

Israel



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1 CONTACT ADDRESSES

Location: Eastern Mediterranean.

Note: Note: The main Palestinian National Authority Region (on the West Bank) and part of the Gaza strip are administered by the Palestine National Authority.

Ministry of Tourism
PO Box 1018, King George Street 24, Jerusalem, Israel
Tel: (2) 675 4811. **Fax:** (2) 625 7955. **Web site:** <http://www.infotour.co.il>

Palestinian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities
PO Box 534, Manger Street, Bethlehem Palestine
Tel: (2) 274 1581. **Fax:** (2) 274 3753. **E-mail:** mota@visit-palestine.com
Web site: <http://www.visit-palestine.com>

Embassy of Israel
2 Palace Green, London W8 4QB
Tel: (020) 7957 9500. **Fax:** (020) 7957 9555.
E-mail: info@israel-embassy.org.uk
Web site: <http://www.israel-embassy.org.uk/london/>
Opening hours: 0830-1730 Monday to Thursday and 0830-1330 Friday.
Consular Section: 15A Old Court Place, London W8 4QB
Tel: (020) 7957 9574-6. **Fax:** (020) 7957 9577.
Opening hours: 1000-1300 Monday to Thursday and 1000-1200 Friday.

Israel Government Tourist Office
UK House, 180 Oxford Street, London W1D 1NN
Tel: (020) 7299 1111. **Fax:** (020) 7299 1112. **E-mail:** information@igto.co.uk
Web site: <http://www.infotour.co.il>
Opening hours: 1030-1530 Monday to Thursday (0900-1700 for telephone enquiries); 0900-1500 Friday (telephone enquiries only).

British Embassy
192 Hayarkon Street, Tel Aviv 63405, Israel
Tel: (3) 725 1222. **Fax:** (3) 527 8574 or 524 3313 (commercial section). **E-mail:** comrcl1@netvision.net.il (commercial section).
Web site: <http://www.britemb.org.il>
Consular section: 6th Floor, Migdalar Building, 1 Ben Yehuda Street, Tel Aviv 63801, Israel
Tel: (3) 510 0166. **Fax:** (3) 510 1167. **E-mail:** bricontv@netvision.net.il
Consulate in: Eilat.

Embassy of Israel
3514 International Drive, NW, Washington, DC 20008
Tel: (202) 364 5500. **Fax:** (202) 364 5423. **E-mail:** ask@israelemb.org
Web site: <http://www.israelemb.org>
Consulates in: Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, New York (tel: (212) 499 5300), Philadelphia and San Francisco.

Israel Government Tourist Office

800 Second Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Tel: (212) 499 5650 or (1 888) 77 47 72 35 (toll free; USA and Canada only). Fax: (212) 499 5655. E-mail: info@goisrael.com

Web site: <http://www.goisrael.com>

Offices also in: Chicago, Dallas and Los Angeles.

Embassy of the United States of America

71 Hayarkon Street, Tel Aviv 63903, Israel

Tel: (3) 519 7575. Fax: (3) 517 3227.

E-mail: usisisrl@usis-israel.org.il

Web site: <http://www.usis-israel.org.il>

Consulate General in: Jerusalem.

Embassy of Israel

50 O'Connor Street, Suite 1005, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 6L2

Tel: (613) 567 6450. Fax: (613) 237 8865. E-mail: embisrott@cyberus.ca or ottawa@israel.org

Web site: <http://www.israel.ca.org>

Consulates in: Toronto and Montréal.

Israel Government Tourist Office

Suite 700, 180 Bloor Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5S 2V6

Tel: (416) 964 3784 or (1 888) 77 47 72 35 (toll free; USA and Canada only). Fax: (416) 964 2420. E-mail: igto@idirect.com

Canadian Embassy

Street address: 3/5 Nirim Street, Tel Aviv 67060, Israel

Postal address: PO Box 9442, Tel Aviv, Israel

Tel: (3) 636 3300. Fax: (3) 636 3380/1. E-mail: taviv@dfait-maeci.gc.ca

Country dialling code: 972.

2 GENERAL

Area: 22,145 sq km (8550 sq miles; includes East Jerusalem and the Golan sub-district).

Population: 5,970,700 (1998).

Population Density: 269.6 per sq km.

Capital: Jerusalem. Population: (including East Jerusalem) 717,000 (1998). The Israeli government has designated Jerusalem as the capital, although this is not recognised by the UN, and most foreign embassies are based in Tel Aviv.

Geography: Israel is on the eastern Mediterranean, bordered by Lebanon and Syria to the north, Jordan to the east, and Egypt to the south. The autonomous Palestinian Authority Region lies mostly on the west bank of the River Jordan; part of the Gaza strip, in the south of the country, is also administered by the Palestinians. The country stretches southwards through the Negev Desert to Eilat, a resort town on the Red Sea. The fertile Plain of Sharon runs along the coast, while inland, parallel to the coast, is a range of hills and uplands with fertile valleys to the west and arid desert to the east. The Great Rift Valley begins beyond the sources of the River

Jordan and extends south through the Dead Sea (the lowest point in the world), into the Red Sea, continuing on into Eastern Africa.

Government: Republic. The state of Israel was founded in 1948.

Head of State: Moshe Katsav since 2000. Head of Government: Prime Minister: Vacant since the resignation of Ehud Barak in 2000.

Language: Hebrew is the official language. Arabic is spoken by around 15% of the population. English is spoken in most places and other languages, including Russian, Romanian, French, Spanish, German, Yiddish, Polish and Hungarian are widely used.

Religion: 81% Jewish, 14% Muslim, with Christian, Druze and other minorities.

