



# Make Israel **YOURS**



“THE FACT THAT STUDENTS CAN LIVE SMACK BANG IN THE MIDDLE OF TEL AVIV AND JERUSALEM IS UNIQUE TO OUR PROGRAMME.” SIMON COHEN

## A tailor-made experience in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem | BY CHANDREA SEREBRO

**AS JEWS, WE ALL HAVE A RIGHT TO A PIECE OF** Israel, but the Aardvark Israel Programme, under the umbrella of the Israel Centre JHB, offers Jewish students from around the world the opportunity to ‘Make Israel Yours’ by providing a tailor-made, modular curriculum, so students can build a customised experience in Israel. This is an opportunity for a more independent, yet still structured experience in Israel that gives you the best of everything other programmes have to offer, while at the same time giving you the chance to stand on your own two feet. Aardvark offers volunteering and internships, the chance to study university level courses, an opportunity to explore the hidden gems of Israel through pro-

grammes and excursions, and independent living in apartments in the centre of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.

“The fact that students can live smack bang in the middle of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem is unique to our programme,” says Simon Cohen of Aardvark Israel. “We have an unparalleled staff-to-student-ratio, which gives the programme the unique ability to cater to the different interests of our international student population, with students coming from all over the world, not only South Africa and Australia, but from North America, Europe, Central, and South America, and even from Asia and other African countries. There are more than 50-volunteer/internship options in each of our cities, ranging from political

think tanks to start-up companies, schools, TV stations, the zoo, and more. And with the option to travel to other countries, volunteer in Nepal, and work in an American Jewish summer camp as well – the ability to customise, to really own it and make it yours, is endless and appealing. Students can choose where they intern or volunteer and really work on building up their resume. And, the international student population is a huge draw to our programme for kids who want to break out of the South African ‘bubble.’”

And a bubble it sure is, specifically for the South African 18-21 year olds who are coming out of homes where they have, for the most part, lived with their parents and enjoyed domestic help and parental support most of their lives. So, what is most amazing for the SA youths on the programme, says Tanya Izaki, Israel programmes coordinator at the Israel Centre JHB, is that for the first time in their lives



they get to live, travel, and shop for themselves, navigate relationships with roommates and co-workers, and live an independent life, making it happen for themselves. “The participants lead a busy life during the time they are on the programme – taking advantage of the amazing offerings while at the same time taking care of their apartment, cleaning, cooking, budgeting, working, and, of course, playing. This is a padded experience of the real world, where you get to find your strength, as all the while we are here to offer you support should you need it.”

It is a time of self-discovery and growth, giving you the chance to be yourself, to find yourself, and to discover new horizons. And the achievement of succeeding, of making it happen for yourself, is so satisfying, says Tanya, it feels like you are “taking your life by the reins”. “It’s a great maturation process. Students also have the freedom to explore Israel and walk around the streets comfortably – and Tel Aviv, one of the most exciting cities in the world, is at your fingertips,” says Simon. “The programme gives you a chance to deepen your connection to Israel, explore your Jewish identity, grow up and mature, learn life skills, find some

more direction in life, and readies you to start university or build up your resume for your next adventure.”

There is a lot of choice on the Aardvark Programme and students can pick and choose from the menu of opportunities on offer and build the version of the programme that works best for them. Students can choose between 4½, 7, or 11 months; whether to volunteer or do an internship; and which classes and which optional evening activities they prefer. There are also optional add-ons to choose from as well. The International Programme, which has educational and tourist trips to Ethiopia, Italy, Spain, Germany, Czech Republic, and China; a stint in the Israeli Military - including Marva basic training in the Israeli Army; a Mind-Body (Psychology & Medicine) track, including volunteering with Magen David Adom ambulances; Entrepreneurship; Law and Government; Sea Sports; Social Media and Communication; Nepal Cultural Exchange; and an American Jewish Summer Camp exchange. “We want everyone to finish the programme as proud, knowledgeable Zionist Jews, who are able to defend Israel when necessary and promote it all the time.”

