

Zohar from Nazareth

From our observation deck we watch with amazement the attention that Israelis pay to its retiree community. The amount and variety of interesting, challenging and stimulating activities designed to keep this community intellectually engaged is overwhelming. This includes organized learning tours on a range of interesting topics from music and the arts to history and archeology, a wide range of adult learning opportunities in academies specifically designed to engage retirees in enriched higher learning experiences and conferences and symposia on a variety of themes with top tier speakers and performers. This community fondly referred to in Israel as the “Third Age” constitutes a deliberate target market for the organizers of the numerous events and activities we just described. In fact catering to the interests of the Third Age has become an industry unto its own. Mind you this is not a mass market and is focused on elderly professionals with reasonable means and significant disposable income.

This appears to us to be in stark contrast to the North American focus which we think focuses on leisure, comfort, travel (cruises) and food and entertainment.

In one of our prior entries we described our tour to learn about practices and visit practitioners of alternative medicine in the Arab and Christian communities in the lower Galilee. This weekend we attended a weekend symposium in the city of Nazareth on the theme of “The Great Revolutions that Changed the World”. It being held in Nazareth is incidental to the topic and totally unrelated to the religious and historical meaning of Nazareth. The Golden Crown Hotel is perched on a mountain top overlooking the beautiful Valley of Izrael (not a typo) and the old city of Nazareth.

We attended lectures on the historical events and societal trends that led to the French Revolution that changed the world forever as we all know if only for the abolishment of the absolute monarchical model. An evening narrated by one of Israel most famous song writer and poet (like me a Rehovoth born and bred – and that’s where the similarities end) of songs of the revolutions with a first rate musical group and a sing along nostalgic trip back in history. This was followed by a lecture on the revolutionaries and the revolutions in the Arts that changed the art form (mainly sculpture and painting) forever (from Bernini to Renoir to Picasso).

By now you get a feel for the theme of revolutionaries and the great revolutions. Next we attended the most fascinating lecture on the Genetic Engineering Revolution that started on June 23, 1973 and the advances and fantastic possibilities that decoding the human genome, and the understanding of the DNA “architecture” are bound to bring to the human race. Case studies were presented from simple yet lucrative genetic engineering of tomatoes and orchids (as examples) to incredible breakthrough genetic therapy opportunities for such diseases as Cystic Fibrosis. We found it incredible that the speaker, the top genetic engineering scientist in Israel was able to impart the fundamentals of genetic engineering for dummies to 300+ retirees with no prior knowledge on the topic.

The Beatles, the perfect revolutionaries of rock and pop music - an evening of (sing along) Beatles songs and finally a tour de force lecture and performance with one of Israel’s and world renowned conductor and pianist on the flagship master piece of the modern age of classical music – Stravinsky’s Rite of

Spring. A sneak guided tour of the town of Nazareth (80,000 people 70% Muslim – 50 years ago it was 70% Christians a change attributed to emigration and demographics) made this for a perfect weekend one of the most fascinating and stimulating in recent memory. With somewhere between 300 and 400 attendees the organizers revenues from this event must be in the neighborhood of 1.5 million NIS (\$400,000). I told you in Israel it is an industry and all the more to them. It was worth every penny.