

# Let's Go to Israel!

Many church pastors and organizational leaders want to travel to Israel. The Holy Land has much to offer; and pastors in particular, realize the life-changing impact your church or group experiences on this type of adventure. It binds their hearts and minds together and enhances their worship and Bible study for years.

Planning an event that is the scope and magnitude of a trip to Israel takes time and effort. It can take about a year to properly plan and promote.

The Bible Comes to Life Travel and Education Center (TBCTL) has the experience and demonstrated best practices for planning a spiritual and educational journey with your church or organization. Applying these practices makes the work a lot easier and ensures nothing is forgotten.



This guide will lead you through steps that have been tried and proven successful. It will direct you to ensure that each part of your trip is exactly what you envision.

## Let's get started!

This guide is being offered to you by **The Bible Comes to Life Travel and Education Center (TBCTL)**. We are a Tour Agent and part of The Tlalim Group, one of the oldest and most respected Tour Groups in Israel. Tlalim is located near Tel Aviv, Israel. **The Bible Comes to Life—USA (TBCTL-USA)**, is located in the Cincinnati, OH area. Contact information is found on the inside front cover.



### In the Beginning

The first step is to **set a date** and *tell everyone* about it.



As the tour leader, it is up to you to set the event into motion. By first determining that **you** are **committed** to the trip, and that a **date is in place**, you ensure your group that this is not just an "idea." In order for them to commit, they need to share your vision and feel confident in the reality of travel.

Many people save their entire lives to be able to take a trip to the Holy Land. For millions of people who travel there annually, most feel that it is a "trip of a lifetime." It is up to you, as the tour leader, to assure them it will happen. Setting a date is the first step.

Once you set a date, create a way to announce the trip (<u>not just once</u>) and gather interested parties to seek more information.

# At TBCTL-USA we have created an "interest gathering flyer" that can be sent via email, printed or posted on your web site or social media page.

Afterward, give them a couple of weeks to get it in their minds that it is possible and then set a meeting time to share your vision about the trip. That requires information gathering on your part to be prepared for the meeting. A light lunch after a service or on a regular meeting night works well.

Before the meeting, you will need to determine a few things:

- Tour Agent (picking the best one for your group will be discussed later)
- Type of trip (Deep Bible Study, Bus Tour, Archeological Tour, etc.)
- Departure city (USA)
- Length of trip (typically 7-14 days)
- Estimated cost of trip (based on your group's budgetary constraints)
- Minimum and maximum number of travelers (Israel hotels need 20 paying travelers to be considered for group discount rates)
- Activity level of trip: Are your travelers physically able to walk a lot; over uneven pavement; up inclines and stairs? Are there special needs in your group (wheelchair or walkers)? All of this needs to be considered when selecting the activity level for your itinerary.



#### **Tour Operator**

If you are wondering what a Tour Operator does and if you need one, here is a partial list of their duties. (Yes, you need one.)

 Assist you to determine the type of trip best suited for your group; offering ideas and suggestions

Assist you to determine where you go and what you will do (many offer set itineraries -

often called Cookie Cutter Tours)

 Act as the Travel Agent or direct you to a Travel Agent to make the international travel arrangements for your group

- Coordinate all arrangements once you arrive in Israel (hotels, food, guide, transportation, etc)
- Some provide promotional materials for you to use (brochures, handouts, video clips, etc.)
- Most can handle registrations and payments for your group



What a Tour Operator is NOT and does NOT do:

- Fill the seats on your bus (that is up to you)
- Arrange your domestic travel arrangements (within USA)
- Answer questions from your group, nor are they the contact person for your group (we will discuss this later)

Why you need a Tour Operator for your trip:

- Logistical travel connections: hotels, bus companies, guides, restaurants and sites
  - They make all the reservations for your group
  - They work with the guide and troubleshoot any issues that may arise while in Israel (due to unforeseen circumstances)
- They are in business to help you save money on your trip



#### **Creating A Trip Leadership Team**

As a pastor or organizational leader, you do not have time to handle all the necessary details to make this a successful trip. Therefore, you need to create a Trip Leadership Team. Choose two or three capable and enthusiastic people to assist you as you plan and promote your trip. Delegate responsibilities based on their strengths. This team will work together closely, so choose wisely to ensure a collaborative effort. Delegated responsibilities include:

- 1. Promotion
- 2. Communication
- 3. Registration



**Promotion is Mandatory:** Your Promotion Leader will be the person who encourages others to sign up for the trip. They need to have an enthusiastic personality and be excited about traveling to Israel. They will be responsible for gathering interest, creating a promotional time line, contacting local media outlets, posting to your web site (or providing information for your web designer), setting up and maintaining an informational table in a common area, and creating a brochure (if one is not provided by your Tour Operator).

