

Our First Trip to Israel (and Jordan)

By Larry Martin

Part 7 – Re-entering Israel: Jerusalem and Tel Aviv

[Note: This is the final part of a travelogue for the trip my wife and I took to Israel and Jordan, October 14-28, 2017. Pictures from the internet have a red border; all the others were taken with my iPhone. All 7 parts are posted at <http://www.lakesidepress.com/IsraelTrip.html>.]

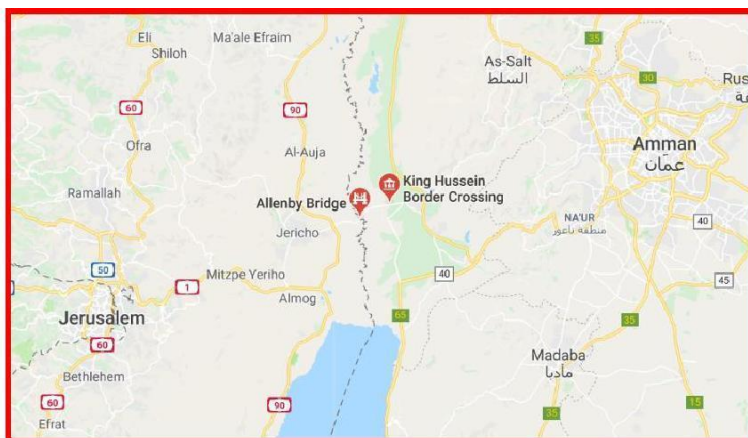
October 25, 2017

After leaving the Movenpick Dead Sea resort in Jordan we traveled back across the border into Israel. However, as explained below, actually not Israel according to Jordan's geography. There are 3 border crossing points between Israel and Jordan, shown below on the map.

Northern: Sheikh Hussein Crossing, 90 km from Amman Middle:

Allenby/King Hussein Bridge, 57 km from Amman

Southern: Yitzhak Rabin Crossing, 324 km from Amman, connecting the two Red Sea resorts of Eilat and Aqaba.

