

WALKS IN PALESTINE
Including The Nativity Trail

Welcome to Palestine...

...a new opportunity to encounter the past.

From the Bethlehem 2000 Project

'For centuries, Bethlehem has embodied hope in the minds of humankind. Whether we have had the privilege of visiting the town or not, its historic and sacred meaning shines like a lodestar in our consciousness. It reminds us of the bonds created by belief, of faith's ability to heal humanity, of the power of prayer.'

*Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the United Nations
for the Bethlehem 2000 Participants Conference, Brussels, 11–12 May 1998*

Dedication

This book was conceived by the Bethlehem 2000 Project Authority to enhance the economic development of Palestine. It is dedicated to all those Palestinians who had the vision and faith to create and support the project through difficult times, and to those we met along the way in the hills, villages and towns who gave their help and wished us well. We trust that, in its own small way, it will indeed contribute to acquainting visitors to the Holy Land with Palestine and its people.

*Bethlehem 2000 Project Authority
and Di Taylor & Tony Howard*

n.o.m.a.d.s

New Opportunities for Mountaineering, Adventure and Desert Sports

Greenfield, Oldham, OL3 7HA, ENGLAND

E-mail: tony&di@n-o-m-a-d-s.demon.co.uk

Website: www.n-o-m-a-d-s.demon.co.uk



WALKS IN PALESTINE

Including The Nativity Trail

By Di Taylor and Tony Howard
n.o.m.a.d.s.



2 POLICE SQUARE, MILNTHORPE, CUMBRIA, LA7 7PY
www.cicerone.co.uk

Thanks to all concerned

Much of the background for the Nativity Trail was prepared by the Bethlehem 2000 Project and by the Birzeit University IT Unit web team. In particular, we thank Hind Khoury, Rana Ishaq and Dr Nabeel Kassis, Minister of the Bethlehem 2000 Project. Also, Ranya and Marwan Tarazi (Head of IT at Birzeit University) who coordinated the Project, provided warm hospitality and were great companions on the hills.

We are equally indebted to Mark Khano of Guiding Star who made the initial invitation to us to visit Palestine and walk the Nativity Trail. Though they hardly knew us, he and his wife, Julie, welcomed us to their home during both our visits to the Holy Land. Mark was also with us for most of the walks, giving his help voluntarily.

Together with staff of the Alternative Travel Group and Guiding Star, both Mark and Marwan did much of the fieldwork for the Nativity Trail. They, and the staff of Bethlehem 2000, also gave invaluable support whilst we were working on the manuscript, doing everything possible to bring it to fruition for the benefit of Palestine. Sue Rockwell, Sue Heher, Anne and Henry Carse and others who originally walked the trail also contributed information, whilst the Applied Research Institute of Jerusalem made an indispensable contribution with their maps, in particular, Manal Daoud and Nader Hrimat, Assistant Director.

Palestinian guide George Rishmawi ensured everything ran smoothly as well as providing information and making the arrangements for our walk along the trail in spring 2000. Also with us were Guides Eli Asmari, Ramsi Ghattas, Kifah Al Fanni and Sami Abu Ghazaleh who, like George, were not only good companions, but added greatly to our knowledge of the Holy Land past and present. Reverend Andrew Ashdown B.D. and Susan Sayers walked the trail with us, opening our eyes to the Christian heritage of the route. We are particularly grateful to Andrew, who has since made a major contribution to this book, with biblical references and notes on biblical history. We also wish to thank the Islamic Association for Palestine and the Islamic Cultural Centre, Park Road, London, for their approval of our selected Islamic quotes.

The Sabat family in Amman, Jordan, provided their usual hospitality, making us feel at home en route to their homeland of Palestine; similarly, Adnan Budieri and family (also originally from Palestine) gave us their usual friendly welcome. Adnan, who is Head of Birdlife Middle East, also helped with information on this project as did Khaled Irani, Director of Jordan's Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature. Imad Atrash, Executive Director of the Palestinian Wildlife Society, and Mousa Sanad of the Wadi Artas Folklore Centre also provided valuable information, as did the Cave Research Centre of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

Our thanks also go to Buffalo, The Brasher Boot Company, Bridgedale Outdoors, Eagle Creek, PHD, North Cape, Tengboche Agency and Troll Climbing Equipment for supplying clothing, footwear and equipment for this project and our other outdoor activities; also to Mary Hartley and Peter Hall of Sansome Hall Architects, Milton Keynes, for their excellent and invaluable drawings and F. N. Hepper of Kew Gardens and Mrs Joan Petford for confirming some of the less well-known flower names. As always, we thank Dave and Suzanne of the Dave Cummins Partnership for their patient assistance with our seemingly inevitable computer problems. Also Cicerone Press for their interest in and unfailing support of the whole project despite troubled times in the Middle East.

Finally, we thank all the people of Palestine for their kindness and hospitality during our time in their country. We trust this book will contribute in its own small way to their future peace and prosperity.

Permissions

We thank the following copyright holders for their permissions:

Arab and Jew. Wounded Spirits in a Promised Land, David K. Shipler. Times Books. Random House Inc. 1986

Before the Mountains Disappear, Ali H. Qleibo. Kloreus Books, 1992

Bethlehem 2000 Project website, Dr Nabeel Kassis, Minister

I am a Palestinian Christian, Mitri Raheb. Augsburg Fortress Press, 1995

In the Steps of The Master, H. V. Morton. Methuen, 1934

Jericho – Oasis Town, Delia Khano. Guiding Star, 1998

Palestine with Jerusalem, Henry Stedman. Bradt Travel Guides, 2000

St George – A Holy Land Saint, Delia Khano. Guiding Star, 1985

The Community Tourism Guide, Mark Mann. Tourism Concern, 2000

The Historical Geography of the Holy Land, George Adam Smith, 1894, 30th edition, 4th impression. HarperCollins Publishers Ltd, 1974

The Nativity Trail. Birzeit University website. Marwan Tarazi, Head of IT

Scripture quotations were taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version, copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Hodder & Stoughton Limited. Permission for use in USA and Canada kindly given by Zondervan. All rights reserved. 'NIV' is a registered trademark of International Bible Society. UK trademark number 1448790.

Other authors, publishers or copyright holders proved impossible to trace or to get replies from, despite our very best efforts. We thank them here for their works, the extracts from which give an added interest to a land already rich in history. If, unwittingly, there has been an infringement of copyright, we offer our sincere apologies.

Di Taylor and Tony Howard, May 2001

Text and photographs © Di Taylor & Tony Howard 2001

Artwork © Mary Hartley and Peter Hall

ISBN 1 85284 337 3

Other Cicerone Guides by the authors:

Walks and Climbs in Romsdal, Norway (out of print)

Treks and Climbs in Wadi Rum, Jordan

Jordan – Walks, Treks, Caves, Climbs and Canyons

All rights reserved No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior permission of the author.

Advice to readers

The authors and publisher cannot accept any responsibility for loss, injury or inconvenience arising from the use of information contained in this guide.

Readers are advised that whilst every effort is taken by the authors to ensure the accuracy of this guidebook, changes can occur which may affect the contents. It is advisable to check locally on transport, accommodation, shops etc. Also please be aware that paths may alter or be eradicated by road building, landslip, flash floods or change of ownership. The publisher and authors would welcome notes of any changes.

Cover photos

Top: *Looking Towards Jericho from the Mount of Temptation*

Bottom left: *Bethlehem Market*

Bottom right: *Monastery of Mar Saba, Bethlehem Wilderness*

CONTENTS

THE BETHLEHEM 2000 PROJECT	10
FOREWORD	11
Map of the Nativity Trail	12
INTRODUCTION	13
About this book	13
Environmental and cultural awareness	16
Cultural heritage	17
Cultural centres in Bethlehem	17
Permanent exhibitions in Palestine	19
Cultural tips for traveller	19
Community tourism	20
The environment – a plea	22
Environmental tips for the traveller	23
The Palestinian Wildlife Society	25
The land and wildlife of Palestine	26
About Palestine	28
The Palestinians	28
Archaeological periods in Palestine	30
Palestinian dress	31
The villages of Palestine	32
Politics and religion	34
The terrain	35
On the move	36
Where to go	37
When to go	37
Travel tips	38
Money matters	41
Airports	41
Visas	41
Transport in Jordan	42
Transport in Palestine	43
Accommodation	43

Visiting and Walking information	43
Time	43
Holidays and holy days	44
Communication breakdown	45
Food and drink	45
Clothing and equipment	46
Taking a guide	47
Maps	48
Be prepared!	49
Ambulance and police	50
Other outdoor activities	51
Rock climbing	51
Caving	51
Route descriptions	51
Grading of walks and treks	52
Grading of rock scrambles	53
Grading of caves	53
THE NATIVITY TRAIL	55
R1 Introduction	55
R2 Day 1 morning. The ascent of Mount Tabor	64
R3 Day 1 afternoon. Jezreel to Faqu'a	66
R4 Day 1 alternative, Nazareth to Mount Tabor	69
R5 Day 1 alternative, Mount Tabor to Taibeh and Faqu'a	69
R6 Day 2 Faqu'a to Zababdeh	71
R7 Day 3 Zababdeh to Agrabanieh	77
R8 Day 4 Agrabanieh to Yanun	81
R9 Day 5 Yanun to Duma	85
R10 Day 6 Duma to Ain Auja	89
R11 Day 7 Auja to Jericho	95
R12 Day 8 Jericho to Nebi Musa	100
R13 Day 9 Nebi Musa to Mar Saba	107
R14 Day 10 Mar Saba to Bethlehem	110
OTHER ROUTES	115
R15 Mount Tabor Circuit	115
R16 Exploring Nablus	117
R17 Wadi Zerqa and Wadi Natuf	121
R18 The Shuqba Cave	124

R19 The Abud Cave	127
R20 Jerusalem Ramparts and Old City Walk	130
R21 The Palm Sunday Walk	137
R22 Exploring Lifta	142
R23 Wadi Qelt	144
R24 Upper Wadi Qelt	147
R25 Lower Wadi Qelt	151
R26 Ain Qelt to St George's Monastery	154
R27 Jericho to St George's Monastery	156
R28 Nebi Musa to Jerusalem	156
R29 Nebi Musa to Mar Saba round-trip	159
R30 Bethlehem to Mar Saba	159
R31 Exploring Bethlehem	162
R32 Wadi Artas walk	169
R33 Wadi Artas to Herodion (and back)	172
R34 Herodion to Khureitun Cave	173
R35 The Hanging Cave of Chariton	176

APPENDICES

Graded list of routes	180
Some useful Arabic / English words	182
Glossary	183
Useful books and websites	183
Background reading	184
Dedication	187



Peter Hall

Old grindstone

THE BETHLEHEM 2000 PROJECT AND THIS GUIDE BOOK

Work on this book commenced in 1998 when it was conceived by the Bethlehem 2000 Project, which welcomes pilgrims and tourists visiting the Holy Land on behalf of the Palestinian National Authority. Under their auspices, the Palestinians recently celebrated the 2000th anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem.

