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| Parking                  | Accessible path  |
| Entrance                 | Ancient pavement |
| Visitor service center   | Walking path     |
| Toilets                  | Lookout          |
| Coffee shop / restaurant | Picnic area      |

## Main Sites in the National Park



The site numbers match the numbers on the map. We recommend starting your visit at the Roman theater gate (no. 1 on the map).

### 2. The Roman theater

The theater Herod built in Caesarea was the first ever constructed in the Land of Israel. During the Roman period it was renovated and expanded, and in the second century CE a *scaena frons* was added – a wall three stories high that served as an opulent backdrop to the stage and whose remains are still scattered around the theater. In the third century CE, the area in front of the stage was converted into a pool to host water spectacles. In the late Byzantine period, the theater was turned into a fortress, perhaps to defend against the Samaritan rebellion of 529 CE.

The theater, now used for musical performances, can seat an audience of 3,700.

### 3. The Caesarea Experience

**A three-part presentation:**

**The Caesarea Experience:** A 10-minute film about Caesarea's history from Herod to the beginning of Zionism in this country and the Baron de Rothschild's settlement project. The film incorporates animation and advanced imaging.

**Caesarea Stars:** An interactive encounter with 12 of Caesarea's famous historical figures from Herod to Paul and Saladin to Hannah Szenes.

**The Time Tower:** A panoramic attraction that invites visitors to marvel at Herod's monumental building projects.

### 4. The artifacts garden

Here you'll find a sarcophagus (stone coffin) from the Roman period and architectural artifacts collected from throughout Caesarea. Among them are parts of the *scaena frons* – the wall rising behind the stage of the Roman theater – intended to improve acoustics as well as serve as a backstage. Remnants of these decorations attest to the theater's opulence.

### 5. The Promontory Palace

The rocky promontory jutting into the sea opposite the theater is an extraordinarily beautiful place. Excavations here unearthed the remains of a magnificent palace with a bathhouse alongside it. A square ornamental freshwater pool was hewn into the center of the promontory (it was once called "Cleopatra's Baths"). The lowest level of the palace, which sits on a peninsula, apparently served as living quarters for the Roman procurators who governed Judea.

### 6. The judgement hall and the prison

The upper level of the Promontory Palace, built around a courtyard, served as its public wing and included a judgement hall (praetorium). It was here that Paul, who was a Roman citizen, was brought from Jerusalem, after questioning by the Sanhedrin, to stand trial before the local Roman authorities and was subsequently sent to Rome (58–60 CE). About 70 years later, the Roman governor Tinius Rufus judged Rabbi Akiva here. Near the judgement hall was apparently a chamber where prisoners

were held before their trials. Rabbi Akiva was imprisoned here for more than three years and was apparently executed by torture in the praetorium. Later, the Christian martyrs of Caesarea were tortured to death here, choosing to give up their lives rather than deny their faith.

### 7. The Hippodrome

Also called the amphitheater, this structure, built by Herod, hosted a variety of entertainment events, including horse races, athletic competitions, gladiator fights and other attractions that appealed to Romans of the time. The tiered seats built around the ring could accommodate some 10,000 spectators. No seats were built on the western side, allowing for an unobstructed view of the sea during the events. The international athletic competitions held here in Herod's time rivaled the importance of the Olympic Games.

In the second century CE the eastern hippodrome was built, some 700 m east of here (outside the site of Caesarea).



The Roman theater



The Promontory Palace



The hippodrome

## Nearby Sites

- Tanim Stream Nature Reserve**  
Approx. 20 minutes' drive
- Nahal Me'arot Nature Reserve**  
Approx. 25 minutes' drive
- Dor Habonim Nature Reserve**  
Approx. 35 minutes' drive

You are here



# Welcome Caesarea National Park

## The City Born from the Sea

### City of the Ages

When Herod ascended the throne in Judah he needed a harbor, and it soon became evident that the small inlets on his kingdom's coastline were too narrow to suit his aspirations. But a man like Herod does not give up; he went on to build a sophisticated harbor on the site of a small Sidonian seaport called Straton's Tower. Herod, one of the great builders of the ancient world, spent 12 years constructing the harbor, and in 10 BCE, he inaugurated it with great pomp and circumstance. He named it "Sebastos" (the Greek equivalent of the imperial title Augustus), and called the city that grew around the harbor "Caesarea" as a sign of loyalty to the emperor.

