



Israel

Mediterranean beaches, desert mountains and cities sacred to three faiths, in a country about the size of Wales.

AT A GLANCE

Facts to know

CAPITAL

Jerusalem

POPULATION

About 10 million (2026 estimate)

OFFICIAL LANGUAGE

Hebrew. Arabic has a special status under a 2018 law, and English is widely understood

CURRENCY

Israeli new shekel

AREA

About 20,770 km² (within the 1949 armistice lines)

GOVERNMENT

Parliamentary republic with a one-chamber parliament, the Knesset

HIGHEST MOUNTAIN

Mount Meron, about 1,200 m, in the Upper Galilee (the highest peak within the 1949 armistice lines)

LOWEST POINT

The shore of the Dead Sea, about 440 m below sea level (2025)

LONGEST RIVER

The Jordan River, about 250 km, which flows through the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea

NEIGHBOURS

Lebanon to the north, Syria to the northeast, Jordan to the east and Egypt to the southwest. The Palestinian territories, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, lie to the east and southwest. Across the sea lies Cyprus

DRIVES ON THE

Right

CALLING CODE

+972

A 45-minute trip to Israel

Everything you need is in this pack. No preparation beyond printing. Adapt the timing to your group.

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| 0 to 5 min | Welcome. Show the map page and find Israel together. Ask: who has been there, or knows someone from there? |
| 5 to 15 min | Read the facts at a glance, then three moments from the story: 1208 BC: Egyptian stele names Israel; 1917: British forces take Jerusalem; 2019: Beresheet reaches the Moon. |
| 15 to 25 min | At the table: talk about Hummus and Falafel. Idea: bring a small taste (bread, cheese, fruit, tea) if your kitchen can help. |
| 25 to 30 min | Say it like a local: practise "Shalom" (Hello, goodbye (literally: peace)), "Boker tov" (Good morning), "Erev tov" (Good evening). Everyone says them together. |
| 30 to 40 min | Quiz: read the questions aloud, or play the big-screen version at https://worldstroll.com/countries/israel/group . No scores needed. |
| 40 to 45 min | Talk about it (questions page), then stamp or sign everyone's passport page. |

You will need

- This printed pack (one per table, or one each)
- Pens for the quiz
- Optional: a world map or globe, a small tasting, music from the country

Israel and its cities



- Jerusalem (Jerusalem District): The Old City, The Israel Museum, The Mahane Yehuda market
- Tel Aviv (Tel Aviv District): The White City, Beaches and the seafront promenade, Old Jaffa
- Haifa (Haifa District): The Bahá'í Gardens, Mount Carmel, The port
- Acre (Northern District): The Old City of Acre, Crusader halls, The fishing harbour
- Nazareth (Northern District): The Basilica of the Annunciation, The old market, Arab sweets and coffee
- Tiberias (Northern District): The Sea of Galilee, Hot springs, Fish from the lake
- Safed (Northern District): Kabbalah, The artists' quarter, Old stone synagogues
- Beersheba (Southern District): Gateway to the Negev, Ben-Gurion University, The Bedouin market

- Arad (Southern District): The road to Masada, Clean, dry desert air, Desert hiking
- Eilat (Southern District): Coral reefs and diving, Winter sunshine, Desert mountains

A short history of Israel

Many peoples, empires and faiths have left their mark on this narrow strip of land between the Mediterranean and the desert. These are some key moments, from an ancient Egyptian stone to a small spacecraft sent to the Moon.

1208 BC Egyptian stele names Israel

Around 1208 BC, Pharaoh Merneptah of Egypt set up a stone slab listing his victories in Canaan. It contains the earliest known written mention of a people called Israel. The stele is now in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo.

37 BC Herod becomes king of Judea

With the backing of Rome, Herod the Great became king of Judea in 37 BC. He was a great builder: he enlarged the Temple in Jerusalem, built palaces on the rock of Masada and created the harbour city of Caesarea.

AD 70 Romans destroy the Second Temple

During a Jewish revolt against Rome, Roman legions besieged Jerusalem and destroyed the Second Temple in AD 70. The Western Wall is part of the old retaining wall around the Temple Mount.

1099 Crusaders capture Jerusalem

Knights of the First Crusade from Western Europe captured Jerusalem in 1099 and founded the Kingdom of Jerusalem.

1187 Saladin takes Jerusalem

After defeating the Crusaders at the Battle of Hattin near Tiberias, the sultan Saladin took Jerusalem in 1187.