The inaugural walk of the Nativity Trail, also a Bethlehem 2000 Project, was part of these celebrations, arriving at the Nativity Church in Bethlehem on December 4th 1999.

This resultant book is of dual purpose. In addition to the usual reason for a guidebook, which is to benefit the reader, the management of the Bethlehem 2000 Project felt there was a pressing need to introduce the outside world to those parts of Palestine rarely visited by tourists, pilgrims and travellers, to 'enhance the economical development of Palestine as a crucial part of building peace'.

This book is a project of:



Bethlehem 2000 PA
PO Box 2000
Bethlehem
Palestine

Tel: (9722) 2766244

Fax: (9722) 2766241

E-mail:

info@bethlehem2000.org

Website:

bethlehem2000.org

United Nations Resolution 53/27 on Bethlehem 2000, 18th November 1998

The UN recognised that Bethlehem, in the Palestinian land, is the birthplace of Jesus Christ and one of the most historic and significant sites on earth. It stressed the monumental importance of the event for the Palestinian people, for the peoples of the region and for the international community as a whole, as it comprises significant religious, historical and cultural dimensions. It further expressed support for the Bethlehem 2000 Project, commending the efforts undertaken by the Palestinian Authority in this regard.

FOREWORD

To celebrate the beginning of the new millennium and mark the anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ in Palestine, the Palestinian National Authority launched the Bethlehem 2000 Project in 1996 to promote sustainable tourism. The project oversees the development of the Bethlehem District through infrastructure and urban renewal, cultural heritage restoration, tourism development and the creation of quality annual events celebrating Christmas. A programme of cultural, religious and artistic events was launched to revive and promote Bethlehem. Walking circuits were identified and promoted inside the newly renovated old city cores of Bethlehem, Beit Jala and Beit Sahour to show our rich cultural heritage. Some are described in this book.

For twenty centuries, people have been telling the Christmas story about the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem and the journey of Joseph and Mary from Nazareth to Bethlehem. With this in mind, the Bethlehem 2000 Project developed a new Nativity Trail that links Nazareth with Bethlehem. Just like travellers in biblical times, hikers and pilgrims will be traversing beautiful but sometimes rough terrain, climbing hills, crossing deserts, pausing to rest in olive groves and sleeping in villages.

Di Taylor and Tony Howard have been walking and climbing in the mountains of North Africa and the Middle East for forty years. Their exploratory work in Jordan and concern for the environment and indigenous people is particularly well known. They were therefore a natural choice to write this guide. The Nativity Trail is more than just a trek, it is also designed to introduce visitors to more remote and beautiful parts of Palestine, and to the people in the villages along the way. It is hoped that in so doing it will contribute to all levels of the economy.

You will find walks in this book to suit everyone: strolls through Palestine's ancient casbahs and along the City walls of Old Jerusalem; pilgrim trails such as the Palm Sunday walk; trails to remote Greek Orthodox desert monasteries; rambles through valleys with ancient terracing for olives and vines; treks over high hills, and scrambles through savage gorges, even some opportunities for cave exploration. Whether you are seeking something different in old Nablus, a walk in the wilderness or a wild mountain day, you will find it in this book. There is information on the flora and fauna of Palestine, advice on environmental and cultural awareness and also biblical references and quotes. Indeed, if there is anything you need to know of relevance to walking in Palestine, you will find it in the pages of this book.

I would like to add my welcome to Palestine.

Dr Nabeel Kassis, Minister, *Bethlehem 2000 Project Authority*



Israel / Eastern Palestine and the Nativity Trail

INTRODUCTION

ABOUT THIS BOOK

'Palestine is before you... Even in the barest provinces you get many a little picture that lives with you for life – a chocolate-coloured bank with red poppies against the green of the prickly pear hedge above it, and a yellow lizard darting across; a river-bed of pink oleanders flush with the plain;... limestone walls picked out with tufts of grass and black-and-tan goats cropping at them, the deep blue sky over all, and, on the edge of the only shadow, a well, a trough, and a solitary herdsman... But, whether there be beauty or not, there is always on all the heights that sense of space and distance which comes from Palestine's high position between the great desert and the great sea...'

The Historical Geography of the Holy Land, George Adam Smith, 1894

The walks in this book will take you through the rolling hills of the north, with their farmlands and olive groves nestled in green valleys; the wild, windy hills above the Jordan Valley with their panoramic views; the rocky ravines which lead from these hills to the salt-crusted shores of the Dead Sea, the lowest point on earth; and the bare emptiness of the Jerusalem and Bethlehem Hills. On these walks you will also see something of the wildlife of Palestine – the thousands of birds, visiting, resident and migrating, fleet-footed gazelles, perhaps even the shy ibex and fox, probably tortoises and hyrax and other small mammals, and possibly also snakes and scorpions.

We need hardly say that archaeological, religious and historic sites are everywhere, even in the smallest villages, from ancient wells and wine presses through to biblical battle sites, monasteries and Crusader relics. Even the architecture of the old Palestinian houses has obviously identifiable links with its biblical past. In these quiet villages you will also find something else to treasure – a warm traditional Palestinian welcome! In return, your presence will bring not just economic benefit to the people but, perhaps more importantly, opportunities for valuable cultural exchange – you will learn something of the problems faced by the people of this land, whilst they will benefit simply by your presence and interest in their lives. If this book persuades you to go, and helps you along the way, it will have served its purpose!

To this end, we have endeavoured not just to give the basic directions necessary to follow the routes but also to portray something of the

INTRODUCTION



Peter Hall

The monastery of Mar Saba, Wadi Qidron

history and unexpected variety and beauty of the land they pass through. We have included numerous biblical references kindly selected for us by the Reverend Andrew Ashdown of Denmead, and also quoted liberally from the writings of nineteenth and early twentieth-century travellers, all of which we hope will add to the interest and 'flavour' of the book.

The concept originated with the Bethlehem 2000 Project, which created the Nativity Trail as part of Palestine's millennium celebrations, linking the historic Palestinian towns of Nazareth where, 2000 years ago, Mary learnt that she was to become the mother of Christ, and Bethlehem, where He was born. The Nativity Trail described in this book does not follow the actual route taken by Mary and Joseph 2000 years ago, as that is now lost beneath modern developments, but it has been carefully chosen to take you through a land that would have been very familiar to them on their journey. It passes by farmlands with workers bent at their tasks and ascends to breezy uplands where shepherds guard their flocks, black nomadic tents in the distance. It takes you over dry hills where ancient wells are the only source of water, with migrating birds overhead and gazelles running for cover at the sight of human intrusion. It stops in small villages, where the walker can enjoy the Palestinian hospitality – just as Mary and Joseph did. What more could you want!

Other walks in this guide explore Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Nablus. They wander through quiet valleys or visit caves. They follow canyon trails from Jerusalem to Jericho, and cross the hills of the Bethlehem Wilderness. They take biblical trails or pass by monasteries or places inhabited in prehistoric times. Like the Nativity Trail, they are as much a journey of spirit and mind as they are of body. You will find them challenging and fascinating and will leave feeling fitter and wiser! You need not be 'religious' to enjoy them – though you may learn much about the life and teachings of Christ – and indeed of the Prophets Moses and Mohammed and other great religious figures. However, although there is an undoubted spiritual aspect to trekking in Palestine, there are many other equally valid reasons for walking in this scenically varied, historic and interesting land. In fact, the rewards of being out on the hills, in clean air away from modern urban life, and amongst people who still value old traditions of hospitality are sufficient in themselves.

In addition to a rich biblical history, Palestine also gives tourists the opportunity to visit archaeological, historical and cultural sites that

INTRODUCTION

date to and beyond the times of the Canaanites (7000BC), and include the extensive Arab and Islamic period, as well as the colonial age. It offers walks and hikes in its extensive valleys and picturesque villages, as well as its deserts, hills and towns.

It has been an honour and a pleasure for us to work with the Bethlehem 2000 Project and the people of Palestine to help bring this guidebook to completion. We would like to conclude by extending the invitation that was originally made to us, 'Come and see for yourselves'. In so doing, we sincerely believe that you too will gain as much by walking these trails and meeting the people of Palestine as we have. As we said in our recent trekking guide to Jordan (and it's even more applicable here) 'Be as good to this land and its people as they will be to you and perhaps it is not too altruistic to hope that both you and they, and thereby the world, will be a little better for your journey.'

ENVIRONMENTAL AND CULTURAL AWARENESS

'Do no mischief on the Earth after it has been set in order ...'

The Holy Qur'an, sura 7, verse 85

We are all too frequently astonished at the lack of awareness of many tourists concerning the impact of their actions on the cultures and environment of the places they visit: people entering holy places or sitting in Bedouin tents dressed in beach wear; picnic boxes and drink cans discarded from vehicles or left at campsites; toilet paper left protruding from beneath stones, names carved on the rocks. The list is a long one and gives our hosts a very poor impression of our society. For half of the world, Palestine is THE Holy Land, home to three of the world's greatest religions. Treat it and its people with respect.

Peter Hall



Islamic and Christian heritage, Old Jerusalem – a view from the Ramparts Walk, R20

You may choose to hike in Palestine for any number of reasons. You may be a nature lover, or interested in different cultures, or seeking a devotional journey – or perhaps you'll just enjoy the exercise. Whatever your motivation, this will be an enriching experience. You will meet the people of these biblical lands in the context of their daily lives, and gain a deeper understanding of the intertwined roots of the Christian, Muslim and Jewish faiths. You will be walking through the land of Genesis so familiar to Abraham.

Palestinian Christians will introduce you to their traditions about Jesus and his disciples. As you walk through the countryside you will hear the Muslim call to prayer from the minarets. Every day you will absorb knowledge of history along with first-hand impressions of current social, cultural and religious realities. Most probably you will come away with your stereotypes challenged and your perspectives changed, and with new insights into issues of justice and peace in this ancient and modern land.

One of the great joys of travel is meeting people from different countries – if we want to be accepted by them it is up to us to behave in a way that is acceptable to them. Make yourself aware of other people's customs and traditions, and act accordingly. Keep the good reputation of trekkers and pilgrims.

Cultural heritage

As guardians of the birthplace of Jesus Christ, Palestinians seek to protect, upgrade and share the treasures with which they are entrusted. The preservation of historic streets and buildings and the rejuvenation of cultural and commercial life in the old city cores of Bethlehem, Beit Jala and Beit Sahour have been central to the Bethlehem 2000 Project plans for maintaining and protecting the cultural heritage of the Bethlehem District. The most famous of Bethlehem's historic and religious treasures is of course the Grotto of the Nativity, in the Church of the Nativity. Throughout the centuries, many other religious and historic sites were built in and around Bethlehem, adding to its character. These sites remain a testimony to the living faith, which continues to exert its influence over Bethlehem and the world.

