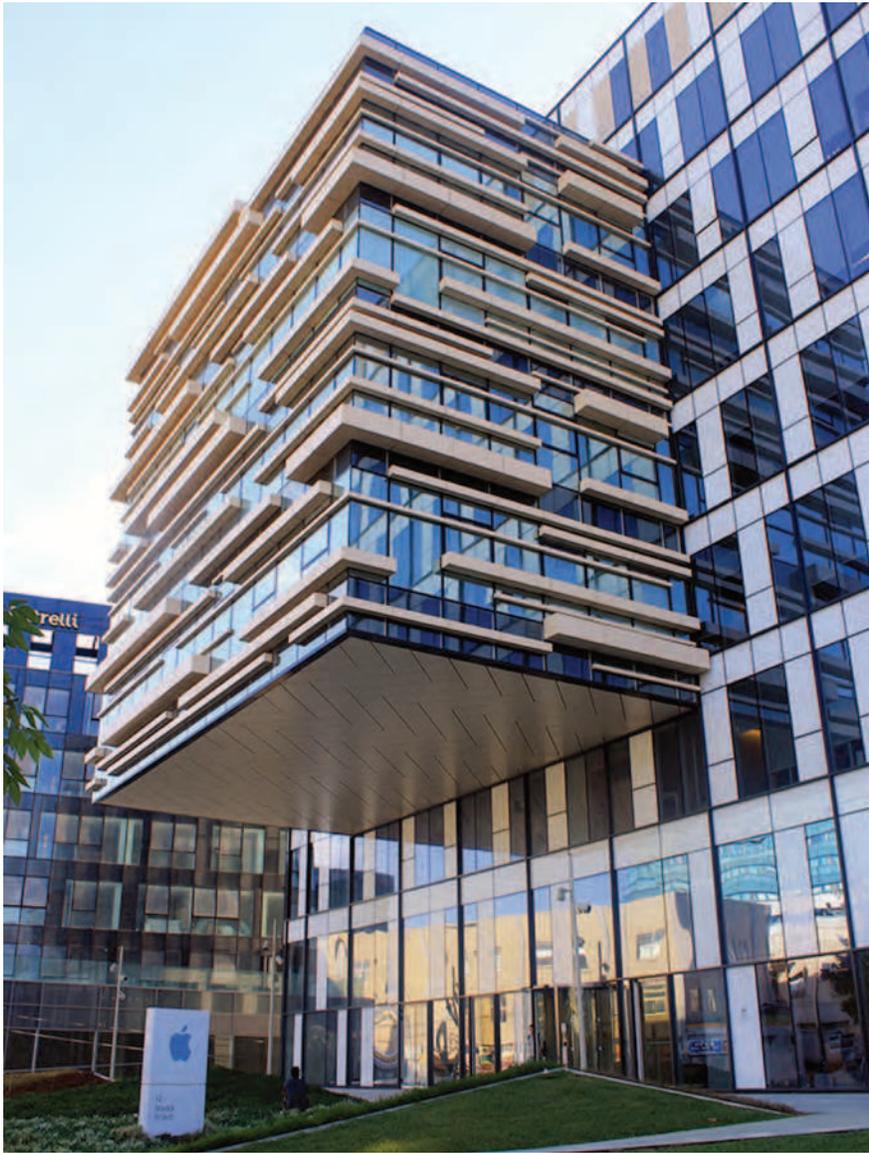


THE OPPORTUNITY of a lifetime



A career making internship in the world's start-up nation | BY CHANDREA SEREBRO

MASA, THE PUBLIC-SERVICE ORGANISATION founded by the Prime Minister's Office of the Government of Israel together with The Jewish Agency, has a myriad of proj-

ects offering South Africans the opportunity to spend some time in Israel. Gap year programmes, study abroad programmes, yeshiva programmes. But Masa

also provides the opportunity for a stint at major high tech companies and exciting start-ups, doing real and amazing work. The Israel internship programme (which in SA falls under the Israel Centre's JHB umbrella) gives budding professionals "hands-on opportunities" to work with some of the world's most cutting-edge companies across Israel. It's a chance "to spend a meaningful time in Israel", not as a tourist or a kibbutznik, not as an out-of-pocket traveller trying to fund the next excursion, but rather to experience Israel like a real Israeli, as a professional, going to work each day, experiencing the after work leisure-time activities Israel has to offer, meeting friends, going out to eat, before doing it all again the next day – repeat. Might sound dreary, and like real-life has come knocking a little too soon, but when you think about the potential for that everyday grindstone to involve working as a newly qualified-but-green go-getter in the start-up nation of the world for an international high tech company or an on the pulse financial trading floor, I bet that endlessly repetitive groundhog day is looking up.

