



# **Families of Israel**

## **Teacher's Guide**

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## **Script Rural**

### **Families of Israel----Inbar 9 Years Old**

This is the Red Sea Desert in southern Israel. I live here with my mother, father, and 5-year-old sister, Timna. We live in a settlement called a kibbutz.

My name is Inbar and I'm 9 years old. Dad wakes me up at 6:30 for school.

Timna's already up, and she's picking some mint leaves for Dad's tea.

This desert's one of the driest places in the world. We get almost no rain at all. Mom says our Kibbutz is like an oasis. An oasis is a place in a desert where water naturally comes out of the ground, so trees can grow and people and animals can live there.

Our Kibbutz gets water by drilling wells down to a huge lake under the ground. The water collected there a long time ago, maybe millions of years. The water we take out of the lake probably won't ever be replaced because we hardly get any rain. So we use water very carefully. We separate drinking water from water that we recycle. That means we save the water from one thing, like washing clothes, and use it again for something else, like watering the trees and plants.

Dad and Mom helped start Kibbutz Lotan almost 20 years ago, and Timna and I have lived here all our lives.

The main idea of a kibbutz is that a lot of things are shared, so everyone takes turns doing things that need to be done, like cooking meals and cleaning up. The buildings on the kibbutz belong to everyone. Our kibbutz has 60 families. Every family has a house and small kitchen, but we eat most of our meals here in the dining hall.

Mom gave me two rolls to make sandwiches for my school lunch. This is goat cheese made with milk from our kibbutz' own goats. I'm also having peanut butter and jelly, but my favorite is peanut butter and chocolate. Once I pack my sandwiches, I have some toast and juice for breakfast. Then it's time to catch the bus to school.

I'm the lookout for the other kids who're busy playing.

Our Kibbutz isn't big enough to have our own school, so we take a bus to a regional school in a bigger kibbutz.

I'm in third grade. We speak and study in Hebrew, which is a language used by Jews for thousands of years. We read and write Hebrew from right to left, the opposite of English, French and German. The Bible was written in Hebrew and Aramaic, another ancient language.

We hear lots of different languages in Israel because Jewish people from all over the world have come here to live. My mother's from the United States, so we speak both Hebrew and English at home. Besides Hebrew, we also learn Arabic and English in school. We work mostly in small groups or by ourselves, and our teacher helps us when we need it. Aaron is using centimeters and millimeters to measure.

My parents say computer technology is one of Israel's most important industries, and that we're a world leader in making computer software. Software tells the computer how to do useful things.

At 10:30 we eat the snacks we brought from home. After we finish lunch, we go outside to play.

Then we have gym class. We do stretching exercises to warm up. We're just beginning to learn forward rolls.

While I'm in school, Dad's taking tree branches and chips to a compost pile where they'll gradually turn into soil that we can use in the garden. Dad says compost is like food for the soil.

He says the kibbutz has to make money to live, just like a family does. One way we do this is by growing and selling watermelons. A computer makes sure every plant and tree on the kibbutz gets exactly the right amount of water, so none is wasted.

We also grow dates. Dates grow at the tops of palm trees in hot, dry places. When the dates are growing, the bunches get so heavy that we have to cut off some of the fruit, or the bunches will break off and fall before they're ripe. Dates are like raisins: When they're dried, they can be kept for a long time without spoiling.

These donkeys are working, too! They eat the weeds in the date grove.

Our Kibbutz runs a fish farm together with other kibbutzim. It's on the Red Sea, about an hour south of here. When the baby fish, called minnows, are big enough, they're taken out of the tanks and put into cages in the Red Sea, where they'll grow until they're big enough to be sold.

Our kibbutz also sells machines that my Dad designed. Without using any chemicals, the machines wash away insects, mold and bacteria that make food spoil. Some kinds of fruit and vegetables washed this way stay fresh a lot longer. So now they can be sent to market by ship instead of by plane, which saves a lot of money in shipping costs.

Besides helping on our kibbutz, Mom's main job is working as an art therapist at another kibbutz. Today she's meeting with a teacher at the treatment center where she works. Art therapists use art to help people feel better. Sometimes someone has a problem they can't talk about in words, but they can show how they feel in the artwork they do. Mom's trained to understand what's on the person's mind from looking at their artwork. Sometimes just doing artwork for a while helps people feel better.

