

# MIT-Israel

## Practical Living Guide

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## Before Arriving in Israel

Once you have been accepted to the MIT-Israel program and signed an internship agreement, the MIT-Israel Program Coordinator will work with you to prepare your trip. Preparations include:

- Taking a course on Israeli history and culture and several MIT-Israel [spring training sessions](#)
- Signing a [Risk and Release form](#)
- Purchasing [airline tickets](#)
- Obtaining a [visa](#)
- Finding [housing](#)
- Picking up your stipend

### Taking a course on Israel

There are several courses you can take to fulfill this requirement. Options include:

- Fall semester: 21H.914 – Jewish History from Biblical to Modern Times
- IAP: 17.911 – Israel: History, Politics, Culture, and Identity
- Spring: 17.565 - Israel: History, Politics, Culture, and Identity

There are also several mandatory training sessions throughout the spring to familiarize you with the Israeli culture, society, and workplace. Though not required, there are also opportunities to learn some Hebrew before your internship (contact [mit-israel@mit.edu](mailto:mit-israel@mit.edu) for more information).

### Purchasing airline tickets

You will purchase your own tickets and submit a receipt to us for reimbursement. To be fully reimbursed, the cost must fall within a season-based standard amount. You will receive your reimbursement together with your stipend approximately one week before your internship begins. To find a ticket, use your favorite airline ticket search engine to find a ticket to TLV – Ben Gurion International Airport. Some suggested sites include:

[www.statravel.com](http://www.statravel.com)

[www.kayak.com](http://www.kayak.com)

[www.studentuniverse.com](http://www.studentuniverse.com)

You can also search directly on an airline's website. Over 100 airlines have flights to Israel – some of the big ones are:

[El Al](#)

[Israir](#)

[Continental](#)

[British Airways](#)

[Swiss Air](#)

[Delta](#)

Be sure to inquire about any special student or under-25 ticket prices!  
Please make sure to keep proof of payment and all receipts.

## Visa

You will need to apply for a one-year student visa. You will receive a visa letter describing your internship from MIT-Israel as well as a letter from your host confirming this information. Please visit the Israeli Consulate [website](#) to find out what other documents you need (passport photos, passport, forms, etc). MIT-Israel has an agreement with the Israeli consulate, so there should not be any trouble, but please apply with enough time to spare to receive the visa. As you are going with an MIT program you DO NOT need a bank statement (as stated in consular site). If you plan to travel to neighboring countries during your time in Israel, please be sure to request a multiple-entry visa. If you plan to visit a country that does not have diplomatic relations with Israel (Lebanon, Kuwait, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, etc.), you may request a second passport from your home country (see more detailed instructions [here](#)).

## Housing

MIT-Israel has agreements with most of the universities in Israel to enable MISTI students to stay in dorms of the university (even if the internship itself is not at the university). Finding housing outside the universities will be challenging. MIT-Israel has agreements for housing in Tel Aviv and Haifa (<http://www.careerisrael.com//ProgramAccommodations.asp>) but there are not always rooms available. You can also look at the sites below, but many are in Hebrew (you can try Google Translate – it does a pretty good job!). If you get stuck, talk with your MIT-Israel Program Coordinator.

- [Craigslist](#), in English. This is mainly useful for the larger cities of Haifa, Jerusalem, and Tel Aviv.
- [Sublet.com](#), in English.
- [Flathunting](#), in English. This is a Yahoogroup where you can read the archives to find people willing to rent apartments. Only useful for Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.
- [Janglo](#), in English. Check the Real Estate tab. Most of the posting reference more expensive or long-term rentals, but it's worth a shot.
- [Yad2](#), in Hebrew.
- [Homeless](#), in Hebrew.

## Stipend

You will receive a stipend, along with your flight reimbursement, during the final week of the semester, or about a week before your departure, depending on the dates of your travel. The stipend should cover your

housing costs, a daily food allowance, and your travel expenses. It is calculated separately for every individual.

