



Land of the Bible Tours

Dear Holy Land Partners,

In just a few short months you will be on your way to Israel! Although I have gone many times, I still get excited in the anticipation of a trip!

Please save this document for future reference. You will want to refer to it as the trip approaches. Many websites exist that provide tips to travelers going to Israel or anywhere else for that matter. In this document I offer some of the insights I have gleaned over the years traveling to the Holy Land. Feel free to email me or your church host with any questions or needs for clarification.

Trip Insurance

One of the decisions that you need to make at this point is whether or not you will purchase travel insurance for your trip. Although you are not required to travel with insurance, it is highly recommended that you do so.

Because different travelers have different needs and risk tolerances, we do not offer a group plan. Honestly, it is better simply to purchase your own individual policy. Online sites are easy to navigate and the process takes about 10 minutes. There are many sites from which to choose, including insuremytrip.com and squaremouth.com and allianztravelinsurance.com. But for me, the best site of all is faithventures.com.

Simply go to the site and answer the few basic questions about yourself and the trip. Examine the options and choose accordingly. I would suggest doing this soon. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Clothes and Packing

Please keep in mind that most people tend to pack too much for trips like these. The general rule to keep in mind is to keep things comfortable. We will be on the move day-by-day and you'll want to travel in clothes that are comfortable to walk around in, especially your footwear.

The weather in for our trip will be beautiful. The mornings and evenings could be a little bit cool, and I would suggest bringing one light jacket along with you. Because we will be traveling on the same bus for the entire time, many people choose to leave their jacket on the bus. The bus is secure and you will not have any problem leaving your belongings on it day by day.

Another factor to consider when packing is the fact that we will be visiting several sites where modesty will be a factor. Pants are never a problem for men or women at any of the sites, but if you are wearing shorts or skirts, they need to be at or below the knee. I would also discourage you from wearing anything that would be sleeveless on these touring days. This is especially true when we tour the Temple Mount and enter some of the more sacred places. We will be sure to let you know ahead of time when we plan to visit these sites.

You are permitted to bring with you one checked bag at no charge. The bag cannot exceed 50 pounds in total weight. Be sure to pack accordingly. You are also permitted to bring with you one carry-on bag and a personal item. The TSA site also has helpful information for those of you not familiar with airplane travel. See tsa.gov/travel.

I would strongly recommend bringing a hat and sunglasses. The sun can be a factor in Israel, and you'll want to be prepared. You may want to consider bringing sunscreen as well if you have skin issues.

Don't be concerned about ironing your clothes. The hotel rooms in Israel will not have irons or ironing boards, although there will be an iron and ironing board available on each floor of the hotel. I would recommend traveling casual and trying to pack wrinkle-free clothes.

There will never be a need for you to "dress up" on the trip so leave your Sunday morning attire at home! One final thought on packing clothes...we will be traveling to the Dead Sea and some of you will want to take part in the unique experience of floating on the Dead Sea. I would strongly recommend that you bring "throw away" clothes for this. There will be a changing area, but you will not want to keep the wet, very salty clothes with you and then have to pack them with your other clothes.

By the way, the hotels are modern and comfortable. You will not need to take towels or anything of that sort. Keep in mind that you will want to pack toiletries and personal items as you would for any hotel in United States. Also keep in mind that you'll want to leave a little bit of room in your luggage in order to take back some souvenirs with you.

Electronics

Like most countries in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia, the electricity in Israel is rated at 220V.

Israel uses what is called a type H plug. This plug, which is unique to Israel, has two flat prongs that form a V-shape and a flat vertical grounding prong at the bottom. They are rated at 16A. Type H outlets (sockets) are so shaped as to accommodate type C plugs as well.

Most larger hotels have 110V outlets for shavers, but these outlets cannot be used for hair dryers or other larger appliances. Additionally, most of your cell phone chargers are fine because they are made for 100-240V. All you would need is an adapter which can be purchased at Walmart or Best Buy or Amazon, etc. For hairdryers you would need a converter, not simply an adapter.

Cell phone providers provide various plans for international calling so it is impossible to offer one general rule of thumb for taking your phone to Israel. Most people simply turn off all cellular data in Israel altogether so as not to incur exorbitant roaming charges. Even with voice and cellular data turned off, you can still use your smart phones in wifi zones. Although the wifi is slow, there will be wifi on the bus and in the hotels at which we stay. At these places, as long as the connection speeds hold up, you can make internet calls using Facebook audio, Skype, FaceTime, etc. Others choose to add a global plan to their existing phone plan.

Contact your service provider and inquire about the various options. Be sure to have them email you the rates and terms of any offer. Also, when making or receiving phone calls, remember that Israel is 7 hours ahead of EST.

