

EGYPT, JORDAN & ISRAEL

30 days

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Day 1 Arrive in Cairo

Today we arrive in Cairo.*

Al-Qahira, literally "The Vanquisher" or "The Conqueror", is the capital of Egypt (about to be replaced by the city of "New Cairo"). The combined populations of the five cities that make up the metropolitan area on the Nile are over 21,000,000, making it the largest urban area on the continent. Nicknamed "The City of a Thousand Minarets" for its preponderance of Islamic architecture, Cairo has long been a centre of the region's political and cultural life.

* PLEASE NOTE - As tomorrow will be an early start and a full day, you may want to arrive a day early should your arrival time be late at night. Extra nights at the same hotel can be quoted/booked by your tour consultants once your flight schedule is known.

Overnight in Cairo.

Day 2 Cairo: Great Pyramids & the Sphinx - Grand Egyptian Museum

This morning we kick off our comprehensive sightseeing program with some of the most iconic of Egyptian monuments: The Great Pyramids and the Sphinx.

Impressive in their grandeur, the pyramids are estimated to have been constructed over a period of 20 years using more than 100,000 labourers each year. The Great Pyramid of Cheops, constructed from over two million stone blocks, is 135m (443 feet) high! You may enter one of the pyramids through a long, narrow passageway and explore the deep inner chambers (OPTIONAL - extra fee applicable).

Later we visit the Sphinx. This feline-human was named by the Greeks because it resembled the mythical winged monster with a woman's head and lion's body. Legend has it that this "Sphinx" proposed a riddle to the Thebans and killed all who could not guess the correct answer! The Sphinx was carved from one solid piece of limestone.

We then continue to the Great Egyptian Museum (GEM), where we can break for lunch at your choice of one of several on-site restaurants/cafes.

After our break, our visit of the museum begins with a guided tour. The Grand Egyptian Museum is not only Egypt's new crown jewel, but also be one of the largest, most modern, and most renowned museums in the entire world. When the Grand Museum fully opens it will be the largest archaeological museum complex in the world and host to more than 100,000 artefacts. For the first time ever, king Tutankhamun's entire treasure collection will be on display alongside artefacts from pre-historic times, through Egypt's many thousands of years of ancient Egyptian civilization, through the comparatively more modern ancient Greek and Roman periods of Egyptian history.

During our visit we'll also receive an explanation of one of the main themes that repeats throughout GEM -- "Kingship and Eternity" -- and witness how this is reflected in the monuments accessible to us on today's visit, namely: The Hanging Obelisk, the Colossal Statue of King Ramesses II, the ten Statues of King Senusret I (distance view), the Grand Staircase (distance view), double statues of Ptolemaic King and Queen, the Victory Column of King Merenptah, the statue of the god Hapy, and the Statue of King Ramesses II.

Our visit will culminate with the ground-breaking "Tutankhamun - The Immersive Exhibition," which takes us on a mythical journey to the mesmerizing world of Ancient Egypt. Through state-of-the-art digital projections, you will have the unparalleled opportunity to step into the astonishing life of the legendary Golden King via an awe-inspiring audiovisual adventure that spans an astonishing 3,400 years of history.

After our visit we return to our hotel for dinner and overnight.

Overnight in Cairo (Giza).

Day 3 Cairo: Dahshur, Memphis & Saqqara

We have an early start for a full-day day of sightseeing. Our drive this morning takes us through the suburbs of Giza, past some small, colourful villages and plantations in the fertile Nile Valley.

We first travel to the stunning site of Dahshur, known chiefly for several pyramids, mainly Senefru's Bent Pyramid and the Red Pyramid, which are among the oldest, largest, and best-preserved in Egypt, built from 2613 to 2589 BC. These pyramids were an extremely important learning experience for the Egyptians as they provided knowledge and know-how to transition from step-sided pyramids to smooth-sided pyramids. Ultimately their breadth of experience would allow them to build the Great Pyramid of Giza.

We continue to Memphis and Saqqara, chronologically the two most important sites in all of Egypt. Memphis was the capital of Egypt during the Old Kingdom (ca 2700-2180 BC). Here we will see several statues in a garden-like setting, including the colossal statue of Rameses the Great.

