

On Your Doorposts Winter 08

And Beyond Your Gates

A Family Trip to Israel: Not Your Typical Family Vacation

Sue Lapp was worried that Israel wouldn't be all it's cracked up to be—like a movie that gets great reviews, but turns out to be just okay.

“Here we were investing in this vacation,” Sue explains. “But what if we turned out to be the only family in history to come home from Israel unchanged? What if our trip was just okay?”

Turns out, Sue learned, a family trip to Israel is not a typical family vacation. “Hiking in the Rockies is nothing like hiking on the soil of our people,” she says. “Israel connected us with our heritage. It enveloped our souls.”

Without question, Israel is not the only vacation destination with sun-drenched beaches and bustling cities, historical sites and nature reserves. But unique to Israel is the moment of inexplicable connectedness with a land and a people. “I have yet to see a person of any age come back from Israel unaffected,” says Rabbi Carnie Rose, who led the Lapp Family and 65 other B'nai Amoona congregants through Israel last July. “Everyone comes back enhanced,

more deeply rooted in their own identity, and able to refract through their own prism of Judaism in a new way.”

The Ultimate Family Classroom

Israeli tourism increased significantly during 2007, nearly reaching the record numbers of the late 1990s. Among the

2.3 million visitors were dozens of St. Louis families—children, parents and grandparents looking to connect with the land of their forefathers. Some joined large tour groups; others hired private guides. Some stayed in hotels; others in homes. Some went to learn history; others to learn

Hebrew. But no matter their mode or objective, they turned Israel into the ultimate family classroom and the landscape into their textbook.

“We learned about King Herod on Masada and King David in front of the caves of Ein Gedi,” says Michelle Rubin, whose family recently toured Israel with a private guide. “Places we'd seen only in photos came alive for us.”

No matter how many previous trips they have taken, parents find they have much to learn when they travel with



Cheryl Maayan explores Akko with sons Gabe and Ari.

(continued on back cover)

Interactions: Programs that Work

For more than 5,000 years, the Jewish family has perpetuated our traditions. And in recent years, congregations have made Jewish family education a priority. Each issue of *Doorposts* features family education programs that have successfully promoted intergenerational interactions in the St. Louis Jewish community.

Fun and Games the Israeli Way: On the floor of the auditorium, hundreds of parents and their children—grades K-2—sat tossing apricot pits, catching peculiar square stones and cautiously retrieving painted sticks from a heap. Nearby, families jumped in and out of long elastic bands, rejoicing each time they completed a level of play. Without a doubt, the first morning of religious school at United Hebrew Congregation was all fun and games.

And while they tried their skill at games with unusual names, perhaps other families—thousands of miles to the east—were also playing with pits and stones and elastic bands. After all, *dookim* (pick-up-sticks), *chamesh avanim* (five stones), *gumiya* (jumping band) and *go'goim* (apricot pits) are popular Israeli leisure activities.

For the UH families, the games offered an opportunity to identify with their counterparts in Israel. The program was the first of six planned this year to help families of all ages develop a deeper connection to their peers half-a-world away. **For more information, call Rachel Persellin-Armoza, 314- 434-3403.**

Mock Trip to Israel: “Welcome aboard Flight 4 from Temple Israel to Tel Aviv,” announce the fourth grade teachers who during the next two hours will double as airline pilots, tour guides and diplomats. The flight itself seems a mere 15 minutes, packed as it is with live entertainment (a sing-down of Israeli tunes) and tasty airline snacks (dates, figs and other indigenous Israeli treats).

Families exit the aircraft through sanctuary doors and break into small groups for intimate learning. Some join a tour of the land, climbing Mount Hermon, splashing in the Jordan River and engaging in other interactive activities on a 30-foot-long vinyl map. Others participate in peace talks, consider both Israeli and Palestinian perspectives, and write family prayers for peace, which are compiled into a book for distribution.

The family mock trip to Israel has become an integral part of the fourth grade curriculum. Families with older children look forward to participating again with their younger children...and insist it's not only for the hummus, babaganoush and Israeli chocolates they enjoy on the flight back home. **For more information, call Debbie Morosohk, 314- 432-8077.**

Israel Teekim: This winter, Israel is going home in a bag with every K-5th-grade student enrolled at a St. Louis-area religious school. Each week, different students have a turn with their class *teek*—Hebrew for tote bag—and all of the treasures within. The contents—Israeli music, DVDs, games and conversation starters—are designed for families to enjoy together.

Parents testify that their week with the *teek* helps them understand the relevance of Israel in their lives, especially as our community prepares to celebrate Israel's 60th birthday. As for the students, they can't wait for their turn to learn and sing and connect to Israel from home. **For more information, call Joan Wolchansky, 314- 432-0020.**



Israel Online

Celebrate Israel at 60 from home. Your tech-savvy kids will be thrilled to join you.

