



ERASMUS+

ISRAEL, HAIFA

GORDON ACADEMIC COLLEGE

March until July 2022

Simone Forster

Planning before the journey

Insurance: Harel Yeddidim

You can apply one month before travelling to Israel for the health insurance. It covers all costs including COVID-19.

Simcard: There are many shops in Haifa, where you can buy and get one instantly. Mine was “simfony” (240 GB, 3000 min, 3000 SMS) for 50 ILS, ≈ € 15,- a month.

Money: you don't need to exchange money before going, find an ATM with low fees (Bank of Jerusalem - 11 ILS, ≈ € 3,30).

Visa: all the necessary information can be retrieved from this webpage

<https://embassies.gov.il/vienna/ConsularServices/Pages/Visa-Information.aspx>

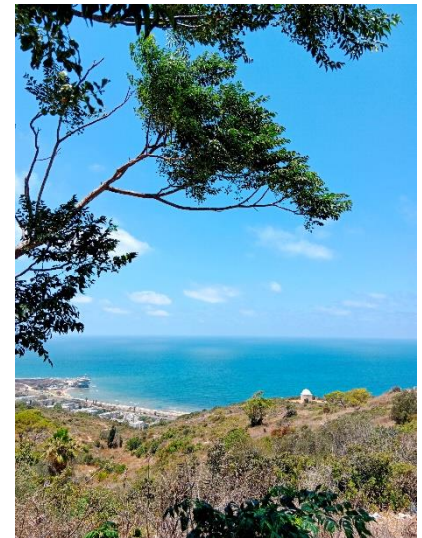
I sent all my documents, including my passport to the embassy in Austria. If they don't grant you the visa for the whole stay, I would recommend extending it in Austria because of the high waiting times in Israel. My visa was valid until July. As I still had some exams, I had to get the tourist visa, which was valid for three months.

Arrival and public transport: I would highly recommend you don't schedule your arrival in Israel on Friday or Saturday. Since it is a religious country, you won't be happy to find out that there isn't any public transport on that day. If you do want to travel at some point on Shabbat, know that there are “Sherut taxis”. These yellow buses can be found somewhere close to the train station and they wait until every seat is taken. They drive to Haifa, Jerusalem, Tel Aviv etc. Know that public transport is quite affordable and not as expensive as in Austria.

To go on a bus or train you need a “RavKav”, you can get it at any train station and some shops. Once you arrive in Haifa I'd recommend you to go to “Hof HaKarmel” to get your student “RavKav” for the semester. Be sure to bring your passport and a letter from Nurit that states you are studying at Gordon.

Financial support, living costs: Israel is extremely expensive, especially Tel Aviv. The costs are about twice as high as in Austria. Be prepared to spend a lot of money on simple things like crisps – 21 ILS (≈ € 6,30), beer – 25 ILS (≈ € 7,50), Falafel 15 ILS (≈ € 4,50), Thai curry 69 ILS (≈ € 20,80).

The cheapest and biggest grocery store in Haifa is called “Osher Ad”. The market in Wadi Nisnas. Other stores are expensive in comparison.



Stellar Maris - Haifa



Market in Jerusalem

Accommodation: I was lucky to get a place in the student accommodation which Gordon College provided. I paid 1025 ILS, ≈ € 309, - per month and shared my flat with three lovely flatmates. I would recommend staying somewhere in Bat Galim (close to the sea) or downtown.

Gather information: Before you travel to Israel gather some information about the middle-eastern conflict. Read up on the topic, buy some books and watch some documentaries. Be sure you know something before going there, this will save you some embarrassing moments in conversations. Despite some events happening during my stay, I felt more than safe in Haifa. It is a mixed city and if you use your common sense while travelling you will be fine. If the situation should get nasty, you can get support from Austria if you let the government know about your journey in advance. Sign up here:

<https://auslandsregistrierung.bmeia.gv.at/#/>

My semester abroad

Gordon Academic College

My academic semester at Gordon was quite relaxed, as I applied for 5 easy-going courses which are in total 19 credit points. In the following table you can see the courses I took and which courses the LiLes recognized.

Course at the GACE	ECTS	Recognition at PHOÖ	ECTS
Rhetoric and Oral Proficiency	4	Spoken Interaction	2
Applied Linguistics in TOEFL	4	Applied Linguistics	3
Syntax and Advanced English Grammar	3	Written Production	3
Sociolinguistics	3	Varieties of English	3
Testing and Assessment in TOEFL	6	Developing Teaching Concepts	3
		+ free credit points	

Throughout the semester you actually get to know your lecturers quite well because of the small number of students in each course. If you need help, there is always someone there to help you. I liked the Sociolinguistics, Rhetoric and Oral Proficiency courses most because we learned about different minority groups in Israel. Judith is known to be a tough (but fair) teacher – still, it was not a challenge to pass her courses if you do the required amount of work. Judith urged me to travel and take some time off from College to explore Israel because she saw that I was doing well in my courses.

Note: Be sure to always charge your laptop before heading to College, not all rooms have sockets. Bring a jacket as well – even in summer. The AC is quite cold and everyone is freezing but they refuse to turn it off.

Events

I travelled a lot in Israel, sometimes with a touristic focus and on other occasions with a political focus. For political tours speaking about the occupation in the West Bank I would highly recommend “breaking the silence” which is a tour organized by ex-soldiers of the Israeli Defense Forces. All over Israel you can find the “Abraham Hostel” and they offer an interesting tour called “Dual Narratives” in Jerusalem. It is guided by a Palestinian and an Israeli tour guide who talk about their perspective on the holy city. To see both sides of the conflict, I went to the West Bank and did lot of couchsurfing. Locals showed me around the cities of Hebron, Jericho, Ramallah, Bethlehem, Nablus. Don’t be afraid to go there, the people were so kind, hospitable and interested in showing us their lives.



