragheb, who is riding his donkey Shosho behind me, in pursuit of another group of tourists, this time from Romania. Ragheb looks at me with a conspiratorial smile. 'They were quick to decline the ride down', he says. 'But on the way up, they will desperately seek me.'

Fully dressed in black

As I reach the main gate of the monastery, I am greeted with a monk fully dressed in black. He points at my head scarf and asks me to wrap it around my waist before I enter the small door.

I enter the gate and see another monk, sitting in the stone archway. I nod with respect and he greets me back with reciprocated humility.

The monastery complex encloses two churches, the Church of the Holy Virgin and the Church of St. George and St. John, both rich in paintings, icons and mosaics. The cave-church of St. Elijah can be reached by stairs from the inner court of the monastery. From this cave, a narrow tunnel provides an escape route to the top of the mountain.

Momento Mori

I walk all the way up towards the main church and sit on a bench next to a balcony looking up down the valley. Next to me there is a young man, with an interesting tattoo inked on his arm. I greet him and ask him what the tattoo symbolizes. 'Momento Mori', he says, 'which means Remember Death.'

As a comical coincidence, right when he says those two words, a monk in a room next to us turns on a recording of beautiful heavenly hymns which give me goosebumps. With the hymns as a backdrop, he elaborates.
'Our time on earth is fleeting. We should be grateful and live life with no regret.'

That touches me deeply. I contemplate how lucky any person is to have the privilege and explore life in its full sense.
He looks at me again and asks: 'What is your name?'
'It is Malak, which means angel in Arabic.'
He smiles and says: 'My name is Gabriel, also an angel.'
We laugh at the coincidence and then fall quiet. Two people named after angels in a monastery in the middle of the Jerusalem wilderness, contemplating the meaning of life and death. It somehow feels appropriate.

Discover Wadi Al Qelt

The complete hike, referred to in this article, is 45 kilometers long. But you can also walk smaller sections of it. The majority of tourists drive (rather than walk) to St. George Monastery, as this option gives them more time to see other beautiful sites in the area. From Ramallah, take the highway to Jericho and let the road signs direct you towards the paved road leading all the way to the entrance of the valley and the monastery.

Mariam Abu Nijmeh, the lady of Al-Aqsa:

‘YOU CAN SMELL TIME IN THE STONES’

To live within the Al-Aqsa compound. A dream for many Muslims, the reality for Mariam Abu Nijmeh. She takes us along within her favorite, sacred part of Palestine.

TEXT: Ysmein Abukhdeir | PHOTOGRAPHY: Afif Amireh

It's almost 4:00 am. Mariam awakens to the steady sound of the ithan (call to prayer), slowly engulfing the night's silence. She makes her way through the darkness of her home, a dash of light peering through the window of her living room. The air is warm, the moon bright, the sky pitch black, and the sound of the ithan rhythmic. Out in the distance, only a few meters away, is a golden glow radiating from one of the most iconic landmarks in the world, the Dome of the Rock.

'This is what I do every morning. I wake up, go to my window, then I go to the mosque to pray', she says with a smile while stirring a pot of Arabic coffee over the blue fire of the stove in her kitchen. 'It is the best part of my day.'

The Noble Sanctuary

Mariam lives within the sacred enclave of Al-Aqsa (Al-Haram Al-Sharif) or the Noble Sanctuary. A place that is not only her home but also her world: the place she most treasures. 'I feel that I am the luckiest person on earth, that God has chosen me to live here', she says endearingly, her eyes twinkling with joy. The enclave of Al-Aqsa sits at the highest point within the Old City of Jerusalem and is known as the third holiest site in Islam. It is a fortified sanctuary accessible from all sides by stairs, gates, and underground corridors.

Mariam's home is warm and beautifully decorated with family pictures, handmade embroidery, decorative vases, and flowers. It

is a Mamluk-era residential complex, a historic building with stone walls, iron-grilled windows, and vaulted ceilings. It is built over the shops of the ancient souq (market) of Al-Qattanin (souk of the Cotton Merchants).

Since 1968

From one side, it oversees the covered market, a long corridor filled with colorful shops that lead into the rest of the Old City market, and the other side peers right into the courtyard of the Al-Aqsa compound. Mariam is one of several families that live within the enclave of Al-Aqsa. 'I have lived here since 1968', she says as voices echo and buzz from the crowds below. It is the home she grew up in and where she raised all seven of her children.

She comes over with a silver tray and serves the coffee in beautiful porcelain cups with gold rims. She is welcoming and kind, offering us sweets, chocolates, and heart-shaped pieces of fresh Ka'ak Al Quds (Jerusalem bread). 'This is Ruaa, my granddaughter', Miriam tells me as Ruaa, a girl of about eight years old, comes to help her grandmother serve. 'She speaks four languages.'

Fajr time

Mariam often hosts people at her home, especially tour groups visiting from all over the world. She is well known for her tours within the Al-Aqsa compound and the Old City. She also has a reputation for preparing delicious home-cooked Palestinian dishes for picnics with her groups within the sanctuary. We finish our coffee, and Mariam happily invites us to accompany her to one of her favorite places within the compound during fajr time, the time of prayer before sunrise.

The next day, at around 5:00 in the early morning, we meet her in the quiet and empty courtyard outside in front of Al-Qattanin gate. This is one of the several fortified gateways that lead into the Al-Aqsa enclave. It is one of the most beautiful gates that leads into the compound, an ornate piece of Mamluk architecture with a semi-domed top and black, red, and cream stones.

