



Journey to Israel: The Beth Shalom Way

Group: Beth Shalom Congregation (Raleigh, NC)

Group Leader: Rabbi Ariel Edery

Dates: December 27, 2026 - January 5, 2027

Itinerary

Day 1: Arrival & Welcome - Sunday, December 27 [Guide, Transfer only]

- Morning/afternoon arrival and transfer to accommodations, store luggage
- *Tel Aviv Introductions* - Explore the heart of Tel Aviv, stopping at key landmarks that showcase the city as a vibrant cultural center. Stand in Bialik Square, named after the poet icon, walk through Gan Meir, home to the city's LGBTQ center, and reach HaBima, home to the National Theater. Pass the Cinematheque and stroll Rothschild Boulevard, discussing the role of this area and its institutions in shaping Israeli identity.
- *Square of Meaning* - Walk through the plaza outside the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, known for over two years as "Hostages Square," for sobering perspectives on the events and nationwide impacts of current events.
- Orientation and group welcome dinner, following hotel check-in

Overnight: Hotel 75, Tel Aviv [D]

Day 2: Tel Aviv Past & Present - Monday, December 28
[Guide, Public transit & touring by foot]

- *Jaffa Port & Old Town*- Walking tour with highlights such as the Old Clock Tower, the Arab-Hebrew Theater, the Farkash Gallery of Vintage Jewish and Israeli Posters and Fine Art, among other religious and historical sites
- *White City, Hebrew City* - Walk past the Hassan Bek mosque and through *HaTahana*, terminal for the old Jaffa-Jerusalem railway turned urban hangout. Tour Neve Tzedek, exploring the birth of Tel Aviv.
- *Carmel Market* - Find lunch, as you weave through the stalls of a bustling marketplace. Browse the shops along *Nahalat Binyamin* and sample the diverse flavors of an international city.
- *South Tel Aviv* - Hear the stories of those who arrived in Israel seeking asylum and refuge. Meet a local entrepreneur for a discussion of day-to-day life for communities living on the margin.

Overnight: Hotel 75, Tel Aviv [B]

Day 3: Peoplehood and Perspectives - Tuesday, December 29
[Guide, Bus]

- *Vision & Innovation* - Learn about Israel's emergence and continuing progress as a "Start Up Nation, at the Peres Center for Peace. Explore advancements across sectors like medicine, agriculture, cybersecurity, and space.
- *Tastes of Tel Aviv* - For lunch, enjoy a food tour "hop" between two markets lesser known to tourists, but celebrated by locals. Enjoy samples in *Shuk HaTikvah*, best known for its Yeminite and Moroccan flavors; then continue through *Shuk Levinsky*, celebrated for its Persian, Turkish and Greek cuisine.
- *Mizrahi* - Meet an activist or cultural creator whose familial roots in Arabic-speaking lands informs their perspective on the intersections of race relations in Israel, the Occupation, and Israel's relationship with its neighbors.

Spend the remainder of the afternoon and evening on your own, getting to know Tel Aviv at leisure.

Overnight: Hotel 75 [B, L]

Day 4: The Coast - Wednesday, December 30

[Guide, Bus]

- *Ancient Port* - Depart Tel Aviv for the Herodian city of Caesarea, whose extensive sandstone ruins overlook the peaceful blue waters of the Mediterranean. See the theater, hippodrome, baths and an aqueduct. Learn about the area's Crusader history and the old Bosnian Muslim community that lived there.
- *Bridges and streams* - Have lunch in Jisr az-Zarqa, a seaside town named after an Ottoman Bridge over a clear blue river, which presents a unique Israeli Arab identity and rare story of survival through the 1948 war. A fisherman's village founded 100 years ago is the only traditional community of its kind that remains active on Israel's coastline. In recent years, town leadership has worked to leverage their location along a well-traveled hiking trail to develop an eco-tourism sector benefitting local residents.
- *Haifa* - Take in a view from the Baha'i Gardens, and walk through the historic *Wadi Nisnas* neighborhood, considering the challenges and opportunities of shared society in this "mixed" Jewish-Arab city.

Overnight: Templers House Boutique Hotel, Haifa [B, L]

Day 5: Through the Galil - Thursday, December 31

[Guide, Bus]

- *Akko Old Town* - Reach the iconic UNESCO World Heritage Site built into the Mediterranean coastline, known for its many standing remnants of the 13th century Crusader siege on the Holy Land. Continue north to the Old City of Akko (Acre), a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Tour the ancient walls and the Templar Tunnel running under the citadel, as well as the Jezzar Pasha Mosque, built over former Muslim and Christian prayer houses by Akko's Ottoman governor in the late 18th century.
 - *Tech & Community* - Stop for a conversation at the Akko Center for Arts and Technology, an innovation center bringing together Arab and Jewish adults and youth for professional tech training programs.
- *Bayt Jann* - Enjoy Druze hospitality for lunch and hear from a local elder about their community's unique minority status within Israel. Learn about their secretive faith tradition, and how they relate to other Arabic-speaking peoples of the region.

