

# The Galilee

الجليل

הגליל



With its rich combination of the spiritual, historical and downright beautiful, the Galilee is probably the most popular area of the country, both with holidaying Israelis and foreign visitors.

For history and religion buffs, the Galilee offers an unparalleled chance to step back in time and follow in the footsteps of Jesus, who is said to have lived, preached and performed some of his more famous miracles in these valleys and hills. But you don't have to be a pilgrim to soak up the serenity of the Mount of Beatitudes, explore the ruins of Capernaum or take in the breathtaking views from Mt Tabor. The ancient synagogues, beautifully preserved mosaics and stately churches should be on every visitor's itinerary.

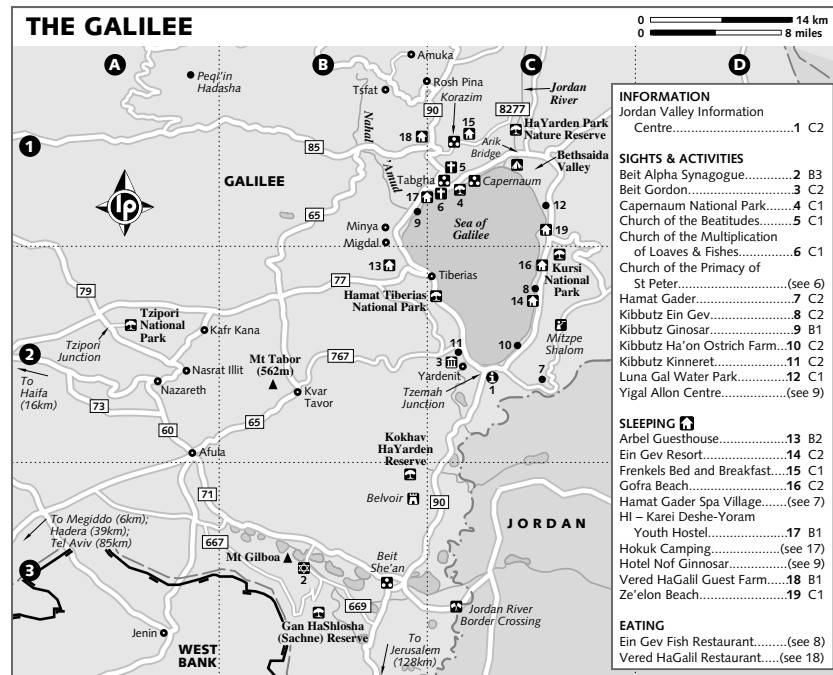
There is also an endless array of archaeological sites from the Roman, Islamic, Crusader and Ottoman periods, with the highlights being the extraordinary ruins of Tzipori National Park and the excavations at Beit She'an. Colourful Nazareth is no longer just a Christian pit stop. Its rambling old city, bustling market and sophisticated eating scene make it a great base for touring the major sites of the Galilee.

After following the history path, it's easy to relax in a region so refreshingly green, marked by curvaceous mountains, thick forests, riotously fertile farmland and of course the shimmering Sea of Galilee. Hiking, water sports and horse riding are just a few of the activities on offer.

Camping enthusiasts can get excited about the range of excellent – albeit pricey – sites right on the shores of the lake. For something more comfortable, head to a kibbutz, one of the last places in Israel where they are still going strong.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Working your way through a Middle Eastern feast at one of Nazareth's excellent **restaurants** (p229)
- Setting up your tent on the beach before kicking back with a drink and a beautiful sunset over the **Sea of Galilee** (p258)
- Taking a giant stride back to Jesus' times and exploring **Tabgha** (p254), **Capernaum** (p256) and the **Mount of Beatitudes** (p254)
- Getting lost among the flowers on **Mt Gilboa** (p234); from December to March the rocky slopes are carpeted with gorgeous daffodils, bright red buttercups and the rare Gilboa iris
- Escaping the summer heat with a refreshing dip at **Gan HaShlosha (Sachne) Reserve** (p233) or discovering your own pool-side paradise by stopping at one of the natural springs



## NAZARETH الناصره נצרת

☎ 04 / pop 63,700

A cacophony of market vendors, blaring car horns and church bells, modern Nazareth will come as quite a shock if you're imagining the bucolic Christmas-card images of the Annunciation and Jesus' childhood home. The largest Arab city in Israel, Nazareth is swallowing up the surrounding olive groves, farms and pine forests at an ever-increasing pace; where there's a view, there's a house on the hillside and where there's a one-way street, there's sure to be a kilometre-long traffic jam heading the other way.

But the disappointment does not last long. Nazareth is a vibrant city, with the feel of a small village, and offers much more than its Christian pilgrim history. While the myriad of churches are certainly worth a visit, come to explore the cobbled streets of the Old City with its crumbling mansions, authentic souq and excellent restaurants specialising in local dishes. While the controversial Nazareth 2000 project (a joint project of the Israeli government and the local municipality; approximately US\$80 was to be invested

in extensive renovation and restoration of the Old City) – unfortunately much of the money was squandered or spent on Upper Nazareth, the Jewish section of the city) has stalled since the start of the second intifada, tourists can take advantage of the early success: the winding alleyways of the Old City beautifully lit at night, preservation of some of the historical homes, and investment into a range of interesting new accommodation options. With its proximity to nearby Christian sites such as Mt Tabor, Nazareth makes an ideal base for a few days' touring the lower Galilee, especially on Shabbat when everything is open for business, unlike the rest of the country.

## History

The words of Nathanel of Cana, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' (John 1:47) characterise the town's insignificance in its early years around the time of Jesus. It's thought that Nazareth was home to a Christian community until the 3rd century, when interest in the town dwindled.

It was rekindled late in the 6th century, due to reports that the town had been the site of a number of miracles, and that a local synagogue had kept the book in which Jesus learnt to write, and the bench he sat on. It can't have done Nazareth's reputation any harm, either, that it was rumoured to have the region's most beautiful women, a result, it was said, of them all being related to the Holy Virgin Mary. Despite being predominantly Jewish at the time, the town experienced a boom in church construction.

The Crusaders, who'd made Nazareth their Galilean capital, dedicated a church to the Annunciation, and another to the Angel Gabriel. After the Christian knights' defeat at the Horns of Hittin in 1187, pilgrims were still able to visit Nazareth owing to a series of truces, but by the 13th century the danger from Muslim attack was too great.

In the 17th century the Franciscans were able to buy back the ruins of the Church of the Annunciation and a Christian presence was re-established, albeit under difficult and often hostile conditions. In 1730 they built a new church, which was demolished in 1955

to be replaced by the modern basilica that you see today.

During the British Mandate, Nazareth was the administration's headquarters in the Galilee. When the British pulled out in 1948, Israeli forces seized the town. Modern-day Nazareth (known to Arabs as *An-Nasra*) has a population that's part Christian, part Muslim. Since the 1950s it has also grown to include Jewish Nasrat Illit, or Upper Nazareth, a new industrial town.

### Orientation

Most sites of pilgrim interest are concentrated in the centre of the old city. The main street is Paul VI St, which runs from the junction with the Haifa-Afula Hwy to the south, up through the town centre and to Mary's Well, where it becomes Namsawi Rd. The other important street is El-Bishara St (also known as Annunciation or Casa Nova St), which intersects with Paul VI St

and runs up to the market in front of the basilica.

### Information

**Money** (☎ 8.30am-12.30pm Mon-Tue, 8.30am-12.30pm & 4-6.30pm Wed, Fri & Sat, 8.30am-12.30pm & 4-6pm Sun) Change money at any number of banks along Paul VI St.

**Police station** (☎ 657 4444, emergencies 100) The main police station is housed in an old Russian hospice one block west of Mary's Well, next to the main post office.

**Post** (☎ 655 4019; ☎ 8.30am-2pm Mon & Wed, 8am-12.30pm & 3.30-6pm Tue, Thu & Fri, 8am-1pm Sat) The main post office is one block west of Mary's Well next to the police station.

**Tourist office** (☎ 602 8219; www.nazarethboard.org; 1601 El Bishara St; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-2pm Sat) Has lots of maps and local information.

### Sights & Activities

#### BASILICA OF THE ANNUNCIATION

Dominating the Nazareth skyline is the Roman Catholic **Basilica of the Annunciation** (El-Bishara St; admission free; ☎ 8.30-11.45am & 2-5.50pm Mon-Sat, 2-5.30pm Sun, 9-11.45am & 2-4.30pm Mon-Sat, 2-4.30pm Sun winter), the largest church in the Middle East and one of the Christian world's most holy shrines. The church is believed to stand on the site of Mary's home, where the Angel Gabriel appeared to her and announced that she was pregnant with the Son of God (Luke 1:26-38).

Commissioned by the Franciscan church and consecrated in 1969, architect Giovanni Muzio was told to create something 'modern, multinational and mysterious'. With its imposing dome, the church (the fifth to have stood on this spot) certainly has a modern feel. The rather weird mix of artwork, mother-and-child-themed gifts donated by Catholic communities from around the world, would be the multinational factor, but where the sense of mystery lies is beyond us.

Perhaps it is to be found in the dimly lit 'lower church' downstairs, where there is a sunken enclosure focused on the apse of a 5th-century Byzantine church – itself built around the Grotto of the Annunciation, the traditional site of Mary's house. Lining the north wall behind it are the remains of a 12th-century Crusader church and some restored Byzantine mosaics.

Leave the upper level via the northern door to exit into a courtyard, under which lie more excavations of ancient Nazareth

including an ancient Jewish *mikveh* (ritual immersion bath).

### ST JOSEPH'S CHURCH

Just north of the basilica is **St Joseph's Church** (El-Bishara St; ☎ 9-11.45am & 2-5.30pm), built in 1914 and occupying the site considered to be that of Joseph's carpentry shop. This belief probably originated in the 17th century; today's church was built over the remains of a Crusader church with Romanesque influences. Down in the crypt you can see an underground cave used for grain storage in pre-Byzantine times.

### SISTERS OF NAZARETH CONVENT

Up the side street across from the basilica (the side street with the Casa Nova Hospice on the corner), this convent operates a school for deaf and blind Arab children. It also provides accommodation for travellers in its hospice and hostel. The convent boasts one of the best examples of an ancient **Herodian tomb** (☎ 655 4304; admission by appointment) sealed by a rolling stone. It lies under the present courtyard and can only be viewed by appointment.

### GREEK CATHOLIC SYNAGOGUE-CHURCH

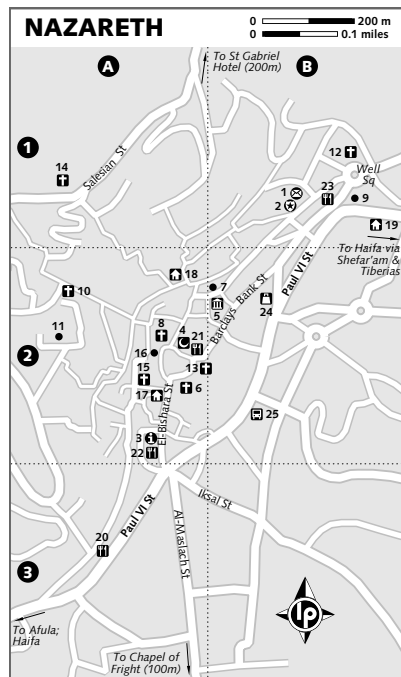
Located in the souq, this unassuming **Greek Catholic Synagogue-Church** (☎ 9am-12.30pm & 2.30-6pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri, 9am-12.30pm Wed & Sat) dates to Crusader times. It's built on the site of a synagogue said to be where the young Jesus regularly prayed and later preached (Luke 4:15-30). In 1887 the adjacent and rather less modest Greek Catholic Church, with its magnificent dome and two bell towers, was added on to the old Crusader structure.

