



## Park Mini Israel: *The Country Comes Alive in Miniature*

By Peter Abelow

Not everything that's new in Israel is old. Park Mini Israel, which opened last Chanukah, is a unique and refreshing addition to your must-see-and-do-in-Israel list. It is a place that captivates adults and children alike.

As its name implies, Park Mini Israel is a scale model of the highlights of Israel. Spread over seven acres, the park features well over one hundred replicas of Israel's cities and most popular sites, all constructed with remarkable detail to a scale of one to twenty-five. But that is only the tip of the iceberg.

*Mr. Abelow is a licensed tour guide and the associate director of Keshet—the Center for Educational Tourism in Israel. He specializes in family and group tours that make Israel come alive "Jewishly." He can be reached at 972-2-653-6835 or peter@keshetisrael.co.il.*

Designed to stimulate all of one's senses, Park Mini Israel is laid out in the shape of a Magen David. Each triangle of the Magen David represents a different region of the country.

Upon entering the park, one cannot help but be struck by the exciting panorama of Mount Hermon (to the north), Akko, Haifa, Caesarea (complete with Herodian port and Crusader fortress), Tel Aviv and Eilat, which is in the process of being built. As you approach the models, the incredible craftsmanship becomes obvious. Dozens of miniature people—each about three inches tall—appear in the models; some 30,000 in all are featured throughout the park. The figures, painted with amazing detail, represent a cross section of Israeli life—religious and secular, soldiers, tourists with cameras in hand,

customers buying lotto tickets, diners playing backgammon in an outdoor café and passengers boarding an Egged bus. Children will undoubtedly spend hours marveling at the miniature people and are sure to find things that escape the most discerning adult eye.

There is much movement in the park as well. To cite but a few of the amazing sights—boats gliding across Haifa Harbor and the Gulf of Eilat, cars and trucks speeding down the Ayalon expressway, planes taxiing on the airport runways, young people playing soccer in a field and *kibbutzniks* dancing at a wedding. And then there are the sounds: the concert in the Caesarea theater, the klezmer music in the streets of Tzefat, Isaac Stern playing Vivaldi in Mishkenot Sha'ananim and the sound of people *davening* at the Kotel. Now you are hooked as you stroll along the red brick paths, exploring Israel from Metulla to Eilat.

The model of Jerusalem is situated furthest from the entrance. Visitors walk up a small rise—replicating the ascent into the Judean Hills—to enjoy a panorama of the city. The extraordinary view includes many of the city's familiar landmarks such as the Supreme Court, Heichal Shlomo, the King David Hotel and, of course, the Old City. Marvel at the archeology of the Southern Wall excavations, and stand in front of the Kotel. Close your eyes for a moment and let your imagination transport you to that holy spot.

Take advantage of a portable audio unit to hear descriptions of many of the historical, religious and archeological sites represented. Dial in the appropriate number and you will be treated to a brief story, often to the accompaniment of music or appropriate background sounds.

Park Mini Israel is located only minutes from Latrun, halfway between Jerusalem and Ben Gurion Airport.

There is no better way to end a visit to Israel. (You can even go there on your way to the airport.) A visit to Park Mini Israel will bring your entire trip to life in a most powerful and meaningful way. Children will be enthralled as they recognize the places they have seen throughout their stay.

The park is open at night during the summer and comes alive in a unique way after dark. Plan to spend at least two hours.

For more information please call 08-921-4121 or go to [www.minisrael.co.il](http://www.minisrael.co.il). Relative to other places in Israel, the price of admission is rather high. But you will quickly discover that your decision to visit Park Mini Israel was well worth it. JA

*Photos, clockwise from top left: King David Hotel, Jerusalem; Me'arat Hamachpelah, Hebron; a building in the Old Jewish Quarter and Artists' Colony in Tzefat; the Kotel, Jerusalem: the figures are animated; they move to simulate davening. Photos courtesy of Park Mini Israel*

