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# Executive Traveller

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January 2010



**DEAD SEA**

Official Finalist



**NEW 7 WONDERS OF NATURE**

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# Israel:

Why the Dead Sea, the lowest place on earth, gets our vote as a new seven wonder of the world *plus - Jerusalem, Tel Aviv- Jaffa and travelling to Israel*

Image: Jerusalem's famous Dome of the Rock with the Western Wall (also known as the "Wailing Wall" below. The covered wooden structure leads to the Muslim Quarter and Temple Mount



# Israel:

*Lyssiemay Annoh explores the seven new wonder destination finalist and discovers an excellent events haven.*

I am born a Christian and an ardent traveller; I also love of stories and excellent story-telling so prior to this journey, my faith did not allow me to visualise Israel as the main source for the history of ancient Israel. For me, the holy land and the holy bible are sacred and could only be found in heaven. For many other Christians though, The Bible, or the *Holy Bible* - although not a history book in the modern sense, together with the books of Joshua through Second Chronicles are the works of ancient Israelite historians.

Call it what you like but the Land of state, and in 1948 Israel came into being. Israel (Hebrew: אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל, Eretz Yisrael) is, according to the Hebrew Bible, the region which was promised by God to the descendants of Abraham through his son Isaac and to the descendants of Jacob, Abraham's grandson. Referred to as the holy land by many faiths, it holds significant religious importance to at least four monotheistic Abrahamic religions: Judaism, Christianity, Islam and the Bahá'í Faith.

I had never been to Israel before nor must confess that I have never actually felt the need to visit the holy land prior to this trip. I had learned that Israel was created as the culmination of the Zionist movement, whose aim was a homeland for Jews scattered all over the international recognition of a Jewish

Headlines aside, Israel is opening its doors to the world of tourism, business, pilgrims and all things curious.

**It all begins from London Heathrow ....**

The first point of entry will be Tel Aviv. El Al, Israeli Airlines (<http://www.elal.co.uk>) flies three times daily to Tel Aviv. The airline departs and arrives from London Luton and London Heathrow with Business and Economy class configurations. Most European and North American visitors will be issued a visitors' visas (or transit visas - see right) free of charge at every port of entry into Israel. It is important that every visitor to Israel holds a valid passport. Visitors are allowed to remain in Israel for up to three months from their date of arrival, subject to the terms of the visa issued. Visitors who intend to work in Israel must apply to the Ministry of the Interior for a special visa.

You can use [executivetraveller.net](http://www.executivetraveller.net), the Israeli Tourist Board website (<http://www.thinkisrael.com>) or approved travel agents to plan your journey but passengers leaving the UK must note that when travelling into Israel, unlike most other

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procedures, luggage security scrutiny precedes check-in. You must ensure that you have packed your bags yourself and have not left it unattended.

I have arrived in Tel Aviv and looking forward to continuing my journey to the Dead Sea.

Nevertheless, unlike those who learn a lot about Israel before travelling there, I am not heading to Jerusalem from Tel Aviv. When you approach Jerusalem, you are retracing the steps of pilgrims who have been making this journey for thousands of years. My mission was different I had a convention to attend in the Dead Sea. I could not imagine how this would take place but I was excited. I have always imagined the holy land to be in Heaven, and I have been advised that I could use any of the several road transfer options available to continue my journey out of Tel Aviv to the Dead Sea. It is important though to make prior arrangements with a transfer company before embarking on a similar venture.



**The** Israeli side of the Dead Sea is about 98km from Tel Aviv. There are three main road entry routes into the Dead Sea area. The first is via Highway 1 and Highway 90, through the West Bank, from the Jerusalem area. Alternatively, you could access the area from Eilat via Highway 90 from the south, or from the road from Beersheva via Arad.

I am now heading for the lowest point of the earth in the Tamar Region of the Dead Sea and the Judean Desert. With 5,000 years of history encompassing King David, King Herod, Jesus and John the Baptist one cannot simply ignore the Dead Sea. The prophet knew of it through the infamous Sodom and Gomorra and if you think that the Dead Sea cosmetics are something new, have you wondered why Egyptian Queen Cleopatra always looked beautiful? Rumour

has it that during the Egyptian conquest, Queen Cleopatra obtained exclusive rights to build cosmetic and pharmaceutical factories in the area.

## The Dead Sea

As I approached the Dead Sea, I remembered why I had embarked on the journey in the first place; the Dead Sea had reached the final stage of the global contest for the seven wonders of nature “new 7 wonders”; which means that the Tamar region of Israel is preparing to embrace its new found fame. The Mayor of the Regional Council, Dov Litvinoff is hoping that the contest will encourage tourism and awaken international awareness of the Dead Sea as in incomparable Council. El Al Israeli Airlines has proudly sponsored the 7<sup>th</sup> Dead Sea International Marketing Weekend endorsing the airline’s commitment to fly in as many visitors to the region as possible.



