



The AIFL/Foreign Ministry delegation of American women of influence gets up close and personal with Mahaneh Yehuda. (Moo-V Group)

Jerusalem's shuk as 'beacon to the world'

Influential delegations are learning about the real Israel via Mahaneh Yehuda

• GOL KALEV

When Dr. Gina Loudon, best-selling author and a member of the Trump 2020 media advisory board, returned from her trip to Israel, she sat down with the US president and shared with him her impressions. “I told him it was a life-changing experience.”

Loudon was on a delegation of influential American women, organized by the America-Israel Friendship League and the Foreign Ministry. The five-day trip was her first-ever to Israel.

“I always wanted to go to Israel. There is no place in the world that is more emblematic of my identity than Israel,” she shared, “but I was afraid to open it up. I was about to embark on something that I dreamt of my entire life, and I was afraid that I would be disappointed.”

Yet upon her return, Loudon summarized her experience in one word: “Wow!” She elaborated: “I cannot begin to say how astonishing it was to see what I saw, to experience what I experienced. Here is where Mary and Martha read, and this is the cave where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered. It is hard to believe you can see so much in one day. It made the Bible so real to me.”

But even more than being enamored by Israel, Loudon was astounded by Israelis: “We in America do not understand how far Israel has come in such a short amount of time.”

THIS CAME to bear not just in seeing Israel’s technological innovations and medical breakthroughs, but also in what she saw in the Mahaneh Yehuda market.

“The shuk was a reflection of what I love about Israel – about raw free markets, about freedom! All this magic is created from nothing. It sends a strong message: Be resourceful, find a way to make money even when there is nothing there to start from. You don’t need a fancy nightclub.”

The revival of the shuk over recent years is part of the



Dr. Gina Loudon on ‘Hannity,’ an American TV political talk program on the Fox News Channel hosted by Sean Hannity. (Courtesy)

astonishing resurgence of Jerusalem. Theodor Herzl, the visionary of the Jewish state, predicted such a resurgence in his 1902 utopian novel *Altneuland*, taking place once the city has been rebuilt: “for Jerusalem was now a home for all the best strivings of the human spirit: for faith, love, knowledge.”

Indeed, Jerusalem is not only the city of peace, it is the city of dialogue. This is strongly felt in the shuk, as Jews shop next to Arabs; haredim sip coffee and beer next to soldiers, nuns and foreign diplomats. Random conversations spark up – about theology, Zionism, global politics, history, life.

Drinking in the shuk’s BeerBazaar, Loudon got a taste of the nascent Israeli beer industry.

“I came to the market never expecting any of this,” she said. “BeerBazaar has its own special beers, which

were the best beer I have had in my life.”

Twelve years ago, Israel did not have a single microbrewery. Today, it has 13. BeerBazaar serves over 100 types of beer from those microbreweries, in addition to its own.

Whether through drinking, listening to poetry readings and lectures in Mahaneh Yehuda’s bars, or dancing to local live music, the shuk is a profound celebration of life. Such celebration is perhaps the most fitting answer to those in Europe and elsewhere who recently have been escalating their opposition to Jerusalem.

When German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier came to Jerusalem last year, he had drinks in the shuk with his Israeli counterpart, Reuven Rivlin. Forbes’s 30 Under 30 held a celebration for its leaders in the shuk. Technology conferences in the city such as the OurCrowd Global Investment Summit hold their after-parties there. Some even come to the shuk from Tel Aviv; after the DLD Innovation Festival in September, a group of participants ventured to Jerusalem and spent hours in the shuk.

Catherine Carlton, founder of a number of tech companies in Silicon Valley and former mayor of Menlo Park, said: “The shuk has such diversity – food, drinks, coffee, crafts. It is amazing how it transforms from day to night and stays friendly to all ages.”

Udi Goldschmidt, World Food Travel Association ambassador to Israel and a regular at Roasters Cafe in the shuk, points to the all-day use as one of the unique aspects of Mahaneh Yehuda. “The competition over public space and the increased population density of towns that is expected in the years to come will bring a need for better management of common areas. The success of the Jerusalem market – from its fresh produce to its culinary adventure – turns it into a must-see attraction and to increased average stay in it.”

