

THE KIBBUTZ MOVEMENT

Beginning in 1882, large groups of Jews began arriving in the Land of Israel—then called Palestine.

Moving to Israel is known as making *aliyah*, literally meaning 'going up' like an '*aliyah l'Torah*.' Jews of the First Aliyah were mostly religious families from Eastern Europe and Yemen looking to settle and work the land. Those who joined the Second Aliyah were largely young, secular Jews escaping anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe.

In 1909, a group of 12 people who had already proven themselves as determined and hard workers, convinced the Jewish National Fund to purchase some land for them, south of Lake Kinneret. They called their new home '*Degania*.' Despite the harsh conditions, the *chalutzim*—pioneers were able to make the land fertile and create a new way of living: meals were eaten together, jobs were rotated, and everything about their lifestyle was communal. Sound familiar? It's just like being at camp! They called this new way of living a '*kvutsa*.' As *kvutzot* became more popular, they were expanded to create a 'kibbutz' meaning 'gathering.' The main difference between the two was that a *kvutsa* had 10s of people, while a kibbutz had 100s of people.

Kibbutzim are unique to Israel and captured the hearts and minds of many; even the first Prime Minister of Israel, David Ben-Gurion, retired to Kibbutz Sde Boker in the Negev Desert! Even though kibbutzim have evolved over time, they can still be found all across the country and have played an important role in Israel's development.

Today, most kibbutzim look quite different; as opposed to sharing everything, many people own their own homes, where they eat meals as a family and not with the rest of the community. Whereas once kibbutzim focused on agriculture and farming, today many house factories or work in tourism, with a hotel on the kibbutz. If you lived on a kibbutz, what would you contribute to the communal living?



ISRAELI BIRTHDAY PARTY

My friends and I love birthday parties, so we decided to throw one for Israel celebrating Yom Ha'atzmaut, Israel's Independence Day. To give it an Israeli twist, we explored what normally happens at birthday parties in Israel. Then, we were ready to get started!

First, we decorated the room in Israel's colors—blue and white—and hung streamers and signs saying *Yom Huledet Sameach*, Hebrew for 'happy birthday.' We even put up stunning images of different regions of Israel, such as waterfalls from the North and desert landscapes from the South. We made sure Israeli music was playing as our guests arrived, especially songs by our favorite Israeli pop duo, Static and Ben El.

In Israel, the birthday person wears a crown of flowers at the party, so we each made our own. All it takes is some floral wire and strong tape, as well as leaves and flowers for decoration. We all took selfies wearing our new crowns and shared them on Instagram.

At the party, we took turns being lifted up on a chair by our friends while we danced and sang Israeli birthday songs. My favorite was *Eifo Ha'Ugah?* meaning 'Where is the Cake?' That reminded us to bring in the huge cake we had baked and frosted with the map of Israel. We counted out, placed on the cake, and carefully lit the candles. Together, we blew out the candles and each made a birthday wish. What would be your wish for Israel this year?



FRIDAY AT THE SHUK

On Friday morning, we went to Machane Yehuda Market, or the *shuk*, in Jerusalem. I didn't know what to expect...

'*An-a-vim*; juicy, sweet grapes, 5 shekels for a bunch.'

'Fresh baked Challah, 15 shekels each.'

'*Ag-va-nee-yot*; the best and cheapest tomatoes you'll find.'

The second I entered the *shuk*, all my senses sprung to life. Vendors were shouting out what they were selling—so loudly that my ears rang and I didn't know where to go first. The colors of the fruits, vegetables, nuts, and OMG—the gummies—were so vivid, I might have even drooled a little. Everything smelled so delicious and fresh...although I held my breath when I found myself in the fish section.

I tried to hold myself back from touching everything, but I just had to feel certain fruits that I had never even seen before. Watch out for the sabra fruit though, it's prickly! Some vendors even gave free samples. I had never had chalva before—who knew sesame seeds could be so tasty?!?

