

Getting Started

Travel in Israel and the Palestinian Territories is a two-sided coin. On the one hand, Israel itself is modern and westernised, with great public transport, infrastructure and plenty of English-speakers. It's a small country, which makes travel times short and travel costs fairly inexpensive. But overall, prices tend to be high for the region – plan on spending as much as you would in most Western countries. Very little pre-trip planning is needed in terms of visas, tours or accommodation and you could literally fly there on a whim and organise as you go. In summer, however, it's a good idea to book ahead for accommodation, especially for guesthouses and B&Bs. Of course, given the tumultuous nature of the country, keep tabs on security and be flexible with travel plans in case a particular area becomes off limits.

The Palestinian Territories are another matter altogether. Facilities in the Territories are often below Western standards and less English is spoken. Gaza is usually inaccessible to the casual tourist (permits given by the Israel Defence Forces, the IDF are reserved for accredited journalists, diplomats and aid workers) but any tourist can visit the West Bank. Even if you are not a fan of tours, joining one for a trip to the West Bank is a good idea, both for background information and security.

While considering all this, friends and relatives will be more than perplexed by your choice of holiday destination, given the region's reputation for terror and warfare. Remind them that casualties due to traffic accidents back home occur more frequently than terror attacks in Israel and the Palestinian Territories. The other piece of key predeparture knowledge to consider is the 'Israeli Stamp Stigma', which you can read about on p402.

Once on the ground it's a good idea to memorise a few key phrases in the local lingo. You could survive solely on English in Israel and the Palestinian Territories, but knowing basic greetings, pleasantries and numbers in Arabic and Hebrew can help tremendously when meeting people.

WHEN TO GO

Israel and the Palestinian Territories are open for all seasons, but there are a few factors to consider when planning your trip. Weather-wise, the best time to visit is in the spring (April and May) or autumn (September and October) when temperatures are mild in most areas. November and March are likewise pleasant but do see some rain, especially in the coastal areas and up north. Consider regional temperatures; while the south is still pleasant in November, the Golan will be cold and wet.

Winter (mid-November to mid-March) can be surprisingly chilly, with heavy rain along the coast and frost in the highlands. Mt Hermon in the Golan gets enough snow to ski on and even Jerusalem can see occasional snow flurries. January temperatures in Jerusalem are 6°C to 11°C, while at the same time in Eilat it is 10°C to 21°C. During these months low season prices prevail.

Summertime temperatures in the far south are extreme. Eilat will see highs topping 40°C, but this is a dry heat. The weather can be even more oppressive in Tel Aviv where the humidity will make you sweat standing in the shade. This is a good time to visit Jerusalem or other highland areas that are less affected by coastal humidity. Summer is also the peak season for tourists; hotel prices are at their highest and it can sometimes be difficult to get accommodation.

See climate charts (p387) for more information.

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

- Sunscreen, a hat and an extra pair of sunglasses in case one goes missing
- A decent change of clothing and a pair of nice shoes for a night out on the town
- Photocopying all your important documents (take one set with you and leave the other at home)
- Planning a visit to Syria, Lebanon, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Libya or Yemen before Israel if you're planning on using the same passport (p402)
- Checking your passport for validity (make sure it's good for at least six months)
- A driver's licence if you intend to rent a car, and a PADI certificate for diving in Dahab
- Getting in contact with tour agents and humanitarian organisations that work in the West Bank if you plan on travelling there
- Using Lonely Planet's Thorn Tree to check up on the latest travel information (and political debates)
- Emailing important documents to yourself. Wherever you are on the road you'll be able to access your files at an internet café
- Checking the latest travel advisory warnings

If possible, avoid visiting Israel during Jewish religious holidays (see p392 for details) when businesses close, public transport is limited and accommodation prices double or triple. If you happen to be in Israel or the Palestinian Territories during a holiday period, just ride it out and enjoy the celebrations.