It's 3:30 when the bus brings us home from school. We go right to the dining hall to have our lunch. I really like vegetables.

Our Kibbutz has an organic garden where we grow a lot of our own vegetables. "Organic" means we don't use chemicals on the plants or soil. We try to make our plants so healthy that they can fight disease and bugs by themselves. When we're done eating we save leftover food to make compost for the garden.

Mom says our kibbutz makes the most money with our dairy. We milk 240 cows three times a day, and we sell milk and cheese to a dairy and neighboring kibbutz. When we milk, we clean the cow's milk bag, or udder, and connect the milking machine. Every cow wears a transmitter that keeps a record of how much milk she gives. When the cow's udder is empty, the machine disconnects. As the cows leave, the floor's washed automatically.

Sometimes I help feed the calves.

Mom's teaching me how to use a potter's wheel to make things from clay. Dad built this wheel with parts from an old washing machine.

After lunch Dad takes Timna, Adam, and me to one of our favorite places, a big sand hill that's called a sand dune. Adam likes to make angels. He said once he made an angel in the snow when he was visiting the United States.

Dad always brings a snack with us. And it's dangerous to go anywhere around here without bringing drinking water. Dad says that for thousand of years traders traveled across deserts by camel, planning their trips so that they would get from one oasis to the next before they ran out of water.

When we get back, we go swimming. If you look past the green grass, you can see Jordan, one of our country's neighbors.

Israel is a new country, and in the past many of the countries around us didn't want Israel to be here. We had to fight many wars to stay here. Young people serve in the army for two years when they graduate from high school.

Every community has places underground for people to go in case fighting starts again. In peacetime our kibbutz uses the shelters for other things, like our library, laundry, and store.

Mom says Israel and our neighbors are trying to solve our disagreements by talking instead of fighting.

It's Friday night and we're going to the dining hall to celebrate the beginning of the most important day of the week, the Sabbath. It starts Friday night when the sun sets and ends Saturday night when the sun sets. We light candles and share wine and special bread called challah. We're thanking God for the food we'll eat and for the Sabbath as a special day of rest. Then we share a meal of chicken, rice, beans, and all kinds of salads and breads. It's a little like a party.

This is a religious community, but my teacher says most Jews in Israel aren't religious.

I like to see if I can make my teacher's baby laugh.

It's Dad's turn to help wash dishes after dinner.

Tonight we can stay up later than usual because tomorrow is the Sabbath, the only day of the week that we don't have school. Before we go to bed, we listen to the news on Dad's computer. Goodnight!

## **Script Urban**

### **Families of Israel---Yoad 6 Years Old**

This is Jerusalem, one of the oldest cities in the world.

It's early morning and my Dad's waking me up for school. My name is Yoad and I'm six and a half years old. I live with my parents, two sisters, a brother, a tropical fish and a rabbit, Dr. Snuffy.

For breakfast I'm having orange juice and cereal with milk. Mom's fixing vegetables for our school lunch. My sister, Sarai, saves the vegetable peels for Dr. Snuffy. This is my oldest sister Aviya.

Mom's from the United States. She met my Dad when she was here on a visit. They got married and she's lived here ever since.

We all have chores to do each week. This week it's my job to put the dishes away. I can tie my shoes all by myself!

The rule in our house is "Always Brush!" because my Dad is a scientist who looks for ways to keep teeth and gums healthy.

It's sunny here in Israel, and it's easy for redheads like me to get sunburned, so Mom always makes sure I have on sunscreen.

Dad will drop Sarai and me off on his way to work. Israel has public schools, but Sarai and I go to a conservative Jewish school. I'm in first grade.

Our first class is math. I'm doing multiplication problems. My teacher's handing back tests we took last week, and she gives a surprise to kids who did well. I love chocolate candy! I'm so excited about the candy that I don't notice the class is saying a prayer before lunch.

After lunch Sarai helps our teacher with art class. Most of us speak Hebrew and English. We also learn Arabic, because it's the language of the Arabs who live in Israel and of all Israel's neighbors.