New York City Council member Rafael Espinal recently spent an evening in the shuk. He shared: “The shuk is a vital piece to building a vibrant and attractive



US President Donald Trump tweets enthusiastically about Loudon, a media adviser for Trump 2020. (Twitter)

city, especially for younger generations.” Espinal, who led the effort to repeal the Prohibition-era “Cabaret Law,” which banned dancing in New York City’s bars, experienced quite a lot of festive dancing in the alleys of the shuk. “It’s great to see Jerusalem embrace night-life culture.”

Loudon emphasized how different it is to see things with one’s own eyes, instead of just reading about Israel: “Everybody should come here. Americans do not realize how safe you feel when you are in Jerusalem. I felt safer than anywhere in Western Europe.”

Part of that safety is provided by female soldiers, which Loudon noticed as she was walking through the shuk’s alleys. She also spoke to young Americans who volunteer to serve in IDF combat units, some as a second tour of duty after serving in the US Armed Forces. This led Loudon to alter her views on two domestic American policy matters. “I was never an advocate of women in combat service, nor was I an advocate of mandatory service.” But after seeing the impression military service makes on young people, she said she is ready to raise this issue with the American public.

LOUDON IS not only a media adviser for Trump 2020, she also has a special, inside perspective on the president when he has vacations in Mar-a-Lago, which he refers to as the “Southern White House.” “I am blessed to get to know the president when he is at his home. I know the president relaxing with family and friends, but always focused; always on the job and happy to be



Taking it all in (from left): FCC commissioner Hon. Mignon Clyburn; leading Democrat Miriam Gonzalez; the writer; and Dr. Victoria M. De Francesco Soto, a lecturer at the University of Texas’s LBJ School of Public Affairs. (Moo-V Group)



German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier (center) raises a glass in the shuk last year with Israeli counterpart Reuven Rivlin. (Courtesy)

there. That is the president I know,” she said.

But President Donald Trump was not enthused about one aspect of Loudon’s trip to Israel: “He was very disappointed that I did not go see the new embassy. That was the first thing he asked me about.” Being on a tight delegation schedule, this is one thing Loudon will need to save for her next trip, which she said is already in the works.

Speaking with Trump about her Israel experience, she recalled his reaction: “The president told me how much he values working with Israel, that we love working with Israelis. He also spoke about how much the embassy means to him and to his relationship with the people of Israel.”

Trump asked Loudon about her interaction with Israelis. “He wanted to know if people are happy about the embassy. My goodness, yes,” she recalls answering. “Virtually every Israeli I met asked me to thank you for restoring the capital,” she said. “When I told him that, he just lit up.”

She also told Trump that other women on her delegation, including leading Democrats, did not share this view, but seeing Israel changed their perspective. “He asked me: So are they going to vote for me? I told him I don’t think so, and we laughed it off.”

One such Democrat of influence on the trip was Miriam Gonzalez, who served in the Clinton administration and is now vice chairwoman of Somos, Inc, a

leading registry management and data solutions company. She reflected: “I am so grateful to have been given the opportunity to travel throughout Israel and visit so many communities and organizations.

“I have developed a tremendous amount of respect and love for Israel. I also witnessed firsthand how individuals from different religious and ethnic backgrounds were able to live together in harmony within the same community.”

Gonzalez underscored that such love for Israel is not a political issue. Indeed, at times of domestic divisiveness, Americans’ admiration for the Jewish state can serve as uniting factor. Israel and the US are both rooted in a bedrock of strong ideology, the US in Americanism and Israel in Zionism. This allows both nations to weather internal disagreements and challenges.

Loudon continues to be a passionate advocate of Israel. Reacting to a book she published just a few weeks after her return – *Mad Politics* – the president tweeted: “Gina is Great!” He then followed it a few weeks later with a second tweet calling it a “Great new book.”

Loudon summarizes her experience with strong emotions: “This trip was the most amazing experience of my entire life, with no question. Israel is a beacon to the world.”

The writer is a board member of the America-Israel Friendship League and chairman of the AIFL Think Tank. For more articles by the writer, visit: EuropeAndJerusalem.com



Famed American filmmaker Quentin Tarantino is part of the scene at the shuk’s BeerBazaar this past summer; at left is his thank-you note to owner Avi Moskowitz. (Avi Moskowitz)