Communicating is Key: Your Communication Leader will be the one who sends all notifications about the trip. They will ensure the traveler list is up to date and accurate, welcome the newly registered guests, answer questions, provide payment options and due dates, and provide insight. As the trip gets closer, they will provide information regarding weather, packing, what to expect, and basic Q&A for the group. They will need a detailed plan and timeline to ensure everything is communicated in a timely manner.

**Registration is Vital:** Your Registration Leader will collect the registration information from each traveler. This may include creating a registration form (if one is not provided from your Tour Operator), organizing the information, collecting payments and updating traveler records accordingly, and sending the payments to the Tour Operator when necessary. This person needs to be detailed oriented and efficient.



### **Making it Happen**

Now that you have the date and Leadership Team in place, it is time to select a Tour Operator. There are many to choose from with varied specialized areas. Choosing one that works **with** you (and **for** you) is imperative.

Browsing the internet is one way to find a Tour Operator. Some of the largest companies will show on the top of the list. These are typically operators who work with celebrities, authors, politicians, historians and so forth. This is generally reflected in the trip cost.

Some Tour Operators specialize in one type of trip or another. For example, they may lean towards the archeological finds in Israel, focusing on ancient sites and current digs. Another may focus on bus tours. This means a great deal of the time, the group will be on a bus, getting off the bus only on sites that are easily accessible to all travelers. Some are vacation tours, with limited information and insight into the spiritual relevance and more on the fun aspects (hiking, swimming, nightlife, shopping, etc).



At **TBCTL-USA** our **focus** is on **Bible Study Tours**. We let you know in advance that if you are looking for a vacation trip, we are not suited for you. We are an educational tour company. It is our purpose and passion to educate our travelers to the relationship between Israel and Christianity today. Our itineraries are full with as little time on the bus as is absolutely necessary. We do a lot of walking, both up and down hills, climbing steps and over uneven terrain.

Start by seeking out a variety of Tour Operators. Review their itineraries and get an idea of their prices. Then contact them to get a personalized quote. We recommend not contacting more then three companies just to keep it easy to compare.

Information you will need to provide to the Tour Operator before they can create a cost estimate will be: travel dates; length of trip; departure city; estimated number of travelers; trip focus; estimated budget; physical limitations of group. Getting estimates back is not instant and may take 7-14 days to complete. Be patient.



Next compare the quotes and itineraries for these important factors:

- Does the \*itinerary match what you requested? Is it customizable?
- Length of days on the ground. (Generally it is two days travel to arrive and one day to come home. Make sure the length is counted as "days on ground" when comparing.)
- How many days are listed as "leisure days" or "free time"? These generally cost you a great deal and drive the overall price up.
- Is this a land-only quote or is the international air fare included?
- Are domestic flights included?
- Is the departure city you requested available?
- What airline and what connecting cities will you be traveling through?
- What time of the day or night do you leave and return?
- · How are payments received?
- Is travel or health insurance included?
- Are all meals included? If not, which meals are included?
- Are all site entrance fees included?
- Are tips for servers, guides, and bus driver included?
- What are the type (and names) of the hotels where you will be staying?
- What type of transportation within Israel is included?
- What type of guide is included? What is their focus? Do they have any special training?
- What amenities are included in your trip (matching tee shirts, backpacks, hats, etc.)?

At TBCTL-USA we will review each of these important items with you to make sure everything is covered before we finalize your proposal.

\*The itinerary is probably the most important. After all, this is why you are going to Israel. To learn, experience, see, smell, and touch the sites that are important to you. Although experience tells us that nothing in Israel is firm when it comes to predicting weather, road conditions or delegates that get pushed to the front of the line. Flexibility is fundamental!

Don't hesitate to ask questions and get all verbal information in writing.

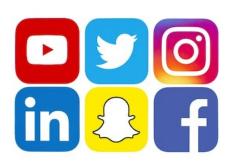




A good Tour Operator and guide will either make your trip memorable or make your memories less than pleasant.

Once your itinerary and prices are set, the fun begins! Meet with your Trip Leadership Team to determine the next steps and set a time line.

#### What happens now? Promotion!



We attend a lot of pastor's conferences each year and the one thing we hear over and over again is "My dream is to visit Israel! It's on my bucket list." To which we reply, "We can make your dream come true!" The promotion for your trip begins when you select your Trip Leadership Team. Sharing your dream <u>IS</u> promoting! It's that easy.

Once you have secured your team and have them equally excited about your trip, it is imperative that you put a promotional plan in place.

- How will they get the word out about your trip?
- What types of social media are available for your group or church?
- How often will you contact your group with information about the trip?
- What other ways can you promote it?

