

TRAVELING ISRAEL



THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE
TO PLANNING YOUR TRIP TO ISRAEL



TRAVELING ISRAEL.COM

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A guide to planning your trip to Israel

You know those spontaneous people who board a flight without planning too much, letting fate decide their path? Well, I'm not one of them (and I probably wouldn't have created my website, booklets and eBooks if I was). Planning your trip to Israel in advance can help you save money and, more importantly, allow you to enjoy your trip more and gain a greater understanding of where you're traveling to and what you're seeing.

When you travel in Israel you will quickly discover that it's a fascinating place. I'd even venture to say that – relative to its size – it's the most fascinating place in the world. Israel boasts sites that date back to the time when humans were still learning to harness fire as well as places where many believe the Messiah will reappear when the end of the world approaches.

Israel is the place where Europe, Asia, and Africa come together. This is also the place where both Judaism and Christianity were founded. The list of figures who have walked over this very stretch of land contains great names that have shaped the history of the Western world – Abraham, King David, Jesus Christ, Alexander the Great, Richard the Lionheart, Saladin, and many more. Despite its historical importance, when you gaze upon the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, you won't think "what a beautiful wall!" And when you stand before the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, one of the holiest places in the world for Christians, the chances are that you'll experience a culture shock rather than a religious epiphany.



To truly enjoy Israel, you must first understand the stories behind the sights. The Land of Israel is a land of tales – biblical stories, stories of the rise and fall of the many civilizations that have lived here, stories of flourishing cultures but also of carnage and destruction, and, most of all, stories about exceptional people and ideas that have changed the world and our perception of it. My name is Oren Cahanovitch, and as an adventurer and a tour guide, I can tell you the story of this harsh yet beautiful land.

The purpose of this eBook is to help you plan your trip to Israel. If you enjoy it, you can support me by purchasing my Day Tour Booklets, which let you be your

own guide. Each booklet equips you with an independent itinerary for your tour, complete with maps, pictures and details about the various sights. Here on my website you'll find all the additional information you need – whether it's details about accommodation, places to eat, transportation, or more sights.

Is traveling to Israel safe?



This did not happen yesterday.

"Is traveling to Israel safe?" – This is probably the question I get asked the most.

The answer is: yes.

When you're floating in the Dead Sea, lying on the beach in Tel Aviv, or hiking on Masada, you will feel safe. Most of the tourists I accompany tell me they feel safer strolling around Tel Aviv or Jerusalem at night than they do in their own home towns. Surveys show that tourists rank their personal safety in Israel very highly (unlike taxi drivers – but that is a different matter).

So why do people think Israel isn't safe?



Israel is not a war zone.

The fear of visiting Israel stems from a lack of knowledge, which, ironically enough, comes from all of the over-reporting in the media. The Arab-Israeli conflict is one of the smallest conflicts in the world. As far as I see it, there are two main reasons why people hear so much about Israel:

(1) Since places in the Holy Land such as Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Nazareth are part of the West's cultural heritage, every small incident that occurs there is reported

on by the many different media outlets. If something were to happen in a city in China or Africa, most people won't have heard of the place and, therefore, don't pay much attention or attach any importance to it.

(2) If a tree falls in a forest and a hundred photographers capture it, does that mean the tree fell a hundred times? It's very easy to be a foreign reporter in

Israel. Israel is a Western country with a developed infrastructure and, more importantly, it's a democratic country with freedom of the press, freedom of speech, and human rights. It's easy for a foreign journalist to stay in a Jerusalem hotel, wake up in the morning and drive twenty minutes to Bethlehem, snap some pictures of a demonstration (and the more young people facing soldiers the better for the pictures), drive back to Jerusalem, send the pictures to Western media outlets, and go out for a drink in the evening. This is also the reason why there are more foreign journalists in Jerusalem than in most other important cities in the world.

Things to know before coming to Israel

Planning your trip is always a good idea. Those who invest time in planning are more interested, know more and, as a consequence, tend to enjoy themselves more. This is very much the case when it comes to Israel. Below are some things to consider before coming.

Israel is not cheap

Israel is not a cheap place to live in or travel in. This becomes particularly clear to tourists when it comes to the prices of hotels and restaurants. If you feel that you paid over the odds, then all that I can say is: welcome to the club... (A night in a 5-star hotel will cost around €350 for a basic room and a night in a 3-star hotel will cost around €150). If you're looking to pay less I can recommend booking a private room in a hostel. You can have a look here – Hostels in Jerusalem and here – Hostels in Tel Aviv. Street food in Israel is also a great option for those who find restaurants too expensive. Just remember to check out the prices on the menus! Even if you are only going to order an orange juice or a cup of coffee. Unlike in other Western countries, where street food tends to be unhealthy, Israeli street food, like falafel, sabich and hummus, is much better. Although food and accommodation is relatively expensive, attractions (such as national parks) and transportation are reasonably priced.

The Negev Desert

It is well known that Israel's highlights are Jerusalem and Christianity. Tel Aviv gets quite a good press too. But the desert, the Negev, is the best-kept secret on the tourist map of Israel. Jerusalem is the starting point for most groups, but if you ask a tour guide why he or she became a tour guide and which part of Israel they like the most, the desert will figure very highly on their list. The Negev covers 50% of Israel. If you like desert scenery and especially if you come in winter – from November to February, be sure to spend some time in the desert.

Mitzpe Ramon, right on the edge of the Ramon Crater, and Sde Boker are great places for desert tours. Both lie about two hours' drive south from Tel Aviv or Jerusalem. Further south there are many sights and parks – HaHarava, Paran, Timna Park, the Eilat Mountains and much more.



Hire a car when traveling in the desert, Galilee or Golan Heights.

March is the best time to travel to Israel

When you travel you realize how important the weather is. At home most of us work indoors, but when travelling a big part of the day is spent outside. If I had to choose the best time to visit Israel, it would be March or April. Winter in Israel is not as cold as it is in many other European countries. The average temperature in Tel Aviv in December is 19°C (66°F) and in Jerusalem it's 14°C (57°F). The winter months are great for spending time in the sunny desert. The average temperature in Eilat in December is 23°C (73°F). Summer, especially June, July and August, is extremely hot. You can expect temperatures of 30-35°C (85-95°F) every day.

Don't hire a car in the cities

You don't need a car in the cities. When traveling to the desert, Golan Heights and Galilee, you might consider hiring a car, but in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Haifa a car is just a hassle: there is a lot of traffic, parking is expensive and Israelis drive like Italians...



Jewish holidays – they tried to kill us, we survived, let's eat.

Consider the Jewish holidays

Holidays in Israel are mostly Jewish religious festivals. It is great to experience them, but it is worth knowing when they are and planning in advance. The prices of hotels are high, lots of places get booked up, shops are closed and there is no public transportation. There is also no public transportation from Friday afternoon until Saturday night. The Jewish calendar is different from the Gregorian calendar so check the dates before you come. In general, the Jewish New Year, Yom Kippur and Sukkoth are in September or October. Hanukkah is around Christmas, and Pesach is in March or April.

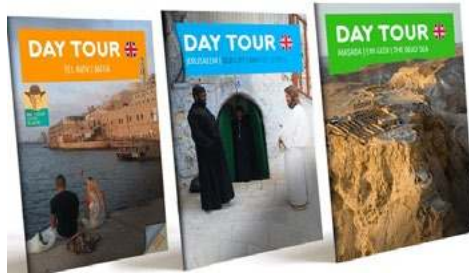
Israel is small

Because Israel is so often in the news, people tend to think it's much bigger than it really is. But Israel is tiny – the size of Wales (if you come from England), or Hessen (if you come from Germany), or the size of New Jersey (if you come from the U.S.). It takes less than six hours to drive from Metula, the northernmost point, to Eilat, the southernmost city in Israel. So if Jerusalem is overwhelming, then Tel Aviv is only an hour away, and if the Dead Sea area is too hot, then Jerusalem is relatively close by.