### MENSA CHRISTI CHURCH

Built in 1860, this small Franciscan church contains a large slab of rock known in Latin as *Mensa Christi* (Table of Christ). The rock is believed to be the dining table used by Jesus and his disciples after the Resurrection. Note the graffiti from numerous pilgrims from over the centuries. It is north of the Sisters of St Charles Borromeaevs Convent, near the Maronite Church and Ecumenical Christian Child Care Centre.

### ST GABRIEL'S CHURCH

According to Greek Orthodox beliefs, the Angel Gabriel appeared before Mary



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while she was fetching water, not while she was home in what is now the grotto in the Roman Catholic basilica. **St Gabriel's** (☎ 7am-noon & 1-6pm) was built in the late 17th century on the site of earlier churches and the beautifully restored crypt at the far end contains the source of the spring supplying the nearby well. Before entering the attractive interior take a look at the ancient graffiti carved around the doorway.

The church is about 10 minutes' walk north of the Basilica of the Annunciation, one block north of where Paul VI St ends.

#### MARY'S WELL & ANCIENT BATHHOUSE

Also known as the Virgin's Fountain, **Mary's Well** (Paul VI St) stands in a handsome-looking plaza in front of St Gabriel's Church. Some believe that the Angel Gabriel appeared here, and the water is said to have powers of healing. Beside it at the **Cactus Gift Shop** (☎ 657 8539; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat), owner Elias Shama has excavated an almost perfectly preserved 2000-year-old Roman **bathhouse**, which utilised water from Mary's Well. The shop runs tours for 120NIS for up to four people including coffee.

#### SALESIAN CHURCH OF JESUS THE ADOLESCENT

Built between 1906 and 1923 in the Gothic style, this is probably the most beautiful of Nazareth's many churches. **Salesian Church Of Jesus the Adolescent** belongs to the French Salesian Order and its attractive architecture, both inside and out, and the great views of the town below, justify the 20-minute climb to get up there. If you don't want to face the 250 steps, take bus No 13.

#### CHAPEL OF FRIGHT

Luke 4:29-30 tells of the occasion when the people of Nazareth tried to throw Jesus off the top of a hill. In the southern part of the town, the Franciscan **Chapel of Fright** (Notre Dame de l'Effroi) is built on the supposed site from where Mary witnessed this event. The nearby hill is known as the 'precipice', or the Leap of the Lord. Look for the signposted gate in the wall on Paul VI St, opposite the Hotel Galilee, south of the town centre. The chapel is behind the wall, beyond St Claire's Convent.

#### SOUQ

Starting at the top of El-Bishara St and occupying a maze of steep, narrow, winding alleys, the **souq** (☎ 9am-5pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri, 9am-2pm Wed & Sat) is a lively place to haggle over a dayglo Jesus for the car dashboard. In the lower part of the town, local authorities have taken steps to clean up the white-stone streets of the souq but it still retains a somewhat authentic Arabian air, particularly on Fridays.

#### OLD CITY MANSIONS

Towards the end of the Ottoman era when local leaders such as Governor Daher el-Omar ruled the Galilee, Nazareth was in its heyday. Beautiful mansions flowered around the city, many of which are still standing (some just barely!) today. Recognisable by their red roof tiles, three arched windows and balcony, they also have richly decorated interiors, all Italian marble and colourful fresco ceilings. The house of El-Rais (6089 St) has 13 rooms with painted ceilings – one featuring the owner holidaying in Egypt with his wife. Contact the **tourist office** (☎ 602 8219; www.nazarethboard.org; 1601 El Bishara St; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-2pm Sat) to organise a visit.

#### NAZARETH VILLAGE

If you're having trouble imagining Jesus doing anything miraculous amid the bustle of modern Nazareth, then step back 2000 years at **Nazareth Village** (☎ 645 6042; www.nazarethvillage.com; 5079 St; adult/child/student 50/22/34NIS; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat). Everyday life and commerce in a traditional Galilean village has been duly reconstructed with actors in period clothing leading tours of the working farm. Leave any nightmares of tacky old-world historical theme parks at the door – it's well done and worth a stop. It's a 15-minute walk due west from the basilica, just beyond Al-Wadi al-Jawani St.

#### DIWAN EL LAJUN THEATRE

If you are interested in seeing co-existence in action, stop by this **multicultural arts centre** (☎ 646 9413; diwanellajun@gmail.com) in the Old City run by Gassan Abbass, a well-known actor and director. There are regular music and theatre performances as well as storytelling workshops for both adults and children from mixed backgrounds. The theatre is always buzzing, thanks to a women's

training program teaching puppet making and traditional Palestinian embroidery. There's also a small café where performer Hanita-Carolin Hendlman will happily discuss upcoming events. Across the road, the **Alsebat Association for Heritage Preservation** (☎ 602 0935; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Sat) is a quirky Palestinian folklore museum with various agricultural and costume pieces on display. Unfortunately there are very few labels.

#### Tours

**Fauzi Azar Inn** (☎ 602 0469; www.fauziazarinn.com) Offers a flexible daily tour to Mt Tabor, Megido, Acre and the Sea of Galilee for US\$30 per person (minimum of two people).

**Sharif Sharif-Safadi** (☎ 601 3717, 050 722 9691; sharifa@zahav.net.il) Nazareth expert with a strong interest in the preservation of historic monuments. He offers excellent tours of the 'hidden city' including inside Old City mansions (US\$100 for up to 10 people).

#### Sleeping

**Fauzi Azar Inn** (☎ 602 0469; www.fauziazarinn.com; dm 50NIS, d with/without shower 350/300NIS; ☎) When young Maoz Inon decided he wanted to open a guesthouse in Israel he walked the entire country from north to south to find the best spot. He and his wife settled on Nazareth, restoring a beautiful Arab house in the heart of the Old City. For independent travellers, their creation is one of the highlights of a stay in the Galilee. A light-filled lounge room with arched windows, marble floors and frescoed ceiling looks out over the city, while in the traditional downstairs courtyard a cosy cushion area is a great place to swap tales with some fresh mint tea from the balcony herb garden. Maoz is a keen hiker who will happily set you up with maps of the area; his website and blog are a must if you are attempting the Israel Trail.

**Sisters of Nazareth Convent** (☎ 655 4304; fax 646 0741; dm US\$8, s/d, incl breakfast US\$19/38; ☎) Weary pilgrims (and exhausted backpackers) can relax in the tastefully furnished lounge-dining room or lovely enclosed courtyard at this popular place. You can also make use of a decently equipped kitchen. On Christian religious holidays the convent is busy with groups from Europe so make a reservation if possible. To get there, go up El-Bishara St, turn left opposite the basilica and then it's up the street on the right. Look for the small sign in French that reads 'Religieuses

de Nazareth' and ring the bell. Reception opens at 4pm and closes at 9.30pm.

**Casa Nova Hospice** (☎ 645 6660; fax 657 9630; s/d, with breakfast & dinner US\$30/60) Across from the basilica on El-Bishara St, this Italian Franciscan hospice is particularly popular with Italian and Spanish pilgrim groups. It's a serene place with simple (bordering on austere) rooms with large green shuttered windows, some with views. Traditional Italian dishes are served in the rustic dining room; not a bad spot to stop for a mid-morning espresso. Doors close at 10pm.

**St Gabriel Hotel** (☎ 657 2133; fax 655 4071; 2 Salesian St; s/d US\$55/75; ☎) Hands down the best views in town, this white-walled, red-roofed former Catholic convent is perched on the edge of a ridge overlooking the city. Either the nuns lived in the lap of luxury or else the hotel has done a pretty good conversion job. With comfortable rooms and landscaped gardens. While popular with groups it can seem overwhelmingly empty at times, particularly overweeking.

**Rimonim Hotel** (☎ 650 0000; www.rimonim.com; St Paul VI St; s/d US\$113/134; ☎ ☎) Part of the Rimonim Israeli chain, this is every inch the businessperson's hotel with well-equipped rooms (modern connection and satellite TV) swathed in dull browns and creams. On the upside, it's well located in the centre of town and the underground parking is a plus for those with cars – trust us, this not a fun city to try and find a park!

#### Eating

The city's growing reputation for delicious local food is another reason to stay the night in Nazareth.

**Tishreen** (☎ 608 4666; 56 El-Bishara St; mains 35-75NIS; ☎ noon-midnight Mon-Sat, 5pm-midnight Sun) Named after the month it was opened in 2004 (*tishreen* is Arabic for October), this sophisticated restaurant has an autumnal atmosphere with its straw-encrusted walls lined with antiques and wine bottles. Locals enjoying long lunches and late dinners order Mediterranean-inspired dishes from the mosaic-tiled wood oven, which turns out 'aborigine (aubergine) stuffed with pesto and cheese' as well as excellent *muhammar*, an Arabic pizza topped with chicken and onion slices. It's located 200m west of Mary's Well.

**El-Reda** (☎ 608 4404; Albesharah St; mains 35-50NIS; ☎ 1pm-2am Mon-Sat, 7pm-2am Sun) The weekend

papers love to rave about this restaurant in a restored 120-year-old Arab mansion, and for once it's justified. The views of the basilica (stunning from the rooftop terrace), the food (friendly owner Daher Zeidani makes only what he likes, and that's traditional Nazareth dishes with a Mediterranean twist) and the atmosphere (occasional live music and poetry) make this one of the better restaurants in the north of Israel.

**Garden** (☎ 645 3756; Mary's Well, Paul VI St; mains 40-50NIS; ☺ lunch & dinner) If the Garden had as good a PR machine as Diana, it too would be knocking back customers. The rocket and tabbouleh salads are so fresh they look like they could wander off the plate, while the *labneh* (thick yogurt flavoured with garlic) is delicately spiced and competes for attention with deliciously fragrant meats grilled on cinnamon sticks, and it's all washed down with fresh lemonade. The food here is second to none, but unfortunately the huge space is not easy to fill and the restaurant appears to suffer from the killer 'if it's not full, it's obviously not good' syndrome.

**Diana** (☎ 657 2919 51; Paul VI St; mains 50-75NIS; ☺ noon-midnight) Mention to anyone that you are heading to Nazareth, and they will invariably know little about the town, except that you must eat at Diana. Behind a rather unassuming façade, Arab chef Dokhol Sadafi presents an incredible range of more than a dozen mezze dishes. Try and save room for the house speciality, – spicy hand-made kebabs with pine nuts – one dish will definitely suffice for a couple. Hugely popular with visiting Israelis, it's best to book ahead, especially on weekends.

**Mahroum's Sweets** (☎ 656 4470; Paul VI & El-Bishara Sts) Locals say this is the best place in town for baklava and all other honey-soaked delicacies; others raise their eyebrows at the sacrilege of making sugar-free halvah. Several places have the same name, but the original is the one on the corner of Paul IV and El-Bishara Sts nearest to the basilica.

## Shopping

**Elbabour** (☎ 645 5596; www.elbabour.com; ☺ Mon-Sat) If you're a sucker for spices, don't leave town without getting a whiff of the beautiful old Galilee Mill, which has more than 1000 different products on offer, from exotic herbs to aromatic oils.

