



**VOLUNTEERS
FOR ISRAEL®**

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**PROGRAM
HANDBOOK.**

STAND WITH ISRAEL. IN ISRAEL.

Thank you for making a commitment to help Israel by serving in the Volunteers for Israel® (VFI) program. You are about to have one of the most rewarding and memorable experiences of your life.

We have developed this booklet to assist you while getting ready for your adventure and while you are in Israel. Take it with you. It's packed with information and helpful suggestions that will be useful to you – but only if you read every page carefully NOW and refer to it later. If you wait until you are on the plane, it could be too late.

If you have any questions that have not been answered by our brochures, interviewers, or this handbook, please let us know.

Because program details may change, we suggest that you check www.vfi-usa.org from time to time for the most current information.

IMPORTANT: Johanna Arrouas is SAR-EL's Program Coordinator. Keep her cell phone number with you in Israel: 054 258 6688. Add it to your phone contact list. Also add the phone number(s) of your madrichim.

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Volunteers for Israel (VFI) is the nonprofit U.S. organization that assists you in the process of becoming a Volunteer. We review your application and other forms, conduct your interview, answer your questions, and work with SAR-EL, a separate nonprofit Israeli organization in Israel that coordinates programs with the IDF. They place volunteers on bases and oversee your activities while you are on the program.

VOLUNTEERING ON AN IDF BASE

IMPORTANT: You are about to volunteer **ON** an IDF base. **YOU WILL NOT BE IN OR WITH THE IDF. YOU WILL NOT BE IN THE ARMY.** Please do not make the mistake of telling anyone, or writing or posting on social media, that you were **IN** the Israeli army. That would not be true.

Volunteers perform various civilian, non-combat duties on military logistics bases that would otherwise have to be done by Israeli soldiers, often on their reserve time (*miluim*). Meeting and working closely with Israelis on the job puts you directly in touch with the culture, lifestyle, and pulse of this vibrant country, while providing essential physical and moral support. **REMEMBER, YOU ARE AN IMPORTANT GOODWILL AMBASSADOR WHILE YOU ARE IN ISRAEL—AND WHEN YOU RETURN HOME.**

***Madrichim* – (group leaders)**

On army bases, each group is assigned an English-speaking *madrich* (male) or *madricha* (female) by SAR-EL. He or she is your group leader and will be responsible for you at all times. Currently, most group leaders are female, so we will refer here to yours as a *madricha*. Her responsibilities include

- meeting you on Sunday at your bus or at your base
- seeing that you have a bed to sleep in
- making sure you get work clothing and a job to do
- educating volunteers about the IDF and Israel

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- providing directions to and from your weekend destination. Tell your *madricha* early in the week if you want help with plans for the weekend. NOTE: *Madrichim* are not responsible for booking hotels or using their personal cell phones to help volunteers with travel plans.
 - seeing that you are contented with your job and having a great VFI experience

Work

On a military logistics base, work may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- quartermaster/supply work e.g., filling and emptying duffel bags, organizing warehouse supplies, taking inventory, packing medical and other supplies
- base maintenance, e.g., painting, repairs, gardening
- maintenance and equipment repair, such as inspecting, replacing and cleaning parts and machinery
- kitchen work, e.g., food preparation, serving, cleaning
- construction, e.g., building bunkers, erecting fences

If you would like more work, talk to your *madricha*. You can make good use of your time by looking for some other job that needs to be done. You could also use this time to get to know some Israeli soldiers or civilians, and explain why you are volunteering on their base. At first they might be reluctant to talk to you, but many Israelis are eager to improve their English language skills and will welcome a chance to talk to Americans. When possible, sit with some Israelis at lunch. This is a good time to start a conversation.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Work Schedules

Each base has its own work schedule. You should expect a 6–8 hour work day and a Sunday through Thursday workweek. Typically, breakfast is around 7:30 am, followed by flag raising and work. Lunch is around noon, and work continues until 4 pm. Dinner is usually between 5:30 and 7:00 pm. You are not permitted to leave the base during the week, day or evening.

Clothing

- You must carry your own bags, so pack lightly.
- We suggest that you bring your own sheets, a small pillow and pillow case (if you need them), and bath and face towels because not all bases have the same amenities. You can find a link to VFI's comprehensive **Packing List** on the FAQ page of VFI's website. Also, SAR-EL will include a link to their packing list in their approval email. This list can also be found on SAR-EL's website under "Before You Depart."

