2017 Tour of Israel

Tips and Information

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Introduction 4

The Land of Israel 4
Let's Go! 4
Our Fellow Travelers 6

Before Our Tour 7

Biblical Things To Read About 7
Non-Biblical Things to Read About 7
Other Things That You Need To Do 8
Attire 8
Security 10
Currency 11
Credit Cards 11
Weather 12
Metric System 13
Immunizations 13
Things to Pack 14
Packing For The Flight 15
Important Paperwork 16

During Our Tour 17

Airline Travel 17
Arriving in Tel Aviv 19
Our Tour Coach 20
Arrival at a Hotel 21
Leaving a Hotel 21
Food 21

Water 23
Laundry 23
Cellular Phones 24
Internet Access 24
Electricity 24
Medications 25
Souvenirs 25
Helpful Tips 26
After Our Tour 28
Welcome Home 28

Introduction

The Land of Israel

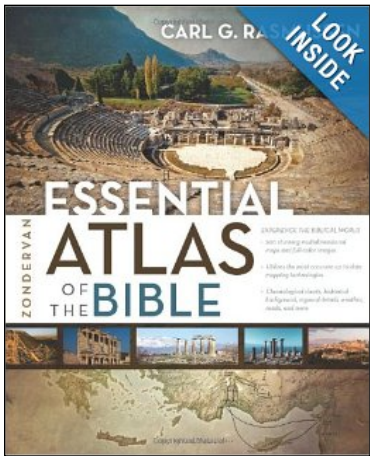
"For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing out of the valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper. And you shall eat and be full, and you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land he has given to you." - Deuteronomy 8:7-10

Let's Go!

Congratulations! You are going to Israel. For all of you, this is probably a dream come true. This is the land that you read so much about in the Bible. If you have never been to Israel, your understanding of many of the Biblical stories is about to go through some major changes. It has been said so many times that it is kind of a cliche, but until now you have read the Bible in black and white. You are now about to read the Bible in color. If you are returning to Israel, I am sure that you will learn even more than you thought was possible.

In a few weeks, you will receive a packet from me containing a couple of items that I hope will assist you in getting the most out of your tour.

First, I will be sending each of you a copy of Zondervan's Essential Atlas of the Bible. I want you to use this book as your manual to prepare for the tour. This is a fantastic book which contains different maps, diagrams and descriptions in it. Hopefully, by the time you arrive back at home, this book will be a tremendous resource for you in your personal study.



Second, I will send each of you a wall map from Satellite Bible Atlas. The detail on this map is amazing. If you have already been to Israel, you will immediately notice this. Because this map is so large, I am suggesting that you do not bring it with you. I will probably have one on the tour bus with us that we

can all reference and share. But, when you return home, I am sure that you will spend a lot of time studying the details of this wonderful map.

Hopefully, you will find these two resources as well as this book helpful in your preparation for the tour.

Our Fellow Travelers

Here is a list of the travelers in our group. I am sure that there will be people that you do not know. That is okay. In fact, that is great! By the end of the tour, we will all be best friends.

Name	Hometown
Adley, Kelley	Prosper, Texas
Beyer, Samantha	Prospect, Tennessee
Britnell, Barry & Tabatha, Samuel, Elizabeth Ann	Athens, Alabama
Carr, Becky	Madison, Alabama
Chittam, Dick	Harvest, Alabama
Dahl, Alayna	Springfield, Oregon
Fielder, Craig & Loren	Athens, Alabama
Fink, Ross & Nancy	Milton, Georgia
Haverstock, Larry	Eugene, Oregon
Hebert, James	Springfield, Oregon
Hyatt, Paula	Arab, Alabama
Kain, Wanda	Steens, Mississippi
Leighton, Leon & Debra	Cumming, Georgia
Smith, Renda	Flowery Branch, Georgia
Smith, Robert & Peggy	Roswell, Georgia
Stauss, Daniel	Seattle, Washington
Wadley, Landon & Kristina	Clovis, California
Wickerham, Bill & Cyndi	Owensboro, Kentucky
Winland, Ashley	Athens, Alabama

Before Our Tour

Biblical Things To Read About

You have already invested a lot of time and money to go on this tour. And, naturally, you want to get the most out of it. So, what do you need to invest a little time in before you go? Well, let me make a few suggestions.

1. Learn some basic geography about Israel. To accomplish this, I recommend that you read pages 10-13 of the Zondervan Bible Atlas. As we travel, you will learn a lot about the geography, but having a basic understanding of the general layout will help you get started.

2. Learn some basic geography about Jerusalem. The ancient city of Jerusalem consists of several hills (Southern Hill, Western Hill, Hill of Offense, Temple Mount and the Mount of Olives) and the three valleys (Kidron, Hinnom and Central). Knowing these basic geographical features will help you understand the city. (See page 140 and following in the Zondervan Bible Atlas for this information.)