While I'm at school, Mom cuts Dr. Snuffy's toenails. Dry, hard pita bread keeps Dr. Snuffy so busy eating that he doesn't try so hard to keep his toenails out of her way.

Before Mom goes to work, she goes around the neighborhood getting people to sign a paper called a petition. The petition asks the Jerusalem city council not to let anybody put roads or buildings on land near our house. The land is a beautiful area that wildlife and Arab shepherders now use.

Mom drops off our bottles and newspapers at recycling bins. People are coming up with lots of new ways to reuse paper and bottles. Plastic bottles are melted to make other things, like containers and even furniture! Newspapers will be used for things like cardboard boxes. Using things a second time instead of throwing them away is called recycling.

Mom's the development director of group homes for kids who have problems with their family or school. The homes are so good at helping kids that people from other places often visit here to learn why the homes work so well.

Dad's going to work. He teaches at a school for dentists. He also studies why people have problems with their gums. He invented a little plastic chip with medicine that kills bacteria that attack people's gums. He slides the chip into the space between the tooth and the diseased gum. The chip slowly dissolves and disappears as the gum heals. Dad tells us the best thing to do is brush our teeth and not to eat too much candy, so we won't have gum problems in the first place.

At 2:30 our school bus drops us off in front of our house. I get my homework done first thing. Today I'm studying English words that rhyme, like "ship" rhymes with "rip" and "sped" rhymes with "bed". Then I go out and play.

Sometimes my brother Ornan and I try to see who can get the most baskets. I like to play video games. Ornan shows me some good tricks to help me play better.

We all have things we do after school. Sarai has ballet. Aviya is learning to read the Torah. Ornan likes to work on the computer. One day a week I have a chess class. Each chess game is like a little war. And I also take karate classes.

At the end of first grade we have a special ceremony, where we each get our own prayer book. Our classes put on a show for our parents.

We give our Moms a flower and we've made them a special card, too. Mine says "Thank you for spoiling me". We all have our pictures taken so we can remember this important day. Most kids' mothers decorated the cover of their prayer book. But my grandma did mine because she's a very good artist. Then we have a snack and I get to eat some of my favorite desserts.

On the way home Mom and I are going to shop for fresh fruit and vegetables. I like the way she can make the windows work when she's not even in the car. On the way to the market, we go through the old part of Jerusalem. Dad's family has lived in this area for 13 generations! Dad was born in Israel, so he's a sabra. A sabra is a large cactus. We say an Israeli is like a sabra ...tough on the outside and sweet on the inside.

Israel has only been a country for about 50 years, but Dad says Jerusalem has been the center of Jewish life for over 3,000 years. Many of the stories in the Bible took place here. Jerusalem is a holy city for Christians and Muslims, as well as Jews.

This market is mostly for fresh food. We go to our neighborhood market for other kinds of groceries. We pay for our food with shekels.

When we get home everybody helps get dinner ready. Mom makes a salad. Ornan and I set up a table outside. Aviya makes her famous fruit shakes with fresh strawberries that Mom and I brought from the market. Dad's specialty is a kind of pancake that's made in this area of the world. We're also having olives, yogurt, and tomatoes. This dinner's very different from the special dinner we have when we celebrate the Sabbath on Friday nights with my grandparents.

At that time we light candles to start the celebration with light and joy. We're singing a song that tells everyone that today is Friday and we're preparing for the Sabbath. We say prayers and then we have a wonderful meal together.

I'm telling a story about the Sabbath that I learned in school. After dinner we play pick up sticks and Parcheesi.

It's already 9:30 when we get home, but tomorrow's the one day of the week when I can sleep late because there's no school. When I get ready for bed, I drop my dirty clothes down this hole, and they slide down to the basement, where we have our washing machine. Mom reads me a story about Davie Crockett. Then Ornan and I take turns reading to each other in Hebrew.

My loose tooth came out today, so I put it under my pillow for the tooth fairy. I've never seen the tooth fairy, but I sure like the presents she leaves! Goodnight!

## **Glossary**

**Aramaic, Arabic and Hebrew:**

Ancient Middle Eastern languages. Arabic and Hebrew are still used today.

**compost:**

Decomposed vegetable scraps, leaves, etc. for fertilizing and conditioning soil.

