

THE LINCOLN CLUB VISITS ISRAEL

A closer look at its first international trip.

BY SUZETTE ZAZUETA

FROM THE SMELLS of saffron wafting through the open-air markets to the numerous sacred sites and the urban and more secular city of Tel Aviv, Israel is dynamic and evolving, historic and holy. It is a place everyone should visit at least once.

In early May of this year, the Lincoln Club of Orange County did just that. But this was not an ordinary vacation trip. Instead, the objective was to enroll 30 of its members as ambassadors for Israel, and to spark an investment interest in Israel's economy. The Lincoln Club, according to its website, "is the oldest and most successful pro-business political organization in Orange County." They are people who have an active role in community politics and have enough political clout to effectively lobby for Israel.

This was the first international trip that the Lincoln Club has taken. Every other

year they visit Washington D.C. where they meet with government officials and other Lincoln Club members from across the nation. But according to one member, the Lincoln Club has a geopolitical element, so studying the Israeli government and getting to meet with government officials there, such as Mickey Levy, a member of the Knesset, and a private lecture by former Defense Minister and Chief of Staff of the IDF Bogie Ya'alon was an opportunity not to be missed.

Benny Mor, founder of Vasco Assets, and a prominent diamond and jewelry manufacturer who has a passion for international travel, led the Lincoln Club on this trip to Israel. That makes sense as Mor is an Israeli and the Director of International Travel and Affairs for the club. The itinerary Mor organized created a travel experience that most people who are visiting Israel do not



Wayne Lindholm and Benny Mor with former Defense Minister and Chief of Staff of the IDF Bogie Ya'alon after his presentation to the Club in Tel Aviv.

have the chance to have. It included holy sites but also, certain other areas most travelers may not access. For instance, Mor was able to facilitate a high-level visit to the Air Force Base Hatzertim, Squadron 69, the F-15 aircraft line, and the Israeli Army Intelligence Center—quite an extraordinary trip. Wayne Lindholm, the Chairman of the Lincoln Club noted that "adding the political aspect to the religious side of Israel...Benny did that very well." Mor stated that his purpose for such an itinerary was to "serve the state of Israel by bringing



The Group posed with former Defense Minister and Chief of Staff of the IDF Bogie Ya'alon after his insider's overview and update of the current security and geopolitical situation.

people who support Israel, and to elevate their level of support so they will be our ambassadors here [in the United States].” He noted that he wanted this trip to highlight all aspects of the country including social, political/government and military.

Sensitive to the religious diversity of the Lincoln Club, the holy sites visited were not limited to Jewish religious history. For example, they visited Via Dolorosa and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. They also visited other sites like the Midgal Synagogue near the Sea of Galilee. And interestingly, the tour guide explained that the Midgal Synagogue represents a cross-section of Judaism and Christianity, because it is believed that this is where the historical Jesus taught the disciples.

Jerusalem: so much religious history in one city. It is likely no coincidence that the trip started there. The Lincoln Club’s Membership and Events Director Cynthia Quimby stated that in Jerusalem, she “immediately felt the weight of where I was and the privilege I had to walk the ancient streets of the holy city. And seeing how close the Jewish, Armenian, Muslim



The Group visited an IDF Front Base 200 meters from the Lebanese border fence, spending time with several IDF soldiers.

and Christian quarters are to each other, was remarkable to see in real life.”

The club additionally went to Masada, the Western Wall, swam in the Dead Sea, observed a diamond polishing center, experienced Tel Aviv, visited a kibbutz, a biotech company along the border of the Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights where they spent the day with the 679th Reserve Armored Brigade battalion commander of the Yom Kippur War, Haim Danon.

This was Mr. Lindholm’s second time in Israel. He stated he “loves touring Israel.” But he was struck by “the political tight-

rope they have to travel surrounded by Syria/ISIS, Lebanon/Hezbollah, and Gaza Strip/Hamas.” Ms. Quimby, for whom this was her first trip to Israel, explained that the trip had a profound effect on her, “visiting Israel has always been something I knew I wanted to do in my lifetime. The trip changed my life and my perspective. I fell in love with Israel beyond what I would have ever dreamed possible.” ✧

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A highlight of the trip was a special visit to Air Force Base Hatzerim and the F-15 aircraft line of Squadron 69.