



# **THE ANNEXATION OF TOURISM**

• ISRAEL'S POLICIES  
• AND THEIR  
• DEVASTATING IMPACT  
• ON PALESTINIAN  
• TOURISM  
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## Introduction



Throughout history, Palestine has been an attractive destination for business travellers, tourists and religious pilgrims not least due to its location at the East Mediterranean, at the crossroads between three continents and at the centre of the birth of the three monotheistic religions: Christianity, Judaism and Islam. Its strategic position and its location as a trade route between ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt also elevated its importance to ancient merchants and traders. Palestine's unique cultural heritage, makes it one of the most attractive destinations on the globe. Despite this, tourism in Palestine has suffered enormously and remains a testament to how Israel's occupation has turned a potential source of income and shared opportunity into a story of theft and lost potential.

Since the Nakba, or the catastrophe of 1948, successive Israeli governments have held a tight grip over tourism, denying Palestinians the ability to develop a healthy sector capable of catering to the large pool of tourists interested in visiting Palestine and experiencing its culture and rich heritage. In fact, Israel managed to turn tourism into an effective tool for further entrenching the occupation and its accompanying narrative by changing facts on the ground with the purpose of preventing the rise of a viable and independent Palestinian state.

The tourism sector, with its great potential to generate a large inflow of capital, is of immense importance to the Palestinian economy. It could

contribute enormously to Palestinian economic recovery and development. Nevertheless, Israel has placed an artificial cap on the development of this highly promising and indeed vital sector with the intent both to undermine the basis for the actualization of a viable and independent State of Palestine and to reinforce the occupation by incentivizing it for Israeli businesses and illegal settlements.

Indeed, not only does Israel regulate the movement of tourists to the West Bank, but Israeli tour operators mostly control how and where tourists may spend their dollars, leaving Palestinians with little to show for their unique position in the tourism industry. This fact is only accentuated by the development of numerous illegal settlement based businesses, funded by the Israeli government to attract the increased influx of religious, cultural and culinary tourists to their establishments.

Israeli policies could be grouped into three broad categories: exclusion, denial and destruction. Israeli measures and policies rise to an effective and de facto annexation of the tourism sector, while using tourism as a means to spread its own narrative and spew its propaganda. This publication will outline some of Israel's policies, including the means by which Israel markets tourism and the ways in which it uses tourism to annex, and expropriate Palestinian land, antiquities and resources.

## A Israel's False Branding

Palestine welcomes about 4 million visits annually, composed mainly of Christian pilgrims and a growing number of Asian Muslim pilgrims interested in visiting historical and holy sites, many of which lay firmly within the occupied State of Palestine.

In an effort to claim and profit from Palestinian sites, Israel, through its Ministry of Tourism, has engaged in a concerted effort to blur the territorial lines between the States of Palestine and Israel. Nowhere in Israel's marketing campaigns in international tourism fairs or on their Israeli Ministry of Tourism's website ([www.goisrael.com](http://www.goisrael.com)), is there ever mention of the fact that East Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Jericho or Nablus lie outside its borders and yet Israel actively operates tours in these Palestinian cities. Israel's false branding is in breach of all ethical and sustainable tourism laws. It is also a clear example of how Israel purposefully denies Palestinian existence and ownership of land. The problem only begins with branding, and continues with clear and unequivocal exploitation of Palestinian land, resources and archaeology for the purpose of maximizing profit generated by tourist spending.



### Palestinian Cities and Sites in Israeli Marketing Campaigns

Israel markets East Jerusalem and the West Bank within the "Israel" brand, erasing any Palestinian presence and using names such as "Judea" and "Samaria" to hide the fact that the tourist is within the occupied state of Palestine.

The maps distributed to international visitors upon arrival is intended to hide the presence of Palestinians and Palestine, thus keeping the pilgrim under the impression that the entire itinerary rests within Israel.

On the Israeli Ministry of Tourism website, referenced above, the whole of the West Bank and Jerusalem

are covered in the same colour as Israel, with the exception of the Interim agreement areas A and B, creating an impression of a single country with a few “Palestinian controlled” dependencies.

Through maps, film and other mediums, the Israeli Ministry of tourism has imposed on Palestine an almost exclusively Jewish-Zionist identity, ignoring the presence and history of the Palestinian people.

In all its publications, the Israeli Ministry of Tourism promotes occupied East Jerusalem and its holy sites as part of Israel, failing to recognize Palestinian ownership. Adding insult to injury, in 2013, the Israeli Ministry of Tourism printed material designating Bethlehem as an Israeli destination and published brochures targeting Christian pilgrims by marketing several Christian sites including the Church of Nativity in Bethlehem as Israeli sites. These and other examples illustrate Israel's policies of excluding Palestinians in the tourism sector, not only in terms of profit or revenue, but also as a people with an undeniable link and oneness with the land of Palestine. By blurring the lines, Israel is in staunch violation of international law and regulations. It is also in clear violation of UN Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, including resolutions 181, 242, and 338.

