

SEVEN WEEKS: Walking through Israel

Monday, February 22, 2016

Alone in Israel. Without any money. Can this possibly work out? Especially as a German, coming from Dachau?

Adventurer and tour-guide Christian Seebauer embarks on a seven week journey of the Israel Trail, alone and penniless – and is welcomed with open arms by Israel's people and KKL-JNF.

In gratitude for KKL-JNF's assistance along his Israel National Trail journey, German adventurer and travel writer Christian Seebauer sent a special gift to KKL-JNF's Avi Dickstein - Executive Director of Resources, Development and PR - in care of KKL-JNF emissary to Germany Schaul Chorev: A signed copy of Seebauer's recently published book of his experiences on the Israel National Trail.



The message inscribed in the book jacket reads:

"Dear Avi Dickstein,

It is not just a story about the Holy Land and its people. It is a wonderful story about Keren Kayemeth (KKL-JNF). Everyone at KKL opened their heart to me. You have shown me what wonderful, great work KKL accomplishes. My special, heartfelt thanks goes to you personally, dear Avi Dickstein.

***Toda raba, Dankeschön,
Dein Christian Seebauer***

The following is a short version of Seebauer's impressions on the Israel National Trail and the people he met along the way:



I have never been to the Holy Land. I have absolutely no experience on this subject. But also: I don't have any prejudices. According to National Geographic, the Israel National Trail is one of the most beautiful long-distance walking trails in the world. Extremely diverse. Over 1,000 kilometres long. Around 20,000 meters altitude difference to be tackled. Is this challenge the next logical step after doing the Camino de Santiago Trail? In an attempt to answer this question, I simply packed my things and set off to Tel Aviv at the beginning of March 2014.

From Tel-Aviv, I hitchhike to my starting point in the North: Kibbutz Dan. And already on day one, I feel completely helpless. I am without money. I am hungry and thirsty. I'm right at the beginning and I already doubt my undertaking.

But immediately I get to experience so much charity and kindness that I cannot hold back my tears. "Do you need anything? Are you hungry?" – People everywhere were asking me these questions as if it was the most normal thing in the world. Here up north, I begin my hiking tour surrounded by green nature. It is almost like being in the Alps. The solitude and the fantastic scenery is exactly what anybody who has walked the Camino de Santiago would ask for. I find myself hiking for days without meeting any other "pilgrim". Everywhere I ask or at every door I knock people give me water and bread. I am embarrassed and deeply shaken. There is nothing I can give in return except for my charm, a smile and friendly small talk.

When setting up camp all alone in the middle of nowhere, every piece of bread I was given develops a very different and special meaning for me. Each piece is connected to its own little story.

When you are all alone for seven weeks, you start talking to yourself. Or you start talking with a small flower you find along the way. The “Shvil Yisrael”, as the locals call the Israel National Trail, shows me the Holy Land from its most beautiful and most genuine perspective. Nothing here resembles the picture that the media is presenting.

Everywhere I go, I find friendly people who help me; people who reach out to me and believe in what is good. Wherever I am, I feel absolutely safe.

The Israel Trail takes me above Lake Kinneret (Sea of Galilee), past [Tiberias](#), down to the [Jordan Valley](#) and through the [Carmel Mountains](#), all the way to the Mediterranean Sea. Every step I walk is a journey towards my inner self. No more noise. Silence in my head. Absolute freedom and a piece of happiness. Every step feels mystical, biblical and also sentimental.

I don't keep track anymore of all the times I get lost. By now, I accept everything the way that it happens. I am happy about every tree that gives me shade and that was [planted](#) by KKL-JNF (Keren Kayemeth leIsrael- Jewish National Funds). For four weeks the Israel Trail takes me through huge forests that were planted in Israel with the help of [donors worldwide](#). While most parts of the world suffer from [deforestation](#), here in Israel I witness a great green vision.

From Arad I hike into the desert. Stone by stone I follow the orange, blue and white marks of the Israel trail. I have given away my tent a long time ago. It is here that I sleep in the sand and look into the stars which I have never seen so clearly. The opportunities to get food become less, but all along I still get enough to keep on going. The only arrangement I made ahead of trip was for water supply in the desert. Prof. Haim Berger from Midreshet Ben Gurion in Sde Boker has buried water bottles for me at different campsites, which I can find with the help of little “treasure maps”.

In the Negev I constantly reach my limits – physically and psychologically – and I often think of giving up. I start praying. And I thank God: even in the Negev I meet hikers coming in my direction. They give me my (almost) “daily bread”; apples or figs. They encourage me to keep on going. I still find it difficult to overcome my pride and accept gifts. How can I ever make up for this? Will God some day grant me the opportunity to help others the same way?

Often I find myself standing alone on some mountain top in the Negev, even before sunrise. How I wish I could share these special moments with my family. The scenery is breathtaking. The silence is good for me. Here in



Israel I can learn again what is important for me in life.

After seven long weeks I arrive at the Massif nature reserve in Eilat and can suddenly make out the Red Sea below me. That was my goal. Now, while I am slowly hiking down, I begin to feel depressed. I would love to turn around and head back into the desert. Back to all those people I met here.

Christian Seebauer

Read more on Christian Seebauer's [Israel Trail website](#) (German)

