

TEL GEZER EXCAVATION PROJECT

STUDENT HANDBOOK



INTRODUCTION

This handbook is designed to provide the Tel Gezer participant general information on camp life, life on the excavation, and living and traveling in Israel. The first part covers Camp Life—what to bring with you, what to expect on the site and camp. The second part contains information about travel in Israel—basic information about currency, phones, internet, etc. The last section provides basic information about Israel: its land, people, and culture.

CAMP LIFE

ACCOMMODATIONS

The excavation project will be housed at Neve Shalom. The Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam (Oasis of Peace) Guest House is part of a unique community in which Jews and Arabs have chosen to live side-by-side. The students and staff will stay in the various suites on the hotel grounds. These suites will be within a short walking distance of the excavation dig house where all the lectures and processing of finds will take place. Neve Shalom is located close to everything in central Israel, 20 minutes from Tel Aviv, 20 minutes from Ben Gurion Airport, 30 minutes from Jerusalem. All guestrooms have air conditioning, telephone, television, and refrigerator. The dig house and hotel lobby have wireless availability for all guests.

Visit their website for more information: <http://www.nswas.com/hotel/>
Contacts: Tel: 972-2-9993030 Fax: 972-2-9917412 hotel@nswas.org

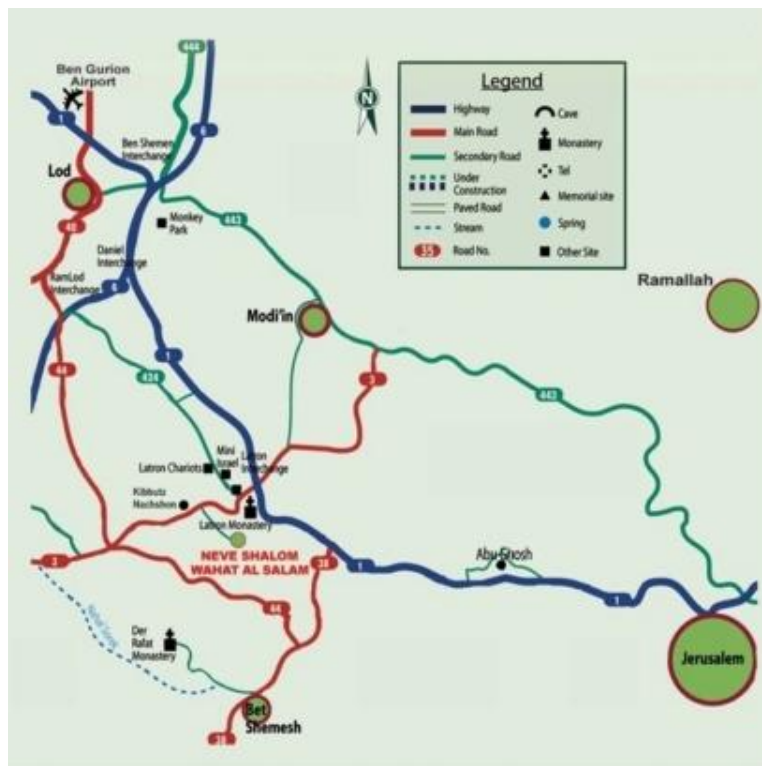
Location: Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam is conveniently located close to the midway point of the Tel Aviv/Jaffa - Jerusalem highway. These two cities are each a half hour away. The West Bank

city of Ramallah is also half an hour away, to the north, while the Ben Gurion International Airport is even closer - just a 20 minute journey.

The Hotel is situated at the entrance to Neve Shalom/ Wahat al-Salam. The village enjoys a scenic location on a 1,000 ft. (314 m.) hilltop overlooking the Aijalon Valley and the Coastal Plain. The village is surrounded by olive groves, pine forests and fields. Within walking distance are the Trappist Monastery of Latrun and the Yitzhak Rabin National Park. Excursions can be made to local vineyards, the Sorek stalactite caves, the rich archaeological site at Beth Guvrin, the Hubert Humphrey National Park and more.

TRANSPORTATION TO CAMP

If you are on the group flight there will be a bus that takes everyone from the airport to the hotel. If you made your own travel arrangements you will need to get to the hotel by yourself. Once outside the airport arrival area, you will see to your right several taxis. A sherut (shared taxi) is the best option. This is similar to airport transportation in the United States where they will group passengers going to and from the airport according to their neighborhoods. Most will be familiar with the hotel/community. You can tell them that it is near the Latrun Junction (Tank Museum) off Highway 1 going toward Jerusalem.



