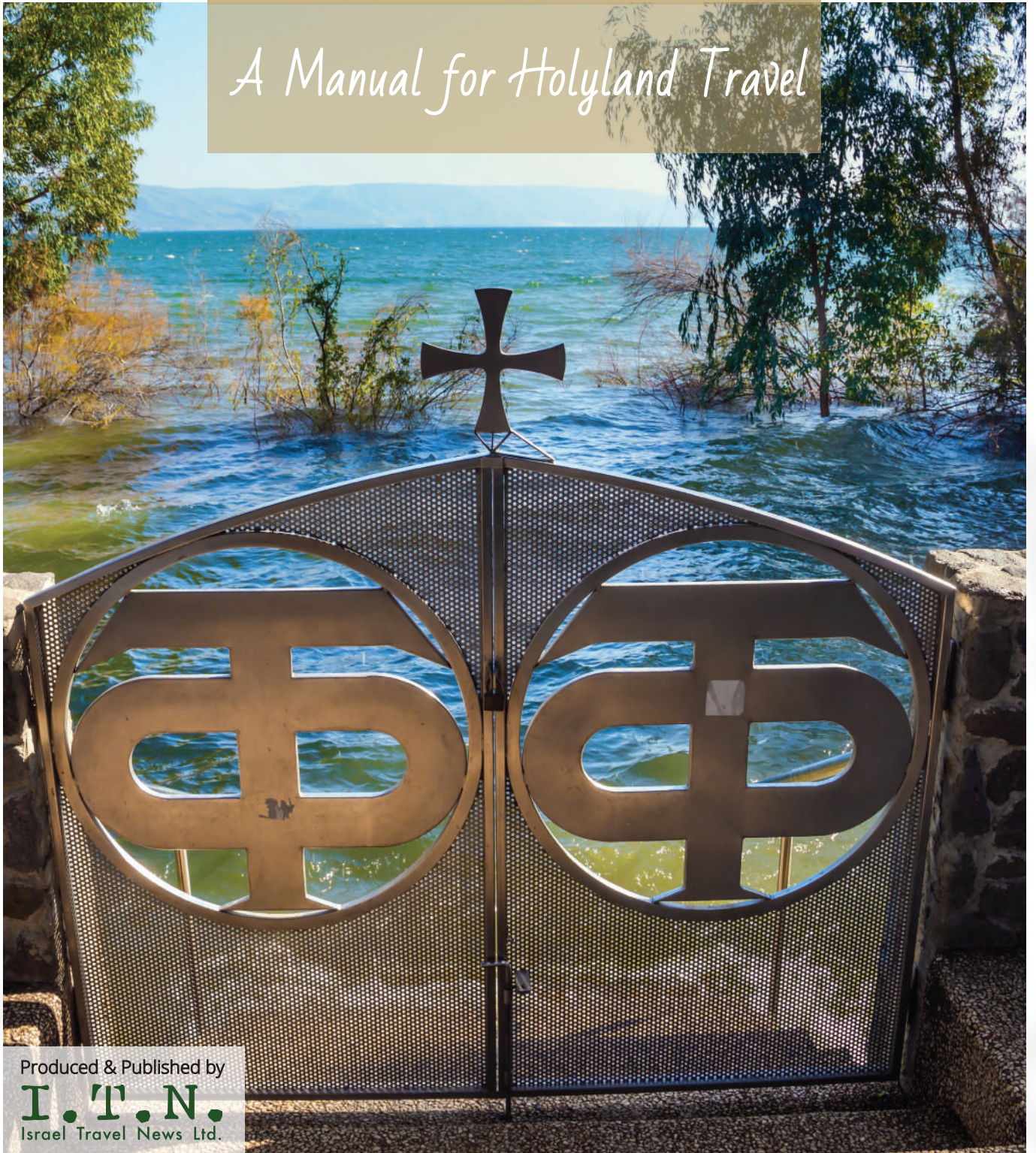


THE ISRAEL PILGRIMAGE EXPERIENCE

A Manual for Holyland Travel



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THE ISRAEL PILGRIMAGE EXPERIENCE

A Manual for Holyland Travel

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father" (Jn. 1:14)."

For many experiencing pilgrimage in the Holy Land, the voyage is life-changing. The authenticity of the spiritual journey that follows in the footsteps of Jesus is a unique opportunity to discover the roots of Christian faith and immerse oneself in the wealth of religious history and significance throughout the Holy Land. The pilgrim experience in itself is an opportunity for believers to unite as one as they explore the diversity of Christian heritage throughout the land of Israel.

What is a Pilgrimage?

According to James Harpur in his book *Sacred Tracks: 2000 Years of Christian Pilgrimage*: "The first pilgrims associated with the Christian faith were arguably the

Magi, the 'three wise men' who, according to the Gospel of Matthew, journeyed from the east to Bethlehem, guided by a star, to pay homage to 'the one who has been born of the Jews'. Their story contains some of the classic elements of pilgrimage. First and foremost, there was a journey. In their case, this would have been a long one from Iran, since according to the fifth century Greek historian Herodotus the Magi were in fact a Median tribe who lived within the Persian Empire and who were renowned as soothsayers and astrologers. Like pilgrimage before and after them, the men were anxious to experience a source - for Christians the source - of sacred awe.

"What distinguishes the Magi's journey from most other later pilgrimages was that they came to see a living being, not the relics of someone who had died. But their instinct was still the same; the desire for contact with a source of holiness."

Following the Magi, Christian pilgrims from all over the world have been journeying to the Land of Israel, the source of their spiritual heritage, for nearly 2000 years. Bible in hand, they've walked in the places where Jesus walked and prayed where He preached and prayed, and many experience a feeling of divine grace, or salvation, along with inner peace and a strengthened belief in their faith. There is no better place on earth than the Holy Land for Christians to feel the events of Jesus' life coming alive before their eyes and in their hearts. Nowhere is His life better documented than in the Holy Bible and now, more than ever, the call to follow in Jesus' Holyland footsteps is reverberating around the Christian world.

The Pilgrimage Experience

The recorded history of the Holy Land, going back more than 5000 years, attests to the fact that this was rarely a quiet, peaceful region. Straddling the divide between Africa and Asia, the area was almost always a battleground. Wave after wave of conquerors poured into the region, anxious to control the strategic trade routes linking the centers of the ancient world. With almost monotonous regularity, control swung from one victorious group to the next. Through it all, the peoples of the region remained, or returned, and rebuilt, again and again.

From within this litany of turmoil and strife, an event took place under Roman rule more than 2000 years ago that was to shape human history from that time on. This momentous milestone was the birth of Jesus.

Jesus, the son of the carpenter Joseph and Mary his wife, was born in Bethlehem, in a manger, the Gospels teach us, because "there was no room in the inn." He grew to manhood in Nazareth, moved among the people

of Galilee and Jerusalem and gained recognition as a preacher and performer of miracles. He died on the cross in Golgotha and bequeathed Christianity to the world. His life and teachings have affected hundreds of millions of people all over the world.

Nowhere is Jesus' life better documented than in the Holy Bible. Nowhere else on earth do the events of the Bible come alive as they do here, in Israel, the Holy Land.

Pilgrim & Pilgrimage

The term "pilgrim" denotes a traveler - one who journeys to holy places and sojourns among the local inhabitants, in a focused activity of faith that attributes significance to the journey and to the place, usually a site lifted to prominence by what happened there. Pilgrimage is a rite of passage for some; for others, it may be a way of freeing one's soul for spiritual explorations, or even a process to encounter Deity.

Pilgrimage is also about remembrance. In both the Old and New Testament, the Bible focuses on the centrality of acts of remembrance on the part of both mankind and the Almighty, starting with events after the Flood, (Genesis 9, 8-17), when God points to the rainbow as a perpetual reminder of His everlasting covenant. This is but the first in a host of biblical correlatives between a physical act and the divine command not to forget. So important is this dictate, that when the prophets judge the People of Israel, one of the most serious charges against them is that they have forgotten the Lord their Maker (Isaiah 51, 13; Jeremiah 23, 27).

Pilgrimage & its Significance

Christian interest in the Land of Israel is closely associated with the birth, demise and subsequent resurgence of the pilgrimage movement. In both Islamic and Hebrew tradition, pilgrimage is regarded as a religious obligation imposed on the entire community of the faithful and taught in its sacred scriptures, hence the importance of the Land of Israel, and in particular the shrines associated with Abraham, Isaac and Ishmael, to both Jews and Muslims.

For Christians, however, there is no such emphasis or requirement. Jesus taught that the sacred is located not in a place, but in the body of the believer, and worship is something to be offered to God anywhere and everywhere (John 4:21-23). Therefore, in the earliest days of the Christian Church, there does not appear to have been any perceived benefit from undertaking

a journey of pilgrimage, and, most Christian visitors to Jerusalem for the first 300 years after Jesus was crucified were more interested in coming to the land of the Bible to learn about it firsthand and meet with its small Christian community, than in visiting sites.

It was a historical destination for them, more than a spiritually significant city. Despite this attitude and approach, the natural desire to visit the scenes associated with the birth, life and death of Jesus was part of early Christian culture as well, and it became a popular custom among Christians, from early on, to remember Jesus and feel His presence by visiting places consecrated by His having been there - Bethlehem, Nazareth, Capernaum, Jerusalem, and elsewhere.

Land; it had become the inheritance of the Church in Byzantine times and, according to Byzantine law, was perceived as the land made holy by Jesus. Most pilgrims came to stand in the presence of those sites associated with the life, death and resurrection of their Savior and to protect the land and its Christian population and sites. Others, however, came - or were obliged to come - to do penance and to obtain redemption from serious crimes. From the ninth through the 11th century, parricides were obliged to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and even later, towards the end of the 12th century, the murderers of Thomas Becket made a pilgrimage of penance to Jerusalem, where tradition holds that some of them died and were buried on the Temple Mount.



Monastic Pilgrimage

The development of the cult of saints was crucial to the growth of pilgrimage as a place-orientated activity, as opposed to a focus on "heavenly Jerusalem." The perceived presence of saints, through their relics, attracted pilgrims and helped establish a new sacred geography, not only in the Holy Land, but later throughout Christendom. However, as relics were transferred from one place to another and new local saints emerged, debates arose, often motivated by political and economic agendas, as to whether pilgrimages should be undertaken to the Holy Land, or to local shrines.

In addition, monastic ascetic migration to the Holy Land began to

develop in the fourth and fifth centuries. It drew devout Christians to the Holy Land desert in acts of spiritual migration, to reflect on the experience of Abraham, of a stranger and a guest, the figure of Moses, who guided the people out of Egypt and led them to the Promised Land, as well as that of Elijah, who met God on Mt. Carmel. The believers founded monasteries, lauras, hermitages and coenobia in the desert of Judea, among other places, and many fervent followers came in their wake from all over the Christian world, either to stay with them for a short while before returning home, or establish their own monasteries and communities - which in turn drew other pilgrims.

Hundreds of monasteries dotted the Judean Desert terrain about 1400 years ago, and many desert retreats were established as well, not unlike the settlement of the Essenes at Qumran, where John the Baptist grew

Christians traveled to Jerusalem as early as the second century, and Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem stated around 350 AD, that: "Others only hear but we both see and touch." St. Jerome went on a Holy Land pilgrimage not long afterwards, and he spent the last 34 years of his life in a monastery in Bethlehem. Although he called the Holy Land "the fifth Gospel," and wrote that: "Nothing is lacking to your faith although you have not seen Jerusalem," Jerome also agreed with Cyril, writing that a pilgrimage to the Holy Land assists believers in understanding the revealed word of God and arguing that it is part of the Christian faith "to adore where His feet have stood and to see the vestiges of the nativity, of the Cross, and of the Passion."

Despite the costs, hazards and arduous nature of such a journey, pilgrims increasingly sought out the Holy

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to manhood, and which Jesus frequented. Today, no more than five are active: St. George, in Wadi Kelt; Qarantal, on the Mount of Temptation; St. Gerasimos, in the Jordan-Jericho Wadi; Mar Saba, on the banks of the Kidron Valley; St. Theodorus, on the Bethlehem-Dead Sea road. All offer the visitor fortunate enough to see them, an intriguing blend of starkly exotic terrain, ascetic piety and biblical holiness.

From All Christendom

Pagan Roman Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity in the fourth century AD and entrusted Empress Helena, his mother, with a mission to visit the Holy Land and locate the holy sites. In 326 AD, guided by her dreams, Helena discovered what she believed was the tomb of Jesus in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, one of the holiest shrines for the majority of Christian believers today. If, as some scholars believe, there is a grain of truth to claims that the Empress found the true cross in Jerusalem, together with the nails used in the crucifixion, then Helena can even be said to be the first archeologist in the Holy Land, along with being one of its most prominent early pilgrim visitors).

Decade after decade, in the centuries following Empress Helena, the trend for pilgrimage travel kept growing, and reports exist of pilgrimage visits from all over the Christian world at the time. By the 10th and 11th centuries, the great age of pilgrimage had arrived, stimulated, it may

be argued, by the significant increase in the construction of Christian buildings in the Holy Land from about 950 A.D., when millennium panic began to set in, and continuing as acts of gratitude afterwards, when the world did not come to an end.

Christians from all over the world sought out the Holy Land, until about the mid-15th century, when the surge in pilgrim travel began to subside. Historians say the Turkish conquest of Constantinople in 1453, and the backlash against church indulgences that led the 16th-century Protestant Reformation, may be some of the reasons for the dampened enthusiasm and for pilgrims becoming the object of satire and ridicule, as can be seen in works of popular literature of the time.

