

Israel, March 15-April 7, 2022

International travel restrictions began to be relaxed in the late winter/early spring of 2022. My wife and I had had a trip planned for Croatia in May 2020 (great timing on that one), which was cancelled, of course. After two years of restrictions, we were eager to get overseas again. In mid-February 2022, Israel announced that it was lifting its travel ban effective March 1, permitting vaccinated tourists to enter. The US already was permitting residents to fly overseas, requiring only a negative Covid test to be taken within 24 hours prior to the re-entry flight. As the final inducement, at that time Israel had the highest Covid vaccination rate in the world, something like 94%. So we made some hurried plans and off we went in mid-March.

We landed at Ben Gurion about 2 p.m. and, per Israeli protocol, took a PCR test. We were required to self-quarantine in our hotel room until the results came back, though at check-in our clerk did everything but go “wink-wink” as to how strictly the quarantine was patrolled and enforced by the hotel. Our results were emailed about 2 a.m.—negative—and we were now free to roam.

We stayed several days in Jerusalem, then based in Tel Aviv for a week or so and visited the northern regions, then spent the remainder (we thought!—see below) of our time at the Red Sea beach area of Eilat. We had a great trip. The Western Wall, the Dome of the Rock, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the bazaars, Masada, Capernaum, the Golan Heights, and on and on—all as profound and mystic and beautiful and interesting as you would imagine.

On our last day before our planned flights home starting from Eilat, we went for our mandatory rapid antigen test required for US entry and—BOOM—we both tested positive. We could only shrug and smile at the various ironies involved in this outcome. I had no symptoms and tested negative the following day (the first test could well have been a false positive), but my wife had some mild symptoms the following few days and kept testing positive.

Per Israeli rules, we isolated at a B&B in Eliat for the week-end, then rented a car (to avoid interacting with the public) and drove up to Jerusalem. There, we stayed in a B&B on the lively Jaffe Road pedestrian mall for a few days, where my wife could get outside and we could eat in open-air cafes. I walked to avoid using buses and taxis and took in a few sights I had missed during our first stay, particularly the Garden of Gethsemane and the Mount of Olives. After a total of about 8 days, my wife tested negative as well as I and we left the next day back to the US.

So, “thanks” to Covid, we had a little bonus stay in Israel.

{ I write this piece with deep sadness because of the recent Hamas attacks out of the Gaza Strip. }