

## **OLD CITY – EAST JERUSALEM:**

Jerusalem is plainly divided in two parts; East Jerusalem and the Western City; the areas and zones inhabited by the Palestinian and Israeli populations respectively. Within the East Jerusalem, there is a walled Old City. On this little piece of the earth, countless historical events took place within its small boundary ... religiously, politically, and emotionally.

The walled **Old City is the heart of Jerusalem**, the place where most religious sites are located. Despite its miniature size [c.1 sq km – 220 acres] in comparison with the whole Jerusalem [125.1 sq kms], it packs in a huge heritage of history and culture. Up until the 19th century, all of Jerusalem resided within the walls of the Old City. Thousands of souls, for thousands of years lived and died there.

Every stone of the Old Jerusalem has some thing to offer to its guests ...the beauty of this place is that it can make you happy, sad, angry or just leave you feeling confused or astonished with too many facts. It's a thrill to walk on some of the ancient and original streets from the Prophet Abraham's time then travelling through Roman and Muslim ruling eras; go pass the crowded markets, looking at ancient synagogues, chapels and mosques that commemorate different phases of Allah's holy messengers [*Nabi & Rusools*], Romans' passion for holy Jesus and glories added by noble Muslim rulers in sequence.

Jerusalem is national & religious symbol for both Palestinians and Israelis; the Palestinian neighbourhoods serve as the Palestinian capital and the Israeli region as the Israeli capital – but practically the whole Jerusalem in under political and administrative control of Israel since 1967.

After 1948's settlement of Israel, there was no Jew living in the Old City and even till 1967 there was not a single Jew in Eastern part. As of 2007 the total population in the Old City was 36,965; of which 27,500 were Muslims; 5,681

Christians; 790 Armenians; and 3,089 Jews. Now there is mixed population - the Jewish count was almost 4500 in 2013.

The Old City of Jerusalem is divided in four quarters. North of Jaffa Gate you'll find the **Christian Quarter**, including the **Church of the Holy Sepulchre**, then moving clockwise you'll encounter the **Muslim Quarter with Golden Dome and Aqsa Mosque**, full of shops, little restaurants and sights like the Ecce Homo Basilica [Church of Sisters of Zion], then the **Jewish Quarter** with the **Western Wall**, and finally the **Armenian Quarter**, south of Jaffa Gate, with the Citadel [location of **a stunning sound and light show**], Cathedral of St James etc.

The main points of entry to the Old City are **Jaffa Gate**, located nearest to the Western part of the City; **Dung Gate**, the closest place to access the Western Wall and the ONLY way to visit Haram Sharif by the NON-MUSLIMS; **Damascus Gate**, to visit Haram Sharif through busy bazaars and **Lions Gate** to see St Ann's Church and Haram Sharif. In 1980-81, the whole Old City was listed as a **UNESCO World Heritage Site** - due to its divinity and mystery.

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam - similarities and differences are there but all the three religions believe in ONE GOD. Scripts of the **Talmud** [*oral and traditional commentary in Hebrew religions*], Bible - Old Testament and New one, holy Qur'an - direct revelation from God and Prophet Muhammad pbuh's deeds and sayings, all are equally respected here. Holy City of Jerusalem is for all.

**The new & young generation of Jewish planners** has coined a term – HOLY BASIN - means **removal of the old city walls after unification of the city** – but the successive governments have been staying the proposal as Israel's whole tourism industry could be knocked down. Also there may start an endless conflict amongst various religious factions. According to the Research Institute of Jerusalem, in 2003,

35,400 residents lived in the Old City, and in the entire proposed Holy Basin around 40,000. 73% of the residents in the old city were Muslims, 18% Christians, and 9% were Jews. In 2013, out of 6,000 families who lived in the Old City, 68% were Muslim, 24% Christian & 8% Jewish.

**East Jerusalem** is also the location of the first campus of Hebrew University *near Mount Olives & Al-Toor of Muslim dominated areas*. The university area and the military base near it were always under Israeli control, even prior to 1967 - thus a high level of coexistence is seen here even there is un-rest in rest of the country.

In the **Haram Sharif** areas, Israel has given functional sovereignty to the **Muslim Waqf** but with no funds for its maintenance or up-keep on the pre-text that it has been surrendered to the Waqf. However, Israel is retaining sole sovereignty over the lower Western Wall where the up-keep is being done in a well deserved manner and nicely.

As per **BBC Documentary** dated **21<sup>st</sup> October 2013**, during 2013's local elections, the Religious Composition of **Jerusalem** was: Jews [502,830]; Muslims [288,170]; Christians [14,820]; others [9,390] and Druze [90]. Ref the **Jewish Virtual Library**: in May 2017, **Israel's population** stood at 8,680,000 - a 10-fold increase to the figures in 1948; AND out of 14.3m Jewish people in the world, 43% had migrated to Israel.