

Israel September 2005

It all started about a year ago, with an idea. My parents' idea to be precise: Let's travel to Israel and see the old homeland one more time. That simple idea escalated into an excursion for the entire family as we quickly jumped on the bandwagon. A chance to travel the world, see a land held sacred by three major world religions, walk in the footsteps of my cultural ancestors, and eat lots of amazing food! So we (Oreet & John, Benny & Anuga) purchased our tickets and packed our luggage, and took off on an adventure...

- **Day 1 - Monday 9/12/05:**

Packing and Travel Day

- **Day 2 - Tuesday 9/13/05:**

Airport Fun and Games, Shula & Itzik, Visit with Omer & Ravid

- **Day 3 - Wednesday 9/14/05:**

Ministry of the Interior, Israeli Breakfast ala Shula, The Diaspora Museum, Jaffa Flea Market & Old Port, Tel Aviv Promenade

- **Day 4 - Thursday 9/15/05:**

Jerusalem, Yad Vashem, Mt. Scopus, Abu-Ghosh

- **Day 5 - Friday 9/16/05:**

Visit with Maoz & Oranit, Ben Gurion Gravesite, Avdat, Makhtesh Ramon, Eilat

- **Day 6 - Saturday 9/17/05:**

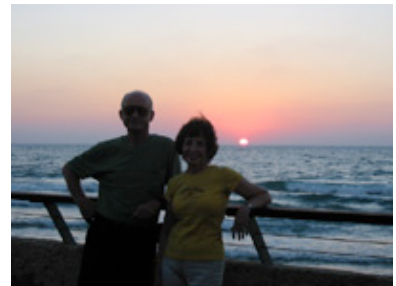
Old Eilat Neighborhood, Dekel Dom, Copper Mines at Timna, Dead Sea and Masada

- **Day 7 - Sunday 9/18/05:**

Palmach Museum, Tel Aviv Promenade, Moshav Be'er Tuvia

- **Day 8 - Monday 9/19/05:**

Tefen, Peke'in, The Kineret, Beit Hillel and The Galil



•**Day 9 - Tuesday 9/20/05:**

The Golan Heights: Mitzpe Golani & Mt. Bantal, Mitzpe Shalom, The Church of the Seven Apostles, Rosh Pina

•**Day 10 - Wednesday 9/21/05:**

Mount of Beatitudes, Capernaum, Bet Gabriel, Caesarea, Visit with Mimi

•**Day 11 - Thursday 9/22/05:**

Soreq Stalactite Cave, Shrine of the Book & Israel Museum, Knesset

•**Day 12 - Friday 9/23/05:**

Masada, Visit with Yinon & Ravit

•**Day 13 - Saturday 9/24/05:**

Visit with Aunt Ora and Family, Haifa and Asia & Gideon, Daliyat al Carmel, Baha'i Gardens

•**Day 14 - Sunday 9/25/05:**

Rosh Hanikra, Akko, visit with Yona & Rifka

•**Day 15 - Monday 9/26/05:**

Rehovot & Packing, Mini Israel

•**Day 16 - Tuesday 9/27/05:**

Travel Day, Trip Retrospective



Day 1 - Sunday and Monday 9/12/05



Packing and Travel

Last minute packing, errands, and travel to Los Angeles. Our flight was due to leave LAX on Monday morning, and airline regulations required us to check in at the airport at an uncomfortably early hour. So we thought it best to spend the

night at a hotel in LA.

As we took the shuttle to the airport at 5am, the Air Canada maple leaf and images of sardines were dancing thru my head. Five and a half hours to Toronto with a three-hour layover there, followed by twelve hours to Tel Aviv in Israel. With a time change of 9 hours ahead, we lost a day during transit and our arrival will be sometime tomorrow.



Day 2 - Tuesday 9/13/05



Airport Fun and Games

We disembarked from our flight at roughly 11am Tel Aviv time - the new airport in Tel Aviv is absolutely beautiful by the way. Groggy from our long voyage, we began the adventure of navigating our way through customs and locating our luggage, compounded by the fact that three of us had expired Israeli passports. We had attempted to renew them at the Israeli Consulate in Los Angeles many months prior to the trip, with many forms and some money exchanging hands, only to be told that we would have to renew them at the passport office of the Ministry of the Interior in Israel because we had not traveled to Israel within the last five years. Oh and by the way, anyone with Israeli citizenship (we all have dual citizenship with the United States and Israel) has to enter Israel on an Israeli passport. Hmmm - welcome to Israeli logic. In the end, it turned out just fine - John entered on his American passport without issue. We three approached the window with six passports between us and let the official select what she wanted - she chose the Israeli passports and explained that the expiration was no problem, just go to the passport office and get it renewed while we were on our trip. Easy!



Unfortunately, luggage was more difficult. Three of the suitcases came off the conveyer belt without delay. Then we waited, watching the carousel spin slowly into infinity, until it ground to a halt and all hope was lost. So it was off to fill out claim

forms. Until, wonder of wonders - there it was standing in all its glory surrounded by the luggage of a tour group that had been set aside for bus loading! We hadn't recognized it because it had been opened by the transit authority and its' colorful security belt was missing. Huzzah!!

Shula and Itzik

Shula and Itzik Dekel - our amazing hosts and tour guide / chauffeur were waiting for us with two cars to haul the luggage. The Dekels and my parents have known each other for years, the sort of very close friends who become family. They drove us to their beautiful home in Rechovot - a suburb of Tel Aviv, and showed us to our rooms. After an amazing home cooked meal and a short nap to fight the onset of jet lag, we were enervated enough to travel again.



Visit with Omer and Ravid

Omer Dekel is the oldest son of Shula and Itzik. We went to visit him and his wife Ravid, and their two children in their new home just 20 minutes away. They have a beautiful house on a hillside with an amazing view, and we were treated to a lovely sunset and another expansive meal. (An interesting fact we learned during our tour of the house - Omer pointed out that building regulations in Israel require every house to have a 'panic room' which is made of thick concrete with sealable door and one sealable window with a metal shutter to withstand the shock of a bomb blast and can be sealed in case of a gas attack. Not something we had planned for our remodel - it's definitely a different country).

