



Nablus Association for Social
and Community Development
(Naseej Center)

Work Camp Nablus

INFOSHEET & ARRIVAL NOTE



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Dear volunteers,

The peace in the Middle East remains one of the major challenges to be solved for the international community today. After years of intifada, peace agreements and ongoing occupation, young people are the part of the population most affected by the stalemate. International voluntary service is a way to express solidarity and transmit hope, energy and creativity for young people to construct their citizenship under difficult circumstances through day-by-day cooperation among people of different backgrounds. We are therefore happy to host you for two weeks in Nablus City and Askar Refugee Camp, where you will have the possibility to make a change!

Volunteering in Palestine is not like any other place on earth. We expect from those who will attend our camp to be motivated, prepared to live in a very different place, and have at least a basic level of awareness about the socio-political complexity of the region. Palestine is a place for individual and personal development and awareness. Despite the complexity of the political situation in Palestine, it is still one of the most beautiful, interesting and spiritually enriched countries on earth.

In this letter you will find all the necessary information regarding accommodation and the work description:

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Introduction

Today almost half a million Palestinian refugees are living in overcrowded refugee camps in the West Bank. Most of the families left their homes in today's Israel during the *Nakba* in 1948 and has since then never had the opportunity to return to their property. While the Israelis call this the War of Independence, the Palestinians regard it as a disaster, which is also the meaning of the word *nakba* in Arabic. For more than 60 years these families have been living under harsh conditions in refugee camps all over the region.

Askar camp (where most of the work will be) was established in 1950 and inhabits today 15 000 refugees. Askar is officially recognised as a refugee camp by UNRWA¹. In 1964 the camp was expanded in to a new part which residents refer to as "New Askar". However, "New Askar" is not recognised which is why there are only few financially supported UNRWA installations there. Like most camps, Askar has severe problems because it is overcrowded and it is in great need of further expansion. For more information on the issue of the Palestinian refugees and the situation in Askar camp, please visit UNRWA's web page: <http://www.un.org/unrwa/>

This project seeks to bring young people of various cultures together to build bridges of understanding, reconciliation and peace. The long-term goal of the project is to prepare youth to make positive contributions to their future and society through the values of understanding, helping, encouraging tolerance, and respectful coexistence. These goals are achieved through education awareness reaction, youth empowerment and work camps.

The work camp will be a challenging two weeks. The participants will have the chance to discuss relevant issues in the world and particularly Palestine. They will visit historically significant sites and refugee camps, and create a positive and real impact in our community through a variety of activities related to social youth development. Living and working together in Nablus, the participants will gain a better understanding of themselves, Palestinian socio-political questions, the world around them and the continuing Palestinian struggle for freedom.

The work camp will consist of varying numbers of participants, who volunteer, socialise and work with the local people. The international work camp is run by young people for young people.

Hosting Organisation

The Nablus Association for Social and Community Development (Naseej) is a non-profit organisation which was established in 2007 with the vision of contributing to the progress of the society through educating and peace-building amongst all sectors. The founders of Naseej met in jail during the first Intifada and began to dream of a sovereign Palestinian state there. However, feeling that their means of resistance were inadequate, they started to envision a new state built through non-violent means. After serving their terms in

¹ UNRWA was established in 1949 by the UN to carry out direct relief and work programmes for Palestinian refugees



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prison and returning to Askar Camp, they established the Local Rehabilitation Committee for the disabled (LRC) in 1992 to care for those who were injured during the first Intifada. They started from zero without any resources or experience and until 1994 they did not have any donors or help from other NGOs. After the first 2 years of operating, they received sponsorship from the Palestine Solidarity Association of Sweden (Palestinagrupperna i Sverige), and this organisation continues to support various projects in Askar. The first contribution helped to build a small library and a computer lab in the camp to get the children and youth out of the fragile situation that the previous generations experienced.

After the second Intifada in 2000, the international community started to view Palestine as a nation, which led to more support from the international NGOs and therefore allowed to establish the Social Development Centre (SDC) and to build an actual centre for the LRC. The work expanded to include treatment for the disabled, educational and economic programmes for women, and cultural and educational activities for the children and youth.

