

ISRAEL TRAVEL PLANNING & PREPARATION

TRAVEL PLANNING

Site Guides – The Dead Sea

An Israel experience can be the seminal moment in Jewish identity formation for any Jewish family or individual. While each individual trip is different, almost every one includes visits or stops at: The Old City of Jerusalem, the Dead Sea, Massada, Yad Vashem (Israel's Holocaust Memorial and Museum), and the lesser visited but equally important Independence Hall in Tel Aviv.

This guide will provide travelers with some background readings of primary source texts for each place to be completed before departure, questions for family or traveler thought and discussion, links to multimedia about each location, and suggestions for other nearby sites to consider including in your planning.

Any family or group of families planning a trip to Israel should engage all family members in the process of planning the trip to provide a richer experience for all participants. This can include everything from itinerary planning, to deciding what types of foods to eat, what to pack, and types of artifacts/souvenirs to look for. While these guides provide a basic overview for these five individual sites, for a more in-depth pre trip educational enrichment experience, we suggest CIE's Pre-Trip Resource and Activity Guide: **The P.O.W.E.R of Israel**, which will provide more insight for groups to use in learning about Israel's development as a modern nation.

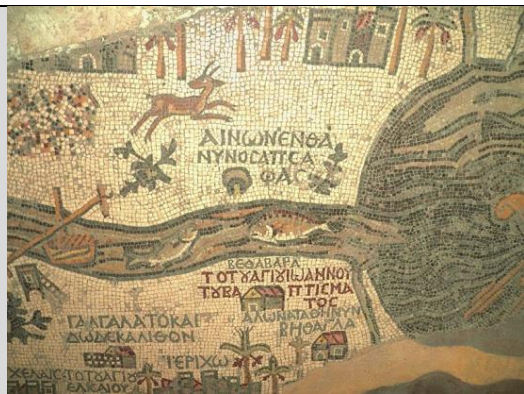
The Dead Sea

With a surface and shore lying 1,388 feet (423 meters) below sea level, the Dead Sea is the lowest point on Earth. Not only is the Dead Sea a geographic wonder as the lowest point on the Earth's surface, it is an important ecological and scientific research site, a rich historical place, and the center of the debate to provide sufficient water resources, protect the environment and maintain an important tourist destination.

Educational Themes when visiting the Dead Sea

- Ancient Jewish History
- Natural Resources
- Scientific Research
- Water Resources
- Innovation

Source Readings on the Dead Sea



Madaba Mosaic Map, a 6th century mosaic map found in Madaba Jordan, showing the Jordan River flowing into the Dead Sea.

“The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Instruct the Israelite people and say to them: When you enter the land of Canaan, this is the land that shall fall to you as your portion, the land of Canaan with its various boundaries: Your southern section shall extend from the wilderness of Zion alongside Edom. Your southern boundary shall start on the east from the tip of the Dead Sea. Your boundary shall then turn to pass south of the ascent of Akrabbim and continue to Zin, and its limits shall be south of Kadesh-barnea, reaching Hazar-addar and continuing to Azmon. From Azmon the boundary shall turn toward the Wadi of Egypt and terminate at the Sea.”

–**Numbers, 34:1-5**

“The portion that fell by lot to the various clans of the tribe of Judah lay farthest south, down to the border of Edom, which is the wilderness of Zin. Their southern boundary began from the tip of the Dead Sea, from the tongue that projects southward. It proceeded to the south of the ascent of Akrabbim, passed on to Zin, ascended to the south of Kadesh-barnea, passed on to Hezron, ascended to Addar, and made a turn at Karka. From there it passed on to Azmon and proceeded to the Wadi of Egypt; and the boundary ran on to the Sea. That shall be your southern boundary. The boundary on the east was the Dead Sea up to the mouth of the Jordan. On the Northern side, the boundary began at the tongue of the Sea at the mouth of the Jordan”

–**Joshua, 15:1-5**



Aristotle

“Again if, as is fabled, there is a lake in Palestine, such that if you bind a man or beast and throw it in it floats and does not sink, this would bear out what we have said. They say that this lake is so bitter and salt that no fish live in it and that if you soak clothes in it and shake them it cleans them”

