



## Letters of Thanks from Tour Participants:

"I would like to make special mention of the explanations in two languages, which were very professional."

"Yesterday I participated in your tour of Kafr Qasem, Kafr Bara/ Rosh Ha'ayin, and I must tell you that it was simply an outstanding tour: interesting, comprehensive, tasty and enriching!"

"The stops along the way were fascinating and enabled a multidisciplinary discussion of a wide range of subjects."

"I would like to congratulate you for this unusual and successful initiative. We had an exceptional experience on this visit. We would like to thank you for the outstanding organization of the entire event. We hope that there will be a follow-up to this first step, to further connect neighbors to one another."

**Sikkuy** is a shared organization of Arabs and Jews that promotes civic equality in Israel through various means. The Equality Zones project, which gave rise to the Via Maris group, is funded by USAID and promotes basic equality between the two populations by promoting municipal partnership on the regional level (in the Galilee and Southern Triangle Region) and by establishing permanent shared frameworks for dealing with issues such as environmental justice, industrial zones, public transportation and roads, and tourism. Upon the recommendation of Sikkuy, the mayors of seven local councils in the Southern Triangle/ South Sharon region - Kafr Qasem, Rosh Ha'ayin, Kfar Bara, Jaljulia, Kokhav Yair, Tira and the Southern Sharon Regional Council - supported the group's establishment and continue to maintain on-going close and supportive contact with them and with Sikkuy.



פרויקט אזורי שוויון  
مشروع مناطق مساواة



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

שותפות אזורית  
شراكة مناطقية

סיקוי / סיקוי  
The Association for the Advancement of Civic Equality

## Magic of Ramadan Tours The Southern Triangle/Southern Sharon Region





## Description



This past Ramadan (August 2013), Sikkuy and the Derekh Hayam ("Via Maris - The Sea Route") Jewish-Arab Working Group conducted tours that combined an innovative Ramadan experience in Arab communities with site-seeing at unique places in Jewish communities, and revealed the treasures of a lovely region that is not generally visited by tourists.

**Via Maris** is a group of local residents, Jews and Arabs, who are working together to promote regional tourism. The project was initiated last year by Sikkuy and funded by USAID for the purpose of fostering joint regional tourism, and with hopes of establishing the region as critically central to Israel's tourism map. The group takes its name from the historical Via Maris, the road that traversed the region and linked Egypt in the south with Syria and Iraq. This route was used extensively by merchants and travelers throughout history.

**The Magic of Ramadan Tours were planned by the group after an in-depth study of the region's tourism assets and include two main itineraries:**

**A. The Northern Route** - includes the communities of Kokhav Yair/Tzur Yigal, the Southern Sharon (Tzur Natan, Tzur Yitzhak) and Tira.

**B. The Southern Route** - includes Rosh Ha'Ayin and Ma'avar Afek, Kafr Qasem, Kafr Bara and Jaljulia.

### Itineraries

The tours began with major attractions in the Jewish communities and continued onto the Arab communities, where visitors were exposed to the customs of the Muslim fast month of Ramadan, a visit to a mosque and a fascinating and moving walk through the streets. At the end the visitors gathered in the home of a local family and joined the Iftar (the meal that breaks the fast at sunset) and learned about the special Ramadan fare. The

tour guides were pairs of Jewish and Arab guides who live in the region and are members of the Via Maris group.

### Successes

During its first year, this initiative brought almost 200 tourists from all over the country into the region. The tours were publicized in the social media and in a number of local newspapers, as well as on the national level.

**\*An article in Ha'aretz magazine** - about the catering entrepreneur Fatia, who hosts the Iftar meal on the Northern tour. (<http://www.haaretz.co.il/magazine/dining/premium-1.2091841>)

**\*The guides are Jewish and Arab members of the Via Maris working group and their cooperation and successes are an important model for regional cooperation, conflict mitigation and management.**

**\*Economic Promise:** The initiative provided income for local guides, transportation companies, regional newspapers, the host families, and many small businesses in the areas.

### Plans for 2014

The group plans to increase the number of Magic of Ramadan tours next year to at least ten tours, targeting a total of five-hundred tourists. In addition, new plans and initiatives for the coming year include:

- A shared regional tourism map to publicize the region;
- A website to make regional tourism accessible to all Israeli tourists;
- A shared Israeli-Arab non-profit association for promoting regional tourism;
- Participation by the group in the 2014 International Tourism Exhibition for promoting ties with other tourism associations in Israel and worldwide.