In 2007, the Nablus Association for Social and Community Development was established in order to build links and partnerships with other associations in Palestine and the international community. Now the Nablus Association is called Naseej, which is the legal entity of the Local Rehabilitation Committee (LRC), the Social Development Centre (SDC), An-Nasariya Cultural Center, and Naseej Center (formally Darna Center in downtown Nablus). Naseej comes from the Arabic word "weaving," which is our main goal within the society, that is, to link and integrate various levels and organisations in order to build a stable, inclusive, and peaceful environment. In order to achieve our goals, we have five main fields of work, which are education, rehabilitation, agriculture, art and culture, and solidarity tourism.

We have been granted permission to work by the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Sports and Youth, and the Ministry of Tourism since April 21, 2008. Our organisation number is NA-7201-SD and we have 55 members.

Accommodation

Naseej provides accommodation for our volunteers in the Guest House located near the center of the city. Home stays with families in Askar Camp can also be arranged, but this is typically more suitable for female volunteers. We are happy to arrange a home stay for a male volunteer, but please keep in mind this is a bit more challenging considering the gender dynamics.

The accommodation includes kitchen facilities where the volunteers can prepare the food supplied by the organisation. Beds and mattresses will be provided for the volunteers. The volunteers are, however, strongly

advised to bring their sleeping bags. One washing machine will also be provided for the work camp. There will be wireless internet access.

Project Description

There are a number of different forms of work that volunteers can participate in, which will be based in New Askar Camp. The work programme has been designed to best suit the needs of the people (children) living in



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such hard places, as well as to effectively utilise the talents we anticipate volunteers will bring from abroad. The volunteers will work in the morning and in the afternoon there will be room for cultural activities; like meeting with organisations, talking to people living in the camps etc. We welcome you to bring and implement your own ideas and ambitions.

Activities that will be provided in the morning:

Manual labor

Building something that will be useful for the people of Askar and that will stand long after the work camp is over gives a very satisfying feeling. We have therefore arranged the possibility for the volunteers to help the local community in constructing stone walls which separate farming land. The volunteers will also help with more traditional farm work out on the fields.

Tidy up Askar

In Askar camp and in Palestine in general there is a problem with littering. Many places in the camp have become unusable due to broken glass and litter. During a part of the work camp the international volunteers will together with local volunteers help to tidy up playgrounds and other public places in the camp.

Sports

We encourage some of the more athletic volunteers to help supervise sporting activities in Nablus city and at the camp for children. Normally the children play games such as football and martial arts. International volunteers will help in organizing matches and also directly participate. What more can we say, sport is what kids love and often do best. Games can vary from football, which is very popular, to rope jumping or even tug-of-war. For this part of the work camp don't worry about supplies. Just pack up your gym shoes, cap and hope you'll keep up.

Arts

A number of workshops have been organised to allow children to develop their creative talents through art. The arts programme involves teaching kids how to make art objects out of common items like bottles, rocks and plastic glasses. Other activities run by volunteers have included face painting, drawing, and painting on rocks, sculpture, hand prints and lots more.

The idea behind this project is to let kids have fun and be creative. Galleries were organised to encourage the children to exhibit their work. International volunteers will work alongside the local volunteers to prepare



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the galleries for the end of the work camp. We encourage volunteers to think ahead of time about activities that would be both useful and fun for the local youth.

Drama

The drama workshop has been shown to be an effective tool for encouraging self-expression and psychological release in which the supervisors help the children explore their creativity and interests.

Drama helps build self-confidence and develops children's communication to better enable them to interact with their social environment. It provides them with a greater feeling of personal security, reveals a variety of talents and makes them more creative in their everyday life. International volunteers are encouraged to share their skills in the production of plays with local young boys and girls. Bring with you short stories that could be performed as plays, and that can be understood by people who have limited English.

Learning

There are various activities and projects for you to participate in, such as teaching English, Spanish, French, providing training workshops in the fields of human rights and civil participation, facilitating educational workshops on environmental sustainability and micro-financing.

