

# Light Will Overcome Darkness



فلسطين  
Palestine



State of Palestine  
Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities  
وزارة السياحة والآثار

Tourism  
Overview  
2016

*A Message from  
The Minister of Tourism & Antiquities  
Christmas Season, 2017-2016*

## *“Light a candle in Bethlehem Light Will Overcome Darkness,,*

It is that time of the year again; Christmas has come with all its joy, happiness and cheering. People have started to prepare for Christmas decorations, shopping, festivities and special food. Unfortunately Christmas for many of my people is a time of sorrow and sadness due to the Israeli occupation and their measures against the land, the people and the holy places.

We believe that the real meaning of Christmas is to spread the message of the Baby Jesus Christ in Peace and Justice to the entire world. It is also praying and acting to end wars and conflicts and to stop killing of innocents and children. Christmas is about enlightening the darkness of our hearts and love one another.

In the second half of the year 2016 the Palestinian tourism has witnessed a remarkable increase in comparison with the same period in 2015. This comes as result of the intensive efforts of the Ministry and the private sector with the support of the international community to promote Palestine in many traditional markets, penetrate new ones and approach new target groups. Palestine is proud of its developed tourism infrastructure, modern facilities and unique service and hospitality that offer an unforgettable experience to all visitors.

We call upon all believers to come to Bethlehem; Palestine to experience the true Christmas and share the excitement of the angels, the shepherds and the wise men, and meet the hospitable Palestinians; the guardians of the holy sites. Come to Palestine and light a candle for peace, prosperity and freedom to all people on this planet. As Jesus Christ has taught us LIGHT WILL OVERCOME DARKNESS.

From the birthplace of Jesus Christ I wish you all great health, happiness and prosperity  
Merry Christmas

*Rula Ma'ayah  
Minister of Tourism & Antiquities  
Palestine*



## Uncovering the world's biggest ancient mosaic

In a historical event, the Minister of Tourism and Antiquities, Mrs. Rula Ma'ayah, uncovered one of the biggest carpet mosaics in the world that covers the floor of Hisham's Palace in the town of Jericho. The unveiling celebration was attended by a large number of diplomats, institutions, and national and international public figures. The uncovering is the phase of a project to cover the mosaic with a special ceiling taking into account the importance of the site, the preservation of the cultural landscape of the palace and its surroundings, the archaeological value of the site, and to highlight this fascinating mosaic carpet that covers 827 square meters. The mosaic is made up of 38 carpets of diverse colors, shapes and forms, decorated with rare artistic creations of geometric and floral motifs.

The project's implementation works are expected to be completed in mid-2018, with the partnership and the generous support of the Japanese government through the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

## Hebron wins the World Craft City Award 2016

Hebron (Al-Khalil) was announced to be a World Craft City for 2016 by the World Craft Council. The WCC organizes the competition on a yearly basis in a bid to record and encourage crafts from around the world. The award follows the initiation of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities in full cooperation with the Hebron municipality and the relevant institutions. The Minister of Tourism and Antiquities, Mrs. Rula Ma'ayah, has announced that the ministry has received the official certificate from the World Crafts Council declaring "Hebron the World Craft City for 2016".



This is the first time that a Palestinian city wins this international title. For Hebron, a city with a long history and authentic Palestinian heritage and traditional craft industries, this award will shed more light on the city's rich heritage, and diverse crafts which in turn will hopefully attract foreign visitors.



## Conferences and hosting international delegations

### Palestine receives a delegation of Romanian journalists

The Palestinian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities in cooperation with the Palestinian Embassy in Romania received a delegation of 30 Romanian journalists representing a number of Romanian media agencies specialized in tourism and travel. The delegation was briefed on the importance of Palestine as an independent religious tourist destination. This event comes as part of the Ministry's effort to proactively engage with travel media and journalists from across key source markets. The trip started with a meeting with H.E Rula Ma'ayah and other private sector representatives at the Bethlehem Peace Center where the visiting delegation was briefed on Palestine's unique & diverse tourism offer. The trip included visits and meeting in key cities across the West Bank highlighting the safety and security, the growing tourism infrastructure and attractions and the diverse landscape.