Non-Biblical Things to Read About

There are a few non-Biblical things that I would encourage you to read about before we go. Having an in-depth knowledge of these subjects is not necessary, but they might help you understand a few things that might be said as we travel. I recommend spending a little bit of time reading some of these topics on Wikipedia or something similar.

1. The Archaeological Ages - If you study ancient history, you will hear time divided into different "ages", and in particular, the Bronze Age and the Iron Age. These signify periods of time by describing the materials used by people. In the Zondervan Bible Atlas, you will see a number of timelines in which Biblical events are placed in these ages.

2. The "empires" - Historical periods in Israel are identified by the nations who were in control of the land. For those of us who do not have a strong background in history and given the long and ever-changing control of power, this can be a daunting task. At a high

level, this land has been under the control of the Canaanites, Israelites, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Ptolemais, Seleucids, Greeks, Hasmoneans and Romans. In the Middle Ages, you find the Byzantines, Arabs, Muslims and Crusaders and Ottomans. Later periods found Great Britain and Jordan in control of the land.

3. Titus Flavius Josephus - He was born in Jerusalem from a priestly family and fought against the Romans in the First Jewish-Roman War. He is most well-known as a First Century AD Jewish historian. Much about what we know about that time period came from the writings of Josephus. We will reference Josephus a number of times during our tour, so it is good to know a little about him.

4. The "Six Day War" - In June of 1967, Israel was in a war with the countries of Egypt, Jordan and Syria. The outcome of this war shaped many of the geographic boundaries (and continued disputes) that still exist today.

Other Things That You Need To Do

1. Exercise. Anyone that is generally in good shape will have no problem on this tour. However, we will probably be doing more walking than you are accustomed to. So, I recommend that a few weeks before we go, take some time in the evening and do some walking. By the third or fourth day of the tour, you will be glad that you did.

2. Get some good, comfortable shoes and break them in before we go. You will be using those shoes a lot! Make sure that they are ready for the journey.

3. Do you have a hat? If not, you might consider buying one. For the most part, we will be outside for a week and a half. A good hat to keep you cool and protect you from sunburn is a wise investment.

In the next section, I will offer some more advice about clothing, what to pack, etc. But, these are a few things to get you started.

Attire

While we will do our best to avoid going to warm areas during the heat of the day, you should still dress in such a way that will maximize your desire to stay cool, including light-colored shirts and thin pants. Here are a couple of other comments and suggestions:

1. Pack Light - Given the weight restrictions on airline luggage and the weather while we will be gone, you need to pack light. Wear layers that you can leave on the bus when you get warm, but then slip on later in the afternoon if it gets cool.

2. Don't Draw Attention To Yourself - It will be obvious to everyone that we are a group of tourists. And, if they take a closer look, it will be obvious that we are from the United States. In general, feelings from Israeli citizens toward the United States is very friendly. However, I would try to avoid wearing clothing that is overtly American. Shirts made to look like the US Flag, jerseys with "USA" on them or even t-shirts with large American company logos or sports teams on them should be avoided. Caps with team logos are fine, but if you have a plain cap or hat, I would take that one instead.

3. Hat - We will be spending a lot of time outdoors, and for the most part, the sun will be shining brightly. I highly recommend that you bring a hat with you. This will help protect you from the sunlight as well as keep you cooler. A couple of years ago, I purchased a Tilley hat and it has served me nicely.

4. Comfortable Shoes - During the tour, we will do a moderate amount of walking as well as be on our feet a lot. It is important to have a nice pair of comfortable shoes to keep your feet from getting sore.

5. "Holy Sites" - On a couple of the days, we will be visiting places that have been deemed as "holy sites" by the caretakers of the site. When we visit these places, everyone will be required to wear apparel that covers your shoulders and your knees. We will let everyone know the day before when we will visit these sites so you can dress appropriately.

6. Worship Service - On Sunday morning, before we leave the hotel, we will have a worship service. No one is required to come. In this service, we will partake of the Lord's Supper, sing songs and listen to some brief thoughts for our consideration. This service will take place in a meeting room that will be reserved at the hotel. Attire for this service is your discretion, but typically, everyone wears what will be worn the remainder of the day. If you

desire to dress a little more formally during the service, there will be about 10 minutes of time afterwards to change.

Security

Many people may inquire about the security in Israel. (And, some of you have asked me about it.) In short, it is very safe in Israel. In many cases, it is safer in Israel than it is in your own hometown. If you don't believe me, just watch your local news tonight.