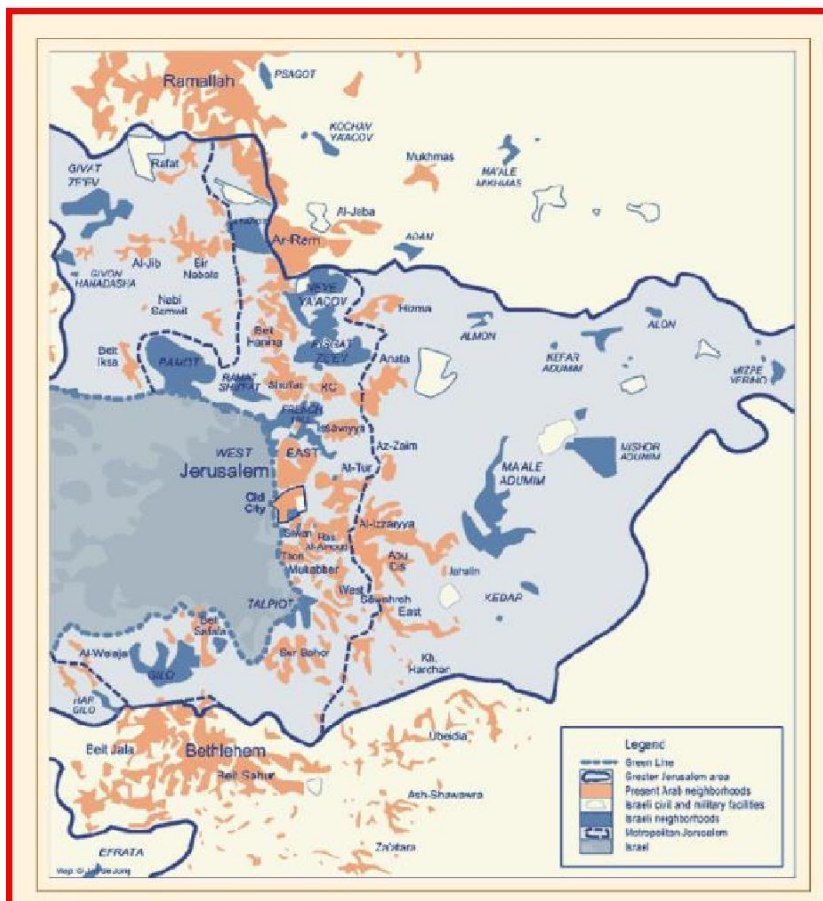


Our tour group entered Jordan October 22 via the northern crossing point (discussed in Part 4). We left Jordan via the middle crossing, over the Allenby/King Hussein Border Crossing, which includes the Allenby Bridge. However, this bridge does not lead into Israel proper, but into the disputed West Bank. Jordanians do not recognize the land over the bridge as Israel, and we were told Israeli citizens cannot use it to enter Jordan; they must go through the northern or southern border crossings. Being foreign tourists, we were able to use the Allenby/King Hussein Crossing. If you want more detail there are web sites devoted to the crossings, e.g.

<https://thematraveler.com/travel-tips/how-to-cross-from-israel-to-jordan-or-jordan-to-israel/>.

After saying goodbye to our Jordanian guide Daoud, we again went through a change of bus, driver and guide. Before re-boarding the new bus, we had to make five stops at various booths in the Israeli-controlled section, with passport in hand. Not sure why, but if you just follow the line and (at least with a tour group) it goes smoothly.

Once seated on the new bus, with Jonathan back as our guide, we drove straight to Jerusalem. Jerusalem is actually a sprawling metropolis of about a million people, with distant suburbs, some of which are controlled by Israel and some by the Palestinians. This picture was taken on the bus as we passed by a Jerusalem suburb.



I wish I could explain or understand the geopolitical makeup of

Jerusalem, but I don't think it's possible unless you live there, and even then I'm not so sure. Before the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, Israel controlled only "West Jerusalem," which did not include the Old City.

After the war Israel took over "East Jerusalem," which includes the Old

City (see Part 1) and many of the suburbs — but not all of them. Bethlehem, for example, is controlled by the Palestinian authority.

This map of East Jerusalem, taken from the internet, shows the scattered makeup of the area: Arab-controlled neighborhoods or suburbs side by side Israeli-controlled sections.

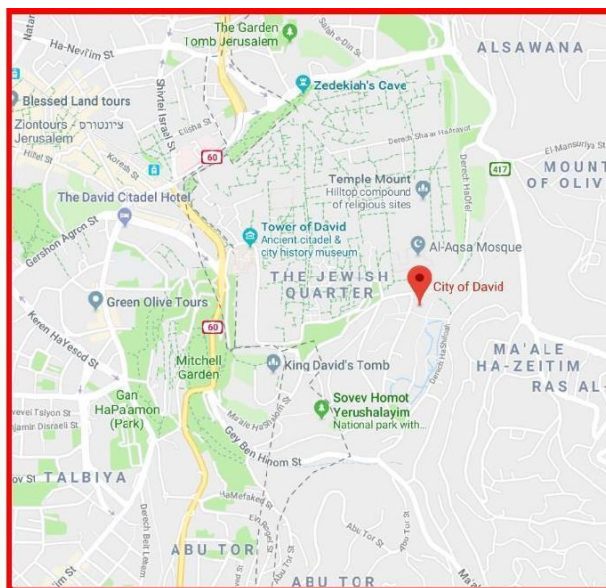
<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/map-of-jewish-and-arab-neighborhoods-in-east-jerusalem>

For further history, here is the first paragraph of the Wikipedia entry for East Jerusalem. Bolded italics added. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East_Jerusalem

