

# En Avdat National Park

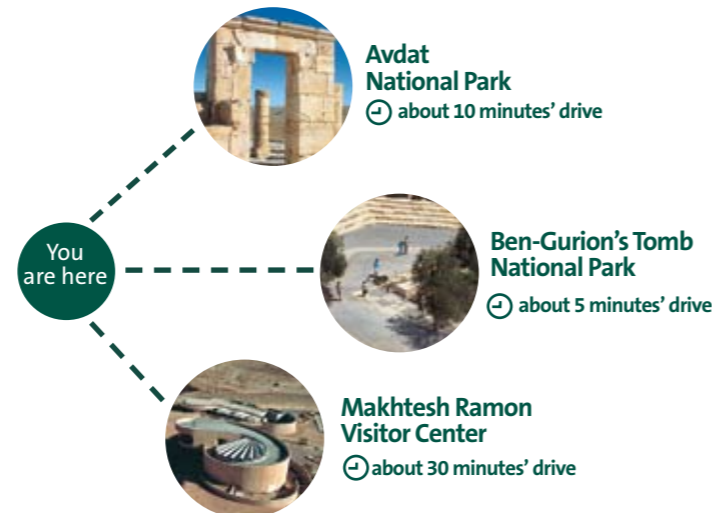
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## THE IBEX

Ibexes are common in the Negev, the Eilat Mountains and the Judean Desert near the Dead Sea. Cliffs and steep slopes near wadi beds with rich vegetation, water holes and springs are their natural habitat, as the Bible says: "The high mountains are for the wild goats" (Psalm 104:18).

Ibexes need to drink frequently and so hunters, from time immemorial, would lie in wait for them close to water sources. They feed on various plants and chew their cud. Their skin is brown and their bodies are compact, with muscular limbs and hooves designed to make them excellent climbers. All of these characteristics allow them to survive under harsh desert conditions.

For most of the year, adult males and females with kids live in separate herds. The males can be identified by their large, cumbersome bodies, beard and long, backward-curving horns. The horns serve as a means of impressing and warning rival males. Males sometimes butt heads violently in an effort to improve their status in the herd and take over better territory.

Males and females come together only during mating season (September–November), when the largest, strongest male in the herd mates with the females after lengthy courtship. In the spring, pregnant females leave the herd to give birth, producing one or two kids at a time.

## OTHER NEARBY SITES TO VISIT

**Ben-Gurion's Hut** – David Ben-Gurion was Israel's first prime minister. After he resigned in 1954, he and his wife Paula moved to a small house, or "hut," as it was called, at Kibbutz Sde Boker, to realize the vision of making the desert bloom. The house has been preserved with his possessions and library. Entrance fee required.

**Ben-Gurion's Tomb National Park** – This site, near Midreshet Sde Boker, above Wadi Tsin, contains the graves of Paula and David Ben-Gurion. You can learn about Ben-Gurion's life, work and vision in an audiovisual presentation in a nearby building. A desert garden, which overlooks the Tsin Valley, has been planted near the graves. There is no entrance fee to this site.

**Midreshet Sde Boker** – This institution was established in 1964 on Ben-Gurion's initiative. It houses the desert research institute of Ben-Gurion University in Beersheba, the Ben-Gurion Heritage Institute and an environmental school. There is a Gadna base (for short-term military preparatory programs) near the college.

**Havarim Cistern** – This is a Nabatean cistern hewn in chalk rock on the northern bank of Wadi Havarim, a tributary of Wadi Tsin. You can reach the cistern on foot after turning east from road 40 at kilometer 128, following the sign. This is one of the most beautiful cisterns in the Negev; it still fills with water when the wadi floods. The roof rests on a central hewn pillar, which bears an ancient Nabatean symbol identified with Dushara, the chief Nabatean god.

**Avdat National Park** – The park encompasses the remains of a Nabatean settlement established as a way station for caravans plying the Incense Route. It later became an important urban center in the Roman and Byzantine periods (second–seventh centuries CE). Cultivated areas, agricultural terraces, dams and cisterns from these periods can be seen around the city from this period. A farm has been recreated nearby to study ancient farming methods.



## Safety and Security Instructions for Visitors

- Wear a hat and carry water. The spring water is not potable.
- Do not bring food into the national park and do not make fires.
- To protect nature, do not bring dogs or other pets into the park.
- No swimming in the pools.
- Be careful not to slip near the pools.
- Walk only on marked trails and be careful not to cause rockslides.
- Do not go near the cliff edge.
- Rappelling and cliff-climbing are prohibited.
- Ladders are one way – ascent only!
- Visitors are allowed in the park only during opening hours.
- There are toilets near the upper and lower parking lots.
- Do not harm flora, fauna or inanimate objects.
- Keep the park clean. Do not leave trash; take it with you.

## Visiting Hours

Summer: 8:00–15:30 Exit by 17:00

Winter: 8:00–14:30 Exit by 16:00

On Fridays and holidays the park closes one hour earlier.

