

Israel & the Palestinian Territories

Israel, or Palestine depending on your politics, defies the logic that size equals importance. A tiny finger of land hugging the eastern Mediterranean, no bigger than the US state of New Jersey, the biblical lands of Judea and Samaria bear as much significance for the modern world today as they have for the past one or two millennia.

The same land that St John predicted would host Armageddon is today the land frequented by heads of state, each armed with ideas to prevent that event from occurring. It's the land of the Bible and Talmud, still considered by millions as the basis of Western law, ethics and religion. And for many, it's a spiritual centre *par excellence*: the Promised Land of the Jews, the last place touched by Mohammed on his journey to Heaven, and the birthplace of Christ.

Israel and the Palestinian Territories may be renowned for their mystical past, disputed present and uncertain future, but there is more than what meets the international headlines. Fascinating archaeological sites, a wealth of natural beauty spots and a cultural diversity matching anywhere else in the Middle East are enough for a trip in their own right. The modern state of Israel, developed for tourism and equipped with stringent security, makes travel both safe and easy to explore its sites and commune with its people.

Your religious, cultural and political baggage is best left at home – any militant preconceptions picked up during a lifetime of media exposure are bound to leave you off balance. So clear the slate. Then plunge in, stay informed, ask questions and listen to the voices around you. Most surprising are not the opinions you'll be bombarded with, but the effects that this speck of land leaves you with long after you've left.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 20,770 sq km; Gaza Strip and the West Bank 6220 sq km
- **Capital** Jerusalem (disputed)
- **Country code** ☎ 972
- **Languages** Hebrew and Arabic
- **Money** new Israeli shekel (NIS); US\$1 = 4.68NIS; €1 = 5.52NIS
- **Official name** Medinat Yisra'el (State of Israel)
- **Population** 6.9 million; Gaza Strip and the West Bank 3.8 million.



HIGHLIGHTS

- **Jerusalem** (p283) The Holy City, bursting with architectural, historical and spiritual wonders that have been drawing pilgrims for millennia.
- **Tel Aviv** (p297) Jerusalem's antithesis, a modern, European-styled metropolis with a fantastic café culture and the Middle East's best nightlife.
- **The Dead Sea** (p327) At the lowest spot on Earth, the Dead Sea lures with promises of health restoration and a relaxing float on water.
- **The Golan Heights** (p326) An area of spectacular natural beauty, with scope for leisurely hiking, cycling and skiing.
- **Nakhal Gishron** (p336) Off the beaten track to magnificent desert scenery along the Israel National Trail.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Israel and the Palestinian Territories enjoy a warm Mediterranean climate for much of the year, although winter (November to March) sees plenty of rain and cool temperatures in coastal areas and even snow in the highlands, including Jerusalem. Summer (April to October) is hot and dry with the peak months in July and August, when daytime temperatures of 45°C aren't uncommon. In the evenings – especially in the highlands and deserts – temperatures may drop as much as 30°C to 40°C below the daytime highs. See Climate Charts, p643. If possible, avoid visiting Israel during the Jewish religious holidays (see p350 for details) when businesses close, public transport is limited and accommodation prices double or triple.

HISTORY

The first inhabitants of modern Israel, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip were probably the Canaanites, who had migrated to the productive coastal areas from Arabia and Mesopotamia as early as the 20th century BC. (It's believed that these Canaanites were Semitic – that is, descended from Shem, the son of Noah of diluvial fame, but that seriously strains the biblical time line.) Around 2800 BC, Egypt claimed Canaan as part of its empire, and in a period of famine, the Israelites (descendants of Israel, grandson of the patriarch Abraham) migrated to the Nile Valley for work. According to the Book of Genesis, God had promised that there,

HOW MUCH?

- **Newspaper** 8NIS
- **Dorm bed in guesthouse** 25NIS to 50NIS
- **Internet connection per hour** 12NIS
- **City bus ticket** 5.3NIS
- **Museum admission** 25NIS to 40NIS

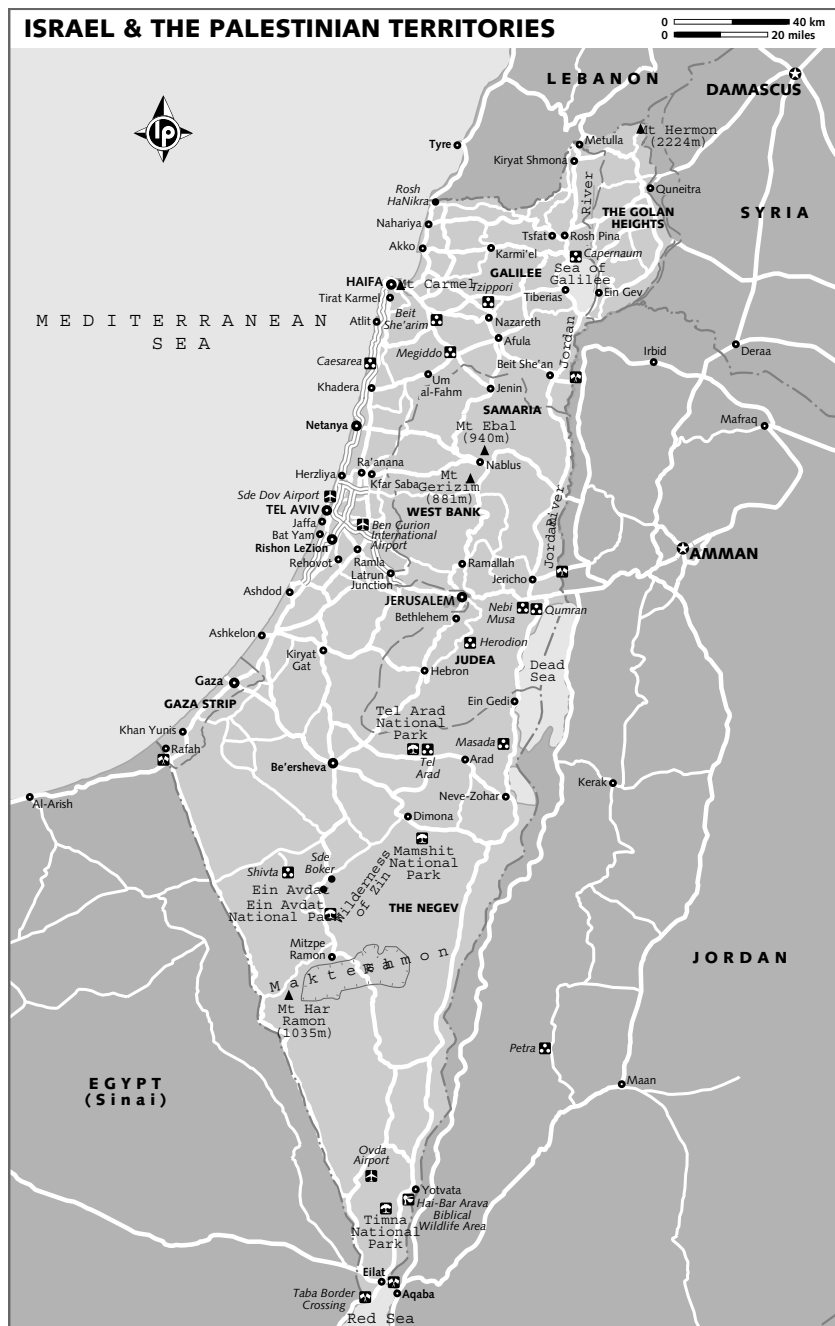
LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **Litre of petrol** 5.4NIS
- **Litre of bottled water** 6NIS
- **Bottle of Maccabee beer** 18NIS
- **Souvenir T-shirt** 15NIS to 20NIS
- **Shwarma** 15NIS

Israel would be made a great nation. After a period of prosperity in exile, the pharaoh Ramses forced the 'migrant workers' into servitude. Some time around the 13th century BC, Moses led the descendants of the Israelites for 40 years through the Sinai (as reported by the Book of Exodus) and across the Jordan River back into their Promised Land. At this point, the lands were divided between the 12 tribes of Israel – descendants of the 12 sons of Israel.

Around 1200 BC, the Semitic civilisation known as the Philistines arrived and established a coastal government between present-day Ashdod and Gaza. The Israelites, threatened by the Philistines' political superiority, consolidated their disparate tribes under one king, Saul. Upon Saul's death, some Israelites supported his son Ishbaal as successor, but the tribe of Judah supported King David, who became a local hero when he killed the Philistine Goliath and eventually conquered the city-state of Jerusalem. There, in the 10th century BC, David's son Solomon built the First Temple.

This is at least one version of history. However, the history of the region is just as much a battleground as any present-day West Bank or Gaza refugee camp, and millennia-old events are constantly being questioned, reinterpreted and fresh claims made. This is a part of the world where archaeology and scholarship have serious political implications.



Few accounts written prior to the Roman era can be considered absolute fact (see p57), and millennia-old events are constantly being reinterpreted to fit current political agendas.

Fast-forward a few thousand years, to the modern Middle Eastern conflict between the Jews (said to be the tribe of Judah and remnants of the scattered Diaspora or 'lost tribes') and the Palestinians (who argue descent from the Philistines). Many Jews claim the right to live in the lands now known as Israel based on a historical lineage stretching back to the kingdoms of Solomon and David and, before that, to the rule of the 12 tribes. Taking this perspective to its extreme, some Israelis claim (based on Old Testament writings) that 'God gave Israel to the Jews', and that the land is theirs by divine right.

The Palestinian claim is based on centuries of occupancy. Whether they are descendants of the Philistines or not, Arabs formed the majority inhabitants of Palestine from soon after the ascendancy of Islam in the 7th century until the 20th century.

For centuries Jews dreamed of returning to their ancestral homeland ('next year in Jerusalem' being a phrase uttered since the fall of the second temple). But the idea was never really stoked into serious action until Austrian journalist Theodore Herzl surmised in his 1896 book *Der Judenstaat* that the Jews had to establish their own homeland or risk further persecution in Europe. The following year he organised the first International Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland, which resolved to 'find a small piece of the Earth's surface' where Jews could establish a homeland. In 1903 London offered Uganda, which the Zionists accepted but then threw out the following year in their ultimate pursuit of a state in Israel.

Waves of Jewish immigrants began making their way to Palestine, which was then a part of the Ottoman Empire. In the wake of WWI, these lands passed into the British sphere of influence (see p43). The increasing numbers of Jews arriving at the ports of Haifa and Jaffa had been causing unrest among the Arabs of Palestine, sparking fighting and rioting, and Britain determined it had to take a stance. In November 1917 the British cabinet announced the Balfour Declaration, which promised a homeland for the Jews in Palestine. However, the controversial

document never determined the status or extent of this homeland, and from an Arab perspective it contradicted the McMahon White Paper for Arab Independence, signed two years earlier, which guaranteed an Arab Kingdom to the Sharif of Mecca.

In the 1930s Adolf Hitler rose to power in Germany and set about fulfilling his twofold dream of establishing a Third Reich and exterminating the Jewish race, which he considered the root of the world's problems. By the end of WWII, six million Jews (1.5 million of them children) had been murdered in the death camps of Eastern Europe.

Hundreds of thousands of Holocaust survivors moved to British-controlled Palestine, knowing now more than ever the importance of Herzl's Zionist dream. Palestinian Arabs felt ever more threatened and resented having to bear the brunt of what they saw as a European problem. In February 1947 the British decided to turn the issue over to the UN, which voted to partition the region into Arab and Jewish states, and make Jerusalem an international city. Ironically, it was Hitler's Holocaust that did more to create the hope for a Jewish state than any other factor.

While the Jews accepted the proposal, the Arabs rejected it outright. Britain washed its hands of the whole affair and withdrew from Palestine in 1948; the Jews declared the independent state of Israel, and war broke out. The combined armies of Egypt, Jordan, Iraq and Syria invaded, but backed with arms from Czechoslovakia, the Tsahal (Israeli army) held its ground until a ceasefire was declared.

An armistice of 1949 delimited the Jewish state, leaving the Gaza Strip under Egyptian mandate and the West Bank under Jordanian control. A 'Green Line' determined the border with Jordan largely on the basis of where soldiers dropped their weapons.

Hundreds of thousands of Arabs fled the fighting (their house keys and land deeds would become a symbol for their right of return), and became refugees in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt. The Palestinian desire to return would be later echoed with Yasser Arafat's rallying cry: 'Next year in Al-Quds (Jerusalem)!' But Arab governments neither engaged in dialogue with Israel nor would they offer amnesty to the Palestinian refugees, causing an instability that would haunt the Middle East for the next 50 years.

Tensions came to a head again in 1967 with Egypt's blockade of the Strait of Tiran, a move that ended with Israel's pre-emptive strike against Syria, Jordan and Egypt. After six days of fighting, Israel had tripled in size with its occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and the Sinai. However, early defeats in the Yom Kippur War of 1973 left Israel less certain of its defences. Subsequent negotiations resulted in the 1978 Camp David Agreement, which brought peace between Egypt and Israel – for which Egypt was ostracised by the rest of the Arab world.

During the 1970s and '80s, under the spearhead of Yasser Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), a terrorist campaign brought the Palestinian plight to international attention. Initially, much of the world watched in horror, condemning the Palestinians for their ruthlessness, but in 1987 the intifada (popular uprising) pitted stone-throwing Arab youths against well-equipped Israeli soldiers and the resulting images seen worldwide on TV news did a great deal to resurrect international sympathy for the Palestinians.

The peace talks to follow appeared to offer little fruit until news broke in August 1993 that Israel and the PLO had been holding secret talks for some 18 months in Norway, resulting in mutual recognition. Now, PLO leader Yasser Arafat and the Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin made their (prematurely) Nobel Prize-winning handshake on the White House lawn in Washington, DC. As a result, the Gaza Strip and most of the West Bank were handed over to Palestinian Authority rule (see opposite), with Yasser Arafat ostensibly at the helm.

Despite the Washington show, mutual trust between Rabin and Arafat wasn't exactly solid, and there remained quite a few details to be hashed out, not least of which were the status of Jerusalem and the future of the four million Palestinian refugees spread across the Arab world. Added to that was a fractious relationship with Syria, centred on the disputed Golan Heights, not to mention the continued confrontation with Hezbollah (Party of God) in southern Lebanon.

Any progress forward, such as the Israeli troop withdrawal from most of the West Bank, was set back once again with the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin by a disgruntled Jewish extremist on 4 November 1995.

Rabin's death marked the beginning of several years of stalled negotiations that came to an ultimate collapse when a deal for a two-state solution (known as the Wye II Accord), brokered by Bill Clinton in 2000, was rejected by Arafat despite support by Israel and much of the Arab world. Meanwhile, tit-for-tat violence escalated to a fever pitch in September of that year when Israel's Defence Minister Ariel Sharon paid a controversial visit to the Temple Mount. Within months the fighting grew into a fully fledged intifada, and when Jewish voters got their chance they chose Sharon to lead them through the storm.

While most moderate Israelis and Palestinians continued to support the cause of peace and the creation of a Palestinian state, Sharon and Arafat got down to what they do best. Blows were exchanged in the form of Palestinian suicide attacks and Israel Defence Force (IDF) aggression that ranged from bulldozing Palestinian homes and dragnet arrests to full-scale aerial and ground assaults.

By late 2004 the number of deaths stood at nearly 3500 Palestinians and over 1000 Israelis. The intifada was also taxing national morale as Sharon's hardball tactics were threatening to make Israel a pariah state among European governments. The economy suffered too: Israel's tourist industry collapsed and the Palestinian economy suffered US\$14 billion in losses. But the war was to be Arafat's swan song; despite a lifetime of fighting for an independent state, he never realised this achievement, dying of an unknown disease in a Paris hospital on 11 November 2004.

Arafat's passing sparked a mood for change that fell on the shoulders of longtime PLO bureaucrat Mahmoud Abbas (aka Abu Mazen). Three months after Arafat's death, Sharon, known as 'the bulldozer' in reference to his strong-arm tactics in campaigns that stretched back more than 50 years, shook hands with his new Palestinian counterpart at a summit for peace in Sharm el-Sheikh.

Encouraged by the internationally supported 'Road Map for Peace', the Palestinian Authority and Israeli cabinet resumed talks and took several encouraging steps, including the withdrawal of Jewish settlers from Gaza and four West Bank towns in August 2005 and the release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners from Israeli jails.

YASSER ARAFAT & THE PLO

'Don't forget Palestine' was the simple petition, written in blood, which a young Yasser Arafat handed to Egyptian military leader General Neguib back in 1953. It was an ominous start to a long career that would evolve from student dissident to revolutionary and terrorist and finally, statesman.

The petition, though, had little effect and five years later Arafat and like-minded Palestinian youth decided to go it alone by forming the first Palestinian resistance group – Fatah (meaning 'Conquest'), which later joined with other groups to form the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO).

In the mid-1960s, the PLO began a campaign of brash acts of sabotage, murder and hijackings in Israel and the Middle East. But it was not until the killing of 11 Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympics, and the assassination of US ambassador Cleo Noel a year later, that the world's attention started to focus on the Palestinian cause.

PLO militancy was also a growing threat to Jordan's King Hussein and the resulting confrontation culminated in the 1971 massacre of Palestinian refugees, an incident that became known as 'Black September'. The PLO was forced to seek refuge in Lebanon where it created a mini state within a state. There too the PLO presence proved disastrous for the host country, leading to Israel's 1982 invasion and occupation. On the verge of collapse, Arafat and the PLO decamped to a new base in Tunisia. These setbacks brought about a more conciliatory tone and in 1988 Arafat changed tactics by explicitly recognising Israel and accepting the principle of a two-state solution.

From then on Arafat attempted to play the dual role of statesman in the international spotlight, and resistance leader in front of his people. These two sides often collided, notably at the UN when he had to check his gun at the door before talking peace.

Negotiations paved the way for the PLO leadership to set up shop in the West Bank and Gaza under the auspices of the newly created Palestinian Authority (PA). Here Arafat continued to oscillate between reconciliation and terror – funding suicide bombers while attending peace conferences. By greasing the palms of his allies with the millions of dollars made from a secret business empire (mostly built on the largesse of foreign governments), Arafat stayed in control despite rising competition from the Islamist group Hamas.

In 1992 Arafat secretly married his economics advisor, a Palestinian-Christian named Suha Daoud Tawil. Suha, 30 years younger than Arafat, worked diligently in Gaza to establish an aid organisation, but during the second intifada she retreated to Paris where her shopping sprees took on legendary proportions, thanks to a US\$100,000-a-month allowance from the PA.

Arafat's signing of the Oslo peace accords won him a Nobel Peace prize, but he was never able to seal the deal and in the end rejected Clinton's best offer in 2000, a decision that ultimately led to a second intifada.

In their parting exchange following the collapse of the Wye II deal, Arafat called Clinton a 'great man', to which Clinton responded: 'Mr Chairman, I am not a great man. I am a failure, and you have made me one'.

When the second intifada hit its stride, Arafat found himself under siege in his Ramallah compound, a virtual prisoner of Israeli tanks and mortar fire. His 40-year war ended, though not from an assassin's bullet but his own failing health; in November 2004 he slipped into a coma and died in a Paris hospital.

Israel denied Arafat's request to be buried in Jerusalem and, after lying in state in Cairo, he was interred at his Ramallah compound.

No official statement has been made on the cause of Arafat's death, but rumours range from the pedestrian (liver disease or blood disorder) to the more sensational (AIDS or poisoning).

The cause of Arafat's passing is, of course, less of a concern in the eyes of ordinary Palestinians compared to the legacy that he left behind. Despite his years of mismanagement in the Chairman's seat, they'd still rather remember the image of Yasser Arafat – his scraggly beard and trademark keffiyeh – as Palestine's most prolific leader in its longstanding fight for freedom.

Yet the path to peace moves slowly. IDF disengagement has stalled in the West Bank and Israel continues to build its controversial 'Security Fence' (see the boxed text, p340). Sharon has repeatedly called for Abbas to disarm rogue militant groups, but so far the PA has refused to confront Islamic Jihad and Hamas, fearing a civil war.

The stalemate has put off final status talks that would finalise issues like settlements, refugees, water, borders and most importantly, Jerusalem. The wait-and-see period has only caused added strain for ordinary Palestinians and Israelis, as attacks from both sides still occur, despite the 'ceasefire'. The lack of significant progress has soured public opinion of both Abbas and Sharon. The former took a beating in 2005 when Hamas and Islamic Jihad rolled over the leading Fatah party in local elections.

Mainstream Israelis and Palestinians, mainly those living in the bigger cities, are visibly tired of war and the enormous economic and emotional toll it has wrought on them. But with peace still hanging in the balance it may not be up to the mainstream to decide the fate of the conflict. As ever, violence on the part of extremists – Jewish or Arab, even in small numbers – can have a lasting impact on the still fragile peace plan.

THE CULTURE The National Psyche

As the only Jewish state, Israel and its society are unique in the Middle East – and in the world. However, it's impossible to generalise about characteristics, mainly because Jewish society is so diverse, and ranges from secular (nonreligious) to conservative ultra-Orthodox.

The one thing that binds all Israelis – be they Jerusalem Hasidim, Tel Aviv peaceniks, or new immigrants from Russia, Yemen or Ethiopia – is a tribal sense of community based on their Jewish roots. While Jews may argue fervently about the best diplomatic path to forge for the country, it is their religion, and belief in Zionism, that has united them in the face of danger.

The army, to which most young men and women are drafted at the age of 18, both unifies the nation and gives it a link that connects the first three generations of Israelis. The effects of the holocaust and over 50 years of almost constant military conflict (not to mention centuries of persecution and anti-Semitism) are more difficult to gauge nationally and can really only be broken down to the individual level.

Despite this unique position from which to view the world, Israelis still see them-

selves as being essentially European. They are global travellers, leaders in the high-tech world, proficient in the English language, and connected closely to the United States through family ties. Ties to Europe are clear in the cultural sense – Israel, for example, participates in the Eurovision song contest and the Euroleague basketball championships.

Palestinians have a national psyche that's all their own. While Islam plays a major role in their worldview, the struggle for independence has made politics of equal importance. This is no more noticeable than on Israel's Independence Day, known in the Palestinian Territories as *Al-Naqba*, the Great Catastrophe. A day for celebration in Israel, this is a day of mourning for Palestinians.

For Palestinians or Israelis, it is above all the Holy Land itself that creates a psychological bridge across cultures and religions. 'It (the conflict) is in God's hands' is a phrase often uttered by the religious right, a fatalistic approach for both Muslims and Jews which shows that no matter how far the conflict is stretched, acceptance of their future together is undeniable.

Daily Life

Although most of Israel was founded on the principles of socialism and the shared community life on the kibbutz, many contemporary Israelis have converted to a two-cars-in-the-garage, white-picket-fence suburban existence. A boom in Israel's economy has helped to increase the independence of individual families – per capita GDP is US\$20,800. New-found wealth and a love of the outdoors have made them an active lot: sports, outdoor pursuits, travel and other leisure activities take the edge off an otherwise stressful position in the Middle East.

Orthodox Jews, by the nature of their relatively large families and religious commitments, are more involved with domestic affairs. While Tel Avivans are out clubbing on Friday nights, the Jerusalem Orthodox are maintaining strict kosher laws – they observe dietary rules and avoid any form of work during Shabbat. Similarly, while gays and lesbians live an open lifestyle in Tel Aviv and other cities, their lifestyle in Jerusalem is more cautious and conservative.

Israeli women enjoy a freedom and prestige on par with their European coun-

CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

While mainstream Israeli society is quite similar to that found in southern Europe, due care should be taken when interacting with Orthodox people – or even walking through Orthodox areas, such as the Jerusalem neighbourhood of Me'a She'arim. Women must wear modest clothing that covers their arms and legs, and outsiders should avoid these areas during Shabbat, unless invited by a local resident.

While a handshake is a common greeting in Israel, Jewish rabbis don't usually shake hands; in Palestinian communities, men should avoid shaking hands with women.

Cultural guidelines for interacting with Arabs outlined on p26 apply to both Christian and Muslim Arabs.

terparts and have historically played significant roles in the economy, the military and politics. (Israel was one of the first countries to elect a female prime minister, Golda Meir). But a number of challenges remain: domestic violence is on the rise and a level of inequality still exists in the workforce. Most troubling for feminists are obsolete divorce laws that technically give a husband the right to prevent his ex-wife from remarrying.

Palestinians earn far less than the average Israeli (an annual per-capita income of just US\$1100), a troublesome statistic that has done much to keep the Arab-Jewish conflict simmering. With an unemployment rate of around 30% (in some places over 60%), and a spectacular birth rate (around 7.5 children per woman), the Palestinian home is both overcrowded and poor. These days, *any* home has become something of a luxury – in the Gaza Strip alone, the IDF was destroying 120 Palestinian houses per month during the second intifada.

While poverty may keep Palestinians hungry for a homeland it is has also driven them to mosque. Traditionally, Palestinians have proven no more religious than secular Jews (women are encouraged to go to work and school), but in recent years, as trust in the Palestinian Authority fades away, more and more people are turning towards the Islamic militants and their fiery faith, hoping to find a better future.

BIG BIRD, PEACE ENVOY

While Ariel Sharon and Mahmoud Abbas struggle to forge a lasting peace, it may be Big Bird and Snuffleupagus who ultimately resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict. Sesame Street (or Sesame Stories as it's known here, streets not necessarily being the safest of places) is just one of several 're-education' programmes promoting peace among the youngest members of society.

The method for fostering such tolerance is being developed in joint Arab-Jewish schools where the playground serves as a tool for integration and dialogue. On TV, specially designed kids programmes like Sesame Stories, in both Arabic and Hebrew language, focus on ethnic tolerance and unity. In Israel children are also brought together for Arab-Jew dance clubs, theatre groups and sports leagues. In May 2005 football superstar Ronaldo, a special 'peace envoy' to the UN, gave a clinic at an interethnic football league.

Both Arab and Jewish adults have also used the film and media as a path towards peace. The 1982 film *Ghandi* (translated into Arabic) has been shown to Palestinian audiences throughout the West Bank and Gaza, in the hope of showing Palestinians the positive effects of nonviolent resistance. Likewise, themes of tolerance directed at Jewish audiences are played out on the theatrical stages of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.

Some meet face to face; the Berethian Circle Families builds dialogue among families grieving for relatives killed in IDF attacks and suicide bombings.

For more information, check out www.pin.org – the website for Palestinians and Israelis for Non-violence. Also see **Givat Haviva** (www.givathaviva.org), another organisation promoting peace and solidarity, or www.handinhand12.org, a website for a joint Arab-Jewish school. Another worthwhile source is the Museum on the Seam (p291).

Population

For more than 50 years Israel has served as a melting pot for the Jewish faithful. Economic opportunities and spiritual commitments have seen the entrance of Russians to Haifa, Moroccans to Tiberias, Yemenites to Tel Aviv, and ultra-Orthodox Ashkenazi to Jerusalem. Other arrivals include Syrian, Ethiopian and Iraqi Jews, among others, all of whom have taken advantage of the *Aliyah* law, which gives full citizenship (and the accompanying benefits) to any Jew who requests it.

But while Arab birth rates are some of the highest in the world (see p277), Israelis have proven mediocre in child production, sporting a growth rate of just 1.2%. For this reason the Israeli government continues to encourage immigration – offering cash incentives to young Russian and American Jews who move to Israel. It's a move with overtones that are as economic as they are political, because, for the moment, maintaining a solid workforce is as important as keeping up with the growing Arab population; demographers report that in 20 years the Arab minority will increase from 20% to 30%.

Many of the newly arrived Jews take up residence in settlements which, for obvious reasons, offer excellent housing at a low cost. The obvious risk in this is the peace process. Some 9000 Gazan settlers were forced to move from their homes in 2005 and, in time, it's likely that 20% of West Bank settlers (who number some 280,000) will be subject to a similar fate.

The Arab population in the West Bank and Gaza is around 3.8 million, 90% of whom are Muslim. This fact, many believe, is why Israel never attempted to annex these areas; had they done so it would have meant giving Israeli citizenship to 3.8 million Arabs, thereby ending the Jewish majority in Israel and negating its status as a 'Jewish state'. As it stands, West Bank and Gaza citizens are, for all intents and purposes, stateless, although many still carry a Jordanian passport.

SPORT

Football (soccer) is the national obsession, with a number of clubs representing various cities across the country. Beitar Jerusalem FC has the biggest following and hooliganism among their fans is not uncommon. Football crosses cultural boundaries, and

several Arabs play on Israel's national side. After star strikers Abbas Suan and Walid Badir scored key goals for Israel during the 2005 World Cup qualifiers, an Arab member of the Knesset (Israeli parliament) suggested changing the popular slogan of the Jewish right from 'No Arabs, no terrorism' to 'No Arabs, no goals'.

Palestine also has its own national football squad, although in qualifying matches it is grouped in Asia while Israel is grouped in Europe. In 2002 it made a surprising debut in the World Cup qualifiers, finishing second in its opening-round group ahead of Malaysia and Hong Kong.

Basketball is the second favourite sport and professional teams are a combination of local talent and American imports. The country's best club, Tel Aviv Maccabee has also enjoyed international success, winning several EuroLeague titles including back-to-back championships in 2004 and 2005.

RELIGION

Around 80% of Israel's population is Jewish, with Muslims making up 15% of the total and Christians and other sects 5%. Church and state are not separate in Israel, so everything from the justice system, holidays and education, right down to the national anthem, is based on Judaism. A special government arm – the Ministry for Religious Affairs – ensures no breaching of Jewish law, although the finer details, like businesses keeping kosher for Passover, tend to be overlooked.

Jewish doctrine states that Jews exist as a conduit between God and the rest of mankind. As God's 'chosen people', Jews have recorded his law in the Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament. The Torah contains 613 commandments, which cover fundamental issues like the prohibition of theft, murder and idolatry. The remainder of the Old Testament (the prophetic books), along with the Talmud (commentary on the laws of the Torah, written around AD 200), make up the teachings that form the cornerstone of Jewish study.

Judaism includes several sects of varying piousness, the most religious being the Hasidim (Haredim) ultra-Orthodox Jews, easily identified by their black hats, long black coats, collared white shirts, beards, and *peyot* (side curls). Hasidic women, like Muslim women, act and dress modestly, covering up exposed

THE MESSIAH COMMETH

It won't take long before you start wondering about a particular bearded fellow peering at you from billboards, flyers, posters and bookmarks. With his right arm raised and eyes beaming under a black hat, Rabbi Manachem Mendel Schneerson (1902–94) will soon become a familiar sight on your travels.

A Ukrainian by birth, Schneerson later moved to Berlin and then Paris where he joined the **Chabad movement** (www.chabad.org), a Jewish outreach organisation. During WWII he emigrated to the USA and settled in Brooklyn, where he built up the Chabad empire that rapidly spread across the USA, Canada, Israel and North Africa. Schneerson later succeeded his father-in-law as 'The Rebbe', the head of the Lubavitch, an ultra-Orthodox sect that founded Chabad in 1772. In this role Schneerson gathered a worldwide following and everyone from political leaders to corporate magnates sought his blessing and wise counsel.

Schneerson's ultraright beliefs came to the fore during the 1967 Six Day War when he called for the capture of Damascus and Cairo; he later voiced strong objections to any return of Palestinian land.

Towards the end of his life Schneerson imparted on his followers that the coming of the Messiah was imminent. Full page ads in the *New York Times* were taken out to make the public aware of this momentous event. In 1992 The Rebbe suffered a serious stroke. It was during this time of sickness that the many Lubavitchers believed Schneerson himself to be the Messiah, a theory that led to much controversy within the ultra-Orthodox community.

Despite much encouragement from his followers, The Rebbe never set foot in Israel, probably because it is halachically forbidden to leave Israel upon entry. By staying outside of Israel he could wield more influence over the worldwide Jewish community, as well as visit the graves of his predecessors, as is customary of Chabad Rebbes.

hair and skin (except hands and face). Many Jews, both Secular and Orthodox, wear a *kippa* (skullcap), generally thought to be more of a tradition than a commandment.

Because of their common roots, Islam and Judaism share holy sites (the Temple Mount in Jerusalem and the Cave of Machpelah in Hebron) as well as prophets and ancestors (Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph and Moses). Although historically Palestinians have been moderate Muslims, the strongest centre of Islam is Gaza, where militant Islamic groups have found ready ears among those disenchanted with false promises of peace. For more on the Islamic faith, see p53.

Despite its origins in Israel, Christianity remains relatively small, and most of the holy sites are administered by overseas churches. The balance of power lies with the Greek Orthodox Church, which has jurisdiction over more than half of Jerusalem's Church of the Holy Sepulchre and a large proportion of Bethlehem's Church of the Nativity. The Armenians, Copts, Assyrians, Roman Catholics and Protestants also lay claim to various holy sites, and disputes arise frequently over how to share their stewardship.

Smaller faiths include the Druze, an offshoot of Islam, whose small communities are based mainly in northern Israel, especially Haifa and Mt Carmel. Haifa is also the centre of the fast growing Baha'i faith, a development of a Muslim mystical movement, founded in Persia in 1844.

ARTS

Israel's struggle for independence – and the conflicts endured since attaining that goal – has been the inspiration for three generations of artists, film makers, musicians and writers. A strong Ashkenazi influence means that most work is European in style.

Not surprisingly, the Palestinian world of art shares a similar passion for freedom, independence and justice. A lack of funding often means less exposure, but Palestinian artists, especially musicians, are slowly making a name for themselves.

Literature

Israel's most celebrated writer is Amos Oz, whose contemporary fiction involving ordinary Israeli characters and settings has been translated into 30 languages. His most recent work, *A Tale of Love and Darkness*

(2004), is a touching autobiography of his childhood that many reviewers are calling his best work to date.

Across the Green Line, it's worth getting hold of some Emile Habibi, a long-time Arab member of the Israeli Knesset, who took up the pen in 1967 when an Israeli counterpart censured Palestine for its lack of literature. His work *The Pesoptimist* was translated into 16 languages including Hebrew. Palestine's most eminent lyricist is Mahmoud Darwish; a highly political poet and member of the PLO in the 1970s he wrote, among other works, Palestine's Declaration of Independence.

Music

Much of Israel's political dialogue is shouted on band stages and in recording studios by its young, mostly left-wing musicians. The biggest act of the moment is Jerusalem-based Hadag Nahash (Snake Fish), an anti-establishment, antigovernment funk outfit that sings about the inevitability of a Palestinian state. Rapper Mook E broke into the Israeli charts with his hit single *Talking About Peace*, while on the right side of the political spectrum, Subliminal and Shadow rap for Israeli nationalism. Elizabeth Nord's documentary film *Jericho's Echo: Punk Rock in the Holy Land* (2005) is an investigative look into complex issues confronted by Israeli punk rockers.

Palestinian hip hop is similarly loaded with political overtones. *Slingshot Hip Hop* (2005), a documentary about Arab rap in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza, gives a powerful perspective on Arab youth culture and the use of rap, instead of weapons, as a means of protest. For a more traditional sound, listen to **El-Funoun** (www.el-funoun.org), a Palestinian folk music and dance group that has toured in a dozen of countries since its inception in 1979.

While Tel Aviv may lead the way in experimental, cutting-edge music, another worthy testing ground for young musicians is Jerusalem's appropriately named Lab (p296).

Theatre & Dance

Unsurprisingly, politics are also played out on stage by all of Israel's main repertory theatres, coming a long way since *Fiddler on the Roof*. The Cameri Theatre in Tel Aviv is the leader in this field, recently performing

controversial works like *Plonter*, by 29-year-old Yael Ronon, which challenges the relationships between Palestinians and Israelis.

Also well received is *Milano*, which describes how various people live under the threat of terrorism and suicide bombings. *Eyewitness*, another fascinating production, is the story of Austrian farmer Franz Jagerstatter's refusal to serve in the Wehrmacht during WWII and the last day of his life before his execution. The story alludes to Israelis who refuse to serve mandatory service in the IDF.

Ramallah-based Al Kasaba Theatre has produced a number of equally stirring theatrical productions, including *Alive From Palestine*, a series of monologues and scenes that the actors have drawn from personal experience. The Palestine National Theatre, based in Jerusalem, has also run racy themes, including the 2004 production *A Happy Woman*, which challenges Arab women to demand equal rights.

Overseas, look out for David Hare's *Via Dolorosa*, a monologue reflecting on his travels in Israel and the conversations he incurs with Jews and Arabs.

Cinema

Historically, Israeli films have never enjoyed much international success. Prior to independence they were mainly Zionist propaganda pieces designed to raise funds for the young nation. Post-independence films were largely overshadowed by British and Hollywood productions filmed on-site, such as Otto Preminger's classic *Exodus*. Only in recent years has there been some success at the box office, including *Six Days to Eternity*, a film about the 1967 Six Day War which includes the first release of documentary clips shot by the Arab army. Meanwhile, Palestinian dramatic cinema is still developing stages, although some of its documentaries have enjoyed international success.

In recent years a slew of films and documentaries about the Arab-Israeli conflict have hit the market, earning accolades at film festivals worldwide. Unmissable is Academy Award-winning *One Day in September* (1999), a play-by-play account of the 1972 Olympic hostage crisis that ended with the deaths of 11 Israeli athletes.

One of the more austere documentaries, *Death in Gaza* (2004), chronicles the lives

of children being trained as resistance fighters, but then changes dramatically when its producer, 34-year-old James Miller, is shot and killed by Israeli tank fire.

Among other documentaries, Hany Abu-Assad's film *Paradise Now* (2005) is a gripping account of two Palestinian suicide bombers during the final 48 hours before their mission. *Checkpoint* (1997) discusses the effect of the Oslo Peace Accords on Palestinian lives. And the somewhat more up-to-date *Wall* (2004), by Simone Bitton, is a sensitive investigation of the Security Fence and the effects of its construction on the Palestinian people. To take the edge off these tension-filled flicks, check out Ari Sandel's zany **West Bank Story** (2005; www.westbankstory.com), a modern spoof on the musical *West Side Story*.

ENVIRONMENT

With an area of nearly 28,000 sq km, Israel and the Palestinian Territories are geographically dominated by the Great Rift Valley (also known as the Syrian-African Rift), which stretches from Southern Turkey to Lake Kariba on the Zambia-Zimbabwe border.

Between the mountain-fringed rift and the Mediterranean Sea stretches the fertile, but sandy, coastal plain where the bulk of the population and agriculture is concentrated. The lightly populated Negev, the country's southern wedge, is characterised by mountains, plains and wadis, and punctuated by military bases and desert-transforming irrigation schemes.

Due to its position at the junction of three natural zones, Israel and the Palestinian Ter-

ritories support a diverse wealth of plant and animal life. In the wet, mountainous Upper Galilee, otters dive in highland streams and Golden eagles circle dense laurel forests, while in the southern desert landscapes, ibex water at date palm-shaded wadis.

Of the 58 national parks run by the Israel Nature & National Parks Protection Authority, just two (Herodian and Qumran National Parks) are located in the West Bank and none are in the Gaza Strip. Many of the protected areas actually double as large archaeological complexes, including Masada, Beit She'an, Nimrod Fortress and Caesaria. If you plan to visit a lot of national parks, its worth investing in an all-access 'Green Card' for 102NIS. It's valid for one year and available at most national park visitor centres.

Environmental Issues

When Theodore Herzl suggested planting 10 million trees in Palestine, his colleagues thought he was nuts. But 100 years later the people of Israel proved that they could indeed 'make the desert bloom'. Unfortunately, the Zionists' zeal to populate the land has had a much greater environmental impact than the afforestation project. The demands on the land from increased urbanisation have resulted in the same problems found in many parts of the world – air and water pollution, over-extension of natural resources and poor waste management. Israel's 197km of coastline is particularly threatened: 56km are already urbanised and construction is zoned for a further 103km.

GREEN TEAMS

The **Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel** (SPNI; tourism@spni.org.il; www.teva.org.il), which is charged with the conservation and protection of antiquities, wildlife and the environment, is an excellent source of information for travellers. At the main offices in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem you'll find outdoor shops selling a range of nature and wildlife publications. The Tel Aviv shop also stocks camping and outdoor equipment.

The SPNI also runs field trips and tours, and operates 10 field schools, where enthusiastic specialists can provide information on local hikes, wildlife and accommodation. For a complete list of addresses, contact either of the two main offices, **SPNI Jerusalem** (Map p286; ☎ 02-624 4605; 13 Heleni HaMalka St, PO Box 930, Jerusalem 96101) or **SPNI Tel Aviv** (Map p298; ☎ 03-638 8674; 4 Hashfela St, Tel Aviv 66183).

The network of managed forests in Israel is overseen by the government-sponsored Kagal. The numerous national parks and archaeological sites are managed by the **Israel Nature & National Parks Protection Authority** (☎ 02-500 5444; www.parks.org.il; Am Ve'olamo St, Givat Shaul, Jerusalem 95463).

Israel and the West Bank's most obvious environmental threat is the drying up of the Dead Sea, which has continued unabated for 30 years – the direct result of overuse of its main water source, the Jordan River. The 20m drop in the Dead Sea water level threatens not only Israel, but also Jordan and Palestine, and in recognition of this the three sides have entered into talks on how to reverse the problem. A number of solutions have been proposed, including one plan to build a canal that would bring water from the Red Sea to the Dead Sea. Whether or not the plan gets off the ground depends as much on finances as it does on political will.

FOOD & DRINK

In the street markets and supermarkets of Israel and the Palestinian Territories, you can choose from an appealing range of quality fruit and vegetables. Alternatively, follow the locals to the pervasive *felafel* and *shwarma* stands; for a 6NIS-to-19NIS filled pitta, you'll also be able to heap on a selection of salads, pickles and sauces. Hummus is regarded more as a national obsession than a mere condiment and when prompted,

many Israelis and Palestinians can wax lyrical about the various kinds of hummus and which local joint produces the best stuff.

Much of the best sit-down fare varies little from that in other Middle Eastern countries – kosher and halal fare is quite similar. On workdays, most fully fledged restaurants offer a good-value 'business lunch', a set lunch special that typically costs 33% to 50% less than other options.

