



We're building a world where Palestine is liberated and all are free

Jericho—Arīḥā in Arabic—is one of the earliest cities in the world, dating back to 9000 B.C.E. according to archeological evidence. Jericho is significant for many other reasons, including the fact that it is the oldest continually inhabited city in the world and it is also the lowest city in the world at 258 meters (846 ft) below sea level. It is located in a valley known as Wadi Qelt in occupied Palestine, with the River Jordan to its east and Jerusalem (al-Quds) to its west. In 2023, the archaeological site in the center of the city, known as Tell es-Sultan / Old Jericho, was inscribed in UNESCO's list as a World Heritage Site in the State of Palestine, and described as the “oldest fortified city in the world.”

Beyond its rich archeological significance and history, Jericho is also a point of biblical significance, known for being the first town attacked by the Israelites under Joshua after they crossed the River Jordan. Its beautiful and ancient palm trees also have record in the Bible. Jericho's name in Arabic, Arīḥā, means 'fragrant' and also has its roots in Canaanite Reaḥis, generally thought to derive from the Canaanite word rēḥ 'fragrant', but other theories hold that it originates in the Canaanite word Yaraḥ 'moon' or the name of the lunar deity Yarikh, for whom the city was an early center of worship. Today, the city's population sits at a humble 56,00 residents (2021) and includes a population of Afro-Palestinians who have long-called Palestine home and a population of roughly 13,000 internally displaced Palestinian refugees. Jericho's beautiful landscape is home to luscious water springs and fertile agricultural lands that grow a variety of native produce.

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## **A CONVERSATION WITH TARIQ SAMARAT FROM JERICHO, OCCUPIED PALESTINE**



*Top left: Tariq with a 2022 delegation, Ein el-Duke, Jericho*

*Bottom left: Tariq with EP Executive Director, Nancy Mansour, in Jericho*

*Right: Tariq Samararat on Mount Temptation, Jericho*

#### By Moureen Kaki

Tariq Samarat is a former athlete turned hostel manager in the ancient city of Jericho. He lives in a pre-dominantly Afro-Palestinian neighborhood called Ein el-Duke. Once a professional runner, he had to turn to a different profession to earn more income. After he left his professional running career, he lived in Tel Aviv (occupied Yaffa) for two years. He earned a degree in English Literature and returned to Jericho, his hometown.

As our interview began, the sounds of aggression and clashes instigated by the presence of the Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) in Jericho echoed in the background of our Zoom call. When asked about the current situation in Jericho, he described it as a lockdown—there are three entrances to Jericho and they are all closed, except for residents who live there. With an illegal Israeli settlement nearby, tensions are even higher. Even though Jericho residents are allowed in, it's not necessarily an easy task just to get home. Tariq describes waiting hours at the checkpoints just to get in and out of Jericho, and the risks that come with it for Palestinians:

“After October 7th, [the checkpoints] are really worse. About a month ago, my friend and I were going through a checkpoint. There were two soldiers and they told us to step out of the car. They are talking in Hebrew. I speak Hebrew, so I understand what they're talking about. I told my friend that it might be our last moment. My friend panicked for a moment, but eventually they let us go. When we were walking away, I explained to my friend that one of the soldiers had said to the other in Hebrew, ‘Let's shoot them and tell our boss that they tried to attack us first.’ To which the other soldier replied, ‘There's so much traffic. Let's just let them go.’”

Beyond the normalized violence of the checkpoints, armed settlers have been in the streets of Jericho, threatening Palestinians, while under the protection of the IOF. Refugee camps within Jericho that are home to internally displaced Palestinians have also been intentional targets for the IOF and settlers. Tariq told me about two refugee camps within Jericho which have been attacked multiple times since the beginning of the genocide in Gaza—Ein a-Sultan and Aqabat Jabr. He says that these camps are attacked almost every other day and people are killed and arrested, and homes are intentionally destroyed by Occupation Forces.

Aside from constant threats to their lives, Palestinians in Jericho (and beyond) are suffering economically by the Occupation's constraints. Tariq was one of thousands of Palestinians who, before October 7th, traveled to the Dead Sea and other parts of historic Palestine for work. Now, traveling to work for Israeli-owned businesses comes with life-threatening dangers. When some Palestinian workers tried to return to work following the events of October 7th, they were killed. Tariq described a particularly violent and horrifying story of a Palestinian laborer who was murdered and had his body cut into pieces that were then dumped outside of a village in Nablus (further north in the West Bank). Following this incident, many Palestinians quit their jobs in Israeli-run companies for fear of safety. They have had to trade income security for relative safety.

Despite the escalated violence imposed on Palestinians, they persist. Palestinians have resorted to developing small agricultural plots and construction jobs to survive during this time. This move back to agriculture, even if temporarily, reflects the variety of skills and steadfastness Palestinians possess. Tariq, whose income has been deeply affected by the lack of tourism, implores non-Palestinians to come visit to truly understand how Palestinians are forced to live. He says, "They [Zionists] have created this false image about Palestinians and our lives. To understand who we are and how we live under occupation, you have to come see for yourself. Then you will see how hard it is for me, as a Palestinian, to try to live or even pray in Al-Aqsa Mosque."

For Tariq and many other Palestinians like him, one of the strongest ways people can support Palestine is by bearing witness to the horrors of their daily lives and using that experience to speak truth in the face of intentional misrepresentations of Palestine.

