

# ISRAEL ITINERARY

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## DAY ONE

Arrive Tel-Aviv

## DAY TWO

**Caesarea-By-The-Sea:** Located on the shore in the center of Israel, Caesarea was the site of one of the most prominent cities in the Roman world. As the previous Roman capital of the province of Judea at the time of Jesus, Caesarea is now home to a large national park and a must-visit while exploring the Holy Land! Initially being home to a Phoenician naval station (Stratonos pyrgos), the maritime merchants of the ancient world used the bays and rivers to establish a port that flourished during the Greek period. King Herod transformed the small port town into one of the largest cities known to man during the Roman period, naming it after Augustus Caesar (Herod's patron). The city was populated throughout the 1st – 6th centuries CE and was an important center of Christianity during the Byzantine period, until the Muslim conquest of 640, abandoning the city until returning it to its former glory by 13th century crusaders.

In 1800, Caesarea was abandoned until its redevelopment into a fishing village by Bosniak Muslim immigrants after 1884. After being established as a modern town in 1940, Caesarea was incorporated as a municipality in 1977. Today, the ruins of the ancient city sit on the coastline just 2 km south of the modern Caesarea. After excavations in the 1950's and 1960's, the site was adopted as a new national park in 2011. Located within the national park are the ancient ruins of the great city built by Herod the Great when he ruled over the region.

Herod's Harbor was built using materials that would allow the concrete to harden underwater. The 40-acre harbor could accommodate 300 ships, much larger than the modern harbor can hold today. Herod's theater was constructed to house a seating capacity of 3,500 and was covered with a skin covering (vellum). According to Josephus and recounted in the Bible in the Book of Acts, this is believed to be the site of Herod Agrippa's death.

The Promontory Palace, proclaimed to be the "most magnificent palace" by Josephus, was built out into the waters of Caesarea and was home to an Olympic-size pool and an array of other incredible constructs. This palace is believed to be the location where the Apostle Paul was imprisoned in Acts 23:25. The famous Caesarea Aqueduct was constructed due to the lack of fresh water within the area. The aqueduct moved water from the springs of Mount Carmel nearly 10 miles away using its unique arches that allowed water to flow by the pull of gravity.

As well as being home to the Hippodrome, the Pilate stone, and beautiful mosaic discoveries, Caesarea is a coastal region with much to offer!

## DAY THREE

**Boat ride on Sea of Galilee** In sharp contrast to the bustling streets of Jerusalem and the sun-kissed beaches of Tel Aviv, is the beautiful and typically tranquil Sea of Galilee in northern Israel. Situated in the Jordan rift valley, at approximately 700 feet below sea level, the Sea of Galilee is the world's lowest fresh water lake. The Sea of Galilee is known in the Bible as the Sea of Kinneret, and to local Israelis, as the Kinneret. The Hebrew word for harp is kinnor, so the Kinneret is descriptive of the "harp-like" shape of the lake. The Sea of Galilee is also referred to in the Gospels as Lake of Gennesaret or Sea of Tiberias.



One of the earliest settled regions in Israel, the Sea of Galilee has changed relatively little since the time of Jesus, who chose the area as His center of ministry. Much of His Galilee ministry was based in the fishing town of Capernaum, where He lived, selected His first disciples, taught and performed many miracles.

As Israel's largest freshwater lake, the Sea of Galilee not only affords breathtaking vistas and charming beaches nestled along its 13-mile coastline, but it also provides a near-pristine look back in time to a landscape quite familiar to Jesus and His disciples. Fed by the upper Jordan River, this large lake is surrounded by broad, fertile valleys and numerous biblical sites:

No visit to the Sea of Galilee is complete without a ride on its beautiful waters. There you can remember the biblical accounts of Jesus walking on these very waters and calming the sea in the midst of a dangerous storm.

A visit to the Sea of Galilee is both refreshing and enlightening. Its rich history, paired with its dazzling jewel-like waters, cozy resorts, hot springs, and sprawling hiking trails, makes it the perfect marriage of the sacred and spectacular.

**Capernaum** Located along the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee, the sleepy fishing village of Capernaum would become well-known as the focal point of Jesus' three-year ministry. Largely undiscovered until the 19th century, Capernaum's biblical significance brings in thousands of tourists year-round desiring to experience the town in its ancient glory.

**Archaeological Findings** Known as the Father of Biblical Geography, the American explorer Edward Robinson discovered the ruins of ancient Capernaum in 1838. British Captain Charles William Wilson later identified the remains of a synagogue while visiting the area in 1866. The synagogue is known to be among the oldest in the world today, built around the Fourth Century AD. Constructed out of ornate white limestone blocks imported from distant quarries, the synagogue was unique for its time, setting it apart from all other buildings in Capernaum, which were made from basalt stone.

The original synagogue during Jesus' time is believed to have been built from basalt. It is here where Jesus is believed to have given many sermons, including the Bread of Life sermon (John 6:35-59). It is also in this spot where He would heal a man possessed by an unclean spirit (Mark 1:21-27), heal the Centurion's servant (Luke 7:3), and raise Jairus' daughter from the dead (Luke 8:41-56).

