

# Rick Steves' HOLY LAND

*Israelis and  
Palestinians Today*

*A Travel Journal Companion  
to the Public Television Special*



## Hi, I'm Rick Steves.

*In 2013 I traveled to Israel and Palestine. I wanted to produce television shows that could help my American viewers better understand this troubled land.*

*My agenda was simply to be balanced and honest. Not with the cold detachment of a news reporter, but with the natural empathy that comes from being a travel writer. I wanted to take on a “dual narrative” approach: giving voice to reasonable and rational people from both sides of the thorny issues.*

*For me, exploring the Holy Land wasn't just educational—it was actually fun, because I flew there knowing so little, and I find that being steep on the learning curve in my travels is a joy. Old dogs can learn new tricks when traveling to complicated places with an appetite to learn. And I've found that the best way to do that is to get out of my comfort zone and simply talk to people.*

*My new TV shows on Israel and Palestine, the new chapter in the upcoming second edition of my Travel as a Political Act book—and this little booklet—are the result of my Holy Land trip.*

*Come along with me. We have a lot to learn.*

The land Israelis and Palestinians occupy is, for a third of humanity, literally holy land. For Christians, this is where Jesus was crucified and rose from the dead. For Muslims, this is from where Muhammad journeyed to Heaven. And for Jews, it's where the Temple of Solomon stood. The epic stories of the three great monotheistic religions on this planet have played out on this tiny piece of real estate, which has been coveted and fought over for centuries.

## How Did We Get Here?

Troubled regions like the Middle East often struggle with a “Who was here first?” debate. And in the Holy Land, that question has no easy answer. The Arabs and Jews who call this region home share a family tree that goes back nearly 4,000 years. That's when, according to tradition, the prophet Abraham—called the patriarch—had two sons: From Isaac came the Israelites, while Ismael spawned the Arabs. That means that today's Jews and Arabs are cousins: They share similar DNA, speak closely related languages, and have a genuine historical claim to this land.

This ancient ethnic mix is complicated by religions. Israelites were Jewish. Christians worship Jesus, a Jew who brought his own message. And today, most Arabs here are Muslim—a religion that arrived much later, in the seventh century, with their prophet, Muhammad. Here in the Holy Land—where Muslims, Jews, and Christians celebrate their Sabbath on different days—Friday,

Saturday, and Sunday are each holy days for some part of the population.

Throughout the centuries, this region endured waves of conquerors—from pagan Roman legions to Christian Crusaders to Muslim Ottomans. In A.D. 70, the Romans destroyed the main Jewish temple in Jerusalem, laid siege to a valiant last stand of Jewish rebels at the mountaintop fortress of Masada (which ended in mass suicide), and exported Jews as slaves, beginning what's known as the Diaspora. The Jews dispersed throughout the world, mostly settling in Europe, where they suffered centuries of oppression culminating in the Holocaust.

During those centuries, the Arabs (and a small minority of Jews) continued living in this land as it was batted between various outside powers. Until the 20th century, the entire area was called “Palestine,” as it had been in Roman times.

Meanwhile, beginning in the late 19th century, “Zionism”—a movement inspired by visionaries such as Theodor Herzl in the Austro-Hungarian Empire—spurred Jews worldwide to dream of creating a modern state in their ancestral homeland. During World War I, when Palestine was ruled by British mandate, the Balfour Declaration set the stage to make this a reality, and Jews began to return to Palestine to claim the land. After the Holocaust, in 1948, the modern state of Israel was officially formed. That trickle of immigration became a flood, as Jews from Europe, Arab lands of the

Middle East, and beyond came here to create Israel.

As Jews returned to build their nation, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were displaced. And to this day, both peoples struggle to find an equitable and peaceful way to share what they each consider their rightful homeland.

The dividing of the Holy Land hasn't been easy. At first, the United Nations established a border known as the Green Line. Then, in 1967's Six-Day War, Israel launched a surprise



offensive to take over land held by Jordan, Syria, and Egypt, substantially increasing its territory. Palestinians managed to hold two enclaves within Israel: the Gaza Strip (a tiny yet densely populated coastal area adjoining Egypt) and the West Bank (between Jerusalem and the Jordan River).

Palestinians—chafing at the loss of their land and freedom—lashed out

with terrorist attacks, and Israelis retaliated by turning Palestinian territories into a virtual police state. Palestinians launched their First Intifada, an armed rebellion that employed violent riots and suicide bombings (1987-1991). In 1993, the Oslo Accords (negotiated by Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat) attempted to create peace by recognizing the Palestinian Territories. The treaty was designed as a transitional agreement, until it could be phased out (in five years) to make way for a more permanent solution. But extremists both in Israel and in Palestine worked hard to undermine the peace. From 2000 to 2005, the Second Intifada brought a rash of bloody terrorist attacks in Israel, killing more than a thousand Israelis—more than three-quarters of them civilians. Israel retaliated, and Palestinians suffered three times the casualties as Israel. During the Second Intifada, Israel began to build a controversial barrier around the West Bank in the name of security from terrorism. From about 2005 through my visit in 2013, terrorist attacks from the West Bank declined dramatically, and my impression was that most West Bank Palestinians had decided to pursue a nonviolent approach to resolving the conflict.

In the late 2000s, the Jewish population of Israel (around 6 million) surpassed the Jewish population in the United States for the first time. Four out of every five Israelis are Jewish, but most are non-practicing. About 20 percent of Israel's population are Palestin-

ians—many internally displaced persons who were not pushed over the borders of Israel in 1948, but are not allowed to return to their homes. The government calls them “Arab Israelis,” but they generally call themselves “Palestinian citizens of Israel.” Most are Muslim, while Christians make up a tiny minority. Palestinians living in Israel are, by law, full citizens with nearly the same rights as Jewish Israelis. But many feel that they're treated as second-class citizens; they compare their situation to the plight of Civil Rights-era African Americans in the USA.

In the Holy Land, terminology is charged with symbolic meaning and controversy. As a travel writer, I struggle with simply what to call the land of the Palestinians. Many conservative Jews and Evangelical Christians, believing this is the land God promised to the Jews, use the biblical name “Judea and Samaria.” The non-loaded “West Bank” or “Occupied Territories” would be the cautious choices. But this area was historically called “Palestine,” and in 2012, the UN General Assembly voted to grant Palestine (with that name) “non-member observer state” status. I've decided to follow the example of the international community. For the title of my TV show, I went with a proud and unapologetic “Palestine: Yesterday and Today.” I realize—and accept—the fact that even using the name “Palestine” will alienate many people. Sadly, these are the people who, I believe, would benefit the most from actually traveling to both sides of the Holy Land.

## Fabled Jerusalem: Steeped in History, Politics, and Religion

Before Columbus and the illustrious class of 1500, many maps showed Jerusalem as the center of the world. Jerusalem—holy, treasured, and long fought over among the three great monotheistic religions—has been destroyed and rebuilt 14 times. Its fabled walls are so strong that its defeats often came by starve-'em-out sieges.



*The mighty walls and gates of Old Jerusalem define the Old City, which is divided into four quarters: Jewish, Armenian, Christian, and Muslim.*

Modern Jerusalem is a sprawling city with about 800,000 people. Exploring its shopping boulevards and malls, you'll feel right at home. But its historic core, the Old City—home to around 35,000—feels lost in time. Its venerable two-mile-long Ottoman wall corrals a tangle of vibrant sights. It's a bustling maze of winding cobblestone paths and streets, each stone carrying within it the shadows and stories of prophets, leaders, and infamous visitors of the past. Each alley, each doorway, each church, each mosque, each store, and each ven-

## Holy Land Almanac

### Population

The total population of the Holy Land is about 12 million—roughly 6 million Jews and 6 million Arabs. Israel's population is roughly 8 million (6 million Jews, 2 million Palestinians). Palestine is divided into two areas—the West Bank (between Israel and Jordan) and the Gaza Strip (along the coast, abutting Egypt)—with a total population of about 4 million. Nearly all Palestinian citizens are Arab, over 90% are Muslim, and less than 10% are Christian Palestinians. Additionally, about half a million Israelis live in settlements within Palestine.

### Area

The Holy Land occupies approximately 10,000 square miles (about the size of Vermont) between the eastern Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River. According to the provisional borders set forth by the 1993 Oslo Peace Accords, Israel makes up about 80 percent of this land (roughly equivalent to New Jersey), and Palestine the remaining 20 percent (about the size of Delaware). In practice, Israel controls three-quarters of the West Bank, leaving Palestinians with a territory about the size of Jacksonville, Florida.

### Geography

Sitting at a latitude equivalent to that of Texas, the Holy Land has a Mediterranean climate (hot summers, mild winters) along the coast, where most Israeli cities are located. Inland, it's mostly desert. But there's a lot of variety—the landscape towers to more than 7,000 feet (snowcapped mountains of the Golan Heights, in the

north), and plunges to the lowest point no earth: the Dead Sea, at a quarter-mile below sea level.

### Biggest Cities

Jerusalem is the Holy Land's biggest city, with about 800,000 people. It's Israel's official capital, but eastern parts of the city are claimed by Palestine. Major Israeli cities include Tel Aviv (415,000) and Haifa (275,000). West Bank cities are Hebron (685,000), Nablus (375,000), and the de facto capital, Ramallah (340,000).

### Currency

Both Israel and the West Bank use the Israeli New Shekel (3 shekels = about \$1).

### Economies

Israel has a thriving economy—powered by technology, pharmaceuticals, and tourism—and a robust GDP of around \$275 billion (or about \$36,000 per person); unemployment hovers just under 6 percent. The West Bank's GDP is estimated at \$8 billion (or about \$3,000 per person), with about a quarter of the population out of work, and one in five living below the poverty line.

