

## The experience of visiting the West Bank

If you're not on an organised tour, you first have to take an 'Arab bus' from Jerusalem. This was difficult to locate or find information about.

When I was on the bus, Israeli Police stopped us and checked everyone's identification. A young Palestinian woman with a baby was found to be 30 minutes over her permitted time on the Israeli side of the division wall (she had been permitted access to the hospital for her baby but got stuck in traffic). I saw the police take her baby and prepare to arrest her. Thankfully, after some scuffles and a long wait, she was allowed to return home. The others on the bus told me this is 'usual'.

Next comes the very secure entrance into what is often referred to in terms of an open air prison or permanent refugee camp.



Once 'inside', away from the designated tourist spot in Bethlehem, Aida Refugee Camp is a densely populated area where housing, education, healthcare and jobs are all severely impacted by the occupation.





Aida Refugee camp is covered with local street art. This shows reference to the 1948-9 division of the land between Arab and Jewish communities. Aida Refugee Camp was formed in 1950 as a result. <https://time.com/5273108/back-to-the-future-israeli-palestinian-conflict/>

The 'largest key in the world' at the 'gate of return' created by local inhabitants of Aid Refugee Camp, still hopeful of freedom to one day return to where they came from in Jerusalem and areas now on the other side of the wall.



There are frequent reminders of the situation, from the United Nations presence to this picture on the spot where this boy was shot dead by the Israeli Authorities. Bullet holes mark the walls of the streets.

After stopping to play marbles with some children on the street, calls to run ended a moment of normal life as gun shots were close by.

PTP is hoping for calm and peace now that international attention has, at long last, returned to the region. We will continue to work with our contacts to find a way to relieve some of the hardships faced by ordinary people.

One local in Aida told me 'nobody cares what religion you are when you live all your life in a refugee camp, we just want to live'.