

Be'er Sheba



The capital of the Negev, the Old City, the university, the Turkish railway station, and the Bedouin market represent only a part of the colorful mosaic offered by the city of Be'er Sheba, a city full of life and proud of itself, as you will be told by any of its 185,000 inhabitants.

Be'er Sheba, spelt Beersheba in most English translations of the Bible, is a major crossroads whose potential was felt by Abraham, father of the Jewish people, who arrived here 3,700 years ago. He dug a well to water his flock, made a covenant of peace with Abimelech, the king of Gerar in those days, and the two swore allegiance to one another. "Therefore he called that place Beersheba, because there the two of them took an oath" (Genesis 21, Verse 21). To symbolize his ownership of the well, he planted a tamarisk tree. Thus the city of Be'er Sheba struck roots at that place and at that time. Abraham's descendants continued to live here, in a place that was the cradle of monotheism.

Modern-day Be'er Sheba was founded at the start of the twentieth century by the Ottomans, and was the only city that the Turks built in the Land of Israel. Remains of buildings from this period and from the time of the British Mandate can be seen in the Old City, located in the south of the city. These include the Governor's House – the residence and office of the city's governor, which was built in 1906 and today houses the Negev Museum of Art; the city's first mosque also built in 1906; the Turkish railway station built during the First World War; the station manager's house; the water tower that supplied the trains' steam engines with water; the Saraya – the Government House (today the city's police station); a public garden; and additional buildings that tell the fascinating story of Be'er Sheba under Turkish rule.

The Jewish city was established in 1949. It developed and turned into the center of the south and became the capital of the Negev. Today, it has museums, a zoo, historical sites, one of the largest universities in Israel, and on Thursdays – the famous Bedouin market.

The market was officially opened in 1905, and became a weekly event where the Bedouins sold various wares. Nowadays, the market has modern stalls (footwear, clothing, etc) alongside authentic Bedouin stalls where you can buy unique items such as copper products, glassware, jewelry, beads and precious stones, as well as mats, carpets, cushions, and the like. The market is variegated, vibrant, exceedingly charming, and colorful.

Another important hub is the Center for Ethiopian Craftsmanship where new immigrant women preserve the ancient handicraft traditions of Ethiopian Jewry as practiced in their home villages, and engage in modeling earthenware, embroidering, sculpting, and straw crafts. Be'er Sheba is the gateway to the Negev – you can start from here on endless walks and car trips.