Certified kosher restaurants can't prepare meat and dairy products in the same kitchen, so they'll have either a meat format or a dairy, fish and pasta format. Vegetarians will find joy in the latter, which generally focuses on vegetarian dishes. Meat-oriented places typically include steakhouses, Chinese restaurants and traditional Ashkenazi restaurants serving such Eastern European fare as *schnitzel*, *goulash*, liver and *gefilte fish*.

A real treat is the variety of juices, which are freshly squeezed and sold in juice bars all over the country. Coffee is generally either instant or of the gritty Turkish variety (*qahwa bi-hel*; or in Hebrew: *kafé turki*) with cardamom. Another local favourite is tea with spearmint (*shai bi-naana*; or in Hebrew: *tey im naana*).

Alcohol is available everywhere, but observant Muslims don't drink at all and Jewish Israelis drink very little. Although Israelis use wine mainly for ceremonial purposes (eg during Shabbat and Pesah), the country now produces a range of very nice red and white wines, including Carmel, Golan, Tishbi and Tzora. To learn more of the wines in this growing industry, pick up a copy of Daniel Rogov's *Guide to Israeli Wines* (Toby Press), which includes a map of the wine regions.

These days, younger people prefer the appeal of beer as a nightlife accompaniment. The national brewery produces Maccabee, Gold Star and Nesher, which are acceptable (in descending order). In the Palestinian Territories, you can try the tasty but rather expensive boutique (micro) brew Taybeh.

JERUSALEM

ירושלים القدس

☎ 02 / pop 693,000

Jerusalem, Israel's ancient and enigmatic capital, is certainly one of the world's most fascinating cities, as well as one of the holiest, most beautiful – and most disputed.

HISTORY

Jerusalem, originally a small Jebusite settlement, occupied the slopes of Mt Moriah, where according to the Old Testament Abraham offered his son Isaac as a sacrifice. In 997 BC King David captured the city and made it his capital, and his son and successor, Solomon, built the great First Temple. The temple was destroyed by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC and the Jews were exiled into the wilderness.

After 50 short years, the Babylonians were pushed off the land by the Persians and it was under Cyrus the Great that the Jews were allowed to return and reconstruct a 'Second Temple', which was completed in 515 BC. Power shifted hands between subsequent invading armies until the Romans marched on Jerusalem in 63 BC, and installed Herod the Great as the king of Judea. Herod launched a massive building campaign in Jerusalem, and the city was thereafter ruled by a series of procurators. It was the fifth of these, the renowned Pontius Pilate, who ordered the crucifixion of Jesus.

The swell of Jewish discontent with Roman rule escalated into the First Revolt in AD 66, resulting in the destruction of the Temple. A Second Revolt in AD 132 took the Romans four years to quell. The Jews were banished from Jerusalem and the Emperor Hadrian razed the city and rebuilt it as Aelia Capitolina, which is the basis of today's Old City. For more information, see p40.

Christianity became the official state religion after Emperor Constantine's mother St Helena visited Jerusalem, causing the conversion of many local Jews and Samaritans. This sparked a building campaign of churches and basilicas atop Christian holy places; most notably, the first work on the Church of the Holy Sepulchre commenced in AD 326. The importance of Jerusalem as a centre of Christian worship spread through the Eastern Roman Empire and was recognised as one of the five patriarchal cities (the others being Antioch, Rome, Alexandria and Constantinople).

In 638 AD, however, after weathering a short-lived Persian invasion and occupation, Byzantine Jerusalem fell to a new power, Islam.

The Umayyad Caliph paid tribute to the place associated with Mohammed's *miraj* (ascension to heaven) and the Dome of the Rock was completed in AD 691 to commemorate the event. But despite its significance to Islam, Jerusalem's political and economic fortunes fell into decline, the result of its distance from the imperial capitals Damascus and Cairo.

For a time all faiths were free to live and practise in the city, but in the 11th century Palestine fell to the Seljuk Turks, who stopped Christian pilgrims from visiting Jerusalem. Hence, between 1095 and 1270, Western Christians led a series of Crusades to deliver the Holy Land from Arab occupation. The Crusaders took Jerusalem in 1099 but lost it in 1187, to Saladin.

In 1250 the city came under the influence of the Mamluks, successors to Saladin's Ayyubid dynasty, who ruled out of Egypt. They endowed the holy city with much fine architecture and turned it into a centre of Islamic learning. In 1517 the Ottoman Turks under Selim I defeated the Mamluks in battle near Aleppo, and thereby absorbed Jerusalem into their expanding empire. The

FOR SALE: THE BREAD OF A NATION

The Orthodox, ultrareligious Jews call it their 'Passover Telephone'. Used once a year during the week of Passover, this special 'kosher telephone' is sealed off for the remaining 51 weeks to keep it protected from the elements, lest some rogue breadcrumb falls into its cracks (to keep kosher, you cannot touch bread during Passover, or anything that has touched bread).

Is it an extreme form of devotion? Or is it a clever marketing ploy? However you see it, the Passover Phone is but one of many oddities facing the visitor to Israel during this holy week.

Travellers browsing the supermarket aisles during Passover are confronted with huge plastic tarps blanketing large sections of the store, effectively covering up any form of bread product, from pretzels right down to wheat grain.

Snackers find soft matzo (unleavened bread) used in place of pita at *falafel* stands. McDonald's gets into the act too: using buns made from, of all things, mashed potatoes.

On farms across Israel, livestock are given kosher feed for weeks before Passover so that Israel's milk won't have any trace of grain. Because their handlers can't touch bread, gorillas and other zoo animals also stay kosher for Passover. Jewish babies do their part by sucking on kosher pacifiers.

Israel's Ministry for Religious Affairs, responsible for ensuring the grain lockdown, symbolically sells off all of Israel's grain reserves to a non-Jew for a few shekels. This temporary grain baron then (hopefully) sells his newfound wealth back to the state when the holiday is over.

On the ground, everybody has their own interpretations of how far they'll go without bread. Since beer contains *chametz* (prohibited food) there is a certain element of society that quickly violates the no-bread rule. Try as they might, other folk simply can't go a week without a proper *felafel*; the result is covert trips to Akko, Nazareth and Jaffa: Arab towns where *felafel* addicts can get their fix.

JERUSALEM

Category	Location	Grid		
INFORMATION	Abu Hassan Alternative Tours	1 E2		
	British Council	2 E2		
	French Consulate	3 E3		
	Israeli Youth Hostels Office	(see 24)		
	Magen David Medical Centre	4 C1		
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	Bible Lands Museum	6 C3		
	Brigham Young University Center for Middle Eastern Studies	7 F2		
	Garden Tomb	8 E2		
	Herzl Museum	9 B3		
	Herzl's Grave	10 B3		
EATING	1868	20 E3		
	Caffit	21 D4		
	ENTERTAINMENT	Al-Kasaba Theatre	(see 22)	
		Al-Masrah Centre for Palestine Culture & Art	22 E2	
		Beit Shmuel	23 E3	
Binyanei Ha'Umah Conference Centre		24 C2		
Jerusalem Theatre		25 D3		
SLEEPING	Allenby 2 B&B	15 C1		
	American Colony	16 E1		
	SHOPPING	Jerusalem Mall	30 B4	
		TRANSPORT	Budget	31 E3
			City Bus Stops	32 D2
Egged Central Bus Station			33 C2	
Eldan			34 E3	
Nablus Road Old Bus Station	35 E2			

city remained under loose Turkish rule from Istanbul for 400 years.

A lack of central authority from the 18th century on resulted in squabbles between landowners, and in the mid-19th century the power vacuum seemed to invite portions of the Jewish Diaspora to return to their ancestral homeland.

Subsequently, Jerusalem became a hotbed of Arab and Jewish rivalry. The Ottomans rejected a British proposal to create an international enclave in the city, a decision that made the city a battleground again in 1948. When the fighting ended, a ceasefire, or Green Line, divided the city, with Israel on the west and Jordan to the east. After the Six Day War of 1967, Jeru-

salem was reunified under Israeli rule, but the control of the Holy City remains a bone of contention with the Palestinians, who also claim it as their capital.

ORIENTATION

Jerusalem is conveniently divided into three parts: the walled Old City with its four Quarters – Jewish, Muslim, Christian and Armenian; the predominantly Arab enclave of East Jerusalem; and the Israeli New City, also known as West Jerusalem. The main street in the New City, Jaffa Rd, connects the bus station and the Old City; the main shopping area is concentrated on King George V, Ben Yehuda and Ben Hillel Sts. Bus No 99, which makes a loop around

Category	Location	Grid		
INFORMATION	Abu Hassan Alternative Tours	1 E2		
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	Garden Tomb	8 E2		
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		Beit Shmuel	23 E3	
Binyanei Ha'Umah Conference Centre		24 C2		
Jerusalem Theatre		25 D3		
SLEEPING	Allenby 2 B&B	15 C1		
	American Colony	16 E1		
	SHOPPING	Jerusalem Mall	30 B4	
		TRANSPORT	Budget	31 E3
			City Bus Stops	32 D2
Egged Central Bus Station			33 C2	
Eldan			34 E3	
Nablus Road Old Bus Station	35 E2			

the city while providing commentary in English, is a good way to orient yourself upon arrival.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Sefer VeSefel (Map p286; ☎ 624 8237; 2 Ya'Avetz St; ☞ 8am–8pm Sun–Thu, 8am–2.30pm Fri, 8.30–11.30pm Sat) This Jerusalem institution houses floor-to-ceiling new and secondhand fiction and nonfiction titles. It's upstairs in an alley linking Jaffa Rd with Mordechai Ben Hillel St.

Steimatzyk (Map p286; ☎ 625 0155; 39 Jaffa Rd; ☞ 10am–7pm Sun–Thu, 10am–3pm Fri) Other locations include 7 Ben Yehuda St and the Jerusalem Mall.

Tmol Shilshom (Map p286; ☎ 623 2758; www.tmol-shilshom.co.il; 5 Yoel Salomon St; ☞ 8.30am–midnight Sun–Thu, 8.30am–4pm Fri, 8pm–midnight Sat)

JERUSALEM IN...

Two Days

Line up early (around 7.30am) on day one for a visit to the **Temple Mount** (p289), followed by a visit to the **Western Wall tunnels** (p289). The tunnel tour terminates conveniently at the start of the Via Dolorosa (Stations of the Cross), which you can follow to the **Church of the Holy Sepulchre** (p289). There are several first-rate places to break for lunch in the Christian Quarter, including **Papa Andrea's** (see the boxed text, p294).

After lunch, wander through the historic Cardo and the busy David St before capping the day with a tour of the **Citadel & Tower of David** (p290).

Spend day two exploring the new city's major sites, including the **Israel Museum** (p291) and the **Shrine of the Book** (p291), the **Bible Lands Museum** (p291) and **Yad Vashem** (p291). Spend your evening around the shops and cafés of Ben Yehuda St.

Three Days

With one extra day you could visit East Jerusalem, touring the **Museum on the Seam** (p291), the **Garden Tomb** (p291) and the **Rockefeller Museum** (p291), before ambling over to the **Mount of Olives** (p290). Continuing south around the Old City, check out the **City of David** (p290) and, if time allows, **King David's tomb** (p290) on Mt Zion.

Bohemian café and used bookshop, this place often hosts poetry readings or lectures by authors and journalists.

Emergency

Central police station (emergency ☎ 100) Near the Russian Compound in the New City.

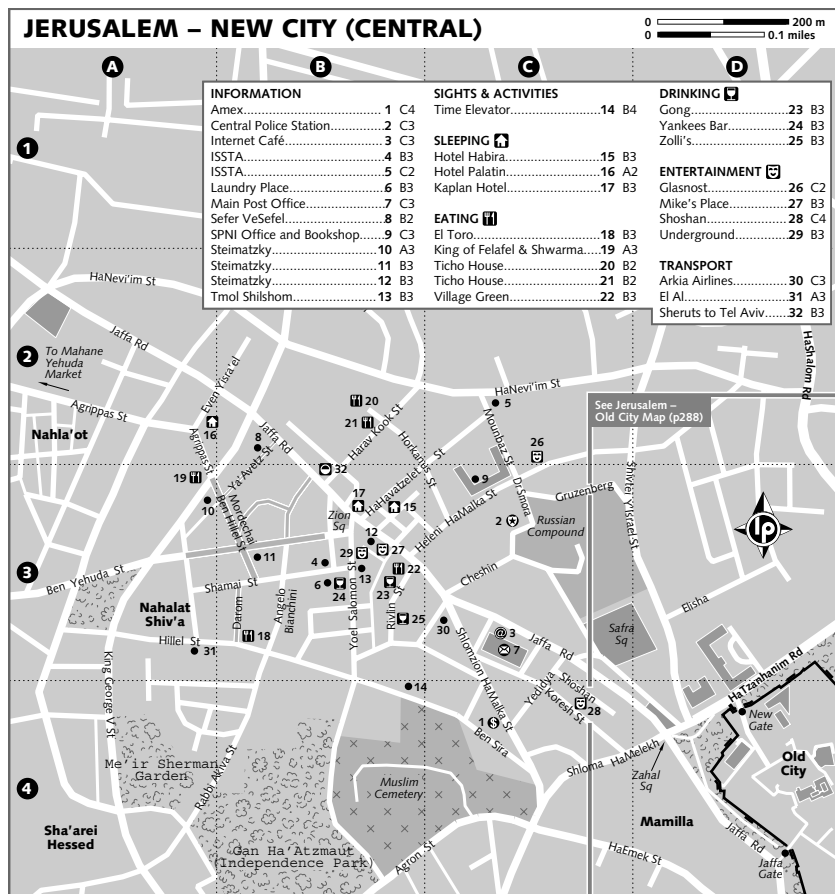
Fire department (☎ 102)

First aid (☎ 101)

Police (☎ 100)

Internet Access

Laptop carriers can find wi-fi 'hot spots' on Ben Yehuda St (on the benches outside Burger King), in Tmol Shilshom bookshop and in the lobbies of several main hotels. If you are hanging around the central bus



station, Internet terminals (9NIS per 30 minutes) are located on the 4th floor.

Freeline (Map p288; ☎ 627 1959; 8th station, 51

Aqabat al-Khanqah; per hr 8NIS; ☎ 10am-midnight)
Internet Café (Map p286; ☎ 622 3377; 31 Jaffa Rd; per hr 12NIS; ☎ 9.30am-4am) Located beside the main post office.

Mike's Centre (Map p288; ☎ 628 2486; www.mikescentre.com; 9th Station, 172 Souq Khan al-Zeit; per hr 8NIS; ☎ 9am-10pm) In the Old City, with Internet and laundry services.

St Raphael@Internet (Map p288; Jaffa Gate; per hr 15NIS; ☎ 10am-midnight Mon-Sat)

Laundry

Laundry Place (Map p286; ☎ 625 7714; 12 Shamai St; ☎ 8.30am-8pm Sun-Thu, 8.30am-3pm Fri)

Mike's Centre (Map p288; ☎ 628 2486; www.mikes

centre.com; 9th Station, 172 Souq Khan al-Zeit; ☎ 9am-10pm) In the Old City.

Libraries

British Council (Map p286; ☎ 640 3900; Agudat Sport Maccabee St; ☎ 2-7pm Mon-Tue & Thu, 11am-4pm Wed, 10am-1pm Fri) Large collection of DVDs, videos and books. Located opposite the Jerusalem Mall.

Media

Jerusalem Post (www.jpost.com) This is an excellent source of local news and events listings. On Friday, the Post includes an extensive 'What's On' weekend supplement.

Medical Services

Magen David Medical Centre (Map pp284-5; ☎ 652 3133; 7 Himem Gimel St, Romema; ☎ 24hr) This place is

located approximately five minutes' walk from the central bus station.

Orthodox Society (Map p288; ☎ 627 1958; Greek Orthodox Patriarchate Rd; ☎ 8am-3pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat) In the Old City's Christian Quarter, the Orthodox Society operates a low-cost medical and dental clinic that welcomes travellers.

Money

The best deals for changing money are at the private, commission-free change offices all over the New City, Old City and East Jerusalem. Many, especially around Ben Yehuda St, will also change traveller's cheques. Note that they close early on Friday and remain closed all day Saturday.

Amex (Map p286; ☎ 624 0830; 18 Shlomzion HaMalka St) Replaces lost travellers cheques.

Post

Main post office (Map p286; ☎ 624 4745; 23 Jaffa Rd ☎ 7am-7pm Sun-Thu, 7am-noon Fri) The place to pick up poste restante.

Tourist Information

Christian Information Centre (Map p288; ☎ 627 2692; fax 628 6417; Omar Ibn al-Khattab Sq; ☎ 8.30am-noon Mon-Sat) Opposite the entrance to the Citadel; provides information on the city's Catholic sites.

Jaffa Gate Tourist Office (Map p288; ☎ 627 1422; www.tourism.gov.il; Jaffa Gate; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Sun-Thu) Offers free maps and can arrange informal meetings with Christian, Orthodox Jewish and Muslim families.

Jewish Student Information Centre (Map p288; ☎ 628 2634, 052 2867795; www.jeffseidel.com; 5 Beit El St) Committed to giving young Jews an appreciation of their heritage, this centre organises free walking tours of Jewish sites around the Old City. (And it's got a great website!)

Travel Agencies

ISSTA New City (Map p286; ☎ 625 7257; 31 HaNevi'im St); Old City (☎ 621 1888; 4 Herbert Samuel St, Zion Sq) Organises inexpensive flight tickets.

Mazada Tours (Map p288; ☎ 623 5777; www.mazada.co.il; Pearl Hotel Bldg, 15 Jaffa Rd) Operates tours and buses to Cairo.

SIGHTS The Old City

Bound by stone ramparts, the Old City is divided into Jewish, Muslim, Christian and Armenian Quarters. Sites of interest include the Haram ash-Sharif (Temple Mount to the Jews), the site of the Dome of the Rock; the Western Wall; and the Church of the Holy

Sepulchre, built over what's claimed to be the traditional site of the Crucifixion.

WALLS & GATES

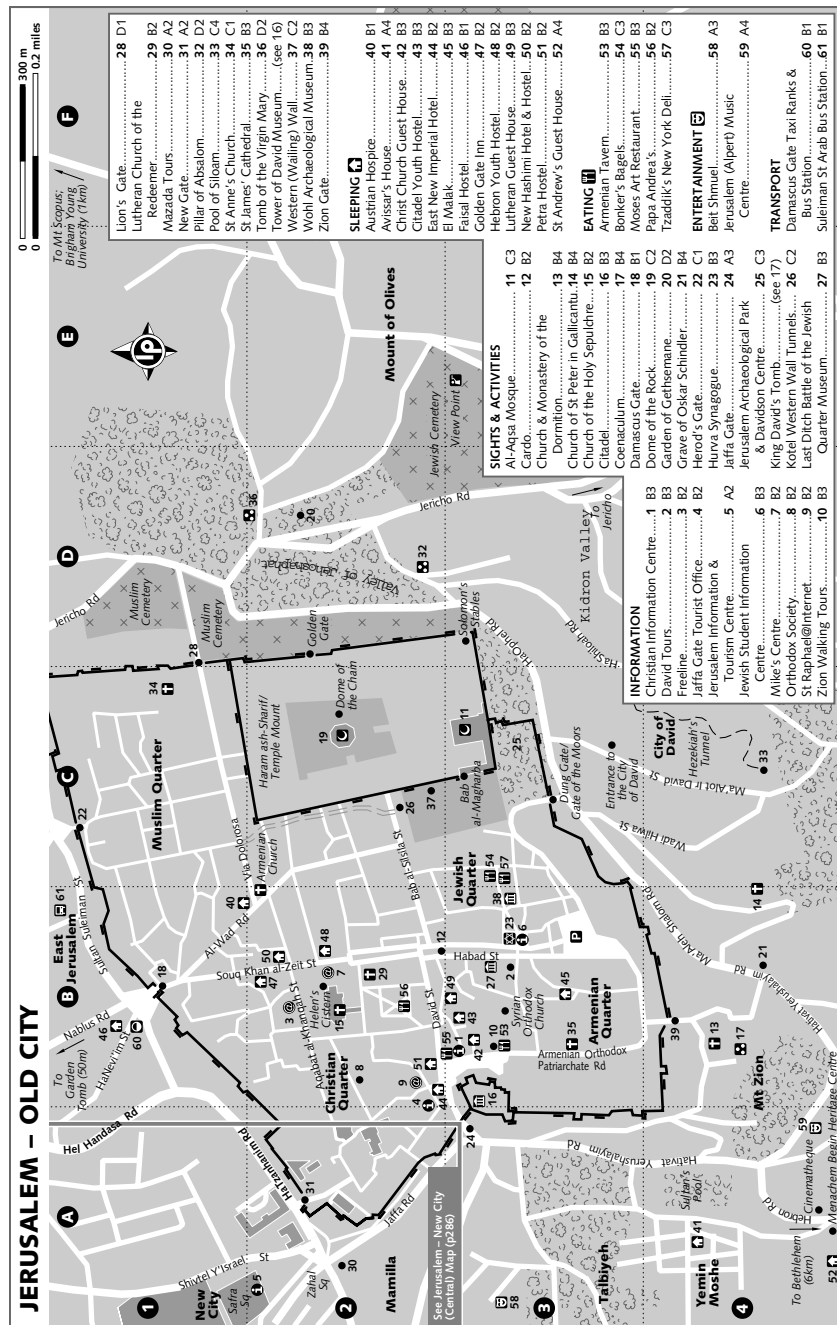
The Old City walls are the legacy of Süleyman the Magnificent who built them between 1537 and 1542, although they've since been extensively renovated. The **Ramparts Walk** (Map p288; adult/child 16/8NIS; ☎ 9am-4.30pm) is a 1km jaunt along the top of the city wall – from Jaffa Gate north to Lion's Gate (also called St Stephen's Gate), via New, Damascus and Herod's Gates, and Jaffa Gate south to Dung Gate (also called Gate of the Moors), via Zion Gate.

There are seven open gates. The **Jaffa Gate** (Map p288), so named because it was the beginning of the old road to Jaffa, is now the main entrance to the Old City from the New City. Moving clockwise, the 1887 **New Gate** (Map p288) also gives access from the New City. Down the hill, **Damascus Gate** (Map p288), the most attractive and crowded of all the city gates, opens into bustling East Jerusalem. **Herod's Gate** (Map p288) also faces Arab East Jerusalem, and it was near here in 1099 that the Crusaders first breached Jerusalem's walls.

Lion's Gate (Map p288), facing the Mount of Olives, has also been called St Stephen's Gate after the first Christian martyr, who was stoned to death nearby. **Zion Gate** (Map p288) became known as the Gate of the Jewish Quarter in late medieval times and is still pocked with reminders of the fierce fighting here in the 1948 war.

JEWISH QUARTER

Flattened during the 1948 fighting, the Jewish Quarter has been almost entirely reconstructed since its recapture by the Israelis in 1967. There are few historic monuments above ground level but the excavations during reconstruction unearthed a number of archaeological sites. The most significant is the **Cardo** (Map p288), the main north-south street of the Roman Aelia Capitolina and, later, of Byzantine Jerusalem. Part of it has been restored to what may have been its original appearance, while another part has been reconstructed as a shopping arcade with expensive gift shops and galleries of Judaica. The Cardo also includes the **Last Ditch Battle of the Jewish Quarter Museum** (Map p288; admission free; ☎ 10am-3pm Sun-Thu, 9am-1pm



Fri), which documents the 1948 campaign for control over the city.

At Hurva Sq, east of the Cardo, a graceful brick arch is the most prominent remnant of the **Hurva Synagogue** (Map p288). Down a narrow alleyway east of the Sq is the impressive **Wohl Archaeological Museum** (Map p288; ☎ 628 8141; admission 15NIS; ⏰ 9am-5pm Sun-Thu, 9am-1pm Fri), which features a 1st-century home and several Herodian archaeological sites, plus interpretive displays.

The **Western (Wailing) Wall** (Map p288), the only remnant of Judaism's holiest shrine, is part of the retaining wall built by Herod in 20 BC to support the temple esplanade (the 'wailing' moniker stems from Jewish sorrow over the destruction of the temple). The area immediately in front of the wall now serves as an open-air synagogue; the right side is open to women (who must dress modestly, covering their arms and legs), and the left side to men. It's accessible 24 hours a day, and up-to-the-minute live shots can be viewed in cyberspace at: www.aish.com/wallcam.

A Jerusalem highlight is the **Kotel Western Wall Tunnels** (Map p288; ☎ 627 1333; www.thekotel.org/adult/child 18/10NIS), a 488m passage that follows the northern extension of the Western Wall. One-hour tours operate several times daily, but must be booked in advance.

On the southern side of the Western Wall, the recently renovated **Jerusalem Archaeological Park & Davidson Centre** (Map p288; ☎ 627 7550; www.archpark.org.il; Dung Gate; adult/child 30/16NIS; ⏰ 8am-5pm Sun-Thu) includes an excellent multimedia presentation and virtual tour of the Temple Mount as it looked 2000 years ago.

The Jewish Quarter is the only part of the Old City that is fully equipped to accommodate wheelchair users.

MUSLIM QUARTER

This is the most bustling and densely populated area of the Old City, and while it's undeniably claustrophobic and hassle-plagued, it's also exhilarating. Clustered around the district of narrow medieval alleys are some fine examples of **Mamluk architecture**. At the Lion's/St Stephen's Gate is **St Anne's Church** (Map p288), perhaps the finest example of Crusader architecture in Jerusalem.

The road leading from the Lion's/St Stephen's Gate into the heart of the Old City is known as **Via Dolorosa** (Sorrowful Way) or

Stations of the Cross, the route that tradition claims was taken by the condemned Jesus as he lugged his cross to Calvary. While this was probably not the actual route taken, the notion does appear to promote faith in believers and at 3pm on Fridays, the Franciscan Fathers lead a solemn procession here.

Haram ash-Sharif, the **Temple Mount** (Map p288; ⏰ 7.30-11am & 1.30-2.30pm Sat-Thu) is one of the most instantly recognisable icons of the Middle East, and not to be missed. The massive stone platform was built over the biblical Mt Moriah, the site of Solomon's First and Herod's Second Temples and the place where Abraham was instructed by God to sacrifice his son Isaac in a test of his faith. The sacred altar of the First and Second Temples (aka the 'Holy of Holies') was here, making it one of Judaism's most holy places. For Muslims, the Temple Mount is revered for its association with Mohammed's mystical night journey (*isra*), in which the Prophet dreamed of flying to heaven from the mount to take his place alongside Allah. In more recent years, the Temple Mount has been thrust into the centre of controversy as Arabs and Jews attempt to stake their sovereignty over it. Plans by Jewish groups to destroy the Muslim sites and build a **Third Temple** (www.thirdtemple.com) have only increased tensions at the now heavily guarded site.

The gold-plated **Dome of the Rock** (Map p288), completed in AD 691, is the centrepiece of the Temple Mount, but actually serves more as a figurehead than a mosque, while the nearby **Al-Aqsa Mosque** (Map p288) is a functioning house of worship. Entrance to the Temple Mount is through the Bab al-Magharba gate, at the Western Wall. Non-Muslims can walk around the Temple Mount, but are barred from entering the Dome of the Rock or the Al-Aqsa Mosque. It's closed to visitors on Islamic holidays. Conservative dress, including a headscarf for women, is required.

CHRISTIAN QUARTER

The Christian Quarter revolves around the **Church of the Holy Sepulchre** (Map p288), the site where the Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Ethiopian and Coptic churches believe that Jesus was crucified, buried and resurrected. The church itself represents a collision of architectural traditions. The original

Byzantine structure was extensively rebuilt by the Crusaders and tweaked by numerous others over the years, but it remains quite a sombre place. It's open daily to anyone who's modestly dressed. It's also worth visiting the tower of the neighbouring **Lutheran Church of the Redeemer** (Map p288) for excellent views over the Old City.

The Jaffa Gate area is dominated by the Crusader **Citadel** (Map p288), which includes Herod's Tower and the Tower of David minaret. It's occupied by the highly worthwhile **Tower of David Museum** (Map p288; ☎ 626 5333; www.towerof david.org.il; Jaffa Gate; adult/student/child 30/20/15NIS; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 10am-2pm Fri), which tells the entire history of Jerusalem in a concise and easily digestible format. Revolving art exhibits in the halls and gardens add an especially pleasant angle. For blind visitors, there is also a series of relief aluminium models of the city at several stages of its history.

ARMENIAN QUARTER & MT ZION

A worthwhile visit is the Armenian **St James' Cathedral** (Map p288; Armenian Orthodox Patriarchate Rd; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Sat), which has a sensuous aura of ritual and mystery. There's also the **Church of St Peter in Gallicantu** (Map p288; adult/student 6/4NIS; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Sat), which commemorates the crowing of the cock that Jesus had predicted would reveal Peter's three denials of him.

From the Armenian Quarter, Zion Gate leads out to Mt Zion, site of the **Coenaculum** (Cenacle; Map p288), traditionally held to be the site of the Last Supper. At the back of the same building is the traditional site of **King David's Tomb** (Map p288; ☎ 671 9767; Mt Zion; ☎ 8am-6pm Sun-Thu, 8am-2pm Fri), and around the corner, the **Church & Monastery of the Dormition** (Map p288), where Jesus' mother Mary fell into 'eternal sleep'.

Just south of King David's Tomb is a small cemetery containing the unelaborate grave of **Oskar Schindler** (Map p288); ask the caretaker to the point the way.

Mount of Olives, Mt Scopus & the Kidron Valley

To the east of the Old City, outside Lion's/St Stephen's Gate, the land drops away into the lovely Kidron Valley, then rises again up the slopes of the Mount of Olives. For Christians, this hillside holds special significance

as the site where Jesus took on the sins of the world, was arrested and later ascended into heaven. Predictably, several churches have been built here, and visitors can still see the olive grove in the **Garden of Gethsemane** (Map p288) and the **Tomb of the Virgin Mary** (Map p288). Equally impressive is the panorama of the Old City from the summit – visit early in the morning for the best light.

On Mt Scopus, between the Mount of Olives and Hebrew University, is the Mormon **Brigham Young University Center for Middle Eastern Studies** (Map pp284-5; Martin Buber St, Mt Scopus; ☎ 626 5621; ☎ tours 10am-3.30pm Tue-Fri). Free guided tours explain the centre's wonderful architecture and include a demonstration of the incredible pipe organ in the main assembly hall. On Sunday evenings, it hosts free public concerts; a list is available on request (from concerts@jc.byu.ac.il).

The **Kidron Valley**, between the City of David/Mt Ophel (the original Jerusalem) and the Mount of Olives, presents an enigmatic set of historical sites. At the top of the valley sits the 1st-century **Pillar of Absalom** (Map p288), which is almost certainly not Absalom's tomb, as claimed.

Below Jerusalem's current city walls sits the remains of the **City of David** (Map p288; ☎ 1-800-252423; www.cityof david.org.il; ☎ 9am-5pm Sun-Thu, 9am-1pm Fri), the Canaanite settlement captured by King David some 3000 years ago. The main attraction is the extraordinary 500m-long **Hezekiah's Tunnel** (Map p288; ☎ 626 2341; adult/child 12/6NIS; ☎ 9am-4pm Sun-Thu, 9am-2pm Fri), an underground passage of waist-deep water that ends at the **Pool of Siloam** (Map p288), where it is said a blind man was healed after Jesus instructed him to wash in it. You'll need sandals, a strong torch (flashlight) and a sense of adventure. The City of David is not well set up for tourists so a guided tour in English (11am Monday and Thursday) does wonders to improve your understanding of the place.

Note that quite a few women have reported unpleasant experiences while walking around the Mount of Olives and Kidron Valley, and we strongly advise women not to visit these areas alone.

East Jerusalem

The modern, blaring, fume-hazed Palestinian part of Jerusalem is characterised by small shops, businesses and ageing hotels.

On Sultan Suleiman St, just outside the Old City walls, the **Rockefeller Museum** (Map pp284-5; ☎ 628 2251; http://www.imj.org.il/rockefeller/; cnr Jericho Rd & Sultan Suleiman St; adult/student 26/16NIS; ☎ 10am-3pm Sun-Thu, 10am-2pm Fri & Sat) has some impressive archaeological and architectural exhibits, although the presentation is a bit musty (your Israel Museum ticket is also good here).

Behind a heavy stone wall on Nablus Rd is the beautiful **Garden Tomb** (Map pp284-5; ☎ 627 2745; ☎ 2-5.30pm Mon-Sat), which contains a 2000-year-old stone tomb and garden that are believed to have once been the property of Joseph of Arimathea. The site also provides a view of what some claim to be the hill Golgotha (The Place of the Skull), also known as Gordon's Calvary. For the many reasons outlined on the free guided tour, it's believed by most Protestants to be the site of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection.

Located on the former Green Line that once divided East and West Jerusalem (and the Arab and Jewish armies) is the **Museum on the Seam** (Map pp284-5; ☎ 628 1278; www.coexistence.art.museum; 4 Hel Handasa; adult/senior/student 25/10/20NIS; ☎ 9am-5pm Sun-Thu, 9am-3pm Fri), a powerful multimedia exposition that deals with conflict and coexistence through the use of art.

The New City

The New City is roughly centred on the triangle formed by Jaffa Rd, King George V St and the pedestrianised Ben Yehuda St. However, the most colourful and bustling district is **Mahane Yehuda**, the Jewish food market. Possibly one of the world's most reluctant tourist attractions, the ultra-Orthodox Jewish district of **Me'a She'arim** is reminiscent of a *shtetl* (ghetto) in pre-Holocaust Eastern Europe. Dress conservatively, don't take photos without permission and avoid the area during Shabbat.

MUSEUMS

The Holocaust museum **Yad Vashem** (Map pp284-5; ☎ 644 3565; www.yadvashem.org; Mt Zikaron; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm Sun-Thu, 9am-2pm Fri) is a moving memorial to the six million victims of the Nazi Holocaust. An impressive US\$56 million history museum, completed in 2005, includes the tear-jerking 'Hall of Names'. This rotunda is the physical repository for the Pages of Testimony – forms filled out by friends and family of Holocaust victims;

three million have so far been collected. The hole dug out of the floor honours those victims whose names will never be known. Equally moving, the solitary flame reflected infinitely inside the Children's Memorial remembers the 1.5 million Jewish children exterminated in the Holocaust.

Next to Yad Vashem is the grave of Theodore Herzl and the **Herzl Museum** (Map pp284-5; ☎ 643 3266; adult/child 20/15NIS; ☎ 8am-5pm Sun-Thu) dedicated to the Zionist movement that he founded. Bus Nos 13, 17, 18, 20 or 27 drop you off near the Herzl Museum.

The **Bible Lands Museum** (Map pp284-5; ☎ 561 1066; www.blm.org; 25 Granot St, Givat Ram; adult/child/student 28/15/15NIS; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Sun-Tue & Thu, 9.30am-9.30pm Wed in summer, 1.30-9.30pm Wed in winter, 9.30am-2pm Fri, 11am-3pm Sat) chronologically reveals the history of the Holy Land with a wealth of well-displayed artefacts and background information.

The country's major museum complex is the **Israel Museum** (Map pp284-5; ☎ 670 8811; www.imj.org.il; Rupin St, Givat Ram; adult/child/student 40/20/30NIS; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon, Wed & Sat, 4-9pm Tue, 10am-9pm Thu, 10am-2pm Fri), just west of the New City. An assemblage of several major collections of national historical and artistic significance, it also includes a peaceful sculpture garden and the jar-shaped and architecturally inspiring **Shrine of the Book**. Here you'll see background displays and examples of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which were uncovered at Qumran between 1947 and 1956. Your ticket is also good for seven days to visit the Rockefeller Museum in East Jerusalem.

A cross between a museum, a theatre and a carnival ride is the **Time Elevator** (Map p286; ☎ 625 2228; www.time-elevator-jerusalem.co.il; Beit Agron, 37 Hillel St; admission 48NIS; ☎ 1-5.30pm). Spectators are jolted around in their seats along with the on-screen action as Chaim Topol (star of *Fiddler on the Roof*) leads them through Jerusalem's equally moving history.

COURSES

British Council (Map pp284-5; ☎ 626 7111; issa.faltas@ps.britishcouncil.org; 31 Nablus Rd) Offers Arabic language courses beginning in September, January and April. Classes meet at the East Jerusalem branch twice weekly for 10 weeks and cost 900NIS.

YMCA (Map pp284-5; ☎ 569 2692; fax 623 5192; 26 HaMelekh David St) A three-month Hebrew language course is available at the YMCA *ulpan* for 900NIS.

JERUSALEM FOR CHILDREN

The list of kid-friendly sites around Jerusalem begins with the excellent **Biblical Zoo** (☎ 675 0111; www.jerusalemzoo.org.il; Masua Rd; adult/child 3-8/senior 40/32/32NIS; ☎ 9am-6pm Sun-Thu, 9am-4.30pm Fri, 10am-5pm Sat) in the southwest of the city, which includes just about every pair of animals that Noah could fit in his ark. Other obvious attractions for kids are the **Time Elevator** (p291), the **Kotel Western Walls** (p289) and **Hezekiah's Tunnel** (p290) where they can make like Indiana Jones and wade through an ancient water channel. Also try the **Tower of David Museum** (p290), which often has special exhibitions for kids – recently featured was a giant model train set snaking its way around the ruins. Outside Jerusalem, **Mini Israel** (☎ 08-921 4121; www.minisrael.co.il; ☎ 10am-6pm Nov-Mar, 10am-8pm Apr-Oct) shrinks 330 of Israel's famed attractions down to scale-model size. It's near the Latrun Junction, halfway to Tel Aviv if you're headed that way.

TOURS

A good introduction to the city is Egged's **Route 99 Circular Line** (ticket 9.90NIS; ☎ 10am & noon Sun-Fri). This coach service, which departs from Safra Sq, cruises past 36 of Jerusalem's major sites, with basic commentary that's more or less in English.

Zion Walking Tours (Map p288; ☎ 050 530 5552; Omar Ibn al-Khattab Sq) operates a three-hour Old City walking tour (US\$15 per person) at 10am, 11am and 2pm Sunday to Thursday (when there are at least four participants).

David Tours (Map p288; ☎ 052 863 8550; www.davidstours.com; 24 Cardo, Jewish Quarter) does a variety of city tours including one of the Temple Mount (US\$25/23 per adult/student).

SLEEPING

A lack of tourism during the last intifada closed down most budget places in the New City, forcing backpackers to take refuge in East Jerusalem and the Old City. Midrange travellers have many more options in the New and Old Cities, including friendly B&Bs, historic Christian hospices and boutique hotels, among others. Top-end hotels are mostly located in the posh neighbourhoods of Yemin Moshe and Mamila in the New City. Better-value business-style hotels are clustered in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood of East Jerusalem.

For a list of B&Bs, contact the **Home Accommodation Association of Jerusalem** (☎ 645 2198; www.bnb.co.il; PO Box 7547, Jerusalem 91074).

Old City BUDGET

Citadel Youth Hostel (Map p288; ☎ 628 5253; www.citadelhostel.com; 20 Mark St; dm 30NIS, d with bathroom 150-190NIS, without bathroom 70-120NIS; ☎) This Palestinian-run guesthouse, with a cave-like entrance, has a mix of scruffy dorms and better private rooms decorated along traditional Arabic lines. Bathroom facilities are mediocre but the rooftop views are dramatic and the management is excellent. Free wi-fi available.

Hebron Youth Hostel (Map p288; ☎ 628 1101; ashraftabasco@hotmail.com; 8 Aqabat at-Takiya St; dm 25NIS, d with/without bathroom 100/70NIS; ☎) This venerable old hostel, with a magnificent stone interior, is buried inside the Muslim Quarter's Souq Khan al-Zeit. Facilities include a billiards table and lockers to protect your valuables.

Petra Hostel (Map p288; ☎ 628 6618; www.inisrael.com/petra; Omar Ibn al-Khattab Sq; roof mattresses/dm 25/35NIS, d with/without bathroom 150/120NIS; ☎) Converted from a grand old hotel (which has housed Mark Twain and Herman Melville), the Petra is starting to come apart at the seams but still retains a friendly atmosphere and first-class management. A big attraction is the Jaffa Gate location and spectacular views over the Old City. Laundry services are available, as well as airport shuttle and 24-hour hot water.

New Hashimi Hotel & Hostel (Map p288; ☎ 628 4410; www.hashimihotel.com; 73 Souq Khan al-Zeit; dm/s/d/ste US\$8/30/35/120; ☎ ☎ ☎) Down the souq from the Golden Gate, the Hashimi has a variety of rooms built around a sunny atrium. Strict Islamic house rules prevent unmarried couples from sleeping in the same room. A variety of services includes laundry, a gift shop and café.

Golden Gate Inn (Map p288; ☎ 628 4317; golden.gate442000@yahoo.com; 10 Souq Khan al-Zeit; dm/s/d/tr 30/100/120/150NIS) Just off a busy souq in the Muslim quarter, the Golden Gate is an underrated option with a large kitchen, friendly management and cool rooms protected from the heat and noise by thick walls.

El Malak (Map p288; ☎ 628 5382, 054 567 8044; 18 El-Malak & 27 Ararat; dm/s/d 50/100/150NIS) This B&B-style place, located in the Jewish Quarter, has

several partitioned rooms in the cool basement of an Armenian home. The dorms are overpriced but the private rooms are good value. Two better rooms are also available in the house upstairs. Ask for Claire Ghawi.

MIDRANGE

East New Imperial Hotel (Map p288; ☎ 628 2261; www.newimperial.com; Jaffa Gate; s/d/tr US\$35/55/75; ☎ ☎) This rambling old hotel was built in 1885 on the site of Bath Shebiye, where King David supposedly saw the wife of Uriah bathing in a pool. It's got loads of character, and the common rooms are decorated with lovely Palestinian embroidered clothing and an incredible hand-drawn family tree.

Christ Church Guest House (Map p288; ☎ 627 7727; www.itac-israel.org; Omar Ibn al-Khattab Sq; Jaffa Gate; s/d US\$50/80, extra person US\$25) This is in the Anglican compound near Jaffa Gate and enjoys a quiet and comfortable atmosphere. Attached are the Christian Heritage Centre and an Anglican church that's built in the form of a synagogue for Messianic Jews. Prices include breakfast.

