

ISSI ISRAEL: MISSION→SURVIVAL

Well, my future ISSI Alumni! First off, you will not be surviving in Israel; you'll be having the best time of your life! Now, in order to accomplish your main goal, which is to have as much fun and make as many friends as possible, there are a few tips that I, being an ISSI Student in 2006, would like to give you as a gift. Believe me, I was thanking the survival guide written by a 2001 student, and you probably will thank this guide again. All the info I'm giving you is factual as of now (i.e. 2006), but if the situation changes then your ISSI Coordinators in your country or in Israel are the best people to contact for advice. This is only my opinion, and is not the official info pack, which you will receive from Weizmann.

What to Pack

- Actually, Israel is very hot and dry in July—it did not rain one second the whole time I was there. I advise you bring shoes for **hiking** and **waterproof** shoes (you will be walking in WAIST DEEP water), as well as dress shoes for the fancy dinners and things, as well as regular walking shoes for your everyday use. Bring a breathable hat, or a very comfortable hat to protect against the sun. I would also suggest investing in good sunglasses for hiking. **DO NOT** over pack, because you will have access to laundry facilities. Save space for souvenirs and your desert equipment.
- Pack one set of formal clothing for your project presentation and the final dinner (sigh, that's a bittersweet time). Pack a swimsuit, as you will receive an unlimited pass to the pool (five minutes from where you stay), and a swimming cap, because you will need one to enter the pool. Also, ladies, please pack something to cover your shoulders and head (scarf, for example), because in Jerusalem and other religious sites which you will be visiting, certain attire must be respected. Please do so. Men too, will need to cover their knees and shoulders I believe, so either long shorts, or pants. For the desert, pack clothing that is not too thick, as you will be sweating quite a bit there.
- Pack a large hiking backpack that can carry lots of water, extra shoes, potentially a change of clothing.
- Pack essentials, such as soap and shampoo. If you run out you can buy them in the Rehovot Mall, or at corner stores around town, but expect very high prices for everything, including food. Pack sunscreen (SPF 30 or higher, anything lower is pretty much useless under Israeli sun)
- Bring a camera with extra film (at least 15 to 20 rolls), or since most of you will be having digital cameras, bring extra memory cards or memory cards with between 512 MB and 2 GB of space. The thing is, the trips you go on will be long days where you can't go back to your base camp or hotel for until your trip is over. So you need to stock up on these things.

- If you decide to bring valuables like cell phones and laptops, do not worry about their security. You will have a communal safe controlled by the house-parent, as well as personal safes in your room, for which only you will have the key. Or, label your things. The people going in and around, should they find your items lying around, will return them to your coordinator. Your friends will probably just return them to you. But, to be safe, keep things under lock and key if you don't want the stress of keeping track of them. The house-parent will keep your passport and extra money you bring if you like. I gave my passport in, because that's something I can't afford to lose, and neither can you.
- Bring many things to represent your country (flags, costumes, music, books whatever!), as you and the rest of your delegation will be presenting your home country on one night!
- AND NOW...for probably the most important thing you will need this entire trip...pack plastic bottles or canteens. Yes, I'm serious. While in the desert, you will be required to carry 7 (SEVEN) litres (don't know how many gallons that is) of water. This is only on one of the hikes. On the others you will need between 3 and 5. My friends and I did not have enough bottles to support this kind of volume, so we had to go into town in Rehovot and buy a pack of water bottles. They are cheap, but it's still a waste if you bring some in advance. Remember: a total of 7 liters. I ended up having three two-litre bottles and my one-litre Nalgene for quick access. Others had water bags with feeder hoses near their shoulders, so they didn't have to go searching for their bottles. It's up to you, but I advise to come prepared.

Where is Home (For the Month, at least)?

- First, home will be in the Weizmann Youth Village, deep inside the Weizmann Institute. You will be received at Ben Gurion Airport and escorted there by one of your counselors. You will all be given rooms based on four-person occupancy. No two people from the same country are put in the same room, usually. You will all be given two keys—one for your room, the other for one safe in the room. The rooms are really nice, and they surround a large common area (like a gazebo) where you and friends can hang out. Inside the room are two bunk beds, two tables with shelves, a common bathroom with two sinks, as well as four safes for each of you. Believe me; it's going to be very nice!
- Home will also be the hotels you stay at in Jerusalem and Eilat. In Jerusalem, we were four in a room, with two double beds and a marble bathroom! You won't be there very often though. All day tours, and parties at night, you'll only be in your room to fall asleep!

- Home is also base camp when you are in the desert. It is based on triplet occupancy, and once again you will only be there to sleep. As it is, the desert hikes will be quite demanding and rewarding, but you will need the sleep.