With that being said, we will be in a part of the world that has a reputation for security issues. To that end, here is a brief summary of the safeguards that are in place to make sure that we are safe.

1. The current situation is very stable right now. This allows us the ability to make this tour.
2. I selected our travel agency (Nawas International Travel) partly because of the many years of experience with tour groups in Israel. They are completely on top of the situation and would cancel a tour immediately if they felt that the situation was not safe. (I know of a situation about 10 years ago, in which they canceled a tour to Egypt due to security concerns.) In addition, Nawas has an office in Jerusalem that can be in contact with us immediately if they need to.
3. Our tour guide is a gentleman that has lived his entire life in Jerusalem. In fact, he lives in the same house he was born in. He is very experienced and has many friends not only in Israel, but also in the West Bank. He will be alerted immediately if something comes up.
4. When we travel through the West Bank area, we will primarily stay on roads that are controlled by Israeli personnel. (You may be asking yourself "why are Israeli personnel controlling roads in the West Bank?" That is a good question, but has a very complicated answer. We will try to explain all of that when we are over there.)

With those safe guards in place, I can confidently say that we are in very little danger while traveling over there. Once you have been there, you will understand the situation as well. Invariably, during my tours, every single traveler usually comes up to me at some point on the tour and mentions that traveling in Israel is much safer than traveling in many places in the United States.

The only real security concern has to do with pick-pockets. If you ever travel in Europe, there is a real problem with this there. That is not really the case in Israel, but when we are in really crowded areas (such as the Old City in Jerusalem), you need to be aware of the possibility of pick-pockets. Interestingly enough, they are not really interested in the $500 camera that is hanging around your neck. They are more interested in the $40 that you have in your pocket. I have never been in a group that has had any problem with this, and I would like to keep it that way. I'll probably remind everyone before we go in to keep an watchful eye out.

Currency

The Israeli denomination of currency is called the New Israeli Shekel (NIS). At the time of this writing, one NIS is worth about 26 US cents. I am sure that will fluctuate some between now and the time we travel.

One of the most common questions travelers have usually surround the need for exchanging US Dollars (USD) for NIS before the tour. This generally is not needed. Most places over there will accept USD. However, by using USD, you may not get the best exchange rate on your purchases. For instance, if you go into a store and purchase a soft drink that is priced at 3 NIS, instead of doing the calculations, the store clerk will probably just charge you one USD. If you don't have one dollar and you pay with a five dollar bill, they will give you your change in NIS.

There are ATM machines throughout Israel and this might be a good way for you to replenish cash. You can usually inquire at the hotel or with our tour guide on the best place to find an ATM. Most major credit cards are also widely accepted across the country.

Credit Cards

You will find that all major credit cards are accepted at most shops in Israel. If there is a question, our guide will help us. However, if you want to use your credit card for a cash

withdrawal, make sure that you have all of the information with you, including a PIN (if applicable).

Also, it is best to call your bank and inform them of your intention to travel overseas. This is very easy to do and can possibly be done via a touch-tone menu. If you don't inform them, there is a chance that they may block your card once they begin seeing unusual foreign purchases on it.

Weather

The question about weather is a good one. In fact, it is one of the things that we will learn about while we are on the tour. In short, the country of Israel has two seasons, the rainy season and the dry season. The rainy season starts with the early rains in late September and October and finishes with the late rains in March and April. (Note: This phenomenon is mentioned a number of times in the Bible. For an example, read Deuteronomy 11:13-15.) Between April and October, the city of Jerusalem gets no rain. So, the chance of us seeing any rain during our entire tour is very near zero. If you are considering bringing a poncho or rain-jacket, make sure it is very lightweight as you will probably not use it at all.

During the summer months, the temperature in the land can get really warm, especially if you are down in the area of the Negev. Luckily, we won't be down in that area much. During our tour, the average temperatures in Tiberias are highs around 32C and lows around 19C. In Jerusalem, the highs are around 25C and lows around 16C. (Don't understand the Metric System? That's okay. I've devoted a section in this book to help you become acquainted with it.) We will do our best to visit the areas in the Rift Valley (Sea of Galilee, Jericho, Masada, etc) during the cooler parts of the day.

Metric System

If you have never traveled internationally, you may not have much experience with the metric system. The truth is, everyone in the world *except* the United States uses the metric system almost exclusively. So, you need not be shocked when you are suddenly dropped into the metric world. You will see distances in kilometers, temperatures using the Celsius scale and volumes using liters.

The following is a basic comparison of temperatures between the Fahrenheit and Celsius scale:

Celsius Temperature Scale	Fahrenheit Temperature Scale
0	32
5	41
10	50
15	59
20	68
25	77
30	86
35	95
40	104

Immunizations

Travel to Israel does not require any immunizations. But, depending on your medical history, you might ask your physician if there is anything you need to be concerned about.

