

## **SURFING IN ISRAEL ?**

That's what I thought when I first read the invitation.

A group of Southern California surfers were being invited to check out the waves, surf and explore Ashdod, Israel, along the eastern Mediterranean coast.

So at the end of May a diverse group of eleven--surfers and friends, from a seventy-year-old to twenty-somethings, were treated by locals to some unique surfing experiences, as well as to Israeli history and culture. Lorraine Schmalenberger and Simon Andrews represented La Jolla Shores Surfing Association. They were joined by Otis Sistrunk, Hayley Nemeroff and Meredith Rose from Cardiff Surf Club, and Taylor Nelson, Lucy Rose, Zander Hartman and Ben Samuel from Malibu Surfing Association. Julie Andrews accompanied as writer, and Martha Everson as photographer. We were greeted on our arrival at the Tel Aviv airport by Omer Zadekevitch, our smiling host and guide for the week. Once we were settled in our rooms in a beautiful new hotel overlooking Lido Beach, we were welcomed at a dinner hosted by Dr Lasry, the

Mayor of Ashdod, Ashdod Council members and officials, and several members of the local Ashdod Surfing Association. This was to be only the first of many bounteous and delicious Mediterranean-style meals that included warm breads, a variety of fresh salads and hummus, followed by local meats and fish for the omnivores among us.

In between surf sessions we were treated to excursions, with professional guides, around the country. First, to the booming and prosperous Ashdod, with its fine beaches and yacht marina, sophisticated port operation and diverse immigrant cultures.

Then to the historic port of Jaffa and the capital Tel Aviv. To Jerusalem, with its powerful new holocaust museum, and old city, whose intense, layer-on-layer, side-by-side, interwoven historic places of the world's three great monotheistic religions touched each of us in his and her own way.

Another day to the Dead Sea, the lowest point on earth, where we had the unique anti-gravity experience of floating on the warm, mineral-rich

waters. On a visit to a kibbutz near the Gaza strip we watched a team of talented young girls rehearse their routines before a performance the next week at EuroDisney in France, then enjoyed a casual potluck dinner on the lawn—a birthday celebration for Allan Goldstein, LJSSA member, our original contact with the Ashdod surfing community, and inspiration for this ‘Surf Delegation,’ who had just joined our group with his family.

Oh yes, the surf...! Ashdod is special—for its surf-friendly public policies, protecting and enhancing surfing areas, promoting the sport, and for its large and enthusiastic surf community. And what’s unique to Ashdod is night-surfing—under the big fieldlights set up on the jetty at Gil Beach, where we surfed in the warm (77+degrees!) waves with a friendly group of local adults and kids until 2:00am!

Surfing in Israel? Oh, yes, we all agreed: it’s not only possible, but has a wow-factor you can only find there!

See images of our trip on Facebook: ‘Ashdod & South California Surf Partnership,’ and the LJSSA website: [www.ljssa.org](http://www.ljssa.org).