From Memphis we travel a short distance to Saqqara, the ancient burial site for the people of Memphis. On the site, considered by many archaeologists to be one of the world's most important excavations, is the Step Pyramid, constructed by Imhotep in the 27th century BC. The pyramid began as a simple mastaba, or long, flat tomb building. Over the course of time, Imhotep added to this mastaba five times -- the pyramid eventually measured 62m (203 feet) in height!

While at Saqqara we also see the Serapeum, the tomb of the sacred Apis bulls that were associated with the god Ptah, whose cult center was in Memphis. An avenue of sphinxes leads to the Serapeum, which is composed of two long corridors that once housed the mummified remains of the bulls.

After a full day we return to our hotel.

Overnight in Cairo (Giza).

Day 4 Cairo - Fly to Aswan: The High Dam, Unfinished Obelisk & Philae Temple

Another early start for our flight to Aswan in Upper Egypt.* Aswan is Egypt's sunniest southern city and an ancient frontier town. Small enough to walk around and graced with the most beautiful setting on the Nile, the pace of life in Aswan is slow and relaxing.

On arrival we'll take a trip to the High Dam of Aswan. Constructed between 1960 and 1971, the High Dam collects and stores water over a number of years so that the annual Nile flood can be controlled. From here we will have a panoramic view of Aswan to the north and Lake Nasser to the south.

We also visit Philae Temple. The temple is dramatically situated on an island, so we enjoy a short boat journey to get to the site. The site is relatively small, but the charm of the setting and the excellent state of preservation makes this a must-see.

On our way back to town, we'll visit the 'Unfinished Obelisk'. The obelisk's creators began to carve it directly out of bedrock, but cracks appeared in the granite and the project was abandoned. The bottom side of the obelisk is still attached to the bedrock. The unfinished obelisk offers unusual insights into ancient Egyptian stone-working techniques, with marks from workers' tools still clearly visible as well as ochre-coloured lines marking where they were working.

* NOTE: The actual order of our sightseeing in Upper Egypt may vary depending on variables such as flight schedules and weather. Your Tour Leader will keep you apprised of any adjustments as the tour progresses.

Overnight in Aswan.

Day 5 Aswan: St. Simeon Monastery & Kitchener's Island

This morning we will take a private boat across the River Nile to the west bank. From here we travel by camel across the sandy desert to the

Christian Monastery of St Simeon. Before we begin this easy trek, our Tour Leader and camel trainer will teach you the technique of riding a camel. This is a journey that can be undertaken by anyone at any age (one rider per camel). Our trek is about 45 minutes to the monastery, and then 15 minutes back to the riverbank. Those who prefer not to ride can travel by open truck to the monastery and meet up with the group there.

Dating from the 6th century, and in use until the 13th century, the Monastery of St Simeon is one of the best-preserved Christian sites in Egypt. Inside we will see the chapel, living quarters, kitchen and dining areas, wine press, bake area and storerooms. On our tour we will also see the remains of some Coptic frescoes -- depictions of Christ and saints as well as many geometric patterns.

We then return to the banks of the Nile and re-board our boat and ride among the islands dotting the Nile. Up the hill, above the river, is the Mausoleum of the Aga Khan, spiritual leader of the Ismailis, a Shi'ite sect based principally in India but with followers around the world. The tomb is an elegant pink granite structure of late 1950 origin.

The main island in the middle of the Nile is called Elephantine Island because many of the rocks look like elephants bathing in the Nile. On the west side of the river is the beautiful Kitchener's Island, where we will have time to stroll through the rich botanical gardens.

Later this afternoon we have a leisurely sail on a felucca, a traditional sailing vessel used for centuries for carrying goods and passengers along the Nile.

Overnight in Aswan.

Day 6 Aswan: Abu Simbel

A pre-dawn departure by road (+/- 3 hours, each way)* takes us south from Aswan across the Western Desert to Nubia, or the "Land of the Gold". Our destination this morning is the impressive Abu Simbel -- the imposing rock temples of Rameses II and his queen, Nefertari.

