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## Key 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 and Arabic

### Currency

The Israeli currency is the New Israeli Shekel (NIS), which is divided into 100 agorot (as of January 1986). (In March 2018: \$1= approx. 3.4 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. In December 2017, U.S. President Donald Trump recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital and began the process of relocating the U.S. embassy to the city.

## **Declaration of Independence**

May 14, 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 February 16, 1949. The President is the titular head of state and is elected by the Knesset every seven years, and the main duties are largely ceremonial. The current president, President Reuven Rivlin, was sworn into office on July 24, 2014.
- **The Prime Minister:** The first Prime Minister was David Ben-Gurion. The first government was established on March 8, 1949. Under Israeli law, the Prime

Minister serves a term of four years. The current Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, has been in office since March 31, 2009.

## **Legislative Branch**

- The Knesset. The Knesset is the parliament of the State of Israel. It is located in Jerusalem, and has 120 members. Under current law, members of the Knesset are elected for a term of four years. The present Knesset is the 20th, and the elections for this Knesset were held on March 17, 2015. The Knesset has parliamentary sovereignty, and enacts legislation on every issue.

## **The Judiciary**

- Includes the Supreme Court, the District Court, Magistrates Court, Court for Local Affairs, Religious Court, Traffic Court, Labor Court, Juvenile Court, etc. Judges of the Supreme Court are chosen by an independent non-partisan committee and are formally appointed by the President.

## **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, though a large number receive exemptions from military service. Men are liable for reserve duty until age 49 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 square miles (as of 1967 including East Jerusalem and as of 1981 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)
- Total length of land border: 532.5 miles
- Coastline: Length of Mediterranean Sea Coast 120.5 miles
- Length of Red Sea Coast: About 7.456 miles

## **Population Figures (2017)**

According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, the population of Israel numbers about 8.7 million inhabitants.

The population of Israel is comprised of:

- Approx. 6.5 million Jews (75%)
- Approx. 1.8 million Arabs (21%)

Annual population growth: 1.8%

Urban population: 91.2%

Percent of population aged 0-19: 36

Percent of population aged 20-64: 52.7

Other figures of note: There are approximately 400,000 Israelis living in 132 settlements in the West Bank.

## **Religious Life**

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

Israel contains sites holy to practitioners of each of these religions. 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 Sepulchre. The Baha'i World Center, the spiritual and administrative center of the Baha'i faith is located in the city of Haifa.

## **Other Assorted Facts About Israel**

- 43% of the world's Jews live in Israel. (2017)
- Over one tenth of the Israeli population is 65 or older.
- There are approximately 186,000 Holocaust survivors living in Israel. (2016)
- The Dead Sea, the lowest point on earth at about 1,300 feet (400 m) below sea level, lies at the southern end of the Jordan Valley.
- The Mount of Olives in Israel is the oldest, continually used cemetery in the world.
- The cell phone was developed in Israel at the Israeli branch of Motorola. Other major high-tech companies, including Google, Apple, Intel and Microsoft, have significant presences in Israel.
- Relative to its overall population, Israel is the largest immigrant-absorbing nation on earth.
- IDF's policies regarding LGBT soldiers are recognized as among the world's most accepting, ensuring that no soldiers are discriminated against based on their sexual orientation. In 2014, the IDF introduced new guidelines to ensure a supportive environment for transgender soldiers.
- Israel is one of the world's leaders in the per capita number of scientists and technicians in the workforce, with 140 per 10,000 workers.

- Israel bank notes have braille on them so the blind can identify them.
- Israel is a world leader in in-vitro fertilization.
- Israel has more museums per capita than any other country in the world.
- In recent years, Tel-Aviv has been consistently ranked as a top international tourist destination for its culture, cuisine, nightlife, architecture and large LGBT community.