



BAHÁ'Í WORLD CENTRE

Important Information about
BAHÁ'Í PILGRIMAGE



You have asked about visiting holy places and the observance of marked reverence towards these resplendent spots. Holy places are undoubtedly centres of the outpouring of Divine grace, because on entering the illumined sites associated with martyrs and holy souls, and by observing reverence, both physical and spiritual, one's heart is moved with great tenderness.

—‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ

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I INFORMATION ABOUT BAHÁ'Í PILGRIMAGE

The first and supreme obligation of all Bahá'ís who visit the Holy Land is to pray and meditate in the Sacred Shrines of Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. To receive this bounty of visiting the Holy Places at the Bahá'í World Centre is an inestimable privilege, infinitely precious to every Bahá'í pilgrim.

In addition to these conducted visits, you will wish to make additional visits to the Shrines and gardens when you are not otherwise occupied and also to visit the Haifa Pilgrim House, the Monument Gardens, the Temple Land, the resting place of Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum and the Bahá'í Cemetery in Haifa during the hours that they are open.

The words of the beloved Guardian on pages 183–224, 244–251, 263–278 and 309–317 of *God Passes By*, describing events associated with the Central Figures of our Faith, will help you to prepare for your pilgrimage. Much information on the Holy Places is also to be found in *Door of Hope*, by David S. Ruhe.

The pilgrimage season usually extends from the end of October to the end of July. You are welcome to stay in the Holy Land for a period not exceeding 38 days, but only the period of the pilgrimage may be spent in the 'Akká/Haifa area.

2 ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE TIMES/REGISTRATION

Your pilgrimage begins on the date stated on your invitation, usually a Monday, and ends on the Wednesday nine days later. If a Holy Day falls at the beginning

or the end of your pilgrimage, your invitation may specify arrival or departure dates other than the usual Monday and Wednesday, but, for the purpose of these guidelines, the normal schedule is presumed.

Pilgrims should plan to arrive in the 'Akká/Haifa area on the first day of pilgrimage (Monday) in time to register at the Pilgrim Reception Centre between 8:00 a.m. and 12:00 noon. If, in order to do this, they would have to arrive in Haifa on the Sunday, they are permitted to do so, but only after 9:00 p.m. The formal pilgrimage programme ends on the evening of the ninth day (Tuesday), and the pilgrims should plan to leave the 'Akká/Haifa area by sunset the following day (Wednesday). Requests for exceptions to this arrival and departure schedule should be sent in writing to the Office of Pilgrimage, prior to arrival, clearly outlining the special circumstances that require an exception to general policy.

The Pilgrim Reception Centre is located at 5 Puah Street. It is open from 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. daily. The upper entrance, at 54 Hatzionut Avenue, may also be used when travelling by bus, sherut or taxi.

It is important that you bring with you to the registration desk your original letter of invitation, as well as your current passport and Bahá'í credentials. If you come as a family group, each member of your family will need to show these documents.

Upon registration, you will be provided with further details concerning your pilgrimage schedule.

3 ACCOMMODATION ARRANGEMENTS

Pilgrims are strongly urged to make their hotel reservations in ample time to receive confirmation of their bookings and receipts for their room deposits before they leave home. Pilgrims who arrive without

firm bookings may find themselves in difficult and uncomfortable situations.

We regret that pressure of work makes it impossible for the Bahá'í World Centre to undertake responsibility for providing food and lodgings for pilgrims or to book accommodation, nor should Bahá'ís serving at the World Centre be asked to help in these ways. A travel agent in your area should be able to provide assistance with both travel and accommodation. In case you prefer to book your accommodation directly, a list of hotels and hospices is enclosed.

The hotels, hostels, etc. mentioned in the enclosed list are, to the best of our information, suitable and reliable. If you choose to stay in accommodation other than one on the list, or one suggested by your travel agent, even one recommended by a friend, you should bear in mind that there may be a risk that the place will be unlicensed or unsanitary, or inadequate for your length of stay.

You may wish to confirm that your hotel accepts credit cards, as some accept only traveller's cheques or cash.

4 CANCELLATION

If, for some reason, you are unable to come for pilgrimage on the date confirmed, you are requested to inform the Office of Pilgrimage as soon as possible so that the space can be offered to someone else.

