

QAUM-E-LUT PUNISHED HERE - **THE DEAD SEA:**

The **Dead Sea** is the lowest surface on Earth, at 430m [1412 ft] below normal geographical sea level - located in the border-region of Jordan, Palestine and Israel; about 25km east of Jerusalem. Its climate offers year-round sunny skies and dry air; less than 50mm annual rainfall and a summer average temperature between 32 and 39°C - winter average 20 to 23°C. Its therapeutic qualities attracted Herod the Great in ancient times. It is more of a lake than a sea, fed by the Jordan River. The Crusaders, when ruled Jerusalem during 1099-1187 AD, called it the Sea of Satan; Muslims also view it as a sign of God's wrath and anger.

The salts and minerals of the **Dead Sea** have long been believed to have healing properties - often used in soaps and cosmetics; several high-class spas have sprung up along its shores to cater the tourists and travellers from the whole world. Its minerals and sticky black mud provided balms for Egyptian mummies and cosmetics for Cleopatra. Its health resorts treat psoriasis and arthritis, its skin-care products are marketed worldwide, and its industrial evaporation pans harvest potash like minerals weighing in tons daily.

The **Dead Sea** is about 50km long, 15km across at its widest point; the water area is constantly shrinking and the water level is dropping by more than a metre every year. Because it has no exit, water is lost only through evaporation, which leaves behind the minerals; thus causing extremely bitter taste. This sea is nearly 10 times as salty as the other open oceans. The high concentration of minerals [*mostly chlorides of Magnesium and Potassium*] provides the buoyancy that keeps bathers floating.

According to Islamic traditions, the Dead Sea is actually the site of an **ancient city of Sodom**, home of the **Prophet Lut [Lot or Luut] AS**. The holy Qur'an describes the people of Sodom as deviant, wicked, evil-

doers who rejected God's call to righteousness. Nabi Lut AS kept trying convey God's message to them - but found that even his own wife was one of the disbelievers.

When Prophet Abraham AS left Egypt, his nephew Nabi Lut AS was commanded by God to go towards the city of Sodom which was on the western shore of the Dead Sea. Then the city was a landmark of evil and its residents used to rob and kill travellers. Another common evil among them was that men used to have sex with men, the unnatural act later named as sodomy [*after the city of Sodom in literature*] AND the evil was practiced openly, shamelessly and defiantly. They refused to even listen God's messenger; instead, they threatened to drive Nabi AS out of the town - **Al-Qur'an 26:160-174** is referred for details.

Every Muslim knows that Qura'nic narration of the event when Allah had sent His three angles to Nabi Lut AS that night....and [at last] how an earthquake rocked the whole town; a mighty power had lifted the entire city and flung it back with top down in one jolt. A storm of red-clay stones rained on the city; everyone perished [including Nabi Lut's wife] – see the whole recitation in **Al-Qur'an 11:82-83 & 15:57-75**.

God severely punished the people of this region for their impiety and iniquity. The site of that punishment is **now the Dead Sea**, standing as a symbol of destruction for all generations to come. All religious references of ancient times carry this unfolding. As per holy **Bible; in 1890 BC**, the wicked cities of **Sodom & Gomorrah** were destroyed by God with red-brick pieces, sulphur and fire; and Nabi Lut's wife was turned into a 20 meters high pillar of salt for looking back at the destruction of her town and inhabitants; Book of **Genesis 19:21-26** is referred. In the northwest there is a town named **Jericho** mentioned also in the **Genesis**; got destroyed in Nabi Abraham AS times – but still living and a key-attraction for the travellers.

On the eastern side of the Dead Sea, the highest peak visible is **Mount Nebo**, where Nabi Moses AS glimpsed the Promised Land. Before destruction, the Dead Sea was a valley full of natural tar-pits. Firstly the **Arabs** discovered the value of the globs of natural asphalt that constantly floated on surface where they could be harvested with nets. The Egyptians were steady customers, as they used asphalt in the embalming process in creating mummies.

The Ancient Romans knew the Dead Sea as **Asphalt Lake**. King Herod the Great built or re-built several fortresses and palaces on the western bank of the Dead Sea - the most famous was **Masada** where in 70 AD, the Jewish zealots fled and got refuge after fall of the Second Temple. During **Byzantine period**, the Dead Sea remained a place of escape and refuge.

