

General Surgery, Asaf Harofe Hospital / Tel Aviv University Medical School, Ramla, Israel

My medical elective in Israel took place in the month of April, at Asaf Harofeh Hospital, just outside central Tel Aviv. I had applied to the Department of General Surgery, as I was interested in the subject and wanted to experience something new. Till now, I had only ever seen surgery in the UK and in Singapore, where I studied and grew up, both of which have very similar surgical practices due to Singapore's early history of sending budding doctors to study in the UK. I also felt that because I did not speak a word of Hebrew, it would be difficult for me to take a history or examine patients in the medical wards. I had figured that instead, I would be able to get more out of my time from other English-speaking surgeons in the operating theatre.

I managed to get allocated to the Surgery Department, and more specifically, the upper Gastro-Intestinal team. I was allowed to scrub in on most days, and to assist in a variety of operations including bariatric surgery, a Whipple's, and robotic laparoscopy. The surgeons, nurses, and medical students were very friendly, and happy to explain things to me in English. I was taught about the common operations in Israel, and read about common medical conditions in the country, for example ischaemic heart disease, and BRCA gene – associated cancers. I also learnt about Israel's healthcare system, which is based on compulsory health insurance.

Apart from getting more surgical exposure, another part of the reason for going to Israel was to learn more about the country and its people. I had new cultural experiences – met with students from America, participated in Shabbat, and was lucky to be in the country during Independence Day, where I got to see the impressive display of air force as planes flew by the stretch of beaches of Tel Aviv. It made me think about my own country Singapore, which has a similar aerial display on National Day, and made me grateful for my freedom and independence. I saw both new and old – Tel Aviv the start-up capital of the world, and Jerusalem as one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities. I met the religiously free and the ultra-orthodox. I hiked the high mountains of Carmel and dipped in the low waters of the Dead Sea.

At the end of 3 weeks, I felt like I learnt a little about the experiences of the Israeli people, but I learnt a lot about myself and my country, Singapore. I saw the similarities and differences between our people and nation, and I left Israel grateful for the experience. I am very thankful to the Jewish Medical Association for supporting medical electives to Israel, and for making this trip possible.

Kok Han Ang

Barts and the London