

A MIDDLE AGED TOURIST ON A DONKEY Si Frumkin

A few days ago a friend gave me a copy of an amazing book. It is “A Short Travel Guide for Jewish Tourists” published in Czarist Russia, in 1911, in Russian, by the Kadima Publishers in Vilno.

It presents an amazing picture of travel, less than 100 years ago, to the area that was to become Israel just 37 years later.

Here is how the chapter on Jaffa begins:

“The city has 45,000 inhabitants of whom 8000 are Jews.

“A trolley goes from the main street to the Jewish section – **Tel Aviv** (!) - that had been built in 1909. It consists of 70 houses with indoor plumbing and about 750 inhabitants. A Jewish high school is in the center of this area.”

We are told that the most common route is by ship from Odessa – it departs every Saturday - directly to Jaffa, via Constantinople, Smyrna and Beirut. The cost of travel ranges from 74 rubles and 95 kopeks for first class – includes cabin and food – and 55.45 for 3rd class – no food and sleeping on deck.

There are also other routes –Trieste, Genoa, and Marseilles.

The best time to visit Palestine is from April to June – after the rainy period. Between July and October there are empty landscapes and all trees and roads are covered with dust. It rains between November and April - warm clothing is advised. Between May and October light summery clothes are recommended – they can be bought in Palestine at reasonable prices. It is advisable to have riding boots – there will be many miles on horseback – a water flask and a revolver: “A gun is not really necessary since the Palestinian roads are quite safe but it will provide a greater sense of security for the traveler, especially in remote areas.” It is also essential to have quinine in case of malaria and powder for bedbugs and such.

During the hot season less meat should be eaten. Don't drink water that is not coming from water pipes or springs, “unless there is assurance of the source's safety by a trustworthy individual.”

The passenger ships for Haifa or Jaffa anchor about a *verst* (1.06 km.) from the shore. Passengers are taken to shore by boats that may be uncomfortable in rough weather but are quite safe.

Once ashore the tourist can use the Jaffa - Jerusalem, and Haifa - Damascus railroads but most of the transportation is provided by horse drawn carriages – 3 horses are used because the roads are poor and the horses are weak – or else by riding a horse or a donkey. The animals can be used even by those who have not ridden before. However, those who are past middle age and cannot ride should use donkeys that are slower but less expensive. The riders are accompanied by a guide who walks along and must be tipped between 2-3 franks (0.75 -1.12 rubles) a day.

Finally, we are told the total estimated cost of the trip including tickets, hotels and excursions helpfully divided into 3 categories – “High, medium and low requirements and expectations: 675 rubles, 356 rubles and 168 rubles respectively.”

The trip can last between 4 and 8 weeks depending on the what the tourist wants to cover.

The second half of the book lists and describes points of interest.

Jerusalem has an approximate population of 80,000 – 50,000 Jews, 15,000 Christians and 15,000 Muslims. Next to the Wailing Wall where Jews pray is the Temple Mount with a mosque on top. The mosque can be visited by tourists daily with an Arabic-speaking guide. *(This includes Jews who cannot visit it in today's united Jerusalem. S.F.)*

Jerusalem is home not only to Sephardim and Ashkenazim but also to Jews from Persia, Yemen, Aleppo and Morocco. The Jews from Bukhara are mostly wealthy and occupy a beautiful area. The Yemenites, on the other hand, live in miserable huts built from wood and sheet metal. The Ashkenazi Jews in Jerusalem receive about 3-4 million franks of donations yearly.

Jerusalem has many hospitals, schools and hundreds of synagogues. Most of them are established and subsidized by organizations in Europe.

Rishon le Zion is the first Jewish colony in Palestine. It and many others are subsidized by Baron Rothschild and are involved in agriculture – oranges, olives, dates, grapes and wine.

Gaza is an ancient Philistine city with about 30,000 inhabitants including 150 Sephardic Jews. It had been a major trade center but has been abandoned.

Hebron is a city of 20,000 Muslims and 1000 Sephardic Jews. The point of interest is the cave where Abraham is supposed to be buried. Only Muslims are allowed to enter the cave and its mosque but Jews pray on the upper entry steps on Fridays.

The guidebook mentions a number of Jewish colonies scattered throughout the area, describes Haifa as having a population of 20,000 including 10,000 Christians and 2800 Jews and ends with a list of 34 colonies established between 1882 and 1910.

It lists the current Jewish population as 26,000 Sephardim, 31,000 Ashkenazim from previous immigrations, 23,000 Ashkenazim from recent immigrations (Zionists) and 6000 Jewish immigrants from Asia and Africa for a total of 86,000.

Something to think about as Israel celebrates its 59th anniversary with a population of more than 6 million.