Ancient limestone

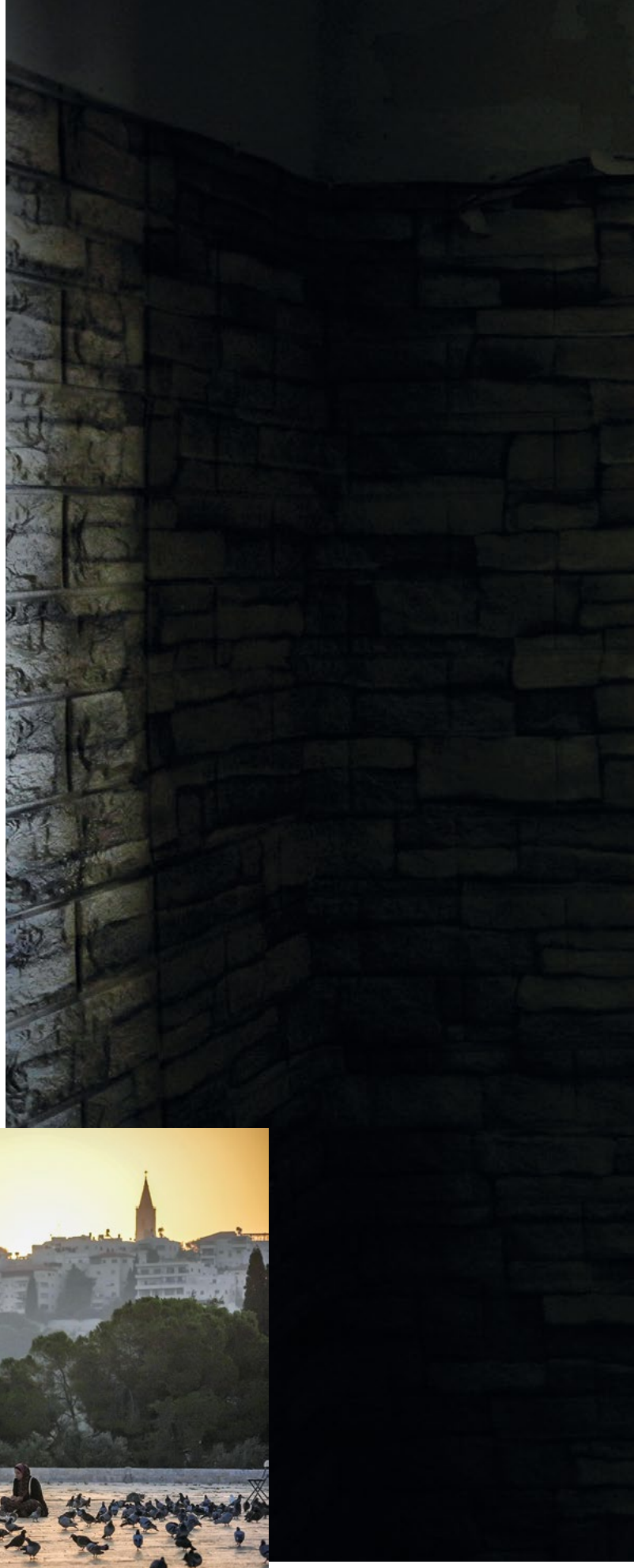
Following Miriam, we walk through the summer night, ancient limestone beneath our feet. There is something ethereal about the atmosphere, a feeling of beautiful serenity.

Over the centuries, many empires have left their mark on this holy place. This resulted in a unique and diverse mix of architecture, archeology, history, and design. The Al-Aqsa compound is a place of kings, caliphs, sultans, and scholars.

We come across the dark, silver-domed congregational Al-Aqsa Mosque (Al-Qibla Mosque), located on the south side of the compound. A rectangular structure originally built in the seventh century commemorates the first direction of prayer in Islam. Then we make our way towards a grand stairway that we ascend. At the top, we walk through the arched gates to reach a central platform. At its center, dazzling in the night is the golden-domed sanctuary known as Qubbet al-Sakhrah (Dome of the Rock), commemorating the Prophet Mohammad's Night Journey (Israʾ and Miʿraj).

Copper doors

Mariam reaches the entrance of great copper doors, takes off her shoes, and heads inside onto white marble floors. She places her shoes on designated wooden shelves. Enshrined at the center of the structure is the sacred Rock of Ascension. An entrance leads to a cave chamber within the foundation stone itself. 'This place is so special. I feel it makes me close to God', Mariam whispers as we go down the carpeted staircase. This cave is known as the Well of Souls. It is one of her favo rite places within the compound. 'You can smell time in the stones. The odor takes you back to the time of the prophets', she says, speaking quietly.

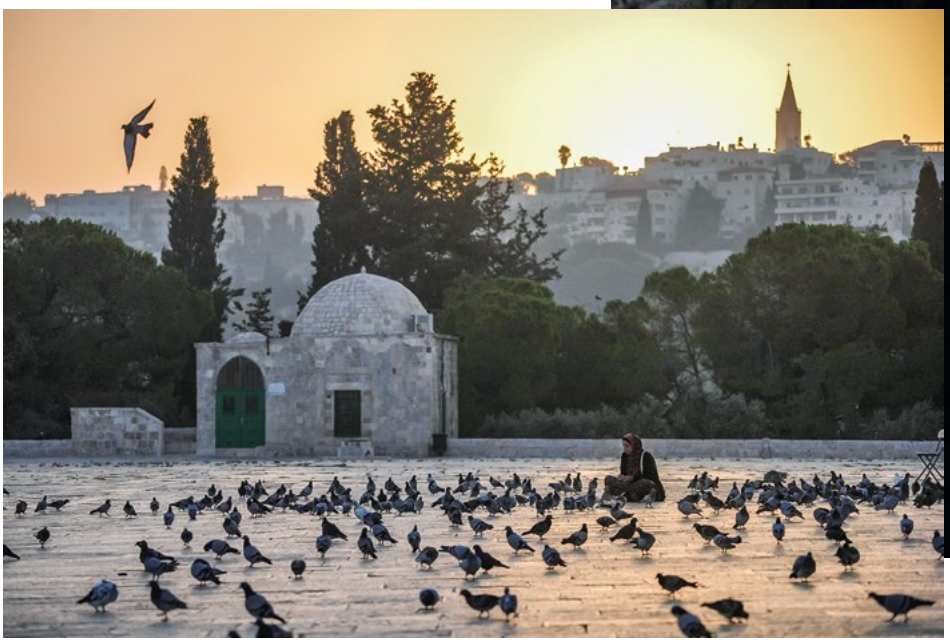


As sunrise approaches, we leave and follow Mariam back outside through her daily morning stroll around the sanctuary. We come across surprisingly many people. Almost everyone knows Mariam and greets her warmly.

Hot mint tea

'I grew up with the stones of Al-Aqsa. I can't believe these are the same stones I walked on as a child', she reminisces fondly as the sky pales and the birds begin to sing.

Mariam's neighbors offer us sweets and hot mint tea as we sit at the steps of one of the monuments near the Dome of the Rock. 'After my walk, I greet my neighbors, then sit to drink my tea and enjoy watching the birds', Mariam says. Birds begin to flock together as the early morning twilight brightens. It is her time of quiet reflection and gratitude.



Avoid epic travel fails:

10 DO'S AND DON'TS WHEN VISITING PALESTINE

When exploring Palestine, you might experience a bit of a cultural shock depending on where you are coming from. Let us help you navigate through Palestinian culture. Ten Do's and Don'ts to avoid awkward situations and fit right in with the locals.

