

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

ISRAEL STUDY TRIP

SAFETY

Is it safe to travel to Israel? This is usually the first question we're asked—and it's the right question. While it's impossible to guarantee 100% safety anywhere in the world, we take safety with absolute seriousness. We would never lead a group into a situation where the risk felt irresponsible, and we would not want to shoulder that kind of weight.

Israel can experience seasons of tension and instability, so we monitor conditions closely leading up to the trip and throughout our time in country. We travel with an experienced Israeli guide who stays current on the situation day-to-day, and we keep our itinerary flexible. If there is any concern about an area—whether because of security, unrest, or advisories—we simply reroute and avoid it. We do not take chances. We know the country well, and we make decisions with the kind of care you would expect from people who take spiritual formation seriously and who are responsible for a group of travelers. We won't go anywhere we wouldn't confidently take those we love.

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 80's. However, depending upon the year, temperatures can rise well into the 90's and even hit 100+. As we get closer to the trip, I'll be in contact about weather trends and what to expect for our trip. Additionally, I'll provide all the locations you'll want to check with a weather app.

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 reading will be helpful to you as well.

Hebrew Scriptures:

Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Isaiah (40-66), Obadiah

New Testament:

The Gospels (especially John), Acts, Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, 1-2 Peter, 1-2 Timothy, Hebrews, Philemon, 1 John, Revelation

Additional Reading:

Sailing the Wine-Dark Sea: Why the Greeks Matter - Thomas Cahill

A Week in the Life of Ephesus - David deSilva

Memorization: Try to memorize, or become very familiar with, the Seven Letters to the Churches in Revelation (Revelation 2-3)

SHEMA

With great confidence I can say there was never a day in the life of Jesus, our Messiah, or Paul, when they did not lift their voices 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 would like you to try and 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 roughly six weeks prior to departure 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 Pam Houck of GTI Tours at (616) 396-1234 or at pam@gtitours.org. If you have any questions about anything else, please email me at bnelson@walkingthetext.com.

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]



“Five gospels record the life of Jesus. Four you will find in books and the one you will find in the land they call Holy. Read the fifth gospel and the world of the four will open to you.”

- St. Jerome