Austrian Hospice (Map p288; ☎ 627 1466; www.austrianhospice.com; 37 Via Dolorosa; dm/s/d/tr €14/42/66/93; ☎) Looking like a lime machine to shoot a film about chain-rattling ghosts or Christian crusaders, this castle-like guesthouse offers clean rooms off cavernous hallways. The front porch and leafy garden are nice places to share a beer with your fellow guests.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Lutheran Guest House (Map p288; ☎ 626 6888; www.luth-guesthouse-jerusalem.com; Marks St; dm/s/d US\$9/49.50/80; ☎) The Lutheran Guest House offers the best dormitory rooms in the Old City, with clean, airy rooms with traditional stone walls, and comfortable bunk beds. A bonus is access to a wonderfully medieval kitchen with plenty of room to spread out, cook and socialise. Likewise, the private rooms are some of the best around, on par with rooms you'd find in the New City, albeit with slightly higher prices. The backyard rose garden and antique sitting room add to the atmosphere. It's located right on the crossroads between the Jewish, Christian and Armenian quarters.

East Jerusalem BUDGET

Faisal Hostel (Map p288; ☎ 628 7502; faisalsam@hotmail.com; 4 HaNevi'im St; dm/d 25/80NIS; ☎) Political tensions run high in this very Palestinian guesthouse, making it a popular meeting point for freelance journalists, political activists and wannabe anarchists. Hisham, the owner, provides free Internet, free tea and free dialogue. Although Faisal is somewhat dishevelled, no guesthouse in Israel offers character quite like this place.

Palm Hostel (Map p288; ☎ 627 3189; 6 HaNevi'im St; dm/d 25/80NIS; ☎) The Palm, reached through a small vegetable stand, is cleaner than its neighbour Faisal, but dimly lit and with less character. Free Internet.

TOP END

American Colony (Map p284-5; ☎ 627 9777; www.amcol.co.il; 23 Nablus Rd, East Jerusalem; s US\$175-340, d US\$230-700; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Offering luxury and class like no other hotel in Israel, this hotel is in a league of its own. Despite its high-brow status, it remains an unpretentious place, a rendezvous point for journalists and scholars as well as a temporary home for visiting celebrities. Former guests include Winston Churchill, Mikhail Gorbachev, Jimmy Carter, Ingrid Bergman and John Steinbeck.

West Jerusalem

If you prefer to stay in West Jerusalem, plan on spending double the price for similar quality in other areas.

TOP END

King David Hotel (Map p284-5; ☎ 620 8888; www.danhotels.com; 7 King David St; s US\$228-488, d US\$298-508; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Like a hangover from the British mandate, the King David offers old-world atmosphere, lush gardens and a grand dining room. Note that some standard rooms are smaller than others, so if you are given something resembling a janitor's closet, ask to see another.

New City BUDGET

At the time of writing, Mike's Place (p296) was planning to set up a dormitory-only guesthouse above the bar on Jaffa Rd.

Kaplan Hotel (Map p286; ☎ 625 4591; www.mznet.org/kaplanhotel; 1 HaHavatzet St, Zion Sq; s US\$35-45, d US\$45-65; ☎ ☎) With a very convenient

location next to Zion Sq, this small budget hotel has basic rooms with private bathroom and kitchen facilities.

MIDRANGE

Allenby 2 B&B (Map pp284-5; ☎ 052578493; www.bnb.co.il/allenby; Allenby Sq 2, Romema; s US\$20-55, d US\$30-70; ☎ ☎ ☎) A comfortable, friendly B&B two minutes' walk from the central bus station. The irrepressible owner is a font of knowledge on the city and a delightful host. Rates include breakfast and use of the communal kitchen. Long-term rates are available.

St Andrew's Guest House (Map p288; ☎ 673 2401; www.scotsquesthouse.com; 1 David Remez St, Yemin Moshe; s/d/tr US\$55/80/100; ☎ ☎ ☎) This charming hospice is not as gloomy as its counterparts in the Old City, but still retains a quaint feel, thanks to the fireplace, novel-stuffed reading room and old-world café. Rooms, most with balconies that overlook the Old City, are equipped with heater, fan and phone.

B-Green Guest House (Map pp284-5; ☎ 566 4220; www.bnb.co.il/green/index.htm; 4 Rachel Imeinu Rd, German Colony; s/d US\$40/50; ☎ ☎) In a lively area 20 minutes' walk or a short bus ride from the Old City. Each fan-cooled room has private facilities and a kitchenette. Futons are available for a third guest at no extra charge.

Avissar's House (Map p288; ☎ 625 5447; www.jeru-avissar-house.co.il; 12 Hame-vasser St, Yemin Moshe; s US\$63-118, d US\$73-120; ☎ ☎) Owner Yossi offers a variety of well-kept suites and studio guest flats. It's one of the closest midrange places to the Old City, but unfortunately it imposes a minimum three-night stay.

Other recommended midrange places:
Le Sixteen B&B (Map pp284-5; ☎ 532 8008; www.bnb.co.il/le16/index.htm; 16 Midbar Sinai St, Givat Hamivtar;

s US\$35-40, d US\$55-60; ☎ ☎) Rates include breakfast and wi-fi access.

Hotel Palatin (Map p286; ☎ 623 1141; www.hotel-palatin.co.il; 4 Agrippas St; s/d US\$60/70; ☎ ☎) Central location near Ben Yehuda St. Rates include breakfast and wi-fi access.

Hotel Habira (Map p286; ☎ 625 5754; jhabira@netvision.net.il; 4 HaHavatazet St; s/d/tr US\$40/50/60; ☎ ☎) Central location off Zion Sq. Competitive rates include breakfast.

EATING

Most of the fine dining places are in the New City, with a concentration of ethnic restaurants along Yoel Salomon St.

Old City

Moses Art Restaurant (Map p288; ☎ 628 0975; Omar Ibn al-Khattab Sq; ☎ 7.30am-1am) A friendly and informal Lebanese choice just inside Jaffa Gate in the Old City. The friendly owner Moses is always up for engaging political debate.

Armenian Tavern (Map p288; ☎ 627 3854; 79 Armenian Patriarchate Rd; meat dishes 35-45NIS; ☎ 11am-10.30pm Tue-Sun) In the Jaffa Gate area, this place attracts diners with its beautiful stone-and-tile interior and a gently splashing fountain. The strongly flavoured meat dishes are excellent, including *khaghoghhi derev*, a spiced minced-meat mixture bundled in vine leaves.

Banker's Bagels (Map p288; ☎ 627 2590; Tiferet Israel St; bagels 3-13NIS) This is a friendly little place where you can munch on the original Jewish snack with a choice of fillings.

Tzaddik's New York Deli (Map p288; ☎ 627 2148; Tiferet Israel St; hot dishes 20-29NIS, sandwiches 16-32NIS) A clone of a New York deli, this place is best known for its attached Internet café and convenient location near the Western Wall.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Papa Andrea's (Map p288; ☎ 628 4433; Aftemeos Market No 4; meals 35-60NIS; ☎ 11am-10.30pm) Head up the stairs at this old Christian-quarter building, down the street from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, to Papa Andrea's, a wonderful rooftop restaurant that guarantees spectacular views from all angles. The food is hot, fresh and excellent, with a selection of soups and salads for starters, followed by platters of grilled meat and chips. The friendly staff and management are eager to please and not shy in lending an opinion to all matters political – apropos as you gaze over the Muslim, Jewish and Christian quarters below.

Ticho House (Map p286; ☎ 624 4186; Ticho House Museum, 9 Harav Kook St; meals 30-60NIS; ☎ 10am-midnight Sun-Thu, 10am-3pm Fri, 8pm-midnight Sat) This renowned bohemian café and restaurant is housed in the 19th-century home of artist Anna Ticho. You can eat a late breakfast from 10am to noon and for lunch and dinner the speciality is fish and vegetarian pasta dishes. On Tuesday at 8pm it holds a cheese-and-wine evening (75NIS) with live jazz music, for which bookings are required.

New City

1868 (Map pp284-5; ☎ 622 2312; 10 King David St; starters 35-70NIS, mains 80-120NIS; ☎ noon-midnight) This French-Italian gourmet restaurant is set in one of the oldest buildings in West Jerusalem, built (obviously) in 1868. It offers a choice of wines to complement a menu of lamb chops, roast beef and other meat-based dishes.

Village Green (Map p286; ☎ 625 3065; 33 Jaffa Rd; dishes 21-25NIS; ☎ 9am-10pm Sun-Thu, 9am-3pm Fri) This clean, kosher vegetarian place serves up a range of vegetable soups, quiches, veggie burgers, pizza, stuffed vegetables, blintzes, savoury pies and lasagne dishes, all served with home-baked bread. It has a well-stocked salad bar.

El Toro (Map p286; ☎ 623 3982; 23 Hillel St; ☎ noon-2am Sun-Thu, noon-5pm Fri, 8pm-2am Sat) Slick little bar-restaurant offering Latin American fare including burritos (25NIS) and 400g Argentinean steaks (75NIS). Try the 'cinco element' (55NIS) with five kinds of grilled meat. The first shot of vodka is free.

Caffit (Map pp284-5; ☎ 563 3584; 35 Emek Refa'im St; ☎ 7am-2am Sun-Thu, 7am-3pm Fri, 8pm-2am Sat) A buzzing atmosphere, candle-lit tables, healthy light meals and a lovely street-side patio make this a fine choice if you're in the trendy German Colony.

Quick Eats

There are surprisingly few felafel places in the Old City, and even fewer are especially good. For decent felafel, try the unnamed stall as you enter from Damascus Gate, in the narrow frontage between the two forking roads. Shwarma stands around the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and Jaffa Gate cater mostly to foreign tourists lured by the location. Walk down a back street or two, especially towards the Muslim Quarter, and you'll find cheaper, more authentic places.

The best value snack shops are in East Jerusalem; try the joint a few doors down from Faisal Guesthouse (shwarmas 12NIS).

In the New City, one of the most popular stands with locals is **King of Felafel & Shwarma** (Map p286; ☎ 8am-midnight), on the corner of King George V and Agrippas Sts, which serves Israeli and Ethiopian food.

Self-Catering

Mahane Yehuda market (Map pp284-5; btwn Jaffa & Agrippas Sts; ☎ Sun-Fri) Offers Jerusalem's best-value food shopping. For the best deals,

stroll in just as it's winding down for the day (5.30pm to 6.30pm Sunday to Thursday in winter, 7.30pm to 8.30pm Sunday to Thursday in summer, and 3pm to 4pm Friday year-round), when stallholders are clearing out the day's produce.

DRINKING

East Jerusalem and the Old City roll up their pavements at sundown and only a hike into the New City will provide an alternative to beer and a book in your room. Yoel Salomon and Rivlin, the two parallel main streets in the New City, are lined with enough late-night bars and cafés to defeat even the most ardent pub-crawlers. The Russian compound is also a safe bet for drinks and late-night dancing.

Gong (Map p286; ☎ 625 0818; 33 Jaffa St; ☎ 7pm-2am) Dimly lit Japanese-influenced place with black lacquer furniture, blood-red lighting and blaring hip-hop sounds. It's mostly a bar but it also serves excellent appetizers such as sushi and chicken wings, as well as main dishes.

Yankee's Bar (Map p286; ☎ 625 6488; 12 Yoel Salomon St; ☎ 4pm-9.30am) This beer bar puts on a variety of events: Monday is all you can drink beer night (49NIS), jam sessions are held on Wednesday, outdoor concerts are held on Saturday and a DJ is in-house on Sunday.

Zolli's (Map p286; ☎ 054 812 4200; 5 Rivlin St; ☎ 4.30pm-late) Located down a narrow alley, this popular sports bar offers 12 draught beers, 15 flavours of tobacco for the nargileh (water pipe) and 50 types of whiskey.

ENTERTAINMENT

Nightclubs

Haoman 17 (☎ 678 1658; 17 Haoman St, Talpiot; admission 50-80NIS; ☎ 11pm-late Thu & Fri) With its warehouse location, booming sound system and great lighting, Haoman 17 is one of the ultimate clubbing venues. When you get down to Haoman St, it's opposite the Anjril Grill, under the Philips sign.

Glasnost (Map p286; ☎ 054 443 3153; 15 Helani Malka St; ☎ 9pm-3am Thu & Sat, 2.30pm-2am Fri, 9pm-2am Mon) In the middle of a strip of grumpy Russian bars, this offers a lighter mood, especially on Friday when it hosts a salsa lesson (40NIS) from 2.30pm to 8pm. Monday is salsa night, when students put their moves on the floor. The bar is also open on Thursday and Saturday when it hosts DJs or live music.

Underground (Map p286; ☎ 054 677 2856; 1 Yoel Salomon St; ☎ 9pm-6am) Cavelike bar and disco floor that reels in Jerusalem's teenage tear-aways and first-time tourists.

Live Music

Mike's Place (Map p286; ☎ 052 267 0965; 37 Jaffa St; ☎ 4pm-5am) Nightly live music, pool tables and a 4pm to 9pm happy hour make this one of the most popular night spots in town.

Lab (Map pp284-5; ☎ 673 4116; adult/student 65/40NIS; 28 Hebron St; ☎ 10pm-3am Mon-Sat) Crafted out of a disused railroad warehouse, this innovative bar and theatre hosts young artists, musicians and dancers mainly interested in alternative and 'experimental' arts, hence the name. Call ahead for upcoming events.

Pargod Theatre (Map pp284-5; ☎ 625 8819; 94 Bezalel St) Great for jazz; jam sessions take place every Friday from 2.30pm to 5.30pm.

Gay & Lesbian Venues

Shoshan (Map p286; ☎ 623 3366; 4 Shoshan St; ☎ 9.30pm-2am) Gay places come and go. At the time of writing the main hangout was this small, slick bar at the end of a quiet alley south of Safra Sq. Dance parties are held Thursday and Friday, while Sunday is lesbian night.

Theatre & Classical Music

Jerusalem Theatre (Map pp284-5; ☎ 561 7167; 20 David Marcus St) The theatre offers simultaneous English-language translation headsets for certain performances. It's also home to the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra.

Khan Theatre (Map pp284-5; ☎ 671 8281; www.khan.co.il; 2 David Remez Sq; adult/student 150/120NIS) Occasional English-language performances.

Binyanei Ha'Umah Conference Centre (Map pp284-5; 1 Shezar Rd; ☎ 622 2481) Is the residence of the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra.

Al-Masrah Centre for Palestine Culture & Art and Al-Kasaba Theatre (Map pp284-5; ☎ 628 0957; Abu Obeida St) Off Salah ad-Din St in East Jerusalem, these places stage plays, musicals, operettas and folk dancing in Arabic, often with an English synopsis.

Classical performances are held at the **YMCA** (Map pp284-5; ☎ 569 2692; 26 HaMelekh David St); at the **Jerusalem (Alpert) Music Centre** (Map p288; ☎ 623 4347; Mishkenot Sha'ananim), on alternate Fridays; and at **Beit Shmuel** (Map p288; ☎ 620 3435; www.beitshmuel.com; 6 Shema St), part of Hebrew Union College, on Saturday morning.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Jerusalem's Atarot airport is used mainly by international charter flights. When demand is high, domestic carriers Arkia and Israir will connect Jerusalem with Eilat and Haifa. These airlines have offices in Jerusalem:

Arkia (☎ 621 8444; fax 623 5758; 4th fl, 42 Agrippas St)

El Al (Map p286; ☎ 677 0207; fax 677 0255; 12 Hillel St)

Bus

From the sparkling **Egged central bus station** (Map pp284-5; ☎ 694 4888; Jaffa Rd), buses connect to all major cities and towns around Israel. Buses to Tel Aviv (17.70NIS, one hour) depart every 15 minutes; to Haifa (39NIS; 2½ hours), Tiberias (42NIS, 2½ hours) and Be'erSheva (32NIS, 1½ hours) depart roughly hourly; and to Eilat (65NIS, 4½ hours) buses depart four times daily. For day trips to the Dead Sea, including Ein Gedi (32NIS, two hours) or Masada (39NIS, 2½ hours), be sure to leave on the first service of the day (8.45am) or you'll be pressed to get back the same day. There is also service to Rachel's Tomb (3.80NIS, 25 minutes) near Bethlehem, departing every two hours.

For info on buses to Egypt, see p355.

Sheruts

Sheruts (service taxis) are much faster than buses, depart more frequently and cost only a few shekels more; they're also the only way to travel during Shabbat. *Sheruts* for Tel Aviv (20NIS per person on weekdays, 30NIS on Friday and Saturday) depart from the corner of Harav Kook St and Jaffa Rd (Map p286).

Sheruts for all destinations on the West Bank and Gaza depart from the ranks opposite Damascus Gate in East Jerusalem.

Train

Trains to Tel Aviv's Arlosoroff station (adult/child 19/17NIS) leave hourly from 6.10am to 9.10pm Sunday to Thursday. The last train on Friday is at 3pm. A combo train/bus ticket saves a few shekels. Reach the station on bus No 6 from Jaffa Rd or the central bus station. Ring ☎ *5770 for more details.

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

Bus No 947 departs from the central bus station for Ben-Gurion airport (20NIS, 40 minutes) at least hourly from 6.30am to

8.30pm Sunday to Thursday, 6am to 4.30pm Friday, 8.20pm to 10pm Saturday. Alternatively, **Nesher service taxis** (☎ 625 3233, 625 5332) picks up booked passengers from their accommodation 24 hours a day for 40NIS.

Bus

Jerusalem is laced with a very good network of city bus routes (5.30NIS per ride). Pick up a colour-coded route map (in Hebrew) from the Jaffa Gate tourist office. Or for the latest route information, call ☎ *2800.

Taxi

Plan on spending 20NIS to 25NIS for trips anywhere within the central area of town. Always ask to use the meter, or risk getting ripped off.

MEDITERRANEAN COAST

The Israeli coast from Ashkelon to Rosh HaNikra is a long band of white sand backed up by a flat, fertile coastal plain interrupted by low coastal hills. Most of Israel's growing population is concentrated in this area, particularly in Tel Aviv, Netanya, Haifa and a host of sprouting new suburbs and communities.

TEL AVIV

☎ 03 / pop 1,160,000

Tel Aviv, barely a century old, is a greatly underrated Mediterranean city that proclaims a modern, tolerant, laissez-faire attitude while thumbing its nose at Jerusalem's piety and 3000-year history. Forsak-

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ing spirituality for the stock exchange, and tradition for the latest fads, this modern, secular city concerns itself with finance, commerce and, above all else, fun.

For visitors, Tel Aviv shows off an absorbing array of distinctive faces – a result of mass immigration from all over the Jewish world, along with its piles of intact cultural baggage. These days, a short walk connects the exotic orientalism of the Yemenite Quarter with the seedy cafés of Russified lower Allenby St and the Miami chic of the pastel, glass-fronted condos along the glitzy beachfront.

Orientation

Tel Aviv's bustling central area focuses on four roughly parallel north-south streets that follow 6km of seafront from the Yarkon in the north to the Yemenite Quarter (the 1930s town centre) in the south. Nearest the sand is Herbert Samuel Esplanade, while the hotel-lined HaYarkon St lies a block inland. The next main street to the east is backpacker-central Ben Yehuda St. The trendy shopping zone, Dizengoff St, is the geographic centre of the city. Allenby St, effectively a continuation of Ben Yehuda St, is lined with bars, cafés and second-hand bookshops.

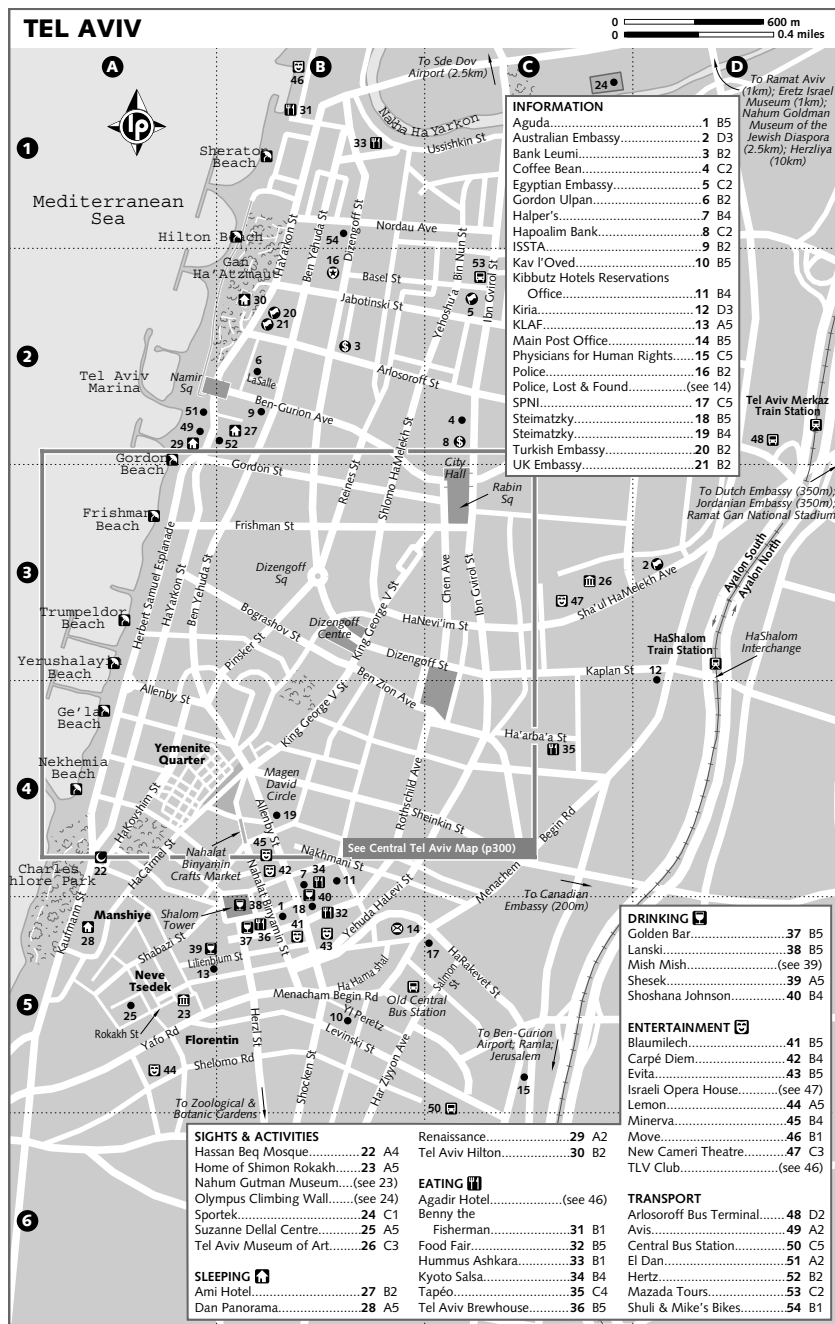
MAPS

The English-language *Tel Aviv-Jaffa Tourist* map is an excellent resource and available for from the Tourist Information Centre (see p299). Most hotels also have the free *Tourist Map of Tel Aviv. Tel Aviv - The White City* (40NIS), published by editions de l'éclat, produces a (1:3000) map indicating where to find the various styles of Bauhaus architecture across the city. It is available at the **Bauhaus Centre** (Map p300;

TEL AVIV IN TWO DAYS

Begin day one with a visit to the **Nahum Goldman Museum of the Jewish Diaspora** (p300) at Tel Aviv University, followed by a wander around the **Tel Aviv Museum of Art** (p301). Have lunch downtown before exploring the **Yemenite Quarter** (p301) and **Carmel Market** (p301). Tuesday and Friday are best for these neighbourhoods, as nearby **Nahalat Binyamin Street** (p301) comes alive with a crafts fair. End the day with dinner and dancing at the Old Port.

Start out day two with an outdoor breakfast and wander through the **junk stalls** (p306) of Jaffa, buying up trinkets or any other discarded gems that catch your fancy. Spend the rest of your morning around **Old Jaffa** (p306), peeking into the **Ilana Goor museum** (p306) and Visitor's Centre. Relax after lunch in the arty neighbourhood of **Neve Tsedek** (p301), from where you can join the sunworshippers at Tel Aviv's **main beach** (p301). Dinner and a pub crawl around posh Rothschild and Lilienblum Sts is a fine way to cap of the southern part of the city.



☎ 522 0249; www.bauhaus-center.com; 99 Dizengoff St;
☎ 10am-7.30pm Sun-Thu, 10am-2.30pm Fri).

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Halper's (Map p298; ☎/fax 629 9710; halpbook@netvision.net.il; 87 Allenby St) Specialist in English-language titles.

Lametayel (Map p300; ☎ 616 3411; www.lametayel.com; Dizengoff Centre) Specialist shop for travel books and maps.

Steimatzky (Map p300; ☎ 522 1513; 109 Dizengoff St) Chain bookstore. The company's other locations include the Central Bus Station, the Dizengoff Centre, the Opera Tower Centre, and at 71 and 103 Allenby St (Map p298).

EMERGENCY

Emergency ambulance (☎ 101)

Fire department (☎ 102)

Police (☎ 100)

Tourist police (Map p300; ☎ 516 5832; cnr Herbert Samuel Esplanade & Geula St) There is also a police booth at the main post office that will record lost items.

INTERNET ACCESS

If you have your own laptop, wi-fi access is available at the Old Port restaurant strip.

Coffee Bean (Map p298; ☎ 529 8669; 73 Ibn Gvirol St; ☎ 7.45am-12.30am Sun-Thu, 7.45am-3.30am Fri, 8.45am-1am Sat) Wired café, which will even let you borrow a wi-fi card if you don't have one (upon deposit of picture ID).

Masarik (Map p300; ☎ 527 2411; ☎ 7am-1am Sun-Fri, 9am-2am Sat) Wi-fi access.

Private Link (Map p300; ☎ 529 9889; private_link@hotmail.com; 78 Ben Yehuda St; per hr 13NIS)

Surf-Drink-Play (Map p300; per hr 10NIS; ☎ 24hr) 112 Dizengoff St (☎ 529 1618); 65 Ibn Gvirol St (☎ 695 8750); 77 King George V St (☎ 629 1311) Three locations with Internet access.

Web Stop (Map p300; ☎ 620 2682; 28 Bograshov St; per hr 12NIS)

INTERNET RESOURCES

www.tel-aviv.gov.il/english Official website for the municipality.

www.tel-aviv-insider.com Excellent tips on activities, dining and nightlife.

LAUNDRY

Nameless self-serve laundromats (12NIS washing machine, 5NIS dryer; open 24 hours) are widespread. A relatively clean one is at 104 Ben Yehuda St.

Momo's Bar (Map p300; 28 Ben Yehuda St) also has self-service laundry, affording you the chance to start your pub crawl in sparkling attire.

LEFT LUGGAGE

Left-luggage facilities are available at Ben-Gurion airport for a pricey US\$4 per day. Most guesthouses and hotels in Tel Aviv have a left-luggage room, charging between 2NIS to 10NIS per day.

MEDIA

Time Out Tel Aviv, produced bi-monthly, is a great resource for what's on in the city. It's available at the Tel Aviv Tourist Information Centre.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Dr Ayaldan (Map p300; ☎ 525 4186) For dental services, try this doctor in the Dizengoff shopping centre.

Physicians for Human Rights (Map p298; ☎ 687 3718, 687 3027; fax 687 3029; 52 Golomb St; ☎ 5-7pm Sun, Tue & Wed) This clinic provides free medical assistance for visitors who aren't covered by health insurance in Israel.

MONEY

The best currency-exchange deals are at the private bureaus that don't charge commission, and there are plenty of them. Try the change bureau at the foot of the Opera Tower escalator. Most post offices also change traveller's cheques. ATMs are similarly widespread. Note that the Amex office in Tel Aviv will not change travellers cheques. ATMs are available at major banks - Bank Leumi, Mizrahi Bank and Hapoalim Bank.

POST

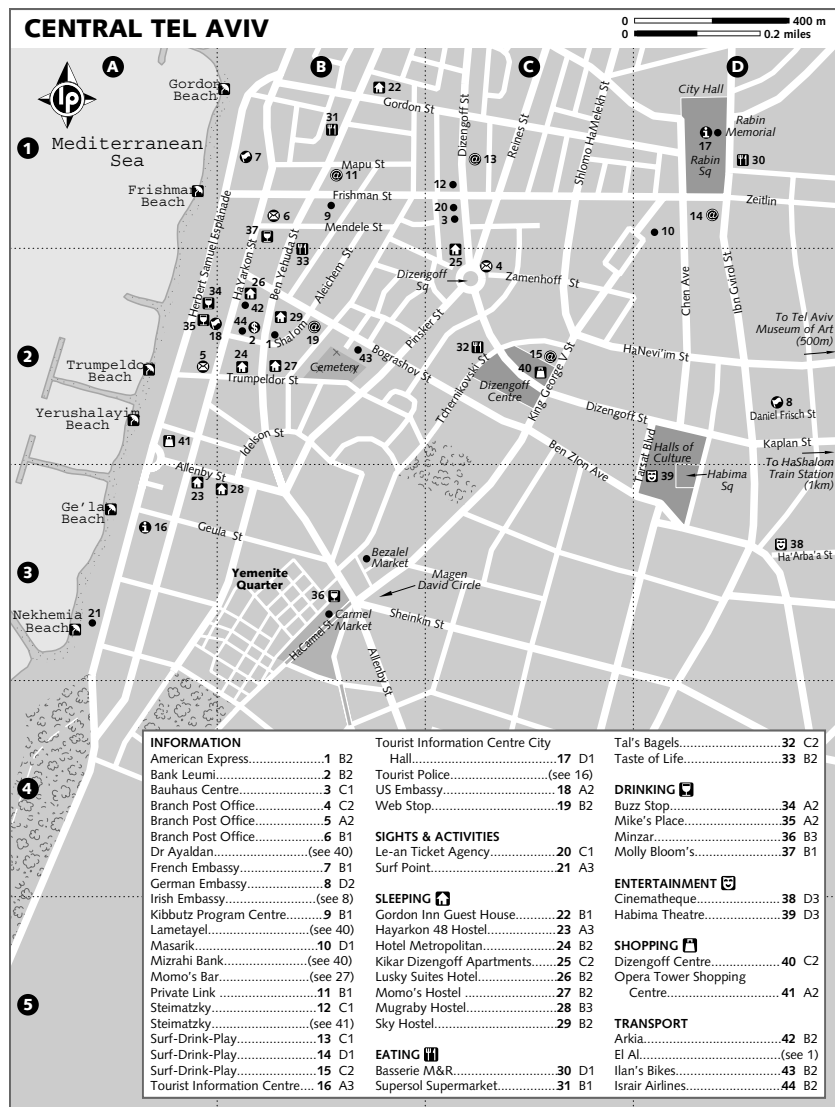
Main post office (Map p298; HaRakevet St; ☎ 7am-6pm Sun-Thu, 7am-noon Fri) On the corner of Yehuda HaLevi St. This is the place to pick up poste restante.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist Information Centre (Map p300) City Hall (☎ 521 8214; 69 Ibn Gvirol St, Lobby, City Hall); Downtown (☎ 516 6188; 46 Herbert Samuel Esplanade)

TRAVEL AGENCIES

American Express (Map p298; ☎ 777 8880; fax 777 8801; Beit El Al Bldg, cnr Ben Yehuda & Shalom Aleichem Sts; ☎ 9am-5pm Sun-Thu, 9am-1pm Fri) Can book tours and flights.
ISSTA (Map p300; ☎ 521 0555; www.issta.co.il; 109 Ben Yehuda St; ☎ 9am-6pm Sun-Thu, 8.30am-1pm Fri) Student



travel agency that can sometimes come up with very well-priced airline tickets. It's on the corner with Ben-Gurion.

UNIVERSITIES

Tel Aviv University (☎ 642 2752; www.tau.ac.il; Ramat Aviv 69978) Israel's biggest university is located on a leafy campus a couple of kilometres north of the Yarkon River. Worthy of a wander if you've come up here

to see the on-site Nahum Goldman Museum of the Jewish Diaspora (see below).

Sights MUSEUMS

The recommended **Nahum Goldman Museum of the Jewish Diaspora** (☎ 646 2020; www.bh.org.il; Beit Hatefutsot, 2 Klausner St, Matiyahu Gate, Ramat Aviv;

adult/student 34/24NIS; ☎ 10am-4pm Sun-Tue, 10am-6pm Wed) has dioramas, films and displays chronicling 2500 years of Jewish culture in exile. It's on the grounds of Tel Aviv University, 2.5km north of the Yarkon River. Take bus No 25 from King George V St or bus No 27 from the central bus station.

Eretz Israel Museum (☎ 641 5244; 2 Chaim Levanon St, Ramat Aviv; adult/student 33/22NIS; ☎ 9am-3pm Sun-Thu, 10am-2pm Fri & Sat), south of the Diaspora museum, consists of 11 themed collections (glass, ceramics, folklore etc) constructed around the Tel Qasile archaeological site.

Tel Aviv Museum of Art (Map p298; ☎ 607 7000; www.tamuseum.com; 27 Shaul HaMelekh Ave; adult/student 40/32NIS; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon & Wed, 10am-8pm Tue & Thu, 10am-2pm Fri, 10am-4pm Sat) is home to a superb permanent collection of Impressionist and post-Impressionist works, as well as some fine 20th century avant-garde. Works by Picasso, Matisse, Gauguin, Degas and Pollock feature prominently, though the gem of the collection is van Gogh's *The Shepherdess* (1889).

YEMENITE QUARTER

The Yemenite Quarter's maze of narrow, cobbled streets and crumbling buildings seems at odds with the clean-cut modernism of the rest of Tel Aviv. Imbued with an oriental flavour, the **Carmel Market** is one of the few places in the city that reminds visitors of Tel Aviv's Middle Eastern location. Push past the first few metres of knock-off brand-name clothing and trainers to reach the more aromatic and enticing stalls of fresh fruits and vegetables, hot breads and spices. Nearby **Nahalat Binyamin Street** is a busy pedestrianised precinct full of fashionable cafés and arty shops. On Tuesday afternoon and Friday midday, it hosts a crafts market and fills with buskers and other street performers.

NEVE TSEDEK

Lovely Neve Tsedek, with its narrow streets and historic houses, is one of Tel Aviv's most upmarket and character-filled neighbourhoods. In the late 19th century it was the choice area for intellectual Jews looking for a prestigious address.

The **Suzanne Dellal Centre** (Map p298; ☎ 510 5656; www.suzannedellal.org.il; 5 Yechieli St), a former school and cultural centre, serves as a venue for festivals, exhibits and cultural events, as

well as a relaxing place to look at artistic murals and spend a sunny afternoon. On weekends, you can visit the historic 1887 **home of Shimon Rokakh** (Map p298; ☎ 516 8042; www.rokakh-house.co.il; 36 Rokakh St; admission 10NIS; ☎ 10am-4pm Sun-Thu, 10am-2pm Fri & Sat), with a video and exhibits outlining life in 19th-century Tel Aviv. On the same street is the **Nahum Gutman Museum** (Map p298; ☎ 516 1970; www.gutmanmuseum.co.il; 21 Rokakh St; admission adult/child 20/10NIS; ☎ 10am-4pm Sun, Mon, Wed, Thu, 10am-7pm Tue, 10am-2pm Fri, 10am-5pm Sat), which displays 200 lively and fanciful works by the 20th-century Israeli artist.

Activities

The **Olympus Climbing Wall** (Map p298; ☎ 699 0910; 42 Rokakh Ave; www.kir.co.il; admission & harness 50NIS, shoe rental 12NIS; ☎ 5-10pm Sun-Thu, 2-8pm Fri, 11am-9pm Sat) is located in the Sportek, along the Yarkon river. Avoid overcrowded Saturdays.

The **Sportek** (Map p298) also has basketball courts, a skate park and trampolines. Ultimate Frisbee matches are held here every Friday at 4.45pm and Saturday at 4.30pm.

Tel Avivans are passionate about their football team, the Maccabee Tel Aviv. Big matches are played October to June at Ramat Gan National Stadium, reached from downtown bus Nos 20, 42 or 67. Buy your ticket at the stadium on game day for 40NIS to 120NIS or in advance from **Le-an ticket agency** (Map p300; ☎ 524 7373; 101 Dizengoff St).

Budding yachties may want to contact **Danit Tours** (☎ 052 3400128; www.danit.co.il), which runs sailing and motorboat trips from the Tel Aviv Port. For a group of up to 13 people it costs 1500NIS for two hours at sea.

At Tel Aviv's main beach is a fine place for swimming and surfing. Windsurfers can rent equipment from **Surf Point** (Map p300 ☎ 517 0099; www.surf-point.co.il; Nekhemia Beach) for a pricey 100NIS per hour.

Courses

Gordon Ulpan (Map p298; ☎ 522 3095; hadas.goren@012.net.il; LaSalle 7, Tel Aviv) Hebrew-language programme that charges around 500NIS per month, plus 70NIS registration fee.

Sleeping

If you have your own car, ask your hotel if it offers parking. Otherwise, you'll need to pay around 45 to 50NIS per day to keep your car in a car park.

BUDGET

Tel Aviv's lively budget hostels are concentrated near the central beaches, trendy restaurants, shopping centres and nightspots. Those who prefer solitude may want to consider staying in nearby Jaffa.

Hayarkon 48 Hostel (Map p300; ☎ 516 8989; www.hayarkon48.com; 48 HaYarkon St; dm 47NIS, d 185-225NIS; 🏠 📺 📺) Renovated from a converted school, this hostel sits just two blocks from the beach and has excellent facilities including a clean kitchen, great showers and a free breakfast. Booking through its website could net you a small discount on double rooms.

Momo's Hostel (Map p300; ☎ 5287471; www.momoshostel.com; 28 Ben Yehuda St; dm 40NIS, d 100-130NIS; 🏠 📺 📺) This colourful, character-filled place has an attached bar-café and a central location. Rates include a light breakfast and use of the kitchen. Men and women (including married couples), and travellers and long-term workers, have separate dorms. In summer you can sleep on the roof for 35NIS.

Sky Hostel (Map p300; ☎ 620 0044; skyhostel@walla.com; 34 Ben Yehuda St; dm/d 45/100NIS; 🏠 📺 📺) One block north of Momo's, this place is rather more staid than its neighbour, but with a touch more privacy.

Mugraby Hostel (Map p300; ☎ 510 2443; www.mugraby-hostel.com; 30 Allenby St; dm 43NIS, s with/without shower 170/150NIS, d with/without shower 190/170NIS; 🏠 📺 📺) Grubby fallback should the aforementioned have suffered some ignoble fate.

MIDRANGE

Note that prices for these places vary according to the season; the highest rates apply mainly to the summer high season and Jewish holidays.

Kikar Dizengoff Apartments (Map p300; ☎ 524 1151; www.hotel-apt.com; 89 Dizengoff St; s US\$60-90, d US\$75-90, ste US\$140; 🏠 📺 📺 📺) Overlooking Dizengoff Sq, these comfortable self-contained units are hard to beat for price and quality. All four types of units have cable TV, safes and kitchenettes. Book through the Internet for discounted price.

Gordon Inn Guest House (Map p300; ☎ 523 8239; www.sleepinIsrael.com; 17 Gordon St; s US\$30-40, d US\$40-55; 🏠 📺 📺) This hybrid hostel/hotel is a well-kept and friendly downtown option. Cheaper shared rooms have a shared bathroom. All rates include breakfast. Take bus No 4 from the central bus station.

Lusky Suites Hotel (Map p300; ☎ 516 3030; www.lusksuites-htl.co.il; 84 HaYarkon St; d/ste US\$70/110; 🏠 📺 📺) A smart lobby leads up to well-appointed rooms, some with an en suite and kitchenette. The 'penthouse' could even squeeze into the top-end category.

Ami Hotel (Map p298; ☎ 524 9141; www.inisrael.com/ami; 152 HaYarkon St; s/d/ste US\$50/65/80; 🏠 📺 📺) This friendly, rambling option near the cluster of luxury hotels has decent rooms, some with sea views, others with balconies.

Hotel Metropolitan (Map p300; ☎ 519 2727; www.hotelmetropolitan.co.il; 11-15 Trumpeldor St; s/d US\$105/127; 🏠 📺 📺) Clean and central; the Met has a few suites that cost about 50% more than the standard rooms.

TOP END

Most of Tel Aviv's top-end palaces rise just a quick shuffle from the beach and, as with the midrange places, rates change with the season. Generally, a good travel agent will get a better deal than you'll manage on your own. All have Internet wi-fi access.

Tel Aviv Hilton (Map p298; ☎ 520 2222; hiltonisrael.sales.telaviv@hilton.com; Gan HaAtzma'ut or Independence Park; d US\$260-355; 🏠 📺 📺 📺 📺) With its parkland setting and beach access, this is one of the best choices.

Renaissance (Map p298; ☎ 521 5555; www.renaissancehotels.com; 121 HaYarkon St; d US\$145-165; 🏠 📺 📺 📺) Set amid other high-rise luxury hotels, this one distinguishes itself by having a slightly better location overlooking a sandy beach.

Dan Panorama (Map p298; ☎ 519 0190; www.danhotels.com; 10 Kaufmann St; d US\$166-214; 🏠 📺 📺 📺) Reasonably comfortable and well known, but a long walk from the centre of things.

Eating**RESTAURANTS**

Despite its small size Tel Aviv can rival even the biggest European cities for its diversity and quality of restaurants. Spanish tapas bars are *en vogue*, but you'll also find everything from sheikh Japanese fusion joints to American-style brew-pubs.

Brasserie M&R (Map p300; ☎ 696 7111; 70 Ibn Givrol St; dishes 50-100NIS; 🍷 noon-5am; 📺) Wannabe French 'matradies' (complete with surly attitude) serve up mouth-watering steak and chicken dishes, in a dimly lit brasserie that stays busy even until the wee hours. It's

quietly known as a meeting place for local celebrities, but still maintains a neighbourhood atmosphere.

Benny the Fisherman (Map p298; ☎ 544 0764; Old Port; dishes 70-90NIS; 🍷 noon-midnight) Serving up large portions of grilled fish, shrimp and calamari, with an excellent location overlooking the harbour, this is arguably the best fish restaurant in Tel Aviv.

