Israeli Life and Leisure in the 21st Century

Editors
Michael J. Leitner
Sara F. Leitner
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Michael J. Leitner and Sara F. Leitner
To our daughters, Arielle and Jessica, thank you for all the joy you bring to our lives.
Michael J. Leitner, PhD, is a professor in the Department of Recreation, Hospitality, and Parks Management at California State University, Chico. Sara F. Leitner, MA, is an instructor in the Department of Kinesiology at California State University, Chico. Michael and Sara are coauthors of the textbooks *Leisure Enhancement*, 4th edition, and *Leisure in Later Life*, 4th edition (Sagamore Publishing, 2012). Michael is actively engaged in research on the effects of joint recreational programs in Israel with Jewish and Arab Israelis and Palestinians and Israelis on the attitudes of Jews and Arabs toward each other. He has published numerous articles in research journals on this subject and has been an invited keynote speaker at conferences worldwide. Michael also teaches in the Modern Jewish and Israel Studies program at California State University, Chico and has worked with several Israeli institutions, including Ben-Gurion University (Eilat campus), Tel Aviv University, The Academic College at the Wingate Institute, Mifalot, the Peres Center for Peace, and The Friendship Games. Michael and Sara’s experiences in Israel are extensive, having lived in Israel for a full year in 1994–1995, 1997–1998, and 2011–2012, as well as during the summer months in the other years since 1994. They have a unique perspective on Israel, as both “insiders” and “outsiders.”
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Collectively, the authors and other contributors to the book represent for us what is good and beautiful about Israel. The friendships with these wonderful people keep drawing us back to Israel.

Michael J. Leitner
Editor

Sara F. Leitner
Editor


Israeli Life and Leisure in the 21st Century is both an academic textbook and a book designed to have wide popular appeal. Intended target audiences for this book include the following:

1. the general public in the United States, Israel, and other countries;
2. modern Israel and Jewish studies students at universities and colleges;
3. students in study abroad programs at Israeli universities;
4. students in recreation and leisure studies departments offering courses on international aspects of leisure;
5. students in Middle Eastern studies programs at universities and colleges;
6. graduate and undergraduate courses on leisure at universities in Israel; and
7. students in religious schools and Jewish day schools.

The topics covered in this book are as varied as the target audiences for it. Despite the variety of topics and chapters in the book, we recognize that we fully did not address additional topics, such as the music and art scene in Israel, both of which are vibrant.

The desire to write this book goes back to 1981 during our first visit to Israel. This tiny country (which fits into the state of California eight times) has many books written about its politics, wars, and battle with terrorism, but few about modern-day life and its people. We wanted to write a book that would help people to truly understand what this country is all about. However, it was the suggestion of Joe Bannon of Sagamore Publishing in 2013 to write this book that really got this project off the ground.

This book presents the real Israel. How do people lead their lives? What do they do in their leisure? What is it like to live in Israel? The reader should be able to answer these questions after reading this book. We have found that people who have never been to Israel are astounded by some of the topics covered in the book, as they defy their preconceived notions about Israel. Israelis will also gain a new appreciation for their country and learn about aspects of life and leisure of which previously they had not been aware.

Israeli Life and Leisure in the 21st Century has been a labor of love. We knew when we agreed to take on this project that we had many friends and colleagues in Israel who were experts on topics to be covered in the book who could help us by contributing chapters on various subjects. What we did not know is that this book project would lead us to meet many fabulous people, who have written brilliant chapters for this book. We have made many new friends in the process and for that we shall always be grateful.

Whether you are a student required to read the book for a course or someone who is interested in learning about Israel, we hope that you will enjoy the book and feel that you have gained insight into life and leisure in Israel today.
PART I

Understanding Israel Today
This book is about Israel today, its people, and the lives they lead. Many books have been written about Israel, most of them on topics such as war, politics, terrorism, history, and religion. This unique book focuses on understanding the lives of Israel’s people.

An issue central to understanding the lives of Israelis is their leisure. For the purposes of this book, leisure is defined as free time, the time during which people are not working or performing life-sustaining functions. This broad definition means that positive uses (e.g., sports and exercise) as well as negative uses (e.g., excessive alcohol consumption) of free time are relevant to the topic. Recreation is defined as activity conducted during free time (Leitner & Leitner, 2012).

Over 50 authors have contributed chapters or sections of chapters to this book. Most of these authors live in Israel or have spent most of their lives in Israel. The editors have lived in Israel part time since 1994, having spent a year there three times and a minimum of two months there per year in the other years. An overwhelming impression they gained from their extensive time spent in Israel is that the reality of what the country and its people are really like is far different from how most people who have never lived in Israel conceive the country to be. The obsession of writers with the politics of Israel contributes to the distorted image of Israel as being nothing more than a political entity. This book reveals the “real Israel,” a nation of people trying to lead normal lives.

