



MYSTAKIDIS TOURS

ORTHODOX PILGRIMAGES SINCE 1959

Holy Land Cornerstones of Faith

Eleven days for the pilgrim who would stand long at each holy place: the fullest Holy Land itinerary we build.

DURATION

11 Days · 10 Nights

ROUTE

Bethlehem · Jerusalem · The Coast

SEASON

Year-round departures

MYSTAKIDISTOURS.COM

WHY THIS PILGRIMAGE

For the pilgrim who would stand long at each place

Cornerstones of Faith is the fullest Holy Land itinerary we build: ten nights across the two holy towns, four beside the Basilica of the Nativity in Bethlehem and six in Jerusalem, and the great sites of the shorter pilgrimages each given room to breathe. Where the eight-day journey must join the wilderness and the Jordan in one day, Cornerstones gives each its own; where others pass the desert monasteries at a distance, this itinerary walks the Wadi Qelt to Saint George of Choziba on the cliff face itself.

The spine of the pilgrimage is unchanged, because it cannot be improved: the Grotto of the Nativity in the quiet of the morning, the Way of the Cross at first light, Golgotha and the empty Tomb, the renewal of baptismal promises in the Jordan, and the night Divine Liturgy at the Tomb of the Resurrection, arranged with the Patriarchate of Jerusalem. Around that spine we add the second wilderness day, the apostolic coast at Caesarea and Joppa, and a final unhurried day for returning wherever the week has taken hold of you.

Groups who travel with their own priest find this the itinerary with the most room for served Liturgies, akathists at the holy places, and the unrushed veneration that a pilgrim committee hopes for when it plans a once-in-a-lifetime journey.

WHO THIS PILGRIMAGE IS FOR

Parish groups planning a once-in-a-lifetime pilgrimage, clergy-led groups wanting room for daily services, and returning pilgrims who found the shorter itineraries left them wanting one more day at every place. The pace is the gentlest of our Holy Land journeys.

THE JOURNEY

- TEL AVIV
Arrival at Ben Gurion Airport
- BETHLEHEM
4 nights, centrally located hotel by Manger Square
- MAR SABA & CHOZIBA
Day pilgrimage: the desert lavras
- THE JORDAN & JERICHO
Day pilgrimage: the Baptism site
- JERUSALEM
6 nights, our base for the rest of the pilgrimage
- CAESAREA & JOPPA
Day pilgrimage: the apostolic coast
- TEL AVIV
Departure

Ten nights across two bases, Bethlehem and Jerusalem: the longest stay at the holy places in our catalog, and one unhurried hotel change.

THE PILGRIMAGE, DAY BY DAY

Cornerstones of Faith: the days

DAY 1 Arrival in the Holy Land, to Bethlehem

Your pilgrimage begins the moment you clear passport control at Ben Gurion Airport, where our pilgrimage director meets the group in the arrivals hall. The coach climbs from the coastal plain into the Judean hills along the old Jaffa road, a rise of nearly 2,500 feet that pilgrims once walked in three days and you will make in under an hour, then rounds the shoulder of the Holy City and drops south along the ridge to Bethlehem, the town of the Nativity, our first base. After check-in at our centrally located 4-star hotel, a short orientation walk brings you to Manger Square, where the fortress walls of the Basilica of the Nativity stand over the cave of the Lord's birth, so that the first holy place of your pilgrimage is fixed in your mind before you sleep. Dinner at the hotel and an early night.

OVERNIGHT **Bethlehem**

MEALS D · 4-star hotel

DAY 2 Bethlehem and the Grotto of the Nativity

The town of the Nativity is ours from early morning, before the day-visit crowds arrive from the north; this is the quiet hour that staying in Bethlehem buys you. At the Basilica of the Nativity, the oldest continuously used church in Christendom, we stoop through the Door of Humility and walk the nave of Justinian's basilica, its Crusader mosaics newly restored, to the Greek Orthodox sanctuary above the holy cave. Down the worn steps, the fourteen-pointed silver star marks the place of the Nativity, and there is time for each pilgrim to kneel and venerate. We visit the adjoining cave chapels and the icon of the Bethlehem Mother of God, the only icon in which the Theotokos is shown smiling. In the afternoon we drive to Beit Sahour and the Shepherds' Field, where the Greek Orthodox church and its cave chapel mark the place of the angels' Gloria, then return for an evening at leisure in Bethlehem, the Basilica a few minutes' walk away for those drawn back to it.

