

**My deepest wish came true:**

**A journey to Palestine for 11 days**



Recently, at the end of our summer, the time, it is still very hot in Palestine, I took part in an organised tour that travelled like Servas people normally do individually.

Despite the fact that Palestine and Al Israa (Israel) do have a lot religious roots either for Hebrews, Christians and Moslems, the aim of this journey was to get to know the people of the country. Individuals, where we stayed for two nights (as in Betlehem – beit laham), refugee camps (like the Aida camp), traumatic centres (like art projects in Ramallah), women projects to sell fair trade products (Jerusalem – Al Kuds/Betlehem) or olive oil campaigns (Jordan valley and Nablus).

I did not expect to meet so many Christian-Palestinians; those see themselves as Palestinians – as Palestine is an Arabic country. Actually the number of Christians is decreasing because of the conflict, but I did not have difficulties to go to church, as there are plenty of it, quite near of a mosque.

Of course, we met Jews, Christians and Muslims. Some Jews we met by accident, that was not very comfortable (aggressive settlers), but most of them very interested in the peace process (as in TelAviv) or in Jerusalem, those who try to protect Palestinian farmers for troubles with settlers and others who tried to avoid the destruction of the houses in East Jerusalem, this August.

Unfortunately, a lot of Palestinians does not believe in supportive initiatives with Jews, as there is a big wall of 5,5 m height and app. 50 km length between them in Bethlehem and a defensive mark of app. 125 km.



The government of Israel say, it is necessary, to protect Israel from terrorism. Actually, as you can see in the news, no one can stop terrorist attacks, of someone is eager to do so. Normally, individual terrorist (even if they are threatened or brainwashed by a terrorist group and believe me, unfortunately it went worse, since “fascistic Islamism” groups could go to Palestine because of the war in Syria and Iraq, thus many Palestinians of West Jordan feels threatened either) finds his or her way through the tunnels or missiles, that are built by man without the possibility of aiming a target, but still very horrible of its possibility to hurt someone really bad or worse to kill someone.

I consider the separation of these two areas – not regarding whether Palestine and Israel is going to decide to be two countries or join into one country – as one of the most problems to go for peace, and definitely it is the worst, that could happen to the animals and plants, as they do not know walls, thus they are losing orientation and there natural way to live and die.

The other horrible mistake of „Israel“ was, to make a problem and powerful weapon against Gaza (the water over their is polluted, that children suffers of kidney problems and they do not get enough water) and inhabitants of West Jordan have to pay extra costs to get it from Israel, even if it is their water.

One first step to smooth the conflict could be to give Palestine enough water (Israel gets 94% of the water, Palestine just 6% with the same amount of inhabitants).

If you might think, that I am antisemitic, you are absolutely wrong. I have nothing against Jews, as they are my older brothers and sisters and yes, I hope, that they can live in peace all over the world, as the holocaust did kill too many of them. One of the biggest genocides of the world took place in Germany. Still I believe that most Israelis do not know or do not want to know, that their government is committing a perverse crime on Palestine and I do accuse all Arabic countries, where Palestinians stay as refugees, even if they do live there without ever putting a step on the grounds on Palestine. They do not give them their nationality and neglect them protection under a nation. This is a shame!

Before you stop reading, because of the facts, you can read by UN-Reports, I have to tell you about the landscape, the people, the sun and the herbs all over the place – and most of all the marvellous feeling to visit a spiritual place.

We started in Bethlehem and stayed with families over two nights. I stayed with a very sweet family, who were producing arts of olive trees. We were eating together for supper and breakfast and got to know the first very important issue in Palestine. Do not through your toilet-paper in the loo, but in the garbage beneath it. Otherwise everything is getting damaged – you do not want to know more details – just never ever through anything in the loo! The good thing is, that every bathroom has a bidet, thus you can imagine that people without a bidet might get considered as dirty. My husband and I did install a bidet in our bathroom, as we thought, that you can take good things from other cultures into your home.

In Bethlehem we visited the church and place of Christ's birth. It is very beautiful but absolutely overcrowded by tourists, as I have been myself.

We went further on to Hebron, to the grave of Abraham, the father of all religions who believe in the one and only God. I felt very safe during my stay in Palestine and I walked on my own a lot of times, as I do talk a wee bit of Arabic (enough two get into a little conversation), but I did not like Hebron. It felt so tense. The market is threatened by stones, settlers throw them on people. A street is heading to a synagogue, that is just a view yards away from the mosque of Abrahams grave.

This street has to be watched by Israeli soldiers, who are doomed to do three months in Hebron during their duty to stay in the armies. They do not feel comfortable as well, as I do asked them.

Even if Hebron is an area with a lot of conflicts, I was impressed by its people, as they do not give up hope, that at some time, peace and justice will come, even if they know, that they might have patience for a long turn. They go on with their life and find solutions - I think, that some of our people in Germany could need some of this hope. Money does not solve problems, people do!

We travelled to Ramallah, which reminds me of Amman in Jordan.



In some way Ramallah is the town for rich people. And we saw the palace of president Abbas, who unfortunately not seems to be a great help for his people. At least he hopefully will subscribe laws to protect and support women, as women power is getting stronger in Palestine. You might be surprised, but I think, that women in West Jordan are more open minded and more educated than in most other Arabic countries. We went on to Jericho, the desert and through the Jordan valley, until we reached Nablus. The little Neaple with its cute market, that is called the little Damascus.



I do love Nablus a lot! It is very light, the market is old and I never ever got a better Satar (herb of thymine) or olive soap than in Nablus. Is is smelling marvellous, Nablus is quite a big town and it is said that the grave of Joseph, the father of Christ is there - and even if it is said to be very conservative, Samaritans, Christians and Muslims are living together in peace. They might not love each other, but they work together and live together in respect.



The last view days, we spent in Jerusalem near the gate of Damascus. We visited the church of Christ's grave and the mountain of the temple and the Al Aksa mosque. We did it very early in the morning and I loved it. The next day, I went on my own just two hours later and I was relieved to get out of old Jerusalem, because of all the people who are very busy to go through. Thus, my second advice: If you want to visit old Jerusalem, get up very early in the morning and go through the entrance first (I thought it was between 7 and 8 o'clock a.m., and you will be overwhelmed by its beauty and spirit.





The last advice every tourist has to know, before travelling to Palestine and Israel is, that you do need a car from East Jerusalem. With this you can travel in Israel and in Palestine. With an Israeli or Palestinian car, you get difficulties at the „border“ between the three different zones (Zone A is under Palestinian control, Zone B is half and half and Zone C is under Israeli control – just at night the Israeli military is in the control of all).

Last of all I have to say that I never felt that safe, if you avoid demonstrations. Everyone is happy to see tourists and if you are talking Arabic you get their hearts immediately. Still, I am missing the light, which I know just of Jordan in the same way – and I miss this weird feeling to stay on the earth of Abraham and his children. A place, which should be more peaceful than any other place. It has already shown, that war and suffer cannot be neglected and won by aggression and war, but just with getting into contact and getting to know each other and meeting with respect – as the old idea of Servas.

Dagmar Lübbers, Hamburg September 2019