Credit cards

It helpful to have a credit card that offers the perk of no foreign transaction fees. Be sure to call your credit card company to alert them that you will be out of the country and for what time frame. Other than taking these simple precautions, there is no problem using a credit card at reputable merchants in Israel.

Weather

The months of fall (September-November) and and spring (February-April) season are beautiful times to travel to Israel! The daily high temperature in Jerusalem will be low to mid 70s, with cooler nights in the high 50s to low 60s. Galilee will be lightly warmer, but still quite comfortable. Occasionally there might be a passing rain shower. On the day you travel to the desert, temperatures could approach 90°F and the sun will be hot.

Daily Schedule

Each day of touring typically begins at 8 am at which time we load the bus and depart for the day's destinations. We do not return to the hotel until late afternoon, so it is important to bring with you whatever you will need for the entire day including medication, spending money, light jacket, etc. As I mentioned before, your free to leave items on the bus. It will be secure as we tour, as well as overnight.

Because we have a large group it is important that we strive to be on time or early to all of our meetings, especially when departing in the morning or meeting back at the bus at our respective sites. We have much to accomplish and do not want to miss out because a few in the group have trouble being prompt. With this in mind, it might be wise to bring your own alarm clock if you do not already have such capability on your phone.

Along these lines, when we travel as a group we must strive to stay close to the tour guide and not be straggling along. It is important that we keep the pace as we walk from site to site. To help with this, I will assign one of our group to be the rear guard and lovingly remind the stragglers to keep up!

Medications

If you take prescribed medication, bring enough to last your entire trip, including some extra in case there are delays on return. Carry your medications in the original labeled containers, and pack them in your carry-on bags. Ask your pharmacy or doctor for the generic equivalent name of your prescriptions in case you need to purchase additional medication during your trip. Get a letter from your doctor in case you are questioned about your carry-on medication.

Food

Each day we will be served a large buffet breakfast and dinner at the hotel. There are plenty of options, and there is sure to be something there that will suit your taste. Should you have any specific food allergies, please let me know about these in advance. For what it's worth, I really like the juice in Israel, but the coffee isn't the greatest. Although the real coffee drinker does need to try some authentic Turkish coffee in the old city of Jerusalem!

Remember that our lunches are the only item not covered by the price of the trip. We will stop daily at various lunch places where you can get a taste of shawarma or falafel or (if they don't sound familiar) a good old-fashioned hamburger. Lunch costs are in the \$10-15 range. Perhaps you might consider bringing some granola bars or snacks for along the way. One couple even brought along their own small coffee maker complete with Dunkin' Donuts coffee (They were very popular!). Bottled water is available on the bus refrigerator, typically for \$1 a bottle. The driver will stock the refrigerator daily so there will be plenty of water.

Spending Money

The amount of spending money you bring is entirely up to you. There will be plenty of places to shop, and we will give you some tips when we are there about how to bargain and where to buy and not to buy. My advice would be to keep it relatively simple. A seashell from the Sea of Galilee or a rock from the Valley of Elah are free souvenirs and sometimes much more memorable. As a reference point, I have found that most people bring \$200-300 dollars. Credit cards and US dollars are accepted readily, and for those places that require shekels, there will be numerous places where we will be able to exchange money. Try to avoid doing so at the airport because exchanges are typically overpriced there.

Safety

You will find Israel to be a very safe place. First time visitors tend to be a bit nervous, especially when they see Israeli soldiers carrying assault weapons on their shoulders. Please understand that this is normal and that we have never had an incident in our travels. That said, take the normal precautions you would take when visiting any city in the USA or elsewhere. Keep valuables in the safes provided in the hotel rooms. Keep your passport on you at all times and be sure to have made a printed copy that you keep elsewhere. If you have not done so already, please provide me with a scanned copy of your passport. And please be sure that your passport is not within six months of expiring, or you could have an issue.

When traveling in crowded city spots, like Old Jerusalem, be aware of the potential of pickpockets and be sure that your wallets and purses are securely on your person. Again, we have never had an issue. Sometimes members of the group, especially in Jerusalem, will choose to take the very efficient public transportation system into the shopping district to make some souvenir purchases. I would simply recommend that shopping always be done in pairs and never alone. It's a lot of fun to barter a bit too!

That's enough information for now. Take a few moments and digest what I have given you. Read this information carefully through a couple of times. Ask questions if anything is unclear. Please be in prayer that our trip will be one of great inspiration and information. If you have not done so already, order a good Bible atlas and purchase a personal journal for your daily reflections. You'll be glad you did!

God bless,

Kurt Skelly