



**VOLUNTEERS
FOR ISRAEL®**



**PROGRAM
HANDBOOK.**

STAND WITH ISRAEL. IN ISRAEL.

June 2020

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: Miri Sharon is SAR-EL's Program Coordinator. Keep her cell phone number with you in Israel: 054-755-0137. Add it to your phone contact list. Also add the phone number(s) of your madrichim.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

VOLUNTEERING ON AN IDF BASE	2
<i>Madrichim</i> – (group leaders).....	2
Work	3
PROGRAM DESCRIPTION	4
Work Schedules	4
Clothing.....	4
– Note To Women	5
Living Conditions.....	6
Meals.....	6
Weekends (Thursday afternoon–Sunday morning) VFI Plus tours	7
Tours and Evening Activities	9
TRAVEL INFORMATION.....	9
Booking Flights to and From Israel; Before You Leave Home; Checklist; Cell Phone; Packing and Carry-On Luggage; Money Tips; Medicine & Prescriptions; Medical Insurance; On Your Departure Day; Arriving in Israel; Meeting Instructions; Meeting Place Directions	
SOME PRACTICAL INFORMATION.....	15
Weather	15
Appliances	15
Internet and Hand-Held Electronic Devices	16
MONEY MATTERS.....	16
ATMs; Credit Cards; Traveler’s Checks; Wire Transfers	
PHONE CALLS	17
Cell Phone Rentals; Telephone Cards	
TRANSPORTATION	
Buses; Trains; Taxis; <i>Sheruts</i> ; Car Rentals.....	20
IMPORTANT SUGGESTIONS & GUIDELINES	21
WHEN YOU RETURN HOME.....	23
CONTACT INFORMATION.....	Inside Back Cover

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 partner 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. **YOU ARE A 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 when you arrive at the base. (The person who meets you at the airport and accompanies you on a chartered bus to your base or assigned job site may not necessarily be *your madricha*.)
- seeing that you have a bed to sleep in
- making sure you get work clothing and a job to do

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- educating volunteers about the IDF and Israel
 - 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* do not ordinarily book hotels or use their personal cell phones to help volunteers.
 - 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, e.g., truck, tank and parts inspection, replacement and repackaging
- 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. At lunch, sit with some soldiers—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 4–5 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 them. Refer to VFI's Packing List, which should be in the welcome packet you received when you were approved for VFI, or ask your representative. A list can also be found on SAR-EL's website under "Before You Depart."

Volunteers on bases are issued work clothes to be worn during the workday. 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: 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 SAR-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 SAR-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 a 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.

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 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 have to live out of your luggage, which might fit under your bed.
- 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.

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 your belongings (not valuables) in the locked barracks.

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. Your *madricha* will tell you when and where to meet the group. On average, expect to spend more than \$125 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 bring a bag suitable for weekend travel, and pack all medications you might need.

Weekend options can include:

- **an all-inclusive, organized VFI PLUS tour** (see p. 8)
- **exploring Israel or visiting family or friends**
- **staying at a youth hostel** or possibly **Beit Oded**, the IDF soldiers' hostel in Tel Aviv/Jaffa. Beit Oded is free, available only on weekends (Th-Sunday am) to volunteers on or after a program, and fills up quickly, so you must reserve a space. There is no guarantee that a room will be

available. There are no towels and no amenities. Tell your *madricha* if you are interested in staying there. (Note: You do not have to be a youth or a soldier to take advantage of these.) There are also “soldiers houses” in some regions of Israel. They are inexpensive, but not free. Ask your *madricha* about them.

- **staying at Abraham Hostel.** 21 Levotin St., Tel Aviv 6511604, Tel. (972) (0)3-624-9200.
- **staying at a hotel.** Note: Volunteer discounts are available at some hotels, especially in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. SAR-EL's website (www.SAR-EL.org) has a list. See SAR-EL's Hotel List under the topic “Before You Depart.” **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 with a private bus, guide, etc. 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 and VFI PLUS ADVANCED are perfect for first timers, couples, and “many timers” to Israel. VFI PLUS ARCHAEOLOGY combines one week on a base with one week on an active dig in Jerusalem.
For other tours, you must deal directly with tour companies or guides. SAR-EL's website (www.SAR-EL.org) lists tour guides recommended by volunteers, under the topic **Upon Your Arrival.**
- 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.** (See TRAVEL INFORMATION, p. 9.)

