

Title:

Meet the Israelis

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806

Summary:

Israelis love to disagree. They prove the saying 'You have four Jews in a room and five opinions'. They shout at one another but no one's really annoyed. It's just their way of saying that they care.

Keywords:

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Article Body:

They speak Hebrew which is a peculiar, throaty language that takes ages to learn. Once you take hold of of basic communication you'll find out that they typically only talk about money and food anyway. Although they can appear rude, at heart they're very kind and friendly. Israelis are tribal so if you're on the outside they seem quite unfriendly. But once you're their friend they'll invite you to come and stay or go on trips around the country.

People will talk to you in the street. Most tend to do or say whatever they feel like when they feel like it. Shyness was one of the traits they left behind in Europe. 'He who is shy does not learn' is a telling Hebrew expression.

Religion in Israel is a strange trip. The orthodox Jews dress in black and scowl at everyone. The rest of the Israelis may be religious in a general kind of way or just not give a damn. Judaism seems to be much more about customs than religion. Most People get together for the festivals and Friday meal, probably they won't eat pork and would think twice before marrying a Goy. That's about as far as it goes.

They're a family-orientated people. Blood ties run very thick here and it's their strong point. The extended family becomes a complex network of support and connections meaning that everything in Israel comes down to who you know.

Israelis from kibbutzim or small towns are often much more mild and idealistic than the astute city crowds.

The first thing you notice about Israelis is that they come from all over the

place. The big aliyah or migration of Jews to Israel occurred back in the 50's after no one wanted to live in Europe any more. Yet many came from places like Morocco, Yemen and Iran, so the resulting inter-marriages have left the current generation of Israelis with just about every physical complexion and aspect conceivable. It's also made them a strikingly attractive race with Spanish eyes mixing with Polish cheekbones and Arabic tanned skin.

Add to the equation that around a million Russian Jews turned up after the fall of the Iron Curtain and that a whole bunch of Ethiopians were affirmed to be Jewish and the racial spectrum is almost complete. The government couldn't quite bring itself to declare the Thais or Filipinos to be Jewish but they were imported anyway to do all the jobs that Israelis don't want to do.

Quite an enlightening fact, that Israelis tend to see jobs like cleaning houses, construction or care work as beneath them. Everyone wants to be a manager and please the ambitions of their parents. Every Friday night each family congregates at the dinner table to pick apart and disapprove of the lives of each member of the family in agonizing detail. Each of them tries to talk louder than the other over 3 or 4 courses and you're reminded of bunch of arguing generals in the strategy tent before a great battle.

The parents are forever pressuring their kids to accomplish something. The religious are forever trying to get them to live up to their obligations as a Jew. The army makes the men serve for three years and the women for two and then demands a month of the men's lives until they're forty. They have to practically intimidate their boss to get paid on occasion and, just in case the pressure cooker wasn't turned up quite high enough, bombs go off in the market or the buses.

When something like that occurs in the country you can feel it like a shockwave. The anxiety is so taut that it's as though you could wet your finger and feel the electric in the air. It's really hard to understand what that feels like when it's your home. As a traveler you can come, take pictures and go. When you're born there you have no choice but to chew what previous generations bit off.

Israelis are still very different from one another depending from where their families originated. Those with European descent are a little more standoffish than the Israelis from the Arab countries. The differences are melting away with each generation but once the division was quite sharp.

The Israelis are a people in conflict with their environment and their own cultural identity yet they're enormously relaxed in themselves. They understand

that they have a right to be in this world and aren't scared to make the most of it. No one is bashful about taking the last biscuit on the plate but neither will they falter in offering you what they have. Known as khutzpah this self-confident nature can be infuriating or appealing depending on where you stand. As a tribal people you do a lot better once you're inside their ranks.