–**Aristotle, Meteorology, 2:3 (350 BCE)**



Dead Sea Salt Pillar

“The nature of the lake Asphaltitis (The Dead Sea) is also worth describing. It is, as I have said already, bitter and unfruitful. It is so light [or thick] that it bears up the heaviest things that are thrown into it. Nor is it easy for anyone to make things sink therein to the bottom, if he had a mind so to do. Accordingly, when Vespasian went to see it, he commanded that some who could not swim, should have their hands tied behind them, and be thrown into the deep. When it so happened, that they all swam; as if a wind had forced them upwards. Moreover the change of the color of this lake is wonderful. For it changes its appearance thrice every day. And as the rays of the sun fall differently upon it, the light is variously reflected. However, it casts up black clods of bitumen, in many parts of it. These swim at the top of the water, and resemble both in shape and bigness headless bulls. And when the laborers that belong to the lake come to it, and catch hold of it, as it hangs together, they draw it into their ships. But when the ship is full, it is not easy to cut off the rest. For it is so tenacious as to make the ship hang upon its clods, till they set it loose with the menstrual blood of women, and with urine: to which alone it yields. This bitumen is not only useful for the caulking of ships, but for the cure of men’s bodies. Accordingly it is mixed in a great many medicines.”

-Josephus, The Wars of the Jews, Book IV, 8:4 (78 CE)



The Dead Sea

“Supporting efforts to advance regional and community based water and sanitation needs of Israelis, Palestinians, and Jordanians as an effective bridge for peace building in the Middle East.

Whereas water is a scarce resource for Israelis, Palestinians, and Jordanians which can be symbolized as a ‘time-bomb’ waiting to explode if not defused expeditiously;

Whereas all significant water resources in the Middle East, both surface and groundwater, cross borders and are a shared resource between the people of the region;

Whereas, due to lack of awareness and capacity, insufficient resources have in the past been allocated to protect this resource from pollution by sewage;

Whereas an estimated 45 million cubic meters of untreated sewage percolate into the shared Israeli-Palestinian groundwater called the ‘Mountain Aquifer’;

Whereas if the current level of pollution of the Mountain Aquifer was to continue for another decade this key source of drinking water for Israelis and Palestinians will be lost and will further exacerbate water scarcity in one of the world’s most water-poor regions;

Whereas the southern channel of the River Jordan, a religiously important river to millions of people all over the world, has been neglected to such an extent that in summer months mostly untreated sewage is all that flows down to its terminal lake, the Dead Sea;

Whereas the Dead Sea, located at the lowest point on earth and as the saltiest body of water on earth, is unique in its therapeutic values and cultural heritage;

Whereas the Dead Sea, due to the diversion of water upstream, such as that which historically flowed down the River Jordan, is now drying up by approximately one yard in depth per year and has shrunk by one third in its surface area in recent years thereby causing major environmental problems in

the region;

Whereas the water resources of this region, recognized by all peoples as vital to basic life and due to their shared nature, are therefore an important issue to promote understanding and cooperation among Israelis, Palestinians, and Jordanians, besides vast tourism and employment opportunities which will result therefrom;

Whereas local community projects, such as 'Good Water Makes Good Neighbors' which is supported in part by the United States Government, have brought concrete partnership and positive results to 11 communities in the Middle East;

Whereas with the advancement of the Middle East peace process it is essential and most effective to involve not only political leaders but local communities dependent on the shared-water resources in peace building efforts;

Whereas a dangerous political impasse has been reached in the region, which urgently requires some tangible development to keep up the momentum for peace developed in June 2003 at Aqaba, Jordan;

Whereas a decision to proceed with the 'Red Sea to Dead Sea' project, if proven to be environmentally and economically sound, could provide a tangible and unique opportunity as a catalyst for peace in the region, bringing concomitant benefits of a vast and sustainable supply of drinking water, the saving of the Dead Sea, electric power supply, and incentives for building large tourism facilities with attendant employment, all of which are desperately required in the region; and

Whereas the United States should take the lead in investigating the viability and the implementation of the 'Red Sea to Dead Sea' project with Israeli, Palestinian and Jordanian consent and involvement: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate concurring), That Congress--

(1) urges the United States Government to increase its support for the efforts to promote local Israeli, Palestinian, and Jordanian community cooperation on water issues in order to improve access to this vital resource, protect this scarce resource from pollution, rehabilitate the River Jordan and the Dead Sea, and in the process advance peace in the Middle East and stimulate tourism and employment in the region; and

(2) urges the United States Government to take the lead in investigating the viability of and promoting and supporting regional water projects, such as the 'Red Sea to Dead Sea' project and desalination projects and other water and sanitation projects which would make accessible large quantities of water to Jordanians, Israelis, and Palestinians and save the Dead Sea, and in the process advance peace in the Middle East and stimulate tourism and employment in the region.

