



Pre-Arrival Guide for International Students and Researchers



אוניברסיטת בן-גוריון בנגב
Ben-Gurion University
of the Negev

Welcome to Ben-Gurion University of the Negev!

We are delighted that you chose BGU and are planning your studies or research at one of our campuses. With exponential growth in recent years, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (BGU) has proven itself to be the ideal institution of higher education, striking the right balance between great academic achievement and an inspirational private life.

As you prepare for your trip to Israel and BGU, the questions you may face seem endless. Where do I need to go when I arrive? What do I need to know about residency permits and health insurance? This pre-arrival guide aims to make your transition to BGU as smooth and informed as possible. Read this guide thoroughly and start organizing your trip as early as possible.

We at the Office of International Academic Affairs (OIAA) hope that your stay at BGU will be an interesting and rewarding experience and that you are just as excited about your trip to Israel as we are.

Do not hesitate to contact us with any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Office of International Academic Affairs
Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

oiaa@bgu.ac.il

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About Israel

Key Facts

- Population: 8.2 million inhabitants
- Religion: 75% Jewish, 21% Muslim and 4% Other
- Capital: Jerusalem
- Form of Government: Unitary parliamentary republic with a President and Prime Minister
- 20% of the population holds at least one academic degree (third highest rate worldwide)

Language

Israel has two official languages: Hebrew and Arabic. The majority of the population speaks Hebrew. The Hebrew language is written from right to left and uses the Hebrew alphabet. Traffic signs and street names are mostly written in English, Hebrew and Arabic. Israelis have decent abilities to communicate in English, as it is taught from the early grades in elementary school and many television programs are broadcasted in English.

Religion

Israel was established as a Jewish state. Today, Jewish religion and tradition play a major role in shaping Israeli culture and lifestyle, while freedom of religion is anchored by law. The impact of the Jewish religion is noticeable to foreigners in day-to-day life, especially during religious holidays and on the religious day of rest (Shabbat). Shabbat is a weekly Jewish ritual lasting ~25 hours, from sundown on Friday to just after sundown on Saturday. Observant Jews will not work, spend money or use electricity. A festive meal is often shared with family and friends on Friday nights. Shops and many restaurants are closed and public transportation does not operate from Friday afternoon (starting around 2-4 p.m.) until Saturday evening. Even though the Jewish religion is the most practised religion in Israel, Israelis are very tolerant of other religions and you will find countless communities of other beliefs and practices.

Climate

Israel enjoys long, warm, dry summers (April – October) and generally mild winters (November – March) with somewhat drier, cooler weather in hilly regions, such as Jerusalem and Safed. Rainfall is relatively heavy in the north and center of the country, with much less precipitation in the northern Negev and almost negligible amounts in the southern regions. Regional conditions vary considerably, with humid summers and mild winters on the coast; dry summers and moderately cold winters in the hilly regions; hot dry summers and pleasant winters in the Jordan Valley; and year-round semi-desert conditions in the Negev.

Weather extremes range from the occasional winter snowfall in the mountain regions to periodic oppressively hot dry winds that send temperatures soaring, particularly in spring and autumn.

For a table of average annual temperatures, see: [Average Temperature in Israel](#).

Weather in Beer-Sheva:

Summer (June – September): Extremely hot and dry. Never rains. Sometimes humid or hazy at night.

■ Day: 32–41°C (90–105°F)

■ Night: 21–27°C (70–80°F)

Fall (October – November): Warm and sunny, with infrequent/sporadic rain.

■ Day: 27–32°C (80–90°F)

■ Night: 15–21°C (60–70°F)

Winter (December – March): Mostly sunny, cold nights. Rain is surprisingly frequent during the winter. While not considered cold by many people, most homes here are not heated or properly insulated, and it can get chilly indoors when there's a strong wind. Some A/C units also have heating capability, but many people rely on small space heaters.

■ Day: 10–15°C (50–60°F)

■ Night: 4–10°C (40–50°F)

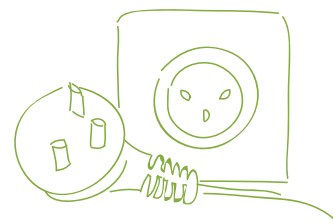
Spring (April – June): Pleasant with warm and sunny days. Cool nights through June.

