

## **BE READY FOR JERUSALEM**

**In the name of  
ALLAH THE ALMIGHTY,  
the most Gracious,  
the most Compassionate**

- Holy [& Exalted] is He Who carried His (pious) man by night **from the Holy Mosque (in Makkah) to the farther Mosque (in Jerusalem) - whose surroundings We have blessed - that We might show him some of Our signs.** Indeed He alone is All-Hearing, All-Seeing. [**AL-Qur'an** 17:1]

A reference to the event known as *Mi'raj* [Ascension] and *Isra'* [Night Journey]. According to the authentic traditions, this event took place about one year before HIJRAH; detailed reports about it are found abundantly in *Hadith* and *Sirah* books of Islam.

That FARTHER MOSQUE was the Al-Aqsa in Jerusalem, now the capital of Israel. Where is **Jerusalem** and why it was so dear to the God [ALLAH] and now to all the communities of the world - so old and so sacred that Allah has mentioned it in the latest holy book Qur'an. Why the Prophet Muhammad [pbuh] was taken to **Jerusalem** first and then to the heavens – a question in many inquisitive minds. The reply lies in the above verse itself – **'....that We might show him some of Our signs'.**

### **KNOW ABOUT JERUSALEM:**

**Jerusalem** is known as the '**land of Prophets**'; its mention is available in all earlier religious books. Travel to Jerusalem is not the exhausting or arduous or demanding camel-back journey it used to be. You can just hop on a plane and come Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion Airport.

World's 79 countries are such that they don't require visa to travel to Israel. Simply get down the airport and follow the queue to get an Entry

Pass valid for two months if you are holding passport of any of those 79 countries - NO VISA REQUIRED; probably all you need to get into Israel is a passport valid for six months at least.

Another saying of the Prophet Muhammad pbuh is: **"Visit it [Al-Aqsa] for prayer - If you cannot go for prayer then send some oil to be used in its lamps; will be as if you've prayed in it".** And there are about forty [40] *ahadith* in which the holy prophet mentioned about Al-Aqsa mosque or Jerusalem.

**Jerusalem** can justifiably be taken as the oldest living place in continuity, the oldest living culture through developments with time. One can find graves of many prophets and Allah's messengers buried here around and also the ancient religious remains – in layers. A city where monotheist Rasuls were given divine revelations; where holy **Zabur** [the biblical book of **Psalms**] was consecrated to Nabi David [in *Arabic*: Dau'd] AS. He had laid foundations of the FIRST TEMPLE to worship ONE GOD which was later completed by Nabi Solomon [in *Arabic*: Suleiman] AS during his reigns.

The holy **TORA** [*Toraaf*] was given to Nabi Moses AS at Mountain TUR in Sinai but Jerusalem is the city where the congregation of the '**TEN COMMANDMENTS**' of Nabi AS were put in practice. About 600 years later, the holy **Injil** [Bible] was blessed on Nabi Isa [Jesus] AS here.

**READY TO GO:** When packing for Jerusalem travel, one must keep in mind what to wear there – it is **NOT a normal Tourist site** to visit. So before you start packing, please read about **modest clothing** – and know its meaning realistically in detail. **Jerusalem** is NOT a place to **show off your body**; clothing matters here much; shorts and sleeveless may not work at most sites.

At most Christian, Muslim and Jewish holy sites, the modesty rules are prominently displayed at the entrances. At the **Western Wall**, the most

sacred place for the Jewish, the ambience is bit relaxed - a scarf wrapped around bare shoulders would go. If someone refuses to let you into a holy site because of dress-code, don't take it personally. Princess Margaret was once refused entrance to one of the churches on the **Mount of Olives** for showing up in a sleeveless dress.

**Israeli currency** is Shekel [NIS]. In early 2018, the exchange rates were 3.35 NIS per US Dollar and 4.70 NIS per Sterling Pound. Dollar is widely accepted currency everywhere in Jerusalem. Inside Airport there are Currency Counters and also bank Cash Tills for exchange – otherwise Dollars are accepted by the Taxi drivers outside. Money changers are abundantly available in markets of the town and nearly all tourist attractions; however, the rates may vary at places.