We have a guided tour of this site, including the interior of the colossal temples. The Temple of Rameses II, with its immense statues of the Pharaoh seated on his throne, is one of the classic images of the power of the Pharaohs. Inside the temple you will see well-preserved wall decorations and several murals. There is a wonderful relief of Rameses presenting captives to various gods, including himself! We also gain insight into the reconstruction process by visiting the interior of the artificial mountain. Return by road to Aswan in time for a late lunch.

* When visiting Abu Simbel we choose to travel by road instead of flying as the air schedules tend to be rather restrictive and do not always allow enough time at the site (much time is taken up by check-in, security, boarding, transferring etc). Driving frees us from this inconvenience and adds flexibility, plus allows us to see the High Dam en route. Departing very early ensures that we are at the site at the optimal time for photography; later in the morning, shadows fall across the temple making conditions less than ideal.

Overnight in Aswan.

Day 7 Aswan - Luxor via Kom Ombo & Edfu

This morning we say farewell to Aswan and travel by road to the Temple of Kom Ombo. In ancient times, Kom Ombo was strategically important as a trading town on the caravan route from Nubia to Cairo. Kom Ombo, actually two temples in one, is dedicated dually to Haroeris (Horus) and Sobek, respectively the god of the sky and the crocodile-headed god. Here we are able to see the remains of a mummified crocodile. Crocodiles no longer exist in the Egyptian part of the River Nile, but in Pharaonic times they lived here in great numbers and were worshipped as gods!

From Kom Ombo we travel to the site of Edfu. As the largest and most completely preserved Pharaonic temple, albeit Greek-built, Edfu is dedicated to the god Horus. Construction of this temple began under Ptolemy III Euergetes I in 237 BC. We will allow time to explore this massive and impressive site, enclosed by walls and flanked by two large pylon gateways. Here we will also be able to see a Nilometer -- an ancient technique of measuring the Nile's water fluctuations and setting the level of taxes

Overnight in Luxor.

Day 8 Karnak Temple & Luxor Temple

This morning we start our day with a guided tour of Karnak Temple.

Karnak was built, added to, dismantled, restored, enlarged and decorated during its colourful history of over 1,500 years. At certain points in Egyptian history, this temple was the most important in all of Egypt. When we arrive at the temple you will be awed by the grandeur of the tremendous pylon gateway and the Avenue of 1,000 Sphinxes that originally ran all the way to the Nile and Luxor Temple! We will have a guided tour of the complex, massive by any standard.

After our visit, we enjoy a break before our evening visit to Luxor Temple. The temple was dedicated to the Theban Triad of Amun, Mut, and Chons and was built during the New Kingdom, the focus of the annual Opet Festival, in which a cult statue of Amun was paraded down the Nile from nearby Karnak Temple to stay there for a while, with his consort Mut, in a celebration of fertility. Luxor temple is considered one of the largest ancient Egyptian temple complexes situated on the eastern bank of the river Nile. At the entrance is a huge tower built by King Ramses II.

Overnight in Luxor.

Day 9 Luxor: Valley of the Kings

Early this morning we cross the River Nile by boat to the West Bank where the wealth of antiquities is outstanding. On the other side we will meet our donkey-cart transport for our excursion into the Valley of the Kings through the New Gurna Village and into the countryside. Avoiding the busier road, we will witness quiet village life along the way for about 40-45 minutes before re-uniting with our road transport for the final leg into the Valley of the Kings.

Once in the isolated valley, dominated by large pyramid-shaped mountains, we will have a guided tour of three of the many tombs that are here.* The valley was the burial ground for kings throughout the New Kingdom. Note that some of the tombs have steep stairways and all are quite dark inside (you might find a pocket flashlight useful).

We then proceed to the funerary temple of Queen Hatshepsut -- the first woman to rule as pharaoh! We have a tour of this impressive complex, discovered in the mid-19th century and still under restoration.

After our tour we return by bus through the countryside back to the river and the East Bank. During free time this afternoon, we suggest a visit to the excellent Luxor Museum or Mumification Museum.

Tonight you may choose to visit the Sound and Light show at Karnak Temple (optional).

* We do not include the tomb of King Tut, as it is very small and not very interesting, relatively speaking, but we allow time for you to see it if you wish (separate ticket).

Overnight in Luxor.

