

Friends of ours recently booked a two-week trip to Israel, one of hundreds of choices for seniors by Elderhostel. In case you're not familiar with the organization: Elderhostel: www.elderhostel.org is just what its name implies. It offers hospitality to elders. The non-profit enterprise promotes senior travel and educational journeys and experiences throughout the world. It was started 35 years ago by university faculty members who saw the advantage of utilizing campus dorms and dining facilities in the summer when students were away.



Within a few years, it was operating in all 50 states, and began branching out in other countries. This year, more than 160,000 older Americans are expected to join in on one or more of the 8,000 programs in 90 countries throughout the world.

Elderhostel keeps costs to subscribers reasonable by using inexpensive campus housing and eating facilities wherever possible. However, with the continued expansion, commercial hotels and restaurants are more often part of the package. For US-based programs, the average all-inclusive cost is \$100 a day; for those in foreign countries and because of more expensive air fares, the average cost is \$200 a day.

Compared to upscale hotel and restaurant vacations, these prices are great bargains. Elderhostel charges include not only food and lodging, but also tours, lectures, entertainment and many other features all for the price of the program. Unlike many commercial tours and cruises, there are no hidden charges for day excursions and so-called extra features.

Our friends' two-week visit to Israel cost them \$3,500 each, including the overseas airfare from JFK New York. Food and lodging in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv were not five-star, but our friends said they were actually more enjoyable because of the delicious, informal homestyle cooking and cozy small hotel atmosphere.

They visited historic sites in Jerusalem, watched shepherds tend their flocks in the ancient Judean hills, ate a kosher Chinese lunch in modern downtown Tel Aviv, climbed to the rocky plateau to Masada and sail-boated on the Dead Sea.

The Elderhostel tourists also met with an impressive line-up of experts that included Jewish, Christian and Muslim religious lecturers. Additionally, because many men in the Elderhostel group had military backgrounds, our friends said they were particularly interested in hearing talks by two Israel Defense Forces officers and a retired general.

The officers spoke extensively of the current problems on Israel's borders and answered many questions from the visitors frankly. In addition to all the other positive Elderhostel features of their two-week venture in Israel, our friends told us that being able to sit down with such unique people in their own land was a priceless experience.

If you're interested in finding out more about this program and the hundreds of other Elderhostel offerings, go to www.elderhostel.org.