

Welcome to Masada National Park



Masada was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2001. Its inscription on this prestigious list epitomizes its outstanding universal significance, which must be protected for the benefit of all humanity.

Masada was the last bastion of Jewish freedom fighters against the Romans: its fall signaled the violent destruction of the kingdom of Judea at the end of the Second Temple period. The tragic events of the last days of the rebels at Masada transformed it into both a Jewish cultural icon and a symbol of humanity's continuous struggle for freedom from oppression.

Built by Herod, king of Judea, Masada was a palatial fortress in the style of the ancient Roman East. The camps, fortifications, and assault ramp at its base constitute the most complete surviving ancient Roman siege system in the world.

Geography

The plateau of Masada is located on the eastern fringe of the Judean Desert near the shore of the Dead Sea, between En Gedi and Sodom. It is a mountain bloc that rose and was detached from the fault escarpment, surrounded at its base by Wadi Ben Yair on the west and Wadi Masada on the south and east. The plateau, 450 meters above the level of the Dead Sea, is approximately 650 meters long and 300 meters wide. East of the mountain is sediment left by the ancient Dead Sea, scored by numerous cracks.

Masada is close to two ancient routes: one cut through the center of the Judean Desert and led to southern Moab in eastern Transjordan; the other connected Edom, Moab and the Arava Valley to En Gedi and Jerusalem.

Masada's remote location and its natural defenses were the advantages that transformed it into a fortress during the Second Temple period.

Safety Rules

- Visits are permitted only when the park is open.
- After dark, visitors are permitted only in authorized areas: the hostel and the open overnight campground on the eastern side, and the overnight campground (entrance fee required) on the western side.
- Do not deviate from marked paths; do not climb walls or damage the antiquities.
- Do not go near the edge of the cliff. Beware of falling rocks.
- Caution: there are dangerous places at this site. Parents, please watch your children.
- Bring water on your ascent of the mountain and drink frequently. A hat and good walking shoes are recommended.
- Obey the park wardens and signs.
- Do not leave your vehicle in the parking garage after the park closes.
- The management is not responsible for valuables left in vehicles.
- Do not bring food up the mountain; there are designated picnic areas at park entrances.
- Pets are prohibited in the park. Cages are available at the entrances.

Access and services for persons with disabilities

All of Masada National Park, its eastern and western entrances, and the sound and light show have been adapted for visits by persons with mobility, vision, or hearing impairments. Disabled access was made possible with the assistance of the National Insurance Institute – the Fund for the Development of Services for the Disabled.



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 The Hebrew University of Jerusalem Institute of Archaeology
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The History of Masada

Sources

The story of Masada was recorded by Josephus Flavius, who was the commander of the Galilee during the Great Revolt and later surrendered to the Romans at Yodfat. At the time of Masada's conquest he was in Rome, where he devoted himself to chronicling the revolt. In spite of the debate surrounding the accuracy of his accounts, its main features seem to have been born out by excavation.

The Hasmonean Period

According to Josephus, the first fortress at Masada was built by "Jonathan the High Priest" – apparently the Hasmonean king Alexander Janaeus (103-76 BCE), whose coins were discovered in excavations of the site. Some scholars tend to identify Jonathan with the brother of Judah the Macabee, who became high priest in 152 BCE. So far no architectural remains have been discovered at Masada that can be dated with certainty to the Hasmonean period.

The Herodian Period

Herod, who ruled from 37 BCE to 4 BCE, was well aware of the strategic advantages of Masada. He therefore chose the site as a refuge against his enemies, and as a winter palace. During his reign, luxurious palaces were built here in addition to well-stocked storerooms, cisterns, and a casemate wall. After the death of Herod in 4 BCE and the annexation of Judea to the Roman Empire in 6 CE, the Romans stationed a garrison at Masada.

The Great Revolt

Josephus relates that one of the first events of the Great Revolt of the Jews against the Romans, which broke out in 66 CE, was the conquest of Masada by the Sicarii, a group that got its name from a curved dagger, the *sica*, which they carried. The Sicarii were headed by Menahem, son of Judah the Galilean, who was murdered in Jerusalem in 66 CE. After the murder, Eleazar Ben Yair fled from Jerusalem to Masada and became commander of the rebel community on the mountain. It was a varied group, which apparently included Essenes and Samaritans. The last of the rebels fled to Masada after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE and joined those already at the fortress under the command of Eleazar Ben Yair.

The rebels, who lived in rooms in the casemate wall and in some of Herod's palaces, constructed a synagogue and mikvehs (Jewish ritual baths). They left behind numerous material vestiges attesting to their community life.

The Siege

According to Josephus, Masada was the last rebel stronghold in Judea. In 73 or 74 CE, the Roman Tenth Legion Fretensis, led by Flavius Silva, laid siege to

the mountain. The legion, consisting of 8,000 troops among which were auxiliary forces, built eight camps around the base, a siege wall, and a ramp made of earth and wooden supports on a natural slope to the west. Captive Jews brought water to the troops, apparently from En Gedi, as well as food.

After a siege that lasted a few months, the Romans brought a tower with a battering ram up the ramp with which they began to batter the wall. The rebels constructed an inner support wall out of wood and earth, which the Romans then set ablaze. As Josephus describes it, when the hope of the rebels dwindled, Eleazar Ben Yair gave two speeches in which he convinced the leaders of the 960 members of the community that it would be better to take their own lives and the lives of their families than to live in shame and humiliation as Roman slaves. In Josephus' own words:

"Then, having chosen by lot ten of their number to dispatch the rest, they laid themselves down each beside his prostrate wife and children, and, flinging their arms around them, offered their throats in readiness for the executors of the melancholy office. These, having unswervingly slaughtered all, ordained the same rule of the lot for one another, that he on whom it fell should slay first the nine and then himself last of all... They had died in the belief that they had left not a soul of them alive to fall into Roman hands; The Romans advanced to the assault... seeing none of the enemy but on all sides an awful solitude, and flames within and silence, they were at a loss to conjecture what had happened Here encountering the mass of slain, instead of exulting as over enemies, they admired the nobility of their resolve and the contempt of death display by so many in carrying it, unwavering, into execution."

