



Israel

cultural note

Until the founding of the state of Israel, Hebrew was primarily used for religious purposes, as Latin was used among Roman Catholics. Hebrew was not the daily language of any Jewish population. It has now been revived and serves as a unifying force among Jews.

Country Background

History

Israel (including the West Bank) was the historical homeland of the Jews in Biblical times. In 66 A.D. the Jews staged their Great Revolt against the Roman Empire, temporarily throwing off the Roman yoke. But the Roman armies returned, capturing Jerusalem and destroying the Temple in 70 A.D. The Diaspora (dispersion) of the Jews began; the Jewish people were scattered all over the ancient world. Some Jews remained in Israel, but they constituted a small minority.

In the late nineteenth century, some European Jewish thinkers decided that the Jewish people would never be safe until they had a country of their own. Led by a Viennese journalist named Theodor Herzl, the Zionist movement was born. Jews began moving back into Palestine (as the area was known), which was then part of the Ottoman Empire.

The United Kingdom promised to support the Zionists in return for Jewish support in World War I. However, in part because of the opposition of the local Arab peoples, Israel did not become a reality until after World War II. The modern state of Israel was created in 1948; the neighboring Arab states immediately declared war.

Two portions of the Occupied Territories - the Gaza Strip and the city of Jericho - are being handed over to Palestinian administration. Palestinians hope that this limited self-rule will one day evolve into an independent Palestinian state.

Type of Government

Israel is a parliamentary multiparty democracy. There is one legislative house, called the Knesset; it has 120 seats. The chief of state is the president, who is allowed to serve for no more than two five-year terms. The head of government is the prime minister, who is also the head of the Cabinet.

Most of the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories are not Israeli citizens. They have had no vote, and they were tried not in the Israeli criminal courts but in special military

courts. The planned limited self-rule will offer them a chance to elect leaders and police themselves.

Language

The official languages of Israel are Arabic and Hebrew. Other languages frequently heard in Israel are English, French, Yiddish, and Russian.

Religion

Although Israel was established as the Jewish homeland, the state of Israel has no official religion. Except for the failed Soviet experiment of the "Jewish Autonomous Oblast" near the Russian-Chinese border, Israel is the only Jewish homeland in existence.

cultural note

"What is a Jew?" is a question that is constantly debated in Israel. While Israeli law allows any Jew to immigrate to Israel, Israeli authorities must constantly decide who is Jewish and who is not. At times, persons who professed to be Christians but who were born of Jewish parents have been denied Israeli citizenship. On the other hand, many Soviets who claimed Jewish ancestry have been accepted, even though they had never worshipped as Jews. Religion classes are offered to Russian immigrants who know next to nothing about the Jewish faith.

A large segment of Israeli Jews are secularists, who rarely observe the forms of the Jewish faith.

Ethnic Jews now make up slightly more than 82 percent of the population. The rest are primarily Arabs, mostly Palestinian. The majority of Palestinians are Sunni Muslims, but there are Christian Palestinians as well. There are also small numbers of a bewildering array of ethnic and religious groups. The largest of these are the Druze (1.6 percent), an obscure Arab people who keep their religious beliefs a secret. They are known to venerate the Biblical figure Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, whose tomb is in northern Israel.

Demographics

The current population of Israel is about 4.7 million. This is rapidly increasing as Soviet Jews pour into the country. Russian Jewish immigration fluctuates according to conditions in the former U.S.S.R.; as many as one million of them are expected.

Cultural Orientation

Cognitive Styles: How Israelis Organize and Process Information

The Israelis are open to information that advances the state, but their positive pragmatism and determination will not allow the acceptance of information that is contrary to the culture's goals. Information is processed analytically and abstractively. The personal aspects of a situation are more important than obeying universal rules or laws, but these aspects may involve the principles of Judaism and the needs of the state.

Negotiation Strategies: What Israelis Accept as Evidence

Subjective feelings tend to be the basis for the truth. However, faith in the ideologies of Judaism, including the Fact that the state must succeed, problems have to be solved, and

security has to be maintained, may modify the truth as one sees it. Objective facts are used to supplement feelings and faith.

