

# The Golan Heights



The Golan Heights, Israel's mountainous northern region, is one of the most beautiful and most traveled parts of the country. There are wonderful scenic treasures alongside lovely nature reserves, historic and archeological sites and attractions for the whole family. Some people call this area the Israeli Texas, because of its size, while others see it as a land of plentiful water sources. The beauty of the Golan is so captivating that some visitors return here again and again to enjoy the sights.

The view from the Golan Heights becomes more and more magnificent as you gradually climb from the plains, at 300 meters above sea level in the south to 1,200 meters in the north. The eastern edge of this region is dotted with a chain of volcanic hills, while the south and west border on basalt cliffs that descend to the Jordan Valley Rift, Lake Kinneret and the Yarmuk River.

Scattered throughout the Golan Heights are a wide variety of sites that offer a broad spectrum of activities for tourists and hikers throughout the year. In the winter both amateur and professional skiers flock to the top of the snow-covered Hermon Mountain to enjoy its excellent ski conditions, the snow that piles up on the ground and the pure white landscape. In the summer hikers can enjoy a swim in the many streams, in spring the plains are carpeted with multi-colored flowers and in autumn the pleasant weather attracts hikers to the many wooded trails.

The Golan Heights also offers tourists an authentic cowboy experience at a ranch with horses and cattle. Visitors can go out to the orchards and pick ripe cherries, raspberries and other seasonal fruits.

Bird lovers can watch the eagles nesting in Gamla and on the cliffs of the nature reserve, and see the remains of a Chalcolithic Era settlement (from about 5,500 years ago). There are also burial grounds from 4,000 years ago, a 2,000-year-old Jewish city a monastery with a Byzantine church (from 1,500 years ago) and much more.

The summit of Mount Bental offers a panoramic view of the whole area, while the Sa'ar, Zavitan and Meshushim streams gurgles and froths from the waterfalls along their routes through breathtaking canyons.

Odem Forest, in the northern Golan, is the home of a deer reserve, with many different species. Near here you can also see Rujum al-Hiri (Circle of Ghosts), a Megalithic structure about 5,000 years old that researchers believe was used for ritual purposes, burial or as an astronomy observatory. The Golan Heights is the only part of Israel with basalt stones, originating from long ago volcanic eruptions. Here in the mountains the nights are chilly all year long.