I heard that once the vendors close their stalls, the graffiti art on the shutters can be seen, the bars open, and the *shuk* is one of the most vibrant nightlife scenes in Jerusalem. I learned the Hebrew word *balagan*, meaning 'crazy, chaotic situation,' when I tried to buy some snacks before heading home. It was so cool to see how people shop at the shuk to get ready for Shabbat. It's hard to imagine that throughout Shabbat this whole place is closed and quiet. I wonder if it is more relaxed the rest of the week or just as awesome? I guess I'll need to go back again to find out!

What would you buy from the shuk to take home for Shabbat?



EASY HUMMUS RECIPE

Many call hummus the national food of Israel. The country is filled with restaurants whose menus feature nothing but plates of hummus with a variety of extras. Hummus can be an appetizer, a side dish, or a meal; it all depends on how hungry you are! Arab cuisine features hummus, and Israel and neighboring Arab countries have long tussled over who makes it the best. Lebanon even asked the European Union to recognize hummus as a uniquely Lebanese dish—but that hasn't stopped Israeli chefs from competing to win the Guinness Book of World Records' recognition as the makers of the largest platter of hummus.

Adapted from *Zahav*, by Michael Solomonov | Serves 8

Ingredients:

16 oz can of chickpeas
Juice of 1 ½ large lemons (about ½ cup)
2 to 4 cloves garlic, grated
1 ½ tsp kosher salt, more to taste
1 cup sesame tahini paste
½ tsp ground cumin, more to taste
Sweet paprika, for garnish
Olive oil, for serving
Chopped fresh parsley, for garnish

Instructions:

Drain the chickpeas and place in a bowl.

Make the tahini sauce. In a blender, combine the lemon juice, garlic, and ¼ teaspoon of salt. Let mixture sit for 10 minutes. Add tahini paste, 1 ½ teaspoons of salt and cumin, and blend until a thick paste forms. Add ⅓ to ⅔ cup ice water while blender is running, a little at a time, until sauce is smooth. You're looking for a smooth, creamy sauce.

Add the chickpeas to blender with tahini mixture. Blend until smooth and not grainy, stopping to scrape down the sides of the bowl occasionally. This blending may take upwards of about two minutes; just keep going until the mixture is creamy and fluffy, adding water if necessary. Taste for seasoning; add more salt, lemon juice, and/or cumin as needed. To serve, spread the hummus on a plate, dust with sweet paprika, drizzle with olive oil, and sprinkle with parsley. Store in an airtight container and refrigerate up to one week.



DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

Standing on a large sand dune in April 1909, the first families of the city that would become Tel Aviv drew lots to divide up the land. The place where they were standing became the house of the first mayor of Tel Aviv, Meir Dizengoff.

On May 13th, 1948, 400 people were invited to attend a ceremony to establish the Jewish State the following day. The site: the very same spot where Tel Aviv was first founded, now an art museum and perfect for an event of this kind. Its large, open space and thick walls with narrow and high windows resembled a bomb shelter—important for protecting guests from the War of Independence that had begun six months earlier. Guests were asked to dress smartly, arrive on time at 3:30pm, and, most importantly, keep it a secret—but that didn't happen! Large crowds of people were lining the street outside ready to witness history.

The next day, Friday afternoon, May 14th, 1948, guests were seated waiting for David Ben-Gurion to begin the ceremony promptly at 4pm so that everyone would be able to get home before the start of Shabbat. David Ben-Gurion read the Declaration of Independence, establishing a Jewish State to be known as the State of Israel. Then, Rabbi Fishman said the Shehechyanu blessing, and the audience stood up and sang *Hatikvah*, 'The Hope,' Israel's newly appointed national anthem. The Israel Philharmonic Orchestra played along from the floor above, as there was no room for them in the main hall. The whole ceremony took just 32 minutes and was recorded and broadcast live on *Kol Yisrael* (The Voice of Israel) radio station. Thousands of people cheered and danced in the streets outside, and Jews around the world celebrated the first sovereign Jewish state in nearly 2,000 years.

