



MEJDI TOURS

Birding, Culture, and Crater along the Ancient Spice Route of the Goddess an Israel Desert Spirituality Journey

Day 1,: Welcome to Israel (rest up)

- After COVID screening and testing at the airport, transfer on your own to the hotel in Tel Aviv.
- Check in to the hotel and await your test results.
- After your test results are back, you are free to go relax on the beach or explore the city on your own.
- Get a good night sleep.

Hotel: Ruth Daniel Residence, Jaffa

Day 2, The Four Elements – Earth, Air, Water, and Fire — and Shabbat in Tel Aviv

- Meet your guide and fellow travelers in the morning.
- The Eretz Israel Museum will introduce the first of our four elements: **Earth**. A highlight of this archaeological museum is its collection of 14th to 12th century BCE artifacts from the Egyptian-Midianite Mining Temple in Timna in the Arava Desert. We will pay special attention to objects bearing the image of **Hathor, the patron goddess of mining**, a figure who we will revisit later in the tour.
- We will have lunch on your own at **Shuk Hanamal**, an indoor food and produce market, with an extra outdoor organic market on Fridays. There we will introduce the second of our four elements: Air, through the scents we take in.
- In the afternoon, have the option to either:
 - Have a feminist perspective on life in Tel Aviv:
 - Visit **Comme il Faut** (Bayit Banamal), a unique store and exhibition space that wishes to give space to the female body and its various needs, to give room to different forms of pleasure: Food, body, fashion, art, thought, and spirit. The founders decided to use brand power to raise awareness and disseminate a feminist agenda. In 2013, the campaign began to raise awareness of breast cancer, to assist in the fight against violence against women, to implement the project to establish the first cleaning workers' cooperative in Israel, aimed at helping cleaning workers cut off

dependence on contractor companies that employ them under unfair conditions.

- We will then have the opportunity to glimpse into the world of Israeli feminist sexual liberation at The Sisters, a women's focused sex shop developed based on the belief that sexual pleasure is a basic right of every woman. The guiding principle of Sisters' day-to-day activities is to open communication among women about sexuality and to share real and reliable information about sex to promote pleasure, health and happiness.
- Have the option of remaining in the port area to get a treatment at Coola, a women only spa, at your own expense.
- Or explore north Tel Aviv on your own. Some suggested activities that are open on Friday afternoon include:
 - Shop in the Port area.
 - Visit the **Museum of the Jewish People** (closes at 2 pm).
 - Visit the **Yitzhak Rabin Center** (closes at 2 pm).
 - Visit the **Museum of Illusions**.
 - Take out a pedal boat or kayak on **HaYarkon** River.
 - Go rock climbing on a premier rock climbing wall, have fun at an outdoor trampoline park, or try out a ropes course.
 - Visit **Rosh Tsipor Bird Watching Center**.
 - Soar up in the air to take in great views of Tel Aviv from the TLV Balloon.
- In the late afternoon, we will connect with our third element, **Water**, as we dip our toes into the Mediterranean Sea. We will then join a group of beachside drummers who have gathered every Friday for the last 20+ years to welcome in Shabbat with rhythm, music, and dancing. Feel the **Air** of the ocean breeze.
- As Shabbat comes in, we will experience our fourth element, **Fire**, as we light Shabbat candles together.
- We will join the egalitarian community of Beit Tefilah Israeli of a special musical Israeli Kabbalat Shabbat. This is an opportunity for a unique encounter as we welcome Shabbat with a Tel Aviv spirit, with traditional and contemporary prayers, alongside singing, dancing, and new Israeli music.
- We will return to the hotel for Shabbat dinner.

Day 3: Curiosity Kicks In: Exploring Identity, Power, and Lore in Jaffa

- Have the morning free to sleep in, explore the city on your own, relax on the beach, or attend services at Mishkanot Ruth Daniel, a Reform synagogue led by Rabbi Mira Raz, located next to the hotel.
- We will regroup for a group in the Jaffa Fleamarket.
- We will then visit the Made in Eretz Israel vintage Israeli kitchen gallery. This is also a chance to see nostalgia from the 1940-1970s.
- Do a workshop and/or see a private performance with the Jaffa Theatre – A Stage for Arab Hebrew Culture.

