

Lesson 6: Mizrahi Cuisine

Appendix A - Touring Israel

Note to Teacher:

This packet can be divided into two parts.

1) Informational reading titled “**Touring Israel**”

2) Student Worksheet titled “**Looking Back at Israel**”

To prepare for lesson, you may choose to print, staple and collate this document as two separate documents to save paper.

This option also allows the teacher to reuse the information packets for future lessons.

Enjoy the tour and your meal!



ISRAEL

Touring Southwest Asia and North Africa



In the southwestern corner of Asia, right on the Mediterranean Sea, lies the narrow country of Israel. A wide variety of geographical features are packed into this small nation, which is slightly smaller than the state of New Jersey. At Israel's northernmost point, near its borders with Syria and Lebanon, is the Galilee region—a hilly agricultural area bordered on the east by the Jordan River and Lake Tiberias.

Traveling south from Galilee, you reach a long, thin stretch of plains, extending from the Mediterranean Sea eastward to Israel's border with Jordan. These coastal plains are home to most of

Israel's major cities and the majority of its population. Here, the Mediterranean sunshine and rich soil create an excellent environment for farming. Citrus fruits, olives, grapes, and a wide array of vegetables thrive in this fertile region.

South of Israel's coastal plains region is the vast Negev Desert, which covers the southern half of the country. Although this region gets less than 10 inches of rain per year, modern irrigation techniques allow the Israelis to farm the land.

Food Traveler's Notes

Agriculture

Farming in Israel is very organized. Perhaps the most famous type of Israeli farms is the kibbutz, a cooperative farming village. On a kibbutz, all land and all property are owned jointly by the people who live and work there. Through Israel's many kibbutzim and similar farming methods, enough food is produced to feed almost all of Israel's population. The largest crops are citrus fruits, tomatoes, wheat, potatoes, melons, apples, and grapes. Cattle and sheep are the most important livestock.

People and Language

Of the 5.6 million people living in Israel, over 80 percent are Jewish. Although more than half of these Jewish people are Israeli-born, their parents and grandparents came from more than 100 different countries. Sephardi and Middle Eastern Jews came from Yemen, Algeria, Iran, Iraq, Kurdistan, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Egypt, Syria, Morocco, Tunisia, etc. European Jews came from the countries of France, Germany, Russia, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, Hungary and Belgium. In addition, more than 15 percent of Israel's population are Arabs. Therefore, the

culture, customs, and cuisine of Israel contain elements of Southwest Asia, Central and Eastern Europe, North Africa, and many other regions! When visiting a city in Israel, you might dine on such Middle Eastern foods as lamb shish kebobs or on such European specialties as smoked salmon and potato pancakes. Although Hebrew is the most common language here, visitors might also hear Arabic, English, French, Russian, or any number of other languages.

Dining

Israeli meals are greatly affected by the dietary laws of the country's two main religions, Judaism and Islam. For example, people who follow Jewish dietary laws cannot eat pork, shellfish, or any type of fish without scales or fins. They are also not allowed to eat meat and dairy products at the same meal. The Islamic people too, cannot eat pork. Breakfast in Israel is typically hearty and may include cheese, vegetables, olives, and sometimes fish. Lunch is the main meal of the day for most people here. This meal is usually eaten later here than in Western cultures—around 3:00 P.M. when school is over for the day. Most Israelis eat a light dinner—often a salad or fish—around 7:00 in the evening.

Israeli Food Briefs

Shakshouka

A favorite dish in Israel is shakshouka, an egg and tomato dish that originated in northern Africa. Although there are many slight variations of the recipe, traditional shakshouka is made by first sautéing tomato, onion, garlic, and various herbs. To complete this dish, Israelis poach eggs over the tomatoes and onion mixture. Some shakshouka recipes call for green peppers or pimentos as well.



Matzo

Matzo is an unleavened bread, which means that it does not rise and get puffy, like yeast breads. Most Israeli people eat matzo during the Jewish holiday of Passover—a week-long celebration of the ancient Jewish people’s escape from slavery in Egypt. The Jews eat unleavened bread during Passover as a reminder that their ancestors fled from Egypt so quickly that they couldn’t wait for their bread to rise.

Made only with flour and water, matzo is thin and brittle. Israelis often grind matzo

into a powder and use it to thicken soups, to bread foods for frying, or to make pancakes or dumplings.



Falafel

One of the most popular of all Israeli foods is falafel—deep-fried balls of a mixture of chickpeas, crushed wheat, and spices. Falafel is usually served in sandwich form, tucked into a flat, pocket-like bread called pita. However, the falafel balls can also be served as appetizers. Most Israelis serve falafel with a sauce made from either yogurt or tahini—a thick paste of ground sesame seeds. Falafel is now sold on practically every street corner in the towns and cities of Israel. Some people even call it the “Israeli hamburger!”



Looking Back on Israel

1. The food traditions of Jewish people in Israel and elsewhere are very detailed and strict. To help those among the Jewish people who observe these commandments, Jewish food inspectors label foods that meet certain standards. The label may be the word Kosher or a symbol, such as the letter k, to indicate that the food is kosher.

Conduct research to find other symbols for kosher and share your findings with the class.

2. Challah bread, gefilte fish, and knishes are some of the many tradition European Jewish dishes common in the United States and elsewhere, as well as in Israel. Hummus, grape leaves, falafel, and pita are foods from the Middle Easter

Look for these and other Jewish foods in your grocery store and make a note of where they are made.

Compare your list with your classmates.

3. List the foods of Israel that you would most like to try.
Where can you find these foods?
Which can you make?

4. To celebrate Passover, the Jewish people eat a special meal called a Seder. Each type of food eaten at the Seder symbolizes something different about the holiday.

Research the Seder meal celebration and write a paragraph explaining what each food item symbolizes.

What other foods are eaten during Jewish holidays (Rosh Hashana, Purim, Chanukah, etc.) How do they symbolize the history of the Jewish people?