### Governments

Israel is a parliamentary democracy ruled by a national assembly called the Knesset, with 120 members. The Knesset's ruling coalition selects a prime minister (currently Benjamin Netan-

yahu) and a president, who's mostly a figurehead. The West Bank is governed by the Palestinian National Authority, which was established by the 1993 Oslo Peace Accords. Palestinian politics are dominated by two rival parties: Fatah, which was co-founded by Yasser Arafat, is viewed as the more moderate of the two, and currently controls the West Bank; Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip, is considered by many foreign states (including Israel, the US, and the European Union) to be a terrorist organization.



### Flags

Israel's flag is a blue, six-pointed Star of David (a symbol of Judaism) on a white field; it's flanked by horizontal blue stripes rep-



resenting those on a Jewish prayer shawl (*tallit*). The Palestinian flag has horizontal green, white,

and black stripes with a red triangle on the hoist side. These colors—popular throughout the Arab world—represent deeds (white), battles (black), fields (green), and swords (red).

Source: CIA World Factbook 2014

## Holy Land Timeline

- c. 2000 B.C.** Abraham has two sons by two different mothers: Isaac starts Jewish nation, Ishmael starts Arab nation
- 1st century**—Jesus and the start of Christianity
- A.D. 70**—Jewish rebels defeated by Romans (committing mass suicide at Masada); their temple in Jerusalem is destroyed; Diaspora begins as Jews scatter throughout the world
- 7th century**—Muhammad and the advent of Islam; most Holy Land Arabs become Muslim
- late 19th century**—Theodor Herzl and others spread “Zionism,” the idea of creating a Jewish homeland and a modern state of Israel

- 1938-1945**—The Holocaust
- 1948**—The state of Israel is established, displacing hundreds of thousands of Palestinians
- 1967**—Six-Day War, Israel dramatically increases in size
- 1987-1991**—First Intifada (Palestinians stage armed riots and suicide bombings against Israeli targets)
- 1993**—Oslo Peace Accords
- 2000-2005**—Second Intifada; Israel begins work on a wall with the goal of keeping out terrorists
- 2012**—UN recognizes the State of Palestine





*For Jews, Muslims, and Christians, Jerusalem is a holy city. And ground zero of all that holiness is a much-venerated rock marked by this golden dome.*

dor—everyone and everything in Jerusalem has a story, waiting to be discovered and unleashed by your own curiosity.

The golden Dome of the Rock is one of Jerusalem's enduring landmarks. Under that glittering dome is a sacrificial stone with gutters to drain the blood spilled upon it by pagans long before there was a Jewish faith. It's the stone upon which—according to Jewish, Christian, and Muslim tradition—Abraham prepared to prove his faith by sacrificing his son, Isaac. (Don't worry: When it became clear that Abraham would be obedient to God's will, God inter-

vened, saving Isaac.) Many consider this spot to be both the starting point or foundation stone of creation, and the closest place on earth to God in heaven. Jews believe this place to be the center of the earth, and have worshipped here for 3,000 years. Muslims believe Muhammad journeyed to heaven from here 1,300 years ago. Pondering the tumult and persistent tragedy caused by



*For nearly 2,000 years, Jews have prayed at the Western Wall, all that survives of their destroyed temple complex on Temple Mount.*

the fact that three religions share a single holy rock, I wonder if God doesn't just have a wicked sense of humor.

Jews call the hill capped by the Dome of the Rock "Temple Mount"—the holiest site in Judaism. A thousand years before Christ, King David united the 12 tribes of Israel and captured Jerusalem. His son, Solomon, built the First Temple right here. It was later burned by invaders, and the Second Temple was built. Then came the catastrophic year for the Jews—A.D. 70, when the Romans destroyed their temple, ushering in the Diaspora. Only a bit of the western foundation of the wall surrounding this ancient temple complex survived. Over the centuries, throughout the Diaspora, Jews returning to Jerusalem came here to the Western Wall—the closest they could get to that holy rock—to pray and to mourn their temple's destruction. That's why it's often called "the Wailing Wall."

Today, Jews still gather at the Western Wall, not only to recall a horrible past but also to pray for a better future. The square operates as an open-air synagogue, divided into a men's section and a women's section. The faithful believe prayers left in cracks between the stones of the Western Wall will be answered. It's a lively scene, with intense yet private worship mixing with the joyous commotion of Jewish families from around the world celebrating bar mitzvahs—a ritual coming of age.

Christians know Jerusalem as the place where Jesus was crucified, buried, and resurrected 2,000 years ago. Just a

few minutes' walk from Temple Mount is the Via Dolorosa—the "Way of Grief" where, it's believed, Jesus walked as he carried his cross to be crucified. Pilgrims come from around Christendom to worshipfully retrace his steps. Today most of the Via Dolorosa feels like a touristy shopping mall, but the presence of devout pilgrims gives it a sacred feeling nevertheless.

Their journey culminates at the site of Jesus' crucifixion, marked by the Church of the Holy Sepulcher on the summit of Calvary Hill, or Golgotha. This dark, sprawling church is the most



*Within the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, this stone—generally surrounded by pilgrims touching it and praying—marks the spot where Jesus' dead body was placed when taken down from the cross.*

sacred site in Christendom. Built around the tomb, or sepulcher, of Jesus, it's shared by seven different denominations. Because it's holy for all kinds of Christians (who see things differently and don't always cooperate), it's a cluttered religious hodgepodge of various zones, each controlled by a separate sect. There are chapels for Greek

## Ultra-Orthodox: Every Religion's Got 'Em

Roughly 8 percent of Israeli Jews are ultra-Orthodox—very religious and living lives that require them to be apart in many ways. Entire districts of Jerusalem are known as ultra-Orthodox, including the fascinating quarter called Mea She'arim. I stopped by for a visit on a Friday, and found the place bustling. Since its population takes the Shabbat (holy day of rest on Saturday) very seriously, Friday is the day when everyone is preparing.

The diversity of Israel—a nation made up mostly of Jewish immigrants from around the globe—shows itself in the way people dress and wear their hair. This is especially evident in the ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods. Most people in Mea She'arim dress very conservatively. Women's stores have a huge selection of wigs, hats, and scarves, because after marriage, Orthodox women must cover their hair in public. And yet, there's a surprising

degree of variety within these narrow constraints.

Simply people-watching comes with fun cultural insights. As I sat with my local friend at a café and surveyed the scene, he offered a running commentary: "The yarmulke is a constant reminder that God is always above us. The ear locks are because some embrace the scripture that says not to cut the hair on the side of your face. Men wear black as a symbol of mourning of the destruction of the Second Temple nearly two thousand years ago. The black top hats come in many varieties, and from them, you can guess which specific brand of Orthodoxy they profess—and, in some cases, which country they emigrated from."

Among ultra-Orthodox Jews, there are many groups who follow different teachers or rabbis. Rabbis are typically charismatic and have huge followings. (One died the day I arrived in Jerusa-



*Leading rabbis have enthusiastic followings. They're like pop stars...without the pop.*

*Israel's ultra-Orthodox community dresses in black and sticks together.*



lem, and the streets of the city were at a standstill as thousands came out to mourn.) In Mea She'arim, storefronts are lined with posters and paintings of the top rabbis; a quick survey tells you which are the most popular.

Israelis are split on the role that Orthodox Jews play in their society: Some see them as leaders of their faith, while others have a more negative view. One secular Israeli told me, "To these Hassidic Jews, I—with my modern ways—am the enemy. And to me, they are parasites. They don't work. Our taxes pay them to just sit around and learn the Torah. Their 'job' is to be religious."

All of this got me thinking about other charismatic religious leaders, and how Evangelical Christians back home can also get caught up in the teachings of one particular dynamic minister. Meanwhile, in both Christianity and Judaism, mainstream worshippers have a spiritual keel provided not by an indi-

vidual, but by a steady liturgy or theology that doesn't flex with the comings and goings of various leaders.

Religions around the world seem to always be stoking turmoil—even though the teachings of those religions say "love your neighbor," and all of them have the "do unto others..." Golden Rule. I've decided that fundamentalism is the crux of the problem. I think the rainbow of religions on this planet is a delight—except for the fundamentalists in each. Perhaps there are "different strokes for different folks" fundamentalists, but it seems to me that, in a nutshell, a fundamentalist (Christian, Jew, or Muslim) believes, "I am correct in my understanding of God, and you are wrong"...and then proceeds to intrude into the lives of people who see their relation with God differently. And that's reason enough to be thankful we live in a nation that is vigilant about protecting the separation of church and state.

Orthodox, Coptic Christians, Armenians, Ethiopians, Roman Catholics, and so on. A Greek Orthodox chapel marks the site believed to be where Jesus was crucified. A few steps away, under a grand dome, pilgrims line up to enter the Holy Sepulcher itself and place a candle near the tomb of Jesus.

Local Christians like to believe that even if God is everywhere, all prayers go through Jerusalem (as if it's a cell-phone tower), and the Holy Spirit comes down to us via Jerusalem. One local joked that the Vatican has a golden phone with a direct connection to God, but the toll is \$1,000. Meanwhile, the golden phone offering the same service in Jerusalem only costs 25 cents. Why? "It's a local call."

Radiating out from Temple Mount is Jerusalem's Old City, divided into four quarters. The Jewish Quarter springs from the Western Wall. The Muslim Quarter faces the Dome of the Rock. And north of the Armenian Quarter, the Christian Quarter surrounds the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. The Old City is fraught with endless little games of interfaith one-upmanship. For example, in the Muslim Quarter, the volume of call to prayer is turned up high...just to annoy the Jews.