(Josephus Flavius, The Wars of the Jews, VII, 395-406)

According to Josephus, two women and five children who had been hiding in the cisterns on the mountaintop told the Romans what had happened that



An ibex

night, on the 15th of Nissan, the first day of Passover.

The fall of Masada was the final act in the Roman conquest of Judea. A Roman auxiliary unit remained at the site until the beginning of the second century CE.

The Byzantine Period

After the Romans left Masada, the fortress remained uninhabited for a few centuries. During the fifth century CE, in the Byzantine period, a monastery of the type known as a *laura*, inhabited by hermits, was founded. Some scholars identify the Masada monastery with a site called Marda, mentioned by the Church fathers. With the rise of Islam in the seventh century, the monastery apparently ceased to exist.

The History of Masada Research

After the Byzantine period Masada sank into oblivion until the nineteenth century. The first scholars to identify Masada with the plateau known in Arabic as *es-Sebbeh* were Smith and Robinson in 1838, and the first to climb it were Wolcott and Tipping in 1842. Warren climbed Masada in 1867, Conder described and mapped it in 1875, Sandel discovered the water system in 1905, and Schulten studied mainly the Roman siege system in 1932.

From the 1920s and especially during the 1940s, Masada became a lodestone for pioneering Zionist youth groups. The Hebrew translation in 1923 of "The Wars of the Jews" by Josephus, as well as the poem "Masada," written by Lamdan, published in 1927, brought Masada closer to the hearts of young people in the country's Jewish community. Shmarya Gutmann, who led numerous trips to the mountain, was particularly instrumental in transforming Masada into a symbol. Together with Micha Livneh and Ze'ev Meshel, Gutmann rediscovered the Northern Palace and the Snake Path in 1953. Survey excavations were carried out in 1955-1956, mainly in the northern part of the plateau and the water system. This led to the major excavations carried out by The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, headed by Yigael Yadin from 1963 to 1965. These excavations uncovered most of Masada's structures, along with thousands of well-preserved artifacts that present a rare picture of the material culture at the end of the Second Temple period.

During the excavations many buildings were conserved and reconstructed and after preparation of the site for visitors, Masada National Park was opened in 1966. The construction of the first cable car in 1971 increased the stream of visitors.

After a short excavation in 1989 conducted by Ehud Netzer, excavations were renewed by the Hebrew University in 1995 in the framework of a large-scale development project funded by the Tourism Ministry through the Israel Government Tourist Corporation. A number of excavation seasons were carried out led by Ehud Netzer and Guy Stiebel on the plateau, in addition to a season directed by Gideon Foerster at Roman Camp F and the siege ramp.

Conservation and restoration activities were carried out by the Israel Nature and Parks Authority.