As

my car descended to the Dead Sea from Jerusalem from the Judean Mountains, I realised that I was in a very different place altogether, about to reach a new point about 400 meters below sea level with a striking landscape. You also notice immediately that whilst this “new 7 wonder” finalist is embracing itself to become overwhelmed with tourists, it is also in danger. The Dead is seeking to win so as to promote tourism and to raise public awareness of some of the problems the region faces; the Dead Sea itself has lost about one metre in height every year for the past 30 years.

### Why would travellers visit the Dead Sea?

As soon as I arrived and checked into my hotel and before my religious instincts kicked in, I started exploring it from the point of view of the groups or meetings and incentives point of view as well as for the individual, the reasons appeared to be obvious. I could not immediately visual it as a bustling business destination but rather as a destination very appropriate for a corporate retreat.

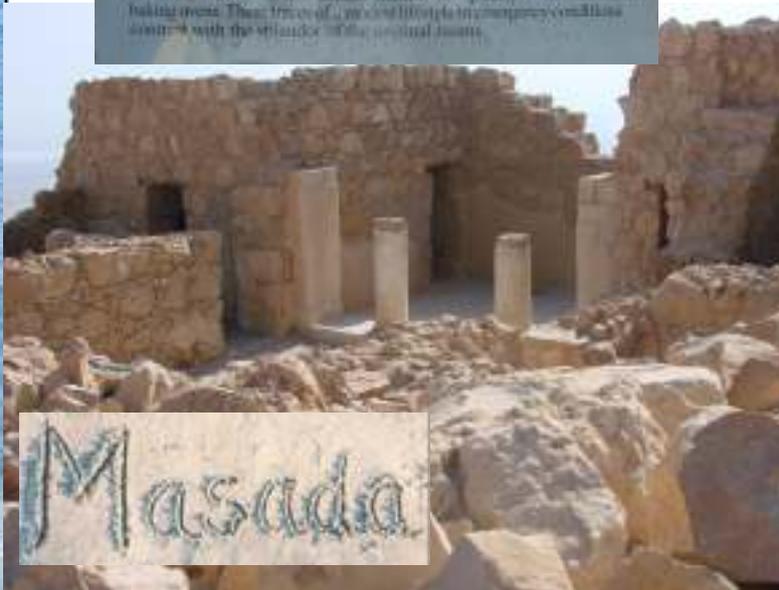
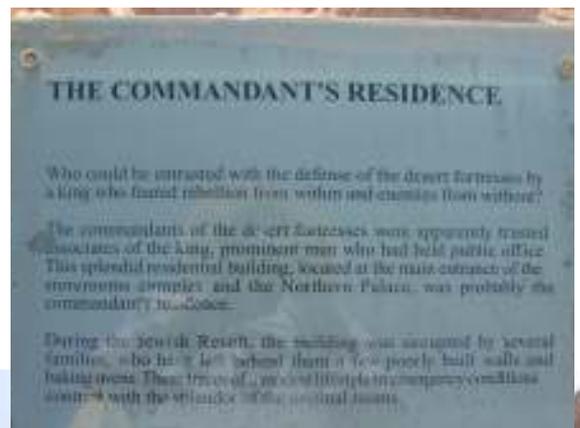
The resources and places to see are clear. There is the health factor because according to findings by the Dead Sea Medical Research Centre as well as through independent studies, dermatological conditions and respiratory conditions are treated here by climatotherapy and heliotherapy. There are a number of clinics offering medical guidance at the Dead Sea. The pollen-free atmosphere and unpolluted air, higher oxygen content, high barometric pressure and low humidity soothe the symptoms of asthma, cystic fibrosis and certain lung diseases. The famous Dead Sea mud is also recognised as a fine stimulant of blood circulation.