Herod overcame the forces of nature in building the harbor at Caesarea. He constructed undersea breakwater, a huge artificial harbor, one of the most advanced in the Roman world, and a vibrant city. Broad avenues spanned its length and breadth, and impressive public buildings sprang up. Aqueducts supplied water from distant springs, and at the tip of the rocky promontory jutting into the sea he built a magnificent palace. These have all left remnants that to this day amaze all who view them.

Roman Caesarea saw major milestones in Jewish history: In 66 CE a bloody clash broke out between the city's Jews and pagans at the entrance to the synagogue. This sparked the Great Revolt of the Jews against the Romans – which ended with the destruction of the Temple According to the Talmud, after the Bar Kokhba Revolt some 70 years later, the Romans executed Rabbi Akiva, apparently because he broke Roman law by teaching Torah publicly and issuing religious rulings.

Caesarea is also a landmark in Christian history. Cornelius, a Roman centurion and resident of the city, was the first pagan convert to Christianity. And around 60 CE, the Roman rulers imprisoned the Apostle Paul here for two years, until he was tried and sent to Rome, where he was ultimately executed for spreading Christianity.

Caesarea flourished during the Byzantine period, boasting a population of more than 40,000. A cosmopolitan commercial city with a large agricultural hinterland, it served as the capital of Provincia Palaestina. It was also an important Christian center, home to the prominent Church fathers Origen and Eusebius.

However, its status failed to withstand the Arab onslaught and capture of the city in 640 CE. The Early Islamic period saw ancient Caesarea's population dwindle and it became a small settlement based on workshops and agricultural exports. During the Abbasid period (ninth century CE), the settlement was surrounded by a wall.

Caesarea also played a major role in the Crusader period. King Balwin I conquered it in 1101. The Muslim leader Saladin subsequently destroyed it, yet in the mid-thirteenth century the French King Louis IX (St. Louis) refortified it. But in 1265, the city fell to the Mamluk Sultan Baibars.

Years passed. In the late nineteenth century, Muslims from Bosnia, seeking refuge in Land of Israel following the invasion of their country by the Austro-Hungarian Empire, settled in the ruins of Caesarea. After they abandoned the site in 1948, the period of settlement of Caesarea came to an end. It subsequently became a national park, revealing the harbor city in all its glory.

### Caesarea National Park and Harbor

Caesarea is a lively focus of entertainment and tourism, thanks to its fascinating past, spectacular finds and the memories its history invokes. Visitors are invited to immerse themselves in its ancient sagas and enjoy its special atmosphere in the artists' workshops, restaurants and entertainment venues in the ancient port. In the summer, a beach carpeted with golden sand awaits.

As you explore, we suggest setting aside a good few hours—don't watch the clock, just enjoy.



Caesarea Harbor Visitor Center

health. The original statue is located in the Caesarea Antiquities Museum in Kibbutz Sdot Yam, while a replica graces the site itself. During the Byzantine period, the pool went out of use and was replaced by another structure; a street was then paved in front of it.

### 17. The sculpture park along the Byzantine Cardo

East of the Crusader city wall and the main entrance to the national park, remains can be seen of a street paved with marble stones and flanked by high walls. Apparently Caesarea's main thoroughfare during the Byzantine period, it was embellished with statuary. The most outstanding of these are two gigantic headless and limbless statues mounted on granite seats, originally from a Roman-period structure. The site was found in 1951 while preparing the area for agricultural use.

### 18. Northern Crusader gate

The northern Crusader city wall is approximately 230 m long and had three towers, the westernmost of which is incorporated into the northern gate. West of the bridge that now crosses the moat, the foundation of the drawbridge from the Crusader period has survived. Under the bridge, a Byzantine villa was found featuring a mosaic floor with mythological imagery.

