

WHERE TO GO?

Enjoying Aboud

Courtesy of VisitPalestine.ps



Olive trees with Aboud in the background.

Even though Aboud is small in size, the village and its surroundings have many fascinating sights to offer that range from its beautiful natural countryside, full of olive and citrus trees to the richness of various important archaeological findings, some of them reflecting local legends and traditions. Located in the highlands of Ramallah and only 25 km away from the Mediterranean Sea, Aboud offers beautiful views of the seashore from the elevated spots of the village.

Locals maintain that village was named after the Biblical Prophet Obadiah (in Latin Abdias), name means "worshipper" and who is said to be buried in Sebastya. It is also believed that the ruins of Aboud's oldest church *Messieh*, the name of which derives from the Arabic word meaning Christ, mark exactly the spot where Jesus once preached. This belief is plausible because the village lies on the principal Roman road that led via Gophna (Jifna) to Antipatris (Ras el-Ain); therefore, Jesus might likely have used it to travel between the Galilee and Jerusalem.

Among the archaeological findings, ruins of various Byzantine structures can be admired. At least in two places we can see remains of colored mosaic floors from that period: The mosaic in Simon's Church was found on the site of the modern Roman Catholic Convent, built in 1912/3, the other one is well visible outside of the present structure of the Orthodox Church of St. Mary, also called *al-Abudiyah*.

At the highest point in the area, west of the village, is located the shrine of Saint Barbara. This small worship place has been built around an ancient cave and just beneath the ruins of what used to be a larger complex with a church and a monastery, dated between the fourth and the sixth centuries. According to Palestinian legend, St. Barbara was born in Aboud and as a young girl persecuted for converting to Christianity. The cave is believed to be the location of Barbara's imprisonment before her eventual execution. Both Christian and Muslim villagers venerate the saint. Palestinians celebrate the feast of Saint

Barbara (Eid *Burbara*) on 17 December, and many pilgrims visit the site on this day. Traditionally, women all over the country prepare a sweet dish called burbara, which is made from wheat seasoned with sugar, cinnamon, fennel and anise.

The area of Aboud also offers various pleasant and not too demanding hikes

a torch would be useful to better view the unique rocks. Those inexperienced in cave exploration are advised not to descend too deeply.

Located just 2 km away from the core of the village is the impressive site of an ancient Roman quarry called *al-Maqata*. Rectangular cuts mark the dark rocks



Remains of Byzantine mosaics.



Saint Barbara.



Al-Maqata.



Entrance to Wadi Leimoun.

among neatly kept olive groves. Wadi Leimoun (Valley of Lemons), located between Aboud and Beit Rima, is a perfect get-away for nature lovers. At the entrance of the valley is a small picnic area (tables and benches) where a person can enjoy, especially during the rainy season, the abundance of citrus fruits: lemons, oranges and bitter oranges. Further down the valley can be spotted Aboud's largest spring, Ain al-Zarka, whose water is gushing throughout the whole year.

To the south of the village is located al-Kalzoun Cave, an interesting geological formation full of stalactites hanging from the cave's roof like icicles. The cavern is large enough for a person to explore while standing. However, there is not much daylight coming into its interior, so

of the area. To exploit the stone, Roman stonemasons inserted wooden wedges along shallow cuts into the rocks, then soaked them with water to make the wood expand and eventually fracture the stone. Besides the quarry can be noticed a Roman burial place where the entrances to the tombs are decorated with ornaments showing beautiful carvings of flowers and fruits.

To learn even more about Aboud and other interesting destinations, visit our website at www.visitpalestine.ps or contact the Visit Palestine Information Center in Bethlehem via info@visitpalestine.ps or (02) 277-1992.

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