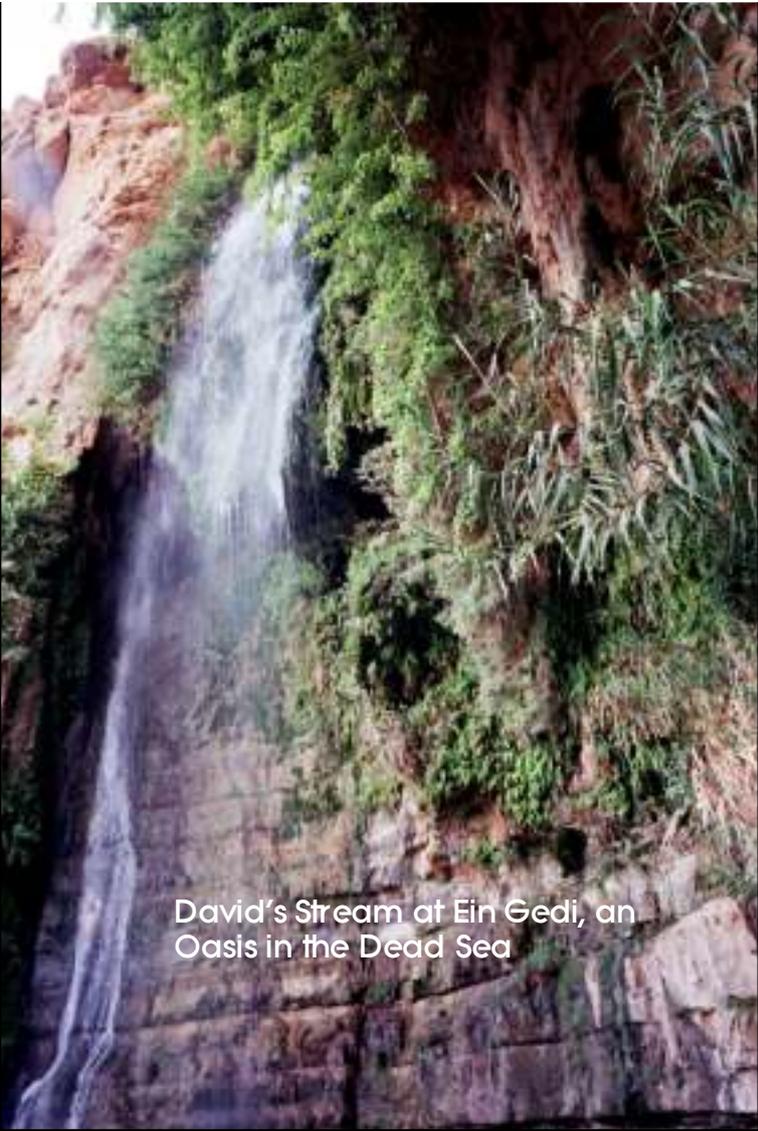
Then there are the Dead Sea Cosmetics; there is great interest in using Dead Sea minerals in producing cosmetics and companies like Ahava, Dead Sea laboratories have cashed in heavy on producing health and beauty products.

Basically, anyone and everyone is encouraged to visit the Dead Sea and float uncaringly in the super saline waters of the Dead Sea, immerse in the sulphur pools, coat yourself with the natural black mineral mud and explore the oasis, waterfalls, caves and historical sites in the area.



Swimmers floating in the Dead Sea





David's Stream at Ein Gedi, an Oasis in the Dead Sea

Stream). The Ein Gedi lives up to its reputation as an oasis in Israel. It is known for its caves, springs, and its rich diversity of flora and fauna. With more than 1,000 varieties of flora, the Kibbutz Ein Gedi is the only botanical garden in the world that people live in.

Other attractions include the Qumran: The community buildings, where the Dead Sea Scrolls were written; Zohar Fortress and Canyon – Remnants of an important city from the Canaanite and Israelite periods; Mamshit National Park – The Nabatean city where the Arabian horse was bred.