Today, tourists from near and far visit Independence Hall to connect with this historic moment. There, you can hear a recording of Ben-Gurion reading the Declaration of Independence and consider the aspirational goals upon which the Jewish State was founded. What might you include in a Declaration of Independence for the State of Israel?



DIG FOR A DAY

In Beit Guvrin National Park, in the center of Israel, lies one of Israel's many 'tels.' A *tel* is a mound of hill made up of layers of civilization built on top of each other. *Tel Maresha* is where the ancient city of Maresha lies buried. To go back in time and discover what once existed, we need to go underground.

It's not that people in those days lived underground; rather, in ancient times, people built with the natural resources they had at hand. In North America, they built with wood; in Israel, they built with stone. People dug into the ground and quarried out large stones for bricks. Once they had built their house above ground, they realized they had a huge hole under their house, which was perfect to create a basement. These underground basements were cooler during the summer and warmer in the winter than above ground, making them great for storage and other uses, such as a workspace for pressing olives or a columbarium (a structure where pigeons or doves are raised and kept).

About 2200 years ago (approximately the time of the Chanukkah story), a bizarre situation happened—for the first and only time in Jewish history. The Jewish leader at the time wanted to live only among Jews, and began converting everyone in the neighborhood. Those who wouldn't convert had to leave. Not wanting anyone else to live in their houses, they packed what they could take with them by hand and destroyed the rest, dumping all the debris into their basements.

Today, you can go on an archaeological dig there, basically excavating a 2200 year old garbage dump! You might find animal bones or pottery shards, and sometimes people even strike gold...or silver/bronze/copper/glass—though unlikely, as they took their precious possessions with them. None of what is found has been "planted there" so if you find something, you'll be the first person in 2200 years to touch it, and it will get washed, recorded, and analyzed. What from your bedroom, bunk, or home would you leave behind for someone to discover generations from now?



A TRIP TO THE DEAD SEA

During our trip to Israel, we went to visit the Dead Sea. It was a hot day, and I was really looking forward to chilling at the beach...but I discovered that the Dead Sea is no ordinary sea or beach! It is the lowest point on Earth, so expect your ears to pop on the way there and back.

The Hebrew name for the Dead Sea is *Yam HaMelach*—the Sea of Salt. In the Bible, Abraham warned his relative, Lot, that the city in which he lived, Sodom, near the shore of the Dead Sea, would be destroyed. Lot was to leave with all of his family and possessions and not look back. However, his wife turned around while the city was being destroyed and was turned into a pillar of salt! Indeed, while a 'normal sea' has a 3% salt concentration, the Dead Sea has 33%.

We changed into our bathing suits and headed down to the shore. Due to the levels of salt, we were careful not to splash so water wouldn't go into our eyes or anyone else's. I had heard that people float in the Dead Sea—and turns out, it's true! You just walk in, lie back, and float! Some people even read a newspaper while floating...although that might just have been for a cool photo on Instagram. You know how you aren't allowed to pee in the pool or lake at camp? Same goes at the Dead Sea, but for different reasons: it burns! We were even warned not to fart in there as it can hurt.

The area around the Dead Sea is flush with sulfur and other minerals. Before arriving in the area, I removed all of my jewelry so that it wouldn't get discolored. The minerals are known to be really great for your skin, so I joined others in digging mud out of the ground and spreading it all over myself. It was kind of gross but really fun. Once it dried, I rinsed it off, and my skin felt so smooth.

Going to the Dead Sea was a really unique experience. What is something you've experienced that surprised you or exceeded your expectations?



ISRAELI ELECTIONS

I happened to be in Israel during the last election, and I finally feel like I understand how its democratic system works. It is totally different from what I knew about the American system!

The most obvious difference is the number of political parties; in past elections, there have been dozens of parties hoping to get the vote. Each party makes a list of their candidates and the 'number 1' candidate will become the Prime Minister if...well, we'll get to that!

On election day, Israeli citizens above the age of 18 can vote at their local polling station—which is normally a school and the students have the day off. I went with my cousin who was voting, and I couldn't believe how many kids were outside, there to convince the public to vote for the party they most believed in. When I was their age, I didn't know anything about what the different parties stood for, so I was amazed by how informed they were and how much they care!

