

The background of the slide features a light blue and white geometric pattern of triangles. Overlaid on this are three large, semi-transparent circles in shades of blue and purple. The leftmost circle contains a white audio waveform. The middle circle contains a faint circuit board pattern. The rightmost circle contains a faint map of Israel.

Cultural Sensitivity Project: Israel

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AIPLA

Serving the

Creative and **Legal** Communities

There isn't one version of Israel, just as there isn't one version of the United States.

Israel is an incredibly diverse and varied society, focused on the future and rooted in the past.

Reuven (“Ruvi”) Rivlin, the current President of the State of Israel (a largely ceremonial position) once noted that Israel is a country made up of four major groups or “tribes”:

- Secular Jews
- National-religious Jews
- Ultra-Orthodox (or Haredi) Jews
- Arabs (Muslims, Christians, Druze)

Although Israel is often called the Jewish State, it must be remembered that over 20% of Israelis are:

- Muslims (primarily Sunnis)
- Christians (e.g., Greek-Catholic Melkites and Greek Orthodox)
- Druze

To put this in perspective, less than 2% of Americans are Jewish.

Israel is the world's only Hebrew-speaking country.

Modern Hebrew (or “Ivrit”) is spoken with a Sephardic pronunciation (traditionally used by Jews from North Africa and the Middle East) and not an Ashkenazi pronunciation (traditionally used by Jews from Eastern Europe).

For instance, Sabbath is pronounced in Hebrew as:

Sephardic:	Shabbát
Ashkenazi:	Shábbos

In addition to Hebrew, other languages spoken in Israel include:

- Arabic (spoken by Israeli Arabs and those Israeli Jews who immigrated (or made “*aliya*”) from Arabic-speaking countries)
- Russian (spoken by over one million immigrants (or “*olim*”) from the former Soviet Union)
- Yiddish (spoken by a significant percentage of Haredi Jews)
- Amharic (spoken by *olim* from Ethiopia)
- English (an international language studied in school and used in overseas business as well as spoken by *olim* from the United States, Britain and other English-speaking countries)
- French (spoken by an increasing number of Francophone Jews who made *aliya* or who spend extended periods of time in Israel)

Most Israelis are “sabras” (referring to those born in the country) and are the descendants of Jews who made *aliya* from around the world, including:

- Sephardim from North Africa and the Middle East
- Ashkenazim from Eastern Europe
- Beta Israel from Ethiopia
- Bene Israel from India

Israelis are direct and forthright.
In this regard, three useful words are:

Chutzpah – Brashness

Tachlis – Getting down to “brass tacks”

Dugri – Speaking straight to the point

Substance, and not formality, is what really counts.

Most young Israelis (primarily, secular and national-religious Jews as well as Druze) are drafted at the age of 18 into the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), often followed by regular stints of reserve duty.

Some Arab Muslim Bedouin, Arab Christians and Haredi Jews also serve in the IDF.

Many life-long friendships and connections are formed while serving in the IDF. Moreover, the question of who is required to serve and who is exempt is a major issue in Israeli politics.

Work Week: Sunday - Thursday

Weekend: Friday and Saturday

Shabbat – the Jewish day of rest – lasts from sundown on Friday to nightfall on Saturday.

Business and government offices are closed and most public transportation does not operate on Shabbat.

Movie theaters and restaurants are sometimes open except in areas with a large concentration of religious Jews.

Jewish holidays (which are also observed as national holidays) include:

Rosh HaShana	The Jewish New Year (literally “head of the year” in Hebrew) which is reflective in nature
Yom Kippur	The Day of Atonement which is a contemplative fast day
Sukkot*	A week-long holiday remembering a period of wandering in the desert while living in temporary booths (“ <i>sukkot</i> ” in Hebrew); also a harvest festival
Hanukka	An eight-day festival commemorating the dedication (“ <i>hanukka</i> ” in Hebrew) of the Temple in Jerusalem after a war of liberation against the Syrian Greeks
Purim	A holiday commemorating the Jews defending themselves from death on a date that was chosen by lots (“ <i>purim</i> ” in Hebrew) in the ancient Persian Empire
Passover*	A week-long holiday commemorating freedom from slavery in ancient Egypt
Shavuot*	A holiday celebrated several weeks (“ <i>shavuot</i> ” in Hebrew) after Passover that commemorates the giving of the Torah; also a harvest festival

All holidays start at sundown and continue through the next day (or the last day of a multi-day holiday) until nightfall.

* Sukkot, Passover and Shavuot each have an extra day outside of Israel. Accordingly, religiously observant Jews in Israel are back to their normal routines while their counterparts abroad are still in the midst of holiday observance.

National Israeli holidays include:

Yom HaShoah	Holocaust Remembrance Day
Yom HaZikaron	Israeli Memorial Day which is a very somber occasion (especially for secular and national-religious Jews and the Druze)
Yom HaAtzma'ut	Israeli Independence Day which immediately follows Yom HaZikaron (not especially observed by Haredi Jews or Arab citizens of Israel)

Other holidays:

Mimouna	Post-Passover holiday originating in the Moroccan Jewish community
Sigd	Ethiopian Jewish holiday
Eid al-Adḥa	Festival of the Sacrifice: Observed by Muslims and Druze
Eid al-Fiṭr	Festival of Breaking of the Fast: Observed by Muslims at the end of the month of Ramadan (in which there is sunrise-to-sunset fasting, followed each night by a meal known as ifṭar)
Christmas	
Easter	Observed by Christians on different dates depending on denomination
Novy God	Secular new year's holiday with a Russian flavor

A word about the calendar:

Israel, as the Jewish State, uses the ancient lunisolar Hebrew calendar for holidays.

For example, Passover always starts on the 15th of the Hebrew month of Nisan (in early spring) while Sukkot always starts on the 15th of the Hebrew month of Tishrei (in the early fall).

Yom HaZikaron and Yom HaAtzma'ut both take place in the springtime month of Iyar.

In terms of commerce and most day-to-day activities, Israel uses the Western civil calendar.

Religious issues:

- Off the grid: Religious Jews do not use electronics, spend money or drive on Shabbat as well as on Rosh HaShana, Yom Kippur, Shavuot and the first and last days of Passover and Sukkot
- No touching: Haredi Jews prefer not to shake hands with members of the opposite sex
- Kashrut: A code of what is religiously fit to eat (e.g., no pork, shellfish, and mixing of milk and meat)
- Religious Jews prefer to eat in Kosher restaurants
- Some prefer to rely on their own community's Kashrut certification over that of the local rabbinical establishment
- If Kashrut is not an issue, the vibrant Israeli restaurant scene opens up a host of other culinary options

Attire:

The dress code in work environments is generally business casual.

Gifts:

Companies in Israel customarily give gifts before Rosh HaShana and Passover.

It is also polite to bring a gift, such as flowers or wine, when visiting a colleague's home.
(Make sure that the wine is kosher if visiting someone who observes Kashrut)

Cafes:

Israel has a plethora of excellent cafes, so don't be surprised if you're invited to a meeting in a café.

Enjoy an espresso and maybe something light to eat!

More on language:

International business is regularly conducted in English.

However, knowing a little bit of Hebrew (for example, “Todah” or “Thanks”) goes a long way.

Names:

You might start off using someone’s last name and pretty quickly switch to first names. Israelis are informal when it comes to title.

Politics:

After you get to know an Israeli, don’t be surprised if the topic of politics comes up. If so, just be thoughtful and honest while taking into account the complexity of a very complicated issue.