

Directory

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ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation in Israel and the Palestinian Territories is varied and caters to all budgets. We order our listings according to prices based on a double room in high season (July and August). Budget listings, under US\$55 (250NIS), include guesthouses, some hostels and a few mediocre hotels with basic facilities. Midrange accommodation costs between US\$55 and US\$120 (250NIS to 520NIS) and consists of three-star hotels, boutique hotels and most Christian hospices. Top end, over US\$120 (520NIS), includes hotels that are four stars and up.

Note that accommodation costs are seasonal. July and August is considered the high season, as well as holiday weeks such

PRACTICALITIES

- Daily (except Saturday) English-language newspapers include *Ha'aretz* (www.haaretzdaily.com) and the *Jerusalem Post* (www.jpost.com). In East Jerusalem, you can pick up the weekly, Palestinian-produced *Jerusalem Times*. The *Jerusalem Report* is a biweekly magazine covering current affairs.
- Tel Aviv's best station for English- and Hebrew-language rock music is 102FM. In Jerusalem, English news can be heard at 10pm on 88.2FM. English news and music is played sporadically on 100.7FM (Tel Aviv), 98.4FM (Jerusalem), 97.2FM (Haifa) and 94.4FM (Tiberias). The short-wave BBC World Service (1323 kHz) broadcasts news in English, as does the Voice of America (1260 kHz). Israel National Radio is streaming on the web at www.kol-israel.com. For Palestinian music, listen to Angham Radio (www.radioangham.com in Arabic).
- Israel's three public TV channels feature plenty of English-language programming with Hebrew subtitles. These are supplemented by the Arabic-language Jordan TV. Nearly all hotels and guesthouses also have cable TV, which carries CNN, Sky and BBC World.
- The predominant video format in Israel is PAL.
- Electric power is 230V, 50Hz AC. The sockets are designed to accommodate two- and three-pin, round plugs (European standard).
- Israel, the West Bank and Gaza all follow the international metric system.

as Passover. In resort areas, such as the Galilee and Eilat, prices go up on weekends.

B&Bs

All over Israel you'll find accommodation in private homes or cabins (known as *zimmers*), ranging mostly from US\$25 to US\$80 for a single or double. Facilities vary from

BOOK ACCOMMODATION ONLINE

For more accommodation reviews and recommendations by Lonely Planet authors, check out the online booking service at www.lonelyplanet.com. You'll find the true, insider lowdown on the best places to stay. Reviews are thorough and independent. Best of all, you can book online.

simple rooms with shared facilities to self-contained studio apartments with kitchens and cable TV. You'll find them by looking for signs posted in the street or check the website of the **Home Accommodation Association** (www.bnb.co.il). Tourist offices will also keep a list of B&Bs in their city.

Bungalows

Down Sinai way backpackers will delight in the sometimes ramshackle but always cheap huts scattered along the beaches. They are incredibly basic – a palm frond shelter with a floor of carpets and cushions for about ££60 per person. You'll find most of these in Nuweiba.

Camping

Camping grounds (with amenities such as running water, shower blocks and electricity) are found all over Israel, but they don't offer the sort of cheap alternative most people would expect; in fact, hostels cost only a bit more. On a few public beaches, you can pitch a tent free of charge, but not on the Dead Sea shore, much of the Sea of Galilee or the Mediterranean coast north of Nahariya. Wilderness camping is possible in many places along major hiking tracks (except in national parks), but water may not be available, especially in the Negev region.

Hostels & Guesthouses

Israel has an extensive network of roughly 30 official HI hostels, all of which are clean and well appointed. In most cities and towns, however, private guesthouses charge one third to half the prices of the official hostels and they're generally more amenable for socialising – but also louder. For more on HI hostels, contact the **Israel Youth Hostels Association** (Map pp86-7; ☎ 02-655 8405; www.iyha.org.il); Binyanei Ha'Umah Conference Centre, 6th fl, PO Box 6001, Jerusalem 91060; ☎ 8.30am-3pm Sun-Thu, 9am-noon Fri).

The most basic guesthouses will charge US\$6 to US\$7 per night for a dorm bed, while cleaner places with more facilities might charge US\$8 to US\$10. The cheapest places tend to be in East Jerusalem. A double room in a backpacker-orientated guesthouse starts at around US\$30.

Hotels

In the midrange category, for a European standard hotel room with reasonable facilities, expect to pay around US\$65 to US\$120 for a double room. An Israeli breakfast (yogurt, cheese, toast, vegetables and a fried egg) is sometimes included with the room.

You don't get any better service with top-of-the-range hotels, which are often soulless and filled with package tour groups from the USA and Europe. Room rates usually start from around US\$120 and you can expect a full breakfast plus other amenities like a swimming pool and fitness centre. Many hotels in this range are kosher, which means you'll have to deal with a few quirky restrictions, for example the swimming pool will have separate hours for men and women; guest services will be limited during Shabbat; and the elevators (during Shabbat) will automatically stop on every floor.

All hotels and guesthouses listed in this book will have private bathrooms unless stated otherwise.

Kibbutz Guesthouses

In a bid to diversify their income, quite a few kibbutzim have turned to the guesthouse concept. They fit mostly into the midrange category and facilities may include swimming pools, beach access, and renowned dining and guest activities. The **Kibbutz Hotels Reservations Office** (Map p162; ☎ 03-560 8118; www.kibbutz.co.il; 41 Montefiore St, Tel Aviv) publishes a booklet listing all of its hotels, restaurants and camp sites, with prices, amenities and a map.

ACTIVITIES

Israel is a miniature playground in the Middle East. Popular activities include horse riding in Netanya (p186), kayaking in the Upper Galilee (p266), 4WD trips in Mitzpe Ramon (p341) and hiking in Yehudiya Nature Reserve. Such activities in the Palestinian Territories are limited or nonexistent. Other possible activities in Israel include the following listings (overleaf).

Archaeological Digs

Israel's 5000 years of settled history, much of it now underground, will keep archaeologists busy for years to come. You can join a dig at a few locations; one of the most popular for tourists is at Tel Maresha (p147). For this and other digs you pay for a day to join. For more options see p399.

Hiking

With its broad range of terrain, Israel offers a wealth of superb hiking opportunities. The most popular areas include Maktesh Ramon (p339), the Wilderness of Zin (p336), Ein Gedi (p316), the Eilat Mountains (p349) and the Yehudia Nature Reserve (p267). For guidelines and quite detailed route information, visit the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (SPNI) in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv or any of its field schools around the country (see Green Teams, p78). The SPNI also sells detailed sectional hiking maps (60NIS, laminated 82NIS).

Long-distance hikers may want to attempt all or part of the Israel National Trail, which rambles for over 1200km through Israel's least populated and most scenic areas, from Tel Dan in the north to Taba in the south. This remarkably varied and beautiful route is marked with red, white and blue blazes.

Kidnappings and robberies of hikers have occurred in wilderness areas of the West Bank. The only area considered safe for hiking is Wadi Qelt (p305). For an armchair read, check out *Walks in Palestine: Including the Nativity Trail* (2002), written by Nabeel Kassisi.

Water Sports

Travel agents like to hype Eilat as an oasis in the desert, but if you've come looking for paradise you'll be let down by the crowds and brash commercialisation of the place. The beaches at Bat Yam (p164), Tel Aviv (p164), Netanya (p186) and Hof HaCarmel (near Haifa; p201) are somewhat less busy. These, along with the Sea of Galilee, all offer ample opportunities to swim, windsurf and sail. At Eilat you can try parasailing and water-skiing.

While many privately owned beaches along the Sea of Galilee, the Dead Sea, and the Mediterranean and Red Sea coasts

charge admission fees (or are restricted for military reasons), some remote beaches are accessible to the public free of charge.

Eilat is Israel's major scuba-diving and snorkelling spot, but if you're headed for the world-class reefs of Sinai, it's hardly worth a stop. An alternative is to dive amid the underwater ruins of Herod's city at Caesarea (p213).

BUSINESS HOURS

Israeli shopping hours are 9am to 6pm (or later) Sunday to Thursday, and 9am to 3pm Friday, with some places opening after sundown on Saturday.

Banks are open Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday from 8.30am to 12.30pm and 4pm to 5.30pm; Monday and Wednesday from 8.30am to 12.30pm and Friday from 8.30am to noon. Post offices open 7am to 6pm Sunday to Thursday and 7am to noon on Friday. Many internet cafés are open 24 hours except during Shabbat. Most bars open their doors around 7pm and close with the last customer. Clubs don't open until after midnight; in Tel Aviv and Eilat most are open seven days a week, while in Haifa and Jerusalem they only open on weekends. For standard opening hours of cafés and restaurants, see p68. Reviews in this book do not include business hours unless they differ from these standards.

Bear in mind that in most parts of the country, things grind to a halt during Shabbat, the Jewish Sabbath, which starts at sundown on Friday and ends one hour after sundown on Saturday. In Jerusalem and most other parts of the country, businesses close down around 3pm on Friday.

In this book we might state that a certain place is open from 8am to 2am except Shabbat. This translates to 8am to 2am Sunday to Thursday, 8am to 4pm Friday and 8pm to 2am Saturday.

In largely secular Tel Aviv, most shops and offices close at around 2pm on Friday afternoon, but at the same time street markets and cafés spring to life. In fact, Friday is the biggest night out of the week.

In predominantly Muslim areas – East Jerusalem, Akko, Jaffa, the West Bank and Gaza – businesses are closed all day Friday but remain open on Saturday. Christian-owned businesses (concentrated in Nazareth, Bethlehem and the Armenian and

Christian Quarters of Jerusalem's Old City) are closed on Sunday.

In the West Bank and Gaza Strip, curfews imposed by the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) can cause businesses to close early; see our warning (p286) for details.

CHILDREN

Travel in Israel shouldn't be too rough on children as distances are short and roads are in good nick.

Practicalities

Baby food and nappies are readily available in shopping centres, but if any special medicines are needed its best to bring what you need from your own country, as labels are often in Hebrew. Kid-friendly hotels and resorts can be found in the *zimmers* and kibbutz accommodation in the Galilee area.

For more tips, see p69 and Lonely Planet's *Travel with Children* by Cathy Lanigan.

Sights & Activities

Many of Israel's museums and historic sites are geared for children as much as they are for adults, complete with learning centres, games and activities. Notable attractions aimed at kids include the National Museum of Science (p198) in Haifa, the multimedia adventure at Caesarea (p212) and Mini Israel (p146) in Latrun.

Public parks are common in Israeli cities, as are activity centres like miniature golf, bowling alleys and movie theatres. There are also plenty of national parks for active trips and short hikes. In winter, a trip to Mt Hermon for skiing is a must. If the kids are still bored, a trip to the beach works every time.

The tense situation in the West Bank – and the checkpoints between towns – makes places like Hebron and Nablus less kid-friendly.

CLIMATE CHARTS

Israel and the Palestinian Territories experience warm, cloudless days throughout the year and although it can get uncomfortably hot in some areas there is always somewhere in the country offering cool respite. The climate charts overleaf will give you an indication of the best months to travel. For more on when to go, see p17.

COURSES

Some Israeli universities operate programs for foreign students in Hebrew, Arabic and Middle Eastern studies. Participants don't necessarily need to speak Hebrew, but may be required to study it as part of their curriculum. The biggest schools in the country offering programs for foreigners include the **University of Haifa** (☎ 04-824 0111; www.haifa.ac.il; Mt Carmel, Haifa), **Tel Aviv University** (☎ 03-640 8111; www.tau.ac.il; Ramat Aviv 69978, Tel Aviv) and the **Hebrew University** (☎ 02-588 2819; www.huji.ac.il; Mt Scopus, Jerusalem).

Birzeit University (www.birzeit.edu), 7km north of Ramallah, runs both beginners', and advanced courses in Arabic language and literature for US\$650 per course.

Travellers wishing to learn Hebrew will probably want to look for an *ulpan* – a language school catering mainly to new Jewish immigrants – but will have to find one that also welcomes nonimmigrant students; for information see Courses under Jerusalem (p128), Tel Aviv (p166) and Haifa (p201). Most programs cost under 500NIS per month. Tourist information offices also carry a list of *ulpanim* in their respective city.

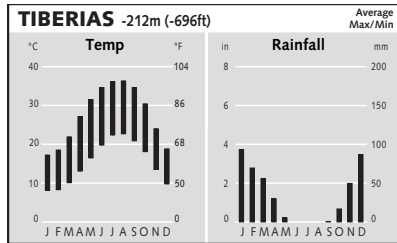
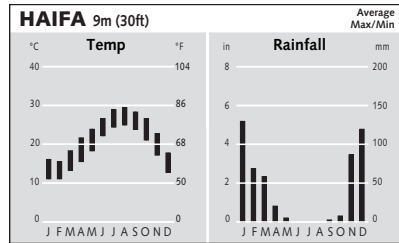
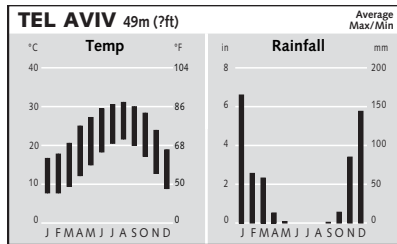
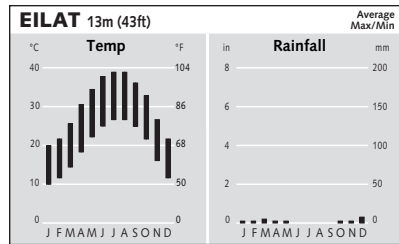
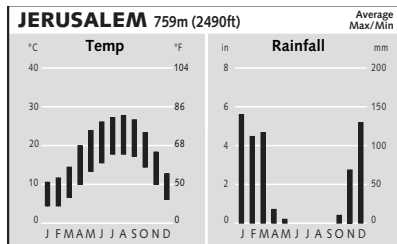
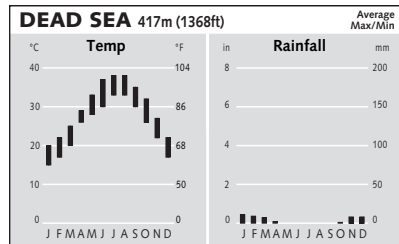
For those who prefer not to study too hard, there are also kibbutz *ulpanim*, where you can take on study in a rural atmosphere and work at the same time. The website www.kibbutzprogramcenter.org is an excellent source of information.

