

ISRAEL CUSTOMS

Greetings:

Shalom (Peace) is the usual greeting and parting phrase. It may be followed by *Ma Nishma?* (What's up?), *Ma Ha 'inyanim?* (What's happening?), or the more formal *Ma Shlomcha?* (How are you?). For women, this last phrase is *Ma Shlomech?*

Handshakes are common. Additional touching (hugging, kissing) depends largely on one's ethnic origin and the relationship between the greeters.

Among the very religious, men and women do not touch in public.

Gestures:

Hands are used often in conversation and make discussions seem very lively. The most common gesture is to bring thumb and fingertips together, palm facing up, and move the hand up and down; this means "wait a minute" or "hold on."

Respect for elders is extremely important. For instance, one always gives up a bus seat to an older person.

Holidays:

The Jewish calendar is based on the lunar standard.

The month of *Tishrei* (September–October) begins with *Rosh Hashanah* (New Year), followed by *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement) on the 10th.

The weeklong festival of *Succot* (Tabernacles) begins on the 15th.

Hanukkah (Festival of Lights) is in December.

Pesach (Passover) takes place in the spring, six months after *Succot*, and Holocaust Day is commemorated 13 days later.

Other important days include Memorial Day (20 days after Passover), Independence Day (21 days after Passover), and *Shavu'ot*, or Pentecost (50 days after Passover). That is why *Shabbat* (Sabbath) begins Friday evening and ends Saturday evening.