



## **STS ISRAEL INITIATIVE STUDY TRIP – IMPORTANT TRAVEL INFORMATION**

Proper planning before departure will contribute to the educational benefit and personal enjoyment that one will gain from the trip. Please do not wait until the last week to prepare! The following guidelines should help in your preparation.

### **PRE-TRIP PLANNING:**

#### **Passports**

You must have a valid passport to travel to Israel. Passport applications are available at local government offices and most area post offices. Please refer to the internet for the nearest passport authority in your area. It often takes months for issuance of a passport, so plan ahead and apply early. Passports are valid for ten years from date of issue (five years for applicants under eighteen).

If you have a passport already, make sure that it is **valid for six months after your stay in Israel ends**.

Be sure that you have your passport and airline ticket on your person before you leave home for the airport. It is wise to make two photocopies of your passport in case – perish the reprehensible thought – you misplace your passport during the trip. Put one copy in your luggage and the other in your backpack. If you are a foreign resident residing legally in the United States, you will be required to travel with your Alien Registration Card in addition to a valid passport from your native country for departure and re-entry into the United States.

#### **Visas and Immunizations**

A pre-arranged visa is not required of United States citizens traveling to Israel. Travelers with Arab country stamps in their passport can expect to receive many questions at passport control security checks, both entering and leaving the country.

There are no immunization requirements for entry into the State of Israel. However, travelers are advised to check status of immunizations and update any needed boosters before departure.

#### **International Student ID Card**

While not required for the Israel Initiative Study Trip, the International Student Identification Card (ISIC) is a valuable card for college or graduate students traveling abroad. Student participants should investigate the value of purchasing the card, which costs approximately \$25. Holders of the card automatically are covered with travel and health insurance and often receive significant student discounts in their travels. Go to [www.myisic.com](http://www.myisic.com) for information or to purchase a card.

#### **International Travel**

The flight to Israel from America is long (flight time of 12-16 hours, not counting time in airports, etc.), and can be uncomfortable. To make the flight as comfortable as possible, the following may be helpful:

- Wear comfortable, loose fitting clothes.
- Carry toiletries in your carry-on backpack. Being able to shave, brush teeth, etc. can be a refreshment.
- Take advantage of stops by getting out and walking around but do not lose track of the local time. You don't want to miss your connecting flight.

- **IMPORTANT:** When you arrive in Israel you will experience jet lag, since Israel is 7-11 hours ahead of USA time. There is a general adrenaline rush that hits most first-timers for the first few days, so you may not realize how tired you actually are. Our concern is that you might get sick, as your body will be run down from international travel, changes in diet, and jet lag. You will probably be wide-awake at 4:00am for the first few days. Try to go to bed at a reasonable hour according to Israel time. Do not stay out all night and expect to be alert and ready to go in the morning.
- Bring some snacks for between meals. Contact the airline forty-eight hours in advance of departure if you have special dietary needs.
- Bring some disposable reading material for the flight.
- Some veterans of international flight recommend sleeping aids (such as Nytol), but we would advise against this unless you know how you respond to such medication. Neck pillows, earplugs, and eye covers are common among veteran travelers.
- If at all possible, don't plan on going back to work the day after you arrive home. You will feel jet lag once again upon return to the USA.
- If you wear contact lenses, avoid wearing them while airborne. Some people have noticed their lenses dry out in flight.

### **Insurance:**

- **Accident / Health:** It is recommended that travelers consider purchasing accident/health insurance for the trip. If your health insurance does not adequately cover you when abroad, consider short-term policies that cover the time you in Israel; they are quite affordable and they do provide thorough and accessible coverage. An American company which provides policies primarily for Christian workers is MissionaryHeath.net. Allow at least two weeks for obtaining this insurance. A fine Israeli provider is Chacoty Sasson General & Life Insurance Agency, [www.chacoty.co.il](http://www.chacoty.co.il). Click the American flag for English, then Options, then Insurance for Tourists; download, print and complete the application form and submit it by fax. Allow at least two weeks to accomplish this.
- **Travel Insurance:** it is strongly recommended that you purchase Trip Cancellation Insurance. A close friend of mine who offers this is Craig Dunning at <https://discipleshiptravel.com>; find the banner entitled "Need Travel Insurance" (right side of page), click and follow the prompts.  
Note: do not insure the land-cost, as that will be refunded to you if you are unable to go for any reason. You are wise to insure the cost of air passage, as the airlines are reluctant to refund that cost.

