



MEJDI TOURS

12 Day, 11 Night Interfaith Experience of Israel and the West Bank

Led by Rabbi Dov Taylor

February 28 – March 10, 2016

With Optional Extension March 10-13, 2016

Interfaith. Israel, The Holy Land, Palestine. Each name evokes its own images, woven of history, legend, myth, and faith. We will visit places sacred to each of the three Abrahamic religions and consider what makes each tradition unique, what we share in common and how we might learn from one another.

Experience. In Israel proper and in the West Bank, we will meet people who try to live the values of their faith and who work tirelessly to promote understanding, respect, cooperation, and peace.

Israel/Palestine. We will hear from both Israelis and Palestinians some of the competing narratives of the two peoples who lay claim to the land.

This groundbreaking, multiple perspective experience of Israel and the West Bank begins in Tel Aviv with Herzl's vision for a new society, journeys up the Mediterranean coast to the flowering hills of the Galilee, and ascends to the holy sites of Safed, Lake Tiberias, Nazareth, Bethlehem, Hebron, and Jerusalem. On the way, we'll experience the diversity of Israeli and Palestinian societies through a broad array of guides and speakers—religious leaders, politicians, scholars, doctors, archaeologists, activists and peacemakers—orthodox and progressive, Jewish, Druze, Christian and Muslim. We'll hear contrasting national narratives and explore prospects for justice, security and peace in the region. With a unique approach that accesses contemporary issues through personal storytelling and relationship-building, we'll discover different approaches to conflict resolution, enjoy some home-cooked meals with local families, and stroll through bustling and colorful shuks (markets). With time for discussion, reflection and relaxation, this unique experience will help clarify the complex issues facing Israelis and Palestinians and celebrate the hospitality and culture of the local communities.

Day 1: Sunday, February 28: Arrive

- Arrive at Ben Gurion airport and transfer to Tel Aviv.
- People who get in early in the day will have the option of signing up for a half-day tour of Tel Aviv (at their own expense), or exploring neighborhoods, markets and museums recommended in our welcome packet, or relaxing at the hotel.
- As people will be arriving at different times throughout the day, dinner will be on your own. The welcome packet will contain suggestions for restaurants near the hotel.
- At 8:00 p.m., we'll gather at the hotel for a brief orientation and a chance to meet one another.

Hotel: Tel Aviv

Day 2: Monday, February 29: Tel Aviv

- Our program begins in the historic *Achuzat Bayit* neighborhood, the original suburb modeled on Herzl's vision in *Altneuland* that grew into the modern city of Tel Aviv. Covering Zionism from Herzl to today, it will continue under the fig and Poinciana trees of Rothschild Boulevard, to see

Independence Hall and some of the Bauhaus style houses of the White City, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

- We'll spend part of the afternoon experiencing coexistence in the historic port city of Jaffa. Our guide will introduce Jewish texts related to social justice and treatment of the other. We'll see the famous clock tower and Old Town, visit the *Bustan Yaffa*, a bilingual (Hebrew, Arabic) kindergarten that operates in the spirit of the Waldorf method, and visit Physicians for Human Rights-Israel's Open Clinic in Jaffa, where we'll meet with one of their professionals.
- To conclude our first day, we'll enjoy a home-cooked dinner hosted by Arab Israeli women from Jaffa.

Hotel: Tel Aviv (B & D)

Day 3: Tuesday, March 1: The Plain of Sharon

- We'll drive up the coast along the Plain of Sharon. Our first stop is Herod's port city of Caesarea, whose extensive sandstone ruins overlook the peaceful blue waters of the Mediterranean. There we'll see the theater and hippodrome as well as baths and an aqueduct, and learn about the area's Crusader history and the old Bosnian Muslim community that lived there.
- After lunch in one of the many restaurants and cafes along the beach, we'll continue up the coast to Haifa to view the magnificent Baha'i Gardens.
- Further north is the city of Akko (Acre), a UNESCO World Heritage Site. There we will tour the ancient seaport's walls and the Templar Tunnel running under the citadel, as well as the Jezzar Pasha Mosque, built over former Muslim and Christian prayer houses by Akko's Ottoman governor in the late 18th century.
- Dinner on the waterfront as a group.