Volunteers on bases are issued work clothes to wear during the day. Clothing includes a hat, shirt, pants, and a belt. Army boots may not be available in your size, so bring your own closed-toe shoes, just in case. This is especially important if you have an uncommon foot size. Shoes should be sturdy, preferably boots. You cannot work in flip flops or sandals. A sweater and parka are provided in colder weather. Work clothing comes in limited sizes, the equivalent of small, medium, large and extra-large. Trying them on can be fun. Don't expect a perfect fit.

Work clothes may be grease- or paint-stained, but they are clean. They are never ironed. Some bases issue new work clothes each week; others do not. In hot weather, clothes washed in the morning or early evening usually dry within hours. Clothespins and lightweight plastic hangers are useful.

We suggest bringing a few cotton t-shirts or tank tops to wear under your work clothes, and a supply of heavy cotton or wool socks to wear with your boots or work shoes. Some people bring work and/or rubber gloves, too.

NOTE TO WOMEN: Dress modestly. Short clothes/pants/skirts and tank tops are not permitted on the base. If you wear a tank top under a long sleeve shirt, you may be told not to remove the shirt, for modesty's sake. With your *madricha's* permission you may remove your shirt if you are wearing a short-sleeved t-shirt that is not low-cut or "immodest." There are no army skirts. If you prefer to wear a skirt, we suggest that you bring two of your own plain or dark-colored skirts to wear while you are working on the base.

It will be a proud moment when your *madricha* pins on your blue SARE-EL insignia, which must be worn on the shoulder flap of your shirt. This identifies you as a civilian volunteer. Work clothing is to be worn only on the base, unless you are instructed otherwise. *After your tour of duty is completed you must return your work clothing. You may not take it from the base or bring any part of it home, except for the blue SARE-EL insignia you have been given.*

Bring clothes that are comfortable, easy to care for, and that you won't mind getting soiled. You may be hand washing your civilian clothing, so bring some liquid concentrate detergent or purchase some in Israel. These dissolve in cold water, take up very little space in your luggage, and go a long way. NOTE: Be sure to limit liquid detergent (and other liquids) in your carry-on luggage to 3.4 ounces or less, or pack the bottle carefully in your checked luggage.

On the weekend, you can use laundry services that are readily available in most cities. Some are open on Shabbat, but, to be safe, try to drop off clothes on Thursday after you leave the base, and pick them up Friday. (Check laundry closing time.)

Base Rules

Volunteers are guests of Israel and the IDF. Be respectful and courteous to your madrichim, fellow volunteers, and Israelis.

It is forbidden to talk about politics or religion on a military base. Volunteers who break rules or exhibit poor behavior may be removed from the base.

Living Conditions

Do not expect amenities. With few exceptions, living conditions on most bases can best be described as austere and somewhat primitive. A three-star hotel will seem like the height of luxury by comparison. However, if you have a positive attitude and a sense of humor, you will take it all in stride. Specifically:

- Most barracks have neither central heat in the winter nor air conditioning in the summer.
- Volunteers sleep 4–10 in a room, usually on cots or bunk beds. Men and women are housed separately, including married couples.
- Some rooms don't have shelves or lockers. You may be able to store luggage under your bed. Travel clotheslines & hooks are handy.
- Water, especially hot water, is at a premium, so be considerate of others and shower quickly.
- Toilets can become stuffed. (If you're a plumber *this* may be a job for you!) It's a good idea to carry toilet paper or tissues with you.
- Sinks on some bases resemble a long trough with several faucets.
- Some shower stalls have no curtains and may not have showerheads. Shower rooms are generally designated male or female. Occasionally, shower rooms are unisex, with separate hours for males and females.
- Sometimes, bathrooms are a distance from the rooms in which you sleep. For night visits, take a flashlight and footwear, and you might want a robe.
- Shower shoes such as flip-flops are a must.

Meals

You will be eating kosher army food in the mess hall with the soldiers and civilian personnel, giving you an opportunity to mingle and get to know each other. Breakfast and dinner are essentially the same—dairy meals featuring fresh vegetables (tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, etc.), eggs, cheese, bread, and beverages. Lunch is the substantial meal of the day. Meat, chicken, turkey, fish, or a soy product, and copious vegetables and salads are offered. The food may not be what you are accustomed to, but you will not starve.