## Getting There & Away

From **Nazareth Bus Station** (☎ 656 9956; Paul IV St) there are hourly buses to Tiberias (No 431, 21.50NIS, 45 minutes), Haifa (No 331, 17NIS, 45 minutes) and Akko (No 343, 25NIS, one hour). To go direct to Tel Aviv (No 823, 36NIS, two hours), take the bus from the junction outside Nazareth or No 824 via Afula (15NIS, 2½ hours) from the bus station. There are no direct buses to Jerusalem so you must go from Afula (Nos 355/356, 7NIS, 20 minutes).

Sheruts to Tiberias leave regularly from in front of Hamishbir department store (on Paul VI St near El-Bishara St). For Haifa and Tel Aviv, they leave from the Paz petrol station (on Paul VI St).

## AROUND NAZARETH

**Kafr Kana** כפר כנא

☎ 04

Historically known as Cana, this Arab town 7km northeast of Nazareth, on the road to Tiberias, is the purported site of Jesus' first miracle (John 2:1-11), where he changed water into wine at a wedding reception. Regrettably there is little evidence of either; instead, a Franciscan church built in 1881 now stands on the site. It contains an old jar of the type that contained the water. Under the church floor you can see a fragment of a mosaic pavement that bears an ancient Jewish Aramaic inscription. Not to be outdone, Kafr Kana's Greek church contains some ancient stone vats that the Orthodox claim were the actual ones involved in the miracle.

This was also the home town of Jesus' disciple Nathanael (John 21:2) and the Franciscans administer a chapel built over the traditional site of his house.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

Arab buses for Kafr Kana depart about every 45 minutes from near Mary's Well in Nazareth. Alternatively, bus No 431, which operates between Tiberias and Nazareth, passes through the village – ask the driver to let you off there. The Greek church is the nearest to the main road, the Franciscan church and chapel are situated in the town centre.

**Tzipori** ציפורי

☎ 04

Grandly described by the 1st-century historian Josephus Flavius as 'the ornament

of all Galilee', the impressive archaeological site **Tzipori** (Sepphoris); (☎ 656 8262; admission 23NIS; ☺ 8am-5pm summer, 8am-4pm winter) was first settled by the Hasmoneans in the 2nd century BC, but in 63 BC it was conquered by the Roman general Pompeii and served as the Roman capital of Galilee through the reign of Herod. Tzipori is also famous for being the birthplace of the Mishnah, which was developed during the late 2nd century AD by Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi. The Mishnah is the oldest codification of the oral law of the Jewish people and the foundation for the Talmud, the primary set of instructions the Orthodox live by today.

Each year archaeological excavations continue to turn out more ruins of the area's subsequent Byzantine, Arab and Crusader history. Allow about three hours to wander through the highlights, which include original colonnaded roadways, an amphitheatre and a Crusader citadel with a collection of some smaller finds.

Exhibited in a purpose-built Roman villa are some fantastic Byzantine mosaics. One of these, a portrait of a contemplative young woman nicknamed the 'Mona Lisa of the Galilee', is alone worth making the visit for. Other mosaics depict the Greek god of wine, Dionysus, and an Egyptian Nilometer, a column once used to measure the flood level of the Nile for the purpose of working out that year's collectible tax. All are labelled with explanatory text in English.

Visitors can also explore the ancient city's water cisterns. Hewn out of rock, they're 15m deep and 260m long and form part of a continuous system that brought water from a spring near Nazareth (over 13km away).

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

Buses between Nazareth and Akko stop at Tzipori Junction, about 4km from archaeological site. From there you'll have to walk – there's no public transport.

**Mt Tabor** הר תבור

You don't have to be a Christian pilgrim to enjoy the beauty of Mt Tabor. It's a teeth-clenching ride (16 hairpin turns) up to the curvaceous summit, which sits high above the Jezreel Valley's multicoloured patchwork of fields. Mt Tabor is the site of the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-9, Mark 9:2-8 and Luke 9:28-36). This was

the occasion when it is believed Jesus was seen by some of the disciples to be talking with the prophets Moses and Elijah when a voice from heaven proclaimed Jesus as 'my Son that I have chosen' (Luke 9:35). Two large churches on the mountain summit, Franciscan and Greek, commemorate the event.

A Byzantine church probably already existed here when Benedictine monks were installed on the mount in 1099 by the Crusaders. They were massacred in a Turkish attack in 1113 that also saw their buildings destroyed. The monks later returned to build a new church and monastery, which survived an attack by Saladin (Salah ad-Din) in 1183 but not the defeat of the Crusaders at the Horns of Hittin in 1187.

The Muslims then built their own fortress on the mount and, as it was on the believed site of the Transfiguration, this inspired the fifth Crusade. Although a Crusader siege in 1217 failed, the Muslims dismantled the fortress because they realised that it would continue to be a major provocation. Later in the 13th century a series of truces made it possible for Christians to return to the mount until, in 1263, they were expelled by Sultan Beybars.

## BASILICA OF THE TRANSFIGURATION

The entrance to the **Franciscan complex** (admission free) is through the main gate of the Muslim's 13th-century fortress, restored in 1897. Its defensive wall, including 12 towers, goes all the way around the summit. About 150m inside the gate to the right is a small chapel. Built on Byzantine foundations, it commemorates the conversation between Jesus and his disciples after the Transfiguration (Mark 9:9-13). The cemetery to the north is medieval, the one to the south is from the 1st century.

At the end of the drive is the **basilica** (☺ 8am-noon & 2-5pm Sun-Fri), built in 1924, and definitely one of the Holy Land's most beautiful churches, both inside and out. A particular highlight is the lovely mosaic of the Nativity. On the right of the piazza, in front of the basilica, stands the Franciscan monastery and hospice, while on the left are the remains of the Byzantine monastery.

No visitors are allowed inside the basilica during services.

**GETTING THERE & AWAY**

Mt Tabor is visited most easily by bus from Tiberias – all Tel Aviv buses stop at the turn-off for the mount. Coming from Nazareth (50 minutes), you need to change buses at Afula, where you can also connect with buses to most of the major destinations in Israel. However, Mt Tabor buses from Afula are infrequent, so check the schedule to avoid a long delay, especially for the return bus.

All buses drop you off at the bottom of the steep and winding road that leads to the summit; the climb takes about 30 minutes on foot. At the top, the turning to the left leads to the Greek church; go straight ahead to reach the Franciscan basilica.

**Eating & Sleeping**

**Bordeaux** (☎ 04-676 7673; Kfar Tavor; meals 40-70NIS; ☺ lunch & dinner) A bottle of boutique wine from next door's Tabor Winery (☎ 04-676 0444; 9am-5pm Sun-Thu) goes well with the great views from the outside deck at this cosy country restaurant. Locals recommend the chicken dishes but the regional produce is really best shown off in the variety of fresh salads. Kfar Tavor is the small village at the foot of Mt Tabor. The winery is in the Kfar Tavor visitors centre.

**Sahara** (☎ 04-642 5959; Rte 65, Nein village; meals 50-80NIS; ☺ lunch & dinner) Behind a petrol station at the entrance to Nein village, on the Afula-Tiberias road, this Disney-esque castle stands out a mile with its sandstone walls, turret and moat filled with goldfish. But inside, the food is no laughing matter with wonderful meats roasted in the clay oven, fresh meze dishes (the *baba ghanooj* is worth the stop alone) and *muhmar*, an interesting Arab dish of grilled Cornish hen with yogurt and potatoes.

**Zipori Village Country Cottages** (☎ 04-646 2643; www.zipori.com; d with breakfast 350NIS) Suzy and Mitch run this laid-back B&B on a hill side overlooking the national park. The cottages are very unpretentious with comfortable cane furniture, cheerful decoration, and a Jacuzzi. Every morning a selection of local produce, including organic bread, goat's cheese and yogurt, is delivered to your door to prepare in the well-equipped kitchen. Guests also receive a 25% discount on entry to the national park.

**HooHaa Cyclists House** (☎ 77 708 0542; www.hoo-ha.co.il; Kfar Tavor; dm/d/st 150/400/650NIS; ☑ ☑) The perfect place to crash after a day exploring the Galilee, this ultramodern guesthouse at the foot of Mt Tabor is run for cyclists by cyclists – people who understand that sore bums and tired muscles demand a good pool, comfortable leather couches and a library filled with cycling maps to plan the next day's ride. For those without a set of wheels, HooHaa rents out bikes from 50 to 70NIS for two hours and from 90 to 120NIS for one day.

**BEIT SHE'AN** בית שאן **بيت شان**  
☎ 04 / pop 16,000

The attraction of this tidy little town, and there is only one attraction, is one of the country's most extensive archaeological sites – including its best-preserved Roman amphitheatre. Depending on the security situation it makes a great stop along the scenic Jordan River Hwy route between Jerusalem and Tiberias.

Located on a busy trade route, 5000 years of continuous occupation is testimony to the ancient importance of Beit She'an. Archaeologists believe that the first real town was established here around 3000 BC and its name is mentioned in 19th-century-BC Egyptian texts as one of the strongholds from which the region was ruled by the Pharaohs. In the 13th century BC, the Israelite tribe of Manasseh inherited the area (Judges 1:27), losing it 200 years later to the Philistines, who hung the body of King Saul on the city walls (1 Samuel 31).

The action didn't stop there – excavations have revealed no less than 18 cities superimposed on top of one another. Jewish sages were moved to write of one incarnation, 'If the Garden of Eden is in Israel, then its gate is at Beit She'an'.

**Roman Amphitheatre & Byzantine Street**

Not to be confused with the main site, these ruins are just a short walk from the bus station. The **amphitheatre** was used for gladiatorial contests and had 12 rows of seats for 6000 spectators. Only three rows can be seen today. The **Byzantine street** dates from the 5th century AD and connected this area with the main town. A Greek inscription notes that the drainage system dates from AD 522.

**Beit She'an National Park**

Excavations and restoration work are ongoing but included among the structures so far revealed at **Beit She'an National Park** (☎ 658 7189; adult/child 23/12NIS; ☺ 8am-4pm winter, 8am-5pm summer) are a temple, a basilica, a nymphaeum and a wide colonnaded Roman street leading down to the great theatre (another 6000 seater). North of the herringbone-patterned street are the extensive Byzantine baths covering over half a hectare, with a courtyard and surrounding porticoes paved with marble and mosaics. One of the mosaics, dating from the 6th century, depicted Tyche, the goddess of prosperity and good fortune – the latter of which aided the thief who made off with it in 1989.

For a good overview of the site, climb the hill on the northern side, beyond the baths. There's a free map of the excavations along with English-language information available at the ticket kiosk.

**Getting There & Away**

Beit She'an is a stopover for the Tiberias-Jerusalem bus and there are also regular services between here and Afula, making it accessible from Nazareth. Travellers headed for Jordan can make use of the Jordan River Crossing, 6km east of Beit She'an, and easily reached by taxi. See p405 for details.

**AROUND BEIT SHE'AN****Beit Alpha Synagogue** בית הכנסת העתיק בית אלפא (بيت الفا كنيس)

No-one was more surprised than the Hefzibah kibbutzniks when they went out to dig an irrigation channel in 1928 and uncovered an almost entirely preserved 1500-year-old mosaic floor. The remains were part of a **synagogue** (adult/child 18/8NIS; ☺ 8am-5pm Sat-Thu, 8am-4pm Fri) that an Aramaic inscription dates to the 6th-century-AD Byzantine era.