As discussed earlier, the concept of leisure, as it is defined for this book, is a broad concept, and therefore the topics discussed in this book are extensive, ranging from an overview of how major holidays and festivals are celebrated, to how recreational activities help the residents of Sderot (near Gaza) cope with rocket fire, to the leisure of ultra-Orthodox Jews, gays and lesbians, and the Arab sector. Activities that may occur during leisure include entertainment, nature activities, volunteering, music, dance, sports, and exercise. Likewise, the population of Israel is diverse. The majority of the population is Jewish and secular. However, a significant minority is ultra-Orthodox (religious) and another 20% of the population is Arab. Within the Arab sector there are Muslims, Christians, Bedouin, Druze, and other subgroups. Within the Jewish population there are immigrants (and their offspring) from the former Soviet Union (over 1 million people), immigrants from Ethiopia, and English-speaking immigrants from the United States, Canada, and other countries. In addition, the special leisure needs and activities of people with disabilities, older adults, and other groups merit attention.

The over 50 chapters in this book cover the topics that must be addressed to adequately understand Israeli life and leisure today. These chapters are organized into six parts.
Part 1, "Understanding Israel Today," provides an overview of life and leisure in Israel today that is meant to facilitate a better understanding of the chapters that follow. Part 2, "Unique Aspects of Leisure and Life in Israel Today," focuses on Israeli leisure innovations and characteristics of life and leisure in Israel that set it apart from other countries. One unique aspect of recreation and leisure in Israel is the multitude of recreational programs aimed at improving relations between Arabs and Jews. Part 3, "Promoting Peace Through Recreational Programs," presents an overview of these programs and detailed information about some of these programs. Part 4, "Diversity in Leisure in Israel," provides further insight into differences in life and leisure among groups within Israel, again pointing out innovative Israeli approaches to leisure services provision. Part 5, "Leisure Services Provision in Israel," explores the leisure services delivery system in Israel. Part 6, "Research on Leisure in Israel," delves even deeper into specific aspects of life and leisure in Israel, presenting research on topics from chess to extreme sports to family vacations. The last chapter of the book, "Overview and Concluding Remarks," summarizes the previous chapters and presents an overview of life and leisure in Israel today that is based on the ideas, facts, and research findings discussed in the previous chapters.

Chapter 2, "Orientation to Life in Israel Today," discusses the unique characteristics of the nation of Israel today and its diverse population. It also provides a context for understanding the leisure activities of its people.

One way in which Israel is unique is the challenges to leisure this tiny nation faces. Some of the more significant challenges to Israeli leisure discussed in Chapter 2 include security threats, hostile neighbors, a diverse population, and lack of space and natural resources. Innovative Israeli solutions to some of these challenges are also presented.

One challenge facing Israeli leisure over the years has been a strong work ethic and economic conditions that have forced many people to work long hours. Meanwhile, some of the worldwide leaders in leisure education over the last 30 years have been from Israel. One of those leaders, Prof. Atara Sivan, is the author of Chapter 3, "Leisure Education: The Israeli Model." This chapter focuses on the leisure education movement in Israel and progress that has been made in leisure education in Israel in recent years. The leisure education movement in Israel is at least partially responsible for the great expansion in leisure activities, leisure services provision, and leisure time in Israel over the last 50 years.

Part 2, "Unique Aspects of Life and Leisure in Israel Today," covers aspects of life and leisure activities that are special to Israel. Chapter 4, "Secret Leisure Gems in Israel," discusses lesser known yet impressive aspects of leisure in Israel, ranging from the dog parks of Tel Aviv to the celebrations of major and minor holidays and festivals in Israel. Israel is the only country where Judaism is the state religion and the majority of its people are Jewish. Consequently, the major holidays and festivals celebrated in Israel are different from those celebrated in other countries in the world. Holidays and festivals are important to understanding the leisure of a country and its people. This chapter presents descriptions of how the major holidays and festivals in Israel are celebrated. The historical and religious foundations of these holidays are not discussed in detail. Instead, the focus is on how Israelis celebrate these holidays today.

Chapter 5, "Kibbutz Leisure and Life," describes the life and leisure of kibbutzim, communal living arrangements found only in Israel. The implications of this liv-
The Role of Leisure in Coping with Rocket Fire in the City of Sderot

A unique program focused on people playing for fun (especially basketball) as a way to motivate people to engage in sports and exercise that has health and fitness benefits. Another popular sport in Israel is chess, which is the topic of Chapter 13.