Time: GMT + 2 (GMT + 3 from March to September).

Electricity: 220 volts AC, 50Hz. 3-pin plugs are standard; if needed, adaptors can be purchased in Israel.

Communications:

Telephone: Full IDD service. Country code: 972. Outgoing international code: 00. Local telephone directories are in Hebrew, but there is a special English-language version for tourists.

Mobile telephone: GSM 900 network operated by Orange, Israel (web site: <http://www.orange.il>) provides coverage practically all over the country, including over parts of the sea. Handsets can be hired at Ben Gurion Airport. Visitors should note that it is illegal to drive whilst holding a mobile telephone.

Fax: This service is widely available.

Internet/E-mail: ISPs include Internet Gold (web site: <http://www.zahav.net.il>) and PalNet (web site: <http://www.palnet.com>). There are many cybercafés.

Telegram: Facilities are available to guests in most deluxe hotels in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, and in main post offices.

Post: Airmail to Europe takes up to a week. There are Poste Restante facilities in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Post office hours may vary but are generally: 0800-1230 and 1530-1830 Sunday to Thursday, 0800-1330 Wednesday and 0800-1200 Friday. All post offices are closed on Shabbat (Saturday) and holy days, although central telegraph offices are open throughout the year.

Press: The main dailies are Ha'aretz, Yedioth Aharonoth and Ma'ariv. Newspapers are printed in a variety of languages, including English. Political and religious affiliations are common. The English-language daily is the Jerusalem Post, and the Jerusalem Post International Edition is published weekly and goes out to 95 countries.

BBC World Service and Voice of America frequencies: From time to time these change.

BBC:

MHz15.5711.769.4106.195

Voice of America:

3 PASSPORT

	<i>Passport Required?</i>	<i>Visa Required?</i>	<i>Return Ticket Required?</i>
British	Yes	1	Yes
Australian	Yes	No	Yes
Canadian	Yes	No	Yes
USA	Yes	No	Yes
OtherEU	Yes	1	Yes
Japanese	Yes	No	Yes

PASSPORTS: Passport valid for a minimum of 6 months beyond intended date of arrival required by all.

Note: (a) Persons wishing to proceed to an Arab country other than Egypt or Jordan after visiting Israel should ensure their passport does not contain an Israeli visa or stamp. However, persons permitted to stay in Israel for a period of 3 months or more will be required to have an extension stamped in their passport. (b) Former nationals of Israel holding a foreign passport must have written proof of having given up Israeli identity, otherwise, they may be required to obtain a new Israeli passport or renew their original one.

VISAS: All nationals require a stamp on arrival. Visas are required by all except the following, although visitors are advised to contact the embassy prior to travelling for up to date conditions: (a) 1. nationals of countries referred to in the chart above (except nationals of Germany if born before January 1, 1928, and nationals of British Dependent Territories (apart from Gibraltar) who do require a visa); (b) nationals of Argentina, Bahamas, Barbados, Bolivia, Brazil, Central African Republic, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Fiji, Guatemala, Haiti, Hungary, Iceland, Jamaica, Korea (Rep. of), Lesotho, Liechtenstein, Malawi, Malta, Mauritius, Mexico, Monaco, Mongolia, New Zealand, Norway, Panama, Paraguay, Philippines, Poland, St Kitts & Nevis, San Marino, Slovenia, South Africa, Surinam, Swaziland, Switzerland, Trinidad & Tobago, Uruguay and Vanuatu; (c) transit passengers continuing their journey within 24 hours by the same or first connecting flight provided holding valid onward or return documentation and not leaving the airport.

Types of visa: Tourist/Entry: £11 (cash only, or £12 postal order). . There are no fees for nationals of Bulgaria and Turkey. Cruise ship passengers visiting Israel will be issued Landing Cards, allowing them to remain in the country for as long as the ship is in port. No visa applications are required.

Validity: 2 months. Visas may be extended (for a nominal fee) at offices of the Ministry of the Interior in the following locations: Afula, Akko (Acre), Ashqelon, Be'ersheba, Eilat, Hadera, Haifa, Herzliya, Holon, Jerusalem, Nazareth, Netanya, Petah Tiqva, Ramat Gan, Ramla, Rehovot, Safed, Tel Aviv and Tiberias.

Application to: Consulate (or Consular section at Embassy); see address section for details.

Application requirements: (a) Application form. (b) 1 passport-size photo. (c) Return ticket. (d) Foreign nationals applying in the UK must submit their residence and/or work permit along with a letter of reference. (e) A copy of tenancy agreement or mortgage arrangements. (f) Bank statement for last 3 months. (g) Self-addressed envelope. (h) Invitation from company/friends/contact in Israel. (i) Letter from employer/university specifying period of time you have worked with them and that you will be returning after trip.

Note: Some visas will require authorisation from Israel and so it is advisable to contact the Embassy before buying tickets.

Working days required: Depends on nationality.

Temporary residence: Apply to the Ministry of the Interior in Israel.

Note: As a concession to travellers intending to travel at a later date to countries inimical to Israel, entry stamps will, on request, be entered only on the entry form AL-17 and not on the passport. This facility is not available to those required to obtain their Israeli visas in advance.

4 MONEY

Currency: New Shekel (IS) = 100 agorot (singular, agura). Notes are in denominations of IS200, 100, 50, and 20. Coins are in denominations of IS10 and 5, and 50 and 10 agorot.

Currency exchange: Foreign currency can only be exchanged at authorised banks, hotels and bureaux de change. It is advisable to leave Israel with the minimum of Israeli currency. Payment in foreign currency exempts tourists from VAT on certain purchases and services. A maximum of US\$500 worth of new shekels can be reconverted to foreign currency by travellers leaving Israel.