The Experience

In centuries past, a Holy Land pilgrimage was a difficult and strenuous trek, and even nowadays, with ease of travel, air-conditioned tour buses and hotels with buffet breakfasts and amenities, there are a few believers for whom such physical endurance is a reflection of the spirit of their faith. The traveling Christian preacher Arthur Blessitt, for example, undertook a 22,500 km pilgrimage trek on foot, carrying a wooden cross through five continents and 30 countries before arriving in Jerusalem in 1977, where he walked from the Mount of Olives to the courtyard of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and from there to the Garden Tomb, where he preached. While this certainly is not a standard, many pilgrimage leaders believe in the traditional value of a grueling journey and in letting pilgrims be pilgrims instead of tourists. Pilgrims, they maintain, should travel the topography of the Holy Land from North to South, top to bottom. They should feel it with all of their senses, recalling the places they have read about. These thoughts echo the words of St. Paulinus nearly 1400 years ago: "No other sentiment draws people to Jerusalem than the desire to see and touch the places where Christ was physically present, and to be able to say from their own experience, 'We have gone into his tabernacle and worshipped in the places where His feet stood.'"

They were reechoed in May 2009 by Pope Benedict XVI during his holy land visit, in a statement that could

A Pilgrim's Guide to the Holy Land with Monarch Israel



Preparing for a Journey of Faith and Reflection

After a pause in travel due to regional challenges, Monarch Israel is now joyfully preparing for the return of faith-based travellers. We understand that a pilgrimage to Israel is not simply travel it is a journey of spiritual connection and personal transformation. Our extensive experience ensures that each pilgrim's experience is seamless, meaningful, and profoundly impactful.



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As Christian pilgrims prepare to return to Israel, Monarch Israel stands ready to lead the way. For over a decade, we have dedicated ourselves to serving believers with expertly crafted journeys that follow in the footsteps of Jesus, guiding pilgrims to experience the places central to their faith. With our commitment to safety, spiritual depth, and personalized service, Monarch Israel is your trusted travel partner in the Holy Land.

Why Pilgrims Choose Monarch Israel

1.Safety First: As you prepare for a pilgrimage, peace of mind is essential. With recent peace efforts bringing stability to the region, Monarch Israel prioritizes your safety at every step. Our team constantly monitors conditions and maintains strong partnerships on the ground, so you can focus on your spiritual experience without worry.

2.Faith-Based Expertise: Monarch Israel's deep-rooted knowledge of Christian pilgrimages means we understand the unique spiritual aspirations of believers. Our experienced guides provide insights and context that deepen each visit, whether it's the Mount of Beatitudes, the Jordan River, or the quiet slopes of Mount Tabor.

3.Tailored Itineraries for Personal Pilgrimages and Group Journeys:

Every Christian pilgrim's journey is unique. We craft each itinerary to reflect the desires of our travellers, whether you're coming alone for personal reflection, leading a group from your church, or traveling with loved ones. From visiting the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem to experiencing prayer time on the shores of the Galilee, every detail is designed to elevate the spiritual experience.

A Road Map for the Christian Pilgrim

Monarch Israel's guides offer a blend of cultural insight, scriptural context, and local expertise, helping you engage more deeply with each site. Here are just a few highlights of the journey:

•**Galilee:** The lush, serene shores of the Sea of Galilee offer a space for prayer and reflection, the same waters where Jesus walked and taught. We guide you to sites like Capernaum, the home of Peter, and the Mount of Beatitudes, where the Sermon on the Mount echoes in spirit to this day.



•**Jerusalem:** The Holy City invites pilgrims to walk through its ancient streets, a place of both historic and spiritual significance. Visit the Garden of Gethsemane, follow the Via Dolorosa, and stand at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, sites that connect with the final moments of Jesus' earthly ministry.

•**Nazareth and Bethlehem:** Nazareth, where Jesus spent much of his early life, and Bethlehem, the city of his birth, offer pilgrims a journey back to the roots of the faith. These towns, rich in history and devotion, resonate deeply with the story of Christ.

Start Planning Your Pilgrimage Today

Monarch Israel is here to support your pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Whether you're planning a group tour or a personal retreat, our experienced team is ready to guide you through each detail, ensuring that your journey is safe, smooth, and spiritually uplifting.

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well serve as the basis for pilgrimage for any Christian believer. Describing himself as a “pilgrim among pilgrims,” the Pontiff remarked: “I appreciate the opportunity that has been offered to me to come on a pilgrimage to a land that is hallowed by the footsteps of patriarchs and prophets; a land that Christians hold in particular veneration as the setting for the events of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. I take my place in a long line of Christian pilgrims to these shores, a line that stretches back to the earliest centuries of the Church’s history and which, I am sure, will continue long into the future.” Pope Francis also described his 2014 holyland visit as a “pilgrimage with a strictly religious purpose.”

The Spiritual Journey

As an outward journey to holy sites and inwards to spiritual elevation, a pilgrimage may be undertaken in a spirit of fasting and penance, or joyously, in thanksgiving for blessings received or in hope, prayer and entreaty to be blessed, to feel a sense of the holy by being in the presence of relics or by walking on ground hallowed by the presence of Jesus and His disciples. A pilgrim might pursue spiritual ecstasy in the religious sites of a particular faith, or seek a miracle through the medium of God or a saint, depending on his or her set of beliefs. Whatever the purpose, leaving behind what is comfortable and traveling off to a strange distant land is a way of stepping outside one’s normal routine. When undertaken with the right attitude, a pilgrimage is a way to “lose” one’s lives for His sake, an echo of Jesus’ teaching: “For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the Gospel’s, will save it” (Mark 8, 35).

Pilgrim & Tourist

Although both are journeys, and a very fine line may exist that differentiates pilgrim from tourist, to undertake a pilgrimage is not merely to take a trip, to travel to Israel the Holy Land, and some religious leaders have even drawn a line between pilgrimage and religious tourism and study tours. Both tourist and pilgrim may visit the same ancient church; it may be of spiritual import for one while for the other it may be of historical, cultural or social interest. Tourism is an escape from one’s own

everyday life into something out of the ordinary and often entertaining, whereas, pilgrimage is a journey that is rich in symbolism, toward a definite goal. A pilgrim travels toward a shrine as to “the house of the Lord,” that is, toward the symbolic house of the Lord, which is in Heaven.

Thus, symbolism is the specific element that distinguishes pilgrimage from tourism. A symbol is something containing two truths: one on the level of reality and the other on the level of the conveyed meaning. A pilgrimage is a symbolic act: a symbolic journey toward God. “O God, you are my God whom I seek; for you my flesh pines and my soul is thirsting for you like the earth, parched, lifeless and without water. Thus have I gazed toward you in the sanctuary to see your power and your glory” (Psalms 63, 2-3). For those that believe, life is a journey, a pilgrimage. While their life may be firmly anchored in reality, which is in history, it is a journey at the same time, a pilgrimage toward salvation.

As opposed to tourism, where the specific destination is less important than the experience and the fun most



of the time, pilgrimage is a spiritual practice, a journey toward a specific spiritual goal, reminding believers that growing closer to God is the sacred purpose of life. For all that undertake it, pilgrimage is a spiritual search for inspiration as well, a strengthening of faith, a renewal of bonds and vows and an opportunity to grow closer as a Church or a congregation.



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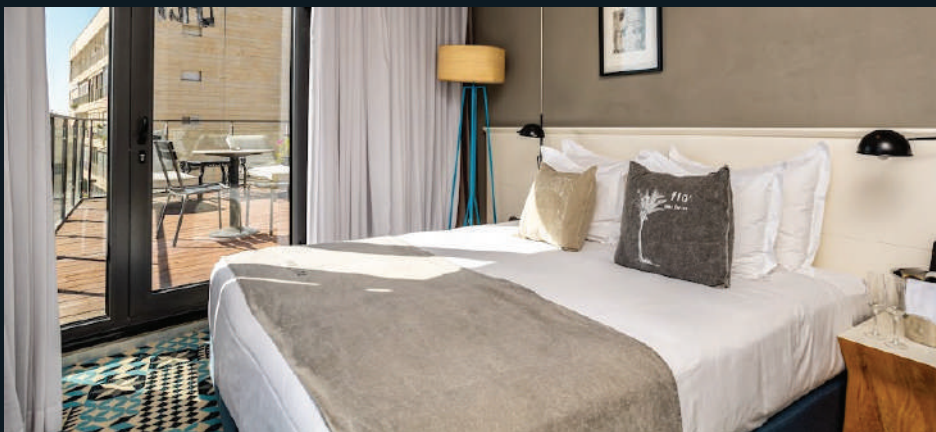
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Preparations

Since the actual time spent in the Holy Land is usually relatively short, preparations are an important element to the success of a pilgrimage tour. Preparation for a pilgrimage can be done on an individual basis, but also as part of a group, either by discussing religious and spiritual matters and/or actually getting together to



plan the trip. This is a period of study and reflection, discussion and prayer, but practical issues also need to be addressed. As in the case of all travel to foreign lands, becoming somewhat familiar with the country, its common features, even its monetary system and similar matters, is recommended.

Many group leaders use multimedia materials to prepare their followers. Slides and illustrations bring the places to life, and many people feel more confident seeing pictures of the sites they are going to visit. Materials are available from the Israel Ministry of Tourism and the branches of the Israel Government Tourist Office in a number of major cities around the world, and the Ministry's website (new.goisrael.com), available in a large and growing number of languages, is also an excellent resource.

Being Present

A pilgrimage can change one's life forever. For many, it is the fulfillment of a once-in-a-lifetime dream. But even for those fortunate enough to return, maybe several times, every visit rekindles the miracle of the place. Man does not live by bread alone. The food of the soul and the spirit awaits replenishment, and it is here, in the holy places of Israel, that body and soul come together

to be whole, a glorious oneness with God. Who can fully understand the power of the parable of the mustard seed (Matthew 13; 31), until they have seen a field of mustard in full bloom by the Galilee roadside? How can you explain the beauty of the parable of the sower if you have never seen the earth of the Galilee with its beautiful, deep reddish brown hues and the multitude of rocks interspersed in it? Can you understand the irony and message of the story of the pigs of Gadara if

you have never stood on the shores of the Sea of Galilee?

What can be more dramatic than reciting the passage from Matthew (8, 23-27) as a Sea of Galilee storm rocks a small boat designed after those that plied the very same waters in Jesus' time, or standing on the site of Jesus' synagogue at Capernaum and reading His teachings aloud from Luke (4, 31-49)? Imagine too, standing at Megiddo, site of Armageddon, and reciting the relevant passage from the Book of Revelations (16, 12-16), or at Jerusalem's Church of Gallicantu - built over the site identified by tradition as the house of Caiaphas, the high priest of that time - and hearing the passage from Mark (14, 66-72) read aloud, describing Peter's denial of Jesus?

Spiritual songs can be part of a pilgrimage too. "Down by the Riverside" after a baptism in the River Jordan, or a hymn at St. Anne Church.

St. Anne's, the best-preserved Crusader-era church in Jerusalem, is located at the start of the Via Dolorosa, in the Old City, to mark the traditional site of the home of Jesus' maternal grandparents, Anne and Joachim, and the birthplace of Mary and features an echo that just doesn't stop.

With the incredible energies unleashed by the pilgrimage experience, it is no wonder that such a spiritual journey can change lives forever.

The Best Time to Come

It goes without saying that pilgrimage planners should take heed of Covid-19 restrictions, many of which can change at a moment's notice. Be sure to check in advance as well as right before departure.

The climate in Israel is comfortable throughout the year. Autumn and spring are transient and often not even felt, leaving the country with a long hot summer and a short winter when rain can be plentiful, but usually is intermittent. Between April to September, when rain hardly ever falls, Israel boasts temperatures that range from pleasantly cool in the hilly regions in the evenings to hot and sunny during the day. In low-lying regions like the Dead Sea or Tiberias, they can reach 35-40°C (about

95°F) at midday. The season running from October to March is more varied. Depending on the region, winter can mean a temperate sun with some rain, or biting winds and even occasional snow showers in the higher elevations. On the other hand, it is usually possible to swim in the Dead Sea even in the heart of winter, and sometimes in the Mediterranean too. When it comes to climate, any time is a good time to visit Israel.

Other factors too may affect the timing of a pilgrimage. Budget-conscious groups are far more likely to travel during the traditional low-season, from November to February (excepting Christmas and the New Years holiday), when rates for land arrangements and airfare may be lower - though with the increase of pilgrimage travel to Israel in recent years and with yield management playing an important role in regulating prices, this is not always true. March to October is still considered a regular season, with some high peaks. As a result of the large increase in pilgrimage visits to Israel, groups wishing to spend Christmas or Easter in the Holy Land should expect to pay top rates and are urged to plan well in advance, as demand may outweigh supply.

It is a good idea to take local holidays and their customs into consideration when planning a pilgrimage. Jewish festivals can add a distinctive flavor to a stay in Israel, even if it does mean that only unleavened bread ("matza") is available at hotels during the seven days of Passover or that there is no transportation for more than 24 hours on the Day of Atonement and just about everything will be closed!