Cultural centres in Bethlehem

- Music and art workshops, concerts, and choral performances, weekly lectures, folklore shows and art exhibitions at the International Centre. Tel: 02 277 0047. Fax: 02 277 0048

INTRODUCTION

- The Folklore Museum: sales of Palestinian hand-made embroidery and a traditional Palestinian lunch offered by the Arab Women's Union Club in Bethlehem (lunches upon request). Tel: 02 274 2589
- Traditional dinner with live music most Saturdays at 19.00 at the Arab Women's Union Club. Tel: 02 274 2589
- Folklore shows with a light traditional lunch every Thursday at the Good Shepherd Swedish School. Tel: 02 276 5898
- Traditional embroidery, shows of folk dresses and lectures presented daily to visitors at the Women & Child Care Society, Mar Nequla Church St., PO Box 313, Beit Jala. Tel/fax: 02 274 2507
- The Land Lovers dance show every first Thursday of the month at the Children's Cultural Centre. Tel: 02 274 2617
- Regular folklore shows with traditional dinner at the Artas Folklore Centre. Tel: 02 274 4046



Peter Hall

Traditional Palestinian home, Artas

Permanent exhibitions in Palestine

- Palestinian Heritage Centre Bethlehem. 8.00–19.00 except Sundays. Tel: 02 274 2381
- Artas Folklore Centre, Bethlehem. 9.00–17.00. Tel: 02 277 4066
- Museum of Palestinian Popular Heritage, In'ash el Usra Society, El Bireh. 9.00–14.30 except Fridays. Tel: 02 240 6876. Fax: 02 240 6544
- Archaeological Museum, Birzeit University. 9.00–14.30 except Fridays and Sundays. Tel: 02 298 2000
- Children's Cultural Centre, Bethlehem. Tel: 02 274 2617
- Crib of Nativity Museum, Manger Sq, Bethlehem. Tel: 02 276 0876

Cultural tips for the traveller

'We see people as we are, not as they are.' The Talmud

The notes below are a modified version of a checklist from the Ecological Centre, Leh, Ladakh, India, another land of great religious cultures and traditions. The original source of these notes was confirmed by Tourism Concern as *A Third World Stopover – The Tourism Debate* by Ron O'Grady.

- Travel in a spirit of humility and with a genuine desire to learn more about the people of your host country. Be sensitively aware of the feelings of other people, thus preventing what might be offensive behaviour on your part. This applies very much to photography – do not take photographs of people without first asking for their permission.
- Instead of the western practice of 'knowing all the answers', cultivate the habit of asking questions, listening, observing and learning, rather than merely hearing and seeing.
- Realise that often the people in the country you visit have time concepts and thought patterns different from your own, but equally relevant.
- Instead of looking for that 'beach paradise', discover the enrichment of seeing a different way of life, through other eyes.
- Acquaint yourself with local customs. What is courteous in one country may be quite the reverse in another. People will be happy to help you.

INTRODUCTION

- Remember that you are only one of thousands of tourists visiting this country and do not expect specific privileges.
- If you really want your experience to be a 'home away from home', it is foolish to waste money on travelling.
- When you are shopping remember that what is a 'bargain' to you may have been made possible only by the low wages paid to the maker or because the poorest merchant may sooner give up his profit than his dignity.
- Do not make promises to people in your host country such as sending photos when you get home unless you intend to carry them through.
- Spend time reflecting on your daily experience in an attempt to deepen your understanding. It has been said that 'what enriches you may rob and violate others'.
- Enjoy yourself, but remember that an extravagant display of wealth is insensitive to local people who may have to manage on much less money than you have. Nevertheless, respect and accept genuinely given hospitality – do not taint your hosts by offering money when none is required but discreetly establish first what is expected.

Community tourism

'The idea of community tourism is simple: you can help local people and still have a good holiday, simply by going on tours that involve local communities. In other words it is a mutually beneficial trade.'

The Community Tourism Guide, Mark Mann, Tourism Concern, 2000

For information on tourism and its effects on others, contact:

Tourism Concern, Stapleton House,
277–281 Holloway Rd, London N7 8HN, ENGLAND.
Tel: 0171 753 3330 Fax: 0171 753 3331
E-mail: info@tourismconcern.org.uk

For information on community and cultural tourism in Palestine, contact:

Alternative Tourism Group, PO Box 173, Beit Sahour, Palestine.
Tel: 02 277 2151. Fax: 02 277 2211
E-mail: atg@p-ol.com Website: www.patg.org

Guiding Star Ltd, Virgin Mary Street, Beit Jala, PO Box 1161,
Bethlehem.

Tel: 02 276 5970. Fax: 02 276 5971

E-mail: info@guidingstar2.com Website: www.GuidingStarLtd.com

A Peek into Palestine. Tel: 052 685578
E-mail: neta_golan@hotmail.com

PACE (Palestinian Association for Cultural Exchange) promotes awareness of Palestinian cultural heritage and works (amongst other things) with cultural tourism towards lasting peace in the region and the world. Contact:

PACE, Samour Building, Nablus Road – near municipality,
Al Bireh, PO Box 841, Ramallah.
Tel: 02 240 7610. Fax: 02 240 7611
E-mail pace@planet.edu Website: www.planet.edu/~pace/

Sabeel (Arabic for ‘the way’ and also ‘a channel’ or ‘spring’ of life-giving water) is an ecumenical grassroots liberation theology movement among Palestinian Christians. Sabeel strives to promote a more accurate international awareness regarding the identity, presence and witness of Palestinian Christians as well as their contemporary concerns. It encourages individuals and groups from around the world to work for a just, comprehensive and enduring peace informed by truth and empowered by prayer and action. Contact:

Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Centre
PO Box 49084, Jerusalem 91492.
Tel: 02 5327136. Fax: 02 5327137. Website: www.sabeel.org

Sunbula, a non-profit organisation committed to social justice and economic self-sufficiency, provides a market outlet for village women, refugees and other groups in the Occupied Territories. You will find them in the grounds of St Andrew’s Scots Memorial Church, SW of the Old City at the junctions of Hebron Road and King David Street. Contact:

Sunbula, 1 David Remez St, PO Box 8619 Jerusalem.
Tel/Fax: 02 6721707. E-mail: sunbula@palnet.com

The Lakiya Negev Bedouin Weaving Centre operates in the Negev Desert, a semi-arid region where Bedouins lived as exclusive residents until 1948, when the state of Israel was established and their lives changed drastically. The majority were forced to move from their lands and were no longer able to keep their flocks. To earn a living men sought employment away from home, thus women had to take on a more passive role. Life has been difficult, but the Bedouins of the Negev have never lost their dignity. They are proud of their heritage, and are well known for their hospitality.

INTRODUCTION

Initiated by its community in 1991, the Lakiya Negev Bedouin Weaving Centre in Lakiya aims to revive and preserve crafts central to Palestinian Bedouin social and cultural heritage. Lakiya's contemporary ethnic rugs are handwoven from pure handspun wool by Bedouin women living in villages in the Negev.

There is a tremendous amount to see, learn, explore and experience in the Negev, and what better way than to stay with a Bedouin family. To help you experience daily life in the area of Lakiya, north of Beer Sheva, and the hospitality of its local tribes, the centre offers a three-day programme. Sunday–Thursday, 8.00–13.00. Rugs, etc, can also be purchased. Contact:

Lakiya Negev Bedouin Weaving Centre, PO Box 1588,
Omer 84965, Israel. Tel/Fax: 050 210327. E-mail:
lakiya@netvision.net.il

The environment – a plea

'The true servants of the most gracious are those who tread gently on the earth.'

The Holy Qur'an, sura 25, verse 63

The idea of the Nativity Trail was to find a route that would not only have a strong connection to Christ's nativity, but would also take the visitor to the more remote and beautiful parts of Palestine and be symbolic of the original Nativity journey. The route created crosses various types of terrain from low-lying farmland and valleys filled with flowers in the spring through to high barren, windswept summits and hot, dry sub-sea-level desert. Some of the walks follow country lanes or existing trails. Others make their own way across the land. Few of these ways other than the tracks between villages are frequently walked.

In the introduction to our recent guide to Jordan – Walks, Treks, Caves, and Canyons (Cicerone Press) – we debated the dilemma usually faced by guidebook writers: do we say nothing and hope these places remain 'undiscovered' and pristine, or do we tell all and risk the hidden jewels being destroyed so that others can share our discoveries and the local people can benefit from their visits? No such soul-searching was necessary for this guide! It was written as much for the people of Palestine as about the land of Palestine. It is our sincere hope that it will bring walkers to experience the warm good nature of the former, and the fascinating variety of the latter. Nevertheless, when we walk 'off the beaten track' we cannot be complacent about our

Mary Hartley



Star of Bethlehem

impact on the people and the land, both of which will inevitably be changed. It is up to us all to make our impact a positive one. We consequently hope that readers of this guide will act in a way that will be a credit to them. You should find little or no litter on the trails in this book. The people you will meet will inevitably be welcoming and friendly. Please do everything you can to keep it this way. Spend time with them, learn from them, enjoy their company, share your experiences, have fun, take care and tread gently!

Environmental tips for the traveller

'The world is green and beautiful and Allah has appointed you as his stewards over it. He sees how you acquit yourselves.'

Sayings of the Prophet Mohammed

Below is an amalgam of the International Union of Alpine Associations Mountain Code, the British Mountaineering Council's conservation booklet – Tread Lightly, and the Himalayan Tourist Code published by Tourism Concern, sponsored by The Independent and Rough Guides publications. By following these simple guidelines, you can help preserve the unique environment of Palestine.

- Observe any locally approved restrictions and access agreements and avoid any actions that might endanger access.
- Limit desertification – make no open fires and discourage others from doing so on your behalf.
- Remove litter, burn or bury paper and carry out all non-degradable litter. Keep campsites clean. Graffiti are permanent examples of environmental pollution.

INTRODUCTION

- Keep local water clean and avoid using pollutants such as detergents in streams, wells or springs. If no toilet facilities are available, make sure you are far away from water sources, and bury waste. Burn toilet paper or use water instead.
- Do not disturb nesting birds or other wildlife and respect sites of historical, geological or other scientific interest. Plants should be left to flourish in their natural environment – do not take cuttings, seeds and roots. It is illegal in Nature Reserves and International Birdlife Areas and bad practice elsewhere.
- Do not disturb livestock or damage crops or vegetation.
- Avoid actions that cause unnecessary erosion (such as taking shortcuts on footpaths). Wear lightweight boots or trainers and tread carefully, especially in descent.
- Do not leave unnecessary waymarks.
- Help your guides and companions to follow conservation measures.