CUSTOMS

Israel allows travellers to import duty free up to 1L of spirits and 2L of wine for each person over 17 years of age, as well as 250g of tobacco or 250 cigarettes, plus gifts of no more than US\$200 in value. Animals, plants, firearms or fresh meat cannot be imported. Video, computer or diving equipment may need to be declared on arrival, and a deposit paid to prevent its sale in Israel (however, this regulation is rarely applied).

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Is it safe? This is the question you'll hear endlessly from friends and family back home when you announce your intentions to travel to the Holy Land. The truth is that fatal car crashes in your home country probably outnumber terrorist-related deaths in Israel. So while there is an inherent risk in any travel these days, your chances of getting caught



up in an act of terror in Israel are extremely low. Still, it's always a good idea to play it safe, plan ahead and get advice from locals on the ground. The following sections are an overview of issues to consider.

Travel in the Palestinian Territories offers considerably more risk. For specific details on travel in these areas, see our warnings, p286 and p356.

Security Measures

For obvious reasons Israel has some of the most stringent security policies in the world. Suspiciously parked vehicles are towed and/or destroyed by police; abandoned parcels or packages are blown up; and streets, markets and public facilities are spontaneously closed at the vaguest rumour of a threat. When entering bus or rail terminals, shopping malls, and just about everywhere else, your bags will be searched – and in some cases X-rayed. You will also be checked with a metal

detector or body search and probably asked the question: 'Do you have a gun?' Flashing a foreign passport can quicken the process.

Roads into most West Bank towns are fixed with army roadblocks where you'll need to show a passport and answer questions about your reason for travel. Similarly, new arrivals at Ben-Gurion airport should be prepared for lengthy questioning and bag searches. As annoying as they may be, such measures have thwarted countless terrorist attacks and aren't likely to be relaxed any time soon.

Terrorism & Military Action

Suicide bombers in Israel and IDF attacks in the West Bank and Gaza have been a part of life for 20 years and there are still no signs of letting up. In Israel there has been a noticeable drop in suicide attacks since 2005. This is due to the end of the second intifada, coupled with heightened security in

Israel. Despite this you need to remain vigilant of suspicious people (or packages), especially when travelling by public bus. If you are travelling in remote areas of the Golan you also need to be wary of land mines and unexploded ordnance (UXO); see p263 for details. Register with your embassy for updates by email and pay attention to news in the local media.

There is much less security in the Palestinian Territories. Bear the following in mind when travelling in the Territories:

- Foreign passports are an advantage at checkpoints and will almost always get you into the West Bank (but not Gaza).
- Kidnapping of foreigners is a frequent danger, especially in Gaza. Fortunately, most are released without harm.
- Don't wear any outward signs of Judaism, such as a kippa, or you might be mistaken for an Israeli settler.
- Israeli soldiers use night-vision goggles so if you are walking near a checkpoint or the Separation Wall at night you will be spotted and possibly targeted if you are deemed a threat.
- Activism can be dangerous business in Israel. Some activists who have confronted the IDF have been injured or killed, as was the case with 23-year-old Rachel Corrie, who was killed by an IDF house bulldozer in Gaza; see www.rachelcorrie.org for details.

Theft

Theft is as much a problem in Israel and the Palestinian Territories as it is in any other country, so take the usual precautions: don't leave valuables in your room or vehicle and use a money belt. In hostels, it's

wise to check your most valuable belongings into the front-desk safe. On intercity buses, it's fine to stow large bags in the luggage hold, but keep valuables with you inside. Crowded tourist spots and markets are obvious haunts for pickpockets, so stay aware of what's happening around you.

DISCOUNT CARDS

A Hostelling International (HI) card is useful for obtaining discounts at official HI hostels and an International Student Identity Card (ISIC) entitles bearers to a 10% student discount on Egged buses, a 20% discount on Israel State Railways and reductions on admissions to most museums and archaeological sites. Having said that, many places offer student discounts only to those studying in Israel, and cards issued by individual universities may not be recognised.

Some museums and sights offer discounts to senior travellers.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Israeli Embassies & Consulates

Following are the Israeli embassies and consulates in major cities around the world. Note: there is no Israeli embassy in Lebanon or Syria.

Australia (☎ 02-6273 1309; <http://canberra.mfa.gov.il>;
6 Turrana St, Yarralumla, Canberra, ACT 2600)

Austria (☎ 01-4764 65000; info@vienna.mfa.gov.il;
20 Anton Frakgassewien, Vienna, 1180)

Canada Montreal (☎ 514-940 8500; <http://montreal.mfa.gov.il> in French; Suite 2620, 1155 Blvd Rene Levesque Ouest, Montreal, PQ H3B 4S5); Ottawa (☎ 613-567 6450; <http://ottawa.mfa.gov.il>); 50 O'Conner St, Ottawa, Ont K1P 6L2)

Egypt Alexandria (☎ 03-544 9501; 10 Sharia Mena, Kafer Abdou); Cairo (☎ 02-761 0545; fax 761 0414; 6 Sharia ibn Malek, Giza)

France Paris (☎ 01 40 76 55 00; <http://paris.mfa.gov.il> in French; 3 rue Rabelais, F-75008 Paris); Marseille (☎ 04-91 53 39 90; fax 04-91 53 39 94; 146 rue Paradis, Marseille F-13006)

Germany (☎ 30-8904 5500; <http://berlin.mfa.gov.il> in German; Auguste Victoria St 74-75, D-14193 Berlin)

Ireland (☎ 01-230 9400; <http://dublin.mfa.gov.il>; Carisbrook House, 122 Pembroke Rd, Ballsbridge, Dublin)

Jordan (☎ 06-552 4686; info@amman.mfa.gov.il); Maysaloon St, Rabiya, 11195, Amman)

Netherlands (☎ 070-376 0500; cons@hague.mfa.gov.il); Buitenhof 47, 2513AH Den Hague)

New Zealand (☎ 04-472 2368; israel-ask@israel.org.nz; 111 The Terrace, Wellington)

GOVERNMENT TRAVEL ADVICE

The following government websites offer travel advisories and information on current hot spots.

Australian Department of Foreign Affairs (☎ 06-6261 3305; www.dfat.gov.au)

British Foreign Office (☎ 0870-606 0290; www.fco.gov.uk)

Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs (☎ 1 800 267 6788; www.dfaif-maeci.gc.ca)

US State Department (☎ 202-647 5225; <http://travel.state.gov>)

South Africa (☎ 012-470-3500; publicaffairs@pretoria.mfa.gov.il; 428 Kings Hwy, cnr Elizabeth Grove, Lynnwood, Pretoria)

Switzerland (☎ 031-356 3588; http://bern.mfa.gov.il in German, French & Italian; 32 Alpenstrasse, Bern)

Turkey (http://ankara.mfa.gov.il) Ankara (☎ 312-446 3605; 85 Mahatma Gandhi St, Ankara); Istanbul (☎ 212-317 6500; Yapi Kredi Plaza, C Blok K7)

UK (☎ 020-7957 9500; http://london.mfa.gov.il; 2 Palace Green, London W8 4QB)

USA (www.israemb.org) New York (☎ 212-499 5400; 800 Second Ave, New York NY10017); Washington, DC (☎ 202-364 5500; 3514 International Dr NW, Washington DC 20008) Israel has nine consulates in the USA – the listed contacts can provide details.

Embassies & Consulates in Israel

Jerusalem may be Israel's capital, but the vagaries of international politics have led most diplomatic missions to locate in Tel Aviv; some also maintain consulates in Jerusalem, Haifa and/or Eilat.

Most diplomatic missions are open in the morning from Monday to Thursday, and some for longer hours. The only Middle Eastern countries with diplomatic representation in Israel are Jordan, Egypt and Turkey. There is no Lebanese or Syrian embassy in Israel.

Australia Tel Aviv (Map p150; ☎ 03-695 0451; www.austrianembassy.org.il; 37 Sha'ul HaMelekh Ave, 64928)

Austria Tel Aviv (☎ 03-612 0924; www.austrian-embassy.org.il; Beit Crystal, 6 Hachililason St, Ramat Gan, 64928)

Canada Tel Aviv (Map p150; ☎ 03-636 3300; fax 636 3380; 3 Nirim St, 67060)

Egypt Eilat (Map p346; ☎ 08-637 6882; 68 HaAfroni St, 88119); Tel Aviv (Map p150; ☎ 03-546 4151; fax 03-544 1615; 54 Basel St, 64239)

France Jerusalem (Map pp114–115; ☎ 02-625 9481, fax 02-625 9178; 5 Paul Émile Botta St, 91076); Tel Aviv (Map p160; ☎ 03-520 8300; fax 03-520 8340; 112 Herbert Samuel Esplanade, 63572)

Germany Tel Aviv (Map p150; ☎ 03-693 1313; www.tel-aviv.diplo.de in German & Hebrew; 3 Daniel Frisch St, 64731)

Ireland Tel Aviv (Map p150; ☎ 03-696 4166; fax 696 4160; 17th fl, 3 Daniel Frisch St, 64731)

Jordan Tel Aviv (☎ 03-751 7722; fax 03-751 7712; 14 Abbe Hillel St, Ramat Gan, 52506)

Netherlands Tel Aviv (☎ 03-752 3150; fax 03-752 3135; www.netherlands-embassy.co.il; 14 Abbe Hillel St, Ramat Gan, 52506)

New Zealand Tel Aviv (Map p150; ☎ 03-695 6622; fax 03-695 6622; 3 Daniel Frisch St, 64731)

South Africa Tel Aviv (Map p156; ☎ 03-525 2566; fax 03-525 3230; www.safis.co.il; 16th fl, Dizengoff Tower, Dizengoff Centre)

Switzerland Tel Aviv (Map p150; ☎ 03-546 4455; fax 03-546 4408; 228 HaYarkon St, 63405)

Turkey Tel Aviv (Map p150; ☎ 03-524 1101; fax 524 0499; 202 HaYarkon St, 63405)

UK Jerusalem (Map pp86–7; ☎ 02-671 7724; fax 02-532 5629; 19 Nashashibi St, 97200); Tel Aviv (Map p150; ☎ 03-725 1222; fax 527 1572; 192 HaYarkon St, 64505)

USA Jerusalem (Map p110; ☎ 02-628 7137; fax 02-625 9270; 27 Nabulus Rd, 94190); Haifa (Map p196; ☎ 04-853 1446; fax 03-853 1476; 26 Ben-Gurion Ave, 35023); Tel Aviv (Map p160; ☎ 03-519 7575; www.usembassy-israel.org.il; 71 HaYarkon St, 63903)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The specific dates of Jewish festivals may vary from year to year. For the latest dates, ask at tourist offices.

January

International Marathon (www.tiberias-marathon.co.il; Tiberias)

February

Dead Sea Half-Marathon (Dead Sea) Foot race from Ein Gedi Spa to Masada and back.

March

Boombamela Festival (www.boombamela.co.il; Net-zanim Beach, Ashkelon) Held annually in March or April. Naked bodies painted rainbow colours, beach bonfires, bongo drums, art and hedonism. It's one of the wildest parties in the Middle East.

Lettuce Festival (Artas, West Bank) Festival to honour the Palestinian farmer. Singing, dancing and handicrafts. Located south of Bethlehem near Solomon's Pools.

Jerusalem Half-Marathon (http://hmarathon.jerusalem.muni.il; Jerusalem)

Arthur Rubinstein Piano Master Competition (www.arims.org.il; Tel Aviv) Scheduled for 2008.

April

Ein Gev Music Festival (Ein Gev, Galilee) Ballet and orchestra music.

Haifa International Youth Theatre (Haifa) Theatre and street performances by Jewish and Arab companies.

May

African Hebrew Israelite Festival (Dimona) Music, sports and entertainment showcasing the lifestyle of the African Hebrew Israelites.

Shantipi New Age Festival (Kibbutz Lehavot Haviva, Pardesh Hanna) Short for Hindu Shanti and Native American Tipi, this is a great New Age gathering with lots of dancing, playing in the mud and free love. Bring your own tent.

Jacob's Ladder Festival (www.jlfestival.com; Sea of Galilee) Draws artists and folk musicians from around the world, often held at Nof Ginosar. See p250.

Abu Ghosh Vocal Music Festival (Abu Ghosh, near Jerusalem) Held inside two different churches, this is a predominantly liturgical repertoire with music from the Renaissance and Baroque periods.

Jerusalem International Book Fair (☎ 02-629 7922; www.jerusalembookfair.com; Jerusalem) Biennial event that attracts 1200 publishers from more than 40 countries.

Israel Festival (www.israel-festival.org.il; Jerusalem) Two weeks of art, music, dance and theatre held in different venues around the city.

Golden Calf Festival (Ein Hod) Held at the end of Passover, Israel's version of the Burning Man Project. Go to http://ein-hod.israel.net and follow the links to the festival.

International Judaica Fair (Jerusalem) Displays of Jewish art, manuscripts and books. The five-day gathering is held bi-annually.

June

Jazz Festival (www.jjf.org.il; Jerusalem) Israeli and international jazz performances at different venues around the city.

Palestine International Festival for Music & Dance (Ramallah) Music and dance festival organised at the Popular Art Centre.

July

Voice of Music in the Upper Galilee (Kibbutz Kra Blum) Chamber music festival.

Jazz Festival (http://jazzfest.co.il; Tel Aviv) Three-day Latin festival held in the first week in July, featuring food, music and dancing. Held in HaYarkon Park.

Karmi'el Dance Festival (www.dancefest.karmiel.israel.net; Karmi'el) Hosts more than 100 professional dance troupes from around the globe and attracts up to 200,000 people. Includes classical, ultramodern and folk dancing.

Jerusalem Film Festival (www.jfff.org.il; Jerusalem) Very prestigious events sponsored by the Cinematheque.

International Street Theatre (Bat Yam) Lots of public art, music and dance.

White Night (Tel Aviv) Night-long program of theatre, music, dance and art. Museums stay open all night and an outdoor fair is held on Rothschild Blvd.

August

Klezmer Dance Festival (Tsfat) Dubbed the 'Jewish Woodstock', you can hear Yiddish tunes and such oddities as jazz played on a *shofar* (ram's horn). See also p281.

