



## Dead Sea Scrolls travelling exhibit lands in Denver

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SPECIAL TO THE CJN

If you are unable to fly to Israel for its 70th anniversary and weren't able to see the Dead Sea Scrolls exhibit when it was at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto in 2009, consider planning a summer trip to Denver which includes a visit to the Denver Museum of Nature & Science (DMNS).

The Dead Sea Scrolls travelling exhibit at DMNS was created by the Israel Antiquities Authority from the collections of the Israel National Treasures and produced by Discovery Time Square and the Franklin Institute. Tickets to this special exhibit are available online until the exhibit's closing on Sept. 3, 2018.

In the early 1990s, I visited Israel for the first time. My two-week tour with my husband and four sons included the Dead Sea region and a visit to Qumran. As I stood looking up toward the caves where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered from 1947-1956, I realized how lucky the world is to have fragile segments from ancient parchment scrolls dating from 150 BCE to 70 CE. I also had the opportunity to visit the Shrine of the Book at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, where the oldest biblical manuscripts are stored.

While the travelling exhibit is only a small sampling of what can be found at the Israel Museum or at the 30,000 known Israeli archeological sites, it is definitely worth a visit if you're interested in Jewish history and happen to find yourself in Denver.

Visitors are introduced to the exhibit by watching a five-minute video that is presented on four large screens. As images are projected onto the screens, the actor provides a brief overview of different parts of Jewish history substantiated by archeological findings, along with a few facts about the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in the vessels stored in 11 caves near Qumran.

On the left side of the room, you can view an artifact timeline that starts in 2018 and goes back to 1200 BCE. This visual representation showcases artifacts including pots, coins, weapons, jewelry, writings, and other items that bring historical facts alive during designated periods— Modern; Ottoman; Mamluk; Crusader Kingdom; Fatimid; Early Islamic; Byzantine; Roman; Persian, Greeks and Hasmoneans; Iron Age II; and Iron Age I.

On the right side of the room, a video displays how foreign rulers from biblical times to the present continually conquered the region.

Based on archeological findings, the developers of the exhibit recreated an ancient Israelite stone walled home from the Iron Age (1200-550 BCE). Houses during this era had a main courtyard that permitted access to all of the rooms in the house. Some of the rooms were even designated for domesticated animals. Authentic artifacts are found in the model home.

Along one wall, artifacts illustrate ancient Israelite life from before the monarchy until the time of the destruction of the First Temple in 586 BCE. The exhibit focuses on how the monarchy helped ancient Israel become a nation. Some of the items were excavated from Lachish, the second most important city in the southern Kingdom of Judah, while other pieces illustrate the high literacy rate of the people, the barter system of shekels, and different architectural styles. A short video summarizes key aspects of this part of the exhibit.

In the centre of the room, people walk around a large circular exhibit to look through a transparent protective cover at the main attraction – 10 fragile fragments of actual Dead Sea Scrolls. Each scroll has a description, an English translation, and an enlarged copy.

Midway through the six-month exhibit, these 10 texts will be replaced with a different selection. This is the first time that



the Tohorot (Purities) fragment is being exhibited.

The curved perimeter walls resemble Jerusalem's Western Wall. Displays of additional artifacts with excellent signage and lighting are mounted on these decorative walls. By examining ancient pottery, coins, footwear, ossuaries, textiles, inscriptions, and other objects, one can draw conclusions about how these people lived.

After viewing this, I recommend sitting down on one of the benches in the left corner to watch a short video that shows footage from the time of the discovery of the scrolls. Viewers will see how the initial handlers were clueless about the importance of their rare find and how dramatically preservation techniques have changed since the 1940s.

Information about the Ten Commandments and exhibits pertaining to Masada are also found in this room.

Twice a day, museumgoers can pay an extra fee to watch the film *Jerusalem* in the IMAX Theater. This National Geographic film intertwines the words and images of three young women – Jewish, Muslim and Christian. Having visited Jerusalem num-

**Artifacts from the Dead Sea Scrolls exhibit at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science. The scrolls are on top.** PHOTOS COURTESY SANDY BORNSTEIN

erous times, I'm not sure all of the words accurately reflect the real dynamics of living in the Old City. Nevertheless, the 3D images capture its essence.

Whether you come for a weekend getaway or for a week or longer, Denver and its neighbouring mountain destinations are spectacular places to explore in the summertime. It would be ideal if you could combine a trip to Colorado with a half or full day visit to the Denver Museum of Nature & Science. ■

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