

Teens Visit Israel – Summer '85 – Part I

Israel: An Awesome Experience

By Tracy Josephson



Tracy (center) with two fellow BBYOers, Jordan Borenstein (L), from Cherry Hill, N.J., and Bill Labovitz, Longmeadow, MA., at airport in Israel.

My summer trip to Israel was unlike anything I had ever experienced. Even after thinking about it for several months, it's difficult to capture in words what an inspiring and wonderful adventure it was. The first time I felt that this trip was going to be something truly different and exciting was when the plane began to descend and the crew played the Jewish national anthem on the loudspeakers. A wonderful feeling swept over me: I was going to the Jewish homeland.

My trip was sponsored by BBYO and I received financial assistance both from the national organization and from the Charlotte Jewish Federation. I paid for about one-third of the trip from savings that I had accumulated from working and my parents contributed about one-third.

My group consisted of 40 teenagers from all over the United States and Canada. One of the best aspects of the trip was experiencing Israel for the first time with these Jewish teenagers. It was perhaps the first time in my life that I spent an extended period of time exclusively with Jewish people and it was a super experience in itself. Almost immediately I felt a common bond with each of those in the group. In addition, most Israelis I met were very nice. They wanted me to love and appreciate their country the way they did. This is not to say that all Israelis were pleasant and warm. I found some to be short-tempered and annoyed by the thousands of tourists wandering around Israel during the summer. In some ways I can't blame them, for tourists were everywhere and some were pretty obnoxious.

Israel is simply beautiful. It is a country of contrasts. One area might be very fertile with lots of growth and the next might be desert for miles and miles.

There simply isn't space to write about all the things I did or all the places I visited. Instead I will restrict my comments to the major highlights. My favorite city by far was Jerusalem. The city is filled with history and beauty. One half of the city is as modern as Charlotte and the other half is thousands and thousands of years old. Walking around the Arab market of Jerusalem is

something I'll never forget. To a certain extent it reminded me of a flea market in the U.S., but it was much more exciting and the bargaining for goods is almost a fine art. I became so involved in the process of bargaining that I often ended up buying things that I didn't want and certainly didn't need.

The most impressive site in the old section of Jerusalem, of course, is the Wall. I still get chills when I think about all the people praying at the Wall. Being there brought about a strong spiritual feeling in me. The modern section of Jerusalem resembles many U.S. cities and is made up of office buildings, stores, and even a "McDavid's" hamburger chain.

Israel is much more than Jerusalem, however. I shall always remember our group's trip to Masada. We awoke at 3 a.m. to climb up Masada to see the sunrise. It was spectacular and something I shall never forget. Eilat was also beautiful, although it was also very hot. While there I went snorkling at the coral reefs. It was outstanding. I never imagined there were so many fish in the entire world. Our group also climbed dozens of mountains and hiked what seemed like hundreds of miles. I was one of those who complained constantly about the heat and the effort while climbing mountains, but once I made it to the top I was always exhilarated. I even rode a camel in Arad. It was a frightening and yet exciting experience.

Working at Moshav Mole-det was one of the most interesting aspects of the trip. I worked side by side with Israelis and learned a great deal about the Israeli lifestyle. The work was hard, but it also brought me in touch with the pioneering spirit that has made Israel a unique nation.

Our trip ended in Jerusalem, just as it had begun. Here the group said goodbye to Israel and had our last Shabbat service at the Wall. Parting with my new friends was very difficult. We developed a bond during our six weeks in Israel that is very meaningful and strong. I have also developed a strong sense of attachment to Israel and I'm sure that I will be returning in the near future. I'm proud to be a Zionist.

Israel: The Ultimate Jewish Experience

By Dalya Massachi

This past summer, I traveled to Israel on the USY (United Synagogue Youth) Israel Pilgrimage. I truly enjoyed the experience, and I really see that every Jewish youth should have this wonderful opportunity to visit the only place in the world where the Jewish way of life is the country's culture. It's one thing to learn about Jewish heritage in school, but a totally different one to see and feel it in living color.

One of the most meaningful and beautiful areas of the state is the city of Yerushalayim (Jerusalem). A feeling of Jewish belonging surrounds the visitor throughout the city, both in the new sections and the old.

The many religious sites seem to be everywhere you turn. The group I was with was actively observant of the Jewish laws and traditions, and this really contributed to the incredible feeling of Jewish identity in Israel.