### Empowering Tomorrow Tourism Conference

In close cooperation with the Holy Land Incoming Cooperation, the Ministry of Tourism hosted the Empowering Tomorrow Tourism Conference in cooperation with the Representative Office of the republic of Malta, The Mediterranean Tourism Forum and the Malta Tourism Authority. The event was held in Bethlehem on November 14th at the Bethlehem Peace Center and included a visiting delegation with keynote speakers from Malta, Italy and Turkey. The conference focused on increasing cooperation among the Mediterranean Destinations in areas of human resources, product development and other regional cooperation initiatives. In attendance were representatives from the Holy Land incoming Tour Operators association, the Arab Hotel association, Bethlehem University, Bethlehem Municipality and other key stakeholders from the tourism sector.

### The First ecotourism conference in Palestine

The Ministry of Tourism and antiquities in close cooperation with all relevant governmental, civil and private sector stakeholders held the first Ecotourism conference in Palestine. The event is part of the Ministry's efforts to diversify the Palestinian offer and showcase our rich natural heritage. Palestine is witnessing a surge in ecotourism both among local and foreign visitors. From the many hiking trails and other community based tourism initiatives stretching from Jenin in the far north to Hebron in the south, ecotourism is showing clear signs of growth and increased demand. Building on this asset and developing Palestine's nature experience complements the sector's strategy of promoting and developing tourism in marginalized areas and increasing the spending, duration, and geographic coverage of visitors. The event was heavily attended and included stakeholders from across the tourism value chain. Key recommendations were proposed including developing the ecological, the regulatory and the legal and frameworks to develop a sustainable ecotourism products and experience in Palestine.

## A tour for the diplomatic corps accredited by the State of Palestine

The Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities and the Negotiations Affairs Department organized a tour for the diplomatic corps accredited by the State of Palestine to the archaeological sites of the Cremisan Monastery and Khirbet al-Najjar. The delegation witnessed first hand the impact of the Segregation Wall on the Cremisan Monastery. They were also briefed on the attacks and destructions that happened in the archeological site of Khirbet al-Najjar by the occupation authorities.

The importance of Khirbet al-Najjar dates back to the Roman and Byzantine periods and contains a collection of notable monuments, including walls, wells, mills, fortifications, and a number of tombs.

## Palestine participates at key international tourism fairs:

The Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities lead the Palestinian participation at several strategic tourism fairs in both traditional and new source markets. In close cooperation with the private sector and civil society, Palestine was showcased at tourism fairs across the Middle East, Europe, Asia and the Americas. Since the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities was established in the early 90s, the participation in international travel fairs has been at the forefront of Palestine's marketing activities. These efforts are geared at positioning Palestine as an independent destination that is rich in religious, historical, cultural and natural treasures. This diversity and the many visitor experiences that Palestine has to offer are all promoted and showcased at these events. Furthermore, the number of trade visitors and media visiting the Palestine pavilion at these shows also continues to gradually increase year after year. Private sector representatives from across the value chain also attend to promote their respective businesses and services to their counterpart across the world.

This year for the first time, the Palestine also participated at the "world Heritage" international fair in the Czech Republic. Next year, the ministry and the private sector will be expanding these activities and potentially exploring new markets including Indonesia, India, Malaysia and China.



## International Awards:

- This year, Palestine won several international awards. Highlights include:
- The Ministry's movie "Palestine – Rediscover your senses" won the prize of "Das Goldene Stadttor" for being one of the best tourism promotional movies. The prize was received during the participation in Berlin international tourism fair (ITB), held last March 2016.
- Palestine won the title for the "World's Best Maftoul (Couscous) Award" at the International Maftoul festival which was held in Vita Lo Capo in Sicily, Italy.
- Hebron awarded the title of "World Craft City" for 2016 by the World Craft Council.
- Palestine wins award for best Pavilion at the World Heritage Travel Fair in the Czech Republic.

## More activities from 2016:

Inauguration of Tourism Information Centers:

The Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities has inaugurated a number of tourism information centers across Palestine that serve the tourist visiting our destination. The new centers include the Hosh abu Jarur (Bethlehem), the Tulkarem, and Al Bireh Tourist Information Centers.

