

# Israel 2018 December

Andrea and Michael depart Hollidaysburg at 11:05 am to Newark International for our 11:05 pm United flight to Israel. Packing is the worst because mistakes will be made, primarily too much stuff. Need clothes, medicine, bike gear, photo gear and my back is hurting. Excited, nervous and very tired, we arrive in Livingston at the mall for a BN tour and prepare for a ten hour flight to Tel Aviv. With the holidays approaching it is very crowded and the two books I desire are not in stock. We meet Andrea's cousins and aunt/uncle for dinner at the Ritz Diner then proceed to Newark. Extended parking B7 and we go to the terminal.

Colleen, Phil, Claudia, Felicia and Nance arrive by car and Allison, Scott and Max arrive from NYC by train. We see the rest of the gang at check in and reunite for a second dinner.



On time, we go and without incident. Third dinner on the plane and a movie, It's A Wonderful Life. Second movie, Black Klansman, results in some sleep. Get about two hours but there are still five hours before we land. Watch Scott sleep and I am very jealous. Sleeping is one of Scott's superpowers. We arrive on time on Saturday at 4 pm and are met by two guides.



Luggage and passport control are easy and we hop in our van for an hour drive to Jerusalem and the King David Hotel. We unpack, we shower and we walk. Our hotel is conveniently surrounded by

art galleries that are a distraction despite the fact that we are “starving.” We successfully work our map and arrive to a restaurant called Katy. It is recommended by the hotel and we are the only guests for Katy this evening.

Our first meal in Israel feels special. It feels like we are sitting together as a family in one of our homes. For that reason as well as others, it seemed appropriate to say the HaMotzi before our first meal in Israel. Dining alone in an empty restaurant is a little weird, but the food is good and we make a new friend in Katy, the owner, maitre d’, waitress and provider of scarves/shawls. Walk home and time for bed.



### **Sunday December 23, 2018 Layers of Jerusalem**

Today is our first full day in Jerusalem. We take our bus to the tayelet, or promenade, a hilltop overlooking the Old City for the shecheyanu blessing, the Jewish prayer for celebrating special occasions and often used when somebody is doing something for the first time, or the first time each year. We have bread and wine and our guide Mickey begins the process of education. We learn about the history of Jerusalem, the people, the kings, Jerusalem stone, the walls, the Temples, the conquerors, the conquered, and what all this means to Israel and the Jewish people. We see Mount Olive were Jesus lived when he visited Jerusalem and ascended to heaven, Mount Scopus home of Hadassah and a trapped enclave from 1948 to 1967, and Mount Zion, the home of the Old City of Jerusalem.



We return to the bus and drive past the Valley of Hell, or Gehenna. In the Bible, Gehennom was initially where some of the kings of Canaan sacrificed their children by fire. Thereafter, it was deemed to be cursed and nothing is built in this area.

The Valley of Hinnom is the modern name for the valley surrounding Jerusalem's Old City, including Mount Zion, from the west and south. It meets and merges with the Kidron Valley, the other principal valley around the Old City, near the southeastern corner of the city.

Through the City of David we enter the Old City through the southern Dung Gate. We walk, we sit, we learn about the pilgrimages to the Old City which usually occurred three times a year. We learn how the walls were built, the excavation of the West Wall, the different entrances for Jews, non-Jews, the mikvahs, the sacrifices, and the foundation stone.



Pesach Shavuot, and Sukkot, are the three major pilgrimage festivals in Judaism, when the ancient Israelites living in the Kingdom of Judah would trek to the Temple in Jerusalem, as commanded by the Torah. In Jerusalem, they would participate in festivities and ritual worship in conjunction with the services of the kohanim at the Temple.

We see the Temple Mount, on Mount Moriah. We enter through security to The Kotel, and pray at the wall. We leave notes in the wall. Mickey tells us that notes began from a story about a Jew hundreds of years ago in Morocco who needed help. His rabbi said go to Jerusalem to pray, but the man could not make the trip. He found another person going to Jerusalem and gave the man a note to take and the tradition has continued.



Why is the Western Wall so special? Jewish tradition teaches us that creation began in Jerusalem and Mount Moriah is the epicenter. Mount Moriah was where Isaac was bound for sacrifice and Jacob dreamed of the ladder ascending to heaven. Although other parts of the Temple Mount retaining wall remain standing, the Western Wall is the spot closest to the Holy of Holies, the central focus of the Temple, and the location of the foundation stone where the Ark was kept.

“The Sages prophesied that even after the Temple’s destruction, the Divine Presence would never leave the Western Wall, and that the Wall will never be destroyed. The Wall is endowed with everlasting sanctity, as the Talmud says: “And I will make your sanctuaries desolate” (Leviticus 26:31) – this means that the sanctuaries retain their sanctity even when they are desolate. Jerusalem was destroyed and rebuilt nine times. And through it all, one symbol remained intact: The Western Wall. In establishing the eternal covenant with Abraham, God promised that the Jewish people will never be destroyed (Genesis 17:7). In this way, the Wall is a symbol of the Jewish people: Just as there have been many efforts to destroy the Wall and yet it remains eternal, so too the Jewish people have outlived its enemies and remain eternal. The Wall thus became the symbol of both devastation and of hope.” aish.com

After prayer, Mickey brings us a Jerusalem bagel and we have a tour of the underground excavations around the Western Wall. We see various areas of prayer, a synagogue under one of the arches, the largest stone in the Western Wall, bedrock, Jerusalem limestone, cisterns, and aqueducts. We see a video on how the large stones were acquired, moved and positioned. The stones have no cement as there is a great deal of seismic activity in Jerusalem. We see an underground pool and two gold fish.