## **Language**

The official languages of Israel are currently Hebrew and Arabic. In theory everyone knows English; in practice many Israelis' English is very accented and mixed with Hebrew (especially on the street or in shops). It is not required but recommended that students have some previous exposure to Hebrew (the MISTI Israel program offers this as part of the spring training). This will also vary by city – Israelis in Jerusalem or Tel Aviv will know more English than Israelis in Beersheva. If you would like to learn some Hebrew before going to Israel, take a look at the [MISTI-Israel website](#) contact [mit-israel@mit.edu](mailto:mit-israel@mit.edu) for more information.

## **Practicalities While in Israel**

Once you have arrived in Israel, you will find that you have some acclimating to do. Although there are parts of Israel that seem very Western, there is often an Eastern undercurrent, and it is important to recognize and understand these. This part of the guide includes practical advice (money issues, security, etc) as well as social and cultural advice.

### **Money in Israel**

Israel's currency is the shekel (abbreviated NIS, or with the symbol ₪ - plural shekalim). There are one hundred agurot (or agorot) in a shekel (singular agura/agora). Israel no longer has a 1-agura coin – any change is rounded to the nearest 5 agurot. The exchange rate varies from about 3.5 to 4.5 shekel to a dollar.

There is no need to open a bank account in Israel. The easiest way to have access to your money is to bring an ATM, debit, or credit card linked to your bank account in the United States (or any other country). There are ATMs all over Israel, just as you would find in the US. Check with your bank for details about any fees that they charge, and make sure that your bank is OK with you using your card in Israel. Most stores will also accept your US credit or debit card directly.

### **Cell phones and other phones**

It is recommended to get an Israeli cell phone number while you are there, as it is quite expensive to roam (depending on your US plan). There are two options:

- Buy a pre-paid SIM card

- If you go this route, you will receive a SIM card with a specified number of minutes on it. Whenever you run out, you will have to replenish your supply. There are many places to do this – most corner shops and convenience stores offer top-up. This option typically costs more per minute (50 agurot/minute), but there is usually no fee beyond the price of the minutes themselves. This plan might be better if you don't expect to use too many minutes.
- Sign up for a post-paid plan
  - This option allows you to be free of the worry of running down your minutes. It is usually accompanied by some sort of monthly fee for the plan, in addition to a per-minute fee; typically, though, the per-minute fee is much less when you are on a post-paid plan than a pre-paid one. Remember to cancel the plan when you leave Israel!

There are a number of cell phone companies – Pelephone, Cellcom, and Orange are the three main ones. They all have various plans which are more or less the same for short-term users – it's not vital to choose one or the other unless you have many friends on one network, in which case it's cheaper to use their network because calling within networks is cheaper than out-of-network.

Landlines in Israel have a two-digit prefix, divided up geographically – ex. 03 is Tel Aviv and its suburbs, 02 is Jerusalem and its suburbs, 04 is the North, 08 is the south, etc. Cell phones have a three-digit prefix, divided up by network – 050 is Pelephone, 052 is Cellcom, 054 is Orange, etc. These area codes will be followed by a 7-digit number.

If you are planning to use a cell phone from the US, make sure your phone is GSM enabled and uses SIM cards (for example, Verizon does not use SIM cards, and therefore their phones cannot be used in Israel). If your phone is locked, which it most likely is, you must get it unlocked before coming to Israel, otherwise the Israeli SIM card will not work. If you have AT&T, call them and tell them that you are going abroad, and they will give you an unlock code and very specific directions on how to use it. Be careful when using the unlock code, as too many wrong attempts can permanently lock the phone, rendering it fairly useless in Israel and impossible to fix (using legal methods).

If you find it necessary to order your SIM card in advance, you can either order directly from the company's website ([www.cellcom.co.il](http://www.cellcom.co.il), [www.orange.co.il](http://www.orange.co.il), or [www.pelephone.co.il](http://www.pelephone.co.il)) if you know Hebrew, or you can use a intermediary website, like [www.israelsims.com](http://www.israelsims.com), through which you can buy a Cellcom or Orange pay-as-you-go SIM card. Note that it is only possible to buy a phone+monthly plan from the websites – in order to buy a pre-paid, you need to either order through one of these intermediary

websites, or when you arrive in Israel.

