

Presbyterian Church of Los Gatos Holy Land Pilgrimage 2024- Frequently Asked Questions

April 15-27, 2024: One week after Easter 2024
11 days in the Holy Land+ 2 travel days

General Questions About the Pilgrimage

1. **Who are the leaders?** *Rev. Erica Rader is the pastoral leader of the pilgrimage. Rev. Jenni Bales is the administrator for the trip.*
2. **Who coordinates the tour in the Holy Land?** *Grace Tours, a Palestinian Christian company located near Bethlehem, organizes all the logistics for our stay in Israel/Palestine. They only hire Israeli-licensed Christian guides and bus drivers. Our in-country tour guide is highly educated about the Holy Land, Israel, and Palestine, and speaks fluent English.*
3. **Are we going with another group or church?** *No, this is a customized itinerary for Presbyterian Church of Los Gatos, modelled after the pilgrimage that a small group from our church attended in 2022.*
4. **How many people are going?** *We limit the group to 30 people. Priority is given to PCLG members and their family.*
5. **Is it safe?** *Yes! Although the news depicts this as a highly violent country, the violence is rare and limited to small pockets of conflict, i.e., Gaza. We only go to very public and very safe areas. Our in-country tour guide, and Grace Tours are all committed to our safety. The same can be said of the Israeli and Palestinian governments.*

Pilgrimage vs. Tourist Trip

1. **How is a "pilgrimage" different from a tourist-type trip?** *Pilgrimage invites the traveler to consider the spiritual lens as the trip's primary focus. This is quite different from the tourist lens of enlightening entertainment. By design, the pilgrimage is a communal journey designed to deepen one's relationship with God. Participants attend to God's presence through the disciplines of prayer, worship, Bible reading, and engagement with others. As a result, the pilgrimage is often filled with surprises and rich insights.*
2. **What do I need to do to prepare for the Pilgrimage?**
 - *Read through at least two gospels: the gospel of John and either Matthew, Mark, or Luke.*
 - *Read *The Lemon Tree: An Arab, a Jew, and the Heart of the Middle East* by Sandy Tolan, a book that encourages understanding both sides of the Palestinian/Israeli conflict.*
3. **Do I have to attend the mandatory meetings?** *Yes! If you can't be there physically, we offer Zoom as an alternative way to participate in the meetings. The sessions will be held on:*
 - *Saturday, January 27, 2024, 10 am–1:30 pm : Pilgrimage Orientation Meeting*
 - *Wednesday, March 20, 2024, 6:30–8 pm: Final Trip Logistics Meeting*
 - *Saturday, June 8, 2024, 6:00 pm: Post-Pilgrimage Reunion dinner*

Itinerary

1. **What is the specific itinerary?** *We start in Tel Aviv, go north to Galilee, travel south through the West Bank to Jericho, make our way through the Judean Wilderness to Jerusalem, and then land in Bethlehem.*
2. **What will a typical day look like?** *Every day is a bit different, but generally, we are up early for breakfast at the hotel, after which we gather for devotions. We then board the bus around 8:30 am to head out to various sites. Lunch is on the road. Most days, we are back at the hotel by 3 or 4 pm, giving time for people to relax, journal, or explore the local area.*

Price: \$3,950 plus Airfare

The price is based on double occupancy and includes ground transportation, experienced Christian guides, tips, and ALL meals. Single-occupancy rooms are an additional \$1,300.

Accommodations

1. **Will I have a roommate?** *The price, \$3,950, is based on two people sharing a room. Those not paired with a roommate will have to pay the single occupancy rate.*
2. **What are the accommodations like?** *Our modern hotels include private bathrooms supplied with hairdryers, soaps, and towels. The food is regional but also features Western food choices, including vegetarian options. While all meals are included in the price, you can order and pay for wine and beer with dinner.*

Travel Arrangements and Requirements

1. **What are the passport and visa requirements?** *A passport is required and must be valid through December 1, 2024. Israel issues visas when entering the country.*
2. **Vaccine Passport:** *Currently we require people to be fully vaccinated against Covid.*
3. **Is there a particular airline you recommend?** *No, but we will try to share information as people book flights if you want to travel with a group. The sooner you book your flight, the less expensive the tickets. Unfortunately, the prices tend to increase the closer you get to the departure date. We do not recommend using El Al Airline due to increased and often invasive security measures.*
4. **Can I extend my trip, arriving early or staying longer in Asia or Europe?** *Yes, you can.*
 - *Arrival – in Tel Aviv no later than 4 pm on Tuesday April 16, 2024. However, you can travel a day earlier to mitigate jet lag. See the cost below for the extra night in Tel Aviv.*
 - *Departure – from Tel Aviv no earlier than 7 pm on Friday, April 26, 2024.*
 - *Should you want to come early or stay longer in Israel or Palestine, let us know and we will gladly make hotel arrangements for you.*
 - *Extended Overnight Hotel Costs in Tel Aviv or Bethlehem:*
 - *Tel Aviv: \$190 double / \$250 Bethlehem: \$90 double / \$130 single per night / person.*
5. **Can I add an extension to Jordan and Petra?** *Our tour guide offers options and we are glad to inquire. If you are interested, let us know ASAP as it requires a flight departure from Jordan rather than Tel Aviv. The in-country costs range between an additional \$1,100-\$1,300 per person.*

6. **Do I need to buy trip insurance?** *That is entirely up to you. Should the group trip be canceled due to some catastrophic event in Israel/Palestine, our tour operators will refund the trip's land or in-country cost.*

Application and Finances

1. **When is the deposit due?** *The application and \$500 per person deposit guarantee a spot on the Pilgrimage. So, if you are applying for or renewing a passport, go ahead and send in the application and deposit. You can send your updated copy of your passport and flight itinerary later.*
2. **When is the final payment due?** *No later than February 28, 2024.*

Contact for more questions: Pilgrimage@pclg.org