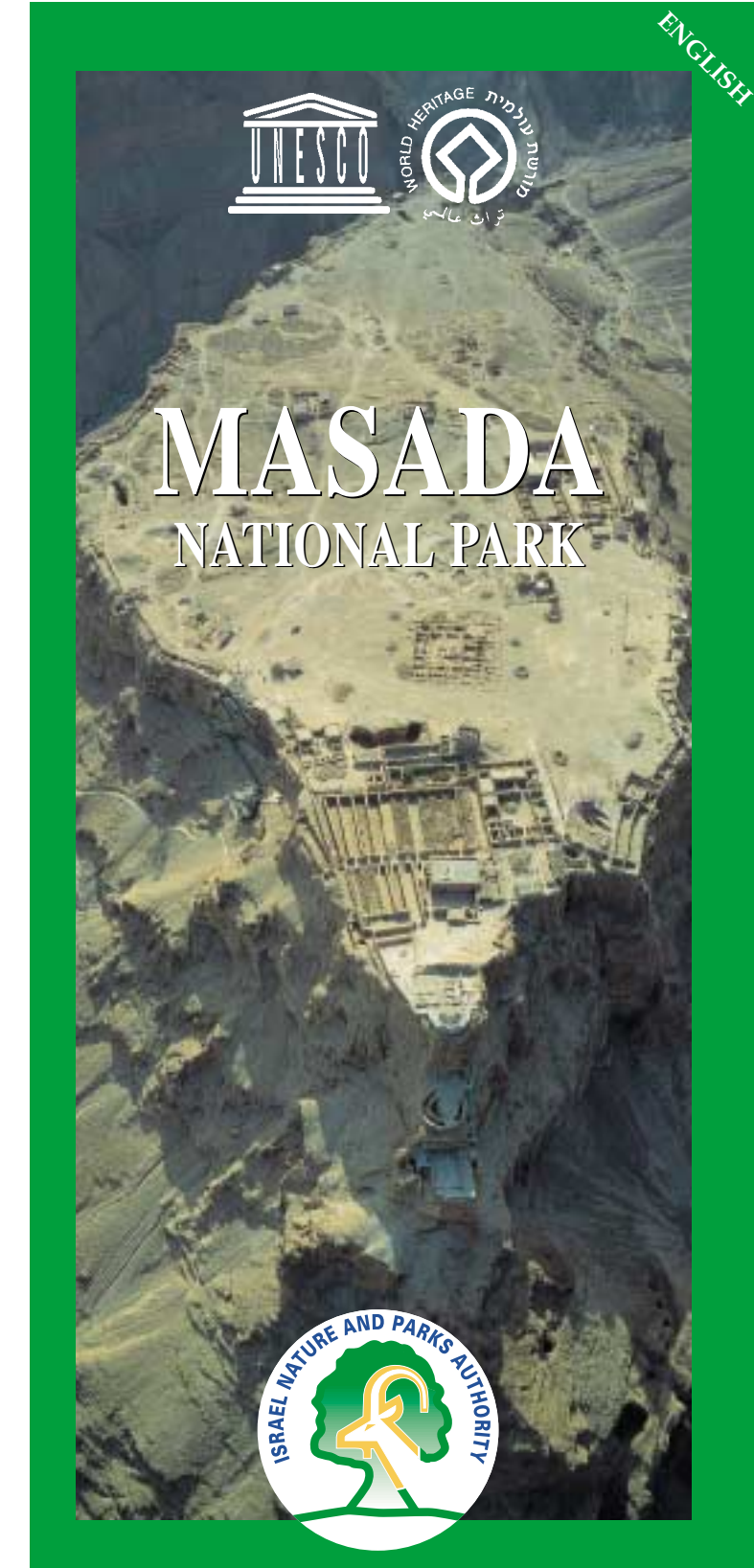
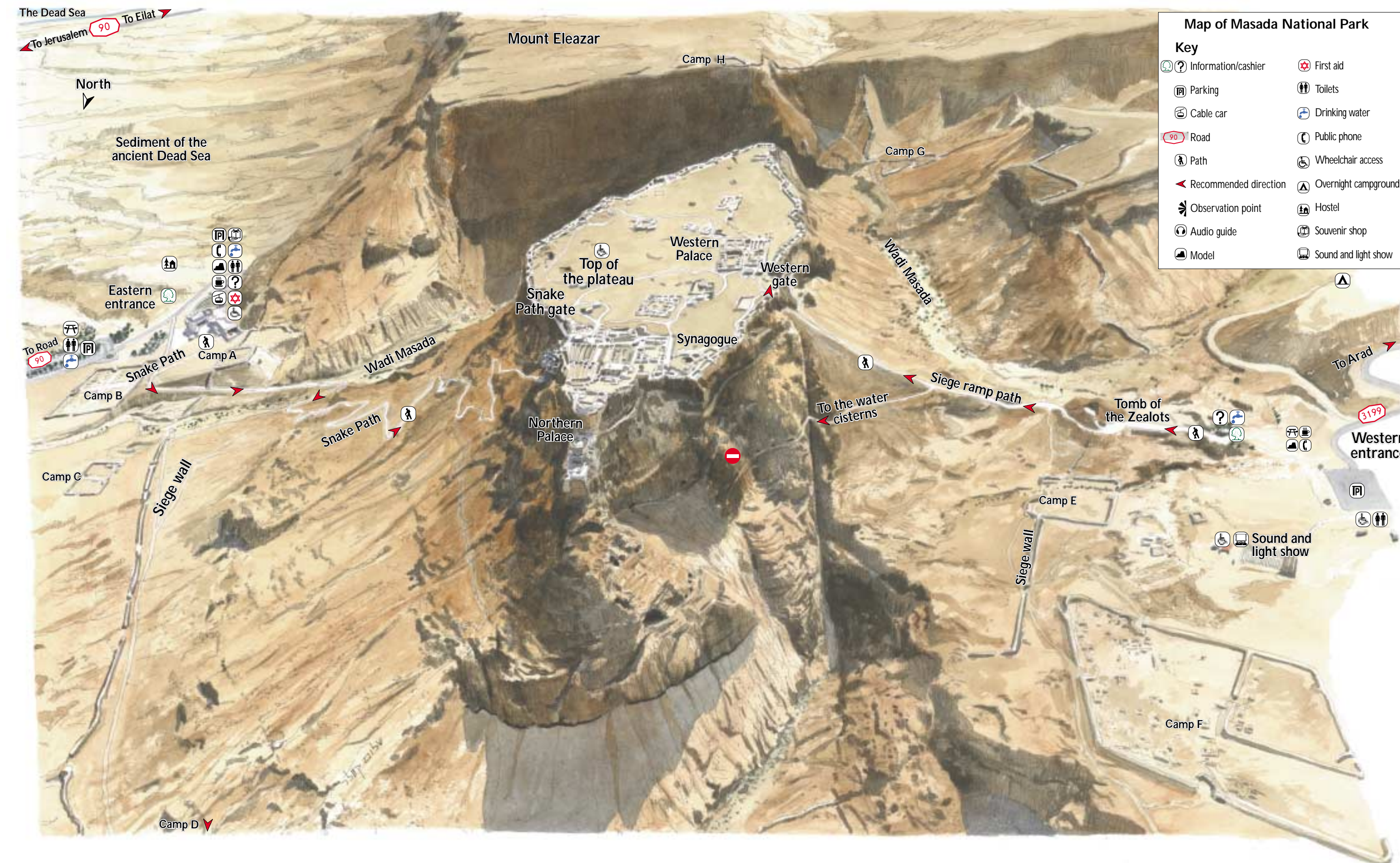


The Roman siege ramp

Excerpts from Eleazar Ben-Yair's Speech (Josephus Flavius, The Wars of the Jews, VII, 320–336)

"Since we, long ago, my generous friends, resolved never to be servants to the Romans, nor to any other than to God himself, who alone is the true and just Lord of mankind, the time is now come that obliges us to make that resolution true in practice. And let us not at this time bring a reproach upon ourselves for self-contradiction, while we formerly would not undergo slavery, though it were then without danger, but must now, together with slavery, choose such punishments also as are intolerable; I mean this, upon the supposition that the Romans once reduce us under their power while we are alive. We were the very first that revolted from them, and we are the last that fight against them; and I cannot but esteem it as a favor that God hath granted us, that it is still in our power to die bravely, and in a state of freedom, which hath not been the case of others, who were conquered unexpectedly. It is very plain that we shall be taken within a day's time, but it is still an eligible thing to die after a glorious manner, together with our dearest friends..."

