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The Temple Mount in Jerusalem - A view of the areas that are closed to the public

Photos & Edit: Ron Peled 2008

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The Temple Mount is open to tourist, but only for an excursion around the open plaza Entrance to the al-Aqsa Mosque, the Dome of the Rock, Solomon's Stables and other sites below the Mount itself, are off limits to any non-Muslims.



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So, let's go in...



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The structure of the Dome of the Rock is called, in Arabic, Qubbat al-Sakhra (which is not the Mosque of Omar, and in fact, not a mosque at all.). It was built in 691 by the Caliph Abd al-Malik (who founded the first Arab town in Israel – Ramla), and is believed to be the oldest and most intact Muslim structure in the Middle East.



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The interior of the dome is gilded and adorned with beautiful art



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Gold...



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The rock in the center of the structure is called the Foundation Stone. According to the Jewish and Muslim faiths, this is where the world was founded. It is where Abraham nearly sacrificed his son Isaac (Mount Moriah), it is where the very center of the Temple, the Holy of Holies, was located (give or take a few feet – but who's counting?) and according to Islam, from this very place, Mohammad ascended to heaven.



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According to Islamic tradition, from this very place, Muhammad ascended to Heaven accompanied by the angel Gabriel



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Below the Foundation Stone is a cave where, according to tradition, Mohammad prayed. The pillars seen in the picture are of secondary use, from the Crusade period when the Templar Knights lodged at the temple mount



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The Mihrab at the entrance to the cave is in honor of King Solomon and is probably one of the first prayer niches in the Muslim world



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The al-Aqsa Mosque, above the southern wall of the Temple (Hulda Gates) was first built at the beginning of the 8th century by the Caliph al-Walid. The 17th Sura (chapter in the Quran) depicts the prophet Mohammad's last journey at night from central Mecca to the outer mosque, the Masjad al-Aqsa, identified in Islam with the Temple Mount in Jerusalem



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Inside the mosque are marble pillars donated by no other than the 'pacifist' Benito Mussolini in the 1930s



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Beneath the al-Aqsa Mosque lie the remains of the al-Aqsa Qadima Mosque (the Ancient al-Aqsa), adjacent to the double (western) Hulda Gates



In the ceiling of the hall (beneath the Temple Mount and al-Aqsa) are four domes. It is uncertain whether they are Herodian (from the Second Temple) or not. If they are, they are the oldest domes in the world. However, they may be from a later period (Roman, Byzantine or Muslim)



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Beneath the south-east corner of the Temple Mount, just a little further, are the arches probably built by Herod, to elevate the Temple Mount and expand it to the 35.5 acre area it is today



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At the southern wall of the hall one can see the remains of the triple (eastern) Hulda Gates, through which one would enter the Second Temple. The Crusaders, who believed that the site was built by King Solomon, called the vast hall 'Solomon's Stables'. Since 1996, the hall is used as the al-Marwani Mosque



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The south-west corner of the Temple Mount from outside (Solomon's Stables)...



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