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Mamilla Mall was once a street bazaar but is now home to modern shops and premium brands

By Nisha Jha and R. Vasudevan

Why Israel? Isn't it dangerous? What are you going to eat? Are you going to Jerusalem, too? Are you on a pilgrimage? The questions bombarded us. Sure, Jerusalem is a holy city for the three major monotheistic religions of the world, but this one is a contrasting journey of the current Jerusalem and the Old City.

Jerusalem itself has been more or less continuously inhabited for 4,000 or more years. The original city, inside the walls, was just about one square kilometre. Now it has grown to 125 sq km. Quickly mounting Mt Scopus, we see before us a sweeping view of the Old City. Dome of the Rock shines at its best and Holy Sepulchre stands at a distance. Almost all the buildings sport a similar colour and architecture owing to two reasons. One, the owners are advised to use the dolomite stone which is available in abundance in this region; and two, they have been told to have arched windows on the façade.

We descend and drive towards Yad Vashem, the biggest memorial in Israel to the Holocaust victims, on a hill suitably called the Mount of Remembrance. This is not only a memorial for the six million Jews who lost their lives, but also works as a research and education centre on the World War II tragedy. Entering one room after another we have goosebumps that stay till we step out of the museum. Artefacts, books, clothes, footwear and other belongings bring tears in our eyes. The last room, Hall of Names, has files containing the names of the heroes.

Goosebumps start all over again when we enter



Walking through history in JERUSALEM

the memorial for all the 1.5 million children who lost their lives to the mindless killings. Millions of reflections of twinkling lights, which actually originate from just five candles kept at various angles using mirrors, intensify the grief. There is also a memorial named Righteous Among the Nations, for all those non-Jews who risked their lives and helped Jews during the plight.

Jerusalem can also be called the city of museums. Israel Museum, one of the biggest, is our next stop. The first thing we notice about this place is that it looks like an open-air museum. The 20-acre campus sprawls across the lip of central Jerusalem's Valley of the Cross and is divided into three sections featuring around 50,000

collections from prehistoric archaeology to contemporary art.

A mini Jerusalem, a model of Jerusalem city depicting its topography and architectural character in the Second Temple Period, greets us. Among the highlights of the museum is the Shrine of the Book, which is the home of several exceptional archaeological finds, including the Dead Sea Scrolls and other rare ancient manuscripts.

The Art Garden displays the evolution of the modern Western sculptural tradition. An Oriental landscape combined with the

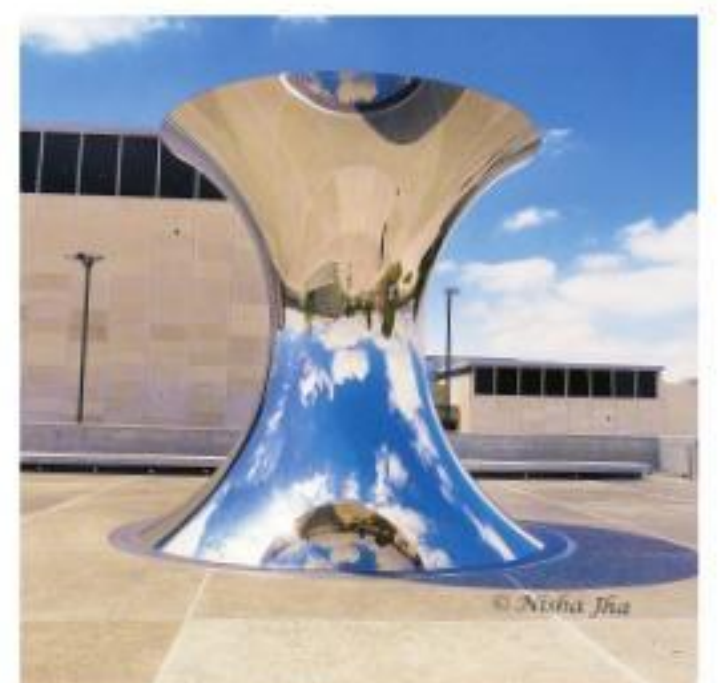
Jerusalem hillside, the garden serves as a platter for sculptures by masters such as Pablo Picasso, Auguste Rodin, Henry Moore, Mark Dion, James Turrell, Israeli artists Benni Efrat and Menashe Kadishman and India's Anish Kapoor. Anish Kapoor's *Turning the World Upside Down* is the real leader here.

Closer to the old city, just outside Zion Gate, lies the historic Mount Zion. King David is said to have set up his palace around 1,000 BC. We can see the Tomb of King David, the room

where Jesus had the last supper (the cenacle), the place where he regularly met his disciples, and also Dormition Abbey, where Virgin Mary fell into an eternal sleep. On the slopes is the grave of Oskar Schindler; this is perhaps the most visited grave in Jerusalem.