The town walls in Capernaum were constructed with basalt blocks and reinforced with stone, typical for a smaller town during this time period. The houses were one story with cobbled flooring and a series of open windows surrounding the courtyards of each home. The roofs of each home, comprised of light wooden beams and thatch mixed with mud, align with the biblical story of the healing of the paralytic in Mark 2:1-12. With this specific type of construction, it would not have been difficult to remove part of the roof and lower the paralytic man to where Jesus stood.

A study showed that beginning around the Fourth Century AD, a shift began in the way houses were constructed with the introduction of quality mortar and fine ceramics. It was during this period that the ancient synagogue we see today was built.

**Capernaum's Role in Biblical History** Established by the Hasmoneans as early as the Second Century BC, Capernaum would become one of the prominent trading outposts in the Gennesaret area. With a population of about 1,500 people, most of the inhabitants were fishermen.

Centuries later, Jesus would choose this town to be the center of His ministry after departing Nazareth. From Capernaum, He launched His ministry and performed many miracles over a three-year timespan, including the



healing of Peter's mother-in-law of a fever (Luke 4:38-39), as well as healing the paralytic man whose friends brought him to the feet of Jesus (Mark 2:1-12 and Luke 5:17-26).

**The House of Peter** In 1990, a modern hexagonal church was constructed by the Franciscans atop what many scholars and archaeologists believe to be the remains of the Apostle Peter's home. A glass floor located at the center of the church allows an incredible view of the excavated remains beneath.

Despite the passing of centuries, Capernaum still stands today in remarkably pristine condition, giving a wonderful insight into the life of the Holy Land's ancient inhabitants. With most of Jesus' ministry taking place at this very site, you will leave enriched and enlightened after exploring the magnificent ruins of Capernaum.

Located in Israel's northern region, overlooking the majestic Sea of Galilee (or Kinneret in Hebrew), is the Mount of Beatitudes, aptly named after the blessings mentioned at the beginning of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. The eight beatitudes, or blessings, are outlined in the Gospel of Matthew, while four of the beatitudes also appear in Luke. They are Jesus' prayers for those who follow Him and obey His teachings.

The Mount is also believed to be the place where Jesus met His apostles after His Resurrection and sent them out to "make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:16-20).

The Mount of Beatitudes is central to Jesus' ministry in the Galilee region. Surrounded by Tiberias to the east, and Nazareth and Mount Tabor to the south, this location is truly ideal for its variation in altitudes and its plain-like valley between its two peaks, making it a natural amphitheatre for the multitudes who would gather at Jesus' feet.

Ascend the Mount of Beatitudes, and you will find a beautiful 8-sided church that shares its namesake. Founded and built by the Franciscans, the octagonal Church of the Beatitudes is located above the small town of Tabgha, the place where Jesus performed the miracle of the loaves and fishes. Its eight sides represent the eight beatitudes and are also depicted in the upper windows.

From the outside, the site affords a windswept vista of the Sea of Galilee. Be sure to walk through the church's adjacent gardens as well. On the inside, visitors can take in the delicate beauty of the mosaic floors, which consist of the 7 virtues—justice, charity, prudence, faith, fortitude, hope, and temperance.

Appropriately, the ceiling welcomes visitors with Jesus' first words of the Sermon on the Mount:

**Golan Heights** If you are visiting Israel's mountainous northern region, you cannot miss the Golan Heights. Rising majestically to the east of the Sea of Galilee to form a green rocky plateau, the Golan Heights, or simply the Golan, is home to some of the most spectacular views in Israel. It is a perfect retreat from the country's bustling cityscapes.

The Hebrew word *golan* is translated to mean "something surrounded." Relatively small in size, the Golan Heights borders Israel, Lebanon, and Jordan, and abuts Syria in the east, running about 40 miles from north to south, and an average of 12 miles from east to west. What it lacks in size, however, it makes up for in importance—the Golan supplies Israel with over one-third of its water, thanks to the snow-covered areas in the higher elevations, which flows into the Jordan River watershed.

Undoubtedly its greatest resource, water has kept the Golan landscape lush, green, and teeming with life. The Golan boasts what are arguably Israel's most spectacular waterfalls—the Saar Falls, and the iconic Banias Waterfall, the largest waterfall in Israel. Fed by the melting snow of Mount Hermon, Banias is a popular spot for locals and tourists.

The lush, green valley and hills of the Golan are also an ideal climate for its abundance of vineyards and wineries, producing some of the most sumptuous wines found anywhere in the world.



In addition, the Golan Heights has a variety of sites scattered throughout that offer a variety of activities for tourists and hikers year-round. In the winter, both amateur and professional skiers flock to the Mount Hermon Ski Resort, Israel's only ski resort. In the summer months, the resort also offers visitors gorgeous views as well as access to the many mountain-fed streams via the ski lifts. Hikers can also enjoy the many streams as well as multi-colored flowers which carpet the plains. For those who are simply looking for the best view, the summit of Mount Bental offers a stunning panoramic view of the region.

Nicknamed the 'Masada of the North,' the Gamla Nature Reserve is the former site of a Jewish city founded approximately 2,000 years ago. There is also a 1,500 year-old Byzantine church with a monastery. Popular with bird enthusiasts, its observatory attracts many visitors from around the world. You can also watch eagles nesting here and on the cliffs. There are also the remains of a Chalcolithic Era settlement as well as ancient burial grounds, which are about 4,000 years old.

