

Welcome to Israel & the Palestinian Territories

At the intersection of Asia, Europe and Africa – both geographically and culturally – Israel and the Palestinian Territories have been a meeting place of cultures, empires and religions since history began.

Holy Sites

Cradle of Judaism and Christianity and sacred to Muslims and Baha'is, the Holy Land invites visitors to immerse themselves in the richness and variety of the region's religious traditions. Ancient Jewish sites include Jerusalem's Western Wall and Byzantine-era synagogues adorned with sumptuous mosaics. The Roman-era synagogues around the Sea of Galilee may have been used by Jews and Christians before they diverged into separate faiths. Both Christian pilgrims and tourists can explore sites associated with Jesus's birth (in Bethlehem), ministry (in Nazareth and around the Sea of Galilee) and crucifixion (in Jerusalem). For Muslims, only Mecca and Medina are holier than Jerusalem's Al-Haram ash-Sharif, known to Jews as the Temple Mount – perhaps the most contested real estate on earth.

Tel Aviv

Brash, forward-looking and unabashedly secular, Tel Aviv is a multicultural swirl of skyscrapers, bike paths, atmospheric cafes, stylish bistros and buff bods tanning on the sand. One of the world's major centres of high-tech venture capital, the century-old city earned Unesco World Heritage status by virtue of its 1930s-style Bauhaus architecture.

Archaeology

Thanks to the painstaking work of generations of archaeologists, modern-day visitors can explore the 10,000-year-old mud-brick relics of Jericho, enter into the world of David and Solomon in Jerusalem's City of David, and twin a visit to Masada, with its dramatic tale of resistance to the mighty legions of Rome, with a tour of the thoroughfares and theatres of Beit She'an, still pulsing with Roman opulence. Many of the country's most extraordinary finds – including a 1st-century-BCE manuscript of the book of Isaiah (one of the Dead Sea Scrolls) – are on display in Jerusalem's Israel Museum.

Adventures in Nature

Few countries have so much geographic variety packed into such a small space. Distances are short, so you can relax on a Mediterranean beach one day, spend the next floating in the mineral-rich waters of the Dead Sea, and the day after that scuba diving in the Red Sea. Hikers can trek the length of the country on the Israel National Trail, splash through seasonal streams as they tumble towards the Jordan, explore spring-fed oases tucked into the arid bluffs above the Dead Sea, and explore the multi-coloured sandstone formations of Makhtesh Ramon. Many trails are ideal for mountain biking.



Why I Love Israel & the Palestinian Territories

By Daniel Robinson, Lonely Planet writer

One of the things I most enjoy about life in Israel is the exuberant diversity. Plenty of people look like characters in a Middle Eastern epic, but more interesting are the women and men who defy stereotypes and convention, crossing religious, cultural, artistic and culinary boundaries to bridge seemingly irreconcilable differences. The results – played out against a backdrop of desert wildflowers, sandy beaches, snowy peaks and cityscapes both modern and ancient – are inspiring, confounding, contradictory and, not infrequently, astonishingly delicious!

For more about our writers, see page 440