OVERNIGHT **Bethlehem**

MEALS B, D · 4-star hotel

DAY BY DAY, CONTINUED

DAY 3 Mar Saba and Saint George of Choziba

A full day among the desert lavras of the Judean wilderness, which begins almost at Bethlehem's door. At the overlook above the Kidron gorge stands the Great Lavra of Saint Sabbas the Sanctified, founded in 483 and never abandoned. Men may enter to venerate the incorrupt relics of Saint Sabbas and see the cave cell of Saint John of Damascus, who wrote his defence of the holy icons within these walls, while the women remain at the women's tower, as the typikon of the lavra has required for fifteen centuries. In the afternoon we walk a stretch of the Wadi Qelt to the Monastery of Saint George of Choziba, clinging to the cliff face above the brook where the Prophet Elijah was fed by ravens, and where the relics of Saint John Jacob the Romanian rest incorrupt. The path down is steep but rewarded; those who prefer may keep to the viewpoint.

OVERNIGHT Bethlehem
MEALS B, D · 4-star hotel

DAY 4 The Jordan, the Renewal of Baptism, Jericho

To the Jordan Valley, the lowest inhabited place on the face of the earth. At Qasr al-Yahud, the traditional site of the Lord's Baptism opposite the wilderness of John the Forerunner, pilgrims in white may enter the river and renew their baptismal promises as the priest reads the blessing of the waters. Bring a towel and a change of clothes; white baptismal gowns are sold at the site. We continue into Jericho, among the oldest cities on earth, to the sycamore of Zacchaeus kept in the courtyard of the Greek Orthodox metropolia, and ride the cable car up the Mount of Temptation to the monastery built into the cliff around the stone where the Lord fasted forty days and was ministered to by angels. We return by the Ascent of Adummim, the road of the parable of the Good Samaritan.

OVERNIGHT Bethlehem
MEALS B, D · 4-star hotel

DAY BY DAY, CONTINUED

DAY 5 To Jerusalem: the Old City, the Way of the Cross, the Holy Sepulchre

After an early breakfast we take our leave of Bethlehem and drive the short road north past the Monastery of Mar Elias, the first full view of Jerusalem opening across the valley, and leave our cases at our Jerusalem hotel, our base for the rest of the pilgrimage. We enter the Old City on foot through the Lions' Gate as the morning light reaches the Pools of Bethesda, where Christ healed the paralytic, and the Church of Saint Anne, built over the childhood home of the Theotokos. From the Praetorium we walk the Way of the Cross along the Via Dolorosa, pausing at each station, through the crowded souk to the courtyard of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Inside, your guide unfolds the geography of the great church slowly: the Stone of Anointing, the steep ascent to Golgotha, where you may kneel and place your hand in the rock socket of the Cross, and the Aedicule over the empty Tomb, kept by the Greek Patriarchate of Jerusalem since the age of Constantine. There is time to venerate without hurry, then the Katholikon and the underground Chapel of Saint Helen, where the True Cross was found. The afternoon is free in the Christian Quarter before we regroup for dinner.

OVERNIGHT Jerusalem**MEALS** B, D · 4-star hotel**DAY 6** The Mount of Olives, Mount Zion, the Patriarchate

The day begins on the Mount of Olives at the Chapel of the Ascension, where the rock keeps the imprint tradition names the Lord's last footprint on earth, and continues down the Palm Sunday road with the whole Old City spread below. At the foot of the mount we venerate at the Tomb of the Theotokos at Gethsemane, descending the wide Crusader staircase by candlelight, then keep a few minutes' silence among the ancient olives of the garden, trees whose roots are older than the Ottoman walls. In the afternoon we cross to Mount Zion: the Upper Room of the Mystical Supper and of Pentecost, and the house of Caiaphas, where the Lord was held through the night of His arrest. We end at the Patriarchate of Jerusalem in the Christian Quarter, at the Church of Saints Constantine and Helen, with, when the Patriarchate's schedule allows, a word of blessing for the group.