Day 3 - Wednesday 9/14/05



Ministry of the Interior

With jet lag ruling our sleep patterns, an early start was no dilemma. The three of us with 'passport problems' planned to be at the Ministry of the Interior at 7:15am so as to be first in line for the opening at 8am. We were only second in line, but were pleasantly surprised at the presence of a reel of numbered tickets by the door. As the stairwell landing in front of the Office door slowly filled, everyone politely took a number and waited quietly - this was not how I remembered Israel - my memories clearly indicated that Israelis were not good at waiting quietly and queuing up. Well, my memories were justified when the door opened and everyone around us sprang into action, stampeding through the small opening and rushing the counter with the grace and fury of an enraged bison (maybe camel as we were in the Middle East). We managed to get through it all, and in the end emerged successfully with our now valid passports extended for another five years. Huzzah!!

Israeli Breakfast ala Shula

We reported back to headquarters in Rechovot and were treated to a lavish breakfast that included: two kinds of bread and rolls, sliced cucumbers and tomatoes and bell peppers, sliced Hungarian sausage, olives and homemade pickles, homemade jam, 5 types of slicing cheeses and 4 types of cheese spread (Israel is famed



for it's many and varied dairy products), burekas (filo dough pockets stuffed with cheese or potato or egg), juices, chocolate croissants, and gourmet coffee courtesy of Itzik and his cappuccino machine. We feasted!! This was a daily occurrence and really a lovely way to start the day as far as we were concerned - we can whole-heartedly recommend 'Dekel's bed and breakfast' as a high-class establishment.



After breakfast, we received delivery of our rental vehicle - a white seven-seater minivan that we named Felix. It had to be rented in John's name in order to get the 'American Tourist' discount.

Earlier in the day, we had left John and Itzik alone at the house to deal with car issues while the rest of us dealt with passport issues. Upon our return home, we discovered that Itzik had introduced John to a type of number puzzle called **Su-do-ku**. Not only did John become obsessed with solving the puzzles themselves, but he also began writing a computer program to solve the puzzles for him.

We piled into Felix and went to our first museum of the trip. Shula explained that our itinerary included three museums, and that she had booked English-speaking guides at each, arranging the itinerary so that we toured them in historical-chronological order (first the Diaspora Museum, then the Holocaust Museum, then the Palmach Museum). To quote my mother: "We went thru history in some incredible museums. Starting with the Diaspora Museum "Beth Hatefutsoth" in Tel Aviv where the flourishing communities all over Europe, Asia, North Africa, etc. were exhibited. Continuing to the Holocaust Museum "Yad Vashem" in Jerusalem where the process of destruction of the European

communities was displayed. Ending in the Palmach Museum in Tel Aviv where the struggle of the new state of Israel was exhibited. These three museums are excellent in their exhibits and guidance."

The Diaspora Museum

This morning's destination was **Beth**

Hatefutsoth, the Nahum Goldmann Museum of the Jewish Diaspora, in Tel Aviv. I quote from the brochure: "Beth Hatefutsoth exists to convey the

story of the Jewish people from the time of their expulsion from the Land of Israel 2,500 years ago to the present. It relates the unique story of the continuity of the Jewish people through exhibition, education and cultural endeavors, providing multiple avenues of personal historical identification. Our hope is that by sharing the unique story of Jewish endurance, new generations may find the key to their own. When it opened in May 1978, Beth Hatefutsoth was regarded by many museum experts as one of the most innovative museums in the world. It created a whole new concept of what a museum is and has influenced museum culture since". We had a wonderful tour guide just for our group who spoke English with a lovely French accent and truly emphasized the highlights of the museum.



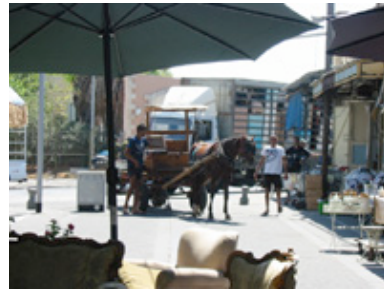


Jaffa Flea Market & Old Port



We next drove to **Jaffa**, an ancient port city, which is now a part of modern Tel Aviv. The natural harbor, defended by protruding rocks, is one of the oldest in the Levant, and the earliest city there was built around 5000 BCE. It was hotly contested and over the years was inhabited by Canaanites, Egyptians, Philistines, Israelites under the rule of Solomon, Assyrians, Babylonians, and the Greeks. After Greek rule crumbled, Jaffa became the port of Judah. It stayed mainly in Jewish control until Mark Anthony gave the city to Cleopatra, and the city once more became Egyptian. After her death the Roman emperor gave Jaffa to Herod. But Herod soon set out to build the harbor of Caesarea, to

the detriment of Jaffa. It was destroyed in 68 CE and rebuilt, fought over by the Crusaders and the Arabs, then occupied by the Ottoman Empire. It was destroyed again by Napoleon in 1799, and again during Israel's War of Independence. In 1965 a process of reconstruction began. Artists were encouraged to live in Jaffa and reconstruct their own houses. Modern 'old' Jaffa is the result. Our experience with Jaffa started with the flea market and ended with a tour of the Old Port. We also stopped at the famous Abulafia Bakery for cheese sambusas before driving back to Tel Aviv.



Tel Aviv Promenade

Dinner was at a restaurant on the newly built Tel Aviv Promenade. We dined outdoors and watched the sun set over the Mediterranean.



Day 4 - Thursday 9/15/05

Yad Vashem

After breaking our fast, our first stop of the day was a four hour guided tour in English of the **Yad Vashem** Museum. Again, I quote from the brochure: "Yad Vashem is the Jewish people's memorial to the murdered Six Million and symbolizes the ongoing confrontation with the rupture engendered by the Holocaust. The new Holocaust History Museum presents the story of the Shoah from a unique Jewish perspective, emphasizing the experiences of the individual victims through original artifacts, survivor testimonies and personal possessions. It is a 180-meter long linear structure in the form of a spike that cuts through the mountain. Galleries portraying the complexity of the Jewish situation during those terrible years branch off this spike-like shaft. At the end of the Museum's historical narrative is the Hall of Names — a repository for the Pages of Testimony of millions of Holocaust victims, a memorial to those who perished. From the Hall of Names, visitors continue on to the epilogue and from there to the balcony opening to a panoramic view of Jerusalem".





Jerusalem

Then it was off to **Jerusalem**, an ancient city sacred to three major world religions. We entered the Old City via the Jaffa Gate, over which looms the Citadel and the Tower of David, and made our way through the Armenian Quarter where we saw ruins of the old 5th century Byzantine Cardo and the stone arch of the Hurva Synagogue. In



the Jewish quarter we stopped at the Kotel (Western Wall) to pay our respects and take the opportunity for some good "people watching".

