



Jewish Federation
OF ST. LOUIS

Israel Travel Handbook

**INFORMATION
YOU NEED TO
KNOW BEFORE
YOU GO.**

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INTRODUCTION

Israel is a country that can be experienced on many levels. As the birthplace of the Jewish People, Israel is an ancient land – full of archeological remains with colorful stories to tell. Israel is also the home of a modern Jewish State – with its multiethnic society, unique democratic system, and vibrant cultural life. At the meeting point of three continents, Israel hosts a breathtaking landscape with alpine meadows, rocky hills, desert canyons, sandy beaches and tropical seas – all compressed within a tiny strip of land. Israel also represents the soul of the Jewish religion – the object of millennia of prayer and the spiritual link connecting all Jewish people to each other.

The Torah refers to Israel as the “Promised Land”. This phrase can be interpreted literally, and it can also be understood as a Land of Promise – a beacon on the winding journey of the Jewish People towards a more perfect world. As you embark on your travels in the Land of Israel, it is our hope that you will uncover your own unique connections and make your own contributions towards this vision of a Promised Land.

PASSPORTS AND VISAS

Check that your passport is not expired or about to expire. Your passport must be valid for at least six months following the date you arrive in Israel. Information about ordering a passport is found at http://travel.state.gov/passport/passport_1738.html. Make photocopies of the inside photo/signature page of your passport which includes your passport number. Keep one in your suitcase separate from your passport and another with someone at home. If you have a smartphone, consider taking a photo of your passport to be stored in your phone.

If you are traveling to Israel on a USA, Canadian or European Union member country passport, you do not need a visa to enter Israel. If you are traveling on a passport from another country (e.g. Russia, Ukraine, etc.), you may need a visa to enter Israel.

FLIGHT & LUGGAGE

LUGGAGE

Most airlines have the following baggage allowances for economy class travel:

- Checked Luggage: One checked bag is free at no more than 50 pounds and no more than 62 inches (sum of length + width + height). You will be charged for luggage over 50 pounds or additional checked bags.
- Carry-on Luggage: One carry-on size bag + one personal hand-held item.

It is recommended that you bring at least one change of clothes, toiletries, all medications (prescriptions and over-the-counter) with you on the flight in the unlikely event your checked luggage is delayed. Consider bringing a small quantity of items you might need, such as Tylenol, Imodium and motion sickness medication. It can be difficult and expensive to get over-the-counter medication. Keep in mind current security restrictions for carrying liquids in carry-on bags. Don't forget to leave room in your bag for gifts and souvenirs you may buy in Israel!

AIRLINE MEALS

Airline meals receive mixed reviews. You might want to bring some non-perishable snacks with you. If you plan to request a special meal (Kosher, vegetarian, etc.), contact the airline or your travel agent at least 24 hours before departure.

SLEEP AIDS

If you are planning to take a sleep aid on the flight, make sure to try the medication prior to departure to be sure you do not have any adverse reactions.

JET LAG

Jet lag generally occurs because changes in time zones confuse the body's 24-hour inner clock, also known as circadian rhythms. To reduce or prevent jet lag, follow these tips:

- **Start out well rested** - Get as much sleep as you can prior to your departure.
- **Board the plane as stress free as possible** - Take care of any personal or business affairs prior to boarding so you won't have to worry about those things during your flight.
- **Drink plenty of water** - Dehydration is one of the key contributing factors of jet lag and is also easily preventable. Try to drink at least 8 oz. of non-caffeinated fluids before, during and after your flight. Try to stay away from alcohol and caffeinated beverages as they tend to dehydrate and disturb sleep patterns.
- **Sleep on the plane** - To help with sleep on the plane, earplugs, an eye mask and a travel pillow are recommended.
- **Stretch on the plane** - Remember to stretch out your muscles by reaching for the ceiling, and try walking up and down the aisles occasionally. Every little bit helps to prevent discomfort, especially swelling of legs and feet.

Once you arrive...

- **Continue eating and sleeping on the new schedule of your destination time** - Eat high fiber foods and avoid fatty foods, which contribute to sluggishness.
- **Expose yourself to as much sunlight as possible** - Exposure to bright light, especially sunlight, can help to shift jet lag. This will help your body to adjust to the new time zone.
- **Get some exercise** - Exercise can always help make you feel refreshed and energetic, so do it (especially outdoors) anytime you have the chance.

USE THE SAME TIPS FOR WHEN YOU RETURN HOME!

