
Doing Business in Israel

Short Term Exchange - Winter 2019

Arunabha Dastidar - January 20, 2019 | Program Duration: 30th Dec, 2018 to 7th Jan, 2019



Visa Process

If you do not hold a visa exempt passport, you will require a study permit to enter Israel. I am a Canadian Permanent Resident, but the visa was needed on my Indian Passport. Always refer to the official website of Israeli embassy for visa issues.

Here is the link: <https://embassies.gov.il/toronto/ConsularServices/Pages/Visas.aspx>

DBI program coordinator will issue an invitation letter to all. I preferred going to the Israel embassy in 2 Bloor St. E with all the required documents to get my Visa. The embassy has very tight security, but the people and guards are accommodating. They right away approve the visa if everything is in order and collect your passport to be posted back within 3-4 days with Visa. Also, they do not require heavy bank balance just ask for the bank statement to make sure you have a valid account.

Insurance

Generally, if you have travel credit cards like CIBC Aventura (which gives a premium coverage for me), it covers most of the benefits of travel insurance. It is essential to have travel insurance in such trips as we saw a few issues with luggage and one of the participants broke her back during the trip. You can also buy additional travel insurance above the basic ones you have with the Canadian health plan, on sites like Priceline after or during the process of booking the flights.

Financials

Most of the places in Israel use Visa or MasterCard but it is sometimes difficult to withdraw cash using ATM especially from Canadian debit cards (I tried), and you will be charged a very high transaction fee. Try to carry some Shekels (the local currency) that will always come handy in small shops or for local taxis. I did carry a few hundred Shekels and some USD before my travel at a decent price from the bank. You can also find a good currency exchange near the Hotel (Art Plus) if you need some during the trip.

Arrival/Departure

Even though my departure was smooth with no questions but it is advised to reach airport much earlier approx. 3 hrs from your departure. I met a few other participants flying on the same flight from Toronto with me coming from various schools in North America and it was

fun. Arrival was smooth and on time even though the food in Air Canada was not that great. At Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv as we were a bunch of students doing the same thing we all lined up together and the customs officer has not asked any questions from me apart from “ Is it the same program?”. THEY DO NOT STAMP YOUR PASSPORT ANYMORE. As they know about the issue with other middle eastern countries, they instead will provide you with the entry slip; please keep it safe in your passport. Make sure you download the GETT app (local taxi app) there at the airport. The Uber works there but does not show any fare as fares are strict as per the meter and are provided after the ride. You can take a Taxi to the Hotel from the airport taxi stand, and we were four people sharing the Taxi which costed us a total of 174 ILS (about CAD 64), a much cheaper ride:)

Academics/Teaching

Program: The program was a very well balanced mix of classroom lectures detailing about the Israeli way of entrepreneurship and on the field, visits to explore the extensive history, culture and the business centers of today in Israel. It included reminiscing of the 5000 years old cities of Jaffa and Jerusalem on some of the days coupled with the hi-tech areas of Beer Sheva & new city of Haifa. You can experience extreme areas of religious balance and business excellence during the program.

Classroom: 45 students came from 11 business schools such as Kellogg, Duke, Rotman, HKUST, etc. both part-time and full-time. Kellogg has the largest group of 13 followed by HKUST of 8 students. Other students came from Sydney, Singapore, Japan etc.

Teaching: The Israeli way of teaching encouraged more questions and interactions. The classroom lectures were more geared towards making us understand the history of the country and how it still impacts the way businesses work in Israel. The core of the program is “The Start-Up Nation” book by Dan señor based on Israel’s economy of miraculous start-ups which lead across the world. We met few outstanding serial entrepreneurs who sold their previous startups to top companies in silicon valley and again working on new projects. There is four pages case analysis paper due in the middle of this program and another six pages due two weeks after the program.

International Services

Before the trip, there was a guidance mail and a booklet with a detailed agenda for each day. Everyone was more than willing to answer any questions or concerns. Day one was orientation program where details about the course are shared, and some of us also were able to book an additional trip for the weekend (Friday - Saturday in Israel) for Masada and dead sea (a recommended experience) where the coordinators organized it. The entire team had excellent help. The team helped plan the group day trips, and they responded to e-mail incredibly quickly.

Housing Arrangement

The Hotel Art Plus is a boutique hotel right at a prime location next to the beaches of Tel-Aviv. It was decent and included in the exchange fee paid to the school along with most of the dinners. Tel-Aviv is an expensive city, the hotel even though it was small was pretty expensive. If you don't want to share the room, additional USD1000 will be charged. I was matched with a participant from Macombs Texas MBA; first, the room provided to us was too tiny even to stand as it has no room for movement after the bed and luggage. On request, they changed us to a spacious corner room, but it will depend on availability. No harm in asking. The Hotel staff was really helpful, and the breakfast was terrific. The hotel also had a free drink and snacks time from 5 -7 in the evening called as the "Happy Hour" is also good for light networking and chit chat with the peers.

Costs/ Expenses

Tel-Aviv is in general much more expensive than Toronto, normal meals will be above CA\$20, and decent dinners at a sit-down restaurant will be CA\$50 per person. Most of the meals are included in the program fee and were sumptuous. On free nights and weekends we needed to buy our meals, which would be a good opportunity to try some excellent local joints like swarm from Yashka and Pita pockets from Miznon all at 15 mins walk from the hotel. You can spend extra days exploring the city and flea market. I have spent extra CA\$150 for dead sea and Masada trip on one weekend and CA\$136 for the Banksy art tour in the west bank including Bethlehem (Jesus was considered to born here). I also spent on shopping, Uber and some other experiences in the city.

My Budget for the trip was CA\$3000 (program fee) + CA\$1200 (Flights) + CA\$1200 (Food, drinks, New year eve party, Shopping & Extra travels). So plan your budget accordingly.

General Impressions

It was surely an excellent and unforgettable experience. The country is very advanced and very well equipped. The service quality is excellent. You can reach out to people in the middle of the night as well. The businesses are very responsive, and they are very cautious about giving the right information. You can buy almost anything you feel you need but be ready to shed some extra \$\$.

Temperature is generally about 7-15 degree Celsius during the period with occasional showers. The country has an unbelievable and extensive history that I knew little of before the journey. Israelis take great pride in their country and their success, and they like to tell you everything, and take advantage of it! I was delighted to learn about the country history and the deep history and development of its country and its race in start-up and innovative culture. The country was much more modernized than I anticipated, as previously mentioned. I felt comfortable and secure and enjoyed local culture, and I got to know people and to understand better what caused so much distress in the country. The program in total was very well planned and had the right mix of various experiences from the country. It's interesting, to visit the start-up nation with a perspective of MBAs across the world!



Enjoy Your Exchange - Toda Raba (Thank You Very Much)