The Community of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam: Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam was founded in 1970 on land leased (and later given) to it by the adjacent Monastery of Latrun. It was founded by the Dominican brother Bruno Hussar (1911 - 1996), with the intention of creating a place where the people of this land would live together despite national and religious differences, and who would conduct educational work for peace. In 1977 the first family came to live in this community. By 2006, about 52 families are settled in the village. The members of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam are demonstrating the possibility of coexistence between Jews and Palestinians by developing a community based on mutual acceptance, respect and cooperation.

The village is democratically governed and owned by its members, the community is not affiliated with any political party or movement. NSWAS is managed by an annually elected steering committee ("secretariat") chaired by a "secretary general" - a paid position equivalent to mayor. Matters of policy, acceptance of new members, annual budget, etc, are made in assemblies of all the members.

Suites

Volunteers sleep in air-conditioned suites, four to a suite. Each suite is self-contained with its own bathroom, television, telephone, separate entrance, and private balcony. Clean linens and towels will be provided twice a week, or upon request. The rooms have a small refrigerator as well as a hot pot with supplies for coffee and tea. The suites are built along the hilltop in four rows following the contour. The rooms overlook the valley floor below.



Inside of a Suite



Individual Rooms from outside

Meals

Two breakfasts will be provided on the Tel and at base camp. The first breakfast is a light breakfast of bread and jelly. The main breakfast is on the dining tent on the tel and consists of meat, cheese, yogurt, cereal, fruit, etc. Lunch and Dinner are prepared by the hotel and consist of hot meals with 1-2 entrees and 2-3 sides as well as a table with a variety of salads.

On weekends, a hot breakfast is served in the dining room on those four days where we start from Neve Shalom. Lunch and Breakfast will be available in the dig house for those who stay in camp.



Grocery Store

One the trip from the dig back to the hotel, we pass near a small grocery store. Once a week (usually Wednesday) the bus stops on the way back before lunch for about 15-20 minutes. You can purchase soda, bottled water, snacks, toiletries, etc. The grocery store only takes Israel currency but you can use a credit card.

Dig House

The dig house is a bomb shelter that has been converted to a meeting room. It is air-conditioned. There are tables for staff, computer database, and conservation. This is also where all lectures are held. The dig house is open to all participants. It is the epicenter of the excavations as staff is working and students are assisting in the paperwork and the processing of finds. We are a teaching dig and expect students to come and go freely. It also has wireless internet so students

also use this as a place to check email, etc. We have a small excavation library. The dig house is open at first breakfast and shuts down when the Project Administrator goes to bed (after 10:00 PM).

Pottery Washing Area

The pottery washing area is located near the upper parking lot. It is a gravel area used as an overflow parking lot on weekends. During the excavation season, the project erects a large shaded tent where daily pottery washing and processing occurs in the afternoons.

Hotel Lobby

The hotel lobby opens at 8:00 am (after we are at the tel) and closes at 10:00 PM. Students usually hang out in the air-conditioned lobby or the balcony where there is wireless internet. The lobby also sells drinks (hot and cold) and ice cream.

Hotel Grounds

There are several grassy areas, one just outside the dining room (near the lower parking lot) and the other just outside the Dig House. These are also areas to congregate, watch the sunset, play frisbee, etc

CAMP LIFE

While each group takes on a personality of their own, there are basic social developments. There is plenty of free time. After lunch there is a “siesta” time where students and staff either 1) nap, 2) go swimming, 3) hang out in the dig house or hotel lobby: socializing, email, etc., 4) whatever else (go on a hike). At 4:00 the schedule resumes with pottery washing and then a lecture. After the lecture is dinner and free time. The hotel lobby stays open late (10:00 pm) to accommodate the excavation project. In the lobby is wireless internet, ice cream, hot and cold drinks.

Social Life and Personal Relationships

An excavation project is a unique social opportunity. In some ways it is similar to summer camps we attended as kids. The five week project is very intense. On the weekends there will be touring and travel. In other words, we keep you moving. The hotel grounds will become your home for the summer and you will constantly be engaging with the same 60+ individuals that will form our unique community of Tel Gezer.

Camp Behavior

Drug and alcohol abuse will not be tolerated. Participants will be sent home.

Dress

Most of Israel is a modern society and dress suitable for the west is appropriate. It is the Middle East and several communities dress conservatively. It is best to always dress modestly, with skirts and long pants. At camp, on the dig site, and usually most tourist sites (where you are not going to a religious/holy site), a participant can wear shorts. *See also Social conventions in Facts about Israel (below).* *Suggestion:* on the touring weekends some students take sweats/loose pants and skirts (females) to pull over shorts on the bus when they are going to a site where they need to be modest, as well as loose shirts and/or shawls to cover shoulders and upper arms.