From there, we were privileged to be able to tour the newly opened archaeological dig north of the Western Wall where the catacombs of the ancient city under the modern city have been unearthed.



The base of the Western Wall has been excavated to reveal it's entire length. We exited the tunnels in the Christian Quarter at the Via Dolorosa near the Second Station of the cross, the site of the flagellation and the crown of thorns. There were a few minutes of confusion where our armed

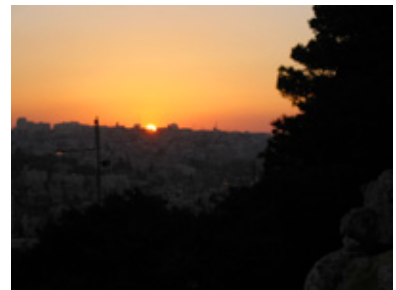
escort was delayed, however our tour guide solved this dilemma handily by flagging down a passing pair of soldiers who were strolling down the street and asking them to accompany us back to the Jewish Quarter (John and I had felt perfectly safe until that particular sobering

and disconcerting incident). Our route passed through the Muslim Quarter and the famous Souk, which is a maze of narrow stone pedestrian streets lined by small stalls selling everything from jewelry to pottery to spices and food.



Mount Scopus

On the way home, we stopped on **Mount Scopus** for a view of the sun setting over the Old City of Jerusalem. It is the highest mountain in the area and is the location of Hadassah Hospital and the Hebrew University (where Oreet took a summer archaeology course in her 21st year).



Abu Ghosh

Then it was off to **Abu-Ghosh** for dinner. This hillside Arab town has been in existence for centuries and has served as a stopping point on the road to Jerusalem - it's spring making it a natural location for a caravansary. The Romans built cisterns in the 1st century, and the Caliphs built a Khan there in the 7th. A Crusader

Church was constructed in 1142, which is now inhabited by Benedictine monks and nuns. Our main purpose in visiting was the Lebanese restaurant featuring traditional Middle Eastern falafel. Yum!!

At this point, barely into the trip, I was already beginning to feel as if my brain was melting from the effort of keeping up a running translation of everyone's conversation for John. My Hebrew is not fluent, though it became better as the trip continued, so much of the time I did not know what people were saying either. At first I would translate one sentence for him and lose the next three sentences that were spoken while I was doing it. Then I slowly gained the ability to translate while listening, and keep the running translation moving one sentence behind the actual conversation. The one drawback of this technique was that I had to translate one word at a time in the order they were spoken, and did not have time to clean up the sentence structure to match conventional English, which sometimes made for an odd sounding conversation on the English end. By the end of the trip I was so confused between the two languages that I would translate for John and he would laughingly inform me that the phrase I had just translated had been originally spoken in English.

Day 5 - Friday 9/16/05

Visit with Maoz & Oranit

Maoz Dekel is the youngest son of Shula and Itzik. He and his wife Oranit and their two children joined us for breakfast. They live just around the corner within walking distance. After the meal, we loaded up Felix for the long drive to Eilat at the southern tip of Israel, on the shores of the Red Sea. On the way down, we stopped at a few sites.

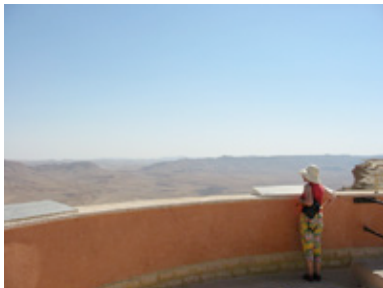
Ben Gurion Gravesite

Our first stop was **Kibbutz Sdeh Boker** to view the gravesites of **David Ben-Gurion**, the first Prime Minister of Israel, and his wife Paula. We also saw our first desert ibex here. This Kibbutz was established in 1952 - a prosperous agricultural development 20 miles south of Be'er Sheba in the heart of the most arid desert in Israel.



Avdat

40 miles south of Be'er Sheva lies **Avdat**, an ancient Nabatean city on the old spice caravan route between Petra and Gaza. The Nabatean culture flourished from the 4th century BC to 106 AD based on caravan trade of myrrh and spices from southern Arabia to Gaza, Damascus, and Alexandria. Their capital at Petra is known for its ruins. Avdat is their most impressive city in the Negev, featuring an acropolis with a temple to Dusares, a Roman villa and citadel tower, baths and pottery ovens as well as Byzantine churches and storage caves.



Makhtesh Ramon

Our last stop was at **Mitzpeh Ramon** in the heart of the Negev Desert 80 miles north of Eilat. This is a lookout on the rim of the Makhtesh Ramon, one of the largest craters in the world -- at 25 miles long and 5 miles wide it reaches a depth of 1300 feet. It was created by erosion and geological activity along the Syrio-African Rift.

Eilat

After a full day of exploring it was a relief to reach Hotel Adi in **Eilat** and enjoy a leisurely dinner at the hotel. Our room had a beautiful view of the bay and Akaba in Jordan just a few miles away. That evening, the 'kids' explored the beachfront and reviewed the guidebook for tomorrow's adventures while the 'adults' went off to visit Nachum and Tova, their old friends from their days of living here in Eilat.



It was this evening that we discovered the Shabbat-A-Vator. The observance of the Shabbath begins just after sundown on Friday night, and continues until



Saturday night - during this time, religious Jews are not allowed to do any 'work', the day being devoted to contemplation and prayer. What we did not previously realize was that pushing an elevator button is considered to be 'work'. Hence the use of the Shabbat-A-Vator - an elevator which spends the 24 hours of the Sabbath doing the work for you, blithely drifting up and down while stopping on every floor to allow one to enter and travel to their destination without having to press a single button. A bit slow perhaps, but an innovative solution to a specific problem.

Day 6 - Saturday 9/17/05

Old Eilat Neighborhood

After breakfast at the hotel, we set out on a driving tour of Eilat, primarily to view the sites of the older town where my parents and the Dekel's had lived and worked in their Eilat years. We then set out north towards the Dead Sea and Masada, with a few stops on the way.

Dekel Dom

The Dekel Dom (Dom Palm) trees north of Eilat are the northernmost grouping of this particular species of palm on the globe. My parents remembered this site as one of the special things



about Eilat from when they lived here years ago. Another unique feature of Eilat is that its coral reef, the northern part of the Red Sea's 4500 km of reefs, is the northernmost coral reef in the world. Another little-known fact is that Eilat is one of the best places in the world for bird watching. Its unique position as the only land bridge between Asia and Africa makes it one of the world's most important bird migratory routes. Approximately one billion birds traverse the area between the Mediterranean coast and the mountains of Jordan making southern Israel the site of one of the greatest concentrations of migrating birds in the world. The migration from Europe to Africa takes place from September to November and the return flight begins in March and lasts through May.