- At the heart of Old Jaffa, we will find images of the 12 Zodiac signs and make own wishes at the Wishing Bridge.
- We will conclude by making havdallah overlooking Andromeda Rocks where we will learn about the legend of Queen Cassiopeia chaining her daughter, the Goddess Andromeda, to the cliffs out of jealousy of her beauty. Along the way, we will learn about other legendary female figures associated with Jaffa including Tabitha who was a disciple of Jesus, educator Jane Walker-Arnott, and modern day artist Ilana Goor.
- We will then have a free evening with an optional dinner offered.

Hotel: Ruth Daniel Residence, Jaffa [B, L]

Day 4,: Ethiopian and Bedouin Communities

- After breakfast, we will have the option of participating in an aromatherapy workshop with Leah Sands at the hotel (those sensitive to smells or uninterested can opt out).
- We will check out and travel to Kiryat Gat to visit members of a Ethiopian Israeli organization. There we will get acquainted with traditional **Ethiopian culture** from members of the community. We will get to savor the tastes of injera and the traditional spice chao.
- We will then travel to the Negev desert to the **Bedouin township of Lakiya**. We will spend the afternoon with the women of Sidreh, a Bedouin women’s right NGO that also houses a women’s weaving cooperative.
- We’ll continue south to **Mitzpe Ramon**. Once we arrive, we will check in and have dinner.

Hotel: Ramon Suites Hotel, Mizpe Ramon [B, L, D]

Day 5, Encounter with the External and Our Internal Craters

- We will begin the day with yoga and meditative walk in the desert along the edge of the crater.
- We will then visit the **Zlilei Hamidbar (Sounds of the Desert) Park** along the northern cliff of Maktesh Ramon where we can admire stone and interactive sculptures and listen to gongs and bells set in motion manually or by the wind.
- We will visit **Faran Cosmetics**, a local factory that makes organic makeup and organic goat and camel milk soaps.
- We will then have some free time in **Mitzpe Ramon’s Spice Route Quarter** for lunch on your own and an opportunity to check out some of the many galleries and shops.
- We will then have the opportunity to participate in a **desert baking field workshop** with Hadas Meir, owner of Lasha Bakery. We will make our own dough outside and bake our bread on an open fire in a special Potjiekos bread-baking dish. Hadas has said: “In the field workshops you really feel the desert...baking bread outside, the desert becomes an active ingredient in the baking, which is very moving. All the different elements—earth, wind, water, and fire—come into play, and at the end of the workshop we have a meal outside, and the bread is the key component of that meal.”

- The Holy One promises the biblical Patriarchs and Matriarchs: "I will cause your descendants to become as numerous as the stars of the sky." After dinner, we will sit underneath this same beautiful clear sky as our ancestors with an astronomer who will guide us in the wonder of the diamonds painted on the sky.

Hotel: Ramon Suites Hotel, Mitzpe Ramon [B, Breadmaking, D]

Day 6, Tuesday, March 15, 2022: Hope Renewed: The Arava Desert

- We will head south to the **International Birding and Research Center** in Eilat for some morning bird-watching with an ornithologist. Eilat is a major junction on the bird's migration flyway and one of the most important stop over sites for migratory birds in the world. The only overland bridge between Europe, Asia and Africa is also a bottle-neck that serves hundreds of millions of migratory birds. Moreover, these birds in Eilat, are preparing themselves for the most challenging task of crossing the foodless and hostile Saharan desert. Eilat area that used to be a large and fertile saltmarsh that consisted the last "fueling station" before the desert for these birds, suffered human development that left nothing of this important habitat.
- We will head back north to **Timna Park**, the site of the world's first copper mine. Thousands of ancient mining shafts can be seen throughout the park as well as remains of smelting furnaces dating back to ancient imperial Egypt. We will also have lunch at the park's King Solomon's Khan restaurant before exploring the park.
- We will wrap up the afternoon with a visit the **Arava Institute for Environmental Studies** that has a student body comprised of Jordanians, Palestinians, Israelis, and students from around the world. Tour their experimental orchards and renewable energy park and hear from their staff or program participants.
- Upon returning to the hotel, the group will have dinner.