- United States House of Representatives, H. Con. Res, 238, 6/26/2003

Questions for Discussion:

- Why has the Dead Sea been important throughout history?
- What roles has it played in Jewish history?
- Why is the Dead Sea shrinking?

- What are the benefits does Israel derive from the Dead Sea?
- Can the Dead Sea play a role in forging peace between Israel and the Palestinians?

Family/Group Activity:

In 1900, the annual flow of water to the Dead Sea was between 1,300 and 1,500 million cubic meters. In 2012, there was between 100 and 150 million cubic meters of water flowing into the sea from the Jordan River and other springs. As a result of the loss of inflowing water as well as natural evaporation, the Dead Sea is shrinking at a rapid rate. According to Israel's National Water Authority, the level of the Dead Sea has dropped 25 meters since 1977. During the Twentieth Century, the population of the region has grown by 20 million people resulting in more water, which previously flowed into the Dead Sea to be used for human needs.

Consider that:

- The Dead Sea is a major tourism center, one of the most visited spots in Israel, for visitors to Israel as well as Israeli citizens. According to NBC News, in 2009, revenue from Dead Sea tourism was \$300 million and there are thousands of jobs that depend on this tourism each year.
- The Dead Sea is a major source of minerals and elements that are beneficial as agricultural fertilizers. There is an estimated 1.9 billion tons of potassium in the Dead Sea which is used to create potash, a fertilizer. In addition, the Dead Sea is rich in bromine which is used in fumigants, flame-proofing agents, water purification compounds, dyes and in medicines and magnesium which is used to develop lightweight and strong metals as well as for fertilizers and medical uses. The mining of these minerals, as well as the growing health and cosmetics industries which promote the benefits of Dead Sea muds and minerals have both a positive impact on Israel's economy generating revenue and providing jobs as well as contribute to the shrinking of the sea by creating evaporation pools to extract the minerals. Israel Chemicals LTD, the largest Israeli company extracting minerals from the Dead Sea had a net income of \$1.5 billion in 2011.

What, if anything should Israel do to reverse the trend of Dead Sea evaporation and shrinking? See if your family or group can develop a plan to reverse the tide and keep all of those who benefit from the Dead Sea happy.

After you have developed a plan, look at the information about the World Bank funded joint Israel, Jordan and Palestinian Authority project, The Red-Dead Pipeline. Is it similar or different to the plan your group or family developed? What do you think about the economic and environmental impacts and risks of the project? Do you think it addresses all of its goals?

Links to Multimedia Resources

- [Interactive map of the Dead Sea](#)
- The Dead Sea Scrolls, a collection of more than 15,000 manuscripts dating from 200–68 BCE, were found in Qumran, adjacent to the Dead Sea between 1947 and 1956. The scrolls included copies of Biblical Books, prayers, and other Jewish writings mostly pertaining to the sect of Jews who lived near Qumran.
 - [Library of Congress Scrolls from the Dead Sea](#)
 - [The Dead Sea Scrolls National Conservation Center](#)
 - [The Digital Dead Sea Scrolls at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem](#)
- In February 2013, National Geographic ran three articles as part of its "Water Currents" on-line news series, following a water diplomacy trip to Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian territories.
 - [The Middle East Lost a Dead Sea-Size Amount of Water in 7 Years](#)
 - [Parallel Worlds: Water Management in Israel and California](#)

- [Desalinating Holy Waters with the Red Sea-Dead Sea Conveyance](#)
- [2012 Power Point presentation on the Red-Dead Project by the Israel Water Authority](#)

Additional Resources:

The Spielberg Jewish Film Archive at Hebrew University has the video "[A Promise of Masada](#)" (1959) which includes information about the use of Dead Sea minerals in the late 1950's.