Come Together at the River

A Tour Guide’s Guide to the Sacred Sites of the Jordan River

The Jordan River is a Central Part of the Holy Land
Described as “The Garden of the Lord” and ”The Entry into the Promised Land”
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A Message from EcoPeace Middle East…

At the heart of the region shared by Jordan, Israel, and Palestine is the Lower Jordan River. It has formed a landscape of outstanding ecological and cultural importance. It connects the eco-systems of Africa and Asia, forming a sanctuary for wild plants and animals. It has witnessed some of the most significant advances in human history, including the Greek and Roman eras, leaving behind several Roman Decapolis Cities that crisscrossed the Jordan Valley.

The Jordan River runs through the heart of many spiritual traditions. Some of the founding stories of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are set along its banks, and the Valley contains sites sacred to half of humanity.

One of the often-cited reasons for travel to this region is “to feel a greater connection to the Holy Land” - be it from an Islamic, Judaic, or Christian background. The Jordan River holds much that is of interest to visitors of all backgrounds, local and international, but it has been diminished in recent years by human action.

In this booklet we aim to provide tour guides with a handbook of useful information so that they can educate tourists in the region to better understand and appreciate the majesty of the River and its surrounding areas, but also the challenges faced. We specifically cover sites of religious interest – Christian, Muslim and Jewish – in an effort to teach about the importance of the River to all the faiths that care deeply about the River.

We will also explain the impacts that human actions have on the shared water resources of the region, and how people - even visitors - can participate in the efforts to rehabilitate the Jordan River, including actions that they can take home, such as the signing of the Jordan River Covenant.

EcoPeace Middle East has been working hard with the support of local residents on all sides to revive and protect this sacred Valley. We hope that you will find this booklet interesting and informative, and that in sharing the stories of the Jordan River Valley, ancient and modern, you are able to inspire others to care for its protection.

Come together at the River in a peace tour; the river itself will tell you its story.
Background

The Jordan River is a 250-kilometre long river, originating at Mount Hermon (Jabel Sheikh), flowing into the Sea of Galilee, and meandering its way down to the Dead Sea - approximately 428 meters below sea level, the lowest place on Earth. The River’s central location, at the meeting point of Asia, Africa and Europe, creates a lush, wetland ecosystem, rich in biodiversity.

The land around the Jordan River and the Dead Sea is revered by Muslims, Christians and Jews as ‘blessed’. The Bible calls it “the Garden of the Lord” (Genesis 13: 10); “With my staff alone I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps Save me, I pray” (Genesis 32:10-11), and the Holy Qur’an says that “whose surroundings We have blessed (17:1) God blessed the land “for all beings.” Indeed, half of humanity views the land and the River Jordan as the geographic and spiritual heartland of their faith.

The Jordan River Valley is home to some of the most momentous events in the history of man’s relationship with God. Here, Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) arrived in the Holy Land; Jacob and Esau made their pact; God protected Lot while destroying Sodom and Gomorrah; Moses saw the promised land which he would never enter; Joshua crossed the Jordan River into Canaan; Elijah crossed the Jordan River and rode a “chariot of fire” into heaven; Elisha cured the leper in the waters of the river; John the Baptist preached here, baptized Jesus, and was killed by King Herod; Jesus received the Holy Spirit and resisted the temptations of Satan; and the Prophet Muhammad made
his nighttime journey - The Night Journey; Isra wa Mi’raj - from Mecca to al-Quds (Jerusalem).

Sadly, even though the River Jordan is significant to billions of people from diverse religions and countries worldwide, the Lower Jordan River is suffering from ecological collapse. Until 1960, this was a healthy River, with 1.3 billion cubic meters of water flowing annually. 96% of that flow has since been diverted for agricultural and domestic use by Israel, Jordan and Syria. Untreated or poorly treated sewage water has been dumped into the River for over 50 years and subsequently causing the loss of 50% of the Valley’s biodiversity.