We exit the underground into the Muslim quarter. We walk past shop after shop to the Christian quarter for a lunch of shawarma and falafel, and Coca-Cola.



We continue into the Jewish quarter and out the Zion gate for a drive to our bike tour. We meet our bike guide near the old train station, which is now a café. The old train from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv was notoriously slow and unreliable. We ride our bikes through the German section to Teddy Park, the Jaffa gate, up a hill and then back into the Old City through the New Gate, back to the Jaffa Gate and then back to the King David hotel.



The family goes to dinner at Machneyuda. Michael walks back to the Jaffa Gate to meet a guide, Laurie Cohen, for a night photo tour in the Old City.





Get some pics and I then take a tram to the Machneyuda market which is full of small restaurants and markets in stalls, where street shops are under roof. I walk around to find the restaurant and arrive just as the meal was finished. We walk back to the market and the Cohen's join their Dad for a small second dinner. We take a taxi back to the hotel for sleep.

**Monday December 24, 2018 Memory and Renewal**



After another grand breakfast at the King David, we have a lecture with Dr. Rachel Korazim, a Holocaust scholar. Rachel speaks about four points to consider when touring Yad Vashem, the Avenue of the Righteous, the Historical Museum and the Children's Memorial. Rachel tells a story of a lecture she gave in Montreal where a member of the audience wanted to debate whether it was actually six, or five and one half million who perished. Rachel asks us to name one person who perished in the Holocaust who was not a family member. We come up with Anne Frank. We were asked to name a second and we struggle. One guide mentions Hannah Szenes. She was as a poet and Special Operations Executive paratrooper. She was one of 37 Jewish parachutists of Mandate Palestine parachuted by the British Army into Yugoslavia during the Second World War to assist in the rescue of Hungarian Jews about to be deported to the German death camp at Auschwitz. Szenes was arrested at the Hungarian border, then imprisoned and tortured, but refused to reveal details of her mission. She was eventually tried and executed by firing squad. She is regarded as a national heroine in Israel.

Her point is understood. We know the number, six million, but we should know more than one name. Secondly, Rachel speaks about a picture of her mother, as a child, a survivor, in a white dress when her mother was a child. Her mother did not remember any white dress from her youth. When her mother saw the picture she said, the dress was not white but pink. Photographs from the Holocaust are all black and white but Jewish life was colorful. Imagine photos in color, Jews were very courageous in this period of great tragedy, they struggled and died with self-respect. Thirdly, words have meaning. So, think about numbers, names, colors and words. As kids we often say we are starving when we miss a meal, really?

We arrive at Yad Vashem and start in the Children's Memorial. We learn about the leader of the Polish orphanage, Janusz Korczak, who saved many children and refused to leave them at the ultimate point of time.



We walk through Yad Vashem and learn and remember. After our visit we stop for lunch at Nourah in Abu Ghosh for a typical Israeli meal of kabob and hummus, etc.



We continue to the Ella Winery in the Judean foothills at Kibbutz Netiv Halamed Hey for tasting and knowledge. A minor crisis occurs when Nance is locked in the toilet. Eventually, she is liberated and our tour continues.



Mickey then has us follow him into a field and he asks us to find a small round stone for reasons he will explain later. We then return to our bus for a short drive to a small hill and we exit the bus. Mickey explains that we are in the Valley of Elah, or Ella Valley, so called after the large and shady terebinth trees which are indigenous to this area but it is best known as the place described in the Bible where the Israelites were encamped when David fought Goliath. It was near Azekah and Socho where our bus stopped.



He explained that the stones we gathered could be the one that felled Goliath. We then return to the hotel to refresh and before we walk to the Tower of David for a laser light show on the inner walls of the citadel. The show consists of music and light to the story of David and was fantastic.



We then walk toward our hotel and stop for dinner at Luciana in Mamilla Mall, for a very average meal. Aroma coffee and an ice cream detour before we return to our hotel for a well deserved night of sleep.

### **Tuesday December 25, 2018 Into the Desert, Masada and the Dead Sea**



Merry Christmas from Israel, today is a new adventure. We begin with a one hour bus ride to Ein Gedi for a hike to the David waterfall. On the way we discuss the decision yesterday by the Netanyahu government to call for early elections. We discuss Israel's parliamentary system of government and it's advantages and disadvantages versus our U.S. system. We leave Israel, enter the West Bank and the land quickly turns to desert. Sand, camels and a big drop in altitude. We soon drop below sea level and eventually see how Israel is bringing life to the desert with date tree farms and greenhouses. Innovation nation, Israel is making sure every drop of water is put to good use. We re-enter Israel as we approach the Dead Sea. We learn about sink holes that develop on the shores of the sea and how the sea has lost 100 feet of water over the last 30-50 years. The Dead Sea sits 1412 feet below sea level. We arrive at Ein Gedi which is a fresh water spring that flows into the Dead Sea with at least three waterfalls and a nature preserve for ibex and other animals. We hike for an hour and enjoy the water.



