

Monthly Profile: Amy and Bill Blocher are long time members of Temple Emanuel. They have 5 children between them and are about to celebrate their 20th wedding anniversary! Mazel tov! To help Amy and Bill celebrate, their kids got together and gave them one of the tickets to go to Israel and they can't thank them enough! Amy and Bill have graciously shared with us the following recap of their travels on their first trip to Israel.

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Amy and Bill's Trip to Israel

The curbs along the streets of Israeli cities are color coded. Blue and white means free parking at night but you better either be gone by 8 in the morning or having a parking sticker showing you paid for the right.

Red and white means no parking. Ever. Unless, of course, you park on the sidewalk. Even if there isn't room and your car hangs over into the street a bit.

These are a couple of the things you can learn on a visit to Israel if you decide to see the country as it is and not concentrate on its ancient history and the ruins.

We stayed in Airbnbs in Jerusalem, Kiryat Shmona and Tel Aviv. Because they cost a third of what a hotel would, we were able to stay two weeks, and to see Israel from a resident's perspective not so much as a tourist.

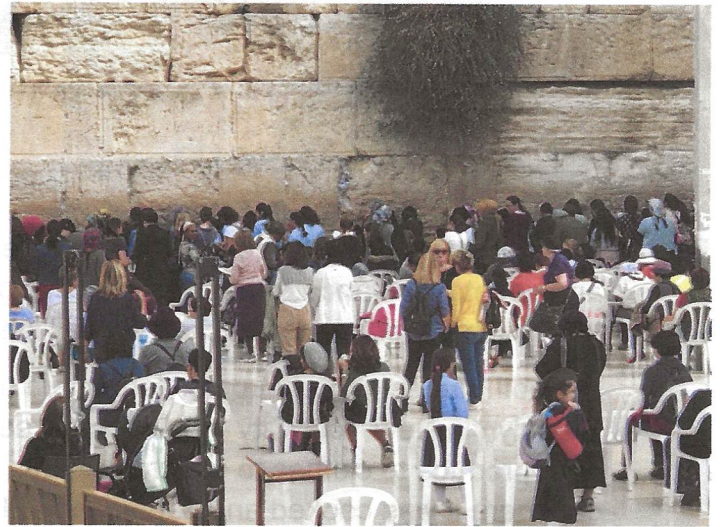
We flew Al Italia to Rome and then connected to a flight to Ben Gurion. While we are not given to believing in stereotypes, the Italian airline sort of lived up to one – the seats would not recline and there were other minor problems. But the planes worked just fine, which was the major point. Our return flight was to be on Air France. Another stereotype confirmed. Don't ask.

When we landed, Amy was disappointed about not getting a stamp in her passport, just a card. The customs agent offered to draw her one in Crayon, but she declined.

Our first mistake was in renting a car the way we did, right at the airport for the entire time we were there. What can we say: We didn't know about the parking. We also discovered the recommendation we received from several people to use Waze to find our way around had one problem – it was in Hebrew. Neither of us know enough Hebrew for that to be of any use. We also, at that point, had not gotten Google maps working yet. Another myth that was quickly exploded was that everyone speaks English. Perhaps that is true for people on tours, but not if you go off on your own into the neighborhoods. In the end, that was not a problem and actually added to the fun of the trip.

While electronics failed us on the evening we arrived, we had a map and headed off for Jerusalem. Fortunately, the road signs are in Hebrew, Arabic and ENGLISH. We got there. And that is when things got interesting. Jerusalem is filled with one-way streets that meander in all kinds of different directions, with cars parked on both sides, reducing the road to a narrow lane. And at times they ended abruptly, with no warning. As we were backing out of one of those streets, we had to wonder how the residents got out in the morning since there was no way to turn around and they were all pointed in the wrong direction. We never found out.

We would still probably be wandering around Jerusalem looking for the Airbnb, but we contacted the guy we were renting from who figured out where we were. He came to meet us and led us back. That is when we found out about the parking. After he explained the problem to us, he told us his wife would take us to a place we could park the car for free. The next morning, she took us to a street nearby that, for some reason, the city authorities had neglected to paint the curb. An unpainted curb meant unrestricted parking. We left the car there for the five days we were in Jerusalem. Walking and the occasional cab got us to where we wanted to go.



The only two sites we were sure we wanted to visit were the Western Wall and the Old City, and Yad Vashem. We spent the better part of two days at the Western Wall, praying, walking the Old City wall, going underneath the Western Wall, and just wandering around. We spent a day and a half at Yad Vashem. Both were spiritual, moving and emotional experiences. While Bill was sitting on a bench waiting for Amy, he got to overhear a Christian minister holding forth with some observations about the wall and how Orthodox women and men dress differently, and saying he could pick them out of the crowds.



