NEGEV

The desert and the dry land will be glad; the 'Aravah will rejoice and blossom like the lily

Chalutz, Shivta, Avdat, Sde Boker, En Saharonim and Tsuqim – just some of the places along the northern Spice Road, now route 90, on the way to the Red Sea; melodious names, evoking a sense of adventure and anticipation in the traveler.

Two worlds collide in Be'er Sheva, the capitol of the Negev and the seventh-largest city in Israel, a worthwhile stop. Down at the Bedouin market, it seems as if only Abraham of Ur is missing, while many modern returnees can be found in the city. They no longer breed livestock, but study at one of the best universities in the land – the Ben Gurion University, named after the first man to envisage the development of this dynamic city, in spite of the harsh desert surroundings.

Thanks to a strong pioneering spirit, this southern region continues to progress. The people who live here make great sacrifices to ensure that their dreams and visions are not, quite literally, buried in the sand. Whether in the areas of agriculture or research, inhabitants work with great dedication and energy to "clothe" the Negev in an attractive green, high-tech mantle for the benefit of future generations of immigrants seeking a new home. In the future, they will have created 200,000 new jobs, with schools and universities focusing on technological and the sciences. Furthermore, leisure and cultural activities are also constantly being planned and promoted, in keeping with the Jewish holistic approach to life.

Ben Gurion was so convinced of his vision for the establishment of a thriving desert city that, upon resigning from the government in 1953, he moved to the Sde Boker kibbutz in the Negev. He spent his days there working in agriculture and is an example of passion and commitment to this long-term plan for a progressive Negev.

The possibility that Ben Gurion's vision could indeed become reality was confirmed by the arrival of various immigration waves. For example, the first Jewish settlers founded Kibbutz Hatzerim in 1946. Today, Netafim, world leader in drip irrigation systems, is headquartered here.

In 2020, around 640,000 people lived in the Negev. With Israel's current population of more then 9 million expected to rise to 15 million by 2050, more than half a million newcomers are expected to settle in the south.

Runway in the desert

Planes can now land at a further important Israeli airport in the Negev – the Ramon Airport or Timna-Ramon Airport, which opened in 2019. 18 kilometers north of Eilat in the Timna Valley, this airport replaces the Elat Airport built in 1949.

The airport is named after Ilan Ramon, the first Israeli astronaut, who perished in the 2003 Columbia catastrophe, and after his son Asaf Ramon, who died in a plane crash in 2009.

The Ramon Airport was originally designed to receive 2 million visitors a year. Its capacity is to be expanded over the coming years; by 2030 it should be able to receive 4 million or even 4.2 million passengers per year. This airport will certainly be a literal "gateway to the future" for many Aliyah arrivals!

The airport grounds have a comprehensive infrastructure, including the world's largest anti-rocket fence (some 26m or 85ft high and 4.5 km or 2.8m long). This is all part of a mega-project planned by the city of Eilat, including plans to move the harbor to a new location and to expand the railroad to reach the city.

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Isaiah 35:1

"A voice cries out: 'Clear a road through the desert for ADONAI! Level a highway in the 'Aravah for our God!'"

Isaiah 40:3

"Look! I am sending my messenger, to clear the way before me…"

Malachi 3:1

The prophet Obadiah says in his prophecy that, "**the exiles from Yerushalayim in S'farad, will repossess the cities in the Negev.** " (see Obadiah 1:20)[1]

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[1] Scriptures taken from Complete Jewish Bible by David H. Stern, 1998 - Jewish New Testament Publications, INC. - Clarksville, Maryland, USA   -Jerusalem, Israel