Laundry

The hotel provides laundry service at a very reasonable price (it is not your typical US hotel price). Once a week, each room puts their laundry in one bag (the room number is placed somewhere on the clothing item by the laundry service) out in a pile by the dig house. These are collected by the camp manager. The laundry usually comes back clean and folded in a day or two. You are charged by weight. A typical cost is \$3.00. Most rooms average \$10-20.00 dollars. Each room is responsible to figure out how to divide the cost between the roommates. There are

also buckets available to wash in your room. Laundry detergent is available at stores. Most use the railings and patio furniture on their room balcony's for drying.

Swimming Pool

The half-Olympic size swimming pool is situated under shade trees on the brow of the hill, is open each summer for everyone to enjoy. It is located across the outer parking lot from the hotel lobby. Guests of the hotel are charged a nominal fee for the use of the swimming pool. All Gezer participants are allowed to use the swimming pool for no charge during its normal operating hours, during the week and on the weekends.

Worship Services

There are no churches, synagogues, or mosques nearby. There are a couple of free weekends that allow participants to go up to Jerusalem and attend a service on either Saturday or Sunday. Normally, students organize a non-denominational Christian vesper/devotion service held on Sunday night. The hotel usually accommodates the group with a room or they use one of the outdoor lawn areas. Those students whose religious practice involves prayers at a set time during the day (e.g. sunrise, midday, etc.) are accommodated during the daily work schedule.

Study Tours

For those who are participating on the weekend study tours (almost everyone), everything will be covered in your initial fee (e.g. hotel, buses, entrance fees, tips, guide, 2 meals [breakfast and dinner; you are on your own for lunch], etc.). For two of the weekends (Galilee and the Wilderness/Negev) you will need to bring an overnight bag. The other study days/free days in Jerusalem, you will have breakfast and dinner at Neve Shalom.

TENTATIVE DAILY WORK SCHEDULE

4:30	Wake-up, first breakfast (4:45)
5:00	Bus leaves for Tel (upper parking lot)
5:30-8:30	Excavations
8:30-9:00	2 nd Breakfast
9:00-11:15	Excavations
11:15-11:30	Fruit Break
11:30-12:30	Final Excavations, clean-up
12:45	Bus leaves for camp
1:00	Lunch (Neve Shalom Dining Hall)
1:30-4:00	Free Time
4:00-5:30	Pottery Washing (Monday-Thursday)
5:30	Lecture (Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday)
6:30	Dinner (Neve Shalom Dining Hall)
7:00	Free Time
9:00	Quiet Time:

Please respect your suite mates. Quiet time in the rooms and on patios, there are plenty of areas to socialize (e.g. dig house, outside of dig house, lobby, etc.) so as not to disturb those who are sleeping.

Gift Shop

"The Gallery" Gift shop and café, by the main parking area at the village entrance, offers refreshments, gifts, souvenirs, handicrafts from the locality, the Middle East and Asia, as well as food stuffs such as olives and olive oil.

Opening Hours: *Open:* Monday – Saturday From 10:30 till sunset (or at other times by special request). *Closed:* Sunday, Monday.

Free wi-fi internet access is available for Gallery customers bringing laptop computers.

Café Menu (prices in N.I.S.)

Food

Humus (chickpea paste) - plate 12
 Toast with labaneh (yogurt cheese) and wild thyme 10
 Fteerah - pastry with herbs 8
 Kubbeh – meat fritters 8
 Sfeeha - filo pastry with meat 8
 Lentil Soup 12
 Baklava (filo pastry with nuts and syrup), cookies 3

Beverages

Herb tea 8
 Black tea 6
 Arabic coffee 6
 Black coffee 6
 Instant coffee 8
 Cappuccino 10
 Chicory (natural coffee substitute) 12
 Mineral water 6/8
 Soft drinks 5/8
 Canned fruit juice 4
 Beer 10/12

WHAT TO BRING

Clothing

It will be very hot and sunny during the excavation season and the nights can get cool in the early morning hours. One should have clothing appropriate for hot weather, and a light sweater or jacket. Please plan your clothing accordingly. Loose fitting, light cotton clothing is the best. Dig clothes will get very dirty. Most excavators tend to have three sets of clothes: 1) those they dig in, 2) camp clothes, 3) weekend clothes. Everyone is required to have closed shoes (light boots or athletic shoes) and a hat for excavating. Sandals, flip-flops, open toed shoes are great for camp. Depending on the touring schedule—it is best to also have good walking shoes for touring.

Field Supplies

All tools and equipment are provided. Participants should bring their own trowel, pastiche (hand-pick), knee pads, and gloves.

NOTE: towels, sheets, pillowcases and blankets are provided by the kibbutz, you may want to bring a washcloth (face) as these are not supplied.

Clothing

Hat with brim
 Short sleeved and long sleeved cotton shirts
 Cotton shorts
 Cotton pants (slacks)
 Underwear
 Socks
 Sweater/sweatshirt
 Lightweight jacket
 Pajamas/sleep wear
 Bathing suit
 Work shoes
 Extra shoelaces
 Sandals
 Touring shoes (tennis shoes, etc.)

