

ISRAEL STUDY TRIP

— February/March 2023 What You Need to Know —

SAFETY

Is it safe to travel to Israel? This is usually the first question I get asked. If there wasn't an enormously high degree of safety, I wouldn't be leading trips to Israel. I would not want to shoulder that kind of weight. Although it's impossible to guarantee 100% safety, travel in Israel is very safe. In fact, I partner with GTI Tours for all of my trips, and in GTI's 30+ years of existence (now doing over 60 trips a year), only 3 trips have ever been cancelled due to safety concerns. We travel with an Israeli guide who serves as my assistant, and he's aware of what's going on in the country. If there's even a hint of potential danger, we'll simply avoid the area. We do not take chances! Overall, the likelihood of any danger is slim. In fact, everyone who returns from one 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 four kids!

COVID

Currently, you do not need to be vaccinated to get into Israel. As we get closer to the trip, we'll let you know if there are any requirements related to COVID. If anything significant changes that will impact your travel, we'll let you know as soon as the information is made available.

TYPICAL DAY

A normal day begins with a wake up call at 6:00, breakfast at 6:30, devotions at 6:55, and then we're on our way! Most of our days involve moderate to strenuous hiking. Lunch tends to fall between Noon and 1:00 and will be served on location. Since lunch can come later in the day, it's highly recommended that you carry snacks with you. At the end of the day, we'll arrive at our hotel for dinner. 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 wonderful shower, and a much needed night's rest (generally speaking, you'll be able to get at least 8 hours per night).

WEATHER

The weather at this time of year is usually fantastic with averages in the 60's (sometimes 70's). We'll likely get some rain this time of year (you'll want a rain jacket and umbrella with you at all times). Because Israel's topography varies greatly, we could, however, experience temperatures anywhere from the high 40's up to the 80's. As we get closer to the trip, I'll be in contact about weather trends and what to expect for our trip.

SHOES/BOOTS

You will need a 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. 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.

PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS AND TRAINING

As you get ready for our trip, please understand there is no level ground in Israel, and you should prepare for 5 to 8 miles of 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. On every trip, I've had some admit they didn't train as much as they should have, and they deeply regret it. 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'll 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. To give you some litmus tests to see if you're able to do this trip, you must be able to: (1) walk/run 1 mile within 13 minutes, (2) walk/run 3 miles within 46 minutes, (3) ascend 20 flights of stairs (240 steps) without stopping, (4) descend 20 flights of stairs (240 steps) without significant joint pain. If you aren't able to do all of these, you will struggle on this trip.

Please consult your physician about these requirements and any medications or conditions that may impact your ability to fully 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 (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.

BATHROOMS

Approximately half of the bathroom breaks will be in nature. Any used toilet paper or feminine products will need to be packed out (bring a large zip lock bag). I know, not very glorious, but in order for us to experience many of the biblical sites, we'll need to do bathroom breaks this way. Obviously, there will be protected areas in nature for women separate from men.

WHAT TO BRING

Please follow carefully the “Suggested Packing List.” This list will help you know what to bring. Please keep in mind the trip is very casual and expect to wear shorts/pants and a t-shirt/fleece every day. 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.

GEAR AND GADGETS

Feel free to bring a digital camera, action camera, and/or your cell phone for taking pictures. I will ask that cell phones not be used for taking or making calls during the day. And a word of warning, please make sure your camera doesn't control you. Your camera is a servant, not a master. Sometimes people experience an entire trip through the lens of their camera, and they miss so much of the experience God has for them. Also, due to unfortunate situations in the past, there is NO recording (audio or video) of any of the teachings during the trip. You can record anything else, just not the teachings. Thank you for your understanding in this matter.

HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY

I'll introduce you to the basics of historical geography during our trip. Please familiarize yourself with some of the basic maps provided in the Maps Section of the study guide ahead of time.

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.

Old Testament: 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: Our Father Abraham - Marvin Wilson (Chapters 8-15)

SHEMA

With great confidence I can say there was never a day in the life of Jesus, when he did not lift his voice to God in the saying of the Shema. Although the Shema is longer than what we'll recite on a daily basis, here is what I'd like you to memorize for our trip - in both the Hebrew & the English (this is the “Shema” according to Jesus in Matthew 22:34-40). Please note I will be emailing you an audio recording of the Shema ahead of time so you can hear it audibly.

Sh'ma Yis'ra'eil
Adonai Eloheinu
Adonai echad.
Ve'ahav'ta et Adonai Elohekha
b'khol le'vav'kha
uv'khol naf'she'kha
uv'khol me'odekha.
Ve'ahav'ta Le're'akha Kamokha

Hear, O Israel,
the LORD is our God,
the LORD alone.
Love the Lord your God
with all your heart
and with all your soul
and with all your might.
And love your neighbor as yourself.

RECEIVING YOUR GEAR

You will receive your Osprey hydration backpack, complete with a study guide, notebook, travel Bible, and luggage tags approximately two to three weeks before trip departure.

NEEDING ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

If you have any additional questions about registration, flights or similar logistics, please contact Signe Koning of GTI Tours at (616) 396-1234 or at signe@gtitours.org. If you have any questions about anything else, please email be at brad@walkingthetext.com. Thank you!

ABRAHAM JOSHUA HESCHEL ON THE BIBLE (JUST A 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]