



AMERICA ISRAEL TRAVEL, Inc.

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Israel Tour Planner

Airlines

Reconfirm your flights at least 72 hours prior to departure. Make sure that your special meals are, as well, confirmed. If you are traveling with children, check with your air agent to see if the airline has children's meals available.

Film

Please be warned that not all scanning machines at airports are "film - safe."

Finances

While you may use travelers' checks in Israel, the rates offered are less than generous. Credit cards are widely accepted at most stores, restaurants and at many tourist sites, parks and museums. In addition, we recommend, in any case, that you bring a few personal checks as well as US dollars/cash. US dollars may be changed into shekels at official moneychangers in the large cities. So too, shekels can be obtained from ATM machines in the major cities with your PIN number. The exchange rate has been fluctuating. In 2004. \$1.00 USD = approximately 4.3 NIS. For today's rate of exchange visit - www.CorporateInformation.com

Insurance

Check to see exactly what your travel insurance covers. Does it include health and baggage, trip cancellation and trip interruption?

Itinerary

Leave a copy of your program along with hotel telephone and fax numbers with family members.

Luggage

You are allowed two suitcases per person, each weighing up to 70 lbs. If you plan on stopping over in Europe you are limited to 44 lbs. per person. You may carry one carry on piece of luggage. Make sure that all of your bags are properly tagged.

Medications

Bring a copy of your prescriptions along with you. It is also a good idea to bring an extra pair of prescription eyeglasses with you.

Vaccination

You don't need any shots to visit Israel, but it is good to have your records in case you come down with something or travel to another country.

Passports

Double check that your passport is valid for at least six months beyond the scheduled return date of your trip. Make a photocopy of your passport and carry it separately from your originals.

WHILE IN ISRAEL

Archaeological digs

Should you be interested, you might participate in an archaeological dig in Israel. Visit www.bib-arch.org/bswbDigBAR.html for details and a list of all current digs.

Banking

Each bank has different hours of operation. However, most banks are open Sunday â€” Thursday 8:30 AM - 12:30 PM. Bring your passport and a book to read. Many banks have separate lines for foreign currency exchange. Don't be shy to ask where to go. As the rate of exchange varies from day to day, stay abreast of the situation.

Beaches

Lifeguards go on duty at the major beaches around the country on or about June 1.

Car Rental

Renting a car is more expensive than in North America. You'll get the best deal if you rent for a week. There are numerous companies today. Compare prices. Most companies have affiliates in the States. There is a drop-off charge at the International Airport. Cars tend to be small. If you are more than four people you will probably need a van.

Cell Phones

Mobile telephones are widely used throughout Israel. There are three providers of service. Coverage is generally good. Reasonable in price. You can rent one prior to departure in the USA, upon arrival at Ben Gurion Airport or via the concierge at major hotels in the large cities. It is illegal to drive while holding a cellular phone. Ask your rental agent for a hands - free set.

Climate

While you may expect rain from November through early April, it is dry during the rest of the year. During the dry season expect high humidity in Tel Aviv and along the coast. In Jerusalem and the mountains expect low humidity and warm weather in the dry season. It is cool in evenings in the mountains. For daily weather updates click www.weather.yahoo.com/regional/ISXX.html.

Clothing

Dress is informal. Leave your suit and tie at home. In the winter bring layers â€” that you can peel off, as you may be above the snow line and in the desert on the same day. For the summer time, bring light clothing. A light sweater is recommended for Jerusalem and high-elevation evenings, even in the springtime. Modest clothing is required for most holy sites. For men - long pants and casual shirts. Women - skirts and blouses (with sleeves). Hats are a good idea year round.

Credit Cards

All major credit cards are accepted, even at the local grocer.

Deserts

Israel is home to two deserts - the Judean Desert and the Negev. While these are two fascinating regions, we do not recommend that you hike there on your own.

Driving

Driving in Israel can be a challenge. Speed limits are in kilometers: 50 kph in the city, 80 on inter-city roads and 90 on super highways, unless otherwise indicated. Seat belts must be worn in front and in back at all times. Children under the age of 12 are not allowed in the front seat unless they are infants in a safety seat. Driving is on the right; passing is on the left.

