



Bethlehem

 Bethlehem Governorate • Palestine

TRAVEL GUIDE



Overview

Bethlehem is one of the most visited pilgrimage towns in the world, honored by Christians as the birthplace of Jesus. It sits in the hills a few kilometers south of Jerusalem, in the Palestinian Authority-administered West Bank. Most visitors come on a half-day or full-day trip centered on the [Church of the Nativity](#) and the old town around it, then head back to Jerusalem the same day.

Beyond its religious core, Bethlehem is a working Palestinian town with a lively souq, family-run olive-wood workshops, and a growing scene of contemporary street art near the separation wall. Visitors cross from Jerusalem through an Israeli-run checkpoint, so bring a passport even on a short trip.

When to visit

Spring (March to June) and autumn (October and November) are mild and the best time to visit; summer is hot and dry, and winter is cool and rainy with occasional light snow.

The single biggest date on the calendar is **Christmas Eve**, when a procession arrives at Manger Square and a Midnight Mass is held at the [Church of the Nativity](#); Orthodox Christmas follows on 6-7 January. Book accommodation well ahead if visiting around either date, as the town fills up and the square is closed to general access during the services.

MONTH	CONDITIONS	DAY °C avg / max	NIGHT °C avg / min	
January	● Fair Fair for sightseeing	14° / 20° Feels like 11°	3° / -1°	Dry air · Calm winds
February	● Good Good for sightseeing	16° / 23° Feels like 12°	4° / 0°	Dry air · Calm winds
March	● Great Great for sightseeing	19° / 28° Feels like 16°	6° / 2°	Dry air · Calm winds
April	● Great Great for sightseeing	24° / 32°	9° / 5°	☀️ 21 sunny days · Dry air · Calm winds
May	● Great Great for sightseeing	29° / 36°	12° / 8°	☀️ 26 sunny days · Dry air · UV 9 (Very high)
June	● Great Great for sightseeing	32° / 37°	15° / 12°	☀️ 29 sunny days · UV 10 (Very high)
July	● Good Good for sightseeing	33° / 37°	17° / 16°	☀️ 31 sunny days · UV 10 (Very high) · Up to 7 days above 35°
August	● Good Good for sightseeing	33° / 37°	18° / 16°	☀️ 29 sunny days · Humid air · UV 9 (Very high) · Up to 5 days above 35°
September	● Great Great for sightseeing	31° / 36°	17° / 14°	☀️ 27 sunny days
October	● Great Great for sightseeing	28° / 33°	14° / 10°	☀️ 21 sunny days · Dry air · Calm winds
November	● Great Great for sightseeing	22° / 28°	10° / 6°	Dry air · Calm winds
December	● Good Good for sightseeing	17° / 22° Feels like 13°	6° / 1°	Dry air · Calm winds

Best months: March, April, May, June, September, October, November

Climate data: NASA POWER (MERRA-2) · 1996–2025

Top sights

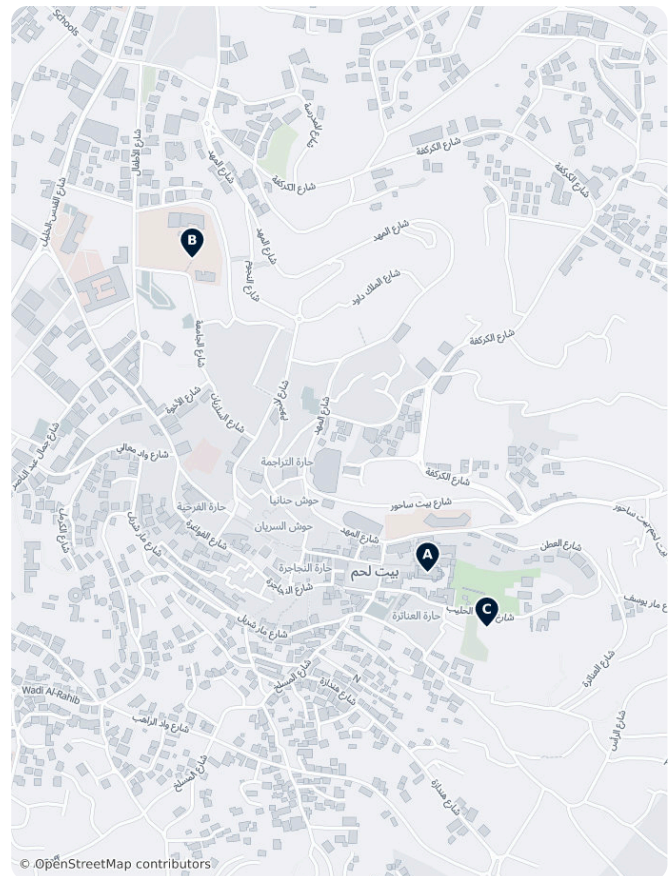
A Church of the Nativity is the town's centerpiece: a basilica built on the orders of Emperor Constantine over the grotto traditionally venerated as the birthplace of Jesus, and the oldest continuously used church in the Holy Land. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, it can mean a long queue to reach the small grotto below the altar, especially around midday.

B Bethlehem Old City spreads out from Manger Square around the church, its narrow lanes packed with spice stalls, olive-wood carving workshops, and souvenir shops. Give it an hour just to wander before or after the church.

C Chapel of the Milk Grotto is a small chapel a short walk from the church, built where tradition says Mary nursed the infant Jesus; pilgrims of several faiths still visit hoping for its blessing on fertility.

Follow **Star Street**, the traditional route pilgrims walked into town from Jerusalem, for a quieter look at Bethlehem's old stone houses and historic gates away from the main square.

Near the separation wall on the edge of town, look for works by Banksy and other street artists, including the well-known Armored Dove; the nearby Walled Off Hotel displays more art and context inside.



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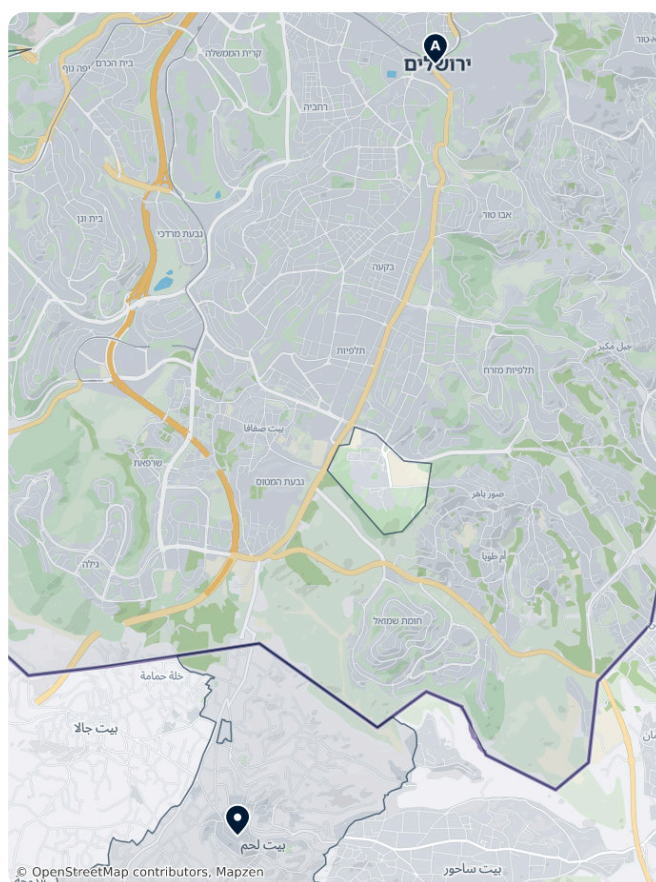
What to experience

- Watch a **nativity-scene carver** at work in one of the family-run olive-wood workshops around the Old City; many have been making the same carved figures for generations and will show you the process.
- Walk part of **Star Street**, the historic pilgrim route into town, tracing the path walked by visitors for centuries.
- Follow the stretch of the **separation wall** near the Walled Off Hotel to see its street art up close, including work by Banksy, and read the context panels along the way.
- Sip Arabic coffee or mint tea at a stall in the souq while watching the town's daily rhythm around Manger Square.

