



WOMEN'S

MISSION

TO ISRAEL

WHAT TO WATCH

UJA WOMEN'S
PHILANTHROPY

This curated guide presents a selection of films and series that will prepare you for your visit to Israel. From celebrated dramas that capture the Israeli spirit to essential documentaries that contextualize recent events, these productions provide a comprehensive portrait of the land and its people. This viewing experience will not only enhance your appreciation for the sites you will see but also for the multifaceted society that defines Israel today.

**Hebrew is the main language. Subtitles available.*

TELEVISION

*Shtisel** (2013-2021)

Shitsel, starring Emmy-nominated actress Shira Haas, follows the daily struggles of a large ultra-Orthodox family in Jerusalem, where the strict Haredi customs that most of the family members follow are in contrast against those open to a more secular lifestyle. Praised for its innovative and authentic portrayal of ultra-Orthodox Jews, the series was picked up by Netflix in 2018 for global streaming. An American adaptation titled *Emmis* is currently in development with Amazon Studios, focusing on a family in Brooklyn, New York.

*Fauda** (2015-)

Meaning “chaos” in Arabic, *Fauda* is a political thriller that depicts both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This suspenseful and action-packed drama follows a counter-terrorism unit as they pursue various terrorists, offering unprecedented access to the psychological and operational realities of counter-terrorism efforts. The series was created by Lior Raz, who also stars as the lead, and Avi Issacharoff, using their own experiences as a basis for the show.

Tehran (2020-)

From Apple TV+, *Tehran* follows Tamar Rabinyan, an Israeli Iranian Mossad agent, who must return to her place of birth—Tehran—to disable a nuclear reactor. The series, which won Emmy nominations, showcases Israel’s intelligence capabilities and the regional threats that influence the country’s strategic thinking, providing an entertaining vehicle for understanding the region’s complex geopolitics. Oscar-nominated actress Glenn Close joined the cast in season 2, and award-winning Hugh Laurie stars in the third season not yet released.

The Spy (2019)

Based on the life of Israeli spy Eli Cohen, this miniseries takes place in the years leading up to the Six-Day War between Israel and Syria. It follows Cohen’s infiltration of Syria’s Ministry of Defense by assuming a new identity and becoming a close confidant of many in the Syrian government. This tense thriller stars Sacha Baron Cohen and was created by Gideon Raff, who developed the TV show *Homeland*.

*Prisoners of War** (2009-2012)

Known in Hebrew as *Hatufim*, this series follows three Israeli men as they return home after 17 years in captivity in Lebanon. As they struggle to reintegrate and move on, discrepancies in their stories call for an investigation into what they might be hiding. Providing insights into how military experiences shape Israeli society and family relationships, the show explores trauma, rehabilitation, and the psychological costs of war. Creator, writer, and director Gideon Raff adapted this into the hit TV show *Homeland*.

*Our Boys** (2019)

This difficult but moving HBO miniseries dramatizes the tragic events of the summer of 2014, beginning with the kidnapping and murder of three Israeli teenagers by Hamas militants. The national outcry that followed culminated in the revenge killing of a Palestinian teenager and, soon after, the war in Gaza. Told through a mix of dramatization and documentary-style realism, *Our Boys* examines how cycles of violence consume ordinary families and deepen divisions within Israeli society itself. Sparking almost immediate debate upon its release—both praised and criticized for its unflinching perspective—its relevance endures, offering a reminder of the human cost of hatred, grief, and revenge.

*The Beauty Queen of Jerusalem** (2021-)

This series depicts the life of the Armoza family, from the Ottoman Empire to Israel’s War of Independence. With the plot taking place over two storylines, the series highlights the family’s highs and lows, in both the past and present. This series is based on the novel of the same name, written by Sarit Yishai Levy.

MOVIES

*Waltz with Bashir** (2008)

Part documentary, part animated drama, *Waltz with Bashir* explores a veteran’s recovered memories of the 1982 Lebanon War, as he interviews fellow veterans and struggles to reconstruct his own experience. This film is a must-watch, providing crucial context for understanding Israel’s security challenges and the psychological impact of war. Premiering at the Cannes Film Festival, where it was nominated for the Palm d’Or award, *Waltz with Bashir* went on to win the Golden Globe for Best Foreign Language Film.

*A Tale of Love and Darkness** (2015)

Written and directed by Natalie Portman, who also stars as the main character, this American-Israeli film focuses on Fania, a mother struggling to raise her son in Jerusalem during the creation of the State of Israel. Amidst the backdrop of political change and the growing pains that come with the birth of a new country, Fania also struggles with bipolar disorder. Though filmed predominantly in Jerusalem, sets include Tel Aviv and various *kibbutzim*.

Shoshana (2023)

Directed by Michael Winterbottom, *Shoshana* is a thriller set in Tel Aviv during the late 1930s and early 1940s under British rule. The film follows the forbidden love between Tom Wilkin, a British police officer, and Shoshana Borochoy, daughter of a Zionist pioneer and a member of the *Haganah*. Their relationship unfolds against a backdrop of escalating tensions between Jewish defense groups, British authorities, and Arab resistance, capturing a volatile moment in the struggle for a Jewish state. Blending fact and fiction, the film portrays both the idealism and the fractures within the Zionist movement, while also highlighting Britain’s complicated role in Mandatory Palestine. Widely praised for its intelligence and urgency, *Shoshana* offers a gripping window into a pivotal and turbulent chapter of Israel’s pre-state history.

