

## Abigail Lance Studies Social Conflict In Israel

By Abigail Lance  
Northeastern University '14

This summer I studied social conflict in Israel for a month. With the current Palestinian bid for statehood in the UN, this was a particularly exciting time to be there. We traveled all over the country, hearing from diplomats, politicians, non-government organizations, professors, religious leaders, students, and regular Israeli citizens.

I was able to attend a rally in Tel Aviv in support of a two-state solution to the conflict, hear from the head of the Jewish settlers in the West Bank, and travel into the West Bank to understand what life was like for the Palestinians who reside there and for the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) soldiers who are stationed there. I was there for Israeli Independence Day, which Arab-Isrealis refer to as Nakba Day (day of catastrophe) and for the border protests at the Syrian border. I hiked to the ruins of Masada at sunrise. I was able to gain a huge variety of experiences, which I found inspiring and enlightening in many different ways.

### Be'er Sheva

Our trip started in Be'er Sheva, where we stayed in dorms at Ben Gurion University, mixed in with students

at the university. We received lectures from a variety of professors on countless different topics including Israel's economy, political system, geopolitics of space, multiculturalism, etc.

We were also able to visit some Bedouin villages. There are several recognized Bedouin villages in Israel, where



Abigail at the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

all Bedouin are supposed to live. However, many do not want to relocate, so they remain in unrecognized villages. The Israeli government has destroyed such villages over and over, and they are constantly being rebuilt. They also exist

without any official government recognition, which means they have no electricity, school busses, or trash pick-up.

Despite all of this, the Bedouins we visited were incredibly nice and hospitable, and their lifestyle was astonishingly resourceful.

Despite having a packed schedule in Be'er Sheva, I was still able to make friends with the teenager who ran the falafel stand nearby, as we ate falafel every single day! I was also able to chat with a group of IDF soldiers we met in a hookah bar and some high schoolers at a school we visited.

### Eilat

While in Be'er Sheva our group was able to take a weekend trip to Eilat. Eilat is a resort town on the southern tip of Israel, on the Red Sea. We took a very enjoyable cruise around the Red Sea, and we were able to see Egypt, Jordan, and Syria from our boat. We also got to swim with jellyfish!

We were also able to go to the Dead Sea, which was incredibly fun. The water is so salty it is impossible to keep your balance; everyone floats. We also covered ourselves in Dead Sea mud, which has healing properties and is super fun!

### Jerusalem

Next, our group moved to Jerusalem for a week. We stayed in a hostel right outside the old city, which led to many nights filled with exploring. While in Jerusalem we went on several different tours. We learned about the history of the old city and the different quarters.

We went on many different tours of religious locations; Jerusalem is a holy place for Muslims, Christians and Jews. I was able to spend time at the Wailing Wall, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, and the Temple Mount. We also took tours of East Jerusalem, to understand the border disputes and socioeconomic realities in that area.

We visited Al-Quds University, which is technically in the West bank (though everything involving a border in Israel is a little bit iffy). Al-Quds is a Palestinian Univeristy which is unrecognized by Israel, but recognized by the rest of the world. There we were greeted with extremely generous hospitality and several lectures from Arab professors who taught there.

We went to the Knesset (Israel's seat of government), where we were able to speak to a Knesset member.

### Hebron

Perhaps the single most thought-provoking day of the trip was the day we traveled inside the occupied West Bank to Hebron. We heard the stories of IDF soldiers who fired grenade launchers into the Arab parts of the town for hours every day, with no provocation. We saw first-hand people who had to climb across rooftops to get to their homes, because certain areas of the city were only open to Jews.

We had to have a police escort when we were in Hebron, to protect us from

the Jewish settlers in the area, who did not appreciate people coming in and seeing the lifestyle there. This was contrasted by the head of the Jewish settler movement in the West Bank (most of which is illegal, though still semi-sanctioned by Israel) speaking to us earlier in the week, justifying his settlement in Palestinian territory with the International Law of the Bible.

Being able to spend time in Jerusalem made the conflict much more real to me. Spending any amount of time in Jerusalem, you begin to understand why the conflict is seemingly impossible to solve: every person has a different opinion on what they are entitled to.

After leaving Jerusalem, we spent some time in Tzfat, which is near the Golan, a territory Israel took from Syria. We were able to go to the Golan and see where the battles had taken place and hear the official Israeli explanation of the situation. We were also able to visit the site of the Syrian border protest. After that we moved on to Haifa, where we spent some time at Haifa University getting lectures from professors there.

### Tel Aviv

Our final stop of the month was Tel Aviv, which was by far my favorite city. While in Tel Aviv we stayed in Jaffa, a predominantly Arab neighborhood outside the city, which was right on the Mediterranean. Our hostel was in the middle of a shuk, which is a large open-air market place.

In Tel Aviv we went to a peace rally which was advocating for a two-state solution to the conflict. It was predominantly Jewish protesters. There was also a small counter-protest. We were able to walk around the rally and speak to people of all different opinions who had come together in support of a peaceful end to the conflict.

Throughout my experience in Israel, I was able to eat amazing food every single day. I was able to talk to people whose everyday lives are affected by a conflict that has been perpetuated as long as they can remember. I was able to visit some of the most historic and beautiful places in the world.

The trip gave me much insight into the world around me, and I feel incredibly lucky to have had the experience. I am eagerly awaiting the outcome of the Palestinian bid for statehood within the UN and to see how this conflict will continue to unfold. I am hopeful that the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority can finally come to a compromise. It would be amazing if one of the most beautiful regions of the world were not being held back by such an ugly conflict.

If you are interested in more details of my trip, I kept a very casual travel blog at [Away-From-Gnome.tumblr.com](http://Away-From-Gnome.tumblr.com).

Abigail grew up in Andover and graduated from AE/MS and MVHS. She is currently studying sociology at Northeastern University in Boston.



*Pleasant Lake*  
**Sunk'n Treasures**  
Gently Worn Clothing Consignment Shop  
**NEW HOURS START OCT 1!**  
**ALWAYS 50% OFF ITEMS**  
Sunday: Closed  
Saturday: 9-4  
Monday 11-4  
Tue-Fri: 10-4  
*MONDAYS! SECRET SALE!*  
Regular hours resume in Spring  
18 Ten Penny Lane • 735-5445 • Mon 11-4, Tues-Fri 10-4, Sat 9-4

**Proven Tree Care...** SERVICING HOMEOWNERS, CONTRACTORS & MUNICIPALITIES  
Well Equipped • Owner Operated • 22 Years Experience  
Guillemette Tree Service  
Ken Guillemette  
Biologist - UMass  
526-8111  
(C)398-0221

- Large - Difficult Tree Removal
- Pruning and View Improvements
- Stump Grinding
- Fertilization
- Land Clearing
- Brush Clearing & Removal
- 170' Crane Truck and 60' Aerial Bucket Truck Rental
- Climbing
- Snow Plowing and Firewood