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# TREKKING ACROSS ISRAEL'S DIVERSE TERRAIN

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By **Kühl Editor** on 06/21/22

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For a country approximately the size of New Jersey, Israel packs a punch for visitors willing to explore. Over the course of four journeys, we saw snow-covered mountains, admired waterfalls in the Galilee, strolled along the Mediterranean Sea, floated in the lowest place on Earth, snorkeled in the Red Sea off the coast of Eilat, and more.

With countless possibilities, visitors can select places that satisfy their love for outdoor adventures. While many of popular archeological sites and main attractions are near urban centers, a significant number of places offer spectacular views and paths in the rolling countryside. To see a diverse range of places in Israel, I'm sharing some of our favorite outdoor adventures.

## **Hermon Stream (Banias) Nature Reserve**

In northern Galilee, we took a break from touring and spent close to an hour hiking in the [Hermon Stream \(Banias\) Nature Reserve](#). Large groups of children and young adults caused gridlock in some of the more popular spots. A hanging wooden platform provides closer access to the rapidly flowing water, so people tend to congregate to take pictures. Designated as the most powerful in Israel, the waterfall drops around 10-meters.



Hermon Stream Nature Reserve

While the trail was more congested than anticipated, the crowds did not detract from the overall beauty of the Hermon Stream flowing forcibly through the canyon. On a warm, sunny day we appreciated the natural canopy created by the mature oriental plane trees, willow trees, Syrian ash trees, and European

nettle trees, as well as the fragrant flowering plants adjacent to the well-marked dirt path. The park offers several trail options.

## Tzipori National Park

In western Lower Galilee, we visited a 16-square kilometer park featuring the remains of an ancient city dating to the Roman and Byzantine Periods. Many notable Jewish sages lived here when the city was the capital of the Galilee. After an earthquake destroyed the town in 363 CE, the city was rebuilt. It continued to be a notable Jewish center until the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, archeologists began the task of preserving the site. At [Tzipori National Park](#), also known as Sephoris, we saw mosaic floors in 23 colors, along with remnants from a synagogue, theater, Roman villa, and reservoir system.

Standing on the roof of a Crusader fortress, we looked down on the visible outdoor features of the park and had lovely views of the surrounding area. From the rooftop vantage point, we understood the Talmudic sages' description of the city of Tzipori, "perched on top of the mountain like a bird."



View from crusader fortress at Tzipori National Park

## Ancient Ein Keshatot Synagogue

[Ein Keshatot Synagogue](#) is another historic Galilee site dating to the Talmudic era. Before modern technology was used to reassemble and preserve this synagogue, the ground was inundated with piles of rocks and large stones, the aftereffects of a 749 CE earthquake.

For 15 years, archeologists used technology to partially reconstruct this 6<sup>th</sup> century CE synagogue. As I walked downhill from the Visitor Center to the structure, I stopped to take numerous digital images of the serene landscape. Inside the synagogue, I reached the conclusion that the people who resided here had selected an amazing place to live and worship.



View from Ein Keshatot Synagogue

## Caesarea National Park

[Caesarea National Park](#) is a must-see archeological attraction between Tel Aviv and Haifa. Bits and pieces from centuries ago, along with a video presentation, showcase Herod the Great's eye for spectacular real estate, coupled with his impressive ideas for a city with an inner and outer harbor, seaside palace, theater, amphitheater, hippodrome, aqueduct system, and other Roman era features. As we strolled through the park, we came across archeological findings from later eras, and took time to enjoy the spectacular Mediterranean shoreline.



Ira and Sandy at Caesarea National Park

The amphitheater, previously the center of entertainment during the Roman era, has been completely renovated. Thousands can take a seat and enjoy outdoor music concerts, performances, and events.



Renovated theater at Caesarea National Park

## Overlook at Hafia

Photo opportunities are ubiquitous throughout Israel. Most would agree that Haifa is best remembered by taking photos from above the Bahai Temple. This vantage point offers a wonderful view of Haifa's harbor along with the Bahai Temple and the property's notable terraces, also known as the Hanging Gardens. Built into the slope of Mount Carmel, the garden showcases 19 levels. When visitors have time to spare, they can take a walking tour downhill.



Haifa overlooks Bahai Temple and harbor

## Masada National Park

In 1993, our visit to [Masada National Park](#) included a special celebration. I had an adult bat mitzvah, and our eldest son celebrated his bar mitzvah along with members of our suburban Chicago synagogue. The backdrop for this ancient fortress is a massive rock cliff overlooking the Dead Sea.





