

JEWISH HERITAGE CLUB TRIP TO ISRAEL – OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 7, 2016

October 24, 2016

At around 5 p.m. I took a cab to Terminal 3 of Ben Gurion Airport to meet up with the group arriving from the states. I was nervous about finding the Kokao Café, but it was unfounded. I took the elevator downstairs to the arrival area, and it was right there, along with the Kuffners, the Vientes, and the Levines. We sat around and chatted a while. The others arrived about an hour later. We walked to the bus and took a relatively short drive to Jerusalem. There wasn't a lot of traffic, since Simchat Torah was ending. We also met our tour guide, Yoav. The lobby was really crowded, and we went directly to dinner. After dinner, Sistie and I got our room keys fairly quickly, but other people had to wait a long time. There was a lot of frustration. People were tired and didn't want to be delayed in getting to their rooms. My suitcase was not with the other luggage, but I found out shortly that Val Viente had taken it by mistake, since she has a purple suitcase too. We had a decent room, with no view! The hotel, Leonardo Plaza, had been a Sheraton that I stayed at during my last visit! The end of Day 1 (for me Day 4) was upon us!

October 25, 2016

We spent most of the day in the Old City of Jerusalem. We entered through the Zion Gate to enter. We visited the Davidson center and saw a multimedia show there. We walked past Robinson Arch, then walked on the Via Delarosa to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. There was a crew filming something there, so the crowds were pretty big. We walked through the church, but didn't spend a lot of time there. We walked to an outdoor café and were asked to rush by ordering either falafel or shwarma or pizza. After lunch we had a short walk to the Rabbinical (Kotel) tunnels. We had to wait to get into the tunnels, and that "hurry up and wait" became an "issue" at times during the tour. We walked about ½ way through the tunnels, which are always interesting! The stones used to make the walls are huge. A few people had to leave the tunnels because they felt claustrophobic, and there was so much walking. Then it was on to the Western Wall, where many of us put little prayer papers in the wall. We noticed the women backing away from the wall, and there must be a religious significance to this, but I'm not sure what it is. Next we went to the City of David, which is outside the walls of the Old City. Last, we went to Mt. Scopus, where some famous Israelis are buried. We took a group photo, and Harriet got on a camel. Dinner was back at the hotel, as compensation for their lack of service the previous night.

October 26, 2016

Our first stop today was the Israel Museum to see the scaled replica of Old Jerusalem, and the Shrine of the Book (Dead Sea Scrolls). We had a great visit to the Knesset. The guide was excellent. There are beautiful tapestries and mosaics by Chagall. The guide explained the symbolism. He also explained how Knesset members are chosen. Went into the chamber where the Knesset members meet. President Obama never went there, but the Bushes and Clinton have! We had a quick lunch in a little outdoor shopping plaza. It was fun sitting in the sun and people watching. We moved on to Mt. Hertzl and the Hertzl Museum. There was a wonderful multi-media presentation about Hertzl's life and his

mission of Zionism. They were preparing for the unveiling of Shimon Peres' grave, so we couldn't get close to many of the graves, though we saw them from a distance. We walked right up to Yitzak Rabin's grave. He was buried in a separate spot because he was murdered. We had some time to shop in the Cardo. Sistic and I both made a few purchases. There were lots of steps getting out of the Old City. We drove to the Time Elevator. It was like a virtual ride back in time, from the time of David and Solomon to the time of the 1967 war. We walked to the Old Train Station for dinner at the Adom Restaurant with the Kates and the Sarnos. Afterwards, we walked through the plaza and then slowly back to the hotel.

October 27, 2016

Our first stop today was Hadassah Hospital in Ein Kerem. We had a great presentation about the Chagall Windows. The hospital is truly amazing! From the hospital, we went to Yad Vashem. We went together to the Children's Memorial, and then had time to walk through the main exhibition. It was very emotional, even though it's the 4th time I went there. We headed to the Jewish Market (Machne Yehuda) for lunch and people watching. Yoav led a group of us to a café, and we ate with the Kuffners. After lunch, we took a short walk through the marketplace. There was great produce and baked goods among many items for sale. We boarded the bus and traveled out of Jerusalem to the 911 Memorial, which is the only one built outside the US. The memorial is in the shape of the flag that bursts into flame. The names of the victims are on a wall several steps from the flag. It was very moving and we shared our thoughts and experiences from that fateful day. We continued our drive, parts of which were a little harrowing, with narrow roads, and cars and trucks trying to pass each other; there was also a steep drop in some place. We traveled to Neot Kedumim, where we each planted a tree. The land was rocky, and even though some holes had been started, it was a task to plant our trees. We had a quick dinner at the hotel; then 19 of us boarded the bus to go back to the Old City and the David Tower Museum for a multi-media sound and light show. Though it had rained earlier, it turned out to be a lovely evening. The show was great!!!

