



JAI

Joint Advocacy Initiative
The East Jerusalem YMCA
YWCA of Palestine

**Tourism in the occupied
Palestinian territories.
How Fair...How Educational?**

Tourism in the occupied Palestinian territories. How Fair...How Educational?

In this edition of the JAI magazine we try to have some focus on tourism from different point of views and perspectives. The articles written and interviews made with the interested people and those involved in this sector activities show a variety in the way those people see tourism and its importance. But also show that new initiatives and ideas to market the Occupied Palestinian territories (OPT) are in place.

In the last few years, many Palestinian organizations working in tourism including the private and public sectors have raised their concern on how to make tourism not only a tool for economic development but also as a tool of cultural exposure and ethical engagement to support the Palestinians in their pursuit for freedom, peace and justice. For such purpose many NGOs developed alternative tourism programs that include encountering Palestinian people at different levels.

A Code on Conduct on Tourism was also issued by the Palestinian Initiative on Responsible Tourism (PIRT) as a result of much work locally and internationally of the theme of Justice Tourism. A new initiative is also being developed among Palestinian NGOs addressing the importance of cultural,

environmental and solidarity tourism with some focus on promoting other Palestinian areas which were out of the touristic programs.

These initiatives were driven by the belief that tourism can be a real tool to educate tourists about the Palestinian culture and heritage as well as our traditions and values. Tourists can come and go with some beautiful picture in mind about place visited. They can also come and leave having a different idea that might lead to some engagement with the Palestinian cause. This is dependant of the tourist personal interests but also on the program and the people the talk to.

Tourism can be a tool to bring attachment between the tourist and not only the holy shrines and historic sites in the oPt, but also with the Palestinian people and their cause and concerns. It can also be an advocacy tool that creates international advocates who work for the self determination of the Palestinian people and for peace with justice. The work on this area has started. Still there is much to be done mainly on developing a unified vision among the Palestinian touristic sectors concerned and a plan on how to work locally on developing the roles of such sectors to serve realizing this vision.

Thanks for all those who contributed to this edition.

We wish you a joyful reading.

JAI team

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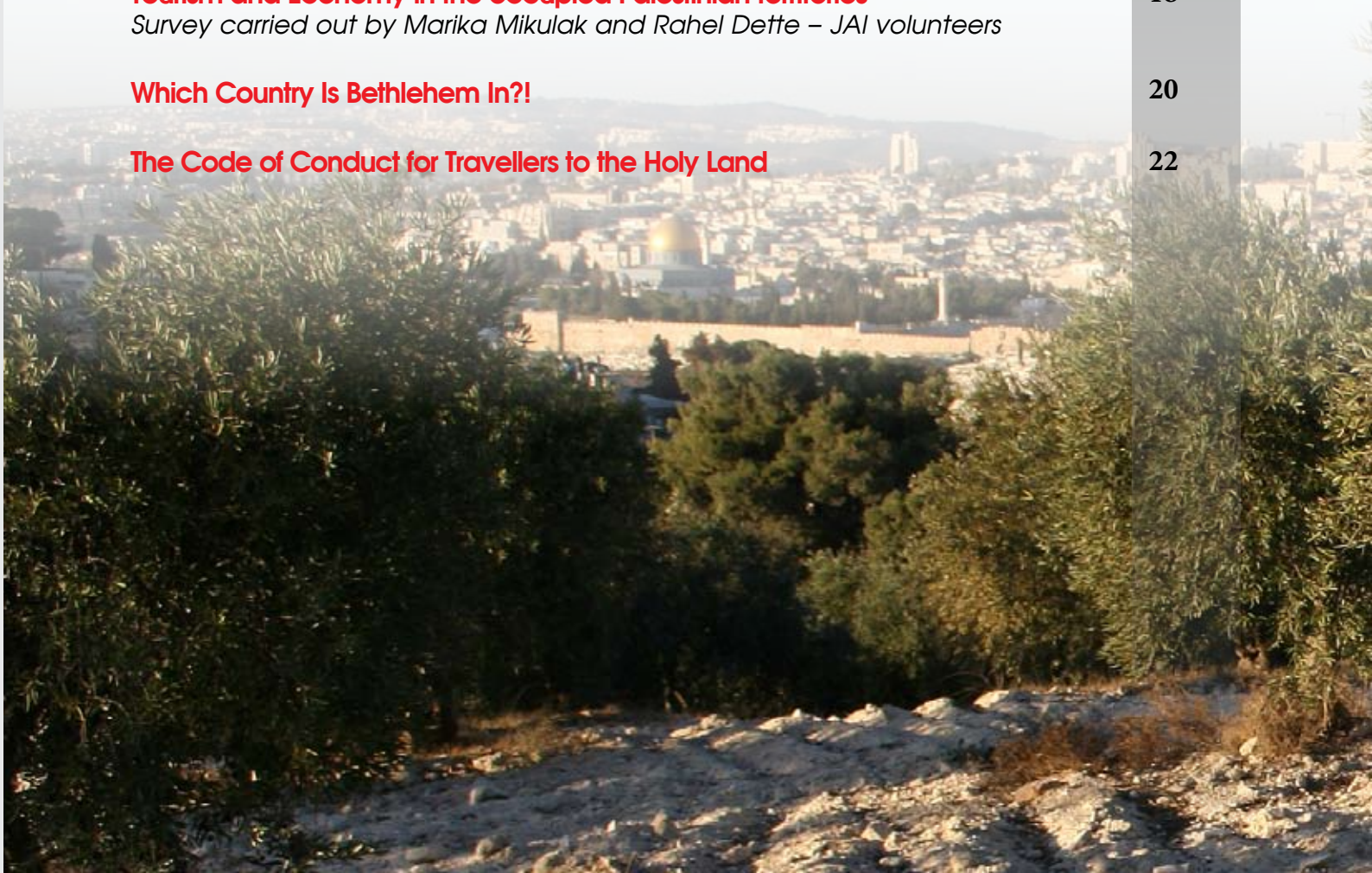
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CONTENT...

Tourism and Peace-building in Palestine: Are we on the right tour? <i>By: Adithya Joseph and Timothy Connerton</i> <i>Ecumenical Coalition On Tourism (ECOT)</i>	4
Difficulties facing tourism and Pilgrims in Palestine <i>By Marika Mikulak – JAI volunteer with Mr. Majed Ishaq.</i>	6
Alternative Tourism in Palestine: The other side of the story <i>By: Rami Kassis</i> <i>Director of the Alternative Tourism Group (ATG)</i>	8
An interview with Mr George Abu Aita General Manager Paradise Hotel - Bethlehem <i>By: Ibrahim Hannounah - JAI</i>	12
Guide perspective Leading tourists into Palestine and the Holy Land <i>By: Wolfgang Wittrock, Ph. D.</i>	14
An electronic interview with Mr. Anwar Shomali <i>General Director of Anastasias Tours in Bethlehem and an experienced tour guide.</i>	16
Tourism and Economy in the occupied Palestinian territories <i>Survey carried out by Marika Mikulak and Rahel Dette – JAI volunteers</i>	18
Which Country Is Bethlehem In?!	20
The Code of Conduct for Travellers to the Holy Land	22



Tourism and Peace-building in Palestine: Are we on the right tour?

**By: Adithya Joseph and Timothy Connerton
Ecumenical Coalition On Tourism (ECOT)**

When tourists journey to an unstable region, the perceived risk of injury and incident increases tenfold. The stigma attached to any given “danger zone” focuses a tourist’s concerns on surviving and avoiding confrontations and incidents. While certain risks must be considered, it’s unfortunate that these might be the only thing troubling a person’s mind as they travel through a place like Palestine. It is the goal of many alternative tourism groups to work beyond the tourist-centered sightseeing and question, how can this trip instead contribute to the much needed peace and well-being of the local population? Indeed, the potential for peace building through tourism has become an important area of exploration, especially in conflict-ridden Palestine. In very practical ways, tourism can be a tool for peace building when a vision of peace in Palestine is at the forefront of a tourists’ mind. The presence of a vision of peace depends largely on one factor: choosing the right tour.



Interpretations of peace building are viewed through the context of specific conflicts. Tourism in Palestine can play a role in peace building largely by creating economic stability and an environment of understanding. Tourists can play a role in reaching out to the unheard, giving a voice, and connecting the two worlds of difference. Through an international presence of sharing hope and concern to people caught in conflict, tourists can be a force in lighting the fire for people in both parties to end hatred and conflict, and rather desire to work towards peace.