The clean-up and rehabilitation of the Jordan River is a critical project from an ecological perspective, but also from a religious – indeed, an interfaith – perspective. The rehabilitation of the Lower Jordan River Valley is a critical enterprise to promote the health and welfare of the people in the surrounding region as well as an opportunity to foster inter-religious dialogue and peace among Jews, Christians and Muslims, all of whom venerate the historical and religious significance of the Jordan River.

This booklet aims to help you - tour guides and tour guide operators around the region - and through you, the tourists around the world - to acquire a greater understanding about the regional context of this area’s rich sites, highlighting the case of the Jordan River and sacred religious sites associated with it.
Quick Facts about the River

Past (Thousands of years ago – mid 20th Century)

- An annual average of 1.3 billion cubic meters of water once flowed in the Lower Jordan River to the Dead Sea
- Historic crossing point with commercial and cultural connections between major cities of the Valley

Present (1962 – 2015)

- 96% of the River’s waters diverted for domestic and agricultural use, by Israel, Syria and Jordan
- Untreated or poorly treated sewage, saline water and agricultural runoff dumped in the River from Israeli, Jordanian and Palestinian communities
- Diversion and pollution has caused an ecological collapse - more than 50 % of the valley’s biodiversity has been lost
- Most of the River Valley is a border / military area; off-limits to the public

2010

- EcoPeace scientific study undertaken recommends that 400-600 million cubic meters of water are needed to rehabilitate the Lower Jordan River
- EcoPeace water economy research identified nearly 1 billion cubic meters of water that can be saved in the region - part of which, from Israel and Jordan, can be utilized to meet the rehabilitation goal for the Lower Jordan River, and to restore Palestinian water rights
- Large scale desalination takes place in Israel decreasing dependence on the Sea of Galilee as a fresh water source
2013 - change is finally beginning to take place

- Israel releases 9 million cubic meters of water from the Sea of Galilee into the Lower Jordan River, and has pledged to raise this amount to 30 million cubic meters in 2017
- Pollutants beginning to be removed by 3 Waste Water Treatment Plants built in the River Valley (one in the Jordan Valley Regional Council in Israel, another one in North Shouneh in Jordan, and a treatment plant in Jericho in Palestine)

2015 - looking into the future

- EcoPeace completes a 3-year research study and published the first-ever Integrated NGO Regional Master Plan for the Sustainable Development of the Jordan River Valley
- The Master Plan suggests 127 “interventions” (projects) for the rehabilitation of the Jordan River Valley
- Investments of $4.5 Billion USD are needed to implement these projects
- $500 Million USD worth of projects identified as capable of moving forward immediately
Faith Tourism – Messages

For Jews:

- For the Jewish people, the Jordan River is a symbol of liberation.
- Crossing the Jordan marks the Jews’ entry into a land of freedom and plenty after the bitter years of slavery and wandering.
- Earliest mention in the Hebrew Bible describes the Jordan Valley as “well-watered everywhere…even as the garden of the Lord” (Genesis 13:10).
- Joshua 3:15 describes the Jordan as “overfloweth all of his banks all the times of harvest”.
- When Joshua led the Israelites across this river it was entry into the Promised Land. The River marks a divine threshold.
- Following the crossing the river becomes a site for miracles: Elisha the prophet, Naaman the Leper.

For Christians:

- For Christians, the Jordan River is a symbol of purity and life.
- Christ’s baptism in the river marks His revelation as the Son of God and the beginning of His ministry on earth.
- For Christians, the Jordan River recalls images of Jesus standing in holy water, his head bowed while John pours the waters of baptism over him.
Matthew 3:16-17 “As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, “That is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”

- Baptism is a ritual of cleansing and renewal – this is why the overriding symbol of the Jordan is purity and why the current polluted, diverted state of the Jordan is in such controversy.

**For Muslims:**

- The Jordan River flows through the cultural heartland of the Islamic world. The Jordan Valley is part of this land that “we have blessed for the nations.” (Quran, 21:71)
- The Jordan River is central to stories of the Islamic Prophets Joshua (Yusha) and John (Yehya) and Jesus (Issa).
- The Jordan Valley played a crucial role in the expansion of Islam under Caliph Umar and one of the most infamous battles against the Byzantine forces took place in the northern Jordan Valley.
- Moreover, many of the closest companions to the prophet Mohammed are buried along the Jordan’s eastern bank.

