

An Israeli Summer

The official start to summer in Israel is June 21, just as it is in North America, but summer is in the atmosphere long before. Starting in May, temperatures reach the nineties and above, the air is humid, and summer clothes are out again, after a very short storage period. Although summer will be over with the beginning of the new school year in September, high temperatures will stay with us at least through mid-October. There is no rain during these months, and since we had a severe drought again this year, Israelis are allowed to water their gardens only for a very limited time during the evenings. Grass lawns are not allowed to be watered at all, so everything looks dry and yellow.

School is over on June 20 for high schools and June 31 for elementary schools. The long two-month summer vacation, or as we call it, *Hachofesh Hagadol*, which translates as "the big vacation," seems to be longer every year. Summer vacation in Israel is in many ways similar to summer vacation in North America. One of the differences is camps. Overnight camps are much more popular in North America. Kids, at a relative young age spend a few weeks in camp. In Israel, overnight camps usually last for a week, and are through youth movements. Most Israeli kids ages 3-12 spend the summer in day camps. Community Centers offer a variety of day camps with different specialties such as cooking, arts, sports, dancing, English, and so on. An average day camp lasts for three weeks and costs between 1000 NIS to 3000 NIS. (\$250-\$750) Many private outdoor day camps offer more opportunities and a wider range of specialties and are obviously more expensive. In recent years, Israeli-Arab day camps offer a joint cultural experience, with the hope that the message of co-existence heard at a younger age will develop into better understanding in the next generation.

Teenagers usually work during the summer. Many of them have already begun searching for summer jobs. Teens work as camp counselors, in retail stores, washing cars, babysitting, etc. This year, due to the economic crisis, thousands of them will be working not to fund their summer activities, but rather to help support their financially distressed families.

The busiest place during the summer is obviously the beach. Israelis love the sea.

We usually go to the Mediterranean Sea, and we're not the only ones. Every summer, hordes of jellyfish fill the water and burn our skin. But the sun is a much greater threat. Israel has one of the highest skin cancer rates in the world. This year alone, we've seen an increase of 24 percent in new skin cancer cases. The Israeli sun, loved by tourists from all over the world, requires following common-sense rules of sun-protection—sun block, hats, protective clothing.

Israelis love to travel during summer vacation. Almost two and a half million Israelis (33 percent of the population) traveled abroad during 2008, half during the months of July and August. Israelis usually travel to neighboring countries such as Turkey and Greece, but Europe and farther destinations are popular as well.

The closest experience to traveling abroad in Israel is spending a vacation in Eilat.

Eilat

Eilat is the southernmost city of Israel, and its location by the Red Sea offers exciting activities and relaxing resorts. Eilat follows the rhythm of the sun, the desert, the sea and nature itself. The calm, transparent waters of the Red Sea reveal a delightful surprise—breathtakingly beautiful coral reefs and an enchanted underwater world, featuring thousands of varieties of fish and other marine life. Eilat is almost like traveling abroad for Israelis, as tourists from all over the world congregate there, and different languages are heard on the streets and at the beach. A cosmopolitan place, Eilat is a perfect getaway <http://www.eilat-guide.com/>.

Summer Festivals

Summer in Israel is a great time for outdoor festivals, which all offer activities, music, and a chance to gather with friends.

Hebrew Book Week

Hebrew Book Week is an annual event that celebrates literature in Israel. Israelis are voracious readers, and publishing houses advertise and sell their products, often at a discount, at day-long outdoor book fairs in Israel's major cities. Book stores typically offer sales during this time, and a variety of literary events take place, such as author appearances, public readings, and the award ceremony for the [Sapir Prize](#). There is also a heightened level of attention paid to literature in the media. This year the book fair marked the 100th anniversary of Tel Aviv.

The Jerusalem Film Festival

Ten days long, the festival screens between 150-200 films in a number of categories: Panorama, showcasing the best of international feature films; Documentary, dedicated to international documentary film-making; The Jewish Experience, dealing with issues of Jewish identity and history; Television Dramas; New Directors, and of course, Israeli Film. <http://www.jff.org.il/?CategoryID=224>

Tel Aviv's Beer Festival

During the past decade, the 'Beer City' or *Ir Ha'bira* Festival has become one of the most popular cultural events in the country. The two-day event (July 8-9) takes place near the beach and offers foods stands, street performances, art stands, a flea market, and a variety of performances and concerts. Over the years, the festival has become one

of the most popular events in Israel, and an outstanding success, both from artistic and business perspectives.

<http://members.virtualtourist.com/m/3bfb8/1a102d/a/>

Spiritual and New-Age Festival

Sagol (Purple Festival) is a biennial happening that takes place by the Mediterranean Sea. People from all over the world gather to participate in spiritual and new-age activities. There are a wide range of workshops focusing on meditation, movement and body awareness, yoga, tantra, shamanism, art—all oriented toward self-growth and self-improvement.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y7k1DMNddO0>

The Hummus Festival

The Hummus Festival (called *Niguvim*) offers authentic summertime fun for the whole family. It combines music, rhythm, and most importantly, HUMMUS. Another example of an Israeli culinary experience in Tel Aviv, the festival brings a variety of hummus makers from all around the country to one place. "The following video has some nice images from the 2004 festival. http://www.rptlve.com/site/detail/detail/detailDetail.asp?detail_id=359526