Not all leisure in Israel revolves around sports and exercise. Wedding celebrations are a big part of leisure in Israel (Chapter 14). The wedding celebrations in Israel have unique characteristics partly because it is the only country where the majority of the population is Jewish. A unique characteristic of the Israeli wedding celebrations is the special food. Four chapters delve into other aspects of food and drink in Israel. Chapter 15, “Food and Wine Tourism in Israel,” Chapter 16, “Food in Israel Today: A Leisurely Revolution,” Chapter 17, “Beer and Leisure in Israel,” and Chapter 18, “Tel Aviv’s Wine Bar Scene,” cover different aspects of one of the central parts of life and leisure: food and beverage. Israel has distinct foods and beverages that shed light on the character of the nation. These chapters reveal important aspects of life in Israel today.

Great creativity may be found in food and drink in Israel today, and the recreational opportunities provided in the desert in Israel are innovative. Chapter 19 presents an overview of leisure in the desert in Israel.

Located close to the desert is Sderot, a city located in the south, near Gaza. It is a unique place in a unique country. Over 10,000 rockets have been fired from Gaza into Sderot since Israel’s unilateral disengagement from Gaza in 2005. No city in the world has had to deal with a situation so severe. How do the people of Sderot cope with the frequent rocket attacks? Recreational activities and programs are a means of coping with the situation, as discussed in Chapter 20, written by Sderot resident Nir Hasson.
Challenging situations, such as the one in Sderot, could not be dealt with nearly as well without the assistance of volunteers. Chapter 21, “Volunteering in Israel,” addresses another leisure activity designed to positively impact society and self-worth: volunteering. A number of unusual volunteering opportunities are available in Israel that are described in this chapter.

Volunteers play a big role in the numerous recreational coexistence programs in Israel with Arabs and Jews. Part 3, “Promoting Peace Through Recreation Peace Programs,” provides a closer look at these programs. Many innovative recreational programs in Israel are designed to improve relations between Arabs and Jews in Israel as well as build friendships between Israeli Jews and Palestinians and Jordanians. In Chapter 2, the hostility of Israel’s neighbors toward Israel is addressed as one of the challenges to leisure in Israel. The tensions that exist between Arabs and Jews in Israel are also a challenge to leisure in Israel addressed in Chapter 2. The chapters in this part of the book present interesting ways that these problems are being dealt with through recreational programs. Research cited in Chapter 22, “Recreation Programs for Promoting Peace in Israel: An Overview,” indicates that these programs are having success in improving attitudes of Arabs and Jews toward one another. The six other chapters in this part of the book provide greater detail about the programs of the Peres Center for Peace (Chapter 23), Mifalot (Chapter 24), The Friendship Games (Chapter 25), Peace Players International (Chapter 26), Ultimate Peace (Chapter 27), The Canada–Israel Hockey School (Chapter 28), and Twinned Peace Kindergartens (Chapter 29).

Most of the previously described chapters discuss aspects of life and leisure in Israel that are most relevant to the secular Jewish majority of the population. Part 4, “Diversity in Leisure in Israel,” focuses on specific minority groups within Israel and special characteristics of their life and leisure.

For example, Chapter 30, “Leisure Culture in Arab Society in Israel,” examines the life and leisure of the Arab minority, which comprises approximately 20% of the population of Israel. However, within the Arab population, different religious and ethnic groups exist, making it difficult to make general statements about this minority group. In reality, this chapter could easily be the topic of an entire book. The chapter is not presented as a comprehensive overview of the Arab sector in Israel but rather as an introduction to the topic and a reminder of some of the similarities and differences that exist between the Jewish majority and Arab minority in Israel. Chapter 31, “Bedouin Entertainment,” by a prominent Israeli Bedouin, Ishmael Khaldi, presents interesting insights into the leisure of the Bedouin minority within the Israeli Arab population. Chapter 32, “Civic Service of Arab Young Women: The Case of Mifalot,” explores another aspect of leisure within the Israeli Arab population.

Chapter 33, “Physical Activity Patterns Among FSU and Ethiopian Immigrants in Israel: A Comparative Analysis,” examines the leisure and life of two particular immigrant population groups within Israel: Ethiopians and immigrants from the former Soviet Union. These population groups have great differences, as discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 34, “Leisure and Life of the Ultra-Orthodox in Israel,” also covers a significant minority group in Israel that comprises approximately 20% of the population of Israel. A major study on the lives of the ultra-Orthodox Jews in Israel was recently conducted, and this chapter discusses some of the major findings related to leisure.
Chapter 35, “Recreational Programs for Populations With Special Needs in Israel,” covers a topic that is relevant to all countries, not just Israel. Unfortunately, relative to the size of its population, Israel has perhaps more experience with providing recreation services for people with disabilities due to injuries incurred in wars and terrorist attacks. Necessity has led to innovation. This chapter shares information on some of the special programs Israel has developed for special populations.