*Live and Become** (2005)

This French-language film tells the story of Schlomo, a small Ethiopian Christian boy, who escapes a refugee camp and grows up in Israel by pretending to be Jewish. After his mother places him with a Jewish woman about to be airlifted to Israel during Operation Moses, Schlomo is forced to adopt a new Jewish identity. However, as an adult he must face the choices he’s made and lies that he told to protect his secret. This film was runner-up for People’s Choice Award at the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF).

*Ajami** (2009)

Oscar-nominated and co-directed by Palestinian filmmaker Scandar Copti and Israeli filmmaker Yaron Shani, *Ajami* offers a rare offers a rare glimpse into the complex coexistence of Arabs and Jews in Jaffa’s Ajami neighbourhood. Told through interwoven stories of love, crime, poverty, and survival, the film blends fiction with raw realism, using mostly non-professional actors and multilingual dialogue—a mix of Hebrew, Arabic, and English. Praised for its layered storytelling and uncompromising honesty, *Ajami* is a landmark of Israeli-Palestinian cinema, offering a window into the multicultural reality found in Israeli cities, where Arab and Jewish communities navigate daily life together.

Golda (2023)

This biographical drama focuses on the immense pressures faced by Prime Minister Golda Meir during the 1973 Yom Kippur War, played by Academy Award winning Helen Mirren. With Israel facing potential annihilation from a surprise Arab coalition attack, Meir must navigate overwhelming military and political pressures, a skeptical and divided cabinet, and fraught negotiations with U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger (Liev Schreiber). While capturing the larger sweep of history, *Golda* also focuses intimately on the personal toll of leadership—the physical strain, the loneliness of power, and the enormous responsibility of making life-and-death decisions under impossible circumstances. Both a political thriller and a character study, the film sheds light on one of Israel’s most perilous moments and the woman who bore its heaviest burden.

*Sand Storm** (2016)

Set in a Bedouin village in southern Israel, this award-winning drama follows a mother and daughter whose struggles with tradition, patriarchy, and forbidden love reveal the clash between old and new. Filmed in Arabic, it offers a rare glimpse into the lives of Israel’s Bedouin community, providing insights into Israel’s diverse populations beyond the Jewish majority. The film received international acclaim, including the Grand Jury Prize at Sundance and Israel’s Ophir Award for Best Film.

*Footnote** (2011)

Written and directed by acclaimed filmmaker Joseph Cedar, *Footnote* is an Oscar-nominated dramedy that blends biting wit with emotional poignancy. It follows a father and son, both Talmudic scholars in Jerusalem, whose bitter academic rivalry escalates when the father is mistakenly awarded a prestigious prize intended for his son. What begins as satire about the insular world of Israeli academia quickly evolves into a moving reflection on ambition, recognition, jealousy, and the fragile bonds of family.

ESSENTIAL VIEWINGS ON OCTOBER 7 AND ITS AFTERMATH

These documentaries, created in the immediate aftermath of the horrific events of October 7 and in the months that followed, serve as vital acts of witness. Through raw footage, survivor testimony, and stories of resilience, they preserve the truth of October 7 and its human cost. While difficult to watch, they offer essential context for understanding Israel today: a resilient country still grieving, still healing, and still standing in defiance of terror.

October 7th (2023)

Produced in the immediate aftermath of the attacks, this documentary special compiles raw footage, intercepted communications, and early survivor accounts to present an unfiltered look at the brutality of Hamas's assault. One of the first films shown to international journalists and policymakers, it remains a stark, visceral record of the massacre's scale and savagery.

Screams Before Silence (2024)

Presented by Sheryl Sandberg, former COO of Meta, this bilingual (English and Hebrew) documentary investigates the gender-based violence of October 7. Through testimony from survivors, hostages, and first responders, it confronts the rape, sexual assault, and sexual torture perpetrated by Hamas—atrocities long denied or underreported—ensuring that women's voices are heard and validated on the global stage.

We Will Dance Again* (2024)

This film tells the story of October 7th, focusing on the Nova Music Festival and its aftermath, following survivors as they grapple with trauma, grief, and recovery. Beyond recounting the horrors of that day, it highlights resilience and defiance, showing how a devastated community rebuilds with a shared message of hope: that joy, music, and life will continue despite terror.

The Road Between Us: The Ultimate Rescue (2025)

Canadian documentarian Barry Avrich tells the extraordinary true story of retired Israeli general Noam Tibon, who set out from Tel Aviv on October 7, 2023, to rescue his son Amir and family trapped in their home in kibbutz Nahal Oz as Hamas attackers closed in. Blending firsthand interviews with raw footage from that day, the film unfolds like a rescue thriller while capturing the terror, courage, and resilience of a family under siege. Avrich chronicles not only one man's daring rescue but also the broader tragedy of October 7, which claimed over 1,200 lives and saw 251 people abducted. The film's controversial removal and reinstatement at the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) underscored its raw power and timely significance, sparking both protest and standing ovations.

The Children of October 7 (2025)

Created by Jewish American performer and activist Montana Tucker, this deeply personal documentary gives voice to Israel's youngest survivors of the Hamas massacre. Through intimate, unscripted conversations with children aged 9 to 17, the film captures harrowing firsthand accounts of hiding under murdered parents, of abduction into Gaza, of loss that defies comprehension. Without narration or political framing, the children's voices stand alone, offering raw testimony marked by both devastation and resilience.

