

BIG FIVE[®]

TOURS & EXPEDITIONS

Enriching Lives Through Distinctive Journeys

Destination Information Guide

Israel



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Welcome to the World of Big Five!

The following general outline offers practical information, suggestions and answers to some frequently asked questions. It is not intended to be the definitive guide for your trip.

Big Five Tours & Expeditions is pleased to welcome you on this exciting adventure. We take great care to insure that your travel dreams and expectations are well met. Our distinctive journeys allow you to experience the finest aspects each destination has to offer. We also aim to provide you with a deeper understanding of and appreciation for the places you'll visit and the people you'll meet.



Jerusalem, Israel Elevation: 2490 feet Latitude: 31 52N Longitude: 035 13E

Average Temperature

Years on Record: 11

	YEAR	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
°F	61	46	47	51	59	66	70	73	74	72	66	58	49

Average High Temperature

Years on Record: 11

	YEAR	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
°F	69	51	53	58	68	75	79	81	82	80	74	65	55

Average Low Temperature

Years on Record: 11

	YEAR	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
°F	53	40	40	44	50	56	60	64	64	63	58	50	43

WEATHER

Mediterranean, with a pleasant spring and autumn. Winters in the north can be cool. From December to February and part of March, there is a 50/50 chance of rain, especially along the coast, Jerusalem and the Galilee, though recent years have seen insufficient rain. When showers do come they are usually short. 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 year round.

TIME ZONES

GMT + 2 (GMT + 3 during summer Daylight Saving Time, April 1st every year and ends on Saturday between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur.)

PASSPORTS & VISAS

Passports: *For international travel, a passport valid for at least six months from date of departure, containing at least 3 blank pages are necessary.*

Visas: *Many countries require travelers to obtain visas prior to arrival. Big Five Tours & Expeditions has appointed Trivisa to process required visas for our passengers. You can find the necessary forms from Trivisa's website at: www.trivisa.com. Please use account code JP1551, and follow the directions.*

Important: *Even if you do not need a visa prior to departure, please check your passport well in advance of departure to insure:*

- 1) It is valid for at least six months after the date of travel.*
- 2) You have sufficient blank pages for visa/entry stamps that will be added as you travel in and out of various countries.*

Please note: Pages reserved for amendments and endorsements cannot be used for visas.

Note: Remember to carry with you in a safe place photocopies of all important documents in the event your passport or other documents are lost or stolen. Also, it's a good idea to have a passport photo with you. As a tourist, you will need to produce your passport when booking in at hotels, changing money or travelers' checks and prove your identity whenever requested by a policeman.

AIRPORT FORMALITIES

Once you pass through customs and immigration, you are welcomed by a Big Five representative, who escorts you to the hotel. **Departure Tax:** Included in the cost of the airline ticket.

Note: LAND CROSSING: Border tax departure /arrival between Egypt and Jordan are usually not included. Currently the border crossing between Egypt and Israel costs 68 New Shekel

ISRAEL CUSTOMS

Duty-Free Items: 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.
- 1l of spirits and 2l of wine.
- 250ml of eau de cologne or perfume.
- Personal belongings and gifts up to the value of US\$200.

Note: There are exceptions to the value limit on personal belongings. If they are for personal use and re-exported, then personal computers, musical instruments, cameras (including video), binoculars, person electronics, etc., may be brought undeclared through the 'Green Channel'. If any items are new, they must be declared and a refundable deposit paid (credit card guarantee may be used).

Requires approval: Approval by customs is required to take the following items into Israel: flowers, plants, seeds, prescription drugs, all animals.

Prohibited Imports: All games of chance, cordless telephones with a range of 900 Mhz or more, fresh meat, most kinds of fruit, and puppies and kittens less than three months, all illegal narcotics.

US CUSTOMS

Returning U.S. residents are allowed to bring back \$800 worth of merchandise duty-free. There are limits on some items. Regulations frequently change, however, so check with your nearest customs office for a list of limited and exempt items, or write the *U.S. Customs Service, Box 7407, Washington, DC 20044*. Or, visit their web site www.customs.ustreas.gov.