October 28, 2016

It was a day on the move today. Checkout from the hotel went smoothly. Our first stop was about 2 hours northwest of Jerusalem. We went to Caesarea and saw the Roman Theater, the Stadium where chariot races took place, and the Aqueduct. We drove on to Akko (Acre) to see the Crusader stronghold. We had lunch (falafel) there, and enjoyed seeing the local action. I had been here before, but had not been inside. We traveled to Rosh HaNikra. We took a cable car down to the grottoes, which were beautiful! The color is a beautiful blue/green. Then we drove about an hour and a half to Kibbutz Hagoshrim in the Golan Heights. This was another place I had stayed in during one of my trips. We had a great room. We walked outside for a bit, had a nice Shabbat dinner, and our day ended.

October 29, 2016

We hopped (or should I say "schlepped" ourselves) into our jeeps for the ride to the Golan Heights. It was a bumpy ride. One of the jeep drivers explained how the Israelis captured the Golan Heights, and how important it is to their security. You could see the Hula Valley below, which would be an easy

target for anyone occupying the area. It was amazing to think of how the Israelis used their brains to win against the Syrians, despite being totally outnumbered. We went to Mt. Bentel to observe Kuneitra and Syria. We had a talk by Shalom, owner and founder of ITAS. He was in the Israeli army and rose to be a full Bird Colonel. After he retired from the army, he decided he had a personal mission to bring bar and bat mitzvah kids to Israel. He expanded his mission to include adults too. We went to Kibbutz Elrom to visit Oz 77 and see a documentary about one of the battles of the Yom Kippur war. We got back to the hotel early and took around the grounds of the hotel. There was a beautiful waterfall and lovely trees and flowers. We saw the indoor and outdoor pools, as well as the gym. After dinner, Channah Levy, a founder of the kibbutz, spoke about Kibbutz Hagoshrim and kibbutz life!

October 30, 2016

Today, our first stop was Safed, a hub of Kaballah study and art. There was a delay with the other bus and lots of frustration by our bus members who had to wait. We heard a presentation about the sculptor Ingber. Several people made purchases in the first shop we visited. We then walked up many stairs to the studio of David Friedman, an artist and student of Kaballah. His work is very interesting and he described his process to us. We walked to the Luria Synagogue, which was originally a Sephardic temple and is now an Ashkenazi one. We had about an hour and a half to shop. I bought some jewelry – 2 “Tree of Life” pendants. We drove on to Tzipori, a national park with excavations of a Roman city with lovely mosaics. We were in what is assumed to be a Jewish synagogue. Yoav explained the meaning of the mosaics. We drove into Haifa and stopped outside the Bahai Gardens. They had already closed, and we are leaving before they open tomorrow. We took photos of the gardens and the city. We could see our hotel, the Dan Carmel, above us. It took us a while to get there through the traffic. The hotel was beautiful and we had a terrific view of the city from our balcony. Had dinner at the hotel, the best hotel food so far. Sistie and I took a short walk, but walked in the wrong direction, and there wasn't much to see. Got a bunch of magnets for my card-playing friends. Wish we had more time in this city!