Red Sea Jazz Festival (www.redseajazzeilat.com; Eilat) Four-day music fest that draws around 40 performers and thousands of jazz enthusiasts. See p349.

Jerusalem Arts & Crafts Fair (Jerusalem) Arts, crafts and food fair, plus nightly concerts.

Nights of Love (Arad) Music and dancing to Israeli pop.

Jaffa Nights (Jaffa) Month-long festival of music and entertainment (see p184).

September

Bereshet Festival (Sea of Galilee) A spiritual Bohemian gathering with lots of live music, dancing and bonfires. It's usually by the Sea of Galilee but you'll need to ask around as the locations change.

Sea of Galilee Crossing (Kibbutz Ha'on) A 4km swim across the sea (no walking allowed).

Hilulim Wine Fest (Rishon LeZion) Wine-tasting extravaganza.

October

Fringe Theatre Festival (Akko) Drama, comedy and dance festival.

Haifa International Film Festival (www.haiffaff.co.il; Haifa) Independent films held at the Cinematheque.

Love Parade (www.loveparade.co.il in Hebrew; Tel Aviv) Beachside festival with lots of dancing and outrageous costumes.

International Poets Festival (Jerusalem) Held bi-annually in odd years.

Wine & Song Festival (Zichron Ya'acov) Wine tasting and live music.

Sagol Love and Meditation Fest (Dor Beach; www.sagol.org) Dozens of activities and workshops for the alternative crowd. Location may change.

November

Olive Harvest Festival (Bethlehem) Olive farmers and locals gather in Manger Sq for dancing, singing and displays of local olive products.

December

Hanukkah-Christmas-Ramadan Festival (Haifa) A mixed marriage of celebrations involving art and music.

Liturgical Festival of Choral Music (Jerusalem; www.jso.co.il) Sponsored by the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

Israel is home to an open and lively gay scene and there are no laws against homosexuality. The biggest gay scene is in Tel Aviv which has a handful of gay hangouts, and plenty of rainbow-coloured flags fluttering over the streets. The resort town of Eilat is also gay friendly, although the scene is mostly Israeli tourists. Haifa and Jerusalem have small gay communities. Ultra-orthodox Jews and Muslims are opposed to homosexuality so it's appropriate to be circumspect in religious neighbourhoods.

Local organisations are based in Tel Aviv (see p167) and Jerusalem (see p129).

Gay culture is nonexistent in the Palestinian Territories and many gay Palestinians have taken refuge in Israel (although this has become increasingly difficult with tight border controls). There are an estimated 300 to 600 gay Palestinians living (legally and illegally) in Israel. To better understand the difficult plight of gay and lesbian Palestinians, click on www.globalgayz.com/g-palestine.html.

HOLIDAYS

Pesah, the major holiday period, can grind the country to a halt, shutting down transport, stores and restaurants. There are lots of other holidays throughout the year that cause things to slow for a day or two (eg Sukkot), although tourist sites and museums generally remain open. On Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, most facilities are closed.

Dates of Jewish holidays may vary from year to year, as they're based on the Jewish lunar calendar. The website of the **Orthodox Union** (www.ou.org/chagim) has links to a calendar of Jewish holidays. Note that the Jewish day begins with sundown and ends at sundown the following day so a holiday technically begins the day before what is listed on a calendar.

The Muslim calendar is also lunar but it does not have a leap year so the holidays tend to drift across the seasons and can fall at any time of the year. Note that different Christian denominations also celebrate holidays on different days.

Jewish & Christian Holidays

January

Eastern Orthodox Christmas 5-6 January

Armenian Christmas 19 January

Tu Bishvat (Arbour Day) The new year for trees; different types of fruit and nuts are eaten and trees are planted.

March/April

Purim The Feast of Lots commemorates the Persian Queen Esther's deliverance of her Jewish subjects from the despicable secular politician, Haman. Kids and adults alike dress up in costume and enjoy an evening of revelry. This is the time for the typically nondrinking Israelis to atone; according to tradition they get so plastered that they can't distinguish between 'bless Mordechai' and 'curse Haman'.

Good Friday A Christian holiday commemorating the crucifixion of Jesus.

Easter Sunday Celebrated first by the Roman Catholics and Protestants and about two weeks later by the

Armenian and Eastern Orthodox churches, Easter commemorates the resurrection of Jesus on the third day after the crucifixion. When times are calm, Catholic pilgrims throng Jerusalem's Via Dolorosa and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in the Old City, while many Protestants gather at the Garden Tomb for religious services.

Pesah, the Feast of Passover Celebrates the Jewish Exodus from Egypt. On the first and last days of this weeklong festival, most businesses (including shops and markets) are closed and public transport shuts down; on other days of the festival, businesses may open for limited hours. Passover dinner, or Seder, consists of several prescribed dishes, each commemorating a different event, and during the entire period, bread is replaced with matzo, an unleavened wafer up to 1m in diameter.

Omer (Pesah to Shevuot) A Lent-like period solemnly commemorating the various trials of the Jewish people.

Soldiers Memorial Day Commemorates fallen soldiers in various Israeli conflicts.

Armenian Holocaust Memorial Day 24 April

Mimouna A North African Jewish festival.

Eastern Orthodox & Armenian Good Friday Takes place two weeks after the Protestant and Catholic Good Friday.

Eastern Orthodox & Armenian Easter Falls two weeks after the Protestant and Catholic Easter.

International Women's Day Celebrated by Palestinians on 8 March.

Land Day (30 March) A Palestinian day of protest against the Israeli government's takeover of Palestinian lands.

Palestinian Prisoners Day (17 April) Palestinians remember their countrymen locked in Israeli jails.

May

Yom HaSho'ah, Holocaust Day (22nd day of Omer) Sirens signalling two minutes of silence sound in memory of the six million Jewish victims of the Nazi Holocaust.

Special services take place at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem.

Lag B'Omer Sports matches and bonfires and a permissible feast on the 33rd day of Omer commemorate the 2nd-century break in the plague that killed Rabbi Akiva's students (in some years, it may fall in late April). Children build bonfires and the religious visit the rabbi's grave in Meron near Tsfat.

Yom HaAtzma'ut (Independence Day; 14 May) Commemorates 14 May, 1948, when Israel became an independent state. The day before, Yom Hazikaron, is a memorial day dedicated to soldiers lost in Israel's various conflicts. For Palestinians, this day is called Al-Naqba, the Catastrophe. On Independence Day there are parades and picnics everywhere.

Labour Day (1 May) Day for Palestinian workers to celebrate their accomplishments.

June

Liberation of Jerusalem Day (4 June) A commemoration of the reunification of Jerusalem in June 1967. Jerusalemites

RELIGIOUS HOLIDAY DATES

Jewish Holidays

Holiday	2007	2008	2009	2010
Purim	4 Mar	21 Mar	10 Mar	28 Feb
Passover	3 Apr	20 Apr	9 Apr	30 Mar
Rosh HaShanah	13 Sep	30 Sep	19 Sep	9 Sep
Yom Kippur	22 Sep	9 Oct	28 Sep	18 Sep
Hanukkah	5 Dec	22 Dec	12 Dec	2 Dec

Islamic Holidays

Holiday	2007	2008	2009	2010
New Year	20 Jan	10 Jan	31 Dec	7 Dec
Prophet's Birthday	31 Mar	20 Mar	9 Mar	26 Feb
Ramadan Begins	13 Sep	1 Sep	22 Aug	11 Aug
Eid al-Fitr	13 Oct	1 Oct	20 Sep	10 Sep
Eid alAdha	20 Dec	8 Dec	27 Nov	16 Nov

Christian Holidays

Holiday	2007	2008	2009	2010
Orthodox Easter	8 Apr	27 Apr	19 Apr	4 Apr
Western Easter	8 Apr	23 Mar	12 Apr	4 Apr

parade through town to the Western Wall for dancing and singing.

Shevuot (Pentecost) Seven weeks after Pesah, this day celebrates the delivery of the Torah to Moses on Mt Sinai. Observant Jews stay up all night to study the Torah and it is customary to eat dairy products. Celebrations are held on kibbutzim. In Jerusalem, the Western Wall is very crowded just before dawn.

August

Tish'a BeAv A commemoration of the 'Destruction of the Temples'. Observant Jews fast and read the biblical Book of Lamentations.

September

Rosh HaShanah The 'Head of the Year' (Jewish New Year); prayer services begin on the eve of the holiday.

October

Yom Kippur Known as the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur ends the 10 days of penitence, which begin on Rosh HaShanah. The observant spend 25 hours in prayer and contemplation, confessing sins and abstaining from food, drink, sex, cosmetics (including soap and toothpaste) and animal products.

Sukkot (Tabernacles Festival) People erect homemade *sukkotim* (shelters) in commemoration of the 40 years that the ancient Israelites spent in the wilderness after the Exodus. The *sukkotim* walls are constructed of plywood with a roof of loose branches (so the sky is visible from inside); these sit on apartment balconies, gardens and even in hotels and restaurants.

Simhat Torah (Rejoicing the Torah) Falls seven days after Sukkot and concludes the annual cycle of reading the Torah.

Yitzhak Rabin Memorial Day This day honours the assassinated prime minister, Yitzhak Rabin; sometimes held in November.

November

Palestinian Independence Day (15 November) Marks the signing of the Palestinian declaration of independence (signed in 1988).

December

Hanukkah Also called the Festival of Lights, Hanukkah celebrates the re-dedication of the Temple after the triumphant Maccabean revolt against the Seleucids. Each night for a week, families light a candle on a menorah (a seven-branched candelabra) and exchange gifts.

HACKTIVISM

While Gaza and the West Bank are notorious battlegrounds, another front has opened that is causing just as much havoc to ordinary civilians. But on this field the tanks have been replaced by viruses and the Qassam rockets by worms – the war in cyberspace may require less hardware, but it does level the playing field.

The cyberwar began in earnest during the second intifada, when pro-Israeli hackers attacked websites belonging to Hamas and Hezbollah, rendering them unusable, while pro-Palestinian hackers managed to take down the Israeli government website and even the Tel Aviv Stock Exchange.

One of the biggest incidents of 'hacktivism' occurred in June 2006, not long after Israel invaded Gaza to start a new military offensive in the strip. In response to the invasion, pro-Palestinian hacktivists systematically shut down more than 700 Israeli web domains and replaced them with a message: 'Hacked by Team-Evil Arab Hackers. U kill Palestinian people, we kill Israeli servers.' Some of the targets were high-profile websites including Bank Hapoalim and Rambam Medical Centre.

Christmas Commemorating the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, Christmas is celebrated by Catholics and Protestants on 25 December, while the Eastern Orthodox churches celebrate it on 7 January and the Armenians on 19 January. When things are calm on the West Bank, the event to attend is the Christmas Eve (24 December) midnight mass on Bethlehem's Manger Sq outside the Church of the Nativity. Note that space inside the church is reserved for observant Catholics who hold tickets (distributed free at the Christian Information Centre in Jerusalem's Old City).

Islamic Holidays

Islamic New Year First Day of Muharram. Gifts and cards are exchanged on this day.

Prophet's Birthday Celebrated on 12 Rab' al-Awal (the date given in the Muslim calendar).

Ramadan Ninth month of the Muslim calendar. Muslims fast during daylight hours. Nothing is allowed to pass through the lips, and that includes water. Most Palestinians adhere to the rules although it is not as strict as in some Islamic nations. If you find yourself in a Muslim area during this time do your best not to eat or smoke in public during daylight hours.

Eid al-Fitr Marks the end of Ramadan. After prayers, sessions at a mosque friends and family typically visit each other and give the greeting 'Eid Mubarak!' (Happy Eid!)

Eid al-Adha The commemoration of Allah saving Ibrahim (Abraham) from sacrificing his son, Isaac. This marks the end of the Haj. Sheep are usually sacrificed at this time.

INSURANCE

Hospital visits in Israel can be expensive and theft is not unheard of so it's a good idea to take out a travel insurance policy before leaving home. In addition to the usual coverage of sickness or theft, try to tailor your policy to your specific needs eg make sure the policy includes scuba diving if you plan to partake in this activity. See p411 for more details.

Worldwide coverage to travellers from over 44 countries is available online at www.lonelyplanet.com/travel_services.

INTERNET ACCESS

Most destinations in Israel and the Palestinian Territories have internet cafés, which typically keep very long hours and charge anywhere from 12NIS to 30NIS per hour. Visitors carrying laptops can find wi-fi hot spots all over the country. Wi-fi in cafés is usually free, while most upscale hotels charge a fee. To sign up for your own ISP account, contact the well-known **Netvision** (☎ 04-856 0660; www.netvision.net.il/services).

Throughout this book we include a computer symbol for hotels that have public internet access; this may or may not be a paid service. For relevant web resources, see p20.

LEGAL MATTERS

Israel has no formal constitution because religious leaders refused to recognise a nonreligious document as the law of the land. Instead, the 'basic laws of Israel' were drafted over a period of 30-plus years (1958–1992). Some religious laws prevail, particularly in regard to marriage – civil marriages are not permitted in Israel.

If you're arrested a court assigns a lawyer to speak on your behalf. In case of arrest there's little that you or your embassy can do for you until the court system plays itself out.

An independent court system exists in the Palestinian Territories, but Israeli and Palestinian police will cooperate on investigations. Palestinian police are not permitted to arrest tourists but can detain

a tourist until Israeli military forces arrive on the scene.

MAPS

Tourist offices in Israel and the Palestinian Territories are well endowed with free city and country maps, most of them in English, although smaller towns may only have Hebrew-language maps. The Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (SPNI; see p78) sells 1:50,000 topographical hiking maps for around 80NIS per sheet.

MONEY ATMs

ATMs are widespread and Visa cards are accepted almost everywhere. Bank Leumi accepts Visa and several other bank cards, but with MasterCard or a home Cirrus or foil format ATM card, you'll have to use Bank HaPoalim.

Cash

The official currency is the new Israeli shekel (NIS), known simply as the shekel (or shekelim in the plural). Rates at the time of printing are found on the inside front cover. For a sample of general costs, see p18.

The shekel is divided into 100 agorot. Coins come in denominations of 10 and 50 agorot (actually marked ½ shekel) and one and five NIS, and notes in 10, 20, 50, 100 and 200NIS. The Palestinian Pound only exists in theory and shekels are the main form of currency in the Palestinian Territories.