The Jewish Quarter is more orderly and modern than the others. Much of this area was destroyed in the 1948 fighting, or during the ensuing period of Jordanian occupation. After the Israelis took control of Jerusalem in 1967, they rebuilt this quarter. Today,



*Top: Deep in the Muslim Quarter, a few houses boldly fly Israeli flags.*

*Bottom: In Jerusalem's Old City, the little things in life are celebrated.*

when you see new stones, you're probably in the Jewish Quarter. While it's not convenient or economical to live in this medieval tangle, devout Jews find great joy in raising their families so close to Temple Mount.

The Muslim Quarter, with over half of the Old City's population, is mostly Arab. But wandering the Muslim Quarter, I noticed several houses fortified and festooned with Israeli flags. These are homes of ultra-Zionist families determined to stake out this

bit of the Old City for their Jewish community. Considering the rich historic heritage of each of these communities, it's understandable that both vie for this sacred real estate.

This struggle over control of Jerusalem is a huge political challenge. While complete Muslim control of Jerusalem is unrealistic, many Arabs envision an independent Palestinian state with this part of Jerusalem—East Jerusalem—as their capital. It's a contentious issue, and Israel seems determined to keep Jerusalem whole and under its control.

And yet, exploring Jerusalem's Old City—with its tight quarters and religious passions—I was impressed by the diversity, the feeling of community, and how things all seem to work together. Life is a celebration here, from the man who's evangelical about the quality of his falafel, to the man whose niche in life is serving the sweetest pomegranate juice.

## Jerusalem's Unforgettable Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial

In 2013, for the first time, Israel's Jewish population passed 6 million. This is considered highly significant because it's symbolic of the number of Jews killed in the Holocaust.

Understandably, Israel works to keep the memory of the millions of Jews killed by Hitler alive and strong. I imagine that with the passing of the generation that actually lived through that horror, this will become a bigger and bigger challenge. To help accomplish this, Israel has constructed a memorial and museum, called Yad Vashem, to honor those victims.

A visit to Yad Vashem is part of every Israeli's upbringing. All visiting heads of state are also brought here. The modern state of Israel rose from

*Yad Vashem tells a compelling story and stirs powerful emotions.*





*Yad Vashem's Hall of Names is an archive with a mission: to give each victim of the Holocaust the dignity of being remembered by name.*

the ashes of the Holocaust—and to understand the history of modern Israel, you must comprehend the cause and the enormity of that massacre. Yad Vashem imprints on visitors a searing impression of the suffering of the Jewish people under Nazi Germany, turning tourists into pilgrims.

The museum brings the hate-filled horror of Nazism to life. It primes you for the grounds, which are a place to think. A train car—one of countless German wagons once jammed with people en route to death camps—sits on rails that stop in mid-air high above.

In the Hall of Names, a vast archive surrounds a powerful collection of faces of Jews killed during the Holocaust. Of the roughly 6 million Jews murdered, about half have been identified by surviving family and friends. Pages of their testimony are archived

here. The purpose: to give victims—whose deaths were as ignominious as their killers could manage—the simple dignity of being remembered.

The Children's Memorial starts with a gallery of photos showing the faces of adorable kids from many countries lost to the Holocaust. You learn that a quarter of Hitler's victims were children. Then, stepping into a dark chamber, you'll see one small light reflected by mirrors 1.5 million times to make a galaxy of flickering souls while a somber voice reads their names in a steady roll call. Emerging back into the daylight, I found myself trying to imagine how such a heritage would impact my outlook if I were Jewish.

Along the "Avenue of Righteous Gentiles," trees are planted to honor non-Jews who risked their lives to help the persecuted. The memorial honors

24,000 Europeans who aided the Jews...while reminding us that another 160 million turned a blind eye. A recurring theme at Yad Vashem is how humanity ignored the plight of the Jews in the 1930s and 1940s. The memorial reminds us that when Hitler was warned that his plan to exterminate the Jewish race would damage his image, he responded, "Who remembers the Armenian genocide?"

For a powerful finale, the Yad Vashem memorial finishes with a platform overlooking the land Israelis have worked so hard to establish as the one nation on earth that is Jewish.

## An Appreciation for Israel's Determined Pioneers

To many, Israel represents a beacon of democracy, stability, and prosperity in the middle of a bunch of very troubled states. (Having traveled recently in Egypt and Iran, I can certainly appreciate that.) To others, its very existence is an offense against groups who were displaced after living here for centuries. As with everything here, it all depends on which people you talk to. And first, I talked to the Israelis. (Palestinian partisans, your turn is coming up.)

There are Jews who don't concern themselves about Israel at all. There are Jews who think the state of Israel is a terrible, even un-Jewish idea. And there are Jews who believe that their people should live together in the single home-

land God chose for them. These Jews are Zionists. Zionists built Israel.

During my visit, Israel was celebrating 65 years as a nation. Star of David flags flew everywhere. Perhaps caught up in the excitement, I welcomed the opportunity to gain an appreciation for the Zionist pioneers who built the country—slowly in the early 20th century, then very quickly after its modern founding in 1948—and to see how far the nation has come.

After World War II, a generation of Holocaust orphans helped end the Jewish Diaspora. Back then, there was an inspiring slogan: "A land without a people for a people without a land." The problem was that this land wasn't empty—it was inhabited, albeit sparsely, by many Palestinians. Still, when you look at a photo of the early Zionists who came here and mixed

*This iconic photograph of determined Zionists—still wearing their concentration camp stripes as they labor to create their country in the late 1940s—stirs the Israeli soul.*





sand, sweat, brain power, and a determined vision into a powerful nation, you can understand the passion Israelis have for their homeland. In the countryside, lush valleys farmed by cooperative communities called kibbutzes recall generations of patriotic Israelis who turned the desert into orchards.

I find the poignancy of nation-building most inspiring in the big coastal city of Tel Aviv. In 1908, Tel Aviv was just a big sand dune. Today the city feels like San Diego. The skyscrapers of Tel Aviv are exclamation points that seem to declare, “We’ve come a long way.”

Tel Aviv’s waterfront promenade is the place to rock to the rhythm of contemporary Israel—foamy cafés, sugar-sand beaches, and the beckoning Mediterranean. With a “use it or lose it” approach to the good life, young Israelis embrace the present. I see Tel Aviv as a fun-loving resort, just the opposite of Jerusalem. People in Tel Aviv told me that many don’t like the religiosity of Jerusalem. “The cities have two different mindsets. The sea makes you open.

There’s no sea in Jerusalem, and no beach. In Jerusalem, everybody is political, religious, or a tourist.”

The relative prosperity between Israel and its neighbors is striking. Waking up on my first morning here, I looked out my hotel window at the wonderful sandy beach (which is made of sediment blown and washed over from the Nile River). Pondering the joggers and kayakers getting in their morning exercise, I kept thinking it’s as if someone put Southern California in the middle of Central America.

The historic town of Jaffa—now consumed by the sprawl of Tel Aviv—was the Ellis Island of the new state. This was where new arrivals first set foot in Israel. Much of historic Jaffa was destroyed in 1948, in what Israelis call their “War of Independence.” As in any war, there were winners and there were losers. When Israel celebrates its Independence Day each spring, the same day is mourned as “The Day of Catastrophe” on the other side of the wall. While Israelis set off fireworks, Pales-

*Tel Aviv, born in 1909, must be the youngest major city on the Mediterranean.*



*Each year on Israel’s Independence Day, the happy soundtrack of families enjoying BBQs fills the parks. It’s like the Fourth of July, only with Stars of David rather than Stars and Stripes.*

tinians remember the destruction of entire Arab communities that once thrived here and elsewhere, and how hundreds of thousands of those who survived ended up in refugee camps over a newly drawn border.

How do you build a new nation? For one thing, it’s national policy to welcome all Jews into Israel. The “Law of Return” entices Jewish immigrants with grants and loans, subsidized housing, and classes to facilitate their assimilation. No matter how poor, foreign, and rough the returning Jew may be, the program expects to create well-educated, Hebrew-speaking Israelis out of his family within two generations. Israel claims to have successfully absorbed at least a million penniless refugees this way.

When you’re surrounded on all sides by enemies, military readiness is serious business. All Jewish Israelis go



*A few blocks away, just over the wall, Palestinians in the West Bank mark that same day, which they call “The Day of Catastrophe,” with sadness and demonstrations.*

into the military at age 18: men for three years, women for two years. While the primary purpose is to protect the country, a strong secondary purpose for the universal draft is to build social cohesion. Military service functions as a kind of cultural boot camp for first-generation Israelis—new arrivals from places like Russia, Iraq, and Ethiopia. After three years in the army, they’re no longer F.O.B. (“fresh off the boat”).

While the “Law of Return” sounds wonderful, it’s a policy that angers many Palestinians I met. They recall how their parents were evicted from their villages—now plowed under and providing foundations for forests and parks—and wonder why a Russian Jew who has no connection with Israel is welcomed as if royalty, while a person whose family had lived there for two thousand years is not allowed to go home.



*Half of Israel's population is first-generation immigrants. Those who are 18 years old go into the military—providing them with a crash course on how to be an Israeli.*

## Israel's Dogged Determination to Keep the High Ground

High in the mountains at the far-north end of Israel, the Gadot Lookout in the Golan Heights overlooks the upper Jordan River Valley. After Israel was created in 1948, its neighbors generally held the high ground around its borders. For a generation, Arabs could lob shells into the towns, kibbutzes, and farms of Israel below. Then, with their victory in the Six-Day War in 1967, Israel surprised all of its enemies (essentially destroying Egypt's air force on the ground in minutes) and substantially increased its size. To the north, they could have waltzed right into Damascus. But Israel just wanted buffer territory. Today, Israel—determined

never again to live under its enemies—controls this and all of the high ground around its borders.

