

Dear friends,

Are you ready to go to Israel?

Our adventure is close at hand. Other than your Bible, Passport, Credit Card and Airline itinerary, a Journal is one of your most important items to bring to Israel.

Note: Make a habit now to begin journaling your experience leading up to, during and after your time in the land and with the people of Israel. Record what the Lord says to you in the Bible too.

Dress in Israel is casual. Even Israeli prime ministers frequently wear short-sleeve shirts without ties. Jewish holy places usually allow you to enter with shorts, as long as they are AT THE KNEE, but the shrines of other faiths often require dress that is more modest.

Note: At the end of each day, we will give you a heads up on any special dress requirements for the following day.

This is true also in religious Jewish neighborhoods where women, especially, are expected to wear sleeves below the elbow and skirts below the knees. One alternative for the ladies, is to carry a shawl that you can wrap around your shoulders or bare legs, or a wrap skirt to cover your shorts. Zip-off knee style pants for men and women are a good idea for both men and women.

Israel enjoys long, warm, dry summers (April-October) and generally mild winters (November-March), with somewhat drier, cooler weather in hilly regions, such as Jerusalem and Safed. Rainfall is relatively heavy in the north and center of the country with much less in the northern Negev and almost negligible amounts in the southern areas. Regional conditions vary considerably, with humid summers and mild winters on the coast; dry summers and moderately cold winters in the hill regions; hot dry summers and pleasant winters in the Jordan Valley and year-round semi-desert conditions in the Negev.

Israel has fabulous food. Most people are probably familiar with falafel -- fried ground chickpeas served with salad in pita. Meat eaters will love shwarma, lamb sliced off a spit and served in pita (similar to gyros). Lots of other Mediterranean specialties like shishlik (shish kebab), baklava (sweetmeat made of dough, honey, and nuts) and moussaka (baked eggplant, minced meat, onion and parsley) will stimulate your taste buds. The Americanization of Israel also means you'll find such familiar names as McDonald's, Burger King, Pizza Hut and Dunkin' Donuts.

The water in Israel is safe to drink; nevertheless, it is different from what you are used to and people with sensitive stomachs may want to stick to bottled water. In addition, Israelis do not usually put ice in their drinks; so if you want some, ask for kerakh. Bottled water can be purchased on the bus or at the hotel.

Forget what you have read in the papers or seen on TV; Israel is a very safe place to visit. You are far more likely to run into trouble in any major U.S. city than anywhere in Israel.

Note: A large part of our time will be in Jerusalem. In the evening, you may want to walk from the Hotel to a shopping area, or take a taxi to Ben Yehuda or the Western Wall. Always ask what the fair will cost in American dollars before you get in the cab. Please! Do not take public transportation. Even though it is safe, always travel in groups or pairs when walking around.

Whenever you go to a foreign country, it is a good idea to familiarize yourself with the local language and customs. Most people in Israel speak English, but, with the influx of Jews from the former Soviet Union, you're almost as likely to run into someone who speaks Russian as Hebrew. Even if you aren't fluent in the language, natives usually appreciate it when visitors make an effort to speak in their native tongue. Below are a few common Hebrew phrases that will help you get by in Israel. If you don't learn anything else, memorize "Please," "Thank you" and "You're welcome."

hello sha-LOM
goodbye sha-LOM
good morning BO-ker TOV
good evening erev TOV
see you later le-HIT-rah-OTT
thank you to-DAH
please be-va-ka-SHA
you're welcome al low da-VAAR
I don't speak Hebrew AH-NEE lo m'dah-BEHR ee-VREET
Do you speak English? at-TAH m'dah-BEHR ang-LEET?
money KES-sef
yes ken
no loh
excuse me slee-CHA
wait REG-gah
what mah
when mah-tie
where is AY-fo
How are you? ma shlomcha? (masc.)
ma shlomech? (fem.)
I'm fine be-se-der
See you later le-hit-ra-ot
bus o-to-bus
taxi ta-ksi (mo-nit)
market shuk
newspaper i-ton
How much does it cost? kama zeh o-leh?
Where's the bathroom? Ay-fo ha sher-u-teem?
expensive ya-kar
cheap zol
post office do-ar
postcard glu-ya
stamps bu-lim
water ma-yim
coffee ka-fee

Israel is a good place to buy souvenirs. As in other Middle Eastern countries, haggling in Israel is a tradition. Keep the following points in mind when you're shopping:

Note: It is rare that you should ever have to pay the full price listed on an item (note this applies mostly to souvenirs, not everything in the markets and is not true of ordinary retail shops like department stores).

