

## Israel: Galilee, the Dead Sea & Jerusalem

### Tour-Only Itinerary



### Highlights

- Walk the Israel National Trail to Caesarea, the remarkable ancient Herodian port city on the Mediterranean.
- Rise early for a hike up to the heights of Masada National Park, where you marvel at sweeping views of the Dead Sea.
- Sail in the wake of Biblical legends during a private cruise on the Sea of Galilee in a replica traditional wooden boat.
- Stroll the scenic Valley of Elah, where David famously confronted Goliath, rewarding yourself with a wine tasting and lunch in a Judaeen vineyard.
- Follow in the footsteps of Jesus along the Gospel Trail to the Biblical towns of Nazareth and Capernaum.

## On all Guided Adventures you can count on ...



Expert local guides to introduce you to the best of your destination.



Gracious accommodations that are a clean, comfortable home away from home.



Off-the-beaten-path places you'd never find on your own.



Experts to handle all the details.



A maximum of 18 fun-loving fellow travelers to share the journey.



Flight + Tour Combos include plane tickets, airport car service, and pre- and post-tour accommodations.



Delicious, authentic multi-course meals—virtually all are included.

## Activity Level

This tour is one of our Guided Walking Adventures, rated moderate. While there are limited options for alternate walks, some point-to-point walks can be skipped altogether and guests can utilize our dedicated transportation to spend a longer time at our start and end sites. There are some ascents and descents, with maximum elevation gains (and losses) of 1,500-1,000 feet. Some of the slopes are short and steep (5-15 minutes), while others are sustained (30-90 minutes). Walking at Masada and Wadi Qelt might prove challenging for someone with extreme vertigo or fear of heights, please speak with your guide on tour to discuss the available alternate (non-walk) options during these walks. The terrain varies from paved and cobblestone streets to uneven, single-track trails that can be rocky, or laid with loose gravel

and/or hard-packed dirt. Most trails are exposed with little coverage from the sun; depending on the temperature, this can increase the challenge of the tour. In case of extreme weather, the guides may need to adjust or substitute the walks. Springtime tours may be affected by rain and flash flooding, while late fall tours may be affected by extreme heat. The pace is leisurely with stops en route to explore nature reserves, engage with locals, and visit historical sites.

## DAY 1

### Join your *Israel: Galilee, the Dead Sea & Jerusalem* tour

*Caesarea to Jisr az-Zarqa; 4 miles, easy. Nazareth; 1 mile, easy*

You meet your guides at 8:00 a.m. in the lobby of the Market House Hotel in Tel Aviv, Israel. They'll be wearing Country Walkers shirts. Plan to have a hearty breakfast beforehand.

Your first destination is the remains of ancient Caesarea Maritima. The city and harbor were constructed under the rule of Herod the Great around 20 BCE and became an important Roman capital and center of Christianity until the Muslim conquest of 640. Today, its treasures include a vast amphitheater, hippodrome, an aqueduct that once brought water from Mount Carmel and other remarkably preserved structures. From here, you start your 4-mile walk on the Israel National Trail, or INT.

Inaugurated in 1995, the INT stretches 631 miles from the northern Lebanese border to the southern Red Sea shores of Israel. National Geographic recognizes it as one of the world's Top 20 "epic trails" and it has been hailed for delivering walkers to a mix of revered Biblical landscapes and the everyday lives of today's Israel.

Heading out of the city, you stroll the soft sands of a Mediterranean beach towards the small Arab village of Jisr az-Zarqa. Along the way, you pause to talk with your guide about the coexistence between Jews and Arabs. It's a complex issue with a long past that is sure to be illuminated during this compelling discussion. Once in town you are welcomed for lunch by a local Arab family. Your meal consists of a variety of well-loved Arabic dishes including freshly baked bread, hummus, falafel, and meat croquets called *kibbeh*. For dessert, perhaps enjoy a piece of *kanafeh*, a pastry made of sweet cheese and phyllo dough and topped with syrup and nuts.