Day 10 Luxor: Valley of the Queens

This morning we make an excursion the Valley of the Queens.* After crossing the Nile we will board our bus for the short journey to visit this wonderful necropolis on the western shore of the Nile.

The Valley of the Queens was used as a burial site for the royal women of the 18th, 19th and 20th Dynasties. Ancient Egyptians called this place "Set Neferu" meaning Seat Of Beauty, and today only a few of the eighty tombs are open to the public (we will visit three). The Valley of the Queens holds far more than graves of queens. Please note that an OPTIONAL visit of the tomb of Queen Nefertari is available for an extra charge (your Tour Leader will advise of the current fee).

As well as our visit to the Valley of the Queens we will also have a guided tour of the workers' village and the Madinat Habu temple. Madinat

Habu, also known as the temple of Rameses III was known in ancient times as Djanet, and according to ancient belief, was the place where Amon first appeared. Both Hatshepsut and Tutmosis III built a temple dedicated to Amon here, and later Rameses III constructed his larger memorial temple on the site.

* Due to periodic and unannounced closures of the tombs at the Valley of the Queens, your Tour Leader may substitute the Tombs of the Nobles, which are equally interesting.

Overnight in Luxor.

Day 11 Luxor: Dendera Temple & Time at Leisure

This morning we enjoy an excursion to the fascinating temple of Dendera located north of Luxor on the banks of the Nile.

Dendera Temple is one of the best-preserved temple complexes in Egypt. Located in the city of Qena (60 km north of Luxor) Dendera was constructed for the worship of Goddess Hathor, goddess of love, beauty, and motherhood in the ancient Egyptian religion. The temple was founded by pharaoh Pepi I (2250 BC) and continued during the New Kingdom (1550-1080 BC). What was left dates back to the Greco-Roman time in Egypt. The recent cleaning of the ceiling of the Dendera Temple has revealed and exposed some of the most vibrant and colourful paintings dating from antiquity. The temple has two decorated crypts, two halls with ceilings supported by columns and two funeral chapels, from where the famous "zodiac" from the Louvre comes.

We return to Luxor for some well-deserved free time for independent exploration, shopping, napping etc after some full days of touring. The Luxor Museum is also worthwhile, as it displays a very good contextual story of Luxor and the nearby valley of the Kings and Queens. The wooden sarcophagi are the highlight -- so vivid that it's hard to believe they are thousands of years old.

Overnight in Luxor.

Day 12 Luxor - Cairo: Museum of Egyptian Antiquities

Today we fly back to Cairo.

On arrival we proceed to the famous Museum of Egyptian Antiquities,* where we enjoy a guided tour of some of Egypt's most beloved treasures. Among the 100,000 pieces housed on the museum's two floors is the famous exhibit of Tutankhamun whose tomb was discovered by Howard Carter in 1922. The tomb and treasures of this young Pharaoh, modest by Pharaonic Egyptian standards, is perhaps the best-preserved of the discovered tombs. We also see archaeological relics from the Old Kingdom, Middle Kingdom, New Kingdom and Greco-Roman periods. There is also a separated area devoted to the best-known of the Tut antiquities (the Mummies Room), which you can enter for an optional extra fee (ask your Tour Leader for the current rate).

* Please note that the above description is likely to be accurate for our tours scheduled for early 2024, when it is expected that the King Tut exhibition will still be housed at this site (rather than at the GEM). It remains unclear as to exactly what exhibits will be moved to GEM and when, but we expect that this museum will continue to function even after GEM is fully opened. Once this situation becomes clearer we will update this day's description.

Overnight in Cairo (central).

Day 13 Cairo: Coptic & Islamic Cairo - Khan el Khalili

Today visit the new National Museum of Egyptian Civilization (NMEC), a nice addition to the Cairo museum landscape and an excellent way to recap all that we have done and seen during our tour.

We then drive through the neat, tree-lined streets of the Garden City area to Coptic Cairo, the centre of Christianity in Cairo.* We will walk the cobblestone streets and stop at a few of the churches, including that of Saint Sergius, presumed to be the spot where the Holy Family lived during their flight into Egypt. The present building dates from the 11th century. As we stroll along we will come to the recently restored Synagogue of Ben Ezra, the oldest Jewish synagogue in Egypt. Despite the 45 Jewish families that remain in Cairo, the synagogue is no longer operational.

