

## Quick Facts About Israel

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**Flag:** The colors blue and white were chosen according to the colors of the 'Tallit' – the Jewish prayer shawl. The Star of David appearing in the center of the flag has been a Jewish symbol for hundreds of years.



**State Emblem:** The official emblem of the State of Israel is the Menorah – a candelabrum, whose shape is derived from the sage plant (Moria). In certain species of the plant, the leaves branch out in a way that resembles the candelabrum that stood in the Holy Temple in ancient Jerusalem. The Menora appearing in the state emblem is similar to the one carved on the Arch of Titus in Rome. It is flanked by two olive branches that symbolize Israel's longing for peace.

**Official languages:** Hebrew, Arabic.

**Currency:** The Israeli currency is the New Israeli Shekel (NIS), which is divided into 100 agorot (as of January 1986). (In March 2010: \$1= approx. 3.73 Shekels)

**Capital:** Jerusalem. Israel proclaimed Jerusalem as its capital in 1950. The United States, like nearly all other countries, maintains its embassy in Tel Aviv.

**Declaration of Independence:** 14 May 1948

**Governing system:** Democratic – unicameral parliamentary.

**Constitution:** None; however, the Declaration of Establishment (1948), the Basic Laws of the parliament (the Knesset), and the Israeli citizenship law fill many of the functions of a constitution.

**Governing Branches:** Executive, Legislative, and Judicial.

**Executive Branch:** includes the President, Prime Minister and government ministries.

**President:** The first President: Dr. Chaim Weizmann, was sworn into office on 16 February 1949. The President is the titular head of state and is elected by the Knesset every seven years, and his main duties are largely symbolic. The current president, **President Shimon Peres**, was sworn into office on June 13, 2007.

**The Prime Minister:** The first Prime Minister was David Ben-Gurion. The first government was established on 8 March 1949. The current Prime Minister, **Benjamin Netanyahu**, has been in office since March 31, 2009.

**Legislative branch** is the **Knesset**. The Knesset is the parliament of the State of Israel. It is located in Jerusalem, and has 120 members. The present Knesset is the 18th, and the elections for this Knesset were held on February 10, 2009. The Knesset has parliamentary sovereignty, and enacts legislation on every issue.

**The Judiciary** includes the system of courts: the Supreme Court, the District Court, Magistrates Court, Court for Local Affairs, Religious Court, Traffic Court, Labor Court, Juvenile Court, etc.

**Local authorities:** Municipalities, local councils, and regional councils. These authorities have governmental and administrative powers in their areas of jurisdiction, and are responsible for provision of services to their constituencies. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF): The Israeli army is comprised of conscription, reserve and career service. All eligible men and women are drafted at age 18, three years for men and two years for women. Men are liable for reserve duty until age 51 and women until age 24. Individuals accepted at institutions of higher education in disciplines needed by the IDF (medicine, nursing, teaching, engineering, etc.) may defer induction and serve in the IDF in their profession for 3-5 years after graduation. With a small standing army, the IDF is built principally on its reserves, which are regularly called up for training and service.

**Geography:** The State of Israel is located on the southwest tip of the Asian continent, on the eastern basin of the Mediterranean Sea. The State of Israel lies at a latitude between 29° and the 33° north of the Equator.

**Area of the country:** 13,714.905 miles. (as of 1967 including East Jerusalem and as of 1982 including the Golan Heights).

Land area: 13,448.3 sq miles.

Area of lakes: 266.5 sq miles (Sea of Galilee – 101.9 sq miles, the Dead Sea-164.6 sq. miles)

Land border: Total length of border: 532.5 miles.

Coastline: Length of Mediterranean Sea Coast 120.5 miles.

Length of Red Sea Coast about 7.456 miles.

### **Population Figures (2008)**

In May 2008, Israel's 60th Anniversary, according to the Central Bureau of Statistics, the population of Israel numbered about 7.4 million inhabitants.

The population of Israel is comprised of:

Over 5.4 million Jews (75.5 %)

Over 1.4 million Arabs (20.1%)

Over 300,000 are immigrants and their offspring who are not registered as Jews by the Interior Ministry (4.3%).

Annual population growth 1.8%

Urban population 91.8%

Percent of population aged 0-18: 34.9

Percent of population aged 19-64: 55.3

### **Religious Life**

The three most practiced faiths in Israel are Judaism, Islam and Christianity.

Israel contains holy sites to practitioners of each of these religions.

Indeed, places such as the River Jordan and the City of Nazareth are holy to Christians

and Jews and Muslims share a reverence for the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron. The City of Jerusalem, houses holy sites for each of these religions: the Dome of the Rock and Al-Aqsa Mosque for Muslims, the Western Wall (the remnant of the Second Temple) for Jews and, for Christians ,the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.