Continuing on the theme of recreational programs and services for Israelis with special needs, Chapter 36, “Integrating the Other: Special Needs Scout Integration Program in Israel,” discusses one program in Israel, perhaps best described as a Girl Scout and Boy Scout program for children with disabilities. This program gives interesting insight into a common philosophy in Israel of caring and providing for people who have special needs.

Chapter 37, “Calculating Hedonism Among Israeli Gay Men,” reflects the openness that exists in Israeli society and provides further insight into its social fabric. Tel Aviv, for example, has been cited as one of the most “gay friendly” cities in the world. There were questions as to whether to include a chapter in the book on this topic because the leisure of gays and lesbians in Israel is not so different from that of gays and lesbians in other countries or that of the general Israeli population. Nevertheless, the chapter, written by Dr. Amit Kama, is important to more deeply understanding life and leisure in Israel today.

Chapter 38 examines the topic of leisure and aging in Israel. Even though it is a small country, Israel is a world leader in research on leisure and aging. It is also a country with a variety of programs to keep older adults healthy and active, as discussed by Dr. Galit Nimrod, a world leader in research on leisure and aging.

The older adult population has many special leisure services provided for them. The first chapter of Part 5, “Leisure Services Provision in Israel,” presents an overview of senior clubs in Israel (Chapter 39). Chapter 40, “Natural Heritage: Leisure Services in Israel’s National Parks, Forests, and Nature Reserves,” presents information on Israel’s extensive outdoor recreation opportunities. The extensive network of parks and nature reserves is remarkable considering how small and crowded the country is. The chapter also discusses Israel’s efforts in the area of conservation. These efforts are further explained in Chapter 41, “Sustainable Tourism in Israel.”

Chapter 42, “The Rural Accommodations Phenomenon in Israel,” discusses rural tourism. Another area of leisure services provision covered in Part 5 is in Chapter 43, “Community Recreation Services in Tel Aviv – Jaffa.” In big cities such as Tel Aviv, and also in smaller cities, the recreational activities and programs the municipality provides are extensive and may serve as model programs for cities around the world.

Part 6, “Research on Leisure in Israel,” consists of 10 chapters with topics ranging from extreme sports to family vacations. The purpose of this part of the book is to provide more detailed information and insights into specific aspects of leisure in Israel as well as comparisons between Israel and its neighbors.

Several chapters delve into research related to sports. Chapter 44, “Trends in Leisure-Time Physical Activity Among Jewish Israelis, 2007–2012” and Chapter 45, “Extreme Sports in Israel,” examine research that provides insight into specific sports-related leisure activities. Sport is certainly an important aspect of Israeli leisure today, and these chapters show how important it has become. Chapter 46, “Women and Israeli Sport Organiza-
tions,” takes a special look at participation in sports among females in Israel.

Chapter 47, “Representations of Leisure in Israeli Films,” examines representations of Israeli leisure in Israeli films of the last 15 years. Content analysis of the films explores leisure-related topics such as travel in Israel, the “café culture,” weekends and holidays, boredom, stress, play, and happiness.

Chapter 48, “The Israeli Family Vacation,” is based on extensive research on Israeli family vacations. This research is not limited to family vacations that occur within Israel. Challenges that Israeli families face when seeking a family vacation experience are examined in this chapter.

Chapter 49, “Far Away From Paradise? Working in the Tourism Industry of Eilat,” explores research on a topic that is related to family vacations. Eilat is the most popular destination for domestic Israeli family vacations. Eilat provides unique family vacation opportunities. However, aspects of the resort and hospitality industry in Eilat may be leading to stress and burnout among some of its workers, a topic explored in the research discussed in this chapter.

Broader perspectives on understanding leisure in Israel are presented in Chapter 50, “A Multicultural Concept of Leisure in 21st Century Israel: Jewish Tradition and Modernity,” Chapter 51, “Leisure Patterns After Age 60 Among Former Kibbutz Members,” Chapter 52, “A Philosophical View of Leisure and Happiness in Israel,” and Chapter 53, “Coping With Stress and Alienation via Leisure Pursuits in Israel.” These chapters help bring together the earlier chapters in the book in understanding life and leisure in Israel today. With the challenges facing Israel today, why are its people among the happiest in the world?

This question is addressed directly in the last chapter of the book, “Overview and Concluding Remarks.” The topics covered in this book span a wide range of topics, but they all contribute to the main goal of the book: to foster a greater understanding of life and leisure in Israel today.

References