

You have had a very busy 6 days and today is a slower pace. After traveling to Masada, you will ascend by cable car to the fortress at the top. This last desperate stronghold of the Jewish Zealots against the Romans was originally built by Herod the Great as a castle complex in the last century BC. After Herod's death and the annexation of Judea, the Romans built a garrison at Masada. Excavations have uncovered 29 storerooms that held the food and weapons, a tall palace on the northern edge with several rooms, a western palace with a water cistern, bathhouses with fresco-adorned walls, an immersion pool, and a sophisticated water system.

When the Great Revolt of the Jews against the Romans broke out in 66 A.D., a group of Jewish people known as the Sicarli, led by Menahem, took over the Masada complex. After Menahem was murdered in 66 A.D., and Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 A.D., 960 rebels, including women and children, fled to live in Herod's former palaces, led by Eleazer Ben Yair.

With Jerusalem in ruins, the Romans turned their attention to taking down Masada, the last community of Judea. Led by Flavius Silva, a legion of 8,000 Romans built camps surrounding the base, a siege wall, and a ramp on a slope of the Western side of the mountain made of earth and wooden supports. After several months of siege without success, the Romans built a tower on the ramp to try and take out the fortress's wall. When it became clear that the Romans were going to take over Masada, on April 15, 73 A.D., on the instructions of Ben Yair, all but two women and five children, who hid in the cisterns and later told their stories, took their own lives rather than live as Roman slaves.

Masada, located high above the Dead Sea is now an Israeli national park and a UNESCO World heritage Site. You can still look down on the remains of the Roman camps and the siege ramp below.

The day will end with a dip in the salt and mineral laden waters of the Dead Sea. (be sure and bring your bathing suit). This landlocked salt lake between Israel and Jordan is 1,300 ft below sea level and is the lowest elevation and body of water on the surface of the Earth. Unfortunately, in the 1960's Israel and Jordan began diverting much of the Jordan River's water flow and with increased use of the lake's water for commercial purposes the lake has had a drop of more than 100 feet. It continues to drop by about 3 feet annually. There are several initiatives currently underway to try and reverse this trend which we all hope will be implemented before it disappears completely. Should you not want to take a dip, there is a great bar, The World's Lowest Bar, to sit and enjoy a beverage overlooking the area.