

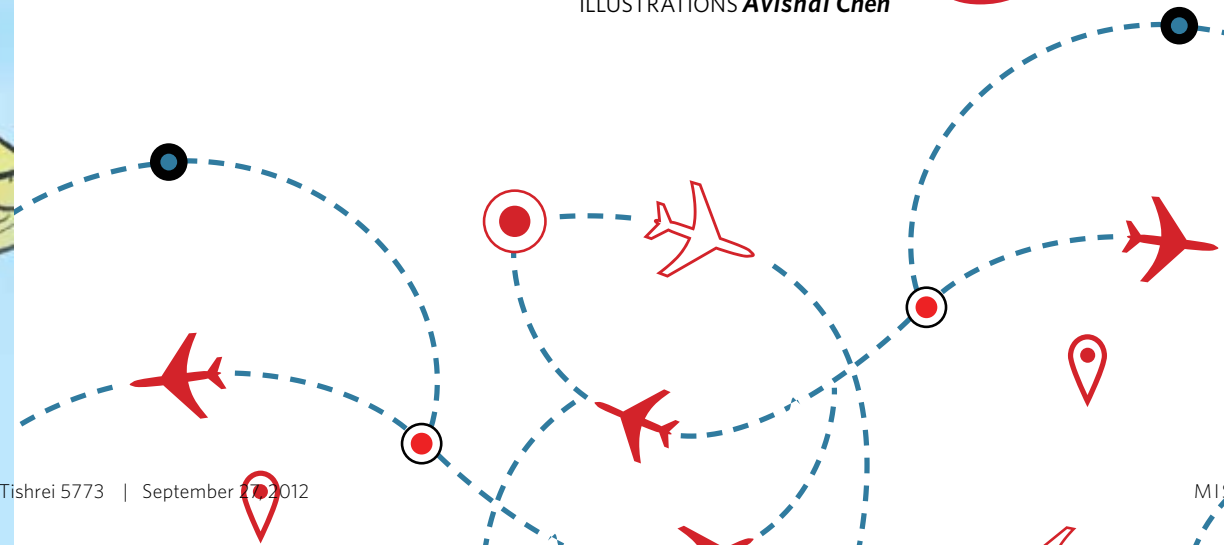
While a click of the mouse can take you all over the globe, there's nothing that delivers like a reporter who's on-site. But when you open your magazine and read about a reporter's adventures in some faraway place, the finely edited text and glossy photographs are just one side of the story



Go

for that Story

BY Libi Astaire
ILLUSTRATIONS Avishai Chen



Just about anyone who has ever journeyed farther than the corner grocery store has a favorite travel story to share. But while no one enjoys the inconveniences that come with being on the road, most travelers don't have the pressures of reporters, whose conversations with their editors sometimes go like this:

Editor: I know you said that a revolution broke out yesterday and there's no electricity and the airports are closed, but we need the article now. Where is it?

Reporter: But ...

Editor: And the production office says the photograph of the bear chasing you is too blurry. Can you go back and reshoot it?

When a magazine sends a reporter halfway around the world, it expects more than a few cheap souvenirs in return. It wants a great story, one that its readers will savor and remember. *Mishpacha* has its own team of reporters who are ready and willing to go almost anywhere at the drop of a black hat — including all the way to the Jerusalem office, where some of them recently gathered to give a behind-the-scenes look at some of their adventures and misadventures. Our frequent flyers are:

Binyamin Rose: As *Mishpacha's* news editor, he has reported from 17 countries during his eight years on the job.

Aharon Granevich-Granot: A reporter for both the Hebrew and English *Mishpacha*, if there's anywhere in the world that he hasn't yet been, he's on the way.

Ari Greenspan and Ari Zivotofsky: Better known to *Mishpacha* readers as Ari & Ari, they've visited 11 countries for the magazine, *shechting* and performing brissim wherever they go.

Yitzchak Carmeli: A freelance reporter, he scours the globe for off-the-beaten-track places of Jewish interest.

Yinon Fuchs: You won't recognize his face because he's the man behind the camera; but you'll recognize his photos, since he's the photographer who accompanies Aharon Granot on his travels.