Agadir Hotel (Map p298; ☎ 544 4045; Old Port; burgers 30-40NIS; 🍷 noon-6am; 📺) About 500m north of Benny the Fisherman is another swanky restaurant with fine food offerings, mostly steaks and burgers. This one is done up like a Moroccan hotel lobby from the 1920s.

Kyoto Salsa (Map p298; ☎ 566 1234; 31 Montefiore St; dishes 50-100NIS 🍷 noon-midnight; 📺) Tel Aviv's answer to Sushi Samba of Manhattan fame, this fuses sushi and margaritas into a winning combination. The excellent menu ranges from Latin-spiced seafood casserole to Japanese business set lunch for 59NIS.

Tel Aviv Brewhouse (Map p298; ☎ 516 8666; 11 Rothschild Ave; dishes 50-100NIS; 12.30pm-1am; 📺 📺) Just south of the Shalom Tower, this is Tel Aviv's poshest bar-restaurant. Here, yuppies sip four kinds of designer lagers (26NIS for 500ml). Try the Masters, a 7% alcohol dark ale. The food is excellent, but doesn't stray much from the usual beer accompaniments.

Tapéo (Map p298; ☎ 624 0484; 16 Ha'arba'a St; dishes 15-40NIS; 🍷 7pm-1am; 📺) Salsa rhythms beat slowly in the background of this glossy tapas bar, located near the Cinemateque. Carefully prepared meat, veggie and fish selections go well with a bottle (or two) of Israeli wine (100NIS).

Taste of Life (Map p300; ☎ 620 3151; 60 Ben Yehuda St; dishes 30-45NIS; 🍷 9am-9pm Sun-Thu, 9am-2pm Fri) This place, run by African-Americans, does vegan cuisine that includes tasty veggie shwarma, steamed vegetables, vegetarian hot dogs, *tamali* (vegetables steamed in masa dough), *tofu-lafel* (falafel with tofu), barbecue twist burgers (veggie burgers with barbecue sauce), yogurts and shakes.

QUICK EATS

The heaviest concentration of Middle Eastern fast food is found along the busy reaches of Ben Yehuda and Allenby Sts.

The city's many cafés, most serving excellent salads and sandwiches, provide ring-side seating for its continuous pavement carnival-cum-fashion show. Bakeries and

nut stalls are common for people on the go. On Saturday afternoon, you can sample all sorts of fare when local restaurants set up an informal food fair along Rothschild Ave.

Hummus Ashkar (Map p298; 45 Yirmiyahu St; dishes 18NIS) This is where locals go when they are after excellent hummus and fuul (fava bean paste). Further credibility was earned when a national newspaper recently voted its hummus the best in Israel. The sign is in Hebrew only, so look out for the Coca-Cola sign and the tables on the street.

Tal's Bagels (Map p300; 69 Dizengoff St; bagel with toppings 18NIS) New York-style bagels served up with your choice of cream cheese or veggie toppings.

SELF-CATERING

Some of the best fresh fruit and vegetables anywhere are sold at the Carmel Market. For one-stop shopping, try the convenient **Supersol supermarket** (Map p300; 79 Ben Yehuda St; 🍷 7am-midnight Sun-Thu, 7am-4pm Fri, 8.30pm-midnight Sat).

Drinking

The bars clustered around the intersection of Allenby and Lilienblum Sts, and those along Sheinkin St, are considered locally to be the most fashionable. Travellers' bars and the dive spots on upper Allenby St remain the least-expensive option for serious beer aficionados, but it's hard to keep track of what's hot, what's not and what's gone.

Golden Bar (Map p298; ☎ 516 9194; 9 Rothschild Ave; 🍷 6pm-late) Even after the neighbouring Allenby-area bars have closed, this raucous yuppie bar is going strong. DJs play a strong mix of rock, blues and rap for patrons on the street-side patio or the small indoor dance floor. There is also a decent choice of pub grub scrawled onto a blackboard, including chicken wings, burgers and fries.

Shoshana Johnson (Map p298; ☎ 506 7443; 97 Allenby St; 🍷 6pm-late) A curious find in downtown Tel Aviv: where most places are all sleek chrome and neon lights, this one belongs in the Latin quarter of some other continent. Reels in a 30s crowd. There is no sign in English, so look for the 'Libros en Español' sign.

Lanski (Map p298; ☎ 517 0043; 1st fl, Shalom Tower; 6 Montefiore St; 🍷 9pm-late Sat-Thu, 10pm-late Fri) Built in the shape of an 'H' for maximum eye-contact opportunities, this bar makes claim to being the biggest in the Middle

East, an assertion we won't try to dispute. Sunday is bartender's night, when Tel Aviv's barmen come in to swap war stories.

Minzar (Map p300; ☎ 517 3015; 60 Allenby St; ☎ 24hr) Set back from the main street, this is a bohemian-style coffee bar that actually specialises in beer. Happy hour extends from 5pm to 10pm.

Mike's Place (Map p300; ☎ 052-267 0753; 86 Herbert Samuel Esplanade; ☎ 4pm-late) On the beach, this is the place to go for live music. Blues and rock bands play nightly from 10.30pm. There's also a sizable menu of grill-style meals, cocktails and, especially, beer. Happy hour lasts from 4pm to 9pm, and all day on Saturday.

Buzz Stop (Map p300; ☎ 510 0869; 86 Herbert Samuel Esplanade; ☎ 24hr) At the beach beside the US embassy, this place caters to night owls and dawn watchers who appreciate pub grub, a wide choice of beer and full English breakfasts (which are often administered as a hangover cure).

Shesek (Map p298; ☎ 516 9520; 17b Lilienblum St; ☎ 9pm-late) This rough-around-the-edges scenerter bar is well known for pumping out a variety of music (smash-ups and punk to trance and avant-garde hip hop) and quality beer (including Taybeh, a micro-brew manufactured in Ramallah).

Mish Mish (Map p298; ☎ 516 8178; 17a Lilienblum St; ☎ 8pm-late) Next door to Shesek, this place attracts a more upmarket crowd.

Molly Bloom's (Map p300; ☎ 522 1558; 2 Mendele St; ☎ 4pm-late Sat-Thu, noon-late Fri) One of only a handful of Irish pubs in Israel, Molly Bloom's is popular with both locals and diplomats that work at nearby embassies. The decent bar menu features such Gaelic options as Irish stew and shepherd's pie. Happy hour lasts from 4pm to 8pm nightly.

Entertainment

Tel Aviv is well known for its nightlife, and the mind-boggling variety of spots can keep you crawling all night long. The funkier café district is undoubtedly Sheinkin St, which is a great place to meet people and soak up the atmosphere.

NIGHTCLUBS

Tel Aviv has a number of excellent, party-till-dawn clubs but it's essential that you dress to impress. Cover charges for dedicated discotheques range from 50NIS to 100NIS. Bars, many of which double as dance clubs, are

free. For a full listing, pick up a copy of *Time Out Tel Aviv*, available at kiosks and hotels.

Move (Map p298; ☎ 602 0426; Old Port; admission 60NIS; ☎ 11pm-late Mon-Sat) If you only have the time (and money) for one club in Tel Aviv, make it this place. Bursting at the seams with young Israelis, the quandary of how so many people fit into such a small space is a sight to behold. Tuesday is gay night.

TLV Club (Map p298; ☎ 544 4194; Old Port; admission 50-100NIS ☎ midnight-late Mon, Fri, Sat) This large discotheque often has Israeli rock and pop stars; call to find out what's on. Admission prices vary depending on who's performing.

Blaumilech (Map p298; ☎ 560 8852; 32 Rothschild Ave; ☎ 7pm-late) Fashionable, low-lit lounge-bar with a small dance floor. Rather swanky clientele, mostly in their late 20s and 30s.

Lemon (Map p298; ☎ 681 3313; 17 HaNagarim St; ☎ Fri & Sat nights) Lemon holds house parties every Friday and Saturday, and is located in Florentin.

CINEMAS

In summertime, free films are sometimes screened on the beach near Allenby St.

Cinematheque (Map p300; ☎ 606 0800; 1 Ha'Arba'a St; admission 35NIS; ☎ 11am-late) This is the flagship in a chain of Israeli cinemas that feature classic, retro, foreign, avant-garde, new-wave, and off-beat films. Alternatively, choose a film from the video library and pay 20NIS for a private screening.

GAY & LESBIAN VENUES

Tel Aviv has the Middle East's most vibrant gay community, and even plays host to an annual Gay Pride Parade. Most of the nightlife is focused on Sheinkin and Nahalat Binyamin Sts, where you'll find plenty of rainbow flags, but the best gay night out in town is surely Tuesday at the Move (see above) in the Old Port. **Plug & Play** (☎ 527 5631; admission 30-60NIS), a suggestively named gay party, is held Thursday, Friday and Saturday. Call for the location.

Evita (Map p298; ☎ 566 9559; 31 Yavne St; ☎ noon-late) This preppy café mutates into a saucy gay lounge-bar by night. There's plenty of pelvic shaking and free-flowing alcohol. It's located on a quiet alley a half block south of Rothschild Ave.

Carpé Diem (Map p298; ☎ 560 2006; 17 Montefiore St; ☎ 8pm-late) A relaxed atmosphere pervades this place, aided by the back lounge

deck which has floor seating on cushions. There are occasional professional strip performances: Monday for men and Tuesday for women.

Minerva (Map p298; ☎ 560 3801; 98 Allenby St; ☎ 10pm-late) Dedicated lesbian bar that was supposedly renovated, though it's still quite the seedy dive, which may appeal to some. DJ dance parties are held every Thursday.

THEATRE

New Cameri Theatre (Map p298; ☎ 606 0900; www.cameri.co.il; Golda Meir Centre, cnr Leonardo da Vinci & Sha'ul HaMelekh Sts) The new Cameri hosts theatre performances in Hebrew, with simultaneous English translation on Thursdays only. The theatre is in the **Israeli Opera House** (☎ 692 7777).

Habima Theatre (Map p300; ☎ 629 5555; Tarsat Blvd, Habima Sq) Home to Israel's national theatre company, Habima stages performances on Thursday, with simultaneous English-language translation.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Most travellers fly in and out of Ben-Gurion airport, usually on **El Al** (Map p300; ☎ 629 2312; www.elal.co.il; 32 Ben Yehuda St) but **Arkia** (Map p300; ☎ 699 2222; telavivb@arkia.co.il; 74 HaYarkon St) also has flights to Eilat (370NIS, 50 minutes, daily) and Haifa (442NIS, 20 minutes, daily except Saturday) from Sde Dov airport, north of the Yarkon River. The other domestic airline is **Israir** (Map p300; ☎ 795 5777; 23 Ben Yehuda St).

Travellers leaving Israel on El Al flights from Ben-Gurion airport can pre-check bags the day before their flight at the **Arlosoroff bus terminal** (Map p298; ☎ 695 8614; cnr Arlosoroff & AP Derakhim Sts; ☎ 4-9pm Sun-Thu, 11am-3pm Fri, 6-11pm Sat). At the time of writing no other airline offered this service, but it's worth asking.

BUS

From Tel Aviv's enormous **central bus station** (Map p298; ☎ 694 8888; Levinski St) outgoing intercity buses depart from the 6th floor, where there's also an efficient information desk. Suburban and city buses use the poorly signposted stalls on the 4th floor. Note that during Shabbat you'll have to resort to service taxis.

Buses leave for Jerusalem (17.70NIS, one hour) roughly every 10 minutes; for Haifa (23NIS, 1½ hours) every 15 to 20 min-

utes; Tiberias (42NIS, 2½ hours) once or twice hourly from 6am to 9pm; and Eilat (65NIS, five hours), more or less hourly from 6.30am to 5pm (an overnight service departs at 12.30am).

Tel Aviv's second bus station, the Arlosoroff terminal, adjoins the central train station northeast of the centre. To get there, take bus No 61, which travels along Allenby, King George V, Dizengoff and Arlosoroff Sts.

For information on buses to Egypt, see p355.

SHERUT

The *sheruts* outside the central bus station run to Jerusalem (20NIS) and Haifa (25NIS). On Saturday, they leave from HaHamashal St just east of Allenby St and charge about 20% more than the weekday fare.

TRAIN

Tel Aviv has two train stations: the main station, **Tel Aviv Merkaz** (Map p298; ☎ 577 4000, *5770; www.israil.org.il/english), and the smaller **HaShalom station** (Map p298; HaShalom Interchange). From Tel Aviv Merkaz, you can travel to Haifa (24.50NIS, one hour), via Netanya (12.50NIS, 25 minutes), more or less hourly from 6am to 8pm Sunday to Friday, and on to Akko (34NIS, 1½ hours) and Nahariya (38NIS, 1¼ hours). Heading south, you can travel as far as Be'ersheva (25.50NIS, 1¼ hours, hourly). To reach Tel Aviv Merkaz from the centre, take bus Nos 61 or 62 north from Dizengoff St to the Arlosoroff bus terminal, which is a two-minute walk from the station.

Getting Around TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Bus No 222 runs hourly on the hour from the Dan Panorama hotel (p302) to Ben-Gurion airport (18NIS, 45 minutes) from 6am to 11pm Sunday to Thursday, 6am to 7pm Friday and noon to 11pm Saturday. En route the bus makes stops at the Sheraton Moriah and the Arlosoroff bus terminal (near Tel Aviv Merkaz train station). It also runs hourly in the opposite direction. From the central bus station, take bus No 475 (11.70NIS), departing every 20 to 30 minutes.

At least two trains per hour also service the airport from Tel Aviv Merkaz station (12NIS, 3.30am to 11pm daily).

BICYCLE

Tel Aviv is flat and traffic relatively light so it's easy to get around by bike. For rentals, try **Shuli & Mike's Bikes** (Map p298; ☎ 544 2292; www.shvoong.co.il; 245 Dizengoff St) or **Ilan's Bikes** (Map p300; ☎ 629 9901; 44 Bograshov St). A 24-hour rental costs around 50NIS.

BUS

Tel Aviv city buses follow an efficient network of routes. The single fare is 5.20NIS, but for 12NIS you can buy a red pass (*hofshi yomi*) which allows one day of unlimited bus travel around Tel Aviv and its suburbs. The city centre is well covered by bus No 4, which travels from the central bus station to the Reading Terminal via Allenby, Ben Yehuda and northern Dizengoff Sts. Bus No 5 also reaches Dizengoff Centre from the **central bus station** (☎ 639 4444).

TAXI

Tel Aviv special taxis suffer from the same rip-off tendencies that pervade the entire country (see p357). Plan on 20NIS to 25NIS for trips anywhere within the central city.

JAFFA

יַפֶּה

☎ 03 / pop 46,400

After Noah was catapulted to fame in a flood of worldwide proportions, one of his sons, Japheth, headed for the coast and founded a new city that was humbly named Jaffa (Yafo in Hebrew) in his own honour. During Solomon's time, it came to prominence as a major port city, but this largely Arab town has now been superseded – and swallowed up – by its neighbouring upstart Tel Aviv.

Today, it's a quaint and mostly Christian harbourside suburb where you'll get a taste of both the enigmatic Middle East and the fruits of the adjacent sea.

Sights & Activities

The central attraction is **Old Jaffa**, for thousands of years a thriving, tumble-down commercial port, now restored and preserved as an outdoor museum and tourist attraction. The once active residential community of longshoremen and market traders have long since been replaced by art studios, galleries and a sprinkling of outdoor cafés, making for a pleasant if somewhat staid one-hour stroll.

As you enter from Roslan St, walk past the boarded up Museum of Jaffa Antiquities (which may reopen pending an increase in visitors), to a grassy knoll called **HaPisgah Gardens**, where an **amphitheatre** affords a panorama of the Tel Aviv beachfront; ongoing archaeological excavations reveal Egyptian ruins dating back at least 3300 years.

From the gardens, a footpath leads to **Kikar Kedumim** (Kedumim Sq), which is ringed by restaurants and galleries but dominated by the orange-painted **St Peter's Monastery**. The small gift shop on the square acts as Old Jaffa's de facto **Tourist Information Centre**, offering up tourist information and free maps of the area.

Close by, in an underground chamber, the well-designed **Visitors Centre** (☎ 10am-6pm) describes the history of Jaffa from its beginnings as a Canaanite settlement nearly 4000 years ago, through its development by and submission to various foreign armies, until its 1948 liberation from British rule by Jewish underground forces. The display is centred on some partially excavated dwellings from the Hellenistic and Roman eras; a guide *might* be on hand to provide some commentary.

A worthwhile stop is the **Ilana Goor Museum** (☎ 683 7676; www.ilanagoor.com; 4 Mazal Dagim St; admission adult/child/student/senior 24/14/20/20NIS; ☎ 10am-4pm Sat-Thu, 10am-6pm Fri), housed in an 18th-century stone hostel for Jewish pilgrims. It features the design and wooden, stone, glass, bronze and iron sculpture of its namesake and owner, Ilana Goor.

Fancy an old boot or rusty xylophone? How about a six-foot tall grinning plastic monkey in a top hat and trench coat? Such treasures and more are waiting for new owners at a desultory marketlike expansion locally known as the **flea market** (junk market), which makes up the heart of new Jaffa. The market also has an array of shops with a more exotic, Oriental flavour, selling nargilehs and silver jewellery.

Normally, a free three-hour **Old Jaffa walking tour** departs from the **clock tower** at 9.30am Wednesday. Also worthwhile is a **boat tour** (☎ 682 9070; admission 20NIS) running every 30 minutes on Saturdays from 11am to 7pm.

Sleeping

Old Jaffa Hostel (☎ 682 2370; www.inisrael.com/oldjaffahostel; 8 Olei Zion St; dm 40NIS, s 147-226NIS, d 168-246NIS) In a beautiful old Turkish home, the

Jaffa is both friendly and atmospheric. The large bar and common room, as well as the airy dorms and comfortable private rooms, are decorated with historic Arabic furniture and *objets d'art*. The *Independent* recently included this place in a list of top 50 guesthouses worldwide (it ranked No 15). Enter from Ami'ad St.

Eating

For Israelis, Jaffa's main culinary attraction is fish, and both Mifraz Shlomo St and the port area boast numerous outdoor restaurants. Around the flea market you'll find plenty of hole-in-the-wall tamiya and felafel stands.

Itzik Bar (☎ 518 4882; 5 Olei Zion) Try this popular stand, which serves up two eggs, chips, salad and hummus for 20NIS.

Said Abu Elafia & Sons (☎ 681 2340; 7 Yefet St; ☎ 24hr) This is a bakery that has become a legend in Israel. In addition to all sorts of breads, pastries and *samosas* (locally called *sambusas*), it does a spinach-and-egg pitta and a uniquely Arab pizzalike concoction which involves cracking a couple of eggs on a pitta, stirring in tomato, cheese and olives, and baking it in the oven.

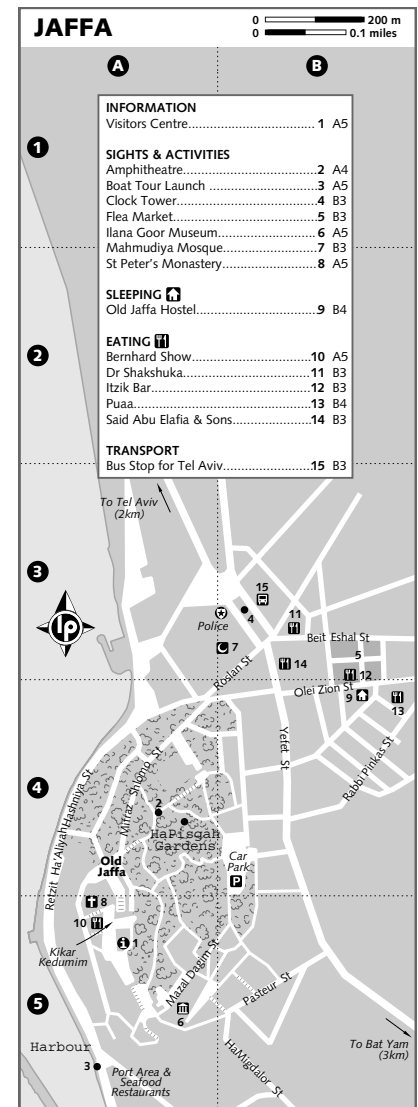
Dr Shakshuka (☎ 682 2842; 3 Beit Eshal St; meals 35-50NIS) This is a culinary highlight in the Tel Aviv area. Along with the eponymous *shakshuka* (a skillet concoction featuring egg, capsicum, tomato sauce and spices), the Gabso family whips up a range of Libyan and North African delights. For an enormous business lunch, you'll pay 64NIS; a massive 'complete couscous' spread with couscous, bread, salads, lamb and a stuffed potato will set you back just 44NIS. Don't miss it!

Puaa (☎ 682 3821; 3 Rabbi Yohanan St; mains from 45NIS) Part retro-style café and part flea market, this place specialises in lunchtime soups and salads, but dabbles in fish and chicken dishes. The beverage selection includes an excellent lassi yogurt drink with cardamom. In the unlikely event that you have a room that needs furnishing, you could also take home the plates, tables, chairs, silverware and wall hangings – everything is for sale.

Bernhardt Show (☎ 681 3898; 10 Kikar Kedumim; mains from 75NIS) This is an upmarket seafood blast, serving calamari, sea trout, mullet, mussels and other *fruits-de-mer* (including lobster from 220NIS). Those on a tight budget can stick to the starters and salads, which average 35NIS to 40NIS.

Getting There & Away

From the centre of Tel Aviv, it's a pleasant 2.5km seafront stroll to Old Jaffa. Alternatively, take bus No 46 from the central bus station, bus No 10 from Ben Yehuda St (or the train station), bus No 26 from Ibn Gvriol St, bus No 18 from Dizengoff St or bus Nos 18 or 25 from Allenby St, and get off



at the clock tower. To return to the centre, take bus No 10 from immediately north of the clock tower.

NETANYA

נתניה נתניה

☎ 09 / pop 167,000

As a sun-and-sand resort, Netanya offers approximately 11km of the finest **free beaches** in Israel. There is also a lively pedestrianised main street that's lined with shops, cafés and patisseries, many of them run by Netanya's recent influx of French Jews. You'll find the **tourist office** (☎ 882 7286; fax 884 1348; ☎ 8.30am-4pm Sun-Thu, 9am-noon Fri) in a kiosk at the southwest corner of Ha'Atzma'ut Sq.

In a prime position near the beach, the budget accommodation of choice is the **Atzma'ut Hostel** (☎ 862 1315; 2 Ussishkin St, Ha'Atzma'ut Sq; dm/s/d US\$10/25/30; P ☎ ☎). **Hotel Orit** (☎ 861 6818; www.israelsvan.com/orit; 21 Chen St; s/d US\$40/56; P ☎ ☎), run by Swedish Christians, is a fairly good-value alternative. Rates include breakfast.

Getting There & Away

Buses run roughly every 15 minutes to and from Tel Aviv (14.80NIS, 30 minutes), and every 30 minutes to and from Haifa (20NIS, one hour) and Jerusalem (32NIS, 1½ hours). To reach Caesarea, Megiddo, Nazareth or Tiberias, you'll need to change buses in Khadera.

HAIFA

חיפה חיפה

☎ 04 / pop 270,400

The attractive multilevel city of Haifa spills down the wooded slopes of Mt Carmel and takes in a busy industrial port area, a trendy German Colony, the landmark Baha'i Gardens, and a host of white-sand beaches, promenades and panoramic views.

While Jerusalem is swathed in historical mystique and Tel Aviv buzzes with hedonism and *joie de vivre*, Haifa, Israel's third-largest city, seems content with its lot as a student town and a solid cornerstone of the country's technological industry. Perhaps it's this air of prosperity that provides it with what appears to be Israel's most relaxed attitude, in which Jews, Christians and Muslims live and work together without the tensions that seem to pervade many other cities.

Orientation

Haifa occupies three main tiers on the slopes of Mt Carmel. New arrivals by bus, train or boat are ushered into Haifa in the Port Area, also known as downtown. Uphill lie the busy Arab commercial district of Wadi Nisnas and the predominantly Russian Hadar district. The Carmel Centre district at the top of the mountain is home to the university, exclusive residences and trendy Carmel Centre bars and eateries.

Information

The Bank Leumi and Hapoalim Bank main branches are both on Jaffa Rd, and you'll find lots of change places around Hadar and other shopping districts. Post offices on MaPalyam and Ben-Gurion will change travellers cheques.

Aldara (Map p310; ☎ 852 0222; 47 Ben Gurion Ave; per hr 10NIS; ☎ 10am-8pm) Coffee shop with on-line computers and wi-fi for laptop users.

Haifa Tourism Development Association (Map p310; ☎ 853 5605, toll free ☎ 1 800 305-090; www.tour-haifa.co.il; 48 Ben-Gurion Ave) Immediately at the foot of the Baha'i Gardens, this tourist office distributes several useful publications, including *A Guide to Haifa Tourism* and a city map (4NIS), which outlines four themed walking tours.

ISSTA (Map p310; ☎ 868 2227; www.issta.co.il; Bei Hakranot Bldg, 20 Herzl St) Books air tickets and sells student ID cards.

Main post office (Map p310; 19 HaPalyam Ave; ☎ 8am-12.30pm & 3.30-6pm Sun-Tue & Thu, 8am-1pm Wed, 8am-noon Fri)

Rambam Medical Centre (Map p309; ☎ 1-700-505-150; Bat Galim)

Steimatzky Bookshop (Map p310; ☎ 866 4058; 16 Herzl St; ☎ 10am-7pm Sun-Thu, 10am-3pm Fri)

Sights

BAHA'I GARDENS

The 19 immaculately kept terraces of the dizzyly sloped **Baha'i Gardens** (Map p310; ☎ 831 3131; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm) are truly a wonder. Apart from the top two tiers, the gardens are accessible to the general public only on guided tours (daily except Wednesday), which must be pre-booked well in advance. Baha'i pilgrims, however, can organise individual entry.

Amid the perfectly manicured gardens, fountains and walkways rises Haifa's most imposing landmark, the golden-domed **Shrine of the Bab** (Map p310; ☎ 9am-noon). Com-

pleted in 1953, this tomb of the Baha'i prophet, Al-Bab, integrates both European and Oriental design, and is considered one of the two most sacred sites for the world's five million Baha'is (the other is the tomb of Mizra Hussein Ali; see p315) outside nearby Akko. Visitors to the shrine must remove their shoes and dress modestly (no shorts or bare shoulders).

Near the upper entrance to the Baha'i Gardens is the **Ursula Malbin Sculpture Garden** (Gan HaPesalim; HaZiyonut Blvd), a small park filled with 'hands-on' sculptures, where families come to relax amid the greenery.

STELLA MARIS MONASTERY & ELIJAH'S CAVE

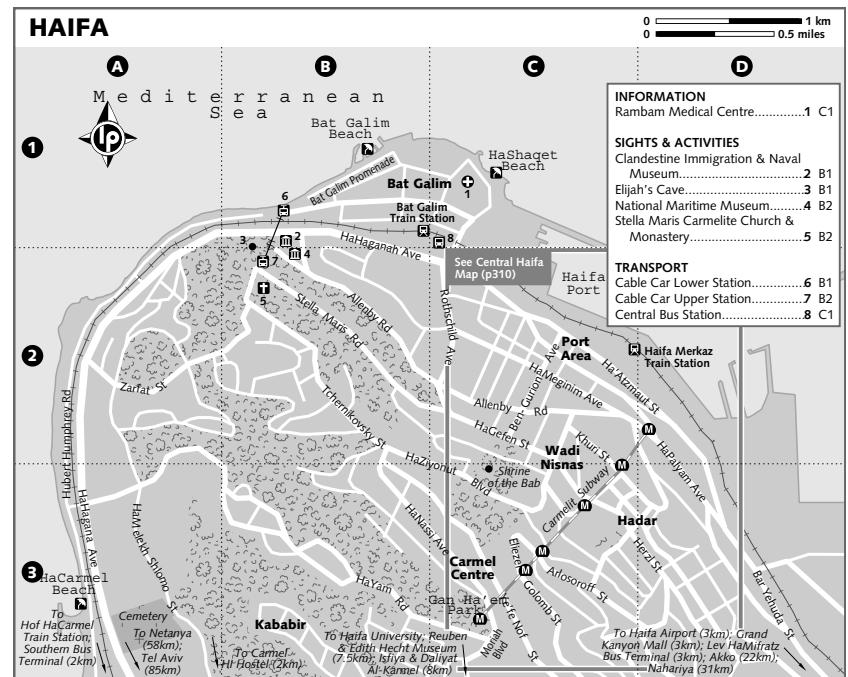
The neo-Gothic **Stella Maris Carmelite Church & Monastery** (Map p309; ☎ 833 7748; ☎ 6am-1.30pm & 3-6pm), with its wonderful painted ceiling, was originally established as a 12th-century Crusader stronghold. It was later used as a hospital for the troops of Napoleon in 1799, but was subsequently destroyed by the Turks. In 1836, it was replaced by the present structure. The easiest access to Stella Maris is via

the **cable car** (Map p309; ☎ 833 5970; one way/return 16/22NIS; ☎ 10am-6pm) from the highway below.

Below Stella Maris, close to the highway, is the grotto known as **Elijah's Cave** (Map p309; admission free; ☎ 8am-5pm Sun-Thu, 8.30am-12.45pm Fri). Here the prophet Elijah hid from King Ahab and Queen Jezebel after slaying the 450 priests of Ba'al, as reported in 1 Kings XVIII.20-40. It now attracts pilgrims of all three monotheistic faiths, and the adjacent garden is a favoured picnic site for local Christian Arabs. Take bus No 44 or 45 from downtown.

MUSEUMS

The **Haifa Art Museum** (Map p310; ☎ 852 3255; www.hms.org.il; 26 Shabtai Levi St; adult/senior/child/student 22/11/16/16NIS; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon & Wed-Thu, 4-8pm Tue, 10am-1pm Fri, 10am-3pm Sat) is three museums in one – ancient art, modern art, and music and ethnology. The same ticket (good for three days) also admits you to the following museums, all with the same opening hours: **Haifa City Museum** (Map p310; ☎ 851 2030; 11 Ben-Gurion Ave), with revolving exhibitions by local artists; the wonderful **Tikotin Museum of Japanese Art** (Map p310; ☎ 838 3554; 89 HaNassi



CENTRAL HAIFA

INFORMATION

Aldara..... 1 A3

Bank HaPoalim..... 2 C3

Bank Leumi..... 3 C3

Haifa Tourism Development Association..... 4 A3

ISSTA..... 5 C5

Main Post Office..... 6 D4

Post Office..... 7 D5

Post Office..... 8 B4

Post Office..... 9 C5

Steimatzky..... 10 C5

SLEEPING

Beth Rutenberg Hostel..... 16 A5

Beth Shalom Hotel..... 17 A5

Molada Guest House..... 18 A5

Port Inn..... 19 C3

St Charles Hospice..... 20 B3

EATING

Arab Bazaar..... 21 B4

Dinner Rush..... 22 A6

Fatoush..... 23 A3

Felafel Michelle..... 24 B3

Hashmura 1872..... 25 B3

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Haifa Art Museum..... 11 B4

Haifa City Museum..... 12 B2

National Museum of Science, Planning & Technology..... 13 C5

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A B C D

Jako Seafood..... 26 C3
Yan Yan..... 27 C3

DRINKING

Basement..... 28 C3

Bear..... 29 A6

Greg Coffee..... 30 A6

ENTERTAINMENT

Achurva..... 31 D3

Luna..... 32 C4

TRANSPORT

Arkia..... 33 C3

Entrance to Haifa Merkaz Train Station..... 34 C2

Haifa Ferry Passenger Terminal..... 35 C2

Ave) and its unique collection of Far Eastern works; and the **National Maritime Museum** (Map p309; ☎ 853 6622; 198 Allenby Rd), which presents the history of Mediterranean shipping.

The **Clandestine Immigration & Naval Museum** (Map p309; ☎ 853 6249; 204 Allenby Rd; adult/child 10/5NIS; ☎ 8.30am-4pm Sun-Thu) commemorates Israel's naval history and the Zionists' 1930s and '40s attempts to migrate into British-blockaded Palestine.

The **Reuben & Edith Hecht Museum** (☎ 825 7773; http://research.haifa.ac.il/~hecht/; Eshkol Tower, Haifa University; admission free; ☎ 10am-4pm Sun, Mon, Wed & Thu, 10am-7pm Tue, 10am-1pm Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) features Israeli archaeology and a collection of French Impressionist art. The museum was donated by Belgian philanthropist, Dr Reuben Hecht, who migrated to Israel in 1939.

A great place to take kids is the hands-on **National Museum of Science, Planning & Technology** (Map p310; ☎ 862 8111; www.netvision.net.il/inmos; Technion Bldg, Shmaryahu Levin St, Hadar; adult/senior/child/student 35/17.50/20/25NIS; ☎ 9am-4pm Sun, Mon, Wed & Thu, 9am-7.30pm Tue, 10am-2pm Fri, 10am-6pm Sat).

Tours

The Haifa Tourism Development Association organises a free guided walking tour on Saturday at 10.30am; meet behind the **Nof Hotel** (101 HaNassi Ave) in Carmel Centre.

Sleeping

Port Inn (Map p310; ☎ 852 4401; www.portinn.co.il; 34 Jaffa Rd; dm/s/d 55/180/250NIS; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Haifa's best budget option is this friendly and central family-run place that's more like a hotel than a hostel. There's a communal kitchen and sitting room, breakfast is an extra 20NIS and laundry service is available for 40NIS.

St Charles Hospice (Map p310; ☎ 855 3705; stchars@netvision.net.il; 105 Jaffa Rd; s/d/tr US\$35/60/75) With a lovely garden, this place is owned by the Latin Patriarchate and run by the Catholic Rosary Sisters. Rooms all have fans and private showers and rates include a filling breakfast. The gate is often locked so you'll need to ring the bell to enter.

Beth Shalom Hotel (Map p310; ☎ 837 7481; www.beth-shalom.co.il; 110 HaNassi Ave; s/d/tr US\$60/84/108; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) In the Carmel Centre district, this is a basic but comfortable Lutheran 'evangelical guesthouse'. Rates include breakfast, and dinner is available for an additional US\$10. From downtown take the metro.

Carmel HI Hostel (☎ 853 1944; www.ihya.org.il; dm/s/d US\$20/37.50/56; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Comfortable and friendly, this place is close to the Hof HaCarmel train and bus station, but less convenient for Haifa's main tourist attractions. Take bus No 3 or 114 from the Hof HaCarmel station or No 43 or 45 from downtown.

Molada Guest House (Map p310; ☎ 838 7958; www.rutenberg.org.il; 82 HaNassi Ave; s/d US\$40/60; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Run by the Rutenberg Institute for Youth Education, this welcoming guesthouse has clean comfortable rooms, some with balconies that offer sea views. It is opposite the Dan Carmel hotel.

Beth Rutenberg Hostel (Map p310; ☎ 838 7958; 77 HaNassi Ave; dm US\$22; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Close to Molada Guesthouse is this cheaper hostel, which is run by the same institute. Phone ahead during normal working hours to secure a bed.

Eating

RESTAURANTS

Hashmura 1872 (Map p310; ☎ 855 1872; 15 Ben-Gurion Ave; dishes 39-105NIS; ☎ noon-midnight Sun-Thu, noon-8pm Fri & Sat) This is a classy and recommended splurge in the German Colony. It does a range of pasta, chicken, steak and lamb dishes, but the speciality is seafood. Shrimp, *carpaccio* (thinly sliced raw fish) or squid starters cost 39NIS to 55NIS, and salmon, bream or mussel mains are 72NIS to 80NIS. A glass floor reveals the extensive wine cellar in the historic 1872 basement, where there's also an atmospheric pub.

Jako Seafood (Map p310; ☎ 866 8813; 12 Qehilat Saloniki St; dishes 55-65NIS; ☎ noon-midnight Sun-Thu, noon-8pm Fri & Sat) Offers an excellent variety of fish (including salmon, bream, bass, shark, triggerfish and St Peter's fish) and seafood (calamari, crab or shrimp). There's a second location at 11 Moriah in Carmel Centre.

Fatoush (Map p310; ☎ 852 4930; 38 Ben-Gurion Ave; dishes 25-45NIS; ☎ 8am-1am) Set up like a medieval Arabic house, complete with burgundy cushions, nargilehs and candle lamps, Fatoush is an atmospheric and popular restaurant serving a fusion of Western and Middle Eastern cuisine. In pleasant weather it's just as nice to eat on the street-side patio.

Dinner Rush (Map p310; ☎ 836 1908; 122 HaNassi Ave; dishes 25NIS; ☎ noon-1am) A concept bar, this one has the bartenders doubling as chefs who serve up American diner-style food – pasta, burgers and chicken wings. It's right next to the Gan Ha'em metro station.

Yan Yan (Map p310; ☎ 855 7878; 28 HaMeganim Ave; main dishes 35-50NIS; 🕒 noon-11pm) Friendly downtown place serving excellent Chinese and Vietnamese fare. The Chinese business lunch costs 39.50NIS and in the evening there's a 49NIS all-you-can-eat special.

QUICK EATS

Felafel Michelle (Map p310; 21 Wadi Nisnas Rd; 🕒 8am-6pm Mon-Sat) Serves up what many locals claim to be the best felafel in Haifa. As you are walking east on Wadi Nisnas Rd, look for the hole-in-the-wall on the left side of the road.

Around the HaNevi'im St end of HeHaulutz St, you'll find a wide range of excellent felafel and shwarma, as well as bakeries selling sweet pastries, sticky buns and other delights. The other prime shwarma area is Allenby Rd, around HaZiyonut Blvd. For fruit and vegetables, shop at the great little Arab bazaar in Wadi Nisnas.

Drinking & Entertainment

For an evening out, locals head for the trendy bars and cafés along Moriah St and the environs of Carmel Centre. A handful of bars and nightclubs are clustered around downtown.

Bear (Map p310; ☎ 838 1703; 135 HaNassi Ave; meals 35-75NIS; 🕒 6pm-3am Sun-Wed, 11am-4am Thu-Fri, 5pm-3am Sat) The Bear, Haifa's only Irish-style pub, is regarded as the city's main expat hang-out and sports bar. For meals, you can choose between salads, sandwiches, chicken, steak and seafood, washed down with your choice of 12 different draught beers.

Barbarossa (☎ 811 4010; 8 Pica St; 🕒 5.30pm-3am) Haifa's most popular singles bar is located just off Moriah St, about 2.5km south of Carmel Centre. Two-for-one drinks offered during happy hour, 6.30pm to 9pm.

Basement (Map p310; ☎ 853 2367; 2 HaVankeem St; 🕒 9pm-3am) Dim, hedonistic and rowdy, this alternative rock bar is popular with young Haifans. Live music is featured on Saturdays while Sunday is open-mike night; aspiring rock stars will have a captive audience.

Greg Coffee (Map p310; 3 Derekh HaYam St; 🕒 7am-1am) If it's a good cup of joe you're after, or some fantastic brownies, try this stylish little café in Carmel Centre.

Downtown dance places, such as **Luna** (Map p310; HaPalyam St) and **Achurva** (Map p310; admission 50NIS; Captain Steve St; 🕒 midnight-sunrise Thu night) only open on weekends.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Arkia (Map p310; ☎ 861 1600; 80 Ha'Atzma'ut St) connects Haifa with Eilat (422NIS, 1¼ hours).

BUS

Arriving from the south, passengers are dropped off at the new Hof HaCarmel bus station (adjacent to the train station of the same name) from where you can take bus No 103 downtown. The old **central bus station** (HaHaganah Ave) handles city buses. Buses to Akko, Nahariya and Galilee use the eastern bus terminal at Lev HaMifratz.

During the day, buses depart every 20 minutes for Tel Aviv (23NIS, 1½ hours), while there's an hourly service to Jerusalem (39NIS, two hours). Heading north, bus Nos 271 and 272 (express) go to Nahariya (13.50NIS, 45 to 70 minutes, every 15 minutes) via Akko, and bus Nos 251 and 252 (express) stop at Akko (11.50NIS, 30 to 50 minutes). Eastbound, bus No 430 goes to Tiberias (28NIS, 1½ hours) and bus No 332 goes to Nazareth (17.50NIS, 45 minutes).

FERRY

For information on travelling to and from Cyprus and Greece by ferry, see p663.

TRAIN

Haifa has three train stations: Haifa Merkaz, near the port; Bat Galim, adjacent to the central bus station (accessible via the passage from platform 34); and Hof HaCarmel, at the new southern bus terminal. From Haifa Merkaz, trains depart roughly hourly for Tel Aviv (27.50NIS, 1½ hours) via Netanya (23NIS, one hour), and north to Nahariya (16NIS, 45 minutes) via Akko (12.50NIS, 30 minutes).

Getting Around

The only underground in Israel, the **Carmelit** (☎ 837 6861; per person 5.50NIS; 🕒 6am-10pm Sun-Thu, 6am-3pm Fri, 7pm-midnight Sat), connects Kikar Paris with Carmel Centre, via the Hadar district. Visitors can ride to the top and see the city sights on a leisurely downhill stroll.

DRUZE VILLAGES

The dusty but friendly Druze villages of **Isfiya** and **Daliyat al-Karmel**, on the slopes of Mt Carmel, have popular high-street bazaars where you'll find inexpensive Indian cloth-

ing, trinkets and handmade Druze handbags. The best way to get there is by *sherut* (11NIS, 30 minutes) departing when full from Hadar. Alternatively, bus No 192 (11NIS, 45 minutes) departs from the central bus station three times daily except Saturday.

CAESAREA

קיסריה *قيصريا*

☎ 04 / pop 3400

First developed by the Persians in the 6th century BC, Caesarea never amounted to much until about 30 BC when Herod the Great made it the headquarters of the Roman government in Palestine. The palaces, temples, churches and mosques built by Herod and subsequent conquerors have all but disappeared, but their ruins, stretching along the Mediterranean for over 1km, are now considered a world-class archaeological site.

