

## Personal Report

### 1. Preparation for the stay abroad

The preparation for my stay abroad started with choosing my host university. Although it was not mandatory for me to study abroad, I wanted to since I already had an amazing time abroad during my Bachelors. So after some academic as well as personal consideration I chose the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Israel and applied for it. And although there were only three spots available, luckily I was accepted for one of those spots. Soon the question of how I would fund myself during the time abroad and everything linked to it arose. Luckily, at one of the information events hosted by the international office I was given some information about different ways to fund myself. Amongst those, the Baden-Württemberg scholarship (**definitely check it out!**). I applied for it and luckily I was accepted for a three month scholarship.

Preparing myself for the study abroad included a lot of organization. As I have been studying abroad before, I knew what that would include. Therefore created an extra folder where I collected all the paperwork and wrote everything down I had to do (so I wouldn't forget anything or miss deadlines): from applying for study abroad Bafög, the scholarship, taking an extra IELTS test for language proficiency, taking care of my finances, getting extra health insurance, getting a student visa, booking my flight to finding a sublet my room at home. Unfortunately finding a **place to stay in Jerusalem** turned out to be more complicated than anticipated. I deliberately decided against staying in the student dorm provided by the host university, as it is a bit expensive and I would have been in this "bubble" of University. This I didn't want since I wanted to get in contact with the locals here and experience living here fully. But finding a room in the city which I could afford (rental costs are in general higher here) was hard. Furthermore those things happen here on short notice and are more in-officially (**the whole renting happens via various Facebook groups**). Which means searching weeks in advance just didn't work. So I was quite happy then when I finally found a place to live four weeks in advance, when I was still in Germany, only to be told one week before arrival that I can't have it anymore, as another girl was moving in now. Thus I ended up going in a hostel for the first week. Luckily I booked a

flight two weeks prior to the start of University, since I wanted to have some time to arrive and acclimate before University life takes a grip on me.

Another thing I did to prepare myself for my stay abroad was to take **lessons in Modern Hebrew** (the university offers Modern Hebrew lessons in the Department of “Judaistik”, the teacher is really lovely – I can only recommend it!), so I would be able to understand and talk with the people here. Unfortunately I only made slow progress, so when I arrived I was at no level to do so. But my teacher also taught us about Israeli culture and Judaism, which came in quite handy at some occasions.

## 2. My first time in Israel

During my first week, which I spend in a (rather shitty) hostel in the middle of the Arab quarter in the old city (that was really an experience...) I explored a lot - especially the old city and the city centre of Jerusalem. I did a lot of touristic activities, went to museums or churches, and I tried to find my way around. Simultaneously, I also searched for a room, which I luckily found after a bit. It was a bit far from University and expensive, but at this time I just wanted to have a proper place to stay. It turned out to be absolutely lovely, in a great neighbourhood with a lovely flatmate and her adorable little dog. So in the end I'm quite happy about it. During my first weeks in Jerusalem, major holidays were coming up, like Rosh ha-Schana and Sukkot. It was really interesting to start my semester abroad with the impression of completely empty streets on Rosh ha-Schana when the life seems to come to a still stand (in retro-perspective the same we have at the moment I'm writing this – life during the Corona-Virus) as well as Sukkot, when each family and community builds their little huts in the garden and celebrate there. I also had time to get to know my new housemate and her adorable little dog and to explore the neighbourhood. I also got an **Israeli sim-card** (I chose a sim-card from rami levy, a supermarket branch. It is cheaper than all the other companies, but there are only two places in Jerusalem where they sell those sim-cards and where you can update you package, so I wouldn't recommend it – one of those place happened to be 5 min from my home), which was a bit of an ordeal as the sim-card and my phone used different frequencies (apparently my phone was just too old, so it didn't support the up-to-date frequency the Israelis sim-cards uses). Ultimately, after going to the shop multiple times to complain, the problem mysteriously resolved itself after two weeks – that's how it is with technics sometimes.