Whatever the Weather

*Record-breaking temperatures:
Djibouti, Africa: 120°F (48.9°C) and humid
Morocco's and Tunis's deserts: 116°F (47°C)
Romania: -4°F (-20°C)
Russia: -22°F (-30°C) with the windchill*



"I was in a monsoon in India and a hurricane in Cuba. In Ethiopia, one Sunday I was soaked from head to toe because they are very devout Christians and not a single store was open where I could buy an umbrella."

— Yitzchak Carmeli

Shot in the Dark

*Number of pre-trip inoculations:
Up to 10, plus anti-malaria pills.
(Ari and Ari)
None. (Granot)*



"Even if I'm traveling to Europe, it's like going to Bat Yam"

A Trip to Remember

The word "memorable" can mean different things to different people, especially when it comes to travel. For instance, one of my most vivid travel memories is my first trip to Eretz Yisrael. I didn't grow up religious or a Zionist, but I had received a Hebrew School education. And so, as the car taking me to my cousin's house sped down the highway in the middle of the night, I remember seeing neon lights advertising gasoline, Coca-Cola, and who knows what and thinking, "Wow! I'm surrounded by Hebrew letters!" The sight of those familiar letters immediately made me feel safe and at home.

But travel is usually not about encountering the safe and familiar. It's an opportunity to chart unfamiliar territory — both in distant places and within ourselves, creating pathways and experiences for us to remember and contemplate.

What was your most memorable trip?

Aharon Granot: My trips are for the magazine, and I divide them into two categories. The first type is when I travel to interview someone. In that case, the place isn't important; even if I'm traveling to Europe, it's like going to Bat Yam. The other kind of trip is when I truly experience a different culture. For those of us who live in Israel or Europe or the United States, we sometimes forget that we are only a small percentage of the world's population and that the rest of the world lives very differently.

One trip that was especially memorable for me was when I traveled to Djerba, in Tunisia. There has been a Jewish community in Djerba for almost 2,000 years, and there is still an active *kehillah* of about 1,000 souls. It was while I was in Djerba that I began to understand the tragedy of the Jews who made aliyah to Israel from Arab countries. So much of their tradition was lost when they came here.

Yitzchak Carmeli: That's a hard question to answer. It's as if someone were to ask, "Which child do you love the most?" But if I had to choose a place, it would be India. It's a place that you have to see with your own eyes to understand. Photographs, films — they don't begin to tell the story. India is a country that has more than a billion people and more than 1,500 languages. When you get off the plane, you don't see the asphalt. You just see people — all sorts of people, from the well-to-do to poor children who are dressed in rags. Traveling from one place to another can be very slow and difficult, because of the roads. I remember going on a journey that was 270 kilometers (168 miles) and it took 14 hours to get to my destination.

Was there a trip that was memorable because of the things that went wrong, or the danger involved?

Ari Zivotofsky: Ari G. and I have had so many funny travel experiences it's hard to pick one. A particularly humorous incident, at least in hindsight, happened when we were in Cuba. The shul van we were using got stuck in the mud during a torrential downpour and we were stuck in the middle of a field, far away from Havana. To add to the excitement, Ethan Schuman, who was traveling with us, was bitten by a dog. While the tires were spinning, the mud was flying, and the chickens were crowing in the field, we called my brother, who is a vet, in Israel to ask what to do about the dog bite. Meanwhile, our local host was putting a freshly *shechted* goat into the van, in which Jewish music was playing. The only *frum* guy in Cuba, he calmly smiled throughout the entire incident.

Yitzchak Carmeli: There's definitely suspense before the trip. You don't know if you'll succeed or not. I went to the Basque Country, between France and Spain, because I'd read about a museum there that had a room with Jewish artifacts. The day before my trip — and this was after I'd already paid lots of money for my plane ticket — I phoned the museum, just to confirm that the room would be open, and I was told, "Sorry, there's no such room in the museum. If there was once, it's now closed." But I went anyway, and the room was there.