While the synagogue is small and simply built, the colourful mosaic floor, which consists of three distinct panels, is striking. The upper panel shows the Torah ark and traditional religious emblems, including menorahs (candelabras), the *lulav* (bundle of branches), *shofar* (ram's horn) and *etrog* (citrus fruit). A zodiac circle with the seasons symbolised in each corner makes up the central panel. These astrological signs, though condemned by the prophets, were widely used as decorative elements in churches and

synagogues of the Byzantine period. Abraham's sacrifice (Genesis 22) is depicted in the lower panel with the Hebrew words reading 'lay not your hand (upon the lad)'. A 30-minute film (offered in four languages) is an easy-to-watch introduction to the site.

Members of the Makoya, a Japanese Christian sect, study Hebrew on the kibbutz. Their lovely little Japanese garden can be seen up the hill from the synagogue, beyond the swimming pool.

The kibbutz **fish restaurant and pub** (☺ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) close to the synagogue is a pretty place to while away a summer afternoon under the shade of the palms and bougainvillea.

The Beit Alpha synagogue on the grounds of the Hefzibah Kibbutz, which is between Beit She'an and Hashita Junction on Rte 669. Travellers should ask for the synagogue – the restaurant is right next to the synagogue. To get there take bus No 412 or 411 from Afula.

**Gan HaShlosa (Sachne) Reserve** שמורת גן השלושה (סחנה) سخنة

Escape the sweaty Galilee heat by stopping for a dip at the attractive **Gan HaShlosa Reserve** (☎ 04-658 6219; adult/child 33/20NIS) with its clear natural pools connected to one another by gentle waterfalls and stone bridges. The water, with a year-round temperature of 28°C (*sachne* is Arabic for warm), comes from a spring. The landscaped lawns make it a very popular place for a barbecue and picnic, but avoid Fridays and Saturdays when you can't see the forest for all the inflatable fluoro pool toys. There is a snack bar, cafés and a changing room within the park.

The entrance fee to the park also covers admission to the **Nir David Museum of Regional & Mediterranean Archaeology** (☎ 04-658 6352; ☺ 9am-2pm Sun-Thu, 10am-2pm Sat), which houses a reconstruction of a small Bronze Age Canaanite temple as well as an interactive display of rare Etruscan artefacts. The museum is a 10-minute walk up the road behind the park.

Gan HaShlosa is about 1km southwest of Beit Alpha and is reached by a signposted side road (Rte 669) off Rte 71 – bus Nos 412 and 411 run down this route. You just have to tell the driver where you want to get off at the reserve or the synagogue.

### GETTING OFF THE GALILEE TRACK – MT GILBOA

If you've had your fill of historic sites and tour buses, get off the beaten track and take the 'scenic route' – Rte 999 (signposted off Rte 669), which, once it climbs Mt Gilboa, turns into Rte 667 – for a relaxing drive across the rugged Mt Gilboa ridge, which was where King Saul and his son Jonathan were slain in battle with the Philistines. It is now more famous for its gorgeous flowers that come out with the winter rains, especially the rare purple Gilboa iris, which carpets the rocky slopes from February to April.

Stop in for an organic meal at the **Herb Farm on Mt Gilboa** (☎ 04-653 1093; Rte 667, Mt Gilboa; meals 40-70NIS; ☒ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) where the Mass family have left the herb export business to concentrate on creating dishes from the best of the Jezreel Valley produce. Herbs still feature (they have over 20 varieties growing in the garden) in dishes such as the farm salad with raspberry vinaigrette and in the wonderful mix of home-made breads. Sit on the deck and try a glass of their house Cabernet Sauvignon, made in the vineyards that run down to the battlefield where in 1260 the Egyptian Mamluks became the first to defeat the Mongols. The restaurant staff can advise on short hikes on the mountain.

### Gan-Garoo Australia Israel Park

Right outside the entrance to Gan HaShlosha is a touch of Australiana in the Galilee. The 4-acre **Gan-Garoo** (☎ 04-648 8060; admission 35NIS; ☒ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat) is an Australian animal park popular with kids, who get to run riot through the kangaroo enclosures. The koalas and Australian birds, such as the dinosaur-like cassowary and the flying fruit bat, hide behind the native plants to escape the hordes. Some youngsters are catching on; we heard a small boy ask his mother whether koalas look this sad in Australia – well, it might have had something to do with the felafel he threw at the animal's head! The large maze is another attraction of the park. There are combination tickets available for visiting both Gan-Garoo and the Gan HaShlosha Reserve.

### Belvoir כוכב הירדן الكوكب

Certainly no Crak des Chevalier, but as the only completely excavated Crusader fortress in Israel, **Belvoir** (☎ 04-658 1766; adult/child 18/8NIS; ☒ 8am-5pm Apr-Sep, 8am-4pm Oct-Mar) is worth exploring if you happen to be passing by. Part of the Kokhav HaYarden Reserve, the ruins are quite impressive but it's the setting that is the main attraction. There's a great view over the Jezreel Valley, Jordan's Gilead Mountains and, on a clear day, even the Sea of Galilee.

The castle was built by the French Knights Hospitallers in 1168 and was held through two attacks by Saladin in 1182-83. However, after being under siege from July

1187 to January 1191, the defenders at Belvoir were forced to surrender. They were permitted to retreat to Tyre unharmed, in acknowledgment of their courage. Saladin also left the castle intact but it was systematically destroyed in the early 13th century by the Sultan of Damascus, who was afraid that the Crusaders would return. They did, in 1241, but they weren't around long enough to do any rebuilding.

At the entrance to the fortress, and in stark contrast to the ruins, stands a sculpture garden by the Israeli artist Igal Tumarkin.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

The Kokhav HaYarden Reserve is 30km south of the Tzemah junction at the southern tip of the Sea of Galilee. Buses running between Tiberias and Beit She'an will drop you off at the signposted intersection of the road that leads up to the castle. From here it is a steep 6km walk or hitch. In the hot summer months it is best to make an early start. Make sure to cover your head and bring plenty of water.

### TIBERIAS טבריה طبريا

☎ 04 / pop 40,100

Tiberias is a town that seems to face in two directions at once. It's one of the four holy cities of Judaism, home to the tombs of venerated sages and ancient ritual baths, and is a popular holiday spot for the ultraorthodox, who combine treatment of the body with purification of the soul. But it's also one of the tackiest resorts in Israel, with a lake-side strip crammed with high-

rise hotels that have hardly seen an update since Ben-Gurion last visited, and a dearth of decent bars or restaurants.

What with the traffic, and the full-on heat in the summer months, it's not surprising that many travellers head straight to the other side of the lake (the Sea of Galilee). But if you arrive late in the day, Tiberias has some good-value accommodation, and it's the easiest place to rent a bike in the area.

### History

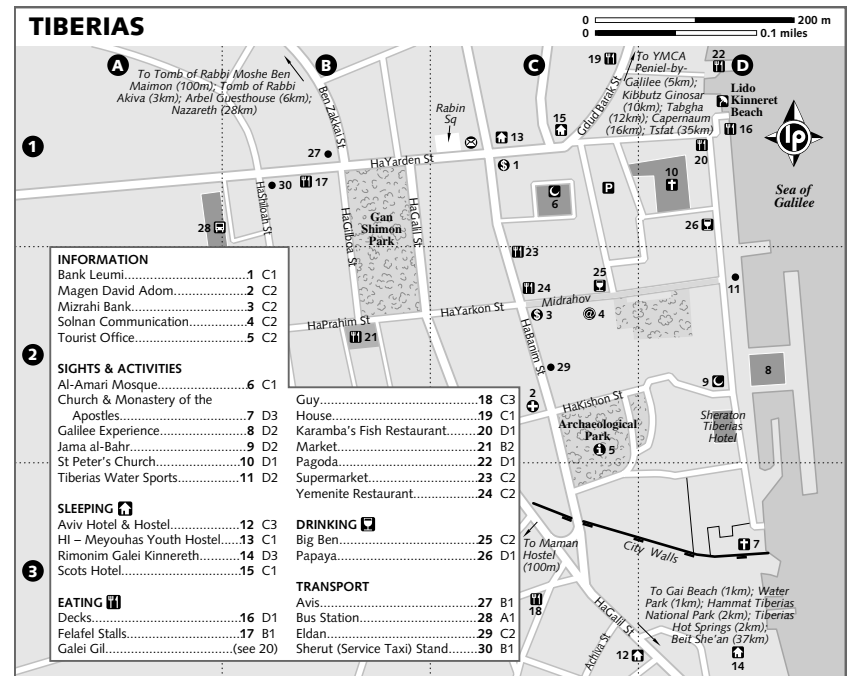
The town owes its origins to a series of hot springs that lured pleasure-seekers of Roman times and attracted the attention of Herod Antipas.

Herod Antipas was almost as egotistical as his father, Herod the Great, founder of Caesarea: the son's town included a grand cardo, a stadium, a gold-roofed palace and a great synagogue.

The population was mixed, but following the Bar Kochba Revolt (AD 132-35) and the resulting exile of the Jews from Jerusalem, Tiberias became the centre of

Jewish life in Israel. The work of the great sages was continued beside the shores of the Sea of Galilee, and academies of rabbinical study were founded. A Tiberian system of punctuation and grammar was applied to the Torah, thus becoming the standard for all Hebrew, and the Mishnah was completed here around the year AD 200 – achievements that elevated Tiberias to the status of one of the country's most holy Jewish cities. The population at this time is estimated to have been around 40,000, making the city larger than the Tiberias of today.

The Crusaders took Tiberias in 1099, built a fortress slightly to the north and generally shifted the focus of the town away from its original Roman-Byzantine centre. However, the new fortifications proved inadequate and failed to keep out Saladin when he arrived at the head of an army in 1187. The loss of Tiberias to the Muslims sparked the battle at the Horns of Hittin, which proved to be another inglorious defeat for the Crusaders, heralding the demise of the Latin kingdom. Tiberias went into



decline, particularly after being seriously damaged by the many battles fought there and severely rattled by occasional earthquakes.

Early in the 16th century, the Ottoman Turks gained possession of the Holy Land and in 1562 Süleyman the Magnificent granted the rights to farm the taxes of Tiberias to a Jew, Don Joseph Nussi. Aided by his mother-in-law, Donna Grazie, he attempted with some degree of success to revive the town as a Jewish enclave. The next player was an Arab sheikh named Daher al-Omar who, in the 18th century, established an independent fiefdom in the Galilee, with Tiberias as its capital. He was assassinated in 1775. The town fared little better, with a great part of it demolished by an earthquake in 1837.

Many Jews of the First Aliyah (late 19th century) chose to settle in Tiberias and more followed with the expansion of the Zionist movement. By 1947 the population of Tiberias was again predominantly Jewish. The following year the Arabs and Jews went to war over the town. The defeated Arabs fled and Tiberias was left wholly Jewish.

### Orientation

Most visitors arrive at the bus station on the eastern end of HaYarden St. Between the station and the lake, intersecting with HaYarden and running parallel to the shore, are the two main streets of HaGalil and HaBanim. On or around these two are the shops, banks, post office and tourist office, as well as many of the town's hostels and hotels. Restaurants, cafés and the town's nightlife are centred on the *midrahov* (pedestrian mall), one block south of HaYarden, which leads to the lake-shore promenade and its string of eateries.