A similar spot is the fortification atop Mount Bentel. From this Golan Heights viewpoint, you can look into Syria toward its capital, Damascus—just 35 miles to the north. As long as things are peaceful, the fort is treated as a scenic tourist depot. The trenches and barbed wire here provide a kind of commando playground for visiting Israelis. There's even an open-air modern art gallery with installations made of rusty military hardware and barbed wire. The café on Mount Bentel is named "Coffee Annan," a clever reminder that former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan once led the UN troops stationed below.

Towering above the Dead Sea is yet another fortified mountaintop—

but this one's 2,000 years old and in ruins. The powerful and historic Masada fortress was built back when the Jews were the rebellious subjects of Roman occupation. In A.D. 70, Roman Emperor Titus, in an effort to put down the Jews once and for all, destroyed much of Jerusalem, including the main Jewish temple. Nearly 1,000 Jewish rebels—the original Zealots—fled to this fortress to defend their families and faith. An army of 15,000 Romans attacked the rebels at Masada. Preferring a direct attack to a drawn-out siege, the Roman army had a huge ramp built up this mountain. Knowing the Zealots wouldn't kill their own countrymen, the Romans forced Jewish slaves to do the back-breaking construction. Slowly, under the frustrated gaze of the rebels, the ramp was completed. The Zealots realized they were doomed to a life of slavery or worse. So, on the eve of the

inevitable Roman breakthrough, Masada's rebels methodically took their own lives.

Today, Masada reminds us that Israel's staunch "they'll never take us alive" commitment to independence started 2,000 years ago. This patriotic site is popular for Israeli schoolchildren, for the ceremony swearing in Israeli soldiers, and for tourists.

Imagine a people maintaining their culture and traditions for nearly two millennia without a homeland. Imagine them remembering the holy temple destroyed and that epic last stand ending in mass suicide on a fortified hilltop. Imagine a generation of people whose parents were killed in the Holocaust and who, with a love of their heritage, found themselves in the position to retake what they believed to be their homeland. A rallying cry among these Zionists is "Masada shall never fall again."

*Hearing an Israeli explain the importance of keeping the high ground while overlooking the Sea of Galilee from a former Syrian pillbox atop the Golan Heights, it was easy to get the point.*





*Mount Bental's fortifications are a fun tourist attraction in good times...and a strategic military stronghold in bad.*

More and more Israeli Jews, along with people around the world who care about peace in the Middle East and believe in the survival of a strong and secure Jewish state, think Israel would be wise to lighten up a bit on the Pales-

*At Masada in A.D. 70, Jewish rebels—facing imminent defeat by Roman soldiers—committed mass suicide. The hilltop ruins remain an important symbol for defense-minded Israelis.*



tinian issues. But when you travel here and interact with the older generation, you appreciate why most of them take every threat to their nation extremely seriously—and make their own rules for security without waiting for anyone else's approval. These people remember 1967, when Hebrew-language propaganda radio from Egypt broadcast to a young generation of Israelis: "Dear fish of the Mediterranean, don't bother eating now—because in a few days, you'll be dining on two million Jews."

### Christian Pilgrims Flock to the Sea of Galilee

As a Christian, I enjoy making travel a spiritual experience—whether hiking on a ridge high in the Swiss Alps with nothing but nature and the heavens around me, or stepping into the great

cathedrals of Europe to be bathed in sunlight filtered through exquisite stained glass created by poor and simple people with a powerful faith nearly a thousand years ago. I'm touched by the delicate yet mighty love of parents for their little children in hardscrabble corners, and I'm inspired by the faith of people who see God differently than I do. Being tuned into my spirituality as I travel enhances my experience.

For a person of faith to travel without letting the experience stir what's inside them is a lost opportunity. Of course, many people actually go on religious trips—pilgrims on pilgrimages. While I've never done exactly that, every time I'm at a pilgrimage site, I endeavor to keep a positive attitude about the devotion that surrounds me. It's easy to be cynical about the reverence given to relics I don't understand, the determination many have to believe in what seem like silly miracles, or the needless pain someone suffers in the name of their faith—whether by climbing a mountain in bare feet or a long staircase on their knees. But it's far more meaningful to let your heart be warmed.

The biggest share of the tourist industry in the Holy Land is religious tourism. While Jesus was born in Bethlehem (in the south, near Jerusalem), he grew up and spent much of his three-year ministry in Nazareth, near the Sea

of Galilee—where the Bible says Jesus walked on water, calmed the storm, and talked fishermen into changing careers. For Christians, making a pilgrimage to the places they've imagined since their childhood Sunday school classes can be a transforming experience. Experiencing "the fifth gospel," as pilgrims call the Holy Land, helps them better understand the other four gospels. While I rarely saw a tour group elsewhere, I was stuck in traffic jams of tour buses at the great Bible sights.

*Meditating on Bible lessons where they actually took place helps a Christian better connect with the word of God.*



The Sea of Galilee—700 feet below sea level, 13 miles long by 8 miles wide, and fed and drained by the Jordan River—is Israel's top source of water. The Jordan River dumps into the north end of the lake, oxygenating the water and attracting a high concentration of fish—and fishermen. In the Bible, Matthew writes, "As [Jesus] walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the



*The faithful believe John the Baptist baptized Jesus in the Jordan River. And today, Christians from all over the world come here in droves to affirm their baptism with a dip in that same storied river.*

lake—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.’”

Churches are built on sites where, for over two thousand years, stories of miracles have inspired worship. Christians gather to worship on Mount Beatitude, high above Galilee, where Jesus gave the Sermon on the Mount. “Beatitude” is Latin for “blessing.” And here, Jesus said, “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” Peacenik priests and pastors enjoy making the point that Christ said “peacemakers” rather than “peacekeepers.” Traveling here in the Holy Land, this Beatitude has a particular poignancy and relevance.

The Church of the Primacy of St. Peter, delightfully set on the Sea of Galilee, is especially important for Roman Catholic pilgrims. The church is built upon the rock where, tradition holds, the resurrected Jesus ate with his dis-

ciples and told Peter to “feed my sheep.” For Catholics, this is a very important site, as it established the importance of Peter—the first pope—among the disciples.

At each pilgrimage site, my Jewish guide read with passion passages from the Bible. I found the scriptures about the Sermon on the Mount, feeding the masses with a few loaves and fish, Jesus calming the stormy sea, and the Beatitudes particularly moving here on the sites where those events occurred.

Gazing out over the fabled Sea of Galilee and imagining Jesus walking on the water, I became more emotional than I had imagined I would be. Closing my eyes, I let the song of pilgrim groups singing in the distance, the sound of the little waves at my feet, and the breeze off the lake come together in a touching, personal moment. If you’d like to share the experience enjoyed by pilgrims over the centuries, travel can be a spiritual act as well as a political one.

## Bethlehem: Gateway to Palestine

For me, no Holy Land visit is complete or balanced without learning from both narratives—Israeli and Palestinian. Crossing from Jerusalem to Bethlehem (in Palestine), suddenly there’s not a yarmulke in sight. Wandering Palestinian streets and markets, I kept thinking how easy it is to get here, how little I knew of it, and how rarely visited this land is.

No longer just the little town of Christmas-carol fame, Bethlehem is a leading Palestinian city. The classic Bethlehem panorama shows a delightful town capping a hill with spires and minarets. But this view is impossible to find today, as the city sprawls and is almost indiscernible from greater Jerusalem. If it weren’t for the border crossing—and the traffic—you could ride a bike from the place Jesus was born (Manger Square in

Bethlehem) to the place he died (Calvary Hill in Jerusalem) in about 20 minutes.

While beloved among Christians as the place where Jesus was born, Bethlehem’s skyline is a commotion of both crosses and crescents—a reminder that historically, the town has held a mix of Christians and Muslims. The main square bustles with commerce. And the traffic circle comes with a memorial to locals doing time in Israeli prisons. Here, immersed in a sea of Palestinian people going about their daily lives, preconceptions are challenged.

Arriving in Bethlehem, I checked into my guesthouse, and within minutes met my Palestinian tour guide. He took me to a tourist-friendly restaurant that posted a “families only” sign so they could turn away rowdy young men. I guess we looked harmless enough, as they let us right in. We sat down, and an impressive array of Palestinian dishes appeared.

*Crosses and crescents share Bethlehem’s skyline.*



There's a rhythm to eating here. You're presented with a delicious and irresistible array of little appetizer plates—hummus, salads, cheeses, meats, eggplant, and various dips to eat with pita bread. Then, just when you're about full, the real meal arrives—generally a plate full of various meats and grilled vegetables. And save room for dessert! If food is love, there's an abundance of that in this land.

In fact, a frustration when traveling in Palestine is being overfed. I don't like to overeat or to waste food. And it seemed I had to do both twice a day. But then my local friend taught me that, according to Palestinian culture, whenever a guest finishes his plate, it's only hospitable to refill it. So I found the solution: not to finish my plate.

As in Israel, nearly all tourism in Palestine is religious tourism. And, of course, Bethlehem is a hugely important pilgrimage site to Christians as the birthplace of Jesus. While our image of

“no room at the inn” is brick and wood, the “inn” of Bible fame was very likely a series of caves. And “no room” meant that a woman about to give birth would not be welcome in the main quarters, as childbirth was considered unclean. Mary was sent to the manger cave, where the animals were stabled, to give birth to Jesus.

Today, the place where the Baby Jesus first entered the material world is marked by the Church of the Nativity, established by St. Helena—mother of the Roman Emperor Constantine—in 326. Inside, you feel the history. A steady stream of tourists and pilgrims come here from all across Christendom to remember that first Christmas and to pray.