Setting a timeline is critical. Start with your travel date and then establish the dates for registration and payments. Your Tour Operator will help you identify these dates.

Once the timeline is set, consider how you will make the initial announcement and what types of media to use (email to church/group; commercial (video); social media posts; US mail; church bulletin; local newspaper; local neighborhood sites; flyers, etc.). There are plenty of ways to get the word out. Once the initial announcement has been made, schedule a Q&A meeting to answer questions anyone might have for you.

It is a good idea to set up an information table in a common area. Provide some type of communication to your core audience **AT LEAST** every 14 days. Choose what media to use. Place your brochure on your web site and leave it there until you travel.



Your promotional plan will determine the success of your trip. Announcing it from the pulpit or putting it in the bulletin will not be enough to fill your trip. It takes a continual effort on the part of your entire Trip Leadership Team.

At TBCTL-USA we help you with marketing materials including an interest gathering flyer, customized brochure, customized video commercial, power point slide show, and many 3-5 minute videos that you can easily access.

#### **Register them NOW!**

No one likes to feel as if they have been left out of the loop. When planning your trip, there are three things recommended by the Israel Ministry of Tourism: **Reach Out, Register and Retain.** The *Reaching Out* comes with the initial announcement by the leader and the promotions from the Trip Leadership Team. *Registering* your travelers is important and the sooner you get them signed up the better. Once they have made that initial down payment, they have shown a commitment to the goal. They will also become one of your best promotional tools, as excited people tell others.

A good registration form is necessary and must include critical personal and travel information. Your Tour Operator can help you with this.

Your team will also need to determine how to collect the money. Will you accept credit cards? Will someone be identified to collect all the money and send it in at once? Will each traveler pay on their own? What will be the due dates for payments? Regardless of what you decide, your registrar will need to keep comprehensive information



on behalf of your travelers, and should be aware of the cancellation fees and or deposit refund requirements for your Tour Operator.

Some Tour Operators provide a way for your travelers to pay on line; others do not. This should be in your list of considerations when choosing a Tour Operator with whom to partner.

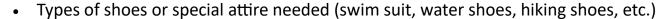
At TBCTL-USA we provide a secure access and web site to make payments. We want each traveler to be able to pay in a way that makes them comfortable: check, credit card or the Zelle bank transfer system.

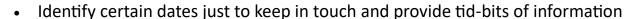


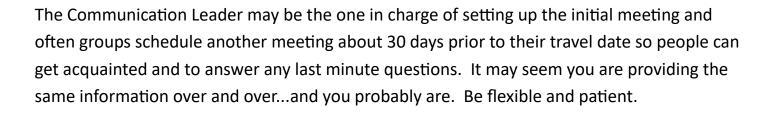
#### **Don't forget to Communicate!**

Your Communication Leader has a critical role. They should be contacting each person who registers and welcoming them into the group, as well as keeping them informed of anything pertaining to the trip. Setting up a mailing list is a great way to keep in touch and to ensure that no one is left out. Other things to share include (but are not limited to):

- Itinerary changes
- Flight and airport information
- Hotel reservations
- Weather conditions
- Suggested packing list
- Specific sites and dress codes







At TBCTL-USA we can be your contact person, field calls, answer questions and keep in touch with your group. We will do as little, or as much, as you deem necessary. What we cannot do is to promote the trip, fill the seats or get your travelers excited. We can, and will, assist you in doing those things by providing the right tools, guidance and information.





Making this the Trip of a Lifetime for your church or group is the reason you are committed to hosting a trip. Most pastors/leaders have little or no extra time. Don't let the day-to-day details diminish your enthusiasm. Let us help you get the job done. Call us today!

The Bible Comes to Life

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We know you have many options when planning your trip to Israel.

## Why work with us?

The CEO of The Bible Comes to Life, Omer Eshel, is a native Israeli and was the Consul for the Government of Israel, Ministry of Tourism. When the Dead Sea Scrolls traveled the USA, he lived in Chicago for three years and gave many lectures about them (having been the Educational Director at Qumran where they were discovered). He maintains his passion to bring many more people to visit this incredible land of the Bible, Israel.

Our tour guides receive extra training by The Bible Comes to Life in Biblical knowledge. They provide scriptures to show reasons why each site is important. *Our trips are not just a vacation, but an education.* 

Patricia Stirnkorb and Jackie Lee are involved in various Christian ministries including teaching, speaking, and leadership positions. We will be your USA contacts.

Each of us has the desire to help your church visit Israel and experience the blessings of God's Holy Land. We truly believe that this is not a job for us, but a ministry that is centered around our own love of Israel. We want to provide the opportunity for as many people as possible to experience what visiting the Holy Land can do for their spiritual life and that of their church.

Only in Israel, where



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