In order to avoid explanation and accountability for the on-the-ground realities of occupation, the Israeli Ministry of Tourism brands Christian pilgrimage in Palestine and Israel as Israeli “Holy Land” tours. This subtle use of a generic term is a clear attempt by Israeli authorities to obscure the reality of the existence of a Palestinian people, with a moral and legal ownership over the land of Palestine.

Moreover, referring to Palestine and Israel generically as the Holy Land in the tourism promotion platforms allows Israel to gloss over the realities of the suffering of Palestine's population and the restrictions imposed by Israel on the Palestinians. International pilgrims often never learn that most of the Christians living here are Palestinians and that all Palestinians are subject to restrictions on movement and access, including restrictive measures preventing their access to the same places of worship which those pilgrims are free to visit.

### Complicity of International Tour Operators

The impact of these marketing schemes is felt in many international markets and can be seen in both the rhetoric used to promote Israel and the design of itineraries by international travel operators.

In a normal system, international travel operators would rely on their local counterparts to propose and design itineraries, but ultimately the international tour operator would have the final say. In the system designed by Israel, the international travel operator receives readymade itineraries from Israeli tour operators without the input or the coordination of Palestinian tour operators. Israel not only puts forward Israeli sites but also Palestinian sites that are illegally managed by Israel's occupation. Such as, Qumran and Palestinian cities and sites under Palestinian control but portrayed as part and parcel of Israel.

Recently some international travel associations, in their engagement towards sustainable and ethical tourism, have raised concerns against such practices which do not only disfigure Palestine but which prevent the traveller and the pilgrim from fully experiencing the multifaceted nature of Palestine and the region with its rich mix of ethnicities, religions, and history.

*"We find it very alarming that Norwegian tour operators are promoting tours to Israel without differentiating what is Israeli or Palestinian territory and that several of the tour operators contribute to economic activity in the illegal Israeli settlements in violation of international law"*

(Anna Lund Bjørnsen, head of the Association of Norwegian NGO's for Palestine).

## Dead Sea Products: The Spa and Cosmetic Industry

Ahava Dead Sea Laboratories Ltd., is the largest Israeli exporter of Dead Sea products and is one of the most illustrative examples of the link between Israeli settler tourism and pillage.

Ahava's factories are located in the illegal Mitzpe Shalem settlement on the Palestinian shores of the Dead Sea. The company is illegally exploiting Palestinian natural resources including salts and minerals for its own economic benefit with the full backing of Israel's government.

By granting bureaucratic and financial benefits to the settlers, and by licensing Ahava Dead Sea Laboratories Ltd, 44.5 percent of which is owned by the illegal settlements of "Mitzpe Shalem" and "Kalia", Israel shares the responsibility for the pillage and theft of Palestinian resources in violation of international law, including Article 1 of the Independent Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Articles 47 and 55 of the Hague Regulations of 1954, Article 33(2) of the Geneva Conventions, and Article 8(2)(b)(xvi) of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Adding insult to Injury, Ahava markets its products worldwide as a "luxury and ethically responsible brand". Many touristic groups visit Ahava in the illegal settlement of Mitzpe Shalem to sample its products and to get a first-hand look at how Ahava's beauty products are manufactured. The tourists are either unaware or willfully ignorant of the sordid reality of spoilage, pillage and exploitation which Ahava truly represents.

Ahava is merely another example of Israel's profitable occupation with a turnover of USD 140 Million per year.





## B Israeli Use of Tourism to Create Facts on the Ground

Israel's military occupation and control of Palestinian territory through its illegal settlements and associated infrastructure has concealed Christian and Muslim heritage in Palestine.

Jerusalem is the most aggressive example of how the Old City, less than a square kilometre, has been the scene of continuous work from the Israeli Ministry of Tourism and the Israeli Department of Archaeology to create, sustain and amplify Jewish history while methodically obscuring the importance of Christian and Muslim heritage in the city and across the occupied State of Palestine.

### Promotion and Management of Sites by Israeli Authorities

Two of the most important touristic sites located in the occupied State of Palestine are Qumran and Herodion. Both sites are located within Palestine's 1967 borders, both are under the Israeli occupation's control and both have suffered from a two-fold pillage: firstly, through the theft of historical and archaeological artefacts and their transfer into Israel; and secondly through Israel's maintenance of administrative and military control over both sites.

The pillage and transfer of artefacts from Palestine by the Israeli Authorities is in clear breach of the UNESCO Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage and the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its associated protocol of 1954.

One of the latest examples of theft can be seen in the Herod Exhibition organized by the Israel Museum in 2013. The exhibition entailed the illegal transfer of approximately 30 tons of artefacts from the Herodion site. Israeli authorities claimed that those artefacts were borrowed, but in reality the Israeli Authorities dug, excavated and looted the site.

