

# **Trip Orientation Info Part 2**

## **Preparing Yourself to See the Holy Sites in Israel**

### **The Need to Understand What You're Going to See**

It would be wonderful if the Holy Land was exactly the same as it was 2,000 years ago when Christ walked its paths, or 4,000 years ago when Abraham traversed its hillsides and valleys. However, 4,000 years is a long time, and there have been many changes that have taken place during this time span. It's hard for us to understand, but 4,000 or even 2,000 years is a long time! Because of its strategic location in the world, no other country has had as many kingdoms occupy it, or as many battles fought on its soil as Israel. This, along with time, has led to much change to Israel and its holy sites.

The good news is that many of the biblical sites are in their natural state and appear much the same as they did when the events that happened there occurred. Other sites have had monuments, churches, or basilicas built near, or on them and are not exactly as they appeared as when the events that occurred there happened. Also, many sites have had many events happen in one spot over thousands of years so it would be impossible to have each event preserved just the way it happened.

### **Understanding What Some of The Holy Sites Will Be Like**

Many of these monuments, churches, or basilicas will have a Catholic, Arabic, or Mid-Eastern style look to them. They're very different from what we're accustomed to seeing and at first glance, you might find this unattractive. You also might not agree with the religious backgrounds of some of these sites and feel somewhat uncomfortable as well. In addition, you most likely will find other people visiting the Holy Land from other countries who are actually worshipping and kissing some of the adornments on these sites. On a previous trip to Israel, some in our group found all this a little repulsive and chose not to enter some of these holy sites. Because of these possible negative reactions, we would like to provide you with a little background and history about how these holy sites have been preserved so your sightseeing experience can be the best as possible during your time in the Holy Land.

### **A Little History**

Even before the time of Christ, and afterward, many of the holy sites were marked out and preserved. Then, about 300 years after the time of Christ, the Roman Empire (world power at that time) embraced Christianity. At that time, the mother of Emperor Constantine (Helena) was one of the first of the royal family to convert to Christianity. Later the Emperor, Constantine, did as well. Helena came to the Holy Land and wanted to preserve some of the holy sites, so she had churches, monuments, and basilicas built over some of the key holy places, i.e., Church of the Holy Sepulture, Church of the Nativity, Basilica in the

Garden of Gethsemane, and others. Helena, along with others throughout history, felt such emotion and awe at these holy sites that they wanted to honor and preserve them for future generations. The Early Church during this period was the first to be in charge of these sites, and then because the Early Church slowly evolved into what we know as the Catholic Church, many of these holy sites then came under the care of the Catholic Church. The monuments, churches, and basilicas were not always Catholic in nature so we shouldn't assume that they shared the same religious views at their inception.

There were others as well that came to the Holy Land to build churches, monuments, and basilicas on these holy sites (Armenians, Russians, Greeks, etc.). Their hearts felt the same awe and emotion as others who came, and so they too built on or by these holy sites to honor and preserve them.

Most of these holy sites are very old (anywhere from 2,000 to 100 years old). These churches have a Mid-Eastern style and are adorned with an Arabic, Mid-Eastern look.

### **Gratefulness to Those Who Preserved the Holy Sites**

If it hadn't been for those who preserved the biblical sites, they would have been lost or had other buildings, roads, and infrastructure built over them. They would have been lost to the world forever. These early pilgrims felt the same awe and emotion you will feel. We certainly can't fault them for this.

Because of all the adornments and construction over the centuries, it is hard to imagine how some of these sites would have looked like in their original setting. However, the years of activity and tradition at these holy sites give greater weight to their authenticity. And while we might not agree with the decorations and atmosphere of these places, we should appreciate and admire all the devotion and sacrifice that has been made to preserve them.

### **Some Might Find These Churches, Monuments, and Basilicas Repulsive**

Part of the reason some might find the places they see in Israel as repulsive will have to do with a difference in religious faith. Another reason is due to a misunderstanding of style. These holy sites have a very different style than what we're accustomed to in modern churches. Most of the old churches we see are just a few hundred years old and have somewhat the same architecture and style from our modern era.

### **Closing Thoughts**

1. Entering these churches, monuments, and basilicas to see these holy sites doesn't mean we're in any way embracing and accepting their religious beliefs.
2. While the style, religious background, and adornments might not be to our taste, the motives of those who preserved these sites seem to be noble and honorable. As you see these sites, you will understand why these early pilgrims wanted to preserve them.

3. It's important to note that we, from a modern mindset, have a different view and taste regarding building styles. Because to us something 200-400 years old seems really ancient, we need to realize that seeing something 1,500 years old has an entirely different architectural look and sense to it than what we're accustomed to seeing.

Hopefully, this info will help you. As mentioned, on a previous trip to Israel, some didn't really understand these things beforehand, and it took them a bit to get themselves wrapped around some of these concepts. It was kind of a self-discovery process. For this reason, this orientation and background is provided so you can get the most out of your Holy Land Experience Trip and not get bogged down in this area.