

Tiberias

The town of Tiberias is one of Israel's most popular vacation spots, both in Summer and Winter, because the climate is always comfortable, never below 200 in the Winter and really hot in Summer, when it has been known to reach as high as 400, but usually hangs around 300, which is really good if you're on vacation.

In addition to the attractive Climate Tiberias is located on the shores of the fresh water Sea of Galilee and to top it all, more than 70 natural springs, rich in health giving minerals, bubbled up from the ground here and continue to do so to this day.

A legend in the Midrash, the Jewish book of legends extolls the healing power of these springs, telling us that Solomon, who could speak the language of all creatures above and below the earth, ordered the demons under the earth who controlled the taps of hell to open them so that the sick people could bathe in the hot, mineral rich healing waters and gain relief from their aches and pains.

A town by the name of Rakat, had been standing here already in Biblical times and we read in the book of Joshua that it was one of the towns of the tribe of Naphtali.

Antipas, who ruled the Galilee after the death of his father, Herod the Great, turned the town into a royal town and renamed it Tiberias after the Roman emperor at that time, who claimed that the waters healed him from epilepsy.

Being inhabited by rich, aristocratic Romans and Jews related to the Jewish king who also had a palace here, Tiberias survived the great war of 70 and continued to flourish. After the war the Romans permitted many Jews, especially learned Rabbis who had served in the now destroyed temple, to live there and to establish schools for the study of Torah and Jewish religious law.

By the 4th century the Jewish religious academy of Tiberias had become renowned for its scholarship and Jews came from all over the world to study Judaism under the great rabbis of Tiberias, which at that time was known as Hamat, meaning the hot place, because of the warm climate here and the hot springs.

To this day one can see the beautiful mosaic floor of the synagogue of Hamat, with its spectacularly colorful images of the signs of the Zodiac.

People come from all over the world to pray at the tomb of Rabbi Meir, the head of the academy, famous for miracles which God had performed for him in times of danger.

The academy of Hamat continued to thrive until the 10th century, the time of the Crusader conquest. By that time Aaron ben Asher, a scholar of Hamat, had written the final, authoritative text of the Bible in Hebrew, according to which all later Bible texts must conform.

The text is based on the Masoretic text, so named because of the scholars who belonged to a school of learning that specialized in grammatical accuracy of the Hebrew language, spread throughout the Jewish intellectual world of that time, from Israel to Babylon, developed it.

Today the final Masoretic text, written by Rabbi Aaron ben Asher in Tiberias(Hamat) in the 10th century is known as the Aleppo Codex, after the town in Syria, better known in the news these days as Haleb, where it was preserved by the Jewish community there until they brought it to Israel, where it is lodged in the Shrine of the Book in the Israel Museum

The many historic sites to visit in and around Tiberias are an additional bonus.