5 TRAVEL FROM BEN GURION AIRPORT

Ben Gurion Airport, the main international airport of Israel, is near Tel Aviv, approximately 100 kilometres from Haifa. There are regular air-conditioned bus services from the airport to Haifa, either directly

from the airport or via the central bus station in Tel Aviv. There are also taxi and sherut stands near the exit from the arrival halls at the airport. For further information, please refer to the leaflet entitled "Information on Accommodation and Transportation for Bahá'í Pilgrims". When travelling in Israel, it is necessary to understand the difference between taxis and sheruts, which are identical in appearance. In a taxi, the traveller has exclusive use of the vehicle, and the fare is shown on the meter or, over long distances, is as prescribed by the company's regulations. A sherut operates like a bus, picking up and setting down passengers along its route, and charging a fare similar to a bus. The fare for a taxi from the airport to Haifa is considerably more than that of a sherut. It is essential to be quite certain, before starting a journey, whether the driver regards his vehicle to be a taxi or a sherut and what the fare will be.

6 TELEPHONES

Most public telephones now operate with the use of telephone cards, which can be purchased at information booths in the airport or post offices. Pilgrims who wish to call the Bahá'í World Centre from within Israel can telephone the following numbers:

The Pilgrim Reception Centre (04) 835-8720
The World Centre Offices . . . (04) 835-8358
The Office of Pilgrimage (04) 835-8511
(04) 835-8477

7 TEACHING THE FAITH IN ISRAEL

Bahá'u'lláh Himself prohibited the friends from teaching the Faith in the Holy Land, and this re-

striction is still observed. Questions about the Faith should be answered factually, but no attempt should be made to teach the Faith to Israelis, of any religion, either in Israel or en route.

8 SOME PRACTICAL MATTERS

a. Passports and Credentials

Your passports should be kept in your possession at all times, and the white paper that will be given to you by the authorities upon your arrival in Israel should be carefully retained, as you must return it to them upon your departure. Be sure to bring your Bahá'í credentials and your original pilgrimage invitation with you when coming to the Holy Land as these documents may be helpful when going through security checks at the airports.

b. Climate and Clothing

Israel is hot in summer, and pilgrims coming between April and July need light clothing; but even in summer a warm wrap may be needed at night. From November to April it can be cold, particularly at night, and heavy rains may occur, so warm clothing and protection against rain will be needed. You may feel it wise to ensure in advance that your hotel rooms are heated or air-conditioned, depending on the season. Bring comfortable walking shoes. Haifa is located on Mount Carmel and it is often necessary to use public stairs when travelling within the city. The paths around the Shrines and gardens are paved with pebbles or broken tiles which will damage the heels and soles of shoes. You may also like to bring extra socks or slippers to wear inside the Shrines and

certain other rooms in Holy Places where shoes are removed before entering. In reference to standards of dress, reverence is reflected in many ways, including in our clothing. Pilgrims will be requested to convey outwardly their respect for the Holy Places and institutions of the Faith by the exercise of dignity and modesty in their attire.

HAIFA'S CLIMATE

- *Winter (Jan.–Mar.):* Can be warm and sunny or cold with heavy thunderstorms. (9°C–22°C/49°F–71°F)
 - *Spring (Apr.–June):* Warm in the day, cool in the evenings. Occasional periods of hot, dry wind. (14°C–29°C/58°F–85°F)
 - *Summer (July–Sept.):* Hot with high humidity. (24°C–40°C/75°F–105°F)
 - *Autumn (Oct.–Dec.):* Warm in the day, cool in the evenings, subject to rainfall. Occasional periods of hot, dry wind. (12°C–29°C/53°F–85°F)
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c. Money

You will need Israeli currency for transport and incidental expenses. Exchange facilities for foreign currency and traveller's cheques are maintained by banks at the entry points to Israel (Ben Gurion Airport and Haifa Port) and elsewhere around the country and are also available in post offices. One new Israeli sheqel (NIS1.00) is divided into 100 agorots. The legal rates of exchange for various currencies are posted at banks and similar facilities. Internationally valid credit cards are also accepted in many hotels and shops.

d. Local Customs/Shabbat

In addition to annual Jewish holy days, Shabbat, which starts on Friday evening and ends on Saturday evening, is a day of rest in Israel. Some hotels may not serve regular meals. Public transport in Haifa ceases on Friday evening and does not resume until approximately 9:00 a.m. on Saturday morning. Interurban bus service is less frequent, but sheruts continue to be available on their regular routes, and taxis operate as usual.

e. Carrying Letters and Packages

Bahá'í pilgrims are sometimes asked to carry letters or parcels with them for the Bahá'í World Centre or for believers serving here. You are free to do this if you wish, but it is most important that you have full confidence in the person giving the materials to you; that is to say, it should be a Bahá'í institution or an individual well known to you personally. You should also know what the contents of the envelope or parcel are, since you may well be asked to state this by security or customs officials. **UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES** should a letter or parcel be accepted from a stranger, either before or during the journey, nor should any articles from strangers be accepted in the Holy Land for taking abroad. These instructions are for your own protection and the protection of those travelling with you.

