A woman's face dubbed 'Mona Lisa of the Galilee' graced the cover of the January 1988 issue of Biblical Archaeology Review. Looking through the magazine I was so mesmerized by this picture I found the contact information and applied to participate in the excavations.

Who was she? The Mistress of the House? A girlfriend of the Artist? What we do know is that more than 20 colored mosaic tiles (made of stone) were used just for her portrait. Her haunting beauty and hint of a smile earned the title.

Just one image in a larger floor dated to around 200 CE it was part of a triclinium or formal dining room. Perhaps belonging to the Roman governor the floor depicts 15 panels which tells the story of a drinking competition between Hercules and the Greek god of wine, Dionysus.
Luckily, when the building collapsed perhaps during the Great Earthquake of 363 the fallen roof tiles preserved the mosaic. Upon its discovery during the last week of the 1987 excavation the mosaic the following year was lifted out of the ground and brought to Jerusalem for conservation. It was later returned to the site where it can be seen today.

Just down the hill from Mona Lisa another incredible floor was discovered a few years later. While preparing the site for a parking lot ruins dating to the 5th century was discovered. Built along the slope of the hill the large public building was of unknown purpose but also had a large mosaic floor. In its center were 12 panels with Hebrew lettering for the 12 Zodiac signs.
Due to this design and the shape of the building it was realized that the archaeologists had uncovered a synagogue! This was not the first such Zodiac discovered as 6 other known Jewish houses of worship had similar designs. What the meaning was (if any) would spark a vigorous debate within the scholarly community.

As you proceed to the lower city of Sepphoris (meaning 'bird') you will come to other public buildings which you would expect to find in any Roman city. Walking along the ancient flagstones of the street you will see mosaics along the sidewalks.
Another interesting floor you can see is known as 'The Orpheus Mosaic'. Orpheus was a figure in Greek mythology whose music was said to tame wild animals. Another triclinium or formal dining room was discovered showing scenes of revelry.

Additional floors await your discovery at this exciting site. The Sepphoris National Park is only a few kilometers north of Nazareth in the Galilee. Make sure you plan a visit soon!