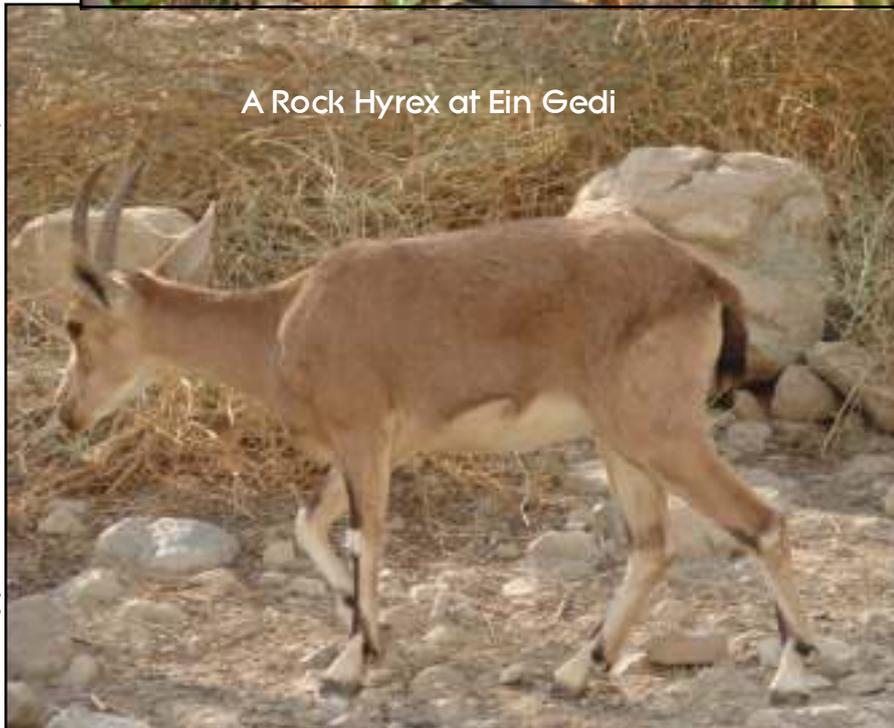


A giant cactus at Ein Gedi

## Places of Interest

For sightseeing there are some remarkable places of interest. There is of course the Masada, a Unesco World Heritage Site in since 2001. The Masada itself is a fortress-palace that was built by a Judean king in the late second century BC. In the first century BC it was embellished by King Herod, and then during the Roman siege of AD 66-74, the site was defended to the death by Jewish rebels. What is even more remarkable is the latest addition of a Museum in Memory of Yigael Yadin, a museological experience in its own rights. Visitors travel through time in designed spaces with earphones and relive the story behind the archaeological finds.

A visit to the Judean desert will bring you face to face with Ein Gedi and its Waterfall in Nahal David (David's



A Rock Hyrex at Ein Gedi

# Dead Sea Art and Entertainment

**The Hebrew Israelites of Dimona**



**Human model at a Garden party at Isrotel, Dead Sea**



**Traditional Drummers at Isrotel, Dead Sea**



**Human model at a Garden party at Isrotel, Dead Sea**



**Members of Israeli Opera, entertaining guests at a masked Ball at the Meridien, Dead Sea**



**Impulsive work of Sand Artist Sverldov Evgeni at the Dead Sea Convention**

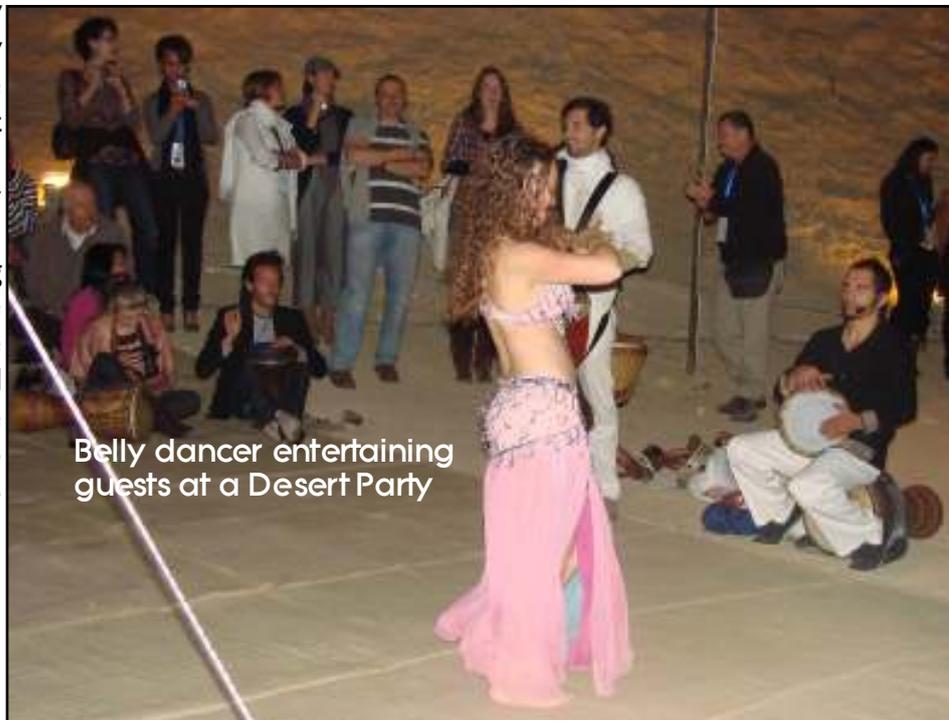


The Hebrew Israelites of Dimona and the Israeli Opera perform together at a Cocktail Party at the Moriah Classic, Dead Sea

# Meetings, Parties, Events and Everything Exciting

**The** biggest impression on me is how this desert area is full of hotels and resorts and how these properties can host very successful events. There are about 14 hotels of varying categories and all members of the Israel hotel Association. Services offered vary but most of them have easy access to the beach and are very easy to walk to. A walk on the promenade at sunrise or sunset gives you an opportunity to breathe the clean mineral rich air and gaze at the changing colours of the Moab Hills while enjoying the 330 sunny days a year. Space is not a problem for any of the hotels available in the desert and entertainment appears to come natural. Every event that I attended during my visit was care-

fully planned, well managed with good food and drink. Even the silent mountains in the desert double up as a perfect event base. After a grand time from the Dead Sea hospitality, I left the healthy, MICE perfect destination to put my religious side to a challenge in Jerusalem.



