

Sanour Village



A LIGHTHOUSE

Almost twenty-six kilometers off the main road southwest of Jenin stands the village of Sanour in the Jenin district. In a population of 4,300 people, the Palestine Fair Trade cooperative in Sanour produces an average of 20-30 tons of olive oil annually.

Stand here and smell the fresh air is probably what Abu Na'im might have you do first thing before answering any questions you might ask about the village of his childhood, Sanour. This historic village gets its name from being the place where light (*Nour* in Arabic) can be seen. Whether it is for emergencies

or to invite people to break their fast in Ramadan, Sanour, the place of light, was considered the lighthouse for all the surrounding villages that are located in the valley. People would light a fire on top of the mountain to send a specific message. Sanour's high elevation has also given it a reputation for being a cool place even in hot summer days. Known for its magnificent plains and high hilltops, this village combines two perfect terrains providing its inhabitants a wide spectrum of views and crops. Located fifteen miles south of Jenin city, Sanour's main landmark is *Qal'at Sanour* or the Sanour Citadel that sits on one of its highest altitudes looking down at *El Marj* (Sanour plain). While Sanour is a vibrant community, history is a living part of the daily lives



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of the people of this village. Many still live in old houses that were part of the fight against the British in the early 1900s. Mariam, who is in her late eighties, still remembers stories from the time when Britain controlled the area. A picture of her father who was a well-known man in those days hangs in the middle of their gorgeous and historic living room. With old artifacts and colorful carpets, many homes in this village are more than 150 years old.

ALL THE COLORS OF *EL MARJ*

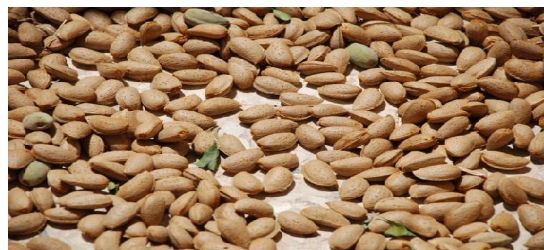
Today the people of Sanour are taking part in different agricultural initiatives that are making a new name for Sanour as a green village for the richness of its plains that make it a fascinating place to visit. As the oral poets of the area say, “the spring in our *Marj* is four seasons”. As life in Sanour revolves around *El Marj* many speak about it in poetic form. *Marj* Sanour is often flooded in the wintertime leaving the soil moist for most of the year. According to Abu Na'im the season starts with the color blue where the clear rainwater covers the soil. “When the water dries the color of the plain turns brown, just like chocolate. After we plow it turns to a natural red color then we plant it and it becomes green. By the end of summer it is golden and deep yellow because of the wheat.” Offering some of his especially delectable honey, which he collects from clay beehives that he builds in his farm, Abu Na'im says, “The earth gives us as much as we give it.”

THE STARTING POINT

This ancient teaching of reciprocity has made it possible for the people of Sanour to welcome the new version of this concept in the form of fair trade practices. Famous for being the original center for the Palestine Fair Trade Association, farmers in Sanour are proud to say that the very first shipment of Canaan Fair Trade olive oil to the United States went out of their village. While Canaan Fair Trade has a large facility in Burqin today, the olive oil was first bottled in Sanour in a small space of three rooms. Sanour is also the home of the first organic nursery that provided all the olive and almond saplings for the Trees for Life program. Abu Na'im who runs the

nursery says that since he became a member of the Palestine Fair Trade Association and committed himself to organic practices he has been enjoying sitting in *El Marj* even more. “The nursery is the place where I find myself. No one bothers me here. I can spend the whole day here with my wife. We plant things around the nursery, we make coffee and tea and we chat and work.”

Walking amidst grapevines and olive trees, one can also find lines of okra and eggplant planted just for their home consumption. “Since we became members of PFTA and we got organic certification we have had to revitalize our soil and we are now eating better because we have learned about the harmful consequences of using herbicides and pesticides. Most importantly, we started to have another form of income through the nursery.” Islam was twenty years old when Canaan Fair Trade started in Sanour. “I remember that time very well because we were coming out of a very rough time. My father was not finding a way to sell his oil and when they started the cooperative and the facility it was a major shift in our lives. It was then when people started coming to our village and we felt revived again.” The work of PFTA and Canaan Fair Trade has not stopped at reviving the community. This year PFTA is taking an even bigger step in revitalizing the indigenous almond trees and Abu Na'im's nursery is prepared with over 2000 almond saplings that will be distributed across tens of villages.



Abu Na'im's nursery (above). Almond nuts.



A SPIRITUAL HERITAGE

Sitting under the shade of an old almond tree cracking nuts and drizzling pure honey on top while taking in the view from one of Sanour's most beautiful viewing points one might not be able to keep up with all the different names of the hills in sight. Each mountain has a name and with each name there is a story. *Ilhaf El Khoury*, (the blanket of the priest) is a hill covered with olive trees and rises from the middle of the valley looking like a bed blanket. The story is that a devoted priest lived and worshiped there until he died. Another distinguished mountain in Sanour is called *Jabal Abu H'eresh* in reference to *Wali H'eresh* who was known as a kind of monk who lived a solitary life.



Jabal Abu H'eresh.

No one knows what religion this *Wali* or spiritual man practiced but some suggest that perhaps the location of his grave facing Mecca indicates that he could have been Muslim. Religious and spiritual stories in Sanour are still inspired by many of these narratives and the best time of the year to experience Sanour's spiritual practices is during the month of Ramadan when the entire village takes part in fasting and refrains from food and water from dawn to sunset for thirty days. Once the sun starts to set people gather on their rooftops, and in their living rooms to enjoy *Iftar* or Ramadan dinner together. They invite neighbors, friends, and even strangers to join. The common wisdom in Sanour is that friends must share meals together. *Illy ma bimalih ma bisalih* which literally means, "He who does not share salt does not

befriend or reconcile". These kinds of teachings have been passed down through generations in Palestine in general but in the village of Sanour several people feel that perhaps their ancestors were also influenced by the likes of *Wali H'eresh*, and *El Khoury*.

Many may drive through the Sanour plains without thinking to go up to the village but those who decide to make a stop and check out this charming place may discover historic jewels and hear many inspiring stories. From renovated ruins to ones hidden under the shades of cactus plants, the people of Sanour know that their village is a historic and modern gem at the same time. According to Abu Mohammed, a lover of archeology and a native of Sanour, "we know that whether it is the agricultural wealth or the historical significance, our grandfathers were right. Our village is worth living for."



Ramadan Iftar on the rooftop (above). Clay beehive (bottom)



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