



Fifth Question: Why Not Israel?

A Passover exodus to land of milk and honey
March 18, 2010 - Elyse Glickman, Jewish Exponent Feature

When it comes to Passover travel in Israel, it is a reality that the itinerary for most people will include the Western Wall, the Dead Sea Scrolls and visits to Israeli relatives.



However, in the era of Lonely Planet guides and the Travel Channel, it comes as no surprise that savvy modern travelers are now demanding ways to experience a place that is decidedly not, "If it's Tuesday, it must be Tel Aviv."

With the demand for more customizable travel to Israel, several progressive tour companies and local guides have responded -- well aware that taking Israel's roads less traveled will ultimately make a journey to the Jewish state satisfy far beyond its promise.

Since 1993, Ronen Paldi, president of the travel company Ya'lla Tours USA (www.yallatours.com), has built his business on the fact that his clientele were graduates of Israel. Therefore, Ya'lla Tours (meaning "Let's Go!" in Hebrew) takes the approach of creating highly specialized trips to Israel as well as Egypt, Morocco, Turkey and other countries with deep Jewish roots.

"While the majority of my clients select tours that cover traditional destinations within Israel, there are always going to be a certain number of people who want to see Israel in a very different way," says Paldi.

"This includes searching for opportunities to do Passover tzedakah, such as helping homeless people find a seder. There is also a trend of people traveling to Israel to observe a secular Judaism seder or celebrating seders in a natural setting away from the city.

"These new ways to observe Passover in Israel enable Americans to find new personal meaning within a holiday that focuses on the exodus from slavery and such shared Jewish values as tolerance, open-mindedness and the freedom of choice."

In addition to Israel, Paldi's company is also putting together a re-enactment of the Exodus, via a seder that takes place in Cairo, followed by a drive in the Sinai Desert, as well as specialized journeys to, of all places, Cuba.

Individualized Itineraries

While Yael Adar, owner of Gems in Israel (www.GemsinIsrael.com), also specializes in custom private tours of Israel, she is also dialed in with 300 hotels across Israel, as well as a myriad of places that until now were best-kept local secrets.

"You can't really get to know a country just by visiting the major tourist attractions," she stresses. "My goal is to enable others to see the Israel I know and love. Since 1999, I have made that happen by working closely with a variety of people, including tour guides, to develop very individualized itineraries, whether it is for Passover, a Bar or Bat Mitzvah or any other special event."

Coral Gables, Fla.-based travel-industry veteran Susan Weissberg (president of Wylly's Professional Travel; www.wyllystravel.com) is also well-qualified to help plan an ultimate Israel trip, including places for Passover. With nearly 40 years of firsthand knowledge of Israel, including 10 years as a travel agent in Tel Aviv, she has helped plan hundreds of individual itineraries, ranging from modest and intimate packages to all-out luxury expeditions that helped her earn the Condé Nast Specialist Award in Israel/Middle East for the last four years.

Israel-based Eddie's Travel (www.koshertravelers.com) is a travel provider dedicated to offering customers top-level vacation options in Israel and around the world. This Passover, the company, which is also making its mark in the world of high-quality kosher cruises, will be running two programs -- one in Jerusalem and the second in the Northern Israeli city of Tiberias.

The Jerusalem program is being hosted at the Ramat Rachel Hotel, which sits on a high bluff on the outskirts of the city offering breathtaking views of the surrounding landscape, including the Judean Hills.

Eddie's Travel will also be hosting guests at the five-star Moriah Hotel in Tiberias.

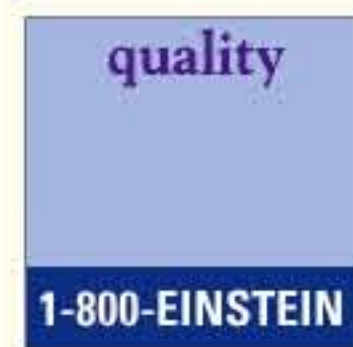
This history-rich city made so beautiful by the Kinneret is surrounded by natural wonders; in the offering are numerous options for day trips, including a visit to the Hamat Tevera hot springs.

And finally, whether you prefer a traditional tour through Israel's Jewish cultural highlights or actively seek some Passover discoveries off the beaten track, long-established Philadelphia agencies Gil Tours (www.giltravel.com) and Rosenbluth Travel (www.rvacations.com) are convenient sources to turn to, especially if you are making last-minute plans.

These firms can also help you prepare for next year's holiday sojourn.

While Gil Tours and Rosenbluth Travel offer customers various packages of Jewish Israel's "Greatest Hits," they also pride themselves on tailoring experiences for families and young adults.

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