We then proceed to Islamic Cairo, where we will tour the Citadel, begun by Saladin in the 12th century. Today the Citadel's buildings are mainly from the Ottoman period, and are truly grand. From the Citadel, actually a complex of three mosques and four museums, we enjoy an amazing view of Cairo spread beneath the hilltop. Here we will see the fabulous Mosque of Mohammed Ali, also known as the "Alabaster Mosque."

Finally we make a stop at Khan el Khalili, one of the most interesting bazaars, not only in Egypt, but also in all the Middle East. The atmosphere of this traditional market, together with the labyrinthine layout of the streets, gives visitors a glimpse into what medieval markets were once like.

* The Coptic Cairo section of our program exists here in a tentative basis given ever-changing security considerations in this district. Your Tour Leader will advise of the current status once you have arrived on tour and a substitution may be put into place.

Overnight in Cairo (central).

Day 14 Cairo, Egypt - Amman, Jordan

This morning we will fly from Cairo to Amman, the capital of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

Amman, the modern and ancient capital of Jordan, is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the World. The city's modern buildings blend with the remnants of ancient civilizations. The profusion of gleaming white houses, kebab stalls with roasting meat, and tiny cafes where rich Arabian coffee is sipped in the afternoon sunshine, conjure a mood straight from a thousand and one nights.

Overnight in Amman.

Day 15 Amman: Jerash & Amman City Tour

Today we have a look at modern central Amman, visiting the Archaeological Museum, and the not-so-modern Roman Amphitheatre and the ruins of the Temple of Hercules.

We then leave Amman by bus for a tour of the extensive Roman site of Jerash. In the 1st and 2nd centuries AD, Jerash was a wealthy city and is today considered one of the most important and best preserved of all Roman sites. We visit the famous elliptical forum, the beautiful amphitheatre with its superb natural acoustics, and the site of the huge Temple of Artemis.

We will stop for our evening meal en route back to our hotel. This allows us to use our bus transport for this purpose and make for an early-ish arrival back to the hotel after a full day.

Overnight in Amman.

Day 16 Amman - Madaba - Mt Nebo - Shobak - Petra

This morning we travel to Madaba, a small town famous for its magnificent mosaic floors. A unique mosaic covers the floor of St. George's

church and consists of a huge map of the Holy Land as it appeared in the 6th century AD.

Driving to the edge of the Jordan Valley we reach Mount Nebo from where Moses and the Children of Israel first saw the Promised Land. On a clear day you can look down to see the Dead Sea and the River Jordan. On the other side of the valley is the city of Jerusalem. Here we see a huge mosaic of hunting scenes covers the floor of a ruined Byzantine church.

We leave Mt Nebo and travel south; along this route, castles and towns were positioned a one day's travel distance apart. Later we visit Shobak Castle, built by the Crusaders in 1115 and sacked by Muslim forces under Saladin in 1189. We finish our full day at Petra.

Overnight in Petra.

Day 17 Petra: Site Tour

Petra was the capital of the Nabataean Kingdom from the fourth century BC to the 2nd century AD. From the 12th century until its rediscovery in 1812, Petra was lost to the world -- a closely guarded secret of the local tribes. Today the 'rose red city half as old as time' is probably the most impressive archaeological site in the Middle East, rivaling the temples and pyramids of Egypt in grandeur.

This morning, on our way into the hidden valley of Petra, we will see the Obelisk Tomb and the irrigation system that carried water from a dam throughout the desert city. Access to the monuments of Petra is through a narrow gorge in the towering rocks called the 'Siq'. As we emerge from the 'Siq' you stand in awe in front of the 'Treasury' (El Kazneh), a graceful structure carved from the living rock. After pausing to admire the elegant columns and carvings we carry on into the valley where elaborate tombs are carved into the multi-coloured walls. Everywhere the sandstone swirls and twists in shades of red, orange, yellow, pink and white. Next we will see the Roman amphitheatre, carved directly out of the mountain, with space for over 3,000 spectators.