Value Systems: The Basis for Behavior

Israel's need to survive as a state permeates all value systems. The following three sections identify the Value Systems in the predominant culture - their methods of dividing right from wrong, good from evil, and so forth.

Locus of Decision Making

Although there are still some collectives, there is an emphasis on individual initiative and achievement and a strong belief in individual decisions within the social and business context. Decisions are made with an effort to blend idealism with reality, emotion with firmness, physical labor with respect for the intellectual and spiritual realms, and a strong military posture with a sincere desire for peace. The dignity and worth of the individual is always emphasized, along with the right to a private life and opinions.

Sources of Anxiety Reduction

A strong nuclear family is the basis for socialization and gives its members a sense of social identity. It also serves as a focal point for emotional and physical security. The revival of Hebrew and its successful adaptation as a modern language bonds the society together with a linguistic identity. A deep consciousness of Jewish history and tradition produces a bond that gives structure and stability to everyday life and also sensitizes people to the anti-Jewish sentiment in the Arab countries that surround them.

Issues of Equality / Inequality

Israel is a democratic and egalitarian culture built on competition. The leveling and educational influences of general military service help to develop a sense of equality. Although there are inequalities in roles, equal rights are guaranteed to all. Strong negative biases exist against the Palestinians and other Arabs, as do some biases against Jews from different countries. The emphasis on the equality of women and men can be seen in all spheres of national life, for example, both are subject to compulsory army training.

Business Practices

Appointments



punctuality

- Punctuality is not a traditional virtue in most Middle Eastern cultures. If your clients are Sephardim or Palestinians, they may be late for an appointment or not show up at all. However, they may have adopted a more Western attitude toward punctuality. Unless you know the individuals, there is no way to tell in advance.
- Most - but not all -, Ashkenazim tend to be more prompt in business dealings.
- It is standard Middle Eastern practice to keep supplicants (including foreign business people) waiting. Until you get to know your clients, it is unwise to schedule more than two appointments per day.

- The population of Israel comes from all over the world (only 60 percent of Israeli Jews are native-born), so many different cultural traditions are represented. As a result, business practices may be North American, Russian, European, or anything in between.
- An appointment is rarely private among traditional Arab business people. Expect your visit to be interrupted by phone calls and visits from your client's friends and family. Westerners frequently find these distractions infuriating; try to maintain your equanimity.
- The Jewish holy day, the Sabbath, begins at sunset on Friday and ends at sunset on Saturday. In deference to the religious Jewish community, no business is conducted on the Sabbath. The workweek runs from Sunday through Thursday.
- Business hours vary widely. Even the days businesses are open depends upon the religion of the owner. Most Jewish businesses close on Fridays (especially in the afternoon) and Saturdays. Islamic-owned establishments will be closed all day on Fridays; Christian-owned ones will be closed Sundays. (Remember that Palestinians may be either Muslim or Christian.)
- A typical schedule for a Jewish-owned business would be 8 A.M. to 4 P.m., Sunday through Thursday, and 8 A.M. to 1 P.m. on Fridays.
- Both Judaism and Islam use lunar calendars that are different from the Gregorian (Western) calendar. However, for official business purposes and when dealing with foreigners, most Israelis will use the Gregorian calendar.
- The Jewish and Islamic lunar calendars use lunar months of 28 days, so a lunar year of 12 months is only 354 days long. Holidays will thus be on different dates (by the Western calendar) every year.
- Note that when a schedule is agreed upon in terms of months (e.g., delivery in two months), an Israeli may be thinking in terms of twenty eight-day months while a Westerner may be assuming thirty-day months.



Negotiating

- It often takes a long time for decisions to be made. Most Israelis have a very confrontational negotiating style, which may become very emotional. Don't hesitate to respond in kind.

cultural note

perhaps as a result of being surrounded by hostile Arab countries that have frequently sought to destroy Israel, the Israeli people exhibit a strong strain of fatalism. When one assumes that one may be dead in a year, long-term plans are not given a high priority. Successful business deals in Israel must promise an immediate return. Long-term guarantees and warranties are rarely selling points.

Similarly, an Israeli's vigorous opposition to a plan may suddenly vanish without warning. There is an attitude of "Life is too short to keep arguing; let's make a deal and be done with it."