Toiletries

Toiletries bag
 Soap
 Shampoo
 Sunscreen
 Toothpaste and toothbrush
 Deodorant
 Athlete's foot powder
 Anti-chafing cream
 Nail clipper
 Insect repellent (mosquitoes)
 Medications
 Personal supplies

Equipment

Canteen/water bottle for personal use

Work gloves

Marshalltown trowel
 Hand Pick
 Duffle bag/suitcase
 Small bag/backpack for carrying daily equipment and weekend travel
 Bag for laundry/Laundry
 Detergent
 Pocket knife
 Camera and film
 Knee pads

Educational Supplies

Writing supplies
 Textbooks: Bible, notebook

ON THE SITE (TEL GEZER)

Tel Gezer is about 15-20 minute drive from the hotel. All participants are required to be prepared to leave to the site with all their supplies for the day. Most participants use a small day bag or backpack to carry their water, sunscreen, camera, tools, etc. The water from the hotel is safe to drink. There is a water fountain with filtered cold water that is by the dig house so volunteers can fill up the night before.

At the excavation site (the tel), you will be required to wear a hat (brood brimmed is nice but many wear mesh baseball hats), sunscreen, and closed shoes (light boots or tennis/running shoes). Bikini tops and tube tops are not allowed. Participants can wear shorts and have exposed arms and shoulders (e.g. tank tops, etc.)—but they should also bring a shirt for cover up to protect skin from the sun.

The site is a national monument and park. Therefore we make every attempt to limit traffic to the site. We only walk in approved paths up to the excavation area. There is no smoking on the tel. At the base of the tel is our dining tent, storage container, water, and restrooms (port a potties).

The site is surrounded by agricultural fields. These fields are privately owned by various owners. The bus will drive down one of these agricultural dirt roads and drop students about 100 yards from the dining tent. Students walk the rest of the way.



On the first day of excavations you will be assigned a Field (A or B). This will be your team for the season (naturally we move people around depending on the work). Within your field you will be assigned a square supervisor. You will form small teams of 4-5 individuals (including your square supervisor). Each team will collect their tools and supplies and walk them up the hill. After the first day-several tools are locked up on the site in the excavation area.

A typical day includes getting equipment and supplies and walking up the tel. Everyone helps put up the shade cloths that are taken down every afternoon (it gets windy). Square supervisors start to assign the daily tasks for the day. It is a cool morning. At breakfast we walk down to the dining tent. We resume excavations after breakfast and have a fruit break up in the excavation area. At the close of excavations we all help each other take equipment down as well as material culture (pottery and other finds) to take back to the dig house. The first week the hill (tel) will look like a mountain as you take several stops to catch your breath. By mid season we will all be amazed that we no longer have to stop as much and can walk up in a single stretch.

We have several cell phones and we always have a couple staff vehicles parked by the dining tent for any emergencies. While most volunteers are conscientious and have a strong work ethic as well as team spirit—there will be days when you might have to stay off the tel or come back early. We have plenty of work to do down in camp so we encourage volunteers not to push themselves. It is best to spend one day out of the sun or getting re-hydrated than to lose a week staying in the hospital or in bed. The dig house has restrooms and for those days where a volunteer or staff needs to be near a toilet, they can still be a team player and help work in camp.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

PASSPORT INFORMATION

Passport:

A passport and return ticket are required to enter Israel. No Visa is required for the following countries (Britain, Australian, Canadian, USA, and Other EU). Your passport must be valid for a minimum of six months from date of entry required by all nationals listed above. **Note:** Nationals not referred to above are advised to contact the embassy to check visa requirements. Nationals are also advised to contact the embassy to check visa requirements if staying for longer than three months or if traveling for business purposes.

Passport Stamp

Tourists continuing to Arab countries excluding Egypt and Jordan are recommended to request that an Israeli stamp does not appear in their passport. As of July 2008, foreign passports no longer require entry stamps. Instead, tourists should fill out form 17L, which shall be stamped by passport control upon entry/exit. The form 17L will not be collected upon exit as it is necessary for the collection of tax refunds and proof of legal entry.

Currency

New Shekel (NIS; symbol ₪) = 100 agorot (singular, agora). Notes are in denominations of ₪200, 100, 50, and 20. Coins are in denominations of ₪100, 50, 10, 5 and 1, and 50 and 10 agorot.

Currency Exchange: Foreign currency can only be exchanged at authorized banks, hotels and change shops. Change shops found in most cities charge no commission and equal the bank exchange rates. It is advisable to leave Israel with the minimum of Israeli currency. Payment in foreign currency exempts [tourists](#) from VAT on certain purchases and services, and is sometimes preferred by shop keepers.

