

From the blog, "Onward, from home to homeland: Tel Aviv'n with Cleveland Onward Israel 2014," by Daniel Pearlman, Cleveland Onward Israel Participant and Social Media Fellow 14.'

June 23, 2014

The meanings of time

Israel is full of contradictions. It is old and new; traditional and modern; religious and secular. It is the beauty of the Mediterranean sunset and the glory of the rising sun over Masada. It is ageless; a country just 66 years old, yet thousands of years young.

Ageless...

Just like time itself, Israel's history has so much joy, so much agony, and so much strife. Depending on who you ask and when you ask them, Israel means something different to everyone. It is the Zionist dream; the phoenix that rose from the ashes of the Holocaust; the start-up nation; the only democracy in the Middle East. It is a beautiful vacation destination; a multicultural and pluralistic society; a Jewish State. It is home to many people, and the homeland of many more.

But time changes. Just like the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Mamluks, and Ottomans, things come and go. Plus, with a history spanning millennia, it can be hard to think in the immediate present. In the grand scheme of things, what is the significance of, say, a mere hour of time?

You'd be surprised.

Within just one hour, you can drive from Tel Aviv's discotheques to Jerusalem's religious sites. In sixty minutes, span the course of human history by traveling from Jerusalem's Old City walls to Tel Aviv's White City, two of my favorite UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Or, if you prefer sand over sacred, spend less than an hour of your day driving from Tel Aviv to the ancient ruins of Caesarea. If you're up for it, drive a few minutes more to reach Israel's third largest city, Haifa. Israel may be an ancient land, but it certainly isn't a large one. Traveling to other parts of the country couldn't be easier, and I've already taken advantage of my free time to explore other areas.

As I briefly mentioned in my previous blog post, Cleveland Onward Israel participants spent last Tuesday in Jerusalem, where we learned about different approaches to Judaism and Jewish life. In many ways, our day in Jerusalem represented the diversity of Israel. We started our day at the nondenominational, pluralistic Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies, where we approached traditional Jewish texts with a modern outlook. We then ate at Mahane Yehuda Market in the heart of Jerusalem, where we witnessed Muslim Arabs, secular Jews, Christian Arabs, and observant Jews shopping side-by-side. Later, we went to a very religious Jewish neighborhood to hear about a different perspective of Judaism.



Lunch at Mahane Yehuda Market in Jerusalem.

Last Friday, I went on a tour of Caesarea, Rosh Hanikra, Akko, and Haifa with a dozen other Cleveland Onward Israel participants. In Israel, the workweek starts on Sunday and usually ends on Thursday, making Friday the perfect excursion day. We booked a tour through a private company, iBookIsrael, making our trip cheap, easy, and fun.



The ancient Roman theatre in Caesarea, now equipped with modern amenities like lighting.

Our first stop, Caesarea, is a unique place. Built by Herod the Great as a magnificent port city before the first century CE, much of it has been preserved for centuries, although wars and earthquakes have taken their toll. Today, it acts as a reminder of historical Roman - and Jewish - ties to the land.



A cool Caesarea selfie overlooking the Mediterranean/King Herod in all of his glory

Our next stop was Rosh Hanikra, a national park with beautiful grottos near the Israel-Lebanon border. After seeing Peter Greenberg's *Israel: The Royal Tour* a few months ago, I've desperately wanted to visit this area. I'm so happy that I was able to go!



Rosh Hanikra is significantly closer to Beirut than to Jerusalem./Beautiful!

We had to take a cable car to get to the grottos. At a sixty degree incline, it is the steepest cable car in the world!



Lebanon is just a few hundred feet away.

After a short cable car ride, we arrived at the grottos:



While it was hard to leave such an amazing place, we were excited to explore the ancient Arab city of Acre next. Also known as Akko, this is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world. Today, it is a mixed city, with Arabs and Jews living together in peace.



Our last stop was the beautiful city of Haifa. Even though we were only there for a half hour, it was my favorite stop. The Bahá'í Gardens were absolutely stunning. For a flawless site like this, every photo that I took was postcard quality.



I want to end by asking you a favor. I found a whole new world by going an hour out of my way. What if you do the same? Explore *off the beaten track*. Take a different route to work tomorrow. Eat at another restaurant this week. Enjoy a new experience, without going too far. I'm incredibly fortunate to be able to travel the world this summer, but I still haven't explored my own backyard in Cleveland, Ohio. Sometimes, you don't have to go too far to have a life-changing experience. So what are you waiting for? *Yalla!*