### 19. Crusader wall

Caesarea's Crusader wall, which surrounds an area of about 120 dunams (12 hectares), is among the most impressive Crusader-era fortifications in Israel. The wall was built in 1251, by King Louis IX (St. Louis) during his stay in Caesarea. Fifteen defensive towers were built on it, a deep moat was dug and three gates were constructed. Today's visitor promenade passes alongside the wall's southeastern corner tower. Below it was a postern gate – a hidden passage exiting at the bottom of the moat. The promenade continues alongside the "Crusader market," where a remnant of a Crusader-era two-story structure was uncovered and restored.

### 20. The ancient synagogue

Caesarea's ancient synagogue is located near the beach, just north of the Crusader city. The structure revealed at least five archaeological strata, dating from the Hellenistic period to the Early Islamic period (the eighth century CE). The earliest synagogue was discovered in a stratum associated with the time of Herod.

In the synagogue's prayer hall, the excavations unearthed Corinthian capitals and columns incised with candelabras, as well as mosaics and clay lamps also depicting candelabras – a common Jewish symbol. Parts of several mosaics were found, one of which bore an inscription stating that a person named Julius had made the mosaic floor after making a vow. Some of the mosaics have been restored, and their vibrant colors adorn the floor.

Josephus Flavius describes clashes that flared up near the synagogue between the Jewish and pagan inhabitants of Caesarea, conflicts that ultimately led to the outbreak of the Great Revolt of the Jews against the Romans. Could this ancient synagogue be the very site where these confrontations began, setting in motion the events that led to the destruction of the Temple

## Useful Information

### Caesarea National Park opening hours

**April – September:** 8 AM–5 PM **October – March:** 8 AM–4 PM

★ On Fridays and holiday eves the park closes one hour earlier. Phone no.: 04-6267080

#### ■ Time Tower presentation:

**April – September:** Sunday – Thursday 8 AM 5:30 PM, last showing 5:30 PM. Fridays and holiday eves last showing 3:30 PM.

**October – March:** Sunday – Thursday: 8 AM – 3:30 PM. Fridays and holiday eves: last showing: 2:30 PM. Saturday last showing: 3:30 PM.

**Hebrew:** Sunday – Friday: 15 minutes before the hour and 15 minutes after the hour. Saturday: every 15 minutes.

**English:** Sunday – Friday: every hour on the hour and every half hour on the half hour. Saturday: Every hour on the hour.

★ Changes may occur depending on visitor numbers

**Reservation center phone number:** 04-6268854 from any telephone

■ **The Caesarea Harbor complex** is open until the wee hours. Tel +6550 (Caesarea Development Company information line)

■ **Entrance fee:** Visitors may enter the Caesarea Harbor complex at a reduced fee that does not include entry to the national park or the Time Tower presentation.

♿ The displays in the harbor vaults, at the top of the temple platform, the hippodrome, the Promontory Palace and the theater are wheelchair accessible.

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**Production:** Adi Greenbaum | © **Israel Nature and Parks Authority**

Mamluk conquest of the country n the thirteenth century led to its destruction.

A staircase leads to the top of the temple platform where a beautiful view of the ancient harbor area awaits.

### 13. The Crusader fortress

The Crusader fortress was built on the foundations of the southern breakwater of Herod's harbor, possibly on the site were a lighthouse once stood. The fortress was a stronghold unto itself, separated from the city by a channel some 20 m wide and walls as much as 4 m thick. A wooden bridge that could be burned or drawn up apparently connected the fortress to the city. The fortress had two tall defensive towers and three large subterranean halls that were used to store food and ammunition. One of the rooms was plastered, perhaps for use as a reservoir.

