

Israel - OVERVIEW

Updated: June 5, 2014



Country Name Long Form: State of Israel

Government Type: Parliamentary Democracy

Languages Spoken: Hebrew, Arabic, English (most commonly used foreign language)

National Flag



Israel is a Tier I Country. Significant security measures are necessary.

	Overall Assessment	Political Violence	Crime	Terrorism	Travel Safety
Israel					
Key: (L) Low – (M) Medium – (H) High – (C)Critical					

POLITICAL CONDITIONS

Political Violence is rated at HIGH in Israel

Political violence has always been a concern in Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. U.S. citizens have been killed or injured in criminal and terrorist actions as well as military conflicts in Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip.

In Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, demonstrations can occur spontaneously and have the potential to become violent without warning. Rock throwing, Molotov cocktails, small arms fire and clashes with police are often dangerous characteristics of such unrest in both Israeli and Palestinian areas. Demonstrations can be particularly dangerous in areas such as checkpoints, settlements, military areas, and major thoroughfares, where protestors are likely to encounter Israeli security forces.

Jerusalem is a holy city, a site of pilgrimage, and an object of devotion to all three of the largest monotheistic faiths. It is made up of a wide variety of ethnicities and religions, with the Old City divided into Jewish, Muslim, Christian and Armenian quarters. The city as a whole is also politically-charged

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ground. Clashes between Israeli security forces and Palestinians in East Jerusalem often occur along with violence of religious or ethnic overtones. U.S. citizens visiting the area should be conscious of their location and vigilant as they travel throughout Jerusalem and its environment.

TERRORISM

Terrorism is assessed as HIGH

Israel faces terrorist threats, particularly from Gaza but also from the West Bank, Gaza-based Palestinian terrorist organizations continue rocket and mortar attacks into Israeli territory, and multiple terrorist attacks were launched along the Gaza security fence. Groups opposed to the Israeli state have carried out numerous attacks in the past against a wide range of targets, including transport, government, military, retail, tourist and a range of other civilian targets. The primary instigators of this violence are Palestinian militants based in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. There are also fears that international terrorist organizations, such as the al-Qaeda, may have infiltrated the Palestinian territories and improved the operational capability of locally based militant groups. Suicide bombings, shootings and rocket attacks have become a regular means of operation for these groups, and further attacks within Israel are likely.

RULE OF LAW / CORRUPTION

The Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) for 2013 gave Israel a score of 61, indicating that the country has moderate levels of corruption. The CPI rates countries by the perceived levels of corruption in the public sector, with the least corrupt countries receiving a maximum score of 100.

CRIME

Crime is assessed as MEDIUM

The crime rate is moderate in Jerusalem and in the West Bank. Incidents of violent crime, residential break-ins, and petty theft are reported to the Israeli government and Palestinian Authority, depending on who is responsible for security.

Most petty thefts occur in crowded tourist locations, such as the Old City and its environments and the Sheroover/Haas Promenades. Additionally, several assaults have occurred, usually after dark, in Independence Park in Jerusalem.

Crowded areas such as transport hubs, markets and tourist sights carry an elevated threat of being affected. Incidents of residential burglary are regularly reported and can occur anywhere. Thieves are rarely armed and violence against victims during burglaries is uncommon.

There are reports of tourists having identity theft issues after using local ATMs.

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KIDNAPPING

There is a low threat of kidnapping in Israel; however the threat of hostage taking is a concern for U.S. citizens and foreigners in the Gaza Strip, West Bank, and along the shared borders with the Gaza Strip, Egypt and Lebanon. U.S. citizens traveling to these areas should register with the American Consulate General in Jerusalem prior to entry. Within Israel (excluding the West Bank and the Gaza Strip) criminal kidnap gangs are known to operate and there have been a number of high-profile kidnap for ransom cases involving Israeli businesspeople in recent years. There is a kidnapping threat along the Egypt-Israel border. During periods of political instability and insecurity, the threat increases as militant groups take advantage of the poor security environment to kidnap journalists, aid workers and other foreign nationals in these areas, typically in return for political concessions.

Armed gunmen in the Gaza Strip have kidnapped foreigners. In 2013, various plans to conduct kidnappings against Israeli citizens and security personnel were exposed by the Israel National Police (INP) and Israel Defense Forces (IDF) throughout the West Bank and Jerusalem.

NATURAL DISASTERS

Jerusalem lies close to the Jordan Valley, the fault line that runs between the Arabian and African tectonic plates. Because of this location, Jerusalem and the West Bank have experienced earthquakes.

Israel is a semi-arid country that receives little or no rainfall during six months of the year and flash flooding poses a concern during the winter rainy season, especially in areas of lower elevation. There is also a water shortage throughout Israel, Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

STANDING TRAVEL ADVICE

- **Keep in mind that the security situation in Israel, Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip is fluid and has the potential to change rapidly.**
- **Due to buses being a favored target of terrorist, travel should be refrained.**
- Most Israelis wear casual Western-style clothing. Men wear suits and ties only on formal occasions, otherwise preferring open-necked shirts and jeans. Women wear slacks and dresses.
- Hands are used often in conversation and make discussions seem very lively. The most common gesture is to bring thumb and fingertips together, palm facing up and move the hand up and down; this means “wait a minute” or “hold on”.
- Respect for elders is very important.
- Travel with caution in the vicinity of Israeli military sites, areas frequented by Israeli soldiers, contentious religious sites and large crowds.
- If caught in a demonstration or disturbance on foot, get off the street and into a shop or public building. Remain in place until it is safe to leave the area.
- If caught in a demonstration or disturbance while in a vehicle, remain inside the vehicle until it can be safely driven out of the area or you can safely evacuate the vehicle to a nearby building.
- Be cautious of travel in Old City, Shoham/Haas Promenades, and Independence Park, especially after Friday prayers. Protests have provoked violent responses.
- Be aware of street vendors who often aggressively harass tourists.
- U.S. citizens should take care in East Jerusalem villages when driving and walking.

