



The Dead Sea: Ten Things to Know Before You Go

It's hard to get over how many amazing things are to be found in this condensed little country. The Holy Land is chock full of churches and monasteries, sites of architectural and archeological significance, and natural wonders; there's truly something for everyone.

One of the things I appreciate about the volunteer experience is the opportunity I have to join the people I work with for normal outings and see what local people do for fun. It's especially great to see the kids getting out and interacting with their surroundings as other children and families do.

This past week, I joined half of the boarding children on an excursion to the Dead Sea. The first view of the Dead Sea is only 30 minutes away from the monastery, but the spot we chose at Ein Gedi Spa, takes about an hour to drive to. The sky was clear and sunny and we had a gorgeous view of the sea as we drove alongside the reddish brown mountains. Although I knew the Dead Sea was the lowest place on earth and the saltiest sea, I didn't realize the enormous health benefits to be had from it's mineral-rich mud and oxygen-rich air. I highly recommend a visit to anyone considering a holiday, business trip or pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Here are some tips for planning your Dead Sea dip:

1. Do go to Ein Gedi Spa. Helmut, the local German man who helped organize our little outing, tries to get the kids there regularly, for fun, but also to help treat skin problems that a few of the girls have. The spa's private beach has mud available that isn't available at most of the public beaches, so it's worth it to pay the entry fee. The changing rooms and showers are clean and spacious. The spa facilities include an indoor mineral-rich pool, coffee and snack bar, and a gift shop where you can buy locally made skincare products. It sounds oxymoronic and perhaps it originally presented a marketing challenge, but apparently the best skincare comes from the Dead Sea.

2. Don't wear sunblock. Helmut reminded me that at 425 feet below sea level, we were relatively far from the sun.

Plus, wearing any kind of lotion or product prevents your skin from getting the full benefit from the mud and water.

3. Remember what they say about having salt rubbed in your wounds? Well, if you have any open wounds or shaved recently, you'll know exactly what that feels like once you take a dip in the Dead Sea.

4. Do make sure to bring sandals or water shoes so that you can walk out into the surf. The shore is lined with crusty salt and hard on the feet.

5. Look for the dark black mud, spread it on thick and then let it dry before getting into the sea. When you're done bouncing in the waves, make sure to rinse off in fresh water at the nearby shower station, so that you can dry comfortably.

6. Don't try to swim. It won't work and it could be dangerous; you might end up with your bottom in the air and your head under the water, unable to turn yourself over. Instead sit or float on your back and relax in the gentle waves that keep you near the shore.

7. Try to keep the water out of your eyes and mouth. In any case, the showers are nearby for rinsing.

8. Do try the various kinds of muds and water, from the sea to the natural hot spring. The water coming from the spring smelled like sulfur, but the pounding, hot water was so soothing, it didn't matter.

9. Don't miss the indoor pool. The water comes from the same spring as the water offered outside, but even more minerals are added; you can see all the particles in the water. Remember to take off any silver jewelry before getting in the pool. Both my ring and cross turned blackish-blue in the water, but they'll be back to normal once polished.

10. The spa closes at 4:00 p.m., so try to be showered and ready to go early enough to allow time to enjoy a coffee or an ice cream before heading out. It's especially important to get some caffeine if you're driving – after all that sun, water and heat you'll be ready to sleep well! ✨



Here's our happy, sunny bunch. The mountains of Jordan are in the background.



This little girl just celebrated her 6th birthday! She happily sat in my lap and took pictures with me as we dried out in the sun.