HEALTH

International travelers should be in generally good health. Talk with your personal physician about any shots or boosters recommended depending on your personal health profile and your itinerary. Tetanus and polio vaccines should be up to date. Be prepared to take precautions against sunburn with sunscreen and lip balm.

Yellow Fever: Yellow fever inoculation is required if one of the following applies:

- If you are coming from any area other than the United States, Europe, or Canada.
- If you plan on visiting more than one African country.

Currently, no vaccinations are necessary for entry into Israel if you are arriving from North America. If, however, you are entering from cholera area, inoculation is mandatory.

Health Care: Israel has excellent medical facilities and tourists may go to all emergency and first-aid centers. However, any form of medical treatment can be expensive. Health centers are marked by the red Star of David on a white background.

Please note: If you are on medication, be sure to bring enough for the duration of the trip. Prescription medicines should always be carried in their original containers in your hand luggage.

Health insurance is strongly advised during any foreign travel. U.S. medical insurance is not always valid outside the United States. U.S. Medicare and Medicaid programs do not provide payment for medical services outside the United States. Uninsured travelers, who require medical care overseas, may face extreme difficulties.

For the most current information, please check the latest regulations with your local health office or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention hotline for international travelers at 1-877-FYI-TRIP (1-877-394-8747); fax: 1-888-CDC-FAXX (1-888-232-3299), or their main telephone number in Atlanta, 404-332-4559. Or, visit the CDC website: <http://www.cdc.gov>.

CLOTHING

*For general clothing information, please review the **Travel Handbook** in your pre-departure materials. See pre-departure information for general packing check list.*

Required Clothing: Lightweight clothes for warmer months are required. Medium weights are recommended for winters, although on the Red Sea coast they are unlikely to be needed during the day.

LUGGAGE

*For general baggage information, please review the **Travel Handbook** in your pre-departure materials.*

MONEY

New Shekel (NIS; symbol ₪) = 100 agorot (singular, agora). Notes are in denominations of ₪200, 100, 50, and 20. Coins are in denominations of 10, 5 and 1, and 50 and 10 agorot, and NIS 2 (two sheqal coins).

Currency Exchange: Foreign currency can only be exchanged at authorized banks, hotels and change shops. Change shops found in most cities charge no commission and equal the bank exchange rates. 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, and is sometimes preferred by shop keepers.

Credit/Debit Cards and ATMs: All major credit cards are accepted. ATMs are widely available.

Traveler's Checks: Are widely accepted. To avoid additional exchange rate charges, travelers are advised to take traveler's checks in US Dollars.

Currency Restrictions: Restrictions apply. Banking hours vary.

COMMUNICATION

The official languages in Israel are Hebrew and Arabic. Most street signs /highway signs are in 3 languages - Hebrew, Arabic and English. English is widely spoken.

ELECTRICITY

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

FOOD & DRINK

Tap water is safe to drink throughout Israel, but it is suggested that you use bottled water, which is widely available. Milk is pasteurized and dairy products are safe for consumption. All local meat, fish and vegetables are considered safe to eat. Israeli eating has distinctive characteristics, especially the fondness for fresh, finely chopped salads, eaten at every meal including breakfast. In general the cuisine is a fusion of East and West, plus many dishes and flavors brought by Jewish immigrants from all over the world. Table service is the norm, except at the many low-cost snack bars. Restaurants, bars and cafes catering for tourists usually have menus in both Hebrew and English.

The Hebrew word 'kosher' means conforming to Jewish religious laws. The laws include not eating milk, cream or cheese in the same meal as meat: and pork and shellfish are prohibited.

National specialties: Falafel (deep-fried balls of mashed chickpeas) in a pita bread, with hummus (ground chickpeas), tahina (sesame seed sauce) and salads. Salads, which include savory vegetable dishes served cold, such as aubergines. Shishlik (charcoal-grilled meat on a skewer). Shwarma (slices of grilled meat served in pita bread with salad). Ashkenazi classics like cholent (Shabbat meat stew) and gefilte fish, a white fish dish.

TIPPING

Tipping should be done at your discretion and as a reward for good or exceptional service.