Credit cards: All major credit cards are accepted.

Travellers cheques: These are widely accepted. To avoid additional exchange rate charges, travellers are advised to take travellers cheques in US Dollars.

Exchange rate indicators

The following figures are included as a guide to the movements of the New Israel Shekel against Sterling and the US Dollar:

Date May '00 Aug '00 Nov '00 Feb '01 £1.00=6.186.125.985.98 \$1.00=4.164.084.134.10

Currency restrictions: There are no restrictions on the import of local or foreign currency. Travellers planning to export local currency should apply to a local bank before departure from Israel. The export of foreign currency is limited to the amount imported.

Banking hours: 0830-1230 and 1600-1730 Monday, Tuesday and Thursday; 0830-1230 Wednesday; 0830-1200 Friday.

5 DUTY FREE

The following goods may be imported into Israel without incurring customs duty (alcohol and tobacco can only be imported by persons aged 17 years and over):
250 cigarettes or 250g of tobacco products; 1 litre of spirits and 2 litres of wine; 250ml of eau de cologne or perfume; gifts up to the value of US\$125.

Note: Firearms, animals, fresh meat, plants and seeds may not be imported without prior permission.

6 PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

Apr 8-14 2001 Passover. Apr 26 Yom Ha'Atzmaut (Israel Independence Day). May 28 Shavu'ot (Pentecost). Jul 29 Tisha B'Av (Remembrance Day). Sep 18-19 Rosh Hashana (New Year). Sep 27 Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement). Oct 2-9 Sukkot (Tabernacles). Dec 10-17 Chanukah (Feast of the Lights). Mar 28-Apr 3 2002 Passover. Apr 17 Yom Ha'Atzmaut (Israel Independence Day). May 17 Shavu'ot (Pentecost). Jul 18 Tisha B'Av (Remembrance Day). Sep 7-8 Rosh Hashana (New Year). Sep 16 Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement). Sep 21-28 Sukkot (Tabernacles). Nov 30-Dec 7 Chanukah (Feast of the Lights).

Note: Jewish festivals commence on the evenings before the dates given above. Only the first and last days of Passover and Sukkot are officially recognised as national holidays, but there may be some disruption on intermediate dates; many shops and businesses may open, but close early. The Jewish religious day is Saturday - Shabbat - and begins at nightfall on Friday until nightfall on Saturday. Most public services and shops close early on Friday as a result. Muslim and Christian holidays are also observed by the respective populations. Thus, depending on the district, the day of rest falls on Friday, Saturday or Sunday.

7 HEALTH

	<i>Special Precautions</i>	<i>Certificate Required</i>
Yellow Fever	No	No
Cholera	No	No
Typhoid and Polio	Yes	-
Malaria	No	-
Food and Drink	1	-

1: Mains water is normally chlorinated, and whilst relatively safe, may cause mild abdominal upsets. Bottled water is available and is advised for the first few weeks of the stay. Drinking water outside main cities and towns may be contaminated and sterilisation is advisable. Milk is pasteurised and dairy products are safe for consumption. Local meat, poultry, seafood, fruit and vegetables are generally considered safe to eat.

Rabies is present. For those at high risk, vaccination before arrival should be considered. If you are bitten, seek medical advice without delay. For more information, consult the Health appendix. Hepatitis A and B occur.

Health care: Israel has excellent medical facilities and tourists may go to all emergency departments and first-aid centres. Health centres are marked by the red Star of David on a white background. Medical insurance is recommended.

Travel - International

Note: Entry stamps will, on request, be entered only on the entry form AL-17 and not on the passport. This facility is not available to those required to obtain visas in advance (see Passport/Visa section for details).

AIR: Israel's national airline is El Al Israel Airlines (LY). Other airlines serving Israel include British Airways and charter airlines.

APPROXIMATE FLIGHT TIMES: From London to Tel Aviv is 4 hours 30 minutes and to Eilat is 5 hours. From Los Angeles to Tel Aviv is 17 hours 35 minutes, from New York is 11 hours 55 minutes, from Singapore is 10 hours 55 minutes and from Sydney is 14 hours 35 minutes.

INTERNATIONAL AIRPORTS: Tel Aviv (TLV) (Ben Gurion International) is 14km (9 miles) from the city. An EGGED Bus runs every 15 minutes between 0500-2200 (travel time - 25 minutes), and United Tours shuttle bus no. 222 runs hourly 0400-0000 to Tel Aviv. There is also a taxi service (travel time - 20 minutes). A shared taxi service ('sherut') is available, charging a fixed rate per passenger. The El Al airline bus goes to the airport terminal in Tel Aviv. Departure depends on El Al flights. The best way to travel to Jerusalem, which is 50km (32 miles) away, is by sherut. Airport facilities include banks (24-hour), restaurants, duty-free shops, general shops and tourist information (24-hour).

Eilat Central Airport (ETH) is 20 minutes from the city. The airport bus departs every 15 minutes, and taxis are available to the city (travel time - 15 minutes). Airport facilities include a duty-free shop, light refreshments and a souvenir shop.

SEA: Principal international passenger ports are Haifa and Ashdod. Foreign yachts sailing to Israel may use these ports of entry as well as Eilat and the marinas of Herzliya, Tel-Aviv and Ashkelon. There are regular sailings of car/passenger ferries from Greece (Piraeus) and Cyprus to Haifa. Cruise lines run to Haifa and Ashdod from Venice and other Mediterranean ports.

