Why Yatta?

The trail of Yatta was designed in order to give a glimpse of the various natural and cultural features of the southern West Bank and to shed the light on how such factors can be conserved and protected through ecotourism development to that area. The rich natural and cultural heritage manifested in that area is however being threatened by human activities mainly through quarrying and waste dumping in fragile areas that is affecting a wide range of biodiversity elements including human health.

Ecotourism initiatives to such areas would increase public awareness towards such environmental threats. Yatta is one of the communities that has participated in the “Good Water Neighbors” program. Together with Eshkol Regional Council from the Israeli side and Ahasan in Gaza Strip. These communities are situated on a single large drainage basin, which begins at Hebron Stream and flows to Beer Sheva Stream then to Wadi Gaza. In addition to that, this trail is meant to attract people’s perceptions on one of the biggest nature reserves in the West Bank. Unfortunately a big part of it is closed for military purpose. Most of this area lies to the east of Yatta and Bani Naim Reaching the Dead Sea.

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.

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What to See!

Prior arriving to the first station of the trail, the trip down to Yatta can give a glimpse of the different natural elements of the mountainous climate to the west and the semi-desert climate to the east bounded with a sense of the traditional agricultural practices. The trail of Yatta consists of the following stations:

Yatta

Located 12 km to the south of Hebron, Yatta is the second largest city in Hebron district. Historically it was called Yatta, which means the flat land. Yatta was inhabited by the Phoenicians, however, its history dated back to the Canaanite era where the ancient Canaanites of Palestine are said to settled. In the Roman period it was called letaem, however, the old city was established in the Ottoman period. It is said that Yatta was the city where prophet Zechariah, John the Baptist’s father, was born in. Yatta is located on the Eastern Mountain Aquifer, a natural source of ground-water located exclusively in the West Bank. From its northwestern boundary, the Hebron Stream flows along Yatta for 14.5 km. This stream is now-a-days highly polluted with slurry from Hebron and the nearby Israeli settlements indicating the need to build wastewater treatment plant to that area.

Khasem El-Daraj

Khasem El-Daraj lies to the south-western of “the Jerusalem Wilderness”, or El-Bariyah as it is called in arabic. This area is classified as semi-arid region with a mountainous desert habitat. Essentially thin-soil treeless, dramatically eroding limestone terrain is dissected by wadis draining towards the Dead Sea. A series of substantial natural variations in plant, species, soils, and landforms are recognized in this region. Given that this area has a unique geological formation, bio-geographical location, and an abundance of water from flash floods and permanent springs, these factors help to create a natural diversity within the desert habitat. It is also considered as one of the major migratory routes for many bird species worldwide.

Bedouins on the Route

The Bedouin tribes are an important part of Palestinian heritage as they have roamed Palestine for thousands of years. Today, the Bedouin way of life is under threat of extinction, where large areas of their territories, have been declared as military zones. The area where they are located are rich in natural resources, such as water and grazing land, as well as many caves, which have served as Bedouin shelters for millennia. This land has also been reasonably far from human civilisation until recently.

Sussiah

It is located to the south of Yatta in the middle of a hillside. There are Egyptian and Phoenician ruins, and a lot of very old coins found there. It is said that Sussiah is one of the Biblical cities. An important feature of Sussiah are the initiatives for green technologies that may work as models for marginalized rural communities.

Khirbet El- Karmel

A village in the Hebron hill, that is located 5 km to the south eastern of Yatta. Originally built by the Phoenicians, El-Karmel was, moreover, considered as one of the largest towns during the Roman and Byzantine Period. It was a fortified city, protecting the route to the Negev in the Crusader Period. The site also contains a cemetery and a storage pool from the Roman-Byzantine periods and various tombs (including shaft and pit types). The village is surrounded by a fascinating system of agricultural terraces of various plants such as almonds, vines, and olives. This helped in creating a distinguished habitat for various flora and fauna that are acclimatized to such habitat.

Touring Tips

This trail is convenient for different types of groups ranging from school students to the elderly. Traveling from one site to the other will be by bus or car, but tourists may choose to take a short hike at each station. Tourists may stop at Ein Rifa’ieh (east of Yatta). Ein Rifa’ieh is one of the springs that are naturally carved, forming several carbonic sedimentations in the rock. For an extra experience of the semi desert habitat, tourists may hike for an approximately 3 km route to an area near a solidwaste landfill where they can encounter a number of desert species.