If you have serious food allergies, tell your Regional Manager *before* you go to Israel.

NOTE: Milk is not available on bases. You can bring powdered milk or buy a carton that does not need refrigeration. Many bases do not provide hot coffee or tea. Cold tea is often very sweet. You may bring your own tea bags and coffee into the dining room, but not your own food. Also, do not bring food for soldiers or civilians.

Weekends: Thursday afternoon-Sunday morning

Volunteers on 2- or 3-week programs must spend from Thursday afternoon through Sunday morning off the base and return Sunday morning. If you volunteer during an Israeli holiday, you will have to leave the base then, too. Many volunteers (wisely) book lodging in advance from the U.S. to assure a reservation, especially during high tourist seasons. Volunteers without plans sometimes travel together, and your *madricha* may have some ideas. If you are returning to volunteer the following week, you may leave some belongings in your room, but it is advisable not to leave valuable items behind. **TIP:** Bring a small bag for weekends, and put luggage tags on all bags.

Returning to Your Base

If you are on a 2- or 3-week program, on Sunday morning you must meet your fellow volunteers at a pre-determined meeting point, and you will be transported back to the base by SAR-EL. Your *madricha* will tell you when and where to meet the group. On average, expect to spend more than \$150 dollars per day for hotel and meals. **If you are on a VFI PLUS tour, transportation arrangements and costs will be different.** Be sure to pack items you might need, such as medications and a phone charger.

Weekend options can include:

- an all-inclusive, organized VFI PLUS tour (see p. 8)
- exploring Israel or visiting family or friends

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- **staying at a youth hostel.** You do not have to be a youth or a soldier to take advantage of these. There are also “soldiers’ houses” in some areas in Israel. They are inexpensive, but not free. Ask your *madricha* about them.
 - **staying at Abraham Hostel.** 21 Levotin St., Tel Aviv 6511604, Tel. (866) 266-3306.
 - **staying at a hotel.** Note: Volunteer discounts are available at some hotels, especially in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. Ask about SAR-EL discounts wherever you stay. Some shops and museums also give volunteers discounts to show their appreciation.
 - **touring.**

NEW! VFI PLUS programs. On select dates, VFI may offer all-inclusive packages that combine working on a base with guided touring on a private bus before, midway, and after the regular volunteer program. See <http://www.vfi-usa.org/program-options/vfi-plus/> for the schedule and itinerary, etc. VFI PLUS ADVANCED is perfect for first timers, couples, and “many timers” to Israel. VFI PLUS ARCHAEOLOGY combines touring plus one week on a base and one week on an active dig in Jerusalem.

For other tours, you must deal directly with tour companies or guides.

- For your safety and security, volunteers must have permission from the *madricha* to travel to certain areas in Israel. **Travel to Egypt (including Sinai) and Jordan (including Petra) and Gaza is not permitted by SAR-EL while you are on the program.**

Tours and Evening Activities

During the evening there are educational programs and lectures created by your *madrichim*. Attendance is mandatory and may feature discussions about topics such as Israeli or IDF history, geography, Hebrew language, famous Israelis, Israeli achievements, environmental and social issues. *Madrichim* and education soldiers spend a lot of time preparing these programs, so do be courteous and attend them.

During the second and third week of a program, SAR-EL may arrange a day tour. Please understand that schedules can change at any time. A liaison or guide who is fluent in English accompanies the group. There is no set day of the week for a tour.

If the tour is on Thursday, at the end of the day (*unless you are on a VFI PLUS tour*) you will be dropped off at a central place where you can get transportation to your weekend destination. Your *madricha* will assist you with directions for getting there and back to the pre-arranged meeting place on Sunday morning, to return to the base. *You are responsible for arranging your transportation during the weekend and back to the meeting place on Sunday.*

TRAVEL INFORMATION: BEFORE YOU LEAVE HOME, ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE FROM ISRAEL

BEFORE YOU LEAVE HOME

Be sure to read every page of this Handbook carefully. If anything is unclear to you, contact your interviewer, local representative, or call VFI at 1.866.514.1948.