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. **(There is no SAR-EL tour on 1-week programs.)** Please understand that there may be changes in the schedule. 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 Beit Oded hostel or 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. *Regardless of the length of your program, 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, unless you plan to travel to Israel anyway.

NOTE: SAR-EL picks up volunteers at the airport on Sunday program dates only. **HOWEVER, TO AVOID ARRIVING LATE AT THE MEETING**

PLACE, VFI STRONGLY ADVISES YOU TO PLAN TO ARRIVE IN ISRAEL BEFORE THE SUNDAY START DATE.

- 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 on the last day of their program must arrange their own transportation from Tel Aviv to the airport. If this is your plan, book your return flight late enough in the evening to allow for travel time, traffic, airport screening, VAT refunds, etc. **Remember, you need to be at Ben-Gurion Airport at least 3 hours before flight time. To be safe, it is best to schedule your flight for 10 pm or later.** If you are not leaving Israel that evening, book your return flight accordingly.

Checklist

Cell Phone

- For your personal security and convenience, VFI strongly recommends that you have a cell phone during your stay in Israel, either your own or a rental. See Cell Phone Rentals p. 18. You can rent a phone from home or in Israel.

Packing

- **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

- your passport (You will need to show it several times. Keep it handy.)

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- 3 sets of collated VFI documents
 - medicine & prescriptions (see p. 12)
 - credit card(s), ATM card (see p. 17)
 - a change of clothing, in case your luggage is delayed
 - 100 Shekels or \$30.00 in cash or check for the SAR-EL Participation Fee

Passports: 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.

Documents for SAR-EL: Be sure to bring three (3) sets of completed VFI forms. One packet is for SAR-EL (Miri), one is for your *madricha*, and one is for you to keep. Each collated set must contain the following items:

- 1) a copy of the PICTURE PAGE OF YOUR PASSPORT(S)

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- 2) the EMERGENCY CONTACT INFORMATION page of your Application (Part II)
 - 3) all three signed MEDICAL PACKET forms
 - 4) the signed RELEASE AND INDEMNIFICATION form
 - 5) PROOF OF MEDICAL COVERAGE (both sides of your health insurance card)
 - 6) a signed UNDER-18 INFORMED CONSENT AGREEMENT (if applicable)
 - 7) 100 Shekels or \$30.00 in cash or check for the SAR-EL Participation Fee

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. 16), 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. 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 while in Israel. Americans on Medicare are NOT covered outside the U.S. However, it's advisable to check with Medicare 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 treatment automatically costs 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, p. 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

- **ALL** volunteers on **ALL** programs must arrive at their Meeting Place (see below) in Ben-Gurion Airport no later than 12:00 noon on their Sunday program start date. If you arrive at the Meeting Place late (up to 4 p.m.), you must call Miri Sharon, SAR-EL's Program Coordinator (054-755-0137) or email sharon@sar-el.org. She will try to get you on a nearby base. If you arrive later than 4 p.m., you must call or email Miri for instructions. You might need to find a place to stay overnight at your own expense.
- **Volunteers who are already in Israel** before the Sunday program date do not need to call Miri unless there is a problem. **Just be at the airport before Noon.**

MEETING PLACE DIRECTIONS

Go through Passport Control, claim your baggage (carts are no longer free), and clear customs. There are separate lines for Israeli citizens and foreign visitors. Then **proceed to the SAR-EL Meeting Place in the Arrivals Hall, Terminal 3 on the ground floor**, near the Erocca sunglasses kiosk. Look for the SAR-EL sign on the right. Wait for instructions at the benches with other volunteers. A SAR-EL representative will meet you there, either Miri Sharon or a soldier wearing army work clothes with the blue SAR-EL shoulder patch. Please be patient and relax. SAR-EL picks up volunteers at the airport several times on Sunday. There may be delays as they try to consolidate volunteers coming in on many different flights. If you don't see someone from SAR-EL after a while, call Miri at 054-755-0137.

