Chapter 32
Israel-Jordan 2011





Journal of Trip to Israel and Jordan, May 28 – June 4, 2011

Friday, June 3, 2011, Jerusalem

I'm just about finished with a week in Israel, including also a one-day outing to Jordan to visit the site of Petra. The trip was for a conference of the International Trade and Finance Association, held in Eilat, Israel, which is at the country's southern tip. That was Monday and Tuesday. On Wednesday we (those who wished to) went to Petra. Yesterday I flew back to Tel Aviv and took a taxi to Jerusalem, where I spent last night. Today I joined a full-day tour of Jerusalem, mostly the old city. And now I'm waiting in

the hotel for a taxi that will return me to Tel Aviv in time for my flight home just after midnight.

So that's the trip. What else is there to tell? Not much, perhaps, but I'll see what there might be.

Sunday, May 29, arrival

I flew through JFK airport in New York, an airport that neither I nor anyone else seems to like. But in this case, it was fine. My flight to Tel Aviv was just a few gates down from where I arrived, and there was a Sky Club just opposite it, so I had a comfortable short wait. Both flights were more or less on time.

Flying Detroit-JFK-Tel Aviv was the easy part of the trip, or at least the most easily understood, as I had selected the flights myself and booked them from home. For the rest of the trip, including the flight from Tel Aviv to Eilat, all had been arranged by an Israeli travel agency that was selected by the conference organizers. For that, everything turned out fine, at least for me so far, but it wasn't obvious that it would.

First, I never got a complete response to my requests for the details of my flight to Eilat. I had sent in a form, months ago, requesting what they listed as a 5:00 PM flight from Ben Gurion (the large international airport in Tel Aviv) to Eilat. A few days before I left, I got an e-mail from Amir, the Israeli economist who was trying to oversee local arrangements, saying among other things to check whether our flights from Tel Aviv were from Ben Gurion or from the other airport in Tel Aviv, a small domestic one. Since I had requested a flight from Ben Gurion, I thought I didn't need to worry about the other airport.

But when I arrived in Tel Aviv – with lots of time to spare, fortunately – I couldn't find any mention of a 5:00 flight to Eilat on any airline. I asked at an information desk, where they were very friendly and tried to be helpful, but their calls to the potential airlines flying to Eilat from Ben Gurion did not find any reservation for me on any flight, and in any case, most of the flights were full. Eventually, I showed them that last message from Amir, which included his local phone number, and they called him for me. When they reached him, after some conversation, they sent me around the counter to a desk phone to talk to him. He told me that I was booked on a 5:50 flight from the domestic airport. Still no airline or flight number, but at least he gave me the spelling of the airport name, so I was able to take a taxi there.

This small airport seemed not much bigger than a rental car office, and it is on a city street. I entered, was told to put my bags through a scanner, and after that went to one of about four airline counters to check in. The woman there directed me instead to another security check, another counter where a woman with a clipboard took my passport, did some checking, and then asked me more questions than I usually get. When that was done, she gave me back my passport and another form, which I took with me to check in.

Apparently, that process had not only cleared me through security, but had also identified for them, if not for me, that I was booked for the 5:50 flight.

But at the check-in counter she wouldn't actually check me in for it, because there were two other flights to Eilat before mine (as I said, I was early), and while they were fully booked, she said she would call me if a space opened up. I settled into the small waiting room to kill time until either she would call me or it would be time for my flight. She never called me, and I watched as the other flights came and went. Fortunately, although the waiting room was small, I was able to find a comfortable seat and the time passed quickly enough. I bought a sandwich at a lunch counter to tide me over. I probably needn't have waited there the whole time, since there seemed to be nothing to prevent passengers from leaving and coming back without repeating security.

By 5:30 I still had not heard anyone call my name, and I noticed that people were boarding. Since there were other flights at 5:30 and 5:45, and since I hadn't heard any announcements in English for my flight, I supposed they were for them. But to be safe, I approached the only occupied check-in counter and asked if I should be checking in for my flight. The woman said yes, of course, since it was boarding. It's good I asked. She said she was sure that an English announcement had gone out, but in any case, she quickly checked my bag, and I was on my way.

I said it was a small airport terminal, just on a city street. A small parking lot behind it had room for several shuttle buses, and it was one of these that took us to the plane. That's not unusual, in small airports especially, but it was unusual that we couldn't see any runway from there. The bus had to take us a fair distance, between buildings that were not obviously airport-related, before it reached our plane. Once there, though, no problem, and the 45-minute flight to Eilat was uneventful.

