

Before You Go ...

What every believer needs to know before traveling to Israel



Are you planning to visit Israel or thinking about it? As the owner of Sar-El Tours & Conferences, I have been providing travel services to Christian visitors to Israel for almost 30 years. Here are a few suggestions that will help you prepare for your visit, which for every Bible believer is a truly life-changing experience.

Group On

An organized tour with a licensed guide is the most effective way to see as many of the interesting and significant biblical sites as your time in the Holy Land allows. It ensures that all your travel needs are met: hotels, meals, itinerary, air-conditioned bus and expert guide. Moreover, you travel with people who have similar views and beliefs. Look for an agency that provides what we call “regular tours” for individuals who want to join a group.

When to Go

Determine which season is best for you to travel. **Summers** can be quite hot, and the coastal and Galilee hotels are very expensive and filled with Israeli and European vacationers enjoying the beaches and outdoor activities.

Autumn is a popular time for Christian tours to Israel. For the most part, the weather is mild and dry. Many exciting activities are held during the Feast of Tabernacles (or “Succoth”; from late September to late October) that Christian tourists enjoy participating in. Hotels are more expensive during the Jewish holiday period of Rosh Hashanah (New Year)

and Succoth, but immediately afterward the rates become reasonable, which is one reason this season is so popular for Christian visitors.

Winter (December through February) is actually the slowest time of the year for the Christian tourist. Yes, groups come during the Christmas and New Year holidays, but other than these times, hotel rates and airfares are lower and the sites are less crowded. Plan to dress in layers during this season. By January you will experience the beauty of the budding almond trees and the beginning of the wildflower season.

Spring (March through May) seems to be the most popular time for Christian tours—other than Passover through Easter, when rates are higher. In March, the landscape is green and wildflowers are still in bloom. By April and May there is less risk of rain and the days are longer than in the winter.

The uniqueness of each season means there is much the visitor to Israel can experience. Trust me, you'll benefit from being there any time of the year.

Don't Forget Your ...

Make sure your passport is valid for at least six months from the time of your arrival. The Israeli currency is the *shekel*, which currently is quite strong. Since most large purchases can be made in U.S. dollars or by credit card, you don't need to exchange many *shekels* before you come to Israel. It's best to exchange a few hundred dollars after you arrive.

If you come to Israel on your own, you still have plenty of options. Throughout the country you'll find many interesting and unique boutique hotels and bed and breakfast inns (often called *simmers*).

You could rent a car—our roads are good and improving all the time—but driving in the large cities of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem can be a little confusing. Consider hiring a private guide

with a vehicle or participating in one-day tours, which are available in all the major cities.

So Much to See

Most visitors are surprised at how much there is to see in this small but diverse country: from the beaches and ultramodern coastal cities to the farm lands and biblical sites among the rolling hills of Galilee; from the desert where prophets received revelation to the inspiring sites of Jerusalem; from the Mount of Olives to the Western Wall to the Garden Tomb.

Whenever and wherever in Israel, you'll find something to see, enjoy and be inspired by. I look forward to welcoming you here and I wish you *shalom* ("peace") as you prepare for your personal pilgrimage to the land of the Bible.

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