TEXT: Ysmein Abukhdeir

DO'S:

1

Always accept the food and drinks that are offered,

especially Arabic coffee! Food and drink are a traditional symbol of hospitality and generosity, and accepting the offer is a mutual form of goodwill. Palestinians are incredibly kind and hospitable and more than happy to welcome tourists. Don't be surprised if you are invited to someone's home for tea, sweets, or a home-cooked meal. Say yes! Palestinians consider it an honor to host you in their homes. When eating a meal at a Palestinian's home, be sure to compliment the food and be prepared for your hosts to be constantly refilling your plate with more food, even if you are full. Welcome it; refusing is considered rude! However, to avoid endless food servings, don't finish your plate. Your hosts will just refill it with more food.

2

Always bring a gift when you visit someone,

especially if you are invited to someone's home. You can bring sweets, chocolates, pastries, cookies, dried fruits, or freshly ground coffee as a token of appreciation. The act of gift giving is a fundamental concept. It is part of the traditional culture and is seen as good manners and something that maintains and encourages good relations. If you are gifting food during the month of Ramadan to a Muslim, be sure to present it to your hosts at Iftar time (sundown). This is because during Ramadan, Muslims fast throughout the day, and it would be awkward and rude to give them food while fasting. Also, when entering a Palestinian's home, be sure to greet everyone in the room and let your host guide you on where to sit.

3

Always be easygoing.

Palestinians are infamous for being late. Palestinians are generally very relaxed and laid back and love being spontaneous. They don't like to stress, so it's better to be easygoing when making arrangements or keeping appointments. If things don't go according to plan, don't get frustrated. Sometimes things end up going better than planned. The friends you make along the way may want to change prearranged plans spontaneously. They may just want to hang out and chat, go on a trip, have you meet new people, or eat lunch at another friend's house. Go with the flow. Never be late for an appointment with a Palestinian, even though a Palestinian may be late.

4

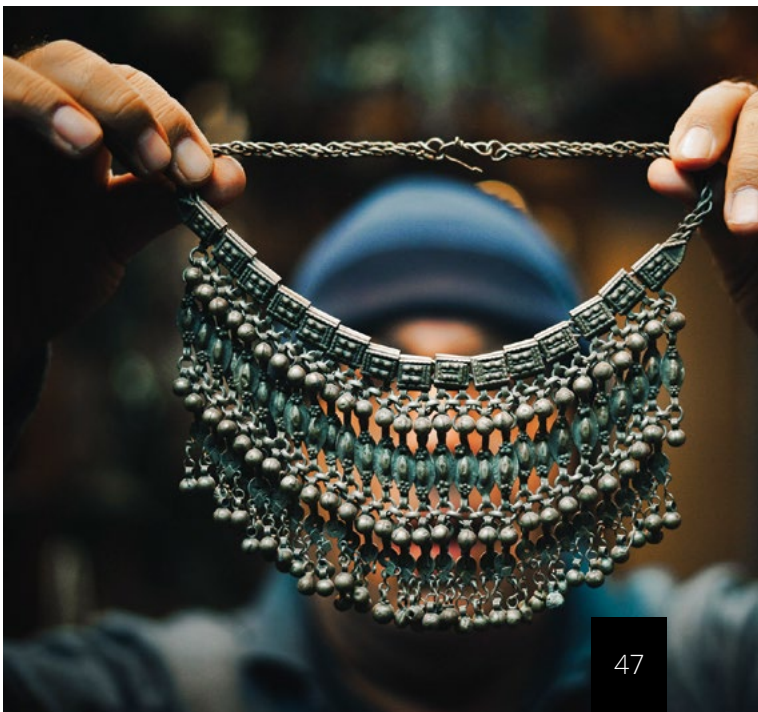
Always speak with the locals.

Palestinians are very friendly and helpful. They have a great sense of humor, are excellent storytellers, and love showing off their language skills. Don't be shy to strike up a conversation. The locals generally love to chit-chat whether you need help with directions, finding interesting events or places to eat, or even just wanting to chat about the weather. Don't miss out on a chance for cultural exchange. They can lead to great friendships and adventures. Also, please take the opportunity to learn some Arabic phrases and use them when interacting. Locals will love and appreciate the effort.

5

Always haggle.

When shopping at the local shops or bazaars (or even when being driven around by your taxi driver), it is expected and a common practice that you bargain with the merchants and vendors, especially when it is clear that there are no fixed prices. Negotiating and bargaining is part of the experience when visiting Palestinian markets. It is also a rite of passage. However, you should only bargain if you are interested in buying something. Also, be sure to bargain reasonably and in a friendly back-and-forth manner.



DON'TS:

1

Do not automatically shake hands or hug people of the opposite sex, especially if they are conservative.

When you meet someone of the opposite sex, wait and see how they operate. They will either extend their hand to you for a handshake or place their hand on their heart. The latter means they cannot shake your hand but respectfully acknowledge you. Just follow their lead and mirror the gesture. However, don't be taken aback when a Palestinian of the same sex will go ahead and give you a hug and a peck on both cheeks. It is considered a warm, affectionate, and welcoming gesture.

2

Do not dress inappropriately when visiting holy sites.

Palestine, in general, doesn't have a very strict dress code. It is pretty relaxed in most places. But this is not the case when it comes to visiting any of the holy sites. Tourists must dress appropriately when visiting churches or mosques to avoid offending the locals. Generally, men should avoid sleeveless shirts and wear long trousers. The same goes for women, except they should also wear loose-fitting clothes. If they are wearing short sleeves, they should have a shawl or veil handy, just in case. It would also be wise to keep these rules in mind when visiting conservative cities within Palestine.

3

Avoid PDA

or public displays of affection. Kissing or hugging in public is considered very inappropriate and disrespectful. Public displays of affection are not part of the cultural custom, as it is very reserved and considers such intimate moments a private act that should not be carried out in public. Be sure to respect the cultural norms. Hand holding, however, is generally accepted and growing in popularity with young local couples, except in the more conservative cities and never around religious sites.

4

Do not take photos of locals without permission.

Locals will be happy to pose for pictures, but you must ask permission first. Some locals are very conservative and uncomfortable with having their photos taken, especially in the presence of women or their families. This rule generally goes for any country around the world. Still, local people in Palestine, or any Arabic country, are a lot more sensitive about it, especially if you want to share that photo on your social media.

5

Do not point your feet at people.

When you are sitting on the floor, couch, or chair, be sure that you are not pointing the soles of your feet or shoes towards anyone. The feet are considered the dirtiest and lowest part of the body, so exposing the sole to someone is terribly offensive and disrespectful. It is also essential to remove your shoes before entering someone's home, although this rule is not so strict in Palestine and generally varies. It is advisable to follow what everyone else is doing or ask if they prefer you remove your shoes.