Hotel: Akko (B & D)

Day 4: Wednesday, March 2: The North

- We'll drive to the northernmost border of Israel to enjoy the sea grottos and white cliffs of Rosh Hanikra.
- Then we'll head to a local Druze village, where we'll share a meal with a Druze family and learn about this important minority community in Israel.
- We'll continue on to the picturesque town of Safed in Upper Galilee—center of Kabbalah (Jewish mysticism) and another of the Four Holy Cities (Jerusalem, Hebron, Safed, Tiberias)—walking the narrow stone lanes and visiting its art galleries and synagogues.
- Next we'll drive along the Sea of Galilee to the Mount of Beatitudes (where Jesus delivered his Sermon on the Mount) and Capernaum.
- We'll end the day with a group dinner.

Hotel: Galilee Kibbutz near Lake Tiberias (B, L, D)

Day 5: Thursday, March 3: Nazareth and Barta'a

- We'll start our day with a visit to Nazareth, Jesus' birthplace and Israel's largest Arab city. There we'll see the Church of the Annunciation and the White Mosque, and meet with local activists to learn about Christian-Muslim and Arab-Jewish tensions in the city, as well as interfaith projects and efforts to bring the communities together.
- In the afternoon, we'll visit the Palestinian village of Barta'a, a town in both Israel *and* the Palestinian territories because it straddles the Green Line.
- Arriving in Jerusalem, we'll dine at the hotel,
- And cap off the day with an evening out, taking in a cultural performance.

Hotel: Jerusalem (B & D)

Day 6: Friday, March 4: Jerusalem

- Our time in Jerusalem begins with a visit to *Yad Vashem*, the Israeli Holocaust Memorial Museum.
- Then on to the neighborhood of Ein Kerem, where we'll hear competing narratives about the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and the displacement of the native Palestinian population. We'll also see the birthplace of John the Baptist and Mary's Well.
- In the evening, we'll welcome Shabbat together followed by a festive Shabbat dinner with host families or at the hotel.

Hotel: Jerusalem (B & D)

Day 7: Saturday, March 5: Jerusalem

- Our day begins atop the Mount of Olives, where we'll be welcomed into a community of interreligious peace-builders by Ibrahim Ahmad Abu El-Hawa (if available), one of the founders of the Jerusalem Peacemakers. In his home, known as the Peace House, we'll learn about their work to promote daily interfaith cooperation, creating cultures of peace, justice and healing for the Holy Land and for all living beings.
- Descending the Mount of Olives, we'll visit the Jewish cemetery and Christian holy sites;
- And spend the afternoon at the Israel Museum and the Shrine of the Book, which houses the Dead Sea Scrolls.
- We'll have dinner available at the hotel.
- In the evening, we'll choose among several possibilities for a Saturday night activity.
- **Optional:** You can opt out of the morning activity to attend Shabbat services.

Hotel: Jerusalem (B)

Day 8: Sunday, March 6: East Jerusalem

- We'll spend the day on a political tour in East Jerusalem to learn about Israeli policies in the city since 1967 and their socio-economic and political implications, including discussion of the municipal boundaries, Israeli development in East Jerusalem, the separation barrier and its effects on the city, political trends, the relationship between the Israeli authorities and the Palestinian population, as well as recent developments.
- On Mount Scopus, we'll learn how the Hebrew University here became an isolated UN-protected Israeli enclave from 1948 to 1967.
- Then we'll visit the "City of David" archaeological site in the Palestinian neighborhood of Silwan in East Jerusalem, where we'll meet local residents and learn with a leading archaeologist. Beyond an introduction to the archaeological splendor of the site, the activity will also provide insight on the role of archaeology in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its impact on the residents who live nearby.
- Accompanied by Rabbis for Human Rights, we'll conclude the day's events in Sheikh Jarrah, where we'll meet residents and take an in-depth tour of this contentious East Jerusalem neighborhood, from which dozens of Palestinian residents have been evicted and displaced by Israeli settlers. With Israeli courts largely backing the settlers' claims, hundreds of other Palestinians now face the same threat. In response, Israeli supporters of diverse backgrounds have joined Palestinian residents to protest the evictions. We'll also meet with representatives of Kids4Peace, a grassroots interfaith youth movement.
- We'll have dinner at the hotel

- Followed by an evening lecture from the Parents Circle-Families Forum, an organization of Israeli and Palestinian parents who have lost loved ones to the conflict and who have come together to work for peace.
- **Optional:** Opt out of the morning's activities to attend church services.