I took a taxi to my hotel in Eilat, a distance that I later learned I could have walked in five minutes. I arrived, according to the man at the hotel desk, just 15 minutes after the conference group had left for the conference reception. I asked if he knew how I could get there – what to tell a taxi, presumably – but he did not. I wasn't overly disappointed, as these receptions are often uncomfortable for me, especially if I don't know many of the people. After putting things away in my room, I set out on foot to find some place to eat. A block from the hotel I found a few businesses, including several restaurants. Had I walked only a little further, I later learned, I'd have reached a very lively area full of many more, plus many tourist attractions and almost a carnival atmosphere. But for this first night, I was happy to find a place, called Café Café, that offered both coffee and a menu. I had an iced coffee and a wonderful salad, and I was very content.

The hotel had wireless only in the lounge, so back at the hotel I brought my laptop down there and did some e-mail. Before long, the group from the reception returned and several who knew me (including a couple whom I knew that I knew) saw me and I joined them to chat for a while.

Monday and Tuesday, May 30-31, the conference

The hotel provided breakfast, and I joined the group there shortly after 7:00, since we'd be picked up at 7:45 to be taken to the university for the conference. Compared to my previous trip, to China, the breakfast offerings were much more satisfactory. Of course, a favorite part of breakfast when I travel is pork – bacon, sausage, maybe even ham – and there is none of that here. But they had several kinds of cereal (though no bran) that were decent; several cooked concoctions that were excellent, some of which seemed more like dinner than breakfast (a baked noodle dish, for example); and a man at a grill cooking eggs in a fashion. One such fashion was to mix up a couple of eggs with some onions and greens and poor it into a metal ring on the grill, so that it cooked somewhat like an omelet. There was orange juice that compared favorably – just – to Tang. And there was coffee once you figured out how to get it out of the machine that provided it – a challenge that was repeated each day, since the same tricks didn't work every time.

The conference was a small affair, involving a mix of scholars not all of whom I'd go out of my way to hear. Apparently, this organization – the International Trade and Finance Association – has existed and has been holding conferences every year for over twenty years. It even publishes a journal, the editor of which was here at the conference. It usually attracts upwards of a hundred papers, which then must be presented in parallel sessions. This time, perhaps for two reasons, the group was small enough that all the papers fit into just a single stream of sessions over the two days, and there was even concern, due to some cancellations, that we'd not have enough even for that. The reason for the low turnout seems to have been partly a late cancellation of another location for the conference, which meant that it was put together here in Israel rather hastily. And second, people may have been put off by the political disruptions in the region – Egypt next door and Syria not far away. In fact, this made for a cozy and informal bunch of sessions at which a few of us could interact extensively and everyone could have their say. I enjoyed both days of it, and only once came close to falling asleep.



Overlook on 4 countries, from trip.

On Monday after the conference, we were offered the chance to ride to a nearby mountaintop from which we could see three other countries, in addition to Israel: Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan. We went there in several taxis, one of which (not mine) got stuck on the way up the dirt road and had to be relieved by another. The sight of all these countries so close together was impressive, although there wasn't all that much to see, except for the incredible barrenness of the mountainous landscape. We could see the

Jordanian flag (actually, that of the king, not of the country) flying proudly across the river in Jordan. Egypt was not marked at all, that we could see, but we were told that there were rocks marking a border a few hills away. And Saudi Arabia was just said to be off to the right, when looking at Jordan.

We were on our own for dinner Monday evening, so after this short outing, a group of us went into town seeking a good restaurant. This took us past the place I'd eaten the night before, which I was now told is a ubiquitous chain in Israel. It wasn't far to the seaside, which was full of lights and action, including much that you would find on a carnival midway. There were plenty of places to eat, but it took a while to find one that looked like it might have a good menu, rather than just tourist food. The one we found was called Boston, and it turned out to be an excellent seafood restaurant. Our group of eight had a good meal and a good time.

On Tuesday evening the conference provided a "Gala Dinner" on a boat. We took a bus to the boat, although it was no further from the hotel than the restaurant of the night before. The boat had three decks. The center one, on which we boarded, had the facilities. The top one, in the open, was where we spent most of the evening, including at tables for dinner. The bottom one was below the water level and was lined with windows looking out into the sea. The boat took us first to a place near the shore where we could see coral and lots of fish, which we looked at as though from a submarine. It was quite special.