**Faith based general:**

- This man-made disaster demonstrates our disregard for the natural world, our spiritual traditions and our failed responsibility as custodians of God’s Earth.
- With the rich cultural and spiritual heritage depleted – what does it mean for our societies that we won’t be able to pass on this heritage to our children?
- The relationship to our natural resources as resources to be mined for our human use is an approach which must be abandoned if we are to survive. Our dominion must not be understood as license to abuse, spoil, exploit or destroy.
Sacred Sites in the Jordan Valley
Northern Jordan Valley

Joseph’s Well

A story which is shared between the three Abrahamic faiths is the story of Joseph. Joseph was loved by his father, but his older brothers became jealous of this affection. Deciding not to murder him, the brothers took Joseph and left him in a well, where they thought he might be found and enslaved by a passing caravan. This site is said to be that same well where the brothers abandoned Joseph, who later became the chief adviser to the Egyptian Pharaoh. He is one of the most revered prophets in Islam for his piety, goodness, and self-control.

Capernaum

Capernaum is home to two of the oldest synagogues in the world, the most ancient (1st century) of which was built over by the newer (4th–5th century). This town is cited in all four of the Christian Gospels, and is associated with the very start of Jesus’ ministry, which stories tell was at the synagogue in Capernaum; and many acts of healing, including that of a man lowered by his friends through the roof of a building, as it was too crowded to get him to Jesus any other way.
Sea of Galilee

The lake itself marks an important location in the Christian tradition. The gospels tell the story of Jesus miraculously walking on the water here, and that this was where Jesus began his preaching after his baptism in the River Jordan. “One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret [Galilee] the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God. He saw at the water’s edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.” Simon answered, “Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.” When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.”

It is also mentioned in the Qura’an: “when Moses said to his servant, “I will not cease [traveling] until I reach the junction of the two seas or continue for a long period.”

Maimonides Tomb

One of the most important Jewish pilgrimage sites in Israel is Maimonides tomb, also known as the Rambam tomb, located in central Tiberias. Maimonides is considered among the greatest sages of the Jewish people whose analytical abilities are still admired to this day. He was a physician to the son of the Muslim ruler Saladin and composed a special healers’ prayer, the Jewish equivalent of the Hippocratic Oath. Physicians often make a point of visiting the tomb to recite the Oath of Maimonides.

“The eternal providence has appointed me to watch over the life and health of Thy creatures. May the love for my art actuate me at all time; may neither avarice nor miserliness, nor thirst for glory or for a great reputation engage my mind; for the enemies of truth and philanthropy could easily deceive me and make me forgetful of my lofty aim of doing good to Thy children. May I never see in the patient anything but a fellow creature in pain. Grant me the strength, time and opportunity always to correct what I have acquired, always to extend its domain; for knowledge is immense and the spirit of man can extend indefinitely to enrich itself daily with new requirements. Today he can discover his errors of yesterday and tomorrow he can obtain a new light on what he thinks himself sure of today. Oh, God, Thou has appointed me to watch over the life and death of Thy creatures; here am I ready for my vocation and now I turn unto my calling.” [S. Y. Tan, M. E. Yeow (2002). “Moses Maimonides (1135-1204): Rabbi, Philosopher. Physician” Singapore Med J. Retrieved 24 March 2012.]