**Davey Crockett:**

A fighter and hunter from Tennessee who became a state legislator, and at 49, died at the Alamo, fighting to help Texas win independence from Mexico. Also the hero of many fanciful stories.

**kibbutz:**

An Israeli collective settlement, originally usually farms.

**oasis:**

A fertile place in a desert due to the presence of water.

**organic:**

Grown with only animal and vegetable fertilizers

**parchisi:**

A board game where pieces are moved according to the throw of dice.

**pita:**

A round, hollow, flat bread that can be cut in half to form “pockets”.

**shekel:**

The official monetary unit of Israel.

**Torah:**

The whole body of Jewish religious literature.

## **Discussion:**

- How large is Israel compared in size to its neighboring countries and to your own country.
- List things the children in the class already know about Israel.
- Ask someone who has been to Israel to talk to the class about his/her visit or life there.
- Discuss why certain fruits grow so well there.
- Discuss how children's lives on the kibbutz are different from the lives of the city children.
- Members of a kibbutz take turns doing jobs that need to be done. Those who work outside the kibbutz turn their income over to the community. Members receive the same benefits from the community no matter what work he or she performs. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of joining a kibbutz.
- Discuss why Jerusalem is holy to Muslims and Christians as well as Jews. (Muslims because the Prophet Mohammed started his voyage to heaven from the rock which is now covered by the Dome of the Rock; Christians because Jesus was crucified by the Romans in Jerusalem; Jews because the remains of the Western Wall are located in Jerusalem. The Temple was meant to be the home for the Ark of the Covenant, which according to tradition, contained the tablets bearing the Ten Commandments brought down by Moses from Mount Sinai.

## Questions

- 1 Why do people want to share things in the kibbutz?
- 2 Who are the Jews?
- 3 How do they make cheese from milk?
- 4 Why are there deserts?
- 5 How do you play chess
- 6 Why is Jerusalem considered a holy city?
- 7 Why did other countries not want the country of Israel to exist?

## Answers to Questions

1 Why do people want to share things in the kibbutz?

People living in the kibbutz believe that people should share things and not try to better only oneself.

2. Who are the Jews?

The Jews are people who believe in the Old Testament. They trace their ancestry to Moses, Joseph and Abraham.

3. How do they make cheese from milk?

Milk turns into cheese with the help of naturally occurring bacteria.

4. Why are there deserts?

Deserts arise when there is a lack of precipitation. This lack can be due to a number of reasons: General climatic change, or a disruption in the ability of the land to hold water.

5. How do you play chess?

Chess is a game where armies represented by pieces on a board try to capture each other's king. It was developed in Asia many hundreds of years ago.

6. Why is Jerusalem considered a holy city?

It is holy to Jews, Christians and Muslims because for each of their religion a major event or monument lies in Jerusalem. For the Jews it is the Wailing Wall which is all that remains of King Solomon's Temple, For Christians it is where Jesus was crucified and came back to life, and for Muslims it is where the prophet Mohammed ascended to heaven.

7. Why did other countries not want the country of Israel to exist?

The Arabs saw the Jews as another European people who wanted the land of the Arabs.

## **Quiz on Some of the Things We've Learned**

1. List some ways the kibbutz treats the environment with respect.
2. Why is Jerusalem an important city many people outside Israel?
3. Why do Israelis say an Israeli is like a sabra cactus?
4. Are most people in Israel religious?
5. What are all high school graduates required to do after graduation?
6. What are some of the ways the kibbutz makes money?
7. Draw a picture that tells the story of the children's life in a kibbutz or in Jerusalem.

## **Introduction**

Israel is famous for being the home of Jerusalem. Jerusalem is famous to all Christians and Moslems and Jews. This is the land of Bible, where the River Jordan flows and where the Western Wall and the Temple Mount stands. This is land where Jesus was born and resurrected.