- *Pioneering Spirit* - Head towards the Kinneret, reaching the modest gravesite of an Israeli giant, “first lady of Israeli poetry and song” Naomi Shemer. Recall her most famous works, noticing the themes that inspired the many Zionist pioneers laid to rest in this Kinneret Cemetery and beyond. Learn about the rise and evolution of the Kibbutz as a uniquely Israeli community enterprise.

Arrive and enjoy dinner at your accommodations near the Kinneret. Spend the evening celebrating New Year’s Eve (called “Sylvester” by some in Israel) with festivities organized at your accommodation.

Overnight: Nof Ginnosar [B, L, D]

Day 6: Valleys and Peaks - Friday, January 1
[Guide, Bus]

- *River Jordan* - Take the highway south, discussing Israeli-Jordanian relations across the nearby border, and environmental challenges impacting the Jordan River and Dead Sea. That this road through the West Bank is nearly indistinguishable from those in “pre-1967 Israel” belies a difficult reality for Palestinians villagers of the Jordan Valley region.
- *Herod’s Fortress* - Ride the cable car to the top of Masada. Explore the extensive excavations of this vacation spot turned refuge for Jewish rebels following the fall of the Second Temple and consider how their story figures in Israel’s national mythology. How might your community respond if pushed to the brink?
- *Ascent* - Stop for a brief dip in the *Dead Sea* (weather permitting), the lowest point in the world, then drive up through the Judean desert towards Jerusalem. Reach the Mt. of Olives for a first glimpse of the Old City.
- *Shabbat* - Join a local liberal egalitarian congregation for *Kabbalat Shabbat* services, then enjoy dinner as a group.

Overnight: YMCA Guest House [B, L, D]

Day 7: Shabbat in Jerusalem - Saturday, January 2 **[Guide, touring by foot]**

Start late, with options for attending services locally or alternative Shabbat observance led by your group leader.

- *Old City & Beyond* - Enter through the Jaffa Gate to explore the four quarters within the Ottoman walls, passing sites of meaning for Jewish, Armenian, Christian and Muslim communities. Step inside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and walk along the *Via Dolorosa*, discussing ancient history and recent developments in the neighborhood.
- *Jewish Quarter* - Make your way past the Hurva Synagogue, see the Roman Cardo beneath your feet, and arrive at the Western Wall plaza, reflecting on the enduring connection of the Jewish people and some Jews' claim to an "eternal capital" here. Hear *Havdalah* near the Kotel as Shabbat concludes or find a space for your own group ritual.
- *Underground* - Journey through hidden passages of the Western Wall Tunnels, discovering layers of Jerusalem's ancient history. Gain a deeper understanding of the wall's spiritual and historical significance beyond what is visible above.

Overnight: YMCA Guest House [B]

Day 8: Shared Stories, Conflicting Aspirations - Sunday, January 3 **[Two Guides, Bus]**

- *Holy Mountain* - Return to the Old City early, ascending as a group to the Temple Mount / Noble Sanctuary. Remember Jewish Temples of previous millenia and come to understand Islamic attachment to *Al Aqsa*. Stroll the vast plaza surrounding the Dome of the Rock, calling attention to underlying national and political sensitivities that make this remarkably tranquil site so volatile.
- *West Bank, Ezion Bloc* - Driving south towards Bethlehem and its surroundings, hear from your two guides - one Palestinian, one Jewish Israeli - about competing claims to a region of great significance in both Jewish and Christian traditions. See the disjointed infrastructure of occupied, or disputed territory, up close and review events leading to the complex lived reality here. View the painted murals along the separation/security barrier before visiting Manger Square and the Church of Nativity.

- Meet a representative from a leading organization (i.e. Parents Circle - Bereaved Families Forum, Land for All, etc) working to advance a more peaceful future for Israelis and Palestinians

Overnight: YMCA Guest House [B, L]

Day 9: Memory and Meaning - Monday, January 4
[Guide, Bus]

- *Tragedy & Memory* - Pay tribute to those lost in the Shoah with a visit to Yad Vashem, Israel's Holocaust museum and memorial. Remember this most painful moment in history and reflect on its reverberation in contemporary Israel.

Spend the afternoon/evening in the region known as the "Gaza Envelope," whose communities were most immediately impacted by the events of October 7, 2023. The specific itinerary for this day will be determined in consultation with your group leader, prioritizing respectful engagement with local communities.

Overnight: YMCA Guest House [B]

Day 10: Conclusions - Tuesday, January 5
[Guide, Public transit and touring by foot + airport transfer]

- *Hand-in-Hand* - Continue to southern Jerusalem for a visit to the local branch of the **Yad b'Yad** network of bilingual Hebrew-Arabic schools to hear from its leadership and educators about the challenges inherent within this educational framework and the power of language to help building bridges between Israeli and Palestinian communities.
- *Markets* - Head towards Mahane Yehuda for lunchtime exploration of its vast flavors and vendors, then take a brief tour through the adjacent neighborhood of *Nachlaot*, home to traditional religious communities, artists, and activists alike.

*After free time in the afternoon, reconvene for a group farewell dinner then head to the airport for late night departing flights.**

Overnight: N/A [B, D] - for an additional cost, travelers may opt to keep their room until departure or stay until the following day*