The site of Qumran, near the shores of the Dead Sea has been turned by the Israeli authorities into a vast complex catering to international tourists in a detailed plan which includes a visit to Qumran, lunch at the site of Qumran and a swim at the Dead Sea settlement of Kalia in one inclusive package. According to the Dun and Bradstreet report of 2008, the site of Qumran received 389,291 visitors in 2008. This not only generates tremendous income to the tourism operation as the site entrance is paid to the "Israel Nature and Park Authority" but falsely implies Israeli sovereignty over the whole north Dead Sea shore as well.

### Tracks, Trails and Walking Trips to Mark the Territory

Walking trails and tracks crisscross the whole of Palestine and are marked by the Israeli Authorities. These trails for the untrained eyes might seem trivial, but they are significant in so far as they symbolize Israel's tireless effort to hide Palestinian existence.

The Jerusalem trail is an example of how the occupation appropriates Palestinian land. The trail's path is routed around Palestinian neighbourhoods when possible in order to prevent any encounters with Palestinians. The path is intended to create the sense that Jerusalem is an Israeli-Jewish city with sovereign and legal contiguity while, in reality, almost half the track is in occupied East Jerusalem.

Another example is the Wadi Qelt trail which cuts through the Jordan Valley, more specifically from the Ein Fara Spring through Wadi Qelt to the Jericho area. The trail starts from the illegal Israeli settlement of "Ein Prat", where the settlers have sealed off the mouth of the spring into a recreational park down through the

valley reaching the illegal settlement of “Almog” at the entrance of Jericho. Once the tourists are done with the trail, they are carried on a bus tour, buying from the long line of settlement-owned attractions along the highway which stretches from Jericho junction up north to Bisan. While the trail is firmly situated within the occupied State of Palestine, the tourist rarely encounter Palestinians. In fact, the only beneficiary from such activities are illegal settlements and their residents who turn a handsome profit as a result, denying Palestinians the opportunity to profit.

### **Development of Jewish Sites in East Jerusalem and its Severance from the Rest of the Occupied State of Palestine**

Jerusalem, the heart and capital of Palestine, has been suffering disfiguration on a daily basis since 1967. Since the inception of Israel's occupation, a methodical and planned policy was enacted with the intention of containing Palestinian demographic presence and increasing Israeli Jewish presence. This entailed highly discriminatory policies in education, housing, health and infrastructure. For instance, all Jerusalemites pay taxes, but the proportion of the municipal budget allocated to the roughly 300,000 Palestinian residents of a city with a population of 815,000 doesn't exceed 10 per cent, despite the fact that their contribution to the budget exceeds 40 percent.

The Old City of Jerusalem and its surroundings have seen a slow yet organized plan to change the realities of the sites, the practices of its inhabitants and the accessibility of tourists to Palestinian areas. A city long accustomed to receiving pilgrims and tourists now suffers from the lack of both domestic and international tourism, a reality not experienced by Israeli counterparts who continue to profit from tourists.

Just outside the Old city, opposite the Al-Aqsa Mosque, in the village of Silwan, the Israeli Authorities have given management of an archaeological park to a settler organization, Elad. This settler organization, with the explicit support and backing of the Jerusalem Municipality has used the archaeological park to dispossess and evict Palestinian homeowners, while simultaneously attracting an approximate 300,000 tourists per annum.

The creation of this multifaceted system exemplified in the encircling of the Old City with archaeological parks in the heart of East Jerusalem such as Silwan, Ras al-Amud, Wadi Joz, Al-Suwana, Sheikh Jarrah and Al-Tur aims at presenting Jewish history, while obscuring the presence of Palestinians. These motivations also underlie Israel's forced displacement of Palestinians in these neighbourhoods for the expansion of these archaeological parks.

Policies of denial extend to history as well. For example, Israel, through its excavation in these areas, found skeletons dating back to an early Islamic period. Rather than preserve these skeletons for their historical value, Israel cast them aside.

UNESCO states clearly that the World Heritage Site in Danger status does not apply only to the city inside the Jerusalem wall, but also to the area outside the wall. According to UNESCO 37 C/Resolution 67 and 185 EX/Decision 36 as well as Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights with regard to the right to education, Articles 4 and 94 of the Fourth Geneva Convention with regard to the denial of the right of children to education, as well as the Hague Convention (1954) and its Protocols and the Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972), all Palestinian cultural heritage within the Old City of Jerusalem is protected and requires urgent measures to safeguard its historical value and preserve its continued existence.

Israeli measures that limit access to Christian and Muslim prayer sites during major religious holidays and festivals are creating a large economic loss to the city's domestic tourism industry. The strong Israeli police presence during Easter at the entrance of the Old City and its violent handling of pilgrims is one such example. These activities prevent thousands of Palestinians and, sometimes, foreign tourists from accessing Jerusalem and other significant religious sites. This policy is not limited to Christian holidays,



but extends to Muslim holidays as well. In fact, the aggressive infringements on access to Al-Aqsa mosque and the Noble Sanctuary compound prevent local Palestinians and millions of Muslims worldwide from praying in Al-Aqsa.