ROAD: On the whole, road access to Israel is somewhat limited. There are two crossing points from Egypt into Israel. Travellers are permitted to cross the border on foot, by bus or in privately owned cars only; taxis and hired cars may not cross. Rafiah (Rafah), the main point of entry, is located some 50km (31 miles) southwest of Ashqelon (open 0900-1700). Four bus companies maintain services between Cairo and Tel Aviv and Jerusalem via Rafiah. EGGED Bus no. 362 leaves Tel Aviv for the Rafiah terminal daily at 0850 and Rafiah for Tel Aviv at 1500. Taba, just south of Eilat, is open 24 hours a day. A regular bus service is available between Taba, Santa Katerina (Sinai) and Cairo.

It is possible to enter Jordan via the Allenby Bridge near Jericho, about 40km (25 miles) from Jerusalem. The Allenby Bridge border opening hours are 0800-0000 Sunday to Thursday and 0800-1500 Friday. EGGED buses and taxi service are also available to the bridge. At present, every tourist passing through here must obtain an entry visa to and an exit visa from Jordan. Exit fees are only payable on leaving for Jordan and are approximately US\$42 (NIS179) per person (children up to the age of two years are exempt). Nationals of countries who are required to obtain an Israeli visa in advance should do so before visiting Jordan, as such visas cannot be obtained at the Allenby Bridge.

The Arava Checkpoint crossing is situated 4km (3 miles) north of Eilat. It is possible to cross the border in both directions. All UK nationals must have passports valid for at least six months from

the date of crossing and a visa as required by each country. Visas to Jordan are issued at the Jordanian checkpoint and payment must be made in Jordanian Dinars. Individual tourists pay for a visa for a period of two weeks. An exit fee is payable on leaving Israel. A branch of the International Bank operates at the checkpoint during opening hours. Israel recognises Jordanian stamps in passports and visas and vice versa. Tourists who wish to proceed to other Arab countries in addition to Jordan and Egypt should ask for the Israeli stamp on a separate paper. Tourists' privately owned vehicles, registered in a third country, will be permitted to cross the border in accordance with existing regulations on each side concerning the type of vehicle permitted on each country's roads. The opening hours for the Arava border checkpoint are 0630-2230 Sunday to Thursday and 0800-2000 Friday and Saturday (closed on Yom Kippur and the Muslim festival of Eid al-Adha).

The Jordan River Crossing (Sheikh Hussein Bridge) can be crossed by holders of UK passports valid for at least six months from the date of entry and persons with dual nationality as individuals or in groups; Israeli passport holders are permitted to visit Jordan through travel agents, who will make the necessary visa arrangements. They can sometimes obtain visas from the Jordanian embassy in Tel Aviv. All UN cars (on official business or not) and vehicles with foreign registration will be permitted to cross freely without paying any fees; however, Israeli cars with diplomatic plates will not be permitted to cross the border. Entry visas for Jordan or Israel will be provided on arrival at the respective border crossing point for all those who have organised pre-arranged visas. At present, visas can be organised through travel agents who will make the necessary arrangements through the travel agents representing them in the country issuing the visa. Lists of the visas issued will be passed to each crossing point every day. Travel agents are requested to co-ordinate the arrival time of buses with the management of the crossing point. Transfer of passengers between the Israeli and Jordanian checkpoints will be carried out by shuttle service (NIS3 per person). Transfers on foot will not be permitted. The Jordan River (Sheikh Hussein) border crossing hours are 0630-2200 Sunday to Thursday, 0800-2000 Friday and Saturday (closed on Yom Kippur and the Jordanian festival on the first day of the Hijrah Calendar). There is no access to Syria and Lebanon. Mobile telephones are not allowed on buses crossing the border.

NOTE: Visitors are strongly advised to seek the most up-to-date advice on border crossings before travelling. For the latest information, contact the Israeli Tourist Office.

Travel - Internal

AIR: A comprehensive service linking Tel Aviv with Eilat and all major cities is run by Arkia/Israel Inland Airways (IZ) and by Isrir (ISR).

SEA/LAKE: Ferries run across the Lake Tiberias (Sea of Galilee) from Tiberias on the west side to Ein Gev kibbutz on the eastern shore. Coastal ferries serve all ports. For details contact local port authorities.

RAIL: Israel Railways provides regular services between Tel Aviv and Herzliya, Netanya, Hadera, Haifa, Akko (Acre) and Nahariya, as well as a daily train between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, which follows a particularly scenic route. Reserved seats may be ordered in advance. There is no railway service on Shabbat (Saturday) and major holidays.

ROAD: Traffic drives on the right. An excellent system of roads connects all towns. Distances by road from Jerusalem to other cities are as follows: Tel Aviv 62km (39 miles), Tiberias 157km (97 miles), Eilat 312km (194 miles), Netanya 93km (58 miles), Dead Sea 104km (65 miles), Zefat 192km (120 miles) and Haifa 159km (99 miles). Bus: Two national bus systems, run by the EGGED and DAN cooperatives, provide extensive services. The service is fast and efficient as well as cheap. With a few exceptions, services are suspended on religious holidays, and between

sunset on Friday and sunset on Saturday (Shabbat). Taxi: Services are either run by companies or by individuals. There are both shared taxis (sheruts) and ordinary taxis. Taxi drivers are required by law to operate a meter and are recommended for short journeys only. Car hire: Available in major cities. Hire fees are not cheap. Documentation: Full driving licence and insurance are required. An International Driving Permit is recommended.

URBAN: DAN and EGGED provide good local bus services in the main towns. Taxis are available.

8 ACCOMMODATION

From small, simple guest-houses to deluxe hotels, Israel offers a wide choice and high standards of accommodation. For a holiday with a difference, unique to Israel, there are kibbutz country inns in all parts of the country where one can find relaxed informality in delightful rural surroundings. Kibbutz Fly-Drive holidays are very popular and so are discovery tours by air-conditioned coach, staying at different hotels and kibbutzim to see the whole country.