Palestinian folklore

Visitors aiming for a deeper understanding of Palestinian culture may want to brush up on some Palestinian folklore. Palestinian folklore provides an exciting and important way to learn communication skills, culture, and language in a social context. Try Speak, Bird, Speak Again. This is a collection of Palestinian Folktales by Palestinian authors Ibrahim Muhawi and Sharif Kanaana.

Kunafeh:

YUMMMMMMMMMM

Kunafeh is a signature dish in Palestinian culture. Yes, it is a wonderful delicacy enjoyed by everyone. But there is so much more to this fantastic product that originates from the city of Nablus.

TEXT: Magdouline Salameh | PHOTOGRAPHY: Frits Meyst

Since my early childhood, this delicacy has always been a source of happiness and luxury. Its excellent taste combines sweet and cheesy flavors and is uniquely rich. And yet this wonderful dish is made of simple ingredients.

Nowadays, Kunafeh is emblematic of Palestine, and though it is popular in the Levant countries and the Middle East region, it tastes different in the place of its origin. And this place of origin is the city of Nablus.

Capital of sweets

Located in the northern part of Palestine, Nablus is considered the capital of sweets, and its kunafeh, or Al-Kunafa Al Nabulsiyyeh, as it is known, is popular in all Arab countries. The name kunafeh derives from the Arabic word knaf, which means 'to shelter'.

In a recent article in de Arab press, Taher Bakeer, a researcher specializing in the history of Nablus, stated that The Abaza sweet shop was the most famous in Nablus. 'A famous sweets maker in the Levant told me that Abaza was the one that taught us how to make kunafeh', he explains. 'The Turks took it from the confectioners of the Levant after we brought it there from Nablus.'

Noodle threads

Three main types of crust can be used when preparing kunafeh. The first is called khishnah ('rough'). This crust is made from noodle threads. The second is n ámah ('fine') and is made from semolina dough. The third crust is called mhayara ('mixed'), which, as its name suggests, is made of khishnah and mhayara. It can be made using jibnah ('cheese'), or eshta ('cream'). All in all, the ingredients of kunafeh consist of cheese, semolina dough, sugar syrup, and pistachio.

So yes, kunafeh is a delicious dish. But there is so much more to this delicacy than just the culinary aspects. It is not only a dessert type but nothing less than an inherited culture. This typical sweet, eaten either warm or cold, is also a symbol of the Palestinian sweet and warm hospitality and its authentic traditions. It helps you to know much more about the Palestinian community and life.

Ramadan

Palestinians consume this sweet on special occasions, for instance, at feasts and happy get-togethers, and not necessarily after a meal. Savoring kunafeh can be a way of welcoming a guest or celebrating some other important event. Also, kunafeh is part of the authentic Palestinian Ramadan and is served to family members and guests during iftar (after sunset).

At times of sorrow, for instance, after the loss of a beloved person, kunafeh plays the silent role of consoler. It is a widespread custom to serve kunafeh to guests offering their condolences. For some families, it is a weekly tradition to eat kunafeh, where family members, friends, and relatives gather to play cards, smoke hookah ('water pipe'), tell

The city of Nablus holds the Guinness World Record for 2009 for the largest kunafeh ever made. This extraordinary delicacy consisted of 600 kilos of cheese, 700 kilos of dough, 300 kilos of sugar, and 35 kilos of pistachios. The plate was 75 meters long, two meters wide, and weighed 1.765 kilos. Now that's a super kunafeh!

jokes, and enjoy each other's company over a delicious dessert.

Traditions

A visit to any local kunafeh factory in Nablus will enable you to see the traditional it is made. You will learn about the authentic Palestinian traditions and understand how Palestinians keep on their traditions.

Kunafeh is an essential element of the Palestinian identity. Savoring this typical dish is a way of protecting this identity. That is why it is made with passion and love, combining all pure Palestinian products into a rich sweet. Al-Halawani (as any owner of a kunafeh store is called) wants you to experience an everlasting taste associated with Nablus and Palestine that makes your visit to Palestine an unforgettable memory.

National pride

Palestinians are committed to using the traditional way and recipe of kunafeh. It is a way of defending identity and symbolizing national pride, unity, persistence, friendship, and hope.

Taste al-Kunafeh al-Nabulsiyyeh, and I am sure you will feel the difference. Bon appetit!

15 FAMOUS PALESTINIANS THAT ROCK(ED) THE WORLD

Palestine lies at the heart of the world and is characterized by its strategic location, fabulous nature and unique relics. It is known as the Holy Land and is held sacred among Jews, Christians and Muslims. Palestine, however, is also distinguished by its talented people. Here we present 15 Palestinian talents who enriched the world.

TEXT: Rana Qumseih, Hiba Abu Libdeh and Lubna Hamad

Mahmoud Darwish

MAHMOUD DARWISH (1941-2008)
Male, poet and author, Ramallah

Mahmoud Darwish was a Palestinian poet and author, regarded as the Palestinian national poet. He won numerous awards for his works. Darwish used Palestine as a metaphor for the loss of Eden, birth and resurrection, and the anguish of dispossession and exile. Mahmoud Darwish was born in 1941 in al-Birwa in the Western Galilee. He published his first book of poetry, Asafir bila ajniha, or Wingless Birds, at the age of 19.

MUHAMMAD ASSAF (32)
Male, singer, Dubai

Mohammad Jaber Abdul Rahman Assaf is a Palestinian pop singer, well-known for being the winner of the second season of Arab Idol. In 2013, Assaf was named a goodwill ambassador for peace by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA). He was also named ambassador of culture and arts by the Palestinian government. Assaf's story is the basis of the 2015 film The Idol. Most of his music is sung in the Iraqi and Gulf dialects.

Muhammad Assaf

Rim Banna

RIM BANNA (1966-2018)
Female, singer, Nazareth

Rim Banna was a Palestinian singer and composer who was best known for her modern interpretations of traditional Palestinian songs and poetry. Banna was born in Nazareth, where she graduated from Nazareth Baptist School. She lived in Nazareth with her three children. From 2001 to 2010 he was married to the Ukrainian guitarist Leonid Alexeyenko, whom she met when studying music at the Higher Music Conservatory in Moscow. She died of breast cancer at age 51.

Oday Aboushi

ODAY ABOUSHI (31)
Male, football player, United States

Oday Aboushi is a Palestinian-American American football offensive guard who plays for the Los Angeles Rams. He is the ninth child of Palestinian parents who emigrated to New York from Beit Hanina, a Palestinian neighborhood in East Jerusalem. He played college football for the University of Virginia and was selected by the New York Jets in the fifth round of the 2013 NFL Draft. He has also played for the Houston Texans, Seattle Seahawks, Oakland Raiders, Arizona Cardinals, Detroit Lions and Los Angeles Chargers.

