

# What Did Five Months in Israel Teach Me?

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After returning from a five-month Masa Israel Journey in August, I was eager to recount the seemingly endless weeks of cultural immersion and all the fun, anxiety, and glory that came with it. When people ask me, “How was Israel?” I leave them with the same overused words probably uttered by all Masa alumni since the first cohort returned home – “It was amazing! I miss it already!”



Dinner with my roommates (10 of us total!)

Don't get me wrong; my April to August internship program in Tel Aviv was truly amazing. I did my internship at a public relations agency in Ramat Gan called ReBlonde, where I was on the content team with their full-time staff. I was living in Israel as an Israeli, not just a tourist, authentically experiencing the Jewish state. I made friends for life and gained a deeper understanding of Israel, the Jewish world, and my responsibilities as a Jew.

Yet I struggle to put the experience into words, making it impossible to convey the moments that will stick with me forever.

Moments like May 10, 9 p.m. IST, when my last final exam as an undergraduate student at CSULB was interrupted by sirens ringing out across Tel Aviv. Running into the bunker with my laptop in hand, I found it difficult to explain why I was unable to complete the exam to my professor.

“Hi Dr. Kreiser,” I wrote in an email as my roommates and I huddled amid loud explosions, shakily reassuring our faraway parents that the Iron Dome was keeping us safe. “I have just ended the exam early as the rocket attacks have become more intense and closer. I hope I can retake it soon. I apologize for the disruption.”

Like many complex issues in Israel, the physical danger and mental toll that came from the rockets were remedied by the warmth of the Israeli people. I immediately had friends from north to south checking in on me even when they faced the same threats to their lives.

Amid the war, a former Israeli emissary who'd lived with my extended family in Connecticut many years ago invited me to her home in the north, where her family provided a safe haven in a peaceful, welcoming *moshav* for several days. Away from the sirens, my stress finally decreased and I stuffed my



A few of my roommates and I at the Western Wall

face with some of the best cheesecakes I've ever had, at their neighborhood Shavuot festival. Countless Israelis, all dressed in white for the chag, greeted me with hugs, smiles, and an endless supply of Israeli flags.

It was a first-hand demonstration of that beautiful phrase from the Talmud: *Kol Yisrael arevim zeh b'zeh*, all of Israel are responsible for each other. Israelis embody this phrase, never failing to remind me that Israel will always welcome me home.

My Masa trip was packed with breathtaking geography, history, and culture, but the people were the highlight. There's never a dull moment in the homeland, and if there ever were, an Israeli with *chutzpah* would be there to fill the space.

I've always heard the *sabra*, or cactus, used to describe Israelis—tough on the outside, sweet on the inside. It took five months of living among them to truly understand the analogy. My time in Israel was incredible, but my time living among Israelis will stick with me forever. 

## Supporting the Israeli Connection

Jewish Long Beach's direct support to David for his Israeli experience was through a grant from the Bob Baldwin Memorial Fund. The fund promotes Jewish continuity by connecting our teens to Israel through organized peer trips, community trips and study opportunities.

As a member of Jewish Federations of North America, Jewish Long Beach also supports Masa Israel Journey. MASA is Hebrew for “journey.” Through a large network of programs, MASA Israel sends young Jewish Americans to Israel for a semester, or a year, to study, work, volunteer or teach. Sponsored by the Israeli Government and the Jewish Agency for Israel (an overseas partner of Jewish Long Beach) its goal is to bring more and more young adults to Israel for immersion programs so they may have a lifelong relationship with the State of Israel and a firm commitment to Jewish life.