

A Tour of the Land Called Holy

Itinerary (subject to modification)

Depart, March 3rd for Israel and Arrive March 4th

Transport to Hotel in Jerusalem. You are at last in that city which an ancient tale describes as in the middle of the world, a city visited by prophets and pilgrims, kings and caliphs, mystics and warriors. The port city on the shores of eternity.

A brief orientation walk will be followed by our dinner together and after dinner a few remarks in anticipation of the next day's experiences. We will also meet our hosts in Israel/Palestine, the Abdinnour family.

Sunday, March 5th

We begin our encounter with the City of Jerusalem by going up on the Temple Mount (Haram al-sharif) home to the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque, and the probable site of the First and Second Temple. We continue by visiting primarily Christian sites connected with the final days of Jesus. We will go by bus to the top of the Mount of Olives and then work our way down stopping at the beautiful church called Dominus Flevit (Christ wept), the Garden of Gethsemane, the Church of All Nations, and the Tomb of the Virgin Mary. After lunch in the Old City we visit the Church of St. Anne next to the Pools of Bethesda and then follow the Via Dolorosa, the traditional path Jesus took to his crucifixion that ends at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. We return to the hotel for dinner and gather after dinner for reflections on what we have seen this day and what tomorrow will bring.

Monday, March 6th

We board our bus and travel west to the beautiful ancient Roman city of Caesarea on the Mediterranean. This marvelous large and complex place is best seen with a measured and thoughtful tour. We will include a stop for refreshments overlooking the Sea and will visit the Caesarea museum.

As we leave we will stop to see the aqueduct built by Herod the Great and then head north to the World Heritage Site of Akko (Acre). Akko offers us an opportunity to visit a beautiful 18th century mosque (el-Jazzar or the White Mosque) in the center of old Acco. We will also visit the extensive Crusader ruins and have a late lunch on the Mediterranean. After lunch we travel east, and time permitting, stop at the site of Beth She'arim, the very impressive Jewish necropolis with burials from the 3rd and 4th century CE. We end our day at our hotel in Tiberius on the Sea of Galilee. We have dinner together and a stroll to the Sea before bed.

Tuesday, March 7th

We head Nazareth. There we will visit the largest basilica in the Middle East, the Church of the Annunciation and the excavations of the remnants of first century Nazareth. We then visit the exceptional recreation of village life in 1st century Nazareth. On our way to our next site, the ruins of the ancient city of Sepphoris, we will first stop at Kibbutz Hasoleim. This kibbutz housed our excavation team for many years. My good friend Richard Knott who lives on the Kibbutz will talk to us about its origins and kibbutz life. Our next stop is Moshav Zippori and in particular the house and café of Rachel and Micah. We will have lunch at this wonderful little café and then press on to Sepphoris. Herod Antipas built this city in the 1st century CE just a few miles north of Nazareth. My wife and I participated in the excavations of this very large and magnificent urban space for over 10 years. I know it well and am excited to tell excavation stories and show you all the different parts of the city that have been uncovered from a first century theater to a 5th century synagogue with an intriguing mosaic floor. We return to our hotel in Tiberius for dinner and after dinner reflections on our day.

Wednesday, March 8th

This is our Sea of Galilee day when we visit the wonderful sites associated with the life and ministry of Jesus to include Capernaum, Mount of the Beatitudes, the church known as Tabgha that commemorates the miracle of loaves and fishes. We will also visit Kibbutz Nof Ginnosar, home to the Yigal Allon Museum of the Galilee (where the 1st century/Jesus Boat is kept) and Magdala. We depart the Sea of Galilee region and head south through the Jordan Valley to our hotel in Jericho.

Thursday, March 9th

we visit the ancient city of Jericho (the oldest city in the world) and then continue south to the Dead Sea. We stop at the site of Qumran and the caves where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found. We then continue further south along the shores of the Dead Sea to the stunning fortress/palace of Masada. Masada was one of Herod the Great's desert palaces and at the time of the Jewish Revolt became the fortress the Zealots used to resist a Roman siege, and when their resistance began to fail committed mass suicide rather than be taken prisoner. We leave Masada and travel back north along the Dead Sea, stopping for an opportunity to swim or at least float in the Sea – an opportunity not to be missed. We will then head west for our return visit to Jerusalem.

Friday, March 10th

This day in Jerusalem will be spent engaging both Jewish and Christian places of great importance. We go first to West Jerusalem to the Holocaust Memorial known as Yad Vashem. Afterwards, we return to the Old City to include the area of Mt. Zion to visit the church known as the Dormition Church, the church that honors where the Virgin Mary died (“fell asleep” – thus the name). We walk from there to the most holy site in all of Christendom, the Church of Holy Sepulcher and spend some time in this sacred space. We end our day at the Western or Wailing Wall as Sabbath

begins on Friday evening. We return to the hotel for our own Sabbath dinner.

Saturday, March 11th

The morning will be free to revisit sites or for some shopping in the 'souk', the large market area in the Old City. We will gather at the hotel around noon and board the bus as we head toward Bethlehem. On our way we stop at Herodium, another impressive Herodian fortress/palace in the Judean wilderness. We go on to the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem and afterward head to the area known as the Shepherds' Fields and to olive wood shops. Before we head back to the hotel we will have a special farewell dinner outside Bethlehem.

Sunday, March 12th

After breakfast, perhaps stroll around the Old City (more shopping?). We then depart for the airport and return to the U.S.