For too many, unfortunately, the word “Palestinian” raises an automatic association with terrorism. Because of this fear, the typical Christian pilgrimage tour visits Bethlehem as a side-trip from Israel. They zip through the wall into the

*Before embarking upon our TV production work, the Palestinian tourist board invited our crew out to a wonderful dinner. When the bill came to me, I happily paid it, assuming that the department of tourism in Palestine is likely on an extremely tight budget.*



*While pilgrims line up at the Church of the Nativity, the people of Bethlehem go about their daily chores under this memorial to locals locked up in Israeli prisons.*

West Bank, head directly to Manger Square, visit the Church of the Nativity, and make a beeline back to safety in Israel. These unfortunate travelers miss a lot and come home with only one narrative. This means that pilgrims who visit the Holy Land to “walk where Jesus walked” seldom walk with the people Jesus walked with. They rarely interact with Palestinian Christians.

The fact that not all Palestinians are Muslims surprises some. When meeting an Arab Christian, many tourists ask when their family was converted. The answer is usually, “About 2,000 years ago, back when Jesus’ disciples were doing missionary work around here.” A century ago, about 20 percent of Palestinians were Christian. But many Arab Christians fled the draft during World War I (since the ruling Ottomans were neither Arab nor Christian, these Arab Christians saw no reason to fight in their army). And many more have fled

with the rising sectarian tensions of recent decades. Today, Christians make up a tiny sliver of the population...and most of them live here in Bethlehem. With the rise of Islamists across the region making parishioners nervous, the Church needs people to stay. Christian leaders meet monthly with Muslim imams to discuss growing extremism in the Muslim community and a growing uneasiness among Christians.

The village of Beit Sahour, just a 30-minute walk east of Bethlehem, is the site of the famous Shepherds’ Fields. In these fertile fields, the Bible



*For over a thousand years, a mosque has also stood on Nativity Square. Muslims consider Jesus a major prophet and have a special reverence for Mary, who has a big role in the Quran.*

tells of an angel who said to ancient shepherds, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will



According to scripture, angels were heard on high at Beit Sahour—the Shepherds' Fields just outside Bethlehem.

find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." Today, pilgrims still come to these fields to hear the good news, then spread it throughout the world. (Locals say that God knew what he was doing, because this town is still notorious in Palestine for its gossiping. Even news less important than the coming of the Messiah spreads fast from Beit Sahour.)

That evening, back at my Bethlehem hotel, I bumped into a dozen Lutheran pastors in the lobby. They were heading into the 2,000-year-old cave upon which the hotel was built for a devotional service. They invited me along. Even though I was really tired, I followed my travel ethic: If an opportunity presents itself, say "Yes." I climbed down into the cave with them and enjoyed a wonderful hour of singing, reading, and sharing. It was, simply, beautiful. You meet far fewer tourists in the West Bank than elsewhere, but those you do meet are really interesting.

## Walls and Settlements: It's About Land...Like Holy Land Monopoly

As long as I've been politically active (since my first trip to Central America back in the Contra/Sandinista days), I've been impressed by how land issues are so fundamental to peace with justice. And land—it seems to me—is what the struggles in the Holy Land are all about.

Two hot-button land issues dominate much of the debate: Israel's erection of a barrier around the West Bank, and the Israeli construction of settlements within West Bank territory. In an effort to get a balanced-as-possible take, I made a point to talk with people on both sides (physically and philosophically) of this divide.

Begun in 2003, a 300-mile-long fortified barrier now separates Israel from the West Bank. What Israelis call the "Security Fence" or "Anti-Terrorism Barrier," Palestinians—who consider it an affront to their dignity—call the "Separation Wall," the "Apartheid Wall," or simply "The Wall."

Israelis explain that the barrier is essential to their national security, and needed to be built after losing hundreds of its citizens to suicide bombers in the previous decade. And they claim it's been effective—noting that since its construction, there has been far less violence.

Palestinians would counter by saying that the wall was built only with the pretense of security. (Several locals

assured me that if anyone really wants to get through the wall—which is far from finished—it's very easy to do.) They don't credit the wall for the decline in violence, but say it's because Palestine, its president, its security forces, and its people have all realized that violence is a losing strategy.

Palestinians also view the wall as a land grab designed to hobble a Palestinian state. The wall generally runs well within Palestinian territory: It's nearly twice as long as the border it claims to defend—gerrymandered in order to secure Israel settlements, aquifers, good farmland, and religious and archeological sites within the West Bank. While it can look landscaped and attractive from the Israeli side, the wall is gloomy and oppressive from the Palestinian side.

Walking through the border checkpoint is enlightening and, for some people, uncomfortable. For a Western tourist, it's easy: Leaving Jerusalem, I took a cab to the checkpoint, flashed my passport, walked through the turnstile, and hopped into one of the many taxis waiting on the Palestinian side for the quick ride into downtown Bethlehem. But for Palestinians heading for work in Jerusalem, it isn't nearly so simple. Like border towns between rich and poor lands all over the world, workers with special passes cross every day on their humiliating commute for higher-paying jobs in the more affluent country.

I can understand Israel's need for security. But my hunch was that the wall is designed at least partly to sepa-

rate people from people. And to me, that's part of the problem. I sensed that the younger generation on both sides wanted to get beyond the baggage of their parents and connect. But with this barrier, there's literally no common ground where people from opposite sides can come together. Walls are ugly. They may be necessary at times, but they represent a diplomatic failure.

In addition to the wall, Israel has steadily encroached upon Palestinian

Whether you call it a "Security Fence" or a "Separation Wall," this 300-mile-long structure has become an icon of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.



territory by building hilltop settlements in the West Bank. Today over half a million Israeli Jews live in settlements in Palestinian land (about a third of them in East Jerusalem, claimed both by Israel and Palestine). These are planned communities—beautifully landscaped and designed—offering the same modern conveniences and efficiency you'd expect in an American gated community. And thanks to Israeli government subsidies for housing and transportation, young Jewish families

can afford to live here and comfortably commute to jobs back in Israel. For many, it's a deal too good to refuse.

When Palestinians complain about Israelis building homes here, they hear many justifications. Supporters of these settlements make the case that developing this land is reasonable because it was unused, and because the language of the treaty designating it Palestinian was open-ended ("until a final status agreement is reached"). Israel also explains that settlement construction creates a needed buffer zone (an action they can defend by simply pointing to their recent history). They say that according to international law, if land is used to attack a nation, that nation has the legal right to both occupy and settle that land for its own defense. And many Jews (and Evangelical Christians who are inclined to support them) believe it is God's will that they occupy this land. (According to the Bible, Judgment Day will only hap-

pen when Jews control the entire Holy Land. A certain breed of Christian supports Israel simply because they'd like to move things along.)

To better understand the settlers' perspective, I spent some time in a few Israeli settlements that were built during the last decade or so in the West Bank. Strolling along *Leave It to Beaver* streets under the red-tiled roofs of cookie-cutter homes, I felt as if I were in suburban California. Gangs of happy-go-lucky children on their bikes were eager to befriend me, and there was a relaxed vibe.

I spoke to one couple who's raising 10 children in one of Israel's biggest and most modern settlements. Chatting in a café at their mall, they acknowledged that the rest of the world may not like it (referring to the "rest of the world" as just another opinion). Describing their community as a "city" rather than a "settlement," they were thankful to have a place to raise their

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*Over 500,000 Israelis live in planned and fortified communities built mostly in the last generation on ridges and hilltops within the West Bank.*



children according to their values in a secure and affordable environment.

I also enjoyed a beer and a chat with a resident of a simple and rustic settlement in the Jordan River Valley. He said he was here not as a Zionist, but because it was quiet and offered his young family a back-to-nature home with wonderful neighbors. "You never see the stars in Tel Aviv like we do here," he told me.

In another settlement, I met a 24-year-old man who had just bought his house and was thrilled to invite me in. He and his buddy talked with me on their balcony, overlooking a vast and unpopulated view. They said that the land was going unused anyway, so why shouldn't industrious Israeli Jews develop it? They can pump in water from desalination plants and build a slick freeway to provide a fine place for people to live within a short drive to jobs back in Israel proper. When I asked these young men if there's a good and peaceful future in this region, I was struck by how matter-of-factly they said, "Only if the Palestinians move east across the Jordan River and into the country of Jordan."

I assumed I wouldn't be welcome to walk with my TV crew through a settlement's security gate and then roam freely within. But I was wrong. The guards at the gate were extremely welcoming—as if there was nothing to hide or apologize for. We chatted with people and filmed what we liked. As we left, rather than saying "goodbye," one of those same guards said, "Enjoy your economy."



*For Israeli parents, settlements in the West Bank are a great place to raise children. I could have played all day with the kids I met.*

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Walking through an Israeli settlement, I can see the appeal of these neighborhoods. But history has taught us that when a government plants its citizens in disputed territory, the descendants of those original settlers are likely to pay the price. Ultimately, rather than cheap, that land is very costly.

I've also learned that these Israeli enclaves embitter the Palestinians as much as violent resistance embitters Israelis. And the more settlements are built, the more the West Bank becomes fragmented, and the more difficult a mutually agreeable two-state solution—or any solution—may become. While I hope it's not true, I worry that the aggressive establishment of these settlements today could haunt Israel's prospects for a happy resolution of the tensions in the Middle East tomorrow.

I see three possible outcomes to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: The first scenario is two independent and secure states (a Jewish Israel and Palestine). The second scenario is one modern,

## Palestinian Borders: Complex as ABC

As a visitor, zipping from Palestinian city to city on fine modern freeways, it's easy to underestimate the complexity of the region and the extent of Israeli control. Palestinians living in the West Bank, while nominally autonomous, feel they're under Israeli occupation. Palestinian cities are generally Palestinian-run with their own security forces. But these islands of relative independence are surrounded by land and roads controlled by Israeli military.

