

# World Heritage Sites in Beautiful Palestine

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It has already been five years since we celebrated the inscription of the Church of the Nativity and the Pilgrimage Route in Bethlehem on the UNESCO World Heritage List on June 29, 2012. The solemn moment that put the world's eyes on this outstanding place of religious and cultural value was followed by an important agreement for the restoration of the site. The ancient architectural complex that marks the birthplace of Jesus is slowly regaining its glory. Everyone is waiting with anticipation for the final revelation of the church's restored parts.

Then in 2014, the ancient terraces of Battir were inscribed under the name "Cultural Landscape of Southern Jerusalem." The nomination attracted great attention to the village, which became one of the most visited places in Palestine for natural recreation. Locals and visitors alike come to Battir

to enjoy a hike in the natural valley or take a rest in a restaurant overlooking the ancient agricultural terraces. The lands of Battir were once endangered by the construction of Israel's separation barrier. Many people believe that the UNESCO inscription has protected the site from this fate.

Finally, just one month ago, we learned about the inscription of only two new sites on the UNESCO World Heritage List – one from Burkina Faso and one from Palestine. On June 7, 2017, the Old City of Hebron (Al-Khalil), a well-preserved architectural complex that dates to the time of the Mamluks (around the twelfth century), found its place on the list. The area was first inhabited in the Chalcolithic period (around 3000 BC), which makes Hebron one of the oldest cities in the world. The Old City of Hebron is also home to the rich-in-history Al-Haram

al-Ibrahimi or Tomb of the Patriarchs, where it is believed that the great forefathers of the three monotheistic religions are buried with their wives.

All the sites included on the World Heritage List must be of unique universal value and meet at least one out of ten special selection criteria set by UNESCO, e.g., to be an outstanding type of architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates a significant stage in human history, or to be an area of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance. After a country signs the World Heritage Convention and has some sites inscribed on the World Heritage List, the subsequent prestige often helps to raise awareness about the sites and contributes to their preservation.

The three sites in Palestine are also inscribed on the World Heritage in Danger list, which is part of a system that was established to respond in an efficient manner to specific conservation needs. It allows for the allocation of immediate World Heritage Fund assistance and is designed to alert the international community to endangered sites.

Undoubtedly, beautiful Palestine has plenty of places that would be qualified for the World Heritage List. There are

as many as 13 sites that are already inscribed on the tentative list and being considered for nomination.

- Ancient Jericho: Tell es-Sultan
- Anthedon Harbour (Gaza)
- Baptism Site: Al-Maghtas (Jordan River)
- Al-Bariyah: wilderness with monasteries (Jerusalem Wilderness)
- Mount Gerizim and the Samaritans (Nablus)
- Old Town of Nablus and its environs (Nablus)
- Qumran: Caves and Monastery of the Dead Sea Scrolls
- Sebastiya (Nablus)
- Tell Umm Amer (Gaza)
- Throne Villages (various locations in the West Bank)
- Umm Al-Rihan Forest (Jenin)
- Wadi Gaza Coastal Wetlands
- Wadi Natuf and Shuqba Cave (east from Ramallah)

*To learn more about various places in Palestine, visit our website at [www.visitpalestine.ps](http://www.visitpalestine.ps), or contact the Visit Palestine Information Center in Bethlehem via [info@visitpalestine.ps](mailto:info@visitpalestine.ps) or (02) 277-1992.*