To make things easier for travellers, most top-end hotels, HI hostels, car-hire companies and airlines quote their rates and accept payment in US dollars, and paying in US dollars will save you the 17% value-added tax (VAT). Euros are also widely accepted by moneychangers. Prices in this book are quoted in shekels except in cases where the proprietor quotes prices in dollars or euro.

Tourists who pay in foreign currency are exempt the VAT, tourists paying in local currency are entitled to a refund on most items purchased in shops that are registered with the Ministry of Tourism (there'll be a sign in the window or at the register). Purchases must be wrapped in sealed, partially transparent plastic, and the original invoice must be legible without opening the parcel.

Claim your refund from Bank Leumi in the departure lounge at Ben-Gurion airport.

Moneychangers

Exchange rates vary little from place to place, but banks may charge a 4% commission. The best deals are the independent exchange bureaux common in most cities and towns, which usually do not charge a commission. Also see the inside front cover for exchange rates.

Tippling

Until recently, tipping wasn't an issue in Israel or the Palestinian Territories, but these days, restaurant bills arrive with a 10% to 12% addition for service, or a notice that service is not included. Note that taxi drivers do not expect tips – they're usually content just to overcharge.

Travellers Cheques

Travellers cheques may be changed at most banks, but commission charges can be as high as 20NIS, regardless of the cheque amount; instead use a no-commission exchange bureau or the post office. Post offices also operate instant Western Union international money transfer services.

POST

Letters and postcards to North America and Australasia take seven to 10 days to arrive; to Europe it's a bit less. Incoming mail takes three or four days from Europe and around a week from other places. Small postcards to anywhere in the world cost 1.40NIS, while large postcards and airmail letters are 1.90NIS to Europe and 2.30NIS to North America. Note that the American Express offices in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv will receive mail for card holders or travellers-cheque customers.

SHOPPING

Israel and the Palestinian Territories have an array of crafts, souvenirs and local products to take home; some of it is of fine quality, while the bulk is tourist kitsch. Places to shop include everything from multilevel malls to historic Arab bazaars.

The best deals are in diamonds, jewellery and handmade crafts. But if you are travelling elsewhere in the Middle East, Arab crafts will be cheaper in neighbouring

countries (where most of it originates). Armenian ceramics, available mainly in Jerusalem, are nice take-home products and you can purchase personalised tiles or plates starting from US\$10. In northern areas you can pick up wines at wineries (also sold at wine shops everywhere). Of course, at the Dead Sea you'll find Ahava Dead Sea skin-care products (there is a Kibbutz Mitzpe Shalem, see p320) at moderate prices.

In Palestinian areas you'll find locally produced olive wood carvings and olive oils, plus water pipes in all shapes and sizes. In Gaza City the place to go is the Arts & Crafts Village (p361), which contains copper work, embroidery and weaving.

Other gift ideas include the Wissotzsky Magic Tea Box, a selection of 80 tea bags sold in an attractive wood box (around US\$25); a *shofar*, lithographs, paper cuts and CDs of *klezmer* music. For Judaica, the best selection is in Jerusalem, and you can find some excellent hand-crafted products. Note that Judaica sold in the Old City bazaar is usually a knock-off and certainly not kosher. The Old City is great for buying 'Super Jew' T-shirts and various trinkets but bargain hard for everything.

Some shops in the Old City sell antiques but remember that it's illegal to export antiques without a written export permit (which the shop can provide if they are legit).

Trendy areas with boutique shops sporting the latest fashions are found in most cities, although all the top designers are based in Tel Aviv. If you are looking for a 'Middle Eastern experience' visit one of the open-air markets such as Jerusalem's Mahane Yehuda Market (p116). If you've forgotten anything, you can pick up many locally produced items at Ben-Gurion airport before flying home.

SOLO TRAVELLERS

There is a small backpacker market in Israel and the Palestinian Territories and you'll find guesthouses and youth hostels with dorm rooms in most areas. Guesthouses are also good places to find other travellers to share the cost of a hire car or inquire about tours. Travel in the Palestinian Territories can be safer in numbers, Solo women travellers see p398.

TELEPHONE Costs

Standard rates (14NIS per minute) to anywhere in the country, including local calls, apply between 7am and 7pm. Between 7pm and 7am and on weekends, calls cost considerably less. Note that hotels charge US\$1 per minute or more for local calls; if you plan on making a few calls it may be cheaper to bring a mobile phone and buy a SIM card.

If you have computer access, you can make phone calls using **Skype** (www.skype.com) anywhere in the world for around US\$0.02 to US\$0.07 per minute. Just set up an account and load it with money. Most computers at internet cafés and guesthouses will have Skype software on their computers. Skype allows you to have multiple phone numbers so you can get an Israel number and one in your home country, allowing you to receive voice mail when you are offline.

Mobile Phones

Mobile phones are extremely popular in Israel and the Palestinian Territories, and most foreign providers operate here (but it may be worth checking with your provider before you leave home). In Israel, Nokia, Pelefon, Cellcom and Orange all offer both fixed-line (local user) and pay-as-you-go services. Pelefon allows phone rentals for a charge of 12NIS per day. A minimum charge is 185NIS, which allows about three hours of domestic talk time and free incoming calls. If you have your own phone, the best deal is with Cellcom, which sells a SIM card for 46.80NIS. Calls run around 1.20NIS per minute. With Orange, SIM card purchase and activation costs 109NIS.

Note that throughout this guide numbers starting with three digits are usually for mobiles.

Phone Cards

Local and international calls can be made from cardphones, which are found at post offices and other public places. The best-value telephone cards are sold at post offices, but are also available from lottery kiosks and newsstands. A 20NIS international card allows you to talk for 60 minutes (standard cost to places such as the UK, USA or Australia).

Phone Codes

The country code for Israel and the Palestinian Territories is ☎972, followed by the local area code (minus the zero), then the subscriber number. Local area codes are given at the start of each city or town section. The international access code (to call abroad from Israel and the Palestinian Territories) is ☎001 with national communications provider Bezeq.

TIME

Israel is two hours ahead of GMT/UTC, eight hours behind Sydney, two hours ahead of London, seven hours ahead of New York and ten hours ahead of San Francisco. Israel operates on daylight savings time from late March until early September. When the daylight savings times do not match the aforementioned cities, subtract one hour. To compare with world time zones see pp446-7.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Nearly every main city in Israel has a tourist office, and in the case of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, multiple offices. These will send you off with maps and more brochures than you can carry. Some also organise city walking tours. The **Ministry of Tourism** (www.visitisrael.gov.il) has a branch tourist information office in Tel Aviv; see p154. In the Palestinian Territories you'll find a tourist office only in Bethlehem (www.peacecentre.org). The best source of online info for the Territories is www.thisweekinpalestine.com.

TRAVELLERS WITH DISABILITIES

Recent laws in Israel require that all hotels have at least one room available for wheelchair users, and many tourist sites such as museums and historic sites can accommodate people with disabilities. Some nature areas also have trails that are partially wheelchair accessible, such as Tel Dan and the Hula Valley.

The Palestinian Territories are less well equipped and getting around is made more difficult by road checkpoints, which are usually crossed on foot; lines for these can be long and crowded and sometimes require moving over and around barriers.

For information on accessible facilities, contact **Access Israel** (☎ 04-632 0748, 054-287702; www.access-israel.com); its comprehensive web-

site contains details on what is and what is not accessible.

The **Yad Sarah Organisation** (Map pp80-1; ☎ 02-624 4242; www.yadsarah.org; 124 Herzl Blvd, Jerusalem) lends wheelchairs, crutches and other mobility aids free of charge (a deposit is required). You may also want to look for the guidebook *Access in Israel & the Palestinian Authority* (www.accessinIsrael.org), by Gordon Couch, which provides the lowdown for travellers with mobility restrictions. Another excellent resource is *Access Unlimited: Your Guide to Israel* (2003; www.access-unlimited.co.il), by Judith Bendel. This book provides details on tourist sights and facilities nationwide, always with an emphasis on disabled travellers.

Another handy item is the *Wheelchair Friendly Guide to the Jewish Quarter*. To get a copy contact Pnina Mossek at the **Moross Community Centre** (Map pp90-1; ☎ 02-628 3415; 20 Misgav Ladakh St, Jerusalem).

VISAS

With a few exceptions, visitors to Israel and the Palestinian Territories need only a passport that's valid for at least six months from the date of entry. Nationals of most Central American and African countries (but not South Africa), India, Singapore and some ex-Soviet republics also require a pre-issued visa (US\$17). Work visas (US\$33) are issued by Israeli embassies to people with a letter from their employer in Israel. The employer must also receive approval from the Ministry of the Interior.

Visas given at the border are valid for 90 days. But (importantly) you will be asked how long you plan to stay in Israel and what your state is generally what you get. So even if you don't plan on staying the full three months, you might as well ask for it anyway. Kibbutz and moshav volunteers must secure a volunteer's visa, which can be arranged with the assistance of the kibbutz or moshav.

If there is any indication that you are seeking illegal employment you may be questioned by immigration officials and asked to provide evidence of a return ticket and sufficient funds for the intended length of stay. Those who can't comply may find themselves on the next flight home.

For visa information on Jordan and Egypt, see p404. For information on the implications of an Israeli stamp in your passport, see p402.

Visa Extensions

To stay more than three months, visitors must apply for a visa through the **Ministry of the Interior** (Tel Aviv (HaKira); Map p150; ☎ 03-736 2534; 3rd fl, Tel Aviv Government Complex, Kaplan St); Jerusalem (Map pp114-15; ☎ 02-629 0222; 1 Shlomzion HaMalka St); Eilat (Map p346; ☎ 08-637 6332; Ha'elmarim Blvd); there are offices in most cities and towns. Join the queue by 8am or you could be waiting all day. You'll need 145NIS for the visa extension (plus 75NIS if you take the multientry visa option) and one passport-sized photo. You must also present evidence of sufficient funds for the extended stay. The Tel Aviv office is so backed up with applications that your first day of waiting in line is only to make an appointment to come back another day (usually one month later). For faster service try applying at a smaller branch office.

Note that overstaying your allotted time elicits a fine of 135NIS per month – this can be sorted out at Ministry of the Interior offices or Ben-Gurion airport, but not at land borders. Travellers who overstay by just a few days report no hassles or fines.

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Female travellers will feel as free and comfortable in Israel as they would in any Western country. Female solo travellers likewise report few problems when getting around. It's important to bear in mind sensible travel advice, such as not hitchhiking alone, and other precautions one generally adheres to back home.

Keep in mind regional dress codes. While tight-fitting, revealing clothing is common in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem fashions are conservative – a long-sleeved shirt, ankle-length skirt and head scarf are par for course (especially in the Old City and religious neighbourhoods). According to Jewish law women should not wear men's clothing (and vice versa), which is why a skirt is more commonly worn than pants. Some female travellers adopt a method of wearing pants under a long skirt when visiting Jerusalem holy sites, religious neighbourhoods or Tsfat.

Conservative dress is also the rule of thumb in all parts of the Palestinian Territories. But Palestinian men are generally very respectful towards women and travelling in the Territories seems to be hassle free compared with neighbouring Egypt and Jordan.

Dress is a little more relaxed in Christian areas such as Bethlehem (Christian women show their shoulders when they dress up for special occasions). Arab Israelis are used to seeing revealing dress and are not so alarmed by tank tops and shorts.

WORK

It used to be the case that travellers could turn up in Tel Aviv and find plenty of casual work in bars and restaurants. But in 2006 authorities started cracking down on businesses that hire illegal workers and opportunities are now slim. Your best chances for gainful employment are through Tel Aviv guesthouses and restaurants near the beach. Guesthouses can help find you a job but only if you are staying there. If you do find work and find that you have been cheated by your employer, you can get free legal advice from **Kav l'Oved** (Map p162; ☎ 03-688 3766; www.kavlaoved.org.il; 3rd fl, 17 YI Peretz St, Tel Aviv; ☎ 9.30am-4.30pm Sun, Tue & Wed, noon-6pm Thu).

Working legally requires a permit from the Ministry of the Interior and these aren't easy to get. Most foreign workers are hired from abroad and have all their paperwork ready when they arrive in country. Nevertheless, it doesn't hurt to scour the classified ads for employment; check the *Jerusalem Post* and *Ha'aretz*.

Volunteering

KIBBUTZ & MOSHAV VOLUNTEER WORK

Volunteering on a kibbutz has been a rite of passage for a couple of generations of travellers. By definition a kibbutz (plural kibbutzim) is a communal farm or rural project staffed by volunteers who are compensated with food, housing and a small stipend (about US\$80 per month).

The utopian ideals of its founders has all but disappeared, however, and many kibbutzim are little more than closely knit capitalist enterprises. Despite the changes, many kibbutzim still welcome foreign volunteers and joining one for a few months is a great way to make friends, learn some Hebrew and immerse yourself in the culture. Note that kibbutz volunteers must be between the ages of 18 and 32 and moshav volunteers 20 to 35. A lot of travellers hope to do a short stint for a couple of weeks, but the minimum period is two months and the maximum is six months. Work lasts eight

KIBBUTZ EXPERIENCES

Pure socialism may be a thing of the past but the following may give you some insight into modern kibbutz life.

Ramat Rachel Hotel (www.ramatrachel.co.il) This kibbutz is conveniently located near Jerusalem. Work in the hotel or health & spa centre, or in the archaeological park (see p386). The luxury hotel has an all-weather pool, tennis courts and probably the best food of any kibbutz in the country.

Kibbutz Baram (www.baram.org.il in Hebrew) Has one of the biggest volunteer programs in the country. Fruit picking.

Kibbutz Ein Gev (p257) Opportunities in tourism and grape picking.

Kibbutz Ginosar (p254) Maintenance at the Yigal Allon Centre or work at the museum.

Kibbutz Lotan (p344) Known for its holistic health program. You may end up in the kitchen or working in tourism.

Kibbutz Manara (p265) Volunteer work at the on-site adventure camp.

Kibbutz Yotvata (p345) One of the largest dairy farms in the country; volunteers milk cows.

Merom Golan (p272) Wranglers might be assigned to work at the stables or act as trail guides.

Sde Boker (p335) One of the most famous kibbutzim and the former home of David Ben-Gurion. Chicken pluckers wanted.

hours a day, six days a week, and usually includes agriculture (picking fruit), tourism (working in the kibbutz hotel) or working in the kibbutz kitchen or laundry room.

