

When we decided to go and live and study in Israel after being away for more than forty years, we knew that we were in for a totally different experience to which we knew we would have to adjust. We were mentally prepared to take it all in stride, as it comes, the good the bad and the ugly knowing full well that we are in for a great doze of each sooner or later. In fact we made a vow to not complain, not to compare and may be 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 yet without the cumulative effects of 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 is probably one of the more ecologically conscious countries in the world. Water conservation is second nature for every Israeli, solar energy has been in wide use since the inception of the country, Israel is pioneering wide use of electrical cars and is likely one of the most “Green” countries in terms of development, technology and practice. Without scientific or statistical proof Israel is probably one of the worst offenders when it comes to noise pollution. This has so far been our single most, and frankly only, pet peeve. Noise pollution is a fact of life in Israel but we and maybe you may wonder why? As you can imagine we had to research the topic in order to understand the root causes to make it easier to accept, if not entirely tolerate the phenomenon. Some of what is to follow is actually serious and understandable the rest you would have to judge for yourself.

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 major metropolitan cities around the world does not have underground transportation. No tubes, no metros, no subways everything is above ground – busses, taxis and cars, cars, cars. The main culprits are the busses. In stop and go traffic (true in every metropolitan) their huge engines are rumbling on the starts and shrieking on the stops. Second, which will not cross Canadians minds there are no thermal windows in Israeli apartments. Add to it the fact that if in the warm to very hot Israeli climate you can get relief in one of two ways: if you want relief from the Mediterranean breeze - (200 yards from our apartment) you must keep the windows open. In the alternative you may turn on the air-condition that is ridiculously expensive. It’s easy – open windows. Thirdly and once again without statistical research as proof Israelis must own the most cars per capita in the world or at least be way up there on the list. In Israel cars come equipped with horns the same is true for all cars everywhere. Big difference. In Israel the horns are the most used pieces of equipment in the vehicle. Honk to acknowledge someone you know walking on the sidewalk. Honk when the car in front of you cannot keep up with your over the limit speed. Honk when pedestrians are trying to cross the street in a designate crosswalk. Israeli care for each other so this is a warning to ensure that nobody gets hurt as

the driver has no intention to stop at the crossroad. Time is money. No need to report on jay walking honking is the most gentle of the options. 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. Honk when you are in the mood, no need to explain. By now you know that Transportation is a major factor in noise pollution.

Next is Communications. You already heard about the method and means of cell phone communications. No matter where but particularly in open or public spaces, the caller and the "callee" are in their private realm. Everything goes: laughing out loud, fighting, including screaming and casual use of profanities or just sheer excitement. You don't have to listen but you can't help but hear even if you are on the second floor above the street. Remembers the windows are open most of the time. Speaking of floors: what if you need to get the attention of someone anywhere from one to seven floors above the street and you happen to be on the sidewalk just in front of the building? There are three options (Canadians would only recognize one): 1. you could walk into the lobby, press the intercom button and announce your arrival – to much work 2. Use the cell phone to call your party – we already described this option. After all the party is a few floor above the street and the call cost money. 3. Natural choice: you know your party's name, your vocal cords are well exercised – Shout their name in full volume and wait to see if more than one person appear on the edge of their balcony. You can narrow it down from there. Is the time of day or night a factor in the selection? You must be kidding. Israeli (mostly Jewish 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 factor in contribution to noise pollution.

Wait there is more. This is a congruency of factors in play. Israelis likely eat out, once again without official statistics as proof, more than most citizens of the world. 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. You may also have heard that Israeli are highly opinionated and love to listen to their voice. This creates a situation where the only way to get your point across in any debate (a.k.a friendly conversation) and your voice to be heard is to talk over at maximum volume over your friends (frankly in this context your opponents). This could get really noisy and most often does. We are almost done. Tel-Aviv is a city under constant renovation so construction and the noise that inevitably accompanies it are an integral component of the noise quotient.

So let me explain. We live on the second floor above one of the hottest or coolest (take your pick) restaurant 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 giddy small talk of teenagers and their exuberant good bye rituals. 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!