



MYSTAKIDIS TOURS

ORTHODOX PILGRIMAGES SINCE 1959

Holy Land Essentials

Eight days from Bethlehem to Jerusalem: the pilgrimage every Orthodox Christian hopes one day to make, at its most direct.

DURATION

8 Days · 7 Nights

ROUTE

Bethlehem · Jerusalem

SEASON

Year-round departures

MYSTAKIDISTOURS.COM

WHY THIS PILGRIMAGE

The widest door into the Holy Land

The Essentials pilgrimage is the widest door into our Holy Land catalog: eight days across the two holy towns, three nights beside the Basilica of the Nativity in Bethlehem and four in Jerusalem, with the desert lavras of the Judean wilderness between them, the journey every Orthodox Christian hopes one day to make, in the most direct form we know how to build it.

Nothing essential is missing. You will kneel at the silver star of the Nativity in the quiet of the morning, because Bethlehem is your home in the first days rather than a stop on the road. You will walk the Way of the Cross at first light and venerate at Golgotha and the empty Tomb, stand in the Jordan to renew the promises of your baptism, see Mar Saba keeping its unbroken prayer above the Kidron gorge, and, at the heart of the week, attend the night Divine Liturgy celebrated at the Tomb of the Resurrection itself, arranged with the Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

Two hotels hold the whole week, first by Manger Square and then by the Old City, with a single morning's move between them, so the pilgrimage keeps a settled rhythm: out after breakfast, back for dinner, the holy places minutes on foot for those drawn back to them in the evenings. For parishes weighing a first group pilgrimage, this is the itinerary we recommend they measure everything else against.

WHO THIS PILGRIMAGE IS FOR

First-time pilgrims, parish groups working within a school-year calendar or a tighter budget, and clergy who want the essential Holy Land in a single week away from their altar. The pace is steady but humane, and no day requires more than moderate walking.

THE JOURNEY

- TEL AVIV
Arrival at Ben Gurion Airport
- BETHLEHEM
3 nights, centrally located hotel by Manger Square
- WILDERNESS & THE JORDAN
Day pilgrimage: Mar Saba and the Baptism site
- JERUSALEM
4 nights, our base for the rest of the pilgrimage
- EIN KAREM & EMMAUS
Day pilgrimage in the Judean hills
- TEL AVIV
Departure

Seven nights, two bases: Bethlehem first, then Jerusalem. The essential Holy Land, kept simple.

THE PILGRIMAGE, DAY BY DAY

Holy Land Essentials: 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 The Judean Wilderness, Mar Saba, the Jordan

East into the Judean wilderness, the landscape of the Temptation and of the desert fathers, which begins almost at Bethlehem's door. At the overlook above the Kidron gorge we see the Great Lavra of Saint Sabbas the Sanctified, Mar Saba, founded in 483 and never abandoned, where the Psalter is still read through every week. Men in the group may enter and venerate the incorrupt relics of Saint Sabbas, while the women remain at the women's tower viewpoint, as the typikon of the lavra has required for fifteen centuries. We continue to the Jordan at Qasr al-Yahud, the traditional place of the Lord's Baptism, where pilgrims in white may enter the river and renew their baptismal promises as the priest reads the blessing of the waters. We return through Jericho, the city of Zacchaeus, pausing beneath the sycamore tree kept in the courtyard of the Greek Orthodox metropolia.

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

DAY 4 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 BY DAY, CONTINUED

DAY 5 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 6 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 7 Ein Karem, the Visitation, 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 BY DAY, CONTINUED

DAY 8 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.

"I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord. Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem."

PSALM 121 (122), THE PILGRIM PSALM

YOUR PILGRIMAGE, PLAINLY STATED

What is included, and what is not

INCLUDED IN THE PRICE

- ◆ Three nights in a centrally located 4-star hotel in Bethlehem and four 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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BY EMAIL

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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.