Volunteers have access to most facilities, including the gym and pool. Kibbutzim show movies in the evening and have a pub. Tours of the area and activities are sometimes available on days off. The kibbutz will also provide medical insurance.

On a moshav, which is a community of small, individually worked farms, the work is typically more strenuous and more interesting than on a kibbutz. It also pays better and allows more privacy and independence.

Some volunteers organise a kibbutz stay through a kibbutz representative office in their own country. After collecting a basic registration fee (around US\$50), the kibbutz representative will arrange flights and visas (individuals may make their own travel arrangements, which is generally cheaper).

For information, contact the **Kibbutz Program Centre** (Map p160; ☎ 03-527 8874; www.kibbutz.org.il; 18 Frishman St; ☎ 8am-2pm Sun-Thu) in Tel Aviv, or their representative offices abroad as shown below.

Canada

Kibbutz Youth Program (☎ 800-463 8041; fax 418-874-1959; Clement-Lockquell, St Augustin, Quebec G3A 1B3)

New Zealand

Kibbutz Program Desk (☎ 09-309-9444; fax 09-373-2283; PO Box 4315, Auckland, 1020)

USA

Kibbutz Program Centre (☎ 800-247 7852; www.kibbutzprogramcenter.org; 21st fl, 633 3rd Ave, New York, NY 10017)

ARCHAEOLOGICAL DIGS

Volunteers at **Kibbutz Ramat Rachel** (www.ramatrachel.co.il) can help excavate ruins that date back to the First Temple period. A one-week dig including food and accommodation on the kibbutz costs US\$640 for one person or US\$860 for two. The **Tel Rehov Project** (www.rehov.org) excavates an Iron Age site in the Beit She'an Valley in northeastern Israel. The dig is run by the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. The season lasts for about six weeks in mid-summer. Volunteers work in three-week shifts. You can also do a 'Dig for a Day' program at Tel Maresha (see p147).

OTHER VOLUNTEER OPTIONS

Al-Rowwad Center (☎ 052 401 325; http://alrowwad.virtualactivism.net) This Bethlehem-based cultural centre runs computer training classes and English lessons for Palestinian students. Volunteers are encouraged to assist with ongoing programs.

Hope Flowers School (☎ 02-274 0693; www.mideastweb.org/hopeflowers) This school, located near Bethlehem, hires volunteers who can teach, do maintenance or IT work. Volunteers receive free accommodation.

Sar-el (☎ 03-681-7442; www.sar-el.org) Israeli organisation that has three-week-long volunteer programs. Volunteers work at army bases, hospitals or retirement homes. They pay a registration fee and all expenses, while Sar-el pays for housing and meals.

Transport

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GETTING THERE & AWAY

For most visitors, the arrivals hall of Ben-Gurion airport is the first thing they'll see of Israel and the Palestinian Territories. There are plenty of flights to Israel, including non-stop flights from the USA, Europe, South Africa and the Far East.

There are land borders with Egypt and Jordan so it's easy to slot a trip to Israel between those two countries if you are travelling through the Middle East. Unless you are a member of the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) there is no getting between Israel and Lebanon, or Syria for that matter, and you'll need to carefully consider your travel plans

THINGS CHANGE...

The information in this chapter is particularly vulnerable to change. Check directly with the airline or a travel agent to make sure you understand how a fare (and ticket you may buy) works and be aware of the security requirements for international travel. Shop carefully. The details given in this chapter should be regarded as pointers and are not a substitute for your own careful, up-to-date research.

if you are thinking of heading to either country or elsewhere in the Middle East; see p402 for details. For the intrepid there is also a ferry between Haifa and Cyprus.

Flights, tours and rail tickets can be booked online at www.lonelyplanet.com/travel_services.

Entering Israel & the Palestinian Territories

A frequent topic of conversation amongst travellers is the entrance procedures for Israel (a great source of annoyance for some and a breeze for others). Rigorous even at the best of times, you can expect a barrage of questions about your recent travels, your occupation, any acquaintances in Israel and possibly your religious or family background.

If you are meeting friends in Israel it's best to have their phone number handy. Anyone planning to work in Israel can expect delays. Travellers who have never been to Israel and have no affiliation with the country seem to get through fastest. The time all this takes varies depending on who is on duty; we've gotten through the border at Taba (Egypt) in 15 minutes, while Allenby Bridge (Jordan) took a couple of hours.

A passport full of stamps from neighbouring Islamic countries will be circumspect, but having travelled to Arab or Islamic countries does not stop you from entering Israel. On the contrary, border guards are accustomed to meeting seasoned travellers and won't be surprised to see eccentric stamps in your passport, provided you have an innocuous (and believable) reason for visiting those countries.

One more tip: when immigration asks how long you plan to stay in the country, and you say 'two weeks', that is probably what they will write on your entry card. For the maximum time allowed, you should specifically ask for three months. For more on entering Israel, see p397.

AIR Airports & Airlines

Israel's main gateway, **Ben-Gurion airport** (TLV; ☎ 03-972 3388; www.ben-gurion-airport.co.il), is 20km southeast of Tel Aviv and 50km west

CLIMATE CHANGE & TRAVEL

Climate change is a serious threat to the ecosystems that humans rely upon, and air travel is the fastest-growing contributor to the problem. Lonely Planet regards travel, overall, as a global benefit, but believes we all have a responsibility to limit our personal impact on global warming.

Flying & Climate Change

Pretty much every form of motor transport generates CO₂ (the main cause of human-induced climate change) but planes are far and away the worst offenders, not just because of the sheer distances they allow us to travel, but because they release greenhouse gases high into the atmosphere. The statistics are frightening: two people taking a return flight between Europe and the US will contribute as much to climate change as an average household's gas and electricity consumption over a whole year.

Carbon Offset Schemes

Climatecare.org and other websites use 'carbon calculators' that allow travellers to offset the greenhouse gases they are responsible for with contributions to energy-saving projects and other climate-friendly initiatives in the developing world – including projects in India, Honduras, Kazakhstan and Uganda.

Lonely Planet, together with Rough Guides and other concerned partners in the travel industry, supports the carbon offset scheme run by climatecare.org. Lonely Planet offsets all of its staff and author travel.

For more information check out our website: www.lonelyplanet.com.

of Jerusalem. An ultramodern US\$1 billion international terminal, unveiled in 2004, it handles 16 million passengers a year.

Only a handful of international charter flights touch down at **Ovda Airport** (VDA; ☎ 08-637 5880), outside Eilat.

The national flag carrier, **El Al** (LY; ☎ 03-971 6854; www.elal.co.il), once had a notorious reputation for nasty service and awful food. Recent changes have done away with the shouting stewards and the service is now remarkably congenial.

Note that airport security is tight, especially on El Al services, and international travellers should check in at least three hours prior to their flight. If you are flying on El Al it's possible to check your bags the night before your flight at the **Arlosoroff bus terminal** (Map p150; ☎ 695 8614; cnr Arlosoroff & AP Derakhim Sts; 4-9pm Sun-Thu, 11am-3pm Fri, 6-11pm Sat). At the time of writing no other airlines offered this service, but it's worth asking as policies do change. The same service is available from Jerusalem and Haifa; confirm the drop-off location with El Al.

Airlines that fly to Israel:

Air Canada (AC; ☎ 03-607 2111; www.aircanada.com)

Air France (AF; ☎ 03-511 0000; www.airfrance.com)

Alitalia (AZ; ☎ 03-971 1047; www.alitalia.it)

American Airlines (AA; ☎ 03-795 2122; www.aa.com)

Austrian Airlines (OS; ☎ 03-511 6700; www.aa.com)

British Airways (BA; ☎ 03-606 1555; www.britishairways.com)

Cathay Pacific (CX; www.cathaypacific.com)

Continental Airlines (CO; ☎ 03-511 6700; www.continental.com)

Iberia (IB; ☎ 03-516 3239; www.iberia.com)

KLM (KL; ☎ 03-971 1138; www.klm.com)

Lufthansa (LH; ☎ 03-513 5355; www.lufthansa.com)

Royal Jordanian Airlines (RJ; ☎ 03-516 5566; www.rj.com)

South African Airways (SA; ☎ 03-510 2828; www.flysaa.com)

United (UA; www.united.com)

Tickets

The **Israel Student Travel Association** (ISSTA; Map p160; ☎ 521 0555; www.issta.co.il in Hebrew; 109 Ben Yehuda St, Tel Aviv) offers competitive fares, though it's worth getting quotes from other travel agents in downtown Tel Aviv or Jerusalem. Alternatively, check around the hostels and nightspots for cut-price flight advertising.

Last Minute Tickets (☎ 03-636 6808), on the second floor of the international terminal, has reasonably priced tickets to Europe (eg London one way for US\$260), but you'll pay well over the odds here for tickets to the USA or Australia. Otherwise,

ISRAELI STAMP STIGMA

Our mailbags are full of questions about the infamous 'Israeli stamp stigma'. Here are a few frequently asked questions.

- Q: I've never heard of this Israel stamp business – what's it all about?
- A: Middle East politics being what they are, evidence of a visit to Israel in your passport will bar you from entering a number of countries in the region, including Israel's neighbours Syria and Lebanon.
- Q: So what can I do if I plan to visit Syria and Israel?
- A: When you arrive in Israel or leave the country you can request that immigration not stamp your passport and they will oblige by stamping a separate piece of paper. However, if you are travelling overland the exit stamps from Egypt or Jordan will be a dead giveaway of your visit to Israel. As with Israel you can request the Jordanian and Egyptian border guards to stamp a separate piece of paper, which they will do. This is usually OK, but those missing stamps will bring unwanted suspicion. For example if you flew into Cairo and you are now standing on the Jordan–Syria border with only an Egypt entry visa – sorry, that's not fooling anyone.
- Q: So my options are...?
- A: Flying into and out of Ben-Gurion airport is pretty safe. There won't be any incriminating evidence left over in your passport. If you plan to go overland, enter and depart at the same border, provided you have a multiple entry visa (it will seem like you never left). Even better, put Israel and the Palestinian Territories at the end of your itinerary, visiting countries like Syria and Lebanon before you go to Israel.
- Q: For which countries in the Middle East is an Israel stamp no problem?
- A: Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Turkey and Jordan don't care at all. Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE and Oman are probably OK as long as you don't go flashing the stamp in the face of the consular.
- Q: For which countries in the Middle East is it a problem?
- A: Syria, Lebanon, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Libya and Yemen.

you can book a flight online through the El Al website. Other online booking websites include **Sidestep** (www.sidestep.com) and **Orbitz** (www.orbitz.com).

Note that a departure tax of US\$13 and a security tax of US\$2 to US\$8 (depending on the airline) are included in ticket prices.

INTERCONTINENTAL (RTW) TICKETS

Intercontinental tickets allow you to buy a combination of flights with around six stops. The discount package is usually good for a year. Israel is only rarely an allowable stop on round-the-world (RTW) itineraries, but Cairo is usually possible. You could include Cairo and visit Israel and the Palestinian Territories as a side trip.

Australia

There are no direct flights between Australia and Israel and the Palestinian Territories. Flights usually go through Southeast Asia but may change in Europe. Flying time

to Israel from Sydney is 22 hours with the stopover.

Austrian Airlines has some of the best fares and flies via Vienna. You may otherwise find yourself on a British Airways or Air France flight, with a leg on El Al. Return low-/high-season fares start at A\$1470/1750.

Book with **Flight Centre** (☎ 133 133; www.flightcentre.com.au) or **STA Travel** (☎ 1300 733 035; www.statravel.com.au).

Continental Europe

KLM-Royal Dutch Airlines and Lufthansa have frequent connections to Tel Aviv. Return low-/high-season fares from Frankfurt start at €333/430. From Frankfurt, book with **STA Travel** (☎ 069 7430 3292; www.statravel.com), which has branches countrywide.

Flights may be even cheaper out of Paris, where a high-season return ticket costs around €380. Book with **Nouvelles Frontières** (☎ 0825 000 747; www.nouvelles-frontieres.fr in French) or **Anyway** (☎ 0892 302 301; www.anyway.fr in French)

From Rome a high-season ticket costs €403. Recommended travel agents include **CTS Viaggi** (☎ 06 462 0431; www.cts.it in Italian).

Middle East

Apart from neighbouring Jordan and Egypt, which may be visited overland, Turkey is the only Middle Eastern country that may be visited from Israel, and lots of Israelis take advantage of the great airfare deals that are available between Tel Aviv and Istanbul: a return ticket costs €323 any time of the year. There are numerous reliable travel agents in Sultanahmet, including **Orion-Tour** (☎ 212 232 6300; www.oriontour.com; Halaskargazi Cad-desi 284/3, Marmara Apartmani, Sisli 80220).

UK

Compared with other European cities, London has reasonably priced fares to Tel Aviv. You'll find plenty of deals listed in the travel sections of weekend editions of London newspapers. Advertisements for many travel agents appear in the travel pages of the weekend broadsheets, such as the *Independent* on Saturday and the *Sunday Times*.

Prices for discounted flights from London to Tel Aviv start at around UK£250 return any time of year. The cheapest flights tend to be with Iberian Airlines and Malev, a Hungarian airline (one stop required). The cheapest nonstop flight on British Airways costs UK£284 return. The flight is about five hours.

It's best to use a travel agent affiliated with the ABTA (Association of British Travel Agents). If you have bought your ticket from an ABTA-registered agent who then goes out of business, ABTA will guarantee a refund or an alternative. Unregistered bucket shops are sometimes cheaper, but can be riskier. Booking agents include the following.

Flightbookers (☎ 0800 082 3000; www.ebookers.co.uk)
STA (☎ 08701-630 026; www.statravel.co.uk)
Travel Bag (☎ 0800 082 5000; www.travelbag.co.uk)

USA & Canada

There are plenty of flights between the USA and Israel; the major hub between the two is New York. El Al and Delta have nonstop flights from New York for low/high season US\$930/1430 return. From Los Angeles the low-/high-season cost is US\$1100/1600. The cheapest flights are with Iberia, which

has low/high season fares from New York for US\$752/1100 return. These make a stop in Madrid.

