

# Hamat Teverya National Park

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# Welcome to Hamat Teverya National Park

The hot springs that emerge from the depths of the earth next to the blue Sea of Galilee have been an attraction since antiquity, with the site's beauty and the healing qualities of the water gaining renown throughout the ancient world. As early as the thirteenth century BCE (Anastasi Papyrus), an Egyptian traveler mentions this area of the Sea of Galilee as a "tourism site."

The heat of the water, emerging at 60° Celsius, gave the city established alongside the springs its Hebrew name – Hamat – which comes from the Hebrew word meaning "hot." Hamat is mentioned as the southernmost fortified city of the tribe of Naphtali (Josh. 19:35). Much later, in the Roman period, (20 CE), the city of Tiberias was founded and "swallowed" Hamat. Hamat then became known as Hamat Teverya to differentiate it from other places with hot springs. The city wall of Tiberias, which was built in the Byzantine period (the sixth century CE), surrounded Hamat.

Most of the area of Hamat Teverya has yet to be excavated, but what has already been found and reconstructed makes for a fascinating visit. The mosaic of the ancient synagogue of Hamat is one of the most magnificent ever found in Israel, and the reconstructed Hamam Suleiman building is unparalleled anywhere in the country.



## A Tour of the National Park

### Steam Chimneys

The hot springs of Hamat have been in continuous use since ancient times, although over the years they have changed their location and structure somewhat. Beneath the park's landscaped gardens, deep below the earth's surface, are 17 highly saline hot springs and their steam escapes from the round chimneys built above them. The water is channeled to the modern baths of Tiberias, adjacent to the national park on the north on both sides of road 90. After use, the water is conducted to a Mekorot Water Company facility within the national park (near the road) and from there to a channel that conveys it to the Jordan River south of the Sea of Galilee.



### The Synagogue

Remains of the synagogue are displayed in all their glory near the southern wall of the city. Three synagogues were built here over the years, one atop the ruins of the other.

**The first synagogue** was founded in around 230 CE on the remains of an earlier public building. A small piece of mosaic survived from this synagogue, which was apparently destroyed in the third century CE. It can be seen on the southern edge of the central mosaic, at a lower level.

**The second synagogue** existed in the third and fourth centuries CE and left behind a magnificent mosaic floor, the earliest such floor ever found in Israel. The mosaic is divided into three panels. The northern panel depicts two lions flanking nine inscriptions in Greek dedicated to donors. In the center is a spectacular wheel of the Zodiac surrounding the image of Helios, the sun god. In the southern panel the Holy Ark is depicted, along with Jewish symbols such as two seven-branched candelabra, a shofar (ram's horn) and a lulav (palm frond).



Translation from Greek: "May he be remembered for good and for blessing, Profoturos the elder constructed this aisle of the synagogue. Blessing upon him. Amen. Shalom."

Translation from Greek: "Severos, disciple of the most illustrious patriarchs completed (it). Blessing on him and on Ioullos the supervisor."



Translation from Aramaic: "May peace be upon anyone who has offered charity in this holy place and anyone who will offer charity may he be blessed. Amen Amen Sela and for myself Amen."

The images of four women appear in the four corners of the mosaic, their dress and the agricultural produce they hold symbolizing the four seasons. One inscription mentions a man named Severus, who grew up in the household of "the extolled princes." Some call this the Severan synagogue after him.

The presence of the sun god in the middle of the mosaic and figures of nude males depicting the Zodiac signs of Libra and Aquarius are surprising. What do these have to do with



Maximos vowing fulfilled (it) long may he live!	Aboudemos vowing fulfilled (it)	Zoilos vowing fulfilled (it) long may he live!
Ioullos the supervisor completed the whole work	Patnarchis Blessing upon (it) fulfilled	Kalinikos vowing fulfilled (it) long may he live!
Profuturos vowing fulfilled (it) long may he live!	Severos disciple of the most illustrious	Stortasis vowing fulfilled (it) long may he be live!

a synagogue? We have no clear answer to this question, but similar depictions do appear in other synagogues of this period, such as the one at Bet Alfa. These images, together with the numerous Greek names in the inscriptions seem to indicate a relationship with the many non-Jewish inhabitants of the country at that time, and that Judaism felt secure enough to set aside concerns that such expressions would threaten its status.

The Severan synagogue was apparently destroyed in an earthquake at the beginning of the fifth century CE.

**The third synagogue** was built on the ruins of the Severan synagogue. This was a more extensive structure with a large hall divided by two rows of columns into three spaces. A semicircular niche was found at the southern end of the building, in the wall closest to Jerusalem, in which the Holy Ark would have stood. This synagogue, with few changes, continued to function until the eighth century CE.

### The "Roman Spring" and Remains of the Roman Bathhouse

Remains of three stone arches and archaeological finds scattered nearby hint at the existence of a bathhouse that functioned during the Roman period. A warm spring emerges from beneath the arches, which bore a structure that did not survive. When the level of the Sea of Galilee is very low, this spring goes dry.



### Hamam Suleiman

Legend has it that when sick people begged King Solomon to find a cure for their ailments, he ordered legions of demons to go down to the depths on the shores of the Sea of Galilee and heat the springs. He then struck them deaf so that they would never hear of his death and stop heating the springs, and so the demons carry out his command to this very day.

No real settlement seems to have been built at Hamat after the Early Arab period (the eighth century CE), but the baths certainly did continue in use. The building of Hamam Suleiman, built in 1780, has been wonderfully reconstructed and a visit there is a great experience (the hall is air-conditioned). The hamam operated for more than 150 years, until the 1940s. It now also serves as a small museum displaying finds discovered at Hamat, including perfume bottles from which bathers would have anointed themselves.

## Hamat Teverya National Park

**Visiting hours:** April–September 8:00–17:00  
October–March 8:00–16:00

On Fridays and holiday eves the site closes one hour earlier than the above.

**Tel:** 04-6725287

**Events:** Activities for schoolchildren and events in keeping with the character of the site, such as ceremonies for schoolchildren upon receiving their first Bible, may be held in the national park.

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