Heading south in the Golan, visitors can enjoy a spa day in the calming waters of Hamat Gader resort, a 2,000-year-old thermal spring. Nearby are the ruins of two ancient Roman spas, which once bubbled with the therapeutic waters of the hot springs. Hamat Gader also boasts the only crocodile farm in all of the Middle East. The farm is part of a sprawling wildlife preserve which also features a petting zoo and a parrot show.

Not to be outdone, the Golan Trail offers plenty of adventure for hiking enthusiasts. One of Israel's most majestic trails, it offers plenty of challenge and beautiful panoramas for the experienced hiker, stretching from Mount Hermon and ending at the Sea of Galilee.

Nearby, is the spectacular Nimrod Fortress National Park, home to the largest Crusader Era fortress in Israel. Situated on a peak adjacent to the snow-capped Mount Hermon, Nimrod Fortress affords visitors commanding views of the Hula Valley as well as a vibrant snapshot of living history within its beautifully-preserved ruins.

Steeped in history, culture, and natural beauty, the Golan Heights is a paradise for nature lovers, with an abundant range of sites and activities.

**Caesarea Philippi** Situated on a terrace overlooking a fertile valley, *Caesarea Philippi* is nestled in the foothills of Mount Hermon, and about 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee.

The most notable feature of this area is a large spring — where the Jordan River comes to life. Originally, the spring emerged from a large cave, lined with a series of niches for shrines, that was carved into a large sheer rock face. A temple to Pan was built at the mouth of the cave with courtyards for rituals. Due to an earthquake in the area centuries ago, the spring now seeps from the surrounding bedrock — but the cave still remains.

This area has also undergone many identity changes over the centuries. Its earliest references, appearing in the *Tanakh* (Old Testament), associate the spring with the pagan gods Baal Hermon and Baal Gad. During the Hellenistic period, the Greeks dedicated the area to the Greek god Pan and named it *Paneas*. During the Hellenistic (Greek) period, this city swarmed with devoted worshippers of the Greek god Pan.

It was during the subsequent Roman period that King Herod the Great's son, Phillip, founded a city in this area in honor of Caesar Augustus. The name was changed to *Caesarea Paneas*, then *Caesarea Philippi*. Today, the city is commonly referred to by its modern name, *Banias*.

In spite of its pagan associations and historical shifts, one of the most pivotal moments in biblical history took place in Banias.

The Bible tells us that Jesus and His disciples came to Caesarea Philippi and Jesus asked His disciples: "*But who do you say that I am?*" (Matthew 16:15). It is here, against the backdrop of Roman political dominance and temples to



pagan gods, that Peter replied with his timeless confession of faith, “*You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.*” (Matthew 16:16)

**The Mount of Transfiguration** Six days following this transformational revelation — Jesus, Peter, James, and John climbed a high mountain and experienced an event we know as the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-9). Despite traditional claims that this event happened elsewhere (Mount Tabor or Mount Nebo), it is most likely that this dramatic supernatural vision happened on nearby Mount Hermon. Pilgrims today can make the trek to experience the remarkable journey of Jesus and his select disciples to the site believed to be where Jesus met with Moses and Elijah.

There are few areas in the world with more spiritual significance than Caesarea Philippi. Despite its storied history, the foundation of the Christian faith resonates from this remarkable place.

#### DAY FOUR

**Baptizing in the Jordan River** Flowing north to south through the Jordan Rift Valley in the center of Israel, the Jordan River carves an impressive 223-mile path beginning at Mount Hermon, into the Sea of Galilee (Kinneret), and ending in the Dead Sea. It is Israel’s most important source in quenching a dry land. But it is the Jordan’s biblical and historical significance which adds to its importance to the land and people of Israel.

The path of the Jordan—whose name means “descended” in Hebrew—is actually divided into an upper and lower section, which drops in altitude incrementally over its course. The upper section, which extends from Mount Hermon to the Sea of Galilee, experiences its first major drop over approximately 65 miles. It meanders into the lower section, dipping at a rate of five feet per mile. By the time it reaches the Dead Sea, the Jordan has dropped over 3,100 feet, making it the lowest elevation of any river worldwide—nearly 1,400 feet below sea level.

Despite its larger-than-life status, the Jordan is quite small compared to its contemporaries like the Nile or even the mighty Mississippi River—it is only about 17 feet at its deepest point and about 100 feet wide at its broadest. Regardless of its size, the Jordan has been a focal point in both the Old and New Testaments.

The Jordan is featured prominently in the biblical narrative of Joshua, who led the people of Israel across the river into the Promised Land (Joshua 3-6). Jacob received a blessing from God after crossing the Jordan with just his staff (Genesis 32:10). Prophets Elijah and Elisha crossed the Jordan on dry ground after Elijah placed his cloak in the river, which then parted (2 Kings 2:8). The Jordan is also a place of healing, including that of Naaman the Syrian, who was commanded to immerse himself in the river by Elijah and was healed of his leprosy (2 Kings 5).