Soon the **orientation week** of the university started: Firstly we were invited for a brunch where we had the chance to meet all the other exchange and international students and had the opportunities to make some contact (here I actually met one of the other girls from Freiburg). After that we got an Introduction in all the academic matters and after that an introduction of

“living in Israel” including a lot of safety recommendations. We were also offered a tour through the campus as well as the city as (**definitely recommended**). For me these orientation meetings were not only helpful in regards to the information we got there, but also because I came into contact with some other exchange students and international students there – some of which I befriended there.

### 3. Life in the Jerusalem

Since I lived quite far from uni, I arranged **my courses** so that I wouldn't need to go there each day. But therefore my days were really long, going from 8.30 when my Hebrew classes started (**I totally recommend taking them, as you**

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**not only learn modern Hebrew quite fast, but it also functions as a social pool, where you can meet other students. But it is quite a lot of work...**) to sometimes 20.30 when my last Akkadian lesson ended. I took more courses than I had to, only because the uni offered really amazing courses I just didn't want to miss out. It was definitely more than I ever would have taken at home and it included a lot of work, but I managed. It just felt like a once in a time opportunity with some of the courses, while others just included a lot of lesson hours (7,5 modern Hebrew hours and 5,25 Akkadian hours per week). But staying at uni for the whole day was no problem, as the uni has multiple cafes and some food courts, where you could get a lunch or just a coffee. They also have a lot of microwaves and places to sit down and eat, so often I just eat pre-prepared food from home.

I think one of the **greatest difficulties** I faced while living here was the language. Although a lot of things are in English, being unable to understand and speak the language properly was challenging. I started to learn Modern Hebrew a year prior to my study abroad and I continued learning it while being here. And even though I made progress, at the end my skills were quite rudimentary and I still have a lot of trouble in having a conversation in Hebrew - which makes me very sad.

Another thing I had to get used to, was the difference in, let's call it, “official politeness”. While Israelis are really lovely and warm people, when they are working they might not be. A lot of times when I was at the supermarket, a postal office or any institution where I required service, the people working there were in my understanding quite rude: having their phones out constantly, chatting over your head with others, not even greeting you as you approach. One of

my friends once explained it to me: “They are working, you can’t expect them to be happy about it”. It is most definitely something you have to get used to.

Surprisingly, it only took me a bit of time to get used to **Shabbats** here. To get used to have everything shut down for 24 hours once a week: supermarkets, public transport, restaurants and cafes, etc. You can’t really do a lot. So, I often used the Shabbat for what it was intended: get a rest and recharge my batteries. Although it really put a limit to my travelling and exploring.

Some of my **fondest memories** so far are all the amazing trips I’ve done here: all the things I have seen and places I’ve been. Israel has a wonderful nature that is so much different from home. I still remember the amazing hikes I’ve done, especially the one through the Wadi Quelt to Jericho where we hiked through the desert; Or my first time being at the beach in Tel Aviv and feeling this utter difference in life and mind-set between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem; Or the bustling old city with all those little cute shops – I really loved going shopping there (**epically in the Arab Quarter, you can get cheap and good vegetables and fruits, or great sweets at JafarSweets**). Once I even signed up for a Shabbat dinner: It was a bit weird, I have to say – coming into this random family I didn’t know, and going through all the rituals I didn’t understand (although I read up on them before hand). As it turned out later, I was a guest to a really famous Jewish family in Jerusalem who opens their doors regularly for tourists – which is really amazing in my opinion. But for me as a Christian, I just felt out of place. But it will be an interesting experience I’ll always remember. Another time I also went to an evening with klezmer music, the traditional Jewish music, which was hosted in a basement. That was really great, too (**also, a definite recommendation** <http://klezmerjerusalem.com/eventbrite-event/klezmer-tish>).

Another thing I will miss, are all the people I was lucky to meet here. Somehow people are closer to each other than at home. It’s easier to randomly chat with a stranger on a bus or having a coffee with someone you just met twenty minutes ago. I’ve become quite close with some people here and I befriended some of the other students here. I will miss those people very much.