■ Day: 21–29°C (70–85°F)

■ Night: 15–21°C (60–70°F)

Electricity

Israel uses 220V 50Hz power. Nearly all modern devices, including computers, are compatible with different voltages, without necessitating the use of a voltage converter. To double check, look at the fine print on the power supply; if it says 100–240V, 50/60 Hz, there is nothing to worry about. You might need a basic plug adapter that is compatible with the type C 'Europlug' with 4mm pins (not 4.8mm or 6mm pins) or the Israel-specific type H. Adapters can either have two or three prongs.



Time Zone and Calendar

Israel is in the UTC/GMT +2 hours zone.

Even though the holidays follow the Hebrew calendar, the Gregorian calendar is generally used in Israel. The work week is from Sunday to Thursday, while Friday and Saturday constitute the weekend (with Saturday as the day of rest).

Israel uses daylight savings time, reflected in clock changes at the end of March and October.

Currency Exchange

There are various options for changing money at exchange offices (also at the airport). Depending on your banking fees at home, it may be cheaper to withdraw cash from an ATM. In order to withdraw cash, you will need an international credit card and a 4-digit security code (PIN).

Quick Tips on Israeli Music, Movies and Books

While getting ready for your stay in Israel, you might want to get yourself into "Israel mood" by reading Israeli books, watching Israeli movies or listening to Israeli music.

There are so many to choose from, but here are some options we've picked out for you:

Music: Yemen Blues, Esther Rada, Tipex, Sarit Hadad

Movies: Walking on Water, Operation Grandma (Mivtsa Sabta), Ha-Ushpisin and Colombian Love

Books: Books by authors Meir Shalev, Etgar Keret and David Grossman

Learn more about Israel on Israel.com



Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (BGU) and Its Surroundings

Ben-Gurion University of the Negev is located in Beer-Sheva, a growing city whose diverse population numbers over 200,000. Beer-Sheva is often called the capital of the Negev region. The Negev desert, which comprises 60 percent of Israel's landmass but only eight percent of its population, is home to some 550,000 people, including 160,000 Bedouins.

Ben-Gurion University of the Negev has been and remains one of Israel's leading research universities and a world leader in many fields. Established in 1969, it has around 20,000 students and 4,000 faculty members. More than 115,000 alumni play important roles in all areas of research and development, industry, health care, the economy, society, culture and education in Israel.

The student population at Ben-Gurion University has more than doubled in the last decade. Global academic ratings place the University high among universities worldwide and even among the world leaders in certain fields. Ben-Gurion University was ranked first in terms of student satisfaction among all academic institutions in Israel.

One University – Three Campuses

The Marcus Family Campus in Beer-Sheva is BGU's main campus. Here you will find all general student services, such as the Office of International Academic Affairs (OIAA), the Student Union offices, the Dean of Students Office, the student cinema and the majority of faculties.

The Sede Boqer Campus is located about 50 km south of Beer-Sheva and is home to the Jacob Blaustein Institutes for Desert Research, as well as the Ben-Gurion Research Institute for the Study of Israel and Zionism.

The Eilat Campus is home to the University's biotechnology and marine biology programs. Eilat is located about 230 km south of Beer-Sheva, on the coast of the Red Sea.



Tuition, Currency and Cost of Living

Tuition

Depending on the purpose of your visit, you may have to pay tuition. Tuition fees for the different Overseas Programs are listed [here](#). You are required to pay your tuition prior to your arrival and send the proof of payment to your student coordinator. For your convenience, the amount and all payment details are listed on your invoice.

Currency

The only currency accepted in Israel is the New Israeli Shekel (NIS), simply called "shekel." 100 agurot equal 1 shekel. Bank notes are available in denominations of 20, 50, 100 and 200. The following coins are available: 10 agurot, 1/2 shekel (equals 50 agurot), 1, 2, 5 and 10 shekels.

Cost of Living

The cost of living in Israel highly depends on how much you would like to travel, how much you eat out and if you need to buy equipment for your housing or travels. Some of the programs include housing. If so, all bills, with the exception of an internet connection, are included.