For information on mountain tourism and the ethics and responsibilities of trekkers and climbers, contact:

The British Mountaineering Council,
Burton Rd, Manchester M20 2BB, ENGLAND.

Tel: 0161 445 4747. Fax: 0161 445 4500. E-mail: info@thebmc.co.uk

or your national mountaineering or trekking organisation.

For information on environmental action in the Holy Land, contact:

The Palestinian Ministry of Environmental Affairs (MEnA), Hebron
E-mail: menah@palnet.com

Applied Research Institute – Jerusalem (ARIJ)
Caritas Street, PO Box 860, Bethlehem, Palestine

Tel: 02 2741889 Fax: 02 2776966

E-mail: postmaster@arij.org Website: www.arij.org

Friends of the Earth, Middle East (FOEME)

PO Box 9341, Amman 11191, Jordan

Tel: 009626 6 5866602 Fax: 00962 6 5866604

E-mail: foeme@go.com.jo Website: www.foeme.org

Ecopeace, a consortium of Egyptian, Israeli, Jordanian and Palestinian environmental non-governmental organisations working jointly to promote sustainable development in the Middle East:

2 El Akhtal St, PO Box 5532, East Jerusalem 97400

Tel: 02 626 0841. Fax: 02 626 0840. E-mail: ecopeace@netvision.net.il

Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (RSCN)
PO Box 6354, Amman, Jordan
Tel: 00962 6 5337931. E-mail: rscn@nets.com.jo

Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (SPNI)
13 Heleni Hamalka St, PO Box 930, Jerusalem 91008
Tel: 02 624 4605/625 2357

The Palestinian Wild Life Society (PWLS)
PO Box 89 Beit Sahour, Palestine
E-mail: wildlife@palnet.com Website: www.wildlife-pal.org

There are two types of Conservation Areas in the Occupied Territories – Nature Reserves declared by SPNI under Israeli settlements criteria, and International Birdlife Areas (IBAs) approved by PWLS in line with IUCN and UNESCO criteria. Some (for example Wadi Qelt) come under both categories. It is hoped that in the future all areas will be solely under PWLS jurisdiction.

The Palestinian Wildlife Society

The PWLS was founded in autumn 1998 and has clear and strategic objectives regarding environmental concepts, conservation of nature and biodiversity. It has already proven effective in raising environmental awareness throughout different sections in the Palestinian territories. Its mission is 'Conservation and enhancement of Palestinian Biodiversity and Wildlife' and its conservation philosophy is 'Think globally, act locally'.

PWLS believes that conservation education is the main pillar in the conservation movement of any country, therefore it has worked intensively in the field of awareness and education with different sections. One of its successes was the inclusion of environment in the national education curriculum of the Ministry of Education in Palestine. It was also part of the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan for Palestine with the Palestinian Environmental Authority.

PWLS encourages the development of eco-tourism and is fully supportive of this guidebook project, which it hopes will introduce visitors to the bio-diversity of Palestine. It co-operates with three main organisations working in different districts and locations in Palestine:

- Palestinian Organisation for Protection of Environment (Jenin)
- Green Peace Association (Deir Al-Baleh, Gaza) and
- Palestinian Agriculture Relief Committee (PARC)

as well as various international organisations.

INTRODUCTION

The land and wildlife of Palestine

The area covered by this guide includes four different eco-systems.

- The 'Mediterranean zone' of forests, maquis and scrub which extends across the north of the country, including much of the Nablus Hills and the hills of Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Hebron.
- The 'Irano-Turanian zone' or 'Oriental steppe' along the Jordan Valley and its fringing Bethlehem Wilderness.
- The hotter, drier 'Sahara-Arabian zone' further east and south near the Dead Sea.
- The 'Sudanian-Zambesian zone' found in oases and river beds.

These substantial local climatic variations are largely due to the extensive differential in heights from the lowest point at the Dead Sea, 400m below sea level, to the mountain tops at close to 1000m. Other contributory factors include the different soil types (rich agricultural soil to desert sand) and the varying rainfall levels – from a mean annual rainfall of 50mm in the Jordan Rift Valley to nearer 800mm in the north and west. Run-off from the mountains is high and much water soaks into the valley floors. Consequently, the vegetation there is much denser than would be expected from the low rainfall. All of this creates multiple wildlife habitats and complex ecology with many different species of flora and fauna in a surprisingly varied and beautiful country. It also creates an environment that needs to be carefully protected.

Palestine is a particular delight in spring when the fields and hills are dotted with flowering poppies, anemones, mustard, mountain tulips, chrysanthemum, daisies and other plants too numerous to mention. Here and there are delicately veined iris, or aloes and cactus. Carpets of scented herbs such as sage, thyme and camomile crush underfoot. Blackberry and other fruits cling to ancient walls. Oak, carob, willow and the ubiquitous olive trees cast their welcome shade. Even in autumn, when Palestine is a dry golden-brown, some plants are still flowering in readiness for winter rains.

Wildlife is equally varied, but perhaps less obvious. Insects, spiders and other small creatures such as lizards, gerbils and desert rodents are everywhere (but not too many nasties like mosquitoes and sand flies). Creatures that prey on them, such as scorpions and snakes, are fairly common but seldom seen (most notoriously the Palestinian Viper and Horned Viper). They will avoid man, but take care in thick vegetation or rocky terrain. Rabbits, porcupines, mongoose and the few scattered herds of ibex and gazelles are equally shy, though hedgehogs, tortoises and foxes are fairly common, and rock hyrax will

be seen scurrying amongst canyon cliffs. Interestingly, crabs, frogs and fishes are found, even in the most remote desert streams and oases.

Perhaps most breathtaking of all are the millions of birds that pass over Palestine on their spring and autumn migrations. The rich variety of habitat, combined with a direct migration route between Africa, Europe, and Asia up the Jordan Valley, makes the area a key region for migrating, visiting and resident birds. Around 500

species have been recorded with about 500 million migrants passing annually. In the fertile Jezreel Valley south-east of Nazareth there are about 14 globally and regionally threatened bird species, either resident, visiting or passing through. There are approximately 400 species of bird in this small area, including thousands of breeding, wintering or migrating birds such as Ibis, Egrets, White Stork, Lesser Spotted Eagle and Levant Sparrow Hawk. You may also see the Black Francolin and rare Pygmy Cormorant nesting here.

Further south, in the hills above the Jordan Valley and around Jericho or in the hills west of the Dead Sea, raptors, cranes and storks may be seen in large numbers. There are also four globally and regionally threatened species around Jericho, whilst the nearby desert hills support a dozen globally or regionally threatened birds amongst their surprisingly large range of species. The Fan-Tailed Raven and Tristram's Grackle will be seen here, also finches, shrikes, desert partridges, warblers, falcons, eagles and many other species. For additional information, contact PWLS (see above) who are the Birdlife International representative in Palestine. Or, information may also be obtained directly from:

Bird Life International, P.O. Box 6354, Amman 11183, JORDAN
Tel: 009626 5337931/2 or 5347733. Fax: 009626 53347411
E-mail: birdlife@nol.com.jo



Palestinian Camomile

Mary Hartley

INTRODUCTION

ABOUT PALESTINE

The Palestinians

'Until you've experienced it yourself, the Palestinian's extraordinary kindness and genuine concern for foreign visitors does indeed seem either miraculous or fantastical.'

Palestine with Jerusalem, Henry Stedman, Bradt Travel Guide, 2000

The human history of the land goes back over one million years – some of the routes in this book visit prehistoric sites of unique relevance to man's history. Archaeologists have traced Palestinian origins back over 5000 years to the time of the Canaanites from Eastern Arabia and the Philistines or 'sea-people' who arrived later from the Mediterranean in the third millennium BC. It was not until about 2000 years later that the Hebrews arrived on the scene, prior to 1000BC.

The image of the Philistines as uncultured (a dictionary definition) has its origins in the Bible, but since the Israelites were at war with them for two centuries it is hardly surprising that they wrote about them so disparagingly. Archaeology is now revealing a different story: it seems they were cosmopolitan craftsmen excelling in fine pottery. Since those Old Testament times, many other races and civilisations have passed through the land and contributed to its history, some intermingling peacefully with its original inhabitants, others belligerently.

The Palestinians of today are an Arabic people, though the Ancient Egyptians, Israelites, Assyrians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, European Crusaders and others inevitably left their mark both on the land and the people. There have been many rulers and empires here including pagan, Jewish, Roman, Christian Byzantine, Islamic Ommayyads, Mamelukes, Ottomans and, in the first half of the last century, the British Mandate. All of which, of course, had its effect on the resident population:

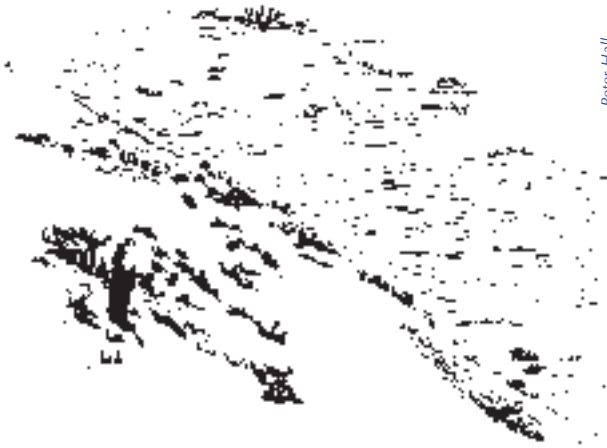
'As each civilisation waned and lost its hold, its heritage was assimilated within the civilisation that followed. Modern Palestinian cultural identity has taken shape under the influence of the various civilisations that reigned over the land of Palestine. The various Semitic and non-Semitic inhabitants of Palestine were first unified ideologically through Christianity. Between the seventh and ninth centuries, when the majority of Palestinians converted to Islam and exchanged their various dialects for the Arabic language, the language of the Qur'an and that of the Moslem rulers, the seeds for a modern Palestinian cultural identity were sown.'

Before the Mountains Disappear, Ali H. Qleibo, 1992

Despite these seemingly constant upheavals, evidence of the Palestinian peoples' continual occupation of the land can be seen everywhere. On many of the walks in this book you will see ancient terracing, which is still in use today and whose origins date back to Canaanite times (R17 is typical). Some of the gnarled olive trees so lovingly nurtured by the Palestinians are said date from the time of Christ. They are symbolic of the Palestinians – deep rooted in the soil, resilient in adverse conditions, and even when cut down, they grow again. The olive groves are almost sacred to Palestinians and are the hub of village life:

'It was an inexhaustible joy to all of them to behold the fruits of their own labor. The whole family would move out to the fields every day; father, mother, sons, and daughters all participated in the work as well as the harvest. During harvest time the family even spent their nights in a cave on their land. They would light a fire in the evening and sing songs, tell stories, and finish with a small devotional service. When the harvest was over, the family returned to Bethlehem, where they sold most of their crops, allowing them to live on their earnings from the sale.'