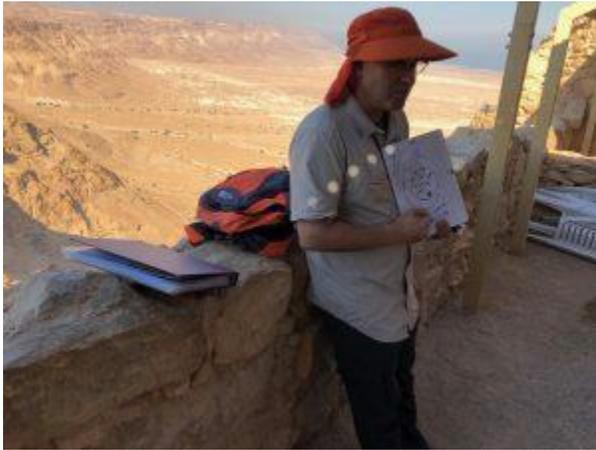
We then return to our bus for ten minute ride to Masada. Mickey tells us of the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls by Bedouins who sell the scrolls for a few pounds before the scrolls value is known. Eventually the price of the scrolls rose as it became more clear about their value.

Masada was a royal palace build by Herod the Great around 30 BCE and sits on a plateau and rises 980 feet from the ground below, or 1400 feet high above the Dead Sea, but only 150 feet above

sea. Phil, Scott and I walk the snake path to the top in 30 minutes and the rest of the gang takes the three minute cable car. The hike is 1.2 miles and we climb 1000 vertical feet. We reunite at the top for a tour of the former royal palace. A black line on the walls marks the original stones and the restoration work above the line allows us to envision what the original palace buildings looked like. We walk through the store rooms, gymnasium, baths and royal quarters. We learn how a series of aqueducts and cisterns were used to catch rainwater from the mountains tops around Hebron and then channel water to Masada. The water was then loaded into containers and bought by mules to the top of the plateau and to the palace. We walk through the gym and see how an outside fire produced smoke that was fanned below the floors and into pipes to create a sauna. We see how the ceiling was sloped so water that condensed would drain to the sides before it would drip down the sides of the walls.

We learn how the Romans would later attack Masada to eliminate the last vestige of Jewish resistance after the destruction of the second Temple. Mounds of dirt around Masada outlined the eight Roman camps that sought to eliminate the last 969 Jewish resisters of the Sicarii sect that had previously overtaken a Roman garrison at Masada in 66CE. Additional Sicarii joined the others at Masada in 70 CE after the Roman destruction of the second Temple. For political reasons in 70 CE, Vespasian, a Roman general, who desired to be the next Caesar, attacked Masada. Vespasian needed to have a big victory to show his worth, so 15,000 Romans soldiers built a ramp and a tower to break the defenses of Masada. Instead of being taken prisoner and sold as slaves, the remaining Jews committed suicide. After the establishment of the State of Israel, soldiers who complete military training with hike up the snake path to Masada and celebrate the beginning of their service with a ceremony and the chant, "Masada shall not fall again!"





We then descended on the cable car and drove another ten minutes to Herods Dead Sea resort. We have lunch, we float in the Dead Sea, we swim in the pool, shower, and nap on the bus back to the hotel.



We have an hour to rest before we walk to dinner at Satya. Dinner is good. After dinner, Andrea and I walk from the hotel to the Old City for a final experience at the Western Wall. It was a 2.8 mile round trip walk and a good time.



### **Wednesday December 26, 2018 Through the Jordan Valley**

We are on time for our 8:30 am departure from Jerusalem. We are on our bus and on our way to Caesarea, another of Herod's palaces. Herod ruled Israel under the auspices of Rome, but had to continue to prove his loyalty and value to Rome, as many sought his throne. After the defeat of Mark Antony, Herod's protector, by Octavian or later known as Augustus Caesar, Herod's power was in danger, but he proved his worth by keeping trade open and building a deep-water port in Caesarea with a pier that allowed shipping from Egypt to Rome with one less day of travel. The pier was built with volcanic ash from Italy that became rigid once mixed with sea water. The same ash was used to construct the Pantheon in Rome. Caesarea contained a royal palace for Herod, an amphitheater, a hippodrome for chariot racing and hosted gladiator events. It lured talent from Rome by being the first Olympic style event to reward first, second and third place finishers as opposed to winner take all events. Michael is gifted a topographic map of Israel and is overjoyed.



After Caesarea we continue to Zikron Ya'acov for lunch at Tishbi for wood fired pizza, salads and sea breem. Five stars for Tishbi. We learn that in 1882 Zikron was one of seven new communities established for immigration during Ottoman rule. Jews bought land and established an agriculturally based community. Jew initially struggled with agriculture and planted potatoes that did not grow because they did not know that potatoes grow down, not up. We learn that Jews helped the British in Egypt in the Sanai campaign by providing intelligence about Ottoman defenses during WWI, which helped the British capture of Beersheva in 1917 from the Ottoman Empire. The British will be given control of Palestine by the Treaty of Versailles after WWI.



The Jews of Palestine hope that their aid to the British will lead to assistance for a future state of Israel. Unfortunately, a carrier pigeon is intercepted in Caesarea by Muslims and agent Sara Aharonson is arrested and commits suicide in Zikron Ya'acov. Her brother Aaron Aharonson found the mother of wheat, a more sustainable type of wheat that resists bad weather and insects through genetic engineering. Aharonson also organized the Jewish intelligence group Nili that helped the British, as he feared the Ottomans would turn on the Jews as Ottomans had turned on and persecuted Armenians.

The Rothschild banking family, led by Edmund Rothschild was the major donor for the establishment of funds for these immigration communities and he sent people to help administer these communities until 1901.