Safe & Sound in Israel

As a country beset by geo-political challenges, but with firm resolve to do what it must to ensure that daily life continues normally in a region beset by abnormality, Israel has implemented a wide variety of sophisticated, state-of-the-art security measures that have left most of the country - and certainly areas frequented by the average tourist - perfectly safe and secure. Security is tight at airports and other border crossings, supported by trained, courteous but single-minded staff and supported

by a host of detection techniques. It is no secret that Ben Gurion International Airport, the major gateway to Israel, is considered the world's most secure airport. The broad range of technological and individual surveillance and screening methods - some upfront, but mostly out of sight - direct questioning, searches and unabashed profiling may cause some minor inconveniences from time to time, but most tourists realize what all Israelis take in stride: there is nothing personal about the procedure, which has been streamlined in recent years, and it is for their own good.

In a world challenged by terror in its many guises, Israel, paradoxically as it may sound, may well be one of the



safest destinations your client could wish for, to visit and travel about.

Staying in Israel

An adequate pilgrimage program can be followed in one week (six/seven nights), although pilgrimages do range from five to 15 nights, or even longer. The itinerary should be planned around touring priorities, budget limitations and, needless to say, the religious traditions and beliefs of the group. A visit to the model of the wilderness Tabernacle at Timna in the Negev Desert may be essential for certain Evangelical groups, while Jerusalem's Church of the Holy Sepulcher is a must for Catholics. Other matters to take into consideration: make allowance for the length of your flight: trans-Atlantic flights or those from the Far East may justify a longer stay and a more relaxed pace. Check that everyone in the group has proper insurance for the trip. Some Israeli companies have become very proficient in designing special insurance policies for pilgrimage groups, and

even very elderly participants can be insured. Also, take into account one free day per week for rest or individual pursuits. Most pilgrims undergo an intense emotional experience and absorb a great deal of information. A common request is simply for “time to think, reflect and absorb.”

The length of a pilgrimage tour may be determined by a group’s special interest, which could lead to the addition of a number of extra days. A farming group may plan to combine a pilgrimage with an agricultural study tour. Music lovers may include one of the many secular or ecclesiastical music festivals in their touring program, or if they are a performing group, may even consider giving concerts during their stay. (The Israel Ministry of Tourism can help organize such events). Some groups may decide to combine the pilgrimage experience with regular touring and vacation time or as part of an incentive program, or even explore medical tourism opportunities in Israel, based on a medical infrastructure that is among the best in the world, at rates lower than in most Western countries. In any case, it is a good idea to take in at least a few of

the “secular” sights.

Israel is a colorful Mediterranean country that offers the visitor a myriad of holiday opportunities - beautiful beaches, vibrant cities, fascinating archeological and natural wonders, a warm, friendly population of rich cultural diversity, and, above all, the all-embracing blend of ancient and modern that adds an extra dimension every step of the way. Consultation with an Israel travel professional can be very useful in helping you decide upon the ideal length for the pilgrimage you or your groups are planning.

Getting Around

Israel’s location at the eastern edge of the Mediterranean Sea makes it a highly convenient gateway for regional tours. Regional packages are becoming more and more popular, combining visits to two or more destinations in the area - Israel, Turkey, Greece, Cyprus, Jordan and Egypt. Especially for travelers flying long distances, it may make economic and logistic sense to experience more than one country. The ancient world spread out across several different lands, and of special interest to pilgrims are tours highlighting places of biblical significance in the entire region.

The overwhelming majority of visitors to Israel arrive by air, however, any number of cruises include Israel as a port of call, enabling passengers to include one-day guided bus tours to Jerusalem/Bethlehem and the Galilee on their itinerary, or even one-night stays - a growing phenomenon.

Overland travel from Egypt and Jordan is one other option, and pilgrimage groups visiting Mt. Sinai and the Monastery of Santa Katarina in Egypt can cross the border into Eilat, the resort city at the southernmost tip of Israel.

Israel has an excellent public transportation system, reaching virtually every corner of the country, though keep in mind that except for Haifa and Nazareth, buses do not operate on the Jewish Sabbath (from late Friday afternoon until Saturday evening after sunset).

Other touring/transportation options in Israel include:

- Luxury air-conditioned buses, mini-buses and vans, which may be hired with or without a guide.
- Four, seven, or 11-seater vehicles driven by a licensed guide. This is the most flexible way for FITs to travel, as sightseeing is tailor-made to personal requirements.
- Helicopter tours of the country (for those with the budget for such a luxury)
- Rental cars
- Private taxis and “sherut” vans (jitneys, or shared service taxis)





The Ramada Jerusalem



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- Not to be forgotten is the traveler's stand-by, always at hand - a sturdy pair of legs!

Whenever possible, it is recommended to walk. There is no substitute for the intimacy and knowledge of a place acquired by the person that walks. For pilgrims in particular, following in the footsteps of Jesus is an unforgettable experience if one simply does that - follow in His footsteps.

Accommodations

Israel's tradition of hospitality dates back to the time of the Patriarch Abraham, who welcomed three strangers into his tent (Genesis 18:1-8). Today, possibilities for accommodations are wide and varied, and still offered with the same warmth and welcome that Abraham demonstrated.

The option to rest in a desert tent, or to pass the night in a sleeping bag under the stars, is still popular, especially with younger, more adventurous groups and individuals. But older travelers, too, can enjoy the



WELCOME TO THE HOLY LAND

"I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go to the house of the Lord!"

"Our feet have been standing within your gates, O Jerusalem!"

(Psalm 122:1-2)



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experience of an open-air “thousand star” hotel, especially when followed by a comfortable night indoors! Israel features hotels of every grade and price range, ranging from super deluxe to those offering simple, basic accommodations. Some are managed by local chains or independently; others are affiliated with well-known international brands. Many feature conference facilities, both indoors and out, suitable for pilgrim group prayers and assemblies.

Christian hospices, located mainly in Jerusalem and Nazareth, are run by various denominations and offer a very special Christian experience. Many have private chapels. The hospices are generally small and bookings are recommended well in advance. Other popular accommodation options include kibbutz hotels, recreational villages (self-catering bungalows, etc.) “zimmers,” (bed/breakfast facilities in private homes, or kibbutzim), youth hostels and field schools.



Guiding

Israeli guides are arguably among the best in the world, and are available to guide in a broad range of languages. Professional guides can provide a wealth of information concerning holy places, historic sites and ancient Israel, since they undergo a two-year training program to study the history of Israel, the Old and New Testament, and the differences among the perspectives of the various Christian denominations, and they must know every inch of the country. They have to know how to travel the land and its topography, and they have to know exactly where history lies. In addition to the two-year training program, guides must take an annual refresher course. This assures that they can supply the latest information as to recent discoveries of archeological and/or religious significance. It also means that guides are well equipped to lead a pilgrimage along the most comfortable, efficient, and interesting routes - and in order to pass their licensing examinations, they must be bi-lingual at least. Clergymen leading groups are often surprised that Israeli guides know more about the Bible and holy sites than they expected, and sometimes even more than the preachers themselves. Experience tells us that the insights they bring to a pilgrimage add to the group's experience while supporting and reinforcing the efforts of the religious leader.

Denominations

Egidius of Assisi, the disciple of St. Francis of Assisi, was the first Franciscan to come to the Holy Land as a pilgrim in 1215, and afterwards, as part of a process lasting centuries, the Franciscan Order was given custody of many sacred holyland sites. The presence of the Greek Orthodox Church in the Holy Land is even older, and the Greek Orthodox patriarchate is in charge of dozens of monasteries and holy sites throughout Israel. While it is only in charge of the churches in Jerusalem's Armenian Quarter, the Armenian Church's significant presence in Jerusalem began with the development of early Byzantine monasticism, and sixth-century ruins with inscriptions in Armenian have been unearthed near Damascus Gate and on the Mt. of Olives.

Since older Churches built and control most of the early churches and sites that attract Holy Land pilgrims today, Protestant visitors, although they may well visit these ancient churches, monasteries and the like, have few sites they can “call their own,” save for the Garden Tomb in Jerusalem. Other than that, while they share many of the same motivations with Catholic pilgrims, their experience, more often than not, is one of direct communication with their Savior, and does not rely on any historical continuity, or even on the Church to which they are affiliated. As one Protestant commentator has noted: “Christian pilgrims ‘see’ the heart of Jesus when they visit the Dominus Flevit Sanctuary on the Mount of Olives, where Jesus wept for the city of Jerusalem.

Pilgrims stand in awe in the Garden of Gethsemane or the Church of All Nations when they sense the agony Jesus went through before He surrendered Himself to walk the Way of Sorrows. And when they see the empty Garden Tomb and read on the inside of the door 'He is not here, He is arisen' they know that their faith in a Living Savior is real."

Approaches to Pilgrimage

While the Catholic pilgrim typically seeks to perform the sacramental rites in the various sanctuaries and shrines of Israel, the Protestant and Evangelical Christian usually wants to visit the actual sites written about in the Bible. For practicing Protestants, the Bible is a very important part of daily life and Protestants and Evangelicals are extremely well versed in both the Old and New Testament, which have personal meaning for them above and beyond the liturgical significance of the texts.

That's why Protestants are particularly interested in personally seeing the sites where the events of Jesus' life transpired, as well as places that are as similar today as possible, to how they appeared in Jesus' time. Churches, those built of stone or other materials, even those with a traditional pedigree, are of lesser interest to them. They want to stand in the places where Jesus stood, contemplate at these spots and read what is written in the Bible at the very places where Jesus spoke those words. Some, especially believers belonging to the more Fundamentalist denominations, may even see in them eschatological signs. When members of a Protestant pilgrimage group ride on a boat across the Sea of Galilee or walk along the streets of Capernaum, their experience of the Bible is enhanced, and this impacts their lives in a very significant way. Now when he or she reads the Bible, the Protestant pilgrim can say: "It comes to life for me because I have seen real places, real people, real Galilean terraces and real Jerusalem stones from the Temple with my very own eyes."

Catholics, on the other hand, are experiential in their approach to their religion more often than not, searching for the tangible and the palpable. Much of what they seek is inspirational, reinforced by the significance of the site, not the stones and mortar, and this style of tourism - if it may be called that - may be a ramification of the sacramental aspects of Catholicism's religious rites. Having said this, distinctions need to be drawn between the various cultures from which the individual Catholic

pilgrim originates. While generalizations are not always totally accurate, it would be fair to say that by and large, Catholic pilgrims from South America are almost always more pious and often less sophisticated than their guide, and he or she must be aware of this. On the other hand, Catholics from France may be more sophisticated, more Cartesian and have a different way of encountering the sites central to their faith." Other than these differences in approach, Protestant pilgrimage itineraries are more likely to incorporate Old Testament sites.

Spiritual - and Tangible Souvenirs

Pilgrimage is a time of soul-searching, and inevitably pilgrims come away with clearer thoughts about their own life, family, future. It may be a time of new resolutions and strengthened commitments. The experiences of the pilgrim are usually shared with others - either spiritual



leaders or co-travelers, or people along the way. Very often, close interpersonal relationships are forged on such a journey. Pilgrims return home enriched by the love and concern of the people they have met. These new friendships may be the best memories of all, for did Jesus not say, "This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." (John 15:12)? The memories that a pilgrim brings home are unique. The journey has been an intense spiritual experience. The words of the Bible have become a living reality and Sunday readings will never be the same again.



Early pilgrims were always searching for pieces of the true cross, the remnants of cloth worn by the Virgin Mary, and other holy relics. Though what may be termed "the age of the relic" flourished between 1000 and 1200 AD, pilgrims in the fifth and sixth centuries mention the horn of oil used to anoint David and Solomon as King of Israel, as a recognized relic then. With the onset of the modern wave of Holy Land pilgrimage travel, and the recognition that part of the pleasure of traveling in foreign places, comes from acquiring and accumulating tangible objects that are pregnant with meaning in their own right, or take on significance because of the circumstances under which they were obtained, this custom was reinvented in the form of souvenirs.

Mementoes are the stuff of which memories are enriched and maintained, and just as in the early Byzantine Christian world, when an important goal of a pilgrimage was to find, salvage and possess a relic of Jesus and His followers and the objects they touched, or a memento of the places visited by these holy forefathers, so do most modern pilgrims make an effort to bind memory to reality with the aid of tokens of their trip.

Rare is the traveler that does not acquire certain objects on route. Objects of religious significance are sought-after purchases, including jewelry, handmade candles, pictures and olive-wood carvings. Natural products are popular gifts, too (cosmetics and beauty care products from the Dead Sea, spices, locally grown herbs, olive oil). Other recommended Israeli products include handicrafts, pottery, glass and leatherwear. Not to be forgotten are videos and books, and of course, lots of personal snapshots guaranteed to keep the memories alive for years to come. One of the most treasured possessions a pilgrim will take home from Israel is a "Pilgrimage Certificate." This may be issued by the tour operating company or

a religious organization or site, bearing witness forever to the pilgrim's stay in the Holy Land. Christian groups visiting Jerusalem - as all of them probably do - can receive pilgrimage certificates in a variety of languages, signed by Israel's Minister of Tourism and the Mayor of Jerusalem.

Stores displaying the Ministry of Tourism emblem offer purchasers the possibility of VAT refund (currently 17 percent - to be arranged at the airport upon departure).

Study & Prayer

The average pilgrimage tour does not allow much time for study sessions. However, even one or two evening lectures during the course of a tour will add content and interest. Some of the study possibilities include:

- A) Inviting speakers on a variety of subjects to the hotel, at convenient times;
- B) Holding on-the-spot discussions at local sites;
- C) Including structured study sessions of one, two, or

more days during the tour;

D) Making the total pilgrimage a study and prayer experience, with occasional trips and accommodations at the place of study.

