

Birzeit

Palestine's Hub of Heritage and Culture

Courtesy of VisitPalestine.ps

The olive-tree-covered hills of Birzeit stretch north of Ramallah and are a great escape from the hustle and bustle of the busy and crowded city. The area is well known for olive oil production, which corresponds with the town's name – Birzeit, meaning “well of oil.”

Every summer, the charming streets of the town's usually tranquil old core revive with various events, such as those of Birzeit Heritage Week – a week-long festival, full of activities and exhibits that promote the rich cultural mosaic of Palestine. In addition, the *Maftoul* (Couscous) Festival takes place in Birzeit and features a competition for the best *maftoul* dish. This special event is organized by the Rozana Association (www.rozana.ps) to honor Palestinian tradition and highlight the women of rural villages who take pride in preparing the delicious dishes of their heritage. Since 2011, the Birzeit Nights Festival offers audiences a variety of events that feature Palestinian songs and folk dances performed by local groups.

Until now, Birzeit has been known in the region mainly as the location of the prestigious Birzeit University (www.birzeit.edu). The institution was gradually transformed from a small family-owned girls' school into the first college for higher education in 1954. In 1975, it gained university status, and in April 1976, it was accepted as a member of the Association of Arab Universities. The old Birzeit University campus is considered one of the most significant historic sites in the town.

The recent opening (on May 18) of the Palestinian Museum's (www.palmuseum.org) impressive building located on one of Birzeit's hills – one of the most exciting new cultural projects in Palestine – gives even more reason to visit the area. Visitors can admire the building's modern architecture, which was designed to blend with the rural landscape, and the extensive gardens filled with indigenous trees and flowers. The first exhibition is expected to take place this autumn.

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