To hear more from Tariq and others in Jericho, [click here to register](#) for Eyewitness Palestine's upcoming **Live from Jericho webinar** happening later this month, on **Wednesday, January 24th at 12 Noon ET**.

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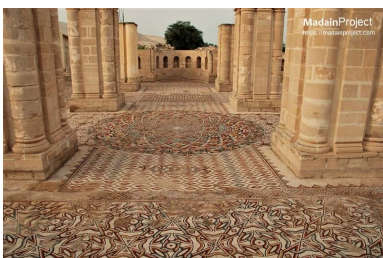
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## VISIT JERICHO

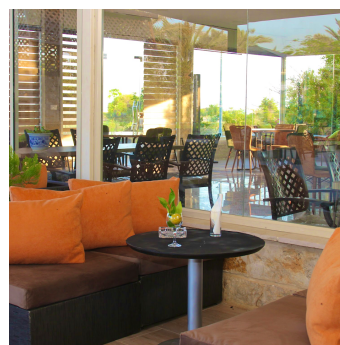
When you're ready to visit Jericho, Palestine, make sure to check out these attractions, recommended by Eyewitness Palestine Staff!



[Hisham's Palace](#)



[Mount Temptation Monastery](#)



[Limona Restaurant](#)



Hisham's Palace, also known as Khirbat al-Mafjar, is a significant early Islamic archeological site in the Palestinian city of Jericho, in the West Bank, occupied Palestine. Built by the Umayyad Dynasty in the first half of the 8th century, it is one of the so-called Umayyad desert castles. It is located 3 km north of Jericho's city center. The site was discovered in 1873. A bath complex with a beautiful mosaic was later discovered and has become a must-see part of the multi-artifact site.

Learn more about it [here](#).

The Monastery of the Temptation is a Greek Orthodox Monastery, located in Jericho, Palestine. It was built on the slopes of the Mount of Temptation, 350 meters above sea level, situated along a cliff overlooking the city of Jericho and the Jordan Valley. Its most ancient structures date back to the 6th century, having been built above the cave traditionally said to be that where Jesus spent forty days and forty nights fasting and meditating while he was tempted by Satan. It currently serves as a tourist attraction and the monastery is owned and managed by the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

Learn more about it [here](#).

Limona Restaurant, located in Jericho near Hisham Palace, is regarded as one of the top dining establishments in the area. Its prime location adds to its appeal and allows customers to indulge in a fresh and enjoyable culinary experience.

The ingredients used are of exceptional quality, providing patrons with a chance to savor the true essence of their meals. The staff members are friendly and efficient, ensuring that guests receive excellent service throughout their visit.

Learn more about it [here](#).

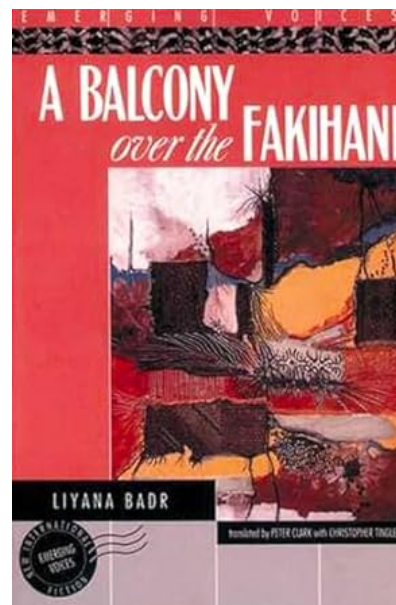
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## LEARN MORE ABOUT JERICHO



### **Recommended Watch: *Shepherds of the Jordan Valley***

**About the film:** Palestinian Bedouins in the Israeli-occupied Jordan Valley struggle to cling on to an age-old way of life.



### **Recommended Read: *A Balcony over the Fakhani***

**About the book:** The title story of Liyana Badr's remarkable collection of three short novellas interweaves the narratives of three Palestinians, two women and one



Stretching from Mozambique in south-east Africa to Syria in the Middle East, the Great Rift Valley is home to the world's lowest city, Jericho, which was established over 10,000 years ago. Farmers and shepherds have tended flocks and lived off the land in the Jordan Valley for thousands of years.

But Israel's continued occupation of the region since 1967 is threatening people's traditional way of life, restricting Palestinian development on the land – and Bedouin homes in the area have repeatedly been razed.

Some 56,000 Palestinians live in the part of the valley that lies in the West Bank, many of who are Bedouin living in temporary communities, always moving with the herds. Their determination to remain on the land is becoming ever more difficult in the face of constant attempts by the Israeli military and settlers to drive them off their land.

Watch this film for free [here on Al-Jazeera](#).

man, relating their successive uprooting: from Palestine in 1948, from Jordan during Black September in 1970, to their final exile in Beirut.

Badr's intensively evocative contrapuntal style allows the reader to glimpse the joy and despair of these lives rooted in exile and resistance. There is an attention to detail in these stories that brings the grand narrative of Palestinian history alive: a horrified mother spotting a white hair on her baby's head the morning after a mortar attack in Beirut; a woman hiding a Palestinian resistance fighter's gun moments before he is picked up by the Jordanian security police.

The final movement of *A Balcony over the Fakhani* is a deeply poetic and harrowing account of Israeli air strikes during the 1982 invasion of Lebanon, told from the perspective we so rarely encounter: that of the disenfranchised people whose courage and suffering cannot fail to move the readers of this extraordinary book.

The book is [available for purchase here](#).



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