

# welcome to Israel & the Palestinian Territories



## Holy Sites

The Holy Land, cradle of Judaism and Christianity and sacred to Muslims and Baha'is, offers visitors the opportunity to immerse themselves in the richness and variety of their own religious traditions – and to discover the beliefs, rituals and architecture of other faiths. Ancient Jewish sites, found throughout the country, include Jerusalem's Western Wall, which once surrounded the Second Temple, 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 started thinking of themselves as belonging to separate religions. Both Chris-

tian pilgrims and tourists are welcome to visit sites associated with Jesus's birth (in Bethlehem), ministry (in Nazareth and around the Sea of Galilee) and crucifixion (in Jerusalem). For Sunni 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.

## Archaeology

Human beings have lived in Israel and the Palestinian Territories since long before recorded history, and thanks to the painstaking work of archaeologists, you can explore and ponder what they left behind. If the 10,000-year-old mud-brick



*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.*

(left) The Dome of the Rock (p47) shines out in Jerusalem.

(below) The pomegranate is said to have as many seeds as there are Jewish commandments.



relics of Jericho don't impress you, you might find inspiration in Jerusalem's City of David, which dates from the time of Kings David and Solomon. Every conflict has two sides, so you could twin a visit to Masada, with its dramatic tale of resistance to the mighty legions of Rome, with a tour of the colonnaded thoroughfares and capacious theatres of Beit She'an, which still pulse with Roman opulence. Many of the country's most extraordinary finds – a silver amulet from the 6th century BCE inscribed with Judaism's Priestly Benediction, a 1st-century-BCE manuscript of the book of Isaiah (one of the Dead Sea Scrolls) – are on display in Jerusalem's Israel Museum.

## Outdoor Activities

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 or rafting down the Jordan River, and the day after that scuba diving in the Red Sea. Hikers can trek the length of the Golan Heights, follow spring-fed streams as they tumble towards the Jordan, explore verdant oases tucked away in the arid bluffs above the Dead Sea, and explore the multi-coloured sandstone formations of Makhtesh Ramon. Some trails are ideal for mountain biking.