For general tipping guidelines please refer to:
www.cntraveler.com/travel-tips/travel-etiquette/2008/12/Etiquette-101-Tipping-Guide

SHOPPING

There is a wide choice for shoppers in Israel. Contrary to a widespread belief among visitors, bargaining is **not** usual in Israel except in the few Arab markets. There are also very animated Jewish markets (shuks) of tremendous cultural diversity, notably the Carmel Market in Tel Aviv. The best place to buy food is at these outdoor markets; the produce is cheap and fresh.

Tourists benefit from a zero rate of VAT (a tax on transactions) on many goods and services. In addition, when buying from souvenir and specialist shops displaying a Ministry of Tourism sign,

especially jewelers and luxury goods stores, it is possible to obtain a refund of VAT: when making your purchase, ask for a Tax Refund Invoice.

About VAT: If you have items that qualify for VAT refund, this will have to be done at the airport prior to leaving the country. Please allow additional time. It should be done *prior* to security and check-in so that you still have your luggage with you. You must go to the VAT refund desk and fill out a form. You will also need to present any receipts and the purchased product(s) must to be available for inspection. Note: *Unless there are major purchases, many travelers find that the amount of refund is not worth the trouble of filing for it.*

Shopping hours: Sun-Thu - 0900-1900; Fri and holidays - 09:00-14:00; malls are usually open until 21:00. Some shops close 1300-1600 and some early on Friday. Remember that Jewish-run stores close for Shabbat from Friday afternoon to Saturday evening, while Arabic stores close Friday. It takes a while to realize that Sunday is a normal working day unlike in Christian countries. For shoppers, Jewish stores are therefore open Friday, Arab markets Saturday and both are open Sunday when Christian stores close. Shops in hotels are often open until midnight.

CUSTOMS & TRADITIONS IN ISRAEL

Shalom, which means "Peace," is the usual greeting and is also used when parting. First names are almost always used when addressing another person, once the person has been introduced. This is true even in the military and among schoolchildren, who call their teachers by first name. Greetings are informal, and handshakes are common. Men who are good friends may pat each other on the back or shoulder when greeting. Women might hug and kiss once or twice on the cheek. Respect for elders is extremely important.

Most visits to Israel are trouble-free. For more information and pamphlets addressing safety issues abroad are available from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402, or at the Bureau of Consular Affairs' home page at <http://travel.state.gov>.

You can also contact the U.S. Department of State, 2201 C Street NW, Washington, DC 20520. (202)647-4000. Their website is www.state.gov.

SUGGESTED READING LIST

Many comprehensive and readily available guides are produced by Lonely Planet, Fodor, Insight, The Rough Guide, etc. Here are a few selections we thought might interest you. Barnes and Noble, www.barnesandnoble.com, and Longitude Books, www.longitudebooks.com, have collections of books, searchable by country.

A SAFE HAVEN: HARRY S. TRUMAN AND THE FOUNDING OF ISRAEL

by Ronald Radosh, Allis Radosh

"On May 14, 1948, under the stewardship of President Harry S. Truman, the United States became the first nation to recognize the State of Israel—just moments after sovereignty had been declared in Jerusalem. But it was hardly a foregone conclusion that America would welcome the creation of this new country. While acknowledging this as one of his proudest moments, Truman also admitted that no issue was "more controversial or more complex than the problem of Israel." As the president told his closest advisers, these attempts to resolve the issue of a Jewish homeland had left him in a condition of "political battle fatigue."

Based on never-before-used archival material, *A Safe Haven* is the most complete account to date of the events that led to this historic occasion. Allis and Ronald Radosh explore the national and global pressures bearing on Truman and the people—including the worldwide Jewish community, key White House advisers, the State Department, the British, the Arabs, and the representatives of the new United Nations—whose influence, on both sides, led to his decision.

ISRAEL: A HISTORY

by Martin Gilbert

Israel is a small and relatively young country, but since the day of its creation half a century ago, its turbulent history has placed it at the center of the world stage. In this new account, Martin Gilbert traces Israel's history from the struggles of its pioneers in the nineteenth century up to the present day. Along the way, he describes the defining moments in the history of the Jewish people, among them the Balfour Declaration of 1917; the U.N. Partition Resolution of 1947; and the founding of the State of Israel in 1948.