Tourist-Centered Tourism

Currently, tourism in Palestine does not reflect a fair and just model of tourism, and might further contribute to conflict. Many circumstances of the political conflict have shaped tourism in Palestine into a very narrow experience. Israeli security checkpoints monitor and regulate all activity inside Palestine, controlling movement and duration of stay in Palestine. These high levels of control and restriction often encourage tourists to purchase accommodation in Israel, and only enter Palestine for a few hours a day. In some cases, tourists are encouraged by their Israeli guides to buy souvenirs (such as carvings from olive trees) from Israel, rather than from Palestinian merchants. Such direct and indirect forces unjustly direct revenues away from the Palestinian economy which should benefit from hosting these tourists. Rather, Israeli tour companies and hotels largely reap the benefits from the tourist industry.

Moreover, pilgrims are not presented with the realities of injustice and oppression in Palestine. On their brief trips to sites such as Bethlehem, attention is rarely drawn to illegal Israeli settlements



along the way, a major source of angst to walled-in Palestinians. Likewise, foreigners do not grasp the real nature of the security “fence” as they pass through a gate within a matter of minutes, while Palestinians might get held up for hours while making the same trip. These are very important aspects of the Israeli – Palestinian conflict that need to be understood from the Palestinian perspective if peace building is to occur.

Another Tourism is Possible

Given these engrained aspects of a typical pilgrimage to Palestine, an alternative tourism model is made more difficult, but yet, is possible. Tourism can be a tool for peace building. ECOT’s media statement for peace in Palestine and Israel further points to questions that tourist would benefit to ask, such as, “Why are the arrangements such that pilgrims end up staying at Israeli places of accommodation but are discouraged from using Palestinian hotels to the detriment of the Palestinian economy?, Is it defensible that pilgrims are bused in and out of Palestine in Israeli vehicles with little opportunity for interface with the local Palestinian population in turn denied access to tourist income? How reliable are the material and advice provided to pilgrims by Israeli tourism with regard to the Palestinian people? Do they reinforce negative stereotypes of Palestinians and Arabs?”¹ If these questions are posed to pilgrims in a non-offensive manner, it would plant the seeds of a more just tourism.

¹“Israel, pilgrimage tourism, and Palestine” *Con-tours, Newsletter of Ecumenical Coalition On Tourism*, v19, 2. Pg. 22, June-July 2009

The Code of Conduct for Tourism in the Holy Land, developed by the Palestinian Initiative for Responsible Tourism, with the collaboration on international groups such as ECOT, is another helpful guideline.² It calls for tourists to be mindful of the issues facing Palestinians before embarking, to make trips beneficial and educational, and to use the experience gained by sharing information with their friends and relatives. The Code should be required reading for travel agencies and groups organizing travel to the Holy Land.

These sources provide a good basis for tourism as a tool for peace building, finding the right tours that direct resources to the Palestinian economy. That encourages pilgrims to spend their money in Palestine on transport, accommodation and merchandise. The stimulation of business is a natural result that Palestinians have a right to benefit from. As a tourist, it is a responsibility to assure that your purchasing power is directed to the hosts of each visit.

Discovering a Common Humanity through Tourism

The “right tour” encourages direct interaction with the local population, exposing their internal reality. Such interactions would give Palestinians a chance to share and portray their daily lives, rather than be turned into headlines of newspapers that perpetuate the world's negative stereotypes of them. As previously mentioned, a different sense of awareness is fundamental and necessary if peace is the objective. Tourism can be a tool for this if visitors are encouraged to ask themselves questions and keep an open mind to seek out the answers. It's the responsibility of tourists to break, and not continue the stereotypes within the conflict as portrayed by the media and by holy site tours.

² “The Code of Conduct for Tourism in the Holy Land” *Contours, Newsletter of Ecumenical Coalition On Tourism*, v19, 1. Pg. 24, March- April 2009



Tourists at the Holy Sepulchre Church - Jerusalem

Going further, tourism might emerge as a peace building tool if the unordinary were to become ordinary tourists. World leaders, especially US leaders pledging for peace initiatives are in greatest need of a wider understanding of conflicts, and tourism can provide this. Palestinians should urge those directly involved in the peace building efforts to become ordinary tourists, subject to the internal reality of Palestine. Furthermore, a friendly and educational exchange of tours should be conducted between Israel and Palestine in order to break the hostile attitude, and gain a more accurate image.

Lessons from a Firsthand Experience

The authors are reminded of their academic tour to Israel and Palestine provided by a University study abroad program. While staying in Jerusalem, we were permitted entrance inside the West Bank only for a few hours. Based on their assessment of the risks, the American insurance company responsible for our group of foreign students allowed us just a brief visit into the occupied territory. Unfortunately this is true of most guided tours in this conflict area, and it was something our mostly American group understood and accepted reluctantly.

Though we initially sought to stay longer our visit still proved to be meaningful. In addition to visiting several holy sites, we spent the majority of the time with peers at Al-Quds University, predominantly attended by Palestinians.

As we conversed over meals together, the initial “us versus them” stereotypes eventually gave way to understanding. We spoke about our various travels and they spoke of occasional detention in Israeli prisons when they dare to travel outside the wall. As college students, we spoke of our aspirations of great jobs promising money and a comfortable life, while our Palestinian counterparts simply joked as they embrace their futures as “professional card players.” While our Palestinian peers were achieving an equal level of education, this was not an instant ticket to success for them as it was perceived to be by us. Sadly and almost as a shock to us, our peers at Al-Quds had already accepted and embraced these tough realities.

During our brief stay in Palestine, we were able to build common ground, joke about bad American movies, and shed our stereotypes of the ‘other’. They shared with us their time and stories of the sad inequalities; we left them with improved understanding of our common humanity and the promise to share their story. For many on our trip, the peace building process did not end there, as we went home and shared the stories, the images of the wall, the sad reality that is simply embraced, and the distressing presence of illegal settlements. We continue to hope similar exchanges will build future understanding and a shared urgency for peace.

Adithya Joseph is on the staff of ECOT. Timothy Connerton assists ECOT in a voluntary capacity.

Difficulties facing tourism and Pilgrims in Palestine

Interview by Marika Mikulak – JAI volunteer with Mr. Majed Ishaq.

*Acting Director General of Marketing and the Acting Director General of Licensing, Tours and Professionals in the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities
29 September 2009*



What role do the internationals play in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT)?

First of all, they support us in terms of creating job opportunities for the Palestinians, especially in this difficult time when we have high unemployment rates all over Palestine. They also bring with them and spend foreign currency here. Yet, the most important thing is that they come here and they get to know Palestinians; their culture, history, and archaeology; so they get a clear picture of the place, the situation, and how the Palestinians live and suffer. Most of the people know about Palestine and Palestinians from the TV, so they get the image of Palestine from the context of the Palestinian – Israeli conflict, thus from the political point of view. Consequently, they don't know Palestine and Palestinians in reality. So when they come here, they have an opportunity to

stay with us, sleep with us, eat with us, to get to know us better without any restrictions, without any walls. In addition, it is very important for us to host tourists in order to build bridges of understanding between different nationalities. The world is more open now than in the last century, so there is a good opportunity for that, and Palestine is working very hard to build such bridges. And lastly, tourism is important for us to promote and market our belief in peace, and our struggle to gain independence.

Do you see their presence as important?

It is very important.

Do you have statistics on how many internationals come to the OPT?

Last year we had approximately 800,000 tourists visiting mainly Bethlehem, Jericho, and East Jerusalem. This year we will get between 600,000 and 650,000 tourists. It is less this year because of the war in Gaza, and also because of the economic crisis and new virus of the flu.

Do you have statistics on how many of them are tourists/volunteers/workers?

Actually we do not have exact statistics. Usually, you get them on the borders. The problem in Palestine is that we do not have any control over our borders and the passage to the area since Israel is controlling it – the Ben Gurion airport, the Rafah crossing, and so forth. So the kind of data that we collect is through the tourist police. They only gather general information, so we are not able to say that this percentage of tourists is here

for political reasons. But this niche market is getting bigger. Currently, in all Palestinian cities there are non-governmental organisations and tour operators specializing in 'unclassical' tourists such as political groups, solidarity groups, or groups interested in the nature or youth exchanges. This is a positive sign as we do not care about mass tourism with people coming only to see the Nativity Church in Bethlehem and then going back to Israel. We want them to stay here longer. Even if we do not gain good income from them, we get a lot of support and sympathy. This gives us an incentive to keep looking for our state, for peace in this country.

Do you have any evidence that a certain percentage of visitors to Palestine engage afterwards in advocacy initiatives?

Yes, when we, as the Ministry of Tourism, participate in national tourism exhibitions worldwide, we meet a lot of people that have visited Palestine, especially solidarity groups. They organize activities in their home countries to support and to create greater awareness about Palestine and the Palestinian case and struggle. By talking to people that you meet here and abroad you discover that the image of Palestine and Palestinian is changing for the benefit of our people.

What do you do to encourage internationals to come to the OPT and to stay here for longer?

