

Holy city of Jerusalem leaves lasting impression

(Editor's note: Diane Hanson of Canton recently took the trip of a lifetime - she visited Israel. This is part II of her two-part story.)

BY DIANE HANSON
SPECIAL WRITER

The City of David is the capital of Israel and the largest and most populated city in the country. Old Jerusalem is at the heart of one of the holiest and most intriguing cities in the world. King David chose Jerusalem to be his capital and built the first temple there which was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC. King Herod, who died in 4 BC, built the second temple, where Jesus was brought by his parents, where he taught and prayed. That temple was destroyed by the Romans in AD 70.

The Jewish Quarter in the Old City dates to the 15th century when the Jewish people desired to live in the area of the Western (Wailing) Wall, the only remnant of the second temple. The tradition of praying at the wall began around AD 200-300 when some rabbis taught that the presence of God still remains at the location of the former Holy of Holies.

To this day pilgrims come to the Wall to pray and insert prayers and petitions, written on bits of paper, into the cracks of the towering ancient artifact.

But just on the other side of the Wailing Wall on the Temple Mount, standing on the location of the former Jewish Temple is yet another reason for religious tension. There the Dome of the Rock was built in AD 691 and is now the Muslim mosque that encompasses the huge rock

Don't leave home without...

Traveling to Israel can be the experience of a lifetime. Being well-informed and prepared ahead of time can make things go much more smoothly.

■ **Pack light** - Although Israel is a small country, there are so many sites to see that you will be frequently packing up to move to the next destination. Take coordinating clothing that can be mixed and matched and preferably wrinkle-free. Lightweight pants and short-sleeved shirts are appropriate in most areas. During the warmer months of summer and fall, shorts would be more comfortable for visiting the ancient ruins and sites in the desert areas, but don't plan on wearing them or tank tops or low-cut tops to any of the holy sites - you may be turned away. Pack a sweater or light jacket. Even summer evenings can drop below the 70s, especially in the northern regions of the country.

■ Many hotels have irons and

hair dryers, but if you are staying in a kibbutz-type lodging you may wish to bring travel appliances with you. An electrical converter set will also be necessary.

■ **Money** - Dollars can be converted into shekels at the airport in Israel or at any bank there. U.S. dollars are also accepted in many places. Most major credit cards are welcome nearly everywhere in Israel and, yes, there are ATM machines.

■ **Phone home** - If you plan on staying in contact with family and friends back in the U.S. be sure to take some pre-paid phone cards with you. I have seen the cards available for as low as \$12 for 200 minutes. Even though a 60-minute card will only last about seven minutes when calling from Israel, it is still considerably cheaper than dialing direct from a hotel.

■ **Travel info** - The official Web site of the Israel Ministry of Tourism is www.goisrael.com or call them toll-free at 1-888-77-ISRAEL.

believed to be where Mohammed ascended into heaven, leaving his footprint embedded in the boulder's surface. It is also a holy site for Jews and Christians as the place where Abraham nearly sacrificed his son Isaac at the Lord's command.

Its golden dome and intricate blue mosaic exterior make it an easily identifiable landmark in the Old City.

Traveling through the Christian section of the city, I found the Garden of Gethsemane was smaller than I had imagined.

But seeing the garden with its ancient olive trees was incredibly inspiring. The oldest, biggest and most gnarled tree there is believed to date back to the time of Jesus.

I had anticipated a spiritual experience walking along the Via Dolorosa (the 14 Stations of the Cross), beginning at the Church of the Flagellation and ending at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Most of the way is lined by markets with proprietors hawking their wares, which can be a definite distraction.

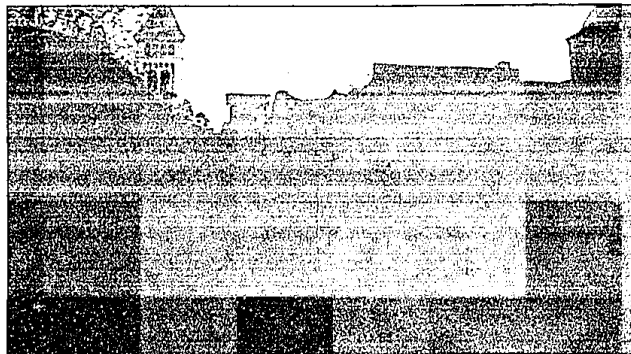
The last five stations are sheltered in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the holiest Christian site. Helena, the mother of Constantine, built the first church in the fourth century. The Crusaders built the current building in the 12th century.

The holy site is now divided by six Christian faiths, each responsible for its own section. To avoid conflict, the guardians of the key to the door of the church are two Muslim families. Every morning and every evening, a family member climbs the ladder to unlock or lock the massive door.

The Roman Catholics have an altar at the 13th station where Jesus is nailed to the cross. The Greek Orthodox claim the 14th station with an altar built over top of the rock where Jesus was crucified - Golgotha - visible through the glass floor and from below. They also claim Jesus' tomb.

Must-see museums

We visited the Tower of David Museum near the end of our trip through Israel, but perhaps that would be a good place to start. It holds a fabulous introduction to Jerusalem's 4,000 years of history. The restored remains of the 2,000-year-old citadel became the site of the museum. Each room holds a different period of Jerusalem's history.



Divided: The Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem is the holiest of Christian sites. The church is divided between six Christian faiths and, to keep the peace, two Muslim families hold the key to the massive door.

The Shrine of the Book at the Israel Museum is the major attraction there and inspiring. But, if time permits, there is so much more at the museum, including archeological finds and the interiors of three original synagogues.

A visit to Yad Vashem - the National Memorial and Museum of the Holocaust - is one that few can leave with dry eyes. The vivid photographs and written descriptions left impressions on me that will last a lifetime.

The memorial to the 15,000 children who died is at the same time, beautiful and eerie. Points of light representing the children, their names and countries read in a continuous steady rhythm, permeate the total darkness inside.

"This is not a Holocaust of just the Jews," said our guide, Oded Geva, whose parents escaped Germany just after Adolph

Hitler was made chancellor. "This place is a warning to the whole world. We are not talking here about Jews, we are talking about people."

Galilee

Of all the magnificent ancient and holy sites in Israel, my favorite was the Galilee area. The Galilee, as the area around the sea is referred to, is lush, green and fertile with an abundance of colorful flowers.

It is certain Jesus visited the Sea of Galilee - the only freshwater body in Israel. In Capernaum, a fifth-century AD synagogue sits atop the ruins of one of just two synagogues - the other was in Masada. The remains of what is believed to be St. Peter's house are in Capernaum. The house had been extended into an octagonal church - for the eight blessings

of the Beatitudes - in the early days of Christianity.

Tabgha, on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee is the home of two important sites. One is the traditional site where it is believed Jesus fed 6,000 with two fish and five loaves. The remains of two successive Byzantine churches built in the fourth and fifth centuries were found there in 1932. The Benedictines built the church standing there today.

Tell us about your trip of a lifetime. Send photos, with a brief description of your trip, and a phone number where you can be reached, to Keely Wygonik, Observer Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150, fax (734) 591-7279 or e-mail kwygonik@aol.com. Please do not e-mail photographs.



A moment of prayer: An Orthodox Jewish man is deep in prayer as he walks near the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem.

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