Hotel: Ramon Suites Hotel, Mizpe Ramon [B, L, D]

Day 7, Wednesday, March 16, 2022: Dead Sea and Looking Ahead/Preparing for Purim

- We will check out after breakfast and head to the impressive **Mount Sodom, rising from the Dead Sea**, with its unusual rock formations including one called "Lot's Wife," after the biblical story. There we will do a text study using the poem Eshet Lot (Lot's Wife) by Anda Pinkerfeld-Amir and other sources.
- We'll have lunch Kibbutz Ein Gedi and relax at their **Dead Sea spa**. Dip into the healing waters of a heated pool filled with Dead Sea water -- float instead of sink, apply the famous black mud with many healing minerals, and soak your troubles and travel stress away....
- We will ascend to Jerusalem and check into the hotel.
- We will meet an **Israeli woman and a Palestinian woman** from the peacemaking organization the Parents Circle-Families Forum (PCFF). Members of this organization have all lost family members to war, terrorism, or violence. Both women contributed recipes to PCFF's "Jam Session Cookbook - Recipes for Friendship, Jams and

Remembrance.” The women will bring samples for jams that we will use with them to **bake hamentashen for Purim**. Two first-year Hebrew Union College rabbinical students will join our group to assist us in making the hamentashen. Everyone will receive a copy of their cookbook.

- Have a free evening with an option to stay back at the hotel for an additional speaker arranged by Rabbi Rayzel Raphael.

Hotel: Beit Shmuel, Jerusalem [B, L]

Day 8, Old City and Purim

- Dr. Melila Hellner-Eshed will join us in the morning to teach us about the presence of the **Shechinah on the Temple Mount**. Melila is a research fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute and a professor of Jewish mysticism and Zohar in the department of Jewish Studies at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Melila is on the faculty of the Institute of Jewish Spirituality and is active in the 'Sulha' - a reconciliation project that brings together Israelis and Palestinians.
- We will then ascend **Ascend to the Temple Mount/Al-Haram al-Sharif** and tour the precinct.
- We will have personal time at the Kotel. Then we will descend underground for a tunnel tour of the Old City.
- After lunch on your own, we will visit Jerusalem's oldest synagogue, the **Karaite Synagogue**, which dates back to the time of Caliph Omar, circa 637 CE. We will use the visit as an opportunity to learn how Karaite Jews have been dedicated to the observance of the original written Torah by its "peshat" or face-value meaning and how the religious role of women in Karaite Judaism developed differently than mainstream Judaism that followed rabbinic law.
- Then we will visit the **Museum of Psalms** where we will engage in a text study of a selection of Psalms through art. The Museum of Psalms features the Psalms Collection, 150 paintings for each of the Psalms created by Moshe Tzvi Halevi Berger, one painting for each one of the Psalms. Moshe Tzvi Halevi Berger realized another two Collections of paintings that bring once imagination to meditation, prayer, faith and visual healing through colors; The Suns Collection and The Tree of Life Collection that we will also learn about.
- We will cap off the day with a fun group photo in the **Cardo** with all of us dressed up in Biblical era garb in honor of Purim.
- We will then return to the hotel and have some free time before heading out for Purim.
- We will join Kehilat Zion, an egalitarian congregation led by Rabbi Tamar Applebaum, for a festive megillah reading.
- For anyone who is interested, have the option of going out with Rabbi Rayzel Raphael for dinner and revelry in the **Machane Yehuda Shuk**.