Promoting Pilgrimage

Investing in tourism is a persistent ongoing endeavor on the part of both the Israel Ministry of Tourism and the private sector. Tourism is one of Israel's top three foreign currency earning industries, employing a large percentage of the workforce, both directly and indirectly. The buoyancy of Israel's economy is therefore directly related to the number of tourists visiting the country.

The Christian pilgrim market is the greatest single segment of tourism to Israel and is therefore of prime importance. The pilgrim comes here for a specific experience, one



that cannot be found anywhere else, and the Israel Ministry of Tourism is very conscious of this fact, making every effort via its Christian Pilgrimage Desk and overseas representatives to give practical assistance to tour organizers. It distributes a wide variety of flyers, shells, toolkits and other promotional materials, hosts educational groups of travel agents and prospective tour leaders from abroad and offers concrete assistance to tour groups and agents by subsidizing advertising

costs and reaching out to the public via road shows, travel exhibitions and large public events. Contact the representatives of the IGTO (Israel Government Tourist Office), located in major cities around the world, for advice and assistance.

The Ministry also utilizes social networking platforms, and it has inaugurated a variety of specialized Christian

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pilgrimage websites. These include a dedicated Catholic site (www.holyland-pilgrimage.org), one for the Evangelical market in even more languages (www.evangelicalisraeleexperience.com), a multilingual "Spirit of the Holyland" Youtube channel with films for the Catholic, Protestant and Provoslavic markets, and "Holyland Pilgrimage," a second Youtube site for the Catholic market. All of these are available in a wide variety of languages. It also produces an annual Holy Land Calendar of Christian Feasts and Events, listing all the special events and feasts according to the Anglican, Armenian, Catholic, Coptic, Ethiopian, Lutheran, Orthodox, Protestant and Syrian churches. Another effort is entitled "A Holy Land Pilgrimage: In the Footsteps of the Virgin Mary," which details a Catholic pilgrimage itinerary featuring sites central to the life of the Virgin Mary.



Updates

Sites that have received upgrades since the country was closed to tourists due to the Covid-19 pandemic, include: Megiddo National Park; the multimedia presentation at the Saxum Visitor Center; excavations at Magdala; new accessible paths at the Garden Tomb; the Northern Ramparts walk in the Old City of Jerusalem; the renovated Tower of David Museum in Jerusalem; the excavations in the Korazim National Park; the Emmaus and the Korazim-Capernaum trails; and spaces for prayer services at national parks such as Banias, the Good Samaritan, Avdat and Kursi.

JERUSALEM

"On the holy mount stands the city he founded; the Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God." (Psalms 87:1-2)

"Shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart,

O daughter of Jerusalem! The King of Israel, the Lord is in your midst." (Zephaniah 3:14-17).

For over 3000 years, ever since the rule of King David, Jerusalem has been set apart from other cities. No other place on earth has been so central to man's dreams and aspirations. No other city is described with so much love and devotion, and no other city has been subject to so much killing and bloodshed.

For Christians, Jerusalem's place in the life of Jesus gives it great importance. Jesus was brought there as a child, to be presented at the Temple (Luke 2, 22) and to attend festivals (Luke 2, 41). According to the Gospels, Jesus preached and healed in Jerusalem, especially in the Temple courts. An account in the Book of Mark (11, 15) relates Jesus' cleansing of the Temple by chasing various traders out of the sacred precincts. At the end of each of the Gospels, there are accounts of Jesus' Last Supper in an "upper room" in Jerusalem, His arrest at Gethsemane, His trial, His crucifixion at Golgotha, His burial and His resurrection and ascension.

In Christianity, the Jewish connection with the city is considered as the account of God's relationship with His chosen people - the original covenant - and the essential prelude to the events narrated in the New Testament, including both universal commandments (e.g. the Ten Commandments) and those specific to Judaism- the "old order."

In medieval Christian thought, Jerusalem was considered to be the center of the world (Latin: umbilicus mundi, Greek: Omphalos), and was represented in various medieval maps. Byzantine hymns speak of the Cross being "planted in the center of the earth," and the imagery is tied to the concept of the Death and resurrection of Jesus being for the benefit of all humankind. Medieval maps of Europe usually placed the East ("orient"; Jerusalem) at the top, and this arrangement



led to the use of the term "to orient" to mean to align a map with actual compass directions. The magnetism of Jerusalem has not diminished over the years. The city spreads in golden splendor across the

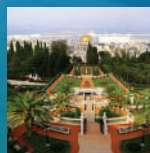
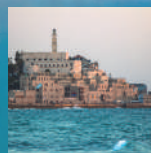
Judean hills, reaching up to the heavens and gathering in unto itself the long lines of pilgrims of all faiths and all nations that converge in this one place. A holy city, a city of the spirit and the soul, where the voice of God can be heard whispering in the ancient stones. **The pilgrim to Jerusalem undergoes a deeply moving experience. It is a visit with enormous historical and religious content. At least three or four days are necessary** to see the holy sites, and greater the joy if the pilgrim has some time in hand simply to wander down the narrow lanes.

Jesus visited Jerusalem several times during His lifetime, and the events of His final visit to Jerusalem, which took place during the fateful week of Passover in the year 30 AD, led to His crucifixion. The places marking His triumphal entry, the Last Supper, the Gethsemane arrest, the Betrayal by Peter, the final passage along the Via Dolorosa and the execution and burial are maintained by Christian communities of various denominations. Over the centuries churches have been built and rebuilt on or by them, and periods of history are layered one upon the other, making the city a true living museum.

Jerusalem's Christian Quarter grew up around the Church of the Holy Sepulcher - Golgotha, according to Catholic

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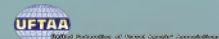
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tradition. The church contains the final five stations of the Via Dolorosa - the 14 Stations of the Cross. The Church of the Holy Sepulcher is a vast, confusing, and in many ways overwhelming building, set at the very heart of Christendom. Hundreds of thousands of visitors are drawn every year to this church, which has been a place of worship almost constantly for nearly 2000 years.

The first Jerusalem Christian community worshipped here until at least 66 AD (when it became impossible to do so), despite the fact that around 42 AD the site was included within an expansion of the city walls. Although it had been incorporated into the city, it was not built upon, suggesting the acknowledgement and acceptance of its role as a place of devotion and worship. Emperor Constantine was responsible for building the first real church on this site, and since then there have been many layers of building and development, especially in the Crusader period. Today's church is vast, encompassing the sites that are believed by many to be the locations of both Golgotha and Jesus' tomb, which is housed in the Rotunda, a building within a building, under a great dome.

A small entrance takes visitors into a central chamber, known as the Chapel of the Angel, from which there is another even smaller entrance into the place of Jesus'

burial - revered by many Christians as the holiest spot in the world. It is a tiny, marbled area, only large enough to hold two people at once, and sometimes the wait on line can take several long minutes.

As a city holy to the Christian faith, Jerusalem can also be proud of its many other historically significant churches. In addition, monasteries are scattered about the city, mostly in sites of particular significance - such as the Old City, the Valley of the Cross (where, it is said, the olive trees grow from which the wood for the "true cross" was taken), and others.

Christian visitors to Jerusalem - and that includes just about every one of the more than over two million Christians that have been visiting Israel annually these past few years - will certainly want to experience the sites sanctified by their being a part of the early history of their faith. However, even before wandering about the ancient parts of the city, it's a good idea to become acclimated to Jerusalem as it was 2000 years ago, by spending some time at the model of Second Temple Jerusalem, which has been moved to the Israel Museum's Shrine of the Book complex, where it was also developed and "fine-tuned." Based on old excavation material, the Talmud, the writings of the historian Josephus and the New Testament, the model was constructed for the main part, of materials used at the time of the Temple

- Jerusalem limestone, copper, wood and iron. It was built to a scale of 1:50, i.e., two cm. equals one meter, with an average man, in scale, measuring 3.5 cm. Across the road, Jerusalem's Bible Land Museum offers a guided tour of part of its exhibition halls, prepared especially for Christian groups. Entitled "From the Chosen Father to the Chosen Son," it has been designed to bring to light the most significant and influential civilizations of the ancient world, connect history to the Holy Scriptures and help visitors understand the historical backdrop to the emergence of Judaism and Christianity.

For a different type of introduction to Jerusalem, one that is fun-filled as well as entertaining, pay a visit to the city's "The Time Elevator," an audio-visual history of Jerusalem presented in a hall outfitted with chairs and a floor featuring motion effects to complement the film and narration.

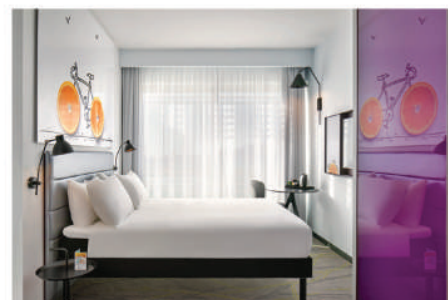
Located within walking distance of the Time Elevator, the Friends of Zion Museum is Jerusalem's latest attraction with a Christian pedigree. It highlights the contributions of Christian Zionists to the development of the State of Israel and support for the Jewish people over the last 200 years. The museum offers a series of films, three-dimensional maps and exhibits, original musical scores, advanced lighting and video mapping, and more, all produced specifically for the location, to allow its story to be shared.

The Western Wall tunnels, left of the Western Wall prayer area, where a model of the Temple Mount can be seen, is also well worth a visit, as is the permanent exhibition of the Tower of David Museum of the City of Jerusalem, at the entrance to Jaffa Gate. Once there, climb to the top of Phasael Tower for a view of the Christian Quarter - and the cross atop the Church of the Holy

Sepulcher, the 19th-century German Church of the Redeemer, Mary Magdalene Church on the Mount of Olives, Mt. Zion and Dormition Abbey (traditional site of the Last Supper). Then tour the museum, where the history of the city can be traced, from the City of David to modern times. Christians will want to pay particular attention to the Second Temple Room (with displays on Jesus of Nazareth, the Last Supper, the trial and the crucifixion), the Late Roman and Byzantine Period Room and the Crusader Room, where the focus is on the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem.

Just outside Dung Gate, right near the Western Wall and the Davidson Center, is the magnificent and fascinating City of David. Along with other sites in this immediate area, there is almost no doubt whatsoever that Jesus would have walked in this area, visited the Siloam Pool and would have climbed the steps discovered here on His way up to the Temple Mount. The Siloam Pool has long been considered a sacred Christian site. According to the Gospel of John, it was at the Siloam Pool where Jesus healed the blind man (John 9:1-11).





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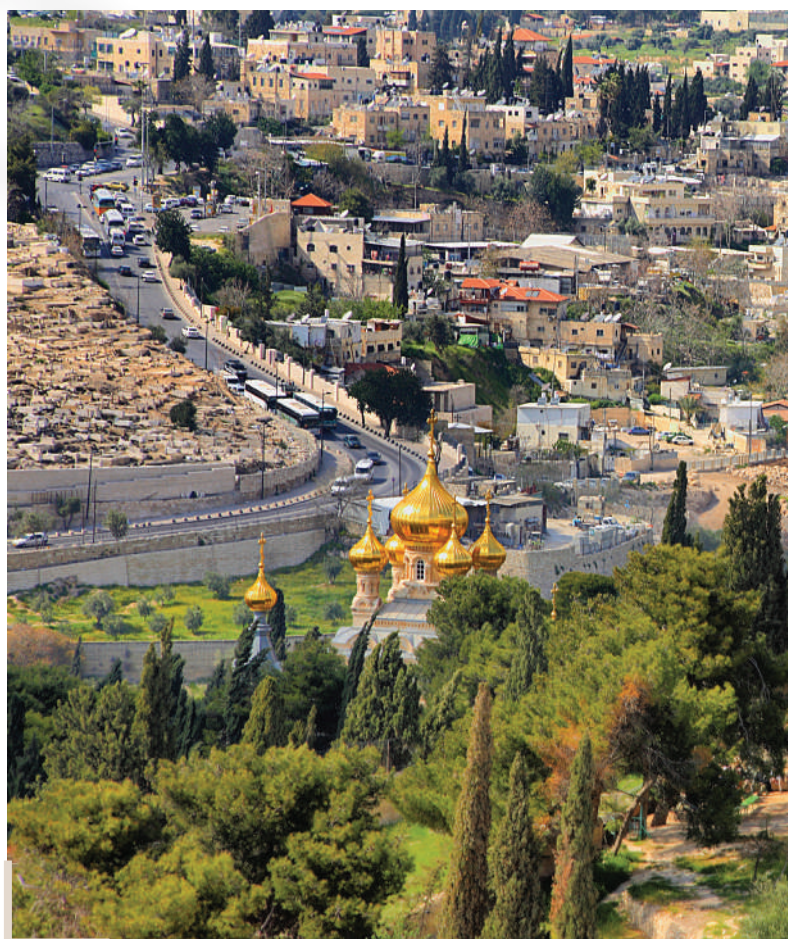
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The newest offering at the Tower of David Museum, based on recent archeological finds unearthed beneath the Museum, provides Christian groups with an opportunity to explore Jesus' life on earth within its historical, archeological and geographic context by viewing portions of King Herod's grandiose palace while reading biblical verses about relevant events in Jesus' life. Entitled "Bookends of the Gospels," the tour, for groups, includes access to the southern part of Jerusalem's historical moat that surrounds the Citadel, where excavations of archeological remains have revealed an ancient quarry, a ritual bath from the Second Temple, a hewn water channel, secret passageways and a giant stone staircase and pools from the Hasmonean and Herodian eras. The moat also includes passage to the Kishle, the Ottoman Prison which was excavated over the last decade and contains remains detailing the history of Jerusalem from the First Temple period to the establishment of the State of Israel.