I am a Palestinian Christian, Mitri Raheb, 1995



Peter Hall

Bedouin shepherdess on Palestine's Eastern Hills

INTRODUCTION

Sadly, Israeli settlers and military have destroyed many of the ancient olive groves, physically uprooting about 100,000 trees, even taking the land itself without the permission of, or any compensation to, its rightful owners.

As evidence of their historic longevity, many of the old villages also have names that go back to Canaanite and biblical times. Ancient trails can still be found winding over the hills from village to village – some are part of the Nativity Trail and the other walks described in this book.

With the 'naqba' of 1948 and the war of 1967, many Palestinians fled or were evicted, becoming refugees or making new lives for themselves abroad. There are now twice as many Palestinians living outside the Occupied Territories as there are within, and many of them are refugees. At the time of writing, only about 10% of Gaza and the West Bank (which is only about 22% of historical Palestine) are under full Palestinian control. Of those still resident in the Occupied Territories, there are about two and half million Muslims and a diminishing population of about 50,000 Christians. Included in the Muslim population are about 20,000 Bedouin, who have a particularly hard time as their rights to the land as indigenous people are totally ignored by Israel.

Despite, or perhaps because of their problems, the Palestinians have proven themselves a warm-hearted people as ready to forget old differences as to struggle with current ones. We well recall someone saying to us, on discovering we were British, 'You gave away my country, but you are welcome. Come in and have some tea.' We can assure you that wherever you go in Palestine, you too will be received with a warm, time-honoured Palestinian welcome.

Recommended reading: William Dalrymple's *From the Holy Mountain* and the books quoted above by Ali H. Qleibo and Mitri Raheb.

Archaeological periods in Palestine

Palaeolithic	1,500,000 – 8300 BC
Neolithic (including Canaanites)	8300 – 3150 BC
Bronze Age (including Philistines)	3150 – 1250 BC
Iron Age (including Hebrews)	1250 – 587 BC
Babylonian and Persian	586 – 332 BC
Hellenistic	332 – 152 BC
Roman	37BC – 324 AD

For historical and archaeological info, contact:
 Archaeological Museum at Birzeit University. Tel: 02 298 2000.
 9.00 – 14.30 except for Fridays and Sundays
 British School of Archaeology, Sheikh Jarrah, PO Box 19283
 Jerusalem. Tel: 02 582 8101. Fax: 02 532 3844
 E-mail: bsaj@vms.huji.ac.il
 Website: <http://britac3.britac.ac.uk/institutes/jerus/index.html>

For up-to-date info on Palestine contact ARIJ. (See above, 'Environmental tips for the traveller'.)

Palestinian dress

Almost uniquely in the Near East, the Palestinians – especially the older women – continue to wear their traditional dress for everyday life, at home, in the streets and markets, or in the fields.

The distinctive full-length dress has multi-coloured embroidery on the chest and is fastened at the waist by a belt; there are also embroidered panels down the dress. Dependent on the season it may be worn with a short over-jacket. The traditional head piece decorated with coins and held in place with a decorative 'chin-chain' is still occasionally seen. (When we were helping with the olive picking in October 2000 it was a delight to see the 'grandmother' wearing the full traditional costume.) Occasionally you may also see elderly women with facial tattoos; perhaps more common amongst the Bedouin, but this custom is all but gone.

The distinctive men's costume largely disappeared during the latter half of the 20th century. The turban, *tarbush* ('Turkish' felt hat) and striped coats are seldom seen. The *kaffiyeh* or headscarf of the Bedouin is still very common; the black and white check popularised by Yasser Arafat is a strong symbol of Palestinian nationality. The red and white check, more often seen in Jordan, is also popular. Plain white tends to be the prerogative of the older men.

Samples of traditional hand embroidery can be purchased in the markets and craft shops (see R16, 20 and 31). Additionally, a good place to shop for embroidery and crafts in Jerusalem is Sunbula, a non-profit organisation committed to social justice and economic self-sufficiency. (See the section 'Community tourism', above, for details.)

Recommended reading: *Palestinian Costume*, Shelagh Weir, British Museum Press, 1989. Also a booklet from Sunbula: *Embroidering a Life: Palestinian Women and Embroidery*, Elizabeth Price.

INTRODUCTION

The villages of Palestine

Much has changed in the last 100 years, particularly in the last few decades. About 400 Palestinian villages were physically destroyed and often their names removed from the map during the 'naqba' of 1948. Those that remain, mostly on the West Bank, retain some of their traditional houses which, built of local stone, consequently merge harmoniously with the landscape. In recent years new, less sympathetic, angular concrete buildings have been added, with a large main room and several adjacent smaller ones, usually on two floors and often with verandas. Generally the new houses stand alone whereas the traditional village house were built together or 'semi-detached'. In some cases they have replaced the traditional houses which were falling into disrepair, though the warm unstructured intimacy of the villages remains – in contrast to the more regimented Israeli settlements which visually dominate and seem at discord with the land.

Many of the walks in this guide pass through Palestinian villages, allowing you to experience both the past and the present. You will almost certainly have opportunities to visit Palestinian homes. Many of the old houses still remain in the villages along the Nativity Trail and other walks in this book. Amongst the newer buildings, you will see clusters of domed stone houses often with gardens, the better housing being higher on the hill. The uppermost villages, or 'throne villages', were home to rural landlords and exhibited the best architecture (Ras Karkar for example on the way to R17).

In all the villages there was a meeting place with a nearby guest house (*madafah*). This area was traditionally male dominated, whilst the women would meet at the spring (*ain*) as in Bethlehem (R31). There was also usually a traditional clay bread oven or *taboun*, some of which are still in use as at Yanun (R8). Additionally, there were threshing floors and oil-presses as at Lifta (R22). Houses were generally single storey, and household activities took place in courtyards, where food was cooked on a brazier or *qanun*. The better-off homes in more prosperous villages exhibit decorative masonry with upper storeys as in Lifta (R22).

Though simple in the interior, with a *mastabeh* (living room), *rawiyeh* (food storage area) and *qa' al-bayt* (stable) below for livestock, as elsewhere in the world, the traditional Palestinian home has a natural ambience frequently denied the modern house. Its form represents a symbiotic relationship between man and nature developed over hundreds, if not thousands, of years. You will find homes based on the same basic principles in the hill villages of the Himalaya and the Berber villages of Morocco, everywhere in fact where man has lived in



Peter Hall

A relic of the 'naqba' – one of the ruined houses in the Palestinian village of Lifta, R22

INTRODUCTION

harmony with the land in a seasonal climate demanding shelter from the elements.

To appreciate the traditional village life of Palestine, you should at the very least visit the Folk and Olive Press Museums in Bethlehem (R31), or the village of Lifta (sadly evacuated in 1948, see R22) or Artas with its Folk Museum (R32). To discover what life was like in the urban centres, spend some time exploring the arched alleyways that squeeze between the old houses of the casbah in Nablus (R16) or in the maze of the Arab Quarter of Jerusalem Old City (off R20). Visit their little local shops. Experience the Hammam or Turkish Bath for which Nablus is famous, or even try the *nargileh* or 'hubble-bubble' with your coffee in a street café.

What better ways to meet the people!

Recommended reading: *The Palestinian Village Home*, Suad Amiry and Vera Tamari, British Museum Publication, 1989.

The Mass Destruction of Palestinian Houses on the West Bank. For this, and associated subjects, contact The Israeli Information Centre for Human Rights. Email: btselem@actcom.co.il Website: www.btselem.org

Also contact:

RIWAQ – Center for Architectural Conservation, Ash-Sharafeh St.,
PO Box 212, Ramallah. Tel: 02 240 6887/6925-6,
Fax: 02 240 6986, E-mail: riwaq@palnet.com, Website: www.riwaq.org

Politics and religion

'Never discuss politics and religion.'

That's the usual maxim, but in Palestine their physical presence is everywhere: Israeli settlements rise from the hills of the Occupied Territories; mosques, monasteries, churches and synagogues are part of everyday life. Soldiers, police, holy men and believers of every persuasion are omnipresent. However, you should find that everyone is polite, courteous and helpful to visitors, so if the opportunity offers itself, take part in the debate, listen to the various viewpoints, learn and contribute.

Much has changed in Palestine in recent years (see 'The Palestinians', above). Different areas of Palestine have different classifications: Zone A (about 10% of the West Bank) is mostly Palestinian city centres under full control of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) since 1994–5.

Zone B, which covers 30% of the West Bank and is usually beyond the city check points, and is administered by the PNA whilst Israel retains control of security. Zone C, which covers the remaining 60% is mostly countryside (Palestinian agricultural land and villages, Israeli settlements and military bases) and is under total Israeli control. This means that Israel can 'close' the West Bank whenever they wish (which obviously makes life extremely difficult for Palestinians and their economy.) There are also H Zones in Hebron – where inner city settlements cause the traditional Palestinian inhabitants particular problems. Finally, the division between 'Israel' and 'Palestine' is known as the Green Line. Here again you will find checkpoints which, for the visitor, can be an inconvenience but should not be a problem.

Zones B and C are under negotiation, but the settlements and their linking 'bypass roads' that form a web across the West Bank could remain under Israeli control for the foreseeable future. This obviously further complicates life for Palestinians as they are unable to pass through them (though Israelis can go anywhere). The settlements have also greatly reduced the availability of spring water in nearby Palestinian villages.

Despite the convoluted politics and religious differences, it is highly unlikely you will meet with any harassment in Palestine; you are more likely to be overwhelmed by hospitality.

The terrain

Whilst the political boundaries could well change again if the hoped for 'just and lasting peace' is realised, give or take a few Rift Valley earthquakes, deforestation and climate changes, the geography of the land remains much as it was when early man arrived here over a million years ago. The valleys, hills, mountains, ravines and deserts explored in this guide were not only home to our ancestors, but feature throughout the Bible. The walks pass through three geographic zones.

- **The Central Uplands** Diverse in character, they include:

The Lower Galilee Situated to the north of the Jezreel Valley with rolling fertile hills rising to 562m at Mount Tabor. This is the high, isolated hill thought to be the location of Christ's Transfiguration when he spoke with Moses and Elijah. It is visited on the first day of the Nativity Trail as well as providing a short but unique walk of its own.

Merj ibn Amir and Nahr Jalud (Plain of Esdraelon and Valley of Jezreel) A low lying, fertile agricultural area and site of many

INTRODUCTION

famous biblical and historic battles, crossed on the first day of the Nativity Trail.

