

Travel

Insider's guide to Israel

AJN STAFF

FOR years, *The AJN* has been providing in-depth coverage of Israel. Now, the newspaper is to offer readers a chance to see the places and meet the people in the news, with a special tour Nathan Jeffay, the newspaper's correspondent in Israel, is building an itinerary which makes the most of the access and contacts that he has built up in almost a decade covering the country.

"It will be the tour that can surprise and fascinate even those who have visited Israel dozens of times," Jeffay said. "It will provide the inside story, with really stimulating conversations and experiences, and with visits to sites that are off the normal tourist track."

He commented: "When I'm writing my articles, I see myself as the eyes and ears on the ground for our readers. I'm trying to capture what is going on here through the written word – though I've often thought that it would be great to move the process one step further, and take readers along with me to interviews and the places where stories are happening, to see and hear for themselves."

"In a sense, that's what this tour is all about – to take the broad perspective and the insight you get as a journalist, and share all of this with readers, on the ground."

Jeffay's impetus for organising the tour now



Journalist Nathan Jeffay with muppet Grover at the Kotel in Jerusalem.

is the centenary of the ANZAC victory in the Battle of Beersheva as well as other key anniversaries this year, including 50 years since the Six-Day War.

Jeffay said: "The Battle of Beersheva anniversary is shining a spotlight on the Australia-Israel ties, so it's a great time for

Australians to deepen their connections with Israel. The tour will devote attention to the connections between the two nations, and include a visit to Beersheva and a special session on the ANZAC legacy in Israel.

"As for the Six-Day War anniversary, this will generate discussion from all political

camp about what Israel's future path should be. So we will be bringing in some important and influential voices from all sides to help us hold this discussion in the very places that we're all talking about."

AJN general manager Rod Kenning says: "I cannot recommend Nathan's expertise highly enough. On my last trip to Israel, Nathan personally organised my itinerary – everything from a tour of the Old City to one-on-one meetings with both peace activists and settler representatives. His insight – and more importantly his access to people and places that other tour operators just don't have – made it a trip of a lifetime."

The program is expected to include briefings in the Knesset with politicians, an inside track on Israel's security and visits to high-tech powerhouses. There will be panels bringing together rivals who are trying to pull Israeli society in different directions, and meetings with some of the most inspiring and unifying figures who make the headlines.

Jeffay, a self-confessed foodie, also plans to focus on Israel's culinary culture.

The tour will take place in June, lasting for six days, with the option of extending to add a Shabbat. It will include luxury accommodation in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and other cities in Israel.

For more information on the tour, email nathanjeffay@gmail.com.

Luxury Escape

Winery resort in the heart of the Yarra Valley

DANNY GOCS

THE Yarra Valley was Victoria's first wine-growing district, dating from 1838, and today it is one of the world's leading cold-climate wine-growing regions.

Situated only an hour's drive from Melbourne's CBD, the region is a popular tourist destination with a choice of wineries, luxury accommodation, spas, restaurants and family attractions such as the Healesville Sanctuary (part of Zoos Victoria), and the Yarra Valley Chocolaterie and Ice Creamery. There's also the TarraWarra Museum of Art in Healesville established by Eva and Marc Besen.

An ideal base in the Yarra Valley is Balgownie Estate Vineyard Resort and Spa, a 4.5-star luxury resort with 70 rooms and suites offering sweeping views over rolling hills dotted with vineyards.

The spa suites have a king bed, spa bath, kitchenette and private balcony and is available with one or two bedrooms. The lounge has a TV with Foxtel and a dining table. There's free wi-fi and access to the indoor heated swimming pool and gym.

Activities at the resort include walking trails, bike riding and tennis, while the Natskin Day Spa Retreat offers a variety of health and beauty treatments.

Sample the wines grown at Balgownie at the cellar door, and enjoy them with a meal at the resort's Rae's restaurant.

The Yarra Valley is blessed with a wide range of quality wineries and there are many wine-tasting tours available as an alternative to self-drive tours.

Balgownie Estate will join more than 50 Yarra Valley wineries in the inaugural Yarra Valley Wine and Food Festival being held on April 1-2 at Rochford Wines in Coldstream. Visitors can sample local wines and food as well as enjoy live music and entertainment.

Enquiries: www.balgownieestate.com.au.



Balgownie Estate Vineyard Resort and Spa.

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