COSTS & MONEY

Israel is not a cheap country and you can expect to pay standard Western prices for most goods and services. Backpackers can expect to spend between US\$20 and US\$40 per day, about half of that going towards accommodation. For a little more comfort in a midrange hotel and meals other than felafel and shwarma, think about spending between US\$50 and US\$100 per day, or more if you don't have someone to share a room with. To live comfortably at the top end, staying in three- and four-star hotels, dining at fine restaurants and renting a car, you can expect to spend US\$120 to US\$180 per day. A student card will save you some shekels at museums and historic sites. Look out for special internet-only deals for hotels.

PREDEPARTURE READING

The late Saul Bellow's book *To Jerusalem and Back* (1976) describes a trip the prolific author made to Israel in 1975. It is an insightful piece of travel literature, although at times overly self-involved. But the *grande dame* of travel literature to the Holy Land is Mark Twain's *The Innocents Abroad* (1871). Twain's sharp humour and keen eye make the story still relevant 140 years after the fact.

Susan Nathan is an English woman who moved to Israel and, following several years in Tel Aviv, moved to an obscure Arab village east of Haifa. *The Other Side of Israel* (2005) chronicles her move to a town where she was a lone Jew among 25,000 Arabs. Part memoir, part admonishment of the modern state of Israel, the book contains a unique perspective of Arab life in Israel.

Also tugging on your heart strings is *If a Place Can Make You Cry* (2002), a compilation of emails and letters sent by the author, Daniel Gordis, to friends and family in the USA following his move to Jerusalem

HOW MUCH?

- Newspaper 8NIS
- Short taxi hop 20NIS
- Main course in a restaurant 35NIS
- Internet connection per hour 12NIS
- Museum admission 25-40NIS

TOP TENS**Books**

Before setting off to the Holy Land, dive into these great reads:

- *Elvis in Jerusalem* by Tom Segev (see p20)
- *I Saw Ramallah* by Mourid Barghouti (see p43)
- *Gate of the Sun* by Elias Khoury (see p20)
- *Only Yesterday* by SY Agnon (see p35)
- *The Fifty Years' War* by Ahron Bregman and Jihan El-Tahri (see p51)
- *Orientalism* by Edward Said (see p56)
- *My Michael* by Amos Oz (see p55)
- *The Innocents Abroad* by Mark Twain (see opposite)
- *The Blue Mountain* by Meir Shalev (see p35)
- *The Secret Life of Saeed the Pesoptimist* by Emile Habibi (see p55)

Signs You are in Israel & the Palestinian Territories

You'll know you have arrived when you spot these trademarks:

- At some point in your conversation with a local they tell you where to get the best hummus in the country
- Joggers end their workout with a smoke
- Your El Al flight touches down to a round of applause
- Martyrs posters in the Palestinian Territories
- Stumbling to your Tel Aviv hotel at 2am whilst others are going out to dinner
- The Rebbe peering at you from every third billboard
- Door guards ask if you have a gun
- The nudge of an M16 whenever you sit next to a soldier on a bus
- Squashed felafel balls lining footpaths
- Fur hats and wool coats on warm August days

Ways to Immerse Yourself in the Local Culture

Get your nose out of this book and meet some locals with a few of these ideas:

- Dance on Chinky Beach (p174) on Friday during sunset
- Join the locals at the Western Wall (p96) to welcome the Shabbat
- Have a Shabbat (p142) dinner with a family in Jerusalem or Tsfat
- Stay overnight with the Black Hebrew community in Dimona (p334)
- Stay at Kfar Hanokdim (p328) near Arad for a taste of Bedouin culture
- Work on a kibbutz (p398)
- Stroll along Yefet St in Jaffa, and stop to eat *masabacha* (chickpeas in warm hummus-tahini sauce) or puff on a *nargileh* (water pipe) with some of the locals (p182)
- Volunteer to work at a West Bank kids project such as Al-Rowwad (p399)
- Join local artists and musicians for a night out at Al-Kasaba Theater & Cinematheque (p301) in Ramallah
- Folk dance the night away at the International Cultural Centre for Youth (p140) in Jerusalem

with his family. A line of similar stories mixed with politics is the excellent *Elvis in Jerusalem*, written by longtime *Ha'aretz* columnist Tom Segev.