Let our wives die before they are abused, and our children before they have tasted slavery; and after we have slain them, let us bestow that glorious benefit upon one another mutually and preserve ourselves in freedom as an excellent funeral monument for us. But first let us destroy our money and the fortress by fire; for I am well assured that this will be a great relief to the Romans, that they shall not be able to seize upon our bodies, and shall fail to our wealth also; and let us spare nothing but our provisions; for they will be a testimonial when we are dead that we are not subdued for want of necessities; but that, according to our original resolution, we have preferred death before slavery."



Information

Masada National Park encompasses the plateau and its antiquities, and the eastern and western entrance areas. A guest house and two overnight campgrounds are also located within its 3,400-dunam area.

The eastern entrance – This complex includes an archaeological display, a film, a model of the plateau and its surroundings, a cashier, toilets, snack bars, a souvenir shop, a parking garage, and first aid services. Access to the mountain is by a three-minute cable car ride or a 45-minute walk up the Snake Path.

The guest house - is also located on the eastern side: Tel. 08-995-3222 or fax: 08-658-4650.

The western entrance – This side includes a cashier, toilets, and a snack bar. Access to the mountain is via a path up the Roman siege ramp, about a 15-minute climb. A sound and light show is presented on the western side from March to October on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Opening Hours and Cable Car Operation

April-September: 08:00-17:00
 October-March 08:00-16:00

On Fridays and holiday eves the park closes one hour earlier. On the eve of Yom Kippur the park closes at 12:00 noon. The park is closed on Yom Kippur.

The park opens for ascent on foot one hour before sunrise. (Check the time of sunrise beforehand.)

There is no road between the eastern and western sides of Masada. Driving time from one side to the other is approximately one and quarter hours.

Telephone: 08-658-4207/8. Fax: 08-658-4464.

E-mail: gl.masada@nature-parks.org.il.

"Masada" - the Sound and Light Show

Spectators at the sound and light show "Masada" sit in an open-air theater on the west side of Masada. Shows take place regularly from March until October: From March through August shows take place on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 20:00.

In September and October shows take place on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 21:00.

Shows may be held at other times by prior arrangement (for groups only). For additional details and reservations, phone 08-995-9333, Fax: 08-995-5062.

Access to the sound and light show is via Arad only. There is no access via the Dead Sea. Please arrive no later than one half-hour before the show. The access road will be closed when the show begins.

Dear Visitors,

We hope you enjoyed your visit to Masada National Park. It is only one of the many beautiful sites located in the Dead Sea region. We look forward to welcoming you at our other national parks in the area:

En Gedi, Enot Tzuqim (En Feshkha) and Qumran – turn north (left) from Masada onto road 90; Tel Arad and Mamshit – turn south (right) from Masada onto road 90.

The Israel Nature and Parks Authority will be happy to answer your touring questions. In Israel call *3639 or visit our website.

Masada National Park, Tel.: 08-658-4207/8

www.parks.org.il

Touring Routes at Masada

Masada may be reached on the east via road 90 by cable car or the Snake Path, or on the west via Arad and the ramp path.

The touring route below starts at the upper cable car station and the top of the Snake Path. Visitors ascending from the west are advised to begin their tour on the mountain at the shaded areas near the church (24).

The Snake Path gate (1) – The bridge from the upper cable car station leads to the Snake Path gate. To the right, a staircase leads to an ancient cistern and from there to the upper end of the Snake Path.

The walls of the gatehouse are decorated with stucco (molded plaster). Along the walls are the original benches that served the guards and those awaiting entry. The stone paving was intended to prevent damage to the floor by the hooves of the mules that brought supplies to the mountain. Notice the black line that shows the height of the preservation of the original remains.

From the gate, the path leads to two shaded areas where a relief map of Masada and its visitor paths is on display. From there, turn left onto a path leading to the northern complex.

The quarry (2) – This quarry, left of the path, provided the stone – hard and durable dolomite – for construction of Masada's buildings in Herod's day. The plateau of Masada consists of extensively cracked rock due to its location along the Syrian-African rift, which made quarrying easier. The quarry later served as a dry moat protecting the entrance to the northern complex.

Herod's massive building program required large amounts of stone, which came from on-site quarries and from the hewing of water cisterns. Architectural elements such as column capitals were apparently brought ready-made to the site. Marks in Hebrew on these and other elements attest to the origin of the stonemasons.

Near the quarry, to the right of the path, is a grand residence (3). Its location at the entrance to the northern complex indicates that it was the **commandant's residence** of Masada. The residence, consisting of a central courtyard surrounded by rooms, some of which were adorned with colorful wall paintings, later served as home to rebel families.

Leaving the residence, turn right and go up to the main entrance to the northern complex. This area includes the storerooms, administrative center, bathhouse, and Northern Palace, to which only those close to Herod were allowed entry.

Past the entrance on the right is a courtyard, which affords a spectacular view of the Dead Sea and the mountains of Moab. In its eastern portion was a large hall originally decorated with stucco reliefs and which apparently served as a reception hall for Masada's visitors. A model of the northern complex occupies the center of the courtyard.

