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# Israel with Kids (and Grandparents, Too!)

Holy to Jews, Christians, and Muslims, Israel is home to religious and historic sites, as well as nature, the arts, and great beaches.

By [Judy Koutsky](#) October 9, 2017

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Israel appeals to so many travelers, and despite the lengthy flight to get there, is a great place to take kids, and many families vacation there with the grandparents as well. One of the reasons it's so popular for multigenerational travelers is that there are so many different paths to pursue there: adventure, history, culture, and of course, religion. For a small country, there are plenty of things to see and experience in [Israel](#). Here are some of the highlights.

## Jerusalem

It's impossible to visit Israel without planning for several days in Jerusalem. There are so many cultural, religious, and historical sites in the city, dating back to ancient times. Israel's capital, Jerusalem is regarded as one of the holiest cities in the world by Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike. At the heart of Jerusalem lies the Old City, a square-mile, walled-in compound where bending cobblestone alleyways lead to holy sites of the three monotheistic religions: The Western Wall, the last remaining segment of the retaining wall of the Jewish Second Temple; the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the traditional site of the crucifixion and burial of Jesus; and the Dome of the Rock, the site Muslims believe Abraham offered his son Ishmael as a sacrifice and from which Mohammed leapt to heaven. Judaism and Christianity were born there, and Jerusalem is Islam's third holiest city. (Israel is also the headquarters of Baha'i faith.)

Visitors should start their tour of Jerusalem with an overview of the city from the Mount of Olives. Proceed to the Western Wall Tunnel, the original Western Wall of Herod's Temple Mount over which the Jerusalem of later eras was constructed. Visitors can walk along 1,445 feet of the original, enormous 2,000-year-old Herodian

stones comprising the wall around the Old City and see the lofty Warren's Gate.

The new city of Jerusalem, a modern metropolis built around the Old City, has its own charm and many significant tourist attractions as well, including the Yad Vashem Holocaust museum and the Israel Museum.

## Masada



Masada, an ancient mountaintop fortress at which Jewish fighters chose to kill themselves rather than surrender to the Roman army, is a favorite destination, because of its history and the sheer beauty of the site. Masada was designated Israel's first UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2001, because of its meaning in Jewish history and as a symbol of the human struggle for freedom and against oppression. Visitors can reach the mountaintop by cable car or on foot. Cable car is the preferred transportation for most travelers, but it's way more fun to hike. (Families can split up according to their activity levels: some hike and some take the cable car.) The long, winding, switchback path is usually quite deserted and thus allows hikers to be entranced by the surroundings. The sound of the wind blowing in this barren land and the beautiful colors of the mountain and desert make for a spiritual experience. Despite being steep, the hiking route is very well maintained.

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What can you expect from the top? You'll see spectacular desert views with hues of yellow, brown, and salmon, and looking beyond the desert, you can glimpse the deep-blue color of the Dead Sea. The Israel Nature and Parks Protection Authority has worked hard to protect the ruins here. Various sections of the ruins have been expertly restored, and the brilliant colors of the frescoes of Herod's cliff-hanging Northern Palace are excellent examples of that.

## Safed



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This is a holy city for Jews, a hub of Lurian mysticism (a branch of Jewish mysticism conceived by the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Rabbi Isaac Luria). Stroll along the lanes of the Old City and to see some of its many synagogues, its unique artist's colony, and historic cemetery. The highest city in Israel, Safed sits perched above the Galilee. The birthplace of Kabbalah, Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai fled from the Romans to Safed in the year 70 to study the hidden truths of the Torah under divine inspiration--his burial place can be found in the nearby Mt. Meron. Many artists have flocked to the spiritual old town, where cobblestone paths lead to medieval synagogues and art galleries.

## **Nazareth & The Galilee**

Throughout history, Nazareth has been a major site for Christian pilgrims traveling to visit Jesus' hometown with its Basilica of the Annunciation, dedicated in 1964 during the first-ever Papal visit to the Holy Land. This is the traditional site of Mary being told by the Angel Gabriel she would give birth as a virgin. The rock-cut grotto that is at the heart of the church is believed to have been the home of Mary. The basilica was built in 1969 over Crusader and Byzantine remains. It is adorned with mosaics and other representations of Mary donated by Catholic communities the world over, each reflecting its own cultural traditions. Nearby, the Sea of Galilee (the lowest freshwater lake on earth) is surrounded by a lush oasis of eucalyptus, oak, and olive groves.

## **Acre**

This city is important city for Jews, Muslims, Christians, and Baha'is. Recognized by UNESCO as a World Heritage

Site, Acre (Akko in Hebrew) promises visitors an emotional journey to a glorious past and a one-of-a-kind experience. An ancient and wondrous city, Akko boasts many remarkable sites, including remnants of the Hellenistic-Roman period and structures from the Crusader and Ottoman periods. You'll also encounter the underground Crusader city, Khan al-Umdan, the Turkish Baths, the Bahai Temple, the Ramchal Synagogue, and more. Much more than a historical and archeological marvel, Acre also has colorful Oriental markets, museums,

beaches, and water sports facilities, a fishermen's port, marina, restaurants, hotels, and annual picturesque festivals.

## **Tel Aviv**

Tel Aviv is another can't-miss spot. There are the family-friendly beaches (yes, Israel has amazing beaches); the Shuks (marketplaces), including Sarona and HaKarmel; and Tel Aviv's oldest neighborhoods, including Neve Tzedek, which has museums, galleries, and restaurants. You'll find amazing dining options here.

# The Negev

In the Negev Desert, you and your family can have a unique and unforgettable experience, by riding atop a camel, or if you're truly adventurous, you can go rappelling at Ramon Crater. Kids and adults can learn a lot about ancient artifacts and the expansive history of the destination by partaking in an archeology dig.

An article like this can only scratch the surface of all Israel offers and all you can experience there. No matter what your interest (from adventure to culture) and how old you are (from young kids to grandparents) you'll find plenty of experiences for the whole family in Israel.

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Judy Koutsky is an award-winning writer and editor and her work has appeared in over 30 publications, including Conde Nast Traveler, Travel + Leisure, Redbook, Parents, Scholastic, and Prevention. She writes often about travel, parenting, health, and lifestyle. Follow her @JudyKoutsky or visit her website JudyKoutsky.com.

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