COMMUNICATIONS ON THE TRIP

INTERNET ACCESS

Free Wi-Fi is available at most hotels in public areas and in each guest room. Tel Aviv has free internet “hot spots” throughout the city. Jerusalem has complementary Wi-Fi in many of the restaurants and cafes. If you would like internet access at all times, you can rent a mobile hot spot which will connect to five different devices.

USING CELL PHONES THROUGH YOUR CARRIER

If you plan to use your cell phone with an international plan for incoming and outgoing calls, contact your cell phone carrier. You will want to make sure you understand all of the potential charges before you travel.

Airplane mode: If you do not get an international plan, turn your phone on “Airplane Mode” when you get on the plane and keep it on this mode until you return to USA. This will turn off cellular data so that you do not get charged. You will still be able to use your camera, play games, and listen to pre-downloaded music. Once on Wi-Fi, you can use all of your apps. If you have an iPhone you can iMessage or FaceTime while on Wifi. If you have an Android, you can use other messaging services such as WhatsApp, SnapChat, etc. which also have audio and video call options.

RENTING CELL PHONES AND SIM CARDS IN ISRAEL

TalknSave (www.talknsave.net) and IsraelPhones (www.gcellular.net) are two of the more popular companies to rent cell phones, SIM cards, data SIMs for tablets and USB modems. They offer a variety of rental options. For SIM card rentals, your phone must be unlocked. Check with your carrier for information on how to unlock your phone. It is highly recommended you preorder your rental item so it can be sent to you prior to departure.

MONEY ON THE TRIP

It is not necessary to exchange money prior to arrival in Israel.

ATM/CREDIT CARDS

If you choose to use your personal ATM card or credit card, keep in mind the following advice:

- If your ATM card has a Visa, MasterCard, Star, Cirrus or Maestro logo imprint, there should not be a problem withdrawing money. Other ATM network cards may work, but we encourage you to check with your local bank if you have any doubts. ATM machines have instructions in several languages, including English. The money withdrawn will be in shekels.

- Major credit cards like VISA and MasterCard are accepted throughout Israel. We advise that you contact your bank to inform them you are traveling abroad and using your cards to make purchases to ensure fraud alerts and holds are not placed on your accounts.
- Check with your bank for exact fees charged when using ATM and credit cards. Some credit card companies, such as Capital One, do not charge foreign transaction fees.
- Bring your bank's contact information and place it in a separate, secure location in the unlikely event your wallet or purse is lost or stolen.

ABOUT THE LOCAL CURRENCY

In Israel, the local currency is the New Israeli Shekel (NIS). Each shekel is worth about 25 United States cents. Shekel coins come in units of 1 (~25 cents), 2 (~50 cents), 5 (~\$1.25) and 10 (~\$2.50), as well as much smaller coin denominations. Shekel bills come in units of 20 (~\$5), 50 (~\$12), 100 (~\$25) and 200 (~\$50) denominations. One important thing to keep in mind is that coins in Israel come in much higher values than what we are used to in North America. Practically speaking, this means you need to watch your coins carefully.

VALUE ADDED TAX (VAT)

Value added tax is usually included in the purchase price rather than added on later at checkout. The tax rate hovers around 16-20% of the total price of the item.

To be eligible for a VAT tax refund, you must purchase a minimum of \$100 worth of goods at one time in a shop registered with the Ministry of Tourism. Look for the "Tax Free Shopping" logo at most retailers participating in the VAT refund. Have your passport or a copy of your passport with you, as the retailer needs the information to complete the VAT refund receipt. The value added tax does not apply to services such as hotel rooms or meals in restaurants.

In order to receive a VAT refund at the airport, will you need to present your receipt as well as the purchased item(s). If you would like those items to go in your checked luggage, there is kiosk in the Departure Hall as you enter the airport. Present the items and have your receipt stamped. Once this has been completed, you can put the purchases in your suitcase and check-in at the airline counter. After going through Passport Control and Security, you can then receive your VAT tax refund at the Change Place counter in the Rotunda. If you are packing your purchased items in your carry-on bag, you do not need to stop at the kiosk in the Departure Hall. All refunds are given at the Change Place counter in the Rotunda. The refund is calculated in US dollars. There are times that the lines are quite long and you may not be able to receive your refund.

WEATHER AND PACKING FOR THE MISSION

WEATHER

Israel enjoys warm, dry summers (April-October) and generally mild winters (November-March) with somewhat drier, cooler weather in hilly regions, such as Jerusalem and Safed. January is the wettest month and June, July and August are the driest months with no precipitation. Average temperatures are listed below.