1291 Fall of Crusader Acre

The Mamluks of Egypt captured Acre, the last major Crusader stronghold in the region, in 1291. The Crusader halls still lie under the streets of Acre's Old City.

1517 Ottoman rule begins

The Ottoman Turks took the region from the Mamluks and ruled it for four centuries. Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem's Old City that still stand today.

- 1909** **Tel Aviv is founded**
On 11 April 1909, 66 Jewish families gathered on the sand dunes north of the old port of Jaffa and shared out plots of land in a lottery using seashells. The new neighbourhood became Tel Aviv.
- 1917** **British forces take Jerusalem**
During the First World War, British forces took Jerusalem from the Ottomans in December 1917. Britain later governed the area under a League of Nations mandate, called Mandatory Palestine.
- 1925** **Hebrew University opens**
The Hebrew University of Jerusalem opened on Mount Scopus on 1 April 1925. Albert Einstein was one of its founders and later left his personal papers to it.
- 1947** **UN votes to partition Palestine**
On 29 November 1947, the United Nations General Assembly voted for a plan to divide British-ruled Palestine into a Jewish state and an Arab state, with Jerusalem under international rule. Jewish leaders accepted the plan and Arab leaders rejected it.
- 1948** **Israel declares independence**
On 14 May 1948, as British rule ended, Jewish leaders in Tel Aviv declared the State of Israel. War with neighbouring Arab states followed. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinian Arabs fled or were driven from their homes, an event Palestinians call the Nakba, and many Jews later came to Israel from Arab countries and from Europe.
- 1949** **Israel joins the United Nations**
On 11 May 1949, Israel became the 59th member of the United Nations.
- 1979** **Peace treaty with Egypt**
Israel and Egypt signed a peace treaty in Washington in 1979, the first between Israel and an Arab state. Israel returned the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt by 1982.
- 1994** **Peace treaty with Jordan**
Israel and Jordan signed a peace treaty on 26 October 1994 at a crossing in the Arava valley, north of Eilat and Aqaba.

2019

Beresheet reaches the Moon

Beresheet, a small lander built by the non-profit SpaceIL and Israel Aerospace Industries, reached the Moon on 11 April 2019. An engine problem made it crash during landing, but it was the first privately funded attempt to land on the Moon.

What people eat in Israel

Israeli food brings together the cooking of Jewish families who came from Morocco, Iraq, Yemen, Poland and dozens of other lands with the Arab and Mediterranean dishes of the region. A typical meal starts with salatim, many small salads and dips eaten with pita bread. Grilled meat or fish follows, and the meal ends with fruit, a sweet and strong coffee or mint tea. Friday evening dinner, at the start of Shabbat, is the big family meal of the week.

Hummus

Eaten across the Levant; in Israel, served in hummus bars everywhere

A smooth purée of cooked chickpeas, tahini (sesame paste), lemon and garlic, spread on a plate with olive oil on top and scooped up with warm pita.

Falafel

Eaten across the Middle East; a favourite street food in Israel

Crisp deep-fried balls of ground chickpeas, herbs and spices. In Israel they are stuffed into a pita with salad, tahini sauce and pickles.

Sabich

Iraqi Jewish tradition; first sold as a sandwich in Ramat Gan in 1961

A pita filled with fried aubergine slices, hard-boiled egg, chopped salad, hummus, tahini and amba, a tangy mango pickle.

Shakshouka

North Africa, brought by Jews from Tunisia and Libya

Eggs gently cooked in a spicy sauce of tomatoes, peppers, onion and cumin, served in the pan with bread to dip. Israelis eat it for breakfast or a light supper.

Israeli salad

All over the country, based on the Arab chopped salad of the region

Tomatoes and cucumbers cut into very small cubes, dressed with olive oil, lemon juice and salt. It is served with almost every meal, even breakfast.

Jachnun

Yemenite Jewish tradition

Thin layers of buttery dough rolled into logs and baked very slowly overnight until golden brown. It is eaten on Saturday morning with grated tomato, a hard-boiled egg and spicy zhug sauce.

Bourekas

Sephardic Jewish tradition from Turkey and the Balkans

Flaky pastries filled with salty cheese, potato, spinach or mushrooms, often topped with sesame seeds. The shape often tells you the filling.

Challah

Jewish tradition; the braided loaf comes from Central and Eastern Europe

A soft, slightly sweet braided bread made with eggs. Two loaves are placed on the table for the Friday evening meal and on holidays.