OVERNIGHT Jerusalem**MEALS** B, D · 4-star hotel

DAY BY DAY, CONTINUED

DAY 7 Divine Liturgy at the Tomb of the Resurrection

This is the night the whole pilgrimage is built around. In the small hours, when the great doors are opened for the pilgrim vigil, we return to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre for the Divine Liturgy celebrated at the Tomb of the Resurrection itself, arranged in advance with the Great Sacristan of the Patriarchate. The Proskomedion is prepared in the Chapel of the Angel, the Liturgy is served on the marble slab of the Tomb, and pilgrims who have prepared may receive Holy Communion a few feet from the place where the Resurrection happened. We return to the hotel before dawn, and the morning is left free for sleep. In the afternoon, an optional walk to Bethany, to the tomb from which Lazarus was called on the fourth day, and time to rest before dinner.

OVERNIGHT Jerusalem**MEALS** B, D · 4-star hotel**DAY 8** Ein Karem and Emmaus

A gentler day in the hill country of Judea. At Ein Karem, the town of Zachariah and Elizabeth, we visit the spring where the Theotokos drew water during the Visitation, still flowing under its stone arch, and climb through the terraced lanes to the Russian Gorny Convent, whose nuns keep the feast of the Meeting of Mary and Elizabeth for three full months each summer. After lunch on your own we drive to Emmaus Nicopolis, where the risen Christ was made known to Luke and Cleopas in the breaking of bread. Among the basilica ruins your guide reads the Emmaus account from Saint Luke on the very road it describes. We return by the western watershed, with the whole descent to the coastal plain opening before the coach, and dinner at the hotel.

OVERNIGHT Jerusalem**MEALS** B, D · 4-star hotel**DAY 9** Caesarea Maritima and Joppa, the Apostolic Coast

West to the Mediterranean and the coast of the Acts of the Apostles. At Caesarea Maritima, Herod's great harbour city, we stand in the theatre where the name of Pontius Pilate was found carved in stone, walk the hippodrome and the praetorium where the Apostle Paul was held for two years and gave his defence before Festus and Agrippa, and follow the ruined aqueduct along the shore. Here the centurion Cornelius was baptised by the Apostle Peter, the first of the Gentiles to enter the Church. We continue south to ancient Joppa, where Peter raised Tabitha and, on the roof of Simon the Tanner, received the vision of the sheet. We visit the Russian Monastery of Saint Peter, with the tomb of Tabitha in its garden, then return through the hills to Jerusalem in time for dinner.

OVERNIGHT Jerusalem**MEALS** B, D · 4-star hotel

DAY BY DAY, CONTINUED

DAY 10 An Unhurried Day in the Holy City

A day deliberately left unhurried, the day pilgrims later tell us they needed most. Those who wish rise early to return to the Holy Sepulchre in the quiet hour after the dawn Liturgy, to venerate again at Golgotha and the Tomb without the crowds. The rest of the day is yours: return to the place that would not let you go, pray, walk a stretch of the ramparts, or shop for icons, olive-wood crosses, and Jerusalem candles in the Christian Quarter shops the Patriarchate itself uses. Your pilgrimage director remains available through the day, and in the late afternoon leads a final walk to the Western Wall plaza and the excavated Byzantine Cardo of the Jewish Quarter. In the evening we gather for a farewell dinner and a blessing of the icons and crosses bought for those at home.