The fortress was the headquarters of the city's military commander and the garrison. At least twice, the fortress saved the Crusader forces stationed at Caesarea. The first time, in 1128, when the Muslims attacked the city, the Crusaders barricaded themselves in the fortress and fought them off with the help of the Genoese fleet. The second time, after the city fell to the Mamluks, the defenders held out the fortress for a few days until they were evacuated by sea to Akko.

In 1265, the Mamluk Sultan Baibars conquered Caesarea and demolished the fortress. The large stone blocks lying in the water



The Roman quarter and the city wall

### The Water Supply to Caesarea

During the Roman period local wells could no longer provide enough water for Caesarea's large population, and to meet the demand, aqueducts were built to channel water from distant springs. It was apparently Herod who built the aqueduct from the Shuni Springs (near Binyamina), some 12 km from Caesarea. Known as the "High Aqueduct," it crosses the kurkar (calcareous sandstone) ridge on which the village of Jisir a-Zarqa now stands.

Later, during the time of Emperor Hadrian (second century CE), a second aqueduct was built that channeled water from the Menashe Springs, 23 km from Caesarea. Between Ein Tzabarin (near Amikam) and Hanadiv Valley, the aqueduct is hewn through a tunnel some 6 km long. On the seashore it runs parallel to the first aqueduct and replicates its architecture. Soldiers of the Second, Sixth and Tenth Roman legions left inscriptions on its walls attesting to their involvement in the construction. The aqueduct reached the city at an elevation of 8 m above sea level, and maintained an incline of only 0.2% (20 cm per km). Slightly north of Caesarea, the aqueduct rests on stone arches.

During the Byzantine period, another aqueduct was built that channeled water to Caesarea from springs near Ma'agan Michael, some 5 km north of the city. But because the springs lay too low to channel the water to the city by gravity, the Byzantines built dams to form a lake. When it filled, the water rose to the required level

### Caesarea and Jerusalem

"Caesarea...and Jerusalem...if...someone says to you that both cities are destroyed, do not believe him. If...he says to you that Caesarea is destroyed and Jerusalem is settled, or that Jerusalem is destroyed and Caesarea is settled, believe him" (Babylonian Talmud, Megillah 1a)



The Roman bathhouse

### 8. The Roman bathhouse

Constructed in the fifth century CE atop the hippodrome's seats, the bathhouse featured a hot bath in the western wing and a cold bath in the eastern wing. Excavations uncovered hundreds of fragments of pink, white and gray marble, which have been reinstalled to restore the ancient grandeur of the space. A colonnaded courtyard extending north of the bathhouse was used for exercise and socializing. During the Roman period, a visit to the bathhouse was an indulgence in pleasure; bathing was only part of the experience.

### 9. The Byzantine governor's palace

The palace is the first complex situated south of the Crusader city, near the beach. It was the ruling center of Caesarea, which at that time was the capital of the province of *Palaestina Prima*, that is, the northern part of the Land of Israel only, not of the entire country. One wing, in the form of an apsidal hall, served as a reception room and courtroom, and to its south were offices of various officials. To the north, another apsidal hall apparently housed the archive or library that served the courtroom and the tax bureau. The structures' function is revealed by the presence of benches in the waiting rooms, inscriptions and other remains.

Numerous vaults that supported the structures on the second floor are well preserved, as were parts of a public toilet and a mosaic. One of the vaults was used in the third century CE as a small shrine to the god Mithras, a Parthian deity whose cult was spread by Roman soldiers. The section closest to the Crusader wall, which was damaged, was apparently the governor's private residential wing. Part of the governor's private bathhouse was uncovered in this wing.

### 10. Southern Crusader gate

The Crusaders built their walls along the lines of the Early Islamic-period city wall. South of the Crusader city, public buildings of the Roman city were found. The city covered 120 dunams (12 hectares) at this time, about one sixth of the size of the Roman city; the location of the gate illustrates how much larger the Roman city was than that of the Crusaders.

The Crusader wall promenade begins at the southern gate. Today it connects Caesarea's harbor to the Roman city's "entertainment district." The promenade ends at the eastern gate of the Crusade wall.\* The promenade is about 300 m long.

