

Al-Marsad Internship Guide

April 2010

About the Golan

The Golan is a mountainous region northwest of Israel and southwest of Syria. It is home to rich water sources and fertile soil. The region is most famous for its apples.

The Golan, which is Syrian land, became illegally occupied by Israel in 1967 following the Arab-Israeli War. Once home to 153,000 Syrians who were spread across two cities and over two hundred villages and farms, the Golan now consists of five villages which are inhabited by 20,000 Syrians. Thousands have been permanently displaced to Syria and the ceasefire line is impassable except to a select few.

With Israel's occupation of the region came the construction and expansion of illegal Jewish settlements. At present there are thirty-three illegal settlements and 20,000 illegal settlers in the Occupied Golan.

Due to the occupation the natives of the Golan are subject to discrimination against them in relation to taxes; water supplies; employment; economic opportunities; housing; and freedom of movement. Land has been expropriated; crops destroyed and access to land inhibited. All of this has been implemented by the Israeli authorities to the advantage of illegal Jewish settlers. Consequently, international human rights and humanitarian law violations are rife within the region and require immediate addressing.

About Al-Marsad

Al-Marsad is a non-profit legal human rights organisation based in the Occupied Syrian Golan. It was established in October 2003 by a group of professionals from Majdal Shams, a village in the most northern part of the Occupied Golan. It is the first organisation in the Golan to address the long neglected human rights situation in the region.

Al-Marsad promotes a rights based approach as the way forward in addressing, highlighting and solving the problems facing the Syrian community of the Occupied Golan. Al-Marsad monitors and documents violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, and provides a pro-bono legal service to the local population.

A number of issues that Al-Marsad has highlighted in the past and continues to work on include: illegality of Israel's occupation of the Golan; expropriation of land; illegality of the Jewish settlements in the Golan; landmines; separation of families; discrimination; restriction on freedom of movement; and Israel's exploitation of the local economy and resources.

Further information is available <http://www.golan-marsad.org>.

Practical Information Concerning Al-Marsad's Internship Programme

Before Departure

Vaccinations

Consult your doctor as soon as possible about vaccinations for Israel and the Occupied Territories as some injections require a period of up to six weeks in order to complete the course. At minimum it is likely that Hepatitis A is required. Rabies is also a consideration. There are dogs and cats roaming the streets with rabies becoming an increasing problem. There may also be the opportunity to visit farms.

Travel Insurance

It is advisable to get travel insurance to cover your trip. Many insurance companies only offer travel insurance for a maximum of 60 days. A good place to get your travel insurance for trips longer than that is through a student travel agency, their services are generally also available to non-students at an increased cost.

Flights

The main international airport within Israel and the Occupied Territories is Ben Gurion International Airport, Tel Aviv.

Visas

All visitors to Israel and the Occupied Territories must hold a passport that is valid for at least six months from the date they enter the country. People with

no nationality must hold a valid laissez passer, as well as a visa back to the country that issued it.

Citizens of the following countries will be issued tourist visas free of charge at every port or entrance terminal to Israel and the Occupied Territories:

Europe: Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Germany (Persons born after 01/01/1928), Gibraltar, Great Britain, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, San Marino, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland.

Asia & Oceania: Australia, Fiji Islands, Japan, Hong Kong, New Zealand, Philippines, South Korea.

Africa: Central African Republic, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, South Africa, Swaziland.

The Americas: Argentina, Barbados, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Ecuador, Guatemala, Haiti, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, St. Kitts, & Nevis, Surinam, Trinidad, & Tobago, The Bahamas, The Dominican Republic, Uruguay, U.S.A.

For those from countries not set out above contact your local Israeli Embassy for further details.

Money

The Israeli currency is New Israeli Shekels (NIS) and is used throughout Israel and the Occupied Territories. It is advisable to not carry notes bigger than 200 NIS, as they can be hard to change in certain places.

NIS can be hard to come by outside of Israel and the Occupied Territories, many banks simply do not offer it in their Bureau de Changes. There are cash machines and places to change currency at the airport. NIS are advised, but if you are really stuck you can take some petty cash in American Dollars to tide you over until you gain access to cash in Israel and the Occupied

Territories. Generally American Dollars will be accepted as a form of payment in Tel Aviv, less so elsewhere, and you will receive change in NIS.

There is a bank in Majdal Shams with a cash machine, however it generally only accepts local money cards. The Golan should be the only place in Israel and the Occupied Territories that it is difficult to access cash. You can withdraw cash from a cash machine in Qiryat Shomna/Kiryat Shomna which accepts most major credit/debit cards. If you require cash during your stay transport to Qiryat Shomna/Kiryat Shomna can be arranged.

It will be very hard to get travellers cheques changed during your visit. The nearest Western Union is in Qiryat Shomna/Kiryat Shomna.

There are a number of shops in Majdal Shams that will accept payment by card, but it is advisable to have cash at all times.

Contacts

Contact Al-Marsad before you leave with your contact details and dates of your intended arrival in Israel and the Golan. Make sure to have at least two contact mobile numbers for Al-Marsad, along with Al-Marsad's landline number before you begin your journey.

On Arrival

Transport from Airport

The best form of transport from the airport is by train. The train station is located on Level S of the Landside Building, adjacent to the Greeters' Hall. There are signposts in the airport to direct you. You can get to most main cities from the airport via train.

Taxis are also available, but at a price.