East Jerusalem is the sector of Jerusalem that was occupied by Jordan in 1948 and had remained out of the Israeli-held West Jerusalem at the end of the 1948–49 Arab–Israeli War. It includes Jerusalem's Old City and some of the holiest sites of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, such as the Temple Mount, Western Wall, Al-Aqsa Mosque, Dome of the Rock and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, as well as a number of adjacent neighborhoods. ***Israeli and Palestinian definitions of it differ***; the Palestinian official position is based on the 1949 Armistice Agreements, while the Israeli position is mainly based on the current municipality boundaries of Jerusalem, which resulted from a series of administrative enlargements decided by Israeli municipal authorities since the June 1967 Six-Day War. Despite its name, East Jerusalem includes neighborhoods to the north, east and south of the Old City, and in the wider definition of the term even on all these sides of West Jerusalem.

One thing I learned on this trip is that the politics, belief systems, and geographic reality in Israel and the bordering lands are much more complicated than most Americans realize, especially so for “East Jerusalem.” A “two-state solution” would supposedly include “East Jerusalem” in Palestine. Apart from the fact that Israel would not accept a hostile nation occupying land immediately adjacent to West Jerusalem, there seems to me zero chance that the two sides could ever even agree what constitutes “East Jerusalem.”

Our first stop in Jerusalem was Emek Tzurim National Park located in section of Jerusalem known as the City of David, adjacent to the Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem's Old City. The Park is actually an archeological dig, with a section set up for people to participate in sifting for ancient artifacts. The web site advertises “Fun for the whole family.” <http://www.cityofdauid.org.il/en/tours/mount-olives/template-mount-sifting-project>



After a brief lecture about archeological “finds,” we enjoyed a hands-on experience in this sifting. We were told to look for anything that might be ancient— old bones, pottery fragments, etc. The artifacts found could date from the time of Jesus, Herod, Tiberius, et. al. The first picture below shows the archeologist leader explaining the 6 types of “finds”: glass, mosaics, pottery, bones, special stones and coins. The next one shows the area where we did the sifting. The young woman in the green shirt helped us sort out the various fragments, some of which are displayed on the dish.

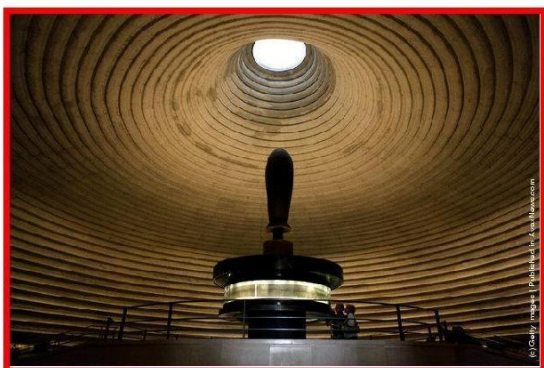


We stayed at Emek Tzurim about an hour and a half, then went for lunch in a local church set up to handle multiple tour busses and hundreds of tourists. (It was buffet style and rather chaotic; afterwards we recommended the lunch venue be removed from the itinerary.) After lunch we drove to the Israeli Museum, a vast complex where you could easily spend a whole day or longer. On the way we passed the Knesset (below right), the seat of Israel's parliament.