Land in Israel is very complicated. The overwhelming majority of land in Israel is owned by the State and only a small minority is under private ownership. A negligible portion of land in Israel has not yet been categorized into either of these two areas. Additional land is Arab land, primarily owned by rich Arab families.

Approximately 7% of the allocated land in Israel is privately owned. The rest, i.e. 93%, is owned by the State and is known as "Israeli Land". Israel's Basic Law on real estate states that Israel's Land is jointly owned by the State (69%), the Development Authority (12%), and the Jewish National Fund (12%). While the law expressly forbids transferring of such land either by sale or other means, it does imply that a long term lease would be permitted.

Land was purchased from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century until the creation of the State of Israel. In many cases Jews bought the same land twice, once from the Ottoman/British governments, secondly from Arab families. Despite this, most Arabs still believe the land belongs to them.

Revolts by Arabs against Jewish immigration began after WWI especially in 1920's and 30's. Major Arab revolts occurred in 1936-39.

As WWII approached the British began to cut immigration and as they tired of administering Palestine. After WWII there is no place for Jewish survivors and after the British lose India to

independence, they have less desire to stay in Middle East. The British want the United Nations to decide the future of the Middle East. On November 29, 1947, United Nations votes to recognize a State of Israel under a partition of Palestine. The CIA gives Israel a 10% chance of survival. Ben Gurion says now or never, and the State of Israel is declared. Immediately the Arabs attack Israel.

Important dates:

4/9/1948 First Jewish offensive campaign and taking of land by force

5/14/1948 Israeli Independence Day

In the first month of the War of Independence Israel is on the defensive and a UN cease fire is declared. Israel then goes on the offense, operation after operation leads to victory.

2/24/1949 Armistice to end Arab- Israeli War

Arabs feel all the land is theirs but 700,000 Arabs left in 1948 because they knew that war was coming, they were told by neighboring Arab countries to leave and the Arabs will win the war, and Israel said to leave to prevent being in the war zone. Of the 700,000 Arabs, 1/3 to Egypt, 1/3 Jordan, 1/3 went to the remaining Arab world.

In 1948 there were 600,000 Jews in Israel and 700,000 more immigrated within two years. Israel considers this 700,000 demographic change as a refugee exchange. All Jews who came to Israel became citizens of Israel and Israel feels the Arab countries should do the same to their 700,000 new inhabitants.

After lunch and lecture, we arrive at Hula lake. Like so many of the places we visited, there were a lot of children on school field trips. We ride one bike and three golf carts around the lake which is a landing spot for millions of birds that migrate from Europe, Russia, Asia to Africa and back. Hula Lake is just north of the Sea of Galilee. It is bordered by the Golan Heights on the west and Israeli and Lebanese mountains to the west. The area was a swamp that was drained for agriculture but the soil is too warm to grow a good yield of crops despite significant effort. Also migrating birds were destroying the crops, so farmers spread massive amounts of corn for the birds to spare the farms that were productive. The next migratory feeding spot to the south is a one day flight to an area near Eilat. The birds must then fly 3-4 days before they can land in an area with food in southern Egypt. As bird need a certain amount of food, they cannot eat too much or the weight will make it difficult to fly, so ideally, they eat for a day of flight. Again, just like for people the best route from Asia/Europe to Africa is through Israel. As we ride around the lake, we see thousands of common cranes on the land and many coypu in the water. There are also ducks, feral mules and other fowl. Beavers were brought to the area to be breed for orthodox hats but the fur was not worthy.



Finally we reach our hotel in Kfar Bloom called Pastoral which is located in a kibbutz. We have dinner in the hotel that was delicious until the schwarma chicken was found to be a Jerusalem mix. What is a Jerusalem mix? Well, it is not the breast, thigh or wing or legs. Allison's pallet is ruined by chicken hearts, livers and spleens! After dinner is the first game of cards and Michael is finally caught up on his blog.

#### **Thursday December 27, 2018 Serenity and Security in the North**

Our day begins like all others with breakfast in the hotel and then on to the bus. Due to rain that is due to fall all day, we switch a morning hike to tomorrow and instead today drive to Tsfat or Safed, a center of Jewish mysticism and a contemporary artists' colony. "During the 11<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries, Spain was one of the greatest centers for Jewish life. This community produced such greats as Maimonides, Judah Halevi and Solomon Ibn Gavirol. Jews felt safe during this time period and produced great works of all sorts. Unfortunately, as Christian rule took over, the Jewish community began to change. Many of the Jews at this time, who had lived in Spain, were attracted to the city of Safed because of the Zohar. The Zohar was a book of Kabbalistic ideas and one of the holiest books of the Jewish mystics. It was first discovered in Spain in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. It was supposedly written by Simon Bar Yochai in a cave in Peki'in on Mount Meron near Safed during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. Some Jews expelled from Spain began to direct their thoughts towards Safed, since the Upper Galil was the birthplace of the Zohar's alleged author. These great thinkers came to Safed and formed a Jewish community together. Within a short amount of time, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Safed went from a small community with three synagogues and one Talmudic study house to a center with 18 study houses and 21 synagogues by the end of the century."

Such a concentration of Jewish thought led to conflict with Jerusalem and there was some rivalry as a result. Mickey discussed the concept of the world being fragile as glass, how God contracted and withdrew, which led to the breaking of glass and the human effort to repair the glass. How the Messiah may not come in our time but we do good deeds to prepare the next generation for the possibility of the Messiah.