Always be ready to walk out of a shop and don't be surprised if the sales person follows you out.

The merchants in the market in the Old City, in particular, can be very aggressive. Don't be intimidated. Remember, you're the customer and it is their job to satisfy you.

Keep in mind what you can afford and don't let yourself be talked into paying more. You'll probably see the same items in more than one store, so shop around before you decide.

Be clear on the exchange rate before you buy.

Haggling is an art, and involves some gamesmanship, but it isn't polite to waste a merchant's time if you do not intend to buy something.

Items common in the U.S., such as film and books are likely to be more expensive in Israel than at home. By paying with a credit card, you can usually get a better exchange rate. Sometimes you can get a better price if you pay with U.S. dollars.

Note: Also, Israel assesses a Value Added Tax (VAT) of 17% on goods and services. Prices should include this tax. For purchases over \$100 per store, you can get a refund of the tax at the airport before you leave. To do so you'll want to get to the airport early so you can go to the customs office. When you make your purchase, the merchant should put it in a clear plastic bag with a copy of the receipt inside. Keep the original. The bag must be sealed and remained unopened to get the refund.

If you can't live without knowing what's happening in the U.S., you can watch CNN in most hotels and pick up an International Herald Tribune newspaper. The Jerusalem Post is the only daily Israeli paper in English. Channel 1 on television also has programs in English and recent movies are in the theaters with Hebrew subtitles.

Long-distance phone calls can get very expensive, especially if made from a hotel room, where substantial service charges are added.

Cell phones are probably the easiest and most cost-effective way to communicate in Israel and you may find it remarkable how good the service is compared to the United States. Check with your provider before you leave to be sure the phone will work in Israel; you may also need to pay extra for an international calling plan.

Note: Almost all Hotels have an internet service where you can check emails and stay in touch with friends and family. Some hotels the internet is only available in the Lobby.

Israel is like a museum. You will see relics that date from antiquity, buildings that are not considered old unless they were built thousands of years ago. Israel offers you a time portal, almost like the ones you see in science fiction movies, through which to see the past. Virtually every step you take is on ground many consider holy. You can visit all the sites and have a wonderful time and learn a lot, but if you think of Israel only as a museum, a place no different than Rome or Athens, you will miss perhaps the most remarkable aspect of Israel -- the vibrancy of the modern Jewish state and its people. Israel has increasingly become Westernized and "Americanized," but it is still a place very different from any other on earth.

Packing Checklist:

Note: It will be hot in some areas. (Check a 10 day forecast for Tiberias and Jerusalem beforehand).

- **Compact Bible**
- **Tickets (e-ticket) We will check in as a group.**
- **Passport**
- Wallet/Handbag
- Cash (The amount is up to you but have at least \$200-300, some small bills \$1 for water)
- Credit Card (accepted in most places)
- Itinerary
- Camera/Video & film (Extra storage chip for camera)

- Comb/Brush
- Deodorant
- Prescriptions (Band-aids) (Sleep-aid encouraged – please try and sleep on the plane) (pain reliever)
- Sunscreen
- Tooth brush/paste
- Pen/Pencil
- Journal
- Addresses
- (Sun) Glasses
- Razor (shaving cream)
- Hat (Visor)
- Bathing suit / Watersocks for the Dead Sea.
- Pajamas
- Handkerchiefs/scarves
- Shirts (casual/dress) (sleeveless shirts not encouraged)
- Socks
- Pants (casual/dress)
- (Good)Walking shoes
- Slippers/Sandals/Flip-Flops
- Underwear
- Belt(s)
- Cosmetics
- **Women:** Skirt or shawl for a few religious sites we will visit.
- Backpack/day pack
- Modest walking shorts (MUST reach the knee) *NO short shorts please!
- Small umbrella or raincoat/rain cover.
- Sweater or light coat.
- **Converter plus plug set for voltage (available at Target, Amazon or Walmart and must say for Middle East or Israel).**

There is laundry service available in most of the hotels.