Drinking

It's hot in Israel. Drink plenty of fluids so that you don't dehydrate. Alcohol is not recommended in high temperature zones in mid-day. Minimum drinking age for alcohol is 18.

Early Check-In

El Al Airlines as well as most other carriers have early check-in service in Tel Aviv in the afternoons prior to departure of late night and early morning flights. This allows you to arrive at the airport one-hour before departure, rather than the usual three hours.

Electricity

Israel operates on 220 volts, 50 cycles. Make sure that your shavers and hair dryers have 220-volt adapters. If not, then 220-volt adapters along with the proper plugs may be purchased in Israel. Luxury hotels have a 110-volt outlet for shavers, etc. in the bathroom. Plug adapters for your appliances can often be borrowed from the concierge at 5 star hotels.

Entering Israel

You'll receive an AL-17 form upon entry. Save it until departure.

Entrance Fees

All of the National Parks and Nature Reserves accept major credit cards. Smaller museums and sites as well as privately managed sites very often do not accept credit cards. Allow for some \$12.00 - \$15.00 per person per day, on the average, for entrance fees. Adventure activities often cost \$20.00 - \$25.00 per person per activity.

Facts and Figures about Israel

Visit the site of the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs at www.israel.org/facts/index.html.

Food

Check with your tour guide or concierge for a list of good restaurants. Food is generally safe to eat. Should you want to feel "at home," many American food franchises now operate in Israel: Burger King, Macdonald's, Subway, Pizza Hut, Domino's Pizza, Kentucky Fried Chicken, and more. But don't be afraid to try the local fare.

Gifts

A word to the wise - Look and price items. Make your purchases toward the end of the visit after you have compared prices. Do not forget to save the VAT form so that you can get your refund at the airport. For good bargains and different kinds of gift items, try off the beaten track workshops and outlets.

Health Insurance

Make sure that you have health insurance coverage. Your hotel concierge can connect you, should the need arise, with the house doctor. Or, private emergency rooms now operate in the major cities. Fill out the appropriate forms and your American carrier will reimburse you. Please contact your tour escort 24 hours a day should you need to see a doctor.

Hitchhiking

While it was once common to hitchhike, we do not now recommend it.

Hotels

As Israeli hotel rooms tend to be smaller than rooms in the USA, most hotels will sleep one, two or three people to a room. Prices are generally based on double occupancy.

Internet

Internet access is available in the Business Center of most major 5 star hotels as well as at Internet Cafes in the large cities. Newer 5 star hotels have hook-ups in all hotel rooms for your laptop.

Israel Bonds

Do not try to cash them at small branches, as they often do not have the appropriate forms. Try the larger Tourism Branches in the major cities. Bring your passport with you.

Jewelry

Keep most of it at home. Why schlep it and risk losing it on a vacation to Israel?

Kosher

If you observe the dietary laws of kashruth, always look for an up-to-date kashruth certificate in hotels and restaurants. If you have questions, contact the local rabbinate in the particular city you are located or consult your tour escort at David Bellin Travel Systems.

Laptops

If you plan on bringing your laptop or palmtop to Israel â€" fine. Most of the larger five star hotels have modular phone hook ups in the rooms. As for the smaller and out of the way hotels â€" use the hotel's fax machine. Bring a long phone cord, as the phone jack may not always be conveniently located. Make sure that your charger is good for use on a 220-volt system and bring a plug adapter that will allow you to plug your gadgets into a standard Israeli wall outlet. If you cannot find one in the USA, don't worry. They can be purchased in Israel for pennies.

Maps

Maps are available in English and other languages at good bookstores (e.g., Steimatzky: Tel Aviv 03-522-1513, Jerusalem 02-6253487), at the local Society for Protection of Nature (SPNI) book stores in major cities and at the Government Department of Surveys. Scale 1:50,000 is recommended for hiking, 1:100,000 for country driving and 1:250,000 for highway driving.