Further on in the main valley of Petra, are the Royal Tombs including the Palace Tomb and the Silk Tomb. We visit the temple of the Nabataeans' main god, Dushara, and we also see the 'Temple of the Winged Lion'. Our formal guided tour of the site terminates with a visit to the Petra Nabataean Museum.

At this point, you may explore further on your own, or return to our hotel to relax and/or shop. You may also take a strenuous walk up a narrow pass to see the magnificent 'Monastery' building, El Deir. The views of Petra and the surrounding area are expansive. The walk is steep and involves approximately 750 steps carved into the rock and will take APPROXIMATELY one hour up (30 minutes down).

NOTE: Access to Petra is by means of footpath only. The main sites occur near ground that is level and well-worn, though the overall site is huge. Our pace is leisurely with frequent breaks; however, to fully experience Petra you must be prepared for a considerable amount of walking and little shade. Please note that we include lunch today on the site of Petra instead of dinner this evening, which allows us to maximize our time here and still enjoy a relaxing sit-down meal without having to rely on carry-in packed lunches. Your Tour leader can assist with your evening meal plans back in the village, which we do not include today.

Overnight at Petra.

Day 18 Petra: El Beidha & Leisure Time

This morning we travel by bus to the nearby Nabatean site of 'el Beidha' (known as 'Little Petra'). We will also see a settlement dating from the Neolithic period, some 8,500 years ago. This is one of the oldest sights in the Middle East; it shows evidence of habitation by a "Pre-Pottery" population who were herders experimenting with agriculture. We return to our hotel by bus.

This afternoon, you can either relax or re-enter the breathtaking main site of Petra to further explore on your own. There are a number of scenic walks/hikes that one can enjoy within the site. Ask your Tour Leader for details.

Overnight at Petra.

Day 19 Petra - Wadi Rum

This morning we depart Petra by road bound for Wadi Rum, where Lawrence of Arabia conducted many of his campaigns during the First World War.

After a break for lunch, we'll hop into smaller trucks and head out into the desert, where the sand is red and the huge rock formations resemble gigantic multi-layered cakes melting in the sun. We may be invited into a goat-hair tent to share a glass of tea with some Bedouin tribesmen -- the nomadic herdsman of the desert who made up Lawrence's army. Running along the floor of the valley is the Hejaz Railway that Lawrence blew up repeatedly. Our excursion is a 3-hour route known as "Siq Al Barra and Om Eshreen."

Tonight we will be accommodated in a luxury tented camp where we enjoy a unique blend of traditional Bedouin culture and modern comfort.

Overnight in Wadi Rum.

Included Meal(s): Dinner

Day 20 Wadi Rum - Dead Sea

Today we travel north along the Dead Sea Highway to the Dead Sea.

King David, King Herod, Jesus, and John the Baptist were closely linked with the Dead Sea and its surroundings. During the Egyptian conquest it is said that Queen Cleopatra obtained exclusive rights to build cosmetic and pharmaceutical factories in the area. Later the Nabataeans discovered the value of bitumen extracted from the Dead Sea used by the Egyptians.

We hope to arrive at our Dead Sea hotel in time for lunch (on your own). The hotel is located on the shores of the sea where you will have the chance to swim and experience your amazing buoyancy in the ultra-salty waters.

Overnight at the Dead Sea.

Day 21 Dead Sea, Jordan - Tel Aviv, Israel

Today we cross the border into Israel and travel to Tel Aviv, Israel's largest city and biggest commercial center. It is a busy metropolis that inspires its visitors with a unique energetic atmosphere. Tel Aviv presents a lively combination of entertainment venues, shopping malls, exotic markets, and golden beaches. It is also the country's greatest cultural center, home of a variety of museums, galleries, theatres and concert halls.

Please note: Given that today is Saturday (Shabbat), it is possible that hotels will be allowing check-in later than usual (+/- 6pm).

Overnight in Tel Aviv.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 22 Tel Aviv & Jaffa

Today we have a tour of vibrant Tel Aviv, a modern city with a unique mix of European and Middle Eastern influences. We see the Independence Hall (possibly closed for renovations) and the colourful Carmel Market. We also visit the Ayalon Institute, now a museum. The Ayalon Institute was a secret ammunition factory disguised as part of a kibbutz to fool the British back in the 1940s. Jewish people used the factory in their efforts to fight for the independent state of Israel, and organizers went to extreme measures to build and sustain this secret factory within the kibbutz.