For those who sign up early, there is an

early-bird special of a free international trip to either Ethiopia, Italy, Germany, Spain, China, or the Czech Republic, while on the programme. For more information, visit: [www.aardvarkisrael.com](http://www.aardvarkisrael.com) or contact Simon Cohen: [simon@aardvarkisrael.com](mailto:simon@aardvarkisrael.com)

**LAURA KALLENBACH**  
**Mother of Jessica Kallenbach,**  
**Aardvark Graduate**

“It is not only so wonderful to have her back home, but to hear about all her amazing experiences and to see how she’s grown. Our children (especially in South Africa), are very ‘protected’. Due to circumstances, they do not have the freedom that other children or teenagers enjoy. This was the first thing she loved about Israel. Being able to catch a bus from Tel Aviv back to Jerusalem at night and to walk freely in the streets. The experience of living independently in a different country with peers from different countries was an amazing opportunity, but all of this would not have been the same without your care and guidance. Thank you so much for making sure that while Jess was growing, learning and experiencing – she was happy!”

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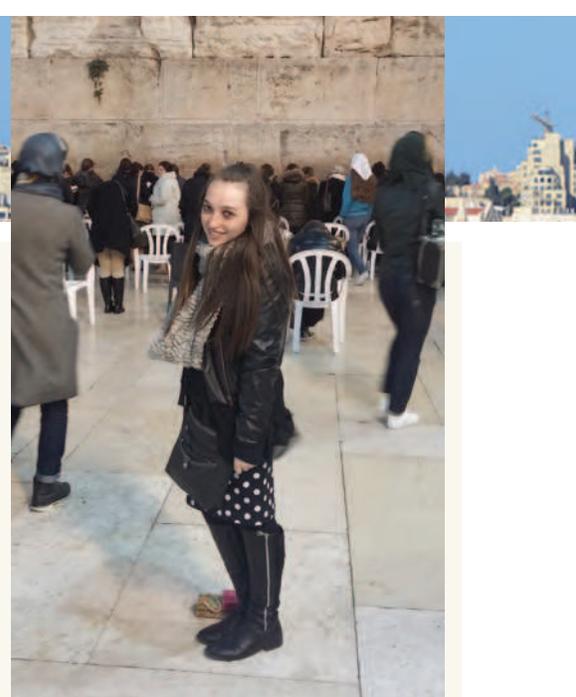


## KERREN LEIBOWITZ

### *Aardvark Graduate*

"I chose to go on Aardvark in 2014 over all the other programmes on offer because it gave me the best of everything I was looking for - learning Jewish studies, volunteering, and meeting people from around the world. I was, and still am, a person who loves meeting new people from different countries and hearing how they grew up, and this gave me the perfect springboard for that. I think that what makes this programme unique is that it caters for all types of people - whether you are religious, or not religious, or if you are looking to find yourself, or even just for an Israel experience. The structure of the programme is different to other programmes and it keeps it exciting and meaningful at the same time. There is time for volunteering, time for learning, and also once a week there is a time for touring - so you really do it all. You can choose your location

between Tel Aviv or Jerusalem (if you stay for the whole year you can do both) and in between there is even an option to do a camp in America. I had been to Israel before, but Aardvark helped me see Israel in a whole new light, living, working, and volunteering there opened new ways of seeing, changing for me what before was a purely tourist perspective that I had on Israel. This programme also taught me how to be independent and confident with my choices and myself. The best part of the programme was Shavuot. There were only a few of us, as the main programme had ended. We went to the old city before Yom Tov came in. It was fascinating to see how people from all walks of life came together for this wonderful festival. We had supper in one of the main dining halls and then we went on to learning all through the night, and returned to the Kotel again at 4am. It was absolutely stunning to see so many people there and the sun rising, a



very spiritual and emotional experience I don't think I would ever have had otherwise. The person I was back then is very different from the person I am now. I have grown so much on so many different levels and, yes, coming back to reality wasn't the easiest thing to do after such a mind-altering experience. But I take all that I gained from there and make it work in my everyday life."

