

Special Travel Section: The Holy Land

Galilee: Walking in His Footsteps



When retracing the primary region of Jesus' ministry, don't skip these sites

Israel's Galilee

region is often a Holy Land pilgrim's favorite, especially for those

who want to walk where Jesus lived and taught. This is where the bulk of

Christ's ministry occurred, where He gathered most of His followers and

where He performed more than 20 miracles.

The absence of modern development makes it easy to visualize first-century life. Solitude and meditation come

easily, especially if you read Gospel accounts as you enjoy the mountain

and water views around the Sea of Galilee, an inland lake known as

Kinneret in on the western shore is lodging central with modern hotels and restaurants near the water. And after visiting

the following sites, don't forget the most popular edible is tilapia,

known as St. Peter's fish—a great meal finale to a contemplative lake float.

Galilee Cruise

Consider a boat launch from Kibbutz

Ginosar as a meaningful beginning or finale to your Galilee tour. But stop first at Yigal Allon Museum and observe the remains of the ancient fishing vessel that was revealed to some local fishermen in 1986 during a draught, then dated and preserved with modern methods. Though nobody knows who rode in this 2,000-year-old boat made of 12 different woods, it has become known as the “Jesus boat” and sits above a glistening blue-green faux sea.

Board your vessel for a leisurely water glide and contemplate the history that courses through these waters.

Operators often slow boat engines so cruisers can listen to their spiritual leader’s teaching and devotional time as they float past the many historical and spiritual sites along the Galilee shores. Some cruisers take a basket for lunch or dinner onboard. Sunrise and sunset cruises are especially memorable.

Capernaum



This ancient fishing village was Jesus’ ministry hub (see Matt. 4:13; John 6:24), and its ruins now include Israel’s best-preserved third- and fourth-century marble synagogue.

Capernaum was active from the second century B.C. to the seventh century and was home for up to 1,500 residents. Ruins of the white

synagogue

are from the fourth century, but the first-century synagogue that formed

the foundation for the later edifice was built of black basalt and

dates to Jesus' time. Luke indicates the early building was built by the

centurion's slave whom Jesus healed (see Luke 7:5). Jesus also raised

from the dead the daughter of the synagogue's leader (see Luke 8:49-53).

The village was obscured after the 11th

century and rediscovered in the 19th century. Major excavations occurred

in the latter 20th century. Today visitors see stone foundations of

early homes and other buildings, inscriptions by early pilgrims,

decorated stone carvings and the synagogue. Early Christians built a

fourth-century house church over the House of Peter, then a large

octagonal Byzantine church in the fifth century. After excavators

discovered fish hooks, it was declared the actual house of Simon Peter. A

contemporary Catholic church now sits astride the house ruins.

Mount of Beatitudes



"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for

theirs is the kingdom of heaven." With these words Jesus began His

Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5) on a stunning hillside location overlooking the Sea of Galilee. Christians have visited this traditional

site since the fourth century, when even the Spanish pilgrim Egeria (c. 318) wrote about it and the Church of the Loaves and Fishes in her travel narratives.

Franciscans manage the enclave today that includes gardens and the black-domed Church of the Beatitudes, built in 1937 by the Italian government to replace the Byzantine original whose ruins are in the vicinity. The hill forms a natural amphitheater that slopes to the lake side and amplifies the speaker's voice. It's possible Jesus stood at the bottom of the hill and spoke to the crowd who sat above Him. The setting has lake views and is a wonderful place to contemplate biblical teachings.

Kursi



The Gospels tell of Jesus healing a madman after sailing across the Sea of Galilee and landing in the southeast corner of the lake (see Luke 8:26-33). He drove the man's demons into a herd of swine that "ran violently down the steep place into the lake." The Talmud text lists towns with pagan worship and includes Kursi as a gentile town during Jesus' times—which explains why pigs were in the vicinity (because pork is forbidden for practicing

Jews). Located on the east shore of the Galilee, Kursi sits at the foothills of the Golan Heights. Ruins of a sixth-century Byzantine church and monastery mark the spot, which is now a national park.

Tabgha

Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, asked Jesus: "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?" (John 6:9). In Jesus' hands, the repast turned into a blessing for no fewer than 5,000 people (not counting women and children). At Tabgha, the traditional location of this miraculous feeding, visitors see a commemorating mosaic on the floor of the modern Church of the Multiplication that was built in 1935 over ruins of a Byzantine church. The mosaic floor from that church shows a basket and fish and is one of the most beautiful art pieces in the Holy Land, dating to the fourth and fifth centuries.



Where Is Jesus' Tomb?

Two Jerusalem locations claim to be Jesus' burial site. You

make the call.

Some say

the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is for Catholics and the Garden Tomb for Protestants. Both are in Jerusalem, and each site is where pilgrims contemplate Christ's death and resurrection. Yet they offer different experiences.

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre has drawn pilgrims since the fourth century, when Constantine declared Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. He built the original church on this site. Many believe it is the site of Jesus' empty tomb and His crucifixion.

