

Cultural tours in the Holy Land

To learn at first hand about the living stones

And the works to preserve the stones of memory in the Holy Land.

ATS pro Terra Sancta is offering the opportunity to participate in guided tours to a number of the most meaningful sites in the Holy Land, where you will have the opportunity to learn more about the preservation works being carried out in this land, see at first hand the mission that the Franciscan friars have been carrying out for more than eight centuries, and witness many revealing elements of the Christian presence which today remains alive and vital.

1. JERUSALEM: the homes and living stones in the Christian quarter.

A tour of the Christian quarter in the Old City of Jerusalem, where the Custody of the Holy Land continues to rent, for symbolic amounts, the residences it owns to the neediest families. An opportunity to deepen one's historical and cultural knowledge, and to learn about the housing crisis in the Holy City. Passing among the houses, terraces, roofs and workshops will give you the opportunity to see first hand the reality and the difficulties experienced by the Christians who live just a few steps from the Holy Sepulchre.

Length: 1-2 hours, with the possibility of evening visits

2. JERUSALEM: the enhancement of the historical and cultural heritage of the Custody of the Holy Land.

An itinerary for deepening one's understanding of the history of the Franciscan presence in this land through the rich heritage acquired over the centuries by the Custody of the Holy Land, on the one hand, and, on the other, to see up close a preservation project currently being carried out in one of the most beautiful churches in the Holy Land.

It begins with a visit to the Archaeological Museum of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, guided by the young archaeological experts employed there, before proceeding to the Church of Gethsemane, just outside the walls of the Old City and thus not very far from the Museum. An important project to restore the mosaics in this church is in progress, involving a number of young restorers from Jerusalem. During your visit you will have the opportunity to see how the preservation is being carried out, observing from up close the work of the young people who are involved in the project.

Length: 2-4 hours, during the daytime. Possibility to visit only one of the two sites.

3. BETHLEHEM: projects in support of the local community.

In the town of Bethlehem the projects of the Custody of the Holy Land are focused on providing support to the weakest elements of the population: children, young families and the elderly. Through two different types of visits, one short and the other longer, you will have the opportunity to learn more about the local community and the problems and hopes of those who today live in the city in which Jesus was born, as well as about the various projects under way to provide concrete assistance to this community. You will thus be able to get closer, to a greater or lesser extent depending on the time you have available, to the social situation existing in the territory: the Franciscan schools, the home for the elderly managed by the Sisters of the Società Antoniana, and the Catholic Action Center.



In the longer excursion we also offer the possibility to visit several sites in Bethlehem that, while less-well known, are interesting in terms of understanding the history and social context of this Palestinian town: passing by Solomon's Pools, the Deisha Refugee Camp and the Wall separating the Palestinian Territories from Israel, you will come to the Convent at Hortas, located in the heart of the valley described in the Song of Songs, where several Sisters are managing a nursery school for more than a hundred children.

Length: 1-2 hours for the shorter excursion, a half day for the longer one. Possibility of organizing the excursion in late afternoon or evening.

4. JERICHO: mosaic art in the most ancient town in the world.

A journey between the past and present to discover mosaic art. The itinerary involves three stops: starting from the Mosaic Center, the workshop where a number of young people from Jericho are engaged in studying, restoring and producing mosaics; then a visit to Hisham's Palace, a Umayyad complex dating from the 8th century where there is a splendid mosaic representing the tree of life; and concluding with a visit to the Byzantine church at St. Andreas – built above the house of Zacchaeus – and its two floor mosaics.

Length: half day. Possibility of organizing an encounter at the Franciscan Parish of the Good Shepherd, with a visit to the school operated by the Custody of the Holy Land.

5. SABASTIYA: the fruits of history and the memory of John the Baptist.

This model project has been under way for several years in a part of the village of Sabastiya, located in the Palestinian Territories ten kilometers from Nablus. A model project since it involves not only the preservation of one of the most interesting archaeological sites in Samaria, which includes the tomb of John the Baptist, but also for its effort to involve the local community.

After visiting the historical, archaeological and artistic treasures of Sabastiya, you will have the chance to meet those who are its inheritors and have learned to make use of and manage this heritage as the precious resource that it is: the young people, women, workers and restorers from the village.

Length: half day. Possibility of organizing a typical Palestinian meal prepared by the women of the village.

NOTES:

- Donations are requested for organizing cultural excursions, which will be used to support the projects of ATS pro Terra Sancta. Donations can be made directly through the Agency or by individual participants during their visit. On request, receipts will be issued.
- In addition to organizing specific itineraries, we are available to offer **assistance to tour operators**, both local and international, in terms of looking after groups during the day and/or evening in case of particular needs, accompanying them on cultural visits to our projects, providing assistance with reservations for celebrations in the Holy Places, and for other types of *on-site* logistical arrangements.

For information and reservations: ATS pro Terra Sancta

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