The Christian Information Center, situated at Jaffa Gate near the museum, provides a wealth of specific information on Christian activities and sites in Jerusalem - and throughout Israel.

Christian visitors to Jerusalem also will want to experience the sites sanctified by their being a part of the early history of their faith, and exploring the Western Wall area, including the Temple compound in which Jesus



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A Path down the Mount of Olives

One fascinating walking tour in Jerusalem begins atop the Mount of Olives and takes pilgrims in the footsteps of Jesus as He entered the city for what was to be the last time. Begin near the summit of the Mount, where a tiny building is open to the public. It has been in Muslim hands for many years, but centuries ago it was a Christian chapel built by the Crusaders. In chronological terms, it marks the very end of the gospel stories about Jesus, as it is the traditional site of the Ascension. There is little to see there, but it is a point of importance in the tradition of holy places in Jerusalem. Also notice the topography. As one scholar has noted, the fact that Jesus continued down the Mount of Olives on His way to Jerusalem and to His death instead of returning easily in the direction of Bethany, where He would have been safe, is a very clear indication of His acceptance of His divine role and fate.

Just down the road from the Chapel of the Ascension is the Church of the Pater Noster, associated with Luke's account of the teaching of the Lord's Prayer (Luke 11:1-4). The church contains over eighty versions of the Lord's Prayer in different languages. Further down the Mount the beautifully located Church of Dominus Flevit is located, commemorating the point at which Jesus wept over Jerusalem. The church itself is built in the shape of a teardrop!

The Garden of Gethsemane, located by the Kidron Brook at the summit of the Mount, on the natural walking route between Bethany and Jerusalem, is where Jesus prayed before His arrest. As with the other traditional sites, we cannot be sure where exactly this happened, but the area in question is really very small, and pilgrims visiting modern-day Gethsemane can be certain that they are within a stone's throw of the place where Jesus went through such agony before His arrest. Gethsemane means "olive press," and very ancient olive trees still grow in the garden.

One of the most impressive churches in Jerusalem has been built on this site - the Church of the Agony, or, as it is usually known, the Church of All Nations, reflecting the considerable international funding that went into its construction. It was constructed in 1924 on the site of two earlier churches, a Crusader oratory deserted in the 14th century and, prior to that, a 4th-century chapel. Its sanctuary contains some exposed rock, venerated as the place where Jesus knelt in prayer. If not the actual site, it cannot be a great distance from it. There are many fine mosaics here, depicting the events

preached, and spending time wandering around the Second Temple Archeological Garden, a part of the Davidson Center, and treading on the original stones where Jesus stepped, at the corner under Robinson's Arch, is a good way to begin. The money lenders He upbraided sat there, and the markings separating the different stalls are still visible. Visitors may climb up the steps leading to Hulda Gate, which Jesus would have used to enter the Temple.

In a separate room, the Center features a computerized three-dimensional model of the Temple Mount in Herodian times, but it must be booked prior to arrival. Another offering at the Davidson Center is a film on Jewish to Jerusalem during Second Temple times, on the Jewish "Sukkot" holiday.

Just a short walk from the Old City, Mt. Zion (which until the 16th century was enclosed by the city walls), is a site of two landmarks of importance to Christian visitors. Dormition Abbey has been built on the site traditionally considered the spot where Mary, mother of Jesus, departed her earthly form. Nearby is the coenaculum, which tradition pinpoints as being the site of the Last Supper.



associated with the spot, including the betrayal of Jesus by Judas, which led to His arrest, trial and incarceration at the House of the Jewish High Priest.

While it is impossible to say with any certainty where the House of the Jewish High Priest was located, many think it may have been to the west of the city, on the edge of Mount Zion, where a modern and very recently renovated church run by a French religious order now stands.

Named St. Peter in Gallicantu (St. Peter and the Crowing of the Cock), it was built on the site of a sixth-century church and is surrounded by many excavated cellars, stables, cisterns and other such items dating from the Herodian period. For some 1500 years, the site has been associated with Jesus' encounter with the local authorities and, perhaps more importantly from a spiritual perspective, with Peter's threefold denial of Jesus, and Catalan pilgrims nearly 700 years ago mention Gallicantu as the site of a beautiful church.

The current church is situated at the top of a flight of old stone steps dating from the first century, and if indeed, this is the site of Jesus' first imprisonment, it is almost certain that the steps there are those He would have been forced to climb. Excavated rooms found under the church that may well have been cellars, or even dungeons, in which Jesus may have been held until Good Friday morning.

Via Dolorosa

From here, the story of Jesus moves to the possible site of Pilate's palace and the fateful walk down the Via Dolorosa. Jesus was taken to Pontius Pilate, who ultimately condemned Him to be crucified, and one of the highlights of many a Christian pilgrimage to the Holy Land is to follow the steps that Jesus took to His death. There is far from total certainty as to where Pilate's palace was located, but over the centuries, tradition has located the site of Jesus' condemnation, and His subsequent walk with His cross, to the place of execution at Golgotha.

Pilgrim tradition has led to a devotional practice known as the Stations of the Cross - a series of fourteen stations associated with Jesus in the last hours of His life, from His condemnation by Pilate to His burial, and many Anglican and Roman Catholic churches have paintings or carvings of these adorning their walls. Although the Stations reflect prayerful tradition rather than historical certainty, they can be moving and helpful, especially when visited in Jerusalem itself.

Excavations have revealed a large stretch of Roman pavement near the possible site of Pilate's palace, and many groups now start to relive the Stations of the Cross from this point, mindful that Pilate brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge's bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, known as Gabbatha in Aramaic (the language Jesus spoke) and also known by the Greek name of Lithostrotos. From this point, the traditional

route of the Stations winds through the Arab heart of the Old City until it reaches the place where Jesus was nailed to the cross, crucified, died and was buried. Two thousand years ago, this was outside the city wall, but the place has since become incorporated into what is now the Old City, and the last five of the Stations are all in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.

Pilgrims can now visit the new wing of the Terra Sancta Museum in Jerusalem's Old City. This museum, on the Via Dolorosa, has a vast collection of archaeological findings that date back to the origins of Christianity and New Testament Times. The multimedia section is available in Italian, English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Russian, Polish, Arabic and Hebrew.

The Garden Tomb - or Gordon's Calvary

Towards the end of the 19th Century, the Governor of Palestine, General Gordon of Khartoum, became convinced that he had come upon Golgotha from the window of his study, having looked out at a piece of rock that was shaped like a skull: The rock and the surrounding land, just outside Jerusalem's Old City, were purchased by the Church of England, and excavations that took place revealed the presence of a 1st-century tomb. The site, now maintained by the Garden Tomb Trust, is kept in beautiful condition and offers free guided tours.

The Garden Tomb, which many Protestant denominations accept as Golgotha, is a quiet and special place to visit, and whether or not you accept it as the true site, it is an excellent spot for one to imagine how Jesus' burial site may have seemed.

Bethlehem

Just south of Jerusalem lies the city of Bethlehem, birthplace of Jesus and also of King David (now in the territory of the Palestinian Authority (P.A.)). As early as 248 AD, Origen, the Christian theologian, wrote of his visit here: "In Bethlehem you are shown the cave where He was born, and, within the cave, the manger where He was wrapped in swaddling clothes. These things that they show you are common knowledge in the district, even among those who do not share our faith. They

admit...that the Jesus whom Christians adore was born in this cave" (Contra Celsum 51).

The biblical roots of Bethlehem go back to the time of the Patriarchs, indicated by Rachel's Tomb on the outskirts of the town. In the nearby Shepherds' Fields (at Beit Sahour), the angel proclaimed to the shepherds the birth of Jesus (Luke. 2:8-20) in the manger in Bethlehem (Luke 2:4-7). The Basilica of the Nativity, virtually unchanged since the fourth century, stands over the birth grotto. This year, a fragment of wood believed to have formed part of Jesus' manger has been returned to Bethlehem after more than 1,400 years in Europe. The wooden relic, believed to have been part of the manger where Jesus was born, was sent by St. Sophronius, the patriarch



of Jerusalem, to Pope Theodore I in the 640s, around the time of the Muslim conquest of the Holy Land. Pope Francis ordered the return of the thumb-sized relic from Rome's Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore as a gift. It was briefly put on display in Jerusalem before continuing its journey to Bethlehem to coincide with the start of Christmas celebrations there. The relic, encased in an ornate stand, was welcomed to Bethlehem by a procession of marching bands and taken to the Church of St Catherine, next to the Church of the Nativity where tradition says Jesus was born.



Jerusalem-Bethlehem Border Crossing

For tourists visiting Israel, crossing into Bethlehem from Jerusalem (and back) is usually not a difficult matter, especially since the terminal between the two cities has been upgraded by establishing special lanes for tourists moving between them. The Israel Ministry of Tourism has also been promoting cooperation with private Israeli and Palestinian partners to develop the crossing points, and a Ministry of Tourism representative is always present or on call at the border crossing to deal with any unanticipated hitches.

The New Testament city of Jericho was built by Herod the Great about two miles south of the ancient city of Jericho - reputedly the oldest in the world - and it was there in Jesus' day that the Jewish pilgrims from Galilee and Transjordan stopped on their way to Jerusalem. There too, Zacchaeus climbed a sycamore tree to get a better view of Jesus.

Just outside of Jericho, the Greek Orthodox Monastery of Temptation, on the Mount of Temptation, stands on the site where Satan offered Jesus the kingdom of the world (Matthew 4, 1-4). Inside the monastery, high up on a barren 1333-meter-high desert hill, visitors may access the cave where Jesus is believed to have stayed during His 40-day stay in the wilderness, fasting after His baptism. The monastery can be reached by foot - for the hardy - or by cable car.

Aside from Bethlehem, Beit Sahour and Jericho, other sites in the P.A. are of potential interest to Christian pilgrims, and the P.A.'s Ministry of Tourism & Antiquities has worked to identify and develop a number of them. These include Jacob's Well in Nablus, on the grounds of a Greek Orthodox monastery, where Jesus is said

to have asked a Samaritan woman to draw water for Him from a well, the Byzantine church at Burquin (near Jenin), built to mark the spot where Jesus cured the 10 lepers, the Byzantine church ruins in El Bireh, where Joseph and Mary stopped to rest on their way to Jerusalem, and Sebastia, where Salome is said to have performed her dance of the seven veils, receiving John the Baptist's head in return (a site of particular interest to Provoslav pilgrims, because of the St. John's Russian Orthodox convent situated there).

Another important pilgrimage site is Bethany, situated just over the brow of the Mount of Olives. The Gospels indicate that Jesus chose to stay in Bethany, rather than in Jerusalem itself, when He visited the City and that He was particularly close to Lazarus - whose tomb may be visited there - and his two sisters, Martha and Mary. Today, a modern church (built in the early 1950s) stands on the site considered to be the home of Martha, Mary and Lazarus. It contains some very striking modern mosaic work, depicting both the characters themselves and some of the important incidents recorded in the gospels that took place in Bethany.

BETWEEN JERUSALEM AND TEL AVIV

Especially - though by no means exclusively - for pilgrims flying into Israel's Ben Gurion Airport, there is much of Christian interest to see in the vicinity of the airport, as well as in the entire region between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. A pilgrimage tour of the country could easily start - or conclude - with a visit to both the Neot Kedumim Biblical Landscape Reserve, and Mini Israel, the Madurodam-like exhibition not far away. At the former, where plants mentioned in the Bible are grown and biblical-style meals are available, pilgrims can read the Gospels in their context - Israel's natural and agricultural landscapes and first-century daily life - and find new and rich dimensions in familiar texts that take on color, texture, fragrance and fresh meanings. They can also visit a chapel where pilgrims prayed 1600 years ago.

At Mini Israel, a large number of miniature models of Christian holy sites are featured - as well as others of general interest from all over the country - and a visit to this site is one way of introducing groups to what they will see, or recapitulating their visit, just prior to departure. Mini Israel is close by the Latroun Trappist Monastery and there may be groups interested in visiting this facility, too.



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One of the latest sites in the area of potential interest to Christians visiting Israel, and Catholic visitors in particular, is the Saxum Project in the Judean Hills region, between Kibbutz Maaleh HaHamisha and Abu Ghosh, 15 km west of Jerusalem. The Saxum Visitor Center is an information center for tour guides and visitors to the Holy Land, where interactive and multimedia resources highlight the heritage and roots of the Christian faith, with the aim of fostering a deeper knowledge of other faiths and to provide a solid foundation for understanding the holy sites.

Pilgrims can now walk the new 18-km. (11-mile) Emmaus Trail that goes from the Saxum Visitor Center in Abu Ghosh and ends at the monastery of Emmaus Nicopolis. The whole walk should take five to six hours.

Other sites of possible interest in this area include the ancient cities of Ramle and Lod. Both were Holy Land centers during Crusader times and the latter was where Aeneas was healed by Simon Peter during a visit to the area (Acts 9:32-35).

