

## Sorry! I can't hear you!



When we decided to live and study in Israel after being away for more than forty years, we knew that we were in for a totally different experience than what we remembered. We prepared ourselves mentally to take it all in stride, as it comes, the good the bad and the ugly. In fact we vowed not to complain, not to compare and only contrast to the benefit of our “readers” back home. After all we are in this privileged, some say enviable position of immersing and engaging in Israeli day-to-day life without the stresses, tensions and anxieties that characterize the daily lives of most Israelis. In other words we are temporary residents on an observer status without full membership. So far we have kept our vows and any reporting from Israel has been delivered in the spirit of observation. This one however is getting close to the red line.

Israel we are certain, without scientific or statistical proof to back it up, is likely one of the more ecologically conscious countries in the world. Water conservation is second nature, solar energy has been in wide use since the inception of the country, it is probably one of the most “Green” countries in terms of development, technology and practice with one exception - noise pollution. This is a fact of life in Israel and we finally understand why.

First we must qualify our report by admitting that we have made a drastic lifestyle change independent of locale. By moving to Tel-Aviv we elected to become city dwellers after 40 years of suburban bliss. Tel-Aviv is a bustling, vibrant and dynamic metropolitan city and we live in the center of all this excitement, so city noise is to be expected. But here are some unique factors we may not have taken into consideration.



First of all Tel-Aviv, unlike other major metropolitan cities around the world does not have underground transportation, everything is above ground – busses, taxis and cars, cars, cars. The main culprits are the

busses. In stop and go traffic that is no different than in any metropolitan city, their huge engines are rumbling on the starts and shrieking on the stops.



Second, there are no thermal windows in Israeli apartments. In the warm Israeli climate you can get relief in one of two ways: keep the windows open and let in the Mediterranean breeze or turn on the air-conditioning which is ridiculously expensive.

Thirdly and once again without statistical proof Israelis must own the most cars per capita in the world or at least be way up there on the list. Cars come equipped with horns like everywhere else but there is a big difference. In Israel it is common practice to honk in order to acknowledge someone you know walking on the sidewalk. You honk when the car in front of you cannot keep up with your over the limit speed. You honk when pedestrians are trying to cross the street in a designated crosswalk just as a warning that you have no intention to stop at the crossroad whatsoever. You honk to remind the driver in front of you to watch the red light as when it turns amber it's time to go as green is sure to follow shortly. Basically you honk when you feel like, no need to explain. Transportation is a major factor in noise pollution.



The next factor is Communications. We already reported on the method of cell phone communications. When in use everything goes: laughing out loud, arguing in full volume or just shout in sheer excitement. With your windows open on the second floor above the street you don't have to listen but you can't help but hearing. What if you need to get the attention of someone when you happen to be on the sidewalk just in front of their building? There are three options (Canadians would only recognize the first one), walk

into the lobby, press the intercom button and announce your arrival. It may be logical, but in Israel not always intuitive. Use your cell phone to call your party. We already described this option. There is a better option: you know your party's name, shout their name in full volume and wait to see if more than one person appears on the edge of their balcony. In selecting any of these options time of day or night is not a factor in the selection. Israeli, like all mothers are very protective of their children. Major announcements like "Time for dinner!" or warning signals such as "Be careful when you cross the street!" are freely barked from Israeli balconies. This is a minor but not insignificant contributing factor to noise pollution.



Israelis like to eat out and much like in Spain, dining out is a late night affair (11 to mid-night are not too late). The climate is great so dining outdoors on the sidewalks of restaurants and cafés are the preferred option. Israelis are also highly opinionated and love to engage in conversation. Dining out is the best place to engage in a debate. The only way to get your point across in a debate and have your opinion heard is to talk over your party at maximum volume. This could get really noisy and more often than not, it could be deafening. We live on the second floor above one of the hottest or coolest (take your pick) restaurants in Tel-Aviv. As already explained our windows are mostly open and even late (and I mean 3-4 in the morning) at night when they are closed, they offer little resistance to the noisy debates, the giddy small talk of teenagers all on top of the noisy background of street traffic. As we promised, we are not complaining just observing and sharing with you the wonderful (and I mean it sincerely) experience of life in Tel-Aviv, Israel.

WHAT?! SORRY, WE CAN'T HEAR YOU!