

Safety

One of the most frequently asked questions about this pilgrimage to the Holy Land is: *Is it Safe?*

Considering the news coverage of the problems between Israelis and the Palestinians over the last few years, it is a very legitimate question. Let me try to explain the situation and encourage you that this will be a very safe trip.

First, just like everything else, the news media thrives on sensationalism. They always splash the bad news on the front page but don't tell the good that is happening. When one sees the news they think Israel is a ball of fire and every street corner has buses being blown up. The reality is very different from what you see on the news.

Second, we have been to Israel about 20 times over the last years and we have always had a delightful and safe time. We have never been close to any problems, nor have we ever been close to danger. When we take folks with us they always comment, "we though we would see war and bombs, but his country is beautiful and I never experienced any danger. It is like being in the USA."

Third, there are places in Israel that we will not visit. Just like we would not visit certain areas of downtown Detroit, New York City, or Washington DC at night, there are areas of Israel which we will avoid. I know the news media sensationalizes the few terrorist incidents in Israel. It is a good-sized country and the problems are very few compared to its size.

But in reality, more people died in New York in one day on 9/11 than have died in Israel in 10 years. Detroit and Washington DC are the murder capitals of the world, yet, most people never think twice about visiting there. We will not take public transportation or visit "hot spots". We will not visit Palestinian areas known for conflict. We know where to go and what to avoid. You will always be in the safe and secure areas.

Fourth, with the death of Arafat and the election of a new government, things are improving even in the Palestinian areas. Fighting in these localized areas has decreased drastically and I am optimistic that even the problems in small geographical areas will be ended or greatly reduced.

Fifth, we are pilgrims and therefore the customers. Both Israelis and Palestinians love us! They are happy we are visiting and they will treat you with great love and respect. They do not want to fight or harm the customer. You will be delighted with their warm welcome and respectful friendship.

Sixth, our guide is Zvi Harpaz. He was a air force helicopter pilot and is still in the military as a reservist. He is always alert and knows Israel like you know your own back yard. He is extremely cautious and will always keep safety as priority number one. We have become good friends and traveled the length and breadth of Israel with him and I

have 100% confidence in him and his ability to provide a marvelous and safe pilgrimage. Our bus driver is also a local citizen, fully experienced in safe touring.

Seventh, it is never the tourist that is attacked. Pilgrimages have increased over the last year. Whereas tourism was way down two years ago, it has greatly increased. The Holy Sites are again filling up with pilgrims. Pilgrimages have never been the target of any attack – they are loved by Jews and Arabs alike.

Eighth, because of the incredible Israeli security, the planes going in and out of Israel and the new airport are some of the safest in the world. There has not been an incident at their airport or planes for many years.

Finally, my wife and I have been to Israel about 20 times in the last 10 years and we have taken our kids on many of those trips. We have NEVER experienced any problems. When you come back home from this pilgrimage you will be very proud of yourself for going and will tell your family and friends that it was perfectly safe and wonderful – and that they should go on our next pilgrimage.

Hope you will join us and trust God for a marvelous experience walking in the footprints of Mary and Jesus.

Steve Ray