Plan

People don't usually travel to Israel spontaneously, spotting cheap flights and booking them as they might for other destinations. I personally think that's a

good thing: it gives you time to plan your trip, and by planning I mean not only booking hotels and planning the itinerary, but also reading about the sites. Most of Israel's sites are not impressive in themselves. To understand and enjoy Israel you need to know its story. My website and [booklets](#) are a good place to start reading about the sites and history of Israel.



My [travel guide booklets](#). Because the beauty is in the story.

Be open to new things

Israel stands out as a travel destination in that tourists often have strong feelings about it, arriving with a whole set of religious and political expectations and perceptions. Israel can be very intense and may throw up the odd difficult encounter. You will certainly find everything you're looking for: conflict and peace, holiness and irreverence, hope and despair. But I want to suggest trying to open up. Israel is a corridor in which ideas, peoples, empires and religions meet. Take advantage of this great abundance.



Security check and questioning before check-in.

Flying to and from Israel

Flying to Israel

Your trip to Israel begins before you even arrive in the country. It will begin at whichever airport your flight to Israel departs from. Waiting in line, you will most likely see Israelis who are returning home. It's easy to recognize them – they travel with enormous suitcases. Israelis can't stop shopping when they're abroad. As a tour guide in Israel and a guide for Israelis abroad, I never cease to be amazed by this fact. Tourists who come to Israel will typically buy a piece of jewelry, an olive-wood figurine of Jesus, a few dates, and that's about it. Israelis though, when traveling abroad, will buy clothing, shoes, electronic appliances and, the most Israeli thing – presents for the children.

You will also notice that the security arrangements are stricter. Sometimes there's an additional check after duty free and you might be asked a few questions before you check in your suitcases. Everyone is asked the same questions, and it's not to be taken personally (though a single man in his twenties who's traveling alone might be asked more questions than a family traveling together).

Even though Israel has a population of almost eight million people, there's only one international airport: the Ben Gurion Airport (abbreviated to NATBAG in Hebrew or TLV – Tel Aviv). If you're flying with El Al, the national carrier, you can

expect to hear the well-known song 'How Good You're Home' by Arik Einstein after you've landed. You'll also see that Israelis sometimes clap when the airplane lands. Even before the signal turns off the Israelis will be on their feet as if in a terrible hurry to get off the plane. It is all part of a very Israeli ability to stress out and forget one's manners.



Free maps and information at the counter of the Ministry of Tourism.

At border control your passport will not be stamped if you don't want it to be; this is because there are some Arab countries that will question you if you have a stamp from Israel. After that you collect your luggage and go through customs.

The Ministry of Tourism operates a counter at Ben Gurion Airport. It is located right after border control, in the luggage hall. At the counter you can pick up free maps and get help with ordering a hotel or traveling on to your final destination.

Your last stop before leaving the airport is the huge welcome hall. Here you will often see families waiting for a family member staying for just a couple of days. Israeli society is very warm (sometimes too warm and a bit sticky) – something you will be sure to notice.

Transportation to and from Ben Gurion (TLV) airport

Ben Gurion airport is located in the middle of Israel, between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.

Ben Gurion airport to Tel Aviv – 20 km (13 miles)

Ben Gurion airport to Jerusalem – 40 km (25 miles)

Ben Gurion airport to Haifa – 110 km (70 miles)

Tel Aviv is the most convenient as well as the cheapest city to get to from the airport. There is a train running from the airport to Tel Aviv (and to many other destinations). As yet there is no train to Jerusalem (the line should open in 2017) but a shared taxi service (taxis carry 10 passengers) will take you where you need to go for 60 NIS (shekels). You can of course take a regular taxi from the airport to any destination you like but it will cost more.

Note that there is no public transportation in Israel from Friday afternoon until Saturday evening. However, shared taxis to Jerusalem continue to run and there are regular taxis to Tel Aviv (and elsewhere). Trains to Tel Aviv and Haifa stop running on Friday afternoon and resume services on Saturday evenings.

Flying from Israel

I recommend spending your last night in Israel in Jerusalem or, even better, in Tel Aviv. Both of the cities are about 40 minutes from the airport so in the event of any problem – the taxi doesn't come or the train doesn't run – you will have enough time to find an alternative. From Tel Aviv it is cheaper to get to the airport and there is a train that runs at regular intervals from Tel Aviv to Ben Gurion airport. You are advised to get to the airport at least two and a half hours before your flight.

There is more to consider when flying from Ben Gurion airport than there is when flying from any other airport, and there are two reasons for this. The first is that it is the only international airport in Israel, which is not that big a deal, but if you add to that the fact that Israelis can't visit neighbouring countries, it makes the airport the only gateway for people visiting Israel and essentially the one gateway all Israelis have to go through when traveling abroad. Almost all of the places you will visit are sites and accommodation where you will encounter other tourists, but here, more than anywhere else in Israel, you will come across all kinds of Israelis: lower middle-class Israelis going on vacation to nearby countries; young Israelis flying off on their big trip after completing their army service in South America or the Far East; Orthodox Jews going to visit their communities all over the world; businessmen; couples who left their kids with the grandparents and are flying off to relax for a few days; package holidays for

pensioners, etc. You can expect to see a cross-section of Israeli society as you sit in the middle of duty free.



The Israeli vacation starts here in duty free.

Duty Free

Once you have passed through security and border control you will enter the last important Israeli institution: duty free. Israelis love duty free. People are often late for their flights because they were too busy shopping. Vacation and shopping are synonymous for Israelis and that vacation starts in duty free.

In 1989 Israelis invented a duty free service called Arrival Collection Service which means that you buy before you fly but don't take the goods with you and instead pick them up when you come back. This led to duty free shops also selling big products and many Israelis now buy TVs, washing machines and refrigerators as well as the usual alcohol, cosmetics and cigarettes. This means that Israeli duty free holds a few world records (one of the biggest duty free shops in the world, the highest expenditure per traveler) and has become a national consumerist phenomenon. (I honestly don't know if this is a good thing.)

Cost of travel in Israel

Calculating your estimated expenses is important, especially in Israel, where it is not cheap to travel. The costs depend, of course, on your standards. Some people won't sleep in anything less than a 4-star hotel whereas for others a private room in a hostel is a luxury. The same goes for transportation and food. This list will give you an idea of the costs involved in a trip to Israel and allow you to estimate how much money you'll be spending each day.

Accommodation (price per night):

Accommodation tends to be the biggest expense wherever you vacation and in Israel accommodation is not cheap. Be sure to check whether your visit falls on Jewish holidays because then the prices go up.

Shared hostel room, per person: 80-130 NIS (\$22-37, €16-27)

Three-star hotel, double room: 330-550 NIS (\$100-150, €75-120)

Five-star hotel, double room: 1000-2000 NIS (\$300-550, €200-380)

Rooms on upper floors, upgraded rooms, and suites cost more.

Transportation:

Transportation in Israel is fairly cheap compared to countries in Western Europe. Buses and trains reach most places in Israel. The touristy cities of [Tel Aviv](#), [Jerusalem](#), [Haifa](#) and Nazareth are easily accessible with public transportation. The Golan Heights and the Negev are less easy to get to, but it is possible. If you rent a car (which I recommend for traveling in the Negev and Golan Heights), be aware that the price of gas is extremely high in Israel.

Taxis within Tel Aviv: 30-50 NIS (\$8-12, €7-10)

Train from Tel Aviv to Haifa: 35 NIS (\$9, €8)

Bus from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem: 20 NIS (\$5, €5)

Bus ticket within cities: 6.90 NIS (\$1.7, €1.7)

Car rental, per day: starts at \$35

Liter gas: 6 NIS (\$1.5, €1.5)

Food:

From street food to restaurants, Israeli food is great, but restaurants are expensive and alcohol is ridiculously expensive.

