

‘Career Israel’ Morphs Into ‘Israel Forever’

I first found out about the Career Israel internship program at the 2010 Jewish Federations General Assembly in New Orleans. I thought about applying but decided to instead go on Birthright that summer. I quickly fell in love with Israel and, a few weeks after returning home, emailed Career Israel, asking them to open up their summer 2012 registration.

When the day finally came, I was terrified. A near panic attack at the ticket counter in Chicago’s O’Hare airport led the kind American Airlines ticket agent to give my parents passes through security, allowing them to sit with me until my flight left.

However, being the 21-year-old panicking at the ticket counter wasn’t my low point. Within 24 hours of my arrival, I called my mom, crying, “What am I doing here?” and panicking at how I knew no one in that foreign country. My mom calmed me, and two days later, I headed to Jerusalem for orientation.

I was quickly reminded of why I loved Israel and called my mom again. A mere 72 hours from my panicked “I want to come home” phone call, I stated that I was not sure I would be returning to America in the fall. I informed my mom that I wanted to look into transferring to a school in Israel in the fall. More research eventually led me to believe it would be best to finish out my senior year in the States. Still, every day of my summer stay in Israel, I fell more in love with it.

I fell in love with the many long nights spent laughing with lifelong friends until sunrise, only to wake hours later, don a swimsuit and pass out on the beach.

I fell in love with the Sunday-through-Thursday workweek that took some getting used to and the coworkers who kept me

laughing throughout the day.

I fell in love with the opportunity to learn from international professionals, who not only helped me improve my writing but welcomed me in true Israeli fashion, as if they had known me forever. I fell in love with the sense of community that came with strangers taking me in for Shabbat, as well as the community in Neve Daniel, which took in me and two friends for the weekend.

I also fell in love with:

- The way the entire country slows down to rest for Shabbat.
- The people who, for some odd reason, mistook me for a Sabra, barking questions about directions to me in Hebrew.
- The falafel, sabich, hummus, chocolate Pop Rocks, chocolate b'sakit, shakshuka and various other tasty foods that just aren't the same in America.
- The way the falafel guy at my favorite stand knew my name and always greeted me with free chips.
- The feeling that I was much safer walking the streets of Tel Aviv than any street near my small-town school.
- The fact that the only time I ever saw an Israeli running was when they were about to miss the bus.
- The time I took the bus the wrong way, resulting in a three-hour commute to work, only to be greeted by a laughing boss.
- The fact that I could confidently tell people which bus to take where by the end of the summer.
- The soldiers, because not only do they defend Israel, but also they are very nice to look at.
- The way no one thinks twice about said soldiers touting around enormous guns in the middle of Tel Aviv.
- The fact that a childhood friend you haven't talked to in years may pop into your Ulpan class to visit the teacher—and that this is a completely regular

occurrence.

- The camel rides offered at gas stations in the desert, and dipping your feet in Ein Gedi after a hike through the desert.
- The haggling that happens in the shuk and getting crazy spice mixtures that only exist in the Middle East.
- The annoying pitter-patter of matkot balls, a far better beach companion than July's swarm of jellyfish.
- The streets of Jerusalem, which are filled with a diversity that includes not only ultra-orthodox Jews but Arabs as well.
- The shorts and blouse I could wear to work and still be the most-dressed-up person on the 189 bus to Tel Aviv's high-tech district.
- The lifelong friendships that resulted in a trip I will never forget and a very teary-eyed trip to Ben Gurion Airport.

While I realized I should head back to the States for my senior year of college, I wanted others to understand my love of Israel. That is why I decided to begin interning with the Israel Forever Foundation. I am so excited to begin this journey!

For the original article, visit .