After lunch, you travel to Nazareth, said to be the childhood home of Jesus. At Mt. Precipice, where nonbelievers tried to push him from the summit, you marvel at the surrounding vistas from a magnificent lookout. Then follow the Gospel Trail for a mile in the direction of your next destination: the Sea of Galilee, where Jesus is believed to have walked on water.

This region is renowned as the Cradle of Christianity. No matter your faith, it is impossible not to be moved when you visit the places where Jesus is believed to have visited and as you gaze upon the landscapes that he witnessed. You experience more tomorrow. This evening, settle in to your accommodation and enjoy a traditional dinner at the hotel's restaurant.

**Included Meals:** Lunch, Dinner

## DAY 2

### Gospel Trail to Capernaum

*6 miles, easy to moderate, 650-ft. elevation loss*

After breakfast, you travel to a local kibbutz to start today's walk. These collective communities sprang up around Israel in the early 20th century; today there are hundreds and they comprise almost 10% of the nation's industry and 40% of its agriculture. During your visit, you learn what it's like to live in this unique type of society.

Leave the kibbutz on foot, picking up The Gospel Trail for a 4-mile walk through legendary landscapes, the Sea of Galilee shimmering in the distance. Your footfalls lead to stunning views of the Horns of Hattin, a pair of extinct volcano peaks overlooking the plains. Some scholars believe this is where Jesus delivered his Sermon on the Mount. Continue traversing these arable lands and stop to visit the tomb of Nabi Shu'ayb, a religious prophet associated with the Arabic-speaking Druze religion, followed by almost a million believers in the Levant.

Next, your guide accompanies you to a charming tavern where a delicious lunch and friendly hosts await. After lunch, you embark a replica of a traditional boat for a cruise along the Sea of Galilee. This boat is an imitation of the so-called "Jesus Boat," a wooden hull dating to Biblical times that was discovered in the sea's waters during a 1986 drought. After your relaxing cruise on the water, stretch your legs as you hike the final section of The Gospel Trail.

Begin the two-mile stretch in Tabgha, where legend says that the miracle of the multiplication of loaves and fishes occurred. You conclude your walk at Capernaum on the northwestern shores of the Sea of Galilee and the center of Jesus' ministry. There'll be time to explore the remains of two ancient synagogues here, one built atop the other, and the house-turned-church that is thought to have been the home of Saint Peter.

Later, you arrive at your Tiberias hotel on the sea's shores. Dinner is on your own at the hotel or at a restaurant in town.

**Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch

## DAY 3

### Peak of Sartaba

*2 miles, moderate with challenging sections, 1,050-ft. elevation gain and 900-ft. elevation loss. Qumran;  
2 miles, moderate*

After another delicious breakfast, you hike to the magnificent peak of Sartaba, with spectacular views of the Jordan Rift Valley, carved over millennia by the flow of the revered Jordan River. A hilltop fortress known as Alexandrium crowned this summit from the 1st century BC to the 1st century AD. As you hike, take in the stark beauty of the undulating terrain, ideal for growing a profusion of dates. Later, you travel to a small moshav, or cooperative agricultural community of individual farmers. Here you enjoy a picnic lunch and learn all about this sweet meaty fruit from a local farmer. During your chat, he provides insight into the intricacies and challenges of agriculture in the arid Judean Desert, with ample dates for sampling.

Next, you visit Qumran and its stunning desert cliffs. Explore the ancient settlements before venturing on foot for a better look at its most famous spot—the Qumran Caves where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Your walk is as inspiring as the parchments themselves as you're surrounded by hulking red-stone walls. It's easy to understand that the highly ritualistic Essene Jews who are believed to have lived here centuries ago were inspired to settle amidst this beauty for religious purposes.

After your invigoratingly scenic hike, arrive at the famed Dead Sea, the lowest land elevation on Earth and almost 10 times as salty as the ocean. After settling in to our oasis just five minutes from its shores, you might have a refreshing float in the resort's own salt water pool, overlooking the sea. Savor a well-

earned and delicious meal at the hotel this evening, part of a working kibbutz.