Ptitim (Israeli couscous)

Created in Israel in 1953

Tiny balls of toasted wheat pasta, cooked like rice or risotto and loved by children. Abroad it is often called Israeli couscous or pearl couscous.

Hamin (cholent)

Jewish tradition; every community has its own version

A rich stew of meat, beans, potatoes, barley and whole eggs that cooks slowly all night and is eaten at lunch on Saturday.

Jerusalem mixed grill

Jerusalem, said to come from the Mahane Yehuda market

Chicken hearts, livers and other meat fried on a hot griddle with onion, cumin and turmeric, usually served in a pita with salad and tahini.

Sufganiyah

Eaten all over the country at Hanukkah

A round, deep-fried doughnut filled with red jam and dusted with powdered sugar. Bakeries sell millions in the weeks of Hanukkah.

Rugelach

Jewish communities of Central and Eastern Europe

Small crescent pastries rolled around a filling of chocolate or cinnamon and sugar, sold in stacks at every bakery and market.

Malabi

Eaten across the Middle East and Turkey

A cool, silky milk pudding set with cornflour, topped with rose water syrup, chopped pistachios and coconut. It is sold from street carts on hot days.

Limonana

Israel, named in the 1990s

Fresh lemonade blended with mint leaves and ice into a pale green, frosty drink, very popular in summer.

GOOD MANNERS

At the table

- Many restaurants in Jewish areas are kosher: they never serve meat and milk products in the same meal, so there is no cheese on a burger and often no milk for coffee after a meat meal.
- Many kosher restaurants close from Friday afternoon until Saturday evening for Shabbat. Restaurants in Arab towns and many places in Tel Aviv stay open.
- At a Friday evening dinner, wait for the host to say the blessing over the wine and the challah before you start eating.
- Salads and dips come to the table first and are shared by everyone. Tear off a piece of pita and use it to scoop up hummus.
- In Arab and Druze homes, guests are usually offered coffee or tea and something sweet. Accepting at least a little is polite.
- If you are invited to a home, a small gift such as flowers, sweets or a bottle of wine is welcome. In a kosher home, choose something with a kosher label.

Hummus

A smooth purée of cooked chickpeas, tahini (sesame paste), lemon and garlic, spread on a plate with olive oil on top and scooped up with warm pita.

Ingredients

- 2 tins (about 800 g) cooked chickpeas, drained (keep a few whole ones to serve)
- 120 ml tahini (sesame paste)
- Juice of 1 to 2 lemons
- 1 small garlic clove
- Half a teaspoon of salt
- 60 ml ice-cold water
- Olive oil, paprika and chopped parsley to serve

Method

1. Put the chickpeas, garlic, lemon juice and salt in a food processor and blend until crumbly.
2. Add the tahini and blend again, pouring in the ice-cold water a little at a time, until the hummus is very smooth and light. This takes a few minutes.
3. Taste and add more lemon or salt if needed.
4. Spread on a plate with the back of a spoon, making a hollow in the middle.
5. Pour olive oil into the hollow, add a few whole chickpeas, a pinch of paprika and some parsley. Serve with warm pita.

Shakshouka

Eggs gently cooked in a spicy sauce of tomatoes, peppers, onion and cumin, served in the pan with bread to dip. Israelis eat it for breakfast or a light supper.

Ingredients

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 onion and 1 red pepper, sliced
- 2 garlic cloves, chopped
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin and 1 teaspoon sweet paprika
- A pinch of chilli flakes (optional)
- 800 g tinned chopped tomatoes
- 6 eggs (for pregnant women, young children, older people or anyone with a weak immune system, cook the yolks until firm or use pasteurised eggs)
- Salt, fresh parsley or coriander, and bread to serve

Method

1. Heat the oil in a wide frying pan and soften the onion and pepper for about 8 minutes.
2. Add the garlic, cumin, paprika and chilli and stir for one minute.
3. Pour in the tomatoes, season with salt and simmer for 10 to 15 minutes until thick.
4. Make six hollows in the sauce with a spoon and crack an egg into each one.
5. Cover and cook on low heat for 6 to 10 minutes, until the whites are fully set.
6. Sprinkle with herbs and serve straight from the pan with bread.

Israeli salad

Tomatoes and cucumbers cut into very small cubes, dressed with olive oil, lemon juice and salt. It is served with almost every meal, even breakfast.

