



Jerusalem: an ever-changing, never-changing place

Viewed from all angles

Nicole Goldstein Strassman made aliyah in 1979. A mother of four based in Jerusalem, she became a tour guide after a two-year archaeological seminars course authorised by the Israeli Ministry of Tourism

I WANT to inspire people to appreciate the rich cultural, historical and religious heritage of Jerusalem and to witness the fascinating mosaic that ties Judaism, Christianity, Islam and other minorities in the city.

I want people to feel the excitement of looking at archaeological evidence, biblical tradition and historical sources and to be awestruck by the connection that the Jewish people have had to Jerusalem throughout the generations.

But enough about what I want. My tours are custom-made and centre completely on my customers' interests, how much time they have, their ages and the type of experience that they are after.

The three Russian bankers I guided recently told me on the phone they wanted to see The Temple, so I had to explain that it had been destroyed by the Romans 2000 years ago, but I would take them to see what remained.

When we met and I showed them on a map where we were

going they said, "No: we want to see the Temple". It was only then that I realised that, for them, the Temple was the Church of the Holy Sepulchre!"

It just goes to show that there is always something for everyone, whether we waded through water in Hezekiah's tunnel, walk on the ramparts of the Old City, visit the Ethiopian monastery Deir es Sultan, shop in the markets,

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discuss modern-day issues at the Supreme Court of Israel or venture further out to Masada or the Dead Sea.

Often Jews, Christians and Muslims all venerate the same sites and I love the fact that the same place might have different traditions associated with different religions; it helps us to understand

the emotional tensions related to history, religion and politics. I enjoy seeing the distinct reaction of each and every person towards Jerusalem.

My clients are quite varied, ranging from small groups and families, to people on business trips — and often barmitzvah or batmitzvah groups.

I learn along with them, as Jerusalem is such a vibrant and dynamic environment. Even the archaeological findings and theories about the city can vary from day to day. But one thing remains constant — and that is my children's good history grades. Recently, my son was presented with an examination question about burial practice during the first Temple period. He was able to answer expertly — after all, just two days previously, he had personally experienced what it was like to lie down in one of Jerusalem's rock-cut tombs.

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