Ofer Gutman, Director of Marketing and Sales at Masa, calls it "The Journey", an experience "beyond the bus". You experience the business-side of living in Israel: the ups and the downs, the late for work, and even the kudos from the boss. But you experience all this in a position that you probably wouldn't have gotten in the first five years of your career elsewhere, in the Jewish homeland, with the support and help that Masa offers you. And the progress they make gets attention both in Israel and back at home, wherever that may be, as the programme is being offered all over the Jewish world. "Living and working in a start-up nation, you are viewed as being one of the team – not someone just there to give the bad or menial tasks to," explains participant Sam Kapp from New York, who wanted to explore Israeli society while gaining work experience. He's getting an inside look at what it takes to build

a successful start-up, working at a biotechnology software company in the heart of Tel Aviv. At present, he finds himself working on the technology to make a glowing plant (by combining the genome of a firefly with that of a plant) – “cool stuff”, he says, and while it might sound off-the-wall, only in Israel could one actually conceive of having this type of experience, in real life, fresh out-of-school. “They asked me what I want to get out of this (experience),” he explains, “and I told them I wanted to see how a start-up is run, and what you needed to do to build a successful company.” So, because he wanted an overview, he is interning at a company in marketing, getting a taste of just what goes on behind the scenes in every element of what makes a successful, exciting company tick, being “inspired every day by [his] colleagues’ passion for their work”. Who even knows, it might just be the next thing sold to some big international high-tech for billions.

Another participant, Jonathan Gerari from Denmark, with his Masters in Finance, chose to work at JP Commodities, a small commodities firm in Tel Aviv. There, he enjoys a lot of responsibility and can also get some insight into what actually goes on in every aspect of the business, which is why he has found the experience so enjoyable. He says, “It would take me five years to get this far in Denmark to achieve the same level of responsibility.” He was going to go home at the end of the internship, but he realised that in Israel, through this experience, he is learning more than he ever would elsewhere, which will enable him to hone his skills early in his career after which he hopes to become a specialist in his field. In addition to his internship, Jonathan

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has made close friends with other people who are abroad with Masa Israel Journey. This has made his experience “valuable and unforgettable” – an experience that “keeps surprising me”. Living in Israel and going to work every day with people who all have the “common goal of living and having a great time,” he says, “is living my life way above expectations.”

And it is slowly catching on with South Africans as a foot in the door to the international business world, which we might otherwise have been left out of. “It’s good for your CV, and you can work in a place you wouldn’t have been accepted to otherwise without having previous working experience,” says Tanya Izaki, Israel Programmes Coordinator at the Israel Centre JHB. Even though the internships are not paid, they are offered the opportunity to gain a lot of hands-on work experience, advance their career, and to live abroad. It is expensive, but once you’re over 21 you get an automatic \$3000 scholarship from Masa, regardless of your financial situation, unique to this internship programme and which, depending on your financial situation, could be even higher. But still, the final cost could be about \$2000-3000, plus your air ticket and spending money – which is no small sum, but the doors that it opens and the experience that it offers has blown the old work-and-travel London experience out of the water, and has given new graduates a reason to excel at what they do so they can find themselves miles ahead of the counterparts they leave behind. Tarryn Snoy-

man from Johannesburg wanted to do the Israel Teaching Fellows programme (the only programme that is almost fully-subsidised and even reimburses the air ticket) because she wanted to be exposed to a different teaching environment other than in South Africa. She describes it as both a stimulating and positively challenging experience for her. “I have enjoyed the personal and professional growth of the journey. Not only has this experience been focused on teaching English but I have been privileged enough to have been involved in many other initiatives that Masa offers, including a global leadership summit, a leadership shabbaton, and being part of the World Zionist Organisation fellowship track, all of which fostered personal and professional development through skills-based training.” Living in Israel, specifically Be’er Sheva which is one of Israel’s fastest growing cities with a large, vibrant student population, Tarryn has enjoyed the social and cultural scenes, which offer many opportunities for anyone to get involved in, from student events and initiatives to enjoying a buzzing, melting-pot of cultures, nightlife, and joining the Ben Gurion University’s international club.

The programmes run from five months up to a year, and many of the interns land their dream job and stay on to achieve greater things. And if you don’t find what you are looking for in the internships that they offer, there is always the opportunity to customise an internship in your field, helping you to find the perfect opportunity just for you. It’s a no-brainer, and just might be the key you were looking for to unlock the potential to be part of the next billion-dollar success story that Israel is so famous for producing. For more information contact Tanya Izaki at the Israel Centre JHB: 011 645 2560 or israelprog@israelcentre.co.za. For more on the Masa internship programme go to: postcollege.masaisrael.org and for more information on the Israel teaching fellows programme go to: israelteachingfellows.org 

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