

For most Christians a trip to Israel is a once in a lifetime event. It is often a life changing experience. It changes our perspectives on well known Bible passages and introduces us to the geographical and historical realities of the Bible. As an experience it can be worth a thousand sermons but not all tours are the same making the choice of a tour extremely important. There is an inevitable trade off between time, cost, itinerary and experience which should be taken into account when comparing tours.

The length of a tour will determine its pace and itinerary. Israel can fit comfortably into the Kruger National Park and you can “do Israel” in seven days if you are prepared to run where Jesus walked! You may see many of the major sights without any time to reflect on what you have seen and their implications for your understanding of faith. Israel is a land of contrasts with desert in the South culminating with forests in the North. The stories of the patriarchs and the exodus play out mainly in the Negev desert region. The prophets, on the other hand, are associated with the central region while the ministry of Jesus centred around Galilee and the north. Checking a detailed itinerary against time allowances should give you a good idea of the quality of the tour. Remember, time is money!

The cost of travel and accommodation in Israel is significantly more expensive than it is in South Africa and so every cent counts. To give you an idea of the cost, a salad and coffee at an Aroma franchise will cost you about R150. In Israel, as elsewhere, you get what you pay for. Check the location of the hotels. Touring after a disturbed night in a noisy hotel is a test of endurance and a false economy. If the hotel is not within easy reach of the sites, as is the case with most of the cheaper hotels, then evening walks at your leisure are impractical. Check the hotels mentioned in the itinerary on the internet to see for yourself.

The experience of a tour is dependent on a number of variables. The experience of the tour leader is the first important factor. It is unlikely that you will know what you are missing and so you will have to be able to trust the experience of the leader to provide the best experience possible within the time and cost limitations.

Preparation before you leave will make the tour more meaningful. Over the years I have found that it is essential to provide good preparation for tour groups through introductory talks and by providing opportunities for tour members to meet each other before the tour. This adds significantly to the overall experience of the tour. Meeting the tour leader and the group at the airport for the first time is not ideal.

Establishing the goal of the tour is essential? Is it educational, or a pilgrimage with visits to many church buildings, or just a holiday in Israel? Is it politically charged - are you going to be exposed to both sides? These are questions that a tour leader should be able to answer before you sign up for the tour.

Happy and blessed travels to the Land of the Bible.