Exchange Rate: Exchange rates fluctuate, but a general rule is \$1.00 = 4 NIS.

Cash

Cash is safe to carry in reasonable quantities, provided you keep it in a safe place (inside pocket, money belt or waist bag, etc.). As a precaution you should only carry the amount of cash you would need for that week. Cash is almost always easier to exchange than any other medium, and has the benefit of being changeable in most circumstances.

Dollar to shekel rates fluctuate so it is best to change money on a weekly basis.

Credit/Debit Cards and ATMs

All major credit cards are accepted. ATMs are widely available. In Israel, most ATM machines will accept foreign ATM cards. You just have to find the right bank for your card by trial and error. (For example, my ATM card will work in 2 of the major Israeli banks' ATM machines but not in 1 of them.). You need to check with your home bank to see if they charge you a fee. Some Americans get charged \$5/transaction. Others don't get charged at all. It depends on your bank and on what type of bank account you have.

It is wise to call your bank and credit cards before you go to Israel. Otherwise, your bank may shut off your ATM or credit card because they'll think the charges are fraudulent.

Plus, this is a good time to ask what your bank will charge you for foreign ATM transactions. One student told us that her bank told her to take out money in bulk, i.e. to take out enough cash for 2 weeks. Then, she's only getting charged once for that money.

We recommend using an ATM card as you get the best exchange rate. We use a shopkeeper in the old city who will accept personal checks. Neve Shalom does not have a bank, but the hotel will accept all currencies (give change in shekels). Gezer participants will have opportunity to transact currency exchange and get money from an ATM on the weekends and every Wednesday when the bus will stop at a small grocery store with an ATM after the daily excavation and before lunch.

Traveler's Checks

These are widely accepted. To avoid additional exchange rate charges, travelers are advised to take traveler's checks in US Dollars.

Banking Hours: Sun-Fri 0830-1200 and Sun, Tues, Thurs 1600-1800.

HEALTHCARE

There are several doctors and hospitals within 5-10 minutes of the excavation site and our hotel. We normally have a nurse on site who is also a participant of the project. We have been very fortunate as a project to have had minimal health issues (e.g. allergic bee sting, dehydration, sprained ankle, etc.). Israel has excellent medical facilities and [tourists](#) may go to all emergency departments and first-aid centers. Health centers are marked by the red Star of David on a white background. The few times we have had participants visit a doctor/hospital the charges have been minimal. Most U.S. insurance will cover "vacations" as out of network. All participants are required to have health insurance. Our travel agent (Village Travel) also offers a package that includes medical insurance at a very reasonable rate (e.g. \$50-75.00 for the duration of the project).

Vaccinations

	Special Precautions	Hepatitis A	Yes
Diphtheria	Sometimes		
Malaria	No	Inoculation regulations can change at short notice. Please take medical advice in the case of doubt. Where 'Sometimes' appears in the table above, precautions may be required, depending on the season and region visited.	
Rabies	Sometimes		
Tetanus	Yes		
Typhoid	Sometimes		
Yellow Fever	No		

Dehydration

Dehydration will be your largest health concern, so it is important to drink above normal amounts of fluids at all times. It is just as important to drink water while lying around on the beach or by the pool on the weekends as it is while in the field. We recommend that each person drink about 40 cups (3-4 liters) of water per day. We recommend that you add a little extra salt on your food each day in order to compensate for the loss of salts while in the field each day. You might also consider brining re-hydration drinks (We keep these supplied in our first aid kit on the site and in the dig house, but it is best to have your own supply). On the excavation you should be well covered at all times so as to avoid both dehydrated and sunburn. Always wear a hat—required for the field but also a good idea for touring on the weekends.

Food and Drink

Mains water is safe to drink throughout Israel. Bottled water is widely available and is advised for the first few weeks of the stay. Milk is pasteurized and dairy products are safe for consumption. All local meat, fish and vegetables are considered safe to eat.

SAFETY AND THEFT

As with any foreign travel, students should be concerned with their safety and protection. Students on the project are almost always in a group setting. Recent events illustrate the tensions that are present in the region, unfortunately, media reports usually focus on the violence distorting the day to day living of most of the inhabitants. Neve Shalom and Tel Gezer are located in a safe region. Foreigners in Israel are not the prime targets for acts of terrorism. The project does not assume a 'hands off' approach to the political situation but takes every necessary precaution for the safety of the project participants.

Many are concerned with news reports regarding Israel. In spite of the political situation, Israelis and Palestinians continue to go about their lives. Tel Gezer, Neve Shalom, and the surrounding areas are not in or near the West Bank. In addition, there have not been any terrorist activities on or in the vicinity of the sites. On weekends, as the students participate on study tours, we carefully review the itineraries to insure that travel is conducted in stable and safe areas.

