



Jerusalem ירושלים القدس

02 / POP 816,000

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Best Places to Stay

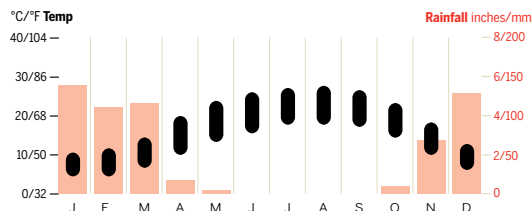
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Why Go?

Holy to Jews, Christians and Muslims, Jerusalem's Old City is one of the world's foremost pilgrimage destinations. A repository of sacred buildings and relics, it is a place where the oft-abused descriptor 'living history' really does apply – here you can walk in the footsteps of prophets, pray in buildings constructed by order of caliphs and kings, and overnight in hospices where Crusaders and cardinals have slumbered. The soundtrack is of church bells, the muezzin's call and the shofar (ram's horn), and the streets smell of everything from church incense to the heady aromas of the spice souq (market). It's a sensory and spiritual experience unlike any other.

There's plenty to see outside the Old City, too, including the hugely impressive Israel Museum and the powerful Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial. They, together with the Old City's manifest attractions, make Jerusalem the number-one tourist destination in Israel for very good reason.

When to Go Jerusalem



Apr Pleasant temperatures, but be prepared for crowds and hefty hotel prices.

Jul The Old City is illuminated at night; shoulder-season hotel prices apply.

Sep & Oct Excellent weather, the Sacred Music Festival and relatively manageable crowds.

History

First Temple

The first settlement on the site of Jerusalem was on the Ophel Ridge, immediately to the southeast of the present-day Jewish Quarter. A small Canaanite city mentioned in Egyptian texts of the 20th century BCE, it was conquered in 997 BCE by the Israelites under King David, who made the city his capital.

Under King Solomon (David's son), the boundaries of the city were extended north to enclose the spur of land that is now Temple Mount/Al-Haram ash-Sharif. The construction of the First Temple began in 950 BCE.

Some 17 years after Solomon's death, the 10 northern tribes of Israel split off to form the separate Kingdom of Israel and Jerusalem became the capital of the Kingdom of Judah. In 586 BCE Jerusalem fell to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and both the city and the First Temple were destroyed; the people of Jerusalem were exiled to Babylonia. Three generations later, the king of Persia, Cyrus, allowed them to return.

Second Temple

The Second Temple was constructed around 520 BCE, and around 445 BCE the city walls were rebuilt under the leadership of Nehemiah, governor of Judah.

The next notable stage in the history of Jerusalem came with Alexander the Great's conquest of the city in 331 BCE. On his death in 323 BCE, the Seleucids eventually took over until the Maccabean Revolt 30 years later. This launched the Hasmonean dynasty, which resanctified the Temple in 164 BCE after it had been desecrated by the Seleucids.

Romans

Under the leadership of General Pompey, Jerusalem was conquered by the Romans around 63 BCE. Some 25 years later they installed Herod the Great to rule what would become the Roman province of Judaea (Iudaea). A tyrant's tyrant, Herod (often known as 'the Great') had his wife and children, as well as rabbis who opposed his rule, put to death. But he is also known for his ambitious construction and infrastructure projects, including expansion of the Temple Mount to its present form.

Upon the death of Herod, the Romans resumed direct control, installing a procurator to administer the city. Pontius Pilate, who is best known for ordering the crucifixion of Jesus around 30 CE, was the fifth procurator.

The Great Jewish Revolt against the Romans began in 66 CE, but after four years of conflict, the Roman general (and later emperor) Titus triumphed. Rome's Arch of Titus, with its famous frieze of Roman soldiers carrying off the contents of the Temple, was built to celebrate his victory.

With the Second Temple destroyed and Jerusalem burnt, many Jews became slaves and more fled into exile. The ruined city continued to serve as the administrative and military headquarters of the Roman province of Judea, but around 130 CE Emperor Hadrian decided to rebuild it – not as a Jewish city (he feared renewed Jewish national aspirations) but as a Roman city complete with pagan temples. This provoked the Jews' unsuccessful and bloody Bar Kochba Revolt (132–35 CE), led by Simon Bar Kochba. After the uprising was crushed, Jerusalem was renamed Aelia Capitolina and Judea became Syria Palaestina. The Romans rebuilt Jerusalem, but Jews were banned from the city.

Byzantines & Muslims

In 313 CE, the Western Roman Emperor, Constantine, and Eastern Roman Emperor, Licinius, met in Milan and agreed on an edict requiring tolerance of all previously persecuted religions. Eleven years after this, Constantine defeated Licinius in a civil war and became sole Emperor of the Roman Empire (later known as the Byzantine Empire). He legalised Christianity and his mother Helena visited the Holy Land in 326–28 CE searching for Christian holy places. This sparked off the building of basilicas and churches, and the city quickly grew to the size it had been under Herod the Great.

The Byzantine Empire was defeated by the Persians, who conquered Jerusalem in 614 CE. Their rule lasted just 15 years before the Byzantines succeeded in retaking the city. That victory, however, was short-lived, for within another 10 years an Arab army, led by Caliph Omar under the banner of Islam, swept through Palestine. In 688 CE the Dome of the Rock was constructed on the site of the destroyed Temple. Under the early Islamic leaders, Jerusalem was a protected centre of pilgrimage for Jews and Christians as well as Muslims, but this came to an end in the 10th century. Under the mercenary Fatimid Caliph al-Hakim, non-Muslims were persecuted and churches and synagogues were destroyed, actions that eventually helped provoke the Crusades.