### Information

#### EMERGENCY

**Magen David Adom** (☎ 679 0111; cnr HaBanim & HaKishon Sts) This clinic is across from the Jordan River Hotel.

**Police** (☎ 679 2444)

#### INTERNET ACCESS

**Solnan Communication** (☎ 672 6470; 3 Midrahov; per hr 20NIS; ☎ 8am-11pm) Internet café and international phone office.

### MONEY

**Bank Leumi** (cnr HaBanim and HaYarden Sts) Charges 4% commission.

**Exchange Office** (HaBanim St; ☎ 10am-7pm) No-commission moneychanger.

**Mizrahi Bank** (cnr HaBanim St and the Midrahov) Charges 4% commission. The post office changes travellers cheques.

### POST

**Post Office** (cnr HaYarden & HaBanim Sts; ☎ 7am-6pm Sun-Thu, 7am-noon Fri)

### TOURIST INFORMATION

**Tourist office** (☎ 672 5666; 9 HaBanim St; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Sun-Thu, 9am-1pm Fri) Located in the 'archaeological park', this office has free maps of Tiberias, Nazareth & the Galilee area. A free city walking tour departs from the Sheraton Tiberias Hotel on Saturdays at 10.30am.

### Sights & Activities

#### AL-AMARI & JAMA AL-BAHR MOSQUES

As out of place as a pin-stripe-suited gent at a teenage rave, the dignified little Al-Amari Mosque on HaBanim St looks threatened and lost squeezed between some gaudy shops and a brusque concrete supermarket. Built by Daher al-Omar in the mid-18th century, the mosque is one of the very few buildings in Tiberias that predates 1948. It is generally held that its construction was partly paid for by the town's Jewish community, presumably grateful to the sheikh for being permitted to return. On the waterfront, Jama al-Bahr (1880) was built with a special entrance for those arriving by boat. Both stand forlornly abandoned, and no-one appears to have any plans to utilise their potential.

#### GALILEE EXPERIENCE

Jesus, Napoleon and the Israeli General Moshe Dayan are all stars of the **Galilee Experience** (☎ 672 3620; fax 672 3195; adult/child US\$6/5; ☎ 8am-10pm Sun-Thu, 9am-4pm Fri), an hourly film in twelve languages that recounts the historical, political and geographical story of the Galilee. The 'state-of-the-art slide show' is more high-school projector job than Hollywood cineplex but it gets a constant stream of visitors to the marina complex, which also includes an internet café (10NIS for 30 minutes) and a souvenir shop.

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### ST PETER'S CHURCH

Hidden along the northern promenade, it is worth looking out for the lovely **St Peter's** (☎ mass 6pm Mon-Sat, 8.30pm Sun) Franciscan church built by 12th-century Crusaders. The Muslims converted it into a mosque, and you can make out an area of uneven stone on the southern wall filling in the hole where a mihrab (prayer niche indicating the direction of Mecca) was carved. Later, the Turks used the building as a caravanserai before it was rebuilt as a church in 1870. Its two features are the boat-shaped nave, a nod to St Peter's piscatorial profession, and the courtyard built by the Polish soldiers stationed here during WWII.

### CHURCH & MONASTERY OF THE APOSTLES

By the water's edge, south of the Radisson Moriah Plaza Hotel, this Greek Orthodox complex is on the site of a Byzantine monastery that was destroyed by the Persians in the 7th century. Since then the complex has been rebuilt and destroyed numerous times; the buildings standing today date from the late 19th century but have been restored as recently as 1975.

Three monks live here and they'll usually admit visitors who ring the bell. There are four chapels beyond the pleasant, walled courtyard. One chapel is dedicated to St Peter, one to the disciples, and one to Mary Magdalene; the one in the ancient round tower is dedicated to St Nicholas.

### HAMMAT TIBERIAS

Israel's spa craze actually has a 2000-year-old history, which started at the hot springs of Hammat Tiberias when, during Roman times, they were the focus, if not the *raison d'être*, of a community of 40,000 fervent bathers. The fame of Hammat Tiberias was such that in AD 110 the Emperor Trajan had a coin struck dedicated to the springs – with the image of Hygeia, the goddess of health, shown sitting on a rock, enjoying the water. The springs were also mentioned by Al-Idrisi, an Arab writer who lived during the Crusades, and were recommended by the Jewish sage Rambam to his patients.

Check out the history of the site at the **Hammat Tiberias National Park** (☎ 672 5287;

adult/child 12/6NIS; ☎ 8am-5pm Sun-Thu & 8am-4pm Fri), which features a small museum in what was originally part of a Turkish bathhouse. The main highlight is a synagogue dating from the 3rd to 5th centuries AD, which has a beautiful zodiac mosaic floor. Much has been made of the mosaic's curious mix of Jewish and pagan symbols, but somehow this seems quite apt in Tiberias, a town that, historically, seems to have been able to reconcile the spiritual with the more earthly.

Hammat Tiberias is 2km north of town. It's a 25-minute walk or you can try waiting for the infrequent bus No 2 or 5.

### TIBERIAS HOT SPRINGS

The old traditions of relaxation and rejuvenation at Hammat Tiberias are maintained across the road by **Tiberias Hot Springs** (☎ 672 8500; Elizer Kaplan Blvd; admission 60NIS; ☎ 8am-8pm Sun, Mon & Wed, 8am-11pm Tue & Thu, 8.30am-8pm Sat). It has both a health centre for people with serious skin conditions and a modern resort centre on the shore of the lake, which is great for enjoying a good soak in one of the mineral baths. Treatments such as Swedish massage and mud wraps are also available.

### TOMB

As the home of the Sanhedrin (Jewish supreme court) during the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD, Tiberias is one of the most important cities in Judaism. The town is often filled with religious Jews paying respect to the number of great *tzadiks* (influential scholars) buried in the area, particularly on the anniversary of their deaths. The evocative atmosphere of dripping candles and tears could be compared to the veneration of saints within Judaism. To reach the tombs, walk two blocks west along HaYarden St before turning right into Ben Zakkai. Look for the red steel monument.

### Tomb of Rabbi Moshe Ben Maimon

The **tomb of Rabbi Moshe Ben Maimon** (Ben Zakkai St) is the final resting place of the Spanish physician, also known as Maimonides or Rambam, who worked in the court of the Muslim ruler Saladin. This revered rabbi, who died in 1204, was one of 12th-century Egypt's most highly regarded sages. Legend has it that before his death in Cairo, he instructed followers to load his remains onto a camel and bury him wherever the camel

expired. The camel was apparently drawn to Tiberias.

Next to Rabbi Moshe Ben Maimon's tomb lies Rabbi Yohanan Ben Zakkai, the Holy Land's most eminent sage at the time of the Roman destruction of Jerusalem. Ben Zakkai is said to have faked his own death, escaping the city in a coffin and jumping out of the casket in front of the Roman general Vespasian, who he prophesied would become the new Caesar. When the prophecy came true, Ben Zakkai was granted one wish by the new leader; a Jewish learning centre for him and for students.

Rabbi Eliezer the Great, a prominent 2nd-century scholar; Rav Ammi and Rav Assi, who lived in the 3rd century, and Rabbi Isaiah Horowitz, who died around 1630, are also buried in the complex.

#### Tomb of Rabbi Meir Ba'al Hanes

Up the hill from the Hammat Tiberias is one of Judaism's holiest sites, the **tomb of Meir Ba'al Hanes** (☎ 7am-8pm Sun-Thu, 7am-3pm Fri), the 2nd-century rabbi who helped to compile the Mishnah.

The tomb is marked by two synagogues: Sephardic, the one on the left with the white dome; and Ashkenazi, with the blue dome. In the courtyard of the Sephardic synagogue is a pillar topped by a large bowl, and four days before the Lag B'Omer holiday a bonfire is lit here on the Pesah Sheni (second Passover). Crowds of religious Jews visit throughout the year to pray and it is a belief that God will answer the prayers of pilgrims with personal problems.

#### Tomb of Rabbi Akiva

A white dome covers the cave-tomb of Rabbi Akiva. Born in AD 50, he was one of the great Jewish scholars, and was killed by the Romans for his role in the Bar Kochba Revolt (AD 132-35). Take bus No 4 from Ben Zakkai St to get to the tomb.

#### BEACHES

Water pollution, lack of water...there's a never-ending list of problems facing the Sea of Galilee, but what really seems to aggravate both locals and travellers the most is the illegal privatisation of the beaches. Some stretches of shoreline are now completely fenced off, with owners charging up to 120NIS for a bit of fun in the sun.

Most of the beaches immediately around Tiberias are owned by hotels, which do at least provide facilities such as changing rooms and showers. For a real splash, spend the day at the **Gai Beach Water Park** (☎ 670 0713; admission 60NIS; ☎ 9.30am-5pm April-Oct), which has giant water slides, including the terrifying kamikaze slide (on a 70° angle), and wave-machine-rippled pools. The water park is 1km south of the town centre. Walk or take bus No 5-Aleph (A) from the bus station.

If you don't like the idea of paying for access to the lake, either head for the harbour wall to the south of the Radisson Moriah Plaza Hotel, or leave Tiberias altogether and walk or take a bus further south, beyond the hot springs, and stop when you see an appealing site. Bus No 5-Aleph (A) heads south.

#### Tours

**Tiberias Excavations** (☎ 02 582 5548; www.tiberiasexcavation.com) is a week-long program run by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem assisting archaeologists on digs just south of Tiberias. Volunteers pay US\$350/450 per single/double for room and board or US\$100 to camp, which includes lectures and field trips.

#### Festivals & Events

**Jacob's Ladder Festival** (www.jfestival.com; adult/child 215/150NIS) is held over two days in May (Spring Festival) and two days in December (Winter Weekend). The festival has been running for over 30 years and features everything from bluegrass to Irish jigs, blues and country rock. It's an intimate affair currently held at Kibbutz Ginosour, about 10km north of Tiberias.

#### Sleeping

Be aware that prices are subject to dramatic changes during the summer high season and Jewish holidays.

#### BUDGET

There is a lot of budget accommodation in Tiberias but sadly the hostels are all on the tired side, with many looking like they haven't seen a backpack since the late '90s. Most of the cheap hotels are clustered around the southern end of town but are within walking distance of the bus station.

**Aviv Hotel & Hostel** (☎ 672 3510; www.aviv-hotel.co.il in Hebrew; 66 HaGalil St; dm/s/d 50/120/170NIS; ☎ ☎)

Bikes for hire, DVDs to watch, cable TV, well-equipped kitchen, organised tours – you say the word and the owner will throw in his first-born if he thinks you might be interested in a room at this well-located hostel. It's amazing how many bunks they manage to squeeze into the tiny dorm rooms, which all have private bathroom and balcony. The double rooms vary a lot but many have had a new lick of paint and are excellent value. The Aviv holiday flats in the adjacent building (to the west) feature kitchenettes and some have Jacuzzi tubs.

**Maman Hostel** (☎ 679 2986; fax 672 6616; Ha'Atzmaut St; dm/s/d 50/140/200NIS; ☎ ☎) When it's sweat city in Tiberias, the Maman Hostel pool is a great place to cool off. The communal areas – such as the garden and terrace around the back – are the highlights of this quiet little place, which is well maintained despite the drop in tourist numbers over the years. Dorms are airy and the rooms uninspiring but clean. There is no curfew as guests are given keys.

