

Walking the Text in the Promised Land

- WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW -

Is it Safe to Travel to Israel?

This is inevitably one of the first questions I get asked. If there wasn't an enormously high degree of safety, I would not be leading trips to Israel. I would not want to shoulder that kind of weight. Although it is impossible to promise 100% safety, travel in Israel is very safe. We always travel with an Israeli guide who serves as my assistant. He is always aware of what's going on in the country. If there is even a hint of potential danger, we will simply avoid the area. We do not take chances! Overall, the likelihood of any kind of danger is very, very slim. In fact, everyone who returns from these trips remarks, "I never once felt unsafe." In addition, I have personally lived in Israel and I know the country. We won't go anywhere I wouldn't take my kids!

Typical Day

A normal day begins with a wake up call at 6:00 a.m., breakfast at 6:30, devotions at 7:00 and by 7:10 we're on our way! In order to accomplish what God sets out for us to experience, the majority of our days involve moderate to strenuous hiking. We travel to our various sites by bus where our hikes will begin. It is during these hikes and at these sites where God's word is studied in its historical, cultural, geographical, and Jewish contexts. Lunch tends to fall between 1:00-2:00pm, and will be served on location. Since lunch can come late in the day, it is highly recommended that you carry snacks with you. Eating small snacks throughout the day is best for keeping energy stored up in the body. It is recommended that snacks (without chocolate - it melts) like trail mix, granola bars, nuts, dried fruit, crackers, or protein/energy bars be taken along. At the end of the day, we will arrive at our hotel for a wonderful dinner and welcomed sleep. We stay at hotels with wonderful breakfast and dinner buffets and great rooms. At the end of a long day, we want you to have a great meal, a soothing shower, and a much needed night's rest. We want you to be able to regroup because we're going to do it all over again the next day. Generally speaking, you should be able to get at least 8 hours of sleep per night if you desire.

Heat & Drink

The heat is a very real concern in Israel, no matter what time of year you plan on going. It will be hot! The rainy season is mid-October through mid-April. May through October temperatures will be warm and dry ranging from the low 80's up to 115 degrees. Lows are usually in the 60's. It is very important that you drink a lot of water everyday (sufficient water will be provided for all daytime excursions). Dehydration develops from an excessive loss of water from the body. Extreme environmental conditions will increase fluid losses (heat, humidity, lack of wind, etc.). It is critical to keep hydrated before, during, and after our daily excursions. A steady intake of fluid is most beneficial. Consuming a large amount of fluid in a short period of time is not the cure for dehydration and is stressful on the body. It is recommended that you bring some kind of powdered electrolyte replenishment mix, such as Gatorade, Powerade, Propel, etc. I usually have one 32 oz bottle of electrolyte drink with me for every hike. It is also recommended that you limit caffeine intake, and you may want to start doing so a week or two before the trip.

Happy Feet

You will need a good, sturdy pair of hiking boots or shoes that have great ankle support. Obtain them well in advance and break in thoroughly before departure. Having a high quality, well broken in pair of boots/shoes is essential for benefiting the most from this experience! Many people wear boots. I normally wear a low-top hiking shoe or an extremely tough trail runner shoe. Please find a boot/shoe that your feet are happy in. Your shoes will be one of the most important items you have for this trip. Extra cushioned insoles are also helpful.

In addition, you may want to steer clear of shoes that are “waterproof” or have GoreTex. These shoes don’t allow your feet to breath, and since it will be hot in Israel, you need your feet to breath. Also, there will likely be times when we get our feet wet. GoreTex or “waterproof” shoes will keep the water (moisture) in and will not allow your feet to dry well. Under these conditions, blisters and Athlete’s foot generally occur.

Physical Requirements & Training

As you get ready for our trip, please understand there is no level ground in Israel, and you should prepare for 4 to 7 miles of moderate to strenuous hiking/climbing/walking each day of the trip. **Physical training (long before our departure) is a must for this trip.** I can’t emphasize this enough. The first thing that goes when you become physically tired is your mind. The more physically prepared you are, the better your mind will be. The trip will be more meaningful, educational and fun if you prepare in advance for the activity level you will experience. I highly recommend physical training that includes cardio and strength training. Stair climbing (actual stairs or machine), lunges, bike riding, running, and long walks are all very good. Additionally, doing some hiking and climbing of stairs with your hip pack (including your Bible, notes, water bottles, etc.) is good practice for the body to recognize the additional weight it needs to carry on the trip.

I realize this information on the physical demands may be intimidating for some of you. Please don’t be overwhelmed by this. I have been on trips with sophomores in High School all the way up to people in their late sixties. Yes, the days are difficult, but I have found that people are always able to do more than they think they can. We’ll work together and we’ll all get through it. The point is not the destination, but the journey. So get in the best shape as you can, and then let the group carry you along.

You should consult your physician concerning these requirements and any medications or conditions which may have an impact on your ability to participate fully. Prescription drugs you anticipate using during the trip should be packed both in your suitcase and your carry-on. We suggest you bring along a written prescription as well, it can be filled if needed. Please contact your health provider to check your coverage when traveling outside the United States. Traveling to the lands of the Bible requires no immunizations though you’ll want to be sure your tetanus shot is current.