## New Agreements:

- This year, the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities signed several bilateral agreements including:
- The signing of a joint agreement with the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) regarding the project of covering and showing the mosaic of the big bathroom hall at Hisham's Palace in Jericho.
- The signing of a memorandum of understanding with the Ministry of Tourism and Traditional Industries in Tunisia to strengthen bilateral relations, to activate common action between the two parties, and to achieve direct networking.
- The signing of a memorandum of understanding with the Massar Ibrahim Al-Khalil aimed at developing community based and environmentally friendly tourism products and itineraries.

## New Archeological Findings:

- The discovery of a natural cave in Arrabah, Jenin. The team from the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities found that the cave is a natural formation in the rocks with an area of 350 square meters; stalactites are hanging from the cave's ceiling while stalagmites are rising from the cave's columns, those columns were formed from water drops that leached from the roof of the cave forming a wonderful and fascinating masterpiece.
- The discovery of an ancient tomb in Nablus. The tomb is found west of Nablus in Khirbet al-Aqabah, also known as Aqabat al-Qadi, some 3.5 km away from the city. The evidences found inside the tomb indicate that the cave was used for burial in the Hellenistic, Byzantine and Roman periods.
- Archaeological discovery of a group of tombs dating back to the Bronze Ages, in Jabal Zahir to the south of Bethlehem. The signs show the existence of a group of ancient tombs that date back to the Bronze Ages. This discovery is important as it will enrich the information about the history of the region



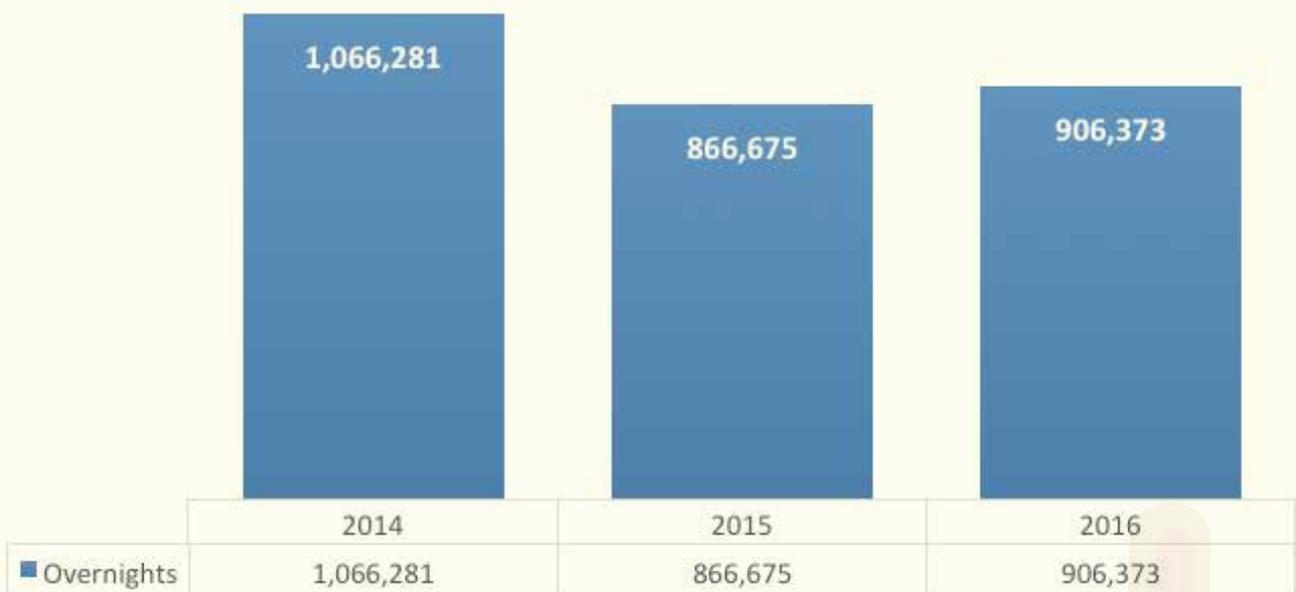
## Museums:

Although the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities has more than 8 museums, it is still working on the inauguration of more archaeological museums. The ministry worked on the completion of all the necessary arrangements for the opening of Tulkarm Museum and the Museum of Sebastia, to join the series of museums that enrich Palestine.