Booking Your Flight(s) To Israel

IMPORTANT: We advise you not to book your flights until you have been accepted by VFI AND SAR-EL unless you plan to travel to Israel anyway. After SAR-EL accepts you, they will email details about your meeting place and time. (CONFIRM THE MEETING PLACE AND TIME BEFORE YOU BOOK YOUR FLIGHT.) SAR-EL will also email links for you to pay their \$100 (U.S.) Application fee and a Waiver you must sign and return to them. Do this ASAP and tell your representative you have been accepted. Complete the Travel Information Form part II (p. 8) of your Application and send it to your representative.

SAR-EL transports volunteers to their bases by bus on Sunday program dates only. However, to allow time to unwind and ensure that you will not arrive late at the meeting place, VFI strongly advises you to book a flight that arrives before your program's Sunday start date. See the Travel Information Form part I (p. 7) of your Application.

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- For your safety and security, we strongly advise against traveling to Israel from Jordan or Egypt—or any Middle East country—or you might not be allowed on the program (or into Israel). This regulation is enforced by the Minister of the Interior’s office. If you intend to travel in these countries, do so *after* the program ends. **YOU MAY NOT TRAVEL TO JORDAN (INCLUDING PETRA), GAZA, OR EGYPT (INCLUDING SINAI) WHILE ON A SAR-EL PROGRAM.**

Booking Your Return Flight From Israel

SAR-EL programs end on Thursday afternoon. Volunteers who are flying home after the program ends must arrange their own transportation from Tel Aviv to the airport. If this is your plan, when booking your return flight allow enough time for travel, traffic, airport screening, VAT refunds, etc. Also, you will need to be at the airport at least 3 hours before your flight. **Therefore, book a return flight that factors in all of this.**

Checklist

COVID-19

- SAR-EL requires you to bring 3 COVID-19 test strips. Also bring some face masks. COVID-19 requirements can change at any time. Refer to Departure emails.

Cell Phone

- You must carry a cell phone with an international plan that works in Israel. It may be your own or a rental from home. See Cell Phone Rentals p. 16.

Packing Tips

- **IMPORTANT:** Be sure to check online at www.tsa.gov and with your airline for the latest information about what is and is not permitted in carry-on and checked baggage.

Pack in Your Carry-on Luggage

- two sets of completed VFI Application forms: one is for SAR-EL and one is for you to keep.
- medicine & prescriptions (see p. 12)
- credit card(s), ATM card (see p. 15)
- a change of clothing, in case your luggage is delayed

Passports, etc. You must obtain your own passport (visa, or travel permit, if needed). Carry important documents—including your passport, photo ID, visa or travel permit with you. Keep them handy. **Do not pack them in your checked luggage.**

- If you are a United States citizen, you will need a *valid* U.S. passport in order to enter Israel. All visitors to Israel must hold a passport that is valid for at least six months from the date they leave the country. Depending on the length of your stay, **there should be at least seven months left on your passport.**
- If you are a citizen of another country, please check with the Israeli Consulate.
- If you hold an Israeli passport in addition to another one, you must bring both passports. SAR-EL needs the non-Israeli passport to register you. Upon entering and leaving Israel, you will be asked to present your Israeli passport.
- *If you are an 18- to 26-year old Israeli citizen, or if you hold dual citizenship, and do not obtain military service postponement prior to going to Israel, you will be going into the military service (for real) when you arrive.*
- If you are stateless or hold a green card, you must contact the I.N.S. to obtain a resident's travel permit in order to reenter the United States.

Money Tips

Banks in Israel are closed on Fridays and Saturdays. Israel uses the New Israeli shekel (NIS). Currency rates can change daily. For the current conversion rate, check with your bank or online at <http://www.xe.com/ucc/>.

If you are bringing an ATM card (see Money Matters on p. 14), check with your bank to be sure your card will be accepted in Israel. **It is imperative to let your credit card company know when you will be out of the country and when you will return so the company won't assume their card is being used without permission and possibly cut off your credit.** It's a good idea to bring more than one type of ATM and credit card in case one does not work in Israel.

Medicines & Prescriptions, etc.

Pack copies of prescriptions for medications. There is no guarantee a pharmacy will fill them, but if you run out they might be helpful to the doctor if you need treatment.

