

By Bassam
Almohor

HOSH AL-SYRIAN

A narrow winding alleyway at the start of Ras Iftais Street (Star Street) tempts you to enter the high old stone walls. Your heart beats faster with every step. Here, you discover an open-air alleyway, then an archway, then an open courtyard with a narrow paved road and tall trees that stretch to reach the sunlight. To the left, high staircases with hanging plants that adorn the walls lead you to the sky. A breathtaking moment brings you to a small sign in Arabic that reads: Hosh al-Syrian (Syriac Quarter).

The welcoming smile of a beautiful, black-eyed Bethlehem hostess invites you in, where a tree laden with oranges stands to the left, near an old stone staircase. Its seven stairs lead to a fork that forms two arches underneath that take you to cave-like alleyways.

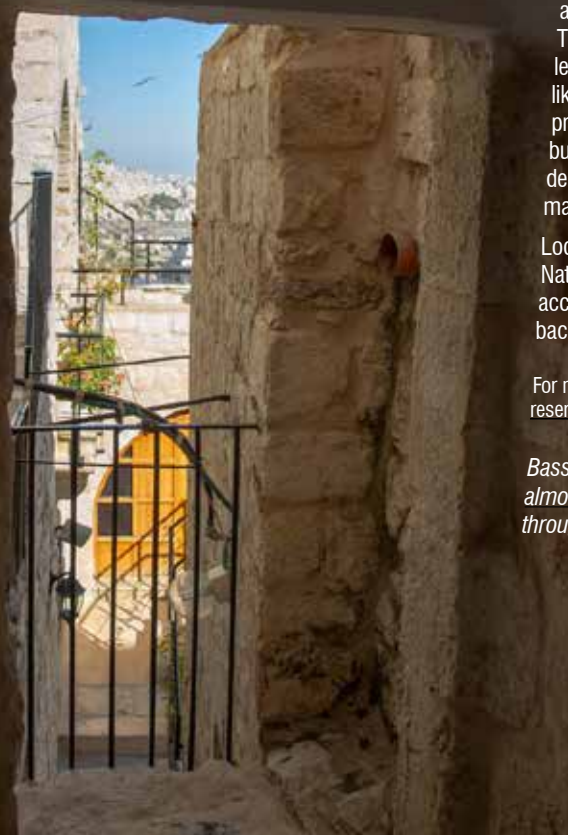
You feel lost. A chill spreads through the air. The first thought that comes to mind is the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Chaos is another way to describe the experience, or better, a millennium-old monastery, similar to that of Mar Saba to the east of Bethlehem.

But this is a monastery of luxury. A maze of alleyways, arched passages, vaulted ceilings, and a stairway to heaven, reminiscent of Led Zeppelin.

Climb the stairs, sit on one of the many roofs in the heart of Bethlehem's old city that overlook the hilly cityscape, order a shot of tequila, and enjoy this ancient town.

A staircase to the left of the entrance takes you to the upper level. A small glass door with a wooden frame bears the title: Fawda Café (Chaos). Inside, a small hall leads to a second dimly lit room that ends up in a third, where an old piano stands with one table and a bar.

Outside the café, three tables with vintage red-mesh metal chairs and an umbrella overlook the entrance to the monastery. A biting aroma unlike any other permeates the air. Newly installed open-riser stairs lead you to the third level where a wide arched door and another balcony overlook the historic town. A sign at the entrance reads: Fawda Restaurant – member of Truth, Love & Clean Cutlery, which, according to its Facebook page, is “a new, kinder dining guide designed to identify the restaurants and food experiences that go above and beyond great food and wine in the ethical, organic and environmentally sustainable ways with which they run their business.”



A long dining room, with soft lighting and tables clothed in white, awaits you. The one-and-a-half-meter-thick arch leads you to the kitchen, where a wizard-like, bespectacled, bearded, long-haired professor of food with a hoarse voice is busy preparing his magical recipes of sinful delicacies. He is Fadi Kattan, the chef and manager of the luxury guesthouse.

Located 300 meters from the Church of the Nativity, Hosh al-Syrian dates back to 1739, according to Fadi, but the ground floor dates back to way before that.

For more information, contact Fadi Kattan at reservations@hoshalsyrian.com, 02 274 7529.

Bassam Almohor can be reached at almohor@gmail.com, 059 753 4681, or through Facebook: [@palestinestreetlife](https://www.facebook.com/palestinestreetlife).