In 1948 in Tzfat, there were 1,500 Jews surrounded by 10,000 Arabs and it was a miracle that the Jews survived. Naomi Shemer of Israeli musical fame was from this area. She was from a Kibbutz on Sea of Galilee, and was the first person from Kibbutz to learn in University.

The first kibbutzim were on the borders of Israel and often under attack. At a kibbutz everybody was equal in ownership. By 1980 kibbutzim most are privatized and only four in their original concept remain and are still profitable. Kibbutz today have hotels, strip malls and industry, often sold for big dollars with some kibbutz members have become very wealthy.

Our visit starts with a meeting with artist Sheva Chaya in her studio for an interactive window into the world of Kabbalah with a demonstration of glass blowing. Sheva Chaya is from Denver and came to Israel as a young lady and was amazed that such a tiny place had such vast energy and activity. She returned many times and after college she stayed, got married, and had children. She found joy through thinking positive thoughts, one after the other and built a happy life. She painted and learned to blow glass. Andrea bought a water color and we then walked along the main path of the Artist's colony which was similar to the market shops in the Old City. Allison was the big winner with the purchase of a Kadishman sheep head painting and a Yemenite pancake for a snack.



We then rode the bus into the Golan Heights. We saw the abandoned Syrian military bunkers from before the 1967 war and had lunch at Ren Lebanoni in a Druze village called Mas'ada. We had a traditional chicken kabob lunch from known chicken parts, falafel, hummus, etc. and Turkish coffee. After lunch we bussed to the Syrian border for a jeep tour at kibbutz Merom Golan. Despite the bitter cold, wind and rain, we drove through apple, grape and cherry orchards. Our driver stopped to pick some apples for us and we continued to one of the UN border gates to Syria, next to Camp Ziouani UNDOF. We visited a bombed out Syrian military command center now home to graffiti murals and past Israeli bunkers. We saw various Israeli lookout camps and a few volcanoes. In the distance we saw the relocated Syrian city of Al Qunaitra. During the war it was completely destroyed and not rebuilt, instead relocated further inside Syria. We saw a memorial to Eli Cohen who was an Israeli spy who infiltrated the Syrian intelligence agency for four years before he was captured and executed in 1964. His intel was crucial to victory in 1967. He made sure trees

were planted near Syrian bunkers to help Israel locate the bunkers for bombing. The memorial was of his wife looking into Syria as she held their children.



The 1967 war officially began June 6, 1967, at 6:45am but it's roots started in 1964 when Syria began blocking water flowing into the Jordan River and into Israel. The Israeli Air Force took out seven Syrian planes about three months before the war. Three weeks before the fighting began, Egypt, based on false information from the USSR, blocked the water ways to Eilat – which is in Israeli eyes was "casus belli" or an act of war. There is a lot happening in the Middle East but for security issues, and issues of saving face, not all the news is fit for print.

Mickey tells us of the loss of Uri Grossman in the 2006 war with Lebanon. He was the son of David Grossman, a leading peace activist in Israel. He died with two other soldiers in a tank battle. His fellow soldiers were an immigrant to Israel and an orthodox right wing settler from the West bank, an example of the diversity of viewpoints in one tank defending one nation.

The 1973 attack on Yom Kippur would have been worse. It would have been worse if the attack had come on Rosh Hashanah. On RH military reservists are all over the place. Contacting soldiers and getting them into place would have been very difficult. Israel depends on its standing army to slow the initial assault and allow for time to get reservists into place. This was especially critical in 1973. Fortunately, the attack came on YK. Everybody is in one place on YK, even secular Jews. There are in synagogue or at least close to home. This was especially important in 1973 in the Golan Heights. Thousands of Syria tanks attacked hundreds of Israeli tanks and the Israeli Air Force was in the Sinai. Israeli tanks declined into the tens and out of ammunition, or on "empty stomach" but still held on as Yossi was coming. "In truth, it was a motley force of repaired tanks crewed by injured and other crewman, which had been mustered by Lt. Col. Yossi Ben-Hanan, a veteran commander who, upon hearing about the outbreak of war, had hurried home from his honeymoon overseas." <http://www.historynet.com/yom-kippur-war-sacrificial-stand-in-the-golan-heights.htm>

Dinner is at a neighboring kibbutz at a restaurant called Foccachia. We have a very large round table with good food followed by gelato next door. Job well done we return to our hotel for rest and blogging.

### **Friday December 28, 2018 Mountains to the Sea**

We awake to cloudy skies but little rain. Breakfast and on the bus with our luggage for a drive north, close to Lebanon, to the ancient city of Dan in the Tel Dan Nature Preserve for a nature walk along the Dan River. The Dan is one of the three rivers that feed the Jordan. The others are the Baniyas spring and another the third is the Hazbani from Lebanon that is being so heavily used that water no longer flows into Israel. The Dan is the largest and has provided twice as much water as the other two. We walk in the mud and rocks and along the water cane, olives trees, vegetation and along the Dan to the ancient temple of the tribe of Dan. We walk further past the city gates to the Abraham Gate, the oldest known arch the world. The Abraham Gate was the original gate to the city but for some reason the city had a minor relocation and a new gate was built.



We often speak of what is fact and legend. A lot of Israel's history is legend. Was King David a myth? No remains have been found. Recently something was found from an Aramean king fighting someone from the house of David. House of David ruled Judea for 400 years. Every shovel of Israeli dirt brings new findings, and the balance of progress for the future vs. preserving the past is a struggle.

Back in the bus and the ongoing saga of Phil wanting to sit next to someone, anyone, versus the remaining family looking for space. Aw, the gift of distance.

