

MENNOJERUSALEM BIBLE LANDS TOUR

Rome, Greece, and Greek Islands

Cruise

Following is a typical itinerary from our recent 16-day tour.

ITALY PORTION (7 Days)

Day 1

Depart Toronto. 8:25 pm on Air Canada.

Day 2

Arrive Rome, at 11:00 am, transfer to hotel for lunch and rest. At 2 pm, meet guide for an afternoon walking tour including: Ancient Rome (entrance to Coliseum and Roman Forum); San Peter in Chains to see Michelangelo's famous sculpture of Moses.

CHRISTIAN ROME, from St. Paul's time. Walking tour through the real core of Ancient Rome, sense the great "power" of Rome and Emperors who demanded divinity for themselves. This was mainly what Paul preached against in Romans 1:25.

From the Trajan's Column, jewel of architecture and sculpture made by Apollodorus of Damascus, move along the Via dei Fori Imperiali (street of the Imperial Fora), the ruins of the fori that the great emperors built as lasting memory of their power.

You will see the Forum of Trajan, the biggest and most splendid of all, whose markets, true forerunners of the modern commercial centers, offered to the Roman citizen any goods to be found at that time. Walk to Capitoline Hill, then the political and religious center of the town.

The stairway will lead you to the Piazza del Campidoglio, the magnificent result of a project by Michelangelo, with a copy of the most famous equestrian statue in the world, the statue of Marcus Aurelius, in the middle. Behind the Piazza is a natural terrace providing the best panoramic point over the valley of the Roman Forum and the Palatine Hill.

Walk through the valley of the Roman Forum; the Curia, seat of the Roman Senate; the State Archive, the basilicas, palaces of justice, the Temple of Vesta, and the House of the Vestal Virgins in charge of keeping the sacred fire always alive, surrounded by temples and columns and arches of triumph commemorating Roman gods.

Romans 1:23, "...and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man..."

From the Forum to the place linked to the fabulous origins of Rome: the Palatine. Here Romulus founded the town in the year 753 BCE. Starting with Augustus, the great emperors settled here. From the valley of the Roman Forum you can admire the Domus Tiberiana, only partially explored, and the ruins of the Imperial Palaces.

Leaving the Roman Forum you will find the Arch of Constantine, erected to commemorate the victory of the emperor over Maxentius in the 4th century CE (tradition says that before the battle the Emperor saw a brilliant cross in the sky and spoke the famous words, "in hoc signo vinces"—by this sign, conquer!, said to have contributed to his conversion to Christianity).

To hotel for dinner.

Day 3

Vatican Museums in the morning, including Sistine Chapel and tour of St. Peter's Basilica. Visit the Vatican Museums and the Sistine Chapel, with personal audio-guide for individualized pacing.

A second option is a visit to the Mausoleum of Santa Costanza, daughter of Emperor Constantine, and the Basilica Costantiniana. Among the first Christian Churches, like the Holy Cross of Jerusalem, St. John Lateran, San Sebastian, St. Lawrence Outside the Walls, and St. Peter's, this "Basilica" was built by Emperor Constantine to support the First Christian community of Rome...

In the afternoon, Basilica of the Three Fountains, Catacombs of San Sebastian and Basilica of St. Paul outside the Walls:

CATACOMBS OF SAN SEBASTIAN Located on the Ancient Appian Way, this is the place where the bodies of Apostle Paul and Apostle Peter were kept during the Christian persecution of Valeriano (253 -260 CE), and where the first Christians venerated the tombs of the two Apostles. For this reason the place today is still called MEMORIA APOSTOLORUM. There are a lot of Latin and Aramaic "graffiti" in the catacombs and in the Basilica of San Sebastian, as well.

ST. PAUL OUTSIDE THE WALLS is a Benedictine Abbey which shares its name, origins, and centuries of history, with the adjoining basilica where the bones of Paul have reportedly been found.

Return to hotel for dinner.

Day 4

Day trip to the hometown of St. Francis of Assisi in the Italian region of Umbria. A true pilgrimage in homage to an outstanding person with a wonderful story!

St. Francis, and the Cathedral in Assisi.

Day 5

Morning worship options in Catholic and Protestant churches, followed by a relaxing walking tour in the Baroque area of Rome to see Trevi Fountain, Spanish Steps, Pantheon, Navona Square and the Bernini's fountain of the Four Rivers. Some free time in afternoon.

Day 6

ROME / TRES TABERNAE / FORO APPIO / PETUOLI. Early morning departure towards the south on the Appian Way, to the sites of Foro Appio and Tres Tabernae where the Sacred Writings tell us of the meeting of Paul with the Christian communities.

Acts 28:14-15, "And so we came to Rome. The brothers there had heard that we were coming and they traveled as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns to meet us."

On board boats similar to the ones used in the swamp during the Times when Paul arrived in this place, we go up the river.

Lunch at Hotel Mansio in Foro Appion, the paved square where Paul met the first Christians!

Continue south to reach Pozzuoli in approx. 1 ½ hrs drive.

"...and so we went toward Rome." Acts 28:14

"and after one day the south wind blew, and we came the next day to Puteoli." Acts 28:13

Visit the area of the sea-port and the Roman Amphitheater for a sense of what Paul experienced once he arrived on the main land of the "Roman Empire." Here we also take a break to taste a real Napolitano coffee or a pizza before check-in at hotel, dinner and overnight.

