

Guide To Being A Kibbutz Volunteer

By John Carson

www.kibbutzvolunteer.com

Introduction

Ever thought of being a kibbutz volunteer in Israel?

My name is John Carson, I'm an English backpacker and I was a kibbutz volunteer for over two years—and had a fantastic time! This free guide will offer tips, hints and information on being a kibbutz volunteer, what Israel is like and what you can get up to over there.

Let me just state that I am not an agency of any kind so can't organize a place on a kibbutz for you. I get no money for this guide or my website from an official kibbutz volunteer office; it's just a passion of mine that I produce for the fun of it.

I also had a book published called *Beer And Bagels For Breakfast*. This is an extremely funny and informative guide to being a volunteer on a kibbutz in Israel. I have been a volunteer four times now and, believe me, you will not understand what a good time can be had unless you try it. *Beer And Bagels For Breakfast* is a diary of those brilliant days as a kibbutz volunteer. It is fast becoming THE volunteer bible! You can get details [here](#).

I welcome any questions about being a kibbutz volunteer; just e-mail me at kibbutzvolunteer@gmail.com or sign my guestbook (please...us travellers are scattered worldwide and I want to hear your comments and stories!), and return to my Web site often because I am always updating it.

I should stress that I am not an agency and cannot arrange a kibbutz placement for you! Wish I could, but you have to contact this [organization](#).

Hope you find this guide and my website useful and decide to backpack to Israel to be a kibbutz volunteer!

Cheers,
John Carson
Twitter: [@johncarson](#)

Kibbutz Life

A kibbutz is a commune in Israel where the members all work and contribute to the running of the kibbutz. In return, their basic living necessities such as food and accommodation are provided free.

If people do have jobs away from the kibbutz in the cities then they submit their wages. Lately this ideal has been changing as more members fight to keep more of the money they earn, but the majority of kibbutzim follow this pattern of sharing resources.

The good part of all this is that most kibbutzim need volunteers from around the world to work with them. Volunteers work for a very small wage—it's probably closer to pocket money—but get free accommodation, food and use of the amenities. Sometimes these can include a swimming pool, tennis courts, gym and the pub.

I have been a kibbutz volunteer four times on three different kibbutzim in the Negev Desert region and by the Dead Sea. Having lived in Israel for just over two years, I can attest to this being the best experience of my life. It gave me a lot of confidence in myself, and I had the opportunity to meet some fantastic travellers from around the world ... some of whom I still keep in touch with 15 years later.

Even though I personally enjoyed the kibbutz volunteer experience, it is definitely not for everyone's taste. You work hard (sometimes in very crappy jobs!), live in very basic rooms, earn a pittance and have no privacy at all. The kibbutz life is a melting pot of different cultures, gossip and communal living.

Having said all that, the majority of volunteers I have spoken to always say that memories of those days are some of the best of their lives, and they fondly recall being a kibbutz volunteer.

Of course it's not all work! Volunteers have lots of parties, go on trips around Israel, spend a lot of time in the kibbutz pub and generally let their hair down during the times when they are not working.

There are romances too between volunteers, and also with the kibbutz members on some occasions. I had some of both!

I can guarantee one thing: kibbutz life is unlike anything you would experience at home, and you will remember those days for ever. It is up to you whether it's a good or bad experience. Go with an open mind and see what happens.

Going To A Kibbutz

There are basically two ways to get on a kibbutz:

- 1) Apply at an agency in [Israel](#).
- 2) Apply at an agency in your [home country](#). This is the safest way in my opinion, as you can check out the facts before flying over.

All the agencies I know of will take a fee for arranging a place on a kibbutz for you. For example, some charge \$150 for registration and \$80 for insurance.

This sounds high, but if you factor that into the overall cost of your trip then you also have peace of mind knowing that a kibbutz place has been arranged for you. You also have to take into account that a kibbutz won't accept you without some kind of insurance, so bear that in mind when saving up for your trip.

If you decide to apply at the agency in Tel Aviv, their contact details can be found [here](#).

Here's an affiliate link of interest if you want to learn Hebrew before you go ...

[Learn Hebrew Online](#)

The Work

Let's not lie about it—the main reason kibbutzim want volunteers is to work! And work hard!

