



## PRE-TRIP ORIENTATION GUIDE

---

Ian Dirnfeld  
12 April, 2018

## INTRODUCTION

---

There are many things that you can do to make sure you are well prepared for your Israel experience; we like to keep things simple, and the pre-trip planning process is no different. We hope that this **Pre-Trip Orientation Guide** will make sure you are ready as possible – it is not an exhaustive explanation of your itinerary or Israel itself, but rather a primer to assist you in understanding Jewish and specifically Israeli culture.

## TIME

---

Israel is seven hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time, eight hours ahead of Central Time, nine hours ahead of Mountain Time and ten hours ahead of Pacific Time. It is two hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time.

## WEATHER

---

Israel enjoys long, warm, dry summers (April-October) and generally mild winters (November-March), with somewhat drier, cooler weather in hilly regions, such as Jerusalem and Safed. Rainfall is relatively heavy in the north and center of the country with much less in the northern Negev and almost negligible amounts in the southern areas. Regional conditions vary considerably, with humid summers and mild winters on the coast; dry summers and moderately cold winters in the hill regions; hot dry summers and pleasant winters in the Jordan Valley and year-round semi-desert conditions in the Negev.

## PASSPORT & VISA RULES

---

Please check to make sure that you know where your passport is and that it is not expired or about to expire. Your passport must be valid for at least six months from the date you arrive in Israel. If your passport expires within this period, please start the renewal process today. Many airlines will deny you boarding if your passport is not valid according to this policy. If you are traveling to Israel on a USA, Canadian, or European Union member country passport, a visa is not needed to enter Israel. If you are traveling on a passport from another country, you may need a visa to enter Israel.

## PACKING CHECKLIST

---

Generally, it's a good idea to travel light and expect that you will need more room in your bags when you go home than when you left to accommodate gifts, laundry and the tendency for clothes to take up more space on the return flight.

Please remember that the power supply is 220 volt AC-50 cycles. Make sure your electrical items can operate or purchase an adaptor kit (hotels sometimes can spare them).

Airplane Tickets	First Aid supplies	Shirts
Aspirin	Handkerchiefs/scarves	Slippers/Sandals
Backpack	Hat	Soap
Bathing suit	Itinerary	Socks
Belt(s)	Pajamas	Sun Glasses
Camera	Pants	Sunscreen
Cash	Passport	Sweater/Sweatshirt
Comb/Brush	Phone Numbers	Tooth brush/paste
Credit Card	Plastic bags	Underwear
Deodorant	Prescriptions	Walking shoes/hiking boots
Dress shoes	Raincoat (winter)	Wallet/Handbag
Dresses	Safety pins	

The most important items are:

- Hat and sunscreen: you will likely be in the sun often, and you will need protection.
- Good shoes: be sure and get some comfortable walking shoes and break them in before you arrive.
- Modest clothing: some holy sites require “modest” clothing—which includes pants or skirts that cover the knees and shirts that cover the shoulders.
- 220 Adaptors and/or converters

## DRESS CODE SUGGESTIONS

---

Dress in Israel is casual. Even Israeli prime ministers frequently wear short-sleeve shirts without ties. For political meetings participants will want to wear business attire, for the business meetings and meals business casual is fine.

In terms of touring, if we go to religious shrines or services, more modest dress is required. This is true also in religious Jewish neighborhoods where women, especially, are expected to wear sleeves below the elbow and skirts below the knees. One alternative is to carry a shawl that you can wrap around your shoulders or bare legs, or a wrap skirt to cover your shorts. Regardless of your personal views, please respect those of the people who live there and you will have no trouble.

## FOOD

---

Israel has great food. Most people are probably familiar with falafel -- fried ground chick peas served with salad in pita. Meat eaters will love shwarma, lamb sliced off a spit and served in pita (similar to gyros). Both are plentiful, filling meals. Lots of other Mediterranean specialties like shishlik (shish kebab), baklava (sweetmeat made of dough, honey, and nuts) and moussaka (baked eggplant, minced meat, onion and parsley) will stimulate your taste buds. The Americanization of Israel also means you'll find such familiar names as McDonald's, Burger King, and Pizza Hut.