Day trips

Bethlehem sits close to several sites that make easy half-day or day trips, best reached by taxi or an organized tour.

- **A Jerusalem** - most visitors actually base themselves here and see Bethlehem as the day trip, but the reverse works too: the Old City and its holy sites are a 20-30 minute taxi ride away through the checkpoint.
- **Solomon's Pools**, three ancient stepped reservoirs a short drive south of town, once fed Jerusalem's water supply via a Roman-era aqueduct.
- **Herodion Ruins**, roughly 20 minutes southeast by car, is a cone-shaped hilltop fortress-palace built by King Herod the Great, with sweeping views over the Judean Desert.
- **Mar Saba Monastery**, about 40 minutes east, is a Greek Orthodox monastery clinging to a cliff above the Kidron Valley, inhabited since the 5th century; note that women are not permitted inside the main compound, only its dedicated tower.
- **Hebron**, roughly an hour south, is one of the world's oldest continuously inhabited cities and home to the Cave of the Patriarchs; check current conditions before visiting, as access there can be more restricted than in Bethlehem.



Getting there

- **By air:** there is no airport in the West Bank. Most travelers fly into Ben Gurion International Airport near Tel Aviv, then continue to Bethlehem via Jerusalem by taxi or organized transfer (roughly 1-1.5 hours in total, depending on the checkpoint crossing).
- **By road:** almost everyone arrives from [Jerusalem](#), a 20-30 minute ride by shared service taxi, taxi, or tour bus through the Israeli-run checkpoint at the edge of town. Carry a passport; lines can be longer on Fridays, Sundays, and around religious holidays.
- **By bus:** shared service taxis (minibuses) run frequently between Jerusalem's Old City area and Bethlehem and are the cheapest option for independent travelers.

Getting around

- **On foot:** the old town around Manger Square and the [Church of the Nativity](#) is compact and best explored on foot; most top sights are within a 10-15 minute walk of each other.
- **Taxi:** local taxis are inexpensive and the practical way to reach sights outside the centre, such as the Milk Grotto's surrounding streets, the separation-wall art, or any day trip. Agree on a fare before setting off, since meters are not always used.
- **Cycling:** not a practical way to get around; the terrain is hilly and there is no cycling infrastructure to speak of.

Getting around on foot & by bike

WALKABILITY

High

The compact Old City around Manger Square is easily explored on foot; a taxi is the practical way to reach anything outside the centre.

CYCLING INFRASTRUCTURE

Low

Cycling isn't practical here - the streets are hilly and there's no cycling infrastructure.

Driving

- **Is a car worth it?:** not for the town itself, which is small and walkable, but useful for day trips to Herodium, Mar Saba, or Solomon's Pools if you'd rather not rely on taxis.
- **Rental cars:** many Israeli rental agreements exclude coverage for driving into Palestinian Authority-administered areas (Area A), which includes central Bethlehem - check the terms before booking, or arrange a private driver instead.
- **Parking:** street parking near Manger Square is limited and fills up quickly; small paid lots on the edge of the Old City are the easier option.

Food & drink

Bethlehem's kitchens lean on olive oil, sesame, and sumac, reflecting the surrounding hill country's groves and orchards. Look for freshly baked taboon bread, local olive oil for sale by the bottle, and knafeh from one of the sweet shops near the souq.

For a meal, head to the restaurants and cafes clustered around Manger Square and the streets leading into the Old City souq, rather than any single standout address - this is where the town's everyday cooking is best sampled.

What to eat & drink

SNACKS & STREET FOOD

Falafel · فلافل

Deep-fried chickpea patties, usually served in flatbread.

SWEETS & DESSERTS

Knafeh · كنافة

Warm shredded pastry with melted cheese, soaked in sugar syrup.

DRINKS

Arabic coffee · قهوة عربية

Cardamom-spiced black coffee, served strong in small cups.