Belly dancer entertaining guests at a Desert Party

# Food and Drink

## Dead Sea Events and Banqueting



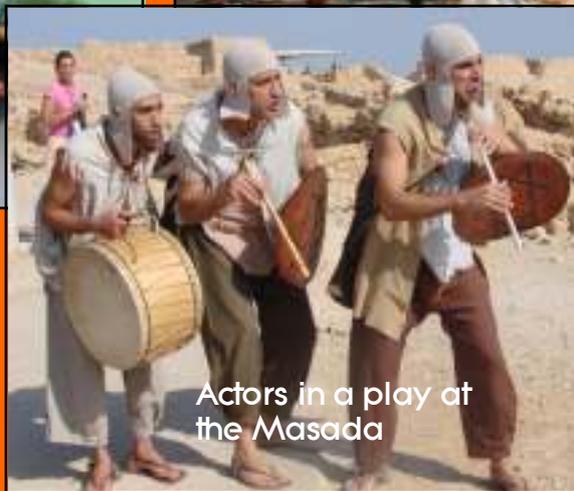
Eshel Tello,  
Crepe Specialist-  
Daniel Hotel,  
Dead Sea



Chefs Uzi Bhastakar  
& Michel Hen at-  
Daniel Hotel, Dead



Sushi Extravaanza at a  
Moriah Classic, Dead Sea  
Cocktail party



Actors in a play at  
the Masada



Water Fairies at Moriah  
Classic, Dead Sea Cocktail  
Party



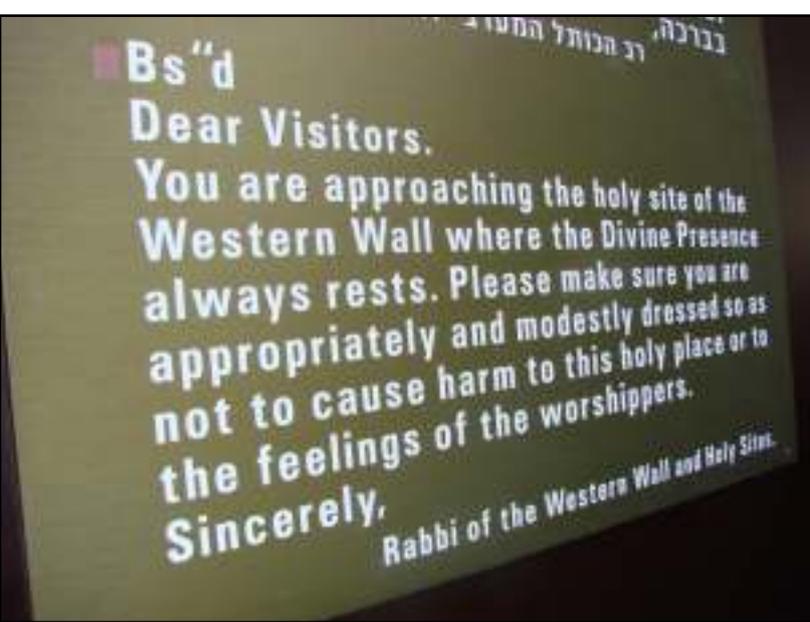
Human Insect  
at Isrotel, Dead  
Sea Garden  
party



Yair Hemon-Daniel Hotel.  
Dead Sea Smoothie  
Maker



Beouins serving tea at a Desert  
Party



tradition, the site of King David's tomb. The Byzantines were the first to call this place Mount Zion, although the name appears in the Bible in reference to Mount Moriah (2 Kings 19; Micah 4; Psalm 48, etc.). In the late First Temple period, Mount Zion and the area north of it were included in the city walls and the Bible calls it the suburb of Mishneh. During the Second Temple period, the area, which was known as the Upper City, was inhabited by Jerusalem's aristocracy chiefly the priestly

ish Kefar Hashiloah can still be seen among the Arab dwellings today.

### The Western Wall

This is also known as the wailing wall because over the years, the Western Wall has become a holy site and place of prayer, yearning, and contemplation for the Jewish and Christians of all walks of life. It is one of the four walls of the Temple Mount built by King Herod some two thousand years ago, during the Second Temple period. Some of the upper layers of the Wall were demolished by the Romans when they destroyed the Temple in the year 70. All four walls of the Temple Mount were restored by the Muslims in the late 7th century.

### Mount Zion

Rising to a height of 765 meters above sea level, Mount Zion is, according to popular

families. Religion over and my faith being put to the greatest test of all times, it is destination Tel Aviv-Jaffa to see what the big city had to offer.