## **The Land and the Climate**

Israel is about the size of New Jersey, Costa Rica and a third smaller than Albania. The country has four major regions, the largest is the desert environment of the Negev and the most populous is the Mediterranean coastal plain. There is also a region of hills in the northern and central part of the country as well as the Great Rift Valley. The Sea of Galilee, the river Jordan as well as the country's main body of water, the Dead Sea, lie in the Great Rift Valley. The Dead Sea is incredibly salty, and it is also the lowest place on the planet

The Negev receives only one inch of rain a year, while the region of the Upper Galilee receives 44 inches a year. Jerusalem receives about 20 inches of rain a year, and snow once every two or three years. Summers are dry and hot, and the interior temperatures are higher than those on the coast. Winters are cool and rainy.

## **Plant and Animal Life**

Israel has a range of environments, from desert to Mediterranean. A fifth of the country is national parks. Notable animals include the gazelles, ibex and wildcats. Israel is the second largest flyway for migratory birds, with species from all over the world passing through. In the north, between the Lebanese border and the Golan Mountains is a wetlands wildlife sanctuary that is home to wild papyrus, pelicans, sea eagles, otters, jungle cats and boars. It also provides a migratory station for birds, with many coming from as far as Scandinavia, Russia and India. A successful afforestation program has been under way for many years in many parts of the country.

## **The People**

Jews make up 75% of the population with the rest being mostly Muslim Arabs and Christian Arabs. Most of the Jews have come after the establishment of Israel. As many as a million have come within the last 25 years from the former Soviet Union, hundreds of thousands have come as refugees first from war-torn Europe and then from Arab countries. Thousands of Americans have also gone to Israel. The Arab population consists of those who remained after the creation of the state as well as those whose land were overrun when Israel won the 1967 war.

The people work in an advanced economy where less than 3% of the population works in agriculture, forestry or fishing. There is a growing software and high technology industry.

Israeli eating habits are defined to a large extent by religious laws - Jews cannot eat dairy and meat products together, and neither Muslims nor Jews can eat pig. The waves of immigrants from all over the world brought their own cuisine with them, and you will find food from Yemen, Hungary, Russia, and the United States. Many Jews are not permitted to do any work on Sabbath, so for most of Saturday they will eat a heavy stew cooked the day before. Arab dishes include falafel, which is made of fried ground chickpeas flavored with spices; flatbread served with either tahina, a sesame paste; or hummus, a chickpea and garlic paste. Very sweet tea and coffee are the main drinks. Palestinians also make juices from tamarind, dates and almonds. Alcohol is forbidden for both Muslims and orthodox Jews.

## **History**

As a major crossroad from Africa to Asia, humans have been in the area of Israel for tens of thousands of years. Neolithic settlements were established by 10,000 BCE and copper was used by 5000 BCE. Situated between the ancient civilizations of Egypt and Mesopotamia, but not fertile enough to sustain a large agricultural base, large states did not arise.

By the 3000 BCE the Phoenicians established settlements as part of their trading network. The history then becomes also a roll call of the major actors in Western Civilization. Semitic tribes filter in by way of the west and east.

About three thousand years ago, Israelites set up a state. King Solomon constructs his temple in Jerusalem in 928 BC. The Assyrians conquer the kingdom of Israel in 721 BC. The Babylonians deport the people to Babylon in 586 BC. The Persians in turn conquer Babylon and allow the deportees to return in 539 BC. In 333 BC Alexander the Great conquers Persia and the region comes under Greek rule. In 63 BC, the region is incorporated into the Roman Empire. In 70 CE, after a great rebellion, the Roman Emperor Titus orders the destruction of the second temple.

In 132 CE after another revolt, Jews are barred from Jerusalem. By 330 the region comes under Byzantine rule, and Christianity is widespread. In 638 the Caliph Omar ibn al-Khattaab enters Jerusalem and ends the Byzantine rule. Under the Umayyad caliphs from Damascus, the Dome of the Rock ('Abd al-Malik, 685-705) and Al-Aqsa in its current shape (al-Walid, 705-715) are constructed. From 750-1258 the region is administered from Baghdad by the Abbasid caliphs.

From 1099-1187, the Crusaders establish the "Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem". And in 1187, Saladin, (Salah al-Diin al-Ayyoubi from Kurdistan) defeats the Crusaders. From 1260, the Mameluks control the region from Cairo. From 1516-1917, the region is incorporated into the Ottoman state and administered from Istanbul. The British were given the region to rule after the First World War.