The best deals are normally available on the internet; try **Travelocity** (www.travelocity.com), **Orbitz** (www.orbitz.com), **Cheap Tickets** (www.cheaptickets.com) or **Sidestep** (www.sidestep.com). Students get great deals with **STA Travel** (☎ 800 781 4040; www.sta-travel.com). For discount travel agencies, check the Sunday travel sections in newspapers such as the *Los Angeles Times*, *San Francisco Chronicle* and *New York Times*.

The flying time from New York to Israel is 11 hours. From Los Angeles it's 18 hours with the stopover.

LAND Border Crossings

Israel and the Palestinian Territories both have borders with Egypt and Jordan, although for all intents and purposes the Palestinian Territories won't figure much into your travel equation. The borders with Syria and Lebanon are shut tight; the only way into these countries is through Jordan, but if you've already been in Israel this gets a little tricky (see Israeli Stamp Stigma, opposite). Note that borders are closed on Yom Kippur and the Islamic holiday of Eid al-Fitr (see p392), and they are also closed during Shabbat (from late afternoon on Friday until sunset on Saturday).

Car & Motorcycle

When crossing into Israel, drivers and motorcyclists will need the vehicle's registration papers and proof of liability insurance, plus a driving licence from home (but not necessarily an international driving licence). You can only drive your own vehicle across the border; rental cars are not permitted. For road rules, see p408.

Egypt

There are two border crossing points, Taba and Rafah, although Taba is the only one open to foreign travellers, as Rafah is closed to all tourists, independent travellers and those on a tour.

If you are trying to get to Cairo in a hurry, the best way is to hop on the **Mazada Tours** (www.mazada.co.il) Jerusalem (Map pp114-15; ☎ 02-623 5777; 15 Jaffa Rd, Pearl Hotel); Tel Aviv (Map p150; ☎ 03-544 4454; 141 Ibn Gvirol St) direct bus service between Tel Aviv or Jerusalem and Cairo. Buses leave

VISAS FOR EGYPT & JORDAN

Nearly all visitors require visas to enter Egypt, which cost 65NIS for USA and German citizens and 100NIS for everyone else. They're available at the **Egyptian embassy** (Map p150; ☎ 03-546 4151; 54 Basel St, Tel Aviv; ✉ for applications 9am-11am Sun-Thu) and the **Egyptian consulate** (Map p346; ☎ 08-637 6882; 68 HaAfroni St, Eilat; ✉ for applications 9-11am Sun-Thu). Deliver your passport, application and one passport-sized photo during opening hours in the morning and pick up the visa around 2pm the same day.

At the Taba border you can pick up a free Sinai-only entry permit, which is valid for 14 days and allows travel between Taba and Sharm el-Sheikh, and to Mt Sinai and St Katherine's Monastery; however, it is not valid for diving at Ras Mohammed National Park near Sharm el-Sheikh.

Nearly all travellers require visas to enter Jordan. Visas can be purchased at both the Yitzhak Rabin (formerly called Arava) and Jordan River border crossings, but not at the King Hussein/Allenby Bridge crossing. If you're going that way, get a visa at the **Jordanian embassy** (☎ 03-751 7722; fax 03-751 7712; 14 Abbe Hillel St), in the Tel Aviv suburb of Ramat Gan (take bus No 66 from Ben Yehuda St). You can apply in the morning and pick the visa up around 2pm the same day; bring one passport-sized photo.

Note that buying visas in Israel will probably preclude you visiting countries such as Syria and Lebanon; see p402.

Jerusalem/Tel Aviv at 9am/11am Sunday, Monday and Thursday. After picking up passengers in Cairo, they head back. Mazada is represented in Cairo by **Misir Travel** (☎/fax 335 5470; Cairo Sheraton, Midan al-Galaa, Doqqi).

BORDER CROSSINGS

Rafah

The **Rafah Crossing** (☎ 08-673 4080) between Gaza and Egypt is currently closed to foreign travellers. The border had been handled by Israel until its departure in August 2005; since then it has come under the joint control of the Palestinian Authority (PA) and Egypt, with the help of EU monitors. Ongoing conflict with the IDF has caused instability at this border and it now remains closed most of the time, even to Palestinians stuck on both sides. It's unlikely that the border will be open to foreigners any time soon. See p362 for other details.

Taba

The **Taba crossing** (☎ 08-637 2104, 08-636 0999; ✉ 24hr), near Eilat, is currently the only open border between Israel and Egypt. If you are descending into Egypt you will pay a 68NIS fee to leave Israel, plus around E£30 to enter Egypt. Remember to get an Egyptian visa before coming down here; you can get one at the Egyptian consulate in Eilat, see Visas for Egypt & Jordan, above. If you only plan on visiting the Sinai you can get a Sinai-only entry permit. Driving your own vehicle

across, you'll pay 32NIS on the Israeli side and a whopping E£180 on the Egyptian side. It is not possible to take a rental car across the Taba border, but you can take a private car. For information on getting to the border from Eilat, see p353.

Jordan

There is a steady flow of tourist traffic between Amman and Jerusalem and although the borders are a bit quirky you shouldn't have too much trouble getting across. Keep the following general tips in mind.

- Private vehicles cannot be driven across the Allenby/King Hussein Bridge, but they can be taken across other borders.
- If you are coming from Jordan use the Allenby/King Hussein Bridge and return within 14 days, and you won't need to get another visa for Jordan.
- When coming from Jordan into Israel visitors are granted one month's entry at the Yitzhak Rabin/Wadi Arava Crossing and Jordan River/Sheikh Hussein Bridge crossing. Those issued at Allenby/King Hussein are good for three months.
- Visas for Jordan are not available at the Allenby/King Hussein Bridge. If you want to cross here you'll need to get a visa at a Jordanian embassy.
- If you are travelling between Petra and the Sinai you can bypass crossing through Israel and take the Aqaba-Nuweiba ferry (see opposite).

BORDER CROSSINGS

Allenby Bridge

The popular **Allenby Bridge** (☎ 02-548 2600; ✉ 8am-6pm Sun-Thu, 8am-2pm Fri & Sat) is only 30km from Jerusalem and 40km from Amman. Traffic can be heavy here, especially between 11am and 3pm. Exit tax here is 127NIS. The Jordanian side is known as King Hussein Bridge.

This was at one time merely a crossing from Jordan's East Bank to its West Bank and to the Jordanians the times have not changed. You can still cross in and out of Jordan on one visa as if you had never left the country. When you return to Jordan just show your stamped exit slip, and on the Israel side have the border officers stamp your Jordanian slip rather than your passport.

If you are going from Israel to Jordan you'll need a Jordanian visa already stamped in your passport – these are not sold at the border. You can get one at the Jordanian embassy in Tel Aviv (see opposite). If you plan on returning to Israel, keep the entrance form given to you by the Jordanians (you may need to present it when exiting the country). Once you've cleared customs you need to wait for a bus (5NIS) to take you across the valley to the Jordanian side.

From Jerusalem you can take a bus from the **ABDO travel agency office** (☎ 628 3281) opposite Damascus Gate to Allenby Bridge. Abu Hassan Alternative Tours (p410) in Jerusalem has a shuttle for USA\$35 for a vehicle it can take up to three passengers. From the Israeli border there are buses to Jerusalem's Damascus Gate and to Jericho. Try to get to the border as early as possible as delays are common.

Jordan River

The **Jordan River crossing** (☎ 04-648 0018; ✉ 8am-10pm) is 6km east of Beit She'an in the Galilee. It's handy if you are travelling in northern Israel and want to take your own car across to Jordan, or if you want to get a Jordanian visa at the border. There is 2km of no-man's-land between the two border posts. You can either walk or hitch between the two. Exit tax here is 70NIS. On the Jordanian side this is called the **Sheikh Hussein Bridge** (Jordan Bridge; ✉ 6.30am-10pm Sun-Thu, 8am-8pm Fri & Sat). Buses are available to the border from Beit She'an (see p233). From the Jordanian side, catch a minibus or taxi to Irbid.

Yitzhak Rabin

Located near Eilat, the **Yitzhak Rabin crossing** (☎ 08-630 0530; ✉ 6.30am-10pm Sun-Thu, 8am-8pm Fri & Sat) is handy for day trips to Petra and Wadi Rum. The border lies just 2km north-east of Eilat. Exit tax here is 68NIS, entry to Jordan is free and exit from Jordan is JD5.

Once you are in Jordan there are taxis at the border that will take you into Aqaba for JD5. Alternatively, bargain for a taxi all the way to Petra (around JD25, two hours) or Wadi Rum (around JD10). If you are coming down from Jerusalem you don't need to go all the way to Eilat; ask your bus driver to let you out at the turn-off to the border.

BUS

The **Nazarene bus company** (Map p196; ☎ 04-601 0458; Kikar Paris, Haifa) runs buses between Amman and Haifa three or four times a week. From Haifa, the service departs at 7am from the Haifa Merkaz train station. It also picks up passengers at 8.30am in Nazareth. You can buy a ticket the day before from their office at Kikar Paris. In Amman the bus service is handled by **Trust International Transport** (☎ 06-581 3427).

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

If you are driving between Jordan and Israel and the Palestinian Territories, use either Yitzhak Rabin/Wadi Arava or Jordan River Crossing/Sheikh Hussein Bridge. It is not permitted to cross the Allenby/King Hussein Bridge on your own.

SEA

It's possible to reach the Holy Land by sea from Cyprus, and going the other way you can make connections from Cyprus to Turkey. There are no ferry connections out of Eilat, but a ferry does run between nearby Aqaba (Jordan) and Nuweiba in Egypt.

Egypt & Jordan

The sleepy town of Nuweiba on the Sinai coast is linked to Aqaba in Jordan by way of a fast ferry link. The boat departs at 2pm (except for Sunday and Thursday when it leaves at 9am) and takes one hour. Be sure to be at the port two hours ahead of time to guarantee a ticket.

One-way tickets for the trip are USA\$50 for adults and USA\$35 for children aged three to 12. Tickets can only be paid for

in US dollars, and its best to get cash in Dahab or elsewhere because banks in Nuweiba may not have dollars. Tickets only go on sale the day of departure and the ticket office – in a small building near the port – should be open by 9am. Note that ticket sales stop an hour before departure. During the Haj season tickets are sold in advance and you'll need to contact a travel agent in Egypt about buying one. Once on the boat you can obtain a free visa for Jordan if you have an EU, US, Canadian, Australian or New Zealand passport. The gratis visa is the result of Aqaba's Free Trade Zone status. Fill out a green form on the boat and hand it over (with your passport) to the immigration officials on board. Other nationalities should organise a visa in advance.

Note that a slow ferry (US\$32, three hours) departs for Aqaba daily at noon. This ferry also accommodates cars and motorcycles.

Going the other way the fast boat leaves Aqaba daily at noon and costs less, around US\$36. Avoid buying a ticket in Amman, where agents jack up the price. Most nationalities can pick up an Egyptian visa when they get to Nuweiba (although some Eastern Europeans have been refused). Sinai-only visas are available on the boat.

Note that information in this section is subject to change and the ferries (especially the slow ferry) do not adhere strictly to their scheduled departure. During the Haj season there may be an extra ferry to handle the crowds.

For details on onward travel from Nuweiba, see p376. For details on travel from Aqaba to Petra, see p364.

Greece & Cyprus

From Haifa there are overnight passenger and cargo ferries to Limassol in Cyprus. The ship departs Haifa on Monday and Thursday at 8pm and costs €150 per person. The trip takes about 10 hours. You can also bring a motorcycle (€150), a car (€150) or a jeep (€200). From Limassol there are overland connections to Girne (Northern Cyprus), where you can catch another ferry to Tacuco in southern Turkey. The ferry is operated by **Rosenfeld Shipping** (Map p196; ☎ 04-861 3671; www.rosenfeld.net; 104 Ha'atzmaut Rd, Haifa). Note that prices

do fluctuate with the seasons and when demand is low the service may be suspended.

TOURS

Tours organised from abroad are usually themed trips, the bulk of which are religious tours that travel to holy places. Other tours are based on cultural and historical offerings. The overlander travel groups usually bypass Israel.

UK

Longwood Holidays (☎ 020-8418 2525; www.longwooldholidays.co.uk) Experienced travel operator that can put together dive trips and cultural tours.

Travel Link (☎ 020-8931 8000; www.travelinkuk.com) Can organise a variety of tours in Israel, both religious and secular.

USA

America Israel Travel (☎ 877-248-8687; www.americaisrael.us) Specialises in both Jewish and Christian religious tours.

Quest Travel Group (☎ 770-518-5864; www.questtravelgroup.com) Christian-focused religious tours.

Tlalim Tours (☎ 800-600-5194; www.tlalimtours.com) Adventurous travel and ecotours.

GETTING AROUND

Israel has an efficient and inexpensive transport system, with buses going everywhere and trains connecting main cities.

There are flights that cross the Negev to shorten the trip to Eilat, but given the pretty desert scenery you'll probably prefer to go overland.

The West Bank is served by Arab buses that travel between cities and East Jerusalem. There are no connections whatsoever between Gaza and the West Bank. For travel to Gaza see p356.

AIR

Israil (☎ 03-795 5777; www.israil.co.il) flies at least once daily (including Saturday) between Ben-Gurion airport (p400), Sde Dov Airport in Tel Aviv (p180), Eilat (p353) and Haifa (p206). **Arkia** (☎ 03-699 2222; www.arkia.co.il) operates flights between the same cities, as well as international charters to Jerusalem.

You are not liable for a domestic departure tax.

BICYCLE

Cycling is a great way to get around Israel. Highways have wide shoulders and there are a number of off-road bike trails and scenic by-ways. Traffic is fairly light and the distances between tourist attractions, cities and villages are relatively short. Moreover, biking is a great way to meet people and experience the country at ground level. Better still, it's free and environmentally friendly.

The main drawback to cycling in Israel is the heat. Always set off as early as possible and carry plenty of water. Choose your route carefully; while the coastal plain is flat enough, the Upper Galilee, the Golan and the Dead Sea region have innumerable steep hills and the Negev Desert can be unmercifully hot. Probably the best bike trip is around the Sea of Galilee; for such purposes, several Tiberias hostels hire out bicycles for quite reasonable rates. Note that buses will accept bikes, although you may need to pay an extra luggage charge. Bikes aren't allowed on trains.

