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##### FAQs and TIPS for TRAVEL to ISRAEL

We are excited that you are considering participating on the experience of a lifetime. The Jewish Federation is an ideal partner to help you plan your trip and to travel with – and we are happy to answer any questions you might have.

Check out the following Frequently Asked Questions and Travel tips:

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***Why should I travel with the Jewish Federation?***

The Jewish Federation has access to resources and partners that can make for an amazing first-class experience. Plus, travel with the Jewish Federation is a great way to connect, not only with Israel, but with people and activities in Greater Middlesex and Monmouth Counties – and to continue to grow your connection and relationship with Israel upon your return. Together with our partners in Israel we can provide you with an inside, close a personal view of life in Israel and the Middle East. Whether this is your first time, or whether you are a repeat visitor, you will see new things and meet new people – and create memories that will last a lifetime.

***Do I need a*** ***visa to travel to Israel?***

Israel has a unique passport requirement: all passports must be valid (i.e. do not expire) for at least 6 months after the trip. Please be sure your passport is up to date, and not near expiration. No visas are required for US Citizens to enter to Israel. This is true for some other countries as well, but if you are of another nationality or not a US Citizen, you will need to check entrance requirements for your particular situation. This is your responsibility. If your tour includes other destinations, please contact the respective consulate or visa agency of your destination in order to determine if any other visas are required for your trip.

***I’ve never been to Israel before – is this the best trip for me?***

Absolutely! The Jewish Federation is a one stop shop for Jewish life and culture. With years of experience planning trips to Israel we are the best at making your first visit to Israel a memorable experience. Our trip is being put together by some of the same experts who have run Birthright Israel programs, and is designed to give you a holistic overview of life in Israel. We live and breathe Judaism daily with Israel at the center, and therefore can provide you with the most meaningful journey.

***I*** ***have been to Israel before – is this the best trip for me?***

Yes! All of our trips are designed so that there is something new and different each time. At almost all of our stops we have options for return visitors. Additionally, watching others experience Israel for the first time will strengthen you love for the country. We are proud to have return travelers.

***Why*** ***should I travel with a group?***

You get the benefit of personalized, VIP service along with group pricing for both ground and air costs. You will have access to certain sites and personalities that would be difficult to see on your own. You get the benefit of experienced tour leaders and the opportunity to meet new friends from your community. You also don’t have to worry about most meals, transportation, portage, or the itinerary; we take care of that.

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***What will*** ***security be like on the trip? Should I be concerned about my safety?***

The safety and well-being of participants is our top priority during this trip. Experienced travelers know that there are no guarantees when it comes to travel or safety anywhere, we believe we are taking all appropriate precautions to organize a successful program.

Please familiarize yourself with the US State Department travel warning for Israel, the West Bank and Gaza. <http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/alertswarnings/israel-travel-warning.html>

While Israel is not in the best of neighborhoods in the Middle East, as we hope you will see during the course of this trip, life these days in Israel is rich and vibrant – and statistically, you may be at greater risk of something happening in New York, New Brunswick or Asbury Park. Over the years, we have perfected our skills in providing top level programming and service, while at the same time maintaining the highest safety and security standards possible. This is how we do it:

* During the initial preparation stages of any trip, we make sure that the routes and sites suggested are accessible and appropriate in terms of safety and security for tour visits.
* The day prior to a group’s arrival, the entire trip route is vetted by relevant security personnel and our staff.
* Each day throughout the trip, prior to departure from the hotel, our team consults Israeli security authorities to verify that the trip route is acceptable and does not include any areas that are not accessible on that given day.
* We are in constant contact with Israeli security and safety officials and receive daily and sometimes hourly updates about all areas of the country.
* We work with security companies, all licensed by the Israeli Ministry of Justice, whose employees are all individually licensed and trained for personal protection. When recommended by security authorities, we will have an armed guard escorting the group; this is something which happens rarely and is always seen as a precaution and not a necessity.
* The safety and security of our clients is our utmost concern. If for any reason, we believe that routes need to be changed, altered or cancelled, we will not hesitate to do so.

Most importantly, when it comes to safety and security, we relate to participants as we would members of our family, with the same level of concern and desire to make sure that they have the best possible time while traveling through Israel.

***Do I need to TRAVEL and HEALTH*** ***insurance?***

Getting insurance can be a very good thing for travel, but you need to do your homework.  Also, when thinking about insurance, there are two different things to consider: do you want travel insurance in case you need to cancel your trip, or do you need additional health insurance for coverage when you travel abroad?  You might need both, and some travel policies cover both - but you need to ask and read the details...as many policies only cover one or the other and can be quite specific about eligibility.

Our tour partners at Makor recommend the following company:

<http://www.travelinsuranceisrael.com/about.cfm>

We urge you to purchase cancellation insurance & supplemental medical coverage (which covers preexisting conditions). This is a smart way to safeguard against life's surprises.
We have made arrangements with SMS-Travel Insurance Center (Israel) of Omaha, Nebraska. SMS has over 25 years of experience as worldwide insurance brokers and can help you choose the policy that best meets your needs. Yonah Engel is our contact person.