After checking in, you receive an envelope and go into a private polling booth. On the table in front of you are different piles of slips of paper, each representing a different party. There is even a blank slip of paper that you can choose if you don't believe in any of the parties running for government, but still want to make a point of exercising your democratic right to vote. You choose one slip of paper only, put it in your envelope, and then put your envelope in a special box. That's it—your vote is cast.

The crazy part is what happens once the votes are counted. There are 120 seats available in Israel's government, known as the Knesset. Israel uses 'proportional representation'—meaning that a party gets the number of seats in the Knesset according to the percentage of votes they get in the whole country—so long as the party 'passes the threshold' and gets the minimum number of votes required. For any party to hold the majority place in the government, they need to win at least 61 seats, but that has never happened in Israeli history! Instead, multiple parties need to get together to form a coalition to create a majority government. A coalition is when different parties agree to work and vote together. Generally, a party will join a coalition if there is also something in it for them such as an important position in the cabinet.

Like other countries, Israel's government debates issues and ideas that matter most to the public. In Israel, these often reflect the tension between being both a Jewish and democratic state. What issue would you bring to the floor at a Knesset debate?



BEACH CULTURE IN ISRAEL

The beauty of Israel resting by the Mediterranean Sea is the sheer number of beaches that we have. The Mediterranean coastline is just one body of water. There are amazing beaches around the Kinneret (Sea of Galilee)—although more pebbles than sand—the Dead Sea, and the Red Sea.

Israelis take beach life seriously. Sports is an example of a passion and hobby that flourishes on or near the beach. The sea is an awesome place for surfing, swimming, paddle boarding, boating, and all kinds of water sports. There are great coral reefs in the Red Sea in the south near Eilat, which makes for a stunning snorkeling experience—and that's just in the water! There are beachfront boardwalks, perfect for walking, running, or biking...or just for chilling, getting a coffee or ice cream, and watching the world go by. In recent years, outdoor gyms have appeared by the beaches more and more. It's great to work out and then relax and cool off in the sea.

You might think you need to be careful in the sea—if the current is too strong, or if it is jellyfish season—but a more imminent danger is being caught in the 'crossfire' of *matkot* (paddle balls). On the beach, it feels like it is Israel's national sport! I can't even imagine a time at the beach without hearing the sound of rubber balls hitting on paddles.

It's not all sports though. I love playing in the sand, building sand-castles or trying to create a sand sculpture. The vibe is always fun with music being played, and the best is when you hear vendors calling out '*artik!*' I always buy an '*artik*' or popsicle, on a hot, summer day.

I'm so lucky that I live so close to the beach! If you were here, what would you do at the beach?



WATER IN ISRAEL

Growing up, I was always told that Israel has a water shortage, but recently I heard that Israel now has an abundance of water. Is that true? What changed?

Well, to be fair, Israel had and still has a shortage of freshwater. Israel draws its freshwater from two sources: the Kinneret (Sea of Galilee) or by digging down into aquifers, which are large underground stores of water. Both of these sources are reliant on rainwater, and since it doesn't usually rain for most of the year in Israel, Israel had a water shortage...and needed to think outside the box.

To start, Israelis got really good at being water conscious and conserving water wherever they could: turning the tap off while brushing their teeth or switching off the shower when soaping up, etc. But that wasn't enough, and Israel needed more of a plan.

In the 1950s, drip irrigation technology was developed. Rather than running sprinklers over crops and grass all the time, rubber hosing with small holes meant that just the right amount of water went exactly where it needed to go. As well as using less water, it also produced more crops. Today, you can see examples of drip irrigation all over Israel, and the technology has been used all over the world to help in countries where drought strikes.

Drip irrigation was a great way to make more efficient use out of the water that Israel has—but how do you create more water? Israel is leading the way through water reclamation or recycling water, and desalinization.