Hotel: Jerusalem (B & D)

Day 9: Monday, March 7: Jericho, Dead Sea, and Masada

- Heading south, and into the West Bank, we'll view St. George's Monastery, a fifth-century cliff-hanging monastery in the Wadi Qelt.
- Then we'll visit ancient and modern Jericho, where we'll ascend 1330 feet in a cable car to see the Greek Orthodox Monastery of the Temptation, the site associated with the devil's temptation of Jesus. Lunch will be on your own at any of the restaurants on the mountaintop.
- Continuing to Qumran, we'll see the site where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found.
- Arriving at the Dead Sea—the lowest point on earth— you can opt either to take a dip in its mineral-rich waters OR to explore the freshwater pools and waterfalls of Ein Gedi (whether permitting, to go for a swim).
- We'll enjoy dinner together at the hotel.

Hotel: Ein Gedi (B & D)

Day 10: Tuesday, March 8: West Bank – Masada, Hebron and Bethlehem

At 8:00 a.m. we'll take the cable car up Masada to Herod's mountaintop fortress with its breathtaking views of the Judean Desert and the Dead Sea.

- We'll spend the second half of the day in the Old City of Hebron with the human rights organization *Breaking the Silence*—an organization of Israeli veterans whose mission is to educate the Israeli public about the realities of everyday life in the Occupied Territories. While in Hebron, we'll have the opportunity to visit the Tomb of the Patriarchs, revered by both Jews and Moslems.
- We'll conclude the day with dinner in a traditional Palestinian restaurant in the Bethlehem area.

Hotel: Bethlehem (B & D)

Day 11: Wednesday, March 9: Bethlehem and Gush Etzion Settlement Block

- We'll begin our day with a visit to the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem.
- Then we'll walk along the Separation Wall, learn about its impact on Palestinian residents, and visit the Aida refugee camp.
- In the afternoon, we'll meet with members of the Yesha Council (Council of Jewish Settlements in Judea and Samaria) to hear their ideology and goals, and to visit a settlement to learn about life there.
- Finally, we'll meet with leaders of the Roots Project, which draws together Israeli settlers and Palestinians who, despite living next to each other, are separated by walls of fear of each other and even of the price of peace.
- Upon our return to Jerusalem, we'll dine at the hotel, followed by an evening lecture from Anat Hoffman, Chair of the Board of Women of the Wall and Executive Director of the Israel Religious Action Center, the legal advocacy arm of the Reform Movement in Israel.

Hotel: Jerusalem (B)

Day 12: Thursday, March 10: Jerusalem's Old City

- Our day begins with an early morning visit to the *Kotel* (Western Wall).

- Then we'll ascend the Temple Mount to see the Al-Aqsa Precinct and have a question and answer session with a local imam.
- We'll explore the excavated exterior Southern Wall of the ancient Temple and Robinson's Arch,
- Then continue into the hidden strata of the Western Wall (revealed through underground tunnels), which tell the story of ancient Jerusalem and of generations of longing for it.
- We'll weave through the shops and alleyways of the Arab *shuk* (market) in the Old City, where you can practice your haggling skills. Don't miss the opportunity to view the Old City from atop the rooftops of shops and homes.
- We'll explore the Cardo and learn about the Christian "Stations of the Cross" along the Via Dolorosa;
- Visit the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, identified as the place of both the crucifixion and the tomb of Jesus;
- Learn about the medieval citadel known as the Tower of David, near the Jaffa Gate;
- And conclude our time in the Old City with visit to the Armenian Quarter.
- Leaving the Old City, we'll enjoy a farewell dinner together.
- For those people departing that evening, we'll help you arrange transportation to Ben Gurion Airport for your flight home.

(B & D)