If you want to leave the area for any reason, please tell one of the other waiting volunteers where you are going. Be friendly. That person might be your roommate for the next few weeks!

An ATM, currency exchange booth, phone rental kiosk, refreshments and restrooms are nearby. While you are waiting, you can buy shekels at the ATM, rent a phone, buy a phone card, or pick up a phone you have

pre-ordered. You can also buy SIM cards for your phone and a **RAV KAV** transportation card. (See TRANSPORTATION p. 20).

You might also want to buy lunch or a snack since you will probably arrive at the base too late for lunch. **Do not leave your luggage unattended for any reason while you are in the airport, or anywhere else.** 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 first one you encounter may be at the airport, opposite the baggage carousel. It's probably a good idea to get some shekels while you wait for your luggage or in the Arrivals Hall. 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. 12)

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.

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

REMEMBER that 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, PST. And noon in Israel can be 5 am, EST. Also, Israel's daylight saving time period is slightly different from the U.S., and this may also affect the time difference.

To call home you have several options:

- You can use a cell phone brought from home or rent one in Israel.
- You can buy pre-paid (international) telephone cards at home, or buy an Israeli Bezeq telecard to use in pay phones.

Cell Phone Rentals

For your personal security and convenience, **VFI strongly recommends that you have a cell phone during your stay in Israel, either your own or a rental.** Most people bring cell phones and buy a SIM card in Israel. Make sure your phone is “open” or “unlocked,” so a SIM card can be placed in the phone. It is very convenient and easy to rent a phone ahead of time in the U.S. or you can rent one at the airport when you arrive. You can also purchase a SIM card there. Be sure to carry the instructions and charger with you, including on weekends. Since every phone company has a different code to make long distance calls, read the directions carefully so you’ll understand how to call the U.S.

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

There are many cell phone providers. Rental fees and usage rates vary. When comparing costs, check to see if a company’s rates include the VAT tax. **It won’t hurt to ask if they offer a discount to SAR-EL (or VFI) volunteers.**

THERE IS A CELL PHONE COUNTER AT TERMINAL 3 AT THE ARRIVALS HALL FOR RENTALS AND PURCHASES OF PHONES AND SIM CARDS.

To find a provider, check online, ask your local representative, or consider the information below:

Some phone companies to consider:

TalknSave cell phones:

info@talknsave.net • www.talknsave.net

CellTalk:

http://www.celltalk.co.il • 1-866-801-9623

Global Cellular/Israel phones:

(US) 516-791-0849 • info@gcellular.com

Telephone Cards

Most Israeli bases *do not* have public pay phones, and if they do the phones might not work. Also, you may have to wait your turn to use them (another reason to carry your own cell phone). Pay phones do not take coins. They require a Bezeq telephone card, which is generally the least expensive way to make a call. The card can be purchased at the airport, at many, but not all, “*shekems*” (PXs) on bases, in some tobacco and candy stores (kiosks), and many other places. It is a pre-paid card that has a given number of message units on it. It comes in denominations of 20, 50, and 100 units, and the cost depends on its unit size. Unless you have lots of calls to make, a small denomination is advisable. How many units a call will use (cost) depends on the time of day, the length of the call, and the distance you are calling. Evening rates are lowest.

To use the telecard, place it in the phone slot. Wait for the dial tone and then follow instructions that will appear on the screen. The readout will be in Hebrew first, then in English. Once your call is connected, the readout will indicate the number of units left on the card. When you hang up, be sure to retrieve your card.

IMPORTANT: To call from Israel to the U.S., you must first dial one of the Israeli international call companies (Barak 013, Bezeq 014 or Zahav 012), then 1 (the country code), and then the area code and phone number (ex. 013-1-212-555-1212). Keep this in mind when programming phone numbers into your address book. To dial a number within Israel, just dial the area code (with the zero first) and phone number.