Mu’ath bin Jabal Shrine

Mu’ath bin Jabal was one of Prophet Mohammed’s companions, and a great scholar of the time. It is said that when he was silent, he attracted attention with his profound peacefulness and devout-
ness. On the other hand, when he talked, he held his people spellbound. Prophet Mohammed sent Mu’ath to teach the people of modern-day Yemen about Islam, and the story tells of how Prophet Mohammed told him it was likely that on his return, he would not see him again, but only his grave. Mu’ath wept bitterly on hearing this news, and indeed Prophet Mohammed had passed away by the time he returned to Medina. It is said that Mu’ath passed on these wise words to his son: “My son! Pray the prayer of he who is just about to leave and imagine that you might not be able to pray ever again. Know that the believer dies between two good deeds; one that he performed and one that he intended to perform later on.” [quote taken from Siffat as Safwah and Archive of Islamic State Administrative Documents; Aymenn Jawal Al-Tamimi; Jan. 2016]

**Sharhabil Bin Hassneh EcoPark**

Sharhabil Bin Hassneh EcoPark provides protected open spaces for local people to enjoy their environment, with walking trails, picnicking facilities, a restaurant and overnight accommodation. The local community, in partnership with EcoPeace Middle East, has created a green haven in a once degraded ecosystem, one that offers opportunities for education and adventure eco-tourism. The EcoPark is named after the companion of Mohammad whose funeral shrine is nearby.

**Sharhabil Bin Hassneh Shrine**

Sharhabil Bin Hassneh is an important figure in Islamic history, best known for being one of the most trusted companions of the prophet Mohammad. A highly educated and talented writer, he helped to write the revelation. 18 years after the journey of the Prophet Mohammad from Mecca to Medina, Sharhabil Bin Hassneh died and was buried in Jordan. A grave shrine was built in the area that now bears his name and is one of the most important religious sites in Jordan.
Central Jordan Valley

Lower Jordan River

Many of the sacred stories of the region involve the Jordan River, but the true locations where these events took place have been lost over time. It may be worthwhile to find a location to sit by the River, appreciate its natural beauty, and recall some of these ancient stories. In 2 Kings of the Jewish Nevi’im and Christian Bible, Elijah and Elias are found crossing the River Jordan on dry land; Elijah having cast his mantel to the ground. In this story, after crossing over the Jordan River, Elijah ascended on a chariot of fire and was taken into the heavens. This story has inspired a number of religious songs about the Jordan River, including “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot”. Joshua, also in the Nevi’im and Bible, describes the dramatic crossing of the River Jordan by the Israelites, carrying the Arc of the Covenant, after their 40 years of wandering in the Wilderness with Moses.

Tell Mar Elias

Rising ~900 meters above sea level, Tell Mar Elias is a hill (Tell) in the Ajlun region of Jordan, and the place where the prophet Elijah ascended to the sky. It is said to be the hometown of Elijah; it was a settlement first known as Listib, and later, Tishbe. The Abrahamic religions revere Elijah as a champion of monotheism, having disapproved of people’s worship of the idols of Baal. There is a large Byzantine Church at the site, with many beautiful mosaics, and a Mamluk-era mosque.

Our Lady of the Mountain Church, Anjara

Jesus Christ, his mother Mary and his disciples are said to have passed through this region of Jordan, and rested in a nearby cave. It is now commemorated by the building of the “Church of Our Lady of the Mountain” in Anjara. The church contains a life-size Italian statue of Mary holding the infant Jesus. There is a story told, from 2010, of a nun and some women who were cleaning the church, who saw the statue cry tears of blood. The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Jerusalem recognised the event, and a photograph can be seen at the entrance to the building of the weeping statue.
Dirar bin Al-Azwar shrine

Dirar bin Al-Azwar was one of the early companions of the Prophet Mohammed, a poet and a fierce warrior. The Mosque commemorating his name is located adjacent to the mausoleum of Abu Ubaydah Amer bin Al-Jarrah, as described below.

Abu Ubaydah Amer bin Al-Jarrah complex

Abu Ubaydah Amer bin Al-Jarrah was one of the first converts to Islam, and one of the ‘Blessed Ten,’ to whom the Prophet Mohammad promised paradise. He was a modest man, who took little comfort for himself. He was also a very brave fighter and companion of Prophet Mohammed. When a drought hit the Arabian Peninsula in 638, he sent a caravan of 4000 camels to Medina to feed the hungry. 4000 Dinars were offered in thanks for his generosity, but he refused this, saying that he had sent the food in an act for God. He died in Syria when he stayed alongside his army during a great plague, and it is said his funeral was led by Mu’ath bin Jabal. In the Central Jordan Valley, his tomb is a major Islamic center comprised of a mosque, library and a cultural center.