*Visitors of all faith praying at the "wailing wall". It is believed that when wishes are inserted in the wall and prayed over they will be granted.*



*Members of the International Press enjoying a Passover-style feast in a restaurant in Jerusalem*



# Jerusalem

**107** km away for the Dead Sea is Jerusalem. Israelis say that the City of David is where it all began for Jerusalem. Legend has it that over 3,000 years ago, when King David left the city of Hebron for a small hilltop city known as Jerusalem, establishing it as the unified capital of the tribes of Israel. Years later, David's son, King Solomon, built the First Temple next to the City of David on top of Mount Moriah, the site of the binding of Isaac, and with it, this hilltop became one of the most important sites in the world.

Today, the story of the City of David continues. Deep underground, the City of David is revealing some of the most exciting archaeological finds of the ancient world. While above ground, the city is a vibrant centre of activity with a visitor's centre that welcomes visitors for an exciting tour to the site where much of the Bible was written.

The tour of the City of David begins with a

breath-taking observation point overlooking Biblical Jerusalem which sends visitors 3,800 years back in time to the days of Abraham, when the first foundations of the city were laid. The journey quickly heads underground to some of the newest archaeological excavations at the site. Here, while exploring the recently excavated fortresses and passageways, visitors relive King David's conquest of the Jebusite city as described in the 2nd Book of Samuel. The underground tour finally ends at the Gihon Spring, the major water source of Jerusalem for over 1,000 years and where, according to the Book of Kings, Solomon was anointed king. Visitors seeking adventure can bring flashlights and wade through the spring in King Hezekiah's 2,700 year old water tunnel, one of the wonders of early engineering.

A tour through the City of David brings visitors face to face with the personalities and places of the Bible. As such, this is the only place on earth where the only guidebook needed is the Bible itself. This was a very frightening experience for me as I came face

to face with places I only expected to see in heaven. Jesus really walked on the paths that I walking? Did Mary really lay to rest in the temple that I was standing? Questions that only your faith can help you find answers to. Every religion must make this journey even it is only to tempt their faith.

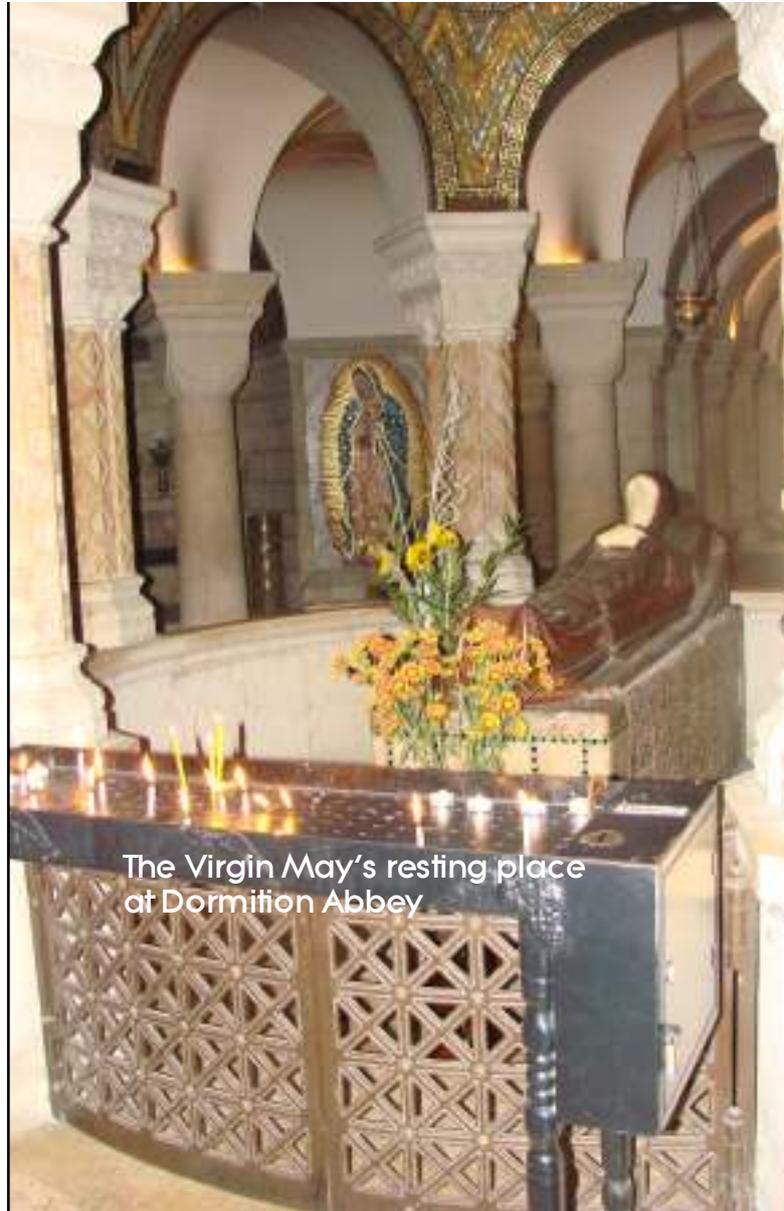
### Places of interest in Jerusalem

It is difficult to select any particular places of interest in Jerusalem as everything in Jerusalem is worth seeing. It also depends on your personal interest or religious background.