We then head off to the Old Port City of Jaffa (Yaffo), an ancient and beautiful city located in the south of Tel-Aviv. Jaffa claims over 4,000 years of history and is the place where the prophet Jonas was swallowed by the whale, and the Rock of Andromeda can be seen jutting from the water. The Turks, Napoleon and the British also established their rule of the region through control of this city. We have a walking tour of the old city of Jaffa, a major attraction with winding alleys full of cafes, restaurants and art galleries.

You will have free time for independent exploration. Jaffa is a mixed city with Jews, Christians, and Muslims living together in harmony.

Return to Tel Aviv.

Overnight in Tel Aviv.

Day 23 Tel Aviv - Caesarea - Akko - Haifa

Travelling north along the scenic Mediterranean coast road, we will cross Netanya and visit the impressive ruins of Caesarea, once Roman capital of the Holy Land. Caesarea, whose construction began in 22 BC was dedicated by Herod to his patron Augustus Caesar. When it was completed 12 years later, only Jerusalem outshone it in its grandeur. The Roman theatre here once seated 3,600 people. By the main gate to the theatre is proof that Pontius Pilate, governor of Judea during the time of Jesus, actually lived in this area. At various times in its history, this beautiful coastal town has been a Roman Capital, a port and a major conquest for the Crusaders.

After visiting Acre (Akko), with its underground Crusader city and the crypt of St John, we arrive at the beautiful city of Haifa.

Overnight in Haifa.

Day 24 Haifa - Nazareth - Tiberias

We begin our day with a visit to the summit of Mount Carmel with its breathtakingly panoramic view of the town, the bay, and a considerable part of western Galilee. Later we will tour the Persian Gardens and the Bahai Shrine.

We continue to Megiddo, named in the Book of Revelations as the place of Armageddon, the place where the forces of good and evil will meet in the final battle for mankind. Of particular interest are the outlines of 5,000 year old early Bronze Age temples.

We travel onwards to Nazareth where we visit the largest Basilica in the Middle East -- the Church of Annunciation. According to one of the ancient traditions, it was here that the archangel Gabriel foretold the coming of Jesus to the Virgin Mary. The interior of the present church has a most beautiful design, incorporating fragments of much older buildings.

We continue to Tiberias on the shore of the Sea of Galilee (Yam Kinneret).

Overnight in Tiberias.

Day 25 Tiberias - Capernaum - Tabgha - Tiberias

At the northern tip of the Sea of Galilee we visit Capernaum, one of the most important Jewish and Christian sites of the Roman and Byzantine period and home of some of the Disciples. Jesus is believed to have moved here from Nazareth because it was the home of his first converts, Peter and Andrew.

Continuing, we arrive at Tabgha where Jesus performed the miracle of the loaves and fishes. We visit the Church of the Multiplication of the Loaves and Fishes. The mosaic floor is incredible, featuring ancient Egyptian motifs.

We then board our boat for a delightful cruise on the Sea of Galilee to ancient Tiberias,* a relaxed seaside resort located in the cradle of Christianity. We have an opportunity to visit Kibutz Ein Gev.

We also visit the Mount of Beatitudes (also known as Mount Eremos), where it is believed the Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Mount. The church is surrounded by peaceful gardens and in the expansive courtyard in front of the church is a mosaic floor created by Italian artist Vasco Nadorri in 1984.

* Ever-changing water levels may require that we defer this activity if impractical. Please note that the order of today's sightseeing elements may be reversed at the discretion of your Tour Leader/local guide.

Overnight in Tiberias.

Day 26 Tiberias - the Dead Sea

Today we journey through the Jordan Valley to the Dead Sea stopping at Beit She'an, a former Roman metropolis home to 30,000 to 40,000 citizens covering approximately 370 acres. Visitors to the park can see the ancient wall that surrounded the city, public baths, a Roman temple, stores, artisan workshops and other well-preserved structures.

We also visit the ancient synagogue of Beit Alpha, located in the Beit She'an Valley. The mosaic floor of the synagogue was discovered in 1929, when members of Kibbutz Beit Alpha dug irrigation channels for their fields.

