

St Catherine Monastery

The monastery is located 115 km away from the hotel at a height of 1550 metres (almost 5000 feet) above sea level. The drive to the monastery takes just over 1 ½ hours. The monastery is open to the public from 9 a.m. to mid-day every day except Fridays and Sundays, and on certain holidays, (see the last page).

One passes several check points on the way, the last of which is at a T – junction several kilometres before the monastery. There one pays entrance tickets to the St Catherine Protectorate – the area of land around the monastery – which were the equivalent of US\$ 3.00 per person.



The driver will then drive to the car-park located about 900 metres below the monastery and wait there from noon time onwards. At the car-park are quite a few little souvenir shops and toilets. There was even a small bank and ATM there at one time though it did close down some time ago.



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Guests will then walk up to the monastery. Take the left hand fork going up as one has better views of the monastery as one approaches.

The visitor entrance into the monastery is through a small doorway on the south side. The main entrance is actually on the east side but this is closed to the public.



The visitor entrance leads into a small alley way. One turns to the right and on the right hand side is the well of the monastery (known as the Well of Jethro). Follow the alley and one will find the entrance to the main church, the Church of the Transfiguration, or the Basilica, dating back to the mid 6th century. Enter inside, (no photography allowed and silence should be observed), and follow through to the side of the church back outside into the alley way.

Turn to the right and follow the alley right to the site of the holy bush and the small, original chapel built some two hundred years earlier than the main basilica. The holy bush is fenced off for its own protection.



Most of the monastery is closed to the public as it is still a working monastery. But up a flight of stairs in the alley is the Ikon Galleria – the museum of the monastery and well worth a visit. The entrance fee is US\$ 5.00 or LE 90.00 per person. Photography is not allowed in the Ikon Galleria.

After the monastery one will find a couple of shops, a small hotel, a cafe and the Chapel of St Triphon, (known as the Chamber of Skulls), this was closed some time ago. (At times you may see a Bedouin sitting opposite it and who has a key and can open the door, but please reward him with a tip.)

When finished, return to the driver who will be waiting at the car-park.

Did you know ? As seen in the picture, there is also a mosque in the monastery, built for the Bedouins who live and work there. The monastery is a shining example of the harmony of Christian and Muslim societies living peacefully side by side. The Bedouins of the area actually originate from South East Europe, and were Christian before converting to Islam and intermarrying with other tribes.

Mount Sinai – “Moses Mountain”

On a path leading up from the monastery one can climb to the top of Mount Sinai, or more commonly known as Moses Mountain. One must take a Bedouin guide from the area and this can be arranged for a small fee down below at the car-park. The top of the mountain is 2385 metres above sea-level, so over 800 metres higher than the Monastery and therefore is not a short, easily managed walk but quite exhausting and which can take 2 – 3 ½ hours.

Most tour groups go at night time to see the sunrise. But then one is too tired to appreciate the monastery in the morning after descending the mountain. We recommend strongly to visit the monastery in the morning, then take lunch in St Catherine and then start the climb of the mountain 3 – 4 hours before sunset, descending just after sunset. Much more enjoyable and much less crowded ! Just before full moon it really is exceptional ! However, electric torches are still a must ! Once down, one can sleep and then be much more fresh the next day.



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