- Unlike most Israeli Jews, an Israeli Arab will not even consider doing business with you until he knows and likes you. Thus, the social aspects of a deal are just as vital as the business ones.
- In general, the pace of business is slower in Israel than it is in the West. Be patient.
- Middle Eastern business meetings traditionally start slowly, with long inquiries into one's health and journey.
- Business cards are important. Although most Israeli business people speak English, many foreigners have cards printed in English on one side and in Hebrew on the other.
- Engraved business cards are considered the most prestigious in Israel.

cultural note

Because strictly observant Orthodox Jews consider a menstruating woman to be "unclean," they avoid the touch of any woman. To avoid even an accidental touch, women are not supposed to hand anything directly to Orthodox men. Instead, the woman places the object on a table within easy reach of the man, who then picks it up. This technique must be used by foreign businesswomen, even when they are presenting their business cards.

- English is read from left to right; Hebrew is read from right to left. The front cover of an Israeli magazine is where English-speakers would expect the back cover to be. While most Israeli business people read English, so that sales material does not need to be translated into Hebrew, they may instinctively look first at the back cover of English promotional literature. Keep in mind that the first impression an Israeli has of your literature may be the back cover.
- Most Israelis speak at a much closer distance than North Americans are used to. Do not back up or shy away. There is also more physical contact, and conversations often involve touching. However, foreign businesswomen should avoid initiating physical contact.
- Coffee is often served toward the end of a traditional Middle Eastern business meeting. This is a signal that the meeting will soon conclude. Arabs may light incense at this time as well.
- Arab men often walk hand in hand, although Westernized Israeli Arabs rarely do this. If an Israeli holds your hand, take it as a sign of friendship.
- Arabic is a language of hyperbole. When an Israeli Arab says "yes," it usually means "possibly." Be encouraged by this, but do not assume that the negotiating is over.
- English-speaking Jews are often surprised to find themselves referred to as "Anglo-Saxons" by Israeli Jews. It is not meant as an insult.
- Israelis love to argue and are rarely at a loss for an opinion. You need not agree with all of their positions.
- Sports are always a good topic of conversation. Swimming, soccer, and basketball are among the most popular Israeli sports.



Business Entertaining

- Hosting visitors is considered a virtue in the Middle East, so most Israelis will take care of the entertaining within their country.
- Be prepared to remove your shoes before entering an Arab building. Follow the lead of your host.
- Remember that religious Israelis have strict dietary laws. Pork is prohibited to observing Jews; strict Muslims do not consume either alcohol or pork. If you decide to host a gathering, know the dietary restrictions of your guests.
- The left hand is considered unclean in the Arab world. Among Arabs, always eat - with the right hand only. Even if you are left-handed, eat with your right hand.
- Do not eat everything on your plate. Leaving a little food is a sign that you have had enough.
- Realize that tipping (baksheesh) is expected for many types of services and courtesies.

Time

- Israel is two hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (G.M.T + 2), or seven hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time (EST + 7).

Protocol



Greetings

- While different cultural groups in Israel may have different styles of greetings, most Israelis who do business in foreign environments shake hands upon introduction.

cultural note

Because of the Orthodox prohibition against touching women, a foreign businesswoman should not offer to shake hands with an Israeli. Wait until they offer to shake hands, then follow their lead. Over 50 percent of Israeli Jews are considered "secular"-they do not observe the traditional Jewish rituals. The majority of business people dealing on an international basis belong to this group. Expect them to shake hands. Orthodox Jewish men traditionally wear a skullcap (yarmulke) or hat and black clothing.

- A traditional Arab or Orthodox Jewish male will not necessarily introduce his wife. Follow his lead; if he acts as if she isn't there, you should do the same.
- A traditional Arab greeting between men involves each grasping the other's right hand, placing the left hand on the other's right shoulder, and exchanging kisses on each cheek. However, Arabs used to dealing with foreigners will probably confine themselves to shaking hands on a first meeting.