The water in Israel is safe to drink; nevertheless, it is different from what you are used to and people with sensitive stomachs may want to stick to bottled water. Also, Israelis don't usually put ice in their drinks, so if you want some, ask for *kerakh*.

## SAFETY

---

Please put aside what you've read in the papers or seen on TV; Israel is a very safe place to visit. You are far more likely to run into trouble in any major U.S. city than anywhere in Israel. Behave in Israel the way you would in those cities. Be careful where you go at night and travel in groups when possible. Generally, it is safe in most places in Israel to walk alone at night.

One of the first things you'll notice when you arrive in Israel is the number of people carrying guns; it can be disconcerting. Soldiers carry them on the streets, in cars and on buses. Soldiers are required to keep their weapons with them, and since so many Israelis are on duty, it is common to stand next to someone on the bus with an automatic weapon. You'll quickly get used to it and realize it's a fact of life in Israel and nothing to fear.

## USEFUL HEBREW WORDS

Most people in Israel speak English, but, with the influx of Jews from the former Soviet Union, you're almost as likely to run into someone who speaks only Russian. Israelis love it when visitors make an effort to speak in their native tongue; below are a few common Hebrew phrases that will help you get by in Israel. If you don't learn anything else, the most useful phrases are "Please," "Thank you" and "You're welcome."

hello	sha-LOM
goodbye	sha-LOM
good morning	BO-ker TOV
good evening	erev TOV
goodnight	lie-lah TOV
see you later	le-HIT-rah-OTT
thank you	to-DAH
please	be-va-ka-SHA
you're welcome	be-va-ka-SHA (lo-davar)
I don't speak Hebrew	AH-NEE lo m'dah-BEHR ee-VREET
Do you speak English?	ah-TAH m'dah-BEHR ang-LEET?
money	KES-sef
yes	ken
no	loh
excuse me	slee-CHA
where is	AY-fo
bus	o-to-bus
taxi	ta-ksi (mo-nit)
market	shuk
How much does it cost?	kama zeh o-leh?
Where's the bathroom?	Ay-fo ha sher-u-teem?
doctor	ro-feh
hospital	bet kho-lim
police	mish-ta-rah
breakfast	a-ru-chat bo-ker

lunch	a-ru-chat tzo-ho-ra-yim
dinner	a-ru-chat erev
water	ma-yim

## SHOPPING

---

Israel is a good place to buy souvenirs. As in other Middle Eastern countries, haggling in Israel is a tradition. Keep the following points in mind when you're shopping:

- It is rare that you should ever have to pay the full price listed on an item (note this applies mostly to souvenirs, not everything in the markets and is not true of ordinary retail shops like department stores).
- Always be ready to walk out of a shop and don't be surprised if the sales person follows you out.
- The merchants in the market in the Old City, in particular, can be very aggressive. Don't be intimidated. Remember, you're the customer and it is their job to satisfy you.
- Keep in mind what you can afford and don't let yourself be talked into paying more. You'll probably see the same items in more than one store, so shop around before you decide.
- Be clear on the exchange rate before you buy.
- Haggling is an art, and involves some gamesmanship, but it isn't polite to waste a merchant's time if you have no intention of buying something.

Items common in the U.S., such as film and books are likely to be more expensive in Israel than at home. By paying with a credit card, you can usually get a better exchange rate. Sometimes you can get a better price if you pay with U.S. dollars.

Israel assesses a Value Added Tax (VAT) of 17% on goods and services. Prices should include this tax. For purchases over \$50, you can get a refund of the tax at the airport before you leave. To do so you'll want to get to the airport early so you can go to the customs office. When you make your purchase, the merchant should put it in a clear plastic bag with a copy of the receipt inside. Keep the original. The bag must be sealed and remained unopened to get the refund.