**HI – Meyouhas Youth Hostel** (☎ 672 1775; fax 672 0372; 2 HaYarden St; dm/s/d 75/160/250NIS) Once the prestigious Hotel Tiberias (built 1862), this landmark building made of local black basalt has been converted into an efficiently run and ever so slightly atmospheric youth hostel. The rooms are lacklustre, but very clean and have small touches such as reading lamps. For an uninterrupted night's sleep avoid the rooms at the back, which get a lot of traffic noise. The huge communal balconies have views of the lake, only slightly diminished by the prison-like bars.

**YMCA Peniel-by-Galilee** (☎ 672 0685; www.ymca-galilee.co.il; s/d 200/290NIS; ☎ ☎) Using the word paradise to describe a YMCA might be overdoing it, but this hostel really is a hidden treasure. About 5km north of Tiberias, it was built as a holiday home for Dr Archibald Hart, who founded the Jerusalem YMCA in the 1920s. Today it's still the best piece of real estate in town, sitting on a secluded section of shoreline with a clean pebbly beach, and with a natural pool fed by a warm spring. It's impossible to hide from the great views that can be found in the attractive upper dining room or, even more inviting, in the spacious lower deck or landscaped gardens. The 12 rooms are forgivably simple, but some have kitchenettes, making this a perfect place to stop for a couple of days.

#### MIDRANGE

Tiberias has a tonne of hotels in the budget and top-end categories but almost nothing to recommend in between. Most of the double rooms in the budget listing are much better value than anything 'midrange' in town.

**Arbel Guesthouse** (☎ 679 4919; www.4shavit.com; Arbel Village; s/d US\$47/62; ☎ ☎) A lovely alternative to the brick monstrosities in town, this B&B has a tranquil garden setting in the small village of Arbel, north of Tiberias. It's only ten minutes' drive but the hustle of central Tiberias feels miles away when you are relaxing in the lush garden or chilling out with a book on the deck. These five units run by the Shavit family are eclectically decorated and all have kitchenettes and cable TV. One unit is wheelchair friendly. Breakfast is US\$8 and the dining room turns into a popular local restaurant at night. Call from town for a free pick-up.

#### TOP END

**Gai Beach** (☎ 670 0700; www.gaibeachhotel.com; Rte 90; s/d with breakfast US\$90/180; ☎ ☎ ☎) If you've got children in tow, Gai Beach is undoubtedly the most family-friendly choice in Tiberias. The Club Med-style atmosphere is replete with kids clubs, free entertainment and overloaded buffet meals. Guests don't pay to enter the attached Gai Beach Water Park, and parents looking for a bit of quiet can retreat to the Romanesque spa. With so many rooms – all of them on the rather small side – on each floor of the hotel expect slamming doors and noisy corridors. The hotel is about 1km south of town.

**Scots Hotel** (☎ 671 0710; www.scotshotels.co.il; 1 Gdud Barak St; s/d/tr with breakfast US\$135/170/240; ☎ ☎ ☎) The stand-out chic of the beautifully restored Scots Hotel leaves most other offerings for dead. After stomping around the sites, escape to the landscaped gardens, breezy courtyards and dazzling pool with lake views. The interior is lovely, and in addition to the well-appointed hotel rooms there are 19 'antique' rooms in the original 1890s former hospital complex. With exposed basalt stone walls, high ceilings and sumptuous decoration; they are an effortless mix of antique furnishings and modern luxuries such as plasma TVs and wi-fi. Service is smart and considerate, with a lot of local historical knowledge.

**Rimonim Galei Kinnereth** (☎ 672 8888; www.rimonim.com; 1 Eliezer Kaplan St; half-board s/d US\$306/366;



☎ ☎) Mentioned in books by Leon Uris, James D McDonald and Taylor Caldwell, the doyenne of the Tiberias hotel scene has recently been revamped. The internal renovations are sympathetic to the hotel's unique history and charm – Ben-Gurion was a favourite guest during the 1950s – but some things, such as the rather standard room décor, have been lost to the national Rimonic chain. On the upside, not only does the hotel sit in a great spot on the lake but it has opened a fabulous spa with a gazebo-enclosed thermal mineral water pool and a range of treatments available.

## Eating

**Yemenite Restaurant** (Midrahov; mains 25NIS; ☎ lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Sat-Thu) This lively late-night fast-food joint is the place to pull up a plastic chair for your weekly quota of grease. For around 20NIS you can order a *malawach*, a large flaky-pastry pancake filled with either meat, mushrooms, egg or honey – one makes a substantial meal.

**Guy** (☎ 672 3036; 63 HaGalil St; mains 50-80NIS; ☎ dinner Sun-Thu, lunch Sun-Fri) There's no view but at least it's an escape from the groups of package tourists that tend to take over the waterfront restaurants. Family-run Guy is popular with locals who dig into a menu that is supposedly Moroccan-inspired, but actually runs the gamut from chopped liver to Iraqi *kibbeh* (burghul – cracked wheat). It's obvious a lot of love goes into the house speciality, a delicious array of stuffed vegetables.

**Torrance Restaurant** (☎ 671 0710; Scots Hotel, 1 Gdud Barak St; 3 courses 150NIS; ☎ dinner) If you're not staying at the Scots Hotel then a meal at the Torrance Restaurant – preferably on the veranda to take in the spectacular views – should be on the list. The menu changes daily and the dishes are filled with fresh Galilee produce such as the ubiquitous St Peter's fish, herbs from the kitchen garden and local cheeses. The impressive cellar has a selection of boutique Galilee wines. The food is pretty good, but it's the setting, in the original Scots Hospital building, and the chance to have a sticky beak around the rest of the property that is the real attraction.

**Pagoda** (☎ 672 5513; Gdud Barak; mains 60-90NIS; ☎ lunch & dinner Sun-Thu) Taking the road north out of town it's hard to miss the Pagoda restaurant, so incongruous is the faux-Chinese temple and its glitzy red-and-gold interior,

located right on the Sea of Galilee. If you keep kosher, the Chinese-Thai dishes are a step above what usually passes for Asian food elsewhere in the country. If you don't, be prepared for a very Israelised version of things with an unadventurous menu featuring sweet and sour chicken, *Pad Thai* and sushi. Definitely reserve a table in advance.

**House** (☎ 672 5515; Gdud Barak; mains 60-90NIS; ☎ dinner Fri, lunch Sat) Author John Le Carré broke the Sabbath by dining across the road from the Pagoda at the House. The two restaurants are essentially the same but the House is open on Friday nights and Saturday lunch – *sans* shellfish and pork of course.

**Decks** (☎ 672 1538; Lido Kinneret Beach; mains 80-150NIS; ☎ lunch Sun-Fri, dinner Sat-Thu) We recommend a 24-hour crash diet before surrendering to the charcoal grill at this legendary steakhouse, where it really is possible to have five different animals on the table at one time. House favourites are the tender pieces of baby lamb, goose liver and filet mignon, slowly roasted on the hickory grill and served with locally grown vegetables. Deserts such as the crepe flambé with apple and cinnamon are truly gluttonous but worth saving room for.

The predictable promenade restaurants such as **Galei Gil** (☎ 672 0699; mains 70NIS; ☎ lunch Sun-Fri, dinner Sat-Thu) and **Karamba's Fish Restaurant** (☎ 672 4505; mains 70NIS; ☎ lunch Sun-Fri, dinner Sat-Thu) make an absolute killing with their overpriced fish and meat grills, but there's nothing unpleasant about a table by the water and a taste of the Sea of Galilee speciality – St Peter's fish. It's a bony little fish but has mild white flesh that even fish-haters seem to like, and is served grilled or fried with a pile of chips and salad.

The small **market** (☎ Sun-Fri), off HaYarkon St south of Gan Shimon Park, sells a range of fruits and vegetables. There's also the convenient Hyper Neto supermarket behind Al-Amari Mosque. A lengthy parade of **felafel stalls** (HaYarden St; ☎ 9am-7pm Sun-Thu, 9am-2pm Fri) runs towards the bus station.

The cheapest sit-down dining options are cafés at the top end of the midrahov, which do standards like kebab or schnitzel with salad and chips.

## Drinking & Entertainment

**Big Ben** (Midrahov; ☎ noon-late) Whatever the season this old-timer continues to attract

tourists and locals with its easy-going sports-bar feel. A mix of young and old enjoy cold beers and greasy bar snacks, international football highlights on the big screen and late-night action under the trees.

**Papaya** (☎ 054 124 1200; Promenade; ☎ 5pm-late) More Thai Island than Tiberias, this slick little beach bar reckons it has the best cocktails in town. Weekly theme nights such as karaoke and salsa get the tiny dance floor shaking, but the best time of day is dusk when you can actually catch not only the bartender's attention, but the great sunset views over the lake.

From the Lido Kinneret Beach, **disco cruises** (☎ 672 1538; 25NIS), hugely popular with Israeli teens, depart according to demand throughout the year.

## Getting There & Away BUS

**Egged buses** (☎ 672 9222) depart for Tel Aviv (42NIS, 2½ hours, hourly) and Jerusalem (42NIS, three hours, every two hours) from the central bus station. There are also hourly (except Saturday) services to Haifa (28NIS, 1½ hours), Tsfat (20NIS, one hour), Kiryat Shmona (25NIS, 1½ hours), Beit She'an (21.50NIS, 40 minutes), and Afula (21.50NIS, 40 minutes) from where you can connect to Nazareth.

## CAR

**Avis** (☎ 672 2766; HaYarden St)  
**Eldan** (☎ 679 1822; HaBanim St)

## SHERUT (SERVICE TAXI)

Outside the bus station and across the street, sheruts leave throughout the day, mostly to Tel Aviv (35NIS, two hours) and occasionally Haifa (20NIS, one hour). Sheruts also line up outside the Mizrahi Bank on HaBanim St.

## Getting Around BICYCLE

As long as you can deal with the heat, getting around Tiberias and the lake by bicycle is ideal. The road by the lake shore is relatively hill-free and many of the sites are close together. **Aviv Hotel & Hostel** (☎ 672 3510) rents top-quality bikes from 40NIS per day. Most cyclists do the lake circuit, which can be done in four or five steady hours. Start early (around 7am) to beat the heat and take plenty of water because there is little shade along the road.

## BOAT

**Tiberias Water Sports** (☎ 052 269 2664) at the bottom of the midrahov rents out boats for 100NIS for 30 minutes.

## SEA OF GALILEE

بحيرة طبريا (كينرت) נגרת

'The blue eye of this corner of our country...Lake Kinneret is no ordinary landscape or even a corner of nature. It is the site of a people's destiny. Here, our past winks its thousand eyes and rocks us in its thousand lips.'

(Rahel, *On the Shores of Lake Kinneret*)

If you really want to explore the natural beauty and incredible history of this region, leave the lights of Tiberias behind and take to the Sea of Galilee (Kinneret in Hebrew). Around 21km long and 55km in circumference, the Kinneret is fed by the Jordan River and is the main source of Israel's water supply. For Christian visitors, it is better known for its biblical significance – some of the most important stories in Christianity took place in the hills of the northern coast. As the heart of kibbutz country the shore is dotted with great places to relax – beaches, camping grounds, walking tracks and water sports. The Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (SPNI) is currently developing a hiking trail along the Kinneret's shores but so far only a small portion is open to the public. Aside from walking on water, the best way around is by hired bike (the best place to hire bikes is in Tiberias – such as at the Aviv Hostel).