Sights & Activities

The central attraction of **Caesarea National Park** (☎ 636 1358; basic ticket adult/child 23/12NIS, with interactive tour 40/33NIS; 🕒 8am-5pm) is the walled **Crusader city**, with its citadel and harbour. Beyond the walls to the north stretch the beachfront remains of an impressive Roman aqueduct. A hippodrome lies to the south, and beyond this, a reconstructed **Roman amphitheatre**, which serves as a modern-day concert venue.

The recommended **interactive tour** features the latest in digital technology, complete with a holographic Herod the Great who answers your questions, a high definition movie, and an interactive panoramic display that lets you explore the city during different historical periods, all with a few taps of a touch screen.

For a more hands-on experience, **Caesarea Diving** (☎ 626 5898; www.caesarea-diving.com), at the national park, by the waterfront, does scuba trips in the area, allowing you to explore the foundations of Herod's ancient harbour.

Sleeping

Grushka B&B (☎ 638 9810; www.grushka.co.il; 28 Hameyasdim St, Binyamina; d 525NIS, per child extra 125NIS; 📞 📧 📍) This friendly Dutch-and-Israeli-run B&B offers several comfortable rooms as well as a quiet cottage and a fully equipped villa for families. It's just a seven-minute walk from the Binyamina train station, or call for a pick up.

Getting There & Away

From Tel Aviv or Netanya, take any bus along the coastal road towards Khadera, where you can disembark and connect with bus No 76 to Caesarea, the best of which depart at 8.20am, 11.25am, 1.10pm and 2.45pm. Coming from Haifa, get off at the Caesarea intersection and hike the last 3.5km to the site. Alternatively, take the train to Binyamina from Tel Aviv (21NIS, 45 minutes) or Haifa (17.50NIS, 30 minutes) and look for a taxi to take you the last 7km.

BEIT SHE'ARIM

בית שערים *شعاريم بيت*

☎ 04

A pleasant day trip from Haifa, the archaeological site of **Beit She'arim** (☎ 983-1643; adult/child 18/8NIS; 🕒 8am-5pm), 19km southeast of Haifa, includes a network of burial caves and 2nd-century ruins. To get there, use bus No 338 from Haifa to Kiryat Tivon.

AKKO

عنكا *عكا*

☎ 04 / pop 45,800

Few of the world's cities are as timeless as Akko, the stonewalled fortress by the sea. After enjoying a long and varied history under Alexander the Great, the Egyptians and the Romans, Akko came to prominence as the Crusader city of Acre. Among the many people of prominence to breach its gates was a young Marco Polo who used this city as a staging point on his journey to the court of Khublai Khan.

During the Jewish immigration of the 1930s, it served as a hotbed of Arab hostility, and in the end the Jews left Old Akko to the Arabs and set about developing a 'new city' outside its historic walls. As a result, Akko has avoided modern development, and while the rest of Israel scrambles to package its history for tourists, Akko soldiers on as an oblivious – and genuine – remnant from the past. Akko's historic homes house families rather than artists, and in the souq and on the quays, merchants and fisher-folk carry on pretty much as they have for several thousand years.

Orientation

From the bus and train stations, it's roughly a 20-minute walk to Old Akko. From the bus station, exit to the left on Derekh

HaArba'a St and continue one long block to the traffic lights. There, turn right (west) onto Ben Ami St. After two blocks turn left onto Weizmann St and you'll see the city walls ahead. The train station is about 300m further east from the bus station.

Information

Public Library (per 30min 7NIS; ☎ 9am-7pm Sun-Thu, 9am-3pm Fri) Located 200m north of the old city walls, the library offers Internet access.

Tourist office (☎ 995 6707; www.akk.org.il; 1 Weizmann St; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm Apr-Oct, 8.30am-4.30pm Nov-Mar) Located north of the 'Festival Garden', inside the Crusader Citadel.

Sights

OLD AKKO

You enter the predominantly Arab enclave of Old Akko through walls built by Ahmed Pasha al-Jazzar in 1799. Its northwestern corner is secured by Al-Jazzar's Citadel, which was reconstructed on the foundations laid out by the 13th-century Crusaders.

The **Al-Jazzar Mosque** (admission 3NIS; ☎ 8am-6pm Sat-Thu), with its green, distinctly Turkish

dome and minaret, is the dominant element on the Akko skyline. North of the mosque is the **Citadel**, entered from the car park to the east. To the right is the tourist office where you buy a ticket for the Citadel or the better value **combination ticket** (adult/student/senior 44/37/37NIS), which allows admission to Knight's Halls, Hammam al-Pasha, Okashi Museum and the Templar Crusader Tunnel. For about 20NIS extra you can add on the Rosh HaNikra sea caves (p316) if you are headed that way. After a short film about the city, grab an audio headset and visit the **Knights' Halls** (adult/child 25/22NIS; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Sun-Thu, 8.30am-2pm Fri), a haunting series of vaulted halls that lie 8m below the street level. At one time, they served as the headquarters of the crusading Knights Hospitallers.

At the back end of the Citadel, look for the tunnel (hard to spot) and follow it through a winding series of passages to the **Turkish Bazaar**. Then turn right to reach the **Hammam al-Pasha** (Turkish Bath), housed in the 1780 bathhouse built by Al-Jazzar, which remained in use until the 1940s. The *hammam* now contains a 30-minute **multi-media show**

(adult/child 25/21NIS; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Sun-Thu, 8.30am-2pm Fri) called 'The Story of the Last Bath Attendant'. From the *hammam* walk back towards the Citadel to the **Okashi Museum** (adult/child 10/7NIS; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Sun-Thu, 8.30am-2pm Fri), an incongruous modern art gallery.

From the Citadel, follow the alley south into the souq, which is the Old City's main marketplace. Beyond it lies the **Khan al-Umdan**, once a grand khan (caravanserai) that served the camel trains carrying grain from the hinterlands, and above its courtyard rises an Ottoman **clock tower**. En route to the harbour, don't miss the amazing **Templar Crusader Tunnel** (adult/child 10/7NIS; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Sun-Thu, 8.30am-4pm Fri), an underground passageway that connected the Port to a Templar palace.

The original **land walls** date from the 12th century, but the sea walls were only put in place in the 18th century, their construction ordered by Al-Jazzar. Throughout the day and evening, **Malkat Akko** (☎ 991 0606, 050-5551136) runs tourist cruises from the Marina.

NEW AKKO

Travellers with an interest in the Baha'i faith may want to check out the wonderful **Baha'i Gardens** (admission free; ☎ 9am-4pm), 3km northeast of central New Akko. The gardens contain the Mansion of Bahji, where the founder of the Baha'i faith, Mizra Hussein Ali (Baha'u'llah) lived until his death in 1892. He is buried in the adjacent **shrine** (☎ 9am-noon Fri-Mon), considered the holiest place on Earth for the Baha'is.

Another worthwhile site just outside new Akko is the **Beit Lohamei HaGeta'ot Museum** (☎ 995 8052; www.gfh.org.il; adult/child 20/18NIS; ☎ 9am-4pm Sun-Thu), which commemorates the ghetto uprisings, Jewish resistance and Allied assistance during the Nazi Holocaust. Despite the depressing theme, it presents a hopeful picture of this tragic period. Your ticket is also good for **Yad Lazeled** (☎ 9am-4pm Sun-Thu, 10am-5pm Sat) a moving museum dedicated to children of the Holocaust, located in an adjacent circular structure.

Sleeping

Walled's Akko Gate Hostel (☎ 991 0410; fax 981 5530; Salah ad-Din St; dm 30NIS, s with/without bathroom 200/120NIS, d with/without bathroom 220/140NIS; ☎) In this split personality guesthouse, you have got a choice of fine-looking street-side

rooms with attached bathrooms, or stuffy nonattached rooms that overlook a grubby yard filled with discarded metal bunk beds. Owner Walled can arrange trips to the Golan Heights (200NIS) and Rosh HaNikra (35NIS) when there is enough demand. Call for a free pick up from the station.

Palm Beach Hotel (☎ 987 7777; www.palmbeach.co.il; s/d US\$105/130; ☎) Located 2km east of the old city, the Palm Beach offers four-star quality rooms and fine facilities, including a pool, sauna, health spa and water sports. Book through the Internet for a 10% discount. To get to the hotel, head east from the Land Gate along the coastal road.

Eating & Drinking

For cheap eating there are several **felafel places** around the junction of Salah ad-Din and Al-Jazzar Sts. Self-catering supplies are available at **Elias Dieb & Sons** (Salah ad-Din St), a great little cavellike supermarket opposite Souq al-Abiad; there's no English sign. For spices or coffee, try the atmospheric **Kurdi & Berit** (☎ 991 6188), located in the souq.

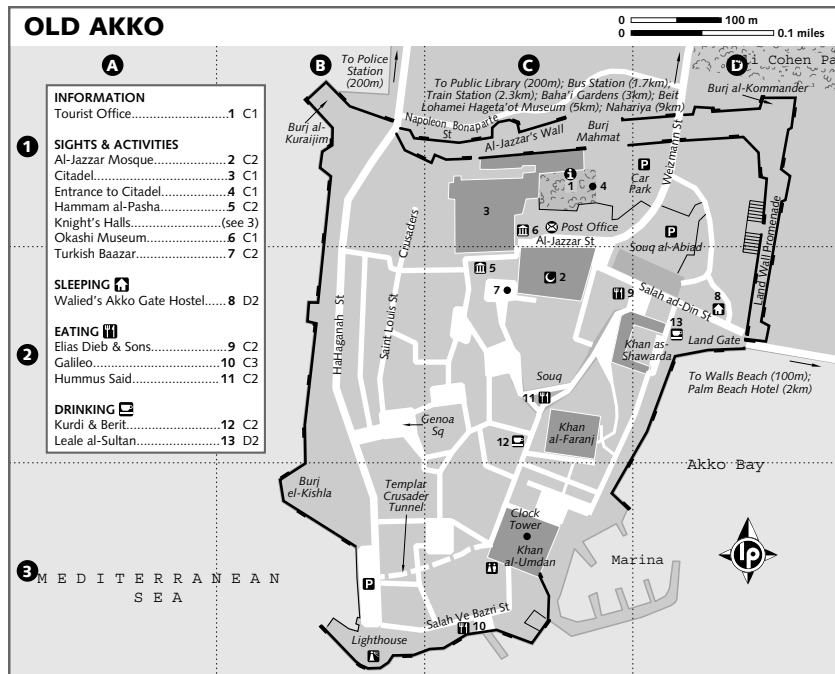
Hummus Said (☎ 6am-2pm) Very much entrenched in the souq, this place has become something of an institution, doling up that much-loved Middle Eastern dip to throngs of visitors from around the country. For 15NIS, you'll get salads, pickles, pitta and a big glob of hummus with fuul or garlic.

Galileo (☎ 991 4617; 176/11 Salah Ve Bazri St; dishes 45-80NIS; ☎ 10am-midnight) Conjuring up images of Arabian nights, this charming restaurant is actually built into the sea wall that divides Akko from the Mediterranean. Not surprisingly, the main menu option is fish.

Leale-al Sultan (Khan as-Shawarda; ☎ 9am-midnight) Traditional Middle Eastern coffee-house sporting sequined cushions, colourful wall hangings and backgammon tables. A Turkish coffee costs 5NIS while a nargileh is 10NIS.

Getting There & Away

Akko's bus terminal and train station lie about a 20-minute walk from the main entrance to the Old City. From Haifa (11.70NIS, 30 to 50 minutes, every 15 minutes), bus Nos 252 and 272 depart frequently, as do the slower bus Nos 251 and 271. From Akko, bus Nos 270, 271 and 272 (express) run north to Nahariya (7.60NIS, 15 to 25 minutes, every 15 minutes). The most pleasant way to travel



between Akko and Haifa (12.50NIS, 30 minutes, every 30 minutes) or on to Nahariya (7.50NIS, 15 minutes), however, is by train along the beachfront railway.

NAHARIYA

נהרייה

☎ 04 / pop 47,400

The appeal of the quiet seaside resort of Nahariya lies solely in its lovely beaches, though most travellers come here to simply catch onward transport for Rosh HaNikra. A **tourist office** (☎ 987 98301; 19 HaGa'aton Blvd; ☎ 8am-4.45pm Sun-Thu, 8am-12.30pm Fri) is on the ground floor of the municipality building, a block east of the bus station.

If you feel like staying, try the quiet **Hotel Rosenblatt** (☎ 992 3469; jael@walla.co.il; 59 Weizmann St; s/d 170/200; P ☎ ☎), on the corner of HaGa'aton Blvd.

Bus Nos 270, 271 and 272 (express) run roughly every 25 minutes (until 10.30pm) to Akko (7.50NIS, 15 to 25 minutes), with the 271 and 272 services continuing to Haifa (10.50NIS, 45 to 70 minutes).

ROSH HANIKRA

ראש הנקרה رأس الناقورة

☎ 04

Right on the Lebanese border, the wondrous **sea caves** at Rosh HaNikra were originally carved by nature but were enlarged by the British for a railway and by the Israelis to improve visitor access. The 10km road from Nahariya ends at the **Rosh HaNikra Tourist Centre** (☎ 985 7109; www.rosh-hanikra.com; ☎ 8.30am-4pm Sep-Mar, 8.30am-6pm Apr-Jun, 8.30am-11pm Jul-Aug) from where a **cable car** (adult/child 38/30NIS; ☎ 8.30am-4pm Sep-Mar, 8.30am-6pm Apr-Jun, 8.30am-11pm Jul & Aug) descends steeply to the caves. Alternatively, find the dim walking track that leaves the main highway about 300m south of the tourist centre; it leads through a former rail tunnel to the caves. Ticket price includes admission to a 15-minute film presentation.

Sleeping & Eating

Rosh HaNikra Holiday Village (☎ 982 3112; www.kfar-rosh-hanikra.co.il; camp sites/r per person 40/180NIS; P ☎ ☎) This is housed in the old British Customs Post about 700m south of the cable car. This self-styled health spa also offers a pool, gym (40NIS) and massage (165 to 195NIS). Rates include breakfast, but add 50NIS for half board.

Eli Avivi (☎ 982 3219; 1avivi@walla.com; camp sites per person 80NIS, r 150-175NIS) A rustic 'lost-hippie' hideaway, Eli Avivi claims to be a separate state – you'll even get a passport stamp upon entry. The rambling property takes in not only a beautiful stretch of Akhziv Beach (national park fee 25NIS), but also a desultory museum (admission 15NIS) of archaeological finds from all over Israel. You'll find it 5km south of Rosh HaNikra.

For meals, there's a tourist café at the top of the cable car offering a buffet lunch with drink for 45NIS.

Getting There & Away

From Nahariya, bus Nos 20 and 32 run four times daily to Rosh HaNikra (6.50NIS, 15 minutes, noon, 2.30pm, 5.30pm and 6pm). Only one bus comes back to Nahariya, at 3pm. You could also get there by shared taxi or hitching.

GALILEE הגליל الجليل

With its lush scenery and religious heritage, Galilee's green valleys, verdant forests, fertile farmland and, of course, the Sea of Galilee, all provide relief from the drier lands to the south. For Christians, the Galilee area is serious Bible territory: it was here that Jesus grew up, gathered his disciples, preached one of the most enigmatic sermons in history, multiplied loaves and fishes, walked on water – and even turned water into wine, when it was necessary.

NAZARETH

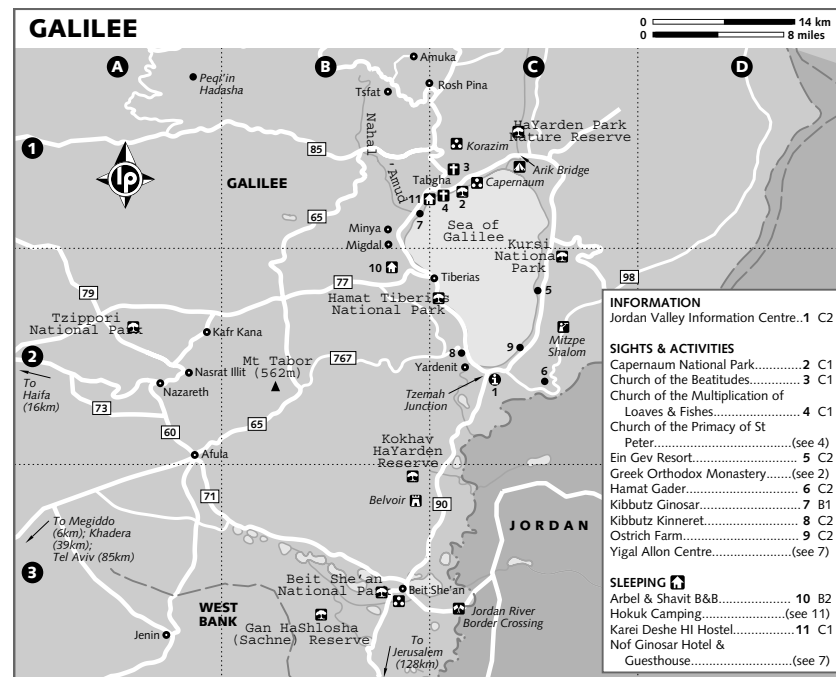
ناصرة الناصرة

☎ 04 / pop 61,700

As the childhood home of Jesus, and the place where he preached, taught and worked in his father's carpentry shop, the timeless but scruffy Arab town of Nazareth is one of the most revered sites in Christendom. Although modern Nazareth may not fulfil everyone's expectations, it is certainly worth a visit, even if only for half a day.

Orientation & Information

Most sites of pilgrim interest are concentrated on Paul VI St and El-Bishara St (also called Annunciation or Casa Nova St). On El-



Bishara St, just above the Paul VI intersection, is the helpful **tourist office** (☎ 657 0555; nazrat@int.gov.il; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-2pm Sat).

Sights

Nazareth's revered **Basilica of the Annunciation** (El-Bishara St; ☎ 8.30-11.45am & 2-5pm Mon-Sat) stands on the site where Catholics believe the Angel Gabriel announced to the Virgin Mary that she would bear the Son of God. Its rather bland 1969 exterior is redeemed by remnants of earlier Crusader and Byzantine churches inside, and the outdoor collection of 'Madonna and Child' artwork donated by Catholic communities around the world.

At the **Sisters of Nazareth Convent** (☎ 655 4304; ☎ 8.30-11.45am & 2-5pm Mon-Sat), up the street, you can see one of the best examples of an ancient stone-sealed tomb; it lies under the present courtyard and can only be viewed by appointment. The nearby **Church of St Joseph** (Al-Bishara St; ☎ 8.30-11.45am & 2-5pm Mon-Sat), built in 1914, occupies the traditional site of Joseph's carpentry shop, over the remains of a medieval church. In

pre-Byzantine times, the underground cavern was probably used for grain storage.

The **Al-Balda al-Qadima souq**, west of upper Al-Bishara St, occupies a maze of narrow streets. In its midst sits the **Greek Catholic Church** (☎ 8.30-11.45am & 2-5pm Mon-Sat), on the site of the synagogue where the young Jesus prayed and taught. The attractive **St Gabriel's Greek Orthodox Church** (Mary's Well Sq; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Sat) lies about 10 minutes' walk north-east of the basilica, two blocks off Paul VI St. Across Well Sq from here is **Mary's Well** (Paul VI St), which the Greek Orthodox Church claims is the site of the Annunciation. Beside it at the **Cactus gift shop** is a wonderful **ancient bathhouse** (☎ 050 538 4343; admission per group US\$25; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Sat), which utilised water from Mary's Well. A 40-minute guided tour of the bathhouse includes excellent commentary and refreshments, including fresh juice and Turkish delights.

Those who just can't imagine Jesus amid Nazareth's modern bustle may want to head for the worthwhile **Nazareth Village** (☎ 645 6042; www.nazarethvillage.com; St 5079; admission 50NIS; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat). Located in

Nazareth's YMCA building, this nonprofit project, staffed by actors in period clothing, reconstructs everyday life and commerce in Nazareth of 2000 years ago. It's a 15-minute walk due west from the basilica, just beyond Al-Wadi al-Jawani St.

Sleeping

Sisters of Nazareth Convent (☎ 655 4304; fax 646 0741; dm US\$8, s/d US\$28/46; 🏠 🏠) With dormitories and 30 private rooms, this is by far the best accommodation in town. Kitchen facilities are available, private room rates include breakfast. The door, marked 'Religieuses de Nazareth', is closed for security reasons, so you'll have to ring the bell. Reception closes at 9.30pm, but if you're prebooked (which is wise, in any case), they may wait a bit later. It's 50m west of the basilica.

Casa Nova Hospice (☎ 645 6660; fax 657 9630; El-Bishara St; s/d/tr US\$40/54/68; 🏠 🏠) Opposite the basilica, the Casa Nova caters mainly for Italian pilgrimage groups. Advance bookings are essential, as the hospice may not open during low periods. Breakfast is included.

Eating

The best felafel and shwarma joints are scattered along Paul VI street, especially at the intersection below the tourist office.

Tishreen (☎ 608 4666; 56 El-Bishara St; meals 30-75NIS; 🕒 11am-midnight) This recent addition to Nazareth is dressed up to look like the interior of a medieval storehouse with scattered wine bottles and antiques clipped to the straw-encrusted walls. The menu is replete with Middle Eastern fare: try the excellent *muhammar*, an Arabic pizza topped with chicken and slices of onion baked in a brick oven. Chicken, seafood, steak and pasta dishes are also available. It's located 200m southwest of Mary's Well.

Holy Land Restaurant (☎ 657 5415; 6168 Casa Nova St; set menus US\$10) With exotic handmade tiles and lots of old artefacts, Holy Land is set in a cavelike 1860 building that served as Nazareth's first sesame mill and, during WWI, as a German and Turkish supply depot. It's friendly but caters mainly for tour groups, so you're normally limited to a set menu.

Getting There & Away

There's no main bus terminal in Nazareth. Bus No 431 for Tiberias (21.50NIS, 45 minutes) departs hourly from the Hamishbir

department store on Paul VI St; over the road, buses leave for Haifa (19NIS, 45 minutes) with about the same regularity. To Akko (25NIS, 45 minutes, hourly), buses stop opposite the Egged information office. For Tel Aviv (36NIS, two hours), take bus Nos 823 or 824.

Sheruts to Tiberias leave from in front of Hamishbir department store. For Haifa and Tel Aviv, they leave from the Paz petrol station.

TZIPPORI

צִיפּוּרִי

☎ 04

The impressive archaeological site **Tzipori (or Sepphoris) National Park** (☎ 656 8262; admission 23NIS; 🕒 8am-5pm in summer, 8am-4pm in 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. Today Tzipori brims with ruins, including original colonnaded roadways, an amphitheatre, a Roman villa with some lovely mosaic floors, a Crusader citadel and a haunting underground system of cisterns and aqueducts. You'll need to allow at least three hours to catch the highlights.

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

MEGIDDO

מֵגִידוֹ מֵיגִדְדוֹ עֵזְבֵי

☎ 04

Better known as Armageddon (in Hebrew Har Megiddo, or Mt Megiddo), the site that St John predicted would host the last great battle on earth is now preserved in **Megiddo National Park** (☎ 659 0316; adult/child 23/12NIS; 🕒 8am-5pm Sat-Thu, 8am-4pm Fri). Ongoing excavations at the site have unearthed evidence of 20 distinct historical phases dating from 10,000 to 400 BC. The most enigmatic ruins are those of the 10th-century-BC fortified city, which was originally built by King Solomon, and the 9th-century-BC water system, which connected the city with a natural spring. The several excellent visitor-centre models depict how it must have looked.

The site lies 2km north of Megiddo Junction, west of the Haifa road, and is best accessed on the Haifa-Afula bus. Alterna-

tively, take the half-hourly Tel Aviv-Tiberias bus, get off at Megiddo Junction and walk the last 2km up the hill.

BEIT SHE'AN

בֵּית שֵׁאֵן בֵּית שֵׁאֵן

☎ 04 / pop 15,300

The tidy town of Beit She'an makes a great stop along the scenic Jordan River Hwy route between Jerusalem and Tiberias, but check the latest security situation before following this route.

Beit She'an National Park (adult/child 23/12NIS; 🕒 8am-4pm winter, 8am-5pm summer) features Israel's best-preserved Roman amphitheatre, as well as extensive and ongoing excavations, which so far have revealed a temple, basilica, nymphaeum, a colonnaded Roman street and 0.5 hectare of elaborate, mosaic-floored Byzantine baths. There's also a smaller amphitheatre in the town centre, and several inviting walking tracks along the lush riverfront.

Buses run frequently between Jerusalem and Tiberias, via Beit She'an, and there are also regular bus services to and from Afula.

TIBERIAS

טְבֵרְיָה טְבֵרְיָה

☎ 04 / pop 35,000

As the only town beside the Sea of Galilee, Tiberias is the obvious base for visiting the lakeside beauty spots and points of interest. With its mix of natural spas and tombs of venerated sages, the town invites observant Jews to combine treatment of the body with purification of the soul, while the less observant can partake of the town's lakeside wining, dining and nightlife. If possible, try to avoid visiting Tiberias and the Sea of Galilee on weekends when hotel prices can rise by 25% to 50%.

Information

Exchange Office (HaBanim St; 🕒 10am-7pm) No-commission money changer. Bank Leumi and Mizrahi Bank charge a 4% commission. The post office changes travellers cheques.

Internet Café (☎ 672 4672; per hr 20NIS; 🕒 10am-3am) Located behind Al-Omri Mosque.

Main post office (cnr HaYarden & HaBanim St; 🕒 7am-6pm Sun-Thu, 7am-noon Fri)

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

Tourist office (☎ 672 5666; 9 HaBanim St; 🕒 9am-1pm & 2-4pm Sun-Thu, 8.30am-12.30pm Fri) Located in the 'archaeological park', this office has free maps of Tiberias, Nazareth and the Galilee area. A free city walking tour departs from the Sheraton Tiberias Hotel on Saturday at 10.30am.

Sights

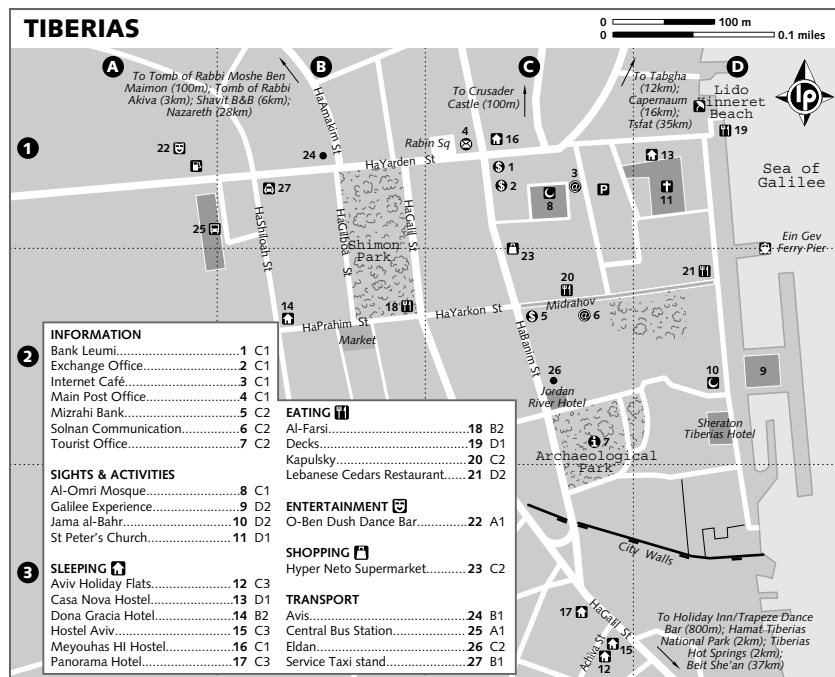
The dignified but incongruous mid-18th-century **Al-Omri Mosque** is one of the few historic structures in Tiberias' Old Town; a second mosque, **Jama al-Bahr** (1880), now stands forlorn and abandoned. The enigmatic **St Peter's Church** (🕒 mass 6pm Mon-Sat, 8.30pm Sun), on the waterfront promenade, was originally built by 12th-century Crusaders, but the present structure dates from 1870. The boat-shaped nave is a nod to St Peter's piscatorial profession.

The **Galilee Experience** (☎ 672 3620; adult/student US\$6/5; 🕒 9-10pm Sun-Thu, 9-4pm Fri), part of a modern waterfront development, presents an hourly audiovisual programme in 12 languages, recounting the historical, geographical and political story of Galilee from Abraham to Jesus, Napoleon and the Israeli General Moshe Dayan.

Uphill from the centre, 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 beast was apparently drawn to Tiberias.

Around 2km south of town, the **Tiberias Hot Springs** (☎ 672 8500; Elizer Kaplan Blvd; admission 60NIS; 🕒 8am-8pm Sun, Mon & Wed, 8am-11pm Tue & Thu, 8.30am-8pm Sat) promises physical rejuvenation after a dip in one of its mineral pools. Swedish massage (125NIS) and mud wrap (115NIS) are also available. Don't mistake this for the older facility on the mountain side of the street.

Just past the modern bathhouse, the archaeological site **Hamat Tiberias National Park** (adult/senior/child 12/6/6NIS; 🕒 8am-5pm) dates back to Roman times, though its major feature is a small synagogue dating to the 3rd to 5th centuries CE. A small museum is housed in the reconstructed hammam,



in use as a bathhouse from 1780 until its closure in 1944.

Tours

Holy Land Sailing (☎ 672 3007, 050 217416) Offers sightseeing cruises on the Sea of Galilee and for prebooked groups, providing ferry services between Tiberias, Tabgha and Ein Gev.

Lido Boats (☎ 672 1538) Has party cruises complete with full bar and music for 20NIS per person. The cruises are not always open to the public so call first.

Sleeping

Hostel Aviv (☎ 671 2272; fax 671 2272; cnr HaGalil & Achiva Sts; dm/s/d 40/90/120NIS, holiday flats 280-350NIS; ☎ ☒ ☒) This is probably the best budget option in town. Both the dorms and private rooms have showers, fridges, and cable TV, and some have private balconies with lake views. The Aviv holiday flats in the adjacent building (to the west) also feature kitchenettes and some have Jacuzzi tubs. Top-quality bicycles can be hired for 40NIS per day.

Meyouhas HI Hostel (☎ 672 1775; www.iyha.org.il; 2 HaYarden St; dm/s US\$19/37, d US\$48-56; ☎ ☒)

In a 110-year-old stone building, formerly a Scottish hospital, this is one of Israel's most pleasant HI hostels. All rates include breakfast. Students and HI card holders receive a small discount.

Casa Nova Hostel (☎ 671 2281; 1 HaYarden St; dm/s/d US\$15/32/50; ☎ ☒ ☒) Adjacent to St Peter's Church, this is a clean and quiet 100-year-old pilgrims' hostel. All rates include breakfast as well as use of the kitchen facilities and satellite-TV lounge.

Dona Gracia Hotel (☎ 671 7176; www.donagracia.com; 3 HaPrahim; s/d US\$70/90; ☎ ☒ ☒) This midrange theme hotel is built around the legend of a 16th-century Portuguese-Jewish woman revered across Europe for her wealth and political influence. There is a museum dedicated to Dona Gracia, free if you are staying here, or 45NIS if you are not. Rates include breakfast.

Shavit B&B (☎ 679 4919; www.members.tripod.com/~shavit; s/d US\$30/60; ☎ ☒ ☒) Located in Arbel village, this B&B makes for a pleasant treat for those who prefer relaxation in a tranquil garden setting to the bustle of central Tiberias. All units have kitchenettes

and cable TV; meals are also available. Call for a free pick up.

Panorama Hotel (☎ 679 1004; 56 HaGalil St; s/d/tr 100/150/200NIS; ☎ ☒ ☒) This friendly hotel offers clean, airy but basic rooms, a communal kitchen and a dining area.

Eating

The cheapest sit-down dining options are cafés at the top end of the *midrahov* (pedestrian mall). More upmarket places are along the waterfront. 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 the Al-Omri Mosque.

Decks (☎ 672 1538; Lido Beach; mains 70-120NIS; ☎ noon-midnight; ☎ ☒) Just to whet your appetite, the enormous grills for this legendary steakhouse are set by the door as you walk inside. Everything on the menu is tempting, from the spare ribs and tuna steak, right down to the garlic fries and heavenly deserts. This is not a good place if you're on a diet. In summer it opens from 6pm.

Kapulsky (☎ 672 0341; Midrahov; dishes 35-55NIS; ☎ 8am-1am; ☎ ☒ ☒) This is part of a nationwide chain of kosher vegetarian restaurants, specialising in pasta, salad, crepes and a range of omelettes and baked potatoes. It also whips up starters, extensive Israeli breakfasts (until noon) and stir-fries.

Lebanese Cedars Restaurant (☎ 651 0314; Promenade; dishes 30-70NIS; ☎ 8am-10pm; ☎ ☒ ☒) This authentic Lebanese restaurant, on the waterfront, is designed to look like the interior of a ship. Try the excellent hummus with lamb (30NIS) or the kebab with tahini (49NIS).

Al-Farsi (cnr HaGalil & HaYarkon Sts; snacks 14NIS) Lively late-night fast food place with low prices and a range of local staples, including shashlik, liver and shwarma.

Entertainment

The cafés and bars around the *midrahov* attract crowds on weekend evenings, especially in summer.

O-Ben Dush Dance Bar (☎ 050 451133; ☎ 10.30am-late Thu-Sat in summer) Features salsa, techno, rumba, samba and disco dancing. It's near HaYarden St.

From the Lido Kinneret Beach, **disco cruises** (☎ 672 1538; 20NIS) depart according to demand throughout the year. There is some-

thing on most nights, especially in summer, but you'll need to phone to confirm.

Getting There & Away

Egged buses (☎ 672 9222) depart for Tel Aviv (42NIS, 2½ hours) and Jerusalem (42NIS, three hours) at least hourly from the central bus station. There are also several daily (except Saturday) services to Haifa (28NIS, 1½ hours), Nazareth (21.50NIS, 45 minutes), Tsfat (20NIS, one hour), Beit She'an (21.50NIS, 40 minutes) and Kiryat Shmona (25NIS, 1½ hours).

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), and to other destinations like Nazareth.

SEA OF GALILEE البحر الجليل

Around 21km long and 55km in circumference, the Sea of Galilee (Kinneret in Hebrew), fed by the Jordan River, is both a natural beauty site and the main source of Israel's water supply. For foreign visitors, it is better known as home base for the preaching Jesus – the area where he gathered followers and worked miracles. Using Tiberias as a base, travellers can readily explore the Galilee in a couple of days. Short of walking on water, the best way around is by hired bike.

Information

The **Jordan Valley Information Centre** (☎ 675 2727; ☎ 8.30am-4pm Mon-Thu, 8.30am-2pm Fri & Sat), at the shopping centre in Tzemah Junction, provides free maps and regional information.

Northwestern Shore

Migdal, 6km north of Tiberias, was the birthplace of Mary Magdalene. The connection is commemorated with a tiny white-domed shrine, overgrown with vegetation, beside a fetid canal near junky Restal Beach.

On Kibbutz Ginosar is the **Vigal Allon Centre** (☎ 672 1495; 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 that shrewd tour operators have dubbed 'the Jesus boat'. Discovered in 1986, it has been dated to the time of Christ's ministry.

Tabgha & Capernaum

כפר נחום & טבחה תבא & כפר נחום
Generally considered to be the most beautiful and serene of the Christian holy places, **Tabgha** (an Arabic rendition of the Greek *hepta pega*, meaning 'seven springs') is associated with three salient episodes from the New Testament. Modest dress (no shorts or tank tops) is required when visiting the following sites.

The **Church of the Beatitudes** (admission per car 5NIS; ☎ 8-11am & 2.30-4.40pm), which commemorates the Sermon on the Mount, sits in a lovely garden about 100m above the lake. The Beatitudes of Jesus are commemorated in stained glass around the dome. The altar of the **Church of the Multiplication of Loaves & Fishes** (☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 9.45am-5pm Sun), also called the Heptapagon Church, is thought to include the rock where Jesus laid the five loaves and two fishes that multiplied to feed 5000 faithful listeners. In 1932, excavations uncovered some beautiful mosaic floors, including the ubiquitous 'loaves-and-fishes' mosaic. The wonderfully serene **Church of the Primacy of St Peter** (☎ 8am-noon & 2-5pm), with its lovely stained glass, was built by Franciscans in 1933 at the site called Mensa Christi. In the 4th century, a now-ruined church was constructed here to commemorate the spot where the resurrected Jesus conferred the church leadership on St Peter.

Capernaum (Kfar Nahum; admission 3NIS; ☎ 8am-4.40pm) was the home base of Jesus during the most influential period of his Galilean ministry. An octagonal church hovers over the ruins of a 3rd- or 4th-century synagogue that was built over his lodgings. Further east along the shoreline rises the very pink, domed **Greek Orthodox Monastery**. Just beyond it lies the tranquil **Capernaum National Park**, which has a souvenir shop, lakeside gardens and a boat terminal. **Lake cruises** (25NIS) to Tiberias, Ein Gev and Ginosar are available when there's sufficient demand.

Buses from Tiberias pass by Capernaum Junction (12NIS, 30 minutes, twice hourly), which is a 5km hike or hitch to any of the major sites.

Eastern Shore

There are plenty of scenic, uncrowded swimming spots along the eastern shore, highlighted by the **Ein Gev Resort** (see oppo-

site), with its secluded beach and renowned seafood restaurant. Another diversion, great for kids, is the **ostrich farm** (adult/child 18/15NIS; ☎ 9am-3pm) at Kibbutz Ha'On.

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

Hamat Gader

חמת גדר

Hamat Gader (☎ 675 1039; www.hamat-gader.com; admission Sun-Thu 69NIS, Fri & Sat 79NIS; ☎ 7am-10pm Mon-Sat, 7am-4pm Sun), which is actually in the Golan Heights, is a resort complex occupying the bottom of a deep valley split by the Jordanian border. Retirees in beach gear and tots spilling ice cream over themselves hang around Hamat Gader's luxury mineral pools. Mineral saturation complete, try one of several ethnic restaurants, or check out the alligator farm and zoo park.

From Tiberias, bus 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.

Sleeping CAMPING

Camping is often expensive as most sites are run by kibbutzim or private resorts, but you do get something for your money – security, a decent shower block and toilet facilities. For a free camping spot, try the bank of the Jordan, near the Arik Bridge.

Hokuk Camping (☎ 671 5440, 057 740 0242; camp sites 100NIS; ☎) Around the bend from Karei Deshe, this is one of the few camping grounds with a grassy pitch. It's open from April to October.

HOSTELS & GUESTHOUSES

Karei Deshe HI Hostel (☎ 672 0601; dm/s/d 91.50/171/240NIS; ☎ ☎) In Tabgha, this is a sparkling white facility set in attractive grounds with date palms, eucalyptus trees, a rocky beach and a few peacocks. Meals are available for 42NIS. To get here, take bus No 52 from Tiberias.

Nof Ginosar Hotel & Guesthouse (☎ 670 0311; www.ginosar.co.il; s US\$66-110, d US\$80-130; ☎ ☎ ☎)

(☎ ☎) On Kibbutz Ginosar, this place provides comfortable lakeside accommodation flanked by gardens and a private beach. The lower rates are for the guesthouse and the higher are for the hotel; add 50% to all rates in summer and during Jewish holidays. Rates include breakfast and a visit to the Yigdal Allon Centre (see p321). Nonguests can use the beach for 30NIS.

Ein Gev Resort (☎ 665 9800; www.eingev.org.il; s/d weekdays US\$70/90, weekends US\$80/95; ☎ ☎ ☎) Set on a working agricultural and dairy kibbutz, Ein Gev has 166 units with kitchenettes and cable TV. Price includes breakfast but a tour of the kibbutz will cost an extra 16NIS. The site also features an acclaimed garden restaurant specialising in grilled fish. Note that a two-night minimum booking is required for weekends.

Getting There & Around

All long-distance access to the Sea of Galilee is via Tiberias. There's a shortage of buses from town to other parts of the lakeshore, but the main sites along the relatively level road around the Sea of Galilee are accessible to cyclists in an easy two-day circuit. In Tiberias, anyone can rent an 18-speed mountain bike (30NIS to 40NIS per day) from Hotel Aviv. If you're in a hurry, hire a car and make the circuit on a day trip.

TSFAT

צפת תצפד

☎ 04 / pop 26,400

The attractive hilltop town of Tsfat (also spelt Zefat, Tzfat or Safed) enjoys a temperate, high-altitude setting and a rich heritage of Jewish mysticism. It makes a pleasant visit on weekdays, but don't under any circumstances turn up during Shabbat, when even the birds are grounded.

Orientation & Information

Tsfat is spread over a single hilltop, with the bus station on the east side and the old town centre directly opposite on the west side – the hill is scored by the restaurant-studded Yerushalayim (Jerusalem) St, which makes a complete loop between the two.

Sights

At the hilltop, the pleasant breeze-cooled park and viewpoint **Gan HaMetsuda** was once the site of a Crusader citadel. Central Tsfat's old quarters slither down from Yerusha-

layim St, divided by the broad, stiff stairway of **Ma'alot Olei HaGardom St**. This sector was developed by the British after the 1929 riots that divided the Arab and Jewish communities.

The **Synagogue Quarter**, accessed via the stairway north of the City Hall, is a traditional Jewish neighbourhood that focuses on **Kikar HaMaganim** (Defenders' Sq). Two of the synagogues are worth a visit: the **Ha'Ari Ashkenazi Synagogue** and the **Cairo Synagogue**. Prospective visitors should dress modestly; women should avoid bare ankles or shoulders and cardboard yarmulkes are available to male visitors. Photography is permitted except during Shabbat.

Courses

Courses in Torah teachings, the Kabbalah and general Jewish mysticism are available at the well-known **Ascent of Safed** (☎ 692 1364; www.ascentofsafed.com). Classes are open to anyone; for an introduction to the concept, check out the websites www.kabalaonline.org and www.thirtysevenbooks.com.