Falafel: 10-16 NIS (€3.5)

Cup of coffee in a café: 12-20 NIS (€3.5)

Beer in a pub: 20-35 NIS (€6-7)

Meal in a restaurant, per person: 80-250 NIS (€20-50)

Guide

Many of the important sights in Israel are not impressive in themselves. You need to know the history in order to enjoy the sites, which is why the best way to see the country is with a tour guide. But not everyone can afford it. There are cheaper options, such as tip-based tours in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv and, of course, my booklets.

Day tour without a car: starts at \$250 a day

Day tour with a car: starts at \$450 a day

Tip-based tours: 30-50 NIS (\$10, €10)

Attractions/Entrance fees

Entry to national parks costs 29 NIS per person. Most museums are more expensive, but prices are reasonable.

Masada: 29 NIS (\$7, €7)

Israel Museum: 54 NIS (\$13, €13)

Cost of a budget day in Tel Aviv for one person

Night in a hostel (including breakfast): 90 NIS

Bus to Jaffa: 6.60 NIS

Tip-based tour/walk with my booklets: 40/25 NIS

Lunch in Shuk (Market) HaCarmel: 50 NIS

Tel Aviv Museum of Art: 50 NIS

Ice cream: 20 NIS

Food for cooking your own supper in hostel + one beer: 50 NIS

Total: 300 NIS (\$78, €75)

Cost of a (non-budget) day in Tel Aviv for a couple

Night in a boutique hotel (including breakfast): 1500 NIS

Private guide (walking tour, without a car): 1300 NIS

Coffee and cake: 100 NIS

Two taxi rides: 70 NIS

Restaurant: 350 NIS

Total: 3,300 NIS (\$860, €800)

10 must-see places in Israel

I have to begin by saying that I don't like these kinds of lists. Because there is no must-see. It's your vacation: you can do whatever you want. You can come in winter and stay a whole week under the warm desert sun or just stick to Jerusalem and dive into the never-ending history of the city. But for those of you who are starting to plan your trip to Israel and want to know what Israel's main sites are, this list will give you a quick idea of what Israel has to offer. Let's begin.

The Old City of Jerusalem – Without a doubt, this is the most important site in Israel. If you were to write a list of the ten most important places on earth, the Old City of Jerusalem would be on that list. The Old City of Jerusalem is tiny – just one square kilometer. In this square kilometer you will find the Wailing Wall, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre – the place where Jesus was crucified and buried, the Temple Mount and the Dome of the Rock. On top of that, there are at least fifty churches, chapels, and monasteries within these walls. There is no other place in the world that contains so many holy sites. But beyond the city's sacred sites, there are also a lot of historical and cultural things to see.

Masada – Masada is located in the Judean Desert. It's one of my favorite places in Israel. And not only mine. Masada is Israel's most visited pay-to-enter site, and with good reason. The views are beautiful, the Dead Sea is nearby, and the story of the people who lived in Masada is connected to one of the most turbulent periods in the history of the Land of Israel – the Roman era 2,000 years ago. During that time the Jews slowly lost their independence, Christianity was



born, the Jews rebelled, the Temple was destroyed and then came the battle of Masada, which was the last chapter of this drama.

The Dead Sea – You can read about Jerusalem or Masada on the internet, but floating in the Dead Sea is an experience you have to have first-hand. I just love it. I think I'm the only tour guide who goes into the Dead Sea every time he's there. One major advantage of the Dead Sea is that, being the lowest place in the world, it has an extra 400 meters' worth of air to filter radiation, making it the least dangerous place you can sunbathe.



Tel Aviv – The first thing you notice about Tel Aviv is that it's not Jerusalem. Nowhere else will you find two cities that are so geographically close – only 60 kilometers (37 miles) apart – yet so different from one another. But Tel Aviv isn't just the antithesis of Jerusalem. Tel Aviv represents the modern, liberal, Western-world-oriented side of Israel. And there is a lot to do and see: the beaches, old Jaffa, Neve Tzedek, Sharona, and much more.

Haifa – The two main attractions in Haifa are of course the beautiful Bahia Gardens and the German Colony, which are definitely worth seeing, but I added Haifa because many independent travelers say that they want to see real local

life beyond the more touristy places. I think that Haifa is a good place to experience that. Jerusalem is very religious, Tel Aviv is full of hipsters, and Haifa is just a normal Israeli city, but normal in the good, slightly boring way.

Nazareth – Most of the tourists who visit Nazareth do so because it has Christian significance, and they visit the Church of the Annunciation, where the Angel Gabriel told Mary she would become the mother of Jesus. But I recommend staying a night here. Nazareth is the biggest Arab city in Israel and a good place to experience a side of Israel that you won't see in the big cities where Jews form the majority.

The markets – Israel is much more than just holy sites and lots of history. The people make Israel what it is. The thing is, if you go to all the historical and religious sites, you won't come across any locals. In general, Israelis don't spend their free time in Masada or in the churches... the place to find Israelis, and to enjoy good food, is the markets. Something good has been happening to the markets in the last couple of years. Markets like Machne Yehuda in Jerusalem or Suck HaCarmel in Tel Aviv used to be nothing more than places where Israelis bought fruit and vegetables, but now they also have good places to eat as well as bars, making for a really fun atmosphere.

The Negev – The Negev desert now covers half of Israel. There are a lot of amazing places to see – Sde Boker, Mitzpe Ramon – right on the cliff of the creator, Timna, the Eilat mountains, and many other places that I'll write about on my site in the months to come. Another reason I like to recommend the desert is that travelers tend to only think about the sight they want to visit and not the place they're coming from. If you're coming to Israel from Europe or the U.S. and you're coming in winter – between October and March, you are probably leaving behind you some very low temperatures. The desert is nice and warm. Around 20-25°C, or 70°F. And so if you *are* coming in winter, be sure to stay in the desert for a while.

The Israel Museum – Because we have to have one museum on the list and this is by far the most important museum in Israel. There is so much to see – the shrine of the Books, which holds the oldest Bible books and scrolls in the world, a great archaeological part, a lot of Israeli and Jewish art, masterpieces from all over the world, and a section that is dedicated to youth. I highly recommend joining the free tours that the museum offers, because it's very easy to get lost in all there is to see.

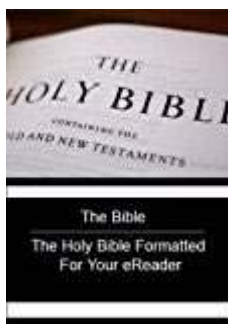
Number 10 – The last spot on my list goes to a place you'll visit without even intending to, a place that you will go through whether you like it or not. You will even visit it not once, but twice. I'm talking about Ben Gurion airport. It is on my

list for two reasons – the first is that you can learn and experience a lot not only from visiting museums and holy sites, but also from the most trivial things, and you can certainly learn a lot about the Israelis from visiting the airport. And the second thing is that the most extraordinary experiences, the ones travelers tend to remember, are not the sites themselves. As a tour guide who talks to thousands of travelers, I can honestly say that I almost never hear travelers saying that the Wailing Wall or the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was the highlight of their tour. It is almost always stories that involve other people, or experiences travelers had on the road, or something that happened in a restaurant or a hotel or just on the street, and not the sights they visited. And so here we come full circle. There is no must-see. It is important to plan your trip, and my videos and website are all about helping you do that, but you shouldn't just follow a checklist. So my number 10 is the airport, where you will start your Israeli experience.



Recommended books about Israel and the Israelis

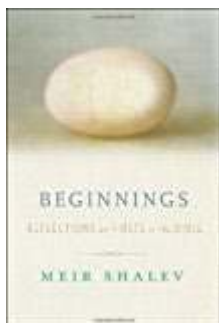
The better you prepare for your trip, the more you'll enjoy it. One of the best ways to get to know Israel is by reading Israeli literature. Good Israeli novelists are able to show the full spectrum of Israeli society in an in-depth and sensitive way. The list below includes a wide variety of books. I have tried to include books that have been translated into many languages.