HOTELS: There are approximately 300 hotels listed for visitors by the Ministry of Tourism. Prices vary according to season and region. It is best to book months in advance for Israel's high season (usually July-August, though this varies according to the region) and for religious holiday seasons. 315 hotels are members of the Israel Hotel Association, PO Box 50066, 29 Ha'mered Street, Tel Aviv (tel: (3) 517 0131; fax: (3) 510 0197; e-mail: infotel@israelhotels.org.il; web site: <http://www.israelhotels.org.il>).

HOLIDAY/RECREATION VILLAGES: Located on the Mediterranean or the Red Sea Gulf, these villages provide accommodation usually in the form of small 2-bed cabins and bungalows. The standard fittings often include full air-conditioning and facilities. Most are only open between April and October and the emphasis is on casual living.

SELF-CATERING: Apartments and individual rooms are available on a rental basis throughout the country.

KIBBUTZ GUEST-HOUSES: All are clean and comfortable with modern dining rooms. Most have swimming pools (though it is wise to check that this facility is open to visitors) and provide a valuable insight into the style and aims of kibbutz life. Approximately 130 out of the 265 kibbutzim have guest-houses and each is located in a rural or scenic part of the country which is usually open all year. Further information is available from the Israel Government Tourist Office.

CHRISTIAN HOSPICES: Throughout the country some 30 Christian hospices (operated by a variety of denominations) provide rooms and board at low rates. Although preference is given to pilgrimage groups, most will accommodate general tourists. They vary greatly in size and standards but all offer tourists basic accommodation in situations where hotels are full. Details are available from the Israel Government Tourist Office.

CAMPING/CARAVANNING: The fine climate means Israel is a good country for camping, with campsites providing a touring base for each region. They offer full sanitary facilities, electric current, a restaurant and/or store, telephone, postal services, first-aid facilities, shaded picnic and campfire areas and day and night watchmen. They can be reached by bus, but all are open to cars and caravans. Most have tents and cabins, as well as a wide range of equipment for hire. All sites have swimming facilities either on-site or within easy reach. Hitchhiking is not recommended.

Youth Hostels: Hostels in Israel can be dormitory, family bungalows, guest house standard rooms, huts or modern cubicles and they are scattered all over the country in both urban and rural areas. For further details, write to the IYHA, PO Box 6001, 1 Sazar Street, Jerusalem 91060 (tel: (2) 655 8400; fax: (2) 655 8430; e-mail: iyha@netvision.net.il; web site: <http://www.youth-hostels.org.il>). Information is also available from the Israel Government Tourist Office.

9 SPORT & ACTIVITIES

Watersports: Watersports: Swimming, surfing, sailing, yachting and fishing are all available. The Israel Water-Ski Federation can provide more information on water-skiing in Israel (tel: (052) 532 666; fax: (03) 631 0931). There are marinas in Akko, Eilat, Jaffa and Tel Aviv. All the large hotels have swimming pools. Skindiving and aqualung diving are especially popular in Eilat on the Red Sea coast with an excellent underwater observatory descending to the floor of the coral reef near the town. Eilat is a particularly good destination for winter sun for visitors from Western Europe. Note: The Red Sea coastline has been designated a preservation area and any tourists found with 'souvenirs' such as coral will suffer severe fines from both the Israeli and Egyptian authorities.

Wintersports: Wintersports: To many people's surprise there is a full skiing season at Mount Hermon, on the northern border.

Among annual sports events are the Tel Aviv Marathon and the Kinereth Swimming Gala. Football and basketball are popular and many hotels have tennis courts. There is a fine 18-hole golf course at Caesarea (tel: (06) 636 1172; fax: (06) 636 1173). Horseriding is available throughout the country. There is also the opportunity to take camel-rides (Camel Rides in the South of Israel, tel: (07) 637 3218; fax: (07) 637 1944). Bicycling is also popular. There are excellent facilities at kibbutz sportsgrounds and in cities. The Israel Sports For All Association (5 Warburg Street; tel: (03) 528 1968; fax: (03) 528 6453) and Israel Government Tourist Office (see address section) can provide more information.

10 SOCIAL PROFILE

Food & Drink: Restaurants in Israel offer a combination of Oriental and Western cuisine, in addition to the local dishes. Some restaurants are expensive, though a high price does not necessarily mean a high standard. Table service is usual. There are many snack bars. Restaurants, bars and cafés catering to tourists usually have menus in two languages (Hebrew plus French or English). Israeli cuisine is essentially a combination of Oriental and Western cuisine, plus an additional distinct flavour brought by the many and varied nationalities which make up the Israelis. Dishes such as Hungarian goulash, Russian bortsch, Viennese schnitzel or German braten are found next to Middle Eastern items such as falafel, humus, tahini, shishlik, kebabs and Turkish coffee, as well as traditional Jewish dishes such as gefilte fish, chopped liver and chicken soup.

Kosher food: The Hebrew word kosher means food conforming to Jewish religious dietary laws. Milk, cream or cheese may not be served together with meat in the same meal. Pork and shellfish are officially prohibited, but it is possible to find them on many menus in non-kosher restaurants.

Drink: The wines of Israel range from light white to dry red and sweet rosé. There is also a good choice of local brandies and liqueurs. Liqueurs include Hard Nut (a walnut concoction of Eliaz winery), Sabra (chocolate and orange) and Arak (an anise drink). Israeli beers are Maccabee and

Gold Star. A centre for liqueurs is the monastery at Latrun on the road between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.