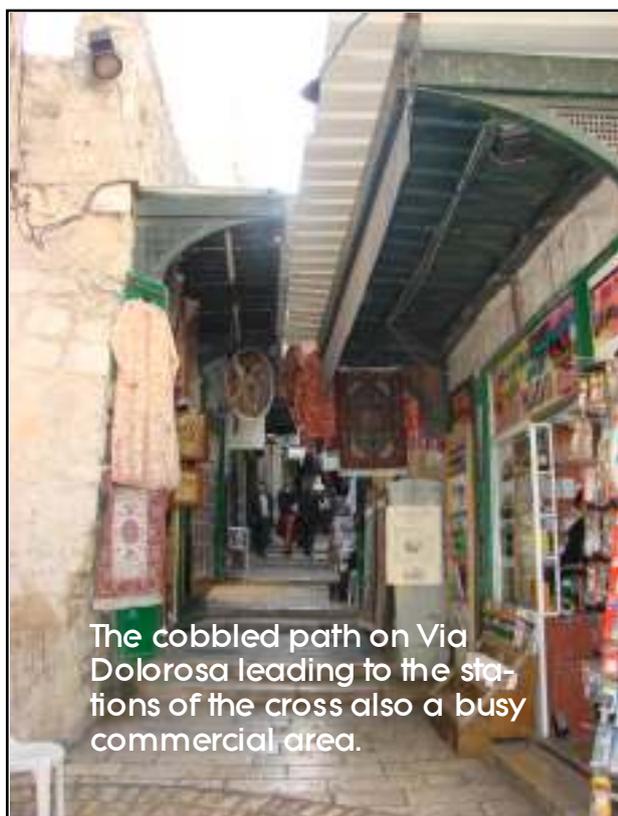
Here are a few you might like to visit::

#### The Jewish Quarter in the West

After the destruction of the Second Temple, the Jewish community moved from place to place in ancient Jerusalem until 600 years ago, when the community settled in this area. At first, only a few families lived in the Quarter, but over the years their numbers increased. By the mid 19th century overcrowding forced many Jews to move into other quarters in the Old City. Once residents began leaving the confines of the city walls in 1860, the status and importance of



The Virgin Mary's resting place at Dormition Abbey



The cobble path on Via Dolorosa leading to the stations of the cross also a busy commercial area.

the Jewish Quarter eroded. By the time the Quarter had fallen into Jordanian hands in 1948, the population had dwindled. For nineteen years the Jewish Quarter was empty of Jewish residents, though it was renewed once again following the Six-Day War.

#### The Shiloach Village in the East

The Arab village of Silwan is on the southern slopes of the Mount of Olives, east of the Kidron Valley. Hewn into the rock between the houses, which are perched at the top and beneath the cliff face, are more than 50 burial caves dating from the First Temple period. In 1884, a Jewish neighbourhood was established in Silwan for Yemenite Jews who had arrived in the country two years earlier. The neighbourhood, named Kefar Hashiloah, suffered bitterly during the Arab riots of 1929 and was finally abandoned in 1938. Nevertheless, the original houses of the Jew-

# Tel-Aviv

The rain led us into Tel-Aviv. The rain is a welcome blessing to the Israelis because being a desert, the rain does not come often. Blessing or not, I knew that it was going to hamper my opportunity of assessing Israel major metropolis as a city fit for business purposes.

It was all doom and gloom until I arrived at the Multimedia Beit Hatfutsot Museum of the Jewish Diaspora, located on the campus of Tel Aviv University. Everyone must visit this museum which houses a large store of information about Jewish life. My curiosity had been aroused and I wanted to learn a lot about Jewish life. What made them different from Christians? There is so much to learn here that you can easily lose yourself in the remarkable place which has been built and set up to inform, educate and appreciate Jewish life. It focuses on aspects of Jewish life, the seriousness and the humour that comes with it.



# Jaffa

**Image:** The exquisite cobbled alley leading to Theatre Hasimta in Old Jaffa

Suspended Orange Tree, an environmental sculpture created by Ran Morin leading visitors into Old Jaffa



Out of the University campus, Tel-Aviv is looking more and more like any big city and for me, lacking in character until ahead of me, up on hill appears picturesque Jaffa. The beginning of Jaffa is deceptive with more of an Arab feel than Jewish Tel-Aviv. I was not quite sure what to expect but sought to establish what was so enchanting about this place so full of character yet appears to be hidden. Jaffa is still an integral part of Tel Aviv and one of the oldest functioning harbours in the world. Jaffa was once the busiest port in the region. It primarily harboured small fishing boats since the rise of modern shipping centres in Haifa and Ashdod. Restaurants and galleries cater mostly to tourists, but the city is still home to a vibrant group of Arab Israelis.