Things to Pack

By no means is this an exhaustive list, but here are a few things that you need to think about while you are packing.

1. Passport - This is obvious, but you need to take your passport. While we travel, your passport will be the most important item that you will have with you. During the day, you have a couple of options. You can either keep your passport with you, or you can lock it up in a safe in your hotel room. I tend to keep my passport with me at all times, but that is a personal decision for you.

2. Camera - You will probably want to bring a camera with you. With regards to your camera, let me offer a couple of suggestions:

    1. Know how to use it. You would hate to get over there and then realize that you don't know how to use your camera.

    2. Carry extra batteries with you. We may not have the opportunity to buy extra batteries while we are over there. And, if your camera uses specialized batteries, they may be difficult to find.

    3. Carry extra memory cards with you. Like the batteries, you will want to have extra memory cards in your possession. You want to be able to quickly take a full memory card out and put an empty one in during the middle of the day.

    4. Have a plan for dealing with all of your pictures every night. Are you going to keep the pictures on the memory cards until you return home? Are you going to upload them to a laptop every night? Whatever way you choose to handle your pictures, know what you are doing before you get over there.

3. Bible - We will not use a Bible continually during the day (mostly because all of you already know many of these stories), but you might want to have it handy so that you can reread a passage in the evening as you learn more about the geography. I would

recommend a very light-weight, easy-to-carry Bible or an electronic version on your mobile device.

4. Day pack - This is an optional choice for you. During the day, you will probably have the following items with you: camera, water bottle, extra batteries, memory cards, passport, hat, sun block and personal items. Therefore, you might want to consider using a small bag or day pack to help you carry everything. During the day, while we are away from the bus, you are welcome to leave anything on the bus. It will either be locked up or occupied by the driver at all times.

5. Sun block - We are going to be spending a lot of time outdoors. If you are sensitive to the sun, I recommend bringing some sun block with you.

6. Sunglasses - It will be sunny there. You might be glad that you have a pair with you.

7. Small ziplock bags - As we travel, you may pick up some rocks, pottery, etc and before too long, all of these may begin to look similar or you may forget where you picked it up. I recommend bringing some small ziplock bags with 3x5 cards in them. This will allow you to pick up a rock, write a short note on a 3x5 card and stick them both in the ziplock bag. When you get home, you'll be thankful that you did.

Packing For The Flight

With our international flight, you will be allowed one checked piece of luggage and a carry on bag. Obviously, we hope that everyone's luggage makes it to Tel Aviv. However, nearly every time that I have been to Israel with a group, there has been at least one person whose luggage does not make it. With that in mind, here are some recommendations on items that you should pack in your carry on luggage:

1. Passport - Always keep your passport with you. (Have I mentioned that yet?)

2. Snacks - I always like to have a couple packs of crackers with me.

3. Clothes - Perhaps a change of clothes (shirt, underwear, socks, etc).

4. Medicines - Always keep your medicines with you and make sure prescriptions are in their original container.

5. Toiletries - Small, travel size portions of toiletries. (Remember, airline regulations state that these must be under three ounces.)

If your luggage does not make it to Tel Aviv, don't panic. We will arrange for your luggage to catch up with us as soon as possible (probably when we are in Tiberias).

If you are traveling with a spouse, friend or other family member, then I would recommend that you divide your clothes and put some of your clothes in each other's checked bags. This will minimize your risk in the event that one bag makes it and the other does not. Once all of your bags get to Israel, then you can rearrange your clothes to get them in the correct piece of luggage for the duration of the tour.

Important Paperwork

You are about to be a long way from home. And, you will have a lot of important items with you (passport, drivers license, credit cards, etc). The last thing that you want to do is to lose any piece of information. However, if you do, you need to have a plan in place to quickly recover those items.

Ask yourself, "If I go over there and lose my credit card, what would I do?" Then, come up with a plan.

I usually make two copies of everything that I take over there. (For credit cards, insurance cards, etc, be sure to copy the front and the back.) One copy, I keep hidden in my backpack at all times. The second copy, I keep with a friend or family member back at home. These copies will come in handy if you get into a situation when you lose one of these items.

This is how I handle this situation. But, you might have a better idea of how to handle it yourself. Do whatever you are comfortable doing, but give it some thought before the tour begins.

During Our Tour

Airline Travel

If you have never flown internationally before, this could be one of the more intimidating parts of the tour. How can I sit in one place for eleven hours? What will I do for that long? Will I be able to sleep? These are just some of the many questions that you are asking. Do not worry. I asked the same questions to myself many times before I flew internationally for the first time. After doing so, I realized that it was much better than I had envisioned in my mind. And now, I actually enjoy it. But, it is nice if you know some things about it before we take off. I'll do this by answering some common questions.