Our next activity was a visit to a goat farm. We began our descent from the mountains to the Camonim dairy farm in the lower Galilee, the “Tuscany of Israel.” Allison, Claudia, Felicia went bat shit as they walked in the goat shit chasing goats. Michael was ordered around to photograph the event. After “the best part of the trip,” we went to the barn for a dairy lunch with a great selection of cheeses, omelets, and bread.



Akko, is our next stop after goat madness. We complete our drive from the mountains to the sea and arrive at the historic former capital of Israel on the sea. Akko or Acre, is the third capital we have visited, after Jerusalem (Jewish) and Caesarea (Roman). Akko was a Christian Crusader and Muslim capital. It was first conquered by the Crusaders in 1099 and then by the Mamluks in 1298. Israeli archeologists found the initial Crusader fortress well below the current city which was located under the Muslim city. We walked through the fortress, the prison, the meeting rooms, the potty room, and then exited through the tunnels to the Turkish quarter. For a small city there were many quarters, or at least more than four. There were quarters with stakes from Venice, Pisa, Templar, Persia, Egypt, etc.

We learned that the Templars initiated the first use of travel checks. Pilgrims would pay their local templar, travel to Akko, show their certificate of payment and then receive funds to visit the holy land. Napoleon was in Akko in 1799 and laid siege to a Muslim fortress but was unable to capture or force a surrender. He returned to France to become Emperor. During the British mandate, Akko was still used as a prison and execution facility, and held many members of the Jewish underground resistance. The Irgun raided the fort to free Jewish inmates.



Thank you, Akko, and now on to Tel Aviv. We arrive without incident at the Tel Aviv Hilton, and say shalom to Mickey and our driver Abed. They have been great traveling companions and brought a tremendous amount of insight and joy to our visit. Mickey has given us a viewpoint on history, culture and religion that we would not be to grasp with our eyes alone. He has also helped to explain the Israeli viewpoint on the delicate political debates of the day. He has been invaluable in bridging the language gap and greased the wheels for easy transitions from one venue to another. He and Abed have been a great addition to the Devorris/Cohen family this week.

Dinner at Shila was very good. Ordering dinner was “amazing.” Best grouper in the city. Good night.

#### **Saturday December 29, 2018 Sabbath in Tel Aviv**

Shabbat in Tel Aviv started with a photo tour for Michael in old town. Three hours of reflections, graffiti and pop culture.



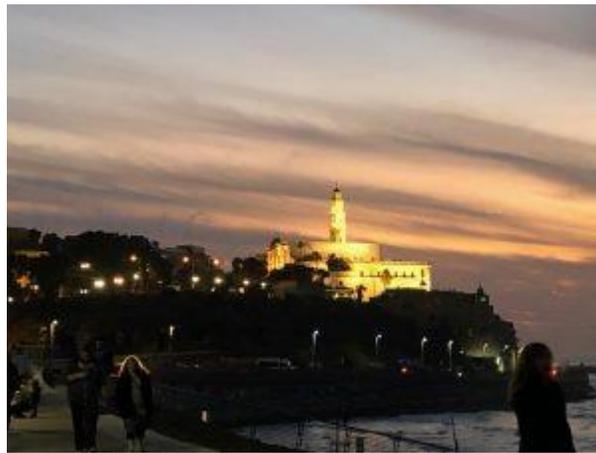
The rest of the gang had a different type of art in mind, galleries. More Kadishman sheep. We then walk to the Sarona market for lunch. Yummy shawarma sandwiches and halvah. We then walk to the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, which ironically had a visiting impressionist exhibit from the Philadelphia

Museum of Art. After a heroic effort by Allison to hail a taxi, we are back to the hotel to prepare for



dinner.

Dinner at Manta Ray overlooks the Mediterranean and our meal was good for some but not others. Service was less than ideal. After the meal the boys walk to the Jaffe Market and drop Scott to meet a friend who is on a birthright trip and the rest of us took a taxi home.



The girls continued to have taxi hassles getting home, as the taxi drivers seem to refuse service to locations they do not want to go to. Also, we find that there was a debate about the tip at the restaurant. Service was poor and an 8% gratuity was not well received. The ladies were told that 10% is customary in no uncertain terms. Tomorrow, we need to remember Sheva Chaya I suppose and all try a little harder with positive thoughts.

### **Sunday December 30, 2018 Tel Aviv: The First Hebrew City**

Our first guided tour day in Tel Aviv started in the old port city of Jaffa. We walked the renovated alleyways of Old Jaffa to the Jaffa Overlook and the wishing bridge



Mickey-isms:

Tip means To Insure Promptness. Rule of thumb refers to where a man in England was permitted to beat his wife as long as the rod he used was no bigger than the width of his thumb.



We had a walk through the famous Jaffa Flea Market – Shuk Hapishpeshim followed by a LaDa'at Ethnic Tasting in Tel Aviv's famous Levinsky Market, where we found a combination of foods and sweets from all over the Mediterranean. We tasted olives, food from Turkey, carrots or carib, apricots or "mish mish." We eat burekas or Turkish dough food.



After we eat, always drink. We pass a coffee shop with an abandoned car parked right in front. Evidently the coffee shop placed tables on the street but that was illegal and they amassed a significant debt in fines. They still needed a place for people to sit, so they parked an old covered jeep and downsized their debt as parking tickets were significantly less than table fines. The jeep remains on site in its space year after year. And the coffee tastes great. They also make a drink with all kinds of fruit and herbs. We called it the beautiful drink. Just say beautiful drink and the shop knows what to do. Coffee in the car has new meaning.