Nightlife: There are nightclubs and discotheques in most cities. Tel Aviv has a wealth of entertainment to divert the visitor and there are rock, jazz, folk and pop music clubs in all the main cities and resorts. Israeli folklore and dance shows can be seen everywhere, especially in the kibbutzim. The Israeli Philharmonic Orchestra can be heard at the ICC Binaynei Ha'uma Hall in Jerusalem during the winter. A summer attraction is the Israel Festival of International Music. Cinema is popular in Israel and many cinemas screen three daily shows of international and local films (all Hebrew films are subtitled in English and French). Tickets for all events and even films can be bought in advance from ticket agencies and sometimes from hotels and tourist offices.

Arts & Culture: There are art galleries all over Israel, with colonies of artists in the village of En Hod on Mount Carmel near Haifa, at Zefat and in Jaffa. Every large town has its museum; the Israel Museum in Jerusalem housing the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the Museum of the Diaspora at Tel Aviv are internationally famous.

Shopping: There is a wide choice for shoppers in Israel; and in certain shops, especially in Arab markets, visitors can, and should, bargain. Tourists who buy leather goods at shops listed by the Ministry of Tourism and pay for them in foreign currency are exempt from VAT and receive a 25% discount on leather goods if these are delivered to them at the port of departure. Special purchases include jewellery, diamonds and other precious stones, ceramics, embroidery, glassware, wines, religious articles and holy books. 'Cashback' on purchased items can be claimed from the Department of Customs, 32 Agron Street, Jerusalem 944190 (tel: (2) 670 3333; fax: (2) 670 3256). Shopping hours: 0800-1900 Sunday to Friday; some shops close 1300-1600. Remember that the shopping facilities are both Israeli and Arabic, and are therefore governed by two different sets of opening hours and methods of business. Jewish stores observe closing time near sunset Friday evenings before Shabbat (Saturday) and Arabic stores close Friday. It takes a while to realise that Sunday is a normal working day unlike in Western countries. For shoppers, the Jewish stores are therefore open Friday, Arab markets Saturday and both are open Sunday when Christian stores close. Shops in the hotels are often open until midnight.

Special Events: For a complete list of special events, contact the Israel Government Tourist Office (see address section). The following is a selection of events taking place in Israel in 2001: Jan 1 2001 The Nazareth Sacra Music Festival. Jan Holiday of Holidays Festival, Bet Hagefen, Haifa. May 26-Jun 14 Israel Festival, Jerusalem. Jun 9-23 International Opera Festival, Caesarea. Jul Haifa International Folk Festival; The Carmiel International Dance Festival, Carmiel. Oct The 'Neighbours' International Film Festival, Haifa.

Social Conventions: Israelis are usually very informal, but in keeping with European style of hospitality. Visitors should observe normal courtesies when visiting someone's home and should not be afraid to ask questions about the country as most Israelis are happy to talk about their homeland, religion and politics. Often the expression shalom ('peace') is used for hello and goodbye. Dress is casual, but in Christian, Muslim and Jewish holy places modest attire is worn. For places such as the Wailing Wall, male visitors are given a smart cardboard yarmulke (skull cap) to respect the religious importance of the site. Business people are expected to dress smartly, while plush restaurants, nightclubs and hotel dining rooms may require guests to dress for dinner. Formal evening wear is usually specified on invitations. It is considered a violation of the Shabbat (Saturday) to smoke in certain restaurants and many hotels. There is usually a sign to remind the visitor, and to disregard this warning would be regarded as discourteous to Orthodox Jews. Tipping: Less evident than in many other countries. A 15% service charge is added to restaurant, café and hotel bills by law.

11 BUSINESS PROFILE

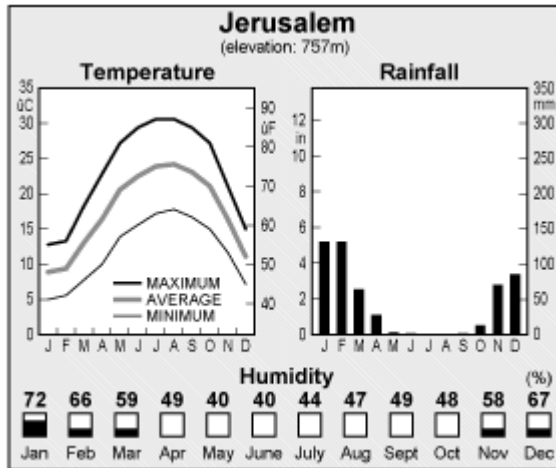
Economy: Israel has a diverse and sophisticated manufacturing economy which in many respects rivals that of Western Europe. (This much is recognised by the IMF which in 1997 reclassified Israel as an 'industrial' economy rather than 'developing'). Agriculture is relatively small - about 4.2% of gross domestic product - but has established a major reputation through the Kibbutz collective system of working; citrus fruit is the main commodity and export earner. The industrial sector is concentrated in engineering, aircraft, electronics, chemicals, construction materials, textiles and food-processing. Mining is also small but is set to expand, with production of potash and bromine. There is a small indigenous oil industry. The infrastructure is well developed and tourism, in which there has been considerable investment, has become an important sector of the economy. Israel's economic difficulties, which were particularly serious during the 1970s and 1980s, were largely the product of political circumstances: specifically very heavy defence expenditure (estimated at around 40% of GDP) and the cost of resettling Jewish arrivals. Other important factors are a large and relatively inefficient state sector and a substantial annual aid package from the USA, estimated at around \$5 billion per annum. The economy has performed relatively well during the 1990s in the wake of economic reforms introduced at the beginning of the decade and including deregulation and some privatisation. This has been despite opposition from the Histadrut, Israel's powerful trades union movement. Israel has free trade agreements with the EU and the USA: the latter is its largest trading partner, followed by Belgium/Luxembourg, Germany and the UK. Trade with both South Asia and the Asia-Pacific region is also growing rapidly. The areas under the control of the Palestinian Authority have not shared in Israel's growing prosperity: given the continuing lack of sufficient foreign aid and the still-fraught political situation, the historic under-development of the Palestinian areas will continue to hamper their economic development.