This is the place where cobbled alleys are priceless and cannot be copied. Every aspect of the Jaffa residential quarter is a gem. The place is so peaceful and unique that every visitor to Tel-Aviv must walk its alleys. For me, unlike Tel Aviv's sky-scraping hotels and glossy storefronts, the winding cobble-stoned alleys and stunning sea vistas of Old Jaffa provide a breath of salty Mediterranean air. Jaffa sums up how characteristically beautiful an old town can be. A 'must see' for any visitor to Tel-Aviv.

# Know before you go

## Travelling in and out of Israel

Israel is two hours ahead of GMT.

All visitors to Israel must hold a passport that is valid for at least six months from the date they enter the country. People with no nationality must hold a valid laissez passer, as well as a visa back to the country that issued it.

## Business Travellers

The Security Division and the Security Centre for Foreign Businessmen are in daily contact with new Israeli companies joining the special service provided for those who arrive to Israel for business; this service is free of charge and is well known to conference and exhibitions organizers as well as for all Government offices. All business travellers should ensure that they are in communication with their hosts at all times to ensure that appropriate procedures are followed.

## General Security

Before you get too excited for your trip, you will have to know that Israeli security is an authority on its own. Even before you check in with your airline, your luggage must be thoroughly screened. Prior to this, you will need to answer some personal questions together with information about how you packed your bags and what items you are carrying. There is no short cut to saving time with this so Executive Traveller advises that you pay attention and remember everything what you have packed.

When leaving Israel, Security at Ben Gurion tends to be very thorough. Once again, always ensure that you have packed your luggage yourself and have not let it out of your sight since. This can be challenging and frustrating but Security just want you and everyone else to have a safe and secure flight so just smile, be patient and always be honest.

Citizens of the following countries will be issued tourist visas free of charge at every port or entrance terminal to Israel:

**Europe:** Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Germany (Persons born after 1.1.28), Gibraltar, Great Britain, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, San Marino, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland.

**Asia & Oceania:** Australia, Fiji Islands, Japan, Hong Kong, New Zealand, Philippines, South Korea

**Africa:** Central African Republic, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, South Africa, Swaziland

**The Americas:** Argentina, Barbados, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Ecuador, Guatemala, Haiti, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, St. Kitts, & Nevis, Surinam, Trinidad, & Tobago, The Bahamas, The Dominican Republic, Uruguay, U.S.A.

## Tipping

Tipping is fairly standard in Israel, though at a current norm of 10% or at your discretion. A service charge may or may not be added to your bill. When it is not

included a tip of about 12-15% is expected.

## Hotels

I am confident that all the four to five star hotels in the Dead Sea like the Ein Gedi, Daniel Hotel, Isrotel and the Meridien Hotel, to name a few will all be able to host any kind of event and come up with top marks. For the everyday guests, I can only share my experience.

I stayed at the **Moriah Classic in the Dead Sea**. While the meetings and events places where excellent, service and food fell short. Nevertheless, the hotel offers free WiFi, uncommon in Israel, has a large free spa swimming pool area for guests. The bedrooms are satisfactory. The hotel is ideal for families

In Jerusalem, I stayed at the **St David Citadel Hotel** overlooking the domes, steeples and towers of the ancient walled city of Jerusalem spread out like a masterpiece. The David Citadel provided the most comfortable bed I have ever slept in and is the newest and one of most luxurious business hotels in Jerusalem. Check-in, customer and breakfast service all follow the very business pattern. The Service was professional sometimes lacking some warmth as they stuck uncompromisingly to rules; nevertheless, it is a very nice place to be in Jerusalem.

For Tel-Aviv Jaffa, I stayed at the panoramic **Dan Hotel** which topped my list with regards to customer and breakfast service. The hotel welcomes its group guests with a drink and a friendly face. This friendly gesture is all that a guest needs after a long journey to a high security destination. The choice for breakfast was endless and hotel staff were surprisingly very friendly at a time when I was beginning to feel that friendly hotel customer service was not part of the Israeli culture. The hotel's accommodation and facilities are also excellent. The Dan Hotel definitely knows how to make a visitor feel welcome. The hotel is suitable for both business and leisure guests.

**Opening Hours of the Masada** (including cable car operation)

April to September 08:00 to 17:00

October to March 08:00 to 16:00

Site Telephone: +972-8-6584207/8

The site like most other Israeli destinations are accessible to the disabled.

How to vote for the Dead Sea

You can vote via a link on the home page of the Tourism Ministry's website, [www.goisrael.com](http://www.goisrael.com) or directly at the competition's website <http://new7wonders.com>.