After coffee and the beautiful drink, we joined Shirel Horovitz for a Street Art, Language & Graffiti tour. Shirel sought to answer the following questions: who are the people going out at night and changing the face of the neighborhood? What are the different styles and how are they created? What kind of story do these images and words tell us about the people living in this neighborhood and in the city? Can we call this art or is it vandalism? What is unique about graffiti in Israel and in Tel Aviv? We'll walk through Florentine, the neighborhood and answer these questions and many more in a dynamic and inquisitive tour.



What do we discuss:  
 Florentine neighborhood was originally carpenters and furniture making by Jews from Greece  
 Busting vs. slashing  
 Rent control prevents remodeling of apartments  
 Vandalism or art

English or Hebrew  
Petting corner  
Stenciling allows most graffiti works to be done in hours  
Tourist attraction  
27 club graffiti  
Rabin assassination graffiti  
Done on Shabbat or night when less police are around  
Eurovision graffiti  
The square of kings of Israel  
YOLO, acronym for "You Only Live Once"  
Shared grief of mother's



Spontaneous expression of local culture  
Graffiti, the word has Italian roots  
"Universe cheers actions"  
Graffiti is about What Where and How  
Tourism makes it less political  
Art vs politics



We return to our hotel then walk to and from dinner at the Kitchen Market. Delicious, best meal of the trip and Andrea finds an art gallery and buys art. Sleepy time.

**Monday December 31, 2018 The Foundations of a City and a State**  
**Tuesday January 1, 2019 Arrival Home**

Our last day in Israel was also the last day of 2018. We began with packing it up and as usual, breakfast in the hotel. We met Mickey and Abed at our bus for a trip to Beit Hatfust, the Museum to the Jewish People. Along the route Mickey pointed out the architecture of the neighborhoods from the beginning of Tel Aviv, to the British Mandate period, to Bauhaus, and then to contemporary. The architecture has earned Tel Aviv UNESCO status and is known as "the white city." We passed City Hall and the main square of Tel Aviv where large rally's occur, especially after the first Lebanon war

in 1982. It was here, now named Rabin Square, where Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated.



Side note: a lot of Israeli's smoke cigarettes. Mickey says that Israel has the third highest smoking rate of first world countries. There is no national smoking cessation education program.

We made our way to the museum which is located on the campus of Tel Aviv University for an exhibit of Synagogues from around the world and an exhibit of Jewish humor. Synagogues on display included Florence, Venice and Amsterdam, all places I have recently visited. Mickey discussed the differences between Sephardic and Ashkenazi Judaism.



After destruction of the first temple, many Jews escaped to Egypt then Spain and became Sephardic. Most were taken by the Babylonians as prisoners to Babylonia or present day Iraq. Eventually, these Jews made their way to Europe and became Ashkenazi.

After 1492, the Jews of Spain were expelled but welcomed by the Ottomans in present day Turkey due to the Jews expertise in finance. As second class citizens Jews were never able to own land, so finance was one of the only professions open to them. Mickey reminded us that the Caro synagogue in Tzfat, that we visited, was Sephardic. Sephardic synagogues have the bimah in the middle, while Ashkenazi have the bimah on one end.

When the Temple was present, Jews prayed in the temple. A few synagogues were around for bible study. Without a Temple, Jews created synagogues for prayer. We also learned that the word basil means king and a basilica is where a king meets his people.

Mickey said, if you have to choose between the two, especially if there is a b'nai mitzvah, choose Sephardic. More singing, shorter services and most important, better food.

We saw some archeologic finds including a stone with the ancient Jewish symbol of peace, love or circle of life, from the Second Temple. Goebbels stole this for the Nazi swastika symbol.

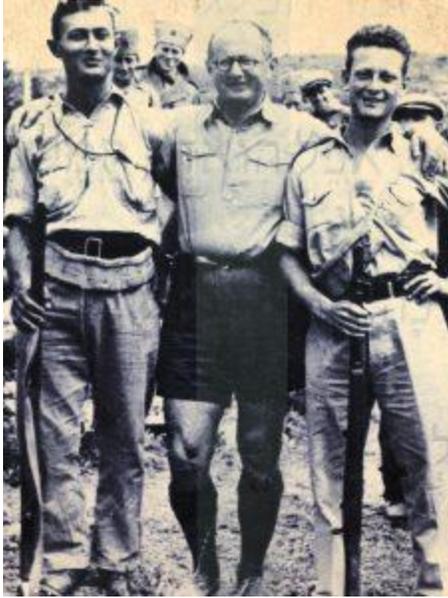
The Jewish humor exhibit had a Seinfeld set and short takes from other famous Jewish comics and shows.



Mickey related a story from Robin Williams, who considered himself an honorary Jew. When asked by a European commentator why there were so few European Jewish comics, Williams said, "you killed them all."

Other Mickey fun facts, there are two main public universities in Israel, Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, and five additional smaller ones. Tuition is \$2,000 a year. There are a few dozen private colleges at \$20,000 a year. Education is one promising factor for future peace. Mickey feels that the more women, especially Arab women, become educated, the greater the chance for peace.