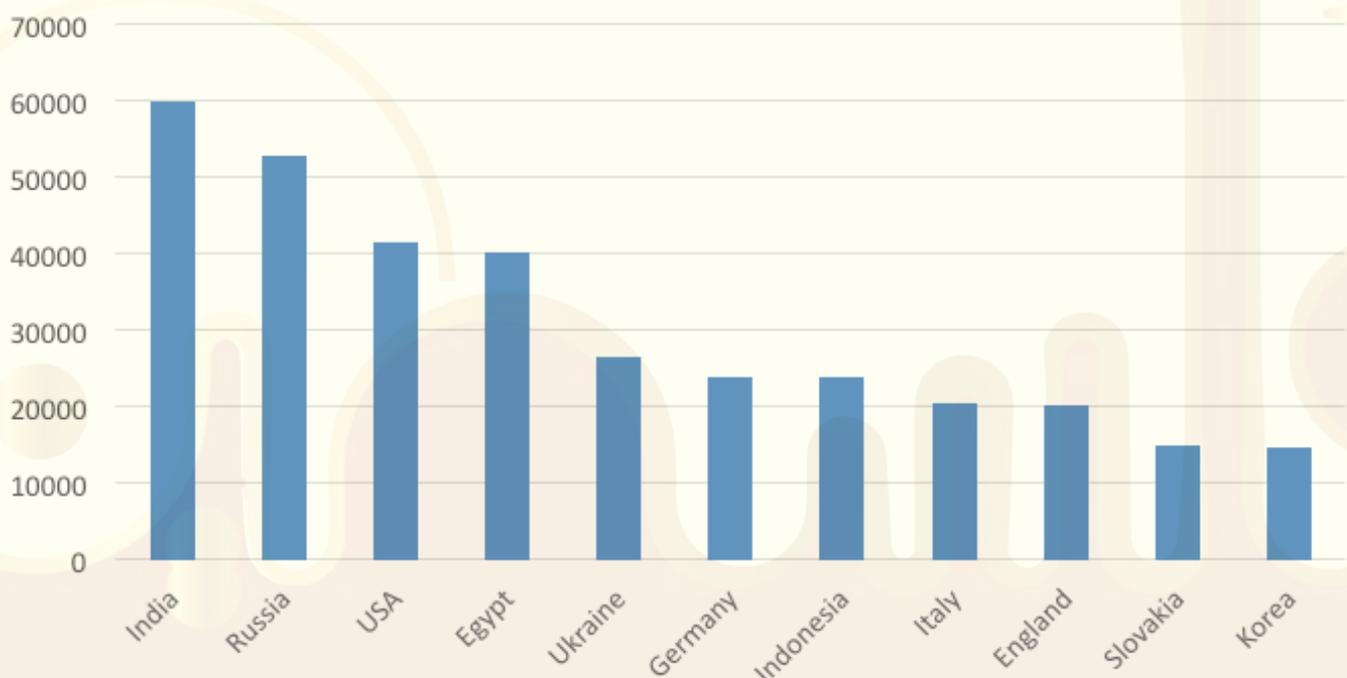
## 2016 Tourism Highlights:

2016 showed another increase in both visitors arrivals and overnights stays across Palestine. In terms of visitors, Palestine received just over 2.3 million visitors as compared to 2.2 million. The main source markets for day visitors included Russia, the USA and Romania followed by India, China and Poland. As for overnight stays, the industry also witnessed an increase with 2016 recording over 900,000 overnight stays compared to 860,000 overnights in 2015. As far as source markets for overnight stays, India, Russia and USA were the top three source markets for overnight stays with 41,000 – 52,000 - 60,000 respectively. Egypt Ukraine and Germany followed.

### Number of Overnights for Inbound Tourism



### Number of Overnights for Inbound Tourism According to Nationalities





### Number of Inbound Visitors According to Nationalities

