

# Students' and Teachers' Visit to Israel & Palestine 2011

## Visit Report by Yemi Abolarinwa

5<sup>th</sup> Year student at St. Kevin's Community College, Dublin

The Palestine and Israel trip is the best experience in my life. The whole entire trip was amazing and exciting even though it was an educational trip it is an experience in my life I will never forget. Every single day was fun because you could never predict what will happen the next day.

When my teacher told me I was going I thought it was just a dream. But getting to the airport and taking a long journey to Israel and Palestine made me realise that a dream can come true without you realising it. Going to Israel and Palestine and living the life of Israeli and Palestinian people made me realise people go through different things.

I have learned some much on the trip: one important thing I learned was to be grateful for what you have because others out there want the same opportunities that other have, but they don't have the chance. So we must appreciate every little thing.

Arriving at Ben Gurion, Tel Aviv at 2.15 am was so stressful but it was good looking forward to get some rest at the Victoria Hotel. Late that day we went to the Old city of Jerusalem and walked around the markets. It was so lovely, different from anything I have seen before. So many beautiful things to buy.

Seeing the Old City from the rooftop of the Austrian Hospice was amazing because you could see everything, even the Dome of the Rock. It all made me feel so good about the trip and made me look forward to the rest of the week we had in Israel and Palestine.

Visiting the Hebrew University Secondary School (Layeda) was great. It was the first school for discussion with Israeli students, first insights into what's important for each others identities. The games we played at the start were made the atmosphere feel good and comfortable and got the shy people talking. The discussion revealed importance of politics to Israeli students. We discussed the diverse experiences of the programme. We did these discussions in every school we went to in Jerusalem.

One afternoon we started at the Damascus Gate of the Old City and went through the Muslim Quarter, passed by the 7<sup>th</sup> station cross and met at the Jaffa Gate. It was really nice and friendly when Yotam and Tamar joined us and showed us the Armenian Quarter, the Jewish Quarter and onto the Western Wall. We viewed the Temple Mount, the Dome of Rock and Al Asqa Mosque. Yotam was so intelligent that he told us all about the Western Wall. The wall is different from every wall have

seen and the way it looks it seem really holy. The way we walked backwards from the wall shows the religious side of it and the prayer or a little message makes the wall feel so special .

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre is built on the site of Calvary site, where Jesus was crucified and rose to Heaven. We saw the Franciscans holding the prayer sessions which is different from the services we have been to in Ireland. My best experience was going to Jesus tomb were he rose to Heaven and touching Jesus' marble tomb where he laid. Being inside the tomb I could feel Jesus in there with me and touching the marble I could feel him laying there but invisible.

In all of these schools we did mostly the same things: we discussed, Denise and Katie sang songs, we danced, Pascal and James and Kieran played the instruments. My favourite school was the Ha Nissui school because the school was fun and the students could do whatever they want when they want. The teachers didn't mind and they were allowed to write teachers notes about hwo they felt .

The lunches we had each day were delicious. We got nice tasty Ice-cream at the Machane Yehuda market.

We visited the Ultra Orthodox area in Mea Shearim which I didn't want to go at first but am glad I went to because I got to see a different part of Israel. It was quieter.

I was excited when we got ready to go to Hebron. Getting to the checkpoint 300, then going through the separation/security wall and railings made me feel so angry and annoyed. I felt like people were being treated like animals. When I got to the West Bank everything was different. I hate the way they are being watched and the way they don't have freedom. The separation barrier is so tall that no one can jump or climb and they are watched from watch towers.

Living with Ghada was so good because I lived the live of a Palestinian person. They are so nice, their family so friendly: they welcome you like their own kid. Solenn and I stayed in the same room. The electric blankets were so good it made everything warm. We got lots of sweets and chocolate and crisps in our room. We had a computer in our room. I went on Facebook every night. We woke up really early every moring.

The schools in Palestine were big but not as big as the ones in Israel. The boys were separated from the girls. The people were so religious. The talks we had in the schools were different from the talks in Israel. The Palestinian discussions was more emotional because they were so open-minded and talked about everything and you could imagine what was going on. I hate the facts that the Palestinian people don't trust the Israel people. They don't want to give them chances because they think they are lying. Most of the schools we visited were girls' school.

In the schools we talked about the importance of politics to students , the identities also reflected in Palestinian students and how the programme aims to work for both sides. In Khadeeja Abdeen school we popped in to say Hi to Marwa and to see how she doing. I found it awkward when she gave all the girls hugs and just nodded to the boys. Even when Pascal wanted to hand shake her she

said no sorry. We didn't really understand when Darran explained to us why.

We visited the Hussein Boys' School where the atmosphere was very calm. We just talked about the project. In the Mazania and Qawasmeh Schools we had interesting discussions... In every school we got tea and sweets.

The Old City of Hebron was different from Jerusalem. There was an overhead mesh to protect passers and shop keepers from rubbish. The newly finished museum was so creative and beautiful. It used to be Turkish Baths.

We visited the rooftop of the Hebron Rehabilitation Committee where there is a fine view of the Old City, including the Ibrahim Mosque. I was happy when we took the Palestinian students through the checkpoint where only Christians and Jews may pass. We went into the Fakhouri pottery shop

We also visited Jamil's house in the H2 area. Jamil's house was covered with camera's there was camera that follow human movement. He told us a little story about his house. Jamil's mother prepared light snacks and beverages. We also went to Samah Sharabati's home where soldiers stay on top her roof 24/7 and her next door neighbour is a settler. They told us that they never leave the house with nobody in it because they feel the settlers will take over the building. When Kate and Denise sang a song its was so sad because its was so sweet that people became so emotional.

We visited Sarah and Abraham and Isaac and Rebecca's tombs. I enjoyed when we went shopping and a few other got things at the handicrafts shop, I got lots of things. It was so good because it was cheap.

The Palestinian students threw a party for us in Ghada's house. It was really generous. I was really sad when we had to start packing to go back to Israel. I was having so much fun I didn't want to leave.

The day we left Hebron we went through Bethlehem. We visited the church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. It's a beautiful place. The line was long and I bought a candle and holy water for my mum and dad.

We also had time for reflection before the serperation wall. We met a woman who lost her store and family all because of the wall. I felt so sorry for her when I heard her story. The graffiti on the wall was was so creative its has beautiful pictures and colours and writing. We took pictures with it. We went back to Israel and did the final reflections on Salahadin Street about what we have learned and how we felt.

We had a final gathering with the Israeli students. They were so conscientious about what the Palestinian people said. I was very annoyed with what a few of my group people said because it made a few people angry but even thought it was the truth like they didn't say it right.

We did a final bit of shopping and I got a jumper which said "I love Jerusalem" on it. We went back to the hotel and got a shower and got ready and went to the airport .

I enjoyed every minute we spent on the trip every single day I learned something new. I am glad that I made new friends. I hope I see them again. This is one experience in my life I will never forget.

I hope one day I will go back and see that the conflicts has ended and the world will be a better place. I also Thank God for guiding and watching over me while I was in Palestine and Israel.