	Jerusalem	Tel Aviv	Yokneam	Tiberias	Eilat
January	43-53	49-65	46-63	48-65	49-70
February	44-57	48-66	47-64	49-67	51-73
March	44-61	51-69	47-70	51-72	56-79
April	53-69	54-72	55-78	56-80	63-87
May	60-77	63-77	58-76	62-89	69-95
June	63-81	67-83	64-82	68-95	75-99
July	66-84	70-86	68-86	73-89	77-103
August	66-86	72-86	70-86	75-99	79-104
September	65-82	69-89	68-85	71-95	75-98
October	60-78	59-83	60-81	65-89	69-92
November	54-67	54-76	56-74	59-78	61-83
December	47-56	47-66	48-65	53-68	51-74

SUGGESTED PACKING LIST

- Bring comfortable, lightweight walking shoes –Make sure they're broken in if buying new shoes!
- Casual clothes
 - A combination of short and long sleeved shirts
 - Shorts if going during the summer and pants which can include jeans, athletic pants, khakis and slacks
- Sweaters and/or light to mid-weight jacket (e.g. fleece jacket)
- Undergarments, socks and sleepwear
- Light weight raincoat and/or compact umbrella (only when traveling November-March)
- Modest clothing for religious sites, such as the Western Wall
 - Women: Wear clothing that covers your shoulders/arms and knees. Skirts, pants and capris are acceptable.
 - Men: Wear pants and a shirt that covers the shoulder.
- If you choose to go to a Saturday morning Shabbat service, skirts and modest top for women and khakis and button-down or polo shirt for men are appropriate. A tie is not necessary.
- Toiletries and minor First Aid care items (Band-Aids, aspirin, hand sanitizer, etc.)
- Prescription medication if applicable (pack in your carry-on bag)
- Sunglasses
- Bathing suit and water shoes to float in the Dead Sea

LAUNDRY ON THE TRIP

Laundry services are available at most hotels. Check with the front desk about pricing. Note that there is no laundry service on Saturdays/Shabbat.

ELECTRICAL CURRENT

The electrical current in Israel is 220 volts at 50 Hertz, which is twice the voltage used in North America. Israel uses a unique three-pronged plug known as type H; however the outlets are designed so that the European type C two-pole plugs may be used. Either way, an adapter is required.

ADAPTERS

These devices simply enable your standard plug to fit into wall outlets in other countries. Adapters can be used with low wattage electronics such as cell phones, cameras, battery chargers and Kindles.

DUAL-VOLTAGE APPLIANCES

Many small electronic devices are dual-voltage and will adjust automatically for other countries. If your appliance has a manual switch, you'll need to change it back and forth before plugging in your appliance. The product box and/or the appliance itself will tell you what the electrical input requirements are. Read the manual or tag on the power cord of the device to know if it will work with 220 voltage without a converter. Laptops are always dual-voltage and only need the European style two-pin adapter.

TRANSFORMERS/VOLTAGE CONVERTERS

These are necessary for larger electrical appliances such as razors, hair dryers and travel irons. Most hotels have 110V outlets for shavers and provide hair dryers.



WHILE IN ISRAEL

WATER

Proper hydration is essential while in Israel. The water in Israel is properly treated and is perfectly safe to drink. Bottled water is widely available. Similarly, you will be able to refill your own water bottles with tap water frequently.

TIME

Israel is on standard time UTC/GMT + 2 or 8 hours ahead of St. Louis.

CABS

If you use a cab anywhere in Israel, insist they turn the meter on – “moneh b’vakasha” (meter please). Cab drivers will try to negotiate a price in advance and not use the meter so they do not need to report the income. Unless you know how much the ride will cost, you are almost always better off paying the meter price. If the driver refuses to put the meter on, simply get out of the car and wait for another cab.

GETT

Gett (Hebrew: גט), previously known as GetTaxi, is an Israeli on-demand mobility company that connects customers with transportation, goods and services (similar to Uber). Customers can order a taxi or courier either through the company's website, or by using the company's GPS-based smartphone app. Note that Gett drivers are the same as cab drivers. Look for the Gett decal on the cab.

TIPPING

It is not common to tip taxi drivers in Israel. A nice gesture would be to round up to the nearest shekel and let the driver keep the change.

When on your own in restaurants, leave between 10-15% as a tip for the wait staff. Servers prefer gratuities in cash, as they don't always receive the tips put on a credit card.

If you choose to leave a tip for the housekeeping staff, \$1-\$5 per night is acceptable. It is best to do your tipping daily since you might have different people cleaning your room each day. Whatever you decide to leave, be sure it is clearly marked so there is no confusion as to whom it belongs to. Gratuities are often included in the room service bill and it should be indicated on the menu.