October 31, 2016

Happy Halloween! We had a wonderful experience at the Druze Village of Ussifaya! We listened to a young Druze woman (Garob, which means sunset) speak about Druze life. The Druze religion is based on 5 prophets, the most important of whom is Jethro. Their god is Allah. They have a strong belief in reincarnation, though they believe they come back in human form and as a member of the Druze community. There are more secular Druze people than religious ones. The young people have 3 opportunities to choose whether they want to be religious or secular. If they are secular, they hear stories about the Druze, but are not educated in the religion. There are 2 ½ million Druze people and they live in many places in the middle east, as well as in the US, Canada, and other countries. You cannot convert to the Druze religion and must marry another Druze person or be considered dead by the family. If a Druze girl is dating, she must have a chaperone. If she's engaged, she can be alone with her fiancé, but must stay within the village. We sampled some pita with a spice that tasted like oregano, and one that tasted like pizza. There were also sesame cookies and tea. Our next stop was

the Binyamina Winery for a tour and wine tasting. I wasn't impressed with the sampling we had. We drove to Zikhron Yaakov, a town near the winery. We had about an hour to stroll and shop. It was a picturesque place. We drove on to Atlit, which served as a detention camp for illegally immigrating Jews arriving before, during, and after WWII. Some were kept there for up to 23 months before they got legal papers. On to Tel Aviv, where we stayed at the Carlton Hotel on the beach, and right across the walkway from Gordon's Gym, where Laurie works. The hotel is lovely! The view of the sea is wonderful! Sistie and I decided to walk along the promenade to find a place for dinner. We stopped at the Gordon Gym, and Laurie had just arrived for her shift. We continued down the way and found a nice restaurant overlooking the water. We ate outside. Met a nice couple from France, though both had an Israeli connection. After dinner, we continued to walk. When we walked back, we stopped again at the gym, and sat and talked with Laurie while she had her dinner break. We're more than halfway through our trip now!

November 1, 2016

We drove south from Tel Aviv to Rehovot, where we visited the Ayalon Institute. This is where the Israelis hid their manufacturing of more than 4.5 million bullets in the guise of a working kibbutz. The bullet factory was built under a laundry and a bakery. It was built in 21 days. The British either didn't know or ignored what was happening. It was amazing, even though I saw it during a previous visit. We drove from Rehovot back to Tel Aviv. The bus dropped us off at Independence Hall. We walked to the corner for something to eat at Aroma, a coffee shop that also serves food. Sistie and I took a short walk before heading back to Independence Hall for a movie and presentation. It was very emotional for most of us. We traveled from Independence Hall to Jaffa. Sistie realized she had left her cane at Independence Hall. We walked around for a little bit with Yoav, walked over the Wishing Bridge, and then went off on our own. We were looking for a place to shop, but it was hard to find. We found 2 stores right near the clock tower, where we bargained and got a bunch of souvenirs. Then we took a taxi back to Independence Hall so Sistie could retrieve her cane. We drove through Nevet Tzedek, a historic Tel Aviv neighborhood. We also drove down Ben Yehuda Street on the way back to the hotel. We had time to regroup and rest before taking a taxi to Laurie's apartment. Laurie wasn't back from work, so we walked for a bit. When we got back, Laurie's friend Shevy arrived, and shortly after that, Laurie came home. We took a cab back to the area where Independence Hall is. We had a delicious dinner at a Georgian Vegan restaurant; Sistie and I were skeptical, but it ended up being a lot of fun.

November 2, 2016

We had a nice breakfast at the hotel, made sure our luggage got on the bus, and traveled out of Tel Aviv to our first stop, Qumran, where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found. Yoav did a lot of talking, and there wasn't enough time to explore. We drove past Ein Gedi, but didn't have a chance to walk through the park or see the falls. We drove on to Masada, where there were big crowds. Forty minutes for lunch wasn't enough, since the lunch lines were so long. After lunch, most of us took the cable car up to Masada. We had an interesting walk around the various buildings and landmarks. We spent a decent amount of time exploring this famous landmark. After taking the cable car back down, we started our drive to the Dead Sea. We were staying at Herod's hotel, and couldn't find our room

for a while. It ended up being on the lowest level, just a short walk from the beach area. There was a lovely patio area and an infinity pool right outside our room. We walked down to the water, but did not go in. It was already dark. Some of our crew did go in, and enjoyed themselves. Dinner was at the hotel and was very good.

November 3, 2016

We had a late checkout today. I got up early and went down to the Dead Sea. There were already some people from our group there. We had a lovely float in the water. After breakfast, I took a short swim in the infinity pool. Then it was time to check out and head toward Eilat. We stopped at Timna Park to see Solomon's Pillars. We stopped at an Eilat Stone factory, and spent too much time there. Several people made purchases there. Our hotel (Herod's Palace) is lovely. Our room was at the very end of the hall on the 6th floor. Sistie went down to see about switching rooms, but the alternative was much worse. We realized the next day that we actually had a great view! We wandered along the promenade looking for a place to have dinner. We joined a group from the other bus at Giraffe, a Thai noodle restaurant. There was a wedding at the hotel next to ours and we enjoyed the fireworks display put on as part of the celebration!!