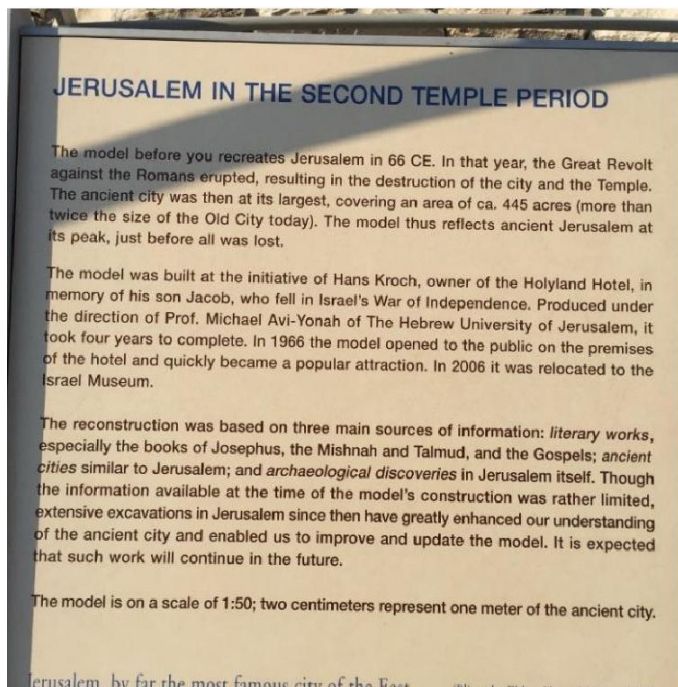


Above left: sign to the Knesset. Above right, the Knesset.

Below left: Aerial view of the Israel Museum, with the Knesset in the rear. Below, right: dome of structure at the Israel Museum that houses the Dead Sea Scrolls (arrow in the aerial photo). The building is dimly lit to protect the parchments, and no pictures were allowed inside. The two bottom pictures are from the internet, showing the inside the dome structure and a close up of the central display case for the scrolls.



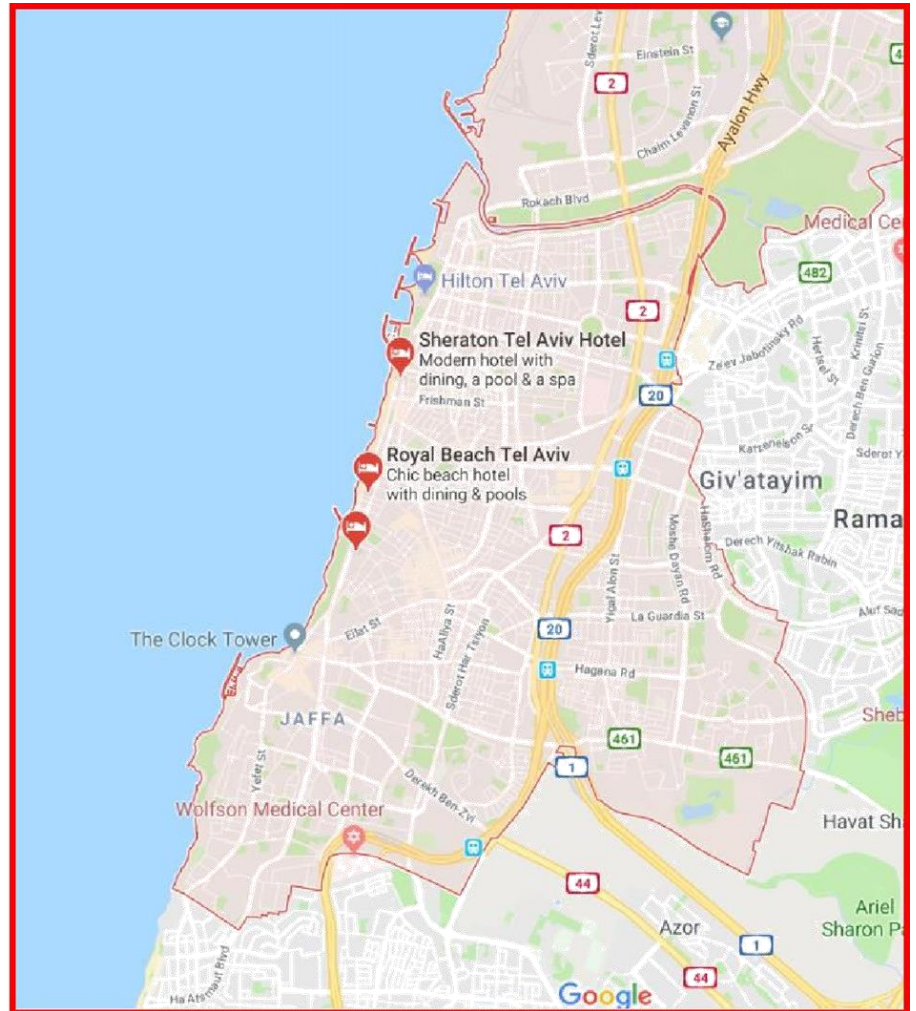
The Israel Museum also has a large outdoor model of Jerusalem's Old City, showing the Second Temple, a huge structure in its day.