Hike in Nablus with our couchsurfer



Couchsurfer showing us Ramallah



Holy Islamic Shrine in Nablus

One of my favorite things to do was salsa night in Haifa. The restaurant/bar “Menches” is located in the German colony and offers a free salsa course every Tuesday at 8:30, which consists of four different levels. Every Friday there is a party close to the Talpiot market as well. The GAG21 is a rooftop party from midday until noon where you enjoy the view on the sea and harbor.

During my stay abroad, I enjoyed the festival scene of Israel a lot. There are so many festivals happening in the Negev or around Tel Aviv. If you are open-minded I can recommend “Zorba the Buddha”, “Desert Flood” (on Independence Day), “Oshu” or “Midburn”.

The Israelis like to celebrate, be sure to spend time in Tel Aviv during “Purim”, which is kind of like a carnival. Also go to Tel Aviv to experience the diversity during the Pride Parade.



Purim in Tel Aviv

Travelling

Luckily, the professors of Gordon College were quite flexible with the attendance for all international students. Therefore, I had the chance to take some weeks off for travelling. I did not do any practice teaching, therefore I had a free week extra.

If you want to go to the **Dead Sea**, I recommend going to “En Bokek”, which is a public beach. In comparison to “Kalya” you don’t have to pay an entrance fee. Go as early as you can in the season because the Dead Sea is at the lowest point, so the temperature can get quite high.

For all people who love to **hike**, I can recommend the “Jesus Trail”, “Mitzpe Ramon”, or the “Mount Carmel National Park” close to Haifa. If you are in the area of the Dead Sea I would urge you to check out “Wadi David” or “Wadi Arugot” – it is a beautiful water trail along oleander and palm trees.

Eilat is not worth exploring, the city is ugly, too expensive and does not offer a nice public beach. Rather go to Sinai (Egypt), where you can actually swim with turtles and see coral reefs. If you still want to stop in Eilat, the red canyon is a nice hike worth exploring. Be sure to bring enough water for the hike, the temperatures are crazy – 47° C on a sunny day in April. You won’t get a lot of shade, therefore bring min. 2-3 liters of water.

I will list some places which I enjoyed visiting:

- Rosh HaNikra
- Golan Heights for camping and hiking
- Tiberias for a swim in the Sea of Galilee and the hot springs
- Akko
- Naharija – it has a quiet beach
- Jerusalem
- Nazareth
- Caesaria
- Metsada Desert Plateau

Jordan: My teacher, allowed me to travel during the semester even though I was officially not allowed to miss any more classes. For this very reason, I could go to Jordan and Sinai with my family. On this trip we went to Akaba, Wadi Rum Reserve, Dana, Amman, and of course Wadi Musa with the very famous world wonder Petra.

If you love hiking do the trails of “Wadi Ghuweir”, “Wadi al Hasa”, “Wadi al Mujib”.

Be careful about the opening hours of the land borders in Akaba – the official hours of the Israeli and Jordanian border are not the same and they are closed on the weekend.

Sinai: Living in Israel gives you the chance to visit beautiful Sinai and go snorkeling or to get the diving license. I absolutely loved it, it was my first time swimming with turtles and the living expenses are quite cheap. I can recommend Dahab and the blue hole for snorkeling or diving.



Wadi Rum Desert



Petra - Wadi Musa

Food

Restaurants in Haifa: Chang Ba, Pizza Linga, Abu Shaker, Hummus bar (all vegan), Bar Galim, Café Masada, Knafeh De Lux, Sadaqa Sweets, Pizza Dali, HaZkenim Falafel, Falafel Michel, food from the market in Wadi Nisnas

Restaurants in Tel Aviv: Joz le voz (Just go there – it is a unique dining experience and the best restaurant I've been to), Shuffle Bar for good cocktails, Ala Rampa, Anastasia (breakfast), Benny the Fisherman

Traditional dishes you must try: Falafel, Lafa with Zatar, Hummus, Date Juice from Falafel George in Wadi Nisnas, Babaganoush, Malabi, Arak with lemon juice (not too much, be careful 😊), Foul, Bourekas, Rugelach, Knafeh, Shawarma, Halva, Arabic Coffee



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So what else can I say? I love Haifa.

I would always go back - I enjoyed my time in Haifa to the fullest. I would always prefer this small mixed city over Tel Aviv, Jerusalem or any other city in Israel. If you are still thinking about a country to do your Erasmus, consider Israel if you are a courageous and curious soul.

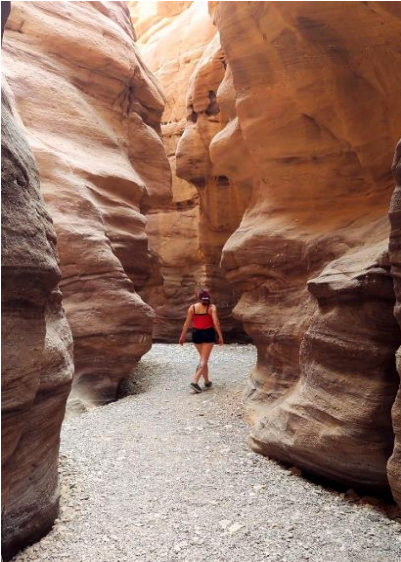




Nablus



National Park Mount Carmel



The red canyon – Negev



En Bokek – The Dead Sea



Tiberias



Temple Mount - Jerusalem



Erasmusstudents and Buddies



Hike in the Negev



Tel Aviv – Jaffa



Wadi Arugot