Today's church retains some of the elements of that first church, but many additions and changes have been made through the centuries as it was assaulted by conquering rulers and then rebuilt. Crusaders added a facade in the 12th century that stands today. Inside are multiple altars, icons, chapels and other elements placed by the various governing communities—mostly ethnic Orthodox including Armenian, Syrian and Coptic.

The Garden Tomb

(pictured), believed to be the one that belonged to Joseph of Arimathea (see John 19:38), is a 19th century addition to the pilgrimage circuit.

European theologians disputed the traditional tomb site inside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, declaring “Skull Hill” (or Golgotha) the authentic place. British Anglicans organized monetary and administrative resources to acquire and develop the site, and a U.K. group remains overseer today. Visitors may enter the tomb and meditate and worship in the gardens.

Pilgrims have visited both sites for centuries, and each affords spiritual connections. A complete tour of Christian sites in Jerusalem would include both.

Israel's Pray-and-Play Cities



Jerusalem and Tel Aviv are polar opposite cities yet perfectly reflect Israel today

Israel's major cities could not be more different, guides tell visitors. “People go to Jerusalem to pray, to Tel Aviv to party,” they say.

There's more than just praying and partying to do in these metropolises, however. Unfortunately, many Christian travelers miss much of Israel's sophisticated arts and culture scene. Yet there are many rewards in active play and cultural

satisfaction for those who venture off the well-trodden pilgrim track.

Jerusalem

With its important holy sites such as the Via Dolorosa (Way of the Cross), Temple Mount, Mount of Olives, Garden of Gethsemane and numerous churches that have been added over the centuries, Jerusalem remains the centerpiece of a believer's journey to Israel. The rhythm of daily life turns on prayer, usually channeled through the city's Christian, Muslim and Jewish communities. Jerusalem is also the seat of government for the state and an important academic center. This Golden City, Eternal City and City of David also offers a rich array of leisure activities, including museums, international art festivals, concerts and shopping.

It's really several cities in one: West Jerusalem is the modern city, and has been a Jewish enclave since the early 19th century. East Jerusalem is primarily Arab in population and culture. In the center of these contrasting sides is the Old City, where pilgrims spend much of their time.

Take a walk along the Ramparts Walk above the 16th century city walls and contemplate the seven gates—including the Dung Gate, Zion Gate, Jaffa Gate and the commanding Damascus Gate.

Facing the Mount of Olives, the Golden Gate has been sealed since 1530 and is said to be the one through which the Messiah will one day enter Jerusalem.

Wander the stalls of the Mahaneh Yehuda market, the Old City bazaar or the ancient Cardo for some local color and souvenirs. Shops along cobblestone streets and lanes, cafes and pedestrian malls are all good places to find crafts and fine art, along with a local snack to replenish your shopping energy.

Tel Aviv



Less than an hour west of Jerusalem, the “new city” of Tel Aviv cuts a very different profile. Along its nearly nine miles of turquoise Mediterranean coastline, people lounge next to palm-lined boulevards that stretch to the sea while boogie-boarding beach bums enjoy their second home three seasons of the year. Modern hotels and outdoor cafes service the beachgoers. Think Miami in the Middle East.

Only 100 years ago, Jewish immigrants staked out Tel Aviv as a sort of suburb to ancient Jaffa, the port city mentioned several times in the Bible and faith pilgrims’ arrival point for centuries. Downtown Tel Aviv looks like a miniature New York City, with tall buildings and real estate prices to match. Hip oozes

from its skyline and 'hoods. This is Israel's engine of commerce and center of contemporary art and culture.

Tel Aviv's modern districts include its White City of Bauhaus architecture brought in the 1930s by German Jewish architects who arrived in Palestine to escape the Nazi regime. The area has been declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site to promote preservation and restoration of the approximately 4,000 buildings from that period.

Tel Aviv is Israel's center of entertainment and culture, with nearly three dozen centers for performing arts. In fact, the official Tel Aviv Performing Arts Center is home to the Israeli Opera, where Placido Domingo was former house tenor. The city is also home to the Israel Ballet and many other theaters.

Where Was Jesus Baptized?



Exploring the sites along the Jordan River

While there is scholarly agreement that Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River, there is continuing discussion about the exact site. Some believe it

was on what
is now the Israeli side, just south of the Allenby Bridge near
Qasir
al-Yahud, a military district and location of an Eastern
Orthodox
monastery.

Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI have
visited another site on the eastern bank in Jordan called
Bethany Beyond
the Jordan, which the Vatican now has on its approved list of
pilgrim
sites.

Bethany Beyond the Jordan emerged in 1996
as excavators discovered Byzantine church ruins while clearing
minefields as a result of the 1994 peace treaty between Jordan
and
Israel. A gilded memorial Greek Orthodox church now stands on
the site,
and other worship traditions—including Russian Orthodox,
Baptist and
Roman Catholic—are adding churches. Visitors may worship
beneath an
outdoor structure at riverside and baptize from a font of
filtered river
water.