For dinner we had a large selection of meats that were cooked on board, including beef, chicken, and even a sausage that presumably was not pork and was not very good. But the rest of the meats and the side dishes were excellent.

I found myself sitting with a couple from Indiana. The woman had given a paper that afternoon about the evils of factory farming and had done her best to persuade us all to become vegetarians. She had not succeeded, though she made me briefly feel guilty about eating this plateful of meat in front of her. We easily got past that, though, and I spent a pleasant couple of hours talking with them, mostly about the trials and tribulations of dog ownership. They are serial owners of Saint Bernards, which they rescue from ill treatment. I don't entirely understand how they manage their lives. Both are political scientists, the man teaching at Fort Wayne (a branch campus of Purdue) and the woman teaching in Scotland. Managing that and three St. Bernards must be a challenge.

Wednesday, June 1, Petra, Jordan

We'd been given the option of a trip across the border into Jordan, to visit Petra. Only ten of us took that option, which was surprising to all of us that went, since it was so special and wonderful. Petra is an ancient site, dating back to before Roman times. The natural landscape is itself amazing, with sand-colored rock cliffs and a remarkable gorge between two of these cliffs that leads into a place where the ancients carved caves and structures into the walls. These carved structures were themselves beautiful, especially

when they included architectural features adopted from the Greeks. But it was the rock itself that was most wonderful. In many places, the rock was not just a uniform sand color. Instead, it had layers and strips of many other colors contributed by the minerals that were part of it.

The trip to Petra started less than auspiciously, when our contact showed up at the hotel with two very decrepit Land Rovers, which are essentially primitive jeeps. Seating was two benches, on which we sat facing each other. Part of the group went ahead in theirs, but the one I was in had to detour to another hotel to pick up a woman, not part of our group, who had not been there when they stopped for her earlier. Since that made us late, our driver said he would take a shortcut, and indeed he did. He took us along embankments surrounding some large pools that were either for sewage treatment or for harvesting salt from seawater – we weren't sure. We passed and ignored signs forbidding us to proceed, and at one point, we plunged into and then climbed out of a large cement trough that was clearly meant for water, not for cars. All of this got us to the border with Jordan not long after the other jeep. There we had time to wait and shop, as the paperwork for our group was processed.

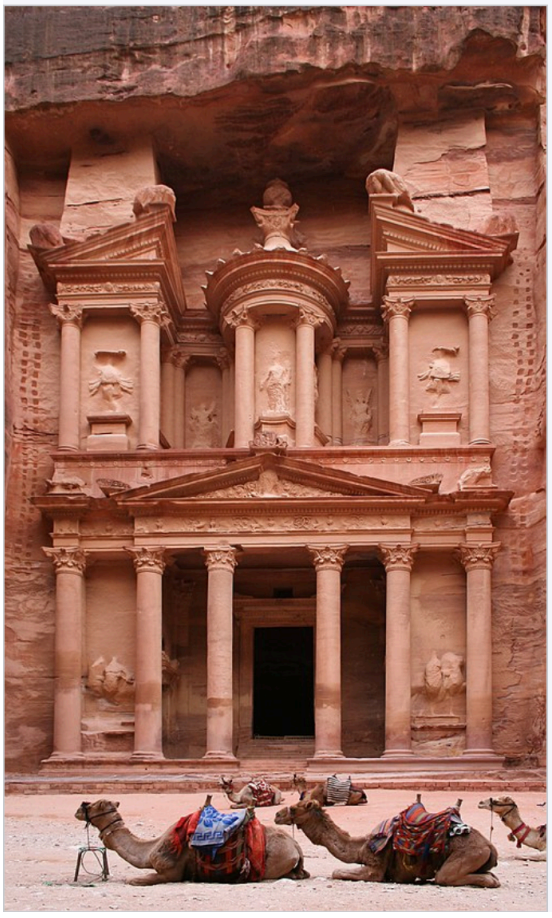
Our Israeli guide could not go with us across the border, so instead he just helped us handle the bureaucracy on the Israeli side, let us walk across the border alone, and left us on our own to deal with Jordan. It all reminded me, just a bit, of the old border between East and West Germany, although relations between Israel and Jordan today are not all that bad.

