

# Ein Kerem



In a peaceful valley between mountains and hills, surrounded by the beauty of natural groves, nestles one of Jerusalem's most picturesque neighborhoods - Ein Kerem.

Like an island in a sea of green forest in southwest Jerusalem, Ein Kerem has charming stone houses adorned with arches, churches whose bells chime in the clear air and lovely paths paved with stone.

Ein Kerem is a pilgrimage site for many Christian visitors, who come here year after year. According to Christian tradition, this is where Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, miraculously became pregnant. This is also where he was born. Tradition teaches that during her pregnancy, Elizabeth was visited by a family relative - Mary, who was also pregnant, with Jesus. The two women met beside the village well and Mary drank from its cool waters. That place is now called Mary's Well. The village around the well grew and its waters are considered holy. Many pilgrims come to drink from the well

and take the holy water away with them in bottles.

Since the Byzantine period (1,500 years ago) many churches have been built in Ein Kerem. Today there are a few active churches and also a few monasteries. Two of the churches are named after John the Baptist, one Catholic and the other Greek Orthodox. Both were built in the late 19th century on the ruins of previous churches. The Catholic church has an ancient mosaic floor and a grotto thought to be the birthplace of John the Baptist.

The Church of the Visitation was built in 1955, on the foundations of a Crusader church built in the traditional location of the summer home where John the Baptist's parents lived when Mary visited Elizabeth. The church is built around a large stone behind which Elizabeth hid John the Baptist from Herod's soldiers, who were ordered to kill all children under the age of two.

The Sisters of Zion Convent, also in Ein Kerem, was built as an orphanage. Today it is home to 13 nuns who run a modest hostel. The nearby Gorny Monastery, also known as the Moscovia (because it resembles churches in Moscow) is reached via a steep, winding path. This Russian-Orthodox church was built in the late 19th century and now houses a church (dedicated to Zechariah, John the Baptist's father) and a convent (to Elizabeth). There is also a "palace in the mountains," built by a protestant bishop in the mid-19th century.

All the walking tours in Ein Kerem start at the well, which has become a famous meeting place, and any tour of the neighborhood is a spiritual experience.

Today Ein Kerem is an important gem in Israel's tourism crown, and will capture the heart of any visitor. There are many fine restaurants for connoisseurs and quaint guest rooms offering relaxing hospitality in authentic surroundings. Artists inspired by Ein Kerem's beauty have settled here to paint and display their works to the public. Ein Kerem is truly a place worth visiting, with many charming treasures to enjoy.