## Palestinians Denied Access to Holy Sites

Jerusalem holds a special status for both Palestinian Christians and Muslims. For Muslims it is the site of Al Aqsa mosque compound, sometimes referred to as the Noble Sanctuary ("Haram al-Sharif" in Arabic), which contains the Al Aqsa building and the Dome of the Rock, the third holiest site in Islam. For Christians, there are several sites with religious significance; most importantly is the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.

Israeli occupation measures have rendered all Palestinians holding a Palestinian ID card subject to military-issued movement permits and most Palestinians with a foreign passport subject to various restrictive visas, thus denying Palestinians access to their Holy Sites in Jerusalem. These acts are in violation of the freedom of worship and expression.

Moreover, and contrary to Israeli's agreements and in violation of international law, other religious sites within the 1967 borders are subject to specific entry measures, most notably the Baptism site on the Jordan River. The site is situated a few kilometers away from Jericho, nonetheless, Palestinian Christians are subject to a long process of obtaining the required military permit. In many cases such permits are denied with some exception around certain holidays.

Today, there are over 500 movement restrictions all over the Occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Palestinians are forced to navigate 60 checkpoints on major roads, not to mention the habit of the Israeli military to establish "flying" checkpoints which appear and disappear without notice or reason. There is an average of 65 flying checkpoints every week, rendering trips and links between various cities and villages even more difficult. The limitation of freedom of travel, through checkpoints, permits and various other bureaucratic hurdles, has also adversely impacted domestic Palestinian tourism and rendered travel between various cities costlier.



## C Developing Tourism Activities and Hotels in Settlements to Compete with Palestinian Tourism

Tourism represents one of the most important and potentially profitable economic sectors in Palestine. However, this fact is not reflected in its current share of GDP, which hovers around 3% with an estimated share of \$271m. The main reason behind this low share is the complex system designed by Israel to ensure that tourism expenditure is aimed towards Israeli businesses and tax payers.

The massive construction and expansion of illegal settlement was accompanied by increased interest by illegal settlers and by the Israeli government to build the necessary infrastructure for tourists in those illegal settlements.

### The Bethlehem Belt

After Jerusalem, Bethlehem is the second major tourism focal point in Palestine, attracting Christian pilgrims as well as many Muslim pilgrims and cultural tourists.

Over the last ten years, the hotel industry in Bethlehem has grown fast and today the offering spreads from church-run pilgrimage guesthouses to fancy four and five star hotels that cater to all types of tourists and offer good accommodation in terms of value and quality.

This has made Bethlehem one of the most frequented destinations for overnight visitors in Palestine with approximately 400,000 overnight stays in 2013.

In response to this expanding and thriving industry, Israel has developed plans to build hotels in the three illegal settlements north of Bethlehem, Gilo, Givat Hamatos and Har Homa, thus creating a hotel belt between Bethlehem and Jerusalem to compete with Bethlehem hotels.

### Ecotourism in Illegal Israeli Settlements

In parallel to the development of massive hotel infrastructure in illegal Israeli settlements that cater to the pilgrimage industry. Israeli settlements have also developed an intricate network of services, catering to individual and family tourists for both domestic Israeli tourism and international tourism.

In their effort to attract larger numbers of domestic tourism, illegal Israeli settlements with the full backing of various government agencies have upped their offering of Bed and Breakfast accommodation services. The illegal settlements of Karnei Shomron and Rotem host such establishments. Many individual settlers are listing spaces for rent on fast-growing websites such as Airbnb. The settlers generally promote such establishments with emphasis on strong biblical imagery or nature-oriented ecotourism, neglecting the fact that many of those establishment are built on private and public Palestinian land.

The second level of development has risen from a growing industry within illegal Israeli settlements focused around wineries and organic food. The "Israel Wine Route" is replicating an earlier industry that grew in the occupied Golan Heights in the 1970's and 80's as a tool to link far off settlements to population centres. The two major winery development sites are located in the northern West Bank, around the Shomron settlements and the central West Bank, around the Bethlehem/Hebron area. On the Israeli Ministry of Tourism's website, those two areas are listed alongside with the occupied Golan as major wine areas. All of those wineries are a manifestation of the boorishness and vulgarity of Israel's occupation, which has managed to turn stolen Palestinian property into a profitable business.

The third level of settlement-linked tourism arises from a growing series of restaurants and farms catering to tourist buses that criss-cross Palestine. On the route from Jerusalem to the Jordan Valley, roads are crowded with new restaurants offering tourists a unique dining experience. Such establishments could

also be found along the border with Jordan in areas that are largely restricted to Palestinians despite being located firmly within the occupied State of Palestine.

### Developing Cultural Tourism and Entertainment in Settlements

The Israeli private and public sectors have developed and sustained a network of cultural and entertainment activities aimed at attracting international and Israeli visitors. Some of those activities include Shooting Ranges in the Etzion settlements of south Bethlehem. The Shooting Ranges are constructed and conceived around a highly nationalistic concept of pride in illegal settlements and an extreme right-wing culture that has a long and recorded history of Palestinian dehumanization.