Since the 1993 Oslo Peace Accords, the West Bank is subdivided into pockets of land classified into three zones: Areas A, B, and C.

**Area A** (18 percent of the land in the West Bank, with about 55 percent of the people) is made up of islands within the West Bank. It contains most of the Palestinian cities and towns, and is entirely controlled by the Palestinian Authority.

**Area B** is filled mostly with infrastructure connecting the islands of autonomy that combine to make Area A. While Area B is technically under Pal-



*The West Bank is not as contiguous as simple maps imply. Locals say it's more like Swiss cheese, with the holes being densely populated islands of Palestinian autonomy surrounded by roads and open land controlled by Israel.*

*As you approach any Palestinian city, a bold red sign makes it clear in Hebrew, Arabic, and English: You are leaving the realm of the Israeli military and entering the zone controlled by Palestinian security.*



*At checkpoints, stalled and frustrated drivers have plenty of time to ponder political art decorating the walls. People living difficult lives are expert at coping—whether through hero-worship, venting with a spray can, or dark humor.*



estine civil authority, it's effectively controlled by the Israeli military. Palestinian license plates are green and Israeli plates are yellow. When times are good, all cars are allowed. In troubled times, traffic is yellow plates only. If there's unrest or a problem, Israel can shut down Area B border crossings all over the country and stop all traffic in the West Bank. In minutes, they can isolate and lock down every Palestinian city.

**Area C**, holding most of the West Bank's uninhabited land, is under complete Israeli authority. While Area C is nominally a part of Palestine, there can be no Palestinian building in Area C without Israeli permission (which is rarely granted). Area C also includes modern Israeli highways that cut through the West Bank, connecting Jewish settlements in Palestine with Israel proper.

Checkpoints stand sternly at the boundary between Israeli-controlled

land and Palestinian territory. Some are manned; others are empty and a simple drive-through; and "flying checkpoints" can pop up unexpectedly in the middle of nowhere. But all checkpoints come with a watchtower reminding everyone that Israel is keeping an eye on things. For Palestinians, the needless wasted time spent sitting at these checkpoints is aggravating and humiliating. Driving by one, I saw two soldiers checking papers one car at a time (holding up traffic in the opposite direction and creating a huge traffic jam in the baking sun). Luckily, by the time I returned, they were gone.

Although Palestinians still feel that they live at least partly under Israeli occupation, they try to remember what an historic accomplishment it is that the land in Area A is free and self-ruled, and has been since 1993—for the first time after centuries of foreign control.

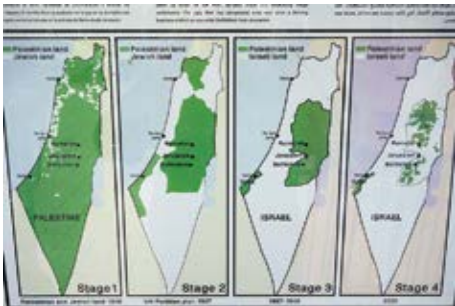




*This Israeli couple—enjoying their community's sleek shopping mall—explains why they choose to live in a West Bank settlement.*

pluralistic, and secular state with a dominant Jewish population and an equal and protected Palestinian minority. Unfortunately, this is untenable for anyone who believes in a Jewish state, as over time—according to demographic trends—the Muslim minority would grow to outnumber the current Jewish majority, tipping the balance of power. The third option is one Jewish state with its Palestinian minority kept on the equivalent of Indian reserva-

*This map, posted in many places around Palestine, illustrates how with each passing decade, Israeli control of the Holy Land is becoming greater, while Palestinian control (the green area) is shrinking.*



tions—what some would call an “Apartheid state.”

I don’t believe an Apartheid state is what Israel wants, and I don’t believe it’s the best option for Israel. But as Israel continues to build settlements that carve up the West Bank, I fear the country may be forcing itself into an ugly and undesirable corner. With a two-state scenario becoming less and less likely, Israel will have to be one state. And if that state is to be Jewish, Israel may ultimately have no option but to become what most Israelis don’t want to be in order to simply be.

### The Beauty of Palestine: Olives, Bedouins, and Salty Seas

After just a couple of days in Palestine, I was really impressed by how much fun it was to simply be there. I sensed a resilience, a welcoming spirit, and a warmth that was striking. While I rarely saw fellow Americans, everywhere I went, I heard over and over, “Welcome to Palestine!” It’s as if people were just thrilled that they have a name for their country...and someone from the outside world was there to see their flags flapping in the West Bank breeze.

Driving through the Palestinian countryside, the vistas feel timeless—I couldn’t help but imagine Abraham, Jesus, or Muhammad traversing these same valleys. One place that stole my heart was a natural preserve for hiking near the village of Battir, west of Beth-



*Families still come together to harvest olives, just as they have since biblical times.*

lehem. A fine trail snaked along terraces that defined this terrain in ancient times. These 3,000-year-old “Biblical Terraces” were lined with stately and graceful olive trees.

Here in the Holy Land, the land itself is holy to its inhabitants. For Palestinians, the olive tree—a symbol of steadfastness and faith in the future—is a kind of lifeblood for the culture. The tree of poor people, it gives without taking. As they say, “It was planted by our grandfathers for us to eat, and we plant it for our grandchildren to eat.”

Each autumn, across the land—as they have since ancient times—families gather in the olive groves for the harvest. Children are let out of school for the week so they can work the trees with their parents. Then families take their olives to the communal village press to make oil. The traditional technique survives—though boosted by hardworking machinery—as a busy crew in oil-soaked shirts meets the demand of the harvest season. Rounds of olive paste are pressed into a weeping mass of fresh oil, which after filtering becomes a golden liquid poured into jugs to be taken home.

Scattered through the Palestinian countryside, like timeless limpets, are the settlements of nomadic Bedouin tribes—filling dusty gullies with their scrappy shacks and goat corrals. Children and sheepdogs follow their flocks of goats and sheep as they search for something to munch on.

While hardscrabble communities still eke out an off-the-grid existence,

*In Palestine, olive trees have been tended by locals for millennia.*



their way of life is dying. Like nomads everywhere, Bedouins are being driven into a world where people have addresses and send their children to school to learn the prevailing values of that society. With the political tensions between Israel and Palestine (the walls, settlements, freeway construction, and aggressive water politics), I was told that Bedouin camps are now less mobile and stick to land near roads where they can tap into water mains. After so many centuries, more and more Bedouin families are finally settling down in towns and villages. As their ability to roam free is disappearing and their access to water is becoming more limited, they are, by necessity, adapting.

And yet, these Bedouins are trying to maintain their traditions as much as a nomad with a roof over his head can. Visiting a Bedouin settlement and watching the man of the house roast coffee with a reverence for tradition is mesmerizing. Observing him at work, it was clear to me that the dignity of these



*Bedouin people, while settling down, are retaining as much of their heritage as the modern world allows.*

people and their closeness to the land is emblematic of Palestinians in general. And tasting his fresh-brewed coffee was like sealing a new friendship.

Also hiding in folds of the desert are fabled monasteries which, since ancient times, have given hermits the isolation of their dreams. The dramatically set Monastery of St. George, built

*Bedouin settlements pepper the Palestinian countryside.*



on cliffs above a natural spring, welcomes pilgrims and tourists alike. For 15 centuries, the faithful have ventured to this remote spot, hiked into the ravine, quenched their thirst, and nourished their souls. Orthodox Christians—whether from Palestine, Greece, Russia, or Ethiopia—enliven these monasteries today, as they have since the sixth century.

I ascended the dramatic Wadi Qilt viewpoint for a thrilling panorama over the Judean Desert. Then my ears popped as I dropped below sea level and passed through the ancient city of Jericho. Dating back some 10,000 years, it's one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities on earth. Locals claim that the thick air that comes with this low altitude—nearly a thousand feet below sea level—makes their bananas, oranges, and dates particularly tasty.

The road ends where the Jordan River does, at the lowest place on earth (about 1,400 feet below sea level): the fabled Dead Sea. The Jordan continually



*Top: The Monastery of St. George is tucked away deep in the Judean Desert. Bottom: The Orthodox icons at the Monastery of St. George are a reminder of how the meditation, isolation, and hermetic way of life can all help the monks—and pilgrims—to better understand the message and will of Jesus.*

empties into this inland sea. Because there's no outlet for the water, and the scalding sun—almost unbearable in the summer—causes constant evaporation, the minerals concentrate. That's why the water is more than one-third minerals (bromine, magnesium, and iodine).

Tourists are more than welcome here, and they enjoy bobbing like corks in water that's about six times as salty as the ocean. A dip rubs salt on cuts you



*The Dead Sea, the lowest place on earth, has a special mystique at twilight.*

didn't know you had. Keep the water out of your eyes and float near a shower.

Dead Sea spas have an impressive brag list. The soothing air is thick—there's 10 percent more oxygen here than at sea level—and hazy with bromine, a natural tranquilizer. Visitors rub the Dead Sea's magically curative black mud on their bodies. Many believe the mud's minerals make their skin younger and more beautiful.

Palestinians living in the West Bank have no access to waterfront.

*This Israeli water pump, in the West Bank, is caged in and surrounded by barbed wire—a reminder of what is the most important natural resource around here.*



Israel even adjusted the border to control the entire Dead Sea shoreline. But when tensions are low, Palestinian families who can afford the admission are allowed to enjoy some Israeli Dead Sea resorts.

Traveling through the West Bank, you become attuned to meaningful symbols of a divided society. For example, the skylines of Palestinian cities and towns are dotted with black water tanks. While Israeli settlers have running water whenever they like, Israel controls and limits water service in Palestinian-held areas. The black tanks absorb the solar heat to warm the water—and help you identify Palestinian houses.

