

Traveling with Jewish Taste®

Israel: Off the Beaten Track

By Carol Goodman Kaufman



In October, Joel and I traveled to Israel to celebrate Hadassah's centennial anniversary. After the excitement and hoopla of the three-day convention, we remained in the country to visit family. While we didn't get a chance to see everybody, we did manage to catch up with some cousins while at the same time getting an "off-the-beaten-path" look at Israel.

I hadn't been to Motza Illit in many years, but it looks exactly the way I remembered it: lush, green, and quiet – an idyllic retreat from the hustle and bustle of Jerusalem. But, life wasn't always so peaceful. During the riots of 1929, Arabs attacked Jews throughout the country, including the tiny village of Motza.

Many residents died, prompting its leaders to consider relocating. In 1934, twenty Jewish families established Motza Illit (meaning "Upper Motza") higher up on the same hill.

This village of fewer than a thousand residents, just west of the Jerusalem city limits, no longer functions as a moshav (a cooperative agricultural community), but is now more of a bedroom community. We enjoyed a wonderful dinner with cousins Ehud and Gila in their home overlooking the magnificent Judean hills and sparkling lights of the city.

One of their children, and his family, live in another section of the same house that Ehud's parents, among the moshav's founders, built decades ago. The young ones added a new branch to our growing family tree that night.

While Motza is not normally a beehive of activity, recent excavations have shone a spotlight onto the place. Anybody who knows Israel knows that one can barely begin to think about a construction project in the country without running into an ancient ruin. And, sure enough, at the end of December, Israel's Antiquities Authority announced the discovery of an ancient ritual site at Tel Motza during excavations being conducted prior to highway construction.

Unearthed were a temple, a public building, storehouses, silos, and a cache of sacred vessels from the early monarchy – before Hezekiah and Josiah, about 2,750 years ago.

The next day, cousin Hagai brought us to visit "Rose House," the offices of the Jerusalem Inter-Cultural Center, where he serves as the founding director. The JICC building is located on Mt. Zion in a beautifully rehabilitated stone house just south of the Armenian Quarter and sandwiched among the Jewish Yemin Moshe, mixed Abu Tor, and Arab Silwan neighborhoods.

Whitewashed walls and large windows let in the sunlight and a refreshing breeze as they provide a spectacular view of the area.

As does everything in Jerusalem, the building itself has an interesting history. South Africans Pauline and Albert Rose moved to Jerusalem in 1963 because Pauline had had a vision that God wanted her to establish a home and plant a garden on Mt. Zion. They found a derelict property on the hill, but because it was situated right in Jordanian gun sights, Israeli officials didn't want them to live there.

Complicating their plans was the fact that there was no road, so there was no way to bring building supplies to the site. Luckily for them in 1964 the Israelis built one to accommodate the visit of Pope Paul VI. The Roses lived there for decades, holding interfaith meetings. They bequeathed the house to the Jerusalem Foundation, which in turn invited the Jerusalem Inter-Cultural Center to establish their offices there in 2006.

An interesting side note: When the Israelis were set to capture the Old City during Six Day War, the troops had no Israeli flag with them. After serving them coffee, Pauline Rose gave them a bed sheet, blue paint, and a pole, from which they fashioned a flag. They planted that flag on the Tower of David on June 7, 1967.



Pomegranates growing in Reuven's virtual Garden of Eden

The Center's facility and its location are truly emblematic of both its history and its mission, which is "to assist the city residents, of various identities, in becoming active and responsible partners in the development of their communities." The JICC develops programs and partnerships that promote dialogue among the various constituencies, such as cultural competence training and cross-cultural conflict resolution.

In collaboration with the Jerusalem

Foundation, the JICC sponsors two programs. One is a Hebrew and Arabic language support program for professionals who need to speak the languages for their work. The second is a training program for project managers of joint Jewish-Arab enterprises.

A walled garden offers historical perspective and a calming atmosphere, despite all the hubbub surrounding it. While Hagai and yet another cousin, Nativ, guided us through the garden lovingly tended by volunteers, Nativ suddenly picked a sprig of sage and said, "This is my sage. I invented it."

Well, you could have knocked us over with a feather – or a sage leaf. Nativ works for the Israeli equivalent of the USDA and is the world's leading expert on several herbs. On our next stop in Israel, we got to learn about his work when he brought us to visit his library.

Nativ's "library" is actually acres of plantings. Rows upon rows of sage, oregano, basil, and other herbs spread from the Neve Ya'ar Research Center, in the Jezreel Valley.

