

Community News

Israel, Part 9: From the Dead Sea to Dead Tired

By Amy Krakovitz

Our next stop is a short drive up the road to a "spa" on the Dead Sea. I use the word spa with caution. This is no glamour stop. This is a sulfurous smelling, humid, warm building with locker rooms, two indoor baths and a tram to the beach.

It is curiosity that brings me to the sulfur baths first. Though the odor is oppressive (serious rotten egg-like), the pools are warm and comfortable. Shelley Pawlyk brings me to the baths where we float for a while. I hope that the water is as beneficial as it is malodorous.

Enough is enough. It's sunny out, I've just done a 41-minute climb up, followed by a 32-minute climb down from Masada, and what I really want is to go to the beach. We head for the shuttle bus stop and take the tram to the shoreline.

The wind is brisk but warm. The view across the water of the Jordanian mountains is uplifting. As we approach the water we can see thick salt formations on everything that the Dead Sea has touched. Inches and inches of salt "towers" have turned into abstract statuary on every surface near the water's edge.

I enter the water and it is warm, warmer even than the sulfur pools, warmer than any bathtub I have ever been in. And the salt from the



This European tourist used the spa-like effects of the Dead Sea mud.

water is heavy in the air; I can detect it inside my nose and in my eyes. Then, I float. There's no stopping the floating. It just happens.

The salt is impossible to avoid. It sticks to your hands. I make the mistake of touching my eyes and the burn from the salt is not unlike the discomfort of touching your eyes after cutting up several jalapeno peppers. Fortunately, there are hoses part way into the sea that spout fresh water. I rinse my eyes. It's convenient not just for getting salt in your eyes, but the salt is also painful on any open sores or scars.

At the immediate shoreline is the famous Dead Sea mud. Many people are covering themselves in it. Leaving it on is supposed to be

beneficial for the skin, but I opt to not get muddy. It appears that washing it off can be difficult.

Shelley and I don't stay long at the water. We head back to the "spa" for lunch. The cafeteria closes soon and our bus leaves to take us back to Jerusalem soon as well. It's late afternoon and I am famished.

Our drive back on the freeways is in the light now and we can see the neighborhoods along the road. We pass Ma'ale Adumim, a Jerusalem suburb that is often referred to as a "settlement." But it appears to be more a lot more like Ballantyne Country Club Estates. Doron points out the differences between the Palestinian and the Israeli villages here in the West Bank. In the Jewish areas, there is a central water tower at the highest point in the town that serves the whole community. In the Palestinian settlements, each family has its own water tank - a small black tank on their roof. There are 100s of these tanks on the roofs of the apartment buildings. The white ones are for hot water; there are fewer of these.

Why? Israel has a community that is willing to pay taxes for a strong infrastructure and services. The money for Palestinian infrastructure has been subject to corruption.

We're all a little tired when we arrive back at the hotel, so a few of

us decide to have dinner close by, at an Italian restaurant within walking distance of the Dan Panorama. It's very nice, the food is good, but we are the loud Americans in the place. One of the guests singles out Kelly Wilson (she seems to be the one that people think can control our group) and asks her to keep the noise down. We're all surprised. We try our best to be quieter, but we are enthusiastic and happy, and we are having a really good time.

I head right for bed after dinner but the next morning I find out that I have missed quite a party at



At the Italian restaurant, from left to right: Steve Newman, Joel Blady, the author, Shelley Pawlyk, Kelly Wilson, DJ Wilson, Doug Wilson.

poolside, with bourbon and cigars and a lot of fun for the participants. Frankly, I'm not sorry that it went on without me. I needed the sleep. ☆

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