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Welcome to Israel

Welcome to Israel and we sincerely hope that your stay in the holy land will be memorable and that you will take back with you to your home country many fond memories of a land steeped in the history and culture of three religions over 4000 years.

Israel, land of the bible and the historic homeland of the Jewish people, is situated along the eastern coast line of the Mediterranean Sea, and forms part of a land bridge linking three regions: Asia, Africa and Europe. In this land, the Jewish people began to develop its distinctive religion and culture some 4.000 years ago, and here it has preserved an unbroken physical presence, for centuries as a sovereign state, at other times under foreign domination.

Long and narrow in shape, the country is about 290 miles (470 km.) in length from north to south and some 85 miles (135 km.) across at its widest point between the Dead Sea and the Mediterranean coast. Israel is bordered by Lebanon in the north, Syria to the northeast, Jordan to the east, Egypt to the southwest and the Mediterranean Sea to the west.

Although small in size, Israel encompasses the varied topographical features and climates of a continent. In the north the forested highlands of the Galilee merge with fertile green valleys; sand dunes and farmland mark the coastal plain bordering the Mediterranean shoreline; the rocky peaks of the Samaritan and Judean mountain ranges in the center of the country descend sharply to the semi-tropical Jordan Valley and the Dead Sea, the lowest point on the earth. Mountainous deserts, stretching southwards through the Negev and Arava, end in the Gulf of Eilat which is the northernmost tip of the Red Sea.

Israel's climate is varied, and although characterized by sunshine, the rainy season is from November to April. The flora and fauna of Israel is also very rich with over 500 kinds of birds and over 3000 plant types. There are over 150 nature reserves and 65 national parks encompassing 400 square miles (1.000 sq.km)



Israel

An overview Historical, Political, Religious & Cultural

The State of Israel was created on May 15th 1948 but then entered into a war of Independence for 6 months with its neighbours, Egypt, Jordan and Syria. There have been five major wars since then, 1956, the Six Day War of 1967, the War of Attrition along the Suez Canal from 1968 till its cease fire in 1970, the Yom Kippur war of 1973, and the Peace for Galilee war with Lebanon in 1982. There have also been campaigns, major short artillery and aircraft battles on the borders and countless cross border raids by the IDF (Israel Defence Forces) and the different terrorist factions from Egypt, Syria, Jordan and the Lebanon.

Israel is a country of immigrants. Since 1948 the population has grown five-fold. Its 6.5 million inhabitants comprise a mosaic of people with varied ethnic backgrounds, lifestyles, religions, cultures and traditions. The Jewish population is today 77% while the non-Jewish citizens, mostly Arabs, number nearly 23%. About 90% of the inhabitants live in 200 urban centres, the rest live in the farms and kibbutzim, which are rural cooperative settlements.

MAIN CITIES:

JERUSALEM. Israel's capital (population 675,000) has stood at the center of the Jewish people's national and spiritual life since King David made it the capital 3000 years ago. Today it is a flourishing vibrant metropolis and the seat of the government as well as being Israel's largest city.

TEL AVIV. (population 360,000) which was founded in 1909 as the first Jewish city in modern times, is today the center of the country's industrial , commercial, financial and cultural life.

HAIFA. (population 272,000) a known coastal town since ancient times, is a major Mediterranean port and the industrial and commercial center of northern Israel.

BE'ER SHEVA. (population 180,000) named in the bible as an encampment of the patriarchs, is today the largest urban center in the south. It provides administrative, economic, health, education and cultural services for the entire southern region.

SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT

Israel is a parliamentary democracy with legislative, executive and judicial branches. The head of the state is the president, whose duties are mostly ceremonial and formal.

The Knesset, Israel's legislative authority, is a 120 member parliament. The Government is charged with administering internal and foreign affairs. It is headed by a Prime Minister and is collectively responsible to the Knesset.

EDUCATION

School attendance is mandatory from the age of five, and free through to the age of 18. Almost all three and four year olds attend some kind of pre-school program.

Israel's institutions of higher education include universities, colleges, and vocational schools. The country's high level of scientific research and development and the application of R&D compensate for the country's lack of natural resources.

Many people are comfortable speaking English, and you will usually be able to get by in your daily life by using English in shops, restaurants and at work.

The Wars.

1948 War of Independence

After the United Nations agreed the formation of the State of Israel on 15th May, 1948, the surrounding Arab countries immediately attacked the new country. After six months of fighting the borders of Israel were stabilised.

- 1967 The Six Days War. After Egypt, Syria and Jordan threatened to attack and destroy Israel, Israel responded with a pre-emptive strike and in six days succeeded in capturing east Jerusalem, what is now known as the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, all of the Sinai Desert up to the Suez Canal, and the entire Golan Heights.

- 1973 Yom Kippur War. This war started on the holiest day of the Jewish year, when most of the country was praying in its temples. Following this surprise attack on both the Egyptian and Syrian fronts, Israel lost ground, then held and counter attacked, surrounding the opposing Egyptian forces and destroyed the Syrian forces. American pressure brought about a cease fire that many people considered a potential winning position for the Arab armies.

- Intifadas. These were the popular uprisings in the West Bank and Gaza Strip against Israeli occupation. They mainly took the form of attacks on military outposts, civilians, rocket attacks and suicide bombers.

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