Alongside the development of hotels, B&B's and restaurants, the settlements are developing entertainment activities close to historical sites aimed at capturing international visitors for longer periods with an eye for generating more income. In Jerusalem's old city near the entrance at Jaffa Gate, the Jerusalem Municipality organizes numerous festivals meant to attract a growing number of tourists.

## Dying Tourism in Palestine: The case of SEBASTIA

Sebastia, a small Palestinian village located near Nablus, reflects the dire situation of tourism and antiquities in Palestine. The village is a rare well-preserved display of the different civilizations that inhabited Palestine with a strong Biblical and Quranic history, specifically that of Saint John the Baptist or Prophet Yehiya as he is known in Arabic. It is a charming little village with a welcoming atmosphere and a scenic hilly landscape situated among olive groves.

The idyllic landscape welcomed thousands of tourists on their way from Jerusalem to Nazareth or back, who would stop by, visit the ruins, meet the locals and enjoy lunch or dinner at the large touristic restaurants in the village.

Israel has built Israeli settler bypass roads which link the illegal settlements of Homesh, Shave Shomron and Enav to Israeli cities. The installation of checkpoints and gates on those roads and the constant harassment at Israeli checkpoints has been a severe blow to tourism in the area; slowly decreasing the flow of tourism until Sebastia lost most of its historic industry.

By the early 2000s, the restaurants had emptied and tourists disappeared. This has not only created an enormous economic loss to the village and its inhabitants but also an empty space where the Israeli Occupation Authorities reinforced the settler presence and conducted illegal renovation and excavation works around the village. This methodical isolation has led to the removal of Sebastia from the itinerary of most pilgrims. Today pilgrims go to nearby illegal settlements or simply pass by Sebastia without stopping. In addition, Israel denies the Palestinian Ministry of Tourism permits for rehabilitating and developing this archaeological site.

In recent years, there have been considerable efforts from the Palestinian Ministry of Tourism and from the local civil society to bring Sebastia back to its past glory. Today, you will see a few tourists during the day stopping off on their way for a quick tour of the ruins and a negligible number of visitors who would spend the night.

Sebastia is not alone in this case; Taybeh, Al-Zababdeh, Hebron, Burqin and many other Palestinian cities and villages have suffered the same fate.





## D Shattered Hopes and the Reality of Palestinian Tourism

The hopes that accompanied the signing of the Oslo agreements 21 years ago have been completely shattered. Indeed, after Oslo, tourism was expected to emerge as one of the most promising pillars of a new economic era, defined by shared prosperity. Tourism represented this hope, due to the fact that while two separate sovereignties might exist in the holy land, the cultural and historical continuity between Israel and Palestine are undeniable, necessitating coordination and cooperation in this growing industry. Based on sound policy foresight, millions of dollars were invested in tourism infrastructure projects such as the construction of hotels, recreation resorts, restaurants and related ventures.

The reality today looks very different. What should have been a policy of cooperation has turned into a policy of Israeli annexation. Israeli policy, especially since 2000, is designed to shut out Palestinians, rendering them both uncompetitive and unable to provide the same services as their Israeli counterparts. These policies include imposing difficulties for nationals of neighbouring Arab countries and Muslim countries to acquire visas, therefore depriving the Palestinian people of a key segment of its market. Furthermore, Israel creates difficulties for tourists with (non-Israeli) plans to visit the State of Palestine by harassing them at the airport or illegally restricting their access to 'West Bank only'; it denies Palestinian tour operators and companies the ability to receive tourists at Ben Gurion International airport; and, as mentioned, it organizes tours within Israel as well as the occupied state of Palestine without mention of the latter. A study by the World Bank has estimated the current income generated by tourism could reach an approximate \$1.2 billion if the artificial cap placed on it by Israel's occupation is removed. Tourism today only generates \$271 million.

The maze of unequal laws and various restrictions give Israeli tour operators and companies a highly unfair advantage. Israel has blocked Palestinians from being able to fairly compete and refuses to negotiate with the Palestinian Authority over new regulations, thereby creating the sense that Israeli tour operators will go the "extra mile" for their customers, unlike their Palestinian competitors.