Jebel Nablus Located to the south of Jezreel. In the west these hills are relatively low lying with traditional terracing and olive groves, as found in Lower Galilee. R17 descends one such valley. The eastern hills are generally higher and wilder than their western and northern counterparts, rising to around 1000m south of Bethlehem, but in general, about 700–900m. They are split by wadies or ravines that plunge east to the sub-sea-level Jordan Valley. The Nativity Trail starts in the hills of Lower Galilee and crosses the Jezreel Valley, before ascending and crossing the Nablus Hills. It then descends into the Jordan Valley where the Bethlehem Wilderness starts, near Jericho.

- **The Jordan Valley** This deep cleft in the earth's crust is rich and fertile wherever there is water, but in its absence abruptly changes to arid desert. Extending from Lebanon to the Red Sea, this section of the Rift Valley commences at 200m below sea level at Galilee and descends to 400m below sea level – the lowest point on earth – at the Dead Sea. The Nativity Trail passes through here, perhaps overnighting in a Bedouin camp and also in a monastery near the Jordan River, not far from the baptismal site.
- **The Bethlehem Wilderness** This biblical wilderness reaches up from beyond the north end of the Dead Sea (at minus 400m) to the hills east of Jerusalem and Bethlehem at 700–1000m. Except where it is cut by deep ravines with their own perennial streams and linear oases, it is barren and harsh terrain, apparently unforgiving yet still home to the Bedouin. Also, because of its wadi systems such as the unique Wadi Qelt, which provides some excellent and varied treks (R12 and R23, etc), it has a surprising variety of wildlife. Many important biblical and religious sites are found here, such as the cliff-hugging monasteries of The Mount of Temptation, St George's and Mar Saba, all of which are visited by the Nativity Trail and other walks in this book.

ON THE MOVE

'Many travellers on returning home safe and sound are not content until they have published some anecdotes of how they were in danger of being attacked by robbers, or how they saw them in the distance, but kept them from coming nearer by the sight of their arms. I must be excused a little incredulity on this respect as, after travelling in all parts

of Palestine for eight years both by day and night, in good weather and in bad, in moonlight and in darkness, both alone and in company in dangerous places, I have never met with any insult.

Customs and Traditions of Palestine, Ermette Pierotte, 1864

Where to go

This book covers the cities, towns, villages, mountains, valleys and deserts of the West Bank. The route descriptions commence with the Nativity Trail. The other routes are then described from north to south. Generally, those in the north are in a greener, kinder environment requiring the least experience – though the ascent to Faqu'a from the Jezreel Valley is not the easiest of walks! Most routes start from villages and can be reached from Jerusalem, though it may be better to stay a night in Nazareth or Nablus for quick access to walks in the north.

Moving south, there are still some short walks to be done, but the ravines that cut through the hills down to the Jordan Valley and Dead Sea offer spectacular and often unexpected scenery. They are very rewarding for those wanting real adventures, but beware of flash floods! We have also included some caves, but going beyond the initial Cathedral Chamber in the Cave of Chariton is for experienced cavers only.

Last but by no means least we have included walks in some of Palestine's ancient cities – Nablus, Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Easy walks for anyone, but fascinating and not to be missed!

When to go

'Spring is a fleeting season. Fresh from the winter rains, hills and pastures are cloaked in a lushness that passes quickly. Wild flowers burst into a riot of colour, then vanish, and the desert, momentarily brushed with tint of green from wisps of new grass, lies burnished again by a relentless sun. The sky takes on its summer tone of cloudless, pastel blue. Not a drop of rain will fall until November.'

*Arab and Jew. Wounded Spirits in a Promised Land,
David K. Shipler, 1986*

There are two main seasons: one starts in April and ends in October during which time the weather is hot, sunny and dry; the second begins in November and ends in March, when the weather is temperate. Average temperatures range from 9 to 18°C in winter and 26 to 30°C in summer. Highs, especially in the sub-sea-level Jordan Valley can be around 40°C.

INTRODUCTION

In the midsummer month (June through to August inclusive) temperatures will be too hot for most, but otherwise the walks in this book can be enjoyed at any time of the year. Suffice it to say that there could be rain almost anywhere on the West Bank during the winter months of November to March, but particularly in the north. Winter, of course, also has short days. It could snow on the hills; it is not unusual, for example, for Jerusalem to have a fall of snow, creating a Christmas card scene. Though unlikely, it is well to remember that, if you are walking in narrow valleys or ravines, even a dry wadi may quickly flood if it rains heavily.

By late summer the land is (as David Shipler says) burnished to a golden brown, though there is not a total absence of colour. Around the villages red roses will be seen. Sweet scented white jasmine and the pretty orange, red and purple flowers of *Bougainvillea* hang suspended in colourful clouds from walls and supporting trees. Bright orange flowers illuminate the greenery whilst spears of white squill, yellow groundsel and other autumn and winter flowers dot the dry wadies. By the springs and small oases, you will find oleanders in bloom, with their pink and white flowers. Fruit trees are ripe for picking. The 'festival' atmosphere at the start of the olive picking season (after the first winter rains, which are usually in late October) is worth seeing – you will no doubt be invited to join in! The delicious oranges, pomegranates and other fruits of Jericho in the Jordan Valley also ripen at this time of year.

The best seasons are undoubtedly spring and autumn, late March through to mid-May, and late September to mid-November. April is undoubtedly our favourite month: the winter rains should have finished, streams are flowing and the land – especially in the north – is green and carpeted with flowers. If you are lucky you will even see pockets of colour in the desert hills to the south. At this time of year, wandering the hills and valleys is a real pleasure, and you may well discover your own walks in this generally gentle terrain.

However, if you are on a pilgrimage you may have other reasons to choose the time of your visit, such as the celebrations of Christmas or Easter, but remember the towns and cities will be busy and hotels may well be full, so book early. (Also see 'Holidays and holy days', below.)

Travel tips

There are numerous Middle East guidebooks with advice on international travel (see 'Relevant books and websites' in Appendices). For a hassle-free journey, many people advise travelling via Jordan. Suffice it



Peter Hall

The Damascus Gate, Jerusalem

INTRODUCTION

to say that British Air now fly to Jordan from London, whilst other airlines fly from Manchester to Jordan via major European cities. Royal Jordanian Airlines fly daily from London, Paris and many European cities to Amman. Their UK address is:

Royal Jordanian Airlines, 32 Brook Street, London. W1Y 1AG.

Tel: 0171 878 6333, Fax: 0171 629 4069

Dependent on route and airline, return fares from Europe vary between £200 and £450 (about \$270–\$600). Cheaper prices generally imply less comfort and longer times. Take the most convenient way and you can be in Jordan from the UK in 5 hours and in Palestine the next morning. A cheaper option may well take double that. Such is life!

For British travellers, tourist information on Jordan is available from:

The Jordan Tourist Board,
Unit 1 Blades Court,
121 Deodar Rd, London SW15 2NU. Tel: 0181 877 0554.

For information on Palestine contact:

Palestine National Authority, Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities
PO Box 534, Bethlehem, Palestine

Tel: 00972 2 2741581, Fax: 00972 2 2743753

E-mail: mota@visit-palestine.com, Website: www.visit-palestine.com

British citizens in Palestine may wish to register at the
British Consulate-General in Jerusalem. Tel: 00972 2 541 4100.

Palestinian info for British citizens: www.britishconsulate.org

General world travel info for British citizens: www.fco.gov.uk/travel/

UK Travellers could also contact any of the following for individual or group travel:

Freelance Travel Ltd, 6 Church Street, Twyford, Reading, Berks RG10

9ED. Tel: 01189 320 311; out of office hours: 01189 341 398;

Fax: 01189 342 681(24hrs)

E-mail: freelancetravel@btconnect.com

The Imaginative Traveller, 14 Barley Mow Passage, Chiswick,

London W4 4PH. Tel: 0181 742 3113, Fax: 0181 742 3045

Arabica Travel Ltd, PO Box 26119, London SW8 4RZ

Tel: 0171 640 2332, Fax: 0171 627 3748

E-mail: arabica@annal.dircon.co.uk

For trekking holidays in Palestine, contact:

Alternative Tourism Group, PO Box 173, Beit Sahour, Palestine

Tel: 02 277 2151, Fax: 02 277 2211

E-mail: atg@p-ol.com, Website: www.patg.org

Guiding Star Ltd, Virgin Mary Street, Beit Jala, PO Box 1161,
Bethlehem, Palestine
Tel: 02 276 5970, Fax: 02 276 5971
E-mail: info@guidingstar2.com Website: www.GuidingStarLtd.com

Money matters

If you are passing through Jordan the unit of currency is the Jordanian Dinar (JD). In October 2000, 1JD was worth £1.05 sterling (0.7JD/\$1). Money can be changed at money exchange offices and most banks and larger hotels. Check around: prices do vary a little and if you're changing a lot it can be worthwhile. (The airport exchange rate is not the best.)

In touristic parts of Palestine, there are at least three currencies that can be used. Visitors can ask for prices and invoices in US dollars, Jordanian dinars, and New Israeli shekels (NIS). Foreign currencies are widely accepted, as well as travellers' cheques and all major credit cards. You can change money in banks, most hotels, and authorised at money changers, where you should get the best rates. The unit of currency in common use in Palestine is the New Israeli Shekel. In Jan 2001 it was fluctuating between 5.2 and 5.5NIS / £1 (4.1NIS / \$1).

Wherever you travel in the Middle East, make sure you have some small currency, including coins, everywhere outside major cities as change always seems to be in short supply. Credit Cards are increasingly acceptable, but mostly confined to the larger international hotels, shops and restaurants, or businesses dealing with tourists on a regular basis.

Airports

The only Palestinian airport is Gaza International (Tel: 07 213 5696). Airports conveniently situated for travel to Palestine are Ben Gurion International (Tel: 03 972 3344) between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv in Israel, and Queen Alia International Airport in Jordan (Tel: 009626 4453200). Due to time-consuming and sometimes humiliating security checks at Ben Gurion, many non-Israelis prefer to enter from Jordan.

Visas

There are no medical requirements for entry to Jordan, Israel or Palestine from most countries. Visitors to Palestine need only a valid passport. Israeli authorities, however, require visitors to fill out an entry visa card. Citizens of the UK, USA, Australia, New Zealand and the EU don't need a visa beforehand. They can be obtained at border crossings

INTRODUCTION

or at the Israeli airport upon arrival. If you pass through Israel and intend travelling elsewhere in the Middle East it is advisable to get your visa stamped onto your entry card rather than into your passport. The one good thing about all this is that it's free; the snag is, that you have to pay 118NIS to get back through the Israeli border!