After the PLO was kicked out of Lebanon in the 1980s, some Palestinians were sent to Cyprus and I went to the island to photograph

Humbled by a Traffic Light



After all his painstaking itinerary planning and flight scheduling, Binyamin Rose once missed Minchah thanks to ... the traffic lights in Flatbush. "I didn't take into account that in Flatbush there is a traffic light at almost every intersection and sometimes they are all running red consecutively."

them. While I was there I decided to also see the Turkish-controlled part of the island. When I tried to reenter the Greek part of Cyprus, I was stopped and interrogated for 12 hours. They thought I was a Mossad agent. In the end, I was released — and baruch Hashem they didn't confiscate my photos.

Aharon Granot: Iran. Why? Because I never made it into the country. The person who was supposed to arrange everything so we could get in turned out to be a crook. When I went to Georgia when they were at war with Russia, I didn't have food for two days.

For some trips, I do a lot of preparation beforehand — and Yinon helps me a great deal — but even with the preparation, things can go wrong. One of the hardest trips to arrange was my trip to Krakow, which is where Oskar Schindler's factory is located. I wanted to find a Jew who had worked in the factory during the Shoah, who had been saved by Schindler because he was on "the list." That was going to be my story.

While I was still in Israel I contacted Yad Vashem, but they said no one was left. All the Jewish workers had already passed away. I also contacted the museum in Krakow — Schindler's factory is now a museum — and a woman who worked there said there was a Jew who had worked there who was still living in Poland and he had visited the museum, but she had forgotten his name. Then I had the idea that the museum has a guest book, so I asked her to go through it. She found the name — actually, there were two names because he had visited

**“When I tried to reenter the
Greek part of
Cyprus,
I was stopped and interrogated
12 for hours”**



Race to the GATE

Longest flight time:

Two full days, from Tel Aviv to Ecuador.
"And I was only there for two days."

— Binyamin Rose



Longest amount of time to plan a trip:

5-6 years.
"And then the trip itself may not be for more than 12 hours. Sometimes they'll tell me at the airport that I made a mistake because I planned the return flight for the night after I've landed."

— Yitzchak Carmeli



Shortest Stay:

Less than two hours.
"I once spent three days in transit to be in Belfast for an hour and a quarter."

— Yitzchak Carmeli



Average amount of time to plan a trip:

Several months.
"We do our research of the existing and former communities, and try and use our network of Jews around the world to make contact with the leadership beforehand. Sometime we get only bits of information or one name."

— Ari Greenspan



Shortest amount of time to plan a trip:

Overnight.
"When the magazine says to get on a plane, I go. All I check is who is going to be picking me up at the airport."

— Aharon Granot



the museum with a friend from New York — and he had written down the town where he lived, but when she tried to find his phone number there was no one by that name listed for that town. Then I decided to call *Mishpacha's* office in New York and ask the staff there to help me track down the friend.

By this time I already had to get on my plane — I was going to the Czech Republic first — and I still didn't know if I had a story. The New York staff found the friend living in New York, who explained why we couldn't find his friend who lived in Poland. The friend was using a

non-Jewish name, which he gave us.

While I was on my way to Poland, one of my contacts from Chabad agreed to drive to the man's town, which was two and a half hours from Krakow, and bring him to the museum. First, though, he telephoned the man, whose first question was, "How did you find me?" At first the man didn't want to be interviewed, and then he said maybe tomorrow. But I didn't have "tomorrow," since my trips are usually very short. In the end, he agreed to be driven to Krakow, but in the meantime another problem had arisen.

Are the NATIVES Friendly?



“Even in Tunis, Egypt, and Iraq, no one ever spit on me and screamed ‘Dirty Jew.’ Reporter Yaron Dekel once asked me how I’m not afraid to go into these countries in my chassidishe levush. I told him not only don’t they hate me for it, they respect me for it.”

— Aharon Granot



Where are you welcome if you look and dress Jewish, and what places should you avoid?

“They loved Israelis in Albania and Armenia. Also Basque Country and Belfast, Ireland. I found that militants seem to like Israelis, because they identify with them.”

— Yitzchak Carmeli

By this time I was at the museum, which usually closed at 6 p.m. The car wouldn’t be back in Krakow until 8 or 8:30. I pleaded with the woman at the museum to keep the museum open for us, so we could take pictures inside the factory with this man, but she refused. She insisted on closing the museum exactly at 6:00. Then I slipped her 50 euros under the table, and she said, “Of course, we’ll keep the museum open for you.” And that’s how we got that story.

