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# JERUSALEM

## ירושלים



Tradition holds that King David declared Jerusalem his capital city 3,000 years ago. Today, at the city's entrance, there is a harp-shaped bridge, referencing his musical talents. In addition to being Judaism's holiest city, it also plays a central role in both Islam and Christianity. Built of golden Jerusalem stone, the city has both a modern and ancient feel. Jerusalem today has nearly 900,000 residents, including secular and Modern Orthodox Jews; ultra-Orthodox Jews; and Arabs. While media and political figures focus on the city as a symbol of the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, residents are more concerned with daily quality of life issues. In recent years, a vibrant arts scene has flourished, and many exciting efforts to bridge religious-secular divides are underway.



# TEL AVIV-JAFFA

## תֵּל אָבִיב-יָפוֹ



Founded by 66 Jewish pioneers in 1909 as the first modern Jewish city, Tel Aviv was designed as an answer to overcrowding in the nearby ancient port city of Jaffa. As one of the oldest cities in Israel and once the main point of entry into pre-State Israel, Jaffa remains an important part of the combined city. It has become an entertainment hub, and the flea market is a wonderful place to scout out treasures from bygone eras. Today, Tel Aviv, which merged with Jaffa to form one municipality, is the country's cultural and financial center. Its vibrant economy, culinary scene, nightlife, and startup culture make it an exciting place to visit around the clock. The downside: the cost of living is among the highest in the world. The preserved Bauhaus buildings earned the city status as a UNESCO World Heritage site.



# BE'ER SHEVA

## בְּאֵר שֶׁבַע



The capital of the Negev desert, Be'er Sheva is Israel's seventh most populous city, with more than 200,000 residents. The city is host to Ben-Gurion University, named for Israel's first Prime Minister who believed that settling the desert was the key to Israel's success. In recent years, the economic base of Be'er Sheva has grown in large part due to the technology boom that is impacting all of Israel, as well as plans by the IDF to relocate many large military bases to the outskirts of the city. Like many places in Israel, Be'er Sheva is the scene of multiple stories from the Bible: it is written in the Book of Genesis that Abraham dug a בְּאֵר—be'er—well here, and Jacob had his famous dream about a ladder rising up to heaven after he left Be'er Sheva. Today, Be'er Sheva is undergoing a building boom, with young families and students helping to revitalize the city.



**HAIFA**  
חיפה



Built on Mt. Carmel in the north of the country, this port city is known for peaceful co-existence between its Jewish and Arab residents. The Baha'i Gardens and World Center create a beautiful landscape in the city center, but locals have been working hard to draw attention to the city's other attractions. The downtown area has become a hipster magnet and the nightlife scene is booming. Haifa is the country's third-largest city, but its fans love that it maintains a small-town feel. Thousands of visitors arrive via cruise ships that dock in Haifa's port, making Haifa their first impression of Israel. Home to two of the country's major universities, Haifa University and the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology, the early 21<sup>st</sup> century saw a major technology hub develop in the city and its surroundings.



Mentioned in the Bible as a port city during King Solomon's time, Eilat is a tropical city at Israel's southern tip. Today, it is a popular vacation spot for Israelis and tourists alike, known for its resorts, beaches, diving, hiking trails, and Red Sea coral reef. Eilat is adjacent to Egypt and Jordan, the two neighbors with which Israel has peace treaties, so one can cross into them via overland border crossings just outside the city. Eilat is also within view of Saudi Arabia. Recognizing that the port here would play an important role in connecting Israel to the world, providing access to the Far East and Africa, Israel's first PM David Ben-Gurion was adamant that the city be included in the state. In 1949, late in the War of Independence, the IDF waged the Uvda Campaign, ultimately linking the small, backwater fishing town of Eilat to the rest of the country and laying the groundwork for its growth.



**TZFAT**  
צפת



Tzfat is known as the city of קַבָּלָה—Kabbalah—Jewish mysticism, and as a center of art. An ancient, spiritual city in the north of Israel, it is nestled high in the Upper Galilee hills. At nearly 3,000 feet above sea level, it's the highest city in Israel. Tzfat is considered one of four cities in Israel that are holy to Jews. The tradition of Kabbalat Shabbat began here in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and an annual klezmer festival is a summer highlight. Visitors love to wander in the winding alleyways of the old part of town, browsing in art galleries and synagogues, and admiring the beautiful views of the Galilee. A bit off the typical beaten track pursued by tourists—but no less important—are the newer sections of town that serve as a regional center for kibbutzim and smaller communities in the surrounding area.