Dalal Abu-Amneh Abbasi

DALAL ABU-AMNEH ABBASI (31)
Female, neuroscientist, singer and producer, Nazareth

Abu-Amneh has been fascinated by both science and music since her childhood. She gained fame and appraisal for her ability to perform a wide variety of different musical styles, while crafting a global Palestinian identity through her music. Abu-Amneh emphasizes the value of musical heritage and glorifies the role of elderly women in preserving folklore. She holds a PhD in neuroscience and has a deep passion for scientific exploration. She craves uncovering the secrets of the brain and solving its puzzling nature, both in health and disease.

YASMEEN MJALLI (23)
Female, designer, Palestine

In 2017, a picture of Yasmeen Mjalli in a denim jacket with the phrase 'Not Your Habibti' went viral. The image sparked a dialogue about sexism within Arab communities. As an Arab feminist, Yasmeen wanted to show Muslims how feminism and Islam can co-exist. She started a clothing brand called The Nöl Collective, which blends activism, feminism and culture into their clothing and jewelry. All their products are produced locally, and 10% of the proceeds go to women's organizations.

LE TRIO JOUBRAN: SAMIR (49), WISSAM (39) AND ADNAN (37)
Male, musicians, Paris

Le Trio Joubran are a Palestinian oud band from the city of Nazareth, consisting of three brothers. All of them master composing and playing the oud, a traditional string instrument, popular in the Middle East. Wissam manufactures their instruments, a craft he inherited from his father and developed by studying at the Antonio Stradivari Institute in Italy. The trio took Paris as their place of residence and from there they move and roam the world.

Amer Zaher

AMER ZAHER (45)
Male, comedian, United States

Zaher is a Palestinian-American comedian and political activist. He is based in Dearborn, Michigan, and works as an adjunct professor at the University of Detroit Mercy School of Law. Zahr was born in Jordan to refugee parents of Palestinian heritage, originally from Nazareth. He moved to the United States when he was three years old. In 2013, Zahr founded the annual 1001 Laughs Dearborn Comedy Festival. He wrote the autobiographical book Being a Palestinian Makes Me and made the documentary We're Not White.

Naji Al Ali

NAJI AL ALI (1938-1987)
Male, political cartoonist, Palestine

Naji Al Ali is probably the most famous cartoonist in the Arab World. He is best known as the creator of the character Handala, who became an icon of Palestinian identity and defiance, and remains a widely popular character, depicted on walls and buildings throughout the West Bank. In 1987, while waiting outside the London office of a Kuwaiti newspaper for which he drew cartoons, Al Ali was shot in the neck and mortally wounded. He drew over 40,000 cartoons.

Maysoon Zayid

MAYSOON ZAYID (48)
Female, disability rights activist and comedian, New Jersey

Maysoon Zayid suffers from palsy, but sees this as a strength. It is her intention to show the world that disabled people they can do anything. She has had a successful career in comedy as 'America's first Muslim woman comedian'. Maysoon was the first comedian to perform a stand-up routine in Jordan and Palestine. Additionally, she co-founded the New York Arab American Comedy Festival and performed all across the nation. Her 2014 TED Talk 'I got 99 problems, palsy is just one' received over eleven million views.

Karima Abboud

KARIMA ABBOUD (1893-1940)
Female, photographer, Bethlehem

Karima Abboud was one of the first female photographers in the Arab World. She received a photo camera as a present from her father for her seventeenth birthday. Her first photographs were portraits of family members and landscapes in the Bethlehem area. After graduating from university in Lebanon, she focused more on archeological work. Abboud excelled in her profession at a time when very few women were involved in the arts and many were reluctant to appear before cameras, especially women.

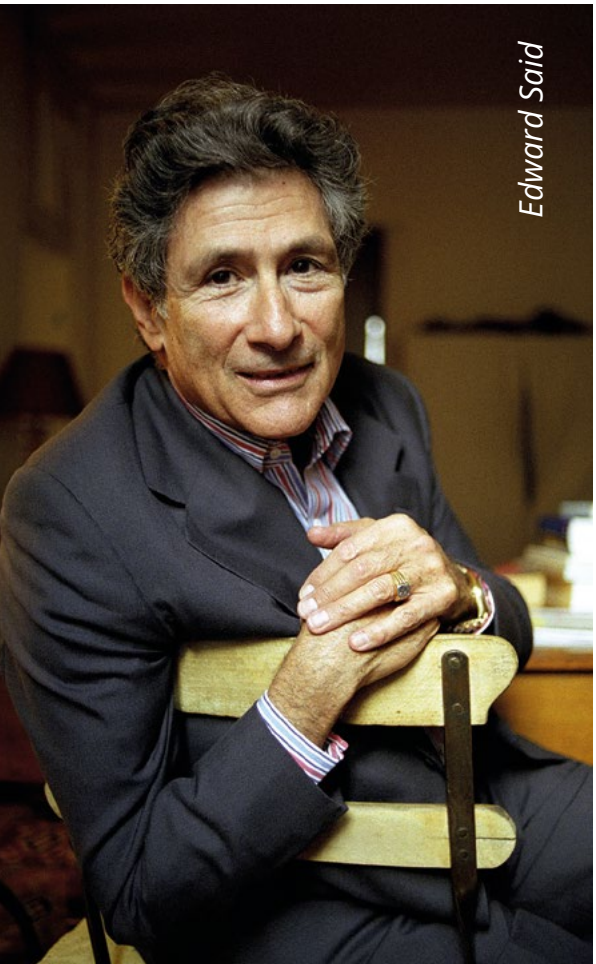
Shireen Abu Akleh

SHIREEN ABU AKLEH (1971-2022)
Female, journalist, East Jerusalem

Shireen Abu Akleh was a Palestinian-American journalist who worked as a reporter for the Arabic-language channel Al Jazeera for 25 years, and was one of the most prominent names across the Middle East for her decades of reporting. She lived and worked in East Jerusalem. On May 11, 2022, the Palestinian Health Ministry announced the death of Abu Akleh. She had been reporting on an IDF (Israel Defence Forces) raid in Jenin Camp when, according to witnesses and Al-Jazeera she was shot and killed by Israeli military.

EDWARD SAID (1935-2003)
Male, professor of literature, United States

Edward Wadie Said was a Palestinian-American professor of literature at Columbia University in New York and a prominent intellectual. He was the founder in de academic field of postcolonial studies. Said was born in Jerusalem during the time of the British Mandate and spent his boyhood in Jerusalem and Cairo. He was educated at British and American schools and studied at Princeton University. Said was a great advocate of the establishment of a Palestinian state, to ensure that Palestinians would acquire the same rights as Israeli's, including the right to return to their homeland.