As Director of the Unit of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants, his job is to introduce, select,

and breed wild plants from around the Middle East as sources of essential oils for a variety of uses, from nutrition to medicine. We learned that some countries prefer more oregano flavor in their za'atar, while other nations have other preferences. Nativ breeds the herb to suit the customer.

Nativ and his plant biologist wife, Olga, live on Kfar Yehezkel, one of the very first settlements in the Jezreel Valley, and only the second moshav in the country. Second Aliyah halutzim (pioneers) named the agricultural moshav after Iraqi statesman and philanthropist, Yehezkel Sassoon. Artifacts from the moshav's early days are visible everywhere, especially in their home. We saw old butter churns, spinning wheels, and, plows, among other things. "Antiques Roadshow" would have a field day.

Another interesting side note: Prominent Israeli author Meir Shalev is a cousin on Nativ's father's side. Much of his novel, *Blue Mountain*, is based on people and incidents at Kfar Yehzkel. It was great fun matching the places and people with scenes in the book, and I am convinced my cousin was the inspiration for one character in the book.

Next stop for a long overdue visit was Kibbutz Beit Zera, on the southern shore of Lake Kinneret. Cousin Reuven and a bunch of kids and grandkids had gathered for our visit, making the normally quiet rural life buzz with noise and activity.



Joel and I amid the garden at the Jerusalem Inter-Cultural Center



The magnificent Judean Hills



"Rose House," the offices of the Jerusalem Inter-Cultural Center

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About fifteen years ago, Reuven developed a passion for exotic plants, and now has fifty different trees in his backyard, many of which produce scrumptious fruits. He keeps a commercial grade juicer on his kitchen counter that furnished us with several varieties of refreshment that day, all from his own produce.

While picking (and eating) everything from figs to kumquats in his yard at the kibbutz, I felt as if we had entered the Garden of Eden. And, on seeing Reuven's pomegranates – the size of small cantaloupes (seriously) – I was convinced.

Generations after leaving Europe, we continue to maintain the Katz family connection despite the geographic and “second-cousin-once-removed” distance. This ongoing relationship has enriched our family history as it has deepened our understanding of, and appreciation for, the developing story of Israel.

I recommend taking a trip “off the beaten path.”



Home-grown scrumptious fruits graced cousin Reuven's table



A view of Kfar Yehezkel, one of the very first settlements in the Jezreel Valley



Figurines found at the Tel Motza excavation

Israeli Salad

Crisp, refreshing, and healthy, this salad is a perfect antidote to all the heavy foods of the holiday, and is good any time of year.



Ingredients:

3 tomatoes
3 English cucumbers
1 red bell pepper
1 orange pepper
1 yellow pepper

1 green pepper
3 scallions
olive oil
fresh lemon juice
salt
pepper

Directions:

- Chop the vegetables into small pieces. (Israelis pride themselves on the tiny size of the dice, so if you want to have a genuine Israeli salad, use a very sharp knife.)
- Immediately before serving, season with olive oil, lemon juice, salt, and pepper.



Part of cousin Nativ's "library" of herbs

New Program: Study in Jerusalem

Hadassah Academic College is an internationally recognized and fully accredited public institution of higher learning specializing in career focused undergraduate and graduate degree programs in four schools: Health and Life Sciences, Computer Sciences, Design and Communication, and Management.

“Case Study Jerusalem” is a summer study program open to students from around the world who are enrolled at an accredited university or college. The Program offers a deep understanding of Jerusalem's complex fabric while allowing participants to experience the vibrancy of everyday life in this world capital, sacred to Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.

The program will be held from June 27 through July 29. Courses include “Jerusalem in the Middle East Conflict;” “Jerusalem as a World Tourist Destination;” “The Challenge of Water in a Dry Middle East;” and “Jerusalem through Photography.”

Students of Industrial Design are invited to enroll in a two-week study workshop to be held from May 29 through 30 in cooperation with the Royal College of Art, London.

Participants will learn together with Israeli students as well as visit museums and industrial design workshops around Israel.

All studies take place at the college's historic campus located in the heart of downtown Jerusalem. Courses include both classroom instruction and study tours around Israel.

Hadassah Academic College of Jerusalem has opened an International School for Overseas Students offering accredited short-term courses taught in English in a variety of academic subjects.

For full information please visit www.hadassah.ac.il/mainen.html or contact: global@hadassah.ac.il.