

JERUSALEM INVIGORATES!

Sumita Chakraborty
traverses through Jerusalem
and ends up falling in love with
this beautiful ancient city.

Jerusalem... the Biblical land of hope and promise, situated between the Judean Mountain and the Mediterranean in the Middle East, is one of the oldest cities in the world. And this fascinating city seeped in ancient history, has always been on my bucket list of places to visit. So when 'SAVVY' received an invitation from the Israeli Ministry of Tourism to visit Israel, I was obviously over the moon.

I was, however, a little apprehensive about the safety aspect while travelling through the 'troubled' land. And the first question I asked the Tourism Department representative was: Is it safe to visit Israel? "Extremely safe," he said, with confidence!



The Church Of The Holy Sepulchre

And so off I flew via Israel's very professional El Al carrier to the Promised Land.

BACK IN HISTORY

Whisked out of busy Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion Airport within 30 minutes into a van, I was now on my way to Jerusalem. The weather, however, was playing truant. It should have been sunny, but it was biting cold – an anomaly, I was told!

The view, however, was breathtaking. And I gazed with my nose glued to the window, utterly enraptured as the van whizzed past picturesque old ochre-hued houses atop craggy hills lined with rows of olive trees. It was like time had not caught up with this gorgeous place. And only when the van veered towards the plush Dan Boutique Hotel in the urbane city centre of Jerusalem, I realised I was back in the 21st century.

MAGNIFICENT CITY OF DAVID!

An hour later, Gabi Landau, my petite Israeli guide with an upright back and a no-nonsense manner, marched me off to the renowned City Of David in the Old City of

Our cute Israeli guide at the City Of David, time travelled me through the ancient ruins of King David's palace.

Jerusalem. An avid history buff, I watched intently a 3D film on the City Of David which took me back to 1004 BC, and told me the tale of King David who conquered the city from the Jebusites and established his capital here.

Yudi, our cute Israeli guide here, time travelled me through the ancient ruins of King David's palace. And I spotted many archaeological remains including numerous seals – some actually had the names of officials mentioned in the 'Book of Jeremiah' in 'The Old Testament' and also, would you believe it, a toilet seat from the days of yore!?

I further walked down hundreds of steps to the intertwined water tunnels - they supposedly irrigated all the land in the city!



City Of David

I walked up the sacred ramparts which led to the gold-capped Dome Of The Rock where Muhammed supposedly sat on a winged horse and flew to heaven.

WAILING WALL

Our next stop was the famous Western Wall or the Wailing Wall that overlooks the Christian, Jewish and Muslim quarters. I walked up the sacred ramparts which led to the Al Aqsa Mosque (the second most holy place after Mecca) and the gold-capped Dome Of The Rock where supposedly Muhammed sat on a winged horse and flew to heaven. Further ahead, I got a bird's-eye view of the famed Temple Dome of the Jews which was built by King Herod, Mount Zion and the Mount Of Olives.

Tour over, I walked down the rampart to the exit, only to be stopped by a soldier wielding a scary looking gun.

“You, Indian?” He grinned, “You know Salman Khan? I love Salman Khan!” So do I, soldier! I sighed, marvelling at the reach of Bollywood...

AMAZING SIGHTS

Once outside the Wailing Wall, I trudged down a confusing maze of cobbled pathways that led to a colourful little bazaar straight out of ‘Alladin’. I was now on the path of Via Dolorosa or the ‘Way Of Sorrows’ which was the route Jesus Christ took through his crucifixion. Fascinated, I stopped by to place my hand on a hand impression of Jesus Christ’s on the wall. And, I felt blessed! Further ahead, I walked into The Church Of The Holy Sepulchre where Jesus’ tomb lies. The ambience was pure and sacred – no wonder, some tourists, overwhelmed with emotion, had tears running down their cheeks. I too felt the sacred pull as I joined thousands of pilgrims queuing into the



Dome Of The Rock



Western Wall



I trudged down a confusing maze of cobbled pathways that led to a colourful little bazaar straight out of 'Alladin'.



modern in Jerusalem, I returned to the hotel and tucked into a tasty kosher breakfast.

AHOY, JERUSALEM CITY!

A city tour through Jerusalem's ochre buildings, broad roads and train lines beckoned! The van also stopped outside The Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Mount Scopus. The Israeli Museum was the next must visit place, where, to my delight, I inspected the historical Dead Sea scrolls. I also checked

church to touch the holy tomb. Outside the church, I scrambled around buying holy souvenirs to take home.

...An hour later, dinner was at the open-by-night Mona restaurant where an array of sumptuous meats, organic vegetables, grilled fish and incredibly light desserts were on the menu...

OLD & NEW MEDLEY

The next morning, I woke up early just so that I could soak in the atmosphere. I caught up with Jerusalem's modern side and spotted theatres, restaurants and malls showcasing high-street brands like Zara, Castro, H&M etc. Musing over the unique medley of ancient and

out the newly opened model of ancient Jerusalem from the Second Temple period and the world's best-known nano 'Bible'. Awesome!

A fascinating guided tour into the hidden tunnels of the city ended at the miraculous Wailing Wall where I stopped to say a short prayer for my near and dear ones.

..For me, Jerusalem was an amazing cauldron of history, delicious food and wonderful people. And yes, it was extremely safe too.

Indeed, Jerusalem rocks!

The writer was on invitation from the Israeli Ministry Of Tourism