Copper Mines at Timna

We then traveled to **Timna**, site of the fabled King Solomon's Mines. In the 14th through 12th centuries BCE, the Egyptians under the Pharaohs Seti I through Ramses V established and maintained enormous copper mining operations at Timna, the world's earliest mine. They used mules to transport the ore to the natural port at the Gulf of Eilat. In the 1st and 2nd centuries CE the Romans worked the mines, and after the Ottoman conquest the Arabs took over the site. The valley also has amazing natural red sandstone formations carved by erosion such as The Mushroom and Solomon's Pillars. There are petroglyphs carved into the rock dating back to

the Egyptian occupation, and a temple to the Egyptian goddess Hathor - ruler of mines and turquoise. There is also a manmade lake where we were finally able to get close to camels.

Dead Sea and Masada

We drove via the Dead Sea to Masada, where we were told that the site closed at 4pm - it was 4:22 at the time. No worries - this enabled us to go back to the **Dead Sea** and explore that landmark further. These mineral rich waters lie at the lowest point on the planet, 417 meters / 1373 feet below sea level. On our way out of the Dead Sea basin, we stopped at an overlook for a view of the Zohar Fortress, and ancient settlement on the old caravan route from the Dead Sea to Arad.



Day 7 - Sunday 9/18/05



Palmach Museum

After a good night's sleep in our own Rechovot beds, and one of Shula's elaborate breakfasts, we were ready for the third of our scheduled museum adventures -- the **Palmach Museum** in



Tel Aviv. From their brochure: "The Palmach Museum is an experiential museum, covering the Palmach legacy through the stories of individuals and groups. Visitors to the museum join the group of young Palmach recruits from its

establishment, and advanced through the story of the Palmach until the end of the War of Independence. The manner of presentation is extremely innovative. There are no displays or documents, but rather an account of a fascinating personal story accompanied by three-dimensional decor, films and various effects incorporating documentary materials. The Palmach [acronym for 'Plugot Hamahatz' -Striking Force] Units were established as part of the "Hagana" underground organization in May 1941. The Palmach was not merely a military organization - it was the way of life of social organization, based on the values of pioneering settlement. The Palmach bases were situated in many kibbutzim. The Palmach members participated in military training exercises alongside their agricultural chores, and created a social framework that was perceived as the core essence of the Sabra [native born Israeli]. The height of the Palmach activity was during the War of

Independence in Israel, from November 1947 until March 1949, where they constituted the "Tip of the Spear" during the war and in the establishment of the Israeli Defense Force." John and I really enjoyed this presentation and thought it was very well done (though it was definitely the loudest museum we had ever been to). It was also interesting to hear my parents' stories of their involvement during the war - that children on bicycles were used as messengers to army units, and that they remembered being woken by their parents to dance with joy in the streets when the vote establishing a State of Israel was read on the radio. At one point, my mother pointed at a photo of a woman holding a huge rifle and reminisced that this particular Czechoslovakian weapon was what she was issued in boot camp - she remembered the huge bruises on her shoulder from the recoil when firing it. She went on to tell us that half way through training they were relieved to exchange their Czech rifles for Uzis, which were more reliable and much easier to break down to clean (only 4 pieces she remembered happily).

Tel Aviv Promenade

Lunch was on the Tel Aviv Promenade, at a different restaurant than our previous dinner, and we were treated to a daytime view of the Mediterranean.





Moshav Be'er Tuvia

Our next stop was Moshav Be'er Tuvia where Shula grew up, to visit Dola and Miriam, friends of hers who own the most modern dairy in the entire country of Israel, and one of only four like it in the world. The entire process is computerized, and the machine tracks the health and output of the animals as well as the analysis of the milk produced. The cows receive only clean organic feed, no hormones, and the waste



is processed into fertilizer without contaminating the water table. We were told that a good European cow produces 35 - 45 gallons of milk per day, but that a good Israeli cow produces up to 65 gallons per day, and that the resulting output is of higher quality and richer in butterfat. It was a fascinating visit and afterwards we were invited to their home for a meal.

Day 8 - Monday 9/19/05



Tefen

After breakfast, we headed north for a three-day trip to the Galil region. On the way, we stopped at the **Tefen Industrial Park**, established by Stef Wertheimer, in order to explore the **German**

Speaking Jewry Museum. This museum addresses the contribution and influence of Central European immigrants, who were steeped in German culture, in Israel. There are five interactive presentations on the following topics: settlement; economy, industry, and trade; architecture; medicine; law; performing arts. Here we were able to see a photo and narrative on Shula's grandfather's grandfather who was the first physician in Israel. There was also an interesting temporary exhibit on the life and work of artist Hermann Struck.

Peke'in

The **Druze** community in Israel is officially recognized as a separate religious entity with its own courts and spiritual leadership. Their culture and language are Arabic but they opted against mainstream Arab nationalism in 1948 during Israel's War of Independence, becoming active participants on Israel's side, and have since served in the Israel Defense Forces. Peki'in is one of the most ancient Druze villages in the country. It was frequently mentioned in historical



sources from the thirteenth century onward, noting it's many springs, flourishing gardens and orchards, and its small Jewish community, which has been present there almost continuously since the Second Temple period (the members of the Zenati family, custodians of the synagogue, claim to have lived in Peki'in since the time of the destruction of the Second Temple). In and near the village are significant sites for Druze and Jews, including a restored Jewish synagogue dating back to the Roman Period that is said to contain stone fragments from the Second Temple within its walls. We saw beautifully built stone houses with flat roofs covered with grape arbors nestled among rocky hillsides covered with olive orchards. We dined at an amazing restaurant that was located in a house up against the walls of the synagogue where we were served typical Druze cuisine including lamb on a bed of cinnamon rice, bulgur wheat with stewed chicken, and lots of salads and dips. Our host explained that his wife was in back doing all the cooking, and kept bringing us extra food 'on the house' just for us to try as it was a specialty. Desert was also on the house - baklava, served along with strong Turkish coffee flavored with cardamom poured out of a silver and gold finjan into tiny cups.