Zionist movement had been growing in Europe due to the Russian oppression. The Zionists desired a state in Palestine and provided financial support to enable Jews to go there. Starting with a few in 1878, by 1903 some 25,000 had arrived in Palestine and by 1914 some 80,000 Jews were in Palestine. Conflict soon arose between the Jews and the Palestinians. Jewish immigration still increased amid the conflict; by 1939 there were an estimated half a million Jews in Palestine. The British were forced to leave as Jews and Arabs neared open conflict over the issue of the establishment of a state of Israel in Palestine. As soon as the UN voted in favor of the creation of the state of Israel, open war ensued in 1948.

Israel has since fought other wars with her Arab neighbors, in 1956, 1967 and 1973. Each time she had won and often expanded her territory. Today the Israelis and Palestinians are in conflict. The two people who share the same homeland are struggling to find a common destiny.

# Factbook on Israel



- Introduction
- Geography
- People
- Government
- Economy
- Communications
- Transportation
- Military
- Transnational Issues



## Geography

**Location:** Middle East, bordering the Mediterranean Sea, between Egypt and Lebanon

**Geographic coordinates:** 31 30 N, 34 45 E

**Map references:** Middle East

**Area:**

*total:* 20,770 sq km

*land:* 20,330 sq km

*water:* 440 sq km

**Area - comparative:** slightly smaller than New Jersey

**Land boundaries:**

*total:* 1,006 km

*border countries:* Egypt 255 km, Gaza Strip 51 km, Jordan 238 km, Lebanon 79 km, Syria 76 km, West Bank 307 km

**Coastline:** 273 km

**Maritime claims:**

*continental shelf:* to depth of exploitation

*territorial sea:* 12 nm

**Climate:** temperate; hot and dry in southern and eastern desert areas

**Terrain:** Negev desert in the south; low coastal plain; central mountains; Jordan Rift Valley

**Elevation extremes:**

*lowest point:* Dead Sea -408 m

*highest point:* Har Meron 1,208 m

**Natural resources:** copper, phosphates, bromide, potash, clay, sand, sulfur, asphalt, manganese, small amounts of natural gas and crude oil

**Land use:**

*arable land:* 17%

*permanent crops:* 4%

*permanent pastures:* 7%

*forests and woodland:* 6%

*other:* 66% (1993 est.)

**Irrigated land:** 1,970 sq km (2007 est.)

**Natural hazards:** sandstorms may occur during spring and summer

**Environment - current issues:** limited arable land and natural fresh water resources pose serious constraints; desertification; air pollution from

industrial and vehicle emissions; groundwater pollution from industrial and domestic waste, chemical fertilizers, and pesticides

**Environment - international agreements:**

*party to:* Biodiversity, Climate Change, Desertification, Endangered Species, Hazardous Wastes, Nuclear Test Ban, Ozone Layer Protection, Ship Pollution, Wetlands

*signed, but not ratified:* Climate Change-Kyoto Protocol, Marine Life Conservation

**Geography - note:** there are 231 Israeli settlements and civilian land use sites in the West Bank, 42 in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, 24 in the Gaza Strip, and 29 in East Jerusalem (August 1999 est.)

## People

**Population:** 7,112,454

**Age structure:**

*0-14 years:* 28%

*15-64 years:* 63%

*65 years and over:* 9%

**Population growth rate:** 1.7% (2008 est.)

**Birth rate:** 20.22 births/1,000 population (2008 est.)

**Death rate:** 5.41 deaths/1,000 population (2008 est.)

**Life expectancy at birth:**

*total population:* 80.61 years

*male:* 78.57 years

*female:* 82.67 years (2008 est.)

**Total fertility rate:** 2.77 children born/woman (2008 est.)

**Nationality:**

*noun:* Israeli(s)

*adjective:* Israeli

**Ethnic groups:** Jewish 76.1% , 23.6% (mostly Arab) (2007 est.)

**Religions:** Jewish 76.1%, Muslim 16% (mostly Sunni Muslim), Christian 2.1%, other 3.2% (2008 est.)

**Languages:** Hebrew (official), Arabic used officially for Arab minority, English most commonly used foreign language

**Literacy:**

*definition:* age 15 and over can read and write

*total population:* 95%

*male:* 97%  
*female:* 93% (1992 est.)

