

## **ISRAEL EXPERIENCE – PLANNING GUIDE**

**MEALS AND CUISINE** - All meals will be provided on this trip, and will be served family style or buffet. Most restaurants in Israel are kosher. This means that they follow Jewish dietary laws which require the separation of dairy and meat. Israel's rich cultural history and renowned agricultural expertise provide a varied, flavorful cuisine using the freshest ingredients. Whether a meal is dairy or meat, you will find an abundant selection of delicious foods from which to choose.

**SPECIAL DIETARY NEEDS** - If you have a specific food allergy, you will find plenty of variety at each meal, and you will be able to enjoy Israeli foods while avoiding specific allergens. We will try but cannot guarantee we will be able to accommodate all special dietary needs.

**MONEY** - Israel's official currency is the New Israeli Shekel (NIS), although most stores and businesses will accept U.S. dollars. Very few places we visit on this tour will have ATMs, so we strongly recommended you bring U.S. dollars or shekels in small denominations. Hotels will exchange small amounts of currency.

To change dollars to shekels before you leave, visit your bank a few weeks before the trip. (Most banks require a few weeks to process this request.) This will save you time waiting in currency exchange lines or searching for an ATM after you arrive, and will likely save you money by giving a better exchange rate.

**CREDIT CARDS** - Almost all businesses in Israel accept U.S. credit cards. (Debit cards will only work with ATMs, as most foreign businesses don't have PIN machines. Please note that ATMs will not be readily available on this tour, but are available)

If you're planning to use your credit cards in Israel, check with each credit card company to determine the international exchange fee for each card, and take cards with lower international exchange fees.

Once you determine which cards you'll bring, remember to notify each credit card company of your intended travel dates and locations to ensure fraud alerts and holds are not placed on your accounts.

For each card, you'll want to store the bank's contact information in a separate, secure location in the unlikely event your wallet or purse is lost or stolen.

Leave all unnecessary debit and/or credit cards at home.

## **PACKING**

The weather in Israel during our trip will be between 45-80 degrees. We recommend that you check the weather forecast online a week or two before the trip so that you will be prepared. Our best advice is to plan to dress in layers.

**PACKING CHECKLIST** - Casual clothes (pants, skirts, jeans, shorts, T-shirts, collared shirts or blouses), Light sweater or jacket, Bathing suit and a cover-up, Light rain coat and/or compact umbrella, Comfortable walking shoes or sandals with rubber soles, Hat, sunglasses, and sunscreen, Toiletries, Medications, Hair care appliances (See Below-Hair Dryers are provided at all hotels), Small bag or backpack (large enough for a small Bible, pen, camera and other personal items), Passport with separate photocopy (see below for more information)

**PACKING TIPS** - Make certain your suitcase closes and fastens securely. Mark your luggage and carry-on bag clearly with your name and address. Put identification information (name, address and phone number) **INSIDE** your luggage in case the luggage tags on the outside are lost in transit. **WE WILL ALSO GIVE YOU COLORED LUGGAGE IDENTIFIERS.** Keep your essential toiletries and a one day change of clothes with you in your carry-on. Do not pack your passport or travel documents in your luggage. Keep a color copy of the information page of your passport inside your luggage in the event that your passport is lost.

**PHONES - BEFORE YOU LEAVE** let your carrier know your travel plans, including how you plan to use your phone on your tour. Make sure international dialing access is active on your mobile phone plan, and remember that international and roaming rates will apply to calls placed during your trip. (Charges will appear on your phone bill).

Confirm specific cost details with your carrier and make sure you understand all the potential charges before you travel.

**SMARTPHONE TIPS** The following tips will help you save your phone's battery life and get the most out of your smartphone while on tour:

Before your trip, disable any applications that give you regular updates, such as sports reports and weather updates. When you board your flight, set your phone to Airplane Mode. This suspends all calling and texting functions but still allows you to play games, use your camera and listen to music, etc. Follow instructions from flight attendants about turning off your phone completely for take-off and landing.

On the trip, charge your phone every night to ensure you'll have enough battery life for the next day. Make sure you bring the proper adapter to charge your phone in Israel. (See Below) To reduce Data Roaming charges, disable the Data Enabled or Data Roaming option on your phone and keep it off. Turn off the function for "Automatic" checking of emails and change the email settings to "Manual". During your trip, plan on checking email when you're connected to a free, wireless Internet connection, such as in a hotel lobby or Internet cafe.