Most notably, the Jordan is one of the sites which feature prominently in Jesus’ ministry. It is where Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist (Matthew 3), and is a symbol of spiritual rebirth, repentance, and forgiveness of sins.

Christian pilgrims seeking to share in Jesus’ baptism experience often come to the Jordan. Two sites, Qasr el Yahud and Yardenit, offer safe access to the Jordan’s blessed waters.

**Beit She’An** Beit She’an offers the most extensive archaeological site in Israel, with some of the **best-preserved** ruins in the Middle East, but its memory will forever be linked to one of the most ghoulish events in the Bible.

On nearby Mount Gilboa in 1004 BC, the army of **King Saul**, Israel’s first king, was defeated by the Philistines and Saul’s three sons were killed. To avoid capture, the wounded Saul fell on his sword.

The triumphant **Philistines** took the bodies of Saul and his sons and fastened them to the wall of Beit She’an. They put Saul’s armour in their temple.



David, who was to succeed Saul as king, composed a memorable **lament** over the tragedy, with the recurring line “How the mighty have fallen . . .” (2 Samuel 1:17 – 27).

Beit She’an is about 13 kilometres south of the Sea of Galilee. Its location at the **strategic** junction of the Jezreel and Jordan valleys made it a coveted prize for conquerors.

Apart from the Philistines, its **rulers** included Egyptians, Israelites (though the Canaanite inhabitants initially rebuffed them), Greeks and Romans.

In the Roman period — under the name of **Scythopolis** — it was the leading city of the Decapolis and the only one of these 10 semi-autonomous cities west of the Jordan River.

From the 4th century until it was destroyed by an **earthquake** in 749, the formerly pagan city was a flourishing Christian centre, with a bishop and several churches.

**City’s population grew to 40,000** Beit She’an began on the flat-topped hill that stands behind the ruins of the Roman-Byzantine city. This **ancient tell**, 80 metres high, contains 18 levels of occupation down to the first settlers around 4000 BC.

In Roman times the inhabitants moved to the flat area at the foot of the hill. Here the city expanded to around **150 hectares** in area, with wide colonnaded streets leading to elegant shops with marble facades and mosaic floors. The population of Scythopolis grew to 40,000 and the **linen** it produced made it one of the leading textile centres of the Roman empire. Centuries later it became a centre for processing cane sugar.

## DAY FIVE

### Overview of the city and travel the path of the traditional Palm Sunday Path.

**Garden Of Gethsemane** Gethsemane, also called Garden of Gethsemane, garden across the Kidron Valley on the Mount of Olives (Hebrew Har ha-Zetim), a ridge paralleling the eastern part of Jerusalem, where Jesus is said to have prayed on the night of his arrest before the Crucifixion. The name Gethsemane (Hebrew gat shemanim, “oil press”) suggests that the garden was a grove of olive trees in which was located an oil press.

**Scripture accounts** Jesus’ sorrowful time of prayer and subsequent betrayal and arrest in Gethsemane is described in all four Gospels (Matthew 26:36–56; Mark 14:32–50; Luke 22:39–53, and John 18:1–12), though the place is named only in the Gospel According to Matthew and the Gospel According to Mark. In the three Synoptic accounts, Jesus was deeply grieved and repeatedly prayed for God to “remove this cup from me” while also surrendering to God’s will. According to Luke, his despair was so profound that “his sweat became like great drops of blood,” and he was comforted by an angel (Luke 22:43–44). The three disciples who accompanied him—Peter, James, and John—repeatedly fell asleep despite his apparent anguish and his requests that they pray with him. All four Gospels describe Jesus’ arrest in Gethsemane by a crowd led by Judas Iscariot, one of his 12 disciples. Matthew, Mark, and Luke chronicle the infamous betrayal of Jesus by Judas with a kiss. Although one of his disciples lashed out at the crowd with a sword, Jesus rebuked this use of violence and went peaceably with his captors; Luke’s account conveys that Jesus healed the enslaved man who had been wounded by that sword (Luke 22:51).

**Location** Though the exact location of Gethsemane cannot be determined with certainty, Armenian, Greek, Latin, and Russian churches have accepted an olive grove on the western slope of the Mount of Olives as the authentic site, which was so regarded by the empress St. Helena, mother of Constantine the Great (the first Christian emperor, early 4th century CE). An ancient tradition locates the scene of the Gethsemane prayer and betrayal of Jesus at a place now called the Grotto of the Agony, near a bridge that crosses the Kidron Valley. At another possible location, south of this site in a garden containing old olive trees, is a Latin church erected by Franciscan monks on the ruins of a 4th-century church.



## **Antonia Fortress: Pilate's Judgment Hall**

### **Location**

1. The Antonia Fortress was located just outside the Temple Mount area on its northwestern side.
2. Today, Umariya Elementary School and a convent of the Sisters of Zion lie atop its ruins.
3. Some of the ruins can be accessed through the Convent of the Sisters of Zion.
4. Tradition places the Antonia Fortress as the beginning point of the Via Dolorosa (painful path).

