

## DIPLOMACY MAJOR - GRADE 12

### WATER-DIPLOMACY FIELD TRIP TO THE JORDAN VALLEY

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Katzir High-School; November 30, 2021.

Tuesday morning, on November 16, 2021, at a very early hour, Katzir's Diplomacy 12<sup>th</sup> graders met at the Kendler St. bus lot, bright-eyed and excited to go on their first Diplomacy field trip after almost two years of strictly Zoom extra-curricular activities. We were about to set off on a very long bus ride to the Jordan Valley area to explore the topic of Israel's water diplomacy, by touring the actual conflict sites close to the border with Jordan. This one-day tour was one of the many educational initiatives organized and sponsored by the *Eco-Peace Middle East* organization (<https://www.waterdiplomacy.net/tour-descriptions>), which encourages Israeli students to learn about the environmental heritage shared by the diverse populations of the area, and help in the creation of necessary conditions for lasting peace in the region.

*Eco-Peace Middle East* (more information can be found in the above link) is a unique organization that brings together Jordanian, Palestinian, and Israeli environmentalists. Their primary objective is the promotion of cooperative efforts to protect the environmental heritage shared by these three communities. In so doing, *Eco-Peace* seeks to advance both sustainable regional development and the creation of necessary conditions for lasting peace in the region. *Eco-Peace* has offices in Amman, Ramallah, and Tel-Aviv.

Focusing on water diplomacy in the Middle East, *Eco Peace* leads cross border encounters for networking and joint problem solving, via various educational and training programs that aim to gather, connect, and share the projects developed by Israeli students in the field of water diplomacy in the area. (<https://www.waterdiplomacy.net/>).

Our tour to the Jordan Valley area is one of 5 English-speaking guided tours offered to Israeli Diplomacy students by this organization, and we were curious and ready for action, first because we had been craving for the breakfast pastries that were waiting for us on the bus - fresh out of the bakery's oven (starting a

Diplomacy field trip with eating pastries has become a kind of a tradition in the Major) - and also because we hadn't had school trips to that area - let alone in English - so we were curious about what expects us. We spent the three-hour drive stuffing our faces, chatting, singing, and bonding until we arrived to meet our tour guide Adam, on site.

The first stop was at an abandoned Syrian Fort along the southern slopes of the Golan Heights, overlooking a vantage point to which our bus took us by a steep, narrow road overlooking the Sea of Galilee (Kinneret). The ride there was as interesting as the destination itself since we saw the Jordanian side of the border up close. On site, we went down into a pitch-dark old and scary bunker in the belly of the mountain, lighted only by our phone flashlights. There, in the dark, where we thought we would lose our way, Adam pointed his flashlight at a map of the area and taught us about the region's political geography, borders, and water security. Then, outside, we climbed onto a panoramic lookout point and learned about the water disputes between Israel and Syria, the Johnston Plan, the dispute over the water rights of the Sea of Galilee (the Kinneret), the importance of the Yarmouk River in relations between Israel and Jordan including the peace treaty in 1994, and water realities in the community of Hama, Jordan - just across the way (<https://www.waterdiplomacy.net/tour-descriptions>).



Our second stop was *Yardenit*, (Hebrew: ירדנית), also known as the *Yardenit Baptismal Site*, which is a baptism site located along the Jordan River in the Galilee region of northern Israel, which is frequented by Christian pilgrims. The site is located south of the river's outlet from the Sea of Galilee, near Kibbutz Kvutzat Kinneret, which owns and manages the site. Yardenit hosts Christian pilgrims and tourists, offering a serene and spiritual setting for those wishing to baptize in the River Jordan (<https://www.yardenit.com/about-us/>). Adam, our tour guide, said

that the river waters at the site are constantly monitored for quality and safety, and we got to witness a Christian child's Baptism ceremony taking place. It was so interesting to watch such a foreign religious ceremony (known to us only from movies) in real life, that we didn't want to leave the place. We tried to understand the spiritual and cultural meaning of this ceremony, but we didn't have enough time.



(<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yardenit>)

Next, we visited the *Rob Roy Kayaks*, a public camping site that offers Kayak rides, modest camping facilities, free hot drinks, comfortable sitting spots, and a very loud crowd of huge roosters proudly roaming around along with meowing kittens looking for cuddles. While Adam continued to tell us about the importance of the Jordan river (which we could barely hear over the noise made by all the animals), we looked around and promised ourselves we would come back there for another visit.



([https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction\\_Review-g297765-d9706606-Reviews-Rob\\_Roy-Tiberias\\_Galilee\\_Region\\_Northern\\_District.html](https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g297765-d9706606-Reviews-Rob_Roy-Tiberias_Galilee_Region_Northern_District.html))

Then, we took a short walk along the Lower Jordan from Yardenit to the Alumot Dam, which took us from the clear, good water of the lower Jordan River to the



Alumot Dam. This part of the river was constructed for tourism (the Yardenit Baptism Site and Rob Roy Kayaks). At the Alumot Dam, the water quality changes- the river receives all the effluents from the Bitanyia Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) and from the Salty Water Carrier. Adam introduced Eco-Peace's plan to rehabilitate the Jordan River and what can be done to improve the situation. The dam was built in the 1930s in order to divert water to the electric power plant in Naharayim and then after 1948 to divert the Jordan River for developmental purposes. Water diversion is the main reason for the poor quality of the Jordan River and the depletion of the Dead Sea (<https://www.waterdiplomacy.net/tour-descriptions>).



<https://www.alamy.com/meager-amount-of-water-is-allowed-to-flow-south-at-alumot-dam-a-dam-on-the-southern-or-lower-jordan-river-3-km-south-of-the-sea-of-galilee-that-ess-image212450575.html>

On our way to the fifth stop, The Dan Simchi Pumping Station, we were shocked to see the collection of garbage and filth that had been polluting the riverbanks and realized how careless people are with nature. When we reached the fifth site, Adam explained that The Dan Simchi Pumping Station had been bringing (and still is) the water from the Sea of Galilee to the King Abdullah Canal in Jordan and told us the story of the Peace Treaty between Israel and Jordan and how water diplomacy works.

Our last stop was at the Peace Island - Naharayim, where Adam told us the story of the Peace Island and the electric power plant, how diplomacy worked, and the current state of diplomacy there (<https://www.waterdiplomacy.net/tour-descriptions>). We rested for a while to reflect upon and share our impressions of the tour, our personal experiences during that day as well as our future plans. Adam told us about himself and shared some of his personal and professional experiences. We told him about our Diplomacy studies and how they had been beneficial for us. We were truly sorry to say goodbye to him, and we didn't want to

leave the peaceful scenery just yet because we had really enjoyed touring the beautiful natural green environment in the sunny weather, breathing fresh air, watching animals roaming freely (including a donkey!), smelling the sweet Jordan River waters (the clean ones!), and forgetting all about our everyday worries for a while. We looked around and saw the houses of a Jordanian settlement across the border, and suddenly realized that both sides were sharing the same natural environment yet experiencing a very different reality!



<https://www.jpost.com/travel/around-israel/the-beautiful-and-tragic-story-of-naharayim>



<https://www.timesofisrael.com/jordan-said-to-bar-hundreds-of-israelis-from-disputed-isle-of-peace-on-border/>

Coming back to the bus, we began getting used to reality again and prepared for the long ride back. At least we had some leftover pastries from the morning to comfort us and time to take a last long nap until we get home. So, things were kind of ok.

By 18:30 in the evening (leaving behind a spotless bus - mind you), we reached Kendler St. Rehovot, we parted our ways - slightly suffering a food coma - but very...very...very pleased!