**For further information:** HaTsinim Cliff entrance pavilion: 08-6555684

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# Welcome to En Avdat National Park



En Avdat National Park is located in Wadi Tsin, on the northern edges of the Avdat plateau, 400–600 m above sea level. The Avdat Plateau is situated between the anticlines of the central and the northern Negev Highlands. Its upper strata consist of hard, white Eocene limestone bearing thin seams of brown-black flint. The basal strata are soft, mainly comprised of clays and marls, and are green and reddish in color. In the geological past, before the creation of the great rift of the Arava Valley to the east, the upper tributaries of Wadi Tsin drained northwest from the Avdat Plateau toward the Besor Stream, which flowed into the Mediterranean Sea. The formation of the deep Arava rift created height differentials of hundreds of meters between the Arava and the tributaries draining eastward. The wadis eventually eroded backward through soft layers, undercutting the harder layers above them. These upper layers collapsed, creating the broad bed of Wadi Tsin as well as HaTsinim Cliff, which stretches along about 20 km on the northern edges of the Avdat Plateau. The collapse also diverted the upper tributaries of Wadi Besor eastward toward Wadi Tsin – a phenomenon known as “watercourse capture.” At points where wadis crossing the Avdat Plateau intersected with Wadi Tsin, the height differential created rock terraces and high waterfalls. Erosion eventually resulted in deep canyons with towering cliffs like the En Avdat Canyon. The concentration of travertine rock and remnants of a few prehistoric sites in the area indicate that the canyon in its present form was created about 45,000 years ago. Water-bearing clay strata in the canyon walls feed the upper spring, En Ma’arif, as well as En Avdat and En Mor, farther downstream in the canyon. The springs and their surroundings are like small oases, rich in vegetation. The greenery blends into the layers of white limestone, a unique landscape among the most beautiful in the Negev.

The streambed is full of thick vegetation, especially common reed (*Phragmites australis*), bulrushes (*Typha domingensis*), juncus (*Juncus rigidus*) and nitriaria (*Nitraria retusa*), dotted with saltbush (*Atriplex halimus*) and tamarisk (*Tamarix sp.*). Algae flourish in the pools, and constantly dripping water at some points nourishes an abundance of mosses and ferns, especially maidenhair fern (*Adiantum capillus-veneris*). A beautiful grove

of Mesopotamian poplar (*Populus euphratica*) grows along the upper part of the stream. These are deep-rooted tropical trees, rare in the Negev.

A lone, large Atlantic pistachio (*Pistacia atlantica*), about 250 years old, grows in the northern part of the canyon. This Irano-Turanian species sprouts new leaves in the summer and sheds its leaves in the winter – evidence of a rainier climate in this area in the past.

Various birds and animals live around the water. Among the many birds are various species of swallows and wheatears, sand partridges (*Ammoperdix heyi*), chukar partridges (*Alectoris chukar*), Arabian babblers (*Argya squamiceps*), pale rock martins (*Ptyonoprogne obsoleta*), and griffon and Egyptian vultures (*Gyps fulvus*, *Neophron percnopterus*). Rock doves (*Columba livia*), which nest in natural nooks and crannies above the streams, are common. Among the variety of animals are the famous ibex (*Capra ibex*), as well as a kind of Asian gray dormouse known as *Eliomys melanurus*, which are quite rare and are nocturnal.

## Entrances to En Avdat National Park

The park, which is reached from road 40 (the Beersheba-Mitspe Ramon road) has two entrances:

**1. The northern entrance (lower parking lot):** Between kilometer markers 130 and 131, turn east following the sign to Midreshet Sde Boker. Continue following the signs for about 4 km to the lower parking lot (1).

**2. The southern entrance (upper parking lot):** Between kilometer markers 123 and 124, turn east as per the sign. About 1 km along the way, you'll reach the upper parking lot (14), from which you can go to the lookout (10) and the top of Wadi Tsin's upper waterfall.

There is no descent to the wadi from this entrance.

**A single ticket purchases admission at both entrances (on day of purchase).**

### Two Suggested Trails

**A. The long trail, which is one way,** and takes 2–3 hours. It takes you along Wadi Tsin from the lower parking lot (1) via the lower pools and a grove of poplar trees to the upper parking lot (14). This trail includes a short, steep ascent of the canyon cliff.

**If you take this trail, you will need a vehicle waiting at the other end, at the upper parking lot.**

**B. The short trail:** This is a **loop trail** that takes 1–2 hours, and takes in part of the long trail. You'll reach the lower pools of En Avdat (4) and the waterfall, and you can continue to the poplar grove (7) farther up Wadi Tsin. From there, retrace your steps to the lower parking lot (1). After this, if you like, you can drive to the upper parking lot (14) to the lookout (10) over the wadi and the upper waterfall.

## Description of the Two Trails, A, B and Combination

Leave the lower parking lot (1), noticing the green vegetation and date palms of En Mor (2). Pass a broad-crowned Atlantic pistachio (3) and reach an intersection of trails near a stone dam. Cross the wadi bed and continue walking on the trail on the other side of the wadi bed, on a natural stone terrace next to the lower pools of En Avdat (4), until you reach En Avdat.



Return to the trail intersection and climb the narrow, rock-hewn steps to the trail (5) that bypasses the waterfall and reached its top (6). Enjoy the lookout from the top of the waterfall, some 15 m high, over the spectacular canyon, the pools and the beautiful vegetation.

Take the trail along the wadi to the poplar grove (7), and enjoy a rest in the shade. You can see the openings of caves in the cliff face (8), which were used by monks in the Byzantine period.

Ascend the slope, taking in the thrilling view of the deep wadi that undercuts the area beneath you.

Climb a short vertical segment using the steps and metal ladders installed especially for this purpose. The ascent is one-way only, for safety's sake. At the top of the slope, near the trail, is a square structure, apparently a tower (9), used by monks in the Byzantine period. From here the monks would descend to their dwelling caves and the small plots they cultivated near the streambed.

Continue along the cliff to the lookout (10), where an amazing view awaits of the cliffs, the upper pools (11) and the desert plateau. Sometimes you can see herds of ibex climbing the cliffs. En Ma'arif (12), hidden in the canyon, emerges above the pools.

It's a great idea to continue on the trail southward to the edge of the cliff above Wadi Tsin, to the top of the large waterfall (13), about 60 m high, to get another wonderful view of the wadi.

From here, go back to the upper parking lot (14) where your visit ends.

