

## Becoming an Israeli Tour Guide

The course to become a guide was one of the highlights of my life to date. There were challenges all along the way and I thought I'd tell you a few of them. I'll start at the beginning, getting into the course.

It all started when a friend, Donna, asked me to find out about getting into a guide program for her. She didn't speak Hebrew very well and didn't think she could find the information without help. I decided to see what I could do for her. At that time there was an office of the government that was the authority for learning to become a guide. They offered officially certified courses and there were some stiff entrance requirements. When I was looking for answers for Donna, there were several schools in various locations around the country but all of them were offering courses in Hebrew, not in English. Donna was disappointed and decided to wait until a course was offered in English. Meanwhile, I was intrigued with the idea. I thought I might be able to handle the Hebrew if I could pass the other requirements. I had been given the status of "Temporary Resident" by the ministry of the Interior and that meant that I was technically eligible for an official government-training course. There were other requirements though and that was going to be difficult. One of the first things was to take a psychological/technical test to determine if I might possibly succeed if I took the course. That test was quite an experience. It took seven hours just to take the test. It was administered by three psychologists and included everything I can possibly imagine that might be connected with being a guide. There were math sections, problem solving, map reading, interaction between the people being tested, computer skills, geometry, language skills and much more. Then they took the paper away from us and administered nearly the whole thing again, this time using computer

terminals. Then they interviewed each of us individually. If there is anything they don't know about me, it's not my fault. They required each of us to sign a form before the test that we would never ask to see the results. The only thing I know for sure is that the ministry of tourism contacted me later and invited me to apply for enrollment in the guide course. It seems I passed.

Later, during the time of the course I became aware that everyone in the course just naturally seemed to like each other. I suspect that is because we all passed that Psycho-techni exam before being enrolled. I can also tell you that everyone in the course was bright. The age span of the students ranged between college students to retirees.

When I started the course, my grasp of Hebrew was at the minimum level possible to understand a normal conversation. I realized I was in trouble in the first class. They weren't using the kind of Hebrew I had learned in Ulpan (Hebrew language school). They were university professors and they were teaching as if this was a master's level course. I had a couple of tricks up my sleeve however. First, I took my laptop computer to class to take notes. That really helped because I could type while keeping my eyes on the instructor. I could follow the body language and the things written on the board enough to get the general meaning of the lecture. I took notes furiously. I found that the Arab students liked to sit near me to read what I was writing in English on the computer. You see, I was listening in Hebrew but writing in English. Try that some time... It's a real trick. Besides, that told me that I wasn't the worst at Hebrew in the class and that encouraged me. I still struggle if there is a complex or technical conversation in Hebrew but I get along fairly well for an American. You may have heard the old joke about Americans and languages. What to you call a person who speaks three languages? Trilingual. Two languages?

Bilingual. One? American. These days that isn't so true with the influx of Spanish speaking Americans as well as many other ethnic groups who now like to retain some of their historic culture. It may be even truer of Russians now though.

There were three classes per week. Each class lasted three hours plus there was a field trip every week. On Mondays we would get up early and meet near the central bus station. A bus would pick us up and we would go somewhere in Israel for on site teaching about all of the tourist sites in Israel. There were lectures on the bus as we traveled as well. On a couple of trips we stayed overnight to have more time at the locations and to reduce the amount of travel time. The accommodations were as cheap as the school could find so there wasn't much luxury but the evenings were fun. I wasn't the only Christian in the group. There were a couple of Messianic believers as well as an Arab Christian and one Armenian guy. We also had one Muslim and a few Orthodox Jewish people. It was an interesting mix, to say the least.

One of my favorite memories took place as we were traveling back from a field trip long after dark one evening after one of our extended outings. One of the guys had brought along a guitar and we sat in the bus passing the guitar around as we traveled. There were several of the typical folksongs and a few more modern songs but then one of the Jewish Believers took his turn. He began to play and sing some of the songs that have become popular in the messianic congregations here in Israel. Now, I love to sing so I was in the middle of the bunch who were singing and now we were singing songs I really knew. It was wonderful because quite a few of the others who are not believers were singing along with us.

The course was taught from as completely secular a slant as is possible considering we were learning to guide people through the land of the bible. There was a section of the sources of the bible that was nothing more than thinly disguised teaching of

“Higher Criticism.” The professor of that section did her very best to make us all doubt the accuracy, veracity and authority of the bible. Many of her arguments were very scholarly and were backed by authoritative research. It was pointless to argue with her since she was fully prepared to fight for her viewpoint at the expense of the rest of the class if necessary. At the end, I decided that I believed the bible and was not convinced of her viewpoint. Yes, I know, that is very narrow thinking. But then, I’ve known the author longer than her and His arguments are far more convincing. Besides, the bible is all about faith anyway. God doesn’t even really like it if we only believe after the facts are fully proven. Actually, that may be one of the greatest things I gained from the guide course. I believe the bible! The bible is truth and that is all there is to it. If there are people who wish to argue, they may do so. I’ll just sit over here and quietly believe the bible anyway.