We were met by another guide, Jordanian, who put us into two vans that each accommodated nine or ten passengers. Our group was joined at this point by three or four others who were traveling independently, and who were then with us for the day. We drove about two hours through the desert to Petra, which was surrounded by a fairly modern, built-up area of hotels and other businesses that cater to tourists. The vans dropped us near the entrance to Petra itself, where we were handed off to yet another guide, Ali. He was then our guide for the next five hours, as we walked into, through, and around the site itself. I think we all liked him quite a lot, as he was very knowledgeable, but also had a light touch.

I'm finding it hard to describe Petra and explain why it is so wonderful. It is an ancient city, carved into rock, and well preserved over two millennia in part because so much of it is buried deep inside a rock gorge and thus protected from the elements. It was built by Arabian tribes that settled here and prospered from their proximity to the trade routes between Asia and the Mediterranean. Thus, they were not isolated, and the influences of other cultures – Greek, Roman, and other – are obvious to those (not I) who understand the architecture. What one sees is just the façades of buildings, carved into the stone, that served a variety of purposes, for government, religion, and business at various times. The city fell into disuse and was forgotten by about the 14th century, then rediscovered in 1812 by a Swiss traveler. Only quite recently was it provided with the infrastructure to handle the number of tourists that it has today.

At the center of Petra is its most well-known feature, Al-Khazneh, the façade of a huge building that was initially a Treasury but may also have been used later as a temple. It includes a row of six columns in a Greek style, supporting a triangular piece above them. But then above that are more columns and structures that take a different form, including a round piece that looks like a giant crown.

This being the central attraction of Petra, it is also where people most like to be photographed, and to make that even more memorable, several camels are available that one can sit on for a price, or ride for short or long distances at higher prices. I chose a short ride, just around the courtyard, after asking one of my colleagues, Raul Moncarz (a very tall, elderly Cuban who I have since learned was Chancellor of Florida International University in Miami before he retired), to take photos with my camera. He took several, one of which seemed to capture me and the camel laughing together, and I later posted that on Facebook. For reasons I never understood, Raul insisted that I take off my hat for the last part of this ride.

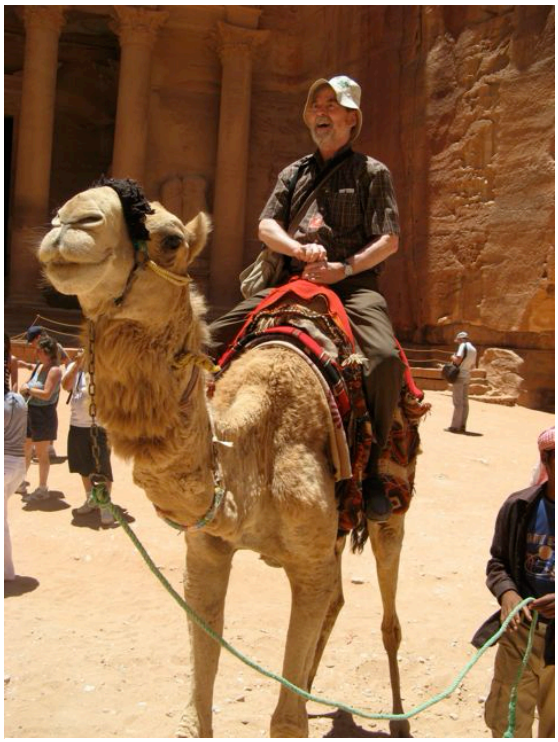


Al-Khazneh, from Web 2025

We had the option, for the walk through the site, of renting rides. There were donkeys and horses, as well as camels, to ride on. There were small horse-drawn carriages as well. I was tempted, but I hoped that the walk would not be all that long or strenuous, and in that I was satisfied. We walked all the way into the site on a flat, slightly descending path through the gorge, and that was not difficult at all. These transportation options were all repeated, more aggressively, inside the site for the return, but again I declined. That was the right choice, although I admit to being hot and tired by the time we'd walked back out.

By this time, it was 3:00 PM, and Ali had been with us five hours. He turned us back over to our drivers, who took us to a restaurant where we had a lunch buffet that many of us indulged in to excess. Among the options was one labeled "vegetables" that was in fact mashed potatoes. This delighted two of our group who were from Germany. I was disappointed when I went back for seconds, planning to take some mashed potatoes myself (I'd taken rice my first time through), but by then the pan really did have vegetables – carrots, beans, etc.

