

DISCOVER ISRAEL - THE STARTUP NATION!

By Ayalla Ruvio



Israel! A small country with a global reach. A country that impacts companies all over the world through its unparalleled innovation and entrepreneurial spirit and practice. How does Israel do it? And how do you convey such a spirit to American students?

During the spring break of 2020, I had the pleasure of leading 23 students from Michigan State University on the First Study Abroad Program in Israel that focuses on innovation and entrepreneurship. This amazing group consisted of students from a wide range of colleges across campus (Business, Agriculture and Natural Resources, Social Science, Communication Arts and Sciences, Lyman Briggs, Arts and Letters, Nursing, Engineering, and Natural Science). All of them were eager to learn how a country the size of New Jersey has become the world's center for innovation. Students registered for this three credit course, "Entrepreneurship and Innovations in Israel," as BUS 491, JS 400, MKT 490 or ESHP 202 and it counted for both the Jewish Studies minor and the Entrepreneurship minor.

Prior to the trip, the students met with business people from Israeli companies that operate in Michigan to learn about the global reach of Israeli innovation. Specifically, Art DuRivage from Sempris and Shahar Golan from Arkal Automotive gave fascinating presentations to the students. These presentations were followed by visits to these companies during their time in Israel.

During our 7-day travel throughout Israel, the students explored Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Tiberias, and Haifa. In each city they interacted with high-level executives and CEOs in various companies and fields. This Serling Institute for Jewish Studies and Modern Israel study abroad program opened with a fascinating presentation of Dr. Harry Yuklea, who has been a Serling Israeli Visiting Scholar at MSU for the past two years, and is an entrepreneur and international academic. He pointed out that Israel breeds innovation and entrepreneurship because it has no other choice. In Tel Aviv, students had the incredible opportunity to gain more insights at Google and Semperis. In Jerusalem, they met with key government officials from the Israel Innovation Authority, and learned about the role of government in facilitating innovation. In Tiberias, Arkal Automotive's CEO gave the students a full tour of this facility. We also visited the Hive Kibbutz Ginosar, which helps its members and people in its area to launch startups. In Haifa, the students had the pleasure of meeting and speaking with Mr. Nathan Hermony, the CEO of GE Healthcare, a multi-billion dollar global company. The students were also given a tour of their entire facilities and were able to meet multiple employees working on future innovations for the global healthcare system.

The students worked hard. Very hard. On most days, they had programs scheduled from 7:00AM until 9:00PM. Throughout the program, students not only



had the opportunity to meet business leaders and entrepreneurs across the country, but also saw the beauty of Israel's nature and culture. They visited sites such as the Jordan River, the Dead Sea, and Masada while also having the freedom to explore Israel's incredible cities together.

As a teacher, I cannot express how rewarding it was for me to witness the amazing transformation in the minds of these young students. I can say with great certainty that none of the students expected what they experienced during their time in Israel. Many came back from the program not just with a different perspective on Israel, but also on who they are and what they want to do. I also want to commend these students for their impeccable and professional behavior during the trip. They represented MSU with honor and demonstrated how wonderful Spartans are. I am humbled that I could facilitate and teach this incredible group of students on my study abroad program in Israel.

Finally, I would like to recognize and thank those who provided scholarships to the students and enabled them to participate in this amazing experience by covering their program fees. Specifically, sincere gratitude goes to the Serling Institute for Jewish Studies and Modern Israel, which provided \$1,000 scholarships to every student through two endowments in the Institute that provide study abroad scholarships for MSU students to study in Israel (The Modern Israel Endowment established by Michael and Elaine Serling and the Ed Levy, Jr. and Linda Dresner Levy Endowed Fund). Finally, a special thank you goes to Yael Aronoff, Director of the Serling Institute, for her help and support. We look forward to our next study abroad program in Israel!

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Students share their experiences from the program:

Adwait (Adi) Ahire (Major in Finance)

"I investigated several study abroad options, such as Brazil, Japan and Spain. I picked Israel and it was one of the best decisions I have made in my college career. I got to meet some very successful entrepreneurs in Israel, visited large offices of companies, floated in the Dead Sea, learned the history of Jerusalem, experienced the modern touch of Tel Aviv and saw the port city of Haifa. Also, I made 20 new friends, got to meet amazing individuals and had one of the best experiences of my life."

Nolan Parker (Major in Finance)

"Despite reading about Israel before arriving, nothing could have prepared me for how enthralling the nation is. The entrepreneurial spirit is palpable, and after meeting with several Israeli engineers and entrepreneurs, I left with a lot of ideas I want to infuse in my work and life here in the states. I admire the directness, dedication to process simplicity, and work ethic embodied in every enterprise we visited, whether it was an automotive manufacturer or a high tech software developer."

Daniel Ruvio (Major in Human Biology)

"All in all the trip was amazing. We met incredible individuals with amazing ideas and eccentric personalities. While not someone in the business sector, I went in with an open mind, and I'm so glad for it. The connections I made on this trip, both personal and professional, were way beyond what I could have expected and hoped for."

Jezreel Wallace (Major in Chemical Engineering)

"By going on this study abroad trip I was able to learn so much more than I would've imagined if I were to do a trip like this in the United States. I am thankful for receiving this international experience. I also enjoyed the food and the welcoming and accepting culture of Israelis. Some of the things that stood out to me in the country's landscape included the mountains of Masada as well as the Dead Sea. I enjoyed floating on the Dead Sea and being able to experience weightlessness in water, something that most people do not get to experience, and for that I am grateful. I really enjoyed my time in Israel and I hope to return there one day, whether it is for work or for leisure in the future and I am thankful for this opportunity. I will be encouraging my younger peers to experience life in Israel by going on study abroad trips such as this one in the future."