To catch up on the causes, effects and possible solutions for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, read Richard Ben Cramer's book *How Israel Lost* (2004). You may have a love-hate relationship with Cramer's brash writing style, but his points are valid and clear. Leaning further to the right is Alan Dershowitz'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.

Israeli reporter Amira Hass is the unlikely author of *Drinking the Sea at Gaza* (2000), a first-hand chronicle of Israeli occupation in the territory. It is a comprehensive and intellectual account of Gaza that does not miss the daily struggle for survival by ordinary Palestinians.

Fast becoming a modern classic, *Gate of the Sun* (1998) by Elias Khoury is a fictional story based on the writer's interviews with Palestinians in refugee camps. Using the flashback style of *The Thousand and One Nights*, Khoury writes the Palestinian saga through the eyes of an Arab doctor who reminisces about his youth in the Galilee. After electrifying readers in the Arab world the novel was translated into several foreign languages, including Hebrew.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Government Tourist Page (www.goisrael.com) The national tourism board has a useful website that includes upcoming events, background and a virtual tour of the country.

Jerusalem Post (www.jpost.com) Up-to-the-minute news. Sections include a blog page, tourism news and a link to the 24-hour Western Wall webcam.

LonelyPlanet.com (www.lonelyplanet.com) Lonely Planet's website contains dedicated pages for both Israel and the Palestinian Territories. There are travel tips, photos and the ever-useful Thorn Tree online forum.

Palestine Monitor (www.palestinemonitor.org) Politically charged website with news, analysis and links to activist groups.

Palestine Net (www.palestine-net.com) Lots of practical details on the Palestinian Territories, including links to restaurants, hotels and travel operators.

'To catch up on the causes, effects and possible solutions for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, read Richard Ben Cramer's book *How Israel Lost* (2004)'

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

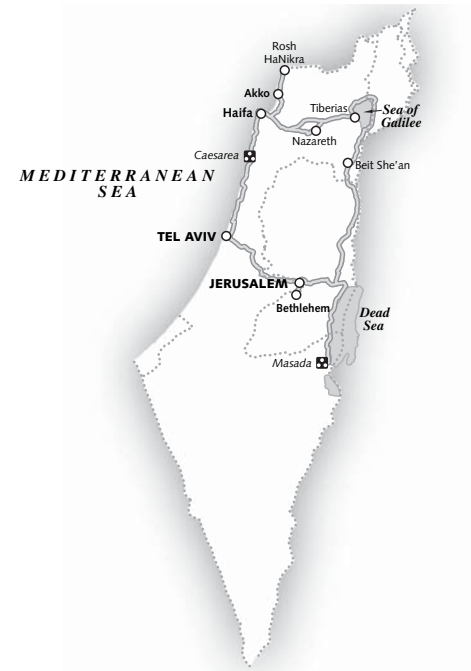
BRIGHT LIGHTS, BIG CITIES Two weeks / Jerusalem to Jerusalem

With two weeks you can see the major highlights of the country. If you have less time, stick to the sights around Jerusalem.

Spend your first two days in **Jerusalem** (p79) and then make a half-day trip to **Bethlehem** (p290). Break out your wide-brimmed hat and sunblock for a full-day trip to the **Dead Sea** (p311) and **Masada** (p320).

From Jerusalem, head to the coast for a couple of days around **Tel Aviv** (p149) and **Jaffa** (p182), with enough time for some bar-hopping and lounging on the beach. Next, head up the coast for a quick look around **Caesarea** (p210) before pushing on to **Haifa** (p192). Make sure to see the Baha'i Gardens before a day trip to **Akko** (p215) and **Rosh HaNikra** (p222).

From Haifa, take a drive out to Tiberias via **Nazareth** (p225) for a day around the **Sea of Galilee** (p253), done by bike or in a hired car. Finish off with a trip back to Jerusalem down the beautiful Jordan Valley, breaking the journey to see the ruins at **Beit She'an** (p232).



With two weeks you can hit the major highlights such as Masada, Jerusalem, the Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee. Everything is within easy reach by car, public transport or, if you are up for some adventure, bicycle.