Day 7

POMPEI / BARI. Early morning departure towards Pompei in less than an hour. Our guide will lead us on an archaeological journey through the ancient city, buried under a layer of ashes and lapilli by a sudden eruption of Vesuvius in 79 CE., less than a decade after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem.

Visiting the “frozen city” of Vesuvius can create a feeling similar to that experienced by Paul when he walked through similar streets from his time periodYou will visit houses, shops, temples, squares, streets and also the “Lupanare” (house of prostitutes with its frescos showing erotic scenes). ... You will understand the anger of Paul shouting aloud against corruption and perdition of the Romans.....

Romans 1:26 “For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature.”

Reboard bus and continue south to Bari to embark the overnight ferry for dinner and onward to Patra, Greece. Breakfast aboard the following morning.

GREEK PORTION (7 Days)

Day 8

Arrival in Greece. Our ship arrives in the morning at the port of Patras at the north western part of Polliponissos. We start our way to Corinth where the apostle Paul lived and preached. He addressed his first and second letters to the Corinthians living here. We will stop the site where Paul established the first church made up entirely of Gentiles.

Continue to Athens for dinner and overnight.

Day 9

City of Athens Tour. Tour Athens with its famous Acropolis, Parthenon, Arcopagus, and Mars Hill where the Apostle Paul delivered his well-known sermon. Then we take a panoramic tour to the rest of the sites of Athens: the famous library; the university; the Parliament House, and the stadium where the first modern Olympic Games took place. Open afternoon to explore the area of Plaka, the old section of Athens, and experience the local street atmosphere.

Dinner and overnight in Athens.

Day 10

Cruise to Mykonos. Embark our cruise ship in the morning with the first stop at Mykonos in the afternoon. There we will have the opportunity to explore the famous island... with plenty of shops.

Our ship will sail at about 23:00.

Day 11

Cruise to Kusadasi & Patmos. Our second stop is at the Turkish port of Kusadasi in the morning (7:00) for the tour to Ancient Ephesus, famous in antiquity for its Temple of Diana—one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, and later the home of St. John. (During the years of the Roman Empire, the Greek port of Ephesus became the greatest city in Asia Minor.) Upon arrival at Ephesus enter this ancient site through the Magnesian Gate. Discover innumerable monuments including the Forum, the Odeon, the Library of Celsus, the Thermal Baths of Scolastika, and the Great Theatre built in the Greek era and reconstructed by the Romans, still noted for its remarkable acoustics.

Walk back to the motor coach along the Arcadian Way, where Mark Anthony and Cleopatra once rode in procession. On the drive back to Kusadasi just outside Ephesus, view the Basilica of St. John, which was erected over his grave in the 6th cent. CE by the Emperor Justinian. We'll review the particular concerns of St. Paul in his important letter to the Ephesians...The ship sails at noon to Patmos and arrives at about 16:30 where we can take part in the visit to St. John Monastery built within the walls of a strong fortification 900 years ago—exceptional architecture! We visit the main church with its outstanding frescoes and interior decoration. Priceless ecclesiastical treasures are housed in the beautiful if small museum: mosaics, books and manuscripts, icons, splendid medieval textiles and vestments, as well as jewelry. Return to the motor coach to continue on to the nearby Grotto of the Apocalypse/St. John.

Our ship will sail at about 21:00.

Day 12

Cruise to Crete & Santorini. This morning we will dock at Heraklion port in Crete with the Minoan Civilization dating back to 4000 BCE, when a great empire flourished on the island of Crete. We will have the opportunity to visit Knossos Palace, decorated with frescoes and shields, which houses the Hall of the Royal Guard. Then our bus will take us to the heart of Heraklion where there will be some free time to explore its beauties, combining the facilities of a modern city with the unique Greek Islands' ambience. Then we will take our bus back to the ship which will sail at about 11:30 to Santorini.

Ship arrives at Santorini at about 16:30. This is one of the most famous islands built on the Caldera rim where volcano activity has taken place many years ago. We will have the opportunity to visit Oia Village, an excellent example of Cycladic architecture. Explore the village along the cobble-stone streets and white-washed houses. A short cable car ride will take you down to the pier to rejoin the ship which sails at about 21:00.

Day 13

Disembark from ship, visit Delphi & Kalambaka. This morning our ship returns to Athens. We will meet our bus and head to Delphi where most of the Ancient leaders worldwide flocked to see the Oracle and ask for its advice. We will visit the Temple of Apollo, Athenian Treasury, the Theater, the Archeological Museum, and the first monument built in the ancient world to “One God”. Then we will continue to Kalambaka for dinner and overnight.

Day 14

Kalambaka, Veria & Thessalonika. Visit two of the unique hanging monasteries in the world: There are 24 Byzantine Monasteries here, only 6 are inhabited. See the strange rocky mountains, then continue to Veria (Berea) where St. Paul walked along the Via Egnatia. We will stop by the Bema where Paul stood and preached the Gospel. Continue to Thessalonika for a panoramic city tour and a recap of St. Paul’s early letter to the Thessalonians, before heading back to our hotel for dinner and overnight.

Day 15

Thessalonika, Thermopiles, & Athens. This morning we will visit the old churches of St. Dimitri and St. Sophia, and see the famous White Tower (center above). Then we head toward Athens, stopping by Thermopiles and enjoying wonderful villages and sites of Greece along the way. Dinner and overnight in Athens. Prepare to head home!

Day 16

To airport at 11:00am. Depart Athens on AC #9217 at 2:00pm, to Frankfurt. Leave Frankfurt for Toronto at 5:00pm on AC #877, arriving in Toronto at 7:35pm local time same day.