## Government

**Country name:**

*conventional long form:* State of Israel (Medinat Yisra'el)

*conventional short form:* Israel (Yisra'el)

**Government type:** parliamentary democracy

**Capital:** Jerusalem

*note:* Israel proclaimed Jerusalem as its capital in 1950, but the US, like nearly all other countries, maintains its Embassy in Tel Aviv

**Administrative divisions:** 6 districts (mehozot, singular - mehoz); Central, Haifa, Jerusalem, Northern, Southern, Tel Aviv

**Independence:** 14 May 1948 (from League of Nations mandate under British administration)

**National holiday:** Independence Day, 14 May 1948; note - Israel declared independence on 14 May 1948, but the Jewish calendar is lunar and the holiday may occur in April or May

**Constitution:** no formal constitution; some of the functions of a constitution are filled by the Declaration of Establishment (1948), the Basic Laws of the parliament (Knesset), and the Israeli citizenship law

**Legal system:** mixture of English common law, British Mandate regulations, and, in personal matters, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim legal systems; in December 1985, Israel informed the UN Secretariat that it would no longer accept compulsory ICJ jurisdiction

**Suffrage:** 18 years of age; universal

**Executive branch:**

*chief of state:* President Shimon Peres (since 17 July 2007)

*head of government:* Prime Minister Ejud Olmert (since May 2006)

*cabinet:* Cabinet selected by prime minister and approved by the Knesset

**Legislative branch:** unicameral Knesset or parliament (120 seats; members elected by popular vote to serve four-year terms)

**Judicial branch:** Supreme Court, appointed for life by the president

**International organization participation:** BSEC (observer), CCC, CE (observer), CERN (observer), EBRD, ECE, FAO, IADB, IAEA, IBRD, ICAO, ICC, ICFTU, IDA, IFAD, IFC, ILO, IMF, IMO, Inmarsat, Intelsat, Interpol, IOC, IOM, ISO, ITU, OAS (observer), OPCW, OSCE (partner), PCA, UN, UNCTAD, UNESCO, UNHCR, UNIDO, UPU, WHO, WIPO, WMO, WToO, WTrO

**Diplomatic representation in the US:**

*chancery:* 3514 International Drive NW, Washington, DC 20008

*telephone:* [1] (202) 364-5500

*FAX:* [1] (202) 364-5610

*consulate(s) general:* Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, New York, Philadelphia, and San Francisco

**Diplomatic representation from the US:**

*embassy:* 71 Hayarkon Street, Tel Aviv

*mailing address:* PSC 98, Unit 7228, APO AE 09830

*telephone:* [972] (3) 519-7575

*FAX:* [972] (3) 517-3227

*consulate(s) general:* Jerusalem; note - an independent US mission, established in 1928, whose members are not accredited to a foreign government

**Flag description:** white with a blue hexagram (six-pointed linear star) known as the Magen David (Shield of David) centered between two equal horizontal blue bands near the top and bottom edges of the flag

## Economy

**Economy - overview:** Israel has a technologically advanced market economy. It depends on imports of crude oil, grains, raw materials, and military equipment. Despite limited natural resources, Israel has intensively developed its agricultural and industrial sectors over the past 20 years. Cut diamonds, high-technology equipment, and agricultural products (fruits and vegetables) are the leading exports. Israel usually posts sizable trade deficits, which are covered by large transfer payments from abroad and by foreign loans. Roughly half of the government's external debt is owed to the US, its major source of economic and military aid. Israel's GDP, after contracting slightly in 2001 and 2002 due to the Palestinian conflict and troubles in the high-technology sector, grew about 5% per year from 2003-07. The global financial crisis of 2008-09 spurred a brief recession in Israel, but the country entered the crisis with solid fundamentals - following years of prudent fiscal

policy and a series of liberalizing reforms - and a resilient banking sector, and the economy has rebounded quickly. Following GDP growth of 4% in 2008, Israel's GDP contracted 0.3% in 2009 but is expected to expand in 2010. The global economic downturn affected Israel's economy primarily through reduced demand for Israel's exports - which account for about 45% of the country's GDP - in the United States and EU, Israel's top trading partners. The Israeli Government responded to the recession by implementing a fiscal stimulus package and an aggressive expansionary monetary policy - including cutting interest rates to record lows, purchasing government bonds, and intervening in the foreign currency market.