Once we check in at the hotel (after 2pm), you can use the hotel spa and beach where you will have the chance to bathe in the mineral-enriched mud or have a float on the Dead Sea.

Overnight at the Dead Sea.

Day 27 Dead Sea - Masada - Wadi David - Jerusalem

This morning we travel south to visit Masada.

This great flat-topped mountain and natural fortress was once held by a small band of Jewish zealots for three years despite the force of Roman armies. On this site 1,000 people committed mass suicide rather than be enslaved. Flavius Josephus said, "Who decided a long time ago, brave soldiers that we are, not to be slaves of the Romans or of any person other than God; for he alone is the true and just master of men." We enjoy an introductory video before proceeding to the top of the mountain by cable car. After our formal guided tour, you will have time for some independent exploration.

From Masada we travel northward to the Ein Gedi Nature Reserve. After a short walk we reach Wadi David (David's Spring), a waterfall hidden in an oasis of luxuriant green vegetation that hangs clustered in a canyon wall.

We continue our journey toward Jerusalem. On the northwest shore of the Dead Sea we encounter the settlement of Qumran. In 1947 it was here that two shepherd boys made one of the most significant discovery in religious history, the Dead Sea Scrolls (written texts of the Old Testament) hidden in the caves. The people who wrote them are believed to have been the Essenes who lived here until AD 68.

Later in the day we arrive in Jerusalem, the City of David.

Overnight in Jerusalem.

Day 28 Jerusalem & Bethlehem*

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Today's focus is the main Christian sites of interest in Jerusalem and its surrounds. Our first visit is Bethlehem,* where we visit the Church of the Nativity, the birthplace of Jesus. Built like a citadel over the cave where it is believed Jesus was born, the original 4th century church commissioned by Constantine was altered in AD 530 by Emperor Justinian. It was later captured by the Crusaders and then came under the jurisdiction of Saladin and then the Mamluks.

Back in Jerusalem, we will see the Old City from the vantage point of the Mount of Olives and then enter the old city and visit the Christian sites. Following the last steps of Christ along Via Dolorosa, we approach Calvary and the most sacred site in Christendom, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Most Christians venerate this site as the location of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ.

We also visit the Garden of Gethsemane, a strikingly beautiful garden, located at the foot of the Mount of Olives. A visit here is a highlight of any trip to Jerusalem's Christian sites; steeped in biblical history, the Garden of Gethsemane is most famously known as the place where Jesus went with his disciples to pray after the Last Supper on the eve of his crucifixion.

* NOTE: Due to security concerns/procedures that change frequently, Bethlehem exists in our program on a provisional and tentative basis only. In the event that a visit to the West Bank is not appropriate by departure time, we may remain in Jerusalem and expand our sightseeing there with a visit to the Israel Museum to see the Dead Sea scrolls and a model of the second temple.

Overnight in Jerusalem.

Day 29 Jerusalem: City Tour

Today we shift our attention the important Jewish and Islamic sites of this timeless city, where old and new merge seamlessly. You may hear the Muslim call to prayer competing with the clanging of bells from Christian churches and the prayers of Jews praying before the Western Wall. Everywhere you turn you'll see reminders of the three religions -- Islam, Judaism and Christianity -- that have shaped this part of the world.

We have a morning visit to the Temple Mount, one of the glories of Islamic Jerusalem, where you will view the Dome of the Rock. We then enter through the Jewish Quarter to witness the Herodian Mansions, a lavish palace in antiquity and built formerly of white marble, followed by a visit to the most important site in Judaism, the Western Wall.

Our tour also takes us by way of the Knesset, Israel's parliament, to the President's House, and the Yad Vashem Memorial. At some point in our day we will also visit the Holocaust Museum for a visit and tour.

Overnight in Jerusalem.

Day 30 Departure

Our tour ends in Jerusalem this morning.

Land & Air customers will be transferred to Ben Gurion International (the airport serving Tel Aviv and Jerusalem - TLV). We can arrange airport departure transfers for Land Only passengers for an extra cost (payable locally), or you can make your own way (with Tour Leader assistance) and pay direct.

BON VOYAGE!!