Both directors have over 25 years of experience working on archaeological excavations in Israel. Each summer there are several projects in the field with hundreds of students from around the world, particularly North America, and there have been no incidents involving any terrorist or security related incident either touring the country or working on the excavation. This is fortunate and a blessing, but we take the necessary precautions and take the situation seriously.

The hotel is safe. Nevertheless, we provide storage in the dig house for valuables. Most participants keep their valuables in their rooms (e.g. cell phones, laptops, etc.). We have been very fortunate that we have not experienced major theft. We have an excellent relationship with the hotel at Neve Shalom.

COMMUNICATIONS

The hotel lobby and the dig house have wireless internet. There are telephones in your room. Participants will be responsible for all telephone costs. There is a public telephone near the hotel lobby. Most students use computers to stay in touch with family and friends. Skype accounts are very common among participants as well as email. Many students have their blogs that they setup to keep in contact with their friends.

Telephones

To call Israel from the states you first need to dial the international operator (011), country code (972), city code/Jerusalem (02), phone number. For example to call the hotel you would dial: Tel: 011-972-2-9993030.

Cell Phones

Israel has two cell phone companies, Orange and Cellcom offer cell phones with prepaid minutes cards: you buy phone cards with pre-loaded amounts of talking time (called "Talkman" cards). You can pick up these "Talkman" cards at most "makolets" (little neighborhood markets).

QUICK TIP: If your American phone has the ability to use an Israeli SIM card, then all you need to do is buy a SIM card from one of the phone vendor companies. Buying SIM card is much cheaper than buying a cell phone and will cost you about \$25 (instead of around \$200 for a new phone).

Unlike in America when they charge you for calling and receiving calls on your cell phone, in Israel, all incoming calls are free. It doesn't matter which cell phone plan you choose. It also doesn't matter where the call comes from – your Mom in America or your friend from seminary in Israel – receiving all calls on your Israeli cell phone are free.

Internet/E-mail

There are many outlets for the internet throughout Israel. Just like in North America, you can find many hotels, cafes, and hotspots to access the internet and email.

Media

Israel has several English language newspapers and a couple of television stations that are English language. Your rooms have televisions and sometimes Israeli stations will show an English movie with Hebrew subtitles. Most foreigners would get their information via the internet.

There are several radio stations (30-35) in Israel, most are in Hebrew or Arabic, but there are some that are English language (mostly news). Several music stations play songs in English (e.g. classic rock, etc.).

Postal Service

Israel has excellent postal service. Every Wednesday we stop by a small market and there is a post office nearby to purchase stamps. The hotel sells postcards and they can mail letters and postcards for you.

Postage Rates (prices in Shekels)

Average price to mail a letter to the US is \$1.40.

Domestic				USA			
Card	Letter	Eco	24 Mail	Card	Letter	Eco	Prio
-----	-----	1.60	2.90	5.60	5.60	-----	-----
Europe EU				Europe (not CEPT / EU)			
Card	Letter	Eco	Prio	Card	Letter	Eco	Prio
3.80	3.80	-----	-----	3.80	3.80	-----	-----

Getting Mail from Home

Have mail sent to the following address:

Tel Gezer Archaeology Project: Name of Student
 Neve Shalom - Wahat al-Salam Hotel
 Doar Na Shimshon
 99761, Israel

ELECTRICITY

230 volts AC, 50Hz. Three-pin plugs are standard. Most current electronic equipment purchased in the states (e.g. cell phone, laptops, PDAs, etc.) are already adaptable for 110V (U.S.) and 220V. All you need to do is buy a two-prong adapter that fits over your 2-prong (or 3-prong, if it has a ground) and can fit into an Israeli plug. The hotel front desk usually offers some of these plugs free of charge, or you can purchase them (about 50 cents).

TRANSPORTATION

Israel is a small country, and it is therefore easy to get from one place to another in a relatively short time. Public transportation is convenient, and you can get to almost any destination for a reasonable price. Israel Railways operates convenient, inexpensive train service. It is also possible to travel by taxi, but this is more expensive, particularly for inter-city trips. It's therefore preferable to use shared service taxis. Several companies provide internal flights between Eilat and Ben Gurion Airport, Sde Dov Airport in north Tel Aviv, or Haifa, but these flights are more expensive. Busses are the most popular form of public transport in Israel for both local transport and intercity trips

Driving

You do not need an international driver's license to drive in Israel. Driving in Israel is on the right-hand side of the road. Israel has an extensive road system and clear signage in most places (in Hebrew, English, and Arabic). It is a little more difficult to find your way in the large cities, but streets and roads are marked, and you can use a map or ask for directions.