Hotel: Beit Shmuel, Jerusalem [B]

Day 9, Women of the Wall, Rachel's Tomb, and Bethlehem

- We'll return to the Old City to walk through the Armenian, Christian, and Muslim Quarters and browse through the Arab Shuk.
- We will spend the morning participating in Women of the Wall's Purim service at the Kotel. Afterwards, we'll speak with some of their leaders.
- We will have lunch on your own in the Old City.
- We will then travel to **Kever Rachel, the matriarch Rachel's grave**. Many religious Jewish women who are pregnant or who experience fertility problem pray here. The site is in a walled enclave that juts into the city of Bethlehem and provides a good opportunity to see the separation barrier from the Israeli perspective.
- After visiting the tomb, we will cross into the West Bank on foot and see the wall from the Palestinian perspective.
- We will get the chance to visit the Walled Off Hotel, set up and financed by world renowned Street Artist Banksy, where we will find a museum and art gallery.
- Visit **Bethlehem Fair Trade Artisans** and meet the Director Suzan Sahori. Hear her story.
- We will return to the hotel and prepare for Shabbat.
- We will then join together for a spiritual Kabbalat Shabbat services at the hotel led Rabbi Rayzel Raphael.
- We will have Shabbat dinner together at the hotel.
- Have the option of a late night trip to the Kotel to experience the different energy from the daytime. Shechinah energy is more palpable at night and on Shabbat.

Hotel: Beit Shmuel, Jerusalem [B, D]

Day 10,: Shabbat and Integration Ritual: Reaping the Rewards of the Journey

- We will check out of our rooms after breakfast and store our luggage.
- We will have a free morning to explore the Old City on your own, visit the **Jerusalem Bird Observatory**, attend Shabbat morning services, or visit the **Israel Museum** (taxis and entrance fee not included).
- Lunch will be available for those who are interested (need to sign up and pay in advance; no included).
- There will be an optional tour in the afternoon walking tour of the **"Street of Prophetesses"** along Jerusalem's Prophets Street. We will follow the footsteps of great Jerusalem women who worked, loved, and created including a Russian princess, an Ethiopian queen, a leader of laborers, a poet, a painter, and a physician. The sites of the tour include Sergei's Courtyard, the Ethiopian Church, Ticho House, the home of Rachel the poet, and the home of Helena Kagan.
- We will end the tour with a **closing ritual** and a musical Havdallah led by Rabbi Ruth Gan Kagan, the spiritual leader of Nava Tehila, a Jewish Renewal Community.

Optional Day 11, Extension for First Timers: Jerusalem

- Take a sobering walk through **Yad Vashem**, Israel's living memorial to the Holocaust. Yad Vashem safeguards the memory of the past and imparts its meaning for future generations. Have lunch on your own there.
- Then visit **Mount Herzl** to learn about Israel's wars. Conclude the cemetery tour with a visit to the Memorial of Ethiopian Jews at Mount Herzl. There, learn about the waves of immigration of Ethiopian Jews to Israel via Sudan that started in the 1980s. By the end of that decade, some 17,000 immigrants arrived. The memorial site at Mount Herzl commemorates the thousands who died along the journey due to the harsh conditions that these immigrants faced.
- Take a tour of the Israel Museum.

Hotel: Beit Shmuel, Jerusalem [B]

Optional Day 12: Masada and Qumran

- Travel south to the mountaintop fortress of **Masada**. There, take in breathtaking views of the Judean Desert, explore the archaeological park, and learn the dramatic story of Masada's role in the Great Revolt.
- Visit **Qumran** to see the site where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found.
- Return to Jerusalem.

Hotel: Beit Shmuel, Jerusalem [B, L]

Optional Day 13, Ancient Jerusalem

- Begin the day by checking out of the hotel and checking your luggage.
- Spend the morning on a tour of the Mount of Olives exploring the Jewish cemetery and **Christian holy sites**.
- After lunch, spend the afternoon in **Silwan**, an East Jerusalem majority-Palestinian neighborhood just outside of the Old City that is home of the City of David archaeological site. Tour the site and hear about the impact of the site and the influx of Israeli settlers on the Palestinians who live nearby.
- Conclude the tour extension by visiting **Mount Zion** with a representative of the Jerusalem Intercultural Center. Mount Zion is a holy site to Jews, Muslims, and Christians that is associated with both King David's Tomb and the Jesus Last Supper.
- Return to the hotel to pick up your luggage and transfer to the airport.

[B, L]