Our ride back to the border was uneventful – many of us dozed. So was our crossing, except that one member of our group, from Turkey, was given a very hard time by the Israeli border immigration officers. Apparently, relations between Turkey and Israel soured substantially last year when Israeli forces boarded a boat from Turkey whose purpose (I've forgotten what) was objectionable to Israel. The forces killed several Turks, which explains why the Turks might be unhappy with Israel. Why Israel is unhappy with Turkey is less clear to me, but it seems to have prompted the border agents to make life hard for Turks crossing the border. Our colleague was quizzed for quite some time, while we waited. The questions were silly, such as wanting to know how many students he had and then wanting him to explain why he didn't know the answer to that. There was no purpose that we could see, other than to be difficult, and eventually they did let him through. The main accomplishment was to convince the rest of us that Israel, officially if not individually, is obnoxious.



On camel, from trip 2011

By the time we returned to our hotel, many of us wanted nothing more than a beer. Fortunately, the bar in our hotel, which until then had always been unattended, now had a young man serving beer. Several of us settled in for the evening and talked until bedtime. The young man kept bringing us refills of our glasses of beer without asking, and without asking for payment. I drank more beer that evening than I have in years.

Thursday-Friday, June 2-3, Jerusalem

I had tried, in meeting with the travel agent at our hotel in Eilat, to get more information about my itinerary for Jerusalem on Thursday and Friday. All they told me initially was that my flight to Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion Airport would be met by a taxi to take me to the Park Plaza hotel in Jerusalem. They didn't say airline, flight number, or time of my flight to Ben Gurion, but when I pressed them, they thought it would be "around 11:00". They promised to get back to me with more details, but they never did. So, on Thursday morning I left the hotel before 9:00 to be sure of getting there on time. I walked just a block to the airport, where after the usual security questioning, I checked in for my flight, which was indeed at 11:00, and waited. Again, I could have left the airport with my bag, had I wished, but I didn't.

At the Ben Gurion Airport I was met immediately and driven the hour or so to Jerusalem. Along the way, I noticed the minarets of mosques on either side of the road. I suspected that we were driving through the West Bank – the Palestinian Territory that is so much in

dispute between Israelis and Palestinians – and my driver confirmed that. I couldn't tell exactly how access to this road and to the territory on either side of it were managed, but I suspect they were treated as being separate countries.

My driver had some difficulty finding my hotel, in part because the name I'd been given was Park Plaza, but the hotel itself was labeled only Park Hotel. He sorted this out, though, with the help of several phone calls, and I paid him the prearranged fee (250 shekels, or about $75 at today's depressed value for the dollar). Inside the hotel, they could not initially find my reservation, however. Again, with some phone calls, the very pleasant and patient woman at the counter, who was also dealing with a bunch of unhappy Russians at the same time, was able to find my reservation, which had been made for arrival one day later. That was not a problem, fortunately, and I checked in for my one-night stay.

I had arranged (or hoped I had, through that same travel agent) a one-day tour of Jerusalem for Friday. For Thursday I decided to go off on my own. From the desk I got a map of the city and instructions on how to take the bus to the old city. This turned out to be easy, although it was a long ride – perhaps an hour – as there was lots of traffic. Inside the old city, I wandered without purpose, to see what I would see. That included a very long, slightly descending, pedestrians-only street lined with shops that were mostly geared toward tourists. The street was narrow, and the buildings were all very old and built of tan-colored stone, like all of Jerusalem, as I would learn. I bought some souvenirs.

I needed dinner, and I found a restaurant that was stunning in its architecture and plausible in its menu. I had shawarma, which I've learned to enjoy at middle eastern restaurants in the US. I found it to be excellent, though somewhat different, in Jerusalem as well. What I was served here was: a plate of lamb similar to gyros though without the distinctive flavor; a plate of French-fried potatoes, a plate of hummus, and a bowl with pita bread. From all of this I assembled four pita sandwiches with all these ingredients, enjoyed them fully, and still had enough left for more. Had I been a group, this would easily have been enough for two.