When dialing Israel from the United States, dial the international calling code, 011, followed by Israel's country code, 972, followed by the number you want to reach, dropping the initial 0.

## Getting Around

Due to MIT travel guidelines, MISTI students may not use most forms of public transportation while in Israel – this includes buses and trains. Permitted forms of transportation include taxis (known as *moniot* – singular *monit*) and shared taxis (known as *moniot sherut*, or just a *sherut* for short). Each city has its own system of *sheruts* – Haifa has a particularly good one – and there is a good *sherut* system connecting many of the cities on the west coast of Israel, as well as Jerusalem and Beersheva. The cost varies, but is generally fairly cheap, i.e. 5 NIS for a local *sherut* and 30-40 NIS for an intercity *sherut*. Within cities, they usually run on the main streets (ex. Allenby, Ben Yehuda, Dizengoff in Tel Aviv). There are designated pickup points, but you can ask to be let off anywhere on the driver's route. The alternative to a *sherut* is a regular taxi. Use discretion when deciding whether to get into a taxi, especially late at night – there are usually many taxis, and if one seems sketchy, you will usually be able to find another. Many taxis have their company name, registration, and phone number on the side – it is a good idea to take down some of the phone numbers, as most taxi companies will send you a taxi if you call them and tell them your location. Taxis have meters, although in some cities the driver prefers to set a fixed price in advance. If you do set a fixed price, don't be afraid to haggle! By law, they are required to use the meter if you request it, so if you are not yet familiar with the expected cost of a trip, you should use the meter – just ignore the driver's grumbling and be firm. They may charge you extra for luggage, extra (>2) passengers, luggage, certain routes (to/from airport, etc), or at night. It is customary to tip the driver a bit at the end, although it is not mandatory.

## Budget

Most prices in Israel are comparable to those in the United States. Fruits and vegetables are usually cheaper, especially if you buy them in a *shuk* (market). As in most places, things will be more expensive if you buy them in a small corner shop (*makolet*) than if you buy them in a larger supermarket; however, the *makolets* are stocked with many more products than one would expect, so if you don't want to go far, it is a good first stop when looking for something. Many cities have *shuks*, but the biggest and most famous one is in Jerusalem, called *Mahane Yehuda*. You can buy pretty much anything there, and haggling is encouraged.

A meal in a restaurant can get expensive, depending on the restaurant – most restaurants have menus out front, so you can check. One way to eat out without paying too much is to visit the “fast food”-type places – falafel and shawarma joints, which will often also have various salads.

Electronics are more expensive than in the United States, so avoid buying any cameras, phones, etc.

Souvenirs will be very expensive in tourist locations, and most of the things you see can be bought in numerous places. It is often worth it to hold out a bit longer to see if you can find it cheaper. You can also haggle there – in fact, you should haggle when buying souvenirs, because the initial price is always 2-3 times as much as the object is worth, though you may not know that. Tips for haggling – look faintly interested, look disgusted when he says the price, offer a low price, and when he rejects it walk away slowly – he will then begin to lower his price, calling after you, and when it’s reached a price that is acceptable, turn around and buy it.

The price of entertainment (movie theaters, shows, etc) is comparable to those in the United States, especially in the bigger cities and in the more popular cinemas.

## **Health Insurance and Doctors**

MISTI-Israel will be providing you with health insurance through IMGlobal, on a plan called Patriot Travel Medical Insurance. If you do get sick in Israel, you can contact one of the doctors on their [list](#). Most doctors in Israel are competent – if you are worried, there are places that have American doctors on staff, especially in cities with large American populations like Jerusalem. The emergency number for an ambulance is 101.

## **Security**

The most important way to be safe in Israel, as in all places, is to use common sense. Avoid dark and deserted areas at night, do not get into cars or taxis where you feel uncomfortable, do not walk about alone at night in unsafe areas listening to an iPod, don’t put your wallet in your back pocket, etc. There are some quirks specific to Israel, for example: when entering a mall, you will often have to walk through a metal detector and put your bags through an X-ray machine. This is for your safety – just empty your pockets of change, and don’t carry around knives and such. This also means that you should leave some extra time to get into many public areas, especially during rush hour, and especially if you have bags.

