

Palestinian Creative Handicraft Workshops

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Palestine has a lot to offer to all connoisseurs of handmade items that can be bought as souvenirs, gifts, house decor, etc. Creative artisans often open the doors of their workshops to anyone who would like to see them at work or even try to learn how to make some items themselves. Here are only some examples of the multiple places that could be included in your itinerary.

Embroidery

Palestinian embroidery is a rich artistic tradition that has been passed down from mother to daughter throughout generations. Designs vary from village to village. The main techniques used in Palestine are the cross-stitch and couching stitch (*tahriri*). Women intricately embellish dresses, jackets, cushions, tablecloths, and pillows made from natural hand-dyed and woven materials. Dresses, however, have always been the most common embroidered items.

Many Palestinian women want to preserve the traditional handicraft and at the same time create beautiful and useful objects to sell in order to support their families. The Arab Women's Union of Bethlehem should definitely be on the itinerary of any visitor who would like to admire this handicraft. The variety of work on display includes multiple colorful motifs. The building also houses a small ethnographic museum.

Ceramics

Palestinian ceramic artists offer a wide array of items: vases, plates, bowls, or coasters that can serve as both home decoration or gifts that will impress any guest. Most of the items are bright and colorful. Artisans often take their inspiration from nature, and it is common to find beautiful pieces covered with motifs that include olives and olive branches or figs and leaves; sometimes the items themselves resemble leaves or fruits (often pomegranates). Many of these creations are covered with sophisticated Arabic calligraphy or typical Islamic or geometric patterns. It is also common to see designs that are taken from Palestinian traditional embroidery.

Probably the most famous ceramics in the area come from Jerusalem. The Balian, an Armenian family of Jerusalem, have been producing exclusive hand-painted ceramic tiles and pottery since 1922. The Armenian ceramics can be recognized by the elaborate floral motifs and dark blue rims. In Hebron, ceramics are produced on a larger scale. Skilled and experienced artisans work at the speed of light.

Another place that has recently become famous for its boutique ceramic workshop is Nifs Jbail, a small town situated in the vicinity of Nablus. There, the artisans mainly base their designs on the patterns and ornaments of ancient pottery that was excavated in Palestine. They see it as a way to encourage heritage appreciation and preservation.

Mosaics

Jericho is home to Hisham's Palace, the extraordinary site that contains the famous mosaic floors. This early Islamic desert palace was the inspiration for the establishment of the Jericho Mosaic Center in the year 2000. Since that time, the center has been training artisans in all aspects of mosaic production, with particular attention to ancient mosaic conservation.



Skilled craftspeople produce and sell elaborate mosaics, often depicting such ancient motifs as the Hisham Palace Tree of Life. Visitors are welcome to take part in special one-day workshops designed to introduce them to mosaic production. Participants can keep their work as a perfect souvenir from Jericho.

Traditional Woven Carpets

Bedouin women traditionally weave strong fabrics that they use for tents, rugs, pillows,



and other domestic items. Sheep wool from their herds is spun and used as thread. Some women dye the wool to create colorful, patterned carpets, whereas others prefer to use natural colors. Their designs and ornaments are based on local folkloric motifs. The Al-Jahalin tribe of the Sea Level Community that lives in the Jerusalem Wilderness invites visitors to come and see how the traditional rugs are produced.

Felted Wool: A New Concept in Holy Land Design

A unique handicraft using local raw material has recently been introduced into the Palestinian craft market. Colorful felt products made from the wool of Bethlehem sheep are brightening shopkeepers' shelves in Bethlehem and Jerusalem. An innovative community that brings together people with and without intellectual disabilities, Ma'an lil-Hayat (L'Arche Bethlehem) creates nativity scenes, sheep, purses, pillows, wall hangings, and other felted-wool items that would add artistic flair to any home or wardrobe. Visitors are always welcome and can even help to make a sheep or two while there!



To learn more about various creative workshop spaces in Palestine, visit our website at www.visitpalestine.ps, contact the Visit Palestine Information Center in Bethlehem via info@visitpalestine.ps or (02) 277-1992, or visit us in Bethlehem.