### **Historical Background**

1. The Antonia Fortress was a military headquarters and barracks built to protect the Temple Mount. Later, it was renovated by the Hasmoneans (164 BC) and Herod the Great (19 BC) to protect the Temple Mount area and the city of Jerusalem. It was named after Herod's patron, Mark Antony.
2. Some believe Jesus appeared before Pilate here and was condemned to death by crucifixion.
3. Others believe that Pilate's Headquarters, also called Pilate's Palace or Praetorium, was the place Christ appeared before Pilate. It's located on the northern side of Jerusalem, just south of the Jaffa Gate. The evidence points strongly in favor of this location as the place of Christ's trial and condemnation.

**Pool Of Bethesda** The city of Jerusalem was center stage for many significant miracles during Jesus' ministry. One of the most significant of Jesus' miracles occurred at the Pools of Bethesda where He healed the paralytic (John 5:2-9).

In the time of Jesus, these pools were believed to possess healing powers. According to John's Gospel, an angel would periodically stir the water, but the paralytic wasn't able to enter the water quickly enough to be healed. With just a simple divine command to "rise, take up thy bed, and walk," Jesus healed the man instantly. Historically, the pools in the Jerusalem neighborhood of Bethesda (Hebrew for "house of mercy" and sometimes referred to as "Beth-zatha") were vital to the bustling city. Believed to have been constructed in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC during the reign of King Hezekiah, the upper pool is likely referenced twice in the Old Testament (2 Kings 18:17, Isaiah 36:2). Sheep brought to the Temple for sacrifice may have been washed in these pools in preparation for sacrifice.

John's Gospel also provides an unusual description of the pool having "five porticoes." Archaeological excavations have revealed a rectangular-shaped pool bounded by porticoes on all four sides, with the fifth portico acting as a dividing wall between the upper and lower sections. Further excavations have uncovered that the porticoes have been built in layers over the centuries, with those from the time of Jesus among the lower-most levels.

The pools were discovered in 1888 by Konrad Schick, a German archaeologist and authority on the water systems of Jerusalem. Prior to this, scholars did not think the Pools of Bethesda existed. Today, visitors to Bethesda can view the below-ground-level ruins of the two ancient pools, which are accessed by a stairway. Located in Jerusalem's Muslim Quarter near the Crusader-era Church of St. Anne and the Lions' Gate (known in Jesus' time as the Sheep Gate, where the sacrificial lambs were prepared), the pools are not far from the starting point of the Via Dolorosa and the Stations of the Cross.

More than just a simple tourist attraction or fascinating stop on your Holy Land tour, the Pools of Bethesda offer visitors and pilgrims a unique portrait in time of a miraculous event and an ideal place for reflection and prayer.



- House of Caiaphas** 1. The House of Caiaphas, also known as the Church of Saint Peter in Gallicantu (cock's crow in Latin) is located on the eastern slope of Mount Zion, just outside the Old City of Jerusalem.
2. It can be accessed by Malki Tsedek Street
  3. It is administered by the Roman Catholic Church.

#### **Historical Background**

1. The church consists of four levels: (1) the upper church (2) the middle church (3) the guardroom, and (4) the cistern (dungeon).
2. According to tradition, the church is the believed site of the House of Caiaphas.
3. A Byzantine church was built on this site in 457 AD.
4. It was later destroyed by Muslims in 1010.
5. It was rebuilt by the Crusaders in 1102 and given its present name.
6. It was destroyed in 1219 by the Turks.
7. Later, a chapel was built in 1300.
8. The church fell in ruins again by 1320.
9. The church that exists today was rebuilt in 1931.

#### **Places of Interest**

1. In the Courtyard of the church is a statue that recalls the events of Peter's denial of Jesus. It shows Peter, the rooster that crowed, a maid, a servant, and a Roman soldier.
2. On the roof of the church is a rooster on a black cross, a symbol of Peter's denial of Christ before the cock crowed.
3. The main sanctuary, located on the first floor, contains large multi-colored mosaics portraying figures from the New Testament.
4. On the second floor is a chapel that utilizes stone from ancient grottos as its walls. It also has mosaics from a 5th-century Byzantine church that previously existed at this site.
5. Above the cistern is the Guard Room. It overlooks the cistern (dungeon).
6. On the lower floor is a cistern (dungeon) where it's believed Christ was placed the night after He was tried and condemned by Caiaphas.
7. Ruins and excavations outside the church at ground level.
8. A walkway with steps that run beside the church that was used for ascending and descending from Mount Zion to the Kidron Valley.
  - They were most likely used by Jesus and His disciples as they went from the Upper Room, where they celebrated the Passover meal on Mount Zion, to the Garden of Gethsemane.
  - Later, Christ would use these same steps as He was brought from Gethsemane, which led through the Kidron Valley, to the House of Caiaphas.

**The Upper Room** Just outside the Old City of Jerusalem on Mount Zion is the Upper Room, or the Cenacle. This structure has been regarded as the traditional site of the Last Supper since the fourth century AD.

According to scripture, the Upper Room is where the Last Supper took place and where Jesus washed His disciples' feet (John 13:1–20). It is where the disciples gathered in fear after the death of Jesus. Jesus appeared in this room on two occasions after the Resurrection. It is here He showed Thomas the wounds in His body. It is where the 120 believers prayed on the Day of Pentecost. The Bible tells us that tongues of fire appeared to them and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages (Acts 2:1–4). At this place the church of Jesus Christ was born.



