

Never did I see myself in the Middle East, and yet here I was, in Israel. I came with Birthright, an organization providing free trips to young Jews between the ages of 18-26. I was afraid that I would not fit in, that I was not 'Jewish' enough, whatever that means. As it turns out, many people felt the same way I did. When the 28 of us participants sat down to really talk for the first time in Israel, we realized that we all belonged on this trip, regardless of how religious, or non-religious, we are.

Birthright gave me the opportunity to experience and see sights I never thought I'd get the chance to see. I hiked to the top of Masada and watched the sun rise, I floated in the dead sea (even though it was winter, and really cold!), visited the old city of Jerusalem where I saw the dome of the rock, the Kotel, the Cardo, and ophel excavations, hiked in the Gilabun nature reserve, slept in a Bedouin tent in the Negev desert, and so much more. I ate hummus, shwarma, falafel, and drank pomegranate juice. Israel has a complicated history and its people interpret their past, and present, differently. There is more than one point of view on any issue, and I felt that I was able to hear different perspectives from the people I encountered on this trip, whether it be through the Mifgash (soldiers), the tour guide, the speakers, or simply the other young adults on this trip.

I have learned more about another culture than I thought possible in 10 days. This trip served to only increase my curiosity about Israel and its people. My desire to be knowledgeable about this culture has not yet been fulfilled and it is now that I realize the real journey has just begun.