1. Why are we flying into Tel Aviv instead of Jerusalem? Basically, it is because Jerusalem does not have an airport. At least, it doesn't have an airport that handles large passenger jets. Israel's only major international airport is Ben Gurion International Airport located just outside of Tel Aviv. However, the airport is only a 45 minute drive from Jerusalem. One of the items that you will quickly learn is how small the country of Israel is. This is a very good example of that.

2. When do we need to arrive in New York City? For security reasons, you need to arrive in New York City no later than three hours prior to takeoff. This will give you plenty of time to walk around, get something to eat and then board the aircraft. We will begin the boarding process about an hour before takeoff, and you will probably have to go through security again. If this is the case, do not purchase a soft drink or bottle of water in New York and try to carry on the plane. It will probably be confiscated as we board our flight. There will be plenty of things to drink once we are in flight.

3. What will the flight be like? Expect a full flight, so it will be crowded. About an hour or so after takeoff, they typically serve us dinner, even if it is in the middle of the night. (They want to help get us acclimated to our new time zone as quickly as possible.) Afterwards, they will probably ask everyone to close all of the window shades and then turn down the lights. This will allow us to get some sleep. During the night, there are usually snacks (drinks, sandwiches, crackers, fruit, etc) set out in the galleys for you to eat if you get hungry. It is advisable to drink as much water as you can. This will help avoid dehydration on the long flight as well as helping you acclimate to the time change. With about three hours remaining in the flight, they will probably serve us breakfast.

4. What is there to do on the flight? As much as possible, you should try to get some sleep. But, there are other things to do. Although we won't know until we board the aircraft, most flights now have individual video screens which contain hundreds of movies, television shows, music and games. Often, flights also have internet access, but it will come with a fee.

5. Can I get up and walk around? Yes! In fact, I highly recommend it. It is not good to sit in one place for eleven hours straight. I highly encourage you to walk around the plane. On these international flights, there are usually three sections of seats and two aisles. In addition, there are a couple of cross walks in the plane where the galleys are located. I like to get up a few times and make a few laps by walking down an aisle, cross through a galley, back up an aisle and then cross again through another galley. Just be careful not to bump people as many will be sleeping. And, don't let the fact that there are 4 or 5 people waiting for the restroom keep you in your seat. Standing up for 10 minutes or so waiting for the restroom is good exercise as well.

6. When will we begin to get our first "taste" of Israel? Very soon after we board. Many of the passengers will be Israeli citizens, so all instructions from the crew will be in both English and Hebrew. Also, when they come around for the meals, they will probably ask you if you

want a kosher or non-kosher meal. Finally, as we make our way into the next day, you may wake up to find a number of Jewish people standing in the aisles going through their morning prayers. Be respectful of them, as you would want them to be to you as you pray.

7. Is there anything else that I need to know about the flight? Yes. Israeli aviation law states that no passenger is allowed to be out of their seat during the final 60 minutes of an inbound flight. Therefore, with about two hours to go, you will begin to hear announcements about this. Obviously, when this occurs, the lines around the restrooms can get rather long. Be conscious of this as you might want to beat the crowd. As soon as we deplane, we will stop at some restrooms that are located immediately outside the gate area.

8. How long do I have to stay awake after we arrive? Luckily, not very long. If you have ever flown to Europe, you know that you typically land in the morning, and you have to try to stay up all day before going to bed. Flying to the Middle East is different. We will probably leave New York in the middle of the night and land in Tel Aviv in late afternoon. By the time we go through customs, collect our bags and drive to our hotel, it will be time for dinner and then we are off to bed. This will allow you to get a good night's sleep before we hit the road the next morning.

Arriving in Tel Aviv

Once we arrive in Israel, we will have a series of steps to go through before we board the bus.

1. Gate Area. From the gate area (and the aforementioned restrooms), we will walk down a couple of long corridors to the main terminal building.

2. Passport Control. When we arrive at Passport Control, there will be a number of booths with passengers lined up to go through. Everyone should divide up into families into the various lines so that we can get through as quickly as possible. When it is your turn, go up to the booth with your entire party (you and your spouse or you and your kids) and

present your passports. The officer will ask you a few questions about your visit to Israel. What will you be doing in Israel? (Sightseeing with a tour group.) How long are you staying? (Ten days.) Where will you be going? (One night in Netanya, three nights in Tiberias, five nights in Jerusalem.) What will you be doing while you are here? (Visiting tourist sites.) Once the officer is satisfied with your answers, they will hand you a piece of paper. This piece of paper is your entrance permission to the country. (Israel no longer stamps passports.) Therefore, I keep this piece of paper in my passport the entire time I am in the country. You will then proceed around the booth toward Baggage Claim. NOTE: The last time I was in Israel, Ben Gurion Airport was in the process of installing the kiosks for biometric passports (sometimes called e-Passports). If these are in place, and if you have a biometric passport, this might be an easier (and quicker) option.