### Main Challenges Facing Palestinian Tourism

- **Restriction of Movement:** Palestinian tours guides or transportation companies have not been able to enter Israel since 2000. From over 150 tourist guides licensed to work all over Palestine, only 40 have permits to guide in Israel, which are renewed periodically and without guarantee. Navigating and understanding the ever changing policies vis-a-vis Palestinian travel restrictions is not an easy task. The procedures tend to change depending on the political relations. Furthermore, all Palestinians have different travel restrictions depending on where they live, whether in Jerusalem, the West Bank, Gaza, Israel or the diaspora. These restrictions on movement severely hinder the development of a domestic tourism industry.
- **Limited Control Over Tourism Resources:** Another key obstacle to developing our tourism industry is our inability to carry out any development work in approximately 60% of the West Bank where many historical, religious and archaeological treasures are located. These are areas which have been expropriated by Israel and are tightly controlled by the Israeli occupying forces. In many cases, touristic sites in these areas are being exploited by Israel in order to benefit its own tourism industry. A primary example in the Bethlehem Area is Herodion which lies well within Palestine's boundaries but is under the full control of the Israeli National Park Authority which collects and benefits from entrance fees, and provides jobs for Israeli settlers.
- **Sizeable Leakages of Tourism Revenues:** Palestine suffers from sizeable leakage in tourism revenue. Bethlehem is one of the clearest examples of such leakage. The city continues to receive millions of visitors, the majority of these tourists only spend half a day there, leaving very little time for a thorough



interaction with its businesses or the residents of the city. These visitors hurry in the footsteps of Jesus and often their only interaction with the “living stones” of the Holy Land is through a tour bus window. Once again, this phenomenon has much to do with Israeli tour operators, who control the industry and are able to tailor tours to benefit Israel and promote hotels in West Jerusalem or in surrounding illegal settlements. This is reflected in the fact that despite the millions of visitors each year, Palestine is only able to attract 500 thousand overnight stays per year.

- **Destruction of Palestinian Cultural Heritage:** Israel has destroyed or damaged Palestinian historical, cultural and religious sites throughout the Occupied State of Palestine since it began its occupation. Among the cultural sites that suffered the most damage is the Old City of Nablus whose cultural heritage includes architectural treasures dating to Roman, Byzantine, Crusader, Mamluk and Ottoman eras.





# The Destruction of Nablus's Cultural Heritage

The destruction and damage that Israel has inflicted upon the Old City of Nablus has adversely impacted tourism in various West Bank cities. One of the most negatively impacted cities was the Old City of Nablus which witnessed heavy Israeli bombardment in the Second Intifada. Some of the most important impacted sites include:

**Al-Shuby House:** An Ottoman-era residential complex composed of three connected houses. It was home to nine low-income families. On April 6, 2003 eight people from Samir Shuby's family were killed (three children, three women, including one pregnant women, and two men) when an Israeli bulldozer attempted to clear a path through the homes, in order for a tank to enter the narrow Old City streets. Residents reported that the Israeli Army did not warn the residents to leave their houses prior to the assault. Amnesty International found that "the IDF clearly failed to ensure that there were no people in the house when they destroyed it." [5] The building was totally destroyed. An elderly couple, Abdullah Shuby and his wife Shamsa, were discovered alive after eight days of being trapped beneath the rubble. The destruction affected the structural stability of the whole residential block.

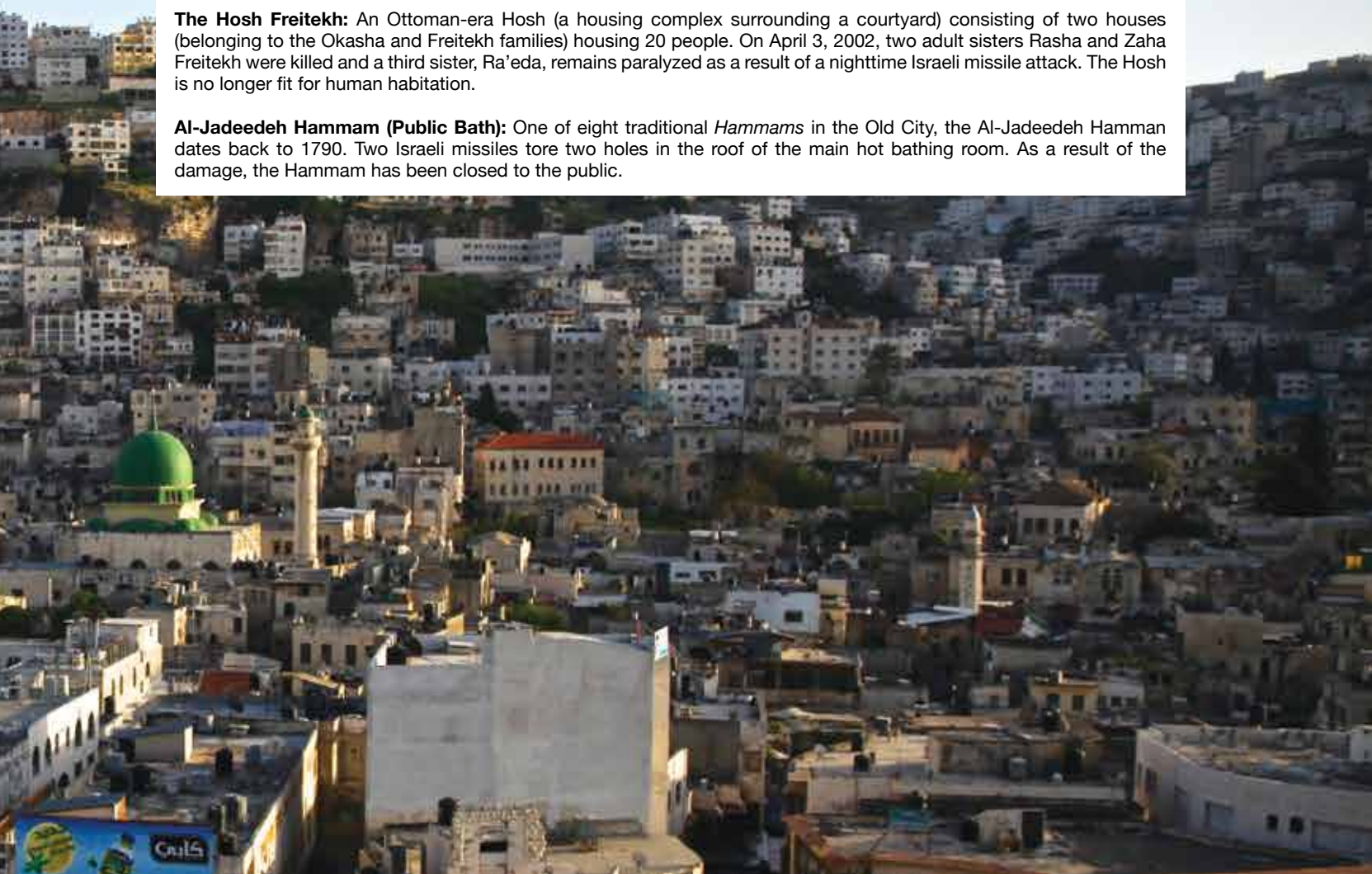
**Al-Fatimiyyeh School:** An Ottoman-era preparatory school for 500 girls. During the first few days of the April 2002 invasion, Israeli army bulldozers ripped holes in the walls damaging the structural stability of the building. The students were transferred to another school.