**Email:**yonah@travelinsuranceisrael.com

**Phone number: 1-402-404-5205.**

We have also had good experience with the following companies which may be worth considering or comparing:

<https://www.insuremytrip.com/>

[www.sevencorners.com](http://www.sevencorners.com/)

Additionally, this company offers coverage in Israel through a local health insurance provider.  You are issued a policy number for the duration of your trip and likely do not need to pay out of pocket in most circumstances should something happen while in Israel.

<https://www.egertcohen.co.il/health/intro.asp>

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**We strongly urge travelers to check international coverage through their current health insurance provider as they are responsible for any and all personal medical expenses during the course of the trip.**

***Is the trip*** ***handicapped accessible?***

Presently the trip and our transportation are not set up for someone traveling full-time in a wheelchair or with serious mobility issues. If you use a wheelchair or scooter full-time, please contact us immediately to discuss options before you book.

While many sites in Israel are handicapped-accessible, this means they have ramps or elevators. Some still have dirt paths or uneven stone walkways. Please keep this in mind. Where possible, we will make arrangements to minimize the walking required, though if you are uncomfortable with certain elements of the program requiring walking, you can remain with the bus or at a convenient location to the tour.

IF YOU HAVE ANY MOBILITY ISSUES OR CONCERNS, IT IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO REACH OUT AND DISCUSS YOUR INDIVIDUAL SITUATION WITH ONE OF OUR TRIP MANAGERS TO BE CLEAR ABOUT EXPECTATIONS AND WHAT OPTIONS ARE.

***Can I use my cell*** ***phone in Israel?***

Many cell phones can be used in Israel, but you need to check with your carrier about set up and costs. Even with international plans, the cost per minute can be significant. If you have a BlackBerry, you should also check data rates, and on an iPhone or other smartphone, consider Skype or another online service, as hotspots in Israel are readily available, including possibly on the bus.

You may also consider renting a cell phone or a cellular modem specifically for your travel to Israel. If you don’t anticipate heavy calling, incoming calls are free on Israeli phones, so this could be a useful option. We recommend: <http://www.israelphones.com>.

Additionally, there are a couple of other communications applications you might wish to consider that enable texting and calls via the internet: Whatsapp and Viber.

***When will the*** ***itinerary be finalized?***

While a draft itinerary is currently available for this trip, it is subject to change up until the activities actually take place. We will share regular itinerary updates until the week before the trip. Even then, the itinerary is subject to change based on a variety of factors, including scheduling, traffic, other opportunities and safety considerations. Our goal is to be as accurate and prepared as possible, giving a good representation of what we will do on the program, and recognizing that flexibility is sometimes essential.

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***How does the trip deal with*** ***Shabbat and keeping kosher?***

The trip is designed to accommodate travelers who keep Shabbat and/or kosher – though we expect a diverse crowd of participants, including many who don’t. All group meals on the program are certified Kosher under the Rabbanut in Israel, and all official programs are shomer Shabbat. Friday night, we will welcome Shabbat and then have a festive Shabbat dinner. During Shabbat day, in addition to information about local synagogues and walking tours, there will be options for people to chart their own course should they choose – and they can work with our hostess on-site to arrange day trips like visiting museums or just lounging by the pool.

***When can I see my*** ***family and friends on the trip?***

Should you have family and friends in Israel, we encourage you to arrange family visits during free time in the evenings in the hotels. Please don’t invite family to participate during scheduled group programs or during free meals in the middle of the day.

***Can we travel on our*** ***own during the program apart from the group? What if we want to relax on our own one day?***

While we do not plan on forcing anyone to do anything, every effort has been made to put together a well-balanced itinerary and holistic trip experience. It is challenging to keep track of folks who go off on their own during the course of the program, adds an extra burden on trip staff to keep track of shifting participants, and detracts from the group dynamic we hope will develop during this trip. Other than in the case of illness or extreme circumstances, we ask and strongly encourage all participants to remain with the group during the organized program.

## *What should I bring and* *pack?*

Dress is generally casual and informal. We suggest that you bring comfortable, easily laundered clothing. Layers are recommended year round as weather can vary during the day. Comfortable walking shoes are a must! A sweater or light jacket are recommended even in the summer, as Jerusalem can get chilly at night, and in winter, bring a warm jacket and umbrella. Don’t forget sunglasses, sunscreen and a hat.

In Jerusalem and in Tzfat, as well as on Shabbat, men should consider wearing slacks and a polo or button down shirt; women should wear a nice outfit, either a skirt or pants, that cover the knees and a top with sleeves below the elbow.

For women – have an easy, packable skirt, scarf and light shawl for covering up in Israel’s holy places. Throw it in your bag in the morning and you’re ready for whatever stops you make.

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Expensive jewelry, electronics and other valuables should be kept to a minimum. If you bring any of these items, please pack them, your passport and a sufficient supply of any prescription medications you are taking, in your carry-on luggage. Once in Israel, we suggest placing your valuables in the hotel safe.

***How much*** ***luggage can I take?***

Transatlantic generally flights allow one (1) checked piece of luggage per person and one (1) carry-on bag. Please check your carrier’s regulations as to the weight and size of the bags.