A visit to the city is not complete without following the paths of countless pilgrims of the three religions. One of the walls surround the temple mount, the Western wall, is the most sacred place for Jews. The wall and adjoining plaza is divided into separate parts for men and women. It is also called the Wailing Wall since many worshippers come here to mourn the destruction of their temple several centuries ago. It is

The streets of the walled city are like one big bazaar! Most of them are geared to entice the tourists with their beautiful wares and ceramic works



Anish Kapoor's *Turning the world upside down*

believed wishes and prayers written on slips of paper stuck in the crevices between the stones

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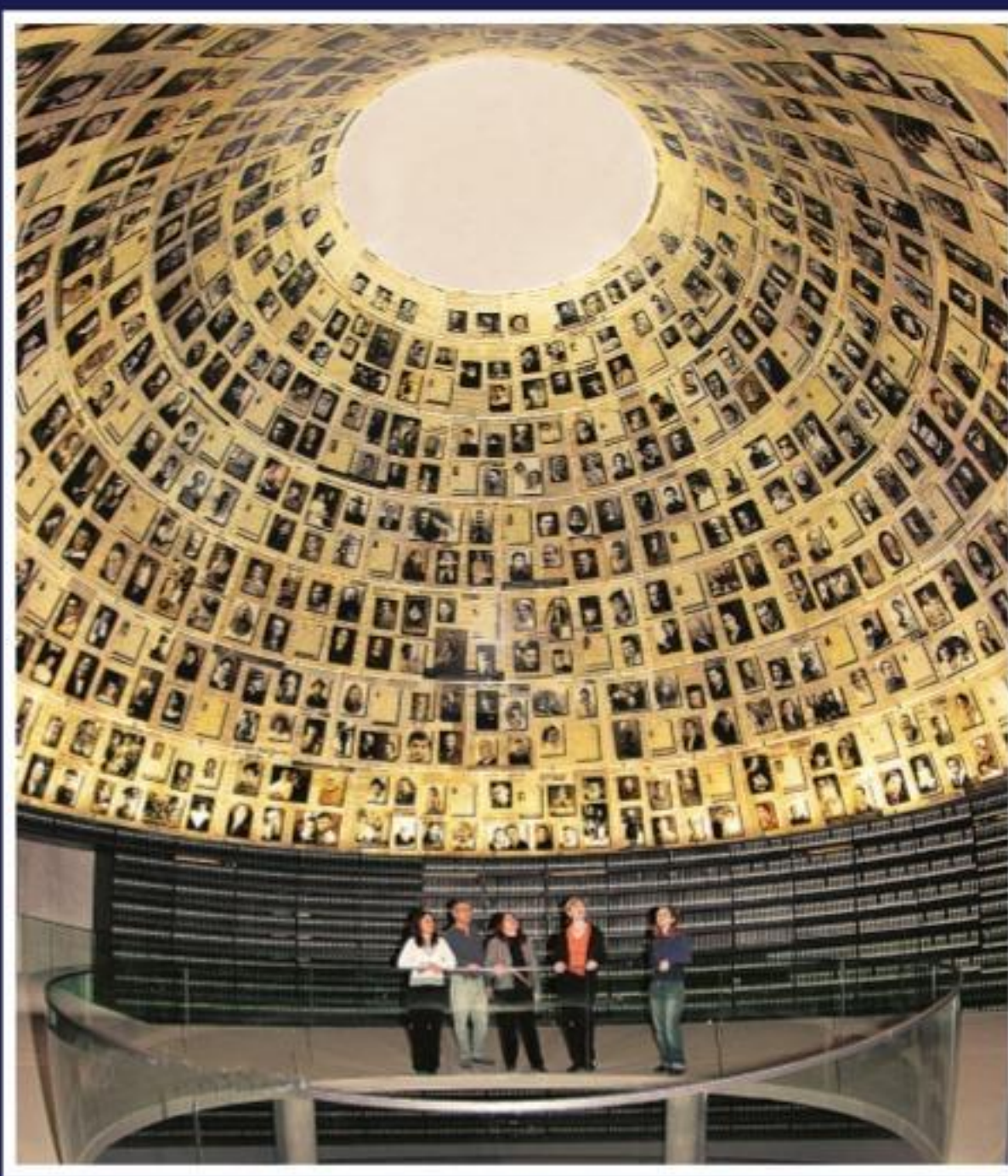