Edward Said

Annemarie Jacir

ANNEMARIE JACIR (48)
Female, film director, Jordan

Annemarie Jacir first rose to fame when her film Like Twenty Impossibles was released. This was the first Arab short film to be featured in the Cannes International Film Festival. It won more than 15 awards. As a result, Annemarie's success only grew from there, with her films Salt of this Sea, When I Saw You and Wajib. She adamantly refuses to hide or deny her Palestinian identity. Annemarie supports local filmmakers and employs Palestinian casts and production for her movies.

Ibrahim Tuqan

IBRAHIM TUQAN (1905-1941)
Male, poet and college professor, Nablus

Tuqan was a Palestinian poet whose work is characterized by patriotism. Most of his poems dealt with the struggle against the British Mandate (1922-1948). Arguably his most famous poem is 'Mawtini'. It has become the unofficial anthem of Palestine, and the national anthem of a number of Arab countries. Ibrahim Tuqan was posthumously awarded the Jerusalem Medal for Culture and Arts in 1990, in honor of his literary efforts. He died at the age of 36 prom a peptic ulcer.

Cremisan Monastery & Winery

BEST WINE IN PALESTINE

Situated not far from Bethlehem, Crimesan Monastery produces the most delicious wines and many other famed products, from extra virgin olive oil to a wonderful 35-year-old brandy. While enjoying them, take in the beautiful views and an atmosphere of spirituality.

TEXT: Magdouline Salameh
PHOTOGRAPHY: Elias Halabi

Welcome to Cremisan Monastery: one of the genuinely fascinating places in Bethlehem and Palestine. If you are looking for a place to retreat, go hiking, enjoying silence among nature and beautiful landscapes, this is the ideal place.

The monastery is situated five kilometers west of Bethlehem, built on an area of 700 dunums (roughly 170 acres) along the Cremisan Valley. It is surrounded by terraces, vineyards, olive groves, and a wide area of pine woods surrounding the monastery and winery.

Byzantine monastery

The monastery was built in 1885 on the ruins of a Byzantine monastery stemming from the 7th century. Remains of it are still to be seen.

Since the late 19th century, Cremisan Monastery has produced the most delicious wines. Cremisan Winery, as it is known, has been a popular destination for both local and foreign tourists for decades.

Here you can enjoy a wide variety of wines and other spirits. Once you enter the site, you will likely be welcomed by the director, Mr. Fadi Batarseh. He will lead you inside the winery, describing the process, from the crushing/ destemming process after harvesting to the press and the vaults where the grape juice is stored for fermentation and bottled.

Magic

You will get to know the facts and magic of the wine-making process, like the secret beyond its red color and unique aroma. Did you know that the color depends on the skin of the grapes? And that the oak barrels the red wine is stored in give it its oaky taste? Crimesian white wine, on the other hand, is stored in stainless steel tanks.

Join visitors and taste the variety of wines, starting with the three types of wines made with local grapes, after which each is called: Baladi, Dabouki, and Hamdani. In addition,

Cremisan Monastery produces Cabernet Sauvignon, Reserve, Star of Bethlehem, Messa, and Port wine.

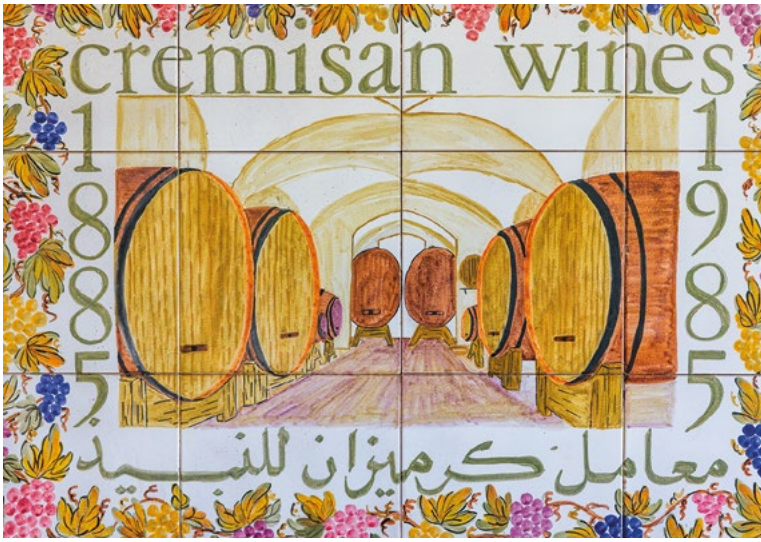
Spirits

Moreover, Cremisan Monastery has recently started to produce various spirits such as Cherry Liquor, Coffee Liquor, Limoncello, Lemon Cream Liquor, and Arak (53% alcohol). Besides all this, the monastery also produces extra virgin olive oil, vinegar, and grape juice, in addition to selling its beautiful 35-year-old Brandy. Visit the winery store, and choose your gifts for your beloved ones.

You can also spend one night or more in the guesthouse managed by the Salesian fathers, where you can experience an excellent quality of services in a simple and authentic atmosphere, a mix of Italian and Palestinian culture. You may feel as if you're in some pleasant Middle East version of Italy when you visit!

Panoramic views

Having said all that, Cremisan is not only a winery and a charming vast area of wildlife and panoramic views but also an ideal place for retreat. A place that takes you to a magical world of profound spirituality. Cremisan is waiting for you!



Welcome to the wine festivals

If you visit the Bethlehem district in summer or winter, make sure to join the wine festivals held three times a year: in June, September and December. Tasting the local food there will also enrich your experience.

www.cremisanwine.com

Palestinian artist & architect Yasmeen Monsour:

‘EXPRESSIONS OF THE LIVED ENVIRONMENT’

Architecture and art have always been a harmonious duo. One represents appealing functionality, while the other tends to express emotions. The first can’t exist without the latter, perfectly illustrated by the timeless pieces created by Palestinian artist and architect Yasmeen Monsour.

TEXT: Ysmein Abukhdeir | PHOTOGRAPHY: Frits Meyst

Monsour grew up around the Old City of Jerusalem, and for as long as she can remember, art has always been a part of who she is. Her family, particularly her mother, recognized her talents early on and provided her with an art tutor to nurture and develop her skills.

Architecture graduate

Having studied at the American University of Sharjah, Monsour is an architecture graduate. Due to its deep connection to the arts, architecture is a field she fell into effortlessly. Her experience as an artist came in very handy during her studies.

