

Jerusalem and Bethlehem Tour

📍 Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Israel



Jerusalem and Bethlehem Tour: Walk Through 3,000 Years of History

Experience the spiritual heart of three faiths in one unforgettable day. This Jerusalem and Bethlehem tour takes you from the Mount of Olives panoramic viewpoint to the Western Wall, along the Via Dolorosa to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, then to Bethlehem's Church of the Nativity where Jesus was born. With hotel pickup, a licensed guide, and clear logistics at every step, you'll explore sacred sites including the Jerusalem and Bethlehem Tour without the stress of navigation or crowds.

Why This Jerusalem and Bethlehem Tour Works

On our Jerusalem and Bethlehem Tour, you'll gain insights that only an experienced guide can provide, making your visit truly special.

Most visitors to the Holy Land have limited time and unlimited sites competing for attention. This tour solves that by covering the absolute essentials - Western Wall, Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and Church of the Nativity - in a single day with expert commentary that brings 3,000 years of history into focus.

You won't waste time figuring out checkpoints into Bethlehem (we handle the paperwork), decoding which chapel is which inside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (your guide explains the Greek Orthodox, Catholic, and Armenian sections), or getting lost in the Old City's 3,000 alleyways (we take the direct routes used by locals).

Mount of Olives: Your Jerusalem Orientation

We begin at the [Mount of Olives lookout](#), 2,600 feet above sea level. From here, you see the entire Old City laid out like a 3D map: the golden Dome of the Rock on Temple Mount where Abraham bound Isaac and Muhammad ascended to heaven, the silver dome of Al-Aqsa Mosque, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre's grey domes, and the ancient Jewish cemetery cascading down the slope where 150,000 graves await the Messiah's arrival.

Your guide points out the Garden of Gethsemane below, the Kidron Valley separating the mount from the city walls, and explains why this spot mattered to Jesus (he wept here foreseeing Jerusalem's destruction) and matters to Jews (the resurrection will begin here according to Zechariah 14:4).

Into the Old City: Byzantine Cardo to Western Wall

Entering through Zion Gate (notice the 1948 bullet holes in the stone), we walk into the Armenian Quarter and head for the Jewish Quarter. The 1,500-year-old Byzantine Cardo - once the main street of Byzantine Jerusalem - runs beneath your feet. Excavated and partially restored, you'll see the original columns, some shops preserved as they were 500 years ago during Crusader times, and modern jewelry stores occupying the same archways.

The Western Wall (Kotel) is 100 meters ahead. This 62-foot-high limestone retaining wall supported Herod's Temple Mount expansion in 20 BCE. When the Romans destroyed the Second Temple in 70 CE, they left this western support wall standing. Jews have prayed here for 2,000 years - it's the closest physical proximity to where the Holy of Holies once stood.

This Jerusalem and Bethlehem Tour is designed for both first-time visitors and those returning for a deeper experience.

Every detail of the Jerusalem and Bethlehem Tour aims to maximize your experience in this sacred region.

You can approach the wall (men go left, women right), touch the ancient stones worn smooth by millions of hands, and insert a prayer note into the cracks. Your guide waits at a respectful distance and reconvenes the group after 15 minutes. If you're planning to visit other Jerusalem holy sites, your guide can provide recommendations for independent visits.

Via Dolorosa: The Way of Suffering

The Via Dolorosa begins at Lion's Gate (St. Stephen's Gate) where Pontius Pilate's praetorium stood. Most tours rush this, but we stop at five of the 14 Stations of the Cross:

Station I (Pilate's Judgment Hall) - where Jesus was condemned

Station III (Jesus falls the first time) - marked by a small chapel

Station V (Simon helps carry the cross) - at the intersection where Via Dolorosa bends

Station VII (Jesus falls the second time) - now a small Franciscan chapel

Stations X-XIV are inside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre

Your guide explains the historical vs. traditional routes (archaeology suggests a different path, but Christian tradition has walked this route for 1,000+ years) and what the streets would have looked like in 33 CE (narrower, more crowded, Roman soldiers everywhere).

