



MUSEUM REVIEW

Battir Landscape Eco-Museum

By Nada Atrash

In 2011, the Battir Landscape Eco-Museum was formed. It's an open museum that offers its visitors a unique experience exploring the landscape surrounding the village of Battir, located just outside of Bethlehem, just over 4 miles (7 km) from Jerusalem. The museum is housed in a small, 200-square-foot building, and its friendly and welcoming staff can provide visitors with detailed information on the surrounding area, over 800 acres (340 hectares) of land. Battir is a key feature of the larger Palestinian Central Highlands landscape, which stretches from Nablus in the north to Hebron in the south.

The eco-museum offers hiking trips through the valleys (*widian*) that circle Battir, from Wadi Al-Makhroun near Beit Jala, to the village of Husan. These valleys are characterized by extensive agricultural terraces, springs, irrigation systems, olive presses, ancient ruins (*khirab*), and stone agricultural watchtowers called *manatir*, which are locally known as palaces (*qusoos*). Visitors can also explore the lovely historical center of the village. Moreover, the eco-museum provides its visitors an exceptional opportunity to learn about the life of the village, introducing them to the ancient irrigation system that has been used by the villagers for thousands of years and is still used today. Visitors are invited to take part in a meal prepared by the women of the village.

The eco-museum also provides overnight stays at Dar Abu-Hassan Guesthouse. The guesthouse offers the visitors a chance to experience Palestinian vernacular architecture, watch the sun set over the village, and then enjoy a local breakfast the next morning.

In June 2014, this area was inscribed on UNESCO's list of World Heritage in Danger under the name "Palestine, Land of Olives and Vines: Cultural Landscape of Southern Jerusalem, Battir." The inscription came as a result of the collective efforts of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, the Battir Village Council, the Center for Cultural Heritage Preservation and the local community of Battir, all of whom worked in close cooperation with the UNESCO Office in Ramallah to complete the proposal.

Battir Landscape Eco-museum is open daily from 9:00 till sundown.

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