SIGNATURE DISHES

Musakhan · مسخن

Roast chicken with sumac, onions, and pine nuts over taboon flatbread.

Maqluba · مقلوبة

An upside-down rice dish layered with meat and fried vegetables.

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Safety & health

Bethlehem's Old City and main pilgrimage sites see a steady flow of tourists and are generally calm day to day, with petty theft rare in the areas visitors frequent. That said, Bethlehem is in the West Bank, a politically sensitive area where conditions can change quickly - check your government's current travel advisory before visiting and stay alert to local news during your stay.

Crossing the checkpoint from Jerusalem requires a passport, and crossing points can close or see long queues without much notice, so build in extra time. Tap water quality varies, so stick to bottled or filtered water. The main everyday annoyance for tourists is high-pressure selling in souvenir shops around Manger Square - a polite decline is usually enough.

History

Bethlehem appears in the Hebrew Bible as the birthplace and anointing site of King David, and Christian tradition holds it as the birthplace of Jesus centuries later. Emperor Constantine's mother, Helena, identified the site on a visit around 325-326 CE, and the first [Church of the Nativity](#) was dedicated in 339 CE over the grotto below - it was later rebuilt by Emperor Justinian in the 6th century and survives largely intact today, making it the oldest continuously used church in the Holy Land.

The town passed through Roman, Byzantine, Crusader, Mamluk, and Ottoman rule before coming under British Mandate administration in 1917, then Jordanian control after 1948, and Israeli military occupation from 1967. Since 1995, under the Oslo Accords, Bethlehem has been administered by the Palestinian Authority as part of Area A of the West Bank.