Food (and sources of food)

- The club house will gradually become a source of food while you're on campus at Weizmann. Meals are all free when provided in Weizmann, but there are many restaurants in and around the campus, which you can visit at your own expense. The club house is between all the rooms in the youth village, and is a nice meeting place, will be used for lectures and for activities. The club house closes at 11:00 PM (or at least when I was there), but towards the final days of the trip it was left open later (i.e. for parties being held in the village, etc.).
- While on trips, meals are provided by the hotel you are staying at, or sometimes when you are left to roam around town during free time (i.e. in Jerusalem (Ben Yehuda Street!) we were allowed to go around and shop. Restaurants are open here, but you buy food at your own expense). In the desert, meals are provided at base camp, and you are provided with lunches to pack for the longer hikes.
- You should understand that in Israel, certain customs regarding food are followed religiously. Meat and dairy products are not served together, so you may have either a meaty or a dairy meal. Some of you carnivores might not get used to this right away, but the food served is usually pretty good (as good as cafeteria food gets!). You will get a lot of EGGS and CUCUMBER SALAD for breakfast, as well as this ice chocolate milk thingy which I can say was pretty good. I advise you to try everything and then select what you like, since the meals are repetitive and only changed every now and then. When you're on trips the food is incredible, especially in Eilat and in the desert (oddly enough!).

Optional Trips (and trips in general...)

- The first trip was supposed to be to the Golan Heights, but because of the conflict that arose while my group was there, we switched and instead when to Caesarea, an ancient Roman ruin. You do not have to pay for this trip, however in Caesarea we walked through an aqueduct where you end up in about waist deep water (refer back to what I told you to pack). The thing is, I don't know if this trip will be the same for you. If you are going to Golan, then you'll miss the aqueduct. However, pack those water shoes, because you'll be walking in water nonetheless.
- The actual optional trip is that to Eilat. After you've finished your scientific part of the trip, there is a trip to Eilat (you will need to pay the equivalent of 50 U.S. dollars, but I think Euros are accepted, and of course shekel are first preference), which is a southern coastal city of Israel known for its calm beauty and relaxing atmosphere. None of us missed the trip (those of you who practice Shomer Shabbat will be accommodated to make it to any trip, so don't worry about not being able to travel on certain days—we are in Israel, after all! ☺), and I advise none of you to miss it either. We went on a nice cruise, and you can go

parasailing, seadooring (skidoo in water), and other cool adventures while on the cruise, by paying a small fee. It is right before the desert hikes, so you should go and get the relaxation you deserve.

The Science Component

- What you are essentially doing in Israel, amidst the chaotic fun and endless joy, is conducting cutting edge research at the prestigious Weizmann Institute of Science. For the first three weeks or so of your stay you will be doing an 8 to 5 job approximately (sometimes the mentors let you out early, but the counsellors were not too happy to find students out of work before 4:30. So even if you are let out, I suggest you go to the Institute's library and do some theory work), experimenting and doing theory work. This is all in the goal of formulating a sophisticated report and presentation (PowerPoint), which you will present to your mentors, the scientific heads of the ISSI program, your friends and counsellors. It's a semi-formal presentation, but there is no stress. It's not a competition, it's more like an information session with your friends.
- Your project will be assigned to you before you actually get to Israel, so I suggest you read up on the topics concerned before. Your mentors assume you have a relatively good knowledge of the background science involved in your topic, and do not always explain things from the ground up. They are, however, very nice and very helpful and will gladly help you if you do have a question.
- Your mentors will be introduced to you, and they will escort you to the lab the first time, so I suggest you remember certain landmarks or shortcuts to get there.

A Day in the Life

- When you're not off gallivanting and adventuring into the wilderness (or shopping), you are doing the following: eating breakfast and getting to your workplace (which is not always easy to find) by 8 or 8:30 AM. You will be woken up (literally) at 7:15 on every work day. Wake ups might be later or earlier for other days, like going on trips and what not. You will work until lunch time (12:30 I believe...), which is an hour break (lunch is sometimes held in a different building from where you ate breakfast, but you'll figure this all out pretty easily), and then work again until 4:30 or 5 PM. When you come back to the village, you will have some free time during which there may be meetings going on or scientific lectures (which you must attend except for one or two). Dinner is served at 7 PM, and lectures are sometimes after that. After dinner, you're free till 7:15 AM the next day. Seriously. The lights go out at 11:30 PM, but since the average age of the group is 18, nobody makes sure you're sleeping. In fact, we could leave the campus and come back whenever we wanted (during our free time), until a sign in sheet was placed—we were required to give the time of our exit, the reason, and the group we were going with, and the time we came back (we were supposed to be back by midnight). This rule was bended several times, however,

and the counsellors were not too happy. Rehovot is interesting until you've seen it all, and you can usually see it all in a few days. So if you're curious, go around and explore, and then stay on campus. Honestly, most of you will be so tired from work that you won't bother. My group arrived two days earlier, so we had that time to look around, since we were not supervised as much for those two days.

Committees

- Throughout your trip, there will be certain committees organized to plan activities, souvenirs and other things:
- The Journal Committee is a large commitment. Basically you get the bio data of all the participants as well as some candid shots (kind of like a yearbook in school) and smash it together in a nice journal, which is presented on the final day to the participants as a parting gift.
- The Sports Committee organize games in the nearby football (soccer) field, basketball courts and swimming pool. These can be during free time, and you will need to sign up before going, to assure that good teams are made.
- The Social Committee organizes social events like dances, movie marathons and anything else. They can be used in the village or on trips (if time permits).
- There is a limit of 5 spaces on each committee, so if you are interested, sign up right away.
- Remember, the committees will need your hard work and ideas often, so if you decide to sign up, give it your all.