THE WHOLE HOLY LAND**Three to four weeks / Jerusalem to Petra**

After a few days in **Jerusalem** (p79), with a side trip to **Bethlehem** (p290), take a day trip down to the wondrous caves at **Beit Guvrin** (p147), stopping at a winery or two on the way. With a little planning it may be possible to join an archaeological dig for a day (p147).

Stir it up in **Tel Aviv** (p149) and **Jaffa** (p182) before a trip up north. Base yourself in Haifa to make trips around northern Israel. From Haifa, visit the quaint town of **Zichron Ya'acov** (p209), famed for its historic winery. Along with **Akko** (p215) and **Rosh HaNikra** (p222), visit the Druze villages of **Daliyat al-Karmel** (p207) and **Peg'i'in** (p222). Head inland for a half-day in **Nazareth** (p225), and then up north for a couple days around the **Sea of Galilee** (p253). With a hired car you could check out the spectacular sights in the Golan Heights, including **Nimrod Castle** (p270) and the waterfall-filled **Banias Nature Reserve** (p270). **Tsfat** (p275) and **Rosh Pina** (p262) are other unmissable highlights in the area.

Having conquered the north, head down the Jordan Valley, stopping at **Beit She'an** (p232) and **Jericho** (p303), before a night by the eerily quiet **Dead Sea** (p311). Get up early the following day to catch the sunrise from the top of **Masada** (p320).

From the Dead Sea, loop into the Negev for a day or two around **Mitzpe Ramon** (p338) and the enormous **Maktesh Ramon** (p339). The next stop is a sun-and-sea respite at **Eilat** (p345). From here organise a trip to awe-inspiring **Petra** (p363); plan on two days or more if you want to do some hiking in the area.

Geographically small, it's possible to hit the main sights of Israel and the Palestinian Territories and take side trips into Jordan and Egypt in a month. This route allows a little extra time for forays into the Negev, hiking in Petra and a leisurely swing through northern Israel.

**ROADS LESS TRAVELLED****WILD WEST BANK****Four days / East Jerusalem to Hebron**

The West Bank offers plenty of scope for adventurous travelling in a rarely visited part of the world. Besides idyllic scenes of olive orchards and folding hills, you can visit ancient cities and places associated with the Bible. As security is an issue in the West Bank, seek out the latest travel advisories before setting off. A good way to understand the politics of the West Bank is on a day trip to a Jewish settlement and/or a Palestinian refugee camp, which you can do on a tour (p306).

From East Jerusalem's Arab bus station, catch a sherut to the Qalandia checkpoint (p143) and then a cab into **Ramallah** (p299). Here it's possible to visit **Al-Muqata'a** (p299), the Palestinian Authority HQ and last resting place of Yasser Arafat. Then, for an entirely different experience, make a side trip to the microbrewery in **Taybeh** (p303).

From Ramallah, head up to **Nablus** (p309) via the Huwvara checkpoint. Spend the day lost in its enchanting market set between stone mansions. From Nablus, head over to the Jordan River valley and down to **Jericho** (p303); the best way to explore this area is on foot, starting with a hike to **Wadi Qelt** (p305) and St George's Monastery.

Next is the southern portion of the West Bank, also known as Judea. The first stop is **Bethlehem** (p290), the most attractive West Bank town and the birthplace of Jesus. After exploring its winding lanes and the Church of the Nativity, take a ride down to **Hebron** (p307).



Seasoned travellers and the adventurous will get a lot out of a trip into the West Bank. The area offers idyllic rural landscapes, places of biblical importance and a tangible tension that will keep you on your toes.

TAILORED TRIPS

HIKE, SWIM, PLAY

Think of Israel and the Palestinian Territories as one big playground. Starting in **Eilat** (p345) and **Dahab** (p377). The area also has some great hikes, including the walk to the top of **Mt Sinai** (p382) and **Nakhal Gishron** (p354). You could also spend a week hiking the boulders, cliffs and ancient buildings of **Petra** (p363).