The Kineret

Continuing north, we came upon our first view of the **Kineret** (named because in shape it resembles a lyre, the word for which in Hebrew is 'kinnor'), the **Sea of Galilee**. Also known as Lake Tiberias, it is the largest freshwater lake in Israel and at 213 meters below sea level, it is the lowest freshwater lake on Earth and the second-lowest point in the world after the Dead Sea.



One thing that continuously struck us as we drove about the country was the similarity between the plant life we were used to from Southern California and the foliage we saw around us on our trip. Everywhere we went, we saw stands of eucalyptus trees and jacarandas, as well as bougainvillea, lantana, marigolds, and a rose garden. There was even red apple ice plant that we were told is called 'grave plant' in Israel because it grows in cemeteries.

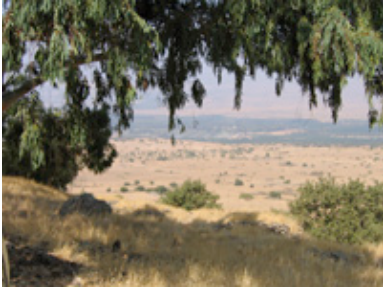
Beit Hillel and The Galil

Our accommodations for the night were in a bed and breakfast in the small town of Beit Hillel in the northern Galil. This was the location of my mother's first teaching job when she was serving in the army. She reminisced about dating my father at the time, the house that she shared with two other army teachers, and the multiple daily trips to the bomb shelter whenever the Syrians shelled the valley from the Golan Heights.



Day 9 - Tuesday 9/20/05

The Golan Heights



Our morning plans involved starting at the northern border of the **Golan Heights** and driving south. Our first stop was Mitzpe Golani, an old Syrian bunker and artillery emplacement and site of one of the bloodiest battles of the 1967 Six Day War. It was quite an experience to peek out of an underground bunker and look upon the valley knowing that the Syrians systematically shelled civilian targets from that location. Further south in the Heights, we drove to the top of Mt. Bantal for a lovely view of Kuneitra across the border in Syria. We had drinks at Coffee Anan, a play on the UN Secretary General's name and the Hebrew words

which translate to 'coffee in the clouds', and then we descended to the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee.

It's an odd feeling to look out over a beautiful vista and realize that we are technically still at war with the country you see just a few miles away. Even odder is the fact that we are constantly faced with views of youngsters throughout the country carrying guns and assault rifles. When they are obviously active military in full uniform, it blends better into the scenery. But when they are dressed in street clothes, in a mall talking on a cell phone, but with an AK47 slung across their back, it is a bit more disconcerting. At one point we were driving along a road in the north of the country and kept passing huge thick cement walls that were discontinuous with one another, spaced about every mile or so. It was later explained that they were constructed to provide shelter for motorists in case of shelling from the Lebanese side of the border. Between the incident in Old Jerusalem where we had to wait for our armed escort, the revelation of the 'panic room' in every home, and the weapons we noticed everywhere, it became very obvious that we were in a country with a completely different mindset regarding the immediacy of a state of war.





Mitzpe Shalom

We stopped for lunch at a new artists village and met several of the artists including a goldsmith descended from a family of jewelers in Hungary (he had his grandfather's journeyman jeweler diploma on display). We then continued on to Mitzpe Shalom, a lookout with a wonderful view of the Sea of Galilee from above the eastern shore. Here we saw prolific banana plantations that are possible because the position of the Sea of Galilee below sea level in the Syrio-African Rift allows for a sub-tropical climate. However, we primates found this same climate to be uncomfortably hot and humid. We also learned that the majority of this region had been swamp that was drained to allow for farming.

The Church of the Seven Apostles

Our drive continued up around the northern end of the lake, and down the western side to **The Church of the Seven Apostles**. This was a beautiful Greek Orthodox church with white walls and pink domes on the shores of the Sea of Galilee surrounded by beautiful gardens. Inside the walls and domes were covered with illuminated scenes from the lives of Jesus and his early disciples.



Rosh Pina

From there, we traveled west to Rosh Pina, a settlement sponsored in 1884 by the Baron Rothschild. We were able to explore the beautiful hillside gardens as well as the museum in the home of Professor Gidon Mer where he conducted research on malaria.

Day 10 - Wednesday 9/21/05

Today we made our leisurely way down the coast back to Rechovot, with many stops along the way. We began with a few sites on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee.



Mount of Beatitudes

The Mount of Beatitudes offers a magnificent view of the Sea of Galilee and the area that was frequented by Jesus during his ministry in this area. The Church of the Eight Beatitudes is a beautiful Franciscan church, built with the love and simplicity for which the Franciscans are noted, and with the financial resources Mussolini was noted for -- he contributed to its construction in 1938, and the church is still served by Italian nuns today. This is the location where Jesus delivered the **Sermon of the Mount** (Matthew 5, verses 3 - 12), which begins, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." And goes on to bless the mourners, the meek, the hungry, the merciful, the clean of heart, the peacemakers, and the persecuted. Not being well versed in Christianity, it took us a while to determine that these eight groupings of people were in fact the eight 'beatitudes' for which the Church was named. (Once this light bulb finally lit, John began to quote from Monty Python's Life of Brian with 'blessed are the Greeks and the cheese makers'. This sent me into a fit of giggles, which just isn't polite when surrounded by devout Catholics in a holy place, and we retreated to the gardens to recover).

Capernaum

Capernaum also known as Kfar Nahum is a site on the shore of the Sea of Galilee that was first inhabited in 150 BCE as a small fishing village. It contains the ruins of a synagogue, as well as a modern Catholic Church built over an older 5th century octagonal church (remember the eight beatitudes) that was in turn built over the ruins of the site of the home of Saint Peter where Jesus lived during much of his ministry in this area.

This site is just three km up the shore from the Church of the Multiplication of the Loaves and Fishes in Tabgha and the Church of the Primacy of Peter.



Bet Gabriel

Then it was onward to Bet Gabriel with its beautiful gardens and striking view, where we had blintzes for lunch. This was the site of the 1994 peace treaty between Jordan and Israel, signed by King Hussein and Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in the 'Peace Room'.