EIN KAREM

Adjacent to Jerusalem - in fact, a part of Israel's capital city nowadays - the pastoral Ein Karem suburb, has long been associated with Elizabeth and Zacharias, the parents of John the Baptist, and is renowned as being his birthplace.



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In addition, Ein Karem was visited by Mary during her pregnancy. It contains two churches, one of which commemorates John's birth and the other the Visitation. Inscribed in the churches is text of the Benedictus (Zacharias' song in Luke 1:68-79) and the Magnificat (Mary's song in Luke 1:46-55) respectively, both in many different languages. In the opposite direction, seven and a half miles from Jerusalem, lies Emmaus, where the resurrected Jesus met the two travelers (Luke 24, 13-35).

Ein Karem's original Church of the Visitation, also known as the Church of the Magnificat, was constructed in the fourth century by the Empress Helena on the site where, tradition holds, Mary felt Jesus stirring in her for the first time. Later, the Crusaders identified the site as the place where the meeting between Elizabeth and Mary took place, and they erected a two-story church on the ruins of the ancient house of worship. Mary visited Ein Karem on the way to Bethlehem during her pregnancy, met her kinswoman Elizabeth and stayed with her for three months following the visitation by the angel Gabriel in which he announced the future birth of Jesus. "Elizabeth spoke out with a loud voice and said: "Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me that the mother of my Lord comes to me" (Luke 1:42). A stone against one wall bears the imprint of a young boy's body. A tradition relates that the infant John left this imprint here when Elizabeth hid him from Herod's soldiers at the time of the Slaughter of the Innocents.

The Church of St. John the Baptist in Ein Karem belongs to the Franciscan monastery of the same name. The first church rose here in the fifth century, on the spot traditionally held to be the home of Zacharias and Elizabeth. A marble star beneath the altar bears a Latin inscription: "Hic Precursor Domini Natus Est" ("Here, the precursor of the Lord was born").

Another find was disclosed, which identifies John the Baptist with this area of Israel and authenticates, perhaps, the



tradition of his having been born in the village of Ein Karem. A cave was discovered by chance near the village, situated within the orchards of Kibbutz Tzuba, during archeological explorations, and signs in it indicate that the cave was a holy Christian place used by monks and dedicated to John the Baptist. Some of the earliest Christian art depicting John the Baptist and his symbols (also the three crosses of the crucifixion) were found on the walls of the cave, and some researchers believe that this is the place where John the Baptist sought his first solitude in the wilderness (Luke 1:80) and where he first

practiced his baptism procedures. Among the site's additional findings are the largest ritual bathing pool ever unearthed in the Jerusalem area and installations connected to early baptism procedures, including a unique foot-anointing stone.

Just off the Jerusalem-Tel Aviv road, the Biblical Garden, located on Moshav Yad Hashmona, a collective settlement populated by Finnish Christians and Messianic Jews, is a general representation of a village from the period of the Bible, from Joshua and until the Second Temple era. It includes reconstructions of a watchtower, threshing floor, wine presses, olive presses, a rock-hewn burial tomb that contains ancient sarcophagi and ossuaries, a mikveh (ritual immersion pool), and more, to help visitors visualize how life was lived by the Jews of biblical times, as an aid to helping them interpret biblical texts.

JAFFA

Closer to Tel Aviv, the ancient port of Jaffa - for centuries the pilgrimage gateway to the Holy Land - is mentioned in both the Old and New Testament in numerous contexts. It was used as a port by both King Solomon and King Herod and it was from Jaffa that the Prophet Jonah attempted to flee from God, rather than upbraid the residents of Tarshish. (Jonah, 1:17). A visitor's center in Old Jaffa's center, which leads down to the port, relates



The Mount of the Beatitudes Guesthouse

Situated on the Mount of the Beatitudes – site of the ceremonies on the Mountain (Matthew 5:102), overlooking the Sea of Galilee and adjacent to the Church of the Beatitudes – erected on the mountain in the last century, after they had been destroyed all the churches that were built from time to time until the fourth century

The Guest House has 50 rooms, serving daily lunches, offers the possibility of filming and has a chapel which can be booked to celebrate Masses, for studies and / or prayers.



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Jaffa's checkered history, including its role in the history of early Christianity in the Land of Israel.

However, for most Christians, what is arguably the most significant reference to Jaffa is the Vision of St. Peter (Acts 10:1-48). As it is written (10-15): "And he [Simon Peter] became very hungry and would have eaten; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance. And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners,

BETWEEN JERUSALEM AND THE DEAD SEA



The improved and upgraded Route 1, connecting Jerusalem to the Dead Sea, now makes sites of interest to pilgrimage tourists more accessible than ever before.

Following the opening of the outdoor Good Samaritan Museum, located on the traditional site of the New Testament Parable of the Good Samaritan, the inn itself, built over what is considered to be the original inn, has been repaired, and it is open for visits every day of the week. The website offers the ability to plan ahead and book in advance. The museum, both the indoor and outdoor parts, features an impressive collection of mosaics - most of which are original - moved from Byzantine Christian churches and Jewish and Samaritan churches in the West Bank (Judea &

and let down to the earth. Wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth and wild beasts and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him. Rise, Peter; kill and eat. And the voice spake unto him again a second time. What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common."

This vision, central to the universality of the Christian gospel, took place in Jaffa on the roof of the house of Simon the Tanner, which for the past 800 years has been the focus of pilgrimage visits to the Holy Land, but which is closed to the public.

Also of interest to Christians visiting the area is the grave of Tabitha (Dorcas), close by the Tel Aviv Botanic Garden, not far away. As it is written in Acts 9, upon the death of Tabitha, a woman known far and wide for her charitable works, Peter was summoned to Jaffa from Lydda (modern-day Lod). "... Peter... knelt down, and prayed: and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes; and when she saw Peter, she sat up. And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive. And it was known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord." (40-24)

Samaria), as well as one large mosaic from an ancient Gaza synagogue. The site is managed by the Israel Nature & Parks Authority (INPA), which also manages two nearby abandoned ancient monasteries, the fifth-century Martyrius Monastery, located off the highway east of Jerusalem, and the nearby Laura of Euthymius from the same period. Both are open to visitors, free of charge.

Herodion, site of the model of King Herod's palace on the mountain where the original stood, is also managed by the INPA, and it may be of interest to pilgrims. Likewise, two additional INPA facilities, the Qumran National Park and the Enot Tzukim Nature Reserve, both on the shores of the northern Dead Sea and also managed by the INPA, may draw interest too. The former is located in the vicinity of Qumran, where Essene scribes wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls. Some of Jesus' pronouncements as recorded in the New Testament bear similarities to expressions in the scrolls, and St. Paul quotes scrolls written at Qumran. Enot Tzukim, a few kilometers south, is a nature reserve dating back to Herodian times. Some Christian groups hold prayer services there, at pools formed by underground freshwater springs where fish swim.



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Turning north again and just off the first section of the road leading from Route 1 to the Galilee, Qasr-el-Yehud, on the shores of the Dead Sea, at the Jordan River's southern edge, has been upgraded and rehabilitated by the INPA. This historical site, considered to be the place where Jesus was baptized but which was only open intermittently, is now open to all at no charge throughout the week - as are all INPA religious sites. Recently, Israeli and foreign engineers sounded the all-clear around three churches on the western bank of the Jordan River at Qasr el-Yahud, after mines that had marooned the shrines for decades were cleared.

THE GALILEE

"And Jesus went about all Galilee...." (Matthew 4:23)

The importance of the Galilee in the life and message of Jesus cannot be overestimated. It was in the Galilee that He spent most of His life. He walked along its paths, lived in its villages, prayed in its synagogues, collected His followers and preached and healed its people. His family and friends - the two Marys, Peter, et. al. - were all Galileans. Looking carefully at New Testament texts, shows that almost

83 percent of Jesus' miracles recorded in the New Testament took place in the Galilee region. All of the spots where these mystical events are believed to have transpired have been commemorated and honored with houses of worship. Yet even for the visitor for whom man-made edifices are of little spiritual import, the sites themselves - their locations based on a word of mouth tradition that has been handed down by generations of Christians dwelling in the Galilee, from father to son - are imbued with the spiritual energy of faith that has given them meaning for century upon century.

Jesus' regular journeys involved long, scenic walks through the rugged and beautiful landscape of the Galilee, its green rolling hills and tranquil lakeside, and Jesus Himself often used the topography of the Galilee in the course of His ministry as a metaphor in His teachings.

This meaningful methodology is no less valid today

in getting to the heart of the Holy Land pilgrimage experience. For the Catholic taking part in a Mass on the Mount of the Beatitudes and experiencing the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount, or the Protestant taking in the Galilee topography - hardly changed in many places, aside from the occasional road or electric pole - or feeling the waves and storms of the sea, there is an added dimension to the religious experience that is sure to leave an indelible mark.

NAZARETH

Nazareth, where Jesus grew up, the city whose name He bore throughout His life, where Mary received the Annunciation (Luke 1) and the Word was made flesh, is a good place to begin a Galilee pilgrimage tour. The



Franciscan Church of the Annunciation - the largest basilica in the Middle East - commemorates the visit to Mary of the archangel Gabriel. The Greek Orthodox Church of St. Gabriel stands not far away, constructed over Nazareth's only spring, where the Holy Family surely drew its water. When Nazareth was preparing for millennium celebrations, an underground tunnel from the time of Jesus was discovered, the pathway the inhabitants of Nazareth would take to reach the source of the water at Mary's Well.

Though a bustling city of more than 65,000 inhabitants nowadays, and becoming more westernized all the time, Nazareth, nestling in a circle of hills, still has managed to retain a special timeless charm. The sound of church bells interlaced with the call of the Moslem muezzin to prayer echoes through the twisting lanes, intermingling with the aroma of exotic foods. For the locals, Nazareth is well known as a gastronomic as well as a religious

center, and it even is developing a nascent nightlife scene. For pilgrims arriving in Israel in mid-December, Nazareth's Christmas Market, located in the local "shouk" (outdoor marketplace), where a diverse assortment of souvenirs representative of the Holy Land is also available throughout the year, operates for a number of days prior to the holiday and may be of interest too. Along with its traditional sites of interest to pilgrims, Nazareth has inaugurated a couple of newer sites that highlight aspects of the city in Christian contexts. Nazareth Village is a recreated village from Jesus' time, where farmers dressed in first-century costumes and using tools and utensils from that era, actually work. Visitors can see a sower struggling to keep valuable seeds from falling waste on barren rock, or watch a builder chisel a cornerstone from a limestone quarry. There are also figures dressed up as New Testament personae, who talk about Jesus and explain His teachings via parables, and there also are a number of "parable walks" where visitors can see and experience the sort of topography and plant life that gave rise to many New Testament parables.

The International Mary of Nazareth Center speaks about the Virgin Mary as part of a learning experience, to show her relevance to all people, Christian or not, and open a dialogue with them. The focus of the Mary of Nazareth tourist experience is its four screening rooms, stylized to resemble caves, with seating for about 50 each, based on periods in Mary's life: "From Creation to Mary's Childhood"; "From the Annunciation to Jesus' Birth"; "The 30 Years in Nazareth," and "From Good Friday to Easter." All the widescreen presentations are in audio-visual form and are screened in 11 languages by numerous computerized projectors as visitors move from one room to the next. Plans call for an additional room, which would relate to the spread of Christianity all over the world.

The tour ends in the interactive video room, where a selection of 30-minute films on aspects of the Virgin Mary can be viewed on touch screens. Aside from these, the center features a hanging garden with about 400 species of plants, a lookout point

from which the Mt. of the Precipice and most of the city's famous churches are visible, a dining room where group meals are available and a chapel atop the facility, decorated with icons. Originally, the chapel was to have been situated in the courtyard, on the entrance level, but excavations revealed the remains of a first-century house and of a wall 800 years older, so plans for the chapel were changed and the archeological remnants put on display.

Many sites within a short drive from Nazareth are associated with the life of Jesus. Sepphoris (Zippori), to the west, the birthplace of Mary's parents Joachim and Anna and a resting place of the three magi on their journey to Bethlehem, is a beautiful national park with amazing ancient mosaics. At Moshav Hoshaya, adjacent to modern Zippori just off the road leading to Tiberias, a first-century village has been reconstructed that offers visitors the opportunity to experience Galilee life as it was lived during Jesus' time.

Mt. Tabor, venerated for centuries by many as the site of the Transfiguration (Luke 9:28-36), is also nearby. A number of churches stand at the crest of this 4500-step mountain, accessible also by motorized vehicles. The one most frequently visited was rebuilt in the 1950s into the stark ruins of a Crusader church and fortress, and inside its three chapels are a reminder of Peter's suggestion to build "three huts, one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." The view from the roof is stunning. The village of Nain, at the foot of Mt. Tabor, is where Jesus healed a young man and was first called "Lord." Kafr Kana (Cana of the Galilee), site of Jesus' first miracle at a wedding ceremony (John 2:1-11), is to the east. It is a small town, with two churches, one Franciscan (i.e., Roman Catholic), and one Greek Orthodox; and both contain remains of

Roman era water pots reminiscent of the abundant supply of wine alluded to in the Gospel, when Jesus turned water to wine. Today, Kafr Kana is a place to which many Christian couples are drawn, to renew their wedding vows.



