

## **Paediatrics, Soroka Medical Centre, Beersheva**

Thank you very much for awarding me an elective bursary from the Jewish Medical Association. This made a great difference to my time in Israel – enabling me to explore much more of the country than I would have been able to otherwise.

I spent three weeks working in the various wards and clinics of the paediatric department at Soroka Medical Centre, Beersheva. Beersheva is known as the 'capital of the Negev' and Soroka is the primary hospital for southern Israel. Many patients travel long distances from across the Negev desert to receive care at Soroka. Soroka is the main teaching hospital for Israeli medical students at Ben Gurion University and for American medical students in a programme run by Columbia University. I travelled with two fellow medical students from my university.

The hospital itself surpassed all my expectations. The doctors were incredibly eager to teach. They made a great deal of time for us, despite having students from Ben Gurion University and Columbia University also for teaching. They were also very keen for us to explore the country. There was no set timetable, but we were allocated a doctor who talked with us about our aims for the placement and then crafted a timetable that enabled us to see all that we wanted. I really wanted to expand my knowledge in neonatology as I felt I did not get enough exposure to this at university. The structure of the wards, rounds and clinics was very similar to the UK model – meaning that we settled in quite easily. What was also remarkable was the friendly and encouraging attitude from the doctors towards their students. I felt there was a greater rapport between the medical students and the doctors, which was much more conducive to learning. Much of the hospital's patient population was Bedouin, many of whom had consanguineous marriage, meaning that there were certain rare genetic diseases we encountered that we would be unlikely to encounter in the UK.

The Israeli medical students were incredibly welcoming. The administrative side of things was well run: a second-year medical student actually coordinates the electives in a volunteer role, but she does it expertly. She introduced us to many areas of the city and organised all our accommodation in the student halls conveniently located opposite the hospital.

One of the main difficulties was that I did not speak Hebrew or Arabic well enough to converse fully with the patients. However, the doctors and Israeli students were always happy to translate where they could. But improving my Hebrew was part of the excitement of living in Israel and I came away much more confident with the language than when I arrived.

Due to Beersheva's proximity to Gaza and being a reasonable large city, it is often the target of rocket attacks from Gaza. Although we were apprehensive about this before we arrived, I am actually glad we got to experience the sudden sirens and the rush towards the nearest air raid shelter. For this gave us the real experience of what life was like for the people of Beersheva and a greater understanding of what they live with on a day-to-day basis.

The city itself is very accommodating to students, with many of the local students describing it as a 'student city' – with plenty of bars, clubs and shops in easy reach. However, there were limited sights of interest 'for the tourist' within the city itself, so we ventured beyond the city every weekend. Travelling through Israel can be easy and cheap. We made much use of the inter-city buses, which were very reliable. We visited Tel Aviv, Herzliya, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Tiberias, En Gedi and the Dead Sea. However, my favourite place was the crater of Makhtesh Ramon in the heart of the Negev. This geological wonder was breathtaking. The silence of the desert and the sheer expanse in front of you was extraordinary.

I've learnt a great deal from my time in Israel – my knowledge of paediatrics has improved and I doubt I will ever forget some of the patients I have met. But most poignantly, I've learnt from the Israeli students' welcoming attitude to us – which made a big difference. At my university, I think we view elective students simply as people who are stealing our places in clinics or our time in the operating theatre. But we should be flattered that they are choosing to learn in the same hospitals in which we have chosen to learn.

The three weeks I spent in Israel were incredible. I wholly recommend experiencing medicine in Beersheva. Soroka is a large, well-organised hospital, with such a diverse patient population. The hospital infrastructure allows you to follow your academic curiosity to whichever subspecialty you wish – and you will always be warmly received.

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