Caesarea

Continuing down the coast, we reached the archaeological dig at the site of **Caesarea** where the 'kids' spent many glorious hours scrambling about the ruins and the 'adults' went off to visit friends Yovav and Miti Katz at their nearby home. Caesarea (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caesarea_Palaestina) was originally settled by the Phoenicians in 586 BCE and flourished under the Hellenists under the name Strato's Tower. It was conquered by the Romans and awarded to Herod in 30 BCE. He built a large port city at the site, naming it after his patron Octavian Augustus Caesar. Caesarea was a planned city including a network of streets, a temple, an amphitheatre (which has been restored and modernized and is in use today), an aqueduct, markets, palace, bathhouse, and hippodrome. By 6 BCE, it was the capitol of Palestine. Over the years, it was conquered and occupied by the Byzantines (who built a perimeter wall in the 6th century), Arabs, Crusaders, and Ottomans. The area is still undergoing active archaeological excavations - this is the site where Oreet dug during the summer of her 21st year. We had a wonderful time wandering the ruins and exploring. In the heat of



the afternoon, we took a rest break seated on old Roman blocks of limestone in the shade of a vaulted warehouse, a view of a gull circling the Mediterranean shore, no sounds but the crashing of the waves and not another person in sight - a perfect moment.

Visit with Mimi

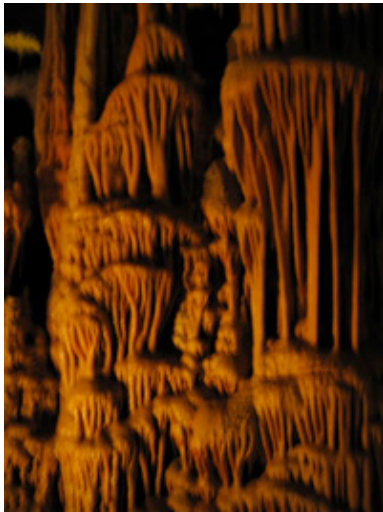
Mimi Prise is Shula's sister and we made a stop in **Rishon Lezion** on the way home to visit with her and her husband Noam. Of course, she treated us to a meal while we were there. It was pleasant to chat and catch up with them, as well as to view all the amazing artwork and collectibles on display in their lovely home.

Day 11 - Thursday 9/22/05



Soreq Stalactite Cave

Our first stop of the day was the **Soreq Stalactite Cave** in the Judean Hills. The cave was discovered accidentally by workers blasting at a nearby quarry and is unique in that prior to the blast, it had no external openings, making it pristine and untouched (undamaged) by human hands. Since my last visit here at the age of around nine when the cave had just been made accessible to the public, many improvements have been made including an informative movie on the formation of the cave, an elaborate lighting system, and a wooden railed walkway.



From that earlier visit, I distinctly remember the poignant story of the Romeo and Juliet stalactite and stalagmite whose ends were only 1 mm apart and would never meet as they were in an inactive portion of the cave and had ceased to grow. On this visit, I was happy to hear that that portion of the cave had become active again last year and the love story now has a chance at a happy conclusion.

We returned to western Jerusalem in order to spend the afternoon viewing the Shrine of the Book and the Israel Museum.

Shrine of the Book

The **Shrine of the Book** is the repository of one of the most exceptional archaeological finds in the Middle East - the **Dead Sea Scrolls**, which are on display along with the **Aleppo Codex**. As the fragility of the scrolls makes it impossible to display them all on a continuous basis, a system of scroll rotation is used. After a scroll has been exhibited for 3-6 months, it is removed from its showcase and placed temporarily in a special storeroom, where it "rests" from exposure. The shrine is built as a white dome covering a structure that is two-thirds below the ground, and is reflected in a pool of water that surrounds it. Across from the white dome is a black basalt wall. We had an incredible two-hour tour with an English speaking guide who really brought to life the people and culture of the sect of Qumran who wrote the scrolls, the story of the discovery of the scrolls, and the contents of the scrolls themselves. In short, a group of religious men during the Second Temple period left Jerusalem and established a community at Qumran in the desert on the northern shore of the Dead Sea in order to freely practice their form of religion which was stricter than that observed in the Temple. When the Jews revolted against Roman rule in 66 CE, these people hid their library in caves in the desert. In 1947, Bedouin shepherds discovered the first cave containing four scrolls, and through 1956, 11 caves were located containing roughly 850 documents written between the 2nd century BCE and the 1st century CE. About 30% are fragments from the Hebrew Bible, from all the books except



the Book of Esther. About 25% are traditional Jewish religious texts that are not in the canonical Hebrew Bible. Another 30% contain Biblical commentaries or other texts such as the "Manuel of Discipline or "Community Rule" and the "Rule of War" related to the beliefs, regulations, and membership requirements of the sect believed to have lived in Qumran. The texts are of great significance in a religious context, as they are the oldest known copies of the Hebrew Bible.



Israel Museum

At the **Israel Museum**, we explored the departments of Archaeology & Antiquities from prehistory to the present. There were also informative displays on the history of Hebrew script and on glassmaking through the ages.

The Knesset

On our way out of town we had a good view of the **Knesset**, the Israeli Parliament building. After feeding our minds for so many hours, it was time to feed our bodies with another stop in Abu-Ghosh for falafel on the way home.



Day 12 - Friday 9/23/05

Today was dedicated to the two-hour drive out to **Masada**, on the western shore of the Dead Sea, and the exploration of the site through the afternoon, followed by the drive back to Rechovot. The drive was a dual landmark in that it was our first trip without our trusty Dekel chauffeur & tour guide duo, and it was John's first time driving in Israel.

Masada

We arrived without incident to the ancient fortress on the edge of the Judean Desert overlooking the western edge of the Dead Sea, and rode the cable car up to the top of the mountain (we had a lovely view of the Snake Path from the cable car, but had no desire to even attempt the climb in the heat of the day). At the top, my parents and I were pleasantly surprised at the differences between the present site and what we remembered from our last trip here. My nine year-old memory supplied visions of piles of rocks and rubble, no signs, no visitor facilities, and one lone spigot protruding from a wall providing odd-tasting warm water on a 100 plus degree-day. Now, amazed, we looked out upon reconstructed buildings (with a thick black line on the walls showing what had previously been present) that were well labeled in multiple languages, shade structures and cold filtered water, restrooms, and a wheelchair-accessible path. We



all agreed that the reconstructed buildings made it a much more personal experience as one could really picture life in Herodian times as well as during the Great Revolt in a way that piles of rubble just didn't convey.



King Herod built **Masada** between 37 and 31 BCE as a refuge for himself should his Jewish subjects rise up against him. In 66 CE, at the beginning of the Jewish uprising against the Romans, a group of Jewish rebels called the Sicarii took Masada from the Roman garrison stationed there. Then, in 72 CE, the Romans marched against Masada and laid siege to the fortress. They built a circumvallation wall and then a rampart against the western face of the plateau, using thousands of tons of stones and beaten earth. The ramp was complete in the spring of 73 CE after approximately two to three months of siege, allowing them to finally breach the wall of the fortress with a battering ram.