## Information

**Jordan Valley Information Centre** (Map p225; ☎ 04-675 2727; ☎ 8.30am-4pm Mon-Thu, 8.30am-2pm Fri & Sat) is at the shopping centre in Tzemah

## WALKING ON WATER *Michael Kohn*

A recent news report...Jesus may not have walked on water as the Bible claims but rather skated on ice formed through a freak cold spell, a scientific study has suggested. Rare atmospheric and water conditions could have caused ice to form on the freshwater Sea of Galilee.

Junction, and provides free maps and regional information.

## Tours

**ATV Trips** (☎ 052 306 0912; www.24x4.com in Hebrew) Runs professional quad-biking trips through the Galilee. It's based close to Kfar Tavor. Call for prices.

**Vered Hagalil Guest Farm** (Map p225; ☎ 04-693 5785; www.veredhagalil.com; Rte 90) Offers leisurely horse-riding tours along the shore of the Kinneret and into the Galilee hills, from one hour (100NIS) to three days. We recommend the full-moon rides, which include complimentary wine (300NIS). Book ahead.

## Northwestern Shore

Migdal, 6km north of Tiberias, was the birthplace of Mary Magdalene. This is commemorated with a tiny white-domed shrine, overgrown with vegetation, near Restal Beach. Following the road by the lake, 1km north, a side road leads eastwards to Minya, the most ancient Muslim prayer site in Israel. Here you'll find the ruins of a 7th-century palace with the remnants of a mosaic floor and, on the southeastern side, a mosque with its tell tale *mihrab* oriented towards Mecca.

On Kibbutz Ginosar is the **Yigal Allon Centre** (Map p225; ☎ 04-672 7700; www.jesusboat.com; adult/child 20/15NIS; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Sat-Thu, 8.30am-1pm Fri), a museum devoted to the theme 'Man in the Galilee'. Its most celebrated exhibit is the skeletal remains of an 8.2m fishing vessel dating back to the time of Christ's ministry. Discovered by local fishermen in 1986, thanks to a severe drop in the lake's water level, the hard-packed mud of the lake bed had almost perfectly preserved the boat by denying oxygen to the otherwise wood-devouring bacteria. It then spent nine and a half years soaking in a tub of preservative solution before being revealed to the world by shrewd tourist-operators as 'the Jesus boat'.

**Tabgha** טבחה **طبخة**  
Tabgha is generally considered to be the most beautiful and serene of the Christian holy places, making a visit special even if you don't have any personal religious interest.

Tabgha (an Arabic translation of the Greek *hepta pega*, meaning 'seven springs') is associated with three salient episodes from the New Testament. Modest dress (no

shorts or sleeveless tops) is required when visiting the following sites. An attractive walkway has been built along the road between Tabgha and Capernaum.

## MOUNT OF BEATITUDES

Standing in the gardens of the **Church of the Beatitudes** (Map p225; admission per car 5NIS; ☎ 8am-11.40am & 2.30-4.40pm) it's hard to imagine whether the disciples of Jesus were more inspired by his Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) or the beauty of this tranquil spot.

Recorded in the New Testament, the most well-known portion of the Sermon on the Mount is the Beatitudes, the opening 'Blessed are...' verses. The Sermon also contains the Lord's Prayer and oft-quoted lines such as 'salt of the earth', 'light of the world', and 'judge not, lest ye be judged'.

The eight Beatitudes of Jesus (Matthew 5:3-10) are commemorated in stained glass around the dome of this octagonal-shaped Roman Catholic church, which dates from 1937 but was built on the site of earlier churches. Inside the church – which is owned by the Franciscans – the seven virtues (justice, charity, prudence, faith, fortitude, hope and temperance) are also represented by symbols around the altar. From the gallery you have some of the best views of the lake, particularly towards Tiberias to the south, and towards Capernaum to the east, with the red domes of the Greek Orthodox monastery beyond.

## CHURCH OF THE MULTIPLICATION OF THE LOAVES & FISHES

The altar of the **Church of the Multiplication of the Loaves & Fishes** (Map p225; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun), also called the Heptagon, is thought to include the rock where Jesus laid the five loaves and two fishes that multiplied to feed 5000 faithful listeners (Mark 6:30-44).

The church is constructed on the site of a 5th-century Byzantine church and in 1932 excavations uncovered some beautiful mosaic floors. They are incredibly well preserved and include depictions of a variety of flora and fauna, as well as the 'loaves and fishes' mosaic.

This complex belongs to the German Benedictine Order and includes an adjacent monastery and pilgrims hospice.

## CHURCH OF THE PRIMACY OF ST PETER

A fragrant garden leads the way down to the water's edge and the wonderfully serene **Church of the Primacy of St Peter** (Map p225; ☎ 8am-4.50pm). Built by Franciscans in 1933, the simple church, with its lovely stained glass, was constructed here to commemorate the spot where the resurrected Jesus conferred the church leadership on Peter. The church covers a flat rock (which can be seen in front of the altar) known to Byzantine pilgrims as *Mensa Christi* (Christ's Table), off which it is believed Jesus and his disciples breakfasted on fish.

Outside the church, by the water, are a few steps cut out of the rock. Some say that this was where Jesus stood when the disciples saw him; however, it's possible they were cut in the 2nd or 3rd century, when this area was quarried for limestone.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus Nos 459, 841 and 963 leave from Tiberias bus station and go northwards, past Migdal, Minya and the Tabgha turn-off. Just before the bus stop at the Tabgha turn-off, as you climb a steep slope, the road passes an electric power plant on the right. When you see this, remind the driver that you want to get off at the Tabgha turn-off.

From the bus stop at the turn-off, follow the side road as it bends to the left; the Church of the Multiplication is a few minutes' walk. Continuing along the road, above the rest-stop is a rough path that leads up the slope to the Church of the Beatitudes. Or, you can stay on the bus until the stop after the Tabgha turn-off; the road veers away from the lake and zigzags up the hill, and the next stop is beside a turn-off marked by an orange sign reading 'Hospice of the Beatitudes'. Follow this side road to reach the church. From here you can walk down the slope to reach the Church of the Primacy.

## Korazim כורזים

Situated high above a basalt plain, overlooking the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River are the ruins of ancient **Korazim** (☎ 04-693 4982; adult/child 18/8NIS; ☎ 8am-5pm summer, 8am-4pm winter). There was a Jewish town here in the 1st century and, along with Capernaum and Bethsaida, it is believed its people were condemned by Jesus for their lack of faith (Matthew 11:20-24).

There has been some restoration, and the remains give an idea of the layout of a small town of that time. The feature of the ruins is a black basalt synagogue of the 3rd to 4th century, similar in style to the limestone one

## APOSTLE LAND

Despite a tough few years for tourism in Israel and the Palestinian Territories, Christian pilgrims with a dream of walking in the footsteps of Jesus continue to arrive by the busload in the Galilee. Ever since Israel's former prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu cultivated ties with US Evangelicals in the late '90s, the American Christian right – famous for its outspoken broadcasters such as Pat Robertson – have been among the strongest supporters of Israel.

Now the Israeli government wants to build a US\$48 million Holy Land Christian theme park on the northern shores of the Sea of Galilee, a hop and a skip from Capernaum and the Mount of Beatitudes. The sprawling Holy Land Centre, to be built on about 50 hectares that the Israeli government is reportedly offering cost-free, will feature an outdoor amphitheatre overlooking the Jordan River, a Holy Land exhibition and a multimedia area with online broadcasting to link pilgrims with the rest of their congregations back home. This is all to be set amid a nature park filled with the plants and trees mentioned in the New Testament.

While locals are welcoming the amount of new jobs the projected 1 million extra tourists a year will bring, some people fear Evangelical Christians are more interested in converting Jewish Israelis than supporting Israel. Knesset member Yossi Sarid told the Guardian newspaper, 'There is something sinister about their embrace'.

But it's not all plain sailing on that lake. When, the day after former prime minister Ariel Sharon's stroke, Pat Robertson made the flippant remark that Sharon was being punished for 'dividing God's land', a reference to the 2005 pullout from the Gaza Strip and four West Bank settlements, the Israeli government pulled straight out of the Holy Land Centre deal. Israel tourism officials confirm the theme park is still a probability, going ahead once they secure a 'real friend of Israel'.

at Capernaum. The synagogue is adorned with ornate carvings of plants, people crushing grapes with their feet, and animals: lions, an eagle, and a bird pecking at a bunch of grapes. Look out for the basalt 'armchair' used during the reading of the Torah.

Beyond Korazim to the east, the ground is covered with large basalt rocks. Many of these are dolmens – large blocks of broad and flat stone placed on other stones and used as burial chambers between 6000 and 4000 BC.

You can either backtrack from here to Tabgha or continue east along the minor road (No 8277) for a further couple of kilometres to a junction, the southern fork of which leads back to the road encircling the lake.

### Capernaum כפר נחום كفار ناحوم

According to Christian belief, the village of Capernaum (Kfar Nahum; admission 3NIS; ☎ 8am-4.40pm) was the home base of Jesus during the most influential period of his Galilean ministry (Matthew 4:12-17, 9:1; Mark 2:1); and is where he preached at the synagogue (Mark 1:21), healed the sick, including Peter's stepmother (Mark 1:29-31), the leper (Luke 5:12-16) and the centurion's servant (Luke 7:1-10); and recruited his first disciples – Peter, Andrew, James and John, who were local fishermen, and Matthew the tax collector.

According to both rabbinical texts and archaeological discoveries, there seems to have been a strong Christian presence here in the 2nd century. By the 4th century the town had expanded to cover the surrounding hills. However, after the Arab conquest sometime around AD 700, the town was destroyed and never again inhabited.

In 1894, the Franciscans purchased the site and set about restoring the ancient synagogue and church, which are now the major attractions of a well-labelled museum.

### SYNAGOGUE

Although the specific date of construction is unknown, it's agreed by archaeologists that this particular house of worship was built at least a century after the Crucifixion took place. The reconstructed building consists of an annexe and a main prayer hall with an impressive Roman façade and a column with a Greek inscription. The entrance to the

annexe, standing to the east of the hall, has a nicely carved lintel, with an eagle and palm tree design. Other carvings adorning various parts of the synagogue include the Star of David, a palm (once the symbol of Israel), a menorah, a wagon that may represent the ancient Holy Ark that carried the Torah, an urn, and a half-horse, half-fish figure.

Note that this is not the synagogue Christians believe was frequented by Jesus.

### ST PETER'S HOUSE

The ruins of a church mark what is believed to have been St Peter's home where Jesus stayed. A mosaic floor decorates the room believed to have been host to Christ. The beginnings of the church, built around the mosaic room, have been traced to the 4th century.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

From the Church of the Beatitudes you have a pleasant walk across the fields and along a newly constructed lake-side promenade to Capernaum. Just follow the various tracks down the hill and aim for the red domes of the nearby Greek Orthodox monastery. To reach the museum, you should walk down the signposted side road; it's at the end.

### Northeastern Shore

As you cross the Arik Bridge and continue towards the eastern shore, the main road verges away from the Kinneret and runs around the edge of the Bethsaida Valley. There are several hiking paths here; find entrances between the Bethsaida and Ma'ale Gamla Junctions. Great on a hot day is the three-hour 'Zaki' hike – a circuit from the main road through the lagoons down to the water and back. Make sure you wear sandals.

**Kursi National Park** (☎ 04-673 1983; adult/child 12/6NIS; ☎ 8am-5pm), designated by the Jewish Talmud as a site for idol worship, was also the place where it is believed Jesus cast a contingent of demon spirits into a herd of swine (Mark 5:1-13). The beautiful, recently excavated ruins feature an impressive 5th-century Byzantine-era monastery.