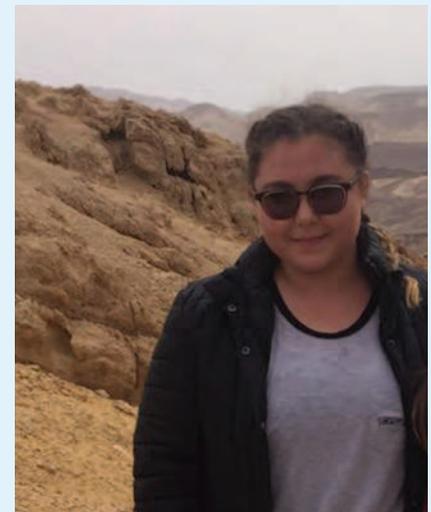
## SHAI ABRAHAMS

### *Current Aardvark participant*

"When Simon, the Aardvark representative, came to my school to chat about the programme, I was immediately hooked. I loved the idea of living independently with people from all around the world for five months. I introduced him to my parents as soon as I could because I wanted to start the application process straight away. I was especially excited about the idea of living like a university student but without the extreme responsibilities that a university student has. In a way, I am using this programme as a sort of a break from reality, but at the same time it is helping me decide what direction I'm going in for my future. And I am loving it - every aspect of these past couple of months has been amazing, and the independence it has afforded me has been exhilarating. Not having to depend on my parents for every tiny detail is a breath of fresh air, but they are still supporting me, so I phone them every day and touch base with home. The biggest challenge that I've had to face has been

to figure out how to feel comfortable not only with living on my own, but also living with other people, some of whom I have only just met. It's a new experience for me, and I'm sure for most South Africans, but I am adjusting and it is improving, and what is surprising is how I have learned to love my roommates. This programme is definitely like no other. We have people from all around the world, such as Swaziland, Panama, Amsterdam, Sweden, France, and a lot more. This programme not only introduces us to new people, but also integrates us completely into Israeli Society. We are living on our own in one of the newest upcoming areas in Israel - and we have to interact with local Israelis every day. We live on the bus system and I'm on and off trains nearly every weekend. This programme has allowed me to have a controlled yet relaxing schedule, giving me the freedom to grow into an independent young adult sooner than I ever could at home. My experience in Israel so far has been incredible. From having to control a monthly budget, buying gro-

ceries, and doing laundry for the first time - which for us South Africans takes some getting used to - to touring Israel, meeting new people, and integrating into Israeli Society. It has only been two months out of five, and already I feel like I've seen it all. My experience so far has been eye-opening, enriched with amazing people and new experiences - I can only imagine what is in store for the next few months!"





Masa, the public-service organisation founded by the Prime Minister’s Office of the Government of Israel, together with The Jewish Agency for Israel, under whose umbrella the Israel Centre JHB offers a myriad of projects and experiences to South Africans who want to spend some

time in Israel, has some exciting news for us Jews here at the tip of the world. Until recently, programmes for many South Africans were largely unaffordable despite the US \$500 grant given to SA participants for the programmes – which can cost anything from US \$12 000 – \$20 000.

Now, through the efforts of Aviad Sela, director of the Israel Centre JHB, who made it his mission to get MASA to lower the costs for South Africans so that more people could enjoy their offerings, MASA has announced that South Africans will now get an increased grant of up to US \$9100, which for some programmes brings down the cost to half. “I made it my mission because I recognise that MASA is the ultimate platform for Diaspora Jews to experience Israel, yet the numbers of SA participants has always been consistent, but low. When I realised the realities facing South African youth, and the extent of the uncertainties of the future, I knew that through MASA so many more doors could be opened up for so many more people if it were just more affordable.” Now, lucky for us it is, and more people can go and enjoy what MASA has to offer. For more information, contact [Israelprog@israelcentre.co.za](mailto:Israelprog@israelcentre.co.za), (011) 645-2560, or visit: [www.masaisrael.org](http://www.masaisrael.org) 

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