

The Undiscovered Archaeological Riches of Hebron

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There is a huge contrast between the grand and busy city of Hebron and the smaller, tranquil agricultural villages surrounding it. Like many areas across Palestine, the surroundings of Hebron remain very much off the beaten track of most visitors. In many cases, these villages are home to many interesting archaeological sites that are part of Palestine's historical and cultural heritage.

Approximately eight kilometers south of Hebron and near the village of Zif is located Aristobolia (Khirbet Istabul), which is an example of a Byzantine basilica built during the beginning of the Islamic Era (eighth century). The building was destroyed by an earthquake in 749, but visitors can still see a typical Byzantine narthex, three entrances from the west, and

an apse facing east. The hill where the church is located overlooks beautiful agricultural lands covered with olive and almond trees.

Farther south of Hebron we find another place that is worth a visit – Khirbet al-Karmil. There, in the middle of the village, is situated a Crusader pool, currently part of a public park. Up the hill, following the village's abandoned Ottoman Era old core, we come across the ruins of a Byzantine church and a Crusader fortress. The site is not well maintained, and its deterioration is progressing fast.

Among the most striking archaeological sites found in Samu'a Village, maintained by the Palestine Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, are remains of a fourth-century synagogue. Beautifully ornamented columns adorn the interior. There is also an Islamic niche, possibly added during the time of Saladin, according to one tradition. The site is surrounded by Ottoman Era buildings.



It is worth noting that the above-mentioned sites are not considered official archaeological parks. Given that they are often found close to private properties, it is important respect the customary guidelines for visits to local communities and holy sites (e.g., modest clothing).

To learn more about Hebron and the surrounding destinations, visit our website at www.visitpalestine.ps, or contact the Visit Palestine Information Center in Bethlehem via info@visitpalestine.ps or (02) 277-1992.