Built atop a church-synagogue constructed in the first century AD, the current structure of the room is a restoration of a 12<sup>th</sup> century Crusader chapel. It is here that archaeologists have uncovered plaster fragments inscribed with Greek graffiti, one of which has been interpreted to contain the name of Jesus.

With all of its classic Crusader-era trappings, the room is mostly empty. Visitors can descend the stairs in the southwest corner of the room, leading to the Tomb of King David or ascend the staircase to the rooftop to encounter breathtaking views of the Mount of Olives and the city of Jerusalem.

While the Cenacle is not universally accepted as the Upper Room, it still remains a much sought-after destination for many Christians who travel to the Holy Land.

**Bethlehem, inner City for some shopping (optional)**

## **DAY SIX**

**Temple Area ??? Wailing or Western Wall** The Wailing Wall, also referred to as the Kotel, the Western Wall, or Solomon's Wall, and whose lower sections date to about the first century BCE, is located in the Old Quarter of East Jerusalem in Israel. Built of thick, corroded limestone, it is about 60 feet (20 meters) high and close to 160 feet (50 meters) long, though most of it is engulfed in other structures.

**A Sacred Jewish Site** The wall is believed by devout Jews to be the Western Wall of the Second Temple of Jerusalem (destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE), the only surviving structure of the Herodian Temple built during the realm of Herod Agrippa (37 BCE–4 CE) in the first century BCE. The temple's original location is in dispute, leading some Arabs to dispute the claim that the wall belongs to the temple, arguing instead that it is part of the structure of Al-Aqsa Mosque on the Temple Mount.

The structure's description as the Wailing Wall derives from its Arabic identification as el-Mabka, or "place of weeping," frequently repeated by European—and particularly French—travelers to the [Holy Land](#) in the 19th century as "le mur des lamentations." Jewish devotions believe that the "divine presence never departs from the Western Wall."

**Worshipping the Wall** The custom of worshipping at the Western Wall began during the Medieval period. In the 16th century, the wall and the narrow courtyard where people worship was located with the 14th century Moroccan Quarter. The Ottoman sultan [Suleiman the Magnificent](#) (1494–1566) set aside this section for the express purpose of religious observances of any kind. In the 19th century, the Ottomans allowed Jewish men and women to pray together on Fridays and high holy days. They segregated themselves by gender: the men stood still or sat apart from the wall; while the women moved about and rested their foreheads against the wall. Beginning in 1911, the Jewish users began bringing chairs and screens to allow the men and women to worship in separate cloisters in the narrow passageway, but the Ottoman rulers saw it for what it probably also was: the thin edge of the wedge to ownership, and banned such behavior. In 1929, a riot occurred when some Jews attempted to build a temporary screen.

**Modern Struggles** The Wailing Wall is one of the great Arab–Israeli struggles. Jews and Arabs still dispute who is in control of the wall and who has access to it, and many Muslims maintain that the Wailing Wall has no relation to ancient Judaism at all. Sectarian and ideological claims aside, the Wailing Wall remains a sacred place for Jews and others who often pray—or perhaps wail—and sometimes slip prayers written on paper through the wall's welcoming fissures. In July 2009, Alon Nil launched a free service allowing people around the world to Twitter their prayers, which are then taken in printed form to the Wailing Wall.

**Israel's Annexation of the Wall**



After the war of 1948 and the Arab capture of the Jewish Quarter in Jerusalem, Jews were generally banned from praying at the Wailing Wall, which was at times defaced by political posters.

Israel annexed Arab East Jerusalem immediately after the 1967 Six Day War and claimed ownership of the city's religious sites. Incensed—and fearing that the tunnel the Israelis began digging, starting from the Wailing Wall and under the Temple Mount, shortly after the war was over was designed to undermine the foundations of Al-Aqsa Mosque, Islam's third holiest site after the mosques in [Mecca](#) and Medina in Saudi Arabia—Palestinians and other Muslims rioted, triggering a clash with Israeli forces that left five Arabs dead and hundreds wounded.

In January 2016, the Israeli government approved the first space where non-Orthodox Jews of both sexes can pray side by side, and the first Reform prayer service of both men and women took place in February 2016 in a section of the wall known as Robinson's Arch.

**Dome Of The Rock** The Dome of the Rock, known in Arabic as Qubbat as-Sakhrah, in Jerusalem is one of the world's most famous holy sites. Not only is its iconic golden dome an integral part of the Jerusalem landscape, but the Dome of the Rock and its location are of great significance to Muslims and Jews.

## History of the Dome of the Rock

The building of the Dome of Rock is considered the oldest existing Islamic structure, having been completed in 691 during the Umayyad Dynasty. The site chosen for its construction is believed by Muslims to have been that of the Prophet Muhammad's ascent to heaven. Whilst piety was certainly a factor in the building's construction, so too was politics. The Dome of the Rock was a statement of intent to Christians and Jews, showing Islam's power and sophistication and making an implicit case for its superiority as a result.

The original building was not so different from the one visible today, covered with mosaics, verses from the Quran and a lavish solid gold dome. The Dome of the Rock briefly fell into Christian hands, when it was repurposed as a church by the Crusaders, before being returned to Islam by Saladin.