We use different tools to raise awareness about Palestine and its touristic products. First of all, we take part in twelve national tourism exhibitions. Furthermore, we address the private sector and media; we distribute materials about the tourism to Palestine and Palestinian products, concentrating not only on the archaeological and religious sites, but also on the Palestinian hospitality and culture. By the end of this year, we will have

our website in seven languages. By the end of next year we will have four information centres in different Palestinian cities to assist tourists coming here. Also we have a long term plan to create tourist attachés in our embassies all over the world to follow up with the travel agencies and the media there, to take part in activities related to tourism, to make advertisements in the media, and so forth; yet it needs a lot of effort and big budget. We also use electronic press releases to send news and figures to all tourist agents in the Middle East region. Soon we will have a new, very professional DVD about tourism in Palestine which will be screened in different international televisions.

How is the image of Palestine changing?

Most people know Palestine from what they see on the TV and 99% of this is to do with the conflict, struggling during the intifada, throwing stones, etc. This kind of image affects tourism to Palestine as people believe that it is dangerous here. This is a critical point for travelers as they have to be 100% sure that they will be safe in their destination. Since they are watching incidents like the war in Gaza and others on the daily basis, they think Palestine is dangerous. So we try to convince them that it is the opposite. And when eventually tourists come here, they discover that what we were talking about is the reality; and later on they resend this message further to people they know.

What kind of obstacles do you face in attempting to make more people come to the OPT?

The first thing is the occupation. It is one country – historic Palestine – where you have two governments and two private sectors on each side and each one is trying to get a bigger piece of cake. The Israeli private sector is using the government to put obstacles in front of the Palestinian tourism industry.

The borders and the movement of tourists and professionals working in the tourism industry are all controlled by Israel. From the beginning of the second intifada Israel attempted to damage the Palestinian tourism industry: three hotels in Bethlehem were shelled.

They realized that since establishment of the Palestinian Authority and the Ministry of Tourism (1993) and the freedom of the Palestinian private investors to invest in the Palestinian tourism industry till the year 2002, we had \$900 million investment in the tourist industry from the private sector, apart from the public sector investment. They found that if they leave us and the investors free to invest in Palestine, we will get a good percentage of the income from the tourism to the area. Currently, because the Israelis have power and control, they are really achieving some of their policies. For example, in the year 2000 we had 10-12% of the income from tourists coming to the historic Palestine (Israel and Palestine), now we are getting mere 3%.

It is very hard for us to work in this unstable environment. Just imagine that you have a plan for three years, then you have political incidents, like incursions or invasion, and you have to give it up and start planning again. It is impossible to have long term plans, so we try to plan in the short term.



Does the Ministry of Tourism aim at raising awareness about the current situation in the OPT among visitors?

Of course, but at the same time we

do not want to use tourism to send political messages. We try not to get deeply into politics, but we do talk about the reality we are living in, the obstacles and difficulties facing Palestinians.

We do not want to create a picture that the conflict is affecting tourism in Palestine. We keep our difficulties and problems inside our society as we try not to discourage people from coming here. We are careful in approaching different groups depending on the type of the people we are dealing with.

While talking to religious groups, we do not go deeply into politics, our struggle and suffering; but while talking to other groups, who know the details about the situation, we speak very freely about the political situation. So it depends on what kind of people you are approaching.

Do you have any local projects to raise awareness about the situation among internationals in Palestine?

In the Ministry of Tourism not, but we work together and encourage these NGOs and tour operators dealing with alternative tourism, like Alternative Tourism Group. Luckily, the number of these organizations is increasing. They have networks worldwide and they receive many political groups who want to learn about the situation.

Our role as the Ministry is to be an umbrella for the private sector and we do not want to take the role of the private sector.

In our press releases and on our website we concentrate on the political issues in Palestine, but we do not make it the only message. Some people are very sensitive to political issues so sometimes you can make a negative impact by talking about it.

But it is a part of our strategy to create a political awareness among internationals in Palestine.

Alternative Tourism in Palestine: The other side of the story

By: Rami Kassis
Director of the Alternative
Tourism Group (ATG)

There is a growing movement throughout the world that is based on tourists' demands for better understanding of the reality of the countries and regions they visit. As opposed to simply seeing the aspects of a country that have been specially presented for tourists to view, some tourists now also want to gain insights into the less comfortable aspects of the sites and societies they encounter on their trips.

Furthermore, many tourists have begun to demand that their visits actually contribute positively to local communities and local development. In these respects there is a desire by tourists to go beyond the attractive images and texts of tour operators and promoters. Tourists are becoming aware of the fact that these images are just part of the story - or the truth - of the country they are visiting, and that the other side is always hidden from view.

This situation has emerged as many tourists start to realise that the tour operators have much to gain from deliberately concealing the reality of the countries which they visit. These companies interest is to keep the tourist away and to surround them with a Wall in order to fulfil their imagination. This is found all over the world, yet in the context of Palestine, these companies are serving the interests of maintaining Israel's public image in the light of criticism about how the state treats the Palestinians.

In Palestine as well as in small places elsewhere, tours are designed to isolate the tourist from the social, cultural, political and economic context. However, as a respond of these kinds of tours, many tourists have started to request that their tours should be designed to look above those walls in order for them to understand and explore the realities of the countries they are visiting, as well as to think about the negative aspects of their trip. Many tourists have started to ask for something different, for real experience that guarantees

that their visit is contributing positively to the local communities and local development.

Tourists who wish to be a part of the Alternative Tourism movement seek to challenge a commercially based structure of tourism grounded in the pursuit of pure profit. The aim of is to redefine tourism in order to recapture its original spirit of connecting people together, building solidarity among peoples and forming a vehicle of intercultural exchange. In Palestine challenging this commercial structure is particularly relevant because commercial companies which do tourism wholly for profit tend to 'follow the money' and adhere to Israel's ideological tour guiding agenda.

There is no doubt that Palestine has been affected by the negative trends in tourism. Mass tourism has for a long history proven to be an imperialist enterprise which has perpetuated Western and colonial stereotypes of people in the developing world. To make matters worse, Palestine has to constantly cope with the fact that it is being occupied and colonized. In many cases, resistance to this occupation has been unfairly described in the mass media as terrorist activity. Israel has kept this racist image



of the Palestinians alive while still cashing in on the emotional and spiritual needs of people everywhere to visit the Holy Land. It has therefore kept the industry within its control, while actively working to prevent Palestinian tourism operators from flourishing. This, however, is only typical of the global tourism industry. The powerful use the levers of the industry to rake in benefits while trampling over social, cultural, and economic rights.

If Palestine is to take its rightful place on the world map as a sovereign and democratic state, the world must recognize the legitimacy of the Palestinian story of dispossession and occupation at the hands of Israel, and hold Israel accountable for the violations of international law that it continues to commit. Alone, the Palestinians will be unable to find their freedom, found a viable state, or develop a strong economy. Like so many oppressed peoples, Palestinians need the support of individuals and civil society institutions from across the world to achieve their goals.

Advocates of alternative and justice tourism believe that the best way to establish support for this is through the development of

personal relationships that only person-to-person interaction at the grassroots level can produce. Once people have seen Palestine and befriended Palestinians, justice tourists, eco-tourists, and even mainstream tourists (such as pilgrims), can return to their countries in possession of the knowledge so long denied them by Western stereotypes and by the mainstream media, and begin to teach others what they know.

It is clear and obvious that tourism has an extremely important role to play in building a country's image. It can be one of the key instruments in developing positive perceptions of Palestine internationally and an essential element in preserving and enhancing national and local pride and spirit, whilst contributing to the health of its cultural institutions and heritage.

In other words, tourism must, in every context, and particularly in the context of Palestine, cease to be devoid of a sense of social responsibility. The place travelled to must be seen within the wider context in which it exists. In the case of Palestine, tourism cannot be kept any longer to the confines of emotional and sentimental site seeing while avoiding the fact that

it is the location and theatre of one of the world's most longstanding conflicts, the resolution of which could define how world peace itself can be brought about.

However, Palestinians have been denied the chance to accurate the full socioeconomic benefits from their natural, historical, and cultural endowments. This is due to the fact that conventional tour programs focus on sites inside Israel, and exclude those located in the Palestinian Territories. The majority of tours are arranged, in most cases, by and through Israeli agencies who provide only Israeli guides following the clear instructions to avoid Palestinian areas and people. The tourists in this case are given only one day to visit Bethlehem, East Jerusalem and in some cases Jericho, while the rest of their trip is spent in Israel proper. This experience to many tourists, especially Christian Pilgrims, does not gratify their passion for the Holy Land and, therefore, sometimes come short from fulfilling their long life dream to feel the Holy Land and not just see it.

