



The Dead Sea

ים המלח البحر الميت

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Best Family Hikes

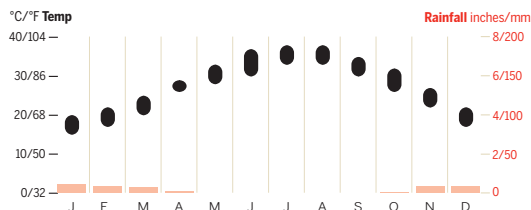
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Why Go?

The lowest place on the face of earth, the Dead Sea (elevation 425m) brings together breathtaking natural beauty, compellingly ancient history and modern mineral spas that soothe and pamper every fibre of your body. The jagged bluffs of the Judean Desert, cleft by dry canyons that turn into raging tan torrents after a cloudburst, rise up from the cobalt-blue waters of the Dead Sea, heavy with salt and oily with minerals. In oases such as Ein Gedi, year-round springs nourish vegetation so lush it's often compared to the Garden of Eden. Atop the bluffs is the arid moonscape of the Judean Desert, while down below, human beings have been at work for millennia, creating Masada and Qumran (where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found) in ancient times and, more recently, hiking trails, bike paths, kibbutzim, luxury hotels, sandy beaches and even a world-famous botanical garden.

When to Go

Ein Gedi



Nov–Apr Warm and sunny. Judean Desert cloudbursts cause spectacular flash floods in wadis.

Jul–mid-Sep Oppressively hot. Record temperature: 49.2°C. Begin hikes at dawn.

Passover & Sukkot Holidays Completely booked with domestic tourists

Preparing for a Dead Sea Dip

The waters of the Dead Sea have some fantastic healing powers, but unless you respect their bromines and chlorides you may find yourself in significant pain – or even danger. As a result, a few preparations are in order before you slip into the slimy brine. First off, don't shave the day before you swim or you may find out more than you'd like to know about the meaning of the phrase 'to have salt rubbed into your wounds'. Other nicks and cuts – whether you realised you had them or not – are also likely to call attention to themselves.

SOOTHING, HEALTHFUL & BRACING

The water of the Dead Sea contains 20 times as much bromine, 15 times more magnesium and 10 times as much iodine as the ocean. It is, in effect, 33% solid substance. Bromine, a component of many sedatives, relaxes the nerves; magnesium counteracts skin allergies and clears the bronchial passages; and iodine has a beneficial effect on certain glandular functions – or so it's claimed.

If this were not enough, the Dead Sea's extremely dense air – the area has the world's highest barometric pressure – has 10% more oxygen than sea-level air. Other healthful properties, especially for people with breathing problems, include high temperatures, low rainfall, low humidity and pollen-free air.

Tours

Several companies offer rather pricey day tours that take in Masada, a float in the Dead Sea and a walk through Ein Gedi.

Abraham Tours

TOUR

(☎02-566 0045; www.abrahamtours.com; per person not incl admission fees 245NIS; ☉Sat-Thu) Minibus tours run by Abraham Hostel that on some days include Masada at sunrise (departure at 3am).

Bein Harim Tourism

TOUR

(☎03-542 2000; www.beinharim.co.il; per person from Jerusalem US\$92, from Tel Aviv US\$99; ☉daily) Standard day circuit.

United Tours

TOUR

(☎03-617 3333; www.unitedtours.co.il; per person from Jerusalem US\$92, from Tel Aviv US\$99; ☉daily) Standard day circuit.

NATURAL SUNBURN PROTECTION

The Dead Sea's dense, low-elevation air naturally filters the sun's harmful ultraviolet rays, making it much harder to get sunburnt than at sea level – despite scorching temperatures.

Hiking Maps

» SPNI topographical trail maps (1:50,000-scale) are on sale for 82NIS at two places at Ein Gedi: the SPNI Field School and the Wadi Arugot entrance to the Ein Gedi Nature Reserve.

Health Benefits

» The Dead Sea Medical Research Centre (www.deadsea-health.org), affiliate with Ben Gurion University of the Negev, conducts scientific analyses of the Dead Sea's health benefits.

Internet Resources

- » Dead Sea Tourist Information: www.deadsea.co.il
- » Tamar Festival: www.tamarfestival.com
- » Ein Gedi International Semi-Marathon: www.deadsea-race.co.il
- » Mt Sodom International Bike Race: www.desertchallenge.co.il