Advocates for both baptismal sites point
to the historic mosaic map in Madaba, Jordan, as reference. As
the
oldest surviving original cartographic depiction of Jerusalem
and the
Holy Land, it may have been used by early pilgrims and shows
both
baptism locations: western bank as Bethabara (House of the
Ford, or of
the Crossing); eastern bank as Aenon or Sapsaphas (Place of

the
Willows). Also, many scholars say the Jordan River has changed
course
many times over the centuries, so the precise spot where Jesus
was
baptized is difficult to identify.

For modern pilgrims less concerned about
historical accuracy than experiencing surroundings similar to
Jesus'
time, Yardenit ("little Jordan"), at the south end of the Sea
of
Galilee, is a serene and popular baptismal site. Some visitors
experience baptism for the first time here; others experience
a renewal
baptism. Located on a leafy and serene bend in the Jordan
River near
major Galilee holy sites, Yardenit offers clothing and
changing rooms
for baptismal ceremonies, snacks and even souvenir video
baptismal
recordings.

No Passport? No Worries!

*If you can't go overseas, visit these U.S. hotspots dedicated
to entertaining, educating and inspiring believers*

1) Creation Museum (Petersburg, Ky.)



Biblical characters and animals bring
millennia of history alive in this "walk through history"
museum that

counters evolution promotion by natural history museums. Enjoy giant animatronic dinosaurs, computer-generated visual effects, a planetarium and lots more on this 49-acre, multimillion-dollar site that advocates Scripture as the source of "true history of the universe." Among the Creation Museum's newest features is an interactive "Knee-High Museum" of children's exhibits where kids can explore Critter Canyon, touch a dinosaur bone and have questions answered by an animatronic Noah in the "Voyage of the Ark" room.

2) Holy Land Experience (*Orlando, Fla.*)



Taking visitors back 2,000 years and 7,000 miles to the land of the Bible, the Holy Land Experience uses sights, sounds and tastes to stimulate the senses for a memorable journey. Encounter live shows that bring the gospel message to life; a Jerusalem street market that resembles an ancient Middle Eastern marketplace; the Dead Sea Caves, replicas of those at Qumran; the Garden Tomb; and the Temple of the Great King, called the Herodian Temple in its day. Students of the Word won't want to miss the Scriptorium, a unique collection of biblical artifacts and antiquities such as scrolls, manuscripts and Bibles, many of which are rare or the only known copy

in existence.

3) Branson, Mo.



Despite a population of only 6,000, this small town in the Ozarks houses a staggering 36 theaters and more than 80 live shows. Pick a type of museum—from cars to toys to dinosaurs to Titanic memorabilia—and the “wholesome family entertainment capital” probably has it. Don’t miss faith-centric attractions such as the Living Word National Bible Museum or Broadway-style shows such as *Two From Galilee* and *The Promise*. Plus, only 50 miles away in Eureka Springs, Ark., is The New Great Passion Play and the New Holy Land Tour.

Jerusalem’s 5 Must-See Museums

Among the historical sites in this religious epicenter, here are five you shouldn’t miss

1. Bible Lands Museum In

its collection of artifacts depicting cultures and civilizations through the early Christian era, this museum presents ancient Egypt, Sumer, Assyria and Babylon, as well as the civilizations of Greece and Rome.

2. Israel Museum The



largest, most important cultural institution includes the Shrine of the Book, a repository for the Dead Sea Scrolls. A recent \$100 million renovation expanded the exhibits of Judaica and international art to include 500,000 objects. Of special interest to Christians: a scale model of first-century Jerusalem; the Pontius Pilate stone discovered in 1963; and the Ossuary of Caiaphas, the high priest who condemned Jesus to death.

3. Yad Vashem Jerusalem's

memorial to the 6 million victims of the Holocaust not only documents the politics and events that led to the mid-20th century atrocity, it also poignantly captures victims' stories through interactive exhibits and literally *millions* of documents, photographs, films and other memorabilia stored both onsite and online. The memorial to the 1.5 million Jewish children who perished in the genocide is particularly memorable.

4. Tower of David Museum A

dramatic setting in the ancient citadel first constructed by Herod the Great, this museum is about Jerusalem's long, eventful history. Utilizing advanced technologies, the museum presents history of the Canaanites and Hebrews, Greeks and Romans, Crusaders, Muslims,

Turks,
British and Israelites. Walk along the citadel towers for
breathtaking
views.

5. Temple Institute This

Old City museum provides insight into the Holy Temple of
Jerusalem and
the dream held by some of a temple rebuild. The “Treasures of
the
Temple” exhibition displays reconstructed, authentic and
functional
sacred gold, copper and silver vessels that have been created
for use in
the priestly service of the rebuilt temple. Original works of
art that
depict life in temple times are also on exhibit.

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