

# Travel

## Tourism booming in Israel

By PETER GERAN

Israel hosted more tourists during 1976 than in any year since the Jewish state was established in 1948.

The most important reason for the tourist boom was decrease in terrorist attacks—Palestinians were busy fighting in Lebanon and the prospects of peace seem better than ever before.

Israel devalued its money, so the American dollar buys more than in most European countries.

Incentive air fares also swelled the number of tourists.

These special fares include non-affiliated group fares. This loosely knit group have many choices of departure dates and durations to Israel-only or combined with trips in Europe.

A TOURIST can save several hundred dollars by taking advantage of these group fares, and he may sit next to somebody paying a much higher individual fare.

Charters are finally allowed after many years of dispute between the Israeli Ministry of Tourism and the state-owned Israeli airline El Al. In the past, charters were allowed only from Scandinavian countries. The first charters have been approved from the West Coast of the United States. These may be extended to all of North America. This will further decrease the cost of travel to Israel.

Four operators offer package tours to Israel with many categories of hotels. These start with the most expensive Hilton Plan, then the S-Star (Deluxe), the 4-Star (First Class) and the 3-Star (Tourist Class) hotel plans. All have private facilities, usually with Israeli breakfast "buffet style" and six-eight days of sightseeing.

Lately, a stripped-down "budget plan" for as little as \$5 a day, including 4-Star hotels and transfers, has been offered during the slow season.

ISRAEL is pleasant year-round, with some rain in the winter months and hot (but dry) summer months. April-May and September-October are best. However, you can visit the holy land any time without fear of bad weather.

The seasons set by the airlines are different. Nov. 1-March 14 is considered the low season. May 15-Sept. 14 is the high season.

There are also special fares for youth 12-21 (stand-by), and children under 12 get a 50 per cent discount, while infants get a 90 per cent discount.

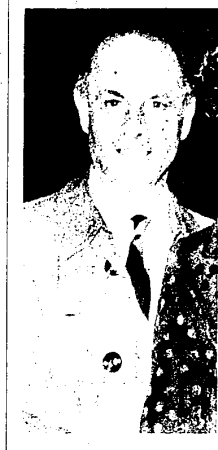
A few highlights no visitor should miss include the Babat temple in Haifa with beautiful gardens, the artist colony in Safed near Haifa, the ancient burial caves in Beth Shearim in the Galilee and Lake Tiberias (Caper-naum of the Bible).

More are the Golan Heights with Banyas where the Jordan River originates, the heroic fortress of Massada (now accessible from the Dead Sea side by cable car) with a magnificent view of the Judean desert, the Church of Nativity in Bethlehem, Nazareth

as well as the Dome of the Rocks and Al Acsa mosques, revered by the Islam.

The wailing wall is an experience mostly for Jews. But next to it is the Arab market ("shook") where you can find many good buys, but don't expect real antique bargains from the Bedouins.

Don't miss the miniature city on the grounds of the holy land West Hotel and the Via Dolorosa leading to the top of the Mount of Olives. Mea Shearim is the Orthodox Jewish quarter.



PETER GERAN

### New column accents travel

"The Inside Track," a new column by Birmingham resident Peter Geran, will appear regularly on the travel pages of The Observer & Eccentric Newspapers.

Geran started in the travel field more than 30 years ago as a trainee in Paris while attending the Commercial Academy. He returned to his native Romania to study law and to work in a string of travel agencies owned by his father.

The entire family immigrated to the United States in 1962, after waiting 17 years for an exit visa. Since then Geran has held positions in the Detroit area, including ones at such large travel agencies as Martz and Elkin.

In 1972 he graduated from the Institute of Certified Travel Agents' (ICTA). He also is a certified translator for French, German, Romanian and Hungarian.

Geran presently serves on the advisory board of the American Travel School in Ferndale and is a frequent guest lecturer at Michigan State University.

which has changed little since the time of Christ, and the modern city of Tel Aviv with restaurants of many nationalities.

OTHER ATTRACTIONS are nearby Jaffa with many good jewelry and souvenir shops, cafes overlooking the Mediterranean sea there in the evening, the shops are open, Bersheba and Arad in the Neghev desert and, above all, the holy city of Jerusalem where practically every Christian denomination has its places of worship

and the chapel at the Hadassah Hospital is proud of its Chagall stained glass windows (but have a guide give you the explanations).

More interesting places include Caesarea, Elat, Jerico, Hebron (glass), the Dead Sea.

People have discovered that, once you have been in Israel—no matter what your beliefs—you are not the same person. And you have a different approach to history, ancient and modern, as well.

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