

Massada



Massada is one of the most exciting and frequently-toured places in Israel, and relates a story of perseverance and power, faith and surrender, ambitions, and a tragic end. Massada is a place where battles were waged with rocks and flaming arrows, as well as battles of the human spirit. Massada is situated on the top of a mountain with steep sides and a flat top like a parapet overlooking the desert panorama to the west and the Dead Sea to the east. The thrilling story of the site reveals the courage of the defenders of Massada and their battle against the conquering Romans.

The story, related against the background of the ancient panorama, is as thrilling as a Hollywood movie, and is filled with tension, struggle, and love.

The fortress of Massada was built in the year 30 BCE by King Herod, whose architectural feats have left their mark throughout the country. At the beginning of the great revolt against Rome in the year 68 BCE, the site was conquered by a group of Jewish zealots, and Massada became their last stronghold. In the year 72 the Romans besieged Massada and succeeded in reaching the steep fortress after constructing a huge earthen ramp on its western side. In the year 73, the 960 Jewish zealots living at the top of Massada chose to commit suicide rather than to fall into the hands of the Romans alive. Their deeds left behind a saga of courage, heroism, and martyrdom. The remains of the fortress of Massada are well-preserved and have been reconstructed in an effort to pay homage to the site and its heroic inhabitants.

The most impressive structure on Massada is King Herod's northern palace, built on three rock terraces overlooking the gorge below. Near the palace is a large Roman style bath house with a colorful mosaic floor and walls decorated with murals. Many other buildings at the site - such as the luxurious western palace, the mikveh (Jewish ritual bath), storerooms, watchtowers, and synagogue relate the history of Massada, especially when viewed with artifacts such as storage containers, decorated pottery, scrolls, and coins.

The beautiful embossments and murals that were discovered on the walls of buildings on Massada were restored by Italian experts to preserve them for years to come. This is the largest and most complete Roman siege camp that remains today.

Massada is extremely high, and can be ascended on foot by the winding "snake path" or by a cable car that runs from the tourist center at the feet of Massada to the top.

The tourist center also features a movie about the story of Massada, a model of the site, and an exhibit of the archeological findings.

A visit to Massada is a thrilling and exciting experience. The chilling story and the archeological remains contribute to the special atmosphere of the site, and preserve its magnificent past.