Moreover, the result of the Israeli occupation during the last decades caused the Palestinian sector to suffer from the lack of an adequate



JAI Campaigns officer guiding international youth visitors site seeing. Source: JAI

infrastructure, the absence of planning, deficiency in tourism policy formulation, difficulty in initiation of vital promotional activities and insufficient number of Palestinian working in tourism industry such as guides and agencies compared to the Israeli one.

Despite all constrains which prevailed during the last years the Palestinians entrepreneurial spirit towards tourism has never lessened. Alternative Tourism is one entrepreneurial quest which aims at deepening the understanding of visitors to the Holy Land of the lives of the indigenous people there. Therefore, the mechanism pursued by the Alternative Tourism to achieve its goal is, simply, to spend more time in the Pales-

tinian Territories. The tour packages developed in accordance with the goals of Alternative Tourism should be designed to cover the socio-cultural aspects of the local community to better convey the current situation.

In Palestine, the need for an alternative tourism that uncovers the reality of the occupation is particularly pressing. Tourism that allows for human encounters has shown that the transforming power that such travelling can have for both hosts and guests. Alternative methods of tourism encourage people to tell their stories to the world and enable tourists both to see with their own eyes the difficult living conditions of their hosts and to discover the rich cultural and human

side of these communities. Interaction with Palestinians helps to break down the negative image that the media disseminates and that interaction also promotes respect for the local communities. Visitors are given the opportunity to have a first-hand experience of the occupation and to better understand the situation.

The main goal of Alternative-Tourism development in Palestine should be to ensure the sustainable economic, social, cultural development of the area, whilst also ensuring the welfare of the Palestinian people. In order to create this new tourism industry in Palestine, the following concepts must never be far from the mind of either the organisers or the participants;

- The Israeli monopoly of Palestinian tourism, specifically pilgrimages, must be challenged. This can be achieved through outreach to the Christian churches of the world and the media. It is also important to ensure the continued cooperation of visitors once they have returned to their home countries. For example by speaking in churches, promoting the idea to friends and through writing articles for the media.
- The direct benefits of tourism, both cultural and economic, must be able to reach the Palestinian population as a whole. In order to achieve this alternative tourism operator must ensure that they reach out to the local community and constantly push to find new ways to integrate more and more families and individuals into their programs.
- The international churches must be reached not only abroad (as mentioned above) but also through their local branches in Palestine. The



Internationals and locals in East Jerusalem through alternative tours. Source: ATG

idea that churches can support their local congregations by becoming more integrated with the growing alternative tourism sector must be promoted within Palestine. The formation of a church related tourism network is the best method of achieving this. In this forum Alternative Tourism operators can discuss community needs and participation as well as encouraging the churches to reach out to their sister branches abroad.

- Code of conduct for both participants and operators must be promoted in order to guarantee that the Alternative tourism sector will not betray its principals and will instead achieve its goals. Although this code should not be seen as a holy writ, it is important to establish broad guidelines that ensure that neither the visiting or local participants are exploited.
- All alternative tourism operators must be politically aware and educated enough to be able to challenge the 'War on Terror' rhetoric that is arguably the most damaging and misleading concept in modern 'East-West' relations. Through workshops and the circulation of publications, all tour guides working in the sector must understand the importance of promoting the similarities between peoples of 'East and West.' This should instead be replaced by a narrative of 'haves and have nots' which allows people to feel that the problems of the modern world are shared by all common people.

Taking these concepts to the point where they are well established throughout the industry is no small task. Without them, however, Alternative tourism will slowly slide into resembling its more ruthless and profit concern counterpart - mass tourism. It is therefore vital

that the alternative tourism sector use these concepts as a guiding light for honest self evaluation.

In a country like Palestine where a small population has the potential to welcome a vast number of tourists, these policies and processes must be integrated with the fabric of government as well as community for the overall development of the country. This general framework must include a cultural, social, economic, environmental, educational, administrative and infrastructural policy.

Palestinian tourism has not yet been able in any way to exploit its enormous potential for attracting international, local and regional tourists. The current state of the Palestinian tourism infrastructure is incompatible with the tourist attractions available. There has been a tragic absence of planning in the tourism sector because of 42 years of occupation.

Tourism in Palestine has been an Israeli monopoly since the establishment of the State of Israel in Palestine. Palestinians are often discounted as "Arabs" or branded as "terrorists" in order to justify the occupation and colonization of Palestine. In this way, Israeli tourism in the occupied territories has served as one more means of ignoring the basic rights of the Palestinian people, especially of their right to resist, to benefit from their own resources, to maintain their cultural heritage and to be freely employed and mobile in seeking that employment.

Although, the Palestinian tourism sector has not witnessed considerable growth since 1967, due to the restrictive policies imposed by the Israeli occupation authorities, Alternative Tourism in Palestine has the potential to be one of the main pillars of the Palestinian economy. Therefore, Alternative Tourism has an extremely important role to play in building and developing a positive image of Palestine interna-

tionally and an essential element in preserving and enhancing national and local pride and spirit, whilst contributing to the health of its cultural institutions and heritage.

In Alternative Tourism, it is necessary to concentrate on the political realities of the conflict and to try to understand them. Only by living what Palestinians experience all the time can a visitor come to recognize the injustices that are their daily bread. With this understanding comes a desire to try to help end the accumulated injustices in Palestine: the constant humiliations, colonization and settlement building, the refugee situation and the dramatic consequences of the growing apartheid wall, human rights abuses and other realities of the highly institutionalized occupation.

Alternative Tourism can facilitate cultural dialogue, harmony and understanding among people. More in-depth knowledge of other peoples' culture will stimulate understanding and a wish to co-operate. The creation of a positive image for a tourist destination, making it better known both in the world in general and in the target markets of tourism specifically, will effectively help to increase the demand for all products and services, including tourism services and products of the country in question.

Alternative tourism is already being established in Palestine from the grass roots up. In order for this to continue however, the democratic participation of both the Palestinian people and the tourists themselves must be developed and guaranteed. With this in place, Alternative tourism will help to create a new economic and social paradigm between the 'consumer tourist' and the local being 'consumed.'

An interview with Mr George Abu Aita General Manager - Paradise Hotel - Bethlehem by Ibrahim Hannounh - JAI



Do you have any idea about the percentage of tourists who stay in Bethlehem compared to those who stay in Israel?

Not more than 10%! Whereas more than 60% of the tourists and internationals who enter Israel come to Bethlehem. The majority of tourists stay at a hotel in Israel. This is due to various factors including: number of hotels available in the Bethlehem area, where around 2000 rooms are available, compared to between 50 to 60 thousand rooms that are available in Israel! Infrastructure is another factor in terms of streets, restrictions on movement and going to and from Jerusalem, available restaurants and buses...etc. Nevertheless, around 30% of the hotel's running costs in Israel are subsidized by their government. This is not available from the Palestinian government, which is dependent mostly on international funding and subsidies!

What kind of tourists stay in Bethlehem and through whom do they come?

They are mainly pilgrims who come through tourist agencies and offices in Palestine and Israel, who have co-operation with agencies and offices from the respective countries where pilgrims

come from. Pilgrims mainly come through Churches and Church related offices.

I attended a conference/workshop on tourism a few days ago and the statistics show that many tourists who come nowadays are Europeans, mainly from Eastern Europe - around 13% and around 11% Italians. Whereas very few Americans come, around 2-3%, and the same for British and Germans!

Very few groups come for alternative tourism or solidarity groups come through very few local organizations some of which include the Alternative Tourism Group, YMCA-YWCA Joint Advocacy Initiative etc.

Do you see tourists' perspective and mentality changing over time with changing political conditions?

Around 90% of the tourists or pilgrims whom I have met at the hotel know nothing about the conflict or what is going on or even that Bethlehem is part of Palestine! Most are not even interested in knowing. This usually depends on the tourist agency that sets the program and schedule for them such as whom to meet, where to go and what to focus on! The guide, even the Palestinian one, has to be committed to the program and instructions given by the agency, so as not to lose his job! He is usually not permitted to talk about politics or to explain or to show how the occupation affects realities. Such instructions come from counter agencies at the tourists' respective countries that the program tourists have signed up for.

Do you talk to tourists and try to change their perspective or understanding of the conflict and life in Palestine?



Israeli army tanks at the Paradise Hotel parking - 2002

Most of the time I am not permitted to! We are not allowed to interfere in the tourist' groups' programs or give any information.

In the end, this hotel is my family business and we do not want to lose groups and cooperation with agencies. We have many staff and this business provides income for many families here, hence we unfortunately need to prioritize maintaining relations and business with agencies over delivering a political message to tourists!

Once we had an exhibition at the hotel with pictures of the hotel under fire, set by the Israeli tanks in 2002. The agencies we deal with and the tourists groups asked to remove it. Most tourists were not even interested in looking at them or even hearing the story!

What political conditions (checkpoints, financial crisis, wars...etc) affect the number and kind of tourists who come and stay in Bethlehem?