Binyamin Rose: I had a few nervous moments the time that *Mishpacha* sent me to Kazakhstan to cover an inter-religious conference. I traveled there as part of a chareidi group from Israel, and since we were all traveling on an investor’s visa we were given the royal treatment at the airport. But after the conference we all had our own travel arrangements and so I arrived at the airport alone. When I got to the passport control desk, I was “questioned” by two Kazakhs. Now the people of Kazakhstan are of Mongolian descent. They look Chinese, but they’re huge. The two clerks also didn’t speak a word of English. They kept talking amongst themselves and I was afraid that they wouldn’t let me out of the country. But in the end, they stamped an exit visa into my passport.

Are We Having Fun Yet?

My first trip for *Mishpacha* was the one I made to Spain, where I did research for a four-part article I wrote about Jewish Catalonia and for my novel *Terra Incognita*, which was serialized in the magazine. I couldn’t believe my good fortune — I was getting *paid* to travel — until my first morning in Girona, when I tried to lift my backpack. Loaded in it were my laptop, digital camera, tape recorder, interview notes, guidebook, lunch, water bottle, and everything else I would need for a long workday on the road — and since for me “traveling light” means putting only four packages of tissues in my bag instead of a dozen, that was quite a lot.

Somehow I got the heavy pack onto my back and staggered out of

my hotel room; suddenly combining work with travel didn’t seem like so much fun. But once I reached Girona’s Old City and its medieval Jewish Quarter, any discomfort I was feeling melted away. It was a thrill to be there — and a thrill to know that I was there to write a story for the magazine.

What’s the hardest thing for you about being constantly on the road, and how do you overcome it?

Aharon Granot: I’ve lost count of how many trips I’ve taken for the magazine. I’m on a plane every other week. So the hardest thing for me is to be cut off from the house, to be so far away from my family. I use Skype when I’m traveling to stay in touch. And, if you don’t want your trip to be disappointing, you have to be prepared for everything. The devil is in the details. Even prices can shock you. I remember when I got to the bridge in Copenhagen and found out that it would be 36 euros in each direction. Who would have thought it would cost that kind of money?

Binyamin Rose: I’ve discovered a way to defeat jet lag. As soon as you get to your destination, you have to jump into that time zone immediately. You can’t say, “It’s daytime here, but it’s nighttime for me and so I’m going to sleep.”

Yitzchak Carmeli: The jet lag can be tough, but the truth is that I often don’t sleep when I’m on a trip. I’m usually in a place for a short amount of time, so I just tell myself that I’ll sleep when I get home. For me, the hardest part of traveling is to get a “visa” — permission to go — from my wife.


Is there anywhere in the world that you wouldn’t go to — not even if the magazine paid you a million dollars — either because it was too dangerous or just too much of a hassle?

Ari Zivotofsky: Brooklyn. Just kidding.

Yitzchak Carmeli and Aharon Granot (in unison): No place.

Binyamin Rose: I would want to know about the security before I’d go


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to a place that could be dangerous. People have spoken to me about going to Iran or Venezuela, and my response has been, “Yes, but ...” I did go to Ecuador, where it can be lawless. But I was invited there by Eden Foods, and they had their own local people who they know and trust to take them around.

Yinon Fuchs: If Granot will go, then I’ll go.

Is there any place that you haven’t been to yet that you wish Mishpacha would send you to?

Ari Greenspan: When you have the travel bug, there is pretty much no place that you wouldn’t want to visit. I’m dying to go to Yemen and Iran. Ari Z. and I had looked into Syria, before the uprising, where there is still a small but active Jewish community. There are some fascinating South American stories that need to be told. There are also many remote places that I’d love to return to. Often, when you visit a place, you just scratch the surface. You make a few contacts and a world opens up that you never expected and don’t have time to pursue. For instance, someone recently contacted me about doing some work with the community in Djerba, where I’ve been to once, and he started telling me about the ancient cave synagogues in the mountains, which to my knowledge no one knows about.