The commandant's headquarters (4) is located left of the entrance. It consists of a series of rooms decorated with wall paintings that may have served as offices to monitor the unloading of goods and scrutinize visitors arriving at the northern complex.

As elsewhere in the Classical world, the walls of the major structures at Masada were covered with frescoes, created by painting the still-wet plaster after it had been prepared. The bold colors were absorbed into the plaster as it dried. Most of the designs were geometric or imitation marble, with a small number of floral designs. Herod's artists clearly avoided figurative images.

Turn left to the **storerooms complex (5)**. This concentration of 29 long rooms surrounded by corridors was built by Herod to hold food, liquids, and weapons. As Josephus describes them:

"For here had been stored a mass of corn, amply sufficient to last for years, abundance of wine and oil, besides every variety of pulse and piles of dates." (Josephus Flavius, The Wars of the Jews, VII, 296)

Three pits, discovered in one of the storerooms' plastered floors, attest to the storage of liquids. Josephus states that when the rebels took the fortress, they found well-preserved food supplies, which he attributed to the arid conditions, *"although from the date of storage to the capture of the place by the Romans well-nigh a century had elapsed."*

(Josephus Flavius, The Wars of the Jews, VII, 297)

Herod's discerning taste was evident in the contents of the storerooms, which included a large number of storage vessels, unique in its quantity, bearing ink inscriptions. Among the inscriptions are those noting a shipment of amphorae to Herod, King of Judea in 19 BCE from southern Italy by a supplier named Lucius Lanus.

According to Josephus, Herod had a special wine servant, and among the delicacies served at Masada was a fish sauce known as *garum*, from southern Spain. Fish bones from this sauce were found in the remains of one vessel. The King ended his banquets with apples or apple liqueur brought from Cumae, Italy.

Cross the storerooms and head for the Northern Palace via a flight of steps alongside of which the original stone steps can still be seen. The massive plastered wall in front of you closed off the palace from the south. From here, continue to the upper terrace of the palace.

The Northern Palace (6) – This grand and daring building constructed by Herod is Masada's architectural gem. It is 30 meters high, built on three rock terraces and supported by impressive retaining walls. Combining both Hellenistic and Roman architectural elements, the palace was built to host high-ranking visitors and to allow the king his solitude. Herod and his family lived on the upper level, and the two lower levels were for receptions.

The upper terrace (6a) – This level, consisting of the king's private rooms and a lookout patio, has been preserved in its original Herodian form. From the semicircular terrace, which was once surrounded by columns, the remains of the Roman siege system and the ancient road northward can clearly be seen.



A Corinthian capital in the Northern Palace

In addition to the strategic advantage of the palace's location at the inaccessible northern edge of the cliff, residents could enjoy the breeze at this point. From here you can look down on the two lower levels of the palace. Descent to these levels in antiquity was via a flight of stairs west of the palace that was destroyed in an earthquake.

The residential wing consisted of four rooms and a central roofed hall. Its rooms were paved with mosaics containing geometric patterns, and their walls were covered with frescoes. A model depicting the restored Northern Palace can be seen in the central hall.

A black and white mosaic has been preserved in the southwestern room. A similar mosaic design can be seen in the courtyard of the large bathhouse. Parallels of this style have been found in Italy, which indicates that Herod brought the mosaic masters, like his fresco artists, from Italy.

Retrace your steps to exit the upper terrace of the Northern Palace, and head for the steps leading to the **middle terrace (6b)**. On the way you will pass a water cistern and a plastered immersion bath, and you will see the beginning of the original flight of steps connecting the upper terrace of the palace to the middle terrace. In the center of the middle level of the palace was a circular hall for banquets and receptions, surrounded by columns of which only the foundations remain. The steps leading to the **lower terrace** of the palace (6c) are original. This level, which was also used for banquets and receptions, consisted of a chamber surrounded by columns. Pilasters, once painted and topped by Corinthian capitals, stand against the southern wall. The outer walls of this central hall were plastered and covered with stucco, and the inner walls were covered with frescos depicting imitation marble slabs and geometric patterns.

East of the hall a flight of stairs descends toward a small bathhouse including a tepid room, a cold room, and a hot room. Finds here seemingly attest to the events of Masada's last night – the skeletal remains of three individuals identified with the rebels, vestiges of clothing and sandals, arrows, and numerous pieces of mail armor. Among the most chilling finds was a woman's braided hair, remarkably preserved.

Return to the upper level.

The Large Bathhouse (7) Bathhouses were an integral part of Roman culture. Enter Masada's Roman-style bathhouse via the courtyard, which was surrounded by columns. A model of the bathhouse located in the courtyard shows its original appearance and use. Enter the dressing room (*apodyterium*), with its unique paved floor and fresco-adorned walls. During the revolt, benches made out of column drums were installed in this room, along with an immersion pool.

Moving into the tepid room (*tepidarium*) you will see remarkably preserved frescoes. On the right is the cold room (*frigidarium*), a stepped pool. Continue through the original arched entrance to the hot room (*caldarium*). This room had a double floor, known as a hypocaust. The upper floor stood on brick and stone columns. Hot air flowed under the floor and rose through clay pipes embedded in the walls. In one corner of the room, a portion of the floor and wall has been restored. Nearby was a bath to which hot water was channeled. The room was originally decorated with frescoes and stucco reliefs and had a wide vaulted ceiling.

Leaving the hot room through an opening in the wall created for visitors, you will pass the bathhouse furnace. Continue right, through the corridor of the storerooms toward the place where the "lots" were found.

Find spot of the "lots" (8) – Hundreds of ostraca (inscriptions on pottery sherds) were discovered here. One group contained names, among them "Ben Yair," the name of the commander of the Sicarii. Yigael Yadin connected this group of ostraca with the lots that Josephus says were cast by the rebels on their last night. Others say the sherds were connected to the administration of the rebel community.