Church of the Holy Sepulchre: Crucifixion and Resurrection

This is Christianity's most sacred site - built over Golgotha (Calvary) where Jesus was crucified, and the tomb where he was buried and resurrected. Six Christian denominations share control (Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Armenian Apostolic, Coptic, Syrian, and Ethiopian), which explains the ornate chaos inside.

Your guide takes you to:

The Stone of Anointing - where Jesus's body was prepared for burial (pilgrims touch and kiss this)

Calvary Chapel (upstairs) - you climb 18 steep steps to the crucifixion site, marked by an altar; you can reach under the altar to touch the rock of Golgotha

The Edicule - the small chapel built over Jesus's tomb; there's usually a 30-60 minute queue, but your guide positions you efficiently

The Rotunda - the soaring dome above the tomb, rebuilt after the 1808 fire

Note: Due to visitor volume, actually entering the tomb (the Holy Edicule) isn't always possible. If the queue is 60+ minutes, we view it from outside and your guide describes the interior (a tiny antechamber and the burial shelf inside).

Lunch Break and Old City Markets

We pause for 30-45 minutes in the Christian Quarter. Your guide suggests nearby spots (not included in tour price):

Abu Shukri (famous hummus, 25-40 NIS)

Jaffar Sweets (baklava and coffee, 20 NIS)

The transition from Jerusalem to Bethlehem is seamless on our Jerusalem and Bethlehem Tour.

Christ Church Café (Western-style sandwiches, 45-60 NIS)

During the Jerusalem and Bethlehem Tour, you will traverse historical pathways and witness significant sites.

Alternatively, explore the souks (markets): carved olive wood nativity sets, Armenian ceramics, spices, fresh-squeezed pomegranate juice (15 NIS). Your guide gives you a meeting point and time. For more dining recommendations, check our Jerusalem food and restaurant guide.

Bethlehem: Crossing the Checkpoint

The Shepherds' Field visit is a highlight of the Jerusalem and Bethlehem Tour, providing a unique perspective on the nativity story.

We drive 20 minutes south to Bethlehem (biblical "house of bread," King David's birthplace). At the checkpoint, our licensed guide handles the passport control (**bring your passport - this is mandatory**). For current entry requirements and visa information, consult the [Israel Airports Authority](#) before your trip.

The Israeli separation barrier here features famous Banksy graffiti pieces including the "flower thrower" and "armored dove" - we stop briefly for photos if time allows.

Within the Church of the Nativity, the point of Jesus's birth is a must-see on any Jerusalem and Bethlehem Tour.

Bethlehem today is in the West Bank under Palestinian Authority control. It's safe for tourists and heavily reliant on pilgrimage tourism. You'll notice Palestinian flags, Arabic signs, and churches everywhere (Bethlehem is about 35% Christian, much higher than the 1-2% Christian population in the wider West Bank). Learn more about visiting Bethlehem safely and responsibly.

Shepherds' Field: "Fear Not"

Just outside Bethlehem is Shepherds' Field, where angels appeared to shepherds announcing Jesus's birth (Luke 2:8-20). The modern Franciscan chapel here has a tent-like roof symbolizing the shepherds' dwellings. The acoustics are stunning - your guide might demonstrate by singing a verse of "Silent Night" or reading Luke 2 aloud. The echo lasts 7 seconds.

From the field, you see Bethlehem rising on the hillside, the same view the shepherds had 2,000 years ago (minus the churches and buildings).

Church of the Nativity: The Birthplace

Entering Manger Square, you see the [Church of the Nativity](#) - one of the oldest continuously operating churches in the world (built 339 CE by Emperor Constantine, rebuilt 565 CE by Justinian).

Recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2012, the church draws millions of pilgrims annually. You enter through the "Door of Humility," only 4 feet high (originally a grand entrance, it was reduced in the Ottoman era to prevent carts and horses entering).

Inside, the church is dim, supported by ancient columns (some from the original 4th-century structure). The wooden ceiling dates to the 15th century. You descend narrow stone steps into the Grotto of the Nativity:

As we conclude the Jerusalem and Bethlehem Tour, reflection time is encouraged during the return journey.

