



West Bank الضفة الغربية

יהודה ושומרון

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Best Places to Stay

- » Dar Annadwa (p263)
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Why Go?

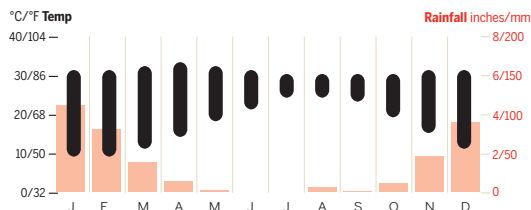
Pocket-sized West Bank is jam-packed with history, bustling souqs and some of the friendliest people you'll ever meet. Sadly, it's also the Middle East poster child for strife, violence and failed peace agreements.

Despite the West Bank's troubled past and uncertain present, its doors are open to tourists. Amid the rolling hills, olive groves and chalky desertscapes you can visit traditional villages and biblical sites galore, from the birthplace of Jesus to the last resting place of Abraham. Palestinian capital Ramallah is a surprisingly vibrant place, with gourmet restaurants and a lively cultural scene. Offbeat sites include Jenin's Freedom Theatre and a cable car strung over Jericho.

Perhaps most appealing is the chance to meet strong, determined and hopeful Palestinians. You'll be spellbound by their decades-long quest for recognition and independence, which always seems tantalisingly close. The West Bank is not the easiest place in which to travel but the effort is richly rewarded.

When to Go

Bethlehem



Oct There's a festive air as city dwellers return to their native villages for the olive harvest.

Nov A harvest festival is held at Burqi'in in early November.

Late Dec Bethlehem is electric, with lights, decorations, carolling and Christmas Eve Mass.

Times & Dates

The West Bank day of rest is Friday, but in Bethlehem and Ramallah, Sundays might also see some shops shut, due to Christian ownership. During the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, shopkeepers scale back opening hours, as do some attractions; food isn't on the menu during the daytime, except in Christian establishments: it's unlikely you'll go hungry in Bethlehem or Ramallah.

ONE-WEEK ITINERARY

Most of the West Bank can be reached from Jerusalem on a day trip. However, Jerusalem makes a lousy base because returning each day involves dealing with time-consuming checkpoints and rush-hour traffic. By staying overnight you'll be pumping much-needed shekels into the West Bank economy.

Get in a full day of sightseeing around **Bethlehem** before a day trip to **Hebron**. From Bethlehem take a service taxi to **Jericho**, tour the city and surrounding desert sites. Next travel to **Nablus** (via the Qalandia checkpoint or Ramallah) for a city tour and much-needed visit to the bathhouse. Next travel to **Jenin** to see the Freedom Theatre and Burq'i'n. Finally, head back south to spend a day around **Ramallah** and **Taybeh**.

Areas

- » The West Bank is divided into three different Areas: A, B and C, designating the amount of civil and military power Israelis and Palestinians respectively exercise in each.
- » Area A (around 17% of the West Bank): under full Palestinian civil and military control; you'll see Israeli signs forbidding Israelis from entering. Includes the cities of Ramallah, Nablus, Tulkarem, Jenin, Qalqilya, Bethlehem, Jericho, parts of Hebron and some other small towns.
- » Area B (around 24% of the West Bank): includes many rural Palestinian areas. Under Palestinian civil control but Israeli military control.
- » Area C (about 59% of the West Bank): under full Israeli control. Includes many sparsely populated areas, outskirts of towns and villages, and the highway network running through the West Bank.

MEDIA

This Week in Palestine (www.thisweekinpal.estine.com) is a free monthly booklet with listings, articles, events and maps related to the West Bank.

Basic Costs

- » **Shared taxi between cities** 10–20NIS
- » **Can of juice** 3NIS
- » **Budget hotel room** US\$60–90
- » **Museum admission** 10–20NIS
- » **One-hour taxi hire** from 50NIS
- » **Shwarma** 10–14NIS

Travel Warning

In recent years, the West Bank has proved a largely safe and trouble-free destination for Western visitors, but circumstances can change quickly. It's important to keep an eye on the news and heed local and embassy advice while travelling. On a first visit it's a good idea to have a knowledgeable guide who can explain the political and security situation as you go.

Resources

- » Palestine Hotels (www.palestinehotels.com)
- » Holy Land Tour Operators (www.holylandoperators.com)
- » Visit Palestine (www.visitpalestine.ps)
- » Palestine News Network (<http://english.pnn.ps>)
- » EnglishPAL (www.english-pal.ps)