Remains of what is probably the very first Christian prayer house in the world and most certainly the first in the Middle East, were discovered a few years ago at Megiddo, the New Testament's Armageddon, which overlooks the Jezreel Valley. Megiddo, with its more than two dozen layers of ruins, tells the story of the changing face of conquest and settlement in northern Israel over thousands of years. Capitalizing on the significance of the find, plans call for the development of the site as an inspirational attraction and for Christian pilgrims and tourists interested in ancient Christian archeology.

THE SEA OF GALILEE

The Galilee is rich in the memories of Jesus' ministry, and no pilgrimage journey can be considered complete without visits to the significant places where He walked and preached. When beginning a trip to explore the sites around the sea, an excellent starting point could be Capernaum - not only because this was where Jesus lived in the area and where He preached, but because it is possible to reach the site via boat, giving the visitor the experience of plying the waves of the Sea of Galilee on a boat very much resembling those in use in Jesus' time. According to accounts in the New Testament, it was at Capernaum that Jesus selected His first disciples. One of the more interesting parts of the site is an edifice known as Peter's House, dedicated in ancient times as a Church shrine, with early Roman graffiti still visible on the

walls. The building is run by the Franciscans, who have constructed a second layer ceiling/floor partition there and have dedicated the upper level as a chapel, with a multi-hued altar and a part of the floor constructed of glass, to afford a view of Peter's House on the floor below. Adjacent to Peter's house stand the remains of a late fourth-century synagogue, constructed on the ruins of a synagogue from a much earlier period. It has been suggested by more than one scholar that it was here that Jesus prayed when He lived in Capernaum. Also at Capernaum is one of the loveliest of Sea of Galilee churches, which belongs to the Greek Orthodox Church. In almost any panoramic view of the western side of the Sea of Galilee, this charming building sticks out with its impressive crosses and red cupolas.

Just south of Capernaum lies Tabgha, a corruption of the Greek word Heptagon, or "seven springs." Two churches stand there. The first, under Benedictine control, marks the Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes. The original church on the site was constructed in the middle of the fourth century AD, with its altar situated on the spot where the loaves and fishes would have been placed. The mosaics on view there, scenes rich in waterfowl, water plants, and local fauna, were rediscovered in the 1930s. They are from a later Byzantine church, built in 480 AD and destroyed by the Persians early in the seventh century.

The second church at Tabgha, the Primacy of St. Peter, commemorates the event mentioned in the 21st chapter of the Book of John, of Simon Peter's being the first to spy the resurrected Jesus as He stood and called His disciples from the opposite Sea of Galilee shores as they were casting their fishing nets. It was here, the New Testament tells us, that Jesus instructed Peter and his



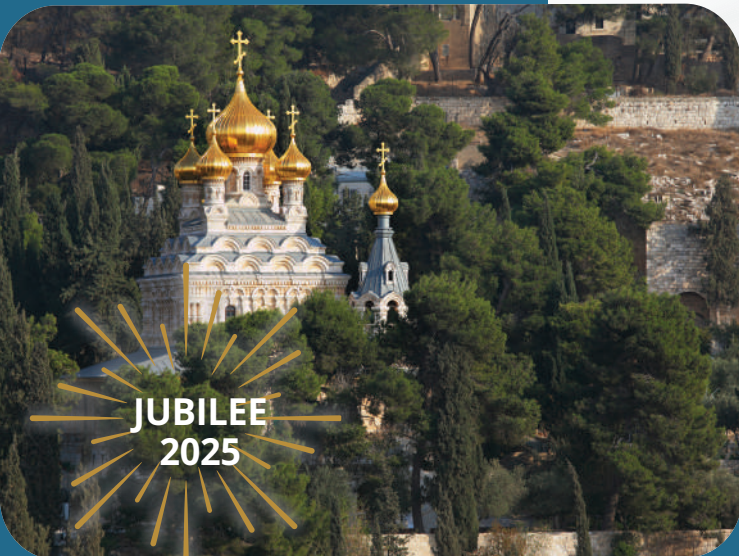
colleagues, who had been unsuccessful in their fishing endeavors, to cast their nets on the other side of the boat, where they immediately hauled in a catch of 153 fish. It was also at this same time that Jesus instructed Peter to “feed my sheep.”

Not far from Capernaum, and also fronting the Sea of Galilee, the Magdala Center, the newest Sea of Galilee attraction, is of particular relevance to Catholic visitors, though of interest to the general public as well, serving as a crossroads of Jewish and Christian history. It is located at Migdal, on land where archeological excavations prior to the center’s development unearthed a first-century AD synagogue where Jesus probably preached, and is being developed to offer visitors an experience of first century Judaism and Christianity in the Holy Land.

The archeological park is now open, as is the facility’s “Duc in Altum” spirituality center comprising the “Atrium of the Women of the New Testament” and four chapels, including one designed for ecumenical use and another with icons, for Orthodox pilgrims. The former houses a boat-shaped altar that overlooks Magdala’s ancient harbor and the Sea of Galilee, and all the chapels have been decorated with mosaics depicting scenes from Jesus’

ministry. The center will soon include accommodations, a restaurant and an expanded archeological park. Across the road from these significant Sea of Galilee religious sites, and up a hill, is the spot which commemorates Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, at a location we know as the Mount of the Beatitudes. With its octagonal church - one side for each of the beatitudes mentioned in the Book of Matthew (chapters 5-8) - built to take full advantage of the Sea of Galilee view, this is the most widely visited Sea of Galilee site, year after year. The hill is the reputed site of the Sermon on the Mount; nevertheless, the remains of a previous, fourth-century church Mt. of the Beatitudes church are evident on the lower edge of the ridge and much earlier traditions identified the Mount of the Beatitudes with nearby Mount Arbel. In any case, the current site is a wonderful spot for any Christian to experience the event as it might have been during Jesus’ time, a place to read the Sermon, meditate on it and reflect in tranquility.

Continuing around the Sea of Galilee, the next spot of interest to the Christian visitor is Bethsaida, located within Jordan Park in the lower Golan Heights. Bethsaida is the city of Philip, Andrew and Peter (John 12:21); Jesus visited here and cured a blind man (Mark 8:22). It is



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also mentioned as part of the “Jewish triangle” in Jesus’ time, along with Capernaum and Korazin, the focus of Jewish life and culture of which Jesus said: “Woe unto thee, Korazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.” (Matthew 11:21). Much serious archeological work remains to be done at the site. Nevertheless, its having been discovered, along with its location relatively far away from the shores of the Sea of Galilee, up on a hill, can tell us much about the way Jesus’ fishermen disciples lived and worked and went about their weekly routine.

Kursi, the biblical Gergesenes, where the remains of a beautiful Byzantine monastery mark the traditional spot of the Miracle of the Gaderene Swine (Matthew, 8:28-34), is another significant site on the Sea of Galilee’s eastern side.

The Galilee abounds with any number of Christian sites. Near Mt. Tabor, in what now is the Arab village of Doburiyah, Jesus cured the epileptic boy (Luke 9, 37-43). Baniyas, also known as Caesarea Phillipi, is the Golan Heights site of Peter’s confession (Matthew 16:13).

Not all the sites in the Galilee that are significant to Christians are enriched with their uniqueness or “holiness” as a result of Jesus having preached, or performed miracles there. At Kibbutz Ginosar, the remains of a first-century boat are on display. This 2000-year-old trireme was discovered in the mud banks of the Sea of Galilee, when the lake receded during a drought in the 1980s, and it may well have been associated with the life of Jesus and the fishermen disciples. “The same day Jesus went out of the house, and sat by the sea side. And great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that he went into a ship, and sat: and the whole multitude stood on the shore” (Matthew 13:1-2).

Evidence shows that the boat was constructed of a strange combination of various types of wood - probably recycled timber - proof that it was a poor man’s ship, very likely similar to those used by Jesus and His fishermen disciples. There are even those who go so

far as to claim that statistically, there is a slight chance that Jesus Himself sailed in this very vessel. In any case, viewing the boat takes pilgrims back in time and places them face to face with a reality that was very much a part of Jesus’ world.

And then there’s the Sea of Galilee itself. No trip to the region can be considered complete without a Sea of Galilee cruise, preferably in a wooden boat constructed after a 2000-year old sailing vessel and accompanied by a reenactment of the Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes and dining on Sea of Galilee St. Peter’s fish, and for those so inclined, wedding ceremonies on a boat in the midst of the Sea of Galilee can be arranged.



HIPPOS (SUSSITA)

The city of Hippos (Sussita) is another fascinating site to visit as it was the central city of the Golan during the Hellenistic and Roman/Byzantine periods and contains a number of churches. It is located on a diamond (or horse) shaped mountain which rises 350M (1148 feet) above the Sea of Galilee. Recent excavations revealed the impressive plan and structures of the city. Some 15 years ago, while on the trail of an elusive Byzantine-era synagogue, archaeologists at the ongoing Hippos-Sussita Excavations Project began excavating what appeared to be a public building that had been burned to the ground, but then moved on to other work. This summer,

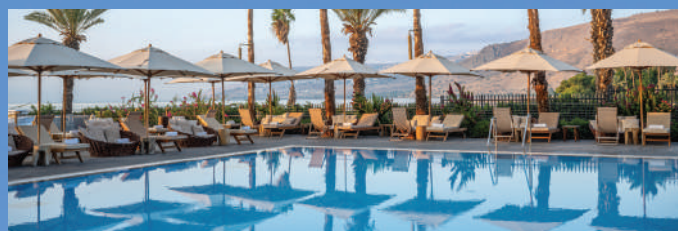
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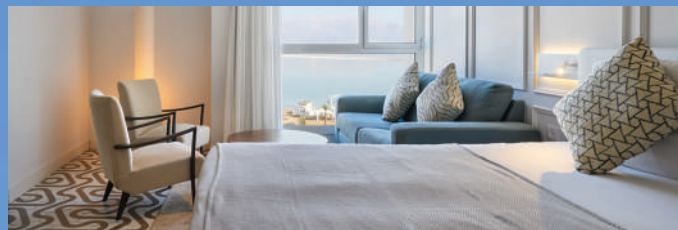
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the settlement's South-West or Burnt Church was revisited by archaeologists in search of firm dating for the conflagration that both destroyed and preserved the church. They revealed a plethora of interesting artifacts and mosaics — and a nearly illiterate artisan, who had been tasked with inscribing the names of donors and abbots for posterity. Instead, his grammar and spelling mistakes are preserved in a trio of ancient Greek mosaics. During the Byzantine period there were eight churches, indicating its importance for Christians. The city was devastated by a massive earthquake in 749 AD which left it in ruins. The city was an important Christian center during the Byzantine period, and was an episcopate - the seat of the Bishop - starting in the year 359. The majority of its citizens were Christian and the existence of eight churches indicates the city's importance.



the public, the entire reconstructed area of the halls has been integrated to create a Crusader experience, highlighted by a signposted route through the complex, a Crusader-style pub and a themed feast featuring food based on the cuisine of Crusader times, along with music and entertainment, waiters dressed in period garb and a jousting tournament.

ACRE & CRUSADES

Aside from the sites that are a reflection of the life and teachings of Jesus, a number of other places in the region are of historical relevance to Christians that visit the Galilee. Of these, the Old City of Acre, a UNESCO "World Heritage Site," is the most prominent, considered by a growing number of experts to be the world's most significant Crusader site. The current Old City is essentially a second layer, built upon a subterranean level dating back to the Crusader period. Everything underground - the cavernous rooms, the catacombs through which one can pass from place to place - dates back to the knights of the order of Saint John de Acre, while the modern city of Acre sits atop the subterranean level of unseen history. For many years Acre's city fathers were content with the few catacombs that had been unearthed. Recently, however, a major project to reveal the Crusader city in its full glory has been undertaken, and with each passing year, additional subterranean Crusader halls and crypts are dug up, reconstructed and put on public display, taking visitors back almost 900 years in time. After years of being on display to

From Acre, Christians - or anyone interested in the history of the period - can set out in the footsteps of the Crusaders, to visit their fortresses in places such as Montfort, Belvoir, Yechiam and Sepphoris. It was at the latter - site of some of Israel's most remarkable mosaic finds - that the Crusaders gathered before setting out one hot July day in the year 1187, to liberate Tiberias from the siege imposed by the Muslim commander Saladin. Reaching the valley at the foot of the Horns of Hittim, they were shot at by what appeared to be a small Muslim force armed only with lances and bows. The Crusaders attacked and chased after these soldiers until they reached Nebi Shueb, where they were ambushed by the main force of the enemy led by its commander Saladin. Because of their heavy armor they couldn't redeploy and were destroyed and their defeat marked the end of the Crusader military presence and its kingdom in the Holy Land, which very soon afterwards fell entirely to Saladin.

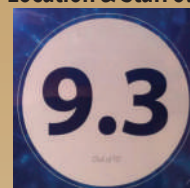
This significant historical tale can serve as the backdrop for a delightful walking tour. Begin at Sepphoris, at the citadel built originally by the Crusaders on Byzantine foundations. (Taking time to admire Sepphoris' amazing mosaics is well advised). Then take the short ride to the Horns of Hittin, close to a hill that is actually a dormant volcano. Disembark at this point and begin to walk. Climb to the top of the volcano for one of the most stunning vistas in the lower East Galilee. Continue walking by



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descending to the grave of Jethro - the father-in-law of Moses and a major prophet for the Druze nation. (This site - Nebi Shueb - is the holiest Druze site in Israel). The path then leads to the archeological ruins of the Jewish synagogue Kfar Hittin.