### **ARRIVAL PROTOCOL:**

#### Optional Early Arrival (i.e., before Sunday, April 11):

If you would like to have a day to recoup after the long flight, you are welcome to arrive a day (or more, for that matter) early. The Gilgal Hotel will be alerted that some travelers may choose to arrive before the rest of the group, but you must make those arrangements yourself. The price of a regular room for *Sunday night* (the first night of our tour) is built into the cost of the trip; if you choose to arrive early, you will need to cover the charge for any additional night(s). Also, meals, transportation and other expenses for the days prior to Sunday, *as well as dinner on Sunday evening*, is your responsibility.

#### Mandatory Arrival by Sunday, Apr. 11:

The group will gather at the Gilgal Hotel on Sunday, Apr. 11, at 7:00pm. Arrival in Israel on Sunday will mean departing the USA on Saturday, Apr. 10. Select any carrier you like, but be careful to *schedule your arrival in Israel sometime on Sunday, Apr. 11*. The earlier you arrive, the more time you will have to gather yourself before we start out as a group early on Monday morning.

If you arrive in the morning on Sunday, you would likely have time to visit Independence Hall, and then Joppa, before the initial meeting at the Gilgal on Sunday evening. The Gilgal Hotel is on the Mediterranean, about a 5-minute walk from a very nice beach, and about 30 minutes from Joppa/Jaffa/Yafo (house of Simon the Tanner,

etc.). Independence Hall, where David Ben Gurion announced the birth of the state of Israel in 1948, is a 20-minute walk away and well worth a visit.

The contact information for the Hotel is as follows:

Address: Nes-Ziona St. Tel Aviv 63904

Website: <http://www.hotelgilgal.net/>

E-Mail: [reception@hagilgal.com](mailto:reception@hagilgal.com)

Phone: +972 3 5111000

Fax: +972 3 5167291

Note: Mention that you are with the Shepherds Seminary Study trip, led by Doug Bookman.

### Airport to Hotel Transportation:

The cost of transportation from the airport to the Gilgal Hotel is not covered in the cost of the trip, so you will have to pay for this yourself. The trip has been arranged in this way in order to provide maximum flexibility for the traveler, and to keep travel cost at a minimum.

There are two ways to reach the Gilgal hotel: taxi and pre-arranged shuttle service. Either is direct and will be no difficulty at all.

- Taxi:  
To secure an *individual taxi*, after passing customs and picking up your luggage, proceed through the Greeters Hall and exit at Gate #3; find the dispatcher's station and ask for a taxi to the Gilgal Hotel. (Have the address and phone number available, as the Gilgal is not a major hotel.)  
NOTE: Taxi drivers in Israel are required by law to use the meter on all trips. Unless you know the accepted rates, do not be tempted to set a price beforehand. For long trips, the driver must charge passengers according to the Ministry of Transport price list posted in all taxis. Further, a 25% surcharge for night trips is in effect from 9:01pm – 5:29am (from 4pm on Fridays & holiday eves). Trips out of Ben Gurion Airport are charged an additional NIS 5.00, and passengers pay approximately NIS 3.00 for each suitcase.
- Shuttle Service:  
There are pre-arranged shuttle services available. One such service is Airport Shuttle ([www.israel.airport-shuttle.com](http://www.israel.airport-shuttle.com)). This is a pre-paid service - you will be asked to pre-pay by credit card, a voucher will be sent you via e-mail, and the driver will be waiting for you in the reception hall at Ben-Gurion Airport with an appropriate sign.

### PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS

This study-trip will be more physically demanding than most trips to Israel, both in terms of daily schedule and physical exertion. Our days will begin early and involve several hours of study and hiking. It is important that each traveler be capable of walking 6-8 miles a day, often up and down steep, long stairs and rugged hills, and very possibly in rainy weather. These physical difficulties are further complicated by the fact that North Americans arriving to Israel experience a change in time zones (lack of sleep, jet lag) and dietary conditions.

There will usually be provision made for travelers to opt out of a given walk, which means waiting with the bus for the group to return. Nonetheless, if you are at all apprehensive about strenuous physical exertion, this is probably not be the best trip for you. There are many good tours to Israel available that are less physically demanding than this one will be. On the other hand, we will do what we can to make the trip work for you, if you are willing to accept this caveat concerning the rigor of the trip.