The **work week** in Jerusalem depends on your neighbourhood; officially, Israel has a six-day work-week that begins on Sunday and ends on Friday afternoon. Saturday - the **Jewish Sabbath** - is the official day of rest; it begins at Friday evening and ends an hour after nightfall on Saturday. When making out Jerusalem travel plans, the travellers have to take into account that most businesses, most Jewish restaurants and even public transport would be closed from Friday noon until Saturday night.

In Arab neighbourhoods, however, the Muslim day of rest is Friday and shops may or may not be open. And in Christian areas, Sunday is the day off. It is a city where you visit places you normally don't expect elsewhere. A simple rule and a fact too: **Expect the unexpected**. The official languages in Jerusalem are Hebrew and Arabic but almost anyone to whom a traveller runs into will speak some English or Russian [astounding?]; this is an incredibly international city. The Hebrew language has its own script, written from right to left like Urdu, Arabic and Persian.

**TEL AVIV AIRPORT TO JERUSALEM:** The distance between Ben Gurion Airport of Tel Aviv

and Jerusalem city is 54km only. Catching a bus [*advised for single travellers only*] directly from the main terminal at Ben Gurion Airport to the Central Bus Station in Jerusalem — and vice versa — is the most affordable option at just 16 NIS per person. The **Bus# 485** run by **Afikim** conveniently leaves every hour and for 24 hours a day from Sunday-Thursday, but less conveniently runs from 12.30pm afterwards on Fridays – NO SERVICE on Saturdays.

**SHARED TAXI VAN:** If you're arriving at the airport during odd hours or prefer to be dropped off or picked up at your hotel in Jerusalem, you can turn to the shared taxi that leaves from just outside the Arrivals Hall at Ben Gurion airport and will deliver you directly to your destination in Jerusalem. Leaving from the airport, drivers typically wait for the van to be full before setting off – but normally a few minutes to go.

On return, **if your flight is on Saturday night or Sunday, then be sure to book your van or taxi 48 hours in advance.**

In any way, after an hour or so after journey on smooth motorway [from Airport], one finds himself in his rest place or hotel where the welcome staff, mainly male, is usually smiling. You can go through the NOTES about Jerusalem – the city which is equally consecrated for all – the birth-place of many prophets where they started preaching about ONENESS OF GOD – and burial place of several ones.

Here, in this city where you feel the blessings of Allah continuously pouring down since thousands of years – one also hears the horrible haunting voices from the Dead Sea - 30kms away, where Nabi Loot AS's nation in village Sodom were dumped amidst the terrible rains, fire-balls and red pebbles / stones.

If you intend to travel in Jerusalem by bus or tram [in Jerusalem it is called LIGHT TRAIN], you'll need a **Rav-Kav** [a card with a computerised chip on it]. You can buy this on the first bus

you get on, or in the Jerusalem Central Bus Station at the ticket windows. The card costs NIS 5; then put NIS 13.50 on the card from the first bus you ride or any TRAM Station platform for **all-day ticket**. When you get on a bus or tram, you put your card on the reader machine and it will give a green signal for you.

**Weather of Jerusalem** in the winter is less predictable than in the summer. The wet season starts in November and goes through April. Israel's water supply is dependent on rainfall. Israelis hope, pray and beg the Heavens for winter rains - so the people don't grumble about a rainy day here - not even little children - they enjoy it like a school off holiday.

In Israel, it comes so windy when it rains that umbrellas go useless. **November & December** are usually fairly mild; **January and February** are the coldest months of the year. Average temperature in January: 12-13C. Israel's famous citrus fruits come in that season - the desert blooms and the surroundings go green and lush. Surprisingly, **spring** in Jerusalem comes for **2-3 weeks only**, in late March or April.