Sleeping

Beit Binyamin HI Hostel (☎ 697 3514; fax 692 1086; 1 Lohamei HaGeta'ot St; dm/s/d 89/153/224NIS; ☎ ☎ ☎) Sitting at the edge of town, this hostel is about 2km (and a stiff slog) from the town centre. All rates include breakfast. This place is more than a little institutional, but at the time of writing it was the cheapest option in Tsfat. Take bus Nos 6 or 7 from the central bus station.

Ascent of Safed Hostel (☎ 692 1364; www.ascentofsafed.com; dm/d 60/180NIS; ☎) This hostel is open to Jews who are studying at Ascent of Safed. It's a five-minute walk from the centre of Yerushalayim St.

Eating

Tsfat's main attraction is a range of eating establishments on pedestrianised Yerushalayim St, which are accompanied by some of Israel's most inspiring views. There's a fruit-and-vegetable market on Wednesday; there's also a supermarket at the eastern end of Yerushalayim St near the Javits St steps.

California Felafel (Yerushalayim St; snacks 5-10NIS) An excellent felafel and shwarma option; it's just below the HaPalmach St overpass.

Art Café (☎ 682 0928; Yerushalayim St; dishes 30-40NIS; ☎ 9.30am-midnight) Poking over the edge

of the cliff face, this café offers sweeping views and a dairy menu of pizzas and pastas.

Café Baghdad (☎ 697 4065; 61 Yerushalayim St; dishes 32-55NIS; ☎ 9am-midnight) This dairy and vegetarian restaurant serves up breakfasts, blintzes, soup, salad and sandwiches, as well as dinner entrées. It also enjoys a great terrace view.

Getting There & Away

Bus routes to Haifa (34NIS, two hours) every 30 minutes until 9pm (5.45pm on Friday), hourly to Tiberias (20NIS, one hour) until 7pm (4pm on Friday), and twice daily to Tel Aviv (51NIS).

UPPER GALILEE & THE GOLAN HEIGHTS

الجليل & الجولان הגולן & הגליל העליון

The Upper Galilee is an area of lush greenery watered by runoff from the surrounding mountains. These streams flow together in the Hula Valley to form the Jordan River, which provides most of Israel's fresh water. The chain of high peaks known as the Golan Heights rises to form a tense barrier between the fertile Jordan Valley and the more arid plains of Syria, to the east.

A shortage of public transport makes the Upper Galilee and the Golan Heights more difficult to explore than the rest of Israel. Independent travellers with a vehicle should plan at least two days in the area, especially if they include hiking in the national parks and nature reserves.

Those with limited time and money may prefer a guided tour of the regional highlights, which will cost an average of US\$38 per day. Hostels in Tiberias can provide information and details on the latest operators.

ROSH PINA

ראש פינה, ראס בניא

☎ 04 / pop 2300

Recent years have seen a rush of artists make their way to Rosh Pina, reinvigorating its former reputation as a laid-back bohemian colony. The 1882 **Rosh Pina Pioneer Settlement Site** (☎ 693 6603), about 1.5km up the hill west of the main road junction, was the first Jewish settlement in Galilee. Here

you'll find cobbled streets and several historic buildings that have been renovated to serve as restaurants, galleries and pubs. You may also want to check out the bizarre **Chocolate Café** (☎ 686 0647; HaRishonim St; ☎ 9am-11pm), which specialises in X-rated chocolate confections (a whole new twist on the sinful nature of that medium!).

The idiosyncratic luxury guesthouse **Villa Tehila** (☎ 693 5336; www.villa-tehila.co.il; 10 Mabat Lachermon Hacholotzim St; d 380-680NIS; P ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) gets our vote for Israel's most unique accommodation option. Once you get past the various enclosures for rabbits, chickens, ducks, turtles and ponies, the inner courtyard leads to antique-filled reading rooms and a billiards hall. The upstairs guest rooms are beautifully decorated with local art, hand-sewn quilts, brass fittings and wood cabinets. In the basement, the colourful **Blues Brothers Pub** (☎ 9am-late Thu-Sat) is worth visiting on the weekend even if you aren't staying here. Both the hotel and pub are run by a jolly retired journalist who bears a striking resemblance to Charlton Heston in his portrayal of Moses in *Ten Commandments*. A two-night minimum stay is required on weekends. It's located on the main road just below the Pioneer Settlement.

Rosh Pina lies on the bus routes between Tiberias, Tsfat and Kiryat Shmona.

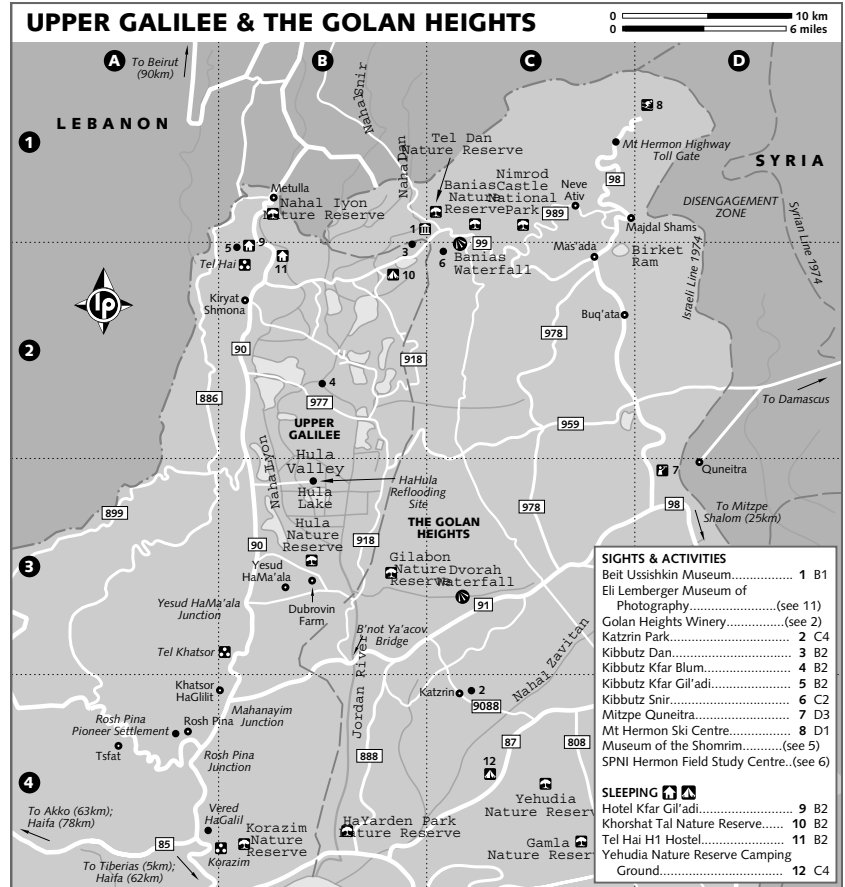
HULA VALLEY

עמק החולה, الحولة وادي

☎ 04

Thanks to a reflooding project along the upper Jordan River, the beautiful Hula Valley attracts lots of migratory birds and nesting waterfowl. The best wildlife-viewing spot is **Hula Lake** in the HaHula Reflooding Site, 12km south of Kiryat Shmona then 3km east on an unmarked side road. Here, an elevated hide overlooks ponds and wetlands that attract ducks, coots, moorhens and other waterfowl. You'll also see nutrias ploughing through the incongruous water holes.

The **Hula Nature Reserve** (☎ 693 7069; adult/child 23/14NIS; ☎ 8am-5pm Sat-Thu, 8am-4pm Fri), best known for its migrating flocks of storks and pelicans, has a visitors centre that explains its eucalyptus forest and wetland environment. Free guided tours are conducted between 9.30am and 1.30pm on Saturday, Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday (call ahead). Buses



between Rosh Pina and Kiryat Shmona will drop you at the signposted junction 2.5km west of the reserve.

Kibbutz Kfar Blum (☎ 694 8409; www.kfarblum-hotel.co.il; s US\$80-100, d US\$120-160), with a comfortable guesthouse, lies 3km east of the main road between Kiryat Shmona and Rosh Pina.

KIRYAT SHMONA

קרית שמונה, كريات شمونة

☎ 04 / pop 22,000

Kiryat Shmona, the 'town of the eight', was named for the eight Jewish settlers killed at nearby Tel Hai in 1920. Since then, its proximity to the Lebanese border has made it a target for Hezbollah (Party of God) attacks, resulting in more casualties. At Tel

Hai, the original watchtower and stockade have been converted into the **Settlement Museum**, but this was under renovation at the time of research. Immediately north, at Kibbutz Kfar Gil'adi, the **Museum of the Shomrim** (adult/child 10/5NIS; ☎ 10am-5pm Sun-Thu, 10am-2pm Fri) documents the history of WWI Zionist regiments in the British Army.

Near Tel Hai, but west of the highway, you may want to see the **Eli Lemberger Museum of Photography** (☎ 695 0769; www.open-museums.co.il; admission 15NIS; ☎ 8am-4pm Sun-Thu, 10am-5pm Sat), which displays the work of many renowned Israeli and international photographers.

Above the frontier town of Metulla, you can saunter up to the **Good Fence** (HaGader Ha Tova), which proverbially makes for

good neighbours. The place was deserted when we visited, but there is nothing stopping you from looking around.

East of the Metulla road, **Nahal Iyon Nature Reserve** (adult/child 18/8NIS; 8am-5pm Sun-Thu 8am-4pm Fri) encompasses the valley of the Iyon River and several impressive waterfalls, including 18m **Tanur Falls**. It's a great place for a quick leg stretch.

Sleeping & Eating

Tel Hai HI Hostel (☎ 694 0043; telhai@iyha.org.il; dm/s/d 95/195/260NIS; 📍 🚻 🚿) This place is friendly and functional option, but more expensive than most HI hostels. Breakfast is included.

Hotel Kfar Gil'adi (☎ 690 0000; www.kfar-giladi.co.il; s US\$70-90, d US\$90-110) Located on Kibbutz Kfar Gil'adi, this is a beautifully situated getaway with a range of amenities, including indoor and outdoor swimming pools, a sauna, gym, tennis courts and organised outdoor activities. The deluxe rooms are somewhat newer. All rates include breakfast, additional meals are US\$18 each.

Getting There & Away

Bus Nos 541, 841 and 963 connect Kiryat Shmona to Tiberias (26NIS, 1½ hours) via the Hula Valley and Rosh Pina.

GOLAN HEIGHTS הגולן

The beautiful Golan Heights, between the Jordan River and the Syrian border, was annexed by Israel in 1981, after it forcefully occupied this former Syrian territory during the 1967 Six Day War and successfully defended it in the Yom Kippur War of 1973. Despite negotiations during the 1990s (mediated by the United States), Syria and Israel remained at loggerheads and still today the Golan is a major stumbling block in normalising relations between the two countries. Despite the conflicts, it remains a lovely area of rich agricultural developments, traditional Druze villages and wonderful national parks and nature reserves. You'll also see trenches, bomb shelters, bunkers, bombed-out villages, minefields and a host of modern ruins.

Mitzpe Shalom מצפה שלום

From the dramatic **Mitzpe Shalom** (☎ 676 1991; 📍 9am-5pm) lookout at Haruv you'll have a view across all of the Sea of Galilee, and

see Tiberias spilling down the slopes in the distance.

Katzrin קצרין

☎ 04 / pop 7000
The planned community of Katzrin, the Golan Heights' 'capital', makes a decent if soporific regional base. Highly worthwhile is the ancient Talmudic village at **Katzrin Park** (☎ 696 2412; adult/child 22/14NIS; 📍 8am-5pm Sun-Thu, 8am-3pm Fri, 10am-4pm Sat), which includes the remains of a 3rd-century synagogue, two reconstructed houses and an audiovisual programme, the **Talmudic Experience** (admission 10NIS). This also serves as the local tourist office.

Another highlight is the **Golan Archaeological Museum** (☎ 696 1350; adult/student 15/12NIS; 📍 9am-4pm Mon-Thu, 9am-1.30pm Fri, 10.30am-1.30pm Sat), in the town centre, which features discoveries from Gamla and Katzrin Park. The laudable **Golan Heights Winery** (☎ 696 8420; www.golanwines.co.il), on the west side of Katzrin, conducts tours (20NIS including wine tasting) during business hours from Sunday to Thursday.

SPNI Field School (☎ 696 1234; Daliyat St; d 245NIS; 📍 🚻 🚿) has a clean and comfortable guest-house and staff that can recommend hikes in the area.

Three buses per day (except Saturday, 25NIS, 6am, 7am and 2pm, 45 minutes), connect Katzrin with Tiberias (25NIS, 6am, 7am and 2pm). A daily bus (except Saturday) also follows the scenic route via Mas'ada to Kiryat Shmona (32NIS, 11.15am, 1½ hours).

Gamla & Yehudia Reserves גמלא & שמורת הטבע של נחל יהודיה

South of Katzrin, a large wild area presents some terrific hiking along deep canyons and past lovely, feathery waterfalls and freshwater pools. **Gamla Nature Reserve** (adult/child 23/14NIS; 📍 8am-4pm Sun-Thu, 8am-3pm Fri) preserves both a large natural area and the ruins of the ancient Jewish stronghold, **Gamla**, overlooking the Sea of Galilee. In a Roman siege on 12 October, in the year AD 67, three legions of the Roman army killed 4000 Jewish inhabitants; the historian Flavius Josephus reports that another 5000 leapt off the cliff face rather than submit.

Between Gamla and Katzrin lies the fantastic 66-sq-km **Yehudia Nature Reserve** (adult/child 23/14NIS), where there's a camping ground and a large network of hiking tracks. The

popular five-hour Nahal Zavitan hike leads past some interesting hexagonal basalt formations, as well as canyons, waterfalls and swimmable pools. If you are going to be doing a lot of walking, pick up a 1:50,000 'Golan Heights' map available at the SPNI Field School in Katzrin (see opposite).

Majdal Shams & Mas'ada מסעדה & מגדל שאמס

The Druze villages of Majdal Shams and Mas'ada, on the slopes of Mt Hermon, maintain their autonomy from Israeli authority and continue to protest the Israeli occupation of the Golan Heights. At the **Mitzpe Quneitra** viewpoint, 15km south of Mas'ada, you can look across the border to the Syrian ghost town of **Quneitra**, flattened by the IDF before it retreated after the 1967 Six Day War. Along the road here, sample the unleavened bread with goat cheese sold by local Druze villagers at roadside stalls.

Mt Hermon הר הרמון

In the northeastern corner of the Golan Heights rises 2224m Mt Hermon, the highest peak in Israel, which is shared with Syria and Lebanon. Limited ski facilities are available from late December to early April. To reach the **ski lifts** (adult/child Sun-Fri 27/24NIS, Sat 31/26NIS), drivers must use the Mt Hermon toll road (30NIS per vehicle). For information, visit the **ski centre** (☎ 04-698 1337; www.skihermon.co.il), down the mountain in the tourist settlement of Neve Ativ, where there are also a few places to stay.

Banias Nature Reserve & Nimrod Castle בניאס & קלעת נמרוד

One of the most spectacular spots in the region, **Banias Nature Reserve** (adult/child 23/14NIS; 📍 8am-4pm Sun-Thu, 8am-2pm Fri), which is also known as the Nahal Hermon Reserve, takes in the Banias Cave sanctuary as well as the lovely **Banias waterfall**, about 1km away (and accessed by a separate gate – one ticket is good for both sites). On a hill above the cave, the grave of the prophet Elijah is marked by a white cliffside memorial. Less than 2km east of Banias, the best-preserved Crusader fortress in Israel rises above its hilltop surroundings in **Nimrod Castle National Park** (☎ 04-694 9277; adult/child 18/9NIS; 📍 8am-4pm). Bus No 55 from Kiryat Shmona passes

by Banias twice daily and bus Nos 25, 26 and 36 pass by Kibbutz Dan, which is 6km to the west.

Tel Dan תל דן

East of Kiryat Shmona, an appealing forested area of natural springs and ancient Canaanite ruins (2700-2400 BC) are preserved in **Tel Dan Nature Reserve** (adult/child 23/12NIS; 📍 8am-4pm Sun-Thu, 8am-3pm Fri). The site was first settled in the 5th century BC as the city of Leshem, but was conquered in the 12th century BC by the tribe of Dan and became the northernmost Israelite outpost.

This popular and often crowded picnic spot is best known for its walking tracks, bubbling waters and ancient stands of oak and ash trees. From Kiryat Shmona, take bus No 25, 26 or 36. The adjacent **Beit Usishkin Museum** (☎ 694 1704; adult/child 18/15NIS; 📍 9am-4pm Sun-Thu, 9am-3pm Fri, 10am-4pm Sat) features an audiovisual programme, dioramas and extensive natural-history exhibits.

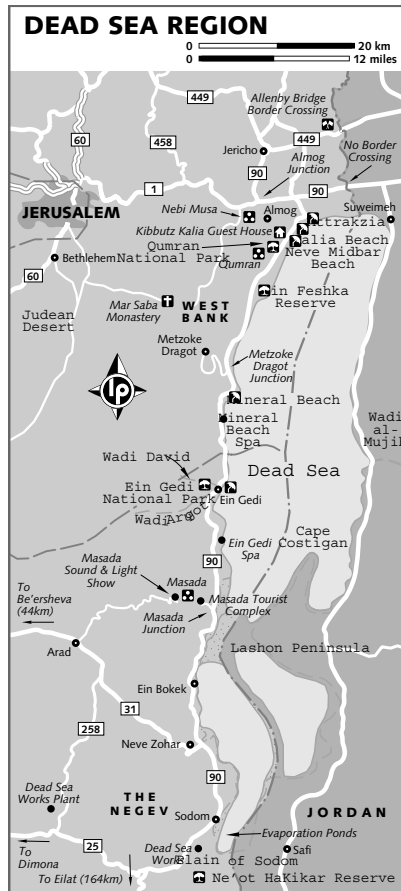
Camping is available at nearby **Khorshat Tal Nature Reserve** (☎ 694 2360; camp sites 15NIS), which also offers basic bungalows. The **SPNI Hermon Field Study Centre** (☎ 694 1091; fax 695 1480; d 245NIS), at Kibbutz Snir, has guest cottages set on oak-shaded lawns.

DEAD SEA ים המלח

At an elevation of 400m below sea level, the Dead Sea shoreline is the lowest bit of dry real estate in the world. After the obligatory float, don't miss the ruins at Masada, which is probably Israel's most enigmatic attraction. Though not as well frequented by travellers, the hiking tracks and springs of Ein Gedi National Park also merit some exploration.

QUMRAN קומרן

☎ 02
Described as 'the most important discovery in the history of the Jewish people', the **Dead Sea Scrolls**, now on display at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, were discovered at Qumran in 1947. The site includes the settlement and caves of the Essenes, the Jewish sect that authored the scrolls from 150 BC to AD 68,



a heated pool and horse riding. Meals are available for US\$7 to US\$10.

EIN GEDI

لاين جدي عين جدي

☎ 08

Ein Gedi National Park (☎ 658 4285; adult/child 23/12NIS) is a paradise of dramatic canyons, freshwater springs, waterfalls, and lush tropical vegetation. Despite the busloads of rampaging school groups that descend on it daily, it continues to provide a haven for desert wildlife. In the winter months, hikers can enter Wadi David from 8am to 3pm and Wadi Aragot from 8am to 2pm; in summer, the trails are open one hour later. The neighbouring **Ein Gedi National Antiquities Park** (adult/child 12/6NIS; ☎ 8am-4pm) includes the ruins of an ancient trapezoid synagogue with an especially inspiring mosaic floor, which was used from the 3rd to 6th centuries AD.

South of the reserve, you'll find the **Ein Gedi spa bathing beach** (admission free; showers 8NIS), petrol station, restaurant and camping ground, and the turnoff for Kibbutz Ein Gedi. One of the best places to bathe is the **Mineral Beach spa complex** (☎ 02-994 4888; www.dead-sea.co.il; admission 35NIS), located 15km north of Ein Gedi, with its pools, mud and sulphur baths.

Sleeping & Eating

Beit Sarah Hostel (☎ 658 4165; eingedi@iyha.org.il; dm/s/d US\$21/39.50/60; ☎ ☒ ☒ ☒) Uphill and 250m from the bus stop, this hostel occupies the finest setting of any Israeli hostel. Rates include breakfast.

SPNI Field School (☎ 658 4288; www.teva.org.il; dm/s/d 75/130NIS, d 190-305NIS; ☎ ☒ ☒ ☒) Perched on the hillside above Beit Sarah, this place enjoys great views and is an excellent launch point for early hikes. Stay a few days and watch the magical light and changing scene over the lake. Rates include breakfast and dinner is 38NIS to 45NIS.

Kibbutz Ein Gedi (☎ 659 4222; www.ein-gedi.co.il; s US\$122-143, d US\$174-204) Has a guesthouse surrounded by lush gardens, with a pool and hot spa. Rates include half board.

MASADA

☎ 08

Masada, a desert mesa rising high above the Dead Sea, figures prominently in the Israeli psyche. In 150 BC, a fortress was built atop

THE DEAD SEA

The water in the Dead Sea, while surprisingly clear, is deceptively laden with microscopic solids that virtually overwhelm the two parts hydrogen, one part oxygen that make up fresh water, creating an oily broth in which people can float.

The ingredients that make up the Dead Sea read like a science experiment: compared to ocean water, the Dead Sea has 20 times more bromine, 15 times more magnesium and 10 times more iodine. Bromine, a component of many sedatives, relaxes the nerves; magnesium counteracts skin allergies and clears bronchial passages; iodine, which is essential to good health, has a beneficial effect on thyroid functions. Not surprisingly, this is all loudly proclaimed by local health-spa owners and cosmetic companies.

Healthy or not, wading into the Dead Sea may seem distinctly unhealthy if you have exposed cuts or grazes – in fact, you'd instantly assimilate the phrase 'to rub salt into the wound'.

Similarly, swallowing even a drop of this foul-tasting brew will induce retching and may well burn your throat for half an hour. It goes without saying that if you splash this water in your eyes, you must immediately flush them with fresh water.

this superb natural lookout, and was re-fortified and improved in 43 BC by Herod the Great, who used it as a retreat. During the Jewish First Revolt against the Romans in AD 66, after the sacking and burning of Jerusalem, the Zealots fled to Masada, which became the last outpost of Jewish Resistance. Faced with imminent attack as the Romans constructed an earthen ramp to invade the fortress, 10 Jewish men were elected to slay the rest of their men. In the end, one of these killed the rest before committing suicide himself. When the Romans stormed the fortress, they discovered 960 bodies; only seven people, who'd hidden in a water cistern, survived to relay the tale to the world.

Once a dusty outpost, Masada is now guarded by a massive **tourist complex** (☎ 658 4207; gl.masada@nautre-parks.org.il), including a restaurant and theatre that shows a short introductory video on the history of Masada. The summit ruins are accessible on foot via the steep and sinuous '**Snake Path**' (adult/child 19/12NIS) or on the considerably more popular **cable car** (adult one way/return 45/61NIS, child one way/return 22/34NIS). For a hand-held audio guide add 15NIS. From March to October, the Masada **Sound-and-Light show** (☎ 995 9333) is presented on the Arad side.

Sleeping & Eating

Isaac H Taylor HI Hostel (☎ 658 4349; fax 658 4650; dm/s/d 78/162/224NIS; ☎ ☒ ☒ ☒) By the Masada bus stop this hostel provides college-style dorms with breakfast included. Sleeping

out on Masada is no longer permitted, but the hostel will let you set up a tent in its garden.

Getting There & Away

You can approach Masada from either the Dead Sea (for the youth hostel, tourist complex and summit access) or Arad (for the Sound-and-Light show). For the former, there are about nine daily Jerusalem buses (39NIS, two hours) and four Eilat buses (55NIS, four hours).

THE NEGEV

הנגב העקה שحرأ

The Negev, the sparsely inhabited southern wedge of Israel, takes in nearly half the national area, but the only towns of any size are Be'er-sheva, Arad, Mitzpe Ramon and Israel's subtropical toehold of Eilat. In addition to numerous military bases, this desert area supports a number of experimental agricultural projects, as well as 75,000 semi-nomadic tent-dwelling Bedouin.

Not surprisingly, the Negev presents some of Israel's best hiking venues, including the recommended Sde Boker, the Wilderness of Zin, En Avedat, Maktesh Ramon, Timna National Park and the Eilat Mountains. For route information and maps, visit the SPNI field schools at Sde Boker, Mitzpe Ramon or Eilat. Note that much of the Negev is a firing zone for the area's numerous military bases; for the latest

when the Essenes were disbanded by the Roman invaders. **Qumran National Park** (☎ 994 2235; adult/child 18/8NIS) includes a seven-minute multimedia programme, a small museum and shops selling books, souvenirs, Dead Sea mineral creams and beauty products.

There are also a couple of beaches at Qumran. **Neve Midbar Beach** (☎ 994 2781; adult/child 35/30NIS, camp sites/huts per person 45/60NIS), located 1.5km off the highway, has a bar and a simple restaurant. **Kalia Beach** (☎ 994 2391; admission 25NIS) is slightly better value.

Kibbutz Kalia Guest House (☎ 993 6333; www.kalia.org.il; s/d incl breakfast 250/320NIS; ☎ ☒ ☒ ☒) is located 1km from Qumran National Park. This kibbutz-hotel occupies a beautiful oasis of gardens and date palms. It offers

information, phone the **army co-ordination office** (☎ 08-990 2294).

BE'ERSHEVA

באר שבע ביראע

☎ 08 / pop 183,200

Scruffy and dusty, Be'ersheva won't impress many, and although it's the 'capital' of Negev, the most satisfaction it's likely to offer is the view from the rear window as you leave.

The **main post office** (cnr HaNess'im & Ben Zvi Sts) is just north of the central bus station. There are plenty of banks in the adjacent Kanyon shopping centre.

Sights & Activities

The much-vaunted **Bedouin market** (☎ 6am-4pm Thu) provides evidence that the Israeli Bedouin are as interested in Nike and Yves St-Laurent knock-offs as anyone in the world. You may see the odd camel, but it's definitely less a cultural than a commercial experience. While that's fair enough, it's not an especially interesting visit.

Be'ersheva's most worthwhile attraction is the **Israeli Air Force Museum** (☎ 690 6855; www.iaf-museum.org.il; admission 26NIS; ☎ 8am-5pm Sun-Thu, 8am-1pm Fri), at the Khatserim IAF base 6km west of the centre. From the central bus station take bus No 31 (9.80NIS, 10 minutes, once or twice per hour).

On Kibbutz Lahav, off the Be'ersheva to Kiryat Gat road, the Joe Allon Centre features the **Museum of Bedouin Culture** (☎ 991 3322; admission 20NIS; ☎ 9am-5pm Sun-Thu, 8am-2pm Fri). Bus No 42 runs directly to the kibbutz once daily, but immediately heads back to Be'ersheva without allowing time for a visit. Alternatively, use bus No 369 towards Tel Aviv, which will drop you at the junction 8km from the kibbutz.

Sleeping & Eating

Beit Yatziv HI Hostel (☎ 627 7444, 627 5735; beit_yatziv@silverbyte.com; 79 Ha'Atzma'ut St; dm/s/d 102/185/280NIS; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) It isn't all that cheap, but this hostel has a garden and no curfew. Rates include breakfast and other meals cost US\$11.

Yitzhak's Bulgarian Restaurant (☎ 623 8504; 112 Keren Kayemet Le-Yisrael St; dishes 40NIS; ☎ 10am-10pm Sun-Thu, 11am-7pm Sat) This restaurant does meat-oriented sit-down meals. The focus is on Ashkenazi specialties: kebabs, schnitzel, liver etc.

Getting There & Away

On business days, buses run every 20 minutes to Tel Aviv (13.80NIS, 1½ hours) and at least half-hourly to Jerusalem (32NIS, 1½ hours). For Eilat (55NIS, three hours), buses depart more or less every hour via Mitzpe Ramon (23NIS, 1¼ hours). Bus services for Dimona (9.80NIS, 30 minutes) and for Arad (14.80NIS, 45 minutes) run at least every half-hour.

From Be'ersheva's central train station, which is adjacent to the central bus station, you can travel comfortably to Tel Aviv (25.50NIS, 1½ hours) roughly hourly on business days.

ARAD

ערד אראד

☎ 08 / pop 24,500

More appealing than Be'ersheva or Dimona is Arad, a lethargic eastern Negev community that benefits from its surrounding wealth of mineral deposits. An attractive addition to the city is Eshet Lot Artist's Quarter, being developed in an abandoned industrial zone, 2km southwest of town. Nearly 20 artists have transformed the old hangers, garages and factories into gift shops, studios and workshops. Check out the **Glass Museum** (www.warmglassil.com; Sadan Rd; ☎ 10am-5pm Sat-Thu, 10am-3pm Fri) opened by artist Gideon Fridman, and **Studio 11** (☎ 054 554 0002; Sadan Unit 4) a bar and concert hall featuring live music on weekends.

Tel Arad National Park (adult/child 18/9NIS; ☎ 8am-4pm Sun-Thu, 8am-3pm Fri), 8km west of town, includes the ruins of a Bronze Age city from the 3rd century BC. Take any bus towards Be'ersheva, get off at the Tel Arad junction and walk the final 2km to the site. East of Dimona, on the road to Arad lies **Mamshit National Park** (☎ 659 1543; adult/child 18/9NIS), which features a complex of extensive and impressive 1st-century Nabataean ruins.

Sleeping & Eating

Blau-Weiss HI Hostel (☎ 995 7150; arad@ijha.org.il; 4 HaAtad St; dm/s/d/tr 63/164/198/248NIS) Typically comfortable rooms in a distinctly institutional atmosphere. For breakfast add another 31NIS.

Zimmer Paz B&B (☎ 054 470 8694; rivkapaz@hotmail.com; 37 HaGilad St; s/d 180/200NIS; ☎ ☎ ☎) Offers four private suites, each with their own sitting room and kitchen. Breakfast

costs an additional 40NIS. Weekend prices jump by around 50NIS.

Muza Pub (☎ 997 5555; ☎ noon-5am) A curious mix of Texas roadhouse and British pub, this charming local watering hole is an Arad institution. It's next to the Alon gas station as you enter the town on the road from Be'ersheva.

Getting There & Away

From the central bus terminal on Rehov Yehuda, buses run twice per hour to and from Be'ersheva (14.80NIS, 45 minutes). Buses depart for Ein Gedi (20.50NIS) at 10.15am, 1pm and 3.45pm.

DIMONA

דימונה דימונה

☎ 08 / pop 29,300

Unless you're involved in espionage (Dimona is the site of Israel's no-longer-secret nuclear weapons facility), the main interest in this bleak desert town is the African Hebrew Israelite Community. In one small enclave, this motivated and self-contained group of around 2000 people operates its own school, and members make their own jewellery and natural-fibre clothing. Dietary restrictions are a variation on veganism, as African Hebrew Israelis don't eat meat, dairy products, fish, eggs, or refined sugar or flour. Visitors are welcome, but you'll get better attention by calling first (☎ 657 3286). The African Hebrew Israelites run a small **guesthouse** (beds with half board 100NIS) and an adjacent vegan restaurant (meals 25NIS). For more information, consult their website: www.king domofyah.com.

From the central bus terminal, buses run frequently to and from Be'ersheva (9.80NIS, 30 minutes).

SDE BOKER & AVDAT

שדה בוקר סדבוקאר

☎ 08

These stops along the route between Be'ersheva and Mitzpe Ramon merit anything from a few hours to a couple of days.

Sde Boker Kibbutz, a popular stopping point for Jewish history buffs, contains the modest **home of David Ben-Gurion** (☎ 656 0469; adult/child 10/7NIS; ☎ 8.30am-4pm Sun-Thu, 8.30am-2pm Fri, 9am-3pm Sat), preserved as it was at the time of his death in 1973. At the entrance to the Sde Boker, a **visitor centre** shows a

20-minute film (7NIS) about the kibbutz. Around 3km south of the kibbutz, at a spectacular cliff-top setting, are the graves of Ben-Gurion and his wife Paula. The gravesite is close to the northern entrance of **En Avedat National Park** (☎ 655 5684; adult/child 23/12; 8am-5pm Sun-Thu, 8am-4pm Fri) where day-hikers can amble through the **Wilderness of Zin** to the bizarrely chilly desert spring, **En Avedat**. The starting point for the 2½-hour walk is at the end of a 3km paved road. Note that this is a one-way hike, so if you need to return to the northern entrance you'll need to hitch or wait for a bus (one every 1½ hours). Ask for a bus schedule before heading off, to help time your hike.

A great place to stay is the British-run **Krivine's** (☎ 052 712304; krivjohn@netvision.net.il; dm/s/d 75/145/215NIS), which provides excellent tourist information, meals, mountain-bike rental and transport from the Sde Boker bus stop. Advance booking is essential.

Avdat National Park (☎ 655 1511; adult/child 23/12NIS; ☎ 8am-5pm Sun-Thu, 8am-4pm Fri), a ruins complex with Nabataean, Roman and Byzantine elements, is best known for the camel-caravan sculpture on the crest of the hill. Constructed by Nabataeans in the 2nd century BC, it served as a *caravanserai* along the trade route between Petra and the Mediterranean coast.

MITZPE RAMON

מצפה רמון ממצפיי ראמון

☎ 08 / pop 6000

Mitzpe is Hebrew for 'watchtower', and accordingly, this small but engaging desert town enjoys an impressive vista across the dramatic **Maktesh Ramon** crater, which measures 300m deep, 8km wide and 40km long. All along this dramatic 'watchtower', you'll find far-ranging views and an extensive network of hiking routes. Pick up a Maktesh Ramon Nature Reserve map at the visitors centre and set off into the desert on foot; this wild wonderland is good for days of wandering – but be sure to carry lots of water.

Information

The ammonite-shaped **visitors centre** (☎ 658 8691; adult/child 23/12NIS; ☎ 8am-5pm Sun-Thu, 8am-4pm Fri), perched on the crater rim, has a tourist office and presents an overview of Maktesh Ramon's intriguing natural history, along with a film about the park.

Sights

Downhill from the visitors centre, the **Bio-Ramon** (☎ 658 8755; adult/child 12/6NIS; 🕒 9am-6pm Sun-Thu, 9am-4pm Fri, 9am-5pm Sat) complex displays a collection of desert flora and fauna. East of town, the **Alpaca Farm** (☎ 658 8047; www.alpaca.co.il; adult/child 25/23NIS; 🕒 8.30am-4.30pm Sat-Thu) is a labour of love for its owners, who spin wool and keep a variety of South American camelids (ie llamas and alpacas).

Tours

Lots of companies run rugged jeep tours, but they come and go with the desert wind and you may need to muster a group; see the visitors centre for the latest offerings.

Guide Horizon (☎ 659 5333; www.guidehorizon.com; 27 Har Boker St) hires out desert dune buggies for excursions into the Negev; a three-hour trip with breakfast goes for 350NIS while an overnight trip, including cook out and sauna upon return to the home base, goes for 800NIS.

Negevland Tours (☎ 659 5555; www.negevland.co.il; 6 Gvanim St) is an adventure company offering crater tours (US\$25 per person) and abseiling (US\$14 for two descents). It has a bike repair shop and will hire out mountain bikes (US\$25 per day).

Peter Bugel Tours (☎ 658 8958; www.shunra.net/peter.html; PO Box 327 Mitzpe Ramon) caters for travellers who are interested in desert culture, geology and botany. It's a sophisticated outfit run by a fellow who speaks Dutch, German, English and Swiss-German. Overnight trips cost US\$350 for a group of seven.

Sleeping

Mitzpe Ramon HI Hostel (☎ 658 8443; fax 658 8074; dm/s/d 100/195/280NIS) This is a short downhill walk from the visitors centre. Most rooms have a great crater view. Rates include a continental breakfast.

Chez Alexis (☎ 658 8258, 056 432627; 7 En Saharonim St; r per person US\$12) This is probably the friendliest place in town, thanks to the French-Algerian owner, who speaks French, English and Hebrew. Guests have access to the kitchen facilities.

Succah in the Desert (Succah HaMidbar; ☎ 658 6280; www.succah.co.il; PO Box 272, Mitzpe Ramon; s/d Sat-Thu 240/400NIS, Fri 450/550NIS) Set 7km from town on a poor track, this is the place to stay if you're intrigued by any sort of mysticism. Although short on creature comforts, the point

is integration with the desert; so if you can't live without modern plumbing, forget it. Advance bookings, which are essential, will avail you of free transport from Mitzpe Ramon.

Be'erot Camping (☎ 658 6713; www.beerot.com; camp sites/Bedouin tent beds per person 25/40NIS) This is camping in a dramatic setting, with local tents, Bedouin cuisine, clean bathrooms and a modern shower block. It's 12km south of Mitzpe Ramon on the highway to Eilat, and then 5km down a bumpy access road. Meals are available for 30NIS but call ahead.

Eating

Pangea (☎ 653 9222; 5 Oded St; dishes 35-40NIS; 🕒 8am-midnight) This kosher restaurant, situated next to the bus stop at the northern entrance to the town, specialises in grilled meats and cheeseless pasta dishes.

HaHavit (☎ 658 8226; dishes 28-45NIS; 🕒 9-2am) Located at the visitors centre, HaHavit (Barrel) serves business lunches and set meals all day, while the pub operates until late.

Self-caterers will find joy at the Hyper Neto and Supersol supermarkets, both in the town centre.

Getting There & Away

From Sunday to Thursday bus No 392 travels to Eilat (42NIS, 2½ hours) at 8.55am, 10.25am, 1.10pm and 4.45pm. The lone Friday bus departs at 9.10am. From 6am to 9.30pm, bus No 60 shuttles hourly to and from Be'ersheva (26NIS, one hour), via Sde Boker and Ein Avdat.

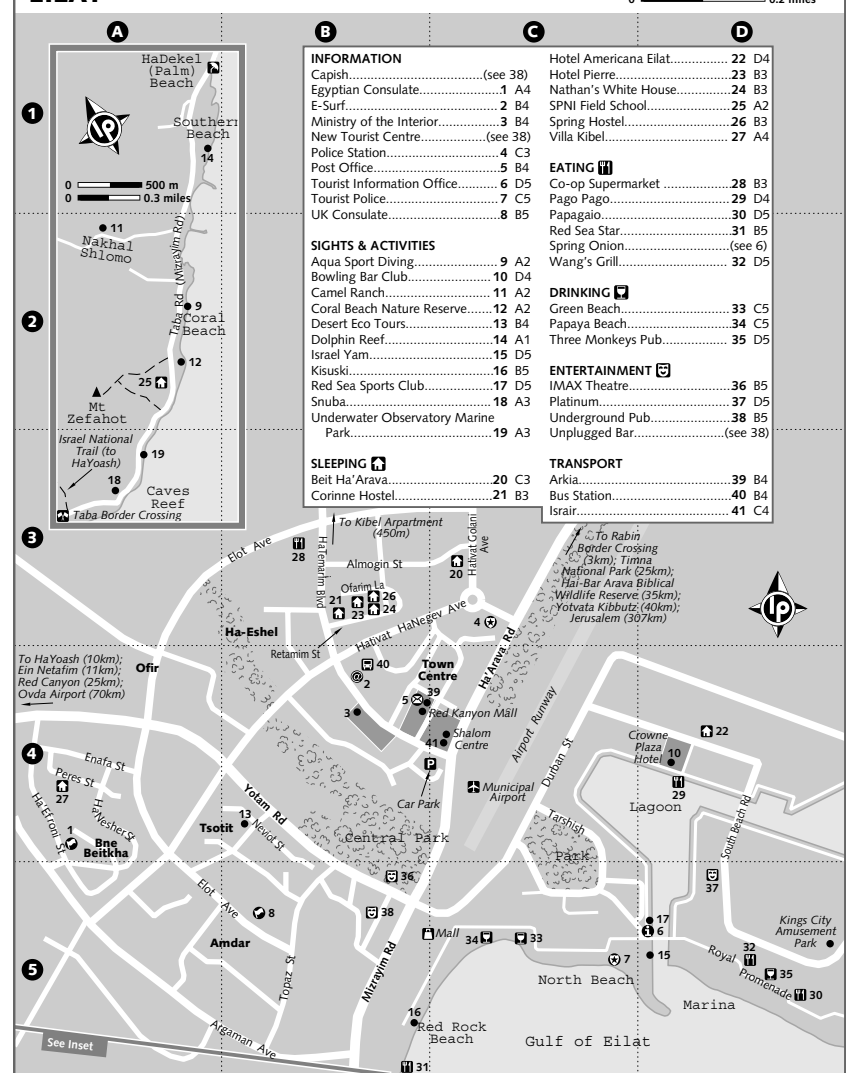
EILAT

☎ 08 / pop 50,000

Wedge between Jordan and Egypt, and separated from the Israel of international headlines by 200km of desert, Eilat is a resort town where glitzy, ziggurat-like hotels line an artificial lagoon and glass-bottomed boats ply deteriorating coral reefs. Its founding fathers – convicts sent here in the 1950s to build the city – now mix with tie-dyed beach bums selling trinkets from India and weekend holidaymakers in search of sin.

The Miami-style scene is somewhat diminished by coarse and cluttered beaches and for most visitors Eilat's real appeal is in its surrounding desert mountains and canyons. Divers, snorkellers, sunbathers and anyone else searching for the Red Sea's

EILAT



אילת אֵילָת

magical underwater world should head posthaste for the Egyptian Sinai.

Orientation

Eilat consists of a town centre, the hotel-fringed lagoon and beaches, and the 5km coastal strip between the town centre and the Egyptian border. The massive Jordanian

flag down the coast to the east marks the town of Aqaba; on clear days it's possible to see King Hussein's mansion.

Information

To change money, head for the many no-commission change bureaus in the town centre. ATMs are widespread.

Capish (☎ 632 5977; New Tourist Centre; ☎ 24hr) Internet is available at this coffee shop.

E-Surf (☎ 634 4331; central bus station; per hr 15NIS; ☎ 9am-11pm Sun-Thu, 9am-4pm Fri, 4-11pm Sat) Internet café.

Police station (☎ 100) Located at the eastern end of Hativat HaNegev Ave.