From this point, continue to the western entrance court, which was a central junction on the plateau. Visitors ascending from the west would enter Masada from this direction via the Water Gate (9).

Bathhouse roof observation point – There is an excellent view from the roof of the bathhouse to the south and the unexcavated portion of the storerooms. Their walls lie prone, the result of an earthquake that apparently took place in the fourth century CE and caused most of the destruction at Masada.

The water gate (9) – The Water Gate was accessed via a path that led from the upper row of the water cisterns on Masada's northwestern slope. A

channel led the water from the gate to cisterns on the mountaintop.

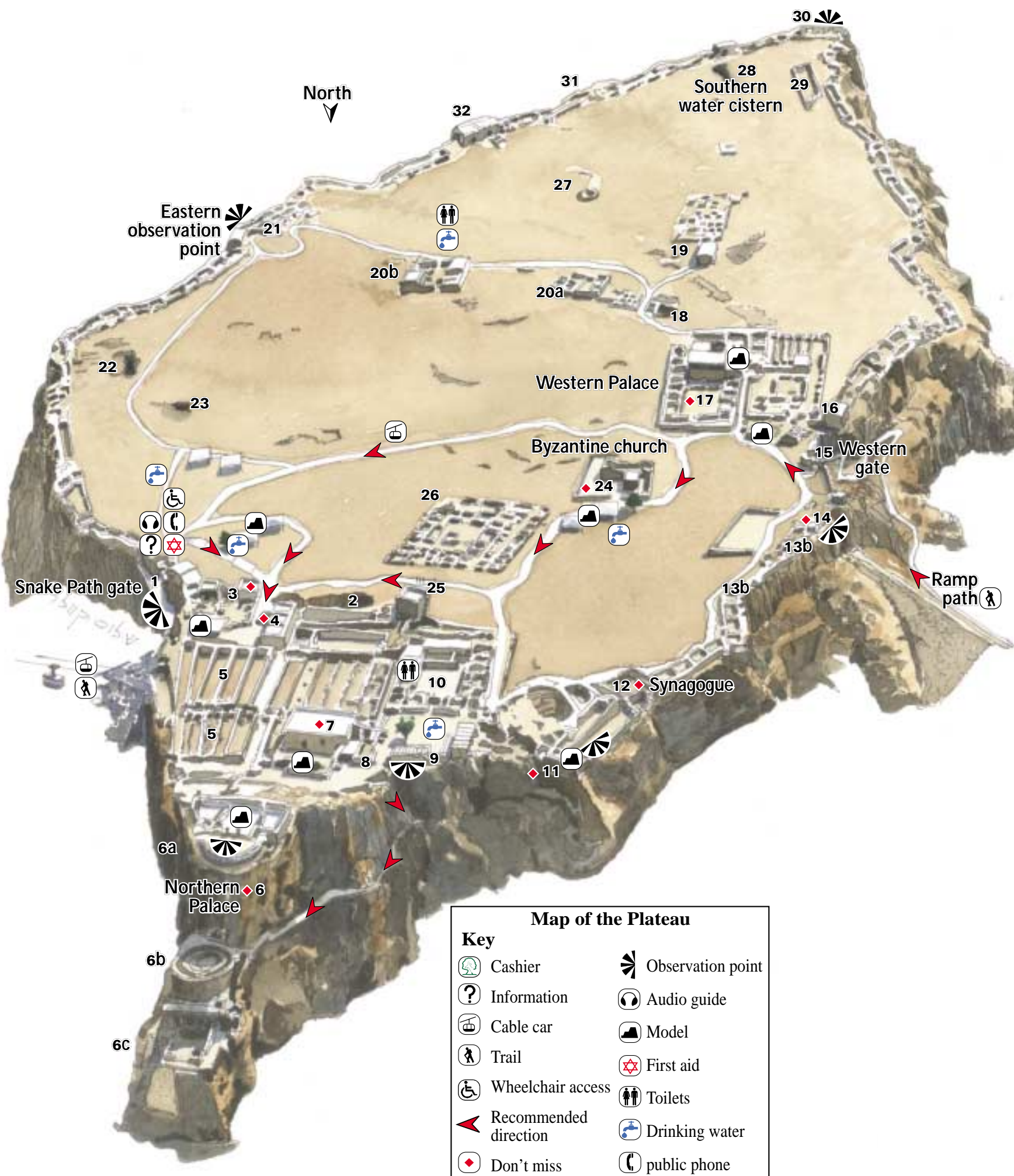
Cross the open court to the **Administration Building (10)**.

The location of the Administration Building near the storerooms demonstrates its probable use by Herod's clerks. During the revolt, a number of rebel families lived in the building, constructing a ritual bath in the corner of its central courtyard. After the conquest of Masada, soldiers of the Roman garrison lived here briefly.

Retrace your steps and turn left toward the **guardroom**, whose walls, along which benches were installed, were decorated with stucco.

The path skirts a water cistern and an ancient storage cave where the remains of dozens of Herodian-era storage jars were found. Take the left branch of the bridge leading to the **Northern Palace observation point (11)**, containing an interactive model demonstrating Masada's water system. This point affords a view of the Northern Palace, the water system, and the paths up the mountain, as well as three Roman siege camps and the siege wall. Looking north, you can see **Wadi Ze'elim** and **En Gedi**.

The Water System – Masada's arid location required a permanent water supply. The impressive system Herod built included dams that diverted floodwater to channels leading to 12 cisterns hewn on two levels into the rocky slope. The plastered cisterns could hold an amazing 40,000 cubic meters of water. Pack animals then bore the water up to the cisterns on the mountaintop.