Visas for Jordan can be obtained beforehand from the Jordanian Embassy (visa info, tel: 0891 117 1261). The UK address is: 6 Upper Phillimore Gardens, London W8 7HB.

You can also get your Jordanian visa at the airport and most other entry points to Jordan. They currently cost 10JD regardless of nationality and are valid for fourteen days. If your visit to Jordan and Palestine will be longer than this, you will need to get a visa extension before leaving Jordan. This is simply and freely obtained in Amman from the nearest Police Station to where you are staying. Your hotel may do it for you. Otherwise ask a taxi driver to take you (there is one downtown, one at the 3rd Circle and one at the 8th Circle). If you are in south Jordan there is a Police Station in Aqaba (opposite the bus station). The visa extension will be added whilst you wait and shouldn't take more than ten minutes, but beware of being caught out by holidays.

Crossing from Jordan to Israel (and vice versa) remember that an Israeli stamp or even a Jordanian or Egyptian stamp from an Israeli border crossing point may preclude entry to countries such as Syria and Lebanon. Ask them not to stamp your passport.

Transport in Jordan

The costs and availability of public transport in Jordan are covered in general travel books such as Lonely Planet's *Jordan and Syria, A Travel Survival Kit*. From Amman's Queen Alia Airport, there are regular JETT (Jordan Express Tourist Transport) bus services to Abdali Bus Station in Amman leaving every 30–40 minutes from 6.00–22.00 and every two hours through the night. The cost is 1JD plus 0.25JD for bags. Or, of course, you can take a taxi.

For Palestine, the most commonly used border crossing between Amman, in north Jordan, and Jerusalem is the King Hussein Bridge (referred to as the Allenby Bridge in Israel), though from further north there is also a crossing point at the Sheikh Hussein Bridge. In the south you can cross from Aqaba to Eilat in Israel.

There are JETT buses from Abdali bus station down to the King Hussein Bridge. Other buses and service-taxis also leave from Abdali from 6.00 onwards. It's 1JD for the bus and 1.5JD for the taxi (about

12 to 15JD in a private taxi). The journey takes about one hour. Allow another hour to cross the border (1.5JD for the bus over the bridge) and one more to reach Jerusalem (30NIS by service taxi).

Transport in Palestine

The easiest means of transportation in Palestine are the frequent buses and share-taxis ('taxi service' or simply 'servis'). These are large cars or small vans that drive along main routes and stop anywhere upon request. They usually depart from places such as the Damascus Gate (Bab el Amud) in Jerusalem, Mujam'aa car park near Manara Square in Ramallah, Bab S'qaq in Bethlehem, and in city centres generally. They are reasonably cheap (3NIS from East Jerusalem to Bethlehem for example – a distance of 10km – for exchange rates see 'Money matters', above). Private or 'special taxis' are a useful and sometimes necessary alternative but they do not always have meters, so you should negotiate the price in advance. They are much more expensive than the servis: a typical cost for the above journey would be 35NIS and maybe 100NIS from Jerusalem to Nablus. Negotiate and agree the price first!

Accommodation

Accommodation in Palestine varies from simple hostels at about 15 NIS/person up to first-class international hotels at whatever price you can afford. See the usual travel guides for information.

Accommodation along the Nativity Trail varies from village homes and community centres to Bedouin camps and monasteries. It will be booked for you if your trek is organised by a Palestinian agent (for example Alternative Travel Group or Guiding Star). If you wish to make your own arrangements, details are given at the end of each day's route description, together with contacts, taxis, nearest hospitals, etc. It is also possible to camp, though when close to, or within view of, a village it would be polite to ask first and sensible to enquire about the availability of water and toilet facilities.

For hotels in Palestine, contact:

The Arab Hotel Association, PO Box 66206, Jerusalem.

Tel: 02 6281805, Website: www.palestinehotels.com

VISITING AND WALKING INFORMATION

Time

Palestine is situated in +2.00 GMT Time Zone (+3.00 GMT in summer). This, by the way, can be a bit confusing at the times when the clocks change: Palestine changes with Jordan, but this is about a week before

INTRODUCTION

Israel changes, so for that week you need to be sure whose time zone you are in – it could well be both!

Working hours are generally 8.00–19.00. Palestinian government offices generally open 8.00–14.30. Banks open 8.00–12.30 (some also open 15.00–17.00). The official holiday is on Friday, but some shops close on Sundays.

Holidays and holy days

This being the Holy Land, there is a profusion of holidays; some are fixed dates, others vary. Islamic and Jewish dates depend on the first sighting of the new moon and therefore move back by about 11 days annually. The different religious and national holidays are, of course, only celebrated by the relevant communities. You should, however, be particularly aware of Ramadan when Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset for 28 days. This, and other Muslim holidays, affects the whole of the West Bank (Palestine) and its borders. Jewish holidays do not affect Palestine but affect borders and flights. Christian holidays mostly take place in Jerusalem, Bethlehem and parts of Ramallah and Nazareth. Armenian holidays are only celebrated by their own community.

Muslim holidays

Eid Al-Adha	23–25 February
Al-Hejira	13 March
Moulid Al-Nabi	23 May
Start of Ramadan	5 November
Eid Al-Fitr (End of Ramadan)	3 December

2002**Jewish and Israeli holidays**

Passover	28 March
Shevuot	17 May
New Year	7 September
Yom Kippur	16 September
Succoth	21 September
Simhat Torah	28 September

Christian holidays

Easter	between late March and late April
Christmas Day	25 December
New Year	1 January
Orthodox Christmas	7 January
Orthodox New Year	13 January

Palestinian holidays

Fatah Day	1 January
Independence Day	15 November

Communication breakdown

Palestinians, of course, speak Arabic, but English is the second language and many speak it fluently. Most have at least enough English to offer advice and have a simple conversation. However, you should try to speak a few words of Arabic – it always helps. Have a try, the worst you can do is make someone smile! Most travel guides have a section with key words and phrases or you can get pocket guides to Arabic such as Berlitz or Penguin or the BBC Language series supported by tapes. (Also see 'Useful Arabic/English words' in the Appendix of this book.)

The weekly English newspaper is the *Jerusalem Times*. For international news and the Israeli viewpoint see the *Herald Tribune/Haaretz*, which is widely available in Palestinian towns; also, the leading European and American papers can be bought in the international hotels. Radio Jordan (in English) with news, interviews, weather forecasts and a variety of music is broadcast on FM 96.3–99 MHz. Jordan TV also has quite a lot of English and French programmes, whilst satellite TV with programmes such as CNN News can be seen in the larger hotels and at many households. If you get withdrawal symptoms away from a computer, there are plenty of Internet Cafés.

Public phones in Palestine work either with coins or phone cards. Phone cards are available at the Palestinian post offices. The international code for Israel is 972. This also works for Palestine, but the correct code for Palestine is 970. When calling from Jordan you need to call 970. To call overseas, you must dial 00 (or 012, 013, 014 if you're in Jerusalem). For information, call 144.

The postal service is reliable but you should not use Palestinian stamps in Israel or vice versa – a complicated world, isn't it!

Food and drink

For lightweight provisions (dehydrated foods), as well as fresh foods, the major towns generally have a good selection. The smaller villages have less choice, but you can usually find bread, vegetables, powdered milk, tinned fish and other foods, biscuits, tea, coffee, sugar and bottled water. A vegetarian diet is the cheapest! The best place to shop for fresh fruit and veg is always in the local markets. In the smallest villages,

INTRODUCTION

there may be no shops at all, so be sure you have enough provisions with you if you are trekking for a few days.

The larger towns also have a good choice of restaurants and cafés of all standards serving international or local Arabic foods, with a range of prices to match. The more expensive ones are also likely to sell alcoholic drinks. Many of the smaller villages also have at least one street café for locals, which are always friendly places to eat in as well as inexpensive. Eating out in Palestine will cost you less than in Israel or in most parts of Europe. If you eat in street cafés and buy local Palestinian produce for your treks, it will cost you far less.

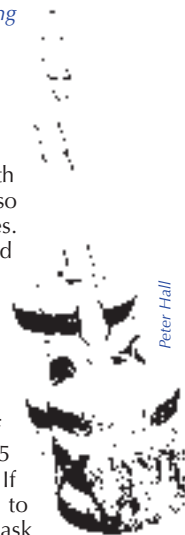
Remember that during Ramadan most food shops and cafés are closed during daylight hours; smoking is frowned upon and alcoholic drinks are banned at this time except in some international restaurants and non-Muslim areas.

Clothing and equipment

'The traveller should take with him a plaid, an overcoat, and a suit for visiting consuls, attending divine service etc., but dress clothes are quite unnecessary. The tailor should be instructed to make the sewing extra strong, for repairs and sewing buttons on are dear in the East, not to speak of the difficulty of finding the tailor just when he is wanted.'

Palestine and Syria,
Karl Baedeker, Leipzig, 1898

Palestine can be cold at night, especially in the north or on the hills (it may even snow in mid-winter!), so have some warm and preferably windproof clothes. Waterproofs can be useful in the north in winter and the occasional storm can be very severe, causing flash floods. Conversely the lack of water can be an ever-present problem. If you are returning to base at night, and it's not too hot, then you can manage on 1–2 litres a day. On long, hot and strenuous days you should allow for 1 litre of water per hour – certainly a minimum of 5 litres of water/day. If you are camping, a minimum of 4–5 litres a day is essential whatever the temperature. If you expect to get water from wells you may need to carry 6–7m of strong, thin cord (and remember to ask permission).



Peter Hall

Wooden pestles and mortars

Except in mid-winter, lightweight clothing, with a fleece jacket, windproof top, sunglasses and sun hat will be adequate for most routes. Shorts are fine up on the mountains, weather permitting, though on a hot day you may suffer sunburn and will lose precious body moisture quickly and without noticing, leading to speedy dehydration. Whatever you wear remember to dress with respect for any holy places you may be visiting; also, respect local traditions if you want to be welcomed into Bedouin camps or the houses of local people.

Trainers or modern lightweight trekking boots are all that's needed for footwear; even modern 'trekking sandals' can be worn on easier walks, but you could regret it if you disturb a scorpion or, worse still, a snake! (Although we've seen plenty of snakes in the Middle East including Palestinian Vipers and the much more venomous Horned Viper, we've never heard of anyone being bitten – see 'Be prepared', below.)

You should, of course, have your own first aid kit, a multi-blade knife and head torch with spare batteries. If you intend camping, take the lightest possible sleeping bag, tent, etc, and a Gaz or multi-fuel stove. If you are staying near a village or Bedouin camp the residents may be able to arrange food for you. (Information is given at the end of some route descriptions.) As always you should have a compass and the relevant maps with you to supplement the maps in this book, though a guide with knowledge of the area is always worth having and usually good company.