When the Romans entered the fortress, however, they discovered that its approximately one thousand defenders had set all the buildings but the food storerooms ablaze and committed mass suicide rather than face certain capture and defeat and slavery by their enemies. The defenders were rumored to draw lots and slay each other in turn, down to the last man, who would be the only one to actually take his own life. The

argument is made that the storerooms were left standing to show that the defenders retained the ability to live and chose the time of their death.

We were able to view the entire fortress. Herod had built an amazing winter palace on three terraces over the north wall, as well as storerooms where archaeologists found a huge array of food in amphorae preserved by the arid environment, water cisterns, a bathhouse, a columbarium tower where pigeons were raised for food, and a casement wall around the entire fortress. The rebels lived in rooms in the wall and constructed a synagogue and mikvehs (ritual baths). In the 5th century CE the Byzantines built a monastery that was inhabited by hermits.



Masada was inscribed on the **UNESCO World Heritage List** in 2001. The tragic events of the last days of the rebels at Masada transformed it into both a Jewish cultural icon and a symbol of humanity's continuous struggle for freedom from oppression. Every year, thousands of Israeli soldiers take an oath there: "Masada shall not fall again."

Visit with Yinon & Ravit

Yinon Dekel is the middle son of Shula and Itzik. He and his wife Ravit and their two children joined us for dinner. Earlier in the week we had visited the site of their new home currently under construction, a large

structure with a lovely view of orchards on the end of a cul-de-sac. We fell in love with their Italian floor tiles and are looking into the feasibility of using them in our own remodel.

Day 13 - Saturday 9/24/05



Visit with Aunt Ora and Family

Today we set out northwards again to Kiryat Yam for a visit with my Aunt Ora (my father's sister) and my cousins Gabi and Eti and their families (Gabi has two children and Eti has one with another on the way in November). As usual, we were treated to a lavish lunch, and it was good to be able to catch up with all the news of the family.



Haifa and Asia &

Gideon

Then we were back on the road towards **Haifa** for a visit with our good friends Asia and Gideon Levita, who were our amazing hosts for this leg of the journey. The Levita's are also longtime friends who are like family. They opened their newly remodeled home to us and made us welcome - John and I were assigned the 'honeymoon suite', a separate cottage with complete amenities on the property.



Daliyat al Carmel

We immediately set out on a whirlwind tour of **Haifa** and its environs, starting with the nearby Druze village of **Daliyat al Carmel** for a little

shopping in native handicrafts. Here we were privileged to witness masters at work as Gideon and Asia expertly bargained the price of our purchases down to reasonable sums.

Baha'i Gardens

We then drove down Mt Carmel with stops to view the famous **Baha'i Gardens** and the **Shrine of Ba'b** from above and below. Here are the words of Yona Yahav, the Mayor of Haifa, as he describes the 'eighth wonder of the world':

"Magnificently designed, nineteen terraces gently glide towards the quarter of the German Colony.



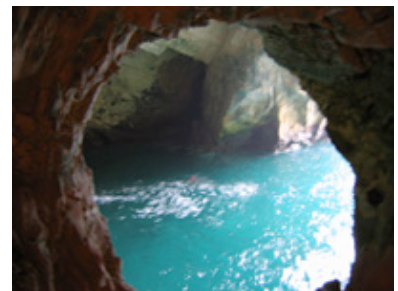
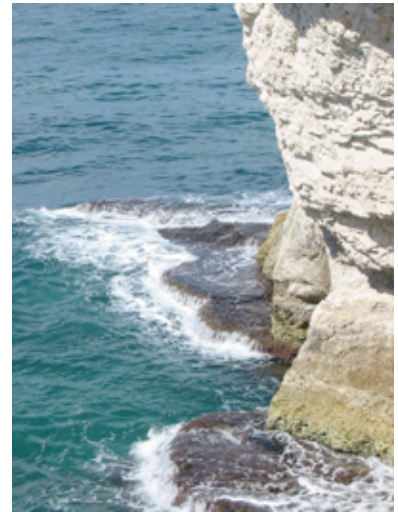
Spread down the northwestern slopes of Mount Carmel the Baha'i Gardens, colorfully planted in meditating beauty, carefully follow the hilly topography. Elaborate water fountains, sculptured ornaments, a wide variety of plants and other decorative elements are set in perfect harmony. Capturing the gaze and marking one's view from the ridge to the seaport is one of nature's major gifts to the City of Haifa - mountain meeting the sea along the golden sandy beaches. The unforgettably stunning panorama is laid out for the appreciation of all beauty lovers!"

We had dinner at a lovely restaurant in the **German Colony** at the base of the Baha'i Gardens, with a view of the gardens at night uphill and of the Bay of Haifa just a few blocks downhill. This area was originally constructed by the Templar Society in 1869, and has recently been renovated into a series of restaurants and boutiques while maintaining the original architecture of the structures.

Day 14 - Sunday 9/25/05

Rosh Hanikra

This morning's destination was **Rosh Hanikra**, the northwestern most point in Israel on the border with Lebanon. This location has always served as a passage point for trade caravans and armies passing from Lebanon and Syria to Israel, Egypt, and Africa. Alexander the Great built the first tunnel through the chalk cliffs for his army, and the British dug a larger tunnel during WWII for their Haifa - Beirut railway. In 1948, during the War for Independence, the Palmach blew up the railway bridges to thwart a possible invasion by the Lebanese army. The landscape is a white chalk cliff studded with flint nodules, extending into the sea. The grottos are cavernous tunnels formed by the action of the sea on the soft chalk. A manmade tunnel was constructed to connect the grottos and allow pedestrian access. We took a cable car down to the beach and explored the natural beauty of the area.