Map of the Plateau

Key

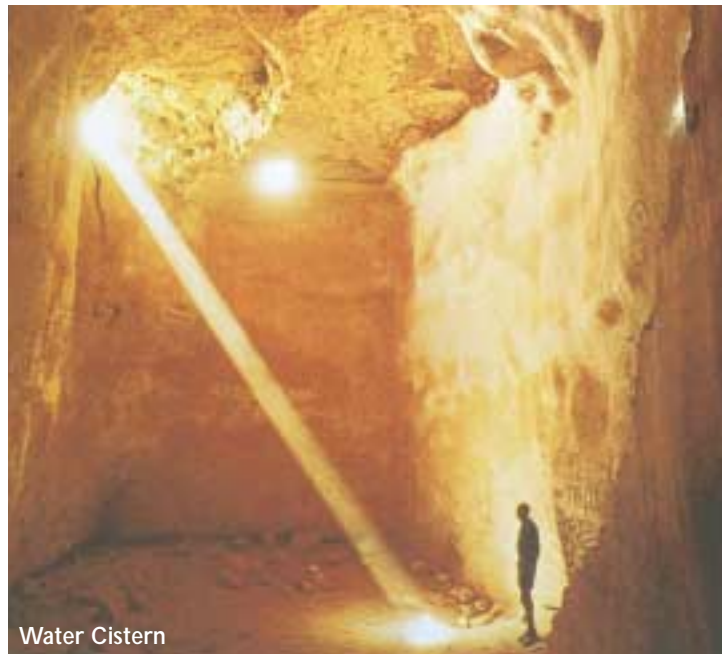
- Cashier
- Information
- Cable car
- Trail
- Wheelchair access
- Recommended direction
- Don't miss
- Observation point
- Audio guide
- Model
- First aid
- Toilets
- Drinking water
- public phone

Retrace your steps past the cistern and the ritual bath, and head to the **synagogue (12)**.

From the guardroom you can also take a detour to the southern portion of the administration building where you can ascend a **tower (25)** for an extensive view of the plateau and its surroundings. In Herod's day, the tower served as a guards' lookout.

South of the tower are the **"officers' quarters" (26)**, a residential house built in barracks style in Herod's day to house his soldiers. This building, which later served the rebels, continued in use in the Byzantine period.

The synagogue (12) - This building, constructed in Herod's time, was apparently first used as a stable. It was converted into a synagogue at the time of the Great Revolt, when rows of benches lining the hall and a separate room at the back were added. Two pits dug in the floor of the back room were found to contain biblical scrolls, indicating it may have served as a geniza, a storage room for sacred scrolls. Among the scroll fragments discovered was Ezekiel's vision of the valley of the dry bones. On the floor of the room an inscription was found that read "the priest's title". This is one of the only



Water Cistern

synagogues dating from the time of the Second Temple, which was destroyed in 70 CE.

South of the synagogue, is the "casemate of the scrolls". A rare group of finds from the time of the Great Revolt was discovered here, collected by the Romans after the conquest of Masada. Outstanding among the finds is a large number of parchment and papyrus fragments. Rolling stones and hundreds of ballista balls were also discovered in the room.

One rare find here was a salary record belonging to a cavalryman of the Tenth Legion Fretensis. The soldier's name, according to the document, was Gaius Messius. He was born in the colony of Beirut and was paid three times a year, with expenses for clothing, equipment, and food deducted at the source.

Columbarium Towers (13a, 13b)

These two square towers in which pigeons were raised and also served as lookout and guard towers, were built at Herod's time before the construction of the perimeter wall. These structures could be accessed only via a ladder. The niches in the walls housed pigeons that were used as food, and whose droppings were used as fertilizer. The southern tower was also used during the Byzantine period.



Mosaic in the Byzantine church



A wall of the Byzantine church

The Byzantine church (24) – The center of the Byzantine monastery was the church, which is well preserved. Pass through the narthex, with its white mosaic, and continue to the nave. The floor here was originally paved with mosaic and its walls were decorated with a design created from pottery sherds inserted in plaster. The room's semicircular apse is preserved to its original height; glass from its window was found in the church courtyard. The floor contains a pit, which may have served as a crypt or a reliquary. It was dug in the ground beneath the altar, which was originally sectioned off by a decorated marble chancel. The church was roofed with clay tiles, which were found by the dozens during excavation. Plastered stone gutters protruded from the roof of the church and were attached to its outer walls. The western room of the church contains a mosaic depicting floral designs and medallions encircling fruit and baskets of communion bread. A low stone wall surrounded the church courtyard, where a number of farming installations were discovered.

The breaching point (14) – Above the Roman siege ramp the perimeter wall is missing where it was destroyed during the assault. In the Hebrew month of Nissan, in the spring of 73 or 74 CE, the Romans raised a tower high enough to overlook the wall and bombarded the area, as attested to by the ballista balls and arrowheads discovered in the excavation. The rebels defended themselves by rolling down large stones on the Romans. After the Romans destroyed the perimeter wall, they burned the wood-and-earth wall the rebels had built to shore it up. Thus, the siege came to an end. From the restored tower you can see the siege wall and the Roman camps at the base of Masada, among them camp F, the camp of the siege's commander.

The western Byzantine gate (15): This gate of dressed stones stood at the upper end of the path that led over the ramp to the top of the mountain during the Byzantine era. It serves as an entrance to this day.

To visit the water cisterns you can leave via the Byzantine gate, take the ramp path west for about 75 meters, and near its starting point turn right on the signposted trail. The entire length of the trail from the gate to the cisterns is about 500 meters.