Currently there are some areas that you cannot travel to: specifically the West Bank, within 30 kilometers of the Gaza strip, or the Old City of Jerusalem (after dark during the entire week and between the hours of 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. on Fridays). This is due to US Department of State

regulations. Please do not cross the Green Line while in Israel under the auspices of MISTI-Israel. You will receive a detailed security guide and get a security briefing prior to your trip.

## **Bureaucracy**

If for some reason you ever need to go to a post office, a bank, or some other bureaucratic institution (including certain offices in universities, etc.), don't be surprised if they are not open Monday-Friday 9-5. Plan ahead; find out what time they are open (often only one or two days a week, or during limited hours). Most banks, for example, close at 3, or have a lunch break from 1-3 when they are closed.

## **Internet**

Depending on whether you are working for a company or a university, you may or may not have access to the Internet. There are Internet cafés scattered around the big cities, and some coffee shops (Coffee Bean and Tea Leaf, for example, in Jerusalem) offer free Wi-Fi. Note that some websites that you are used to in the United States (some streaming media websites, for example) may block IP addresses from outside the United States.

## **Dress Code**

Israelis are usually quite casually dressed (jeans and sandals were only recently banned from the *Knesset*, the Parliament!). Students in universities dress casually, and levels of modesty vary by university. Some universities are slightly more conservative with modesty of dress (Hebrew University and Bar Ilan University), but most of the students in the universities will look just like students in any other European or North American university. Common outfits during the summer are shorts or skirts and T-shirts or sleeveless tops with sandals.

Some companies do request that their employees dress a bit less casually – that will vary by company. Come dressed a bit less than business casual on the first day, check out what others are wearing, and follow their lead!

## **Weather**

The weather in Israel in the summer is hot. If you are in one of the lower-lying cities, such as Haifa, Tel Aviv, or Beersheva, you do NOT need sweaters! It would also be a good idea to buy a fan once you arrive if your accommodation does not come with any. If you are in a mountainous region, such as Jerusalem or cities in the North, it may get chilly in the evenings or at night.

## **Electricity**



Israel uses 230V, which means that any of your non-electronics appliances (iron, blowdryer, electric shaver) need converters. Check your electronics to see what voltage they are rated for – most laptops, phone chargers, etc can handle 110-240V. All American plugs will need adaptors – these are readily available in office supply stores or electronics stores here or in Israel.

## **Time and Schedules**

Israel runs on GMT+2, which means that they are 7 hours ahead of the United States. Keep that in mind when calling your host institution in Israel or when you are in Israel and calling home.

Also note that because Israel's schedule is guided by the Jewish calendar, part of the country shuts down for Shabbat, the Sabbath, which begins Friday at sunset and ends Saturday about an hour after sunset. This means that shops, tourist locations, and transportation options will often stop functioning early Friday afternoon. This is especially true in Jerusalem, and true to a somewhat lesser degree in Haifa and Tel Aviv. Make sure you buy your food for the weekend and begin your weekend traveling before things begin to close down!

Due to Shabbat, the workweek in Israel is usually Sunday through Thursday, although some companies still keep Monday through Friday. This means that while you may be expected to work on Sundays, you should be free to begin your weekend on Friday! Contact your individual supervisor to find out what the expectation for your job will be.

## **Any other problems or questions**

Check out the MISTI-Israel WIKI ([http://scripts.mit.edu/~misti-wiki/wiki/index.php?title=MIT\\_Israel](http://scripts.mit.edu/~misti-wiki/wiki/index.php?title=MIT_Israel)) for city-specific information. If all else fails, or in case of an emergency while in Israel, contact the MISTI-Israel Program Director at [mit-israel@mit.edu](mailto:mit-israel@mit.edu) and your local contact person (which you will get details on prior to your trip).