Titles / Forms of Address

- Israeli Jews come from all over the world, and their names usually reflect the tradition of their previous country. For example, Russian Jews will have a given name, followed by a patronymic ("son of...") and a surname.
- In general, an Israeli Jew's given name will come first and the surname will come last. Address them by their title, or Mr., Mrs., or Miss, and their surname, unless they indicate otherwise.
- Israeli Arabs have traditional Arabic names, which Westerners frequently find confusing. The best solution is to request the names - written in English - of any Arabs you will have to meet, speak to, or correspond with. Find out both their full names (for correspondence) and how they are to be addressed in person.
- Israeli Arabs write their names in Arabic. In part because short vowels are not written in Arabic, translating from Arabic to other alphabets is not an exact science. Thus, Arabic names may be spelled several different ways in English. (For example, the leader of Libya's name is variously rendered as Colonel Muammar al-Qaddafi, Mu'ammar al-Qadhafi, Qaddhafi, QathaFi, Gaddafi, and so forth.)
- In general, Arabic names are written in the same order as English names: title (if any), given name, sometimes a middle name (often a patronymic), and surname (family name). Thus, the previous leader of Egypt was President Anwar al-Sadat; his title was President, his given name was Anwar, and al-Sadat was his family name.
- The term al literally means "from" in Arabic. A name like al-Barudi could mean "son of Barudi" or "from the town of Barudi." Do not mistake the term al- for the Western nickname Al (short for Alex or Albert).
- The term abu means "father of" in Arabic. Israeli Arabs frequently refer to revered elders as Abu.
- Most Arabs should be addressed by title and surname (e.g., Doctor al-Nahhas), just as you would address a Westerner. In writing, use their full name. If they do not have a title, just use Mr., Mrs., or Miss.



Gestures

- The left hand is considered unclean in the Arab world. In the Middle East, always use the right hand in preference to the left (unless you are handling something that is considered unclean). Never eat with the left hand; eat only with your right hand. Avoid gesturing with the left hand.
- It is acceptable to use both hands when one is insufficient.
- While Israelis constantly gesture with their hands when speaking, they avoid pointing at another person. This would be considered impolite, especially among Arabs.
- As a general rule, keep both feet on the ground. Traditional Arabs do not cross their legs when sitting. Never show the bottom of your foot to an Arab; this is considered offensive. When one removes one's shoes (as when entering a mosque), the soles of the shoes are placed together, preventing the sole from being pointed at anyone.

- Any gesture that displays an extended thumb - including the "thumbs up" gesture or a hitchhiker's gesture - is offensive throughout the Middle East.



Gifts

- Avoid giving a gift until you know something about the person you are giving it to. Especially with Orthodox Jews and Arabs, a gift must not violate one of the restrictions of their belief system.
- If you are invited to an Israeli home, bring a gift of flowers or candy. Be sure a gift of food is kosher if it is going to an Orthodox person.
- Make sure you give or receive gifts with the right hand, not with the left (although using both hands is acceptable).



Dress

- While foreigners are not exempt from Israeli standards of modesty, do not adopt traditional native clothing. Non-Jews should not wear yarmulkes (except when inside a synagogue), and non-Arabs should not wear turbans or other Arab headgear.
- Since Israeli law is mostly secular, there are few laws regarding clothing. But "immodest" dress will result in vocal disapproval from both Orthodox Jews and traditional Muslims.
- Despite Israel's heat, conservative tradition dictates that most of the body remain covered.
- Men should wear long trousers and a shirt, preferably long-sleeved. A jacket and tie are often required for business meetings. However, many Israeli businessmen rarely wear a tie. Keep shirts buttoned up to the collarbone.

cultural note

all women - including foreigners - are expected to wear modest clothing in public, especially among traditional areas. The neckline should be high and the sleeves should come at least to the elbows. Hemlines should be well below the knee, if not ankle-length. The overall effect should be one of baggy concealment; a full-length outfit which is tight and revealing is not acceptable. Therefore, pants or pant suits are not recommended. While a hat or scarf is not always required, it is wise to keep a scarf at hand.

- Israeli social events almost never require tuxedos; the only regular black-tie affairs are those hosted by foreign embassies.
- Remember that Israeli summers tend to be hot and humid, while the Winters are often chilly enough to require overcoats. Indoor heating is often poor, so sweaters or shawls are useful. Away from the coast, Winters can be cold enough to require hats and gloves, especially at higher elevations.