

ISRAEL TRAVEL PLANNING & PREPARATION

TRAVEL PLANNING

Site Guides – Masada

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, Masada, 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 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.

Masada

Rising in the Judean Desert and overlooking the Dead Sea, the fortress of Masada is a link to ancient Israel as both a symbol of the wealth and power of King Herod as well as the resistance and revolt that took place against the Roman legions in the first century. In modern times, it has served as an inspiration to young Israelis, including soldiers, as well as a symbol of Israeli archaeology and fighting spirit. It is Israel's most popular tourist destination.

Educational Themes when visiting the Dead Sea

- Ancient Jewish History
- Natural Resources
- Archaeology
- Zealotry
- Pioneering Spirit/Symbolism and Myth

Source Readings on Masada



Michelangelo's David, public domain

"David was staying in the stronghold (Hebrew: *BaMitzadot*) of the wilderness of Judah; he stayed in the hill country, in the wilderness of Ziph."

–I Samuel 23:14

"David swore to Saul, Saul went home, and David and his men went up to the stronghold (Hebrew: *HaMitzudah*)."

– I Samuel, 24:23

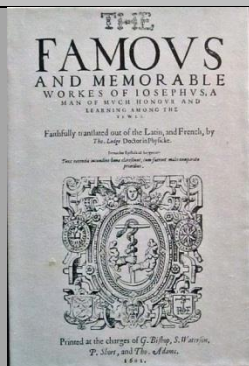


Pliny the Elder, public domain

"Lying on the west of Asphaltites (the Dead Sea), and sufficiently distant to escape its noxious exhalations, are the Esseni, a people that live apart from the world, and marvelous beyond all others throughout the whole earth, for they have no women among them; to sexual desire they are strangers; money they have none; the palm-trees are their only companions. Day after day, however, their numbers are fully recruited by multitudes of strangers that resort to them, driven thither to adopt their usages by the tempests of fortune, and wearied with the miseries of life. Thus it is, that through thousands of ages, incredible to relate, this people eternally prolongs its existence, without a single birth taking place there; so fruitful a source of population to it is that weariness of life which is felt by others. Below this people was formerly the town of Engadda (Ein Gedi), second only to Hierosolyma in the fertility of its soil and its groves of palm-trees; now, like it, it is another heap of ashes. Next to it we come to Masada, a fortress on a rock, not far from Lake Asphaltites."

–Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, 5:17 (77-79 CE)

The Natural History. Pliny the Elder. John Bostock, M.D., F.R.S. H.T. Riley, Esq., B.A. London. Taylor and Francis, Red Lion Court, Fleet Street. 1855



The Famous and Memorable works of Josephus Flavius, 1602, public domain

"...for Malichus's brother had made many places to revolt, and kept garrisons in them, and particularly Masada, the strongest fortress of them all."

-Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book XIV, 11:7 (93 CE)

"Now Herod happened then to be with Fabius, the governor of Damascus, and as he was going to his brother's assistance, he was detained by sickness; in the meantime, Phasaelus was by himself too hard for Felix, and reproached Hyrcanus on account of his ingratitude, both for what assistance he had afforded Maliehus, and for overlooking Malichus's brother, when he possessed himself of the fortresses; for he had gotten a great many of them already, and among them the strongest of them all, Masada."

Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, Book I, 12:1 (78 CE)



Masada, photo by Avinoam Michaeli

“When Bassus was dead in Judea, Flavius Silva succeeded him as procurator there; who, when he saw that all the rest of the country was subdued in this war, and that there was but one only stronghold that was still in rebellion, he got all his army together that lay in different places, and made an expedition against it. This fortress was called Masada.”

Josephus, The Wars of the Jews, Book 7, 8:1 (78 CE)



Hiking on Masada, Library of Congress, No Known Restrictions, (Approximately 1900-1920)

“The fort of Metzada (Masada) became for this generation an inspiring icon of strength and perseverance. It was the ultimate symbol of defiance of all external threats and a lesson of devotion to a larger cause.

The devastating outcome of the defenders of Metzada had a lesson that resonated forever in the minds of many young Israelis: “Again Metzada will not Fall”.