At some periods, the number of tourists decreased due to intense political and security conditions and changes. For instance during the Hamas take over of the government, many tourists were afraid to come. Nevertheless, decreases were noticed during the War on Gaza in 2009, the start of the second Intifada 2000 (Palestinian uprising), Gulf War 1991, War on Lebanon 2006...etc. No tourists or very few tourists could manage to come in during severe curfews and sieges in Bethlehem which used to last for more than 40 days!

Besides this are international crisis that sharply reduce the number of



Tourists harassed by Israeli soldiers at checkpoint – Hebron. Source: JAI

travelers and tourists almost everywhere including the Swine Flu, financial crisis...etc.

Are you optimistic about the future? Why or why not?

No I am not! There are no political solutions or stability on the horizon! A war might be launched against Iran or again against Gaza, or a third Intifada (uprising) seems to be about to rise in the West Bank against the Israeli occupation and practices. All this would definitely affect the number of tourists, as it is strongly related to political stability and security.

Do you have any further related missing points you would like to mention?

Palestinian, Arab and International Media are still weak in delivering the correct image about Palestine. I believe they should play a bigger role in this. Although we are under occupation with its practices and movement restrictions, people from around the world should be educated on these real conditions and safety and life in such conditions! We hear from tourists that they used to think it is an ongoing war in Palestine, with shootings all over and it is unsafe to be here,

while that is not the fact. Many did not used to know where Palestine was and confused it with Pakistan! Many also think that we are still riding horses as our main means of transportation! Others feel unsafe coming to Palestine, thinking that the Palestinians are terrorists and that they will be killed!



Guide perspective Leading tourists into Palestine and the Holy Land

By: Wolfgang Wittrock, Ph. D.

My first journey to the Holy Land took place in 1970, as part of my training for rectory in the Protestant Church. As a young theologian, for me this was not a docile pilgrimage, but rather a means of tracing ostensive links to Biblical theology and its background of historically critical demystification. We were all enthusiastic about the opportunity to freely visit sanctuary sites, to bathe in the Mediterranean and Dead Sea and to encounter people of different biographical, ethnic, religious and political backgrounds.

We were aware that all this was “thanks to” the Six-Day War in 1967 - only a few years back. We did not, however, reflect this in its controversy, namely, that the great new freedom of Israel was on the expense of the people in the conquered and occupied territories. Contrarily, to us the Israelis collectively were like the admired David, defying the threatening Goliath of the Arab world (who was embodied in the Egyptian president Nasser). While I personally had refused to serve in war and disdained military violence, I saw myself powerless to apply this conviction to my view on Israeli politics.

For this, I saw Arabs as too hostile, which I came to feel very personally when my wife and I took a bus to Nablus (which back then, even though known to be dangerous, was possible). We were recognized as foreigners, and once some approached us and learned that we were German, as a notion of

courtesy we heard “Deutsche gut! Hitler gut!” Shivers went down my spine; this still happens today when I hear such colloquialism on Palestinian grounds. (Even though I now know that least of the people truly grasp what Hitler Germany stood for - he was against Jews in any case.)


The Palestinian people as a distinct political reality (as opposed to the diffuse uneasy category of plain “Arabs”) only fully came to my awareness after the terrorist attacks at the Olympics in Munich in 1972, as well as several assaults and plane abductions. By now, I had seen the problems of the Israeli occupation much more clearly, even though its condemnation was counteracted by Palestinian terror assaults (embodied in Arafat). However, can, and even must, a people threatened by terror not defend itself? Such cautious assessment of Palestinian resistance to the Israeli occupation in Germany is present even today. I believe this to be the result of the devastating experiences of my generation, witnesses of the Holocaust: It would have to be a truly “clean” resistance, without external violence nor repression within it, to be met with thorough approval.

The first Intifada towards the end of the 1980’s seemed to very closely resemble this ideal, even though stone-throwing children and youth, and especially death-bringing fighters, did strain my tolerance. I was more relieved when Palestinian resistances refuted fighting and commenced diplomatic dispute. Only a few years before Arafat’s

speech at the U.N., as well as political acceptance of the PLO would have been entirely unimaginable! Likewise were the negotiations in Madrid, which gave new hope for a far end to the conflict, and even a peaceful and tranquil neighborhood. It followed the unexpected breakthrough of the Oslo Accords, and finally a way out of the political-moral-emotional dilemma of a ‘friend of Palestine,’ who did not want to become an ‘enemy to Israel’ seemed to be coming about. I viewed this too uncritically, as did many of my kind, taking this as an indication for peace at last.

Both of my succeeding trips to the HOLY LAND were at about that time: the turn of the year 1994/95 and January 1996. In each, the character of political investigation and the encounter of people, clearly dominated over touristic and biblical motives. This however inevitably diluted our hopes for peace: People in both Palestine and Israel were much more skeptical than Germans. It became more and more clear, that the underlying problems, were nowhere near a solution. Instead, these had been postponed to “final status” negotiations. In particular my second trip was overshadowed by the assault on Rabin in November 1995 and a terrible series of suicide attacks in the fall of 1996.

What became clear: inner-society’s resistance against the peace process was much stronger than vigor for it, among both the Israeli and the Palestinian people (even though this came from a small more vigorous minority on both sides). With



the election of Netanyahu, Israel's "no" to an equitable peace and a two-state solution moved to official politics. Even Barak's election could not change this, who's incumbency had its tragic peak in the Camp David summit of 2000. Whoever had not resigned until this point, did with the irrevocable mandate of Sharon and the outbreak of the Second Intifada. Its use of armature further counteracted acceptance of Western "friends of Palestine." Arafat's inability (and possibly even reluctance) to undermine Palestinian terror attacks, made his sad death in the bombed Mukata almost seem inevitable.

As the topic of peace, the interest for journeys to Israel and Palestine also froze: repeated advertisements could not gather enough participants to form a travel group. (Of course this was also due to the increased risk of witnessing violence.) Paradoxically, it was the re-occupation of the West Bank by Israelis militia in April 2002, that brought about a turnaround, maybe because it had especially affected our parochial partners in and around Bethlehem. With our motto "Travel of Solidarity Jerusalem" we could appeal to many people - particularly those in the "Jerusalemverein" (a German association supporting Evangelical Christians in the HOLY LAND) and could organize a trip for November 2002. We wanted to pass our message to our partners in the Palestinians parts of Jerusalem but also peace-friends in Israel: "Even if at this point, there seems to be no way out of this dead-end road - persevere, we are on your side; with our visit we want to show you: You are not forgotten by the world!"

The feedback was overwhelming: Almost anywhere we went, people would greet us with the same word: "You are the first group in over two years" - their joy and gratitude often left me with a feeling of embarrassment. Since then, the continuous realization of such trips for encounter and solidarity,

became a priority for me. In October 2003 we went under the title "Learning Target: Dual Solidarity" (the aim was to signalize how solidarity with the Palestinians is not to be confused with a generalized condemnation of Israelis; it is to be accounted for with the honest and essential concerns of both sides, in the eyes of the other). More travels were pursued in October 2004, May 2006 and 2007, the change of years 2007/08 and April 2009. The next journey is planned for October 2010.

Naturally, the theme "Solidarity" for our trips was extended in each journey, while it does remain constitutionally in all the travels that I guide. Along with this, I want to avoid becoming subject to the paternalistic danger of a benevolent attitude of solidarity. Such is inexpensive for those of us that return to our peaceful mid-European home, after only a week. Neither do I want to pursue voyeurism of sordid to those in Palestine, nor tourism of outrage to Israel. I find it ominous when someone proclaims his or her "omniscient" political and moral views and blames everything seen and experienced in the Palestinian territories on the Israeli occupation (even though the occupation undoubtedly is the fundamental problem of the situation). Instead, it is much more important to me, to learn the tender affection and bond to experiences and estimations of the people we meet. Partly I also want to encourage critical questioning. Ultimately however, it is usually sympathy, condolence, sorrow and perplexity which remains. In this respect, I return enriched and animated from each journey - but also mentally and emotionally strained.

I find it equally important to instead of only spending time in sterile seminary and church rooms, actually participate in people's lives. This comprises attempting to walk by foot rather than only taking the bus, as well as visiting schools, taking part in classes, and staying with local families (it could be an

option to try overnight visits). We also engage in services in church, meetings of Christian communities, festivities, concerts... Particularly special are those times, when we can contribute to gatherings, rather than just being consuming. For example, for New Year 2008 in Bethlehem, we organized a day for our group and local families: we had a service, joint dinner, home visits, as well as a final shared concert in the Nativity Church. In every instance, it matters to truly be involved in life, which also means, experiencing joy and social gatherings, as well as giving something back. Solidarity is not a mere declaration, but also means sharing a piece of life and giving strength and hope.