The modern day tiles were added in the 16th century by Suleiman the Magnificent originally, but were replaced in the 20th century as part of a major restoration problem. Likewise, the solid gold dome is no more, replaced instead by 80kg of gold plates donated by the King of Jordan, costing somewhere in the region of \$8.2 million. Despite these modern day additions, the building looks remarkably similar today to the one conceived in the 7th century.

The rock, which the building is named after, is a site of immense religious significance. Jews call it the Foundation Stone, where Abraham planned to sacrifice Isaac. Islam dictates that this was the spot where the Prophet ascended to heaven, and the rock is said to have two footprints on, one belonging to the Prophet and another to the angel Gabriel.

## The Dome of the Rock today

The Dome of the Rock is at the heart of religious and political tensions in Jerusalem. It's not unusual for the whole complex to be closed during periods of unrest, and only Muslims are permitted to enter the Dome itself – modestly attired non-believers can walk around the complex to appreciate the beauty of the building, but be



warned, the guards are strict about clothing so really make sure no flesh is showing, particularly if you're a woman. Security is tight – expect to have your bag searched before even entering the complex.

Technically the Dome of the Rock is not a mosque but rather a shrine, and due reverence is expected inside. The interior is said to be just as lavish by those who are permitted to enter. If you do visit inside, look out for the oldest known *mihrab* in the Islamic world, and the steps down to the Well of Souls, where supposedly the voices of the dead can be heard as they pass onto eternity.

## DAY SEVEN

**Dead Sea** Its name may take on an ominous tone, but the Dead Sea is anything but dead. Deriving its title from its inability to sustain most forms of marine life, it is a place of tranquil beauty, and perhaps a bit of mystery. Travelers have utilized its gentle waters as a natural spa for thousands of years...and still do today. While it doesn't figure as prominently in the biblical narrative like the Sea of Galilee, it did play a significant role in protecting the Israelites from advancing armies, acting as a natural barrier. Scripture records that the Ammonites and Moabites were believed to have crossed a shallow part of the Dead Sea to attack King Jehoshaphat (2 Chr. 20).

Sandwiched between Jordan to the east and Israel to the west, the Dead Sea lies in the Jordan Rift Valley. Not only does it possess the title of being one of the saltiest bodies of water in the world, its shoreline is also the lowest point of dry land on earth. At 1,300-feet below sea level, the lake does not drain; however, what little it gains in volume from the Jordan River, it quickly loses through evaporation. Pure minerals are left behind in the salt, which is harvested and refined for sale around the world for use in a variety of products, from table salt to cosmetics.

The Dead Sea's famous hypersaline waters are undisputedly one of the world's top tourist destinations. It's not uncommon to see vacationers floating on the shallow, crystalline pools or lathering mineral-rich mud on their skin.

Both the salt and the mud have been precious commodities since the time of King David, known to have therapeutic effects on the body. Found to contain more than 20 known minerals including calcium, iron, potassium, manganese, and zinc, the Dead Sea salt's unique composition is believed to relieve symptoms of a variety of common skin conditions, such as eczema and psoriasis, as well as arthritis and related ailments.

Visitors to this area can also stay in any number of resorts that pepper the landscape to take advantage of their full spa services and spend time exploring the area for a bit of adventure. A great place to start is Masada, a ruggedly majestic natural fortress in the Judean Desert built by Herod the Great. Now an Israeli national park, visitors can hike to the top of the mesa and take in the breathless beauty of the Dead Sea and its surroundings. The site of the final stand between Jewish patriots and their Roman oppressors, Masada stands as a lasting monument to the courage and heroism of the Jewish people.

A short distance from the Dead Sea, Qumran National Park offers history buffs the opportunity to explore the place where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered. Visitors can take in a short film about the scrolls and then hike the ruins and view the caves nested in the mountains of the Judean desert.

Another popular spot for adventure-goers is the Ein Gedi Reserve, an oasis in the middle of the Judean Desert. The trails which proceed from Nahal David (David's Stream), lead to refreshing waterfalls, a wide variety of desert plants and wildlife, and sprawling landscapes.



**Masada** Rising 1300 feet above the western shores of the Dead Sea are the remains of the ancient Jewish fortress of Masada. Masada stands in majestic beauty and splendid isolation in an area that is one of the most desolate on earth. Built by Herod the Great between 37 and 31 BC, Masada was a lavish and self-contained mountaintop refuge for the ruler, built as a safeguard in the event of a revolt against him. Masada was not only self-contained with a perpetual water supply and storehouse filled with grain; it was also virtually impenetrable. One small and narrow snake path weaving back and forth along the eastern side of the mountain provided the only means of access. Forced to climb this steep path single-file, any attacking army would be easily defeated by the soldiers above.

Located on the eastern edge of the Judean Desert, people from across the globe come to visit Masada and tour this magnificent feat of ancient innovation. It is the most visited historic site in all of Israel. However, it is not only the innovation and archeology that draw people to Masada. It is also the site of one of the most dramatic episodes in history.

Nineteen centuries ago, a group of freedom fighters, called Zealots, decided to kill themselves on top of Mount Masada rather than submit to the oppressive yoke of Roman slavery.