The Bible

I doubt that many would attempt to read the entire Bible before coming to Israel and yet it's impossible to compile a list of literature about Israel without starting with the Bible. The Bible is the best-selling book of all time and it made the Jewish people what it is today. I don't recommend wandering around with a heavy Bible, but you can always download the Bible as an app or e-book and read from it at the relevant sites.

Beginnings: Reflections on the Bible's Intriguing Firsts – Meir Shalev



Non-religious people may balk at the idea of reading the Bible because of the occasionally unclear language, because of memories of boring Bible class in high school, and because the Bible 'belongs' to believers. But the Bible doesn't belong to any religious man.

In recent years many writers have approached the Bible from a different, non-religious perspective. Meir Shalev was a pioneer in this field. In his book, 'Beginnings', he writes about biblical firsts: the first laugh in the Bible, the first kiss, the first instance of love, etc.

Books about the Jewish Orthodox world – Yochi Brandes and Naomi Ragen



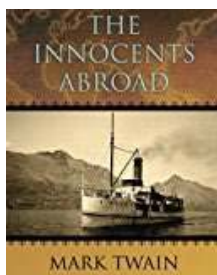
The Arab-Israeli conflict can be discussed in [Jerusalem](#) or in Golan Heights, Christianity can be talked about in any church, but Orthodox Jewish society, a topic that interests many, is altogether more difficult to approach. As travelers you might speak to secular Jews, Arabs, and settlers, but do not expect Orthodox Jews to start a conversation with you. They don't like people wandering through their neighborhoods in order to take photos of them (and with good reason: they aren't an exotic species). It's more likely

you will get to know them by reading books. Yochi Brandes and Naomi Ragen are two writers who grew up in the Orthodox world and who write about their experiences and about Judaism in general.



Jerusalem: The Biography: Simon Sebag Montefiore

It takes a lot of courage for a writer to name a book 'Jerusalem: The Biography' but Montefiore is up to the task. Although I can recommend this book, I doubt that all those who praise it have actually read it all. It is not an easy read, even for a tour guide. If you managed to remember even one tenth of what it says, you could become a tour guide in Jerusalem.



The Innocents Abroad: Mark Twain

Many travel books and pilgrim diaries have been written about the Holy Land. This book is one of the best, and among the most unusual. Unlike pilgrims, who describe deep religious emotions and spiritual experiences, Mark Twain describes the empty, deserted Holy Land and its pilgrims with a certain disparagement and sarcasm. The best-selling of Twain's works during his lifetime, it was written in 1867 as he traveled on board the chartered vessel

Quaker City. In many ways, this cruise was the first of its kind, and marks the beginning of tourism to the Holy Land that was not strictly religious.

Israeli writers

Amos Oz is probably the best-known Israeli writer working today. His autobiography, 'A Tale of Love and Darkness,' led to his nomination for the Nobel Prize for Literature. Oz was born in Jerusalem, grew up on a kibbutz, and moved to Arad, so his story is in many ways the story of Israel. Other good books of his are 'My Michael' and 'Black Box'.

David Grossman is one of the best-loved writers in Israel. 'Someone to Run With' is a great book. The action takes place in Jerusalem in the year 2000. Another of Grossman's novels is 'To the End of the Land,' which describes the journey of a woman who leaves her home so that if her soldier son falls in battle she won't be at home to hear about it.

Other than non-fiction books about the Bible, **Meir Shalev** has written some great novels. Many of them are about Zionist pioneers at the beginning of the 20th century. My favorite is 'The Blue Mountain'. Other great books are 'A Pigeon and A Boy' and 'Fontanelle'.

The book 'A Trumpet in the Wadi' was written by **Sami Michael**. It is a love story between a Jewish-Russian immigrant and an Arab woman set in Wadi Nisnas, a neighborhood in [Haifa](#). **Eli Amir**'s book 'Yasmine' is another love story, this time involving an Israeli soldier and an Arab woman from Jerusalem and set in the wake of the Six-Day War (1967). Both Eli Amir and Sami Michael grew up in Iraq and their books combine a deep understanding of both Arab and Israeli societies.

In his short story collection 'Missing Kissinger,' **Etgar Keret** doesn't write about Jerusalem. He doesn't write about the Bible either. The principal themes of his books don't include Orthodox Jews or other tensions in Israeli society. Keret won't win the Nobel Prize for Literature (although he writes very well). He doesn't even write about the Arab-Israeli conflict.



Of all the many great Israeli writers and books about Israel, here are my top five:

The Blue Mountain – Meir Shalev

The Innocents Abroad – Mark Twain

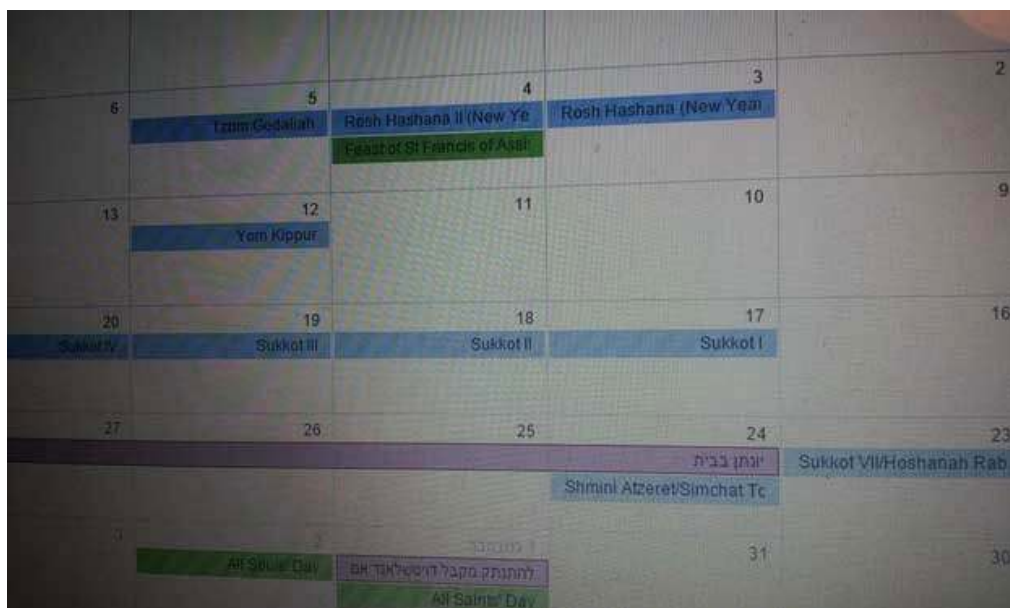
A Tale of Love and Darkness – Amos Oz

Beginnings: Reflections on the Bible's Intriguing Firsts – Meir Shalev

Jerusalem: The Biography – Simon Sebag Montefiore

Israel as a Jewish state and your trip

Israel is the only Jewish state in the world, and within its borders state and religion are not separated. What does it mean? What is a Jewish state? How can a country be both Jewish and democratic? These are big questions that have been addressed in numerous books and articles. The relevant question for this website is how Israel being a Jewish state affects your trip.



Holidays in Israel

Holidays in Israel are mostly in line with Jewish religious festivals. Of course Muslims and Christians celebrate their holidays too, but when planning a vacation in Israel the Jewish holidays should be taken into consideration. The Jewish calendar is different from the Gregorian calendar, meaning the Jewish holidays fall on a different date in the calendar each year. During the Jewish holidays the prices of flights and hotels will be higher since many Israelis fly abroad and many Jews from around the world come to celebrate the holidays in Israel. If you plan to visit Israel during the holidays you should book your flight and accommodation as early as possible. The advantage of being in Israel during the holidays is that it allows you to experience Judaism not just as an intangible religion but also as a lively festival on the streets.

Shabbat

Sunday is the first day of the week in Israel. Friday is a half-workday but many offices are closed for the whole day. Saturday is a day of rest. Public transportation, shops and many cafés and entertainment venues are closed. Sunday is a workday and there is heavy traffic on Sunday mornings.



No buses on Saturdays.