Bring enough medicine for your entire trip and keep it with you in your hand luggage. When you leave the base for the weekend, be sure to bring your medicines with you. Liquids in your hand luggage or purse must be in containers that hold 3.4 ounces or less. It's advisable to pack all medicines, prescriptions and toiletries that you need every day, a change of clothing, underwear, socks and required SAR-EL papers—in your carry-on luggage in case your checked luggage is delayed.

If you are carrying a gift, it is better not to wrap it because Security may open it. Paper gift bags are handy substitutes.

Medical Insurance

All participants on Volunteers for Israel programs are required to carry medical coverage that includes COVID-19 while you are in Israel. Americans on Medicare are NOT covered outside the U.S. However, it's advisable to check with Medicare and any supplemental insurance carrier in case it offers other options. Please contact your carrier and make sure that you are covered for emergency room treatment, hospitalization, and doctors' fees while traveling in Israel. Also check with your credit card company to see if they offer Travel Health Insurance. If these are not adequate for your needs, you must obtain a short-term travelers medical insurance policy. Please see VFI's website (<http://www.vfi-usa.org/faq/>) for suggestions, ask friends who travel, look online, or call VFI at 1-866-514-1948.

Emergency Room Fees automatically cost a minimum of 1,300 shekels, or more, and private doctors also charge fees. Both will expect you to pay when services are rendered and to be reimbursed by your insurance company when you return home. Ask for a complete description – written in English – of all services you received. ***Be sure the receipt shows whether you paid in dollars or shekels so your insurer will reimburse the correct amount to you. This is very important!***

On Your Day Of Departure

Arrive at the airport at least **three hours** prior to flight time. Lines can be long and screening can take more time than you expect.

- Have your passport, ID, and other travel documents handy, not packed in your checked luggage (see packing tips, page 10.)
- Security personnel may ask you several questions. Answer all questions honestly and courteously. They know what they are doing, and everything they do is to ensure everyone's safety.

ARRIVING IN ISRAEL

MEETING INSTRUCTIONS

- SAR-EL will email instructions regarding meeting location and time after you are accepted to the program. Also see p.7 of your Application.

AIRPORT SECURITY

After you pick up your luggage do not leave it unattended for any reason. Airport security is extremely vigilant and they will remove it.

NOTE: Consider calling home so everyone will know you are ok.

SOME PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Weather

If you don't like hot weather, don't go to Israel July through September. Barracks are not air conditioned. In winter months, bring warm pajamas, as barracks can be cold at night (it rarely goes below freezing). Israel has two main seasons—rainy and dry. The rainy season is from December–March. It doesn't rain every day, and it may not rain when you're there. Israel needs the rainfall, so don't be upset if it rains on your parade! Rain in the dry season (April–November) is rare, so you probably won't need rain gear. Since the climate varies depending on the region, and you don't know where you'll be stationed, bring clothes you can layer. Check Israel's forecast online at <http://yahoo.com>. Click "Weather."

Appliances

Israel uses 220-240 volt – 50 cycle AC electric power. Some U.S. appliances (razors, iPhone, Kindle) feature the autoswitching (110/220 volts) capability; check the label for compatibility with multiple voltages. If not, you will need a voltage converter (step down transformer), or an appliance with a dual voltage switch—110/220. In most cases U.S. appliances will also require the European-configured plug adapter (found in hardware and travel stores, etc.). The Israel standard plug (Type “H”) uses a pyramid setup with either 2 or 3 (grounded) round pins. The older Israeli standard used flat pins.

Internet and Hand-Held Electronic Devices

With smartphones prevalent, SAR-EL **no longer prohibits the use of Internet devices.** (Please be considerate of others when you use them.) However, Wi-Fi is not available to volunteers on bases. On weekends, you can find an Internet café or service at your hotel. Also, for your protection, SAR-EL **cautions against bringing valuable devices that might be misplaced, lost, or stolen.**

MONEY MATTERS

REMINDER: Israeli banks are closed on Friday and Saturday.

Israel uses the New Israel Shekel (NIS). To obtain a current conversion rate, check with your bank or online at <http://www.xe.com/ucc/>. Currency rates can change daily.