Security checks are routinely carried out for your protection and safety. Expect to be asked about the contents of your luggage – whether you packed your bags yourself and were they in a supervised place before reaching the airport. Do not take any mail, packages or unknown items from anyone before or after arriving at the airport.

***What spending*** ***money will I need?***

That depends on how much you like to spend. ;-) The New Israeli Shekel (NIS) is Israel's legal tender; you can change money at the airport. Credit cards are widely accepted, as are most bank ATM cards at Israeli banks (note – you will need a 4-digit pin).

Meals on your own can range from $5 to $20, depending on your tastes. Shopping and gift prices can also vary. While you can change money at the airport and at the hotels, most ATMS work and give you the best exchange rate, as does MasterCard, Visa and American Express. Check your credit card companies, though, as they often charge foreign transaction fees (except American Express Gold/Platinum, Capital One, and select other cards).

***What’s the deal with*** ***electricity?***

Electrical current in Israel runs on 220 V.  For personal appliances from the USA like a hairdryer or curling iron, you will need a convertor.  For small electronics like phone chargers, laptops or iPod chargers, a plug adaptor is all you need (like the one pictured here).

***What will the*** ***weather be like?***

Israel enjoys long, warm, dry summers (April-October) and generally mild winters (November-March) with somewhat drier, cooler weather in hilly regions, such as Jerusalem and Safed. Rainfall is relatively heavy in the north and center of the country, with much less in the northern Negev and almost negligible amounts in the southern areas.

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Regional conditions vary considerably, with humid summers and mild winters on the coast; dry summers and moderately cold winters in the hill regions; hot dry summers and pleasant winters in the Jordan Valley; and year-round semi-desert conditions in the Negev.

Weather extremes range from occasional winter snowfall in the mountain regions to periodic oppressively hot dry winds that send temperatures soaring, particularly in spring and autumn. The good news is that we travel on luxury, air-conditioned and heated buses throughout the trip.

Table of average temperatures in major cities in Israel [https://weather.com/weather/monthly/l/Jerusalem+Israel+ISXX0010:1:IS](https://weather.com/weather/monthly/l/Jerusalem%2BIsrael%2BISXX0010%3A1%3AIS)



***What are*** ***gratuities like in Israel?***

Tipping is very personal and should be reflective of the service you receive. We cannot dictate the amount of tips you pay, but since so many people ask, we have provided some basic guidelines that we hope will help. Tips can be paid in Shekels or US Dollars.

On a group tour, it is customary to tip $10 to $13 per day to cover the guide, bus driver and hostess – for our trip, approximately $100. We will divide these tips for the group among key tour personnel.

If hiring a private guide, it is customary to tip your private Israel guide at the end of your tour. We suggest a minimum of $50 per day for a private car of up to 6 passengers. This is per car, not per person. This is only a recommendation and tips should be determined by the individual.

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In Jordan, if you are traveling on an extension there, it is customary to tip a guide a minimum of $10 per person per day.

Hotels: It is customary to tip hotel personnel (bellboys, chambermaids, etc) as you would anywhere when you travel. Tips to waiters and front desk personnel are at your discretion.

Private Drivers and Taxis: It is customary to tip private drivers if they have provided good service and been helpful. It is not necessary to tip taxi drivers, and we recommend simply “rounding up”.

Restaurants: It is customary to tip your wait staff. Please note that the tip cannot be added onto your bill or paid with a credit card. Tips must be paid in cash (shekels or dollars) and should be a percentage of your bill. Depending on the standard of the restaurant and quality of the service, tipping should be anywhere from 10 – 15%.

***Are there other helpful*** ***hints for me to know?***

* Always ask your taxi driver to turn on the meter in the city. It is the law, but they may try to negotiate a “fixed price” which will almost certainly be higher than the meter.
* Inter-city taxi travel is based on a fixed price – no meter necessary.
* There is a great app in Israel like Uber for ordering cabs: GetTaxi.
* Please carry drinking water with you at all times – the sun can be really hot.
* Please wear hats and sunscreen when you are out and about.
* Make sure your valuables are secure on your person as pickpockets can be an issue in crowded places (particularly in and around the Old City). Men should carry wallets in their front pockets. Purses or handbags should be carried across your shoulder and securely closed.

***What is the*** ***time difference between New Jersey and Israel?***

Israeli Standard Time is seven hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time, U.S.A.

***Are there helpful*** ***phrases I should know?***

Shalom Hello, goodbye, peace

Todah Thank you

B’vakasha Please, your welcome

Slicha Pardon me

Boker tov Good morning

Laila tov Good night

Malon Hotel

Monit Taxi

Kama zeh oleh? How much does this cost?

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***What are other links to*** ***explore what Israel is like?***

Visit the Israel Virtual Experience online: <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/vie/vietoc.html>

General Israel travel info from Frommers: <http://www.frommers.com/destinations/israel/>

A great way to explore Israel in the news:

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-inside/>

Israel’s history in maps:

<http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/AboutIsrael/Maps/Pages/Israel%20in%20Maps.aspx>

A good resource for exploring social and other issues facing Israel:

<http://makomisrael.org/>

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