

By Bassam
Almohor

BAIT AL KARAMA

At Bait Al Karama (House of Dignity), you cook your own food. A group of women from the Old City of Nablus opened a house in the *souq* to cater to visitors who are interested to learn about the local culture, meet people, listen to stories, walk the hidden alleys of the old city, and, above all, taste the delicious food and delicacies of Nablus.



Hidden in the middle of the busy souq (📍32.218835, 35.261238), it is very quiet here. To get there, you enter a small alley, climb narrow stairs, pass through a low door, and reach a house behind the noisy An-Nasr street. Fatima Qaddumi, the manager of the house, welcomes you to her center and its kitchen. It is located in a very old structure that is unlike any other house, as houses in cities this old developed according to the individual needs of their inhabitants. To the left is a tiny kitchen where magic is produced, next to it a small open-air area with some seats for visitors and smokers. Another narrow staircase leads up to the third level, where you can enjoy a view of the dense structures of the old city of Nablus.

The chef is a Nabulsi lady with a big smile, a lovely sense of humor, and skillful hands. She shows visitors how to roll *dawali* (grape leaves); make dough for *shishbarak* (meat dumplings); carve out zucchini,



aubergines, carrots, and potatoes to stuff them with rice and meat; and, most importantly, prepare the thorny plant '*akoob* (*Gundelia*), a specialty in Nablus.

Fatima and her ladies tell you stories of the old city and the difficult times during the Israeli invasion during the second intifada. They narrate intimate stories of the comradeship, sacrifices, warmth, cooperation, and tenderness of the people who live in this ancient city. Once the food is ready, visitors dine in the kitchen. They taste all the dishes they prepared, served in the traditional ceramic plates that are painted with blue ornaments. There is plenty of food, and it will be hard for you to stop eating.

Fatima then takes you on a tour of her neighborhood. The shop next door is the most famous maker of *knafeh* (sweet cheese pastry soaked in syrup) in the city; at Aqsa Sweets, you can witness the making of the *knafeh* and eat your in the alleyway among the local passersby who order 125 grams of *knafeh*, finish it in a couple of minutes, and continue on their ways.

We continue to another tasting at the *tahini* (ground sesame paste) factory. Here you'll learn how to make the delicious *tahini* in very old ovens and with machines that have been used in this way for centuries. A little further down, a small home factory produces a delicious paste from black caraway or black cumin. Nablus, you will feel, is a food paradise.

Do you want to see more? You can visit one of the old soap factories for which this city is famous. The soap is organic, made entirely from olive oil. To round off your tour, Fatima will take you to see the *hammam* (Turkish bath). If you come at the right time (there are special times for men and women to bathe), you can stay on and indulge in luxury.

For more information and guidance, please contact Fatima Qaddumi at 059-7959924 or <https://baitalkarama.org>

Bassam Almohor can be reached at almohor@gmail.com, 052-458-4273, or through Facebook: [@palestinstreetlife](https://www.facebook.com/palestinstreetlife)