

Walk the Story ישראל

What you need to know

Is it safe to travel to Israel?

Obviously, this is an important question and one we get often. First, I have no desire to put you nor myself intentionally in harm's way. In traveling to Israel for ten years and living there for extended periods of time with my family, I feel we have gained a balanced perspective on the situation there. If I was not overwhelmingly convinced of a high degree of safety, then I would not be leading trips to Israel. Although, it is impossible to guarantee anything 100%, travel to Israel is very safe. We have a number of people to guide us daily in what is going at the moment in the country to keep us safe, from our local tour guide, fellow local staff members, acquaintances in the US Embassy and US military. If there is even a hint of potential danger, we will simply avoid the area. We do not take chances! Overall, the likelihood of any kind of danger is very, very slim. Most people return home with a completely different experience than what they were expecting; commenting, "I felt completely safe the whole time." Lastly, I have taken four of my most precious people with me to live for extended periods of time in Israel. The only way I would have taken my wife and three children is if I truly believe they would be safe.

A Typical Day

Wake-up call can be anywhere from 6:00 to 7:00 am depending on where we are in country. Breakfast is a half hour after the wake-up call and then we are on the bus off to our next adventure. To be able to experience the land, the majority of our days intentionally include hiking, some strenuous and other days less. Most portions of the tour can be adjusted to the physical needs of the individuals. My mother at 72 did most of the hikes and my father at 80 was able to get around well. So it is possible to do it. Some locations, like Jerusalem, you have no choice but to walk because I am unable to drive you to where we need to be. Others, we can make adjustments. A typical tour will log about 60 miles of the course of 12 to 13 days if you do all the hikes. It is during these hikes and at these sites where God's word is studied in its historical, cultural, geographical, and Jewish contexts. Lunch tends to fall between 1:00-2:00pm, and will be served on location, which means a picnic style lunch most days. Since lunch can come late in the day, it is highly recommended that you carry snacks with you. Eating small snacks throughout the day is best for keeping energy stored up in the body. It is recommended that snacks (without chocolate - it melts) like trail mix, granola bars, nuts, dried fruit, crackers,

or protein/energy bars be taken along. We typically arrive back at our hotel between 5:00 and 6:00 pm. Eat, shower, talk, rest and then do it all over again.

Heat & Water

Israel is an arid desert climate, very similar to Arizona. In the rainy season (mid-October through mid-April) it can get cold and even snow in Jerusalem. The rest of the year it can be hot and often with little cloud cover. From May to October/November, I can almost guarantee we will not get rain on any day. It sprinkled on day in June a few years back and people thought it was a sign of the Second Coming. We will be in a wide range of climates, from the desert/wilderness where temperatures can range from between 90 and 100 degrees to more humid environments in the Galilee that remind me of my years growing up next to Lake Michigan with similar temperatures. Jerusalem is unique due to its elevation. It can be very hot during the day but get cool in the evenings to the point that you will want a light coat or sweater. The most important thing is that you drink water throughout the day. If you wait until you are thirsty, then you will be in trouble. We often will use the term, 'pre-hydrate', to mean drink before we get off the bus. Whenever we stop to teach or catch our breath, I will remind folks to take a drink. Water will be provided for you on the bus every day. It will be your responsibility to fill and carry your water bottles with you. Powdered mixes such as Powerade, Propel or Gatorade can be helpful to provide electrolytes. It is also important to remember that caffeine dehydrates. I noticed one dear friend as we prepared for the hike did not fill up their water. I inquired as to why and was told politely that they had enough water. My response was, 'you don't know where we are going.' It is important to follow instructions for your safety and the safety of the entire group.

Your Feet are Your Joy

We can easily take small things for granted until they don't work so well. Your feet would be a prime example. With the amount of walking/hiking we will do, you will need a good pair of hiking boots/shoes. It depends on how much support your ankles need. I typically recommend just shoes, due to weight. The important factor is shoes that are designed for walking on rocks, typically with a six inch plastic shank to protect the soles of your feet. It is also essential to have them broken in before you depart on your trip. If your feet are barking at you with every step, it will distract you from soaking up the experience. You want shoes that can breathe. Shoes that are 'waterproof' or have GoreTex don't allow for that to happen. There will be times when your shoes will get wet and you want your shoes to be able to dry well and quickly to prevent blisters.

Physical Preparations and Expectations

The only level ground in all of Israel is on the tarmac at the airport and the beach. Our stay near the beach will be brief. It is a physically demanding tour averaging 4 to 7 miles of walking/hiking a day. **You must prepare yourself before you go to get the most out of the experience.** A common observation made is, 'I wish I had taken your advice to prepare myself better.' As a basketball coach, I understand that oxygen is either going to prioritize your muscles

or your brain when fatigued. To be able to concentrate, you need to be in shape. I have had a few people take the trip a second time because they wanted to experience it while being in better shape. To maximize the quality of your experience, prepare yourself in advance for the level of physical activity you will undertake. We highly recommend a training program which includes cardio and at least some light strength training. Use of walking and stair machines to vary the speed and incline can be helpful. Walking in general and finding an area with a large number of stairs or an extended incline will also be helpful. You will be required to carry a backpack as well that will have your water, bible and essentials. It is wise to practice with the extra weight as well. My intent is not for this information to intimidate or overwhelm you. We have had people of all ages come and enjoy their experience. Most people are far more capable than they give themselves credit and often are able to do more than they think they can. Some days will be harder than others, but we will do it together and move at a pace that is appropriate for all. We all will be encouraging each other along the journey.

