

Exchange at Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design
WS 18/19

I arrived in Jerusalem two weeks before the classes started. In early October, the weather was still warm and pleasant; I have decided to spend the first days in Sinai, Egypt, by the Red Sea. I came back for the orientation days that took part in the main Bezalel campus situated in the north of the city, Mount Scopus. I have had a chance to meet the fellow students from different faculties as well as a friend from Uni Li. We have been given the information regarding safety within the campus and in the entire country (risks of traveling to its particular parts). We've been also given a chance to sign up for one of three classes available for students of all faculties: Photography, Making of Jerusalem, Printing Workshop (I have chosen the first one, curated by Yosaif Cohen - I can highly recommend).

The following day we've been assigned for the orientation days in our departments. The Department of Architecture is separated from the rest of the campus and located in the center of the city by Bezalel Street. The complex consists of two buildings which include studios, workshops, administration, and library. My apartment was located only 15 minutes walk from there in the neighborhood called Rehavia.

After a brief introduction with the head of the department, we've been presented different design studios. Unfortunately half of them was not available for us due to the language issues and their very limited capacity; some of the tutors came to speak to us and give us more information about their course. We have been also informed that there are no other courses than design studio available in English.



Tel Aviv
a view from the Central Bus Station



Jerusalem, Mt Scopus
a view from Bezalel Academy

I have decided to take part in the Black City Project studio tutored by Sharon Rothbard and Talia Davidi. Our main focus was the Central Bus Station in Tel Aviv, which is currently one of the most controversial buildings in the whole country. The government is debating for years whether the building should be kept or demolished, therefore they have asked Bezael to research about possible scenarios regarding this place. Our task was to develop a good scenario, the bad one and the “beyond”. Half of our group was the exchange students thanks to which the instruction language was switched to English (other studios were not this lucky). Our tutors assigned us to the particular groups (in my case it was a pair) to allow better integration and understanding of the topic. We continued working in the teams till the end of the semester.

I have also decided to take part in some of the urban planning classes on the Master’s Programme level. I signed up for The Arab City (instructed by the Palestinian architect Senan Abdelqader) and the Urban Innovation (which in the end happened to be fully in Hebrew and I have had to resign). The classes were taking part in the beautiful building of Hansen House, a former hospital transformed into exhibition space and university.

Besides the integration within the studio group, we didn’t have many chances for the interaction with the local students (on the educational level at least). The group of the exchange students stayed together joining cultural events and organizing trips. Myself, I was lucky to share the apartment with two amazing Israeli girls. Thanks to them I could experience deeply the local culture especially while taking part in the Shabbat dinners with their family and friends.

I’ve had a chance to travel quite a lot during this semester, not only within the country of Israel but also in Palestine and Egypt. Public transportation is developed quite well, and the prices of buses are relatively cheap in comparison to the general costs of living, which are very high (comparable to Switzerland).

I am really satisfied with my overall experience in Jerusalem. Even though I wasn’t able to take as much as I wanted from the educational offer, I have learned a lot through the teamwork with my Israeli partner. I have also enjoyed being in this very different mentality, yet many times it was really challenging. I am sure that the friendships I’ve made will last for years.