There are plenty of scenic swimming spots along the eastern shore, but if you are after something more action-packed then visit the popular **Luna Gal Waterpark** (Map p225; ☎ 04-667 8000; www.luna-gal.co.il in Hebrew; adult/child 100/80NIS; ☎ 10am-5pm April-Oct), allegedly the best in the

country, with zillions of slides and great fun for splashing kids (big and small).

About 8km south is **Kibbutz Ein Gev** (Map p225; www.eingev.com), established in 1937 by German and Czech pioneers as the first permanent Jewish settlement on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Prior to 1967 this outpost could only be safely visited by boat as the surrounding area was Syrian. As a frontier post (the kibbutz was stockaded like a fortress), security concerns ruled out agriculture as a means of existence so the kibbutz developed a fishing industry. One of Ein Gev's major attractions today is its restaurant (see Eating, p259), well supplied by the kibbutz fish farm. There is a regular **train tour** (16NIS; ☎ 12.30 & 2.30pm Sun-Thu, noon-5pm on the hr Fri, noon-7pm on the hr Sat) showing the working kibbutz, including vineyards, banana and date plantations and the fish farm.

More agricultural action can be found at **Kibbutz Ha'on** (Map p225; ☎ 04-665 6557; www.haon.co.il), which has an **ostrich farm** (adult/child 18/9NIS; ☎ 9am-3pm) with activities for kids, and an area for paintball.

### Hamat Gader המת גדר حمامة

One of the highlights for many visitors to the Galilee, and a regular attraction for locals, **Hamat Gader** (Map p225; ☎ 04-665 9999; www.hamat-gader.com; admission 69NIS Sun-Thu, 79NIS Fri & Sat; ☎ 7am-4pm Sun-Tue, 7am-10pm Wed-Fri, 7am-9pm Sat), is a hot springs resort and animal park occupying the bottom of a deep valley split by the Jordanian border. Retirees in beach gear and stressed-out parents relax in the hot pools with massage jets and waterfalls, while the kid-friendly cold 'splash' pool features slides and fountains. Peace and quiet is on offer for a price – entrance to the spa village, which has a beautiful private pool, saunas and a variety of treatments, costs 190NIS.

Mineral saturation complete, try one of several ethnic restaurants, or check out the largest crocodile farm in the Middle East. The park started off with reptiles imported from Florida but the reptiles are now born and raised for export in the hothouse by the entrance to the pools. Performing parrots are another attraction, but this is no 'Polly want a cracker' moment – these birds actually ride bikes!

If that's not enough to keep you amused, the partially reconstructed Roman ruins are quite impressive and include various bath-

ing areas, such as a smaller pool reserved for lepers and the hottest spring (51°C), which in Hebrew is called Ma'ayan HaGehinom (Hell's Pool) and in Arabic Ain Makleh (Frying Pool). There is also a ruined 5th- or 6th-century synagogue just west of the Roman baths and past the picnic area. Unfortunately they were temporarily closed at the time of research, but the hill behind the site gives a fine view of the ruins, as well as the valley crossed by the bridge that used to carry the Haifa-Damascus railway.

The site is 8km southeast of the Sea of Galilee (21km from Tiberias). From Tiberias, bus No 24 departs Sunday to Thursday at 8.45am and 10.30am, and Friday at 8.30am and 9.30am. Returning, buses leave Hamat Gader Sunday to Thursday at noon and 3pm, and Friday at noon and 1pm.

### Eastern Shore

Also known by the Saddam-esque title of Em Hakevutsot, or 'Mother of all Cooperative Villages', Kibbutz Degania Aleph (not to be confused with Degania Bet next door), established in 1910, was the world's first kibbutz. **Beit Gordon** (☎ 04-675 0040; admission 12NIS; ☎ 3-7pm Sun-Thu, 9am-noon Fri) is an archaeological and natural history museum dedicated to the memory of the father of the kibbutz movement, AD Gordon.

Nearby, the Kibbutz Kinneret cemetery is a peaceful place to wander. Among those buried here are the Hebrew poets Rahel and Elisheva, and Berl Katsnelson, a leader of the Jewish labour movement. Rahel's grave beneath a palm tree on the shore of the lake has become something of a pilgrimage site for lovers of her poems and songs. Immigrating from Russia in 1909, Rahel lived on Kibbutz Degania 'playing the shovel, and painting the earth'. Most of her poems were written in the last six years before she died a lonely death from tuberculosis in Tel Aviv. The simple beauty of her prose captures her nostalgia for the Galilee and love for 'Eretz Yisrael' (the land of Israel), easily translating into lyrics for modern Israeli folk songs. Today Rahel's life has taken on mythic proportions in Israel, and 65 years after her death a volume of her collected verse remains one of the country's top sellers.

Just south of the bridge crossing the Jordan River where it leaves the Sea of Galilee is the **Yardenit** (☎ 04-675 9111; www.yardenit.com), a

flash-looking baptism site where white-garbed devotees – praying and singing – line up to be dipped in the river. The river here is quite beautiful, overhung with eucalyptus trees and swarming with fish and is, not surprisingly, very popular all year round. There's a restaurant and change-room facilities at the site.

Note this is not where Jesus is said to have been baptised, which is at Al-Maghtes, near Jericho – out of bounds to pilgrims because of its proximity to the Jordanian–West Bank border.

## Sleeping

### BUDGET

#### Hostels

**HI – Karei Deshe-Yoram Youth Hostel** (Map p225; ☎ 04-672 0601; dm/s/d with breakfast 91.50/171/240NIS; ♿) Both locals and travellers rave about this good-looking youth hostel, a sparkling white facility with a mix of double and dorm rooms, set in attractive grounds with date palms, eucalyptus trees, a rocky beach and a few peacocks. Located at Tabgha, this is the perfect base for a few days of New Testament site-hopping and relaxing on the lake. Meals are available for 42NIS. To get here, take bus No 459 or 841 from Tiberias. The hostel is a 1.5km walk from the bus stop.

## Camping

Camping is often expensive as most sites are run by kibbutzim or private resorts – but your money buys security, a decent shower block and toilet facilities. Several places charge per car for 24 hours; camping is otherwise 'free' – great for those on bikes.

**Ze'elon Beach** (Map p225; per car for 24hr 50NIS; ☎ year-round) Summer weekends have a festival atmosphere here with a young, slightly alternative crowd gathering to camp on grass pitches under the trees and barbecue on the beach. Swimming is officially prohibited but in true Israeli style everyone does it anyway. Great facilities including a simple café-bar (open late) make this one of the best accommodation bargains in the region.

**Hokuk Camping** (Map p225; ☎ 04-671 5440, 057 740 0242; per car 85NIS, camp sites 50NIS; ☎ Apr–Oct) Around the bend from the HI – Karei Deshe-Yoram Youth Hostel, this is a small but attractive camp site with grassy pitches under the trees. Regulars set up hammocks between the palms, giving it a tropical feel. There is also a mini-market on site.

**Gofra Beach** (Map p225; ☎ 04-673 1942; www.gofra.beach.com in Hebrew; per car for 24hr 85NIS; ☎ year-round) Several kilometres south, Gofra Beach is a very well-developed camping ground with a small supermarket, café and even nargilehs and fridges for hire. The palm-fringed beach bar is a great place to hang out and watch the sun set over the lake.

### MIDRANGE

**Frenkels Bed and Breakfast** (Map p225; ☎ 04-680 1686; www.thefrenkels.com; Rte 8277; Kfar Korazim; s/d/tr 350/450/550NIS) This sweet B&B occupies a serene spot at Korazim (p255). There are three suites to choose from (one is wheelchair friendly) and all are decked out in a cosy, rustic style with rugs and individual furnishings. The American Frenkels – who can generally be found tending their gorgeous garden – are very easy-going and know a lot about the local area, from the nearby Christian sites to Tsfat and the Golan Heights.

**Hotel Nof Ginnosar** (Map p225; ☎ 04-670 0320; www.ginnosar.co.il; s/d with breakfast US\$100/120; ♿) Redolent with '70s charm, this old-timer kibbutz has huge leafy grounds and an attractive private beach. It's popular with groups of seniors who book out the very uninspiring motel-like rooms most weekends and holidays, and then careen around the buffet tables in the dining room like over-excited campers. Extra perks include bike rental, exercise classes and massage (per hour US\$30). The extensive buffet dinner is US\$15 and gets good reports.

**Ein Gev Resort** (Map p225; ☎ 04-665 9800; www.ein.gev.com; d with breakfast 535NIS; ♿) A long-time favourite with the international kibbutz crowd, Ein Gev is a working agricultural and dairy farm that also has a range of accommodation options, from motel-style rooms to beach-front family units with kitchenettes and cable TV. Unfortunately the 'deluxe' rooms back right on to the main road, so the sunny lake-side apartments with their great views and spacious living area are the best bet. The resort is about 1.5km south of the kibbutz entrance.

### TOP END

**Vered HaGalil Guest Farm** (Map p225; ☎ 04-693 5785; www.veredhagalil.com; cabin/studio/cottage US\$129/151/162; ♿) Whether or not you are taking advantage of the excellent horse-riding facilities (see Tours, p254), Vered HaGalil

offers lovely accommodation in rustic wood and stone cottages amid the farms' garden up in the Galilee Hills. The unique cottages and cabins with their wood-panelling, wood-burning stoves and great views are inviting in an American-ranch sort of way. Guests can make use of the billiard table and library. As well as horse riding, the farm is getting a name for its impressive spa, which offers aromatherapy massage treatments from 220NIS. To get there, get off the bus from Tiberias at the signposted Korazim junction (it's at the junction of Rtes 90 and 8277).

**Hamat Gader Spa Village** (Map p225; ☎ 04-655 555; www.hamat-gader.com; Hamat Gader; d with breakfast & 2 massages 2380NIS; ♿) For sheer indulgence nothing in the area beats this newly designed spa village, which exudes Palm Springs–esque luxury and cool. Attached to Hamat Gader recreational park, there are no screaming kids to be found here, just attractive wooden cabins where you can enjoy the hot spring water in your private Jacuzzi and dry off with fluffy white robes and a complimentary bottle of wine. Aside from free entry to Hamat Gader, guests also have use of wet and dry saunas, a small gym and a private outdoor hot spring pool with hanging lanterns for late-night

bathing. Sheltered in a canyon under the Jordanian mountains, this is the ultimate place to bliss out.

## Eating

**Vered HaGalil Restaurant** (Map p225; ☎ 04-693 5785; mains 60–100NIS; ☎ 8am–10pm Sun–Wed, 8am–11pm Thu–Sat) Refreshingly hummus-free, this rustic wood and stone restaurant in the Galilee Hills is the place to come for an eclectic menu that jumps from American favourites like southern-fried chicken and home-made apple pie to fresh smoked trout and entrecôte steak served on the wisteria-covered terrace or in the cosy pine dining room. Friday nights are all about music-making and wine drinking.

**Ein Gev Fish Restaurant** (Map p225; ☎ 04-665 8136; mains 70–90NIS; ☎ lunch & dinner) Despite the fanaticism with which some people talk about this restaurant, one can't help but wonder how much of that is the result of excellent marketing. Innumerable plates of St Peter's fish – fresh from the Ein Gev ponds (p257) – are sent out of the kitchen every meal time but, grilled or fried, filleted or whole (served with chips and salads), it's neither terribly exciting, nor reasonably priced. That said, the great views from the lake-side terrace aren't cause for any complaint.

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