Tel Aviv – October 25-27

From Jerusalem we drove one hour to Tel Aviv and in late afternoon checked into the Prima City Hotel, which is only a block from the beach. On maps Tel Aviv is often written as Tel Aviv-Yafo, Yafo being another name for the ancient city of Jaffa, now part of Tel Aviv.





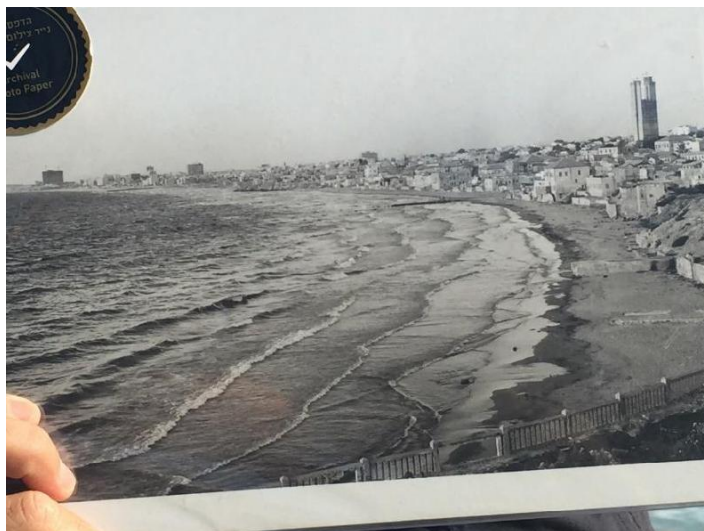
Tel Aviv is a Mediterranean City, with a large beach, many tourists and an active night life. The city is popular with Europeans; it is like a combination of Miami Beach and New York City: beaches lined with high rises, bustling sidewalks, lots of traffic, and (we are told), very expensive real estate. So expensive, in fact, that the cost of housing is a far greater concern to most locals than the Palestinian conflict.

Jonathan led a morning tour on Oct 26 to Jaffa and the Sarna neighborhood, then we were on our own for the afternoon. The Road Scholar trip officially ended that evening, with a farewell dinner at the hotel. Many of the flights home left late on Oct 26th and early on Oct 27th. (Several members of our group had to check out and leave for the airport at 1 a.m.) Because our flight to Newark did not leave until 11 p.m. on Friday, October 27, we had two full days to explore Tel Aviv, which was fortunate, for we got to see a lot of the city. Like Manhattan, Tel Aviv is fun to walk around, and we averaged seven miles a day walking the streets and the beaches.

Panoramic view of Tel Aviv from the Azrieli Center, a skyscraper complex shown below, left. Below, right, skyscrapers in Tel Aviv.



Below, views of Tel Aviv looking north from the old city of Jaffa; photo on left is from 1964, showing first skyscraper going up, the Shalom Meir Tower (completed 1965). The one on right was taken with my iphone.



You can look up “top 10 things to do or see in Tel Aviv” and we probably did half of them in just two days. The number one thing, in my opinion, is just to walk the city, to see how vibrant and modern it is. As cities go, it seems to be a success. You have no sense whatever that the city and the country are at continual risk of attack by hostile forces. We saw many young IDF soldiers on the streets, including young women who appeared to be in their teens (service is mandatory for both men and women right after high school).