**GDP:** purchasing power parity - \$205.4 billion (2009 est.)

**GDP - real growth rate:** -0.3% (2009est.)

**GDP - per capita:** purchasing power parity - \$28,400 (2009 est.)

**GDP - composition by sector:**

*agriculture:* 2.6%

*industry:* 32%

*services:* 65.4% (2009 est.)

**Household income or consumption by percentage share:**

*lowest 10%:* 2.8%

*highest 10%:* 26.9% (2006)

**Inflation rate (consumer prices):** 3.4% (2007est.)

**Labor force:** 3.0 million (2009)

**Labor force - by occupation:** public services 31.2%, manufacturing 20.2%, finance and business 13.1%, commerce 12.8%, construction 7.5%, personal and other services 6.4%, transport, storage, and communications 6.2%, agriculture, forestry, and fishing 2.6% (1996)

**Unemployment rate:** 8.1% (2009 est.)

**Industries:** food processing, diamond cutting and polishing, textiles and apparel, chemicals, metal products, military equipment, transport equipment, electrical equipment, potash mining, high-technology electronics, tourism

**Industrial production growth rate:** 5.4% (1996)

**Agriculture - products:** citrus, vegetables, cotton; beef, poultry, dairy products

**Exports:** \$44.5 billion (f.o.b., 2009)

**Exports - commodities:** machinery and equipment, software, cut diamonds, chemicals, textiles and apparel, agricultural products

**Exports - partners:** US 32.5%, Benelux 6.7%, Hong Kong 6.7%, Japan, Netherlands , UK (2009)

**Imports:** \$47.4 billion (f.o.b., 2009)

**Imports - commodities:** raw materials, military equipment, investment goods, rough diamonds, fuels, consumer goods

**Imports - partners:** US 12.3%, Benelux 6.5%, China 6.5%, Germany 6%, UK 6%, Switzerland 6% (2009)

**Currency:** 1 new Israeli shekel (NIS) = 100 new agorot

**Exchange rates:** new Israeli shekels (NIS) per US\$1 - -3.93 (2009), 4.14 (2007), 4.2260 (1999), 3.8001 (1998), 3.4494 (1997), 3.1917 (1996), 3.0113 (1995)

**Fiscal year:** calendar year

## Communications

**Telephones - main lines in use:** 2.9 million (2009)

**Telephones - mobile cellular:** 8.9 million (2009)

## Transportation

**Railways:**

*total:* 853 km 1.435-m gauge (2009)

**Highways:**

*paved:* 17,965 km (including 146 km of expressways)

**Ports and harbors:** Ashdod, Ashqelon, Elat (Eilat), Hadera, Haifa, Tel Aviv-Yafo

**Airports - with paved runways:** 33

## Websites

[travel.yahoo.com/t/Middle\\_East/Israel/](http://travel.yahoo.com/t/Middle_East/Israel/)

[search.gallery.yahoo.com/search/corbis?p=israel](http://search.gallery.yahoo.com/search/corbis?p=israel)

## Recipes

### APPLE 'N HONEY SQUARES

- 1 cup sugar
- 1/2 cup honey
- 3 eggs
- 2 cup flour
- 1 tsp. baking powder
- 1 tsp. cinnamon
- 1/2 tsp. salt
- 2/3 cup oil
- 1 tsp vanilla
- 2 cup sliced apples
- 1 cup chopped walnuts

Beat sugar, honey and eggs. Add dry ingredients. Add oil and vanilla, then apples and nuts. Bake in a greased 9 x 13 inch pan for 40 minutes at 350°. Cut into squares.

## Activities

One of the most famous dances in Israel is a folk dance called the hora. The hora. It can be danced to any music with two beats per measure.

1. Step to the left with your left foot
2. Cross your right foot behind your left
3. Step to the left with your left foot
4. Hop on your left foot and swing your right foot across in front of your left foot
5. Step in place with your right foot
6. Hop on your right foot and swing your left foot across in front of our right foot
7. Repeat this until the song is over.