Post office (Red Kanyon Mall; ☎ 8am-4pm Sun-Thu)

Tourist Information Office (☎ 630 9111; Bridge House, Yacht Marina; ☎ 8am-4pm Sun-Thu)

Tourist police (☎ 10am-3am Sun-Wed, 10-6am Thu-Sat) This station is near the Tourist Information Office at North Beach.

Sights & Activities

The **Underwater Observatory Marine Park** (☎ 636 4200; www.coralworld.com/eilat; Taba Rd; adult/child 79/69NIS; ☎ 8.30am-4pm Sat-Thu, 8.30am-3.30pm Fri) features the 'Oceanarium' mock submarine ride, tanks with sharks and rare green and hawksbill turtles (which live for 150 to 200 years!). The highlight is the magical glassed-in underwater viewing centre – it's like snorkelling without getting wet. The adjacent aquarium displays many of the tropical species you may have missed on the reef.

A popular excursion from the main hotel area is the **Israel Yam** (☎ 637 5528, 050 531 0090; Yacht Marina; adult/child 60/40NIS) glass-bottomed boat cruise, between the Egyptian and Jordanian borders. It lasts two hours and operates at least three times daily.

The crowded and cluttered hotel area at **North Beach** is great for a drink in the sun, but isn't especially appealing for underwater activities. For snorkelling, your best options are the **Coral Beach Nature Reserve**, with underwater trails marked by buoys, and the free **HaDekel (Palm) Beach**.

At **Dolphin Reef** (☎ 637 1846; www.dolphinreef.co.il; Southern Beach; adult/child 42/28NIS; ☎ 9am-5pm), on the Taba road, visitors can observe dolphin training, feed the dolphins and even snorkel (227/204NIS per adult/child) or dive (introductory dive 274/246NIS per adult/child, guided dive 223NIS) with them. Diving certification courses are available from 1400NIS.

You can also dive with one of Eilat's other operators: **Red Sea Sports Club** (☎ 633 3666; www.redseasports.co.il; Bridge House); **Snuba** (☎ 637 2722; www.snuba.co.il; Caves Reef); or **Aqua Sport** (☎ 633 4404; www.aqua-sport.com; Coral Beach). All charge around €41 for an introductory dive, or €315 for a five-day PADI certifica-

tion. You can rent diving equipment for around €23 per day.

These places also rent sailboards for 45NIS to 55NIS per hour, and Red Sea Sports Club organises water-skiing (120NIS for 15 minutes) and parasailing (120NIS for 10 minutes). With **Kisuski** (☎ 637 2088; www.kisos.co.il; Red Rock Beach), you can rent jet skis, jet boats, parasails, pedal boats, kayaks, ski tubes and other water toys.

After sunset, you could get drunk and bowl a few frames at the **Bowling Bar Club** (☎ 631 6797; Eilat Marina; ☎ 3pm-2am Sun-Fri, 6pm-2am Sat) located behind the Crowne Plaza Hotel.

Tours

A reputable choice for wilderness tours is the reputable **Desert Eco Tours** (☎ 637 4259; www.desertecotours.com; Zofit Centre, Neviot St, PO Box 4113, Zofit Centre), which does half-day to multi-day jeep, camel and hiking tours in the Negev, Sinai and southwestern Jordan. If you're camping, plan on US\$40/100 for a half/full day (plus any border taxes).

Sleeping

As a resort town, the cost of hotel rooms in Eilat rise by about 25% or more on weekends, and 25% to 50% (or more) in the months of June and August. Reserve ahead or you'll be out on the street, or avoid the place altogether at peak holiday times.

BUDGET

Camping isn't permitted on most beaches.

Corinne Hostel (☎ 637 1472; 127 Retamim St; dm/s/d 40/70/120NIS; ☎ ☎) This is Eilat's oldest hostel, an atmospheric place with double and dorm rooms in the main block and small wood cabins out the back, each topped with wooden reindeer cut-outs, as if Santa had just arrived in Eilat. Kitchen facilities and cable TV are available.

Nathan's White House (☎ 637 6572; Retamim St; s/d 100/120NIS) This place is quite basic, but has air-con dorms with fridges and attached bathrooms.

Spring Hostel (☎ 637 4660; www.avivhostels.co.il; 126 Ofarim Lane; dm/s/d/ste 40/120/150/200NIS; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) This small hotel has very clean doubles and handy little two room suites that come with kitchenette. Breakfast is served in the high season and kitchen facilities are available. The small pool on the

second floor is a rare commodity among places in this range.

Beit Ha'Arava (☎ 637 4687; 106 Almogin St; dm/s/d/tr 40/100/120/150NIS; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Considered by many travellers the cleanest and best value guesthouse among several others in this area, the Beit Ha'Arava consists of 27 rooms, a well-lit common room and a pleasant patio garden. Breakfast costs an additional 12NIS to 20NIS.

MIDRANGE

Villa Kibel (☎ /fax 637 6911; ☎ 050 534 5366; www.villakibel.co.il; 18 Peres St; flats 160NIS; ☎ ☎ ☎) This is a friendly and quiet private home divided into a collection of comfortable holiday flats with kitchenettes and cable TV. The same management also offers a 13-bed house for 760NIS. It tends to fill up, so bookings are highly recommended. If you have a lot of luggage, the owner will pick you up at the bus station.

Hotel Pierre (☎ 632 6601; www.eilat-guide.com/pierre; 123 Ofarim Lane; s/d US\$50/80; ☎ ☎ ☎) This place is friendly, quiet, unassuming and very French. The small-but-comfortable rooms all have fridges, phones and cable TV.

Hotel Americana Eilat (☎ 633 3777; www.americanahotel.co.il; Kaman Rd; s/d 200/250NIS) Attracting the Israeli blue-collar set, this place is not the best place to meet the party crowd, but it's got a well-placed location near the marina, a five-minute walk from the heart of North Beach. Amenities include tennis courts, a large swimming pool and the Flintstone-style Cave Bar. Breakfast is included.

Eating & Drinking

Spring Onion (☎ 637 7434; Bridge House; dishes 45-65NIS; ☎ 9am-3am) This is a popular dairy and vegetarian place beside the lagoon bridge in the hotel area. In addition to a great Israeli breakfast (38NIS), you'll find fruit shakes, salads, pizza, and fish dishes.

Pago Pago (☎ 633 6660; Eilat Marina; dishes 45-100NIS; ☎ 1pm-midnight) On a boat in the marina, this is the place to go for an atmospheric seafood dinner or grilled speciality in nice watery surroundings. It's best known for sushi combos (from 49NIS), seafood platters (from 78NIS), and fish, beef, chicken, ostrich and duck grills.

Red Sea Star (☎ 634 7777; Mizrayim Rd; dishes 64-109NIS; ☎ 6pm-midnight Mon-Thu, noon-midnight Fri & Sat) This is the place to go for underwater

dining – that is, if you don't mind eating your fish dinner while accusing eyes glare at you through the windows. In the evening, there's a dance bar on the upstairs deck.

Papagaio (☎ 633 2217; Dan Hotel, Royal Promenade; all you can eat 110NIS; ☎ noon-midnight) Bring an empty gut and a lot of cash and gorge on greasy grilled meat until your shirt buttons pop open. This Brazilian-style restaurant serves 12 kinds of meat and seven salads in a chic restaurant-bar combo, enlivened by periodic Carnival-style song and dance routines.

Wang's Grill (☎ 636 9899; Royal Promenade; dishes 45-95NIS; ☎ 7-11pm Sat-Thu) 'Kosher Asian food' might sound a bit out of the ordinary, but it works here, combining a Japanese steakhouse, Chinese noodle bar and strict Jewish cooking law approved by the rabbinate of Jerusalem.

A number of small restaurants, cafés and shwarma stands can be found in the New Tourist Centre, opposite the IMAX theatre, as well as the Food Court inside the Mall. If a sandwich is sufficient – and it probably will be given Eilat's appetite-busting temperatures – try the **Co-op supermarket** (cnr Eilat Ave & HaTemarim Blvd), or the one in the Shalom Centre.

Three Monkeys Pub (☎ 636 8888; Royal Beach Hotel, Royal Promenade; ☎ 9pm-late) This recommended watering hole on the promenade does a plying trade in fruity cocktails.

The beach bars are fashionable with Eilat's beautiful people, but there's not much between them. Try **Green Beach** (☎ 637 7032; North Beach) and **Papaya Beach** (☎ 634 0804; North Beach) and think DJs and tanned, bikini-clad bods partying until sunrise.

Entertainment

Eilat's nightlife is firmly bar-based, and the action focuses on the New Tourist Centre. This compact little area is packed with frequently changing options.

Underground Pub (☎ 637 0239; www.underground-pub.com; New Tourist Centre; ☎ noon-4am) This is the travellers favourite, with cheap pub grub and beer, easy music and nightly live entertainment.

Unplugged (☎ 632 6299; New Tourist Centre; ☎ 7pm-3am) Next door to the Underground Pub, this place attracts a younger crowd with a dance-bar atmosphere.

Platinum (☎ 636 3444; Antibes Rd; admission 60-100NIS; ☎ 11pm-6am) Located in King Solomon

hotel, this was, at the time of writing, the most popular disco in town. Monday is Hebrew music only, Thursday is reserved for 25-and-overs, and on Friday the club hosts a gay party.

For a more family-friendly activity, or if the temperatures reach unbearable heights, take cool respite in the pyramid-shaped **IMAX theatre** (☎ 634 8080; www.imaxeilat.co.il; admission 55NIS; ☎ 4-11pm Sun-Thu, 11am-5pm Fri, 9pm-midnight Sat).

Getting There & Away

AIR

Step outside of Eilat's **municipal airport** (☎ 637 3553) and you are already downtown. Both **Arkia** (☎ 638 4888; Red Canyon Mall) and **Israir** (☎ 634 0666; Shalom Centre) fly several times daily between the municipal airport and Tel Aviv (US\$72), and to Haifa three times per week (US\$87).

BUS

The **central bus station** (☎ 636 5120; HaTemarim St) offers service to Tel Aviv (65NIS, five hours) with buses departing every 1½ hours from 5am to 7pm, with an additional overnight service at 1am. The last Friday bus is at 3pm and the first Saturday bus at 11.30am; this bus also stops in Be'ersheva (55NIS, three hours). To Mitzpe Ramon (45NIS, 2½ hours), buses run more or less hourly on weekdays and at least twice on Saturday. To Jerusalem (65NIS, 4½ hours), there are buses Sunday to Thursday (7am, 10am, 1.30pm and 4.30pm), Friday (7am, 10am and 1pm) Saturday (4.30pm and 9.30pm).

Getting Around

The town centre is walkable, but you'll need a bus or taxi for locations along the Taba road. The hourly bus No 15 connects the central bus station with the Egyptian border at Taba (6.40NIS) from 8am to 6pm Sunday to Thursday, 8am to 3pm Friday and 9am to 7pm Saturday. To reach the Rabin border crossing into Jordan, you'll have to get a taxi (25NIS).

AROUND EILAT

Hikers will want to head for the Eilat Mountains, but be sure to pick up a copy of the 1:50,000 SPNI *Eilat Mountains* hiking map (82NIS), which is sold at the SPNI Field School in Eilat. Any of the following

places is accessible on a 38NIS to 50NIS taxi ride from Eilat.

The small spring and 30m **waterfall** (☎ running Apr, May, Oct & Nov) at Ein Netafim, which attract wildlife with their perennial water, lie less than 1km off the main road. From here, hikers can follow the Israel National Trail to the spectacular **Shehoret Canyon**, 15km away; make arrangements with a tour operator to pick you up at the trailhead at the finish. Near the mouth of Shehoret Canyon lie the impressive **Amram Pillars**, also along the Israel National Trail, where there's an official camp site (no water).

An excellent six- to seven-hour day hike will take you through the spectacular **Nakhla Gishron** (part of the Israel National Trail) from HaYoash to the Egyptian border. In the early 1990s the Dalai Lama walked part of this route, lecturing to a small collection of adherents atop one of its upper crests. Get an early start and carry at least 3L of water per person.

Further north, the 600m-long **Red Canyon**, a slot canyon 1m to 3m wide and 10m to 20m deep, is readily accessed on foot via a 1.5km walking track from the car park. It makes a great short hike.

If you'd prefer to take to the mountains under an alternative form of transport, **Camel Ranch** (☎ 637 0022; www.camel-ranch.co.il; Nakhla Shlomo; ☎ 9am-1pm & 4-8pm) organises 90-minute (98NIS per person) and four-hour (180NIS per person) camel treks from its base, less than 2km inland from the Eilat-Taba road.

Timna National Park

תמנע פארק תמנע חדיקה

About 25km north of Eilat and accessible by public bus, **Timna National Park** (☎ 631 6756; www.timna-park.co.il; adult/child 38/33NIS) is the site of some stunning desert landscapes, enlivened with multicoloured rock formations. It's best known as a source of copper for 5th-century-BC Egyptian miners – the park is dotted with ancient mine shafts – but it also includes a wonderland of geological phenomena. The most intriguing are the **Natural Arch**, the eroded monolith known as the **Mushroom** and the photogenic **Solomon's Pillars**. There is also a range of excellent day hikes through one of Israel's wildest desert landscapes.

Overnight **accommodation** (Bedouin tents per person 25NIS) is available at the artificial **Timna**

Lake. Camping is sometimes possible but call ahead to the park. For meals, try the adjacent **restaurant** (dishes 30-45NIS; ☎ 9am-5pm).

Buses between Eilat and Jerusalem pass the park turn-off, 2.5km from the park entrance. From there, it's a long walk to anything of interest. This is one place where it really makes sense to hire a car.

Hai-Bar Arava Biblical Wildlife Reserve

שמורת חייב-ב

Located 35km north of Eilat, the **Hai-Bar Arava Biblical Wildlife Reserve** (☎ 637 3057; per person 23NIS; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Sun-Thu, 8.30am-4pm Fri & Sat) was created to establish breeding groups of threatened Negev wildlife. A private car is needed to navigate its gravelled roads, from where you can observe the animals in their 'natural state'. Just behind the ticket office is the **Predator Centre** (☎ 637 3057; per person 23NIS), a modest zoo housing animals endemic to the Negev. A combined ticket for both the Wildlife Reserve and the Predator Centre is 40NIS.

Camp sites (per person 20NIS) with shower block and toilets are available at Hai-Bar Arava. Around 5km north of here, the cafeteria at **Yotvata Kibbutz** (☎ 635 7449; yotvata-office@yotvata.ardom.co.il), offers simple meals and fresh dairy products.

THE WEST BANK & GAZA STRIP

أضفة & غزة
רצועת עזה & הגדה
(המערבית) יו"ש

The West Bank and the Gaza Strip, predominantly Palestinian territories captured by Israel in 1967 during the Six Day War, have been neither annexed by Israel (as were East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights), nor granted outright autonomy. Security around both territories is extraordinarily tight, with hundreds of checkpoints, fences, walls and road blocks built around them to monitor the movement of Palestinians.

IDF control over Palestinian cities, and their surrounding roads, has waxed and waned with the political tide. The 1993

WARNING

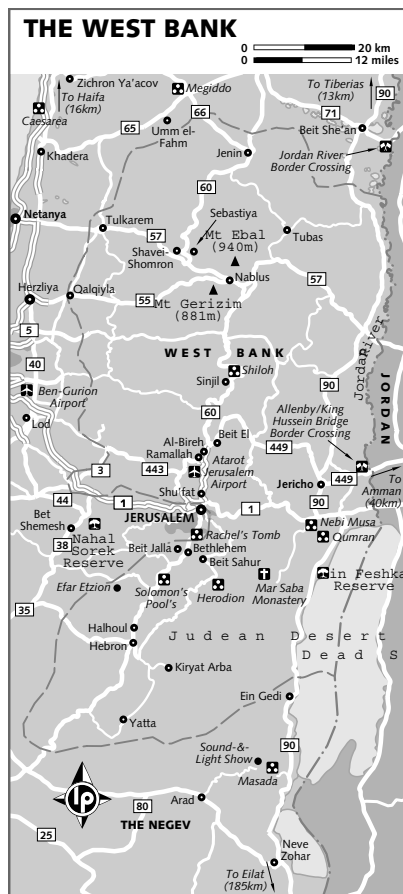
Despite the relative calming in tensions between Israel and the PA in early 2005, the situation in the Palestinian territories could change rapidly and without warning (for the better or worse). Avoid public demonstrations when they occur and don't wear any outward signs of Judaism (eg a yarmulke). Always carry a foreign passport to get through the checkpoints. Seek local advice – and keep abreast of the latest news – before visiting any of the areas mentioned in this section.

Oslo Accords brought Palestinians limited self rule in the Gaza Strip and West Bank, but the IDF took back most urban areas during the second intifada. Under the 2005 ceasefire agreement, Israel promised to pull back from five West Bank towns – Ramallah, Qalqiya, Bethlehem, Jericho and Tulkarem. At the time of writing it had only pulled back from the latter two.

The biggest disengagement plan yet occurred in August 2005 when some 9000 Israeli settlers were pulled out of their homes in Gush Katif and forced to relocate in Israel proper. They left behind a US\$200 million a year hothouse industry and 1500 homes, which were demolished to make way for low-cost housing.

The IDF pullout includes Rafah, the scene of some of the most appalling atrocities committed by the IDF against ordinary Palestinians. In May 2004, a six-day siege on Rafah left 42 dead, 180 homes destroyed and a swathe of urban destruction that prompted international outrage and a strong rebuke from inside Sharon's own cabinet. Rafah is a hotbed of violence largely because of the secret tunnels that connect to Egypt, allowing the trafficking of weapons, drugs and people.

If you feel uneasy about travelling to the West Bank on your own, **Abu Hassan Alternative Tours** (Map pp284-5; ☎ 052 286 4205; www.jrshotel.com; Jerusalem Hotel) organises custom tours to the Palestinian Territories for around US\$25 per person – if you can muster a group. Another excellent resource is the snazzy **This Week In Palestine** (www.thisweekinpalestine.com) brochure, available in upmarket Arab hotels.



RAMALLAH

☎ 02 / pop 40,000

Once a Christian religious centre and later a resort town for wealthy Arabs, Ramallah is now better known as the administrative headquarters for the Palestinian Authority and the centre for culture and arts in the West Bank.

There is little left to remind the visitor of old Ramallah, much of it having been torn down to make way for modern shops and malls. However, the city does have the feel of prosperity and youthful energy that's lacking in other West Bank towns. Apart from catching onward transport to Nablus, the main reason to come here is to view **Yasser Arafat's tomb** (admission free; ☎ 8am-

9pm), which is located inside the compound of the partially destroyed headquarters of the Palestinian Authority (bullet holes still clearly visible).

Duar al-Manara Sq marks the centre of Ramallah; Arafat's compound (Muqata) is 900m east, access is from the south side.

To get to Ramallah, take Arab bus No 78 from the Nablus Road old bus station in East Jerusalem (Map pp284-5) to the Calandia checkpoint. From the checkpost, frequent *sheruts* (*servees*) run to central Ramallah for 2.50NIS.

JERICHO

☎ 02 / pop 32,000

Jericho is best known for the biblical account of Joshua, his army's seven circuits with its trumpets and the subsequently tumbling walls. Unfortunately, precious little remains of this legacy, but Jericho still claims the title of the oldest town in the world. At 260m below sea level it's also the lowest town in the world. While Jericho's archaeological sites remain impressive, they are readily surpassed by the surrounding desert landscapes and the views across the Dead Sea to the mysterious Mountains of Moab.

Ancient Jericho

Ancient Jericho's main sites are best accessed on the 6km anticlockwise loop formed by Qasr Hisham St and Ein as-Sultan St. Heading north out of the centre, the first site of interest is the **Mount & Monastery of Temptation**, a 12th-century Greek Orthodox monastery, rebuilt in the 19th century, which clings to the rocks at the traditional site where Jesus was tempted by Satan. You could walk there in 30 minutes or take the 1.3km-long **cable car** (☎ 232 1590; www.jericho-cablecar.com; adult/child 40/30NIS; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat), triumphantly advertised as the 'world's longest cable car under sea level'.

Across the street from the cable car is the Ahava Temptation tourist complex with souvenir stalls, shops and restaurants, and the archaeological site of **Tel Yericho** (adult/child 10/7NIS; ☎ 8am-5pm), otherwise known as Tel as-Sultan, which has little more than sign-posted trenches and mounds of dirt.

Around 3km past the tourist complex, the road winds to the ruins of a 5th- or 6th-century synagogue and **Hisham's Palace** (adult/

child 10/7NIS; ☎ 8am-5pm) – the impressive ruins of a 7th-century hunting lodge, replete with a beautiful Byzantine mosaic floor.

Back in town, look out for the **Zachaeus Tree**, said to be the very same that Zachaeus climbed for a better view of the preaching Jesus (Luke 19:1-10).

Sleeping & Eating

Jericho Resort Village (☎ 232 1255; fax 232 2189; s/d 250/320NIS; P ☎ ☎ ☎) A surprisingly well-run operation, catering for well-heeled Jordanian tourists. It's 2km past the Mount of Temptation cable car.

Intercontinental Hotel (☎ 231 1200; jericho@interconti.com; s/d US\$80/90; P ☎ ☎ ☎) An odd place for a five-star hotel, this 180-room operation closed its casino and limped through the last intifada, but there are renewed hopes for a business boom if peace prevails. It's located southeast of Jericho on the road to Jerusalem.

Hisham's Palace Hotel (☎ 052 275 6990; Ein as-Sultan St; r 100NIS) This place is so neglected that floorboards have started to sprout vegetation. Shabby rooms with three beds have private bathrooms and dodgy plumbing.

There are a few cafés and felafel/shwarma joints around the main square, and a proper sit-down restaurant at the Ahava Temptation tourist complex, opposite the cable car.

Getting There & Away

At present, no buses service Jericho. Shared taxis and *sheruts* depart from Abu-Dis, an eastern suburb of Jerusalem. A private taxi will cost 50NIS. There are buses to/from the Allenby border crossing for 10NIS from the bus station, a 20-minute walk east of downtown.

AROUND JERICHO

About 8km before Jericho a road leads right to **Nebi Musa**, a small monastic complex built in 1269 and revered by Muslims as the tomb of Moses, with the Judean Desert as a dramatic backdrop.

Wadi Qelt is a nature reserve with a natural spring where you can swim in a pool under a waterfall and hike along an aqueduct to **St George's Monastery**, built into the cliff face of a canyon on the Mount of Temptation. The hike takes about four hours. The starting point is the Wadi Qelt turn-off on the Jerusalem-Jericho road (get the bus driver

to drop you off here) and the finishing point is Jericho, from where you can continue sightseeing in the town or easily find transport back to Jerusalem.

BETHLEHEM

☎ 02 / pop 61,000

The Christian Arab town of Bethlehem no longer resembles the cosy Middle Eastern village portrayed on Christmas cards, but even worse, much of it has been bombed and otherwise damaged in conflicts dating back to the intifada. Christian visitors will probably still want to see Bethlehem, but those hoping for a spiritual experience may be disappointed by the blatant commercialism and the unheavenly host of kitsch that surfaces here. If it's all too much for you, head out to the Shepherds' Fields early in the morning, before the tour groups arrive, and gaze back at the town from a contemplative distance.

Besides the pilgrimage sites, there are also some excellent excursions to places just outside the town, such as the Mar Saba Monastery and the Herodian.

Orientation & Information

Around Manger Sq, right in the centre, are the Church of the Nativity, police station, post office and various shops. The **tourist office** (☎ 276 6677; Manger Sq; ☎ 10am-4pm) has maps of the town.

Milk Grotto St heads off to the southeast, past the Milk Grotto Chapel; uphill to the northeast Paul VI St leads to the museum, the outdoor market and more shops and hotels. The winding Manger St, running off the east side of the square, is the main street through the new town; it eventually brings you close to the security fence, from where you can walk to the Jerusalem-Hebron road.

Sights

The venerable **Church of the Nativity**, which is one of the world's oldest functioning churches, is built like a citadel over the cave cited by tradition as Jesus' birthplace. In April 2002 it suffered damage as 200 Palestinian troops sought sanctuary there from the IDF.

Down Milk Grotto St is **Milk Grotto Chapel**, a shrine that commemorates the lactation of the Virgin Mary. North of the square

A WALL BETWEEN THEM

When crossing into the West Bank from Jerusalem, either to Bethlehem or Ramallah, the most noticeable feature is no longer the change of cultures from Israeli to Palestinian, but the wall that divides them.

A Berlin Wall for the 21st century, this 'Security Fence', as its known by Israelis, cuts through farmers' fields, town centres and between the homes of onetime neighbours. In the case of one unfortunate Palestinian in Elkana, the 6m wall and its supporting fences actually encircles his home, caging him between Israel and Palestine.

This vast barricade's construction began during the second intifada and is part of a 704km security project to halt the movement of Palestinian weapon smugglers and suicide bombers (leading supporters to compare it not to the divisive Berlin wall but the defensive Great Wall of China). The IDF claims an 80% drop in the number of terror attacks since its construction.

But Palestinians argue that the wall, because it cuts well beyond the 1949 Green Line armistice, is an Israeli attempt to grab land before an official border is established between the territories. In July 2004, the International Court of Justice in the Hague sided with the Palestinians, claiming the wall violated international law.

The wall, along with its fences, barricades, earth mounds and watchtowers, is costly beyond its US\$3-billion price tag. Neighbourhoods around the wall have been turned into virtual ghost towns as people have been uprooted from their homes and road blocks have halted trade between customers and clients. Case in point is Rachel's Tomb (below), a holy site outside Bethlehem, which has seen the closure of 72 of 80 surrounding businesses since the barrier went up in June 2002.

Equally traumatic is the political fallout caused by the Security Fence, or as its known by Palestinians and political activists, the 'Apartheid Wall'. For Arabs worldwide, this is the new symbol of Israeli domination of Palestinian land, central to Islam's conflict with the Judeo-Christian West.

Locally, this sentiment is reflected on the wall itself in the form of graffiti. 'American Money, Israel Apartheid', a common rally cry among graffiti artists, refers to America's US\$2.5 billion in economic and military aid to Israel per year; strong support that deepens the divide confronting Americans, Europeans, Israelis and the Arab world.

For more information on the Wall, see the IDF-sponsored www.securityfence.mod.gov.il. For details from the Palestinian side, click on www.stopthewall.org. Also contact **Machsom Watch** (www.machsomwatch.org), an NGO that monitors Israeli checkpoints.

on Paul VI St, the **Bethlehem Museum** (☎ 274 2589; admission 8NIS; 🕒 10am-noon & 2.30-5pm Mon-Sat, closed Thu afternoon) exhibits traditional Palestinian crafts and costumes. In the gift shop you can buy handmade crafts produced by a local NGO, the **Arab Women's Union** (www.arabwomenunion.org).

Around 1km south of the Gilo (Bethlehem) checkpoint, and 400m past the security fence, is **Rachel's Tomb**, revered by Jews but also considered holy by Christians and Muslims. Every two hours a bus travels here direct from the Jerusalem central bus station (3.80NIS, 30 minutes). For security reasons, Jewish pilgrims are ferried to the site from the checkpoint.

Sleeping & Eating

Accommodation in Bethlehem is limited, especially at Christmas and Easter, and it makes more sense to stay in nearby Jerusalem.

Casa Nova Hospice (☎ 274 2798; www.cnop-beth.org; s/d US\$25/50; 🕒 🗺 📺) This Franciscan-run guesthouse beside the Church of the Nativity has reasonable facilities and a dining room. Price includes breakfast and additional meals cost US\$5.

Alexander Hotel (☎ 277 0780; ahotel@p-ol.com; s/d US\$30/45; 📺 🗺 📺) Tastefully furnished rooms with a scenic view over the valley, a 20-minute walk from Manger Sq on the road to Jerusalem.

You'll find plenty of felafel and shwarma merchants around Manger Sq, and the **St George Restaurant** (☎ 274 3780; Paul VI St; dishes 35-50NIS; 🕒 8am-11pm), which serves up grilled chicken, fish and meat dishes.

Getting There & Away

Bethlehem *sheruts* (3NIS, 40 minutes) run from East Jerusalem's Sultan Suleiman station, passing Jaffa Gate (they are often full

when leaving so it's difficult to pick one up at Jaffa Gate). Shared taxis (5NIS, 20 minutes) sometimes leave from the taxi stand outside Faisal's Guesthouse (Damascus Gate). All vehicles stop at the Gilo checkpoint, from where you can take a taxi (15NIS) the final 3km.

Alternatively, follow the pilgrims' option and walk from Jerusalem (at Christmas, there's an official procession). Unfortunately, the 2½-hour up-and-downhill trek attracts heavy traffic all the way.

AROUND BETHLEHEM

Various biblical events are associated with the **Field of Ruth** and the **Shepherds' Fields**, 2km from Beit Sahur (1km east of Bethlehem). The ruined Byzantine monastery here was destroyed by the Persians in AD 614, and there's also a 5th-century church built over a mosaic-floored cave. From Manger St in Bethlehem, take Arab bus No 47 to Beit Sahur and walk for 20 minutes to the fields. The **Herodium** (☎ 776 2251; adult/child 23/12NIS; 🕒 8am-5pm Sun-Thu, 8am-4pm Fri), the amazing volcano-shaped remains of the palace complex built by Herod between 24 and 15 BC, lies 8km south of Beit Sahur. Buses run infrequently from Bethlehem and your best bet is to take a taxi or walk.

Splendid architecture and a superb location combine to make the Greek Orthodox Monastery of **Mar Saba**, on the steep Kidron banks, one of the Holy Land's most impressive structures. The interior is open only to men, but the exterior is also quite amazing. Without a private vehicle you'll have to walk the 6km from the bus stop at Abu Diye (accessible on Arab bus 60 from Bethlehem).

The large reservoir and Turkish fort at **Solomon's Pools** lie 8km south of Beit Jalla. To get there from Bethlehem, take Arab bus No 23 or Arab minibus No 1 to Dashit. From here it's possible to continue to Hebron by shared taxi.

HEBRON

☎ 02 / pop 120,000

A major flashpoint of the Israeli-Arab conflict, Hebron maintains a palpable sense of tension, even when a ceasefire is in place. Visitors to the old city and marketplace should strive to look like a tourist – avoid wearing a yarmulke, Star of David or any other suggestion of Judaism.

The main stress point is the disputed **Cave of Machpelah**, which is the presumed burial site of father Abraham, and the **Ibrahimi Mosque**, which overlays it. For Jews, it's a highly revered site and to Muslims, its importance in the region is second only to that of Jerusalem's Dome of the Rock.

In the early 1970s, Jewish settlers established a community on the fringes of this largely Arab town, and their incursion inflamed strong – and often violent – passions. The result was an IDF guard posted to protect the 500 settlers from their unhappy Palestinian neighbours. Tragically, in February 1994, a Jewish settler stepped into the mosque and opened fire on the Muslims at prayer. The building is now segregated into Muslim and Jewish sections, and security is tight.

Hebron's souq is a blend of Crusader and Mamluk façades, vaulted ceilings and narrow alleyways; but repeated violence has cleared out its shops and residents, making the place a virtual ghost town. Most commerce has moved to the adjoining new town, centred on a vibrant outdoor market. Also, don't miss the Ein Sara St factories that produce Hebron's fabulous blue glass.

Located 3km from the bazaar, the modern hotel complex of **Regency Al Mezan** (☎ 225 7389; regency@palnet.com; s/d US\$55/77; 📺 🗺 📺), with plush rooms and mod cons, is an island of luxury in scruffy old Hebron.

Arab bus No 23 operates between Jerusalem and Hebron (10NIS), via Bethlehem, but service taxis (12NIS) from Damascus Gate (outside Faisal's guesthouse) are faster and more frequent. Public transport will drop you on HaMelekh David St, at the northern edge of the market. To the south lies the aforementioned Ibrahimi Mosque.

NABLUS

☎ 09 / pop 260,000

The typically bustling and quite attractive Arab town of Nablus, which is scenically situated between the Gerizim and Ebal peaks, is the largest West Bank population centre and is known for its production of soap, olive wood and olive oil. In the central Palestine/Al-Husseine Sq, you'll find the bus stops, the service taxi ranks and a small market. Immediately to the south, the Old Town stretches eastward along Nasir St.

שכם נאבלס

הברון הברון

Sights

From Al-Hussein Sq head south toward the minaret of **An-Nasir Mosque** (Nasir St) – one of 30 minarets punctuating the Nablus skyline. Nearby is the privately owned old Turkish mansion known as **Touqan Castle**, where visitors will normally be able to admire the architecture and garden. From Nasir St walk south through Al-Beik Gate and the entrance is up the slope on your left.

East of the An-Nasir Mosque on An-Nasir St is **Al-Shifa** (☎ 09-838 1176; ☺ men only 8am-10pm daily, women only 8am-5pm Tue), the country's oldest functioning Turkish bath. Built around 1480 at the start of the Ottoman period, Al-Shifa has been lovingly restored, and along with the hot rooms, you can enjoy the cushion-strewn central hall where guests can recline, sip black coffee or mint tea and puff on a nargileh. A bath costs 10NIS and a massage goes for 20NIS.

The nearby Arab village of **Sebastiya** stands about 15km northwest of Nablus up on the scenic slopes of the Samarian hills. Just above it on the summit of the peak lie the impressive ruins of Samaria, the capital of the ancient Israelite kingdom.

Sleeping & Eating

Crystal Hotel (☎ 233 2485; Faisal St; s/d with air-con 100/150NIS; s/d without air-con 120/170NIS, (P) ☺) A reasonable option in Nablus, this place has a central location, clean rooms and English-speaking staff.

Al Qasr Hotel (☎ 238 5444; alqasr@alqasr.com; Sharia Omar Ibn al-Khatib; s/d incl breakfast US\$75/85; (P) ☺ ☺) Visiting journalists and aid workers often make this their temporary home. It's about as luxurious as you can get in the West Bank with all the mod cons.

Al-Istiqlal Pension (☎ 238 3618; 11 Sharia Hitteen; dm 30NIS) At the bottom of the scale, this pension offers basic dormitory accommodation.

Along with soap, the Nablus speciality is sweets, including Arabic pastries, halvah, Turkish delights, and especially *kunafa* (cheese topped with orange wheat threads soaked in honey). The best bakery at which to try this delicious delicacy is **Al-Aqsa** (Nasir St), in the Old City beside the An-Nasir Mosque.

Getting There & Away

Sherut taxis run to Nablus from Al-Nahda St. in central Ramallah (13NIS, one hour) or from Calandia check point (16NIS, 1¼

hours) just south of Ramallah. Taxis stop at Huwwara check point outside Nablus from where you can catch a *sherut* to central Nablus (3NIS).

GAZA CITY

غزة، غزة

☎ 08 / pop 469,000

Historically, Gaza has been one of the most strategically important eastern Mediterranean towns, and has long served as a staging post on the major trade routes linking Central Asia and Persia with Arabia, Egypt and sub-Saharan Africa. In fact, it's believed that Gaza has been captured and destroyed more than any other town in the world – and that tradition lives on. After the establishment of limited self-rule in 1994, Gaza became a respectable place, but closed up once again during the second intifada.

Despite the ceasefire and pullout of all Israeli settlers in August 2005, Gaza remains unstable. The Palestinian Authority has put little effort into disarming militant groups and Islamic fundamentalism is on the rise.

Sights & Activities

Palestine Sq holds most of the city's sites of historical interest. The most distinguished structure is the converted Crusader-era church, **Jama'a al-Akbar (Great Mosque)**. Along its southern wall runs the short, vaulted **Goldsmiths' Alley**, which served as a lively souq during the Mamluk era. A short walk from here, across Palestine Sq, **Fras Market** is a photogenic menagerie of donkey carts, mounds of fruit and tables overflowing with seafood.

In 1799, during his Egyptian campaign, Napoleon Bonaparte camped in Gaza and established his base on Al-Wahida St in the attractive Mamluk-era building now called **Napoleon's Citadel**, which is currently a girls' school. From the citadel, head west and take

WARNING

At the time of research, tourists were barred from visiting Gaza. For this reason, we did not visit the area for the purposes of updating this chapter. If the situation changes and the area opens up, exercise caution and take a trusted guide. For further information on Gaza and a map of the city, see www.mogaza.org.

the second right to reach the **Mosque of Said Hashim**, which was built on the grave of the Prophet Mohammed's great-grandfather.

An **Arts and Craft Village** (☎ 284 6405; artvlg@palnet.com; Jamal Abdel Nasser St) produces and

then sells a range of local art and craft, which includes embroidery, copperware and glasswork. You'll find the village about 800m south of the Islamic University on El-Khartoum St.

INDEPENDENT PALESTINE?

Depending on your level of optimism, Independent Palestine is either a pipe dream or a near reality. But how would a future Palestinian state look? A few of the essentials are already there. They have a flag, a national football squad, a motto (May God Protect My Country) and there's even a currency lined up – the Palestinian Pound. More sticky discussions revolve around population movements and borders.

Helping with the complexities are the EU, Russia, the UN, the USA – the 'quartet' of groups which devised the current 'Road Map for Peace'. First outlined in June 2002 by US president George W Bush, the Road Map called for an independent Palestinian state living side by side with Israel, in peace, by 2005. The second intifada caused delays in implementation and the new target date is 2008, conspicuously set prior to the next US and Palestinian elections.

In April 2004, Bush announced two key revisions to the Road Map. The first declared that Israel would retain major Israeli settlement blocs inside the Green Line (the 1949 Armistice). The second announced that Palestinian refugees would not be allowed to return to Israel, but that they could be re-settled in Palestine. The latter would comply with the two-state solution – one state for Jews and one for Arabs. Both of his amendments were, of course, part of Clinton's parameters in the Wye II deal rejected by Arafat.

Any progress forward, though, hinges on Israel stopping further settlement build up (particularly around East Jerusalem which the Palestinians plan to make their future capital), and the Palestinian Authority dismantling militant groups. Little progress has been made on either account.

If and when independent Palestine is born, numerous challenges will stand in the way of security, prosperity and peace – simple geography being the most obvious. With just 6220 sq km (smaller than the US state of Maryland), Palestine would have little land to stand on. The Gaza enclave would be separated from 'mainland Palestine' by around 50km of Israeli territory which would probably require the construction of a secure highway linking the two. Already overcrowded Gaza and West Bank cities could become even more impacted if a significant proportion of the four million Palestinians abroad decide to return. An estimated 400,000 to 800,000 are expected to do just that.

These small portions of land are of grave concern to Israel as well – the heavily populated coastal corridor between the West Bank and Netanya will be narrowed to just 14km, posing an obvious security threat for the country.

Palestine's economy, crippled in recent years by high-level corruption and Israeli occupation, is another big question mark. Certainly tourism will come to the fore as the country would contain a number of historical sights associated with the Bible, including the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, the Cave of Machpelah in Hebron and the Mount & Monastery of Temptation in Jericho. Trade opportunities would improve with the departure of the IDF, but Palestine's likely trading partners are to be found not in Israel but elsewhere in the Arab world.

For international negotiators, Jerusalem remains the elephant in the room. Should a final resolution go back to the parameters of the Wye II deal, East Jerusalem will become the capital of Palestine and West Jerusalem the capital of Israel. As for the Old City, Palestine would control the Muslim and Christian quarters while Israel would take the Armenian and Jewish quarters. Also to Palestine would go the Temple Mount while the Western Wall would remain with Israel. A 10-minute stroll through the tightly knit alleys of the Old City, and the proximity of these areas, displays the complexities of such a plan.

Suggestions by mediators to internationalise Jerusalem (ie putting its authority in the hands of a multinational force of observers) have been given a thumbs-down by both Jews and Arabs.

For a first-hand account of the peace negotiations, read *The Missing Peace* by former US Envoy to the Middle East Dennis Ross.

The best **surfing** in the Gaza Strip can reportedly be found along the stretch of beach between the Al-Deira hotel and Chalehut beach, 1km to the south.

Sleeping

Marna House (☎ 2823322; marna_house_hotel@yahoo.com; Ahmed Abdel Aziz St; s/d US\$50/70; ☒ ☑) Located two blocks north of Omar al-Mukhtar St, just west of An-Nasser St, this place has 16 clean and spacious rooms with satellite TV, private bathrooms and balconies. Rates include breakfast.

Al Deira (☎ 283 8100; adeira@p-i-s.com; Rashid St; s/d US\$90/110; ☐ ☒ ☑) An island of luxury in Gaza, the Al Deira has 12 swish rooms, all with excellent sea views plus minibar and cable TV. Local expats report that the seafood restaurant here is the best in town.

Getting There & Away

The only entry/exit point at the time of writing was Erez. At the time of writing, access was only allowed to visitors with special permits given by the IDF or Ministry of the Internal Affairs (ie journalists, aid workers and diplomats). Erez is reached by *sherut* from Damascus Gate in East Jerusalem (50NIS per person), but allow lots of time to await other passengers. A private taxi will cost around 300NIS.

Or, take an Egged bus from Tel Aviv to Ashkelon (21NIS, one hour, every 30 minutes) and find a southbound bus to Yad Mordechai junction; taxis (10NIS, five minutes) run the last 5km to the Erez border.

ISRAEL & THE PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation in Israel and the Palestinian Territories is varied and caters to all budgets, although travellers coming from Egypt or Jordan will need to modify their pricing scale somewhat, as Israel is one of the most expensive destinations in the Middle East (although the Palestinian Territories is somewhat cheaper). Note that accommodation costs in both Israel and the Palestinian Territories can change quickly

with the seasons or influx of tourists. Prices are even more volatile in resort areas such as the Galilee and Eilat.

B&Bs

All over Israel you'll find accommodation in private homes, ranging mostly from US\$25 to US\$70 for a single or double. Facilities vary from simple rooms with shared facilities to self-contained studio apartments with kitchenettes and cable TV. You'll find them by looking for signs posted in the street or check the website of the **Home Accommodation Association** (www.bnb.co.il). More often than not tourist information offices will also keep a list of B&Bs in their city.