You should consult your physician concerning these requirements and any medications or conditions which may have an impact on your ability to participate fully. Prescription drugs you anticipate using during the trip should be packed both in your suitcase and your carry-on. We suggest you bring along a written prescription as well, it can be filled if needed. Please contact your health provider to check your coverage when traveling outside the United States. Traveling to the lands of the Bible requires no immunizations though you'll want to be sure your tetanus shot is current.

What to Bring

Please follow carefully the "Suggested Packing List" which you can find on the current tour participant page. This list will help you know what to bring. Please keep in mind the trip is very casual and expect to wear shorts and a t-shirt every day. Also, please be prepared to bring a "modesty kit," meaning long pants and something to cover your shoulders, as there are several religious sites that require modest dress. A pair of zip-off pants is helpful on days where pants are required for modesty.

Two specific things you will need to bring would be a sun hat. Yes they look a little dorky, but everyone will have one and you will want one to keep the sun off of your face and neck. Shade is hugely comforting in the desert and you have an opportunity to provide shade for your face and neck. Also, you will want to get a backpack of some kind to carry your water, notebook, bible, camera and any necessary snacks and items. People have many different preferences as to how they want to carry this weight. If you have questions about this, please give me a call.

Technology

It is safe to bring things like your laptop and good cameras with you. At the same time there is a drawback too. I would ask that you think through the usefulness of the technology you are bringing with you. It has its blessings and its curses. You will want a good camera and at the same time, you don't want your camera to be the focus of your trip. I will ask that when we get to a site, please allow the teaching to happen first and then I will give you time to take pictures

and explore. I would strongly suggest practical and functional technology. I will also ask that NO cell phones, iPods, mp3 players or things of the like be brought with us during the day. Take a sabbatical from technology and connection overload and let your five senses soak up the experience. Yeah it will feel weird at first, but it will allow you to be fully present in the moment.

Mental Preparation

I have prepared 11 lessons for you to watch. Each lesson gives you a foundation for what you will experience. We will go over all the material in country again. You will also receive a detailed study guide with maps, diagrams and places to take notes. It will seem just like facts, but when you are there, these facts will come alive when placed with the context in the greater story.

What to Read

- 1) All Four Gospels (if you only have time for one – Matthew)
- 2) Genesis 1-23
- 3) Exodus 1-20
- 4) Deuteronomy
- 5) Joshua 1-11 (if you have time)

Bonus materials

- 1) Sitting at the Feet of Rabbi Jesus – Tverberg and Spangler
- 2) Yeshua: the Guide to the Authentic Jesus and the Early Church – Dr. Ron Moseley

I have created a 60 days of preparation for the trip that you can download and follow.

DO NOT watch Ray VanderLaan's DVDs *before* our experience.

BE SURE to watch Ray VanderLaan's DVDs *after* our experience.

It will mean so much more as you let the trip unfold in its context and experience it fresh in the moment rather than have your mind jump ahead. RVL's DVDs will be a great resource to you when you come home.

The Shema

Every righteous Jewish person would say the Shema at least once every day. Every rabbi would begin his lesson with the Shema. Jesus, our Messiah, would have been no exception. We will be following this same pattern on during our time together. I need you to memorize this for our trip - in both the Hebrew & the English (this is the "Sh'ma" according to Jesus in Matthew 22:34-40).

Sh'ma Yis'ra'eil

Adonai Eloheinu

Adonai echad.

Ve'ahav'ta et Adonai Elohekha

b'khol le'vav'kha

Hear, O Israel,

the LORD is our God,

the LORD alone.

Love the Lord your God

with all your heart

uv'khol naf'she'kha
uv'khol me'odekha.
Ve'ahav'ta Re'akha Kamokha

and with all your soul
and with all your might.
And love your neighbor as yourself.

Abraham Joshua Heschel on the Bible (this is just bonus):

“Irrefutably, indestructibly, never wearied by time, the Bible wanders through the ages, giving itself with ease to all men [and women ☺☺], as if it belonged to every soul on earth. It speaks in every language and in every age. It benefits all the arts and does not compete with them. We all draw upon it, and it remains pure, inexhaustible and complete. In three thousand years it has not aged a day. It is a book that cannot die. Oblivion shuns its pages. Its power is not subsiding. In fact, it is still at the very beginning of its career, the full meaning of its content having hardly touched the threshold of our minds; like an ocean at the bottom of which countless pearls lie, waiting to be discovered, its spirit is still to be unfolded. Though its words seem plain and its idiom translucent, unnoticed meanings, undreamed of intimations break forth constantly. More than two thousand years of reading and research have not succeeded in exploring its full meaning. Today it is as if it had never been touched, never been seen, as if we had not even begun to read it.”

[Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, pg. 242]