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## Where in Los Angeles Did *Transparent* Film Its Israel Scenes?

By Lisa Liebman



The Wailing Wall was located in a Paramount Studios parking lot. Photo: Jennifer Clasen/Amazon Video

### **Spoilers ahead for season four of *Transparent*.**

*Transparent* creator Jill Soloway [said](#) she facetiously modeled the Pfefferman's pilgrimage to Israel on the [The Brady Bunch's Hawaii episode](#). But unlike the '60s sitcom, which actually traveled to the Aloha State to film, the *Transparent* cast never set foot in the Middle East to shoot their new season. Soloway, the writers, and some of the creative team took a research trip to Israel before scripts were written, says production designer Cat Smith, who was later tasked with turning local Los Angeles locations into the Israeli sites she saw. We talked to Smith about the spiritual sleight of hand it took to create Holy Land hot spots in Southern California.

#### **A Santa Clarita ranch became the goat farm in Ramallah.**

After arriving at Ben Gurion Airport — in reality, a transformed Van Nuys flyaway terminal — Ali and her new activist friend Lyfe end up in the Palestinian city of Ramallah in episode three. The goat farm they visit was actually Sable Ranch, a popular Santa Clarita film location. It was a good substitute for the West Bank spot where Ali gets an education in Israeli-Palestinian politics due to a 2016 wildfire that made its dry landscape a good desert double.

#### **An L.A. beach house subbed for Moshe's seaside home in Caesarea.**

"He lives like a Malibu Jew," Ali says about Maura's long-lost father, Moshe, whom they track down in episode four. In fact, a house in the exclusive beach community did sub for one in Israel's coastal town of Caesarea, where Maura's dad lives among the country's rich and famous. Smith says finding the house was easy, thanks to sites where homeowners advertise their shoot availability. But locating a spot on the sand where Ali and Maura could sit after their first encounter with "the cool guy" air-conditioning mogul was trickier because of Malibu's surrounding mountains.

### **A Compton cemetery stood in for the “street of sorrow.”**

Josh may have said, “I feel like we’re in Venice Beach right now,” when the Pfeffermans checked out Jerusalem’s Old City market in episode six. But his words were actually uttered at the [Angeles Abbey Memorial Park](#) in Compton. “The shots of stalls are B-roll for the most part,” says Smith, who also added some of her own stands based on pictures she took during her trip. In addition to making a “Via Dolorosa” street sign, Smith’s crew built a *faux* Jerusalem stone plaster front. The fake wall included the well-worn spot with Jesus’ handprint at which the Pfeffermans stop.

### **A Paramount Studios parking lot became home to the Wailing Wall.**

Before shooting a frame of film for episode six, in which the Pfeffermans visit the sacred site, Smith says Soloway “had a rabbi come in and give a prayer” in front of a fabricated 60-foot plaster wall meant to mimic ancient limestone and crammed with hundreds of tiny pieces of paper — including script pages — into barely there crevices. The rabbi also invited everyone to write a note, and put it in the wall that had to match an establishing B-roll shot of the real temple wall. “It was strangely moving, and people really did put prayers in that wall,” Smith says. At the end of the day, the director of photography sent Smith a photo of someone praying at the wall after everyone had left.

### **A Southern California sand quarry posed as the desert.**

The Bedouin village Moshe takes the Pfeffermans to in episode seven was actually a Simi Valley business that mines sand for glass. Smith brought in camels, goats, and even planted palm trees. “When you look at the hill [in the scene], and see a cliff of sand, that’s because it’s been bulldozed,” Smith says. The fictional West Bank settlement of Tapuz that Sarah and Len visit in the same episode was based on the Har Homa and Ma’aleh Adumim settlements. The show used a Santa Clarita building for an exterior shot, and photos of real apartments on an Israeli real estate site gave Smith decorating ideas.

### **A movie studio water tank doubled for the Dead Sea.**

After eating in a spa cafeteria that’s really the empty eatery of the shuttered Robert F. Kennedy Medical Center in Hawthorne, the Pfeffermans (minus Ali) head to swim in the Dead Sea in episode nine. “That one scene where they’re walking up to the beach, and there’s the lifeguard tower, the sign, and the mountains and Masada in the background, that’s the most impressive,” Smith says. That’s because it’s green screen combined with a simulated seashore made of sand and white gravel that looks like salt, and an L.A.-built lifeguard tower — all located on a Universal Studios soundstage. As for the floating Pfeffermans, the actors were in a water tank wearing rubber panties that acted as flotation devices. The costume designer called them “rubber diapers,” Smith says.

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