Taking a guide

Many visitors to Palestine are experienced enough to do any of the routes in this book without guides. Others come with qualified trekking guides to lead their party. Nevertheless, using the facilities of a Palestinian agency or local guide with knowledge of the area is always worthwhile, and will not only provide you with in-depth knowledge of the land and people, but also guarantee access to local communities. Additionally, on multi-day treks such as the Nativity Trail, the complex logistics of travel and accommodation are solved. This enables you to trek with minimal gear (just enough for one day), allowing you maximum enjoyment of the walk and the Palestinian hospitality arranged for you at your next overnight stop!

Palestinian agents familiar with the Nativity Trail are Alternative Tourism Group and Guiding Star. See 'Community tourism', above, for full details.

INTRODUCTION

Maps

The current 1:50,000 maps which include Palestine are the 'Hiking and Touring' Maps published by the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (SPNI) and the Survey of Israel Series. The relevant map numbers are given at the beginning of each route with the suffix SPNI for the former and SOIS for the latter. Grid references are eight figure and refer to the black grid numbers. All maps are available from the SPNI Office in Jerusalem, at: 13 Heleni Hamalka St, PO Box 930, Jerusalem 91008, Tel: 02 624 4605 / 625 2357.

Other places such as bookshops and hotels sell general maps which include Palestine, such as the 1:100,000 road maps of Israel, whilst most travel guidebooks have some road and town maps. For a good selection of books and maps, walk up Salah ed Din St, just east of Jerusalem's Damascus Gate and opposite Herod's (Zahra) Gate, to visit the Educational Bookshop and the American Colony Hotel Bookshop (0.5 and 1km respectively). You could also contact specialist map suppliers in Europe.

The following maps are all useful:

The Times Concise Atlas of the Bible, Times Books 1991

Palestine – The Holy Land Tourist Map, Palestinian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, Bethlehem

Map of Jerusalem and Bethlehem, Arab Hotel Association (free from hotels)









Israel, 1:250,000 northern sheet, 1997

The maps in this book were made by the authors. Apart from the few city maps and the cave survey, all other maps are based on originals supplied by: Applied Research Institute – Jerusalem (ARIJ)
Caritas Street, PO Box 860, Bethlehem, Palestine
Tel: 02 274 1889, Fax: 02 277 6966

E-mail: postmaster@arij.org,
Website: www.arij.org

The combination of the maps and route descriptions in this book should be adequate to find all the routes and also

KEY TO TREKKING MAPS IN THIS BOOK

	Palestinian town or village
	Israeli settlement
	Sea or lake
	Major road
	Minor road or track
	Walk / trek
	Wadi (permanent or seasonal stream or river)
	Contour (100m intervals)

to follow some, though route-finding skills will be needed for the more complex treks due to the inevitably small scale of the maps and consequent limited information. It is always advisable to supplement them with the relevant 1:50,000 maps.

Be prepared!

Some routes are easy strolls taking only an hour or so. Others are more serious undertakings, sometimes crossing complex terrain with no water sources and always with inadequate maps when compared to the large-scale European ones. On top of that, there are sometimes only disconnected shepherds' paths or even none at all! Furthermore, it's likely to be hot and, because of the water situation and the amount of gear you may have with you, you may well be carrying more than 10 kilos. On long, hot and strenuous days, when you want to carry the least, you will need a minimum of 5 litres of water per person – that's 5 kilos, before you add other essentials – such as life!

You also need to be self-sufficient as, on some of the routes in this guide, the only people you may meet are Bedouin shepherds. If you have an accident or get lost it will be up to you to extricate yourself. As always, what you carry will be a compromise between weight, comfort and safety. Your pack should always include a first aid kit and other items such as water purifiers and sun creams, etc (see 'Clothing and equipment', above).

Be aware that as well as mosquitoes, which can sometimes be a nuisance, it is also possible (despite tents with mosquito nets) to be bitten by minute sand flies which may carry *Leishmaniasis*. The result is unsightly scabs, which appear three or four months later and take another eight months or so to disappear, possibly leaving a small scar. To avoid sand flies it is always best to sleep away from water and vegetation. It is, apparently, also possible to get malaria; we have never taken any anti-malaria tablets, but insect repellent creams are probably a wise precaution if sleeping out near wadies and pools. Cases of mosquito-carried Nile Fever have recently also been reported in the Jordan Valley.

Snake bites and scorpion stings are almost unheard of, but be careful in thick vegetation which may conceal either, and avoid picking up stones (for example to clear a campsite) as scorpions may be hiding there during the heat of the day. If bitten or stung, try not to panic: it increases heart rate and blood flow. Nevertheless, you should get to the nearest doctor or hospital as soon as possible. (If you have a mobile phone with you, consider requesting an ambulance to meet you – see below.) Scorpion bites are rarely fatal to adults, though they can make

INTRODUCTION

you ill for a few days. A bite from a viper, though extremely unlikely, is usually much more venomous and should be taken seriously.

There are probably only two other hazards that could seriously threaten a walk in the wilderness. First of all, flash floods – avoid narrow valleys and rocky gorges if rain is possible anywhere in the locality. If in doubt, phone the weather-line (see below). Secondly, political unrest – keep in touch with your Embassy or Consulate for information and advice on the latest events. You may well find that things are not as bad as they are portrayed in the media!

Finally, always let someone know not only where you're going, but when you expect to be back. Having made this commitment, don't go somewhere else, and do check in on your return!

Ambulance and police

The following are some useful numbers:

All areas ambulance 101

City	Ambulance	Police
Jerusalem	101	100
Nazareth	101	100
Jenin	101 / 06-2503537	06-2501035
Nablus	101 / 09-2385077	09-2383518
Ramallah	101 / 02-2957574	02-2956571
Jericho	101 / 02-2957574	02-2322521
Bethlehem	101 / 02-2743225	02-2748231
Hebron	101 / 02-2228598	02-2228598

Tourism and antiquities police

Bethlehem	02-2770750/1
Jericho	02-2324011
Nablus	09-385244

Telephone services

Information	144
Weather	03-9668855

Border crossings

Allenby Bridge	02-9943358
----------------	------------

As mobile phones now work in most parts of Palestine outside the deeper mountain valleys and canyons leading down to the Rift Valley,

it is now possible to phone directly for help in emergency. Please don't abuse the system.

OTHER OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

Rock climbing

The rock climbing in the West Bank, which is generally on excellent and usually steep limestone crags, has mostly been developed by Israeli climbers. The few cliffs that have established routes tend to have fixed gear (for example in Wadi Qelt). Climbing access agreements in Nature Reserves/International Birdlife Areas should be respected.

For details, contact:

Israeli Alpine Club, PO Box 39101, Jerusalem 91390

Tel: 02 6236551, E-mail: relkatz@yahoo.com

Caving

'When planning a caving trip think of the return journey and remember that caving grades only apply to fit, competent and properly equipped parties; novices in particular will find caves harder than indicated and for most systems there must be sufficient and competent cavers in the party.'

Advice from a British caving guide

The caves in this guide include the most extensive in Palestine – the Cave of Chariton – which has 3450m of passages (R35). There are many caves in this part of the world, some of which await further exploration. Caving is a serious business for experienced people only. An 'active-cave' – that is, one which has (or could have) water running through it – will be subject to flood hazard. If in doubt, don't!

For further information on caves in Palestine, contact:

Israeli Cave Research Centre, Tel: 02 976740 or 976411.

Cave Research Section, Hebrew University of Jerusalem,

Tel: 02 9975541, Fax: 02 820549

Route descriptions

Each route description in this guide details its special features, interests and risks, the grade of difficulty, distance covered with altitude changes and the time required for an average party. The time given may seem a lot for the distance, but trekking in the Middle East is much more demanding than in more temperate climates, so don't expect to cover the same amount of ground, even if it is virtually all downhill! Minor errors in route finding can lose considerable time; heat and dehydration are your greatest enemies.

INTRODUCTION

The approach is also described, before giving details of the route, followed by, if necessary, the return and any useful information on transport and accommodation. The terms 'true left' and 'true right' apply when looking down a mountain, canyon, wadi or valley, whereas directions to go 'left' or 'right' apply to the direction of travel, whether in ascent or descent, and are abbreviated to L and R. Compass points are abbreviated to N S E W, for north, south, etc, whilst route numbers in the text and on the maps are prefixed by R. Distances and heights are in metric, as is altitude (abbreviated to alt.). They are quoted in kilometres (km) or metres (m). Four-wheel drive is abbreviated to 4wd, and times in hours and minutes are shown as hrs and mins.

Apart from three walks, the routes in this guide have all been done by the authors. The descriptions of the three not checked by us are based on notes supplied by others, and the words 'Not verified by the authors' appear in the route introduction. Finally, although we walked the Nativity Trail in spring 2000 we were not asked to write this book until later. Despite our best intentions, events in October 2000 prevented us from re-checking all but a couple of days of the trail. Those descriptions are therefore partially based on notes by the trail's creators.

Anyone doing any routes in this book and having useful comments to make, or anyone with details of new routes, should send their notes for inclusion in future editions of this guide to either:

Cicerone Press, 2 Police Square, Milnthorpe, Cumbria, LA7 7PY
England or

n.o.m.a.d.s. Greenman's Farm, Greenfield, Oldham, OL3 7HA England

Grading of walks and treks

There is, as yet, no internationally agreed grading system for treks. As a consequence, the grades below are specific to the routes in this guide; they bear no correlation to the grades in our guide *Jordan – Walks, Treks, Caves, Climbs and Canyons*, nor to those in other guidebooks.

- **Easy walk** Usually short, with no difficulties such as scrambling on rock or scree, no exposure to heights, no unduly arduous ascents or descents and no serious route-finding problems.
- **Moderate trek** Usually half to one day. Altitude differences may be considerable. Some easy scrambling may be necessary and experience in route finding could be required.
- **Serious trek** Amongst the longest in this guide, these routes pass through the more remote areas and require stamina, self-sufficiency

and confidence in rocky terrain. There could be considerable ascent and/or descent and route-finding experience is essential.

Grading of rock scrambles

A few treks include rock scrambles. This is noted both in the route introduction as well as in the actual description and shown in brackets, for example (Grade 2).

- **Grade 1** The point at which hands are required for balance or safety.
- **Grade 2** Generally steeper rock, but with good holds for security.

Grading of caves

- **Easy cave. Grade 1** No rope-work or technical difficulties. Route finding may present problems for the uninitiated.
- **Moderate cave. Grade 2** This grade includes small pot-holes. Ropes may be required for ascent and descent. Possibly quite long. Some experience necessary.
- **Serious Cave. Grade 3 or more** Definitely experienced cavers only.



Peter Hall

Old Jerusalem



**Do not attempt any other than
the 'Easy' routes in this book
without either adequate experience or a guide.**