Our next adventure was the museum of the Palmach at Beit Hapalmach. We followed the story of Israel's pre-state elite strike force of the Haganah, the Palmach, while walking through a state-of-the-art multimedia experience that allows a glimpse into the lives of these extraordinary people. We were led by an Israel soldier through the tour and learned that 1186 palmach soldiers lost their lives in the seven years of it's existence. The Palmach was created as an elite unit of the Haganah in 1941 and for a period of time was trained and served beside the British military during WWII as the Germans were a threat to Palestine through Egypt. The British trained and armed over one thousand Palmach fighters but after ten months the British disbanded the Jewish fighters from its ranks. In 1945, WWII was over and people all over Europe returned to their homes, but Jews had no homes to return to. Jews in Palestine knew they needed to bring European Jews to Palestine. The Palmach became active in settling the land with Jews, helping with Jewish immigration from Europe and in military activity to remove the British mandate and pave the way for a Jewish state. As a result the Palmach worked two weeks in kibbutz for food and money and trained for the remainder of the month to stay in fighting condition. After the establishment of the State of Israel one military force was created, the Israeli Defense Force or IDF.



On the bus Allison asked why a middle ground could not be found for Israel and the Arabs. For Arabs, all Israeli cities are settlements and Israelis are intruders. Arabs say kill them all. Mickey explained that most issues are generally worked out, such as borders and Jerusalem, some give and take on current border lines, water sharing, and no air force for a Palestinian state.

The sticking points are a no return for Palestinians who left in 1948, the recognition of Israel and that the peace be permanent and binding as Arabs want to continually renegotiate. Israel is firm that refugee status is not an inherited condition.

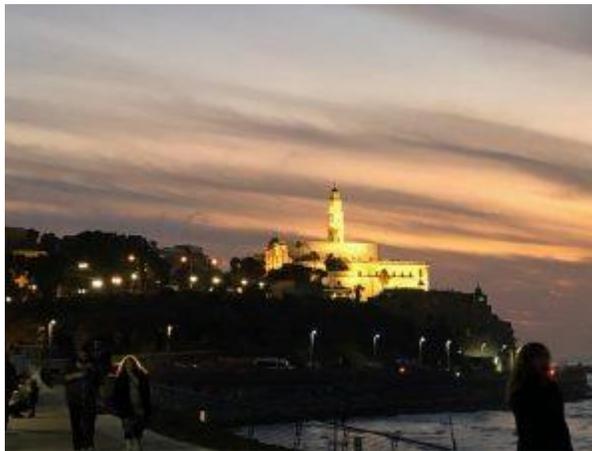
After our second museum we returned to Jaffe for a quick lunch of chicken, lamb, spices, small plates and general indifference. We were saved by gelato and blended beverages. We walk to the water for a Segway tour of the old city of Jaffe.

It was fun and we learned about why the Jaffa St. Peter's Church and a few other unique churches in Israel face west:

"In Christianity, the importance of Jaffa is connected to an event that occurred after the ascension of Jesus to heaven. Peter, one of the more important apostles, stays in the home of Simon the Tanner in Jaffa. He goes up to the roof to pray and falls into a trance. Peter then has a vision of a large sheet containing all kinds of animals and birds descending from heaven. A voice calls him and tells him to kill something and eat, but he protests that the meat is unclean (not kosher and thus forbidden for Jews to consume). The voice replies "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean" (Acts 10:15). The church is special because its apse and altar are located in the western part of the church. Most of the Churches face the east – Jesus as a symbol of light. But because this church commemorates an event that is essentially an appeal to non-Jews and to all the nations across the sea, it faces west." <https://www.travelingisrael.com/st-peters-church-jaffa/>

Jonah the fish, not the whale  
45 meters above the sea, on top of the dump  
Can see 65% of Israel coast line from the hill top

A past dangerous Arab neighborhood of Ajami overlooks the sea  
No renovation is allowed 300 meters from the sea  
French/Hebrew school for boys and girls  
First Jewish neighborhood Neve Tzedek  
The Napoleon chapel  
Most rock kissed in Israel  
Map of seaports on the ground



On the bus to the hotel to retrieve our bags and we then return to the Jaffe area for dinner at Romano. Romano is an eclectic establishment on the balcony of an enclosed courtyard. Our food is served on small plates with NO substitutions. Also, Scott's backpack got hit by bird poop. One hour later back on the bus to the airport. We bid Mickey and Abed shalom and we cleared security and customs for our New Year's Eve flight to Newark. On time, we land at 4 am. Happy New Year. All went well until we were about to exit baggage when Michael realized he left one of his two

bags on the plane. Michael, ashamed, went to get the car and Andrea stayed in baggage claim while United thankfully retrieved his bag off the plane.

Once we were all in the car, we drove to NYC with Scott and Allison. We hung Scott's art work on his wall and checked on the progress of Allison's apartment renovation. We had Tal bagels and hit the road at 8:30 am for our drive home. Can't wait to tell my dog all about our trip.

Some final thoughts:

Israel is a special place. Being an American Jew in Israel, I felt a tremendous amount of pride in having a connection to this place. So much has been created with so much adversity.

So many stray cats, and dogs on leashes. So much dog poop on the sidewalks.

So much history of terror yet so little armed/police presence in the cities. Certainly you see armed citizens, but you do feel safe. As my photo guide said, "the more guns you see, the better."

Next Visit Ideas

Haifa

City of David

Bedouin Experience

Walk in Crater Makhtesh Ramon

Negev, Petra, Eilat

Machneyuda in day

Thursday evening in Orthodox Jewish neighborhood

Great Synagogue of Jerusalem

Military base tour

Hebron and Patriarchs

Shiloh tabernacle

Sea of Galilee and Tiberius