Heading into the Negev proper, adventurers will delight in **Mitzpe Ramon** (p338), where you can do

everything from abseiling to 4WD trips in the desert. In the Dead Sea region, go for a leisurely walk through **Ein Avdat National Park** (p336), climb to the top of **Masada** (p320) for the sunrise, or hike in **Ein Gedi Nature Reserve** (p316) and up to St George's Monastery in **Wadi Qelt** (p305).

Activities along the coast include kiteboarding off the beaches in **Tel Aviv** (p164), horse riding near **Netanya** (p186) and scuba diving over the ruins of King Herod's port in **Caesarea** (p210).

Heading far north, cycle around the **Sea of Galilee** (p253) and hike the magnificent **Banias Nature Reserve** (p270). If it's summer, try kayaking on the **Jordan River** (see HaYarden Park Nature Reserve; p266) or if it happens to be January, click into a pair of skis and swoosh down **Mt Hermon** (p271).



IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF PROPHETS

Even travellers without a religious bone in their body can't help but be sucked up by the holiness of Israel and the Palestinian Territories. **Jerusalem** (p79) is of course the crown jewel for religious travellers and you could spend days visiting sites holy to Christianity, Judaism and Islam.

Having been thoroughly infected by the Jerusalem syndrome, take a short trip over to **Bethlehem** (p290), said to be the birthplace of Christ. Continuing south, **Hebron** (p307) contains one of the most sacred sites in the country: the Cave of Machpelah is holy to Jews, Muslims and Christians and is believed to be the burial place of Adam, Eve, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and their wives.

Elijah the prophet made his mark in northern Israel and in **Haifa** (p192) you can see the cave in which he hid from King Ahab. The city is also the headquarters of the Baha'i faith and the Baha'i Gardens have become a requisite stop for people of all faiths. Inland, doomsdayers might want to visit **Megiddo** (p214), the place that the Bible cites will be the stage of the last great battle on earth. Not far away is **Nazareth** (p225), the boyhood stomping ground of Jesus.

Further north, **Tsfat** (p275) is the centre of the Kabbalah, traditional Jewish mysticism. It is just up the road from the **Sea of Galilee** (p253) where Jesus is said to have worked his miracles.



HEDONISTIC PLEASURES

Don't be surprised to come home from your trip having put on a few pounds. Israel is a hedonist's delight, with all manner of gourmet restaurants and spas to feed your senses.

The Dead Sea may not sound like a good place to start your life-giving holiday, but the area is in fact recognised as the country's premiere spa destination. Most of the spa resorts are located at **Ein Bokek** (p324), but if you simply want to lather yourself up with mud and float in the sea, try the beach at **Ein Gedi** (p316).

Up north, you can get a taste of the good life by doing a wine tour in the **Upper Galilee** (p260). The **Golan Heights Winery** (p274) is the largest winery in the area, but there are a few choice boutique wineries, including the **Pelter Winery** (p274) in Ramot. Amazingly, Israelis have even managed to grow grapes in the desert, bringing a small wine industry to the Negev; try the **Sde Boker Winery** (p329).

As you get around to these places, it is imperative to have only the finest accommodation. Most boutique hotels and four- or five-star hotels have spa and massage services; you could try the luxurious **Ahuzat Gaya** (p219) in Akko or the **Hotel Mizpe Hayamim** (p263) in Rosh Pina.

And finally, the food. **Tel Aviv** (p170) tops the list with dozens of gourmet eateries. Dine one night at **Messa** (p172) and you'll never forget the experience and do not miss an opportunity to have desert at the **Chocolate Bar** (p174). Heaven.



Snapshot

Every few years Israeli and Palestinian leaders get together for a summit and shake hands amid flashing bulbs and shutter clicks. Yet between the promises of peace-seeking moderates, extremists on both sides have successfully managed to tear down any meaningful gains.

The last episode of peace occurred in early 2005 when then prime minister Ariel Sharon and Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas called off fighting after four years of bloody intifada. Following the 'Road Map' towards peace, as outlined by a few concerned international bodies, Sharon upped the stakes by ending Israel's 38-year occupation of Gaza, forcibly pulling thousands of settlers out of their homes.