View of Dead Sea from Masada

Due to the overall significance of the site, we made a second visit about a decade ago. Once again, we were impressed by the size and complexity of the archeological ruins and King Herod's ingenuity. During his reign, a remarkable aqueduct system was constructed offering ample water for this extremely arid environment. After the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, this Jewish stronghold was destroyed by the Romans. In modern times, Masada represents the resiliency of the Jewish people.

The hot Masada desert can make the climb up the snake path dangerous during summer months and hotter days. A cable car ride to the top is a great option for people with limited time, mobility issues, or when the weather doesn't cooperate.

## The Dead Sea

Not only is the [Dead Sea](#) the lowest point on earth, it's also the world's deepest hypersaline lake. The salinity levels in the water prevent plants and animals from flourishing while microorganisms can survive. The high concentration of minerals is a draw for people experiencing some skin and health conditions.

Our children had a wonderful time floating on the surface and were fascinated by their positive buoyancy. Instead of having therapeutic value, some of our family members experienced an outbreak of hives after being in the mineral enriched water. During our second visit, I indulged in a mud treatment and floated in

the Dead Sea without any issues.

## Tel Aviv Beach

Every time we've visited [Tel Aviv](#), we've walked on the beach while the sun was setting. Even though this simple outdoor activity can be experienced along any shoreline, we've always enjoyed our leisurely Tel Aviv strolls. During our latest visit, we included a delicious dinner at the adjacent [Manta Rey Restaurant](#). While waiting for our food, we watched surfers ride the waves until dusk.



Sunset over Tel Aviv Beach

## Makhtesh Ramon

On a previous trip, we drove through the Negev on the way to Eilat and were in awe when we passed through the [Makhtesh Ramon](#), the largest erosion crater in the world. Not knowing when we would return, we made a mental note that, during our next visit, we would include more time in Mitzpe Ramon, the nearby town.

We concluded our recent Israel adventure at [The Beresheet Resort](#) that sits adjacent to this geological site. We explored this makhtesh by participating in an informative and enjoyable two-hour off-road private jeep tour and by taking early morning treks on the edge of the impressive landform. As the sun rose

overhead, we were able to capture incredible pictures of this unique desert environment filled with wandering ibex.



Ibex at Maktesh Ramon

Adventure seekers will be intrigued by the steep walls and multicolored rocks, along with the fossils, rock formations, and volcanic and magmatic phenomenon showcasing a 220-million-year history. Makhtesh are unique to Israel's Negev and Egypt's Sinai.

## Timna Park

Less than 20 miles north of Eilat is a 15,000-acre park known for its many geological features. Some notable landmarks at [Timna Park](#) are the Solomon Pillars, the Mushroom, and the stone arches. While we were intrigued by what we saw, our bodies struggled with the intense summer heat. To fully appreciate the landforms, as well as the hikes, I recommend avoiding the months when temperatures hover above 100 degrees.



Sandy and Ira at Timna Park

## Eilat

[Eilat](#), a Red Sea coastal town, sits at the southern tip of Israel. During our first visit, we flew the short distance to this resort town; we chose to drive through the Negev Desert for our second visit 15 years later.

Water sports, the beaches, Eilat Mountains Nature Reserve, and the Coral Beach Nature Reserve are some of the reasons why people spend time in this Red Sea Resort. A visit to Eilat will provide first-hand knowledge of exactly how close Israel is to its neighbors Jordan and Egypt. In conjunction with our second visit, we arranged to cross the border into Jordan so we could take a day trip to [Petra](#), the red sandstone structure showcased in the 1989 movie, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*.

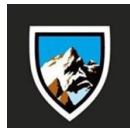
A comprehensive visit to Israel offers a unique opportunity to visit an incredible variety of places, including a few rare gems. If you haven't traveled to Israel yet, add it to your list of places to visit.

*Disclosure: Our second and third trips were arranged and guided by [Jacob Firsel](#). [Israel My Way](#) created our latest trip and provided a media discount for our tour package.*

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*When Sandy Bornstein isn't trekking in Colorado or writing, she's [traveling with her husband Ira](#). After living as an international teacher in Bangalore, India, Sandy published an award-winning book, [May This Be the Best Year of Your Life](#), as a resource for people contemplating an expat lifestyle and living outside*

their comfort zone. Among other things, Sandy writes about family, intergenerational, and active midlife adventures highlighting land and water experiences.



Kühl Editor

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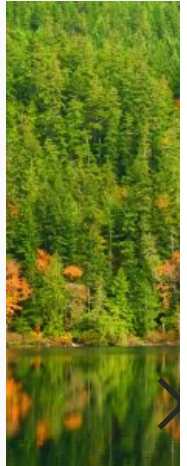


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