The tanners' tower (16) – In the ground floor of a tower to the west of the Western Palace, an industrial installation for the tanning of skins was discovered.

The Western Palace (17) – At 3,700 square meters, the Western Palace, built during Herod's reign, is the largest structure on Masada. It was built around a core that consisted of an open courtyard containing living quarters, guard rooms, reception rooms and a series of bathing rooms. To the right of the entrance is a model of the reconstructed palace. As you enter the palace, you will see benches covered with stucco reliefs. Crossing the long narrow courtyard, notice the water channel on its eastern side. You will pass through two vestibules with benches leading to a central well-plastered courtyard. In this courtyard you will see a model of the core of the grand palace. In this part of the palace is a room identified as a throne room because of four depressions discovered in the floor where a throne may have been placed.

Ascend the flight of steps on the north side of the courtyard to view the bath complex below, with its mosaics and stucco. Nearby is a reception room with a magnificent colorful mosaic. Going down the steps, you will see a room on the left containing two bathtubs and a water cistern. Now head toward the public immersion pool.

For mobility-challenged visitors and their helpers: Enter the door on the east side of the courtyard to see the mosaic in the core of the palace. Continue via an opening on the west side of the courtyard and you will notice a large stove used for cooking in the days of the rebels. At the end of the storage room turn left toward the public immersion pool.

The public immersion pool (18) - This stepped pool was constructed during the days of the Great Revolt. The wide steps allowed several people to enter the bath at once. Near the steps a dressing room was discovered, containing wall niches where clothing could be placed.

Small palaces – Herod built three small palaces for his guests, which were later used by the rebels.

Small palace (19) – This palace, situated on the continuation of the path to the south, was apparently never completed, and residential structures were built around it during the Great Revolt. Next to it is a public hall with benches along the walls and a kind of constructed table at the center. (The excavators



Exhibit at the eastern entrance

nicknamed this structure the "Beil Midrash" – the Torah study house.)

Small palace (20a) – Located east of the pool, this palace had rooms surrounding a central courtyard containing a water cistern. The rebels made changes in the building to use it as living quarters, and constructed a small ritual bath.

Note: *To visit the southern part of the plateau (27-32), turn south.*

Small palace (20b) – Located close to the continuation of the path, this palace also consisted of rooms surrounding a courtyard. Here too, remains dating to the period of the Great Revolt were found.

The path will lead you eastward to the casemate wall and a number of buildings dating to the period of the Great Revolt.

Rebel dwellings (21) – This large group of modest structures hugging the inner face of the perimeter wall served as living quarters during the Great Revolt. Artifacts discovered here reveal elements of daily life during the period of the revolt. Among them were textiles, tools and platted baskets, as well as pottery and glass vessels and bone utensils. Leather items were also discovered, together with stone and metal implements, and coins. Jewelry and even foodstuffs were also found. However the most outstanding discoveries were written finds in Hebrew and Aramaic, which provide a rare glimpse of community life.

Take the path down toward the eastern observation point, which is accessible to the mobility-challenged, and continue on the path northward toward the **eastern water cistern (22)** at the bottom of the slope. The cistern drains the northern half of the plateau, and the makeup of its plaster hints that it may have been constructed as early as Hasmonean times. A plastered channel originating at the Snake Path gate led water to this cistern. The cistern was renovated and reused by the Byzantines.

Continue along the casemate wall and on the left of the path you will see a **Byzantine monastic cave (23)** located in a depression that had apparently been a quarry. The monks would remain isolated during the week in cells or caves like this one, and on weekends they would come together for meals and prayer in the church.

From here, head toward the exit via the **Snake Path gate (1)** next to the flagpole.

The round columbarium tower (27) – Leave the path south of the **small palace (20b)** and head toward the round columbarium tower, built during Herod's time. Pigeons were raised in the lower floor of this tower and the upper floor was used as a guard tower.

Byzantine monastic cell – On the southern side of the plateau, east of the swimming pool, is a two-room monastic cell.

Swimming pool (29) – Herod built a large plastered swimming pool at Masada with a flight of stairs leading to the bottom. The construction of this swimming pool with its capacity of 550 cubic meters in such an arid area attests to the importance Herod accorded the culture of bathing.

The southern fort (30) – Masada could be accessed in antiquity via the southern cliff. This is apparently the reason a fort was built at this point, from which the southern approach to Masada could be watched. This point affords a spectacular view of Wadi Masada, the Dead Sea, the siege wall, and the siege camps. Camp H, on the cliff to the south, had a view of the top of the plateau.

The southern water cistern (28) – The huge investment and know-how that went into the construction of Masada's water cisterns are exemplified here. A flight of 64 stairs leads into this great cistern, whose walls were covered with many layers of plaster. On the wall to the left of the stairs is an inscription mentioning a youth group that was here in 1941.

The southern casemate wall and **southern gate (31)**

Turn left to a portion of the casemate wall that includes a gate paved with stone that led to a large water cistern and to caves in the southern cliff. Adjacent to it is a tower and an original casemate containing a **ritual bath (32)**, storage facilities for grain, and ovens. From the roof of the tower is another breathtaking view of Wadi Masada, the Dead Sea, and the mountains of Moab.

Continuing north you will arrive at a number of simple dwellings built by the rebels (21) and the modern path leading to the **Snake Path gate (1)**.

Since we, long ago, my generous friends, resolved never to be servants to the

Observation point at the Northern Palace



Group of imported amphorae

From the catalog of the exhibition "The Story of Masada", The Hebrew University of Jerusalem Institute of Archaeology. Photo: Gabry Laron. (Photos courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority).



Stone vessels used by the rebels