★ This gate is locked when the national park is closed.

### 11. The Caesarea Harbor Visitor Center

This state-of-the-art visitor center is housed in four of the 14 southern vaults that once supported the temple platform built by Herod. The conservation and development of the platform vaults was one of the largest projects undertaken at any archaeological site in Israel. They span some 1,000 sq m of ground space, with an additional 600 sq m functioning as a gallery.

The center is the introduction to a visit to Caesarea and its vaults recount the city's rich history. The northernmost of the four houses a timeline and a computerized simulation model of Caesarea in its various periods. In the next vault, a presentation is projected about the harbor's construction and the dedication of the city, and the two southern vaults display finds from the excavations. The southernmost vault has remained almost completely intact and undamaged since Herod's day.

The visitor center – or by its full name "The Center for the Heritage of Caesarea, Edmund Benjamin de Rothschild – was created in cooperation with the Caesarea Development Company, the Israel Nature and Parks Authority and the Israel Antiquities Authority.

### 12. The temple platform

During the Roman period, while Caesarea's harbor was the gateway to the city, the temple platform was its showcase. Herod, the great builder of antiquity, knew full well that nothing compares to a first impression. Thus, all who entered the harbor, whether soldiers, wealthy merchants or sailors, were struck speechless by the magnificent buildings that welcomed them.

The platform was situated atop an artificial hill that was clearly visible as one approached from the sea, and covered some 13 dunams (1.3 hectares). A grand temple to Emperor Augustus was built on the summit, beside which stood a large statue of the emperor and several altars. A magnificent staircase led to the temple. The platform continued to serve as a cultic site for approximately 1,400 years. During the Byzantine period, at the end of the fifth century CE, an octagonal church was built over the temple's ruins. Today's visitors can still see small segments of the corners of its walls. A new staircase connected the quay to the church, and on the foundations of the Herodian vaults on the western façade, new vaults were built that served as storerooms.

During the Abbasid period (ninth–tenth centuries), a mosque was built on the platform. Tenth-century geographers describe it as a tall structure with a courtyard offering a view of the sea. After the Crusader conquest (1101) a church was built on the same site, remains of whose three apses survive to this day. The

at its foot are remnants of the fortifications. Today the structure serves as a restaurant.

### 14. The ancient harbor of Caesarea

The lawns at the foot of the temple platform mark part of Herod's inner harbor. Dug on dry land, it featured an anchorage basin, a built quay and storerooms whose remains can be seen to this day. West of the inner harbor was another anchorage basin that utilized a natural break in the kurkar (calcareous sandstone) ridge. A third such basin, the westernmost, was built in the open sea with a breakwater and quays. In Herod's time, approximately 100 ships could anchor in the harbor at the same time. In the Early Islamic period, the harbor was filled in and replaced by a residential quarter.

The western part of the harbor has sunk some 5 m into the sea and is now an underwater archaeological park with four diving zones. One is accessible to amateur divers using a mask and snorkel, and the other three are reserved for divers with professional equipment.

### 15. Eastern Crusader gate

The walls and deep moat around Crusader Caesarea were built in 1251 during the reign of Louis IX of France. King Louis headed a failed Crusade to conquer Egypt, during which he was captured by the Muslims. Following his release upon payment of a ransom, he came to Caesarea and rebuilt its walls. He was later canonized as a saint.

During the Crusader period, a wooden bridge spanned, which could be removed in wartime by the city's defenders to prevent access to the gate. The impressive gate ceiling has been reconstructed with its original stones, and on the promenade that runs along the wall, the arches from the Crusader street have been reconstructed. On the street that enters the city from the gate toward the sea, remains can still be seen of paving from the Roman period.

### 16. Nymphaeum

The nymphaeum, or public fountain, which served both as ornamentation and a source of water for the city's inhabitants, stood at the intersection between the city's main street and the harbor. It was a magnificent structure, with a monumental façade featuring marble statuary. The excavations of the nymphaeum's pool revealed a stature of Hygeia – the goddess of cleanliness and