Neighbours Path

TULKAREM

Background

The trail of Tulkarem is very rich in its natural and cultural themes. Many archaeological sites and features are contained within this region. The notable sites of Sabastia, Beit Leed, Irtah suburb, and Tulkarem provide information about the cultural history, ranging from the Iron Age and Roman period to modern times. Furthermore, this region embraces important historical and cultural routes for traders and travelers. The area is distinguished by its cultural and natural landscape, which is a combination of hilly areas and plains. The diversity of these areas is represented by the wide range of its agricultural products such as olives, almonds, figs, and citrus. This area is, moreover, rich in water resources as it lies on the Mountain Aquifer’s Northern Basin, Al-Zomer stream, and its continuation, the Alexander stream flow through this area on its way west to the sea.

What to See!

This trail starts from Sabastia and ends in Irtah Suburb. Tourist will encounter a number of different cultural and natural heritage themes throughout this trail, including areas where great attentions for water and land conservation needs to be highlighted. Additionally, through travelling from one station to the other, tourist will learn about main threats to Al-Zomar stream and the surrounding natural areas. The main stations of this trail are:

Irtah Suburb and Banat Ya’qoub (Jacob’s daughters) Monument

To the western part of the village lies Jacob’s daughter monument. Where it is said that Saint Jacob and his daughters settled in that area through their trip to Egypt. The site is thought to be Jacob’s resting place, hence, the name Irtah (meaning “to have a rest” in Arabic). The monument consists of two floors; the lower floor is Roman while the upper floor is an Islamic shrine with domes. Since Tulkarem is located on the Green Line, the Separation Barrier can be seen from Irtah suburb.

Touring tips

There is a panoramic view from a hilltop east to Sabastia overlooking the village and the surrounding landscape, where tourists may like to hike to that area and enjoy the tremendous view. If any would wish to further explore the natural and cultural features of that area, an overnight stay at the Sabastia hostel would give the trip an amazing taste. A cafeteria is located near the Roman pools in Beit Leed, providing visitors with refreshments and light traditional food. Likewise, in Irtah, visitors to Jacob’s daughters monuments can find pottery workshop nearby.

Why Tulkarem Trail?

Tulkarem trail is designed to highlight some of the important cultural and natural sites in that area, which could be of high potential for ecotourism and community development. Another aim of this trail is to shed the light on such area as a trans-boundary water resource, in addition to drawing attention to the need to protect the Mountain Aquifer and Al-Zomar stream as an ecosystem by itself, and the need to build wastewater treatment plant there.

Good water Neighbor Path

This trail is one of the 25 paths that deal with the issue of shared water, environmental resources and peace building between Palestinian, Jordanian and Israeli communities. The general goal of these trails are to:

- Raise public awareness of shared water and environment concerns to the communities.
- Promote cross border cooperation for solving environmental problems
- Develop potential for local ecotourism

For more information please visit our website: www.foeme.org
Tel:+972-2-2747948

Design & Copy by: Sami Backleh
Review by: Iyad AbuRdeineh
Al- Masoudieh Station and the Hijaz Railway

Al-Masoudieh station is one of the main stations along the Hijaz Railway in Palestine. It is located about 1 km to the west of Sabastia. Connecting the holy sites in the Hijaz to Istanbul via railway was a project that came to light during the reign of the Ottoman Sultan Abdel Hamid II. He sought to demonstrate his strength and power practically by applying the concept of a greater Islamic community to a series of projects within the Ottoman Empire. Al-Masoudieh is located in a nice natural valley that is suitable for picnic and bird watching with visible evidences of the archeological railway crossing the valley.

The Cultural and Natural Landscape of Sabastia

The site of Sabastia-Samaria is located approximately 10 km northwest of Nablus. It is located on a strategic point on the junction of two main historical routes, the northern Nablus road and the Jenin and the western route from the Jordan valley to the coast. It commands the surrounding fertile agricultural area.

Samaria (Sabastia) was the capital city of the northern kingdom during the Iron Age II in Palestine and a major urban centre during the Hellenistic and Roman period. Local Christian and Islamic traditions locates in Sebastia the tomb of John the Baptist, where churches and a mosque were built dedicated to John the Baptist, prophet Yahya, to inaugurate this religious tradition. The Mamluk, Ottoman and present town of Sebastia, still preserving the ancient name, is located on the eastern part of the Roman city, indicating an element of cultural continuity.

Beit Leed

Beit Leed is a village to the east of Tulkarem city. During the Roman Period, it was called “Led”, which means the “leader’s House”. During the late Ottoman period, Beit Leed was one of the 43 villages of “Bani Sa’eb” tribe of Tulkarem district. Many important archeological features are found in Beit Lid.

Pools dated back to the Roman Period are carved into the rock to the southwest of the village. It is believed that the stone columns of Sebastia were carved out of these ponds. A mosque that is dated back to the Mamluk period, in addition to a large number of caves, cisterns and ancient olive presses are all detectable. The old olive mill in Beit Leed is one of the historic mills found in Palestine. It dates back to Roman times and was used during the Ottoman period as well. A historic road connecting the eastern with the western part of Palestine crosses through Beit Leed. The historic road used to be known as the “Sa’a’abeh Road”. Along the road many shrines and small size mosques were built for travelers needing praying and rest.

The City of Tulkarem and Al-Zomar stream

Tulkarem was founded and settled by the Canaanites in 3000 B.C. After the Muslim conquest of Palestine in the 7th century, it received its current name “Tulkarem” which means “the bountiful mountain”. The Arabic name is derived from the Aramic words “Toor Karma” meaning, “mount of vineyards”. The modern locality was established by the Mamliks in the 13th century and it became a strategic center in western Palestine. The Tulkarem Archaeological Museum, which is located in the center of the town, includes numerous artifacts from the Roman period onward. This historic building is itself the museum. It dates back to the Ottoman period, during which time it was used as a post office. It was transformed into a government center during the British mandate.

Through Tulkarem passes Al-Zomer Stream - also called the Nablus Stream - which is the main tributary for the Alexander stream. Originating between the Gizrim and Eibal Mountains, this stream drains from the west and crosses the Green Line near the city of Tulkarem into Emek Hefer from the Israeli side. The Mountain Aquifer, an underground water resource shared by Israeli and Palestine, lies below Tulkarem. These water resources, underground and above ground, are the main highest quality water resources of the entire area. However, today, the stream and the Mountain Aquifer are prone to pollution originating from both sides of the Green Line. As a result, there is reduction in the quality of water available to the two populations and the ecological system that it sustains.

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Short-toed Eagle soaring in that area