Finally: It became a personal priority for me, to remain conscious, that despite it being such a troubled and torn area, the region we travel to is after all the HOLY LAND. By no means does this have to be reflected in unpolitical pilgrimage and archaeological tourism, but the holy sites and biblical transmissions from the Old and New Testament always give incentive to think about the present connection to the episodes, the place has witnessed before. The Dominus Fleuit opposite the Old City of Jerusalem and the word of Jesus in Lucas, 19, 41ff always represent an important example of this. Even though the doubt of historical "realness" always are a reason for me to challenge the mere, good-willed following of facts towards a more proximity to reality for today.

Beside the biblical sites, I see significance in the diversity of the area, in all its facets of beauty and paucity, along with the human impact in this country - in both, the honor of the Old City Walls and the monstrosity of the Separation Wall. Here I feel new blessing and creational gratification, but also the scream for salvation and grieve for new creation.

After all, these journeys to me are a travel into the TRUTH OF THE HOLY LAND.

An electronic interview with Mr. Anwar Shomali



Mr. Anwar Shomali is the General Director of Anastasias Tours in Bethlehem and an experienced tour guide.

The following questions were answered by him.

Your experience as a tour guide:

My experience as a tour guide has not been a long one. I obtained the General License, although, it was not my major aim. I guided several Groups from 1996 till 2000, but it was during my free time. My main work was in the office doing all land arrangements for our groups. On the other hand, my experience as a Tour Operator, specialized in the religious-cultural tours, goes back to 1979. I have also participated in several courses to improve my historical and archaeological knowledge in the Stadium Biblicum in Jerusalem (1988-1989), the Spanish Institute of Biblical Research in Jerusalem (1990-1991) and the Bible College (1995-1996).

How did the blockades, closures, checkpoints and political conditions affect

the number and attitude of tourists coming to the Bethlehem area and Palestine in general?

It is obvious that since the closures and the construction of the wall, the number of tourists coming in to Bethlehem has decreased notably, especially US citizens, who are told beforehand that the Palestinian territories are not safe and that their travel insurance does not cover them if they go into those areas. Besides, the harassment that some tourists are subject to at the checkpoints entering and leaving Bethlehem such as security checks, long queues, passport checks, even police dogs check-up etc. also deter visitors.

The closures have also affected the work and delivery of our Palestinian guides who are subject to security checks every time they go out to receive their groups and furthermore they are forbidden to go out when there is a general closure on the territories

The hotels, souvenir shops, restaurants and consequently all business related to tourism, have been affected by those procedures of closures and the wall.

How has the tourist's mentality and perspectives changed with days (how was it before, how has it developed and how is it today)?

The tourist is part of the international community. He/she hears news and he/she is aware of the problem we are experiencing in this part of the world. In my opinion, western mentality does not approve of the closures, barricades, walls (that of Berlin) and when they see the wall surrounding Bethlehem, they ex-

press their disappointment and of course disagreement and some of them start to look at the situation here through a different perspective.

Do you give alternative tours showing and explaining about the Palestinians life conditions and effects of the occupation, and do tourists love and prefer such tours or prefer only the religious historical ones? Do you know why or have you ever asked tourist groups why?

We are handling religious-cultural groups, coming mainly on Pilgrimage to visit the Holy Places that recall the life of Jesus and the establishment of the First Church. The program they are following does not include any political items, although this subject can be discussed during the tour, but in a moderate way.

Are you free, to some extent and permitted to give information to tourists as you want regarding Palestine, or are you, and usually tour guides, restricted with the given schedule, set by partner travel agencies, on what to say or not to say? Why?

I have to say that we do not have any kind of restrictions set out by our partner agencies, but we prefer to fill our program first. The kind of tourist we are used to handling are middle aged (from 60 upwards) and their main interest is purely religious, although, as I mentioned before, political, social, religious and economic issues could be discussed easily without any restrictions on the guide.



Guided tourist group – just outside the Church of Nativity - Bethlehem

Do you try to affect tourist perspectives on the political situation (advocating or making supporters or believers) and how effective do you feel you are?

Tourism is a direct means of communication with different cultures. Our Tour Operators, Guides, Bus Drivers, Hotels, Restaurants, Souvenir Shops, Vendors are the inter-mediators and ambassadors who are relaying, through their jobs, the picture of Palestine to those cultures. In my opinion, we

must educate in a right way those «Ambassadors» as they will be responsible afterwards to present the right image of Palestine, thus creating a strong solidarity in favor of our country.

Do you have other related information or perspectives, points or comments?

I would like to send a message to all those concerned with Tourism in the Holy Land: This Land is considered sacred by the three monotheistic religions and conse-

quently is visited by people from those religions. As natives of this land, we have the duty to respect and help our visitors, making their touring as easy as possible, keeping them away from the consequences of the internal conflicts. We all should give them facilities and not create obstacles for them. Their stay among us should be a memorable one so that they can come again and send more people to our country. Tourism is a strong means to economical stability and which will eventually lead to political stability as well.

*Closed shops at Shuhada Street -
Hebron.*



Tourism and Economy in the occupied Palestinian territories

**Analyzed interview
by Marika Mikulak – JAI
volunteer – with Louis - a
shopkeeper in Bethlehem**

Due to its millenary history and religious significance, Bethlehem attracts masses of tourists annually. In any other place, tourism would be a driving force for the economy and the main source of income for the local population, in other words like the goose that lays the golden eggs. Indeed, around 80% of its population is employed in tourism, not because they are able to earn their living this way, but due to the lack of other options; the unemployment rate amounts to 30% in the West Bank. Tourism in Bethlehem presents its own unique patterns; it is like an organized system, which excludes some and includes others.

Usually, a tourist bus arrives in the centre of Bethlehem and parks in the close proximity of the Nativity Church – undoubtedly, the main attraction. Since the time for visiting the site is extremely limited, tourists are shown around the Church, come back to the bus straight after and drive away. Only approximately 60% of all tourists stand a chance to visit the Milk Grotto – recognized as a second attraction - located on the street parallel to the Nativity Church. There is literally no time left to walk around the remarkable Old City in Bethlehem, to stop by at Palestinian restaurants, to try the local falafel or drink Arabic coffee, to purchase souvenirs from local shops, and so forth. Instead, the group is taken to one of a few big souvenir shops in Bethlehem where the tour guides manage to obtain up to 35-40% commission from every single

product purchased by the people from their group.

Undoubtedly, these big shops cannot complain about the lack of business. Buses full of tourists, who are willing to purchase olive wood or mother of pearl products from the birthplace of Jesus, stop regularly by them. Unaware tourists incur prices twice as high as in other shops since they must cover not only the cost of production, but also the high commission.

What about dozens of small shops in the Bethlehem Old City? What are their takings?

They hardly get any business. Those shops located closer to the Nativity Church, or to be more precise on the way from the Nativity Church to the place where buses usually park, have definitely more chances of getting some business

*Closed shops in Bethlehem -
near manager square.
Photo by: JAI volunteer.*



than those in the Old City. The customers of these disadvantaged shops are mostly locals and a few internationals that volunteer or work around the Bethlehem area.

“Tourists come for half a day from Jerusalem or even Sharm-el-Sheik. They visit the place in a hurry. They don’t spend much money here; they don’t go to restaurants here. They visit only one big souvenir shop. For them, Bethlehem is like a bus station where one stops only for a short while to see the Church” – an owner of the shop on the way to the Milk Grotto states.

Prior to the second intifada (the Palestinian uprising) that broke out in 2000, Bethlehem streets were full of tourists who, unlike today, were staying there overnight. Today, they fill hotels and guest houses in Jerusalem (almost all of them Is-

raeli-run) and come exclusively to see the Nativity Church for about 20-30 minutes. In 2007 for instance, merely 15% of the 509,980 visitors to Bethlehem stayed overnight in the city.¹ This pattern combined with the Wall, checkpoints and other movement restrictions is destroying the hotel and souvenir industry in Bethlehem.

“As such, it is much easier to visit Bethlehem as part of a tour group that can be bussed in from Israel controlled areas and bussed out again, receiving preferential treatment at the checkpoints.”²


Guidebooks do not offer any help toward encouraging tourists to stay in Bethlehem and the West Bank as a whole for longer. For instance,

1. Stop the Wall Campaign (2008, pg: 18) “Development or normalization”. Accessed at <http://www.stopthewall.org/downloads/PRDPcritique.pdf>.

2. Ibid, pg: 19.

in Israel and the Palestinian Territories by the Lonely Planet, one is advised to go on an organized tour to Bethlehem from Jerusalem rather than travel on their own. This is despite the fact that travelling from Jerusalem to Bethlehem is easy and inexpensive.

All in all, both tourists and those excluded from the system largely lose out. The former because they do not have a chance to experience life in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and leave the Middle East with their unchanged points of view and the latter since they struggle to make ends meet.