The people of the city add to the historical feeling. They are members of many different religions, including variations of the Jewish faith. Yerushalayim is said to have received 90% of the world's beauty from G-d, and it's very obvious, both in its people and its buildings.

Not only is Yerushalayim a religious place, but also a place of history and remembrance. There are memorials to Israel soldiers who have died for their country, and there are museums displaying the plight of Jews all over the world in every era. Much of the city is the place for archaeological digs, and everyone is considered an amateur archaeologist.

Yerushalayim is also the site of Yad Vashem, the memorial to the six million Jews who were killed in the Holocaust. It is an incredible place, that brings the fate of these Jews close to the visitor, too close for comfort.

There is also a section of Hebrew University located in Yerushalayim. It is a place of learning, with a special feeling of Judaism to it. There are multitudes of synagogues scattered rather densely throughout the city, including here.

Today's Yerushalayim has many features, such as the beautiful Knesset, and the hundreds of shops and cafes. All over the place there are young Israeli soldiers, reminding everyone that Israel is surrounded by terrorists and that we must be protected at all times.

Besides the wonderful capital city of Yerushalayim, Israel is the home of many other exciting sites. Near the Jordan Valley, there are many scenic mountains that allow the viewer to see the surrounding areas from a vantage point.

One of these magnificent



Dalya Massachi

natural creations is Masada. After the hours of hiking to the top, the history of the Zealots' hiding and ultimate self-destruction surrounds you. From Masada's peak, the incredibly salty Dead Sea is visible, as well as a spectacular early morning sunrise.

Another popular place is the Mediterranean Sea, all along the western coast of the country. Many tourists as well as native Israelis visit the great beaches for warm water, sand and fun in the sun.

Our group was fortunate enough to be in Israel at the time of the Maccabiah Games, the Jewish Olympics. We went to the opening ceremonies, and we all loved it. There were colorful parades and dancing there, and thousands of spectators all joined in heartily for the singing of the national anthem, Hatikva.



USY Israel Pilgrims at walls of Old City of Jerusalem.

(photo/D. Massachi)

Israeli cities are unique in the world, and Tel Aviv, Haifa, Tiberias and Jaffa are good examples of that. They cater to all tastes, from fresh felafel and orange juice to handmade artwork. Modern, as well as traditional outdoor shopping is readily available, and you are constantly reminded that you are in the Jewish state by the items there.

The city of Eilat, in the south of Israel, is a vacation resort by the Red Sea. It openly displays every color imaginable in its fishes, coral and other spectacular sea life. Eilat is also famous for its wonderful pottery and stone artwork. The serenity of this place is a welcome retreat from other busier areas of the country.

My group spent the weekend of Tisha B'Av at a cooperative moshav, a mixture of a kibbutz and a

moshav. It was a community way of life very different from what I am used to. The houses were small and close together, if not attached, and the grounds were spread with greenery and flowers. The families lived by themselves, and there was no community dining room like at kibbutzes.

We visited the first conservative kibbutz in Israel. It was at its early stages, having been started just a year ago. Although the living conditions were not very developed, the spirit of the people there was that of lively pioneers.

Israel is the home of many charitable projects, and we visited some of them. We went to a home for children with Down's Syndrome called Ma'on Latinok in Ramat Gan and got to know the kids there. We also went to the Lifeline for the Old in Jerusalem, where elders work creatively at arts and crafts, instead of idly existing at Nursing Homes. We learned of the support and funds they both need to aid them in achieving their goals.

In the north of Israel, there are many beautiful sights to see. The Golan Heights set the scene for much military action, with rows of barbed wire left as a reminder of how close our Arab neighbors are. Located here, is an alligator farm next

to the ancient hot springs that the Romans used for therapeutic reasons.

Also in this area is the Sea of Galilee, the Kineret in Hebrew. The water is warm and relaxing, with a calm breeze. Nearby is the mystical city of Tzefat. With its many artists living and working there and its religious traditions, it's a different way of life than anywhere else in the country.

Sad to leave such an inspirational and significant place, but eager to return to familiar surroundings, it was time to come home to the U.S. But my Jewish homeland is definitely Israel.

(Editor's note: Dalya also received scholarship money from the Charlotte Jewish Federation to help her to go to Israel, as did two others whose reports will be in future issues of *The "CJN."*)