Transportation

Most public transportation doesn't run on Saturdays. The Jewish day doesn't start at midnight but at sunset and so there is no public transportation from Friday afternoon (around three hours before sunset) until Saturday (about two hours after sunset). Airplanes land on Saturdays but there are no trains running. A Nesher taxi service to Jerusalem runs on Saturdays but for any other destination you will have to use regular taxis (which are more expensive on Saturdays).



Food

Do you usually eat bacon for breakfast? Do you like cheeseburgers? Want a milky coffee after eating a steak? In kosher restaurants you won't be able to enjoy any of the above. Judaism is not only a religion, but also a way of life comprising many rules. It is well known that Jews don't eat pork but there are many other



rules regarding the preparation, serving and eating of food. In Tel Aviv, in Arab villages, and along the coastline there are many non-kosher restaurants but although many Israelis eat non-kosher, some things have become the norm. A lot of Israelis won't eat pork and breakfast is almost always a dairy-only affair.

Marriage and divorce

You happen to find your other half in Israel? Mazal Tov! But if you are able to work out the cultural differences and want to institutionalize your relationship it might be problematic. In Israel, marriages and divorces are overseen by the religious authorities. Jews may only marry Jews, Muslims may marry Muslims and Christians may marry Christians. Inter-religious ceremonies are not recognized in Israel. The only way to bypass the religious authorities is to marry outside Israel and then bring the papers to the Ministry of the Interior, where the marriage will be officially recognized.

Death

It's a sad fact but it comes to us all. I hope it won't happen to you when travelling in Israel but if it does, it is important that you know (or rather, that your relatives know) that burial in Israel is also carried out by the religious authorities. There are cemeteries for Jews, Muslims and Christians.

Transportation in Israel

When thinking about visiting Israel, or any other destination, what normally springs to mind are specific sights, meeting new people, the local cuisine and accommodation. But very little thought is given to logistics and transportation. Travelers don't really notice it but they spend a large portion of their time on the road. On a very popular tour, for example, from Jerusalem to Masada and the Dead Sea and back to Jerusalem, you'll be more than three hours on the road. The distances can't be shortened but if you plan well and understand the various options available, you'll be able to make the most of your time.

Renting a car

Renting a car is the best way to get around between the main cities and the Negev and Galilee regions. Driving in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem is not much fun. The traffic is pretty bad and there are lots of one-way streets, plus it's very hard to find parking spaces. You can, of course, rent a car at the airport, but I usually recommend first visiting Tel Aviv and/or Jerusalem without a car in order to recover from the flight, acclimatize yourself and get a feel for the place, and only then renting a car.

Road signs in Israel are also in English. You usually have to be at least 25 years of age to rent a car. A valid driving license from your native country is enough in most cases. There is rarely the need for an international driving license. Renting a car in advance, over the internet or by phone, will be much cheaper than renting the car directly at a company in Israel.

Trains

Trains are the best way to travel between Ben Gurion airport and Tel Aviv, Haifa, Akko (Acre), and Be'er Sheva, as well as other places along the coast. Note that trains do not serve Jerusalem.

Buses

The most common form of public transportation in Israel is the bus. There used to be only two main bus companies – Dan (in Tel Aviv and the surrounding cities) and Egged (in the rest of Israel). Today there are a number of companies to choose from. One website with information on all the bus companies is <http://www.bus.co.il/otobusimmvc/en>. There is no need to buy tickets in advance, unless you are taking a bus to Eilat in the summer.

Monit Sherut

These shared taxis (or service taxis) are vans that typically seat ten passengers. They follow the routes of the main bus lines and are a little bit cheaper. They also



run on weekends and Jewish holidays as well as between some cities.

Transportation on Saturdays

Because most public transportation does not run from Friday afternoon to Saturday evening, I recommend planning your trip so that you spend weekdays outside the cities – in either the mountainous Galilee region or the Negev Desert – and weekends in the main cities. Another advantage is that the nature parks are much less crowded on weekdays and that there is much more going on in the cities on weekends. You can always take a taxi on Saturdays, but it is more expensive than other options. As mentioned above, Monit Sherut taxis run on Saturdays between the main cities. They pick up passengers in Tel Aviv (outside the main bus station), in Jerusalem (on Kook St.), and in Haifa (on HeHaluts St.).

Driving in Israel

The steering wheel is on the left side of the vehicle, and you drive on the right side of the road (like in the United States and continental Europe). A valid driving license from your native country is sufficient in most cases. There is rarely the need for an international driving license. From November to April you are required to have your headlights on even when driving during the day.

In the mornings there is heavy traffic heading into Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. Traffic is at its busiest on Sunday mornings and Thursday afternoons, while the roads are fairly clear on Fridays and Saturdays. When the weather is nice on Saturdays, there will be pretty bad traffic from the north toward Tel Aviv.

Highway numbers:

North-south highways have even numbers: 2, 4, 6, 40, 90

East-west highways have odd numbers: 1, 5, 65, 75, 431, 433

There are three toll roads:

- Highway 6: be aware that there are no toll booths, so if you're driving a rental car you'll have to pay the normal toll plus a NIS 50 surcharge. You can avoid these charges by taking alternative roads: Highway 2 along the coast or Highway 90 along the Jordan River.
- The Carmel Tunnels: the tunnels take you under Haifa, straight to the other side of Mount Carmel. There are toll booths. If you're not in a hurry, you can drive along the Haifa Bay instead.
- On Highway 1 there is an extra fast lane that you can pay to use. It runs along the Jerusalem-Tel Aviv highway between the Ben Gurion Junction and Tel Aviv.

Driving and transportation apps:

[Waze](#) – By far the most popular driving app in Israel. It tells you the fastest route (you can plan your trip with or without toll roads).

[Moovit](#) – This is a good public transportation app.

Israelis are just as impatient behind the wheel as in other areas of life. They are particularly quick to sound the horn, even when it's not necessary. Also, many Israeli drivers don't signal when changing lanes, so watch out!

Drive safely!



Basic Itinerary for Israel

When planning your visit to Israel, just like any other place, you need to take into account how much time you have, the season you're traveling in, your budget, and, most importantly, your interests. The days of visiting Israel with a congregational leader for a seven-day tour are over. There are tourists who come to enjoy Tel Aviv for a weekend or attend a jazz festival in Eilat. Tourists visit for the archaeological or agricultural seminars, vineyard tours, and to take desert hikes in the winter, enjoying the January and February sunshine. The itinerary I'm presenting here enables you to gain a good understanding of what Israel has to offer in one very full (perhaps even too full) itinerary.

Day 1 – Jerusalem: The Old City

If I had up to 72 hours to spend in Israel, I would stay in Jerusalem. Although the distances between places in Israel are short, moving from one hotel to the other always takes up considerable time and is more of a hassle than one expects. It's always better to be relaxed than to rush things, and this is even more true while on vacation. The sites on the Mount of Olives and in the Old City are the most important to see, and include the Mosque of Ascension, the Wailing Wall, the Temple Mount, and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

Day 2 – Jerusalem: The “New City”

The Orthodox neighborhood of Mea Shearim is interesting to walk through. Here one can observe how Jews lived in Eastern Europe and have kept their traditions. The Mahane Yehuda Market (often referred to as “The Shuk”) is a good place to



grab something to eat. If you plan on visiting just one museum in Israel, make sure it is the Israel Museum. The Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum and Memorial is one of the key places to learn about the Holocaust and how Israeli society has dealt with and continues to deal with the loss of one third of the Jewish people.



Day 3 – Tel Aviv

The beach will probably be your first stop once you're settled in your hotel. Old Jaffa sights are a good place to start your tour: the visitor's center, St. Peter's Church, the galleries in the alleyways, and the flea market. In central Tel Aviv, along Dizengoff Street and Rothschild Boulevard, you will see Israel as Israelis see Tel Aviv. Continue on to the hip neighborhood of Neve Tzedek

and then cycle along the promenade to Tel Aviv Port – a new shopping, eating, and party zone.

