

Cycling Through Israel

By Shelly Dutch

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In November we took the opportunity to combine travel to Israel with our passion for cycling. As this combination may not seem like an immediately obvious mix, we would like to share some observations for anyone who might have similar interests. Our adventure turned out to be a powerful and memorable trip.

My son Alex was in Tel Aviv for a six month internship with Career Israel, so the first priority was a few days of visiting Alex and exploring in Tel Aviv. Unfortunately, the missile attacks on Tel Aviv started the evening we arrived. The conflict between Hamas in the Gaza Strip and Israel was in play until a truce was brokered a week later. We sought shelter during several air raid alerts, saw firsthand a missile explode harmlessly in the Mediterranean off the Tel Aviv beach and generally learned more than we'd like about the stress and destruction that goes with a modern armed conflict. Although the conflict was unsettling for us, we were universally reassured by local Israelis that there was no need to worry excessively.

We had prearranged with an Israeli bike tour operator for a one week guided tour from north to south through the nation. We traveled with a large van and were given outstanding logistics support. We were provided with an energetic, licensed tour guide with advanced degrees in archeology who cycled with us to offer historical and cultural background in a personal format. The operator also made all route, hotel and meal arrangements. We found the roads to be totally suitable for road cycling with good pavement and substantial paved shoulders. The car traffic was generally low and in most cases we were trailed by our support van so we had a mobile safety barrier just behind our small cycling group. Our guides arranged stops of historical and geographic interest at regular intervals along the way, providing rest breaks from the cycling as well as education and context for our travel. They had several route formats but were also flexible in adjusting to the group's interests.

The November weather was outstanding with highs in the 70's and around 80 degrees in the desert, and large doses of sunshine. The scenery was epic with colorful sweeping desert vistas in the south and fertile river bottoms in the north. There were some lengthy climbs and cruising descents along the way. The cycling format allowed us to breathe the air, feel the hills and intimately absorb the scenery. Major points of interest on our route included Mt. Hermon and the Golan Heights area to the north, the Sea of Galilee, Jordan River valley, a full day of touring on foot in Jerusalem, the Dead Sea, Negev desert, and Eilat on the Red Sea in the far south. Some of our stops included the Roman and Byzantine Era ruins including Bet She'an, Beatitudes, Masada and Mount Gilboa.

It was amazing to walk and ride in the lands of Abraham, Jesus and Mohammed where so much history and conflict has unfolded over the centuries.

For anyone with a love of cycling, we recommend this touring format for a proximity that may be hard to get from a bus or rental car. Our guides had a passion and love for Israel that fostered an intimate and unique opportunity to immerse ourselves in the true spirit of the Israeli culture! We feel so fortunate to have had this experience. We have heightened respect for the history of the region but also for the difficulties currently facing Israel. We were provided an opportunity of a life time and we hope you will consider taking a cycling trip in Israel in the future.


For more information on travel or study opportunities in Israel, please contact our community shaliach Yehonatan at 278-1808 or Israel@jewishmadison.org.

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