Joseph’s Tomb

Joseph was the adviser to the Egyptian Pharaoh who was abandoned in the Well, described in the Northern section of this booklet. This site has been visited by followers of Islam, Judaism and Christianity in reverence for this man’s wisdom. The Joseph’s tomb site has witnessed many struggles.
between the nations of Israel and Palestine. It is hoped that in time, a peaceful understanding will be made to allow travelers of any culture, race or creed to visit the tomb in safety to show their respects for this great man of history.

**Auja EcoCentre**

Run by EcoPeace Middle East, the Auja EcoCentre offers opportunities to explore and learn about the region with hikes, meals, and comfortable overnight accommodation. The EcoCentre works with local communities to protect the landscape and in turn supports them with environmental education and a source of income through eco-tourism.

**Jericho and the Monastery of Temptation**

From clay and straw brick buildings forming villages in 9000 BCE, Jericho has been populated almost continuously through to the present day. Archaeologists have determined that the walls of Jericho, famous in the Jewish and Christian traditions for having been destroyed by Joshua’s army, were more likely to have been flood defenses. The Monastery of Temptation is located on top of the “Mount of Temptation”, 350 meters above sea level, with a magnificent view of Jericho and the Jordan Valley. This site is where Jesus is said to have spent 40 days and nights fasting and worshipping. Nowadays, a cable car brings visitors to the top, where there is a café, restaurant and souvenir shop.
Baptism Sites

One of the most important sites of Christian pilgrimage is on the River Jordan, where Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist. There are three baptismal sites on the River; (1) Yardenit - at the river’s outlet from the Sea of Galilee; (2) “Qaser el Yehud” (Al Maghtas) is situated north of the Dead Sea and east of Jericho. The “Al Maghtas” area is dotted with deserted monasteries including the Monastery of John the Baptist; and (3) “Bethany Beyond the Jordan”, in Wadi Al-Kharrar, which lies on the East bank of the River. The Bethany Baptism site also contains the Roman and Byzantine remains of churches, monasteries, and caves used by hermits who had come to live near the baptism site. It was recently recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
Southern Jordan Valley

Mount Nebo & Memorial Church of Moses - Siyagha

The stories tell of how Moses, a significant figure to all three Abrahamic religions, led the Israelites out of Egypt where they were enslaved. On top of Mount Nebo, rising over 700m above the Jordan Valley, God revealed Himself to Moses, and Moses stood and looked over the Promised Land stretched out in front of him. He saw the Jordan River before him, and the depths of the Jordan Valley. Moses died on Mount Nebo, having never entered the Promised Land. Joshua, the son of Nun, crossed with the Israelites into the Promised Land.

“Then Moses climbed Mount Nebo from the plains of Moab to the top of Pisgah, across from Jericho. There the Lord showed him the whole land—from Gilead to Dan, all of Naphtali, the territory of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Mediterranean Sea, the Negev and the whole region from the Valley of Jericho, the City of Palms, as far as Zoar. Then the Lord said to him, “This is the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob when I said, ‘I will give it to your descendants.’ I have let you see it with your eyes, but you will not cross over into it”. [Deuteronomy 34:4 – New International Version]
At the archaeological site, you will find the remains of a Byzantine church which has ornate mosaics and incredible views across the Jordan River Valley.

Qumran

The caves at Qumran are where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found. These scrolls are the oldest known manuscripts of books that later became parts of the Jewish and Christian Bibles. They are thought to date from as early as the 2nd Century BCE, and may have been placed there by a Jewish sect, possibly to hide them.

