



WHERE TO GO?

Cremisan Valley – Before It's Gone

Courtesy of VisitPalestine.ps

The Cremisan Valley, characterized by an abundance of agricultural terraces planted with grapevines and olive and almond trees, is considered to be one of the last green areas located near Bethlehem. The land is owned and cultivated by people from Beit Jala. The area is also famous for three buildings that are located there: the Salesian monastery, Cremisan Cellars, and the Salesian Sisters convent and school.

The Salesian monastery was built in 1885 on the ruins of a seventh-century Byzantine church. Its main building consists of thick walls, stone floors, and high-arched ceilings. Cremisan is famous for its wine cellars and first class production of olive oil – as is the rest of Beit Jala. A bottle of one of these specialities makes a nice souvenir from a visit to Palestine.

Cremisan, also rich in unique flora and fauna, is a perfect place for a walk, a picnic, or a retreat. Many newlyweds choose to have their outdoor wedding ceremonies on the premises of the Salesian monastery.

However, the Cremisan Valley is also situated between the Israeli settlements of Gilo and Har Gilo, which were constructed on lands that belong to people from Beit Jala. In 2006, the Israeli military authorities announced an order for the construction of a separation barrier in the area. In June 2015, after nine long years of prayers and legal battles, the two monasteries and the 58 Palestinian landowners, threatened with losing parts of their lands, were shocked to learn that the Israeli High Court approved construction of the barrier. The Salesian monastery would

be cut off behind the wall and be separated from its sister convent and school and be inaccessible to the communities of Beit Jala and Bethlehem.

In late August, Israeli forces started to uproot olive trees that belong to Palestinians of Beit Jala's Bir Onah area as part of its plans to proceed with the construction of the wall. Many people and organizations, both local and international, gather every morning to resist in a daily protest-mass against the illegal confiscation and closure of this important and rich agricultural land.

According to a decision taken in 2004 by the International Court of Justice and the United Nations General Assembly, the construction of the wall, which had begun in 2002, was declared illegal and should therefore be demolished.

For more information, visit the official website of the Society of St. Yves, Catholic Center for Human Rights (<http://www.saintyves.org>), the legal representative of the Salesian convent in the Israeli High Court.



Cremisan By Johnny Andonia.

