THE GREAT OUTDOORS

THIS PASSOVER, THE SOCIETY FOR THE PROTECTION OF NATURE IN ISRAEL (SPNI) IS ENCOURAGING THE PUBLIC TO ENJOY NATURE BY PARTICIPATING IN THE FUN ACTIVITIES IT PLANNED FOR DIFFERENT AGE GROUPS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY

By Dan Zeller

Founded in 1953, the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (SPNI) is the oldest and largest environmental organization in Israel. For over 60 years, SPNI has worked to improve the quality of life for Israel’s citizens by preserving the country’s natural assets and beauty. Through education and tourism, SPNI strengthens public awareness and connects people to Israel’s rich biodiversity, biblical landscapes and natural oases.

By leading public environmental campaigns, working with policy makers, cooperating with other organizations and through legal advocacy, SPNI serves to protect the natural resources the state and people of Israel depend on.

SPNI was instrumental in the establishment of Israel’s Nature and Parks Authority and Israel’s first nature reserves. The organization is famous for the amazing success of its Wildflower Campaign during the 1990s, whose legacy is the carpets of wildflowers still visible across the country. In the early 1990s, SPNI’s Israel Trails Committee hiked the Israeli National Trail from Kibbutz Dan in the north to Eilat in the south, a 1,099 km hike, declared one of the world’s Top 20 Epic Hikes by National Geographic. The Israel Trails Committee continues to blaze and maintain trails throughout Israel.

Instrumental in the establishment of the 2004 Coastal Law which preserves all of Israel’s beaches for public access, SPNI has continued to work throughout the past decade to ensure those beaches are maintained.

With community centers and field schools across the country, SPNI meets the face of Israel planting community gardens, hiking the trails, clearing military bases, learning in the classroom and camping under the stars.

Over the years, SPNI has received international recognition and awards acknowledging its achievements in environmental conservation, including the prestigious Israel Prime Minister’s Award. During the upcoming Passover vacation, SPNI has organized a variety of exciting outdoor activities that take advantage of the pleasant weather at this time of year and appeal to different age groups. Space is limited, so don’t forget to register in advance!

For children of all ages

Sidewalk Adventures
Bring the kids to the big “open air museum” – the city of Tel Aviv – and discover the fascinating world of the city’s street art. Enjoy special activities, including quizzes, simulations and a hands-on workshop to get into the spirit of the Florentine neighborhood and the exciting downtown scene Wednesday, April 17th. Guided by Dinah Sogee.

Tale of the Wild Peony
The Wild Peony (Dianthus maurus) only blooms for two weeks each year in the month of April, and only on Mount Meron. Join us among these vibrant pretties and see how they slowly blossom. We will lead you to the crown of Mount Meron, and we will then descend by way of Ein Zeelem. On Thursday, April 17th. Guided by staff from the Hof Hacarmel Field School.

Pistachios and Playtime!
The green hills of the Carmel invite you to visit the Nahal Oren and the Kaidamim Quarries. Pine, oak, cedar, fir, oak and Israeli pistachio are all moved by the pleasant breezes, signaling you to enjoy the outdoors, wander along the stream and the Byzantine era quarries and to view the ancient wine presses.

Sunday, April 20th. Guided by Yaniv Alon, from the Hof Hacarmel Field School.

For families with toddlers

Aikomon on the Beach
This Passover, in addition to searching for the Aikomon during the Seder, children are invited to search for waterfowl and fish in the ponds of Mo’agin Michael. After getting to know some of these fascinating birds, everyone will receive a prize – a trip to the beach! Wednesday, April 16th. Guided by Yaniv Alon from the Hof Hacarmel Field School.

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Hidden Treasures
Come find natural treasures in the sand dunes on the coast. Join us for a walk to explore the rolling, golden dunes of Nitzanim and look for the unique animals, large and small, that call this beach home. Perhaps along the way you’ll meet deer, gerbils, reptiles and songbirds. Thursday, April 17th. Guided by expert herpetologist Dr. Boaz Shacham from the Hof Hacarmel Field School.

Meet the Strawberry Tree
There are many trees that sprout from the earth but the Eastern Strawberry Tree steals the show. Come to Nahal Kafar to see for yourself – meet the Eastern Strawberry Tree, with its crimson red branches and trunk. Along the way, explore ancient reservoirs, orchards, and paths. Catch your breath, admiring the idyll setting before finding yourself at the old Bar Giora train station. Monday, April 21st. Guided by staff from the Shikanim Field School.

For adults

Visit to an Ancient Kingdom
Visit the fascinating capital of the ancient kingdom of Samaria, Sebaste. First built by the King of Israel, Omri, you are sure to be impressed by this unique site, as the tour guides you through this biblical relic. The trip includes a visit to an ancient Samaritan synagogue. Thursday, April 17th. Guided by Ariel Fliter from the Otla Field School. Bus departs from Mungan.

The Kinneret From Another Angle
You are invited to a fascinating and unusual journey around the Sea of Galilee, encompassing Judaism and Christianity, past and future. Explore the new excavations in the village of Migdal and the oldest synagogue in the country. Stroll along the Kinneret Trail route and hear about new initiatives to empower local women. Discover the newest church in the land. At the peak of the Mount of Beatitudes, visit the House of Galilee, a complex of beautiful structures that serves as a center for Christian learning. Friday, April 25th. Guided by Adi Mirrati.

Overnight camping trip

The Shepherd’s Flute
This two day trip will take you from the bustling city, along desert trails into a fairy tale. Enjoy an authentic shepherd’s meal and ride on a camel. Set out from Mitraj Ramon on Wednesday for Nahal Yeret, meet local Bedouins, enjoy the majestic landscape and the Spring blossoms. On Thursday, wander along the beautiful and little known scenery of Nahal Elau, enjoy the impressive power of the ancient visits. Wednesday, April 16th-Thursday, April 17th. Guided by staff from the Har HaNegev Field School.

For more information about the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (SPNI) and its activities, go to www.israelnature.org. To register for activities, call 052-2514825.