Located on the western shore of Lake Kinneret—making it hot and humid in the summer—Tiberias was established around the year 20 CE and named in honor of the Roman emperor Tiberius. Archaeological excavations in and around the modern city have uncovered many relics from ancient times, including a Roman amphitheater. Its location on Lake Kinneret, and proximity to many sites that are holy to Christianity, makes Tiberias a popular tourism destination; Christians often use it as a base for pilgrimages, and everybody loves the water sports, beaches, and nighttime party cruises. The Jerusalem Talmud was codified here, making Tiberias one of the four holy cities in Judaism. While the Tiberias Marathon isn't the biggest one in Israel, it does have one specific distinction: the city is located 660 feet below sea level, making the local marathon the lowest one on earth.





Located 20 miles south of Jerusalem, in the heart of the West Bank, the modern-day city of Hebron is a flashpoint of tension between Israelis and Palestinians. The patriarch Abraham, who is holy to all three monotheistic faiths, is believed to have sojourned in this area. Hebron is one of the four holy cities for Jews, and also holds special significance for Muslims. It's the site of the Cave of the Patriarchs, which the Book of Genesis tells us Abraham purchased as a burial site for the Patriarchs and the Matriarchs. Israel captured the city, along with the rest of the West Bank, from Jordan in the 1967 Six-Day War. Today, Hebron is home to 250,000 Palestinians and about 700 Israeli Jews. Extensive security arrangements seek to keep the area calm.



A mountainous region in Northern Israel, the Galilee is home to Jews, Arabs, Druze, and other diverse populations. In many parts of the Galilee, the Arab population is greater than the Jewish one, the only part of the country where this is the case. The Galilee boasts many nature preserves, hiking trails, Christian religious sites, and ancient synagogues. It borders with Lebanon to the north and Syria to the east, and is home to many small villages that have been established in recent years, reflecting the Israeli public's passion for pioneering even long after the country gained independence. On weekends and holidays, huge crowds travel from the center of the country to "get away from it all" in the Galilee.



Israel's southern desert, the Negev, covers more than half the country's land but is home to less than 10% of its population. The word "Negev" refers to the Hebrew word for "dry," while in the Bible, Negev means "south." Israel's first Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, was a passionate advocate for settling the Negev and making the desert bloom. Inspired by young people he met in the 1950s who were building a new community in the area, he decided to follow suit, and moved to Sde Boker. The Negev includes the city of Be'er Sheva, military bases, Bedouin villages and towns, and many kibbutzim. With the development of the national railway in recent years, Be'er Sheva and the Negev are a short, comfortable ride from the center of the country and its employment opportunities—perhaps explaining why housing prices here have been rising even faster than in other parts of the country.



# GOLAN HEIGHTS

רִמַּת הַגּוֹלָן



This mountainous region in Northern Israel supplies one-third of Israel's water. Located on the border of Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon, Israel captured the territory from Syria in the 1967 Six-Day War and annexed it in 1981. Neither Syria nor the rest of the world recognizes Israel's sovereignty, and indirect negotiations have been held over the years in an effort to resolve the region's status. In light of the devastating Syrian civil war and other recent developments, the military has been on high alert in the Golan, though civilian life continues normally. The Golan includes Israel's highest peak, הַר הַחֶרְמון—Mt. Hermon. At over 7,000 ft, it turns into a ski resort during the winter months.



Also known by the Biblical names of Yehudah VeShomron, Judea and Samaria, this disputed territory was captured by Israel from Jordan in the 1967 Six-Day War but never annexed. Named for its location west of the Jordan River, the West Bank is home to more than two million Palestinians and close to 400,000 Israeli Jews. The 1993 Oslo Accord sought to separate Israeli and Palestinian populations to reduce tensions. It established three zones that afforded the Palestinian Authority varying levels of self-rule while negotiations for a final-status deal were held. In the absence of an agreement, the status quo remains. The area's rich Biblical history makes it holy to Jews, Muslims, and Christians, complicating prospects for a negotiated settlement.



