



**Nature Israel Southern Discovery Mission**  
**March 19th – 24th 2023**

“Israel is literally dotted with lovely corners and even a few species that would have long ago disappeared without SPNI's uncompromising voice.”

Pollution in a Promised Land, an environmental history of Israel – Professor MK Alon Tal

You are invited to spend a week with us in March 2022 to see some of these corners and species that through your support of SPNI you've helped save.

For veteran SPNI supporters this week is a chance for us to show you how thankful we are for your generosity. We will take you to enjoy Israel's finest nature and share with you the inside story of how you've made a difference to our country.

For first-timers to Israel and SPNI, you'll see a different, beautiful side to Israel that you never realized existed while learning about the history of one of the world's oldest environmental organizations.

Enjoy a week of unique insights, beautiful nature, 5-star accommodation, great company and amazing food

For more information please contact [barrys@spni.org.il](mailto:barrys@spni.org.il)

## **Sunday – March 19<sup>th</sup>**

### **Nili and David Jerusalem Bird Observatory**

In 1993 two young birdwatchers discovered a banded migrant bird from Sweden and so started the Nili and David Jerusalem Bird Observatory, a center of education, science and community located next to the Knesset. Over 50,000 visitors, from around the world and all sectors of society, flock to visit the JBO. You'll be joining them to experience an unforgettable up close bird banding activity and learn about Israel's vitally important spot on global bird migration fly routes.

### **Gazelle Valley Park**

Located in the heart of Jerusalem, in the shadow of the infamous Holyland apartment block, the Gazelle Valley was saved by SPNI and turned into a world-class urban wildlife site. It's a very special type of park, and a haven for the endangered Israeli mountain gazelle. Amir Balaban, our Director of Urban Nature, will tell you the story of how the park came to be and how it's being used as a model for urban sustainability in Israel and around the world.

### **Levi Eshkol House**

Levi Eshkol is arguably Israel's most underappreciated Prime Minister. We will give you a guided tour of Israel's Historic Prime Ministers' Residence – where Ben Gurion and Golda also resided! -- where you will learn about Levi Eshkol's impact on Israeli-American relations and building the National Water Carrier. Also the home of SPNI's Jerusalem community, we'll have lunch with some community professionals hear about SPNI's work on the municipal level.

### **Tour of Jerusalem Hills to see Wildfire Recovery**

Over 6000 acres of the Jerusalem forest was torched by wildfires in August. With an SPNI professional, you will hike in places affected by the fire first hand to witness the recovery and see how resilient nature is. You'll learn about Israel's misguided afforestation policy and what SPNI is doing about it.

Return to hotel to freshen up before dinner as a group

Overnight – Orient Hotel, Jerusalem

## **Monday March 20<sup>th</sup>**

### **Visit to Start Up Nature Project**

Start Up Nature is one of SPNI's most ambitious initiatives – to create an artificial wetland that will support mass bird migration and global biodiversity. At Kibbutz Kfar Ruppin you'll see migrating birds in their glory, and you'll hear about the complexities of creating and managing a nature reserve from former fishponds, and SPNI's bold goals for replicating this model nationwide.

### **Treasures of the Jordan Valley**

While driving back to Jerusalem, we'll explore some special sites along the Syrian-African rift, and the peaceful border with Jordan. We'll stop at Qasr al-Yahud, the baptismal site on the banks of the Jordan River, a site of great significance in Christian tradition, where Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist. Nearby, we'll see an SPNI-pioneered project to create bat caves in abandoned military bunkers (following the peace treaty in Jordan in 1994 ) and use insectivore bats as biological pest control for farmers on both sides of the Jordan, reducing the need for chemical pesticides.

Evening to be spent at leisure in Jerusalem. Return to Jerusalem estimated at 17.30 – 18.00

Overnight – Orient Hotel, Jerusalem

### **Tuesday March 21<sup>st</sup>**

#### **Boat Ride on the Dead Sea**

Join the Dead Sea Story for a unique boat ride on the Dead Sea, the lowest point on earth. You will see first-hand the dramatic geological changes, salt crystal formations and sink holes from the vantage point of the sea itself, and learn about what is being done to protect this natural wonder.

#### **Wadi David Hike at Ein Gedi**

Enjoy an easy hike to David's waterfall, one of the many trails in the area. Learn about the natural and biblical history of Ein Gedi during a 60-90 minute walk up this ancient desert spring, and see **SPNI's first Field School**.

#### **Masada**

In the days of the Great Revolt, the last of the rebels against Rome entrenched themselves at Masada and turned their desperate fight into a symbol of the struggle for freedom. You will ascend this world UNESCO heritage site by cable car and learn the tragic history of this famous Jewish stronghold.

Dinner in the hotel.

Overnight – Isrotel Dead Sea, Ein Bokek

## **Wednesday March 22<sup>nd</sup>**

### **Hatzeva Field School**

Travelling south to SPNI's Field School in the middle of the Arava desert, you'll be introduced to a most curious flock of birds, the Arabian babbler. These birds maintain a rigid social structure and were the topic of SPNI co-founder Amotz Zehavi's Ph.D. research into evolutionary behavior. These birds are used to human presence so look forward to getting extremely close to these friendly avians.

### **Evrona Nature Reserve**

Evrona Nature Reserve was devastated after an oil spill in 2014. Home to delicate Dorcas gazelles, other small mammals and an acacia tree forest. The nature reserve is still recovering and you'll get exclusive access to the scene of Israel's biggest environmental disaster.

### **Kibbutz Ketura**

You will visit Kibbutz Ketura, the epicenter of Israel's solar energy industry. You'll tour the kibbutz and learn about Israeli solar technology and about the balance that needs to be found between clean energy and protecting open spaces.

After arrival in Eilat an evening at your leisure

Overnight – Royal Beach Hotel, Eilat

## **Thursday March 23<sup>rd</sup>**

### **Eilat International Birding and Research Center**

You'll enjoy a VIP tour of this birding hotspot, one of Eilat's top tourist attractions. Visiting at the beginning of the spring migration you will get a chance to see many different bird species, including flamingoes, and hopefully including some seasonal rarities.

### **Coral Reefs**

Enjoy a ride on a glass-bottom boat to see Eilat's coral reefs. You'll receive expert insight about why Israel's corals are so resilient and the experimental techniques scientists are using to protect and regenerate them.

### **Timna Park**

You will hike through King Solomon's mines in the Timna Valley and discover some of the amazing geology and landscapes of Timna Valley, including strips of volcanic magma frozen into the cliffs.

Overnight – Royal Beach Hotel, Eilat

## **Friday March 24<sup>th</sup>**

### **Return from Eilat to Jerusalem**

As time allows we'll break up the drive with stops at various points of interest along the way including within Machtesh Ramon, the Ramon Crater. We will also stop for lunch in Mitzpe Ramon.

Arrive in Jerusalem or Ben Gurion Airport in late afternoon

### **Prices and Important Information:**

Per person in double room: \$2,599

Per person in a single room: \$3,299

Price includes 5-star accommodation March 19<sup>th</sup> -24<sup>th</sup> 2022, includes private transport, guide, all activities, breakfasts and lunch, and three dinners.

- Tips (\$20 per person per day, collected on the first day)
- Airfare and airport transfer not included
- Participants should be able to handle light to moderate intensity activities
- Participants must have own travel insurance

Participants will need to show proof of COVID vaccination records and abide by COVID restrictions.