But two steps forward in the peace process frequently results in a few steps back. The Gaza pullout, despite its vast political significance, was undermined when the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) returned a year later in Operation Summer Rain. Five months of fighting left over 400 Gazans dead – one in five of them children.

The mistakes of a unilateral Gaza withdrawal without a peace deal were only magnified in southern Lebanon, which Israel left in similar circumstances in 2000. Without a peace agreement the region festered with militancy and during 2006 Hezbollah launched a raid into Israel, sparking a 34-day war that only ended in a tenuous ceasefire. The attacks have forced Israel to indefinitely postpone a unilateral pull-out from the West Bank, lest a third front should emerge.

While Israel tightens the screws on security, the Palestinian leadership has failed to unify in its relationship with Israel. Abbas and his party Fatah recognise Israel while Hamas – in control of the government since March 2006 – does not. This ideological rift stands as the first obstacle towards renewed peace talks with Israel. It also stands in the way of economic solvency for the Palestinian people – Western donors stopped the flow of aid (totalling US\$160 million per month) when Hamas came to power and refused to renounce violence or recognise Israel.

Yet even as conflict brews under its feet, Israel has remained resilient. Katyusha rockets may have been zinging across the skies but that didn't stop Haifa's IBM techies from uploading their work while hunkered inside bomb shelters. When the bombs fell silent, tourism resumed at a steady clip, urbanites returned to their favourite espresso joint and grape growers rushed to the Golan vineyards to try and salvage their summer crops.

Israel is among the top 30 countries worldwide in terms of per capita GDP (see p53 for more details on the local economy) and has recently welcomed high-rolling foreign investors such as Donald Trump and Warren Buffet. Its innovative people trade shares on Wall Street, regularly win Nobel prizes and have flown in space with NASA. And despite remarks from Iran that it wants to wipe the country off the map, Israel still manages to attract the Jewish faithful – each year thousands of immigrants arrive from Russia, France, the USA and beyond.

But for every success story in Israel there is a tale of hardship in the Palestinian Territories. The stoppage of aid to the Palestinian Authority (PA) left tens of thousands of civil servants unpaid for months. Gaza's economy was already in tatters before the IDF levelled its infrastructure during the summer of 2006 (the heaviest fighting occurred from June to August). And construction of the Separation Wall isolating the West

Bank has continued unabated, further crippling the local economy. Condemnation of the occupation is no longer limited to the Arab world and some European groups, particularly academics, have called for a boycott against the Jewish state.

Both Israelis and Palestinians have shown signs of working together, as the Oslo Accords and subsequent agreements have shown. In recent times, giant border terminals have been constructed in Gaza and the West Bank to allow a freer flow of workers, yet until peace talks resume these will remain ghostly concrete shells.

See p51 for more information on the governments and politics of the region.

FAST FACTS

Population: 6.4 million
(Gaza Strip and West Bank 3.8 million)

Percentage of Israelis born in Israel: 68%

GDP growth: 5.2%
in 2005

GDP per capita: 24,600
(2005)

Major exports: military hardware, machinery, computer software, cut diamonds, phosphates

Human Development Index rank: 23rd out of 177 countries

Religion: Israel – 76% Jewish, 16% Muslim, 2% Christian, 1.6% Druze, 3.9% unspecified; Palestinian Territories – 95% Muslim, 5% Christian

Tourists per year: about 1.5 million (accounting for US\$3 billion in revenue)

Israel's air force: the world's fourth largest (after the USA, Russia and China)

Lowest spot on earth: Dead Sea (400m below sea level and dropping)

The Authors



MICHAEL KOHN

Coordinating Author, Getting Started, Itineraries, Snapshot, The Culture (Population & People, Religion, Lifestyles, Government & Politics, Economy), Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Haifa & the North Coast, Directory, Transport

Michael made his first trip to the Holy Land at the impressionable age of 15 when he and 50 schoolmates stormed Jerusalem's Old City by day and learned the delights of Maccabee beer by night. He returned to the region in 2005 on a reporting trip to Egypt, Lebanon and Syria before plunging into Israel and the Palestinian Territories to update Lonely Planet's *Middle East* guide. The hummus seemed to have tasted a lot better this time around and the politics certainly more intoxicating than the beer. This was Michael's third visit to Israel and the Palestinian Territories. When not paying homage to Tel Aviv's coffeehouse culture he resides in northern California.