Country Presentations

- In Jerusalem, we spent one night in the hotel conference room where all the different groups presented their country. This can be done in any fashion you deem worthy—some sang, others held quiz shows, gave out food, etc. Make sure you do this in style. The chaps and ladies from the U.K. really impressed me—hilarious and informative!!
- Try for something interactive, because everyone will be tired and might phase out if you don't involve them. Humour is always appreciated. Question and answer type presentations are also invited.

Security

- Unfortunately, many of you watch the news concerning Israel and the Middle East, and are fed numerous stories of violence and terrorism. While this is true, and conflicts are happening in that area, consider the following: **I, personally, was in Israel for the whole month that the conflict with Lebanon took place. AND, I did not for one moment, truthfully, feel unsafe or at risk.** Many of my friends share this opinion. We were provided with bodyguards on all of our trips, and the Weizmann Institute is heavily guarded at all times. The bodyguards were young, and I actually made good friends with one of them. Please do not let the issue of security stop you from making the most of this experience. Israel is a very

beautiful country, and I actually found it very peaceful, even though soldiers were seen frequently in the city.

- While the unexpected cannot be avoided, the counsellors do their best to keep as much order in the group as possible. When you take buses to a certain place, you will be assigned a bus (no particular order, usually by alphabet), and you will be required to take that bus as long as you are assigned to it. There will be attendance taken each time the buses are boarded, to ensure everyone is there. In addition, when you are given free time in the cities and places you are *visiting*, there will be specific meeting places and meeting times, which you should respect. When you exit the campus, on regular days, you will be given a pass card which you should show the guard not when exiting, but open re-entry. My friends and I forgot our cards numerous times, but the guards usually let you in if you tell them you're part of the summer camp, or the Science program, or something to that effect.

Need a Helping Hand?

- On desert hikes and all trips there will be medics accompanying each group, including one or two counsellors and a bodyguard, should you need any help physically.
- Your counsellors are always around wherever you are, if you need someone to talk to. Don't hesitate to talk, they will respect your privacy always.
- Hopefully you will make friends during the trip who are trustworthy enough to talk to as well, seeing as they will be your age and will understand you maybe a little better. Whatever you're looking for, people are around who are willing to help.

Look out for this!

- The conversion rate of dollars to shekel is approximately 4 shekel for every dollar. Do the math for other currencies.
- Should you wish to change money, you will be charged a heavy commission (10 percent!!), unless you do so at the post office, which is hard to find and open at hours during which you will be working. I suggest you bring shekel with you, and keep traveler's cheques or other currency only for emergency exchange.
- Look out during meals, your counsellors will be giving instructions and updating the schedules (this is where we found out we were changing our trip from Golan Heights to Caesarea).
- Look out when buying souvenirs. The vendors hike up their prices—they know you are a tourist, no matter what you do. Bargain with them, but don't bargain too much. Sometimes if you pretend to leave, they will lower their prices. I got half off on many things because I pretended to leave, or I pretended to know a lot about the product, and I accused the vendor of selling me fakes. They want you to buy. Don't let them control the way the sale goes—remember, they need you, you don't need them. But be careful. Sometimes they force things on you, like stuffing things in bags and telling you to take it and pay. In that case, walk away and never

look back. Honest. Others can actually be very nice to you, but be sure to tell the difference between genuine conversations and sweet-talk.

- Bring a musical instrument, if you have something light and portable (guitar? Kazoo?). We jammed so many times with my friends' guitars and sang so many songs.
- I don't know how much money you want to bring. But I would suggest around 400 U.S. dollars should suffice, since most things are paid for. If you bargain properly, you can get some really nice merchandise for a small price.
- There is a computer room in the village near the club house, with about 20 computers. You can surf the net, write emails and chat on MSN during your free time.
- Israel is in a different time zone that makes it hard to communicate by MSN with family living in Asia or North America. In Europe, the time difference is only one or two hours, so that's better.
- Information and sign-up sheets are posted on the bulletin board, which is near the entrance to the dorm area in the Youth Village

That's all folks!

It's been my privilege and honour to advise you guys on the wonderful trip that ISSI is, and I hope my suggestions serve you well throughout the whole month. There some small surprises I haven't told you about, including meeting some awesome people and certain things you might see or notice or do along the way. Keep your eyes peeled, and feel free to contact me about your experiences: kartik.madiraju@sympatico.ca .

I REEAALLLY hope you enjoy this trip, and have the most fun possible. Take lots of pictures, and maybe keep a diary if you have the patience. Or take videos every now and then so you can relive the moments. Once again, many congratulations for being selected! Toda raba (thank you), and shalom (greetings, or goodbye)!

Yours sincerely,

Kartik Madiraju

But anyway, all I have to say in short and simple, The ISSI Experience is definitely for someone who is up for a challenge – academic, physical and emotional, and who likes to keep occupied and having fun at the same time! Well done for getting thorough and enjoy every minute of it.