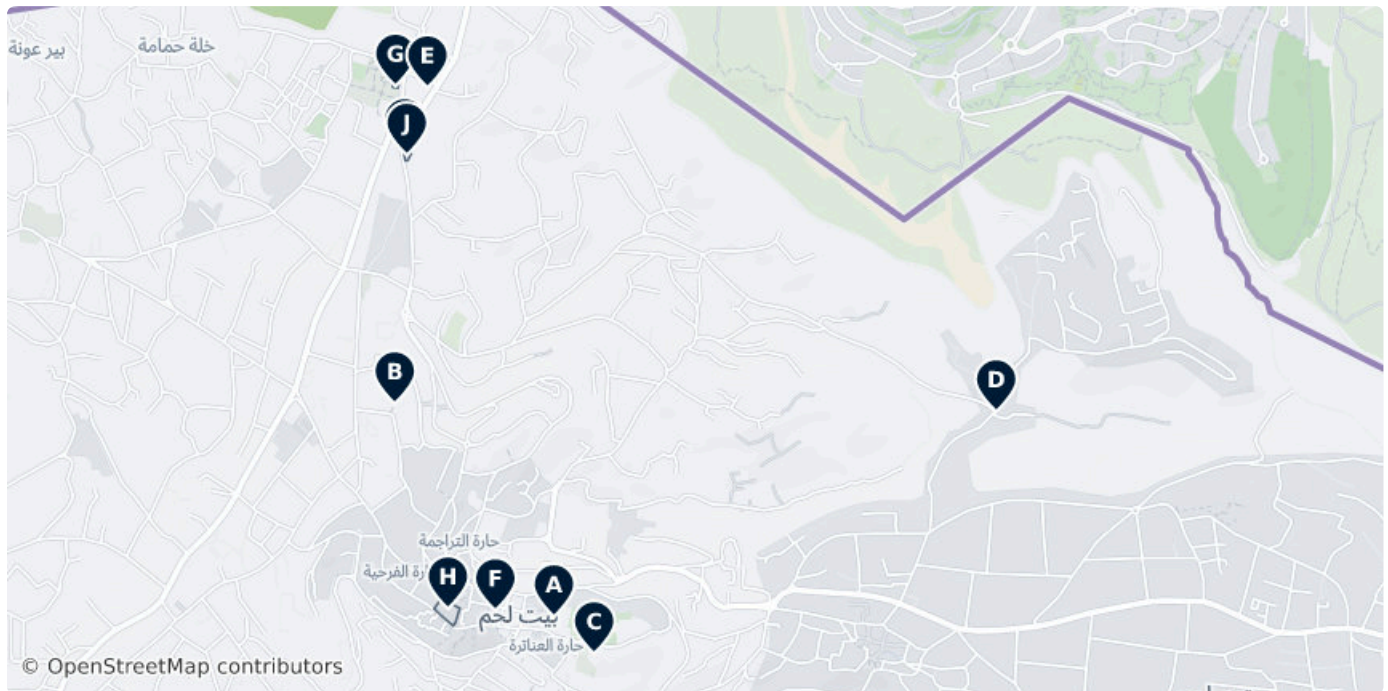
Country facts

Quick practical facts for the Palestinian Territories at a glance:

 CURRENCY ILS	 ELECTRICITY    Type C / Type D / Type H 230 V · 50 Hz	 LANGUAGES Arabic	 TAP WATER Use caution
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Bethlehem Unmissables

Bethlehem centers on Manger Square, home to the 4th-century Church of the Nativity and the Omar Mosque. The Old City's limestone alleys house the traditional Al Souq market and the Milk Grotto. On the city's edge, the Walled Off Hotel and Banksy's Armoured Dove mural provide contemporary political context. Cultural sites like the Palestinian Heritage Center showcase traditional embroidery, while the remote Mar Saba monastery offers insight into Greek Orthodox monastic life in the Judean Desert.



A Church of the Nativity

The Church of the Nativity, or Basilica of the Nativity, is a basilica located in Bethlehem in the West Bank, Palestine.

Bethlehem, Palestinian Territories (31.70432, 35.20737)



B Bethlehem Old City

Come and experience the wonders of the ancient city of Bethlehem, an essential religious site described in the New Testament as the...

Bethlehem, Palestinian Territories (31.71035, 35.20207)





C Chapel of the Milk Grotto

This chapel takes its name after a story about Mary dropping milk here while nursing Jesus.

Bethlehem, Palestinian Territories (31.70327, 35.20871)

+972 2 274 2425



D Mar Saba Church

The Holy Lavra of Saint Sabbas, known in Arabic and Syriac as Mar Saba and historically as the Great Laura of Saint Sabas, is a Greek...

(31.71013, 35.22211)

Mo-Su



08:00-17:00



E Walled Off Hotel - Banksy

A boutique hotel designed by Banksy, situated directly opposite the West Bank separation wall. It contains a museum detailing the wall's history and an art gallery featuring Palestinian works.

(31.71930, 35.20316)

walledoffhotel.com



F Omar Mosque

The Mosque of Omar is the only mosque in the Old City of Bethlehem, Palestine.

Bethlehem, Palestinian Territories (31.70449, 35.20542)

Mo-Su

10:00-11:00, 13:30-14:30, 17:00-19:00





G Rachel's Tomb

Ancient burial site and holy place of worship traditionally identified as the tomb of a biblical matriarch. The site features an Ottoman-era structure and serves as a significant pilgrimage destination for multiple faiths.



Derekh Hebron, Bethlehem, Palestinian Territories (31.71935, 35.20209)

kerenkeverrachel.com, +972732101015

H Old Market (Al Souq)

A traditional marketplace in the Old City featuring narrow alleys lined with vendors selling fresh produce, spices, local olive wood handicrafts, and traditional textiles.



بيت لحم (31.70454, 35.20384)



I Armoured Dove by Banksy

A street art mural by Banksy depicting a white dove in a bulletproof vest with a target on its chest, located on a wall near the Palestinian Heritage Center.



Bethlehem, Palestinian Territories (31.71752, 35.20239)

youtube.com/watch



J Palestinian Heritage Center

A cultural institution focused on the preservation of Palestinian folklore, featuring a collection of traditional embroidered dresses, antique household items, and a fair-trade gift shop.



Bethlehem, Palestinian Territories (31.71739, 35.20247)

palestinianheritagecenter.com

DATA SOURCES

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