My Favourite Trip

Israel and the Palestinian Territories are packed with amazing sights, but Jerusalem (p79) stands head and shoulders above the crowd and has to be my first stop. After a few days of wandering its Old City streets I'd hop on a bus and head up to Nablus (p309), my favourite West Bank town, to explore its vibrant bazaar. The intensity of Jerusalem and West Bank travel inevitably calls for some therapy, and a trip down to the Dead Sea (p311) for a float usually does the trick. Next stop is Tel Aviv (p149) to visit friends, lounge on the beach and bar hop down Lilienblum St. Hiring a car, I'd head north to Akko (p215), a gem of a city on the Mediterranean, and then inland to the Golan (p260) for a few days of hiking and camping.



ROXANE ASSAF

The Culture (Media), Food & Drink, West Bank

Roxane Assaf is a media studies adjunct and college administrator in Chicago with a professional background in video production, performing arts, entertainment and food. She is a 2004 national first-place winner of the 'Mark of Excellence' award for balanced reporting from the Society of Professional Journalists. Roxane's freelance magazine credits are owed to her experience in the West Bank and Israel, while her newspaper, TV and radio work resulted from a stint as a Washington correspondent with the Medill News Service. Roxane received her Master's degree from Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism and her BA from Loyola University, New Orleans.

LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

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MIRIAM RAPHAEL The Galilee, Upper Galilee & the Golan (Tsfat & Around Tsfat), The Dead Sea, The Negev, Petra (Jordan), Sinai (Egypt)

As an ambitious 20 year old, Miriam dropped out of an exchange program with the Hebrew University to become an intern at JPost Radio, where she asked big questions of Hanan Aswari and then Jerusalem mayor Ehud Olmert. When she wasn't covering Palestinian hip-hop gigs, teenage *refuseniks* and the young settler movement, she would sneak off to the Red Sea for diving, the Negev for hiking and as many music festivals as she had new shekels. Between Lonely Planet gigs she indulged her passion for the Middle East with trips to Syria, Iran, Jordan and Egypt. Now working inhouse at Lonely Planet in Melbourne, she has hung up her authorial boots for the moment and takes away her felafel from Elsternwick.



AMELIA THOMAS The Culture (Arts), Upper Galilee & the Golan (except Tsfat & Around Tsfat), The Gaza Strip

Amelia has been working as a journalist in Israel and the Palestinian Territories since 2004, where she's encountered Disco Rabbis, Palestinian acrobats, Raelians planning an intergalactic embassy in Jerusalem, Evangelical Christians digging for oil, and been holed up in an armed settler stronghold in Gaza, covering the Israeli disengagement in the scorching summer of 2005. She conducted her research for the Upper Galilee and Golan as the first missiles began to fall from across the border, and managed to make it back from Gaza, nine months pregnant, without going into labour at the Erez Crossing. Her new baby, Cairo, is already accompanying her on West Bank assignments, where he's very popular with the ladies.

CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS

Matt Beynon Rees wrote the History chapter. Matt has covered the Middle East as a journalist for over a decade. Now a contributor for *Time*, he was the magazine's Jerusalem bureau chief. He published a nonfiction account of Israeli and Palestinian societies called *Cain's Field: Faith, Fratricide, and Fear in the Middle East* and is the author of *The Collaborator of Bethlehem*, the first in a forthcoming series of Palestinian murder mysteries.

Professor Alon Tal wrote the Environment chapter. He founded the Israel Union for Environmental Defense and the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies, and has served as chair of Life and Environment, Israel's umbrella group for green organisations. Professor of the Desert Ecology Department at Ben-Gurion University, he heads the Jewish National Fund's sustainable development committee and still finds time to hike and bike around Israel with his wife and daughters.

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