3. Baggage Claim. As you enter baggage claim, you will use the entrance permission slip you just received to pass through a gate. Once you have passed through the gate, you can proceed to the correct baggage claim carousel, where (hopefully) all of our luggage will soon come out. If you desire a baggage cart, then please get one. Unless they have changed their policy, they are free of charge to use.

4. Greeters' Hall. Once we have all of our luggage, we will proceed to Greeters' Hall, which is where our guide will be waiting for us.

5. Bus. Finally…we'll make it out to our bus where our bags will be loaded and then our adventure begins!

Our Tour Coach

I have been informed that we will be on a 52 seat tour coach. So, with the size of our group, this will be nice in that we will have plenty of room to move around.

There are no reserved seats on the bus. So, I encourage you to move around and sit in different places every day. However, please do not sit in the first row on both sides of the bus. These need to be reserved for myself and the tour guide. This will allow us to communicate with each other and access the public address system. (Typically, due to the bus door and the window configuration, the front rows are the worst rows for sightseeing anyway.)

Our bus will not have a restroom on board. However, this should not be a problem because there will be ample opportunities when we stop and we will rarely be on the bus more than 30 minutes at a time.

Arrival at a Hotel

The hotels where we will be staying are used to having tour groups in their facility. So, they have a fairly efficient system for handling us and our luggage.

When we arrive at a hotel for the first time, we will all gather in the hotel lobby. While we are assembling, our luggage will be unloaded from the bus and brought inside. Each of us will receive an envelope with the keys to our room and two hotel stickers with the room number written on them. You will need to take these stickers and place them on your bags. Once all of the luggage is tagged, the porters will take them up to our rooms.

Leaving a Hotel

On a typical morning, the wake up call will come at 6:00am, breakfast will be served at 7:00am and we will board the bus and leave at 8:00am. On the mornings in which we leave a hotel for the final time, you will be asked to leave your packed suitcase outside your room at 7:00am when you come down for breakfast. While we are eating, all of the luggage will be brought to the lobby and placed outside the bus. When you arrive at the bus to board, you will need to positively identify your specific bag. Only at that point will it be loaded onto the bus.

Also, if you have accumulated any specific fees during your stay (Internet access, laundry, etc), please make sure these charges are taking care of before you board the bus.

Food

As mentioned in the tour brochure, all of our breakfasts and dinners will take place in our hotels and are covered by the cost of the tour. Lunches will be paid by you at that time.

While many of the dishes may have Israeli flavorings, these hotels cater to western tourists, so you should not have any problem finding items that you enjoy.

Our breakfasts will be ready at 7:00am and is served buffet style. There will be a variety of breakfast items including eggs, breads, fruits and pastries. There may also be some meats (remember, there is no pork in Israel, so there is no sausage, ham or bacon). Drinks will include water, milk, coffee and juices.

Our dinners will be served shortly after we arrive back at the hotel and, like breakfast, will be served buffet style. Among your choices will be salads, breads, meats (chicken, fish, beef and lamb), vegetables, fruits and desserts. Primarily, the drinks that they will serve to you will be water. (I'll have a comment about soft drinks in just a moment.)

Lunches will be eaten at a variety of places depending on where we are touring. We will try to stop at restaurants that have a variety of options, so everyone will find something suitable. Our mid-day meal will be your best opportunity to try some authentic Israeli dishes, and I encourage you to give them a try. You will probably find that you really like them. For the most part, our lunches will be $10-$12 per person. However, while we are in Galilee, we will try to eat at a restaurant that serves "St. Peter's Fish" (they also have other items). This meal is usually a little more expensive and will cost around $25 per person.

As good as the food is in Israel, I encourage you to carry some snacks with you. We will probably be eating on a schedule that is different than what you are accustomed to. You will be thankful to have some snacks with you to hold you over until our next meal. As you will probably have to put these in your checked luggage, I recommend selecting snacks that can survive the tour. Items such as peanut butter crackers, granola bars, dried fruit, Hershey's miniatures, raisins, all work well. All of these can be packed in large Ziploc bags in your checked luggage.

I will try my best to schedule our days so that we can eat lunch around noon each day. However, there are a couple of days (due to the route that we will be taking), that we will not eat lunch until a little later. These are the days in which it is nice to have some snacks with you.