My tour on Friday was without much of a hitch. When I booked it through the hotel, I was told I'd be picked up at 8:30. A fellow did appear at 8:25, asked if I was going on a tour alone, and loaded me into a taxi with three women. He then made a phone call, just to check that he had the right person, and it's good that he did, because I was not in fact the person he was supposed to be picking up. I went back into the hotel and waited until 8:50 with nobody else appearing. Finally, I went to the desk to ask, and the man there (much less pleasant than the woman from the day before) said the tour company had called and said they'd be late, arriving at 9:00. They'd said to tell me, but he didn't. I gathered that he thought it beyond his duties to make that effort, even though I was sitting no more than 12 feet from him.

When the tour did start, I was added to a green bus that already had a couple dozen passengers. It turned out that we are on several different tours, all of which started the

same but then branched off in different directions later in the day. The guide started by asking how many of us were going to what sounded like "beclekem." Since I hadn't paid much attention to the details of the tour I selected, I didn't know the answer and I said so. But as he went on with his instructions for those doing this – such as the fact that they needed to have their passports – I realized that "beclekem" was Bethlehem, which is in the West Bank and not part of what I had chosen.

The bus took us close to one of the gates of the old city and dropped us off. Our guide walked with us through several "quarters" of the city – Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Armenian – and explained as we went. In some places we men were required to cover our heads, and yarmulkes were provided for those who needed them (I did not, as I had my hat from Machu Picchu). Women were required to cover their shoulders and their legs. In other places, men were required to take off their hats. With all these different religions represented, I guess it's not surprising that the customs would differ. In no place were we asked to remove our shoes. That's apparently reserved for religions in Asia and for security checks at US airports (but not Israeli airports; with all their concern about security, Israelis don't expect us to bomb an airplane with our shoes).

What did I see? A lot, I'm sure, but I can't say much about what it all was. I know there was the Western Wall, also called the Wailing Wall, which is all that remains of the last in a series of Jewish temples that were built and destroyed over 1500 years ago. I didn't get all that close to it, since I didn't see the need and many others clearly did.

There was an ancient Christian church, built inconveniently around what was said to be the tomb of Jesus's mother, Mary, deep underground and subject to flooding when it rains. This church was filled with chandeliers and other decorations hanging from the ceiling throughout. What was striking was that the chandeliers were electrified, not with incandescent bulbs but with the new spiral fluorescents that we all know and love.



Wailing Wall, from trip.

There was a catacomb – an underground cave meant as a tomb, but with the body long-since removed by grave robbers. This we were able to walk into, stooped, three at a time and with a flashlight. I was trying so hard to get a video of this on my iPhone that I didn't actually see anything inside myself. And the video is no more informative.



Selfie over Jerusalem, from trip.

We were told about the "stations of the cross," which were marked by Franciscan monks some centuries ago and are intended to capture the 14 places where Jesus's progress was marked as he carried his cross from the jail to the crucifixion. The first several of these we couldn't see, as I gather that they are inaccessible. But we did stop at each of numbers 7-14, thus reliving a bit of His experience.

I learned that the custom was to block the entrance to a tomb with a large disk-shaped rock that could be rolled into place. That, apparently, was what was found to have been moved when Jesus's tomb was visited three days after his death.

I know that Jerusalem is considered a holy place by all three religions, but I learned only a little about the reasons for this for Jews and none about it for Muslims. I gather that most of the tourists here are, or are expected to be, Christians, primarily interested in the events of Jesus's last days. We visited, for example, what was billed as the room of the Last Supper. In fact, as I understood it, this room may have been in approximately the location of the last supper. But the building itself seems to have been built, since then but long ago, to commemorate it. Then, later, it was taken over by Muslims who added some sort of altar inside the room.

We saw, but only from a distance, the location where Abraham was supposed to have prepared to sacrifice his son. I had always thought of that as being out in the woods or on a mountain somewhere, but here it was, right in the old city of Jerusalem. Perhaps it wasn't quite as urban then as it is now. That exact same location is the site of something else that is holy to Muslims – Mohammed's death and ascension into heaven. I don't know why our tour did not come closer to this important place.

The old city of Jerusalem has several gates through its walls. One of these is the Golden Gate (not actually gold; I don't know why it's called that) which is never opened. Why? Because when the Messiah comes, all the Jews buried across from it on the Mount of Olives will arise from their graves and walk to that gate, which will then open and… I'm not sure what. I guess they too will ascend to heaven. There's a lot of that going on in Jerusalem, either past or future. We also visited the location where Jesus ascended.