Young IDF soldiers taking a break in Sarona neighborhood of Tel Aviv.



Before Tel Aviv there was Jaffa, a seaside ancient city with civilizations dating back thousands of years. Originally named Ahuzat Bayit, Tel Aviv was founded by 60 families in 1909 as a Jewish neighborhood near Jaffa. In 1910, the name was changed to Tel Aviv, meaning “hill of spring.” The name was found fitting as it embraced the idea of a renaissance in the ancient Jewish homeland. *Aviv* is Hebrew for “spring,” symbolizing renewal, and *tel* is a man-made mound accumulating layers of civilization built one over the other.

From the beginning Tel Aviv’s founders planned a clean and modern city, one in contrast to what they perceived as the squalid and unsanitary conditions of neighboring Arab towns. A marketing pamphlet advocating for its establishment in 1906 stated:

“In this city we will build the streets so they have roads and sidewalks and electric lights. Every house will have water from wells that will flow through pipes as in every modern European city, and also sewerage pipes will be installed for the health of the city and its residents.”

Like any large, cosmopolitan city, there is no one site to define the city, and first-time visitors must choose which areas and sites to visit. Jaffa, for sure, but after that where you should go depends on factors like how much time you have, the weather (walking the beaches not good in the rain), availability of transportation (some sites are outside the city), how much you like to walk, and the day of the week (many places are closed on the Sabbath). Here is our short list of sites we managed to visit.

Jaffa

A morning tour the day after arrival started in Jaffa, one of the must-see tourist sites in Tel Aviv. The first civilization in Jaffa dates to 7500 B.C. In 636 A.D. Jaffa was conquered by Arabs and served as a Mediterranean port. Jaffa was captured in June 1099 by the Christians during the First Crusade, then

Saladin conquered Jaffa in 1187, then King Richard the Lionheart conquered it in 1191, then...



As I stated earlier, Jaffa is now just part of Tel Aviv, like Greenwich Village is part of New York. This internet picture is the skyline of Jaffa, taken from the sea. After 1909, immigration by mostly Jewish refugees led to Tel Aviv growing larger than Jaffa. In 1950, two years after the establishment of the State of Israel, Tel Aviv and Jaffa were merged into a single municipality.

Jaffa's iconic structure is a bell tower (seen in the internet photo above, and close up below), but it also contains churches, a mosque (lower left photo), a synagogue, narrow streets and some places that make you want to stop and take a picture. The Floating Orange Tree is one of those places, basically a live orange tree inside a large earthenware jug elevated off the ground, hung by metal chains. It was created by Israeli artist Ran Morin and placed in a Jaffa courtyard in 1993.

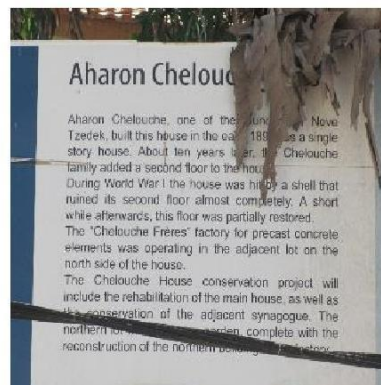


We never passed up the opportunity for a group photo. Our guide Jonathan is at far right in the front row.