Mukawir

The fortress at Machaerus was the center of administration for the area ruled by the Hasmoneans, around 90 BCE, and later by Herod the Great. The site of Herod’s palace is argued by scholars to be the closest surviving example of the style of palace in which Pontius Pilates undertook the judgement of Jesus, which occurred in Jerusalem. It is also the place associated with the story of Princess Salome’s dance, which so enthralled Herod Antipas that he offered anything she desired in tribute. She asked for the Head of John the Baptist at her mother’s prompting and a cave nearby marks the point where the killing took place. The story became later popularized by Oscar Wilde in his play, “Salome”, where it was first named “The Dance of the Seven Veils”. Mukawir town is also famous for its handicrafts.
**Dead Sea**

The Dead Sea is a truly magical place—where the water density is so high that swimming is much like floating! The unique properties of the area allows it to provide many raw natural products, such as bitumen, that was used in the detailing of the Ain Ghazal statues, the oldest human-form sculptures in the world; asphalt, for the Egyptian mummification process; and nowadays potash as a fertilizer. The salty environment does not support much life however, hence its name. The Dead Sea provided a refuge for King David and a health spa to Herod the Great. Unfortunately, today, the Dead Sea ecosystem is collapsing; diversion of its main water inflow, the Lower Jordan River, and use of Dead Sea waters for mineral extraction by the Mineral Industries in Israel and Jordan, has depleted its waters, causing it to recede by 1 – 1.5 meters each year. These actions have also caused thousands of sinkholes to open up around the Sea, dubbed as “Nature's Revenge”.

**Ein Gedi EcoCenter**

The Ein Gedi EcoCenter began as a miniature Zoo at Kibbutz Ein Gedi, growing into another one of EcoPeace’s Environmental Education Centers in the region. Similarly to the Auja and Sharhabil bin Hassaneh parks, one can undertake a variety of environmental education workshops and hands-on activities. Specifically, the Ein Gedi EcoCenter teaches about sustainable technologies and the environmental challenges of the local Dead Sea region.

**Zayd ibn Harithah Shrine**

Zayd ibn Harithah (or Zayd Mawla Muhammad) was kidnapped at a young age, purchased as a slave, and presented as a gift to Khadijah bint Khuwaylid, who later married Prophet Mohammed. Prophet Mohammed became very attached to Zayd and officially adopted him, referring to him as al-Habib (“the beloved”). Zayd is the only companion whose name appears in the Qur’an. His shrine is located at Mazar village, near Kerak.
Ja’far ibn Abi Taleb Shrine

The ornate silver and gold shrine of Ja’far ibn Abi Taleb commemorates a man of courage and generosity in his charitable giving. The story tells of how he would invite people to his home to share in all that it had to offer, even offering the leather wrappings of the butter to lick when all else had gone. He was killed in battle, soon after Zayd ibn Harithah, whose shrine is also nearby (described above).

Nabi Musa

Nabi Musa, meaning the “Prophet Moses”, is the name of a site in the Judean desert / West Bank desert that popular Palestinian folklore associates with Moses. Muslims believe that the grave of Moses is located here at Nabi Musa; however, the biblical book of Deuteronomy records that Moses was buried “in the valley in the land of Moab opposite Beth-Peor” (east of the Jordan River) and that actually, “no one knows the place of his burial to this day.

Deir Hijlah (St. Gerassimos Monastery)

Deir Hijlah, or St. Gerassimos Monastery, is a Greek Orthodox Monastery that was founded in 455 AD by the 5th C. Abbot Gerassimos of the Jordan. He was an Abbot of a community of 70 monks in the Jericho area who maintained a strict rule of asceticism. The Monastery was built in the form of a Laura - a cluster of caves for hermits with a common center. The monks met in the center on Saturdays and Sundays, and lived in seclusion the rest of the week. The caves are located 1 km to the East and in the mountains around the site. Its Arabic name - Deir Hijla (“monastery of Hijla”) preserved the name of the nearby Biblical city of Beth-Hogla.
Ecotourism Tips

- When you leave your accommodation, be sure to turn off the lights, heating or air conditioning and any electronics in the room.
- Leave things as you find them - DON’T take away stones or flowers - DO take away photographs and memories.
- Use a re-fillable water bottle, and refuse plastic bags when you can - plastics are not biodegradable and make up a large portion of the waste produced in this region.
- If you are having a picnic, dispose of any waste in an appropriate refuse container, and recycle where the facilities allow. Plan ahead, by taking a trash bag with you if you will be in the countryside.
- Shop smartly, asking yourself if you know where an item came from before purchasing, so you know you are not buying archaeological artefacts or taking anything from a reserve before buying. Local artisans are often happy to show you how an item is made.
- Save water by taking shorter showers, turning off the tap while you are brushing your teeth, and re-use towels to save on laundry.