**Al-Khadra Mosque:** The oldest mosque in Nablus, the Al-Khadra Mosque was converted from a church to a mosque in 1187. It consists of a Mamluk minaret, intricate details of stone and hand-carved wooden doors. The main prayer hall (150 square meters) was destroyed and parts of the roof at the western side collapsed as a result of Israeli bombardment.

**Kanaan Soap Factory:** Nablus is famous for its production of soap, an industry dating back to the 10th century, and the Ottoman-era Kanaan Soap Factory was completely destroyed by an Israeli F-16 missile attack in April 2002. The destroyed site consists of two soap factory buildings, Kannan and al-Nabulsi and a group of houses belonging to the Shabaru, Istetaiyeh, Shakhsheer, Zatar, Khalili, Johari, Younis and Alfi families. The Khan al Wakalat and the door and part of the interior of the 17th century St. Demetrios Greek Orthodox Church were also destroyed.

**The Hosh Freitekh:** An Ottoman-era Hosh (a housing complex surrounding a courtyard) consisting of two houses (belonging to the Okasha and Freitekh families) housing 20 people. On April 3, 2002, two adult sisters Rasha and Zaha Freitekh were killed and a third sister, Ra'eda, remains paralyzed as a result of a nighttime Israeli missile attack. The Hosh is no longer fit for human habitation.

**Al-Jadeedeh Hammam (Public Bath):** One of eight traditional *Hammams* in the Old City, the Al-Jadeedeh Hamman dates back to 1790. Two Israeli missiles tore two holes in the roof of the main hot bathing room. As a result of the damage, the Hammam has been closed to the public.







## E Conclusions

Israel's systematic policy of exploiting Palestinian archaeology, sites and cultural heritage for its own profitable gain, and its promotion of its illegal settlements through false marketing, and its host of occupation policies have amounted to a near annexation of Palestinian tourism.

Since the Israeli occupation of 1967, the Israeli tourism industry has flourished, in many cases through the exploitation of Palestinian sites, while the Palestinian sector has been faced with unfair competition and an oppressive military occupation. Nevertheless, between 1994 and 2000, an estimated \$700m was invested into the sector to develop infrastructure (hotels, restaurants etc.) and preserve heritage sites across Palestine. Following a near collapse of the industry during the second intifada (2000-2005), the sector gradually recovered, again demonstrating the resilience of the private sector through an influx of fresh investment.

The Palestinian Ministry of Tourism has devised a multipronged strategy aimed at countering Israeli policies by concentrating its efforts on increasing the visibility of the Palestine brand and by highlighting Israel's treatment of Palestinian tourism. This has included wider participation in international fairs, conferences and active engagement with the international tourism market in its various sectors. Palestine's membership in UNSECO has also been a useful step, giving the State larger leverage in countering Israel's false branding.

The Ministry has also conducted refresher courses to all licensed Palestinian guides. The themes have included rural Palestinian life and national history as well as field visits to Palestinian archaeological sites and sites of national importance, in order to familiarize Palestinian tour operators with the State's touristic offerings.

