

## Get Busy in Beit Sahour

*Courtesy of VisitPalestine.ps*



*Interior view of church at Greek Orthodox Shepherds' Field.*

Actually, there are as many as three "Shepherds' Fields" in Beit Sahour, each one commemorating the Biblical event. The site that belongs to the Greek Orthodox Church features a grotto that has been used as a chapel since the fourth century. The site also contains Byzantine ruins and a church that was built in 1989, whose walls and ceiling are covered with colorful icons. The Roman Catholic site holds extensive ruins of a Byzantine monastery that encompasses various caves and a tent-shaped chapel designed by the famous Italian architect Antonio Barluzzi (1950s). The third site is located on the premises of Beit Sahour's YMCA and consists of a simple grotto that is believed to have been used at the time of Christ.

Beit Sahour has a beautiful old core, where time seems to pass more slowly than in other areas. A stroll through this part of the city reveals various features characteristic of Ottoman architecture (1517–1918), for example, thick stone walls, arched windows, decorative reliefs, and small

Beit Sahour, located next to Bethlehem, is a perfect place for those looking for a heady mix of history, Palestinian cultural experience, and modern life.

To the east, the town overlooks the dry hills of Jerusalem's wilderness and a truncated volcano-like hill – Herodion, the ruins of one of the ancient fortresses of King Herod the Great. On a clear day, the background to this scene is a spectacular view of the mountains of Jordan.

The name Beit Sahour, meaning "the house of vigilance," consists of two Arabic words: *beit* meaning "house," and *sahour* meaning "night watch." The name of the area reflects its importance for the shepherds of long ago. The land provided their flocks with good grazing during the day and safety in its numerous caves at night. It is not a coincidence that this area has been associated with the place where, according to Biblical tradition, the angel appeared to shepherds to announce the birth of Christ (Luke 2:8–20).



*Beit Sahour, Shepherds' Field, Byzantine ruins.*

openings that let the sunlight into the buildings.

The town is also famous for its alternative approach to tourism. Although it is possible to stay in Beit Sahour's well-furnished hotels or guesthouses, many inhabitants open their doors and offer accommodation to visitors in their own homes. These specially prepared homestays, with private rooms and often en suite bathrooms, offer visitors a degree of privacy alongside the traditional Palestinian hospitality.

Many visitors come to Beit Sahour for the annually organized volunteer programs, including the olive harvest or olive-tree planting. Other features include Arabic language courses, cultural, historical, and political tours, and various kinds of local volunteer opportunities.

In terms of entertainment and nightlife, Beit Sahour has a lot to offer. Various cafes, restaurants, and bars serve delicious meals and drinks. The locals pride themselves on barbecue platters and *zarb*, a dish of meat and vegetables prepared in a special underground

oven. On most weekends, it is possible to attend live music concerts or other fun evenings of entertainment. The town is home to a new microbrewery. Visits can be arranged through contacting the owner.

What is more, there are two annual festivals that take place in the city. The summer *Faqous* Festival celebrates the harvest of *faqous*, a delicious variety of cucumber that is abundant in Beit Sahour. The celebrations feature folklore dance performances and a farmers' market. The annual winter festival, which takes place around Christmas, is the Shepherds' Nights Festival that hosts local bands, dance troupes, and singers. A highlight of the festival is the candlelight procession around the Greek Orthodox Shepherds' Field church.

To learn more about Beit Sahour and other interesting destinations, visit our website at [www.visitpalestine.ps](http://www.visitpalestine.ps), or contact the Visit Palestine Information Center in Bethlehem via [info@visitpalestine.ps](mailto:info@visitpalestine.ps) or (02) 277-1992.

*Article photos courtesy of VisitPalestine.*

*View of Beit Sahour.*



*Latin Shepherds' Field.*



*A typical street in Beit Sahour.*