Ingredients

- 4 ripe tomatoes
- 3 small cucumbers
- Half a red onion (optional)
- A handful of chopped parsley
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- Juice of half a lemon
- Salt and black pepper

Method

1. Cut the tomatoes and cucumbers into cubes as small as you can, about half a centimetre.
2. Finely chop the onion, if using, and the parsley.
3. Mix everything in a bowl.
4. Just before serving, add the olive oil, lemon juice, salt and pepper and stir well.

Malabi

A cool, silky milk pudding set with cornflour, topped with rose water syrup, chopped pistachios and coconut. It is sold from street carts on hot days.

Ingredients

- 1 litre milk
- 80 g cornflour (cornstarch)
- 80 g sugar
- 1 tablespoon rose water
- For the syrup: 100 ml water, 3 tablespoons sugar, 1 teaspoon rose water and a few drops of red food colouring or raspberry syrup
- Chopped pistachios and desiccated coconut to serve

Method

1. Mix the cornflour with 250 ml of the cold milk until smooth.
2. Heat the rest of the milk with the sugar until it steams.
3. Pour in the cornflour mixture and stir all the time over medium heat until the pudding thickens and bubbles, about 5 minutes.
4. Take off the heat, stir in the rose water and pour into six glasses or bowls. Chill for at least 3 hours.
5. For the syrup, boil the water and sugar for 3 minutes, then add the rose water and colouring and let it cool.
6. Before serving, pour a little syrup on each pudding and sprinkle with pistachios and coconut.

Limonana

Fresh lemonade blended with mint leaves and ice into a pale green, frosty drink, very popular in summer.

Ingredients

- Juice of 4 lemons
- A large handful of fresh mint leaves
- 4 tablespoons sugar (or to taste)
- 500 ml cold water
- 2 large handfuls of ice

Method

1. Put the lemon juice, sugar and water in a blender and blend until the sugar dissolves.
2. Add the mint leaves and the ice.
3. Blend until the ice is crushed and the drink is pale green and frosty.
4. Taste, add more sugar if needed, and serve at once.

Useful phrases

Shalom

shah-LOHM · Hello, goodbye (literally: peace)

Boker tov

BOH-ker TOHV · Good morning

Erev tov

EH-rev TOHV · Good evening

Laila tov

LIE-lah TOHV · Good night

Ma nishma?

mah nish-MAH · How are you? What's new?

Todah rabah

toh-DAH rah-BAH · Thank you very much

Bevakasha

beh-vah-kah-SHAH · Please; you're welcome

Slicha

slee-KHAH · Excuse me, sorry

Ani lo mevin / mevina

ah-NEE loh meh-VEEN / meh-vee-NAH · I don't understand (said by a man / by a woman)

Ata medaber anglit? / At medaberet anglit?

ah-TAH meh-dah-BER ahng-LEET / aht meh-dah-BEH-ret ahng-LEET · Do you speak English? (to a man / to a woman)

Kama ze ole?

KAH-mah zeh oh-LEH · How much does it cost?

Eifo ha-sherutim?

ay-FOH hah-sheh-roo-TEEM · Where are the toilets?

Ha-cheshbon, bevakasha

hah-khesh-BOHN beh-vah-kah-SHAH · The bill, please

Beteavon

beh-teh-ah-VOHN · Enjoy your meal

Lechaim

leh-KHAH-yim · Cheers (literally: to life)

Shabbat shalom

shah-BAHT shah-LOHM · Have a peaceful Shabbat

Mazal tov

MAH-zahl TOHV · Congratulations

Lehitraot

leh-heet-rah-OHT · See you later, goodbye

Yalla

YAH-lah · Come on, let's go (from Arabic)

Things you might not know

1. The shore of the Dead Sea is the lowest land on Earth. As of 2025 it was about 440 metres below sea level, and the water level is falling by more than a metre a year.
2. The Dead Sea is almost ten times saltier than the ocean, so people float on it without trying.
3. The Sea of Galilee, called Kinneret in Hebrew, is the lowest freshwater lake on Earth, about 210 metres below sea level.
4. For many centuries Hebrew was used mainly for prayer and study. In the late 19th and 20th centuries it was revived as an everyday spoken language, and today it is the mother tongue of millions.
5. Tel Aviv began in 1909 when 66 families shared out plots of land on the sand dunes in a lottery using seashells.
6. Tel Aviv has more than 4,000 buildings in the Bauhaus or International Style, which is why it is called the White City. UNESCO listed it in 2003.
7. The working week in Israel runs from Sunday to Thursday. Shabbat, the day of rest, lasts from sunset on Friday to nightfall on Saturday.
8. In 2008, about 155,000 Israelis voted in a national poll, and the hoopoe, a bird with a crest like a fan, became the national bird.
9. Netafim, a company founded on Kibbutz Hatzerim in the Negev in 1965, launched the world's first commercial dripper for drip irrigation.
10. The navigation app Waze started in Israel as a community mapping project. Google bought it in 2013.
11. The blue and white flag of Israel, adopted in 1948, was inspired by the tallit, the Jewish prayer shawl, with a blue Star of David in the middle.
12. Albert Einstein was one of the founders of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and left it his personal papers. Its archive holds about 55,000 items.
13. The name of the Moon lander Beresheet is the first word of the Bible in Hebrew and means "In the beginning".

