

...The Waters of the Hatzbani River

By Peter Abelow

The Hatzbani River originates in natural springs in Lebanon. The river makes its way into Israel and eventually merges with the Dan and Banias Rivers to form the Jordan River.

Photo: www.sassontiram.com

Even in the Galilee and the Golan, with their breathtaking beauty, a spot with both lush greenery and rushing streams is highly unusual because of Israel's limited water resources. The fact that the Hatzbani Nature Reserve offers both makes this site in Israel's northeastern corner quite unique.

The Hatzbani River (the stream's Arabic name), which is also known as Nahal Snir, actually originates in natural springs in Lebanon. The river makes its way into Israel and eventually merges with the Dan and Banias Rivers to form the Jordan River.

The Hatzbani Nature Reserve, which accommodates hikers of all abili-

ties and even provides wheelchair trails, is just east of Kiryat Shmoneh on Route 99. Continue for about four and a half kilometers to the Hagoshrim Junction, and follow the signs north for about one more kilometer to the Hatzbani River entrance gate and parking lot. On the way, you will pass scenic orchards that will help put you in the mood for a nature hike.

At the entrance gate you will receive a lovely brochure with clear maps and descriptions of the various trails and the flora and fauna of the area. Thanks to the recent efforts of the Israel Nature and Natural Parks Protection Authority, there are modern facilities and well-marked trails at the site to help you enjoy your visit. The simplest hike is a short loop trail (a five-to-ten-minute walk), which accommodates baby strollers and wheelchairs. The trail begins in the parking lot and leads to a shallow wading pool under a manmade waterfall. Children can splash in the water and cool off on a hot day.

Shady spots around the pool provide a welcome respite from the scorching Israeli sun. Visitors with limited mobility can return to the parking area via a short trail on the far side of the pool. Another trail leads to the banks of the



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Hatzbani River, and this hike is well worth the effort, even if you only go to peek at the stream and then turn around.

For those interested in a more challenging hike, follow the signs to the stream and follow the path into the water. This hike involves occasional climbing around tree roots, walking on rocks and getting wet up to your ankles (or knees—depending on the season). At the point where the trail meets the water is exactly where the Hatzbani River meets one of the tributaries of the Dan. You can put one foot into the warm waters of the Hatzbani River (around 72 degrees in the summer) and another foot into the cooler waters of the Dan (65 degrees) and actually feel the difference. Ten minutes of walking through water and on trails along the banks will bring you to a short flight of steps up the left embankment, and to a trail that returns to the wading pool and the parking lot. Allow thirty-to-forty-five minutes for this exhilarating and scenic stroll.

The most rewarding trail continues along the river for an additional half hour. This more exhausting hike actually takes you into sections of the rushing stream and entails climbing over logs and boulders. Enter the water only when it is part of the trail, as other sections can be dangerous, especially in spring and early summer when the volume and intensity of the river is at its greatest. Although my most memorable visit to the Hatzbani River included a phone call from the United States to inform me of the birth of a grandchild (our children have since made *aliyah*), I would suggest leaving your cell phones in the car so that you can enjoy this unusual wonder of nature uninterrupted by the realities of modern society. Besides, why risk having your cell phone fall into the water?

Water shoes are obviously required for all the trails, except the short walk. Parents should constantly supervise their children during these hikes. For both safety and ecological reasons, entry into the water is only permitted at designated locations. *Cool off and enjoy!* 

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