ATMS

The easiest, least costly, and safest way to obtain Israeli currency (NIS) is with a bank or debit card at an ATM machine. They give you a good exchange rate and ready access to your money. ATMs are found throughout Israel. The ATM at the airport might not be in service, so you might want to bring some shekels with you just in case. Withdrawing at least 200 shekels is advisable for starters. You won't need much cash on the base.

The ATM readout will be in English. In Israel, money can be withdrawn only from checking accounts, and you will not be able to transfer or withdraw money from your savings account.

NOTE: The Israeli ATM machines have numerical keypads only. Know your PIN. If it has letters as well as numbers, you must know the numerical equivalents. Check with your bank before leaving home. Some bankcards must be activated for international use with a different PIN number. When the machine asks you how much money you want to withdraw, it is asking *how many shekels, not dollars*. At some point you will be instructed to press the “green button” after entering your PIN #. This button is usually located in the lower right column of buttons. The color may be worn off. If you need help, you might ask someone waiting in line for assistance.

IMPORTANT: At an ATM, take the same precautions to ensure your safety and privacy that you would at home.

Credit Cards (see Money Tips p. 11)

Credit cards are widely accepted for purchases and usually give the best exchange rate. VISA and MasterCard are widely used. You can get cash with your credit card, but a cash advance is costly. When making a purchase, make sure that the credit slip correctly identifies the monetary unit as either NIS (shekels) or \$ U.S. dollars. It's a good idea to save credit slips until you are back home.

Traveler's Checks

If you want to use traveler's checks, be aware that cashing them in a bank can be costly. You pay a service charge for each check cashed, so bring checks in larger denominations to cut down on the number of service charges. To cash traveler's checks in a bank you must present your passport. Remember, banks are closed Fridays and Saturdays.

Wire Transfers

If you run out of money, you can have money wired to you through the Western Union International Money Transfer Service. Their telephone number is 1-800-225-5227 (www.westernunion.com).

PHONE CALLS

There is a 7- to 10-hour time difference between Israel and the various time zones in the U.S., depending on daylight saving time. Israel is ahead. (Even your loved ones may not appreciate a 3 am phone call.) For example: 10 pm in Israel can be noon in the US, PST. Also, Israel's daylight saving time is slightly different from the U.S. Consider this when you call.

Cell Phone Rentals

You will need a cell phone with an international plan that will work in Israel and is capable of communicating via **WhatsApp**. You can bring your own phone or rent one at home or in Israel. There is a phone store near the meeting place in Ben-Gurion airport for rentals and purchases of phones and SIM cards. TIP: On Friday afternoon the phone store might close early. However, Ben Yehuda street in Tel Aviv (where many SAR-EL-friendly hotels are located) has several stores which sell good phone plans.

If you buy a SIM card, be sure to carry the instructions and charger with you, including on weekends. Read directions for long distance calls; each company has a different code

There are many cell phone providers in the U.S. Rental fees and usage rates vary. When comparing costs, ask if their rates include Israel's VAT tax. Also ask if they offer a discount to SAR-EL or VFI volunteers

NOTE: Do not use your phone for personal calls while you are working.

Follow directions that come with the card. NOTE: **U.S. calling cards (or collect calls) can be VERY EXPENSIVE.**

TRANSPORTATION

NOTE: As of August 2022, all public transportation is free for Israeli citizens. For bus and train information in Israel, call *8787. There is an English language option.

MOOVIT CELL PHONE APP AND RAV-KAV BUS/TRAIN CARDS

You'll need either a Rav-Kav card or a Moovit app on your cell phone before boarding a bus or train. Bus drivers will not take money. You can purchase the Rav-Kav cards at central bus stations or train stations, and possibly the airport in the Arrivals Hall. The cards cost 5 shekels and then you put as much money as you want on them. The suggested amount is 50 or 100 shekels. If you are going to be in Israel for a few weeks and plan to take buses and trains, you should probably put 100 shekels on the card because if you run out, the bus drivers will not add more money once you are on the bus. You can "refill" your cards at kiosks in stores in cities, but not on buses.

Moovit is a cell phone app which can be used to pay at all public transports after adding your credit card information. No Rav-Kav is needed then. Moovit is increasingly preferred because it is so convenient to use.