Tel Aviv and Jerusalem are in the center of Israel. From here, you can head north to the Galilee or south to the Negev Desert. During the summer, I would suggest spending more time in the north, and in the winter, more time in the south. If you



have limited time, travel from Jerusalem to the Judean Desert – Masada and the Dead Sea (see Day 8).

Day 4 – The Northern Coast

Rent a car in Tel Aviv and drive to the Caesarea National Park, the site of the port city built by King Herod. From here, continue north to Haifa, Israel's third largest city. From the top of Mount Carmel, you have a view of the Baha'i Gardens and the German Colony. There are also many tasty places to eat in downtown Haifa. The Old City of Akko (Acre) has the best Crusader sights in Israel – one of the most interesting periods in the long history of the Land of Israel.



Days 5 & 6 – The Galilee and the Sea of Galilee (Kinneret)

There are many different kinds of sights in the Galilee. I suggest a mix of it all. Nazareth is where Christianity began, and around the Sea of Galilee there are many sites connected to the ministry of



Jesus: Tabgha, Capernaum, and the Mount of Beatitudes, where the Sermon on the Mount was delivered. Megiddo and Zippori (Sepphoris) are two archaeological sites worth seeing. Safed has been a center of Kabbalah (Jewish mysticism) since the 16th century. Some of the first Zionist settlements are in the Galilee: Kinneret, Rosh Pina, and Tel Hai. Hikers can head to the Mount Meron and Amud Wadi National Parks. And if you're looking for a challenge, there is a three-day walking route from Nazareth to the Sea of Galilee: the Jesus Trail.

Day 7 – The Golan Heights

Take in beautiful views of the Galilee on one side and Syria on the other. Gamla, Yehudiya, and the Nimrod Fortress are popular national parks. Mount Hermon, at the northernmost part of the Golan, is the highest mountain in Israel. In winter, it acts as Israel's only ski resort.



Day 8 – The Judean Desert

Drive down Road 90 to the Judean Desert. Masada and the Dead Sea are sights not to be missed. Two more interesting sights are Ein Gedi, the biggest oasis, and Qumran, a place that was inhabited by a small but very interesting sect 2,000 years ago, and where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found.



Day 9 – Eilat

I wouldn't visit Eilat on Jewish holidays and during the summer vacation (July and August), but during the winter (on weekdays – Sunday to Thursday) it's great. If you prefer nature to touristy cities, there are some kibbutzim north of Eilat that offer accommodation. Eilat is a good place to snorkel and enjoy watersports. It could also be your base if planning a day or two in Petra in Jordan or in Sinai in Egypt. In Eilat, you can lie on the beach in January and enjoy the warm sun.



Day 10 – Mitzpe Ramon

Timna National Park, 25 kilometers (15.5 miles) north of Eilat, is an ancient copper mine and a beautiful desert park. The amazing arid landscape will accompany you all the way to Mitzpe Ramon and the Ramon Crater.

Day 11 – Return to Tel Aviv or Jerusalem

Accommodation

Accommodation will most likely constitute your main expense when traveling. Although most hotels and hostels have their own websites and nothing could be simpler than booking a night's stay, I decided to write about accommodation in Israel for the following reasons:

- Every city and region has its own logic. When choosing a hotel in Jerusalem, you will need to take into account different factors to those you would consider when choosing a hotel in Tel Aviv. You will find some points to consider below.
- You can learn a lot about your options from review-driven travel websites. The reviews are helpful in the sense that they are honest, but a traveler who writes about a hotel (s)he stayed in has had only one of many possible experiences. Maybe it was good and maybe it was bad, but (s)he certainly didn't try all the hotels in Jerusalem and it could be that there was a better option. As a tour guide I know many of the hotels and can better estimate what kind of hotel is suitable for travelers.
- Online booking websites look after their own interests. Hotel owners have to pay them to get on the site and then they pay more to rank more highly. Many hotels pay up to 20% of the order value as commission! Some places, especially the more unique spots, refuse to play the game, and therefore you don't come across a lot of information about them. Just try finding information on the places I wrote about in [special guesthouses in Jerusalem](#).
- On online booking sites you have many options. Pop-up windows tell you that a friend of a friend (who you don't even know) went to that hotel, another flashes up that three other people are about to order rooms in that hotel, another informs you that a different hotel is offering a 30% discount on exactly the weekend you are looking at (and the weekend before and after...). In my experience, travelers want to keep it simple – what are the 3 top hostels in Jerusalem? The 4 best boutique hotels in Tel Aviv? And accordingly this is how I have written my recommendations.

Accommodation in Tel Aviv

One of the most important things to take into consideration before booking a hotel in Tel Aviv is how close you want to be to the beach. If you want to come straight down from your room to the beach, book a room in one of the hotels on the promenade – Yarkon St. or Herbert Samuel St. There are also business

hotels closer to the business center and the highway and trains. In recent years, more and more boutique hotels have sprung up in the city's nicer neighborhoods.

[Recommended Hotels in Tel Aviv](#)

[Recommended Hostels in Tel Aviv](#)



Accommodation in Jerusalem

There are a lot of hotels in Jerusalem; most of them don't feature on my list because, as a tour guide, my main consideration has to be the location – the center of the city. I narrowed down hotel options to ensure they are all within walking distance of the old city and the city center.

[Recommended Hotels in Jerusalem](#)

[Recommended Hostels in Jerusalem](#)

Types of accommodation in Israel

There are different types of accommodation in Israel, some the same as in other countries and some unique to Israel. One thing that characterizes all of them is that they are usually more expensive than you would expect. If you've ever stayed somewhere and come away with the feeling that you paid a bit more than it was worth, then welcome to the club... The average price of accommodation is \$240 per night, but there are of course many cheaper options. This post is intended as a practical guide for travelers and not a meditation on the Israeli tourist industry, but I will just say this: the blame lies principally with government taxes and regulations and not with the greed of hotel proprietors, who actually earn less than their equivalents in other countries. Now back to the matter in hand:

Camping

The cheapest option is camping. In the desert and in Galilee there are designated places where you can pitch your tent for free. In most of these places there are no facilities. There are also campsites that you have to pay for and these are fully equipped.

Hostels

There are three different kinds of hostel in Israel. The oldest one is ANA, the **Israel Youth Hostel Association**. Their hostels are generally located in cities. To be totally honest, I can't recommend staying in their hostels since they're popular with schoolchildren and not really intended for independent travelers. There are better options to be had in the cities. The ANA Masada Hostel, at the foot of Masada, is their best hostel because it stands in a location that is perfect for those wanting to ascend Masada before sunrise. Another chain of hostels belongs to the **Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel** (SPNI). They have nine field schools (in Hebrew they are called *Beit Sefer Sade* – Israelis don't know them by the name SPNI) offering functional rooms. The facilities may be simple but the teams working there are usually able to recommend walking trails and give guests plenty of information about the natural surroundings. Sometimes groups of schoolchildren stay, meaning it can get noisy, but staff members try to keep children and travelers separate. For me, staying in an SPNI field school always brings back happy memories of traveling as a kid, but I recommend them to others because they're located close to nature trails and your money goes toward protecting Israel's natural heritage.

The third option, and the most suitable for independent travelers, is the hostels listed under ILH (Israel Hostels – Independent Travelers Accommodation). They are not a chain but an organization of independent hostel owners. They are very different from each other but all have cooking facilities, free wifi and, most importantly, no schoolchildren running through the hallways. I wrote about some of them here: [Best hostels in Jerusalem](#) and [Best hostels in Tel Aviv](#).