This very special place on the shores of the Dead Sea evokes a resort-style atmosphere in the middle of the desert. The property boasts beautiful swimming pools, lush botanical gardens, dramatic baobab trees, an indulgent spa offering treatments and wellness activities, and two restaurants serving delicious Israeli cuisine. Hoteliers here are fond of saying that the Ein Gedi Hotel was founded by guests, not by owners, when members of the nearby Ein Gedi Kibbutz frequented the then-undeveloped shores. Word of the secluded spot spread, and soon other members followed until wooden cabins and other facilities were gradually brought in. Today, it offers a taste of luxury on the Dead Sea.

**Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## DAY 4

### Masada National Park

*1.5 miles, moderate, 1,500-ft. elevation gain and 650-ft. elevation loss and 1 mile, easy. Ein Gedi Nature Reserve; 3 miles, moderate or 1 mile, easy*

Early risers can join a spectacular early morning hike to Masada, an ancient fortress perched atop a secluded rock plateau. Herod the Great had these fortifications and two palaces constructed between 37 and 31 BC. One legend tells of Sicarii Jewish rebels who jumped to their deaths from Masada's great height rather than face capture by Romans who had summited the rock. Today, it is a splendid archaeological site on its own, made more breathtaking by its dramatic setting. A cable car is also available for those who prefer to skip the morning ascent. After time to explore, descend by cable car.

Before returning to the hotel, you make a visit to Ein Bokek beach. Here you have the chance to get in the water to experience the famous Dead Sea float. Those who prefer not to swim may enjoy relaxing on the beach or perusing the nearby shops. Lunch today is on your own at the beach or back at hotel's cafes. Midday, relax at the hotel, perhaps lounging on the lawn or swimming at the pool. The Dead Sea Ein Gedi Botanical Gardens are also nearby for strolls among some 900 species of flora from around the world. It is the world's only Botanical Garden shared by the homes of community residents. If you're feeling creative, indulge in an indigo-dyeing workshop (please inquire at the front desk for availability).

This afternoon your guides escort you for a walk in of the most picturesque areas in Israel— the Ein Gedi

Nature Reserve. Your leisurely one or three-mile amble follows the spring-fed David Creek to its source, passing acacia, jujube, and poplar and a profusion of bird species. You might even spot the Nubian ibex or the rodent-like rock hyrax. After, continue to the ancient synagogue, once central to the region but destroyed by Byzantine emperor Justinian.

Enjoy tonight's dinner at the hotel.

**Included Meals:** Breakfast, Dinner

## DAY 5

### Wadi Qelt

*4 miles, moderate with difficult sections, 1000-ft. elevation loss*

Depart the Dead Sea after breakfast and head to the spellbinding Wadi Qelt, a scenic valley in the Judean Mountains cut from perennial springs. Tracing rocky terrain, you traverse deep-cut canyons, waterfalls washing over stone walls and other natural pools ideal for a refreshing swim or dunk. Remarkable desert vistas stretch to the horizon and ancient aqueducts wind a path through canyons like serpents. This is one of the most exciting walks in the region. **Please note:** you may wish to have waterproof hiking boots or water shoes/sandals available for this hike as it may including wading through shallow water.

You pause for a traditional lunch at a Bedouin restaurant. Perhaps you will savor a typical delicious tender chicken and rice cooked in the ground accompanied by fresh salads. Later, you travel to a scenic viewpoint overlooking St. George Monastery, a stunning structure etched into canyon rock.

After, you leave the Judean Desert and head to Mt. Scopus, which shares the same ridge with the famed Mount of Olives. From here, you take in sweeping views Jerusalem. A short walk takes you to a unique excavation site where you can help sift through debris from the excavations from the Temple Mount. Though you are unlikely to find priceless treasures, you will surely discover clay, stone, or perhaps an ancient coin or two.

Later, you arrive at your Jerusalem hotel and are free for the remainder of the evening. There are multiple restaurants onsite, and your guides can recommend nearby spots in the city.



**Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch

## DAY 6

### Elah Valley

*4 miles, easy. Kidron Valley; 1-2 miles, easy with steep sections*

Begin your final full day with another delicious breakfast of Israeli specialties. Then you head to the starting point of our walk below Tel Azekah along the revered Golan Trail. The *tel*—an artificial mound built up from millennia of subsequent abandoned settlements—dates to the Canaanite period and today is part of Britannia Park, a vast recreation area in the Judean lowland.

This is the land of David and Goliath. The Philistine giant Goliath is largely believed to have been enlisted to fight the United Monarchy of Israel and Judah. Famously, the young shepherd boy David defeated the giant single-handedly. Your walk brings you to the ancient ruins of Khirbet Qeiyafa. Recently discovered, archaeologists are still excavating the site and many believe it may be remains of a biblical town called Shaaraim, dating back to the Kingdom of David. As you continue, you ponder this interesting history and marvel at sweeping vistas of the green Elah Valley.

End your walk at the HLH monument, a moving memorial dedicated to fallen Israeli soldiers. Later, enjoy lunch at a winery at Givat Yeshayahu, a tiny moshav in the valley. This region is ideal for wine makers; its ancient wine presses attest to its long history of viticulture. The village was settled in 1958 by Hungarian immigrants and named for a renowned Israeli researcher Yeshayahu Press. Various breads, vegetables, and fruits will be on hand, along with other farm-fresh delights. And of course, you enjoy some locally made wine.

This afternoon, continue your walk in the Kidron Valley, starting your next leg at the Mount of Olives, where Jesus is said to have ascended to heaven. The mountain ridge rises alongside the Old City of Jerusalem, providing splendid views of this deeply spiritual place, the gilded Dome of the Rock glittering in the Mediterranean sun. Your footpath delivers you to the Garden of Gethsemane, site of the Agony in the Garden the night before the crucifixion. Tidy olive groves rest on the properties of various churches here; many of the trees are the oldest in the world, dating to the 11th century. Your enlightening journey concludes at the Western Wall in the Old City. There'll be time to observe the Jewish tradition of prayer at this revered site, keeping your distance as strict religious observation requires.



This evening at a local restaurant, gather with your fellow walkers to recount your time in the Holy Land. Stories, delicious cuisine, wine, and some Jewish traditions put a final and inspirational point on your walking adventure.

**Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## DAY 7

### *Your Israel: Galilee, the Dead Sea & Jerusalem tour concludes*

After a final breakfast, travel to Bethlehem for a morning visit. You first stop at the Church of the Nativity. Not only is this one of the oldest continuously operating churches in the world; it marks the spot where Jesus was born. Enter the site through the Door of Humility and pass remarkably preserved wall mosaics that date back a millennium. If time permits, pause to reflect at the Grotto of the Nativity, the cave in which Christ was born.

After, there may be time to visit the Shepherds' Field and its sacred chapel in the village of Beit Sahour. Legend tells of the angels who came here to announce the birth of Christ to Jewish shepherds. The chapel, designed by Italian architect Antonio Barluzzi, stands on a rock and over a large cave and overlooks the ruins of temples erected here through the centuries to commemorate the event.

**Note:** Depending on the season, you might experience a long queue at the Church of the Nativity and the checkpoint leaving Bethlehem.

The tour ends with your local guide inviting you into his home for lunch. Enjoy traditional Palestinian fare as your guide shares compelling stories about his family history and life in Bethlehem. You arrive back at the hotel by 1:30 p.m. We provide detailed city information to help you plan your day. Perhaps you'll try a make-it-yourself falafel on Ben Yehuda Street, followed by sweet cardamom coffee at a café. You might also walk the ramparts of the Old City or find the perfect Palestinian embroidery on Christian Quarter Road. Dinner is on your own tonight.

**Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch

## What's Included

### Tour Only

Exceptional boutique accommodations	✓
16 on-tour meals: 6 breakfasts, 6 lunches, 4 dinners	✓
Local guides with you throughout tour	✓
Local wine and/or beer with dinner	✓
Entrance fees and special events as noted in the itinerary	✓
Telescopic walking sticks provided on tour	✓