



Report on the trip to Israel and Palestine 2013

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We left school on the 7th of February to the airport around 1pm. I was so excited because from what I heard from the students who already went to Israel and Palestine I knew it would be an amazing journey! So we first took a flight going from Dublin to Istanbul by Turkish Airlines that lasted for 4 hours and then another one from Istanbul to Tel-Aviv in Israel 2 hours long.

We travelled by mini-bus taxis from Ben Gurion Airport to New Victoria Hotel, Massoudi street, Jerusalem and it was Friday the 8th, 6 am. We rested at the hotel until 1pm and then we started our visit. We walked in West Jerusalem, the Jewish part and went to the Mahane Yehuda market. We went to this market just before the Sabbath (Shabbat) time so we saw all the sellers closing their shops and also an Orthodox Jew calling for the Shabbat. Then we visited the historic quarter of Mishkenit Sha'ananim. At the end of the day, we went for few minutes to the Old City, in the Muslim quarter, entering by Damascus Gate. Finally, we had the evening meal at Jerusalem Hotel restaurant. This first day in Israel was very interesting and fascinating because it was the first time I discovered these new landscapes and new culture.

On Saturday the 9th on the morning, we went back to the Old City of Jerusalem and went to the Austrian Hospice. Here we did a bit of history to really understand where we were and to know more about the conflict, it was really interesting, I learnt a lot. After this little history time, we went above onto the roof and had a beautiful view of the Old City. Then we went to the Jewish Quarter and we saw the Western wall which was so impressive, I never thought I could have the chance to see it for real! We also were able to get a view of the Temple Mount, Dome of the Rock and the Al Aqsa Mosque, Silwan (Siloam in Bible) and the West Bank Barrier.

After the lunch in the Christian Quarter we went to the Church of Holy Sepulchre which is built on the site of Golgotha. There are 6 Christian religions which manage the Church and there is the tomb where Jesus buried and rose from the dead (according to some views). It was really interesting to be in that place, knowing that a lot of people dream to go there because it's a really important place for them. We also saw the Ethiopian Coptic priests' stone dwellings on the roof and St Catherine's Well which was so impressive! After that we saw an occupied building with a play area on rooftop which showed an example of Palestinian Muslim houses occupied by Jewish settlers. We also visited the Prison of Christ. In the late afternoon we went to the French Cultural Institute in East Jerusalem and met some Palestinian girls who were learning French, so we spoke with them for few minutes. In the evening we went to see the Palestinian Youth Circus show at Palestinian National Theatre which was really nice!

On Sunday the 8th, we went to the Western Wall but this time we touched it! And we went to see the Dome of the Rock and Al Aqsa Mosque. The Dome of the Rock is such a beautiful building! It's so big and colorful! I think it's the most beautiful monument I saw in Israel.



Then we climbed a hill to the Mount of Olives and had a beautiful view of Jerusalem. In the afternoon, we went to At-Tur neighborhood and saw the West Bank Barrier.

When we were walking in this neighborhood, people living there were watching us because they normally never see tourists. We ate the evening meal at Alice's restaurant in West Jerusalem.

On Monday the 11th, we met the 10th Grade of Ha Nissui School in Jerusalem and after the 9th Grade of Hebrew University Secondary School in Jerusalem. In each school we made group discussion with two students from Dublin and some Israeli students so we asked them questions about conflict issues and on the core concepts of the programme (human rights, interdependence, universal values, conflict transformation). It was really interesting in both schools, the students were really nice.

In the afternoon, we visited West Jerusalem (Zion Square and Mahane Yehuda market) with Israeli students. We also had a brief walk through Mea Shearim (Haredi or Ultra-Orthodox Jewish neighbourhood). All people living here were wearing traditional Orthodox Jewish clothes, news was printed on paper, sticking them on the street wall because of those Orthodox Jews who don't use computers, internet, tv and all this electronic stuff for their news. However, some of them had mobile phones so they use some technology.

Then we went to the site of Sbarro restaurant suicide bomb attack, on corner of Jaffa and King streets (August 2001, in which 15 civilians were killed, including 7 children and a pregnant woman, and 130 wounded) and to the site of suicide bomb attack on bus where Bnayahu Zuckerman (18 year old student at Ha Nissui school) was killed in February 2004 (we did one minute of silence). They were really emotional moments. In the evening we ate in a restaurant with Israeli students who went to Ireland with Schools Across Borders in 2011.

On Tuesday the 12th morning, we met the Irish Government Representative to Palestinian Authority at her residence (her office is in Ramallah). After that we met the 10th Grade of Hebrew University Secondary School and talked with them divided in little groups.