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- Be alert at open markets or crowded areas.
- Stay in groups, travel in a caravan consisting of two or more vehicles, and stay on the main roads.
- Ensure that someone not traveling with you is aware of your itinerary.
- Avoid hotels that do not have adequate security.
- It is preferable to stay in the main tourist destinations.
- Pay close attention to your surroundings, especially when walking or driving in Israel
- Official taxis are a suitable means of travel in daylight hours in urban areas. It is highly recommended that taxis be arranged through your hotel, or program office. Negotiate the price in advance.
- Women should be especially careful when traveling alone and avoid staying out late without a trusted male escort.
- Make sensible security precautions to mitigate the risk of petty crime, particularly pick pocketing and bag snatching.
- Carry a photocopy of your passport when traveling to avoid losing it in a robbery.
- **Do not resist if you are being robbed and avoid eye contact and to not make any sudden movements.**
- Be aware of your surroundings at all times and keep a low profile.
- Never leave your belongings unattended.
- Carry bags close to your body and make sure the fasteners are secure.
- Avoid carrying large amounts of cash or wearing expensive jewelry or valuables.
- Leave all important documents in a safe or safe deposit box at your hotel and only carry certified copies.
- **Trust your instincts. If someone or something makes you uneasy, avoid the situation.**

Important Contact Details:

International Dialing Code: +972

International Dialing Prefix: 00

Victims of crime in Israel should contact the following phone numbers for assistance:

POLICE: The local equivalent to the “911” emergency line in Israel is 100

FIRE DEPARTMENT: 102

AMBULANCE: 101

Note: Police, ambulance or fire department response may be unreliable in some parts of the country.

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TRAVEL & ROAD SAFETY

- The standard of infrastructure in Israel is generally very high.
- Israel is connected via an extensive road and rail network, telecommunications are on par with most Western nations and the supply of basic amenities, such as power and water, is adequate.
- The road infrastructure in Israel is of a high standard in Israel.
- Taxis are readily available and considered a safe form of local transportation in Israel.

RECOMMENDED TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS

- No use of ATMs after dark.
- No walking around after dark.
- No travel in Old City, Sherover/Haas Promenades, and Independence Park after dark.
- No travel to Temple Mount of Fridays.
- No photographs of military personnel or installations.
- No visit to any of the separation walls during protests (commonly held on Fridays).
- No participation in protests, demonstrations, public rallies or assemblies.
- No travel into the Golan Heights, West Bank or the Gaza Strip.
- No traveling within 10 km of international borders (or within Lebanon, Syria and Iraq).
- No voicing of political opinions.

HEALTH

There is a high standard of medical care in Israel, on par with most Western countries. Medical personnel are well trained and pharmacies are well stocked. Travelers should be aware that health care in Israel is expensive and some facilities may take legal action against patients who have not paid their bills prior to being discharged. Travelers are advised to consume only sterilized or bottled water. This applies to water used for brushing teeth, making ice or washing foods.

There are no vaccinations required for travel to Israel. However it is nonetheless important to ensure that routine vaccinations are up to date for diseases including influenza, chickenpox, polio, measles mumps, rubella, diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus.

- Tap water in Israel is generally safe to drink; however as a precaution, travelers are advised to consume only sterilized or bottled water, particularly in rural areas.
- Pasteurized milk can normally be found in major cities, hotels and resorts. Unpasteurized milk should be boiled before consumption, or powdered or tinned milk should be used as an alternative.

Significant Diseases –

Tick Borne Relapsing Fever – A bacterial infection transmitted by ticks. The disease can occur throughout the country.

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Cutaneous Leishmaniasis – A disease spread to humans via the bite of a phlebotomine sand fly, which typically breeds in forest areas, caves or the burrows of small rodents.

Leptospirosis – An infection caused by bacteria. Outbreaks often occur after flooding and mostly affect sewerage workers and persons working with animals. This disease can occur throughout the country; however cases usually occur in agricultural areas.

Visceral Leishmaniasis – A parasitic disease spread by the bite of infected sand flies. The worst affected-areas are located in the northern parts of the country.

Murine Typhus – An infection transmitted by rat fleas. The disease can occur throughout the country.

Brucellosis – An infection that affects domestic and wild animals and is spread to humans through consumption of unpasteurized milk. The disease occurs throughout the country.

Q Fever – A bacterial infection usually transmitted to human through contact with infected animals. Cases have been found in central Israel.

US EMBASSY – CONSULATE LOCATIONS

The US Embassy Tel Aviv

71 Hayarkon Street
Tel Aviv
Tel: +972 (0)3 519 7575
Fax: +972 (0)3 516 4390
Email: amctelaviv@state.gov

U.S. Consulate General, Jerusalem
18 Argon Road
Jerusalem 94190
Tel: +972 (0)2 622 7230
Regional Security Officer: +972 (0)2 622 7298
Email: UsConGenJerusalem@state.gov

USF INTERNATIONAL HOTLINE

USF 24/7 EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE LINE: 813-317-5815

AXA Assistance 24/7 EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE LINE: 1-877-577-9504 / +1-203-399-5130 (Call collect from abroad)

ASSIST ID #: GLMN 04983932. <http://www.culturalinsurance.com/resources/>

* Information derived from CIA World Fact Book, US Department of State, OSAC, and Travel Guard. This travel overview summarizes some of the most important concerns; however, it does not negate the need for detailed trip planning.

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