For those who want to come to Jerusalem to study abroad I would have **a few tips**: firstly be flexible. I for myself am not, and I faced some trouble because I love to plan things in advance. But some things here you can’t, as it is quite chaotic and in some degree inefficiently. Secondly, prepare yourself to talk about politics. You should be up-to-date with Israeli politics, especially when it comes to the Westbank. I personally don’t really enjoy discussion politics and hence often felt disadvantageous in such conversation, as I – apart from knowing the basics – never dealt with it in depth. But it seemed for me very important to have an opinion on it as well as to position yourself and to defend your position. And one last thing: don’t go into the student

dorms. Whereas it does provide you with some advantages and it is for sure easier than finding a room in the city, it also keeps you in this university bubble and in some extent hinders you of experience living here properly. I am very glad I lived outside the dorms, even though it meant having a long trip to University ([traffic sucks here](#)). And I a lot of other exchange students I met were very sad that they chose to stay at the dorms.

#### 4. An chaotic End

The end of my semester abroad was very chaotic and stressful. Unfortunately I wasn't really well in February and I couldn't use the free time (I still had to write some essays) for travelling and meeting friends, like I wanted to. Moreover, to the end of the month, I had major problems with my visa. Since the semester here ended in February and my semester at home only started (or was supposed to start) in April, I planned to stay here for March too and use the month to travel and explore the country. When I applied for a student visa in Berlin they gave me one until the end of February and said to me that I can go to the ministry of interior affairs in Jerusalem and just get a tourist visa for March. As it turned out, that was not possible: they told me I had to leave the country, in order to re-enter then. But they also said, that they are not sure if I will be let me in again. I was still in the middle of writing essays and I still had my room rented, so that was not an option for me (not speaking of all the costs for Buses/planes). Within a week I went to the ministry 4 times and spend 3 to 5 hours each time waiting, but I managed through sheer luck to get the tourist visa there – as I was told, an absolute exception ([so DON'T DO IT, too](#)).

The problems went on, as in march due to the spread of the Corona-Virus Israel implemented a strict policy for all tourist: everyone who entered the country (at this time it already included Germany) had to go into 14 days quarantine. This new policy resulted in my sister, who was supposed to visit me for a week for her 30<sup>th</sup> Birthday and another friend visiting me for a week of travel, cancelling their trips on short notice. Ultimately we lost quite some money, as a lot of things had been already paid. As I still wanted to travel the country, I decided to just go by myself. But this also didn't go well: the airline kept cancelling my flights home, so I spent a lot of time at the service hotline. The streets and towns in Israel were slowly but noticeably getting emptier day by day, shops were closing due to the loss of customers and attractions were closing too. Ultimately all the hostels/hotels were require to expel their guest – a new policy of the government given on short notice. By then I already had rebooked my flight home. By luck I found a hostel which was willing to take me in one last night (although they weren't allowed anymore) and I took my flight the next day to Brussels (as there were no flights to Germany anymore). From there I took the train the next day to my parents' home, as my room in Freiburg was still in sublet.

## 5. Personal conclusion and outlook

From the beginning on I tried not to have too high expectations of what my time here should look like and what I wanted to experience. Because ultimately, it would not live up to them. So rather than that, I tried to approach it neutrally and just take what comes along. I think this was a good decision. Due to the Chaos of the Corona Virus I had to shorten my stay in Israel and thus missed a lot of travelling which I consciously postponed to the end of my stay as I thought I would have more time then. But my stay in Israel ended so abruptly that it just still feels “unfinished”. I already decided to go back after all this is over and to finish my travelling and visit my friends there – maybe even for a longer time.

My time here also served in some extent as a break from my “normal” life back home. I got the chance to reflect on some things that had happened before I left and I think I gained a new perspective on certain things. I have for sure learned some important life lessons here and therefore having been abroad was highly valuable for me on a very personal level. But also academically speaking I gained from studying here. I also finally found a rather interesting angle for my master thesis where I can hopefully slip in some of the things I learned here. Now looking back at those last months, I really had a good time: all the fond memories I have made here and all those amazing people I’ve befriended.



# Jerusalem and the Dome of the Rock



Tel Aviv





Some Hiking through the Wadi Quelt





Nationalpark of Caesarea





Nazareth