Meal Plans

Israeli hotel rates are based on the standard bed and breakfast plan. Half board indicates that the price includes one other meal daily. Full board means that your program includes breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Money

The NIS - New Israeli Shekel (or simply shekel) operates on the decimal system. In mid 2004 the rate of exchange to the dollar is approximately 1 dollar = 4.5 shekels. Check local newspapers for the average rate of exchange. American currency happily accepted in most places, but confirm the exchange rate used. There are 100 agurot to the shekel.

Nature Parks

Israel has an extensive system of Nature Reserves that have marked trails, most of which are free of charge. Those parks that provide services such as toilets and food take a modest fee. If you plan on hiking (not in the desert) please purchase a 1:50,000 topographic map that has the trails clearly marked. If you plan on hiking on your own consult the nearest Field School of the Society of Protection of Nature in Israel.

Newspapers

You can get your baseball scores and other news from the two English language dailies: The Jerusalem Post and HaAretz. The former has inserts from the NY Times and the latter has an insert of The International Herald Tribune. For news on-line click www.jpost.com or www.haaretzdaily.com.

Passports

Passports are required for all foreign currency bank transactions.

Photography

As film is rather expensive, bring plenty of it. 100 or 200 speed is recommended for outdoor and

indoor-flash photography. Photography is not allowed in some museums and in some security-conscious facilities like the Knesset as well as in some "ultra-orthodox" neighborhoods. On the Sabbath, it is inconsiderate to photograph at the Western Wall and in "religious" areas.

Physicians

If you feel unwell, please call the emergency travel number in your itinerary packet 24 hours a day.

Porterage

Bellboy service is not available for individual travelers at the airports. The dollies, however, are still free of charge. Porterage is available at most hotels. It is customary to tip bellboy \$1.00 per suitcase.

Postage

Stamps are available at post offices or at hotel newspaper stands. Additional postage must be placed on mail items above 20 grams. Allow at least seven days for delivery of a letter from Jerusalem to New York.

Public Buses

There is comprehensive bus service in the large cities. While drivers do give change, it is always best to buy tickets at the counter when leaving from bus stations. Save your receipt until the end of the ride. Multi-ride cards are available at a discount from the driver. There is also a comprehensive bus system between large and medium sized cities. In the periphery of the country - northern Galilee, Golan, Negev Highlands, and out-of-the-way areas -- bus service can be sparse. The phone number for inter city information for the Egged Bus Company is 03-6948888.

Public Telephones

Public phones are plentiful and usually do work. Most of them operate today with a plastic credit card size phone card, available at post offices and your hotel newsstand. Cards of 20, 500 and 100 units are available (time per unit depends on distance of call and time of day). You may access AT&T, MCI and Sprint for overseas calls from pay phones by dialing a 177 (toll-free) number. Check for your service's number before you leave. Overseas operator and overseas directory information is available by dialing 188. Domestic directory information is available by dialing 144 (free from public phone). For collect calls within Israel, dial 142.

Public Toilets

Known as WC, and available in most tourist locations. Be prepared with tissues in your pocket at all times. Also, be aware that some public toilets are staffed by attendants who ask for a "user's fee".

Security

You and your bags may often be checked by security guards at public buildings such as shopping malls. Be cooperative - it is for your safety too. Do not leave your bag unattended anywhere.

Shabbat

A wonderful place to experience Shabbat in Israel is Jerusalem. In addition to the "traditional" methods of observing Shabbat, many of the museums in the city are open on the Sabbath. For a traditional Shabbat experience, hang out at the Western Wall after Friday evening services and you may be asked home to dinner by one of the locals. For candle lighting time in various Israeli cities click www.ou.org/zmanim/candlelighting/default.htm.

Sherut

Interurban jitneys (group taxis). As soon as all seats are filled the driver leaves. There is a set fee per passenger. They operate between major cities as well as between the airport and major cities. Worthwhile to check the prices since they are sometimes cheaper (or about the same) as the bus, and are faster.

Synagogues

The Friday edition of the Jerusalem Post lists times of services in the major synagogues in the large

cities. Weekday morning services are generally at 6:00 AM throughout the country. Friday evening services tend to be some 15 minutes after candle lighting time. Most Orthodox synagogues start the Saturday morning service at 8:00 AM. Conservative synagogues start the service at 8:30 - 9:00 AM and Reform synagogues generally at 9:30 - 10:00 AM.