Descend along a steep cliff and pass through the mammoth caves in which rebels against King Herod dwelled. Herod, who was half-Jewish, died in the year 40 BC; nevertheless, his influence colored the society in which Jesus lived and taught. Look down for amazing

sites such as Sepphoris, Cana, the Horns of Hittim, the Arbel Cliffs, Tabgha, and Capernaum, culminating at the Mount of the Beatitudes. An optional return trail of equal distance is also a part of the Jesus Trail project - a route that passes by Tiberias, the Jordan River, Mount Tabor, Mount Precipice and returns to Nazareth. The trail offers an accessible way for pilgrims to navigate an ancient route in a modern location and offers the experience of walking in the steps of Jesus in a way that is authentic, adventurous and educational. Recently, the

developers of the Jesus Trail launched self-guided tour packages, based on orientation, luggage transport from one day to the next and accommodations along the way. Yet another trail connecting Nazareth with the Sea of Galilee is the Israel Ministry of Tourism's Gospel Trail, which dovetails about 90 percent with the Jesus Trail but was designed to make the terrain accessible for ordinary visitors, not just backpackers and trekkers, according to the Ministry. The trails have also started to serve as centers around which tourism businesses are being developed.

One modern pilgrimage site deserving of mention, which adds greatly to the pilgrimage experience in the Galilee, is the Yardenit Baptism Site, where the Jordan River meets the Sea of Galilee. Yardenit, which features a visitor's center, together with a new riverside promenade and a parking lot for 50 buses at a time, is an officially recognized Jordan River baptism site and access to it and its facilities is free of charge. It has been enlarged and improved

over the years, and features separate baptismal pools, enabling different groups to conduct private worship ceremonies. Baptismal robes can be rented or purchased, and hot showers are available on site.

The "Wall of New Life" running from the entrance to the baptismal pools, features translations into more than 90 languages and dialects, of the verses from the New Testament (Mark 1:9-11) that relates the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist, inscribed on ceramic panels. The riverside promenade, landscaped with indigenous flora, offers spots for small gatherings and contemplation, while to complement the experience, the on-site Manna Restaurant, located on the Jordan River, serves a traditional meal featuring St. Peter's Fish.

views of the Sea of Galilee and of Migdal, where Mary Magdalene was born. Descend via the path cutting down the cliff, to the Valley of Ginosar and the Sea of Galilee, to Kibbutz Ginosar, home of the boat from the time of Jesus. This one-day walking tour creates an active encounter with the topography and the land, and at the same time, takes pilgrims from the Crusader period, back in history to the era just prior to Jesus.

Another example of a route that traverses time, religion and topography, is a walk from the Mount of the Beatitudes, through the ruins of an ancient Jewish synagogue dating 400-500 years after the life of Jesus, and then back again to Capernaum, a site replete with actual and symbolic meaning in Christian teaching.

A third, is the Jesus Trail, a 65-kilometer trail route complete with maps and coordinates that can be accessed online. It begins in Nazareth and passes through

Located in Tiberias, the "Galilee Experience" is one more modern attraction of possible interest to the Christian pilgrim. A multimedia presentation, it offers a good



overview of the history of the Galilee, including much of interest to Christian pilgrims and visitors. Commentary is in several languages.

Building an Effective Pilgrimage Itinerary

Except for the programs of pilgrimage groups with specialized interests, or those comprised of those that have visited Israel many times, almost all Holy Land itineraries will include the same basic components: Jerusalem and the Galilee; the Via Dolorosa and the Sea of Galilee; Bethlehem and Nazareth. True, the emphases are certain to change from group to group, depending on denomination, country of origin, the preferences of the spiritual leader, the length of the trip and the like, but still, to the degree that a pilgrimage is based on the text of the Holy Scriptures and its participants follow in the footsteps of Jesus or have another biblical or Christian focus, just about every pilgrim will have visited Capernaum, the Mt. of the Beatitudes, the Garden of Gethsemane and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and/or the Garden Tomb, to name but a few pilgrimage “highlights.”

For this obvious reason, some of the itineraries here sound so similar. In fact, they are no more than suggestions, and every itinerary, every day, every site should be looked upon as no more than a thread - an individual piece of a fabric that in the final analysis will make up a unified spiritual weave that will be your unique trip. Some itineraries in this manual refer to sites in terms of chapter and verse; there are those that hint at a more experiential approach; in others, places are listed more dryly, outlines, as it were, to serve as a basis for development or expostulation by the tour leader or religious guide. Mix and match what best serves your group and your temperament. In the final analysis, there are many ways to structure a pilgrimage itinerary and none is necessarily “right” or “wrong.”

Let your pilgrims be pilgrims. Give them an opportunity to traverse the topography, feel it and breathe it. Jesus often used the topography of the Holy Land as a metaphor in His teachings, and pilgrimage organizers can recreate this meaningful methodology today. Just as Christianity talks about moving from the catacombs to

the high cathedrals, encourage your pilgrims to hike and climb. Let them walk, walk, walk. Singing hymns and/or other sacramental or devotional songs while hiking is an excellent way to strengthen group bonding; media with music or other content relevant to the area is also a good idea as they advance by foot from Capernaum to Tabgha, for example, and descend to the fields from



the Mount of the Beatitudes.

In short, allow your program participants to undergo and experience transformation. Encourage recommitment and reaffirmation through authentic encounters with people and place. Thrust your pilgrims into challenge, both intellectual and physical, by opening your itinerary up to the resources of the people of the land and the people who know the land.

SUGGESTED ITINERARIES

For First-Time Visitors (Protestant Pilgrims)

Day 1

Arrival. Overnight Jerusalem.

Day 2

Panoramic view from Mt. of Olives, walk down past Dominus Flevit to Garden of Gethsemane, Kidron Valley, St. Peter in Gallicantu, Mt. Zion (Room of the Last Supper, Dormition Abbey). Overnight Jerusalem.

Day 3

David's Tower for view of East Jerusalem and visit to museum models highlighting Christian history in the city. Walking tour of walled Old City including Temple Mt. (Dome of the Rock, Western Wall), St. Anne, Lithostrotos, Via Dolorosa, Holy Sepulcher, Cardo, Jewish Quarter and bazaars. Communion service at the Garden Tomb. Overnight Jerusalem.

Day 4

Bethlehem, Ein Karem, Model of Second-Temple Jerusalem at the Israel Museum, Yad Vashem. Overnight Jerusalem.

Day 5

Inn of the Good Samaritan, Qumeran, Masada, swim in the Dead Sea. Overnight Jerusalem.

Day 6

Depart Jerusalem for the Galilee. Jericho, Qasr-el-Yahud Baptism Site, Jordan Valley, Nazareth, Cana. Overnight Tiberias.

Day 7

Boat ride on Sea of Galilee, Capernaum, Tabgha, Mt. of the Beatitudes, Banias. Overnight Tiberias.

Day 8

Megiddo, Caesarea, Jaffa, Tel Aviv.



For Second-Timers (Protestant Pilgrims)

Day 1

Arrival. Overnight Jerusalem.

Day 2

Panoramic view from the Haas Promenade, Monastery of the Cross, Shrine of the Book, Emmaus, Neot Kedumim with a biblical meal. Overnight Jerusalem.

Day 3

Day at leisure for private sightseeing. Overnight in Jerusalem.

Day 4

Beit Shean, Yardenit Baptism Site, Mt. Tabor, half-day seminar experience in a Galilee education center. Overnight Galilee.

Day 5

Acre, Haifa, Mukhraka, Druze Villages, Tel Aviv. Overnight Tel Aviv.

Day 6

Morning flight to Eilat. Cross Taba border and drive to hotel at Mt. Sinai for overnight.

Day 7

Early morning climb up Mt. Sinai, visit Santa Katarina Monastery; return to Eilat for visit and overnight.

Day 8

Timna, Avdat, Bedouin hospitality, Tel Aviv.



For First-Time Visitors (Catholic Pilgrims)

Day 1

Arrival. Overnight Jerusalem.

Day 2

Panoramic view from Mt. of Olives, Ascension Church, Dominus Flevit, Gethsemane Basilica (Holy Mass) and Grotto, Mary's Tomb, Kidron Valley, St. Peter in Gallicantu, Mt. Zion (Room of the Last Supper, Dormition Abbey). Overnight Jerusalem.

Day 3

Enter St. Stephen's Gate for a walking tour of the Old City: Temple Mt., St. Anne, Pool of Bethesda, Chapel of Flagellation, Ecce Homo Arch, Lithostrotos, stations of the Via Dolorosa, Church of the Holy Sepulcher (Holy Mass). Overnight Jerusalem.

Day 4

Bethlehem (Mass at the Church of the Nativity), Shepherds' Field, Ein Karem, Church of the Visitation and St. John's Church, Model of Second-Temple, Israel Museum. Overnight Jerusalem.

Day 5

Good Samaritan's Inn, Masada, swim in the Dead Sea, return to Jerusalem for Mass. Overnight Jerusalem.

Day 6

Depart Jerusalem for the Galilee. Jericho, Jordan Valley, Nazareth (Holy Mass at Basilica of the Annunciation), Cana. Overnight Tiberias.

Day 7

Sea of Galilee boat ride, Capernaum, Tabgha, Mt. of the Beatitudes (Holy Mass), Kursi, Yardenit Baptism Site. Overnight Tiberias.

Day 8

Mt. Tabor (Holy Mass), Megiddo, Jaffa.



For Second-Timers (Catholic Pilgrims)

Day 1

Arrival. Overnight Jerusalem.

Day 2

Walk from Bethesda to Ascension, Mass at Dominus Flevit, Bethpage, Bethany, Monastery of the Cross, Shrine of the Book, Yad Vashem, Emmaus. Overnight Jerusalem.

Day 3

Day at leisure for private sightseeing. Overnight Jerusalem.

Day 4

Jericho (Mt. of Temptation), Qasr-el-Yahud Baptism Site, Belvoir Castle, Nazareth (Mass at the Shrine of St. Joseph). Overnight Nazareth.

Day 5

Walking tour of Nazareth, Nain, Mt. Carmel (Elijah's Cave, Stella Maris for Mass), Caesarea, Jaffa to see the House of Simon the Tanner. Overnight in Christian hospice in Jaffa or Tel Aviv hotel.

Day 6

Holy Mass at St. Peter's Church in Jaffa, flight to Eilat. Cross Taba border and drive to hotel at Mt. Sinai for overnight.

Day 7

Early morning climb up Mt. Sinai, visit Saint Catherine's Monastery; return to Eilat for visit and overnight.

Day 8

Timna, Avdat, Tel Aviv.



THE ISRAEL PILGRIMAGE EXPERIENCE

A Manual for Holyland Travel

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THE OLD CITY OF AKKO INVITES YOU TO DISCOVER ITS SECRETS ABOVEGROUND AND BELOW

Old Akko (Acre) is a port city situated on a peninsula on the Mediterranean coast in northern Israel. It is known for its well-preserved old city walls. A visit to this ancient city is an important part of the Holy Land experience and one of Israel's main tourist destinations. Currently home to thousands of residents, Akko is a study of contrasts – the convergence of East and West, modernity and antiquity, beauty and ruins. Known for centuries as the gateway to the Holy Land due to its location as a port of entry for international dignitaries and trade, Akko provides a unique glimpse into the Crusader and Ottoman periods in the region. The subterranean crusader city was revealed and restored under the Ottoman city above. This extraordinary phenomenon was awarded World Heritage Site by UNESCO

POINTS OF INTEREST: The Knights' Kingdom

A 5,000-year old story unfolds inside the halls of the fortress - the museum's displays and films projected on the walls tell the story of the crusades. During this tour, each visitor receives a headset, and can choose one of 10 different languages.

The Hospitaller Fortress

The Hospitaller Order, which thrived in Jerusalem during the First Crusader Kingdom (1099-1187) transferred its headquarters to Akko during the Second Crusader Kingdom (1191-1291). The

Hospitallers expanded their headquarters and rebuilt the site, which consisted of two to three floors around a central court as well as underground sections.

The Templars Tunnel

The Templars were a military-monastic order who – in the name of the pope – aided pilgrims and the ailing coming from Europe to visit the holy sites of the Land of Israel.

MORE POINTS OF INTEREST:

The colorful Market Street and galleries is the main thoroughfare of the Old City, running from north to south. One cannot visit the city without tasting the delicious dishes at the wonderful Chef Restaurants and paying a visit at the unique Boutique Hotels. A regular ferry from Akko to Haifa and from Haifa to Akko is a special experience that offers tourists the chance to enjoy the spectacular views of the cities by sea.

There are Churches, Mosques and Synagogue in Old Akko. Some of them are opened to visits. The "Or Torah" Synagogue in the new city is a site worth seeing. So is the "Al Basha" Turkish Bath and the Seraya, a structure built during Turkish rule in Akko, in the late 18th century, where the offices of the civilian regime officials were located. It is also recommended to visit the galleries in the Turkish Bazaar and the "Okashi" Art Museum as well as the "Treasures in the Walls" Museum.

Old Akko (ACRE)

Christian pilgrims' point of view

59 CE – Paul of Tarsus visits the city (Ptolemais – Acts 21:7)

1191 CE – King Richard I (Richard the Lionheart) recaptures the city that becomes the capital of the Crusader kingdom of Jerusalem and the gateway to the Holy Land for all the Christian pilgrims.

1219 CE – St. Francis of Assisi arrives in Akko and founds the first Franciscan convent in the city.



For more information on the city of Old Akko:

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