When discussing art, Monsour becomes captivated and illuminates the room as she describes her love of creating. ‘Art is not something I do. It is a way of living. It is my career, my inspiration. It’s the way I think. It’s my life’, she says as she rifles through her backpack for her sketchbook, something that is always near and dear to her. It is her tool for capturing the beauty she sees in the world around her. Her deep curiosity makes her a very observant person.

Art process

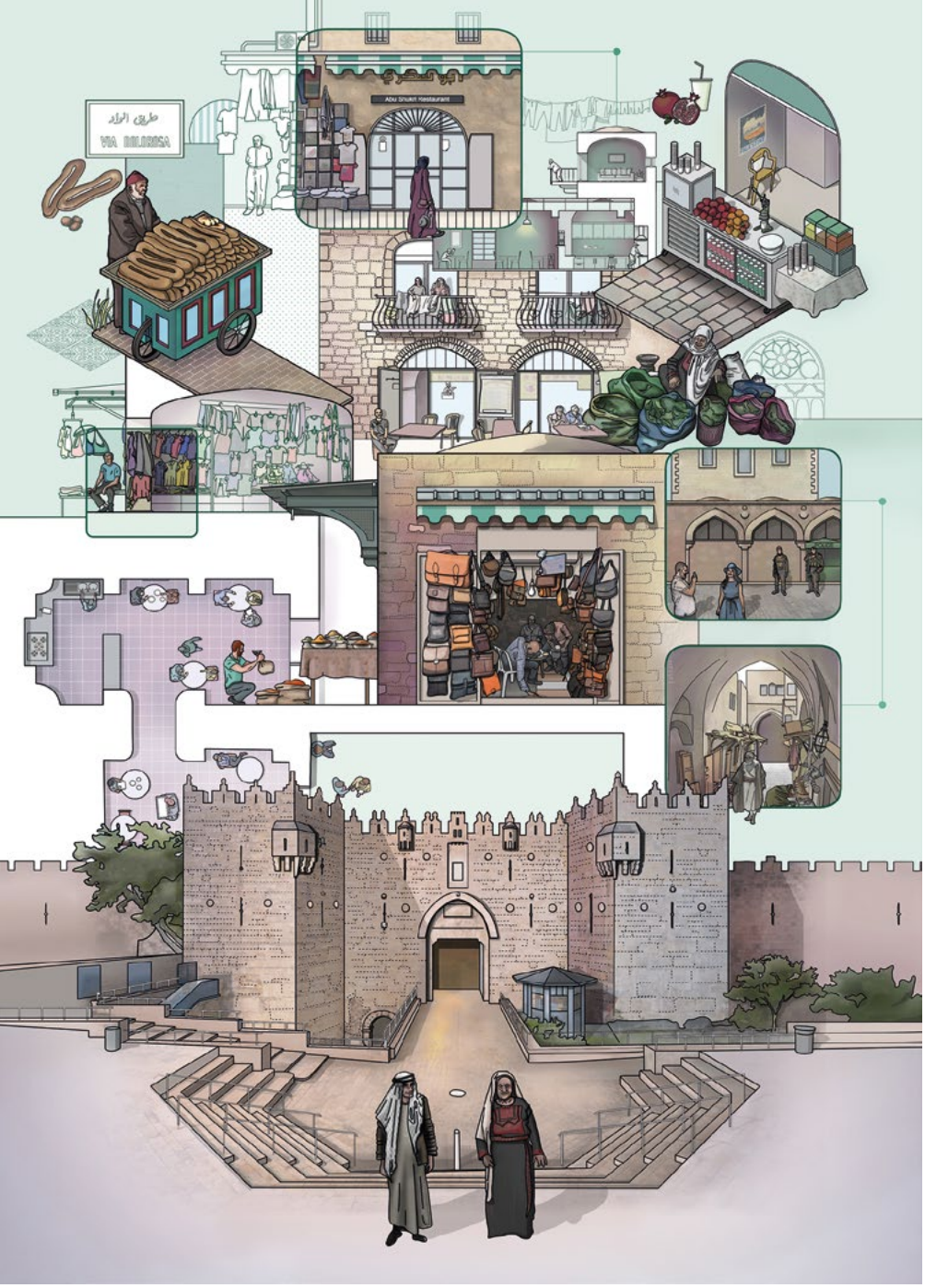
She has a quiet determination about her and a steady focus. While we talk, she puts away her sketchbook and fetches her tablet. Speaking excitedly but eloquently, she scrolls through, explaining her rigorous art process through multiple digitalized sketches. It is a technique called reverse work, which is working and reworking drawings as a way of thinking, gradually adding layers of expression little by little. ‘My work is constantly growing and evolving through reimagining and reformulations’, she explains.

Mansour is humble and thoughtful as she speaks about her inspirations. Although she admires the works of many fellow artists, she absorbs much of her inspiration from her surroundings and the people she interacts with. ‘My art’, she explains, ‘consists of expressions of the lived environment’.

Pride

A constant theme throughout her work is pride in her Palestinian cultural heritage. ‘Since I was little, I always created things that oriented towards Palestine’, she says. The essence of her works reflects this beautifully, with the Old City in particular often serving as her muse.

This collection is entitled ‘Layers of the City’, Mansour’s thesis and passion project. It is a layering of facades and sectional views portraying historical and structural elements in the tiny spaces that is the labyrinth of the Old



City of Jerusalem. It represents a new structural functionality and tells the story of the different historical periods.

Inviting

The color palette gives it a warm and inviting ambiance and emphasizes each time period with depth. It analyses an existing courtyard (hosh) within the Old City and represents a new way of living, giving the families living within a dignified existence.

This piece represents street culture, made up of different scenes laid out like puzzle pieces that represent different facets of everyday life within the city, embellished with colors you would find in the spice market in the Old City.

Lived experience

The inclusion of certain elements entices an experience of the senses (the sounds of the crowded and narrow alleys, the smell of leather and spice, the warmth from the bakery ovens, the taste of fresh juice) that gives a truly authentic feel of lived experience.

It also perfectly represents Monsour's emotional connection and nostalgia for the ancient city.

Fusion of art

Monsour's works are true poetic images that convey history, culture, and society. In the future, she sees herself continuing to create a fusion of art and architecture that will expand, include, and celebrate the MENA region.

Currently, she is in the research phase of her latest project, which will be her take on the placement of the separation wall and its intricacies.

Yasmeen Monsour
To see more from Yasmeen Monsour, check out her Instagram page. Her art is available via DM.
www.instagram.com/yasmins_archive

A DOOR OPEN TO EVERYONE

Each door holds a small mystery, a hidden history. In this series, we knock on a door to retrieve the story behind it. Part one: Dar Al Sabagh.