Taxes

There is **16%** value added tax (VAT) on most goods and services in Israel. At retail stores, this tax is always already included in the price. Upon making a purchase of \$100.00 or more at a gift store that has an agreement with the VAT authorities, you should fill out a form at the store and have it stamped there. You will be eligible, upon presenting the form and the item, for a 17% refund at the airport prior to departure. Do not pack these gift items in your luggage. They should be kept in your hand luggage along with the special VAT form that you receive from the merchant. Tourist services, such as hotel rooms and meals, purchased as export goods with foreign currency are exempt from VAT. Taxis While traveling in the city, insist that the meter be turned on. The driver may want to close a "deal" with you -- insist on the meter and make sure it is reset at the start of the trip. Between cities, you can close a deal with the driver, as you will be using the services of a "special".

Telephone Directories

For on-line telephone books of Israel (in Hebrew) click <http://www.144.bezek.com/>.

Telephones

Direct dialing from your hotel room overseas is not cheap. Phone credit cards accepted. For calls within Israel, you'll do better making calls with a TeleCard plastic card from a pay phone. You may access AT&T, MCI and Sprint for overseas calls from pay phones by dialing a 177 (toll-free) number -- check for your service's number before you leave. Overseas operator and overseas directory information is available by dialing 188. Domestic directory information is available by dialing 144. For collect calls within Israel, dial 142.

Time

For the current time in Israel click [_ www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/custom.html?cities=110](http://www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/custom.html?cities=110).

Tipping

Tipping is not necessary for cab drivers or barbers. As to restaurants, check the bill to see if "service included" (it often is). If not, 10 - 15% is a good bet. It is accepted practice to tip hotel staff, your tour guide and tour bus driver.

Tourist Information

The Ministry of Tourism has closed most of their "manned" information centers and has placed computer information terminals in their stead. Good luck!

Traffic

Rush hour in and out of the major cities is from about 6:15 AM - 9:00 AM and from 4:15 PM - 7:30 PM. If you have a meeting to catch allow for plenty of time. Within the major cities themselves, traffic can be hectic throughout the day, especially if a visiting head of state is in town.

Trains

There is excellent train service along the coastal route between Nahariya - Acre - Haifa - Netanya - Tel Aviv - Beer Sheba. The rates are reasonable and the ride is comfortable, avoiding the traffic jams. On Sunday mornings expect standing room only. There is no longer train service to Jerusalem. For up to date train schedules visit www.israil.org.il (in Hebrew).

Travel to Jordan and Egypt

Travel to Jordan and Egypt from Israel has become rather hassle-free. For Jordan Visas can be obtained on the spot at the border crossing near Eilat (Arava Crossing) and at the crossing in the Galilee near Beit Shean (Sheikh Hussein). American Citizens can obtain visa to Egypt at the Cairo

Airport. For more information please check with the Egyptian or/and Jordanian embassies for up to date information on changing rules and regulations.

Tzedakah

There are numerous opportunities to give tzedakah in Israel. You may contribute directly to the charitable organization of your choice - yeshiva, school, hospital, etc. Or, you may participate in a hands-on tzedakah project while in Israel.

Underwater Activities

Yes, you can take advantage of a host of underwater sports in Eilat. Our representative in Eilat will advise you and will help you book your water activities in this southern location.

Vaccinations

Vaccinations are not required for tourists entering Israel from western countries. Valuables There is no need to bring valuable jewelry on your Israel trip. Most 5 star hotels have safes in the rooms for valuables. Otherwise, they may be locked in the safe at the desk.

Water

Although water in Israel is of good quality and suitable for drinking, you may not be used to the high mineral content. Bottled natural spring water is available everywhere - expensive at your hotel, more reasonable at the supermarkets.

Weights and Measures

Metric system used exclusively. A kilometer is a bit over a 1/2 mile - (0.62 miles). A kilogram is equivalent to 2.2 pounds. For a conversion table www.sciencemadesimple.com/conversions.html.