9 INFORMATION FOR THOSE WITH SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES OR CONDITIONS

a. Believers Requiring Visas to Enter Israel

Many friends find that they need to obtain visas in order to travel to Israel. If you are not certain whether you require such a visa, you are advised to contact your nearest Israeli consulate.

Those believers requiring visas to enter Israel are advised to make a visa application to their nearest Israeli consulate two months prior to their pilgrimage date. It is important that Bahá'í identity be clearly shown on each application, as applications from Bahá'ís are processed by a separate section in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Israel.

Prospective pilgrims should notify the Bahá'í World Centre as soon as they have made their visa application, and provide information concerning any changes that may have taken place in their passports or travel documents since the original application for pilgrimage several years before. The World Centre provides this information to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Israel, where it is used to verify the pilgrim's Bahá'í identity when the pilgrim's visa application is received from his/her local Israeli consulate. In general, the time between the application for a visa and the issuance of a visa ranges from four to six weeks.

If you encounter serious problems, or if your visa has not been received by the end of six weeks after your application to the consulate, please contact the World Centre so that steps can be taken to provide assistance.

b. Believers Travelling to Israel on Iranian Passports

Those believers travelling to Israel on Iranian passports will require Israeli visas to enter the country. Owing to heightened Israeli security measures, it is advisable for you to visit the nearest Israeli embassy or consulate, in person, with your invitation letter and passport. This should be done four months in advance of the scheduled pilgrimage, so that you can confirm what documentation will be required and submit the paperwork as soon as the agency will allow.

For the protection of the Faith in Iran, it is the wish of the Universal House of Justice that such a visa be obtained on a separate piece of paper and not be entered in the passport. Israeli officials at the airport should be reminded to stamp the separate paper and not your passport.

c. Believers Travelling to Israel on Travel Documents

Those believers travelling to Israel on travel documents will require Israeli visas to enter the country; these visas must be obtained before arrival in Israel. In such a case the visa will be stamped in the document and not issued on a separate paper. Please follow the same guidelines as set out above for Iranian passport holders.

d. Health Issues

Friends who have physical disabilities or severe health problems can request to bring a person (Bahá'í or non-Bahá'í) to help them during their pilgrimage.

The helper must be 18 years of age or older and able to assist you with all your needs. For more details, please refer to the leaflet entitled “Request to Add a Helper”. Please note that, as the helper will be included in the number of people invited, approval must be given before the pilgrimage commences. You are advised that the pilgrimage programme is physically strenuous and there are many steps to climb. Not all Holy Places are wheelchair accessible. Should you require a wheelchair, you will need to bring your own or rent one that is suitable for travel.

In the case of emergency illnesses or accidents while at the Bahá’í World Centre, you should immediately contact the staff at the Pilgrim Reception Centre for assistance and guidance concerning the local health care system. Since the cost of medical treatment is quite high in Israel, it is extremely important that you have medical insurance for the duration of your stay. This insurance should cover you for any medical emergencies and, if possible, for pre-existing conditions.

You should be prepared to pay for health expenses in cash. Most hospitals accept major credit cards, but generally will not bill an insurance company abroad directly. When asked for your address by health care professionals, please provide your home mailing address, rather than that of the World Centre.

If you are on prescription medication, please be sure to bring an adequate supply to cover your needs while away from home. You should hand-carry your medicine and a copy of your prescription with you in case your luggage is lost. If prescription eyeglasses are worn, it is advisable to bring an extra pair or a copy of the current prescription in case of breakage.

In general, World Centre Departments are not equipped to provide health advice and services to

pilgrims and visitors. A listing of local physicians and hospitals is available through the Pilgrim Reception Centre or the hotels.

e. Children under 18

Please note that children who are under 18 at the time of application may be included on their family's application for pilgrimage and will be included in the quota for that particular pilgrim group and counted as pilgrims.

