



Boy, this is

RESERVE A DATE

Start to plan at least a year in advance. According to tradition, a barmitzvah boy should read the Torah portion (*alayah la-Torah*) on the Shabbat following his Hebrew birth date or later. Contact your venues: a synagogue, the Kotel (The Western Wall Heritage Foundation, english.thekotel.org), hotels, halls, etc, to reserve the date. It is possible to plan and organise a barmitzvah even two months in advance but you might have to compromise on your choices. Reserve an appropriate venue or venues for the style and season. Try not to fall in love with an outdoor venue if your function is between November 1 and March 1, when rain is most likely (although this is also the season when events are priced most competitively). And obviously you will need a cool, air-conditioned or shaded venue in summer. Since many guests will be flying in for the occasion, consider spreading it over a few days and venues instead of having everything on one day.

LEARN THE PARASHAH (TORAH PORTION)

Find a tutor for the Torah reading about two years in advance. The actual learning should begin a year or so before the barmitzvah (take the tutor's advice). The tutor does not have to be a rabbi. Any patient person with fluent knowledge of the traditional notes and punctuation (*ta'amim*) is suitable. Such tutors usually charge a fee.

BUY TEFILLIN

Every set of tefillin includes parchment scrolls, boxes and straps. The parchment scrolls are the most important, so purchase tefillin with high-quality parchments, hand-written by a ritual scribe. Inexpensive tefillin might have poorly written, hurried and sloppy texts and fonts forbidden by Jewish tradition.

THE CEREMONY

This is celebrated when a boy arrives at the age of 13 years and a day and consists of two main parts: wearing the tefillin and reading a Torah portion. A boy may recite a *drasha* (talk) about his favourite Torah issue, wear the tallit and tefillin, read the Torah verses or recite the aliyah blessings only.

All these rituals can be performed at once, or on different occasions according to your wishes and family traditions.

WEARING TEFILLIN

Any boy over the age of 13 may don tefillin.

Tefillin are worn only on weekdays, not on Shabbat. If you wish your son to put on tefillin and read the Torah in a synagogue on the same day, this can be done on Monday and Thursday mornings, when a short portion is read. You may also choose a *rosh chodesh* (first day of the month in the Hebrew calendar) or some holidays.

Tefillin can be put on separately from the Torah aliyah on any weekday at a local synagogue, at the Kotel, a hotel synagogue or one of the ancient synagogues open to the public throughout Israel.

It might be better to put on tefillin and read the Torah on a weekday, because photography on Shabbat is forbidden.

In addition, if you read the Torah at the Kotel on a weekday, you can continue the celebration in another location, even if it requires driving.



The Kotel plaza is filled with happy, excited families

An indoor venue can be dressed in any fashion





brilliant

So your son has reached 13 years of age and is ready to celebrate his barmitzvah in Israel? Here are some pointers from events expert Ronit Hogi

TEFILLIN AT THE KOTEL

Families from around the world come to celebrate the barmitzvah tefillin-wearing ceremony at the Western Wall. The Kotel prayer plaza is filled with happy, excited families holding barmitzvaahs at the holiest site of Judaism and the greatest symbol of Israel's strength. Here, in an atmosphere of spirituality and unity, you, your family and your barmitzvah boy will have the most unforgettable experience.

You can hold barmitzvaahs at the Kotel on Mondays, Thursdays, and also on *rosh chodesh* and *chol hamoed* days. A traditional ceremony is about 45 minutes long and can be held between 7am and 3pm. The location is in high demand, so register well in advance. You may contact the Western Wall Heritage Foundation staff for free assistance at all times.

THE TORAH READING (ALIYAH)

If you decide to have the tefillin ceremony separately on a weekday, the barmitzvah boy may read his Torah portion on a Saturday. In most Ashkenazi and some Sephardi congregations (for instance Moroccan and Iraqi) the barmitzvah boy also reads maftir and haftarah. Most Sephardi Jews, however, do not follow this tradition. The boy's father and other relatives are also honoured with an aliyah. The parental blessing and the sweet-throwing happen much as in the UK.



There is nothing like the atmosphere of a barmitzvah in Israel, whether it is in a synagogue, at the Kotel or elsewhere

READING THE TORAH IN A SYNAGOGUE

If choosing a synagogue, find one that suits your family traditions and reserve your date early. Many synagogues customarily celebrate only one barmitzvah per Shabbat but, if you do have to share, do not be disappointed; just unwind and enjoy the celebrations with all the other families.

Photography on Shabbat is prohibited and appropriate dress is essential.

READING THE TORAH AT YOUR HOTEL SYNAGOGUE

You can celebrate your boy's great day in your hotel and use its synagogue for the Torah reading. Your boy would be the only barmitzvah celebrant that day and your rabbi of choice can officiate. You can also hire a chazan.

After the ceremony, guests can go straight to a festive lunch at the hotel without walking (or indeed driving) to another venue.

THE PARTY

If you decide to throw a party, you will find a great variety of lavish venues and great ideas to fit your budget and wishes.

You may choose many conventional indoor halls, gardens and hotels, some in the vicinity of the Western Wall.

You can also party on the seashore or outdoors, or even reserve an ancient site such as Masada for your special event.

It makes no difference how you celebrate your Israeli barmitzvah. It matters only that your festivities are joyous and exciting for you, the parents, the guests and especially your barmitzvah boy. **Q**