Business: Business can be frustrating, as in many instances it is difficult to get a direct reply to a question. Appointments are usual, as is the use of business cards. Normal courtesies should be observed, although business meetings tend to be less formal than in Britain. Office hours: Business hours vary owing to the different religions practised. Some offices are open half day on Friday.

Commercial Information: The following organisation can offer advice: Federation of Israeli Chambers of Commerce, PO Box 20027, 84 Hahashmonaim Street, Tel Aviv 67011 (tel: (3) 563 1010; fax: (3) 561 9027 or 561 9025; web site: <http://www.chamber.org.il>).

Conferences/Conventions: The Ministry of Tourism brochure Israel Conventions & Congresses 1996-2000 states that 'about 2000 years ago, some of the greatest conventions were held near Tiberias where it was recorded that 5000 were amply catered for'. Israel's record as a contemporary international conference centre began in 1963, and the country now attracts about 150 international meetings a year with 50,000 delegates; scientific and academic meetings account for about half the meetings, though religious and sporting events are on the increase. In 1992, 55% of meetings were held in Jerusalem. Apart from hotels and the convention centres in Jerusalem, Eliat and Tel Aviv, opportunities exist to hold meetings in kibbutzim. For further information, contact the International Conventions Department at the Ministry of Tourism (see address section); or the Jerusalem International Convention Centre (JICC), 1 Shazar Boulevard, PO Box 6001, Jerusalem 91060 (tel: (2) 655 8558; fax: (2) 538 3064; e-mail: infoicc@iccjer.co.il; web site: <http://www.iccjer.co.il>).

12 CLIMATE



Mediterranean, with a pleasant spring and autumn. Winters in the north can be cool. Rain in winter is widespread, particularly in Jerusalem. Snow is rare. Summers can be very hot, especially in the south. The Red Sea resort of Eilat has a good climate for beach holidays all the year round.

Required clothing: Lightweight cottons and linens for warmer months are required. Mediumweights are recommended for winters, although on the Red Sea coast they are unlikely to be necessary during the day.

13 HISTORY AND GOVERNMENT

History: The history of Israel may be traced back to 2000BC, though the earliest recorded event derives from the era of Moses (around 1300BC) when elements of the tribes of Israel escaped to Palestine from serfdom in the eastern Nile Delta. Once established there, the Jewish people maintained control of much of Palestine, despite occasional clashes with the neighbouring Assyrians and Philistines, until overrun by the Greek conqueror Alexander the Great in the 4th century BC. By AD100 the country was under direct Roman rule. Palestine was subsequently occupied by Arabs, then retaken by the armies of the First Crusade (1096-1100). The Christians established several states, including the Kingdom of Jerusalem, which survived until the fall of Acre in 1291, although after the battle of Hattin in 1187, Jerusalem was no longer a permanent part of it. After 1291 the area fell under the domination of the Mamelukes and subsequently the Ottoman Empire. Few countries today lack a community descended from Jewish settlers. The Zionist movement emerged in the 19th century with the aim of re-establishing a separate Jewish nation in Palestine, building on the common sense of identity of the scattered Jewish communities and the insecurity caused by frequent persecution. The aspirations of the Zionist movement were ultimately recognised by the British government in the Balfour Declaration of 1917, which followed Britain's occupation of Palestine after defeating the Turks in the Middle East during the First World War. The Balfour Declaration formed the basis of the 1920 mandate granted by the League of Nations which acceded to British rule over the territory. The mandate laid the foundations of the modern Arab-Israeli conflict as the British struggled to balance their commitment to the Jews against their parallel promises to the indigenous Arab population. After World War II and the appalling slaughter of Jews in Hitler's concentration camps, the United Nations favoured the creation of a separate Jewish state carved out of Palestine. The Arabs

