

WSCI - A new experience

Take 400 ambitious students from over 72 countries, a team of dedicated and passionate coordinators and a ridiculous high budget, mix them up in the heat of the Israeli sun and you will get the first World Science Conference Israel.

For a week, students from all over the world experienced one of the most anticipated science conference of the year. The level of enthusiasm was sky high and the joy of finally arriving in Israel safely was immense. 15 Nobel laureates were expected to hold speeches in the campus of the Hebrew University during this exciting week.

I was thrilled when I first heard that I was selected to be a part of the Romanian delegation that would represent our country in Israel. I was very curious about what this event could've been about (except science, of course) and at the same time honored because I have been given the opportunity to meet all these famous people that have succeeded in their fields of work to such an extent that they were awarded with one of the most prestigious prizes in the world of science.

It was a bit overwhelming at first seeing all these strangers from all over the globe just chatting, getting to know each other, exchanging opinions and ideas ... But because of the way the conference was organized I had the opportunity to get past some inhibitions and interact in a relaxed manner with most of the people that I came in contact with.

The opening ceremony was glorious, a true show. Dance, music and something truly special: the famous mentalist - Lior Suchard. I made a very good friend that night. His name is Santiago and he is from Peru. We share the same passion for music and the same vision of this world, so a link between us was pretty easy to establish. It was a relief to find someone who I had so much in common with, because I had someone to talk to when my colleague, Silvia, was busy knowing every single one of the participants.

After this, "the game began". We all arrived at the Hebrew University eager to listen to what these great people had to say. And for the most part we weren't disappointed. It was in this first day that I listened to the presentation that I enjoyed the most. Professor Robert Aumann, who received the Nobel Prize in economics, talked about consciousness and about how we know almost nothing about it. He said that we know so much about the outside world and about the Universe, but we often forget to explore something that is far closer to us than the stars and that is our own mind. I am very fascinated by psychology and this was a moment that truly impressed me. Amongst all that science that was feeding our minds, we had the pleasure of experiencing something for our hearts too.

Some presentations have been really well done with humor and jokes scattered around the scientific material, others focused exclusively on

explanations about the subject that was at hand, and I believe that was a good thing because it was a opportunity for everyone to feel that they got what they came for.

I wanted to ask the Nobel laureates if they had to give up something to pursue their careers, and to my disappointment in a way, I found out that some of them did. To achieve these kind of results some sacrifices need to be made ...

It was inspiring to hear these people talk about the fact that everything is possible if you truly work hard for it, because firstly they are humans like us and only then they are the great scientists that we got to know, and it was nice to see their human side too.

We had some other activities besides the speeches we attended at the Hebrew University: we had the opportunity to visit the old part of the city of Jerusalem, we spent a beautiful night in Tel'Aviv, we created and presented a scientific poster and we were once again delighted with the presence of our favorite mentalist. The only problem with the schedule was that it was too busy. It was too much stuff to do in a single day and because of that some students just collapsed towards the end. My own group leader had to hospitalized because of exhaustion and was unable to attend the poster competition, which was a huge disadvantage. Thankfully, with some rest, he was back on his feet the next day. So this could be a sign for the organizers that, for future conferences, the schedule needs to be more relaxed and not marathon. You can't enjoy everything they had to offer if your eyes just can't take it anymore. And some presentations should have been optional, because, as I already said, it was too much.

I had a great time working with everybody on my team for the poster. We collaborated in a civilized manner, we shared ideas, opinions, information, and in the end I believe we did a great job when it came to the final product. Also you learn that no matter the country, the religion, the traditions, when it comes to science, we all speak the same language, so there were no problems in designing the poster.

As for the host country, Israel ... I am a person that never builds expectations because often they lead to disappointment. Being my first time traveling east, I was very curious about what this country had to offer. Honestly I was not impressed ... The landscapes were mostly "populated" by giant rocks and the architecture of the building was certainly not helping the view either. They were very simple in their form and colour. They could have been easily mistaken for small mountains or hills from a far away point of view.

We arrived in Jerusalem during Sabbath which is their weekly day for rest. The problem is that during these 24 hours EVERYTHING in the city (except maybe the museums) is closed. This includes shops, restaurants and gas stations. And it was pretty unpleasant to not have what to eat for the first hours we spent there. Water was also hard to find because the shops were closed and because we had the "luck" to catch the greatest heat wave in years, that became a true problem. Though we had the chance to visit the Jerusalem museum of

science which had some truly amazing things on display. The whole Bible written on small tablet the size of a grain of sugar.

Overall I believe it was a great FIRST science conference that they organized. They sure had a lot to learn from organizing this kind of event and I really hope that they will improve everything for future conferences not because this one was bad, but because it could've been better.

Would I do it again? Yes! Nothing I experienced so far comes close to the scale of this conference. I am grateful that I have been given the opportunity to participate and to meet all these people with such interesting background and beliefs.

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