Zimmerim

Zimmerim are vacation cabins located in villages, for the most part in the north and south of Israel (not in the cities). The term itself – *Zimmer* – means “room” in German and the ending “-im” is the masculine plural in Hebrew. The cabins probably took on the name because Israelis who had travelled in Germany, Austria and Switzerland had seen signs for “Zimmer frei” (rooms available). Zimmerim came into being in the nineties, when a dramatic rise in the price of water made agriculture less profitable and farmers were obliged to look for other sources of income. It suited more and more Israelis, who were wanting to vacation in rural areas and looking for an alternative to big hotels. Some translate zimmerim as “B&B” but there are some differences. In most zimmerim breakfast is not included, and in B&Bs sometimes you are hosted inside the host family’s house. The zimmerim are always private cabins or rooms with a separate entrance. There is a very wide range of zimmerim. From a small room in the

garden with views onto the neighbor's kitchen to luxury cabins with wonderful views. In the weeks to come I'll be writing about my recommendations.



Airuach kibbutzi

The kibbutzim, like the moshavim (villages), were also badly affected by the agricultural crisis and took the step of adding extra accommodation to the kibbutzim. They usually have a few dozen rooms, making this a good option for groups that want to stay together. In some kibbutzim the accommodation area is separated from the kibbutz itself and sometimes it is part of it. The rooms are never luxurious and sometimes they leave a lot to be desired (it is a kibbutz, after all). Although most kibbutzim are no longer communal, the structure of the kibbutz, with its small private houses and large community buildings, all built close together, as well as its agricultural structures, still stands as a memorial to the values it used to represent.



[*Airuach kibbutzi – Shaar Hagolan*](#). Photo from the hotel website.

Chavot bodedim

Chavot bodedim literally means “lonesome farms”. Most of the farms were established in the nineties and are run by a single family that owns a lot of land (in Israel “a lot” means more than a few hectares). Many of them grow wine grapes and olives and some make cheese. Most of them have 2-3 zimmerim and include breakfast on account of their remote location. They are not cheap, starting at around \$150 per night, but personally I like them and the money goes to individual families.



[Chavot bodedim – Haroa Farm](#). Photo from the hotel website.



Photo from the hotel website.

Boutique hotels

If zimmerim were the hot new thing in the nineties and chavot bodedim came into their own at the beginning of 2000, the latest trend is boutique hotels. Tel Aviv is of course leading the trend (some of its hotels have won international prizes) but there are also some in Jerusalem and the north. The hotels are usually housed in beautifully renovated buildings in excellent locations, and great

attention is paid to the smallest of details. Some of them might make you feel as if you're staying the night in an art museum. Prices start at \$250 and can easily reach \$500 per night; more for the suites.

Recommended Hotels in Jerusalem

Israel's hotels are on a par with other Western countries. The most common criticism you'll hear is the price. Israel isn't a cheap country and hotel prices are high. If you liked your hotel but felt it was too expensive, you can be sure you're not the only one.

Luxury Hotels:

King David Hotel

23 King David St. (230 rooms, starting at NIS 1,500 per night)

Every city has that one highly reputable hotel. In Jerusalem's case, it's the King David Hotel. The rectangular structure and tall palm trees are part of Jerusalem's landscape, and the history of the hotel – not all of it pleasant – is in many ways the history of Israel in the 20th century. Since the 1950s, the hotel has hosted heads of state and dignitaries from around the world.

[Click here for more information or to make a reservation](#)



Photo from the hotel website.

Mamilla Hotel

11 King Solomon St. (190 rooms, starting at NIS 1,300 per night)

Mamilla is located on the boundary between the old and the new city. This luxurious, modern hotel is part of the Mamilla Compound, a pedestrian mall that

connects Jaffa Road and Jaffa Gate. The hotel roof boasts a beautiful view of the Old City.

[Click here for more information or to make a reservation](#)



Photo from the hotel website.

Waldorf Astoria

26 Agron St. (220 rooms, starting at NIS 1,600 per night)

The international luxury hotel chain opened its first hotel in Israel in a beautiful building that used to host one of Jerusalem's luxury hotels in the 1930s. Later, it served as a British government building (just like the King David Hotel did). After the creation of the state of Israel, the building housed the Ministry of Rationing and Supply during the austerity period. After many years of standing abandoned, the building was restored at great cost and returned to its original purpose as a luxury hotel.

[Click here for more information or to make a reservation](#)

Boutique Hotels:

Boutique hotels are smaller than regular hotels, and usually don't have the large swimming pool or facilities you might expect of larger hotels. However, they do offer an intimate space with an emphasis on the personal touch, when it comes to both service and design.

Arthur Hotel

13 Dorot Rishonim St. (50 rooms, starting at NIS 840 per night)

This beautifully designed hotel is located at the Ben Yehuda pedestrian mall (near Jaffa Road) in the center of the city, where you'll find most of the city's nightlife. The Old City is a 15-minute walk away.

[Click here for more information or to make a reservation](#)



Photo from the hotel website.



Harmony Hotel

6 Yoel Moshe Salomon St. (50 rooms, starting at NIS 840 NIS per night)

Located in Nahalat HaShiv'a, one of the first neighborhoods built outside Jerusalem's city walls.

[Click here for more information or to make a reservation](#)

3-Star Hotels:

There are a lot of mid-range hotels in Jerusalem. I focused on those that are in the middle of the city and close to the main sites. Other than that, there is not much to say about 3-star hotels. You can expect friendly and helpful staff, clean rooms and a decent breakfast.



Eldan Hotel

24 King David St. (76 rooms, starting at NIS 650 per night)

A good hotel that is similar to the luxury hotels but with more reasonable prices. A 10-minute walk from the Old City and the Mahane Yehuda Market.

[Click here for more information or to make a reservation](#)



Photo from the hotel website.

Montefiore Hotel

7 Shats St. (48 rooms, starting at 600 NIS per night)

The hotel is located in the center of the city. A good, simple hotel for anyone wanting to return to a clean and tidy room at the end of the day.

[Click here for more information or to make a reservation](#)



Prima Kings

60 King George St. (213 rooms, starting at NIS 520 per night)

As with other hotels in this category, there isn't much to add. Good hotel with a central location.

[Click here for more information or to make a reservation](#)

The Best Hostels in Jerusalem

Hotels in Jerusalem are expensive. But you don't have to sleep in a hotel: there are some great hostels in Jerusalem and all of them also offer private rooms, so you don't have to sleep with people you don't know in your room. The price for a bed in dorms is about 100 shekels (around \$23-26 or €23-26) and around \$80-100 or €80-100 for a private room. All are located in the middle of the city. So, let's start.

Abraham Hostel

67 HaNevi'im St., Davidka Square (260 beds, starting at NIS 90 per night)

This hostel was selected as one of the best large hostels in the world, and rightly so. The location is excellent: it's in the middle of Jaffa Road, next to the HaDavidka light rail station. It's a 15-minute walk from the Old City and five minutes away from the Mahane Yehuda Market. The staff are friendly and courteous. During the day, the hostel operates an information center for travelers. This is a great place to start your trip to Jerusalem or Israel, especially for people who are concerned about traveling alone or traveling in Israel.

[For more information and reservations click here](#)





Allenby 2

2 Allenby Square (30 beds, starting at NIS 90 per night)

In the name of full disclosure, I should mention that I had decided to recommend this place before I had even visited it. I met the owner and knew immediately that I would like his place, simply because he was so warm and friendly. If you arrive in Jerusalem by bus and are looking for a

hostel close to the station, this is the place for you. It's a small, quiet hostel, with a nice homely atmosphere. The hostel is about a 20-minute walk from the center of the city, but the light rail passes every few minutes, making this a comfortable option for getting to the Old City.

[For more information and reservations click here](#)

The Jerusalem Hostel

44 Jaffa Road, Zion Square (70 beds, starting at NIS 90 per night)

This hostel enjoys a superb location on Zion Square on Jaffa Road. It's a 10-minute walk from the Old City and very close to the Tel Aviv-Jerusalem line shared taxi station. Drawbacks are the level of cleanliness and the crowdedness. And because the hostel is close to the city center, it can get noisy at night.