Some bike shops in Israel will rent out bikes by the week; others will buy a bike back from you at a fair price if you purchase one in their shop. Contact **Rochvim Bikes** (Map pp86-7; ☎ 623 2598; 88 Agrippas St, cnr Mani St) in Jerusalem or **O-Fun** (Map p150; ☎ 544 2292; 197 Ben Yehuda St) in Tel Aviv. Bike hire isn't really an option in the Palestinian Territories but if you have a bike there shouldn't be a problem bringing it through the checkpoints. Check our personal security warnings, p286 and p388.

For an organised biking tour of Israel contact **Dekel Holiday** (☎ 03-523 9022; www.dekel-holiday.co.il), which runs bike trips all over the country.

If you choose to bring your own bike, contact your airline ahead of time to ask about baggage restrictions and associated costs. Bike shops can give you a bike box. Consider taking a fold-up bike, which is easier to deal with if your trip will include buses and flights as well as biking.

For information on cycling in cities, see p409. Following is a list of bike clubs.

Carmel Mountain Bike Club (www.geocities.com/Colosseum/Arena/9765/cmbchome.htm)

Israeli Mountain Bikers Club (www.cydenix.com)

Jerusalem Cyclists Club (☎ 02-561 9416)

Mountain biking group (www.rechasim.com)

BUS

The national bus service, **Egged** (☎ 03-694 8888; www.egged.co.il), has an extensive route system in Israel, partially due to the fact that it's also the major transport vehicle for soldiers moving about the country. As such you can expect to find buses filled with soldiers heading home for the weekend or back to their base. Some routes make stops near army bases, although this is never very inconvenient.

Egged buses are modern, clean and equipped with air-con, making travel safe and comfortable. Buses generally run on time, though it's far from an exact science. Remember that on Shabbat Egged intercity buses don't run at all (Friday afternoon to Saturday evening). Most intercity routes have an Egged bus departing two to five times an hour but you can expect long waits if you are out on the back roads, which may be serviced by only one or two buses a day. Egged also serves West Bank settlements, utilising a fleet of a more than 100 bullet-proof buses.

Sample fares include Jerusalem to Haifa (39NIS), Jerusalem to Tel Aviv (17.70NIS) and Tel Aviv to Eilat (65NIS).

Check the Egged website for information on schedules, prices and routes. Egged allows reservations only to Eilat – you can order tickets over the phone 14 days before your trip.

In Nazareth, East Jerusalem and the West Bank, a number of small, Arab-run bus companies provide public transport on typically slow and antiquated vehicles. They are not particularly comfortable but the short distances make travel bearable. Fares are quite cheap and International Student Identity Card (ISIC) holders are entitled to a discount of about 10% on interurban fares. Sample fares include Jerusalem to Hebron (10NIS) and Ramallah to Nablus (16NIS). Note that Arab buses continue to run right through the Shabbat.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Drivers won't need an international driving licence, but must have their home driving licence in order to rent a car or drive a private vehicle.

Automobile Associations

If you want to get in touch with an automobile association, try **Memsi** (Map pp114-15;

ROAD DISTANCES (KM)

Ashdod	160																			
Ashkelon	175	35																		
Be'er Sheva	233	85	68																	
Ben-Gurion airport	135	40	55	98																
Bethlehem	190	143	145	75	60															
Eilat	475	335	307	240	340	320														
Ein Gedi	338	197	170	105	205	153	233													
Gaza	190	55	28	45	75	85	290	152												
Haifa	23	140	160	210	112	168	450	315	180											
Hebron	220	115	118	50	88	28	290	128	95	195										
Jericho	162	103	115	117	85	38	365	200	135	148	73									
Jerusalem	182	67	77	85	50	10	312	163	92	160	35	40								
Netanya	87	75	90	145	50	105	388	250	110	65	132	122	93							
Tel Aviv	118	43	65	113	18	73	355	220	82	95	97	100	62	30						
Tiberias	57	170	198	235	152	208	490	345	215	70	185	118	157	103	132					
	Alko	Ashdod	Ashkelon	Be'er Sheva	Ben-Gurion airport	Bethlehem	Eilat	Ein Gedi	Gaza	Haifa	Hebron	Jericho	Jerusalem	Netanya	Tel Aviv					

☎ 02-625 9711; www.memsi.co.il in Hebrew; 31 Ben Yehuda St) in Jerusalem, which provides maps, route planners and tool kits.

Hire

Hiring a car is a great way to cover a lot of ground in a short amount of time. It doesn't make much sense to have one in Jerusalem or other big cities, but it's definitely a good idea for the Golan, Upper Galilee and Negev areas. Note that Tel Aviv has a serious parking shortage and you'll probably end up having to park in a private lot at around 45NIS a day. **Hertz** (www.hertz.co.il), **Avis** (www.avis.co.il) and **Budget** (www.budget.co.il) each have about 15 to 20 offices countrywide. Car hire with insurance and unlimited kilometres costs as little as US\$250 per week or US\$600 per month. Note, most Jerusalem-based rental-car agencies forbid you to take their cars into the Palestinian Territories, though Green Peace is an exception (see p143).

Insurance

Car-hire companies can sell you a complete insurance package for around US\$7 per day

(with some restrictions, like driving only in Israel and not in the West Bank).

If you do not take the insurance option you may be liable for any damages to the vehicle, or damage to another car or property. You may already be covered by your personal travel insurance, so be sure to inquire with your insurer about conditions before setting off.

Road Conditions

Conditions on the roads are quite good, although in the West Bank it's not uncommon to find animals lingering on the road. For more information on driving in the West Bank, see p289.

Road Rules

Vehicles drive on the right-hand side of the road in Israel and the Palestinian Territories.

Seatbelts are required at all times. Using a mobile phone whilst driving is illegal and subject to a fine of around 500NIS.

Road signs are clearly marked in English, Hebrew and Arabic.

HITCHING

Although hitching was once a common way of getting around Israel, increasing reports of violent crime make this a risky business and we do not recommend it. Women should not hitch without male companions and all travellers should be circumspect of the cars they get into. The local method of soliciting a lift is to simply point an index finger at the road.

LOCAL TRANSPORT**Bicycle**

Tel Aviv is a fantastic city for biking. There are extensive bike paths, parks and a beach-front promenade. Both Eilat and Tiberias are good places to tool around on a bike. Both Haifa and Jerusalem are hilly and lack bike paths.

Tel Aviv has a Critical Mass (a group of bikers who take the streets back from fossil fuel-burning modes of transport) that departs at 1pm on the last Friday of the month from Rabin Sq. It's great fun to hire a bike on this day and ride along with the crowds. A smaller Critical Mass is held in Jerusalem at the same time; meet at the corner of King George and Ben Yehuda Sts. For more information, go to www.bike.org.il/cm and click the English link.

For more info on cycling in Tel Aviv, go to <http://bike.org.il/tabla>.

Bus

Buses are used widely within the main cities of Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Haifa. If you don't read Hebrew, or you are new to a city, it can be a little difficult to figure out the bus routes. You may need to ask others at the bus stop which bus to take. You can also ask advice from any driver that passes by; they are usually pretty helpful.

In Tel Aviv, the local bus company **Dan** (☎ 03-639 0444; www.dan.co.il) transports about 600,000 commuters a day. It operates from 5am to 1am daily except during Shabbat hours. West Jerusalem is served by **Egged** (www.egged.co.il), while Arab buses handle most of East Jerusalem. Haifa is also served by Egged.

Taxi

Drivers of 'special' (ie nonshared) taxis are renowned for overcharging (sometimes spectacularly!). Always ask to use the meter

and watch your progress on a map to ensure that the shortest route is followed. A trip across town in Jerusalem or Tel Aviv shouldn't cost more than 20NIS to 25NIS; you will also be charged a few shekels for luggage. (Taxi prices quoted are for the whole taxi, no matter how many people are in the cab.)

If possible, study your map before getting in the taxi to check the route and the cross streets of the place you want to go. If a driver sees that you don't know the city the chances are good that he will take the long way, thus driving up the price. The best way to avoid this is to confidently give a street address, a cross street and directions. Taxi drivers also have the annoying habit of driving slowly and stopping when the lights turn yellow, also causing the meter to creep up because it still runs when the car is idle. Telling the driver you are in a hurry might help, although you'll probably just be ignored. Note that tariffs rise between 9pm and 5.30am.

Taxi drivers are not normally tipped, but in the absence of a rip-off attempt, it's fine to refuse a shekel or two in change.

SHERUT (SERVICE TAXI)

The Palestinians call it a service taxi (pronounced 'ser-vees') and the Israelis call it a sherut, and by any other name it is just as useful. These 13-seat minivans operate on a fixed route for a fixed price like a bus. If you don't know the fare, ask your fellow passengers. You can expect to pay around 20% more than the bus, although some routes are the same as bus fares.

Sheruts run between cities and towns and are generally quicker than buses. They depart from a recognised taxi rank, but only leave when full so you may have to hang around for a while, although rarely more than 20 minutes. You can get out anywhere you'd like but you'll still pay the full fare. Many sheruts operate 24/7 and are the only means of public transport during the Shabbat.

Inside Tel Aviv, sheruts run along some of the main bus routes (eg Rtes 4 and 5). If you've just come from Jerusalem on a sherut, there is a quick transfer over to the local sheruts, which run all the way up Ben Yehuda St, close to the hotels.

In the West Bank service taxis may be the only transport available. Service taxis line

up near main town squares such as Ramallah, or outside of checkpoints like Qalandia and Huwwara.

TOURS

Several local companies offer day tours to sites of interest around Israel. Ads are often posted in hotels or on guesthouse message boards. The following options may only operate when demand is sufficient, so it helps to turn up with a motivated group.

Abu Hassan Alternative Tours (Map p110; ☎ 052 286 4205; www.jrshotel.com; Jerusalem Hotel, Jerusalem) Half- and full-day tours are available to Palestinian towns and villages. Trips usually include a visit to local workshops and homes, plus historical sites. Trips are often politically minded and may take you to the Separation Wall or a refugee camp.

Ben Harim Tours (☎ 03-546 8870; www.beinharim.co.il) Custom tours around Israel and trips to Petra and Sinai.

Daila (p306) A good way to understand the politics of the West Bank is on a day trip to a Jewish settlement and/or a Palestinian refugee camp. The Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD) operates these tours through its activist centre, Daila. The tours take in the Ma'ale Adumim (a settlement), the Separation Wall and the home of a Palestinian family.

Egged Tours (☎ 03-920 3998; www.egged.co.il) The national bus company runs reasonably priced trips around the country, though these are mainly geared for the domestic market.

Mike's Centre (Map pp90-1; ☎ 02-628 2486; www.mikescentre.com; 9th Station, 172 Souq Khan al-Zeit, Jerusalem; tours per person 170NIS) This place runs popular day trips. Tours depart from Jerusalem at 7am and return at 7pm on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. The trip includes Masada, the Dead Sea (Ein Gedi), Qumran and Jericho. Mike also runs trips down to Egypt. Prices do not include entry to sights. Many budget and midrange travellers end up on this tour when they sign up for such a trip through their hotel (Mike has connections with most backpacker-type places in the city).

Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (SPNI; ☎ 09 774 8670; spni@amitravel.com) On the first

and third weekends of the month SPNI operates a two-day program with a focus on hiking in the Dead Sea region. The cost is US\$385 per person and includes accommodation, food and entrance fees. See also p78.

Touring Israel (☎ 054 636 3126; www.touringisrael.com) Private, tailor-made trips around Israel; caters to the top-end market.

United Tours (☎ 03-693 3412, 02-625 2187; www.unitedtours.co.il) Does one- and two-day trips all over the country, plus city tours of Jerusalem. Also runs a daily tour of the Dead Sea region (excluding Qumran) for US\$70 per person leaving Tel Aviv at 7.15am and Jerusalem at 9am.

Zel Tours (☎ 02-563 0611; www.zeltours.com) Personal service from tour leader Zel Lederman. Offers trips to off-beat locations, plus active tours on bike or on foot.

TRAIN

Israel State Railways (ISR; ☎ 03-577 4000; www.israil.org.il) runs a convenient, efficient and inexpensive network of passenger rail services. The main line runs along the coast; the northernmost station is Nahariya and heading south there are stops in Akko, Haifa, Binyamina (for Caesarea), Netanya, Tel Aviv, Ashdod and Ashkelon. From Tel Aviv there is a spur to Be'er Sheva and Dimona; a spur to Rishon LeZion and Rehovot; a spur to Ben-Gurion airport; and a spur to Jerusalem. Plans are afoot to extend the network down to Eilat. There is also a project to build a high-speed rail link between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem (completion date 2011), with a stop on the way at Ben-Gurion airport. The ride will take 28 minutes.

The main problem faced by foreign travellers is the language barrier. Trains are not marked in English, announcements are made in Hebrew and there are no route maps on the trains. If you don't speak Hebrew, the best thing you can do is ask your fellow travellers about which trains to take and where to get off. Note that ISIC holders get a 20% discount.

Health

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While it's never nice to get injured or become sick while travelling, you can at least take some comfort in the knowledge that Israel has world-class medical facilities. While standards of health are high in Israel there are several location-specific conditions to be aware of, particularly heat exhaustion and sunburn. Medical facilities in the Palestinian Territories are of a lower standard, but the territory is so small that a hospital in Israel is never too far away.

BEFORE YOU GO

A little planning before departure, particularly for preexisting illnesses, will save you a lot of trouble later. See your dentist before a long trip; carry a spare pair of contact lenses and glasses (and take your optical prescription with you); and carry a first-aid kit with you.

It's tempting to leave it all to the last minute – don't! Many vaccines don't start to ensure immunity for two weeks, so visit a doctor four to eight weeks before departure. Ask your doctor for an International Certificate of Vaccination (otherwise known as the yellow booklet), which will list all the vaccinations you've received.

Bring medications in their original, clearly labelled containers. A signed and dated letter from your physician describing your medical conditions and medications, including generic names, is also a good idea. If carrying syringes or needles, be sure to have a physician's letter documenting their medical necessity.

INSURANCE

Find out in advance if your insurance plan will make payments directly to providers or reimburse you later for overseas health expenditures (in many countries doctors expect payment in cash); it's also worth ensuring your travel insurance will cover repatriation home or to better medical facilities elsewhere. Your insurance company may be able to locate the nearest source of medical help, or you can ask at your hotel.

