

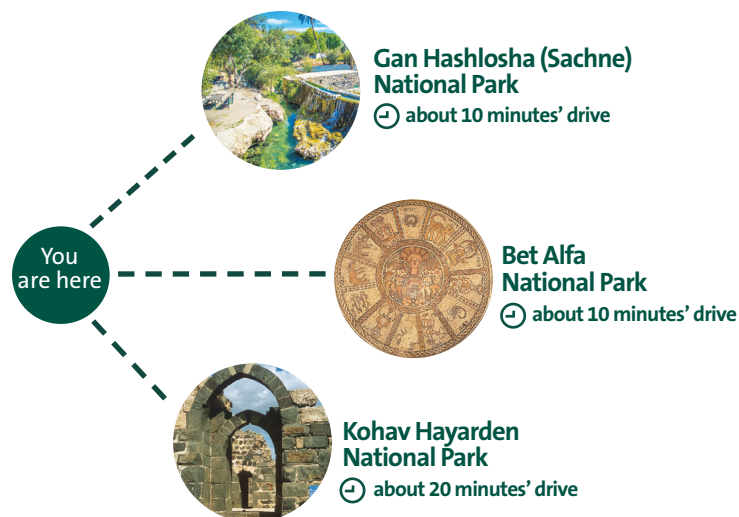
Bet She'an National Park


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Welcome to Bet She'an National Park



Corinthian capital bearing the head of the god Dionysus

Bet She'an National Park, which extends over an area of 400 acres, includes the ancient city of Bet She'an-Scythopolis and the imposing Tel Bet She'an. Archaeological excavations were first carried out in Bet She'an in the 1920s. Major excavations have been going on since 1986 in the framework of a joint enterprise run by the Israel Antiquities Authority and the Hebrew University. The archaeological excavations, which have uncovered about one tenth of the city's area, are accompanied by architectural – reconstruction of buildings, installations and streets.

Bet She'an – Historical Background

Settlement of Bet She'an first began in the fifth millennium BCE on the tell rising to the south of the Harod Stream, in the heart of a fertile area enjoying an abundance of water and located on a major crossroads.

In the Late Canaanite period (16th–12th centuries BCE), the city became the seat of Egyptian rule. The Israelite tribes did not succeed in conquering Canaanite Bet She'an. After the battle waged at Mt. Gilboa, the Philistine lords of Bet She'an displayed the bodies of Saul and his sons on the city walls. The city was later taken by King David along with Megiddo and Ta'anach, becoming the administrative center of the region during King Solomon's reign. The site was destroyed in 732 BCE, with the conquest of the northern part of the country by the Assyrian King Tiglath-Pileser III.

During the Hellenistic period, the city known as Nysa-Scythopolis was founded on this spot. Local lore has it that Dionysos, the god of wine, buried his nurse Nysa here, and subsequently settled the region with Scythians from among his followers.

At the end of the 2nd century BCE the city fell to the Hasmoneans. Its gentile residents were exiled, and the city's population became predominantly Jewish. The city was once again dominated by gentiles following the Roman conquest in 63 BCE. As one of the ten cities of the Decapolis, it became the most important city in northern Israel. During the revolt against the Romans in 66 CE, the city's Jewish residents were murdered by their gentile neighbors. Under Roman rule, when the population consisted of pagans, Jews and Samaritans, the city thrived and expanded, with magnificent public buildings going up, engraved with inscriptions and adorned with statues. In the Byzantine period, Bet She'an became largely Christian, its population reaching 30,000–40,000. A wall was erected around the city, with churches and monasteries near it. In the aftermath of the Arab conquest, the city



Figure of a lion in the mosaic of the Byzantine agora

steadily declined in prominence and the number of its inhabitants dwindled. A severe earthquake in 749 CE devastated the city. The name Scythopolis was forgotten and the place became known as Beisan. A rural settlement was built at the site during the Abbasid period. During the medieval period, the settlement was concentrated in the city's southern part, and during the Crusader period, a fortress was put up to the east of the destroyed amphitheater. Under Ottoman rule, Beisan remained a small settlement.

Bet She'an has begun to develop and flourish once again since the establishment of the State of Israel. The city takes great pride in the impressive remains of the ancient city which is slowly being uncovered in its midst.

Please Follow the General Rules of the Bet She'an National Park

- Follow the instructions of national park personnel.
- Make sure to walk only along the marked trails.
- Entrance is permitted only to sites officially open to visitors.
- Do not harm the antiquities and archaeological finds in any way.
- Scaling walls of any kind is dangerous and absolutely forbidden.
- Do not throw stones or cause stone slides.
- Maintain order and cleanliness throughout the national park.



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The Recommended Tour

1. Theater – Built in the 1st century CE, the 7,000-seat theater seen today is the product of renovations carried out at the end of the 2nd century. It continued to function throughout the Byzantine period. The theater had three tiers of seating, of which only the lowermost was preserved intact. Rising behind the stage was a 20-meter scaenae frons – an elaborate backdrop wall, comprising a row of imported granite and marble columns adorned by ornate capitals, a richly decorated entablature and statues.



The Roman theater. In the background – western bathhouse

2. Western Bathhouse – This Byzantine bathhouse, covering about 2.2 acres, contains hot and tepid bathing halls with a heating system (hypocaust). Its walls were coated with colored plaster and its floors were paved with marble slabs and mosaics. The main structure opens on all sides onto rooms and exedras. Frequent changes made to the building, with the funding of the province's governors, are documented in Greek dedicatory inscriptions.

3. "Palladius Street" – The 150-meter long colonnaded street crossed the city from the slopes of the tell to the theater. Originally built during the Roman period, the street was renovated at the beginning of the Byzantine period. On its northwest side is a covered portico that opens onto a row of shops whose facade was faced with marble. A dedicatory inscription from the 4th century CE found in the portico mosaic, recounts the construction of the portico in the days of Palladius, governor of the province. Thus the road came to be named Palladius Street by excavators. On the opposite side of the street, a two-story row of shops was erected on an ancient foundation from the Roman period.

4. Sigma – A semicircular concourse of the Byzantine period, referred to as the Sigma in an inscription found at the site, surrounded by rooms opening onto it. Several of these rooms were paved with colored mosaics displaying geometric, plant and animal motifs as well as Greek inscriptions. One mosaic medallion depicts Tyche, guardian goddess of the city, wearing a crown of city walls and holding a cornucopia.



Tyche, the city's guardian goddess

