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Kursi National Park



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Welcome to Kursi National Park

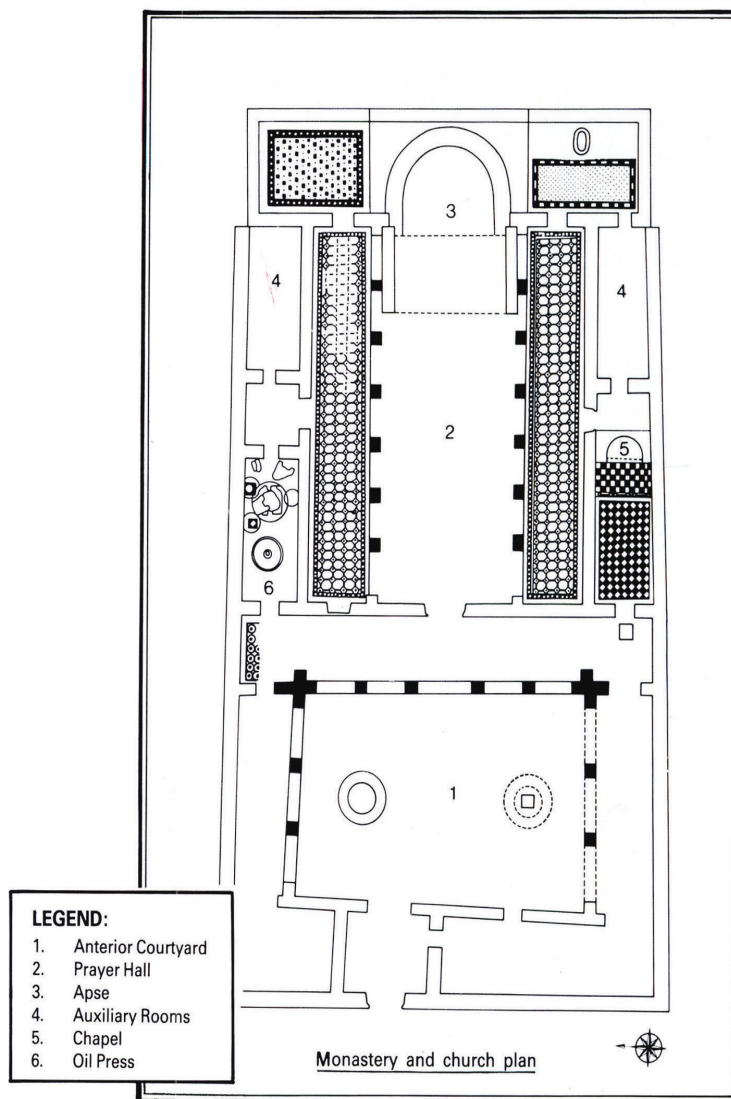
Kursi is located east of the Sea of Galilee, seven kilometers north of Ein Gev, at the turnoff leading to the Golan Heights via Giv'at Yoav.

According to Christian tradition, Kursi is the site of the miracle of the swine mentioned in the New Testament (Luke 8:26–39, Matthew 8:23–34). It is identified with Gergessa or Gerasa, “which is the country of the Gadarenes, which is over against Galilee.” Here, the New Testament relates, after Jesus had exorcised demons from the body of a man, they entered a herd of swine grazing nearby. The swine then raced into the Sea of Galilee and were drowned. Archaeologists identify the site as ancient Kursi, mentioned in the Talmud as a center of idol worship.

In 1970, the remains of an ancient structure were accidentally uncovered during road construction at Kursi. The site was excavated by Dan Urman and Vassilios Tzaferis of the Department of Antiquities and Museums, who unearthed the remains of the largest known Byzantine monastery in the Holy Land. The monastery, which had a church and was surrounded by walls, measured 123 x 145 meters. While the monastery was being reconstructed, additional excavations were conducted on a nearby hill. Here, a chapel paved with three separate layers of mosaics was found.

The monastery and church were probably built in the fifth century CE. The church was built in the basilica form with rows of columns that divide it into a nave and two side aisles. Near the apse (a semi-circular niche that protrudes from the building) is the baptistry, built at the end of the sixth century. Streets, fortifications and a variety of buildings were constructed around the monastery in order to serve the numerous pilgrims who frequented the area.

In 614, during the Persian invasion of the Holy Land, the church was damaged, many of the other buildings were destroyed, and the area of settlement was substantially reduced. The church was later reconstructed, but at the beginning of the eighth century it was razed by fire. Ninth-century Arab settlers in the area used the remains of the church as homes and storage rooms.



It is probably they who were responsible for the destruction of the figures in the mosaic floors. From the ninth century until the recent reconstruction, Kursi ceased to serve as a place of Christian pilgrimage.

The Israel Nature and Parks Authority reconstructed the lower church and its oil press. The walls were cleared of rubble and reconstructed.

By the northern part of the wall surrounding the monastery residential buildings, courtyards, and drainage channels were found. In the nearby chapel, the skeletons of 30 men, probably local priests, were discovered.

Kursi was opened to the public in September 1982, and has become a magnet for Christian pilgrims to the Holy Land.