Car Rental

Most international car rental companies and local companies have offices in the large cities and at Ben Gurion Airport. It is recommended to reserve a car in advance from abroad. To rent a car in Israel the driver must be over 21 years of age, and have a major credit card. See individual car rental companies as policies are always changing.

Taxicabs

Local and intercity taxi service is available to and from any point in the country. Fares within the cities are charged according to the meter. The fares for intercity taxi service are standard fares that are set by the Ministry of Transportation. It is recommended to verify what the fare will be before boarding the taxi.

Taxis can be ordered by telephone from a local taxi station, or stopped by waving your hand at one on the street.

The starting fare within the city is NIS 9.10. An average ride will cost around NIS 20. There is an additional charge of NIS 3.50 for telephone orders and an additional charge of NIS 2.90 for each suitcase that is not hand luggage. Night rates are 25% more than the normal fare, and begin at 9:01 pm and end at 5:29 am. These rates also apply for Sabbath and holidays.

Drivers must operate the meter for trips within the city. Do not let the driver convince you to agree on a price ahead of time if you are not familiar with the rates!

Service Taxis

Service taxis (jitneys) travel on permanent local and intercity routes coinciding with the bus routes. The fare for these taxis is set according to distance. In most cases, it is equal to or slightly cheaper than the equivalent bus fare. Service taxis stop at permanent stops, but will also make request stops along the way. Some central taxis lines also operate on the Sabbath. Departure times are not prescheduled: the taxi leaves the station when it is full. For this reason it is wise to take into account that you might have to wait some time before the taxi fills up and departs.

Buses

The Egged bus company operates most of the intercity bus lines, as well as the local service in most of the large cities and towns. Local and intercity transport in the Gush Dan area (Tel Aviv and the surrounding suburbs) is provided by the Dan bus company. Bus service in Be'er Sheva and Nazareth is provided by private companies. The fare for all bus lines is reasonable, the busses are comfortable and usually air-conditioned, and there is regular, frequent service. Tickets can be purchased at the ticket booths in the central bus station in each city or town, or from the driver. Most of the bus lines do not run on Shabbat or on Jewish holidays. Service ends on Friday

afternoon and resumes Saturday evening. Students are entitled to discounts on intercity bus lines. To receive a discount they must present an international student card when purchasing tickets.

There is bus and taxi service to the hotel, but we are somewhat off the beaten track. Down the hill from the settlement is a gas station that is at a major junction. Most buses frequent this junction (Latrun). It is about a 20-30 minute walk up hill from this junction to the hotel. Staff will be more than willing to pick up participants from the gas station, or drive them down the hill to catch a bus or taxi.

KEY FACTS ABOUT ISRAEL

Location

Eastern Mediterranean.

Time

GMT + 2 (GMT + 3 during summer Daylight Saving Time. Daylight Saving Time in Israel starts on 1 April every year and ends on the Saturday between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.)

Area

7,849 sq mi (20,329 sq km); total area: 8,019 sq mi (20,770 sq km)

Population

7.28 million (2008) (growth rate: 1.1%); birth rate: 17.4/1000; infant mortality rate: 6.6/1000; life expectancy: 79.7; density per sq km: 319

Population Density

328.7 per sq km.

Capital

Jerusalem. **Population:** (including East Jerusalem) 732,000 (2007). The Israeli government has designated Jerusalem as the capital, although this is not recognized by the UN, and most foreign embassies are based in Tel Aviv.

Other large cities: Tel Aviv, 365,300; Haifa, 280,200

Geography

Israel is on the eastern Mediterranean, bordered by Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic to the north, the Palestine National Authority (West Bank) and Jordan to the east and Egypt to the south. Gaza, a small coastal strip between Israel and Egypt, is claimed by the Palestine National Authority, but under de facto rule by the militant group Hamas.

Although only the size of Wales or Massachusetts, Israel contains a great variety of terrain and four climate zones. The north of the country is the fertile hill region of Galilee, rising to Mount Hermon and Golan in the northeast. The fertile Plain of Sharon runs along the coast, while inland, parallel to the coast is a range of hills and uplands with relatively barren stony areas to the east. The country stretches southwards through the Negev Desert to Eilat, a resort town on the Red Sea. The Great Rift Valley begins beyond the sources of the River Jordan in the north and extends south through the Dead Sea (the lowest point in the world), into the Red Sea, continuing

on into Eastern Africa. Israel's largest freshwater lake, the Kinneret (also known the Sea of Galilee) is an important source of drinking water for the country.

Government

Republic. The state of Israel was founded in 1948.

Head of State

President Shimon Peres since 15 July 2007.

