

## **Israel - a new adventure - by Mario A.**

I remember really good the day of the information event of the AIANI office in Innsbruck. I read on the poster "Study in Israel". I was interested in that country and thought, ok let's go to the event. At the event, we got a lot of important information and this was the reason to apply. When I applied, I was not sure if it is possible for me to go to Israel, because I already did a semester abroad during my bachelor time (Prague - amazing), but now in masters it was no problem. The process was good and the ladies of the office are very nice and helpful. So after a while I got the answer that I am allowed to go to Israel and at the first time I was very happy but after a while a little bit worried because of the news. The news in Austria shows you not the best side of Israel.

But I want to go and said to myself "I make it". After a long time preparing my suitcase and thinking of what I really need, the plane already landed on the 07.10.2018 at Tel Aviv Airport. I was a little bit worried about the passport control, but the lady asked 3 questions about my study and I was allowed to pass.

Next adventure was to go to Beer Sheva by train. After some while and changing money, I was able to buy a train ticket to Beer Sheva. So I walked to the train station and there was it, Hebrew. I did not learn anything for Hebrew and I was so glad that there was an English translation on the sign. Entered the train, with all my suitcases, sat down and I was sweating. Unfortunately, the A/C of the train was broken and so it was really hot, and during the train ride, I was thinking of the people I will meet in the international dorms.

From the train station in Beer Sheva, I took a Taxi to the Dorms and went into the area and was lost. Yael, one of our great Erasmus buddy, came to me and picked me up and showed me my room in the apartment which was at the ground floor. Nobody was in the apartment, because all of them went to University, I thought. So we did all the office stuff for living in the dorms, and I made myself cozy in my room.

Due to the fact that it was already about 20:00, my roommates were at a birthday party, and I met them the next day, not very early. Firstly I met Antoine, surely from France, he is a wonderful guy, it is every time a lot of fun with him. My second roommate was Tommaso from Italy, a very nice person and a good cook.

To complete our apartment there was Tim from Germany, our third college. And now we are very good friends and this is, in my opinion, the spirit of Erasmus.

In the first week, we had an orientation day by visiting the big University and the surroundings. It is for the first time strange that in every building you had a control of your bags. But after a while, you do it as usual. During this day, I also met Tamar, who was our second Erasmus buddy. Yael and Tamar organized a lot of different events for us, like a wonderful international dinner, where we had a great time and they loved my homemade Glühwein (red hot wine) according to an Austrian recipe. We had many events where you met so many people from all over the world. This was amazing.



But going to University was also on the schedule. So after some changes in courses, finally I registered in 6 different courses, University started on the 10.10.2018. All my courses from the field of desert studies were in Sede Boker or more precisely in Medreshet Ben Gurion. To get to this campus, twice a day a University bus took you from Beer Sheva and return. This was the time when I met Vincent from Belgium who lived in the apartment next to me, and we studied together. I really remember the first time at this campus, we were astonished by the beautiful canyon of Ein Avdat.



At the first lesson of "Geography of Desertification", I was alone with the teacher. And, surprising, she said she will do the course for me. Finally, we were more, at the end, 2 students. I also had another course with just 2 students. So from an educational point of view, the teachers want to teach you and do it even when you just alone. Five of my six classes were under 8 students, only one was with about 20 students and mostly from all over the world. This campus in the desert is very international and I also met good friends there. For me, the learning level was like in Innsbruck. The teachers are very helpful, we did some excursions to companies and even if you have a problem in private, you are welcome to phone them and ask for help.

Also some kind of minor change, that on Friday and Saturday most of the shops are closed and no public transportation is provided. Sometimes we went to another city to celebrate; we took the bus on Friday noon because the bus stops operating by about 14:00 and back with the bus after 18:00 on Saturday. And Sunday was already the first day of work or University. The first time in Tel Aviv for the party was very nice because the beach is perfect for the sunset over the sea, including some drinks and the evening is great. Going to Haifa is very nice too, with the train along the beachside to the city which is very hilly. To find accommodation is easy in Israel, you can either book something in the hostel or just an Airbnb.

Going around is the only cheap thing in Israel, for a bus ride from Beer Sheva to Jerusalem is about 7 € for about 1.5 hours ride. Every time when we went to a city we were a bunch of people, which was a lot of fun. Sometimes I also did something alone to put the focus on that what I want to see and you do not have to wait for other people.

During the semester I had my classes and the rest of the time we had a great time in the apartment, had parties, played cards or just talked about everything. Nearby our dorms there was the dance club Manga, we visited it many times. And also the biggest club of Israel, Forum, is in Beer Sheva and it was really big.

After the classes, final papers and exams, which all I passed, 3 friends of mine and I did a road trip to the north of Israel. Driving in Israel is very easy and the North is wonderful, we went to the border and saw interesting buildings. We also went to the South which is completely different, and it is so amazing that you have different vegetation in such a small country. The North is greener and in winter you also can go skiing on Mount Hermon and when you go to the south you have the Dead Sea and more in the south the desert Negev and Eilat at the Red Sea. Amazing country and amazing people. We did Couchsurfing, and one night was with a family who provided us with such a good dinner, it was wonderful and all for free. We had a great time with the family.

Finally, I really can recommend going to Israel; it is a wonderful country, with a lot of beautiful areas, amazing people, who will help you every time if you have a problem and a very good University. I did this semester during my master of Ecology and Biodiversity and the courses were very good.