

ISRAEL

'Exploring the Holy Land'

10 days

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Day 1 Arrive in Tel Aviv

Today we arrive in Tel Aviv and transfer to our hotel.

Stretched along the beautiful beach strip of the Mediterranean, Tel Aviv is Israel's largest city and main commercial center. It is a busy metropolis that inspires 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 (+/- 5pm).

Overnight in Tel Aviv.

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

Day 2 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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 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 Kinerett).

Overnight in Tiberias.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 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 Nasorri 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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Jerusalem & Bethlehem*

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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 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!!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast