



# An Explosive Vacation

By Robby Berman

Last week, bitten by the wanderlust bug, I hopped into my car and headed north with no particular destination in mind. For five days I toiled around Galilee, “did” a couple of wadis in the Golan, and bivouacked in a jackal-infested forest.

All for the express purpose of escaping city noise and becoming one with nature. Which is why it’s a little difficult for me to admit that the highlight of my trip was the shooting range at Ayelet Hashahar.

I’ve shot rifles and guns before, so I wasn’t really expecting to be wowed. But believe me when I say “Wow!”

I entered the outdoor range and innocently asked “What’s available to shoot?”

Gideon, the garrulous owner, responded: “The tank is in the garage and we’re out of missiles for the RPG... but everything else is available.”

At first I thought he was trying to be cute. But the truth is you can shoot just about any weapon you have seen or heard of. They have an Uzi, an M-16, an M1 carbine, and even some old classic rifles and machine guns.

As the range’s guest, I was invited to pick my heart’s desire. I reached for the AK-47 Kalashnikov Russian assault rifle. Surprisingly, Gideon recommended that I fire on automatic, something that is forbid-

den on an IDF firing range during reserve duty. I didn’t hit the target while firing on automatic, but I felt real good.

Gideon then handed me a pistol called the Desert Eagle, otherwise known as the Schwarzenegger gun, and stepped behind me. I aimed, pulled the trigger, and the kickback blew me right back into Gideon’s arms.

Some of the sites on the range have targets that move away from you as you shoot them; some move towards you, others simply fall down when you hit them. One site, on the expansive range, allows two patrons to draw at the same time to see who can down five targets first.

The most fun for me, and the most addicting, was shooting clay pigeons out of the sky with a single-barrel, pump-action shot gun. Not something you get to do often in downtown Jerusalem, although I occasionally have the urge.

Gideon set the machine “on Robocop mode,” which means it throws clay pigeons (really disks) randomly across the sky. I placed the butt of the hunting rifle in my shoulder, closed one eye, and yelled “Pull.”

The clay disk flew towards the horizon. Just as the little sucker began to lose altitude, I squeezed the trigger. Both the pigeon and my shoulder exploded. Don’t forget to place the butt of the rifle tightly against your shoulder to prevent bruising.

The outdoor firing range faces an escarpment of volcanic rock. But because the weaponry available is so powerful, Gideon lined the wall with used tires to prevent the basalt from crumbling away.

GIDEON IS a real character.

“This place is every boy’s true wet dream,” he says.

“I had a family in here a few weeks ago from Toronto. The boy had his bar mitzva at the Western Wall and then they came here to shoot.”

He showed me a picture of the whole family firing at the range. He has printed up “Bar Mitzva Shooting Certificates” to distribute on just such occasions.

“Now this boy, Emmanuel, sent me this picture in the mail from Toronto. I’ll bet you anything in the world the rabbi at the Wall didn’t get a picture,” he says.

Or how about the group of Baptists from Georgia who came to the Holy Land to ritually immerse themselves in the Kinneret. A member of the group spotted the range and pleaded with the pastor to stop the bus “just for a few minutes.”

Though he protested, saying, “This is the Holy Land, not the shooting land,” he did.

They decided they would spend 20 minutes shooting – and got so carried away – that they spent six hours at the range. They left only

because the pastor’s cellular phone rang; it was another group of parishioners calling from the Kinneret, wanting to know where the church group was.

After the group returned to America, members posted 16 pictures of their trip to the Holy Land on the church’s Web site. Seven of the 16 showed the group firing machine guns at the shooting center.

“The whole family can enjoy themselves,” says Gideon proudly. “Children seven years of age and up can shoot air rifles that are propped up on supports. And to be politically correct, we don’t use human figures on the targets, but rather lines and bull’s-eyes.

The cost to fire 25 rounds: Air rifle, NIS 35; small-caliber hand guns, NIS 60; 9-millimeter hand guns, NIS 90; shotgun, Uzi submachine gun, Kalashnikov AK-47, and M-16 assault rifle, NIS 100.

The prices include instruction and insurance. The instructors speak English and are National Rifle Association and Israeli government certified.

Adjacent to the range there is a peaceful – and free – camping ground, as well as air-conditioned bed-and-breakfasts and a hotel.

The Ayelet Hashahar shooting range is north of the Kinneret, about five kilometers north of Hatzor. It’s open 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily, including Saturday. Telephone: (06) 693-2721.