

## MARCH

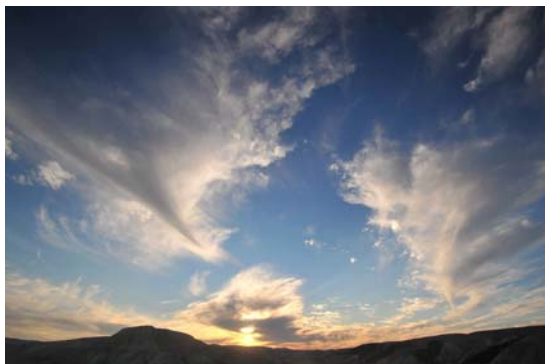
I just returned from Prague. It was a truly beautiful experience. The colors, the architecture, the uniqueness, the history, and the authenticity. I learned a lot about the city. Everything is dubbed so not many people speak English at all but many people do speak Hebrew. It gets pretty cold in the winter. Many buildings are black because they appreciate the beauty of age and authenticity. There is a lot of Jewish history in Prague but not a huge current Jewish population. Terezinstat reminded me of Poland a lot for obvious reasons. it was a ghetto village with a crematorium. Terezin was the only place where Hitler didn't destroy everything relating to Jewish culture because he wanted it to be the museum for the race that had existed. inside the crematorium our spiritual guide Ezra pointed out how incredible it is that we walk in and out and represent the living and growing Jewish people. We all stood around with candles that we lit from one another's wicks and sang "am yisroel chai" the tune that Carlebach was inspired to create when he visited the Jews of Prague.

We also went to the old-new synagogue which is the oldest shul in all of Europe and where the golem lives! The Maharal's seat is still preserved in the shul and we visited his grave as well. I bought a baby golem but sadly left him in my hotel room. I spent some time in it because I got fairly sick on Shabbat.

Our last day in Prague we went to the John Lennon wall and took a ton of pictures and then we left Prague, reason still unknown. We went to the beautiful [Karlovy Vary](#). it was cold and there wasn't much to do there but we drank very natural mineral water and saw more beauty. Then off to the Czech Airlines ready to be healed and continue my experiences in ISRAEL.

The next week my sister, Debbie came to Israel! Shabbat with Debbie was filled with laughter. Everything with Debbie turns fun. She came for Shabbat to Ashalim, where I live. There was a large group of people in Ashalim that Shabbat that were doing The Israel National Trail— שביל ישראל . The group was large and incredible with great energy and excitement for Shabbat and for their journey.

Soon after, Purim came and left pretty fast like most of my favorite memories here. After a barefooted ayalim purim dance party and two straight days of hiking in the Eilat mountains my feet began to hurt!



My OSP group and I arrived in Eilat in the late afternoon and the sun was soon to set. The air was dry and warm with a cool soft breeze. We unloaded the bus and pitched our orange and blue tents into the rocky ground. My friend Eli and I climbed onto a higher ledge to watch the sunset and dinner preparations. We all sat around and ate a hot pasta dinner. Yakery shared his tuperware with me. After dinner we all felt like dancing. So we did. Then we went on a nighttime walk. The stars with twinkling and the moon was full and bright. We went to sleep that night with the moon shining in our faces. The tents were empty and the ground surrounding was covered with friends buried in sleeping bags.

The next day there was climbing, sliding, crawling, jumping, eating, drinking, resting, viewing, singing, chatting, laughing. We landing at the shores of Eilat. I jumped into the cool clear water refreshed and amazed at the magnificence of goggles. The fish were swimming all around me so clear and colorful. We

peeled open pomelo and sipped cold drinks as we dried off in the sun with our hiking gear sprawled out around us. the group left and Eli and I went to קטורה Keturah, a kibbutz 40 minutes north of Eilat, where we would be spending Shabbat.

We finally made it with the perfect amount of time to shower and relax. Students studying at the Arava institute, Americans, Israelis, and Palestinians, live on this kibbutz. i met wonderful new people from Seattle, Jordan, NYC, and Ramallah with different backgrounds and new things to share.

The next week I ran the 10K in the first ever Jerusalem marathon. it was amazing, amusing, entertaining, invigorating to watch people fall, kiss, hug, laugh, skip, dehydrate, and faint as they finished one of the hardest marathons they had ever run

Being in Jerusalem brought back amazing memories. I returned the next week again for day at the Knesset with Ayalim. After I went to Yael's grandparent's house. Their house was on top of a mountain with a huge magnificent view of the Jerusalem Mountains. We drank wine that they harvested themselves in their warm colorful garden. They showed us their artwork and their home. It is truly amazing what people can create and the creativity that can be expressed.

The next day I had my first desert ecology field trip. The field trip was fun, exciting, interesting, and informational. We saw prints for foxes, gerbils, snakes, and beetles. We saw different types of sand dunes. We learned about environmental engineering and the different relationships between species relating to predation. It's amazing to learn about this new place I am exploring...and I can't wait for April's explorations!



### **Zahava Mandelbaum**

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