In an emergency, contact your embassy or consulate. Your travel insurance will not usually cover you for anything other than emergency dental treatment. Not all insurance covers emergency aeromedical evacuation home or to a hospital in a major city, which may be the only way to get medical attention for a serious emergency.

RECOMMENDED VACCINATIONS

Get your jabs well before travelling; some require more than one injection.

The World Health Organization recommends that all travellers regardless of the region they are travelling in should be covered for diphtheria, tetanus, measles, mumps, rubella and polio, as well as hepatitis B.

MEDICAL CHECKLIST

Following is a list of items you should consider packing in your medical kit.

- Acetaminophen/paracetamol (Tylenol) or aspirin
- Adhesive or paper tape
- Antibacterial ointment (eg Bactroban) for cuts and abrasions
- Antibiotics (if travelling off the beaten track)
- Antidiarrhoeal drugs (eg loperamide)

- Antihistamines (for hay fever and allergic reactions)
- Anti-inflammatory drugs (for example ibuprofen)
- Bandages, gauze, gauze rolls
- Insect repellent containing DEET (for the skin)
- Insect repellent containing permethrin (for clothing, tents and bed nets)
- Iodine tablets (for water purification)
- Oral rehydration salts
- Pocket knife
- Scissors, safety pins, tweezers
- Steroid cream or cortisone (for allergic rashes)
- Sun block
- Syringes and sterile needles (if travelling to remote areas)
- Thermometer

INTERNET RESOURCES

There is a wealth of travel health advice on the internet. For further information, the **Lonely Planet website** (www.lonelyplanet.com) is a good place to start.

The **World Health Organization** (www.who.int/ith/) publishes a superb book, *International Travel and Health*, which is revised annually and is available online at no cost. Another website of general interest is **MD Travel Health** (www.mdtravelhealth.com), which provides complete travel health recommendations for every country, updated daily, also at no cost. The **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** (www.cdc.gov) is a very useful source of traveller's health information.

A list of doctors in Tel Aviv is published on the **US embassy website** (<http://israel.usembassy.gov/publish/mission/acs/doctors.html>).

FURTHER READING

Lonely Planet's *Healthy Travel Africa* is packed with useful information including

TRAVEL HEALTH WEBSITES

It's usually a good idea to consult your government's travel health website before departure, if one is available.

Australia (www.dfat.gov.au/travel/)

Canada (<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/english/index.html>)

UK (www.doh.gov.uk/traveladvice/)

USA (www.cdc.gov/travel/)

pretrip planning, emergency first aid, immunisation and disease information and what to do if you get sick on the road.

Other recommended references include *Traveller's Health* by Dr Richard Dawood (Oxford University Press) and *The Travelers' Good Health Guide* by Ted Lankester (Sheldon Press), an especially useful health guide for volunteers and long-term expatriates working in the Middle East.

IN TRANSIT

DEEP VEIN THROMBOSIS (DVT)

Deep vein thrombosis occurs when blood clots form in the legs during plane flights, chiefly because of prolonged immobility. The longer the flight, the greater the risk. Though most blood clots are reabsorbed uneventfully, some may break off and travel through the blood vessels to the lungs, where they may cause life-threatening complications.

The chief symptom of deep vein thrombosis is swelling or pain of the foot, ankle or calf, usually but not always on just one side. When a blood clot travels to the lungs, it may cause chest pain and difficulty breathing. Travellers with any of these symptoms should immediately seek medical attention.

To prevent the development of deep vein thrombosis on long flights you should walk about the cabin, perform isometric compressions of the leg muscles (ie contract the leg muscles while sitting), drink plenty of fluids, and avoid alcohol and tobacco.

JET LAG & MOTION SICKNESS

Jet lag is common when crossing more than five time zones; it results in insomnia, fatigue, malaise or nausea. To avoid jet lag try drinking plenty of fluids (nonalcoholic) and eating light meals. Upon arrival, seek exposure to natural sunlight and readjust your schedule (for meals, sleep etc) as soon as possible.

Antihistamines such as dimenhydrinate (Dramamine) and meclizine (Antivert, Bonine) are usually the first choice for treating motion sickness. Their main side-effect is drowsiness. A herbal alternative is ginger, which works like a charm for some people.

IN ISRAEL & THE PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

AVAILABILITY & COST OF HEALTH CARE

Israel has first-rate state-funded hospitals across the country, plus a number of private hospitals and clinics. Private dental clinics are found anywhere from suburban streets to shopping malls. Costs are comparable to what you'd expect at home but free clinics are available for general checkups. Large cities in the Palestinian Territories have reasonable hospital facilities but these can be crowded or short on supplies. For a list of facilities see www.healthinforum.org.

Pharmacies (*beit mirkachat*) in Israel are common on city streets, and pharmacists will speak English and can give advice about what medicine to take if you describe your problem. In the Palestinian Territories, medicine may be expired so check the date.

If you require any prescribed medication, take enough from home to get you through your trip and bring a copy of the prescription in case you need a refill. If you need immediate medical care ask at your hotel. In an emergency, contact your embassy or consulate.

Standards of dental care are high but keep in mind that your travel insurance will not usually cover you for anything other than emergency dental treatment.

For first aid call ☎ 101 on any phone.

INFECTIOUS DISEASES

Diphtheria

Diphtheria is spread through close respiratory contact. It causes a high temperature and severe sore throat. Sometimes a membrane forms across the throat requiring a tracheostomy to prevent suffocation. Vaccination is recommended for those likely to be in close contact with the local population in infected areas. The vaccine is given as an injection alone, or with tetanus, and lasts 10 years.

Hepatitis A

Hepatitis A is spread through contaminated food (particularly shellfish) and water. It causes jaundice, and although it is rarely

fatal, can cause prolonged lethargy and delayed recovery. Symptoms include dark urine, a yellow colour to the whites of the eyes, fever and abdominal pain. Hepatitis A vaccines (Avaxim, VAQTA, Havrix) are given as an injection: a single dose will give protection for up to a year, while a booster 12 months later will provide a subsequent 10 years of protection. Hepatitis A and typhoid vaccines can also be given as a single dose vaccine, Hepatyrix or Viatim.

Hepatitis B

Infected blood, contaminated needles and sexual intercourse can all transmit hepatitis B. It can cause jaundice, and affects the liver, occasionally causing liver failure. All travellers should make this a routine vaccination. (Many countries now give hepatitis B vaccination as part of routine childhood vaccination.) The vaccine is given singly, or at the same time as the hepatitis A vaccine (Hepatyrix). A course will give protection for at least five years. It can be given over four weeks or six months.

HIV

HIV is spread via infected blood and blood products, sexual intercourse with an infected partner and from an infected mother to her newborn child. It can be spread through 'blood to blood' contacts such as contaminated instruments during medical, dental, acupuncture and other body piercing procedures, and sharing used intravenous needles.

Leishmaniasis

Spread through the bite of an infected sandfly, leishmaniasis can cause a slowly growing skin lump or ulcer. It may develop into a serious life-threatening fever, usually accompanied by anaemia and weight loss. Infected dogs are also carriers of the infection. Sandfly bites should be avoided whenever possible.

Rabies

Spread through bites or licks on broken skin from an infected animal, rabies is fatal. Animal handlers should be vaccinated, as should those travelling to remote areas where a reliable source of postbite vaccine is not available within 24 hours. Three injections are needed over a month. If you have not been vaccinated, you will need a

course of five injections starting within 24 hours or as soon as possible after the injury. Vaccination does not provide you with immunity; it merely buys you more time to seek appropriate medical help.

Tuberculosis

Tuberculosis (TB) is spread through close respiratory contact and occasionally through infected milk or milk products. BCG vaccine is recommended for those likely to be mixing closely with the local population. It is more important for those visiting family or planning on a long stay, and those employed as teachers and health-care workers. TB can be asymptomatic, although symptoms can include cough, weight loss or fever months or even years after exposure. An X-ray is the best way to confirm if you have TB. BCG gives a moderate degree of protection against TB. It causes a small permanent scar at the site of the injection, and is usually only given in specialised chest clinics. As it's a live vaccine it should not be given to pregnant women or immunocompromised individuals. The BCG vaccine is not available in all countries.

Typhoid

This is spread through food or water that has been contaminated by infected human faeces. The first symptom is usually fever or a pink rash on the abdomen. Septicaemia (blood poisoning) may also occur. Typhoid vaccine (Typhim Vi, Typherix) will give protection for three years. In some countries, the oral vaccine Vivotif is also available.

TRAVELLER'S DIARRHOEA

Traveller's diarrhoea can occur with a simple change of diet, so even though Israeli food and water are healthy you may get an upset stomach simply because your body is not accustomed to the new foods – it may take a few days to adjust. Keep in mind that in summer, outdoor food spoils quickly, so this is a good time to avoid hole-in-the-wall shwarma joints because the hummus goes bad quickly. Eating hummus in an indoor restaurant will be safer. Be even more circumspect than usual in the Palestinian Territories.

If you develop diarrhoea, be sure to drink plenty of fluids, preferably an oral rehydration solution containing salt and sugar. A few loose stools don't require treatment, but if you start having more than four or

five stools a day you should start taking an antibiotic (usually a quinolone drug) and an anti-diarrhoeal agent (such as loperamide). If diarrhoea is bloody, persists for more than 72 hours, or is accompanied by fever, shaking chills or severe abdominal pain, you should seek medical attention.

ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

Heat Illness

Heat exhaustion is one of the most common ailments among travellers in Israel and the Palestinian Territories. This occurs following heavy sweating and excessive fluid loss with inadequate replacement of fluids and salt. It is particularly common in hot climates when taking unaccustomed exercise before full acclimatisation. Symptoms include headache, dizziness and tiredness. Dehydration is already happening by the time you feel thirsty – aim to drink enough water that you produce pale, diluted urine. The treatment of heat exhaustion consists of replacing fluid with water or fruit juice or both, and cooling with cold water and fans. The treatment of the salt loss component consists of salty fluids as in soup or broth, and adding a little more table salt to foods than usual.

Heat stroke is much more serious. This occurs when the body's heat-regulating mechanism breaks down. An excessive rise in body temperature leads to sweating ceasing, irrational and hyperactive behaviour and eventually loss of consciousness and death. Rapid cooling by spraying the body with water and fanning is an ideal treatment. Emergency fluid and electrolyte replacement by intravenous drip is usually also required.

Insect Bites & Stings

Mosquitoes may not carry malaria but can cause irritation and infected bites. Using DEET-based insect repellents will prevent bites. Mosquitoes also spread dengue fever.

Bees and wasps only cause real problems to those with a severe allergy (anaphylaxis). If you have a severe allergy to bee or wasp stings you should carry an adrenaline injection or similar.

Sandflies are located around the Mediterranean beaches. They usually only cause a nasty itchy bite but can carry a rare skin disorder called cutaneous leishmaniasis. Bites may be prevented by using DEET-based repellents.

The number of jellyfish has been increasing over the years, thanks to overfishing in the Mediterranean (fish eat jellyfish, and in the absence of predators the jellyfish have boomed). The jellyfish sting is irritating but in most cases it wears off in about 10 or 15 minutes. A particularly strong sting (or a sting to the face or genitals) requires an evaluation by a physician.

Scorpions are frequently found in arid or dry climates. They can cause a painful bite which, is rarely life threatening.

Bedbugs are often found in hostels and cheap hotels. They lead to very itchy, lumpy bites. Spraying the mattress with an appropriate insect killer will do a good job of getting rid of them.

Scabies are also frequently found in cheap accommodation. These tiny mites live in the skin, particularly between the fingers. They cause an intensely itchy rash. Scabies are easily treated with lotion available from pharmacies; people who you come into contact with also need treating to avoid spreading scabies between asymptomatic carriers.

Snake Bites

Do not walk barefoot or stick your hand into holes or cracks. Half of those bitten by venomous snakes are not actually injected with poison (envenomed). If bitten by a snake, do not panic. Immobilise the bitten limb with a splint (eg a stick) and apply a bandage over the site with firm pressure, similar to a bandage over a sprain. Do not apply a tourniquet, or cut or suck the bite. Get the victim to medical help as soon as possible so that antivenin can be given if necessary.

Water

Tap water is safe to drink in Israel but carries an unpleasant taste (especially in Eilat, where it has been desalinated). Bottled water is available everywhere. Do not drink water from rivers or lakes; this may contain bacteria or viruses that can cause diarrhoea or vomiting.

TRAVELLING WITH CHILDREN

All travellers with children should know how to treat minor ailments and when to seek medical treatment. Make sure the children are up to date with routine vaccinations, and discuss possible travel vaccines well before departure as some vaccines are

not suitable for children aged under one year old.

In hot, moist climates any wound or break in the skin may lead to infection. The area should be cleaned and then kept dry and clean. Remember to avoid contaminated food and water. If your child is vomiting or experiencing diarrhoea, lost fluid and salts must be replaced. It may be helpful to take rehydration powders for reconstituting with boiled water. Ask your doctor about this.

Children should be encouraged to avoid dogs or other mammals because of the risk of rabies and other diseases. Any bite, scratch or lick from a warm-blooded, furry animal should immediately be thoroughly cleaned. If there is any possibility that the animal is infected with rabies, immediate medical assistance should be sought.

WOMEN'S HEALTH

Emotional stress, exhaustion and travelling through different time zones can all contribute to an upset in the menstrual pattern. If using oral contraceptives, note that some antibiotics, diarrhoea and vomiting can stop the pill from working and lead to the risk of pregnancy – take condoms with you just in case. Condoms should be kept in a cool dry place or they may crack and perish.

Emergency contraception is most effective if taken within 24 hours after unprotected sex. The **International Planned Parent Federation** (www.ippf.org) can advise about the availability of contraception in different countries. Tampons and sanitary towels are readily available in Israel and the Palestinian Territories.

Travelling during pregnancy is usually possible but there are important things to consider. Have a medical checkup before embarking on your trip. The most risky times for travel are during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, when miscarriage is most likely, and after 30 weeks, when complications, eg high blood pressure and premature delivery, can occur. Most airlines won't accept a traveller after 28 to 32 weeks of pregnancy, and long-haul flights in the later stages can be very uncomfortable. Taking written records of the pregnancy with details of your blood group is helpful if you need medical attention while away. Ensure your insurance policy covers pregnancy delivery and postnatal care, but remember insurance policies are only as good as the facilities available.

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