The Palestinian tour operators and civil society organizations have started developing tourism as a tool for carrying the Palestinian message across to international visitors and as a means to strengthen the resilience of villages, camps and the rural areas of Palestine. There is a strong drive led by both the public and private sectors in Palestine to develop cultural tourism.

Solidarity tourism is another developing segment that serves Palestine's tourism industry and the cultural riches of Palestine. This includes the creation of awareness tours through campaigns such as Stop the Wall or stays at the refugee camps through centres such as the Aida youth centre.

Such initiatives not only promote Palestine as a tourism destination but also defend against the misconceptions resulting from Israel's long campaign of annexing tourism in Palestine. Despite these and other efforts the situation remains bleak. What was once a hope for a shared future is today the exemplification of how a brute military occupation deprives, denies and excludes Palestinians on all fronts, including in tourism.



## Statement by Dr. Hanan Ashrawi



From a global positioning and state-building perspective, tourism has always been considered key to achieving Palestinian independence. Tourism, including religious pilgrimages to Palestine, is not only essential for the economy, but it has been part of our social fabric for centuries. Palestine is a human responsibility, and its value to humanity is incontestable. Our families who live in ancient cities such as Jerusalem and Bethlehem have been dedicated to welcoming international visitors to Palestine for centuries. Palestine, as a whole, is a human heritage that should be experienced freely by all people.

However, Israel's Judaization of Jerusalem and its consolidation of control over the rest of Occupied Palestine have severely impacted Palestinian tourism and strained the Palestinian economy (For example, Bethlehem, surprisingly, has the highest unemployment rate in the Occupied West Bank). Since the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, and more profoundly, with the onset of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip in 1967, the Israeli government has deliberately used tourism as a tool to advance its political agenda and ensure its domination and control over Palestinian areas. We have been unable to avail our international guests of the full experience of all that Palestine has to offer since Israel is in control of our borders and crossing points. In addition, the Israeli government has imposed a draconian system of restrictions on Palestinian movement in Occupied Palestine, and it continues to fragment Palestinian land and families with its illegal settlement enterprise, military checkpoints and apartheid walls, as well as settler extremism and violence which constitute serious impediments not only to tourism but also to the very essence of life in Palestine.

Under the mantra of the "Jewish State," Islamic sacred places are rarely promoted and Christian holy sites are presented in a Jewish-Zionist context. The Israeli monopoly over tourism includes the denial of licenses for Palestinians to become tour guides and the refusal of permits for organizations and institutions to build or renovate tourism infrastructures in Area C, which comprises about 62% of the West Bank. As a matter of fact, while there are over 7,150 Israeli tour guides allowed to work in Jerusalem, only 42 Palestinians carrying Jerusalem IDs are allowed to work as tour guides in our occupied capital. Israel has assumed control over several important sites in the Occupied State of Palestine, including the Al-Aqsa Mosque Compound in Jerusalem, the Baptismal Site and other shrines in the Jordan Valley, and the Church of Imwas (Emmaus) in the Latrun Valley. Note that Gaza and its religious and cultural sites are completely off-limits due to the Israeli occupation and siege, and many ancient sites have been

destroyed and left in ruins during repeated Israeli military assaults in Gaza.

All members of the international community have the responsibility to hold Israel accountable for its policies of racism, institutionalized discrimination and violence, and to boycott and divest from companies linked directly or indirectly to Israel's occupation and more specifically to the Israeli settlement enterprise and tourism industry. While most sites significant to Christian pilgrims and tourists are located in the State of Palestine, Israeli tour operators continue to promote trips inside Israel, normalizing the occupation of Palestine. Incentivizing visits organized by Palestinian tour operators and avoiding those Israeli tour companies that promote the occupation, including its infrastructure, should be a first step. Visiting Palestine is a nonviolent way of defying the military occupation, empowering the Palestinian people and contributing to peace and justice. In addition to the Israel Ministry of Tourism, the Israel Nature and Parks Authority, the Jewish National Fund, and all Israeli institutions promoting, managing and funding tourism-related projects and sites in the Occupied State of Palestine should also be boycotted until they comply with the basic principles of international law and human rights.

The State of Palestine also has the right to accede to international tourism treaties and agreements and organizations as a full member. In order to develop its tourism sector and to overcome the barriers and constraints caused by the occupation, Palestine needs full cooperation from the international community. Until the Palestinian government has complete control over its religious, archaeological and historic sites, including in and around Jerusalem, Palestinian tourism will continue to decline and suffer dramatically; Palestine must be set free to make sure its potential is realized.

We invite all international travelers to visit our touristic, historic and holy sites situated in Palestinian cities, towns and villages. Enjoy Palestinian culture by visiting museums, cultural centers and theaters, and participate in interactive tourism, which includes nature tours and trips to the apartheid wall, to witness first-hand Israel's annexation of Palestinian land. By traveling to Palestine, you will contribute to developing the multi-faceted Palestinian tourism industry and promoting Palestine's long and rich cultural heritage that should be made available to all humanity.

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