CONNECT THE DOTS

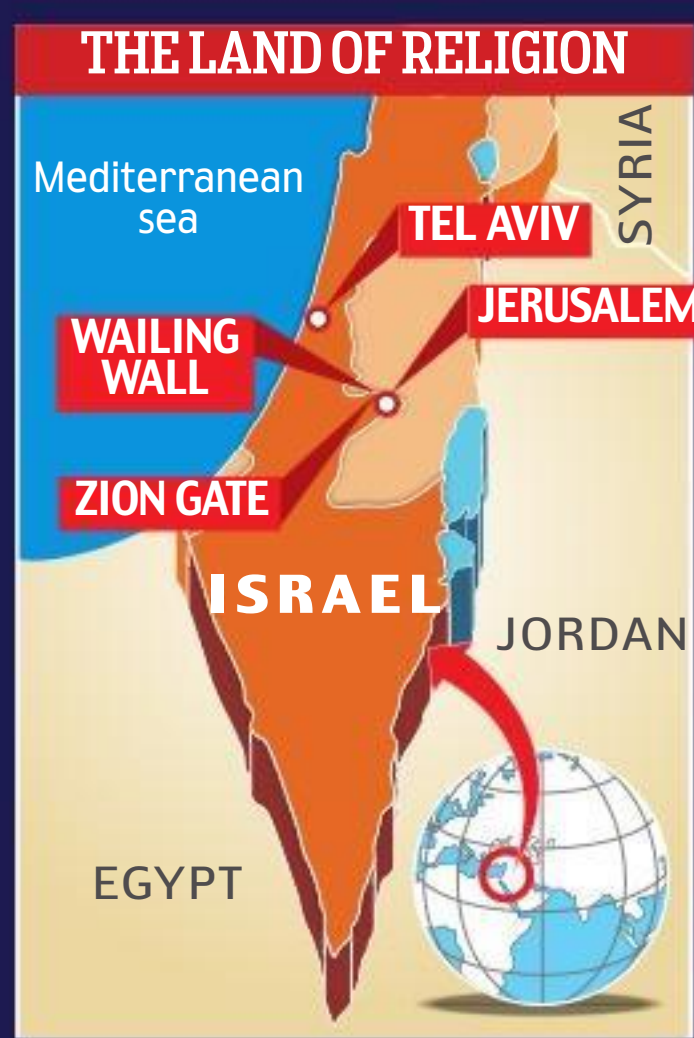
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Pictures: Nisha Jha



(Clockwise from left) A miniature model of Jerusalem at Israel Museum; Hall of Names at Yad Vashem has files containing the names of the heroes; the bazaar in the Walled City where trinkets can be bought; the Western Wall and the Dome of the Rock



come true. A set of stairs leads us to a vantage point from where the golden Dome of Rock is visible. It is situated on the temple mount and is perhaps the oldest Islamic architecture. It is believed that Prophet Mohammed ascended to heaven from this spot. A few hundred metres inside Lions' Gate is the starting point of Via Dolorosa which literally means the "way of sorrow". It is believed to be the route taken by Jesus on his way to the crucifixion. On Friday, we follow the procession taken out by the priests of various Christian domains. The streets of the walled city are like one big bazaar! Most of them are geared to entice the tourists with their beautiful wares. Exquisite ceramic works, claimed as original Armenian in one shop, are vying for attention with another selling sou-

venirs. So are those selling religious artefacts and clothes. Our favourite, however, is in the Muslim Quarters near Damascus Gate where they sell aromatic spices of all types. This is where we had one of the tastiest falafel. Mamilla Mall was once a street bazaar but is now home to modern shops, boutiques, fashion chains and restaurants. Many of the original stones from the demolished bazaar have been numbered and used in the new mall.

So, if you are looking for an old world charm in a modern city, then what are you waiting for? Pack up your bags and get going. It's the place to be.

CHECKLIST

ASHLIN MATHEW checks out the best deals and must-visit places

Revive amid coffee plantations



DYING to get out of the balmy city? The Tamara Coorg, a luxury resort tucked away in the lush landscape of a coffee and spice plantation in Coorg, has a three-night and five-night yoga packages available at ₹39,000+ and ₹60,000+ respectively. It is inclusive of accommodation and breakfast, lunch and dinner (wholesome vegetarian) on all days and is valid until July 31. For more details, log on to www.thetamara.com

DO you want to go on a vacation in Goa at a time when nature flourishes, the rain brings with it masti and romance. Stay at Cidade de Goa with the 'Discover Happiness' package ₹9,500 plus taxes per night on week nights and ₹10,250 plus taxes per night on weekends for the standard room. Two children below the age of six can stay in the parents' room. It includes airport transfers, meals, complimentary couple entry to Goldfinger Casino once during stay, inclusive of free play coupons worth ₹500 per room. For details, log on to www.cidadedegoa.com

Luxury in the wilderness



TRAVEL to any of the four Taj Safaris' lodges — Mahua Kothi at Bandhavgarh National Park, Baghvan at Pench National Park, Banjaar Tola at Kanha National Park and Pashan Garh at Panna National Park — and enjoy exceptional luxury at a discounted price by availing the Full Jungle Plan. Book a three-night stay at the price of two at ₹17,000 per person, per day. It includes accommodation, meals, house wine, two game drives each day, park fees and laundry. For details, log on to www.tajsafaris.com

THIS holiday season head to Shirdi and discover your inner self. Shradha Sarovar Portico, located in the divine dham of Sai Baba, Shirdi, offers a quiet interlude. You can avail the all-inclusive one-night stay at ₹4,199, valid until September 30. It includes accommodation, transfers, two meals and taxes. The hotel has a doctor on call, library, games room, children's play area and a travel desk and offers special rooms for differently-abled. For details, log on to www.sarovarhotels.com

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