[For more information and reservations click here](#)



The Post Hostel

Jaffa 23 (43 rooms, starting at NIS 90 per night)

The Post Hostel is the newest hostel in Jerusalem and when you walk in it feels more like a boutique hotel than a hostel. I think this may well be the hostel with the highest standards in Jerusalem. They really have thought about even the smallest detail. There are night lamps in the rooms, so if somebody arrives late at night he won't wake everybody up. Each bed has its own personal lamp and electricity sockets. This hostel is next to the town hall station of the light railway and it's about 300 meters from the Old City.

[For more information and reservations click here](#)



Recommended Hotels in Tel Aviv

The most important criterion when choosing a hotel or hostel in Tel Aviv is how important the beach is to you. If lying on the beach is to be a big part of your vacation and you want a room with sea views, then choose accommodation along the promenade (and make sure that your room has a view of the beach). In summertime and on holidays the promenade is full of tourists so if you don't mind walking, cycling, or taking a taxi you can stay in the city center or in Newe Tzedek in a boutique hotel.



Photo from the hotel website.

Dan Tel Aviv

99 HaYarkon St. (280 rooms, starting at around \$280)

One of the most iconic and best-known hotels in Tel Aviv. Great location on the promenade.

[Click here for more information](#)



Photo from the hotel website.

The Royal Beach

19 Hayarkon St. (230 rooms, starting at around \$200)

One of the finest big luxury hotels on the promenade. The hotel has all the facilities that a 5-star hotel has to offer, plus all the rooms have sea views. It has received very good reviews from my travelers and from various internet sites.

[Click here for more information](#)



Photo from the hotel website.

Sea Executive Suites

76 Herbert Samuel (47 rooms, starting at around \$150)

A 4-star hotel with a great location in the middle of the promenade. It's just a few minutes' walk from the center of Tel Aviv.

[Click here for more information](#)

Business Hotels

Crowne Plaza City Center

136 Menachem Road/Azrieli Center 5 (270 rooms, starting at around \$160)

This 5-star business hotel offers a great location for business people, particularly for those who have meetings in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Beer Sheva and Haifa but want to stay in one hotel (because they don't want to drag around their spouse or families). The hotel is located in the upper floors of one of the Azrieli Center's silvery skyscrapers, near the inter-city Ayalon Highway (the main highway in Tel Aviv) and next to the HaShalom Train Station. The renovated Sharona is nearby and there are free shuttles to the beach.

[Click here for more information](#)

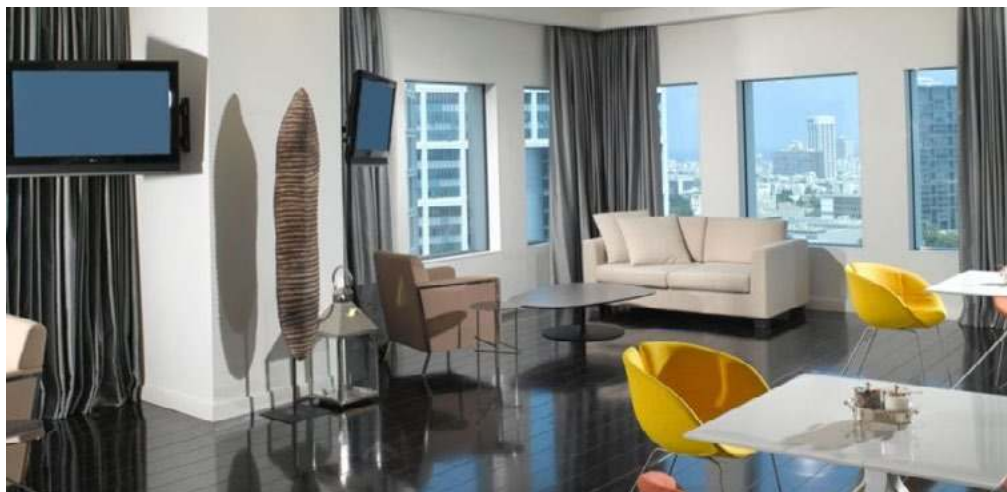


Photo from the hotel website.



Photo from the hotel website.

Hotel Indigo

Aholiav St. No. 5 Ramat Gan (91 rooms, starting at around \$170)

This 5-star hotel is a combination of a business hotel and a boutique hotel, located in the heart of the Diamond Exchange District (Bursa) business area of Ramat Gan. The hotel is also very close to Ayalon Highway and Savidor Train Station.

[Click here for more information](#)

Boutique Hotels

For decades almost all of the hotels were close to the promenade. But in recent years, there has been a movement towards smaller boutique hotels that don't try to be as close as possible to the beach, but prefer instead the nice, hip neighborhoods of Tel Aviv (though they are still only a couple of minutes' walk from the beach). So if you want to experience Tel Aviv like a local, a boutique hotel might be the right place for you. These hotels are smaller so you won't find a 25-meter-long swimming pool or in-house kids' activities but you will enjoy more personalized service and stylishly decorated rooms.



Photo from the hotel website.

The Diaghilev, Live Art Boutique Hotel

56 Mazeh St. (50 rooms, starting at around \$150)

This highly rated hotel is situated in a quiet residential street in central Tel Aviv near trendy Rothschild Blvd. Its historic building also houses an art gallery.

[Click here for more information](#)



Photo from the hotel website.

The Rothschild Hotel

96 Rothschild Blvd (25 rooms, starting at around \$250)

The Rothschild Hotel is a luxurious boutique hotel on the Rothschild Blvd. The hotel is known for its high standards and for paying attention to the smallest of details.

[Click here for more information](#)



Photo from the hotel website.

Brown Hotel

25 Kalisher St (30 rooms, starting at around \$150)

A great boutique hotel with '70s-style furniture and a roof terrace with views over the city of Tel Aviv.

[Click here for more information](#)

3-Star Hotels

For those who plan on spending their days outside the hotel and want to come back to a clean, basic hotel with no frills (but with free wi-fi), here are some good options:



Photo from the hotel website.

Olympia Hotel

164 Hayarkon (64 rooms, starting at around \$70)

Promenade location, breakfast, and free wi-fi. Whatmore do you need?

[Click here for more information](#)

See The Sea

Yordei Hasira 3 (20 rooms, starting at around \$80)

This hotel is located very close to Tel Aviv Port (HaNamal).

[For more information and reservations](#)



Photo from the hotel website.

Recommended Hostels in Tel Aviv

Sleeping in a hostel is more than just sleeping cheaply in a room with people you don't know (in most hostels there are private rooms as well). It's more about the good atmosphere. Unlike hotel lobbies, where everyone is for himself, in a hostel it is much easier to start a conversation. Another advantage is that there is a shared kitchen in all of the hostels so you can cook your own food.



Photo from the hotel website.

Hayarkon 48

Hayarkon 48 (100 beds, starting at around \$23)

One of the first hostels in Tel Aviv. Great location – where Allenby meets the promenade.

[Click here for more information](#)



Photo from the hotel website.

Old Jaffa Hostel

13 Amiad St (70 beds, starting at around \$23)

This great hostel is located in the middle of the flea market. It is closer to where the good hummus joints are and just a few minutes' walk from the shore.

[Click here for more information](#)



Photo from the hotel website.

Little Tel Aviv Hostel

51 Yehuda Ha'Levi St. (16 rooms, starting at around \$25)

Great new hostel in the heart of Tel Aviv, not far from Sderot Rothschild.

[Click here for more information](#)

A Final Word

The travel world (I don't really relate to the term "tourist industry") is going through some major changes: the days of choosing between traveling with a guided group or independently with a guide book are over. There are many options in between. The internet and apps have granted us endless information but, more importantly than that, the one-way writer-reader flow of information has become a two-way street. So, if you have any questions about planning your trip, please feel free to contact me via my website: www.travelingisrael.com.

I hope you've found the information in this eBook helpful and that you enjoyed it. As a tour guide and traveler myself, I want to help independent travelers discover Israel. Israel is a fascinating place, but it seems to me there is still a lot of useful information that is missing in English (and other languages). Please consider purchasing one or more of my booklets, as it will allow me to add more content to my website and create more videos and eBooks.

**Thanks,
Oren**