Each community has its concerns: They say the first thing an Israeli considers when building a house is a bomb-hardened safe room, and the first thing a Palestinian considers is building a cistern. Along with water tanks and solar panels, Palestinian rooftops also



*Palestinian rooftops are punctuated with countless black water tanks.*

sport satellite dishes to connect to Arab and international satellites, which serve as their window on the world. Palestinians told me that many here keep the TV on at all times. To them, "breaking news" stories aren't just entertainment, but critical updates about a constantly shifting reality.

Driving through the West Bank at night was also instructive. In the countryside, there were no streetlights unless I was under an Israeli settlement or military base—in which case, the highway was well-lit, including powerful spotlights facing away from the road, illuminating the land nearby. In the distance, the faint flicker of open fires, lanterns, and makeshift dangle lighting marked off-the-grid Bedouin camps. And I could identify Palestinian towns on the horizon by the proud green lights of their minarets.

*Right: Hebron, the biggest city in the West Bank, is a jostle of activity.*

### A Synagogue, a Mosque, and Bulletproof Glass: Jews and Muslims Sharing Abraham in Hebron

Hebron is the West Bank's biggest city (with over 685,000 people), and is also home to one of the holiest sites in the Holy Land: The Tomb of Abraham, revered by Jews, Muslims, and Christians. According to scripture, Abraham had one son by his wife, Sarah (Isaac, the ancestor of the Israelis), and another



son by their Egyptian servant, Hagar (Ismael, from whom the Arabs are descended). That's why both Jews and Muslims come to the Tomb of Abraham to be close to their great patriarch. While this confluence could have been an opportunity for unity and cooperation, instead it has turned the tomb into a divisive place with an uptight aura.

The Tomb of Abraham stands right in the center of town, where Israeli troops are posted in the name of security. In the surrounding streets, Jews live literally atop Muslims as the two communities struggle to be near the shrine of their common patriarch. While the city is mostly Palestinian, a determined and well-protected community of several hundred Israeli settlers has staked out the high ground. The tension between the communities is illustrated by a wire net that protects the Arab food and clothing market

*In Hebron, the bustling market comes with a net to protect it from falling Israeli garbage.*



*The tomb of the great patriarch Abraham, venerated by both Jews and Muslims, is shared by a synagogue and a mosque—and split by a pane of bulletproof glass.*

from the garbage tossed down by the Jewish residents above. Observing this, I wondered what Abraham would think about the inability of his feuding descendants to live together better.

And it's all about one complicated and tragic sight: The Tomb of the Patriarchs, an ancient structure capped by a medieval church, which now functions both as a mosque and a synagogue holding the tombs of Abraham and his family. Abraham purchased this burial plot almost 4,000 years ago, as explained in Genesis 23.

For centuries, Jews were generally not allowed to worship here. Then, after the Israeli victory in 1967's Six-Day War, this holy site was shared by Muslims and Jews. But during a Muslim service in 1994, a Jewish settler entered with his gun and killed 29 Palestinian worshippers. Since then, this holy space has been smothered with security and divided—half mosque and half synagogue—with Abraham's tomb

in the middle, granting both communities partial access.

Sadly, this shrine comes with bulletproof glass and barred windows so that his two sons' feuding descendants can respect his grave. On one side of the glass, Jews worship in the synagogue, enlivened with singing, studying, and praying among the tombs of their great patriarchs. And the other half is a mosque, where Muslims worship with equal fervor.

Hebron is the place where I feel the most tension in the West Bank. Jews expect access, as do Muslims—and, with a history of massacres on both sides, any trust is fragile. Palestinians can do little but annoy the huge number

*Top: A virtual no-man's-land with Jewish political art decorating closed buildings divides Hebron's two communities.*  
*Bottom: A giant key is a powerful symbol among Palestinians.*



of Israeli soldiers stationed here—and vice versa. During my visit, I noticed that they were putting down extra carpets in the mosque. When I asked why, I was told that they expected an inspection by Israeli soldiers, and they didn't know if the soldiers would remove their boots before entering.

I sensed a sad and unsettling sentiment of occupiers' vengeance among these young Israelis, who seemed to have little empathy for the people they were controlling. I thought



*In Hebron, turnstiles and checkpoints are a way of life.*

of the troubling fact that in World War I, the French and Germans were so willing and able to slaughter each other on the Western Front because the vast majority of them had never broken bread with someone from the other side. The society here seems purposefully structured to prevent people from knowing each other. These seemingly likeable young soldiers were fun to chat with. Then, when it was time to go, one of them said, "Time to go bust down a door." His friends in uniform laughed, and they were off.

## A Stroll Through Balata Refugee Camp

Refugees are a big issue in the Holy Land. When Jews returned to their ancestral homeland after World War II to create the modern state of Israel, they displaced hundreds of thousands of Palestinians. Many of these families still live in refugee camps in the West Bank.



Top: The claustrophobic Balata Refugee Camp is home to more than 20,000 Palestinians. Bottom: Political art in Palestine comes with unmistakable symbolism: Here, along with the Dome of the Rock (sacred to Muslims), a shattered wall, and an olive branch, is a key.

The biggest, with over 20,000 people, is Balata, just outside the city of Nablus.

The original ten-foot-by-ten-foot plating—marking where tents were pitched in 1948—survives. Only now the tents are gone, replaced by multi-story cinderblock tenements. Exploring these narrow lanes, I tried to imagine living in such tight quarters: being a parent with children and little money...the feeling of desperation and no way out. The density is horrible, and there's little privacy. It's a land of silent orgasms.

Walking through the Balata camp, I made a point to remember that throughout the world, there are refugee camps filled with people living this way. When we travel, we draw a tiny line of experience across our globe. But what we experience hints at a much broader reality; even though we see very little, we can learn a lot. From one country to the next, a gated community is a gated community. A happy person with clean running water is a happy person. And a refugee camp—regardless of who lives there and why—is filled with destitution, frustration, and faint but distant hope.

Wandering the streets of Balata offered a vivid glimpse of life here. Mothers send their sons out for chicken, and they bring home a very fresh bird ready to cook. The boy selects a bird from the cage. The butcher slits its throat, drains it, and tosses the bird into a spinner to remove all its feathers. Then he guts it, washes it, and puts it in a plastic bag. The cost: about \$4 a bird. Palestinians call the spinner a *ma a'ta*—the same word they



At an Internet café in the refugee camp, kids spend a few pennies playing violent shoot-'em-up games. One cute little boy turned to me, saying, "Shalom." Another boy, just as cute, said, "F\_\_k you, rich man." Part of me was impressed.

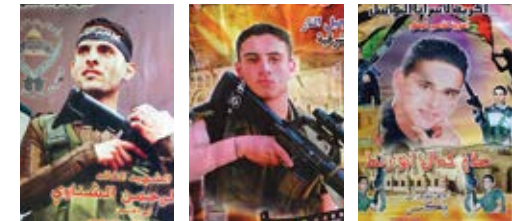
use for the turnstile they have to go through at various security checkpoints.

Balata's political art—typical of the graffiti decorating the wall separating Israel and Palestine—comes with powerful symbolism. And for Palestinian refugees, one of the most poignant symbols is a key. In 1948, when the families now living in Balata left their homes, they were told it would be for a short time. They locked up and took their keys. Now, more than 60 years later, many of these people treasure those old keys and are eager to share their story.

For over 60 years, the United Nations has kept a calming presence in Balata Refugee Camp. When the UN-run-and-funded school lets out, the streets are flooded with children eager to practice their English with a rare tourist venturing into their world.

In Balata—and throughout the West Bank—I saw Palestinian kids with toy guns shooting imaginary Jews.

It was disturbing to me. But then, in the Israeli settlements, I also saw Jewish kids with plastic guns gunning down imaginary terrorists. And it occurred to me that, if we're being honest, what American man today didn't grow up with a toy gun happily shooting Indians or Soviets in their imagination? Whether it's cowboys and Indians, Commies and Capitalists, or Jews and Arabs, little boys throughout the world are raised with a toy gun in their hands to shoot their parents' bad guys.



Top: Just being a tourist in Palestine for a week, I can understand the toll it must take on any "love thy neighbor" person to live in a land where they say, "To exist is to resist." Bottom: Like many other Palestinian cities and towns, Nablus is encrusted with posters honoring young men killed or imprisoned in the struggle against Israel. While considered "terrorists" by many, these Palestinians are viewed as freedom fighters and martyrs in their hometowns.



But many parents take the opposite tack. I asked a Palestinian whether children here are taught in schools to hate Jews (as some Israelis allege). He said, “As a parent raising my family under this Jewish occupation, it’s my challenge to teach our children *not* to hate Jews.”

The conditions in Balata are dismaying, particularly when you think that people have been living this way here for decades. But Israelis point out that Israel has taken in many Jewish refugees and assimilated them into their prosperous society. Meanwhile, they claim that Palestine—and the Arab world—has intentionally kept the West Bank refugee camps in squalor in order to stir public opinion against Israel.

Observing the Holy Land from a distance through a media lens, we can’t really get an honest picture of the reality here. I might see a news clip of Palestinians destroying a synagogue. It looks so hateful. And then I learn that during a land swap, Israel agreed to give back land upon which they had built a luxurious modern settlement. And, before retreating, they destroyed every building in the settlement except the

synagogue. When hardscrabble Palestinians, so poor and needy, walked into their land, they saw only rubble except for one building—and they got mad and destroyed it. It’s ugly both ways. But the television coverage leaves the viewer with no context a wrong impression.