Questions for the group

- Have you ever been to Israel, or has someone in your family? What do you remember?
- Have you ever tasted Hummus or Falafel? What is a dish you remember from a trip?
- Peace treaty with Egypt (1979). Do you remember hearing about it? Where were you then?
- Peace treaty with Jordan (1994). Do you remember hearing about it? Where were you then?
- Have you seen Caesarea, in person or in pictures? Which famous place would you most like to see?
- If you could spend one day in any city of Israel, which would it be and why?

QUIZ

How well do you know Israel?

Circle the right answer. The answers are on the last page.

1. What is shakshouka?

- A) A braided bread for Shabbat
- B) A milk pudding with rose syrup
- C) Eggs cooked in a tomato and pepper sauce
- D) Fried balls of ground chickpeas

2. Which Hebrew word do you say when raising a glass?

- A) Lehitraot
- B) Lechaim
- C) Slicha
- D) Beteavon

3. "Mazal tov" is said to wish someone a safe journey.

- A) True
- B) False

4. On which days does the normal working week in Israel run?

- A) Monday to Friday
- B) Tuesday to Saturday
- C) Saturday to Wednesday
- D) Sunday to Thursday

5. Which pita sandwich with fried aubergine and hard-boiled egg comes from the Iraqi Jewish kitchen?

- A) Shawarma
- B) Sabich
- C) Bourekas
- D) Falafel

6. Nazareth is a beach town on the Red Sea.

- A) True
- B) False

7. Hebrew is written from right to left.

- A) True
- B) False

8. Which is the lowest land on Earth?

- A) The shore of the Sea of Galilee
- B) Death Valley in California
- C) The shore of the Dead Sea
- D) The shore of the Caspian Sea

9. How do you say "Excuse me" or "Sorry" in Hebrew?

- A) Yalla
- B) Ken
- C) Shalom
- D) Slicha

10. Which rock fortress high above the Dead Sea, with palaces built by Herod, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site?

- A) Masada
- B) Tel Megiddo
- C) Caesarea
- D) Old Jaffa

11. The design of Israel's flag was inspired by the tallit, the Jewish prayer shawl.

- A) True
- B) False

12. What does the Hebrew word "shalom" mean?

- A) Please
- B) Peace, also used for hello and goodbye
- C) Thank you
- D) Water

Quiz answers

1. C) Eggs cooked in a tomato and pepper sauce

Shakshouka is eggs cooked in a tomato and pepper sauce, a dish brought by Jews from Tunisia and Libya.

2. B) Lechaim

Lechaim means to life, the Hebrew toast.

3. False

False. Mazal tov means congratulations, said at weddings, births and other good news.

4. D) Sunday to Thursday

The working week runs from Sunday to Thursday, and Shabbat lasts from Friday sunset to Saturday nightfall.

5. B) Sabich

Sabich joins fried aubergine, egg, salad, tahini and amba in a pita. It comes from the Shabbat breakfast of Iraqi Jews.

6. False

False. Nazareth is in the hills of Lower Galilee in the north. The Red Sea resort is Eilat.

7. True

True. Hebrew, like Arabic, is written from right to left.

8. C) The shore of the Dead Sea

The shore of the Dead Sea is the lowest land on Earth, about 440 metres below sea level as of 2025.

9. D) Slicha

Slicha means excuse me or sorry.

10. A) Masada

Masada is a flat-topped rock fortress above the Dead Sea. UNESCO listed it in 2001.

11. True

True. The blue stripes on white recall the tallit, with a blue Star of David in the middle.

12. B) Peace, also used for hello and goodbye

Shalom means peace, also used for hello and goodbye.

Israel visa page

Name: _____ Date: _____



Next stops

Country: _____	Country: _____	Country: _____
Country: _____	Country: _____	Country: _____

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<https://worldstroll.com/countries/israel>