Head of Government

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Recent History

Following a tumultuous rule that included a failed military offensive in Lebanon and allegations of corruption, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert resigned his post in September 2008. Olmert also gave up his role as the head of the Kadima party and was succeeded by Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni. Elections took place on 11 February 2009 but the outcome is still undecided with both leaders of the two main parties looking for coalition partners after no clear winner merged.

Whoever emerges victorious in the elections must address urgent issues, not the least of which is the revival of the moribund Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Conflict is heaviest in and around Gaza, which Israel has blockaded since the summer of 2006. The blockade has caused food and fuel shortages in Gaza yet Hamas remains defiant and continues to launch rockets on Israeli towns lying just outside the strip. A rift between Hamas and the secular Fatah, which rules the West Bank has helped to thwart peace efforts with Israel.

Former Prime Minister Shimon Peres is now the ninth president of Israel. The 83-year-old was elected in June 2007 and will serve a seven-year term. His predecessor, Moshe Katsav, was forced to resign after admitting charges of sexual harassment and abuse of authority.

Language

Hebrew and Arabic are the official languages. Hebrew is the first language of about two-thirds of the population. Arabic is spoken by around 15%. Other languages, including English, French, German, Hungarian, Polish, Romanian, Russian, Spanish and Yiddish are widely spoken. A large proportion of the population speaks good English, a compulsory school subject.

Ethnicity/Race

Jewish 80.1% (Europe/Americas/Oceania-born 32.1%, Israel-born 20.8%, Africa-born 14.6%, Asia-born 12.6%), non-Jewish 19.9% (mostly Arab) (1996 est.)

Religion

80% Jewish, 16% Muslim, with small Christian (2%), Druze (2%) and other minorities.

Social Conventions

Israelis are usually very informal but with the European style of hospitality. Israelis are typically blunt and direct in speech, which should not be misinterpreted as rudeness. Visitors should observe normal courtesies when visiting someone's home and should not be afraid to ask questions about the country as most Israelis are happy to talk about their homeland, religion and politics. The expression *shalom* ('peace') is used for hello and goodbye. Dress is casual, but in the holy places of all religions modest attire is worn. For places such as the Western Wall, male visitors are given a smart cardboard *yarmulke* (skull cap) to respect the religious importance of the site. Businesspeople are expected to dress smartly or at least in smart casual style, although ties are often not worn, while the most expensive of restaurants and nightclubs may expect a similar standard. If formal evening wear is required this will be specified on invitations. It is considered a violation of *Shabbat* (Sabbath, on Saturday) to smoke on that day. There is usually

a sign to remind the visitor of this, and to disregard the warning would be regarded as discourteous.

Public Holidays (2009)

10 Mar Purim.

9 Apr* Pesach (Passover).

29 Apr Yom Ha'Atzmaut (Israel Independence Day).

29 May Shavuot (Pentecost).

19-20 Sep Rosh Hashanah (New Year).

28 Sep Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement).

3-9 Oct* Sukkoth (Tabernacles).

10 Oct Simchat Torah.

12-19 Dec Chanukah (Festival of Lights).

Economics

GDP/PPP (2007 est.): \$185.9 billion; per capita \$25,800. Real growth rate: 5.3%. Inflation: 0.5%. Unemployment: 7.3%. Arable land: 16%. Agriculture: citrus, vegetables, cotton; beef, poultry, dairy products. Labor force: 2.88 million; agriculture 18.5%; industry 23.7%; services 50%; other 7.8% (2002). Industries: high-technology projects (including aviation, communications, computer-aided design and manufactures, medical electronics, fiber optics), wood and paper products, potash and phosphates, food, beverages, and tobacco, caustic soda, cement, construction, metals products, chemical products, plastics, diamond cutting, textiles, footwear. Natural resources: timber, potash, copper ore, natural gas, phosphate rock, magnesium bromide, clays, sand. Exports: \$48.6 billion f.o.b. (2007 est.): machinery and equipment, software, cut diamonds, agricultural products, chemicals, textiles and apparel. Imports: \$52.8 billion f.o.b. (2007 est.): raw materials, military equipment, investment goods, rough diamonds, fuels, grain, consumer goods. Major trading partners: U.S., Belgium, Hong Kong, Germany, Switzerland, UK, China (2006).

Communications

Telephones: main lines in use: 3.006 million (2006); mobile cellular: 8.404 million (2006). Radio broadcast stations: AM 23, FM 15, shortwave 2 (1998). Television broadcast stations: 17 (plus 36 low-power repeaters) (1995). Internet hosts: 671,030 (2007). Internet users: 1.899 million (2006).

Transportation

Railways: total: 853 km (2006). Highways: total: 17,446 km; paved: 17,446 km (including 56 km of expressways); unpaved: 0 km (2004). Ports and harbors: Ashdod, Elat (Eilat), Hadera, Haifa. Airports: 53 (2007).