

A Trip to the Holy Land

A Celebration of 60 Years of Independence



Left Old Jaffa Above A coffee shop on trendy Shenkin Street in Tel Aviv



There I stood, in front of the holy Western Wall, fingering a shekel coin in my pocket, making sure my wish written on a scrap of paper was securely stuffed into a crack in the large rock. Pigeons perched on small ledges overhead, while modestly dressed women chanted prayers in the mild sunshine next to me.

Just hours later, I would be placing my hands where Jesus was buried, bobbing like a cork in the Dead Sea and ending the day drinking fine kosher wines in a trendy Tel Aviv restaurant.

Israel, I discovered during a five-day whirlwind visit, was more than just the holiest of lands. Seeped in a history that leaves Florida blushing like a baby, this country – officially celebrating its 60th birthday as an independent nation – is also surprisingly modern, with a gourmet palate, non-stop nightlife and relaxed atmosphere that makes it difficult to believe some parts were too dangerous to tour.

My trip started out with a healthy dose of melatonin, allowing me to sleep so

finally arrive at the David InterContinental, a luxurious 25-story hotel overlooking the Mediterranean beaches.

The fun began quickly. After a delicious dinner at the hotel's acclaimed Aubergine kosher restaurant, we made a stop at the Whiskey A-Go Go, a nightclub at the newly renovated Tel Aviv port. After a few Goldstar dark lagers there, I remembered my dream of a comfortable bed and called it a night.

Once rested, the expert concierge at the David InterContinental helped connect me with an extremely knowledgeable tour guide to show me the historic port city of Jaffa, located in walking distance from the hotel. There was an excellent outdoor flea market, where I was able to barter a merchant down 300 shekel – about \$85 – for a traditional string instrument called an oud. We ate a fabulous lunch at Dr. Shakshuka's, where a waitress brought plate after plate of challah, sweet potatoes, olives, vegetable soup, grilled lamb bites and a strange root

stopped into the Nahum Gutman Museum in Tel Aviv's renovated Neve Tzedek neighborhood for a local artistic impression of the city. Dinner in hot spots like the all-white décor of the Messa restaurant made eating an event – I even gained a few pounds, despite all the touring!

Thankfully, I also gained a lot of knowledge, especially in Jerusalem, and I learned even more about the Jewish people with a worthwhile visit to the Nahum Goldmann Museum of the Jewish Diaspora, located at Tel Aviv University. Plus, I learned it's not just the religious who would appreciate a visit to Israel – food lovers, history junkies and the just plain curious could find something worth wishing about – and adding to a crack in the 2,500-year-old Western Wall, of course. ■

Handy Phrases When in Israel

While English is widely spoken, especially among young adults, below are some useful phrases that may help during your travels in Israel.

Hello

Hebrew: Shalom
Arabic: Marhaban

Thank you

Hebrew: Todah
Arabic: Shukran

What is your name?

Hebrew: Ma shimkha