

# Wartime Travel—Israeli Style

By Evelyn Preston

**To go or not to go was the haunting indecision in 2014 when my son, Ken, planned to take me, his aging mom, to Israel. Bomb shelters and rocket attacks weren't part of our original itinerary.**

However, "to go" became a true mission via the passionate Israeli guide we'd found. Yossi (Joel, a convert from New Jersey), held out a Pied Piper's tantalizing view of Israel's wonders enhanced by his passion, experience—and car.

Yossi's welcome hug set the tone of our odyssey, instructive and exciting; an old, bullet-riddled Jordanian Fort set the stage, the ancient and modern struggle for a Jewish homeland and the centuries of events and groups that led up to the recent, just-ended battle.

Everywhere we discovered Israel's disputed history, noting Palestinian Authority West Bank warning signs. Through reconstructed pre-'48 Palmach military camps, Artillery Hill trenches from the fight for Jerusalem, a chilling British prison and a docu-tour of Begin's compromises that brought tears, we re-lived the struggle to secure the Zionist dream. At the tucked-away Gaza Museum, a rocket artfully twisted into a candled menorah proved Israel's mandate to promote life over death

even after the broken promise of trading land for peace.

What a country of stark contrasts and palpable community! Hasids with time-frozen black garb and beards strode beside the scantily clad on Tel Aviv beaches. Mini skirted teens at the neon-lit mall ate McDonald's first kosher hamburgers, and I needed my French for directions to the Orthodox synagogue—modestly dressed women upstairs only.



Adventuring on our own, we shopped in the "shuk's" warren of shops—a farmer's market on steroids, bought Jewish symbols from Arab shopkeepers and strolled on the suddenly silent, no-traffic Sabbath to view the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Everywhere modern Israel emerged from thronged shops to thriving high tech, Israel having the third most publicly traded companies in the world.

The Yvel diamond and pearl factory, built in an ancient winery, now integrates immigrant Ethiopian Falashhas, teaching them to carry on its world-renowned jewelry designs.

We marveled at the beauty of the land from the terraced hills of Jerusalem to the curving Mediterranean shores and thrilled at the still shining Roman mosaics and Herod's distinctively framed stone work. Like all tourists, we prayed at the Western Wall, inched along deep excavations and explored Solomon's labyrinthine quarries in the old city.

Being almost lone tourists, we found the fabled Masada, Herod's mountain top fortress, eerily empty except for the resident scribe who blew the ancient shofar in our honor. And we made our own history. Rabbi Mottle interviewed us for his *Voice of Israel* program as courageous Americans visiting when so many had cancelled.

A bookend to our experience was "goodbyes" at Yossie's West Bank tiered settlement that staunchly and serenely overlooked a dual land of neighboring Arabs and close friends. With no TV, and a houseful of children, his family was comfortable, busy and happy. They toasted our double "mitzvah" (good deed)—a son leading his mother, bravely travelling together—truly the trip of a lifetime!



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