Dead Sea Scrolls: Jews respect this sea equally. During 1945-55, religious documents dated between 150 BC and 70 AD were found in caves near the ancient settlement of **Qumran** - about 1.6kms inland from the north West Bank – now worldly known as the DEAD SEA SCROLLS. Qumran's ancient caves and settlements are worth for Jewish travellers. Being a place where the oldest biblical documents ever found, the daily life of mystical **Essenes**, a Jewish sect that fled Jerusalem 2000 years ago – are the real attractions for Jews.

That earlier mentioned [in holy Qur'an & Biblical books] areas, towns and their tribes were erased from the earth for ever - a chapter of moral corruption was closed for all times to come. Nabi Lut AS then visited Nabi Abraham AS and when he started recounting the story of his people, he was surprised to learn that Nabi Abraham AS already knew it. **Sodom & other two towns are still under this Dead Sea – where no water creature can live or survive – and cannot ever;** it is God's decree.

The **Dead Sea** is the most unusual water reservoir in the world; so loaded with minerals

that no fish or plant can live in it; so dense that bathers can lie back on its surface and read a newspaper – no breathing body can sink in it. The Dead Sea itself is 304 m [997 ft] deep, the deepest hyper saline lake in the world - with a salinity of 342 g/kg, or at 34.4%; thus no plants or animals can flourish. The southern part is devoted to evaporation pools for mineral extraction.

Since the late 1980s the landscape around the sea has been reshaped by thousands of **sinkholes** — caused by fresh water from the mountains dissolving underground levels of salt. In December 2013, representatives of Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority agreed on a long-term **desalination project** - started in 2018 and to be completed till 2021. The **world's lowest roads, Highway 90**, run along the Israeli and West Bank shores of the Dead Sea and with **Highway 65** on the Jordanian side, both at 393m [1,289 ft] below sea level.

Tourist Attractions: The most **stunning archaeological site** on top of a hill is **Masada** - about 300m up; of course strenuous if you're not fit. If on private or group-hire vehicle, you may continue your tour to **Ein Gedi**, a nature reserve and oasis in the desert – but now considered deserted.

Public **Bus 486 / 487** travels from the Jerusalem **Central Bus Station** direct to the **Dead Sea**, Ein Gedi and Masada via Highway 90 all the way downhill [no buses on Shabbat from Friday afternoon till Saturday evening]. There is a public beach at the **Dead Sea** accessible to all. **Masada and the Dead Sea Day Trip** from Jerusalem is also available from various companies: Duration: 9 hours and fare is about £75.00.

The main access points are the oases of **Ein Gedi** and **Ein Bokek**. One has to remember that **Ein Bokek** has a public access beach with free showers; **the beach in Ein Gedi has been completely abandoned** and currently has no facilities whatsoever. Population services are

infrequent, so check schedules before planning your journey for the Dead Sea.

The Dead Sea is very sunny; the low altitude makes the sunlight weaker; thus sunbathing here carries a lower risk of sunburn. This quality of the Dead Sea sunlight is the real secret behind its mythological curing ability for several diseases, especially skin diseases. This is, in fact, natural photo-therapy. The hyper-saline water of the Dead Sea itself carries its own magnetism.

Masada - Mountaintop Fortress, Masada National Park is 18 km south of Ein Gedi, or 12 km from Ein Bokek to the cable train on the east of Dead Sea: Open 7 Days a Week; Cable Cars timings 8am - 4pm. Masada is a mountaintop fortress which King Herod, in year 35 BC, transformed into a 3 tiered winter home - the site is a UNESCO World Heritage. **Masada Sound and Light Show** is also worth enjoying but is reachable only via Arad - 20km away.

Ein Gedi Oasis and Kibbutz. Ein Gedi was a real oasis with lush vegetation, nestled between two streams, amidst the arid landscape. Today, it stands abandoned due to sink holes. The palm trees are dead and there are abandoned buildings everywhere. There is no longer a public beach here.

Mount Sodom is a mountain near the Dead Sea that has significant caves including the largest in Israel [5.5km] the caves has a salt stalagmites and stalactites.

Beware! Several people drown every year in the Dead Sea because they do not obey the rule: **Only float on your back**; accidents happen when someone tries to swim normally [stomach first] in the water. Short of actual drowning, inhalation of the water can cause specific and life-threatening medical problems. Also; wash the salt off in the beach showers before you use your towel.

The restaurant options near the Dead Sea are almost NIL; so better to take your own food with

you. **Ein Bokek** town has two small shopping malls with a McDonald's, a number of Falafal Bars, a liquor store, and a few other stores selling everyday items and souvenirs. The shopping centre [visible against the majestic background of Desert Mountains] has a large McDonald's sign on the roof – the only sign of hope for the European travellers.