Student Budget	
Item	Approx. NIS/month
Food (home meals)	800
Accommodations	1500
Personal/Miscellaneous	1000
<hr/>	
Total costs	3,300

Price of Food Products in Israel	
Item	NIS
Milk	5.5 (1 liter)
Bread	12.5 (750 g)
Rice	7 (1 kilo)
Eggs	12 (a dozen)
Wine	35-45 (750 ml)
Beer	10 (500 ml)

Please note: The listed costs should be regarded as an indication of the price level in Israel. Please be aware that costs of living are very individual.

Groceries

For one person – 200 NIS per week. The indicated price does not include alcoholic beverages and meat.

Bills

Mobile phone, internet, gas, water, electricity and municipal taxes – up to 400 NIS per month (some of the items may be included in your rent)

Housing

Around 1100 NIS for a shared apartment with two roommates and around 2000 NIS for a single-studio (not including monthly bills)



Passports and Visas

Upon entering Israel, your passport must be valid for at least another six months past your issued visa expiration date. The law requires that your visa reflect the purpose of your stay in Israel.

Please note: Once you have entered Israel with a tourist visa you cannot change it to another type of visa from within Israel's borders.

Please have your visa issued as soon as possible. Information about visas is available here: [Visa](#)

If you are not sure what kind of visa suits your visit, please contact our visa coordinator: vhi@bgu.ac.il



Health Insurance

In order to apply for a visa and to study/conduct research at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, you are required to hold valid health insurance. The insurance must be continuous even when you are periodically out of Israel (semester breaks, holidays, conferences, etc.).

Your insurance must cover the following areas:

- All medical emergencies
- Hospitalization
- Medical flight evacuation back to your home country
- Transportation of mortal remains

Specific programs may have additional requirements.

If you are coming with health insurance from your home country, please make sure that it covers you for the duration of your studies.

If you would like to purchase health insurance from an Israeli company, please visit [Insurance Info](#) for information about local providers.

In any case, you should be aware of what is and is not covered before purchasing the insurance.

Before leaving your home country, have provisional medical examinations, including dental examinations, done.

If you need medication for pre-existing conditions, you should bring it with you.



Planning Your Arrival in Israel and on Campus

When to Arrive

There are several factors to keep in mind when planning your arrival in Israel. As previously mentioned, public transportation and most shops are closed from Friday afternoon until Saturday late evening and on public holidays. Getting to Beer-Sheva will be considerably more difficult and expensive if your plane lands between noon on Friday and sunset on Saturday.

If you are staying in University housing, make sure to take the check-in times of your accommodation into consideration by contacting the dorms counselor: osp@bgu.ac.il. You will not be able to enter your accommodation on Saturday, meaning that you will have to book a hotel room for the time right after your arrival.

For your consideration, a list of all public holidays is available [here](#). The current academic calendar is available [here](#).

Booking a Flight to Israel

Ben-Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv (airport code TLV) is the international airport in Israel. When flying to Israel, please make sure to arrive at the airport 3 hours before departure, since the security check for flights going to Israel might take some time. Please do not be offended or worried by the security checks. It is for the sake of our safety and should not bother you. When purchasing your plane tickets, bear in mind that it is crucial to also possess a return ticket for the purpose of immigration.

Travel from the Airport to Beer-Sheva

You may take the train (32 NIS one way), rent a car one way (about 250 NIS), or take a private taxi (400–500 NIS, cash only). The train is easy, but rental/taxi may be worthwhile if you have a lot of luggage and/or someone to share the ride with.

Train: This is an easy journey requiring one transfer. Double check times at www.rail.co.il/en. Departure is from “Ben-Gurion Airport.” In order to board the train, enter the train station at the airport (ground level) and purchase a ticket to Beer-Sheva for 32 NIS. Board the train going to Tel Aviv (terminus could be Binyamina, Haifa, Nahariyya, or other). The train will always be going away from Modi’in Center. Get off at the first stop (12 mins.) at Tel Aviv HaHagana Station, cross the platform, and board the train to Beer-Sheva. Make sure it is a train to Beer-Sheva (it will be written on the side of the train), since a few different trains use the same track. Usually, but not always, the Beer-Sheva bound train leaves 6 minutes after your arrival at HaHagana station, from Track 1. If you are staying in one of the campus housing options or elsewhere close to campus, you should get off at the Beer-Sheva North/University Station. The ride from the airport to Beer-Sheva takes around 1 hour and 40 minutes. If you booked a hotel close to the central bus/train station, get off at the Beer-Sheva Center Station (one stop after Beer-Sheva North/University).