Working with the disabled

Working with disabled kids and organising activities for them is one of the most vital programmes for children who are in need of special consideration and treatment. International volunteers can participate in painting, dancing, playing instruments and encouraging kids to smile. Any suggestions for games are welcomed. Due to the special circumstances of the disabled youth we both encourage and are in need of volunteers with specialised experience when it comes to working with the disabled.

Murals

We will have a special corner dedicated to creating murals and wall paintings. Kids often help and come up with many good ideas that are often added to the "masterpiece," the mural brings joy to the kids and takes their minds off the current situation that surrounds them. These murals are the result of team work and two things are certain when it comes to murals, they never end up the way they were originally intended and you always end up with a very colorful shirt!

Cultural Activities in the afternoon:

- We offer Arabic lessons for the international volunteers. You will be taught the colloquial Palestinian dialect to help you communicate with locals and to better enhance your voluntary work.
- Visit to the An-Najah National University of Nablus
- Tour of the Old City of Nablus
- Presentation of the Al-Farah prison of Nablus and hearing the stories of Palestinians who have spent time in Israeli jail.



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- Meeting and talking with older Palestinians who will share their memories of the six day war and their experience of living in Palestine in general.
- Visit to the Balata refugee camp in Nablus (the biggest camp in the West Bank)
- Open house at Askar with the children of the camp. There will be music and *dabka* dancing (traditional Palestinian dance).
- Excursions by foot to Al Bada'an, a valley 45 minutes to one hour walk from Nablus.
- Visit to Burin village (located 7 kilometers southwest of Nablus.) which has a great deal of problems with Israeli settlers living close by.
- Football game between the volunteers and some local football teams at the camp.
- Meeting with the Samaritans of Nablus
- Meeting with the mayor of Nablus.

PS. There will also be days with no activities planned when the volunteers can organise trips or visits on their own. If there is an interest among the volunteers we can help to organise a trip to Hebron, Bethlehem or to Tulkarem, Jenin etc.. The travel expenses will, however, not be covered by the work camp.

Visas and Arrival

Since 1967 Palestine has no direct borders or access with the outside world. Israel is controlling all these passages and crossing points, and this makes it obligatory to anyone to visit the occupied Palestine to go through Israeli borders and measures. This is why it is not possible for the organisation to have any contact with the Israeli authorities to facilitate the visa procedures or crossing.

Upon entering Israel you will need a three month visa and that is all you need. No documents are required to enter the Palestinian Territories. Upon exiting however, you may be asked to present your passport but that's it. Citizens from most western countries can obtain a visa on the spot at any Israeli border point. We advise that you contact the closest Israeli embassy or consulate in your country beforehand, inform them about your intention to participate in a work camp and ask about any new measures or regulations or steps they might provide you in order to obtain the necessary visa to enter Israel.

When you arrive at the Israeli border, the officials could question you and could search your luggage and sometimes yourself in an exhaustive way. It is possible that the authorities at the borders will not provide you with a visa to enter Israel/Palestine justifying this for security reasons. Some volunteers decide to say they are tourists visiting Israel as they feel more comfortable with that version. At the airport Ben Gurion they might ask you questions about your journey. It is a good idea to reserve a room in a hostel in Jerusalem to have proof to show (you can find very cheap hostels on the internet and reserve a bed paying just 6 or 7 dollars even if you won't use it).

Do not carry with you anything that can compromise your entrance (anti-Israel items, Palestinian flags) and don't carry any Palestinian number on your mobile - if you do not want to delete the number on your phone just change the country prefix.



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You may also know that any indication of travelling to/from Israel in your passport will mean that you cannot enter Syria, Lebanon and other Middle Eastern countries (except Jordan and Egypt). We advise you to ask to the Passport Control Officer at the border not to stamp your passport if your intention is to travel later on

around the Middle East. In this case, the officer will stamp just the separate piece of paper which you should keep with your passport during all your stay in the country.

How to get to the Camp

From Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv, you can find white mini buses (*Sherout* in Hebrew), which normally take 9 people, that are standing directly outside the main door of the airport. They work 24 hours and cost around 45-55 New Israeli Shekel –NIS-- (about 9 €). If the taxi is not full, you will have to wait. It takes about fifty minutes to get from the airport to Jerusalem. This is the most convenient way to travel from Tel-Aviv to Jerusalem.