Soft drinks are popular in Israel, but not as popular as they are in the United States. Most restaurants that we stop at for lunch will offer soft drinks because they want to cater to the tourists, but they are not readily available for dinner at the hotel. You can ask for one, but it is important to know two things:

1. They will probably be expensive. Expect to pay at least two US Dollars for a can of Coca-Cola in the hotel.
2. They may not be served cold. And, if you request ice, it will probably only be a couple of ice cubes in your glass. This is very typical of the way that soft drinks are served in the Middle East.

Water

It is very important to keep hydrated while we are on the tour. To that end, at every stop you will probably hear our guide say, "okay, everyone grab your hat, your camera and a bottle of water."

Typically, the tour buses over there have a small cooler in the front that the bus driver keep stocked with cool bottles of water. These are available for purchase for a nominal price. Unfortunately, we won't know if we have this until we arrive in Israel. Regardless, you need to be prepared to have water with you all of the time.

Often, people will ask about Americans' ability to drink the water in Israel. In short, the water in Israel is perfectly safe to drink. The methods of water purification that they use are very similar to what we are accustomed to. Therefore, Americans only rarely have any problems drinking the water. No one on any of my tours have ever had a problem. With that being said, I always encourage everyone to drink bottled water as much as possible.

Laundry

Unfortunately, due to our schedule, we will not have time for you to do any laundry while we are on the tour. So, you have three options:

1. You can pack enough clothes to last the entire tour. This is possible, but difficult given the length of the tour and the luggage weight restrictions on the airline.
2. When we get to Jerusalem, it should be possible to send your clothes out to be laundered by the hotel. This option is fairly expensive, but this is something to consider.
3. You can hand-launder some clothes while we travel. This is an option that I have done before and it works well. I carry a small package of liquid laundry detergent with me, wash

out some items in the sink and/or bathtub and then allow them to hang dry during the day. Typically, I try to carry enough clothes to get me to Jerusalem. Then, I wash some clothes out and then wear them again during the remainder of the tour. If you select this option, keep that in mind as you select your clothing. Thin polyester/cotton pants drying out very quickly. Blue jeans may take a couple of days to hang dry.

Here is one other idea: carry a piece of string with you. A string can be used as a clothes line in a pinch. It is small, light and can be easily packed. You may be happy that you have it.

Cellular Phones

Similar to here in the United States, cellular phone signals in Israel are pretty good in the populated areas and sporadic away from cities. If you desire, you can take your cell phone with you and use it. Just check with your service provider about availability and costs.

Internet Access

Israel is one of the most technological advanced countries in the world. All of the hotels that we will stay in should have wireless internet access for free or a nominal fee. I will have more information about this when we get closer to our travel date.

Electricity

The electric current in Israel is 220-volt AC, single phase, 50 cycles which requires special adapter plugs with round prongs. The adapter is the uniquely Israeli Type H or the European grounded Type C. If you take electric devices that are suitable for both 110 and 220 volts, you will need an adapter. If your appliance only worked with 110 volts, then you will need a converter. Don't assume that your appliance will work unless it clearly indicates that it will run on 220 volt. These adapters and converters are

generally available at Wal-Mart, Target, Radio Shack or online. You cannot plug a US electrical appliance into an Israeli outlet without an adapter.

Medications

For the most part, you should always keep your medications with you, including in your carry on bag for our flight. Prescription medication should be kept in their original container. And, it is a good idea to have a nice variety of over-the-counter medication to help with any ailments that may arise.

Souvenirs

Of course, while we are over there, you will probably want to shop for souvenirs. Due to our schedule, we won't have a tremendous amount of time for shopping, but we will do our best to allow for some of that as we travel.

Being in a different country offers advantages and disadvantages to US citizens as far as shopping is concerned. It might be possible to find some real bargains over there. However, you need to be mindful of the fact that there are many people whose intentions are not admirable.

So, how can you tell the difference? Well, always remember the old phrase "let the buyer beware". But, we also have some assistance with us in the form of our guide. One of the duties of our guide is to assist us with things like this. He can help with a wide variety of tasks, and don't be intimidated to ask him. Remember, we have actually hired him to help us with situations like this.

For instance (and this is a purely hypothetical example), let's say that you walked into a store to purchase a Magnum Ice Cream bar and all of the writing on the wrappers is in Hebrew and you don't know if you have picked up a chocolate filled or almond bark flavor. Often, the store owner will help you. But, if you are still a little confused, feel free to have our guide assist you.

But, the situation may arise in which you are wanting to buy a very expensive item and you question the authenticity of it. This is a perfect situation in which to contact our guide. He will tell you if the store owner is to be trusted or not.