OVERNIGHT Jerusalem

MEALS B, D · 4-star hotel

DAY 11 Departure from Tel Aviv

After breakfast, and for the early risers a last visit to the Holy Sepulchre, we check out and drive down through the Judean hills to Ben Gurion Airport, our coach and pilgrimage director with the group to the doors of the terminal, in comfortable time for the three-hour international check-in that Tel Aviv requires. You leave with what pilgrims have carried home from Jerusalem for seventeen centuries: the memory of the empty Tomb, a blessing for your parish, and, we find more often than not, the firm intention to return. For groups whose flights leave late in the evening, a final free afternoon in Jerusalem or a stop in old Joppa on the way to the airport can be arranged when the group's air schedule is set.

OVERNIGHT None, departure day

MEALS B

PRACTICAL NOTES FOR PILGRIMS

Walking is moderate: the Old City is stepped and cobbled, and the wilderness days cross uneven ground. Modest dress is required in all churches and monasteries, shoulders and knees covered; women may wish to carry a headscarf for the monasteries.

The Divine Liturgy at the Tomb is requested through the Patriarchate and confirmed in the final weeks before departure; the hour is set by the Patriarchate and is always in the night. Groups travelling with their own priest should tell us at booking so we may request concelebration and, where desired, additional Liturgies at Bethlehem or the Jordan.

YOUR PILGRIMAGE, PLAINLY STATED

What is included, and what is not

INCLUDED IN THE PRICE

- ◆ Four nights in a centrally located 4-star hotel in Bethlehem and six nights in a 4-star hotel in Jerusalem, twin or double share
- ◆ Half-board throughout: breakfast and dinner at the hotel daily
- ◆ All land transportation in a modern air-conditioned coach
- ◆ Licensed English-speaking guide, briefed in the Orthodox tradition, throughout, as required by Israeli law
- ◆ Entry fees to every site named in the itinerary
- ◆ Divine Liturgy arrangements at the holy sites named in the itinerary, coordinated with the Patriarchate of Jerusalem
- ◆ Airport transfers on the group arrival and departure days
- ◆ All road tolls, parking, and portorage of one case per pilgrim

NOT INCLUDED

- ◆ International airfare to and from Tel Aviv; group air quoted separately on request
- ◆ Single room supplement, quoted on request
- ◆ Travel insurance, strongly advised
- ◆ Tips to guides and drivers; we suggest \$8 to \$10 per day for the guide and \$4 to \$5 per day for the driver
- ◆ Lunches, taken at leisure on the road
- ◆ Alcoholic beverages with dinner
- ◆ Optional excursions offered locally
- ◆ Passport fees; US citizens do not currently require a visa for Israel
- ◆ Items of a personal nature: laundry, telephone, minibar

Hotels are named in your final documents; in Bethlehem we contract centrally located 4-star houses within walking distance of Manger Square, and in Jerusalem 4-star pilgrim-class houses within walking distance of the Old City gates. Prices are per person, twin share, land only, in US dollars.

BOOKING YOUR PILGRIMAGE

Terms, plainly stated

RESERVING YOUR PLACE

A deposit of \$400 per pilgrim confirms your reservation. Places are assigned in the order deposits are received, and each departure is limited to forty pilgrims.

BALANCE OF PAYMENT

The balance of the pilgrimage price is due 90 days before departure. Prices are per person in US dollars, sharing a twin or double room. A single room is available for a supplement, quoted on request.

CANCELLATION

More than 90 days before departure	Deposit only
89 to 60 days before departure	50% of the price
59 to 30 days before departure	75% of the price
Inside 30 days of departure	No refund

TRAVEL INSURANCE

Travel insurance is not included and is strongly advised. We recommend a policy covering trip cancellation, medical care abroad, and baggage, purchased within days of paying your deposit.

GROUP SIZE

A minimum of 15 pilgrims is required for the pilgrimage to operate. Maximum 40 pilgrims per departure, so that veneration at the holy places is never rushed.

A FAMILY COMPANY

Mystakidis Tours has led pilgrims to the holy places since 1959, a family company in its third generation. Your group travels with one experienced pilgrimage director from arrival to departure.



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ON THE WEB

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Every itinerary can be adjusted for your parish. Ask us about preferred dates, group air from your nearest gateway, and a visit from our team to present the pilgrimage to your community.