Another option is buying a pre-paid telephone card at home. They are widely available at drugstores and supermarkets, etc., from companies like MCI, Sprint, AT&T, and countless other providers. **Providers may change their coverage, so make sure the card you select is International and will work in Israel.**

You **MUST** use a Bezeq telecard to get a dial tone. After you get a dial tone you can use your U.S.-based cards. Follow directions that come with the card. **NOTE: U.S. calling cards (or collect calls) can be VERY EXPENSIVE.**

TRANSPORTATION

NOTE: For bus and train information in Israel, call *8787. There is an English option.

NEW: RAV KAV BUS/TRAIN CARDS

There is a new rule about buses and trains in Israel. Everyone must purchase a “**Rav Kav**” bus card BEFORE going on a bus or train. Bus drivers will not take any money. You can purchase these cards at the central bus stations or train stations, as well as at the airport. **The best place to buy them is at the airport at the Transportation counter in the Arrivals Hall (near where the volunteers meet).** The cards are 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.

Buses

Israeli Egged and Dan buses are a very convenient way to get to and from the base on weekends. 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. On Sunday morning, if you are returning to your pre-arranged meeting place to go back to the base, keep in mind that bus stops and stations will be VERY crowded. Leave enough time!

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.

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 Miri.**

IMPORTANT SUGGESTIONS & GUIDELINES

- Take along one or more copies of the front page of your passport and keep them 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.

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- 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.
 - No special vaccinations are required before you go to Israel.
 - Do NOT have things mailed to the SAR-EL office or Beit Oded. You will not get them. If you need something mailed to you, ask Miri for suggestions.
 - **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.) To understand the "whys" behind the "ways," and to make the transition easier, please consult the tips on "Cultural Differences" prepared by volunteer Ruth Mastron that are available on VFI's website or through your representative.
 - **MAINTAINING ISRAEL'S SECURITY—AND YOURS—IS VITALLY IMPORTANT.** On social media, do not post copies of your ID cards or photos of military equipment with identifying numbers, or a volunteer holding a weapon. 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 Miri Sharon.
 - 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.**

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- If you encounter behaviors or circumstances that concern you on the base, such as drug use, proselytizing, or other situations your *madricha* cannot easily remedy, call Miri Sharon immediately at 055-755-0137. 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 volunteered **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.”

IMPORTANT! VFI CAMPUS PROGRAM

Help send college students to Israel. Each donation helps enable a student to experience a VFI program and develop a meaningful and enduring relationship with Israel and Israelis. Returning students are enthusiastic ambassadors who share their positive experiences on campus... and beyond.

PLEASE HELP VFI 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/>

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:

Miri Sharon (SAR-EL Program Coordinator in Israel)

Email: sharon@SAR-EL.org

Cell phone: (in Israel) 054-755-0137

From U.S.: 011-972-54-755-0137

SAR-EL Office

PO Box 953, Kiron 5510802 Israel

Email: SAR-EL@netvision.net.il • Website: www.SAR-EL.org

Phone: 03-682-9740 (in Israel) / 011-972-3-682-9740 (from U.S.)

03-681-4769 (in Israel) / 011-972-3-681-4769 (from U.S.)

Beit Oded (SAR-EL weekend hostel)

5 Jerusalem Blvd., Tel Aviv (Yafo)

Tel: (in Israel) 03-569-2848

VFI Headquarters (in the U.S.)

Email: info@vfi-usa.org

Tel: 1-866-514-1948

Ben-Gurion Airport Information (24-hour)

Tel: (from outside Israel) 011-972-3-975-5555

(in Israel) 03-975-5555 or 03-975-6663

EMERGENCY TELEPHONE NUMBERS (in Israel)

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

Miri Sharon: 054-755-0137

Police: 100

Medical Emergency/Ambulance: 101

Information: 144

Fire Department: 102

U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv: 03-519-7475 (Mon.–Thurs. between 2-4 pm)

or 03-519-7575 (after hours and emergencies)

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 good will among Israelis, American Jews, and other friends of Israel.



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