72 Hours of Salami

“When we flew to Ethiopia in 1987, all our bags didn’t make it. But we had a large dried salami in our backpacks. So that’s what we ate for three days.”
 — Ari Greenspan

Binyamin Rose: I’d like to go to Australia. I understand it’s beautiful — very scenic — and also very interesting from the Jewish perspective. It’s also the only continent I haven’t yet been to, except Antarctica — and if I could find a Jewish scientist doing some research there, I’d definitely want to go.

Yitzhak Carmeli: I always look for the Jewish point of interest. I wanted to go to Mount Etna, the famous volcano in Sicily, but I needed to find a Jewish connection. I found it when someone told me that Mount Etna is considered to be one of the entrances to Gehinnom.

What’s for Lunch?

Six-year-olds aren’t the only ones who get cranky when they’re hungry. But how do reporters cope when it’s mealtime and they’re hundreds of miles away from their refrigerator? What do they pack, and what’s available on the road?

Binyamin Rose: It depends. When I went to Havana, I took lots of sardines with me. I once learned that if you don’t expect to be eating as much as usual, it’s best to eat foods rich in iron.

Aharon Granot: I always have a supply of *manot chamot* — those instant meals you just add hot water to.

Yitzhak Carmeli: I carry three months of meals on my back. I take crackers and canned goods. I always say that people don’t realize the value of canned goods.

Ari Zivotofsky: It’s very dependent on the destination. I usually rely on Ari G. to bring a salami. We usually rely on finding fruits and vegetables, although in some Third World countries that’s limited to items with thick peels and so sometimes we subsist on bananas. If we will be in a place for Shabbos, we bring grape juice and *lechem mishneh*.

Ari Greenspan: Contrary to what people think, food is never a problem. We can always *shecht*



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What's white and powdery and pareve?



"I can't last without coffee. Once, Yinon turned to me when we landed in Salonika, Greece, and said, 'Aharon, did you bring drugs in your suitcase? It's covered in white powder.' We opened the suitcase, and it was covered with powder. The airport authorities ran over with dogs and started to search us for drugs. It was a box of coffee whitener that had exploded all over my suitcase."

— Aharon Granot

our own. We have koshered kitchens and pots, and used layers of tinfoil. Vegetables and fish are always available. Sometimes we take along some matzoh and a can of tuna. Today, the kosher Israeli bread has so many chemicals in it that it can stay fresh for two weeks — which may be bad for the health but is great for halachic adventuring. The truth is I usually pretend I forgot to bring anything, and Ari Z. has what to give me.

Were you ever surprised to see kosher food in a certain place?

Ari G. and Ari Z.: We were blown away to see lots of OU products with Hebrew on the package in Bahrain. There was Duncan Hines with OU and kosher matzoh from the UK.

Aharon Granot: In America, you can find things in gas stations in the most far-flung areas, which took me, an Israeli, by surprise. Americans looked at me like I was crazy, since they didn't understand why I found it strange. They know there's kosher food everywhere. In the middle of a supermarket in Moldova I found a Strauss ice cream with Hebrew lettering, and that shocked me.

Yitzchak Carmeli: In the airport in Slovenia (Central Europe) I found an ice with a European *hechsher* sitting in a freezer. After a couple of days of eating only nuts, I'll never forget the taste of it.

Don't Leave Home Without It

Seasoned travelers have their favorites — their favorite seat, their favorite carry-on, their must-have snack. Fill in the blank: I would be lost without ...

Yitzchak Carmeli: Language. When you're in a foreign country and a policeman grabs you for no reason, it helps to be able to know what to say. Baruch Hashem, HaKadosh Baruch Hu has helped me learn a little English.

Ari Greenspan: I'd be lost without my partner, Ari Zivotofsky. We've been closest friends, *chavrutot*, research writers on Jewish topics, and travel partners since 1988. We usually don't stop laughing from the minute we get into the cab to the airport until months after the trip, when we reminisce about our experiences. I think this aspect of our lives is very important to both of us. It's rejuvenating, and often we're able to uncover some interesting tidbits about a halachah or a *mesorah* or an unknown aspect of Jewish history. Clearly, we wouldn't be able to do this without the understanding and support of our families. I feel blessed to have this unique and wonderful opportunity.

Binyamin Rose: As long as I have my tallis and tefillin, I know I'll survive wherever I am. *L'havdil*, having access to my e-mail is the next most important thing on the road. ●