BLOOD BROTHERS

by Elias Chacour, David Hazard, James A. Baker

Riveting, true-life story of a Christian Palestinian from Galilee brings to life the history of modern Israel and offers insight into living at peace.

BOOK OF NEW ISRAELI FOOD: A CULINARY JOURNEY

by Janna Gur, Eilon Paz (Photographer), Rami Hann (Contribution by)

In this stunning new work that is at once a coffee-table book to browse and a complete cookbook, Janna Gur brings us the sumptuous color, variety, and history of today's Israeli cuisine, beautifully illustrated by Eilon Paz, a photographer who is intimate with the local scene.

In Gur's captivating introduction, she describes Israeli food as a product of diverse cultures: the Jews of the Diaspora, settling in a homeland that was new to them, brought their far-flung cuisines to the table even as they looked to their Arab neighbors for additional ingredients and ideas. The delicious, easy-to-follow recipes represent all of these influences, and include some creative interpretations of classics by celebrated Israeli chefs. This book offers a unique culinary experience for every occasion. All of this is enriched by Paz's gorgeous and vibrantly colored photographs and by short narratives about significant aspects of Israel's diverse cuisine

ISRAEL: THE CULTURE

by Debbie Smith

Surveys the practice of various religions--Judaism, Islam, Christianity, and others--in Israel and the different customs that are part of the religious holidays and festivals.

ISRAEL: THE PEOPLE

by Debbie Smith

Introduces the history, people, daily life, military service, education, and other aspects of life in Israel today.

THE BRONZE BOW

by Elizabeth George Speare

Age Range: 9 to 12

In this Newbery Medal-winning novel, Daniel bar Jamin is fired by only one passion: to avenge his father's death by crucifixion by driving the Roman legions from his land of Israel. He joins an outlaw band and leads a dangerous life of spying, plotting, and impatiently waiting to seek revenge.

Headstrong Daniel is devoid of tenderness and forgiveness, heading down a destructive path toward disaster until he hears the lessons taught by Jesus of Nazareth. With a brand new cover, young readers won't be able to pass up this timeless tale.

THE HOPE

by Herman Wouk

Herman Wouk is one of this century's great historical novelists, whose peerless talent for capturing the human drama of landmark world events has earned him worldwide acclaim. In *The Hope*, his long-awaited return to historical fiction, he turns to one of the most thrilling stories of our time - the saga of Israel. In the grand, epic style of *The Winds of War* and *War and Remembrance*, *The Hope* plunges the reader into the major battles, the disasters and victories, and the fragile periods of peace from the 1948 War of Independence to the astounding triumph of the Six-Day War in 1967.

ISRAEL: LAND OF CONTRASTS

by Rachel Goldmann, Nicola Forg

Israel is a land of stark contrasts. This beautifully illustrated book reflects the range of sights and issues crammed into this tiny strip of land along the coast of the eastern Mediterranean. Antiquity and modernity, peace and conflict, beaches and deserts—all jostle together to form a social, political and cultural environment pulsing with energy, nervous tension, creativity and beauty. Authors and photographer here combine to produce a wonderfully packaged portrait of the culture, history, archeology, architecture and social life of Israel, with its diverse and multi-ethnic population. We see the traditions of Jews, Christians, and Muslims deeply imbedded into a landscape of staggering beauty and infinite variety.

ISRAEL: A TRAVELER'S LITERARY COMPANION

by Naomi Seidman (Editor), Michael Gluzman (Editor)

There may be no place more blessed — or burdened — with narrative than Israel. In this country, story and place are inextricable. From stories set in the historical, holy city of Jerusalem to those that take place in the modern, secular city of Tel Aviv, from writing addressing the current "situation" to tales inspired by the timeless desert, this volume of sixteen short stories of Israel's finest new writers, and some of its best-loved ones, captures for the reader one of the world's most fascinating travel destinations. Contributors include Gafi Amir, Yossi Avni, Yosl Birstein, Orly Castel-Bloom, David Ehrlich, David Grossman, Shulamith Hareven, Etgar Kerrett, Yoram Kolerstein, Yitzchak Laor, Amos Oz, Ofra Riesenfeld, Gadi Taub, and A. B. Yehoshua.