**SAFETY -** Despite Israel's historical, cultural, and spiritual significance as a travel destination, many would-be visitors are concerned about the safety of travel in this nation where diverse religious beliefs, different nationalities, overlapping claims of ownership at holy sites, and armed conflict create tensions which cannot be ignored. We are committed to your safety, and we monitor every instance of conflict, unrest, or potential danger with your security in mind.

## **HOW SAFE IS ISRAEL? JUST REMEMBER WE ARE GOING WITH YOU NOT JUST SENDING YOU!**

**TIPS FOR TRAVELING SAFELY** - While Israel is a very safe country, we do recommend several standard, basic travel tips to help you protect your personal belongings and yourself.

- o Don't let safety concerns distract you from enjoying Israel. Relax and let us take care of security. As you would anywhere, be alert, and feel free to ask us about anything.

- o Watch for pickpockets and unethical street vendors. As in any tourist destination, there are always people who want to take advantage of tourists. We will let you know when and where to be especially cautious and are always available to help you navigate purchases.

- o Keep a close eye on your belongings, regardless of the destination. Lock your passport in the hotel safe. Bring a Bible, camera, purse, or wallet with you on day trips, but leave the rest of your belongings at the hotel.

- o Use caution when traveling alone. It is generally safe to walk alone in much of Israel, but we advise travelers to explore with others when you have free time—just as you would in any large, unfamiliar city.

**TIPPING** - We cover all tips and gratuities on the tour, including airport porters, Israel hotel bellmen (NOT NYC Hotels) and your tour guide. THIS IS NOT SOMETHING YOU SHOULD WORRY ABOUT, WE TAKE VERY GOOD CARE OF OUR TEAM AND THE STAFF THAT SERVES US!

**VALUE-ADDED TAX (VAT)** - Israel adds a “value-added tax” (VAT) to the retail price of merchandise bought in the country. The VAT rate in Israel is about 16- 20% of the total price of the item. The tax is usually included in the price rather than being added on later at checkout. The specific rate depends on the kind of merchandise; it is higher for luxury items and lower for basic items such as food.

**VAT REFUND** - In many cases, travelers who aren't Israeli citizens can apply for a VAT refund on items they purchased on their travels. For tourists, the refund doesn't apply to services such as hotel rooms or meals in restaurants. Remember to always ask the store if they participate in the VAT Refund Program.

**To Get Your Refund:**

- o Shop in certified stores. Look for the green VAT REFUND logo posted in stores. If you don't see it, ask if they participate in the VAT Refund program.
- o Spend a minimum of \$100 or the equivalent in local currency in a single transaction.
- o Ask the retailer for the VAT form, and be sure to keep your merchandise receipts.
- o On the day of departure, you must show your purchases to a VAT representative at the airport's Departure Hall before you reach the first security checkpoint – so have your purchases handy in your carry-on luggage. Once the rep verifies your items and stamps the VAT forms, you can pack them in your luggage or carry-on bag.

- o After passing all security checkpoints and passport control, show your stamped VAT refund forms at the VAT desk in the Duty-Free hall.

- o At the VAT desk, you'll receive a VAT refund on your purchases in your currency or in shekels. (You can choose to get your refund via credit card, but keep in mind that it can take up to three months before your card is credited.)

**APPLIANCES AND ELECTRONICS** - NOTE: Electric current in Israel is 220-volt, not 110-volt as in the U.S. DUAL-VOLTAGE APPLIANCES

Many small appliances and electronic devices are dual-voltage and will adjust automatically for other countries. If your charger has a manual switch, you must change it back and forth before plugging in your device. Check the manual or power cord for the device to find out if it will work with 220-volt without a converter.

**CONVERTERS** - A power converter allows you to use U.S. devices that are not dual-voltage in Israel. Most converters cost \$40 to \$50.

**ADAPTERS** - Adapters enable your standard plug to fit into wall outlets in other countries. Most are relatively inexpensive, about \$3 to \$5 each. If you travel frequently, you may want to consider purchasing a universal adapter kit.

**BLOW DRYERS, CURLING IRONS & STRAIGHTENERS** - Most hotels provide hair dryers in each room. If you prefer having your own hair appliances, you may want to consider purchasing or borrowing more travel-friendly, dual-voltage appliances instead of buying a converter – a less expensive (and lighter) option.

**PHONES, MP3 PLAYERS, LAPTOPS, CAMERAS & VIDEO CAMERAS** - Most small digital devices have dual-voltage chargers that do not require a converter. Before leaving on your tour, check the manual or power cord for each device to determine if it is dual voltage. If so, you'll simply need to bring an adapter to plug the charger into the outlet. If not, you'll need a converter.