TEXT & PHOTOGRAPHY: Saleem Anfous

'Yes, this is a beautiful door, and it is open to everyone. But I am afraid there is also a rather sad story to it. Do you want to hear?' Mr. Iyad Handal beckons me in. Do I want to hear? I sure do!

I have been walking through the Old City of Bethlehem, especially Star Street, which is on UNESCO's Word Heritage list. This area contains many historical buildings, often 200 years old or older, and practically all have beautifully decorated entrances. It is one of the great Palestinian traditions. When Palestinian families build their homes, they make sure their entrance door is decorated with all kinds of symbols, which tell us who they are and what gives them pride.

Two doors in one

Unlike others buildings in the area, this one is not empty but has been renovated. It has not one but two doors. The smallest is not very decorated, but the bigger one is. It has two square columns on each side and decorative metal bars shaped like crosses on top of the door.

'From 1850 to 1940, the Al Sabagh family lived in this house', Mr. Handal explains. They are one of the original Palestinian families from Bethlehem. Initially, they lived in a relatively small house with a simple door.'

He points at the smaller door. 'The family had three sons. Around 1940 the youngest two, Shahada and Mikhael, moved to Chili for business purposes. They regularly sent money to their oldest brother, Jeries, who used it to expand the house, so that their own families could also live in it. 'And this new, bigger house was completed with a new, bigger, and beautifully decorated door'.

Dramatic event

Then the expression on Mr. Handal's face changes. 'After a couple of years, Shahada and Mikhael wanted to return home. But the British Mandate refused them entry! Nearly thirty thousand Palestinians shared their fate and weren't allowed to return to their homeland either.' Because of this dramatic course of events, the Al Sabagh family moved out.

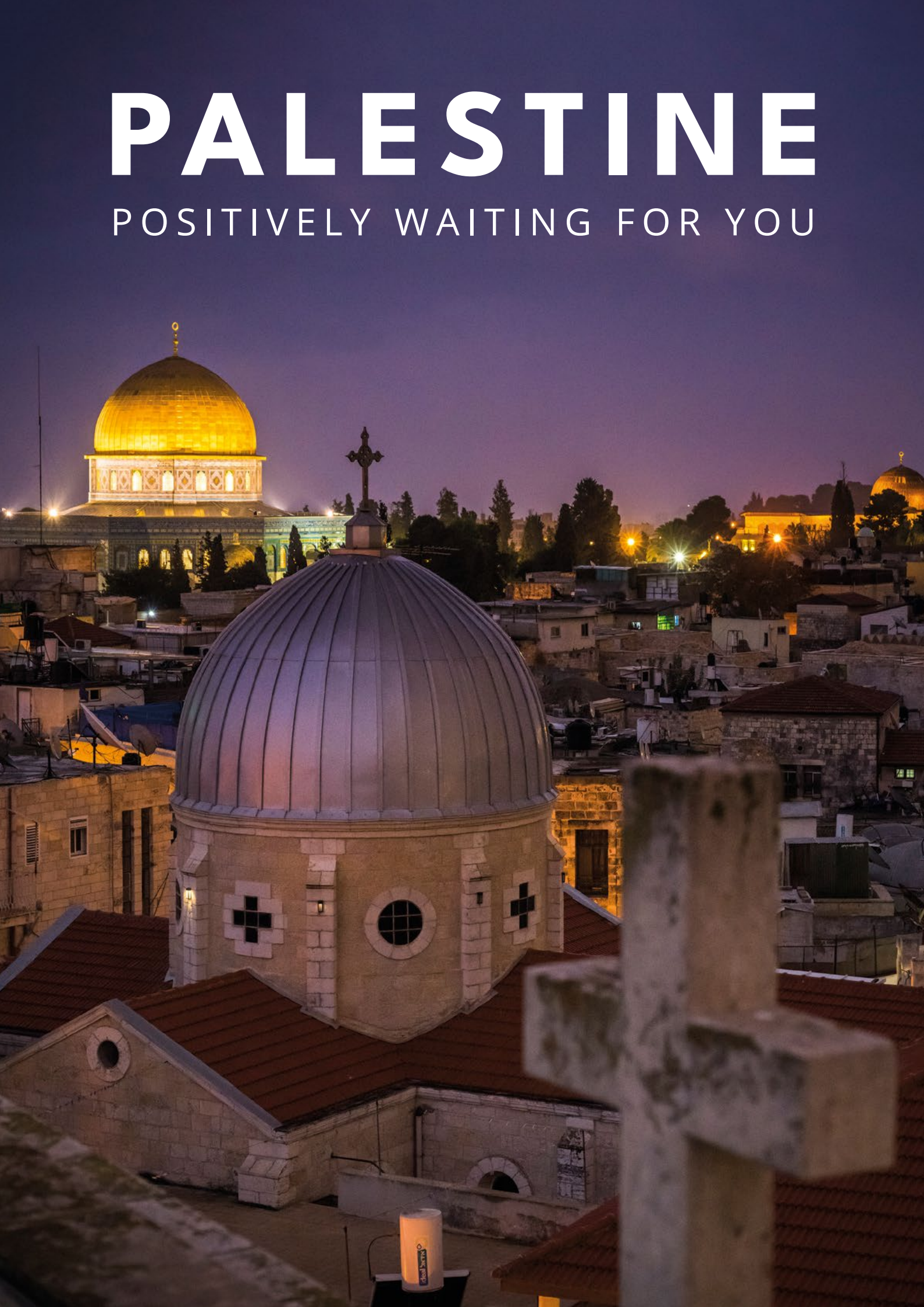
In 2017 Alberto Kasis, one of the great-grandsons of the family, was able to repurchase the house with the help of George Al Ama, and the Bank of Palestine. After consulting both George Al Ama and the Centre for Cultural Heritage Preservation they decided on a new destination for the building. It became a Research and Study Center for the Palestinian People in the Diaspora. The building is called Dar Al Sabagh, 'dar' being the Palestinian word for 'house'.

Craftworks

'We have had a lot of support from the local people and churches to collect data and family trees that date back to the eighteenth century', Mr. Handal explains. 'It illustrates the cultural richness of Bethlehem and Palestine.'

That Dar Al Sabagh is not only about the past is proven by the paintings and craftworks by contemporary artists from the George Al Ama Collection, which are displayed in the center. Maybe it is more than just a pleasant coincidence that the family name 'Sabagh' derives from the Palestinian word for 'fabric dying'.

Before saying goodbye, I ask Mr. Handal what his hopes and dreams are for the center. He replies: 'Our goal is to connect the diaspora people with their homes, streets, and cities and that one day they can revive their homes and the beautiful Old City of Bethlehem'.

PALESTINE

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