A slew of websites can connect you with all that is *Sababa* (slang for “cool”) in Israel. Gather your family 'round the computer screen and check out the latest in Israeli culture, food and fun.

The land of shofars...and cell phones: Teens today are perplexed at the notion that their parents actually survived childhood without cell phones. But do they know that cell phones were developed in a land that once communicated by blasts of a ram's horn? Israeli technology impacts our lives daily. Learn how by visiting YouTube (www.youtube.com) and typing in “Cool Facts about Israel.”

Not their parents' rock and roll: So, it's not the Van Halen of your youth, but Israeli musicians are shaking up the international music scene with their innovative hip-hop tunes and lyrical commentary on society. Acclaimed keyboardist/composer Idan Raichel is quite an item in Israel with his blend

of Israeli and Ethiopian songs devoted to love and tolerance. Likewise, his contemporaries Hadag Nachash, Ivri Lider and Miri Ben Ari continue to garner worldwide acclaim. Visit their websites, or check out (www.israel-music.com) to hear the songs that top Israeli charts.

More than Milk and Hummus: Since the birth of modern Israel, Jews from more than 80 countries have returned to their ancient land with the recipes of their wanderings. So naturally, Israeli cuisine is a potpourri of tastes modified to accommodate Jewish law and indigenous foods.

No doubt you've tried hummus...but when did you last feast on burekas, shakshuka or babaganoush? The Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs has posted recipes for these and other Israeli favorites on its website (www.mfa.gov.il). Click on “Facts about Israel” and then “Israeli Cuisine.”

The ultimate family street fair is coming to your neck of the woods!

Rehov Kaleidoscope Street Fair

Celebrating Israel at 60

Take a walk down Rechov Kaleidoscope (Kaleidoscope Street)—St. Louis' own rendition of Tel Aviv's Nachalat Binyamin street fair. Israeli artists will sell their wares, and your whole family will enjoy interactive activities and crafts, and a carnival of roving entertainers.

Presented by the Jewish Family Educators' Network and Educators Council in co-sponsorship with the Central Agency for Jewish Education, and hosted by the Jewish Community Center. Generously funded by the Lubin-Green Foundation, a supporting foundation of the Jewish Federation of St. Louis.



2-4 p.m. • Sunday, May 4, 2008 • Jewish Community Center • Wohl Building

A Family Trip to Israel (continued from front cover)

their children. Kids, after all, are quick to point out things that adults might overlook. “My kids noticed every ice cream stand and McDonald’s restaurant,” says Rubin. “They noticed posters advertising Croc shoes and people on the beach reading Harry Potter in Hebrew. I tend to focus on the unusual. They drew our attention to all we have in common with Israelis.”

Of course, it works in reverse, too. In Israel, children learn by their parents’ example that Jewish growth is a lifelong process. “Kids always remember the first time they see their parents cry,” says Rabbi Rose. “They remember watching their parents run fingers along the Kotel or give *tzedakah* to a beggar. These are endearing moments, and they create lifelong memories.”

A Connection for the Kids

Research shows that Israel experiences greatly impact Jewish identity and Israel attachment. A 2007 research study—“Beyond Distancing”—finds that younger American Jews are feeling increasingly less attached to the Jewish state than their elders.

Cheryl Maayan was not going to let her children fall into that trend. Last summer, she spent a month with her children at an intensive Hebrew study program in Natanya. “I always knew that I wanted my children to have exposure to Hebrew language when they were young. But I also want them to understand early that Israel is their home,” she says. “I want them to have relationships with Israeli friends and relatives. One day they will go back on a teen tour or in college, and they’ll have all of these people who remember them.”

The Lapp’s were similarly motivated. “I recognized that passing on our Jewish legacy is my responsibility,” says Sue. “Out of the nine cousins in my generation, I’m the only one with Jewish children. If I give my kids opportunities to embrace their heritage, we start another generation. If not, we’ve lost it.”

Meeting the Real Israel

If St. Louis families are evidence, it’s safe to say that a single trip to Israel has clear positive effects on families and their Jewish identities. For one thing, both children and adults learn that the real Israel is different from the messages put forth by the media. “Kids go to school, and parents go to work. Kids play tag on the playground, and parents make them eat vegetables. It’s just a regular place,” says 10-year-old Rebecca Bloom who went with her family to visit friends in Jerusalem last summer.

Hebrew teachers contend that their students who have visited Israel attend to their studies with a vigor that sets them apart. And Maayan, a third-grade teacher at The Saul Mirowitz Day School–Reform Jewish Academy, says “When it comes to lessons about Israel, students who have traveled there pay attention a little more closely and learn a little more deeply. That’s what education is all about: building on what you already know.”

As for Sue Lapp’s fear of coming home unchanged, here are the words she spoke to her congregation one recent Shabbat: “I now have a love and a connection to a country that was always just talked about. You know what? You really need to go see this movie!”