The Israeli students: In my groups, the students told us that they are not that much concerned by the conflict because Jerusalem is safer since the Separation Wall was built: "Most of the time we don't feel the conflict". Some of them are afraid sometimes as they had heard the bomb alert alarm in Jerusalem on two occasions. When we asked them about the Israeli settlements, they said that there are bad and West Bank has to go back to the Arabs. Some of them think that the wall and the Israeli settlements stop the peace process. About Human rights, they feel that they are respected for them or they said that they give their right of freedom (such as the 2-3 years of military service) to have the right of protection. They know and they said that these human rights are not respected enough in relation to the Palestinians. Most of the Israelis we met want peace; some of them think that the two States could live together; others said that it's impossible because of all the hate between the Israelis and the Palestinians, so the best solution is that the two States live in peace in two different countries.



In the afternoon we went to the Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum. It was really informative and shocking at some points. I would liked to have had more time to visit it more fully because I was really interested.

In the early evening, we travelled to Hebron via Checkpoint 300, one of the two main entrances to Bethlehem; it was the first main experience of the West Bank Barrier. The Barrier was very high and had graffiti on the Palestinian side. Then we arrived at Al Amaneh Hotel, off Ein Sara Street in Hebron.

On Wednesday 13th, met 10th Grade of Mazania School and Qawasmeh School which are girls' schools. The Palestinian girls talked about the conflict with a lot of passion and sometimes with anger. The girls from Qawasmeh School did a traditional Palestinian music and dance show for us, It was really great!

Then we met Mrs Nisreen Amro, the Director of Directorate of Education in Hebron, representative of the Palestinian Ministry of Education in secondary schools.

In the afternoon we were with Palestinian students and we visited the Old City of Hebron from the souk (market) in H1 area to H2. So we saw the blocked off streets for the first time, Israeli army watch posts on rooftops, street checkpoints, Israeli settlements building. We also saw an overhead fencing put up to protect Palestinian shopkeepers and pedestrians from rubbish, rocks etc... thrown by settlers living in the buildings above. All of this was really sad and shocking.

We had a view from rooftop of Hebron Rehabilitation Centre and had a first view of Cave of Patriarchs/Ibrahimi Mosque/Ha Machpela. Then we decided to walk with Palestinian students down Shuhada Street (normally prohibited for Palestinian because some Israeli settlers live here). One Israeli soldier allowed us to go with the Palestinians but once we walked a few minutes, some soldiers came, asked us for our Ids and divided us in two distinct groups: the Palestinians and the people from Dublin. The soldiers disallowed the Palestinian students from going any further. It was again really shocking. Then we visited to Jameel Abu Heikal's home beside Tel Rumeida settlement.

On Thursday 14th, we met 11th Grade from Hussein School, a boys' school and 10th Grade from UGU Boy's school. They were like the Palestinian girls when they talked about the conflict; passionate and a bit angry.

The Palestinian students: The Palestinian students are more concerned by the conflict, their everyday life is more affected than that of the Israelis. They are suffering from the conflict (e.g. the check points). They are deprived of their freedom: "We are in a huge prison called the West Bank". Palestinian boys are not as scared as the girls because they said they have to be strong and one day they hope they will have their land back. Then they said that the situation is worse in Gaza but they would like to go there to help their friends living in Gaza. For them, the most important human rights are freedom, homeland and safety - the rights they feel they don't have.



In the afternoon we first visited first the Jewish synagogue side of the Patriarchs/ Ibrahimi Mosque/Ha Machpela and then the Muslim mosque side. We did a minute's silence by the group for Sabreen Abu Sneineh (9 years old, killed by Israeli army gunfire August 2001), Omran Abu Hamdieh (17 years old, beaten to death by 3 Israeli soldiers, December 2002), 29 victims and many wounded of the Ibrahimi Massacre (February 1994 when Dr. Baruch Goldstein, a Hebron settler opened fire with machine gun on worshippers).

On the evening we went to a Palestinian girl's house with some other Palestinians, we played cards and ate some traditional food. We had a really nice time!

On Friday 15th, we rested during all the morning and on the afternoon, we visited Bethlehem with two of the Palestinian students . We went to the Church of the Nativity. We stopped for a view of the Har Homa settlement. And in the late afternoon we went to Aida refugee camp, one of three refugee camps in Bethlehem. I felt really sad for them because they live in really poor conditions, but I think it was interesting to see how much some people are affected by this conflict. Then we returned to Hebron, did final reflections and left Hebron at 00h to arrive in Dublin on Saturday the 16th at 3:55 pm. It was so sad to go back to Ireland, I would loved to stay longer in Israel and Palestine.

It was a wonderful journey! I learned so much! I found Jerusalem was a beautiful city with a lot of things to see, many different cultures, with contrasts between East Jerusalem and West Jerusalem. However Hebron was so impressive! There are so many shocking things over there. Palestinians are deprived of their freedom because of settlements, of the Israeli soldiers, because of the separation wall... They are enclosed in West Bank and can't go everywhere. I think all Palestinians dream to go to the Al Aqsa Mosque one day as it's so important for them but they can't, because they can't go to Jerusalem. So I had more affection for the Palestinian students because from what I saw, their lives are so hard.

So I think I achieved my aims which were to discover new countries and new cultures and to meet the Israeli and Palestinian students to hear what their thoughts about the conflict.