Buses

Some buses do operate during Shabbat. Check the schedule before you make plans to travel. Each city has a central bus station from which you can reach almost any destination in Israel. Your *madricha* will advise you on the location of your base's closest station or junction. Buses stop running one hour before sunset on Friday and do not resume service until after sunset on Saturday. Sunday morning, Israeli Egged and Dan buses are a convenient way to get back to the meeting point if you are on a multi-week program. Keep in mind that bus stops and stations will be VERY crowded. Leave enough time! **Keep bus and train tickets until the end of the ride. You will need them to exit.**

Trains

Israel's trains are efficient, clean, and they run frequently. Schedules are posted at stations, and an inexpensive paper copy can be purchased there.

There are no trains to/from the airport on Fridays. Remember that trains will be crowded Thursday afternoons and Sunday mornings. For further information, check <http://www.rail.co.il>. Click "English" for an English translation.

Taxis

Taxicabs can be found in practically every city and town in Israel. Your *madricha* or a friend might know the number of a reliable taxi company. For short trips, tell the driver you want to be "on the meter," to avoid the possibility of being overcharged. For longer rides, establish the fare before you enter the taxi. Additionally, in some locations, special vehicles known as "*sheruts*" (shuttle vans) travel set routes and are shared with other passengers. Usually, the driver will not set out until the *sherut* is full. The fare is quoted before the ride begins.

- Israeli license plates have black numbers (no letters) on a yellow background, but do not use license plate color as the only way to judge if a ride is safe. **If for any reason you have doubts about a vehicle or driver, find another one.**

Car Rentals

If you are thinking of renting a car in Israel, be aware that some credit cards will not cover the insurance for the rental. Check with your credit card company, your personal automobile insurance company, and the Israeli rental car company to see who will provide the car rental insurance coverage. **NOTE: SAR-EL strongly advises against renting a car while you are on the program.** You won't be able to park it on the base, and they can't guarantee a parking place outside of the base. **CAUTION: Take care not to drive to any "questionable" or "restricted" areas. If you are unsure, ask your *madricha*.**

IMPORTANT SUGGESTIONS & GUIDELINES

- Take along one or more copies of the front page of your passport and keep them hidden in a place separate from your real passport. Also consider leaving a copy at home with someone who will be responsible for it. In case you lose it, a copy can help with identification and replacement.
- Travel light so that you won't have to *schlep* too much. Remember – you are your own porter.
- If you are a light sleeper, bring earplugs, and if you snore loudly, bring earplugs for your roommates.
- The sun in Israel is VERY strong. We advise a sunscreen of 45 SPF or higher, sunglasses that will protect you against UVA and UVB, and a sun hat when you are outdoors. **Remember to drink lots and lots of water.** By the time you feel thirsty, you are already dehydrated.
- Check whether any special vaccinations are required before you are allowed to enter Israel.
- Do NOT have things mailed to the SAR-EL office. You will not get them. If you need something mailed to you, ask your *madricha* for assistance.
- **Cultural Differences:** It's important to understand that there are some differences between Israeli and U.S. behaviors, based on different cultural values and world views. For example, women, especially, should be aware that the Israeli sense of space differs from ours. (If anyone gets too close for comfort, don't hesitate to tell them to keep their distance.)
- **MAINTAINING ISRAEL'S SECURITY – AND YOURS – IS VITALLY IMPORTANT.** *Do not post videos of your base or personnel on YouTube or any other social media platforms. Do not post photos of your ID cards, military equipment or weapons. Use good judgment. Consider yourself a guardian of Israel's security and global image.*

Do not photograph or post anything that is sensitive or classified. The IDF monitors online social network sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and blogs. If you are not sure what is appropriate or allowed, ask your *madricha* or Johanna Arrouas, SAR-EL's program Coordinator at 054 258 6688.

- For your safety, **NEVER, NEVER HITCHHIKE** or accept a ride with someone you don't know well, including someone you have only met online.
- To avoid the appearance of proselytizing (which is not permitted on the program), it is best not to discuss religion or religious issues while you are on the program. **Anyone who proselytizes will be dismissed from the program.**
- If you encounter behaviors or circumstances that concern you on the base, such as drug or alcohol use, proselytizing, or other situations your *madricha* cannot easily remedy, call **Johanna Arrouas**, SAR-EL's Program Coordinator, immediately at 054 258 6688 or **Keren Dahan**, SAR-EL's CEO, at 054 924 0300. Do not wait until you are back home to let us know.
- If you are staying in Israel after the VFI program, you may need to confirm your return flight at least 72 hours prior to departure. Check with your airline. To extend your flight ticket you must call the airline yourself.