In Jerusalem, spring is also the time of several major religious holidays, when pilgrims' Jewish and Christian flock to *Jerusalem holy sites* and so there's the added excitement of that tangible holiday feeling in the air. This means lots of traditional holiday meals and seasonal treats, school holidays, yearly parades and events - not too hot not cold.

The **hotels in Jerusalem** are always busy and go fully occupied the whole year because about 15K tourists land and fly every day; the Ben Gurion Airport goes extremely busy. In hotels here, seldom there is a concept of English breakfast; normally bread slices with Tehina, hummus and tea or coffee without milk. There is little concept of eggs, cheese, jam / honey, yogurt, butter, cereals, juices or similar luxuries.

**Jerusalem** is a costly city for the English or

American tourists because meals are high priced than in UK or the States. For European tourists there is no much difference because the most European tourist cities are also much expensive. **Jerusalem food** is a unique fusion of Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, North African and East-European cuisines. One of the exciting things about Jerusalem travel is the opportunity to experience a wide variety of delicious exotic meals.

In Israel, the green produce isn't refrigerated for months - so fruit and vegetables are always fresh and in season. In fact, Jewish green produce is a major export and finds its way into Europe's high-end food stores. Fresh, seasonal produce is a staple of Jerusalem's cuisine, both in veg-fruit salads. Freshly juiced green apples, carrots and almonds make a popular drink available at many refreshment kiosks in Jerusalem.

Jerusalem's food is influenced heavily by Middle Eastern flavour. The city shows up in popular Arabian or Palestinian foods like **shawarma** and **the gyros sandwich**. Seldom one finds **McDONALD** or **KFC** or **BURGERKING** or **CKICKEN-COTTAGE** or **SUBWAY** in Jerusalem - it was astonishing. The Jews claim that Jerusalem is gaining reputation as a **foodie's paradise**. Although this is a tiny country, almost anything grows here - cooked and served fresh.

The **Shwarma** Sandwich is a classic Arabian cum Jewish food and liked by all. It is normally served in **pita bread** or **Laffa** with vegetables and sauce. **Falafel and Shwarma sandwiches** have got **street food reputation** all over the city; most travellers go to the **Damascus Gate** to enjoy and to have the best taste.

Jerusalem cuisine has a sweet tooth, too. You can find every possible kind of **halva**, a sesame-seed based confection, and counters of perennial Jewish / Arabic food; sweet, sticky **Kunafa** or **rugelach**; rose-water infused **malabi** pudding is light or pomegranate juice on every corner.

BUT what about Jewish Community's main meat

ingredient – KOSHER. **What is kosher food?** Travellers see that some Jerusalem restaurants advertise themselves as KOSHER restaurants. Keeping kosher is one of the basic doctrines of Judaism. The Jewish dietary laws are derived from several Torah prohibitions; thus Kosher restaurants serve **ONLY Kosher meat and its dishes - but NOT DAIRY items.**

Travellers in Western Jerusalem have to decide if they feel like having dairy OR meat for dinner. It's also why restaurants in Western Jerusalem are placed in two categories [may also be licensed separately]. Here are some basic rules of what **kosher food** is and what isn't:

- Some animals, like pork, are forbidden for all.
- Animals that are permitted, such as **cows and chicken**, must be slaughtered according to Jewish law.
- Certain parts of permitted animals are forbidden.
- **Meat cannot be cooked or eaten with dairy products.**

In Jerusalem, some **holiday foods** are enjoyed every week, like chicken soup and *matza balls*, traditionally served at the Sabbath [Saturday] evening meal. Some foods are common in other religions too – like '*Sheer-Khurma*' of Muslims.

In short, Tourism is one of Israel's major sources of income, with a record 3.6 million tourist arrivals in 2017, yielding a 25 percent growth since 2016 and contributed \$7 billion to the Israeli economy making it an all-time record. Israel offers a plethora of historical and religious sites and beach resorts etc but the most visited city is Jerusalem – with 19% of tourists from the US, followed by Russia, France, Germany, Poland, China, UK & Italy in descending order.