Nativity Church – Bethlehem,
Palestine

WHICH COUNTRY IS BETHLEHEM IN?!

Survey carried out by Marika Mikulak and Rahel Dette – JAI volunteers

The situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) is complicated, unclear and confusing for both tourists and pilgrims. The mainstream media does not necessarily provide people with unbiased information that would help in creating a clear image of this part of the world.

Imagine that an average person decides to visit the Holy Land. Firstly, he has to buy a flight ticket. When he scrolls down the options of airport names on the airlines website looking for Palestine, he cannot find anything as there is no functioning airport in the OPT. The only options remaining are either Amman in Jordan or Tel Aviv in Israel.

Furthermore, since the OPT are

under the Israeli occupation, all passage of peoples in and out of the Territories is controlled by Israel. This means that the only officials that he will encounter on the border with Jordan or at the checkpoints are Israelis.

Eventually, he buys the ticket to Israel. Upon arrival at the Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv he is subject to invasive and interfering Israeli control. He should never dare say that he is planning to go to the West Bank as it may cause, in the best scenario, some delay (see another article). Most tourists direct their steps towards a must-see city, namely Jerusalem, and usually from there go on a day trip to Bethlehem. Since the line between the State of Israel and the West Bank is not clearly demarcated and checkpoints are located inside the West Bank rather than on the internationally recognized border, tourists

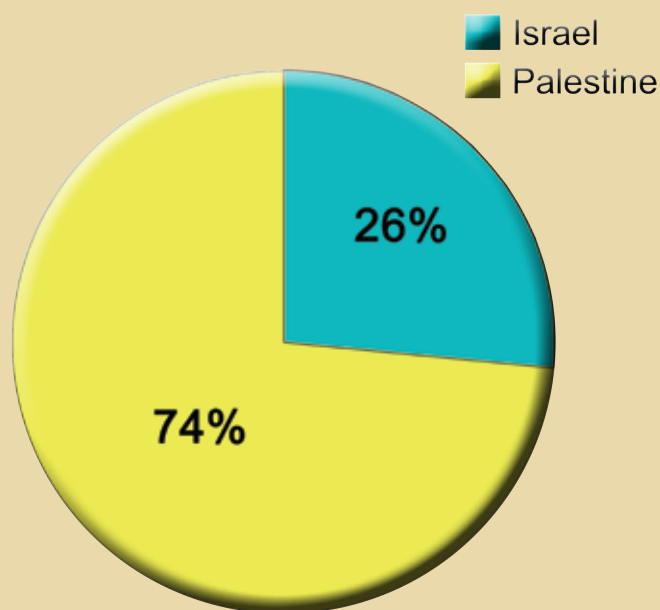
might not even realize that Bethlehem is not in Israel. At the end of the day, the city where Jesus' birth took place is a stone's throw away, merely 10 km, from Jerusalem.

Consequently, people tend to get confused and many ask themselves: 'Where is this Palestine that people talk about?'

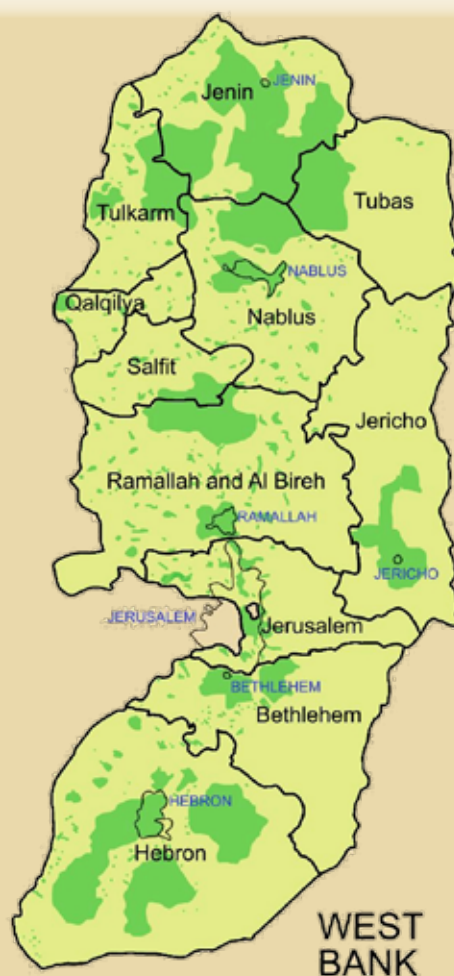
The results of the survey conducted in front of the Nativity Church in Bethlehem of 50 respondents from 22 different countries and from different age groups confirm the confusion and lack of awareness of tourists to the Holy Land. When asked which 'country'¹ Bethlehem is in, a portion of the respondents seemed visibly hesitant and did not really like the question:

1. The word 'country' is put in brackets as Palestine is not a recognized state. The correct term is the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Yet, in spoken language the OPT is referred to as Palestine.

Which 'country' is Bethlehem in?



GAZA STRIP



WEST BANK

***‘What country?
Is that a tricky question?
I don’t want to answer that
survey again’ – one respondent
stated.***

Clearly, the question was problematic and not straightforward. While the majority of the respondents (76%) realized that they were in Palestine, the remainder (26%) believed that they were still in Israel. Some of them were fully convinced that their answer was correct:

‘In Palestine, ha ha [laughter], no, in Israel of course’

‘My husband thinks it’s not in Israel, but it is definitely in Israel’

For the Palestinian people, the

fact that one in four people call their homeland Israel is undoubtedly sad. But when one looks at maps provided by any national park, hostels, hotels, and information centres in Israel, neither West Bank nor Gaza is marked on them. Therefore, it is understandable that people get confused.

The respondents were also asked about their opinion on the levels of security and their feelings on their trip to Bethlehem before coming here. The majority (66%) stated that they were not worried and they did not expect it to be dangerous. Still, the remainder (34%) claimed the opposite: they were worried and thought it would be dangerous to visit Bethlehem. When asked if they feel safe, 88% of the respon-

dents answered positively, while 12% either skipped this question or said that they had not spent enough time in the place to ascertain that.

‘If I had known we would come to Palestine, I wouldn’t have come. I would be too scared. The media shows it in this way. But now, when I am here, I feel very safe and I am glad I came’ – one respondent travelling on an organized tour stated

Not everyone has time and is interested enough to follow the news from the alternative sources. The majority rely on the mainstream media which clearly fails to provide a real picture of the current situation in the OPT. As a result, stereotypes and wrong images have been created.

The Code of Conduct for Travellers to the Holy Land

A Palestinian Initiative

Responsible and just forms of tourism offer communities opportunities to share their cultures, tell their stories, request solidarity and foster tolerance and greater understanding. This is the principle that has shaped this Code of Conduct which has been developed to inform pilgrims and tourists of the reality of Palestine and Palestinians and to seek their support in using tourism to transform contemporary injustices. At the same time, the Code aims to raise awareness amongst Palestinian tourism stakeholders of how tourism in Palestine can be transformed and enhanced to truly benefit both hosts and visitors.

The Context of Palestine

The establishment of just and responsible tourism for Palestine and Palestinians requires an understanding of political context and history – for it is these that set the constraints and barriers within which Palestinian tourism has to operate. The Code addresses these directly – and, by doing, so attempts to overcome them.

Palestine is a unique tourist destination, its long history, religious significance and natural beauty making it an amazing place to visit. Palestine's importance derives partly from the fact that it is home to the three monotheistic and Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Every year it attracts many pilgrims, people of faith and scholars who visit the holy places. Secular tourists come to explore the historical sites, Palestine's vibrant cities, rural life and nature reserves.

However, since the beginning of the 20th century Palestine has passed complicated political circumstances. These have included the creation of Israel in 1948 and

the 1967 war. As a result of the latter Israel occupied the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip. These events have created catastrophic political, economic and social facts which have deeply affected the life of the Palestinian people, most of whom became refugees. In many ways Palestine itself was simply wiped off the map, historic Palestine coming to be known as Israel. In this context tourism became a political tool in the supremacy and domination of the Israeli establishment over land and people and an instrument for preventing the Palestinians from enjoying the benefits and the fruits of the cultural and human interaction and encounter that tourism thrives upon. Despite the fact that Israel signed the Oslo Agreements with the PLO in the 1990's and recognised the establishment of the Palestinian Authority to administer some of the Palestinian territories, namely the West Bank and Gaza Strip, many areas of life in those areas are still under Israeli control. For example, Israel controls all access to Palestine (land and sea borders as well as access from the airport), most of the Palestinian water resources, all movement of people and goods from, to and within Palestine. These facts have significant impacts on the development of tourism in the Palestinian territories and the dissemination of information to tourists. Jerusalem as the heart of tourism was illegally annexed to Israel, filled with illegal settlements, besieged, surrounded by the Apartheid Wall and checkpoints, denied free access and is now isolated from its social surroundings.