The Israeli *Sherouts* will drop you where you want. Ask the driver to drop you at Damascus Gate (by the ancient wall of the Old City of Jerusalem), or at the closest point possible (New Gate).

Next, you will need to find the bus station on Nablus Road (when the Damascus Gate entrance is directly behind you, Nablus Road will be straight ahead) and take bus 18 (white with green stripes) to Ramallah. This will cost 10 NIS. If there are checkpoints or any soldiers asking you where you are going, tell them that you want to go to the Dead Sea.

Then you will arrive in the bus station in Ramallah where you get a final bus to Nablus for 10 NIS. When you get to the bus station in Nablus you can call us and we will direct the driver to the guest house.

The journey takes no more than 3 hours. Please let us know which day and at what time exactly you will arrive so we can organise ourselves according to your time.

P.S. Note that all transportation from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and from Jerusalem to the work camp location are not covered by the organisation.

Social Life

Nablus is a very charming city which offers a variety of activities and sights to explore. One of the most prized possessions is the Old City, dating back from the Ottoman Empire and here you can get lost in the labyrinthine alleyways and markets which sell almost anything you can imagine. The Turkish Baths, Al-Shifa and Hammam Al-Hana, are also popular places to relax and get the real Arabic spa experience. As Nablus is very famous for its olive oil soap, there are about 30 soap factories, the production of which dates back to the 12th century.

Another special feature of Nablus is one of the last Samaritan communities in the world, located on Mt. Gerizim. Here you can check out the history of the Samaritans at their museum and also visit the Roman ruins overlooking Nablus.



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In addition, you can socialise at Nablus's many parks, cafes, restaurants, argileh (tobacco water pipes) cafes, and a cinema.

Social Costumes

Since Palestine is a predominantly Muslim country, both men and women should expect to dress modestly. For men, this means wearing clothes that covers at least your knees and shoulders. For women, you should also cover knees, shoulders, and chest.

Palestinian culture is very welcoming and hospitable, so don't be afraid to approach the locals.

General Guidelines

Don't forget to bring

- ✓ Working shoes
- ✓ Working clothes
- ✓ One towel
- ✓ Cool clothing for summer seasons (but please keep dress codes in mind), and warm clothing for the winter (from November to April it can be rainy and cold)
- ✓ Sleeping bag
- ✓ Camera
- ✓ Information about your country; food, drinks and music

You are encouraged to bring musical instruments and anything which can create international theme parties, based on food, drinks, music, dance and games that are typical from your home country.

Additional notes

- ✓ The participants have to pay **200 Euros** to the organization upon arrival. The amount can be paid in Euro, US Dollars and New Israeli Shekels according to the official exchange rate of the day. This includes accommodation, food and transportation. For any other expenses, such as cigarettes, phone cards, leisure activities, you will need to use your own discretion to account for your personal spending habits.
- ✓ The local currency is the New Israeli Shekel. One Euro is around 4,75 Shekels. Life in general is less expensive than life in Europe or the U.S.
- ✓ Volunteers are advised to bring the money in cash as it is difficult to find international withdrawal machines in the Palestinian territories. International VISA cards work in most ATMs but volunteers with Maestro cards have encountered problems with withdrawals..

Dates of Camps for the Year of 2013:



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Work Camp Title	Place	Dates	Work Camp Type
Love and peace for new year	Nablus	10/03 - 23/03	International – English Work-Camp “Culture – Education – Rehabilitation”
Together for a better Environment	Nablus	23/04 – 4/05	International – English Work-Camp “Culture – Education – Rehabilitation”
Palestinian Refugees “Realities and Facts”	Nablus	10/06 – 25/06	International – English Work-Camp “Culture – Education – Rehabilitation”
Hope and Smile	Nablus	27/06 – 10/07	International – English Work-Camp “Culture – Education – Rehabilitation”
Let’s Make a Change	Nablus	20/08 – 01/09	International – English Work-Camp “Culture – Education – Rehabilitation”

For more information:

Information about the wall and its negative impacts: www.stophthewall.org

Information about the city of Nablus: <http://www.nablus.org/en/new.php>

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Feel free to ask for advice to the leaders!!!



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See you soon 😊