Depending on the job, the day starts between 6-7 a.m. (earlier if in the cowsheds or fields) and finishes between noon and 4 p.m. (again, varies depending on the job you do).

And it is a six-day working week = Sunday to Friday.

Jobs include: dishwasher, fields, gardening, cowsheds, chickens, factory, picking dates and bananas, dining room, garage, supplying the nurseries with supplies, laundry, looking after children (normally only the female volunteers do this work), swimming pool maintenance (lucky to be assigned this one!) and general duties as required.

It's not unusual to be given one particular job on one day, and another the next ... but generally the volunteers are kept in the same jobs for at least a month. Newcomers usually start on the dishwasher or in the dining room, and move on "up the chain" when other volunteers join the kibbutz. So don't feel disheartened at starting on a crappy job; you will have a chance to change eventually.

In my two years on kibbutzim I worked in most of the jobs mentioned above, my favourite being a gardener. I could basically set my own hours within reason, and the boss just let me get on with it. Had my own tractor and moped too ... it was great!

All the jobs have coffee and lunch breaks, and sometimes you can earn extra time off for working overtime or putting in extra effort. That is negotiable between you and your boss, so don't be afraid to ask. Members have an uncanny knack of spotting the volunteers willing to make an extra effort and those who are along for an easy ride. (You won't last long if you are in the latter category.)

Don't worry about spoiling your designer jeans either; kibbutz work clothes and boots are provided for you, and also coats in the winter.

Yes, kibbutzim need volunteers 365 days a year, but obviously the summer months are most popular and competition for places is higher. Don't be turned off going in winter—Israeli winters are not that cold, mainly rainy, although Jerusalem gets a bit chilly during the winter months. Eilat is nice all year round.

Useful Reading

Allow me a small plug for my book. It is called [Beer And Bagels For Breakfast](#) and is a diary of my time as a kibbutz volunteer.

I had such a great time I decided to commit my memories to paper. Not for financial gain (I get peanuts a copy!) but just because I wanted my future kids to see what their dad got up to as a young lad ;-)

A lot of friends and family also asked me about my experiences, so I decided to get it published for other potential volunteers to read and learn from. Be warned: it is a "warts and all" account of my adventures and observations, so there's accounts of the good times, the not-so-good times, the parties, the volunteer trips, mishaps, kibbutz characters that you meet ... and a lot more than I can describe here.

Feel free to read testimonials on my [website](#).

Just to show there's room for more kibbutz volunteer research, I am also going to plug a "rival" book ... although I see it as a complimentary one to mine, not competition.

It has been around a long time and is simply called [Kibbutz Volunteer](#). I actually read one of the first editions of this book and can recommend it as a useful "how-to" type of book on being a kibbutz volunteer.

This one is more about the aspects of arranging a place, what to expect etc... whereas mine is more about the stuff you don't normally hear about in the straightforward guides!

Anyway, feel free to check them out and make your own mind up.

(And if you do buy mine, let me know what you think!)

What Are You Waiting For?

Well, that is about it. I have explained as clearly as I can what it takes to become a kibbutz volunteer. The only way to really know for certain is to give it a go.

It goes without saying that Israel can be a dangerous country to be in sometimes ... but, it has been like that for a long time and people still travel there to work on kibbutzim. It would not stop me if I ever decided to go back.

I lived there for two years—including 1991 during the first Gulf War—and never felt in danger. You just have to be observant, use common sense and ask the kibbutz members for help and advice when travelling around the country. In my opinion, there's danger everywhere in the world these days, but it's up to you whether Israel is for you or not. I can't advise you one way or the other, just simply offer information from my own experience so you can make your own decision.

So, if you want a disclaimer, it's up to you whether you decide to spend time and money being a kibbutz volunteer, and I can't be held responsible. Do your own research too. That's all I can say really!

In summary ... the experience is not for everyone, but I had the best time of my life and will always remember those days with affection, excitement and fondness.

There is more information, including forums and photos, on my website at www.kibbutzvolunteer.com and feel free to e-mail me with questions that I might not have covered in this guide at kibbutzvolunteer@gmail.com.

Best of luck, and safe travelling!

John Carson

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