

THE WESTERN WALL

The Western Wall, often referred to as the "Wailing Wall" in the past, is a significant site in Judaism and an important place of pilgrimage for Jews around the world. It is located in the Old City of Jerusalem and is a remnant of the ancient wall that surrounded the Jewish Temple's courtyard.

The term "Wailing Wall" was derived from the Arabic name for the wall, and it was commonly used by non-Jewish observers who witnessed Jewish worshipers mourning the destruction of the Second Temple, which once stood on the Temple Mount. The term is rarely used today, and some Jews find it offensive. The preferred term in Hebrew is "Kotel," meaning simply "Wall."

Today, the Western Wall is still a site of lamentation for the destroyed Temple, but it is also a place of prayer, celebration, and reflection. For Jews, the Western Wall is a potent symbol of their historical and religious heritage. Many believe it is the nearest accessible site to the original location of the Holy of Holies, the innermost sanctum of the ancient Temple, which is believed to be situated somewhere on the Temple Mount itself.

If you visit the Western Wall, it is important to be respectful of the site's significance to Jews. Dress modestly, behave appropriately, and observe local customs. Many visitors, regardless of their faith, leave a note with a prayer or wish in the wall's crevices, a custom that has become a meaningful part of the Western Wall experience. Remember, if you are Jewish, it is traditional to walk backwards when leaving the wall out of respect.

JERUSALEM'S WALLS AND GATES

Jerusalem's walls, which date back to the 16th century, were rebuilt by Suleiman the Magnificent, the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire. These walls have eight gates, each carrying its own unique history and significance.

Gate	Location	Leads to	Notes
Damascus Gate	North	Muslim Quarter	The largest and most ornate gate in Jerusalem's Old City.
Jaffa Gate	West	Christian and Armenian Quarters	Located on the western side of the Old City.
Zion Gate	South	Jewish Quarter	This was a site of fierce fighting during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War.
Dung Gate	South-East	Western Wall Plaza	Its name comes from the rubbish that was once dumped nearby.
Lion's Gate	East	Muslim Quarter	Named after the two lion statues that flank the gate.
Herod's Gate	North	Muslim Quarter	Despite its name, it is not believed that Herod's palace was once located nearby.
New Gate	North-West	Christian Quarter	Built in 1889 to provide easier access for Christian pilgrims.
Golden Gate (Gate of Mercy)	East	Sealed shut	According to Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions, it is through this gate that eschatological events will unfold.

Within these walls lie the Four Quarters: Jerusalem's Old City is divided into four quarters - Jewish, Muslim, Christian, and Armenian. This division, established by the Ottomans in the 19th century, reflects the city's diverse cultural, religious, and historical identities, visible in each quarter's distinct architecture, shops, food, and local inhabitants.

THE NEW CITY

West Jerusalem stands in stark contrast to the ancient Old City, serving as a bustling, modern metropolis teeming with vibrant markets like Mahane Yehuda, cultural institutions, government buildings, and academic institutions such as the Hebrew University. This city is a testament to the resilience of the Jewish people and their adaptability to the modern world.

ISRAEL'S PARLIAMENT - THE KNESSET

Located in Givat Ram, a neighborhood in western Jerusalem, stands the Knesset, the legislative branch of the Israeli government. With 120 members, the Knesset's building, designed by Joseph Klarwein, was completed in 1966.

The Knesset has borne witness to many key historical events. In 1979, it passed the groundbreaking peace treaty between Israel and Egypt.

THE HOLOCAUST HISTORY MUSEUM (YAD VASHEM)

Positioned on the Mount of Remembrance in Jerusalem, the Holocaust History Museum is Israel's official memorial to the victims of the Holocaust. It is dedicated to preserving the memory of the deceased, honoring Jews who resisted their Nazi oppressors, and acknowledging Gentiles who selflessly aided Jews in need.

The main exhibit of the museum narrates the Holocaust from a Jewish perspective. Visitors embark on a chronological journey starting with the rise of anti-Semitism in Europe and ending with the liberation of the concentration camps. The museum showcases a variety of artifacts including photographs, personal belongings, and artwork created by concentration camp prisoners.

A visit to the Holocaust History Museum is a sobering and emotional experience, reminding us of the atrocities of the Holocaust and the importance of never forgetting its victims.

CULTURE IN MODERN JERUSALEM

Israel is a melting pot of cultures, featuring a diverse population shaped by waves of immigration from around the globe. Jewish immigrants from Russia, Ethiopia, North Africa, and elsewhere have contributed to the country's unique cultural tapestry.

The influence of these immigrant communities is reflected in the food, music, and art of modern Israel. Israeli cuisine, for instance, is a fusion of traditional Jewish dishes, Middle Eastern cuisine, and European and North African flavors. Falafel, hummus, and shawarma are popular street foods that have become synonymous with Israeli cuisine.

Beyond immigrant communities, distinct cultural and religious communities exist within Israel. Notably, there is a stark contrast between the Chasidic and secular communities in Jerusalem. Chasidic Jews, as ultra-Orthodox Jews, abide by strict religious practices and often live within insular communities. Traditional attire is common, and languages spoken include both Yiddish and Modern Hebrew, depending on the community. Conversely, secular Israelis more commonly wear Western clothing and may be less strict about religious observance.

Despite these differences, the various communities in Israel have found ways to coexist and even celebrate each other's unique cultures.

In conclusion, the diversity of cultures in Israel has given rise to a rich and vibrant society that continuously evolves and changes. It stands as a testament to the resilience and adaptability of the Israeli people, who have built a thriving country from the ashes of the past.

ARAB AND JEWISH NEIGHBORS

Jerusalem is home to both Jews and Arabs, and their interactions can be complex and sometimes fraught. The city is at the center of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and tensions between the two groups can sometimes be high.

In the city, some neighborhoods are predominantly Jewish, while others are predominantly Arab. There are also mixed neighborhoods where both communities live side by side. Despite living in close proximity, the communities often lead separate lives and have little interaction with one another.

The situation is further complicated by the political situation. Jerusalem is a contested city, with both Israelis and Palestinians claiming it as their capital. The Israeli government has annexed East Jerusalem, which is home to many Arab residents, but this move has not been recognized by the international diplomatic community.

Despite the challenges, there are also examples of cooperation and coexistence between Jews and Arabs in Jerusalem. There are joint Israeli-Palestinian organizations that work towards peace and reconciliation, and some neighborhoods have community centers that serve both Jewish and Arab residents.

Overall, the relationship between Jews and Arabs in Jerusalem is complex, with both cooperation and conflict present. The situation is further complicated by the political situation, and the future of the city remains uncertain. However, most tourists would not notice the nuanced relationships between Jews and Arabs.