Be respectful of other people’s cultures and traditions when visiting sacred sites
What You Can Do!

- Read the Covenant for the Jordan River (below) & sign it here: www.savethejordan.com
- Invite an EcoPeace representative to come speak to your community!
- Show an EcoPeace presentation or video at your school, community centre or house of worship! Write to info@foeme.org for material.
- Write or talk to your political representative about supporting efforts to rehabilitate the Jordan River and Dead Sea!
- Talk to others about the plight of the Jordan River and what they can do to rehabilitate the Jordan River!

Lower Jordan River
Covenant for the Jordan River

EcoPeace Middle East is now working on a Master Plan for the revival of the Jordan River. But technical and political solutions must begin with a shared vision of the valley. The Covenant for the Jordan offers that vision. We urge you to sign this covenant, and to call on decision-makers on all sides of the valley to transform the covenant’s vision into policy.

We recognize that the Jordan River Valley is a landscape of outstanding ecological and cultural importance. It connects the eco-systems of Africa and Asia, forms a sanctuary for wild plants and animals, and has witnessed some of the most significant advances in human history. The first people ever to leave Africa walked through this valley and drank from its springs. Farming developed on these plains, and in Jericho we see the origins of urban civilization itself. Not least, the river runs through the heart of our spiritual traditions: some of the founding stories of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are set along its banks and the valley contains sites sacred to half of humanity. By any measure, this landscape must be counted as part of the heritage of humankind.

But over the past 50 years, the Lower Jordan River has been destroyed. 96% of its historic flow has been diverted. What little water remains is polluted with saline and effluent, including untreated sewage. The valley’s wetlands have dried up, its springs are failing, and half its biodiversity has been lost. This is not just a tragedy for wildlife: families have seen their fields turn to dust, not from a lack of water but from the injustice of its distribution.

The demise of the Jordan and the collapse of the valley’s eco-system represent a failure of our most basic responsibility towards the species whose habitats have been destroyed and the ecological systems that sustain life on earth. It is a neglect that leaves us impoverished, that cripples the growth of an economy based on tourism, and that exacerbates the political conflicts that divide this region. It also exemplifies a wider failure to serve as custodians of the planet: if we cannot protect a place of such exceptional value, what part of the earth will we hand on intact to our children?

We have a different vision of this valley: a vision in which a clean, living river flows from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea; in which the valley’s plants and animals are afforded the water they need to flourish; in which the springs flow as they have for millennia; and in which the water extracted for human use is divided equitably between the nations that share the valley and the people who live here.

Realizing this vision will not be easy. But difficulty cannot be an excuse for inaction. We therefore call upon the governments of the countries that share this watershed to make a serious commitment of resources and political capital to the rehabilitation of the Jordan River. As individuals and organizations, as members of civil society, and as religious or community leaders, we also affirm that this is a landscape of universal ecological, cultural, and spiritual importance, and commit to work towards the vision expressed in this covenant.
About EcoPeace Middle East

EcoPeace Middle East is a unique organization at the forefront of the environmental peace-making movement. As a tri-lateral organization that brings together Jordanian, Palestinian, and Israeli environmentalist, our primary objective is the promotion of cooperative efforts to protect our shared environmental heritage. In so doing, we seek to advance both sustainable regional development and the creation of necessary conditions for lasting peace in our region. EcoPeace has offices in Amman, Bethlehem and Tel-Aviv.

EcoPeace would like to recognize and thank the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) and the Osprey Foundation for their support of the Jordan River Rehabilitation Project.

The views expressed are those of EcoPeace Middle East and do not necessarily represent the views of our funders.

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