

The Dead Sea

Overview: Students will visit the Dead Sea in Jordan. The Dead Sea is over 400m below sea level – the lowest place on earth. It is part of the Great Rift Valley that runs from southern Turkey through Syria, Jordan, and the Red Sea, west into East Africa and south to Mozambique. The cataclysms that created the rift began some 30 million years ago and recurred until 15,000 years ago, forming mountains which on the east rise to around 1,500m above the Dead Sea. Until 100,000 years ago, the rift was an extension of the Red Sea; then the waters receded, forming the saline Lake Lisan, 200m higher than today's Dead Sea. By 10,000 BC this had shrunk further, leaving the Dead Sea and Lake Tiberius, linked by the Jordan Valley. Tiberias became a freshwater lake, but the Dead Sea, with no outlet, became saline.

As its name evokes, the Dead Sea is devoid of life due to the high salt concentration and minerals. However, this also means that the Dead Sea has curative powers, therapeutic qualities, and its buoyancy. Herod the Great recognized the Dead Sea more than 2000 years ago. You can float in the Dead Sea without trying. This is the only place you could read a newspaper while in the water without thinking about it!

Scientifically speaking, its water contains more than 35 different types of minerals that are essential for the health and care of the body skin including Magnesium, Calcium, Potassium, Bromine, Sulfur, and Iodine. They are well known for relieving pains and sufferings caused by arthritis, rheumatism, psoriasis, eczema, headache and foot-ache, while nourishing and softening the skin. They also provide the raw materials for the renowned Jordanian Dead Sea bath salts and cosmetic products marketed worldwide.

Although sparsely populated and serenely quiet now, the area has a historical and spiritual legacy of its own. It is believed to be the site of five biblical cities: Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zebouin and Zoar.

Interesting Facts about the Dead Sea:

1. It is called the Dead Sea, but is in reality not a sea!
2. This hypersaline lake is one of the saltiest lakes in this world. The salt concentration of Dead Sea is 33.7%. But this does not make it the saltiest water body because Caspian Sea's Lagoon Garabogazköl has 35% salinity, Lake Assal in central-western Djibouti has 34.8% salinity, Antarctica's Lake Vanda has 35% salinity and Don Juan Pond located in Antarctica's McMurdo Dry Valleys has 44% salinity!
3. The salinity of Dead Sea is way more than that of normal sea. According to scientists, this water body is 9.6 times saltier than oceans and contains very high concentration of sodium chloride along with other minerals.
4. Dead Sea has a very unusual phenomenon. It spits out asphalt almost constantly. Asphalt used in ancient Egypt for mummification was imported from Dead Sea. Because of this unusual asphalt spitting phenomenon, the Greeks named the Dead Sea as Lake Asphaltites.
5. This lake is the primary source of potassium used worldwide for agricultural processes.
6. The region around Dead Sea consists of 618 acres of date palms.
7. Dead Sea was Cleopatra's one of the most favorite places. She was so fond of the lake that resorts and cosmetic factories were ordered to be built along the shores of the Dead Sea.
8. The Dead Sea has various Biblical ties. Biblical writings closely tie Jesus Christ and John Baptist to the Dead Sea. It is also being said in Bible that there will be a day when the Dead Sea will spring back to life and marine life form will not only survive but also thrive in this sea.
9. Many centuries ago, Dead Sea was known by the name 'Stinky Sea.'