It became the uncontested realization that their duty was to be prepared for the ultimate sacrifice. There will be no excuses for letting history repeat itself. A new reality dawned on this land and its historical heritage and archeological remnants were the vivid evidence that (I) was walking the same paths as his forefathers.”

The comments of an anonymous fourth generation Israeli born in Jaffa in the early 1940’s



IDF Oath of Allegiance on Masad, Source: www.zionism-israel.com

“We will not exaggerate by saying that thanks to the heroism of the Masada fighters –like other links in the nation’s chain of heroism – we stand here today, the soldiers of a young-ancient people, surrounded by the ruins of the camps of those who destroyed us. We stand here, no longer helpless in the face of our enemy’s strength, no longer fighting a desperate war, but solid and confident, knowing that now our fate is in our hands, in our spiritual strength, the spirit of Israel “the grandfather who has been revived...We the descnbdents of these heroes, stand here today and rebuild the ruins of our people.”

Yigal Yadin in a speech at Masada to new recruits of the Armored Corps in 1963

Quoted in: Yael Zerubavel, *The Death of Memory and the Memory of Death: Masada and the Holocaust as Historical Metaphors*, Representations, No. 45 (Winter, 1994), p. 84, Published by: University of California Press

Questions for Discussion:

- What have been some of the different uses of Masada throughout history?
- How has Masada been used as a myth throughout Israel’s history

- In 1927, poet Yitzhak Lamdan wrote the poem *Masada* which included the verse, “Ascend the chain of the dance! Never again shall Masada fall!” Why do you think this verse became such an important slogan for Israelis?
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Family/Group Activity:

Beginning in the early 1950’s, Masada became linked with the units of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) first as part of their training regimen and later, starting in the fall of 1956 as a site where soldiers in the Armored Units had their swearing in ceremony.

Historian Nachman Ben Yehuda points out, “The selection of Masada (for the swearing in ceremony) was not only symbolic of the fact that, ‘We are here again,’ stresses the continuity of the Jewish nation, but also as an act of almost megalomaniac historical challenge and colossal defiance: ‘indeed we were NOT beaten.’ The ceremonies represented a message to Flavius Silva (commander of the Roman 10th Legion in 73 CE) saying that, ‘you did not win.’ (Ben Yehuda, Nachman, *The Masada Mythical Narrative and the Israeli Army in The Military and Militarism in Israeli Society*, Eyal Ben Ari and Edna Lomsky-Feder ed., 1999, Albany, p. 68)

After the Six Day War in 1967, the Armored Units moved their swearing in ceremony first to the Western Wall or Kotel in Jerusalem and later to the fort at Latrun, which is still the location of the ceremony today – as well as a museum featuring a vast array of tanks.

Where in Israel do you think that the Armored Units or other IDF units should hold their swearing in ceremonies and why? Should these ceremonies be held at locations linked to ancient Jewish presence in Israel; sites with religious significance; sites with significance to the achievements/victories of modern Israel – or some other type of site?

Where do other countries hold their swearing in ceremonies for military personnel? How is this similar or different to what happens in Israel?

Links to Multimedia Resources

- [Masada at the UNESCO world Heritage Center](#)
- [Masada National Park in Israel](#)
- In 1981, ABC television produced a miniseries about the siege of [Masada](#)
- The Library of Congress has a series of photographs from between 1989 and 1946, including 25 of [Masada](#)
- The website [Zionism and Israel](#) has a detailed page about Masada

Additional Resources:

The Spielberg Jewish Film Archive at Hebrew University has the video, “[The Story of Masada](#)” (2010) as well as, “[A Promise of Masada](#)” (1959) which details some of the development that took place in the Judean desert around Masada, including extracting minerals from the Dead Sea as well as the building of Ein Gedi

In 2007, Israeli recording star David Broza put on a [sunrise concert atop](#) Masada, where he was joined by American artist Jackson Browne and Shawn Colvin.

[Masada](#) at the Institute of Archaeology at Hebrew University

The PBS Heritage Series Civilization and the Jews has a [section](#) on the siege of Masada