Above all, go with a sense of adventure and a sense of humor. Attitude makes all the difference. Be adaptable. These traits are assets on the program and wherever you travel in Israel. Remember: *Blessed are the flexible, for they shall not be bent out of shape.*

WHEN YOU RETURN HOME, THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO SUPPORT VFI

Your input is vital to help us make informed decisions about programs. Please let us hear from you when you return home, and please fill out VFI's Post-Program Questionnaire (PPQ), which will be emailed to you after you return. The link to the PPQ is there. We would also welcome copies of your photographs for our website or for publicity. Send them to your Regional Manager.

You Can Be a VFI "Ambassador." We need enthusiastic volunteers to help us with local recruiting and other tasks. **Our best advertisement is through word of mouth.** Most first-time volunteers hear about VFI from a friend or at a local presentation. **Tell your family and friends** about Volunteers for Israel and encourage them to go on a program too. **Write an article** about your experience for "The Volunteer Connection" (VFI's newsletter) or another newsletter; a newspaper; a magazine; and social network sites on the Internet. **Offer to speak to local clubs and organizations.** VFI will provide promotional materials and information to help you.

Please contact your local representative or VFI's national office (1-866-514-1948 or info@vfi-usa.org) to offer your services.

CHOOSE YOUR WORDS CAREFULLY. If you are new at this, before you write or give a presentation, review the list of guidelines you were given at home and in this Handbook, and check with your local representative. **Reminder: If you speak or write about your experience on a military base, it is accurate to say that you were a civilian volunteer ON an IDF base. You did not volunteer **IN**, **WITH** or **FOR** the IDF.** The distinction is very important. Please tell anyone who interviews you for an article not to use a headline or text that says or implies that you were "a temporary soldier," "in the army" or "in the Israeli army."

**PLEASE HELP VFI TO HELP ISRAEL BY SENDING
A DONATION TO:**

Volunteers For Israel

Irene Newman, *Financial Secretary*

Volunteers for Israel

Park West Finance Station

PO Box 20616

New York, NY 10025

See our website: <http://www.vfi-usa.org/support-vfi/>

WAYS TO PAY:

Check payable to:

Volunteers for Israel

Park West Finance Station

PO Box 20616

New York, NY 10025

Zelle

to vfifinansecy@aol.com

Venmo

to [Venmo@VFI-USA-2](https://venmo.com/VFI-USA-2)

**We are grateful for your service and for your support of the State of Israel
and the Israeli people. Thank you!**

CONTACT INFORMATION

To reach SAR-EL, call this number first:

Johanna Arrouas, SAR-EL Program Coordinator

Email: Johanna@sar-el.org

Cell phone in Israel: 054 258 6688

Keren Dahan, SAR-EL CEO

Email: kerend@sar-el.org

Cell phone in Israel: 054 924 0300

SAR-EL Office (Tel HaShomer)

Sar-El

PO Box 953

Kiron, 5510802 Israel

Phone: 03-682-9740 | Office: 03-681-4769 | Fax: 03-682-9743

VFI Headquarters (in the U.S.)

Email: info@vfi-usa.org

Tel: 1-866-514-1948

Ben-Gurion Airport Information (24-hour)

From US: +972 3 972-3333

From Israel: 03 972 3333

Phone: +972-3-748 6860

Email: Virtual@goisrael.gov.il

EMERGENCY TELEPHONE NUMBERS (in Israel)

SAR-EL office: 03-682-9740 FAX: 03-682-9743

Police: 100 Medical Emergency/Ambulance: 101

Information: 144 Fire Department: 102

U.S. Embassy Jerusalem

Phone in Israel: 02-630-4000

U.S. Embassy Branch Office, Tel Aviv

Phone in Israel: 03-519-7475

NOTES

The mission of Volunteers for Israel is to connect Americans to Israel through volunteer service.

We achieve this goal by partnering with military and civilian organizations that enable volunteers to work side-by-side with Israelis.

We promote solidarity and goodwill among Israelis, American Jews, and other friends of Israel.



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