Gaza is a densely populated 141-square-mile enclave on the Mediterranean coast, just north of Egypt. Israel captured the territory from Egypt in the 1967 Six-Day War, and handed autonomous control to the Palestinian Authority (PA) following the signing of the Oslo Accord in 1993. In 2005, Israel unilaterally withdrew from Gaza, removing all Israeli civilian and military presence. The PA assumed full control of the area, although Israel and Egypt continue to control land, air, and sea crossing points. In 2007, Hamas, which Israel, the US, and the EU recognize as a terror organization, seized control of Gaza and has ruled ever since. Gaza is home to almost two million Palestinian Arabs, nearly all of whom are Muslims, and has an annual population growth rate of about 2.9%, one of the highest in the world. Tensions between Israel and Gaza remain high, especially in light of Hamas' stated goal of eliminating Israel.



# RED SEA

## יָם סוּף



The Red Sea—in Hebrew, יָם סוּף—Yam Suf—Sea of Reeds—lies at the southern tip of Israel and provides important shipping routes from the southern port city of Eilat. The Bible says that the Children of Israel crossed the Red Sea after the waters parted for them as they fled from slavery in Egypt. In 1967, Egypt closed the waterway to Israeli shipping, one major factor leading to the Six-Day War. Today, the Red Sea offers extensive diving, snorkeling, and other water sports, and a lively beach scene that caters to Israelis and tourists. The Israeli section of the Red Sea coastline is met on the west by the Egyptian coastline and on the east by the Jordanian resort town of Aqaba. The three countries coordinate in managing the tremendous natural resource that they share.



# DEAD SEA

## ים המלח



The lowest point on earth, the Dead Sea is 1,300 feet below sea level. Also known as the Sea of Salt, the salt content is so high that no living thing can survive in it, allowing people to float while enjoying the natural minerals that form in the mud. The minerals of the Dead Sea are in high demand around the world as beauty aids. Due to the precarious water situation in Israel, the Dead Sea, which historically was filled by the Jordan River, has been shrinking dramatically, raising questions about what the future holds for this natural resource and the medical tourism industry that has developed around it.





# MEDITERRANEAN SEA

הַיָּם הַתִּיכוֹן



Israel lies at the eastern edge of the Mediterranean Sea, at the nexus of Europe, Asia, and Africa. It shares the eastern coastline with Gaza and Egypt to the south, and Lebanon and Syria to the north. The countries that border the Mediterranean Sea share a certain informality shaped by the centrality of the shoreline. Israel's relationship to the Mediterranean has been changing dramatically in recent years: while the fourth Prime Minister, Golda Meir, joked that Moses led the Children of Israel to the only place in the Middle East without oil, recent exploratory efforts have revealed huge natural gas reserves off the Israeli coast, and the country is beginning to exploit this resource. In response to the shortage of freshwater in Israel, giant desalination plants have been built along the coast, allowing salty seawater to be turned into sweetwater that alleviates the shortage.



# JORDAN RIVER

נהר הירדן



Traditionally, the Jordan River has been an important source of freshwater for Israel and its neighbors. It flows on the eastern side of Israel and the western border of Jordan and connects Lake Kinneret with the Dead Sea. Despite what many people may think, the Jordan River has never been “deep and wide.” Compared to the great rivers of North America and Europe, it’s barely a stream. As growing populations put stress on Israel’s sources of freshwater, the flow in the river has slowed to a trickle. Nonetheless, it remains a popular tourist attraction, both for the Christian baptismal sites on its shores, and for rafting and tubing recreational activities.



**KINNERET**  
ים כנרת



Lake Kinneret is the country's largest body of freshwater and traditionally, it has been Israel's main source of drinking water. Also known as the Sea of Galilee, it is located in Northern Israel. Legend has it that Jesus walked on water here, making Lake Kinneret a popular destination for Christian pilgrims. The first קיבוצים—kibbutzim were founded around Lake Kinneret decades before Israel gained independence. The Kinneret Cemetery, on the shores of the lake, is the final resting place for many of the luminaries of the Zionist movement, as well as Rachel the Poet and Naomi Shemer.