A 14-point silver star marks the spot where Jesus was born (inscription: "Hic de Virgine Maria Jesus Christus natus est")

Thousands of ornate lamps hang above, donated by nations and denominations over centuries

For more information on planning your own Jerusalem and Bethlehem Tour, please refer to our additional resources.

We highly recommend reviewing the official tourism information regarding the Jerusalem and Bethlehem Tour to enhance your experience.

An altar marks the manger where Jesus was laid (3 meters away from the birth spot)

Your guide explains the theological significance (why Bethlehem? because Jesus had to be born in David's city per prophecy; why a cave? because Bethlehem was crowded for the Roman census and caves were commonly used as stables).

Important: Visitor numbers inside the grotto are controlled. During peak times (Easter, Christmas, summer), you may have only 2-3 minutes inside. We time our arrival to avoid the worst crowds. Dress appropriately for both sites during your Jerusalem and Bethlehem Tour to show respect for the local customs.

Travelers can connect their journey by adding our Jerusalem and Bethlehem Tour to a longer itinerary.

Consider combining the Jerusalem and Bethlehem Tour with other local experiences for a comprehensive grasp of the area.

Be sure to inquire about nearby tours that complement your Jerusalem and Bethlehem Tour.

Return Journey and Drop-Off

We return through the checkpoint to Jerusalem (or continue to Tel Aviv if that's your drop-off point). The return drive takes 30-40 minutes. Your guide answers final questions and provides recommendations for the rest of your trip.

Drop-off is at your original pickup point unless you've requested otherwise (see supplements below for alternate drop-off locations). If you're staying in Israel for multiple days, consider combining this tour with our Dead Sea and Masada day tour or Galilee and Nazareth tour for a comprehensive Holy Land experience.

Additional Resources and Practical Information

Official Tourism Information:

- [Israel Ministry of Tourism](#) - Comprehensive travel guides, safety updates, and destination information

- What to Wear in Jerusalem and Bethlehem:** Religious sites enforce strict dress codes. Review our complete guide to modest dress in Israel before your tour.

Getting Around Israel: This tour includes hotel pickup from Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. For travelers arriving at Ben Gurion Airport, check our airport transfer options and Jerusalem accommodation guide.

Combine Multiple Tours: Maximize your time in Israel by booking multiple tours:

Eilat and Red Sea tours - Beach and underwater activities in southern Israel

[Caesarea, Haifa, and Acre tour](#) - Explore Israel's Mediterranean coast

Jerusalem Old City walking tour - Deeper dive into the four quarters

Tour Facts

Group Size:

50

Duration:

1

Language:

English, Spanish, French, German

Tour Type:

continuous

Tour Itinerary

07:15 : Hotel pickup 07:15 from Tel Aviv, 07:00 from Herzliya, 08:30 from Jerusalem

Duration

1.5 Hour

09:00 : Mount of Olives panoramic photo stop and orientation

Duration

15 Minutes

09:15 : Drive to Zion Gate, enter Old City

Duration

15 Minutes

09:30 : Walk through Armenian Quarter to Jewish Quarter

Duration

15 Minutes

09:45 : Byzantine Cardo explanation

Duration

15 Minutes

10:00 : Western Wall (15 min personal time)

10:20 : Via Dolorosa walk begins at Lion's Gate

Duration
30 Minutes

10:50 : Enter Church of the Holy Sepulchre

Duration
40 Minutes

11:30 : Stone of Anointing, Calvary Chapel, Edicule viewing/queue

Duration
45 Minutes

12:15 : Lunch break in Christian Quarter markets (40 min, own expense)

13:00 : Drive to Bethlehem checkpoint (20 min)

Duration
20 Minutes

13:35 : Shepherds' Field chapel visit (15 min)

Duration
15 Minutes

13:55 : Manger Square arrival

Duration
5 Minutes

14:00 : Church of the Nativity exterior and history

14:10 : Grotto of the Nativity descent (10-15 min depending on queue)

14:30 : Optional: Milk Grotto visit (small chapel, 5 min walk)

14:45 : Return to checkpoint

15:15 : Drive back to Jerusalem/Tel Aviv

Duration
1 Hour

16:00 : Drop-off in Jerusalem

18:00 : Drop-off in Tel Aviv (depending on traffic)