November 4, 2016

We went out on a boat today. It was an older boat and somewhat disappointing, especially since we weren't the only ones on board. We were able to see 4 countries – Israel, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Egypt- from our boat. Some people went swimming off the boat, and enjoyed their time in the water. We enjoyed a delicious lunch onboard the boat. We stopped near the pier to shop. I bought some gifts. We strolled back to the hotel. We had a lovely Shabbat dinner at the hotel.

November 5, 2016

Up early to head to Petra. There was only one busload going. Going through the Israeli border and the Jordanian border was a hassle. Lots of places to show our passports, get visa tickets, passports stamped, etc. It was about a 2-hour drive from the border to Petra. We made a bathroom/shopping stop. I didn't buy anything, but some people did. We began to walk through Petra. Our guide, Mr. Muhammed, explained the history as we walked. Sistie and I got about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way down before we turned back. We had little boys trying to sell us bracelets and postcards. Though we said no, they continued to pester us. We decided to take a donkey cart back up to the visitors' center. It was a fun, but bumpy ride, and I was glad we did it. We waited for the others and they all arrived a bit earlier than the appointed time. We went to a restaurant nearby for a buffet lunch. Not wonderful, but I had made a cheese sandwich from the breakfast buffet, which I supplemented with what was on the lunch buffet. It was a quiet 2-hour drive back to the Jordanian border. The trek back into Israel was less tedious than the way in. Once we got back, I repacked my suitcase and we went down to dinner. We then walked again along the promenade looking for a drugstore so Sistie could buy cold medicine. The pharmacy was further than I thought – almost to the bridge. I walked over the bridge to buy some more bracelets at the grocery store where I had purchased one the previous day. Our trip is coming to a close.

November 6-7, 2016

We had no alarm to set today. Enjoyed our last buffet breakfast at Herod's Palace! We met some of our crew in the hotel's gift shop after breakfast. Sistie bought one of Tzuri's multi-colored metal sculptures, and so did I. I also bought a beautiful hamsa, made from Eilat stone and silver. We headed to the lobby at 1 p.m., and as usual, sat around waiting. There was a wedding party from France leaving the hotel today too, so the lobby was crowded and chaotic. There was ITAS luggage all over the lobby, so I got a bellman to take mine outside to the bus. One piece ended up on our bus, and the other piece ended up on the other bus. We made the short drive to the Eilat Airport, where we had to take our own luggage into the terminal. As usual, there was a wait, and getting through security, but we made it to the gate. We had a nice plane and a short flight to Tel Aviv. Naftali was there to meet us with our regular bus. The luggage was re-loaded and we drove to a small restaurant that was close to Jerusalem. Dinner started with a speech/prayer by Shalom. We had various salads with falafel and other appetizers. Next came skewers with various meats – chicken, beef, lamb, hamburger. They were accompanied by fries and rice. We had baklava for dessert. Then we drove back to Terminal 3 at Ben Gurion Airport, where it all began. Some people had to wait a long time on the line for a VAT refund. We waited until the Delta counters opened. We proceeded through several layers of security. My suitcase weighed the same as it did coming over – below the limit!!! We had plenty of time before our flight. Some of us with extra shekels tried to spend them before it was time to board. Got on the plane, and was pleasantly surprised that there was nobody sitting in the middle seat. I used it for my phone and tablet. Couldn't find a movie to watch, so I read. It was cold on the plane, so I used the extra blanket from the extra seat. It was a long flight, but not too bad. When we got to JFK, I was very glad to have Global Entry. No hassles going through customs. There was plenty of time to get to the gate for our JFK to Tampa flight. Tailwinds allowed us to arrive in Tampa 45 minutes early. Neil called the bus company and they were on their way. Delta was good about getting our luggage out in a timely fashion. We lugged our bags outside and the bus arrived shortly afterward. The bus ride was uneventful, and we were at the clubhouse. What a trip!!!