Despite all this, the touristic, historic, and holy places found in Israel and the Palestinian territories are united. They cannot be separated from each other. In this regard what we are asking tourists to do

is to visit both Israel and Palestine rather than chose to visit just one or the other. This is the route towards more fairness and justice.

Tourism in Palestine provides tourists with a particularly rewarding and enriching experience. Not only may the tourist discover the beauty and hospitality of the country but also come to encounter some of the political, economic, and social facts on the ground that shape the daily lives of Palestinians. This is as it should be for much can be gained – both by tourists and by their Palestinian hosts – from a proper relationship between the two. Too often the contact is very slight, consisting of rapid, coach driven, visits to the Nativity church in Bethlehem (with a souvenir shop on the way) – a style of tourism that derives from the fact that much of itinerary is controlled by Israel and the processes of the Israeli tourism industry. Our Code, on the other hand, seeks to contribute to a more general effort to re-engage the tourist with Palestinian land and people in such a way that will benefit local communities, reduce over exploitation of a small number of iconic sites, and also reduce the pollution that derives from coach driven mass tourism in the Palestinian towns and cities (especially Bethlehem).

Therefore, we urge you, the tourists, to consider visiting the Palestinian cities, towns and villages and to allow time for encounters with the population living in these places. We believe that in this way, tourism will realise its potential for both you and us. At the same time, we call on the local community to interact positively and in a respectful way with pilgrims and tourists and to renounce small-mindedness and exploitation of visitors. We should all remember that visits by tourists to the country are opportunities for cultural, social and human exchange.

Preparation

To prepare your trip to Palestine, we encourage you to consider including the following in your preparation:

1. Choose an inclusive and balanced itinerary that allows you to visit and stay in different places.
2. Educate yourself by reading guidebooks, travel accounts and articles about current news and events.
3. Establish contact with Palestinians to get up-to-date information about the current situation, safety and local history, culture and customs.
4. Approach travelling with a desire to learn rather than just observe. Leave prejudices behind.

Your trip

Adopting a considerate attitude towards the people you encounter, the environment and host communities when travelling in Palestine helps to make sure that your trip is beneficial both for you as a tourist and for the hosts.

5. Your attitude:

- Respect and learn about the local culture. Although taking pictures is in general welcome, be aware of people's sensitivity about being photographed: always ask first for their approval.
- Observe local customs. Respect local dress codes and dress modestly.
- Interact and spend time with local people. Be aware that your cultural values may differ from theirs. They may, for example, have different concepts of time, personal space, communication and society. They are not wrong or inferior, just different.

6. Your behaviour:

- Be aware of short-sighted emotional reactions – such as giving money out of compassion. This

can be offensive.

- Make sure that you encounter and engage with the local communities who are struggling for the respect of their dignity.
- Support communities in a responsible way, without encouraging them to change their customs in order to adopt yours.
- When visiting holy sites, allow members of the respective religious community to guide you.

7. Your use of natural resources:

- Co-operate with locals in conserving precious natural resources. Commit yourself to a moderate use when possible.
- Be open to experience local standards rather than expecting to find the same conditions as in your home town and/or country.

8. Support the local economy:

- Appreciate local expertise by paying adequately.
- Buy local products.
- Contribute to ensuring that tourism has a beneficial outcome for the local community.
- Use local transportation, guides, inns, restaurants and markets to benefit the local economy. Consider giving tips where customary.

9. Remember that the people you encounter have lived under military occupation for many years. Be sensitive when discussing related topics and listen to their points of view.

10. Be inspired by the pilgrim's journey: take your time to live and experience the daily life of the local people.

Returning home

When you return from Palestine do not hesitate to share your experiences with friends and relations. Your Palestinian hosts will be very happy to know that you keep them in your mind and that you tell their and your stories. In

this way, you can strengthen the human side of tourism and enhance its benefits to communities and individuals.

11. Share your experience:

- Think of creating links between your community and the community you visited.
- Tell the stories of the people you met.
- Discuss and debrief with other members of your group (if you travelled together with others).
- Share with your family; inform your community; write articles.

12. Stick to the commitments you made during your trip:

- Remember the promises you made to the local people you met and honour them.
- Keep the people in your thoughts, pray for them and act when your actions are needed.

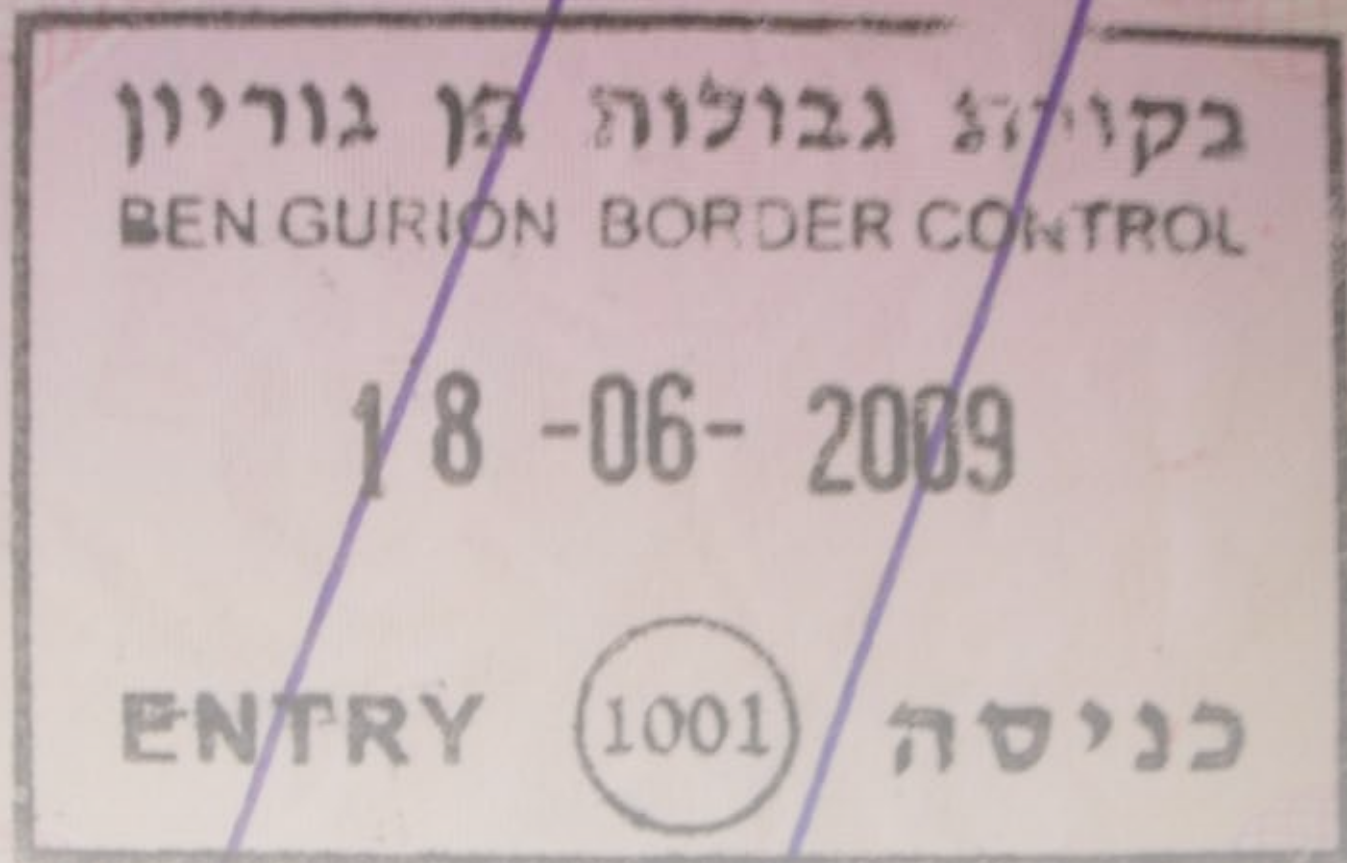
13. Allow yourself to be enriched by learning experiences:

- Question your stereotypes/generalisations, both the ones you had before the trip and the ones emerging from your experience abroad.
- Address prejudices and injustice where you meet them.

14. Take action:

- Learn about the involvement and responsibilities of your home country in the Middle East. Expose and confront them when they have been unfair.
- Address statements you do not agree with, such as inaccurate tourism brochures, stereotyped views of Palestine in conversation and inaccurate or biased media portrayals.

Confront statements you don't agree with, e.g. in tourism brochures, etc.



It is the Israeli policy to obstruct and prevent tourists and internationals from getting into the occupied Palestinian territories. Many of who are suspected as Palestinians' supporters, are rejected entry and deported from the airport and other boarders!

We need your feedback on our magazine :
www.jai-pal.org/Magazine_2010_Feedback_Form.php