## **PACKING (See also Suggested Packing List)**

- What to Wear:
  - Weather Appropriate: Late spring can be **cold and rainy**. Many people don't realize how **cold, windy and wet** it can be in Israel in the spring. Bring clothing that you can put on or take off in layers. Clothing should include long sleeve shirts, sweatshirt(s), heavier jacket (rain-proof if possible), thermal underwear, winter hat, and good warm shoes. Expect rain. A disposable rain poncho with hood (or similar outer rain gear) can be handy; an umbrella is not much help and is intrusive at many places. Most buildings are not heated to the levels to which Americans are accustomed.
  - Informal – There isn't any time in Israel that you will need formal or dressy attire.
  - Modest – The Middle Eastern cultures generally dress much more modestly than Western cultures. Muslims and Orthodox Jews have very stringent standards of modesty, which they will enforce or comment upon. A woman dressed immodestly (by their standards) is likely to be publicly rebuked by total strangers. Extremely tight or short shorts should not be worn at all. Modest shorts (such as Bermuda-type walking shorts) are appropriate on field trips and some part of our Jerusalem walking tours. Tank tops, halter tops or anything that exposes the shoulder should not be worn. Note: Modest dress (which means shoulders, midriff and legs covered) will be required at certain sites (especially Catholic churches and sites). For swimming in the Dead Sea, women should bring a modest bathing suit (i.e. one-piece).
  - Shoes – Bring a good pair of walking shoes. Rockports or cross-trainer type athletic shoes are ideal. Thongs are not acceptable footwear. You should be comfortable in your footwear and shoes must be broken in before leaving for Israel. If you like boots, ultra-light hiking boots are acceptable. Avoid heavy hiking boots and forget cowboy boots. An old pair of sneakers or sandals that can be left behind will be necessary for the wet wade through Hezekiah's tunnel or a swim in the Dead Sea. "Rubbers" (e.g. Totes) that can be worn over sneakers will help if we encounter snow and slush.
  
- What to Bring:
  - See Suggested Packing List
  
- What NOT to Bring:
  - Anything that you don't absolutely need!
  - Clothes that are difficult to care for, easily ruined, require dry cleaning, are immodest or dressy
  - Quarters for laundry; don't bring American coins – no one will accept them.
  - Expensive jewelry. Wedding bands are OK
  - Clothespins, hangars, sheets or blankets
  - Too much stuff! It's nice to have room in your luggage to bring back souvenirs.

## OTHER CONCERNS

### Electronic Equipment – Computers, Tablets, Smart Phones, et al.

#### *Making Calls from Israel*

Telephone and fax numbers of the hotels where you will be staying will be provided before your departure from the USA. Family and friends calling Israel should be aware of the 7-9 hour time differential. To call the USA from Israel one can: 1) use a USA long distance calling card, which must be obtained before leaving the USA (ATT, MCI, Sprint, etc.); 2) dial direct from hotels (expensive); 3) purchase an international plan from your provider, carry your cell phone with you; 4) contact Talk'NSave, a company which has various reasonable plans for renting either a phone or a local SIM card for your (unlocked) cell phone - <https://www.talknsave.us/Bundle1.aspx?linkid=13762> - all of which include unlimited calling to anywhere in Israel or the USA for a basic daily cost (see below).

The leaders of the trip will be traveling with a phone service that allows toll-free calls to the United States, and which receive calls from the States. Travelers will be welcome to use those phones to make or receive calls. Bookman's phone can be reached from the US by dialing 973.685.5625; travelers may alert family and friends that they are welcome to use that number at any time (taking into account the time difference when appropriate); voice-mail is not easy to access on that system, so they would be well-advised to call again after a bit if the phone is not answered the first time. You will be notified of additional numbers as well.

A specific note concerning cell phone access in Israel. There are plans which can be purchased for your phone which afford you international access, and the coverage is very good throughout Israel. More specifically, I have contacted a company which provides cellphones to travelers to Israel at what seems to me to be very reasonable prices. The charge is a flat rate per day and provides unlimited talk time (and text messaging, if you pay a bit more) either in Israel or to the USA / Canada. The phone would be waiting for you at the Gilgal Hotel and would be yours until you drop it at the airport on the way out of the country. The phone # would be different than yours, but you can get that ahead of time and distribute it to those who might need it. There is nothing at stake in all of this, and I make absolutely nothing for your signing up. If you are interested, go to this site:

<https://www.talknsave.us/Bundle1.aspx?linkid=13762>

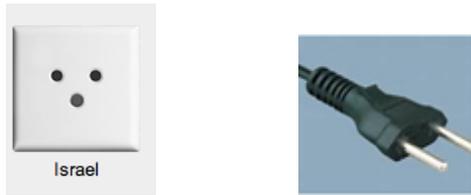
Click on the Shepherds Seminary Study Trip – Dec 2-14, 2018 (or reasonable facsimile) link in the drop-down box labeled “Select a Program,” and you will see the options.