Typically, our guide will only take us to places that he is familiar with. In fact, it is probable that our guide is getting a "kick back" from the store owner for bringing a group of people to the store. I don't consider this a negative thing. Our guide has spent years establishing relationships with people all across the country. Simply put, the guide wants all of you to be happy (think "tips"). In addition, he knows that I will be making repeated tours to Israel and he will want to be my guide again. So, he is not going to do anything to us to jeopardize that.

With that being said, the man who will be our guide is a man that I have known for a couple of years. He is a good man and one that each of you will come to enjoy and trust as you select souvenirs.

Many items that will be purchased in Israel can be purchased "duty free". I recommend that you look at the US Customs website (http://www.cbp.gov/travel/international-visitors/kbyg/customs-duty-info) to understand the policies regarding this.

Helpful Tips

Here are a few helpful tips to help you and everyone else enjoy this tour.

1. People Pictures - In addition to your regular pictures that you take, be sure to take "people pictures". Having people in your pictures allows for some perspective when you show them to friends back home. Also, make sure that you have pictures made with you in the picture. Ask me or another tour member to take your picture. I'm sure that we will be glad to do so.

2. Know Everyone - Try to get to know everyone on the tour. We are going to be in a bus together for about a week and a half. The better friends we are, the better the tour will be. By traveling together, you will create a special bond between them. When we eat together, try sitting next to everyone at least once during the tour.

3. Soak It In - There are literally thousands of things to see in Israel,

and we will only see a small portion of them. But with the hustle of the tour, don't let yourself get wrapped up in only taking pictures in a rush to see the next thing. Take a moment and soak it in.

4. Be a Christian - We are going to be busy and see a lot of things. We will get tired. And, when we get tired, we might want to complain or whine. Don't be a complainer. Be an encourager. Be polite. Help others when you see they need assistance. Let others go before you. Hold the door open for others. Let's let unexpected events be an opportunity to do good.

5. Keep Up With The Group - At one point in history, the sun stood still over Gibeon. But, it doesn't now. We have a limited amount of time and a lot to see. Let's take the time to absorb the moment, but let's not straggle.

6. Drink Water - This can not be overemphasized. You will be glad that you did.

7. Listen - When someone is speaking, please listen. Not only is it the courteous thing to do, you will probably miss something important if you are not listening.

8. Ask Questions - Between myself and the tour guide, we will try to explain everything that you are seeing as clearly as possible. But, I'm sure that we will not do a perfect job every time. ASK! I am sure that someone else in the group will have the same question and will be glad that you asked.

9. Take Notes - It is impossible for you to remember everything. So, figure out a way to take some notes. I've seen this done a dozen different ways. I've seen people with spiral notebook writing down everything that is said. I've seen people digitally record everything. I've seen people make hours of video so that they can capture what is being said. Honestly, this tour is like drinking water from a fire hose. So much will be thrown at you, it will be impossible to absorb it all. However, you should still try to capture as much as you can while we are there. Perhaps you take just small notes during the day, then when you are back at the hotel, write longer notes in a journal.

After Our Tour

Welcome Home

You are finally home after your tour. You have bills to pay, the grass needs to be mowed and your email inbox is completely full. What can you do so that all of this knowledge doesn't slip away? Here are some ideas:

1. Look over your notes and add in all of the little things that you can. Think of it this way: if you were to pick up your notes in three years and look over them, would they make sense? If not, then make them clearer now.
2. Label your pictures as quickly as you can. We are going to go a lot of places and you will have many pictures that will look similar. Try to label them quickly. If you have a question about picture, send it to me with the approximate date/time it was taken. I'll try to help you figure out what you have taken a picture of.
3. Look again at the wall map that I have given you. Do some of the smaller features on the map jump out at you now? They should. I'm sure that if you look at that map long enough, you will notice hundreds of things on it that you didn't see before the tour.
4. Try to stay connected with the people on the tour. As has already been mentioned, all of you have had a unique experience together. Connect via Facebook or exchange email addresses.
5. Show off your pictures! If you have a brave friend who has asked you to see your pictures, take them up on their offer. Don't show them all 3,400 pictures that you have taken, but select a number of your favorites and show them off. Try to tie each picture to a Bible story so that they will understand better as well.
6. Encourage others to go on a tour of Israel. As you will learn, it is a wonderful experience. Don't you want others to enjoy it as well?
7. Thank God for allowing you to go. He has provided everything to us, including the ability to travel. He deserves to be thanked.
8. Thanks others for allowing you to go. Maybe someone drove you to the airport. Or perhaps someone mowed your yard, or checked your mail, or took care of your pet.

Rarely is a tour to Israel a single-person effort. Be sure to thank them for helping you to go.

9. Consider going back to Israel again. It is impossible to soak up everything on a single tour. Perhaps going back to Israel is something that you can plan to do.
10. Teach others about the Bible. Use your experiences to help others learn about God.