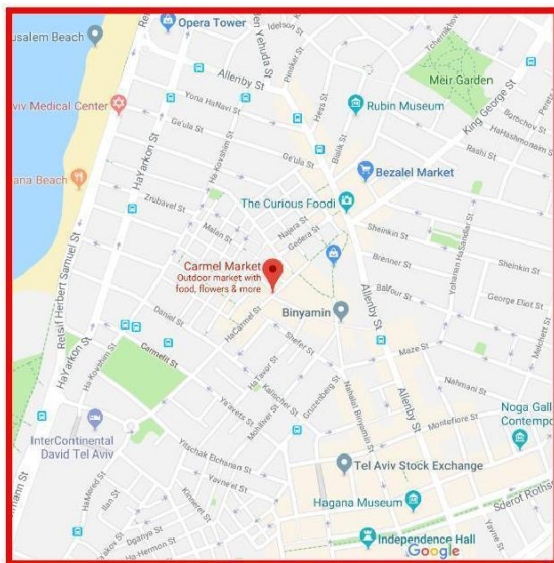
Neve Tzedek

Though Tel Aviv was founded in 1909, the city's first neighborhoods were actually established in 1886, starting with Neve Tzedek. These pictures were taken on a stroll thru Neve Tzedek, which you can see is close to modern skyscrapers. Aharon Chelouche was a landowner and jeweler, a major figure in Jaffa's 19th century Jewish community and one of the founders of Neve Tzedek neighborhood. No. 32 Aharon Chelouche St. was his home.



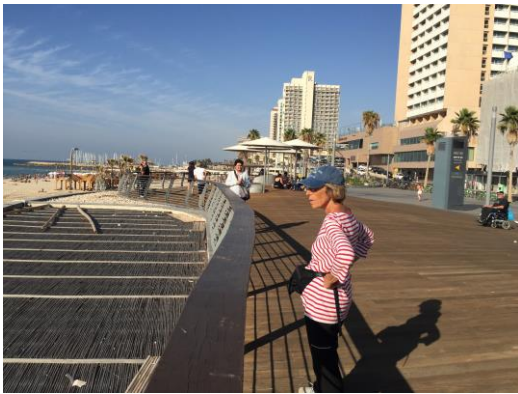
Carmel Market

This is a huge and very lively outdoor market, as crowded and varied as any you'll find in other foreign cities. It shuts down before sundown Friday for the Sabbath.

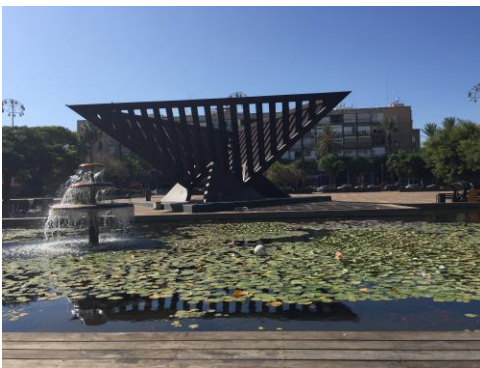


Beaches

Tel Aviv's extensive beachfront is lined with boardwalks and many eateries, and is a great place to walk and enjoy the scenery.



Rabin Square



Rabin Square is a large public city square in the center of Tel Aviv, the site of numerous political rallies, parades, and other public events (far left). On right, memorial at site of the shooting.

Originally known as Kings of Israel Square, it was renamed Rabin Square following the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin on November 4, 1995. Rabin was assassinated by 25-year-old Yigal Amir, an orthodox Jew and right-wing extremist who opposed the signing of the Oslo Accords. Rabin had been attending a mass rally in support of the Accords. When the rally ended, he walked down the city hall steps towards the open door of his car, at which point Amir fired three shots with a semi-automatic pistol. Rabin was taken to a nearby hospital and died on the operating table less than 40 minutes later, due to blood loss and a punctured lung. Amir was seized by Rabin's bodyguards, later tried, found guilty, and sentenced to life imprisonment. The square itself is surrounded by the non-descript city hall building to the north, and includes several modernist pieces of sculpture. The above picture on the right is a monument at the site of the assassination. We went there because I read about it in the guidebook, but except for its historical significance, there's not much to see.

Authentic Israeli Falafel Joint

As in...no English spoken here. And no signs in English. We went there with a local tour the morning after our Road Scholar trip officially ended. The tour guide ordered for us. I am not a fan of hummus and other falafel ingredients, and asked if I could just get “meat and bread.” “Yes, said the man behind the counter, in Hebrew. Schnitzel.” So that’s what I ate. Bread and schnitzel.