Akko

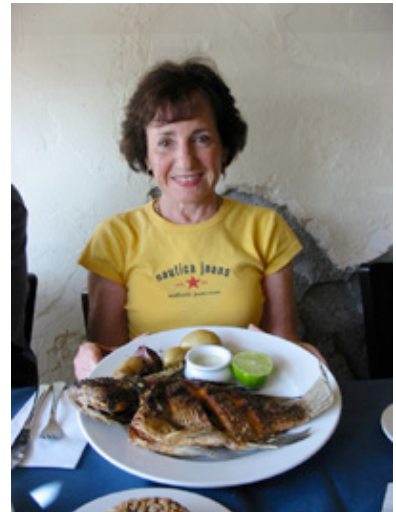
Our next stop heading south along the coast was the ancient city of **Akko**, also known as Acco or Acre. It was first settled in 1500 BCE and has changed hands often throughout its history. Here is a quote from the brochure: "The walls of the city, its fortresses and citadels, its churches and mosques and the other buildings within its boundaries, tell the history of the many rulers who governed it and fought for it, who built the city and glorified it. Acre's most prominent sites include ruins from the Hellenistic-Roman period and buildings from the Crusader and Ottoman periods: Al Jazar Mosque, the buildings of the Order of Saint John, the subterranean Crusader city, Khan Al Omdan, and the Turkish Baths. In Acre you will be able to see the fingerprints of many peoples and religious movements: the Canaanites, the Greeks, the Romans, the



Byzantines, the Crusaders, the Mamelukes, the Turks and the British. Acre's colorful Oriental markets, the city walls, the museums, the beaches, and the restaurants are a few more of the city's tourist attractions." A few interesting tidbits from the city's history: In 1799, Napoleon tried to take over the city and was repulsed by the Turks after a two-month siege - his only defeat in his campaign against the

Ottoman Empire. During the British Mandate, the Citadel was used as a **prison** for political prisoners. In 1947, the Irgun broke into the prison and succeeded in releasing 27 of the activists held there. Foreign journalists described it as "the greatest jail break in history." We particularly enjoyed our tours of the Ottoman Citadel, the Turkish Hamam (Bath), and the subterranean Crusader city including the Templar Tunnel which we used as a shortcut across town several times. The souk market was very colorful as well, and we spent time in a spice vendor's stall purchasing zatar (a middle eastern spice mix) and brass spice grinder, and the vendor threw in a bag of peppercorns for free.

Lunch was at a local restaurant on the water. My mother finally had the fish she had been craving - served whole, fried and then baked. John and I sampled a locally caught variety, filleted. My father, who does not eat fish, enjoyed a delicious dish of mushrooms in cream sauce with rice.



Visit with Yona & Rifka

Back at Asia and Gideon's home, we enjoyed a desert of Turkish halva with Yona Yahav (the Mayor of Haifa) and his wife Rifka. They are good friends of the Levitas and have become acquainted with my family over the years - in fact we spent several days with them in Paris many years ago. It was good to catch up.

Day 15 - Monday 9/26/05

Rehovot & Packing

The end of our trip approaches. We continued south along the coast back to Rehovot where we spent the afternoon packing for the trip home.



Mini Israel

In the late afternoon, we ate at a marvelous restaurant where we enjoyed chicken and couscous prepared in a Moroccan tagine.

Afterwards, we toured **Mini Israel**, a 13-acre theme park that displays hundreds of models that are exact copies of sites, buildings and landscapes from around the country. The models are built at a scale of 1:25, and are of architectural, historical, religious, archeological

and social importance. Colorful flowers, miniature vegetation, bonsai trees, and thousands of figures that are 7 cm tall surround them. This was a lovely way to wrap up our trip with a review of all the locations we had explored throughout the country on our adventure.



Day 16 - Tuesday 9/27/05

Travel Day

Back to the airport. It was a good thing we had three hours before our flight, as John was subjected to a very interesting (to those of us who weren't John) third-degree series of questions as we waited in the check-in line. Did he speak any Hebrew? Was he a member of any religious or politically affiliated organization? He clearly stated that he was not Jewish and was just here to tour Israel with his in-laws to see the country. At this point they took his passport and ticket and walked away for several nerve-racking minutes. Another more senior staff member appeared and continued the debriefing: Do you belong to a temple? Do you celebrate Jewish holidays at home? Which ones? Are you sure you don't belong to any organization? Are you sure you don't speak Hebrew? After a few more minutes of this completely unexpected and frankly worrisome line of questioning, they finally got to the standard questions about leaving your bag unattended and accepting wrapped packages from strangers. At that point we gratefully received our pink stickers and were allowed to move on in the check-in line. We're still not sure what the point of all that was. Just a bit of excitement to begin our trip home I guess.





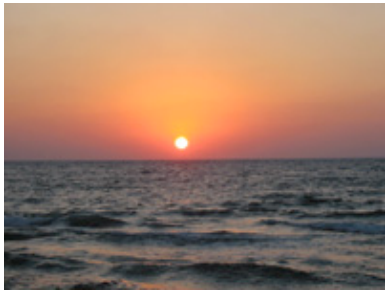
We arrived at the airport Los Angeles at 11pm, collected our suitcases without incident, and boarded the shuttle back to the hotel where the car was waiting. Then there was a two-hour drive back to San Diego. We finally reached home at 2am and were able to collapse into bed.

Trip Retrospective

My mother noted some of the positive changes that my parents had noticed throughout the country: "During our visit in Israel we covered 3,000 km in two weeks. The roads and freeways between cities and towns are in top condition. Many are lit at night to make driving easier and safer. We were impressed with the changes since we were there last. It made the travel comfortable, fast and even pleasurable. The landscape around the freeways is green and colorful with vegetation. Along the roads one can see memorial landmarks (sculptures) for groups and individuals that are a constant reminder of the sad reality in Israel. The artwork of the sculptures is varied in styles and sizes. Each one is very unique and represents a different artist. The beautiful forests (mostly planted by the **Jewish National Fund**) are covering the



countryside. Young forests on the Golan Heights and the Judean desert are very distinct. The Arab towns and cities that were villages before look very picturesque along the west Bank. The Bedouin villages around Be'er Sheva have changed too. You do not see the black tents anymore. Now, instead, there are real houses and the villages stretch to the south. In the Arava on the way to Eilat you can see many date palm groves along both sides of the road. Also many hot houses growing vegetables, especially peppers. In the past, the area was completely desolated. To sum up: The Israeli landscape is very impressive, even in the dry summer."



We had completely covered the country, from Eilat in the south on the shore of the Red Sea bordering Jordan, to the Golan Heights in the northeast bordering Syria, to Rosh Hanikra in the northwest bordering Lebanon, to Tel Aviv, Caesarea, Akko, and Haifa in the west on the shore of the Mediterranean. And we had explored the middle of the country too with trips to Jerusalem, Avdat and Timna and the Negev desert in the south, the Judean desert with Masada and the Dead Sea in the east, and the Sea of Galilee in the north. In reviewing our packed itinerary, my mother commented that it was like boot camp, but with much better food. It was an amazing trip and we made many wonderful memories!!