

# The Upper Galilee & the Golan

## הגליל האعلى والجولان הגליל העליון והגולן



The greenest, lushest region of this otherwise rather dry land, Upper Galilee and the wild, mountainous Golan Heights offer the visitor some of the best and most diverse travel experiences in the country.

From Nimrod Castle and the ski fields of Mt Hermon in the far north to the mystical city of Tsfat and the boutique wineries of Ramot, there is so much to see, do and taste. When you're not feasting on local produce at the rustic country restaurants nestled in the Galilean Hills, or sinking into a jacuzzi on the deck of your luxury zimmer, there are rivers to raft, horses to ride and birds to watch.

This region is also a hiker's dream, especially between February and May when its more than 30 national parks, filled with rivers and waterfalls, are at their most dazzling. Experienced walkers might want to explore the 140km Golan Trail, which winds through forested mountains, streams and historical ruins. Others will prefer wandering in the many orchards and picking fresh fruit straight from the tree.

The Upper Galilee and the Golan Heights is the place to hire a car for a couple of days. This will give you the freedom to get lost among the back roads and tiny villages, enjoying forest picnics and refreshing swims in the natural pools.

### HIGHLIGHTS

- Touring the wineries of the Upper Galilee and Golan Heights, such as **Pelter** (p284) – high altitude, rich soil and impressive wine
- **Horse riding** (p296) around Ramot, high up into them thar hills with a genuine Israeli cowboy
- Hiking the trails, canyons and waterfalls of the **Yehudiya Nature Reserve** (p294)
- Getting lost in the mysticism and ancient stories of **Tsfat** (p272)
- Staying at a **luxury guesthouse** (p290) complete with spa treatments, log fire and gourmet cuisine, in Nimrod, in the mountains



## THE UBIQUITOUS ZIMMER

The most common form of accommodation throughout the Upper Galilee and the Golan is known as the 'zimmer'. No one really knows how this particular German word came to symbolise, for Israelis, all that's idyllic about a cabin in the country, though some suggest it was originally an attempt to copy the 'Zimmer Frei' signs of Germany's alpine guesthouses. But whatever the reason, cabin fever has taken Israel by storm.

Zimmers adhere to their own set of very specific criteria, most commonly consisting of a glorified wooden cabin with rustic varnished-pine decor, satellite TV and a kitchen corner complete with tabletop stove and small fridge. Little treats usually await guests: a fruit bowl, homemade cookies, fresh flowers and sometimes a bottle of local wine, alongside tea- and coffee-making facilities. The cabins can be solo or form part of a massive, tightly packed complex; they may be set high on a hillside with a great view from the porch, or isolated in the middle of the woods. But their most oft-touted and highly prized feature is the jacuzzi – normally in the bedroom. Most have one; most Israelis won't book a zimmer without one. Chances are you'll find yourself soaking in one, with a sigh of 'Well, we *did* pay for it', on almost any trip to the area.

## Information

**Upper Galilee Tourist Information Centre** (☎ 04-690 3737; Makhanayim Junction; ☏ 8am-4pm Sun-Sat) 3km north of Rosh Pina.

**Golan Tourism Information Centre** (☎ 04-696 2885; [tour.golan.org.il](http://tour.golan.org.il); ☏ 9am-3.45pm Sun-Fri) In the mall complex outside of Katzrin.

## Climate

This area is characterised by a cool climate with dry summers and wet winters. Snow falls for a few days every winter, yielding enough to operate the ski resort at Mt Hermon.

## Accommodation

In the last few years, due to its popularity as a weekend destination, accommodation in the Upper Galilee and Golan region has become notoriously expensive, and there are consequently few recommended mid-range places available. Many very simple outfits charge more than a good hotel in Tel Aviv would. Prices skyrocket at weekends (Fridays and Saturdays) and during the summer, when a minimum two-night stay may apply. All prices listed in this chapter refer to weekend rates (Friday and Saturday stays) in the high season; off-season (between mid-November and March) you've got some scope for bargaining, especially for longer and midweek stays. Since places reinvent themselves fairly rapidly, go to [www.weekend.co.il](http://www.weekend.co.il) or [www.zimmer.co.il](http://www.zimmer.co.il) to check out the latest available options.

Because even youth hostels are pricey, it's best to consider camping if you're on a tight budget. The most appealing, and best-value, camping sites are situated on the eastern rim of the Sea of Galilee (p267).

## Parks & Reserves

The highlight of a trip to the Upper Galilee and the Golan Heights is a hike or two through one of the stunning national parks. Nearly all are maintained by the **Israel Nature & Parks Authority** (INPA; ☎ 06-680 0086/2006; [www.parks.org.il](http://www.parks.org.il)) and have standard opening hours of 8am to 5pm April to September and 8am to 4pm October to March. On Fridays and holiday eves they close one hour earlier.

To save money you can buy a one-week, six-park 'Green Card' for 90NIS. A two-week, all-park card is 130NIS.

## Getting There & Around

While **Egged buses** (☎ 03-694 8888; [www.egged.co.il/eng](http://www.egged.co.il/eng)) ply the routes between the main Galilean and Golani settlements, principally Katzrin, Rosh Pina and Kiryat Shmona, services are pretty thin on the ground, particularly at weekends.

The best option to explore the region is to rent a car in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem or Tiberias. Distances are relatively short, and the flexibility driving gives is unparalleled. Although not recommended, the local alternative is to hitchhike. Many Israelis, particularly teenagers, thumb their way around the region, and friendly locals are happy to oblige with rides.