What to Bring

Please follow carefully the “Suggested Packing List” that you have received. This list will help you know what to bring. Please keep in mind the trip is very casual and expect to wear shorts and a t-shirt everyday. Also, please be prepared to bring a “modesty kit,” meaning long pants and something

to cover your shoulders, as there are several religious sites that require modest dress. A pair of zip-off pants is helpful on days where pants are required for modesty. More information is provided in the “Suggested Packing List.”

Gear and Gadgets

The modern age has its blessings and its curses. With all the great toys out there, it is tempting to want the best, fastest and most sophisticated. Some people are likely to be slaves to their newest toy. Please think about bringing minimal electronic gear and gadgets (I know this will be hard for some). I am not saying forget the camera and all the rest, I’m just saying be careful. Make sure that your camera doesn’t control you. I will ask that NO cell phones, iPods, mp3 players or things of the like be brought with us during the day. Sometimes people experience an entire trip through their modern gear and not with their God-given five senses. Again, please refer to the “Suggested Packing List” for more information on what to bring. I am sorry but there is absolutely NO recording of any of the faith lessons (teachings) during the trip. This includes both recorders and video cameras. Thank you in advance for your understanding in this matter.

History and Geography

I will introduce you to the basics of historical geography during the course of our trip. It will be helpful to familiarize yourself with some of the basic maps provided in the study guide (will be sent to you). Please try and memorize pages 21, 22, 26, 38, 39, 63, 86, and 150. What may appear to be cold facts will be very helpful on-site. For further background on geography, look in a good study Bible or Bible atlas. In addition, please try and memorize the basic historical time periods on page 23. Trust me, it will help.

What To Read

In preparation for your upcoming Israel study experience, these are the readings I highly recommend. I realize it is a lot - do what you can. It is most important to focus on the readings from the Bible, but the additional readings will be very helpful to you as well.

Hebrew Scriptures: Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Psalms 120-134, Isaiah (40-66), Malachi
Time permitting: Joshua (1-11), Judges, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings

New Testament: The Gospels (if limited on time - read Matthew), Acts 1-12

Additional Readings: *The Source* ~ James Michener (historical fiction ... long but well worth it)
Our Father Abraham ~ Marvin Wilson (Chapters 8-15)

DO NOT watch any of Ray Vander Laan’s DVD’s *before* our experience (*please* trust me on this)

BE SURE TO watch Ray Vander Laan’s DVD’s *AFTER* our experience

*My list of recommended readings above are slightly different than what is listed on page 11 of your study guide. Please follow my list and not that of the study guide. Thank you.

Sh'ma

With great confidence I can say there was never a day in the life of Jesus, our Messiah, when he did not lift his voice to God in the saying of the Sh'ma. Although the Sh'ma is longer than what we'll recite on a daily basis, here is what I need you to memorize for our trip - in both the Hebrew & the English (this is the "Sh'ma" according to Jesus in Matthew 22:34-40).

Sh'ma Yis'ra'eil	Hear, O Israel,
Adonai Eloheinu	the LORD is our God,
Adonai echad.	the LORD alone.
Ve'ahav'ta et Adonai Elohekha	Love the Lord your God
b'khol le'vav'kha	with all your heart
uv'khol naf'she'kha	and with all your soul
uv'khol me'odekha.	and with all your might.
Ve'ahav'ta Re'akha Kamokha	And love your neighbor as yourself.

Receiving Your Gear

You will receive your hydration backpack, complete with a study guide, travel Bible, flashlight, and luggage tags roughly sixty days before the trip.

Additional Information

Please refer to the "Trip Brochure" and "Suggested Packing List" for any additional information you may need. Both of these are available at www.walkingthetext.com. Also, feel free to visit GTI's website at www.gtitours.net/studytours.html. If you have any additional questions, please contact Amy Holstege at (616) 396-1234 or amy@gtitours.net.

Abraham Joshua Heschel on the Bible (this is just bonus):

"Irrefutably, indestructibly, never wearied by time, the Bible wanders through the ages, giving itself with ease to all men [and women ☺], as if it belonged to every soul on earth. It speaks in every language and in every age. It benefits all the arts and does not compete with them. We all draw upon it, and it remains pure, inexhaustible and complete. In three thousand years it has not aged a day. It is a book that cannot die. Oblivion shuns its pages. Its power is not subsiding. In fact, it is still at the very beginning of its career, the full meaning of its content having hardly touched the threshold of our minds; like an ocean at the bottom of which countless pearls lie, waiting to be discovered, its spirit is still to be unfolded. Though its words seem plain and its idiom translucent, unnoticed meanings, undreamed of intimations break forth constantly. More than two thousand years of reading and research have not succeeded in exploring its full meaning. Today it is as if it had never been touched, never been seen, as if we had not even begun to read it."

[Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, pg. 242]