St. John the Baptist Church in Acre



St. John the Baptist Church in Acre: The Latin Church on the Sea Wall

St. John the Baptist Church is a Latin Catholic church in the old city of **Acre**, standing on the sea wall near **Acre's lighthouse** and overlooking the sea. It was built in 1737 in the Gothic style and attached to the house of the friars of the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land, who had returned to Acre in 1620 and settled in the Khan al-Franj quarter, to serve as the parish church of the city's Latin-rite Christians. Neglected for many years, it was restored by its parishioners beginning in early 1994, and it still serves Acre's small Catholic community. This guide covers

the church's history, architecture and significance.

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Quick facts

St. John the Baptist Church in Acre at a glance

Arabic name	كنيسة القديس يوحنا المعمدان – عكا
Location	Sea wall near Acre's lighthouse, old city
Denomination	Latin Catholic
Administration	Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land
Built	1737
Style	Gothic
Builders	French merchants, according to local sources
Role	Parish church of Latin-rite Christians
Restoration	Begun by parishioners in early 1994
Feast	Nativity of St. John the Baptist, 24 June

St. John the Baptist: the patron

The church bears the name of **St. John the Baptist**, the Prophet Yahya son of Zakariya in Islamic tradition, who baptised Jesus in the Jordan River. He is revered by Christians and Muslims alike, and the Catholic Church celebrates his nativity on 24 June.

Location

The church stands at the south-western edge of the old city of Acre, on the sea wall east of the **lighthouse**, overlooking the sea. It is close to the Khan al-Franj quarter and the Monastery of St. Francis, Khan al-Umdan and the Clock Tower, and the churches of St. George (Greek Orthodox) and St. Andrew.

The Franciscans in Acre

- **1220:** St. Francis of Assisi visited Acre after meeting the Ayyubid Sultan al-Kamil in Egypt, who granted him and his friars freedom to travel to the holy places.
- **Before 1291:** the Franciscan Provincial Minister and the Custos of the Holy Land lived in Acre with about sixty friars, who were killed when the Mamluk army liberated Acre from the Crusaders in 1291.
- **1620:** the Franciscans returned to Acre under Emir Fakhr al-Din al-Maani, settling in the Khan al-Franj quarter and building their church and friary in the middle of the old market.
- **1737:** St. John the Baptist Church was attached to their house to serve as the city's Latin parish church.

History of the church

The church was built in 1737, at a time when Acre was enjoying a commercial revival that began with the return of European merchants to its khans and

flourished under Zahir al-Umar al-Zaydani, who made Acre his capital from the mid-18th century and under whose rule other churches were built in the city, such as St. Andrew's and the Maronite church. Local sources say it was built by French merchants. As the European merchant community declined, the church became the parish church of Arab Christians of the Latin rite. It was neglected for many years until its parishioners began restoring it in early 1994.

Architecture

The church is a small stone building in the **Gothic style**, topped by a bell tower, built on Acre's sea wall so that it became part of the line of fortifications facing the sea. Its position near the lighthouse gives it an open view of the sea, making it one of the most prominent sights for anyone approaching Acre from the water.

Acre's Christians and the Nakba

Acre was an Arab city of Muslims and Christians of several denominations, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Latin and Maronite, where mosques and churches stood side by side in the old city. On 17 May 1948 the city fell to the Haganah, and most of its people were expelled to Lebanon and Syria, while some remained in the old city. St. John's remained the church of the Latin Catholics who stayed in the city.

The church today (2026)

Today the church serves Acre's small Latin Catholic community and is cared for by the friars of the Monastery of St. Francis, who work with the city's people and engage in dialogue with Muslims and with Christians of other denominations. Visits require advance booking. On the sea wall it remains a witness to Acre's Arab diversity, alongside the al-Jazzar Mosque and the city's other churches.

Frequently asked questions

Where is St. John the Baptist Church in Acre?

On the sea wall in Acre's old city, near the lighthouse, overlooking the sea.

When was the church built?

In 1737, in the Gothic style.

Which denomination does the church belong to?

The Latin Catholic Church; it is run by the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land.

Has the church been restored?

Yes. After years of neglect, its parishioners began restoring it in early 1994.

Can the church be visited?

Yes, but visits require advance booking with the Monastery of St. Francis in Acre.

Conclusion

On Acre's sea wall, near its lighthouse, St. John the Baptist Church has stood since 1737 as a witness to commercial Acre under Zahir al-Umar, and to a small Christian community that stayed in its city after the Nakba and restored its church with its own hands. Together with Acre's mosques and other churches, it tells the story of an Arab city of many communities and one identity.

Sources

- Palestine 48 – Acre
- Custody of the Holy Land – Acre (Arabic sanctuary leaflet)
- Custody of the Holy Land – Sanctuaries: Acre

- Akka Net – The city of Acre: location, civilisation and history
- Christian Media Center – Acre: the millenary city where Saint Francis visited

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