



MYSTAKIDIS TOURS
ORTHODOX PILGRIMAGES SINCE 1959

Holy Land Extended with Sinai

Eleven days from the cave of the Nativity to the mountain of the Law, with the night ascent of Sinai and the Monastery of Saint Catherine.

DURATION

11 Days · 10 Nights

ROUTE

Bethlehem · Jerusalem · Mount Sinai

SEASON

Year-round departures

MYSTAKIDISTOURS.COM

WHY THIS PILGRIMAGE

From the Tomb of the Resurrection to the mountain of the Law

The Extended pilgrimage joins the two poles of the covenant in a single journey: a full week at the holy places, based first in Bethlehem and then in Jerusalem, and then the road south to Sinai, to the Monastery of Saint Catherine and the mountain where God spoke with Moses and gave the Law.

You begin with the whole substance of our Holy Land pilgrimage: the Grotto of the Nativity in the quiet of the morning, because Bethlehem is your home in the first days, Mar Saba above the Kidron gorge, the renewal of baptismal promises in the Jordan, the Way of the Cross, Golgotha and the empty Tomb, and the night Divine Liturgy at the Tomb of the Resurrection, arranged with the Patriarchate. Then the coach descends through the Negev and crosses at Taba into Egypt, to the fortress monastery Justinian built around the Burning Bush, where Orthodox monks have kept the holy mountain without interruption for more than fourteen centuries.

Those with the strength climb through the night to keep the sunrise on the summit where the Law was given; those who remain below wake instead to the monastery bells. Either way, the pilgrimage ends where the Old Covenant and the New hold together, which is the whole point of extending it.

WHO THIS PILGRIMAGE IS FOR

Pilgrims who want the full arc of salvation history in one journey, returning Holy Land pilgrims ready for Sinai, and parish groups with the extra three days to spend. The night ascent is optional and demands sound legs and lungs; the monastery itself asks only patience with early hours.

THE JOURNEY

- TEL AVIV
Arrival at Ben Gurion Airport
- BETHLEHEM
3 nights, centrally located hotel by Manger Square
- JERUSALEM
4 nights: the Holy City and its day pilgrimages
- TABA CROSSING
Into Egypt along the Red Sea coast
- SAINT CATHERINE'S
3 nights below the mountain of Moses
- TEL AVIV
Return north and departure

Three bases: Bethlehem by Manger Square, Jerusalem by the Old City, and the pilgrim guesthouse below Saint Catherine's Monastery.

THE PILGRIMAGE, DAY BY DAY

Holy Land with Sinai: 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 Proskomedia 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 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 The Road South: the Negev, Taba, the Red Sea

We leave Jerusalem after an early breakfast and turn south through the Negev, the long biblical descent toward Egypt, with a rest stop at Mitzpe Ramon on the rim of the great desert crater. At Eilat we cross the border into Egypt at Taba, where our Egyptian coach and licensed local guide are waiting, then follow the Red Sea coast beneath red granite mountains before turning inland through the Wadi el-Sheikh. By late afternoon the fortress walls of Saint Catherine's appear at the foot of the mountain of Moses. We settle into a traditional pilgrim guesthouse below the monastery, take dinner early, and sleep early: those making the night ascent will be woken well before midnight. Border formalities take time and patience; your pilgrimage director handles the group crossing, and you need only your passport.

OVERNIGHT Saint Catherine's Village, Sinai

MEALS B, D · Traditional pilgrim guesthouse

DAY 9 The Night Ascent of Mount Sinai

In the small hours we set out by torchlight up the camel path, the route pilgrims have climbed for sixteen centuries, rising in long switchbacks through the cold desert night. Camels can be hired for the first two thirds of the way for those who wish. The final 750 steps of the Stairway of Repentance, cut into the rock by a monk in fulfilment of a vow, bring us to the summit chapel of the Holy Trinity at 7,497 feet, on the height where God spoke with Moses and gave the Law. We keep the sunrise on the summit, the granite ranges of Sinai turning red beneath us, with prayers and hymns as the light returns. The descent is by the steeper monks' stairway past the Basin of Elijah for the sure-footed, or back down the camel path for the rest. Late morning at the guesthouse, then sleep, and a quiet afternoon.

OVERNIGHT Saint Catherine's Village, Sinai

MEALS B, D · Traditional pilgrim guesthouse

DAY 10 Saint Catherine's Monastery and the Burning Bush

The Monastery of Saint Catherine, built by the Emperor Justinian between 548 and 565 around the Burning Bush, is the oldest continuously inhabited Christian monastery in the world, and it has never been sacked. We enter after the monks' morning prayers: the basilica with its sixth-century carved cedar doors and the great apse mosaic of the Transfiguration, the Chapel of the Burning Bush behind the altar, and the living bush itself in the courtyard. We venerate the relics of Saint Catherine, and see icons from the monastery collection, the finest in Christendom, works that survived iconoclasm because Sinai lay beyond the emperor's reach, among them the sixth-century Christ Pantocrator. The afternoon is free in the valley, with an optional walk to the hermitage gardens and the skete of the Forty Martyrs. A final night at the guesthouse below the mountain.

OVERNIGHT Saint Catherine's Village, Sinai

MEALS B, D · Traditional pilgrim guesthouse



DAY BY DAY, CONTINUED

DAY 11 Return North, Departure from Tel Aviv

An early start north: we retrace the Red Sea road to Taba, cross back into Israel, and climb through the Negev with a lunch stop on the road. Depending on the group's flight time, the coach continues directly to Ben Gurion Airport, or allows a final hour in Jerusalem for those with evening departures, before check-in assistance from your pilgrimage director and the journey home. Eleven days will have taken you from the Tomb of the Resurrection to the mountain of the Law, the two poles of the covenant, which is exactly the shape of this pilgrimage and the reason we build it this way. Groups wishing to break the return with one more night in Jerusalem before flying can arrange a twelfth day at booking.

OVERNIGHT None, departure day

MEALS B

PRACTICAL NOTES FOR PILGRIMS

The Sinai section crosses an international border twice; allow patience at Taba in both directions. The night ascent is voluntary: the camel path is long rather than technical, but the final 750 steps are steep. Warm clothing is essential on the summit, even in summer.

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.

“Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.”

EXODUS 3:5, AT THE BURNING BUSH

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, four nights in a 4-star hotel in Jerusalem, and three nights in a traditional pilgrim guesthouse below Saint Catherine's Monastery
- ◆ Half-board throughout: breakfast and dinner daily
- ◆ All land transportation in modern air-conditioned coaches on both sides of the border
- ◆ Licensed English-speaking guides, briefed in the Orthodox tradition, as required by law in both Israel and Egypt
- ◆ Entry fees to every site named in the itinerary
- ◆ Divine Liturgy arrangements coordinated with the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, and monastery visit arrangements at Saint Catherine's
- ◆ 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
- ◆ Egyptian border and Sinai entry fees at Taba, payable locally in cash, approximately \$25 to \$35
- ◆ Camel hire on the night ascent, optional, payable locally
- ◆ Lunches, alcoholic beverages, and optional excursions
- ◆ Passport fees; US citizens do not currently require a visa for Israel
- ◆ Items of a personal nature: laundry, telephone, minibar

Guesthouse nights at Saint Catherine's are simple, clean, and warm, in the manner of pilgrim houses; hotels in Bethlehem and Jerusalem are centrally located 4-star pilgrim class. 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.



BY TELEPHONE

+1 (646) 475-7994

BY EMAIL

sales@mystakidistours.com

ON THE WEB

mystakidistours.com

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.