Israel recycles over 85% of its water; the next best country to reclaim water is Spain, which recycles just under 20%—quite a difference! Recycled water that has been used for showering or even from the toilet is used for industrial needs and for agriculture.

Desalinization is taking salt water from the Mediterranean Sea, for example, and removing the salt so that it becomes like freshwater. Israel has a number of desalination plants along the coast and is a world leader in this field. Israel is also using this knowledge to help other countries in the world who are in need. Israel is even using this technology and desire to help others as a way to build relationships with countries with whom it doesn't have diplomatic relations—yet! In short, in the past seven decades, Israel has totally changed its water situation and is hoping to do the same for the world. What are some ways that you try to conserve water?



A VISIT TO PARK ARIEL SHARON

Just outside of Tel Aviv is a large, strange shaped mound. This used to be called the '*Hiriya*' and was a huge garbage dump site. '*Hir*' means good in Arabic, as this was once good land for farming. The early pioneers needed a garbage dump near the village of Hir, as it was convenient to the growing towns in the coastal plain.

As time went by and communities grew, so did the mound of trash, turning into a mountain. Everyone knew that when you drove out of Tel Aviv and past the *Hiriya*, you had to close your windows to avoid the stink! The constantly decomposing piles of trash attracted lots of birds, posing a dangerous threat to planes coming in and out of Israel's only international airport nearby. It was only when a number of international airlines threatened to stop flying to Israel that the *Hiriya* closed down. Beyond that, it was a major environmental problem, with rotting garbage seeping into the groundwater and a build up of unstable gases underground.

After years of cleaning up the damage and figuring out how to turn the toxic gases into usable ethanol, the old garbage dump has been transformed into a gigantic, public park built out of repurposed building materials and boasting flora native to Israel, such as olive trees, carob plants, rosemary bushes, and more. There is a huge, working recycling facility where people can enjoy a workshop and learn all about recycling.

This site has been renamed Park Ariel Sharon, in honor of the former Prime Minister, who decided that the former dump should become a park to be enjoyed by all rather than using the land to build a luxury housing complex. The park today is three times the size of New York's Central Park!

It's amazing how having an awareness of the environment and making environmentally friendly choices has made such an impact and a difference in the area. What are you doing or could you be doing to take better care of the environment?



A VISIT TO THE OLD CITY

I was so excited to explore inside the ancient walls of the Old City of Jerusalem. As we walked through one of the seven original gates, I learned that while what may lie inside is ancient, the walls of the Old City are 'only' 500 years old. That might sound like a lot to us, but for Israel, it's like they were built 'just yesterday!'

The Old City of Jerusalem is divided up into four quarters: Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and Armenian. One of the best places to see all four quarters is from a really cool observation point on the rooftops. From there you can see the sacred sites for each religion, including the Western Wall, the Temple Mount/Haram el Sharif, Al Aksa Mosque, Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the Stations of the Cross, and more. While from above, each quarter looks different, down on street level, they look quite similar. The everyday life of the Old City's residents seems to reflect the layers of history upon which today's neighborhoods are built.

We started our tour by walking through the Armenian Quarter. They have some beautiful ceramic tiles and plates for sale in their stores, as well as water and snacks which are both important when seeing the sites on a hot day.

From there we walked to the Jewish Quarter, exploring both the museums in the basements of the buildings, as well as the newer sites and stores. We ended our tour of the Jewish Quarter at the Kotel, or Western Wall. It was powerful to put a note in the Kotel and to think about our ancestors visiting the Temple. We were literally walking in the footsteps of thousands of years of history!

A few minutes walk away from the Kotel we found ourselves in the Muslim Quarter. The colors and smells of what was being sold and cooked there was incredible. The Muslim Quarter links to the Christian Quarter, which seemed a little more quiet and reserved in comparison.

As I explored all four quarters, I was fascinated by each quarter's unique identity and vibe, and the fact that people of all faiths and backgrounds live side by side in this shared city. I tried to buy something small from each quarter. What might you expect to find or buy as a souvenir from each of the four quarters of the Old City of Jerusalem?