Tel Aviv’s White City



The White City refers to a collection of over 4,000 Tel Aviv buildings built in the Bauhaus or International Style of architecture. They were designed in the 1930s by German Jewish architects who immigrated to what was then the British Mandate of Palestine. They had fled the Nazis. As result, Tel Aviv has the largest number of Bauhaus buildings of any city in the world; they are collectively called the White City. In 2003 UNESCO proclaimed Tel Aviv’s White City a World Cultural Heritage site, as “an outstanding example of new town planning and architecture in the early 20th century.” We saw several of these buildings walking Tel Aviv’s streets (two photos above were taken on HaYarkon St.). To show better examples of this architecture I’ve copied three photos from the internet (next page).

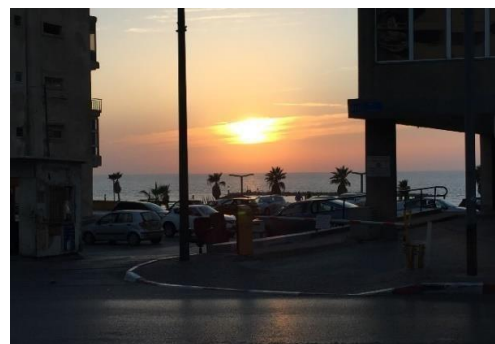


Sunset

Just before sunset on our final day in Tel Aviv we strolled along the beach boardwalk, back to the hotel. It was about 5:30 and we came upon a Gelateria, an ice cream shop. The proprietor was closing up, despite the throngs who still filled the boardwalk. “Why so early?” we asked. “Shabbat,” he said meaning the sabbath. To keep his Kosher certificate he had to close before sundown. The Kosher certificate is important to many places of business, particularly hotels, restaurants and, yes, ice cream shops. He pointed to the certificate in the window (far left in the storefront photo; enlarged in the right photo).



I took one last picture before entering the hotel and getting ready for our flight home. The sun is setting west, over the Mediterranean Sea.



Epilogue & Opinion

Trump Recognizes Jerusalem as Israel's Capital and Orders U.S. Embassy to Move

By MARK LANDLER DEC. 6, 2017

One outcome of this trip is that events affecting the region are now more understandable, like Trump's December 6, 2017 announcement of plans to move the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Explanations, discussions and arguments after his announcement leaned heavily on history, geography and Mid East politics, and I had a much better grasp on all this having just visited Jerusalem.

The trip was the most eye-opening and educational of all the Road Scholar trips we've taken. It helped form some opinions, and reinforce others. It is fair to ask, "Just two weeks in the Holy Land and you have opinions?" Well, no, not just those two weeks, of course. But they helped, and also spurred me to do some research on the history of the Israeli-Palestine conflict.

You can go to Israel and come away with information to support any belief system, any historical understanding, any opinion about who is right and who is wrong regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. My own opinion is that there will never be true peace in this region, because the positions of the Palestinians and Israelis are forever worlds apart.

What Israel's leaders want is to remain a strong democracy – economically and militarily – with Jerusalem as its capital, including East Jerusalem. To maintain this position Israel must also maintain a large-majority Jewish population.

What the Palestinian leaders want is redress for the wrongs they feel have been done to them, which date back to the early twentieth century when a large number of Jews began immigrating to the Holy Land. For the Arab leaders, the only truly acceptable redress is a single Palestinian nation with Israel nowhere on the map. This goal has not really changed since Israel became a nation in 1948, and will forever prevent any true and peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The basic divide far transcends recent Israeli settlements in the West Bank. It goes back a hundred years or more. The history is dense, and can be mined to support any pre-formed opinion. For me, the history is fully supportive of my assessment. For anyone interested, I expound on this situation in a lengthy opinion piece, linked separately on this website.