The story of the siege of Masada and the apparent suicide of its inhabitants is deeply ingrained in Jewish tradition. The Zealots did not kill themselves because they were afraid or hopeless, nor hungry nor thirsty – they believed it was God’s will that they die bravely, and more importantly, that they die as free men, women, and children.

Josephus Flavius, the ancient historian, records that what took place on Masada was not strictly suicide because Judaism forbids suicide; instead, the people atop Masada drew lots, killing one another in turn, until only one man remained, leaving him to fall on his own sword.

For many, the story of Masada and the Zealots’ resolve to resist being taken as prisoners by the Romans and their courage to choose death over slavery, symbolize Jewish heroism and strength; not only their last fatal decision, but also the fact that the 960 inhabitants of Masada managed to hold off the 15,000 men of the Roman Legion X for nearly three years.

Masada’s defenders, who, in 70 AD witnessed the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem during the four year full-scale revolt by the Jewish people against the Romans, evaded capture after the fall of Jerusalem. Led by Eleazar ben Ya’ir, the remaining Zealots took refuge on the mountaintop fortress of Masada.

For two years, control of Masada went unchallenged. Then, in 72 CE, the Roman Legion X, under the command of Lucius Flavius Silva, the Roman governor of Judea, laid siege to Masada to bring an end to the Jewish revolt. The Romans built a fortification wall around the entire mountain, so no one could escape. The remains of the Roman wall and encampments can still be seen today.

After considering all their options, the Romans decided to build a siege ramp up the western face of Masada. The Romans strategically used enslaved Jews to construct the ramp, knowing that the Jewish Zealots atop the mountain would not kill their fellow brothers. The ramp took nearly three months to complete, as the people on top of Masada watched and waited. In the spring of 73 CE, the ramp was finished and on April 16, the Romans breached the walls of Masada. As Eleazar ben Ya’ir realized the end was near, he met with his followers and entreated them to be true to the cause that had brought them to this moment. He declared, “Let us rather die than be enslaved by our enemy. Let us leave this world in freedom.”



At long last, when the Romans entered the fortress to overtake the Zealots, they found 960 Jewish men, women and children had died by their own hands: the men embraced their wives and children as they put them to the sword; then, lots were cast, and ten men were chosen to take the lives of the remaining men; finally, the last survivor set fire to the palace and fell upon his own sword. Purposefully, the defenders left behind full and abundantly well-supplied storehouses for food and cisterns for water, a message for the Romans that they had chosen death over slavery.

For many generations, it was believed that the story of Masada was just a legend. But in 1963, Professor Yigal Yadin led the excavation of this memorable site and proved the legend to be history. Masada has become the symbol of the determination of the Jewish people to be free in their own land. After two thousand years, the sacrifice made on Masada remains a heartfelt reminder of the commitment and exorbitant cost freedom often requires. Masada is a site not to be missed on any trip to Israel.

## **DAY EIGHT    The Garden Tomb**

North of the Damascus Gate, near the fast-paced center of Jerusalem, lies a garden oasis—believed by many to be where Jesus was buried and rose from the dead.

For over a century, the site of the Garden Tomb has drawn the faithful and the curious to this two acre plot. Today, the site boasts nearly a quarter of a million visitors each year. The Garden Tomb affords a tranquil place for worship, prayer and reflection, as well as an unfinished tomb that matches the biblical description. However, any claims to its authenticity as the site where Jesus was buried and resurrected remain uncertain.

The tomb was discovered by General Charles Gordon, who, while on a visit to Jerusalem in 1883, believed he located Golgotha (or The Place of the Skull), the site where Jesus was crucified. Gordon immediately associated the limestone cliff with a previously discovered tomb nearby, making the claim these were the actual sites of Jesus' crucifixion and burial. For years, the location bore the name "Gordon's Calvary".

Offered as an alternative site to the famed Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the Garden Tomb preserves the look and feel of what the tomb and garden may have been like 2000 years ago. The Gospels are largely silent about the exact location of Golgotha and the tomb, but they do describe that Jesus was crucified outside the city of Jerusalem, near an oft-traveled road, and that He was buried in a new tomb in a nearby garden.

Opinions remain divided about the actual location of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection. However, the Bible writers demonstrated more interest in the reality of the resurrection of Jesus than in the place where it occurred. This experience is best summed up by the message carved on the wooden door of the Garden Tomb, "He is not here for He is risen!" The Garden Tomb affords visitors a place to celebrate the resurrection of the One who changed the world.

## **HILL OF GOLGOTHA**

**Golgotha**, (Aramaic: "Skull") also called **Calvary**, (from Latin *calva*: "bald head" or "skull"), skull-shaped hill in ancient Jerusalem, the site of Jesus' crucifixion. It is referred to in all four Gospels (Matthew 27:33, Mark 15:22, Luke 23:33, and John 19:17). The hill of execution was outside the city walls of Jerusalem, apparently near a road and not far from the sepulcher where Jesus was buried. Its exact location is uncertain, but most scholars prefer either the spot now covered by the Church of the Holy Sepulcher or a hillock called Gordon's Calvary just north of the Damascus Gate.