Transport to Al-Marsad

Transport to Al-Marsad occurs in three stages. First, a train from Tel Aviv or Ben Gurion Airport to Akko/Acre. Then a bus from Akko/Acre to Qiryat Shomna/Kiryat Shomna. From Qiryat Shomna/Kiryat Shomna if someone is available they will collect you and if not you can get a taxi to Majdal Shams, Golan which is about 30 km away (approx 150 NIS). Unfortunately there is no public transport available between Qiryat Shomna/Kiryat Shomna and Majdal Shams.

Bus times are available at: <http://www.egged.co.il/Eng/>

Train times are available at: <http://www.rail.co.il/EN/Pages/HomePage.aspx>

It is advisable to try and avoid travelling to the Golan at the weekend. Transport is suspended from Friday afternoon to Saturday afternoon. It is possible to travel on Sunday, but the public transport is usually extremely busy and may be uncomfortable.

Be prepared for security checks on entering train stations especially. This will usually entail a check of your passport and visa, along with a few questions about your journey.

If you are travelling from Tel Aviv city all train stations host trains which travel directly to Akko/Acre, though some may be less frequently than others. If you are leaving from Ben Gurion airport you can get a train directly to Akko/Acre. Tickets can either be bought from an automatic machine or from a ticket desk, depending on which station you are leaving from. A single journey should cost around 40 NIS.

Akko/Acre's bus station is a short walk from the train station. On exiting the train station head left to a roundabout. At the roundabout imagine the train station, which will be behind you is North. South will be a main road with a number of bus shelters. Head down this road until you come to the next main junction. On your left you should see buses exiting from a slight hill. This is the bus station. Unfortunately there are no timetables or ticket desks, so it is best to check the time of the buses using the provided website before you travel. Tickets are bought on board the bus and should cost around 40 NIS for a single journey. The bus is number 500 and departs from the stop '500 Kiryat Shomna'. Just check with the bus driver before boarding the bus that it is the right bus.

Before you begin your journey contact Al-Marsad and arrange how you will be transported from Qiryat Shomna/Kiryat Shomna to Majdal Shams.

Language

Within Israel proper Hebrew is the main language. Throughout the Occupied Territories, including the Golan, the main language is Arabic. Most people have basic English at the very least.

Life in Majdal Shams, Golan

Accommodation

During your time with Al-Marsad accommodation is free. An apartment directly beside the office accommodates interns. During your internship there can be anything from one to three interns. Depending on the number of interns you may be required to share a room.

The apartment consists of two bedrooms, a kitchen and toilet/shower. It has all the basics: hot water, washing machine and electric heaters. Bed linen will be provided.

If you are the only intern the other bedroom will be made available to any visitors that Al-Marsad may have over the course of your internship.

Working Day

Generally you will be working five days of the week. There will be some weekends, due to events or deadlines that you will be required to work, or it will be in your interests to attend. Your days off will be Friday and Saturday, but this is negotiable. The office is open 8am - 4pm.

The office contains three PCs, all of which have assigned members of staff. Therefore, it is advisable to bring a laptop if you have one.

Transport within the Golan

If you need to get anywhere transport can be arranged.

Mobiles

It is advisable to ensure that your mobile is 'unlocked' before you leave for Israel and the Occupied Territories. Otherwise you will have to purchase a mobile and a sim card. Mobiles and sim cards are available in all the main cities and Majdal Shams. Generally sim cards should cost around 150 NIS - 50 NIs for the sim and 100 NIS credit.

Internet

Wireless internet is available 24/7 in the office and apartment. Wi-Fi is also available free of charge in the local coffee shops.

Mail

Post can be sent to Al-Marsad. Al-Marsad's post box is located close to the office. However, if you are receiving packages these will need to be collected from Masa'da, the neighbouring village, which can be arranged.

To send mail there is a post box for sending mail where the PO Boxes for the village are located. However, stamps can only be bought from the post office in Masa'da.

Shops

You will be able to get all the basics in Majdal Shams. There are small corner shops, supermarkets, butchers, toy shops, clothes shops, electrical shops, hairdressers etc. There are also a number of pharmacies which between all of them you should be able to get everything you need. However, if you cannot get what you are looking for you can arrange a lift into Qiryat Shomna/Kiryat Shomna.

Weather

Generally the weather in the Golan is good. During the winter months (November-February) it can be very cold and snow is likely. During the

summer it (May-September) can be quite hot. The months in between fluctuate between warm and cold. It is quite a dry region, but expect days of heavy rain.

Clothing

Israel and the Occupied Territories are becoming progressively more westernised. Generally it is quite relaxed, even while working. There is no real need for formal clothes, though it is advisable to have one outfit in case such an occasion arises. As long as you dress respectfully it is up to you. It is very rare to be required to wear traditional clothing; most places where it is required (for example Mosques) will supply alternatives for tourists. It is advisable for women to carry a spare scarf in their luggage.

Food

The food in the Occupied Golan is very natural. It mainly consists of wheat, bread, meat and salad. If you are a vegetarian or have an allergy state this clearly from the beginning.

Medical Treatment

There are a number of dentists and medical clinics available in Majdal Shams. They provide top class services. The emergency number for Israel and the Occupied Territories is 100.

Safety

As long as you exercise due diligence Israel and the Occupied Territories are generally safe. The Golan in particular, is a small community where everyone knows everyone so it is extremely safe and people are more than willing to help.

Further Information

If require any further information please do not hesitate to contact Al-Marsad at marsad@golan-marsad.org or (00972) 4 687 0644.