refused to accept this, but the imminent expiry of the mandate and pressure, often violent, from Jewish immigrants, many of whom had moved to Palestine after the war, forced the British to withdraw. The Jewish leaders inaugurated the State of Israel in May 1948, bringing an immediate conflict with the Arab population which escalated into full-scale war. Although neighbouring Arab states, notably Jordan, intervened on the Arab side, the Israelis took control of and held about three-quarters of Palestine. The remainder - the largely Arab-peopled area between Jerusalem and the River Jordan commonly described today as the 'West Bank' - was occupied by the Jordanian army. Since the Six Day War of 1967, in which Israel defeated a combined force from several Arab countries, the West Bank has been occupied by the Israelis; similar territorial losses were suffered by the Egyptians in the Sinai Peninsula and Gaza Strip, and by the Syrians in the Golan Heights. Efforts to recover these in the 1973 Yom Kippur War were repulsed by Israel. Progress towards a lasting Arab-Israeli settlement began with the Camp David Accord between Israel and Egypt signed in 1979. The Accord included not only a peace treaty but provisions for the return of occupied land to Egypt (which has been effected) and for a transition to autonomous rule for West Bank Palestinians. From 1987, Palestinian activists wound down the armed struggle in favour of a more generalised campaign of civil disobedience, street disturbances and strikes known under the collective rubric of al-intifada ('uprising'). This was allied with a diplomatic offensive by the exiled PLO leadership and endorsement of UN resolutions 242 and 338 which implicitly recognise Israel's right to exist. The right-wing Israeli government of Yitzhak Shamir seemed reluctant to reach a settlement and such dialogue as occurred was largely futile. The 1991 war in Iraq seemed to offer an opportunity to break the impasse. Despite intense domestic pressure and provocation from Baghdad in the form of missile attacks on Israeli cities, the Israeli government was persuaded by the Americans to stay out of the fighting. This was considered essential to keeping the Arab members of the anti-Iraq coalition, including Saudi Arabia, Syria and Egypt, on side. Moreover, the Bush administration had made a definite commitment to finding a regional settlement as part of its pre-Gulf War diplomacy. When they finally occurred late in 1991, the talks quickly stalled. This was partly because 1992 was election year in Israel, with Shamir facing a strong Labour challenge from Yitzhak Rabin, one of the last of Israel's original soldier-politicians who had served in several Labour governments from the 1960s onwards. Labour came out as the largest party and Rabin took office at the head of a coalition government, comprising his own party, the centre-left Meretz bloc and the Jewish orthodox Shas party. The tacit support of the two small Israeli Arab parties, the Democratic Arab Party and Hadash, gave the Government a working majority. Despite Labour's more flexible attitude towards the Palestinians, the public progress of talks between the two sides remained painfully slow. Meanwhile, however, an exceedingly discreet diplomatic initiative brokered by the Norwegian government had, by the end of the summer of 1993, brought an agreement between the Israelis and the PLO. The rest of the world was presented with a virtual *fait accompli*. The essence of the agreement, enshrined in a declaration of principles and signed by Rabin and Yasser Arafat on the lawn of the White House in September, was that the Israelis would relinquish control of the Gaza strip (which has always been something of a poisoned chalice) and an area around the West Bank town of Jericho. This would come under sole Palestinian control, administered by an elected Palestinian government of sorts. This was designed as the first stage of a process eventually extending throughout the occupied territories and leading to a complete and comprehensive settlement by the end of 1998. The implementation of the first phase of the agreement was concluded, not without some difficulties, in mid-1994. The following year, six major West Bank towns, including Nablus and Jenin, came under Palestinian control. However, the schedule for the final settlement - which will include the status of Jerusalem - has repeatedly slipped. The deal had a catalytic effect on Jordan which concluded a peace treaty with Israel during 1995 but Syria (upon whom the attitude of Lebanon also depends) has proved more intractable. The Syrians insist on the return of the Golan Heights, which the Israelis will find very difficult, but the recent declaration by the Barak government (see below) to relinquish its security zone in south Lebanon may help to keep the dialogue with Syria moving. The attitude of the Likud government which succeeded Labour in May 1996 and the activities of militant Palestinian

groups (especially the Islamic-inspired Hamas) have been largely held responsible for most of the difficulties in implementation of the Oslo agreement. In the early part of the 1990s, several factors served to induce a fundamental change in the nature of Israeli politics. First was the influx of several hundred thousand Russian Jews, taking advantage of their birthright and keen to escape the deteriorating situation at home. Second was the growing influence of orthodox Jewry within the country, both fundamentalist and mainstream, which has gradually produced a schism between the religious and secular in Israeli society - what has become known as the 'kulturkampf' (literally, 'culture war') between the two. The assassination of Yitzhak Rabin in November 1995 by right-wing Jewish fundamentalists, angry at Rabin's supposed sell-out to the Palestinians, sharply polarised the country and made the June 1996 election which followed one of the most fraught. Labour's new leader was another veteran, Shimon Peres, but to the surprise of many, the Likud leader Binyamin Netanyahu, won a marginal victory with a strong campaign which negated much of the emotional effect of Rabin's death. Netanyahu's rule was characterised by consistent opposition to what he perceived as concessions to the Palestinians made under the terms of Oslo, and a haphazard approach to government at home. In May 1999, the electorate once again turned to Labour, now led by Ehud Barak (yet another ex-general), who won by over 10%, the largest margin in recent electoral contests. The constitution of the coalition which Barak assembles is not yet clear. Whatever it is, the decisive political struggle of the coming years in Israel will be this one between secular forces and religious zealots. But some accommodation must also be found for Arafat and the peace process, and one acceptable to the Syrians. The initial signs are that Barak recognises this and is prepared to move as quickly as public opinion will allow.

Government: Israel has a parliamentary system of government, with a single chamber, the 120-seat Knesset, elected every four years by universal adult suffrage. The Knesset passes legislation and appoints a President as Head of State. Executive power rests with the Cabinet, led by the Prime Minister - normally the leader of the largest party - which takes office after a vote of confidence from the Knesset.

14 OVERVIEW

Country Overview: Israel is on the eastern Mediterranean, bordered by Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Egypt. The Great Rift Valley begins beyond the source of the River Jordan and extends south through the Dead Sea, into the Red Sea.

For many, Israel is the Holy Land. Attractions include the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem (the Holy City, the capital and cradle of Judaism, Christianity and Islam).

Tel Aviv is an exciting city offering culture and sandy beaches. The Israeli Philharmonic Orchestra draws audiences from all over the world.

Haifa is Israel's leading seaport. As an industrial town and ancient fortress, it is a starting point for visits to Galilee to see the Sea of Galilee, Nazareth and the Mount of Beatitudes.

The Dead Sea is an inland lake lying in the lower Jordan Valley, flanked by the Judean and Moab Mountains. Its minerals and high salt content are renowned for their health-giving properties.

Israeli cuisine is essentially a combination of Oriental and Western cuisine.

Folklore and dance shows are performed for visitors everywhere.