Children over 15 who are not declared Bahá'ís may participate in all aspects of the pilgrimage programme, with the following exceptions. They are not normally allowed to participate in the reception by the Universal House of Justice, the visit to the International Archives, and the meeting with the International Teaching Centre. They are welcome to visit the Holy Places and to attend the evening meetings in the Pilgrim Reception Centre.

Parents are discouraged from bringing children under 10 years of age on pilgrimage. It is permitted—but only if the children have been included in your invitation. Please advise if you plan to arrange for a full-time babysitter, as children who are not under the care of a babysitter will be counted in filling the pilgrimage quotas.

Since no facilities for the care of children are provided by the Bahá'í World Centre, and members of the World Centre staff are not permitted to undertake such services, arrangements for babysitting and other services are the responsibility of the parents and must be planned prior to arrival in the Holy Land. Parents may request to bring their children accompanied by a babysitter (Bahá'í or non-Bahá'í). Babysitters must be 18 years of age or

older. They are expected to devote their full attention to the needs and care of the child/children they are accompanying and, therefore, will not be allowed to participate in any part of the pilgrimage programme, formal or informal. In coordination with the parents, the babysitter may visit the Shrines at the times they are open to the general public (if non-Bahá'í) or to the Bahá'ís (if the babysitter is a Bahá'í).

For more details, please refer to the leaflet entitled "Request to Add Children under 18 and/or a Babysitter".

f. Addition of a Spouse

Spouses may be included on their family's application for pilgrimage and will be counted in the quota for that particular pilgrim group. Spouses who are not declared Bahá'ís may participate in all aspects of the pilgrimage programme, with the following exceptions. They are not normally allowed to participate in the reception by the Universal House of Justice, the visit to the International Archives, and the meeting with the International Teaching Centre. They are welcome to visit the Holy Places and to attend the evening meetings in the Pilgrim Reception Centre.

For more information about adding a Bahá'í or non-Bahá'í spouse to your application, please refer to the leaflet entitled "Request to Add Immediate Family Members and Guidance Regarding Non-Bahá'í Family Members".

g. Non-Bahá'í Children over 18 and Non-Bahá'í Parents

Non-Bahá'í children over 18 and parents who are not declared Bahá'ís may participate in all aspects of the

pilgrimage programme, with the following exceptions. They are not normally allowed to participate in the reception by the Universal House of Justice, the visit to the International Archives, and the meeting with the International Teaching Centre. They are welcome to visit the Holy Places and to attend the evening meetings in the Pilgrim Reception Centre.

The leaflet entitled “Request to Add Immediate Family Members and Guidance Regarding Non-Bahá’í Family Members” provides detailed information regarding the inclusion of these family members in your pilgrimage invitation.

IO NOTES FOR PILGRIMS WHO ARE NOT EXPERIENCED TRAVELLERS

For some pilgrims their pilgrimage to the Holy Land is the first journey they have made outside their homeland. The following cautions may be helpful to avoid unpleasant experiences. While most of the people you meet will prove to be as helpful and as friendly as you could wish, and completely honest, unfortunately you must guard against the few exceptions.

Friendliness will generally call forth friendliness from others, but you should not forget that excessive helpfulness offered by others can often be a cloak for ulterior motives. Unless a country and its customs are familiar, it is not wise to accept invitations to go with strangers or to visit their homes. Being too open and friendly, particularly on the part of women and girls, can convey a completely wrong impression and can lead to unpleasant and even dangerous situations.

Please heed the warnings given in hotels concerning the security of personal belongings and either keep valuables—including your cash and traveller’s cheques—close at hand, or place them with the re-

ceptionist for safekeeping. In any case, be sure not to leave the room unlocked and check that there is no easy access through an open window or balcony. It is recommended that you keep your passport with you at all times.

Prices vary considerably from country to country, so you should not assume that, because something is expensive, you are being cheated. On the other hand, please remember that some people do take advantage of tourists, so it would be wise always to check prices where possible and, when paying for a service rather than a commodity, to agree upon the price in advance.

These warnings are offered to increase your awareness of the challenges travellers may face in a foreign land, so that you can be prepared and better able to enjoy the bounties of your pilgrimage. In general, common sense and the observance of just a little extra caution in unfamiliar surroundings will ensure a trouble-free journey.

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