Arriving at the Student Dorms

Rental Cars: The airport car rental office is open 24/7. You can do a one-day rental, driving from the airport and returning the car in Beer-Sheva. This costs ~250 NIS including gas and \$27 airport fees. The drive will take about 80 minutes, providing no traffic hold ups.

Arrival at the Sede Boqer Campus

Students traveling to the Sede Boqer Campus for the first time will be picked up at the airport and driven directly to campus. If you are planning to arrive independently, take bus number 60 from the Beer-Sheva Central Bus Station to the Sede Boqer Campus (a 40-minute bus ride).

Eilat Campus

The Eilat Campus is located in the southern tip of Israel right next to the Egyptian border. You can get there by bus or car from Beer-Sheva (about 3 hours) or by flight from Ben-Gurion Airport.



Accommodations

If you are coming on one of the international student programs, housing may be included in the tuition fees. All information about the dormitories is available [here](#). Make sure you understand what equipment is provided.

If you prefer other housing options or if housing is not provided by the University, you should only start your apartment search once you have arrived. For temporary housing, there are several options to choose from:

- [U-Tel](#): Fully furnished and equipped guest apartments that are run by the University.
- Hotels: There are a few hotels in Beer-Sheva that offer different price ranges. You will easily find them on Google.
- [Airbnb](#): Offers short-term housing solutions
- [Melonit Ben-Gurion](#): Guest apartments located right next to campus
- [Ben Gurion Apartment Rentals by MH Group](#): Fully furnished guest apartments located within walking distance of campus, close to the Ilanot Gate



Academic Life

Depending on the purpose of your visit, the contact person for academic matters varies. In general, your Faculty will help with any question you may have regarding courses, registration and academic requirements.

You might want to take a look at the [list of courses taught in English](#). If you need assistance in understanding and communicating with the Faculty, please do not hesitate to visit our front desk.

Grades

The Israeli grading scale is 0-100, with 100 being the highest. In order to pass most courses, you need to achieve a grade of 65. Be aware that this requirement may vary from course to course, and exact regulations are set in each syllabus.



Packing List

- Letter of Acceptance
- Passport and visa documentation
- Technology and communications devices
- Linens and towels (if you are not staying in a fully equipped apartment)
- Cell phone: All Israeli carriers give the option of using SIM, microSIM or nanoSIM cards. Your phone will need to be unlocked in order to use it here – ask your carrier for the code to unlock your current phone before you leave for Israel. The network technology is GSM/UMTS.
- Adapter for electrical appliances (if necessary)
- Toiletries: You should bring a supply of your favorite brand of shampoo, conditioner, deodorant, razor cartridges, etc., since imported products are very expensive.
- Sunscreen
- Comfortable sandals
- Comfortable clothing for travel and hikes
- Short summer clothes
- Hats with 360° brims, such as fedoras, panama hats or bucket hats, are strongly recommended.
- Travel guides: You should bring them from home, if you would like.
- Warm clothing: Even though the weather is oppressively hot during the summer, in winter it can be quite cold, dropping to 4°C (40°F) at night. It is especially cold inside apartments as they are not insulated, so bring comfortable, warm clothing to wear around the house.
- Winter jacket and raincoat (during the winter).



Disabilities

Over the past two decades, BGU has made great efforts to make its campuses wheelchair accessible. Please find an accessibility map, including elevators, [here](#).

The Dean of Students Office offers services for students with disabilities of all kinds. Please do not hesitate to contact the Office of International Academic Affairs to find out more about your rights and our [services](#).

Questions?

Feel free to contact us with any question you may have prior to your arrival at BGU. We are here to guide you through every step of the process.

For all questions, contact osp@bgu.ac.il
or call +972-8-6461144



Looking forward to meeting you at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev!