The rest of the time we spent in Jerusalem's neighborhoods, strolling around, eating in restaurants and just soaking up the atmosphere. At most of the places we ate, the tables were small – and everything came on the side, a manner of serving that overwhelmed the table when two people were ordering separately. And it took us a couple of times to figure out that “service” meant “tip” and that it did not show up on the bill. You had to tell the server to add a percentage when paying. Our apologies to the first couple of servers we accidentally shorted.

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Since we were in Airbnbs, we had to do some food shopping because not every meal was eaten out, especially on the Sabbath. The only supermarket we found was in Jerusalem where meat was sold along with everything else. But in Tel Aviv we never did find a supermarket – we may have just been in the wrong neighborhoods – and the grocery stores did not sell meat. That was sold in a separate butcher's shop. If we had to guess, we would have thought it would be the other way around. What confused us a

bit about the grocery stores were that the entrances were open and no wider than the fruit and vegetable stands. Then we walked into one to discover that it opened up in the back to a much larger space, stocked with all kinds of dairy and parve products.

But both the neighborhoods in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv reminded us in many ways of Brooklyn in New York City – business streets lined with small shops selling everything from produce to clothes to electronics, and restaurants offering a wide variety of food, except here it was cooked and served in the Israeli fashion.

One main difference between the two cities is that in Jerusalem we saw few dogs, but cats were all over the place. It was a feline infestation. But in Tel Aviv, we saw few cats, but dogs were everywhere. And we do mean everywhere – people stroll into stores and restaurants with the dogs in tow. We were the only ones apparently who were surprised.

When we were leaving Jerusalem to head north, Bill went to get the car, a 10-minute walk away. It took him another 45 minutes to get back. We knew the area well enough by then to navigate it on foot, but figuring out the web of one-way streets was another matter.

Eventually, we got on the road heading north using Google Maps on both our phones – sometimes one phone would work and sometimes the other. We have no explanation for that. Our destination was the Golan Winery on, you guessed it, the Golan Heights. The Rabbi suggested we stop there, saying it is an excellent winery. He was right. The wine is great. What also is great is the lamb prepared in the restaurant nearby. Amy claims it is the best lamb she has ever had – and she has had a lot of lamb.

We stayed in Kiryat Shmona, a small city in the north of Israel with the Golan and Syria to the east, and Lebanon to the north and west. It is beautiful up there with the nature areas and the mountains. We spent a day and a half, running around the countryside to such places as Tal Dan and strolling around the city.

On our way to Tel Aviv we stopped at Ein Hod at the Rabbi's suggestion. It was worth the side trip. Ein Hod is an artists' colony where the artists and their families live and sell their creations. Paintings in various media, sculptures, jewelry, clothes, etc., were displayed in small shops down winding streets, with the artists' homes scattered above and between the shops.

When we reached Tel Aviv and the neighborhood we were staying in, we quickly realized that the parking situation was identical to Jerusalem. We unloaded the car and took it back to the airport. Walking and taxis were much easier, even if the drivers didn't speak English. We figured it out. These translation apps on smart phones really do work. We spent the bulk of our time strolling around the city, down to the Mediterranean, where Amy got to dip her feet in for the first time, and in general just exploring the city. We did go to Independence Hall and the Palmach Museum. We also went to a large



open-air market which bore an uncanny resemblance to International Market World in Auburndale.

We left Israel with a better understanding of the country and the society, having met a number of people we learned from. One evening in Tel Aviv, after we had finished dinner sitting on the patio of one of the ubiquitous cafes, we spent more than an hour visiting with a mom, who is a retired teacher, and her son, who is a history teacher, at the next table. That was a treat for Amy, who is a retired teacher.

The trip back was made interesting when we got to the airport only to discover that Air France had lost our reservations for the 7:30 a.m. flight to Miami by way of Paris. We were sent to this guy sitting behind a counter with a glass enclosure who at first wasn't sure if we qualified for help until we showed him our confirmation documents. After standing there for about half an hour, he was able to book us onto a Lufthansa flight to Miami through Munich. It left at 7 a.m.

We made it to the gate on time.

On the plane, Amy mentioned to the flight attendant that she is gluten intolerant. The attendant asked her if she had let the airline know about that in advance. We then explained what happened. That lady went out of her way to make sure Amy was taken care of.

It seems that Germany and France still have some issues.
