

Salam&Shalom everybody!

My name is Michael and before I started off to Israel I was ... let's not call it afraid but somewhat uncomfortable to go there. Mostly because for myself this infamous conflict between Israel and Palestine has been going on far too long and was way too complicated for me to form a clear opinion on it. Also I never wanted to decide on whether which of them was on the right side.

In the beginning of 2019 I went there without being prepared for what was to come in all the ways. However first things first: My hosting organisation was the Beit Ben-Yehuda (BBY) which is known in Jerusalem as the house of the reviver Hebrew language Eliezer Ben-Yehuda. Eventhough he never lived there because when he died the house (=beit / like in Beit Lehem = house of bread) was still unfinished. Nevertheless it is an important site of cultural interest in the neighbourhood of Talpiot a calm area in the southern outskirts of Jerusalem. So a bunch of people were visiting our place with so many of questions for me. Especially during Shabbat when lots of families are just strolling around the city and see which door can be opened.

The house has been with Action Reconciliation Service for Peace (ASF) for almost 50 years now, which is an German organisation that has been sending thousands of young German volunteers to places in the world where survivors of the Holocaust are still living up till today.

In the backyard there is a house set up for seminars, events and for guests 15 years ago and can be seen as a link between the centuries. During these seven months I moved to the upper floor of the historical house the Beit Pax, making me what I still didn't know back then a „Paxaner“. The newer generations had another definition for this position the housemother and in my case the housefather. But lots of former volunteers from even decades ago are still paying a visit to their former place of volunteering which I was always happy to welcome in the house. Therefore I also gained a lot of knowledge about the development of Volunteering at the place and about the area itself.

My main task was dealing with our clients, guests and visitors in oh so many ways. Either if it was from our office, where we were taking requests from people who were interested in our programs or just the seminar or guest rooms. As well there was the need to keep the

ongoing programs running that have been already appointed before I came there. Those programs offer expert guides, lectures and workshops about everything the region is predestined for like: intercultural, interreligious and encounters on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict but also guiding guests through museums or historical sites which almost all of them have some religious background, which can't be seen as a surprise in the so-called „Holy Land“.

A lot of times I could join some groups which have not booked us as their operators. But even in the start where I didn't know too much about the place I carried a book with me that had the answers for questions from my fellow travelers. So within the months and with every new book I kind of became half an expert on some topics. And not only from books did I learn. Especially those informal talks with people helped me a lot to understand or just created the urge to learn more about specific things. This must also be the most positive prejudice on Israelis I have found out about: They just don't give too much about etiquette or who you are and in which position you are in. Most of them really take their time to listen if they have the chance and further are keen on keeping the conversation on eye-level.

But that exact same element that I received, seems to be missing in the big discussion about the land, its borders and the different people living within or outside them. I don't even think that the different people don't fairly communicate on most levels. The majority actually does, because they live next to each other and work together. But I am afraid the responsible people in charge have lost these senses to see the other side as what it is or should be.

So as I wrote in the beginning I never want to choose one of the sides here. I will remain in this position , because eventhough I just had a short insight into this new and strange world it is enough to say that both of them have their points and again both of them must be held responsible for their misdoings. However it is always more than just „the two of them“. It's millions of people there with their personal stories of hope and despair. If someone wants to come close to some kind of truth in the so-called Holy Land - they just need the desire to let go of what they think to know about, simply go there and form their own mind on it.