#### *Internet Access:*

Israel is a remarkably advanced culture in many ways, and especially with regard to communication via electronic devices. Students are very much encouraged to bring along some piece of equipment by which they can access the internet. You will not need to do this as we travel by day, but in the evenings there will be reasons for you to be able to do that, and at any rate the contact with home is helpful. The hotels will all have wireless internet access – most of the time available even in the rooms, and always in the lobby areas.

## Electronics / Power converters

Outlets in Israel accept round prongs rather than the flat ones you are accustomed to. Here is what they look like:



In order to plug into those outlets you will need a simple converter; it doesn't change the current in any ways, but it converts the flat prongs on your equipment to the round prongs you'll need in Israel. Here is what the converter looks like – though there are many variations on the theme:



Please understand that this simple converter (above) will only work on electrical appliances rated to accept 220 volts of current. Most modern items like cell phones, computers, will allow for 110-220v; check your device/charger to see the voltage specifications. If it indicates 110-220v, you will be OK with the simple adapter above.

However, for electronics such as hair dryers, irons, and curlers, which are not manufactured to handle 110v, you will need an additional step-down transformer which not only converts the shape of the prongs but converts the electrical current to 110. These are more expensive but readily available. They will look something like this:



Note that they will often be ungrounded, so if you have a plug with a ground prong (3rd prong – round – on American appliances) you will have to bring a ground converter as well NOTE: Don't plug in anything important unless you are confident it can handle the 220 current.

All of this sounds more complicated than it is, but you would be well-advised to have two or three of the simple converters so you can plug in your appliances, and perhaps a transformer just in case.

TIP: Bring a grounded extension cord. Outlets are sometimes hard to find (where are they not?), and with an extension cord plus a 3-way addition you can re-charge all your appliances rather easily – either in the hotels or in the airport!

## Security and Safety

Safety is a major concern for most tourists traveling to the Middle East. Your tour leaders have had years of experience organizing and teaching study programs in Israel. Safety is also our concern. You will probably find that Israel is safer than many places in the USA. Granted there are a few areas in Israel which are hot spots, just like in any major USA city. If you practice common sense and listen to instructors and course leaders you will not have any problems. If we advise you to stay out of a certain village or area, please take us seriously and do not go exploring.

Do not make jokes about bombs or guns. Do not leave a backpack or suitcase unattended. Security officials will cordon off and dispatch a bomb squad to an unaccompanied backpack or suitcase. Please keep our hotel location confidential for the privacy of all involved.

The Muslim and Orthodox Jewish communities have very strong standards of social and public conduct. Married and dating couples should avoid public displays of affection.

Dating (formal or informal) locals is forbidden. Many locals regard it as a significant conquest to develop a relationship with a tourist, particularly with a woman in the group. Due to the potential of both physical and verbal harassment of a sexual nature toward unaccompanied women, women should not travel alone during free time. It is best that women travel in groups of 2-3 **and** with a male companion from the group.

## Spending Money

How much spending money to bring? This will largely depend on personal taste. Your trip costs are complete covered except for lunches, snacks, and any gifts or souvenirs; you should budget \$15/day for lunch. Snacks, cokes and ice cream generally cost \$2 - \$5. The largest portion of the traveler's additional money is usually spent on souvenirs/gifts. All together, travelers commonly bring between \$300 and \$600 in spending money. Use this as an indicator.

## Currency Exchange

You will be able to exchange American currency to Israeli shekels when you are in Israel. Care should be taken to be sure that you are getting the best possible exchange rate. We will recommend places to make the exchange when necessary. Generally, it is best to avoid changing money at the hotel desk; the exchange rate will be poor and there will be a fee.

As to the money you will need in Israel, it is recommended that you carry with you a reasonable amount of cash (in small denominations), as well as a credit/debit card. (Traveler's checks may also be used, though they are expensive and it is not always easy to find someone who will cash them. There is a commission charge for changing travelers checks, as high as \$1.00 per check.) ATM's dispense Israeli shekels at the market rate with no exchange fee, but most banks charge a 3% international transfer fee. On the other hand, there will be times when we have no access to an ATM for a day or two.