In Israel, we will be moving around a lot and you won't want to pack and unpack a lot of stuff. Generally, it's a good idea to travel light and expect that you will need more room in your bags when you go home than when you left to accommodate gifts, dirty clothes and the tendency for clothes to take up more space on the return flight. Also, remember that the power supply is 220 volt AC-50 cycles. Make sure your electrical items can operate or purchase an adaptor kit Tip: take low cost socks and underwear and throw away each day. (cuts down on laundry and room in your luggage). Take older t-shirts and pants you don't mind parting with and leave in the room after you check-out. (maids appreciate this). Israeli's love American jeans.

Note: You don't need any shots to visit Israel.

Every visitor to Israel must have a valid passport to travel to Israel. Note that it usually takes several weeks to obtain a passport, so apply well ahead of time if you don't have one yet.

Note: It's a good idea to make three copies of the first two pages of your passport. Keep one at home and put the other two separate from your passport. I place a copy in my checked bag and keep one copy in my wallet This will help speed the process of replacing your passport if it's lost or stolen.

Travelers have different opinions regarding carrying wallets and purses. Some people believe it's safer to put valuables in a pouch or conceal them. The kind of pouches and backpacks people wear outside their clothes make you stand out as a tourist and don't necessarily protect you from thieves.

It is a good idea to have some cash with you for emergencies, transportation and small purchases. \$200-300 dollars per person plus your credit card, should be plenty. Bring an ATM card and you can get more from local banks without having to worry about exchange rates and fees. If you go inside the bank, or to a post office, you'll have to pay a fee. Hotels also exchange money. Beware of money changers on the street.

Bring important phone numbers with you for emergencies and to contact friends and family in Israel.

Getting sick away from home is always depressing. Several items on the checklist are meant to keep you healthy and insure you have the basic remedies for common maladies. Health care in Israel is excellent, but you still want to be safe rather than sorry. The food and water in Israel should give you no trouble, but, just in case, bring medication to relieve the symptoms of stomach problems.

The flight over to Israel is an experience in itself.

We will all go through a security check. It's nothing to worry about, mostly questions about what you're going to be doing in Israel, if you have relatives and other seemingly innocuous inquiries that somehow help the security officials spot potential problems.

The trip takes about 10 hours from the East Coast and 14 hours from the West.

During the flight you're likely to see Orthodox Jews standing in the aisles praying. When the plane touches down in Tel Aviv, expect a burst of applause that you won't hear for any other destination.

You are now in the Holy Land!!!

Hundreds of thousands of men, women and children have come to this same spot to escape persecution, to live among their fellow Jews and to fulfill a biblical injunction. The same tarmac you are going to walk across was where the -- Yemenite Jews of Operation Magic Carpet first arrived. It is where the Ethiopian Jews were brought after the dramatic rescues known as Operations Moses, Joshua and Solomon and the site of the jubilant welcome of the hostages rescued at Entebbe. This is also where nearly 800,000 Jews from the former Soviet Union have arrived since 1989.

In area, Israel is about the size of New Jersey. The population of New Jersey is more than 8 million, compared to 7.1 million in Israel. Roughly 76% of the population is Jewish, 16% are Muslims, 2% Christians and 1.6% Druze. More than half the Jews are sabras, native-born Israelis, the rest come from more than 100 countries.

When you enter the terminal, prepare to show your Passport, then you pass through the passport station, grab a cart and start looking for your luggage. While you wait, you might want to go to the ATM (which has better rates than the currency exchange office) and withdraw a few shekels. Check out the latest rate. It fluctuates daily, but should be roughly \$1 dollar = 4 shekels.

Note: Rebecca will give you direction about exchanging currency. Usually, customs officials will wave you right through, but don't be surprised if you are asked to open up your bags. Checks are sometimes random and are very common. Don't be offended or resist and you'll be on your way quickly.

Chances are you're a bit bleary-eyed from the trip and will have jet lag. You'll hear many ideas for how to beat it, but your best bet is to try to get yourself on Israel time right away. Don't sleep on the first day on the bus.