Golden Gate, from Wikipedia 2025

That's all that I remember now. I returned to my hotel where I was picked up at 8:00 by another taxi to take me back to Ben Gurion airport for my flight home. That gave me about four hours to wait, which I did in the hotel lounge with coffee and wifi.

While waiting, I noticed a sign on the elevator that I had heard about before. It said that on the Sabbath the elevator would stop automatically at every floor. The reason is that observant Jews are not permitted to do any work on the Sabbath, and pushing an elevator button would be considered work. Therefore (some? all?) elevators in Israel avoid this problem by doing all the work themselves, stopping at every floor and presumably "working" much harder than necessary for their purpose. I didn't see a lot of high-rise buildings in Jerusalem, but I wonder if that practice extends to them. You'd wait a long time to get an elevator that had to stop at dozens of floors, and longer still to get where you are going. I also wonder what was done before elevators became automatic and had operators.

Saturday, June 4, Ann Arbor

My connection coming home was, as it was going out, through New York's JFK. I said earlier that I found the connection going out to be very easy. Not the return. To get from the terminal where we arrived in JFK, which presumably was dictated by the need to go through immigration and customs, I had to get to terminal 2. But I didn't know that. On exiting customs, I found no displays telling where to find various flights, just signs that said, "to all gates," which one might have thought would include mine. I went up two levels following those signs, found check-in counters that I didn't need, since I already had my boarding pass issued in Tel Aviv (but with no gate number), and finally found a very small display with some listed flights. All were international, and mine, to Detroit, was not included. I finally found someone who worked there to ask, and he pointed to another small display that was on the other side of a crowd of people checking in, too far away for me to read. He was able to read it, though, and told me I needed terminal 2. To get there, he said, I needed to take the Sky Train.

I found the Sky Train one level down and very nearly took one that would have taken me into the city. Somehow, I realized it was the wrong one, and I did board the correct one that was going in the direction of terminal 2. Indeed, its next stop was for terminals 2 and 3. Getting off there, signs for terminal 3 led into a building, but those for terminal 2 led outside. Once there, I had to cross a street to reach the terminal. Once inside, I had no more difficulty, as this was filled with gates for Delta. It was apparently the terminal that I had both arrived at and departed from on my way out. None of this was at all serious. But I couldn't help wondering how people handled this when they arrived from abroad in winter or in bad weather, and if they had tight connections. How can a major American airport be so poorly designed and poorly marked. We're not French, after all.

When I arrived in Detroit, I stopped for a venti coffee from Starbucks, then went to take a Metro Car home to Ann Arbor. The last time I'd done that, coming home from China, the car had had no cup holder, and I had to juggle my coffee as I did other things during the ride. This time, to avoid that problem, I looked immediately for a cup holder and, when I didn't find one, asked to move to a different car. That wasn't a problem, since there was another car waiting behind this one, although my driver did manage to close the door on my arm in the confusion and splatter coffee over my shirt and pants. I collected my things and moved to the other car, where I settled in for the ride. My driver chatted a bit until I told him I wanted to listen to my headphones and wouldn't be able to hear him. That's when I found that the cord for my headphones, which had been dangling from one of the earpieces, was missing. It had evidently gotten pulled out when I was changing cars. That's something I've had happen before, occasionally, but I'd never lost the cord. It wouldn't be easy to replace, since it has a fitting that is specific to these headphones (from Bose).

I asked my driver if he could call back to the driver of the car that I'd been in to see if the cord was there. He got that car's number from the dispatcher, but he got no answer when he tried to call the car. I also asked him, then, to ask the dispatcher to look for the cord on the pavement, but now the dispatcher also didn't answer. The driver volunteered to go back to the airport (by now we were on I-94 heading for Ann Arbor), and I agreed. To my great surprise, when he got back there and let me out, I immediately found the cord on the pavement next to a waiting car. Not a big deal, of course, but I've gotten to like listening to my headphones every night on my way to sleep, and I doubt I could have replaced the cord soon, if at all.

There's a lesson here that may save me from this happening again. No, it's not to avoid Metro Cars, or even Starbucks. It's to keep the cord for my headphone always plugged into the iPhone as well as into the headphones, and not let it dangle where it can get caught on something and be pulled out and lost. If I learn that lesson (and I'm hoping that writing it here will help), surely I will have a happy life.