Camping

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

Hostels

Israel has an extensive network of roughly 30 official HI hostels, all of which are clean and well appointed. In most cities and towns, though, private hostels charge a third to half the prices of the official hostels and they're generally more amenable to socialising – but also louder. For more on HI hostels, contact the **Israel Youth Hostels Association** (Map pp284-5; ☎ 02-655 8405; www.iyha.org.il; 6th fl, Binyanei Ha'Umah Conference Centre, PO Box 6001, Jerusalem 91060; ☎ 8.30am-3pm Sun-Thu, 9am-noon Fri).

Hotels & Guesthouses

Even the grimmest of Jerusalem flea pits will charge US\$6 to US\$7 per night for a dorm bed while a slightly better guesthouse might charge US\$8 to US\$10. The cheapest double room in a backpacker-orientated guesthouse starts at around US\$25. Guesthouses are great places to meet other travellers, as they usually have a common kitchen

PRACTICALITIES

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

and TV room where guests lounge around for hours, swapping travel info.

In the midrange category, for a European standard hotel room with reasonable facilities, expect to pay around US\$65 to US\$80 for a double room. An Israeli breakfast (yogurt, cheese, toast, vegetables and a fried egg) is sometimes included with the room.

You don't get any better service with top-of-the-range hotels, which are often soulless and filled with package tour groups from the USA and Europe. Room rates usually start from around US\$90 and you can expect a full breakfast plus other amenities like a swimming pool and fitness centre. Many hotels in this range are kosher, which means you'll have to deal with a few quirky restrictions; for example, the swimming pool will have separate hours for men and women; guest services will be limited during Shabbat; and the elevators will automatically stop on every floor during Shabbat.

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

Kibbutz Guesthouses

In a bid to diversify their income, quite a few kibbutzim have turned to the guesthouse concept. They fit mostly into the midrange category and facilities may include swimming pools, beach access, and renowned dining and guest activities. The **Kibbutz Hotels Reservations Office** (Map p298; ☎ 03-

560 8118; www.kibbutz.co.il; 41 Montefiore St, Tel Aviv) publishes a booklet listing all of its hotels, restaurants and camp sites, with prices, amenities and a map.

ACTIVITIES

Hiking

With its range of terrain, Israel offers a wealth of superb hiking opportunities. The most popular venues include Maktesh Ramon, the Wilderness of Zin, Ein Gedi, the Eilat Mountains and the Golan Heights. For guidelines and detailed route information, visit the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (SPNI) in Jerusalem or Tel Aviv, or any of its field schools around the country (see p281). The SPNI also sells detailed sectional hiking maps (60NIS, laminated 82NIS).

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

Note that due to the security situation, hiking in the West Bank is not recommended. In 2001 two Israeli teenagers were murdered while hiking in the Judean Desert. The only area considered safe for hiking is Wadi Qelt (p339). For an armchair read, check out *Walks in Palestine: Including the*

Nativity Trail, written by Nabeel Kassis and published by Cicerone Press (2002).

Water Sports

Eilat's beaches are rather overrated, despite its subtropical climate, but the beaches at Bat Yam, Tel Aviv, Netanya, Carmel (near Haifa), and most intervening areas are excellent. These, along with the Sea of Galilee, all offer ample opportunities to swim, windsurf and sail, while the Dead Sea provides a unique and therapeutic 'floating' experience, and the water-sports capital of Eilat offers everything from parasailing to water-skiing.

While many privately owned beaches along the Sea of Galilee, the Dead Sea and the Mediterranean and Red Sea coasts charge admission fees (or are restricted for military reasons), some remote, marginal and/or undeveloped beaches are accessible to the public free of charge.

Eilat is Israel's major scuba-diving and snorkelling venue, but if you're headed for the world-class reefs of Sinai, it's hardly worth a stop. An alternative is to dive amid the underwater ruins of Herod's city at Caesarea (see p313).

BOOKS

To catch up on the causes, effects and possible solutions for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, read Richard Ben Cramer's *How Israel Lost* (2004). You may develop a love-hate relationship with Cramer's brash writing style, but his points are valid and clear.

Leaning further to right is Alan Der-showitz's book *The Case for Israel* (2003), in which the author responds to 32 particular criticisms chronically made of Israel's defence, domestic and foreign policies.

For something less political and more sentimental, try *If a Place Can Make You Cry* (2002), the compilation of emails and letters sent by the author, Daniel Gordis, to friends and family in the US following his move to Jerusalem with his family. A line of similar stories mixed with politics is the excellent *Elvis in Jerusalem* (2003), written by longtime *Ha'aretz* columnist Tom Segev. *The Innocents Abroad* by Mark Twain, written in 1871, is still one of the best accounts of the tourist experience in the Holy Land.

Well-known novelist Amos Oz deals in Israeli history and peace efforts in his collections of essays: *In the Land of Israel* (2003);

The Slopes of Lebanon (1989); and *Israel, Palestine and Peace* (1989). The BBC's *The Fifty Year War: Israel & the Arabs* (2000) was published to accompany the TV series of the same name. This largely balanced account of the conflict was cowritten by the Jewish Israeli Ahron Bregman and the Arab Jihan al-Tahri, and contains hitherto unpublished interviews with key players on both sides.

The list of popular historical novels is topped by James Michener's *The Source* (1965), and Ernest K Gann's *The Antagonists* (1970; later published as *Masada*); both have enjoyed enormous international success.

For a Palestinian perspective on the conflict, see Edward Said's *The Question of Palestine* (1977). Said's famous, influential and controversial work, *Orientalism* (1978), investigates how the Western world views the Arab world. In similar fashion, his book *Covering Islam* (1997) describes the adverse image of Islam and Arabs propagated in the American media.

More emotive and gritty is *Gaza: Legacy of Occupation* (1995) by Dick Doughty and Mohammed al-Aydi, in which the authors put in print the images and words of Palestinian refugees living in Gaza and Egypt. For an academic approach, try Nur Masalha's *The Politics of Denial* (2003) and *Imperial Israel and the Palestinians* (2000). For a moving personal story, read Mourid Barghouti's *I Saw Ramallah* (2003), in which the author describes his heart-breaking return to his home city after a 30-year absence.

The Jewish and Christian Bibles are also logical texts for anyone interested in the historical significance of Israel and the Palestinian Territories. The Jewish Bible includes the Pentateuch (the five books of Moses), and most of the rest of the Christian Old Testament. Among the many translations of the Christian Bible, which includes the Old and New Testaments, the King James Version is the most literary and the Septuagint (the Greek version) is generally considered the most historically sound. One of the best English translations of the Quran is by Abdullah Yusuf Ali.

BUSINESS HOURS

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

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

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

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

CHILDREN

Travel in Israel shouldn't be too rough on children as distances are short and roads are in good nick. Baby food and nappies are readily available in shopping centres, but if any special medicines are necessary it's best to bring what you need from your own country, as labels are often in Hebrew.

Many of Israel's museums and historical sites are geared for children as much they are for adults, complete with learning centres, games and activities. Notable attractions aimed at kids include the National Museum of Science, Planning & Technology (p311) in Haifa, the multimedia adventure (p313) at Caesarea and the Tower of David Museum (p290) in Jerusalem.

Public parks are common in Israeli cities, as are activity centres like miniature golf, bowling alleys and cinemas. If they are still bored, a trip to the beach works every time.

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

COURSES

Some Israeli universities operate overseas programmes for students of Hebrew, Arabic and Middle Eastern studies. Participants don't necessarily need to speak Hebrew, but may be required to study it as part of their curriculum. **Bir Zeit University** (www.birzeit.edu), 7km north of Ramallah, runs both beginners

and advanced courses in Arabic language and literature for US\$650 per course.

Travellers wishing to learn Hebrew will probably want to look for an *ulpan* – a language school catering mainly to new Jewish immigrants – but will have to find one that also welcomes nonimmigrant students. Most programmes cost under 500NIS per month.

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

CUSTOMS

Israel allows travellers to import duty free up to 1L of spirits and 2L of wine for each person over 17 years of age, as well as 250g of tobacco or 250 cigarettes. Animals, plants, firearms or fresh meat may not be imported at all. Any video, computer or diving equipment may need to be declared on arrival, and a deposit paid to prevent its sale in Israel (however, this regulation is rarely applied).

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Theft

Theft is as much a problem in Israel and the Palestinian Territories as it is in any other country, so take the usual precautions: don't leave valuables in your room or vehicle and use a money belt. In hostels, it's wise to check your most valuable belongings into the desk safe. On intercity buses, it's fine to stow large bags in the luggage hold, but keep valuables with you inside. Crowded tourist spots and markets are obvious haunts for pickpockets, so stay aware of what's happening around you.

Terrorism & Military Action

Streets in the West Bank, Gaza and Israel proper have been relatively quiet since a formal ceasefire was declared in February 2005. Still, it's a good idea to keep abreast of the situation as sporadic violence still occurs. Register with your embassy for email updates and pay attention to the local media.

Even in the best of times, both Jews and Arabs still hold demonstrations. These are mostly peaceful, but are also potential flash-points for violence and you're best off keeping a safe distance. In the spring of 2003, three foreign nationals were killed in Gaza

at the hands of the IDF; one of them, 23-year-old activist Rachel Corrie, died shortly after being steamrolled by an IDF house bulldozer as she attempted to block its path. See www.rachelcorrie.org for details.

Security Measures

When it comes to security, travellers won't be able to ignore Israel's justifiably paranoid – but almost universally welcomed – measures. Suspiciously parked vehicles are towed and/or destroyed by police; abandoned parcels and packages are blown up; and streets, markets and public facilities are spontaneously closed at the vaguest rumour of a threat. When entering bus or rail terminals, shopping malls, government buildings and any place else that might conceivably be a terrorist target, your bags will be searched – and in some cases X-rayed. You will also be checked with a metal detector or body search and probably asked the question: 'do you have a gun?'. Flashing a foreign passport can quicken the process.

Roads into most West Bank towns have army roadblocks where you'll need to show a passport and answer questions about your reason for travel. Similarly, those leaving the country from Ben-Gurion airport are likely to be grilled about their stay and have their luggage thoroughly scrutinised. As annoying as they may be, such measures have thwarted countless terrorist attacks and aren't likely to be relaxed anytime soon.

DISABLED TRAVELLERS

For information on accessible facilities, contact **Access Israel** (☎ 04-632 0748, 054-287702; www.access-israel.com). The **Yad Sarah Organisation** (☎ 02-624 4242; www.yadsarah.org) loans wheelchairs, crutches and other mobility aids free of charge (a deposit is required). You may also want to look for the guidebook *Access in Israel & the Palestinian Authority* by Gordon Couch (www.accessinrael.org), which provides the lowdown for travellers with mobility restrictions.

DISCOUNT CARDS

A Hostelling International (HI) card is useful for obtaining discounts at HI hostels and an ISIC card entitles bearers to a 10% student discount on Egged buses, a 20% discount on Israel State Railways as well as reductions on admissions to most museums and archaeo-

logical sites. Having said that, many places offer student discounts only to those studying in Israel, and cards issued by individual universities may not be recognised.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Israeli Embassies & Consulates

Following are the Israeli embassies and consulates in major cities around the world. For addresses of the Israeli embassy in Amman see p400 and in Cairo see p172. Note: there is no Israeli embassy in Lebanon or Syria.

Australia (☎ 02-6273 1309; <http://canberra.mfa.gov.il>; 6 Turrana St Yarralumla, Canberra, ACT 2600)
Canada Montreal (☎ 514-940 8500; <http://montreal.mfa.gov.il>; Suite 2620, 1155 Blvd Rene Levesque Ouest Montreal, PQ H3B 4S5); Ottawa (☎ 613-567 6450; <http://ottawa.mfa.gov.il>; 50 O'Conner St Ottawa, Ont K1P 6L2)
France Marseille (☎ 04 91 53 39 90; fax 04 91 53 39 94; 146 rue Paradis Marseille F-13006); Paris (☎ 01 40 76 55 00; <http://paris.mfa.gov.il>; 3 rue Rabelais F-75008 Paris)
Germany (☎ 30-8904 5500; <http://berlin.mfa.gov.il>; Auguste Victoriastr 74-75, D-14193 Berlin)
Ireland (☎ 01-230 9400; <http://dublin.mfa.gov.il>; Carrisbrook House, 122 Pembroke Rd Ballsbridge, Dublin)
Netherlands (☎ 070-376 0500; cons@hague.mfa.gov.il; Buitenhof 47, 2513AH Den Hague)
UK (☎ 020-7957 9500; <http://london.mfa.gov.il>; 2 Palace Green, London W8 4QB)
USA New York (☎ 212-499 5400; <http://newyork.mfa.gov.il>; 800 Second Ave New York NY10017); Washington, DC (☎ 202-364 5500; www.israelemb.org; 3514 International Drive NW, Washington DC 20008) Israel has nine consulates in the USA – the listed contacts can provide details.

Embassies & Consulates in Israel

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

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

Australia (☎ 03-695 0451; www.austalianembassy.org.il; 37 Sha'ul HaMelekh St, Tel Aviv 64928)
Canada (☎ 03-636 3300; fax 03-636 3380; 3 Nirim St, Tel Aviv 67060)
Egypt Eilat (☎ 08-637 6882; 68 HaAfroni St 88119); Tel Aviv (☎ 03-546 4151; fax 03-544 1615; 54 Basel St, 64239)
France Haifa (☎ 04-813 8811; fax 04-813 8800; 37 HaGefen St); Jerusalem (☎ 02-625 9481, fax 02-625 9178;

5 Paul-Émile Botta St 91076); Tel Aviv (☎ 03-520 8300; fax 03-520 8340; 112 Herbert Samuel Esplanade, 63572)
Germany Haifa (☎ 04-838 1408; fax 04-837 1353; 98 HaNassi Ave); Tel Aviv (☎ 03-693 1313; www.tel-aviv.diplo.de; 3 Daniel Frisch St, 64731)
Ireland (☎ 03-696 4166; fax 03-696 4160; 17th fl, 3 Daniel Frisch St, Tel Aviv 64731)
Jordan (☎ 03-751 7722; fax 03-751 7712; 14 Abbe Hillel St, Ramat Gan, Tel Aviv 52506)
Netherlands (☎ 03-752 3150; www.netherlands-embassy.co.il; 14 Abbe Hillel St, Ramat Gan, Tel Aviv 52506)
Turkey Jerusalem (☎ 02-532 1087; fax 02-582 0214; 20 Nashashibi St); Tel Aviv (☎ 03-524 1101; fax 03-524 0499; 202 HaYarkon St, 63405)
UK Jerusalem (☎ 02-671 7724; fax 02-532 5629; 19 Nashashibi St, 97200); Tel Aviv (☎ 03-725 1222; fax 03-527 1572; 192 HaYarkon St, 64505)
USA Jerusalem (☎ 02-622 7200; fax 02-625 9270; 27 Nablus Rd, 94190); Tel Aviv (☎ 03-519 7575; www.us-embassy-israel.org.il; 71 HaYarkon St, 63903)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

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

March

Boombamela Festival (www.boombamela.co.il); Netzanim Beach, Ashkelon) Very popular and lots of fun! Naked bodies painted in rainbow colours, beach bonfires, bongo drums, art and hedonism. It's one of the wildest parties in the Middle East.

Haifa International Youth Theatre (Haifa)
International Judaica Fair (Jerusalem)
International Poets Festival (Jerusalem)

April

Ein Gev Music Festival (Ein Gev, Galilee)

May

Abu Ghosh Vocal Music Festival (Abu Ghosh, near Jerusalem)
Israel Festival (Jerusalem)
Jacob's Ladder Anglo-Saxon Folk Music Festival (Sea of Galilee) Draws artists from around the world.
Jerusalem International Book Fair (Jerusalem)
Shantipi New Age Festival (Kibbutz Lehavot Haviva, Pardesh Hanna) A gathering in the spirit of Glastonbury.
Tribal Dance Experience (Barkai Forest)

July

Cherry Festival (the Golan Heights)
Dead Sea Water Festival (Dead Sea)
International Street Theatre (Bat Yam)
Jerusalem Film Festival (Jerusalem)

Karmi'el Dance Festival (Karmi'el)
Kol Israel Music Days (Kfar Blum, Upper Galilee)
Oriental Soul Music Festival (Sea of Galilee)

August

Full Moon Desert Festival (Negev)
Klezmer Dance Festival (Tsfat)
Red Sea Jazz Festival (Eilat)

September

Bereshet Festival (Megiddo Forest) A Bohemian gathering in the spiritual Megiddo Forest, with lots of live music.
Wigstock (Independence Park, Tel Aviv) Tel Aviv's answer to a gay Woodstock.

October

Fringe Theatre Festival (Akko)
Haifa International Film Festival (Haifa)
Jerusalem Marathon (Jerusalem)
Love Parade (Tel Aviv)

December

International Christmas Choir Assembly (Nazareth)

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

Undoubtedly, freewheeling Tel Aviv is the gay capital of Israel, and nearly all of those bars and nightspots that don't specifically cater to gays are at least gay-friendly. Jerusalem, Haifa and Eilat also have gay-oriented entertainment venues. For details, see the coverage for those cities in this chapter or contact the **Gay Hotline** (☎ 03-516 7234; ☎ 7.30-10.30pm Sun, Tue & Thu) in Tel Aviv or the **Jerusalem Infoline** (☎ 02-537 3906; ☎ 8pm-10pm Tue) in Jerusalem. Gay culture is non-existent in the Palestinian Territories and many gay Palestinians have taken refuge in Israel (although this has become increasingly difficult with tight border controls). To better understand the difficult plight of gay and lesbian Palestinians, click on www.globalgayz.com/g-palestine.html.

Several local organisations may also be useful:

Association of Gay Men, Lesbians, Bisexuals & Transgenderers (Agudah; ☎ 03-516 7234; www.aguda-ta.org.il; 18 Nahalat Binyamin; ☎ 10.30am-4pm Sun, Tue & Thu)
CLAF (☎ 03-516 5606; www.gay.org.il/claf; 22 Lilienblum St, Tel Aviv; ☎ 11am-4pm Mon & Wed) Lesbian organisation.
Jerusalem Open House (JOH; ☎ 02-625 3191; www.gay.org.il/joh; 7 Ben Yehuda St, Jerusalem; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Wed, 10am-11pm Sun & Thu)

HOLIDAYS

Dates of Jewish holidays may vary from year to year, as they're based on the Jewish lunar calendar. The Orthodox Union website (www.ou.org/chagim) has links to a calendar of Jewish holidays. For a list of Islamic holidays, see p648.

January

Eastern Orthodox Christmas 5 and 6 January

Armenian Christmas 19 January

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

February

Black Hebrew Day of Appreciation & Love

Festivities include art, music, food and dancing.

March/April

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

Good Friday Christian holiday commemorating the crucifixion of Jesus.

International Women's Day Palestinians celebrate this day on 8 March.

Easter Sunday Celebrated first by the Roman Catholics and Protestants and about two weeks later by the Armenian and Eastern Orthodox churches, Easter commemorates the resurrection of Jesus on the third day after the crucifixion. When times are calm, Catholic pilgrims through the Via Dolorosa and Church of the Holy Sepulchre in the Old City, while many Protestants gather at the Garden Tomb for religious services.

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

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

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

Soldiers Memorial Day This day commemorates fallen soldiers in various Israeli conflicts.

The Armenian Holocaust Memorial Day 24 April

Mimouna North African Jewish festival.

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

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

May

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

Labor Day (1 May) Day for Palestinian workers to celebrate their achievements.

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

Yom HaAtzma'ut This day commemorates 14 May 1948, when Israel became an independent state. The day before, Yom Hazikaron, is a memorial day dedicated to soldiers lost in Israel's various conflicts. For Palestinians, this day is called Al-Naqba, the Great Catastrophe.

June

Liberation of Jerusalem Day (4 June) This is a commemoration of the reunification of Jerusalem in June 1967.

Shevuot (Pentecost) Seven weeks after Pesah, this day celebrates the delivery of the Torah to Moses on Mt Sinai.

August

Tish'a BeAv This is a commemoration of the 'Destruction of the Temples'.

September

Rosh HaShanah This is the 'head of the Year' (Jewish New Year) and prayer services begin on the eve of the holiday.

October

Independence Day (15 November) Marks the signing of the Palestine Declaration of Independence (signed in 1988).

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

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

Simhat Torah This falls seven days after Sukkot.

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

December

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

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

INTERNET ACCESS

Most cities and towns have Internet cafés, which typically keep very long hours and charge anywhere from 12NIS to 30NIS per hour. Visitors carrying laptops can find wi-fi hot spots in Tel Aviv (p299), Jerusalem (p285) and Haifa (p308). To sign up for your own ISP account, contact the well-known **Netvision** (☎ 04-856 0660; www.netvision.net.il/services).

Israeli phone networks are now 100% digital. Phone plugs look similar to those used in the UK, but they employ a different wiring polarity, so either bring an Israel-specific adaptor or buy one locally.

LANGUAGE

Israel's national language is Hebrew, and the first language of most of the Arab population is the Syrian dialect of Arabic. Most Israelis and Palestinians speak some English – or will attempt to – and many speak other European languages, especially in the tourist centres.

Because Israelis are largely immigrant stock, various other languages are also represented. Some Ashkenazim still speak Yiddish (medieval German using the Hebrew alphabet) in everyday conversation, but due to an influx of over a million Russian Jews from the former Soviet Union, Russian has now emerged as Israel's fourth major language. A very small number of Sephardic people still speak their traditional – but dying – language, Ladino, a blend of Hebrew and Spanish written in the Hebrew alphabet.

Most road signs appear in all three alphabets, but often with baffling transliterations – Caesarea, for example, may be rendered Qisariyya, Kesarya, Qasarya, and so on; and Tsfat may appear as Zefat, Zfat, Safed and other renditions. In other cases, signs may use Hebrew names, such as Yerushalayim for Jerusalem or Tverya for Tiberias.

MONEY

The official currency is the new Israeli shekel (NIS), which is divided into 100 agorot. Coins come in denominations of 10 and 50 agorot (actually marked ½ shekel) and one and five new Israeli shekels, and notes in 10, 20, 50, 100 and 200NIS. The Palestinian pound only exists in theory. If and when a Palestinian state is created you can expect this currency to be put into use.

To make things easier for travellers, most top-end hotels, HI hostels, car-hire companies and many airlines quote their rates and accept payment in US dollars, and paying in US dollars will save you the 17% Value Added Tax (VAT). Euros are also widely accepted by money changers.

Tourists who pay in foreign currency are exempt the VAT, and others are entitled to a refund on most items purchased in shops registered with the Ministry of Tourism (there'll be a sign in the window or at the till). Purchases must be wrapped in sealed, partially transparent plastic, and the original invoice must be legible without opening the parcel. Claim your refund from Bank Leumi in the departure lounge at Ben-Gurion airport.

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

Exchange rates vary little from place to place, but banks may charge voracious commissions and the best deals are the independent exchange bureaus dotted around every major city and town. Typically, they charge no commission at all.

Banks function from 8.30am to 12.30pm and 4pm to 5.30pm on Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday, from 8.30am to 12.30pm on Monday and Wednesday, and 8.30am to 11.30am on Friday and holiday eves. Most exchange bureaus keep longer hours.

Until recently, tipping wasn't an issue, but these days, restaurant bills arrive with a

10% to 12% addition for service, or a notice that service is not included. Note that taxi drivers do not expect tips – they're usually content just to overcharge.

Travellers cheques may be changed at most banks, but commission can be as high as 20NIS, regardless of the cheque amount. It's better to change them at a no-commission exchange bureau or the post office. Post offices also operate instant Western Union international money transfer services.

Below are the rates for a range of currencies when this book went to print.

Country	Unit	New Israeli shekel (NIS)
Australia	A\$1	3.43
Canada	C\$1	3.95
Egypt	E£1	0.81
euro zone	€1	5.52
Japan	¥100	4.00
Jordan	JD1	6.55
Lebanon	LL100	0.31
New Zealand	NZ\$1	3.20
Syria	S£100	9.03
UK	UK£1	8.16
USA	US\$1	4.68

POST

Letters and postcards to North America and Australasia take seven to 10 days to arrive, and to Europe, a bit less. Incoming mail takes three or four days from Europe and around a week from other places. Small postcards to anywhere in the world cost 1.40NIS, while large postcards and airmail letters are 1.90NIS to Europe and 2.30NIS to North America.

For poste restante, have correspondents send mail or packages to the main post office in the city or town where you'll pick up post. Note that the Amex offices in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv will receive mail for card holders or travellers-cheque customers.

TELEPHONE & FAX

Standard rates (14NIS per minute) to anywhere in the country, including local calls, apply between 7am and 7pm. Between 7pm and 7am and on weekends, calls cost considerably less.

Fax

At post offices, you can send a local or international fax for 12NIS for the first sheet and 5.20NIS for subsequent sheets, regard-

less of the destination. At most Internet cafés, you can send or receive faxes for 7NIS to 10NIS for the first page and 5NIS for each page thereafter.

Mobile Phones

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

Phone Codes

The country code for Israel and the Palestinian Territories is 972, followed by the local area code (minus the zero), then the subscriber number. Local area codes are given at the start of each city or town section. The international access code (to call abroad from Israel and the Palestinian Territories) is 013 with Barak, 011 with Golden Lines and 001 with Bezeq, all of which offer comparable international rates.

Phonecards

Local and international calls can be made from cardphones, which are found at post offices and other public places. The best-value telephone cards are sold at post offices, but are also available from lottery kiosks, newsstands and bookshops. A 20NIS international card allows you to talk for 60 minutes.

TOILETS

Most Israeli towns have clean (and often free) public toilets in such prominent places as town squares, pedestrian underpasses, and bus and train stations. Alternatively, a 'McBathroom' is never too far away. In an emergency, do as the Israelis do and just ask at any restaurant – most Israelis are sympathetic to such plights and will normally let you use the facilities without expecting you to buy anything. Public facilities in the West

Bank and Gaza are usually not as good or are hard to find. If you do find something, toilet paper probably won't be available, so it's a good idea to carry some of your own. If there is nothing available, again the best thing to do is ask politely at a restaurant or hotel if you can use their facilities.

VISAS

With a few exceptions, visitors to Israel and the Palestinian Territories need only a passport valid for at least six months from the date of entry. Nationals of most Central American and African countries (but not South Africa), India, Singapore and some ex-Soviet republics also require a pre-issued visa.

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

Anyone who appears 'undesirable' or is suspected of looking for illegal employment may be questioned by immigration officials about the purpose of their visit and asked to provide evidence of a return ticket and sufficient funds for their intended length of stay. Those who can't comply may find themselves on the next flight home.

For details on how an Israeli stamp can blight your passport, see the boxed text, below.

Visa Extensions

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

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

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Female travellers can expect the same sort of treatment they'd receive in most European countries. Women wanting to blend in and respect local customs should dress modestly

THE ISRAELI STAMP STIGMA

The game of wits played between travellers and diplomatic consulars across the Middle East is ratcheted up by what's known as the 'Israeli Stamp Stigma'. In the Middle East, only Turkey, Egypt and Jordan recognise Israel – all other countries refuse to admit anyone whose passport has been tainted by evidence of a visit to the Jewish state. Israeli immigration officials will, *if asked*, stamp only a separate entry card and not your passport. This is fine for travellers flying into and out of Israel, but if you are crossing into Jordan or Egypt overland, the entry/exit stamps into those countries (marked, for example: 'Taba' or 'Aqaba') will be no less incriminating than an Israeli stamp.

Travellers can ask the Jordanians and Egyptians not to stamp their passport when entering/leaving Israel (instead stamping a separate piece of paper), but further down the track those missing stamps may raise questions in the eyes of consuls when you apply for visas in other parts of the Middle East. We had no trouble getting into Lebanon, Syria and Jordan after visiting Egypt and Israel (avoiding Egypt exit and Israel entry stamps), but maybe we were just lucky.

A safer option includes returning to the country (Jordan or Egypt) from where you started. This will negate the need for a new entry stamp (it will seem like you never left). Even better, arrange your itinerary so that a visit to Israel is that final stop on your tour in the Middle East.

For information on possible new regulations related to organised group travel from Israel to Syria via Jordan, see p553.

in conservative areas like Tsfat and parts of Jerusalem (including the Old City and M'ea She'arim). A long-sleeve shirt, ankle-length skirt and head scarf are par for the course in these areas. Western women won't blend in as well in Arab areas, but the same precautions apply. Take particular care when walking on the Mount of Olives, where reports of harassment are not uncommon.

WORK

While it isn't difficult to find casual work in Israel, to work legally you'll need a work permit from the Ministry of the Interior and they aren't easy to get. Unfortunately, unscrupulous employers often take advantage of illegal workers, assuming the workers have no recourse. They're wrong. The *pro bono* *publico* service **Kav l'Oved** (☎ 03-688 3766; www.kavlaoved.org.il; 3rd fl, 17 YI Peretz St, Tel Aviv; ☎ 9.30am-4.30pm Sun, Tue & Wed, noon-6pm Thu) provides legal services on behalf of workers – legal or not – who have not been paid by employers.

In good times, eager international volunteers descend on Israel for a stint on a kibbutz or moshav. By definition, a kibbutz (plural kibbutzim) is a communal farm or other rural project staffed by volunteers, who trade their labour for food, lodging and a small stipend. After a short stint, though, quite a few volunteers are disappointed with what they encounter, and Tel Aviv hostels are crowded with dropouts who found things less utopian than anticipated. Before committing yourself to a volunteer programme, be sure to balance agency propaganda with testimonials from previous volunteers to get a realistic idea of what to expect. Note that kibbutz volunteers must be between the ages of 18 and 32 and moshav volunteers 20 to 35.

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

Some volunteers organise a kibbutz stay through a kibbutz representative office in their own country. After collecting a basic registration fee (around US\$50), the kibbutz representative will arrange flights and visas (individuals may make their own travel arrangements, which is generally cheaper). Alternatively, would-be volunteers can apply in person at the kibbutz agent in Tel Aviv. Your chances of success will increase dramatically

if you can convince the officials that you're not a drug-crazed, beer-guzzling layabout.

For more information, contact one of the following offices:

Australia

Kibbutz Program Centre (☎ 02-9360 2368; fax 02-9380 5124; 140 Darlinghurst Rd, Darlinghurst, NSW 2010)

Kibbutz Program Desk (☎ 03-9272 5688; fax 03-9272 5640; 306 Hawthorn Rd, Caulfield South, Victoria 3162)

Canada

Kibbutz Aliyah Desk Montreal (☎ 514-486 9526; fax 514-483 6392; Suite 206, 1 Carre Cumming Sq, Montreal, PQ H3X 2H9); Ontario (☎ 416-633 4766; fax 416-633 2758; Suite 100, 3995 Bathurst St, North York, Ont M3H 5V3); Vancouver (☎ 604-257 5100; israelmatters@jfgv.com; 950 W 41st Ave, Vancouver, BC V5Z 2N7)

Israel

Kibbutz Program Centre (Map p300; ☎ 03-527 8874; www.kibbutz.org.il; 18 Frishman St, cnr Ben Yehuda St, Tel Aviv; ☎ 8am-2pm Sun-Thu)

New Zealand

Kibbutz Program Desk (☎ 04-384 4229; fax 04-384 2159; 80 Webb St, Wellington 6001)

UK

Kibbutz Representatives (☎ 0181-458 9235; fax 0181-455 7930; 1A Accommodation Rd, London NW11 8ED)

USA

Israel Aliyah Centre (☎ 305-573 7631; aliyahmiami@gmjf.org; 4200 Biscayne Blvd, Miami, FL 33137)

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

TRANSPORT IN ISRAEL & THE PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

GETTING THERE & AWAY Entering Israel & the Palestinian Territories

A frequent topic of conversation among travellers (a great source of annoyance for some and a breeze for others) is the entrance procedures for Israel and the Palestinian Territories. It's rigorous even at the best of times, and you can expect a barrage of questions

about your recent travels, occupation, any acquaintances in Israel and possibly your religious or family background. If you are meeting friends in Israel, have their phone number handy. Anyone planning to work in Israel can expect delays. A passport full of stamps from neighbouring Islamic countries will likewise be circumspect. When immigration asks how long you plan to stay in the country, and you say 'two weeks', that is exactly what they will write on your entry card. For the maximum time allowed, you must specifically ask for three months.

Air

Israel's main gateway, Ben-Gurion airport, is 20km southeast of Tel Aviv and 50km west of Jerusalem. An ultramodern US\$1 billion international terminal, unveiled in 2004, handles 16 million passengers a year. Only a handful of international charter flights may touch down at Ovda airport, outside Eilat. Israel's national carrier El Al operates flights to and from Ben-Gurion (except on Saturday). To check on international flights, phone **Ben-Gurion airport information** (TLV; ☎ 03-972 3388; www.ben-gurion-airport.co.il).

Last Minute Tickets (☎ 03-636 6808), on the 2nd floor of the international terminal, has reasonably priced tickets to Europe (eg London one way for US\$260), but you'll pay well over the odds here for a ticket to the USA or Australia.

Note that airport security is tight, especially on El Al services, and international travellers should check in at least three hours prior to their flight. In Tel Aviv, passengers can check in downtown on the day before their flight and avoid lugging baggage to the airport (see p305).

Fares into Israel aren't especially cheap and it's rarely an allowable stop on round-the-world itineraries. The best deals are normally available on the Internet (try www.travelocity.com), or with a discount travel agent or consolidator. At the time of writing, the lowest return fare from New York to Tel Aviv was US\$880 with LOT Polish Airlines, via Warsaw. From London Heathrow, return fares on El Al go for US\$535, nonstop. From Sydney, the lowest current return fare is US\$1250 on Qantas to London Heathrow, then with British Airways to Tel Aviv.

Apart from neighbouring Jordan and Egypt, which may be visited overland, Tur-

DEPARTURE TAX

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

key is the only Middle Eastern country that may be visited from Israel, and lots of Israelis take advantage of the great airfare deals that are available between Tel Aviv and Istanbul.

Airlines that fly to Israel:

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

Hub: Pearson International Airport, Toronto.

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

Hub: Charles de Gaulle Airport, Paris.

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

Fiumicino Airport, Rome.

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

Hub: O'Hare Airport, Chicago.

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

Hub: Vienna Airport.

British Airways (BA; ☎ 03-606 1555; www.britishairways.com) Hub: Heathrow Airport, London.

KLM (KL; ☎ 03-971 1138; www.klm.com) Hub: Schiphol

Airport, Amsterdam.

The Israel Student Travel Association (ISSTA; p299) offers competitive fares, though it's worth getting quotes from other travel agents in downtown Tel Aviv or Jerusalem. Alternatively, check around the hostels and night-spots for cut-price flight advertising.

Land

If you're planning to visit Lebanon or Syria, try to do so before arriving in Israel or the Palestinian Territories. Not only are borders with these countries closed, but any evidence in your passport showing a visit to Israel will bar you from visiting them (see p353).

On the other hand, Egypt and Jordan both have open land borders with Israel and the Palestinian Territories, and you may cross on foot or by private vehicle, but not in a taxi or rental car. Drivers and motorcyclists will need the vehicle's registration papers and proof of liability insurance, plus a driving licence from home (but not necessarily an international driving licence).

EGYPT

The **Taba crossing** (☎ 08-637 2104, 08-636 0999; ☎ 24hr) is currently the only open border between Israel and Egypt. Here, travellers

pay a 68NIS fee to leave Israel, plus around ££20 to enter Egypt. Driving your own vehicle across, you'll pay a fee of 32NIS on the Israeli side and a whopping ££180 on the Egyptian side.

For safety and security reasons, the **Rafah crossing** (☎ 08-673 4080), on a 'safe' road in the Gaza Strip, is currently closed to individual travellers. Tour operators, though, are still allowed to ferry paying clients across on organised trips; contact Mazada Tours (below) for details.

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

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

Access to the Taba border from Eilat is on city bus No 15. From the Egyptian side, buses and shared taxis leave for Sinai; for details, see p176.

If you are trying to get to Cairo in a hurry, the best way is to hop on the **Mazada Tours** (Jerusalem Map p288; ☎ 02-623 5777; 15 Jaffa Rd, Pearl Hotel; Tel Aviv Map p298; ☎ 03-544 4454; www.mazada.co.il; 141 Ibn Gvirol St) direct bus service between Tel Aviv or Jerusalem and Cairo via Rafah (US\$84, 12 hours). Buses leave Jerusalem/Tel Aviv at 9am/11am Sunday, Monday and Thursday. After picking up passengers in Cairo, they head back. Mazada is represented in Cairo by **Misr Travel** (☎ /fax 02-335 5470; Cairo Sheraton, Midan al-Galaa, Doqqi).

JORDAN

There are three border crossing points with Jordan.

The least used of the three is the **Jordan River crossing** (☎ 04-648 0018; ☎ 8am-10pm), which is 6km east of Beit She'an in Galilee. It's not particularly convenient for anyone. Exit tax here is 70NIS.

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

In the south the **Yitzhak Rabin crossing** (☎ 08-630 0530; ☎ 6.30am-10pm Sun-Thu, 8am-8pm Fri & Sat), called Wadi Araba by Jordanians, lies just 2km northeast of central Eilat, making it handy for day trips from Eilat to Aqaba, Petra and Wadi Rum. Exit tax here is 68NIS, entry to Jordan is free and exit from Jordan is JD5.

Nearly all travellers require visas to enter Jordan; for details see p403. Visas can be purchased at both the Rabin (formerly called Arava) and Jordan River border crossings, but not at Allenby Bridge. If you're going that way, get a visa at the **Jordanian embassy** (☎ 03-751 7722; fax 03-751 7712; 14 Abbe Hillel St, Ramat Gan, Tel Aviv), in the Tel Aviv suburb of Ramat Gan (take bus No 66 from Ben Yehuda St). You can apply in the morning and pick the visa up around 2pm the same day; bring one passport-sized photo.

Sea

For details of sailings between Haifa and Piraeus (the port for Athens) see p663.

GETTING AROUND

Air

Israir (www.israir.co.il) flies at least once daily (including Saturday) between Ben-Gurion, Tel Aviv Sde Dov, Eilat and Haifa. **Arkia** (www.arkia.co.il), which also runs international charters, operates flights between the same cities, as well as international charters to Jerusalem.

Bicycle

Cycle tourists should bear in mind the hot climate, winter rainfall and steep hills. Israeli drivers can be aggressive at times, but generally respect a cyclist's right of way. The best place for a leisurely cycle trip is around the Sea of Galilee; for such purposes, several Tiberias hostels hire out bicycles for quite reasonable rates.

Bus

Israel's small size and excellent road system combine to make bus travel the public transport of choice. The network is dominated by **Egged** (☎ 03-694 8888), which runs

fast and modern air-con buses on both long-distance and city bus routes; call for information on schedules and prices, including city buses.

In Nazareth, East Jerusalem and the West Bank, a number of small Arab-run bus companies provide public transport on typically slow and antiquated vehicles. Fares are quite cheap and ISIC holders are entitled to a discount of about 10% on inter-urban fares.

Note that Egged bus schedules are affected by public holidays and usually don't run during Shabbat, while Arab buses operate daily.

Car & Motorcycle

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

Because buses are less frequent in the Golan Heights and the Negev areas, these places are best seen with a rental car, and those on a budget will find that sharing a vehicle can be quite economical (unless you're staying in Tel Aviv, where parking costs at least US\$10 per day).

Car hire companies include:

Avis Ben-Gurion airport (☎ 03-971 2315); Tel Aviv (Map p298; ☎ 02-527 2314; 113 HaYarkon St); Tiberias (☎ 04-672 2766; cnr HaAmakim & HaYarden)

Budget Ben-Gurion airport (☎ 03-971 1504); Jerusalem (Map pp284-5; ☎ 02-624 8991; 23 HaMelekh David St)

Eldan Ben-Gurion airport (☎ 03-977 3400); Jerusalem (Map pp284-5; ☎ 02-625 2151; 24 HaMelekh David St); Tel Aviv (Map p298; ☎ 03-527 1166; 114 HaYarkon St); Tiberias (☎ 04-679 1822; 1 HaBanim)

Hertz Ben-Gurion airport (☎ 03-977 2444); Tel Aviv (Map p298; ☎ 03-522 3332; 144 HaYarkon St)

With most of these companies you can hire a car with insurance and unlimited kilometres for as little as US\$250 per week or US\$600 per month. Just make sure your designated driver is good on both the offence and defence, and has a long fuse, especially when tackling Jerusalem or Tel Aviv.

Hitching

Although hitching was once a common way of getting around Israel, increasing reports of violent crime make this a risky business. Women should not hitch without male companions and all travellers should be

circumspect of the cars they get into. The local method of soliciting a lift is to simply point an index finger at the road, but the fact that we tell you how it works doesn't mean we recommend you do it.

Local Transport

SHERUT

As in neighbouring Middle Eastern countries, the shared taxi (*sherut*) rules the roads of both Israel and the Palestinian Territories. The Arabs call it a service taxi (pronounced 'ser-vees'). During Shabbat, *sheruts* provide the only transport on certain major intercity routes, and on the West Bank, where Egged is limited to Jewish towns, the *sheruts* save hours of travelling time over the typically spluttering, smoke-belching Arab buses.

SPECIAL TAXI

Drivers of 'special' (ie nonshared) taxis are renowned for overcharging (sometimes spectacularly!). If you can't negotiate a reasonable fare – trips around central Jerusalem or Tel Aviv should run between 20NIS and 25NIS – insist that the driver use the meter, and watch your progress on a map to ensure that the shortest route is followed. Tariffs rise between 9pm and 5.30am.

Note that taxi drivers are not normally tipped, but in the absence of an attempted rip-off, it's fine to refuse a shekel or two in change.

Tours

Several local companies offer day tours to sites of interest around Israel. The following options operate only when demand is sufficient, so it helps to turn up with a motivated group. These are some of the more useful ones:

Ben Harim Tours (☎ 03-546 8870; www.beinharim.co.il)

United Tours (☎ 03-693 3412; www.unitedtours.co.il)

Train

Israel State Railways (ISR; ☎ 03-577 4000; www.isra.rail.org.il) runs a limited but convenient, efficient and inexpensive network of passenger rail services between Be'ersheva and Nahariya, as well as a new spur to Jerusalem. It is especially recommended for travel between Tel Aviv and Haifa or Akko. ISIC holders get a 20% discount. For the latest details, see its website.

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