Credit cards (Visa or MasterCard only) can be used to get spending money while in Israel but it is often inconvenient and incurs a service charge. Bank hours are uncertain, and not all banks provide the service. A Personal Identification Number (PIN) is required to withdraw cash with a credit card.

Empty your wallet of unnecessary materials before you travel. We recommend that you bring a Driver's License for second identification, a credit card for emergencies, International Student ID card, photocopy of the picture page of your passport, and your health insurance documentation. Bring only what you might need while abroad. Leave the rest at home.

## Mail/Stamps

Postcards and stamps are available throughout the country. You will not be able to use USA stamps

## Laundry

There are laundry facilities available with varying degree of access depending on where the group is staying. The laundry facilities in Israel are much more expensive than in America. To wash and dry an average sized load costs around \$6.00. It is recommended that travelers hand-wash their clothes. (Some of the quick-dry materials work remarkably well; they can be washed and hung out in the hotel room in the evening, and they will be dry in the morning.) In that connection, it is wise to bring a small supply of laundry detergent. On the other hand, the Gloria Hotel has a very good laundry service which is quite reasonable. Given the fact that we arrive at the Gloria about halfway through the trip, it works well to pack about 6 days of necessary clothing and then pay to have it all laundered at the Gloria and start over again.

### Luggage

Most airlines allow two pieces of checked luggage, up to 50 pounds each; check with your carrier as to specific restrictions for your trip. Airlines can/will charge for overweight bags. **Note:** If you do not need all the bags allowed you by the airline on the trip to Israel, you might be wise to pack a collapsible duffel-bag for gifts and souvenirs you need to get back home.

### Shopping

Upon arrival, your teacher/guide will give you tips for shopping in Israel.

### Health

In general, water is safe to drink in Israel. However, many travelers visiting for a few weeks prefer to be on the safe side and purchase bottled water. Bottled water is readily available in Israel, but can be expensive: \$1-1.50 for 1.5 liters.

If you are susceptible to traveler's diarrhea, (and many travelers will have a bout of it during their stay), bring an over-the-counter anti-diarrhea medication with you. If you have a real problem with diarrhea, you might see a doctor for advice on anti-diarrhea procedures/drugs.

### Photography

Taking pictures is one of the best ways of remembering your stay in Israel. We encourage you to bring a good camera. Suggestions:

- Bring a notebook in which you can take notes on the pictures you take, and be careful to work hard at those notes. (It might be good to team up with another traveler – one taking notes and one taking pictures.) Be sure that you have a workable way to match the notes to the pictures. One of the most valuable learning strategies available to you is taking careful notes on a lot of pictures, and then going back and reviewing, cataloging and preparing those notes for presenting to friends and family (whether they like it or not!).
- Due to the significant amount of haze that can exist at certain times of the year, a haze filter is recommended. Polarizing filters are also very valuable.
- If you have the option of bringing good lenses, the most helpful will be a standard zoom (28-80mm) and a telephoto. Flashes are necessary for indoors, caves, etc.
- We lovingly discourage the use of video cameras. They tend to be a hassle and disturbance at field sites - you end up missing what your instructor was saying as you gaze through the viewfinder. Experience suggests that most self-shot videos of the Holy Land are ultimately not viewed.
- Military officials do not allow photographing of military installations. If a sign or your instructor says "no photography" please comply. Offenders may have their film and that of the entire group confiscated.
- PLEASE NOTE: While on bus field studies, participants should follow the instructor and gather at the location where instruction is to be given. After the instruction/discussion, students will be free to move about and take photos. Please wait to take your photos until after the instruction is given. You will know better what you are photographing, and it will save much time for the group.

### **RETURNING HOME:**

The last travel/study day of the trip is Wednesday, Apr. 21. Schedule your departing flight as close to midnight as possible on Wednesday, Apr. 21 or as early as possible on Thursday, Apr. 22. This will give us a full day together on Thursday and saves the cost of rooms Thursday night. We will fly through the night and arrive home sometime on Thursday, Apr. 22.

We will work to arrange transportation to get the group to the airport in plenty of time for the various departure times. If you cannot arrange Thursday night departure, and must stay in Israel on Thursday night, your room will possibly be available. However, you must pay the cost of the extra night at the Gloria and you will need to arrange for separate travel to the airport.