Many Palestinians I met resent that the “terrorism” tag is typically applied to their community. One Palestinian said to me, “Maybe terrorists are ‘terrorists’ only because they lack uniforms, tanks, and warplanes.”

### Ramallah, Palestine’s De Facto Capital

Ramallah is the boom town of the West Bank. As, bit by bit (under the settlement policy of Israel), the likelihood of East Jerusalem being the capital of Palestine is fading, Ramallah is emerging as a natural stand-in, hosting the Palestinian government and international agencies. The PLO headquarters is here. Yasser Arafat is buried here.

*Ramallah proudly flies the flag of Palestine.*



And it’s busy with NGOs and international agencies working on Palestine’s problems.

As many Palestinian Americans have moved back home and live here, there are lots of American accents. The city of 340,000 people sits at about 3,000 feet above sea level. Its name means “God’s Mountain.” As it lacks the trouble-causing religious sites—and is more liberal and cosmopolitan than other Palestinian cities—I found it the most relaxed place in the country.

With its international professionals and university students, Ramallah has an almost cosmopolitan energy. Whether coming together at the Square of the Lions or browsing down a stylish shopping street, the people of Ramallah inspire me to envision a peaceful and prosperous Palestine of the future.

The number one sight in Ramallah is the tomb of Yasser Arafat. While he certainly has plenty of detractors, this Palestinian statesman, who led the PLO from 1969 to 2004, is without a doubt the father of modern Palestine. Call him what you like—people here celebrate Arafat as the man who did more than anyone else to raise awareness of the Palestinian struggle for independence. I found that, while many Palestinians believe Arafat squandered some opportunities for peace that they would love to have now, nearly all respect him as an important leader who committed his life to forging a free Palestinian state.

Growing up, the only Palestinian I was aware of was Yasser Arafat. Today, Arafat’s tomb stands next to the Pales-

tinian president’s headquarters. A thoughtful museum at the tomb of the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish introduced me to the author and poet who wrote the Palestinian Declaration of Independence. Darwish, who died in 2008, worked with Arafat, but used a pen rather than a gun as his weapon—a reminder of the wide range of approaches the Palestinians have used to make their message heard.

To get a more well-rounded feeling for modern Palestine both in its people

*The tomb of Yasser Arafat*



and its institutions, I popped into Birzeit University. Its campus, at the edge of Ramallah, has an enrollment of about 10,000. With beautiful landscaping connecting modern buildings and a student body that represented the future leaders of this young country, the campus was a sharp contrast with the intense and chaotic cities. A stroll through the campus gave me a chance to connect with young students and learn a bit about both their culture and their aspirations. It was inspiring.

## Israelis and Palestinians: Who's Right, Who's Wrong...Who Knows?

My Holy Land trip had the best possible outcome: It challenged my preconceptions. I learned that people whose language always sounded to me like terrorists conspiring are actually gentle souls with big challenges. And it taught me that there are two sure things: Violence doesn't work, and neither the Israelis nor the Palestinians are going to move. The only workable road is one of peaceful coexistence. It's clear to me that if you care about the future of Israel, you must find a viable solution for Palestine. Creating security, dignity, and independence for Palestine is actually in Israel's best interest—part of the long-term, sustainable solution to this region's troubles. I know—the hurdles are high. But hearing both narratives, I can envision a peaceful and prosperous

Holy Land—with a secure Israel and a free Palestine.

Another thing is clear: Good travel is all about connecting with people and better understanding their perspective. I learned what Muslims think of Jesus while sitting on a carpet with an imam; talked about raising kids while sipping coffee with Israelis who live in a settlement overlooking the West Bank; and visited with a Palestinian refugee as he clutched the key his parents took with them when they fled their village in 1948. I talked with soldiers in guard towers, roasted coffee with a Bedouin, and gained insight into why a proud and independent young woman would choose to wear a hijab. And I chatted with a Hebron butcher—next to the swinging head of a camel he just slaughtered—for insight into his world.

I remember when I first went on a political trip. It was back in the 1980s, to Nicaragua and El Salvador. Seeing me off, my Dad (suspicious of communism) said, "Don't be duped." Now, after

*Good travel is all about meeting people, talking with them, and learning.*



## The Hijab: The Meaning of a Scarf

At Ramallah's Birzeit University, I enjoyed a fascinating conversation with three smart, young, female Palestinian university students about the role of women in a Muslim society. Along with many other things, I was curious about the hijab, or traditional head covering. I've noticed that some women throughout the country wear it, while others don't.

Like many Westerners, I'm intrigued and perplexed by the tradition of women in religious families or communities needing to be covered in public for modesty. Modesty requirements are not unique to Muslims. Some conservative Christian women are expected to cover their heads in church. Some ultra-Orthodox Jewish women are expected to shave their heads and to wear a wig in public. And many Muslim women cover their heads. In Palestine, far more women wear scarves in Hebron and Nablus than in the more

cosmopolitan cities of Bethlehem and Ramallah. For Muslim men, it's a sin to look lustfully at a woman who's not your wife. Around here, hair is sexy, and in the strictest of Muslim societies, women carefully cover up every strand in public. (Of course, in the privacy of their own domestic world, they are welcome to be as sexy as they like for their husbands.)

Happily for many men, the scarf—while meant to downplay a woman's beauty—has morphed into something stylish and sexy in itself. Women can be technically proper with their faith while

still looking good. These days, scarves are worn like peacock tails. For many women, much care is put into coordinating their scarves, nail polish, handbags, and lipstick. One woman I met told me that she has over a hundred scarves, and each morning, she enjoys choosing one that fits her mood. It's an ensemble. You never wear pattern-on-pattern or solid-on-solid. If the dress is solid, the hijab will be patterned. I picked up another fashion tip: Propping up the back end with an empty yogurt cup as you tie it gives it a fetching lift.

The women I talked with agreed that women are free to be individuals in



Palestine, and that choosing to wear the hijab was entirely up to them. The woman who covers up is just as socially active, and in on all of the jokes and fun. But when she walks in public, she feels she gets more respect.

As for the broader role of women in Palestinian society, they pointed out that there were more women than men in higher education, and feel that they can do anything they want, if they work hard. Still, the consensus was that a woman's role is generally to raise children and run the family, while the man's role is to be out making the money.

a few weeks in the Holy Land—the latest chapter in 30 years of satisfying my curiosity about our world and its challenges by traveling and talking to people—I believe that the people most in danger of being duped are actually those who stay home.

Traveling through the Holy Land, my heart was a shuttlecock, flipping back and forth between sympathy for Israel and solidarity with Palestine. I'm saddened by the many people—in Israel, Palestine, or the USA—who are so hardened on one side or the other that they cannot allow themselves to find empathy with the society they consider the enemy. Even if one side is the enemy, it's not the entire society—just its leaders or its extremists. Just like American children of Catholic parents tend to be Catholic, and children of Lutheran parents tend to be Lutheran, children of the Holy Land have their parents' baggage from the start. And very few are packing light around here.

I'm concerned that—as a result of the societal and physical barriers that separate them—people on both sides will not get to know each other. It's next to impossible for Israelis and Palestinians to connect in any way. Consider this: Israelis and Palestinians who are soccer fans, curiously, root for the same Madrid and Barcelona teams—but many don't realize that they have this fandom in common. There's no way mutual fans of Real Madrid could be mutual enemies. They are completely reliant upon hometown media, parents, and schooling to shape their opinion of

the younger generation of the people on the other side of the wall—a generation they are destined to share their historic homeland with.

There's a little turnout on the Palestine side of the wall where passengers can conveniently change from a Palestinian car to an Israeli one. When I left Palestine, my Israeli driver was there, waiting for my Palestinian driver to drop me off. While I barely knew either of these men, I'll never forget their handshake—in the shadow of an ominous Israeli watchtower painted black by the flames of burning tires and ornamented with angry Palestinian art. These men were each beautiful, caring people, trapped in a problem much bigger than either of them. In the exchange, I was little more than a suitcase shuttling from one back seat to the other. I watched as they quietly shook hands, looked into each other's eyes, and said a solemn and heartfelt “Shalom.” And I thought, “With all these good people on both sides, there has got to be a solution—and a big part of it will be regular people making not walls...but bridges.”

*In this land, so treasured by Jews, Muslims, and Christians, I'm reminded that the prophets of each of these religions taught us to love our neighbors.*

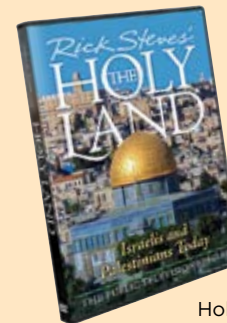


Producer Simon Griffith, cameraman Karel Bauer, and I condensed our Holy Land experience into *The Holy Land: Israelis and Palestinians Today*, a one-hour public television special airing across the USA starting September, 2014. This program airs only on public, noncommercial television. You can watch it on your public television station or at [ricksteves.com](http://ricksteves.com).

*Rick Steves'*  
THE  
HOLY  
LAND

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*No trip to the Holy Land is complete, nor is the learning experience balanced, without spending time in Palestine as well as in Israel. I found travel in Palestine comfortable and safe in part because I hired a local guide to be with me each day I was there (pictured here are Kamal, one of my Palestinian guides, and Abie, one of my Israeli guides). For contact information for my Palestinian and Israeli guides and for a list of companies doing “dual narrative” tours of the Holy Land, see the TV section of [ricksteves.com](http://ricksteves.com).*



### Watch the Holy Land Special

You can watch *Rick Steves' The Holy Land* on public television. Please contact your local station for air times. Or, watch it on-demand—streaming for free—at [ricksteves.com](http://ricksteves.com). You can also buy this program on DVD at the [ricksteves.com](http://ricksteves.com) Travel Store.

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